

The politics of blame

Published: September 23, 2026, 6:02 am

British politics is increasingly becoming a politics of blame. Instead of addressing difficult social problems, politicians are finding people to punish.

Small boats are one example. Parents whose teenage children commit offences are another. Poverty, benefits and migration become convenient targets, while the underlying causes of social problems receive far less attention.

In this video, I argue that this is mindless politics. Teenagers have always tested boundaries. Parents cannot know everything their children do. Making already poor families poorer by punishing parents for their children's behaviour will not prevent crime. And blaming asylum seekers does not resolve the political and administrative failures that have contributed to dangerous Channel crossings.

The deeper problem is that poverty, inequality, inadequate housing, limited opportunities for young people and underfunded public services are real and the issues that need to be addressed. Solving them requires serious government. Blaming people is much easier.

That is why Britain needs grown-ups in the room. We need politicians willing to accept responsibility for the consequences of political decisions and prepared to invest in functioning public services, policing, criminal justice, education, housing and opportunities for young people.

Politics should be about solving problems, not finding scapegoats.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4YuXncPwuow?si=8IrsrArcWy93CytN>

This is the audio version:

https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=ss9n3-1b663a3-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&fonts=Arial&skin=f6f6f6&font-color=auto&logo_link=episode_page&btn-skin=c73a3a

This is the transcript:

Mindless politics is replacing serious political debate in the UK, in my opinion. Too much politics is being reduced to the expression of base sentiments. Ideas that in earlier generations of politicians might have been considered unthinkable are now being openly expressed. Complex social problems are being turned into opportunities for anger and blame. The result is politics that avoids responsibility rather than solving problems.

Small boats are one example of how this works. The small boat problem was manufactured by our politicians, who have then exploited it. Politicians who refused to provide safe routes for people seeking asylum in the UK, as people have the legal right to do, created a situation where people have resorted to crossing the English Channel in small boats, and a resulting crisis has been exploited to generate deeply offensive racism and hate. Those seeking asylum are blamed for a problem that politicians actually helped create and are doing very little or nothing to solve.

The same politics of blame is now being directed at some parents. Some politicians are now suggesting punishing parents when their children commit crimes, from shoplifting onwards. Benefits or other privileges might be withdrawn as a consequence. That is what they're proposing. And parents might even face criminal penalties for alleged neglect. Again, the political instinct being revealed is not to tackle the problem, but to find someone else to punish.

And the fact is that teenagers test boundaries as an entirely normal part of growing up. Young people have to discover the limits within which adults are expected to live, and sometimes that means they do things that are wrong or even illegal. And very few adults will have passed through adolescence without making some mistakes for which the police could have spoken to them, or done worse. And I'll put my hand up, I did. That does not make their parents responsible for those mistakes. The children make them, and we should accept that this is a normal part of life that has gone on for decades.

And as a matter of fact, parents cannot know everything their teenage children are doing. Children do not normally announce that they've been out shoplifting when they come home. Nor do they necessarily disclose drug taking, illicit sexual encounters,

taking part in fights or other risky behaviour. Establishing parental intention or culpability would therefore be extraordinarily difficult if children commit these offences, but parents are to be blamed. Responsibility cannot reasonably be imposed simply because someone is a parent.

And the link in the suggestions made to benefits is something that troubles me greatly. That suggests that there is deep-seated class prejudice within this argument. It assumes that parents of children who offend are likely to receive benefits. Teenage boundary testing is not confined to the children of benefit claimants, by a very long way, as the history of the Bullingdon Club at Oxford University reveals. Do remember David Cameron and Boris Johnson were members of that, and it was notorious for its lawbreaking. Crime is not confined to poorer people and major crimes can involve the wealthy.

Poverty is being treated as evidence of culpability when it is nothing of the sort. What is more, making poorer families poorer cannot solve the problems associated with poverty. One in five people, including millions of children and teenagers, experience poverty every day in the UK. Financial hardship can create real needs that sometimes contribute to petty crime. I'm not exonerating that. I'm stating a fact. And withdrawing benefits would deliberately increase that hardship. Greater deprivation would increase the likelihood of offending rather than reduce it.

And the real causes of the crisis we have are being ignored. The excuses being offered and the blame being pointed at are all about providing cover. The real crime issues we have were all caused by austerity. That reality is being ignored while politicians blame vulnerable people. Punishing or imprisoning parents could deepen alienation and destabilise families, and the police and criminal justice system is already under-resourced, and this would only stretch it much further at a time when it can't cope already.

Poverty, inequality and the lack of opportunity for young people are not being tackled effectively by our government, and there's no sign that it's going to do so. Politics has failed people and is now blaming them for the consequences of that failure. That is what I am seeing.

We need grown-ups in the room as a result. Grown-ups who will solve these problems rather than blame people. We need politicians who will accept responsibility for the society their decisions have helped create. We need public services, policing and criminal justice systems that really work on the basis of proper funding. We need to tackle inequality, low pay, poor housing, poor education, and lack of work. All of these things need to be addressed, and post-neoliberal politics must tackle problems rather than scapegoat those with the least power.

We need an end to the mindless politics of excuses and to replace it with the politics of care that really works. That is what this country needs at present. More finger-pointing,

more blame, more mindless solutions that will only make everything worse: none of those is required. Real solutions are.

That's what I think. What do you think? There's a poll down below. Please let us have your opinions. Please do like and share this video. Please do subscribe to our channel. Please do hit the bell button because that means you will be told when we make another video. And if you would like to support our work, there is a donation button down below this video. It's a Kofi button, or coffee button, whichever way you wish to read it. And there you can make a donation to our work, and that will keep these things flowing. Thank you very much.

Poll

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