

# Lockdown sceptic Molly Kingsley: ‘I was cast as an extremist but I’ve since been proved right’

The mother of two wanted to stand up for parents and children during the pandemic, but was branded an anti-vaxxer

By [Camilla Tominey](#), ASSOCIATE EDITOR 5 June 2023 • 9:00pm



Molly Kingsley: 'The anti-vax slur is deliberately delegitimising' CREDIT: David Rose for The Telegraph

For lockdown sceptic [Molly Kingsley](#), the discovery that she was spied on by the Government in an attempt to curtail discussion of its [controversial coronavirus policies](#) has been nothing short of horrifying.

The mother of two, 44, was disgusted to find out articles she had written for The Telegraph [cautioning against school closures](#), the wearing of face masks in classrooms and [the vaccination of children](#) had been flagged by the Counter-Disinformation Unit (CDU), set up by ministers to tackle supposed domestic “threats”.

Yet having endured three years of hatred and abuse for standing up for parents and children during the pandemic, she wasn’t surprised to read Saturday’s Daily Telegraph’s expose, revealing that as well as covertly monitoring lockdown critics with artificial intelligence, [social media firms may have used technology to stop certain posts being promoted, circulated or widely shared](#) after being pinpointed by the CDU or its counterpart in the Cabinet Office.

Some posts were even removed from social media altogether following meetings of the Counter-Disinformation Policy Forum, which brought together civil servants from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and technology giants – including Facebook and Google – as well as the BBC to discuss how to limit the spread of what was considered Covid-19 disinformation.

MPs and freedom of speech campaigners have condemned the “truly chilling” disclosures as “a tool for censoring British citizens” akin to those of the Chinese Communist Party.

But for the Cambridge-based former lawyer turned campaigner, the spying has had such a profound effect that she is now considering legal action against the Government in a bid to prompt Covid disclosures even bigger than Boris Johnson’s WhatsApp messages.

“This is just the tip of the iceberg,” insists Ms Kingsley. “We need absolute clarity on which ministers and officials knew and authorised this, exactly which agencies were involved, and on what scale.

“Most importantly, we need to know the true impact. Did the collaboration between the Government and social media companies [amount to actual censorship](#)? And if so, how on earth was this allowed to happen in a supposedly liberal democracy? If the only way to force disclosure is through litigation then absolutely I would consider that, to get the answers the public deserves.

“I am very open to spending the rest of my life making the Government and all those involved in the decision-making around the pandemic more accountable to the people they serve. I don’t believe this is a political framework that should be inherited by our children. Until we correct the failings of this period then we will be stuck in this doom loop of bad decision-making.”



Molly Kingsley: 'This is just the tip of the iceberg' CREDIT: David Rose  
It has been suggested that the activities of the CDU should be investigated as part of [Baroness Hallett's Covid inquiry](#) – but Ms Kingsley believes a separate, independent investigation is warranted.

Speaking after a major study by Johns Hopkins and Lund universities found that lockdown saved as few as 1,700 lives in England and Wales in spring 2020, concluding that the benefits of the policy were “a drop in the bucket compared to the staggering collateral costs”, she says: “With no disrespect to Baroness Hallett, I don't understand how anyone can think the inquiry will be balanced when the whole debate around Covid has been skewed by groupthink, with one narrative amplified and any dissent stifled. We need a separate independent inquiry into whether there has been state-sanctioned censorship.”

Elon Musk, Twitter's chief executive, is [among those to have joined the chorus of disapproval](#), describing the revelations about the CDU as “terrible”. Yet, as Ms Kingsley points out, the billionaire may hold the key to unravelling the role social media companies played. “[Elon Musk must absolutely release what he knows](#),” she says. “There's now a duty on anyone with insider information on this to put it in the public domain. Why wouldn't you?”

[The BBC's involvement](#) should also be scrutinised, argues Ms Kingsley, describing the “one-sided nature” of its coverage as “incredibly damaging”.

Ms Kingsley had long held a sneaking suspicion that the social media activities of [the UsForThem campaign group](#) she co-founded in March 2020 “to speak up for children who don't vote or have unions” had been “suppressed” to curtail dissenting voices.

It wasn't just that UsForThem appeared to have become the target of what she believes was an “organised hate campaign” designed to discredit supporters by labelling them all “anti-vaxxers”.

Something odd also seemed to be happening to the volunteer group's Facebook page, [Twitter output](#) and other online activity. “It seemed really obvious to me, although I had no way of proving it, that our social media was in some way being suppressed. For instance, we'd have thousands of retweets of a particular post but no more followers.

“At one point, our Facebook group, which was a really important source of engagement for us, was subject to these weird ‘strikes’ when we'd get warnings for sharing stuff. If, within the group, people started talking about certain topics – not just vaccines but also masks – the group would be downgraded and we'd be pushed down people's feeds.

“I had this constant feeling that we weren't getting the traction the size of our group merited – it seemed to be a pattern.”

A low point came when the group “got cancelled” by PayPal, which suddenly refused to process donations “overnight”. “It looked to us like a politically motivated assassination attempt but could we prove that? No.”





'It seemed really obvious to me, although I had no way of proving it, that our social media was in some way being suppressed,' recalls Ms Kingsley CREDIT: Christopher Pledger

Ministers have denied asking for posts by Ms Kingsley to be removed – along with those written by her fellow lockdown sceptics [Prof Carl Heneghan, the Oxford epidemiologist](#) who has advised Boris Johnson, and Dr Alexandre de Figueiredo, a research fellow at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. Yet the results of her “subject access request” demanding to know what personal information the CDU held on her make for alarming reading.

Twitter posts that were seemingly thought-policed include comments completely unrelated to the pandemic made as recently as January this year when she accused the National Education Union of having “little regard for children’s welfare” over the strikes.

Other monitored posts include an article she wrote for this publication in December 2020, headlined: [“Parents will not forgive No 10 if schools are closed again.”](#) Another which caught the CDU’s eye in September 2020 suggested that “disproportionate rules around social distancing and masks are making our children’s lives a misery”. Other flagged posts include a call for children to be allowed access to playgrounds, an article questioning the need to vaccinate five-year-olds and another urging the Government not to apply curbs to children’s extracurricular activities.

“None of these posts were controversial or presented the ‘domestic threat’ the CDU was apparently set up to tackle,” explains Ms Kingsley.

“In fact a lot of what I said has since been proved right. It seemed unarguable at the time that kids should be allowed access to playgrounds. But what happened was that the inverse of the reasonable position became normalised – and that was particularly pronounced when it came to kids.

“People like me who were asking legitimate questions were cast as the extremists, which of course had the effect of massively deterring other people from speaking out. We were accused of being selfish, the constant criticism being that we simply wanted these kids off our hands.

“It was totally perverse, sinister even, to be labelled a ‘ghoul’, a ‘child killer’ and a ‘granny killer’ simply for questioning whether lockdown was doing more harm than good. At one point, there was a ‘Killer Kingsley’ hashtag trending on Twitter.”

Although Ms Kingsley openly admits she never got her daughters, now aged nine and seven, vaccinated, she says being labelled an “anti-vaxxer” simply for raising concerns about the potential harms of the jab “took an enormous toll” – not just on her individually but also on her marriage to her lawyer husband Ben, 46.

“The anti-vax slur is deliberately delegitimising,” she adds. “You feel silenced by it and with friends and family, it really did drive a huge wedge. We had a good friend who, at some point in the middle of the pandemic, sent me a text saying: ‘How’s my favourite anti-vaxxer?’”

Yet as Ms Kingsley points out, when the first lockdown happened, she felt the same as any worried parent. “I keep a diary and I’ve looked back at what I wrote in March 2020 and it was: ‘The main thing is that we all stay alive.’

“It was once the novelty factor of those first sunny weeks of lockdown had worn off that I started to see how much the girls were struggling. Then I remember seeing a picture of little French kids in a dystopian playground segregated into 2m by 2m squares and feeling that it was so wrong.”

She co-founded UsForThem with fellow campaigners Liz Cole and Christine Brett, who along with fellow volunteers have dedicated the past three years to fighting for “parents and children failed by the system”. So does she feel vindicated by Monday’s report finding that the draconian measures had a “negligible impact” on Covid mortality and were a “policy failure of gigantic proportions”.

“It’s a bittersweet moment,” she admits. “Until quite recently I’ve felt like I’ve been on the naughty step for my views on lockdown. You feel guilty for not following the crowd. But my question now is how do we move past this? We have lived through a period of extreme perversion of our democracy, when decisions were taken without any reference to cost and benefit and when ethical lines were crossed. My being monitored is a sign of that.

“I want answers for me but most of all I want answers for my daughters. It’s the least our children deserve.”

A Government spokesperson said: “The Counter Disinformation Unit’s purpose is to track narratives and trends using publicly available information online to protect public health and national security.

“It has never tracked the activity of individuals and has a blanket ban on referring any content from journalists and MPs to social media platforms.

“The Unit works to address dangerous disinformation in all its forms, including encouraging platforms to address 5G-related conspiracy theories and Russian state-backed disinformation”.