# Baroness Emma Nicholson

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## Semantic Summary

British Conservative life peer and one of the most active parliamentary anti-trans voices. Cross-party trajectory: Conservative MP (1987–1997) → Lib Dem MEP (1999–2009) → Conservative peer (2016–). Removed as vice-president of the Booker Prize Foundation in 2020 after 100+ authors signed an open letter citing her "homophobic and transphobic views." Reported to the Lords Commissioner for Standards over transphobic memes and racism (2020). Made false claims about trans women using M&S changing rooms (2020). Defended Section 28 and compared AIDS to COVID (Oct 2024). Claimed a rainbow pedestrian crossing could "trigger epilepsy" (2023). Telegraph interview (Jul 2023): "this movement isn't for trans people — it is for liars who don't need science." Connected to Sex Matters (aligned on NHS single-sex campaigns). Represents the parliamentary/establishment arm of the UK gender-critical movement, using House of Lords privilege to provide legislative legitimacy to anti-trans campaigning.

## Overview

- **Full Name:** Emma Harriet Nicholson, Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne
- **Born:** 16 October 1941, Oxford, England (age 84)
- **Role:** Conservative life peer in the House of Lords (since 1997); former MP, MEP
- **Party:** Conservative (before 1995; since 2016), Liberal Democrats (1995–2016)
- **Nationality:** British
- **Known For:** Anti-trans and gender-critical campaigning in Parliament; Booker Prize controversy; defending Section 28; repeating debunked single-sex-space claims
- **Notable Relatives:** Uncle — Reginald Manningham-Buller, 1st Viscount Dilhorne (Lord Chancellor). Cousin — Eliza Manningham-Buller (Director General of MI5)
- **Personal:** Deaf since age 16. Educated at St Mary's School, Wantage and Royal Academy of Music. Family founded J&W Nicholson & Co gin distillers.

## Background

Baroness Nicholson is a British politician from an establishment family — her uncle was Lord Chancellor and her cousin ran MI5. She was a Conservative MP (1987–1997), then defected to the Liberal Democrats and served as an MEP for South East England (1999–2009). She rejoined the Conservatives in 2016 and was appointed Prime Minister's Trade Envoy for Kazakhstan in 2017.

In recent years she has become one of the most prominent anti-trans voices in the House of Lords, using parliamentary privilege to campaign against trans inclusion in single-sex spaces. Her campaigning extends well beyond parliamentary contributions — she has shared transphobic memes on social media, made false claims about retailers' changing-room policies, defended Section 28, and compared AIDS to COVID-19. She is a key figure bridging older homophobic tropes with the contemporary gender-critical movement.

# Timeline

## Political Career

- **1987–1997:** Conservative MP for Torridge and West Devon
- **1995:** Defected to Liberal Democrats
- **1997:** Made a Conservative life peer as Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne
- **1999–2009:** Lib Dem MEP for South East England
- **2016:** Rejoined the Conservative Party "with tremendous pleasure"
- **2017:** Appointed Prime Minister's Trade Envoy for Kazakhstan

## Anti-Trans & Anti-LGBT Activity

- **Jun 2020:** Shared transphobic memes on social media; reported to the House of Lords Commissioner for Standards for bullying, racism, and transphobia. Munroe Bergdorf called her out publicly.
- **Jun 2020:** 100+ authors — including Bernardine Evaristo, Sarah Waters, and Nikesh Shukla — signed an open letter calling for her removal as vice-president of the Booker Prize Foundation over her "homophobic and transphobic views." She was subsequently removed from the role.
- **Jul 2020:** Munroe Bergdorf published a powerful open letter calling out Nicholson's "casual racism and transphobia" (GCN).
- **Dec 2020:** Falsely claimed trans women were using women's changing rooms in Marks & Spencer. M&S publicly rebutted her, doubling down on support for trans customers (PinkNews).
- **Jan 2023:** Slammed Tate for hosting a children's drag queen storytime session; described it as "inappropriate" (The Art Newspaper).
- **Feb 2023:** Claimed a rainbow pedestrian crossing installed for Pride could "trigger epilepsy" — widely mocked (Them).

- **Jul 2023:** Telegraph interview — declared: "This movement isn't for trans people – it is for liars who don't need science." Also referenced in Economist coverage of British politicians defending women-only spaces (Oct 2023).
- **2024:** Active in Lords — petition for "no males on single-sex NHS wards."
- **Oct 2024:** Slammed for comment defending Section 28 and comparing AIDS to COVID-19. PinkNews reported she appeared to suggest Section 28 was justified and equated the AIDS epidemic with the pandemic response (PinkNews, 14 Oct 2024).
- **2026:** Continuing Lords activity on single-sex spaces and NHS policy; frequently cited in gender-critical discourse as a parliamentary champion.

# Ideology & Positions

## Anti-Trans Positions

- Opposition to trans inclusion in single-sex wards: leading parliamentary petition for NHS single-sex hospital wards
- Rejects gender identity: "This movement isn't for trans people – it is for liars who don't need science" (Telegraph, Jul 2023)
- Repeats debunked claims about trans women in women's spaces — M&S publicly corrected her false changing-room claims (Dec 2020)
- Anti-drag: opposed Tate's children's drag queen storytime (Jan 2023)
- Rainbow crossing complaint: claimed a Pride rainbow pedestrian crossing "could trigger epilepsy" — widely seen as bad-faith concern-trolling (Feb 2023)

## Broader Anti-LGBT Positions

- Defended Section 28 (the 1988 law banning "promotion of homosexuality" in schools) — Oct 2024
- Compared AIDS epidemic to COVID-19 pandemic, minimising the AIDS crisis (Oct 2024)
- Shared transphobic memes that were also widely described as racist — reported to Lords Commissioner (Jun 2020)
- Removed from Booker Prize Foundation after 100+ authors cited her "homophobic" record (Jun 2020)

## Framing Strategy

- "Protecting vulnerable women and children" in healthcare settings and single-sex spaces
- Positions herself as speaking scientific truth against "trans ideology"
- Uses parliamentary privilege to make claims that would be legally risky outside the chamber

- Patterns match older homophobic tropes (Section 28 defense, AIDS minimisation) repackaged for contemporary gender-critical discourse

# Connections & Network

- **Sex Matters:** Aligned on NHS single-sex campaigns; frequently cited in the same parliamentary and media circuits
- **Conservative anti-trans bloc:** Part of a cohort of Conservative peers using Lords to advance gender-critical policy
- **GB News / Telegraph ecosystem:** Telegraph op-eds and interviews; echoed in the broader right-wing media
- **Older moral-conservative networks:** Her defence of Section 28 and AIDS-comparison comments connect her to pre-2010s homophobic conservatism, not just the contemporary gender-critical movement

# Controversies & Rebuttals

- **Booker Prize removal (Jun 2020):** 100+ authors demanded her removal; Booker Foundation abolished her vice-president role. She denied the accusations, claiming she was "cancelled."
- **Lords bullying complaint (Jun 2020):** Reported for sharing transphobic and racist memes. Outcome unclear — Lords standards process is notoriously opaque.
- **M&S false claims (Dec 2020):** Publicly corrected by a major retailer. M&S stated they "do not tolerate discrimination of any kind" and confirmed trans customers were welcome.
- **Section 28 comments (Oct 2024):** Defended the repealed homophobic law; generated widespread criticism from LGBT advocacy groups.
- **Rainbow crossing "epilepsy" claim (Feb 2023):** Medical experts dismissed the claim; widely characterised as trolling.

# Sources


- PinkNews — "Tory peer slammed for comment about Section 28 and Aids" (14 Oct 2024)
- Telegraph — "Baroness Nicholson: 'This movement isn't for trans people – it is for liars who don't need science'" (30 Jul 2023)
- PinkNews — "M&S doubles down on support for trans customers after Tory peer's false changing room claims" (9 Dec 2020)
- PinkNews — "Baroness Nicholson reported for bullying after sharing transphobic memes" (23 Jun 2020)

- Guardian — "Booker foundation vice-president removed after 'homophobia' row" (25 Jun 2020)
- Guardian — "Authors call for removal of Booker prize vice-president over 'homophobic' views" (24 Jun 2020)
- GCN — "Munroe Bergdorf calls out Baroness Nicholson's 'casual' racism and transphobia in powerful open letter" (2 Jul 2020)
- Them — "A Conservative British Politician Said a Rainbow Crosswalk Could 'Trigger Epilepsy'" (7 Feb 2023)
- The Art Newspaper — "Controversial UK politician slams Tate for hosting children's drag queen storytime" (27 Jan 2023)
- Independent — "Booker Prize: Former vice-president denies transphobia accusations after being removed from post" (27 Jun 2020)
- Economist — "Why British politicians are defending women-only spaces" (12 Oct 2023)
- Wikipedia — Emma Nicholson
- Bluesky discourse (Dec 2025): referenced as JKR ally with history of anti-gay campaigning alongside anti-trans positions

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