

# [***Opinion: Why Gerard Depardieu hasn't been 'canceled'***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C04-2741-JBSS-S004-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; France has no bigger movie star than Gerard Depardieu. In his native country and mine, he is more than just a towering figure in French culture. He is seen in the eyes of many as nothing less than a national treasure.

Since his acting debut in 1965 at the age of 17, Depardieu, 75, has [*appeared in more than 200 films*](https://www.cinematheque.fr/cycle/gerard-depardieu-175.html). In 1996, he [*received the Legion of Honor*](https://www.causette.fr/societe/en-france/legion-dhonneur-de-depardieu-une-procedure-disciplinaire-ouverte-apres-la-diffusion-de-complement-denquete/), France's highest honor, bestowed upon him by then-President of Jacques Chirac.

But Depardieu's exalted status in France has only amplified the controversy over accusations [*by no fewer than 20 women*](https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/290424/gerard-depardieu-sera-juge-en-octobre-pour-des-agressions-sexuelles-sur-un-tournage) that Depardieu perpetrated a catalogue of sexual offenses going back decades, including rape, sexual assault and sexual harassment.

Accusations have swirled around Depardieu for years. Accusers stepped forward [*in 2018,*](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/french-actor-gerard-depardieu-questioned-over-alleged-sexual-assaults-2024-04-29/) as [*the #MeToo movement was taking off.*](https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/290424/gerard-depardieu-sera-juge-en-octobre-pour-des-agressions-sexuelles-sur-un-tournage) In 2020, after another [*alleged victim stepped forward accusing Depardieu of rape*](https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/290424/gerard-depardieu-sera-juge-en-octobre-pour-des-agressions-sexuelles-sur-un-tournage), a formal investigation was launched, the outcome of which is still pending.

Last week, the French movie legend was [*formally charged*](https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/29/world/europe/gerard-depardieu-trial-sexual-assault.html) with two criminal counts for alleged sexual assaults committed in September 2021 during the shooting of the film "Les Volets verts" - "[*The Green Shutters*](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt15167162/)." A trial date has been [*set for October*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/04/29/entertainment/gerard-depardieu-arrest-france-scli-intl/index.html).

Since then, additional sexual misconduct allegations have been made. An investigation by independent French newspaper Mediapart in April 2023 reported that [*13 women*](https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/110423/violences-sexuelles-13-femmes-accusent-gerard-depardieu) accused Depardieu of having committed rape and sexual assault on the sets of various films he was shooting between 2004 and 2022. In July, the public television channel France 2 aired a documentary "[*Depardieu: The Fall of an Ogre*](https://www.france.tv/france-2/complement-d-enquete/5454513-gerard-depardieu-la-chute-de-l-ogre.html)" which showed footage of the actor making obscene comments to and about women - and even making [*explicitly sexual remarks*](https://english.elpais.com/culture/2023-12-18/gerard-depardieu-self-destructs-in-damning-video.html) about a 10-year-old girl.

For his part, Depardieu has denied allegations of sexual misconduct. In a letter published in October 2023 in the conservative newspaper [*Le Figaro*](https://www.lefigaro.fr/vox/societe/gerard-depardieu-je-veux-enfin-vous-dire-ma-verite-20231001), he wrote that he had never harmed any woman, and that he never would. "Hurting a woman would be like kicking my own mother in the stomach," he wrote.

In the United States, prominent men accused of sexual improprieties very often have taken a career hit, sometimes [*losing - at least temporarily - positions of power*](https://www.elle.com/culture/career-politics/a20710282/men-planning-me-too-comebacks-harvey-weinstein/) and influence, although some bounce back professionally. Sometimes, encouragingly, they have been [*replaced in their posts by women*](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/10/23/us/metoo-replacements.html).

Except for a few cases, that has not proved to be the case in France. Women often find that coming forward with an allegation still exacts a price on their careers and they are sometimes dismissed as not being credible or said to be vindictive - harboring the goal of bringing down powerful men.

In the case of Depardieu, it's not entirely evident that decades of allegations have hurt him professionally - at least not so far. Far from being "canceled," Depardieu has continued to work prolifically in cinema. He has appeared in more than a [*dozen films and three miniseries*](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000367/) since the first formal accusations against him were lodged in 2018.

And despite decades of innuendo and notoriety, he continues to garner a great deal of public support from some of the leading figures in the world of cinema and ***politics***, most notably [*French President Emmanuel Macron*](https://www.politico.eu/article/france-emmanuel-macron-gerard-depardieu-enemies-controversy-allegations-sexual-assault-violence/), who so far has [*resisted calls*](https://www.politico.eu/article/france-gerard-depardieu-scandal-puts-emmanuel-macron-president-back-foot-sexual-violence/) to strip Depardieu of his Legion of Honor medal.

"I'm a great admirer of Gerard Depardieu; he's an immense actor ... a genius of his art. He has made France known across the whole world. And, I say this as president and as a citizen, he makes France proud," Macron said in a [*TV interview in December.*](https://www.politico.eu/article/france-emmanuel-macron-gerard-depardieu-enemies-controversy-allegations-sexual-assault-violence/)

That same month, dozens of France's leading public figures published an [*open letter in Le Figaro*](https://www.cnn.com/2018/01/10/europe/catherine-deneuve-france-letter-metoo-intl/index.html) expressing unconditional support for Depardieu and denouncing what they referred to as a public "lynching" of the actor. Signatories included the actress and model Carla Bruni, wife of former French President Nicolas Sarkozy.

Americans trying to make sense of last month's [*overturning of movie mogul Harvey Weinstein's conviction*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/04/25/us/harvey-weinstein-conviction-overturned-appeal/index.html) might be asking themselves about the [*durability of the progress*](https://variety.com/2024/film/news/harvey-weinstein-overturned-conviction-metoo-movement-1235987162/) made during the #MeToo movement, in which the voices of women's charging sexual abuse in the workplace gained newfound credibility. In France, meanwhile, the pushback against efforts to see Depardieu prosecuted has disappointed many women, who hoped to have achievedfar greater progress on issues of sexual violence as a result of #MeToo.

What detractors of the #MeToo movement seem to fear is that women in France will use the media as a platform to diffuse false accusations of sexual violence against men in order to gain publicity and undermine these men's reputation or careers. But the reality is quite different, with victims facing skepticism, online backlash and harassment. As prominent French journalist French journalist [*Sandra Muller said*](https://www.npr.org/2019/05/19/719691001/in-france-the-metoo-movement-has-yet-to-live-up-to-womens-hopes), "In France, when a woman speaks out, she's seen as a liar or maybe hysterical." Sometimes they're even left fearing for their safety.

Anxiety over false accusations is, for the most part, overblown, because false accusations are incredibly rare. It is also because men who are accused of wrongful sexual behavior, for the most part, go on with their lives - as has Depardieu, who has continued to perform for the big screen despite the swirl of accusations around him.

Other critiques of the #MeToo movement gesture toward something quintessentially French that was at risk of being lost. In 2018, the newspaper Le Mondepublished an [*open letter signed by 100 prominent women*](https://www.cnn.com/2018/01/10/europe/catherine-deneuve-france-letter-metoo-intl/index.html), including French actress Catherine Deneuve, berating the emerging #MeToo movement and defending men's "freedom to bother" - the right of men to make unsolicited come-ons, make unwanted compliments and the like.

These public figures actually disparaged those who demanded that women be treated with respect and free of abuse, and supported the rights of men to continue making unwanted advances. "Insistent or clumsy flirting is not a crime, nor is gallantry a chauvinist aggression," [*the letter read.*](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/09/movies/catherine-deneuve-and-others-denounce-the-metoo-movement.html#:~:text=Catherine%20Deneuve%20joined%20more%20than,have%20gone%20too%20far%20by)

None of this is to say, however, that the #MeToo movement has not had an impact in France. It has, for example, irrevocably changed the way in which French media responds to sexual violence against women. Just in the past few years, French news reporting has come a long way in making the personal political, increasingly taking on investigation of and reporting on accusations of sexual violence to an extent that would have been inconceivable a decade earlier. Victims of sexual violence, consequently, often say they feel less isolated than they used to.

Depardieu has not yet been tried, so it is far from certain that he will be convicted of the offenses of which he's been accused. He does appear to be guilty, at very least, of treating women badly, and he is accused of committing criminal acts against them. [*Powerful men in the US have been canceled*](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/10/23/us/metoo-replacements.html) for far less.

France may not be as far along in heeding the voices of women sex assault survivors, but that's not to say that the #MeToo movement has not been impactful. It has irrevocably changed the way the media respond to sexual violence against women.

Another positive effect of #MeToo in France can be seen in the sharp increase in the number of complaints for rape, sexual assault and sexual harassment reported to the police. In her 2023 book "Fixing France: How to Repair a Broken Republic," Nabila Ramdani uses figures released by the French Interior Ministry to assert that 75,800 complaints were filed in 2021, a 33% increase from the previous year.

There is, perhaps, one way in which the detractors of the #MeToo movement have a point. The thousands of men who have been accused of sexual violence are not the [*monsters*](https://www.michigandaily.com/opinion/the-monster-myth/) that some in media and in public life claim they are. Instead, these men are a manifestation of our own monstrous cultural fabric. They are our politicians, professors, doctors, actors, authors, TV hosts, professional cooks and athletes.

They are also our fathers, brothers, uncles, cousins and nephews, a formerly taboo topic that gained prominence in France as #MeToo took hold, sparked by the 2020 publication 2020 of Camille Kouchner's book about incest [*"La Familia Grande*](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2022/may/14/camille-kouchner-familia-grande-olivier-duhamel-abuse-interview)" and the viral [*#MeTooInceste*](https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2021/01/18/la-france-a-un-probleme-avec-l-inceste-avec-metooinceste-des-dizaines-de-milliers-de-tweets-liberent-la-parole_6066605_3224.html) (#MeTooIncest) on social media. All of them - colleagues, neighbors or blood relations - more often than not, are able to maintain their status and privilege of their professions, despite allegations of sexual violence.

It remains unclear whether the French will at long last "cancel" Gerard Depardieu, even if one or both trials find him guilty of sexual violence. But until our laws adequately punish perpetrators of sexual violence, there will be, as there always have been, far too many victims scarred by a pervasive rape culture and far too many perpetrators from all strata of society who continue to act with impunity.

Opinion by Caroline Sequin

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