

The Guardian

卫报

2022.03.21 - 2022.03.27

- [2022.03.27 - Opinion](#)
- [Headlines](#)
- [2022.03.22 - Spotlight](#)
- [2022.03.22 - Opinion](#)
- [2022.03.22 - Around the world](#)
- [Headlines](#)
- [2022.03.25 - Spotlight](#)
- [2022.03.25 - Opinion](#)
- [2022.03.25 - Around the world](#)
- [Headlines](#)
- [2022.03.21 - Spotlight](#)
- [2022.03.21 - Opinion](#)
- [2022.03.21 - Around the world](#)
- [Headlines](#)
- [2022.03.26 - Spotlight](#)
- [2022.03.26 - Opinion](#)
- [2022.03.26 - Around the world](#)
- [Headlines](#)
- [2022.03.24 - Spotlight](#)
- [2022.03.24 - Opinion](#)
- [2022.03.24 - Around the world](#)

2022.03.27 - Opinion

- [The Observer view on Rishi Sunak's spring statement](#)
- [The Observer view on why Europe must redouble its pressure on Putin](#)
- [Jiggery-wokery: the real obstacle to a united front on Ukraine](#)
- [Vladimir Putin plays poisoner's poker – cartoon](#)
- [China-Russian relations carry deep memories of mutual respect... and scorn](#)
- [Tones and I is not alone in wishing people would stop making a song about that tune](#)
- [Letters: Britain should knuckle down and embrace the boring](#)
- [For the record](#)
- [Collaboration thrives on everyday vanity and ambition. Just look at RT's wannabes](#)

[Opinion](#)[Spring statement 2022](#)

The Observer view on Rishi Sunak's spring statement

[Observer editorial](#)

The chancellor had the opportunity to address Britain's spiralling poverty but callously chose not to take it



The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rishi Sunak, delivering his spring statement in parliament. Photograph: UK Parliament/Jessica Taylor/PA

Sun 27 Mar 2022 02.30 EDT

Judge a political party by the choices it makes. Rishi Sunak may plead that [no chancellor could protect everyone](#) from a cost of living crisis driven by events outside his and the country's control. But he protests too much. There were two realities as he composed the [spring statement](#) that he presented last week. First was the [warning from the Office for Budget Responsibility \(OBR\)](#) that British households faced the most severe drop in living standards for 66 years. Second was the unexpected good news that, far from being in a

tight fiscal spot, there was a [revenue bonanza](#) that would carry the budget deficit in four years' time to the lowest for a generation. The chancellor had some £30bn of financial headroom he had not expected in October. Sunak had choices, but he chose not to make them.

Living standards for the poorest in our society are already desperate. Sunak could comfortably have afforded the £6bn to lift universal credit by £20 a week, restoring the valuable increase made during the pandemic. He could have indicated that he would fully index all benefits to reflect the surge in inflation that is so swelling the Treasury's coffers. His refusal to do so, [estimates the Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#), will pull a further 600,000 people into poverty, of whom around a quarter are children. He could have indicated that he would revisit February's package to help households with their energy bills, given the OBR forecast of a further 40% rise in energy prices in the wake of the Ukraine war. As a result, the price cap [will rise to £2,801](#) in October, nearly £2,000 higher than 18 months ago, equivalent to a 6p rise in the standard rate of income tax.

He did none of these, contenting himself with raising the fund available to local authorities to assist vulnerable people by a mere £500m. After taking all the measures into account, including the concessions on national insurance and fuel duty, the typical working-age household will see its income fall next year by 4%, or £1,100, according to the Resolution Foundation. But the poorest quarter of households will see their income fall 6%, taking [1.3 million into absolute poverty](#).

These numbers are breathtaking, but avoidable. The Trussell Trust [reports](#) that 600,000 more people used food banks in 2021, taking the grand total to more than 2.5 million. That number will surely rise at least another 600,000 in 2022 to more than 3 million. Yet Britain is one of the richest countries on Earth. What kind of society are we creating that we are prepared to live with such poverty in our midst? For the Tory party, what matters is not the condition of the people but the drive for tax cuts and the shoehorning of every policy ambition into the straitjacket of artificial constraints on debt. A moral and effective social policy is the also-ran.

It is a carelessness born of profound cynicism. There are many Britons with every reason to believe that they should not live in a society that makes so many choose between eating, clothing or staying warm. But prevailing Conservative practice indicts their poverty as a matter of choice; they should pull themselves up by their bootstraps into self-reliance.

But as we learned from the pandemic, the rich cannot insulate themselves from poor people crowded into multi-occupied decrepit housing, incubating the virus. Self-interest alone demands we all care. The doctrine of self-help ignores the reality that for the poor the struggle is just to survive. But beyond that, acknowledgement of reciprocal obligation to our fellow citizens defines our humanity. There is a collective “we” beyond the “I” demanding tax cuts. By their choices we shall know them. Last week, the Conservative party’s choices, and their impact, were laid bare.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/27/observer-view-rishi-sunak-spring-statement>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

OpinionUkraine

The Observer view on why Europe must redouble its pressure on Putin

Observer editorial

As Russia's attack on Ukraine falters, the west has to show there are no cracks in its support for Volodymyr Zelenskiy



US President Joe Biden and the European Council president, Charles Michel, last week in Brussels. Photograph: REX/Shutterstock

Sun 27 Mar 2022 02.00 EDT

No amount of propaganda or fake news can disguise the fact that President Vladimir Putin and Russia's invaders are in deep trouble in Ukraine. The problem is partly military. Moscow's forces have failed to secure major cities, including the capital, Kyiv. They have suffered tens of thousands of casualties – including 16,000 dead, according to Ukraine – and lost hundreds of tanks, planes and armoured vehicles. Bad planning, poor logistics,

incompetent leadership and rock-bottom morale, sparking [reported mutinies](#), have undermined their entire operation.

Yet Putin's problem is also political and ideological. Russia has almost zero international support. And in an extraordinary intervention that is certain to infuriate and antagonise the Kremlin, US president Joe Biden said in Poland on Saturday: "For God's sake, this man cannot remain in power." At home, too, Putin faces [mounting criticism](#). Russia's people and army do not seem to have any clear idea what grand cause supposedly justifies their sacrifices in Ukraine.

Not so Ukrainians, both soldiers and civilians, whose courageous, highly effective defence of their homeland has held the world spellbound and paralysed Putin's war machine. They have no doubt of what they are fighting for: for their children, for their future as a sovereign nation, for democracy. It is no exaggeration to say, with President Volodymyr Zelenskiy, that Ukraine is fighting for Europe and the world against the reactionary forces of autocracy and authoritarianism, a central theme of President Joe Biden's [Warsaw speech](#).

The latest Moscow defence ministry statement saying that Russia will henceforth "focus our core efforts" on achieving "the main goal, [the liberation of Donbas](#)", while disingenuous, may nevertheless be seen as an admission that Russia has failed in its wider aims, as vaguely set out by Putin, of "denazifying" and "demilitarising" all of Ukraine and forcing regime change on Kyiv. It may be this statement is another lie. It may be that Russia's commanders are trying to regroup. But it does give cause for cautious optimism.

Last week's EU summit failed to impose significant new sanctions and Ukraine's EU membership hopes were dashed anew

Sensing weakness, Zelenskiy has been quick to renew his call for unconditional peace talks. He is right to do so. If it ever gets its act together, Russia's military remains a formidable if wounded beast. It has reserves of men and weaponry that Ukraine can only dream of. If the battlefield

stalemate continues and its humiliation deepens, Russia also has chemical and biological weapons. Fears that Putin may resort to such extremes produced a stern warning from Biden last week of an unspecified, consequential Nato response.

An immediate ceasefire, followed by talks that do not seek to make Ukraine's territorial integrity the price of peace, must be the aim. Neither side lacks incentives. The suffering of Ukraine's people is dreadful. About a quarter of the population is displaced. Millions have fled abroad. The prospect of more war crimes and massacres, such as that in Mariupol, where up to 300 women and children reportedly died in a theatre bombing, is unsupportable. Putin needs to stop, too, if only to prevent permanent damage to Russia's economy, its global standing and his hold on power. Does he see this? Who knows?

At this fragile juncture, the clear responsibility of the western democracies, working through Nato and the EU, is to step up pressure on the Kremlin to stop the war – not in any way to ease off. Unfortunately, there are signs the latter may be happening. Influenced by France and Germany, last week's EU summit failed to impose significant new sanctions. Russia's hugely lucrative EU oil and gas exports are largely unaffected so far. Calls by the Baltic republics for a ban on Russian road freight and shipping were ignored. And Ukraine's EU membership hopes were dashed anew.

A parallel Nato summit also saw too much self-congratulation and too little self-examination. Despite Biden's talk of unprecedented alliance unity, there are clear divisions. Poland and other east European members have pressed in vain for a more robust military approach, for example by supplying MiG-29 fighter planes. Boris Johnson's idea of sending tanks was reportedly quashed by President Emmanuel Macron. Promised weaponry from France and Germany has not arrived. Speaking via video link, Zelenskiy bitterly complained that the more sophisticated armaments Ukraine needs are not forthcoming and personally challenged leaders who he said were dragging their feet.

It may be that Putin is becoming more realistic. Or that, observing intra-European tensions, he is playing for time. It's possible that, in any negotiation, he would settle for the territorial gains he has made in the

Donbas region while trying to hang on to a southern “land bridge” to Crimea. It’s possible, too, that some European countries might favour such a deal and even offer to lift sanctions, if it stopped the war, the refugee exodus and the economic damage it is causing them.

Such concessions would be difficult, even impossible, for many Ukrainians to accept and they should not be pushed into making them. Ukraine must ultimately decide how and when this ends. Meanwhile, this is not the moment to ease western pressure on a flailing Russia and its war criminal president.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/27/observer-view-europe-must-redouble-pressure-on-putin-ukraine>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

[NotebookSociety](#)

Jiggery-wokery: the real obstacle to a united front on Ukraine

[Rowan Moore](#)



Concern about a placename's associations with slavery – unlike cosying up to oligarchs – doesn't put anyone on Russia's side



Bristol has been reconsidering its historical links with slave traders; Tulse Hill may be next. Photograph: Matthew Horwood/Getty Images

Sat 26 Mar 2022 11.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 26 Mar 2022 11.55 EDT

Beware the journalistic use of the word “we”. It’s a slippery pronoun that can slide from meaning “we, the whole of humanity” to “we, the author and some like-minded friends” to “we, an ill-defined mass who uphold an imaginary consensus that the author wishes bravely to oppose”.

It’s out in force in the persistent and evidence-free claims that “woke wars”, as the *Daily Telegraph*’s Sherelle Jacobs [put it](#) last week, have gravely undermined “our” ability to confront the evils of Vladimir Putin. In the cold war, she claims, conflict with the Soviet Union was “confidently framed” as one between “the enlightened forces of liberty and the darkness of communism”. Now, “we” are tearing ourselves apart with “squabbles over statues and gender pronouns”.

There are so many holes in this argument that it’s hard to know where to start. With the fact that what she calls “squabbles” might also be called free speech and the wish to defend minorities? Or that the cold war coincided with a much-squabbled-over expansion of rights for those same minorities, which rightwing commentators of the time, had the term existed, would

assuredly have called “woke”? Or that tirades like hers oddly echo those of Putin himself against Russian “traitors” and western “[cancel culture](#)”? Or that the complicity of British conservative elites with oligarchic wealth might possibly be a more relevant issue vis-a-vis the Ukraine war than statue-toppling?

If she really wants “us” to support Ukraine with a united home front, perhaps she can start by questioning her own newspaper, which [claimed](#) that the south London suburb of Tulse Hill was in danger of being “cancelled”, simply because the council had launched a consultation as to whether residents of the borough were troubled by the associations with slavery of local placenames.

There's a kind of hush



‘Homes huddled against the traffic will now be liberated’: an almost deserted section of the A12 in 2021. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

A well-known feature of lockdown, especially in big cities, was its quiet: almost no traffic noise, just the unchallenged and increasingly grating chimes of ice-cream vans. Now that things are roughly back to normal, busy roads resemble their former selves, but with the volume turned down.

Enough cars, vans and buses are hybrid or electric that the pre-Covid roar has become a hum.

They also make for cleaner air.

Since town planning and property markets have been based for decades on the assumption that big roads are noxious, the effects could be profound: blasted thoroughfares are now potential boulevards, their wide margins ripe for pavement cafes, and homes huddled against the traffic will now be liberated, their views on to the wide-open spaces of urban motorways transformed into assets. This is an almost utopian prospect. There will still be ice-cream vans, though.

Parks and re-creation



The drama of town planning: Ralph Fiennes as Robert Moses in *Straight Line Crazy*. Photograph: Manuel Harlan

This electric hush will mitigate, if not entirely vindicate, the works of Robert Moses, the man who, from the 1920s to the 1960s, wielded extraordinary power over the fabric of New York City. With the mild-sounding title of parks commissioner, he razed neighbourhoods to construct expressways, threw bridges over the city's rivers and built vast housing projects. That he is

the subject of a new play, *Straight Line Crazy*, written by David Hare and starring Ralph Fiennes, makes one wonder why such a dramatisation took so long. And where is the Hollywood movie? Perhaps the pitch “this is a film about a town planner” doesn’t play well in an elevator.

Rowan Moore is the Observer’s architecture correspondent

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/26/jiggery-wokery-real-obstacle-to-a-united-front-on-ukraine>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

Observer comment cartoon

Chemical weapons

Vladimir Putin plays poisoner's poker – cartoon

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/picture/2022/mar/26/vladimir-putin-plays-poisoners-poker-cartoon>

[OpinionChina](#)

China-Russian relations carry deep memories of mutual respect... and scorn

[Rana Mitter](#)

As the world awaits Beijing's response to the Ukraine war, history shows its reaction could be complicated



Illustration by Dominic McKenzie

Sun 27 Mar 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Sun 27 Mar 2022 03.13 EDT

The troops gathered on the border. The supreme leader decided that it was time to invade, to teach the other side a lesson. Shortly afterwards, troops breached the internationally recognised border and clashed with local forces.

Not Ukraine 2022, but Vietnam 1979. In January of that year, the Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping told the US president Jimmy Carter that he wanted to “spank the butt” of his neighbours. For a month, Chinese and Vietnamese forces clashed, leading to a death toll of tens of thousands. Chinese troops withdrew in March 1979, when, unlike [Vladimir Putin](#), Deng sensibly

decided to declare a famous victory and head home. Since then, there has been no unambiguous breach of an international border by Chinese troops.

China's brief invasion of Vietnam isn't much talked about today during the [Ukraine](#) crisis. None of the western actors wants to bring it up when they are trying to pressure China over its general fixation on the sanctity of national sovereignty. And Moscow won't mention it, because it brings back an awkward memory for their friends in Beijing: China's 1979 venture wasn't really about Vietnam, but about Russia.

China is genuinely concerned about the destruction of Ukraine's sovereignty, although it will not say so in public

Sino-Soviet relations had become poisonous ever since the split between the two communist superpowers in 1960. Vietnam, with Soviet backing, invaded and occupied Cambodia in 1978, ousting the Khmer Rouge. In the bizarre cold war politics of the time, both the US and [China](#) supported Pol Pot's genocidal regime because its Vietnamese enemy was supported by Moscow.

On 4 February, at the Beijing Winter Olympics, Xi Jinping and Putin [declared](#) a "friendship without limits". Shortly afterwards, Russia invaded Ukraine; most analysts judge that Beijing had some idea that Russia would attempt to seize further Ukrainian territory but almost certainly did not realise that there would be a full invasion.

China is genuinely concerned about the Russian destruction of Ukraine's sovereignty, although it will not say so in public, calling instead at the UN for vaguely defined humanitarian gestures and censoring pro-Ukraine sentiments on Chinese social media. But Beijing seems to see little benefit in becoming a mediator in the conflict, judging that many of its partners in the global south, such as Pakistan and South Africa, do not consider a European crisis to be an existential test for them or for China.

China's primary motivations in seeking peace between [Russia](#) and Ukraine are pragmatic. Ukraine is an important, though not crucial, source of grain for China and having to find new suppliers of cheap cereals in a hurry for its

middle-class population could fuel inflation. There are pluses for China in a settlement that leaves Putin in charge but weaker and still sanctioned. China could become the sole major market for Russia's wheat and fossil fuels, obtainable at bargain prices, although traditional allies of Russia such as India have not taken nearly such a hard line against Moscow as the west and might also provide markets.



United they stand? Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping in Beijing, China, on 4 February 2022. Photograph: Alexei Druzhinin/Kremlin/Sputnik/EPA

Russia is also still China's preferred partner to create semi-formal military groupings (rather than Nato-style binding alliances) against the west. Beijing has repeatedly suggested the Shanghai Cooperation Organization should be used to mediate in Ukraine; the SCO is a would-be Nato dominated by China and Russia, with India and central Asian states as members.

However, the Russia-China relationship is not just about power politics pure and simple. Somewhere in the pragmatic relationship of the present day lies muscle memory of a more emotional link between China and Russia, not just the Soviet Union but a longer tradition of Russian literature and culture that shaped the modern Chinese revolution.

One of China's greatest modern authors, [Ba Jin](#), took his pen name from syllables in the Chinese transliterated names of the revolutionaries Bakunin and Kropotkin. Young Chinese women, leaving their families to take part in the communist uprising of the 1940s, would cite Turgenev's poem Threshold (1878). The work is written in the voice of a man speaking to a young woman about to join the anti-tsarist movement; he says she will suffer "alienation" and "loneliness", to which she replies: "I know, and I still want to enter."

China has seen its economy and its global influence soar, while Russia's spending power and life expectancy have shrunk

The heyday of that Russian influence was in the 1940s, when Soviet ideology and the lure of Soviet technology also influenced Chinese visions of Moscow as the future, and in the 1950s, when the country was isolated from the US. It was emotionally distinct from the anti-foreign Cultural Revolution that Xi grew up with, but it was very much the world of his father, the veteran revolutionary general Xi Zhongxun.

From the 1960s to the end of the cold war, the love turned to hatred, as ideological disputes brought the two countries close to war over border islands on the Ussuri River in 1969, prompting Chinese enthusiasm for the opening to the US that took place just over 50 years ago.

In recent decades, the relationship has become warmer, as Moscow and Beijing realise that it gives them both cover against the encroachment of the west.

Yet the post-cold war trajectory of Putin's Russia and Xi's China is not the same. China has seen its economy and global influence soar, while Russia's spending power and life expectancy have shrunk. In some areas, such as central Asia, cooperation masks mutual distrust. Russian residents of Siberia have become increasingly resentful of Chinese investment in their region. China has created one of the most powerful civilian and military economies in the world, yet Russia's elites still look to the west, many considering China rich but "uncultured" (*nekulturny*, a much stronger insult in Russian than English).

China feels a little superior because Russia has never come up with a Huawei; Russia is a touch contemptuous because China has never produced a Dostoyevsky. In that ambivalence, along with unmentioned episodes such as the 1979 proxy war between them, lies a shared history of respect and resentment. This still seems to flavour the relationship today between Xi and Putin.

Rana Mitter is author of *China's Good War: How World War II Is Shaping a New Nationalism* (2020). He teaches at Oxford University

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/27/sino-soviet-ties-deep-complex-will-they-unravel>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

Names in the newsMusic

Tones and I is not alone in wishing people would stop making a song about that tune

[Rebecca Nicholson](#)



When music artists come to loathe their megahit, it's a sure sign they've made it to the top of the pop industry



Tones and I: 'I just don't wanna go there any more.' Photograph: Don Arnold/Getty Images

Sat 26 Mar 2022 14.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 26 Mar 2022 15.15 EDT

Shortly after its release in 2019, *Dance Monkey*, by the Australian artist Tones and I, became the biggest song in the world. If you passed a radio playing music, you probably heard it. Its lilting, simple piano-and-beat loop had a rapid, whiplash-inducing rise to the top. The statistics around it are so large that they blur into an immeasurable mass: YouTube views and Spotify plays are well into the billions and it is the most Shazammed song of all time. (You'd think, given its ubiquity, people wouldn't need to Shazam it any more, but it remains in the top spot.) Tones and I had been a busker not long before *Dance Monkey* came out and, for her, its success was life-changing and then some.

But, as is often the way with songs that become far bigger than their performer, the artist has a complicated relationship with it. "I loathe that song a lot of the time," she told the Australian station Nova FM. "A lot of the time, I don't want to sing it. I'm not going to write another song like it." She was talking about working with songwriters who were aiming to recreate the magic of *Dance Monkey*. "I was like, I don't wanna go there any more," she said.

Elsewhere in Australia, a presenter on morning TV asked Bryan Adams to explain the albatross around his neck, Summer of '69. I watched the clip because, having done a fair few of them myself, I am helplessly drawn to awkward interviews: I can't resist the painful wince of witnessing a ropey question followed by a rude answer. "I don't want to talk about that. I want to talk about the new album, that's why I'm here," he said, curtly. That new album is called *So Happy It Hurts*. Perhaps the title is ironic.

Both Tones and I and Adams are part of a long tradition. Madonna reportedly despises Like a Virgin. Radiohead didn't play Creep for years. Michael Stipe is scathing about REM's Shiny Happy People. Liam Gallagher says he hates Wonderwall, but then again, Gallagher strikes me as a man whose words should be taken with a fistful of salt. Kanye West wrote Gold Digger because he knew it would make money, but says he never really liked it. This complicated relationship with the hand that feeds is so common that it's practically a pop star rite of passage. For all of the chart successes and the number ones and most-played accolades, rejecting your biggest hit is a sign you've really made it.

Elise Loehnen: when ‘wellness’ requires a detox from detoxing



Elise Loehnen: that's enough 'cleansing'. Photograph: Ian Tuttle/Getty Images for goop

Elise Loehnen, who until 2020 was Gwyneth Paltrow's second-in-command at Goop, has [revealed](#) that when she left the "wellness" company she decided to "forswear any cleansing", claiming that she has eaten like a teenager in the two years since. This announcement, made on Instagram, is not a rejection of personal hygiene, but an important point about the toxicity of cleanses and detoxes. "To me, it had become synonymous with dieting and restriction," she said. "And I felt like I was not in a healthy relationship with my body, where I was always trying to punish it, bring it under control."

I remember once sitting down with someone who was on the third day of a "cleanse" – and I apologise for the quotation marks here, but this is the wellness industry, and it deserves it – who had been surviving on cayenne pepper, maple syrup and lemon juice and barely had the energy to talk. The science debunking even the idea of a detox is plentiful and widespread and I am glad to hear a prominent figure in that world explaining the problems she had with it. Even if it is a bit like Jeremy Clarkson swearing off cars.

Richard Curtis: it's funny, but comedy doesn't cut Oscar gold



Richard Curtis: give comedy a fair crack of the whip. Photograph: Rob Latour/REX/Shutterstock

In Los Angeles, as the film world geared up for the Oscars by hoping that people would actually watch the ceremony, the director and Academy member [Richard Curtis](#) talked about the historic lack of recognition for comedic films and comic actors. Will Ferrell should have been nominated for *Elf*, he said. “I think it’s a real issue that comedy isn’t respected as much... but I do try and push for comedy performances whenever I can,” he added.

I try to watch as many of the best picture nominees as possible each year, but this is rarely an uplifting experience. Of course it is stunningly beautiful, and brilliantly acted and directed, but it took me several run-ups before I managed to muster the enthusiasm to watch *The Power of the Dog*. There is a lightness to *Licorice Pizza*, but the only film nominated for best picture that could be considered a straightforward comedy is *Don't Look Up*, a movie about the imminent end of the world. The funniest thing about it was how many heated family arguments it caused over Christmas. Insightful masterpiece or patronising, self-satisfied waffle? There were a lot of opinions.

Curtis pointed out that comedy films tend to make more money and that is their reward. It's true that there is far more critical snobbery around comedy, though there is a strong argument to be made that it's harder to be truly funny. It is also harder to agree on what makes people laugh, because humour is simply much more divisive. The same humour/drama imbalance is just as true for novels and for television. What I'm saying, I think, is that *Jackass Forever* was robbed.

Rebecca Nicholson is an Observer columnist

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/26/tunes-and-i-not-alone-wishing-people-would-stop-making-song-about-that-tune>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

Observer lettersSociety

Letters: Britain should knuckle down and embrace the boring

Instead of ensuring people are well fed and improving homes and infrastructure, our leaders have divided the nation



Volunteers at a food bank in Birmingham. Photograph: Andrew Fox/The Guardian

Sun 27 Mar 2022 02.00 EDT

I had hoped post Brexit that the UK would become a boring, reliable friend of freedom and democracy (“[Do you find everyone else boring? You've only yourself to blame](#)”, Focus). I had hoped that we would do boring things such as feed and house the entire population. Potholes would be fixed, public transport less expensive and unreliable houses insulated.

Alas, the quest for shareholder value and bone-headed populism has instead produced a constant flow of unlearned lessons from our state institutions and an almost comical lack of self-awareness in the international arena. Ukraine,

in her agony to achieve freedom from autocracy, has transformed a comedian into a statesman and leader and maintained a unity of purpose and nationhood. In contrast, the UK has become divided – between rich and poor, town and country, young and old and between the smaller nations of the union and England.

Let's embrace the boring and knuckle down to achieving concrete results, rather than promoting hype. Let us sit down and stop thinking that there are shortcuts to success at any level.

Richard Styles

Walmer, Kent

Viv Groskop's entertaining article on boring professions reminded me of the entry that used to appear in the Yellow Pages phone directory in the 1980s: "Boring – see Civil Engineers".

David Harper

Cambridge

Love and disability on screen

It was great to read your interview with Ruth Madeley about the drama *Then Barbara Met Alan* ("[These stories change how people think](#)", Magazine). While Ruth's comments are excellent, she says: "I don't think it had been done before: two visibly disabled characters, played by two disabled actors, in a loving – and sexy – sex scene."

However, this was done for the first time in the BBC film *Every Time You Look at Me* (2004), with Mat Fraser and Lisa Hammond. It was still astonishing that it took this long. My disabled partner, Richard Rieser, ran the "1 in 8 Campaign" in the 1990s, which broke new ground in campaigning for disabled people to be shown positively in all mainstream media, culminating in *The Raspberry Ripple Awards* on Channel 4.

Susie Burrows

London N1

Sweet dreams? Hardly

I read with mounting horror Stuart McGurk's piece on the new-age fashion for "manifesting" what you want ("When your dreams come true", Magazine). This turbo-charged individualism was a trend in the 1990s and it's sad to see it being peddled again to desperate and gullible young people. Apparently to manifest a dream car or boyfriend you just need to totally focus on what you want. Presumably, people caught up in war and famine, poverty or violence are just not focusing enough?

Marianne Craig

Brighton

Young people and gender

Last week, this paper published its view on the Cass review on gender identity services for children, calling, without a hint of irony, for an end to "ideology" ("Children with gender identity issues are ill served by adults who shut down debate", Comment). For years, the Gender Identity Development Service has been positioned as variably both "affirmative" or "gate-keeping", "too rushed" or "too ponderous". These are false dichotomies.

At GIDS, we take a young person's sense of themselves seriously. Some may refer to this approach as "affirmative". However, being respectful of someone's identity does not preclude exploration. Recent independent research relates first hand the experiences of young people.

Most of our young people meet the criteria for a diagnosis of gender dysphoria. Yet only a minority access puberty blockers. Gender dysphoria alone is a poor predictor for who might benefit from a medical pathway.

Our specialist NHS service works developmentally to arrive at a shared understanding of what support may be needed. While we are trained to identify wider psychological or safeguarding needs, we liaise with local services to meet these. We do explore and seek to understand the impact of co-occurring difficulties and neurodiversity, but do not conceptualise the experience of gender incongruence as a symptom to be resolved with extensive therapy.

There is a reason GIDS evolved over decades at the Tavistock – it is a place with a long history of holding complexity. Simplistic notions about gender have no place and do not serve young people. Of course, what is universally accepted is the recognition that young people need more support from other services, something we have long been calling for.

Paul Jenkins, CEO Tavistock and **Polly Carmichael**, director GIDS

My family's adoption trauma

Thank you for your piece about the forced adoptions carried out in the 1950s-1970s (“[We're human beings, we deserve an apology,' say forced adoption victims](#)”, News). My mother was one of those who gave birth in a mother and baby home during that period and the experience scarred her for life. She was one of the few to keep her baby – in her “cohort” only two did so, herself and another young woman who was handing her child over to the grandma to raise. The impact on my mother was tremendous. She has suffered from mental health issues ever since, and when she gave birth to my brother 16 years later, the impact of that delayed trauma was still with her.

She often spoke of the way she was chastised as she was giving birth to me, being told that she was an awful human being and that there was no way she would be able to raise a child out of wedlock. The impact was so extreme that when I was pregnant 40 years later, she had to have therapy due to PTSD flashbacks.

The young women who had their children adopted were not the only ones who suffered. It was all young women who went through that system and the impact reverberates still among women of my age, both as daughters of those who kept their babies and daughters of those who were forced to submit, since that knowledge becomes a form of generational trauma that is handed down.

Yasmin Stefanov-King
Scarborough, North Yorkshire

Slings and arrows

Snobbery and stereotyping in the Everyman crossword last Sunday? I fear so: Everyman No 3,936 clue for 21 down: “Here you see outsized competitors hover excitedly, primarily?” Solution: oche (the line to be toed when playing darts). Not so Everyman after all?

David Reed
London NW3

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/commentisfree/2022/mar/27/letters-britain-should-knuckle-down-embrace-boring>.

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

[For the record](#)UK news

For the record

This week's corrections

Sun 27 Mar 2022 02.00 EDT

An article ([Balancing the books on the backs of the poor](#), 13 March, p14) erred in saying the Trussell Trust “has consistently reported, for the last 10 years, that more than half the people referred to its food banks for emergency aid are there because they are in debt to the Department for Work and Pensions”. In fact the trust’s latest figures (for 2020) show 47% of referred users were in debt to the DWP, up from 26% in 2018, which was the first year this data was collected. The trust also says debts may combine with broader social security issues in driving these referrals.

The Labour MP Tulip Siddiq wrote that the foreign secretary, Liz Truss, accepted the UK’s debt to Iran was “legitimate” and acknowledged the link between that debt and Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe’s release; Siddiq did not write that Truss described the link itself as legitimate as we stated in a news article ([Family’s MP says Johnson’s ‘very poor grasp’ of case led to errors](#), 20 March, p16).

An article about a rewrite of London Calling for the war on Ukraine said the original song was written by the Clash’s Joe Strummer and Mick Jones. While they played key roles in its composition, the song is primarily credited to the band ([Kyiv calling: Clash classic reborn as an anthem of resistance](#), 20 March, p10).

We misdescribed the human rights organisation Stand for All as a charity ([Refugee sponsorship scheme is ‘unworkable’ unless visa red tape is removed, warns Labour](#), 20 March, p6).

Other recently amended articles include:

'We have come to protect you,' Russian soldiers told Ukrainian man they'd shot

*Write to the Readers' Editor, the Observer, York Way, London N1 9GU,
email observer.readers@observer.co.uk, tel 020 3353 4736*

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2022/mar/27/for-the-record>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

OpinionRT

Collaboration thrives on everyday vanity and ambition. Just look at RT's wannabes

[Nick Cohen](#)



Few people on Putin's TV network were true believers... which is the really frightening thing



George Galloway hosting a programme on RT. Photograph: RT

Sat 26 Mar 2022 15.00 EDT

When Adolf Hitler was ascendant, the American foreign correspondent Dorothy Thompson invented the “[macabre parlour game](#)” of guessing who would “go Nazi” if the Germans invaded. With Vladimir Putin, there is no need to imagine who would collaborate, as so many have already collaborated with the Russian propaganda effort.

Some were convinced ideologues. Others were has-been politicians such as Alex Salmond and George Galloway: conceited old men, grateful that Putin’s RT (Russia Today) network still wanted to broadcast them. The rest were not has-beens but never-beens: wannabe pundits the national media would not touch; TV presenters who never had star billing; desperate young reporters who could not break into the UK’s exploitative media sector.

TV journalists are actors with notebooks. There is no hiding place on stage or in the news anchor’s chair. The failure to succeed is deeply personal because, however vigorously you try to blame others, the public’s reluctance to clamour for your company can only be the result of your own failings. [Bill Dod](#) exemplified RT presenters who moved between jobs on local and

consumer channels until RT offered them a national platform. Its staff took the opportunity because RT exploited vanities most of us feel unless we have achieved a rare serenity. The vanity of the passed over. The vanity of men and women who believed society would reward them if they worked hard and obeyed its rules, only to find it ignored them after they had done both. Russia gave them new rules to obey and rewarded them with money and, as joyous to the ego, recognition. All it asked in return is that they never asked hard questions about their paymasters.

RT offered Alex Rees his first job as an assistant producer in 2017. His £25,000 salary was better than just getting by on the one-off commissions many young journalists must endure. The UK operation focused on Brexit, Scottish nationalism, culture wars and unilateral disarmament: anything, in short, that weakened Britain. No newsroom commissar dictated the party line. Alex told me staff at the grand London studios in Millbank, just down the road from parliament, would pitch ideas. The management would return with the authorised news list.

In theory, his boss was a Ukrainian, who resigned when Russian missiles taught her the hard way not to believe the propaganda she spread. But Alex's impression was that "people we never saw made the editorial decisions. Maybe in London, maybe in Moscow."

He began to have doubts when Russian agents launched a chemical weapons attack with novichok on Sergei Skripal in Salisbury in 2018. If the London journalists had a conscience, they could soothe it by saying that their work just about complied with broadcasting standards. But Moscow accompanied their reporting with packages of hacks standing outside factories saying the nerve agent could have been made in the Czech Republic or come from the British research lab at Porton Down – from anywhere and everywhere [except Russia](#).

And then there were the studio guests. George Galloway was as reliable an apologist for Putin as he was for [Bashar al-Assad](#) and [Saddam Hussein](#) – "the man's search for a tyrannical fatherland never ends", as Christopher Hitchens once said. Galloway duly derided the truth about Russian crimes on RT and the broadcasting regulators duly [censured him](#).

But Galloway was not a typical figure. Most people over 30 know who he is, just as most could pick RT contributor [Nigel Farage](#) from a police identification parade. I challenge you to put a face to Neil Clark, Craig Murray and so many other useful idiots on the RT sofa. Clark was a typically disappointed figure from our media-saturated age. He was a [jobbing teacher](#) at a crammer helping the children of the upper middle class scrape into Oxbridge. He spent his evenings far from the world of power politics at meetings of Oxfordshire's North Hinksey parish council, complaining that a fellow councillor had the impertinence to call him a "[plonker](#)" or that a member of the public had said he was "[pathetic](#)".

Journalists, like actors and athletes, are visible. Scrutiny goes with the job. Accept it or quit

The leftish press of the day briefly ran his pieces defending the war criminal Slobodan Milošević as a "prisoner of conscience". But the market for whitewashing crimes against humanity was limited. The dreary meeting rooms of North Hinksey beckoned, until RT gave him a platform, which allowed him to put failure behind him and show all who had snubbed him that Clark was a man to be reckoned with.

Did I hear you say you would never deal with the devil to confound your enemies? Are you sure about that?

Craig Murray is an equally symptomatic figure. I [defended him](#) in 2002 when he was Britain's ambassador in Uzbekistan and found the moral courage to criticise the tyrannical practices of the Uzbek dictatorship. It was pouring boiling water over prisoners while remaining the west's ally in democracy's war against radical Islam. Naturally, Murray didn't last long in the Foreign Office after that outburst.

If you had asked me at the time, I would have said that, as a brave and principled figure, Murray would go on to defend human rights whether the west or the west's enemies oppressed them.

But like so many others he was prepared to expose western crimes while [covering for Putin](#). If I make him sound a hypocrite, then he is hardly an

exceptional hypocrite. The west kids itself if it thinks Ukraine enjoys global support. Millions in Africa, Asia, South America and in the west itself will excoriate the double standards of democracies while excusing or ignoring the crimes of dictatorships.

You may object that it is unfair to pick on propagandists when the bankers, lawyers and estate agents who laundered Russian money remain anonymous. But journalists, like actors and athletes, are visible. Scrutiny goes with the job. Accept it or quit. You might say that belatedly, even by the lax standards of a cynical world, RT journalists are speaking out against Putin and have called time on their collaboration. For all that, they remain important and quietly frightening figures.

Although some thrilled to Putin's violence, most of RT's employees served the world's mightiest crime gang while remaining average people with everyday concerns. Their story is a warning to guard against power worship and subservience: not just in those around us but in ourselves.

Nick Cohen is an Observer Columnist

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/26/collaboration-built-on-everyday-vanity-ambition-look-at-rts-wannabes>

Headlines

- [Exclusive Former minister takes second job as No 10 drops plan to cap MPs' earnings](#)
- [Live UK politics: we failed Nazanin, says Jeremy Hunt](#)
- [Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe Hunt calls for inquiry into Iran debt payment delays](#)
- [Revealed \\$17bn of global assets linked to 35 Russians with alleged ties to Putin](#)
- [Roman Abramovich Inside his £250m property portfolio](#)

[Politics](#)

Former minister takes second job as No 10 drops plan to cap MPs' earnings

Exclusive: Caroline Dinenage given approval to take up nonexecutive role at care home developer owned by Tory donor



Caroline Dinenage was the social care minister from 2018 to 2020.

Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

[Rowena Mason](#) Deputy political editor

Tue 22 Mar 2022 02.00 EDT

A Conservative MP and former social care minister has signed up for a second job working as a director for a care home developer, just months after Boris Johnson promised a crackdown on outside earnings.

Caroline Dinenage asked for formal approval to take up a job as a nonexecutive at LNT Group, a developer of new care homes owned by Tory

donor Lawrence Tomlinson.

Many of her party colleagues have been offloading second jobs following a furore about MPs spending too much time on outside interests after the Owen Paterson lobbying scandal that forced him to resign.

The government pledged to bring in changes to the rules on MP jobs to tighten restrictions around lobbying and consultancy after a consultation held by the Commons standards committee, but last week No 10 quietly dropped support for capping hours and earnings.

Despite the lack of formal new rules, many MPs have cut back their work for private companies.

Julian Smith, a Conservative former cabinet minister, quit all of his private sector advisory roles, which had been earning him £144,000 a year, while Iain Duncan Smith, the former Tory leader, ended his advisory board role at Tunstall Healthcare, which had been earning him £20,000 a year.

In contrast, Dinenage, the MP for Gosport, was given approval for the new part-time role at the care home developer earlier this month by the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments (Acoba), which noted that she had toured an LNT site while she was a social care minister but said her former department had no concerns about her taking up the job.

It said she must not lobby the government on behalf of LNT, draw on privileged information, advise on government contracts or use contacts from her time in office.

Angela Rayner, Labour's deputy leader, said: "Just as Boris Johnson breaks his promise to crack down on Tory MPs' outside work, it emerges one of his former health ministers has a second job with a care home firm.

"This is a prime minister who has repeatedly allowed his own MPs to put their own private business interests ahead of their constituents and it must be stopped. Labour will set up a commission for integrity and ethics to make sure the British people's interests always come first."

The government's pledge last year to put tighter restrictions on second jobs came amid a public outcry over lobbying breaches by Paterson, whom MPs were initially whipped to try to protect, and a furore over the former attorney general Geoffrey Cox [being paid nearly £6m](#) as a lawyer since joining parliament, voting by proxy on days he was undertaking paid work.

Two cabinet ministers, Dominic Raab and Anne-Marie Trevelyan, backed a time limit on second jobs last autumn, suggesting it could be 10 to 15 hours a week.

But with pressure off Johnson's premiership because of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, ministers submitted their view to the Commons standards committee that a time limit or ceiling on such earnings would be "impractical".

At least 20 Conservative MPs have lobbied the standards committee investigating new rules on second jobs and their behaviour in the Commons chamber, with many saying they strongly disagreed with time limits on outside work.

Dinenage has been contacted for comment.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/mar/22/former-minister-takes-second-job-as-no-10-drops-plan-to-cap-mps-earnings>

[**Politics live with Andrew Sparrow**](#)

[**Politics**](#)

Minister admits Ukrainian refugees arriving in UK illegally would risk jail under nationality bill plan – as it happened

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/live/2022/mar/22/nazanin-zaghari-ratcliffe-jeremy-hunt-boris-johnson-politics-government-latest-news>

[Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe](#)

Zaghari-Ratcliffe: MPs to hold inquiry into delay over Iran debt payment

Foreign affairs committee inquiry could help determine why it took six years to secure release



Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe tells a news conference on Monday that she should have been released six years ago. Photograph: Reuters

[Patrick Wintour and Jessica Elgot](#)

Tue 22 Mar 2022 06.39 EDTFirst published on Tue 22 Mar 2022 04.34 EDT

An inquiry into why the British government took more than 30 years to pay a £400m debt to the Iranian government that was deemed fundamental to the release of British-Iranian dual nationals held in Iranian jails is to be mounted by the foreign affairs select committee.

The decision was taken in principle by the committee on Monday, a committee source said, but would not start until [Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe](#)

and any other former prisoners felt ready to provide evidence.

The former foreign secretary [Jeremy Hunt](#) joined the calls for an inquiry, saying it had taken too long to pay the debt.

The former Middle East minister Alistair Burt had already written to the committee asking for an inquiry, saying even in office he could not discover the source of the resistance to paying the debt. In a letter to the committee he said “we have a right to know”.

Hunt and Burt say the UK must take the opportunity to learn wider lessons from the negotiations – rather than allow the issues to be forgotten amid the Ukraine and cost-of-living crises.

The select committee inquiry was initially sought by the Labour MP Tulip Siddiq and Richard Ratcliffe, Nazanin’s husband, in a letter to the committee.

Zaghari-Ratcliffe, a dual British-Iranian national, was held in Iran after visiting her parents with her then-22-month-old daughter, Gabriella. She was accused of plotting against the regime, linked to her work with media charities though she was not carrying out that work while in the country.

Hunt said there had been a reluctance to pay the £400m debt to Iran because there was a view inside government that it would be equivalent to paying a ransom. He said he had that policy changed in principle during his period as foreign secretary, but there were still practical problems over making a payment due to US sanctions.

The UK government last week finally paid the debt leading to the release of Zaghari-Ratcliffe and Anoosheh Ashoori saying it had received undertaking from the Iranians that the money would be used only for humanitarian purposes.

But Gibson Dunn lawyers for Nazanin’s husband, repeatedly wrote to the prime minister, the foreign secretary, the chancellor and the defence secretary suggesting ways in which the money could be paid through

humanitarian channels but ministers largely did not reply, or simply replied that all avenues were being explored.

Letters in the possession of the Guardian suggesting humanitarian routes to make the payment were sent on 6 September 2019, 15 April 2020, 13 May 2020 and 11 August 2020.

The last of these letters accused the Foreign Office of “a deliberate policy of procrastination and delay, coupled with the fallacious insistence that the roadblocks to repayment are unavoidable.

“The UK government defaulted on its contractual obligations to Iran in the context of the IMS [International Military Services, the UK government’s former arms sales export arm] debt over 30 years ago, but is still looking to delay or evade repayment, including it appears at the behest of the US government.”

It added: “We have on numerous occasions set out what we consider to be viable options for repayment, including to you personally to the foreign secretary, and have never had any indication as to whether these options have even been explored by International Military Services and the UK government. Please now clarify this and provide details, including whether (and if so when) you have explored payment via humanitarian aid.

”All that the UK government has to do is to honour its legally owed obligations to Tehran in a manner that is unconnected to the release of any British nationals.”

The letter received a one paragraph response, and in private meetings with the family the Foreign Office refused to discuss issues of debt payment.



Jeremy Hunt said factors including ministerial turnover could have contributed to delays in securing Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe's release.
Photograph: Tayfun Salci/Zuma Press Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

At a press conference on Monday, Zaghari-Ratcliffe said she did not agree with her husband thanking the British government. "I mean, how many foreign secretaries does it take for someone to come home? Five? We all know ... how I came home. It should have happened exactly six years ago. I should not have been in prison for six years."

In a [Twitter thread on Tuesday](#), Hunt said: "Those criticising Nazanin have got it so wrong. She doesn't owe us gratitude: we owe her an explanation.

"She's absolutely right that it took too long to bring her home. I tried my best – as did other foreign secretaries – but if trying our best took six years then we must be honest and say the problem should have been solved earlier."

Burt, a Tory MP until 2019, in his letter to the select committee asks "If the FS [foreign secretary] wanted the debt paid, and there were times when it appeared the PM, FS and defence secretary all agreed it should be paid, why it was not? And what was the recent change to allow the payment which was not in place this past four years?"

Burt says at one point formed a view that the then defence secretary [Gavin Williamson](#) was opposed to the payment. Burt challenged him, leading to a row, but never received a direct response.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2022/mar/22/nazanin-zaghari-ratcliffe-jeremy-hunt-inquiry-iran-debt-delay>.

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

Advertisement

US edition

- [US edition](#)
- [UK edition](#)
- [Australian edition](#)
- [International edition](#)

[The Guardian - Back to home](#)

[Russian asset tracker](#)[Vladimir Putin](#)

\$17bn of global assets linked to 35 Russians with alleged ties to Putin



Composite: Guardian

International collaboration tracks wealth of oligarchs and officials accused by western governments of being president's supporters

[Simon Goodley](#), [Kalyeena Makortoff](#) and [Jasper Jolly](#)

Mon 21 Mar 2022 12.30 EDT Last modified on Tue 22 Mar 2022 13.02 EDT

More than \$17bn (£13bn) of global assets – including offshore bank accounts, yachts, private jets and luxury properties in London, Tuscany and the French Riviera – have been linked to 35 oligarchs and Russian officials alleged to have close ties to [Vladimir Putin](#).

Today, the Guardian, working in a partnership with the [Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project](#) and other international news organisations, is unveiling the initial research in an ongoing project to track the wealth of Russia's most powerful operators.

[Russian asset tracker graphic](#)

Graphic

The [Russian asset tracker](#) project will start by focusing on a list of 35 men and women named last year as Putin's alleged enablers by the [jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny](#). It will record assets outside Russia where the reporting partners have seen evidence connecting them to these individuals.

Navalny's organisation wrote to western governments requesting the names on its list be considered for sanctions and all but one have since been [blacklisted by either the US, EU, UK or Canada](#).

[Russian asset tracker graphic](#)

The names include four of the wealthiest oligarchs, plus heads of state-controlled companies, prominent broadcasters, spy agency chiefs, ministers, political advisers and regional governors. They have been read out in the US Congress by lawmakers [seeking tougher penalties](#) for the Russian elite and in the UK parliament by the Liberal Democrat foreign affairs spokesperson, Layla Moran.

Moran [told the Commons](#): “Putin’s cronies must be subject to the strongest possible sanctions now, because it is through them that Putin and his inner circle keep their wealth. If we go after his associates, we go after him.

Actually, we are rather uniquely placed to do so, because they choose London. They live here: it is ‘Londongrad’ to them.”



Clockwise, from left: The businessmen Roman Abramovich, Alisher Usmanov, Oleg Deripaska and Igor Shuvalov all feature in the Russian asset tracker. Photograph: Reuters/PA

The [Russian asset tracker](#) has identified UK properties or plots of land – collectively worth more than half a billion dollars – that are linked through companies, trusts or relatives to four leading figures on Navalny’s list: [Roman Abramovich](#), Alisher Usmanov, Oleg Deripaska and Igor Shuvalov. The Guardian will report on these findings over the coming days.

The research so far has seen evidence, most of it dating from 2020 to the present, of the names being connected to more than 145 assets consisting of 35 mansions, 43 apartments and 27 other pieces of real estate. Seven yachts, plus 11 private jets and helicopters, worth a combined \$2bn, have been identified as linked to just six individuals.

Some of the assets in the tracker are in the public domain – including [Deripaska’s Belgrave Square mansion in central London, which was taken over by squatters last week](#), as well as the Dilbar, Lena and Amore Vero

superyachts, linked to the oligarchs [Usmanov](#), [Gennady Timchenko](#) and [Igor Sechin](#) respectively.



Oleg Deripaska's £25m London mansion was taken over by protesters last week. Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

Other possessions have gone largely unnoticed, or sometimes existed in almost total secrecy. Last month, the US Treasury highlighted the problems of opaque ownership by stating: “[Sanctioned oligarchs and powerful Russian elites have used family members to move assets and to conceal their immense wealth.](#)”

Outside the UK, the Russian asset tracker has uncovered:

- Twenty-six assets apparently connected to Deripaska, who is [said to be Putin's favourite industrialist](#). They include billions of dollars in shares, a hotel in the Austrian Alps, a superyacht, a 60-metre support vessel with helipad and luxury properties in London, Paris, Washington DC and New York, and four villas in Sardinia.

- Two private jets – a \$65m Gulfstream G650 and a Bombardier Global Express – connected to Shuvalov, Russia's former first deputy prime minister and now chairman of the state development corporation. Shuvalov is also linked to three luxury properties collectively worth about \$35m located in Salzkammergut, Austria, Tuscany in Italy, and Dubai, United Arab Emirates.
- Property holding companies linked to the families of Nikolay Tokarev, the chairman of the state-controlled pipeline company Transneft, as well as the presidential press secretary, Dmitry Peskov. The Tokarev companies appear to own luxury properties on the Croatian island of Lošinj, a known hotspot for rich Russians, while the Peskov firm is connected to an expensive Paris apartment.



The Amore Vero superyacht, said to be owned by the Rosneft boss, Igor Sechin, at La Ciotat port near Marseille. Photograph: Albert Gea/Reuters

Many of the less well-known assets are held via shell companies based in offshore secrecy jurisdictions and trust funds, making them harder to track. Others are owned by relatives or associates of those on the Navalny list, raising questions about the source of funds used to acquire those assets.

They have been checked using proofs ranging from publicly available sources, data from the [International Consortium of Investigative Journalists' offshore leaks databases](#), the [FinCEN files](#) of reports of suspicious banking transactions and human intelligence sources.

The tracker serves as a snapshot in time, and includes assets only where reporters have seen documentary evidence or other reliable information linking them to the Navalny 35. Some possessions linked widely to certain oligarchs have yet to be confirmed.

Abramovich, Tokarev, Peskov and Shuvalov have yet to respond to requests for comment.

A spokesperson for Deripaska, said: “It is unclear how publishing this kind of ‘asset inventory’ might serve the public interest. Unless, of course, by ‘public interest’ you mean encouraging squatters to occupy private property, like they did with a London house belonging to Mr Deripaska’s relatives.

“All of the property and assets that he owns were acquired by fair means. The ongoing media frenzy, regrettable as it is, certainly doesn’t give anyone the right to call Mr Deripaska a kleptocrat. The Russia witch-hunt of which Mr Deripaska has become a victim is driven entirely by political motives.”

A spokesperson for Usmanov added: “The entirety of Mr Usmanov’s capital was built through successful, sometimes risky, investments, as well as through the effective management of his assets, which is the essence of business. Therefore, to characterise the source of his money as ‘non-transparent’ is inherently incorrect and damages Mr Usmanov’s reputation as an honest entrepreneur and philanthropist.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/21/global-assets-russians-alleged-ties-putin-wealth-oligarchs-navalny>.

Advertisement

US edition

- [US edition](#)
- [UK edition](#)
- [Australian edition](#)
- [International edition](#)

[The Guardian - Back to home](#)

[Russian asset tracker Roman Abramovich](#)

Inside the £250m Abramovich property portfolio



Composite: Guardian

Chelsea FC owner and family amassed UK collection that includes 70 homes, buildings and plots of land

Simon Goodley

Mon 21 Mar 2022 12.30 EDT Last modified on Tue 22 Mar 2022 13.02 EDT

As football fans wend their way to Stamford Bridge for Chelsea's home game against Brentford next month, not all will realise they are walking past dozens of apartments belonging to one of Britain's most valuable private property portfolios.

The sanctioned club owner, [Roman Abramovich, and his family have amassed a UK property collection worth more than £250m](#), numbering about 70 homes, buildings and pieces of land.



Roman Abramovich's 15-bedroom property in Kensington, west London.
Photograph: Mark Thomas/Rex/Shutterstock

The [list of assets connected to the oligarch](#) has been compiled by [the Russian asset tracker](#), a partnership involving the Guardian, the [Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project](#) and other international news organisations that are reporting on the wealth of Russia's most powerful operators.

It is a snapshot in time, based on information dating from 2020 to the present.

The Guardian, working alongside the campaign group Transparency International, has also seen evidence connecting the billionaire's companies and relatives to 53 luxury residential properties – plus commercial buildings and plots of land – in central [London](#).



Roman Abramovich at Stamford Bridge, the home of Chelsea football club.
Photograph: Matt Impey/Rex/Shutterstock

Alongside the oligarch's widely reported 15-bedroom mansion in Kensington Palace Gardens, bought for £120m, the Abramovich collection includes 42 flats and apartments in Chelsea Village, the hotel and residential complex situated around the football ground, including a \$5.5m penthouse apartment overlooking the stadium and a \$1m penthouse in the hotel.

Properties owned by the wider Abramovich family include two luxury addresses next door to each other in a square in Belgravia, where the adjacent homes are adorned by neat privet hedges and a flower-filled first-floor balcony.

Less than three miles down the road, near Kensington Palace, the family added to their luxury collection last year with a £17.5m townhouse.

Other connected assets include the use of two jets – a £39m Gulfstream and a \$10.4m Bombardier – plus a pair of Airbus helicopters, struck off the Isle

of Man registry the day after sanctions were imposed on Abramovich by the UK. There are two yachts linked to Abramovich: the 458ft Solaris and the 533ft Eclipse. Confirmation is also being sought for the ownership of two more private jets.

Graphic

There are also trust funds connected with Abramovich and his family, including two in Cyprus: the first, HF Trust, valued at \$900m, according to 2016 data contained in the banking leak known as the FinCEN files. A second entity, the Sara Trust Settlement, was involved in transactions totalling \$304m, also in 2016.



Abramovich's Solaris superyacht in Barcelona, Spain. Photograph: Albert Gea/Reuters

The compilation of the list of assets linked to Abramovich comes as governments have warned how opaque ownership structures could frustrate efforts to implement sanctions.

Abramovich was sanctioned by the UK government at the beginning of March after ministers accused him of having "[clear connections](#)" to Vladimir Putin's regime and being among a group of businesspeople with "blood on their hands".

The oligarch has previously vehemently disputed reports suggesting his alleged closeness to Putin and Russia, or that he has done anything to merit sanctions being imposed against him.

The most visible effect of the UK move has been to plunge the Russian tycoon's football team into crisis, with the business restricted from making further ticket sales. The club is up for sale, with bids of more than £2bn submitted by interested parties last weekend. The proceeds are expected to be either donated to charity or held in a restricted account.

Among other well-known assets held by the oligarch is a 29% stake in the London-listed steel and mining group Evraz, which was worth £2.5bn at the end of 2021.

However, the shares then plummeted, with Abramovich's stake worth about £338m as the crisis in Ukraine unravelled. The 10-member board of directors of Evraz resigned this month after sanctions were imposed on the Russian oligarch and shares in the company were suspended.

Abramovich did not respond to numerous efforts by the Guardian to contact him.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/21/roman-abramovich-uk-property-portfolio-chelsea-fc-owner-sanctioned>

2022.03.22 - Spotlight

- 'Totally out of control' The authors whose books are being banned in a culture war at US schools
- 'The casino beckons' My journey inside the cryptosphere
- 'People feel suffocated' Cost of living tops French concerns before election
- 'A wild triple-decker sandwich' World's first multistorey skatepark lands in Folkestone

Advertisement

US edition

- [US edition](#)
- [UK edition](#)
- [Australian edition](#)
- [International edition](#)

[The Guardian - Back to home](#)

[Books](#)

‘It’s a culture war that’s totally out of control’: the authors whose books are being banned in US schools



There has been an unprecedented rise in attempts in the US to have books removed from shelves. Composite: Alex Hinds/Alamy; Pantheon via AP; Kokila via AP

From Art Spiegelman to Margaret Atwood, books are disappearing from the shelves of American schools. What's behind the rise in censorship?



[Claire Armitstead](#)

[@carmitstead](#)

Tue 22 Mar 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 22 Mar 2022 04.45 EDT

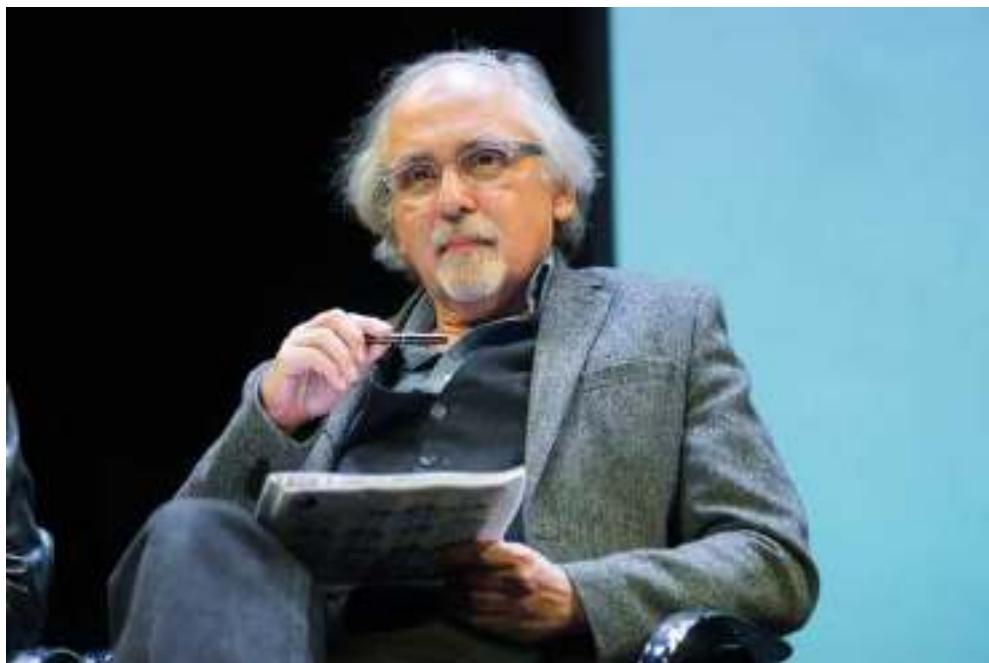
When the owners of a Tennessee comics shop learned that a local school board had [voted to remove Art Spiegelman's Holocaust classic Maus](#) from its curriculum, they sprang into action with an appeal calling for donations to fund free copies for schoolchildren. Within hours, money started pouring in from all over the world. “We had donations from Israel, the UK and Canada as well as from the US,” says Richard Davis, co-owner of Nirvana Comics.

Ten days later, they closed the appeal, after raising \$110,000 (£84,000) from 3,500 donors. “We bought up all the copies the publisher had in its warehouse and we’re now in the process of shipping 3,000 copies of Maus to students all over the country, along with a study guide written by a local schoolteacher,” says Davis, who has relied on volunteers to help with the distribution.

For Spiegelman, it has meant an exponential sales boost for a 30-year-old book – the only graphic novel to win a Pulitzer prize, in 1992 – and a flurry of speaking engagements across the country. “It just shows,” he says, “you can’t ban books unless you’re willing to burn them and you can’t burn them all unless you’re willing to burn the writers and the readers too.”

That’s just as well, adds the 74-year-old cartoonist, “because this is the most Orwellian version of society I’ve ever lived in. It’s not as simple as left v right. It’s a culture war that’s totally out of control. As a first-amendment fundamentalist, I believe in the right of anyone to read anything, provided they are properly supported. If a kid wants to read *Mein Kampf*, it’s better to do it in a library or school environment than to discover it on Daddy’s shelves and be traumatised.”

Unfortunately, there is an unprecedented rise in attempts to remove books from the US’s libraries and schools. The American Library Association (ALA) told the Guardian that in the period from 1 September to 30 November, more than 330 unique cases were reported – more than double the number for the whole of 2020, and nearing the total for the previous (pre-pandemic) year.



Art Spiegelman in 2015. Photograph: Mark Sagliocco/Getty Images

“It’s definitely getting worse,” says Suzanne Nossel, the CEO of the free-speech organisation [PEN](#) America, which has led the resistance against book banning for more than a decade. “We used to hear about a book challenge or ban a few times a year. Now it’s every week or every day. We also see proposed legislative bans, as opposed to just school districts taking action. It is part of a concerted effort to try to hold back the consequences of demographic and social change by controlling the narratives available to young people.”

Predominantly, the ALA reported, the challenges were targeted at “the voices of the marginalised … books and resources that mirror the lives of those who are gay, queer or transgender, or that tell the stories of persons who are Black, Indigenous or persons of colour”. Or, as Spiegelman says, of his own experience: “If I was a transgender Black great-grandchild of slaves, I’d be more likely to be banned. This feels like a drive-by shooting.”

Maus was removed on the basis of eight swearwords – mainly “God damn” – and nudity: a bare-breasted, suicidal mouse representing Spiegelman’s mother, who killed herself when he was 20 years old. The ironic thing about it, says the cartoonist, is that he never intended the book for children, but wrote it to work out his own feelings about the parental legacy of the Holocaust. “I was a bit offended at first when I learned that it was being used in schools, but, after speaking to young people who had read the books [it was originally published in two volumes], I just had to drop my prejudice and accept they were fine with it.”

Many of the challenges centre on a moral hysteria about the protection of children. “They’re playing woke snowflakery back: ‘This might upset people’,” says Margaret Atwood in an email to me. A graphic novel version of Atwood’s The Handmaid’s Tale was one of the books removed from classroom libraries in a Texas school district in December, along with two other dystopian graphic novel classics: an adaptation of Shirley Jackson’s The Lottery, and Alan Moore’s V for Vendetta.



Margaret Atwood: ‘They’re playing woke snowflakery back.’ Photograph: Nick Zonna/IPA/REX/Shutterstock

Texas sensitivities about *The Handmaid’s Tale* are not new for Atwood, who directs me to an open letter she wrote in 2006 to a school authority after learning that it had decided to remove the novel because of sexual explicitness and offence to Christians (a decision that was overturned after impassioned representations from students). “First,” she wrote, “the remark: ‘Offensive to Christians’ amazes me. Nowhere in the book is the regime identified as Christian. As for sexual explicitness, *The Handmaid’s Tale* is a lot less interested in sex than is much of the Bible.”

Though the current censorship drive in the US is predominantly in Republican states, it has become a tit-for-tat controversy, with conservative commentators quick to point out that the left has its own form in censoring classics such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* or *Huckleberry Finn* for their perceived racist content. “The only ones banning books are critical race theorists,” wrote the Jewish News Syndicate columnist Daniel Greenfield. “Erstwhile liberals, who had once vocally championed Huck and Mockingbird and shouted down any effort to keep them out of the classroom, now just as vocally want them out and replaced with ... Ta-Nehisi Coates and Ibram X Kendi.”

Ta-Nehisi Coates's memoir Between the World and Me, written as a letter to his teenage son, was among more than 800 books about social justice identified for removal from Texas schools by a state legislator last year, on the basis that they were "liable to make students feel discomfort, guilt, anguish or any other form of psychological distress because of their race or sex". Kendi's profile, as director of the Center for Antiracist Research at [Boston University](#) and the author of three influential books on the history of racism in the US (as well as a children's book), has made him a lightning rod in the row over critical race theory, which – according to the [Brookings Institute thinktank – has become](#) "a new bogeyman for people unwilling to acknowledge our country's racist history and how it impacts the present".

The relationship between book challenges and attempts to control public debate is particularly obvious in this arena, with Brookings reporting in November that nine states (Idaho, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina, Arizona, and North Dakota) had already passed legislation against the teaching of critical race theory, with a further 20 either in the process of doing so, or planning to.



Ibram X Kendi, a lightning rod in the row over critical race theory.
Photograph: Jeff Watts/AP

“We do see increased resort to censoriousness on both the left and the right,” says Nossel. “On the left, it targets books that some people regard as racially offensive, sometimes because they originate from a different time period, when slurs were used more widely than is acceptable now. But it is the right that has invoked the machinery of government – including legislative proposals in dozens of states – to enforce these bans and prohibitions. In the hierarchy of infringements of free speech that must be recognised as more severe and alarming.”

She adds: “There must be room for communities to debate what books and curriculum should be made available to students at various levels of education, and parents deserve a say. But ideologically driven crusades to ban particular narratives and viewpoints infringe upon open discourse in the classroom.”

It is not only in Tennessee that an alarmed progressive public has responded by pouring money into the pushback. In February, Markus Dohle, the CEO of the publisher Penguin Random House, said he would [personally donate at least \\$500,000 to PEN America](#) to kickstart a new fund to fight book banning, while PRH itself pledged a further \$100,000.

Such high stakes might seem unthinkable in the UK, where censorship technically ended with the abolition of the Lord Chamberlain’s role as theatre censor in 1968. “Banning for swearwords – as in the Maus case – is a peculiarly US thing, as is banning books for sex, like Judy Blume’s *Forever* was from some US state libraries for a long time,” says Julia Eccleshare, the director of the Hay children’s festival. “There are two reasons for that. One, the US still has a very active children’s library service, so a collective of easy-to-rouse gatekeepers. Two, the religious right remains very powerful, so fundamentalist Bible teaching is still brought into arguments.”

More recently, says Eccleshare, the US has been very much on the “front foot in attacking anything that can be interpreted as cultural appropriation or cultural insensitivity. Most tragically, I think, Laura Ingalls Wilder’s *Little House on the Prairie* series has fallen from being a national treasure to being shunned, because of the Native Americans being described as frightening.”

In the UK, she adds, “there are rarely these public ‘bans’, with the exception perhaps of [the Little Black Sambo books](#), which were quite publicly removed from library shelves”. Back in 2003, the author Anne Fine [tried to use her influence as children’s laureate](#) to get Melvin Burgess’s young-adult novel Doing It junked by its publisher, on the grounds of obscenity, but only succeeded in increasing its sales.

“Plenty of books go out of print because they are no longer politically acceptable, and we do quietly remove books,” says Eccleshare. “It’s usually to do with racism, because we have changed such a lot in how we think. Enid Blyton’s original Noddy stories vanished years ago, on account of their obvious racism. Similarly, Tintin in the Congo is only available now from very shady booksellers on the web.”

The reasons for book banning have fluctuated over history, but fall roughly into three categories: religion, obscenity and political control. In 213BC, the Chinese emperor Qin Shi Huang buried 460 scholars alive and burned all the books in his kingdom so he could control how history would remember his reign (his distant successor Xi Jinping blocked the name Winnie-the-Pooh from social media sites after being compared to the tubby bear). The first list of books forbidden in Christianity was issued by the pope in the fifth century. And, in 1749, more than a century before the Obscene Publications Act was introduced in the UK, the writer John Cleland was charged with obscenity for Fanny Hill: Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure, a pornographic moneyspinner he wrote while languishing in a debtor’s prison.

DH Lawrence’s Lady Chatterley’s Lover had been available in France and Italy for more than 30 years before it was published in the UK in 1960, whereupon its publisher, Penguin, was prosecuted. After a six-day trial at the Old Bailey, during which the book’s defenders included the novelist EM Forster and the critic Raymond Williams, the jury found [Lady Chatterley’s Lover to be not obscene](#). On the first day it was available, a month later, all 200,000 copies sold.

The Lady Chatterley case also demonstrates the international reach of censorship, with separate obscenity trials in Japan, Australia, Canada, India and the US (where it was exonerated along with Fanny Hill and Henry

Miller's Tropic of Cancer). But, it is in the political arena that book banning is now most toxic globally, with writers themselves under threat, in some parts of their world, along with their books.



Hamid Ismailov. Photograph: Murdo Macleod/The Guardian

The UK is the refuge for two novelists banned from their homelands, who still write in their languages of origin. Hamid Ismailov won the EBRD literature prize in 2019 [with The Devil's Dance](#), the first Uzbek novel to be translated into English. [Ismailov fled Uzbekistan in 1992](#) because of what the authoritarian state described as his “unacceptable democratic tendencies” and worked for the BBC for 25 years. The Devil’s Dance was smuggled into the country. “I’m the most widely published Uzbek, yet nobody can mention any of my books. Nobody can mention my name in any article, review [or] historic piece. It’s a total ban of my name, of activity, of books, of existence. It’s as if I’m nonexistent,” he has said.

His most recent novel, *Manaschi*, offers a unique perspective on the colonisation by stealth of former parts of the Soviet empire by China – and also of the complex geopolitical legacy that has led to conflicts such as that playing out in Ukraine. “It’s a part of post-Soviet history that is unravelling. In the initial aftermath of the USSR breakup, many were surprised by how peacefully it happened – let’s say in comparison with the breakup of

Yugoslavia,” he says. “But the Soviet Union left lots of knots, like the border issues, diasporas, ethnic minorities, mixed populations that are quite explosive in the framework of ethnic states, which inherited that legacy.”

The writer Ma Jian has been in exile from mainland China since 1987, when he published a collection of short stories based on his travels in Tibet, which was immediately banned. Until 2008, he says, his novels were published in Hong Kong, but since then they have only been available in Taiwan. By the time he finished his most recent novel, 2018’s China Dream, even the underground bookshops in Hong Kong that had quietly imported his work had been shut down. “Every Hong Kong publisher I approached turned China Dream down. They said if they did publish it, they’d lose their jobs, and, anyway, there were no bookshops left in Hong Kong that would dare sell it.”

Such international examples offer an ominous clue as to where the censorship surge in the US could lead, says Nossel. “In the 20th century, the South African apartheid state banned 12,000 books, [at one point commandeering a steel factory furnace](#) in order to burn reviled texts. And, in the 1930s, the Nazi party railed against ‘un-German books’, staging book burnings of Jewish, Marxist, pacifist and sexually explicit literature.”

Legislation adopted in Hungary last year [banned from schools all books](#) referencing homosexuality, in the name of the “protection of children”. In 2014, Russia passed a law adding Nazi propaganda to the subjects it bans and restricts – “LGBT content, offences to traditional values, and criticisms of the state are among others,” says Nossel. “Booksellers were so fearful of running afoul of the broad law that they removed Spiegelman’s Maus from stores because of the swastika on the book’s cover, despite its potent anti-fascist message.”

“This is a book about memory,” [said Spiegelman at the time](#). “We don’t want cultures to erase memory, because then they just keep doing the same thing again and again.”

The symmetry between Russia and the US is striking. As Oscar Wilde once wrote: “The books that the world calls immoral are books that show the world its own shame.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2022/mar/22/its-a-culture-war-thats-totally-out-of-control-the-authors-whose-books-are-being-banned-in-us-schools>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

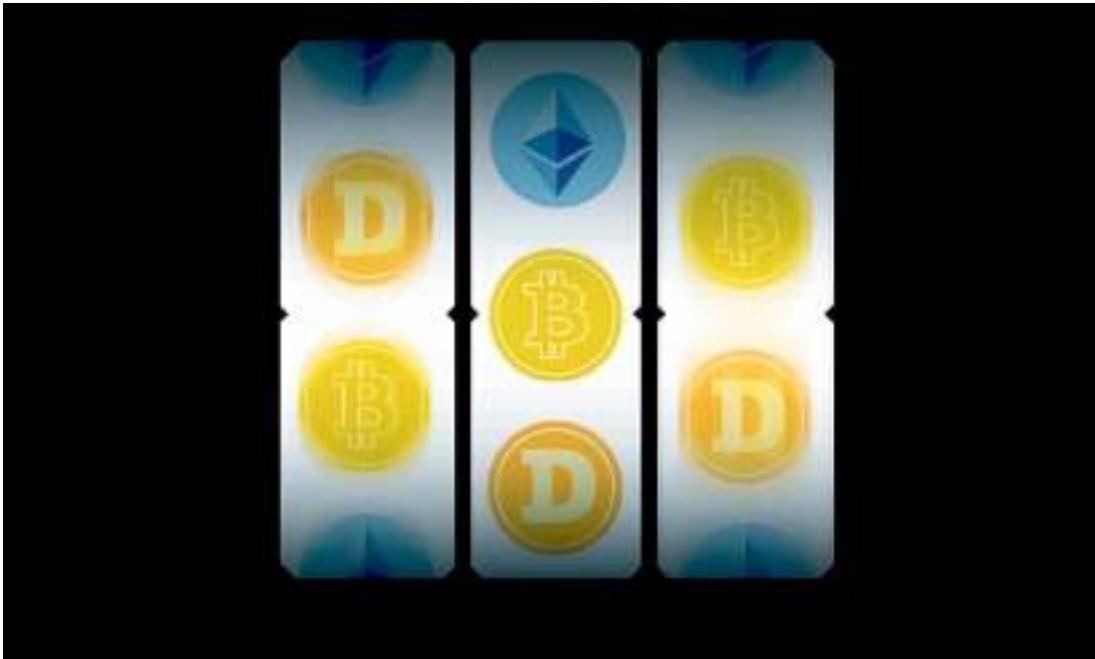


Illustration: Guardian Design

[The long read](#)

‘The casino beckons’: my journey inside the cryptosphere

Illustration: Guardian Design

Not all cryptocurrency investors fit the cliches. Many are people looking to somehow claw their way out of a life of constant struggle

by [Sarah Resnick](#)

Tue 22 Mar 2022 02.00 EDT

I can’t explain exactly how I ended up on crypto Twitter (or CT, as it’s known in the cryptosphere) and in the crypto-focused Telegram and Discord groups I started lurking in late last summer. As a writer I don’t really have a regular beat. I’ve occasionally written about fiction and film. I’ve written on the overlaps between the health and criminal legal systems. Crypto would

not be an obvious story for me to tackle. But there was a bull run going on – market confidence was high, investors were buying and prices were going up – and whenever cryptocurrency values skyrocket, the corporate press turns up like a kettle of raptors spewing headlines about improbable fortunes. “This mom quit her job to focus on crypto full time and build ‘generational wealth.’ Now she makes around \$80,000 per month.” “This 33-year-old ‘dogecoin millionaire’ is now being paid in the meme-inspired cryptocurrency—and continues to buy the dips.” The subject was impossible to avoid, and my longstanding if until now private, nerdy interest in the machinery of our enigmatic financial markets propelled me toward it.

At first I felt a little dirty, a little shameful. Everyone is in these spaces for one reason: to make money. It’s a subject that remains uncouth to speak about in my wider professional and social milieu. Soon, though, my shame started to interest me. I stayed a little longer, thumbing through channels on the subway or in bed late at night. It’s a kind of rubbernecking only the internet allows, providing near-full access to a subculture to which you don’t belong.

In time I grew familiar with the way the crypto obsessives express themselves, the phrases and acronyms they use: gm (good morning), wagmi (we’re all gonna make it), ngmi (not gonna make it), and its corollary hfsp (have fun staying poor). I learned to distinguish the swing traders and scalpers from the hodlers (hold on for dear life) and degens (degenerates, or speculation addicts) by the way they talk and post. I perceived the subcultures within their subculture – the [Bitcoin](#) maxis (Bitcoin is the one and only crypto) v the Ethereum maxis (Bitcoin is for boomers) v the Eth-killer maxis (Ethereum is ngmi) – and how they signal their allegiances through their avatars (Bitcoin maxis often have lasers shooting from their eyes) and, for a smaller subset, their self-care habits (some Bitcoin maxis only eat meat; others won’t use seed oils, wear sunscreen, ice their injuries, or touch receipts). Across the forums, I could not discern any unified politics other than a shared certainty that the government and wealthy elites are keeping the little guy down.



An advert for the Nasdaq-listed cryptocurrency exchange Coinbase in New York. Photograph: Shannon Stapleton/Reuters

Reporting on financial markets tends toward extremes. There is the hopelessly mystifying description of market movements, in which byzantine concepts are compressed into small units of abstract language, and then there are the individual stories. In reports on the crypto markets, these stories generally feature people during a bull run getting rich through dumb luck or getting rich and then losing it all. Lurking in these groups provides a third angle. Here are people with complex lives and distinct needs and desires, battling their emotions – their greed and, just as important, their fear – through buying and selling. These are not, for the most part, wealthy people intent on obtaining more wealth. They are people trying to teach themselves how to get ahead in ways they believe were previously foreclosed to them. They call one another “fam”, cheering on those who make a winning trade and commiserating with those who get “rekt”, as if they aren’t all opponents on the trading battleground.

The more time I spent in the cryptosphere, the more I came to see it as a place where all our economic ills are refracted.

When I started thinking about crypto, in late summer 2021, I came to the discourse with a set of preconceptions about what I would find. The lofty

vision of a transparent and fair financial system had mostly given way to the public worship of the appetites. Talk about crypto's "radical potential", whatever the politics, had been replaced by a caricature of Silicon Valley hype men and gym rats who liked to pose in front of Italian luxury sports cars and post closeups of their Rolexes. (A good day in crypto can equal a year's worth of returns on the stock market.) Most of what I'd gleaned about this part of the cryptosphere I had absorbed ambiently from the internet or the news.

I quickly came to understand that cryptocurrency is a term no longer precise enough to describe the array of projects under its umbrella. It's more than Bitcoin and ether and the occasional meme coin: it's thousands of projects with corresponding tokens, most of them unrelated to the ambition of replacing the US dollar as the world's reserve currency. In simplified terms, each project is built on a blockchain, what the cryptosphere calls a "settlement layer" or "layer 1." Ethereum is a layer 1; so are Terra, Avalanche, Solana and Cosmos, among others. Each layer 1 has its own native currency or token, which is used to pay for conducting transactions in its ecosystem. There are two main ways to access these tokens: on centralised exchanges, like the ones day traders use for foreign exchange or stocks, or on the blockchain itself, using a decentralised exchange.

Every token has its own "community" of loyal holders who congregate in project-specific Discord or Telegram channels to talk about the road map, to ask questions, or, as often happens, to complain about the price ("Why is price going down? Any news?"). Admins serve as the bridge between the project team and the community and share updates. For some projects, community support can resemble something like religious faith, insofar as the devotion on display seems incommensurate with the project's outputs. Imagine an Amazon-run Telegram channel where thousands of Amazon stockholders gather to make friends, cheer on the launch of a new service, or squawk at company reps when they aren't responsive enough. You can't. It would never happen. But it happens here, in crypto.

I looked around these online spaces and found that every token, every project, was at the mercy of the hype cycle, or what people in the cryptosphere genteelly call "narratives". Use value was merely incidental. The hype for the final third of 2021 hinged largely on [NFTs](#); on projects

with even a remote connection to the words “metaverse” and “gaming”; on layer 1s; and on a series of community-owned decentralised finance applications, known as DeFi 2.0. Apart from trading, the main strategy people rely on to make money is to identify the newest hype, get in early, and then pivot to the next, ahead of the herd. If you study the charts, you can pretty much watch the money move en masse from one speculative focus to the next.



Screens showing cryptocurrency trends and prices at a cafe in Thailand.
Photograph: Soe Zeya Tun/Reuters

It's influencers (who else?) who make the hype go round. A few of them are people with genuine skill and knowledge, or “OGs” who traded through at least one of the previous bull runs and over time built followings through displays of wisdom about how to grow a portfolio and trade the charts. Some even produce free educational content and preach the gospel of risk management (eg never risk more than 1% of your portfolio). But no small number appear to be marketers paid to push a given token on their followers. They buy the token at low prices – or are given an allocation as payment – then promote the token once the price is inflated. When their followers buy the token, it gives them the opportunity to exit their position at these higher prices (every seller needs a buyer). They use Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and TikTok, and some have private Telegram and Discord channels. If

you're new, it's not always easy to ferret out the people who are mostly good-intentioned from those who have no shame. But the charlatans tend to give themselves away by posting a lot of "hopium" ("#bitcoin rewards those who are patient", "I hope all 950,000+ of my Twitter followers become #crypto millionaires in 2022!").

There are outright scams, too, among all the legitimate projects. It's the norm for developers to remain anonymous, and anyone can easily spin up a token and corresponding liquidity pool to make it available on a decentralised exchange. The creators of the play-to-earn game Squid Game borrowed from the hit Netflix series its name and design scheme – and also its winner-takes-all denouement. Buyers of the \$SQUID token found it was nearly impossible to sell, and after the price shot up 110,000% in the span of about a week, the creators pulled the rug out from under the project, removing its liquidity and making off with around \$3.36m. Tweet anything containing the words MetaMask or Trust Wallet, the names of two widely used crypto wallets, and phishing bots unfailingly turn up posing as support staff. After luring the unsuspecting into their DMs and convincing them to give up their seed phrase (a kind of password), scammers immediately use it to drain the wallet of funds.

All this I expected to find. What I did not expect to find in this corner of the cryptosphere was an overwhelming number of seemingly ordinary people of all ages – some still teenagers, others parents of small children or caregivers to older family members – desperate to make money to get by. These were not the people I imagined seated behind a multiscreen trading setup or moving assets around an investment portfolio. Many were here, trying to make money in crypto, because they felt they had no other choice. People struggling financially, who despise their jobs, who feel the system is rigged and there is no way out. People whose country has been at war for years and want to leave, or who have left and want to help family members who stayed behind. From crypto they draw optimism for the future, the possibility that their lives could change, or that they could change the lives of others:

"I have only \$100 to put in. My wife stays home with our baby and I work full time and do delivery apps on weekends to make extra."

“Don’t assume that if things are going well for you they are going well for everyone. I’m a girl in uni and take care of my whole family. I’m not here to whine I have accepted how life is and I am patient. I’m going to try so hard to grow my \$83. This group on its own motivates me a lot.”

“I had constant stress about my investments but today all of it went away. Saw 3 people die, 2 of them were my close friends and [I] made it out safely after i got shot at 4 times. I was busy trying to make money, never would have thought things could go this wrong. Appreciate life and spend time with family and friends.”

“I’m 17. If I stay here in my country after uni and work I can earn maybe \$100 a week max.”

“Can’t wait to tell my manager to eat shit and walk away like a boss.”

“I came to Kabul a few days ago and what i saw here made me devastated, kids starving and their parents begging for a single piece of bread. I tried to help as much as possible, bought rice bags, oils, flour, clothes, blankets to many families, but i cannot do this alone. I wanted to create a gofundme link but its not possible here since i am in afg. I urge you guys to pray for everyone here and if possible, help them financially. You don’t have to be a muslim to feel the pain of afghans, you just need to be a human.”

“Got a dollar raise at work today lol, they felt like it was so nice of them but it’s really not shit.”

“If I’m starting with \$10, is that enough?”

These expressions of frustration and, at times, despair, are from people living in the US, UK, India, Turkey and Afghanistan. The countless other messages I’ve seen like these span an even wider geography. They surface amid the casual misogyny, the dick talk, the advice on managing steroid-induced anxiety – men (and occasionally women) letting their guard down in moments of vulnerability.

In the wake of a pandemic that forced people out of their jobs and upended work life, obliging a lot of people to stay home, it makes a certain kind of

sense that people are looking to supplement already precarious incomes with crypto. All you need is a smartphone. This is especially true in places where local currencies are weak. In the Philippines especially, but also in Venezuela and Brazil, people played a Pokémon Go–style game called Axie Infinity because it was more lucrative than other forms of employment. You play the game, you earn digital assets, and you cash out these assets for local currency. The value in local currency fluctuates, of course. “Here in the Ph,” someone wrote on a Discord forum in early August, “lockdowns are so frequent so people are striving and trying to take chances in ‘play to earn’ stuff. Even the best financial advisors here promote [in-game tokens] \$AXS, \$SLP and \$SKILL here now and people are crazy about it coz they’re really earning.”



People playing NFT game Axie Infinity in Manila. Photograph: Jam Sta Rosa/AFP/Getty Images

In places where unemployment levels are already recovering from pandemic highs, disgruntlement about wages, working conditions and work-life balance may be intensifying. More than 4.5 million Americans resigned from their jobs in November 2021, up from 4.2 million in October, a phenomenon known as [the Great Resignation](#). Some version of this is also taking place in Australia, Germany, the UK and elsewhere. It's likely more of a reshuffling than a resignation proper, as workers leave their jobs for

better ones, or to work for themselves. Still, in the US, [labour participation rates](#) remain below pre-pandemic levels and haven't budged. At least 4 million people have not yet returned to the labour force. It's not hard to imagine why: for such a wealthy country, the US treats many of its workers cruelly, with [low wages](#), long hours and rampant instability. Even those with better jobs, materially speaking, may find themselves unfulfilled as they "spend their entire working lives performing tasks they secretly believe do not really need to be performed", as [David Graeber](#) wrote in an article that was the basis of his book *Bullshit Jobs*.

Resentment for these working conditions has found expression on the subreddit r/antiwork, where nearly two million subscribers post grievances about their employers, share stories of being overworked, and offer one another moral support. (Graeber's writing serves as one of the group's intellectual foundations.) Speaking on behalf of the subreddit, the historian Benjamin Hunnicutt told the Financial Times, "We maybe consider that there might be an alternative to living our lives in thrall to the wealthiest among us, serving their profit." In China, a parallel movement has emerged. Tang ping, or "lie flat", describes a trend among the young who are protesting the nine-nine-six work life – ie 9am to 9pm, six days a week – by opting out. The point is not that people are leaving their abject and exploitative jobs for crypto, but that many wish they could, if only they had enough money. That's why they're here.

The hypermasculine tenor of most day-trading groups, where technical analysis is the primary profit-making strategy, suggests that most crypto traders are male. But in forums focused on DeFi or NFT collecting, where analysing fundamentals and being early to projects are the primary focus, avatars suggest the presence of women, or at least of people who aren't averse to having femme anime characters stand in for them online. (Most are anonymous, so there's no way to know.) The spirit of the DeFi groups is a little different from the day traders' toxic jock vibe. It's less macho – maybe because these spaces have rules about conduct and moderators who enforce them. It's here that every financial product you might access through a traditional bank is being replicated. The fact that users can remain anonymous, supporters say, removes the barriers that leave so many people unbanked or unable to access credit.

Still, I was surprised to learn that, [according to NORC](#), a research institute at the University of Chicago, 41% of cryptocurrency traders in the US are women. I would have guessed the percentage to be lower. I also assumed that most investors would be younger than me, in their early to mid-20s, but the average investor is 38 – an age that, being not far off my own, I can't help but reflect on. It's the age at which I began to find it increasingly difficult to suppress anxiety around my own financial vulnerabilities. From this vantage, the appeal of being able to fill in financial gaps or respond to a financial emergency by transforming \$100 into \$1,000 in the span of hours or days, not years, is more legible to me. If you're desperate, the time horizon for other kinds of change – at the policy level, say – can seem too far off.

Because the forums I visited have participants from all over the world, I was already disabused of the idea that the cryptosphere was populated almost entirely by white Elon Musk types, as some of the rhetoric around crypto suggests. But even in the US, the numbers appear to paint a different portrait. NORC's study also found that 44% of crypto investors are people of colour (compared with 35% of stockholders), and 55% do not have a college degree. In the US, people of colour on average earn less than white people, are more likely to have crushing debt, and are less likely to own their homes. Only a small fraction of the \$130tn wealth in America belongs to them. This aligns with the sentiments I've seen expressed on the forums: that people are there because they feel the odds of getting a leg up are stacked against them.



Crypto logos on a smartphone. Photograph: Omar Marques/SOPA Images/REX/Shutterstock

When I dug a little deeper, I found some reporting on these stats with a human angle. Last December the Washington Post ran a story about Penelope and America Lopez, twins who saved their immigrant parents from financial ruin because of investments they made in crypto. The article quotes Cleve Mesidor, the founder of the National Policy Network of Women of Color in [Blockchain](#) (and a former Obama appointee who worked inside the commerce department), explaining crypto's allure: "When you have been locked out of the system, when you haven't had pathways to create generational wealth, you see this as an opportunity." For Time magazine, the reporter Janell Ross went to the Black Blockchain Summit at Howard University in September 2021 and described the approximately 1,500 "Black crypto traders, educators, marketers and market makers" in attendance as a "world that seemingly mushroomed during the pandemic, rallying around the idea that this is the boon that Black America needs". There are risks, these authors observe, but whether they outweigh the potential rewards remains an open debate.

The risks are worth considering. Is replacing an exploitative and exclusionary system with an inherently vulnerable, unpredictable one a remedy to this system, or merely a reflection of just how debased it's

become? There are no stats on how many people lose money in crypto, but there are a preponderance of hazards that may not be obvious to less experienced investors. There are the risks related to security and the lack of consumer protections, to volatility often linked to price manipulation by so-called “whales”: exchanges, accredited investors, market makers and individuals who hold tokens in such large quantities that they can move the price on their own. (Unlike in traditional finance, there is no regulating entity watching the market for manipulation strategies such as wash trading, pumping and dumping, cornering and ramping.) There are the risks related to liquidation cascades, in which large institutional selling (or buying) induces a deluge of forced selling (or buying), the end result of which is no small number of individuals with emptied accounts. During these episodes, exchange platforms tend to suffer outages, making it impossible to log on and take action to protect your money.

There are the risks related to holding future “dead coins” – coins or tokens that start off having value but are later abandoned by their creators, not necessarily maliciously. And then there is the risk that, like the [dotcom boom](#), the speculative bubble will burst and you’ll be one of the people left holding the bag.

In the broader context, equal opportunity to participate looks like an equal opportunity to get wiped out.

I keep returning to the idea that our present moment is a kind of reverse mirror image of the one in which Bitcoin was launched. We are once more living in the aftermath of an economic crisis – this one induced by Covid-19 – and, in the US, the Federal Reserve is in the spotlight. But conditions are markedly different: growth is relatively high (not low), unemployment is relatively low (not high), and wages are rising at the fastest rate in 20 years. These are signs that the US economy has muscle. But its vigour is being overshadowed by the spectre of inflation. In the past 12 months, the price of buying a home in the US has soared by nearly 20% – an increase that, according to one economist’s estimate, will force working-class households approaching homeownership before the pandemic to resume saving for another five to 10 years. The price of meat, poultry, fish and eggs has gone up by around 12.5%; the price of fruit and vegetables by around 5%; and the

price of electricity by 6.3%. It's hard not to feel a sense of defeat. All the news of rising wages notwithstanding, the average earner is actually worse off than they were a year ago.

When there's inflation, it's the Fed's mandate to rein it in. The cryptosphere has been following the Fed's activities with the kind of dedication and verve I would expect for football, not central banking. In the days preceding a meeting of the Federal Reserve Open Market Committee, or an appearance of Federal Reserve chair Jerome Powell before the press, the acronym FOMC circulates through Discord and CT with the frequency of a filler word, like bro. I notice how attuned people outside the US are to dollar imperialism, something that's easy to be unaware of when you live here. As Powell began to signal that the Fed would end its quantitative easing programme and hike interest rates, the US equities market reacted by selling off riskier assets. The more speculative sectors of the market, such as tech stocks, took a tumble. Many in the cryptosphere appeared surprised when the crypto market began to sell off, too.



Federal Reserve chair Jerome Powell on a screen at the New York Stock Exchange. Photograph: Brendan McDermid/Reuters

There is a contradiction that those who truly believe that crypto exists outside our financial system will have to contend with: this latest bull run

appears to have been fuelled by government stimulus and by easy monetary policy, and the removal of these policies, at least at the time of writing, seems to have brought it to an end. There is another, related contradiction: banking giants BNY Mellon, Goldman Sachs and JPMorgan Chase have all begun offering clients access to crypto products. Bank of America has started a crypto research division. A recent survey of 100 hedge fund officers across the world found that by 2026, executives expect their portfolios to hold an average of 7.2% of their assets in cryptocurrency; in the US the average is even higher, at 10.6%. Meanwhile venture capitalists have been pouring money into the sector: an astonishing \$32.8bn in 2021. The moneyed art world – the commercial galleries, the auction houses – are already profiting from NFTs. And this year’s Super Bowl was dubbed the Crypto Bowl on account of all the crypto-related ads viewers were subjected to.

If crypto is a complex Ponzi scheme, it’s one that mainstream institutions are clamouring to get in on. The FOMO is too overwhelming. The same institutions, the same wealthy elite, the same nefarious forces that early cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin and Ethereum were supposedly protesting, could now subsume their antagonists, rendering them impotent. As with the co-opting of any subculture, it can no longer be called a protest against the “system” if it is the system. There’s nothing inherent in the technology that makes it resistant to being assimilated by the ruling financial order. There’s also nothing inherent in the technology that guarantees that the multimillionaires and billionaires minted by crypto will be more benevolent elites than the ones we have now. (The World’s Billionaires List published annually by Forbes counted 12 crypto billionaires among its ranks in March 2021.)

In December, a crypto influencer tweeted a sentence I haven’t been able to shake: “They nuked wages so bad that now ppl have to gamble their way up the food chain through markets.” It’s a devastating description for being true and unvarnished, though I’m anxious that the worst is still to come. If the Fed starts to raise interest rates, making it more expensive to borrow money, it will discourage investment by employers and decelerate the economy, which could even slump into a recession. Either way, the unemployment rate is destined to go up, which means that working people will have less

leverage to bargain for higher wages, which means they will have less purchasing power, and eventually, prices will stabilise to reflect this. It's a strategy that forces workers to pick up the tab. But so far higher wages do not appear to be amplifying inflation. A study published by the Economic Policy Institute in January reveals that in sectors where inflation is high, it's generally not because wages are high. Meanwhile, CEOs are bragging to their shareholders about marked-up prices and unparalleled profits, and using inflation as a cover. From 3M's most recent earnings call: "The team has done a marvellous job in driving price. Price has gone up from 0.1% to 1.4% to 2.6%." All the while the casino beckons. But we already know how that ends. We already know that the house always wins.

A longer version of this piece appeared in the [Spring 2022 edition of n+1](#)

Follow the Long Read on Twitter at [@gdnlongread](#), listen to our podcasts [here](#) and sign up to the long read weekly email [here](#).

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/mar/22/the-casino-beckons-my-journey-inside-the-cryptosphere>

[**France**](#)

‘People feel suffocated’: cost of living tops French concerns before election

As prices rise, there are warnings president could face another protest movement like gilets jaunes



Isabelle and Bruno Martin outside their local Lidl. ‘I’m constantly thinking about my bank balance,’ Isabelle said. Photograph: Guardian



[Angelique Chrisafis](#) in Guéret

[@achrisafis](#)

Tue 22 Mar 2022 02.00 EDT

Outside Lidl, Isabelle Martin, a childminder from a village in Creuse, in central [France](#), was loading discounted eggs, sugar and milk into her car. With prices rising, the 55-year-old couldn't stretch to a full trolley and could rarely afford to drive to Guéret, her nearest town.

"I'm constantly thinking about my bank balance," she said. At home she turned lights off and cut heating, and she never filled her car's petrol tank completely "because the cost would be too much of a shock".

But it was when a young relative working as a rural healthcare assistant recently broke down and wept at the fuel pump because she could barely afford the petrol to get to work that Martin's anger rose. "How can there not be a mood of revolt?" she asked.

Worries about purchasing power and how to make ends meet have become French voters' top concern before the April presidential election.

The government says that, on paper, people have more in their wallets since Emmanuel Macron's election in 2017. The treasury estimates that gross disposable income, which economists use as a gauge of purchasing power, has [grown twice as fast](#) under Macron than under his two predecessors, helped by tax cuts and job creation.

But because food and fuel prices are rising, and because fixed costs such as housing, insurance, energy and phone bills account for such a large part of French budgets, voters feel a sense of daily struggle. An [Ifop poll](#) last month showed 69% of people felt their purchasing power had deteriorated over Macron's term.

Last week there was a national strike over wages and the blockade of fuel depots, with people in rural areas dependent on cars saying they were being hit hard. If Macron is re-elected next month – as polls suggest he will be – there are questions over whether he could face another form of social protest movement like the *gilets jaunes* demonstrations, which began over fuel taxes and living costs and morphed into a widespread anti-government revolt.



A march in Toulouse last week over pay, working conditions and purchasing power. Photograph: Alain Pitton/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

Macron has said the fallout from the Ukraine war could drive inflationary pressures higher but he has promised to protect households. To cushion the impact of rising commodity prices and global oil markets before the election, the government has already introduced a raft of measures – capping gas and power price increases, giving one-off financial handouts to low-income households to cope with higher energy prices and inflation, and now a 15 cents-per-litre fuel discount.

Martin said that although she received the government's €100 payment to help with rising fuel prices in December, it was instantly "soaked up by bills". Rural La Creuse is one of the poorest *départements* in France, with an ageing population, a shortage of doctors, and scant transport options other than cars. In Martin's village of La Pionnat, with a population of 700 people, the long-term closure of a road has led to protests because it forces villagers to make a five-mile detour, and "that's absolutely crippling us with fuel prices", she said.

On walls near Lidl in Guéret, posters for the hard-left candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who is rising in the polls, promised he would "block prices" for essential goods. Martin would vote for him.

Her husband, Bruno, a self-employed mechanic, fears a high abstention rate. "The rich will all turn out to vote; the poor are so disgusted they don't even vote," he said.

On the pavement outside the local prefect's office, slogans had been spray-painted on the street. "Macron your people are starving," said one.

At a local fuel pump, Jean, 73, parked his Skoda. "Because pensions are so low I've got to keep working," he said of his job in transport logistics. He voted for Macron in 2017 but won't do so again. "We're sleepwalking into a social crisis, salaries are low and people feel suffocated," he said.



Gilets jaunes protests in November 2018. Photograph: Julien Mattia/Le Pictorium/Zuma/Rex/Shutterstock

It is uncertain who Macron will face in the final-round presidential vote on 24 April. The far-right Marine Le Pen is leading among a cluster of candidates. She has held ground against competition from the far-right TV pundit Eric Zemmour in part because she has focused on the cost of living and what she calls “the impoverishment of the population”. On a recent visit to a rural town, she said people were “having to choose between eating or heating”. She promised an extra €150-€200 a month for each household by cutting VAT on fuel and raising family tax credits.

A key issue is salaries, particularly among essential caring professions, which are poorly paid and often involve travel over great distances. Pascaline Bon, 44, lives in a hamlet in La Creuse and is a school support worker for children with special needs. She went on strike last week over wages and demonstrated with her trade union, the SNUipp. “Around here, if I or my colleagues have to travel 25 to 35km to get to work then half of our salary is spent on diesel. We’re overdrawn by the fifth day of the month just to feed our children and pay bills.”

Mathias Bernard, a political historian at the University of Clermont Auvergne, said the *gilets jaunes* protests had revealed the long-running

struggle of people living on the periphery of towns or in rural areas, whose increased fuel and energy costs and stagnating salaries were tipping them into debt. He said: “The *gilets jaunes* – as a coordinated movement – have disappeared, but the factors that led to their protests have not gone away. The anger and potential for social protest among those on low and middle incomes is just as present today.”

In Bordeaux, Anne Lauseig, 50, heads a collective of care assistants campaigning for better recognition and pay. She works nights assisting a young woman with disabilities. “We love the work we do,” she said. “But some of us can barely afford the petrol to travel to work. Some go to food banks or sleep in their cars if they can’t afford rent. I wait until the fridge is empty before I buy a little food. I’m not sure the government is aware of the anger and injustice people feel.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/22/people-feel-suffocated-cost-of-living-tops-french-concerns-before-election>

Advertisement

US edition

- [US edition](#)
- [UK edition](#)
- [Australian edition](#)
- [International edition](#)

[The Guardian - Back to home](#)

[Architecture](#)

‘A wild triple-decker sandwich’: world’s first multistorey skatepark lands in Folkestone



‘A gamechanger’ ... a skater enjoys a bowl at F51. Photograph: Matt Rowe

The Kent town just became the kickflip capital of Britain – with a little help from Saga. Our writer gets some vert at F51, the swooping, looping, wheel-

rattling £17m extravaganza



[Oliver Wainwright](#)

[@ollywainwright](#)

Tue 22 Mar 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 22 Mar 2022 03.09 EDT

A great aluminium ark has landed in the centre of Folkestone, like some futuristic container ship run aground. Its steeply sloping sides are covered with a skin of crushed metal mesh that wraps the hulking vessel from blank stern to flaring prow, punctuated only by a few triangular windows. There's no hint of what it might contain – until you get closer and see big bowl-like shapes bulging down from the ceiling and bursting into the glass facade above the entrance. Step inside and you find yourself beneath a billowing cloud of concrete that ripples and swells with the unmistakable undulations of a skatepark, as the sound of speeding wheels rattles overhead.

“We were originally asked to design a multistorey car park,” says Guy Hollaway, architect of [F51](#), as this gleaming arrival to the Kent seaside town is known. “But when a nearby skatepark had to be relocated we were asked to incorporate it into the design. The client increasingly thought the cars looked boring, so we got rid of them and made the world’s first multistorey skatepark instead.

The client in question is Sir Roger de Haan, a local businessman and philanthropist who sold the Saga holidays empire for £1.3bn in 2004, and has since pumped millions into the regeneration of Folkestone. His charitable trust has funded the construction of an academy school and a sports centre, set up numerous galleries and studios, and transformed the harbour with a new promenade.



Unlike anything else on the planet ... F51. Photograph: Matt Rowe

Having sprinkled the town with munificent regenerative fairy dust, and cemented the place as a cultural capital with the Folkestone Triennial, De Haan has now embarked on a vast development of luxury flats on the beachfront. Currently rising from the sands, the 1,000-home project, 8% of which will be affordable, has polarised the town. Some see it as welcome further investment, others as naked property speculation aimed at out-of-town buyers.

“He’s doing the opposite to most developers,” says Hollaway, “investing a huge amount in the community before building the flats, rather than doing it as a token gesture afterwards.” F51 is certainly far beyond what any developer would normally cough up: a £17m “adrenaline building”, gifted to the town.



Slip-sliding away ... the sweeping curves of the bowl park. Photograph: Matte Rowe

The phrase world-first is overused, but there really is nothing quite like this anywhere else on the planet. It is a wild triple-decker sandwich of kickflips and ollies, along with the tallest indoor climbing wall in, well, south-east Britain, all floating above a boxing gym and cafe. [The drawings for the building](#) look like something from an improbable student project: climbers scale one side of the structure, as skateboarders leap past them, pumping between mounds and quarter pipes, while a boxing match is in full swing down below, beneath the rippling rack of floors.

There are continual views between the different parts of the building, which expands outwards as it rises, forming a dynamic sense of a place buzzing and bursting out at the seams. In the view of [Iain Borden, architectural historian and author of Skateboarding and the City](#), it's a gamechanger, "as startling and shocking as the [1955 Citroën DS](#) was for automobile design, and as cohesive and timely as the [2007 iPhone](#) was for smartphones".

The three different levels cater to all ages and abilities, ranging from shallow ramps for beginners to concrete bowls deep enough to keep even the most fearless Olympians entertained. The more gentle flow park at the top of the building is a seamless wooden world, conceived with skaters, scooters and

BMXers in mind. It is dotted with mounds (or “pump bumps”) and volcanoes, where the floor rises to merge into the building’s hefty concrete columns, while a “vert” ramp launches riders up seemingly within reach of the orange steel beams that shoot across the ceiling, five metres overhead.

The middle floor houses a “street park”, which is equipped with features that recall the urban landscape, with steps, rails and ledges to slide and grind across – also made of plywood to allow the park to be easily updated as skating evolves. Made by [specialists Cambian](#), the wooden floors have been crafted like fine cabinetry, each piece of the complex jigsaw cut in their Sussex factory then hand-finished on site. Cutouts on both levels provide vertiginous views of the climbing wall, designed as a three-sided crevasse, with plenty of overhangs and an Olympic spec speedwall, with big red buttons to time your ascent.

We wanted to emulate the origins of bowl-skating in Dogtown

Finally, the first floor is home to the spectacular bowl park, a sculptural symphony of polished concrete that plunges and swells in heart-stopping swoops, as if commanded by the late Zaha Hadid. On one side is what’s known as a capsule bowl, along with skateable columns where the floor curves up between two massive pillars. These are a nod to the famous [Burnside DIY skatepark](#) in Portland, Oregon, built by a group of skateboarders beneath a bridge in the 1990s, that has since become a touchstone for such makeshift skateparks around the world. In a similar vein, there’s a pool, complete with a frieze of swimming pool tiles and specialist stone coping, inspired by the empty swimming pools in California where skateboarding started out.

“We wanted to emulate the origins of bowl-skating in Dogtown,” says Hollaway, referring to the nickname for Santa Monica in the 1970s, where skateboarders began testing their skills in pools that had been drained due to drought. F51’s pool features vertical sides and a double waterfall, as the transition between levels is called, plunging to almost three metres at the deep end. “It’s a legit pool that will challenge even the most expert of riders,” says Borden.



Dizzying ... the indoor climbing wall. Photograph: Matt Rowe/F51

The work of [specialist skatepark firm Maverick](#), which is more used to casting its concrete landscapes straight into the ground, the bowl floor was made all the more complex by having to be suspended in midair. A primary concrete slab was first cast into carved polystyrene moulds, to create the visible bulging underside, with a secondary layer of concrete sprayed on top, hand-trowelled to a smooth finish with the care of icing a cake.

Begun in 2015, and delayed for several years by technical difficulties and Covid, the opening of the project is well timed to catch [the recent boom in skateboarding](#). The pandemic saw the biggest increase since 2000, when the release of the Tony Hawk Pro Skater game sparked new interest, and skateboard sales rose by more than 30% last year. There are now 1,650 outdoor parks across the UK and 65 indoor ones, according to Skateboard GB, the new national governing body established since skateboarding became an Olympic sport for Tokyo 2020 – an event that saw a further spike for the sport, [particularly among girls](#), after 13-year-old Sky Brown scooped a bronze for Britain.

“We’re keen to counter the idea that if you don’t play team sports you’re not sporty,” says Dan Hulme of the Sports Trust, the branch of De Haan’s charitable foundation charged with running F51. Their coaching programme

with local schools will run skateboarding classes as well as workshops covering graphic design, videography and skatepark design. “It provides a pathway into so many different areas,” he says.



Going with the grain ... the wooden level. Photograph: Matt Rowe

It’s a markedly different approach to when skating fever first swept the UK in the 1970s, spawning several commercial indoor skateparks that turned out to be expensive failures. In 1978, two major London parks opened: [Rolling Thunder](#) in Brentford, which had an astonishing concrete landscape cast inside a former market hall; and [Mad Dog Bowl](#), the biggest such skatepark in Europe at the time, housed in the former Astoria cinema on the Old Kent Road.

“They were amazing places,” says Borden, who began skating as a 15-year-old in 1977. “But they got their timing and attitude completely wrong. The skateboarding boom was already fading away by the time they opened, and they were run like golf clubs, with expensive membership fees and officious management, so most closed by the 1980s.”

By contrast, F51 will offer £1 monthly after-school membership to local kids, with skateboarding planned to be actively built into the curriculum of the academy school. “Skateparks are so often in dingy out-of-town

locations,” says Hollaway. “We wanted this to be a beacon right in the centre, saying to young people, ‘You’re the most important customer in town – because you are the future.’”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2022/mar/22/wild-triple-decker-sandwich-worlds-first-multistorey-skatepark-lands-in-folkestone>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

2022.03.22 - Opinion

- Why the BBC drama Then Barbara Met Alan brought tears to my eyes
- Spend a day with me in the eviction court, Mr Sunak, and you'll understand the 'cost of living'
- Work of the devil? I think not. As a priest, I'm all for exotically tasty hot cross buns
- Sudan's military is brutally suppressing protests – global action is needed

[Opinion](#)[Disability](#)

Why the BBC drama Then Barbara Met Alan brought tears to my eyes

[Frances Ryan](#)



To see on primetime television the activists who fought for disability rights in the 1990s was a profoundly moving moment



Ruth Madeley and Arthur Hughes in *Then Barbara Met Alan*. Photograph: Samuel Dore/BBC/Dragonfly Film & Television Productions Ltd

Tue 22 Mar 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 22 Mar 2022 03.48 EDT

Before we even reach the opening titles of *Then Barbara Met Alan* – the BBC's one-off drama depicting the fight for the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), which aired on Monday night – Barbara has graffitied “piss on pity” on a bus stop and turned down going for a drink with Alan because, in her words, she'd just end up getting drunk and giving him a blowjob. It is an instruction to the audience from the off to reject their preconceptions: this is not [disabled people as you might think](#).

The story of how disabled activists – led by Barbara Lisicki and Alan Holdsworth – used direct action to lobby for the UK's first disability civil rights law is one you'd be forgiven for not having heard before. Disability history is not taught in schools. It is not dramatised for entertainment and is rarely the subject of documentaries; on the odd occasion that the subject is on British screens, it's likely to have been from the US – as in the 2020 documentary [Crip Camp](#). As a result, I'd wager most of the British public think disability rights were introduced in the 1970s along with other anti-discrimination laws, like those legislating against sex and race prejudice, and came about by benevolent authorities gifting rights to the grateful disabled.

As *Then Barbara Met Alan* shows, this couldn't be further from the truth. When *Take That* were top of the charts and Rachel and Ross were “will they, won’t they?” in *Friends*, disabled people in the UK still had no basic rights enshrined in law. That meant it was perfectly legal for a company not to hire someone because they were Deaf or for a bus not to have ramps and be unable to take wheelchair-using passengers. These moments of everyday inequality are cleverly represented in the show and the characters’ lives. When Barbara and Alan get arrested for protesting about a lack of disability access, they have to be kept in a police van because the cells aren’t accessible. It’s a moment of irony that makes clear just how preposterous discrimination is once you really start to think about it.

One of the most striking parts of the programme comes when Barbara and her friends decide to protest over ITV Telethon, a charity drive show that raised money for disability charities, but really served to reinforce negative stereotypes about “pitiable crips”. Interspersed with real historical footage of bemused host Chris Tarrant and protesters, it sums up in just a few scenes how, for decades, British society was content to hand out charity to its disabled citizens but not rights. When change did come, it was not thanks to kindly non-disabled politicians and media organisations, but the fury and power of wheelchair users throwing themselves under buses. Their demands were simultaneously uncompromising and unremarkable. As the campaigners chant to passersby: “We want what you’ve got! Civil. Rights.”

That *Then Barbara Met Alan* is built around a love story between the two campaigners is itself refreshingly subversive. A society that often others disabled people as sexless, passive and sad naturally sees no need to grant them access to pubs, cinemas or gigs. On an early date, we see Alan and Barbara stopped from going into a restaurant because there’s no ramp. As a sign of what’s to come, Alan insists on challenging the manager and a waiter promptly brings a table out to the pavement so the couple can at least have their date outside. “We fight every battle,” Alan implores Barbara. “Do you understand that? Every battle.”

It would be a mistake to watch the show and think the story is over. As Alan himself says, after storming the House of Commons when the DDA is finally passed: “It won’t be enough. But it will be a start.” Any disabled

person who has recently been unlawfully turned down for a job, [denied healthcare](#) during the pandemic, or been left to [wet themselves on a train](#) because there's no accessible toilet knows this all too well. Research published this week by Euan's Guide, the disability access charity, [found](#) that 59% of disabled people believe the pandemic has made access worse. Progress is a slow game.

And yet I can't help but feel a little hope. Watching *Then Barbara Met Alan*, I was struck not only by the power of disabled activists but of seeing their story told in the mainstream. This was disability rights front and centre on primetime television, played by disabled actors and created by disabled storytellers. By the time the real-life Barbara was on screen in the final scene – with a ramp symbolically coming out of a bus to finally give her entry – I was crying. For what we gained. For what was taken from us for decades, and still is. For the campaigners who gave so much for my generation and those that do today. Roar in the streets and kiss your lover. This is what disability looks like – and the battle continues.

- Frances Ryan is a Guardian columnist and author of *Crippled: Austerity and the Demonisation of Disabled People* – now out on audiobook
-

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/22/bbc-then-barbara-met-alan-disability-rights>

[Opinion](#)[Cost of living crisis](#)

Spend a day with me in the eviction court, Mr Sunak, and you'll understand the 'cost of living'

[Polly Toynbee](#)



If the chancellor raised benefits in line with inflation, it would help those tenants for whom rising bills are the last straw



A Courts & Tribunals Service bailiff serving an eviction warrant.
Photograph: Alamy

Tue 22 Mar 2022 04.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 22 Mar 2022 11.58 EDT

Expect something on Wednesday, some gesture in the [spring statement](#) to ease the gathering cost-of-living storm. But for whom? That's the chancellor's political and moral choice. But, before he chooses, I would like to bring him with me to sit in court to watch a day of housing evictions, warrants and repossessionss.

Since the ban on evictions in England during Covid ended last summer, a wave of cases has surged through the justice system. Here Rishi Sunak would see stricken households losing their daily battle to stay afloat in a sea of bills and misfortunes. Many were knocked into debt by lost earnings in the pandemic, struggling against mounting bills. Many were “just about managing” with the £20 a week “uplift” to universal credit, before that was [cruelly withdrawn](#).

In Watford county court, Hertfordshire, some of them find their last hope in Ruth Camp, a duty solicitor and housing specialist who works for Shelter, the housing charity. They spill out their story briefly to her before they go into the courtroom, where she argues their case before the judge, doing the

best she can on the day. Some tenants, having already given up in despair, never even turn up. Often she does win adjournments and delays, finding technical errors in landlords' paperwork or gaining a legal "breathing space" for those with mental health problems. Years of legal aid cuts have left just one law firm still taking housing cases in all of Hertfordshire, she says, while landlords often have barristers. The usher says no reporters ever come here.

I'd like the chancellor to meet Adele, who has fallen asleep in the foyer queueing for Camp's help. She has already been evicted by bailiffs, but all her possessions, including, crucially, her ID, are locked in the flat – she can't get benefits or anywhere else to rent without it. She had lived there for nine years with her brother, until both lost work during Covid and fell behind with their rent.

Or how about Michael, who has taken the day off his chemotherapy for throat cancer to attend court? His arrears are huge, as he says his benefits got stopped. Why? He rambles, a bit confused, and has brought a heap of documents, including photos of black mould in his sitting room. "I've tried over 40 flats, but no landlord will take me," he says, knowing eviction is inevitable. The judge tries his best but has no discretion in granting the landlord possession within 28 days. Camp writes everything down for Michael, tells him to go to Citizens Advice about his benefits and the council's homelessness prevention team, but, she says, hard-pressed councils keep raising their criteria for help of any kind.

If some tenants seem disorganised, maybe the typical Tory minister would brand them feckless, but in hard times those in the frailest mental state fall under the wheels first. Some are just unlucky – like Kingston, an assistant plumber, who tells me that in his 20 years since leaving the Caribbean: "I paid tax and stamp, took no benefits, never been in debt in my whole life." But work was scarce during the worst of the pandemic and now he's been in hospital. Working on a zero-hours contract for an agency, he got no sick pay, so he's in arrears and his landlord wants him out. Camp bargains with the judge to reduce his repayment rate. "He can't pay it off that fast, with the cost-of-living rising," she warns. Housing associations can be as tough as private landlords. "We're a charity, we can't afford arrears," one argues – but the judge negotiates a last chance to repay.

The chancellor really should meet Esther, so resourceful and resilient that she leaves Camp and me full of admiration. She's a widow with children who has already been served with a warrant for eviction. Her landlord does no repairs, so she taught herself on YouTube to plumb in a new toilet. Her budgeting is tuned to the last penny. "We buy 20p pasta packs, cheap packed lunches, no school dinners. We've stopped wifi, my boy's football club and my girl's bus pass," she says: all that with no breath of self-pity. She works in hospitality and barely earns above the minimum wage. She glows with pride at her daughter, who has just been accepted into university, but her debt problems started when she had to pay for her mother's funeral. When Camp assesses her bills, the scale of the problem is apparent, especially now that crucial £20 week has been lost from universal credit. The judge lets her repay a bit less, but warns he can't stop an eviction from taking place if she falls behind in the onslaught of price rises ahead.

One landlord came to court accompanied by an incandescent father, who shouted at Camp after the case: "Shelter! You're a disgrace: you should be ashamed!" Finding a technical error, Camp had won a stay for an agoraphobic tenant in high arrears. But usually the boot is firmly on the landlord's foot. Official figures show a 43% rise in evictions in the three months to December in England on the previous three months, with Shelter [reporting](#) that 275,000 privately rented households had received an eviction notice or were behind on their rent. A landlord can evict a tenant with two months' notice for no reason at all.

Of the 30 clients Camp has helped this month, she says, in 10 of those cases outright possession orders were made, meaning evictions are very likely to follow. In all of those cases, the only discretion the judge had was the amount of time before the order took effect. But, even for those cases where she won a respite, many would still end with the bailiff's knock. Since the great austerity axe fell on the welfare state, charities such as Shelter and Citizens Advice can be all that's left to defend destitute people; the Department for Work and Pensions can be worse than no help, and social workers are stretched to life-and-death cases only.

On Wednesday, the chancellor chooses how to spend [a windfall of £9bn](#) from better than expected tax income, as the Bank of England warns of the

deepest fall in living standards since modern records began. His backbenchers clamour for popular cuts to petrol duties and taxes for all voters. But if he took the moral course and directed £9bn to keeping benefits up with inflation, then, [says the Resolution Foundation](#), three-quarters of his assistance would be well-targeted on the lower earners in most need.

If he does nothing to stop benefits falling, low earners such as Esther will be losing a colossal 14% of their real income to rising prices, [according to the political economist](#) Richard Murphy, analysing official figures. Barring a miracle, that means she would fall behind with rent and lose her home. Would the chancellor look her in the eye and tell her that? Esther probably shouldn't hold her breath. It doesn't take much political tea-leaf reading to guess who this Tory chancellor will spend most money on pleasing.

- Some names have been changed in this piece
- Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist
- Join Hugh Muir, Richard Partington and Anneliese Dodds MP in a livestreamed event on the cost-of-living crisis and the effect on the poorest households.
on Thursday 14 April 2022, 8pm BST | 9pm CEST | 12pm PDT | 3pm EDT Book tickets [here](#)

This article was amended on 22 March 2022. Ruth Camp made reference to 10 cases where outright possession orders had been made, out of 30 clients she had helped this month; rather than 10 evictions out of 30 cases in one day, as an earlier version said.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/22/eviction-court-sunak-cost-of-living-benefits-inflation>

OpinionFood

Work of the devil? I think not. As a priest, I'm all for exotically tasty hot cross buns

[Fergus Butler-Gallie](#)

Marmite, mocha and blueberry: they may be commercially motivated, but they're still a reminder of Easter's importance



‘Even if the symbolism of the bun is warped by different flavour, Christians believe that the symbolism of the cross cannot be.’ Heston Blumenthal’s mocha hot cross buns. Photograph: Waitrose

Tue 22 Mar 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 22 Mar 2022 16.24 EDT

In many ways I agree with Dr Gavin Ashenden, the former cleric who has [railed against](#) exotically flavoured hot cross buns as “the work of the devil”. I am a huge enthusiast for the original; toasted so that the upper crumbs just begin to hint at carbonisation, slathered with butter and then briefly placed

under the grill, to enable the cream and salt to permeate the crevices where the plump raisins lie. Such is my devotion to this treat that I am innately suspicious of any deviation from the traditional formula.

This has been confirmed for me by a series of taste tests. I tasted savoury versions with cheese and Marmite (which came under particular fire from Dr Ashenden). These were fine but infinitely worse than, say, a slice of cheese on toast with marmite. I tried Heston Blumenthal's mocha buns, too – another disappointment, as if someone had mixed old coffee granules with croissant dough. I have even tried Aldi's hot cross bun liqueur. It was vile – the lovechild of Jägermeister and sweet, Christmassy sick. If supermarkets can't even link the flavour of their product to seasonally appropriate vomit then what hope is there for a proper theological discussion?

However, I have to confess that even as a cleric, my issues with these recent mutations stem only from problems with their flavour. Dr Ashenden's gripe was with the form itself: that "Christians are sad that the symbolism is lost". Yet when I looked at countless varieties of hot cross bun, from blueberry to cheddar to chocolate, what struck me about all of them was that they retained the cross in their design. Now, I would have thought that aspect was what provided them with their theological value – unless, of course, Dr Ashenden is claiming some special salvific significance of the humble raisin.

Perhaps I might be accused of not taking the cross seriously, but quite the opposite is true. Hot cross buns were probably developed more as a marketing ploy by an enterprising baker than as an aid for teaching the faith, and so the idea that without a specific flavour we will suddenly forget the meaning of the cross is palpably absurd. Dr Ashenden is concerned that such changes represent a "loss of the narrative of struggle". Yet I'm not sure the original buns necessarily had that in the first place – what they do represent are small reminders of [Christianity](#), even in the sphere of the commercial. Surely that can be no bad thing. It's difficult to know what will stir meditations on the life and death of Christ for someone, but it is foolish of Christians to try to shut down potential routes to the cross. The Damascene moment might be prompted by a piece of art or music or literature, or simply

the way light streams through a window or rain flows into a gutter. It might even be the result of meditating on a strangely flavoured bun.

Even if the symbolism of the bun is warped by different flavour, Christians believe that the symbolism of the cross cannot be. The Carthusian order of monks has as its motto: “the cross stands steady while the world turns.” Whether those turns are represented by the wars, horrors and tumults we see across the world every day, or whether they are represented by Asda putting red Leicester in them is, of course, a matter of opinion. Essential to Christian belief is the idea that the cross embraces all and that the cross conquers all. It is a symbol of torture and pain and death that changes into one of hope and joy. In the light of that leap of faith, the flavour of the dough it’s made from seems a secondary issue at best.

The cross is a reminder of hope because, for Christians, it leads to the empty tomb, to the idea that life conquers death and that love conquers all. Whether accompanied by Marmite or cinnamon, reminders of that are always to be welcomed.

- Fergus Butler-Gallie is a clergyman and author
-

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/22/priest-defiling-hot-cross-bun-easter>

[**Opinion**](#)[**Global development**](#)

Sudan's military is brutally suppressing protests – global action is needed

Mohamed Osman

A targeted response, including sanctions against those leading the repression, will allow Sudanese striving for a fairer future the freedom to organise



People in Khartoum protest against the military's seizure of power.
Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty

Global development is supported by



[About this content](#)

Tue 22 Mar 2022 05.30 EDT

In Sudan, where prices for bread and fuel have risen sharply after the [coup](#), people are once again taking to the streets. The global [shortage of wheat](#) triggered by the war in Ukraine may be adding fuel to the fire, but dissatisfaction has been brewing for years.

Five months ago, Sudan's military carried out a coup, bringing an abrupt end to the country's short-lived transition towards democracy and empowering a repressive clique, many of whom were in power when the former strongman, [Omar al-Bashir](#), was in charge. Sudanese from all walks of life have been rallying in resistance ever since.

The military has used brute force to suppress the protesters, shooting at them with live rounds and teargas canisters and preemptively arresting individuals perceived as active within protest groups.

Sanctions should be designed to have minimal negative humanitarian impact. They could include visa bans and assets freezes

What we are seeing in [Sudan](#) isn't the work of a few bad apples but the actions of a well-managed apparatus bent on denying people's basic rights, trying to break the will of the protest movement while also buying time to cement their power.

Since the revolution, Sudanese protesters have been clear that without an end to impunity and reform of abusive forces, the path to democracy is blocked. Strategic regional and international engagement with Sudan needs to address both issues – impunity and reform – head-on and not trade them off or delay resolving them indefinitely for political concessions or convenience.

Unfortunately, to date Sudan's international and regional partners have floundered, rubber stamping power-sharing deals that put justice and reform demands on the back burner.

It is time to change tack. Concrete actions, including targeted sanctions on individuals implicated in serious human rights abuses and war crimes, are needed to change the behaviour of security forces and curb the repression. If Sudan's leaders see that the international community is willing to impose consequences, peaceful protesters should enjoy greater freedom to express themselves and organise.

Military leaders in control in Khartoum have ordered operations against protesters that [have killed 87 people, including 11 children](#), and injured thousands, hoping to undermine resolve. Protesters have been beaten and assaulted, including sexually, and [hundreds locked up](#). Many have been held [incommunicado](#). There have been attempts to rein in independent media reporting, raids on at least two media offices and [arrests and harassment](#) of journalists. The security forces have also targeted [healthcare facilities](#).

No one should underestimate the tenacity of the Sudanese risking their lives for real change. But as a longtime activist, whose 16-year-old son was detained at a protest, beaten and humiliated in detention, told me: "They want to break our boys from joining the protests, and also want to send a signal to families to trigger fear for the fate of their children so they won't allow them to protest."

Lawyers and families describe how the authorities deny knowing detainees' whereabouts and invoke the state of emergency imposed after the coup, which gives security forces carte blanche to hold people. Refusing to disclose the whereabouts of someone in custody can constitute an enforced disappearance, a crime under international law.

The military junta has also tactically deployed forces and rotated units in an apparent attempt to deflect responsibility. Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, the army leader, [has blamed the police](#) for crackdowns, even though the military has been involved.

Police officials have denied using excessive and lethal force despite overwhelming evidence of the opposite. After his reinstatement as prime minister, in November last year, Abdalla Hamdok [sacked](#) the then police chief and his deputy. This, however, did not stop security force crackdowns.

A prosecutor in Khartoum said the presence of many forces creates confusion, which makes it harder for investigators to identify those responsible.

Sudan's regional and international partners should roll out a coordinated response, including targeted sanctions, which should be carefully designed to have minimal negative humanitarian impact. They could include visa bans and assets freezes that will help prevent individuals leading the repression from thriving while they throttle Sudan's frail economy and oversee the brutal machinery of oppression.

Clear benchmarks indicating when and how sanctions can be lifted should be linked to behaviour change by the military and others and should be set out from the beginning. These benchmarks should lead to achieving the reforms sought by the protest movement.

The coup leaders should be given no further concessions that facilitate their efforts to undermine the future of a fairer, rights-respecting country that Sudanese people continue to strive for.

Mohamed Osman is an [Africa](#) researcher at Human Rights Watch

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/mar/22/sudan-military-brutally-suppressing-protests-global-action-needed>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

2022.03.22 - Around the world

- Syria Regime using maze of shell companies to avoid sanctions on Assad's elite
- Revealed Ships may dump oil up to 3,000 times a year in Europe's waters
- Live Business: rising inflation hits UK government borrowing in February; crude oil up again
- Oink, oink How scientists decoded pig emotions from their sounds
- Rohingya Refugees welcome US decision to call Myanmar atrocities a genocide

Global development

Syria using maze of shell companies to avoid sanctions on Assad regime's elite

Exclusive: documents seen by the Guardian prove Assad minister's boast that evading financial sanctions has 'become a Syrian craft'



A poster of Syria's President Bashar al-Assad and the Russian leader, Vladimir Putin, on a road in the Syrian capital, Damascus, this month. Photograph: Louai Beshara/AFP/Getty

Global development is supported by



[About this content](#)

Tessa Fox and Karam Shaar

Tue 22 Mar 2022 03.30 EDT Last modified on Tue 22 Mar 2022 03.32 EDT

The Syrian regime is setting up shell companies in a systematic attempt to avoid sanctions, according to official documents obtained by the Guardian.

The documents, not publicly available, detail at least three companies established in Syria on the same day with the explicit purpose of operating as a shell to buy shares and manage other companies.

They show clear links between the owners of the new shell companies, President [Bashar al-Assad](#) and Syria's economically powerful elite, including individuals under sanction.

Complicating the ownership structure of businesses in Syria increases the complexity in untangling the role they have in bolstering the regime's finances and makes it more difficult for foreign powers to impose sanctions effectively on the government's inner circle.



Muhammad Samer al-Khalil, Syria's economy and trade minister, advised foreign investors 'not to appear under their true names in the local market'.
Photograph: Louai Beshara/AFP/Getty

Last October, Syria's economy minister, Muhammad Samer al-Khalil, said that "[evading sanctions has become a Syrian craft](#)," and called on foreign investors reluctant to join the market because of sanctions "not to appear under their true names in the local market".

Each of the new shell companies, established in October 2021 – Trappist, Generous and Super Brandy – is majority owned by an individual linked to the Syrian regime by an intricate web of connections.

Eyad Hamid, a senior researcher at the London-based [Syrian Legal Development Program](#), said: "It is important [to continue to track shell companies] as it is part of the asset freeze and drying-up of resources the regime is using to violate human rights in Syria."

Justine Walker, head of global sanctions at the [Association of Certified Anti-Money Laundering Specialists](#), said governments did not have to wait for shell companies to start buying shares or moving money before imposing sanctions on them.

“Part of [sanctions] is to ensure a company doesn’t continue operations and isn’t able to set up [in the first place],” she said.

One of the three owners of the new shell companies is Ali Najib Ibrahim, who is a co-owner of Tele Space, a firm that part-owns Wafa JSC, which was licensed in early 2022 to become the country’s third telecom operator.

Another part-owner of Wafa JSC is [Yasar Hussein Ibrahim \(also known as Yasser Hussein Ibrahim\)](#), an adviser to Assad and head of the economic and financial office of the presidency, and under [sanctions imposed by the US](#) and the UK.

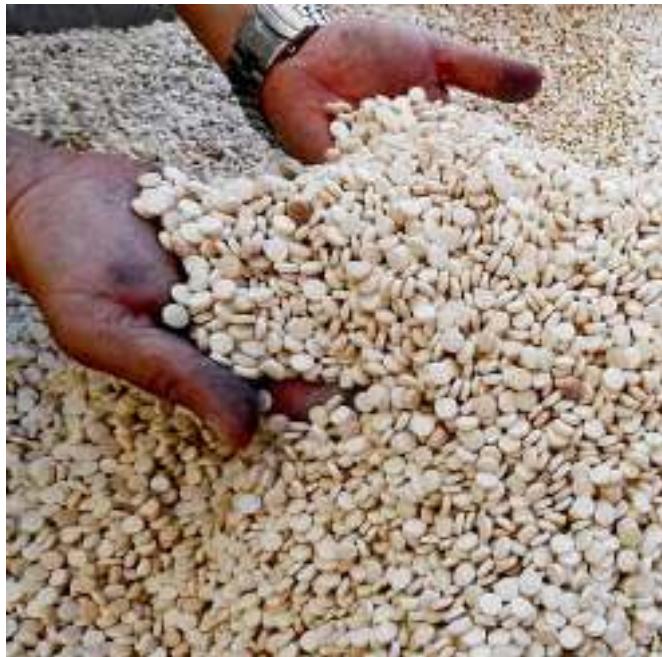
[Graphic showing links between shell companies and figures in Assad regime](#)

The other two figures who own the new shell companies are Rana Ahmad Khalil, 20, and Rita Ahmad Khalil, 21. They are the daughters of Ahmad Khalil Khalil, who half owns Tele Space, in partnership with Ali Najib Ibrahim.

Ahmad Khalil Khalil is also co-owner of Sanad Protection and Security Services, which is in charge of [protecting Russian phosphate shipments](#) from central Syria to Tartus port.

His partner in Sanad Protection is Nasser Deeb Deeb, co-owner of Ella Services – and under sanctions imposed by the US – with [Khodr Ali Taher](#), a leading businessman for the Assad regime.

Taher, who has also had sanctions imposed by the US, [UK](#) and EU for bankrolling the regime and his involvement in smuggling and profiteering, is reportedly [implicated as a smuggler of captagon](#) – a type of locally made amphetamine.



A record 14-ton seizure by Italian police of a Syrian-made amphetamine known as captagon. One key figure in the Assad regime has reportedly been identified as a smuggler of the drug. Photograph: Ciro Fusco/EPA

The criminal network the Syrian regime uses to evade sanctions and to keep the country's illicit economy functioning to continue is outrunning any updates by western governments.

Hamid said: "The new [Biden] administration's sanctions have been very limited and, in a way, they do not have the appetite that was in the previous administration to impose sanctions on individuals in Syria."

The same also applies to the UK government, which has only announced [one fresh round of sanctions](#) since leaving the EU. The sanctions targeted close allies of Assad, including Yasar Hussein Ibrahim in 2021 and Syria's foreign minister, Faisal Mekdad. The US Office of Foreign Assets Control, the enforcement agency of the US Treasury, has also imposed sanctions on Ibrahim and Taher.

Peter Stano, of the EU's foreign affairs department, said developments in Syria were kept under constant review.

"[The EU] has shown ... that it is responsive in deciding to renew sanctions and/or amend the list of targeted entities or persons based on developments

on the ground,” Stano said.

The EU Commission said it would pass on information the Guardian had published to “the relevant competent authority for assessment and, if needed, further investigations”.

The US’s so-called Caesar Act – named after a whistleblower in the Syrian security services who documented the [Assad regime’s use of torture](#) – allows for secondary sanctions to be imposed on individuals and businesses connected to the regime even if they did not commit sanctionable behaviour.

However, such sanctions have not been applied since the act went into effect in mid-2020.

Walker said: “If you can imagine how many companies are set up in Syria, it’s outside of the bandwidth of governments … [therefore] investigation specialists [and] due-diligence providers … play a very crucial role.”

Hamid added: “There needs to be more investment, investigations and on-the-ground sources to keep up with these changes in the Syrian business scene because it’s not a stable environment, it keeps shifting.”

[Karam Shaar](#) is research director at the [Operations & Policy Center](#) (OPC) and Syria programme manager at the Observatory of Political and Economic Networks

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/mar/22/syria-using-maze-of-shell-companies-to-avoid-sanctions-on-assad-regimes-elite>

Seascape: the state of our oceansOil spills

Revealed: ships may dump oil up to 3,000 times a year in Europe's waters

Collaborative investigation shows ships regularly discharge 'bilge' water illegally instead of treating it, with toxic effect on marine life



A tanker legally discharging bilge water in port. To save costs, some ships illegally empty bilge tanks at night or in rough seas when it is harder to see the oil. Photograph: lucag_g/Alamy

Seascape: the state of our oceans is supported by



About this content

Laura Paddison, Beatriz Ramalho da Silva, Max Bernhard and Max Muller

Tue 22 Mar 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 22 Mar 2022 16.20 EDT

Up to 3,000 cases of oil dumped by commercial ships may be happening every year in European waters, according to a new investigation, which found the scale of illegal “bilge dumping” is likely to be far higher than publicly acknowledged.

Bilge water is a mix of liquids from the engine room of a ship along with other potentially toxic substances including lubricants, cleaning solvents and metals such as lead and arsenic, which collects at the bottom of the vessel.

Dealing with this oily wastewater – by treating it to remove pollutants or by offloading it at port – is expensive. To cut down on operational costs, some ships simply dump it directly into the ocean, where it can pose a serious threat to marine life.

01:32

How vessels may be dispelling tonnes of toxic wastewater into the ocean daily – video

A six-month investigation by Lighthouse Reports, a European non-profit newsroom, with nine publications across Europe, used satellite technology, whistleblowers' testimonies and freedom of information requests to document hundreds of incidents of potentially illegal oil spills from ships. It found that despite the use of sophisticated satellite technology, countries were slow to act and prosecution levels were low, leading to what some experts say is a culture of impunity.

In Europe, marine oil spills are monitored by the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) through its [CleanSeaNet](#) initiative, launched in 2007, which analyses satellite images to detect potential oil discharges from ships.

When the system identifies a potential spill, it sends an alert to the relevant EU country, which can observe the slick by sending out a boat or plane or by asking a nearby vessel to inspect it – sometimes the satellite picks up algal blooms or legal discharges of vegetable or fish oil. The national authority can then feed its findings back to EMSA.

Be quiet – do not speak out. If you speak, then it is very much trouble for you

Warning given to whistleblower

But annual CleanSeaNet data, which EMSA started publishing for the first time in 2021, reveals that feedback levels are low. In 2020, the agency recorded 7,672 detections of potential oil spills. It received feedback for only a third of these, of which 208 were confirmed to be oil slicks.

The longer the interval between an alert and an on-site check, the higher the chance of the countries reporting “nothing observed”, according to a 2021 [report](#) from EMSA and the European Environment Agency. In 2019, only 1.5% of 7,939 alerts of potential oil spills were verified by authorities within three hours.

Experts argue that slow response times, combined with limited public data provided by EMSA, reduce accountability. The agency's report for 2020 does not disclose detection dates or provide information on the likely source of pollution.

A spokesperson for EMSA said this was to avoid revealing “sensitive information” about monitoring and investigations, “which could support polluters in evading detection”.



A long black line marks a possible bilge discharge detected by the Sentinel-1 satellite off the coast of Malaysia near Singapore – a hotspot for bilge dumps. Photograph: Courtesy of SkyTruth

Even if countries identify potential illegal bilge dumping in their waters, they do not have to disclose what action is subsequently taken.

“This is a problem that’s been invisible to the public,” said John Amos, president of SkyTruth, an environmental watchdog that has been using satellite data to track illegal bilge dumping since 2011. “You can give governments all the best tools in the world but if there’s no public accountability and pressure for them to use those tools, problems will not get fixed.”

SkyTruth used EMSA data to calculate how many spills may be avoiding detection because of gaps in coverage by satellites, which are in orbit and do not constantly monitor the ocean, and the rate at which slicks dissipate.

“Taking the CleanSeaNet results at face value, and accounting for the frequency of the satellite imagery and the lifespan of a typical oil slick,

SkyTruth estimates there may be nearly 3,000 oil slicks every year caused by vessels transiting EU waters,” said Amos.

Ships have developed tactics to avoid detection, according to whistleblowers’ testimony collected by Lighthouse Reports and reporting partners, including using portable pumps to discharge untreated bilge water into the ocean and [dumping at night](#) or in rough seas when it’s harder to see the oil.

There is still a certain incentive, for cost reasons, to illegally dump oil at sea

Christian Bussau, Greenpeace

One whistleblower, who worked in a ship’s engine room, described the ease of bilge dumping using a portable pump. “You can assemble this portable pump in five minutes and then detach for five minutes and hide if somebody is coming,” he said. The dumping would often happen after dark, at about 10pm, the whistleblower said.

Raising the alarm can be very difficult, according to another whistleblower, a ship’s engineer, who observed illegal bilge dumping. He said he was told by the chief engineer: “Be quiet, do not speak out. If you speak then it is very much trouble for you.” When he confronted the chief engineer, his contract was terminated, he said.

Both men asked to remain anonymous for fear of the consequences of speaking out.

Bilge dumps do not tend to receive the same attention as large industrial spills because they are smaller and less visible but experts argue the frequency with which they are happening is having a big effect on marine life. A 2016 [study](#) on short-lived oil spills found “immediate adverse biological effects” on marine life, including a decline in numbers of plankton in the sea.



Acartia tonsa, a type of zooplankton on which the marine food chain rests, was found to be badly affected by bilge, according to ecotoxicology tests. Photograph: Nigel Cattlin/Alamy

Maritime oil pollution has “direct toxic effects” on the smallest marine creatures, said Kerstin Magnusson, an ecotoxicologist at the Swedish Environmental Research Institute and author of a [report](#) that linked bilge dumping to negative impacts on the feeding and reproduction of *Acartia tonsa*, tiny zooplankton that form a vital part of the base of the ocean food chain. This has an impact all the way up the food web, she said, adding: “It’s a network of effects and consequences.”

Penalties for illegal bilge dumping can include fines – Carnival’s Princess Cruises [was fined \\$40m](#) in 2016 after pleading guilty to bilge dumping along the British coast. In some cases [prison sentences](#) are given to individuals found responsible.

But enforcement is sporadic, say experts, and even when fines are imposed, they may not be high enough to deter the behaviour. “Even if an oil sample is taken after the fact and they find out which ship the oil came from, the likelihood of the polluters being fined a large amount is minimal,” said Christian Bussau, a marine biologist with Greenpeace.

“There is still a certain incentive, for cost reasons, to illegally dump oil at sea,” he said.

Maja Marković Kostelac, executive director of EMSA, said: “Illegal discharges of oil and other polluting substances still regularly occur in European waters, albeit the number of detections, as well as the number of prosecutions, remains low.”

She said the agency’s CleanSeaNet programme “has so far proven to be an important resource at EU level for monitoring maritime areas, providing rapid detection alerts that allow for prompt follow-up actions.”

In response to claims of a lack of transparency, a spokesperson for EMSA said: “The agency can only disclose feedback and verification data when approved by the coastal states.” They added that information on prosecutions related to illegal oil dumps was the responsibility of coastal states, not EMSA.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/mar/22/revealed-ships-may-dump-oil-up-to-3000-times-a-year-in-europe-s-waters>

Business live

Business

Record number of UK manufacturers to raise prices, says CBI – as it happened

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2022/mar/22/uk-government-borrowing-higher-expected-mini-budget-crude-oil-up-again-business-live>

Animal behaviour

Swine language: scientists decode pig emotions from their sounds

Analysis of vocal expression of emotions is being increasingly used as a tool to assess pigs' welfare, study finds



'In positive situations, the calls are far shorter, with minor fluctuations in amplitude.' Photograph: Daniel Acker/Reuters

[Maya Yang](#)

Tue 22 Mar 2022 11.15 EDTFirst published on Tue 22 Mar 2022 02.00 EDT

A new study seeks to answer a key question: what does it mean when a pig oinks, squeals or grunts?

In the study published earlier this month, researchers from the University of Copenhagen, ETH Zurich and the French National Research Institute for

Agriculture, Food and Environment recorded 7,414 sounds from 411 pigs in different scenarios.

The researchers then developed an algorithm to decode whether pigs were experiencing a positive emotion, negative emotion or something in between.

The recordings were collected in situations encountered by commercial pigs from birth to death, the University of Copenhagen said. Researchers also monitored behavior and heart rates.

“Due to the impact of emotions on vocalization, the analysis of vocal expression of emotions is increasingly being considered as an important non-invasive tool to assess the affective aspects of animal welfare,” the study [said](#).

It added: “In the last decade, it has been shown that vocalizations of various animal species produced in specific emotional contexts and/or physiological states display specific acoustic characteristics.”

Positive situations include when piglets suckle from their mothers or when they are reunited with family members. Negative situations include separation, fights, castration and slaughter.

Researchers also developed mock scenarios designed to evoke more nuanced emotions. Such scenarios included an arena holding toys or food and a corresponding arena without any such stimuli. They also introduced new and unfamiliar objects.

The study revealed that pigs typically vocalize high-frequency calls such as screams or squeals in negative situations, while low-frequency calls such as barks and grunts occur when pigs experience both positive and negative emotions.

“There are clear differences in pig calls when we look at positive and negative situations,” said Elodie Briefer, a professor at the University of Copenhagen’s biology department who co-led the study.

“In the positive situations, the calls are far shorter, with minor fluctuations in amplitude. Grunts, more specifically, begin high and gradually go lower in frequency.

“By training an algorithm to recognize these sounds, we can classify 92% of the calls to the correct emotion.”

According to the researchers, most modern animal welfare efforts focus on physical health.

Briefer said: “We need someone who wants to develop the algorithm into an app that farmers can use to improve the welfare of their animals” including their emotions.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2022/mar/22/oinks-squeals-grunts-scientists-decode-pig-emotions>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

Myanmar

Rohingya refugees welcome US decision to call Myanmar atrocities a genocide

Refugees ‘very happy’ with declaration, while experts say ‘concrete steps’ must follow



Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh have welcomed the US move to designate atrocities committed by Myanmar’s military a genocide. Photograph: Allison Joyce/Getty Images

Alex Hern and agencies

@alexhern

Tue 22 Mar 2022 12.09 EDTFirst published on Mon 21 Mar 2022 23.32 EDT

Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh have welcomed the [announcement by the US](#) that it considers the violent repression of their largely Muslim ethnic group in Myanmar a genocide.

“We are very happy on the declaration of the genocide; many many thanks,” said 60-year-old Sala Uddin, who lives at Kutupalong camp, one of the many in Cox’s Bazar district that are now home to about 1 million [Rohingya](#).

“It has been 60 years starting from 1962 that the [Myanmar](#) government has been torturing us and many other communities including Rohingya,” he said. “I think a path to take action by the international community against Myanmar has opened up because of the declaration.”

The US made the determination on Monday to call the repression a genocide based on confirmed [accounts of mass atrocities on civilians](#) by Myanmar’s military in a widespread and systematic campaign against the Rohingya, US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, said in a speech at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Imtiaz Ahmed, director of the Centre for Genocide Studies at the University of Dhaka, said the declaration was “a positive step,” but it would be important to see what actions and “concrete steps” follow.

“Just by saying that genocide had been committed in Myanmar against the Rohingya is not good enough. I think we need to see what would follow from that statement,” Ahmed said.

He said it was too early to say how the new development would ensure the recognition of Rohingya refugees, who have long been denied citizenship in Myanmar, and the fundamental questions remained how and when they would go back to Myanmar.

He also said that harsh economic sanctions by the US against Myanmar could be the next outcome. He said it was also equally important to see whether the US would take an interest in supporting the international court of justice in The Hague where Myanmar is facing a trial put forward by the Gambia.

Myanmar’s government is already under multiple layers of US sanctions since a military coup ousted the democratically elected government in

February 2021. Thousands of civilians throughout the country have been killed and imprisoned as part of ongoing repression of anyone opposed to the ruling junta.

Currently [Bangladesh](#) is hosting more than 1 million Rohingya refugees. More than 700,000 Rohingya have fled from Buddhist-majority Myanmar to refugee camps in Bangladesh since August 2017, when the military launched an operation aimed at clearing them from the country following attacks by a rebel group.

Bangladesh's prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, said repeatedly that their repatriation to Myanmar is the solution to the crisis but Bangladesh would not force them to leave Bangladesh.

The early days of the genocide were marked by widespread use of Facebook to organise and incite the killings. In 2018, the social network acknowledged its role for the first time, and committed to improving its moderation efforts in the country. But an investigation from Global Witness found that the company is still falling short of those promises.

The charity wrote and submitted eight explicit and violent adverts to the social network, each containing real examples of Burmese-language hate speech against Rohingya. The adverts were designed to clearly fall under Facebook's criteria of hate speech, and should have been banned from the platform, but all eight were approved for publishing.

"It is unacceptable that Facebook continues to be shockingly poor at detecting Burmese language hate speech. If they still can't do this in Myanmar after five years of supposed efforts, what are the chances that their own voluntary efforts will be enough to avoid contributing to atrocities in Ukraine and other conflict zones," said Ava Lee, digital threats to democracy campaign lead at Global Witness.

None of the adverts were shown to the public, after Global Witness intervened to prevent them being published.

In a statement, a Facebook spokesperson said: "We've built a dedicated team of Burmese speakers, banned the Tatmadaw, disrupted networks

manipulating public debate and taken action on harmful misinformation to help keep people safe. We've also invested in Burmese-language technology to reduce the prevalence of violating content. This work is guided by feedback from experts, civil society organisations and independent reports, including the UN Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar's findings and the independent Human Rights Impact Assessment we commissioned and released in 2018."

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/22/rohingya-refugees-welcome-us-decision-to-call-myanmar-atrocities-a-genocide>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

Headlines

- [P&O Ferries Ferry operator boss should quit after ‘brazen’ mass sackings, says Shapps](#)
- [Live UK politics: Grant Shapps calls on P&O Ferries boss to resign over mass sackings](#)
- [Education MPs accuse DfE of failing to control academy leaders’ excessive salaries](#)
- [Antarctica Satellite data shows entire Conger ice shelf has collapsed](#)

P&O Ferries

Downing Street urges P&O Ferries boss to resign after 800 sackings

Government promises legislation to force company to reverse move and pay crew minimum wage



Peter Hebblethwaite admitted his firm broke the law by sacking 800 workers without consultation. Photograph: Dan Kitwood/Getty Images

[Matthew Weaver](#) and [Peter Walker](#)

Fri 25 Mar 2022 10.52 EDTFirst published on Fri 25 Mar 2022 04.09 EDT

Downing Street has called for the chief executive of P&O Ferries to resign over the sacking of 800 workers, and pledged to push through legislation next week to force the company to reverse the move and pay its crew the minimum wage.

The transport secretary, [Grant Shapps](#), had earlier promised action after Peter Hebblethwaite's performance in front of the transport and business

committees, which he said was “brazen, breathtaking, and showed incredible arrogance”.

Hebblethwaite admitted to MPs on Thursday that his company [broke the law by sacking the 800 workers without consultation](#).

Boris Johnson’s deputy spokesperson said the prime minister agreed with Shapps’s view that Hebblethwaite should step down, and confirmed the plan for legislation. “We’ll be setting out a package of measures to take action against the unacceptable behaviour of P&O, and ensure this can’t happen again,” he said. “I can’t pre-empt that, but it would cover measures under things like international maritime law, domestic maritime law, employment law.

“The transport secretary spoke before about making sure that there are rules in place so that people sailing in UK waters can’t be paid below the minimum wage. [He] will set out full details of that next week.”

Speaking to Sky News, Shapps said: “I cannot believe that he can stay in that role having admitted to deliberately going out and using a loophole – well, break the law – but also use a loophole.”

Shapps also promised new legislation next week that would “close every possible loophole that exists and force them to U-turn”.

Shapps had called P&O Ferries’ plan to replace the sacked workers with agency staff on less than the minimum wage “simply unacceptable and we will force that to change”.

He accused the company of “mischievously” registering its ships under the Cyprus flag to avoid UK laws. He added: “They were breaking the law and deliberately set out to break the law, but effectively pay people off for their silence.

“We can’t have a situation where the minimum wage exists onshore, but as soon as you’re offshore … people aren’t covered by British laws on things

like minimum wage, and overseas cheap labour is exploited on those routes.”

Shapps suggested that the new law, to be drawn up in consultation with the Labour party, would ban shipping companies from operating from British ports if they failed to pay the minimum wage. He said: “I’ve already spoken to my opposite number in the House of Commons in order to try and build a consensus around this.”

Hebblethwaite said on Thursday that Shapps knew about the intention to slash jobs in November last year, despite denials from the Department for Transport (DfT).

Asked if Hebblethwaite was “lying”, Shapps said: “I’ve sent the note, actually, from the meeting in November, which was with a parent company – DP World – when I was at World Expo, where they simply said the competition is very tough, the conditions are very tight … and they’ll be looking at the shape of their business. I’ve actually sent the formal civil service note of that meeting.

“I think we can all see that what they’re trying to do is distract attention. The fact of the matter is that they needed to give 45 days’ notice to ministers, in fact to the secretary of state for business, if you’re making these kinds of redundancies. They did not do that, they did not provide the notice.”

Minutes of the 22 November meeting were [later released](#) by the Commons transport committee, sent to them by the DfT. They show Shapps saying he knew about the issues faced by P&O Ferries, but only seemingly in general terms. “I’m aware of the issues relating to P&O,” Shapps told Sultan Ahmed bin Sulayem, DP World’s chair, the minutes recorded. “I recognise you will need to make commercial decisions, but please do keep us informed.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/mar/25/po-ferries-boss-should-quit-after-brauen-mass-sackings-says-shapps>

Politics live with Andrew Sparrow

Politics

Boris Johnson backs call for P&O Ferries boss to resign over mass sackings – as it happened

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/live/2022/mar/25/uk-politics-live-grant-shapps-p-and-o-ferries-boss-should-resign-cost-of-living-crisis-boris-johnson>

Academies

MPs accuse DfE of failing to control academy leaders' excessive salaries

Committee highlights a lack of transparency surrounding academy finances in its report on the sector



The DfE is expected to extend its academies programme to eventually include all schools in England. Photograph: Leon Neal/Getty Images

[Sally Weale](#) Education correspondent

Fri 25 Mar 2022 02.00 EDT

The government has failed to get a handle on excessive salaries paid to academy trust leaders, according to parliament's spending watchdog, which also criticised the use of tens of millions of pounds in public money to "prop up" poorly managed trusts.

According to a report by the Commons public accounts committee, the number of academy trusts paying at least one senior staff member more than £100,000 went up from 1,875 in 2019-20 to 2,245 the following year. Meanwhile, a promised review of high pay by the [Department for Education](#) has still not been published.

The committee highlighted a lack of transparency surrounding academy finances in its report on the sector, which was published on Friday just days before the DfE is expected to unveil plans to extend its academies programme to eventually include all schools in [England](#).

More than half of England's pupils are educated in academies across 2,700 trusts and about 43% of all state-run schools are academies, which are independent of local authority control. While the majority of secondaries have become academies, primary schools have been more reluctant and there continues to be strong resistance in many communities.

MPs on the committee said the sector's lack of financial transparency undermined parents' capacity to hold school leaders and the DfE to account, both for their use of public funds and the education they provide.

They also accused the DfE of not yet having a sufficient handle on excessive pay within the sector, which meant the department could not assess whether public funds were being well spent. The committee said using public money to prop up academy trusts in difficulty failed to address poor financial management within trusts.

An additional £31m in financial support was paid to 81 academy trusts in 2019-20, the majority of which was non-repayable. The following year, the government wrote off £10m of academy debts, including £5m accrued by a single trust.

“We are concerned that there is a risk that a trust becomes too big to fail and could therefore see large sums of public funds being pumped into it to keep it afloat,” the report said. At the other end of the scale, there were fears that small schools in rural areas – which may be less attractive to trusts – could become “orphaned”.

The report also raised concerns about uneven finances in the academies sector. In the north of England, a far higher proportion of trusts report deficits – 8% compared with 2% in the south-east. Meanwhile some trusts are building up large cash reserves, which may be for specific capital projects, but the DfE does not know so cannot challenge them.

The DfE is expected to publish its long-awaited schools white paper early next week, which is expected to focus on the government's long-held ambition to make all schools academies.

Meg Hillier, the committee chair, said: “Parents deserve a lot more visibility and clarity over exactly what is being provided to their children, in what facilities, for the vast amounts of public money pumped into the school system.

“This unacceptable lack of transparency and accountability to parents and taxpayers must be resolved before the DfE presses ahead with plans to consolidate all of our schools into academy trust groups.”

A DfE spokesperson responded: “Schools across the country continue to have high standards of financial management and governance, with the latest published data showing that 95.9% of academy trusts have balanced accounts. We have set out clear expectations to the sector that academy trust salaries must be justifiable, and we will continue to challenge high pay if it is not proportionate.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2022/mar/25/academy-leaders-excessive-salaries-dfe-mps-committee>

[Antarctica](#)

Satellite data shows entire Conger ice shelf has collapsed in Antarctica

Nasa scientist says complete collapse of ice shelf as big as Rome during unusually high temperatures is ‘sign of what might be coming’

- [Get our free news app; get our morning email briefing](#)



Satellite data shows the Conger ice shelf has broken off iceberg C-38 and collapsed in Antarctica. Photograph: USNIC

*[Donna Lu](#)
[@donnadlu](#)*

Thu 24 Mar 2022 23.58 EDT Last modified on Fri 25 Mar 2022 12.47 EDT

An ice shelf about the size of Rome has completely collapsed in East [Antarctica](#) within days of record high temperatures, according to satellite data.

The Conger ice shelf, which had an approximate surface area of 1,200 sq km, collapsed around 15 March, scientists said on Friday.

East Antarctica saw unusually high temperatures last week, with Concordia station hitting a [record temperature of -11.8C](#) on 18 March, more than 40C warmer than seasonal norms. The record temperatures were the result of [an atmospheric river that trapped heat](#) over the continent.

Complete collapse of East Antarctica's Conger Ice Shelf (~1200 sq. km) ~March 15, seen in combo of [#Landsat](#) and [#MODIS](#) imagery. Possible it hit its tipping point following the [#Antarctic #AtmosphericRiver](#) and heatwave too? [#CongerIceShelf](#) [#Antarctica](#) [@helenafricker](#) [@icy_pete](#) <https://t.co/7dP5d6isvd> <pic.twitter.com/1wzmuOwdQn>

— Catherine Colello Walker (@CapComCatWalk) [March 24, 2022](#)

Ice shelves are extensions of ice sheets that float over the ocean, playing an important role in restraining inland ice. Without them, inland ice flows faster into the ocean, resulting in sea level rise.

Dr Catherine Colello Walker, an earth and planetary scientist at Nasa and the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, said though the Conger ice shelf was relatively small, “it is one of the most significant collapse events anywhere in Antarctica since the early 2000s when the Larsen B ice shelf disintegrated”.

“It won’t have huge effects, most likely, but it’s a sign of what might be coming,” Walker said.

The Conger ice shelf had been shrinking since the mid-2000s, but only gradually until the beginning of 2020, Walker said. By 4 March this year, the ice shelf appeared to have lost more than half its surface area compared to January measurements of around 1,200 sq km.

Peter Neff, a glaciologist and assistant research professor at the University of Minnesota, said that to see even a small ice shelf collapse in East

Antarctica was a surprise.

“We still treat East Antarctica like this massive, high, dry, cold and immovable ice cube,” he said. “Current understanding largely suggests you can’t get the same rapid rates of ice loss [as in West Antarctica] due to the geometry of the ice and bedrock there.”

“This collapse, especially if tied to the extreme heat brought by the mid-March atmospheric river event, will drive additional research into these processes in the region.”

Satellite data from the Copernicus Sentinel-1 mission showed that movement of the ice shelf began between 5 and 7 March, Neff said.

The final ~4.5 years of the now-collapsed Conger Ice Shelf, East Antarctica as seen by [#Sentinel1](#).  [@sentinel_hub](#) [@CopernicusEU](#) [@helenafricker](#) [@CapComCatWalk](#) pic.twitter.com/q1OUCPgxEI

— Peter Neff (@icy_pete) [March 25, 2022](#)

Helen Amanda Fricker, a professor of glaciology at the Scripps Polar Center, [said](#) that three calving events – when ice chunks break off from the edge of a glacier – had occurred in East Antarctica in March. In addition to the Conger ice shelf collapse, there were smaller calving events of the Totten glacier and Glenzer ice shelf.

“Much of East Antarctica is restrained by buttressing ice shelves, so we need to keep an eye on all the ice shelves there,” Fricker said in a [tweet](#).

Prof Andrew Mackintosh, head of the school of earth, atmosphere and environment at Monash University, said the Conger ice shelf had significant amounts of melting from the ocean beneath, which could have preconditioned it for collapse.

“Ice shelves lose mass as part of their natural behaviour – but the large-scale collapse of an ice shelf is a very unusual event,” Mackintosh said. “This seems to be a collapse rather than normal behaviour.

“The collapse itself, however, may have been driven by surface melting as a result of the extremely warm temperatures recently recorded in this region. More evidence is needed to link this collapse to the recent warming.”

Surface melt was responsible for the [Larsen B ice shelf](#) collapse in 2002.

The Antarctic heat event began on 15 March, said Alex Sen Gupta, an associate professor at the University of New South Wales. “It looks like large parts of eastern Antarctica reached over 20C warmer than normal,” he said.

Prof Matt King, who leads the Australian Centre for Excellence in Antarctic Science, said because ice shelves are already floating, the Conger ice shelf’s break-up [would not in itself](#) impact sea level much. He said that fortunately the glacier behind the Conger ice shelf was small, so it would have a “tiny impact on sea level in the future”.

“We will see more ice shelves break up in the future with climate warming,” King said. “We will see massive ice shelves – way bigger than this one – break up. And those will hold back a lot of ice – enough to seriously drive up global sea levels.”

- [Sign up to receive an email with the top stories from Guardian Australia every morning](#)

Sign up to receive the top stories from Guardian Australia every morning

Scientists are particularly concerned about the future of the Florida-sized [Thwaites glacier](#) – also nicknamed the “[doomsday glacier](#)” – which is around 100 times larger than Larsen B and contains enough water to raise sea levels globally by more than half a metre.

“The speed of the breakup of [the Conger] ice shelf reminds us that things can change quickly,” King said. “Our carbon emissions will have an impact in Antarctica, and Antarctica will come back to bite the rest of the world’s coastlines and it may happen faster than we think.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/25/satellite-data-shows-entire-congery-ice-shelf-has-collapsed-in-antarctica>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

2022.03.25 - Spotlight

- ['Covid ruins storytelling!' Judd Apatow and David Duchovny on lockdown comedy The Bubble](#)
- [Explainer When do the clocks change in the UK – and what started the annual ritual?](#)
- ['You cannot put the pain into words' Anoosheh Ashoori on his detention in Iran](#)
- [You be the judge Should my husband start trying new cuisines?](#)

Advertisement

US edition

- [US edition](#)
- [UK edition](#)
- [Australian edition](#)
- [International edition](#)

[The Guardian - Back to home](#)

[Judd Apatow](#)

Interview

‘Covid ruins storytelling!’: Judd Apatow and David Duchovny on lockdown comedy *The Bubble*

[Catherine Shoard](#)



‘It was such a gift, meeting people that weren’t like my immediate family’ ... Karen Gillan, Keegan-Michael Key, Samson Kayo, David Duchovny, Judd Apatow and Pedro Pascal on the set of The Bubble. Photograph: Laura Radford/Netflix

The first mainstream film to tackle the pandemic appears to take aim at actors’ vanity. The director, star and cast members explain why they might actually be heroes



[@catherineshoard](#)

Fri 25 Mar 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 25 Mar 2022 05.46 EDT

At the start of the pandemic, Judd Apatow slacked. Two-hour strolls, then home for [Schitt’s Creek](#) and [Ted Lasso](#). “In my mind, I had tons of downtime. But lately I’ve realised I must have been in full lunatic-workaholic mode. Because I wrote a book and made a documentary and made this movie, all within a very short amount of time. Which sounds to me like a nervous breakdown that had some productivity to it.”

He grins down the line from Los Angeles, 54 now and at the exact physical intersection of Seth Rogen and [Garry Shandling](#). “This movie” is The Bubble, a meta comedy about a group of film stars holed up in Cliveden House hotel, Berkshire, in late 2020 to make a dino franchise flick. [Cliff](#)

Beasts 6 is claptrap; The Bubble is the biggest film yet to grapple with life in the time of Covid.

Why have so few directors dared? “It just ruins everything with storytelling! No one wants to watch Idris Elba do a new season of Luther wearing a mask. This is our nightmare as consumers.



Gillan, Leslie Mann, Duchovny, Guz Khan, Iris Apatow and Pascal
Photograph: Laura Radford/Netflix

“So I just thought: if I do it, I’ll do it 100%. Be dumb enough to try. Maybe I’ve done something people enjoy or maybe I’ve made a terrible mistake.” Bingeing comedy helped him through the lows: he might as well get stuck in, “given the only contribution I make to society is a pleasant couple of hours every few years”.

Five and a half thousand miles away, in London, Harry Trevaldwyn was thinking something similar. The 28-year-old has spent the past two years building a devoted fanbase with snappy sketches to camera, released on social media, mostly playing delightfully craven versions of himself. “Every time a big, scary announcement got made on the news, my gut instinct would either be to watch something funny or try to write something funny. Often while crying.”

In *The Bubble*, Trevaldwyn plays Gunther, an inept Covid protocol officer. His casting is testament to Apatow's antennae – and willingness to experiment. For this film feels a bit different to [Knocked Up](#) and [This is 40](#). Some Apatow regulars are present and correct: his wife, Leslie Mann, and their daughter Iris. The Saturday Night Live veterans Fred Armisen and Kate McKinnon don't seem out of place, nor does Keegan-Michael Key. But then Peter Serafinowicz pops up. And Pedro Pascal. And, er, Donna Air.



Trevaldwyn in *The Bubble*. Photograph: Laura Radford/Netflix

The biggest name is probably [David Duchovny](#), as a grizzled Harrison Ford type increasingly weary of the series' daftness. Duchovny did not watch a lot of TV during the first wave, he says, squinting down the camera from some sort of log cabin. He tried two episodes of *Tiger King*, then quit. “Sentimentally, I was touched by it, because I think everybody was trying to find community. Like: at least we can all agree that this is fucking fantastic and let’s all watch it. Like a pacifier.”

Duchovny warms to his theme. “*Tiger King* was this juggernaut! And now that the fictionalised versions are coming out, I don’t think [anyone cares any more](#). These things get so hot and so big, then they’re just gone.”

Actors aren't allowed to complain. You just have to suck it up and keep it to yourself

Leslie Mann

Duchovny is now 61 and writes novels (four) and albums (three). He too is less hot and big, but today at least, that sexy dyspepsia remains pretty robust. Yes, the pandemic drove people to escapism – but it also popularised the opposite. Documentaries boomed as real-life drama reduced the relevance of storytelling. Both are fine, but, yikes, he hates the hybrid.

“Fictionalised documentaries” – he mentions [Pam & Tommy](#) as well as [Joe vs Carol](#) – “are not what we do best. I’m *very* bored by that. What it means is that fiction writers like myself, or people that try to make original stories on film, are now in this weird space, figuring out a way to exist.”



Serafinowicz and Duchovny. Photograph: Laura Radford/Netflix

This is why he was fine with quarantining before The Bubble: “I’m usually in my room anyway, looking at the walls.” Having food shoved through a hole in the door for a fortnight was “slightly depressing. But everything gets normal. Humans are amazingly adaptable. Or forgetful.”

The film was shot about a year ago, when the UK was in a strict lockdown and few of the cast had yet been jabbed. Post-quarantine, they still couldn't mix in the evenings. According to Mann, who calls from New York, remaining "really lonely" only enhanced the happy days. Actors flogging a film always enthuse about the shoot. This time it feels genuine. "I did not stop smiling," says Mann. "I was on top of the world."

Trevaldwyn says it felt like "rehearsing for a uni play: very collaborative, very level ground, everyone mucking in. And it was such a gift, meeting people that weren't like my immediate family. I probably walked less than I've ever walked in my life. You'd get driven from place to place and have a full meal every two hours. It was a glorious life. I was *so sad* when it was over."



Duchovny, Via Das, Pascal, Gillan, Key and Harry Trevaldwyn. Photograph: Laura Radford/Netflix

The film's apparent target is actors: their self-absorption and vanity, the bubbles that insulate them – and their blindness to them. In an early scene, Serafinowicz's producer briefs the hotel staff that they will be handling "animals" who "literally lie for a living" and require constant cossetting.

Legitimate criticism, thinks Duchovny. “You’re thinking about yourself a lot. The job is to be vulnerable and somewhat self-obsessed. On top of that, there’s career anxiety and shaping and branding and all that shit. We’re overpaid and overwatched and people care way too much about us. Nobody deserves any of that.”

There is no algorithm that makes *The Graduate* or *Harold and Maude*.
The special things usually go against all the rules

Judd Apatow

He sips on something. “But, for the most part, actors are just human beings doing a job. A silly job – but a job.” And, actually, now that he thinks about it, the lying part isn’t true. “We’re all acting in life. We all put on [a face to meet the faces](#). Actors just try to lie truthfully.”

In fact, the longer *The Bubble* goes on – particularly if you take a break to watch President Zelenskiy on the news – the more it starts to feel like a defence of the profession. A caution not to underestimate the clown.

“You can’t know what a person is capable of,” says Duchovny. “Shakespeare was an actor. Reagan was a mediocre actor. If he’d been a great actor, he probably wouldn’t have been a good president. Great actors try to see both sides of everything. I think Reagan couldn’t do negative capability. He was an actor who played the line. Zelenskiy is clearly a legitimate, grown-up human being and is trying to rise to the occasion.”

At one point, Mann’s character calls actors “some of the toughest people I know”. Does she think it is unfair how much the profession is ridiculed?

“It totally is, but actors aren’t allowed to complain,” she says. “You just have to suck it up and keep it to yourself. I can’t say anything, because people would hate my guts. At the end of the day, it’s a great job and we’re lucky to have it. And that’s all you can say. Leslie will get into trouble.”

Even their wildest follies are not entirely lampooned. In the film, Karen Gillan plays an actor fresh from starring as a half-Israeli, half-Palestinian

woman who unites both sides to battle aliens in a film that she believes may help secure peace in the Middle East.

Are such delusions commonplace? Yes, says Apatow – and they are not delusions. “I don’t know if you could say for sure that they’re not [changing the world]. Young people are much more enlightened, discriminate less, are less prejudiced, because they’ve seen things like South Park or The Daily Show their whole lives – shows that have mocked hateful people. My gut has always been that culture changed.”



Key, Pascal, Gillan and Mann. Photograph: Laura Radford/Netflix

Duchovny demurs. Making grand claims for your project is just another way of bolstering it. “I’m a fan of the work standing on its own. But we don’t live in that world any more,” he says. “It’s impossible to judge a work on its own merit. There’s just too much that you’ve heard, mostly from the fucking people who made it. I should be disqualified from talking about my work. Not only because I’m gonna lie to you, but because I’m not outside it.”

Flagging a film’s political credentials is also an attempt to second-guess criticism, he thinks. “People are scared. You kind of have to gird yourself against imagined attacks. That seems probably fairly recent. When Mel Brooks made [The Producers](#), I don’t think he had to field questions about

making light of the Holocaust. ‘What are you saying to the 6 million Jews? How dare you!’”

I put this to Apatow a night later. He leans back in his chair and hums. You could make The Producers now, he thinks – you would just need an enlightened executive. Yes, the climate is sensitive, but for good reason: this is a time for righting wrongs, giving opportunities to those previously denied them, seeing how things shake down. He sits on the fence when I ask what he thinks about [Helen Mirren playing Golda Meir](#) and enthuses about making a romcom in which all the cast and crew were LGBTQ+ (Bros, co-written by and starring Billy Eichner), including the actors playing straight people.

His big concern when it comes to the future of cinema turns out to be a curious one, given The Bubble was bankrolled by Netflix. “Metadata! They know the second you pause to go to the bathroom; if you watched the second half of the movie three days later, or never finished it. And it’s changing which movies are greenlit. They’re saying: oh, people love crime. People love when you murder people. People love kidnapping. People love swindlers. So, suddenly, you’ll see a lot of that.

“But there is no algorithm that will make The Graduate or Harold and Maude. The special things usually go against all the rules. It’s not a talented executive working from their gut about art that moves them. You need some flesh and blood there.”

Anyway, Apatow seems to be doing OK. He is not going to attempt “my big Saudi Arabia comedy” any time soon, but he is clearly getting projects over the line (up next: This Is 50).

As well as the relentless work, he says he is “reading a lot of Buddhism” and getting comfortable with the concept of “groundlessness and the idea that you’re never really in control”. Is he more optimistic than when he was relying on strolls and sitcoms? “I can go either way. If you want me to go down to a dark well, I’ll go there with you and Google ‘long-haul Covid’.



Apatow on set. Photograph: Laura Radford/Netflix

“I don’t think that our minds are designed to be under this level of stress and fear for this long. That’s why you see people having meltdowns on airplanes. Life is hard enough in the good times.”

As for Trevaldwyn, he no longer relies on awful news bulletins for inspiration. “That would really put a lot of pressure on the world to go to shit. ‘Another pandemic’s gotta happen, otherwise I’m not gonna generate content!’”

And Duchovny? He is fine, he says, just fine. Fiction writers will muddle through somehow. The pandemic hasn’t changed the fundamentals of entertainment. “Whatever a pandemic story could tell us would be about what it is to be human, not about what it is to be human in a pandemic.”

One final thing: what has he lied about today, given that he always does, when he talks about his work? Oh, he says, looking briefly bashful. Nothing. “The lie is whatever angle you’re doing. Or: ‘This is the best work I’ve ever done.’ I used to watch Arnie go on chatshows and say that about every film he made. And I believed it! It was said with such conviction.

“I love Judd and his work, so I’m happy to be in that world and making a big comedy at this point in my life. But sometimes you go out there and you’re

like: this is not the best movie I ever made. So am I gonna salvage my own sense of integrity as a person? Or say: buy this thing! Buy it! And then be like: oh, sorry ...”

The Bubble is on Netflix from 1 April

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2022/mar/25/maybe-i've-made-a-terrible-mistake-judd-apatow-and-david-duchovny-on-covid-comedy-the-bubble>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

[UK news](#)

When do the clocks change in the UK – and what started the annual ritual?

British Summer Time begins again at 1.00am on Sunday 27 March, with the nation losing an hour of potential lie-in



BST owes its origins to fuel-saving efforts during the first world war.

Photograph: Jeff Pachoud/AFP/Getty Images

[Martin Belam](#)

Fri 25 Mar 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 25 Mar 2022 03.03 EDT

British Summer Time (BST) begins once again at 1.00am on Sunday 27 March, when you are obliged to put your clock forward by an hour to 2.00am. Not only do you lose an hour's sleep, you also get to spend thirty minutes once you are awake on a Sunday morning trying to work out how to change the clock on the microwave and the washing machine if you have them.

The ritual owes its origins in the UK to the first world war. The annual hourly changing of the clock was first established in the UK more than 100 years ago under the Summer Time Act 1916, with the thought that lighter evenings might preserve fuel for the war effort.

In the debate in parliament about introducing it at the time, Henry Petty-FitzMaurice, the Marquess of Lansdowne, made reference to Benjamin Franklin, who had, half-jokingly, proposed a type of daylight saving time while living in Paris. There, in 1784, Franklin observed that the sun had risen much earlier than his Parisienne acquaintances. He argued they would save money on candles if they opted for earlier mornings rather than continue to enjoy their later nightlife.

It would have been impossible to introduce daylight saving time on this side of the channel that early though, as the UK didn't even have legal standardised time until 1880. Prior to that date, people calculated when noon was locally, and worked from that, but the introduction of railways and their timetables made ultra-local timezones confusing.

The UK currently seems slightly isolated on the issue, in that there are no plans afoot to abolish the practice. The European parliament has [voted to scrap mandating it](#) at an EU level, leaving it up to national governments to decide whether to continue it.

The US Senate has unanimously [approved a measure that would make daylight saving time permanent](#) across the United States next year, although the Sunshine Protection Act still needs approval from the House of Representatives and the president, Joe Biden, to come into force. The US first adopted daylight saving time as a wartime energy-saving measure in 1942.

You will eventually get that lost hour back when BST ends this year on Sunday 30 October. It was all a lot easier when we used sundials, but there seems little appetite to change it. As the Marquess of Lansdowne observed in parliament in 1916 of the British people: “We do not like changing our habits, still less do we like changing them under instructions from acts of parliament.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/mar/25/when-do-the-clocks-change-in-the-uk-british-summer-time>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

Advertisement

US edition

- [US edition](#)
- [UK edition](#)
- [Australian edition](#)
- [International edition](#)

[The Guardian - Back to home](#)

[Iran](#)

‘You cannot put the pain into words’: Anoosheh Ashoori on his detention in Iran



Anoosheh Ashoori with his daughter, Elira, wife, Sherry Izadi, and their dogs, Chickpea and Romeo. Photograph: Sarah Lee/The Guardian

Arrested on spying charges and held for four years, Ashoori describes interrogation and threats to his family



[Patrick Wintour](#) *Diplomatic editor*

Thu 24 Mar 2022 16.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 25 Mar 2022 01.27 EDT

Sitting in the front room of his house in south London, surrounded by his wife, daughter and four excited dogs, Anoosheh Ashoori admits that at night he reaches out to touch his wife's hand to reassure himself that she is really there.

In Evin prison in Tehran, over the previous four years one of his worst nightmares was to dream about her, and wake up in his "coffin" – as beds were called by inmates in Evin – to realise she was not by his side and might never be again.

Sentenced to 10 years for spying in 2017, the 68-year-old British-Iranian [was released last week along with Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe](#). During his five-year incarceration "hope was the only emotion that kept me alive and from insanity", he says.

In his first newspaper interview since his release he criticises UK ministers singling out Boris Johnson's "blunder", and wondering if British ministers

had spent just one day in Evin they would have acted earlier to pay the £400m debt that led to his and Zaghari-Ratcliffe's release.

Ashoori travelled to [Iran](#) in August 2017 to see his mother who had just had a knee operation. “One morning after about 10 days I went to the market to have the zip of my suitcase fixed and, as I walked down to the bottom of the hill, a car pulled over. Four people got out of the car and asked me whether I was Mr Ashoori. I said ‘yes’, and one of them took my suitcase, and they pushed me in the backseat. Two guys sat in the back and two in the front.

“As we entered the motorway towards the east of Tehran, one of them handed over a piece of paper. It was headed anti-espionage department. It was a warrant for my arrest. They handed me a blindfold and told me to put it over my head, and then they ordered me to rest my head on one of the men’s lap, so it was disorientating, and then the noise died down, and we reached a building.

“I did not know what was going on. I was completely perplexed. And then it is almost like having a heart attack. What have I got to do with spying? What have I got to do with any of this?

“They started interrogating me, and saying if I did not cooperate they would take me to Evin jail. Then they took me back to my house and they took the laptop, my phone and hard drive. Then they took me to a prison and strip-searched me.

“I was then taken to a cell for two days and left alone. All I could hear was shouting. The suspense is terrifying. It starts hitting you. And then my interrogation started, sometimes 10-hour sessions.

“They would say: ‘Talk,’ and I would reply: ‘What should I talk about?’ Anything. And then they tried to make me write my guilt down, and ironically the paper they gave me said at the top ‘your salvation is in your honesty’. So if you tell the truth you will be acquitted.

“But during the past 68 years you cannot find a shred of evidence that I was politically active.

“They would show me pictures of [his wife] Sherry, and multiple pictures of my daughter and said you will never see them again. I told the interrogator: ‘You cannot reach them. They are in Britain’, and he replied: ‘Do you remember Shapour Bakhtiar, the former prime minister killed in Paris. We can reach anybody’.”

His desperate situation seemed to trigger suicidal thoughts. “I remembered pictures from Auschwitz that people had died from starvation. So I quietly decided not to eat.”

He pretended to eat his food but in reality flushed it down the toilet. The guards intervened after 17 days when they realised he was rapidly losing weight. “I started crying because I thought with another month I would achieve my mission and die.”

His interrogators put him in cell with three other people for the first time. Eventually he was put into room 121 – six metres (19.7ft) by eight metres – with 17 other people.



Ashoori with his wife, Sherry, at their home in south London. Photograph: Sarah Lee/The Guardian

It was here for the first time he was allowed to speak with his wife. “But she had an operation on her thyroid and I could not recognise her voice. I

thought it was an impostor and told her to give a sign that it was her, so she gave her nickname. Only she and I knew it.”

All the time there was his interrogations. Even now he says he cannot understand what his interrogators were doing since they knew he was not a spy, but just trying to break him into giving a confession.

“The interrogator would say: ‘If you don’t cooperate we can extend this stay in here for years and years. You will see spring come, summers come and autumns come,’ and then you start to form a bond with your interrogators. It’s amazing you become happy to see him.”

When they felt they had extracted all they could, his inquisitors wrote a report to the main interrogator. “When we met, I was crying so hard and he was smiling, saying he was indifferent. He said: ‘I do not have any compassion whether you are an infant or a 99-year-old woman’. The guard I saw was crying too”.

Once his interrogation with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps was over, he was taken to a larger dormitory, hall 12, containing other dual nationals charged with spying.

“Many of the people were highly educated. They formed poetry societies, a short-story writing society, a macro-economics society. There was a diplomat that taught Spanish and a doctor with a PhD in physics. I wrote a 3,000 page diary.”

He also built a shelter in a little patio outside hall 12. It became known as Ashoori’s corner. “I had my tea or coffee and people would come to sit with me and chat. I gained a reputation for being discreet, and people would come and confide, and empty their hearts.”

The shelter was heated by putting cotton strands from a mop into the lid of an empty bottle of cough mixture, filling the lid with smuggled alcohol disinfectant, and then using the strands as a wick. “Alongside I grew some morning glories, some white, and some pinkish. I dried 100 of them. I thought to myself, if I am ever released I will give one to every person that helped me recover my freedom.”

There is a pile of them on the table in the front room, along with his marquetry, including his picture of the Mona Lisa, and portraits of David Attenborough and Charles Darwin. “It was how I fought insanity and rage.”



An abstract of the Mona Lisa made in prison by Ashoori. Photograph: Sarah Lee/The Guardian

It was in the larger hall with his fellow inmates that he began to piece together why he had been arrested. “It was the first time, for instance, that I heard Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe’s name.”

But the sense of injustice and loss began to tell. “Anytime I rang Sherry I had difficulty talking to her. I had a lump in my throat. I knew that if I talked I would burst into tears. You cannot put the pain into words. It’s impossible to explain what it is like to be stung like a bee, unless you have.”

It was only after two years when he was finally sentenced to 10 years, and his case publicised by the Iranians, that he and wife decided to follow Richard Ratcliffe and campaign in public.

“For two years the Foreign Office advice was to keep away from publicity. If we had not listened, maybe we would have got a better result earlier. I really admire Richard Ratcliffe, and if it was not for his joint effort with Sherry we would still be rotting in there.”

He makes a distinction between UK Foreign Office officials, for whom he has the highest praise, in particular the negotiator Stephanie Al-Qaq and the British ambassador Simon Shercliff, and ministers.

“Why that blunder by Boris Johnson that ended up with Nazanin staying a number of years when she could have been released? You expect leaders to make the right decisions on time. You expect someone to lead his nation – to do his job correctly. Why did they not acknowledge us as hostages? I asked them: why won’t you refer to us as hostages? I never had an answer.

“It is hard that the same time when you are in Evin and you know your presence is related to this debt the UK government owes. Is it such a big job to pay this debt? Would those ministers be able to stand even one day of their life in Evin? If they could feel what it is like maybe they would have made the right decision much earlier. You cannot imagine yourself in that hell, that cesspool.

“My birthday is on 8 April but I will not celebrate it. I cannot celebrate it until everyone is out. I sat in the VIP lounge at Tehran airport and I saw Nazanin come in. Right up to the last moment I expected others.

“I know I am not going to be the last person to end up in this hell that I have just left, so if I do something that takes us one small step away from tyranny then that will be worthwhile.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/24/anoosheh-ashoori-detention-iran-nazanin-zaghari-ratcliffe>

Advertisement

US edition

- [US edition](#)
- [UK edition](#)
- [Australian edition](#)
- [International edition](#)

[The Guardian - Back to home](#)

[You be the judgeFood](#)

You be the judge: should my husband start trying new cuisines?



Illustration: Joren Joshua/The Guardian

After 63 years of marriage, she wants to try spicy dishes, he wants to stick to meat and two veg. You deliver a verdict on this food fight

- [If you have a disagreement you'd like settled, or want to be part of our jury, click here](#)

Interviews by [Georgina Lawton](#)

@georginalawton

Fri 25 Mar 2022 04.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 25 Mar 2022 22.01 EDT

The prosecution: Alice

We've been married for 63 years and are stuck in a food rut. It's time to try something new

I have been cooking for my husband, Lyndon, for most of my adult life, but after 63 years of marriage, I want to spice our meals up. He's a very simple eater – he likes cottage pies, roasts with meat and two veg – but I'm getting bored of all that. I'm facing a bit of resistance, though.

I've bought ingredients like Thai mixed spices, but I rarely use them as Lyndon kicks up a fuss. Curry does not pass his lips – he really dislikes it. He also hates pasta.

I try to encourage him to eat foods from around the world, but he just says: "I'm not eating that rubbish." It's very narrow-minded. He's also not fond of quiches or lasagne. He likes me to make a lot of roasts with potatoes, beetroot, cabbage and tomatoes from our garden. He says: "English food is the best." But I always say: "There's more out there."

Recently I've been sneaking a bit of cayenne pepper into the mince when I make a shepherd's pie. Lyndon loves it. He will say, "That was tasty," which I find amusing. I'm 83 now and over the years I've learned various ways to be sneaky in our marriage.

I will try something new when we eat out, but Lyndon will always stick to what he knows. One time in a restaurant, he sent back a turkey steak because it was too spicy. He made a scene, which I found embarrassing.

Recently I've been sneaking cayenne pepper in the mince when I make a shepherd's pie

We both eat differently now compared to when we met in 1955. I've become more adventurous, but Lyndon has gone the opposite way. We were just children when the second world war ended, but rationing went on for years. Nobody knew what pizza was. Over the years there has been a food revolution with interesting cuisines available everywhere, which I love.

I've got Lyndon into frozen pizzas and now he thinks they are very tasty – but he doesn't like them too often. When I ask him what he likes for dinner, he says: "Cook whatever is easiest." But if I serve up a lasagne, there's a chance he will get into a huff. It's not worth the argument. Lyndon needs to broaden his palate.

The defence: Lyndon

I'm 87 and like traditional British dishes. I don't enjoy spicy food, so what's the point in changing now?

Traditional British food is my favourite cuisine. I don't need my dishes to be of a ridiculously high standard but I like what I like. I'm 87, so really, at my age, what's the point in changing?

I'm not one for curry. I had it a couple of times and I can't deal with the spice, even when it's mild. I like my food seasoned but not too much. I don't want things to be completely bland but I don't like too many spices or herbs. If we are eating out and I have to foot the bill for something I didn't enjoy, I'll be very annoyed. The time I sent back the spicy turkey steak at a restaurant was justified – it was inedible, you couldn't taste the meat. I know Alice was embarrassed but that's just how I am.

I don't agree with Alice that I'm a fussy or boring eater. Once we went away to Scotland and ended up at a Thai restaurant, where the food was excellent. I usually stick to what I know, but on that occasion, I felt more adventurous. That doesn't happen very often, though.

Alice enjoys eating different cuisines. That's fine; we can each do what we like outside the home. Inside it, I think we should stick to what we've always done.

Every day we have a pudding and I always say to Alice, "Make whatever is easiest": apple pies, rice pudding, crumbles. I'm not fussy. We've been lucky with our health so far and I put that down to eating a varied but traditional British diet. Why fix what's not broken?

We've been lucky with our health and I put that down to a varied but traditional British diet

I don't think I'm difficult to cater for. I seldom quibble. If Alice serves a quiche or pasta, I might complain because I find those dishes boring and insubstantial. I prefer meat and two veg as it's more interesting and balanced.

There are times when Alice doesn't come up to scratch with her cooking, but I won't say anything. We've been married so long there's no point. And I don't mind the occasional lasagne or pizza these days.

After 63 years, you're so set in your ways. I won't be changing my palate. I'm quite happy with the rut we've found ourselves in.

The jury of Guardian readers

Is Alice right to try to spice up their food?

At 87, Lyndon can be excused for being a bit set in his ways. Alice is obviously more adventurous. However, I think, from bitter experience, that it's not a case of him disliking spicy food; it's that he just can't eat it. I'm going to have to side with the defence.

Martin, 70

Lyndon is guilty just for saying "meat and two veg is more interesting". More interesting than what, exactly – watching paint dry? He is lucky

enough to have had Alice cook for him for 63 years, so if her cooking is not up to scratch, maybe it's time he took a turn in the kitchen.

Asiya, 28

The "rut" to which Lyndon refers is one in which both parties are confined. Alice treats him as a recalcitrant child, and Lyndon hasn't joined the 21st century in terms of believing in "a woman's place"! A wake-up call is needed for both – age refusing to bestow wisdom.

Jane, 77

Lyndon is guilty. After 63 years, Alice should be allowed to cook what she likes, and the fact that she's been dosing his food with spices undetected is a sure sign that he's just being unnecessarily cranky. He's pretty lucky she hasn't dosed him with something else.

Shubhangi, 35

I can see both sides. However, making a scene in a restaurant for the food not being to your taste, and his comment about her cooking not always being up to scratch, tell me a lot. Lyndon is guilty and should learn how to cook.

Tracy, 54

Sign up to our Inside Saturday newsletter for an exclusive behind the scenes look at the making of the magazine's biggest features, as well as a curated list of our weekly highlights.

You be the judge

So now you can be the judge, click on the poll below and tell us: should Lyndon start trying new cuisines?

We'll share the results on next week's You be the judge.

The poll will close on 31 March at 9AM BST

Last week's result

We asked if Jerome should start cleaning his cat's litter tray and not always leave it for his partner, Erica.

73% of you said no – Jerome is innocent

27% of you said yes – Jerome is guilty

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2022/mar/25/you-be-the-judge-should-my-husband-start-trying-new-cuisines>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

2022.03.25 - Opinion

- The UK's poorest people have been utterly abandoned by this ideological chancellor
- As a historian of slavery, I know just how much the royal family has to answer for in Jamaica
- Ted Cruz and the ‘racist baby’: sometimes reality threatens my political maturity
- P&O Ferries may not regret breaking law, but the UK should regret dealing with its owner

OpinionSpring statement 2022

The UK's poorest people have been utterly abandoned by this ideological chancellor

[Paul Kissack](#)

He could have thrown them a lifeline. Instead, he is pushing thousands more into their ranks

- Paul Kissack is chief executive of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation



‘Rishi Sunak seemed taken aback that so many of the questions put to him focused on those who will struggle most to bear the cost of living crisis.’
Photograph: Simon Walker Hm Treasury

Fri 25 Mar 2022 05.44 EDT Last modified on Fri 25 Mar 2022 11.39 EDT

I can’t recall a worse fiscal event than Wednesday’s [spring statement](#).

It had nothing meaningful to say on the big strategic challenges our economy faces. According to the prime minister, levelling up is the defining mission of this government. The chancellor couldn't bring himself to even mention it. There was similarly nothing to learn about net zero or the UK's productivity challenge.

It was fiscally incoherent. Even the mild-mannered [Institute for Fiscal Studies](#) was left shouting "Oh for goodness sake" at the news that Sunak is raising national insurance while cutting income tax, increasing taxes on people who work to protect the incomes of those who often don't, including landlords and wealthy pensioners.

As a set-piece event, it unravelled within hours. Sunak woke on Thursday to a full spread of hostile front pages. During media interviews that morning, he became increasingly rattled and tetchy. He seemed taken aback that so many of the [questions put to him](#) focused on those who will struggle most to bear the cost of living crisis.

This should not have come as a surprise. The rising cost of essentials affects us all, but not equally. People on the lowest incomes are at greatest risk, because unavoidable spending on energy and food takes up a higher proportion of their budget than any other group. Already they have nothing to cut back on.

Faced with the greatest threat to living standards for generations, it is impossible to justify the decision to leave almost everyone at the sharp end of the crisis out in the cold. Rather than strengthen the support available, he chose to cut benefits in real terms, leaving households in poverty £445 out of pocket for the year ahead; 600,000 more people will be [pulled into poverty](#) by this decision. Around a quarter of them are children.

The new tax changes that were announced deliver nothing for people who are unable to work and those earning too little to pay tax or national insurance. Many low earners who earn just enough to gain from the rise in the national insurance threshold will find more than half the gain tapered away through the subsequent reduction in their universal credit.

The chancellor's response to challenges on his lack of action was that he had prioritised people in poverty in his budget last autumn. That, you might recall, was when he cut universal credit by [£20 a week](#), in the face of widespread opposition, including from many of his own backbenchers. Some prioritisation.

Dealing with a cost of living crisis of the current scale was never going to be an easy task. It called for the best tools available. The [additional £500m announced](#) for the household support fund is dwarfed by the cut to benefits and the scale of need that councils now expect to see. Equally frustrating is the difficulty people have accessing what little support there is. It must be sought out, applied for, and different criteria navigated depending on the local area. Many of those who jump through these hoops will find they are ineligible for any support.

Go on the [government's own website](#) and you will find a clue to another tool available. In answer to the question "what is universal credit?" the website says it is "a payment to help with your living costs". The government spent several years and many millions of pounds building the system. In the pandemic, it showed that the government really wasn't helpless in the face of a crisis and could provide a lifeline to those at risk of being dragged into poverty. But now the chancellor's ideological resistance to using that tool means he is cutting people adrift.

The basic rate of social security will soon be at a 35-year low. The impact of this has been steadily growing clearer. Even before the pandemic, destitution [was rapidly growing](#) in scale and intensity. On the brink of the pandemic, a large and increasing number of children were growing up in [very deep poverty](#). The pandemic itself had disastrous and well-documented effects. But most worrying of all are the predictions for the year ahead, as inflation reaches a [30-year high](#). The fact that food banks have once again been called upon to [deliver their verdict](#) on the chancellor's statement should tell us all we need to know.

- Paul Kissack is chief executive of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation
-

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/25/the-uks-poorest-people-have-been-utterly-abandoned-by-this-ideological-chancellor>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

OpinionSlavery

As a historian of slavery, I know just how much the royal family has to answer for in Jamaica

[Trevor Burnard](#)

Protests during the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge's visit to the Caribbean highlight royalty's pivotal role in the slave trade



'Protesters in Jamaica want the royal family to apologise for its role in institutionalising slavery on the island.' Photograph: Ricardo Makyn/AFP/Getty Images

Fri 25 Mar 2022 04.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 25 Mar 2022 04.43 EDT

It wasn't supposed to go like this. Usually, royal tours are full of cheering people lining the streets and gushy accounts of glamorous dresses. There has been some of that during the royal visit by the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge to the Caribbean. But there also have been protests, [especially in](#)

Jamaica, where many people want the royal family to apologise for its role in institutionalising slavery on the island. To top it all off, it has also been reported this week that Jamaica has begun the process of removing the Queen as the head of state.

Such a reckoning with Britain and its state is long overdue. Jamaica in the 18th century was described by Charles Leslie as a “constant mine, whence Britain draws prodigious riches”. It contributed greatly to the wealth of individuals thousands of miles away, such as William Beckford, Lord Mayor of London and the owner of well over 1,000 enslaved people, whose statue still graces Guildhall in London. But more significantly, it enriched Britain by filling the coffers of the Treasury with money from taxes levied on sugar and rum. Britain was the greatest slave trader in the Atlantic world during the 18th century, sending nearly 1 million captive Africans to Jamaica between 1655 and 1807, resulting in a population of enslaved people barely over 300,000, due to horrific mortality rates. Black people suffered greatly for white people’s enjoyment of sweet things.

Kingston, where the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge visited, is the Ellis Island of forced migration to places that were colonised by the British in the 17th and 18th centuries. More Africans arrived in Kingston to become plantation slaves than arrived in any other place in the British empire. The visiting royals might have acknowledged this fact by visiting the foreshore and noting the trauma for Jamaicans, most of whom are descendants of those people arriving from Africa some centuries back, rather than kicking a football around and playing bongos in Trench Town.

If they had done so they might realise why many Jamaicans are so angry at their visit. The royal family has a long and undistinguished history in regard to Jamaican slavery. In the 17th century Charles II granted a charter to the Royal African Company and his brother, James II, would later become its governor. Under royal blessing, the company became the largest single slave trader in British history, bringing perhaps 100,000 captive Africans to the Americas before 1713. George II was a prominent supporter of the slave trade and plantations. George III as a young man is said to have expressed antislavery sentiments before he became king, but he did little to stop the slave trade or slavery during his long reign.

Some royals, such as the Duke of Gloucester, supported William Wilberforce in his campaign against slavery. But most of the royal family – George III and his many sons – supported slavery and West Indian planters, with seven royal dukes in favour of slavery against one against during debates on abolishing the slave trade heard in the House of Lords. Indeed, William, the Duke of Clarence (later William IV), was a leader of the pro-slavery lobby, being given a gift of expensive silver dinner ware (still in the royal family's possession), by the Jamaican assembly for his efforts against closing down the slave trade. Consequently, we can understand why many Jamaicans who are descendants of enslaved Africans feel the royal family have to answer for their past behaviour and attitudes. As far as I'm concerned, they need to do more than just apologise on behalf of Britain; they might acknowledge their own responsibility – moral and even financial – as a family enmeshed in multiple ways in supporting slavery. Prince William rightly condemned slavery in a speech at a state dinner on Wednesday evening as “an appalling atrocity” that “forever stains our history”. But he did not take the necessary next step and note that it is more than just something bad that Britain did. It is an atrocity for which the royal family itself has a degree of personal responsibility.

Of course, we could argue that Britain has acknowledged its liabilities as a slave-holding nation by the fact that it paid what was then the enormous sum of £20m pounds in 1834 as compensation for slavery. Some of that money ended up being invested in developing Jamaican infrastructure, such as banks, insurance agencies and railways. The problem is that it all went to slaveholders, those people who had kept Black Jamaicans in misery.

Britain gave money to slaveholders as a means of ensuring the abolition of slavery would occur. It was very worried that without such compensation, white planters would refuse to give up their enslaved property, which would lead to the island and its plantation colony being destroyed in ways that Britons had seen happening a generation before, in Haiti. The British government gave nothing to the enslaved people who produced the wealth for which Jamaica used to be famous. Now, Jamaica is a poor country. It would be a good thing if Britain recognised its historical responsibility for creating those conditions of poverty, while benefiting from Jamaican wealth. It might start with the royal family recognising its role in supporting this terrible institution.

- Trevor Burnard is the Wilberforce professor of slavery and emancipation and director at the Wilberforce Institute, University of Hull
-

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/25/slavery-royal-family-jamaica-duke-duchess-cambridge-caribbean-slave-trade>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

[**OpinionUS news**](#)

Ted Cruz and the ‘racist baby’: sometimes reality threatens my political maturity

[**Emma Brockes**](#)



Try as I might to rise above it, I felt a visceral dislike for the men grilling Biden’s supreme court nominee, Ketanji Brown Jackson



Ketanji Brown Jackson responds to a question from Senator Lindsey Graham before the Senate judiciary committee on Wednesday. Photograph: Susan Walsh/AP

Fri 25 Mar 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 25 Mar 2022 02.02 EDT

For sheer drama, we will probably never match the spectacle of Judge Brett Kavanaugh [snivelling through his supreme court confirmation hearings](#) in 2018. But [this week's hearing](#) by the Senate judiciary committee to confirm Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson, President Biden's pick for the supreme court, came a close second. There was Republican senator [Josh Hawley](#) asking Jackson if she was soft on child molesters. There was Lindsey Graham, going on a rant that, if not quite expletive-filled, took on a playground quality with language like "crap", "ass" and "how would you feel if we did that to you?" And there was Ted Cruz, straight-facedly asking Jackson if she thinks babies are racist. Along with someone throwing a pie at Rupert Murdoch and Zoom meetings of the Handforth parish council, it was up there with the best histrionics of the committee room canon.

Jackson herself was almost supernaturally composed, occasionally letting a pause extend a beat beyond normal to indicate the scale of the resources required to stay calm. The confirmation hearings at the supreme court have become a grandstanding opportunity for ambitious senators, rather than a

useful extra-legal enquiry, and of course they are completely partisan. But while, four years ago, no one but the staunchest Republican could hear Kavanaugh's inarticulate address and conclude he occupied his seat on merit alone, the visceral dislike many of us on the left felt towards, say, [Amy Coney Barrett](#), seemed to me not entirely premised on her performance and track record.

What I mean by that, is that while Coney Barrett's thoughts on abortion and connection to groups such as [People of Praise](#) were legitimately concerning, there was, on my part at least, also a visceral dislike of the woman that took much more personal form. Ugh, I recall thinking, while watching her confirmation hearing; look at her fanatically straight hair and beady little eyes. She's clearly a Catholic fundamentalist. And what's up with her adoption of all those children? In spite of the mixed racial makeup of her family, I bet at heart she's a massive racist. So my internal judgments jogged along, and very enjoyable they were, too, premised as they were on moral superiority. In similar form, one can imagine without too much effort, what visceral responses Jackson's broad outline might trigger in spectators on the right.

I don't mean to erase the two women's legitimate differences. Late last year, Barrett, in the course of hearing an abortion case, made the bizarre and, to my mind, woefully wrong-headed assertion that [adoption rendered many abortions unnecessary](#). But it was still a useful thought experiment to consider that nominees put forward to the supreme court by Republican presidents were as subject to extra-judicial dislike as those coming in from the left. Unlike Kavanaugh, Barrett is clearly highly intelligent and extremely well qualified. With super-human effort, I can stop the domino-run of character assassination that takes off once I understand that I don't like her politics, and consider the possibility that she's not a bad judge.

Where this experiment falls down is in trying to extend the same largesse to the Republican senators themselves. However hard I try, I can't put most Republican senators in the same category as [Dianne Feinstein](#). I can concentrate on keeping my responses relevant until my veins stand out, but a single image of Hawley will trigger a flood of judgment that always terminates in, oh, gross, what a terrible little runt that man is: he's literally

got a pin head. This is not a helpful or sophisticated response, but oh God, here comes Ted Cruz: the state of that man.

This kind of reflex attack is recreational and tribal, used on both sides to foment connections with others who feel the same way. Increasingly, I wonder if the extreme sport of giving a minute to the possibility that, in some of our responses, we're as trigger-happy as the other lot, is a beneficial undertaking worth putting time in to. Aren't we as childish as them, sometimes? And as reluctant to take into account the whole story? I can do this, I think. I can consider people I violently disagree with fully rounded human beings worthy of consideration and respect. And then I'm caught off guard by a clip of Graham, scurrying out of the committee room like a tiny, angry blond mole. The state of that man. And there it is; all my mature aims, once again, lost.

- Emma Brockes is a Guardian columnist based in New York
-

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/25/ted-cruz-racist-baby-ketanji-brown-jackson-us-biden-supreme-court-nominee>

Nils Pratley on financeBusiness

P&O Ferries may not regret breaking law, but the UK should regret dealing with its owner

[Nils Pratley](#)



Dubai's DP World has proved itself an unfit partner for Britain's freeport programme

05:56

'Are you just a shameless criminal?': P&O Ferries boss questioned over mass sackings – video

Thu 24 Mar 2022 15.17 EDT Last modified on Fri 25 Mar 2022 01.31 EDT

More than a few business chancers have appeared before Commons select committees over the years, but it's hard to recall a chief executive who has

admitted that his company carefully assessed its options and decided that breaking the law was its best bet.

Peter Hebblethwaite of P&O Ferries, the firm that sacked 800 seafarers last week, [offered candour and cynicism in the same breath](#). “There’s absolutely no doubt that we were required to consult the unions. We chose not to do that,” he said. For good measure, he said he would take the same decision again.

Naturally, Hebblethwaite laced his account with pleas that P&O Ferries wasn’t viable unless it replaced its UK crew with foreign agency workers being paid salaries as low as £5.15 an hour. No doubt he’s correct about the many millions P&O has been losing amid the pandemic and energy crises, but this was a brazen attempt to claim that protecting wealthy parent [DP World’s investment](#) was more important than staying within the law. Trade unions would never accept P&O Ferries’ proposals, said Hebblethwaite, so there was no point negotiating with them.

Via video link from [Dubai](#), Jesper Kristensen, the chief operating officer of marine services at DP World, weighed in that P&O Ferries was not a rogue part of the corporate empire. Hebblethwaite would not be sacked, the mass dismissal of the UK crew had been blessed in advance and DP loved doing business in the UK, where its major investments are the Thames and Solent port terminals.

Government ministers spluttered in the following session to explain why they had not immediately run off to the high court last week. The gist of it was that the Insolvency Service must be given time to get on top of the legal details. In due course, ministers would look to close any loopholes in the law to better protect employees.

Wherever those subplots lead, one move for the government ought to be straightforward: DP World, for all its wealth and state backing, cannot be considered a suitable partner for the UK’s freeport programme. A company that declares a casual relationship with UK employment laws does not belong in a government-backed scheme. Nor, frankly, should it be here at all.

The Next 15 years

Don't call our 15-year stress test a forecast or a plan, it's a "scenario", said Next. Even with that qualification, chief executive Simon Wolfson's sums were striking: the retail group could generate £14.7bn of cash between now and 2037. That's an upgrade of £2.4bn on the last time the modelling was done in 2019.

For aficionados, the underlying assumptions were laid out in colourful detail, including the critical input that like-for-like sales in the shops are assumed to decline at a rate of 10% a year. The cashflow magic, as it were, arrives via steady reductions in store rents and an assumed 6.4%-a-year increase in online sales.

The long perspective made [Next's £10m trim to this year's profit forecast](#), and the likely effects of higher prices and "chronic labour shortages", feel almost minor. In practice, the volatility looks a proper challenge, but, yes, there's every reason to think the structure is capable of handling most stresses, which was the deep message in Next's projections.

The credibility of a 15-year outlook is improved after many years of success and when the boss has done two decades in post and has no plans to retire. But more companies should try their hand at mapping the horizon in public. Most say they're in the game of attracting long-term shareholders; this is one way to show they mean it.

Slow-moving Renault

Renault has been shockingly slow to concede that its presence in Russia had become untenable, but the rouble has finally dropped in the boardroom. The group has suspended operations at its Moscow factory and is considering a sale of its majority stake in Avtovaz, which owns the Lada brand.

The size of Renault's investment in Russia explains the slowness of the decision-making, but does not excuse it. It has been obvious for weeks that a firm 15%-owned by the French state could not continue to support Russia's

largest car manufacturer. It should not have taken a public shaming by Ukrainian politicians to reach this point.

Other western multinationals who are hoping that their lower-profile operations in Russia will escape scrutiny should take note. We're well into overtime for reviewing.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/nils-pratley-on-finance/2022/mar/24/p-and-o-dubai-dp-world-britain-freeport>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

2022.03.25 - Around the world

- [Donald Trump Ex-president sues Hillary Clinton, alleging 'plot' to rig 2016 election](#)
- [China Frustration grows as daily Covid cases near 5,000](#)
- [US Many bird species nesting and laying eggs nearly a month early, study says](#)
- [Solomon Islands Chinese draft security deal didn't blindside Australia, Morrison says](#)
- [China Secret shipment of replica guns to Solomon Islands police triggers concern](#)

[Donald Trump](#)

Trump sues Hillary Clinton, alleging ‘plot’ to rig 2016 election against him

Clinton, James Comey and others accused of orchestrating Russia conspiracy that makes Watergate ‘pale in comparison’



Donald Trump, nearly six years after beating Hillary Clinton, alleges his 2016 opponent is guilty of ‘racketeering’ and a ‘conspiracy’. Photograph: Rick Wilking/Reuters

[Martin Pengelly](#) in New York

[@MartinPengelly](#)

Thu 24 Mar 2022 15.30 EDT Last modified on Fri 25 Mar 2022 11.05 EDT

Donald Trump has sued [Hillary Clinton](#), the Democratic National Committee and other people and entities tied to the investigation of Russian election interference in 2016, claiming that in a bid to rig the election they orchestrated a conspiracy which made Watergate “pale in comparison”.

The suit came a day after the release of [a letter from a prosecutor](#) in New York who said he believed Trump was “guilty of numerous felony violations” in his business affairs, despite the district attorney in Manhattan choosing not to indict.

Trump beat Clinton for the presidency in 2016. Nonetheless, six years on he alleges she is guilty of “racketeering” and a “conspiracy to commit injurious falsehood”, among other claims.

The 108-page lawsuit follows suits filed by Trump and allies in the aftermath of the 2020 election, alleging Joe Biden’s victory was the result of electoral fraud. Out of [62 such suits](#), only [one](#) succeeded.

Among those also listed as defendants in the new suit are ex-FBI officials [James Comey](#), Andrew McCabe, Peter Strzok and Lisa Page; the former British spy Christopher Steele, author of a famous dossier on Trump’s links to Moscow; Jake Sullivan, now national security adviser to Joe Biden; and John Podesta, Clinton’s campaign chair.

The suit was filed in US district court in the southern district of Florida, by lawyers from that state and Alina Habba, a New Jersey attorney has represented Trump in failed suits seeking to block investigation of the [deadly Capitol riot](#) on 6 January 2021, which [Trump fueled](#) with lies about electoral fraud.

Those suits have widely been seen as delaying tactics, meant to help Trump wait out the January 6 committee until [Republicans](#) can retake the House this November and kill the investigation.

Other attorneys for Trump have complained about Habba’s work, according to [the Daily Beast](#).

Russia denies interfering in the 2016 US election to boost Trump. The US intelligence community [agrees](#) that it did.

[Robert Mueller](#), the special counsel who investigated the matter, did not establish collusion between Trump and Russia but did list [10 instances](#) in which the then-president may have tried to obstruct justice.

Mueller, who explicitly said he was not exonerating Trump, also detailed several connections between Trump aides and Moscow.

In August 2020 a Senate intelligence committee report [detailed](#) links between Paul Manafort, Trump's campaign manager for part of the 2016 race, and Russian intelligence.

Manafort was jailed on charges [of fraud](#). Trump [pardoned](#) him.

Regardless, Trump's new lawsuit claims that in the run-up to the 2016 election, "Hillary Clinton and her cohorts orchestrated an unthinkable plot – one that shocks the conscience and is an affront to this nation's democracy.

"Acting in concert, the defendants maliciously conspired to weave a false narrative that their Republican opponent, Donald J Trump, was colluding with a hostile foreign sovereignty."

The suit claims the conspiracy involved "falsifying evidence, deceiving law enforcement and exploiting access to highly-sensitive data sources" in a plot "so outrageous, subversive and incendiary that even the events of [Watergate](#) pale in comparison".

Clinton and her fellow defendants, it claims, "nefariously sought to sway the public's trust" and "worked together with a single, self-serving purpose: to vilify Donald J Trump".

According to the suit, "the deception, malice, and treachery perpetrated by the defendants has caused significant harm to the American people, and to the plaintiff, Donald J Trump, and they must be held accountable for their heinous acts".

The suit seeks "punitive damages, costs, and such further and other relief as this court may deem just and proper".

It says Trump "has sustained significant injuries and damages including, but not limited to, expenses in the form of defense costs, legal fees and related expenses incurred ... in an amount no less than \$24m and continuing to accrue, as well as the loss of existing and future business opportunities".

Eli Hoenig, a former federal prosecutor, now an analyst for CNN, said: “It’s difficult to put into words just how deeply flawed and utterly hopeless this lawsuit is.”

Philippe Reines, a former Clinton spokesperson named in the suit, pointed to how damaging an actual trial could be for Trump when he tweeted: “I look forward to deposing the plaintiff.”

A lawyer for Strzok, the FBI agent who was fired for sending messages critical of Trump, told Politico: “We haven’t had a chance to read the complaint, but knowing the former president, there’s probably very little in there that’s true.”

Some in Republican leadership reportedly fear Trump’s grip on the party and fixation on Clinton, 2016 and supposed electoral fraud could cost the GOP dearly in elections this year and in 2024.

In legal jeopardy over his business affairs and attempted political subversion, Trump has all but declared he will run for the White House again.

Speaking to reporters in Brussels on Thursday, Biden said of the 2024 presidential election: “I’d be very fortunate if I had that same man running against me.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/mar/24/trump-hillary-clinton-russia-lawsuit-2016-election>

[China](#)

Frustration with Covid response grows in China as daily cases near 5,000

As the Omicron variant takes hold, some say the country's hardline approach is causing more deaths than the virus itself

- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



A long queue for Covid testing in Shanghai, where growing daily cases are prompting concern. Photograph: Reuters

Helen Davidson in Taipei

[@heldavidson](#)

Fri 25 Mar 2022 01.15 EDT Last modified on Fri 25 Mar 2022 01.31 EDT

China reported almost 5,000 Covid-19 cases on Friday, as authorities continued to battle an outbreak of the highly transmissible Omicron variant

across multiple provinces and as evidence of frustration among the population grew.

After the death of a nurse in Shanghai who was denied hospitalisation after suffering an asthma attack, many are angry that [China's Covid responses](#) appear to be causing more deaths than the virus itself.

On Friday, health authorities reported 4,988 cases, with rising numbers of asymptomatic infections, which China records separately. There is growing concern in Shanghai, where health officials in the city of about 25 million people reported 1,609 cases on Friday. Just over 1,500 cases were asymptomatic, marking a sharp increase from the previous day's 979.

Shanghai's authorities have resisted going into city-wide lockdown, a harsh measure still being used in other provinces, and are instead closing individual buildings and communities for testing. But some residents have claimed they've been locked down for far longer than warned, and others reported issues in securing fresh food and other deliveries.

“2+2+2+2+2, the lockdown days has been infinitely increased by two,” complained one resident. “Policies change every day, prices rise every day. I have to get up at 5 o'clock every day to grab food. It is still unknown whether it can be delivered. This is how our government treats its citizens?”

On Wednesday a nurse in Shanghai [died](#) after she was denied entry to hospitals after suffering an asthma attack, echoing the cases of people who died during a lockdown in Xi'an last year after they were denied medical care because of overly strict Covid policies.

Wu Jinglei, director of the Shanghai municipal health commission, offered condolences to the nurse's family and urged hospitals to better streamline their screening and sterilisation processes, which were keeping hospital areas closed for too long.

China has reported [two Covid-19 deaths from this Omicron outbreak](#), and some online discussion has centred around “secondary” deaths caused by harsh anti-epidemic measures.

“I am not afraid of the coronavirus, I am afraid that I can’t get treatment for other diseases,” said one person on Weibo.

“I really don’t know why people who should be treated cannot get treated? How many lives will it take to change our one-size-fits-all policy?” said another.

Across China authorities have imposed various measures as they seek to implement orders from the country’s leader, Xi Jinping, to ensure “the maximum prevention and control at the least cost, and minimise the impact of the epidemic on economic and social development”. Last week Wang Hesheng, vice-head of the National Health Commission, said China’s increasingly refined tactics had reduced inconvenience.

But frustration is building. Last week social media posts went viral of crowds in Shenyang banging against shop windows and shouting in frustration at the announcement of another round of testing.

And while entire provinces like Jilin have been locked down, the resistance to do so in cities like Shanghai and Shenzhen have prompted accusations they are “dragging down” the response effort.

“Other cities took a month to control the epidemic, Shanghai grows epidemic in one month,” said one online commenter.

On Wednesday “Why can’t China lift safety measure just like foreign countries?” was a top trending topic on Weibo, according to What’s On Weibo.

Viewed more than 5.4m times, the hashtag drew debate over views recently put forward by epidemiologist Liang Wannian, who supports Xi’s zero-Covid strategy, against comments by a Beijing hospital director, Jiang Rongmeng, that Omicron was “more like a cold”.

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

Birds

Many bird species nesting and laying eggs nearly a month early, study says

Heating of the atmosphere, due to the burning of fossil fuels, is seemingly upending a process that long appeared unshakeable



Species including bluejays, yellow warblers and field sparrows are now laying their first eggs 25 days earlier than they were 100 years ago, the research found. Photograph: Ashwini Bhatia/AP

[Oliver Milman](#)

[@olliemilman](#)

Fri 25 Mar 2022 01.01 EDT Last modified on Fri 25 Mar 2022 21.47 EDT

The arrival of spring has seemingly immutable rituals – lengthening days, blossoming plants and a surge in bees' activity. But the onset of spring is now being warped by the climate crisis, with new research finding that many species of birds are nesting and laying eggs nearly a month earlier than they did a century ago.

US scientists who analyzed the nesting trends of birds from egg samples collected in the Chicago area found that of the 72 species for which historical and modern data exists, around a third are now nesting much earlier in the year than before.

These species, including bluejays, yellow warblers and field sparrows, are now laying their first eggs 25 days earlier, on average, than they were 100 years ago, the research found. The heating of the atmosphere, due to the burning of fossil fuels, is seemingly upending a process that long appeared unshakeable.

“It was shocking to find this,” said John Bates, curator of birds at the Field Museum and the study’s lead author. “What we can see is clearly pointing in the direction that climate change is having a significant effect on the behavior of birds. It’s another piece of the puzzle we are trying to figure out in terms of impacts.”

The study, [published in the Journal of Animal Ecology](#), drew upon records of birds’ eggs gathered during a period, from about 1880 to 1920, when people could rampantly collect them from nests without penalty.

These records, largely consisting of boxes of eggs with hand-written labels describing the type of bird and when the eggs were collected, were compared with modern nesting data collated by Bill Strausberger, a colleague of Bates’ at the Field Museum, and Chris Whelan, an evolutionary ecologist at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Whelan and his team used mirrors mounted on long poles to peer into high-up nests.

A model built by the researchers revealed that birds moving their nesting dates forward has been closely correlated with rising carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere, a leading driver of rising global temperatures.

Birds choose when to nest in line with other developments in spring, such as the budding of plants and the increase in insect numbers. These interactions of nature are being unpicked by climate change – [in the US](#) bears are emerging from hibernation earlier and cherry, peach, pear, apple and plum trees are blossoming weeks earlier than they once did. In the UK, plants

flowered a full month earlier between 1987 and 2019 than they did before 1986, [recent research found](#).

“If you’re a bird and you nest earlier, you put yourself at risk of these cold snaps that can still arrive in spring, which then affects the plants and insects,” said Bates. “That then impacts the reproductive success of the birds. Springs are becoming more volatile and that is taking its toll.”

Bates said more research needed to be done but the scrambling of the seasons may well be a significant factor in the decline of many bird species, along with other factors such as habitat loss and the indiscriminate use of pesticides.

In 2020, [a study revealed](#) that nearly 3 billion birds had disappeared from the US and Canada since 1970, a loss of nearly a third of all bird numbers. Researchers said the losses have been “staggering”, with the declines heaviest among sparrows, blackbirds, warblers and finches.

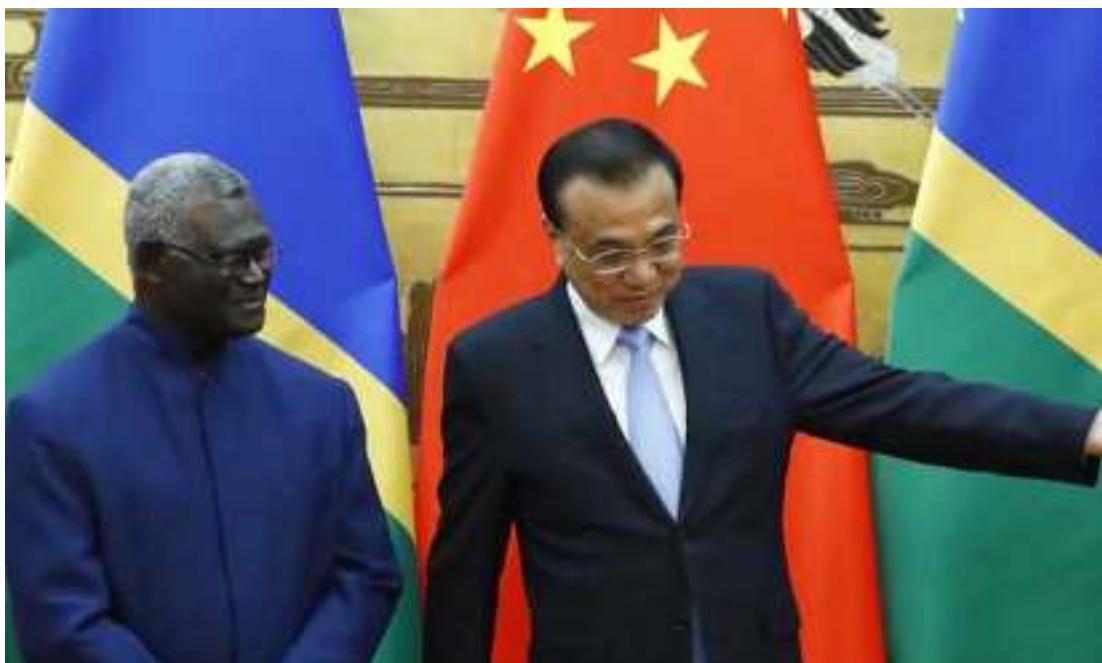
This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/mar/25/birds-nesting-laying-eggs-early-climate-crisis-study>.

Solomon Islands

Chinese draft security deal with Solomon Islands didn't blindside Australia, Morrison says

Analysts say unratified document which would allow China to base ships in the Pacific is a 'wish list' which reveals nation's intent in 'black and white'

- [Get our free news app; get our morning email briefing](#)



The Solomon Islands prime minister, Manasseh Sogavare (left), and the Chinese premier, Li Keqiang, in 2019. Of the draft security deal, experts say 'this sort of document would not come as a surprise [to Australia]'. Photograph: Thomas Peter/AP

[Paul Karp](#) and [Kate Lyons](#)

Fri 25 Mar 2022 02.15 EDT Last modified on Fri 25 Mar 2022 12.57 EDT

Scott Morrison says Australia was not blindsided by a draft security deal between China and [Solomon Islands](#), which experts warn has demonstrated a “black and white” intent at expanding influence in the Pacific.

The draft would allow [China](#) to base navy warships in the Pacific less than 2,000km off the Australian coast, but some experts, including the Lowy Institute’s Jonathan Pryke, caution it reads more like a “wishlist” from China than a finalised agreement.

While the document still needs to go through the Pacific nation’s cabinet, the Solomon Islands government confirmed on Friday it was seeking to “broaden its security and development cooperation with more countries”, referring to Australia and China as its “two major partners”.

In November, [Australia sent more than 100 police and defence force personnel](#) to Solomon Islands to help quell unrest, but found itself in competition with China which also [agreed to send police](#).

[Solomon Islands switched diplomatic ties from Taiwan to Beijing in 2019](#), which partly fuelled discontent that led to riots in the capital, Honiara.

On Friday, Morrison told reporters in Sydney that Australia is a “leader” in the region, and having upped its aid contribution from \$1.12bn to \$1.7bn is “the single largest provider of development assistance into the Pacific”.

The Australian prime minister said that China’s push for a security deal with Solomon Islands highlights “the constant pressure and ... push that is coming into the region from interests that are not aligned with Australia’s and not aligned with those of the Pacific”.

Morrison noted Australia had negotiated a bilateral security deal with Solomon Islands in 2017, and is always the “first call” when a crisis arises.

“Now, there are others who may seek to pretend to influence and to seek to get some sort of foothold in the region,” he said.

- [Sign up to receive an email with the top stories from Guardian Australia every morning](#)

Sign up to receive the top stories from Guardian Australia every morning.

“So, I think these most recent developments and the uncertainty and instability in the Solomons just highlights once again why it has been so important that we leaned in as heavily as we have.”

Morrison said Australia would “see how [the draft agreement] progresses”. Asked about the prospect of a Chinese naval base so close to Australia, Morrison replied that Australia wanted “a free and open Indo-Pacific”.

“We share with our Pacific family values, we share culture, the principles of democracy and freedom, and these are things that are very important to the Pacific Island peoples.”

In a statement released on Friday, the Solomon Islands’ government seemed to seek to reassure Australia, emphasising that “Solomon Islands values its 2017 Security Agreement with Australia” calling it the Pacific country’s “first Security Agreement”.

“Solomon Islands continues to preserve its Security Agreement with Australia as it develops and deepens its relations with all partners including with China.”

However, the government added that it was “working to broaden its security and development cooperation with more countries”.

In a significant signal, the government statement referred at one point to Australia and China as “Solomon Islands two major partners”.

The government said the agreement with China had a “development dimension to it, covering humanitarian needs of the country besides maintaining rule of law” and was necessary given “the country is located in a global hotspot where the impact of climate change is three times the global average.”

“More development cooperation is being sought within and externally to ensure the country is put back on track especially during this difficult time with the impact of COVID-19 on people’s lives, building the economy including damages caused by the recent riots and looting and the population’s wellbeing.”

Pryke, the director of the Lowy Institute’s Pacific Islands program, told Guardian Australia that caution should be applied to the draft deal that “reads to me as a Chinese-drafted wishlist” and not “earnestly negotiated” yet by Solomon Islands.

“The Australian government has a much more hardened view of China’s intent; this sort of document would not come as a surprise,” he said.

Pryke suggested after years of China saying it is a “benign actor” despite increased geopolitical contestation, the draft deal is proof of China’s intent in “black and white”.

“In a sense it has done a favour to the Australian government and a disservice to China, because it removes strategic ambiguity and reveals that intent.”

But Pryke said Australia should be “alert but not alarmed” because a buildup to a port in Solomon Islands would take several decades.

“There’s all sorts of engagement that China could do to build its way up to a military presence,” he said.

“Get this agreement, start with police, maybe the next step would be to set up some dual-use coast guard facility, then put up a fuel depot.”

“Because it’s happening piecemeal, it’s happening without too much alarm.

“If … at every turn the alarm is raised and it gets international attention and forces Solomon Islands to react, it reduces the likelihood of them moving on to the next step.”

Earlier, the Labor leader, Anthony Albanese, said if reports of the deal are correct “then this would have real implications for the region, and is of concern”.

“Australia needs to be a partner of choice in the Pacific,” he told reporters in Shellharbour. “We were that for a long period of time.

“When this government came to office and withdrew funding, in terms of its aid and its presence in the Pacific, that was an error of judgment,” he said.

“We have had the Pacific step-up in terms of rhetoric. That’s a good thing. We need to make sure that we engage with the region.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/25/chinese-draft-security-deal-with-solomon-islands-didnt-blindsde-australia-morrison-says>

The Pacific projectSolomon Islands

Secret shipment of replica guns to Solomon Islands police by China triggers concern

Police had been criticised after reports that a ‘shipment of arms’ arrived in the country on a logging vessel from an unknown source



Police in Solomon Islands say a shipment of weapons sent by China are replicas to be used for police training. Photograph: Royal Solomon Islands Police Force

Supported by



Judith Neilson Institute for Journalism and Ideas

[About this content](#)

Georgina Kekea

Thu 24 Mar 2022 20.20 EDT Last modified on Thu 24 Mar 2022 20.22 EDT

A shipment of replica firearms by China to [Solomon Islands](#) police has caused concern as the Pacific nation grapples with security concerns sparked by its increasingly close relationship with Beijing.

The police force had been criticised over the secrecy surrounding delivery of what a local media report called a “[large shipment of arms](#)” that arrived in the country on a logging vessel earlier this month from an unknown source.

On Tuesday [the police said](#) the firearms – 95 rifles and 92 pistols – were replicas donated by China for police training and denied accusations the force had anything “to conceal or hide”. It also published pictures of police training with the replicas.

Solomon Islands banned firearms and replica weapons in 2000 during a bloody ethnic conflict in which police armouries were raided by militia groups. However, police were allowed to carry weapons again in 2017.

“These things do not in any way threaten the security of this country so far, except they are as good as helping RSIPF [Royal Solomon Islands Police Force] in building its tactical knowledge and capabilities,” police commissioner Mostyn Mangau said in a statement.

“RSIPF is the main security agency of this country and so some of the methodology we use or apply does not need the public to be aware of this as a matter of national security,” he added.



Solomon Islands police have denied having anything to ‘conceal or hide’ regarding what they say was a batch of replica weapons sent by China for training purposes. Photograph: Royal Solomon Islands Police Force

It comes amid wider security concerns that [Beijing could base navy warships in the area](#), according to a leaked draft security agreement that emerged on Thursday. Those arrangements are also likely to worry the United States, which said in February it would open an embassy in Solomon Islands after senior US administration officials expressed concern China wanted to create military relationships in the [Pacific islands](#).

It comes just months after rioting in Solomon Islands, sparked in part by the country’s 2019 switch of diplomatic relations to Beijing from Taiwan.

The Solomon Islands' political opposition remains sceptical about the replica firearms consignment and has demanded access to the replicas in order to verify they are not real weapons.

"Questions that raise a lot of suspicion are why are replica guns offloaded at a log pond somewhere in Guadalcanal on a logging barge? Why are they not shipped commercially and offloaded at our internationally recognised port?" deputy opposition leader Peter Kenilorea Jr said.

The government has dissociated itself from the saga and said it would be up to the police to decide whether they would allow media to view the replica guns in order to ease public concerns.

In November last year, up to 60 buildings in the capital, Honiara, were destroyed in riots that caused more than \$300m of damage. Buildings in Chinatown were targeted during the outbreak of arson and looting.

The unrest came after the decision by the prime minister, Manasseh Sogavare, to launch relations with China fuelled a dispute between the national government and the most populous province, Malaita, although other domestic issues also stirred discontent.

Troops and police from Australia, New Zealand, Fiji and Papua New Guinea were deployed to the country to assist local police in the immediate aftermath. China has also since sent a team of police officers to help with training.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/25/secret-shipment-of-replica-guns-to-solomon-islands-police-by-china-triggers-concern>

Headlines

- [China Plane with 133 people onboard crashes in Guangxi province](#)
- [NHS Over 80% of UK GPs think patients are at risk in their surgery, survey finds](#)
- [Coronavirus UK case numbers ‘no particular cause for concern’, says Javid](#)
- [Vaccines NHS rollout of second Covid booster jabs begins in England](#)

[**China**](#)

Chinese plane with 132 people onboard crashes in Guangxi province

State media reports that China Eastern 737 went down near city of Wuzhou, sparking mountainside fire

01:12

Smoke rises from aftermath of passenger plane crash in China – video report

[Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei and [Gwyn Topham](#)

Mon 21 Mar 2022 10.16 EDTFirst published on Mon 21 Mar 2022 04.39 EDT

A passenger plane carrying 132 people has crashed in southern China, with no survivors announced so far, Chinese authorities have reported.

The China Eastern Airlines plane departed Kunming at 1pm, on route to Guangzhou. At about 2.20pm, according to data from Flightradar24, the plane, a Boeing 737, plummeted more than 20,000 feet in just over a minute. It then seems to have regained altitude momentarily, before dropping rapidly again. The plane crashed near the city of Wuzhou in Teng County, Guangxi province.

The Civil Aviation Administration said it had activated emergency protocols and sent a working group to the scene. State broadcasters said rescuers had been dispatched but there were no immediate details of casualties. China Eastern Airlines said it had also sent officials to the site in line with emergency measures.



Pictures from the scene of a Boeing 737 crash in south China. Photograph: CGTNOfficial/Twitter

Onboard were 123 passengers and nine crew members. State media said some family members of the passengers had arrived at the airline's Yunnan branch by Monday evening. The airline said no foreign nationals were aboard the plane.

Several show a plume of smoke coming from a mountainous region. Other clips show intense flames around a circular area, while another clip appears to show plane wreckage with the name China Eastern Airline visible. Drone footage of the crash site published on Monday evening showed a deep scar in the ground, and very few large pieces of wreckage.

The Guardian has not independently verified the footage.

The Wuzhou fire rescue department [said it had dispatched](#) 23 firetrucks and 117 personnel to the site. Another 538 personnel had been ordered in from surrounding detachments as reinforcements. Firefighters could not reach the site by road, and so had walked part of the way into the forested region, state media said.

[Locator](#)

CCTV said the fire was contained within a few hours.

China's leader, Xi Jinping, called for a prompt investigation into the cause of the crash, the country's first major fatal air disaster since 2010.

Aviation experts in the UK said there could be multiple reasons for the crash before further evidence emerged. Tony Cable, an air accident investigator, said that possibilities included a "loss of control event" or high altitude stall.

Others said that the pattern of the flight shown on tracking sites, which saw the plane cruising at a steady altitude and speed before descending without any reported mayday call, and with no loss of data signal, appeared similar to the Germanwings crash in 2015. The Airbus A320 passenger plane was crashed deliberately into the French Alps by the pilot, killing himself and 149 people on board.

David Learmount, consulting editor at Flightglobal, said: "We don't have any direct evidence but we can observe that at this stage when we had observed the Germanwings disappearance, when it descended to destruction the two profiles looked very similar – so it is worrying."

01:29

Rescuers sort through debris of China plane crash as family of victims gather at airport – video

The plane is a six-year-old [Boeing 737-89P](#), according to flight data trackers. The Boeing 737-800s are among the most common passenger planes in the world, and different to the 737 Max, which was grounded worldwide after two fatal crashes in 2018 and 2019.

China operates more of the planes than any other country, with 1,177 aircraft based there, according to aviation analytics firm Cirium. State media reported China Eastern Airlines had grounded all 737-800 planes.

China Eastern Airlines, a state-owned company and one of the biggest airlines in Asia, did not answer calls from the Guardian. Its homepage had switched to black and white, which state media said was to mark the crash.

Shares in Boeing fell 10% on news of the crash but have since climbed back to be just under 7% down.

A spokesperson for Boeing told the Guardian they were aware of initial media reports and were working to gather more information.

Additional reporting by Xiaoqian Zhu and Chi Hui Lin

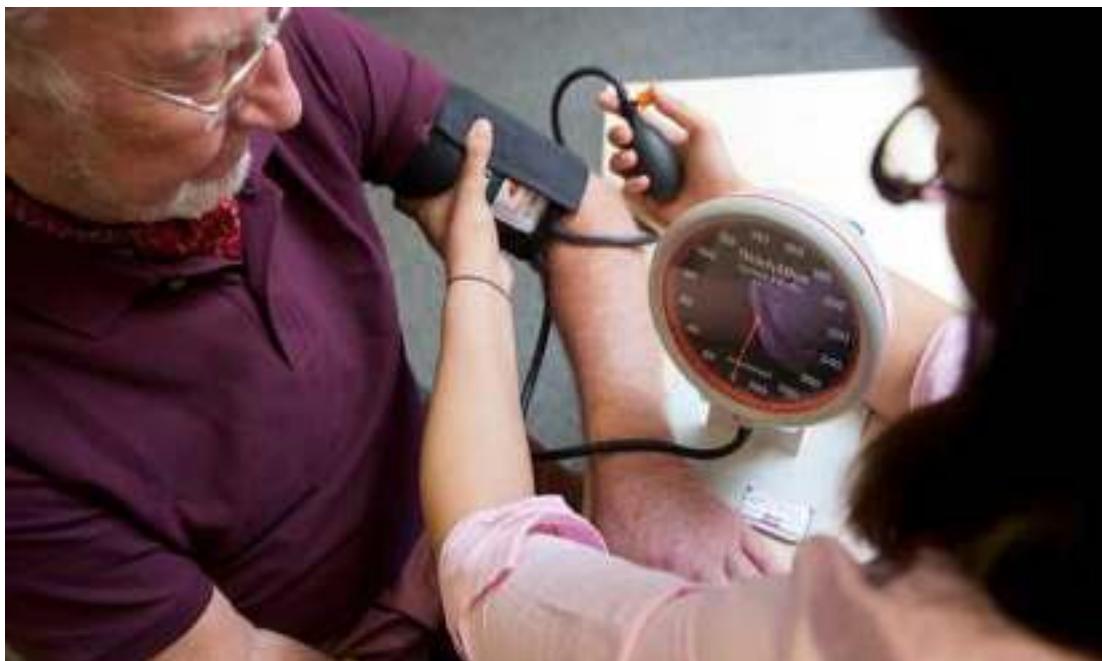
This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/21/chinese-plane-crashes-guangxi-province-china-eastern-737-wuzhou>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

NHS

Over 80% of UK GPs think patients are at risk in their surgery, survey finds

Doctors identify lack of time, staff shortages and heavy workloads as reasons for lack of safety



A poll of 1,395 GPs found only 13% said their practice was safe for patients all of the time. Photograph: Adrian Sherratt/Adrian Sherratt (commissioned)

[Denis Campbell](#) Health policy editor

Mon 21 Mar 2022 02.00 EDT

More than 80% of GPs believe that patients are being put at risk when they come into their surgery for an appointment, a new survey shows.

A poll of 1,395 GPs found only 13% said their practice was safe for patients all the time. Meanwhile, 85% expressed concerns about patient safety, with

2% saying patients were “rarely” safe, 22% saying they were safe “some of the time” and 61% saying they were safe “most of the time”.

Asked if they thought the risk to patient safety was increasing in their surgery, 70% said it was.

Family doctors identified lack of time with patients, workforce shortages, relentless workloads and heavy administrative burdens as the main reasons people receiving care could be exposed to risk. The survey, which was self-selecting, also found that:

- 91% said more GPs would help improve the state of general practices.
- 84% have had anxiety, stress or depression over the past year linked to their job.
- 31% know a colleague who was physically abused by a patient in the last year.
- 24% know of a member of general practice staff who has taken their own life due to work pressures.

“The evidence shows that, after you’ve already made 25 to 35 decisions about patients’ health on a particular day, that as a GP the risk of making a bad decision goes up,” said Dr Kieran Sharrock, a GP in Lincolnshire and the deputy chair of the British Medical Association’s GP committee.

“That could be prescribing an ineffective medicine for a patient, or making a referral to hospital for them when it’s not needed or, worse than that, not making a referral when it is needed. For example, we miss a red flag sign of cancer because we are overloaded already with decisions.”

Sharrock is one of the leading lights in a new campaign, called “Rebuild General Practice”, which is calling for urgent action to improve GP services. Patients are waiting longer than before to get an appointment as surgeries

struggle with a shortage of both GPs and other staff such as receptionists, practice nurses, pharmacists and mental health support workers.

Asked why they thought patients' safety was at risk, 86% of the GPs surveyed in England, [Scotland](#) and Wales mentioned not having enough time to fulfil patients' needs. Others cited the widespread shortage of GPs (77%), having too many patients to look after (66%), and too few staff (63%).

Jeremy Hunt, the former health secretary, who is backing the campaign, said: "The workforce crisis is the biggest issue facing the [NHS](#). We can forget fixing the backlog unless we urgently come up with a plan to train enough doctors for the future and, crucially, retain the ones we've got."

In 2015 Hunt pledged to increase the number of GPs in [England](#) by 5,000 by 2020. He acknowledged that he missed that target because more retired early than joined.

Boris Johnson promised in the 2019 general election to boost the GP workforce by 6,000 by 2024-25. However, Sajid Javid, the health secretary, has admitted that that pledge [will not be delivered either](#). A continuing high rate of early retirement means that the number of full-time GPs is still falling.

Over half either agreed (29%) or strongly agreed (24%) that working as a GP is incompatible with a healthy family life, while just 24% would recommend general practice as a career.

"We are at a turning point for general practice. Workload has gone inexorably up and workforce has gone downwards, and if that continues, general practice will fail. It will be unsafe for patients and therefore the NHS will also fail because general practice is the bedrock of the NHS," added Sharrock.

A spokesperson for the Department of [Health](#) and Social Care said: "There has been an increase of more than 1,600 GPs over the past two years.

"Through the GP access plan, we have made £520m available to improve access and expand general practice capacity during the pandemic. This is in

addition to £1.5bn announced in 2020 to create an additional 50m general practice appointments by 2024 by increasing and diversifying the workforce.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/mar/21/80-per-cent-gps-patients-at-risk-surgery-survey>.

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

Coronavirus

UK Covid case numbers ‘no particular cause for concern’, says Javid

Health secretary says ‘vaccine wall of defence’ is helping keep situation stable despite surge in cases



A Covid mobile testing unit in King's Cross, London, England. Photograph: Vuk Valcic/Zuma Press Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

[Peter Walker](#) Political correspondent

[@peterwalker99](#)

Mon 21 Mar 2022 05.40 EDT Last modified on Tue 22 Mar 2022 01.10 EDT

There is “no particular cause for concern” about the UK’s rapidly rising number of Covid cases, [Sajid Javid](#), the health secretary, has said, saying that England was demonstrating to the world a successful model for living with the virus.

Despite [survey data showing](#) almost 5% of the population in England had Covid earlier this month, and record infection levels among the over-70s, Javid said the “wall of defence” from vaccines was keeping the situation stable.

From Monday, 5 million people across England at higher risk from Covid – the over-75s, care home residents and those who are immunocompromised – [will be able to book](#) a second booster jab in the coming weeks. Javid confirmed that a wider booster programme, most likely aimed at the over-50s, was expected in the autumn.

“Our level of concern hasn’t changed,” Javid told BBC1’s Breakfast programme. “Although the case numbers are rising, infections are rising, and indeed hospital numbers are rising, they are still way below their peak.

“It’s also important for us when we review this to understand why they are rising. And that is primarily down to the increased social mixing we are seeing, as our country has opened up, but also the BA.2 subvariant of Omicron, which we know is, on the one hand more infectious, but on the other hand we know that our vaccines work just as well against this.

“Taking all that into account, of course we keep the data under review, but there’s no particular cause for concern at this point.”

Asked about the case numbers in a later interview with BBC Radio 4’s Today programme, Javid said that while 11,500 people in hospital in England had Covid, 60% of these were being treated for non-Covid reasons.

“There’s no particular cause for concern at this point,” he said. “The reason why things are stable and we are learning to live with Covid is because of our vaccine wall of defence.”

There is particular concern about the scale of infections in older people, while school leaders fear preparations for A-levels and GCSEs are being disrupted by outbreaks among staff and students.

The ongoing Office for National Statistics Covid survey, based on swab tests taken in the community, found that almost 5% of the population in England had Covid in the week ending 12 March, including 3.5% of people in the oldest age group.

The high prevalence among older people has prompted unease, after reports this week that vaccine immunity declines steeply in care-home residents. It is six months since many people in this age group had their last vaccine dose.

Javid dismissed the idea of complacency. He said: “For anyone to suggest that the government or our advisers are unbothered would be clearly wrong. We have a plan for how, as a country, we learn to live with Covid, and that plan is working.” England was, he added, “successfully showing the world” how to live with the virus.

While free Covid testing for most people will end in April, Javid said the ONS survey and similar ongoing studies, such as one based in care homes, would help track the progress of the virus.

He said: “Because of that we will still have excellent data on a very regular basis about what is going on with the virus in the country. But the one thing that we will remain focused on is the the vaccination programme.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/21/uk-covid-case-numbers-no-particular-cause-for-concern-says-javid>

Coronavirus

NHS rollout of second Covid booster jabs begins in England

Offer of top-up dose to over-75s, care home residents and those who are immunocompromised follows JCVI advice last month



About 5 million people will be contacted by the NHS with the offer of the additional jab. Photograph: Kirsty Wigglesworth/AP

[Denis Campbell](#) Health policy editor

Sun 20 Mar 2022 20.01 EDT Last modified on Mon 21 Mar 2022 01.13 EDT

The NHS in England will on Monday start giving a second booster vaccine to millions of people who are at higher risk from Covid-19 to help combat the latest resurgence in infections.

Over-75s, care home residents and those who are immunocompromised – 5 million in all – will be contacted by the NHS and then be able to book an appointment online or by calling 119.

The new rollout of booster jabs comes after the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) [advised the government last month](#) that those three at-risk groups should be offered a top-up because the immunity from their first booster was waning.

Cases of Covid are rising again, with [90,349 cases](#) recorded on Friday across the UK, according to official figures, more than double the 39,000 seen on 1 March. However, the true number of infections is higher. The Office for National Statistics estimates that one in 20 people in England had Covid in the week up to 12 March.

The number of people in UK hospitals with Covid had risen to 14,671 by last Thursday.

Experts believe the increase is linked to people spending more time at their work premises, greater socialisation in bars and other venues and the lifting of restrictions.

Provision of the second boosters began in Scotland on 7 March and in Wales last week. England will follow suit from Monday when several hundred sites – including high street pharmacies, vaccination centres and hospitals – start delivering the jabs.

Dr Nikki Kanani, a GP who is the deputy lead for the NHS vaccination programme, said: “Sadly, we are still seeing large numbers of people seriously unwell in hospital with Covid, so it remains vital that those most at risk come forward when they are invited to do so.”

Ruth Rankine, the director of primary care at the NHS Confederation, which represents groups of GP surgeries, also urged those who are eligible to get their top-up. “As we learn to live with Covid-19, and in the face of the new dominant BA.2 variant, we must use all the tools in our arsenal, of which vaccination has been the most important,” she said.

When the JCVI [recommended the spring booster programme](#) last month to protect the most vulnerable, the committee said it would also set out advice on an autumn top-up campaign, but gave no details.

Sajid Javid, the health secretary, hinted last week that it would encompass many more people than those covered by the spring campaign. “[The JCVI’s] most recent advice is that they think that towards the end of this year, maybe in the autumn, there will be a need to give a lot more people a boost,” he said.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/21/nhs-rollout-second-covid-booster-jab-begins-in-england>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

2022.03.21 - Spotlight

- ['I'm just surprised I still have a career' Chloë Sevigny on hipsters, Hollywood, fame and family](#)
- ['It's not a problem any more' Israel's increasingly porous West Bank fence](#)
- [Blockbuster or bladderburster? Why movie intermissions must return – now!](#)
- [Darjeeling unlimited New party vows to end region's strife](#)

Advertisement

US edition

- [US edition](#)
- [UK edition](#)
- [Australian edition](#)
- [International edition](#)

[The Guardian - Back to home](#)

[The G2 interview Chloë Sevigny](#)

Interview

‘I’m just surprised I still have a career’: Chloë Sevigny on hipsters, Hollywood, fame and family

[Emine Saner](#)



Chloe Sevigny: ‘Kate Winslet had the world at her feet. I just aspired to be on the cover of the Face.’ Photograph: Taylor Jewell/Invision/AP

The actor talks about being an indie icon, becoming a mother during lockdown and her joy at joining the second season of Russian Doll



[@eminesaner](#)

Mon 21 Mar 2022 02.00 EDTLast modified on Mon 21 Mar 2022 07.17 EDT

Remarkably, given that [Chloë Sevigny](#) is still only in her 40s, her work has spanned 30 years. In typical self-deprecating style, she says with a laugh: “I was talking to my manager about my career and I’m just surprised I still have one.”

I am not sure anyone has a career quite like Sevigny’s. She has switched between indie films and sitcoms, taken risky roles and lived a parallel life as a style idol, which has given her a cult celebrity. She has skirted the mainstream for years, never quite becoming a household name. But to some – those who grew up reading the magazines that tracked her years as a 90s cool girl via films such as *Kids* and *Gummo* – she is a fashion and arthouse superstar.

We speak on a video call. Sevigny is at home in New York, positioned beneath a reclining female nude by her longtime friend the artist Rita Ackermann. It gives the impression that Sevigny is being birthed by her. She is wearing black and applies a slash of red lipstick before we begin. Somewhere in the background, I can hear her nearly two-year-old son.

In the Netflix show [Russian Doll](#), soon to begin its second series, Sevigny plays the chaotic mother of Natasha Lyonne's character, Nadia, in flashback. She has known Lyonne – who wrote, co-created and stars in the show – for years and is palpably proud of her friend's success. The show – which follows Nadia, trapped in a nihilistic time loop – is a riot. "Just watching your friend flourish like that; I've always thought she was a genius and I've always wanted her to be celebrated," says Sevigny. "I'm glad that I can contribute in some little way and just be around her, help propel her in any way I can. Or ride her coattails, I'm not sure."



Sevigny (right) with Paige Roy in *The Girl from Plainville*. Photograph: Steve Dietl/Hulu

First, though, in a role that could not be more different, Sevigny plays Lynn, the mother of Conrad Roy, a teenager who kills himself, in *The Girl from Plainville*. It is based on the real case of Michelle Carter (played by Elle Fanning in the drama), a 17-year-old who was convicted of involuntary

manslaughter after [encouraging Roy to kill himself](#) in an intense text relationship. She was released from prison in 2020, after serving less than a year. “I remember seeing pictures of the girl and automatically being like: ‘She’s guilty,’ so I’m as complicit as anybody else in vilifying young, beautiful girls,” says Sevigny. “I thought that was interesting, just having the time to really examine the case and look at it from all sides.”

She didn’t meet Lynn, who has since become a campaigner to get Massachusetts to criminalise coerced suicide and make it punishable by up to five years in prison. Sevigny wanted, she says, to “help raise awareness around the issues, destigmatise depression. Also, look at suicide and how it affects families and how far-reaching it is.” The five-month shoot, she says, “was a real exploration of grief and pain. Also, how [Lynn] kind of healed from that and eventually found some peace. It just felt like a very full arc, to really examine how this woman navigated her way through that.”

The Girl from Plainville doesn’t feel exploitative, but how does Sevigny view the appetite for true crime served up as entertainment? “Well, I think it’s case by case. Just look at the way people consume the news – I think there is a little bit of a car-crash culture thing happening. But people are always baffled by what humans are capable of. I think that’s why people keep going back to true crime – and life is stranger than fiction.”

A lot of Sevigny’s roles seem to tap into wider social issues, from *Kids* ([she played an HIV-positive teenager](#)) and *Boys Don’t Cry* (her Oscar-nominated supporting role, [playing the girlfriend of a transgender man](#)) early in her career to, more recently, Luca Guadagnino’s foray into television, *We Are Who We Are*, which explores teenage angst and edgy family dynamics. “I’m attracted to film-makers that want to examine what’s happening in the culture now,” she says.



With Rosario Dawson in *Kids*. Photograph: Prod.DB/Alamy

The Sevigny story goes like this: she was plucked from the streets of New York as a teenager, on one of her visits to the city from her home in Connecticut, by a magazine fashion editor who put her in a shoot. She interned at the magazine, got cast in a Sonic Youth video, then got a role on *Kids*, written for her by her then boyfriend, Harmony Korine. A 6,000-word [profile of her in the New Yorker](#) in 1994, written by the novelist Jay McInerney, compared [her to Edie Sedgwick](#); she reluctantly agreed to be the subject of the piece on the condition they got her a pink, latex Helmut Lang dress.

She seems weary of revisiting that time, but humours me. New York was thrilling then, she says – this “burgeoning scene was happening”. Sevigny worked at Liquid Sky, [the influential clothing and record store](#), which became a hangout. “I hate to use the word hipster, but it was the birth of this New York downtown thing. It was a specific 90s time and I had a lot of friends that were in fine art and fashion and movies and music. I felt like I was dipping my toes into all of them.”

Did it feel – with all this sudden attention – that she had the world at her feet? “No!” she says. “Kate Winslet had the world at her feet. I just aspired to be on the cover of the Face [magazine]; I wasn’t going to be in *Titanic*.

My world felt pretty niche and I was OK with that. Like, these are my people, this is where I belong. I wanted to be a character actor.”



With Harmony Korine in 1996. Photograph: Catherine McGann/Getty Images

That is why she did *Trees Lounge* next, she says of Steve Buscemi's 1996 dive-bar film. “It had all these great character actors in it – I was like: I want this to be my trajectory, I want people to see me as this.” Did she never want to go to Hollywood and become more mainstream? “I mean, now I do,” she says, laughing. “I tried for a while. There was a time when I was leaning into it and playing the game. I don’t know if I was pigeonholed as ‘indie’, or what it was, but I haven’t done a lot of studio pictures.” She adds, smiling: “Yet.”

Anyway, intense fame, she says, didn’t look much fun. In the late 90s, she dated Jarvis Cocker, the Pulp frontman. “He was one of the most famous men in England and I remember being out with him and people chasing us down the street,” says Sevigny. “I was like: wow, I never want this. I think that really informed some of my decisions, seeing what being a really public person entails. Then having to maintain at that level also poses its own challenges – I think that would be kind of stressful.”

Sevigny always seemed to have a clear idea about where she wanted to go, which she credits with reading something the director Werner Herzog said about building a career like a house – I paraphrase, but along the lines of something structurally sound, enduring and where you would feel comfortable living. For Sevigny, this meant embracing interesting work and directors: several times with Jim Jarmusch and Whit Stillman, for instance; Lars von Trier's *Dogville*; and even, you might say, the Vincent Gallo film *The Brown Bunny* (famous for a scene in which Sevigny performs unsimulated oral sex), which, [while hated by many critics](#), gave Sevigny a reputation as fearless.

Did she ever do anything just for the money? “I think I did some nude photos, where you didn’t see my face, for money,” she says, with a smile. “And maybe some Korean advertising.” She could have made other choices, she says, if she just wanted money.



Dogville. Photograph: Lions Gate/Allstar

There is something subversive and uncompromising about Sevigny. She never looked like a typical Hollywood star and she remained in New York, rather than moving to Los Angeles. Even when she was being called the coolest girl in the city, she didn't seem to buy into it entirely; she never seemed aloof. She has had a parallel career in fashion, as a muse to

designers such as Marc Jacobs and as a designer of her own collections. She has an experimental approach to dressing that was beloved by the cult magazines, less so by the gossip mags. “There were certain tabloids that targeted me for my style; I was the one that they made fun of,” she says, with a smile.

Perhaps this unconventional approach was cemented in childhood – she grew up in an affluent town in Connecticut, but her family were less well-off than average and she didn’t aspire to the things her classmates did. “I had different interests,” she says. “I was interested in the theatre, in art class, in music. I was more interested in the broader outside world and going to New York and seeing what was happening there.” Her older brother was a big influence. He was “into alternative lifestyle – skateboarding and punk rock and hip-hop – and I wanted to do whatever him and his cool girlfriend that wore Doc Martens and had purple hair were into”.

She knew she wanted to become an actor as a child, ever since her mother had taken her to see Annie on Broadway. When she was spotted later, it wasn’t as if she had been plucked from total obscurity; she had acted in commercials and modelled for Connecticut catalogues – “very regional style stuff”, she says, with a knowing look. (Even so, I can picture the young Sevigny making pastel slacks and knitwear look avant garde.) “I wasn’t that successful at it.”

She had been more successful, she says, at her summer theatre camp, where she was usually in a leading role. But her mother encouraged her to stop traipsing around New York for auditions when she was about 12. “When you’re older,” she remembers her mother saying, “you can see if you want to pursue it professionally again.” So, when Kids happened, in 1995, that was the moment. “It was like: I have this opportunity, I’m going to seriously consider how I strategise.” She says she could be “a little precious”; there were jobs she wishes she had taken, but didn’t, “because I didn’t think they were right for me. That has led me to where I am now, but that could mean [I’m] just overthinking everything.” She laughs at herself.



Sevigny walking the runway at the Simone Rocha show in London fashion week in February 2019. Photograph: Victor Virgile/Gamma-Rapho/Getty Images

A few years ago, it sounded as if Sevigny had become disillusioned with the way her career was going. “I think that actors are never really satisfied with their careers and maybe I was just a little more vocal about it, maybe in a grasp to be more interesting; I’m not sure,” she says. “I think I was frustrated in giving up control and always giving myself over to other people.” There had been a trend for more dramatic acting, whereas she wanted to do quieter, subtler work. “I’m always frustrated with lack of opportunities, but ask any actor that.” A self-aware smile. “It’s just the actors’ struggle.”

Sevigny turned to directing, which has “been very fulfilling”, she says. So far, she has made three short films – all female-focused – which are fantastical and dreamy, if also melancholy or nightmarish. In her first, which premiered in 2016, a young girl called Kitty metamorphosises into a cat; her third, *White Echo*, which was selected to compete at Cannes in 2019, is a deeply unsettling film about a group of female friends summoning a spirit.

Her dream, she says, is to direct a feature film, even if at the same time she worries: “Do I have enough passion? Is this the be-all and end-all for me?

For me, that has always been friends and family, and now I have a son and a husband. So I'm trying to work back to that passion, because I feel like, to be a film-maker, you really have to be hook, line and sinker."

Over her career, has she noticed a shift in the sort of opportunities that are available to women? "It feels like it, especially in TV, because when I first started off doing *Big Love* [[the HBO series about a Mormon family](#)], we rarely had a female director. So it feels like there's a push for that. There are more women in positions of power – producers and directors, showrunners. It feels like a lot of actresses are getting opportunities to [direct] features, and that's exciting."

Does it feel like the #MeToo movement has had a big impact? "I feel like there's a level of – I don't know if it's respect, but it did feel like men couldn't get away with as much any more. Thank God." Sevigny has said she has been propositioned by men in the industry, but would confidently reject them, while acknowledging that it might have been more difficult for other women to do the same. "I was just never put in a position where I felt like I had to speak out about something," she says. "Of course, you want to help other women tell their stories, and I want to be there and be supportive of them."

In 2020, during the lockdown in New York, Sevigny gave birth to her son; a couple of months earlier, she married her partner, a gallerist. Their son's birth was a strange period, she says – a life-changing moment, coinciding with the world having also changed. "Hard to differentiate. Just having this person around that you just ... the love; it's unbridled, it's insane. I'm so in love with him and luckily so in love with my husband, and luckily we've had a good go of it. I know, for some people, the first year can be hard." She worries about her son endlessly, she says with a laugh, "and I know that's just the beginning".

Her ambition isn't dimmed. She has been out pitching and developing ideas. "Directing, pursuing [projects]; I want to do that, but I also feel like the formative years are ... I mean, it's my child's life and I feel like he needs me right now. Just thinking about how I'm going to navigate that is also anxiety-inducing," she adds, smiling. But her career has been long – and the foundations are solid.

The Girl from Plainville premieres on Hulu in the US on 29 March. It is coming soon to Starzplay in the UK. In the UK and Ireland, the youth suicide charity [Papyrus](#) can be contacted on 0800 068 4141 or by emailing pat@papyrus-uk.org. [Samaritans](#) can be contacted on 116 123 or by emailing jo@samaritans.org or jo@samaritans.ie. In the US, the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) is at 800-273-8255, or chat for support. You can also text HOME to 741741 to connect with a crisis text line counsellor. In Australia, the crisis support service [Lifeline](#) is on 13 11 14. Other international helplines can be found at [befrienders.org](#)

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2022/mar/21/im-just-surprised-i-still-have-a-career-chloe-sevigny-on-hipsters-hollywood-fame-and-family>.

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

Advertisement

US edition

- [US edition](#)
- [UK edition](#)
- [Australian edition](#)
- [International edition](#)

[The Guardian - Back to home](#)

[Israel](#)

‘It’s not a problem any more’: Israel’s increasingly porous West Bank fence



A Palestinian man crosses the broken separating barrier next to the Palestinian village of Shuweika, West Bank. Photograph: Quique Kierszenbaum/The Guardian

Questions raised over point of barrier as Israel turns blind eye to many crossings for economic reasons



[Bethan McKernan](#) and Quique Kierszenbaum in Shuweika, West Bank

Mon 21 Mar 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 21 Mar 2022 06.02 EDT

It's 6am, and the espresso machine at an unusual new business enterprise is whirring.

Proprietor Mohammed set up his breakfast kiosk near the [West Bank](#) town of Shuweika three weeks ago, and so far trade is good: hundreds of people pass by every day on their walk to work, picking up bread, cucumbers and tomatoes as well as coffee and cigarettes.

Two years ago, Palestinians entering this 200-metre-wide part of the militarised "seam zone" between [Israel's](#) West Bank separation barrier and the 1949 armistice line would have been shot at by Israeli soldiers. They still patrol just a few metres away. But on a bright March morning, a steady stream of commuters were walking by Mohammed's new outfit and clambering through a nearby hole in the fencing, the majority on their way to work in illegal construction, cleaning and agriculture jobs in Israeli communities on the other side.



Mohammed, 30, prepares coffee in his kiosk next to the broken security fence. Photograph: Quique Kierszenbaum/The Guardian

“It’s not a problem any more,” the 30-year-old said. “I’m just happy to find a good job. For years I made money in more dangerous ways.”

“I can make \$100 a day working there,” said a young man with wavy hair who didn’t want to give his name as he was crossing illegally. “Of course I will go.”

Israel started work on the [contentious West Bank separation wall](#) 20 years ago to stem Palestinian terror attacks during the second intifada, but the reality of the multi-billion dollar project today is more fluid than it might seem.

[Map](#)

Despite the walls and fences, Palestinians have always managed to enter Israel. While there is no data, people in the West Bank have begun crossing [in increasing numbers over the last few years](#) in search of better-paid work. That used to entail playing a deadly cat-and-mouse game with the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) – but since the pandemic hit, the situation appears to have relaxed.

Dror Etkes documents illegal Israeli construction in the occupied Palestinian territories for his NGO [Kerem Navot](#) and spends most of his time roaming the West Bank in a beaten-up Chinese car. He estimates there are now hundreds of breaches in the barrier, which an unknown number of people use each day. The IDF might occasionally dig a new trench to stop vehicles, he said, but have not moved to fix any of the fences.

“The Israeli public was sold this wall as a necessary security measure. My understanding is there’s been a change of policy, and soldiers are now supposed to turn a blind eye to the Palestinians coming in,” he said.

“Israel knows it needs to relieve the economic pressure in the West Bank and it benefits from the cheaper labour. Which raises the question: if [the wall] is just an arbitrary construction, why is it here at all?”

To date, only around 65% of the barrier’s planned route has been completed: construction stalled long ago owing to a combination of internal politicking, legal battles and international criticism. The majority of the barrier which has been built so far is inside the West Bank, rather than in Israel or on the armistice line.



Palestinians cross the broken separating barrier between Baqa al-Gharbiya and Baqa al-Sharqia in the West Bank. Photograph: Quique

Kierszenbaum/The Guardian

To protect illegal Israeli settlements, some sections reach as deep as 13 miles (22km) into Palestinian territory, dividing communities and leaving farmers reliant on Israeli permits to access their own land. Much of the seam zone is abandoned, strewn with rubbish and used for fly-tipping.

In densely populated places like Jerusalem, the barrier takes the form of an eight-metre-high concrete wall topped with concertina wire and cameras. In more rural areas, however, it is often made up of military patrol roads sandwiched between parallel wire fences, sometimes supplemented with barbed wire, trenches and strips of sand for tracking footprints.

After meeting Mohammed, the Guardian visited five more points along a 22-mile (35km) stretch of the barrier cutting through the top left-hand corner of the West Bank. Holes had been cut in the fencing there to facilitate access to the Triangle, a cluster of majority-Arab-Israeli towns and villages abutting the Green Line.

All of the gaps were big enough for adults to pass through comfortably; incongruously, some were next to locked gates, or close to checkpoints and visible cameras. Some people said they had valid permits, but chose to use the breaches in the fence because it was quicker and easier than queuing at official terminals, where soldiers can question and search them.

In a statement, the IDF said: “Damaging the security fence to create passageways which allow unmonitored infiltration into Israeli territory is a security threat and a clear violation of the law.

“IDF soldiers are stationed across the security fence in accordance with the situational assessment. The troops use a variety of means in accordance with the rules of engagement.”

Neither the Israeli defence ministry, which is responsible for the maintenance of the separation barrier, nor the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (Cogat), which implements Israeli government policy in areas of the West Bank under its control, responded to the Guardian’s questions.

In the seam zone near Khirbat al-Aqaba, an elderly couple in an old Corolla waited to meet their son, who walked up from the other side to pick up bags of vegetables for the restaurant he works at legally. In the Arab town of Baqa, which was split in two after Israel's creation, a middle-aged woman dressed in her finest gingerly made her way through a hole in the fence and across a muddy stream bridged by wooden goods pallets to visit her sister, who lives on the Israeli side.

And near Umm al-Fahm, a rupture in the fence down the hill from what appeared to be an improvised checkpoint, controlled by a group of local men not responsible for the safety of Israeli citizens, was big enough for cars. Tyre tracks in the sand suggested it was being used for that purpose.

Very few people dare to cross when they can see an IDF patrol nearby, and there are still dangers. In May 2020, soldiers ambushed workers trying to cross near Faroun, [shooting eight people in the legs](#).



Palestinian women cross the broken separating barrier. Photograph: Quique Kierszenbaum/The Guardian

But the ease with which people are now using breaches in the fence – and the carefree attitude displayed by most – is a striking change. One elderly man trying to get from one side of Baqa to the other even argued back with

an IDF patrol unit. Rather than make an arrest, they told him to take his papers to the official checkpoint.

Up until [at least 2019](#), there were fewer gaps, and crossings were usually arranged by paid fixers: those entering Israel had to run through dangerous sections, climbing over walls, under razorwire and through drainage systems, all under the cover of darkness.

Unemployment in the West Bank has hovered at around 25% for several years, and wages are much lower than in Israel. Once they arrived, many workers remained in Israel for a week or longer, avoiding police or anyone who might report them, until they had earned enough to risk making the journey home again. Even working with no rights in [sometimes dangerous conditions](#), the risk was worth it.

The pandemic also curtailed the ability of Asian and eastern European service and construction workers to come to Israel, so Israeli businesses' appetite for cheaper Palestinian labour has increased despite the risk of raids, stop-work orders and fines for employers who are caught.

Such a large flow of people still poses an undeniable security challenge. Some of the illegal workers making the crossing wondered if Israeli surveillance technology is sophisticated enough to monitor persons of interest from afar, or whether some of the Palestinian vendors, makeshift car park attendants and taxi drivers who now service the breaches are informants for the Shin Bet, Israel's internal security service.

For now, most seem happy to take advantage of the economic opportunities the increasingly porous barrier has created. On a windy plateau above Zemer, a local council in Israel created from the merger of four Palestinian villages, Mohammed Bakir, his son and several legal West Bank employees were using bulldozers to level the earth near their house in the seam zone, hoping to cultivate the land.

After the [Gilboa prison break](#) last September, all the crossing terminals were closed, and his workers could not enter Israel for several days while the authorities hunted for the six escapees. The family know the status quo

might change and they may have to abandon the project, but believe it's still worth trying.

From the top of the muddy plain, white blossom from almond and hawthorn trees could be seen drifting onto the rubbish and litter next to the fence below. The barrier meandered to the left and right, a strange grey snake carving up the landscape into before and after.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/21/its-not-a-problem-any-more-israels-increasingly-porous-west-bank-fence>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

Advertisement

US edition

- [US edition](#)
- [UK edition](#)
- [Australian edition](#)
- [International edition](#)

[The Guardian - Back to home](#)

[Movies](#)

Blockbuster or bladderburster? Why movie intermissions must return – now!



Neverending stories ... (clockwise from top left) No Time to Die, The Batman, Avengers Endgame and The Hateful Eight. Composite: MGM/Universal/Nicola Dove; DC Entertainment/Warner Bros; Marvel/Disney;Guardian Design

From Bond to The Batman, films are nearing the leg-crossing, buttock-numbing three-hour mark. Bring back the interval, says our writer, and a golden era of cinema will follow

[Phil Hoad](#)

[@phlode](#)

Mon 21 Mar 2022 04.00 EDT

According to Robert Pattinson, the most important accessory on the new batsuit was not the batarang, the bat lasso or the bat grapple, but a Velcro flap that allowed him to pee when needed. No such easy escape, though, for audiences of [The Batman](#), who must display superhuman willpower and gird their loins for its 176-minute runtime. Given that it joins [No Time to Die](#) (163 minutes) and [Avengers Endgame](#) (181 minutes) in the ranks of recent blockbusters dicing with the bladder-busting three-hour limit, is it time we reinstated that staple of another era of maximalist cinema: the intermission?

It feels like a relic of a more civilised epoch. But, with more franchises than ever happy to take their sweet time, the intermission would be a welcome opportunity to hit the WC, as well as loosen the legs and buttocks and avail ourselves of refreshments, while musing with fellow cinemagoers on the semantics of grunge in The Batman. Elongated runtimes have become so common that many franchises, such as Avengers, [The Hobbit](#) and [It](#), started breaking up unified stories into multiple parts anyway – effectively enforcing months-long intermissions. So why not make it official and, once a film tops the 150-minute mark, give us all a break?

Old-style, sprawling epics parted their productions midway as surely as Charlton Heston did the Red Sea

However, the death of the intermission has actually been much exaggerated: it still survives in Iceland, Switzerland, Egypt, Turkey and, of course, India, where movies contain so many volcanic emotions that a break to let everyone cool off is practically a public health measure. They have made the occasional return in showcase screenings of latter-day Hollywood film, to

enhance the old-timey mood – as with Peter Jackson’s King Kong (187 minutes) or Quentin Tarantino’s [The Hateful Eight](#) (187 minutes) – or simply out of mercy in the case of the [Zack Snyder cut of Justice League](#) (242 minutes). But essentially, at some point, some Hollywood analyst decided that a 10-minute hiatus was incompatible with the “pack ’em in, six shows a day” production line of the modern multiplex.

Gandhi, in 1982, is often cited as the last major western film to feature an intermission. This would be fitting as this multi-Oscar-winner was a holdover – in a world leaning into the streamlined blockbuster machines ushered in by Spielberg, Lucas et al – from the old-style, sprawling epics that parted their productions midway as surely as Charlton Heston did the Red Sea.



‘Let’s all go to the lobby’ ... a Technicolor intermission message from 1957.
Photograph: Filmack Studios

Originally, intermissions were a legacy of theatre and opera, though in early cinema they had a technical justification: giving the projectionist time to change the very big reels. But in the 1950s and 1960s they became part of the deluxe theatrical experience the studios laid on for widescreen epics such as [The Ten Commandments](#), [Lawrence of Arabia](#) and the original [West Side Story](#), in an effort to entice viewers back from the young pretender, TV.

These behemoths were first wheeled out at “[roadshow](#)” screenings in major cities, often with the full trimmings: overtures, entr’actes and intermissions that allowed weary punters to hit the concession stalls and get a Coke to see them through another two hours of warring gangs, endless desert treks or Egyptian plagues.

But 21st-century cinema now faces its own existential threat: streaming. No one’s going to pretend that bringing back intermissions would suddenly reverse the post-pandemic malaise of movie theatres in the face of Netflix, Disney+ and others. However, especially compared with the degraded home viewing experience, interrupted by social media every 30 seconds, they might help bolster the status of cinema-going as a prestige event.

Over the last decade, it feels as if the movies have tried every gimmick – from 3D to Imax to immersive, Secret Cinema-type masquerades – to rejuvenate the night-out experience, but these all come at a premium. Intermissions could lend a sense of occasion and ceremony to today’s cold-eyed franchise lineup and subtly link back to a more genteel era of film-making. This would come at no extra cost – and indeed the extended pause would help boost the snack sales that already deliver the fattest profit margins.

They might even help blockbusters lift their game. It’s a regular complaint of the CGI era that story – frequently retro-fitted around VFX sequences – takes second place. Under the yoke of those long runtimes, a kind of digital fatigue often sets in, where you’re suddenly unable to distinguish one muddy monster smackdown from another. If intermissions were a regular feature, it might force studios to think more about structure again – to carefully modulate the rhythm of their screenplay around the pause, and see what cliffhanger, or other dramatic effect, they could spirit up.

Lawrence of Arabia, with Peter O’Toole and his Arab chums having the bit between their teeth, hits the intermission on a [chastening note](#) from Claude Rains: “He’s riding the whirlwind! Let’s hope that we’re not.” In [Seven Samurai](#), some villagers are beginning to think they can beat the bandits without all this extra help, but Takashi Shimura takes them to task right

before [half-time](#): “This is the nature of war: by protecting others, you save yourself.” This is the intermission working smartly: as an introspective inflection point, a minor fall before the major lift. With the [Snap](#), when Thanos seemingly irreversibly finger-clicks half the universe’s population out of existence, Marvel managed a true coup de théâtre to close Avengers: Infinity War – and what a marvellous intermission it would have made if Endgame had followed immediately. But that kind of poise feels like a rarity for their formulaic Lycra-fests.

In truth, though, the return of the intermissions seems about as likely as Batman smoking a bong. But maybe, just hypothetically, we can float a gentlemen’s agreement with Hollywood: if you’re going to insist on stretching out comic-book juvenilia to Tolstoy proportions, how about doing the decent thing and letting us take our time too?

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2022/mar/21/blockbuster-or-bladderburster-why-movie-intermissions-must-return-now>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

[India](#)

Darjeeling unlimited: new party vows to end region's strife

Hamro's leader promises new start for Indian hill station after years of strikes and insurgencies



A tea estate in Darjeeling, West Bengal. Photograph: Indranil Aditya/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

[Saptarshi Ray](#) in Kolkata

Mon 21 Mar 2022 01.45 EDT

India's romantic hill station Darjeeling has evoked images of beautiful tea-growing gardens but also, for those who follow its politics, of industrial strikes and violent insurgencies.

No more, says the leader of a new political party that swept to power in recent municipal polls, vowing to end years of agitation that have blighted

the region's main sources of income: tea and tourism.

Ajoy Edwards, whose four-month-old Hamro party won 18 out of 32 seats in the local elections, is the charismatic former leader of the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) who went into exile from the region for long periods due to his times as an armed activist, and now says he wants to make progress on historical issues but ultimately get back to business.

“We cannot keep doing what we have done for the past 35 years,” Edwards said. “Especially with strikes, as when we have long ones nothing really happens in the rest of Bengal yet our own people are driven into poverty.”

The scenic town at the foot of the eastern Himalayas is famous not just for the “champagne of teas” but as a hotbed of tension between ethnic Bengalis and Gorkhas – Indians of Nepali origin. Gorkha separatist groups want a wholly autonomous region, free from the West Bengal state government in Kolkata, and this is often manifested in strikes by agricultural workers. Naturally this affects tea production, which in turn ravages the local economy.

“Every time there is a revolution, things don’t go forward. We’re stuck. I mean the infrastructure is essentially still what the Britishers left us with,” Edwards said. “We are still drinking water from 100-year-old reservoirs and living in crumbling houses from that age. There’s a systemwide failure. We’ve just been putting screens on old windows for too long, without ever repairing the glass.”

Edwards formed the Hamro party (Our party, in Nepali) last November after becoming estranged from his GNLF colleagues, preferring an onus on social work and a more centrist approach to the relative tub-thumping nationalism of the past.

He narrowly missed out on winning the seat he stood for but he remains party chairman and is an adviser to the new municipal chair, and carries great influence.

His former comrades have been somewhat scathing of his new persona but he appears unruffled. “A separate state for our people is something we can never lose sight of,” he said. “That’s part of my vision and part of my party’s vision. Having a homeland for the Gorkha people is an emotional demand that will always stay with me – just nothing violent.”

In recent years tea production in Darjeeling has been plagued by industrial action. Strikes and protests that lasted almost a year in 2017 cost the Indian tea industry an estimated 2.5bn rupees (£25m).

While Darjeeling accounts for about 7% of India’s total tea output, its luxury price tag at five to six times that of ordinary strands means it accounts for a disproportionately large share of income. The largest importer is Russia, followed by Iran.

Edwards, whose family owns the picturesque Glenary’s bakery, which offers tea and cakes with breathtaking views from Darjeeling’s main drag, sees a chance to improve the wider economy by ending the region’s political turbulence and strikes.

“Tea production has become so overtly politicised, workers’ wages are dismal. They have remained frozen in time. To earn decent living wages has become a thing of the past,” he said.

“My own restaurant charges around 200 rupees for a pot of Darjeeling tea and it’s absurd that a daily tea worker can earn only around 180 rupees a day, picking the leaves for that pot. And all this means it is our women who end up doing the bulk of the tea garden work, as they can’t do alternative – and better-paying – labourer jobs so easily.”

He is also acutely aware of the negative effects on tourism. He said there was a regular intake of visitors, “but it’s never been done at a proper, professional level. We need to market not just the town but the hamlets around it.”

It remains to be seen whether he can deliver. Of his former comrades, he acknowledged rivalry remained. “We’ve been in a cycle of enmity both

internally and with outsiders. We're looking at ending that with proper diplomacy," he said.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/21/darjeeling-unlimited-new-party-vows-to-end-regions-strife>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

2022.03.21 - Opinion

- I grew up in a paranoid dictatorship. Isolating Russia won't bring Europe peace
- Policing in Scotland has been radically reformed – all UK forces can learn from us
- There's an easy way to help Ukraine without military escalation: cancel its foreign debt
- The Tories' bellicose posturing on Ukraine is dangerous – and unfair to us

[OpinionUkraine](#)

I grew up in a paranoid dictatorship. Isolating Russia won't bring Europe peace

[Lea Ypi](#)

At school, we practised sheltering in underground bunkers. Albania's history teaches that only dialogue and integration end the cycle of war



Illustration of a shelter in the basement of a monastery in Lviv, Ukraine by Svitlana Maidukova

Mon 21 Mar 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 21 Mar 2022 06.46 EDT

“Are the bunkers in Albania still working?” my 11-year-old asked on hearing the news that [Russia had invaded Ukraine](#). “Some,” I said. “Why?” “In case there is a war in Europe, and we need to find shelter,” he replied.

I was his age one of the last times we “practised war” at school. At that time, all the bunkers worked, not only some – indeed they were one of the few things to still “work” in communist [Albania](#). Once or twice a year an alarm would ring and we would rush out of our classrooms into the nearest shelter: a long, dark, underground tunnel that, legend had it, stretched all the way to the border with Yugoslavia – though nobody dared to venture more than a couple of hundred metres inside.

When the cold war was over, the [hundreds of thousands of bunkers](#) built to allegedly protect people from the threat of nuclear war acquired a variety of new uses: from toilets in the wild to habitats for bats, from underground cafes to secret sites for lovers. It was a powerful symbol that the conflict between what we in Albania called the “imperialist west” and the “revisionist east” was now consigned to the past.

When I was growing up, the perpetual threat of war was the condition for securing a perpetual peace at home: the kind of peace in which all dissent is suppressed and people have little choice but to comply. Over the course of the 20th century, my country progressively [cut ties with the rest of the world](#). The more isolated it became, the more paranoid its political elites grew, the tighter their grip became on those who dared to disagree.

This experience has been on my mind as I followed Russia’s invasion of Ukraine; I have become somewhat sceptical of the view that an [extensive range of sanctions](#), which cuts off Russians from the rest of the world, will serve to delegitimise the Kremlin in their eyes. It has been impossible to not think about our own “war practice” as I’ve watched the chilling images of innocent Ukrainian citizens crowded in [bunkers of the past](#), sheltering from bombs that must have seemed like an abstract, immaterial threat until they were not.

Like us, they are the chess pieces in a fatal game of great power politics. But only some will be fortunate enough to survive until the next round. For many, the end of hostilities will be akin to the kind of peace mentioned by the philosopher Immanuel Kant in *Toward Perpetual Peace*, one of the most famous anti-war texts of the European Enlightenment: the perpetual peace of the graveyard.

Written in 1795, at the height of the French revolutionary wars, Kant's essay was heavily influenced by the French author Charles-Irénée Castel, abbé de Saint-Pierre. In 1712, shortly before the treaty of Utrecht, which inaugurated the era of great power politics that is alas still very much with us, Saint-Pierre advocated the creation of a European union of states that would include [Russia](#). Both Saint-Pierre and Kant knew that a politics based on the balance of powers would never be able to produce a lasting peace. Future trade wars, civil wars and wars between states could hardly be avoided without the guarantee of a genuinely inclusive federation of states, where "the weakest would have enough security that the most powerful of the great powers would be unable to harm them".

The world might have looked very different if those projects had been pursued. Today, confronted by the realities of contemporary Europe, where Germany has decided to reverse a decades-long defence policy to ramp up its military spending, where Sweden and Finland contemplate accelerated accession to Nato, and where the prospect of nuclear war haunts even an 11-year-old born in London, they have a distinctively utopian ring. Where does one find hope?

One misleading way to think about hope is as an attitude that sits somewhere between a desire and belief: a desire for a certain outcome and a belief that the outcome will be favourable. In that sense, to be hopeful means to observe the world and find evidence that the course of events supports a generally optimistic outlook. But when confronted with the brutality and destruction of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, it is difficult not to conclude, as Tolstoy does in War and Peace, that "the higher the human intellect goes in discovering more and more purposes, the more obvious it becomes that the ultimate purpose is beyond comprehension". As we all struggle and fail to read the mind and purposes of Vladimir Putin, fear replaces rationality, [the Leviathan](#) unleashes its power, and all hope seems lost.

But there is a different perspective from which to think about hope. Hope is needed most exactly when the world looks hopeless. For Kant, hope is not something you find in the world, it is a categorical imperative. We can retreat from each other or we can envisage political projects that are genuinely inclusive: a departure from the status quo, from the world of

spheres of influence and boundaries that protect existing military and economic interests. Which of these attitudes prevails at any given point depends on the expectations we have for each other, on whether we see one another as targets to destroy or fellow humans with whom to engage.

The European project of a cosmopolitan federation of states, including Russia, is discussed in the opening pages of War and Peace. “Perpetual peace is possible,” Tolstoy’s Pierre Bezukhov says, “but not by a balance of political power.” Tolstoy teaches us that even in the midst of fatal conflict, some confidence in the humanity of the enemy must remain. When hostilities degenerate into a war of extermination, Kant argues, all justice is destroyed and perpetual peace turns into “the vast burial ground of the human race”. In this world, no bunkers can be of any help. The greater the terror of war, the more pressing the moral duty to hope.

- Lea Ypi is the author of Free: Coming of Age at the End of History, and is a professor in political theory at the London School of Economics
-

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/21/dictatorship-russia-europe-peace-albania>

OpinionPolice

Policing in Scotland has been radically reformed – all UK forces can learn from us

[Iain Livingstone](#)

There is still work to do, but structural improvements mean the people of Scotland are now safer and better served by the police

- Iain Livingstone is chief constable of Police Scotland



‘The climate change summit demonstrated our core duty and responsibility to enable the public to make their voices heard.’ Photograph: Andy Buchanan/AFP/Getty Images

Mon 21 Mar 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 21 Mar 2022 02.03 EDT

Our police services across the UK are under intense scrutiny. The onus is on us to nurture trust and legitimacy by demonstrating no tolerance for misogyny, racism and discrimination within policing and across society. Equally, ensuring an effective and professional policing response for victims and communities is a prerequisite for public confidence.

Two recent reports from [Sir Michael Barber](#) and [Sir Tom Winsor](#) both called for structural, cultural and operational reform of policing in England and Wales, as referred to in last week's [Guardian editorial](#).

But when discussing policing reform in Britain, it is important to consider the experiences of Police [Scotland](#). Nine years ago, 10 policing organisations in Scotland merged into a single national police service of about 23,000 people, the second largest in the UK, serving a third of Britain's land mass and communities in villages, towns, islands and cities.

Establishing a reformed service has been enormously challenging and we did not get everything right. However, much progress has been made. Under our structure, we have strengthened operational competence and provided direct access to all policing capabilities for every citizen.

More than 520 murders and homicides have been committed in Scotland since 2013. Only two are currently unsolved. Our safety and security operation for last November's Cop26 resulted in no significant violence, disorder or injury and relatively few arrests. The climate change summit, along with our approach to policing during the pandemic, demonstrated our core duty and responsibility to enable the public to make their voices heard – and independent reviewing has largely concluded [Police](#) Scotland did so in line with our commitment to put human rights at the heart of all we do.

Last month, I announced Police Scotland will become the first service in the world to train and equip all operational officers with Naloxone, a life-saving overdose [first aid nasal-spray](#), on a national basis, reflecting our broad mission to improve the safety and wellbeing of communities as enshrined in the law establishing Police Scotland.

Tests remain: operational failings, or when we don't live up to our values, are rightly subject to critical review and require persistent leadership, focus and action. We must face up to the cultural challenges of UK policing as a whole, of other sectors and organisations, and of wider society. That's been underlined by reports including Dame Elish Angiolini's [review of police complaints](#) and individual cases such as [Rhona Malone's employment tribunal](#), describing unacceptable behaviours.

There is a moral imperative and operational necessity for policing to lead change to improve the experiences of all our communities, including our own officers and staff. Words and good intent are not enough. There must be action; practical, firm, progressive, visible action.

Structural simplicity and stability can help drive progress: our response to serious offending has been transformed under reform but we continue to listen so we can do better, our resolve to tackle violence against women and girls being a clear example. Last year, I was grateful to meet survivors to hear directly about their experiences of the criminal justice system. The voices and perspectives of survivors and groups such as Rape Crisis Scotland are vital and help us to improve our response to rape and sexual offending.

Every year since reform we have returned more than [f200m to the public purse](#) while providing better, more efficient policing. This remains an achievement and a challenge – especially given that serving increasingly complex community needs requires significant investment.

Digitally enabled offending such as online child sexual abuse and fraud continue to grow at a very high rate, underlining that online policing is frontline policing. We must build the workforce and tools to keep people safe in public, private and virtual spaces.

It is wrong to view community policing and specialist capability as competing imperatives – they complement each other and both are essential to build public confidence. Confidence to come forward. Confidence you will be treated fairly, with compassion and respect. Confidence our response will be professional and thorough.

Reform has enabled clearer communication, leadership and accountability – key when driving change. Last October, our [That Guy](#) public awareness campaign asked men to challenge their own and each other's behaviours and attitudes towards women. This was an important message for Scottish society, including for us in policing – as individuals and as a service. A verification scheme, established to reassure women approached by lone officers, also reflected the onus on policing to accept responsibility for addressing public concerns.

Policing in Scotland is realistic about the challenges ahead but confident in the progress made and optimistic we can build on it. I am encouraged by the consistently strong levels of public confidence reported in our own research, and by the recent Scottish government household survey which found [87% of respondents](#) trusted the police.

The key assessment I apply is whether our communities and people are safer and better served now than they would have been had reform not taken place - not only for the threats of today but those of tomorrow. The answer is yes. As we continue our own development, our offer is to share the insight and value that Scotland's hard-earned lessons can provide to improve policing for communities across the UK.

- Iain Livingstone is chief constable of Police Scotland
-

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/21/policing-scotland-radically-reformed-all-uk-forces-learn>

OpinionUkraine

There's an easy way to help Ukraine without military escalation: cancel its foreign debt

[Owen Jones](#)



A country battered and bruised by Russia's invading forces needs space to breathe – not demands from hedge funds



‘Even before Vladimir Putin started bombing apartment blocks and maternity hospitals, Ukraine was Europe’s poorest country.’ Photograph: Maxym Marusenko/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

Mon 21 Mar 2022 04.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 22 Mar 2022 01.20 EDT

A bloodied man empties his wallet to his creditor while being mercilessly attacked by an unprovoked assailant. This is the plight of Ukraine, which recently made a scheduled interest payment to private lenders as tanks rolled over its land and missiles struck its cities. Even before Vladimir Putin started bombing apartment blocks and maternity hospitals, Ukraine was [Europe's poorest country](#) as measured by GDP per capita – significantly [poorer than Albania](#). Yet this war-ravaged country is saddled with unsustainable debt – and as the piles of rubble grow, so do the repayments. That’s debt for Ukraine, but profits for western hedge funds. War, for some, is the ultimate money-spinner.

Since Russia annexed Crimea in 2014 – triggering a conflict in the east that had claimed thousands of lives before the current invasion – Ukraine has been forced to borrow \$61bn (£46bn) from external lenders, according to calculations by the Jubilee Debt Campaign; a small sliver has been paid off, but what remains represents about a third of the country’s total economy. Ukraine was due to cough up \$7.3bn this year alone – more than its [annual education budget](#). For a rich country blessed with peace, that would be

manageable, but Ukrainians are [poorer today](#) than when the Soviet Union collapsed three decades ago. At least \$100bn worth of damage has already been inflicted to infrastructure – from roads to bridges, hospitals to schools – and, as you read this, that figure [only mounts](#). Yet almost all of the financial assistance being given to Ukraine is in the form of loans. Precious funds will be diverted from rebuilding a shattered country, instead filling the coffers of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and private bondholders.

Putin's barbaric siege of Mariupol underlines just how urgent debt cancellation is. While the Russian army seeks to starve and bomb it into submission, the city increasingly suffers the fate of Grozny during the second Chechen war: razed to the ground, piece by piece. It is macabre but necessary to state that Mariupol's present state may well be the future of other Ukrainian cities. Each day, [billions are added](#) to Ukraine's reconstruction bill: it would be pure cruelty to expect this to be repaid as debt.

That's why Ukrainian civil society organisations have [launched a petition](#) demanding Ukraine's debt is cancelled. They note, too, that much of the supposed assistance given to the country has been accompanied by strict conditions: the IMF calls it "economic restructuring", but it's more honestly described as the imposition of free-market dogma, resulting, for instance, in a [650% surge](#) in household gas prices since 2014. "Previous governments had two options: either to fairly tax the fat cats and bring them out of the shadows, or to borrow from the IMF and others," Ukrainian economist Oleksandr Kravchuk told me. "They chose the latter."

The Jubilee Debt Campaign has taken up this demand and begun to lobby MPs in Britain. Like millions of us, executive director Heidi Chow had that gnawing, helpless sense of "we've got to do something". For some, that manifested itself in the demand for a no-fly zone. But in practice, that could lead to a direct confrontation with the Russian military, which could in turn easily escalate into nuclear war. In contrast, this is a tangible and hugely impactful proposal with no risk of military escalation.

So why hasn't this commonsense demand been taken up by the powerful? In part, perhaps, it's because Ukraine's own government hasn't officially called for it, although some [high-ranking officials have](#). "They were quite keen before the war to pay debts and push forward their standing in Europe and the world," suggests Chow. Applying for any form of debt relief is a complicated and drawn-out process. Any fears that their ability to borrow and their global reputation may be damaged clearly need alleviating.

Yet the grisly fact is that as yet more loans are granted – even though now without conditions – vast profits are to be made. Ukrainian bonds are trading at about 25 cents on a dollar, and so if repayments continue, hedge funds and banks are set to make profits of more than 300%. That the profit margins of the already obscenely rich are being inflated by the bloody slaughter of civilians should surely be a cause of universal revulsion – and sufficient impetus to action.

But if the IMF and World Bank cancel Ukraine's debt, critics may ask, doesn't that mean less money in the pot to lend to other poorer countries? But there's a straightforward solution: richer countries, like our own, should contribute more to make up the shortfall. There is a precedent of sorts – the G20's debt service suspension initiative suspended or cancelled nearly \$11bn of poorer countries' external debt because of Covid-19. If a pandemic is reason enough to write off debt, surely a war of aggression is too.

When this all ends – hopefully in failure for Putin – then Ukraine will need a modern-day Marshall plan, made up of grants, not a reconstruction financed by loans. In terms of the current moment, as the Jubilee Debt Campaign suggests, there should be a mechanism to automatically suspend debt repayments for countries suffering severe external shocks. Ukraine is in the midst of existential crisis – as the Ukrainian social scientist Volodymyr Ishchenko told me: "Personally, it feels like the country in which I was born may simply disappear." A country battered and bruised by war needs space to breathe. That's in our power: cancel the debt.

- Owen Jones is a Guardian columnist

This article was amended on 21 March 2022. Due to an editing error, an earlier version wrongly ascribed a remark about no-fly zones to Heidi Chow.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/21/help-ukraine-without-military-escalation-cancel-foreign-debt-russia>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

[OpinionUkraine](#)

The Tories' bellicose posturing on Ukraine is dangerous – and unfair to us

[John Harris](#)



Tough talk from Putin seems to trigger a misplaced machismo from those who should know better

01:30

Boris Johnson likens Ukrainians' fight to British people voting for Brexit – video

Sun 20 Mar 2022 08.19 EDT Last modified on Mon 21 Mar 2022 01.24 EDT

There is a fascinating tension in the British attitude to war and military matters. When he wrote about [England in 1941](#), George Orwell said his home country was defined by the “gentleness” of its civilisation, and such a “hatred of war and militarism” that flag-waving and patriotic boasting were always the preserve of a small minority. Events over the past 40 or so years

have perhaps proved him wrong: from time to time, a widely shared jingoism has been brought to the surface of our national life, focused either on actual conflict – as happened when Britain [fought for the Falkland Islands](#) – or some hare-brained proxy for it, such as Brexit. But there is something about Orwell’s portrayal of people with an innate distaste for bellicose posturing that still rings true, across all the countries of the United Kingdom.

Among certain politicians, by contrast, there is far too little of that kind of thinking. Over the past three weeks, the unimaginable awfulness of what has happened in Ukraine and the fact that Vladimir Putin’s invasion is such a matter of moral clarity has encouraged a lot of rhetoric and posturing that has been shrill, banal and full of a misplaced machismo. The war, [says one Tory MP](#), is Boris Johnson’s “Falklands moment”. The vocal Conservative backbencher Tobias Ellwood – a former soldier in the Royal Green Jackets, and now an active reservist – [insists](#) that the west’s response shows “we’ve lost our appetite, we’ve lost our confidence to stand up: to stand tall”. And while he and other Tory MPs – including zealous believers in Britain breaking from the EU, suddenly holding forth about the urgent need for international unity – have been making [sense-defying demands](#) for Nato to impose a no-fly zone, some of the cabinet have come out with their own very unsettling pronouncements, seemingly thinking that if Putin talks tough, they should talk tougher. When Sajid Javid was asked about the recent Russian attack on a Ukrainian military base only about 10 miles from the country’s border with Poland, we saw the strange spectacle of the health secretary [apparently embracing](#) the prospect of nuclear war: “Let’s be very clear ... if a single Russian toecap steps into Nato territory, there will be war with Nato.”

With the chancellor Rishi Sunak’s spring statement arriving on Wednesday, a familiar sound is getting louder: Conservatives demanding more money for the military, even though the UK [currently spends](#) the fifth-largest annual sum in the world (after the US, China, India and Russia). For well over a decade now, most Tories have been united in the belief that just about every public service is best cut to the bone and subjected to [endless lectures](#) about inefficiency. But defence is suddenly a glaring exception: Labour may have

[credibly identified](#) £13bn of departmental waste since 2010, but that seems to be no barrier to calls for a [spending rise](#) of about 25%.

If you want a flavour of the thinking at work, a good place to start is a [recent piece](#) in the Sunday Telegraph by the former Brexit minister David Frost. He reckons that “western muscle memory is returning and we are getting back to the principles that helped us to win the cold war”. He says: “We are going to have to spend more on defence and that will mean tough choices.” We all know what those are likely to be: the price of our supposedly central role in a reshaped world may well be paid in social care, education, children’s services and all the rest.

Though he would presumably express opposition to cuts elsewhere, Keir Starmer has [joined in the calls](#) for more military cash, which snugly fits the “I’m not Jeremy Corbyn” narrative of his leadership. Given Starmer’s apparent determination to follow the example set by his New Labour forebears, and Tony Blair’s recent offer to help his old party with policy advice, we should be listening hard to what the latter has to say. Last week, [he published an essay](#) about the Ukraine crisis. Its most sobering passage ran thus: “When Putin is threatening Nato and stoking fear of nuclear conflict, there is something incongruous about our repeated assurance to him that we will not react with force.” Naturally enough, Blair also wants more money for the armed forces. “We are awake,” he says. “Now we must act.” This the same register he used [at the start of the “war on terror”](#), when he talked about shaken kaleidoscopes and the need to “reorder this world around us”. Hearing it again is not exactly reassuring.

As is usually the case, Boris Johnson’s tone swings between the serious and utterly crass. At this weekend’s Tory spring conference, he and his colleagues parroted the familiar argument that the war demands an end to “woke” ideas and criticisms of British history (which actually sounds like a milquetoast version of Putinism), and he made that grotesque comparison of Ukrainians to Brexit voters. When caught in a more sensible mood, he has also counselled a measure of caution and level-headedness. “It’s very important that we don’t get locked into any kind of logic of direct conflict between the west and Russia because that’s how Putin wants to portray it … as a fight between him and Nato,” he told the Economist last week. “It isn’t. This is about the Ukrainian people and their right to defend themselves.”

This line [was repeated on Sunday](#). But around him, there still swirl very dangerous currents.

Back in the 1980s, as Ronald Reagan speculated about a [limited nuclear war in Europe](#) and we were warned about the prospect of an accidental nuclear exchange, I grew up with a cold sense of fear. Now a new generation has to face not just those same anxieties, but the existential threat of the climate emergency and the prospect of regular global pandemics. Not surprisingly, there is a growing crisis in [childhood mental health](#): a sign not just of failing public services, but arguably of a system of power and politics that does not ease such visceral fears, instead endlessly inflaming them.

In a situation as fragile as this, belligerent talk can have terrifying consequences. It also tends to highlight the way Westminster's armchair generals neglect their duty of care to their own citizens. I am now having conversations with my 12-year-old daughter about the prospect of nuclear annihilation. I tell her it'll be all right, but her – and my – fears are hardly helped by the reckless words we sporadically hear from some of those supposedly in charge.

Yes, the world has clearly changed. Even if liberal values are always damaged and compromised by people in power, that does not mean that they are not still the best hope we have, something Putin's passage into something [close to fascism](#) makes plain. But those same values – not to mention the delicate stuff of geopolitics and diplomacy – demand nuance and calm. Moreover, there is one thing we overlook at our peril: that however much we spend on our military, our social fabric needs to be resilient and secure enough to cope with a new reality of constant shocks and disruptions, and at the moment it is anything but. In this dreadful moment, these seem to be things in danger of being forgotten. I worry about that. I think we all should.

- John Harris is a Guardian columnist. To listen to John's podcast Politics Weekly UK, search "Politics Weekly UK" on Apple, Spotify, Acast or wherever you get your podcasts. New episodes every Thursday
-

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/20/tories-belligerent-posturing-ukraine-dangerous-putin>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

2022.03.21 - Around the world

- [South China Sea China has fully militarised three islands, US admiral says](#)
- [Live Business:: oil rises as EU mulls Russian ban; UK chancellor hints at fuel duty cut](#)
- [Kyiv Mother seriously wounded while shielding baby from missile strike](#)
- [Volodymyr Zelenskiy President tells Israel's Knesset that Russia envisages 'final solution' for Ukraine](#)
- [Germany Gas deal with Qatar agreed to help end dependency on Russia](#)

South China Sea

China has fully militarized three islands in South China Sea, US admiral says

John C Aquilino says Beijing is flexing its military muscle by arming isles with fighter jets, anti-ship systems and other military facilities



Chinese structures and buildings at the man-made island on Mischief Reef at the Spratlys group of islands in the South China Sea. China has fully militarized at least three of several islands it built in the disputed region.
Photograph: Aaron Favila/AP

Associated Press

Sun 20 Mar 2022 21.47 EDT Last modified on Mon 21 Mar 2022 00.52 EDT

China has fully militarized at least three of several islands it built in the disputed [South China Sea](#), arming them with anti-ship and anti-aircraft missile systems, laser and jamming equipment and fighter jets in an increasingly aggressive move that threatens all nations operating nearby, a top US military commander said Sunday.

US Indo-Pacific commander Admiral John C Aquilino said the hostile actions were in stark contrast to the Chinese president Xi Jinping's past assurances that Beijing would not transform the artificial islands in contested waters into military bases. The efforts were part of China's flexing its military muscle, he said.

"Over the past 20 years we've witnessed the largest military buildup since world war two by the PRC," Aquilino told the Associated Press in an interview, using the initials of China's formal name. "They have advanced all their capabilities and that buildup of weaponization is destabilizing to the region."

There were no immediate comments from Chinese officials. Beijing maintains its military profile is purely defensive, arranged to protect what it says are its sovereign rights. But after years of increased military spending, China now boasts the world's second-largest defense budget after the US and is rapidly modernizing its force with weapons systems including the J-20 stealth fighter, hypersonic missiles and two aircraft carriers, with a third under construction.

Aquilino spoke with the Associated Press onboard a US navy reconnaissance aircraft that flew near Chinese-held outposts in the South China Sea's Spratly archipelago, one of the most hotly contested regions in the world. During the patrol, the P-8A Poseidon plane was repeatedly warned by Chinese callers that it illegally entered what they said was China's territory and ordered the plane to move away.

Spratly islands

"China has sovereignty over the Spratly islands, as well as surrounding maritime areas. Stay away immediately to avoid misjudgment," one of the stern radio messages said in a veiled threat.

But the US navy plane dismissed the multiple warnings and pressed on defiantly with its reconnaissance in brief but tense moments witnessed by two AP journalists invited onboard. "I am a sovereign immune United States

naval aircraft conducting lawful military activities beyond the national airspace of any coastal state,” a US pilot radioed back to the Chinese.

“Exercising these rights is guaranteed by international law and I am operating with due regard to the rights and duties of all states,” he said.

Navy commanding officer Joel Martinez, who led the P-8A Poseidon’s crew, said there had been an incident in which a Chinese jet flew close to a US aircraft in a dangerous manoeuvre in the disputed region. The US flight crew reminded the Chinese to comply with aviation safety regulations, he said.

As the P-8A Poseidon flew near the Chinese-occupied reefs, some appeared to house multi-story buildings, warehouses, hangars, seaports, runways and radars. Near Fiery Cross, more than 40 vessels could be seen apparently anchored.

Aquilino said the construction of missile arsenals, aircraft hangars, radar systems and other military facilities on Mischief Reef, Subi Reef and Fiery Cross appeared to have been completed but it remained to be seen if China would pursue the construction of military infrastructure in other areas.

“The function of those islands is to expand the offensive capability of the PRC beyond their continental shores,” he said. “They can fly fighters, bombers plus all those offensive capabilities of missile systems.”



Admiral John C Aquilino (left) commander of the US Indo-Pacific Command, looks at videos of Chinese structures and buildings on board a US P-8A Poseidon reconnaissance plane flying in the South China Sea on Sunday. Photograph: Aaron Favila/AP

He said any military and civilian plane flying over the disputed waterway could easily get within range of the Chinese islands' missile system.

"So that's the threat that exists, that's why it's so concerning for the militarization of these islands," he said. "They threaten all nations who operate in the vicinity and all the international sea and airspace."

China sought to shore up its vast territorial claims over virtually the entire South China Sea by building island bases on coral atolls nearly a decade ago. The US responded by sending its warships through the region in what it calls freedom of operation missions. The US has no claims itself but has deployed navy ships and aircraft for decades to patrol and promote free navigation in international waterway and airspace.

China routinely objects to any action by the [US military](#) in the region. The other parties – the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan and Brunei – claim all or part of the sea, through which approximately \$5tn in goods are shipped every year.

Despite China's aggression, the long-simmering territorial conflicts should only be resolved peacefully, Aquilino said, and cited the Philippine government's successful move to bring its disputes with China to international arbitration in 2013 as a good template.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/21/china-has-fully-militarized-three-islands-in-south-china-sea-us-admiral-says>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

Business live

Business

Oil rises as EU mulls Russian ban; UK chancellor hints at fuel duty cut – as it happened

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2022/mar/21/oil-price-rises-ukraine-russia-eu-stock-exchange-shares-live>

Ukraine

Ukrainian mother seriously wounded while shielding baby from missile strike

Olga recalls horror of seeing blood covering her six-week-old daughter after shrapnel blasts in Okhmatdyt Children's hospital in Kyiv

- [Russia-Ukraine war – latest updates](#)

01:55

Ukrainian mother recalls the horror of protecting her baby from a missile strike – video

Reuters

Sun 20 Mar 2022 21.27 EDT Last modified on Tue 22 Mar 2022 01.11 EDT

Olga, a 27-year-old Ukrainian woman seriously wounded while sheltering her baby from shrapnel blasts in Kyiv, recalled the shock as she saw blood covering her child after a missile strike that shattered glass across the room.

“I was wounded in the head, and blood started flowing. And it all flowed on the baby,” said Olga, sitting on a bed at the Okhmatdyt Children’s hospital where she was being treated.

“I couldn’t understand, I thought it was her blood.”

Photographs of Olga, her head bandaged and her upper body covered in cuts as she holds her baby, Victoria, have featured widely on social media, in an image encapsulating the heavy toll being paid by civilians in Russia’s invasion of [Ukraine](#).

As Victoria's father Dmytro took the girl, Olga said she began screaming that her daughter had been cut.

"Olga, it's your blood, it's not hers," she recalls Dmytro responding.



Olga holds her baby Victoria. Photograph: Okhmatdyt Childrens Hospital/Reuters

Ukrainian authorities say at least 60 civilians have been killed in Kyiv since [Russia](#) launched what it calls a "special military operation" on 24 February several in missile strikes on residential buildings.

Olga, who did not share her family name, said she had woken up to feed the six-week-old baby and had already covered her with a blanket to keep her warm when the missile strike occurred.

"And that's what kept the baby alive. I just got her covered in time. And then Dmytro jumped up and covered us, too."

Olga is being treated for multiple cuts to the head and body but the baby was unharmed apart from a scratch and some bruises.

"There's nothing left for us to do but to stay positive, just to believe that it was the worst, the most horrible thing that could have happened in our

lives," Dmytro, who was woken by the sound of shattering glass, added.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/21/ukrainian-mother-seriously-wounded-while-shielding-baby-from-missile-strike>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

Ukraine

Zelenskiy tells Knesset Russia envisages a ‘final solution’ for Ukraine

President says Vladimir Putin intends to ‘destroy our people’ and that Israel will have to live with its choice not to take sides

- [Russia-Ukraine war: latest updates](#)
- [What we know on day 25 of the invasion](#)



A mother embraces her son, who escaped the besieged city of Mariupol, on his arrival at Lviv train station in western Ukraine on Sunday. Photograph: Bernat Armangué/AP

[Daniel Boffey](#)

Sun 20 Mar 2022 14.21 EDTFirst published on Sun 20 Mar 2022 12.17 EDT

Volodymyr Zelenskiy drew links between Vladimir Putin’s “final solution” for Ukraine and the Nazi extermination of the Jews as he challenged Israel

over its failure to impose sanctions on Russia in an uncompromising address to the Knesset.

Speaking via video link, Ukraine's president warned that indifference cost lives and that there could be no mediating between good and evil, as he challenged Israel over both the lack of sanctions and the failure to come to Ukraine's aid with weapons.

Warning Israelis that they would have to live with their choices, Zelenskiy, who is Jewish, said Russia's president was waging an "all-out war, illegitimate, intended to destroy our people, our country, our cities, our culture and our children. Everything that makes Ukrainians Ukrainian".

"The Russians use the terminology of the Nazi party, want to destroy everything," he said. "The Nazis called this 'the final solution' to the Jewish question. And now ... in Moscow ... they're using those words, 'the final solution'. But now it's directed against us and the Ukrainian question."

01:28

Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy compares Russian invasion to Nazi Germany – video

Israel has condemned the invasion of Ukraine, but has not followed the west in imposing sanctions on Moscow. Under Israeli law, it can only do so to a state formally designated as an enemy. Israel also has an understanding with the Kremlin that allows Israeli forces to strike at Iranian arms shipments to Hezbollah in Lebanon or other Iranian-backed militia in Syria, where Russia has held up Bashar al-Assad's regime.

Israel's prime minister Naftali Bennett has instead sought to position his government as a mediator in the ongoing but so far fruitless peace negotiations.

Zelenskiy went on: "Everybody knows that your missile defence systems are the best and that you can definitely help our people, save the lives of Ukrainians, of Ukrainian Jews.

“We can ask why we can’t receive weapons from you, why Israel has not imposed powerful sanctions on Russia or is not putting pressure on Russian business. Either way, the choice is yours to make, brothers and sisters, and you must then live with your answer, the people of Israel.

“We are turning to you and asking whether it is better to provide help or mediation without choosing a side. I will let you decide the answer to the question, but I do want to point out that indifference kills.”

While there are significant doubts in the west about the peace talks, Turkey’s foreign minister, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, claimed that agreement on the terms of a deal was “close”. The Turkish government has also sought to act as a “mediator and facilitator”. Çavuşoğlu said there was “momentum” behind the negotiations.

Kyiv was said to be open to changing its constitution to abandon aspirations to join Nato, but wants Turkey, Germany and the five permanent members of the UN security council to act as guarantors of any deal.

Çavuşoğlu, who visited Russia and Ukraine this week to meet his counterparts, said: “Of course, it is not an easy thing to come to terms with while the war is going on, while civilians are killed, but we would like to say that momentum is still gained ... We see that the parties are close to an agreement.”

map

The UN’s human rights office said on Sunday that at least 902 civilians had been killed and 1,459 injured as of midnight on 19 March, with the real toll likely to be much higher.

Most of the casualties were from explosive weapons such as heavy artillery shells and multiple-launch rocket systems, and missile and air strikes, the OHCHR said. It has not been able to receive or verify casualty reports from several badly hit cities including Mariupol.

Ukraine’s government claims that 112 children are among the dead.

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, said 10 million people – about a quarter of Ukraine’s population – had now fled their homes, with nearly 3.4 million of the total having gone to neighbouring countries, mostly via the Polish border.

Speaking on Sunday, the British chancellor, Rishi Sunak, said it was “encouraging” that the talks were continuing but that the west needed to keep a “degree of scepticism”.

However, in an interview with CNN, Zelenskiy said that despite the doubts, he would continue to try to find a compromise with the Kremlin. He said: “I’m ready for negotiations. I was ready for the last two years. And without negotiations we cannot end this war.

“All the people who think that this dialogue is shallow, and that it is not going to resolve anything, they just don’t understand that this is very valuable. If there is just 1% chance for us to stop this war, we need to take this chance, we need to do that.

“But if these attempts fail, that would mean that this is a third world war.”

An official in Zelenskiy’s office told the Associated Press that the main subject discussed between the two sides last week was whether Russian troops would remain in the self-proclaimed republics in Luhansk and Donetsk.

Olha Stefanishyna, Ukraine’s deputy prime minister for European and Euro-Atlantic integration, told Sky News that redrawing Ukraine’s borders is “absolutely not” being considered by Kyiv, a sign of the major obstacles remaining in the way of a deal.

She said: “Ukrainian territory is a territory which has been fixed [since] 1991. That is not an option for discussion.”

In an interview with the Hürriyet newspaper, İbrahim Kalin, a spokesman for Turkey’s president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, said six points were the focus of the talks. They are Ukraine’s neutrality, disarmament and security guarantees, the so-called “de-Nazification” of the country, removal of

obstacles on the use of the Russian language in Ukraine, the status of the breakaway Donbas region, and Crimea, which was illegally annexed by Russia in 2014.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/20/ukraine-russia-peace-deal-close-says-turkey-despite-western-scepticism>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

Germany

Germany agrees gas deal with Qatar to help end dependency on Russia

Long-term contract will not immediately stop flow of money to Russia, for which German ministers have been criticised

- [Russia-Ukraine war: latest updates](#)



The German economy minister, Robert Habeck, with the emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, in Doha on Sunday. Photograph: Untitled/AP

[Patrick Wintour](#) Diplomatic editor

Sun 20 Mar 2022 13.39 EDT Last modified on Mon 21 Mar 2022 01.14 EDT

Germany has agreed a contract with Qatar for the supply of liquefied natural gas (LNG) that will help the European country wean itself off its dependency on Russian energy.

But the contract is a long-term solution and will do little to slow the current flow of European money into Russian coffers, estimated to be worth [\\$285m \(£217m\) a day for oil alone.](#)

Germany's economy minister, Robert Habeck, announced the deal after discussions in Doha, where he was accompanied by German business leaders. "It is great that I can say it was firmly agreed to enter into a long-term energy partnership – a cooperation," Habeck said. "The companies that are now involved in this journey will enter into contract negotiations with the Qatari side." He gave no detailed figures on planned imports from [Qatar](#).

Habeck, a Green party leader in the German coalition government, has faced sharp criticism in recent weeks for refusing to accept a complete energy embargo on Russia, as sought by the Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy. In a speech to the Bundestag last week, Zelenskiy accused Germany of having only three priorities: "[economy, economy, economy](#)".

Polling shows a majority of Germans would be prepared to make sacrifices, including higher gas prices, if it helped defeat [Russia](#), but the German government either does not believe the polling or thinks the public do not understand the real risk of mass unemployment that an embargo would entail.

02:42

Zelenskiy urges Germany to 'tear down wall' Russia is creating – video

Habeck's visit to Qatar follows [Boris Johnson's apparently fruitless trip to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates](#) in an attempt to persuade two traditional British allies in the Gulf to boost oil production.

Qatar is expected to almost double its production of LNG by 2025. Habeck promised that [Europe](#) was in the process of reducing its flow of energy from Russia to zero, but at present Germany has no LNG terminals. Two have just been given the go-ahead, at Brunsbüttel and Wilhelmshaven, but may take three years to build.

Germany imported about 56bn cubic metres of natural gas from Russia in 2020. Nearly 55% of its gas imports came from Russia, with 40% of the demand for gas in Germany coming from industry. The EU's total gas imports from Russia are about 168bn cubic metres.

In 2020, Qatar exported 106bn cubic metres, selling the bulk of the product to Asian markets.

In Doha, Habeck stressed the future for Europe was to develop a diversity of suppliers, and there would be little point in Germany transferring its dependency from one supplier to another. Germany is also in talks with Norway, Canada and the US. He admitted previous German administrations had made a mistake by becoming so dependent on Russia.

Moscow also provides 34% of German oil, predominantly along the Druzhba pipeline.

As a result Germany has insisted the EU does not sanction two banks that service German purchases of Russian energy.

The former head of the Ukrainian state energy company Naftogaz, Andriy Kobolyev, believes Germany could take a tougher line by continuing to take Russian energy but refusing to pay for the gas until Russia pulled out of [Ukraine](#). He said Russia cannot simply turn off the gas supplies, and there would be enough to get Germany through the next winter.

Habeck has ruled out reversing the planned switch-off of nuclear power in Germany, scheduled for the end of 2022. But he is said to be open to extending the life of coal powered stations, all due to close by 2030.

Disputes inside Germany rage over whether it would be possible to cut off Russian energy.

Bruegel, a Brussels-based thinktank, has suggested the EU could survive next winter if all Russian pipeline imports were halted, though it would require painful measures including power rationing.

The EU itself has said it aims to reduce the bloc's gas imports from Russia by nearly two-thirds by the end of 2022, and to make Europe independent from all Russian fossil fuels well before 2030.

The French finance minister, Bruno Le Maire, hinted France was willing to go further, saying: "Should we immediately stop buying Russian oil, should, a little bit further down the line, we stop importing Russian gas? The president has never ruled out these options."

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/20/germany-gas-deal-qatar-end-energy-dependency-on-russia>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

Headlines

- [P&O Ferries Ship detained over crew training concerns, says coastguard agency](#)
- [Grant Shapps Questions raised over meeting with DP World](#)
- [Explainer How P&O broke the law and the potential consequences](#)

P&O Ferries

P&O ferry detained over crew training concerns, says coastguard agency

Transport secretary Grant Shapps says ship was detained in Northern Ireland for being ‘unfit to sail’



The European Causeway is seen moored at the port of Larne on the north-east coast of Northern Ireland on 17 March 2022. Photograph: Paul Faith/AFP/Getty Images

[Nadeem Badshah](#)

Fri 25 Mar 2022 18.20 EDT Last modified on Fri 25 Mar 2022 19.11 EDT

A P&O ferry has been detained in [Northern Ireland](#) “due to failures on crew familiarisation, vessel documentation and crew training”, according to the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA).

The agency said the ship, the European Causeway, was impounded at the port of Larne.

Transport secretary [Grant Shapps](#) said that the ferry was detained for being “unfit to sail”.

Shapps [wrote on Twitter](#): “Following my instruction to inspect all P&O vessels prior to entering back into service, the MCA has detained a ship for being unfit to sail. I will not compromise the safety of these vessels and P&O will not be able to rush inexperienced crew through training.”

The MCA said: “The vessel will remain under detention until all these issues are resolved by P&O Ferries. Only then will it be reinspected.”

Detention of ships is based on concerns over their safety and to prevent them going to sea.

Karl Turner, Labour MP for Hull East, wrote on Twitter: “It gets worse for P&O Ferries, news just in that the European Causeway on the Cairnryan-Larne route has failed her Port State Inspection.

“The vessel is arrested and detained by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency in Larne.”

Earlier this week, an inspection was carried out by the MCA on a P&O ferry docked in Hull to ensure agency staff brought in to replace 800 sacked workers can operate it safely.

Downing Street has [called for the chief executive of P&O Ferries to resign](#) over the sacking of the staff and pledged to push through legislation next week to force the company to reverse the move and pay its crew the minimum wage.

[Peter Hebblethwaite admitted to MPs](#) on Thursday that his company broke the law by sacking the 800 workers without consultation.

The transport union [RMT](#) said it welcomed the detention of the European Causeway and it demanded the government “seize the entire fleet” of P&O vessels.

General secretary Mick Lynch said: “The seizing of the European Causeway by the MCA tonight shows that the gangster capitalist outfit P&O are not fit

and proper to run a safe service after the jobs massacre.

“This mob should be barred, their ships impounded and the sacked crews reinstated to get these crucial ferry routes back running safely.”

Alliance MLA for East Antrim Stewart Dickson welcomed the impounding of the ferry as a safety measure.

“It’s not like the crew of an airplane getting off one easyJet and getting on to the next one where the controls are the exactly the same, and everything is in the same place,” he told PA.

“No two ships are the same, and you cannot just fly a crew in and expect them to be able to sail a ship. Every control will be in a different place, but particularly all those health and safety drills that have to be gone through, everything from lifeboat stations to how each item of equipment operates. It seemed to me it was going to be very difficult for staff to be able to take on that role in such a short period of time.

“I am absolutely delighted they have [impounded the ship]. This isn’t vengeance against P&O, it’s about passenger safety and the safety of the crew as well.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/mar/25/po-ferry-detained-over-crew-training-concerns-says-coastguard-agency>

P&O Ferries

P&O Ferries: questions raised over Grant Shapps' meeting with DP World

Dubai meeting in November revealed in departmental minutes



A P&O ferry moored at the Port of Dover in Kent, England. Photograph: Gareth Fuller/PA

[Gwyn Topham](#)

[@GwynTopham](#)

Fri 25 Mar 2022 11.04 EDT Last modified on Sat 26 Mar 2022 01.07 EDT

The UK transport secretary, [Grant Shapps](#), met the DP World boss Sultan Ahmed bin Sulayem last November and told him that he was “aware of the issues at P&O Ferries” but recognised “you will need to make commercial decisions”, according to official minutes of the meeting.

The revelation raises further questions about whether Shapps could have acted to head off the [mass sackings last week](#) at the Dubai-owned ferry

operator.

On Monday, Shapps told the Commons that “the first I heard about it was at 8.30 in the [Wednesday] evening, not through the memo, which I did not see, but instead through communication with my private office to indicate that P&O would be making redundancies the next day”.

Shapps said he expected P&O Ferries to consult on more redundancies rather than instigate mass sackings.

The Department for Transport minutes show Bin Sulayem welcomed Shapps to DP World’s pavilion at the [Dubai](#) Expo on 22 November. During the face-to-face encounter, the sultan warned Shapps: “In respect of our ferry business, there’s a new low-cost competitor from Irish Ferries. This poses challenges in respect of P&O’s operations. We kept ferries operating during the height of the pandemic to support movement of people and goods.”

Shapps thanked Bin Sulayem and told him: “I’m aware of the issues relating to P&O. I recognise you will need to make commercial decisions, but please do keep us informed.”

Bin Sulayem added: “As we recover we can reinvest in the UK. We make a significant amount of income from the passenger side of our business (even though it only makes up c.30% of total business), because the margins are so tight on the cargo side.”

Shapps replied: “I appreciate everything you’ve done to support P&O.”

The minutes were published after revelations at Thursday’s extraordinary joint hearings of the Commons transport and business select committees, where the P&O Ferries chief executive, Peter Hebblethwaite, [admitted wilfully breaking employment law](#) to summarily sack almost 800 crew without consultation. He told MPs that DP World had notified the government of planned changes to the business model.

The maritime minister, Robert Courts, speaking later in the hearing, said: “There was a discussion about challenges to the business but not any more

than that.”

Responding to the published minutes, the shadow transport secretary, Louise Haigh, said: “Despite the clear warning signs, Grant Shapps didn’t appear to raise a single word of concern for the workforce when he had the chance. Throughout this scandal, every window of opportunity to save jobs had been missed and hundreds of British workers are paying the price.”

The mass sackings have been met with widespread outrage although not action from the government.

Earlier on Friday, Shapps called for Hebblethwaite to quit, saying: “I cannot believe that he can stay in that role having admitted to deliberately going out and using a loophole – well, break the law.

“They flagged their ships through Cyprus [which meant they] avoided having to tell anybody about this, or they felt they did. And even though they know they’ve broken the law, what they’ve done is to pay people off in such a way to try and buy their silence. It’s unacceptable.”

However, Labour said Shapps had the power to disqualify Hebblethwaite as a director rather than simply call on him to quit.

Haigh added: “The government have still done absolutely nothing to hold P&O Ferries to account.”

Sign up to the daily Business Today email or follow Guardian Business on Twitter at @BusinessDesk

On Friday, Hebblethwaite emailed P&O Ferries staff attempting to clarify “issues” in his testimony to MPs. Although he had told the committees he would make the same business decision again, he told staff: “The first is that this type of dismissal could not happen again.”

He added: “The second point is that no criminal offence has been committed ... There has been a failure to comply with the obligation to consult.”

A DfT spokesperson said: “DP World did not mention to the transport secretary any changes it would be making to P&O Ferries and there was no

indication of the completely unacceptable changes it has subsequently made.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/mar/25/po-ferries-questions-raised-over-grant-shapps-meeting-with-dp-world>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

P&O Ferries

How P&O Ferries broke the law – and what the consequences might be

P&O admits choosing an illegal course with its mass sackings, but will ministers do anything about it?



A demonstration against the dismissal of P&O workers, organised by RMT union at the ferry terminal in Cairnryan, Dumfries and Galloway.
Photograph: Andrew Milligan/PA

Gwyn Topham Transport correspondent

[@GwynTopham](#)

Fri 25 Mar 2022 09.50 EDT Last modified on Fri 25 Mar 2022 10.12 EDT

What exactly has P&O Ferries done?

Last week it [summarily sacked 786 crew](#) working on ships sailing from UK ports, telling them that this was their last day in employment and that they would be replaced by new crew brought in by a third party. Ministers

expressed their [immediate outrage](#) – but have not yet followed up with any action.

But isn't it illegal?

Yes – but possibly not as illegal as you might think. There are two specific areas where P&O clearly admits to have flouted employment law, but neither necessarily lead to sanctions from the UK government. Ministers are currently taking advice from the Insolvency Service on possible action. Despite the prime minister claiming that P&O Ferries would be prosecuted under section 194 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations Act of 1992, no action has yet been taken.

What exactly are the dodgy bits?

An employer has a) to give 45 days notice to the relevant authorities when planning to make significant redundancies, and b) to consult the workforce, normally via unions.

05:56

'Are you just a shameless criminal?': P&O Ferries boss questioned over mass sackings – video

And what did P&O Ferries do?

On point a), P&O Ferries argues that it did not have to notify the UK government since an amendment to the law in 2018 – and it didn't. However, it also admits it did not give notice, as legally required, to the flag states for its ships, which are registered in Cyprus, Bermuda and the Bahamas. The three flag states, which under international maritime law regulate the ships, require 30-45 days notice but were only told of P&O's plans on the day. Given the long history of flag states being unable to police crimes onboard ships in international waters, any intervention or sanction appears unlikely.

What about the consultation?

P&O Ferries admits it deliberately broke the law. In [astonishingly candid testimony to MPs](#) this week, chief executive Peter Hebblethwaite said: “There’s absolutely no doubt we were required to consult with the unions. We chose not to do that.”

Why did they not consult unions?

Because it was cheaper to break the law and take any potential fine – if indeed, one comes. Hebblethwaite said unions would not accept the changes and therefore P&O Ferries would give higher payoffs to sacked crew, effectively more than crew could win from tribunals despite their illegal treatment. The firm also demanded crew accept swiftly without discussion or lose the offer.

Hebblethwaite said the action was to “save the company”, which was losing money, and admitted it would halve crew costs. Replacement crew will work different schedules than agreed with unions, allowing fewer overall staff, and be paid an hourly rate starting at £5.15 via a new agency abroad rather than an average £36,000 a year to those sacked from the Jersey agency.

0

'Disgraceful': Unions describe how P&O Ferries enforced mass sackings – video

Is there nothing the UK government can do?

The maritime minister, Robert Courts, suggested that ministers are constrained by the law. However, other MPs pointed out that parliament’s role is to pass new law, and urged emergency legislation.

The transport secretary, Grant Shapps, pledged new legislation next week to force the company to pay workers minimum wage on all routes – currently P&O say they will only do so when sailing between two UK ports, namely on its route between Northern Ireland and Scotland.

Were all crew fired?

No. About 600 people employed by P&O Ferries recruitment divisions in Calais and Rotterdam, on French and Dutch contracts, remain in work.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/mar/25/how-p-and-o-ferries-broke-law>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

2022.03.26 - Spotlight

- 'It's not about big brands' How will UK casual dining fare after Covid?
- Blind date One of the waiters seemed to be chatting us up, but that was awkward for him, not us
- Gordon Ramsay's Future Food Stars It's The Apprentice meets food – with added helicopters
- Mother's Day Brunches that even a teenager can make

Advertisement

US edition

- [US edition](#)
- [UK edition](#)
- [Australian edition](#)
- [International edition](#)

[The Guardian - Back to home](#)

[Hospitality industry](#)

'It's not about big brands': how will UK casual dining fare after Covid?



Shoryu Ramen is looking for franchise partners to expand beyond its current nine sites. Photograph: Andriy Blokhin/Alamy

Byron and Strada are among chains to close sites, but independent restaurants are gaining ground



[Sarah Butler](#)

[@whatbutlersaw](#)

Sat 26 Mar 2022 04.00 EDT

As the pandemic slashed through the UK's restaurants like a sharpened cleaver, one slice of the industry fared far worst than most: pizza and burger chains.

Byron, Gourmet Burger Kitchen and Italian chains Strada and Carluccio's were among the casual dining brands forced to shed dozens of sites as repeated lockdowns and other Covid restrictions left the chains haemorrhaging cash.

A net 11.4% of chain restaurants, or about 700 outlets, have disappeared since March 2020, according to the Local Data Company (LDC) which monitors 3,000 areas across England, Scotland and Wales.

Italian and pizza restaurants chains shrunk by a net 22% or 448 sites during two years of the pandemic, while American-themed chains fell by a net 21% or 151 outlets, figures from the Local Data Company (LDC) reveal.

Areas where restaurants were worst hit by the Covid pandemic

Despite the heartbreak for those made redundant, the celebrity chef [Gordon Ramsay](#) credited the Covid-19 pandemic with [clearing away “crap” restaurants](#). Ramsay this week argued that there might now be a new beginning as the experience of lockdown, where families killed time by cooking more from scratch at home, as well as raising appreciation of well-made food.

In an interview with the former shadow chancellor Ed Balls in [Radio Times](#), Ramsay described the shrunken chains as: “Well, just shitholes in a prime position and taking advantage because they’re in a great location, and they’ve got the footfall. But now we’ve wiped the slate clean, which is good.”



Gordon Ramsay said the Covid-19 pandemic had cleared away ‘crap’ restaurants –but has also closed some of his own. Photograph: Ken McKay/ITV/REX/Shutterstock

Ramsay should know about the perils of the pandemic: his own chain of 25 London restaurants lost £5.1m in the year to the end of August 2020.



Byron was among the restaurant chains to close branches during the Covid lockdown. Photograph: Dave Rushen/SOPA Images/REX/Shutterstock

The trade association UK Hospitality said almost 700,000 jobs were affected at the peak of the pandemic – a combination of job losses, plus roles that were not needed due to tourist seasons being heavily affected.

The clear-out reversed the effects of a desperate land grab fuelled by private equity cash over the previous four or five years, where customers were lured with generous discounts and vouchers, but left businesses locked into expensive sites, often too close to similar outlets.

The Restaurant Group, which owns Frankie & Benny's, Garfunkel's and Chiquitos, and the Casual Dining Group, which owns Café Rouge and Bella Italia, both closed dozens of outlets, rapidly exiting sites they might have planned to close over five or more years.

Areas with the biggest increase in restaurants

But finally, green shoots are emerging. The pandemic has cleared a path for new names which are rapidly expanding, including Pizza Pilgrims, Rosa's Thai – which has plans for six more sites a year – and Shoryu Ramen, which is looking for franchise partners to expand beyond its current nine sites.

Independents have also stepped into the gaps left by the chains. The number of local restaurants has increased since March 2020 – up by 3.7% or 888 more according to LDC – as cheaper rents have made it easier for entrepreneurs to start new businesses.

Stefan Chomka, the editor of Restaurant magazine, says the pandemic has changed the balance of power between landlords and restaurateurs, opening the way for cheaper rent deals. “[Landlords] are much more willing to give smaller nimbler restaurant groups a go,” he says.



The Thai restaurant chain Rosa's has plans for six more sites a year.
Photograph: Robert Evans/Alamy

Paul Askew, the owner of The Art School fine dining restaurant in Liverpool opened a second outlet, Barnacle, in Duke Street Market in December just as the hospitality industry was hit by a fresh wave of cancellations prompted by fears of the Omicron Covid wave.

He says many good businesses failed because they had unhelpful landlords or their business insurance did not pay up but he was able to expand because he was offered rents linked to sales after another restaurant failed. “We took a gamble and it seems to have hopefully paid off,” he adds.

Askew says that despite difficulties with rising costs, staff shortages and the prospect of higher VAT the market has bounced back with “a tsunami of bookings” since reopening. “With disposable income cut, you might go out less and if you go somewhere it will be where they are going to give you a really good time with better service and better food.

How restaurant sectors that have fared since Covid

Chomka sees small brands with fewer than five sites as the ones that will really benefit from the changes wrought by the pandemic as they can now offer “that young feel that landlords are really craving”. “They could double or triple their sites in a short amount of time,” he says.

He says “it is not about big brands any more” and landlords are looking to curate sites with more variety, and less familiar names creating space for a new wave of private equity-backed brands. [Restaurants](#) are also battling with food, wage and energy inflation, while household incomes are under intense pressure.



The Vietnamese street food chain Pho attracted new investment last year.
Photograph: Grant Rooney Premium/Alamy

Peter Backman, an independent restaurant consultant, says that competition for cash is likely to be tougher as many of the private equity firms that were

previously investing in restaurants had their fingers burnt. “A lot have pulled out and they probably won’t come back at least for a while,” he says.

But Graeme Smith at the consultancy Alix Partners, who works with restaurant investors, says interest is still there. In August, TriSpan ploughed money into the Vietnamese street food chain Pho, US fund Fortress recently bought Punch Pubs while Alchemy Partners bought Brasserie Bar Co, the company behind Brasserie Blanc and the White Brasserie foodie pubs.

He admits the days of expecting to rapidly roll out a brand to 400 sites are probably over but says there is “still a lot of interest” from private equity in the restaurant world.

[Fastest growing restaurant chains since the Covid pandemic](#)

Britons’ taste for takeaways during multiple lockdowns has driven a boom time for brands such as German Doner Kebab, Crosstown Donuts, the healthy eating brand Choppaluna – which has 60 sites in the pipeline – and the dessert specialist Creams which now has 100 outlets in partnership with local franchisees.

Backman says about 10-20% of restaurants’ business now tends to be made up of delivery income, with some opening dark kitchens or starting up new brands out of their existing kitchens to cater specifically for takeaways. The Azzurri Group, for example, uses spare capacity in its Zizzi and Ask Italian restaurants to supply its Coco di Mama takeaway business.

Sign up to the daily Business Today email or follow Guardian Business on Twitter at [@BusinessDesk](#)

Meanwhile, chains such as Zizzi and Leon are diversifying into supermarket ready meals or new locations such as drive-thrus and motorway service stations.

New ways of business are partly being driven by trade investors such as the Issa Brothers – who bought healthy takeaways group Leon Restaurants to complement their motorway services business and the supermarket chain Asda. [Ranjit Singh Boparan](#), the food industry tycoon behind 2 Sisters Food

Group, has also been snapping up troubled restaurant brands – including Giraffe, Ed's Diner and Carluccio's and Gourmet Burger Kitchen.

Chomka says that in straitened times these brands are “trying to sweat all their assets”.

“It’s no longer good enough to just open a restaurant and serve people.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/mar/26/uk-casual-dining-covid-independent-restaurants>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

Advertisement

US edition

- [US edition](#)
- [UK edition](#)
- [Australian edition](#)
- [International edition](#)

[The Guardian - Back to home](#)

[Blind date](#)[Life and style](#)

Blind date: ‘One of the waiters seemed to be chatting us up, but that was awkward for him, not us’



Photograph: Christian Sinibaldi/The Guardian

Amy, 29, artist, meets Grace, 28, education specialist

Amy on Grace



What were you hoping for?

A hoot.

First impressions?

She has a lovely, soft American accent, and made me comfortable quickly.

What did you talk about?

Being bisexual. Her astute American observations on British people. How doomed the couples are on [Love Is Blind](#). Her tattoos. Impulsivity.

Any awkward moments?

One of the male waiters seemed to be chatting us up, but that was awkward for him, not us.

Good table manners?

We decided early on that table-manner judgment was for squares.

Best thing about Grace?

We belly-laughed the whole night. She was open and authentic, and her pretty face lit up when she talked. And I loved that we were on the same page about eating and drinking the whole menu.

Would you introduce her to your friends?

She can talk about the silly and the serious. She'd get along with them fine.

Describe Grace in three words?

Insightful, fun, courageous.

What do you think she made of you?

I panicked at an early question and said rice cakes were my favourite snack, so she probably thought I was a loser.

Did you go on somewhere?

I had rail replacements to Brighton to navigate but I regret not going to the pub.

And ... did you kiss?

I wish I could give you some juicy gossip but no, we didn't.

If you could change one thing about the evening what would it be?

A bit more sexual chemistry.

Marks out of 10?

9. It would have been great to have more of a romantic spark.

Would you meet again?

Yes. I'd like to take her for another margarita.



Amy and Grace on their date
Q&A

Want to be in Blind date?

Show

Blind date is Saturday's dating column: every week, two strangers are paired up for dinner and drinks, and then spill the beans to us, answering a set of questions. This runs, with a photograph we take of each dater before the date, in Saturday magazine (in the UK) and online at theguardian.com every Saturday. It's been running since 2009 – you can [read all about how we put it together here](#).

What questions will I be asked?

We ask about age, location, occupation, hobbies, interests and the type of person you are looking to meet. If you do not think these questions cover everything you would like to know, tell us what's on your mind.

Can I choose who I match with?

No, it's a blind date! But we do ask you a bit about your interests, preferences, etc – the more you tell us, the better the match is likely to be.

Can I pick the photograph?

No, but don't worry: we'll choose the nicest ones.

What personal details will appear?

Your first name, job and age.

How should I answer?

Honestly but respectfully. Be mindful of how it will read to your date, and that Blind date reaches a large audience, in print and online.

Will I see the other person's answers?

No. We may edit yours and theirs for a range of reasons, including length, and we may ask you for more details.

Will you find me The One?

We'll try! Marriage! Babies!

Can I do it in my home town?

Only if it's in the UK. Many of our applicants live in London, but we would love to hear from people living elsewhere.

How to apply

Email blind.date@theguardian.com

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

Grace on Amy

**What were you hoping for?**

Someone with a smart sense of humour, similar politics and game for over-ordering tacos and tequila.

First impressions?

Intimidatingly pretty but also swore like a sailor, which was endearing.

What did you talk about?

How annoying it is when people try to invalidate bisexuality. Trash TV. The insanity of internet dating. We talked a bit about our jobs (she's an artist, which is amazing) and how we got to this place in our lives. We both agreed that being single is great.

Any awkward moments?

Honestly, no! It felt very easy.

Good table manners?

We both wondered who comments on table manners at a taco restaurant.

Best thing about Amy?

Her energy – it's infectious. She's got that whole cool-girl thing down

without being pretentiousShe has a really genuine laugh.

Would you introduce her to your friends?

Definitely.

Describe Amy in three words?

Spontaneous, light-hearted, independent.

What do you think she made of you?

I think she felt comfortable around me and laughed at things I said (unless she was humouring me!). I'm just not sure if I was her type.

Did you go on somewhere?

I invited her to another bar, but she had to get back to Brighton as it was late.

And ... did you kiss?

Nope.

Sign up to our Inside Saturday newsletter for an exclusive behind the scenes look at the making of the magazine's biggest features, as well as a curated list of our weekly highlights.

If you could change one thing about the evening what would it be?

The restaurant was very loud, so it was hard to hear sometimes.

Marks out of 10?

9.

Would you meet again?

Definitely. We've exchanged numbers, so let's see!

*Amy and Grace ate at [El Pastor Soho](#), London W1. Fancy a blind date?
Email blind.date@theguardian.com*

[The watcherTelevision](#)

Gordon Ramsay's Future Food Stars: it's The Apprentice meets food – with added helicopters

Why is the chef jumping out of a chopper? Why is this cooking competition so much like Alan Sugar's show? And why are people angry about mushrooms? Not sure, but it could be great TV



Gordon Ramsay with Jen, Steph and Amit at the Beach Shack challenge.
Photograph: Studio Ramsay/BBC

[Joel Golby](#)

Sat 26 Mar 2022 04.00 EDT

I like Gordon Ramsay, even (especially? Something to interrogate in therapy, perhaps) when he's yelling. The beauty of Ramsay is he is capable of dialling the self-mythologising machismo up and down at will, depending

on the shape of the show around him. So in Hell's Kitchen, he was consistently history's worst ever bastard. In MasterChef Junior, he was oddly delicate and encouraging. In The F Word, he's all staccato sentences while chain-making beef wellington in a bizarre, "Why are you bothering me at home?" approach to hospitality. And in Kitchen Nightmares, he is at his best, a laser-focused problem-solver who goes ego-to-ego with failed head chef after failed head chef, making people cry the bad way at the start of every show – and the good way by the end.

So the question ahead of Gordon Ramsay's Future Food Stars (Thursday, 9pm, BBC One), which is just The Apprentice but for food entrepreneurs, is: which Gordon Ramsay is going to turn up? The raging beast or the quizshow host? The Michelin star ambitionist or the bloke who keeps doing pranks where he wears prosthetics? Well, how to put this: in his entrance into this show, he jumps out of a helicopter into the sea.

No, I don't know why Gordon Ramsay is jumping out of a helicopter into the sea. Neither do any of the assembled food entrepreneurs (lockdown salmon-smokers and farmers' market jam-makers, mostly). Gordon barks at them out of a wetsuit while dripping into the sand at Newquay, explaining the show (a £150,000 investment as the grand prize; each week, a "challenge" to "test their mettle"; a grave promise that it's going to be tough). Eventually, finally, we get some explanation: just as Gordon has "made a leap of faith for them", so they have to make a leap of faith for him. They all have to put wetsuits on and jump in the sea. Why aren't they cooking? Why is a pre-requirement for this cooking competition the ability to swim 500m through open water then scramble over some rocks? We are 15 minutes in and nobody has touched a single pan. I am starting to fear Future Food Stars is less a TV cooking competition and more a hyper-produced and very belated Gordon Ramsay stag do.

It warms up from there. If you're an Apprentice fan (I am, even – especially? – when Alan Sugar is yelling at someone), the vague format will be familiar to you: it's like the food challenge week from The Apprentice, but every week. Contestants are split into teams and after a profit task reveals the losing team, they are asked to tell on each other to identify the point of failure. Gordon gathers them all into a room in businesswear. One

person gets pointed at with a significant finger and sent home. You know, like *The Apprentice*.



Gordon Ramsay's Future Food Stars. Photograph: Colin Hutton/BBC/Studio Ramsay

Although, I have to say it's *The Apprentice* if *The Apprentice* were conceived in 2022: contestants are actually allowed to communicate with each other, and conduct mild market research, and at no point are they forced to act and star in their own terrible TV adverts. Week one sees three teams compete to see who can sell the most food from a stall on a Newquay beach, and obviously a lot goes wrong – a late change in the line-cook responsibilities almost leads to war; someone genuinely cries over a taco; a lot of mango dressing ends up on the floor – but there are successful moments, too. While the teams cook, Ramsay goes around Newquay highlighting the local food scene. It's exactly what this show should be doing, and it does it well. I'm still thinking about the helicopter (why? *Why?*) but the subsequent 45 minutes really make up for it.

There are teething problems – as with any first-series show, it has to find its tone, and contestants never quite know if they are meant to be fighting (I suppose their adrenaline is still pumping from the cliff dive) or getting along – an argument about a mushroom threatens to derail the entire first episode

in its out-of-nowhere ferocity, and a squabble about monkfish really makes you want to go: “Guys, guys, it’s just TV.” But there’s a germ of a very, very good show here, as soon as Gordon Ramsay stops jumping out of things and just hosts it. Maybe this will lead to 15 more series and an American spin-off that eventually changes world politics for ever! Or maybe this will lead to a terrible accident that changes how TV stunts are conducted for the rest of time! I am excited to see which of the two it is.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2022/mar/26/gordon-ramsay-s-future-food-stars-its-the-apprentice-meets-food-with-added-helicopters>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

Kitchen aideFood

Mother's Day brunches that even a teenager can make

It's hard to mess up pancakes, make muesli, pop a couple of eggs on a crumpet, and let's not forget eggy bread ...

- Got a culinary dilemma? Email feast@theguardian.com



Looks good, easy to make: Jordan Bourke's sourdough French toast with tomato, bacon and avocado. Photograph: Lizzie Mayson/The Guardian. Food styling: Rosie Ramsden. Prop styling: Anna Wilkins.

[Anna Berrill](#)

Sat 26 Mar 2022 04.30 EDT Last modified on Sat 26 Mar 2022 05.30 EDT

What easy brunch dishes could my teenagers make for Mother's Day?
Joe, Cardiff

With only a day (or less than that, depending on when you're reading this) to go, you don't have long to get those teens organised, Joe, so let's focus on brunches that rely on staple ingredients. For cook and food writer [Claire Thomson](#), that means eggy bread. "You can't really mess that up," says the author of [Home Cookery Year](#). Eggy bread, of course, is where you mix eggs and milk, dip in slices of bread, then fry on both sides in melted butter (or hot oil) until crisp. "The kids have it with ketchup or whatever they want, and Matt [Thomson's husband] and I have it with chipotle hot sauce, avocado and sliced ripe tomatoes." And that's the brilliance of eggy bread: you can take it in whatever direction you fancy. "Go savoury or sweet – sliced fruit, maple syrup, a dusting of cinnamon and perhaps a bit of salt is a good one."

Crumpets, meanwhile, are the edible equivalent of a hug. Happily, Thomson says, they're also "a really good vehicle for brunch", with a fried egg, bacon and hot sauce. Sweet or savoury spreads are an easy win or, for some serious carb-based comfort, top lightly toasted crumpets with rarebit mix and grill until bubbling. If you can squeeze in a trip to the shops, channel Guardian columnist [Yotam Ottolenghi](#) and up the ante by adding tamarind paste to a [mix of English mustard, grated mature cheddar and double cream](#), and serve on crumpets with piccalilli on the side.

"[Bircher muesli](#) is another great thing for kids to make for their mums, because you do it the night before," Thomson says. Tonight, soak oats and, if it's your mum's thing, some dried fruit in apple juice, then, just before eating, top the oats with grated apple, yoghurt and maybe some nuts. "Use plant-based milks to make it more interesting – almond milk and poached rhubarb [instead of apple] is nice and seasonal."

Alternatively, make [granola](#). [A banana version](#) is a big hit in the Thomson household, and has the added benefit of containing less sugar than most shop-bought ones.

Bananas and oats could also be destined for [pancakes](#). To serve two, [the Guardian's Ravneet Gill](#) combines a couple of mashed bananas with an egg, two teaspoons of honey and two tablespoons of ricotta. In another bowl, she mixes 50g wholemeal flour, 20g rolled oats, a pinch of salt and a half-

teaspoon of baking powder, then mixes in the wet ingredients and you're ready to start cooking.

Or go for [baker and food writer Claire Ptak](#)'s favoured batter-based option, a [Dutch baby](#). "They are so fun to make, and a bit more of a challenge than regular pancakes," says the owner of [Violet Bakery](#) in east London. The batter (eggs, whole milk, flour) for this puffy pancake is baked in a hot cast-iron pan for about 20 minutes, so those teenagers will need to get up on time. "Drizzle with lemon and sugar or chocolate sauce, or serve with crisp smoked bacon or sausages. Mum will love you even more."

- Got a culinary dilemma? Email feast@theguardian.com
-

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/food/2022/mar/26/mothers-day-brunches-that-even-a-teenager-can-make>

2022.03.26 - Opinion

- Zelenskiy is Churchill with an iPhone, but the video war will be easier to win than the real one
- Ukraine will not surrender one inch of land to Russia – the west must understand this
- Tonight in Britain the clocks will go forward – all except mine
- Pool sliders, charm bracelets and a Kia Rio ... the rise and fall of Brand Rishi

[OpinionUkraine](#)

A key reason Putin's bloody invasion is faltering? He's no match for Zelenskiy's iPhone

[Jonathan Freedland](#)



The leader's messages to his people – and the west - have been central to the heroic fightback. But now more than ever, we must stay engaged



‘Volodymyr Zelenskiy has been careful to offer variety.’ Composite: Guardian Design/Facebook/@Volodymyr Zelenskiy/AFP/Getty/Reuters/Ukrainian Presidential Press Service/AFP

Fri 25 Mar 2022 14.02 EDT Last modified on Sat 26 Mar 2022 06.40 EDT

Ukraine has so many nightmares to contend with, but here’s one more: that Ukraine becomes Bosnia. By Bosnia I don’t mean the country itself so much as the war of a quarter-century ago and the way that conflict came to be seen from afar. For much of the 1990s, war in the Balkans was background noise, even to those who were just an hour or two’s flight away. Every now and then an especially horrible episode might propel it to the top of the news; otherwise, Bosnia was a permanent fixture on the inside pages and halfway through the TV bulletin. Bridget Jones confessed to [her diary](#) that she felt guilty for not talking or thinking about it, but it just slipped out of view. Besides, you knew the war would still be there tomorrow.

That is the danger [Volodymyr Zelenskiy](#) faces now: that his struggle against Russian invasion becomes a long, slow war of attrition and so, with time, the world’s attention starts to wander. The war would go on; it would still be there on page 14. But newer stories would edge it aside. Soon, yellow and blue would be last season’s colours.

Zelenskiy seems aware of this danger, and if anyone can combat it, it's him. He's not merely a politician with a knack for communication. Often missed in descriptions of him as a former entertainer is the fact that he made his fortune as a phenomenally successful producer of television. His core team in the presidential palace is the same group that ran his production company: his speechwriter is a scriptwriter. The Kyiv-born author of [This Is Not Propaganda](#), Peter Pomerantsev, says of the Zelenskiy inner circle: "They're all showrunners."

Note the present tense. There is nothing former about Zelenskiy and his colleagues' vocation: they're still producers now. Indeed, there is scarcely a gap between Zelenskiy's two incarnations as politician and performer. His most famous hit show was called Servant of the People; his political party is called Servant of the People.

Zelenskiy is hardly the first to grasp the tight connection between politics and storytelling. In some ways, he is merely succeeding in doing what Donald Trump longed to do: conducting a presidency like a top-rated TV series, with great visuals, shocking plot twists and plenty of action. Except Trump not only lacked Zelenskiy's talent, he had to rely on manufactured drama and imagined enemies. The Ukrainian president is in a bloody war against an enemy who is all too real.

Of course, the primacy of "comms" long predates Trump and Zelenskiy. In David Hare's new play [Straight Line Crazy](#), the urban planner Robert Moses is hailed in the 1920s as "a new kind of man ... the man who believes that the way you're written about is as important as what you do". But Zelenskiy has taken it to a new level, not least because he has adapted everything he learned from conventional TV to the idiom of social media.

He understands that in the new era, the war leader does not stand besuited at a podium, declaiming a speech packed with rhetorical flourish. Instead, Zelenskiy's message is that he is a servant of the people because he is one of the people, no different from any of them. In his trademark short videos, he wears military olive-green, but it's not a formal uniform, still less the ceremonial getup of a head of state. He wears exactly what a civilian volunteer would wear.

The locations are chosen just as deliberately. If he's not at a simple desk in a plain office, he's just outside the presidential palace, with landmarks Ukrainians would recognise visibly in shot. As David Patrikarakos, whose book, War in 140 Characters, was among the first to identify the changing face of battle in the age of Twitter, tells me: "In those videos, Zelenskiy is literally the man in the street." Together with a knack for demotic, unflowery soundbites – "[I need ammunition, not a ride](#)" – he has become a master of what Patrikarakos calls "digital statesmanship". He's Churchill with an iPhone.

By comparison Moscow, until recently feared as the master of manipulation by social media, has looked lumbering, slow and old: "There's Zelenskiy," says Patrikarakos, "and then there's this Botoxed Bond villain who won't sit at a table with other people. All that's missing is a trapdoor and a pool of sharks." (As if to show he has not entirely lost his touch for fuelling culture wars in the west, today Vladimir Putin tried to cast himself as defender of JK Rowling against the western malaise of "[cancel culture](#)" – which would be convincing but for the fact that Rowling is no ally of his, but is instead spending big money [protecting vulnerable children](#) in Ukraine.)

And yet, there are limits to Kyiv's success in the messaging wars. For one thing, while it has made the Ukrainian president a hero in the west, it is not penetrating elsewhere. It was notable that the 35 countries that abstained on this month's UN resolution condemning Moscow's invasion account for [half the world's population](#). Zelenskiy is a hit in Paris and Berlin; in Beijing and Delhi, not so much.

But the other obstacle is the Bosnia problem, the risk that the longer this goes on, the likelier it is that fatigue and boredom set in. Social media in particular crave novelty. Once the initial shock of footage of bombed-out buildings or distraught victims wears off, [Ukraine](#) could recede from the public mind.

Perhaps mindful of that danger, Zelenskiy has been careful to offer variety. In his rolling series of video link addresses to the world's parliaments – itself an innovation – he's careful to tailor his message to his audience. Speaking to Westminster, he channelled Churchill. To Capitol Hill, it was America "the leader of the free world". To Budapest on Thursday, he invoked the

memory of the fascist massacre on the banks of the Danube. He is intensifying his language too, shaming western allies for not doing enough. “[Why can’t we get weapons from you?](#)” he asked Israeli lawmakers on Sunday, reminding them they would “have to live with” their decision. Visually, he’s mixing things up: this week saw a [montage](#), complete with voiceover in English. It looked and sounded like a trailer for a Hollywood blockbuster.

But canny messaging and sharp production values take you only so far. Pomerantsev says: “Sympathy is not enough. He has to take people on a journey towards something.” There has to be a concrete goal, besides day-to-day survival: maybe Ukraine’s bid to join the EU. Yana Lyushnevskaya of BBC Monitoring tells me that Zelenskiy’s great gift as a comedian was his ability to know what his audience “were scared of”: maybe his next move will be to play on global fears of a Russian nuclear, chemical or biological attack. “That would be the most logical thing for him to do.”

In truth, this should not all be on Zelenskiy and his extraordinary team of TV maestros. Putin’s threat is not just to Ukraine, but to a wider world that has not fully absorbed the menace it now confronts: a dictator ready to obliterate cities in the heart of [Europe](#), his head filled with fantasies of conquest and domination, happy to ward off any challenge by threatening to unleash nuclear havoc. Turning back that danger cannot be left to a small group of creatives in a bunker in Kyiv, no matter how gifted. This is a task for the world.

- Jonathan Freedland is a Guardian columnist. To listen to Jonathan’s podcast Politics Weekly America, search “Politics Weekly America” on Apple, Spotify, Acast or wherever you get your podcasts

OpinionUkraine

Ukraine will not surrender one inch of land to Russia – the west must understand this

[Maria Zolkina](#)

Kyiv knows concessions will not bring security: on the contrary, they will provoke a new Russian offensive



‘Any calls for ‘disarmament’ and ‘demilitarisation’ of Ukrainian troops are impossible in a country where the army clearly wins ground operations and strongly rebuffs Russian air forces.’ A member of the Ukrainian territorial defence forces in Kyiv. Photograph: Fadel Senna/AFP/Getty Images

Fri 25 Mar 2022 09.35 EDT

Western analysts are trying to develop different scenarios for Russia’s actions in Ukraine. The “menu” is expansive: a protracted conflict with a

gradual transition to low-intensity hostilities; a nuclear disaster; the use of [chemical or biological weapons](#) to bring victory in land operations; political compromise on the side of Ukraine and others.

The only scenario that is not discussed is the full restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity. Everywhere there are some "buts", as if the need to "sacrifice" something to Russia is considered unavoidable.

It is impossible for Ukraine to accept any of [Russia's ultimatums](#). Not the recognition of the so-called "republics" within the borders of Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts, not the annexation of Crimea, and not the demilitarisation of Ukraine.

Kyiv understands that these concessions will not bring any security and in no way will they guarantee the withdrawal of Russian troops. Moreover, these "compromises" will not prevent a new Russian attack. To the contrary, they can only provoke a new Russian offensive against Ukraine.

The only issue that can be debated between the west and Ukraine is security guarantees in the form of a treaty, if Ukraine does not join Nato in the near future.. Any agreement would have to include terms about how military support will be provided in the event of a new invasion. This military support should include concrete forms of collective response, including using troops. However, western partners may consider such a guarantee as too risky.

A ceasefire is not enough, as it would only fix the positions of the military where they stand. After that, it would be possible to force the Russians to leave only in exchange for complete political surrender.

Russia would use a ceasefire to strengthen and rearm its troops while demanding the west reduce military assistance to Ukraine. Ukraine's partners would be much more inclined to a political compromise – read: surrendering part of the interests and even territories of Ukraine. The will of Ukrainians is also too strong to accept this course of action.

Furthermore, any calls for “disarmament” and “demilitarisation” of Ukrainian troops by Russia and/or the west are impossible in a country where the army clearly wins ground operations and strongly rebuffs Russian air forces. Queues at military registration and enlistment offices would not disappear.

The rest of the population is involved in logistical backing of the army. In Kyiv, territorial defence has around [100,000 people](#) with weapons in their hands already. In the occupied cities, thousands of people go out every day to [protest against the occupying forces](#). It is impossible to stop this resistance, no matter how much someone wants it.

Vladimir Putin is not ready to step back, but he cannot win on the ground. This means that Russia will continue to increase terror against the civilian population, and [cities will be wiped off](#) the face of the Earth by air and missile attacks. The use of strictly prohibited weapons, namely biological, chemical and even nuclear ones, is becoming more and more probable.

For Ukraine, on the contrary, the strategic goal is the withdrawal of Russian troops from its territory. However, it seems impossible to achieve it diplomatically. Regardless of how uncomfortable the west may be about it, this goal can be achieved only by military means. And the Ukrainian army is absolutely capable of that.

Ukraine must actively push Russian troops to the border. This can be achieved both physically, by Ukraine’s armed forces, and diplomatically and economically, with the support of sanctions and isolation launched by our western partners.

We urgently need weapons, including air defence systems and antimissile systems. We need sanctions, especially the refusal of EU states to purchase Russian gas and oil, and the [disconnection of all Russian banks](#) from Swift. We need western support for the independence of all of Ukraine.

- Maria Zolkina is a political analyst at Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation, a Kyiv-based thinktank
-

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/25/ukraine-west-russia-kyiv-russian-offensive>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

[Opinion](#)[Health & wellbeing](#)

Tonight in Britain the clocks will go forward – all except mine

[Stefano Pavone](#)

With the EU and US voting to scrap hour changes, I'm very gratified to see the world finally catching up with my activism



Speaker Lindsay Hoyle sets a clock in the House of Commons to daylight saving time on 28 March 2021. Photograph: Jessica Taylor/AFP/Getty Images

Sat 26 Mar 2022 04.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 26 Mar 2022 13.12 EDT

On Sunday, clocks across the UK will go forward by an hour – except mine. Since October 2018, I have been living my life entirely by GMT. It may sound extreme (and inconvenient) but I do it because I believe that daylight savings time (DST) is an unnecessary bane on our society; a failed experiment long in need of terminating.

For a start, changing the clocks is bad for our health. This is because we humans (and many other lifeforms on this planet) are synchronised with Earth's natural orbit – we naturally wake up when the day begins and sleep when night falls. Changing our “social clock” creates a gulf between the time on our watches and the height of the sun in the sky. (This was made even worse during the second world war, when [British double summer time](#) was introduced, time-shifting the natural day by two hours instead of one.) In 2019, [a group of experts](#) in psychology, neurology and sleep cycles concluded that “if we want to improve human health … we should abandon DST”, after studies showed that, in the weeks after a clock change, sleep durations fall and heart attacks increase. There is a strong safety case, too: when DST was paused as an experiment in the 1960s, [road traffic accidents in England and Wales fell by 11%](#).

Personally, I have struggled with maintaining consistent sleeping patterns for most of my life, and my learning disability (Asperger syndrome) and sensitivity to change makes the transition even more difficult. Keeping my clocks on GMT since 2018 has improved my sleep and has made me a slightly less nervous person, as I now know that the day is progressing as it should instead of being artificially rewound or fast-forwarded. When I have to keep an appointment between April and October, basic arithmetic is enough to translate it into my time zone.

I founded the anti daylight saving time movement Hora Solaris (“solar time” in Latin), because I am convinced that DST can no longer be allowed to exist and must be abolished in not just the UK, but every country implementing it. Indeed, earlier this month, the [US Senate voted](#) to put an end to the changing of the clocks by making daylight savings time permanent. The European parliament voted to scrap the hour change in 2019 (and a poll showed that a majority of EU citizens agreed) but the bill was then [mired in bureaucracy](#) and hasn't been implemented.

In the UK, my anti-DST activism has been met with both support and derision. Some see my efforts as a form of subtle heroism, and follow my example of “freezing” their clocks in one of the two time zones; while others consider them a thorn in society’s side.

The original purposes of DST, it seems, were to encourage people to spend longer outdoors and to promote productivity in factories and on farms, but the practice has failed to live up to the theory. The former was the initial justification made by [William Willett](#), a chief proponent of the DST movement in the United Kingdom and one of the key figureheads of the “spring forward/fall back” routine, after he witnessed too many closed windows and people indoors during a ride in the countryside on a warm sunny day.

Our flip-flopping between time zones must be phased out – it has failed to serve its intended purpose. It stands to reason that if a policy or tradition does not function as expected, we should either revise it to increase efficiency, or revoke it entirely.

It is my fond hope that this will be the last year in which people are forced to compromise their health for the sake of this cursed tradition. Once GMT returns this October, it is my wish that it be the last ever “fall back” moment. Until then, I will keep on marking the time in my own special way.

Stefano Pavone is a writer and the founder of Hora Solaris, an anti-daylight savings movement

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/26/britain-clocks-go-forward-eu-us-hour-changes>

OpinionRishi Sunak

Pool sliders, charm bracelets and a Kia Rio ... the rise and fall of Brand Rishi

[Hannah Jane Parkinson](#)



It's hard to convincingly look like a man of the people while you're busy impoverishing the public



'The chancellor has been mercilessly mocked for pretending that he owned a Kia Rio.' Photograph: Simon Walker/SIMON WALKER HM Treasury

Fri 25 Mar 2022 10.11 EDT Last modified on Fri 25 Mar 2022 17.20 EDT

It is [tradition](#) that politicians' relatability is measured by knowing the price of a pint of milk. Which, I'm guessing, will be circa £9.80 in a couple of weeks' time. Margaret Thatcher was very proud of being able to answer this question, an aptitude somewhat undermined by her [nicking it all later](#).

The problem with having recent governments packed with millionaires (at one point it was [two-thirds of the cabinet](#)) is that, even if they could answer this question with certainty, it wouldn't detract from the fact they have zero idea what budgeting and financial constraints are like for most of the public.

The chancellor, Rishi Sunak, as a prime example, married into an absurd amount of money; think of him as a sort of Austen heroine in a Supreme hoodie. His wife, Akshata Murthy, the daughter of a billionaire, is said to be richer than the Queen. On Wednesday morning Sunak was asked [awkward questions](#) as to whether his family was benefiting from connections to Russian businesses, hours after saying connections to Russian businesses were bad. Which reminded me of when Katie Hopkins said naming kids

after places was gross, before being reminded that her daughter was called India.



Photograph: Simon Walker/HM Treasury

Earlier, the chancellor had been mercilessly mocked for pretending that he owned a Kia Rio, and filling it up at a Sainsbury's petrol station to show off the fact he had cut 5p off a litre of fuel to help "hard-pressed" motorists, who, forgive me, do not currently seem the most in need. Perhaps even more mortifying, poor Rishi (I use the word poor metaphorically) managed to bungle his payment by – swear down – tapping his contactless card to a barcode scanner. This has to be the greatest failure of a millionaire politician struggling to deal with the rudimentary tasks of everyday living since Jeremy Hunt pulled an emergency stop cord on a train thinking that it flushed the loo.

All of this brings us to Sunak's spring statement. The papers are unanimous in their brutal criticism of a mini-budget that crushes the poorest people in society (no!? This government?! Get outta here!). With energy bills also set to rise by 54% next month, I doubt I will be the only one donning every item of clothing I own, a la Joey from Friends piling on Chandler's entire wardrobe.



One of Rishi Sunak's social media graphics.

The interesting thing is whether this will be the moment Brand Rishi falters. Surely, his slick social media presence will be unable to cut it in the face of [69% of respondents to a YouGov poll](#) saying he had not done enough. For the past 18 months, Sunak has come to prominence aided by interns who learned how to use the layering tool in Photoshop, and created graphics that look like announcements that their boss is playing a residency at the Ministry of Sound. The entire Treasury has developed a startup air, which will never not be a super cringe move for any government department ([Steve Hilton](#) is right there as a cautionary tale, guys).

I'm not sure that, when the nickname "[Dishy Rishi](#)" was coined (off the back of the second*-youngest chancellor in a century being moderately good-looking), many of us could have foreseen him, maskless, indoors, holding an actual dish, pretending to work in a Wagamama under his "[eat out to help out](#)" scheme – a name surely cooked up during a focus group with Benny Hill fans. (*The youngest chancellor in a century was George Osborne, which is difficult to comprehend because, even at the age of 38, he often had the vibe of the undead.)

Especially strange was when Sunak put an "eat out to help out" sticker in the window of No 11, as though his own home were participating in the scheme;

although I suppose it is pretty much cocktail hour 24/7 next door, so perhaps he got confused.



Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

In the end, the scheme increased footfall by 5%, but also increased Covid infections by up to 17%, and millions were lost to fraud. So who's to say really whether it was a good idea?

Sunak was praised for the billions spent on Covid mitigation measures, which would have been fine if he hadn't shafted freelancers and gig economy workers, and messed about with the furlough deadline to the point where thousands of people lost their jobs, only for him to reverse course literally five hours before it hit.

All the while, the photo ops keep coming. Here is Sunak standing in front of a bank of screens, which I imagine he thinks makes him look purposeful and in charge, but actually looks like a still from Squid Game.



Photograph: Simon Walker/Hm Treasury

Then there is Suave Sunak, as witnessed here. Which is, unfortunately for him, giving off strong Harry Maguire chatting up those girls at the World Cup energy. To wit:



Photograph: Simon Walker Hm Treasury/Hm Treasury



Photograph: Twitter

On the subject of football, Sunak likes to think of himself as a chilled-out kind of guy, so it made sense when he and Boris Johnson organised the below pic session around a foosball table (with strategically placed hand sanitiser).



Photograph: WPA/Getty Images

Johnson, of course, is a sporty kind of man, well known for [jogging in dress shoes](#); [taking out children on the rugby pitch](#); and thinking it [fine to boo](#) the England football team. The only thing I really know about Sunak's sporting life is that he supports Southampton FC, and that one time he took part in some kind of boxing event – “delivering a punchy message” about exercise – and was photographed smiling while [about to be kicked in the chest](#). His love of sporting apparel, however, extends beyond tracksuit bottoms and hoodies, which once led to the BBC's great Naga Munchetty deeming his favourite pool sliders “[awful](#)”.



Photograph: Simon Walker Hm Treasury/Hm Treasury

I'm all for jogging bottoms and sliders – mostly because I haven't been outside in two and a half years – and I am actually in favour of politicians dressing more casually in general, but, as with Emmanuel Macron last week, the contrived attempt at edginess is palpable. And the plastic charm bracelet worn by Sunak when delivering last October's budget was a step too far. Part Alex Garland writing The Beach, part children's after-school activity, it was the most awkward piece of jewellery since [Theresa May wore a bangle](#) of the famously communist Frida Kahlo.



Photograph: Paul Marriott/Rex/Shutterstock

None of this cool, down-to-earth Rishi shtick really washes when you're a man in a [£795 jacket](#) plunging [1.3 million people into poverty](#), and families are [declining potatoes from food banks](#) because they can't afford the energy to cook them. When [2.5 million food parcels a year are given out in the UK](#), Sunak's entire spring statement could be summed up thus: let them eat caviar.

- Hannah Jane Parkinson is a Guardian columnist

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/25/pool-sliders-charm-bracelets-kia-rio-tories-brand-rishi-sunak>

2022.03.26 - Around the world

- [Ginni Thomas Capitol attack panel may call in judge's wife who wanted election overturned](#)
- ['Perfect storm' Royals misjudged Caribbean tour, say critics](#)
- [Canada Key Conservative says party risks takeover by far-right 'lunatics'](#)
- [Aids quilt Creator to leave San Francisco home after rent doubles to \\$5,200](#)
- [Ethiopia Tigray rebels agree 'cessation of hostilities' after government truce](#)

US Capitol attack

House January 6 panel members weigh seeking cooperation from Ginni Thomas

Wife of supreme court justice Clarence Thomas sent texts to Trump's chief of staff urging overturning of 2020 election result



Some committee members are concerned that Ginni Thomas could seek to create a spectacle that could distract from the investigation, sources said.
Photograph: Susan Walsh/AP

[Hugo Lowell](#) in Washington

Sat 26 Mar 2022 09.24 EDTFirst published on Sat 26 Mar 2022 03.00 EDT

Members of the House select committee investigating the January 6 Capitol attack are weighing whether to demand that Ginni Thomas, the wife of the supreme court justice Clarence Thomas, cooperate with the inquiry, according to two sources familiar with the matter.

A move to request cooperation from Ginni Thomas, who was revealed to have pushed in text messages to [Trump's](#) former chief of staff Mark Meadows to overturn the results of the 2020 election, would mark one of the most aggressive steps taken by the panel.

The select committee did not formally decide on whether to summon Thomas after a series of private deliberations on Friday, the sources said, even as the members discussed whether to request her voluntary cooperation or compel documents and testimony with a subpoena.

But the renewed discussions – the panel weighed the matter for weeks after it first obtained the text messages – are likely to continue in huddles and on the House floor on Monday before the select committee moves to hold two Trump aides in contempt of Congress, the sources said.

The hesitation to date about demanding that Thomas cooperate with the inquiry appears to have centered in part from concerns that she likely has scant interest in assisting the panel and could seek to create a political spectacle to distract from the investigation.

Thomas, for instance, remains a close friend of prominent rightwing political operatives including Trump's former strategist Steve Bannon, who last year [openly defied a subpoena](#) as he sought to undermine the legitimacy of the select committee.

The other principal concern among some members on the panel is whether it would be worth it to pursue testimony from Thomas at potential political cost if she appears for questioning but then stonewalls the inquiry, one of the sources said, for instance by asserting the fifth amendment.

At least one member on the select committee also appeared to only just learn about the content of the text messages after reading them in news reports on Thursday, one of the sources said.

Justice Thomas remains an icon among the Republican base and some members have warned that a move against his wife would almost certainly

be perceived as a partisan attack by Democrats trying to tarnish his reputation, the sources said.

The worries about political backlash has increasingly become a point of contention for the select committee in recent months. The Guardian [first reported in January](#) the panel had similar reservations about issuing subpoenas to House Republicans.

The select committee could yet demand cooperation from Thomas, seeking information on whether Thomas knew about the scheme to have then vice-president Mike Pence stop the certification of Joe Biden's win or plans for Trump supporters to descend on the Capitol January 6.

Other lines of inquiry might include whether she connected lawyer John Eastman, who drew up the Pence scheme and clerked for Justice Thomas, to Trump, and whether she communicated with Meadows during a gap of unexplained correspondence between 24 November and 10 January.

The select committee would then find itself in the bizarre position of having John Wood, also a former clerk for Justice Thomas who now leads the "gold team" examining Trump's role in the Capitol attack, questioning the senior justice's wife.

A spokesperson for the select committee declined to comment.

Thomas is facing heightened scrutiny for working as a Republican activist while her husband sits on the supreme court after the Washington Post and CBS reported that she pushed Trump's most senior White House aide to overturn the 2020 election results.

In one of 29 text messages from Ginni Thomas that Meadows turned over to the select committee, Thomas also pressured the former White House chief of staff to have Trump appoint the conspiracy theorist and lawyer Sidney Powell to lead his post-election legal team.

The communications are significant as they represent the first evidence that she was advising the White House on how to return Trump to office by any

means, while her husband ruled on cases attempting to change the outcome of the election.

But Meadows did not turn over any text messages between 24 November and 10 January, the Washington Post and CBS reported – a gap in communications that overlaps with the Capitol attack and would almost certainly be an area of interest to the panel.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/mar/26/ginni-thomas-house-january-6-committee>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

Monarchy

‘Perfect storm’: royals misjudged Caribbean tour, say critics

Calls for slavery reparations and Jamaica’s PM insisting country was ‘moving on’ signal sea change in relations with royals

01:10

Jamaican PM tells Kate and William his country is ‘moving on’ to become republic – video

[Rachel Hall](#) and [Amelia Gentleman](#)

Fri 25 Mar 2022 13.14 EDT Last modified on Sat 26 Mar 2022 06.52 EDT

It was supposed to be a visit to mark the Queen’s platinum jubilee – a chance to present the modern face of the British monarchy to a region where republican sentiment is on the rise.

But it really didn’t turn out that way.

When the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge end their week-long tour of the Caribbean on Saturday, they will report back that the tour may have accelerated moves to ditch the Queen as the head of state.

Calls for slavery reparations and the [enduring fury of the Windrush scandal](#) followed them across Belize, Jamaica and the Bahamas – overshadowing a trip aimed at strengthening the Commonwealth and discouraging other countries from following Barbados’s example in becoming a republic.

Upon arrival in Belize, [the couple were met with protests](#) from villagers over a land dispute involving a charity William is a patron of. In Jamaica, the prime minister told them in an awkward meeting that the country would be “moving on” to become a republic, and a government committee in the

Bahamas urged the royals to issue “a full and formal apology for their crimes against humanity”.



The Duchess of Cambridge shakes hands with children during a visit to Trench Town. Photograph: Reuters

From photos of Will and Kate shaking hands with Jamaican children through wire fences, to the military parade in which the pair stood, dressed in white, in an open-top Land Rover, the optics of the visit has been described by local campaigners as a throwback to colonialism.

“This was another photo opportunity, and rather presumptuous to assume that Jamaican people were suddenly going to welcome William and his wife with open arms,” said Velma McClymont, a writer and former Caribbean studies academic who was born in Jamaica and was five when the country gained independence.

“My grandparents could trace generations back to slavery, but they died believing Jamaica was fully independent. Imagine, 60 years later and it’s still an extension of the British empire. It’s an infant colony, not standing alone.”

‘The monarchy is a relic’: Protests in Jamaica over royal visit – video

Followers of the trip in the UK may have gained a different impression. On Friday, the Sun reserved its front page for the tour, gushing that “Kate dazzles on Jamaica tour” and suggesting that the pair had “touched hearts”. On Wednesday, the Daily Mail splashed a photo of Kate, the “diving duchess”, scuba-diving with nurse sharks in [Belize](#).

The same could not be said of the coverage in the Jamaican media. “It was dubbed in [the UK] media as a charm offensive, but I’m not quite so sure it came off that way. It wasn’t a royal failure, but I wouldn’t quite deem it a regal success either,” said Tyrone Reid, an associate editor at national newspaper the Jamaica Gleaner.

Reid added that local publications had devoted considerable column inches to the views of “a growing number of Jamaicans demanding the British monarch and British state apologise for and accept its role in the abhorrent slave trade of years ago.”

Royals experts, including one former palace PR, said that an enormous amount of planning went in to the visits, often starting years in advance. They are led by government in line with Foreign Office diplomatic, culture and commercial priorities.

Philip Murphy, a professor at the University of London and former director of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, said that although the palace had “taken a relaxed view” about countries removing the Queen as head of state, “the British government has been less consistent about that” – ministers are thought to be anxious to preserve the soft power benefits of the Commonwealth after Brexit.



The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge view a portrait of the Queen during a visit to Sybil Strachan primary school in Nassau, the Bahamas. Photograph: Ian Vogler/The Daily Mirror/PA

"I think the Foreign Office is sometimes a bit naive, and it doesn't have much institutional memory any more. There are profound sensitivities around the legacies of colonialism and slavery and around the royal presence in the Caribbean, and sometimes you get the feeling that the Foreign Office doesn't quite get it," he said.

Murphy pointed to the growing emphasis on the relationship between colonialism and racial oppression after the Black Lives Matter movement, along with damage to the royals' reputations after Meghan Markle's [accusations of racism](#) and the British government through the Windrush scandal. "All of those things make it politically very difficult to stage this visit at this time. You've got the makings of a perfect storm," he said.

A better approach to the trip, said Prof Trevor Burnard, director of the Wilberforce Institute for the Study of [Slavery](#) and Emancipation at the University of Hull, would have been for the royals to go prepared to directly acknowledge and apologise for the family's role in the slave trade, including through memorial visits to sites connected with slavery, such as Kingston harbour, to express sorrow instead of upbeat photo ops.

“They should recognise that members of the royal family from Charles II to William IV were involved with and supported slavery and the slave trade, and that this is part of their past.”

Although a “quiet minority” in Jamaica were supportive of the Queen as head of state, there was “a great deal of antipathy and resentment toward the monarchy”, said Cynthia Barrow-Giles, a professor at the University of West Indies who has researched the British monarchy in the Caribbean. “[The visit] smacks of political opportunism and is disturbingly self-serving,” she said.

Many members of Commonwealth countries in the Caribbean are increasingly questioning its purpose, especially since they have received little support during the pandemic, which has devastated the Jamaican economy and left [120,000 children out of school](#), and are pointing to unequal access to vaccines, which has resulted in nearly 3,000 deaths in an island of 3 million people.

Jennifer Housen, a lawyer in Jamaica, said the fact the UK revoked visa-free access for Jamaicans in 2003, with applications regularly refused, had led people to feel “the relationship is pointless”.



The Duchess of Cambridge attends a dinner hosted by Patrick Allen, governor general of Jamaica, at King's House, Kingston, Jamaica. Photograph: Toby Melville/PA

"These are discussions we need to be having with them – not pretty flags and smiling black children pushing their hand through chain fences to say: 'Oh, you know, I've touched the royals'; that's garbage, that's fostering something that is completely cringeworthy."

The [reparations movement](#) has been growing considerably over the Caribbean in recent years, led by the 15-country strong intergovernmental Caricom Reparations Commission.

Rosalea Hamilton, one of the campaigners for Advocates Network who [organised slavery reparations protests in Jamaica](#), said there was currently a "heightened consciousness of the history", including "understanding of the legacies of colonialism today, economic, sociological, psychological". There was, she said, an increased awareness that this had led to trauma in the population that affected confidence levels, along with swathes of the population living in "unhealthy, unsanitary, unsafe" conditions.

Reid said the reparations movement had been "gathering significant steam" in part because of increased access to information about Jamaica's history that went beyond the school textbooks that had traditionally taught a British interpretation of history.

"The man on the street is demanding reparations as well, it's not just at the intellectual level. That's when you know something is really gathering momentum, when it's spreading across a broad section of society. More people are recognising the horror of slavery and the atrocities that were committed, and becoming aware of the impact that has on modern day life."

This article was amended on 26 March 2022 to correctly refer to the Queen's platinum jubilee, rather than diamond jubilee as an earlier version said.

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

[Canada](#)

Canada: key Conservative says party risks takeover by far-right ‘lunatics’

Jason Kenney warns a far-right element could seize control in the coming weeks as United Conservatives hold leadership review



Jason Kenney in Alberta in November 2021. Photograph: Todd Korol/Reuters

[Leyland Cecco](#) in Toronto

Fri 25 Mar 2022 15.45 EDTFirst published on Fri 25 Mar 2022 13.38 EDT

Alberta’s premier has called fellow Conservatives “lunatics” who are “trying to take over the asylum” as a populist mutiny in his party foreshadows a bitter fight for the future of Canada’s Conservative movement.

In a leaked recording of a meeting with caucus staff on Tuesday, Premier Jason Kenney warned a far-right element – [skeptical of coronavirus measures and wedded to conspiracy theories](#) – could seize control of the

party in the coming weeks as the United Conservatives hold a leadership review.

“I will not let this mainstream conservative party become an agent for extreme, hateful, intolerant, bigoted and crazy views. Sorry to be so blunt with you but you need to understand what the stakes are here,” he said, before alluding to the baseless QAnon conspiracy theory with a warning that “people who think I am involved in a global conspiracy to traffic children” would show up to vote for his removal.

The comments underscore both Kenney’s sagging poll numbers and the degree to which an energized faction of the United Conservatives threaten his leadership.

But the controversy could also foreshadow a bitter fight for control over the federal Conservative party, as candidates vying for national leadership gauge a possible ideological shift in Alberta, the party’s electoral heartland.

“The Conservatives seem to have this existential crisis, where they break apart and come together and break again,” said Lori Turnbull, director of Dalhousie University’s School of Public Administration, citing the “deep-seated” differences within the party that flare up every few years. “The federal candidates are definitely looking to see what happens in Alberta, because that’s going to be a big part of the game for whoever ends up winning the leadership race.”

In a statement, the premier’s office said Kenney’s comments were “consistent” with previous public remarks on the issue.

For the last two years, Kenney has led a party with strong internal divisions over public health measures, with the more anti-government element protesting lockdowns.

Those fissures, which critics say slowed Alberta’s response, are cited as part of the reason that Alberta at one point during the pandemic had [one of the highest coronavirus infection rates in North America.](#)

Recent polling suggests Kenney's response to the crisis placated neither the libertarian element nor those wanting strong public health measures: the premier has one of the lowest approval ratings in the country.

"He was seen as the saviour of a fractured party, a shot in the arm for Alberta. He looked like a slam dunk," said Turnbull. "And now he's crash and burned."

For his part, Kenney has suggested those looking out him are "kooky people generally".

"[Prominent Alberta conservative] Preston Manning used to say that a bright light attracts a few bugs, well, there's more than a few bugs attracted to us, this party, right now," said Kenney.

In the audio recording, the premier suggests mounting frustrations over the job led him to consider quitting.

"What's the easiest path for me? Just to take a walk. I don't need this job. I could go to the private sector, have my evenings, weekends off," he said. The premier opted to stay and fight, he said, over fears that internal turmoil would hand the rival New Democrats power in the next election.

The party was hit with fresh turmoil this week after leadership made a last-minute switch to mail-in ballots, citing a record surge in party registration. The sudden shift has led to accusations of cheating by party members, some of whom called for Kenney to resign.

The results will be announced 18 May and Kenney will need a simple majority to stay on as leader.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/25/canada-alberta-premier-jason-kenney-conservatives-warning>

San Francisco

San Francisco activist behind Aids quilt to leave home after rent doubles to \$5,200

Property where LGBTQ+ rights champion Cleve Jones lives was purchased by a new owner last month



Cleve Jones in 1987. Photograph: Liz Hafalia/San Francisco Chronicle/Hearst Newspapers/Getty Images

[Maya Yang](#)

Fri 25 Mar 2022 22.07 EDT Last modified on Sat 26 Mar 2022 12.30 EDT

A prominent [San Francisco](#) LGBTQ+ rights activist is being uprooted from his home in the Castro neighborhood after the new owner of the property nearly doubled his rent to \$5,200.

Cleve Jones, 67, who moved to San Francisco in 1973 and first conceived of the [Aids Memorial Quilt](#), is reportedly moving out of his rent-controlled, one-bedroom apartment this week. The move comes after he was notified of a significant price increase from the property's new owner, who claims that the apartment is not Jones' primary residence.

The situation has been described as "heartbreaking" by a local supervisor and is seen by many as emblematic of the increasing unaffordability of a city that was once a haven for bohemians and social activists. The median house price in the Castro, the historic LGBTQ+ neighborhood that helped birth the modern gay rights movement, now stands at over \$1.5m, [according to](#) Redfin.

The new owner, Lily Pao Kue, is a 30-year-old self-described stock market investor who, according to Zillow records reviewed by the [San Francisco Chronicle](#), purchased the property in February for \$1,585,000.

According to the Chronicle, Kue has installed security cameras around the property, begun construction work in the building and had a car that belonged to Jones' friend and roommate removed from the property.

In a letter Kue sent to Jones on 18 March, she stated that she assessed he had vacated the property and she would be increasing the current rent – \$2,393 – to \$5,200 as of 1 July, invoking a Costa-Hawkins petition.

Costa-Hawkins is a state law that sets certain requirements for cities with rent control. Under the law, landlords are allowed to raise rent to market rate once a tenant moves out.



Jones in 2017. He said he had not moved out of his home but was spending more time outside the city during the pandemic. Photograph: Vivien Killilea/Getty Images

Jones told the Chronicle he had not moved out but had been spending more time out of the city during the pandemic, because he is immunocompromised. Instead of dealing with a court battle, however, Jones said he and his roommate would move out of the property this weekend and search for a new place to live.

“If I were a younger man, I would fill the sandbags and I’d batten down the hatches and would drag this out for as long as possible,” Jones told the Chronicle.

“Part of me feels quite guilty that I don’t have it in me to do it. I am not in good health, I’m HIV-positive and one of the longest-living HIV survivors ... And I’m old,” he added.

Kue has said that she is seeking a hearing regarding her petition from the San Francisco rent board.

“I want Cleve to continue the tenancy and let the judge determine the petition,” Kue said in an email to the Chronicle. “I will be gracious and accepting of law.”

Since the property dispute became public, Kue said that she had seen online harassment from Jones' social media followers and had filed a police report.

In a statement to the Chronicle, the district supervisor, Rafael Mandelman, said: "Cleve recognizes that this is happening and has happened to so many other folks ... But he is such an iconic figure and so associated with that neighborhood. It's heartbreakin."

On Sunday, Jones' supporters will rally at Harvey Milk Plaza in the morning to shed light on his situation and those of others who have faced similar issues in the neighborhood.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/mar/25/cleve-jones-san-francisco-housing-rent-lgbtq-activist>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

[Ethiopia](#)

Ethiopia: Tigray rebels agree ‘cessation of hostilities’ after government truce

Announcement marks turning point in the nearly 17-month war in the northern region



Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) fighters react to people from a truck as they arrive in Mekele, the capital of Tigray region, Ethiopia in July 2021. The war broke out in November 2020. Photograph: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP/Getty Images

AFP in Addis Ababa

Fri 25 Mar 2022 15.24 EDT Last modified on Fri 25 Mar 2022 15.51 EDT

Tigrayan rebels have agreed to a “cessation of hostilities”, marking a turning point in the nearly 17-month war in northern [Ethiopia](#) after the government’s announcement of an indefinite humanitarian truce a day earlier.

The rebels said in a statement sent to AFP they were “committed to implementing a cessation of hostilities effective immediately” and urged Ethiopian authorities to hasten delivery of emergency aid into Tigray, where hundreds of thousands face starvation.

Since war broke out in November 2020, thousands have died, and many more have been forced to flee their homes as the conflict has expanded from Tigray to the neighbouring regions of Amhara and Afar.

On Thursday, [Abiy Ahmed's government declared a surprise truce](#), saying it hoped the move would ease humanitarian access to Tigray and “pave the way for the resolution of the conflict”.

It called on the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) to “desist from all acts of further aggression and withdraw from areas they have occupied in neighbouring regions”.

The rebels in turn urged “Ethiopian authorities to go beyond empty promises and take concrete steps to facilitate unfettered humanitarian access to Tigray”.

The conflict erupted when Abiy sent troops into Tigray to topple the TPLF, the region’s former ruling party, saying the move came in response to rebel attacks on army camps.

Fighting has dragged on, triggering a humanitarian crisis, as accounts have emerged of massacres and mass rapes, with both sides accused of human rights violations.

More than 400,000 people have been displaced in Tigray, which has also been subject to what the UN says is a de facto blockade.

The United States has accused Abiy’s government of preventing aid from reaching those in need, while the authorities in turn have blamed the rebels for the obstruction.

Nearly 40% of Tigray's population faces "an extreme lack of food", the UN said in January, with fuel shortages forcing aid workers to deliver medicines and other crucial supplies by foot.

The UN, US, European Union, African Union and China hailed the truce declaration.

"These positive developments must now translate into immediate improvements on the ground," said the spokesperson for UN secretary-general chief António Guterres.

"The conflict in Ethiopia has caused terrible suffering for millions of people."

The US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, said Washington "urges all parties to build on this announcement to advance a negotiated and sustainable ceasefire, including necessary security arrangements".

In contrast to Beijing's more circumspect approach, Washington angered Ethiopia's government by removing trading privileges for the country over rights concerns during the war, but stopped short of imposing sanctions to encourage a ceasefire.

Diplomats, led by the AU's envoy to the Horn of Africa Olusegun Obasanjo, have spent months trying to broker peace talks, but with little evident progress.

The new US special envoy to the region, David Satterfield, visited Ethiopia this week to meet Obasanjo, government and UN officials, as well as representatives of humanitarian groups.

Analysts said the truce was an important step but urged the government to act quickly to ease humanitarian access to Tigray.

"The unconditional and unrestricted delivery of aid could also help create enough trust to pave the way for ceasefire talks and, eventually, dialogue," said William Davison, the International Crisis Group's senior Ethiopia analyst.

Aid workers and rights groups have long sounded the alarm about the conditions in Tigray, with the UN humanitarian agency OCHA on Friday warning that food supplies were running perilously low.

More than 9 million people need food aid across northern Ethiopia, the UN says, but humanitarian organisations have been forced to curtail activities because of fuel and supply shortages.

Sarah Jackson, Amnesty International's deputy director for east Africa, asked both sides "to seize this opportunity to avoid worsening the humanitarian catastrophe that is unfolding in Tigray".

"All parties to the conflict must immediately allow humanitarian aid workers uninterrupted access to all conflict-affected areas of northern Ethiopia, including Afar and Amhara," she said.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/25/ethiopia-tigray-rebels-agree-cessation-of-hostilities-after-government-truce>

Headlines

- [Spring statement 2022 Lack of help from Rishi Sunak for struggling UK families will push 1.3m into poverty](#)
- [Live Rishi Sunak says he ‘can’t make every problem go away’ after criticism of spring statement](#)
- [Live Business: absolute poverty to rise in UK; Moscow stocks rally as trading resumes](#)
- [Analysis Sleight of hand aims to shift blame for hardship ahead](#)

Rishi Sunak

Lack of help from Rishi Sunak for struggling UK families will push 1.3m into poverty

Resolution Foundation says it will be first large increase in number of people pushed into poverty outside of a recession



Donations from Morrisons supermarket for a food bank. Inflation is predicted to hit a 40-year high of 8.7% in October. Photograph: Peter Summers/Getty Images

[Richard Partington](#) and [Mark Sweeney](#)

Thu 24 Mar 2022 03.58 EDT Last modified on Thu 24 Mar 2022 09.14 EDT

Rishi Sunak's spring statement will push 1.3 million people – including half a million children – below the poverty line next year while raising tax to the highest level since the second world war, according to leading economists.

The chancellor's [spring statement on Wednesday](#) offered some tax cuts, such as 5p-a-litre off fuel duty and a £3,000 increase in the threshold for national insurance contributions, but came in for [widespread criticism for failing to support poorer families](#) and other vulnerable groups from the soaring cost of living.

Paul Johnson, the director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies, said the chancellor had "proved to be something of a fiscal illusionist" for announcing tax cuts that would not offset other previously announced plans.

The Resolution Foundation thinktank said just one in eight workers would have their tax bills fall by the end of this parliament in May 2024, when the rate of income tax would drop by 1p to 19p.

"In the face of a cost of living crisis that looks set to make this parliament the worst on record for household incomes, the chancellor came to the box yesterday promising support with the cost of living today, and tax cuts tomorrow," said Torsten Bell, the thinktank's chief executive.

"The decision not to target support at those hardest hit by rising prices will leave low- and-middle income households painfully exposed."

Income chart

The Resolution Foundation said it was the first time there would be such a large increase in the number of people falling into poverty outside of a recession.

The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) said on Wednesday that inflation would hit a 40-year high of 8.7% in October, fuelling the biggest fall in living standards in any single year since records began in 1956.

The foundation's analysis of Sunak's spring statement estimates that a typical family will experience a £1,100 decline in income this year, or about 4%, with the poorest households facing a 6% fall.

Sign up to the daily Business Today email or follow Guardian Business on Twitter at [@BusinessDesk](#)

It also found that only those earning between £49,100 and £50,300 would pay less income tax in 2024-25, and only those earning between £11,000 and £13,500 would pay less tax and national insurance.

Of the 31 million people in work, 27 million would pay more in tax and national insurance in 2024-25.

“The big picture is that Rishi Sunak has prioritised rebuilding his tax-cutting credentials over supporting the low- to middle-income households who will be hardest hit from the surging cost of living, while also leaving himself flexibility in the years ahead,” Bell said. “Whether this will be sustainable in the face of huge income falls remains to be seen.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/mar/24/lack-of-help-from-rishi-sunak-for-struggling-uk-families-will-push-13m-into-poverty>

[**Politics live with Andrew Sparrow**](#)

[**Politics**](#)

Labour suggests PM misled MPs when he said government definitely taking P&O Ferries to court – as it happened

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/live/2022/mar/24/rishi-sunak-says-he-cant-make-every-problem-go-away-after-criticism-of-spring-statement-uk-politics-live>

Business live

Business

Cost of living crisis hitting economic outlook as firms hike prices – as it happened

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/live/2022/mar/24/cost-of-living-squeezes-sunak-poverty-moscow-stock-market-po-ferries-economics-business-live>

Spring statement 2022

Rishi Sunak's sleight of hand aims to shift blame for hardship ahead

Analysis: Chancellor trying to distance deliberate political choices from declining living standards



Rishi Sunak presenting the spring statement in the House of Commons.
Photograph: Jessica Taylor/AFP/Getty Images

[Heather Stewart](#) Political editor

Wed 23 Mar 2022 14.34 EDT Last modified on Thu 24 Mar 2022 01.14 EDT

Rishi Sunak's spring statement opened by summoning the power of free societies and open markets, as a counterpoint to Russian aggression in Ukraine. "What the authoritarian mind perceives as division, we know are the passionate disagreements at the heart of our living, breathing democracy," he said.

It was a Thatcherite rhetorical flourish aimed at stirring his supporters on the Conservative backbenches, but also framed the statement as a response to the war, which Sunak said had made the UK's economy more fragile and underlined the need for "security" at home.

The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) is now forecasting the steepest one-year decline in living standards since records began in the 1950s. So perhaps it should not be surprising that Sunak appeared keen to paint the hardship ahead as a contribution to the war effort rather than the result of deliberate political choices.

He didn't quite say the privations to be faced by the British public over the next 12 months were a price worth paying (Kwasi Kwarteng almost went there last week, saying the public were prepared for "sacrifices"). But he was sending a clear signal to voters that when they open up next month's energy bill, or wince as they get to the supermarket till and see how much their shopping costs, they should put the blame on an international crisis, not on the government.

Labour believes that won't wash with a public who were already feeling the impact of rocketing inflation – and Conservative policies, including the cut to universal credit – even before the tanks rolled across the Ukrainian border.

There was another political sleight of hand at the heart of Sunak's statement, too. With great fanfare, he highlighted the announcement that the threshold for national insurance contributions (NICs) would rise by a chunky £3,000 next month, and income tax would be cut by 1p in 2024, calling it "the biggest net cut to personal taxes in over a quarter of a century".

He was not willing to let his ambition to cut the basic rate of income tax "wither and drift", he said, and while he couldn't justify it this year, he would press ahead with it in two years' time.

The increase in the NICs threshold was welcomed by experts such as the Institute for Fiscal Studies' Paul Johnson as a sensible simplification, as well as a tax cut, bringing national insurance in line with income tax.

Yet, as the OBR pointed out, these much-vaunted tax cuts only reverse one-sixth of the tax increases the Johnson government has announced.

This has been a pattern with Sunak: his NICs cut helps soften the blow of a measure he brought in himself in the autumn – the health and social care levy – just as the cut in the universal credit taper rate he introduced in the budget partly offset the reversal of the £20-a-week Covid uplift he had pushed through.

He is evidently banking on a pat on the back from voters at the next general election for cutting their taxes, even when he has, in fact, increased them.

The shadow chancellor, Rachel Reeves, tried to capture the absurdity of this position with an extended Alice in Wonderland metaphor; the Liberal Democrats' leader, Ed Davey, called it the “Sunak swindle”. But Tory backbenchers were overjoyed.

And of course, those backbenchers will form the electorate for the first round of any leadership contest that might take place in the not-too-distant future.

Sunak insisted on the NICs increase as a quid pro quo for funding the prime minister's plan to cap social care costs, but it was loathed by many of his colleagues and further dented his credentials as a Thatcherite small-state tax cutter.

The Treasury's new tax plan, announced alongside the statement, says that from now on tax cuts, not more public spending, will be the first priority – and tackling the deficit is back in vogue. George Osborne hailed it as putting “Tory economics back on track”.

It remains to be seen how well the plan sits with Sunak's neighbour in No 10, who loathed the very idea of austerity, loves grands projects and tends to want to reach for the spending taps.

And it is unclear, too, whether voters promised “levelling up” – only mentioned once by Sunak, in passing – will hail the government for handing

them a tax cut after two years that, judging by the OBR's forecasts, look very grim indeed.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/mar/23/sunak-sleight-of-hand-hardship-ahead-spring-statement>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

2022.03.24 - Spotlight

- Obese pets ‘He raids the bin and eats the cat’s food!’
- The long read The queen of crime-solving
- Architecture Like something from a Kubrick film – the hunt for Britain’s best modern buildings
- ‘A freeze frame death in front of the world’ The police killing of Sean Downes at the height of the Troubles

Advertisement

US edition

- [US edition](#)
- [UK edition](#)
- [Australian edition](#)
- [International edition](#)

[The Guardian - Back to home](#)

[Pets](#)

‘Strangers tell me: “Your dog is really fat!”’ How pets from cats to gerbils are being forced to diet



George, the overweight pomeranian visits Buckingham Palace. Photograph:
@littlefatcockney/Instagram

A staggering 78% of vets say they have seen a rise in worryingly overweight pets in recent years, and lockdown has only made things worse. Could social media's obsession with chonky cats and podgy pooches be to blame?



[Sirin Kale](#)

Thu 24 Mar 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 24 Mar 2022 09.42 EDT

Eight-year-old chocolate labrador Blue is shaped like a barrel and has a slow, lumbering gait. Rolls of fat bulge from his collar; his belly hangs low, skimming the ground. Mournful eyes look out from a jowly face. Blue is on a diet, you see, and he's hating every minute of it. No more juicy rabbit ears or plump chicken feet. He sneaked some cake earlier in the week from the kitchen floor, but his owner, Mary, got it away before he could finish it.

"I hate this bit," groans Mary*, as Blue thunks on to the scales at the [Pet Health and Therapy Centre](#) in Welling, south-east London. "It's like Weight Watchers." Ideally, Blue should weigh no more than 36kg. The scales creak: 47.1kg. "He's gone up again," sighs Mary, who has requested anonymity because she is embarrassed. "My son and daughter are really skinny," she says in a pleading tone. "People think I starve my children but overfeed my animals."

Blue is arthritic and finds it painful to walk. If he doesn't lose weight, he is likely to die young

A 39-year-old dog walker from Mottingham, south-east London, Mary says that Blue is on a calorie-controlled diet and regularly walked. "He goes on walks all the time!" she says, pulling up her phone to show me photos of Blue hulking over her clients' dogs. Sometimes, members of the public come up to Mary at work and tell her that she's got to let Blue's owner know he needs to lose weight. "I am the owner," she responds.

Reluctantly, Blue is led into a hydrotherapy tank for his weekly session. "The water reduces the pressure on his joints," says 23-year-old veterinary physiotherapist Miranda Cosstick, "and places less stress on the hips." When Blue began training in November 2021, he could only manage 10 seconds on the underwater treadmill. Now, he is up to 45 seconds, even if he has regained the weight he initially lost. The treadmill whirrs. Blue stares out glumly from the warm lapping water. Cosstick waves a dog treat in front of him, and he lunges forward and tries to get it out of her hand. "You have to taunt him with it," says Cosstick, "to get him to move."

But this is not animal abuse, whatever Blue's plaintive eyes might suggest. Already, Blue is arthritic and finds it painful to walk. If he doesn't lose weight, he is likely to die young from obesity-related complications. And he is not alone. Fuller-figured pets are, increasingly, a mainstay of UK homes. "We've seen an increased prevalence of obesity in both dogs and cats for a long time," says Prof Alex German of the University of Liverpool. The PDSA animal charity [reports that](#) 78% of veterinary professionals have seen an increase in pet obesity in recent years, with obesity rated as one of the top five welfare problems for UK pet owners.



Blue gets dunked in the hydrotherapy tank as part of his exercise regime.
Photograph: Suki Dhanda/The Guardian

Many owners don't realise the health consequences of their pets being overweight. Only 69% of those the PDSA surveyed agreed that overweight pets were more likely to suffer from serious diseases. "They're more likely to suffer problems with mobility, arthritis, diabetes, respiratory problems and problems with their urinary systems," says German. Overweight dogs may die two-and-a-half years [earlier than](#) their non-obese peers.

But Kitty Thanki is not one of those members of the public in denial about the damaging effects of pet obesity. "I'm a doctor," says the 35-year-old, from Camden, north London, "which is one of the ironies of having a fat dog." Her seven-year-old pomeranian, George, looks like an overstuffed draft excluder. He weighs 6.5kg; ideally, he should weigh no more than 4.5kg. "He is greedy," says Thanki. "He raids the bin. He eats the cats' food." During lockdown, George's weight went up to 7.1kg. "My mum came to stay with me," says Thanki, "and that's where it all escalated. She feeds him human food, even though I tell her not to. She says it's only a little bit, but she doesn't realise the calorific impact of a slice of toast on a dog that's so small."

The internet is part of the problem. If all you see is overweight pets, you start to think that's normal

Lynne James

George's story is not uncommon. The UK's pet obesity crisis has been exacerbated by the pandemic. Five per cent of cat owners, and 9% of dog owners, reported that their pets had gained weight since the March 2020 lockdown, with 1.4 million pets being fed more human treats during this time. "Being at home has made owners more likely to give pets a little bit of what they're having," says PDSA vet Lynne James. "It's easy to do, when they're sat there, looking at you."

George has an Instagram account with 2,418 followers ([@littlefatcockney](https://www.instagram.com/@littlefatcockney)), which Thanki initially set up to document his "weight loss journey", to use the terminology of diet groups across the world. But the algorithm does not want George to become more streamlined. "When he looks the most rotund," says Thanki, "he gets the most likes." Thanki understands this impulse, even if she'd much rather have no likes, and a healthy dog. "I'm probably just as guilty of looking at fat animals online and thinking, *they are so cute*," she says.



George, the overweight pomeranian, whose ‘weight-loss journey’ is being documented on Instagram. Photograph: @littlefatcockney/Instagram

Thanki is referring to the pervasive internet trend for videos and photos of obese animals, often referred to as “chonky”, “thicc”, and “absolute units”. The most [popular Instagram accounts](#) have hundreds of thousands of followers, who like [videos of obese cats](#) getting trapped in cat flaps and [struggling to climb on chairs](#). Some even sell merchandise, including dog [backpacks](#), so owners can carry obese animals that are too unfit to walk. “The internet is part of the problem,” says James. “It’s normalising the appearance of these animals being overweight. If all you see is overweight pets, you start to think that’s normal. Pets that are a healthy weight start to appear skinny in comparison.”

The best way to check whether your animal is overweight is to take them to a vet, but owners can also assess them at home. “Run your fingers loosely over their torso,” says James, “and see whether you can feel their ribs and spine. You should be able to feel them with minimal pressure. You should also see a waistline that tucks in when you’re looking at them from the side.” I text James photographs of my two pet cats, Kedi and Larry, for professional assessment. “I’d want to put my hands on them to feel sure,” she says, “but they look good. I’d use them in a PDSA campaign as an example of healthy-looking cats.” I flush with pride.

The most important thing, says German, is not to berate owners. “Obesity is a highly stigmatised condition,” he says. “There’s a lot of fat-shaming out there. You could argue: well, cats and dogs don’t know you’re making fun of them. But you’re potentially shaming the owners, and that leads to blame, and the problem with blame is that it gets in the way of good obesity care.” Thanki has experienced this casual judgment. “Strangers have come up to me and said: ‘Your dog is really fat,’” she says. “Once, my partner was carrying George at an event so he wouldn’t get stepped on and a woman said: ‘He’s got legs, you know. Oh wait, maybe he doesn’t, because he’s so fat.’”



Marlowe, the 7.5kg cat. Photograph: Courtesy of Celia Deakin

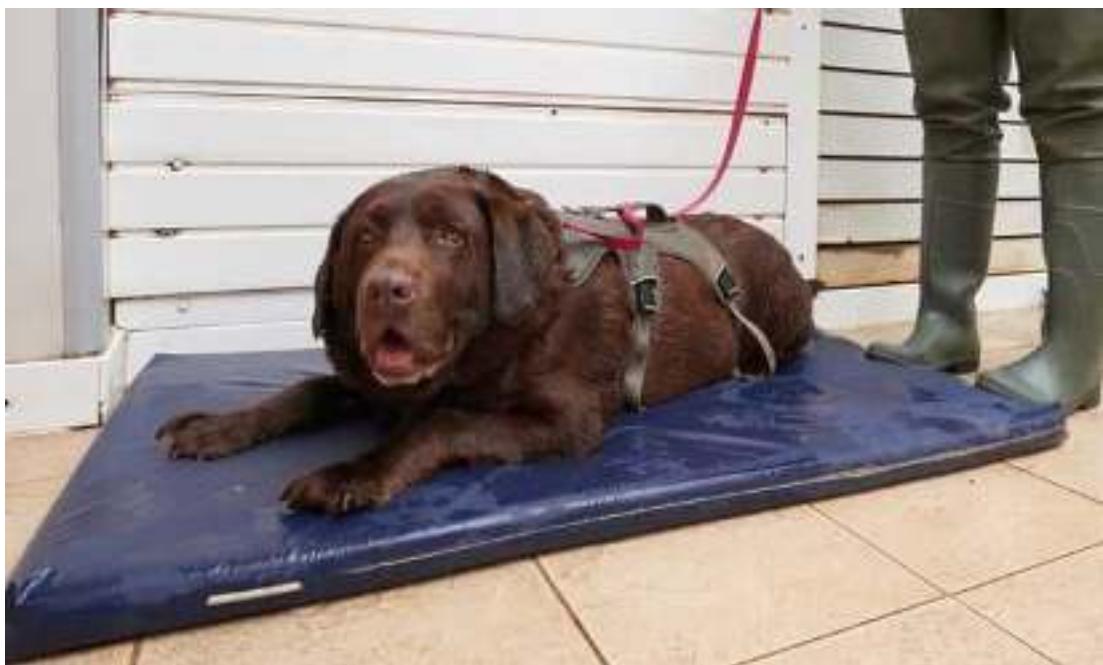
Celia Deakin, a 40-year-old teacher from Edinburgh, knows this stigma all too well. “I do feel guilty,” she says. “I would like him to be healthy.” Deakin is attempting to lose weight herself and says that when she takes her 13-year-old moggy Marlowe to the vet, she feels judged. “It’s shameful,” says Deakin, “to be overweight yourself and holding an overweight cat and saying: ‘I swear he doesn’t eat that much.’” Deakin describes Marlowe, who weighs 7.4kg, as “an absolute unit” and a “giant puma”. “Not in a Rubenesque way,” she adds. “He’s just a big, massive chunk.” When Marlowe jumps off the bed, says Deakin, “it sounds like a cannonball hitting the ground.”

Like George, Marlowe piled on the pounds during lockdown, when Deakin would feed him treats to stop him whining while she was teaching classes on Zoom. But, over the past year, she’s been on a mission to drop his weight, after the vet diagnosed him with arthritis. “I did this really intense diet where I ignored all his wails for food,” says Deakin, “and put him on special satiety food [calorie-controlled to help animals stay fuller for longer]. He lost literally a gram.” Deakin is at a loss. She doesn’t believe he’s stealing her other cat’s food, and she isn’t overfeeding him. She wonders if he’s just naturally big boned.

When your animal is whining, what it's really craving is that sense of attention and reward

Alex German

“Dieting can be a challenge,” says German, “and it’s best done in conjunction with a vet.” He advises owners to put their animals on high-quality satiety food, which is nutrient-dense. “Always weigh the food on a scale,” says German, “and minimise treats as much as possible.” When animals start begging for food, German advises giving them low-calorie snacks, such as slices of cooked courgette. “Often,” says German, “when the animal is whining, what it’s really craving is that sense of attention and reward. But there are other things you can do to reward your pets. Take the dog for a walk. Groom your cat.”



Blue the brown labrador takes a breather after his exercise regime.
Photograph: Suki Dhanda/The Guardian

The best efforts of owners can be undone by our food-centric treat culture, and a lack of general awareness about the dangers of pet obesity. Deakin suspects that Marlowe is finding food outside: either the neighbours are feeding him, or he is hunting his own food. Thanki has had members of the public feed George from their picnics. “One man in St James’s Park gave

him an entire packet of ham,” she says. “The man said: ‘Oh don’t worry, I don’t mind.’ I said: ‘I mind!’”

But there are also members of the public actively trying to undo the bad habits of their fellow pet owners. “I monitor their weight six times a week,” says Anna Talbot of the 37 gerbils in her care. Talbot, a 44-year-old cleaner and renovator from Staffordshire, runs an unofficial shelter from her house. “I haven’t got a home any more,” she says. “I have 16 tanks around the house. Six in my bedroom, six in my spare room, and four in the back room.”

Talbot specifically seeks out what she describes as “sad gerbils”, meaning gerbils who tend to be overweight or obese, and are being kept in small cages. She takes them home and puts them on diets. She rescued Jake in 2021, when he weighed 113g. “He was absolutely depressed,” she says. “All he would do is just shovel food in.” Jake was initially too fat to climb the stairs in Talbot’s house, but she would coax him up. “Give him that encouragement,” she says. “He lost a gram here and a gram there.”



Jake the gerbil who passed away from complications caused by obesity.
Photograph: Courtesy of Anna Talbot

In a few months, Talbot got Jake down to a much healthier 80g. But her efforts came too late. She found blood in his urine. She thinks it was related to his obesity. As it was a weekend, her vet wouldn't do a home visit. "He lay next to me all night," says Talbot in a strangled voice. "He was in agony. He was looking at me, just lying there. Half an hour before he passed, he walked up to me and Eskimo-kissed me. He knew I was there for him." She says it was the worst experience of her gerbil-keeping life. "I've lost gerbils before," she says. "I trod on a gerbil and killed him. It was awful. I have flashbacks. But Jake was different, because he was such a beautiful little soul."

Despite her loss, Talbot is undeterred in her efforts to rescue obese gerbils. When we speak, she has just finished weighing Ethan, a gerbil she rehomed 10 days ago. He weighed 103g when she got him; now he is down to 88g (he should weigh around 80g). "They were chuckling at how fat he was in the pet shop," Talbot recalls. "Saying: 'Oh my God, I've never seen such a fat gerbil!' I couldn't wait to get him out. If you hit an animal, it would be animal cruelty. Obesity is the same. They can't decide for themselves. You need to take the upper hand, give them a good diet and exercise."

Most experts agree, however, that overfeeding is not wilful animal abuse. "People aren't doing this from the wrong point of view," says James. "They're doing it because they love their pets and think they are doing the right thing. I hesitate to call it cruelty, especially when you have a pet that is really motivated by food, and acts as if they are hungry, even when they are not." Thanki is charitable about her mother's habit of feeding toast to the dog. "A lot of it is cultural," she says. "I'm from an Indian background. When I went to my nan's house when I was a child, I would always be bursting when I left. It's ingrained, that idea that feeding someone means they're loved."

But there is such a thing as loving someone to death – particularly when they are an adorable animal with a taste for treats, and a petulant whine. Owners of obese pets can take comfort that most bad habits can be undone, with discipline, underwater treadmills – and the odd chunk of courgette.

**Some names have been changed.*

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2022/mar/24/he-raids-the-bin-and-eats-the-cats-food-the-dangerous-rise-in-obese-pets>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |



Angela Gallop, forensic scientist. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian
[The long read](#)

The queen of crime-solving

Angela Gallop, forensic scientist. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

Forensic scientist Angela Gallop has helped to crack many of the UK's most notorious murder cases. But today she fears the whole field – and justice itself – is at risk

by [Imogen West-Knights](#)

Thu 24 Mar 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 24 Mar 2022 06.54 EDT

Early one morning in June 1982, a smartly dressed man was found hanging from scaffolding beneath Blackfriars Bridge in central London. The dead man was carrying two Patek Philippe watches, one on his wrist and one in his top jacket pocket, both of which had stopped. The pockets and seams of his suit trousers contained 5kg of bricks and rubble. He was also carrying a forged Italian passport and about £10,000 in cash. The next day, police in Rome confirmed the man's identity. His name was Roberto Calvi and he was

the chair of an Italian bank with close ties to the Vatican. Calvi had been missing for at least six days. He was due to appear in an Italian court the next week to appeal against a conviction for illegally transferring several billion lira out of the country. The press called him “God’s Banker”.

Calvi’s death was recorded as a suicide, but his family believed he had been murdered, possibly by the mafia. In 1991, almost 10 years after Calvi’s body was found, the family hired Kroll, a private detective company, to carry out a new investigation into his death. To review the evidence, Kroll in turn hired a forensic scientist named Angela Gallop. In the previous five years, Gallop had gained a reputation as an expert prepared to go beyond the methods favoured by her peers – the straightforward DNA tests or fingerprint comparisons – in order to solve a crime. “She was meticulous, very open-minded, and her scientific methods were second to none. There weren’t many others doing it in quite the same way,” said Michael Mansfield, a barrister who often worked with her at the time.

The key to her work, Gallop believes, is imagination. “People always hate when scientists use the word ‘imaginative’. They think you’ve been inventing your results,” she told me not long ago. “But it is critical.” Looking at what was known about Calvi’s death, Gallop agreed that the suicide story didn’t add up. If Calvi had climbed down a ladder from Blackfriars Bridge and on to the scaffolding in order to hang himself, wouldn’t paint flecks from the poles have transferred to the soles of his shoes? Wouldn’t the movement of the bricks inside his trousers as he walked have produced abrasions on his thighs? The postmortem had found neither. That suggested another possibility: Calvi’s body had been put there by someone else.

Gallop designed an experiment to test her theory. She would need the original scaffolding from under the bridge, clothes similar to those Calvi was wearing, and a man of a similar build to re-enact the scene. Finding the man was easy enough. Russell Stockdale, a fellow forensic scientist, who also happened to be Gallop’s husband, had the right proportions for the job. And by a stroke of luck, the company that erected the scaffolding had not only kept the poles, but knew precisely which ones they were. Gallop asked to borrow them, and asked Calvi’s family for one of his suits and a pair of his

shoes. Calvi's son, Carlo, told me that at this stage, having hired private detectives at "horrendous" expense, the family would have granted Gallop anything she wanted. "I wasn't going to tell them no," he said.

One afternoon in 1992, Gallop stood in her garden in Newbury, Berkshire, watching as the scaffolding was rebuilt on the lawn next to her pond. Once it was up, Gallop and Clive Candy, a colleague who specialised in forensic chemistry, watched closely as Stockdale clambered on to the scaffolding wearing Calvi's clothes. In her A4 notepad, Gallop noted down the difficulties her husband was having as he climbed, and how the bricks in his clothes were affecting his movements.

Satisfied with her initial findings, Gallop and Stockdale went to London to inspect the scene at Blackfriars Bridge. Gallop asked Stockdale to climb down a fixed iron ladder that led from the embankment next to the bridge down to the foreshore, from where it would have been possible to walk to the scaffolding at low tide. Gallop wanted to see if it was plausible that a 62-year-old man like Calvi could have done so without slipping, and without dislodging the bricks and rubble in his clothes.

"I was absolutely terrified. I'm no good with heights, or water," Stockdale told me, "but Angela's very persuasive." This was not the first time Gallop had encouraged him into an unusual activity in the name of crime-solving. "We beat my favourite hat to death with a hammer once," he said, a little forlorn. "It was never the same again." (He and Gallop separated in 2003, but remained close. Stockdale died late last year.)

Through the experiments in her garden and by the riverside, Gallop concluded it was almost impossible that Calvi's death was a suicide. And although the case has never been resolved – various mafia members and associates have stood trial for the murder and all have been acquitted – Gallop did what she set out to do, which was to prove that God's Banker had been murdered. Calvi's family are still waiting for his killer to be brought to justice, but Carlo told me that Gallop's findings remain essential to them, even all these years later. "I couldn't have been more pleased about her work," he told me. "It was exhaustive and authoritative. I was extremely impressed, then and now."

Over almost 50 years as a forensic scientist, Gallop has seen enough grisly cases to fill several lifetimes. Murder, bestiality, rape, incest, the contents of Princess Diana's stomach, war crimes, alleged alien abductions, an elderly woman stabbed in both eyeballs. Name a famous crime that took place in Britain since the 1980s and there is a good chance that Gallop was involved in the investigation. The killings of [James Bulger](#), [Stephen Lawrence](#), [Damilola Taylor](#) and [Rachel Nickell](#), the [Pembrokeshire coastal path murders](#). People in her field describe her as an icon, an idol, a star. "She is the doyenne of her profession," William Clegg QC, a retired defence lawyer who specialised in serious crime, told me. "If I had a forensic issue in a case, then it was always the same instructions to the team: phone Angela Gallop."

Picture a forensic scientist and one of the following images probably comes to mind: a mild-mannered oddball in a white lab coat, or a leather-jacketed pseudocop stalking around a crime scene. Gallop is neither of these people. She is ebullient and stylish. We first met last spring, in a converted barn where she does some of her work, near her house in Oxfordshire. We met several more times, and I never saw her without nails that matched a pair of statement earrings, and never saw the same nails or earrings twice. She has a jolly, mile-a-minute energy, and being in her presence brings to mind old-fashioned phrases like "chatterbox" and "go-getter". One colleague described her as "a human dynamo". The clue, with Gallop, is in the name.

Get the Guardian's award-winning long reads sent direct to you every Saturday morning

No individual has had a closer view of the way the science of crime-solving has changed in the past 40 years. Gallop started out in the 70s, at the government's Forensic Science Service (FSS), which conducted all forensic work for the police. She then led the charge in dismantling the FSS's monopoly by establishing rival companies in the 90s, cracked some of the UK's most notorious cold case murders, and now finds herself at the forefront of what sometimes looks like a losing battle to save the field from collapse. In 2019, The House of Lords' science and technology committee [found](#) that a lack of funding, an absence of leadership and poor research and development means that England and Wales, once considered world leaders in forensics, are now in crisis. Gallop sees herself as one of a dying breed of scientists who have been given the training, the time and the money to solve

complex crimes. Her growing fear is that she and her peers will take those skills to their graves.

Forensic science is a relatively young discipline. Its origins can be traced back to two attic rooms in Lyon, where a Frenchman named Edmond Locard, inspired by the still-fictional techniques he read about in Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, opened the world's first crime investigation laboratory in 1910. One of Locard's core beliefs was that every contact made between two objects leaves a trace. This idea, known as Locard's principle, is still central to forensics. Most of us are aware of the traces left by fingerprints, hairs and body fluids, but Locard's principle goes much deeper. We give ourselves away wherever we go. We are constantly shedding clothing fibres, brushing them on to other people, picking them up in the office, on the bus, at the pub. Then there are the tiny quantities of radioactive isotopes in everything we eat and drink, which are retained in our bones, soft tissues, nails and hair. By analysing the isotopes in human bones, scientists are able to trace someone's movements across their entire lifetime.

Today, forensic science contains a dizzying number of specialisms. Forensic entomology pinpoints time of death by examining the insects that proliferate on a dead body. Forensic ecology can tell us where a deceased person has been from pollen in their nasal mucus. Because every brand of matches uses slightly different chemicals to make their product, forensic fire investigators can track down an arsonist by finding a single match head in a burned-out building and establishing where those matches are sold.

Gallop came to forensics almost by accident. She spent much of the early 70s on the Isle of Wight, working on her DPhil about the biochemistry of sea slugs. "There were only about six people in the world who cared what I was doing," Gallop said, a certain sadness in her voice. (She still loves sea slugs.) Hoping to apply her scientific training to something of greater consequence, in 1974, Gallop applied for a job with the FSS, which was then part of the Home Office. She got the gig, and soon began working at a lab that had been cobbled together in a grand Edwardian house in Harrogate.

Today, forensic labs are made floor-to-ceiling of wipe-clean surfaces and all the air in every room is replaced 20 times every hour. In the 70s, things were different. “There was a marble basin in one of the bathrooms we did all our blood grouping in,” Gallop said, “and we used the ballroom for our big X-ray crystallography machine.” Scientists did not wear protective covering over their noses and mouths, which meant that when they examined blood-stained clothing they would sometimes taste iron in the back of their throats from breathing in the particulates that dried blood creates, a substance she refers to as “blood dust”. Recalling this era, Gallop seemed almost nostalgic.



Members of the Roberto Calvi inquest jury at Blackfriars Bridge in central London. Photograph: Ted Blackbrow/Daily Mail/Shutterstock

In the early years, the work was gruelling. The police could send as much evidence to the FSS as they wanted, and the government would foot the bill. “There was so much to get through, police were sending whole wardrobes of clothing,” Gallop told me with exasperation. “And if you missed something the police could say,” – here she adopted a pompous voice – “‘Oh, you missed a spot of blood on that cardigan among the other 56 items.’”

In 1977, Gallop and her FSS colleagues moved out of the converted house and into a proper lab in Wetherby, West Yorkshire. Over the years, the facilities improved, but Gallop felt overworked and understimulated. In

1986, she decided to strike out alone. The idea for Forensic Access, her first company, was to provide genuinely expert forensic expertise to the defence. At the time, only lawyers for the prosecution had access to FSS expertise. If defence lawyers wanted to challenge forensic evidence, they could hire independent consultants, but many had no accreditation. They were, in Stockdale's words, "hired guns", who would say whatever they were paid to say in court. Forensic Access, Gallop hoped, would change all this. She set up a small laboratory in her own home, a three-bedroom 60s chalet-style house in Newbury. "With everything, I've always just thought: I'm gonna make this bloody work!" she told me with delight. "How difficult can it be?"

The answer was: very difficult, at least at first. To drum up customers, Gallop contacted criminal law solicitors and advertised her services as a forensic biologist in the Yellow Pages. Soon she found herself fielding calls from jealous husbands who wanted her to establish whether their wives had been unfaithful: what those in the business used to call "dirty knicker cases". Clients would bring Gallop a suspicious piece of clothing, and she would test it for semen. That was the easy part. Trickier was breaking bad news to clients. On one occasion, Gallop recalled, a client "just became incredibly tense, his knuckles were white and he was frozen in the doorway in the house. I thought, oh Jesus, he could take it out on the messenger." After this, she had a panic button installed in the laboratory.

Little by little, Gallop built a reputation for her skill and trustworthiness. More salubrious customers arrived. In one early case, she was asked by an officer from the Department of Health to confirm that a reddish-brown smear on a cheese and tomato sandwich they examined during a restaurant inspection was human blood. (It was.) By late 1986, Forensic Access had grown enough for Gallop to hire full-time employees and move its operations out of her house and into a proper laboratory.

Recently, Gallop has started to write books about her career, in order to leave behind a record of her life's work. Her first, [When the Dogs Don't Bark](#), came out in 2019 and details her early cases. A few months after we first met, I tagged along to a meeting between Gallop and her ghostwriter Jane Smith, again in the barn, where they were working on a second [book](#), which came out earlier this year. Gallop sat flicking through an archive of case files with her pearlescent turquoise nails, happily mumbling things like

“drowning” under her breath. “Marvellous case,” she said as she produced the one she was looking for, about an impaling.

Gallop has to be careful about what she puts in her books, in case they become guides for getting away with murder. Midway through this meeting, Gallop and Smith discussed an element of forensic technique that is not public knowledge. “There are one or two things we don’t want people to think too deeply about, because it would make our job a lot more difficult,” Gallop said. They decided, ultimately, that it was too revealing to include. “Maybe we just keep that one up our sleeve,” she said, tucking a case back into her file.

People who know Gallop often describe her as someone who likes people. More important for her line of work is the fact that people like her. She has needed to persuade people to use her services and to liaise successfully between the police, the lab, the court and, later in her career, the shareholders: to be a scientist, but also a canny businesswoman. Gallop has a warm, slightly goofy charm. “I do just smile when I think about her,” Deb Hopwood, an expert in hair analysis who left the FSS to work with Gallop, told me. Another former colleague, a cannabis expert called Anne Franc, recalled a series of arduous strategy meetings to which Gallop brought a Buzz Lightyear toy. When the team’s energy flagged, she would press a button to make the toy’s wings pop out and then say “To infinity and beyond!” It became a catchphrase for the team. “Once Angela’s decided to do something, then that something will happen,” said Franc.

In 1997, Gallop set up another company, Forensic Alliance, which would offer forensic expertise to the police. By this time, it was no longer legal for the FSS to have a monopoly on forensic work for the police, and forces in England and Wales had to pay for this work out of their own budgets rather than from a central fund. “The FSS were in trouble from that point,” says Chris Gregg, a former detective chief superintendent who later went into business with Gallop. “They were having to look in the mirror and think, well, we’ve got serious competition.”

Gallop began approaching police forces with the offer of looking into their cold cases for a competitive price. Her pitch was simple: if Forensic

Alliance didn't solve the case, nobody would complain because the cases had already gone cold. But if they did, the police could take the credit. A detective at Merseyside police, David Smith, offered Gallop a particularly grim case. In 1997, a 74-year-old woman named [Alice Rye](#) had been discovered dead in the bedroom of her home on the Wirral, tied up half-naked, with a kitchen knife driven into each of her eyes. The initial investigation had failed to discover any conclusive evidence. When Gallop took on the case in 1999, her team re-examined the initial evidence and found DNA belonging to the prime suspect. He was arrested and later sentenced to a minimum of 18 years in prison. Smith was impressed. "She brought a different type of thinking," he told me. "And it made me look good."

Later in 1999, South Wales police asked Gallop to review a case that had remained unsolved for more than a decade. On Valentine's Day in 1988, in a cramped, dingy flat above a betting shop in Cardiff's docklands, [Lynette White](#), a sex worker, was found dead. The flat was covered in blood and White had been stabbed more than 50 times.

The initial investigation had been a fiasco. In 1990, five men, all of whom were black or mixed-race, were tried for the murder, and three of them were sentenced to life in prison. One of those three, Stephen Miller, was White's boyfriend, and had confessed to watching as his friend, Tony Paris, killed her. But two years later, their convictions were overturned. It emerged that the police, who wanted the case closed quickly, had aggressively questioned Miller on 19 separate occasions over four days and for a total of 13 hours, working him into such a state of confusion and distress that he made a false confession. The three men were released, as there was no reliable evidence to tie them to the scene of the crime. At the time, the police resisted calls for the case to be reopened, saying that the three men were still the prime suspects and that they had only been released on a technicality.



Angela Gallop, photographed in Oxfordshire. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

In 1999, when South Wales police commissioned Gallop and her team to take another look at White's murder, it was partly because of advances in DNA techniques since her killing. "But it's not all about new technology," Gallop told me. "It's finding the things to test. It's understanding the crime scene." In the initial investigation, some blood had been found in White's flat that did not come from the victim or any of the suspects. Its presence had never been explained. Eleven years later, the chances of turning up new evidence seemed slim. In 1988, the police had sprayed the entire flat in luminol, a chemical used to detect blood, which has the unfortunate side-effect of destroying DNA. The flat had also been repainted twice since the murder. But Gallop thought that if they looked in the right places, they might still find blood that could yield a DNA profile. "With Angela, it's the adage of no stone unturned," Gregg told me. But, he added, Gallop's greatest skill is knowing which stones to turn and when.

During their investigation, the police had removed strips of wallpaper from the bedroom where the attack took place. Gallop got hold of these strips and attached them to boards, in order to reconstruct, in her laboratory, the room. By examining the blood spatter patterns on the wallpaper, she established that any remaining blood might be found on a particular section of the

skirting board in the flat, under the new layers of paint. She had the police cut out this section and bring it to the Forensic Access lab, where she asked a colleague, April Robson, to scrape away the paint. It took two weeks of delicate work with a scalpel, but finally, under the paint, was the microscopic flake of dried blood they were looking for.

That flake of blood yielded a DNA profile. Searching the DNA database did not initially produce a match, until they ran a search for people whose DNA was very similar but not identical. This search brought up a 14-year-old boy who had committed a minor crime. He was not a suspect – he hadn't been born when the murder was committed. But the police were interested in speaking to members of his family, including a reclusive uncle named Jeffrey Gafoor. The police tracked Gafoor down and asked him for a DNA sample, which he provided. Gafoor then left the station and went to buy a lethal dose of paracetamol. But the police had him under surveillance, and were able to intercept him before he killed himself. Gafoor went on to plead guilty to the murder of Lynette White. In 2003, he was convicted and sentenced to a minimum of 13 years in prison.

By the 2000s, whenever police forces needed to commission big cold case reviews, they would call Gallop. In 2004, the Metropolitan police asked her to examine forensic evidence relating to the death of Princess Diana. Gallop helped establish that there were no grounds to support allegations by Mohamed Al-Fayed of a murder conspiracy involving the Royal Family.

During the same period, the FSS, which had been underfunded for decades, was declining fast. Between 1997 and 2004, the organisation had, under pressure from private companies such as Gallop's, reduced its turnaround time for cases from almost a year to closer to six weeks, but this had come at a cost. "There was this change of culture whereby the forensic scientist was almost living in fear," said Doug Stoten, who worked at the FSS at the time. "Management is on my back, I've got to meet my target, I've got to turn around this case. And a lot of the scientists thought, hang on, that's going to impact on quality, and mistakes are going to be made."

There were high-profile failures. In November 2000, Damilola Taylor, a 10-year-old schoolboy, was killed in Peckham, south London. The FSS did not

identify evidence that could be linked to any suspect. In 2003, the Metropolitan police gave Gallop this case to review, and very quickly she and her team [discovered](#) a bloodstain on a trainer that belonged to one of Taylor's suspected killers, a local boy called Danny Preddie. Danny and his brother, Richard Preddie, who were 12 and 13 at the time of the killing, were sentenced to eight years in youth custody on the strength of this evidence.

Sometimes the main obstacle to solving a case is money. Between 2000 and 2010, police budgets increased by 31% and they spent more on forensics. Then, during the following decade, under first the coalition government and then the Conservatives, this progress was undone. Police budgets in England and Wales were cut [by 19%](#) in real terms between 2010 and 2018, and police spending on forensics fell from about £120m to about £50m. One of the more niche approaches Gallop is skilled in, and one she's scared we're going to lose in the future because of its cost, is searching for textile fibre evidence, the tiny bits of clothing you leave wherever you go. This involves a process called taping, where a scientist presses strips of sticky tape all over the surface of an object, picking up tiny pieces of debris – skin flakes, clothing fibres, paint fragments, glass, soil. Then they examine each strip, millimetre by millimetre, under a microscope. It sounds simple, but it's expensive and time-consuming. This is rarely the kind of work that police want their budget spent on. Instead, as David Halliday, an ex-FSS forensic fire investigator, put it: "Out on the ground, the police officer wants a new patrol car."

But Gallop has seen over and over again how useful taping can be. In 2006, she was approached to work on what are known as the [Pembrokeshire coastal path murders](#), which dated back to 1985, when Richard and Helen Thomas, middle-aged siblings, were shot in their home near Milford Haven, a port town in Wales. After the shootings, the house was burned down with the bodies inside. Four years later, a member of the public informed a local policeman that they had seen a curiously large swarm of flies on a stretch of windswept clifftop near where the Thomas' house had been. Here, the bodies of a husband and wife, Peter and Gwenda Dixon, were discovered. They, too, had died of gunshot wounds. Both sets of killings went unsolved. But in 2005, a Dyfed-Powys detective named Steve Wilkins noticed a possible connection between these murders and a third unsolved case, the violent sexual assault of some teenagers in the same area in 1996. In 2006,

he commissioned Gallop to review all three cases, because the man he suspected – John Cooper, a 62-year-old farm worker from the local area, who was serving a 14-year prison sentence for armed robbery – was due for parole.



Gwenda (left) and Peter Dixon, who were murdered on the Pembrokeshire coastal path in 1989. Photograph: Dyfed Powys police/PA

Wilkins, like detectives all over the country, did not have an unlimited budget for these reinvestigations. So he told Gallop and her team that they were to look for DNA evidence and nothing else. For months, they searched in the obvious places: the rope that had been used to tie Peter Dixon's hands, items of Gwenda Dixon's clothing that had almost certainly been handled by the killer, the swabs taken from their bodies. But they found nothing. Gallop's team felt hamstrung. What they wanted to look for was clothing fibres that could connect garments worn by John Cooper to the scenes of the crimes.

After 18 months, Wilkins was running out of money and patience. He threatened to take the case away from Gallop, but she convinced him that they should meet in person at the police station. "They were so unpleasant," she said, grinning. "This whole team sitting there, stony-faced." Gallop told them that if they wanted the case solved, they needed to let her look for what

she wanted to look for: fibre evidence. I asked Wilkins about his memory of this confrontation. “Oh, Angela is more than happy to argue the toss with you,” he said. As we spoke, I was reminded of something William Clegg, the QC, said to me about watching Gallop being cross-examined in court. “It’s a bit like trying to tell off a very stern headmistress,” he said, “you don’t get very far.” Gallop got her way: she would keep the case, and her team would be allowed to look for textile fibre evidence.

Whoever killed Gwenda and Peter Dixon had covered their bodies with branches from nearby trees. Gallop suspected that the reason her team had had such trouble finding DNA was because the killer had been wearing gloves. If that was right, fibres from the gloves would be on those branches. And as it happened, those branches had been sitting, unexamined, in evidence bags at Milford Haven police station for almost 20 years. On the branches, Gallop and her team found the fibres they were looking for, which they were eventually able to prove came from gloves owned by Cooper. And as a result of taping other items of Cooper’s clothing, they found a tiny flake of blood that belonged to one of the victims.

Gallop and Wilkins remember this moment distinctly. Wilkins was in the car driving home from a policing seminar in south Wales when his phone rang. “She said: ‘Steve, are you driving? Pull over,’” Wilkins recalled. Gallop told him that she and her team had found the DNA linking Cooper to the crime. “I think I actually proposed to her,” Wilkins said. Cooper was found guilty of the double murders in 2011, and is now serving four life sentences.

If they hadn’t looked for textile fibres, they wouldn’t have found the DNA. Examinations of textile fibres were also key to solving the murder of Stephen Lawrence. But tapings of evidence are being taken less and less. “Because fibre evidence is perceived to be very expensive, [it is] not used,” Bob Green, vice-president of the Chartered Society of Forensic Sciences, told me, “and yet it can be vital.”

One day last summer, Gallop gave me a tour around the main Forensic Access lab, which is located in an anonymous business park in Oxfordshire. Here, a team of 24 scientists do their daily work: examining tissue samples from victims, studying textile fibres from crime scenes, using the in-house

firing range to determine how far an attacker was standing from their target, and so on. In many areas, it looks like any office – an empty [Colin the Caterpillar](#) cake box sat on one of the desks – and in others, it does not. One internal window that we passed was blacked out, and I was informed that this was because one of the scientists was usually working on “body parts” in there.

As we toured the lab, Gallop’s pride was palpable. But the shiny facilities of Forensic Access do not reflect the current state of forensic science in England and Wales, which has been getting worse for at least a decade. Even Gallop, who describes herself as an “appalling optimist”, [is worried](#). To her, the mid- to late 00s were the high point for forensic science in England and Wales, when private companies and the FSS competed for work. But in 2012, the government closed the FSS, claiming that it was too expensive to keep running.

Many, including Gallop, view the decision as [disastrous](#), not least because the government used to fund important forensic research through the FSS – research that is now simply not being done. They also mourn the loss of the training that used to be given by the FSS, training that Gallop herself received in her early career. “There are some people in the business who will point the finger at Angela for the demise of the Forensic Science Service, because she created another commercial provider that would go into business in opposition to it, and that’s when the rot set in,” says Niamh Nic Daéid, director of the Leverhulme Research Centre for Forensic Science at Dundee University. “I think that’s a bit unfair. But what she did do was demonstrate that a private sector laboratory *could* deliver services into the justice system.” Gallop has written that rather than being closed, the FSS should have been “modernised and made properly commercial”, though whether a “properly commercial” outfit would have pursued the kind of research and training that made the FSS institutionally valuable is debatable.



Stephen Miller, one of three Cardiff men wrongly convicted of killing Lynette White. Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian

One consequence of the FSS closing is that, to save money, police forces have started to do more testing in their own forensics laboratories, rather than outsourcing the work to specialised forensics companies. The result, said Jim Fraser, a forensic scientist at the University of Strathclyde, is “a real dog’s breakfast”. Police officers, who may have no training in forensics, are often tasked with choosing which simple forensic tests to have carried out. Their options are restricted to a limited “menu” of tests, and younger forensic scientists are being trained in how to do just one or two of the tests on that menu, and not much more. “The real nadir of all this is when, instead of sending in an item for examination for blood, where the pattern might tell you something about what happened, the police cut a stain out and just send the stain in for DNA,” said Fraser. In summary, he said: “The police have completely fucked forensic science in England and Wales.”

After we left the Forensic Access laboratory, Gallop drove in her shiny, blood-red Tesla to her home in rural Oxfordshire. (“I’ve had some really, deeply nice cars,” she admitted to me later. “I like going quite fast.”) When we arrived, two sleepy Siamese cats were listening to the radio by an aga in the same shade of red as her car. As we drank tea in the garden, Gallop spoke about the wider crisis in the criminal justice system in England and

Wales. Legal aid [has been cut](#) by almost half since 2005, and the courts currently have such large [case backlogs](#) that people are waiting more than a year for their cases to be heard. Meanwhile, the general quality of forensic work continues [to deteriorate](#), as police increasingly do work that she believes should be conducted by specialists. “I don’t see how you can expect the people in the organisation that is charged with going out, finding criminals and then helping to prosecute them, to come up with independent, impartial, scientific evidence,” Gallop told me. “I think that is completely wrong.”

Sometimes all this talk of cuts and declining standards can sound rather abstract: a series of statistics, percentage decreases, laments about a lack of research that might possibly yield something at some point in the future. But the real meaning of forensic science is felt in lives saved, injustices averted, victims consoled. In February, I spoke to Damilola Taylor’s father, Richard, on the phone. He agreed to speak to me about what Gallop and her team’s work meant to him, although it still makes him distraught to speak of what happened to his little boy, more than 20 years later. Had the evidence that helped convict the killer not been found, he said, “it would have been a lifetime depression for me and my family. It helped us a lot in getting closure. In being able to move on.”

A few months ago, Gallop met John Actie, one of the five Cardiff men who were wrongly accused of the murder of Lynette White. He spent two years in jail. The meeting, which took place in Actie’s local park, was being filmed for a documentary that will air on Channel 5 in April. For Actie, it was a moment he will never forget. “Without Angela Gallop, my life would have been fingers still pointing at me, people nudging each other and whispering,” he told me. “She’s cleared up so much for us and our families.”

Gallop doesn’t often come face to face with the living people involved in her cases. This was the first time she’d met someone falsely accused of a crime she then solved. She found it moving and humbling. “I suppose it also made me determined to continue to do my bit,” she said. And then she went back to work.

Follow the Long Read on Twitter at [@gdnlongread](#), listen to our podcasts [here](#) and sign up to the long read weekly email [here](#).

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2022/mar/24/queen-of-crime-solving-an Angela-gallop-forensic-science>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

Advertisement

US edition

- [US edition](#)
- [UK edition](#)
- [Australian edition](#)
- [International edition](#)

[The Guardian - Back to home](#)

[Architecture](#)

Like something from a Kubrick film – the hunt for Britain's best modern buildings



And now children, some geometry ... the Plastic Classroom, Preston.
Photograph: Chris Matthews, taken from Modern Buildings in Britain by
Owen Hatherley

Author Owen Hatherley set out to find fabulous modern buildings all over Britain, from Aberdeen to Aberystwyth. What did he learn? That every town has one – even Reading



[Oliver Wainwright](#)

[@ollywainwright](#)

Thu 24 Mar 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 24 Mar 2022 06.11 EDT

‘Why does nobody ever talk about Grimsby central library?’ asks Owen Hatherley with an air of mild outrage. ‘How is it not famous? It’s a fabulous little building, with chandeliers, mosaics, public sculpture, a wonderful double-height reading room. It’s a fantastic place but it’s not listed. It’s never ever mentioned.’

Hatherley stumbled upon the [little concrete jewel box](#), which was built in 1968 by JM Milner for the Grimsby borough architects department, while researching his latest book, a hefty 600-page gazetteer of [Modern Buildings in Britain](#). Entering the classically inspired block of prefabricated concrete panels, under a sculptural honeycomb grid ceiling, he found a world of swirling mosaics and abstract tapestries illuminated by chic 1960s lighting in clustered tubes – a pristine example of “civic design of the highest order” in this neglected northern town.



Chandeliers, mosaics, sculpture ... Grimsby central library. Photograph: Chris Matthews, taken from *Modern Buildings in Britain* by Owen Hatherley

It is one of many such unexpected entries in the book, which roams voraciously from Aberystwyth to Aberdeen in search of those remarkable everyday products of the modern movement that are often hiding in plain sight. The famous favourites are all in there too, from [Lasdun](#) and [Goldfinger](#) to the New Towns, given entertaining new appraisals in Hatherley's characteristically bolshie prose. But there are new finds for even the most hardcore concrete caressers.

“I didn’t want the book to be about iconic buildings,” says Hatherley, “the way people tend to look at modern architecture as being about great objects in big cities, thanks to the cult of brutalism. For a start, most of the iconic architecture we’ve got in this country is not very good. Famous architects have very seldom done their best work here. Often the most interesting stuff is the more mundane.”

Most of the iconic architecture we’ve got in this country is not very good

Owen Hatherley



Owen Hatherley. Photograph: Murdo Macleod/The Guardian

When he was first approached by Penguin to write the guide, he thought he could probably do it in a year. It sounds about right for the prolific 40-year-old, [who has published 14 books to date](#), several of which have covered similar ground. But it ended up growing into a six-year project. He began by combing through Pevsner guides, back issues of [the Modernist](#) and [C20 Magazine](#), and trawling Instagram feeds before criss-crossing the country by train and bus, with occasional lifts from friends and family who drive. The aim was not an exhaustive, scholarly documentation of modernism in Britain but an approachable guide to accessible, or at least visible, things to go and see.

“I tried to find a decent modern building in every settlement in the country, which was really quite gruelling,” he says. “The idea was that everywhere probably does have one or two good modern buildings – even Reading. No matter whether you’re in Scunthorpe or Chandlers Ford or East Kilbride, there should be something interesting that you can go and look at.” The one building he singles out in Reading is the university’s [school of construction management and engineering](#), designed by Howell Killick Partridge & Amis in 1973, known locally as the Lego building for its kit-of-parts look. In Hatherley’s eyes, it is “the Katsura Palace in coloured concrete”.



Just the ticket ... Contact theatre in Manchester. Photograph: brinkstock/Alamy

It is an addictive book to dip in and out of, to open at random to learn something new. In Preston, as well as the once threatened, now cherished bus station, you can find the [Plastic Classroom](#) at Kennington Road primary school, a faceted white dome built in 1974 that looks more like something from a Kubrick film set than a municipal architects' department. In Swansea, Hatherley finds "one of the most admirable examples of civic brutalism in Britain," in the form of the 1980s civic centre – which is [currently slated for demolition](#), like a good number of buildings in the book.

Shetland, meanwhile, turns out to be a site of some remarkably progressive public housing, with [colourful eco-friendly homes designed by Richard Gibson](#) that seem more akin to what you might find in Norway. Like its cousins across the water, Hatherley notes, Shetland has used its oil revenue to build a Scandi-style social democratic state-within-a-state, with great public buildings and attractive social housing. He steers clear of politics as far as possible but the overarching message is clear: the best modern architecture is always the product of a strong welfare state.



Scandi style ... colourful housing in Shetland. Photograph: Mark Sinclair/née gibson architects/Phat Sheep Photography

“There are certain points at which the rest of the country outside London just disappears from serious architecture,” he says. “And the reason is always the same: at each point, whether it’s the 1920s and 30s or the 1980s and 90s, or the last 10 years, you have a Conservative government that doesn’t give a shit about the rest of the country and lets them die.”

He begins his introduction – which is possibly the most lucid and concise history of modern architecture in Britain you will find anywhere – [at the St Mary's estate in Woolwich](#), south London; a typical product of 1950s council housing where he lived when he began writing the book.

You wouldn’t normally give it a second look. With brown brick walls and shallow pitched roofs dotted with chimneys, it exemplifies “[people’s detailing](#)” – a waspish term, Hatherley explains in a handy glossary, used for the sort of communist-aligned, Swedish-influenced, picturesque modernism of the decade after the second world war. But modern architecture in Britain, he writes, is all about places like this. No matter how mundane they may seem, they are expressions of a revolutionary approach to who builds in the city, how they build and in whose interest.



Revolutionary ... Balfron Tower in London. Photograph: Justin Tallis/AFP/Getty Images

Many of Hatherley's opinions, on both aesthetics and politics, will be familiar to readers who know his work, but there are some surprising, unpredictable judgments. While he is mostly full of contempt for postmodernism ("the 'funny tie' in the Brooks Brothers corporate cityscape"), he finds a lot to love in the eccentric buildings of [Alan Short](#), whose "riotous" 1990s university projects, which writhe with clashing materials and wayward ventilation towers, are "packed with thrills and spills".

Hatherley is also partial to the polychrome excess of [John Outram](#), particularly the [Judge Institute](#), which he calls "a ridiculous and exhilarating ride, Thatcherite sci-fi, and the most gleefully tasteless building in Cambridge." Similarly, you might expect Hatherley to have nothing but scorn for the "pseudomodernism" of the New Labour era, but he loves much of Will Alsop's work, applauding the "mastery of monumentality" of his hulking [Palestra](#) office block in Southwark, London.

He is also an unlikely fan of [Norman Foster's globular Sage concert hall](#) in Gateshead, and finds lots to admire in [Kengo Kuma's colossal V&A Dundee](#), which he thinks is "wholly of its place" and full of "smart and

subtle ideas” inside. Elsewhere, he is refreshingly honest about his love-hate relationship with certain structures: the Shard skyscraper in London is “a shocker” at street level but, by night, its eerie silhouette is “a sinister and glowering masterwork”.



‘Mastery of monumentality’ ... Will Alsop’s Palestra House, London.
Photograph: CAMimage/Alamy

With the aim of producing a guide of things worth going to see, Hatherley says he hasn’t included anything he hates, although there are plenty of entertaining swipes at nearby structures. While praising the [Charles Street car park in Sheffield](#) he condemns the Conran-designed [St Paul’s Tower](#) alongside as “pitifully underdesigned ... an utterly trivial piss-weak extruded grid of brown luxury flats”. In Manchester he finds the [Beetham Tower](#) to be the only work by Ian Simpson worth naming, compared to his other towers that exhibit an “unfortunate combination of over-slick glass glop and a fumbling approach to form”. Pretty much every recent tower in the city could be demolished tomorrow, adds the author, without anyone missing them. [It’s true](#).

Given the current state of contemporary construction in Britain, it’s not hard to see why Hatherley prefers to dwell on the products of more enlightened

times. Is he optimistic about the current direction of architecture on these isles?

“No,” he says bluntly. “But the thing that’s wrong with British architecture isn’t to do with style or fashion, it’s to do with the fact that everything here is incredibly badly built, thanks to a procurement culture based on the endless deferring of risk. It’s evident in the [Grenfell inquiry](#): there were dozens of contractors, just to refurbish a tower block, with labyrinthine contracts to ensure there was no risk to those companies. The first thing that’s always driven down is quality – and people have died because of it. Until we get rid of [PFI](#) [private finance initiative], and something is done to raise the quality of mass housing, schools and hospitals, I don’t have much hope for British architecture.”

Modern Buildings in Britain: A Gazetteer by Owen Hatherley is published by Penguin on 7 April.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2022/mar/24/something-kubrick-britain-best-modern-building-owen-hatherley>.

Northern Ireland

‘A freeze frame death in front of the world’: the police killing of Sean Downes at the height of the Troubles

In 1984, an Irish republican was shot dead by police in front of journalists and TV crews. In an extract from a new book, the *Guardian’s* Ireland correspondent at the time remembers the incident and its aftermath at the height of the Troubles



John 'Sean' Downes clutches his chest as he is fatally wounded by a plastic bullet on 12 August 1984 in Falls Road, Belfast. Photograph: Alan Lewis

[Paul Johnson](#)

Thu 24 Mar 2022 04.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 24 Mar 2022 08.58 EDT

It is the photograph that is lodged in my memory, never to be erased, no matter how many years go by. It is in black and white. Grainy. In the foreground, there are the heads of a dozen or so people, crouching but

looking upwards. At the top of the picture are three armoured, police Land Rovers with grilles across their windscreens.

The middle of the picture is the focal point. A police officer, a burly figure padded out with a flak jacket, helmet on, visor up, stands side on, right arm nearest us, right index finger on the trigger of his 2ft-long gun, the stock wedged into his shoulder. The left arm is extended to a grip at the end of the barrel. There is another policeman in the centre. But the figure you are drawn to is on the right, a man in his early 20s, black tousled hair and a moustache, about two metres away from the end of the gun. In his right hand, he seems to be carrying a thin stick. He is leaning forward, as if stopping suddenly, left hand going to his chest, to his heart.

Sunday 12 August 1984: the moment that Sean Downes was killed on the Falls Road, a freeze-frame death in front of journalists and TV crews from around the world. It was a sunny Sunday. But there wasn't any jollity in the air that day. There was a provocation to the government and the security forces. And the likelihood was that the provocation would mean confrontation. The two-mile march – including women and children, many young – to the rally site, was flanked by police and army vehicles all the way. Along the route the occasional missile was flung at the police. Every side street sealed off. Helicopters hovered low overhead.

Many of the crowd sat in the road to listen to speeches from a raised podium set up outside Sinn Féin headquarters. Gerry Adams, the Sinn Féin president, was there. But this time the security forces were not interested in him. It was the man to his left, clutching the microphone, that they wanted: Martin Galvin, the 34-year-old director of Noraid – a US-based group that raised funds for the Irish republicans – whose day job was, improbably, working as a lawyer in New York City's sanitation department, and who was the subject of an order banning him from the UK.

It was the moment Galvin picked up the microphone and moved to address the gathering and the TV cameras that the police moved in. Dozens of them charged into the crowd to try to carve a way through to their target.

A photographer nearby was hit with a baton as he waved his press card aloft. The shouting and screaming was instant, and then there were the cracks of plastic bullets being fired. Behind me, a man, blood pouring from a head wound, was being dragged into a front garden – a couple of youths smashed the door of a house to get him inside.

Another journalist and I saw a low-slung pram abandoned in the middle of the chaos. We barged our way through and manoeuvred it to the side of a low wall, out of the way. Relieved, we looked inside. It was empty. Another man was unconscious to our left, with people trying to drag him out. Just a few metres away, there was a glimpse of the young man with the stick, running towards police and then a crack.

A plastic bullet is a solid, PVC cylinder, 10cm long and 3.8cm in diameter. It has an operational range of between 33 and 66 metres. At 45 metres its impact is in the severe-damage category – meaning skull fractures, ruptures of kidney, or heart and haemorrhages. The rules said it should not be fired from less than a 20-metre range and aimed below the waist. The rules didn't mean much that day.



The cortège takes Sean Downes's body to be buried. Photograph: Alain Nogues/Sygma/Getty Images

Galvin escaped through the houses and back gardens of the Falls Road. His object was provocation and publicity. On those terms, it was a grim success. One person was dead, four seriously injured and 20 people hurt.

The remarkable photograph, by Alan Lewis of the Daily Mail, was published the next day, so it was all the more puzzling that, at a hastily called press conference, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) chief constable, [the pugnacious Sir John Hermon](#), didn't seem to have seen it or heard about it. If he had, he surely wouldn't have claimed – during what became an ill-tempered event – that his officers had fired into the air, not at any targets in the crowd; that the reporting was hyperbolic; and that force was only used because a riot had broken out. That angry, reflex version didn't hold for long in the face of the evidence. But it was quickly replaced by another, this time from another senior RUC officer, who explained that the bullet had ricocheted off a wall and then hit Sean Downes.

Media bias is not a new theme. Coverage was slanted, said Ian Paisley, the leader of the Democratic Unionist party. And the BBC was particularly to blame. Unionists won recall of the [Northern Ireland](#) assembly in order to vent anger at the reporting. In London, some took an opposing view: Shirley Williams, of the Social Democratic party, called it Belfast's Peterloo; David Steel, the leader of the Liberal party, called it a police riot.

Eight months later, in April 1985, Constable Nigel Hegarty, 27, appeared at a Belfast court charged with unlawful killing. It emerged that in a statement made on the day, he said he had fired from a distance of 20 to 25 yards (18-23 metres). At Hegarty's trial, it emerged that Downes had been convicted, as a 16-year-old, of membership of the junior IRA and possession of a weapon. Mr Justice Hutton said he believed Hegarty when he said he thought that his life and those of his colleagues were in danger. He took into account "the stress of the moment and the obvious determination of the deceased". Hegarty was acquitted.

Downes's funeral took place three days after he was killed; an estimated 5,000 people joining the cortege to the vast Milltown cemetery. In the crowd were Adams, with Sinn Féin's Martin McGuinness and Danny Morrison. It was only when the shiny nameplate on the side of the coffin was visible that

it became clear that the victim's name was not Sean but John, and that was how he was known to his family.

John Downes left a widow, Brenda, aged 20. She had been at the rally but had gone home, with their 18-month-old daughter, Claire, when trouble broke out. She tried to get the court's decision overturned and believed her solicitor was making progress. At one point Brenda went to Australia, but returned to Belfast, immersing herself in the Irish Palestine support campaign, women's causes and the support group Relatives for Justice. Her solicitor was Pat Finucane. [He was shot dead by the](#) Ulster Defence Association, with security forces collusion, in 1989.



Sean Downes's coffin is carried. Photograph: Alain Nogues/Sygma/Getty Images

The reverberations of the killing last to today. In March 2021, the Council of Europe said it would open a review after the British government refused to order a public inquiry. Nigel Hegarty returned to service in the RUC. Mr Justice Hutton became Lord Hutton. His name, address and car registration appeared on an IRA list discovered by the RUC. He moved his family to Scotland. Years later, in 2004, he chaired [the inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the death](#) of the Iraq-weapons expert David Kelly. Hutton absolved the prime minister, Tony Blair, reserving his criticism for the BBC.

Hermon retired as chief constable in 1989. In 1997 he published his autobiography, Holding the Line. Galvin tried to repeat his appearance of that 1984 day in 1989, but was arrested and deported to the US. He went on to oppose the peace process and Sinn Féin's role in it.

The day after Downes's funeral, I went to Donaghadee, a small seaside town, bedecked in red, white and blue bunting and union flags, for another funeral. Sgt Billy McDonald, 29, was the 200th member of the RUC to be killed in the Troubles. He was attending a lecture as part of his criminology studies at Ulster University when a bomb planted in a wall cavity was detonated. He had hung on to life for nine months, recovering consciousness only once, dying just hours after Downes was shot dead. Inside the church, the congregation sang The Lord's My Shepherd as another congregation had done the day before when saying goodbye to John Downes.

Paul Johnson is the former deputy editor of the Guardian. He was Ireland correspondent from 1984 to 1986. This is an edited extract from Reporting the Troubles 2: More Journalists Tell Their Stories of the Northern Ireland Conflict, published by Blackstaff Press (£16.99). To support the Guardian, order your copy at guardianbookshop.com. Delivery charges may apply.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/mar/24/a-freeze-frame-death-in-front-of-the-world-the-police-killing-of-sean-downes-at-the-height-of-the-troubles>

2022.03.24 - Opinion

- Why can't some scientists just admit they were wrong about Covid?
- My daughter says it's uncool to get Covid now. So, naturally, I got the dreaded second red line
- To prevent repeats of the P&O travesty, unions must get tougher
- Landline phones are back? I'm waiting for the apocalypse before I plug mine in again

Rewriting Covid-19Coronavirus

Why can't some scientists just admit they were wrong about Covid?

[Devi Sridhar](#)



Our understanding of the virus has changed so much. Yet some ‘experts’ doggedly cling to theories they proposed two years ago

- Prof Devi Sridhar is chair of global public health at the University of Edinburgh



People wearing face masks in London, 17 March 2020. Photograph: Dan Kitwood/Getty Images

Thu 24 Mar 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 24 Mar 2022 10.31 EDT

As Britain slowly emerges from the pandemic, after two bruising years, Covid camps are one of the lasting legacies. What I mean by Covid camps are people or groups with particular pandemic positions taken early on that they then continually reinforce by selectively sourcing information, eventually building a base of followers that organise around that position and defend it viciously.

It's unsurprising: similar camps developed around Brexit and other key issues. However, the emergence of scientists also dividing themselves into camps over Covid is more novel.

These camps include those who have always compared Covid to seasonal flu and advocated a "let it rip" approach; those who have argued for maximum suppression (and still do); and those who have changed their stance based on emerging data, including around vaccines and variants. There are also camps for those who have always been against masks, noting the lack of evidence over effectiveness; those who have argued for masks regardless of age and

context; and those who analyse their cost and benefit in different situations and age groups.

The essence of science is asking questions, forming hypotheses for possible answers, and then revising these based on new data. Covid has been a constantly changing situation. One only has to look at the emergence of variants and how policy response had to modify with a steep rise in Delta cases – which was more severe than the original Sars-CoV-2 – and then again with Omicron (which is milder than previous variants). There were also [early hypotheses](#) suggesting that many people may have prior immunity from other coronaviruses against Sars-CoV-2.

The pandemic has been like seeing something coming through the fog – but being unsure of the contours or exact characteristics of what was approaching. Humility and flexibility in responding were two hallmarks of effective policy response. For example, delaying infections through pursuing maximum suppression or a [zero-Covid response](#) were optimal in a pre-vaccine, pre-antiviral era. Every infection averted was giving someone a chance to have access to scientific tools – and live many more healthy years of life. Early in the pandemic we also didn't understand the full impact of the virus and so had to take a more cautious approach.

“Living with Covid”, now that science has [largely defanged it](#), involves ensuring widespread vaccination, as well as creating schemes such as the [US government's “test to treat”](#). The latter involves Americans going to pharmacies to get tested for Covid and if positive, immediately receiving antivirals on the spot, free of charge. Testing, treatments and vaccines mean that governments can find their “exit” from the pandemic and manage Covid as another one of the many infectious diseases they have to deal with.

But instead of evolving their position based on new data, some, instead, keep trying to show how they were still right in early 2020, digging themselves an even deeper hole. A case in point is Stanford professor John Ioannidis, who, in March 2020, argued that governments were overreacting to the threat of Covid. [He mocked those](#) who worried that the “68 deaths from Covid-19 in the US as of 16 March will increase exponentially to 680, 6,800, 68,000, 680,000”. He estimated that the US might suffer only 10,000

deaths. He also was cynical that vaccines or treatments could be developed in any timeframe that would affect the trajectory of the pandemic.

Two years later, the current US death toll [stands at 969,000](#), with almost [250,000 of those](#) being people under 65. These numbers would have once been seen as outlandish. In addition, in less than a year we had developed [safe and effective vaccines](#) – and a year after that, [safe and effective antivirals](#). One would expect these facts to prompt an academic to reconsider their initial assumptions – but instead, Ioannidis has continued to publish articles solidifying his starting position.

Why is this the case? Why can't academics just admit that they might have got their assumptions wrong at the start, or reassess their positions? I think it's a mix of playing to a fanbase that has formed over two years (in this case, an anti-lockdown, "Covid-as-flu" base), and the idea that moving with new data is a sign of backtracking and weakness, instead of the basic scientific virtue of reflection and re-analysis. The overall need is to be proven "right" for oneself and a small group of followers, rather than right for society.

Governments (and the public) have expected scientists to be oracles who can predict the future – and have put them in the spotlight in a previously unusual way. Social and mainstream media have amplified extreme positions – for the sake of debate and the impulse to show "two sides" – instead of trying to find a sensible middle ground. The move in society and workplaces towards largely virtual communication during the pandemic has made this polarisation even worse, with so many primarily communicating via Zoom and social media platforms. In this way, extreme positions have received disproportionate exposure in comparison to the "silent majority" who seem to understand the complexity of the situation – and the need to rely on expertise grounded in data.

I have respect and admiration for scientists who have [admitted what they got wrong](#), and also understand that each stage of the pandemic has required a different response, based on the latest data, tools and analysis.

"Experts" and influential people stuck in these Covid camps continue to influence the narrative. In some ways, this keeps us stuck reliving and

relitigating arguments from early in the pandemic at the very moment we should be focused on the best evidence and policies to help us “exit” the pandemic safely. This should involve the equitable distribution of vaccines and therapeutics around the globe, protecting those vulnerable to severe disease and rapid-response public health plans based around surveillance. In these moments it’s important to remember the two principles of humility and flexibility in response – and how these don’t fit easily with the new world of media.

- Prof Devi Sridhar is chair of global public health at the University of Edinburgh
 - Join Devi Sridhar for a Guardian Live online event on Monday 25 April. She will talk to Nicola Davis about Covid-19 and the lessons we can learn from our handling of the pandemic. Book [here](#)
-

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/24/scientists-wrong-covid-virus-experts>

OpinionHealth

My daughter says it's uncool to get Covid now. So, naturally, I got the dreaded second red line

[Adrian Chiles](#)



After two years and five jabs, I finally caught coronavirus on holiday in south Wales. But despite my fevered state, I learned something new



‘It was nice to be able to do nothing at all, without having to feel bad about it.’ Photograph: Yuttana Jaowattana/Getty Images/EyeEm

Thu 24 Mar 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 24 Mar 2022 13.28 EDT

After two jabs in a vaccine trial, and three Pfizers, I was sure my defences were rock solid, impregnable. Turns out they were unbreachable only in the sense that the Maginot line was unbreachable. Like Axis forces in 1940, the subvariant of the Omicron variant – or whatever they’re saying it is – found a way around the undefended flanks of my antibodies. Yes, I finally got Covid. Yes, I know, yawn. As my elder daughter said to me: “It’s so uncool to get Covid now.” I was in south Wales with her and our dog when I got my first-ever second red line. Feeling decidedly awful, I took to my bed. “You’re being very 2020 about this,” she said. Not long after, she packed her bag and buggered off to leave me to it, all alone but for the dog.

Thence began 10 days of drifting between sleeping and waking states. I had a raging temperature and a cough like my late Aunt Vesna’s in Zagreb when she was smoking at least three packs a day. I woozily remembered her fondly while snatching bits of sleep between death rattles. I wouldn’t have got out of bed at all were it not for the needs of the dog, who, when requiring attention, would lick my face, or any other extremity poking out from beneath the sheets. He would lie around bored to tears until another round of vicious coughing started up, at which point he would slope off

elsewhere. As I drifted back to sleep, I imagined him lying on the floor with his big paws over his ears, desolate with the tedium of it all.

There were upsides to all this, though – for me if not for him. It was nice to be able to do nothing at all, for once, without having to feel bad about it. I picked up a couple of books that I'd had knocking around for years without ever opening. One was *Metroland* by Julian Barnes. The first chapter was so astoundingly good that it was almost exhausting to read. I wasn't quite up to the challenge. So then I tried a book about the area I was languishing in – a place I've been coming to every year (every month, in fact) since I was a toddler – *Gower in History* by Paul Ferris. As early as the first paragraph, I knew I was blessed to be in the presence of a great writer. The Gower peninsula, he writes, “is about 14 miles long – depending on where you start measuring at the Swansea end – a rocky appendage, like something left over from a design that hasn't quite worked”. Nicely put, sir.

A more insightful, intelligent, moving and often funny history of anything I have yet to read. That it was about an area I love so well made it a still-greater joy. I came close to thanking Covid for the opportunity to discover the late author. “The unsettling thing about history,” Ferris writes, “is that we know what was going to happen to people next, and they did not. Our past was still their future.” An obvious enough point, I suppose, but I couldn't get it out of my ibuprofen/paracetamol-addled mind. I'm always unsettled in country churchyards when I come across a grave of anyone who died in the early 1940s. Good God, they never knew that we won the war.



Keep to the path ... Penrice Castle in south Wales. Photograph: LatitudeStock/Alamy

A related thought was expressed – brilliantly, I thought – in a tweet by the BBC's Fergal Keane in the early days of the unfolding horror in Ukraine. "We are into one of those periods in history whose course will seem blindingly obvious to future generations, but for us feels like the first steps into a dark forest filled with traps and malice." Sweating away, half-awake with no one but a disappointed dog for company, I lay there quite oppressed by the fears of the millions of souls who have come before us, who didn't know what to do – though it eventually became obvious – and never found out what was going to happen next.

Eventually my dog could take no more and had to be exercised. A mate took him out and then after a week, once my red line had faded away, I worked up the energy to leave the house myself. As the former England manager Bobby Robson once said of his defender Terry Butcher, who had cut his head open but carried on playing, VCs have been won for less.

It's amazing how much more you notice when you're having to walk very slowly. It was deeply mindful. And, mindful of the safety of other walkers, I was careful to stand a good way downwind of them as I told them how ill I was, eliciting great sympathy.

Later, though I still felt rough, I risked a short drive to Penrice Castle, seat of one of Gower's biggest landowners. Having been enthralled by their story in the book, I wanted to breathe their air. The castles – there's a ruined one and one they live in – are in a private park but, doubtless to their irritation, a public footpath runs through it. Unleashed, the dog sprinted around, describing great arcs of joy.

We came across a sign acknowledging only the most grudging acceptance of our right to be there. "Keep to the path." Well, I was, even if my hound wasn't. "Dogs must be kept on leads." Oh dear. "No picnics." None planned. "No cycling." Ditto. "No running." Eh? What happens if I break into a jog? Does a sniper take me out? And I'd have to run to catch the dog! This appalling catch-22 brought on another wave of fatigue. So we sloped off home back to bed.

- Adrian Chiles is a broadcaster, writer and Guardian columnist
-

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/24/my-daughter-says-its-uncool-to-get-covid-now-so-naturally-i-got-the-dreaded-second-red-line>

[Opinion](#)[Trade unions](#)

Exploiters such as P&O watch out – there's a new wave of trade unionists coming for you

[Owen Jones](#)



Trade unions are shackled by restrictive laws and demonised by politicians, but they can still challenge militant capitalism



‘Increasing numbers have come to realise that rather than being too extreme, the modern labour movement has been too subdued.’ Protesters outside the offices of DP World, owners of P&O Ferries, in London, 18 March 2022.
Photograph: Victoria Jones/PA

Thu 24 Mar 2022 04.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 24 Mar 2022 10.59 EDT

Spare a moment for the real victim of the [mass sacking](#) of P&O workers: Natalie Elphicke, the Conservative MP for Dover. When she turned up to address a local protest in support of the now redundant staff, the attendees were, for some reason, [unimpressed with her failure](#) to vote against fire-and-rehire rules that had left those workers vulnerable to gangster capitalists such as the owners of P&O Ferries. After they chanted, “Shame on you” she [warned fellow MPs](#) of the dangers of “militant unionism”, and said she had been “bullied” and “abused”.

But increasing numbers of Britons have come to realise that the real menace is not militant unionism, but militant capitalism. And that rather than being too extreme, the modern labour movement has been too subdued. [Trade union membership](#) is around half of its 1979 peak: just a quarter of the British workforce are members of unions, and in the private sector, it’s a derisory 13%. As Tony Blair boasted in 1997, British law was “the most restrictive on trade unions in the western world”, and Tory anti-union laws have only tightened that vice since. Communities based around secure jobs

in mining, factories and docks have given way to a precarious and transient workforce that is harder to organise.

And there's an even bigger existential menace to trade unions: decades of officially sanctioned hostility to trade unionism has left the very concept alien to many younger people. As [one study of young core workers](#) by the Trades Union Congress in the UK found: "The vast majority hadn't heard the words 'trade union' and couldn't provide a definition."

But a new generation of trade unionists believe these are challenges to overcome, not excuses for passivity. "The anti-union laws in the UK are draconian and terrible," Eve Livingston, the author of *Make Bosses Pay: Why We Need Unions*, told me. "But that said, there are still powerful tools and strategies available to unions if they're brave enough to make use of them."

Livingston's critique goes like this: some unions shifted from an organising model to a servicing model – that is, focusing on signing members up to union magazines, offering discounts and insurance policies, rather than going to the workplace to discuss activism and politics. One striking example of an organising model is that of the Independent Workers Union of Great Britain (IWGB), whose Ecuador-born general secretary Henry Chango Lopez can often be seen on picket lines bellowing through a megaphone as the union's red-white-and-green flags flutter behind him.

When he became a porter at the University of London in 2010, "I just didn't know about any rights we had," he tells me. Like other outsourced workers – from cleaners to security – he lacked basic rights but felt abandoned by traditional unions. "We weren't being supported, they wouldn't put any resources into supporting us," he tells me. But the IWGB's tactics of wildcat strikes, direct action and building coalitions with other grassroots organisations, trade unions and students paid off. In 2020, the University of London was forced to recognise the workers – from porters to receptionists to cleaners – as staff, with all the rights that entailed.

IWGB is a small union, but it punches hard: it has won employment rights for workers ranging from [couriers](#) to [foster care workers](#). “I think if we’re able to do all of this without resources – we function on a shoestring – why can’t unions with loads of money in their bank accounts,” asks Lopez. “They can organise workers, invest in training, get organisers to go into workplaces.” Those younger, precarious workers who are supposedly out of reach of unions are being organised by IWGB: for actions such as the ongoing [longest ever courier strike](#), as McDonald’s, Greggs and Costa delivery drivers take action over pay and conditions.

There are some other unions that do this, and have found themselves vilified for their success: such as the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT), which represents the P&O workers and, more famously, train and tube drivers, whose decent salaries should be seen as the product of dogged organising. But the most decisive shift towards the organising model is the recent election of Sharon Graham as general secretary of Unite, the biggest private sector union, who pithily sums up her pitch to me: “We need to get back to the workplace and get off the hamster wheel of party politics.”

Believing Unite has invested too much energy and resources into remoulding the Labour party rather than “hard miles dedicated to organising and mobilising workers”, Graham believes younger workers need to be won over by focusing energy on unionising the service sector. Given Unite’s size, this resolute approach poses the biggest potential threat yet to the Thatcherite anti-union settlement.

There are several factors feeding into a possible union resurgence. Stagnating living standards were often masked by access to cheap easy credit, but that has injected [destabilising levels of household debt](#) into the economy. In-work benefits, too, have been repeatedly slashed in real terms. Horror stories – from Sports Direct’s reliance on zero-hours contracts to the [lack of rights for Uber drivers](#) to the latest P&O travesty – have helped cement a justified public attitude that British workers have an unfair lot.

Yes, unions are shackled by restrictive laws, they’re demonised by politicians and media outlets, and they face formidable obstacles in organising an increasingly fragmented workforce. But unions are the only

viable challengers to the P&Os of this world – and that fact is surely becoming ever more obvious.

- Owen Jones is a Guardian columnist
-

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/24/p-and-o-travesty-recognise-unions-tougher>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

[Opinion](#)[Life and style](#)

Landline phones are back? I'm waiting for the apocalypse before I plug mine in again

[Tim Dowling](#)



Old-fashioned handsets are the latest big thing in the US. Does no one remember the constant ringing, ropey sound and nuisance calls?



The landline: an antidote to screen fatigue? Photograph: Dann Tardif/Getty Images (posed by model)

Thu 24 Mar 2022 04.45 EDT Last modified on Thu 24 Mar 2022 05.15 EDT

The New York Times reports on a nostalgic surge for landline phones in the US. In parallel with the resurgent affection for VHS tapes and record players, young people are apparently drawn to old-fashioned corded, non-digital instruments as an antidote to screen fatigue and bottomless distraction. They like the idea of a tool that only does one thing: makes phone calls.

To the British this may sound like missing something that never quite went away. Although landlines are in sharp decline in the UK, four in five households still have one, even if a quarter of us don't have a phone plugged into it. Mine was installed only five years ago, as an inescapable element of a new broadband/TV package. I have never used it; I'm not even sure what my phone number is.

I don't miss the landline, because I remember that by the end it served exclusively as a conduit for nuisance calls. I stopped answering it, and then I unplugged it so it would stop ringing. If I wanted to, I could have it back in my life tomorrow.

For young Americans, however, the nostalgia is hard won: only 30% of homes still have landlines. In most cases, their prized old-fashioned handsets – models from the 50s and 60s are especially popular – have been refitted so they can connect to a mobile phone network via Bluetooth. They haven't returned to the age of the landline at all. They've just found a way to make placing a mobile call more difficult.

In a sense, that's what nostalgia is: a yearning to retreat to a past you don't remember. The old landline system came with its own annoyances: the tyranny of its constant ringing, the engaged signal, the ropey service, the never knowing who might be calling. It didn't slow life down to a more manageable pace. It just held things up.

Somewhere in a box in our attic sits an old red rotary-dial phone that belonged to my wife. If you're old enough you may recall a previous wave of nostalgia for these, in the 80s. They also had to be refitted to cope with modern wiring. You could buy them from market stalls.

With any luck, the red phone will stay in that box. But I'm happy knowing it's there, ready to plug in, so that one day, when the apocalypse comes, we will still be able to order pizza.

- Tim Dowling is a Guardian columnist
-

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/24/landline-phones-back-waiting-apocalypse-plug-mine-in-tim-dowling>

2022.03.24 - Around the world

- [China plane crash Cockpit voice recorder analysed as first victims found](#)
- [Madeleine Albright First female US secretary of state dies aged 84](#)
- [US gun violence Washington joins nine other states in restricting bullet magazine capacity](#)
- [Capitol attack US man charged gets asylum in Belarus](#)

[China](#)

China plane crash: cockpit voice recorder analysed for clues as first victims found

Human remains found at the remote crash site as work continues to discover why the China Eastern Boeing 737 crashed, killing 132 people



An aerial view of the site in Guangxi where China Eastern flight MU5735 crashed on Tuesday killing 132 people. Photograph: VCG/Getty Images

[Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei

[@heldavidson](#)

Thu 24 Mar 2022 00.57 EDT Last modified on Thu 24 Mar 2022 03.22 EDT

The cockpit voice recorder from a plane which crashed into a Chinese mountainside with 132 people onboard is being analysed in Beijing, as the recovery mission confirms it has found human remains at the site.

The China Eastern Airlines flight crashed on Monday afternoon, after plunging from more than 6,000m (20,000ft). The cause of the crash is not known, and investigators have said determining it could prove difficult given the circumstances. The plane crashed with such force that much of it disintegrated on impact, and the recovered black box was “badly damaged”. A second black box, which records flight data, has not yet been found.

Zhu Tao, an official at the Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC), said the storage units of the recovered recorder were damaged but “relatively complete” and had been sent to a Beijing institute for decoding.



Rescue workers search for the black boxes at a plane crash site in Tengxian county. Photograph: Zhou Hua/AP

More than 300 rescue workers remain at the crash site in a remote area near Wuzhou in Teng County, Guangxi province. Work was suspended briefly on Wednesday due to poor weather, but an evening briefing revealed some human remains had been located.

Some details of passengers have begun to emerge in Chinese state media. In China Youth Daily, a man who gave the pseudonym Wang Baiyang said his 26-year-old sister, her husband and their 18-month old daughter were onboard and that it had been their first ever flight. They were flying to

Guangzhou for medical treatment for the child, and had originally been scheduled on an earlier flight but it was cancelled.

01:12

Smoke rises from aftermath of passenger plane crash in China – video report

“For the past two days, I felt like I had a dream, and I always felt that when I woke up the next day, my sister would call me,” he said. “I didn’t think it was real at all, first my grandfather died, and then I heard the news of the flight, and I just froze there and tried to reach my sister through the phone.”

Wang said his sister, Gu Hanyu, sent the family a video before the flight of her daughter jumping around the lounge and playing with her mask, and giggling. Gu was born deaf, he said, and had met her husband Guo Zengqiang on a blind date. They married in February 2020 at a simple ceremony.

“Who would have thought that just after they found a doctor who can cure the child’s disease, this disease will not have to be treated,” said Wang. “Life-saving flights become fatal flights. It was their first and last flight.”

A retiree surnamed Zhang, from Shenzhen, visited the crash site earlier and told Reuters his nephew was onboard.

“I hope the country can thoroughly investigate this matter and find out whether it was the manufacturer’s fault or it was a maintenance problem,” Zhang said, his eyes filling with tears.



Grieving relatives arrive at the site. Photograph: Noel Celis/AFP/Getty Images

The search for the second flight recorder continues, with investigators hoping the information could give answers to why the plane, which had passed safety checks prior to taking off, crashed during the cruising phase of the flight.

The plane was a six-year-old [Boeing 737-89P](#), according to flight data trackers. The Boeing 737-800s are among the most common passenger planes in the world, and different to the 737 Max, [which was grounded worldwide](#) after two fatal crashes in 2018 and 2019.

In apparent answer to speculation the crash could be due to pilot activity, Sun Shiying, chairman of the airline's Yunnan branch, told reporters on Wednesday the three pilots on board were in good health and "had good performance and had maintained harmonious relationships with their families".

The investigation into the worst air disaster in [China](#) for over a decade is being led by local authorities, however American investigators from the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) have been invited to take part because the plane was made in the US. However it has not yet confirmed if

those investigators can travel to China because of visa and quarantine requirements.

“We are working with the Department of State to address those issues with the Chinese government before any travel will be determined,” the NTSB said.

Additional reporting by Xiaoqian Zhu and agencies

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/24/china-plane-crash-cockpit-voice-recorder-analysed-for-clues-as-first-victims-found>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

[US news](#)

Madeleine Albright, first female US secretary of state, dies aged 84

Former cabinet member was 'a trailblazer' as the highest-ranking woman in history when she was named to the role in 1996

- [Obituary: Madeleine Albright, 1937-2022](#)

02:01

Madeleine Albright hailed as a 'trailblazer' by colleagues – video

*[Martin Pengelly](#) in New York
[@MartinPengelly](#)*

Wed 23 Mar 2022 18.34 EDTFirst published on Wed 23 Mar 2022 14.47 EDT

Madeleine Albright, who came to the US as a refugee and made history as the first woman to be secretary of state, has died. She was 84.

A family [statement](#) read: "We are heartbroken to announce that Dr Madeleine Albright, the 64th US secretary of state ... passed away earlier today.

"The cause was cancer. She was surrounded by family and friends. We have lost a loving mother, grandmother, sister, aunt and friend."

Joe Biden saluted Albright as "a force for goodness, grace, and decency – and for freedom".

"Hers were the hands that turned the tide of history," the president said.

Bill Clinton, the president Albright served, [paid tribute](#) to “one of the finest secretaries of state, an outstanding UN ambassador, a brilliant professor and an extraordinary human being”.

Born Marie Jana Korbelová in Prague in 1937 but known as Madeleine since infancy, Albright fled with her family for London in 1939 after the Nazis took Czechoslovakia. She came to the US in 1948.

She was raised Catholic and only decades later discovered her parents were Jewish and that several family members were murdered in the Holocaust.

After the election of Clinton in 1992, Albright was first ambassador to the United Nations, then secretary of state. The dominant foreign policy themes of the time were the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, including the wars in the former Yugoslavia, the quest for peace between Israel and the Palestinians and the rise of fundamentalist Islam in the years before 9/11.

Albright became secretary of state in 1997, then the highest-ranking woman in the history of US government. It made her fourth in line to the presidency, though like her predecessor Henry Kissinger she would not have been able to fill the role, not being a natural born US citizen as defined in the constitution.

The state department spokesperson, Ned Price, said: “The impact that Secretary Albright ... had on this building is felt every single day in just about every single corridor. She was a trailblazer.”

Ben Rhodes, a former foreign policy adviser to Barack Obama, [said](#): “Madeleine Albright was always exceedingly generous to and encouraging of younger people coming up in national security ... she always extended a hand, opened her home and shared her wisdom.”

Val Demings, a Florida congresswoman and Senate candidate, [called](#) Albright “not only a ... breaker of glass ceilings [but] a brilliant, passionate, dedicated public servant”.

Bill Clinton [said](#) “few leaders have been so perfectly suited for the times in which they served” and called Albright “a passionate force for freedom,

democracy and human rights”.

Hillary Clinton, a successor as secretary of state, recalled Albright’s “unfailingly wise counsel” and said: “So many people around the world are alive and living better lives because of her service.”

Bill Clinton’s successor, George W Bush, saluted “a foreign-born foreign minister who understood first-hand the importance of free societies for peace in our world”.



Madeleine Albright shakes hands with Vladimir Putin in Moscow in February 2000. Photograph: Mikhail Metzel/AP

The threat of authoritarianism was the subject of Albright’s last book, *Fascism: A Warning*, published in 2018.

“Democracy is not the easiest form of government,” she told the Guardian then. “It does require attention and participation and carrying out the social contract. And it doesn’t deliver immediately. What we have to learn is how to get democracy to deliver because people want to vote and eat.”

In her book, Albright called Donald Trump “the first anti-democratic president in modern US history” and “actually really smart – evil smart, I think”.

But she cast her eye worldwide.

“The things that are happening are genuinely, seriously bad,” [she said](#). “Some of them are really bad. They’re not to do with Trump; it is the evolution of a number of different trends.”

Four years on, as Vladimir Putin amassed Russian forces on the border with Ukraine, Albright published [a column in the New York Times](#) in which she recalled being the first senior US figure to meet the Russian leader, in Moscow in 2000.

“Flying home,” she wrote, “I recorded my impressions. ‘Putin is small and pale,’ I wrote, ‘so cold as to be almost reptilian.’ He claimed to understand why the Berlin Wall had to fall but had not expected the whole Soviet Union to collapse. ‘Putin is embarrassed by what happened to his country and determined to restore its greatness.’”

If Putin ordered an invasion of Ukraine, Albright said, he would make a historic mistake. A month later, Russian troops are bogged down in brutal fighting and Russia is [an international pariah](#).

On Wednesday, from Europe and in words with particular resonance as Nato faces a renewed Russian threat, Biden said: “As the world redefined itself in the wake of the cold war, we were partners and friends working to welcome newly liberated democracies into Nato and confront the horrors of genocide in the Balkans.”

In her interview [with the Guardian](#), Albright said the US had a problem with women in politics.

“I don’t understand it, frankly,” she said. “We are very good at being No 1 in many things and yet we are not in this and I don’t know the answer. Because there are certainly very qualified women.”

“When my name came up to be secretary of state, you would think that I was an alien, you know. People actually said: ‘The Arabs won’t deal with a woman.’”

Lamenting Hillary Clinton's defeat by Trump, she said: "I think she would have been a remarkable president. And I think that it's very disappointing."

In 2012, Albright was given the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Bestowing the award, [Obama said](#): "Once, at a naturalisation ceremony, an Ethiopian man came up to [Albright] and said, 'Only in America can a refugee meet the secretary of state.'

"And she replied, 'Only in America can a refugee become the secretary of state.'"

On Wednesday, Obama said: "Michelle and I send our thoughts to the Albright family and everyone who knew and served with a truly remarkable woman."

This article was amended on 24 March 2022 to remove an erroneous mention of Zbigniew Brzezinski, who never held the office of secretary of state.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/mar/23/madeleine-albright-dead-84-secretary-of-state>

Washington state

Washington joins nine other states in restricting gun magazine capacity size

A package of bills signed by Jay Inslee tighten the state's gun laws, including adding restrictions to a law prohibiting ghost guns



Governor Jay Inslee signs a package of bills tightening the state's gun laws.
Photograph: Ted S Warren/AP

Associated Press

Wed 23 Mar 2022 20.57 EDT Last modified on Thu 24 Mar 2022 08.35 EDT

The Washington governor, Jay Inslee, signed a package of bills on Wednesday tightening the state's gun laws, including a measure that bans the manufacture, distribution and sale of firearm magazines that hold more than 10 rounds of ammunition.

Washington joins nine other states, including California and New Jersey, that restrict magazine capacity size.

“We are not willing to accept gun violence as a normal part of life in the state of Washington,” said Inslee, a Democrat, at a news conference where he was surrounded by lawmakers and other supporters of the new laws.

The capitol was closed to the public for several hours before and after the bill signing. A spokesperson for the [Washington state](#) patrol said that there was no specific threat, but that the temporary closure was a “prudent precaution”.

Washington’s measure, which takes effect 1 July, does not prohibit the possession of such magazines. It also includes exceptions to magazine limits for law enforcement and corrections officers, members of the armed forces, Washington’s national guard and licensed firearms dealers who sell to those institutions.

Violations would be a gross misdemeanor, which in Washington is punishable by up to 364 days in county jail, a maximum fine of up to \$5,000, or both.

The measure was requested by the Democratic attorney general, Bob Ferguson, who said he was motivated to push for the bill after a 2016 shooting at a party in Mukilteo in which a 30-round magazine was used, killing three teens and seriously injuring another.

“It’s individuals who are directly impacted by gun violence. When they speak, politicians respond,” Ferguson said.

The new law also makes selling a prohibited magazine or offering one for distribution or sale a violation of Washington’s Consumer Protection Act, which allows the attorney general’s office to take action on alleged violations of the act to get restitution and civil penalties.

In a statement issued after the bill signing, the Sacramento, California-based Firearms Policy Coalition said that it plans to lead a lawsuit over the new law, saying that it “condemns this latest act of state aggression and will not allow this law to go unchallenged”. The group said it was looking for Washington residents who could be potential plaintiffs in the planned action.

Ferguson said he was confident that the ban was constitutional and that his office could successfully defend any potential litigation. He pointed to appellate history with other states with bans, including California, where the ninth circuit court of appeals overturned a ruling by two of its judges and [upheld California's law](#) in November.

Inslee also signed a measure that prohibits people from knowingly bringing weapons either openly carried or carried with a concealed pistol license to ballot counting sites and on-campus school board meetings. The new law also bans openly carried firearms at local government meetings and election-related facilities such as county election offices, off-campus school board meetings and local government meetings, though people who have concealed pistol licenses would be allowed to carry their concealed weapon in those locations.

Firearms are already prohibited at several designated places statewide, including restricted areas of jails, courtrooms, taverns and commercial airports. And last year, lawmakers approved a ban on openly carrying guns and other weapons at the Washington state capitol, part of the capitol campus and public protests statewide.

"No one should be prevented from accessing their government due to fear of armed intimidation," said representative Tana Senn, the bill's sponsor.

Law enforcement is exempt from the restrictions, as are any security personnel hired at a location.

Violation of the law would be a misdemeanor, punishable by up to 90 days in jail and fines of up to \$1,000. Second or subsequent violations would be a gross misdemeanor.

Additionally, any person convicted would have their concealed pistol license revoked for three years.

Under the measure, a person must knowingly be in violation of the law in order for the criminal penalty to apply.

A third measure signed by Inslee on Wednesday adds further restrictions to the law on the manufacture, sale, or possession of so-called ghost guns by prohibiting people from possessing components to build an untraceable firearm, as well as possessing any firearms built after 2019 that do not have serial numbers. Hobbyists will be able to continue making guns at home, but under the new law they must use components with serial numbers.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/mar/23/washington-gun-control-bills-jay-inslee>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

US Capitol attack

US man charged in Capitol attack gets asylum in Belarus

Evan Neumann, accused of hitting police with metal barricade, tells Belarusian state TV he has ‘mixed feelings’ about the move



A candlelight vigil in remembrance of the January 6 insurrection, a year later. Photograph: Allison Bailey/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

Associated Press

Wed 23 Mar 2022 18.22 EDT Last modified on Wed 23 Mar 2022 18.25 EDT

A former San Francisco Bay Area resident facing federal criminal charges from the January 6 attack at the US Capitol has been granted asylum in [Belarus](#), the former Soviet nation’s state media reported on Tuesday.

Evan Neumann, 49, was charged a year ago with assaulting police, including using a metal barricade as a battering ram during the riot last year. In an

interview with the Belarus 1 channel that aired last year, he acknowledged being at the building that day but rejected the charges and said he had not hit any officers.

The move comes a month into Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Joe Biden was [heading to Europe](#) to talk with allies about possible new sanctions against Russia and more military aid for Ukraine.

"Today I have mixed feelings," Neumann told the state-owned television network BelTA in the report aired on Tuesday, the [Washington Post](#) reported. "I am glad Belarus took care of me. I am upset to find myself in a situation where I have problems in my own country."



Evan Neumann smiles during his interview with the Belarus 1 channel in video released last year. Photograph: AP

The Belarusian president, Alexander Lukashenko, and Russian president, Vladimir Putin, have used the riot as evidence of a supposed double standard by the US, which often condemns crackdowns on anti-government demonstrations elsewhere.

Belarus is a Russian ally and neighbor to Ukraine. It does not have an extradition agreement with the US.

Neumann told Belarus 1 that he had traveled to Italy in March 2021 and eventually arrived in Ukraine before crossing over illegally into Belarus. He owns a handbag manufacturing business.

Police body-camera footage shows Neumann and others shoving a metal barricade into a line of officers before he punches two officers and hits them with the barricade, according to court papers. Court documents state Neumann stood at the front of a police barricade wearing a red “Make America Great Again” hat in support of Donald Trump.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/mar/23/us-capitol-riot-belarus-asylum-evan-neumann>

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

Table of Contents

[The Guardian.2022.03.27 \[Sun, 27 Mar 2022\]](#)

[2022.03.27 - Opinion](#)

- [The Observer view on Rishi Sunak's spring statement](#)
- [The Observer view on why Europe must redouble its pressure on Putin](#)
- [Jiggery-wokery: the real obstacle to a united front on Ukraine](#)
- [Vladimir Putin plays poisoner's poker – cartoon](#)
- [China-Russian relations carry deep memories of mutual respect... and scorn](#)
- [Tones and I is not alone in wishing people would stop making a song about that tune](#)
- [Letters: Britain should knuckle down and embrace the boring](#)
- [For the record](#)
- [Collaboration thrives on everyday vanity and ambition. Just look at RT's wannabes](#)

[Headlines](#)

- [Exclusive Former minister takes second job as No 10 drops plan to cap MPs' earnings](#)
- [Live UK politics: we failed Nazanin, says Jeremy Hunt](#)
- [Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe Hunt calls for inquiry into Iran debt payment delays](#)
- [Revealed \\$17bn of global assets linked to 35 Russians with alleged ties to Putin](#)
- [Roman Abramovich Inside his £250m property portfolio](#)

[2022.03.22 - Spotlight](#)

- [‘Totally out of control’ The authors whose books are being banned in a culture war at US schools](#)
- [‘The casino beckons’ My journey inside the cryptosphere](#)
- [‘People feel suffocated’ Cost of living tops French concerns before election](#)
- [‘A wild triple-decker sandwich’ World’s first multistorey skatepark lands in Folkestone](#)

[2022.03.22 - Opinion](#)

Why the BBC drama Then Barbara Met Alan brought tears to my eyes

Spend a day with me in the eviction court, Mr Sunak, and you'll understand the 'cost of living'

Work of the devil? I think not. As a priest, I'm all for exotically tasty hot cross buns

Sudan's military is brutally suppressing protests – global action is needed

2022.03.22 - Around the world

Syria Regime using maze of shell companies to avoid sanctions on Assad's elite

Revealed Ships may dump oil up to 3,000 times a year in Europe's waters

Live Business: rising inflation hits UK government borrowing in February; crude oil up again

Oink, oink How scientists decoded pig emotions from their sounds

Rohingya Refugees welcome US decision to call Myanmar atrocities a genocide

Headlines

P&O Ferries Ferry operator boss should quit after 'brazen' mass sackings, says Shapps

Live UK politics: Grant Shapps calls on P&O Ferries boss to resign over mass sackings

Education MPs accuse DfE of failing to control academy leaders' excessive salaries

Antarctica Satellite data shows entire Conger ice shelf has collapsed

2022.03.25 - Spotlight

'Covid ruins storytelling!' Judd Apatow and David Duchovny on lockdown comedy The Bubble

Explainer When do the clocks change in the UK – and what started the annual ritual?

'You cannot put the pain into words' Anoosheh Ashoori on his detention in Iran

You be the judge Should my husband start trying new cuisines?

2022.03.25 - Opinion

[The UK's poorest people have been utterly abandoned by this ideological chancellor](#)

[As a historian of slavery, I know just how much the royal family has to answer for in Jamaica](#)

[Ted Cruz and the ‘racist baby’: sometimes reality threatens my political maturity](#)

[P&O Ferries may not regret breaking law, but the UK should regret dealing with its owner](#)

2022.03.25 - Around the world

[Donald Trump Ex-president sues Hillary Clinton, alleging ‘plot’ to rig 2016 election](#)

[China Frustration grows as daily Covid cases near 5,000](#)

[US Many bird species nesting and laying eggs nearly a month early, study says](#)

[Solomon Islands Chinese draft security deal didn’t blindside Australia, Morrison says](#)

[China Secret shipment of replica guns to Solomon Islands police triggers concern](#)

Headlines

[China Plane with 133 people onboard crashes in Guangxi province](#)

[NHS Over 80% of UK GPs think patients are at risk in their surgery, survey finds](#)

[Coronavirus UK case numbers ‘no particular cause for concern’, says Javid](#)

[Vaccines NHS rollout of second Covid booster jabs begins in England](#)

2022.03.21 - Spotlight

[‘I’m just surprised I still have a career’ Chloë Sevigny on hipsters, Hollywood, fame and family](#)

[‘It’s not a problem any more’ Israel’s increasingly porous West Bank fence](#)

[Blockbuster or bladderburster? Why movie intermissions must return – now!](#)

[Darjeeling unlimited New party vows to end region’s strife](#)

2022.03.21 - Opinion

I grew up in a paranoid dictatorship. Isolating Russia won't bring Europe peace

Policing in Scotland has been radically reformed – all UK forces can learn from us

There's an easy way to help Ukraine without military escalation: cancel its foreign debt

The Tories' bellicose posturing on Ukraine is dangerous – and unfair to us

2022.03.21 - Around the world

South China Sea China has fully militarised three islands, US admiral says

Live Business:: oil rises as EU mulls Russian ban; UK chancellor hints at fuel duty cut

Kyiv Mother seriously wounded while shielding baby from missile strike

Volodymyr Zelenskiy President tells Israel's Knesset that Russia envisages 'final solution' for Ukraine

Germany Gas deal with Qatar agreed to help end dependency on Russia

Headlines

P&O Ferries Ship detained over crew training concerns, says coastguard agency

Grant Shapps Questions raised over meeting with DP World Explainer How P&O broke the law and the potential consequences

2022.03.26 - Spotlight

'It's not about big brands' How will UK casual dining fare after Covid?

Blind date One of the waiters seemed to be chatting us up, but that was awkward for him, not us

Gordon Ramsay's Future Food Stars It's The Apprentice meets food – with added helicopters

Mother's Day Brunches that even a teenager can make

2022.03.26 - Opinion

Zelenskiy is Churchill with an iPhone, but the video war will be easier to win than the real one

Ukraine will not surrender one inch of land to Russia – the west must understand this

Tonight in Britain the clocks will go forward – all except mine

Pool sliders, charm bracelets and a Kia Rio ... the rise and fall of Brand Rishi

2022.03.26 - Around the world

Ginni Thomas Capitol attack panel may call in judge's wife who wanted election overturned

'Perfect storm' Royals misjudged Caribbean tour, say critics

Canada Key Conservative says party risks takeover by far-right 'lunatics'

Aids quilt Creator to leave San Francisco home after rent doubles to \$5,200

Ethiopia Tigray rebels agree 'cessation of hostilities' after government truce

Headlines

Spring statement 2022 Lack of help from Rishi Sunak for struggling UK families will push 1.3m into poverty

Live Rishi Sunak says he 'can't make every problem go away' after criticism of spring statement

Live Business: absolute poverty to rise in UK; Moscow stocks rally as trading resumes

Analysis Sleight of hand aims to shift blame for hardship ahead

2022.03.24 - Spotlight

Obese pets 'He raids the bin and eats the cat's food!'

The long read The queen of crime-solving

Architecture Like something from a Kubrick film – the hunt for Britain's best modern buildings

'A freeze frame death in front of the world' The police killing of Sean Downes at the height of the Troubles

2022.03.24 - Opinion

Why can't some scientists just admit they were wrong about Covid?

My daughter says it's uncool to get Covid now. So, naturally, I got the dreaded second red line

To prevent repeats of the P&O travesty, unions must get tougher

Landline phones are back? I'm waiting for the apocalypse before I plug mine in again

2022.03.24 - Around the world

China plane crash Cockpit voice recorder analysed as first victims found

Madeleine Albright First female US secretary of state dies aged 84

US gun violence Washington joins nine other states in restricting bullet magazine capacity

Capitol attack US man charged gets asylum in Belarus