

# The Guardian

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## 2022.04.24 - Opinion

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## **Forget the likes of Will Smith. Audiences are also behaving badly**

[\*\*Rebecca Nicholson\*\*](#)



The Tonys has a violence policy and Nish Kumar is subjected to racist heckling; something is amiss in the entertainment world



The ‘rash moment’ in which Will Smith (right) slapped Chris Rock onstage at the Oscars ceremony may be part of a bigger picture. Photograph: Robyn Beck/AFP/Getty Images

Sat 23 Apr 2022 11.40 EDTFirst published on Fri 22 Apr 2022 10.12 EDT

This is not about [Will Smith](#) slapping Chris Rock at the Oscars last month. Nobody needs to read more about that. It’s swimming in cold water, it’s how good *Succession* is: we know, so why hasn’t anyone mentioned it before?

But that one rash moment and its afterlife is part of a bigger picture, a sense that something is not quite as it was. Last week, the *Hollywood Reporter* [revealed](#) that the organisers of the Tony awards, the New York ceremony that recognises excellence in Broadway theatre, sent an email revealing they now have a policy for dealing with violent incidents: “In the event of an incident, the perpetrator will be removed from the event immediately.”

The Tonys, back for the first time since 2020 and celebrating its 75th year, draws no direct connection between this and Smith’s actions in March, but surely this has to be the first time that an entertainment awards ceremony has needed to explicitly state that you’re not allowed to perpetrate an act of violence while clapping for *Moulin Rouge! The Musical*.

This protocol is aimed at an audience largely made up of professionals; while I have witnessed how heated feelings can become over whether this or that person more deserved their shiny trophy, the idea that there has to be a plan now for dealing with the possibility of that spilling over into violence is odd, isn't it?

Live entertainment in all forms, cut off during the pandemic, given little support in this country by the government, is now attempting to scratch and claw its way back in a near-impossible landscape. The audiences that feel brave enough to attend events may find themselves in a different world. [Comedians talk about a mood shift](#), post-lockdowns, with audiences behaving badly; last week, Nish Kumar spoke of racist hecklers at his stand-up shows and said other comedians agree that "there's something in the water". In an Instagram video, the musician Adrianne Lenker, of the brilliant band Big Thief, said: "Try to be mindful of what's happening and pay attention and don't talk."

Trying to manage an audience's behaviour is difficult. It exists on a sliding scale: a sign requesting that a crowd does not take photographs is not the same as an artist berating an audience for not clapping loudly enough, which I have seen before. But after a period away, this seems like a period of great readjustment, in which everyone is trying to find their feet. At least, that is one way to see it, if you want to remain hopeful.

## **Monica Galetti: key ingredient to the success of MasterChef**



Monica Galetti: tough, but fair. Photograph: Matt Holyoak/Comic Relief/PA

I have written before about how television became a comfort blanket for many over the course of the pandemic, and those big event series such as *Bake Off* and *Strictly* were particularly soothing.

On a personal level, I'd add *MasterChef* to that, and *MasterChef: The Professionals*, although if the former doesn't implement a ban on fondant potatoes in the early rounds soon, I may switch off in protest (it's the new scallops, black pudding and pea puree).

Monica Galetti, the tough but fair judge on *The Professionals*, whose praise is usually the hardest earned but the most valued, announced last week that she is leaving the show, after 14 years. “It is with a heavy heart that I have made this decision to step back from filming this year’s series of *MasterChef: The Professionals*,” she said, though the “this year’s series” allowed for a little sliver of hope that she might return one day. She explained that she felt unable to balance filming the show with her family life and her London restaurant. “Those in the hospitality industry know just how tough it is at the moment,” she said.

There is something sturdy about *MasterChef* and its offshoots. It is a reliable perennial, despite the odd attempt to tweak the format, and newcomers to

food TV, such as Gordon Ramsay's bizarre *Future Food Stars*, just cannot compete with its familiar elegance. Monica leaving *The Professionals* is like Oti leaving *Strictly* or Mary Berry, Mel and Sue walking away from the *Bake Off*. It feels like more than just a personnel rotation and I hope that she comes back soon.

## Charlotte Brontë: misspelt teenage poetry is book fair headline act



Another Brontë bestseller. Photograph: Timothy A Clary/AFP/Getty Images

I have never been to the New York International Antiquarian Book Fair, taking place this weekend, though I am imagining it as a kind of Glastonbury for bibliophiles, with all the hedonism yet none of the regrets. The star of this year's fair, the Pyramid stage headliner, if you will, is Charlotte Brontë, played in the film *To Walk Invisible* by Finn Atkins, right. In 1829, nearly two decades before she would write *Jane Eyre*, a 13-year-old Brontë compiled *A Book of Rhymes* [sic], a handwritten collection of 10 of her poems, sewn into a miniature book, a little smaller than a deck of cards.

It is reassuring that even one of the most celebrated authors of all time could not spell rhyme correctly and I love the teenage petulance of its title page: “Sold by nobody and printed by herself,” she wrote. The “sold by nobody” is no longer the case. Last Thursday, it reportedly sold for \$1.25m (£973,500) to a private collector. This beats the highest price previously paid for a printed work by a woman of \$1.17m, for a first edition of *Frankenstein* in 2021. Funnily enough, that is about what I would pay someone *not* to read my attempts at writing poetry as a teenager.

# Rebecca Nicholson is an Observer columnist

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## OpinionMigration

# In this new age of empire, the west has no need to conquer. Money and coercion do the job

[Kenan Malik](#)



Britain's refugee deal with Rwanda is just the latest example of how rich nations extend their sovereignty by getting the poor to do their bidding



Illustration: Dominic McKenzie/The Observer

Sun 24 Apr 2022 02.30 EDT

Where is America's southern border? Look on a map and you can see the line where America ends and Mexico begins, a line along part of which Donald Trump tried to build his wall.

Justin Campbell will tell you that the maps are wrong, or at least disclose only half the story. He is a historian and former US soldier who served with Joint Task Force Six (now called Joint Task Force North). It is a military unit initially set up in 1989 to wage the "war on drugs", then, after 9/11, to combat terrorism, too, and now also to stem migration.

America's southern border, Campbell insists, does not simply lie on that line where the US meets Mexico. It lies also 1,500 miles to the south where Mexico meets Guatemala. Here, as at the US-Mexico border, there are American troops and border force police to monitor migrants coming through. Any who are thought to be heading for the US are immediately apprehended. The US border lies a thousand miles farther south, too, where Guatemala meets Honduras. Here, too, the US forces carry out operations to stop possible migrants to the United States.

“The US-Mexico, Mexico-Guatemala and Guatemala-Honduras borders,” Campbell told journalist Todd Miller for his book *Empire of Borders*, are all part of “a border set... where all borders face south... and try to prevent the same things going north”.

One can similarly ask: where is the European Union’s southern border? Just as the US border stretches into Central America and beyond, so the EU border extends further south than the Mediterranean coast of Spain, France, Italy, Malta and Greece, reaching out into Africa. The EU pays millions of euros to dictators and warlords, militias and criminal gangs in north Africa, the Sahel, and the Horn of Africa to act as immigration police, to hunt down and detain potential migrants to Europe. The EU’s former special representative for the Sahel, Ángel Losada, calls it “Europe’s new forward border”.

Why cannot Britain cope with any more asylum seekers – while Rwanda, per capita, already hosts five times as many?

Britain’s recent migration deal with Rwanda has generated much controversy. It is an obnoxious arrangement, not even a policy of offshore processing, but, rather, of mass deportation. The deal, however, did not emerge out of nothing. It is the latest move in what Alan Bersin, former commissioner of US Customs and Border Protection, calls a “massive paradigm change” in western perceptions of borders. For western governments, Bersin argues, borders are no longer lines to “demarcate... one sovereignty from another” but are seen, rather, as “movements – flows of people and goods on a global scale”.

Rich countries seek not to defend sovereignty at a line on the map but to manage those flows by extending sovereignty across the globe. As Miller details in his book, US troops and border police are to be found not just in Central America but in Ecuador and Kenya, Kazakhstan and the Philippines, stemming potential migration to America through a global operation.

There has in recent years been a fierce debate in the west about the “migration crisis” and how best to protect borders, defend sovereignty and insulate itself from that crisis. One of the ironies is that the protection of the

borders of rich countries now requires them to trample all over the borders of poor countries. It is a new form of imperialism, in which immigration controls become the means of defending the sovereignty of rich nations through undermining that of poorer ones.

“Nonsense”, respond the defenders of the globalised immigration controls. “Poor countries may be poor but they are independent, capable of making their own decisions. Mexico is freely accepting US border police on its territory. Niger is voluntarily acting on behalf of the EU. [Rwanda](#) is willingly taking on more refugees.”

The nations of the world do not, though, all make decisions on equal terms. Mexico, Niger and Rwanda are sovereign nations but they don’t have much leeway when negotiating with the US or the EU or the UK, any more than when Amazon warehouse workers or P&O staff sign contracts promising pitiful wages and abysmal conditions, they do so truly out of choice. The market and the global economy can hide myriad forms of coercion behind the rhetoric of “free choice” and “sovereignty”.

The reason that Niger is [“Europe’s migration laboratory”](#) is that it is among the poorest countries in the world. It is also the [largest per capita recipient of EU aid](#). In return for that aid, the Niger authorities have to shape domestic policies to fit the EU’s migration needs. So, [Niger’s economy](#) has become distorted and its citizens are prevented from travelling freely within their own country. The EU makes all aid conditional on support for its [migration prevention policies](#). Niger signed a treaty with the EU, but its sovereignty was barely visible when it did so.

Or take Rwanda. Ever since Britain signed the deportation deal, rightwing commentators, such as the Tory peer Daniel Hannan, have suddenly discovered their love of Rwanda as a “safe and prosperous country” and have condemned critics of the scheme as demonstrating “racist attitudes” and [promoting “stereotypes about Africa”](#).

Rwanda has recovered remarkably well from the genocide of 1994 and has made huge economic strides. It remains, though, [among the 25 poorest countries in the world](#). Britain’s per capita GDP is more than [50 times](#)

greater than Rwanda's. Rwanda had every right to sign the deal. But let us not pretend that when Priti Patel and the Rwandan foreign minister, Vincent Biruta, met across the negotiating table, they did so as representatives of equal powers. Or ignore Rwanda's human rights record or President Paul Kagame's refusal to tolerate opposition. Or wonder why it is assumed that Britain cannot cope with any more asylum seekers but Rwanda, which already hosts five times as many refugees per capita as the UK, and with a population density almost twice as great, can do so.

Britain has the economic clout to transport its "problem" away and Rwanda's government has both the economic need for the cash and the political desire, given its human rights image, to appear humanitarian. And, in the process, migrants are turned into commodities to be traded on the global stage, victims of a new imperialism in which immigration controls have become a means of dividing the world into rich, gated nations and poorer ones that take care of the west's unwanted.

Kenan Malik is an Observer columnist

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## [Opinion](#)[Children](#)

# The Observer view on failures of the child protection system

Observer editorial

Two decades after the Victoria Climbié case led to an inquiry, recent deaths show we have learned little from such tragedies



Victoria Climbié, eight, died in February 2000 after a horrific catalogue of abuse by her guardians. Photograph: PA

Sun 24 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT

Twenty years ago, Britain was confronted with the horror of what can happen when the child protection system fails. Victoria Climbié, a “happy, smiling, enthusiastic little girl”, was tortured to death over a period of months by her relatives, in the [worst-ever case of child abuse](#) the professionals who investigated her death had seen. The government ordered an inquiry into how she was failed so monumentally by the professionals whose job it was to understand the danger she was in. Lord Laming, its

chair, wrote that he hoped that the memory of Victoria would act as “a beacon pointing the way to securing the safety and wellbeing of all children in our society”.

Many changes have been made in the years since that report was published. Yet children still lose their lives in the most horrific of circumstances as a result of abuse and neglect. Last year, convictions were secured for the dreadful murders of six-year-old Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and 16-month-old Star Hobson. Just in the last week, a court found that five-year-old Logan Mwangi had been murdered by his mother and stepfather, and the mother of seven-year-old Hakeem Hussain was convicted of his manslaughter. Logan suffered a “slow and painful death”, after months of abuse and being imprisoned in a dungeon-like bedroom. Hakeem endured abject neglect from a mother with a drug addiction problem and suffocated to death in freezing conditions during an asthma attack while she was high on drugs.

Like Victoria, they all lost their lives as a result of serious failures in child protection. Logan’s teachers noticed worrying changes in his appearance and demeanour in the weeks before his death; social workers and the police knew of his injuries and of death threats against him from the teenager involved in his murder. His stepfather already had convictions for assaulting a child. Hakeem had been subject to a child protection plan before his death and a few days earlier a nurse at his school had predicted he would die if action was not taken to protect him; his three half-siblings had already been removed from his mother’s care.

There were 206 serious safeguarding incidents that involved child deaths in England in 2020. Fifty-six of these deaths occurred as a result of filicide, physical abuse or cruelty or involved maltreatment. Child abuse and neglect are not one-off incidents, but patterns of behaviour that produce tell-tale signs that a child is at serious risk. More of these deaths should be preventable through a well-functioning child protection system.

Resourcing has clearly been an issue in the past decade as a result of government cuts and rising costs, driven in large part by the privatisation of children’s care. It is much harder for a social worker to make accurate risk

assessments when they are responsible for more than 30 children each, as they are in some areas.

But it goes beyond insufficient resourcing. There is no decision more complex or intrusive that the state takes in relation to children than the point at which they should be taken into care. It is unbearably high stakes: leave a child in the care of abusive or neglectful parents and they may suffer terrible harm. It is made harder by social workers' dual role. Their job is to support vulnerable families to provide the best environment possible for their children. But they are first and foremost an advocate for children, which can require them to investigate families and take tough decisions in the interests of children but not the parents they also care about.

As the Laming inquiry highlighted, abusive parents can be highly deceptive when it comes to covering up the harm they cause their children and children have died in cases where social workers have been too ready to believe parents and focused on the parent's need at the expense of the child's. This makes children's social work one of the most highly skilled and demanding of public service professions. We should be investing far more in training and developing the people whose responsibility it is to keep vulnerable children safe.

Of course, it would be better if there were fewer children in care because more parents can care for their children safely. The experience of a local authority such as Leeds, which has reduced the number of children in care over a decade through providing support for at-risk families, show that this is possible, though it requires significant investment and outstanding leadership, scarce resources in a system where there are too many failing social services departments. But the cart cannot come before the horse. The evidence suggests that a timely move into care is associated with better outcomes for children at risk of neglect and abuse. Yet there is a dangerous narrative in some parts of children's social care that the system is too quick to take children into care where there is no serious risk of harm.

There is little evidence to suggest that this is the case, but one reason this sticks is because parents who feel they have been wrongly investigated by social services form a more powerful constituency with a louder voice than the children whose abuse and neglect is allowed to persist. The deaths of

Hakeem Hussein and Logan Mwangi are the latest alarms that there is something seriously amiss with the child protection system in this country. Two decades after Victoria Climbié was murdered, we remain a long way from securing the safety and wellbeing of every child growing up in Britain.

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## OpinionGermany

# The Observer view on Germany's response to the war in Ukraine

Observer editorial

German timidity is driven by self-interest as much as caution



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz addresses a press conference following a meeting with the state leaders on Ukraine in Berlin. Photograph: John MacDougall/AFP/Getty Images

Sun 24 Apr 2022 01.30 EDT

Days after Russia's invasion of Ukraine began, Olaf Scholz delivered a bombshell of his own. Addressing an extraordinary session of the Bundestag, Germany's chancellor [declared his government](#) would boost defence spending by €100bn (£84bn), suspend the prized Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline from Russia and reverse a long-standing ban on transferring arms to conflict zones in order to help Ukraine.

The shock announcements, termed a “revolution”, were seen as evidence that [Germany](#), and especially Scholz’s centre-left Social Democratic party (SPD), was definitively turning away from its postwar pacifist tradition. The fact Scholz also pledged to meet Nato’s 2% of GDP defence spending obligation was cited as further proof of a historic shift in Berlin’s thinking about its role in the world.

The resulting satisfaction, bordering on smug self-congratulation, evident in Washington, London and Warsaw, was compounded by the ensuing German debate about how to deal with Russia. Leading figures on the left and right conceded the post-Soviet policy of [conciliating Moscow](#), rooted in the SPD’s famed cold war era *Ostpolitik*, had been fundamentally misconceived.

As millions in Ukraine flee merciless bombardment, and incontrovertible evidence emerges of war crimes by Vladimir Putin’s troops, this changed belief that Russia cannot be treated as a normal country with which it is possible to do business as usual is now widely accepted. Yet at the same time, Scholz’s revolutionary fervour [seems to be waning](#).

Germany’s refusal to quickly sanction Russian oil and gas exports, on which its industries and households remain heavily dependent, has provoked fierce criticism from western partners, not least Ukraine’s president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy. The influential American commentator Paul Krugman [harshly accused](#) Germany of acting as “Putin’s enabler” and being “complicit in mass murder”.

Claims by Scholz and industry chiefs that an energy embargo would hurt Europe more than Russia and [push Germany](#) into recession are hotly disputed. Critics cite studies that suggest the negative impact would be manageable and short-lived. Yet in a report last week, the Bundesbank warned an embargo could [shrink Germany’s economy](#) by 2% and cause a 5% fall in output.

Scholz is also under fire abroad, and within his own coalition, for allegedly backsliding on heavy weapons supplies to Ukraine. *Bild* newspaper [reported last week](#) that a list of 15 types of German-made armaments to be offered to Kyiv, including Leopard battle tanks, was reduced to three by the

chancellery before being submitted to Ukraine. Zelenskiy's subsequent pleas were ignored, *Bild* said.

Egged on by [some UK media](#), Boris Johnson is among those pressing Germany to do more. Ugly forces are at work, too. Recent attacks also partly reflect visceral anti-German, anti-EU sentiment on the right, borne of old resentments and rivalry. Donald Trump, notoriously hostile to Scholz's predecessor, Angela Merkel, often indulged in such Berlin-bashing.

Yet it's fair to say Germany's policy of *Wandel durch Handel* (change through trade) lies in tatters in the wake of the invasion. There's no doubt the 30-year, post-1991 period, when Germany thrived on cheap energy while its diplomats made nice with Putin, is over. It's certain, too, that Germany has suffered a rude [geopolitical awakening](#). Berlin can no longer duck its wider leadership responsibilities, especially for European security.

Pressed on these issues last week, Scholz said [his biggest worry](#) was nuclear war with Russia. "I am doing everything I can to prevent an escalation that would lead to a third world war," he said. This is eminently sensible. But it's possible to be too cautious and self-interested – and Scholz is far from getting the balance right.

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**Observer comment cartoon**

**Boris Johnson**

## **Partygate is ready to bring down Boris Johnson – cartoon**

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Notebook[Katharine Whitehorn](#)

## Katharine Whitehorn had the church in stitches

[Rachel Cooke](#)



The late Observer fashion editor and writer was guaranteed to be a hoot, even at her own memorial service



Katharine Whitehorn in a London restaurant. Photograph: Bert Hardy/Getty Images

Sat 23 Apr 2022 10.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 23 Apr 2022 17.02 EDT

The memorial service for the *Observer*'s beloved columnist [Katharine Whitehorn](#), organised by her sons Bernard and Jake, and held at St James's church, Piccadilly in London last Monday, was completely marvellous and I feel certain that she would have loved every moment of it (Katharine died in January 2021, at the age of 92). Not only was the Revd Dr Mariam Ifode-Blease's sermon reflexively feminist; her leopard-print spectacles spoke joyfully to Katharine's first job at the paper (she joined the *Observer* in 1960) when, as its new fashion editor, she decided that it was her solemn duty to get the British woman out of her "limp cardigans" once and for all.

When Bernard asked me to speak at the service, I responded by bursting into tears – I owe her such a lot, not least because from the moment I first read her as a little girl, I never wanted to be anything other than a journalist – and on the day, I was as nervous as hell. But in the end, of course, she did all the work for me. Quote Katharine once and everyone will laugh; quote her half-a-dozen times and you can spend the rest of the afternoon basking in her reflected glory.

The biggest hoots came when I recalled how she put hats into three categories: offensive, defensive and shrapnel. The latter, in case you're wondering, are the kind of "frilly bits" that might have landed almost by accident on the heads of random wedding guests.

## A fishy story indeed



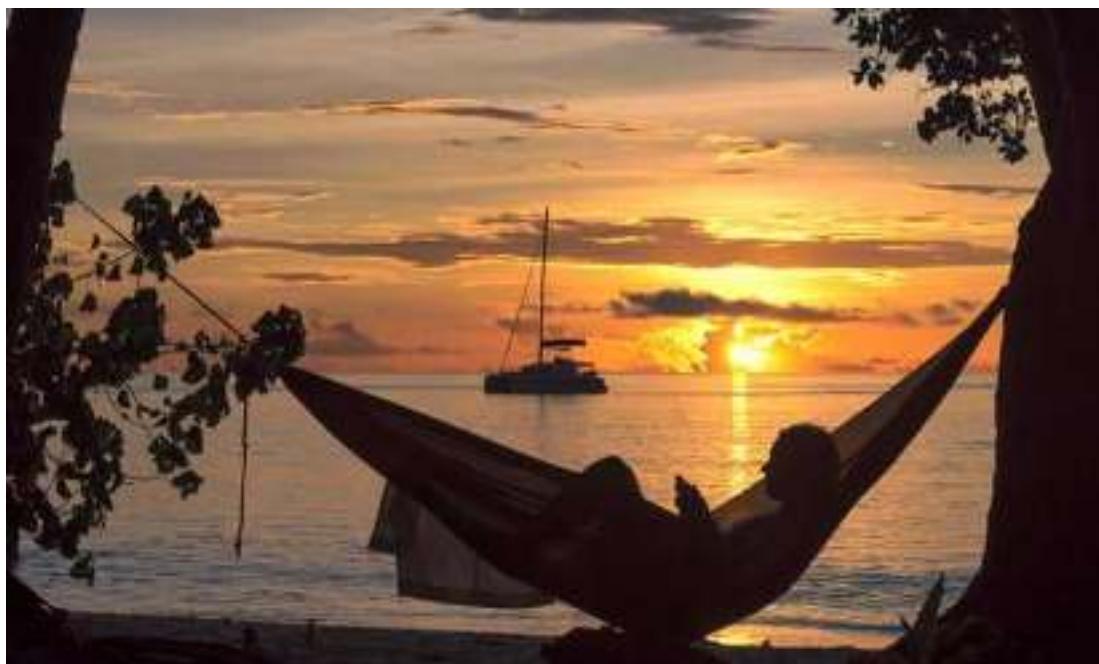
'Was it really the case that even the islanders' breakfast porridge was taken with the fishy-tasting flesh of seabirds?' Photograph: fotoVoyager/Getty Images

Last Thursday, my long-standing fascination with far-off St Kilda took me to a London theatre I've never visited before – the tiny [Finborough](#), in Earl's Court – to see a revival of Sue Glover's 1988 play, *The Straw Chair*. It was a good production: Rori Hawthorn, who plays Isabel, a naive young woman newly married to an Edinburgh missionary, is destined to be a star.

But I'm afraid that my deepest interest lay throughout in what this piece, based on the true story of Lady Grange, exiled to the islands by a cruel husband, inadvertently reveals about life there in the middle of the 18th century.

Can it be true that, just as there are no trees on St Kilda, there were then also no chairs? Was it really the case that even the islanders' breakfast porridge was taken with the fishy-tasting flesh of the seabirds (gannets, fulmars, puffins) on which they largely subsisted? A discussion of rotten eggs – early on, an islander insists that the more addled an egg, the better it tastes – distracted me so much that for a time I lost track of the plot entirely.

## Seething in the sun



'The hotter and happier it is wherever I am, the more damp and miserable it must be in the novel I'm reading.' Photograph: lucky-photographer/Alamy

At Easter, a miracle. Thanks to the kindest friends a person could ever have, I spent the weekend on a Caribbean beach, where I indulged once again a now well-established holiday tradition. It goes like this: the hotter and happier it is wherever I am, the more damp and miserable it must be in the novel I'm reading.

On this score, Elizabeth Taylor's *The Sleeping Beauty* exceeded all expectations by being set almost entirely in a postwar boarding house in an out-of-season south coast resort called – wait for it – Seething.

Everyone in it is sad and thwarted, sleeps alone in their chilly bedroom and considers an hour in a milk bar whose windows are weeping condensation as no more than they are due by way of enjoyment – and yes, each page increased exponentially my own pleasure every time I lifted my eyes to the wide, turquoise sea.

Rachel Cooke is an Observer columnist

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[Opinion](#)[Older people](#)

## Beware! Having an opinion about sex while growing old has now become a crime

[Catherine Bennett](#)



Those concerned by The Family Sex Show are apparently ‘older’ or, in modern parlance, ‘irrelevant’



Josie Dale-Jones, producer of ThisEgg's *The Family Sex Show*, said the production 'challenged older people's preconceptions'. Photograph: Lidia Crisfulli

Sun 24 Apr 2022 03.00 EDT

Will five-year-olds and their parents ever get the chance to see the clitoris song performed at *The Family Sex Show*? All together: "Oh, go on then and touch it."

How long will they be denied the guidance, formerly on the *TFSS*'s website, on searching the internet for pictures of masturbating animals? "Sexual development and behaviour in children starts from birth", as the company points out. Now the tots must make do with Squirrel Nutkin.

But all may not be lost. Though the show has just been cancelled, following critical articles and online protests, its creators have responded with a commitment to future performances and a statement that instantly locates their struggle in the UK's long tradition of artistic martyrdom at the hands of philistines.

“We believe”, [says ThisEgg](#) company, “that what has happened is reflective of structural and societal attitudes towards relationships and sex education as well as art, culture and who is allowed to create and what we are allowed to engage with in the UK.” It might not have much artistic merit, the clitoris song, at least not written out, but isn’t that the kind of thing the Lord Chamberlain used to say about Joe Orton?

This emphasis on artistic expression (albeit in a primarily educational enterprise) was respectfully received: you gathered that the rehabilitation of Mary Whitehouse has yet, in liberal circles, to extend to reviving her habit of condemning theatre unseen. And it can only have helped ThisEgg, given the current vogue for guilt by association, that her [role in the dispute is played by Laurence Fox](#).

It was the extreme behaviour of their would-be censors – “unprecedented threats and abuse directed at our building and team” – that had forced, the company said, the show’s cancellation. Nothing in its statement indicated that the project’s content, with its sexual songs, masturbation hints and adult nudity, had perhaps called for something more than the justifications on the show’s website, nor that, alongside online aggression, serious doubts about safeguarding had been carefully expressed.

How, people asked, did the company’s line, “pleasure as a vehicle for consent”, make sense to 16-year-olds, let alone to children in reception year? Had it really been okayed (no, someone on [Mumsnet](#) checked) by the NSPCC?

[Writing in UnHerd](#), Mary Harrington did not doubt that *The Family Sex Show* was “well-intentioned”. But “by normalising the idea that pre-pubescent children should engage with sexual material, *The Family Sex Show* in practice carries water for genuine paedophiles”.

Such responses could not have come as a surprise. Interviewed by Kate Wyver for the *Guardian* about her “show about sex and relationships for ages five and above”, [Josie Dale-Jones anticipated](#) resistance – and simultaneously dismissed it. “Children aren’t anxious about the idea of the show,” she said. “It’s the older people who feel discomfort in something that’s challenging their preconceptions.”

And maybe – retirement homes would know – Captain Tom’s generation would indeed be disappointed to find *The Family Sex Show*’s “I have a penis in my pants” substituting for We’ll Meet Again. Younger older people may, however, have registered *Oh! Calcutta!* running for ever, while their formal sex education was confined, where it existed, to diagrams of rabbits. In many ways, there could hardly be a more promising audience.

No matter: “older people”, particularly older women, are accustomed to seeing this descriptor used as a shorthand for pitiful irrelevance.

Dale-Jones reminds the merely middle aged, the proudly not-boomers, that the wrong or unfashionable opinions can still be dreadfully ageing. An excessive concern for boundaries can, this suggests, put a good 10 years on you; doubts about online masturbation searches betray, at any age, an inner pearl-clutching (a popular code for annoying, older and female) hysterical.

Originally a substitute for pensioner, the “older people” category is regularly expanded to include most people over 50, as experienced by the stars of the *Sex and the City* sequel, and even, if they are careless enough to cause trouble, by women still strangers to the perimenopause. Laurence Fox is, for what it’s worth, 43. There are, as Dale-Jones’s comment confirms, no strict rules.

The selective attribution of oldness to uncooperative adults only underlines its continuing value as an insult

If relatively young people can recoil, as they have, from a performance introducing five-year-olds to masturbation, it just goes to prove the old adage that you’re only as old as your opinion on *The Family Sex Show*.

It is naturally the fate of Mumsnet’s members, so many of them being female, intelligent, sexually unavailable and indifferent to male abuse, that their age should be considered ideologically telling in a way that, if it caught on generally, would mean reading repeatedly about “the mainly middle-aged shadow cabinet”, “the mainly middle-aged guests on *The News Quiz*”, “the mainly middle aged or older court of appeal”.

Opening a discussion on *The Family Sex Show* one contributor began: “Just for clarity & in case anyone jumps at the chance to call me a rightwinger bent on denying women reproductive rights: I’m a socialist agnostic who has protested anti-abortionists.”

The selective attribution of oldness and its variants to uncooperative adults of all ages only underlines, of course, its continuing value as an insult, one with the bonus of being, still, semi-respectable. We recently heard “dinosaur” deployed by the otherwise peerlessly inclusive David Lammy.

Unlike David Cameron, who was accused by Labour of ageism after he aimed it at Dennis Skinner, Lammy, no gerontophobe, used it impartially it to insult all women who insist, on one subject, on disagreeing with him. “Auntie” worked well recently, for one of the *Harry Potter* stars wanting to condescend to JK Rowling without being as rude as Emma Watson. With or without the added “crone” or “witch”, old, as more and more people are discovering, is the perfect insult for our times: for caring individuals who know name calling is bad.

Catherine Bennett is an Observer columnist

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[Opinion](#)[Record Store Day](#)

## I love an LP, but spare me the Vinyl Snob going on like a broken record

[Barbara Ellen](#)



Just what is it about a day celebrating music stores that sets off those who fetishise format over pleasure?



John Cusack (left) and Jack Black in the 2000 film *High Fidelity* - 'fetishising vinyl is something mainly blokes do'. Photograph: Photo 12/Alamy

Sun 24 Apr 2022 02.00 EDT

My name is Barbara and I've been a vinyl-abuser. In youth, I did unspeakable, shameful things to records. I'd leave them out of their covers. I'd abandon them on the floor and walk on them; sometimes dance on them. I'd balance wine glasses, ashtrays and nail varnish pots on them. If a track started jumping, I'd stick a penny (or three) on the stylus. When records were trashed, I'd buy them again.

Which is how I emerged from years of music journalism with several wrecked copies of the Jesus and Mary Chain's *Darklands* and a scratched, filthy record collection worth about 20 pence. While fellow music hacks sit pretty on vinyl goldmines, what remains of my collection will one day have to be disposed of by toxic waste experts wearing biohazard suits. What an idiot. Then again, as the lady sang, *je ne regrette rien*. My vinyl may be worthless, but the feelings and memories are priceless.

I was reminded of my vinyl-atrocities by the run-up to yesterday's 15th annual [Record Store Day](#), a global event to support and celebrate independent record stores, where artists release special editions you can only buy from record shops. This year, Taylor Swift is the special ambassador and there are hundreds of special releases featuring artists from U2 to Cypress Hill, Blur to Stevie Nicks.

While some [have issues with Record Store Day](#), such as major labels hijacking it, it's generally perceived as a great thing: keeping a crucial branch of the music ecosystem alive. Amen to that. However, there's an elitist side to vinyl culture, a nerd shadow-world encapsulated in various online tips for Record Store Day: Be prepared... Arrive early... Meet other vinyl enthusiasts... Plan ahead for weather. Oh Christ, you think, Record Store Day may be many wonderful things, but it's also a mass global gathering of Vinyl Bores.

It's a recurring issue: should a musical format matter *that* much – more than the actual music? How do Vinyl Heads become Vinyl Bores? First things first: you've got to applaud the tenacity: the hand-wringing down the years about every format change, from CDs to streaming, including some you'll have forgotten. Mini-discs, anyone? Please note that Vinyl Bores are a species distinct from Vinyl Heads, most of whom are just as likely to fashion a [Spotify](#) list as they are to rhapsodise about rare albums. There are even people able to talk about historical studio techniques/listening modes and the myriad sounds/atmospheres/nuances they produce, without making you want to claw your own ears off and feed them to a dog.

Vinyl Bores/Snobs are a self-regarding breed apart: they tolerate no other formats and regard other listening modes as cultural philistinism. You may have met one or two of them. They treat their records like priceless exhibits at Sotheby's. They store them in plastic sleeves and clean them with little dusters. They balance them between their palms. They lower them on to turntables as if performing a sacred ritual. There may be an anxious inspection of the stylus – has a minuscule speck of dust managed to attach itself?

When I was a music journalist, I had about as much interest in the mechanics of formats as I did in how a kettle worked

When music is (finally) permitted, it's hard to hear it over the inevitable highly technical tutorial about superior sound quality that feels as long as Bob Dylan's career.

What life-sapping madness is this? When I was a music journalist, I had about as much interest in the mechanics of formats as I did in how a kettle worked. It was the music that mattered and it could have arrived in a cereal packet for all I cared. Fetishising vinyl struck me as fuddy-duddy and weirdly sex-specific: something mainly blokes did. I thought music should be visceral, not collectible, hence the vinyl-abuse (my excuse anyway). Still today, I wonder: why is it that some people allow a format – how music is conveyed – to overwhelm the love of music itself?

Since music was rendered anti-physical, I understand the vinyl argument more. Not only does Spotify have ignoble form for treating artists shabbily, it [sometimes feels like a huge, soulless, aural discount supermarket](#). I mourn the loss of cover art and the dying concept of “the album” in an era where tracks are scattered to the winds.

And sometimes it's good to be reminded that listening to music can be an activity, not just “background noise”. I can see how vinyl could feel like a grassroots rebellion against commercialism: socking it to The Man, creating a cottage industry of sound Spotify can't get its mitts on.

That said, isn't vinyl itself an established, highly lucrative wing of the industry? [A couple of years ago, it outsold CDs](#). Negatively speaking, the heightened emphasis on heritage acts can represent cultural stagnation. Then there's consumer expense: decent kit alone – turntables and speakers – is far from cheap. Nor is vinyl portable or always accessible; storing records must be difficult for skint renters.

Worse, there's the abiding sense of snobbery, elitism, a posture of authenticity that too often feels like crowing. Do Vinyl Snobs think they're superior to other music fans? I think a fair few of them do. There's that sense of: “We might both enjoy music, we may even like the same artists, but do you listen to them ‘correctly’?.” What emerges is a fetish for format that drags everything back to the dreary, dated concept of “good” and “bad”

taste, when one of the most powerful aspects of music is that it's democratic: everyone's vote is equal.

In a way, where's the fire? For some people, on Record Store Day – and every other day – the human soul is round, made of black plastic and has a little hole in the middle. Which is great. It just doesn't make you better than me.

Barbara Ellen is an Observer columnist

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## Observer letters

# Letters: more Tory MPs must stand up to Boris Johnson

Caroline Nokes called for the prime minister's resignation, but surely she isn't the only one who is listening to constituents



Caroline Nokes: 'I have not withdrawn the letter of no confidence in Boris Johnson.' Photograph: Leon Neal/Getty Images

Sun 24 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT

I hope and pray that there are many other Conservative MPs with the humanity and intelligence that Caroline Nokes demonstrates in her article (["Johnson broke the rules that hurt so many. I still think he should resign"](#), News).

In the elective dictatorship to which this country's strange version of democracy has doomed us, backbench Conservative MPs have become our only hope. Surely Nokes is not alone in what her constituents are telling her? Or is she just exceptional in actually listening?

**Anthony Nixon**  
Horndean, Hampshire

You ask if Conservative MPs are prepared to be complicit in the damage Johnson is wreaking to their party (“[Tory MPs should use their power to get rid of PM](#)”, Editorial).

But it is no longer truly theirs, nor is it the party of Churchill, Macmillan, Heath or even of Margaret Thatcher. It is the Johnson party, which in less than three years under his leadership has moved from the centre right to the extreme right with its policies on immigration, policing and rights to free expression, its cruelty to the poor and its disdain for the law and parliament. Every Tory MP is already complicit in this transformation and no voter should mistake it for the Conservative party of the past.

**John Hambley**  
Snape, Suffolk

## Nato is failing Ukraine

I agree entirely with Simon Tisdall’s article “[Nato should talk less and do more, or Ukraine will be torn apart, bit by bit](#)” (World).

Does anyone think Nato would not intervene if Russia invaded Sweden or Finland? Of course they would; those countries would not be left to fight on their own, it’s just inconceivable. Yet Ukraine, it seems, must just get on with it. Is Ukraine not European enough, is it too far east? Is it still seen as part of the Soviet Union instead of Europe “proper”? As pointed out in your article, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Slovakia, Czechia and Poland have shown more support, yet it seems their views aren’t considered important enough. Perhaps they also are thought of as ex-Soviet and not yet western enough to be truly influential.

Nato is like an exclusive gentleman’s club. Let’s hope it has a change of heart before it’s too late to provide decisive help. My father was Ukrainian, and who wants to watch a nation being destroyed before our eyes day by day? The reporting of war has changed but the attitude of Nato is still stuck in the past.

**Christine Romaniw**  
Swansea

## Making all births safer

As a midwife, the recent Ockenden report is a heartbreakingly clear read – each and every loss is a tragedy and every experience of poor care represents an injustice (“[Relentlessly pushing the idea of ‘natural’ childbirth is an affront to pregnant women](#)”, Comment).

The report makes clear that seeking a reduction in the caesarean rate at all costs is misguided and dangerous. The reason midwives seek to promote physiological birth is because we are trained professionals who understand the evidence base to support better outcomes and witness the results of over-intervention – increased morbidity, increased mortality and traumatised parents. The report shows where this intention has gone tragically astray and we must learn lessons. Please can we make better attempts to understand the complexity of the terrain instead of turning it into another culture war issue?

**Rachael Ferguson**  
Glasgow

## Solving the Shroud of Turin

Film-maker David Rolfe said he'll donate \$1m to the British Museum if it can create something similar to the Shroud of Turin (“[The \\$1m challenge: ‘If the Shroud is a forgery, show how it was done’](#)”, News).

Better pay up, David, because my collaborators, the father-daughter scientist team of Robert and Rebecca Morton, have already figured it out. As I chronicle in my 2020 book, *The Holy Shroud: A Brilliant Hoax in the Time of the Black Death*, the two hypothesised – and demonstrated – that the image on the shroud is a human body printed in the medium used in all medieval writing: iron gall ink.

It was not a direct print, rather, the two ingredients of iron gall ink, tannic acid and iron sulfate, were separately applied to the cloth and to the body and pressed together. The resulting print matches the Shroud of Turin in that

it appears, after exposure to air and humidity, in shades of sepia. Like the shroud, it is a negative, with the protruding parts of the subject's body revealed as dark against light.

**Gary Vikan**

Baltimore, Maryland

## Bacon's bequest

Your article mischaracterises the material donated to the Tate by Barry Joule and the events that have taken place since ("[Francis Bacon bequest will be sent to France in snub to Tate gallery](#)", News).

This is a collection of archival material from Bacon's studio address, including documents and photographs, not finished works of art. It was accepted into the Tate's archive as such, where it has been catalogued and made available for research at Tate Britain, and where some of the items have since been publicly shown in archival displays. We have acknowledged and thanked Mr Joule, keeping an open dialogue with him throughout this period and our conversations with him about the material are ongoing.

**Maria Balshaw**, director, and **Roland Rudd**, chair of Trustees, Tate

London

## The price of animal welfare

The intensification of animal farming at the expense of the welfare of the animals themselves is perhaps at its most extreme in the chicken meat industry ("[Cheaper than chips... 'Frankenchicken' at the heart of the animal welfare fight](#)", News). Birds have been selectively bred to grow so fast that many are lame, suffer from chronic pain and cannot support their own weight. However, the same process of intensification has taken place – and continues to do so – throughout the animal farming industry.

**Iain Green**, director, Animal Aid

Tonbridge, Kent

## The greenest of mowers

Shane Hickey asks: “[Is it time for cutting-edge tech to make your lawnmower greener?](#)” (Business and Cash). The answer is no. A push mower, not mentioned in the article, is both better for the environment and for one’s health.

**Brenda Rush**

Lincoln

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## [For the record](#)UK news

# For the record

This week's corrections

Sun 24 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT

An article (“[First public exams for three years ... and Covid is still playing havoc](#)”, 17 April, p19) said exams would return to schools from 16 May. To clarify: this date applies to GCSE and A-levels in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. In Scotland, some pupils begin their Nationals and Highers this week.

In a list of prime ministerial resignations in Britain since 1937, Neville Chamberlain should have appeared among those who departed after losing the support of parliamentary colleagues; and we should have said that Harold Macmillan left on health grounds (“[Just what exactly is keeping Boris Johnson in power?](#)” 17 April, p43).

An article (“[Francis Bacon bequest will be sent to France in snub to Tate gallery](#)”, 17 April, p22) referred to Bacon’s work going to “the French National Archives in the Centre Pompidou Paris”. The French National Archives and the Centre Pompidou Paris are two separate organisations; we meant the archives of the latter.

We described the actor Olivia Colman as a Cambridge graduate. She began studies for a teaching degree at the university’s Homerton College but left the course and later graduated from Bristol Old Vic Theatre School (“[Nicola Walker: at the very top of her game, with her feet firmly on the ground](#)”, 17 April, p36).

An interview with the film director Robert Eggers said that he and his wife, Alexandra Shaker, moved to Dublin for the production of The Northman. In fact they moved to Belfast (“[‘I’m shocked I made such a macho movie’](#)”, 10 April, New Review, p18).

[Shein: the unacceptable face of throwaway fast fashion](#)

[Calls to end needless bureaucracy adding to agony for bereaved families](#)

[Can we take the hatred out of social media?](#)

[When the gig's up, should we mourn our lost music venues?](#)

[Plants hold key to developing future cancer treatments](#)

*Write to the Readers' Editor, the Observer, York Way, London N1 9GU,  
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**OpinionRussia**

## **Putin has ignited a new anti-colonial struggle. This time, Moscow is the target**

[Nick Cohen](#)



Belarusian exiles watch events in Ukraine with fear but also hope. Could they too fight back?



Belarus's President Alexander Lukashenko, left, with Vladimir Putin on 12 April 2022. Photograph: Mikhail Klimentyev/Sputnik/AFP/Getty Images

Sat 23 Apr 2022 14.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 23 Apr 2022 17.01 EDT

History is teetering on an edge. No one knows which way it will go. Maybe the Russian empire, the last and most terrible of the European empires, will fall. Or maybe it will absorb the hit and survive as it has survived and expanded since the 17th century. You'd be a fool to bet against it. The graveyards of Eurasia are full of those who did.

And yet the breathtaking heroism of the Ukrainian resistance and the insane self-delusion of the Putinist regime are allowing Russia's opponents from Syria to Central Asia, and from Georgia to Moldova, to ask that most revolutionary of questions: "What if?"

What if the empire falls? What if structures that have endured and enslaved for centuries can be blown apart like the creaking trucks in a Russian munitions convoy?

Talking to the men and women engaged in what is – if only the global left could see it – the great anticolonial struggle of our times, you hear them moving through the stages of revolutionary commitment. From peaceful

protest to jail sentences to the realisation that civil disobedience will never be enough.

Non-violent tactics work only against regimes that are not so oppressive that they cannot be persuaded to change

Lives are transformed as the stakes are raised. The story of Timur Mitskievich echoes the anticolonial protests of the 20th century. In 2020, he was a teenager in Minsk when the Belarusian dictator, [Alexander Lukashenko](#), rigged the presidential election as he had crushed every challenge to his rule since he came to power in 1994. Supporters of the opposition candidate [Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya](#) took to the streets in the largest popular demonstrations in Belarus's history.

The paradox of civil disobedience is that non-violent tactics work only against regimes that, however oppressive the protesters think them, are not so oppressive they cannot be persuaded to change. For all their crimes and prejudices, the British imperial authorities in India in the 1940s and the US government of the 1960s had to listen to Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King. Lukashenko did not listen to his opponents. He terrorised them. He didn't have to worry about bad publicity when he controlled the media. Nor need he concern himself with the reaction of the "international community" after Vladimir Putin said he would [maintain the dictator](#) in power if he gave up what little remained of Belarusian independence. His country became a Russian colony again, which it had been almost continuously since the Russian empire seized control in 1795.

The 17-year old Mitskievich [joined the protests](#). The police beat him so badly doctors put him into a medically induced coma. While he was out, his mother died, leaving nine orphaned children.

Peaceful disobedience works only against regimes with a capacity for feeling shame and the Belarusian and Russian regimes have no shame.

Belarus, like [Ukraine](#) before 2014, is a country parochial westerners barely thought about. If its name registers today, it is as Russia's base for its failed assault on Kyiv. In the glib 1990s, liberal democracy's triumph was assumed

to be so inevitable we called Belarus “Europe’s last dictatorship”. Look at its weirdness, we said. It still clung on to Soviet-style rule, an error that history would surely correct as the ideals of free markets and free societies marched on.

The Ukrainian war has made clear how Russian nationalists view Slavs with the impertinence to reject them

Instead of being an anachronism, Belarus was a model for the future. While it became a Russian client state, Russia became a supersize Belarus, as Putin removed the limited freedoms he had allowed Russian citizens in the 2000s and aped Lukashenko’s dictatorship.

To Belarus’s exiled opposition, Ukraine’s war is their war and a Ukrainian victory would open up the prospect of radical change across territories Russia intimidates and controls. The Ukrainian war has made clear, if clarity were needed, how Russian nationalists view eastern Slavs with the impertinence to reject them. Russian official media [explained](#) that Ukrainians (and by extension) Belarusians were really Russians. If they rejected Russian identity and said they had their own cultures and histories that existed before the Russian empire, they proved only that they were “Nazis”. No form of human life could be lower. The Russian state had a duty to kill them or send them to labour camps; to take their children from them and crush their country and their culture.

When I spoke last week to Tsikhanouskaya’s senior adviser Franak Viačorka, in exile in Poland, he said revolution was the only viable option now. He spoke the language of an officer in an underground war rather than a politician trying to negotiate a settlement. The Lukashenko regime was the “collaborationist state”. The activists who sabotaged Belarusian railway lines, to stop Russian troops and armour reaching Ukraine, were “resistance cells”.

Even in Soviet times Moscow “recognised the existence of Belarus and Ukrainian nations”, Viačorka said. Putin was bringing a “new form of fascism” that denied their very being. The Belarusian opposition was fighting it with covert action. It was attempting to drive the army away from

its subservience to Lukashenko and Putin. In Belarus, as in so many other countries, hope depended on a Ukrainian victory offering the “chance to get out of Russian sphere of influence”.

Well, we’ve learned better than to be optimists in the years since the fin de siècle’s silly season. We expect brute power to prevail now. The Russian armed forces are undoubtedly corrupt and inept. But you can see the empire winning, as it has always won, by throwing recruits into battle without a thought for their lives and terrorising civilians. For its part, western intelligence is not predicting a swift Ukrainian victory but a hard, grinding war whose outcome is uncertain.

For all that, there is in the air, if not optimism, then a plausible question. What if the partial collapse of the Russian empire in the 1990s is followed by decisive defeat in the 2020s? What if the whole rotten structure falls?

The doctors released Mitskievich from hospital. He is now fighting in Ukraine in the Belarusian version of the International Brigades of the Spanish civil war. He is one of thousands of Belarusians who volunteered to join the Kastuś Kalinoŭski Battalion, named after the leader of an uprising against the Russian empire in 1863. The battalion has seen action in the battles around Irpin. One day, its members will return to Belarus with highly portable military skills. They will have questions of their own.

Nick Cohen is an Observer columnist

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# Headlines

- [Live Boris Johnson faces more questions over lockdown parties as India trip continues](#)
- [Conservatives Johnson loyalists turn on Tory MPs who called for PM to step down](#)
- [Partygate Authority of Boris Johnson damaged as own MPs say ‘gig’s up’](#)
- [Explained What is the Commons privileges committee and how powerful is it?](#)

[Skip to key events](#)

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

## Boris Johnson says he will still be prime minister in October as Partygate overshadows India trip – as it happened

PM says he will [still be leading the country by Diwali](#) after being asked questions over Partygate scandal while on India trip

- [Johnson vows to stop UK exports to India ending up in Russia](#)
- [Britain to reopen embassy in Kyiv, Boris Johnson announces](#)
- [Labour toasts its success in Johnson's Partygate humiliation](#)
- [Analysis: PM feels Westminster heat under the Indian sun](#)
- [Russia-Ukraine war: latest updates](#)

Updated 2d ago

[Kevin Rawlinson](#) (now) and [Tobi Thomas](#) (earlier)

Fri 22 Apr 2022 13.06 EDTFirst published on Fri 22 Apr 2022 05.28 EDT

Boris Johnson says he will still be PM in October and announces reopening of Kyiv embassy – video

[Kevin Rawlinson](#) (now) and [Tobi Thomas](#) (earlier)

Fri 22 Apr 2022 13.06 EDTFirst published on Fri 22 Apr 2022 05.28 EDT

## Key events

- [2d agoEvening summary](#)
- [2d agoRussian victory in Ukraine a real possibility, acknowledges Boris Johnson](#)
- [2d agoBoris Johnson says he will still be prime minister in October](#)

- [2d ago UK to reopen embassy in Ukrainian capital, Johnson says](#)
- [2d ago Crisis deepens for Boris Johnson after parliament votes for inquiry into allegations he lied](#)

Show key events only

## Live feed

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From 2d ago

[06.41](#)

## Boris Johnson says he will still be prime minister in October

Johnson is taking questions now. He's asked if he will even still be prime minister by Diwali. "Yes," he replies. The question, in its substance is repeated, And Johnson tells reporters he believes he has covered the questions on his moral probity already.

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Updated at 07.49 EDT

[2d ago 13.01](#)

## Evening summary

Kevin Rawlinson

Here's a summary of the day's major events:

- [Boris Johnson insisted he would still be prime minister when the time arrives to make good on his promise to deliver a trade](#)

**agreement with India.** Johnson is facing a deepening crisis as MPs vote for a parliamentary investigation into his conduct and some of his own party colleagues have joined opponents in calling for him to resign. But he claimed to be confident of still being in office by Diwali; when he has said he expects a deal to have been struck.

- **The UK will reopen its embassy in Kyiv, the prime minister said.** Johnson denounced the “barbarism” being perpetrated by Putin’s forces and said the UK will be “sending more artillery” – as well as reopening the embassy.
- **A Russian military victory in Ukraine is a real possibility, Johnson said, but added Putin would never conquer the spirit of the Ukrainian people.** During his visit to India, the PM said:

Putin has a huge army. [But] he has a very difficult political position because he’s made a catastrophic blunder ... No matter what military superiority Vladimir Putin may be able to bring to bear in the next few months – and I agree it could be a long period – he will not be able to conquer the spirit of the Ukrainian people.

That’s all from me for now. You can follow our live coverage of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine here:

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Updated at 13.06 EDT

[2d ago](#)[11.03](#)

Docherty also discussed Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Asked if there is effectively a proxy war between Nato allies and Moscow, now Ukrainian troops are in the UK being trained on how to use new equipment, he said:

Not at all. I think what it shows is that we are standing by our brothers and sisters in Ukraine. We’ve done that all along. We’ve been very much on the front foot. We were the first European nation to give lethal aid and we’re very proud of that.

We're proud of the fact that we've been able to help Ukraine defend their homeland. And I think what's been amazing is the incredible bravery and commitment of all of the Ukraine armed forces.

That same spirit I think is shown in the team that they are fielding here at the Invictus Games.

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Updated at 11.15 EDT

2d ago11.01

When it was put to Docherty that Partygate was overshadowing Johnson's trip to India, he told the PA news agency:

I wouldn't say so. I would say actually the outcome will be improved trade relations with India. Outside the Westminster bubble, I think people realise that the Partygate story is just sort of fizzling out, I would say.

It was put to Docherty that people were concerned about the integrity of government and the possibility the prime minister may have misled parliament. He replied:

Well that's a valid question, but I'm 100% supportive of the prime minister.

He said Johnson had "behaved with integrity" because he had been "very upfront" in apologising. Docherty tried to portray Johnson as someone who "encapsulates that positive, aspirational view of the Great British future". Asked if history would look upon Boris Johnson favourably, he said:

Yeah, I think history will ... of course, he's got a number of years to serve as prime minister. But I think history will judge him as someone who was successful as a political leader because he could communicate

a sense of hope about the future, because he's very, very interested in science and technology and innovation.

He said Johnson knew that addressing challenges of the future, such as economy, energy sovereignty, and the jobs market, "depends on us being the best in field".

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Updated at 11.17 EDT

[2d ago](#)[10.32](#)

The prime minister is facing three investigations into his behaviour over Partygate, calls from some of his own MPs to stand down and polls that suggest many voters now see him as fundamentally dishonest and unfit for his job.

But, for the junior defence minister **Leo Docherty**, Partygate is "done and dusted". Speaking to the PA news agency at the Invictus Games in The Hague, he said:

It's pretty much done and dusted in the sense that the prime minister's apologised for the fixed-penalty notice he received. In my opinion, I regard that as matter closed. I really want to see him being able to get on with the job.

Docherty said the "vast majority" of the country wanted to see [\*\*Boris Johnson\*\*](#) get on with representing Britain.

People, I think, are sick of it and want us to move on.

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Updated at 11.18 EDT

[2d ago](#)[09.32](#)

**Nicola Sturgeon** has defended her party's decision to campaign for Scottish independence during a local election campaign.

PA reports:

*The first minister launched the SNP party manifesto at the Beacon Arts Centre in Greenock on Friday ahead of the 5 May council elections.*

*Sturgeon, leader of the SNP, said the cost of living crisis and local services are at the forefront of her party's manifesto.*

*However, a key pledge also states local councillors will back the Scottish government's plans to hold a second independence referendum during the first half of this parliamentary term.*

*The public could be asked to decide on the constitution issue by the end of 2023, Sturgeon said.*

*When asked if it was appropriate for local councillors to campaign for independence during an election where local issues such as cleansing services and schools should be the priority, Sturgeon said: "The manifesto is very clear that the priority for SNP councillors will be the cost-of-living crisis and local services.*

*"But I don't think it is going to surprise anybody that SNP councillors will support the Scottish government's proposals for a referendum in the first half of this parliament.*

*"And of course, that is a mandate that was won at the election last year and one that therefore democratically I have not just a determination to but arguably a duty to proceed with because that's what I put to people in the election last year."*

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Updated at 12.05 EDT

2d ago**09.16**

[Heather Stewart](#) and [Dan Sabbagh](#) report that Boris Johnson has said he will close loopholes to ensure UK exports to India cannot end up being used in Russian weapons, as he conceded the war in Ukraine could go on until the end of next year, and Russia could win.

Speaking in Delhi at the end of a two-day visit, the UK prime minister warned that Vladimir Putin was resorting to a “grinding approach” in Ukraine and suggested the UK would help to “backfill” countries including Poland if they provided heavy weaponry such as tanks to Kyiv.

Johnson was asked about a report by the Royal United Services Institute (Rusi), warning that [India](#) was one of a number of major routes for smuggling arms to Vladimir Putin’s regime.

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Updated at 11.20 EDT

[2d ago](#)[09.08](#)

The UK has set up an anti-extremist taskforce to tackle groups like Khalistani extremists in India, Johnson has said.

Speaking at the New Delhi conference, he said: “We have a very strong view in the UK that we don’t tolerate extremist groups setting up in the UK with huge... causing, threatening other countries, threatening India.

“But what we’ve done in particular, as a result of this visit, is set up an anti-extremist taskforce to see what more we can do to help India in that particular respect.”

*\*This post has been amended. The text, based on an agency contribution, originally read referred to “Kurdistan extremists”. The transcript shows Johnson was being asked about “Khalistani extremists”.*

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Updated at 11.13 EDT

[2d ago](#)[08.28](#)

We reported just now on Burns' comments this morning on the Northern Ireland protocol. Here's what the prime minister had to say about it during his press conference in India:

The protocol really does not command the confidence of a large, large component of the population in Northern Ireland. We have to address that, we have to fix that.

We think we can do it with some very simple and reasonable steps. We have talked repeatedly to our friends and partners in the EU. We will continue to talk to them. But, as I have said many times now, we don't rule out taking steps now if those are necessary."

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Updated at 08.39 EDT

[2d ago](#)[08.23](#)

Defending Johnson against such attacks, Burns has said there are some Conservative MPs who never truly accepted the prime minister as their party leader.

There are a number of colleagues across parliament who have never really supported the prime minister. If the prime minister stepped off Westminster Bridge and walked on top of the water they would say he couldn't swim. That is a fact.

The reality is that it is only two years ago since we won a majority of 80 seats – the biggest majority since Margaret Thatcher in 1987.

What the prime minister is saying is, ‘I led you to that victory, I have got business I want to do.’ What he has also said is that the events in Downing Street and the fine has actually redoubled his determination to rebuild the bonds of trust with the British people.

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Updated at 08.39 EDT

[2d ago](#)[08.20](#)

The Conservative MP **Tobias Ellwood** is among those calling on his party leader to stand down, saying “we must stop drinking the Kool-Aid” by continuing to support Johnson. The former defence minister has told Sky News:

All MPs are deeply troubled by what the party is now going through and what to do next, given the huge credit you must give to Boris Johnson in bringing the party so far. But we must stop drinking the Kool-Aid that’s encouraging us to think this is all going to disappear and that we can all move on.

We can’t use Ukraine as a fig leaf to dodge those difficult questions – the issue of Partygate continues to distract from both domestic and international issues and is just not going away.

We’re going to see, I’m afraid, a steady trickle of letters, resignations ... I predicted that. You listen carefully to the silence of support, and it’s clear that more and more MPs are privately believing that it’s the time that the leadership baton is actually passed on.

Ellwood has said the onus is on Tory MPs to force a change in leadership.

There’s a recognition that every MP now realises it’s up to us to take ownership of this. Because, I’m afraid, the absence of discipline, of focus and leadership in No 10 during that lockdown period has led to a huge breach of trust with the British people.

It's causing such long-term damage to the party's brand and that's proving difficult to repair. Can it be repaired in time for the next general election?

So it's beholden upon all Conservative MPs, then, to take matters into their own hands. And I think this is where things will go; particularly as we have more bad news to follow."



Tobias Ellwood, pictured outside the houses of parliament in February.  
Photograph: Henry Nicholls/Reuters

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Updated at 08.23 EDT

[2d ago](#)[08.15](#)

A government minister has issued a fresh warning the UK could unilaterally suspend elements of the deal with the EU governing post-Brexit trading arrangements with Northern Ireland unless Brussels accepts the need for change.

The Northern Ireland minister **Conor Burns** refused to be drawn on a report by the Financial Times that ministers were preparing legislation giving them sweeping powers to tear up the Northern Ireland protocol in the withdrawal agreement.

However, he claimed the protocol was not working in the way it was intended and the protocol's articles already granted the government powers to suspend elements of it.

He told LBC radio:

As far back as last July, the prime minister said that we believed that the threshold for triggering article 16 of the Northern Ireland protocol had been reached. There is significant societal disruption in Northern Ireland due to the way that the protocol is being implemented.

I hope Brussels are listening to this conversation and other conversations. I hope they will come back to the table constructively to allow us to change the protocol to make it work in the way it was intended.

If they don't hear that, then the government reserves the right – as we have always said, as laid down in the protocol – to take remedial action.

Addressing the reports, Kyle has told Sky News:

This is absolutely astonishing and incredibly damaging. Boris Johnson negotiated, his team drafted the Northern Ireland protocol; they presented it to the EU, they negotiated it into the deal.

It doesn't work as well as it can do, that's why the Labour policy is, you build on it – we can improve the protocol, we can smooth it, and we can do so without breaking the law and breaking our international treaty we signed with the EU.

If we just recklessly pull out of it unilaterally, how will any other country in the world sign a deal with us and think that we will honour it?

How will Prime Minister Modi react today when Boris Johnson asks for a trade deal if he is pulling out unilaterally of the last trade deal he signed?"

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Updated at 08.26 EDT

[2d ago](#)[08.09](#)

[We reported earlier](#) that Labour's shadow Northern Ireland secretary **Peter Kyle** had said the prime minister's authority is "draining away". Here's a little more detail. Kyle has added that the Johnson's "character flaws" are damaging the way the country is being run. He told Sky News:

[Partygate] fundamentally speaks to his character flaws as a leader: he lies, he is untrustworthy and he is incompetent.

Those same character flaws are the same reason why we have a low-growth economy and a high-tax economy, we have crime at the record levels it is now, and we have seven million people waiting for NHS treatment.

It's all down to his character flaws, exposed by partygate.

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[2d ago](#)[07.58](#)

In an intelligence update on the war in Ukraine, the Ministry of Defence has said:

Putin's decision to blockade the Azovstal steel plant likely indicates a desire to contain Ukrainian resistance in Mariupol and free up Russian forces to be deployed elsewhere in eastern Ukraine.

A full ground assault by Russia on the plant would likely incur significant Russian casualties, further decreasing their overall combat effectiveness.

In the eastern Donbas, heavy shelling and fighting continues as Russia seeks to advance further towards settlements including Krasnyy Lyman, Buhayikva, Barvinkove, Lyman and Popasna as part of their plans for the region.

Despite Russia's renewed focus they are still suffering from losses sustained earlier in the conflict. In order to try and reconstitute their depleted forces, they have resorted to transiting inoperable equipment back to Russia for repair.”

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[2d ago](#)[07.55](#)



Ben Quinn

Here's a little more detail on the announcement that the UK is to reopen its embassy in Kyiv.

Since the embassy's closure in February, the UK has retained a diplomatic presence in [Ukraine](#), but has not been providing in-person consular assistance. The Foreign Office (FCDO) said at that time that the embassy was relocating temporarily and staff were operating from an embassy office in the western Ukrainian city of Lviv.

However, the embassy is expected to reopen next week after Russian forces were pushed back or withdrawn from the region around Kyiv in the face of Ukrainian resistance. A team of diplomats returning will include **Melinda Simmons**, the UK ambassador. Johnson said earlier:

The extraordinary fortitude and success of President Zelenskiy in resisting Russian forces in Kyiv means I can announce that very shortly, next week, we will reopen our embassy in Ukraine's capital city. I want to pay tribute to those British diplomats who remained in the region throughout this period.

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[2d ago](#)[07.42](#)



Libby Brooks

**Nicola Sturgeon** has called on Scottish voters to “tell the Tories exactly what we think of their antics and their inaction” while promising a “pandemic-level” response to the cost of living crisis.

Launching the SNP’s local council election manifesto in Greenock this morning, Sturgeon promised that “the immediate priority of every SNP councillor elected will be supporting families through the current cost of living crisis – not just in words, but in action”.

Describing decision-making in Westminster as “ideological, deliberate, and harmful” she urged voters to “send the strongest possible message to this corrupt, out-of-touch Tory government”.

The manifesto includes commitments to prioritise expansion of free early years education to all one and two-year-olds – starting with children from low-income households, protecting council tax reduction schemes and starting a new “parental transition fund” to tackle the financial barriers facing parents entering the labour market, as well as a renewed commitment to holding a second independence referendum by the end of 2023.

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Updated at 07.47 EDT

[2d ago](#)[07.08](#)

Here’s a little more background to that question about ensuring no British-made arms end up in Russian hands via India. My colleagues **Dan Sabbagh** and **Heather Stewart** write:

Labour has said Boris Johnson should call for ‘urgent action’ from his Indian counterpart, Narendra Modi, after an influential defence thinktank warned this lunchtime that India was one of a number of major routes for arms-smuggling to Russia.

The warning comes only a few hours after Johnson announced the UK would ease its arms exporting licensing arrangements with New Delhi

by issuing an open general export licence to India, meaning separate licences are no longer needed for most arms sales.

Labour's John Healey, the shadow defence secretary, accused Johnson of going on a 'vanity trip' – but said he could use his visit to try and stop the illegal supply of western components highlighted by the Royal United Services Institute (Rusi) in a report out on Friday.

'In discussions with Prime Minister Modi today he must press for urgent action to clamp down on weapons parts passing through India and into Russian hands,' Healey said on the day that Johnson met with Modi in New Delhi. 'He can use this report to help halt the Russian war in Ukraine.'

The Rusi report, a 26-page overview of Russia's overall military situation, says western economic sanctions mean Moscow will become increasingly reliant on component-smuggling to ensure its jets, missiles and other high-tech munitions can function. Some components have a dual civilian and military use.

Its authors – Jack Watling and Nick Reynolds – warn that 'Russia has established mechanisms for laundering these items through third countries'. And they argue India should be subject to specific restrictions.

'Restricting access, therefore, likely means preventing export to countries such as India of goods that are in some instances used for civilian purposes,' they write. 'Moreover, there are myriad companies based around the world, including in the Czech Republic, Serbia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Turkey, India and China who will take considerable risks to meet Russia supply requirements.'

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Updated at 07.36 EDT

2d ago **07.03**

That concludes the press conference. The eagle-eyed among you will have noticed that it was not, in fact a joint statement from the leaders of both the UK and India, as we [erroneously reported earlier](#). Johnson was appearing alone at his own press conference.

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## [Conservatives](#)

# Johnson loyalists turn on Tory MPs who called for PM to step down

Supporters rally as senior Tory decries ‘absence of discipline, focus and leadership in No 10’

- [Today's politics news – live updates](#)



Boris Johnson speaking during a reception in New Delhi on Friday during his visit to India. Photograph: WPA/Getty Images

*[Aubrey Allegretti](#) Political correspondent*

*[@breeallegretti](#)*

Fri 22 Apr 2022 05.39 EDT Last modified on Fri 22 Apr 2022 08.54 EDT

Boris Johnson loyalists have hit out at [Conservative MPs calling for the prime minister to resign](#) in the wake of an investigation being launched into whether the prime minister lied to parliament.

Conor Burns, a Northern Ireland minister, said there was no question of Johnson resigning over Partygate and the prime minister would “rebuild the bonds of trust with the British people”.

After an astonishing day in Westminster during which the government capitulated to allow a third inquiry into Johnson’s Partygate denials, Burns insisted the prime minister had been “straightforward” and acted in “good faith”.

But Tobias Ellwood, the Conservative chair of the Commons defence select committee, urged colleagues to “take matters into their own hands” and fix once and for all the “absence of discipline, of focus and leadership” in No 10.

The tussle looks set to continue while Scotland Yard pursues its investigation into Covid rule-breaking parties in No 10. So far, the police have issued 50 fixed-penalty notices.



Tobias Ellwood urged Tory MPs to ‘take matters into their own hands’.  
Photograph: Tayfun Salci/Zuma Press Wire/Rxe/Shutterstock

Dismissing the criticism levelled at Johnson by some of his own backbenchers, Burns said there were “colleagues across parliament who

have never really supported the prime minister”.

He told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme: “If the prime minister stepped off Westminster Bridge and walked on top of the water they would say he couldn’t swim. That is a fact.

“The reality is that it is only two years ago since we won a majority of 80 seats, the biggest majority since Margaret Thatcher in 1987.”

He added that Johnson had told MPs “I have got business I want to do” with that large majority.

Burns added: “What he has also said is that the events in Downing Street and the fine has actually redoubled his determination to rebuild the bonds of trust with the British people.”

He told Sky News there was “no question of the prime minister going” and that Johnson was confident when all investigations had concluded “it will be clear that he was straightforward, he said to the house in good faith that he believed the rules were followed”.

Ellwood, meanwhile, urged fellow disgruntled Tory MPs to submit a letter of no confidence in Johnson. A total of 54 letters are needed to trigger a leadership challenge.

“There’s a recognition that every MP now realises it’s up to us to take ownership of this,” said Ellwood. “Because, I’m afraid, the absence of discipline, of focus and leadership in No 10 during that lockdown period has led to a huge breach of trust with the British people.

“It’s causing such long-term damage to the party’s brand and that’s proving difficult to repair. Can it be repaired in time for the next general election?

“So it’s beholden upon all Conservative MPs then to take matters into their own hands, and I think, as I say, I think this is where things will go, particularly as we have more bad news to follow.”

Ellwood apologised in December 2020 for giving a speech at a club in central London at an event that was billed by organisers as a “Christmas party” for 27 guests, when no mixing of households indoors was allowed.

He said when his attendance at the gathering – organised partly by the Iraqi embassy – emerged that it was “fully Covid-compliant” but understood that “during this challenging time perceptions count”.

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**Boris Johnson**

## **Authority of Boris Johnson damaged as own MPs say ‘gig’s up’**

William Wragg, Tory chair of Commons’ constitutional affairs committee, states ‘no confidence’ in PM

‘Gig’s up’: Tories join in condemning Boris Johnson for Partygate – video

*[Jessica Elgot](#) and [Heather Stewart](#) in Ahmedabad*

Thu 21 Apr 2022 14.59 EDT Last modified on Fri 22 Apr 2022 04.25 EDT

Boris Johnson suffered humiliating blows to his authority after MPs backed a formal investigation to look at whether he lied to parliament, and senior party figures made new calls for him to resign.

The prime minister will now be investigated by a Commons committee over claims he misled MPs about lockdown parties – a potential resigning matter under the ministerial code.

The move came after the government tried to delay the inquiry only to make a U-turn hours later amid a backlash.

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Speaking during a Commons debate after chaotic scenes in Westminster, the former Brexit minister Steve Baker, an influential figure among [Conservatives](#), said he was appalled by Johnson’s private attitude towards the fine he had received for breaches of Covid rules and said the prime minister “now should be long gone”.

Others made clear that they had told Tory whips they would not block or delay a new Partygate inquiry.

The Guardian can reveal that the former health secretary, Jeremy Hunt, told constituents he had warned whips he would not support moves to delay the inquiry.

Hunt said in an email to constituents that he found the fines issued to Johnson and the chancellor, Rishi Sunak, “shocking and disappointing”. “We will also now see the privileges committee investigate whether parliament was lied to,” he wrote. “I made it clear to the government that I would not have supported any move to delay such an investigation had we been asked to. But in the end thankfully, we were not.”

He said he would not make a final judgment until the end of the process but did not believe now was the “best time” to change prime minister. While other prime ministers had been removed in wartime, “in this situation we only have to ask ourselves, would Vladimir Putin be happy to see a two-month leadership contest in Britain?” Hunt added.

The turbulence in Westminster threatened to overshadow the prime minister’s trade trip to India, where he toured Ahmedabad as MPs debated his political future for four hours on the floor of the Commons.

Minutes before the debate about whether to refer Johnson to the privileges committee, government whips pulled their amendment – tabled on Wednesday evening – that would have delayed any vote on the investigation until after the final Sue Gray Partygate report was published.

The Labour motion was passed on Thursday although the privileges committee investigation will not begin for weeks or months, once the police and Gray inquiries are complete.

Johnson’s press secretary, speaking during a trip to India, sought to suggest the prime minister was relaxed about being referred to the privileges committee, with “no concerns”.

At the Commons debate, William Wragg, chair of the Commons' constitutional affairs committee, said he had written a letter of no confidence in the prime minister and that he would have rebelled if the government had not withdrawn its amendment.

He said: "We have been working in a toxic atmosphere. The parliamentary party bears the scars of misjudgments of leadership. There can be few colleagues on this side of the house, I would contend, who are truly enjoying being members of parliament at the moment. It is utterly depressing to be asked to defend the indefensible. Each time part of us withers."

Steve Baker had previously told the Commons he had been prepared to forgive Johnson but said that the PM's bullish approach to the fines, in a private meeting of the 1922 meeting of backbenchers this week, had changed his mind. He said Johnson's contrition "only lasted as long as it took to get out of the headmaster's study".

Baker added: "I have to say I'm sorry, that for not obeying the letter and spirit – and I think we have heard that the prime minister did know what the letter was – the prime minister now should be long gone. I'll certainly vote for this motion. But really, the prime minister should just know the gig's up."

Bob Neill, who chairs the justice committee, stopped short of calling for Johnson to go but said he had planned to abstain on the Labour motion.

"I am profoundly disappointed in what happened at No 10. People were badly let down, my constituents feel badly let down, I feel personally badly let down and there must be consequences that follow from that," he said.

The Conservative MP Anthony Mangnall said he could not forgive Johnson for misleading the Commons. "I do forgive the prime minister for making those mistakes but I do not forgive him for misleading the house, as I see it."

Tobias Ellwood, the Tory chair of the Commons defence committee, who has already called for the prime minister to go, tweeted that it was time for his colleagues "to stop drinking the Kool Aid".

Opening the debate, the Labour leader, Sir Keir Starmer, said it was imperative for MPs to judge if Johnson had deliberately misled them with his denials of Partygate lockdown breaches in Downing Street.

Starmer said: “He has stood before this house and said things that are not true, safe in the knowledge that he will not be accused of lying. He has stood at that dispatch box and point blank denied rule-breaking took place, when it did.

“As he did so, he was hoping to gain extra protection from our assumption, and from the public assumption, that no prime minister would deliberately mislead the house. He has used our good faith to cover up his misdeeds.”

Boris Johnson denies misleading parliament and says he wants to focus on India trip – video

Speaking to reporters on his trade visit to India, Johnson said he had reversed his position on the amendment because he had “nothing to hide” but appeared irritated at Labour’s determination to continue pressing the issue.

“People were saying it looks like we are trying to stop stuff. I didn’t want that. I didn’t want people to be able to say that. I don’t want this thing to endlessly go on,” he told Sky News. “But, I have absolutely nothing, frankly, to hide. If that is what the opposition want to talk about, that is fine.”

Asked about Baker’s call for him to resign, Johnson said: “I understand people’s feelings. I don’t think that is the right thing to do.” He conceded the situation was serious, however.

On Wednesday Tory whips had scrambled to find a way to block or delay the inquiry by the privileges committee. But MPs had privately and publicly asked whips not to give Labour the opportunity to paint them as taking part in a cover-up.

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## [House of Commons](#)

# What is the Commons privileges committee and how powerful is it?

Special body will look into claims that Boris Johnson misled parliament over Partygate



The Tory MP Sir Bernard Jenkin (standing) responds to Boris Johnson in the Commons in January. He is likely to chair the committee after Labour's Chris Bryant recused himself. Photograph: UK Parliament/Jessica Taylor/PA

*[Aubrey Allegretti](#)*

*[@breeallegretti](#)*

Thu 21 Apr 2022 14.25 EDT Last modified on Fri 22 Apr 2022 14.52 EDT

Boris Johnson faces a fresh investigation over Partygate – this time over whether he misled MPs by repeatedly denying Covid laws were broken in Downing Street.

## What is the privileges committee?

The special body known as the [committee of privileges](#) looks into allegations that an MP has committed contempt of parliament.

Misleading the Commons, as opposition parties have [alleged Johnson has done](#), comes under this category.

While the committee has conducted numerous investigations before, the sitting prime minister has never previously been referred to it for scrutiny.

## **Who sits on it?**

A cross-party group of seven MPs make up the committee. They are the exact same members as sit on the standards committee, given the two used to be combined until 2010.

But unlike the standards committee, the privileges committee does not have any extra lay members – independent people who are not politicians – appointed to sit on it.

There is an in-built government majority, with the four Conservative MPs consisting of Alberto Costa, Bernard Jenkin, Andy Carter and Laura Farris. Labour has two spots, held by Yvonne Fovargue and Chris Bryant, while the Scottish National party has one, Allan Dorans.

It is one of only two committees that [House of Commons](#) rules dictate must have a Labour chair, currently occupied by Bryant. However, Bryant was a vocal critic of the government and Johnson over Partygate so has recused himself from the impending investigation. Jenkin, as the acting vice-chair, is expected to take his place.

## **How will its investigation work?**

The motion that set up the investigation said committee members “shall not begin substantive consideration of the matter until the inquiries currently being conducted by the Metropolitan police have been concluded”.

So while the committee may meet fairly soon to rubber stamp that they will act in accordance with the motion being passed, it will have relatively little

to do until Scotland Yard's inquiry, known as Operation Hillman, is completed.

That is at least some weeks away, given the Met has said it will not provide any further updates until after the local elections on 5 May. The police investigation may well drag on longer, and MPs may also want to wait for the final report about the Whitehall investigation run by Sue Gray to be released.

But the committee will look into something quite different from the other two investigations. It is not intended to examine the extent of law-breaking but whether Johnson deliberately misled parliament. Doing so is a cardinal offence, given the ministerial code that bears the prime minister's signature states clearly that ministers who do so are expected to offer their resignation.

The committee will have wide-ranging powers to call for papers and other evidential documents – such as photographs, which could prove particularly damning for Johnson – and summon witnesses.

The difficulty they will face, though, is that it may prove tricky to prove without equivocation that Johnson knowingly misled parliament about his knowledge of law-breaking.

Boris Johnson denies misleading parliament and says he wants to focus on India trip – video

## **What would happen next?**

After all the work has been completed, the committee can recommend a sanction – including suspension or expulsion of an MP from parliament. Crucially, whatever sanction is recommended would need the approval of the Commons.

So some allies of Johnson still believe he would have a chance of surviving. Though others argue that voting down the recommendations of a cross-party committee tasked with looking through all the evidence would be politically impossible.

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## 2022.04.22 - Spotlight

- ['Villanelle will be back!' Killing Eve's author speaks out over the catastrophic TV finale](#)
- ['Everyone should prep' The Britons stocking up for hard times](#)
- ['It's just good energy!' How TikTok and Covid made drum'n'bass hot again](#)
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## **‘Villanelle will be back!’ Killing Eve’s author speaks out over the catastrophic TV finale**



‘Why couldn’t they walk off into the sunset together?’ ... Villanelle (Jodie Comer) and Eve Polastri (Sandra Oh) in the Killing Eve finale. Photograph: David Emery/BBC America

The characters I created on the page have been a lifeline to so many. But I have words of comfort for fans devastated by its punishing ending



[Luke Jennings](#)

[@LukeJennings1](#)

Fri 22 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 22 Apr 2022 12.55 EDT

*Warning: this piece contains spoilers from the [Killing Eve](#) season four finale.*

As an author, it's a thrill having your work adapted for TV, as my *Killing Eve* novels were. You're never going to love everything the screenwriting team does, that's a given. You're too close to the characters. You've lived with them in your head for far too long. But it's a thrill to see your story taken in unexpected directions, overlaid with a great soundtrack (thank you David Holmes and Unloved) and dressed fantastically (that unforgettable pink tulle dress by Molly Goddard).

And the actors. Who cares about plot minutiae when you're watching Jodie Comer and Sandra Oh do their thing, with the sexual tension crackling and the sparks flying? It's an extraordinary privilege to see your characters brought to life so compellingly. But the final series ending took me aback.

In the last moments of the last episode, just hours after they've shared their first proper kiss, Villanelle is brutally gunned down and killed, leaving Eve screaming. We have followed their romance for three and a half years. The charged looks, the tears, the lovingly fetishised wounds, the endlessly deferred consummation. When Phoebe Waller-Bridge and I first discussed Villanelle's character five years ago, we agreed that she was defined by what Phoebe called her "glory": her subversiveness, her savage power, her insistence on lovely things. That's the Villanelle that I wrote, that Phoebe turned into a screen character, and that Jodie ran with so gloriously.



'Jodie ran with her so gloriously' ... Comer as Villanelle in *Killing Eve*.  
Photograph: Robert Viglasky/Sid Gentle Films

But the season four ending was a bowing to convention. A punishing of Villanelle and Eve for the bloody, erotically impelled chaos they have caused. A truly subversive storyline would have defied the trope which sees same-sex lovers in TV dramas permitted only the most fleeting of relationships before one of them is killed off (Lexa's death in *The 100*, immediately after sleeping with her female love interest for the first time, is another example). How much more darkly satisfying, and true to *Killing Eve*'s original spirit, for the couple to walk off into the sunset together? Spoiler alert, but that's how it seemed to me when writing the books.

TV folk sometimes see ultra-fans of TV drama as weird and cranky, but for many young people living difficult and isolated lives, a show such as *Killing Eve* can be a lifeline. I recently heard from a young gay woman living in Russia. “Villanelle means the world to me,” she wrote. “She’s my comfort character, someone I’ve found representation, understanding, freedom, strength and bravery in. And I know that no TV writers can take her away because she’s ours – all of ours – and thanks to your books and our love she will live on forever.”

I learned the outcome of the final episode in advance, and suspected, rightly, that fans would be upset. But to those fans, I would say this: Villanelle lives. And on the page, if not on the screen, she will be back.

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## Emergency planning

# ‘Everyone should prep’: the Britons stocking up for hard times

Whether it be Covid, Brexit, the climate crisis or war in Ukraine, some are determined to be ready in case of the worst



Dean Axford, a ‘pandemic prepper’, has a pickup truck so he can move all his provisions to a caravan if he needs to. Photograph: Richard Saker/The Guardian

*[Linda Geddes](#) Science correspondent*

Fri 22 Apr 2022 06.02 EDTFirst published on Fri 22 Apr 2022 05.25 EDT

Even before the pandemic, some people were stocking up on essential items such as food and toilet roll, in anticipation of supply chain disruptions wrought by [Brexit](#) or a fundamental civilisational collapse.

Some stockpiled candles, matches and logs, and bought a wind-up radio for keeping in touch with the news. Others installed freezers and shelving in

outbuildings in which to store food, and shifted a proportion of their savings into overseas accounts.

So, how did these “preppers” fare once Covid-19 hit the UK, and are they still stockpiling items today? We asked some to offer a glimpse inside their larder.

## **Angi Strafford, 41, nurse practitioner from Leeds**

I started building a store of food, after reading there may be problems with fresh goods coming into the UK in the event of a no-deal Brexit. It started out as not wanting to run out of things that my little one likes: at the time it was specifically olives, sun-dried tomatoes and tinned tomatoes for making spaghetti bolognese – all thought to be things potentially affected by Brexit. But it expanded to most of our common foods, as well as extra bottles of Calpol and household items.

Having a stock of store cupboard ingredients came in handy when Covid hit. As a non-driver, a single parent and a nurse, I didn’t have the time or the means to keep going to the shops to look for sold-out essentials.

When my son and I caught Covid last September, I didn’t feel well enough to cook, so had to order in tins of soup and other easy bits and pieces. I now keep a stock of these things in case of illness.

I think given the potential volatility of “just in time” delivery systems, the conflict in Ukraine and the worsening climate emergency it is important to have a safety net for difficult times. I’ve expanded my “stockpiling” into growing my own fruit and veg with heirloom seeds, and hope to seed save this year. The future could be difficult, and Covid has shown that the government will largely leave us to it in times of crisis.

## **Philippe Marti, 54, London**



Philippe Marti: ‘Roughly a year before Brexit was imminent, we started slowly stocking up.’ Photograph: Linda Nylind/The Guardian

I’ve always had a secondary interest in basic survival and prepping. Nothing extreme, just a bug-out-bag containing anything that I might need in case we have to leave the house in an emergency (lights, radio, crank-up phone chargers, cooking utensils), and some preparedness for likely scenarios that could force us to leave London in a jiffy, like a “dirty bomb” on the city, economic meltdown, a flash-flood or a pandemic.

Roughly a year before Brexit was imminent, we started slowly stocking up long-term foods, especially when they were temporarily discounted, and rotated the stock to avoid it going off. We had two large boxes: one long-term in the garage and one shorter term under the staircase, plus some meat in the freezer.

Then Covid happened and our Brexit boxes became Covid boxes. We carefully avoided panic-buying or reacting emotionally to any news. Any shortage was properly shock-absorbed by the stockpile and we would replenish it later.

I’ve added some more things over time, but not directly because of the pandemic. For instance, I replaced my disposable BBQs with a nice

camping-hob with gas canisters when I realised that, in case we get the electricity cut off, we need to make hot water.

Stockpiling, done rationally and properly planned, is a great way to save money – you buy food on last month’s or last year’s prices, or bulk-buy on sales – and feel incredibly smug.

## **Laura Aucuparia, 38, West Yorkshire**

I’ve been hoarding food, water, medical essentials and general survival gear since I watched the film *The Road* about 15 years ago, in which a man struggles to survive in a post-apocalyptic world with his son. It chilled my blood, how awful a scenario like that would be.

I have enough water for a week, and then water filters and cleansers. I have enough food for six months, and some extras that would last longer: sugar, oil, salt. I have a great array of legally obtained medicines.

I have to rotate it and manage it all so it doesn’t go out of usefulnesses. I’ve had to move house three times with it all, which was no fun, but when the pandemic hit I was so glad of it.

I had been told not to leave the house because I was high risk for Covid, but I couldn’t get any food delivered. I couldn’t ask friends to risk illness for me, so I survived on my stockpile, eating mostly peanut butter on oatcakes, tinned fruit and soup until I could get a priority delivery. I lived without bread for six weeks.

The supermarkets were totally unprepared and unhelpful. I am severely disabled and without my hoarding I would have been completely stuck. Everyone should prep.

## **Nicki Tinkler, 52, Maidenhead**

I have always read a lot of post-apocalyptic books and although I totally understand these are works of fiction, what I couldn’t get out of my head was what would happen at a society level if there was a pandemic. I started “prepping” when swine flu happened, I also kept track of any epidemics

including Ebola, and rotating my 30-day food source, brought a generator and always kept petrol in our garage. Most people thought I was mad. I am a middle-class woman in a senior role and don't fit the stereotype of a prepper.

I got very worried about Covid when reading news of a new virus in China. Very early on I was wearing a mask on my commute, and had people laughing at me a lot. I also encouraged everyone to make provisions. Most people ignored me. When Covid got serious I had enough food and water to last over 30 days. We were able to completely isolate ourselves and keep safe.

My best moment came when one person I worked with, who had a young child, rang me to say thanks; he had built up some extra supplies after speaking to me, which made a huge difference when the shops ran out in the early days. I worry about Russia now, and the threat of nuclear war. I think mankind would and does act in horrific ways when food or water runs out. I want to protect myself from that as much as possible.

## **Dean Axford, 49, Saltburn**



Dean Axford: 'In December 2021, I decided the Ukraine situation was hotting up and, assuming the worst, restocked depleted supplies.'

Photograph: Richard Saker/The Guardian

I became aware of Covid in late 2019, while in Israel, and decided it looked quite novel, so began prepping once back in England. I had already purchased a caravan to be able to go mobile in September 2019, and purchased a pickup truck in February 2020. I also bought a generator for electricity, and approximately £700 worth of storable food and drink, which I keep in the house, and a deep freezer which was filled up. Also, several metal jerry cans of petrol for the generator.

In December 2021, I decided the Ukraine situation was hotting up and, assuming the worst, restocked the depleted supplies – mainly tins, packets of flour, etc, plus refilled the deep freezer. I also bought more jerry cans, so now have four x 20 litres of diesel and four x times 20 litres of petrol.

I have a large first-aid kit, self-heating meals, medicines, 500 litres of chlorinated water, a portable gas heater and camping gas stove – both with full bottles of fuel, survival bags and foil blankets, and various other survival items including a Bear Grylls knife.

Everything purchased or stored is movable at short notice, using the truck and caravan, plus my son's car.

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[Drum'n'bass](#)

## **‘It’s just good energy!’ How TikTok and Covid made drum’n’bass hot again**



‘My nana loves jungle!’ ... Nia Archives. Photograph: Melissa Gardner

The 90s genre is being freshened up by young, often female artists mixing hyper-fast breakbeats with soft vocals. But why is it so suited to our post-lockdown, attention-deficient era?



*Alexis Petridis*

Fri 22 Apr 2022 03.00 EDT

When Lincoln Barrett started making drum'n'bass tracks in the late 90s, he says, “people were kind of mocking me for being into it. People were already saying drum'n'bass is dead. Going into the record shop in Cardiff, Catapult, you would kind of get the piss taken out of you by people who were, I guess, into trance.”

He laughs. In the intervening period, Barrett became High Contrast, one of the most respected drum'n'bass producers in the world: he's about to celebrate the 20th anniversary of his debut album, *True Colours*. Drum'n'bass, meanwhile, has steadfastly refused to die – in fact, it is enjoying an unexpected moment in the sun, freshening up 2022's pop music. “It’s people who aren’t really part of the drum’n'bass scene just coming through and doing jungle in their own way, and it’s really in a separate lane from established artists and what drum’n'bass is now,” says Barrett. “It’s amazing that it’s been led mainly by young women artists as well.”

At its most extreme, the pop drum'n'bass wave has manifested itself in Australian producer Luude's [breakbeat reworking of Men at Work's 80s hit Down Under](#), a Top 5 novelty hit that features Men at Work frontman Colin

Hay and that, as the journalist, author and presenter of the Drum&BassArena awards, Dave Jenkins, delicately notes, “has caused all kinds of debates”. He laughs as he quotes drum’n’bass legend Shy FX: “If any self-respecting drum’n’bass DJs play this, they need to look at themselves hard in the mirror and slap themselves twice.” At last count, the track had racked up 102m streams on Spotify alone.

Less obviously adjacent to the *fromagerie*, there are the artists whose work finds its way on to [Spotify’s Planet Rave playlist](#), apparently the fastest-growing playlist on the platform among 18- to 24-year-olds. Not everyone on it deals in drum’n’bass. There are latterday two-step garage producers, people dabbling in trance, old-fashioned hardcore and even the occasional appearance from venerable electronic artists including Aphex Twin. That notwithstanding, the sheer volume and variety of artists wedded to 175bpm breakbeats seems striking. There are indie bands dabbling in drum’n’bass, not least Porij, with the wispy My Bloody Valentine-esque single Figure Skating. There are hyperpop-adjacent artists welding super-fast breaks to four-to-the-floor kick drums. There’s PinkPantheress, the bedroom producer and chart star whose track Reason has done much to break the genre open to a gen Z fanbase. There are emo-seeming types with manga illustrations instead of artist photos, lots of Xs and Vs in their names and song titles that one assumes are tongue-in-cheek: xxstarlit has an online mix called Bad Goth Bitch Music To Cut/Worship Lucifer To.

There is Vierre Cloud, a 20-year-old Australian catapulted to online ubiquity when a Fortnite gamer used one of his tracks as the closing music on his YouTube videos And Nia Archives, a half-Jamaican, Yorkshire-born singer/producer/DJ who claims inspiration from Roni Size, Remarc and Lemon D, writes tracks that deal with mental health and body dysphoria, has been outspoken in her attempts to attract more women of colour into the drum’n’bass scene and shows every sign of becoming a breakout star.

When you’re making stuff for streaming, you have to think: are people going to listen for five minutes? Probably not

*goddard.*

And there is goddard., a fan of august drum'n'bass labels Hospital and Ram in his teens, who makes soulful vocal tracks that seem aimed squarely at the dancefloor, but which clock in at pop-single length; hardly anything he does exceeds three minutes. “When I was studying at uni, one of the things we spoke about was people’s attentiveness through the digital revolution, how it has shortened,” he explains from his studio in Kettering, Northamptonshire. “The necessity of grabbing people’s attention straight away, and maintaining that, is really important. When you’re making stuff to release on streaming services, you have to think: are people going to listen for five minutes? Probably not. It’s just how we’ve evolved.”

Almost all of it has a distinct pop edge: even the artists with the manga imagery and the dark song titles have a tendency to sample the cute strains of Opus III’s It’s a Fine Day or Ellie Goulding’s Starry Eyed. Indeed, there seems to be an entire sub-genre, pitched somewhere between drum’n'bass and bedroom pop, that sets breaks against soft, wide-eyed-sounding female vocals: Yaz’s Mr Valentine; Take Van’s Time Goes By; oOo’s Frou Frou sampling Wedbecutetoget-her; piri and Tommy Villiers’ feathery Soft Spot, and Beachin’.



New breed ... piri and Tommy Villiers.

The latter duo are a couple; they went on a date in Manchester and subsequently started making music together in a bedroom studio. Their ambitions were modest – piri says she paid three TikTok creators to use Soft Spot in their videos and asked for support from the online community Manchester Student Group – but it went viral: it currently soundtracks 110,000 TikTok videos, featuring everything from footage of someone laying a laminate floor to advice on how to get rid of period cramps. Charli XCX announced it was her preferred gym soundtrack (“it goes so hard”) [while PinkPantheress](#) – whose use of drum’n’bass breaks was “massively influential” on their sound – DMed the duo to tell them she loved the track. “I think people just haven’t taken a very pop angle on drum’n’bass beats until recently,” says Piri. “It makes it more accessible if there’s a pop song over the top of it, these dreamy vocals, because a lot of people won’t just listen to instrumental music, they need a vocal and song. And obviously, drum’n’bass is sick.”

The question of what has prompted all this is an intriguing one. Clearly some form of nostalgia plays a role. Sometimes it appears to be the rosy second-hand variety involving an era you’re too young to remember: Planet Rave is thick with twentysomething producers using graphics derived from old PlayStation games or calling tracks things like planet1995; producers seem enthralled by the way drum’n’bass was made in an era before technology advanced (“Adam F’s Circles, that’s one of the best drum’n’bass tracks ever,” says Villiers, “and I don’t know how it was made, but it definitely wasn’t on a Mac, man”). Sometimes it’s more direct and personal. “I grew up around soundsystem culture, as half of my family are Jamaican, and I was always drawn to that sound, the drums and the distorted bass,” Nia Archives told an interviewer this year, adding – and any original junglists may want to look away now, lest they feel impossibly ancient – “my nana loves jungle”.

Jenkins points out that drum’n’bass enjoyed one of its few pop crossover moments in the middle of the average zoomer’s childhood. “DJ Fresh had the first-ever drum’n’bass No 1 with Hot Right Now 10 years ago. Then you had Sigma and Matrix & Futurebound, artists who could see the potential to experiment with songwriting and see if drum’n’bass could exist in the mainstream. It was controversial at the time, there was a kind of jumping the shark moment when Sigma collaborated with Take That … but when you’re

young and you get that first flavour of something, you can dig deeper and refine your tastes. I think that it brought this tempo and those type of breakbeats to the mainstream pop vocabulary and this is what we're enjoying now.”

Perhaps there are other, more prosaic reasons. goddard. thinks it might be bound up with global events over the past couple of years, that the in-your-face exhilaration of fast breakbeats provided both escapism during lockdown and a perfect soundtrack when pent-up kids were allowed out. “I think when lockdown happened, people like [DJ] Dom Whiting came along, [making videos of himself on his bike](#), playing drum’n’bass, just on his own, then you’d see people coming out of their houses because they were low and this music made them feel happier. That really put drum’n’bass out there publicly, for every type of listener, because it was just good energy. [Post-lockdown] feels like a very exciting time for drum’n’bass because it feels like there’s a lot of energy in the air.”

Piri, meanwhile, suggests pop artists might have gravitated to the genre because of the way music is disseminated in 2022. No latterday artist I speak to has come up through the more traditional route of having their music played in a club – all of them have relied on social media for exposure. “You can get a lot of information from the song in a shorter period of time. It keeps you stimulated,” she says. “A verse in a house song is going to be longer than a verse in a drum’n’bass song. On TikTok, you have to make a very strong vibe in 15 seconds, and in drum’n’bass, you can get a whole chorus within 15 seconds, just because it’s faster.”



‘There’s a lot of energy in the air’ ... goddard. Photograph: Khali Ackford

The means by which people now access music might also account for the current wave of producers’ preference for one specific area of drum’n’bass’s history: on Planet Rave you hear a lot of tracks audibly influenced by jungle, the raw, reggae-influenced, sample-friendly precursor that, as Barrett points out, “was seen as ancient history” by the late 90s. “For a long time, the drum’n’bass production standard has been insanely high,” says Jenkins. “I think we’re finding an inverse situation where a new generation has come through and they’re like: ‘I don’t care about the mixdowns, I’m listening to this through earbuds’ – especially in the last two years, when they don’t even have to think about club reactions at all. Those really rough, energetic, scratchy breaks have come back in a big way. If you put incredibly well-produced sub-bass on a track, it’ll be lost completely on people who are watching TikTok on their phones.”

What happens to all this stuff in the future is a moot point. It could be a fad, it could produce lasting stars, it could establish itself as a permanent fixture in the pop landscape. “Maybe there’s a degree of fickle hipsters,” chuckles Barrett. “I guess if it’s going to have legs, it’s down to whether this new generation are not just thinking about what it was 20 years ago, they’re using it as a tool today, to make something different.”

Not that its continued success or failure will affect the longevity of drum'n'bass itself, he says. "It's out there on its own in terms of tempo, it gives an energy that no other genre can, so it just sounds great at festivals, in a rave, outdoors ... There will always be a market for that, because you're not getting it anywhere else. People will always want that energy boost."

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## Local elections

# Will local elections put the brakes on low-traffic neighbourhood schemes?

Wider rollout of LTNs has prompted anguished debate, with one former party member standing against Labour over the issue



A cyclist passes through a low-traffic neighbourhood in Hackney, London.  
Photograph: Jenny Matthews/Alamy

*Peter Walker* Political correspondent

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Fri 22 Apr 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 22 Apr 2022 05.37 EDT

Sadiea Mustafa-Awan, an Oxford solicitor, spent years as a [Labour](#) member, including a decade working for one of the party's MPs. But on 5 May she will stand for election with the express intention of removing a Labour councillor. Why? It's all about traffic.

“I just felt that Labour are not listening to residents,” Mustafa-Awan says. “Someone needs to tell them to think again. That’s what I’m trying to do.”

There will be many subplots in next month’s local elections, held in various forms across the UK, not least whether a bad Conservative result could spell trouble for Boris Johnson. But few will be as bitterly argued over as low-traffic neighbourhoods, or LTNs.

Mustafa-Awan is standing as an independent in her home ward of Littlemore, a couple of miles south-east of Oxford’s centre, hoping to persuade the ruling Labour group to remove an LTN put in place a year ago.

LTNs, which use either fixed obstacles such as planters and bollards, or cameras to limit through-traffic along smaller residential streets, with cyclists and pedestrians passing as normal, have been used intermittently in the UK for decades, and are widely seen in some other countries.

But a more widespread rollout amid efforts to boost bike and pedestrian travel during Covid has prompted an anguished and sometimes bitter debate about their fairness and effectiveness, or otherwise, coupled with some complaints about a perceived lack of consultation.

It will particularly be a local election issue in London, where a series of LTNs have sprung up, and in some cases been removed. But as well as Oxford, LTNs and associated rows over bike lanes are factors in places including Edinburgh, Birmingham and Bath.

Mustafa-Awan argues that her LTN was installed with minimal consultation, is unpopular locally, and funnels vehicle traffic towards busy main roads while bus services remain poor and local cycle routes unsafe, making alternative transport choices tricky.

The Liberal Democrat-Labour-Green Oxfordshire county council says it has made some changes after consultation, and a final decision on the scheme will come next year.

Mustafa-Awan is standing for the city council, which is not responsible for the LTN. But she says if she succeeds in ousting a Labour city councillor it

will put wider pressure on the party. “I’m not against all LTNs as a matter of principle,” she says. “I’m against the ones in Littlemore because I don’t believe they work for the residents.”



A low-traffic neighbourhood in the centre of Oxford, England. Photograph: Geoffrey Swaine/Rex/Shutterstock

The rise of such single-issue politics is notable for a series of reasons. The first is how it reflects wider dissatisfaction about dominant ruling groups, especially in inner London, where many councils are de facto one-party Labour states.

Another is how, in the heat of a local election battle, national policy platforms can be jettisoned. All three main English parties notionally support efforts to boost cycling, while the LTN policy is led by Downing Street. But a significant number of Conservative candidates, plus quite a few Liberal Democrats and even some Labour groups are standing on anti-LTN platforms.

Jordan Redshaw, a Tory activist and a member of the Conservative Friends of Cycling, has produced a guide for the party’s candidates explaining [why they should support LTNs](#) and cycle lanes, but concedes it is an uphill battle.

“We have no complaints about the central policy, but at a local level there is a pretty big disconnect,” he says. “I’m not even sure that some Conservative councillors are aware of the government’s pro-cycling stance.”

Finally, the debate demonstrates a long-known fact about local politics: whether LTNs, or earlier rows about bike lanes and parking zones, some voters take policies that affect their driving very, very personally.

Tony Travers, professor of politics at LSE, recounts how a London council held an ambitious, months-long consultation on the future of the borough and was delighted to get 2,200 responses. He adds: “Just afterwards there was a minor change to the parking rules in one area. It produced 3,500 public contacts, unsolicited.”

Travers explains: “There’s this embedded issue, connected to traffic engineers and many councillors, who believe in getting away from cars and congestion and pollution.

“They want cycling and pedestrians given priority. And people say, yes, of course we do want all this, but we don’t want it to affect our capacity to get about. It’s a perfectly respectable position to hold in a democracy. Politicians volunteer to square off these conflicts. That’s what they are there for.”



An anti-LTN protest in Oxford takes place in June 2021. Photograph: Greg Blatchford/Rex/Shutterstock

It can, nonetheless, be an uncomfortable experience for some councillors, not least in gauging how unpopular, or not, an LTN scheme might be. “A lot of the debate about LTNs gets amplified by social media, meaning the siren voices go a long way,” said one north London councillor whose borough has introduced such schemes.

“All this means it can be hard to know what people believe, unless you actually ask them. I was canvassing the other day inside an LTN, and a woman told me: ‘I assume I’m in a minority, but I actually like it.’ The people in the next five houses then said the same thing.”

Some proof will come on 5 May, albeit with caveats. An independent like Mustafa-Awan has an inbuilt campaigning disadvantage battling an incumbent councillor from a big party.

She is nonetheless bullish about her chances of removing the sitting Labour councillor: “This is a car-dependent area, and effectively we are cut off from the rest of the city. We need to send a message.”

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## Hips don't lie, Liam Gallagher – there's no shame in getting them fixed

[Gaby Hinsliff](#)



The singer's refusal to have replacement surgery reinforces horribly negative ideas about older bodies



Liam Gallagher at the Teenage Cancer Trust Concert, London, 26 March 2022: ‘Nobody I know is traumatised by the odd grey hair or wrinkle. What we secretly fear instead is looming decrepitude.’ Photograph: Aaron Chown/PA

Fri 22 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 22 Apr 2022 05.41 EDT

Psst, want to feel old? Liam Gallagher, the eternally chippy younger brother of rock, apparently now needs a [hip replacement](#). At 49, the ex-Oasis frontman is suffering from arthritis, which he seems to be approaching with customary but misplaced stubbornness. This week it emerged that he is refusing to have the surgery his doctor recommended, because hip replacements are for old people. And who wants that?

“I think I’d rather just be in pain,” he explained to Mojo magazine. “It’s the stigma, saying you’ve had your hips replaced.” Either he hasn’t seen the reboot of Sex and the City in which a fiftysomething Carrie has surgery on hers, or else – surprise, surprise – one lone stab at reinventing the idea of growing older for primetime isn’t nearly enough.

Middle age is many things, but it isn’t always rock’n’roll. There comes a point when you can pull a muscle just by getting up too quickly from the sofa, and when the only phone number you come home clutching from a

night out is that of a hotly recommended osteopath. While women are popularly supposed to mourn the fading of their looks in their 40s, nobody I know is traumatised by the [odd grey hair](#) or wrinkle. What we secretly fear instead is looming decrepitude, or the idea that one day our bodies may just stop doing what we need them to do.

Generation X can't afford to get old; not *that* kind of old, anyway. Gallagher's body has to hold out long enough to headline Knebworth this summer. The rest of us, meanwhile, still have teenage kids to launch into the world, our own parents to look after, pensions whose pitiful inadequacy will keep us [working into our 70s](#), and bosses seemingly just waiting for a chance to put us out to grass. We don't have time to crumble.

Even the Queen, for heaven's sake, is said to fear using a wheelchair in public in case the bodily reality of being 96 is somehow seen as humiliating or diminishing, a sad reminder of the stigma still clinging to both disability and age. Yet those words – decrepitude, crumble, humiliating – give the game away. Is it really ageing itself we fear, or the horribly negative ideas attached to older bodies which we've unknowingly internalised, much as teenage girls absorb seemingly by cultural osmosis the sense that their (in retrospect glowingly perfect) bodies are too fat or too skinny, or just in some mysteriously undefined way shaming?

A new book by the Yale professor of epidemiology Dr Becca Levy, *Breaking the Age Code*, argues that the grim assumptions we all unthinkingly soak up about growing older have a direct impact on how we actually cope. Levy's research found that people with cheerily optimistic ideas about ageing lived a startling [seven and a half years longer](#) than those gloomily anticipating the worst. She finds that older people's memory, balance or walking speed improve when they're exposed to positive stereotypes – such as the idea that age brings wisdom – before testing, while exposure to the idea that older people are doddery and forgetful [made them perform worse](#) in physical tasks.

Intriguingly, that mirrors more familiar research suggesting girls score [worse in maths tests](#) if told in advance that boys are better at maths, or that [stereotypical assumptions](#) about black college students can lower their grades. Most startlingly, Levy's work suggests that even among people

genetically susceptible to Alzheimer's, those with positive beliefs are [less likely to develop dementia](#).

It may be that cheerfulness itself has some kind of chemical impact, lowering levels of stress hormones. Or it could be that people confident of thriving in old age are motivated to keep fit, eat healthily and push for medical interventions if something goes wrong, while those convinced that it's downhill all the way from 40 resign themselves to falling apart. "I don't mind a little pain," said Gallagher unhelpfully. "Keeps you on your toes."

There's an obvious risk here of falling into a sort of medical "lean in" doctrine, blaming sickness on an individual's failure to be sufficiently upbeat rather than the structural inequalities driving public health. But if Levy is right, we should be worried that [ageism is still](#) the most socially acceptable form of hate speech, the one prejudice for which nobody ever seems to get cancelled. We should be worried too about the way it's fuelled by economic resentment of baby boomers, and lockdown sceptics arguing that it wasn't worth closing pubs to save pensioners who were probably going to die soon anyway. In reality, the typical person dying of Covid lost a good decade of life they'd otherwise have enjoyed, but since when did knee-jerk prejudice bow to facts?

During the pandemic, subconscious ageism may have cost lives, making us too slow to shield care homes from the virus. Yet according to what Levy suggests, it's been quietly killing the middle aged for years: sapping confidence, breeding fatalism, making people feel bad not just about their necks (the title of Nora Ephron's legendary collection of [essays on female ageing](#)) but apparently now their hips too. We are just so conditioned to see the older body as a source of shame; sagging, creaking, leaking, but not to be complained about to doctors because what did you expect, at your age? Well, maybe we should expect better. If Levy is right, lives depend on it.

- Gaby Hinsliff is a Guardian columnist

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## OpinionLabour

# The Tories profited from Labour ‘chaos’ in the 1970s. Can Starmer do the same now?

[Andy Beckett](#)

Labour must hammer the message home that these are the worst of times, and pin the blame squarely on Boris Johnson



Rubbish piling up in London's Leicester Square during the winter of discontent in 1979. Photograph: PA

Fri 22 Apr 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 22 Apr 2022 13.32 EDT

In a usually stable country like Britain, how periods of crisis are portrayed and remembered is a very powerful political weapon. For nearly half a century, the turmoil of the 1970s and the sense that the decade's governments couldn't cope have been used by the [Conservatives](#) to argue that Labour is never truly fit for office. Despite the relative competence of

Tony Blair and Gordon Brown's premierships – a competence that Keir Starmer aspires to now – the association between Labour governments and chaos has never been completely broken.

This picture of the 1970s is highly selective. The decade also brought many Britons greater freedom and equality, and the Conservatives were in power for almost half of it. But these realities have not lessened the influence of the Tory narrative. Constantly presented by rightwing newspapers, politicians and historians, it has a powerful simplicity. For the many voters who have seen post-imperial Britain as a country in decline, Labour's struggling 1970s prime ministers have been perfect scapegoats.

But now that problems supposedly unique to that decade, such as out-of-control inflation, panic buying by the public and other disruptions to everyday life, have recurred under [Boris Johnson](#), a fundamental rethink of our political past and present has become possible. If the Conservatives are finally to be removed from power, this rethink may be essential.

Johnson's failures as prime minister ought to cast his 1970s predecessors in a new light. If he, with a big majority, an often sycophantic press and a limited opposition, can still seem so out of his depth, then we should stop being so dismissive of the efforts of Edward Heath, Harold Wilson and Jim Callaghan to govern Britain in a much more hostile political environment, which had frequent hung parliaments, more independent political journalism and Margaret Thatcher waiting to pounce. The three men's policies often failed, but never as disastrously as Johnson's. Callaghan's inability to maintain good relations with the unions ultimately led, in the winter of discontent, to some [dead people being left unburied](#). That infamous episode looks trivial next to Johnson's lethal complacency about Covid.

He and his defenders often argue that his impact as prime minister has been limited by disruptive global events. Yet so were the governments of the 1970s: that decade's two energy crises, just like today's, increased inflation and reduced economic growth. We need to acknowledge that any modern British government, in a middling country with limited influence, can be thrown off course by external events. If we accept this, the power of the 1970s as the great cautionary tale of British politics will significantly wane.

For Labour, the resemblance of the Johnson era to modern Britain's supposed nadir presents a double opportunity. Not only to neutralise a political negative once and for all, but also to position the Conservatives rather than themselves in voters' minds as the party of disorder. For months, Starmer and his shadow ministers have included references to "Conservative chaos" in their public statements. In the absence of compelling Labour policies – however welcome some of them are, for example on strengthening the rights of employees – Starmer's main strategy is to play on voters' growing exasperation and anxiety about Johnson's inability to govern, and to promise that life under Labour would be safer and calmer.

In theory, this is a shrewd approach. In some ways, Britain is even more turbulent now than in the 1970s: more fragmented by nationalism, more polarised by wealth and poverty, more clamorous with discontent thanks to social media, and more disgusted at its ruling class. The Tories have been in power much longer than they or Labour were in the 1970s, and their sense of entitlement and their self-serving behaviour are much worse, as Partygate continues to expose. There was plenty of corruption in Britain in the 1970s, but compared with Johnson's cosiness with the super-rich - the likes of Evgeny Lebedev – the lives of our 1970s prime ministers seem quite modest: Heath went sailing, Callaghan had a farm, Wilson owned a holiday bungalow in the [Scilly Isles](#). The Conservatives' current air of decadence and casual destructiveness may have no precedent in our modern history.

And yet they could easily win the next election. [Labour's poll lead](#) is much smaller and less solid than those Blair and Thatcher achieved as opposition leaders. The difference is that today's electorate has not definitely had enough of the status quo. Part of the problem for Labour is that, unlike Thatcher in the 1970s, it does not have a chorus of supportive newspapers constantly declaring that Britain is in crisis. Nor, unlike then, is there general and open discontent among the establishment about the state of the country. As with Brexit, there are mutterings and isolated outbursts, but most business leaders, for example, are quiet, despite the Conservatives' dead-end economic policies, calculating that the Tories may yet win another term.

Even many left-of-centre Britons, pessimistic after multiple election defeats, can be reluctant to connect the mess Johnson has made of the country to his party's electoral prospects. To adapt the famous line about capitalism

attributed to the [theorist Fredric Jameson](#), many leftists find it easier to imagine the end of Britain than the end of Tory rule.

**S**It's virtually a heresy to say now, but the closest Labour has come to a really effective critique of the Conservatives' record in power since 2010 was at the 2017 election. [Labour's manifesto](#) described the frayed and desperate condition of much of Britain in clear and resonant language, and that systemic condemnation, at least as much as Jeremy Corbyn's actual policies, caused the surge in Labour support. When the party offered less critique and more policy at the 2019 election, its vote shrivelled.

**S**Yet Starmer, in his determination to dissociate himself from "Mr Corbyn", as he called him with theatrical distaste in the Commons this week, has disconnected Labour from the sort of broadbrush but morally and emotionally potent politics that Corbyn reawakened. Starmer is trying to condemn the whole Tory status quo while also presenting himself as a cautious figure. As Thatcher's victory in 1979 showed, voters often prefer politicians offering to rescue the country to be radicals.

**S**However, it's not realistic to expect Starmer's Labour, or the other opposition parties, to crystallise what is wrong with Johnson's Britain on their own. If the chaos of these years is to be properly remembered, not just at the next election but for decades afterwards, then that work also needs to be done by journalists, historians, activists and voters. Unless enough of us decide these are the worst of times, the Conservatives will swagger on.

- Andy Beckett is a Guardian columnist
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[Opinion](#)[Road transport](#)

# Arson, death threats and ‘eco-crazy councils’: low-traffic neighbourhoods are dividing England

[Jonn Elledge](#)

As local elections approach, few issues spark the passion that has greeted the rise of the new controlled zones



An LTN scheme near Kingston-upon-Thames, London, September 2020.  
Photograph: Peter MacDiarmid/Rex/Shutterstock

Fri 22 Apr 2022 05.18 EDT Last modified on Fri 22 Apr 2022 12.09 EDT

A few weeks ago, the Daily Mail ran a [lengthy feature](#) exploring how “eco-crazy councils turned our streets into Gridlock Britain”. It begins with a heartrending and in no way manipulative story about how the traffic jams in the north London borough of Islington are upsetting a disabled 13-year-old boy.

Across the river in Lambeth, the council is celebrating a victory after the court of appeal [declined to order a judicial review](#) into three different low-traffic neighbourhoods (LTNs) across the borough. No matter: the local Tories have promised that, in the unlikely event they win next month's council elections, they'll [scrap them all anyway](#).

Don't imagine, though, that the row over LTNs is restricted to either inner London or the political right. In Oxford, Labour's former shadow chancellor [Anneliese Dodds has said](#) she's "increasingly concerned" about the rollout of such schemes, and called on Oxfordshire county council to pause them pending measures to prioritise buses. If the Lib Dem/Labour/Green coalition running the council is disappointed by this response from a Labour frontbencher, they can take some comfort from the fact that she was, at least, polite. Last summer one local communicated their views of the policy by [setting fire to a planter](#).

Few issues in local politics spark the passion, not to mention hysteria, that has greeted the rise of low-traffic neighbourhoods. As well as the fires (there have been several), campaigns against them have included vandalism, doxxing and placards depicting council leaders as military dictators. Graffiti has appeared accusing councils of "abuse of power" or, inevitably, blaming Sadiq Khan, who has had nothing to do with any of this. [Councillors](#) and [private campaigners](#) alike have reported death threats.

All of which seems a pretty unhinged response to a policy intended to make streets a tiny bit nicer for those without cars. Low-traffic neighbourhoods, after all, aren't doing anything as radical as, say, banning cars. They're merely a gentle attempt – a new bollard here, a planter full of flowers there – to close off rat runs and keep through traffic to main roads. They're nothing new, either: outer London boroughs including Waltham Forest and Kingston have had LTNs ever since Transport for London introduced its "[mini-Hollands](#)" scheme in 2014. Go to Walthamstow now, and you'll find a glorious world of segregated cycle paths, quiet sidestreets and minor changes in road surface, intended to communicate that any motor vehicle passing through should be aware they're in someone else's space.

But they have expanded rather a lot of late. In May 2020, in the middle of lockdown with the need for social distancing at its height, the Department for Transport [called on councils](#) to reallocate road space from cars to cyclists and pedestrians. At the same time, transport secretary Grant Shapps announced the government's £250m "[emergency active travel fund](#)". About 50 councils created [about 200 LTNs](#) – often, thanks to the temporary and emergency nature of the interventions, without consulting the public.

Some of the benefits of LTNs – reducing air pollution, preventing journey planning apps from telling drivers to use your street as a shortcut – are pretty obvious. Others are not. For one thing, researchers have found that those living inside mini-Hollands are [more active](#), with benefits for the health service. [Past studies](#) have found that those living on low-traffic streets are [more likely to have friends locally](#), too. Between all that and halcyon images of kids playing in the street, you start to wonder why anyone wouldn't want to live in an LTN.

Part of the problem, in fact, is that not everyone can. Diverting through traffic towards main roads is likely to mean more traffic on the main roads. In many cases that problem should, eventually, solve itself thanks to the magic of "traffic evaporation": the phenomenon by which people switch to walking, cycling or public transport, because driving is just too big a pain in the arse. That, though, can take a while, and in the meantime traffic is going to get worse.

Another problem is that changes like this do create losers as well as winners – people who for one reason or another genuinely need to drive, and object to being sent, literally, all round the houses – and that it's in the nature of things for them to shout a lot more loudly than those who benefit.

Perhaps the biggest issue, though, is that those pandemic LTNs were introduced in a tearing rush, as councils raced to grab a limited pot of funding. That meant a lack of consultation over temporary schemes (although councils are required to consult before making them permanent). What's more, it would hardly be a surprise if under-resourced councils moving at speed failed to distinguish between decent schemes that would cause some temporary increase in traffic, and badly designed ones that

would cause genuine, longer-term problems. A number of schemes introduced in 2020 have since been suspended.

For all that, though, it's hard to shake the suspicion that at least some of the hysteria is just that people don't like being inconvenienced. There are those who could walk or cycle, and whose lives would improve if they did. But they don't want to. They want to drive, and they want to drive the most direct route, and until they can they're going to shout at anyone trying to stop them. As well as stories of angry protests and vandalised planters, the past two years have brought footage of cars literally driving on the pavement to bypass an obstacle, rather than accepting that this route is now closed to them. Some drivers just assume their car is a god-given right, probably enshrined in Magna Carta.

They are, though, in the minority. A recent [Centre for London poll](#) found that only 12% of Londoners considered LTNs an important issue in the upcoming local elections; a 2021 survey conducted by Redfield and Wilton Strategies for the [New Statesman](#) found that twice as many people supported as opposed them. Like your car, in a traffic jam, LTNs are here to stay.

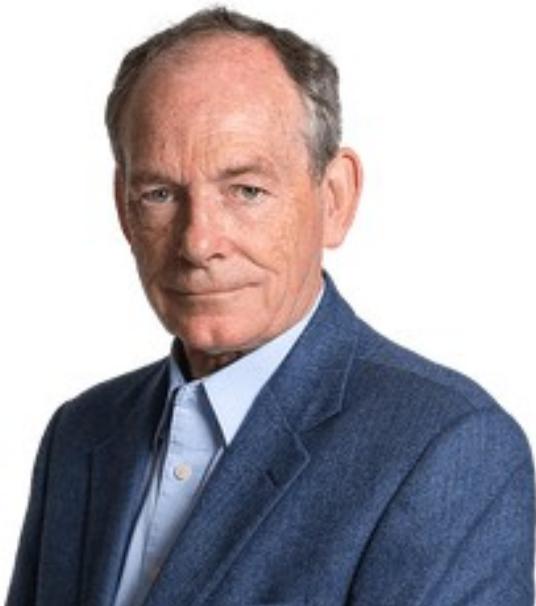
- Jonn Elledge is former assistant editor of the New Statesman
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[Opinion](#)[Boris Johnson](#)

## Boris Johnson's guilt is beyond doubt. There is no way back from this

[Simon Jenkins](#)



The failure to block the motion to refer the prime minister to the Commons privileges committee is a watershed moment



Boris Johnson poses with sadhus at the Swaminarayan Akshardham temple in Gandhinagar, India. Photograph: Ben Stansall/AFP/Getty Images

Thu 21 Apr 2022 12.52 EDT Last modified on Thu 21 Apr 2022 16.39 EDT

Boris Johnson is in serious trouble. He faces danger on all fronts. His capitulation to the Commons privileges committee leaves him open to the risk of being found lying to parliament. Resignation would have to follow. Beyond that, he has the May elections and further penalty notices ahead. Even his talents as a political Houdini will be tested.

The issue is not what he did. No one doubts that there were [rule-breaking gatherings](#) in Downing Street during coronavirus restrictions. Proof enough lay in the resignations that followed their disclosure. In December last year, [Sue Gray was asked](#), quite unnecessarily, to see whether they were true. The Metropolitan police then did likewise, proceeding with inexcusable delay, as if the culprits were an elusive and secretive mafia. This favoured Boris Johnson's strategy of playing bad news long, hoping for luck and events to postpone any day of judgment. The home secretary, Priti Patel, should have ordered the police to resolve this matter immediately months ago. It is suspicious that she did not.

I at first assumed that Johnson's lifelong tactics would see him through. He would fumble and lie and delay. He has duly used the Met's dilatoriness to silence Gray and consign her to history. He has fled the scene to Ukraine and now taken refuge in a [JCB factory in India](#). He has invoked the aid of Vladimir Putin, the cost of living crisis and the virtues of political continuity. He ordered his MPs to stall a vote to refer him to the privileges committee, in what appeared to be a tacit acceptance of guilt, but that transparent delaying tactic quickly fell apart in the face of accusations of a cover-up. Tory whips [withdrew their blocking amendment](#), allowing the Labour motion to pass and the examination of Johnson's actions by the privileges committee to proceed. Politicians lie to the Commons all the time, but with a subtlety that eludes Johnson. If he was innocent, he would have referred himself to the committee.

This is not over. If one fixed-penalty notice can yield the past week's pandemonium, what of the next [multiple notices](#), all reputedly more serious? There is no question of guilt, only of punishment. In the middle ages, political executions were preceded by a prolonged ritual of hanging, drawing and quartering. Death was postponed amid screams of pain to enlighten and entertain the populace. Today's torture is psychological, leaving Johnson's face pallid with daily torment. Keir Starmer can barely suppress his glee. The Labour leader works himself into a froth, his vitriol sprayed over Johnson beyond that of any opposition leader in my memory. But then, Starmer cannot really want Johnson to resign. He would be mortified to lose such a heaven-sent target before the next election. Rishi Sunak would make a hopeless victim of his abuse.

Tory MPs are so far more opaque, though bellwether [Steve Baker](#) has made his feelings known. Local elections in Britain have become opinion polls rather than expressions of lower-tier democracy. [Those forthcoming in May](#) are Johnson's next day of reckoning. Even assuming Johnson evades an adverse judgment from the privileges committee, his colleagues seem increasingly likely to realise that they are going to need a new leader, and soon, but preferably not until a plausible alternative is on offer. They appear ready for the time being to play along with Johnson's can-kicking buffoonery, but their humiliation before the electorate can go on only so long. Polls suggest [two-thirds of the public](#) want him to go if fined again.

The country at large must now accept that the future of the government depends on an indefinite series of fixed-penalty notices, as ordained by a currently leaderless London police force. This is, of course, democracy. The US's leadership once hung on an act of fellatio. But the question remains open as to how Britain should be led through a period of acute strain infecting all areas of the state.

The prime minister has no programme, no strategy, no professed ideology: only a frantic search for survival. In a revealing aside last Tuesday, Johnson argued that this was demanded by circumstance. Whenever challenged, [he refers to the war](#) in Ukraine, as if this was Britain's business. A war is handy for any prime minister. Thatcher's leadership in 1982 was rescued by the Falklands war. David Cameron wanted to go to war in Syria and went to war in Libya. But these prime ministers were conducting or proposing conflicts on their country's behalf.

Ukraine is not Britain's war, thank goodness. It may be that Johnson would dearly love to swap places with Volodymyr Zelenskiy. But it is outrageous that he feels he can periodically [lecture him](#) on what he should or should not concede to Russia. That is not Johnson's business, any more than underpinning his leadership struggle is Zelenskiy's. In fact, Johnson's most distinctive contribution to Ukraine's plight has been to deny an open door to Ukrainian refugees, leaving in place the Home Office's "hostile environment" to all European migrants. Nothing must breach Brexit's aversion to foreigners, however desperate their plight. Yet, as Johnson turns away the refugees, he could fly for a picture opportunity with Zelenskiy in Kyiv. Even Emmanuel Macron did not descend to such a stunt.

That stable leadership is advisable when the economy is in trouble is beyond argument. But Johnson is not in control. He leaves Downing Street almost daily to wander the country in a desperate search for photo opportunities for the evening news. He deports asylum seekers and reverses [energy policy](#). He attacks the [archbishop of Canterbury](#). Every utterance drips with self-righteousness.

The British economy currently rests in the hands of [Rishi Sunak](#). His inexperience has led him to make mistakes, but he is a competent chancellor facing the toughest challenge in a generation and needing constant support.

He did not deserve to be paraded as Johnson's accomplice in the last fixed-penalty ritual. The last thing he now needs is a boss teetering almost daily on the edge of downfall.

The security of any prime minister should not turn on a random mistake or misdemeanour. Downing Street is a job under phenomenal pressure, besieged by a catalogue of accidents and errors, not all of the prime minister's making. Over Partygate there was some justice in Johnson's plea that its criminality did not merit the penalty of resignation. But that excuse needed to be deployed instantly and sincerely in a burst of confession and apology.

Johnson's error was not to do that. Denial was buried deep in his narcissism. He fell back on a conviction that he could bluff and squirm his way through what should have been a passing crisis. In doing so he has subjected his country to a distasteful farce that has lasted six months and is not yet over. It is that farce that has deflected attention from Ukraine, the economy and the cost of living. Partygate has thus confirmed the view that Johnson was never fit for the office he holds. At an appropriate moment his friends should advise him not to seek re-election, but simply resign.

- Simon Jenkins is a Guardian columnist
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[China](#)

## Shanghai further tightens Covid restrictions after weeks of strict lockdown

China vows to eradicate virus, neighbourhood by neighbourhood, amid frustration among residents

- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



Workers in protective gear disinfect a pile of rubbish in Shanghai, China, as part of measures to tackle Covid-19. Photograph: Nico de Rouge/AP

[Vincent Ni](#) and agencies

Fri 22 Apr 2022 06.56 EDTFirst published on Fri 22 Apr 2022 02.10 EDT

Authorities in Shanghai have further tightened restrictions on the movement of residents in some districts and warned its 25 million inhabitants that strict

measures would continue until Covid-19 was eradicated, neighbourhood by neighbourhood.

After three weeks of stringent lockdown that has fuelled discontent in China's largest metropolis, some districts were told that restrictions would be tightened even when they met the criteria for people to be allowed to leave their homes.

"Our goal is to achieve community zero-Covid as soon as possible," the government said, referring to a target to stamp out transmission outside quarantined areas. "This is an important indication that we win this major, hard battle against the epidemic ... so that we can restore normal production and life order."

The Shanghai municipal government said on its official WeChat account that infections were showing a "positive trend" and that life could return to normal soon as long as people stuck to strict rules to curb the spread of Covid-19.

Since last month, China's most populous city has experienced its worst surge in Covid cases. But the draconian lockdown not only constricted residents' movements but also resulted in many facing loss of income, family separations, food shortages and difficulty meeting other basic needs.

Grocery haul vlog shines a light on price gouging in locked-down Shanghai – video

The announcement came after a notice the previous day of a new round of "nine major" actions, which included daily city-wide testing from Friday, minimising people's movement and accelerating transfers of residents to quarantine centres.

Videos circulated widely on Chinese social media this week showing busloads of people being taken to quarantine, at times outside Shanghai. In one account told to the Guardian, thousands of non-Covid-positive residents in the upmarket Xuhui district were told to relocate out of Shanghai so their area could be disinfected. The move confused and angered residents.

City authorities urged people to cooperate with the measures to ensure that progress made so far was not reversed. But many residents said orders were being issued en masse and indiscriminately for the sake of speed and efficiency, with little consideration for individual circumstance and wellbeing.

Resident Zhang Chen, 30, told Reuters her four-year-old son and his 84-year-old grandmother were taken to quarantine on Sunday, along with her inlaws, and she was worried poor conditions in the facility might affect their health.

She said meals lacked nutrition (breakfast is two slices of toast), the building was dusty and only partly renovated, there were no showers and too few toilets. “They are patients, not criminals. But here it’s like they’re criminals, and being sent off to suffer,” Zhang said.

The Shanghai government did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

### Covid: inside Shanghai's largest makeshift hospital – video

On Friday, the Chinese financial hub reported 15,698 new local asymptomatic coronavirus cases, down from 15,861 a day earlier. New symptomatic cases stood at 1,931, down from 2,634.

Eleven people infected with Covid-19 died in Shanghai on 21 April, authorities said, taking the tally to 36 – all recorded in the past five days.

But there are doubts over the official toll, as many residents have said that a family member had died after catching Covid-19 since early March, but cases had not been included in official statistics. The authorities have yet to publicly explain the reasons for these apparent discrepancies.

Businesses are beginning to slowly reopen, though they have to operate under “closed loops”, which entail workers living on site and undergoing daily testing and rigorous disinfection.

Beijing last week published a list of 666 firms in Shanghai prioritised to reopen or keep operations going and the Shanghai government said on Friday that 403 were doing so as of 20 April, citing the US carmaker Tesla as an example.

Factories, however, faced reduced trucking availability, fractured supply chains and a shortage of labour, and were far from being in a position to resume full production, economists said.

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**Carlos Ghosn**

## France issues international arrest warrant for Carlos Ghosn

Warrant issued over €15m in suspect payments for ex-Nissan chief who jumped bail in Japan and fled to Lebanon



Carlos Ghosn pictured in 2020. As he awaited trial in December 2019, Ghosn staged an audacious getaway, smuggled out of Japan in an audio equipment case on a private jet. Photograph: Anwar Amro/AFP/Getty Images

*Guardian staff and agencies*

Fri 22 Apr 2022 03.20 EDT Last modified on Fri 22 Apr 2022 14.52 EDT

France has issued an international arrest warrant for [Carlos Ghosn](#), the disgraced former Nissan executive who jumped bail in Japan and fled to Lebanon, prosecutors have said.

The warrant was issued on Thursday over €15m (£12.6m) in suspect payments between the Renault-Nissan alliance that Ghosn once headed and an Omani company, Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA), said prosecutors in the Paris suburb of Nanterre.

The allegations involve misuse of company assets, money laundering and corruption.

Ghosn, then the chief of [Nissan](#) and the head of an alliance between Renault, Nissan and Mitsubishi Motors, was detained in Japan in November 2018 on suspicion of financial misconduct, along with his top aide, Greg Kelly. They both denied wrongdoing.

In December 2019, as he awaited trial, Ghosn staged an [audacious getaway](#), being smuggled out of Japan in an audio equipment case on a private jet.

Ghosn, who holds French, Lebanese and Brazilian passports, landed in Beirut, which has no extradition treaty with [Japan](#).

The 68-year-old said he fled because he did not believe he would get a fair trial in Japan, where prosecutors have an almost 99% conviction rate in cases that go to trial.

He also accused Nissan of colluding with prosecutors to have him arrested because he wanted to deepen the Japanese firm's alliance with Renault.

A statement from his PR team called the French warrant "surprising", suggesting it was ineffective as Ghosn "is subject to a judicial ban on leaving Lebanese territory".

Lebanon does not extradite its citizens. Ghosn has citizenship in [Lebanon](#), France and Brazil.

The Nanterre judge heading the investigation issued four other arrest warrants targeting the current and former leaders of SBA, the prosecutor's office said.

Nanterre authorities visited Beirut twice during their investigation, questioning two witnesses in February after having spoken to Ghosn last year along with Paris investigators.

The French investigation centres on alleged improper financial interactions with Renault-Nissan's distributor in Oman, payments by a Dutch subsidiary to consultants, and lavish parties organised at the Palace of Versailles.

Ghosn was heard as a witness and would need to be in [France](#) to be formally indicted and gain access to the details of the charges he faces.

His former aide Kelly, meanwhile, was given a six-month suspended sentence by a Tokyo court last month over allegations he helped Ghosn attempt to conceal income.

Prosecutors had sought two years in prison for Kelly, accusing him of helping Ghosn underreport his income to the tune of 9.1bn yen (£55m) between 2010 and 2018. The court found him not guilty on the charges for the financial years 2010 to 2016, and guilty for the financial year 2017.

Ghosn, who faced several additional financial misconduct charges, has always insisted he and Kelly are innocent and that Japanese prosecutors worked to help Nissan push him out in a “palace coup”.

In an interview with the French newspaper [Le Parisien](#) in February, Ghosn said he wanted to return to France but could not “for the moment” because of an Interpol warrant for his arrest.

“Of course I will go to France the day that I can do so,” he said, hitting back at the “stab in the back by the French government and the Renault board of directors”, which is a civil party to the case.

France’s economy minister, Bruno Le Maire, declined to comment on the arrest warrant on Friday, telling BFMTV/RMC radio: “Let justice do its job.”

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## Google doodle

# Google doodle marks Earth Day 2022 with stark images of climate crisis

Time-lapse satellite images show glacial retreat at Mount Kilimanjaro, Great Barrier Reef coral bleaching, deforestation in Germany and Greenland glacial melt



Images of deforestation of the Harz forests in Germany, coral bleaching on the Great Barrier Reef in Australia and glacial melt in Sermersooq, Greenland appear as the Earth Day 2002 Google doodle. Composite: Google Earth Timelapse

*Royce Kurmelovs*

*@RoyceRk2*

Thu 21 Apr 2022 23.29 EDT Last modified on Thu 21 Apr 2022 23.52 EDT

Google is marking Earth Day with time-lapse satellite images showing melting glaciers, retreating snow cover, deforestation and coral bleaching to remind its users about humanity's impact on the climate and environment.

The 2022 Earth Day Google doodle includes four Gifs created from satellite imagery and photographs from [The Ocean Agency](#) that will rotate throughout the day.

They show glacial retreat at the peak of Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania between December 1986 and 2020 and glacial melt in Sermersooq, Greenland, between December 2000 and 2020.

Other images show the result of a coral bleaching event on the [Great Barrier Reef](#) near Lizard Island in Australia between March 2016 and October 2017 and deforestation of the Harz forests in Elend, Germany, between December 1995 and 2020.

Great Barrier Reef hit by sixth coral bleaching event – video

Climate counsellor Lesley Hughes, a professor of biology at Macquarie University in Sydney, said the images of coral bleaching on the Great Barrier Reef are “a very high-impact visual image” that would resonate.

“Our major natural icon, that we are stewards of, is a symbol of the impact of climate change on an extraordinarily diverse ecosystem,” Hughes said.

“Our physical and biological world is transforming before our eyes and that’s what these images are emphasising and so there’s absolutely no time to waste.”

The Great Barrier Reef went through its [sixth mass bleaching event in March](#) with aerial surveys showing almost no reefs across a 1,200km stretch escaping the heat – the first known to have occurred during a La Niña year.

Hughes said for those elsewhere, the images of glacial ice retreating would be similarly meaningful.

In New Zealand, the vast and ancient glaciers [are thinning at an alarming rate](#).

The National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (Niwa) [found that](#) between 1977 to 2014, a third of the permanent snow and ice was lost from the Southern Alps – a dramatic decline that began accelerating rapidly in the last 15 years.

More recently the summer of 2017-2018 brought temperatures 3C warmer than average across New Zealand, shrinking some glaciers so much they all but disappeared.

Elsewhere [artefacts long-entombed in the Italian Alps are being revealed](#) as the ice melts, leading to the discovery of equipment left behind by soldiers camped out on the peaks during the first world war and a 5,300-year-old crime scene when the mummified body of Ötzi was found by hikers.

What has been a boon for archaeologists is also a symptom of the catastrophic threat caused by climate change. Forni, one of Italy's largest valley glaciers, has retreated 800 metres within the past 30 years and 1.2 miles (2km) over the past century.

The images contrast with the positive note struck with the animation published for [Earth Day 2021](#), which the company said was designed to “encourage everyone to find one small act they can do to restore our Earth”.

Hughes said the confronting images published in 2022 may be a [response to the IPCC26 report](#) and were important for raising awareness.

“I think when you’re sitting in a middle-class environment and it’s a nice day and the sun’s come up or has gone down, it’s easy to become complacent about the larger forces at work in our climate system and the impacts those forces have,” Hughes said.

“So reminding people that just because it’s a nice day, climate change hasn’t gone away is really important.”

Alphabet, the company which operates the Google search engine, claims to have been carbon neutral since 2007 and plans to [operate all its data centres entirely on renewable energy by 2030](#).

The company used 15.5 terawatt hours of electricity in 2020, mostly to power its data centres. It also slashed the waste generated from its operations by 40% to 28,864 tonnes but increased its water consumption.

Its figures for 2021 have not been made available yet but the company says it has compensated for its emissions by buying enough renewable energy and offsets to cover its consumption.

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## Pop and rock

# Pop singer Tom Grennan hospitalised after assault in New York

Brit-nominated chart-topper suffered ear injuries during robbery and complications with a jaw fracture from another attack aged 18



Tom Grennan at the 2022 Brit awards. Photograph: Joel C Ryan/Invision/AP

[Ben Beaumont-Thomas](#)

[@ben\\_bt](#)

Fri 22 Apr 2022 03.40 EDT Last modified on Fri 22 Apr 2022 04.11 EDT

Chart-topping British pop singer Tom Grennan has been hospitalised after a physical assault in [New York](#) City.

His manager John Dawkins wrote on social media:

In the early hours of [Thursday] morning after Tom's New York show, he was the victim of an unprovoked attack and robbery outside a bar in Manhattan. Tom is currently being assessed by doctors for his injuries which include a ruptured ear, torn eardrum and issue with his previously fractured jaw. Despite this Tom is in good spirits but needs to temporarily recuperate while doctors assess his ability to continue with his touring.

Grennan has postponed a concert due to take place in Washington DC this weekend. Dawkins thanked Grennan's fans for their support.

The Bedford-born singer, 26, previously suffered a physical assault aged 18 by a group of strangers, that left him needing a metal plate and screws in his jaw for life.

Grennan broke through in 2017 with his single Found What I've Been Looking For, a slow-burning hit that ended up being certified gold in the UK. His second album Evering Road, released in 2021, reached No 1 and featured two Top 10 singles, Let's Go Home Together and Little Bit of Love. The latter track was nominated for song of the year at this year's Brit awards, and he was also nominated in the rock/alternative category. Last month he released a new single, Remind Me.

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2022/apr/22/pop-singer-tom-grennan-hospitalised-after-assault-in-new-york>

## [Singapore](#)

# Singapore editor jailed for defamation over corruption claims

Terry Xu was convicted last year after publishing a letter alleging ‘corruption at the highest echelons’



Terry Xu speaks to reporters outside the supreme court in Singapore in November 2020. Photograph: Jason Quah/The Straits Times/EPA

*[Rebecca Ratcliffe](#) in Bangkok*

Fri 22 Apr 2022 05.35 EDTFirst published on Fri 22 Apr 2022 02.43 EDT

The editor of a now-closed Singaporean news outlet has been jailed for three weeks for defamation over a letter published on the site that alleged corruption among government ministers.

Terry Xu, the former editor of the Online Citizen, was convicted last year for the publication of a letter that said there was “corruption at the highest echelons”.

The Online Citizen was known for its relatively liberal stance and for featuring criticism of the authorities in the city-state, where media is tightly controlled. It was closed last year after Singapore's media regulator rescinded its licence, stating it had failed to declare the sources of its funding.

The regulator the Infocomm Media Development Authority said it was necessary for the site to do so to avoid foreign actors from influencing domestic politics. Xu had said he did not want to betray the confidentiality of the site's subscribers.

Xu's jailing adds to fears over worsening of media freedoms in Singapore, which ranks 160th out of 180 territories in Reporters Without Borders' World Press Freedom Index, behind Belarus and Russia.

On Thursday, the district judge Ng Peng Hong said a jail term was warranted for Xu considering "the nature of the allegation, the standing of the defamed parties, as well as the wide spread of the publication".

The author of the letter, Daniel De Costa Augustin, was sentenced to three months and three weeks, after he was convicted of defamation and breaking computer crime laws for sending the letter from another person's email account without their consent.

In a statement posted on Facebook after the sentencing, Xu described the charge against him and the police investigation as "selective and unfair". The letter had made no mention of individuals or entities, he said.

"I am opting to serve my sentence with immediate effect and not asking for a stay of sentence even though I am appealing against the conviction. I am not afraid of the jail sentence imposed upon me and strongly deny the charge placed before me," Xu said.

Separately, Xu and another Online Citizen writer were ordered to pay substantial damages last year after losing a defamation suit against the prime minister, Lee Hsien Loong.

Rights groups and press freedom advocates accuse Singapore of using defamation suits and other draconian laws to suppress critical coverage.

Last year, parliament [passed a foreign interference law](#) that granted broad powers to the authorities, including the ability to compel internet service providers and social media platforms to provide user information and block content they deem hostile. A fake news law came into effect in 2019, which gave ministers the power to order social media sites to put warnings next to posts they consider false.

*AFP contributed to this report.*

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- [Partygate Penalties 'like parking fines', says cabinet minister](#)
- [Cost of living crisis Labour says it will insulate 2m houses in first year to cut bills](#)
- ['Incredibly inefficient' Where Britain's journey to insulation went wrong](#)

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

# Johnson's 'dishonest' excuses over Partygate fine an insult to public, says Starmer – UK politics live, as it happened

Latest updates: the prime minister apologises for breaking Covid lockdown rules but Labour says the public 'don't believe a word he says'

- [Boris Johnson apologises in Commons over Partygate fine](#)
- [Full text of Johnson's apology](#)
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- [Brandon Lewis mocked for comparing PM's fine to a speeding ticket](#)
- [Summary of Downing Street lobby briefing](#)
- [Theresa May says Rwanda plan may be illegal and impractical](#)

Updated 4d ago

[Jenn Selby \(now\)](#) and [Andrew Sparrow \(earlier\)](#)

Tue 19 Apr 2022 17.25 EDTFirst published on Tue 19 Apr 2022 04.34 EDT

'What a joke': Keir Starmer berates Johnson over Partygate apology – video

[Jenn Selby \(now\)](#) and [Andrew Sparrow \(earlier\)](#)

Tue 19 Apr 2022 17.25 EDTFirst published on Tue 19 Apr 2022 04.34 EDT

## Key events

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- [5d ago Starmer reprimanded by Speaker after telling MPs Johnson is 'dishonest'](#)
- [5d ago Johnson restates apology for lockdown breach, claiming he has 'even greater' sense of duty to deliver on priorities of British people](#)
- [5d ago Boris Johnson arrives for Commons statement](#)

Show key events only

## Live feed

Show key events only

From 5d ago

[12.46](#)

## Full text of Starmer's response to Johnson

And here is the text of **Keir Starmer**'s response to Johnson.

It was probably the most powerful and effective speech Starmer has given in the Commons, and it should go a long way to quash claims that he is boring, or powerless. As he concluded, Tory MPs were listening in silence. It is worth posting in full.

What a joke. Even now as the latest mealy-mouthed apology stumbles out of one side of his mouth, a new set of deflections and distortions pour from the other.

But the damage is already done.

The public have made up their mind.

They don't believe a word the Prime Minister says.

They know what he is.

As ever with this Prime Minister those close to him find themselves ruined and the institutions he vows to protect damaged.

Good ministers forced to walk away from public service.

The Chancellor's career up in flames.

And the Leader of the Scottish Conservatives rendered pathetic.

For all those unfamiliar with this Prime Minister's career.

This isn't some fixable glitch in the system.

It's the whole point.

It's what he does.

It's who he is.

He knows he's dishonest and incapable of changing.

So he drags everybody else down with him.

The more people debase themselves, parroting his absurd defences, the more the public will believe all politicians are the same.

All as bad as each other.

And that suits this Prime Minister just fine.

Some members opposite seem oblivious to the Prime Minister's game.

Some know what he's up to but are too weak to act.

But others are gleefully playing the part the Prime Minister cast for them.

A minister on the radio this morning saying it's the same as a speeding ticket.

No it's not.

No one has ever broken down in tears because they couldn't drive faster than 20mph outside a school.

Don't insult the public with this nonsense.

But Mr Speaker, as it happens the last Minister who got a speeding ticket and then lied about it ended up in prison and I know because I prosecuted him.

And last week we were treated to a grotesque spectacle.

One of the Prime Minister's loyal supporters accusing teachers and nurses of drinking in the staff room through lockdown.

Members opposite can associate themselves with that if they want.

But those of us who take pride in our NHS workers, our teachers and every other key worker who got us through those dark days will never forget their contempt.

Plenty didn't agree with every rule the Prime Minister wrote.

But they followed them nonetheless because in this country we respect others, we put the greater good above narrow self-interest and we understand that the rules apply to all of us.

This morning, I spoke to John Robinson, a constituent for the Member for Lichfield, I want to tell his story.

When his wife died of Covid, John and his family obeyed the Prime Minister's rules.

He didn't see her in hospital, he didn't hold her hand as she died.

Their daughters and grandchildren drove 100 miles up the motorway, clutching a letter from the funeral director in case they were questioned by the police.

They didn't have a service in the church, John's son-in-law stayed away because he would have been the forbidden seventh mourner.

Doesn't the Prime Minister realise that John would have given the world to hold his dying wife's hand, even if it was just for nine minutes?

But he didn't.

Because he followed the Prime Minister's rules.

Rules that we now know the Prime Minister blithely, repeatedly and deliberately ignored.

After months of insulting excuses, today's half-hearted apology will never be enough for John Robinson.

If the Prime Minister had any respect for John and the millions like him who sacrificed everything to follow the rules he'd resign.

But he won't.

Because he doesn't respect John.

He doesn't respect the sacrifice of the British public.

He is a man without shame.

Looking past the Member for Lichfield and the nodding dogs in the cabinet.

There are many decent, honourable members on the benches opposite.

Who do respect John Robinson.

Who do respect the British public.

They know the damage the Prime Minister is doing.

They know things can't go on as they are.

And they know it is their responsibility to bring an end to this shameful chapter.

Today I urge them once again.

Don't follow in the slipstream of an out of touch, out of control Prime Minister.

Put their conscience first, put their country first, put John Robinson first and remove the Prime Minister from office.

Bring decency, honesty and integrity back into our politics.

And stop the denigration of everything that this country stands for.

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[4d ago](#) [17.25](#)

**That's all from us this evening.**

Here's a summary of the key events from today:

- [MPs to get vote on Thursday](#) relating to claims Johnson lied to parliament, Speaker announces.
- No 10 refuses to back [Lewis's claim that PM's fine for breaking lockdown rules like parking ticket](#).
- [Theresa May says Rwanda plan may be illegal](#) and impractical, and is likely to increase trafficking of women and children.

- [Johnson restates apology for lockdown breach](#), claiming he has ‘even greater’ sense of duty to deliver on priorities of British people.
- **Starmer reprimanded by Speaker** after telling MPs Johnson is “dishonest”.
- **Mark Harper**, the former Tory whip, says he no longer thinks Boris Johnson is “worthy of the office he holds”.
- Bereaved relatives of people who died from Covid called Boris Johnson “a liar and a charlatan debasing the office of prime minister”.
- Boris Johnson started his meeting with the 1922 Committee of Conservative MPs by telling them that their government “has got the big calls right”.
- During “bullish” 35-minute private meeting, he repeatedly asked if Tories preferred Labour government to Johnson leadership.
- Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby and the BBC criticised by PM for views on Rwanda.

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Updated at 17.28 EDT

[4d ago](#)[16.43](#)

**NHS Millions, a not-for-profit organisation set up by a team of NHS staff during the pandemic to encourage support for hospital workers, is not satisfied by the PM’s performance in the Commons today – nor the continued support of Conservative MPs at the 1922 Committee meeting this evening.**

The group tweeted:

Tory MPs expected NHS staff to have the courage to fight Covid for over two years, and more than 1,500 health and care staff lost their lives.

Yet the majority of them don’t even have the courage to stand up against a proven liar. [pic.twitter.com/HlnKG7qkMS](#)

— NHS Million □ (@NHSMillion) [April 19, 2022](#)

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[4d ago](#) [16.32](#)

**The Mirror's Whitehall correspondent Mikey Smith said that the mood in the private Tory party meeting this evening was “bullish”.**

Posting on Twitter, he wrote: “Source says PM accepted it was ‘right’ for him to say what he did in the Commons, but there was no specific apology to MPs.”

On Keir Starmer’s blistering attack, he posted:

One Tory MP accused Keir Starmer of “whipping up hysteria” and “visceral hatred”. PM said to have distanced himself from that “a bit”. But said there had been a “coarsening of the debate”

— Mikey Smith (@mikeysmith) [April 19, 2022](#)

Source said one Tory had urged colleagues not to go to the press. Quoted as saying “If we throw the boss under the bus, do we think the left will suddenly be nice to us? Of course not. I'm sticking with the man we have here.”

— Mikey Smith (@mikeysmith) [April 19, 2022](#)

The BBC was also heavily criticised by the PM in his speech to the 1922 Committee.

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Updated at 16.44 EDT

4d ago16.13

**Jacob Rees-Mogg told Andrew Marr to “get a sense of perspective” this evening, after the broadcaster described the “intense anger” he felt at the death of his father.**

Marr, who presents the LBC show *Tonight with Andrew Marr*, told the Cabinet minister:

I buried my father on the week that one of those parties took place and it was a party. He was an elder of the Church of Scotland – that church was locked and barred. We had a small gathering, most of the family weren’t there. The other parishioners he would have loved to be there weren’t allowed to be there because we followed the rules. And I felt intensely angry about that – and I do not regard this as fluff.”

Rees-Mogg told Marr that while he believed closing churches during Covid was a “great mistake”, he did not regret using the word “fluff” to describe partygate allegations.

“What is happening now two years on against what’s going on in [Ukraine](#), what is going on with the cost of living crisis, one has to get a sense of perspective,” Rees-Mogg said.

“What is going on in Ukraine is fundamental to the security of the Western world.

“And you are comparing this to a fine issued for something that happened two years ago.”

He added: “I think we need to look at what is fundamental to the security of our nation and the security of the Western world.”

Marr told the Brexit opportunities minister that what happened to him “happened to so many others up and down the country.”

“We find, I would say, that word ‘fluff’ quite offensive”, he said.

But Mr Rees-Mogg replied: “I still think that in comparison with the war in Ukraine... a fine for something that happened two years ago is not the most pressing political matter”.

“The *Daily Mail* headline said ‘don’t forget there’s a war on’ and this is something we have to remember - we need a sense of perspective”.

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Updated at 16.13 EDT

[4d ago](#)[15.58](#)

**In today’s political sketch, John Crace tackled the PM’s “flimsy and feeble” apology to the Commons, referring to Johnson throughout as “the convict”.**

Here’s a excerpt of that:

The Convict began by saying he wanted to make a full apology. Which would have sounded more convincing if he hadn’t already made several apologies to the Commons on previous outings. Each time hoping to draw a line under whatever he had done wrong – or more importantly, been found out to have done wrong. But if practice doesn’t make perfect, it certainly makes Johnson a slightly better apologist. In the past he has never really sounded that sorry for anything – rather just irritable that he had got himself into yet another situation where he was obliged to apologise.”

Read the sketch in full here:

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Updated at 16.11 EDT

[4d ago](#)[15.50](#)

**Boris Johnson started his meeting with the 1922 Committee of Conservative MPs by telling them that their government “has got the big calls right”.**

According to the *Byline Times*'s Adam Bienkov:

Boris Johnson keeps asking the 1922 Committee if they'd rather have him in charge than Labour. This feels quite a low bar for a room full of Conservative MPs.

— Adam Bienkov (@AdamBienkov) [April 19, 2022](#)

Johnson also used his platform to criticise Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and his condemnation of the Rwanda policy. He apparently argued that Welby was far less scathing in his criticism of Putin than he was of Priti Patel's bombshell refugee reform.

PA reports: “Sources close to the Prime Minister said he told Tory MPs in a private meeting it was a ‘good policy’ despite some ‘criticism on the BBC and from senior members of the clergy’ who he said ‘had been less vociferous in their condemnation on Easter Sunday of Putin than they were on our policy of illegal immigrants’.”

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Updated at 16.21 EDT

[5d ago](#)[15.08](#)

**Boris Johnson has arrived to address the 1922 committee of Conservative backbenchers**, with PA Media reporting he was met by “sustained banging and the odd whoop”.

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Updated at 15.36 EDT

5d ago[14.56](#)

**Opposition parties have called for a special body known as the privileges committee to look into if Johnson deliberately misled MPs.**

The prime minister made repeated denials to the Commons that any rules were broken in Downing Street – but Scotland Yard has now put paid to that, and confirmed that parties which breached lockdown laws did take place in No 10 and other parts of Whitehall.

Given that the ministerial code carries the unambiguous direction that any breaches should result in a resignation, Labour wants the matter to be scrutinised instead of being brushed under the carpet.

But what is it? And how does it work? An excellent piece here explaining everything you need to know about the privileges committee:

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5d ago[14.46](#)

**Conservative MP Mark Harper told the Commons that [Boris Johnson](#) was no longer worthy of the “great office” he holds earlier.**

The former chief whip has since spoken to the BBC about his decision to submit a letter of no confidence in the PM.



Conservative MP Mark Harper in the Commons. Photograph: PRU/AFP/Getty Images

“I’m not expecting lots [of Conservative MPs] follow me today, but they’re going to have to reflect in the coming days and weeks,” he said.

“I think many of them will reach the same conclusion that I have.”

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[5d ago](#)[14.30](#)

Bereaved relatives of people who died from Covid called [Boris Johnson](#) “a liar and a charlatan debasing the office of prime minister” after he defended his actions over partygate in the Commons today.

Fran Hall, whose husband Steve Mead died of the virus three weeks after the couple married in 2020, described Johnson as “a man without shame, without morals and without honour”. Hall, 61, from Buckinghamshire, told PA:

The endless apologies that the prime minister gave to the house when he finally stood up half an hour late to make his statement mean nothing to me – nor do they mean anything to him. He is a liar whose lies slip easily from his mouth. He will never resign. We depend completely on the backbench Tory MPs to finally decide that he is a liability rather than a leader. Until then, we have a liar and a charlatan debasing the office of prime minister.”

Kathryn de Prudhoe, 47, from Leeds, whose father Tony Clay died with Covid-19 in April 2020, said Johnson’s apology “doesn’t go nearly far enough”.

“My family suffered two devastating Covid-19 deaths in a period of seven months while these parties were taking place in Downing Street,” she told PA.

“My dad died alone and there were five people allowed at his 20-minute funeral.”

She added: “To then hear him conflate the issue with [Ukraine](#) is exactly the sort of, ‘I’m sorry, but look how great I am’ none apology I’ve come to expect from him.

“He has no authority to lead and nothing but his resignation will do.”

Meanwhile, Oxford doctor Rachel Clarke tweeted the following:

Quite mind-blowing that [@BorisJohnson](#)'s excuse to the Commons for breaking the law (& then lying about it to the nation) is that he didn't understand his own laws.

Even though at 5pm every night he told us the rules were life-and-death.

Even though he signed off on this. [pic.twitter.com/j8ujgi27wI](https://pic.twitter.com/j8ujgi27wI)

— Rachel Clarke (@doctor\_oxford) [April 19, 2022](#)

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Updated at 15.06 EDT

[5d ago 14.12](#)

**With Boris Johnson's rather repetitive turn at the dispatch box now at an end, we have a short wait on our hands before the PM addresses Conservative backbenchers in private at 8pm.**

Will his many apologies be enough to sway the crucial vote on Thursday, or will more of his party decide to get writing and submitting letters of no confidence to 1922 Committee chairman Sir Graham Brady?



Boris Johnson in the House of Commons making a statement to MPs following the announcement that he is among the 50-plus people fined so far as part of the Metropolitan Police probe into Covid breaches in Government.  
Photograph: House of Commons/PA

Johnson will not be there for the Commons debate on whether his actions over partygate merit a referral to the privileges committee. Conveniently, he'll be in Ahmedabad in India before he travels to New Delhi on Friday to meet Indian PM Narendra Modi.

He is, however, expected to appear in front of MPs for PMQs on Wednesday.

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Updated at 14.31 EDT

[5d ago](#) [13.57](#)

**Former MP Anna Soubry reminding us all that there are still at least five police investigations left to conclude that could spell even more trouble for the PM.**

Some very glumfaces on the Govt front bench. Reckon they know the game is up. Remember the police are investigating at least 5 more Downing St parties which [#BorisJohnson](#) attended. It will only get worse. [#Resign](#)

— Anna Soubry (@Anna\_Soubry) [April 19, 2022](#)

Soubry resigned from the Conservative party on 20 February 2019, along with Heidi Allen and Sarah Wollaston, and joined ill-fated The Independent Group, later Change UK.

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Updated at 14.19 EDT

[5d ago](#) [13.47](#)

**The Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice group said [Boris Johnson](#) will need to resign before grieving families “move on from Partygate”.**

Spokesperson Safiah Ngah lost her father, Zahari Ngah, 68, to coronavirus in February 2021.

She said:

Today's apology from the prime minister was the words of someone who is sorry they've been caught, not someone who regrets the harm they've done. There are already over 50 Partygate fines issued aside from his own, and many more parties to be investigated, including in his own flat. His claim that he didn't realise rules were being broken is just laughable, and shows he still takes us for idiots.

She added: "Backbench Tory MPs might want us to move on from Partygate, but first they'll need to move Johnson on from his office."

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Updated at 14.19 EDT

[5d ago](#)[13.45](#)

## **Johnson's apology over fine for breaking lockdown rules – snap verdict**



Andrew Sparrow

Boris Johnson has just finished. He has delivered multiple apologies now over Partygate, but this is probably the third major one he has had to do in the [House of Commons](#). And it is a marked improvement on the other two.

The first came in December, after ITV released a video of Allegra Stratton, his then press secretary, joking with colleagues about a No 10 party that Johnson had said did not take place. Johnson claimed that he was “furious”, but [badly failed the sincerity test](#).

In January Johnson again apologised, after the publication of Sue Gray’s “update” cataloguing the extent of wrongdoing in No 10. He briefly managed to sound apologetic, but within minutes [he had reverted to party politics](#) (and dishonesty), smearing Keir Starmer by suggesting that he had stopped the CPS prosecuting Jimmy Savile.

Today Johnson managed to maintain his contrite composure all afternoon. He was following what in the New Labour era was called a “masochism strategy” (when Tony Blair decided just to suck up criticism of the Iraq war). Several of the PM’s Tory colleagues (with a naive understanding of what is helpful) sought to minimise the seriousness of Partygate (Bill Cash was the worst offender – see [5.27pm](#)), but Johnson kept refusing to take their bait. He wasn’t seeking to make light of what happened, he insisted.

Presentationally, it was an improvement, and a large cohort of Tory MPs still seem to support him – at least for now. But, by and large, those defending him are not people who would be seen as members of the Conservative party’s A team, and the contributions that will be remembered will be those criticising him – particularly from Starmer (who was outstanding). Today might not have been fatal to Johnson, but it has been profoundly humbling.

That is all from me for today. My colleague **Jenn Selby** is now taking over.

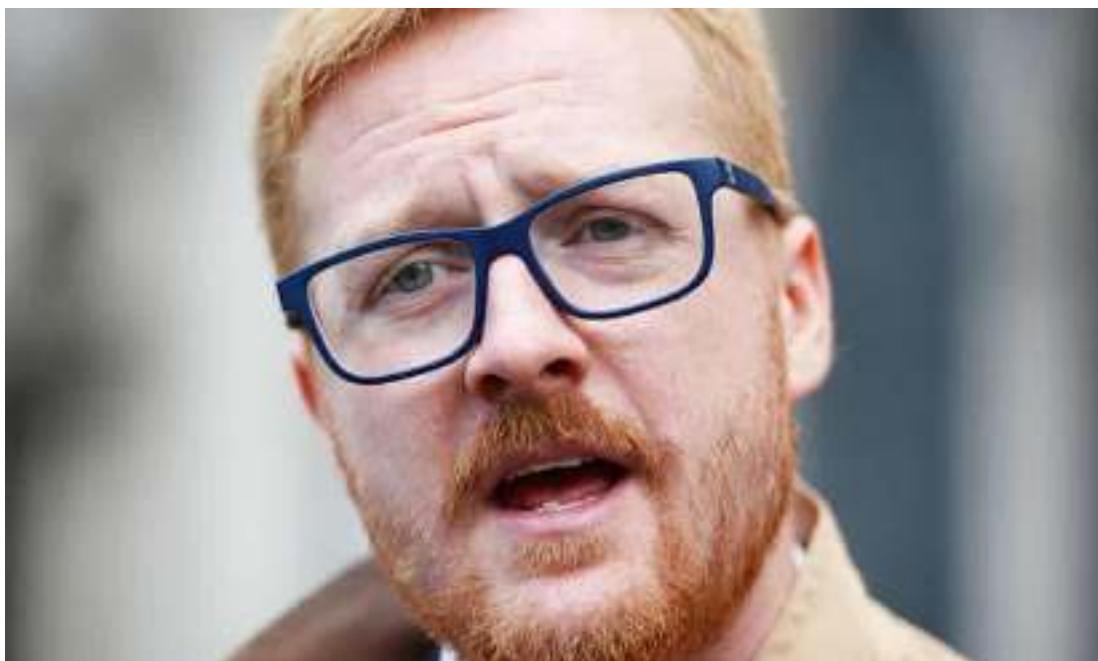
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Updated at 14.22 EDT

[5d ago](#) [13.43](#)

**Earlier on, Labour and Coop MP Lloyd Russell-Moyle called the government frontbenchers “tax-dodging, Russian-financiered snowflakes”, prompting what has become one of many calls by the Speaker for the use of “moderate” language.**

“Let’s try and see if we can keep it temperate and moderate, there was no individual mentioned so therefore it was within, not what I would expect, but that’s where we are,” Commons Speaker Sir Lindsay Hoyle said.



MP Lloyd Russell-Moyle. Photograph: Kirsty O'Connor/PA

The prime minister said he did not agree with Russell-Moyle’s remarks, including about the frontbench.

In a stinging attack, Labour MP Zarah Sultana accused Johnson of “robbing the public purse” – an accusation the Speaker described as “just not the case” before asking her to withdraw her remarks.

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Updated at 17.09 EDT

[5d ago 13.23](#)

In her intervention **Angela Eagle** (Lab) asked why Boris Johnson was holding himself to lower standards than Matt Hancock, who resigned for breaking lockdown rules, or Allegra Stratton, who resigned for joking that a party could be described as a business event - a defence that Johnson is now using himself.

Why is PM holding himself to lower standards than those who's resignations he accepted for breaching COVID guidelines & joking about No10 parties? #Partygate #ResignJohnson  
pic.twitter.com/yo3YFkZRMv

— Angela Eagle DBE (@angelaeagle) April 19, 2022

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5d ago 13.19

In the Commons **Boris Johnson** has repeatedly said he does not want to minimise the significance of Partygate. But - not for the first time - **Jacob Rees-Mogg**, the Brexit minister, is not following the same script. He has just told Andrew Marr on LBC that he still thinks it is “fluff” compared to other problems facing the world.

This is from LBC's **Ben Kentish**.

Asked if he regrets dismissing the Partygate row as “fluff”, Jacob Rees-Mogg tells @AndrewMarr9: “No I do not.” Says it’s important to keep a sense of “proportion”.

— Ben Kentish (@BenKentish) April 19, 2022

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[5d ago](#)[13.15](#)

**Carol Monaghan** (SNP) asks [Boris Johnson](#) to explain, “for the sake of children across these isles”, what the difference is between a lie and a mistake.

**Johnson** says he has apologised for what he did.

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[5d ago](#)[13.11](#)

**Nadia Whittome** (Lab) asks Johnson if he agrees that comparing his fine to a parking ticket was insulting.

**Johnson** says he is in no way minimising the importance of the fine.

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## Conservatives

# Partygate penalties ‘like parking fines’, says cabinet minister

Brandon Lewis defends colleagues as Boris Johnson prepares to face MPs

- [Today's politics news – live updates](#)



Brandon Lewis (right) pictured with the prime minister during a visit to Belfast in 2020. Photograph: Brian Lawless/PA

*[Geneva Abdul](#) and [Aubrey Allegretti](#)*

Tue 19 Apr 2022 08.57 EDTFirst published on Tue 19 Apr 2022 05.14 EDT

A cabinet minister has defended [Boris Johnson](#) and Rishi Sunak over their Partygate penalties, equating them to fines issued to speeding motorists, as the prime minister prepares to argue he did not mislead parliament.

When asked if lawmakers could be lawbreakers, the Northern Ireland secretary, Brandon Lewis, told Sky News on Tuesday morning: “I think we do see consistently, whether it is through parking fines or speeding fines, ministers of both parties over the years have been in that position.

“We’ve had prime ministers in the past who have received penalty notices, from what I can see, and also frontbench ministers.

“I saw there was a parking notice that Tony Blair had once. We’ve seen frontbench Labour ministers [be fined] and, let’s be frank, government ministers as well.”

He added: “You’ve asked me, can someone who sets the laws and the rules, can they also be someone who breaks the rules? That clearly has happened with a number of ministers over the years.”

Later on BBC Radio 4, Lewis clarified that he was not trying to equate a speeding ticket with the “sacrifices people made through Covid”, but added: “A minister or a parliamentarian getting a fixed-penalty notice, accepting that, acknowledging that, and apologising for that, is the right way to handle it.”

Facing claims that the prime minister deliberately misled MPs over his knowledge of a Downing Street party, Lewis said Johnson’s apology did not mean that what he had earlier told parliament was not correct.

On Sky News earlier, asked when Johnson came to the view he’d broken the law, Lewis said it was “when the police had issued a fine”.

Johnson is expected to use this defence as he faces MPs for the first time since he received a fixed-penalty notice for breaking his own Covid laws by attending a No 10 lockdown party for his birthday. He is expected to make a “full-throated apology” in the Commons on Tuesday, according to PA News agency.

However, Johnson, thought to be the first sitting prime minister to be criminally sanctioned, is expected to stop short of addressing the Partygate

allegations. He will call for a renewed focus on the Ukraine crisis, and the government's controversial policy to [send asylum seekers to Rwanda](#).

Downing Street later refused several times to back Lewis's comparison of the Partygate fines to fixed penalty notices issued to motorists for speeding.

Boris Johnson's spokesperson said he had "talked about understanding the strength of feeling about this issue, which is why he has apologised and fully respects the outcome of the police investigation".

He did not dispute briefings over the weekend saying the prime minister thought he had done nothing wrong, but said Johnson had made clear that "many will feel that he fell short" of the rules.

After the Conservative MP Michael Fabricant accused many teachers and hospital workers of having after-work drinks, too, Johnson's spokesperson could not point to any evidence of that happening.

"I can't speak to what may or may not have happened in other workplaces where people are required to be in work," he added.

If Johnson is fined again by police, No 10 confirmed he would say so publicly.

Lewis talked down any prospect of a leadership challenge against Johnson, saying the prime minister was focused on "how we move our country forward" and getting the "big calls right" – pointing to Brexit, Covid, the war in Ukraine and the cost of living crisis.

While Johnson [hopes to ride out the storm](#), the full Whitehall report into Partygate by Sue Gray is yet to be published, and police are still investigating up to six further gatherings where Johnson is said to have been present.

In the Commons, opposition MPs will question why the prime minister insisted repeatedly that no rules had been broken.

Emily Thornberry, the shadow attorney general, told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: "We're not going to get the result we should get unless the

prime minister looks into his own conscience and decides he should do the right thing.”

She added: “We’re not going to get that because the PM doesn’t tell the truth.”

While Thornberry said Johnson would get “a good reception” for his actions on the Ukraine crisis, she said he was expected not only to give “another weak apology” but accept he lied to parliament and explain how he “squares that” with his own ministerial code.

Opposition parties are pushing for the Speaker, Lindsay Hoyle, to allow a vote on a debate about whether the prime minister should be held in contempt of parliament, potentially launching an investigation into whether the Commons was misled.

Anything that requires a vote, however, is likely to fail given the Tories’ large majority.

On Saturday, Conservative MPs across the country said they believed traditional supporters were abandoning them after the prime minister’s penalty. The former immigration minister Caroline Nokes wrote in the Observer that she was sticking with her decision to submit a letter of no confidence in Johnson.

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/apr/19/partygate-penalties-like-parking-fines-says-cabinet-minister>

## Cost of living crisis

# Labour says it will insulate 2m houses in first year to cut bills

Ed Miliband says move will ease energy price crisis and reduce dependence on Russian gas

- [Where Britain's journey to insulation went wrong](#)



Sustainable loft insulation is installed in a loft in Kirklees, England.  
Photograph: Andrew Aitchison/Alamy

*[Rob Davies](#)*

*[@ByRobDavies](#)*

Tue 19 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 19 Apr 2022 04.33 EDT

Labour has said it would insulate 2m houses within a year to slash bills and reduce reliance on Russian gas, accusing Boris Johnson of a “shameful” failure to stop Britain’s homes leaking heat.

The government put [major nuclear](#) and offshore wind projects at the heart of its [energy security strategy](#) announced earlier this month, but faced criticism for failing to include any new measures on insulation despite the UK having some of the draughtiest housing in Europe.

The shadow energy secretary, [Ed Miliband](#), said that, if elected, Labour would aim for 2m household upgrades in the first year of a decade-long £60bn scheme that could save households £400 on bills annually.

“As families face the steepest rise in energy bills on record, it is shameful that Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak are refusing to take the action needed to help them,” he said.

Miliband said one reason for sky-high bills was “12 years of failure” to back energy efficiency upgrades, which have dwindled from nearly 2.5m a year to a tenth of that, after funding cuts that followed David Cameron’s 2013 pledge to [“cut the green crap”](#).

“Insulating as many homes as possible to cut bills, protect our pensioners, and reduce our dependence on Russian gas must now be an urgent priority,” said Miliband, adding that Labour would make energy efficiency a “national mission”.

He said this could cut average bills, which are on track to soar to more than £2,500 later this year, by up to £400, as well as eliminating Russian gas imports and supporting jobs.

“If this government were serious about cutting people’s bills, it could start right now, insulating 2m homes this year,” he said. “Anything less will damage our energy security and leave families to pay the cost.”

The chief executive of the UK’s second largest energy supplier, E.ON, has argued that the failure to back insulation projects “condemns thousands more customers to living in cold and draughty homes, wasting energy and paying more than they need to for their heating”.

Meanwhile, Italy has [already spend £17.5bn on a 110% tax credit](#) for people who install insulation systems, heat pumps and solar panels, or replace an

old boiler or undertake works that reduce the risk of damage from seismic activity.

A government spokesperson said: “We recognise the pressures people are facing with the cost of living, which is exactly why we have set out a generous £22bn package of support, and the energy price cap continues to insulate millions of customers from volatile global gas prices.

“We have an excellent record on insulation, with the energy company obligation alone delivering around 3.4m measures in 2.4m homes since 2013.

“We are building on that record by already investing over £6.6bn to decarbonise homes and buildings, and bringing in higher minimum performance standards to ensure all homes meet EPC band C by 2035.”

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/apr/19/labour-says-it-will-insulate-2m-houses-in-first-year-to-cut-bills>

## [Environment](#)

# Where Britain's journey to insulation went wrong

Conservative governments have left the UK's problem with leaky homes unresolved

- [Labour says it will insulate 2m houses in first year](#)



Thermal image of residential buildings shows the energy wasted due to lack of insulation. Photograph: ivansmuk/Getty Images/iStockphoto

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Christmas 2015 was a miserable one for the 1,000 employees of Leicester-based Mark Group who had lost their jobs with the energy efficiency company just weeks before.

The business, named Britain's fastest-growing in a prestigious list published just two years earlier, had become a casualty of then prime minister David Cameron's environmental flip-flopping, which saw him oscillate from [hugging a husky](#) to issuing a pledge to [“cut the green crap”](#).

A wave of state-funded schemes helping homeowners to patch up draughty homes had been replaced in 2013 with the deeply flawed green deal, which was [eventually killed off in summer 2015](#).

Companies in the sector shrank or folded in the face of a sudden dearth of customers able to afford improvements. The annual number of installations of cavity wall and loft insulations has fallen from more than 2m to barely a tenth of that today.

“Helping people [laid-off employees] carry personal belongings to their cars brings it home to you,” says Mark Group’s chief commercial officer Bill Rumble. “You’re not sure what to say when they close the boot.”

“It’s not rocket science,” says David Adams, of the UK Green Building Council, who witnessed the insulation industry’s rapid decay.

“If the market reduces by three-quarters, you have to take three-quarters of your capacity out. Some will close and to a significant extent they have not rehired because activity has remained low since.”

### [Installed insulation line chart](#)

Boris Johnson has fared little better than Cameron. His Green Homes Grant for England was introduced in summer 2020 only to be axed six months later. It was [branded a “slam dunk fail”](#).

Meanwhile, upgrades made under the [Energy](#) Companies Obligation system have risen and fallen as short-term schemes ended, never fuelling a return to the pre-2013 glory days.

The UK’s piecemeal attitude to patching up its energy inefficient homes – [among the leakiest in Europe](#) – is back in the spotlight after the

government's [energy security strategy](#), published earlier this month, was criticised for failing to include any new measures on insulation.

The government has said it wants as many homes as possible to be upgraded from energy efficiency band D to C by 2035 but Adams does not see where that shift will come from. "There are no policies for delivering it," he says. "It's simply words."

Meanwhile, the Italian government is effectively paying its citizens to upgrade their homes, offering 110% on the cost of installing insulation systems, heat pumps and solar panels or replacing an old boiler. It has cost about £17.5bn so far.

Labour has criticised the lack of action on the issue as "shameful" and has offered its own pledge, costed at £60bn over 10 years, to fund the upgrade of 2m homes in the first year.

That is double the rate that even the insulation-friendly Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit (ECIU) thinktank has proposed, but Labour insists it can be done with sufficient investment.

Dr Simon Cran-McGreehin, of the ECIU, anticipates significant challenges, not least reanimating an industry that was badly beaten down a decade ago and has had only scraps to feed off.

"The industry is severely jaded and wounded from all the changes," he says. "The rug was pulled out in 2013 and they laid off thousands of people."

"The industry made an effort for no real return. So getting them to upsize now would need good long-term commitment and a programme that was really viable."

You cannot get the staff these days either, according to Prof Sir Jim McDonald, president of the Royal Academy of Engineering.

He estimates that 30,000 new skilled workers would be required to retrofit buildings, while 60,000 technicians would have to be on hand to go one step

further and install energy efficient heating systems in homes, offices and factories, with intensive training required.

“The ability to fill vacancies in these highly technical fields is restricted by the UK’s stagnating levels of engineering skills over the past decade,” he says.

Adams thinks the industry can rise to the challenge but that “fatigue” after years of broken promises means it could only do so in response to a bold and ambitious long-term strategy.

“What we don’t need is a one or two-year programme again. They’re incredibly inefficient. You’ve got to hire and train people, buy loads of kit and then you end up having to lay them off again.”

It is hard to see where the insulation revolution is coming from. The only new measure on the table is a VAT cut – from 5% to 0% – on installing solar panels and energy efficiency materials, a welcome but small-scale measure announced in Rishi Sunak’s spring statement rather than the energy strategy.

That, says James Higgins, of the National Insulation Association, is “not a gamechanger”. The NIA has been supportive of government measures that do exist for funding home upgrades, particularly for the poorest households, but envisages more ambitious thinking.

The big challenge, says Higgins, is not simply returning to the high levels of cavity wall and loft insulation that were going on prior to Cameron’s 2013 U-turn, but the 9m homes that could benefit from more expensive solid wall insulation.

“What we need as a country is to look at homes in the round and say what do they need to be compatible with net zero.

“It’s insulation but not just walls; there’s roof space, underfloor, draft exclusion, doors and windows. The whole house retrofit is the future but it’s a massive job.”

A chart produced by parliament’s climate change committee illustrates the eye-watering costs involved in implementing the most effective measures.

Nearly 11m homes are suitable for loft insulation, it says, at a cost of between £440 and £740 each. That's £8bn for a 4% reduction in heat demand for a semi-detached home. An 18% reduction could be achieved with external wall insulation but that would cost up to £8,590 per home, or nearly £65bn.

With relations between [Sunak and the business and energy minister, Kwasi Kwarteng](#), strained, it is hard to envisage the Treasury opening the purse strings for the most ambitious projects, even spread over a decade.

Insulation advocates think there are mechanisms that could complement direct government support, harnessing market forces to incentivise homeowners to spend their own money.

Ideas include council tax discounts for people who upgrade the energy efficiency of their home, or a sliding scale of stamp duty, with leaky homes taxed more highly but a rebate available for homeowners who make improvements within two years of buying.

“It means there’s no free money,” says Adams. “But it does encourage you to think about what needs to be done.”

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/apr/19/where-britains-journey-to-insulation-went-wrong>

## 2022.04.19 - Spotlight

- ['I was in front of an audience but all I could think was, I could be dying' Robert Lindsay on acting, ageing – and surviving cancer](#)
- [From prorogation to partygate 1,000 days of Boris Johnson as PM](#)
- [Sea-farmed supercrop How seaweed could transform the way we live](#)
- ['Like using chopsticks to eat steak' My life in Shanghai's never-ending zero-Covid lockdown](#)

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Interview

## **‘I was in front of an audience but all I could think was, I could be dying’: Robert Lindsay on acting, ageing – and surviving cancer**

[Zoe Williams](#)



‘Life is full of mistakes ... Robert Lindsay at Hampstead Theatre, London.  
Photograph: Linda Nylind/The Guardian

The actor, who has starred in everything from sitcoms to Shakespeare, talks about his family rows over Brexit, having his phone hacked – and why he did not want to be like Laurence Olivier



[@zoesqwilliams](#)

Tue 19 Apr 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Wed 20 Apr 2022 10.36 EDT

Robert Lindsay was sitting on the set of *The Fever Syndrome* at London’s Hampstead theatre, having his photo taken. Instantly recognisable everywhere since his stupidly handsome days – playing the eponymous Marxist in the BBC’s sitcom *Citizen Smith* from 1977 to 1980 – his face nevertheless, at 72, has an unexpected quality. It’s craggier than you remember, and much more relaxed than you’d expect. Content, even.

*The Fever Syndrome* is a family drama set in New York, where the adult children of an eminent IVF scientist are congregating in his creaky brownstone to have a number of things out. It’s a powerful, moving work – “in the audience, every night, we’ve had people sobbing” – of which he is passionately proud and a little defensive. “I haven’t read the reviews, but I know from what friends have been saying that the actors have come out of it

really, really well, but critics have [had a go at the play](#). I think they're wrong. It's remarkable what [Alexis Zegerman] has written." This is a habit, and an endearing one – mention his stunningly malevolent and charismatic performance in GBH in 1991, and it's, "Oh, that was all Alan Bleasdale". He's equally generous about his co-stars: I now know much more about how great Emma Thompson was, in Me and My Girl (a West End hit in 1985, which transferred to Broadway, and made Lindsay's name there), or what Zoë Wanamaker was like in the long-running BBC sitcom My Family, than about any plaudits or career-defining moments they delivered for Lindsay.



Lindsay in Citizen Smith. Photograph: Moviestore Collection Ltd/Alamy

"I love this profession," he says, "I love what I do. I'm passionate about it." He sounds a bit as if he's sitting in front of a parole board – his crime, not being luvvie-enough. "But I do feel quite cavalier about my career. I don't get nervous. Because it doesn't matter. But it does. But it doesn't." He loves a line AA Gill wrote about him in the early 00s, when reviewing an eerie detective show called Jericho. "He said, 'he's very versatile, he wears his career like a used overcoat'."

Lindsay was born in Ilkeston, Derbyshire, in 1949, his father a carpenter, his mother a cleaner, and went to a rough school where "the uniform was a leather jacket and a bicycle chain". When he said he wanted to be an actor –

inspired by a theatre group with a free-thinking teacher – the careers adviser said, “‘What, you want to wear tights? Have you considered a career in hairdressing?’ I wanted to punch him so badly,” he remembers. “That’s no disrespect to hairdressers. Just how the theatre was regarded, so effeminate.” But he got in to Rada – “I was euphoric. My mother was beside herself. I mean, running around the neighbours, knocking on all the doors. It was just lovely. I remember that day vividly. My mum and dad, so proud.”

My voice coach said, ‘We’re just trying to give you another depth – because there aren’t many DH Lawrence plays

Rada is where he learned received pronunciation, how to sound a lot less Derbyshire, so that when he went home his friends looked at him as if he was from outer space. “But I just wanted to act. My voice coach said, ‘Robert, we’re not trying to take you away from yourself. We’re just trying to give you another depth. Because there aren’t many DH Lawrence plays. I know, deep down, you have the facility to be anything. You have all the attributes of a great actor. And you have to stay true to that.’ So she made me very proud of the fact I was changing.”

Still, he always felt conflicted about shedding his authentic voice, ambivalent about where the line was between training oneself to take on many guises and being left with no self to disguise. He distils all that into an anecdote: a meeting between John Lennon and Laurence Olivier sounds a bit name-droppy, but isn’t, because Lindsay wasn’t there. “These were my two heroes – my working-class hero and my theatrical hero. They met at the Savoy, and Lennon hated Olivier. He said, ‘This fucking guy doesn’t know who he is.’ And when I worked with Laurence [in Granada’s King Lear, in 1983, with Olivier as Lear and Lindsay as Edmund], I remember he was like an amoeba. He’d change with you and with the moment. That worried me later in life. I started to reevaluate, and I think that’s why I’ve got quite political, and started to relate to where I come from.”



‘He wears his career like a used overcoat’ ... AA Gill on Robert Lindsay (*left*) in *Jericho*. Photograph: ITV/Rex/Shutterstock

Straight out of drama school, what gave his career its moorings was this sense that if versatility was his prize for giving up his roots, he had damn well better use it. This philosophy has given the world an array of incredibly different performances. There is the most wholesome musical theatre – *Me and My Girl*, as Fagin in *Oliver* in 1997, for which he won an Olivier award, this year’s *Anything Goes*, for which he was nominated for an Olivier. Then a fair amount of Shakespeare on stage and screen (“creaky floorboard Shakespeares, we used to call it,” he says of the BBC season in the early 80s). But also the much darker performances, in (Channel 4) dramas including *GBH* and *Jake’s Progress*, both written by Bleasdale. And finally the classic sitcoms such as *My Family* and *Citizen Smith*, the latter giving him his first taste of fame as a household-name, which he absolutely hated.



Lindsay (*centre*) in Anything Goes at the Barbican, London. Photograph: Tristram Kenton/The Guardian

Just about the only thing missing on his CV is a prolonged stretch in Hollywood, though he did play the title role in the niche musical, Bert Rigby, You're a Fool, and [fell out with Harvey Weinstein](#) during the making of Strike It Rich. But, what really did for him in LA was that he hated it there. It came to a head in the early 90s, when he was driving around in his Starsky & Hutch car. He was on his way to see Helen Mirren, with whom he'd worked in 1982, on Cymbeline: "We had that wonderful bedroom scene, when Iachimo has to find her mole. I called my dogIachimo, funnily enough. What a stupid thing to call a dog." Elgar's Nimrod came on the radio, and he realised how homesick he was; how little he wanted to do the project he was about to start. Mirren tried to persuade him that everyone does a bad film sometimes, but he says: "The story I love more than anything is Jack Lemmon and Walter Matthau, Jack's in this really, really awful film. And they're at the screening at Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer, sitting there watching it. Walter, sitting behind him says, 'Jack, can you get out of this now?'"

It is rare that you can reasonably ask the question of Lindsay: "How much does this character mirror your own life?" But The Fever Syndrome is an exception. This play is full of peculiar coincidences and resonances: one of

the other actors has a child with sudden fevers, as does the grandchild in the play – which gives the play its name, and ‘I have a son with terrible OCD, which he’s dealing with. We all have our own particular problems with our children, everyone does. As the play says, ‘There’s no perfect child’.”



Lindsay with Emma Thompson in *Me and My Girl* at the Adelphi theatre, London. Photograph: Donald Cooper/Alamy

Also, the actor playing Lindsay’s daughter bears a resemblance to his actual daughter, and his family composition – a daughter from his relationship with actor Diana Weston, two sons from his second marriage – is the same as his character’s. As he delves into where reality and fiction diverge, it’s like following him on a deep sea dive, moments of obscurity, reflection, clarity, sudden colourful tangents, all delivered in a voice so rich and compelling that every detail sounds vital. So, this irascible patriarch he’s playing “was always too self-obsessed to bring his kids up the way he should have, and I think my self-obsession stopped when I had kids. Before I had children, I was going to the top, wherever that means. I was driven.” In the early days, the attention turned his head – he was getting these incredible reviews, he was the new Laurence Olivier, the new Gene Kelly, the new Fred Astaire. “I’d started believing all that rubbish. That single-mindedness broke up my first marriage [which was to actor Cheryl Hall; they divorced in 1980]. I

haven't had therapy, so I sometimes sound a little bit confused." So he has never once set foot in a therapist's office? Wait, bookmark that for a minute.



Lindsay with Zoë Wanamaker (*centre*) in *My Family*. Photograph: Neil Genowner/DTL

There was no acrimony in his blended family – Weston is godmother to one of his sons with his second wife, the actor and dancer Rosemarie Ford, and all his kids get on very well – "They're brothers and sister, there is no 'step'" – but, as he describes this harmonious, un-stagey life, the memory of that separation, in the mid-90s, intrudes. "I did go to see a therapist once. When I broke up with my ex-partner, I was so destroyed. Where I come from, how I was brought up, you just did not break up when you have children. I was in a shocking state. I was filming Alan Bleasdale's *Jake's Progress* and the press were horrendous. They were following my daughter to school. The Daily Mail bribed a lovely guy who used to clean my car for me ... It was just dreadful. And then I found out my phone was hacked." He never followed that up, but it made sense of why photographers would be on his doorstep when he tried to patch things up with Weston, or at the train station when he went to meet Ford. "As the years go by, I wish in many ways I had done something. But I had my own problems to deal with, and I think we dealt with them brilliantly. My ex, my wife, my kids, we've all handled it brilliantly."

Comedy's the worst thing when you're having emotional problems

As we talk about his character's emotional tempo and his top note of grumpiness, Lindsay slides, again, from self-deprecating domestic observation into something much more searching. "I've got more irascible as I've got older, as my sons and my daughter will all point out. When they saw the play, they all said, 'It's not much of a stretch for you dad'. Parkinson's disease is making this character very angry, and I know what that is, because I was diagnosed with prostate cancer 11 years ago. I was monitored, and it came to the point where it was getting a little near to the periphery, and they can't help you after that. So my wife and I had to make a decision and I had it removed." He dates each point of the disease from what he was filming or starring in when he got bad news. "Comedy's the worst thing when you're having emotional problems."

He was sitting in makeup with Zoe Wanamaker, his screen wife on *My Family*, when he was first diagnosed. "She said, 'Right, OK, let's go on and be funny, and then we can talk about it.' I can't remember the recording at all. It was in front of a studio audience – 500, 600 people, cameras, lines, bang, bang, bang. All I could think was, I could be dying." He was doing a charity performance for the Queen with Emma Thompson, the night before he had his prostatectomy, and he diverts on to what a great friend she is, before concluding: "What I'm trying to say is, I think my irascibility came when that was taken away. I've had a very healthy and sexual life. I'm very, very happy. And that whole period when it's removed is awful."



Lindsay in *The Fever Syndrome* at Hampstead Theatre, London.  
Photograph: Ellie Kurttz

This was all just before Covid, which he caught last month, and “I panicked,” he says, “because my brother nearly died at the very start; he was really sick”. His brother is a carpenter, like their dad, and they have a warm relationship, with a bit of straight-talking and side, as they did with their dad. He remembers his parents coming to the press night of *Me and My Girl*, at the Adelphi in 1985. “As I went forward for the curtain call, the whole theatre stood up. And I thought, ‘Wow, this is it!’ And I looked down and the only person sitting down was my dad. Afterwards, I said, ‘Dad, I got a standing ovation. You were just sitting there!’ He said, ‘I paid for the seat, I’m sitting in it.’ But he didn’t pay for it, actually!”

I’m going to enjoy my age in this profession. How women cope with it, I’ll never know

Recently, in life as well as on Twitter, Lindsay has become much more open about his politics – he has always described himself as a socialist, but has recently put more flesh on those bones: he is an environmentalist, a fierce decrier of dishonesty in government, and passionately anti-Brexit. “People have said to me, ‘Why don’t you go into politics?’ But I think I probably

care too much.” He and his brother had such a bad argument over Brexit that, “my son filmed it,” he said, “because we were almost getting to blows.” It’s hard to see how filming it would have helped. “Maybe he just wanted to put it on YouTube.”

“I’ve decided now,” he concludes, “I’m going to enjoy my age in this profession. I’m gonna celebrate my age and not get fucked up by it. How women cope with it, I’ll never know.” He switches back into character to quote a wry, elegant line from *The Fever Syndrome*, peculiarly fitting to his mood of rueful contentment: “I made mistakes. Yeah. Life is full of mistakes. Life itself is a mistake. One genetic mutation after another.”

*The Fever Syndrome* is at Hampstead theatre, London, until 30 April. Tickets available via [hampsteadtheatre.com](https://www.hampsteadtheatre.com)

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**Boris Johnson**

## **From prorogation to partygate: 1,000 days of Boris Johnson as PM**

The UK prime minister leaves a trail of scandals, U-turns and law-breaking as he reaches his milestone

- [\*\*All the day's politics news – as it happens\*\*](#)



Boris Johnson speaks outside No 10 on 24 July 24, 2019, the first day of his premiership. Photograph: Frank Augstein/AP

*[Matthew Weaver](#) and [Tobi Thomas](#)*

Tue 19 Apr 2022 01.30 EDTFirst published on Tue 19 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT

Tuesday marks 1,000 days since Boris Johnson first began working in Downing Street on 24 July 2019. When he came to power, many warned that UK was in for a bumpy ride. He promised to defy the “[the doubters, the](#)

[doomsters and the gloomsters](#)”, but since then his premiership has exceeded even the gloomiest, most doom-laden fears of his doubters and detractors.

Here is a list of some of the most notable scandals, U-turns and examples of law breaking.

## August 2019

### Unlawfully proroguing parliament



A protester dressed as Boris Johnson outside the supreme court on 24 September 2019. Photograph: Hollie Adams/Getty Images

The supreme court unanimously ruled that Johnson's decision to [prorogue parliament at the height of Brexit crisis was unlawful](#). In a devastating judgment, Lady Hale, the president of the court, said the move was “unlawful, void and of no effect”.

## 3 September 2019

### Purge of senior Tory MPs



Dominic Grieve speaks at PMQs on the day Johnson removed the whip from him. Photograph: Jessica Taylor/UK Parliament/EPA

Johnson [removed the whip from 21 senior Tories](#) who defied the government by voting to delay Brexit to prevent the UK leaving the EU without a deal. The prime minister's chief adviser, Dominic Cummings, who was believed to be behind the move, was quoted as saying: "When are you fucking MPs going to realise we are leaving on 31 October? We are going to purge you."

## 22 September 2019

**Former lover Jennifer Arcuri awarded cash and access**



Boris Johnson, with Jennifer Arcuri, guest speaking at the Innotech Summit in July 2013. Photograph: Innotech Network/YouTube

The Sunday Times revealed that US business woman Jennifer Arcuri was [given tens of thousands of pounds in public funds](#) and access to overseas trade missions led by Johnson during his time as mayor of London. Johnson made no mention of Arcuri in his lists of interests as mayor, and claimed there was no interest to declare. But Arcuri later alleged that she had an affair with Johnson.

He avoided a criminal investigation into the funds and favours granted to Arcuri, but the [Independent Office for Police Conduct](#) found evidence that officials were influenced by the close relationship between the pair. The [IOPC investigations](#) are ongoing and Johnson has denied misconduct in public office.

## 5 November 2019

### **Attempting to use public money to attack Labour**

Johnson's administration was blocked from attempting to [use the civil service to rubbish Labour's spending plans](#) before the December 2019 election. The permanent secretary, Mark Sedwill, ruled that the publication of Treasury analysis before the 12 December poll would be improper.

## 11 December 2019

### Hiding in a fridge

Johnson was caught hiding in a fridge in Pudsey, West Yorkshire, to avoid being interviewed by ITV's Piers Morgan on the eve of the election. He also refused to be interviewed by the BBC's Andrew Neil ahead of the election.

## 31 January 2020

### Leaving Brexit unresolved

As promised in the election the UK formally left the EU on 31 January. But Brexit is far from done. Unresolved rows rumble on over UK imports, fishing, and the Northern Ireland border.

## March 2020

### Fatally slow response to Covid

Medical experts believe that 20,000 deaths from Covid could have avoided if Johnson had not delayed the decision to introduce the first lockdown. The prime minister skipped the first five Cobra meetings about the virus and boasted of shaking hands with medical staff on his first hospital visit to a Covid ward.

## May 2020

### Backs Cummings over lockdown breaches



Dominic Cummings speaks as he delivers a statement with journalists sat at a distance in the Rose Garden at 10 Downing Street on 25 May 2020.  
Photograph: Jonathan Brady/AFP/Getty Images

The Guardian and the Daily Mirror reveal that [Dominic Cummings breached lockdown rules by travelling to Durham](#) and [Barnard Castle](#) with his family after they contracted Covid. The revelations prompt widespread anger, including among dozens of Tory MPs, and the first accusation that the government is operating by different rules from the rest of the country.

## **Spring and summer 2020**

### **‘Chumocracy’ Covid contracts**



Baroness Dido Harding, executive chairwoman of NHS Test and Trace, and Boris Johnson on 17 July. Photograph: Andrew Parsons/10 Downing Street/Crown Copyright/PA

Appointments and millions of pounds worth of PPE and Covid-related contracts were [awarded to individuals and companies with links to the Conservative party](#). The High Court later ruled that the [VIP lane for awarding PPE contracts was illegal](#). The government insisted that circumventing the usual procurement rules allowed it to act quickly in national emergency.

## 16 June 2020

### **U-turn on school meal vouchers**

Johnson's government had refused to provide £15 food vouchers for some of England's poorest families, but was forced into a [humiliating U-turn after a campaign launched by the footballer Marcus Rashford](#).



A banner in Wythenshawe, where Marcus Rashford grew up. Photograph: Molly Darlington/Reuters

## Summer 2020

### Test-and-trace failures

Johnson promised a “world beating” test-and-trace system for tackling coronavirus in England. Instead the £12bn scheme was dogged by [delays](#), [IT problems](#), [expensive contracts](#) and proved only to have a “[marginal impact](#)”.

## 6 August 2020

### Planning reform prompts Tory revolt



Boris Johnson visits a construction site, August 2020. Photograph: WPA/Getty Images

Johnson's government proposes [tearing up the planning system](#) by tipping the balance of power in favour of developers and away from local objectors. The plans cause [outrage in the Tory heartlands](#), and were seen as the main cause of the loss of the previously safe [Tory seat in the Chesham and Amersham byelection](#) 10 months later.

## 17 August 2020

### Exams U-turn

In a humiliating change of policy the UK government [abandoned a controversial computer modelling system](#) for assessing the exam grades after thousands of stories of unfairly awarded grades.

Quick Guide

### How ministers defended the A-level results system

Show

**Gavin Williamson, 12 August, to ITV**

“[I have] every confidence that the system we have put in place is a robust system, a system that’s fair”

### **Gavin Williamson, 12 August, to the BBC**

“The system, for the overwhelming majority of young people, is going to deliver credible, strong results. It’s a robust system, it’s a fair system, it’s making sure that young people get the grades that they’ve worked so hard towards”

### **Nick Gibb, 12 August, to Sky News**

“Most young people … will get the grade that the teacher sent in to the exam board that they thought they would get.”

### **Gavin Williamson, 13 August, to Sky News**

Q) “Can you give a cast-iron guarantee that you will not be forced into the embarrassing U-turn that John Swinney and Nicola Sturgeon were in Scotland?”

A) "Absolutely"

### **Boris Johnson, 13 August, to reporters in Northern Ireland**

“Let’s be in no doubt about it, the exam results that we’ve got today are robust. They’re good, they’re dependable for employers. It’s very important that for years to come people should be able to look at these grades and think these are robust, these are dependable”

### **Gavin Williamson, 15 August, interview to the Times**

“This is it… No U-turn, no change… [In Scotland] you’ve got a system where there aren’t any controls, you’ve got rampant grade inflation. There’s been no checks and balances in that system; it degrades every single grade as a result and in-baked unfairness”

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

## 8 September 2020

### Attempting to break international law

The Northern Ireland secretary, Brandon Lewis, admits that plans to reinterpret the [Brexit arrangements for Northern Ireland will break international law](#) “in a very specific and limited way”. The move was eventually abandoned after the [resignation of the UK’s top legal civil servant](#), Jonathan Jones, and a mutiny in the House of Lords by a gang of former Tory party leaders.

## October 2020

### Evgeny Lebedev given peerage despite security concerns



Johnson with Evgeny Lebedev and his sister Rachel Johnson in November 2012. Photograph: Alan Davidson/Rex/Shutterstock

Johnson gives a [peerage to the Russian tycoon Evgeny Lebedev](#) despite the concerns of the security services. Johnson was warned that Lebedev could be a potential security risk because his father, Alexander Lebedev, was once a KGB spy. The media owner [dismissed the concerns as farcical](#).

## October 2020

### ‘Get Covid live longer’

Johnson was holding out against lockdown measures and appear to suggest he was unconcerned by the deaths of people in their 80s, according to WhatsApp messaged released by his former aide Cummings. A message quoted the prime minister as saying: “I must say I have been slightly rocked by some of the data on Covid fatalities. The median age is 82 – 81 for men, 85 for women. That is above life expectancy. So get Covid and live longer.”

## November 2020

### ‘Let the bodies pile high’



A protester holds cover page of the British newspaper Daily Mail outside the Cabinet Office, April 2021. Photograph: Tayfun Salcı/Zuma Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

After he left No 10, Cummings alleged that Johnson resisted advice to introduce a second lockdown with the words: “no more fucking lockdowns – let the bodies pile high in their thousands”. Despite corroboration from several other sources, Downing Street denied Johnson uttered those words.

## 8 November 2020

### **Second U-turn child food poverty**

After weeks resisting calls to extend free school meals to children from low-income families during school holidays in England, the government [performed another screeching U-turn](#).

## 20 November 2020

### **Johnson's ethics adviser quits in protest**

Johnson's ethics adviser, Sir Alex Allan, resigned after the prime minister [ripped up the rulebook by refusing to sack Priti Patel](#) despite a formal investigation finding evidence that she bullied civil servants.

## 19 December 2020

### **'Cancel Christmas'**



Boris Johnson on the television during a media briefing, 19 December 2020.  
Photograph: Victoria Jones/PA

Johnson is accused of cancelling Christmas after suddenly [abandoning plans to avoid tight Covid restrictions](#) over the festive period. The U-turn prompts

an immediate backlash from lockdown sceptic backbenchers.

## 3 March 2021

### ‘Pork barrel’ spending

The government is accused of “[pork barrel politics](#)” after towns fund cash is awarded almost exclusively to Tory supporting areas. All but six of the 45 towns granted cash in the first tranche of the scheme were represented by Conservative MPs.

## 25 June 2021

### ‘Matter closed’ after Hancock apologises for kissing an aide



Matt Hancock with adviser Gina Coladangelo. Photograph: Yui Mok/PA

Johnson initially [resisted calls to sack his health secretary Matt Hancock](#) after he was caught on camera kissing his aide Gina Coladangelo in breach of social distancing rules. After Hancock apologies, Downing Street said it considered the “matter closed”. But a day later, after mounting anger, Johnson dismissed Hancock and tried to claim credit for acting decisively.

## 12 July 2021

## **Manifesto busting cut to foreign aid**

Johnson's [manifesto pledge to keep foreign aid at 0.7% of national income is scrapped](#) despite opposition from senior government backbenchers.

## **18 July 2021**

### **'Pilot scheme' to dodge self isolation**



Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak. Photograph: Jonathan Brady/PA

[Johnson and Rishi Sunak initially tried to avoid the need to self-isolate](#) after they were pinged when a colleague contracted Covid. They said they were participating in a trial scheme to allow them to continue to work if they had daily tests. They backed down within three hours after widespread criticism.

## **3 August 2021**

### **Travel restrictions ditched after chaos**

Johnson [ditches plans for tougher quarantine restrictions](#) for some holidaymakers after days of travel chaos. A cabinet revolt and a backlash from the travel industry forced the abandonment of planned amber watchlist

to warn travellers which countries were at risk of turning red because of high Covid infection rates.

## August 2021

### Johnson ‘authorised’ rescue of pets from Kabul



Boris Johnson meets with military personnel and Marlow, an army detection dog who worked in Afghanistan searching for IEDs, in September 2021. Photograph: Dan Kitwood/Getty Images

Two foreign office whistleblowers [alleged Johnson ordered the prioritisation of the Nowzad animal charity](#) based in Afghanistan during the evacuation of Kabul. Johnson has denied that he had anything to do with the decision. Josie Stewart, who worked in the Foreign Office for seven years, suggested senior civil servants in the department had lied to cover up the embarrassing episode.

## 7 September 2021

### Pensions triple lock abandoned

The government [ditches its manifesto promise of a pensions triple lock](#), by

announcing the commitment will be suspended to avoid the government having to hike payments by 8%.

## 8 September 2021

### Manifesto-breaking hike in National Insurance



Boris Johnson speaking after announcing a 1.25% increase in National Insurance. Photograph: UK Parliament/Jessica Taylor/PA

Johnson forces through another manifesto-breaking plan to increase in National Insurance to pay for a £12bn fund for the NHS and social care. He avoids a significant rebellion by springing a vote on MPs with just 24 hours' notice. The increase from 12% to 13.5% was introduced in April 2022, adding to the cost of living crisis.

## 25 September 2021

### Supply crisis prompts emergency visas

Panic buying prompted by a post-Brexit shortage of lorry drivers and farm workers prompts the government to hastily compiled plans to add 5,000 HGV drivers and 5,500 poultry workers to its visa scheme. Later

immigration rules were also relaxed for care workers to fill another chronic workforce gap.

## November 2021

### Paterson lobbying scandal



A poster stuck to a waste bin in Whitchurch, Shropshire protesting against Owen Paterson's involvement in breaching lobbying rules. Photograph: Andrew Fox/The Guardian

Johnson's botched attempt to shield his friend and former minister, Owen Paterson, from suspension for lobbying rule breaches prompts 100 Tory MPs to rebel. The prime minister reversed the plan 24 hours later forcing Paterson to resign and engulfing the government in accusation of sleaze. The Liberal Democrats win the resulting byelection in Paterson's previously safe Tory seat of North Shropshire.

## 22 November 2021

### Peppa Pig speech

Johnson prompts questions about his welfare after delivering a rambling

speech to business leaders in which he lost his place for 20 seconds, [praised Peppa Pig](#), compared himself to Moses and made car noises.

## 9 December 2021

### ‘Misleading’ Geidt over flat makeover

Johnson is accused of misleading his second ethics adviser, Lord Geidt, over the [source of funding](#) for the makeover Downing Street flat. The Electoral Commission fined the Conservative party £17,800. But it also suggested he gave differing accounts to investigators looking into the redecoration.

## January 2022

### Almost £900,000 spent on Northern Ireland bridge plan

The Department for Transport reveals that £896,681 of taxpayers money was spent on a study commissioned by Boris Johnson that found his idea to build a [tunnel between Scotland and Northern Ireland would be too expensive](#). Cummings described the idea as “world’s most stupid tunnel”.

## 12 April 2022

### Johnson and Sunak fined over Partygate



A placard calling for the resignation of the PM outside the entrance to 10 Downing Street, 13 April 2022. Photograph: Tolga Akmen/AFP/Getty Images

Johnson becomes the first sitting prime minister to be criminally sanctioned when he is given a £50 fixed penalty notice for breaking his own Covid laws by attending a party for his birthday in No 10. The chancellor and Carrie Johnson are also fined.

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## **Sea-farmed supercrop: how seaweed could transform the way we live**



Seaweed ecologist Dr Sophie Steinhagen inspects the crop at the seafarm in the Koster archipelago in Sweden.

From high-protein food to plastics and fuel, Swedish scientists are attempting to tap the marine plant's huge potential

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[Richard Orange](#) in Malmö

Tue 19 Apr 2022 02.15 EDT Last modified on Tue 19 Apr 2022 02.16 EDT

“You can just see the buoys of the seafarm,” Dr Sophie Steinhagen yells over the high whine of the boat as it approaches the small islands of Sweden’s Koster archipelago. The engine drops to a sputter, and Steinhagen heaves up a rope to reveal the harvest hanging beneath: strand after strand of sea lettuce, translucent and emerald green.

“This is one individual that we would collect now and keep as a parent, because it’s growing very fast,” she exclaims. In summer, these waters teem with sea kayaks and yachts from neighbouring Norway, but for Steinhagen and the seafarming group at the [Tjärnö Marine Laboratory](#), spring is their peak season.

For one thing, it means less animal and plant life on the seaweed.“When you buy a lettuce, you don’t want to have a caterpillar in there. The same is true for seaweed: you don’t want a crab or snail eggs”. More importantly, spring is also when sea lettuce yields the most protein.

In fact, experts believe that seaweed could be a key crop in the “[protein shift](#)” away from meat. Some of last spring’s harvest here hit about 30% protein, close to the level that would make it compete against the world’s other big protein sources like meat and soya.



Seaweed farming in Sweden could be a vital component of the shift away from eating meat for protein.

Steinhagen also believes passionately that this plant – [long eaten as “green laver” on the coasts of Britain](#) – can be a more sustainable alternative to soya. Sea lettuce doesn’t draw on scarce resources of land and fresh water.

“There is no other option,” she says later, on a bench outside the Tjärnö Marine Laboratory’s greenhouses. “Climate change is affecting most of our crop systems and we are in urgent need of new production. We cannot extend terrestrial farmland – so we need to go into the ocean.”

It’s not just a protein source. As we shift to a [bio-based rather than fossil-fuel-based economy](#), seaweed could provide a lot of the compounds we need.

For example, Ulrica Edlund, Steinhagen’s collaborator at KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, is a professor of polymer science who

has used polysaccharides extracted from seaweed to make plastic films, filaments and other plastic materials. “It’s circular because it provides a route away from fossil-based plastics. It allows you to use biomass that can be produced at a really high rate in the oceans,” Edlund says. “You don’t have to wait 50 years for the forest to grow until you can harvest those polymers.”

New startup packaging companies are using these advances to develop seaweed-based plastics, [such as the UK’s Notpla](#) or the US company [Sway](#), though there are challenges, too: unless you take steps to alter their chemical structure, seaweed plastics absorb rather than repel water, turning them into a formless slime.



Seaweed ecologist Dr Sophie Steinhagen at work in the Koster archipelago.

Seaweed farming is also, outside Asia, in its infancy. But the techniques Steinhagen’s team have helped develop are beginning to be applied more widely. [Nordic Sea Farms](#), a company spun-off from the laboratory, has long been growing sugar kelp, and has seen soaring demand from local restaurants and biomaterials startups. In October, it launched an EU-funded programme to develop commercial sea lettuce cultivation at Otterön, or Otter Island, 20km down the coast towards Gothenburg.

“As far as we are aware, there’s no sea-based cultivation of *Ulva* [sea lettuce] up-and-running on a commercial scale,” says Göran Nylund, a former researcher at the marine laboratory, who co-founded the company. The first seeded ropes – 20km of them – will be set out this autumn, with the first harvest expected next spring.

Seaweed plantations are beginning to pop up all along Europe’s Atlantic and North Sea coasts. There are now at least seven seaweed farming companies in neighbouring Norway. In the Faroe Islands, there is [Ocean Rainforest](#), perhaps Europe’s leading seaweed producer. Others have sprouted in Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, the UK, Ireland, Spain and Portugal. There are even emerging multinationals: Dutch-owned [The Seaweed Company](#) operates farms in Ireland, Morocco and India.

Despite all this, Europe still produces only a tiny fraction of the world’s seaweed: 90% of the estimated [£14bn seaweed market](#) is produced in Asia, where entire bays in China, Indonesia and Japan are taken up by seaweed farms.



Steinhagen inspects the tanks in her “seaweed kindergarten”.

The EU currently produces only a tiny 1,000 tonnes of seaweed a year, against 35m tonnes of global production, although a report by the advisory

firm Systemiq argues that it could potentially hit 8m tonnes a year by the end of this decade.

“First of all, you need to find the water area, and – compared to Asia – that’s pretty complicated,” Nyland says of the barriers. “Another challenge is that we need some technical development. [Asian countries] have been doing this for a long time, but [some] are also low-income countries, so their methodologies are not suitable for us, because our salaries are too high.”

One way to find more sea access is The Seaweed Company’s experiment in growing seaweed between offshore wind turbines in the North Sea. Meanwhile, some companies are developing their own seaweed harvesting machinery to make the job less labour intensive. But there’s still no seaweed equivalent of a combine harvester or tractor you can buy off the shelf.

At Tjärnö, which is part of the University of Gothenburg, Steinhagen is working hard to improve seaweed strains to make them more productive, just as terrestrial crops have been improved over centuries. “We want to find strains which have a high growth rate and simultaneously a high protein content,” she says. “This can be done by genetic selection or strain selection – the usual horticultural methods – but we can also select for different nutrients which could enrich the protein content.”



Steinhagen seeks the holy grail of high-growth, high-protein strains of seaweed.

In the laboratories, she shows her “seaweed kindergarten”: rows of bubbling cylindrical tanks where she breeds new varieties, clones new plants, and seeds plants on rolls of twine which are then wrapped on the ropes and laid out to sea.

“You see that the outer margins are brownish – that’s where they release the swarmers,” she says, showing me a container of sexually mature sea lettuce. “It’s just like sperm: they have flagella, they can move.”

This is only half of the puzzle. In the city of Gothenburg, a team at Chalmers University of Technology is looking at how to most efficiently and economically extract the protein. Prof Ingrid Undeland, the research coordinator for [Blue Food, Sweden's “Centre for Future Seafood”](#), says that seaweed is getting ever more “trendy” but she wants it to escape from high-end New Nordic restaurants and vegan food stores and be sold as a commodified bulk protein powder – like the ones derived from soya, whey or pea that are used to make vegetarian mince.

The new product will, she concedes, have “a little bit more of a marine flavour profile” than the almost tasteless whey and soy protein. “If you want to make a vanilla smoothie that doesn’t taste of anything, that might be challenging,” she says. “But if you want to make a savoury product, with some umami, saltiness and marine flavour, it could be an advantage.”

Unlike soya and pea plants, where protein is concentrated in special bodies in the cells of the bean or pea, seaweed protein is spread much more widely, both in the plants and inside their cells, making the protein harder to reach with the weak alkali used in extraction.

João Trigo is a PhD student in Undeland’s lab, working on improving extraction techniques. At best, he says, he can now extract about 10% of the protein in sea lettuce. Given that dried sea lettuce is at best 30% protein, that means only three grams of protein would come out of 100g of dry sea lettuce.

In his office, he holds up the end result of his labours: a test tube containing a small amount of green crystalline flakes which took a whole sack of sea lettuce to produce. “Let’s say if we start with 10kg of fresh sea lettuce, we might end up with around 40g of dried protein isolate,” he says. “So that tells you that we still have some way to go.”

The solution, he and Edlund agree, might be a biorefinery approach, with the protein removed first, then other useful substances such as thickening agents already used in the food industry, then polysaccharides for plastics. The remainder could then be burned as biofuel.

“It would be a shame to throw this biomass away,” Edlund says.

“There are so many sophisticated molecules in there that nature made, so why not make the most of them?”

Steinhagen is confident that her pilot farm is the start of a new industry. “People always laugh at the person doing new things,” she says. “But look today, we have electricity and we have cars. It takes time.”

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[China](#)

## My life in Shanghai's never-ending zero-Covid lockdown

A resident in the Chinese megalopolis describes the desperation – and the humanity – of three weeks in strict quarantine

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Apartments in Shanghai, where there is no end in sight to a three-week lockdown as the Chinese government pursues its strict zero-Covid policy.  
Photograph: Héctor Retamal/AFP/Getty Images

*Anonymous*

Tue 19 Apr 2022 00.31 EDTFirst published on Mon 18 Apr 2022 20.39 EDT

Somehow after [three weeks in quarantine](#), locked up in my studio in Shanghai, while cutting the only cucumber left from the last pack of

governmental supplies for dinner after scrolling over an overwhelming amount of miserable lockdown experiences online then watching them “disappear”, these four words from Steve Jobs popped up in my head: stay hungry, stay foolish.

It feels like an invisible force is shouting those words into my ears, then shouting loud and clear into the sky above 26 million souls in this city; this lone, still, empty, gigantic city that has known everything effervescent in the past 30 years.

Through my narrow kitchen window, an empty street from pre-lockdown Shanghai somehow resonates with my deep consciousness: memories of those wonderful years before 2019 seem so surreal that they escape me like stories from my previous life.

To begin with, this is not my first quarantine, not my second, not even my third.

As one of many Chinese who returned to [China](#) after years abroad in 2020 amid the Covid-19 outbreak, I’ve already learned and practised the art of sitting quietly in a room alone repetitively and religiously over the past two years. I already have all the indoor fitness apps, audiobooks, streaming subscriptions, meditation apps, remote meeting apps of all sorts and food delivery guys I know well, and thought I could dive into the fourth quarantine of my life gracefully without blinking an eye, like a professional.



People line up for Covid-19 tests in a residential community under lockdown in Shanghai, China. Photograph: Alex Plavevski/EPA

It started as a slow train. In the first week of March, I was aware that some compounds were locked down here and there for several days due to a new surge of Omicron variant infections, but no one I know personally was affected by the situation yet.

In the second week, everyone had a friend who was either locked up in their office or locked up in their compound. Memes and jokes started circulating around on Chinese social media: “Those who are at work spend the day worrying if they can go back home tonight, those who are at home spend the night worrying if they can go to work the next morning.”

By mid-March, everyone knew for a fact that some sort of lockdown was about to happen. Offices started to close and people were gradually asked to work from home. Numbers of cases were still not part of daily discussion, and no one was really anxious because ... come on: everyone has a friend or a friend of a friend outside China who got Covid, recovered and is having great fun now in their life. Not from the media, not from politics, not even from scientific research, but someone who has been there that they trust.

In the last week of March, we finally realised we were in deep water, and going to be there for a long time. Restaurants are semi-closed for dining in, chaotic hoarding scenes start to become [creative materials](#) for rap songs, and the city authorities finally impose a full lockdown in segments for 10 days. I reasonably hoarded food for 10 days, started downloading spiritual books and Buddhism classics for my mental wellbeing, and wrote down daily scheduling on my whiteboard while jumping from zoom calls to instant message apps while trying to concentrate on my writing.

## **'The situation just got worse and worse'**

By the second day into full lockdown, I tried to browse Meituan and Hema to purchase coffee. Within a few clicks, my heart skipped a beat. Nothing was available any more. From that point, the rest is history.

The more I dive into the Shanghai lockdown, the more I realised I just dived into a black hole. The situation just got worse and worse. I downloaded 30 more apps and added community service, woke up at 6am to empty my shopping list, but nothing helped. I had to come to the realisation that either stock is running out or no one is out there to deliver. It didn't take me long to realise that everyone is in the same situation. Among friends, we reached a silent consensus: behind every smiley on WeChat at 6am is a desperate resident in Shanghai.

'This cannot last': residents in locked down Shanghai scream from their balconies – video

On day six, the expected release never came true but real anxiety kicked in. A neighbour knocked on the door to ask for rice. He is 50 years old, living alone in the building next to me, and ran out of the last grain. I poured half of my rice pack into the pot in his hands and turned him down when he insisted on paying me. The minute I closed the door I realised that the situation had reached a point where it became difficult to get the bare essentials.

As days go by, food shortage becomes more and more serious. Like many of those who were not able to buy groceries online and were provided with the bare minimum from government supplies, WeChat group buy was the only

way to go. Due to limited circulation on the streets and the high risk for delivery workers during the lockdown, only food orders above a certain price or amount could be prioritised.

Group leader (团长) quickly became a trending word and heroic role to play in lockdown Shanghai: one needs to be resourceful, serviceable and organised at the same time. They'd usually launch an inquiry in the WeChat group, collect requests from neighbours, connect with food suppliers, pay in advance and distribute accordingly when supplies arrive.



Workers sorting bags of vegetables to be delivered to residents in Shanghai's Jing'an district. Photograph: Héctor Retamal/AFP/Getty Images

I also started to know my neighbours way better in a few days' time than in the past two years. I traded soja sauce for coffee with one neighbour and eggs for milk with another. I even started to plan a “small” celebration for a girl upstairs who would celebrate her 30-year-old birthday during this lockdown “without cake, without candles, without wine, without friends”, as she sarcastically described.

Black markets also start to emerge by week three: Coca-Cola, instant noodles, dried mango and chips are sold at twice or three times higher than their original price through the window of one resident to the rest from the

same hallway. The girl who owns “the little stand” has contact with one food supplier who keeps his supermarket closed to the public.

PCR testing is the only occasion to get outside. We are asked to do these tests every three or four days, sometimes within short notice or very late in the night. Somehow most of us still feel lucky to be asked to do the test, because it is the only way to get out for a while and breathe the fresh air.

We are lucky enough that the whole compound remained negative until now. The infected people who tested positive during group PCRs are requested to go to mobile medical cabinets (方舱) where patients are grouped, separated from the “negative” world in Shanghai.

## **‘It’s like packing bikinis for Siberia’**

I later learned from the online WeChat diary of a friend who was obliged to go there after testing positive that they sleep in a gigantic open space where lighting is on 24/7, and 10 loos are shared among 2,000 people. “It’s like a night train with no destination in sight” – I remember this line from her online diary.

The past few weeks have been depressing enough as anxiety about food slowly starts to drag people down, but daily numbers of new infections continue to increase. The date of the initial release keeps extending. Uncertainty starts to rule people’s mind: are we going back to normal ever again? Will Wuhan’s model work for Shanghai?

We are now in a country firmly abiding by zero tolerance, but cases are soaring as high as the beginning of the second wave in Europe. It’s like packing bikinis for Siberia, using chopsticks to eat steak, teaching an eagle how to swim: when extreme situations confront each other, drama happens.

Shanghai has always been the stage of drama in modern Chinese history, and will always be in its essence. The city is not only the economic centre of the country but is also appreciated for its dynamic middle class, diverse public life, open-minded intelligentsia and active (by Chinese standards) civil society.



The empty Humin elevated road in Shanghai. Photograph: VCG/Getty Images

Retired medical workers start to suggest alternatives to the drastic measures and question the legitimacy of the zero-Covid policy; journalists start to collect censored deaths due to inaccessible healthcare and strict PCR testing results that block patients from emergency rooms; citizens start to question how their beloved city became a hell on Earth with people starving and crying for help. Anger and frustrations start to dominate social media, with articles and videos being shared millions of times before they get brutally deleted or removed by censors.

One article titled "[Shanghai people has reached the limit of their maximum tolerance](#)" was viewed 20m times and miraculously made visible again after being deleted by authorities for the first time in Chinese internet history, due to unprecedented attention from citizens.

I know I am witnessing and living a once-in-a-lifetime experience: planned provision, barter economy, starvation, wartime anxiety, and uncertainty.

Covid: inside Shanghai's largest makeshift hospital – video

I also slowly start to become more and more uncomfortable with the public narrative around “positive cases”: every building that has known a positive case would have 14 more days of lockdown and multiple new PCR tests added, not to mention the fear of being sent into the mobile medical cabinet. This easily triggers public fear over “positive” cases and people.

In the past few days, neighbours start to denounce each other in our WeChat group. Some days it was about who didn’t get a PCR test, other times it was about who tried to sneak out for food. In my friend’s compound, neighbours even start to call the police when they see someone getting downstairs or talking in a group.

I can see the uncanny resemblance between being “positive/suspicious” now and being “intellectual/bourgeois” in the 1960s during the Cultural Revolution.

To be honest, this unsettles me way more than hunger or Covid-19.

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## 2022.04.19 - Opinion

- Should we feel joy or despair that we're on track to keep global heating to 2C?
- Ugandan Asians like me were resettled within weeks in the 70s. What happened to the UK?
- Rape victims failed by UK criminal courts are being forced to seek justice elsewhere
- It felt beautiful when neighbours came together on WhatsApp during Covid. Then came the rows about teens

## [Opinion](#)[Climate crisis](#)

# Should we feel joy or despair that we're on track to keep global heating to 2C?

[Christiana Figueres](#)

A 2C world will bring much devastation, but the extraordinary work that has brought us to this point is worth celebrating



Workers install solar panels in Wenling, China, March 2022. Photograph: VCG/Getty Images

Tue 19 Apr 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 19 Apr 2022 07.52 EDT

The atmosphere does not react to pledges for the future or reports about past achievements. It only reacts to real emission reductions. The research [published in Nature](#) last week showing that the pledges by countries to reduce emissions made since the Paris agreement could keep warming within 2C, if met on time, has therefore understandably sparked a series of conflicting reactions. Outrage that even if the promises are met, they don't

come close to 1.5C; and optimism that 2C is such a huge improvement on where we'd be headed without the Paris agreement.

On the one hand, we have to acknowledge this looks very much like failure. A 2C world will not be livable for vast swathes of humanity, and half of the world's children are [already at extremely high risk](#) from the impacts now, including hunger-inducing floods and droughts.

A 2C future may even lead us into conditions that insurers would deem uninsurable for practically all businesses and homes, and that's only if the pledges are met. There will never be a shortage of excuses for slippage on these promises. The atrocious invasion of Ukraine, which has brought our deadly [addiction to Russian oil and gas](#) into shocking view, is just one of them. Short-term arguments to push decarbonisation down the road will always find a way to rise back above the parapet.

On the other hand, we have to agree that this new projection based on national commitments portends a far better outcome than we would get without them. Bending the curve of future emissions down – from 4.5C or higher as it was projected to be in 2015 – to within the stated goal of the agreement would be a huge improvement.

This is a real result stemming from the difficult, intricate and decades-long multilateral process of negotiations as well as from the power of the decreasing costs of clean technologies. The Paris agreement is working, even if not fast enough.

This process has been enabled at every turn by extraordinary momentum for action from all sectors of society, activism of all stripes from all corners of the globe and individual leadership. It's also just the start: once action unleashed by these commitments begins to really kick in, and the non-state actor community continues pushing their additional pledges, the progress will quickly become exponential.

So we are caught between two truths, and two deep feelings in our bones: outrage and optimism. Both are valid responses and both are necessary.

Those in the community who have contributed to the provenance and ongoing implementation of any commitment to reduce emissions – national or corporate – would do themselves a great service by celebrating the tectonic shift. I know that these pledges are nearly always the result of dogged hard work and determination combined with deep-seated effort to develop a shared understanding and collective action.

Yes, they are not yet enough, but behind each one are individuals who share the increasing pain about the ecological devastation we are witnessing and the anxiety about what we will continue to lose as a result of unambitious choices.

Celebrating what we have on the table so far doesn't mean we should not continue to challenge the commitments made, ensure their base in the latest science and call for proper accountability. After all businesses and governments pledging action cheat all of us, including themselves, by saying one thing and doing another. Integrity and transparency must be at the heart of all efforts.

Delving into the actual work going on on the ground is absolutely inspiring. I know this first-hand from working closely with [the Climate Pledge](#), in which 300 companies are aiming to accelerate solutions to the climate crisis and reach net zero by 2040. There is a treasure trove of future possibility burgeoning, even as we constantly read of new fossil fuel projects the atmosphere cannot afford being developed.

By assuming one reaction or the other – outrage or optimism – we force ourselves into a box. We risk reducing our thinking and acting according to a binary mentality that can drive polarisation at a time where acting in solidarity with each other is ever more important.

The complexity of the climate crisis and its solutions mean we need to get used to holding complex emotional reactions, and to pursuing complex solutions. The path ahead will be full of outrage and optimism. We can use both of those to push for the policies we know we need: policies that will enable every commitment and pledge to reduce emissions to be met not just on time, but ahead of schedule.

- Christiana Figueres is co-host of the Outrage and Optimism podcast and a former UN climate chief
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[Opinion](#)[Immigration and asylum](#)

## Ugandan Asians like me were resettled within weeks in the 70s. What happened to the UK?

[Fiyaz Mughal](#)

Priti Patel is also of Ugandan Asian heritage. It's despicable that she is sending today's desperate refugees to Rwanda



Ugandan Asians arrive at Stansted airport in September 1972. Photograph: Dennis Stevens/ANL/REX/Shutterstock

Tue 19 Apr 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 19 Apr 2022 12.37 EDT

On 23 August 2022, it will be 50 years since my parents, my brother and I landed in Stansted airport as refugees, expelled and made penniless by Uganda's General Idi Amin. A brutal dictator, he made sure that Ugandan Asians, who had lived for three generations in the country, were stripped of all their assets and kicked out.

In an August 1972 edition of the Uganda Argus, Amin was reported as asking the British government to take “responsibility” for British passport holders in Uganda, because they were “sabotaging the economy of the country”. He gave Asians three months to leave the country from 5 August 1972 and said that they “only milked the cow, but they did not feed it”. The loss of Uganda’s Asians, who accounted for most of the tax revenue, sent the economy into a slump – it was an act of economic self-harm created by a leader who had initially been backed by the British. The British government thought Amin was “their man”, until he turned on it.

As part of the 50th anniversary of the arrival of the Ugandan Asians in Britain, I have delved into local newspapers of the time to see how they framed the migration of the roughly 28,000 Ugandan Asians who were forced to leave places such as Jinja, Mbale and Kampala in Uganda.

The British government at the time set up the Uganda Resettlement Board to control the inflow of Ugandan Asian refugees to prevent, what the Observer at the time called “a backlash of white resentment by heading the newcomers away from the areas of coloured immigrant concentration which already exist”. The newspaper went on to say that “predictable twitches of this backlash have already come from … Enoch Powell, the National Front and the Monday Club”. We must also not forget that government papers from the time show that proposals were even put on the table to send the Ugandan Asians to the Solomon or Falkland Islands to appease the political right.

However, despite the predictable reaction by people like Powell, the British public generally welcomed the Ugandan Asians, and the British Council of Churches and faith groups formed themselves into the Co-ordinating Committee for the welfare of Evacuees from Uganda. Church halls were fitted out as temporary reception areas and volunteers came forward to assist the new arrivals who had turned up in clothes that were unsuitable for the oncoming winter. Some wore shorts, others Safari suits, with many in western clothes, such was the influence of British culture on them.

By late October 1972, about 18,000 Ugandan Asians had passed through various resettlement camps, and my family had been assigned to the Stradishall Royal Air Force camp in Suffolk. The Evening Standard stated on 2 November 1972 that at least 7,000 of them had already been moved into cities and rehoused, with many finding jobs, so that they could move their lives on. Some families had to wait only a few weeks for resettlement, while others waited for months.

In the last few days, Priti Patel, (also of Ugandan Asian heritage), launched the [Rwanda relocation scheme](#) for those (mainly) single male refugees arriving on boats and on to the shores of our country.

In 50 years, our country has gone from resettling Ugandan Asian refugees within weeks and getting them into employment, to planning to send refugees 4,000 miles away to a Rwandan government that has a [very questionable human rights record](#). I can only imagine what would have happened to me if Amin was to eject Asians from Uganda today and if I had arrived on to the shores of Dover, simply because I had a link to the colonial legacy of Britain's involvement in east Africa. You can bet your bottom dollar I would be sent packing. It is true that one difference between then and now is that most Ugandan Asians had British passports; but if [the Windrush scandal](#) has taught us anything, it's that such distinctions mean little to the modern-day Home Office.

Successive British governments have slowly dehumanised refugees, driven by a fear of alienating parts of our population who believe that "[Britain is full](#)" – a nonsensical claim that the far right has been making for years. This is the same "full Britain" that rightly opened the gateway to up to 100,000 Ukrainian refugees, entitling them to receive public funds such as universal credit, and access to public services such as schools and healthcare services. This is in direct contrast to other refugees, such as those from Iraq and Iran, who survive on voucher support and cannot work, many of whom have languished for years, awaiting a decision on their asylum claims. They have been made to feel powerless, hopeless and disregarded by a system in which certain refugees are welcome but others are dehumanised and treated with utter disdain.

Patel should never forget that the Ugandan Asians were settled and welcomed under the Conservative government of Edward Heath. He firmly stood against the xenophobia and racial intolerance of people such as Powell. This home secretary, it seems, is willing to give up Conservative ideals of providing a safe haven to the powerless. Instead, her posturing against refugees shames those of us who see no hierarchy in preserving the dignity of people.

It would make Amin proud, knowing that he could no longer be maligned for ejecting a whole section of people. Today, in 2022, our home secretary is also willing to physically move large numbers of vulnerable people out of our country, to put them of sight and out of mind.

- Fiyaz Mughal was born in Uganda in 1971 and has worked in the charity sector for more than 25 years

This article was amended on 19 April 2022. The former RAF Stradishall site was in Suffolk, not Surrey as an earlier version said.

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## OpinionRape and sexual assault

# Rape victims failed by UK criminal courts are being forced to seek justice elsewhere

[Charlotte Proudman](#)

With prosecutions at an all-time low, some women are turning to civil courts – but the process can be difficult and expensive



A protest against rape and sexual violence in London, 2011. Photograph: Janine Wiedel Photolibrary/Alamy

Tue 19 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 19 Apr 2022 01.02 EDT

In the UK, we are witnessing the "[decriminalisation of rape](#)" and as a result, more and more women are having to find alternative ways to access justice. In the year to September 2021, police in England and Wales were told of [63,136 allegations of rape](#), but only [820 alleged rapists were charged](#): the prosecution rate for rape was just 1.3%.

As a result, more and more rape victims are turning to the civil courts for some semblance of justice. Unlike in the criminal courts, those found to be rapists do not receive a criminal record or time in jail. Instead the judge can issue a “finding” of rape and issue a financial “award” for victims (although enforcing an order for damages can be an uphill struggle against a defendant who is, or claims to be, impoverished). In a criminal court, the state must establish that the jury “are satisfied so that they are sure”, the defendant raped the complainant, but in the civil court, the standard of proof is lower, the claimant must prove the defendant raped her on the balance of probabilities (51% likely).

The process is not without hardship. The burden is on a traumatised victim to bring a claim within a narrow time limit, pay for it and wait (sometimes) years to conclude. Some victims don’t have any resources or power to access the civil courts. Victims do not have the same legal powers as the police to gather evidence.

Despite the difficulties, a finding of rape by a judge can give closure to victims. After [Ms M’s rapist was acquitted](#) at a Scottish criminal trial (that she described as “abysmal”), she won £80,000 in damages against him at a civil trial in 2018. She said: “It was never about the money, it was about the law acknowledging what Stephen Coxen did to me was wrong and against the law.” These victories, however, are few and far between, as some perpetrators buy their way out of justice by settling the claim and paying the victim off, before it even reaches a trial. [The data](#) suggests a general settlement rate of 96% to 97% of civil claims in UK county courts.

In 2011, Denise Clair reported two former Scotland football players, David Goodwillie and David Robertson, to the Scottish police for rape but the [criminal case was dropped](#) due to insufficient evidence. In a [civil claim in 2017](#), she won a finding of rape and £100,000 in damages. Such an amount would be a drop in the ocean for the rich and powerful.

Some women are instead turning to private prosecutions (when a private individual rather than the CPS takes a case to criminal court). Unlike civil claims, private prosecutions result in the same criminal punishment upon conviction as public prosecutions. But the director of public prosecutions

(DPP) has the power to take over a private prosecution and either continue it or end it, and in some cases, the private prosecutor must seek the consent of the DPP or attorney general before commencing proceedings. The average cost of a private prosecution is about £8,500.

It's not just rape complainants looking for alternative justice: domestic abuse victims are also taking matters into their own hands. Earlier this year, a husband who, among other things, failed to grant his wife a Jewish religious divorce was convicted of coercive or controlling behaviour after his wife brought a private prosecution against him. While it is positive that victims have the power to bring private prosecutions, many survivors do not have the resources to do so. The state has a duty to bring perpetrators to account rather than putting the onus on victims.

The philosopher Kate Manne has described a culture of “himpathy”, which is inappropriate or disproportionate sympathy towards male perpetrators of sexual violence over their female victims, who are erased in the process. Himpathy means worrying about his bright future rather than her suffering. She is right. In one case, in which a soldier was accused of raping a woman he met in a Dundee nightclub, the victim claimed that the jury in the criminal trial were told to think about the impact their verdict would have on his military career. When the victim brought a claim in the civil court, where there was no risk of a criminal record, the judge made a finding of rape.

There is a genuine question as to whether rape has become decriminalised in part because society doesn't believe the crime justifies “ruining” a rapist's life. Rape should be treated as seriously by the state as terrorism: it is an invasion of (usually) women's autonomy by men using domination. Instead it has become a “problem” that can potentially be solved with a chequebook.

- Charlotte Proudman is a barrister specialising in violence against women and girls

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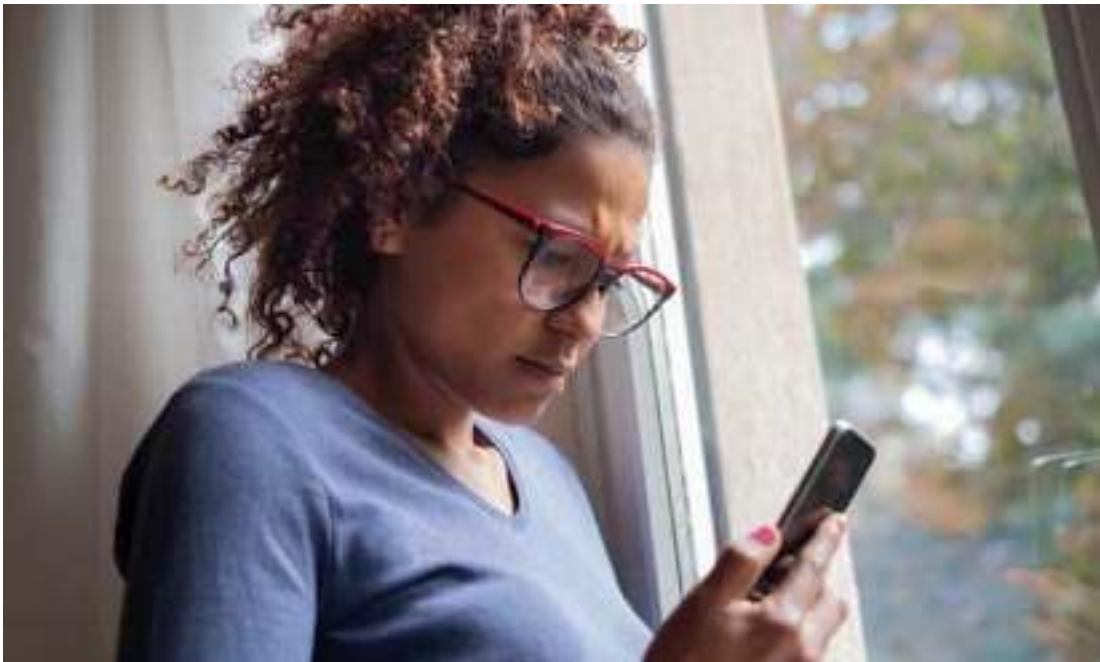
## OpinionSociety

# **It felt beautiful when neighbours came together on WhatsApp during Covid. Then came the rows about teens**

[Zoe Williams](#)



There was a definite blitz-spirit as we joined group chats in lockdown. But as arguments erupted, it turned out there was an upside to not having everyone's number



‘When the chips were down, we cared about each other. It just hit a hump in the road.’ Photograph: tommaso79/Getty Images/iStockphoto (Posed by model)

Tue 19 Apr 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 19 Apr 2022 09.19 EDT

This time two years ago, as the country went into lockdown, the neighbourhood [WhatsApp](#) group came into its own. It often just spanned a couple of streets – but the shock of the moment and the surge of civic spirit delivered at least one adult in any 40m radius, prepared to do the legwork of tracking down every phone. And it would be stupid to the point of deliberate amnesia to pretend that it didn’t, at the time, seem like something genuinely beautiful was happening – solidarity, care, mutual aid, respectful watchfulness, a forest of collective responsibility springing up overnight, where previously there had only been the odd tendril of “do you have my parcel?”, and “did you hear that last night – do you think it was a fox or a murderer?”

My group fell apart over low-traffic neighbourhoods. That’s not quite right; it would be more accurate to say it split irretrievably, divided by the most profound ideological differences, but stayed together on the tacit understanding that LTNs would never be spoken of again, except when they were, and the fight would be more brutal every time. It was a lot like the Labour party.

In more Tory areas, they mainly fell out over cats. So, it turned out that there was an upside to the era when nobody knew anyone else's phone number: you might suspect that your cat had gone to live at number 42, but would be unlikely to confront them over it. And if you did, it would only be in the mildest possible terms, certainly without the audience of the entire rest of the street, and these conventions were a vital protection for civility because – newsflash – your cat doesn't care where you think it lives.

Teenagers were another flashpoint. There is a very clear social dividing line, which I'm sure could serve as a useful tool of psephological analysis, between people who think of adolescents as large children, warranting care and protection, and people who think they are waging a deliberate war of provocation just by wearing a jumper, the threat-level rising to imminent if they put the hood up (even when it's raining). A friend's neighbourhood group disintegrated when some teens were observed smoking weed; the emergency services were called and the operator got the wrong end of the stick, summoning an ambulance instead of the police. A bitter row ensued over the teens' punishment.

One person wanted them to go and apologise to the paramedics. Another said, "You want them to atone for wasting paramedics' time by wasting more of their time?", and a third said, "the time-waster here is the person who called 999." Social attitudes, on the matter of soft drugs, are quite divergent, though such a total disintegration is pretty rare. Normally, after a storm, the group stays together but everyone goes silent, except for the three people who always need a cardboard box, and the one person who always has one. There's surely a market for some kind of cardboard box Tinder.

While we thought we were doing something quite simple and blitz-spirited – meeting a moment of timeless challenge with new tools and fresh selves – in fact, what we were doing was incredibly complicated. We were trying to take our meet-world selves – where we are generally emollient, guarded, always looking for the subtlest clues to an acquaintance's worldview and pre-emptively avoiding saying the opposite – and merging them with our virtual-world selves, where we are absolutely full of views, and will spend hours or at least minutes crafting them into their strongest possible expression. It's enough to start a war between your own two selves, let alone you and your neighbour, who's trying to lard some casual snobbery into a

conversation about dogs (the time-honoured route is “I’ll never understand why those young men need to have dogs like that”).

Yet it hasn’t been a failure: that early promise of a new Eden. When the chips were down, we cared about each other. It just hit a hump in the road. The management cliche about groups – form, storm, norm, perform – is as true of neighbours as it is of an underperforming sales team. We’re currently in the “storm” phase. All it takes, now, is for a load of us to all need a cardboard box.

- Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist

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## 2022.04.19 - Around the world

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## Tax havens

# G20 ministers urged to use oligarch crackdown to tackle tax havens

Heavyweight economists demand a global register to stop the wealthiest depriving countries of what they owe



Protests in France denouncing the tax avoidance. Economists say the concentration of extreme wealth hidden in tax havens is impoverishing the poorest in society. Photograph: Vincent Isore/Zuma Press/Rex/Shutterstock

*[Joanna Partridge](#)*

Tue 19 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 19 Apr 2022 02.29 EDT

G20 countries are being urged by a group of renowned economists to use the crackdown on oligarchs' wealth amid Ukraine sanctions as a spur to tackle [tax havens](#) once and for all.

[An open letter sent to the 20 finance ministers](#) before they meet on Tuesday called on them to implement [a global register to link assets, companies and](#)

structures to their owners so they could no longer deprive countries of what they owed.

Its 14 signatories – all commissioners of anti-tax avoidance group the Independent Commission for the Reform of International Corporate Taxation (ICRICT) – include the economists Gabriel Zucman, Joseph Stiglitz and Thomas Piketty, as well as the French investigative judge Eva Joly.

They argued that the concentration of extreme wealth hidden in tax havens was increasing inequality and impoverishing the poorest in society, and demanded reform of an international financial system that was “skewed in favour of wealthy tax abusers”.

Since the start of the pandemic, the world's richest people have seen their wealth double to \$1.5tn (£1.01tn), yet the ICRIC commission found the gap between rich and poor had only widened during that time, a situation that had been exacerbated by the conflict in Ukraine and had left many of the poorest facing a cost of living crisis and soaring energy and food bills.

They wrote that members of the global elite often hid their wealth “through elaborate structures to avoid paying taxes, but also to hide money generated by corruption and illegal activities … Global finance allows tax abuses, corruption and money laundering to flourish.”

Attempts to sanction assets belonging to Russian oligarchs after Vladimir Putin’s invasion had highlighted what the signatories called the “wall of opacity” over where their wealth was held, causing difficulties for nations looking to impose penalties on those with links to the Kremlin.

The letter read: “The war in Ukraine shows that we need to tackle tax havens head-on now, by implementing transparency measures as a matter of urgency. It is about targeting all oligarchs, and all forms of wealth hidden from the tax authorities and the public in general and hidden in jurisdictions with high levels of financial opacity.”

Some progress in linking wealth to its real owners had been made in recent years, according to the group, including the automatic exchange of financial account information, and the introduction of [national registries of beneficial ownership](#). However, they said previous developments had lacked “political will”, prompting them to urge the G20 countries to do more.

Huge leaks of documents – including the [Panama Papers](#), the [Paradise Papers](#), and most recently [Suisse Secrets](#) – have highlighted the activities of wealthy individuals and companies, and their use of offshore tax havens. However, despite the resulting pressure on governments to take tougher action on tax, activists say little progress has been made to crack down on their use.

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The ICRICT economists proposed the introduction of an international network of asset registries that listed all different forms of wealth: from assets including property, yachts, jets and jewellery; to bank accounts, cryptocurrency assets and safe deposit boxes; as well as trusts and other legal arrangements; and even intangible assets such as intellectual property and trademarks.

These would be linked to their actual, beneficial owners, who may be different to their legal owners. The economists said a global asset registry that detailed what was owned where and by whom would enable countries to record and analyse wealth and inequality and would lead to greater enforcement of tax laws while hindering those who wanted to pursue illicit activities.

The commissioners urge [G20](#) leaders to convene an urgent international summit to implement such a system and discuss offshore wealth and tax havens. “No more excuses, no more pandemics, no more wars to justify lack of action,” they sign off, concluding that such action was required “to preserve democracy, end spiralling inequality and rebuild the social contract”.

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[Israel](#)

## **Israel strikes Gaza after rocket attack as Jerusalem tensions soar**

Hamas ‘weapons manufacturing site’ targeted in response to rocket fired from Palestinian enclave



An explosion visible after Israeli air strikes in the southern Gaza Strip on Tuesday. Photograph: Ismael Mohamad/UPI/Rex/Shutterstock

*Agence France-Presse*

Tue 19 Apr 2022 05.32 EDT Last modified on Thu 21 Apr 2022 13.26 EDT

Israel has carried out its first airstrikes on the Gaza Strip in months in response to a rocket fired from the Palestinian enclave as tensions soared after a weekend of violence around a Jerusalem holy site.

Warning sirens sounded in southern Israel on Monday night after the rocket was fired from the enclave controlled by the Islamist group Hamas, the first such incident since early January.

“One rocket was fired from the [Gaza](#) Strip into Israeli territory. The rocket was intercepted by the Iron Dome air defense system,” the Israeli military said in a statement.

Hours later, the Israeli air force said it had hit a Hamas weapons manufacturing site in retaliation.

Hamas claimed to have used its “anti-aircraft defence” to counter the air raids, which caused no casualties, according to witnesses and security sources in Gaza.

No faction in the enclave of 2.3 million inhabitants immediately claimed responsibility for the rocket strike. Israel holds Hamas responsible for all rocket fire from Gaza, and usually carries out airstrikes in response.

The incident followed a [weekend of Israeli-Palestinian violence](#) in and around Jerusalem’s al-Aqsa mosque compound in which more than 170 people, mostly Palestinian demonstrators, were wounded.

Diplomatic sources said the UN security council was due to hold a session on Tuesday to discuss the rise in violence. Similar violence in Jerusalem around the same time last year triggered repeated Hamas rocket fire into Israel that escalated into an 11-day war.

The increase in tensions coincides with the Muslim holy month of Ramadan and the Jewish festival of Passover.

Al-Aqsa mosque compound is known to Jews as Temple Mount. It is the holiest site in Judaism and the third holiest in Islam. Palestinians have been angered by repeated visits to the site by Jewish worshippers, who are permitted to enter but may not pray there.

The government of Naftali Bennett has declared repeatedly that Israeli security forces have a “free hand” to deal with demonstrators.

Hamas had warned on Sunday that “al-Aqsa is ours and ours alone” and swore to defend Palestinians’ right to pray there.

The exchanges of fire in Gaza and al-Aqsa clashes followed an outbreak of violence including four deadly attacks since late March in the Jewish state by Palestinians and Israeli Arabs that claimed 14 lives, mostly civilians.

Twenty-three Palestinians have been killed in the violence since 22 March, including assailants who targeted Israelis, according to an AFP tally.

They include Hanan Khudur, an 18-year-old Palestinian woman who died on Monday after being shot by Israeli forces last week in the village of Faquaa, near the flashpoint city of Jenin.

Israel has been pouring additional forces into the occupied West Bank.

Ned Price, a US state department spokesperson, said on Monday that Washington was “deeply concerned” about the rise in tensions and that senior US officials had been in touch with their counterparts from Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Arab nations.

“We have urged all sides to preserve the historic status quo” at al-Aqsa compound and avoid “provocative” steps, he said.

Jordan on Monday summoned the Israeli chargé d’affaires “to deliver a message of protest over illegitimate and provocative Israeli violations at the blessed al-Aqsa mosque”, its foreign ministry said in a statement.

Jordan serves as custodian of holy places in East Jerusalem, including the Old City, which Israel occupied in 1967 and later annexed in a move not recognised by most of the international community.

Bennett on Monday denounced what he called a “Hamas-led incitement campaign” and said Israel was doing “everything” to ensure people of all faiths could safely worship in Jerusalem.

“We expect everyone not to join the lies and certainly not to encourage violence against Jews,” he said, in an apparent reference to Jordan.

Bennett is facing a political crisis at home after his ideologically disparate coalition lost its one-seat majority in the 120-seat Knesset, Israel’s

parliament, almost a year after he painstakingly cobbled a government together.

On Sunday, Raam, the first Arab-Israeli party to be part of an Israeli government, said it was suspending its membership over the violence in Jerusalem.

This article was amended on 21 April 2022. An earlier version said Israel held Hamas responsible for all rocket fire “from Israel”, when “from Gaza” was meant. A reference to the intercepted rocket from the Gaza Strip reportedly landing in the sea was also removed.

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## [New Zealand](#)

# **Sheep shorn of 18kg fleece after three years on the lam**

Elusive New Zealand merino sheep named Shrekapo was caught after years in the wilderness and relieved of half his bodyweight in wool



Shrekapo, the elusive merino sheep that has spent most of its life on the run  
Photograph: George Empson

[Eva Corlett](#) in Wellington

[@evacorlett](#)

Tue 19 Apr 2022 00.04 EDT Last modified on Tue 19 Apr 2022 17.39 EDT

A merino sheep named Shrekapo who grew an enormous fleece while evading capture in [New Zealand](#) is now 18.6kg lighter after its first shave.

The animal was named Shrekapo after the [famous sheep Shrek](#) who was found carrying a 27kg fleece after six years on the run in 2004, and after Lake Tekapo, which is near where it was found.

Shrekapo was spotted hiding in the rocks last week, and was caught later that day, carrying nearly half its bodyweight in wool. The animal had probably been roaming the hills alone for the past three winters, said Gavin Loxton, owner of Sawdon Station at Lake Tekapo.

“He had been spotted up there before by rabbiters and Tahr hunters, and had probably had about three sightings, but any time we had been up there to get him, nobody had been able to find him,” Loxton said. “We had pretty much given up on the whole process, but he’s made it back, so that’s excellent.”

The four-year-old is the latest in a series of elusive sheep to have developed overgrown fleeces, entering an unofficial leaderboard of shaggy heavyweight champions across New Zealand and Australia including: [Chris](#), [Shrek](#), [Ewenice](#), [Baarack](#) and [Shaun the Sheep](#).

Loxton runs 5,000 sheep at his station and said it was unclear how Shrekapo became a hermit sheep. It had had its ear marked and had been tailed, which involves removing the tail to reduce the chance of blowfly strike. “We put the lambs back out after tailing … when we bought them all back in for weaning he must have been left behind up there on his own.



The newly shaven Shrekapo. Photograph: George Empson

“Whether he was snoozing under a bush or something, nobody will ever know.”

Shrekapo was blinded by his wool, and as a roughly 40kg sheep, was carrying nearly half his body weight in wool. “And that’s when it’s dry,” Loxton added.

Loxton and his crew had some celebratory drinks after finding Shrekapo and “hatched a plan” to shear him at the Easter Monday farmer’s market in Tekapo. Three hundred locals and visitors watched the spectacle, which Loxton said was great for the community after a quiet couple of pandemic years.

The 18.6kg fleece would yield about 14kg of clean wool, which would “get you quite a few garments”, Loxton said. After the shave, Shrekapo was a little wobbly adjusting to his new weight, but was now happily “following the sun around like a sun dial”.

“It’s a weight off his shoulders.”

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## [Afghanistan](#)

# Six killed in bomb blasts at Shia school in Afghan capital

Two explosions rock boys' school in Kabul as students were coming out of their morning classes



Medical staff move an injured person on a stretcher inside a hospital after two bomb blasts at a boys' school in a Shia Hazara neighbourhood in Kabul.  
Photograph: Wakil Kohsar/AFP/Getty Images

*Agence France-Presse*

Tue 19 Apr 2022 05.51 EDT Last modified on Tue 19 Apr 2022 17.14 EDT

At least six people have been killed and 11 wounded in two bomb blasts at a boys' school in a Hazara Shia neighbourhood of the Afghan capital, Kabul.

The frequency of bomb blasts in the country has declined significantly since the Taliban ousted the US-backed Afghan government in August last year, but Islamic State has claimed several attacks.

A Kabul police spokesperson, Khalid Zadran, said Tuesday's blasts at the Abdul Rahim Shahid school were caused by improvised explosive devices. He said there was a third blast at an English-language centre in the same area, but did not specify whether it was caused by an explosive.

The school is in an area inhabited mainly by the Hazara community, and has been previously targeted by IS.

Tuesday's blasts occurred as students were coming out of their morning classes, a witness said. Images posted on social media networks showed several bodies lying at the gate and inside the school compound. Taliban officials were seen cordoning off the area.

The Taliban have been blamed previously for attacks targeting Hazaras, who make up 10-20% of the country's 38 million population.

The Taliban insist their forces have defeated IS, but analysts say the jihadist group is a key security challenge to the hardline Islamists who rule [Afghanistan](#).

Since seizing power, the Taliban have regularly carried out raids on suspected IS hideouts, mainly in the eastern Nangarhar province.

IS has claimed some of the deadliest attacks in Afghanistan in recent years. In May last year at least 85 people – mainly female students – were killed and about 300 were wounded when three bombs exploded near their school in Dasht-e-Barchi.

No group claimed responsibility, but in October 2020 IS claimed a suicide attack on an educational centre in the same area that killed 24 people, including students.

In May 2020, the group was blamed for an attack on a maternity ward of a hospital in the neighbourhood that killed 25 people.

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[France](#)

## Macron lead over Le Pen stabilises as election scrutiny intensifies

Policies of far-right candidate put under spotlight, while both contenders try to woo leftwing voters



Both candidates have opted for light agendas before a influential TV debate on Wednesday. Photograph: Benoît Tessier/Reuters

*[Jon Henley](#) in Paris*

*[@jonhenley](#)*

Mon 18 Apr 2022 12.23 EDT Last modified on Tue 19 Apr 2022 05.46 EDT

Emmanuel Macron has consolidated his lead over Marine Le Pen as France's presidential election enters its final week, according to polls, suggesting harsher scrutiny of the far-right challenger's plans may be shifting the race's dynamic.

Six days from the runoff that will decide who occupies the Élysée Palace for the next five years, all 16 polls carried out since the first-round vote on 10 April have put the incumbent ahead, by between seven and 12 percentage points.

Both candidates have opted for light agendas before a TV debate on Wednesday that could prove critical to the campaign: in 2017, when they last faced off at this stage, Le Pen's poor performance was widely seen as precipitating her second-round defeat.

Le Pen insisted on Monday she was better prepared this time around. “I hope it’s a real confrontation of ideas and not the succession of invective, fake news and excess like I’ve heard over the past week,” she said on the campaign trail in Normandy.

Macron also expressed confidence, telling the broadcaster TF1 on Sunday night he believed he had “a winning project that deserves to be known – and the feeling that on the far-right side, there is a programme that deserves to be clarified”.

The Rassemblement National (National Rally) leader’s first-round campaign, focusing on cost of living issues, succeeded in sharply narrowing the early gap between her and Macron, securing her 23.1% of the vote against his 27.8%.

With a long push to detoxify her party and soften her own image finally bearing fruit, analysts say Le Pen was also shielded by her first-round far-right rival, the virulently xenophobic TV pundit Éric Zemmour, who distracted media attention.

But polls suggest a far more intense second-round scrutiny of her economic, welfare, immigration, foreign and environment policies – combined with renewed and more pointed attacks from Macron’s team – may have slowed her momentum.

Some opinion polls immediately before the first round saw Macron winning a runoff against Le Pen by as little as three points, within the margin of error.

The president's predicted lead now averages eight or nine points across polls, while the Ipsos daily tracker foresees a 56% to 44% victory.

Media outlets have highlighted Le Pen's recent call for a "strategic rapprochement" with Moscow after its war against Ukraine, her promise to remove existing wind turbines and ban new ones, and her proposal to ban the Islamic headscarf in public places.

Her team on Monday played down the headscarf proposal, saying it was "not her priority" in the fight against extremism, and also hit back at the "suspicious" timing of [embezzlement accusations against her](#) by the EU's anti-fraud office, Olaf.

[Multiple analyses](#) have argued that one of the cornerstones of the far-right leader's manifesto – a law on "immigration, identity and citizenship" that would establish a "national preference" for French nationals for jobs, welfare, housing and benefits – would violate the principle of equality enshrined in France's constitution.

The law – which Le Pen has said she aims to pass by referendum – would exclude non-nationals and dual nationals from many public sector jobs and restrict access to benefits.

It would also cancel automatic citizenship rights for children of non-nationals born in [France](#), and make naturalisation significantly harder.

Le Pen's draft law "would constitute a radical break with France's identity", Dominique Rousseau, an emeritus professor of constitutional law, [said](#) on Monday, adding that it would also "breach European law, set France on the same path as Hungary or Poland, and lead to [a progressive or indirect Brexit](#)".

Economists have been similarly scathing about the far-right leader's "incoherent" economic plans, including lowering the retirement age to 60, which Jean Tirole, the French winner of the 2014 Nobel prize for economics, [warned this weekend](#) would cost €68bn (£56bn) more than estimated and "permanently impoverish the country".

Lawyers, NGOs and teachers have also [criticised Le Pen's plans](#) to:

- Grant police a “presumption of self-defence” and the right to file anonymous complaints.
- Radically boost the number of prison sentences handed down.
- Deny healthcare to undocumented migrants.
- “Restore neutrality” to an education system based on “traditional values”.

Analysts say the harsher second-round spotlight is making it harder for Le Pen to maintain the affable image on which she relied to sell a platform that [Le Monde has described](#) as “superficially soft – but fundamentally far right”.

“The French are taking a closer look at her programme, and don’t seem to like what they see,” said Mujtaba Rahman, [Europe](#) director of the Eurasia Group consultancy.

Growing clarity around what an eventual Le Pen presidency might look like in practice is unlikely to change the minds of many convinced Le Pen supporters, pollsters say, but it may persuade enough hesitant voters – particularly on the left – to vote for Macron to keep the far-right candidate out.

With the election likely be won by the candidate who can reach beyond his or her camp to convince voters that the other option would be far worse, both candidates are [looking to attract some of the 7.7 million voters](#) who backed the far-left’s Jean-Luc Mélenchon in the first round.

Polls suggest about 33% of the radical leftist’s voters – mostly moderates who backed Mélenchon because he was the only leftwing candidate with a chance of reaching the second round – will back Macron.

Several surveys, meanwhile, have suggested that not all voters who backed Zemmour will cast their ballots for Le Pen.

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/18/macron-lead-over-le-pen-stabilises-as-election-scrutiny-intensifies>

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# Headlines

- [Live Boris Johnson says he would welcome inquiry into claims he misled parliament – but only after police probe](#)
- [Boris Johnson MPs should wait for ‘full facts’ on Partygate, says PM in India](#)
- [Home Office Staff threaten mutiny over Rwanda deal](#)
- [Rwanda No 10 goes into battle with archbishops over asylum plan](#)

[Skip to key events](#)

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

## Boris Johnson to face inquiry into claims he misled parliament over Partygate – as it happened

Latest updates: MPs back investigation into Boris Johnson after [senior Tories say PM should go](#)

- [PM will face Commons inquiry over whether he lied to parliament](#)
- [Commons vote for inquiry into PM - summary and analysis](#)
- [PM says No 10 dropped its amendment because he has ‘nothing to hide’](#)
- [Full text of Labour motion on inquiry into claims PM misled parliament](#)
- [Steve Baker tells MPs he can no longer forgive Johnson who should quit](#)
- [Police delay updates on Partygate fines until after May elections](#)
- [PM says he wants to focus on ‘things that matter to electorate’](#)
- [Starmer withdraws claim about PM accusing BBC of being soft on Putin](#)

Updated 2d ago

[Nadeem Badshah](#) (now) and [Andrew Sparrow](#) (earlier)

Thu 21 Apr 2022 15.11 EDTFirst published on Thu 21 Apr 2022 04.14 EDT

Boris Johnson denies misleading parliament and says he wants to focus on India trip – video

[Nadeem Badshah](#) (now) and [Andrew Sparrow](#) (earlier)

Thu 21 Apr 2022 15.11 EDTFirst published on Thu 21 Apr 2022 04.14 EDT

## Key events

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- [3d agoJohnson says he abandoned attempt to put off inquiry into claims he misled MPs because he has 'nothing to hide'](#)
- [3d agoSteve Baker explains why he can no longer forgive Johnson, and wants him gone](#)
- [3d agoMet police says it will suspend further Partygate fine announcements ahead of local elections](#)
- [3d agoFormer Brexit minister Steve Baker says Johnson 'should be long gone'](#)
- [3d agoMPs set to vote for inquiry into PM after government U-turn - summary and analysis](#)

Show key events only

## Live feed

Show key events only

From 3d ago

[11.38](#)

## MPs approve unopposed motion to set up inquiry into claims PM misled MPs over Partygate

**Nigel Evans**, the deputy Speaker, calls the vote. There are no objections, and so the motion goes through on the nod.

That means MPs have voted to trigger a privileges committee inquiry into claims that Boris Johnson misled MPs over Partygate. You can read the motion in full at [11.35am](#).

But the committee will not start its “substantive” work until the Met police inquiry into Partygate is over.

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Updated at 11.40 EDT

[2d ago](#)[15.06](#)

## A summary of today's developments

- **Boris Johnson will face a Commons inquiry over whether he lied to parliament after Downing Street withdrew an attempt to force Conservative MPs to delay the new Partygate investigation.** Two more Tory MPs called for Johnson to quit on Thursday, including the influential Brexiter Steve Baker. A Labour motion to launch a parliamentary investigation into whether Johnson lied to MPs about Downing Street parties passed without a vote on Thursday afternoon. Hours earlier, government whips had pulled an amendment that would have delayed any vote to start the inquiry until after the Sue Gray report was published.
- Asked if a general election should be called now, Sir [Keir Starmer](#) said: “I think the prime minister’s lost trust, I don’t think he has the moral authority to lead, and I think he should go. “Obviously I can’t force that – it’s for his own MPs to reflect on the situation they are in and decide for themselves whether they’re still prepared to go on defending the indefensible. I don’t think they should. I think they should call on him to go. Sir Ed Davey, the Lib Dem leader, believes Boris Johnson is too “distracted” by the Partygate allegations to lead the country.
- Earlier, Johnson spoke about the No 10 whipping U-turn on his trip to India. In an interview with Sky’s Beth Rigby at the Akshardham

Temple in Ahmedabad, Johnson said the government dropped its amendment because it did not want to look as if it had something to hide.

- The Home Office's top civil servant has told thousands of his staff that they will not be breaking the law or be guilty of racism if they enforce Priti Patel's plan to send people with rejected UK asylum claims to Rwanda. Matthew Rycroft, the permanent secretary, faced questions at an online staff meeting asking if the home secretary's policy of giving people a one-way ticket to Kigali was racist, while others demanded to know if the new policy was within international law.
- The [Metropolitan police](#) has said that it will not make any further announcements about people being fined for lockdown breaches at No 10 ahead of the May local elections. Fines could still be issued, but there won't be announcements about them.

We will close this blog now but you can read our story on Boris Johnson's position within the Tory party here:

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Updated at 15.11 EDT

[3d ago](#)[14.41](#)

The Home Office's top civil servant has told thousands of his staff that they will not be breaking the law or be guilty of racism if they enforce Priti Patel's plan to send people with rejected UK asylum claims to Rwanda.

Amid growing anger from the department's workforce, [Matthew Rycroft](#), the permanent secretary, faced questions at an online staff meeting asking if the home secretary's policy of giving people a one-way ticket to Kigali was

racist, while others demanded to know if the new policy was within international law.

Rycroft told staff they had to implement ministers' decisions, and reminded them of the civil service's neutral role, sources said.

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Updated at 14.50 EDT

[3d ago](#)[13.58](#)



Boris Johnson drapes a ring of khadi cloth around a statue of Gandhi during his visit to the Gandhi ashram in Ahmedabad, India. Photograph: EyePress News/Rex/Shutterstock

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Updated at 14.01 EDT

[3d ago](#)[13.31](#)

The shadow foreign secretary, David Lammy, tweeted:

“The @Conservatives’ humiliating climb-down on the inquiry into @BorisJohnson’s law-breaking and lying shows he’s lost the confidence of his own MPs.

“The Prime Minister is a basket case. He must go.”

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Updated at 14.01 EDT

[3d ago](#)[13.15](#)

The shadow chancellor, Rachel Reeves, has tweeted this:

Honesty and integrity matter in our politics, and for our democracy.

Today the Conservatives failed to stand up for either.

Britain deserves better.

— Rachel Reeves (@RachelReevesMP) [April 21, 2022](#)

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Updated at 14.02 EDT

[3d ago](#)[13.04](#)

Asked if a general election should be called now, Sir [Keir Starmer](#) said: “I think the prime minister’s lost trust, I don’t think he has the moral authority to lead, and I think he should go.

“Obviously I can’t force that – it’s for his own MPs to reflect on the situation they are in and decide for themselves whether they’re still prepared to go on defending the indefensible. I don’t think they should. I think they

should call on him to go.” Pressed on whether that means he does not think there should be a general election now, he said: “I think many people think he should resign, including some of his own MPs, but it’s only when the majority of them think that he should go that in the end he will go.” He added: “I think the country is crying out for change, so of course I think there should be change.

“But the issue before the house today was whether the prime minister had the confidence of his own MPs to support him in relation to what I think were misleading statements made to the house.

“And in the end his MPs showed that they didn’t support him in that.”

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Updated at 13.10 EDT

3d ago 12.53

Sir Ed Davey believes [Boris Johnson](#) is too “distracted” by the Partygate allegations to lead the country.

The leader of the Liberal Democrats told BBC News: “The Tory MPs were clearly too embarrassed to back the prime minister today but I’m afraid they are too weak to sack him. “And I think that’s what we need, we need the prime minister gone. “The country is facing some huge crises: the cost of living crisis here at home hitting millions of families and pensioners, as well as the international crisis in Ukraine. “And we need a prime minister who can provide leadership, who isn’t distracted and who has the trust of the British people.

It is pretty clear Boris Johnson has lost that trust and we have a Conservative party incapable of taking the measures that are needed to restore trust.

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Updated at 12.58 EDT

3d ago[12.44](#)

The Labour leader, Keir Starmer, said: “Honesty and integrity matter in our politics, and for our democracy. Today the [Conservatives](#) failed to stand up for either.

Boris Johnson has lost the trust of the public over parties held in Downing Street during lockdown. Now it’s clear he has lost the confidence of his MPs. Today’s humiliating climb-down showed that they know they can no longer defend the indefensible.

While the prime minister dodges accountability, the British public is demanding action on the cost of living crisis. It has never been more clear that Boris Johnson’s authority is shot and he is unable to lead.

Britain deserves better.

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Updated at 12.58 EDT

3d ago[12.44](#)

Here is the [Commons Hansard for today’s debate](#). The first two-and-a-half hours of the debate are already up (up to Clive Efford’s speech). Further speeches will be added as the afternoon goes on. Speeches normally appear on Hansard online about three hours after they were delivered.

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Updated at 12.50 EDT

3d ago[12.36](#)



Andrew Sparrow

Downing Street has indicated that it will tell the public if Boris Johnson or the cabinet secretary, Simon Case, receive a fine (or a further fine in Johnson's case) between now and the local elections on 5 May - even though the Met police does not plan to make any further announcements about fines during this period. (See [1.53pm](#)). A No 10 spokesperson said:

We've committed before to being transparent and to letting people know if that were the case. That hasn't changed. But specifically the announcement made today - it's clearly a matter for the Met police, it's their investigation and it's an independent matter for them.

The spokesperson said that he was not aware of any conversations between Downing Street and Scotland Yard preceding the Met announcement.

That is all from me for today. My colleague **Nadeem Badshah** is taking over now.

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Updated at 12.40 EDT

[3d ago](#)[12.35](#)



Boris Johnson being interviewed by ITV's Anushka Asthana inside the premises of the Swaminarayan Akshardham temple in Gandhinagar.  
Photograph: WPA/Getty Images

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Updated at 12.38 EDT

[3d ago](#)[12.11](#)

This is from **Tobias Ellwood**, the Conservative chair of the Commons defence committee. It's a message to his Tory colleagues. Ellwood has already said publicly that [Boris Johnson should go.](#)

An extraordinary 24 hours in Parliament.

It's time to stop drinking the Kool-Aid.

— Tobias Ellwood MP (@Tobias\_Ellwood) [April 21, 2022](#)

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[3d ago 12.02](#)

The latest edition of the Guardian's Politics Weekly podcast is out now. As MPs approve an unopposed motion to set up inquiry into claims [Boris Johnson](#) misled MPs over Partygate and the home secretary, Priti Patel, has been heavily criticised over the legality of her plans to send asylum seekers to Rwanda, Guardian columnist Gaby Hinsliff stands in for John Harris, and asks what happens when ministers no longer seem afraid to push the boundaries of the law? Gaby is joined by Guardian parliamentary sketch writer John Crace and Dr Hannah White, deputy director of the Institute for Government and author of *Held in Contempt*.

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Updated at 12.03 EDT

[3d ago 11.49](#)

The barrister **Adam Wagner**, who is an expert on Covid restrictions, has posted a long and interesting thread on Twitter on the Met police's decision not to publicise any further Partygate fines until after the local elections. It starts here.

The police do purdah now! <https://t.co/Mk3yUkWsvH>

— Adam Wagner (@AdamWagner1) [April 21, 2022](#)

Wagner is critical of the decision. Here are his conclusions.

To be fair to the Met, I can see why, reading NPCC guidance as a whole, they might think "ooh we shouldn't be releasing information" which could influence the election. But they are missing the point that deciding not to release information will itself influence the election.

— Adam Wagner (@AdamWagner1) [April 21, 2022](#)

Also, they will not be releasing the name of any politicians, as per their policy. Just that FPNs have been issued. It is up to the politicians to say whether they have been given one.

— Adam Wagner (@AdamWagner1) [April 21, 2022](#)

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[3d ago](#)[11.42](#)



An anti-Tory banner being held up outside parliament today. Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

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[3d ago](#)[11.38](#)

# MPs approve unopposed motion to set up inquiry into claims PM misled MPs over Partygate

Nigel Evans, the deputy Speaker, calls the vote. There are no objections, and so the motion goes through on the nod.

That means MPs have voted to trigger a privileges committee inquiry into claims that Boris Johnson misled MPs over Partygate. You can read the motion in full at [11.35am](#).

But the committee will not start its “substantive” work until the Met police inquiry into Partygate is over.

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Updated at 11.40 EDT

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**Boris Johnson**

## **MPs should wait for ‘full facts’ on Partygate, says Johnson in India**

Row over breaching of lockdown rules rumbles on as PM begins two-day visit to discuss trade and security

- [\*\*All the day’s politics news – as it happens\*\*](#)



Boris Johnson visits the Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad, India.  
Photograph: Sam Panthaky/AFP/Getty

*[Heather Stewart](#) in Ahmedabad and [Aubrey Allegretti](#)*

Thu 21 Apr 2022 07.23 EDTFirst published on Thu 21 Apr 2022 04.49 EDT

Boris Johnson has insisted MPs should wait for the “full facts” before deciding whether to trigger a fresh investigation into Partygate, as he kicked off a two-day trip to India.

Johnson will discuss trade and security with India's premier, [Narendra Modi](#), on his first visit to the country since becoming prime minister in 2019. He landed in Ahmedabad and was greeted warmly with multiple bunches of roses. The road into the city centre was lined with billboards featuring large photographs of Johnson.

But the trip risks being overshadowed by the ongoing Partygate row, as MPs prepare to vote on a Labour motion aimed at referring him to parliament's privileges committee over whether he misled the House of Commons.

Johnson was forced to signal a fresh climbdown on Thursday, as the government dropped a compromise amendment aimed at delaying an investigation by the privileges committee until after the Sue Gray report into lockdown rule-breaking is published.

"I'm very keen for every possible form of scrutiny and the House of Commons can do whatever it wants to do. But all I would say is I don't think that should happen until the investigation is completed," the prime minister said.

He added that MPs should have the "full facts" before taking any action. "Let's let the investigators do their stuff, and then knock this thing on the head," he added.

He was speaking on a visit to a new JCB factory in Vadodara, where he toured the facility with Tory donor Lord Bamford, who owns the company. Johnson has repeatedly visited JCB's UK factories, including to bulldoze through a wall of polystyrene bricks during the 2019 general election campaign.

En route to [India](#), Johnson had played down Partygate, saying he would concentrate on what he said were more pressing matters. "I think politics has taught me one thing – that you're better off talking about and focusing on the things that matter, the things that make a real difference to the electorate and not about politicians themselves," he said, adding, "I'm focused on jobs, growth and a fantastic partnership with India."

Asked whether there were circumstances in which he could resign over Partygate, he said: “Not a lot springs to mind at the moment.”

Instead, Johnson stressed the importance of securing a free trade deal with India, hinting that the UK might be prepared to relax its immigration regime in order to do so.

Two rounds of talks have already taken place, with a third due later this month – and both sides have expressed the hope of securing some kind of deal by the end of 2022.

The conflict in Ukraine also looms large over the visit, although No 10 has insisted Johnson will not “lecture” his host. India, which has a longstanding relationship with Russia, declined to support a UN motion criticising Vladimir Putin’s invasion of Ukraine.



Boris Johnson speaks to workers at a JCB factory in Vadodara, Gujarat, owned by the Tory donor Lord Bamford. Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

A cabinet minister denied that the move to delay the parliamentary investigation into whether Johnson misled parliament with his repeated denials of Covid law-breaking was a cover-up.

Nadhim Zahawi, the education secretary, said effectively annulling Labour's motion by putting off letting MPs make a decision until after the Metropolitan police and Whitehall inquiries have concluded was "the right thing to do".

He told Sky News: "If you want to play politics with this, the shenanigans that Labour are attempting today is the route. If you want to follow due process then you allow the police to do their investigation, you allow the Sue Gray report to be published and then the privileges committee can look at that."

Zahawi added: "Most of my colleagues who are fair-minded, who believe in due process, will vote for the amendment because it is the right thing to do."

But Chris Bryant, the Labour chair of the privileges committee who recused himself from any investigation to avoid accusations of a stitch-up, said it was "another Owen Paterson moment".

Referring to the sleaze row that exploded last autumn after the government forced Tory MPs to let a colleague avoid suspension after breaching lobbying rules, Bryant said party whips were "trying to buy time and lashing themselves to the Johnson mast when they don't know what waters lie ahead".

Thousands of miles from the turmoil over his behaviour, Johnson visited the Sabarmati Ashram, where he was presented with a copy of a guide to London written by Mahatma Gandhi. As he read from it, the prime minister said: "Vegetarianism costs far less than meat eating."

After removing his shoes, Johnson remarked: "There's always a panic that the socks are going to let you down."

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## Immigration and asylum

# Home Office staff threaten mutiny over ‘shameful’ Rwanda asylum deal

On an intranet noticeboard civil servants drew a comparison with serving under Adolf Hitler, and asked if they had a duty to ‘resist’



Priti Patel and Rwanda's foreign minister, Vincent Biruta, shake hands after signing the agreement. Photograph: Simon Wohlfahrt/AFP/Getty Images

[Rajeev Syal](#) and [Mark Brown](#)

Wed 20 Apr 2022 15.05 EDT Last modified on Thu 21 Apr 2022 03.27 EDT

Home Office staff have threatened to strike and drawn comparisons to working for the Third Reich over Priti Patel's plan to send asylum seekers to Rwanda, it has emerged.

Comments on an internal online noticeboard include calls for industrial action to stop the policy and concern from a staff member of 20 years who feels “deep shame” and is considering their position.

One anonymous civil servant drew a comparison to serving under Adolf Hitler. In a reference to the post-second world war Nazi trials at Nuremberg, they wrote: “The words ‘I was only obeying orders’ are echoing down through history to me and making me queasy.” They were later chastised by a colleague for making “absurd comparisons”.

It comes as a Conservative MP challenged the government’s plan to build a processing centre for asylum seekers in a small North Yorkshire village.

The internal comments, [first disclosed by Mail+](#), reveal that dozens of staff have voiced their opposition to the agreement with Rwanda, which was signed off by the home secretary this week and has been applauded by Boris Johnson.

One Home Office staff member asked whether staff would have a duty to campaign against the policy. “Do we have a responsibility to not just leave, but to organise and resist? We cannot simply wash our hands and walk away,” they wrote. Another asked: “I find the government proposal totally unethical and it impacts directly upon my workstream. As a civil servant can I refuse this type of work in contravention of my own ethics?”

Another said: “I’ve worked for the Home Office for 20 years. There’s been some ups and downs in that time. But this announcement has made me feel deep shame and is the first time I am considering my position here and whether I need to get out of this department.”

Another stated: “Can the permanent secretary and seniors give staff any advice on coping with our conscience with these sort of policies? I don’t feel safe telling people I work for the Home Office any more and now just make up a nondescript role in another government department when asked what I do for a job.”

The report has been confirmed as accurate by a Home Office source. The comments will be put to the Home Office permanent secretary, Matthew Rycroft, during an online group call for staff on Thursday.

In a further development, the local Tory MP has challenged plans for a new centre at the former RAF base Linton-on-Ouse, announced as part of the government's new migration measures.

Kevin Hollinrake, representing Thirsk and Malton, initially suggested he was sympathetic to the plans.

'Unethical and extortionate': Yvette Cooper challenges Priti Patel on Rwanda asylum plan – video

But on Wednesday, after meeting Patel, he called for the proposal to be reversed and threatened to support a judicial review if it is not.

"The current proposal of 1,500 young men in an open camp in the heart of a small rural village is not workable, sustainable or acceptable," wrote Hollinrake in a letter to the home secretary. "It simply cannot be that availability of a site dictates the appropriateness of the location," he said.

Some Conservative MPs raised concerns over the [Rwanda](#) policy on Wednesday as they debated the government motion to disagree with Lords' amendments to the nationality and borders bill.

Simon Hoare, the MP for North Dorset, said: "A safe route clearly would kill the evil traffic of people-smuggling at a stroke. That's one way of dealing with it.

"I fail to see how moving people to Rwanda is going to in any way disrupt this money-making scheme which these people traffickers have. They're just going to use different routes to land people on our shores. I'm just not getting it, I'm afraid."

The Conservative former minister Sir Bob Neill suggested using the £120m paid initially to the Rwandan government to improve the UK's system for handling claims.

"Can I make the point that the salary of an immigration tribunal judge, first tier tribunal judge, is £117,000. If you put on costs, even most generously, that's about £200,000.

“Look at the £120m so far committed to the Rwanda scheme; there’s about 600 first tier tribunal judges could be bought for that, or any number of hundreds of Home Office case workers. Would that not be an alternative, actually to invest in the current system? … That would be a constructive alternative, surely,” he said.

Tom Pursglove, the junior migration minister, replied: “That of itself will not solve this issue and I genuinely believe that the approach that we are taking through the comprehensive plan will shift the dial, will change the dynamic and will ultimately help us to shut down these evil criminal networks.”

A Home Office spokesperson, said: “The Home Office is committed to constructive and open conversations with staff on our policies. However, personal attacks are unacceptable and we will remove comments from our channels that are disrespectful, break our guidelines or contravene the Civil Service values of integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality.”

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**Boris Johnson**

## No 10 goes into battle with archbishops over Rwanda asylum plan

Downing Street refuses to deny PM told MPs archbishops were being unfairly critical as church figures defend Justin Welby

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Boris Johnson refuses to apologise to archbishop of Canterbury over Rwanda policy – video

*[Peter Walker](#), [Geneva Abdul](#) and [Tobi Thomas](#)*

Wed 20 Apr 2022 14.16 EDTFirst published on Wed 20 Apr 2022 08.03 EDT

Downing Street has gone into open battle with the Church of England over its condemnation of the [Rwanda deportation scheme](#), with No 10 officials doubling down on Boris Johnson's claim that archbishops were being unfairly critical.

The prime minister reportedly told Conservative MPs on Tuesday evening that senior clergy had criticised plans to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda more than they had condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This was not denied by No 10.

On Wednesday morning a senior Church of England branded the comments a "disgraceful slur".

With Johnson declining to apologise, the office of [Justin Welby](#), the archbishop of Canterbury, insisted he would continue to speak out about the

policy on “moral and ethical grounds”, setting the ground for an ongoing row.

A series of prominent Church of England figures defended Welby and the archbishop of York, Stephen Cottrell, with one saying those who questioned their right to criticise the controversial Rwanda scheme “need to acquaint themselves with the most basic rudiments of Christianity”.

Johnson, addressing Conservative MPs at a meeting on Tuesday, was said to have criticised the church and the [BBC](#) for being more condemnatory of the asylum policy than of Russia.

Speaking to journalists on the plane on Wednesday night as he travelled to India, Johnson defended his criticism of Welby and the BBC.

“I have a very good relationship with the archbishop. All I was saying was that I think we have an excellent policy to try and stop people drowning in the Channel. I was surprised to find it criticised,” he said.

“What I said was I thought was very mild, and I was very surprised. All I said was I thought the policy was misconstrued on the BBC and by some parts of the clergy. That’s what I said. I had just come off phone to Paul Kagame {the Rwandan leader} who was making that exact point to me. I thought it has been misconstrued. As far as I understand it, it was all alright until the [BBC Radio 4’s] Today programme piled in.”

Quizzed by [Keir Starmer](#) during prime minister’s questions (PMQs) earlier, Johnson vehemently denied attacking the BBC over its Russia coverage, calling this “completely without any foundation whatever”.

But he pointedly did not deny the condemnation of the church and bishops, and declined Starmer’s invitation to apologise, saying only that he had been “slightly taken aback” by [vehement criticism of the plan](#) in Welby and Cottrell’s Easter sermons, with the former calling the Rwanda policy “opposite of the nature of God”.

Speaking after [PMQs](#), Johnson’s press secretary said she could not comment on remarks made at a private meeting but refuted that Johnson criticised the BBC for its coverage of Ukraine.

Asked what Johnson thought about the church's criticisms of the Rwanda plan, as against its comments on Russia, she said: "You heard him answer the first point, where he said he was surprised to be criticised for a policy that is designed to end deaths at sea that are a result of people being exploited by criminal gangs."

The Church of England's head of news, [John Bingham, said](#) if the reports of Johnson's comment were true it was a "disgraceful slur" and that both archbishops had strongly condemned Russia over the war on Ukraine.

A statement by Welby's office said both he and Cottrell, as well as other faith leaders, were "gravely concerned by proposals to send migrants overseas", adding: "They will continue to speak out against these plans on moral and ethical grounds."

Both archbishops "have condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine as an act of great evil and spoken out repeatedly against it", it added.

Rev Richard Coles, the vicar of Finedon who is also a prominent radio presenter, said it was perfectly valid for the archbishops to criticise the policy.

"People who question the archbishop of Canterbury's right to criticise government policy need to acquaint themselves with the most basic rudiments of Christianity," said Coles. "Christianity always insists, or should insist, that we uphold the dignity of every person, and I don't think this policy is one that fully respects the dignity of people who are seeking asylum in this country."

Alan Wilson, the bishop of Buckingham, insisted criticism of the Rwanda policy was not overtly political.

"One of the things all of us who preach the word of God do is expound the scriptures, and when you look at the Christian scriptures, again and again and again they tell us to be generous to the stranger within your gate, to the person you've never met," Wilson said in an interview on [Premier Christian Radio](#).

He added: “Yes of course there should be criminal sanctions against people traffickers, and of course there should be a proper police reaction to all forms of crime, but to take it out on the most vulnerable people in the world is silly,” he said of the government’s Rwanda asylum policy.

Jayne Ozanne, a member of the church’s General Synod, who was formerly on a government advisory panel on LGBTQ+ issues, said Johnson “has shown himself to be devoid of a conscience and frankly would do well to seek advice from the archbishop and listen to his counsel, before asking for both his and the nation’s forgiveness”.

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## ‘It’s the worst thing I ever put in my mouth!’ : my week living off TikTok recipes



Sauce liberally ... Rhik tries some Korean cheese corn dogs. Photograph:  
Jill Mead/The Guardian

Custard toast, smashed brussels sprouts and a Snickers in a gherkin. Is it time to ditch the cook books and get your recipes from social media? There's only one way to find out ...



Rhik Samadder

@whatsamadder

Thu 21 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 21 Apr 2022 08.10 EDT

For anyone over the age of 25, TikTok is a baffling world of moronic dance routines and teenagers lip-syncing to each other's conversations. Yet it's also a hotbed of authentic culinary creativity. [Dalgona coffee](#), [cloud bread](#), [feta pasta](#), [the tortilla folding hack](#), [hot chocolate bombs](#) – these crossover food trends all gained popularity on the platform, and they are only the tip of the iceberg lettuce. But what makes certain dishes go viral, and are any of them any good? Will social media replace recipe books? In a transparent, ultimately pathetic attempt to stay relevant, I'll be living largely off TikTok recipes for one week to find out, and keeping a food diary. Let's go!

## **Day 1: Nature's cereal / hasselback cheesy Marmite hot cross buns / jello frozen grapes**

Nature's cereal [@lizzo](#)



Breakfast of champions ... nature's cereal. Photograph: Rowena Price

*Pour coconut water over berries and ice. Eat.*

I doubt berries in water will replace wheat pieces in milk. Yet pop star [Lizzo](#) – among thousands of others – claims to be addicted. And, despite my scepticism, this is ... fantastic? The smooth sweetness of coconut water lifts the blueberries and strawberries, with the pomegranate giving crunch. It's supremely hydrating. Crunching on ice does feel a bit fashion week, though. And have you seen how much coconut water costs? I won't be doing this again, any more than I'll be sprinkling saffron in the bath and calling it aromatherapy. Nothing tastes as good as avoiding bankruptcy feels.

**Hasselback cheesy Marmite hot cross buns** [@thisisplanetfood](#)



The Marmite hot cross bun ... love or hate? Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

*Cut vertical slices into a Marmite hot cross bun. Stuff with cheese and grill to melt. Drizzle with Marmite to finish.*

Peckish after my water breakfast, I discover an intriguing snack. Hasselback may sound like an 80s German TV star, but it's actually a way of increasing a potato's buttering area by 10,000%. I was therefore intrigued by an idea courtesy of @thisisplanetfood, of deep-pleating a Marmite hot cross bun to concertina it with cheese. It's unquestionably great, like five fluffy, mini cheese-on-toasts. Looks like I'm in for a good week.

**Jello frozen grapes** [@baybradyy](#)



Expect grape things ... Jello frozen grapes. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

*Wash grapes and put in freezer bag, still wet. Shake in jelly powder. Freeze.*

I was ready to scoff at this health trend, in which frozen grapes are said to taste like juicy candy. But guess what – I dust, I freeze, I experience revelation. The sparkly globes that emerge are sharp and sweet and ice cold; addictive to eat, magical to behold. I scoff the lot; a grape success.

## **Day 2: Overnight Weetabix cheesecake / ramen lasagne / dalgona**

### **Overnight Weetabix [@eatwithjamielee](#)**

*Moisten Weetabix with milk, in a lunchbox. Spread with yoghurt and chopped strawberries, topped with strawberry conserve. Swirl toppings with a cocktail stick, then refrigerate.*

TikTok recipes are simple. That's because the pop-music-scored videos are about eight seconds long, frantically edited and play on a loop that, after a while, makes you feel as if you're being subjected to enhanced interrogation. The idea behind this massive 2022 trend is that, after a night in the fridge,

thick yoghurt and Weetabix approximate the taste of cheesecake! If I was cheesecake, I'd consider legal action. This tastes like jam and yoghurt over Weetabix. Not bad, but have you ever had someone cancel plans just before you were going to? Now that's delicious.

### Ramen lasagne [@ramenkingivan](#)



One for the ramfam ... ramen lasagne. Photograph: Rhik Samadder

*Layer instant noodle nests with pasta sauce and cheese. Bake.*

How to explain the existence of ramen lasagne? It was created by Ivan McCombs, a Victor Frankenstein of instant noodles. He also has videos on how to make spring roll ramen, banana mayo ramen, microwave lobster ramen, coffee ramen and more. McCombs' 6 million #ramfam followers lap up videos of him eating ramen with babyfood, or cooked in cream with melted Skittles, because this is who we are. The lasagne video has been viewed 20m times. Must dash as I've now consumed an entire jar of passata and am sweating tomatoes.

### Dalgona [@saifshawaf](#)



Lick the back Rhik! ... Korean street food, dalgona. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

*Melt sugar in a pan. Add baking soda. Pour on to baking sheet, score to shape.*

Not to be confused with dalgona coffee, this old-fashioned Korean street sweet is better known as the Squid Game candy. You know, the episode where the contestants have to snap a shape accurately, or get shot in the head. It's a bit of fun! It's surprisingly easy to make, with just two ingredients. Whisking and pouring, I struggle to extract the cookie cutters from the quick-cooling foam without everything shattering. If I was in Squid Game, I would fall over my laces and stab myself with the pen while signing up. Pro tip: don't taste caramel while it cooks – it is a red-hot glue that turns to fibreglass in your mouth. Happened to, er, a friend of mine.

## **Day 3: Custard toast / corn ribs and smashed brussels sprouts / french-fried korean corndog / yorkshire pudding profiteroles**

**Custard toast** [@cookingwithayeh](#)



Berry delight ... custard toast. Photograph: Rhik Samadder

*Make a custard. Indent a slice of bread, and pour in. Top with berries or chocolate drops, bake to set.*

Great to be reminded how easy it is to make custard – here it's just yoghurt, an egg and maple syrup. The problem is the bread. You have to squidge it down with your fingers to make a shallow basin for the custard. The sourdough I'm using springs right back. Against my political beliefs, I buy white bread that costs 9p; it works much better but makes me sad. I also find that raspberries trap a lot of heat; it's like eating magma off a baked playing card.

### Corn ribs [@spicednice](#)

*Quarter corn on the cob, lengthwise. Brush with a spicy oil mix, airfry until charred. Serve with chipotle mayo.*

This is more like it. TikToker [@spicednice](#) created corn ribs – with a nod to Mexican street food elotes – in a video that has 1.8m likes. While corn cobs are harder to slice than titanium, this is still a brilliant innovation. The corn curls as it bakes, taking on rib shape and colour, while the kernels get chewy under a smoky seasoning. Superb. I have since tried these at upmarket

Mayfair restaurant Fallow, proof of how far a good idea can travel, no matter where it comes from.

### **Smashed brussels sprouts [@lowcarbstateofmind](#)**

*Trim sprouts, steam in microwave. Crush, spray with oil and garlic powder. Bake until crispy.*

What's not to love about mini-cabbages? I Hulk-smash these, season, and in 15 minutes am enjoying crispy, garlicky little green sliders. With this recipe (as with many others), TikTokers are obsessed with air frying, but baking works just as well.

### **Korean cheese corn dogs [@stellanspice](#)**



'Medieval club of batter and sausage' ... Korean cheese corn dogs.  
Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

*Mix yeast batter, let rise. Wrap a sausage in cheese, and skewer. Coat in batter, roll in diced potato and panko breadcrumb. Deep fry.*

I invite friends round for dinner, inspired by mukbang, the Korean TV genre in which hosts eat extreme foods in front of a live audience. TikTok also centres dishes with ASMR value: slurpy noodles, crunchy nugs, with a sub-

genre devoted to Korean corn dogs – half hotdog, half mozzarella, deep fried for the ultimate cheese pull. I wrap a cheese slice around a sausage, which immediately falls off. I compensate with too much yeasty paste. Rolling the hot mess in potato cubes doesn't feel excellent. The resulting medieval club of batter and sausage, sans cheese, tastes weirdly OK. Sweetly boozy, tangy with cheap mustard and ketchup. I'm too old to mukbang, though. My stomach is squeaking and my friends left early.

### **Yorkshire pudding profiteroles** [@foodmadesimple](#)



Doing Yorkshire proud ... pudding profiteroles. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

*Squirt whipped cream in half a batch of cooled yorkshire puddings. Make lids with the rest, and dip in melted chocolate to seal.*

I tried this cultural atrocity on my friend, Yorkshire Jill. She wasn't fazed by me squirting cream into the puddings but she did take exception to the puddings being shop-bought. She claimed to be *unaware such a thing existed*. Madness. It pains my inner purist to record that these chewy profiteroles, while a little heavy, somewhat too oily for the ambassador's reception, aren't bad.

## **Day 4: Crust pops / spicy cucumber salad with carrot bacon / easy salmon sushi / TikTok crinkle cake**

**Crust pops** [@caughtsnackin](#)



Give 'em a twirl ... crust pops. Photograph: Rhik Samadder

*Roll leftover white bread crusts into a swirl and skewer. Baste with butter, then grill, then dip in cinnamon sugar.*

I wake up with a second wind! These crust pops are super easy, and probably a fun thing to make with kids (unless your kids are on TikTok, hosting professional makeup tutorials and insulting you in a language you don't understand). Let's call them cinnamon pinwheels, because "crust pops" sounds like a late-stage skin condition. They make even 9p bread luscious, like a fairground treat. Still, I've had bigger thrills. Did you ever ride an empty escalator, pretending to be a Mayan king ascending to the Sky World? I might be hallucinating from lack of vitamins.

**Three-minute spicy cucumber salad** [@michelletiang](#)



On your side ... three-minute spicy cucumber salad and carrot bacon.  
Photograph: Rhik Samadder

*Slice cucumber. Add sugar, salt, sesame oil, rice vinegar and crunchy chilli oil. Shake in lunchbox, refrigerate.*

In need of something green and speedy, I find a video of someone preparing food in real time! It feels like breathing for the first time in days. Michelle Tiang's marinaded cucumber salad really does take three minutes, and is a juicy, piquant winner. She's a mum of three, the only kind of influencer I trust.

### **Carrot bacon [@iamtabithabrown](#)**

*Shave carrot. Marinade in liquid smoke, maple syrup, smoked paprika, garlic and onion powder. Fry till crisp.*

Tabitha Brown's carrot bacon video has 3.7m likes, and they can't all be from pigs. (Hard to like and subscribe with trotters.) I don't have liquid smoke, but use sriracha for colour and am impressed with the crispy strips that emerge. Spicy, deeply savoury, almost tandoori red. They are very easy to burn though, which at least compensates for the lack of artificial smoke. With all of my shopping earmarked for TikTok experiments, I raid the fridge

for nutrients. I find a bag of iceberg lettuce and push my face into it, like the Titanic going down.

### **Easy salmon sushi [@emilymariko](#)**

*Flake leftover salmon into cooked sushi rice. Mix with kewpie mayonnaise and sriracha sauce. Scoop up with mini seaweed sheets.*

Now for an ancient (ie 2021) technique that I have genuinely incorporated into my repertoire since I first saw it. Vlogger Emily Mariko got 2 million followers from inventing sushi rice with salmon scooped up with mini seaweed sheets. I once grilled a slice of ham until it curled into a bowl, then cooked an egg inside that, and my only followers are stray dogs. I suppose this has broader appeal, especially with added spring onion, sesame seeds and crispy onion. It's futomaki for sophisticated slatterns, and I love it with my whole heart.

### **TikTok crinkle cake [@ramenasaidwow](#)**



Winning ... TikTok crinkle cake. Photograph: Rhik Samadder

*Concertina filo pastry in a tray, two sheets at a time, and bake. Brush with melted sugar, bake again. Pour in custard, bake for a final time. Finish with sugar syrup.*

FoodTok is built on pudding. I've seen things you wouldn't believe: people [putting puddings inside cakes](#); people [sandwiching cookie dough in Oreos and dipping them in chocolate](#). Aching kidneys tell me I shouldn't go near any of that. I am taken with this recipe for crinkle cake however, which has 1.5m likes. It's a multi-step process but easy. I tweak with pistachio and leftover cinnamon sugar from the crust pops. The result is incredible. Aromatic caramel crackling gives way to cool, vanilla-soaked layers and sweet perfume, something like Greek bougatsa. I will be eating this for the rest of my life. Which I suspect is 10 days.

## Day 5: Rice paper boba tea / green goddess salad and replica KFC / snickle

### Rice paper boba tea [@caughtsnackin](#)

*Dunk rice paper in warm water, roll up and slice into balls. Place in cup with scoop of Nutella. Top with ice, tea and milk.*

DrinkTok is a wild west. People are making [strawberry vodka shots with Haribo melted in a dishwasher](#). They're [mixing milk and Ribena](#). Let's play it safe, I think. Bubble tea is kawaii! The video has such fast cuts, I miss the instruction to dunk the rice paper, and leave the sheets to collapse. Attempting to slice this ectoplasm, the balls stick to my fingers. When I use another finger to dislodge them, they stick to that, turning to gunk all the while. I feel like Winnie-the-Pooh. Cursing, I fling my hands up. Boba mess sticks to the ceiling, the cupboards; some gets trod into the carpet like chewing gum. When I decant tea over the few hairy bubbles I rescue, it runs down the cup, staining the carpet. And the taste? The worst thing ever put in a mouth.

### Green goddess salad [@bakedbymelissa](#)

The phrase "viral salad" is hardly mouthwatering. It reminds me of the first time I used public transport after lockdown. Still, Melissa Ben-Ishay's green goddess has 1.7m likes and I need vitamins. It's a headache to chop, but with an entire cabbage in the slaw, plus a bag of spinach in the dressing, it's got those to spare. (I'm using [a recipe tweak from Delish.com](#), which adds feta

and dill.) I blend the dressing – it's neon green, as if Hannibal got to Kermit the Frog. Cheesy, yet acidulous and fresh, my guts feel some relief. Shame I'm pairing it with deep-fried chicken!

### Replica KFC Nashville chicken tenders [@yashodhas\\_eats](#)

*Marinade chicken in buttermilk and Cajun spices. Add hot sauce, rest. Coat in garlicky flour mix and deep-fry until golden.*

Recreating franchise food is huge on TikTok. There are instructional videos on making home-style Big Macs, Whoppers, Domino's garlic and herb dip. I find a not-too-demented KFC-inspired video and follow it. Not quite 11 herbs and spices, but there's smoky, spicy goodness here. I deep-fry the tenders, burn them, then eat eight. My stomach gurgles like an animal trying to talk. It's had enough. I have too.

### Snickle [@liamslunchbox](#)



Shoot, eat and heave ... the snickle. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

*Hollow gherkin, insert Snickers. Eat?*

Putting a Snickers inside a pickle started as a joke, yet numbers know no irony, and I've a job to finish. Maybe this is how strawberry v black pepper

started? Or that huge caramel/salt collab? I close my eyes and bite. It's certainly a job to finish. Heinous. I would describe this as an efficient way to ruin your day, your week and even your year. No wonder nature is trying to take away our sense of taste. We're not using it right.

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People fleeing a fire at the Moria camp on the Aegean island of Lesbos, Greece, in September 2020. Photograph: Petros Giannakouris/AP

[The long read](#)

## **‘A disaster waiting to happen’: who was really responsible for the fire at Moria refugee camp?**

People fleeing a fire at the Moria camp on the Aegean island of Lesbos, Greece, in September 2020. Photograph: Petros Giannakouris/AP

Days after fire destroyed the overcrowded camp, six inmates were charged with arson. Greece is now opening ‘prison-like’ secure camps in the Aegean islands as part of a growing tendency to criminalise refugees

by [Lauren Markham](#)

Thu 21 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT

About 11pm on the night of 8 September 2020, residents of the Moria refugee camp on the Greek island of Lesbos were roused from sleep by the smell of smoke and the sound of urgent voices. Sedique, a 16-year-old from Afghanistan, remembers her neighbours bellowing: “Run, run, run!” She poked her head outside her tent and saw fire burning below them on the hillside a few hundred metres away. Along with her parents and two younger siblings, she gathered documents, grabbed an armful of clothing and ran.

The first blaze had caught hold in the official camp, then spread among the clusters of tents outside its walls. At that time, an estimated 12,000 people were living in Moria, most of them in tents packed together so tightly on the steep hillsides above the main camp that there was barely room to walk between them. The flames leaped from one makeshift shelter to the next, making easy work of the plastic tarps and rickety shacks. The olive trees, too, caught fire. Embers blown on the wind caught on people’s shirts and headscarves, and on the trees and brittle grasses, as rats skittered about.

Throughout the camp, walls of flame and thick smoke blocked the pathways and made it difficult to breathe. By midnight, the sky glowed orange. The road below the camp filled with people heading towards the safety of the city of Mytilene, six miles south. Sedique’s family joined the procession, but the police had set up a blockade about a mile before the turnoff to Mytilene.

“Behind us was fire,” one refugee told me later, “and in front of us were police.”

A local anti-immigration group had also set up their own blockade to keep migrants from entering the nearby Moria village. By 1am, thousands of refugees were marooned on the road without food, water or shelter. Sedique’s family found a place to huddle on the roadside. When the sun rose the next morning, it was clear that much of the camp had turned to char and ash – the tents were gone and the olive trees now resembled smouldering black harpoons. The wind was still blowing, pushing the lingering flames into the unburned areas.

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It took four days to extinguish the blaze. For more than a week, thousands of refugees remained on the roads with no medical care, hungry and thirsty, hemmed in by the blockades. When food trucks organised by the local authorities, the ministry of migration and the UN arrived, people rushed the vehicles, pounding on the windows and climbing over one another to reach the supplies. Almost nothing survived of the camp – but miraculously, no one had been killed in the fire.

Pretty much everyone had wanted Moria gone: refugees, locals, volunteers, politicians. The camp had been built in 2013 to accommodate 1,200 people for short stays, then was expanded to a capacity of roughly 3,200 in 2015. But by the time it was destroyed, more than three times that number were living there – many of whom had been stuck for years, trying to get the documents they needed to move on. Inmates had called the camp a “living hell”. “No More Moria” had become a rallying cry of the right and the left. For one side, the slogan meant “no more refugees on our islands”. To the other, it meant no more squalid conditions for people seeking refuge from war and persecution.

Most people at the camp had arrived in [Greece](#) in 2015, hoping to travel farther north and west in Europe, but had found themselves stranded as other EU countries shut their borders. EU law obliged Greece to deal with asylum applications before people were allowed to leave – a process that could take years. Under a new deal with the EU, Turkey was obliged to patrol the shore, but for those who got through, Greece, with encouragement from EU officials, corralled refugees on six “hotspot” islands in the Aegean, including Lesbos, in camps that grew more and more crowded, dilapidated and dangerous.

When I first visited Moria in 2019, I met Patrick Mansour, a protection manager for the UN High Commissioner for [Refugees](#) (UNHCR) who had worked in refugee settings all over the world. He told me that, in spite of the influx of money and volunteer support, Lesbos was one of the most frustrating posts he’d ever held. “Here, even with funding, nothing is moving forward. It’s bullshit. This is a disgrace,” he said.

Between the start of the crisis in 2015 and the end of 2019, about 1.2 million refugees [had arrived](#) in Greece, a country of fewer than 11 million, mostly

landing on the Aegean islands by boat from Turkey. As Greece and Italy continued to shoulder the work of managing new waves of migrants, both countries stepped up efforts to deter new arrivals, by criminalising migrants and those who came to their aid. Last November, a trial opened on Lesbos of 24 humanitarian workers charged with espionage and forgery. (The arrests had been decried as a farce, and the trial [was adjourned](#) after the court declared itself unfit to judge the case and referred it to a higher tribunal.) Thousands of refugees are facing smuggling or trafficking charges: in 2019, [nearly 2,000 people](#) were in prison in Greece for driving migrant boats across the Aegean.

In 2019, the Greek government announced [plans](#) to demolish the sprawling camps and build secure structures, paid for by the EU, to accommodate fixed numbers of refugees in closed facilities. The minister for migration said arrivals would be screened to make sure they weren't terrorists. NGOs and legal volunteers protested that the planned camps were effectively prisons, and demonstrated a growing tendency in Europe to criminalise refugees.

#### [A map showing the location of the Moria refugee camp on Lesbos island in Greece](#)

A week after the fire at Moria – as the roads were still being cleared and the migrants moved to a hastily built new camp nearby – Greek authorities announced that six Afghan men had been arrested for starting the fires. The government claimed it had a clearcut case against the men, but to some observers it did not seem so. The charges were based on the testimony of a single witness who had provided six common Afghan first names to the police. “There was a general feeling that they’d got these guys, and that was the end of it,” Amanda Muñoz del Toro, director of [Fenix](#), a Lesbos-based legal nonprofit, told me. “They had to have someone to put it on. After the arrests, the [authorities] talked as if it was a done deal.”

Over the nine months that followed, as a campaign grew to challenge their arrest, the young men, known as the “Moria six”, maintained their innocence. “What did I do to deserve this?” the oldest of the accused said to me through his lawyers. “I came to this country for a better life, and I ended up in jail for something I did not do.” In the eyes of the accused and their supporters, the men were casualties of Europe’s war on refugees.

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When Sedique's family had arrived at Moria camp in the summer of 2019 after a terrifying journey from Turkey in an overcrowded boat, Sedique looked at her mother in disbelief. They'd risked everything to end up *here*? She was stunned by the wretchedness of the place and its residents. When a new group of refugees arrived at Moria, long-term inmates would jeer from the hillsides: "Welcome to hell!"

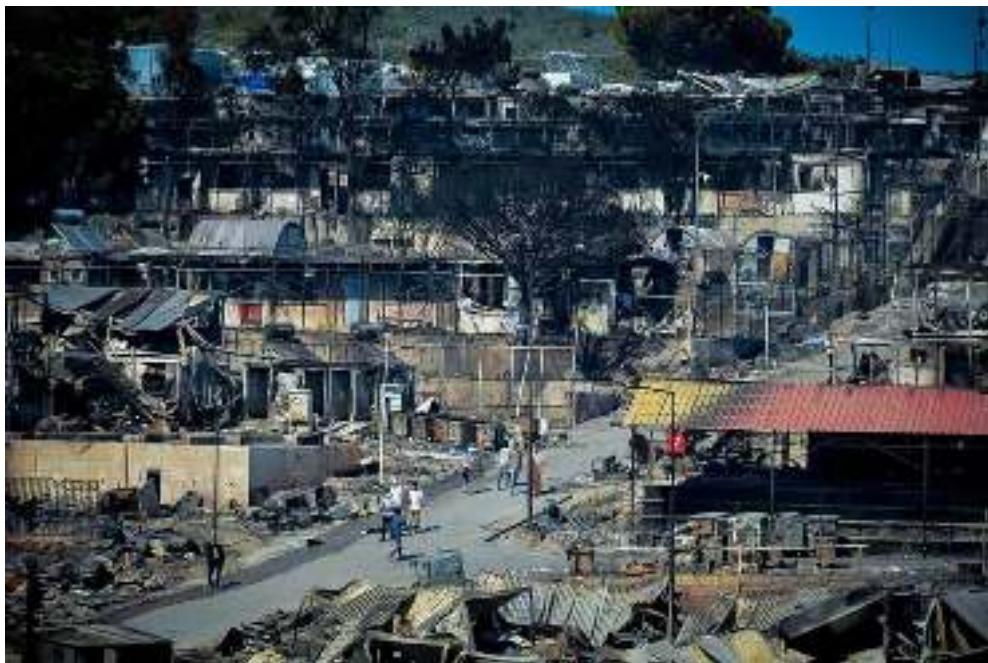
For the first two nights, Sedique's family slept under a tree. After that, a Dutch NGO issued them a rudimentary tent, in which they lived for the next year. "I couldn't imagine living there for even a week when I first came," Sedique told me. But she soon learned how long the asylum process could be. People's days were mostly spent standing in line: they queued for hours for food dispensed by volunteers, and sometimes just as long to use the wash facilities. During her stay in Moria, there was only one shower stall for every 500 people. The toilets were often clogged, the cracked tiles always covered in filth. When it rained, water flowed down from the hills and areas of the main camp would flood.

The official, bricks-and-mortar camp was known as the Reception and Identification Center, or RIC, where vulnerable residents, minors and women on their own lived in shipping containers. The majority of Moria residents, however, like Sedique's family, lived in what was known as "the jungle", a shantytown cluttered among the olive groves that stretched across the hills above the camp. Here, the refugees and aid workers built makeshift wooden huts and tents made of canvas or white tarps emblazoned with the blue logo of the UNHCR. Rats and mice burrowed into the trash that filled the passageways and drainage canals, and into tents at night, in search of food. After a number of reported rat bites, volunteer doctors launched rabies vaccination campaigns.

Stalls and kiosks, mostly operated by enterprising refugees, cropped up along makeshift streets. People used the €90 a month stipend to buy their basic needs: phone credit to keep in touch with family back home, tea, bus fares into town to meet lawyers, electric heaters and blankets, supplemental groceries to cook in their tents. Noori, an Afghan refugee living in Moria who volunteered as a [medical](#) interpreter, recalled the horrific conditions of the camp, but also had some fond memories, particularly of warmer

evenings when residents would cook food and share plates with their neighbours. Such moments offered a fleeting semblance of family and community.

But it wasn't uncommon for cooking fires – which were not officially permitted – to get out of control. In 2019, a fire in one of the containers killed a woman and child, and another child died in a similar blaze in March 2020. Fire was a hazard and a necessity of Moria life: essential for surviving the cold, dangerous in the overcrowded, rubbish-filled alleys, and at times, a form of protest. In 2016, a group of refugees had deliberately started a fire in protest at the conditions in the camp, and the threat of being sent back to Turkey.



The Moria camp on Lesbos after the blaze in September 2020. Photograph: Eurokinissi / Rex / Shutterstock

Boredom was another major feature of life in Moria. With months, sometimes years, to wait before their asylum interviews, the feeling of being stuck became unbearable. Since the beginning of the humanitarian crisis, volunteers and NGOs had come to the island to offer activities such as sports, film-making and English classes, but these did little to alleviate people's despair. Larger NGOs including Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) provided medical care, legal assistance and mental health care, but the

waiting lists for these services were long. “This camp does crazy shit to people’s minds,” as Ahmad Ebrahimi, an Afghan refugee who filmed a documentary about his life inside the camp, [Citizen of Moria](#), put it. Alcoholism and drug abuse were common.

What Sedique recalls most was the fights at night. “On the first of the month,” Noori told me, when their allowance was loaded on to residents’ cards, “there was no wine left in the supermarket next to the camp.” Residents knew to expect fights soon after. Noori despaired, he told me, about how the men would fight over nothing – a perceived slight, or simply being from a different country or, just as common, a different ethnic group within the same country. He often interpreted for stab victims in the hospital.

The longer people spent in Moria, the more their mental health suffered. In 2018, MSF [called](#) what was happening in Moria camp “an unprecedented mental health emergency”.

“If not urgently and adequately addressed,” said the head of the Human Rights Commission for Europe during a visit to Moria a year before the fires, “these abysmal conditions, combined with existing tensions, risk leading to further tragic events.”

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By the end of 2019, there were [nearly 20,000 people](#) living in Moria – a facility designed for just 3,200. Under EU law, refugees arriving on the “hotspot” islands closest to Turkey were required to remain in camps like Moria until their paperwork was processed. “The EU wants to keep the problem away, to give it to Greece,” Kostas Moutzouris, the regional governor for the Aegean islands, told me. “And Greece, they want to keep it to the islands, not the rest of the country.”

On Lesbos, many local people, who had initially rallied around the new arrivals, bringing them home-cooked food and blankets, were weary after years of disruption and chaos. Fed up with the refugees for stealing their goats and cutting down their olive trees for firewood, some residents blockaded town centres and staged protests against the camps.

Earlier in 2019, rightwing politicians had swept local and national elections, running in part on a “tough on migration” platform. In the autumn, the new

conservative national government announced that they would shut down the existing, overcrowded camps and build “closed controlled” facilities as far away from towns and tourist areas as possible. On Lesbos, residents reacted furiously to the proposal. Many believed the plan signalled that there would be no end to refugees being detained on Lesbos long-term. Refugees and aid workers feared the new camps, resembling US detention centres, would restrict refugees’ ability to access services including healthcare and legal assistance.

“The people revolted,” Moutzouris told me. On 22 January 2020, local people gathered in Mytilene in their thousands to protest against what Moutzouris described as “warehouses of suffering souls”. “Our islands can no longer be prisons,” protesters told [reporters](#). In February, at the port of Mytilene, protesters [clashed](#) with police as they tried to block the unloading of construction equipment for the new camp. As tensions mounted, a group of men armed with clubs [attacked](#) aid workers, including a group of foreign doctors, beating people up and smashing up their cars.



A woman carries a child away from the fire at the Moria camp, September 2020. Photograph: Angelos Tzortzinis / AFP / Getty

Then, on 27 February, Turkey’s president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, [announced](#) that his government would no longer be patrolling the borders

between Turkey and Europe. Greece sent ships to patrol the sea around Lesbos, and detained all new arrivals at Mytilene. In March, the government announced it would be temporarily suspending the right to seek asylum for one month, a move condemned by rights groups.

“Greece has an obligation to analyse the merits of the asylum claims for people who have arrived in their territory,” Muñoz del Toro of Fenix told me.

The Covid-19 pandemic effectively forced Moria camp to close its gates to the outside world for the spring and summer of 2020. Even when the rest of the island opened to tourists in the summer, Moria remained closed. In early September, the first Covid case was confirmed in the camp, and dozens of Moria residents were transferred to quarantine barracks inside the main camp walls. “Many people felt they were being left to die,” said Amelia Cooper, a researcher with Legal Centre Lesvos, a local nonprofit. Shortly after that, word got out that the local government had contracted a company to build a wall to encircle Moria for good, jungle and all. Then came the fire.

“Moria was a pressure cooker,” Cooper told me. “What surprises me about this fire is that it took so long to happen.”

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In the days after the fire, everyone seemed to have a theory about who was responsible. Many, including former residents of the camp, believed it was the refugees themselves who set the hated Moria ablaze. Some Afghans I spoke to blamed the Arabs; the Arabs and west Africans said it was the Afghans. Suspicion was also attached to the island’s growing far-right faction. An anti-immigrant group had burned down a transit centre on the north of the island in 2019.

On the evening of 15 September, seven days after the fire, the police pulled four young Afghan men from their makeshift shelters and took them into custody. Two unaccompanied minors were arrested and brought back from the mainland, where they had been evacuated after the fire.

One of the accused (they all asked not to be named) later told me through his lawyers that when police had loaded him into the car he was certain there had been a mistake. “I was in shock,” he said. But once he and the other

d detainees were being interrogated in the station, he said, “I lost all hope.” According to the accused, the police treated them roughly, and had taken their statements in separate rooms, without the presence of a lawyer or an interpreter, though they spoke little Greek or English.

The six felt they had been framed by the government, and targeted by the supposed eyewitness because of their ethnicity. Though from different parts of Afghanistan, the young men were all from the Hazara minority. After the Taliban takeover in 1995, Hazara communities had been persecuted, and thousands had fled. One of the six told me his father had been killed by the Taliban in 2005, and he had left Afghanistan as soon as he was old enough. Each of the accused had left their families and travelled to Greece alone, to seek asylum in order to escape the war, and to try to send money home. Just before the fire, one of the unaccompanied minors had received approval to move to France to live with his older brother, who had been granted asylum there. “Why would he burn Moria down when he was so close to leaving?” his lawyer said. “Why would any of them risk everything to destroy the camp?”

Dimitris Choulis, a human rights lawyer on the Aegean island of Samos, told me that the criminalisation of refugees in Greece serves as “an example to others”. The government’s hope, as he sees it, is that locking up refugees will serve as a deterrent to others making their way to Europe via Greece. It also helps appease the rightwing base. “It’s political,” he said.

Effie Doussi, one of the attorneys for the Moria six, agrees. “The Greek authorities are using penal law as a tool for migration management on the Aegean islands,” she told me.

One of the most common charges against refugees in Greece is people smuggling. Refugees have consistently reported that Turkish smugglers force them to pilot the boats themselves, so the smugglers are not exposed to any risk, but the authorities persist in accusing those caught driving the boats of working for the smugglers. People smuggling trials that have come to court in Greece in recent years have tended to last roughly 30 minutes and almost always end in a conviction, with average sentences of 44 years and fines of up to €370,000.

In March 2020, a 25-year-old Afghan man named Amir crossed the Aegean on an inflatable boat with his pregnant wife and young daughter. Amir said he was ordered to drive the boat by the smugglers. He said that as they neared shore, a coastguard vessel attacked the boat with metal poles in what attorneys believe was an attempt to push the boat back into Turkish waters. When Amir's boat began to sink, the coastguard took the refugees on board, and brought the whole group to Lesbos. Because they had been driving the boat, Amir and another refugee were charged with "facilitating illegal entry" and "provoking a shipwreck" – their own. On 8 September 2020, the same day as the Moria fire, they were each [sentenced](#) to 50 years in prison.

Choulis explained that such cases often lack physical evidence linking the accused to the crime. "No fingerprints, no photographs. No one asks who owned the boat, or goes to investigate on the Turkish side." He adds that there is a racial element to the justice system. "Only 5% of criminal cases end in an innocent verdict," he said, "if you're not white."



A drone view of the camp on Samos, Greece, September 2021. Photograph: NurPhoto / Rex / Shutterstock

In early November, an Afghan refugee named Ayoub Nadir boarded a boat from Turkey with his six-year-old son, along with his brother, mother, sister and 19 other refugees. About midnight, they reached the rocky coast of the

island of Samos, where their boat crashed against the shoreline, dumping all the passengers into the sea. Nadir lost his son in the waves, in the dark. He made it to shore, and ran to raise the alarm. When the coastguard arrived, the next morning, they found his son's dead body in the water.

Choulis, who represents Nadir, believes this death could have been prevented. The Hellenic Coast Guard records noted a distress call at 12.06am, and the passengers testified to twice seeing coastguard vessels nearby, but these ships did nothing to help them. Police charged Nadir with the crime of child endangerment. "They had to accuse someone of this death," Choulis said. "Either the boy's father, or themselves. And of course they chose the refugee."

For 10 months, the Moria six were held in a youth prison outside Athens, awaiting trial. A team of lawyers with Legal Centre Lesvos volunteered to represent them. In May of 2021, the two minors were tried and sentenced to five years in prison. The other four, three of whom claimed to have been under 18 at the time of the fire, were tried as adults. On 11 June, the trial began on the island of Chios, two hours south of Lesbos by ferry. Due to Covid, the judges said, there would be no independent international observers allowed in the court, as is customary in such cases, or journalists. A representative of the UNHCR was asked to leave the courtroom.

The trial lasted two days, during which, as a result of problems with interpretation, the defendants generally had no idea what was going on. The witness who had given their names couldn't be found. The defence argued his written statement should therefore be deemed inadmissible, but it was allowed to stand. Late in the afternoon on 12 June, the verdict was issued: all four [were sentenced](#) to 10 years in prison. The court interpreter repeated the verdict in Farsi, but the defendants could already tell, from their lawyers' fallen faces, that the news wasn't good.

"I couldn't look them in the eyes," Doussi, one of their attorneys, told me. "I wanted the earth to open up and swallow me."

The case had received a lot of publicity in Greece, and human rights activists had spoken out about what they felt to be an outrageous miscarriage of justice. When the defendants were escorted out of the courthouse, the

narrow street was packed with supporters – local Greeks as well as volunteers, aid workers and fellow refugees, shouting “Azadi, Azadi”, the Farsi word for freedom, Doussi recalled, “like a beautiful symphony”. From there, the young men were taken back to prison on the mainland. After they have served their time, the Greek authorities might try to deport them. They have each traded many thousands of dollars, traumatic experiences on the way to Greece, and years of their lives, for nothing.

After the conviction, I met with Moutzouris, the regional governor, who has been a leading voice in the campaign against the EU’s outsourcing of the refugee crisis to his islands. “If they are really guilty, I am happy,” Moutzouris told me. “Although they helped us. They helped the local society.” A new temporary camp had been built near Moria, but thousands of refugees had been transferred to the mainland after the fire. “It is tragic to say that the fire helped,” Moutzouris told me, “but in a certain way, it was very successful.”

“Moria camp burning was a gift from God,” Vasilis Tsakaris, a baker from Moria town, told me one morning while he pulled bread from the oven. In the early years, he’d provided food and water to the refugees, but they began breaking into his bakery and stealing from his friends, too. “Moria camp burning was a gift from God, and you can say that Vasilis Tsakaris of Moria said so,” the baker repeated.

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In July 2021, a few weeks after the trial ended, I drove to the remains of Moria camp and walked among the wreckage. A few carcasses of former buildings remained, and the odd tent had survived, but most of Moria was now just a thick, charred carpet of former belongings – scraps of clothes, shards of kitchen items and broken toys, the odd single shoe. Years before, someone had scrawled “Welcome to Europe, Human Rights Graveyard” in massive letters on the camp’s front entrance. This graffiti had survived the fire, along with the coils of razorwire atop the walls.

As I made my way through the site, I smelled fire – not the remnant char, but actual, live flames. I looked around and saw a small group of refugees sitting beneath a wide-canopied tree. They had built a cooking fire and were boiling water for tea and preparing lunch. This was where I first met

Sedique, seated with her family and friends, having a picnic in Moria's ruins. Her mother greeted me and motioned for me to sit down with the children, who'd formed a small circle around a platter of nuts and sweets.

They hadn't been back since the fire, they told me. They had been relocated to the new camp that the government had built quickly after the fire, on a former military firing range near Mytilene. Residents were only allowed out for a few hours a week, and today, their release day, the group had decided to take a taxi to see what remained of their former home.

"I hated it there," Sedique said in English. "But also, we were so curious. What was it like now? What had happened?"

"It was a bad home, but it was home," her friend Fatimah said, pouring me a cup of tea.



A new refugee camp on Samos, Greece, in September 2021. Photograph: Nicolas Economou / NurPhoto / Rex / Shutterstock

The new camp was supposed to be temporary, but nearly a year later it was still in use, with only slight improvements. It was called Mavrovouni, meaning Black mountain in Greek, but most people just refer to the place as "New Moria".

While the security is better, and it is less crowded, Sedique told me, people's movements in and out are severely limited. Parts of the site are prone to flooding, and several accidental fires have already broken out. After everything they had been through, people still saw no possibility of escape. Some had become desperate.

That spring, Sedique told me, a 27-year-old pregnant Afghan woman had tried to burn herself to death. She had fled the Moria fire with her husband and their three young children, and they were due to be transferred to Germany, but just before the scheduled flight, she was informed they would not be leaving. No one told her the reason – which was that her pregnancy was too far advanced for her to travel. According to her lawyer, she had been feeling stranded and suicidal. Being trapped in the New Moria sent her even deeper into despair. When her husband was out, she took the children outside the tent, and set fire to the doorway. Then she sat down inside, waiting for the fire to engulf her.

By the time her neighbours saw the flames and ran to rescue her, she was near-unconscious and badly burned. But they managed to get her to hospital and she survived, against the odds, as did the baby. As she lay in agony, fire inspectors and then the police came to interrogate her. While she was receiving treatment for third degree burns, they charged her with arson and endangering the lives of others. Her case will come to trial in June.

Doussi, who is representing her, sees a powerful link between her case and the Moria six. “After the Moria fire, the authorities were afraid that there would be a mass spread of fires inside new the camp as acts of resistance, and they wanted to make my client an example.” The authorities’ aim was to show that anyone who “tries to challenge their inhumane reality”, Doussi said, will face criminal consequences.

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The first of the new, permanent, secure camps for refugees, known as Closed Controlled Access Centres, opened on Samos in September 2021. From the start it was clear that new security measures would mean getting permission to move on would take even longer than before, as each refugee is subjected to an extensive screening process.

“The purpose is to follow the law,” the minister of migration announced, “and the law says we have to screen them and register them to make sure they don’t have fake [papers] and aren’t terrorists, aren’t a danger, and that takes time.” The message was clear: refugees must be treated as potential criminals until proven otherwise.

The ministry promised the new camps would improve on the squalor of Moria, with better sanitation and amenities such as shops, cash machines and recreation facilities. But the emphasis was on security. The Samos camp cost €38m to build, paid for by the EU, and is surrounded with razorwire and equipped with state-of-the-art surveillance systems.

The camp was widely decried by humanitarian workers, who saw it as one step closer to a prison. It is in a remote area, more than an hour’s walk from Samos town, and the bus fare costs several euros each way. Residents are only allowed temporary leave with special permission. Bright lights stay on all night – a security measure that makes it difficult to sleep. Human rights workers fear these camps are merely “warehousing” refugees on the islands, keeping them far away from support centres, and designed to disappear them from view.

“There is no doubt that this new centre will only further dehumanise and marginalise people seeking protection in the European Union,” MSF said just before the camp opened. “For the people undergoing these violent migration policies, the opening of this new centre marks an ‘end’: an end to the meaning of life, to their patience, to any rudimentary freedom they had.”

The ministry announced plans to open further camps on Kos and Leros, each with capacity for 2,140 people. More would follow on the other “hotspot” islands. Moutzouris, the regional governor, refused to go to the opening of the Samos camp in protest. “We don’t want these camps built on our islands,” he told me in September. He felt the Aegean islanders had already borne the brunt of the refugee crisis, which affected the local economy and disrupted daily life. “The people will revolt,” Moutzouris warned. “And I will join them.”

In late January, a ferry full of construction equipment tried to dock at Mytilene harbour on Lesbos, but Greek protesters prevented the ships from

unloading. The ministry tried a different tactic, hiring contractors on the island. They began levelling ground in a remote, wooded area an hour north of Mytilene, but word got out, and on 7 February protesters occupied the site. According to a Greek newspaper, about 300 people barrelled past police, who did nothing to stop them. The protesters destroyed a generator and set fire to bulldozers and excavators. Six Greeks were arrested for arson, unlawful violence and sedition. As of mid-April, construction continues – as do the protests.

Within weeks of these protests, Russia would invade Ukraine, sending millions more refugees into the EU. Ukrainians have, by and large, been welcomed with solidarity and open arms – even in Greece. In late March, the ministry of migration announced it had capacity for 15,000 Ukrainian refugees. “We have created a reception centre in Promachonas, the main entry point,” minister Notis Mitarachi told the press, “and have quickly renovated an old building in order to have a proper reception area, with the presence of more medical support, plus hot drinks, food, and a warm welcome.”

The contrast to the treatment of refugees on the Aegean islands is stark. The new camps – with the exception of the ones open to white Ukrainian refugees – represent a crackdown meant to keep refugees in custody until their immigration status is confirmed, or they can be deported.

I kept in touch with Sedique after the picnic. She and Fatimah had started taking painting classes at a nonprofit in town, which allowed them to leave camp every day. On the anniversary of the Moria fires, they hosted an exhibition of paintings depicting that fateful night. When I visited them at the gallery last September, the girls showed me the canvases: images full of blaze and shadow, people running, buildings burning, faces cast in postures of sorrow. One painting depicted a line of people silhouetted against a yellow-orange sky. In the top corner of the painting, a flaming demon bellowed at the refugees, a burning tree in its claws.

In Sedique’s eyes, the painting depicted the Moria fire as a manifestation of the larger forces at play upon the lives of refugees. It brought to mind

something attorney Effie Doussi had said when I first met her. The fire at Moria, as she saw it, “was a chronicle of a disaster foretold”.

*Reporting for this article was supported by the [Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting](#)*

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## **‘Will Boris drive a tuk-tuk this time?’ ... a comedian relives Johnson’s last hilarious India visit**



‘Just the right dash of Oxbridge erudition to sound wise without remotely being so’ ... the then London mayor in Mumbai in 2012. Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

In 2012, he gurned his way around Mumbai on a tiny bike, baffling everyone except the Indian elite, who adore a posh, bumbling Brit. Could this new visit see the PM being compared to Beyoncé?

*Anuvab Pal*

Thu 21 Apr 2022 05.26 EDTLast modified on Thu 21 Apr 2022 23.30 EDT

If you Google [Boris Johnson](#) while online in India, a brilliant YouTube video shows him at the Gateway of India in Mumbai, doing bewildering things on a very small bicycle. Built during the British empire to welcome King George V on his visit to the country in 1911, it is now a tourist site populated by young lovers, wastrels, pickpockets and photographers trying to scam foreigners. The video was shot in 2012, when Johnson was mayor of London. Loiterers look on, baffled by this British man in a suit going round in circles, being chased by photographers who eventually give up.

It was a strange way to promote British-Indian trade, a bit like an Indian prime minister sitting on a wild elephant in the middle of the Royal Albert Hall, telling the world that [India](#) is open for business. The goal was to increase “bilateral deals”. This term, which no one understands, is often accompanied by photos of British and Indian diplomats sitting at very long colonial tables with leather folders and tea, smiling like extras in a Raj-era film. The British look as if they can’t wait for the meeting to end so that they can go off and buy custom suits at half-price, while the Indians look relieved, probably because whatever it is they are trying to negotiate, at least it isn’t independence.

At some point, someone decided that these trips to India had to look more fun. Former prime minister [David Cameron played cricket in Mumbai](#) in 2013 and wore all black, like a character in a Versace biopic. He had a couple of lovely cover-drives before he was clean bowled by a young woman. In 2016, ex-PM Theresa May visited a temple in Bengaluru and made headlines because she wore a traditional sari and got all the Hindu prayers right. In 2017, mayor of London [Sadiq Khan](#) partied with Indian billionaires and Bollywood stars, both demographics being his key constituents, as they probably own more of central London than Londoners.

Johnson, when he wasn't cycling, had enough jokes, charm, and call-backs for his visit to qualify as a standup routine. Its trade purpose, however, was more ambivalent, triggering this Guardian headline: "Boris Johnson continues to charm and confuse on visit to India."



Blending in ... Johnson at Juhu beach in Mumbai . Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

As an Indian comedian who spends a fair bit of time in the UK, I know that a sizable section of Britain despises Johnson, his very name causing them to spew expletives, froth and even faint. That is not how he goes down in India. Among the Indian business elite he often addresses, and will again on this new visit, he reinforces the idea of an Englishman that a certain older generation of Indians know from classic BBC comedies: a mix of Basil Fawlty, Mr Bean and Jim Hacker from Yes, Prime Minister, with just the right dash of Oxbridge erudition to sound wise without remotely being so. The Indian elite audiences love that: a kedgeree of wit, posh accents, bumbling vulnerability, and praise disguised as information.

He was a hit in 2012. But 10 years is a long time. India now has its own hugely popular leader, [Narendra Modi](#), a global star who can work a stadium crowd. Modi has played to rapturous audiences from Wembley to Madison

Square Garden in New York. The press have analysed how Modi's shows differ from Beyoncé's, as if this were a serious comparison.

If Johnson wants to hold his own, we'll need more than Mumbai cycling. There is, of course, our version of Strictly, called Dance India Dance. He could ride a tuk-tuk around the Prince of Wales Museum in Mumbai (name now changed to the more tourist-friendly Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya). Or he could deliver a spoken-word performance on the drunken habits of Mughal kings, at midnight under moonlight at the [Taj Mahal](#). The potential is endless.

These days India wants hard cash, not bike clips

There have been misfires with other world leaders. US President Trump, while addressing a massive stadium in Gujarat, mispronounced the name of India's greatest cricketer [Sachin Tendulkar](#), calling him "Soo-chin". Prime minister Trudeau of Canada landed wearing such garish Indian outfits that the local press thought he had come as a best man at a Punjabi wedding.

Johnson knows India too well to make those mistakes. He has read enough Kipling to know that it is not fashionable to read Kipling any more. But, problematically, [India no longer sees Britain as a great trade partner](#) but as one of many options. If anything, the UAE, Russia, Israel and the US are closer, maybe because they show up with hard cash, not bike clips. India has moved on, even if its politicians still make policy while sitting in British-built buildings. Britain, meanwhile, feels like the upset ex-husband who can't understand why it all ended.

*Anuvab Pal's new stand-up special The Empire is on Amazon Prime UK on 6 May as part of Soho [Theatre Live](#).*

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## Mind that satellite! The mission to clean up dangerous space junk



Sweeping satellites: In the film Gravity, debris from a shot-down satellite damages not just the ISS but the Hubble space telescope and a visiting space shuttle. Photograph: Universal Pictures/Sportsphoto/Allstar

As soon as we left the planet, we began leaving rubbish in orbit. Now it is putting space stations and astronauts at risk. What can be done about the millions of pieces of debris?



Ian Sample  
@iansample

Thu 21 Apr 2022 05.00 EDT

In November last year, the five astronauts and two cosmonauts on the International Space Station (ISS) were ordered to suit up and take refuge in their capsules for fear their spaceship might be struck by flying debris. Russia had deliberately destroyed one of its own satellites with a missile, producing a cloud of wreckage that threatened the orbiting outpost. “It’s a crazy way to start a mission,” Nasa told its sheltering crew, who had arrived only days beforehand.

The incident revealed how hairy Earth’s orbit has become, and it wasn’t a one-off. Two weeks later, mission controllers received another alert that the ISS might be hit by more debris. This time, Nasa delayed a planned spacewalk amid concerns that the astronauts could be in danger if they went outside. Before the week was out, yet another warning came in, this one forcing the space station to dodge a US rocket body that has been barrelling

around Earth since the 90s. It was all worryingly reminiscent of the 2013 movie [Gravity](#), in which debris from a shot-down satellite damages not just the ISS but the Hubble space telescope and a visiting space shuttle.

“It’s a particular problem in low Earth orbit because that’s where everybody wants to be, and it’s where collisions have happened in the past,” says Holger Krag, head of the [European Space Agency](#) (Esa) space debris office in Darmstadt, Germany. Low Earth orbit (LEO) is any altitude up to 1,200 miles. While many satellites are far higher up, those orbits are much less cluttered.



A European Space Agency artist's impression of space debris in low Earth orbit (size of debris is exaggerated compared with the Earth). Photograph: ESA/PA

Even since the early days of the space age, there has been more junk in orbit than active satellites. No one worried that much at first: space is a big place, after all. But the amount of tumbling detritus and its combined mass has risen steadily over the past six decades. The military, space agencies and private operators launched hundreds and then thousands of satellites for spying and navigation, scientific missions, communications, the internet and more. Earth's orbit is not the void it once was.

More than 8,000 tonnes of space junk now circle the planet, a mix of spent rocket parts, dead satellites and fragments of hardware that are doing their best to defy the rule that what goes up must come down. Far above the drag of the atmosphere, old space kit can stay aloft for centuries, millennia even, where it can smash into other objects. According to the UN Office for Outer Space Affairs, had the Romans launched a satellite into a 750-mile-high orbit, it would only fall back to Earth about now.

There's potential for space junk to be weaponised, to render entire orbits unusable

"I think it's fair to say that space is becoming congested," says Wing Commander Thom Colledge, the station commander at RAF Fylingdales in the North York Moors. The base (motto "Vigilamus" for "We are watching") is first and foremost an early warning system for intercontinental ballistic missiles. But the same radar that keeps watch for nukes also looks out for collisions in space. And, as more and more satellites are launched, collisions are an ever-growing danger.

Fylingdales is part of the [US Space Surveillance Network](#), which monitors about 30,000 items of space junk larger than 10cm. The network issues warnings when objects might collide, hopefully giving operators time to assess the risk and move if need be. But there are more than 100,000,000 pieces that are too small to track and eminently capable of causing damage. Travelling at more than 15,000mph, micrometre-sized particles can [chip windows](#) and dent solar cells, while millimetre-sized flakes can destroy satellite cameras or puncture astronauts' space suits. At 1cm and above, a speeding fragment can take out an entire satellite. Operators may never know what happened.

Space debris tracking at Fylingdales is performed by a military-private partnership, with the RAF operating the radar and analysts from Serco interpreting the data. They watch the heavens from the pyramid, a nine-storey building that's been a striking landmark on the surrounding moors for the past 30 years. The three square sides of the building form the solid state phased array radar, or SSPAR, which provides a 360-degree view of space up to 3,000 miles high. The radar tracks orbiting objects by focusing a beam

of energy on a region of space and analysing the reflections that bounce back. “We can pick up an object the size of a can of Coke,” Colledge says.



‘We are watching’: The pyramid at RAF Fylingdales in North Yorkshire.  
Photograph: Catherine Lucas/Stockimo/Alamy

I’ve arrived to see how the tracking is done, but to get inside the pyramid – the radar station doubles as a workplace – visitors must first ditch their laptops, phones and smartwatches. On the way to the training room, where teams learn the ropes on a simulation before taking shifts on the live system, we pass the operations centre where the real work takes place. It has a thick metal door complete with a hand wheel that wouldn’t look out of place on a submarine.

Warnings of potential collisions are issued all the time. The UK Space Agency (UKSA) receives nearly 3,000 alerts a month from the US Space Surveillance Network. These are triaged and risk-assessed by drawing on data from Fylingdales, other sites around the world and sensors across the UK. The UKSA already provides alerts to some UK satellite operators and will roll the service out to the rest this year, says Jacob Geer, head of space surveillance and tracking at the agency.

Many operators move their satellites if the risk of collision is more than one in 1,000, but there is a cost to taking evasive action. Dodging debris consumes precious fuel, which can shorten a satellite's lifetime. Ideally, avoidance manoeuvres are performed days in advance, and can sometimes be incorporated into pre-planned station-keeping burns. "What you don't want is a completely unscheduled burn," says Charlotte Newton, a Serco spacetrack analyst at Fylingdales.

Moving a satellite to avoid space debris can have other downsides, too. If a satellite has to dodge a stream of debris, it might end up in a less useful orbit. In the case of spy satellites, this could hamper what can be seen and when. The fact isn't lost on space-savvy nations: there's potential for space junk to be weaponised, to disrupt and degrade what others can do, and render entire orbits unusable.

There are times when crashes cannot be avoided. When two dead satellites are on course to collide, all observers can do is watch and wince. When one of the satellites is operational, it will usually have a chance to swerve. But the dance becomes more complex when two active satellites are involved. There is no highway code in space, no accepted right of way. So it's often those with most to lose who ensure disaster is averted.



The launch of a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket in Florida in March. Photograph: Malcolm Denemark/AP

One of the biggest new challenges for satellite operators comes from “mega-constellations”. Companies such as SpaceX and OneWeb are launching hundreds and potentially thousands of small satellites into low Earth orbit to provide services such as global broadband access. The satellites will undoubtedly bring benefits, but they add to the congestion. In 2019, Esa took – for the first time – [evasive action to avoid an operational satellite](#). The Aeolus Earth observation satellite fired its thrusters to dodge a Starlink satellite after SpaceX declined to move. “At Esa our assets are so expensive that we’d rather move and take the effort than have a situation where we don’t know what’s going to happen,” says Krag. Others had similar close shaves. In December, China [criticised the US](#) for threatening the lives of astronauts on board its Tiangong space station after it was forced to dodge one Starlink in July and another in October. The US said it would have let China know if there was “[a significant probability of collision](#)”.

One theoretical concern is called Kessler syndrome, where the debris from one collision sets off more collisions

Collisions in space do happen. The most spectacular was in February 2009 when an operational Iridium communications satellite slammed into a defunct Russian military satellite at 26,000mph. The impact, 480 miles above Siberia, created thousands of fragments that continue to threaten satellites today. The incident [made headlines](#), but many more suspected collisions are never confirmed, often because satellites are taken out by fragments too small to track.

Among the debris that has accumulated in orbit are some particularly risky objects. Old Russian rocket bodies known as SL-12s are prone to [spontaneous explosion](#), leaving their orbital paths strewn with fresh clouds of debris. Meanwhile, large drifting satellites such as Esa’s doubledecker bus-sized Envisat are sitting ducks in congested orbits. It’s this big stuff that space agencies worry about most: a major collision with Envisat could add a profound amount of debris to low Earth orbit. One theoretical concern for the future is called Kessler syndrome, where there is so much junk in a

particular orbit that the debris from one collision sets off a chain reaction of more collisions, and more debris, until the orbit is off limits for years.

The risk that space debris poses to satellites and humans in orbit has not stopped countries adding to the problem when they want to flex their muscles. In 2007, China [destroyed a defunct weather satellite](#) with a missile, increasing the amount of space debris in low Earth orbit by 30%. [The US](#) and [India followed suit](#) in 2008 and 2019 respectively, cluttering the environment even more. Russia's [own act of orbital vandalism](#) last year created more than 1,500 fragments that will circle the planet for years. This week, the US announced a national ban on further so-called direct-ascent anti-satellite (DA-ASAT) missile testing and urged other countries to follow suit, claiming it wanted to establish "[a new international norm](#)" for responsible behaviour in space.



Esa's [ClearSpace-1 mission](#) aims to become the first to remove an item of space debris from orbit in 2025. Photograph: ClearSpace SA/AFP/Getty Images

Faced with a growing problem, space agencies and others are taking action. One option is to build better instruments to track debris and satellites more accurately. Modern satellites often carry reflectors that allow operators to track their trajectories precisely from laser ranging stations on Earth. Space

junk is harder to track this way, but it can be done with more powerful lasers, a feat Esa hopes to achieve in the next two years from a laser ranging station in Tenerife. Having more precise information on the positions of satellites and wandering junk should slash the number of collision alerts that turn out to be false alarms. Further efforts are focused on automating avoidance manoeuvres so teams of engineers are not needed to execute every sidestep and swerve.

Guidelines for [space debris mitigation](#) and, more recently, the [long-term sustainability of outer space activities](#), published by the UN Office for Outer Space Affairs, lay out how nations and companies should behave in space. Operators are meant to remove satellites from orbit within 25 years of completing their missions. For satellites in geostationary orbits, which are more than 20,000 miles high, this means nudging them up to a “graveyard orbit” well out of harm’s way. Satellites in low Earth orbit should be steered into the atmosphere where they burn up on re-entry. For large satellites that may partly survive re-entry, operators are advised to time their re-entries so plummeting remnants land in the Pacific.

But not everyone follows the guidelines. While most new rockets are now “de-orbited” once their work is done, the vast majority of satellites in low Earth orbit are simply abandoned to their fate.



Hoping to offer a satellite removal service ... Astroscale's end-of-life services demonstration (ELSA-d) satellite. Photograph: Astroscale/PA

Esa's approach to the problem is to come up with cost-effective ways to remove dead satellites, rocket parts and large chunks of debris, and hope regulators endorse those that work. Krag favours a similar approach to national park protection, where people must leave with whatever they bring in: whenever a satellite reaches the end of its life, it must remove itself from orbit, or be disposed of by a space junk removal service.

How well that works will soon become clear. Astroscale, a Japanese tech firm with a facility in Oxfordshire, hopes to offer a satellite removal service in the next few years. Meanwhile, Esa's [ClearSpace-1 mission](#) aims to become the first to remove an item of space debris from orbit in 2025. The same mission will test a propellant kit developed by D-orbit, an Italian firm also with offices in Oxfordshire, that will steer the mission's spent rocket body back towards Earth where it will burn up in the atmosphere.

“It becomes almost corporate good practice to show that you are sustainable, to make your satellites able to move out of orbit when they reach the end of their life, or to make it possible for a company to come and retrieve or service your satellite,” says Geer. By developing the knowhow to retrieve dead satellites, the UK can build expertise for the coming “orbital economy”, he adds, where satellites are serviced and assembled in orbit.

“Every year, dozens of objects are left behind that could have been disposed with their own means,” says Krag. “But that’s not happening because of the lack of technology and the lack of policy. It’s like plastic in the oceans. Would you start cleaning up the old stuff while, every year, people add more? No. You concentrate on stopping them adding more. We need to do the same with debris in space.”

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## 2022.04.21 - Opinion

- We forced the Russians back from Kyiv. Now we're braced for what comes next
- It's no joke – since lockdown, live audiences have forgotten how to behave
- Globalisation is not working – in an age of insecurity, we need more local solutions
- I have a urinal in my flat and it has changed my life – so why are people appalled?

## [OpinionUkraine](#)

# We forced the Russians back from Kyiv. Now we're braced for what comes next

[Nataliya Gumenyuk](#)

Ukrainians know the war is not over, so each day we clean up, document the destruction, and do our best to prepare



Kitchen cabinet on the wall of a bombed-out building in the town of Borodyanka, near Kyiv. Photograph: Alex Chan Tsz Yuk/SOPA Images/REX/Shutterstock

Thu 21 Apr 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 21 Apr 2022 08.35 EDT

Near one of the oldest and most beautiful squares in Kyiv, Sofiivska, I met Andriy Khlyvnyuk – a famous Ukrainian singer who recently joined the police civil defence. I [wrote about him](#) during the first days of the war. The video of him singing the century-old march Oh, the Red Viburnum in the Meadow [went viral](#). Pink Floyd collaborated with Khlyvnyuk and issued their version of the track, [Hey Hey Rise Up](#), in support of Ukraine.

At the start of the war, the streets of Ukrainian cities emptied. So when strangers meet now they say hello, and when you come across someone you know, even a distant acquaintance, you hug each other. I told Khlyvnyuk I'd just come from Donbas, and had a feeling of irreversible tragedy lying ahead in anticipation of possibly the biggest battle of the war. "How are you holding yourself together?" Andriy asked me. "I'm not thinking too hard," I told him. "I just focus on what I should do next." "The same with me," he said. This is the case with most of my friends and the people I meet.

A few days after the liberation of Bucha, I walked through the most damaged street – Vokzalna. According to the Ukrainian authorities, at least 400 people were killed there during the Russian occupation. Bucha is a suburban town near Kyiv, where middle-class professionals prefer to buy affordable flats and houses since there are more kindergartens and fresh air. Among the wreckage of burnt tanks, Ihor and Volodya – workers in a communication company – were repairing fibre cables to restore internet connections in the town. Metres away, rescue workers were de-mining the area. In the neighbouring town of Irpin, which was heavily shelled, the mayor asked residents to help clean up the debris. He needed 300 volunteers; 1,500 signed up at once, and within days almost 10,000 had joined the clean-up effort.

I take photographs of every house I see. First, I photograph all the houses that have not been destroyed – these are the majority. I post these photos so people who have managed to escape can check whether their homes survived. For a brief moment, I feel I have come to these areas not just to provide a grim account of horrors, but to give hope that their towns have survived, that there is a place to go back to.

Travelling between liberated villages and towns around Kyiv to document evidence of crimes – something I see it as part of my job to do – has become hard. Many bridges were bombed and roads are being cleared, so traffic jams are enormous. People are now coming back en masse. But the mayor of Kyiv, Vitali Klitschko, has asked residents to wait. Air raid sirens are still sounding, though we hear them less often. The full-scale assault on the capital may resume. Oleksandr Gruzevych, deputy chief of staff of land forces and the general in charge of the defence of Kyiv, says it doesn't

matter how the battle in Donbas goes: the Ukrainian capital will remain a key target for Russia. Others are concerned that after the [sinking of the Moskva battleship](#), the Kremlin is keen for revenge and will consider another attack on Kyiv.

Nevertheless, there is a feeling of victory. So far Kyiv has been saved not because of Putin's mercy but because of the capital's air defences, the best in the country. The Russians' retreat was not a goodwill gesture; they withdrew because they failed to conquer the capital. Some checkpoints in the streets of Kyiv are now being removed to allow traffic to flow more freely. A beauty parlour near my house sends a message: "We're open again." A plumber is ready to come to my friend's flat as soon as tomorrow. Pupils attend online lessons in schools. The overnight curfew starts later – 10pm, not 7pm as it was in the first days of war. This allows residents to commute to work, and essential shops and businesses have reopened. A few restaurants are open again too.

I am not ready to go to restaurants yet, and opt for a supermarket instead. Eating out, having a good time, doesn't feel right. Many Kyiv residents feel survivor's guilt. The city authorities say 228 civilians, among them four children, were killed in Kyiv, and almost 400 people wounded. Still, the level of destruction cannot be compared to Kharkiv or Mariupol. Moreover, in nearby towns such as Bucha, Irpin and Hostomel, many residents paid the highest price possible for not letting Russians in. They were tortured, robbed, murdered. Many houses were burned.

Coming back to Bucha a few days ago with a group of foreign journalists who wanted to see destroyed Russian tanks, we couldn't find any, and even Vokzalna street is now open to vehicles. Houses have been destroyed by shelling, yet it's not obvious that a fierce battle took place here. The journalists looked disappointed. For us it's still the place we live, though cleaning up doesn't mean erasing the memory of what happened here.

Ukrainians are resilient because we know how to switch to survival mode very fast. That's our history. You do what you have to do, because you might not get another chance. Oddly enough, it's me who calms down western friends and colleagues who complain that they feel powerless. Here in [Ukraine](#) we do not feel powerless. We do something practical to defend

ourselves all the time. My major criticism of western intelligence analysts, who were correct about Putin's war, is that, among the often dire scenarios they outline, the one in which Ukraine wins is rarely mentioned.

These days the most popular image in Ukraine is the photograph of a kitchen cabinet that stands untouched on the wall of a bombed-out building in the town of Borodyanka, near Kyiv. "If a kitchen cabinet holds up," people say, "we definitely can."

- Nataliya Gumenyuk is a Ukrainian journalist specialising in foreign affairs and conflict reporting, and author of *Lost Island: Tales from the Occupied Crimea* (2020)
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## OpinionComedy

# It's no joke – since lockdown, live audiences have forgotten how to behave

[Dani Johns](#)

From chatting through the show to manhandling the acts, bad behaviour at comedy shows has got noticeably worse



'Have two years of lockdowns and limited live performances made people forget how to be civilised audience members?' Photograph: Carla Speight/Getty Images

Thu 21 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 21 Apr 2022 05.01 EDT

Do you consider yourself a well-adjusted, functioning adult who enjoys a night of live entertainment? Or are you the type of person who turns up to a comedy gig four Malbecs deep, and decides to sit in the front row to have an in-depth chat with your mate about how bad your boss's BO is? Maybe you don't like waiting for a break. Instead, you'd rather stand up and loudly announce you need a wee, making the entire row stand up as you squeeze

by, vigorously scratching your backside? At the end of a show, do you use your hands to throw popcorn across the room rather than smacking them together to create a pleasant clapping sound?

I'll be honest, if you're reading this, then you're probably not one of those people. I bet you've seen a few of them, though, especially if you've been to a standup comedy gig recently. Because since we've come back after lockdown, it's become increasingly apparent that a small but noticeable percentage of audience members have forgotten how to behave in public.

Last week, I was hosting a gig when a man leapt on to the raised stage and grabbed my top. I jumped back, having no idea what his intentions were. In a split second, I had to choose between laughing it off, telling him off or knocking his block off. It turned out he was trying to check the label on my clothes and thought it was fair game to have a rummage. It was a weird interaction, but I didn't get "[Chris Rock'd](#)" or "[Me Too'd](#)"; it wasn't aggressive or sexually motivated. It falls into the category of "poor audience etiquette", something which is demonstrably worse now than before the pandemic.

The gig before the label-grabbing one had a similar vibe. I had to tell people to stop talking through the comedian's routine and to stop repeating his punchlines back to him like an annoying parrot, drunk on cider. Even "well-meaning" interruptions are unwelcome ("OMG that's so funny, my partner snores too!"). I call this "disruptive engagement", which is annoying and unnecessary even if the sentiment behind it is positive.

I reached out to my comedy network to see if anyone else had noticed this change in behaviour. My inbox was soon flooded with messages, with many comics agreeing that things have escalated since the pandemic – from aggressive heckling, to talking over the act, to jumping on stage, and various other examples of being a right pain in the arse.

It's not just comedy; musicians and actors tell similar stories. [Sophie Ellis-Bextor](#) has repeatedly had to ask rowdy audience members to pipe down so everyone else can hear the gig they've paid to see. [Beverley Knight tweeted](#)

after a particularly galling incident: “If your intention is to come to the theatre, get rat-arsed, make a scene, disrupt the show … My advice is stay your ass at home.” The worst story I heard was from a visually impaired act, whose cane was snatched by an audience member who shouted: “Are you really blind? How many fingers am I holding up?” The majority of comedy audiences are brilliant, but some idiots ruin the show for the rest, as well as for the performers. It’s like reading a book and ripping out half the pages, except it’s a library book and now no one else can fully enjoy it.

So how have we ended up here? Have two years of lockdowns and limited live shows made people forget how to be civilised audience members? Are we so deprived of performance art that we can’t contain our excitement? Do venues need to display reminders that we’re supposed to drink our drinks, not slosh them over the people sat next to us?

Partly, yes. I think people are struggling with boundaries. We lived in our own bubbles for so long that we've forgotten how to interact and engage with others in an appropriate way. On top of that, there’s something about the nature of comedy that makes people think it’s more interactive than it is. Nor does social media help, with “comedian destroys heckler” clips going viral. Those kind of interactions are rare and they can be funny, but it shouldn’t set the standard for what to expect at a comedy night. You should expect a friendly welcome from the MC, some cracking material from the acts and a good night out. A well-written routine will always be funnier than any off-the-cuff put-down in response to a drunken nuisance.

We’ve arrived in a weird place, where some people need to be reminded that it’s only the comedians who require the spotlight. Not them and their mates so they can have a testosterone-off. There’s literally a stage and microphone for that very reason.

Whether it’s caused by a lack of social boundaries, pent-up frustration after multiple lockdowns or a cheap deal on blue lagoon cocktail pitchers, wally-like behaviour isn’t acceptable. As an MC, I always start the show with a friendly welcome and a few house rules. Phones on silent, don’t heckle the acts, don’t talk among yourselves while the acts are on stage. Do I now need to add, don’t interrupt the show, don’t manhandle the entertainers, don’t act like a plonker, and never, ever try to examine the act’s labels?

- Dani Johns is a comedian and compere who runs multiple gigs in Bristol
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## OpinionGlobalisation

# **Globalisation is not working – in an age of insecurity, we need more local solutions**

[Larry Elliott](#)



From the supply-chain crisis to Covid vaccines, the past couple of years have brought home the benefits of self-sufficiency



'Politicians have lined up to condemn P&O and its decision to sack British seafarers and replace them with cheaper foreign staff.' People protest in Dover against P&O, 19 April. Photograph: Gareth Fuller/PA

Thu 21 Apr 2022 05.39 EDT Last modified on Thu 21 Apr 2022 12.20 EDT

Rishi Sunak is in Washington DC this week to discuss the state of the global economy with his fellow finance ministers. But he is clearly keener on listening to some of them than others. Had the chancellor not been on a plane on his way across the Atlantic, he would have [joined a walkout](#) by the UK delegation – led by the Bank of England governor, Andrew Bailey – when Russia's representative started speaking at a gathering of the G20. The protest by the Brits – along with the Americans and the Canadians – at a forum that includes the world's leading developed and developing economies won't make the slightest difference to the Kremlin. For all that, it is a symbolic gesture that matters. The International Monetary Fund [issued a warning](#) this week about the risk of the war accelerating the fragmentation of the world into rival economic blocs, and here is an example of it. China made it clear it didn't think Russia should be excluded from G20 meetings, as did the country currently in the chair: Indonesia.

The IMF is worried about the risk of a return to the 1930s. It fears the current trend towards deglobalisation will result in trade barriers going up, countries adopting their own technological standards – and rival reserve

currencies emerging to challenge the supremacy of the US dollar. Bad all round, in other words.

But hang on a minute. Greater international cooperation is a good thing, to be sure. There are global problems that need global solutions, as the IMF's managing director, Kristalina Georgieva, [rightly noted](#) at a press conference yesterday.

Yet there isn't much evidence that the current model of globalisation is much good at solving them. As the IMF itself notes in its latest [world economic outlook](#), the debt-relief process is unfit for purpose. A properly functioning globalisation would have resulted in a fairer distribution of Covid-19 shots rather than vaccine apartheid. There would be more effective action to tackle the biggest collective problem of all: the climate crisis.

The mistake is to see globalisation as synonymous with multilateralism rather than the particular variant of international capitalism that has emerged in the three decades since the collapse of communism. Funnily enough, countries managed to find ways of trading with each other in the years before the Berlin Wall came down.

China, the big winner from the past 30 years, has seen a marked reduction in poverty but has achieved it by retaining strong control over its economic policy and movements of capital. Wary of the sort of shock treatment administered to Russia in the early 1990s, Beijing has liberalised its economy in its own way and at its own pace. India has liberalised cautiously.

The rhetoric of globalisation is all about smooth-running and efficient supply chains. An international division of labour and the lack of any controls on capital moves production to where labour costs are lower, and helps keep prices in the shops down.

But as we are now finding out, there is no guarantee that long and complex supply chains are an [impregnable defence against inflation](#). On the contrary, when global production lines get gummed up – either due to a post-pandemic surge in demand or the shockwaves from war – cost of living pressures surface. The past couple of years have brought home to

governments the benefits of self-sufficiency: be it in food, fuel, personal protective equipment or Covid-19 drugs.

Moreover, despite all the hype, globalisation has not led to faster growth and more rapid advances in living standards for most of those living in the UK and other developed nations. For the rich, of course, it has been a different story. They captured the gains from global growth and salted them away either in offshore tax havens or – in the case of Russian oligarchs – in the [London property market](#).

In the late 1990s, I co-wrote a book with my colleague Dan Atkinson warning that sooner or later there would be a backlash against the insecurity that would result from turbo-charged, post-cold war capitalism. At the time, globalisation was all the rage – with politicians of the left as well as the right – and the book was not exactly a bestseller. Our critics told us to wake up and smell the coffee.

These days, the mood has changed somewhat. Labour and Conservative politicians competed with each other [to condemn P&O](#) and its decision to sack British seafarers and replace them with cheaper foreign staff. The courts have recognised that workers in the gig economy need [greater protection](#) from the “flexible” labour market. There has been a rethink of the wisdom of being dependent on foreign energy and of allowing China to take stakes in strategically important sectors. It is no longer seen as ludicrously quaint to trumpet the need for a bigger manufacturing base.

Let’s be clear: the drift towards deglobalisation does not mean a retreat into North Korean-style autarky. Nor does it mean the death of globalisation, because countries will always cooperate when it suits them. There is, though, a recognition that countries were better able to command their own economic destiny pre-globalisation and less prone to financial crises. Transporting goods halfway round the world is expensive when energy prices are high, and unsustainable to boot. The process of re-onshoring production was under way long before Vladimir Putin sent his troops into Ukraine.

But the prime reason for the rethink of globalisation is political. The age of insecurity has arrived and it has prompted a predictable backlash from voters

unhappy about the rising cost of living, falling living standards and rising inequality.

The current model of globalisation has been shaped by deliberate policy choices and what comes next will also be shaped by deliberate policy choices. If that allows governments to take back control of their economies and to be better able to protect their citizens then there is only one thing to say: bring it on.

- Larry Elliott is the Guardian's economics editor
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# I have a urinal in my flat and it has changed my life – so why are people appalled?

[Adrian Chiles](#)



Some have been known to retch at the sight of it, but I am a great enthusiast for urinals in the home. Mine has pride of place beneath the West Brom crest



No more missing the pan. Could this be the answer for men chastised over their use of conventional toilets? Photograph: mevans/Getty Images

Thu 21 Apr 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 21 Apr 2022 07.17 EDT

Those Hollywood fellows Ryan Reynolds and Rob McElhenney are never far from social media virality. Last week they were at it again. For reasons that remain unclear, the pair of them have [bought Wrexham AFC](#), in the fifth tier of English football, and pumped some money into the place. Now Reynolds has made McElhenney a birthday present of a urinal at the club's stadium, placing a commemorative plaque next to it.



The writer's own urinal. Photograph: Adrian Chiles

This put me in mind of a friend of mine, the late and much-missed Jon Brookes, drummer with the Charlatans. When West Brom demolished their home fans' end of the stadium, he nicked some bricks from it for an extension that his brother, another West Brom fan, was getting built. It was only on the way home with the bricks, in his brother's Capri, that they realised the bricks were from the toilet block. The stench was awful. But, like the true fans they were, they used them anyway and after a few months the smell abated.

I was also reminded of the urinal I have in my flat, sitting below a stained glass window, featuring West Brom's crest. I'm very proud of it – the urinal more than the crest. I'm a great enthusiast for urinals in the home. This is an enthusiasm shared by very few people, especially women, who have been known to retch at the very sight of it. This baffles me. Many a chap has been chastised about his incompetent use of conventional toilets – poor aim, not putting the seat down, and so on. Well, here's the answer: a receptacle at the correct height for ease of use, which is neat, tidy, clean and flushable. It changed my life. Gentlemen – or anyone with a penis – trust me: it is wonderful to have a toilet of one's own.

Adrian Chiles is a broadcaster, writer and *Guardian* columnist

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## 2022.04.21 - Around the world

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## Rights and freedom**Serbia**

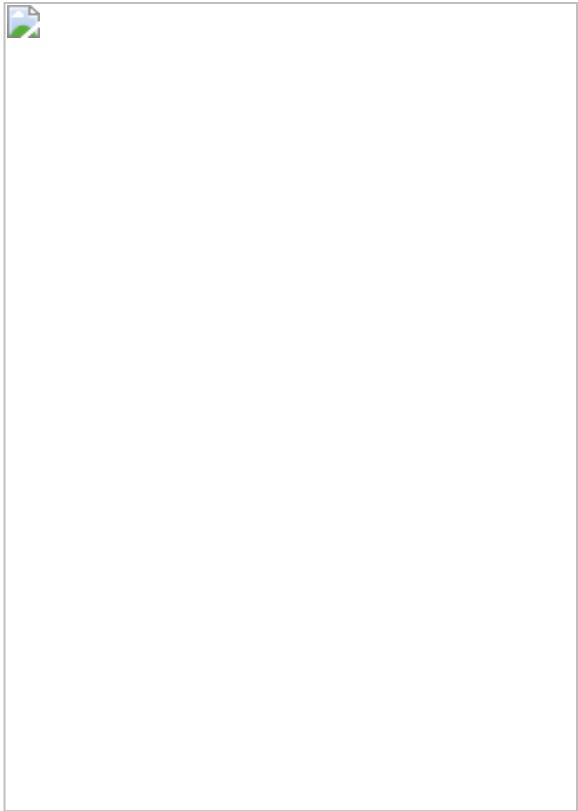
# **Serbia ‘sliding towards autocracy’ as president secures second term**

Amid claims of dirty tricks, Aleksandar Vučić has held on to the presidency, but activists are saying he is silencing opponents



A mural opposing Nato and the EU in Belgrade, Serbia. The country is torn between an aspiration to join the EU and its traditional ties to Russia.  
Photograph: Andrej Čukić/EPA

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Phoebe Greenwood in Belgrade

Thu 21 Apr 2022 01.45 EDT Last modified on Fri 22 Apr 2022 00.27 EDT

Democracy watchdogs and civil society activists in Serbia have warned that the country is sliding towards autocracy under President Aleksandar Vučić, who was elected for a second term this month with a large majority.

After a campaign marred by reports of widespread bribery, intimidation and gerrymandering, Vučić won 60% of the presidential vote. The outcome of the parliamentary and Belgrade city elections, however, is still unclear. The opposition is waiting for courts to decide whether balloting will be repeated

in areas where they have raised complaints of severe irregularities. As a result, a new government will not be formed for several months.

“The most likely situation is that Vučić will drag this process out and it will be chaos, and he always uses chaos to his advantage,” said Bojan Elek, deputy director at the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy. “He is such a great calculator and strategist he is able to turn any situation to his favour.”

However, the war in [Ukraine](#) presents the president with a significant challenge, as Serbia is seemingly poised between its application to be a member of the EU and an instinctive alliance with Russia.



A billboard supporting President Vučić in a campaign marred by reports of bribery and intimidation. Photograph: Andrej Čukić/EPA

The two countries have close historic, religious and cultural ties and Moscow has provided crucial support to Belgrade at the UN security council, blocking Kosovo's independence. Moreover, Serbia is totally dependent on Russian oil and gas. This week, Vučić accused Ukraine and an unnamed EU country of orchestrating [a series of bomb hoax threats](#) against Air Serbia planes. He did not provide evidence for the claim, which Ukraine called “baseless”.

But after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the signals coming from European capitals to Belgrade make it clear that Vučić's balancing act is no longer viable. "They are asking for more harsh condemnation – this could be an easy win – and definitely to join some sort of sanctions," said Elek. "He will try to play it a little longer like this, but I think if he finally has to make a decision, the only rational choice would be to pick the pro-European side. They might decide to join packages of sanctions that would not hurt Serbia too much."

The president was slow to condemn the Russian aggression, which was initially reported in pro-government tabloids as a Ukrainian invasion of [Russia](#). Nor has Serbia adopted any of the EU's sanctions against Russia since the 2014 annexation of Crimea. But Serbian analysts believe the president is likely to join direct sanctions on Moscow if the war is still going on when his new government is finally formed.



Activist Sofija Todorović, who has been attacked and fined for protests against the ruling party. Photograph: Balkan Investigative Reporting Network

Despite a clear awareness of Vučić's autocratic tendencies, Angela Merkel and Ursula von der Leyen both made visits to Belgrade within a month of each other last year.

“I don’t think it’s helpful but I can understand. The issue is that the EU doesn’t see in the opposition a credible, strong enough partner,” said Biljana Đorđević, an opposition MP with the newly formed green-left coalition Moramo (we must), which won 13 seats. She described a culture of endemic abuse of parliament by the ruling party, using as an example the 2018 budget, which was passed without debate after its MPs used hundreds of amendments to filibuster and block any questions from the opposition.

“Unfortunately they [European leaders] chose stability over democracy, which is really bad. It has also undermined the EU here in [Serbia](#). People have become Eurosceptics, which is understandable.”

Stability in the Balkans is critically important to the EU, and in Vučić Brussels appears to have found a politician who can offer that.

At the last election in 2020, Vučić secured 188 seats in the 250-seat parliament. This result was, however, largely because of a boycott by opposition politicians who were protesting against verbal abuse and sabotaging of parliamentary processes by ruling party MPs. “The situation in parliament was really bad. People from the ruling party were very verbally aggressive, it’s insane the things they say about you,” said Đorđević.



A police officer guards the Serbian parliament building during a protest against President Vučić in the run-up to elections, Belgrade, June 2020. Photograph: Darko Vojinović/AP

Vukosava Crnjanski, the director of democracy watchdog CRTA, explained that in the absence of an opposition in parliament for the past two years, civil society figures were unwillingly thrust into the role. “We were constantly under attack,” Crnjanski said, describing smear campaigns against CRTA and her personally in parliament and pro-government media.

“What we are seeing is a serious backsliding of democracy in Serbia, especially in the functioning of institutions, including parliament. In 2016, [the ruling party] started silencing every free voice in Serbia.”

Sofija Todorović, a programme director at the Youth Initiative for Human Rights in Belgrade, said that far-right and nationalist groups are intimidating civil rights bodies with impunity.

Todorović was attacked by nationalist football supporters at the *Mirēdita, dobar dan* festival in 2017, an annual event promoting cultural ties between Kosovo and Serbia that she helps to organise. After the assault, she was fined more than £350 for protesting during a speech made by convicted war criminal [Veselin Sljivancanin at an event](#) organised by the president’s party.

Serbia is one of four Balkan countries [negotiating access to the EU](#). A 2021 report by the European Commission on its progress in areas of necessary reform noted an alarming lack of media freedom, assaults on opposition and civil society activists, corruption, organised crime and state control of police and judiciary.

“Inflammatory language against political opponents and representatives of other institutions expressing diverging political views was still used during parliamentary debates,” the report warned.

“The nature of autocracy is that you can’t go back, it’s very difficult to ‘de-autocratise’ a leader, unless there is some huge external shock, which may have happened with the war in Ukraine,” said Elek.

“In order to stay on his path towards autocracy, Vučić needs the support of the west. Our fear is if he decides to turn his back on Russia, this will allow him to continue.”

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## Executive pay and bonuses

# Elon Musk poised to collect \$23bn bonus as Tesla beats targets

Electric car giant's CEO says he is not in talks on new bonus scheme after completing 2018 deal early

- [Tesla has another record quarter](#)



Elon Musk is thought to have a personal fortune worth \$249bn. Photograph: Reuters

*Rupert Neate* Wealth correspondent

[@RupertNeate](#)

Thu 21 Apr 2022 05.42 EDT Last modified on Thu 21 Apr 2022 19.01 EDT

Elon Musk, chief executive of Tesla and the world's richest person, is set to collect a \$23bn (£17.6bn) bonus after the electric car company's reported record quarterly profits.

Musk, who is already sitting on an estimated \$249bn fortune, is in line for the bonus share payout after Tesla hit share price and financial growth milestones in [its earnings on Wednesday night](#).

Tesla made an adjusted profit of \$5bn on revenue of \$18.8bn in the first quarter of the year, an 81% increase on the same period a year earlier. The results, combined with the growth in Tesla's share price performance, mean Musk has hit targets that should lead to a bonus share payout worth about \$23bn.

The company outlined [an extraordinary deal for Musk in 2018](#) that would pay him an unprecedented record \$55.8bn (£40bn) bonus if he built the business into a \$650bn company within a decade.

He achieved that milestone early, in January 2020. Tesla today has a market value of \$1.1tn, after a 1,600% rise in its share price since the target was set in January 2018. The shares jumped 11% in early trading on Thursday to \$10.60.

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It means Musk, who collects no salary from Tesla, should now have unlocked the final three parts of the 12-tranche bonus scheme. Each tranche gives Musk the right to buy 8.4m Tesla shares at \$70, a huge discount on the current \$977 price of the stock. His profit on each tranche could be \$7.7bn, or a combined value of \$23bn. The payments need to be signed off by the board, and he must hold on to the shares for five years before selling.

Musk, who is [attempting to buy Twitter for more than \\$43bn](#), said he was not in talks with Tesla's board over a new bonus scheme after completing the 2018 deal early. "There are no discussions under way about incremental compensation for me," he said on the company's earning call with investors.

"The future is very exciting," he added. "I've never been more optimistic or excited about the future of Tesla than I am right now."

Julia Davies, a member of Patriotic Millionaires UK, [a group of super-rich people campaigning for a more equal society](#), said Musk's mega payday was "a perfect answer to the question: 'When does a person have too much money?'"

"What can one human possibly need with a bonus of \$23bn? It's time we gave big money a meaning, instead of allowing it to be just a number attached to a person. How many millions of people could be lifted out of current fuel poverty, through energy efficiency and renewable installations, with that bonus – instead of giving one man an even greater fortune to play God with?"

When Tesla [revealed the bonus plan](#) in 2018 it said: "Elon will receive no guaranteed compensation of any kind – no salary, no cash bonuses, and no equity that vests by the passage of time. Instead, Elon's only compensation will be a 100% at-risk performance award, which ensures that he will be compensated only if Tesla and all of our stockholders do extraordinarily well."

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[Netflix](#)

## US hedge fund billionaire sells Netflix stake at huge loss

Bill Ackman's Pershing Square fund dumps 7% stake for \$400m loss after streaming service's value plunges



Netflix shares plunged 35% after results showed it had shed 200,000 subscribers and expects to lose 2m more. Photograph: Andre M Chang/ZUMA Press Wire/REX/Shutterstock

*[Kalyeena Makortoff](#)*

*[@kalyeena](#)*

Thu 21 Apr 2022 04.14 EDT Last modified on Thu 21 Apr 2022 04.29 EDT

The billionaire hedge fund manager Bill Ackman has sold his shares in Netflix at a loss of about \$400m (£305m), reversing his bullish position in the streaming giant after it reported an outflow of [more than 200,000 subscribers](#).

The New York-based investor bought more than \$1bn of [Netflix](#) shares in January, despite grim forecasts about the company's subscription levels. Ackman said at the time that the subsequent drop in the share price had presented an "attractive" opportunity for his Pershing Square fund.

But Ackman made a U-turn overnight after shares in the online streaming platform [plunged more than 35% in reaction](#) to news that Netflix had lost more than 200,000 subscribers in the first three months of the year and was likely to lose a further 2 million over the next quarter, as customers reviewed subscriptions bought at the height of Covid lockdowns.

The share drop wiped about \$50bn off of Netflix's market value.

Ackman's decision to offload the stake is estimated to have resulted in a \$400m loss for the Pershing fund. [In a letter to investors](#), Ackman conceded that the losses had knocked returns by four percentage points.

"One of our learnings from past mistakes is to act promptly when we discover new information about an investment that is inconsistent with our original thesis. That is why we did so here," Ackman told investors.

"While we have a high regard for Netflix's management and the remarkable company they have built, in light of the enormous operating leverage inherent in the company's business model, changes in the company's future subscriber growth can have an outsized impact on our estimate of intrinsic value," Ackman added.

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The hedge fund manager acknowledged that Netflix had a strategy to stem the losses, including by going after non-paying customers more aggressively and incorporating advertising into its streaming service. However, he noted that the changes could take at least one to two years to implement.

"While we believe these business model changes are sensible, it is extremely difficult to predict their impact on the company's long-term subscriber

growth, future revenues, operating margins, and capital intensity,” Ackman said.

Russ Mould, investment director at AJ Bell, said the strategy amounted to “radical changes” at the streaming service. “It will be interesting to see how its biggest shareholders view its chances of executing them with any success or whether it’s back to the drawing board with fresh thinking and potentially fresh leadership.”

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## US Capitol attack

# Capitol rioter caught after FBI finds recording of him boasting to Uber driver

A 15-month long investigation resulted in Jerry Braun's arrest on 12 April; he's been charged with violent entry and disorderly conduct



Jerry Braun can be seen on a recording taken by an Uber driver saying he'd torn down the barricades at the US Capitol. Photograph: Julio Cortez/AP

*[Maya Yang](#)*

Thu 21 Apr 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 22 Apr 2022 00.26 EDT

On 6 January 2021, Jerry Braun hailed an Uber in [Washington DC](#) and got in the car, nursing a bleeding eye wound. The Uber driver noticed and asked, "So, has it been violent all day?"

“Well it started around, right when I got there. I tore down the barricades,” Braun bragged.

The conversation, captured on video by the driver’s recording device installed on the dashboard, triggered a 15-month long investigation by the FBI. Earlier this month, on 12 April, Braun was finally arrested by federal authorities and charged with violent entry or disorderly conduct, obstruction during civil disorder, and entering and remaining on restricted grounds, according to an [affidavit](#) by Lucas Bauers, FBI special agent.

Braun boasted openly to the [Uber](#) driver about his involvement in the deadly riots, which resulted in the deaths of five people. When he explained he’d torn down the barricades, the driver asked: “You did? Why?”

“Well, because, so we could get to the Capitol,” Braun replied.

The driver asked: “Well, how’d that work out for ya?”

“Well, it looks like, uh, Biden’s gonna be our president,” said Braun.

The Uber driver’s tip to the authorities identified Braun as “Jerry Last Name Unknown”, according to court documents. The car dropped him off at a Holiday Inn in Arlington, Virginia; authorities searched the booking records to discover that Braun had checked in as “JD Braun” on 5 January and checked out two days later. He had listed his phone number and an address in South El Monte, California.

Authorities then compared the Uber image of Braun with a California department of motor vehicles photo of him. With a positive match, they began to pore over images and video footage taken on the day of the riot, searching for Braun.

“Agents reviewed several images on the webpage, including one of the digital images that depicts an individual with a white beard, wearing a black face mask covering his nose and chin, black sunglasses, a black beanie hat, black gloves, and a dark colored jacket with a hood,” said the affidavit.

“The individual’s white beard is coming out from underneath the black mask, and a backpack shoulder strap is seen over the individual’s left shoulder,” it added.

Authorities also noticed a pocket holding a pen and paper with graphics “near the individual’s left shoulder”. Upon enlarging the image, they found the following text: “23-359-4”, “Ask For JD”, and a website, [shotgunshock.com](http://shotgunshock.com) – the website of a South El Monte-based store that sells motorcycle air-suspension systems.

Officials accessed the Google cached version of the site and found an email address, shotgunshock@yahoo.com – which turned out to be the same address associated with Braun’s Uber account – and a phone number that was registered with the AT&T Corporation under “Jerry Braun”, according to court documents.

The affidavit included screenshots of video footage that showed Braun “physically struggling with law-enforcement officers using a barricade”. At one point, Braun is also seen with a wooden plank in his hands. “The officer body camera videos show Braun in possession of the wood plank, controlling the wood plank and maneuvering the wood plank towards law enforcement officers in an aggressive manner,” the affidavit said.

“In one instance ... Braun extends the wood plank and physically strikes an individual who is wearing a helmet with the text ‘PRESS’ displayed across the front (the photographer) and appears to be taking photographs with a camera,” it added.

“Braun and the photographer appear to exchange words. Braun then strikes the photographer with his left hand, and subsequently strikes the photographer once more with the wood plank.”

On 8 November, authorities executed a search warrant in Braun’s California residence and found clothing he appeared to wear at the riot. They also seized Braun’s cellphone, which included a selfie of his eye wound as well as text message exchanges in which Braun wrote “Occupied the capitol”, and “Hand to hand combat”, in reference to videos he took at the riot.

When authorities asked Braun if he had anything to say during the search, Braun replied, “Guilty.” Authorities then asked him what he was guilty of, to which he said, “Everything.”

More than 800 people have been charged for their involvement in the riot, of which more than 250 have so far pled guilty.

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**Mitt Romney**

## **Joe Biden must ditch ‘woke advisers’ to fix US economy, Mitt Romney says**

Republican senator makes demand in Wall Street Journal but does not suggest what a ‘woke adviser’ is or what one might recommend



Biden ‘must stop nominating doves to the Fed’, Romney said, demanding ‘hard-nosed economists’ instead. Photograph: Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images

*[Martin Pengelly](#) in New York*

*[@MartinPengelly](#)*

Thu 21 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Thu 21 Apr 2022 01.27 EDT

Joe Biden must act to reduce mounting economic pressure by ditching “woke advisers”, [Mitt Romney](#) said.

The Utah senator and former Republican presidential nominee made the demand in a column [for the Wall Street Journal](#).

“A new set of priorities requires a new set of principals,” Romney wrote. “President Biden needs to ditch his woke advisers and surround himself with people who want to get the economy working again.”

Romney’s office did not immediately respond to a request for comment about what a “woke adviser” was or who might qualify for the title. The White House did not comment.

As midterm elections approach, the Biden administration faces strong economic headwinds. Inflation is at long-term highs, adding to a cost-of-living crisis fueled by the coronavirus pandemic and the invasion of Ukraine by Russia.

Biden’s favourability rating has plummeted as polling shows disapproval of his handling of economic affairs.

As the Associated Press [put it](#), “hopes for a lasting economic renaissance have faded as Americans cope with higher food and energy costs. And the promise of a country no longer under the pandemic’s sway has been supplanted by the uncertainty of war in Europe.”

Romney is a rare Republican not under Donald Trump’s sway, having been the only GOP senator to vote to convict Trump in both his impeachment trials. Romney has also plotted a middle course on some political issues.

Earlier this month, he was one of three [Republicans](#) to vote to confirm Ketanji Brown Jackson as the first Black woman on the supreme court. Biden compared Romney to his father, the Michigan governor George Romney, who also “stood up and made these decisions on civil rights”.

But [in the Journal](#), Romney came out swinging.

He wrote: “The Biden administration did pretty much everything wrong, [injecting \\$1.9tn](#) into a supply constrained economy, sending out stay-at-home checks, letting tenants live rent-free, squeezing oil and gas production, launching an avalanche of growth-killing regulations, lining up behind unions, and pushing yet another deficit-financed budget.”

Biden “must stop nominating doves to the Fed”, Romney said, demanding “hard-nosed economists” instead. He also demanded Biden drop his [Build Back Better spending plan](#), which aims among other goals to boost social care and combat the climate crisis.

Romney repeated Republican calls for increased domestic oil and gas drilling but also indicated splits in his own party.

The senator called for reform of programmes such as social security and Medicare rather than their end, as outlined in a controversial proposal [by Rick Scott of Florida](#).

Romney also said Biden should “find a way to stop the flood of illegal immigration while accelerating legal immigration”, a less hawkish stance than most in his party.

His call to ditch “woke advisers” came alongside advice ahead of midterms in which Republicans are favoured to retake Congress.

“Remember Bill Clinton’s 1992 mantra,” Romney wrote. “It’s the economy.”

In fact, the phrase associated with Clinton’s victory over George HW Bush, coined by the adviser [James Carville](#), was: “[The economy, stupid.](#)”

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# Headlines

- [Partygate Boris Johnson leadership doubts resurface after report of fresh fine at lockdown event he attended](#)
- ['Bring your own booze!' What happened at No 10 on 20 May 2020?](#)
- [Analysis PM feels Westminster heat under the Indian sun](#)
- [Partygate Labour toasts its success in Johnson's humiliation](#)

**Boris Johnson**

## **Johnson leadership doubts resurface amid report of fresh Partygate fine at event he attended**

No 10 denies PM fined again as source says at least one new fine issued for 20 May party and Tory MPs reconsider his survivability

- [Tories face heavy local election losses over Partygate, PM told](#)



Boris Johnson attends a news conference in Delhi, India. Senior Tories say he could face a leadership challenge in weeks. Photograph: Reuters

*[Aubrey Allegretti](#) and [Heather Stewart](#)*

Fri 22 Apr 2022 14.23 EDTFirst published on Fri 22 Apr 2022 13.49 EDT

Boris Johnson is facing deepening peril over the Partygate scandal after a source said a fine had been issued for a second event attended by the prime

minister, while senior [Conservatives](#) warned he could face a leadership challenge within weeks.

On Friday evening, No 10 was forced to deny Johnson had received another fixed penalty notice (FPN) for a “bring your own booze” [Downing Street garden party on 20 May 2020](#).

In January, Johnson admitted attending the event – held during the first national lockdown when indoor and outdoor social mixing were banned – for about 25 minutes but claimed he “[believed implicitly that this was a work event](#)”. Johnson’s principal private secretary, Martin Reynolds, is said to have invited up to 100 people to the “socially distanced” evening drinks.

A source told the Guardian that at least one FPN was issued on Friday to a Downing Street official who attended the event. As Johnson finished a two-day trade trip to India on Friday, a spokesperson said he had not received a new fine.

On Thursday the [Metropolitan police announced it would not provide any updates on FPNs](#) for Downing Street lockdown breaches until after next month’s local elections “due to the restrictions around communicating” ahead of the 5 May vote, though the criminal investigation and issuing of fines could continue.

It came as senior party figures warned that [Boris Johnson](#) will probably face a leadership challenge if the Conservatives suffer significant losses at the May elections.

The prime minister was told his support was being “eroded markedly” after the government capitulated to allow a third investigation into lockdown breaches, sparking renewed jostling among those vying to replace him.

Allies of Jeremy Hunt, the former health secretary, and Penny Mordaunt, a trade minister, were said by MPs to have renewed discreet preparations for a leadership contest.

During an overshadowed trade trip to India, Johnson admitted he had got a “pretty good kick” from his backbenchers after the [government tried to force](#)

[them to delay a third Partygate inquiry](#), by the privileges committee, only to U-turn hours later. He vowed to fight on, insisting he would still be prime minister in six months' time.

Meanwhile, [infighting between his detractors and supporters](#) spilled out into the open. Conor Burns, a Northern Ireland minister, dismissed criticism levelled at Johnson by some Tory backbenchers and said there were “colleagues across parliament who have never really supported the prime minister”.

Robert Hayward, a Conservative peer and elections expert, said MPs, councillors and Tory associations were fearful of the Partygate row stretching on indefinitely. “I expect that there will be some form of contest for leadership at some stage, not immediately,” he told the BBC. “But the support for the PM is being eroded quite markedly and has been since the recess.”

Hayward suggested Johnson’s downfall would be “death by a thousand cuts” given the various investigations by Scotland Yard, the senior civil servant Sue Gray and now the Commons privileges committee.

He revealed MPs were “looking around” to gauge who would be the most suitable replacement for Johnson and said: “They won’t necessarily admit it but that is the reality.”

Hayward added: “I think they’re moving to a position, from whoever they started, to a position of saying ‘this cannot go on and there is only one way of resolving that and that is by saying we will need some form of challenge, leadership election, whatever it may happen to be’.”

A cabinet source also predicted the local elections on 5 May could be as dire for the Conservatives as the 2019 European parliament elections, where the party won their lowest ever share of the vote.

Iain Duncan Smith, a former Tory party leader, said many MPs had not grown any more hostile to Johnson because of the poor handling of the vote about the prime minister being investigated for misleading parliament.

However, he told the Guardian: “We’ll wait to see what happens at the end of this. The majority of the public are sick and tired of the story; Conservative MPs are sick and tired of the story.

“Colleagues may decide it is recoverable. If they reach the decision it’s too damaging, then it’s over. That balance is just sitting waiting. I fancy that the local elections and inquiry will put that to rest.”

Steve Brine, a former health minister, was also revealed to have told a constituent that a confidence vote in Johnson “should take place … sooner rather than later”. He emailed: “This is not a sustainable situation and I suspect further FPNs will follow those issued last week. I will be liaising with senior colleagues to see that confidence is tested in the period ahead.”

Robert Largan, the new Tory MP for High Peak in Derbyshire, the 14th most marginal seat in the country, also told constituents he would not “defend the indefensible”.

“We cannot have a situation where it is one rule for politicians and another rule for everyone else,” he said. “I can assure you that I am taking the appropriate action to defend integrity in public life.”

Rory Stewart, a former cabinet minister, also predicted the May elections would demonstrate Johnson “has lost his magic and the Conservative MPs will then conclude there is no point staying behind him”.

Tory MPs who have submitted letters of no confidence in Johnson felt quietly optimistic that others would follow suit, and be given heart by the likes of senior backbenchers Mark Harper and Steve Baker calling on the prime minister to go this week. “They’ll just do it quietly or privately – until we’re left with these mad people who wouldn’t get anything under another regime,” one surmised.

Another MP supportive of Johnson admitted: “It’s so unpredictable and all seems to have changed again. I’ve gone from thinking he should be safe to thinking ‘this is it’.” A Conservative MP who previously kept an open mind

about Johnson's future diagnosed the concerns about his political leadership as "terminal".

Winding up his two-day trip to India, an exasperated Johnson was unable to escape fresh questions about the Partygate row. He was adamant he would still be prime minister in October – when he hopes a free trade deal with India could be ready to sign – and insisted he was in India to discuss issues of interest to British voters.

"I think what people want in our country is for the government to get on and focus on the issues on which we were elected, and that's what we're going to do – and I think they'll be particularly interested in jobs and growth in the UK," he said, going on to highlight cooperation with the Indian government on green energy and defence.

In an odd outburst, responding to a question about whether he would compare himself to a cat with nine lives, he said: "We had a pretty good kick of the cat yesterday" but quickly added: "Not that I'm in favour of kicking cats."

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## Boris Johnson

# ‘Bring your own booze!’: what happened at No 10 on 20 May 2020?

Explainer: the British government reiterated Covid lockdown rules to the public – before staff headed to the garden



The prime minister, Boris Johnson, and his now-wife, Carrie Symonds, clap to show thanks for NHS workers on 14 May 2020, the week before the party in question. Photograph: Isabel Infantes/AFP/Getty

*[Haroon Siddique](#)*

Fri 22 Apr 2022 15.15 EDT Last modified on Fri 22 Apr 2022 17.30 EDT

It was the hottest day of the year, the sun was shining with the temperature in the mid-20s, perfect for a get together – or so one of Boris Johnson’s top officials had obviously thought.

[In an email](#), sent to more than 100 employees, on [20 May 2020](#), Martin Reynolds, the prime minister’s principal private secretary, wrote: “Hi all,

after what has been an incredibly busy period we thought it would be nice to make the most of the lovely weather and have some socially distanced drinks in the No 10 garden this evening. Please join us from 6pm and bring your own booze!"

There was just one problem – the country was in lockdown. The gathering, believed to have been attended by 30 or 40 people, occurred at a time when social mixing was banned except with one other person from another household outdoors in a public place.

Staff quaffed wine and ate food laid out for them on tables.

Among those present was the prime minister, who is believed to have attended with his then fiancee – now wife – Carrie Johnson.

When details of the gathering first emerged, [Johnson said he joined the event for about 25 minutes](#) from 6pm to talk to and thank staff, believing that it was a work event, with the No 10 garden being used as “an extension of the office” amid lockdown.

It was an explanation that attracted howls of derision in the House of Commons, given the invitation to “bring your own booze”.

While the prime minister [said he was not warned it was against the rules](#) – and Reynolds was apparently equally ignorant, assuming it was not a wilful breach – some staff were more cautious. They feared they might be breaking the very laws the government had implemented.

“Um. Why is Martin encouraging a mass gathering in the garden?” one staffer said, according to the BBC. Another asked: “Is this for real?”

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Johnson’s former aide Dominic Cummings, [also claimed he raised a red flag at the time](#), saying he had told Reynolds that the invitation broke the rules. He said the prime minister’s principal private secretary replied: “So long as

it's socially distanced I think it's OK, I'll check with the PM if he's happy for it to go ahead.”

Just minutes before the party started, the daily press conference held inside Downing Street had concluded.

The then culture secretary, now Conservative party co-chair, Oliver Dowden, had reinforced the messaging around what was permitted, saying: “You can meet one person outside your household in an outdoor, public place provided that you stay 2 metres apart.”

Dowden announced the launch of the Covid alert level system, with each of its five levels relating to the level of threat posed by the virus, with the country at the time preparing to move to level 3 from 4.

On that day, there were 9,953 people in hospital with coronavirus. A further 363 deaths were announced, bringing the total at that point to 35,704.

Dowden was not the only one highlighting the rules. The Metropolitan police told people in a tweet on the afternoon of 20 May 2020 that they could have a picnic, exercise or do sport outside providing you are “on your own, with people you live with, or just you and one other person”.

Have you been enjoying the hottest day of the year so far? □

It is important that we all continue to [#StayAlert](#)

You can relax, have a picnic, exercise or play sport, as long as you are:

- On your own
- With people you live with
- Just you and one other person [pic.twitter.com/LAVe6DScQ5](https://pic.twitter.com/LAVe6DScQ5)

— Metropolitan Police (@metpoliceuk) [May 20, 2020](#)

The Met’s message was posted in apparent recognition that the hot weather would test adherence to the rules. But they could not have imagined that the

transgressors they would be handing fixed-penalty notices out to more than two years later would include the occupants of No 10.

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## Foreign policy

# Boris Johnson feels Westminster heat under the Indian sun

**Analysis:** The PM travelled 4,000 miles to not get very far, on a trip fraught with tensions about Partygate and Ukraine



Boris Johnson being interviewed at a temple in Gandhinagar on Thursday.  
Photograph: WPA/Getty Images

*[Heather Stewart](#) Political editor*

Fri 22 Apr 2022 11.01 EDT Last modified on Fri 22 Apr 2022 17.13 EDT

As [Boris Johnson](#) met Narendra Modi on Friday morning, he joked of the enthusiastic welcome he received in the Indian prime minister's home state of Gujarat featuring giant posters of the British leader's face, and flag-waving crowds: "I wouldn't get that necessarily everywhere in the world."

It was a characteristically self-deprecating reference to the fact that even 4,000 miles from home, he was unable to escape Partygate.

When this much-delayed trip was being planned, Johnson's refreshed Downing Street team hoped it would demonstrate his commitment to the solid issues of investment, post-Brexit trade deals and green energy.

But beleaguered prime ministers rarely find solace from their troubles in trips abroad, and Johnson was peppered with questions about the collapse of his authority back in Westminster.

By Thursday afternoon, being interviewed in the baking Gujarat sun by a string of broadcasters, he was noticeably tetchy, at one point theatrically consulting his watch, and urging Sky's Beth Rigby to stick to questions about the substance of the India visit.

In truth the victories from the visit were relatively modest. Johnson hailed the prospects for a free trade agreement, which the Indian government is indeed keen to press ahead with. Modi's imprimatur may help speed up the process, but talks have been under way since January, after a shift in Indian policy. It has already signed recent deals with the UAE and Australia.

There are questions, too, about how much the UK may be willing to tie in visas with any deal. Johnson appeared to signal he would welcome more high-skilled Indian immigration as part of an agreement, reversing a longstanding UK stance.

Government sources claimed he was only referring to the "inter-company transfers" that allow firms to bring in overseas staff.

Johnson also highlighted cooperation on green technologies, including a memorandum of understanding on wind power, which is expected to see Indian and UK firms collaborating. There was also the customary announcement of new investment projects, though some of these were notably small, one creating just 15 jobs (though, Downing Street claimed, 11,000 in all).

Aside from that, tangible outcomes from the two-day tour were hard to identify, raising the question of why India, and why now, apart from the hope of generating some upbeat headlines about a post-Brexit trade deal.

Johnson repeatedly insisted the UK and India were fellow democracies ready to take on autocratic regimes (without mentioning China or Russia by name). Human rights watchdogs warn that while it was indeed democratically elected, Modi's government has taken on increasingly autocratic characteristics – including repressive measures against journalists and activists. Johnson stood alone at his final press conference in Delhi, because Modi himself has not given one for years.

At the same time, the trip was also fraught with tensions about deepening the UK's cooperation with a country whose stance is radically different on the overriding foreign policy issue of the day: Ukraine.

Downing Street had made clear in advance that Johnson had no illusions about influencing Modi, who recently entertained Moscow's foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, in Delhi – though the pair did discuss the conflict at length.

The contradictions inherent in the relationship were evident in a story published in the Times of India during the visit, and not denied by No 10, that the UK had requested a US-made Chinook helicopter be used to transport Johnson to a JCB factory visit, instead of a Russian-made alternative. India buys much of its defence equipment from Russia.

One of the few solid announcements from the visit was that the UK will liberalise exports of defence equipment to India, issuing an across-the-board licence so that individual contracts will be subject to less scrutiny.

That was intended as a signal of defence cooperation as part of Johnson's "Indo-Pacific tilt" towards a region he described in his closing press conference as "the geopolitical centre of the world".

But it was [thrown into question](#) by a report from the defence thinktank Rusi on Friday warning that Russia is laundering components for weapons from western countries through India.

While Johnson's reception in India was certainly warm the impossibility of escaping his travails was underlined when, as he was entertaining business

leaders in his last engagement in Delhi, ITV reported that the next batch of partygate fines are dropping into inboxes.

Johnson left his lieutenants back home exposed to the full force of backbench fury over Partygate, and returns with little to show for it. And the welcome as he flies back to London is unlikely to be anything but chilly.

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## Labour

# Labour toasts its success in Boris Johnson's Partygate humiliation

Keir Starmer's team in ebullient mood as focused tactics contrast with PM's ebbing authority



Keir Starmer had to be sure not to alienate voters when challenging the prime minister on the same subject for three consecutive days. Photograph: Jessica Taylor/UK Parliament/AFP/Getty Images

*Peter Walker Political correspondent*

*@peterwalker99*

Fri 22 Apr 2022 08.52 EDT Last modified on Fri 22 Apr 2022 14.52 EDT

The contrast was marked. Shortly after the Commons agreed a [third Partygate inquiry](#), the few visible Conservative MPs seemed notably downcast while colleagues had already scarpered, wheeling their suitcases out of Westminster and heading to their constituencies amid the chaos of government U-turns.

The mood in the Labour team, meanwhile, was ebullient after the party led the humiliation. [Keir Starmer](#) joined aides for a drinks gathering on the Commons terrace that evening.

“It’s not the first time we’ve done this kind of thing, and everyone has done an amazing job,” one official said. “But it’s also fair to say that if there was a way for the government to have messed up this week, they’ve managed to find it.”

Boris Johnson has perhaps experienced worse weeks as prime minister, but none have so brutally underlined the contrast between his ebbing authority and the increasingly focused tactics of Starmer’s operation, plus the willingness of opposition parties to cooperate.

A painstakingly drafted motion paving the way for a Partygate inquiry by the Commons [privileges committee](#) eventually passed without a vote. It was written by Labour but signed by the Westminster leaders or sole MPs from six other parties, including the Scottish National party and the Liberal Democrats.

Labour officials sought wording that would prevent ministers from trying to delay or dismiss the process, specifying that the inquiry would not fully begin until the end of the police investigation.

To get around another government objection, the committee’s Labour chair, Chris Bryant, who has criticised the prime minister, said he would step back from the process. Bryant even discussed this with Graham Brady, the shop steward for Tory backbenchers, to make sure the message got through.

All this took place in a truncated Tuesday to Thursday political week after the bank holiday, with opposition parties first sounding out the Commons Speaker, Lindsay Hoyle, over [timetabling a motion](#) before MPs had returned from their Easter recess.

Another challenge for Labour was to avoid potentially alienating voters when Starmer challenged the prime minister in the Commons on the same subject on three consecutive days, requiring a varied approach.

On Tuesday, responding to [Johnson's Commons apology](#) for receiving a fixed-penalty notice, Starmer took a personal tone, calling the PM "[a man without shame](#)". The next day at prime minister's questions, Starmer tried to pin down Johnson over details. Finally, opening the debate on Thursday, he sought to highlight the constitutional principles involved.

'What a joke': Keir Starmer berates Johnson over Partygate apology – video

The overall plan was to leave Downing Street with two unavoidable and unpalatable choices: accepting the motion, or whipping Conservative MPs to vote it down, leaving them open to accusations of trying to block scrutiny.

Such was the tangle that while Downing Street did table an amendment, late on Wednesday evening, little more than 12 hours later it had been dropped after Tory MPs made it plain they could not support the tactic.

The end result is Johnson will be investigated for alleged lying, many Tory MPs are even more unhappy, and a news agenda No 10 had hoped would be shaped by the prime minister's [visit to India](#) has been dominated by questions about his honesty.

"I think we can say it went well," one official for another opposition party said. "All these Commons procedures can seem deeply weird. But people know a shambles when they see one. It's like the chaos over Theresa May's Brexit deal. No one really understood the deal, but they all knew it was a shambles."

Credit for Labour's strategy will inevitably fall on its chief whip, Alan Campbell, and Starmer's political director, Luke Sullivan. But Labour aides stressed the wider team element.



Boris Johnson reacts to Keir Starmer in the Commons on Wednesday.  
Photograph: Jessica Taylor/UK Parliament/AFP/Getty Images

Meanwhile, though MPs from either side will be wary about reading too much into a handful of days, Tory backbenchers are gloomily aware that the [much-vaunted rejig](#) of No 10 staff and the whipping operation has not brought about the changes billed.

There were many factors behind the decision to drop the government amendment minutes before the debate began, but it was not a good sign for the new chief whip, Chris Heaton-Harris, in terms of gauging the mood of his MPs.

Hannah White, the deputy director of the Institute for Government thinktank, said it was a surprise that the government had got itself into such a mess.

“If they’d looked at it calmly, they could have just said, ‘We can let this pass. We have nothing to hide,’” she said. “But it has ended up being an own goal. They didn’t need to expend all this political capital, and they’ve ended up looking defensive.”

While the procedure could appear arcane, White said, the issues at stake were vital: “Fundamentally, this isn’t about parties. It isn’t even about Boris

Johnson's career. It's about whether we care that when a prime minister comes to the Commons, they make sure that what they are saying is true.

"If that's not the case then the whole point of parliament in terms of its scrutiny role is undermined. Parliament has to be able to trust that when ministers come before it, they are telling the truth. Ministers need the discipline of believing that it is important they tell parliament the truth."

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## 2022.04.23 - Spotlight

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Sienna Miller: ‘I was raised to be a people-pleaser.’ Photograph: Silvana Trevale/The Guardian

## **Sienna Miller on taking on the tabloids: ‘It was so toxic – what women were subjected to’**

Sienna Miller: ‘I was raised to be a people-pleaser.’ Photograph: Silvana Trevale/The Guardian

After a bruising battle to expose the red tops’ dirty tricks, the actor reveals the price she paid

by [Emma Brockes](#)

Sat 23 Apr 2022 02.00 EDT

In the late summer of 2005, Sienna Miller was appearing in the West End of London in a [production of As You Like It](#). It is hard to remember how things were back then – how feverish the attention around young, female celebrities

was and how ferocious the tabloids were in pursuing them. Fresh from filming the remake of [Alfie](#), and dating her co-star Jude Law, Miller was both a style icon (the queen of “boho chic”) and the biggest tabloid target in Britain – as the Observer [put it](#), an “actress and model who has been traded like pork belly on the celebrity market”. When, that summer, the Sun published a “rumour” that Miller was pregnant, her world exploded.

She was 23, panicked, mortified – and obliged to stand on stage eight times a week before a capacity audience of 800 people. She was also, as the Sun had correctly reported, pregnant – less than 12 weeks. Looking back, she still boggles at the grotesqueness of it: “Appearing in public when you’re extremely heartbroken. Trying not to break. All the while being mocked and ridiculed.” The now 40-year-old smiles. “Hell, honestly.”

This all happened a very long time ago. The reason we are talking about it on a Monday morning in Manhattan is that at the end of last year [Miller reached a settlement with the Sun](#). The newspaper agreed to pay the actor an undisclosed sum on the basis that there was no admission of illegal activity, and as part of the settlement the judge allowed Miller to read out a prepared statement. In it, she expressed regret that she didn’t have the resources to pursue the tabloid further, to a full trial, and restated her belief in its guilt; Miller alleges that the Sun obtained details of her pregnancy via illegal subterfuge, the so-called “blagging” of medical records from her doctor’s office by pretending to be one of her reps. “I wanted to expose the criminality that runs through the heart of this corporation,” she read, standing outside the high court flanked by her lawyers. “A criminality demonstrated clearly and irrevocably by the evidence which I have seen. I wanted to share News Group’s secrets just as they have shared mine.”



Reading a statement after settling her case: ‘I wanted to share News Group’s secrets just as they have shared mine.’ Photograph: Hollie Adams/AFP/Getty Images

We are downtown, in a cafe around the corner from where Miller lives with her 10-year-old daughter, Marlowe. She is in green mohair, slight and cheerful. If she appears a little nervous, it’s probably because Miller has a habit of shooting her mouth off and regretting it afterwards. In 2007, she gave an interview to my colleague Simon Hattenstone in which she said, among other things, [people do drugs “cos they’re fun”](#). A lot of people liked her for that, an honest answer in a context in which they are exceedingly rare. But it upset her mum, which she tries not to do. For much of her life, Miller has pinballed between impulse and correction. “I sometimes wish I was more able to focus and strategise,” she says, particularly in relation to her career. The fact is, however, “If I’m happy, I’m happy. I’m an absolutely present, in-the-moment person – not much looking back, or further forward. I’ve never known where I’ve wanted to be in 10 years’ time.” There’s no question that this guilelessness of Miller’s, underscored by somewhat shaky self-esteem, added to the scorn with which she was treated.

This month, she can be seen playing against type in *Anatomy of a Scandal*, a six-part Netflix drama adapted from [Sarah Vaughan’s novel](#) and directed by SJ Clarkson, in which an English cabinet minister, played by Rupert Friend,

is caught up in a #MeToo-type sex scandal. Miller plays Sophie, his wife, with Michelle Dockery as the barrister tasked with bringing him down. It's a loose take on Boris Johnson's old Bullingdon Club coterie and an enjoyable, bingeable romp. (One of the makers is Big Little Lies and Ally McBeal creator David E Kelley – this is his first show for Netflix – and the series has a lot in common with [The Undoing](#), his highly stylised hit starring Hugh Grant and Nicole Kidman.) For Miller, the character seemed unattractive at first. "I wasn't that excited about playing a kind of English Tory wife," she says. But the subject of betrayal interests her; she has Shakespearean-level experience of it, both from cheating boyfriends and endless gaslighting from the tabloids. I point out there's not a single appealing man in the entire thing. "I know! They're all shit!" Miller looks delighted. She thinks for another second. "Yeah, no, they're all shit. She's rampantly feminist, SJ Clarkson. She's great."



'At first, I wasn't that excited about playing an English Tory wife': with Rupert Friend in Anatomy of a Scandal

The other noticeable thing about the show is the way it highlights how starkly the conversation around consent has moved on. The case prosecuted by the character played by Dockery – "Dockers" to Miller, who had few scenes with her, but is wildly admiring: "She's genuinely a great person" – hinges on whether a woman who has said "yes" can, a moment later, say

“no”. Even 10 years ago, this would have been a fantastical proposition on which to hang a fictional court case, and 20 years ago, when Miller was in her 20s, it wouldn’t have been a discussion at all. “God, no,” she says. “We grew up in such a different world.”

Miller’s own character, Sophie, says at one point, “It was just easier to acquiesce,” to which Miller adds, “as a teenager, fuck, there’s no way that you could [say no], really. I mean, God forbid you offend a man’s ego by rejecting him. Versus the generation 10 years below us. ‘No!’ They’re happy to say it. It’s very different.”

A language has evolved to enable this change, and Miller hoots with laughter when I ask if she used the word “boundaries” when she was younger. “If someone had ever said to me you need a boundary, I’d have said ‘What *is* a boundary?’” The same goes for gaslighting, she says. “Or ‘love-bombing’ or ‘narcissistic tendencies’. I realise I’ve been gaslit and love-bombed several times.”

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After her parents divorced when Miller was five, her father, an American banker and art dealer, stayed in New York and she returned, with her sister and her English-South African mother, to London. At eight, she was sent to boarding school. It has been a feature of Miller’s life that she has been serially underestimated, and it started early. “I was raised to be a people-pleaser,” she says. (Her daughter, however, has no trouble saying no, which is great, says Miller, bar “moments of arse-clenching embarrassment” when she won’t do what her mother asks her in public.)

As a child and a young adult, Miller was sunny and pretty, and when she got into acting and modelling after school, a readymade template was waiting for her. It’s thanks almost single-handedly to Miller that many of us tried, in the early 00s, to carry off boot tassels, big scarves and floaty florals, a wardrobe that made her look pixie-like and whimsical, and made the rest of us look like we got dressed in the dark. She hated the “It Girl” tag. “For a long time [my reputation] was something to celebrate – it’s just it wasn’t celebrating anything that I wanted to celebrate. People would come up to me and say, ‘I love your clothes!’ I’d be like, ‘Aaaaaargh, I’m trying to do Shakespeare!’”

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If this was the extent of her grievance, Miller, whom no one forced to pose for the cover of Vogue, wouldn't have much to complain about beyond basic, misogynistic double standards. ([Jude Law](#), as pretty as Miller back then, had – I'm going out on a limb here – much less substance than his then girlfriend, but in spite of appearing on magazine covers, too, was taken very seriously indeed as an actor. Miller, on the other hand, was dismissed as an empty, talentless celebrity.) But of course, it went further than that. In her statement to the high court Miller said that she believes it was Rebekah Brooks, then editor of the Sun, who called Miller's publicist and told her she knew Miller was pregnant. Miller alleged that Brooks was one of those responsible for leaking the story. The story itself was not originally published in the Sun but in Page Six, the notorious gossip column in the New York Post, Rupert Murdoch's US tabloid. The Sun followed up and published the story in the UK.

There's a weak link in human psychology that makes us slow down and look at a road accident. That's what tabloids exploit

For a split second – “Because I was in a mess” – Miller wondered if one of her close friends had betrayed her. How else could the tabloid have found out about her pregnancy? But she didn't suspect her friends for long. “I mean, there's no fucking way they could've known that from someone [I knew] – literally my three best friends were the only ones who knew. I realised pretty soon that [the Sun] was blagging medical records.” How did she know? “My doctor phoned and said, ‘We sent the documents you asked for.’ And I said, ‘I didn't ask for any documents.’” Wow; a real the-phone-call's-coming-from-inside-the-building moment. During the hearing last year, Miller's legal team presented evidence, including invoices issued to the Sun from an alleged medical blagger for “Sienns [sic] Miller Pregnant research”, along with personal expenses that used references such as “SIENNA MILLER PREGNANCY RIDDLE” and “DINNER WITH TRACER (WHO CONFIRMED SIENNA WAS PREGNANT)”.

The allegations are shocking, even now. It's obscene that a 23-year-old, in the early stages of a pregnancy, should have had these alleged actions taken against her. She did not ultimately continue with the pregnancy. "Horrible," she says. "The anxiety it induced. At the time, it removed any ability I had to think clearly about making a decision. I was in an absolute panic, and already dealing with a huge amount of pain." She pauses. "And then you think of, you know, the family of [Milly Dowler](#) [the murdered schoolgirl whose voicemails were targeted by the News of the World], and it's insignificant. But it was just so toxic. Those days – the frenzy of it, the madness of what women, specifically, were subjected to. I actually look back at it and it's like a weird film. Another universe."



'I think a lot of people probably feel disgusted at what they did.'

Photograph: Silvana Trevale/The Guardian. Clothes: [miumiu.com](#). Earrings: Harris Reed x Missoma, from [missoma.com](#). Rings: [goossens-paris.com](#) and [alighieri.com](#)

Making her statement outside the high court was a complicated moment for Miller. It didn't feel like a victory. "When you hear there's been an out-of-court settlement, of course it's an astounding amount of money, but it's nothing near what you imagine. I don't tell people the actual figure as I'm not allowed to say. But it's a drop in the ocean. I mean they won, essentially." The reason Miller was able to go after the Sun in the first place

was because she didn't settle with the News of the World during the first phone-hacking scandal. When that story broke, she knew she was one of those who had been hacked. "I knew it. And I was being told that I was not one of them. I had to take the police to court to even find out I was a victim, which is indicative of how deeply it all runs, in terms of this democracy we're living in." She sued the police to hand over evidence that she was a victim of phone-hacking, and the judge ordered them to comply. "I got four boxes of evidence." But in the end, "There's very little you can do with it; you're going up against a Goliath." Airing all this is fine, she says, but "I thought it would have more of an impact than it did."

You weren't really inaugurated until Weinstein made you cry. I imagined this is what Hollywood producers were like

What struck her most about the evidence was how removed reporters at the Sun were from the implications of what they were doing. It was gamification, effectively, and she was considered fair game. "I heard a lot, at the time: 'You wanted it. You asked for it.' Well, no. No one can prepare you for what that experience is. It was like big game hunting. It's so vicious. And then reading through the emails of the correspondents and journalists, in court: 'Look what she's done now, silly little twat' – that kind of thing. Banter, between grownups. There's a weak link in human psychology, which is the part that makes us slow down on a motorway and look at an accident. That's what tabloids exploit."

She doesn't blame individual Sun journalists particularly. "It was a collegial environment, where that's what they were doing, and it was probably exciting. And I understand if you just detach from the fact that there's a human being [at the other end of it], you can get sucked into a way of behaving that you are really not proud of, ultimately. And I think that a lot of people look back on it and probably feel pretty disgusted at what they did."



Photograph: Silvana Trevale/The Guardian. Jumper: Totême, from [matchesfashion.com](http://matchesfashion.com). Jacket, trousers and heels: [gucci.com](http://gucci.com). Earrings: [completedworks.com](http://completedworks.com)

News Group, which owns the Sun, has always denied that illegal activity took place at the News of the World's sister daily during the era when Rebekah Brooks was editor of the tabloid, including the blagging of medical records. Though it has made substantial payouts to celebrities who have accused it of phone hacking, including Paul Gascoigne.

How did her parents react when all this was going down? “Ugh, it was brutal. Actually, Mum’s got a claim against the Sun. It’s starting to be worth it because of all the people around me who were hacked and are going to get a settlement. That’s made it worthwhile, once you add up what everybody else is getting.”

Wait, what? “Mum and my best friend. The web was extremely large. It was agony, because it was out of everybody’s control. They were watching me somewhat implode. They set the stage for people to unravel and then documented it. Young women. Amy Winehouse. Britney Spears.” When I asked a Sun spokesperson if it had any comment on the allegation that it targeted Miller’s mum and her friend, they said no.



With her mother, Jo, who also has a claim against the Sun. Photograph: François Durand/Getty Images

It's because of all this that Miller is very nervous about phones. Marlowe doesn't have one. "I've told her she's never getting one. She can have a flip-phone when she's 12. All she wants is to go to her friends' house and learn TikTok dances."

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It is with a bleak amusement that one notes that, after the Sun's pregnancy story exploded, the first movie Miller made was [Factory Girl](#), a biopic of Edie Sedgwick produced by ... [Harvey Weinstein](#)! Ah, to be a young woman in Hollywood in the early 21st century! Actually, says Miller, Weinstein never tried to assault her, partly, she thinks, because "I was Jude's girlfriend, and there was probably protection in that. Jude was a big actor for Harvey." And partly, she says, because "I called Harvey 'Pops' from day one, which I'm sure helped; you're not going to wank on that."

The former movie mogul and convicted sex offender currently serving a [23-year prison sentence](#) did, however, shout at her. "I was rehearsing one day with Steve Buscemi, and Harvey called and asked me to come to his office. I said, I'm in rehearsal. And he shouted, 'NOW!' and sent a car. He sat me down in his office and said, 'You're not fucking going out any more, you're not partying, rah rah rah.'" This was a period during which Miller was out

every night, appearing in gossip columns. “I was having a lot of fun, but I managed to go to work on time. And he was standing over me while I was sitting in a chair, lip quivering, and then he slammed the door, and I burst into tears. And then he came back in and said: ‘It’s because I’m fucking proud of you.’ And slammed the door again.”



Photograph: Silvana Trevale/The Guardian. Styling: Melanie Wilkinson, assisted by Peter Bevan. Hair: George Northwood. Makeup: Wendy Rowe and Amy Wright. Clothes: [jilsander.com](http://jilsander.com). Earrings: [alighieri.com](http://alighieri.com). Rings: [goossens-paris.com](http://goossens-paris.com) and [alighieri.com](http://alighieri.com)

It sounds abusive, but at the time, says Miller, it felt like an honour – “You weren’t really inaugurated until Weinstein made you cry. I imagined this is what Hollywood producers were like. I genuinely felt he’d given me the biggest validation. I was so grateful. I wasn’t scared of him, actually. And I was not aware that he was raping people. He asked for one meeting with me in a hotel, and I brought the other producers and it was innocuous. I’ve never been propositioned by anyone, for a job.”

Her biggest problem, beyond the behaviour of tabloids, has been her own confidence. Miller has appeared in more than 30 movies, turned in excellent performances in films such as *Foxcatcher*, and [\*American Woman\*](#), and appeared on stage as Sally Bowles in a 2015 Broadway revival of *Cabaret*.

But, she says, “I don’t have rock-solid self-esteem. I wish I did.” Learning to ask for equal pay has been hard – although she was pleased, recently, when she walked away from a theatre project rather than accept less money than her male co-star. More generally, though, “Advocating for myself in that way is not who I am. I don’t see myself as valuable. I’m just grateful to be there. I’m trying very hard not to think this way; to switch my mindset into a place where I can say no. I try. And I can’t. Because ultimately, deep down, I *am* really happy to be there and would probably pay to be there.” She’ll tell a joke against herself before anyone else can get there. “I do it endlessly and I have to stop.”

Is she ambitious? “No. I mean, I must have *some* ambition. I have had this conversation with my English agent, who thinks I do have ambition. But I know that reaching some kind of apex of success in this industry is not the thing that would make me happy.” Other conventional measures of success have never interested her, either. She notes with interest that Sophie, her character in *Anatomy of a Scandal*, is someone with an agenda: “To marry the ‘best’ man, to be the wife, to have the kids. To set up the perfect world to live out that fantasy, and it all implodes. That’s so far away from my ambitions when I was younger.”

Miller, who is single, separated from [Tom Sturridge](#), the actor with whom she had Marlowe, in 2015, but he is very present in their lives. His mother, the actor Phoebe Nicholls – who in fact appears in *Anatomy of a Scandal* as Sophie’s mother-in-law – is visiting Miller at present, and at one point walks past the cafe where we sit, though she doesn’t spot us. During the first lockdown in 2020, Miller moved upstate into a house with Marlowe, Tom, her best friend, Tara, and briefly, her dad. “It was communal living, which I love, although by the end we were ready for it to end. But Marlowe was really happy. I look back on the start of that lockdown quite fondly.”

Miller sometimes wonders, and worries, if she talks and thinks too much about what happened to her at the hands of the Sun and its sister papers during those days of her early 20s. And she tries to recalibrate. “It was at the same time as really falling in love, and having magical times. I look back on that decade with mostly fond memories. I can really dissociate my life from that person – put it in a box where it feels like somebody else.” But a

moment later, she rebels against this impulse. “It was such an enormous part of my life. And it’s still being bashed out.” Reading the statement outside the high court, in which she publicly accused Rupert Murdoch’s company of doing her harm, was a moment of terror and empowerment. “To be able to acknowledge the truth.”

Does that mean she has closure? Miller laughs, suddenly incredulous with outrage. “No!” she says. “No!”

*Anatomy of a Scandal* is on Netflix.

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## Blind date: ‘I spied her hiding at the bar, getting a pep talk from the host’



Photograph: Linda Nylind/The Guardian

Jo, 35, junior buyer, meets Joel, 30, head barista

Sat 23 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT

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## **Jo on Joel**



### **What were you hoping for?**

A different sort of evening, good company and maybe a little more.

### **First impressions?**

Great head of hair, nice eyes, inquisitive and very well mannered.

### **What did you talk about?**

A lot! The fact that we both write – scripts for him, short stories for me. Football. Music. Past jobs. How nice the restaurant was and how lovely the food and staff were.

### **Any awkward moments?**

I think he found the photoshoot as embarrassing as I did.

### **Good table manners?**

Very good. We had sharing plates and he made sure I had enough, and didn't react too much when my fork fell on the floor.

### **Best thing about Joel?**

He seems to have a really open and friendly personality, and he's interesting to chat to.

**Would you introduce him to your friends?**

Yes.

**Describe Joel in three words**

Funny, warm, polite.

**What do you think he made of you?**

I hope he found me friendly and good company, although he may have picked up on a few nerves that I had at the beginning.

**Did you go on somewhere?**

We did: to a pub nearby for last orders. We were well entertained by the music and the football documentary.

**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](http://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](mailto:blind.date@theguardian.com)

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

**And ... did you kiss?**

A little one on the tube.

**If you could change one thing about the evening what would it be?**

I wouldn't have worn such uncomfortable shoes.

**Marks out of 10?**

9.

**Would you meet again?**

I'd be open to it. It feels like there is still a lot to find out about each other.



Jo and Joel at Brunswick House

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### **Joel on Jo**



**What were you hoping for?**  
Just a fun night getting to know someone new.

**First impressions?**

I spied her hiding at the bar, getting a pep talk from the host, so it was good to know she was nervous as well. She was bright, smiley and chatty from the off.

**What did you talk about?**

Only the important stuff: Sunderland till I die. What type of wine Jesus made. Michael Owen's charisma. And whether Kim or Aggie from How Clean Is Your House was sitting behind us.

**Any awkward moments?**

When I called her a geordie.

**Good table manners?**

She flung a fork across the restaurant – not in response to being called a geordie.

**Best thing about Jo?**

I could talk about everything and anything with her: work, football, theatre, writing ...

**Would you introduce her to your friends?**

Yes.

**Describe Jo in three words**

Friendly, genuine, mackem.

**What do you think she made of you?**

Mumbly and obsessed with the meat called Jesus, an option on the menu.

**Did you go on somewhere?**

Yes, we caught last orders where we got to watch a Michael Owen special.

**And ... did you kiss?**

I'll let her say.

**If you could change one thing about the evening what would it be?**

The restaurant was nice but Vauxhall is a bit of a dystopian hellscape.

**Marks out of 10?**

8.

**Would you meet again?**

Possibly.

*Jo and Joel ate at [Brunswick House](#), Vauxhall, London. Fancy a blind date?  
Email [blind.date@theguardian.com](mailto:blind.date@theguardian.com)*

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## Renting property

# ‘We’re not all terrible’: the landlords who keep rents low

Tales of misery for tenants hit the headlines but there are property owners who go the extra mile



Offering property at less than market rent can give a family an affordable place to live. Photograph: LightField Studios Inc./Alamy

*[Suzanne Bearne](#)*

Sat 23 Apr 2022 04.00 EDT

When landlords hit the headlines it tends to be for the worst of reasons – what we don’t tend to hear are the stories of tenants who live in properties in good condition, where the owner quickly replaces the fridge when it breaks or organises for an electrician to fix the flickering light fitting.

There are about 1.5 million residential landlords in England, according to the [2018 English Private Landlord Survey](#), and in 2020-21, the private rented sector accounted for [4.4 million, or 19%](#), of households in England.

Earlier this month, a committee of MPs reported that more than one in eight of these homes [posed a risk to safety](#), and that it was “too difficult for renters to realise their legal right to a safe and secure home”.

This week there has also been news of a major charity failing to look after the homes of some of its tenants.

But alongside the problem properties, and the landlords who are doing everything they should be doing, there are some owners who are going the extra mile for their tenants.



Heather Scott says she could charge double ‘but in a town where a three-bed terrace house costs at least £1,300 a month in rent and the average wage is about £20,000 a year, it didn’t seem right’. Photograph: Heather Scott

“We’re not all terrible landlords,” says Heather Scott, 41, a copywriter, who started renting out her dad’s property in Whitstable when he went into care, charging the tenants less than the market rent. “We both liked to put our morals where our mouth is and the rents here are astronomical,” she says.

They decided to rent out the property to a friend and her three children who were “living in a tiny house” nearby for which they paid £760 a month. For the same money the family now live in a three-bedroom detached house with a large garden and parking close to the children’s school and a 10-minute walk to the beach.

“We worked out that level of rent would cover my dad’s care home bill and she would have a lovely place to live,” Scott says. “Dad has since died but I’m happy with the renting situation as I know the children have stability in their lives, I have long-term income coming from the property, which I no longer have a mortgage on, and it isn’t losing value.

“Yes, I could probably charge double the rent but in a town where a three-bed terrace house costs at least £1,300 a month in rent and the average wage is about £20,000 a year, it didn’t seem right.”

As in many tourist hotspots, there are only a small number of properties to rent in Whitstable. Pointing to the rise of holiday lets in the coastal town, Scott says she can “count the key safes down the road”. She says there are 20 empty homes on the street. “I know I could earn at least four times as much renting through Airbnb but that would mean taking a home away from a family who have roots and work in our town,” she says.

## **‘I try to keep rents low’**

Homeless at 19 and sleeping in sheds, back gardens and train stations, Lara Oyedele, 55, is perhaps an unlikely landlord. But those tough beginnings led Oyedele to study a master’s in housing, move into a career in social housing and become a landlord herself. She has a portfolio of 10 rental properties in Bradford.

“The first properties (prior to 2014) were bought purely for investment,” she says. “I was working full-time within the social housing sector, so I was doing my bit. But even then, I was determined that my rents would be affordable. The properties acquired after 2014 were bought with the full intention of creating a portfolio of affordable homes so I could support others and be a good landlord.”



Lara Oyedele was ‘determined that my rents would be affordable’.  
Photograph: Lara Oyedele

Oyedele, who is the vice-president of the Chartered Institute of Housing, says: “I remember that feeling when I eventually got a council flat. It was the best thing that ever happened to me. It was in a grotty block with two bedrooms but I could shut the door and it was mine.”

She keeps the rents on her nine properties as low as possible. “I’ve never charged market rates,” Oyedele says. “It’s not fair on people. If I don’t need the money and can make an OK profit and be kind to other people [that’s good enough].”

She is also flexible and willing to stagger payments or help out tenants at times of crisis. “A couple of years ago my tenant had issues with family stuff and I said: ‘Listen, don’t pay the £350 in rent in December, just put an extra £100 on top of your rent for the next few months,’” she says. “I have one tenant who can’t work, her rent is cheaper than the mortgage. I try to keep rents low so people aren’t stressing out about paying rent, and I organise repairs as quickly as I can.”



Moira Beattie likes helping people because they ‘can’t get a job or bank account if they don’t have anywhere to live’. Photograph: Moira Beattie

On top of providing homes, she says she recently bought baby items for tenants. “I also do coaching and help my tenants with interview skills. I say I’ll help you get a job, send me your CV. Although one tenant did say to me: ‘It’s my personal life; it’s not your business.’”

Moira Beattie, 60, who lives in Chertsey, lets out four bedsits in the building above her hair and beauty salon via Rentstart, a charity that works with landlords to offer properties to people facing homelessness.

“I think everyone deserves a chance,” Beattie says. “I’ve got to know a lot of the 20 tenants who have lived here since I bought the building in 2008 and have helped several with trips to the jobcentre. Many have gone on to find jobs. I quite like being this kind of landlord. I like helping people. People can’t get a job or bank account if they don’t have anywhere to live. Once they have somewhere to call home they can start rebuilding their life.”

Beattie keeps rents as low as possible. “All I want to do is pay my mortgage. I’m not in it to make money from my tenants,” she says. “My investment is the building.”

## **‘The father messages to say how happy they are’**

When Jacqui Furneaux, 72, a retired nurse and travel writer living in Bristol, bought a two-bedroom flat in Clevedon last year with money her brother had left her she knew she wanted to do something “useful” with her inheritance.

“I set the wheels in motion to let it out to refugees and contacted North Somerset council, who allocated it to a lovely family from Afghanistan who I believe had helped the British armed forces,” she says. “It seemed like a nice way of saying welcome.”

The couple and their three-year-old son moved into the property in December. “I’ve met them several times, they’re lovely,” Furneaux says. “I’m so pleased to have helped. The father messages to say how happy they are.”



Jacqui Furneaux says: ‘It’s comforting to know a family who have helped the forces have a home.’ Photograph: Chris Boulton

Furneaux, who rents out the flat for £850 a month, says she was told by estate agents that she could receive rental income of more than £1,000. “I don’t miss the extra money; I’m in a fortunate position that I have the state

pension and an occupational pension,” she says. “It’s comforting to know a family who have helped the forces have a home.”

## **‘A landlord charging a fair rent ... should be the norm’**

Lee Coates, an ethical money and environmental, social and corporate governance consultant, says there is nothing intrinsically unethical about being a landlord.

“Those who cannot buy and need to rent need landlords to provide a property to rent,” he says. “How the landlord acts, however, is where ethics come in. We all know of instances where problems are not sorted and landlords do not meet even basic requirements – making an extra few pounds at the tenant’s expense. A landlord charging a fair rent and meeting their obligations, keeping the property in good condition, should be the norm.”

Richard Blanco, a spokesperson for the National Residential Landlords Association and the owner of 14 rental properties, says most tenants have a positive experience with their landlord.

“It’s a small minority of landlords who misbehave,” he says. “There’s some accidental landlords who don’t know the regulations and some downright stupid or negligent ones. You only hear about the small proportion because it’s much more newsworthy to report on the evil landlord. No one ever calls the local authorities to say how wonderful their landlord is. Hearing about a landlord repairing the boiler is really boring.”

Of his own properties, he says: “If someone reports an issue to me, I want to fix it asap.” He adds: “Knowing the tenant individually and understanding their lives is important. You’ve got to help them and encourage them to stay on top of their rent.”

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Interview

# Candice Carty-Williams: ‘It’s time to write a book just about Black people’

[Lisa Allardice](#)



Candice Carty-Williams ... There's 'pride and there's sadness' in being a Black woman in publishing. Photograph: Chantel King

How do you follow a game-changing, award-winning debut? Candice Carty-Williams on Queenie, binning her second novel, and how People Person draws on life with eight siblings

Sat 23 Apr 2022 04.00 EDT

It was Candice Carty-Williams who came up with the “Black Bridget Jones” tagline for her debut novel, [Queenie](#). (She wasn’t working in marketing for a publishing house at the time for nothing.) She wanted her novel, which follows the misadventures of millennial south London journalist Queenie, to reach as wide a readership as possible. She succeeded. Today, her name rarely appears without the words “publishing phenomenon” attached: Queenie won book of the year at the British book awards in 2020 (Bridget Jones took it in 1998), making Carty-Williams the first Black writer ever to

get the prize, an indictment of the industry in itself. The novel has sold more than half a million copies and is being made into a TV drama on Channel 4.

But where Bridget Jones's Diary now seems dated in terms of sexual politics, Queenie is often deeply shocking in its depiction of the heroine's treatment at the hands of a series of toxic men, taking in internet dating, mental health problems and the housing crisis, as well as everything else that goes with being a young woman. Toni Morrison's famous injunction to write the book you want to read might have been conceived with a future Carty-Williams in mind. Written when she was in her early 20s, and landing in the midst of the [#MeToo](#) and [Black Lives Matter movements](#), Queenie couldn't have been more timely. Critics praised its combination of empathy, wit and political awareness; some readers recognised themselves in fiction for the first time. "Queenie was this big burst of 25-year-old energy: 'I am sick of sexism and going on bad dates and hearing all this shit, and my friends having to go through all this shit, and going through shit at work. I have to write it all down,'" the author, now 33, says when we meet to talk about her much-anticipated second novel, People Person.

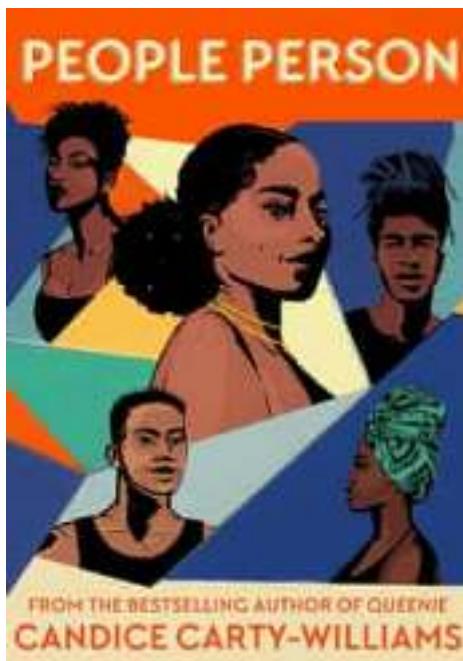
"Queenie was so much about Blackness in response to whiteness, I've said what I needed to say about that," she says. "It's time to write something that is just about Black people. That's it." Also set in south London, People Person is about a non-nuclear family coming together rather than falling apart, but again touches on contemporary issues such as social media, revenge porn and distrust of the police.

As I go through my life I will always write the things that I'm trying to make sense of

"I'm a proper south London girl for ever," Carty-Williams declares, after welcoming me into her home in Streatham, just round the corner from where she grew up, which she was able to buy thanks to Queenie. It is decorated with touches of the candy-pink and lush green of one of the book's original hardback designs. While she is delighted to finally have a place of her own (much of Queenie was written in a studio with mice and slugs for company), doing it up as a single woman was no fun. In a scene that might have come

straight out of her debut novel, a workman cornered her in her bedroom one night and started lighting candles. “It was horrible, but I was also like, ‘Of course this happens,’” she says, settling into the sofa. Now she always has a friend over if a builder is coming. “That’s just how it is. It is absolutely awful, but I’m so accustomed to it.”

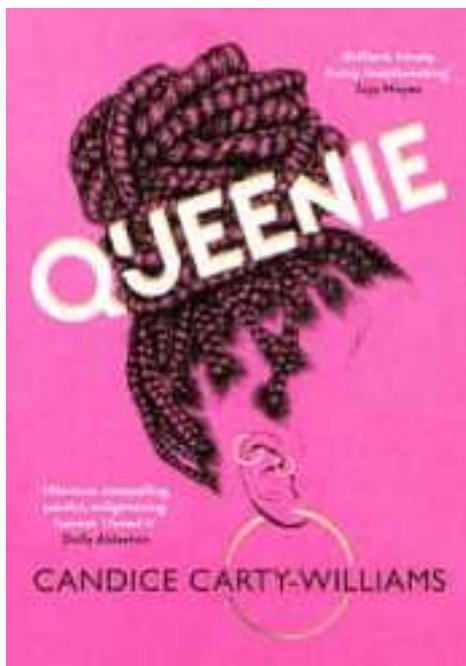
On the wall behind her is the famous 1970s Jamaican tourist board poster of the model Sintra Arunte-Bronte in a wet T-shirt in the same candyfloss shade with the word “JAMAICA” across her breasts. “Yeah, she fits in,” Carty-Williams laughs. She has a small version of Sintra that goes on the top of her Christmas tree. More sombrely, on the other wall is a poster from the 2016 film [Moonlight](#), which she saw at the Barbican with a live orchestra playing the score; she cried so much that a man asked her if she was OK. She cries a lot, she says. On the pink bookshelves, there are two black-and-white prints that she bought to support Black Lives Matter: one of a woman weeping, another of a boy in a hoodie, his face hidden by beautiful hands. “They are two identities that I’ve seen and that I’ve loved in my life – weeping and hiding,” she says. And a photograph of her nan, who was always her most stable influence growing up. “Isn’t she lovely!”



How do you follow a smash hit like Queenie? Writer [Kit de Waal](#) advised her to get the next book out as quickly as possible, so Carty-Williams had

already completed a novel about a group of friends by the time Queenie was going to press. She had even sent it to her editor. But looking at it again during lockdown, she just “wasn’t vibing with it”. It was all about grief and she felt the world was grieving enough. “That novel was so raw. I was like: ‘People don’t need this.’ So I just binned it,” she says. “There was no one there to stop me.”

Then one night – she works best when it’s dark – she put a song on repeat and, starting at 11pm and finishing at six the following morning, wrote until she had 10,000 words. “This is it! This feels better,” she remembers thinking, albeit also feeling wired and sick. Queenie took off in a similar blast after Carty-Williams won a competition to spend a week writing in novelist Jojo Moyes’s house: she notched up 8,000 words in the first day, 40,000 by the end of the week. The whole novel was finished in six months, and she was working full time.



The result of that all-nighter is People Person. The first chapter introduces us to the Pennington clan, five half-siblings who have never met before, until their errant father Cyril decides to pick them all up in his gold Jeep one day. Fast-forward 16 years and the farcical second chapter sees the now adult siblings reunited for the first time, when they have to deal with the body of Dimple’s abusive boyfriend, who has slipped and hit his head after a row.

“Why would you call the police?” Dimple’s brother Danny asks when they are trying to work out what to do. “They’ll create some story and put it on you.” Against the background of the police handling of [Richard Okorogheye’s disappearance](#) (mentioned in the novel); murdered sisters [Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman](#), whose bodies were photographed by the officers guarding the crime scene; and, most recently, the [strip-search of Child Q](#), People Person has the same grim urgency as Queenie. “I’m sick that it takes these things for people to realise ‘Oh, Black people are treated really badly,’” Carty-Williams says of Child Q. “It’s like, Yeah, of course! People see Black children as women. It is horrible. I had men talking about my body when I was not even 10 years old.” Just last week, the police pulled the author over in her car while she was singing along to music with a friend. “They ran my plates!”

While Queenie dealt with difficult mother-daughter relationships, People Person is her “daddy issues” novel. “I know that as I go through my life I will always write the things that I’m trying to make sense of myself,” she says. “So when it came to dads, I was like: ‘I really have to do it.’” She is one of nine siblings with the same father – far too many characters for a novel, she jokes. Although she doesn’t keep in touch with all of them, “it’s nice to have different people to talk to”. Her father worked as a taxi driver and met her mother when he picked her up from her shifts as a hospital receptionist. It turned out he already had three children, and (like the characters Dimple and Lizzie in the novel) another sister was born to a different woman the same year. “It’s never clear!” she says, trying to work out how many mothers in all. “Your dad has *how* many kids?” she was always asked as a child, but it never really bothered her. “That’s my life. And there are people who have that life, too. I want to connect with those people and make them feel less lonely.”



‘I’m not naturally a very happy person. But that’s all right because I’m used to it’ ... Candice Carty-Williams. Photograph: Chantel King

Unlike the gregarious Cyril in the novel, her father is not a people person, she says, showing me an old photo of him looking shyly at the camera on her phone. When he worked for London Underground she would visit him at the depots in Kennington or Morden. “We would just sit in silence together, and that was cool.” Earlier this morning, her mum was over for a visit. “She’s the funniest person I know,” Carty-Williams says. “We just get on.” But that hasn’t always been the case. It took her many years to realise that her parents were their own people and couldn’t really look after her, she says. “And it is really, really tough.”

Her childhood was “very lonely and very shit”. She moved all over south London with her mother, ending up in a mouse-infested council house with no proper kitchen – it has since been boarded up. When she was eight they moved in with her mother’s new partner in Lewisham, which meant that her nan was no longer living round the corner, and a year later her sister was born. A turning point came when she was sent home from school for a week for bad behaviour and her stepfather made her go to the library every day. She discovered [Sue Townsend](#), [Louise Rennison](#) and [Malorie Blackman](#) (“she has my heart in so many ways”) and books became her escape from the “chaos” in her head and the unhappiness around her.

But in her early 20s, after university (communication and media studies at Sussex), she had “a terrible nervous episode” following the death of her best friend, Dan, from cancer – Queenie is dedicated to him. Eventually, with the help of a course of CBT on the NHS, she recovered enough to apply for a couple of internships and landed the marketing job at HarperCollins. “I just had so much fun,” she says. Although she was unable to ignore the lack of diversity: “It is men at the top and loads of white women in the middle; overwhelmingly so.” In 2016 she set up the [Guardian 4th Estate BAME short story prize](#). “Obviously in this world if you are Black and you want to do something you still have to get permission from lots of white people to do it. Which is sad,” she says. And while there has been an improvement in the last few years, publishing still has a long way to go. As she says, the prize would never have happened had she not been given a job in the first place. “If you are there, you can see it and say it.”

She is shocked by Queenie’s ‘absolutely wild’ sex scenes. ‘Oh my God, did I really write that?’

Then came Queenie and Carty-Williams was the one winning prizes. When she found out she had won the Nibbies’ book of the year award, the first thing she did was find a therapist. “I was in such a place of not liking myself,” she says, that receiving public accolades was just too much. She has been with the therapist ever since: “It has changed my life. I’m going to be with her until I don’t need to be with her again, which won’t be any time soon.” Although she is more settled than she has ever been, she still finds happiness difficult: “I’m not naturally a very happy person. But that’s all right because I’m used to it.”

Both Queenie and Dimple struggle with insecurity and anxiety, and she is keen to challenge the stereotype of Black women as strong and resilient in her fiction (Queenie is the first person in the family “to go to *psychotherapy!*”, her Jamaican grandmother declares in horror). Although rooted in what she knows (she would never write a book set in west London, she says), her novels are not autobiographical: she is so fed up with people assuming that she is Queenie that she refuses to give readings. “I wouldn’t want anyone to hear me speak in her voice and think we’re the same person.” As she likes to point out, nobody asks Ian McEwan if he suffers

from premature ejaculation, referring to the crucial scene in [On Chesil Beach](#). “Nobody! Of course women would have to write about all their emotions and feelings,” she says. “But we also have imaginations.”

As well as adapting Queenie for Channel 4, she is also writing a TV drama called Champion for the BBC, about a rapper who comes out of prison – in south London, “obviously”. Rereading Queenie for the first time, she is shocked at how dark it is in places, and the “absolutely wild” sex scenes. “Oh my God, did I really write that?” Neither her mum, her nan or her sister have read the novel. “They are not really fussed,” she says. “They know what I do.” Although her mum promises to be first in the line to buy People Person.

Writing has introduced her to a new community, and she stresses how fellow authors such as [Zadie Smith](#), [Diana Evans](#) and [Raven Leilani](#) have supported her. “When you are a young Black writer, I think you’ve got to hold each other up. We are always in it together and you kind of have to be.”

There’s “pride and there’s sadness” in being a Black woman in publishing, she says. “It is amazing seeing all the authors who are being given opportunities because publishers can finally see that Black books sell. And they win prizes.” One of her favourite recent books is [Open Water by Caleb Azumah Nelson](#), which won the Costa first novel award this year, but which she believes might not have been published 10 years ago. Queenie not only transformed her life, but has helped other young writers like her. “It’s always going to be my special ‘little project’, as my nan calls it.”

People Person is published by Trapeze on 28 April (£12.99). To support The Guardian and Observer, order your copy at [guardianbookshop.com](#). Delivery charges may apply.

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## 2022.04.23 - Opinion

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## OpinionChildren

# **It is illegal to hit our partners, friends and dogs – so why is it OK to smack children?**

[Sarah Ockwell-Smith](#)

It is extraordinary that the debate is still being had in England – we should focus on alternatives to physical discipline



A rally at the Scottish parliament in support of the bill that banned smacking of children in Scotland, 2019. Photograph: Jane Barlow/PA

Sat 23 Apr 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 23 Apr 2022 10.11 EDT

Is it ever OK to inflict pain on a child to try to change their behaviour? It is a debate that has rumbled on for decades, yet if the minister responsible for children doesn't see the harm in it, then we are no closer to ending it.

Nadhim Zahawi, the education secretary, said this week that he doesn't want to ban smacking in England because we could “end up in a world where the state is nannying people about how they bring up their children”. Zahawi’s nine-year-old daughter is lightly smacked, he said, when her behaviour justifies the punishment.

In England, it is still legal for parents to hit their children, so long as it is a “reasonable punishment” in the name of discipline – a marker of which tends to hinge on whether the smack leaves a mark, such as a bruise. It became illegal to hit, smack or slap children in Wales last month. The same actions were outlawed in Scotland in November 2020. The education secretary’s remarks came after calls from the children’s commissioner for England, Dame Rachel de Souza, to introduce the same ban in England.

The evidence against smacking children is unequivocal. A recent meta-analysis of more than 160,000 children found that hitting them as a form of discipline is ineffective at positively changing behaviour, in the short and the long term. The analysis also found that children who were disciplined with physical punishment were more likely to become aggressive, display antisocial behaviour and exhibit mental health problems as they grew.

The problem with smacking is that it punishes children for problematic behaviour, yet does nothing to help them to solve it. If children are too young to understand a conversation about more appropriate ways to behave, then they are certainly too young to understand why they have been hit by their parent. Conversely, if they are old enough to understand the conversation, then there is no need to hit them.

There are, of course, the moral issues. It is illegal for us to hit our partners, our friends, colleagues, strangers and even our dogs. Why, then, is it ever deemed appropriate to hit our children, the smallest and most vulnerable members of society, who are arguably the most deserving of our protection? It is nonsensical.

Those who defend smacking often cite the flawed logic that physical discipline will teach children respect. Yet what it really teaches is fear. True respect can only ever be earned. The best way to teach children to respect us,

as parents, is to treat them with respect first, something that can be done easily alongside mindfully enforced boundaries and teaching better behaviour.

A YouGov poll recently found that [83% of adults were hit](#) by their parents at least once as children. While younger adults are less likely to have been smacked than older ones, physical punishment of children is still alarmingly common today. One of the biggest barriers to ruling out smacking altogether is that any debate on it quickly elicits proclamations of, “It never did me any harm!” The shadow education secretary, Wes Streeting, provided a classic example this week, speaking in defence of [his own parents hitting](#) him occasionally as a child.

But are people who were smacked qualified to assess any harm smacking may have caused them as a child – or indeed the lack thereof. Those who were hit have no idea how they may have turned out without physical punishment. Then there’s cognitive dissonance, where it is too painful to consider the thought that our own parents may have mistreated us. Instead, we rush in with statements of how we “deserved it” and – in Streeting’s case – that his were “good parents” and that attitudes are changing.

No child deserves to be hit by an adult – and there is no behaviour worthy of smacking. Those who justify the morality of it based upon their own upbringing are surely indicating that it has, in fact, harmed them.

Is the answer to make smacking illegal in [England](#) in line with Wales and Scotland? Yes, partly. Without a doubt, children deserve to be protected. Merely criminalising the behaviour, however, without educating parents in more effective and gentler discipline methods, or better supporting them so they do not find themselves in the depths of despair that so often lead to smacking as a last resort, is hugely problematic. There is still much work to be done, but in 2022 it is surely time to end the debate and finally focus instead on solutions and alternatives.

- Sarah Ockwell-Smith is a mother of four and the author of 13 parenting books, including How to be a Calm Parent

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[\*\*Opinion\*\*](#)[\*\*French presidential election 2022\*\*](#)

## The left in France must vote against Le Pen – but Macron isn't making it easy

[Philippe Marlière](#)



Wednesday's TV debate was a chance for the president to attack his far-right opponent's policies. Instead, he normalised them



‘Emanuel Macron’s performance lacked vision and a sense of historic momentum.’ Customers in a Paris bar watch Wednesday’s debate between Macron and Marine Le Pen. Photograph: Jeanne Accorsini/SIPA/REX/Shutterstock

Sat 23 Apr 2022 03.00 EDT Last modified on Sat 23 Apr 2022 05.27 EDT

President Emmanuel Macron faced Marine Le Pen, his far-right challenger, [in a televised debate](#) on Wednesday ahead of Sunday’s crucial runoff vote. The media agreed that Macron had largely [dominated the exchanges](#). Viewers interviewed by pollsters agreed that Macron had been [more convincing, more dynamic and more sincere](#).

Yet following the debate, [Libération](#) declared on its front page that Le Pen was “still not up to par”. This was an astonishing headline on the part of a centre-left newspaper. Does it mean that had Le Pen had better oratory skills and a better grasp of policy details, she would be worthy of becoming president? Meanwhile, most of the commentary about the debate failed to point out that Le Pen is a far-right candidate who has extreme views on immigration, Islam, civil liberties, the EU and Putin’s Russia. This shows that the normalisation of Le Pen’s far right movement is at an advanced stage.

While debating with Le Pen, Macron further “de-demonised” the Rassemblement National’s leader by focusing on policy details. During the three-hour debate, Macron sounded nerdy and technocratic. He endeavoured to demonstrate to French voters that he has the best policies.

Not once did the incumbent label his opponent a “far-right” politician; nor did he mention that some of her policies were a threat to democracy; nor did he stress that should Le Pen be elected president, France’s standing in the world would be tarnished. Yet her programme attacks major civil liberties: she vows to ban the hijab in public spaces, to curb asylum-seekers’ rights, to end the granting of French nationality to youngsters born in [France](#) from foreign parents, and to discriminate against foreigners by allocating welfare provisions to French nationals only.

Macron’s performance lacked vision and a sense of historic momentum. During the debate, his task was to emotionally engage with reluctant voters – notably left-leaning voters. By adopting a technocratic and professorial rhetoric, Macron depoliticised the debate. He sounded competent but also lacking in empathy; meanwhile, Le Pen came across as much more empathetic, despite her hardline views.

This is the heart of the problem. Macron’s critics argue that his policy shift to the right and his [aloof, Jupiterian style](#) of government are partly to blame for the [rise of the far right](#). He has given [free rein to members of the government](#) who have used far-right rhetoric, and he has supported the adoption of [repressive policies on Islam](#), immigration and law and order.

According to the latest polls, Macron is on course to get re-elected with [a much-reduced majority](#). He cannot afford to be complacent, yet he seems oblivious to the danger he is in. To win, he must secure the support of a large chunk of the 7.7 million who voted for the radical left candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon. Most of those voters detest Macron’s policies and most of them abhor his persona. [The latest figures](#) show that 42% may vote for him, but 25% may choose Le Pen and 33% may abstain. In the words of some Mélenchon voters, it is a case of [“choosing between plague and cholera”](#).

Macron's staggering realignment of party politics has led to the demise of the two dominant parties of French politics: the centre-left Parti Socialiste and the centre-right Républicains. Three blocs have now emerged: a liberal-conservative one around Macron, a far-right one led by Le Pen, and a divided and weakened left led by Mélenchon. The France Insoumise leader has radicalised a fraction of the leftwing electorate. For some Mélenchonistes, Macron is as dangerous as, if not more dangerous than, Le Pen. In some quarters of the radical Left, Macron was branded a "dictator" for implementing an immunity pass during the pandemic. This sort of political confusion is a recipe for disaster at the ballot box.

On social media, there is currently a lot of soul-searching: should one abstain or vote against Le Pen? It appears that an increasing number of leftwing voters will pinch their nose and [vote for Macron](#) on Sunday, notably those who would have a lot to lose from a Le Pen presidency: the [young](#), [the racialised](#) and the impoverished middle classes, the core of Mélenchon's electorate.

This reluctant push may be enough for Macron to get over the finishing line, but a political system that blackmails a majority of its citizens to vote against their interests is brutal and unhealthy. Once re-elected, Macron should expect a backlash.

- Philippe Marlière is professor of French and European politics at University College London
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[Opinion](#)[Prince Harry](#)

## **Everyone knows the Queen hates a fuss – except, strangely, her most loyal defenders**

[Marina Hyde](#)



Prince Harry's comments about visiting his grandmother have provoked uncontrollable fury among Elizabeth II superfans



Prince Harry at the Invictus Games in the Hague, Netherlands, April 2022.  
Photograph: Aaron Chown/PA

Fri 22 Apr 2022 09.26 EDT Last modified on Fri 22 Apr 2022 13.32 EDT

Like all truly patriotic Britons, I hugely enjoy how mad Prince Harry makes some people. Mad in both the British and American senses of the word. More than two years after he stepped back from royal duties to become yet another boring Californian, seemingly every [utterance of Harry's](#) induces proper steam-out-of-the-ears stuff in a whole demographic of British people who insist they never want to hear another word from him – yet absolutely refuse to simply stop reading about him.

Is HRH doing it on purpose, like some clever, extremely high-status troll? That's a nice idea, but feels unlikely. The Windsors have never exactly been fabled for their intellects. It's possible the situation is actually extremely uncomplicated: [Prince Harry](#) just wobbles out some stuff every now and then, at which point millions of grownups are completely unable to handle it.

Either way, the Duke of Sussex's latest act of treason seems to have been calling in on the Queen on the way to his [Invictus Games](#) for disabled former soldiers, held this week in the Netherlands. Not only did Harry later reveal that he and his grandmother had had a [good-humoured tea](#) – decried

as oversharing by the sort of former aides who lucratively betrayed all his mother's secrets – but he explained he'd been “making sure that she's protected and got the right people around her”. Can't be sure what he's on about. Perhaps he saw the Queen being [walked to her Westminster Abbey seat](#) at Prince Philip's memorial by the Duke of York, about 10 minutes after she'd forked out for some of his multimillion-dollar [sex assault case settlement](#), and wondered if she was being advised by some kind of paedo Oliver Cromwell.

Whatever the import of Harry's comment, though, it has caused a huge number of pants to be wet, and whole fleets of prams to be emptied of toys. You cannot move for corpulent royal experts hissing about it all as they bank another appearance fee, while Britain's [leading body language authority](#) wheels herself out to explain that Kate and William look “subdued” because of the “emotional exhaustion” she reckons was caused either by Harry, or by the fact they were visiting a Ukraine charity. (What a huge amount the rigorous science of body language can tell us.)

However, in a country where millions act as if they know the Queen socially, people were always going to claim their chief concern was for the monarch, who celebrated her 96th birthday this week. “How CAN he do this to the Queen?” they always demand, apparently unwilling to realise that anyone who really cared about the Queen's supposed feelings would simply avoid making it worse by ranting about the situation on every available airwave. That would surely be the most civilised course of action. After all, if a real-life friend of ours has an irksome relative we regard as potentially upsetting to them, we don't spend their birthday wanging on about him.

So the logic escapes me. If newspapers and TV pundits were simply trying to sell clickbaity content to be consumed by messy bitches who live for the drama, that would be one thing. But nothing – nothing! – could be further from the noble truth. As they never tire of telling us, they utterly REVERE the Queen. In which case, surely they should conduct themselves with a baseline level of social tact? The true, committed royalist would ignore Harry's pronouncements completely. We ignore most of the other Californians; it can't be beyond our famous British reserve. As close

personal strangers to the Queen, we know the one thing of which we can be absolutely sure is that she wouldn't want a fuss about it all.

Yet a fuss is endlessly made. No snowflake in an avalanche ever feels responsible, as the saying goes, but maybe the provisional wing of the Elizabeth II fandom ought to suppress the urge to call in furiously to a phone-in, or post furiously online, in order to spare this 96-year-old woman the endless drama? If not, I'm not sure how much longer we can keep taking lectures in duty and service from people too emotionally incontinent to prevent themselves being exercised by a Dan Wootton article.

If they can't commit to ignoring Prince Harry's supposedly incendiary pronouncements, it's past time for every single one of them to admit to themselves the truth: that they love the drama of the royal soap opera, and relish every new half-baked opportunity to re-enter the outrage cycle. As I say, I myself adore it. I am completely with the Bloomsbury group diarist Frances Partridge, who characterised people's reaction to the death of George VI as "richly revelled-in emotional unbuttoning". "What the public is feeling is a sense of great drama," she noted, "not at all unpleasant."

Well quite. What a sadness, then, that the great British public remains too repressed to acknowledge this as far as Prince Harry is concerned. Instead, many feel more comfortable using the feelings of the Queen as a figleaf, at the same time as taking none of those feelings into account. So as she enters her 97th year, one of the greatest public services Her Majesty performs is serving as the proxy for all sorts of desires and impulses that her people lack the honesty and self-awareness to admit. What an exhausting job that must be at her age – but of course her heartless "fans" will never permit her to retire.

- Marina Hyde is a Guardian columnist
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[Project Syndicate economists](#)[International Monetary Fund \(IMF\)](#)

## The world's engines are sputtering: IMF points to deeper problems beyond 2022

[Mohamed El-Erian](#)

Organisation suggests there is a broader crisis as it revises down its forecasts for economic growth



The IMF suggested the world economy will not move ever forward in 2023.  
Photograph: Jim Lo Scalzo/EPA

Sat 23 Apr 2022 03.00 EDT

The International Monetary Fund's revised [World Economic Outlook](#) is sobering. It is rare for the organisation to revise [down sharply its projections for economic growth](#) only one quarter into the calendar year. Yet in this case, it has done so for 86% of its 190 member countries, resulting in a decline of

almost one percentage point in global growth for 2022 – from 4.4% to 3.6%. Moreover, this forecast is accompanied by a significant increase in projected inflation, and all this bad news is packaged in a wrapping of deeper uncertainty. There is a downward bias in the balance of risks, and inequality is expected to worsen within and across countries.

The WEO revision is attracting a great deal of media attention. The focus, understandably, is on the relatively large size of the revisions for the current year, most of which are associated with the detrimental economic effects of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The war has disrupted the supply of corn, gas, metals, oil and wheat, as well as pushing up the price of critical inputs such as fertiliser (which is made from natural gas). These developments have prompted warnings of a looming global food crisis and a severe increase in world hunger. Given the scale of the disruptions, it would not surprise me if the IMF issued a further downward revision to its growth projections – particularly for Europe – later this year.

But as important as these 2022 effects are, especially when it comes to the impact on vulnerable segments of the population and fragile countries, we also must pay attention to the IMF's 2023 outlook. The projection for next year points to a medium-term problem that is no less important: the lost potency of growth models worldwide. The IMF does not expect its significant downward revision in global economic growth for 2022 to be offset in 2023. Instead, it has lowered its forecast for next year from 3.8% to 3.6%, with those revisions applying to advanced and developing economies.

The implication is that the world's economic engines are sputtering. This problem is especially worrisome in such a fluid operating environment because it means that the prevailing growth models are not up to the task of pulling economies through unanticipated negative shocks. Making matters worse, the same models have also failed to maintain a decent level of inclusive growth during periods of less stress.

Three big secular developments are to blame for the tepid outlook: the changing nature of globalisation; the prolonged reliance on artificial growth boosters; and the long-term failure to invest in the sources of sustained growth.



The US-China trade war had knock-on effects throughout the global economy. Photograph: Future Publishing/Getty Images

Economic and financial globalisation have been evolving in ways that make it more difficult for national economies to leverage international trade and foreign direct investment for domestic growth. While the pandemic raised questions about the proliferation and potential vulnerabilities of “just-in-time” cross-border supply chains, it is worth recalling that trade and investment restrictions were increasing well before Covid-19 emerged. The US-China trade war featured the return of high tariffs and other protectionist measures that have generated far-reaching knock-on effects throughout the global economy.

While governments should use their firepower to protect vulnerable people, some already face troubling debt levels

Moreover, these developments have come at a time when many countries face tighter policy constraints. A return to conventional and unconventional monetary-policy stimulus is now precluded by high and persistent inflation. As the IMF notes, this new environment confronts central banks with very delicate and problematic policy tradeoffs, and it exposes the real economy to the potential vagaries of financial-market volatility.

Although the scope for fiscal action is less limited than it is for monetary measures, it is not well distributed among countries. While governments should use the firepower they have to protect the most vulnerable segments of their populations, some already face troubling debt levels.

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These developments coincide with a period of low productivity growth in many countries, which is a function of past and persistent failures to invest in the drivers of genuine growth, including physical infrastructure and human capital.

The IMF's report offers an important reminder to policymakers that they need to focus much more attention on generating innovation, improving productivity and strengthening the other drivers of robust, inclusive economic growth. Failure to do so will make the risk of medium-term growth stagnation uncomfortably high. In a world that is already subject to considerable climate, economic, financial, institutional, political and social challenges, that is not a scenario we can afford.

*Mohamed El-Erian, the president of Queens' College at the University of Cambridge, is a professor at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania*

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## [Asia Pacific](#)

# **US warns Solomon Islands against China military base as Australian MPs trade blame**

Treasurer Josh Frydenberg refuses to say when Australia first knew of pact between Solomon Islands and China

- [Guardian Australia's full federal election coverage](#)
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Indo-Pacific security adviser Kurt Campbell leaves after meeting with the Solomon Islands government in Honiara. The US says it will ‘respond accordingly’ if there is a Chinese military presence in Solomon Islands.  
Photograph: Mavis Podokolo/AFP/Getty Images

[Nino Bucci](#)

Sat 23 Apr 2022 00.51 EDT Last modified on Sat 23 Apr 2022 04.40 EDT

The US government has warned [Solomon Islands](#) it will “respond accordingly” if its security agreement with China leads to a Chinese military presence in the Pacific island nation.

A visiting US delegation including Indo-Pacific security adviser Kurt Campbell delivered the message to the Solomon Islands prime minister, Manasseh Sogavare, directly, the White House said, as fallout over the agreement continued to dominate the Australian federal election campaign.

Details of the agreement have not been made public. But according to a draft version of the deal, it would allow armed Chinese police to be deployed at Solomon Islands’ request to maintain “social order”. It would also allow [China](#) to “make ship visits to, carry out logistical replenishment in, and have stopover and transition in Solomon Islands”, and Chinese forces could also be used “to protect the safety of Chinese personnel and major projects in Solomon Islands”.

In a statement, the Biden administration said Sogavare assured the US there would be no long-term Chinese presence on the islands. But the US would nevertheless “follow developments closely in consultation with regional partners”.

“Solomon Islands representatives indicated that the agreement had solely domestic applications but the US delegation noted there are potential regional security implications of the accord, including for the United States and its allies and partners,” the White House said in a statement.

“The US delegation outlined clear areas of concern with respect to the purpose, scope and transparency of the agreement.

“If steps are taken to establish a de facto permanent military presence, power-projection capabilities, or a military installation, the delegation noted that the United States would then have significant concerns and respond accordingly.”

The White House also committed to expedite [the reopening of its embassy in Honiara.](#)

On Saturday morning the Australian treasurer, Josh Frydenberg, refused to be drawn on when the government became aware of the agreement.

It had been reported by the Nine newspapers earlier this week that Australian intelligence agencies first became aware in March, and played a role in leaking the draft of the agreement online.

But the failure of the Morrison government to prevent the deal has been described by the opposition Labor party as the most significant foreign policy failure in the Pacific since the second world war.

Frydenberg would not say when Australia first knew of the pact between the Solomon Islands and China, saying instead that “we’ve known that this was always a risk”, adding that “we’ve known that there were discussions under way”.

He also told Weekend Sunrise that the government could do little more to assist Solomon Islands, describing its existing aid as a “full court press”.

The Coalition government continued to try and use the issue to paint Labor as soft on China, with Frydenberg describing a speech by Labor’s deputy leader, Richard Marles, in 2019 as the “biggest story” of the day.

Marles – who was campaigning alongside Jim Chalmers in Brisbane due to Labor leader Anthony Albanese’s infection with Covid – confirmed reports he had shown Chinese government officials a copy of a speech he gave at a Beijing university in 2019.

“I made a speech in China where I criticised China and I wanted to make sure that the Chinese government were not at all surprised with what I was going to say,” Marles said.

“The assertion made by the government is another desperate attempt to divert from their failings in the Pacific.”

Senior Labor MP Tanya Plibersek said on Saturday morning that Solomon Islands’ security pact followed “years of neglect” by the Australian government.

Asked what Labor would have done differently from the Coalition, she said: “We wouldn’t have trashed the relationship with our Pacific neighbours in the first place.

“It is inexplicable that, having been warned about this, [prime minister] Scott Morrison didn’t say to his foreign minister, Marise Payne, I want you on the first plane to the Solomon Islands to talk this through.”

The reaction to the deal in the Solomons has been mixed.

Peter Kenilorea, the chair of the Solomon Islands’ parliament’s foreign relations committee and an opposition MP, described the agreement as only benefiting China.

During a forum hosted this week, Kenilorea also questioned Sogavare’s contention that his government was entitled to reach the agreement as it was a sovereign decision.

“I don’t think is a path we should take or that it is a path would benefit Solomon Islands,” he said. “I think the biggest winner here will be the People’s Republic of China, in terms of a foothold in the Pacific region.”

He went on to say that “when it comes to security, especially in this heightened geopolitical environment, it is more than a national issue … the region is impacted, there are implications”.

Another participant in [the forum](#), leading Solomon Islands academic Dr Transform Aqorau, said it was concerning that no one outside the government had seen a copy of the signed agreement or been provided with any detail of its content, but said he did not see anything wrong with an agreement that bolstered the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF).

But former Solomon Islands prime minister and current MP Danny Philip [told the same forum](#) that the agreement would help ensure Chinese assets were protected in the country, after Australian security forces that were deployed there failed to do so. His claims were rejected by Australian authorities.

## *Associated Press and Australian Associated Press contributed to this report*

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## [France](#)

# France's candidates make final pitches as Macron extends poll lead over Le Pen

Macron accuses Le Pen of 'living off fear' as both try to get Mélenchon voters to turn out for them



Polls also predict the lowest turnout for a French presidential runoff since 1969. Photograph: Laurent Cipriani/AP

*[Jon Henley](#) and [Kim Willsher](#) in Paris*

Fri 22 Apr 2022 12.20 EDTFirst published on Fri 22 Apr 2022 06.09 EDT

France's two presidential contenders have traded their last blows before Sunday's deciding runoff, with polls suggesting fear of a Marine Le Pen victory was outweighing dislike of [Emmanuel Macron](#) and his record.

Hours before a media blackout was due to begin at midnight, the incumbent and his far-right challenger made their final pitches to undecided voters in

radio interviews and on walkabouts, with Le Pen saying Macron's polling lead would be proved misleading.

"Polls aren't what decide an election," the Rassemblement National (National Rally) leader said in Étaples in her northern stronghold, attacking the current president's "condescension and arrogance" and insisting her policies held up under scrutiny.

"I call on people to form their own opinion, read what I actually propose," she said, adding that Macron "calls millions of French voters 'far right'; for him it's an insult. I've never expressed even the slightest hostility to his voters." In a radio interview she went further, saying Macron "does not like the French".

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Again slamming her centrist rival's unpopular plan to extend the retirement age to 65, saying it amounted to "a life sentence", Le Pen said the choice facing French voters on Sunday was "fundamental. It is in the hands of the French people. It is Macron, or [France](#)."

For his part, Macron accused Le Pen of trying to divide France and stigmatise Muslims with her proposal to outlaw the hijab in public. "The far right lives off fear and anger to create resentment," he said. "It says excluding parts of society is the answer."

Much of Le Pen's programme, including her plan to give French nationals priority on jobs and benefits, "[abandons the founding texts of Europe](#) that protect individuals, human rights and freedoms", the president said on French radio. Her proposals would exclude non- and dual-nationals from many public sector jobs and restrict their access to welfare, also cancelling automatic citizenship rights for children of non-nationals born in France and making naturalisation harder.

He also dismissed his challenger's plans to tackle the cost of living crisis, the main focus of her campaign, saying she "gives the impression she has an

answer, but her answers aren't viable" – although he conceded Le Pen had "managed to draw on some of the things I did not manage to do to pacify some of people's anger".

The cost of living has emerged as the election's main campaign issue, with a sustained squeeze leaving many voters saying they have difficulty making ends meet despite support during the pandemic, caps on rising fuel prices, and data suggesting that all but the poorest 5% of French households are better off than five years ago.

On his final campaign visit in Figeac in the rural south-west, Macron promised to radically improve public services, including healthcare and transport, in small- and mid-sized country towns, saying a lack of investment outside big cities, in particular in medical provision, was "a real issue that fosters real anger".

Polls published on Thursday and Friday after Wednesday's [fractious live TV debate](#) showed Macron's score stable or rising at between 55.5% and 57.5% and Le Pen's between 42.5% and 44.5% – a lead for the incumbent of between 10 and 14 points, but a far closer race than the 66%-34% score when the same two contestants met in the previous 2017 election.

The narrowing of the gap partly reflects the success of Le Pen's long drive to [sanitise her party and normalise its policies](#), although she complained bitterly on Friday of a concerted attempt by the media and commentators to "retoxify" the Le Pen brand.

But also reflected in the figures is a strong public perception of Macron as an aloof, arrogant and high-handed leader, out of touch with the concerns of ordinary people. Many leftists in particular feel also he has veered decisively to the right in office despite his 2017 pledge to be "neither of the left nor the right".

Polls also predict turnout at between 72% and 74%, the lowest for a presidential runoff since 1969. The turnout for 2017's second round was 74.56%. Easter holidays are under way across much of France, boosting an abstention rate already inflated by the many French voters who feel politically orphaned by the two-round race and no longer represented.

Both candidates are seeking to win over in particular those of the 7.7 million voters who backed the radical left firebrand Jean-Luc Mélenchon in the first round on 10 April who now say they are tempted either to stay away or spoil their ballots.

Starting at midnight, neither candidate will be allowed to give interviews, distribute flyers or hold campaign events until polling stations close on Sunday evening and initial estimates of results start coming in.

Polls will open on Sunday at 8am and close at 7pm across most of France and 8pm in major cities. Voting opens on Saturday in France's overseas territories.

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## Taiwan

# Taiwan won't go into lockdown like Shanghai despite Covid surge, premier says

Taiwan opts to live with the virus in contrast to Shanghai, which has been criticised for measures taken as part of zero-Covid approach

- [Read all our coronavirus coverage](#)



Taiwan has been dealing with a spike in local cases since the start of the year, but the numbers overall remain small by global standards. Photograph: Annabelle Chih/Reuters

*Reuters*

Sat 23 Apr 2022 01.50 EDT

Taiwan will not go into a Shanghai-like lockdown to control a rise in Covid-19 cases as the vast majority of those infected have no symptoms or show only minor symptoms, the premier, Su Tseng-chang, has said.

Taiwan has been dealing with a spike in local cases since the start of the year, but the numbers overall remain small – 18,436 since 1 January for a population of some 23 million – and just four people have died.

Backed by a high vaccination rate, the government has been promoting the “new Taiwan model”, learning to gradually live with the virus and avoiding shutting down the economy, unlike in Shanghai, which is in [its third week of a lockdown to control the pandemic](#).

On Saturday, local authorities in Shanghai reported that 12 people infected with Covid died in the city on Friday, up from 11 the previous day. China’s financial hub recorded 20,634 new local asymptomatic coronavirus cases on the day, compared with 15,698 a day earlier. Total new symptomatic cases reached 2,736, up from 1,931 on Thursday.

Mainland China reported 24,411 new Covid cases on Friday, the country’s national health authority said on Saturday. The total number of cases was up from 18,598 a day earlier.

In Taiwan, Su said the government was confident in the steps being taken and it was “fortunate” more than 99% of cases were either asymptomatic or had mild illness.

“We will gradually deal with it and won’t be like Shanghai and go into lockdown, but we also won’t immediately stop wearing face masks and not take anti-pandemic measures,” he added.

The government expects daily cases to reach 10,000 by the end of the month and has warned the peak is likely several weeks off.

Su said more vaccines and rapid tests were on their way to help cope with the uptick in infections to “prepare for the next steps in reopening” and

reduce the amount of time those with Covid or their contacts have to spend in quarantine.

The government has already cut the quarantine for all arrivals in Taiwan from two weeks to 10 days and is considering further gradual reductions as it looks to reopen its borders.

About 80% of Taiwan's population is now double-vaccinated and almost 60% has had a first booster dose, while mask-wearing mandates remain in place.

Taiwan has reported 47,100 infections since the pandemic began more than two years ago and 856 deaths.

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## [Republicans](#)

# Trump accepted ‘some responsibility’ for Capitol attack, McCarthy audio reveals

House Republican leader says ex-president ‘told me he does have some responsibility’ in clips released by New York Times



Kevin McCarthy with Donald Trump at the White House in 2020. McCarthy has not responded to the release of the audio clip. Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

*[Lauren Aratani and Richard Luscombe](#)*

Fri 22 Apr 2022 15.31 EDTFirst published on Fri 22 Apr 2022 08.54 EDT

New audio clips reveal that the House Republican leader, Kevin McCarthy, held Donald Trump responsible in the immediate aftermath of the January 6 Capitol riot, and that Trump himself accepted “some responsibility” for the insurrection.

The explosive clips were released by the New York Times on Thursday and Friday after an earlier [report](#) said McCarthy and the Republican Senate leader, Mitch McConnell, initially [believed Trump to be responsible](#) for the attack, and both privately expressed anger against him.

Speaking in Seattle on Friday, Joe Biden addressed the reports.

“This ain’t your father’s Republican party,” the president said. “All you got to do is look what’s being played out this morning, the tape that was released  
...”

“This is the Maga [Make America Great Again] party now ... these guys are a different breed of cat. They’re not like those I served with [in the US Senate] for so many years, and the people who know better are afraid to act better because they know they’ll be primaried.

“They come to me and say: ‘Joe, I want to be with you on such and such but I can’t because I’ll be primaried, I’ll lose my race.’ Folks, this has got to start to change.”

In one released clip, from a 10 January 2021 call with House GOP leaders, McCarthy can be heard answering a question from the Wyoming representative Liz Cheney, who had a leadership role at the time. Cheney asked McCarthy if he believed Trump would resign if Congress passed a 25th amendment resolution, which would declare Trump incapable of holding office.

“My gut tells me no. I am seriously thinking about having that conversation with him tonight,” he said. “The only discussion I would have with him is I think [the resolution] will pass, and it would be my recommendation that he should resign.

“That would be my take, but I don’t think he would take it. But I don’t know.”

In a second clip from 11 January, McCarthy can be heard detailing a conversation with Trump where he asked the former president if he believed he had any responsibility for the attack.

McCarthy says: “Well, let me be very clear to all of you, and I’ve been very clear to the president: he bears responsibility for his words and actions. No ifs, ands or buts. I asked him personally today, ‘Does he hold responsibility for what happened? Does he feel bad about what happened?’ He told me he does have some responsibility for what happened and he needs to acknowledge that.”

McCarthy did not immediately respond to the release of the audio clips. Nor did Trump, though the Washington Post [reported](#) that the two men had spoken. Trump, the paper said, was “not upset about McCarthy’s remarks and ... glad the Republican leader didn’t follow through” on his threat to demand Trump’s resignation, “which Trump saw as a sign of his continued grip on the Republican party”.

A spokesperson for Cheney [said](#) she did not release the tape and did not know who leaked it.

In a statement on Thursday, before the clip was released, McCarthy made a [blanket denial](#) of the Times report saying that it is “totally false and wrong”.

“It comes as no surprise that the corporate media is obsessed with doing everything it can to further the liberal agenda,” he said. “The corporate media is more concerned with profiting from manufactured political intrigue from politically-motivated sources.

“Our country has suffered enough under failed one-party Democrat rule, and no amount of media ignorance and bias will stop Americans from delivering a clear message this fall that it is time for change.”

The Times story, reporting for which comes from an upcoming book. This Will Not Pass: Trump, Biden and the Battle for America’s Future, by Jonathan Martin and Alexander Burns, detailed scathing comments against Trump Republican leaders made in the days after the Capitol insurrection.

McCarthy reportedly told colleagues in private: “I’ve had it with this guy,” adding: “What he did is unacceptable. Nobody can defend it and nobody should defend it.”

McConnell reportedly told senior advisers: “If this isn’t impeachable, I don’t know what is.

“The Democrats are going to take care of the son of a bitch for us,” McConnell said, according to the book.

Although McConnell criticized Trump publicly for his role in the attack, he voted to acquit the former president in his impeachment trial. He also said he would support Trump should Trump be the 2024 Republican nominee.

McCarthy, for his part, did a more complete about-face: he has claimed Trump was unaware of the attack until McCarthy told him it was happening. McCarthy has also condemned the special House panel that is investigating the insurrection and refused to cooperate with its inquiry on conversations he had with Trump after the attack.

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/apr/22/kevin-mccarthy-trump-recording-house-republican-capitol-attack>

## [Arizona](#)

# ‘This is not typical’: Arizona wildfire fighters brace for threat ‘on steroids’

Winds and dryness heighten danger from Tunnel fire as teams battle blazes in American south-west



Smoke drifts from the Tunnel Fire north of Flagstaff, Arizona, this week.  
Photograph: Reuters TV/Reuters

*[Gabrielle Canon](#) and agencies*

*[@GabrielleCanon](#)*

Fri 22 Apr 2022 13.34 EDT Last modified on Fri 22 Apr 2022 15.55 EDT

Firefighters working to keep more homes from burning on the edge of a mountain town in northern Arizona were treated to scattered showers and cooler temperatures early on Friday, but the favorable weather was not expected to last as more ferocious winds were forecast to batter parts of Arizona and all of [New Mexico](#) through the weekend.

The combination of high winds, warmer temperatures and extremely dry conditions will make for an atmosphere that's "pretty much on steroids", said Scott Overpeck, with the National Weather Service in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

"This is not typical," he said, looking ahead to what could be explosive fire growth on Friday. "This is really one of those days we need to be on our toes and we need to be ready."

The weather conditions will complicate the firefight on a half-dozen large wildfires burning in the American south-west.

In [Arizona](#), the flames stretching 100ft (30 meters) raced through rural neighborhoods near Flagstaff this week.

The [fast-moving flames of the Tunnel fire](#) have forced evacuations of at least 765 homes since the blaze broke out on Sunday. Authorities said on Thursday that at least 30 homes and numerous other buildings had been destroyed, with sheriff's deputies saying more than 100 properties were affected.

By Friday morning, the more than 21,000-acre fire was just 3% contained, and Dick Fleishman, an information officer, said firefighters were concerned defense lines might not keep the fire in check during strong winds.

In New Mexico, firefighters are battling a blaze north-east of Santa Fe. At least one airtanker was able to join the fight against the flames on Thursday, but weather conditions would make its deployment impossible on Friday, officials said.

Strong winds fuel more than 21,000-acre Arizona wildfire – video

Fire managers said that without air support and no crews working directly on the fire lines due to the weather, explosive growth was expected.

"It's definitely lining up to be a very dangerous situation," the San Miguel county sheriff, Chris Lopez, said during a community meeting on Thursday

night, pleading with residents to take the evacuation orders seriously.

Authorities on Friday morning started evacuating several tiny communities in the valleys north-east of the fire as officials expected it to overtake some of those areas by the end of the day. They said flames could spread as much as 13 miles (20km) in that direction. Several roads in the area were also closed.

Wildfire has become a year-round threat in the west given changing conditions that include earlier snowmelt and rain coming later in the fall, scientists have said. The problems have been exacerbated by decades of fire suppression and poor management along with a more than 20-year megadrought that studies link to human-caused climate breakdown.

Colorado saw one of its most destructive wildfires last winter, when flames tore through two densely populated Denver suburbs. While crews in that state got a handle this week on two small wildfires, Jared Polis, the Colorado governor, was scheduled on Friday to talk about the continuing danger and how state officials planned to deal with what was expected to be a significant fire season.

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# Headlines

- Priti Patel Rwanda plan critics ‘fail to offer their own solutions’
- Cost of living Almost one in 10 parents ‘very likely to use UK food bank in next three months’
- Exclusive Women in England’s poorest areas die younger than in most OECD countries
- ‘Shock absorbers of poverty’ Women’s lives cut short by their unequal position in society

## Immigration and asylum

# Priti Patel: Rwanda plan critics ‘fail to offer their own solutions’

UK home secretary attacks critics of plan to give unauthorised asylum seekers one-way tickets to African country



Priti Patel speaks to the media after signing what the two countries called an ‘economic development partnership’ in Kigali, Rwanda, last Thursday.  
Photograph: Muhizi Olivier/AP

*[Haroon Siddique](#)*

Mon 18 Apr 2022 13.15 EDTFirst published on Mon 18 Apr 2022 04.53 EDT

[Priti Patel](#) has defended plans to send unauthorised asylum seekers on a one-way trip to Rwanda, saying critics of the scheme have failed to offer any alternative solution to the migration crisis.

The proposal, announced last week, has been widely condemned as inhumane, illegal, unworkable and prohibitively expensive. Critics have included Conservative MPs and peers, the UN's refugee agency (UNHCR) and a former and the current archbishop of Canterbury, who said, in his Easter Sunday sermon, that the scheme “does not stand the judgment of God”.

Writing in the Times in a joint article with the Rwandan foreign minister, Vincent Biruta, Patel hit back at critics. The home secretary said the proposal was the act of a “humanitarian nation”, describing the partnership as “groundbreaking” and one that would set “a new international standard”.

She said: “We are taking bold and innovative steps and it’s surprising that those institutions that criticise the plans fail to offer their own solutions.”

She said the plans would help put an end to the “deadly trade” of people trafficking and also the “deeply unfair” current situation that “advantages those with the means to pay people traffickers over vulnerable people who cannot”.

She said: “We can provide legal, safe, orderly and controlled ways for people to better their lives, flee oppression, persecution or conflict and enjoy new opportunities.”

However, a letter to the prime minister by 150 British organisations supporting refugees, including the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, Rainbow Migration and Hope not Hate, has claimed the plan would “cause immense suffering” and “result in more, not fewer, dangerous journeys – leaving more people at risk of being trafficked”.

Rowan Williams, a former archbishop of Canterbury, said the policy of removing some asylum seekers to Rwanda was sinful.

Coming to the defence of his successor, Williams told Times Radio: “The policy itself seems to me to be not in accord with what I understand about God.”

He added that the plan demonstrated “hostile-environment thinking towards refugees and asylum seekers”, which “is not what we associate with what we say about the Jewish and Christian God as someone who welcomes the stranger, who looks after the vulnerable”.

Williams added that Boris Johnson’s position ought to be “in doubt” after he was fined for breaching Covid laws.

The government has also been criticised for [not creating new safe and legal routes to the UK for asylum seekers](#), having previously suggested that such new routes would ensure that people would no longer need to risk their lives trying to reach the UK.

Patel and Biruta also defended Rwanda against critics who point out its [poor human rights record](#), with groups having logged torture of detainees.

They wrote that the scheme would “support the humane and respectful treatment of refugees, provide human capital opportunities for migrants and the host community and offer safe and legal pathways for those fleeing persecution and insecurity”.

Meanwhile, it emerged that the UK will take in some people granted refugee status by Rwanda – a fact that was not previously highlighted in government briefings.

The memorandum of understanding between the two countries states: “The participants will make arrangements for the United Kingdom to resettle a portion of Rwanda’s most vulnerable refugees in the United Kingdom, recognising both participants’ commitment towards providing better international protection for refugees.”

The detail was first [reported by the Mail](#), which quoted a Home Office source as saying it would apply to “a number in the tens, not hundreds”. It said it was likely to apply to people with complex needs, such as physical or mental health problems.

The energy minister, Greg Hands, echoed Patel’s defence. Asked on Sky News if the archbishop of Canterbury was wrong to call the plan “ungodly”,

he said: “I think what others, the critics of this plan, need to do is to show what their solution would be.”

He also rejected suggestions that the scheme was unworkable, saying it would act as a “significant deterrent” to people attempting to cross the Channel in small boats.

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## Food banks

# Almost one in 10 parents ‘very likely to use UK food bank in next three months’

Survey finds third have skipped meal to keep up with other costs and 20% unable at least once to afford cooking with oven



Deliveroo is to enter a partnership with the Trussell Trust to support food banks. Photograph: Deliveroo/PA

[Tom Ambrose](#)

Mon 18 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT

Nearly one in 10 parents are “very likely” to use a food bank to feed their children over the next three months, a survey has found.

It means that as many as 1.3 million parents are expecting to have to visit a food bank as families struggle to cope with rising costs of living, with 88%

of those surveyed admitting their monthly food bill has increased in the past three months alone.

The Trussell Trust research, carried out with the food delivery company Deliveroo, also found that a third of parents skipped at least one meal to keep up with other costs, while 20% said they had been unable to cook hot food at least once in the past three months because of the cost of using an oven.

Of those who said their household bills had gone up, 58% said they had cut back on heating as a result.

Emma Revie, the chief executive of food bank charity, said: “Everyone should be able to afford their own food, but as families face the biggest income squeeze in a generation, people are telling us they’re having to make impossible decisions between heating and eating and being forced to turn to food banks to feed themselves.”

She said the charity was about to enter a partnership with Deliveroo to provide up to 2 million meals and support for people facing hunger across the country.

“Our new partnership with Deliveroo will help us support food banks to provide emergency food and in-food-bank support to thousands of people in immediate crisis while we work towards our long-term vision of a future where nobody needs to turn to charity to get by,” she said.

Will Shu, Deliveroo’s chief executive, said: “I am pleased we are partnering with the Trussell Trust to support local food banks across the country. We’re committed to using our platform to play a positive role in the communities in which we operate.

“Together with our consumers, our amazing restaurant and grocery partners and our network of riders, we want to play our part in helping to tackle food insecurity in the UK.”

The archbishop of Canterbury spoke in his Easter Sunday sermon at Canterbury Cathedral of his concern for families struggling with rising

energy and food prices.

“Families across the country are waking up to cold homes and empty stomachs as we face the greatest cost-of-living crisis we have known in our lifetimes. And because of this they wake up with fear,” he said.

Leading analysts warned last week that [energy bills would stay well above £2,000 for two more years](#).

Cornwall Insights, which approximately predicted the [recent 54% rise in the cap](#) on average energy bills to £1,971, said that prolonged high prices would threaten the chancellor’s loan scheme to help households cope with the soaring cost of gas.

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## Life expectancy

# Women in England's poorest areas die younger than in most OECD countries

Exclusive: average life expectancy in most deprived areas is 78.7 years, worse than the average of any OECD nation except Mexico

- [Analysis: women's lives cut short by unequal position in society](#)



Knowsley in Merseyside. The gap in life expectancy between women in the richest and poorest areas of England is 7.7 years. Photograph: Adam Vaughan/REX/Shutterstock

*[Andrew Gregory](#) Health editor*

Sun 17 Apr 2022 13.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 18 Apr 2022 04.45 EDT

Women in the poorest areas of [England](#) are dying earlier than the average female in almost every comparable country in the world, according to a

damning analysis of life expectancy data that MPs and leading health experts have called “shocking”, “devastating” and “unacceptable”.

Millions of women living in the most deprived areas of England can expect to live 78.7 years, almost eight years fewer than those living in England’s wealthiest areas, the Health Foundation has discovered.

It is worse than the average life expectancy for women in every single one of the world’s [OECD](#) countries except Mexico.

The stark analysis, seen by the Guardian, also reveals that the average life expectancy for all women across England and the UK is lower than the global OECD average. The UK ranks 25th out of 38 OECD countries when it comes to the number of years a woman can expect to live.

Ministers have repeatedly promised to tackle decades of gender inequality and pledged to “reset the dial” on women’s health as part of their levelling-up agenda.

But experts say the findings show the government has a “mountain to climb”, with a “fundamental shift” in policy urgently needed to enable women to enjoy longer, healthier lives.

“The government has committed to addressing stalling life expectancy and this has been described as a core part of the levelling up agenda,” said Jo Bibby, the director of health at the Health Foundation.

“However, it has so far failed to acknowledge the mountain it needs to climb to bring life chances in the UK in line with other comparable countries.”

### Chart of average life expectancies

Women living in the 10% most deprived parts of England have a lower life expectancy than the average woman in countries such as Colombia (79.8 years), Latvia (79.7 years) and Hungary (79.6 years), according to the new study. Globally, only Mexico has a lower overall life expectancy (77.9 years) than women in the poorest parts of England.

The analysis also exposes the true scale of health inequalities in England. Life expectancy for women in the poorest areas is well below the UK average of 83.1, the England average of 83.2, and the OECD average of 83.4, the analysis shows.

Some of the most deprived areas in England include the local authority areas of Blackpool, Knowsley, Liverpool and Middlesbrough. The least deprived areas include Chiltern, Hampshire, Hart and Rutland.

The gap in life expectancy between women in the richest and poorest areas is 7.7 years. Women in the 10% least deprived areas in England live on average 86.4 years – higher than the overall life expectancy for women in any OECD country, except Japan, which has the highest level for all OECD countries at 87.3 years.

“When OECD countries are ranked by life expectancy, the UK comes in 25th – a somewhat disappointing showing for the world’s fifth-largest economy,” said Bibby.

“However, an even more concerning picture emerges when we look at the gap between the rich and poor. The stark reality … is that the poorest can expect to live shorter and less healthy lives than their richer counterparts.”

England is not an OECD member, like the UK, but the Health Foundation compared life expectancy for 2018 in England – as well as the UK – to other OECD countries. It did not examine Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland.

The cost of living crisis is likely to further widen the gap between rich and poor, experts say. The pandemic has already hit the finances of millions of families and rising prices will force growing numbers to choose between going without essentials that are vital to living healthy lives – such as heating and food – or going into debt.

Clare Bambra, a professor of public health at Newcastle University, who was not involved in the analysis, said it highlighted the “vast scale” of health inequalities in England, which were “likely to worsen through the very real health threats posed by the rising cost of living”.

Hannah Davies, the health inequalities lead at the Northern Health Science Alliance, who was also not involved with the research, described the findings as “shocking”.

She added: “Inequalities between the richest and poorest in England are morally and economically unacceptable and the devastating impact they’re having on the poorest women is shown here clearly.

“If the government is to achieve its healthy life expectancy goals, it cannot ignore deprivation in the UK and must invest in helping those worst affected by the cost of living crisis through significant, funded support.”

Bibby said the government must focus on providing secure jobs, adequate incomes, decent housing and quality education to improve women’s health in the poorest areas, otherwise levelling up “will remain little more than a slogan”.

Anneliese Dodds, the shadow secretary of state for women and equalities, said the “shocking figures” showed women were being failed by the government.

“Everywhere you look the Tories are letting women down, whether it’s their inability to confront the cost of living crisis, their broken promise to deliver a women’s health strategy or their failure to tackle the entrenched structural inequalities in healthcare that are putting black, Asian and minority ethnic women at risk,” she added.

A Department of Health and Social Care spokesperson said: “We are committed to levelling up health across the country and our health disparities white paper, due later this year, will set out action to reduce the gap in health outcomes between different places, so that people’s backgrounds do not dictate their prospects for a healthy life.

“We are also set to publish our women’s health strategy later this year to tackle gender health inequality and ensure everyone gets the high-quality care they need.

“We are also helping local authorities improve public health by increasing their grant to just over £3.4bn this year. We are investing a further £36bn in overall health and care over the next three years to put in place comprehensive reforms that are sustainable and fit for the future.”

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/apr/17/women-in-englands-poorest-areas-die-younger-than-in-most-oecd-countries>

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## Inequality

# ‘Shock absorbers of poverty’: women’s lives cut short by their unequal position in society

High levels of inequality in England is shortening female life expectancy in the poorest areas

- [Women in poorest areas of England die younger](#)



The overall picture for disabled women is even more bleak with the slashing of the social safety net in the past decade. Photograph: John Birdsall/Alamy

[Alexandra Topping](#)

Sun 17 Apr 2022 16.48 EDT Last modified on Tue 19 Apr 2022 10.14 EDT

Women who speak out about gender inequality are often dismissed, especially in [England](#). After all, women here are lucky – we are much better

off than in other countries. Aren't we?

The short answer is, only some of us. Devastating [new data analysis](#) from the Health Foundation has revealed – on the starker measure – that for many women in England, that is far from being the case.

Life expectancy for women in the poorest parts of England is less than the overall life expectancy for women in every [OECD](#) country in the world besides Mexico. Let that sink in for a second. Lower than every other country in that club, bar one.

In 2017-19 female life expectancy in the most deprived local areas of England was 78.7 years. In the richest areas, it was 86.4 years. What does that say about the situation for England's poorest women in 2022?

It tells us that women are the “shock absorbers of poverty”, according to the Women’s Budget Group. [Women](#) are more likely to be poor and have more debt than men.

Because of unpaid caring responsibilities often they can work fewer hours, and as a result have fewer savings and smaller pensions. For minoritised and disabled women, the picture is even bleaker. When the social safety net is slashed – as it has been, repeatedly, for more than a decade – it is women who fall first through the cracks.

“There’s really clear evidence that poverty is related to lower life expectancy,” says Jemima Olchawski, chief executive of the Fawcett Society.

“Over a decade of austerity and rising poverty levels have hit women hardest. They’re more likely to be working on the lowest incomes, to be lone parents or to retire with a lower pension.”

It is not poverty alone that has an impact on life expectancy – inequality in and of itself, is bad for people, she adds. “So high levels of inequality will be contributing to shorter lifespans for these women – that’s a really important part of this picture.”

Mandu Reid, leader of the Women's Equality Party, agrees. "Women are paying a heavy price for a one size fits men approach to planning the economy," she said. Reid, a woman not easily blind-sided by dismal gender inequality statistics, admits to being genuinely shocked at the new analysis.

"Political choices are being made that benefit those who have always benefited," she says. "This data tells us very clearly that we are not using our abundant wealth to address inequality. There is no way we should be in that position. No way."

The data snapshot was taken before the pandemic. A pandemic which resulted in twice as many (43%) young women from low-income households saying their financial situation had deteriorated, compared with 21% of higher-income young women and just 16% of higher-income men.

In their report on the unequal gendered economic impacts of the pandemic, the Commons women and equalities committee concluded "existing gendered inequalities in the economy have been ignored and sometimes exacerbated by the pandemic policy response".

In December, the government pledged to "reset the dial" on women's health in England", with its Vision for Women's Health strategy, after 100,000 women came forward to share their healthcare concerns. With muttering that it was about bloody time that the rampant sexism in healthcare was recognised, that was welcomed.

But even the most dazzling of healthcare visions can achieve nothing without resources and long-term commitment. And even then, it will have little impact on this most stark of bottom lines if women's longstanding and persistently unequal position in society is not addressed.

With the government refusing to carry out a review into the cost of childcare that keeps so many women out of work, no commitment to restoring the £20 universal credit uplift and the cost of living crisis biting hard there seems little sign of that.

"We're moving into a cost of living crisis, which again, will hit women the hardest," says Olchawski. "The potential impact of that is terrifying."

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/inequality/2022/apr/17/shock-absorbers-of-poverty-womens-lives-cut-short-by-their-unequal-position-in-society>.

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## 2022.04.18 - Spotlight

- 'I come from a country of strong women' Oti Mabuse on fame, family, Strictly – and that samba
- A new start after 60 I won MasterChef – and finally learned to believe in myself
- 'It will be tough for us' Lib Dems fight for 'footholds' in local elections
- Local elections A visual guide on what to expect in England, Scotland and Wales
- The end of the suit Has Covid finished off the menswear staple?

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Interview

## **‘I come from a country of strong women’: Oti Mabuse on fame, family, Strictly – and that samba**

[Zoe Williams](#)



Oti Mabuse ... ‘We were the first generation that was able to just do whatever we wanted, without restriction.’ Photograph: Sarah Lee/The Guardian

The Strictly Come Dancing star has left the show that made her name in the UK but her creative, competitive spirit loves a challenge – with three projects on the go, she’s not standing still



[@zoesqwilliams](#)

Mon 18 Apr 2022 01.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 19 Apr 2022 06.06 EDT

Oti Mabuse is the only person ever to win [Strictly Come Dancing](#) two years in a row, but the great unspoken rule about competitive television is that people don’t really care who wins. In fact, she was already the ballroom’s sweetheart for her samba with Hollyoaks’ Danny Mac in 2016 – a moment so exhilarating that people stood up to cheer when they were halfway through it.

“That was when it all started to change for me,” she says, fresh from a photoshoot, at a rooftop bar in west London. She has a ready, infectious smile that grows ever wider when she’s describing moments of great resolve in her life: when she told her mother, for instance, that she wasn’t going to finish her civil engineering degree in Pretoria, South Africa, but was instead

moving to Germany for its competitive ballroom dancing scene; when she tries to persuade her husband, the dancer Marius Iepure, to do another maths quiz (she loves quizzes). Charm, charisma, razzle-dazzle, sure, she has all those things, but what also stands out is how hypnotically persuasive she is.

“That samba was really the first African dance that was ever on Strictly. Everyone thought they knew samba, they had seen everything, but this was something they had never seen. And they jumped out of their seats. If that’s not the point, what is? Afterwards, people would come up to us in Pret just to say ‘wow’.”

Watch the samba with Danny Mac that made Oti Strictly’s sweetheart.

It is unsurprising to find her launching three projects at once: a tour of her own, *I Am Here* (this is a direct translation of her name, in Setswana); *The Cher Show*, a new musical, for which she is the choreographer (Arlene Phillips directs); and finally *Romeo & Duet*, an endearingly daffy TV dating format, where a single person stands on a balcony and a suitor has to woo them down with song.

*I Am Here* launches in Cardiff at the end of the month. It’s not unusual for the principals from Strictly to go on the road – it would be a waste of all that adulation not to – “but it’s not very common for a woman to do a solo,” she says. “Usually the girls work together.” It tells the story of her life, backwards, with a through line. “I want to recognise the people that have helped me on the way up. A lot of it, really, has been because women have given me the opportunity. I want to pay homage to them and say thank you, with dance.”

Mabuse’s father was a lawyer, often working pro bono, representing people during the bleakest days of apartheid. Her mother, a teacher, also had a formidable civic drive, pushing on after apartheid was overturned to secure equal rights for women. “Even after Nelson Mandela was president, we still had to march to get the right to vote. That’s what has made me who I am, that I come from a country of strong women.” But her mother also took the dancing extremely seriously. For years, she “kind of adopted” Mabuse’s dance partner, when they were both 10, “so that he would have the financial

support and be able to make rehearsals. She always said: ‘I want more for my daughters because I know what they are worth.’ She fought for us a lot.”

You take those advantages that your parents and educators didn’t have and, you want to just make them proud

The result is not just one nationally and internationally feted daughter – Oti, the youngest, won the South African championships eight times before she moved to Germany in 2012 – but another, Motsi Mabuse, the eldest, has been a judge on Strictly Coming Dancing since 2019, and is also extremely successful in Germany. The middle sister, Phemelo, apparently, was the best of all. “We’d prepare five dances – and she’d have 10. But she was almost too good, you know? It wasn’t a challenge.” Phemelo still lives in Pretoria, where she is the CEO of a Belgian company that makes wind farms.

They are pretty prodigious, in other words – like the Williams sisters of dance – and she says (of [King Richard](#), the biopic about the tennis coach who brought his daughters up to be champions): “I saw that movie on a flight, and I told my parents, we need to watch this because I think we have to have a conversation. We call my mum King Richard.”

It all sounds so seamless, leaping from one competition victory to the next, one super talent in the family to the next, but there is a lot of sadness in the hinterland; not just Mabuse’s mother but her dance teacher, her grandmother, all poured their ambitions into the Mabuse sisters, having themselves been thwarted by racist oppression. They call South Africans born after 1994 the “born free generation” (Mabuse was actually born in 1990, and is now 31), because “we were the first generation that was able to just do whatever we wanted, without restriction. In a good way, we were quite naive. We’d go into situations without even thinking about it, without even thinking that we didn’t belong. Our ancestors look up to us now because we’re quite fearless. Can you even imagine my grandma getting on an aeroplane? So you take those advantages that your parents and educators didn’t have, and you want to fulfil them. Or just make them proud.”

Mabuse and her semi-adopted “brother” were dance partners between the ages of 10 and 20, and went through high school and the whole world of

dance competitions together, but it came to an end when he wanted to join a show, and she wanted to carry on competing. The two worlds – perhaps superficially similar from the outside, full of sequins and phenomenal skills – couldn't be more different. "They talk different languages," says Mabuse. She loses the power of speech as she tries to imagine her career without the furnace of competitive spirit that took her to Germany.



Love songs ... Mabuse is presenting Romeo & Duet, ITV's new musical dating show. Photograph: Sarah Lee/The Guardian

Before she left, though, she had to get out of her civil engineering degree course: she started it under pressure from her mother to be sensible. "She always said: 'If you don't find a partner, if you're tired of dancing, you need something to fall back on.' When she could see that I couldn't imagine getting tired of dancing, she was, like: 'OK, what if you break your leg?'"

When she describes her degree subject, though, it's with great civic seriousness and sense of purpose. "I love town and regional planning, but it was also to do something that would help other people. If you're in South Africa, you want to start out by helping people who are living in poverty. You want to build actual houses, with running water, a shower – that's what builds community." The sensibility of the world in which she has built such success is always-be-smiling – which she has totally got the hang of – but

she talks a lot about the poverty that the post-apartheid era hasn't eradicated and her tone is not showbiz at all, it's systematic and practical. She works with two orphanages and dreams of better plumbing. If she went back to civil engineering later in life, I wouldn't be that surprised, even if her family would – she has been away 11 years, when she originally said six months.

When she arrived in Nuremberg, Motsi was already one of the judges on the German version of Strictly, which is called Let's Dance. "We're very competitive but never with each other. It's a generational thing; she's 10 years older than me, our experiences have been completely different. But also, in our culture, you have your family: the dad talks to the mom; the mom talks to the eldest sister and the eldest sister tells all the others. So she's like a second mother; you would never compete with your mom." Motsi was her coach for competitions, but Oti wasn't interested in auditioning for Strictly. She went to Germany because they take dancing, above a certain level, extremely seriously – and will pay for accommodation and dance lessons, pay you to go and compete. "If you wanted to be a part of a country that really supports you, especially at international world championships, European and world class, Germany is one of the countries that you want to go to."



Oti Mabuse performing with Colin Grafton on Dancing On Ice, February 2022. Photograph: Zac Cooke/PA

She got into Let's Dance by accident, but just before that met her husband, Marius. If you got into YouTube fitness during lockdown, you will have seen them doing dance tutorials for beginners, their improbable gorgeousness downplayed in onesies, so naturally graceful that you imagine even their arguments must look like a tango. She met him when both were auditioning for a partner, and their different ambitions hint at their complementary styles. He was quite big on German Strictly but is more interested in coaching and building up a teaching studio. And personally, “he’s very laid back. Everyone loves me because of him. I’m very out there, very loud. I’m also a control freak. He’s ambitious and strict with himself, but he’s very chill to live with.” They have one similarity that wouldn’t be obvious through a screen or on a double date, which is that Iepure, as a Romanian and eight years older, also grew up in a nation just emerging from a repressive regime, and: “If ever we’re talking about this or that experience in South Africa, he’s not shocked. He’s not saying: ‘Wow,’ he’s saying: ‘Yeah.’” They married in 2014, and moved to London the following year.

Before that, while she was just being “a supportive girlfriend”, hanging in the Let's Dance queue with Marius and warming up with him – he was already one of the professional dancers on the show – she was spotted by producers. “They went to Motsi, said: ‘There’s a girl downstairs, shall we bring her up and see how good her German is?’” By the time that season aired, in 2015, she had already won third place in World Cup Freestyle Latin in 2014, second place in the European Championship Latin in 2014 and first place in the German Championship, Freestyle Latin, so she had fulfilled her *raison d’être*, and the reason she had moved to Europe in the first place – to compete.

Probably the greatest departure of her career is now, as she moves away from a lifetime of heats, points and prizes – she has been competing since she was five, and her first trophy was made from a Coca-Cola bottle – into more expressive and, from some angles, eccentric forms. Then there is the Romeo and Duet dating show, in which, for the first time, she is flying by the seat of her own personality. “I was really nervous,” she says, “because I realised that people know me for my dancing, and they love seeing me dance, and I appreciate that so much. I’ve always used my body to perform, but now it’s my voice, it’s my self – it’s allowing people to get to know me.”

A moment of uncertainty flickers across her face, but she is an expert self-soother. “It’s very lighthearted. Everyone loves love. We might have a bad time with it, but we still do it all over again.” But no individual trophy or opportunity or burst of fame can on its own distil what she considers her main achievement: “I think, to be honest, the real gift is that the life we live was my parents’ dream. It was always my mom’s dream to be able to say, ‘I’m going to leave the country and I’m going to go somewhere where I don’t know anyone, and I’m going to make something of myself.’”

The Cher Show is on tour until 2023, [cheronstage.com](http://cheronstage.com). Oti Mabuse’s UK tour of I Am Here starts on 28 April, [otimabuse.com/tour](http://otimabuse.com/tour). Romeo & Duet is on Saturdays at 7pm on ITV and ITV Hub

This article was amended on 18 April 2022 because the last picture is of [Oti Mabuse](#) with skating professional Colin Grafton, not with her husband, Marius Iepure, as an earlier version said.

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[A new start after 60](#)[Life and style](#)

## A new start after 60: ‘I won MasterChef – and finally learned to believe in myself’



All the right ingredients ... Irini Tzortzoglou, who won BBC MasterChef in 2019. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

Life as a retired banker bored Irini Tzortzoglou, so she decided to enter the cooking competition. She trained hard to win and now works as a chef, writer and public speaker



[Emine Saner](#)

[@eminesaner](#)

Mon 18 Apr 2022 02.00 EDT

When she worked in banking, Irini Tzortzoglou's idea of cooking was to pick up a ready meal from Marks & Spencer at Waterloo station on her way home, and put it in the oven. But now, since winning the BBC cooking competition [MasterChef](#) in 2019 at the age of 60, with menus inspired by her Greek heritage, food has become her life and new career.

She had not been overly interested in cooking, she says with a laugh, though as a child, food was an important part of her life. Tzortzoglou, 64, was born in Crete, where her grandparents' house was always open – her grandfather was a priest – and her grandmother would often be cooking for dozens of people. Tzortzoglou would help out: "I loved the smells, I loved the processes." After her parents moved the family to Athens when she was about eight, she didn't really cook again, until she got married and moved to London. "I thought: 'I better be a good housewife and feed my husband.' I

bought recipe books, and started cooking three-course meals every day because I was bored.”

But she stopped cooking when her husband complained he was putting on too much weight and she started her career – she worked in finance for 30 years, eventually becoming an executive at Piraeus Bank, one of Greece’s biggest financial services companies. “As my career progressed, I found that I had less and less time for cooking,” she says. In 2000, she married her second husband, John, who was often away on business. Then, she says, “I really didn’t cook. I want to cook for other people, I don’t particularly enjoy feeding myself.”

She decided to enter [MasterChef](#) “out of boredom” after retiring. “It was out of not feeling challenged and driving John crazy, that one day he said: ‘Why don’t you try, because you always love watching it.’”

Tzortzoglou was a reasonably good cook, who loved entertaining and could put together a decent dinner party menu, but competing on the show demanded a whole new skill level. “I didn’t want to embarrass myself by leaving in round one, so I trained myself for a year,” she says. She put in time, effort and money (including buying gadgets and overhauling her kitchen at home in Cumbria). “I went to Athens, I ate at Michelin-star restaurants,” she says. “I wanted to see what was happening with Greek food today. I watched a little bit of Greek MasterChef to see what the young chefs were doing. And then I started practising.”



‘I’d had an office job all my life’ ... Irini Tzortzoglou in the MasterChef kitchen.

She also started physical training because she could see how tough it was to run around the kitchen while filming, or stand for hours. “What worried me was that I was going to have a heart attack in the studio,” she says with a laugh. “I’d had an office job all my life.” She started running, joined a gym, and took hill walks around her home. She treated it, she says, “like my life’s work.”

I had a father who was incredibly demanding, for whom nothing was ever quite good enough

Since her win, Tzortzoglou has become immersed in Greek food, and has written a cookery book, *Under the Olive Tree*. When we speak, she has spent the previous couple of weeks on a residency at a London restaurant, catered for two dinners, devised and cooked the menu for an awards lunch, and launched a Greek meal for a recipe box company.

“I don’t have free time, but I love it,” she says. “I feel like a child let loose in a sweetshop.” She has also become a public speaker, determined to inspire others in later life to start again. “Seeing how alive I feel and how much

energy I have, the alternative is unthinkable – to think that, at 60, you go, ‘Oh, now I sit in a corner and read books, and one day I die.’”

Tzortzoglou found that being on the programme not only gave her a new career, but changed how she felt about herself, after a lifetime of low self-esteem. “I always felt a fraud in banking,” she says. “I had a father who was incredibly demanding, for whom nothing was ever quite good enough; there was always room for improvement. I thought I had dealt with all that, but clearly I hadn’t because MasterChef showed me that I still did not believe enough in myself.” She couldn’t understand why she was progressing through the rounds, and finally won – with a starter of red mullet, followed by lamb chops, and a fig and hazelnut baklava – because she was so critical of herself. “I would say to [co-host and chef] John Torode, ‘What’s wrong with your taste buds? This is rubbish.’ He would say: ‘Stop it, this is my job.’”

She is emotional when she remembers how it felt to win. “To actually be able to say, OK, I’m good enough.” The other weekend, she did a catering job, cooking for 20. When she walked into the dining room, she received a huge round of applause. “A few years ago, I would be like, ‘No, no, it wasn’t good enough.’ Now I’m thinking, actually, that was a bloody good dinner.”

- [Tell us: has your life taken a new direction after the age of 60?](#)
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## Liberal Democrats

# ‘It will be tough for us’: Lib Dems fight for ‘footholds’ in local elections

Party bolsters support around existing strongholds with leadership doubtful of winning new councils



The Liberal Democrat leader, Ed Davey, has been rallying party activists for the 5 May local elections. Composite: Guardian Design/Getty Images



*[Rowena Mason](#) Deputy political editor*

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On a wet Wednesday in April, spent picking litter and spotting sewage in the River Wandle in Merton, south [London](#), the Lib Dems look beside themselves with enthusiasm.

Ed Davey, the Lib Dem leader, is here to rally his activists with a speech highlighting Tory failures to clean up Britain's waterways. He arrives in a sharp suit to deliver his party's local election launch to waiting TV cameras, before gamely changing into wellies for a photo op in the water.

"Soaring energy bills are overwhelming millions of families but this Conservative government doesn't care or doesn't get it. Instead of help, the Conservatives are raising unfair taxes again and again," he says. "And Conservative MPs have voted time and time again to pour filthy sewage into our rivers like the Wandle."

It may seem an odd message to be giving out in Labour-held Merton – and in fact, a strange place for the party to kickstart its local election effort when it is unmistakably going after Tory rather than Labour voters. This council has never been held by the Lib Dems, unlike nearby Sutton or Kingston. In

fact, it has swung from Labour towards the Tories, back to firmly Labour again.

But this set of local elections is about gaining and building on “footholds” where the Lib Dems are strong in nearby areas, says one of the party’s senior electoral strategists.

The party is fairly entrenched in about 27 councils in the UK, with disparate pockets of Lib Dem power in south-west London, Somerset and Cumbria. However, there are few places where the party is poised to take over any councils or even knock the governing parties into no overall control from second place, although they are hoping for a miracle in Labour-held Hull.

The Lib Dem activists have the energy of insurgents, as they hope to replace the Tories as the second biggest party on Merton council. But it is hard to know whether their optimism will translate into hard wins – and the party leadership is not sounding confident about any taking any new councils, despite the scandal-hit position of the Tories nationally.

“It will be tough for us because we won a lot of councils four years ago – Kingston, Richmond and South Cambs. So we are fighting from a high base. There’s a few we can win, but it’s difficult,” Davey says, setting a low bar for success in gaining councillors on 5 May.

The last council election in Merton saw 34 Labour councillors elected, 17 Tory, six Lib Dem and three independents. But there is a fairly strong geographical divide between the Labour-Merton and Tory-Wimbledon sides of the council area – and it is Wimbledon, the Conservative-voting seat of the Tory MP Stephen Hammond that the party has its sights on at a national contest.

“We’re hoping to make lots and lots of gains in Merton,” says Munira Wilson, the Lib Dem MP for Twickenham, who succeeded Vince Cable in the seat in 2019.

One of the reasons the Lib Dems are feeling hopeful about Wimbledon is Paul Kohler, their parliamentary candidate who came within 628 votes of

ousting Hammond in 2019. A university law lecturer, Kohler is well known in the area for being beaten up so badly in 2014 that he required facial reconstruction surgery. After his attackers were jailed for aggravated burglary, he visited one of them in jail in a restorative justice process.

“People are angry about national politics, they are angry about Partygate and they can see the cost of living affecting them or others,” he says. “There’s lots of decent, soft, ‘One Nation’ Tories who can’t abide the lies or hypocrisy of the Johnson Tory party. It’s not the party they recognise. It’s changed out of all proportion.” In terms of local issues, he says a big focus is “Mucky Merton” – with people annoyed by mess and rubbish collections.



Paul Kohler, a Merton councillor and parliamentary candidate, accompanies Davey in the River Wandle. Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

On the doorstep in Trinity ward, which has two Tory councillors along with one Lib Dem, Kohler is recognised by many of those he approaches along a street he says he will have canvassed three times before the campaign is out.

His reception is generally positive, with his first resident, Louise, saying she will vote a mixture of two Lib Dem and one Green for an “unambiguous vote” in favour of environmental action, and she will not go for

“complacent” Labour. Another resident, Andrew, says he will “possibly” support the Lib Dems but is weighing up them up with the Tories.

But he gets a roasting from one woman, Jennifer, who lays into Davey’s stance on trans rights as “a disgrace” because she says he cannot define what a woman is and that women are under threat of “having our rights taken away behind our backs”. The former Labour voter says she feels similarly about Keir Starmer, saying “Labour is finished” and that she does not like the way they have been running the council. Despite her harsh words for Davey, she says she will probably vote Lib Dem at the locals anyway.

Among the Conservative activists in Wimbledon, one of them says the contest is harder fought than ever, describing his most recent outing on the Saturday doorstop as “a bit of a disastrous reception”. He says the view is “hardening” against Johnson among liberal metropolitan centre-right Tories, with little sympathy for his excuses over Partygate and concern about tax rises.

The Lib Dems are feeling chipper after surprise byelection wins at [Chesham and Amersham](#) and [North Shropshire](#). They believe this test at the local elections in places like Wimbledon will show they have the potential to break new electoral ground in 2023-24.

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## Local elections

# Local elections 2022: a visual guide on what to expect in England, Scotland and Wales

More than 6,000 seats are up for grabs across England, Scotland and Wales



Ed Davey, Boris Johnson and Keir Starmer. Composite: Guardian Design/Alamy/Getty Images/ZUMA Press Wire/REX/Shutterstock

*[Antonio Voce](#) and [Ashley Kirk](#)*

Mon 18 Apr 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Fri 22 Apr 2022 12.06 EDT

Voters in Scotland, Wales and parts of England will vote in local elections on 5 May. All London borough councils will be up for grabs and seven areas of England will elect mayors.

Since the last time most of these seats were contested in 2018, the political landscape has changed significantly. In England, both the Labour and

Conservative parties have replaced their UK leaders, while the Covid-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and a cost of living crisis have all hit.

Although local issues will certainly carry a weight, the elections in England will be seen as a test for Boris Johnson's leadership in wake of the [Partygate scandal](#) and the government's handling of the cost of living crisis. Recent polls show that Labour has a slight lead over the Conservatives.

In Scotland, Labour's status is also the dominant theme. There, Labour hopes to replace the Tories as the country's second largest party behind the SNP; successive opinion polls this year suggest it is on course to do so, with Partygate severely denting unionist backing for the Tories.

National polling, however, is only of limited use in [local elections](#), which only happen across some parts of the country.

In England, most of the seats will be contested in London – 1,817 seats across 32 boroughs – where Labour controls the vast majority of councils. Outside the capital, a wide variety of councils are up for election: 33 metropolitan borough councils covering 904 seats; 21 unitary authorities, with 627 seats; 60 district councils (1,011 seats). Six mayors will also be elected in London boroughs, and one in the South Yorkshire Combined Authority.

In Scotland, there are 1,219 seats up for grabs in 32 unitary councils, while for Wales it is 1,234 seats in 22 councils.

The fact that many English metropolitan boroughs, as well as every London council, are up for election means the Conservatives could struggle in traditional Labour strongholds. In total, Labour will be defending 69 councils across England, Wales and Scotland, compared to the Conservatives' 47.

### [Bar chart of councils defended per party](#)

The Northern Ireland assembly election will also take place on 5 May. Polling puts Sinn Féin, a party that campaigns for a united Ireland, on course

for a historic victory, becoming the largest party in Stormont.

## Key battlegrounds

With the next general election rapidly approaching, Labour will be hoping that these elections show signs of a bounce back that they can build up.

To do this, Labour will need to make up ground in the constituencies they lost in 2019 – several of which overlap with councils that have seats up in the 2022 local elections.

In total, there are 11 councils in England and Wales that the Guardian has assessed as essential for Labour to see at least some gains if they are to have serious hope of returning to power. All of these saw Conservative flips in the 2019 general election and hold opportunities for Labour to at least wrestle full control away from the Tories.

This is especially true in the four Welsh councils, where Labour will hope to build momentum after [strong Welsh parliament election results last year](#).

If Labour fails to make gains in these seats, especially after the latest Partygate developments which saw [Johnson fined for breaking his own coronavirus regulations](#), there will be serious questions asked of Keir Starmer's ability to win the next general election.

This article was amended on 19 April 2022. Denbighshire council is run by a coalition of Conservatives and Independents, but the coalition does not include Plaid Cymru as an earlier version said. And two references to the “Welsh Assembly” have been corrected to the “Welsh parliament”.

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[Men's suits](#)

## The end of the suit: has Covid finished off the menswear staple?



Oliver Cheshire in Hardy Amies, Jon Hamm as Mad Men's Don Draper, and a suit from M&S. Composite: Getty/AMC/M&S

While formal clothing was already in decline in the years before the pandemic, working from home has accelerated the trend, and in the office

smart casual rules



[Rupert Neate](#)

[@RupertNeate](#)

Mon 18 Apr 2022 05.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 18 Apr 2022 11.51 EDT

Simon Cundey's family have been tailor-making men's suits for seven generations, taking 37 measurements from every customer through the Great Depression and two world wars. The tailor's arsenal of chalk, scissors and thread were put to work every weekday since the company was founded in 1806, until March 2020 when the government ordered almost everyone to work from home.

"If there's one thing you can't do at home, it's measure people for suits," says Cundey, who has worked for his family firm, Henry Poole & Co, tailors on Savile Row in London since his early 20s. "The pandemic is, by far, the worst crisis the business has ever faced. It is far worse than the Great Depression or the wars ever were."

"In wartime, the allied forces were here so we made uniforms for Americans and Canadians, and we could still see customers face-to-face," he says, as

we chat on leather sofas in front of a roaring log fire in the shop, surrounded by 48 framed warrants from the royal family and other world leaders.

Post lockdown, Cundey and his team of cutters, undercutters, trouser-, jacket- and waistcoat-makers are back at work at 15 Savile Row – the street known the world over as the home of the finest bespoke menswear – and customers are coming back through the doors. But there are not as many as before the pandemic, and fewer than before the 2008 financial crisis. It's a story repeated up and down "the row", and at other tailors across the country, as well as high street retailers from Marks & Spencer to Reiss, and online companies from Mr Porter to Asos.

Declarations of falling popularity don't come much more authoritative than from the Office for National Statistics (ONS), which last month removed suits from the basket of goods it uses to calculate the annual inflation rate. The government's statistics agency said suits, which had been in the basket every year since 1947, were not bought often enough to make it into the basket of 733 representative goods and services selected to measure the UK's cost of living. They have been replaced in the ONS basket with a "formal jacket or blazer".



Inside Gieves & Hawkes on Savile Row, London. Photograph: Adrian Lourie/Alamy

Nick Paget, a senior menswear editor and “trends forecaster” at the consumer analytics firm WGSN, says “many men have simply fallen out of love with suits, if they ever did love them”.

Paget, who has worked in menswear for more than 20 years, says suits were on the wane long before the pandemic, with dress-down Fridays slowly chipping away at office formality. “But 18 months of slouching around the house in joggers and a hoodie has definitely sped it up,” he says, adding that people just need suits less than they once did.

“When a guy used to have to wear a suit to work, it wasn’t just one. He would have a number of suits on rotation and at the cleaners.”

Men, Paget says, are now unafraid to tell their bosses what they want to wear to work. “I expect that as part of the deal to go back to work, people will be expected to wear formal suits less,” he says. “Personally, I hate wearing a collared shirt, and I know I’m not alone.”

Figures from the market research firm Kantar Worldpanel back him up. It found that spending on men’s suits collapsed from £460m in 2017 to £157m in 2020, before recovering slightly to £279m last year. The suit is being replaced, Paget says, not with working from home outfits of joggers, jeans or hoodies but with “chore jackets”.

Asked to explain, he says: “It’s in the name really.” They are jackets first designed for tradesmen to wear for handiwork, painting or plumbing. Originating in late 1800s France, where they were worn by farm workers and labourers, the jackets were dubbed “bleu de travail” or “worker’s blues” for their deep shade of indigo.

“Workwear staples that are comfortable and practical have been elevated to office attire, particularly in the creative industries,” Paget says. “The fabrics and detailing have been improved on, but fundamentally they are clothes that an old-school plumber would have worn.”

M&S, which has cut the number of stores selling suits to 110 out of its 245 larger locations, has credited the workwear trend with helping it return to profit on a half-year basis.

Wes Taylor, M&S's director of menswear, says the suit has been declining since at least 2019, when the market for them dropped 7%. As a result, the company is switching to focus on “separates” – suit trousers and jackets sold separately so they can be mixed and matched with less formal clothes.



Henry Poole & Co on Savile Row, the family firm of Simon Cundey.  
Photograph: Roger Hutchings/Corbis/Getty Images

“The pandemic hit fast-forward on the trend for more casual dressing – especially for the office, where, for many, chinos and a shirt is the new uniform,” Taylor says.

Gieves & Hawkes, the best-known Savile Row tailor, which dates back to 1771, could soon disappear altogether. Trinity Group, the Chinese owner, collapsed [into liquidation earlier this year](#) after failing to find a buyer for the tailor.

Like most on the row, Gieves & Hawkes started out selling military uniforms to army officers. It operates out of No 1 Savile Row, the previous home of the Royal Geographical Society and is by far the biggest shop on the street. Under Chinese ownership, the company has expanded to 58 shops in 25 cities, which experts say may be the reason it has been hard to sell. “The ubiquity has diminished the exclusivity somewhat,” Paget says.



Carrier Company's Norfolk work jacket. Photograph: Andy Hook/Courtesy of Carrier Company

Gieves & Hawkes is not the only struggling tailor. Hardy Amies, the firm founded by Sir Edwin Hardy Amies in 1946 and which specialised in suits for British Olympians, collapsed in 2019. Thomas Pink, the City shirtmaker, collapsed in 2020 before it was bought from the previous owner, the luxury conglomerate LVMH (Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton) by the former JD Sports executive Nick Preston.

Andy Saxton, strategic insight director for fashion at Kantar, doesn't expect the market for office suits to recover but reckons people are more willing than ever to spend money on suits for weddings and parties. "Casualisation has been growing for quite some years now," he says—while wearing a navy jumper with dark jeans. "The suits market is down 40% in five years, I don't think that is ever coming back to that level. But I do feel there are huge opportunities for dressing-up for celebrations – I feel like everyone is going to go very big on weddings."

Saxton says people are demanding clothes "work harder" for them. "They don't want to spend money buying something just for the office," he says. "They want their clothes to have flexibility and a multipurpose nature: 'Yes,

I can wear it to work, but I could also wear it out on a night out with my mates.’ It’s now all about blurring the boundaries between work and life.”

On Black Friday in the UK, suits were the most heavily discounted items, with 54% of all tailoring marked down, according to WGSN Instock data.

At Henry Poole, Cundey thinks society is about to go through a mass “smartening up period” that will filter down across all walks of life as we return to life as it was pre-pandemic. “It’s like the great beast waking from a slumber,” he says. “As people go back to work and engage socially again, they will remember why they need to be smart.

“Soon there will be Ascot and Wimbledon, of course,” he says. “But for everyone, there’s always a point where you have to dress to a certain degree.

“When your wife or partner dresses up and you come out in a hoodie and a pair of jogging pants, you have to ask yourself, would they be happy with you? The answer is no, of course.”



An apprentice coatmaker at Henry Poole & Co on Savile Row. Photograph: RJT Photography/Alamy

Cundey reckons the reason many young men don’t like suits is because they have been wearing the wrong size. “Lots of people say they hate wearing

suits, but that's probably because they were forced to wear an ill-fitting one at school," he says. "I'd hate wearing them, too, if they didn't fit. The No 1 rule is you shouldn't feel a suit. It should be natural, there should be no tightness and no looseness."

Wearing the wrong suit, Cundey says, is worse than not wearing one at all. "Remember when [Mark] Zuckerberg of Facebook got hauled up before Congress?" Cundey says. "He looked like a naughty schoolboy because his suit was three sizes too small." The New York Times dubbed it the "I'm sorry suit".

Cundey, who wears a suit every day, has a view on just about every famous man and his wardrobe. Critiquing Boris Johnson, he says, is too easy but he gives it a go anyway. "Obviously, there could be a better look for Johnson – his suits are far too big. But really, it comes down to mentality and how you carry yourself. Some people get it, some people don't."

Rishi Sunak, the chancellor, on the other hand, is praised for always looking "slim and trim" but "perhaps his suits are a little on the small side".

Cundey's sons – Henry (who is nicknamed Henry VIII, as he is the eighth generation since the original Henry Poole) and Jamie – are expected to carry on the family tailoring tradition, but even they don't wear suits every day, Cundey finally concedes.

"They are smart casual," he says, "but they don't let me down."

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## 2022.04.18 - Opinion

- How to turn England's rivers from filthy sewers into shining streams
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- Don't assume being 'hard' on asylum is popular. Britons will recoil at the Rwanda plan
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# How to turn England's rivers from filthy sewers into shining streams

[Rachel Salvidge](#)

None of our rivers meet the legal standard for health, and communities are starting to take matters into their own hands



A swimmer jumping into the River Wharfe near Ilkley, a stretch of which was the first to be given bathing water status in the UK. Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

Mon 18 Apr 2022 04.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 18 Apr 2022 10.42 EDT

I wouldn't go swimming in England's rivers, in the same way that I wouldn't flush my head down a public toilet. It's not just me who feels this way. Even Sir James Bevan, the chief executive of the Environment Agency – the regulator responsible for protecting and improving water in England – [has said](#) he would be “cautious” about it, first seeking out assurances by

checking the websites of the EA and the campaign group Surfers Against Sewage before going for a paddle.

Bevan's agency does provide some assurances – as long as you only wish to swim in one of the country's 417 or so designated bathing water sites, most of which are at the coast. In fact, there are only around a dozen inland bathing lakes in the whole country; and, for now, just one river – in Ilkley, West Yorkshire – which was rated "poor" in the agency's last assessment of bathing water, so you might want to avoid it anyway. Better to hop across the Channel instead, where France can offer around 1,300 glorious lakes and rivers designated for safe swimming among its 3,300 bathing sites.

The main reason Defra, which sponsors the EA, is loth to greenlight river swimming is that sewage, farm, urban and industrial pollution is so widespread that all of England's rivers failed to meet the legal standard for overall health the last time they were assessed. It's not the EA's fault though, according to the agency. It has pleaded poverty over the abysmal state of our watercourses, stating that "you get the environment you pay for" and calling for more government funding to enable it to nobble polluters and do its job properly.

So where does that leave the wild swimmers, the boaters, the anglers and pretty much anyone who would prefer to stroll alongside a shining stream than an open sewer? Sensing abandonment by the agency – compounded by its recent moves to stop attending "low-impact" pollution incidents and the low morale of staff who say they are no longer able to deter polluters – communities have begun to take matters into their own hands. It appears, at first glance, as though it is working.

It began last year when the people of the Ilkley Clean River Group in West Yorkshire succeeded in getting a stretch of the River Wharfe, already popular with swimmers, designated as an official bathing water site. Situated downstream of a sewage treatment works, the group knew the water would not be safe and concluded that a bathing designation was the only way to oblige the Environment Agency to install a water quality monitor and acknowledge the level of pollution there. After a bizarre scrap to get the agency to locate the monitor downstream of the sewage works rather than in

the cleaner water upstream, that stretch of the Wharfe officially became the first river bathing water in England, albeit one with [poor water quality](#).

A year on and we now have a grand total of two river bathing sites: thanks to the efforts of the Thames21 charity, a stretch of the River [Thames in Oxford](#) will also be granted bathing water status next month.

France we are not, but could these two sites signal the first green shoots of a wider society-led movement to clean up our rivers?

The Rivers Trust and Surfers Against Sewage (SAS) campaign groups hope so. Together they've compiled a [map](#) showing 273 popular river recreation spots, including some where there is already community interest in setting up a bathing water designation, such as Warleigh Weir on the River Avon and Sheep's Green on the River Cam. SAS has also launched a [petition](#) calling for Defra to create 200 new bathing sites by 2030.

Bagging a bathing water site is relatively straightforward, according to Thames21. For anyone embarking on the process, it recommends convening river users, picking a popular spot with access and facilities, researching pollution risks, logging the number of people using the river during the May-September bathing season, getting the landowner's permission, raising public awareness and then making a formal application to Defra. It sounds simple, but Prof Becky Malby from the Ilkley Clean River Group points out that there is no transparency over Defra's decision-making and that it takes around two years to complete the whole process – time which, in their case, would have been better spent fixing [sewage spills](#) from the nearby water firm's pipes.

So we're in (at best) muddy waters. Clearly, the growing bathing water movement is positive and the associated public awareness is critical if things are to improve, but it doesn't get anywhere near addressing the problem of chronic and widespread river pollution. A couple of [Environment Agency](#) tests for two types of bacteria taken at one site during the bathing season doesn't even begin to scratch the surface of the number of pollutants flowing through our beauty spots, or the consequent risks to people and wildlife.

What we need are wholesale improvements to entire catchments made by tougher regulation of the biggest polluters: the water industry and agriculture. A few bathing designations on a river in a catchment that is inundated with sewage pollution or choked by farm fertilisers will not be enough to make swimming safe.

- Rachel Salvidge is an environmental journalist and deputy editor of the Ends Report
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## **Whether you're 'childless' or 'childfree', you shouldn't have to talk about it**

[Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett](#)



Whatever term is used, it positions having a child as the default, and has the power to be wounding. Why define by deficit?



‘For many people, including myself before I became a mother, we are neither ‘childless’ nor ‘childfree’, but hover somewhere in between.’  
Photograph: Giuseppe Cacace/AFP/Getty Images

Mon 18 Apr 2022 02.00 EDT Last modified on Mon 18 Apr 2022 02.13 EDT

In recent years, I’ve heard members of the older generation complain that it is no longer considered acceptable to ask a younger person whether or not they have children. It’s true that this isn’t polite, especially during small talk with a stranger. They may as well be saying: “So, tell me all about the inner workings of your/partner’s uterus.”

Personally, I used to dread this question, even more so when it was framed as, “Do you have a family?” Of course I do, I just haven’t birthed any of them. People’s feelings on procreation are often complicated, sometimes painful, and always deeply personal. In the context of increasing [panic about the birthrate](#), the question of having children – or not, as it may be – is even more loaded, because it intersects with so many other factors in our lives: health, finances, employment status, gender or sexuality, housing, relationship status, and so on. These are not things you necessarily want to delve into over the course of a casual conversation.

Or, perhaps – revolutionary as it might sound – you simply [don't want to have children](#), and it's your right to not want to discuss that or be interrogated about that.

The fact that the word “childless” seems to be going out of fashion is largely to be celebrated. It positions having a child as the default, and has the power to be intensely wounding. As a word, it carries with it a feeling of “lacking”, when that is certainly not everyone’s experience. This stigma is why the term “childfree” is increasingly becoming the default in media reporting after being popularised on internet messageboards in recent years.

I was interested in how people without children may feel about that, so I’ve been asking them on- and offline whether they see the use of “childfree” as an improvement. People who had chosen not to have children generally preferred to be referred to as “childfree”, but those whose “childlessness” was involuntary, due to infertility, bereavement or life circumstances, felt erased by it. Many complained that both terms positioned having children as the default, when it shouldn’t be (“I’m just a woman living life,” said one respondent). Why define by deficit? Indeed, I’d say the overwhelming majority disliked both words, with one being seen as stigmatising and the other gleeful and nasty in its implication that parents somehow need “liberating”.

Others took issue with the term “childfree” because it has become the chosen moniker for an online community with a too often misogynistic undercurrent, according to several I spoke to. I checked out a few subreddits, and luckily my skin is as thick as rhino’s hide after more than a decade of newspaper journalism, because some of what I read was pretty unpleasant, including several threads about people finding pregnant women “disgusting” and how looking at them makes them “feel sick”. Sobering reading for someone who was pregnant at the time.

After reading these forums, and then cleansing my palate with several videos of babies and kittens interacting, I can understand why a person without children may not want to be associated with a community that often expresses strong dislike, even hate, for children and their parents. I can understand why communities for those who have difficult feelings about

pregnancy ([including phobias](#)) need to exist, but some comments were profoundly misogynistic.

After all, we are all part of a collective and a community, and not having your *own* children doesn't mean that your life is "childfree", and that the people you love haven't made a different choice to your own. There are many ways to care for children, from being an uncle or godparent to fostering, step-parenting, volunteering or working with them. Perhaps we need to focus less on the act of "having" a child and more on the act of parenting.

There's also the fact that, for many people, including myself before I became a mother, we are neither "childless" nor "childfree", but hover somewhere in between – or oscillate between the two. I have had days where I have spent time with a baby and felt desperately, profoundly childless, only to take to the dancefloor that evening after a dangerous fourth martini and feel blissfully, hedonistically childfree. Perhaps that's one reason why – when absolutely necessarily – "doesn't have children" is the kindest, most neutral descriptor we can hope for. Though we can also hope to be moving away from one's parenting status needing to be defined at all, especially for women, who still face this question far more frequently than men. Language matters, and as ever it often says more about us and our assumptions than we realise.

**What is working:** My response to the mother of all impertinent of questions has often proved very effective, so I thought I might share it here. "That's a very personal question," I reply, looking the querent dead in the eye. It usually has the desired effect.

**What isn't:** At risk of causing paroxysms of revulsion among the childfree Reddit community from being forced to imagine the following scene, I had the most appalling bath while heavily pregnant: lukewarm, as medically recommended (I used my husband's homebrew thermometer to check it was below 37C). The baby first kicked to the Adagietto in Mahler's Fifth, so I thought I'd try the whole symphony, not realising how bellicose and bombastic it was. "Are you OK in there?" my husband asked, as I sat in a

cold bath listening to a cacophony of trumpets. “You sound like you should be piloting a spitfire.”

- Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett is a Guardian columnist
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## OpinionImmigration and asylum

# Don't assume being 'hard' on asylum is popular. Britons will recoil at the Rwanda plan

[Sunder Katwala](#)

UK attitudes to migration and asylum are mixed but, in the round, they are softening. The left should not join the Tories in thinking the worst of voters



'Dangerous journeys across the Channel are nobody's idea of a safe or effective system for claiming asylum.' Illustration: Dominic McKenzie/The Observer

Sun 17 Apr 2022 04.00 EDT

It is 50 years since the most principled decision about refugees in postwar Britain was taken. The then prime minister Ted Heath's insistence on upholding Britain's duty to protect the 28,000 Ugandan Asians expelled by Idi Amin showed political courage. Doing the right thing by them was broadly unpopular in 1972. Indeed, [Whitehall panic](#) in the face of Enoch

Powell's pressure saw the Foreign Office ask Bermuda and then the Falklands if they might provide an "island asylum" to limit the numbers who may come to Britain.

Ugandan Asian migrants have contributed much to Britain. Their British-born children have enjoyed opportunities in professional life beyond their parents' hopes. It could even be an indicator of integration that it is Priti Patel, the first British Asian woman to occupy a great office of state, who leads this government's search for an asylum island for our times. On Thursday, the home secretary proudly unveiled [her plan](#) to send asylum seekers who reach Britain to Africa instead.

The [first snap poll](#), by YouGov, misunderstood the government policy, so asked respondents about a more moderate version. One in three people supports asylum seekers being sent to Rwanda while their claims are processed. But that "offshoring" idea has been ditched. The plan now is for Britain to just declare asylum claims inadmissible and deport people to Africa, letting them try their luck in Rwanda's asylum system if they wish.

The mantra of the sceptics, that governments always foist immigration on an unwilling public, has never been less true

It may take months to discover how far this plan is legal or practicable but it cannot claim to be popular. The politicians cannot blame the public for this policy.

The "progressive" mind can find it hard to accept that people may be becoming more pro-immigration or can struggle to devise the strategies to reinforce that in politically polarising times. Brexit reflected a loss of public confidence in how governments managed immigration, so the post-2016 softening of attitudes seems counterintuitive. If the government is deliberately reheating and repolarising the asylum debate, might that untap something deep in the British psyche?

Instead, to reheat and repolarise may bring diminishing returns. Support for reducing migration has not been lower for decades. The Conservatives now

trail Labour on immigration, due to the corrosive impact of 10 years of making promises they could not keep on net migration. But Labour needs to speak to the pro-refugee mobilisation of liberal opinion and broader audiences too. It would help if the left did not caricature engageable “red wall” swing voters, largely drawn from the “balancer” middle of the spectrum of attitudes, as core Nigel Farage supporters.

Though warmer, then, attitudes remain somewhat polarised. A quarter of people want large reductions in immigration, while one in five says they want numbers to go up. But beyond the fierce asylum arguments, there is quiet policy and public consensus on most other immigration questions: a broadly positive approach to managed migration. Labour accepts the points-based system for work visas now that Brexit has ended free movement. By ditching Theresa May’s impossible net migration target, Boris Johnson chose more open policies for students and post-study visas, lower salary thresholds for non-EU migrants and a new offer to bring hundreds of thousands of Hongkongers to Britain.

So the mantra of the migration sceptics, that governments always foist immigration on an unwilling public, has never been less true. This mantra can make no sense of the Homes for Ukraine phenomenon, as *Daily Mail* and *Observer* readers share frustration at the [Home Office](#) red tape that prevents the public from bringing refugees to Britain.

The general view is that a competent government would be able to combine compassion with control

Attitudes to asylum are more complex. Dangerous journeys across the Channel are nobody’s idea of a safe or effective system for claiming asylum. Sympathy for those making perilous crossings is combined with concern at the visible lack of control. A third of the public are attracted by tough messages to deter people from claiming asylum in Britain, while another third think it unconscionable to consider any such thing. The general view is that a competent government would be able to combine compassion with control.

Which means that critics of the [Rwanda](#) plan need solutions as well as critiques. An orderly, effective and humane system, which makes fair decisions within six months, may be more boring than the headline political stunts, but that is the task at hand.

How Britain protects refugees has been contested in every era. We respond to the emotive story of the lives saved by the Kindertransport without always noticing that Britain did not want to take the adults too. That is why the rights of the postwar Refugee convention, ratified by Winston Churchill's government, mattered. On its 70th anniversary last year, I heard people given sanctuary over those decades – from Hungary to Vietnam, Uganda to Syria – talk about what it had meant to them and why they want to “pay forward” that debt.

The [Homes for Ukraine](#) surge offers an opportunity to extend the spirit animating it across groups. British Future's research finds that those stepping forward to offer a roof are just the tip of the iceberg, with millions more keen to help in other ways. Spreading long-term contact with refugees across geographic and political divides would make the biggest long-term difference in entrenching the liberal shift in attitudes.

So these are curious times, in which the biggest surge of pro-refugee public sentiment in living memory has ended with our government proposing to deport asylum seekers to [Africa](#). Britain can be better than this. We can take pride in what is good in our mixed history of refugee protection, but only if we choose to act again in that spirit today.

Sunder Katwala is the director of British Future

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[Opinion](#)[Boris Johnson](#)

## Tories – for the good of the nation, save your party from this moral void

[John Harris](#)



I never vote Tory, but that's not the point. Boris Johnson's toxicity poisons all of our politics



Illustration: Matt Kenyon/The Guardian

Sun 17 Apr 2022 07.30 EDT Last modified on Mon 18 Apr 2022 00.23 EDT

Boris Johnson's disgrace is only deepening. On Tuesday, the House of Commons will hear a new prime ministerial statement on so-called Partygate, [trailed over the weekend](#) as "a plea for perspective". But from any reasonable standpoint, he will surely look shamed and desperate. Johnson [reportedly faces](#) more fines for breaking his own lockdown laws – and, by implication, further proof of his lies. May's local elections, and now a byelection in red wall Wakefield, draw closer. And as he doggedly hangs on to power, the vacuum at the heart of his government is now impossible to ignore.

Long spells in power tend to leave parties short on ideas and devoid of any sense of purpose. But thanks partly to the prime minister's entirely self-centred understanding of politics, this government's sense of moral and political rot is something else again. A question now screams out for an answer that no one seems able to provide: six years on from the 2016 referendum and nearly three years into Johnson's time at the top, what is left of British Conservatism?

Tory ideas and attitudes that once defined the party have been discarded, or drastically weakened. The old strand of centre-right, “one nation” politics that really was conservative – sceptical, nonideological and usually opposed to any radical change – still exists, but is a marginal presence, first sidelined by Thatcherism, then dealt another blow by the Conservative party’s furious embrace of Brexit. The free-market credo Thatcher used to reinvent her party still has plenty of high-profile disciples (Liz Truss and [Rishi Sunak](#) among them), but it now feels more like a nostalgic comfort blanket than a vibrant set of ideas – seriously weakened not just by its lack of answers to 21st-century problems, but by Johnson’s professed belief in economic interventionism, and the way the pandemic has shredded no end of Tory shibboleths, not least their belief in low taxation.

Amid the “[war on woke](#)” and the rank nastiness of Priti Patel’s Home Office, David Cameron and George Osborne’s brief attempt to “modernise” their party and acquaint it with liberal social attitudes seems like ancient history. Meanwhile, many of the supposed big new ideas brought to post-Brexit Conservatism seem to have already withered away, as evidenced by the great anticlimax of “levelling up”: [a bit of spending here and there](#), but nowhere near the great economic reformation voters were promised.

To cap it all, Johnson’s conduct – or, more to the point, his party’s acceptance of it – now threatens even its most basic articles of faith. If they wave through law-breaking and lying to parliament, how can Conservatives still claim to believe in law and order and the sanctity of British institutions? As the damage caused by Brexit piles up, the idea that the Conservatives are the [party of business](#) is also fading fast. For the foreseeable future, there ought to be plenty of room in British politics for a party of the centre-right comfortable with modernity, and attached to property ownership, limited government, a cautious approach to social change and the promise – however illusory – that the benefits of capitalism are open to everyone. But the Tories seem to be going much the way of the US Republican party, transformed over 30 or 40 years from politically stable protectors of the status quo into a volatile mess of almost neurotic obsessions and animosities, and currently just about stilled by a collective belief in one all-powerful individual.

Despite their sense of political decay, a mixture of factors – age, demographics, Brexit, our creaking electoral system and the failures of the Labour party – has kept the Tories in power. But many of these things will not last. The relevant numbers are stark: almost [half of Tory voters](#) are now over 65, and 83% are over 45. For younger people, the economic model created by Thatcher and her heirs has entailed the impossibility of home ownership, and there is fading interest in what the Tories have to offer, surely accelerated by Brexit nostalgia and nastiness: in 1983, the Conservatives [won](#) the support of 42% of those aged 18 to 24, but by 2019, that figure had [halved](#).

Given that degree-level education now seems to [tilt people](#) away from the Tories, the fact that [50% of young people in England](#) now go to university is a big driver of that shift. It is also worth noting deep changes in the culture and politics of many places that once gave the Tories their most loyal support: as highlighted by the party's [declining fortunes](#) in everywhere from suburban Greater Manchester to the south-east commuter belt, an increasingly large chunk of the English middle class is now socially liberal, eco-minded and repulsed by the Tories' increasingly reactionary instincts.

Somewhere in their collective soul, a lot of Conservatives presumably know that their current political luck will soon run out, but that nagging realisation only makes some of them more determined to upturn as many things as they can, while they still have the chance. The result is that paranoid, flailing style of politics that Johnson has decided is his best means of staying on top. Any distinction between substantial policy and desperate gimmicks has long since dissolved. The prime minister and his allies seem to have precious little to say about the everyday realities of people's lives. Everything centres on his apparently amoral attitude to power and a growing array of enemies: [judges](#), "leftwing lawyers", broadcasters, [teachers](#). The abiding impression is of people with a rabid disdain not just for the conventions of politics and power, but for liberal democracy itself.

In 2020, the British political writer Edmund Fawcett [published](#) a compelling work of history titled Conservatism: The Fight for a Tradition, whose story runs from the 19th century to the present day. "To survive, let alone flourish, liberal democracy needs the right's support," he wrote. "It needs, that is, conservatives who accept liberal and democratic ground rules ... When, as

now, the right hesitates or denies its support, liberal democracy's health is at risk.”

He added: “With the left in retreat, both intellectually and in party terms, the right commands politics at present. But which right is that? Is it the broadly liberal conservatism that underpinned liberal democracy’s post-1945 successes or an illiberal hard right claiming to speak for ‘the people’?” When I reread those words last week, the home secretary was in Rwanda, announcing a policy on refugees seemingly inspired by a work of dystopian fiction, while the prime minister continued to think he ought to be allowed get away with breaking the law and then endlessly lying about it. Once again, it was obvious which side they had picked.

For any Conservatives who remain genuinely conservative, that ought to be an urgent reason to get rid of their leader and at least attempt to reconnect their party with coherence, sense and the basic responsibilities that come with power. Maybe the rot is now too deep; perhaps expecting any moral course of action from a political force so used to shamelessness and cruelty is a vain hope. But if only to pull our system of government back from a complete moral void, if consciences once again stir and a few Tories start to move, the rest of us ought to quietly cheer them on.

- John Harris is a Guardian columnist. To listen to his podcast Politics Weekly UK, search “Politics Weekly UK” on Apple, Spotify, Acast or wherever you get your podcasts. New episodes every Thursday
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## 2022.04.18 - Around the world

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## [Pakistan](#)

# **Pakistan ‘inches away’ from civil unrest after ousting of Imran Khan**

Former PM is accused of creating wave of public anger that could prove difficult to control



Imran Khan has gone back out on the campaign trail with gusto, and has accused opponents of being part of a foreign conspiracy to oust him.  
Photograph: Bilawal Arbab/EPA

*[Shah Meer Baloch](#) in Islamabad and [Hannah Ellis-Petersen](#)*

Mon 18 Apr 2022 05.44 EDT

On Tuesday, two days after Imran Khan had been [ousted as Pakistan’s prime minister in a dramatic no-confidence vote](#), Noor Alam Khan – a politician and former member of Khan’s party – was eating dinner at a restaurant when he was confronted by another diner.

The man began shouting “traitor”, “American agent” and “turncoat” and then lunged over to punch Khan, who had been attempting to ignore him. In the middle of the restaurant, the politician and the angry voter began to brawl, with food and tables going flying.

For Noor Khan, who was among the dozens of members of Imran Khan’s supporters who recently switched sides and voted against him in the no-confidence vote, the incident was the culmination of mounting abuse he has faced in recent weeks from the former prime minister’s supporters.

“I have been harassed and faced death threats since I announced that I would vote against Imran Khan in the no-confidence vote,” he said. “I have received phone calls saying: we will kill you and your children like Benazir Bhutto [former prime minister who was assassinated] because you are an American agent and betrayed prime minister Imran Khan.”

Similar chaos ensued on Saturday at a gathering of the Punjab assembly meant to be discussing the election of a new chief minister , as supporters of Khan’s [Pakistan](#) Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party and opposition lawmakers began to aggressively confront each other and the deputy speaker, Sardar Dost Muhammad Mazari, was attacked by members of the treasury benches.

In a tweet after the incident, Khan’s former information minister and close ally Fawad Chaudhry tweeted that Pakistan was “inches away from fully fledged civil unrest”.

“Imran Khan has exercised utmost restraint,” he said. “Very soon even he won’t be able to stop this very angry mob and we’ll see the country plunging into a civil unrest.”

Khan, Pakistan’s premier cricketer turned pious Islamist prime minister, was elected in 2018 on a wave of populist sentiment, speaking out against the west and Pakistan’s powerful political dynasties, who had been shrouded in corruption allegations. But while his charisma and populist rhetoric never failed to pull in the crowds at rallies, he also oversaw a period of huge financial turmoil and massive inflation that devastated the economy.



Supporters of former Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, hold flags and signs as they gather during a public rally, on 13 April in Peshawar, Pakistan. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

After losing the support of the powerful military, the opposition moved in with a no-confidence vote, backed by many from Khan's own coalition who had lost faith in the prime minister. Shehbaz Sharif, the leader of the opposition coalition and brother of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, was elected by the national assembly to succeed him.

But the removal of Khan has in no way led to the demise of the populist politics he fostered while in office. Many fear that the deep polarisation cultivated by Khan could prove deeply destabilising for Pakistan, pushing the country into greater political turmoil that the new prime minister, who is known more for his skills as an administrator than a charismatic leader, might be unable to contain.

In recent days, the inflammatory rallying cry of Khan, who has gone back out on the campaign trail with gusto, has been "ghaddari" – traitors – with anyone opposing him, be it his political parties, the media, activists, intellectuals and the judiciary being tarnished as part of a "foreign conspiracy" to oust him.

Pervez Hoodbhoy, an analyst who has extensively written on Khan, called the former prime minister “a true populist”.

“Khan has polarised Pakistan to such an extreme level,” said Hoodbhoy. “The coming days will be chaotic as his insatiable lust for power makes him truly dangerous for this country.”

Evoking popular anti-western sentiment that he has played on for the past four years in office, Khan has continued to push the narrative that the no-confidence vote which ousted him was a “foreign conspiracy” by the west, citing diplomatic correspondence with the US to prove it.

The US vehemently denied it and no definitive proof of a conspiracy has been shown. In a rare press conference on Thursday, Maj Gen Babar Iftikhar, the spokesperson of the armed forces, dismantled Khan’s narrative and rejected the claim that a diplomatic cable contained evidence of foreign interference.

Iftikhar, referring to the diplomatic communication, said: “Is there any word such as conspiracy used in it? I think not.”

He also clarified that the US never asked for army bases in Pakistan, something Imran khan used as “evidence” of why the US wanted him to be ousted. Yet the stance of the military establishment, which wields huge power in the country, has also made its members targets of a social media campaign led by Khan’s supporters, who see the army as having played a role in the prime minister’s fall from power.

Tens of thousands of tweets have been sent in recent days criticising the army. On Wednesday, the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) arrested 12 social media activists who reportedly ran these campaigns, which Iftikhar called “illegal, immoral and against national interest”.

On the streets of cities and towns across Pakistan, the narrative that Khan was victim to a western conspiracy has been powerful and pervasive, and thousands have continued to come out in protest in support of him.

Addressing a huge crowd on Wednesday, Khan said that a decisive moment had arrived, and the nation needed to choose if it wanted “slavery or liberty” from the US. Khan accused the opposition leaders of being an “imported government” who are “slaves of the US” and said he and his supporters would be on the streets until fresh elections were announced.

Muhammad Banaras, 35, a resident in Islamabad, said Khan was the first prime minister to “think about the poor and challenge the corrupt”.

“Khan has talked about Islam, the rights of Kashmiris and against corruption. The west and the US are against him, they don’t want Pakistan to be a great nation. We should support Khan in this fight,” said Banaras.

Reema Omer, a lawyer who was victim to a lengthy online trolling campaign by Khan’s supporters, said Khan was creating a wave of public anger that could prove difficult to control.

“This narrative is based on no evidence whatsoever and has repeatedly been debunked,” said Omer. “However, Imran Khan is following Goebbels’ playbook, using ‘convenient lies’ that evoke strong emotions and spew hatred and contempt, not caring about how dangerous the effects can be for society.”

With Khan expected to contest the next general election, which is likely to be called before the end of the year, many are predicting a volatile time ahead for Pakistan. “I wasn’t dangerous when I was in government,” said Khan on Wednesday, addressing a rally. “But I will be now.”

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Composite: Guardian Design/Reuters/Facebook

[Facebook in Africa](#)

## **Facebook's fibre optics in Nigerian state put Africa pivot in focus**

Composite: Guardian Design/Reuters/Facebook

As company faces rising pressure in west, it is investing in digital infrastructure elsewhere

by [Emmanuel Akinwotu](#) in Lagos

Mon 18 Apr 2022 00.00 EDT Last modified on Tue 19 Apr 2022 05.23 EDT

When government officials in the southern Nigerian state of Edo set about radically improving poor internet access for its population of 4 million, they didn't have to look far for help. MainOne, a company responsible for laying a vast network of fibre-optic cables across west Africa, was an obvious partner. Another, perhaps less obvious one, was [Facebook](#).

A joint agreement was signed to install fibre-optic cables running across the state's capital, Benin City. Since 2019, 400km (250 miles) of cables have been laid in Edo, about a quarter via the partnership between the two companies and the government.

"Obviously, Facebook isn't really a digital infrastructure company, but they invested in these cables," said Emmanuel Magnus Eweka, who worked as a senior government official for the Edo government until last September.

In recent years, as Facebook has come under rising legislative pressure in the west, the company has increased its focus on [Africa](#), particularly in countries where the regulatory and legislative environment tends to be much looser.

The combination of weak and expensive internet coverage for most of Nigeria's fast-growing population of more than 200 million people has meant that companies hoping to tap into a potential goldmine of new users – and their data – have sought to invest in the business of helping those potential users get online in the first place.

"To make internet data more affordable, Facebook needs to build infrastructures that are almost free," Eweka said. "In fact, I'd say Facebook actually loses in terms of making money out of those cables. But then they gain it back on the user data that they will generate, and obviously that has huge potential in a country like Nigeria."



An advertising billboard for the Facebook service Free Basics on a street in the Nigerian capital, Abuja. Photograph: Reuters/Alamy

New potential users are rapidly emerging in countries with fast-growing populations and rising smartphone use driven by increased connectivity. Just over half of Nigeria's population currently has access to the internet, and the proportion with access is rising each year.

In places like Edo, where government officials are committed to overhauling sparse and expensive internet access, there are ripe opportunities for Meta, Facebook's parent company, to become increasingly central to digital infrastructure, thereby positioning itself to capitalise on the increased connectivity that will follow.

Edo's governor, Godwin Obaseki, has in recent years driven a digitisation agenda that touches on many areas of ordinary life, and tech companies have become fundamental parts of it.

In 2019, Facebook invested \$20m in internet infrastructure in Edo, and committed alongside MainOne to laying 750km of fibre-optic cables in Edo and the south-western state of Ogun. Both states have committed to building business and technology hubs, expanding internet access for entrepreneurs, tech workers, government agencies and schools.

Faster internet supplied through the cables has underpinned a drive to change the way the government in Edo works.

The state's previously "analogue" civil service now uses an online government portal according to Eweka, supported by partnerships with Microsoft and using fibre-optic internet access provided by MainOne and Facebook. "The level of accountability this system brings is so effective," Eweka said. "Right now, if a case file is sent to a civil servant from the governor's office, the governor can see exactly when it is opened, and whether it has been actualised. So the days where you send one file somewhere and it gets lost in the system are gone."



Edo state election campaign posters in Benin City in September 2020.  
Photograph: Pius Utomi Ekpei/AFP/Getty Images

Schools in Edo and areas where fibre-optic cables can be accessed have benefited from subsidised internet connectivity and are also working with Microsoft-based learning programs, improving the quality of education, officials say.

Last November, the government launched the Edo Tech Park, a largely as-yet-unbuilt project on 200,000sq km of land that developers envision will be the centre of the state's growing tech ecosystem.

The hub will provide “live-in, work apartments, residential and commercial real estate, tech incubators, and offices for rent”. Fundamental to the plans are the increased access to faster and cheaper internet services that Meta has helped provide.

Stephen Osawaru, a 38-year-old entrepreneur and business consultant in Benin City, works with a network of more than 300 startups in the state. “Many internet businesses in education, agriculture, health and finance didn’t exist five years ago that have now taken advantage of the connectivity in Edo,” he said. “The internet is better and cheaper than it was five years ago; internet penetration is growing at an exponential rate and creating more opportunities,” he said. Both of his businesses have thrived as a result of engagement through Facebook and Instagram and through WhatsApp broadcasts to customers.

Funke Opeke founded MainOne in 2008. Since then, a single deep-sea cable running south along the edge of the Atlantic, from Portugal to west Africa and on to South Africa, has expanded, spawning a vast maze of fibre-optic connections. She describes the public-private partnerships in Edo as “a model” for how internet access in Nigeria can be rapidly increased.



Funke Opeke, the founder and chief executive officer of MainOne.  
Photograph: Bloomberg/Getty Images

Opeke said cables are leased by other telecommunication companies and that this lowered costs for mobile operators because operators do not have to build their own infrastructure.

“We also build to all the critical points of importance for governments so that we’re able to deliver services to them and help their automation. It’s accelerating development and state services to the people – a win-win for the government and the private sector.”

Others are more circumspect, acknowledging the potential benefits to the country alongside the motives of the companies involved. When partnership announcements are made, the tone has sounded “quite altruistic, like they [the technology companies] are doing this to help,” said Gbemisola Alonge, a senior development analyst at Stears, an economic analysis company in Lagos. “But it’s never like that. It’s to expand their reach and increase their [user] base.”

A Meta spokesperson said the company worked with partners “to drive innovation on all aspects of performance and efficiency” and that its partnership with MainOne had helped bring online training to 2,000 teachers in Edo and connectivity to four schools and their surrounding communities.

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## Sweden

# Sweden: three injured during protest against far-right rally

Violence erupts in eastern city amid demonstrations against anti-Islam group's plans to burn Qur'an



Anti-riot police in Norrköping, Sweden, on Sunday, amid protests against a rally by Hard Line. Photograph: Stefan Jerrevang/EPA

*Agence France-Presse in Stockholm*

Mon 18 Apr 2022 05.07 EDT Last modified on Tue 19 Apr 2022 05.54 EDT

Several days of unrest in [Sweden](#), sparked by a far-right group's plans to burn copies of the Qur'an, have injured several dozen people.

Protests have turned violent in several cities since Thursday, leaving 26 police officers and 14 civilians injured, police said at a press conference on Monday.

The unrest has been sparked by the leader of the anti-immigration and anti-Islam group Hard Line, the Danish-Swedish politician Rasmus Paludan who is aiming to drum up support ahead of September elections.

Paludan – who intends to stand in the September poll but does not yet have the necessary signatures to secure his candidacy – has gone on a declared “tour” of Sweden, visiting cities and towns with large Muslim populations with the intent of burning copies of the Qur'an during the holy month of Ramadan.

Clashes with police have erupted during protests against the group since Thursday evening, starting in the cities Linköping and Norrköping.

They spread to the city of Malmö, where a school was set alight during a second night of unrest Saturday-Sunday.

“Criminals have profited from the situation to show violence toward society, without any link to the demonstrations,” national police chief Anders Thornberg said at a press conference on Monday.

“There are too few of us. We have grown, but we have not grown at the same pace as the problems at the heart of society,” he said, asking for more resources for the police.



People burn branches to block a road before a demonstration in Norrköping on Sunday. Photograph: TT/Reuters

As protesters burned cars and lobbed rocks at the police in Sunday clashes, officers responded, head of police special forces Jonas Hysing said.

“Some 200 participants were violent and the police had to respond with arms in legitimate self-defence,” he said.

Police had earlier said officers wounded three people after firing warning shots during Sunday’s “riot”.

Eight people were arrested in the city of Norrköping and 18 people were detained in the neighbouring city of Linköping, because of the violence.

After the incidents, Iraq’s foreign ministry said it had summoned the Swedish chargé d’affaires in Baghdad on Sunday.

It said the affair could have “serious repercussions” on “relations between Sweden and Muslims in general, both Muslim and Arab countries and Muslim communities in Europe”.

Saudi Arabia’s official news agency said the kingdom has “condemned the agitations of certain extremists in Sweden and their provocations against Muslims”.

In November 2020, Paludan was arrested in France and deported. Five other activists were arrested in Belgium shortly afterwards, accused of wanting to “spread hatred” by burning a Qur’an in Brussels.

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[Israel](#)

## More than 20 injured in Israeli-Palestinian clashes around al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem

Israeli police say Palestinians in compound began gathering stones before the arrival of Jewish visitors later seen leaving under police guard



Israeli police outside the Masjid al-Qiblatain mosque in the al-Aqsa compound in East Jerusalem on Sunday. More than 170 people have been injured in Israeli-Palestinian clashes since Friday. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

*Agence France-Presse in Jerusalem*

Sun 17 Apr 2022 20.52 EDT Last modified on Sun 17 Apr 2022 22.34 EDT

More than 20 Palestinians and Israelis have been wounded in several incidents in and around Jerusalem's al-Aqsa mosque compound, two days after major violence at the flashpoint site.

The clashes on Sunday take the number of wounded since Friday to more than 170, at a tense time when the Jewish Passover festival coincides with the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan.

They also follow deadly violence in Israel and the occupied West Bank starting in late March in which 36 people have been killed.

Early on Sunday morning, police said “hundreds” of Palestinian demonstrators inside the mosque compound started gathering piles of stones, shortly before the arrival of Jewish visitors.

Jews are allowed to visit but not to pray at the site, also known as the Temple Mount, the holiest place in Judaism and third-holiest in Islam.

Israeli police said its forces had entered the compound in order to “remove” the demonstrators and “re-establish order”.

The Palestinian Red Crescent said 19 Palestinians were wounded, including at least five who were hospitalised. It said some had been wounded with rubber-coated steel bullets.

Early on Sunday morning Jewish worshippers were seen leaving the site – barefoot for religious reasons – protected by heavily armed police.

Outside the Old City, which lies in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem, Palestinian youths threw rocks at passing buses, smashing their windows, resulting in seven people being treated for light wounds, Shaare Zedek hospital said.

Police said they had arrested 18 Palestinians, and the public security minister, Omer Bar-Lev, said Israel would “act strongly against anyone who dares to use terrorism against Israeli citizens”.

The Israeli prime minister, Naftali Bennett, said the security forces “continue to receive a free hand ... for any action that will provide security

to the citizens of Israel”, while stressing every effort should be made to allow members of all religions to worship in Jerusalem.

King Abdullah II of Jordan – which serves as custodian of holy places in east Jerusalem – called on Israel on Sunday to “stop all illegal and provocative measures” that drives “further aggravation”.

Senior Palestinian official Hussein Al Sheikh said that “Israel’s dangerous escalation in the al-Aqsa compound ... is a blatant attack on our holy places”, and called on the international community to intervene.



Palestinians in the al-Aqsa compound on Sunday. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

The chief of the Hamas Islamist movement, which controls the Palestinian enclave of Gaza, had earlier warned Israel that “al-Aqsa is ours and ours alone”.

“Our people have the right to access it and pray in it, and we will not bow down to [Israeli] repression and terror,” Ismail Haniyeh said in a statement.

Meanwhile, Israel’s fractious governing coalition faced a new split on Sunday when the Arab-Israeli party Raam “suspended” its membership amid the Jerusalem violence.

The government – an ideologically disparate mix of leftwing, hardline Jewish nationalist and religious parties, as well as Raam – had already lost its razor-thin majority this month when a religious Jewish member quit in a dispute over leavened bread distribution at hospitals.

Since then, the clashes around the al-Aqsa compound put Raam under pressure to quit too.

“If the government continues its steps against the people of Jerusalem … we will resign as a bloc,” Raam said in a statement, hours after the latest injuries around al-Aqsa.

The UN has called for calm, a year after clashes in and around the mosque compound escalated into an 11-day war between Israel and Palestinian militants in Gaza.

Weeks of mounting tensions saw two recent deadly attacks by Palestinians in or near the Israeli coastal city of Tel Aviv, alongside mass arrests by Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank.

A total of 14 people have been killed in attacks against Israel since 22 March.

Twenty-two Palestinians have been killed over the same period, including assailants who targeted Israelis, according to an Agence France-Presse tally.

On Friday morning, police clashed with Palestinians in the al-Aqsa compound, including inside the al-Aqsa mosque, drawing strong condemnation from Muslim countries. Some 150 people were wounded during those clashes.

The Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, in a call on Sunday with the Palestinian president, Mahmud Abbas, said he would make contact with all sides to “end the Israeli escalation”, Abbas’ office said in a statement.

Pope Francis on Sunday prayed for peace as Christians marked Easter at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, where they believe Jesus died and was resurrected. The pontiff said in his Easter address: “May Israelis,

Palestinians and all who dwell in the Holy City, together with the pilgrims, experience the beauty of peace, dwell in fraternity and enjoy free access to the holy places in mutual respect for the rights of each.”

Despite the tensions, hundreds of Christians staged a lively parade in Jerusalem, with processions led by marching bands with deafening drums and wailing bagpipes.

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## US news

# US rocked by three separate mass shootings over Easter weekend

Two teenage boys killed in Pittsburgh in one of at least three shootings over the weekend, including two in South Carolina



Bullet holes are seen in a van parked outside an Airbnb apartment rental in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on Sunday. Photograph: Jeff Swensen/Getty Images

*[Ramon Antonio Vargas](#) in New York and agencies*

Sun 17 Apr 2022 15.55 EDT Last modified on Mon 18 Apr 2022 08.36 EDT

Two teenage boys were killed and eight other people were wounded after gunfire erupted at a party in a short-term rental home in Pittsburgh early on Sunday, one of at least three mass shootings across the US on Easter weekend.

The other two shootings – both in [South Carolina](#) – left a total of 18 people with bullet wounds, once again reigniting calls among advocates for meaningful gun control legislation.

In Pittsburgh, police said equipment that detects gunfire prompted officers to go to an address on Suismon Street where at least 10 people had been shot about 12.30am on Sunday.

First responders brought several of the victims to a hospital, including two 17-year-old boys whom doctors later pronounced dead. Others who were shot but survived took their own rides to the hospital.

There had been at least 50 gunshots fired in the home in question by multiple people who had been drawn into some sort of fight, police said. A handful of other partygoers who were injured but not shot had suffered cuts and broken bones while jumping out of the home's windows in a desperate attempt to get to safety, investigators added.

Authorities did not immediately announce any arrests, though the Pittsburgh police chief, Scott Schubert, pledged that his officers were “going to do everything [they] can to get those responsible”.

“This shouldn’t have happened,” Schubert said in an afternoon news conference. “We’re sick about it.”

The short-term rental provider Airbnb issued a statement saying the person who had rented the home had now been banned from using the service for life.

The person violated a company policy banning parties, said the statement from an Airbnb spokesperson, Ben Breit. “We share the Pittsburgh community’s outrage regarding this tragic gun violence,” read the statement from Breit. “Our hearts go out to all who were [affected], including loved ones of those who lost their lives, injured victims and neighbors.”

Investigators determined the party where the violence broke out had drawn roughly 200 guests who were mostly younger than 18, police said in a

statement.

Pittsburgh officials later identified the two slain boys as Matthew Steffy-Ross and Jaiden Brown.

Meanwhile, also early on Sunday, gunfire which erupted at a nightclub in Hampton county, South Carolina, injured nine people. None of the wounds reported at Cara's Lounge, about 80 miles west of Charleston, were fatal, said officials, who had not immediately announced any arrests in that case.

That bloodshed occurred about 90 miles north from, and mere hours after, a separate shooting at a mall in South Carolina's capital of Columbia left nine with bullet wounds. The wounded ranged in age from 15 to 73, and one man – 22-year-old Jewayne Price – was jailed following that shooting on accusations of unlawfully carrying a pistol.

Price's bail was set at \$25,000 on Sunday afternoon.

The violence in Pittsburgh and South Carolina came as many American Christians prepared to attend church to worship on Easter Sunday. They also occurred after at least two other high-profile shootings elsewhere in the US.

A shooting in downtown Sacramento on 3 April left six dead and 12 injured. Another, on Tuesday, left 10 shot on a New York City subway.

Police have arrested suspects in both the Sacramento and New York City shootings.

- *The Associated Press contributed to this report*
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