

# The Guardian

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## 2022.01.02 - Opinion

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Names in the news[Jamie Dornan](#)

## **Jamie Dornan's right, comfort TV is causing our attention spans to desert us**

[Rebecca Nicholson](#)



Instant streaming gratification will inevitably lead to bad TV – but first, pass the remote, it's time for another Girls5eva



Actor Jamie Dornan told the Radio Times that viewers are ‘spoilt for choice’, which makes it too easy to give up on new shows. Photograph: Thomas Cooper/Getty Images

Sat 1 Jan 2022 10.00 EST

I like to imagine [Jamie Dornan](#) – you might anticipate a full stop there, but do carry on – having the same issues as the rest of us over Christmas, craving a second to switch off and so switching the television on.

Perhaps he, too, spent time staring at a hectic page on a streaming service, wondering for so long what to watch that scrolling became the activity and then it was time for bed, the evening having been filled by an endless click of the down button, interrupted only by arguments about whether *The Wolf of Wall Street* or *Zero Dark Thirty* is more festive or should we do a *Girls5eva* or three instead? (The answer is always yes.)

In an interview with the *Radio Times*, [Dornan pointed out](#) that viewers are “spoilt for choice” these days and that it is always easy to give up on a new series quickly and move on to the next. “Which I think is a bit dangerous,” he said, arguing that it is often worth giving something a chance or more than one episode.

It brought to mind *Succession*, of course it did, which, in its first season, was far from the ubiquitous [must-see it has become](#). I'd heard it was "slow", put it off, until I didn't. The BBC's new adaptation of [Around the World in 80 Days](#) is a certifiable slow starter, but it gets better and I hope viewers offer it their patience.

They are under no obligation to, of course. There is an avalanche of choice, though that in itself can be overwhelming, which, granted, is a wild indulgence to grumble about. It is the "my diamond shoes are too tight" of complaints, to borrow a line from *Friends*, which has inflated its own popularity using the air pump of streaming and remains as popular as it was when it first appeared, if not far more so. Which makes me wonder if the sheer amount of shows we have to choose from drives many viewers back to old familiars or comfort viewing.

Certainly, it seems that older shows remain popular. [Netflix reports](#) that *The Salisbury Poisonings*, *Downton Abbey* and *Ackley Bridge* have been among its most viewed series in recent weeks, though it's impossible to know if viewers are rewatching or discovering for the first time. Is it the fact that they are inherently known, already tested on audiences, which makes them an easier choice? It's hard to tell. But Dornan is right: our already-stretched attention spans are getting shorter and shorter. If we demand instant gratification from television, it will lead to television that is eager to please and that is rarely a good thing.

## **Abba: vinyl is on a voyage, but not for new artists**



Abba: time shall not whither them. Photograph: Olle Lindeborg/TT News Agency/AFP/Getty Images

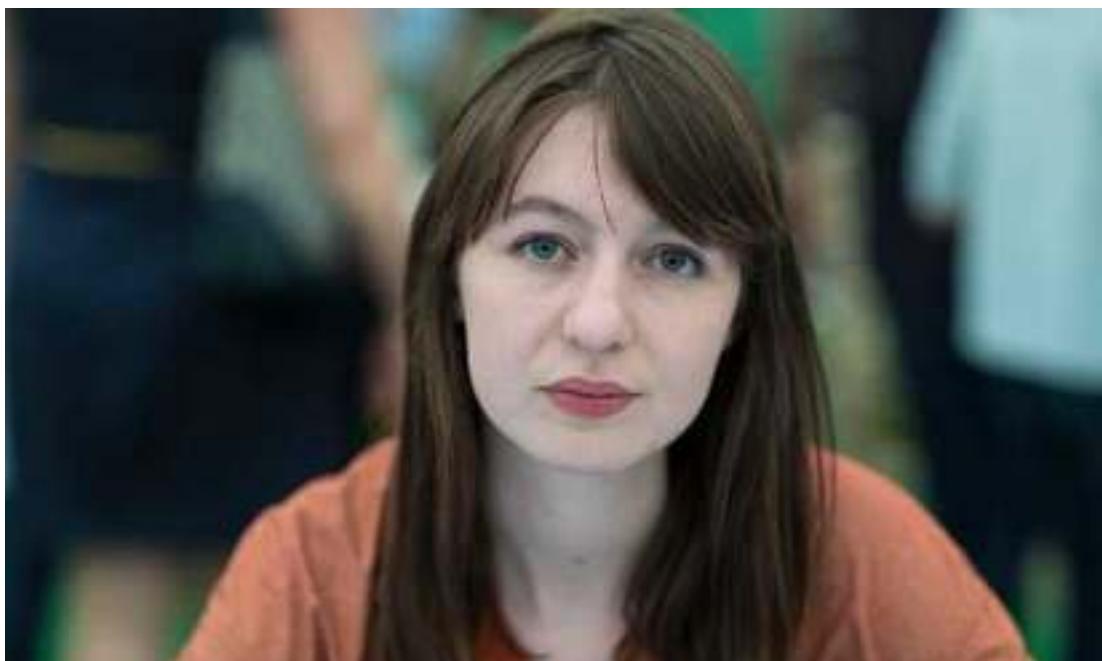
The great vinyl revival shows no sign of stopping. The [British Phonographic Industry has estimated](#) that more than 5m vinyl albums were bought in the UK in 2021, accounting for almost one in four album purchases, the highest proportion since 1990. Abba's *Voyage* is on track to be the bestselling vinyl of the year, followed by Adele, Fleetwood Mac, Ed Sheeran and Amy Winehouse.

It's a funny old list, a hodgepodge of huge stars, suggesting the decline of that image of the crate-digger sifting through rare cuts in a dusty old shop, affirming that the popularity of vinyl is built on pop. It also points to the collapse of distinct musical eras. Over Christmas, I watched my young niece and nephew dancing to their favourite songs, loaded up on YouTube, one after the other, and it was an odyssey through the decades that reached a climax with Shakira's 2010 World Cup anthem Waka Waka. It was a concoction of everything from pop's beginnings to its present and was not particularly shaped by the time in which they live.

For smaller and newer artists, though, who are far more reliant on the income from record sales in order to have a hope of surviving, getting vinyl produced last year was difficult, if not impossible, owing to a lack of

infrastructure, supply chain issues and the sheer dominance of the big guns at the top, who have gobbled up production capacity. A new plant, [Press On Vinyl](#), is about to open in Middlesbrough and one can only hope the appetite for vinyl leads to more places that are capable of making it.

## Sally Rooney: a panel of 4.7million is a prize indeed



Sally Rooney: well judged. Photograph: David Levenson/Getty Images

I have an awful habit of lurking on the internet, rather than getting involved in it. I do it on Reddit to the extent that I had to delete the app, because it was filling all the time I'd saved by deleting the Facebook app and then Twitter. But my favourite place to lurk is Goodreads, where readers leave sometimes devastatingly honest, incredibly well-considered reviews of books they have read.

Its users have just voted for their favourite books of 2021, giving [Sally Rooney's novel \*Beautiful World, Where Are You\*](#) the best fiction prize.

Its novelist character Alice would, I'm sure, accept the award, but feel terribly bad about it. Forget all those literary panels of six, with a prize

winner here and an academic there. This is the real deal, a voting panel consisting of more than 4.7 million readers who truly know their stuff.

Whenever I have finished a novel (never before, it's full of spoilers), I check in with Goodreads to see how much people liked it, or not, and I always feel a little crushed if something I adored gets pummelled. I love the site so much that I know it now: I will never, ever, be able to download the app.

Rebecca Nicholson is an Observer columnist

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## OpinionConservatives

# The Observer view on UK politics in 2022

[Observer editorial](#)

It's too early to write off Boris Johnson, but the prime minister is definitely on the ropes



Boris Johnson in Downing Street: 'his dreadful errors of judgment over the last 21 months will be raked over'. Photograph: Victoria Jones/PA

Sun 2 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

The contrast between the upbeat tone of the prime minister's [new year message](#) and the political cloud hanging over him as he goes into 2022 could not be starker. Boris Johnson said Britain is in an "incomparably better" state in the fight against Covid than it was at the start of 2021; thanks to the scientific research that produced a vaccine in less than a year, that is certainly true.

But Johnson begins the new year as an irrevocably weakened political figure, his poll ratings significantly down from a year ago, his authority within his own parliamentary party eroded. Just two years after winning a decisive parliamentary majority of 80, this will be the year that requires him to fight for his survival.

While 2022 will hopefully bring a diminishing of the disruption and harm caused by Covid, it will also see the launch of the independent inquiry into the government's handling of the pandemic. Johnson's dreadful errors of judgment over the last 21 months will be raked over: his decisions to hang back in introducing social restrictions not once, not twice, but three times cost too many people their lives, and still more the hardship of living under harsher social restrictions for longer as a result of his delays.

It is likely that the cost of living crisis will further damage Johnson politically in the coming months

The inquiry may also uncover further revelations about Johnson's hypocrisy in his approach to enforcing the social restrictions he imposed on the country within his own residence. The Cabinet Office investigation into the [Downing Street parties](#) will report and, if it generates evidence that the law was broken, may even lead to a police investigation. Johnson will also continue to face scrutiny over his lack of probity around [declaring political donations](#).

The country is facing an acute cost of living crisis that the government has made immeasurably worse through its policies. A decade of tax credit cuts enacted by successive Tory chancellors – which effectively paid for tax cuts for more affluent families – has eroded the incomes of low-paid parents, for some households by thousands of pounds a year. Yet this did not stop Johnson enacting a [further tax credit cut of £1,000 a year](#) in October, the biggest overnight benefit cuts for low-income families with children in history. The increase in generosity of the universal credit taper rate the government introduced in November still leaves [three-quarters of families on universal credit worse off](#), and despite the pandemic, unemployment benefits are now [at their lowest real rates since 1990](#).

These cuts will hit families living in the constituencies the Conservatives won from Labour in the so-called red wall much harder than those in their heartlands and will make it even harder for families to cope with fast-rising housing, [energy](#) and food costs. It is likely that the cost of living crisis – and the lack of government support to help the lower-paid weather the storm – will further damage Johnson in the coming months.

The Brexit that Johnson so coveted as a cynical route to the premiership will also continue to throw up difficulties. The key Brexit conundrum remains unsolved: there is no Brexit that involves a complete break with all of the EU's regulations and institutions that is compatible with both no border in the Irish Sea and no border on the island of Ireland. Given that the UK willingly sacrifices sovereignty in exchange for trade in other trade agreements, it seems extraordinary that this should become the sticking point of principle over which Conservative politicians are willing to undermine the Good Friday agreement. But thanks to the ideologues of the Eurosceptic right, that is where we are. Johnson's approach thus far has been to pretend this irresolvable dilemma does not exist, misleading the public that the Northern Ireland protocol would involve [no customs checks on goods coming from Northern Ireland into the rest of the UK](#). And the insidious economic impact of Brexit will continue; voters do not need to associate its economic malaise with Brexit itself to hold the government responsible for the state of the economy as we move towards the next election.

Voter discontent with the government has translated into a consistent poll lead for Labour in recent weeks. This creates a window of opportunity for [Keir Starmer](#) to position Labour as a government in waiting, one the country can get behind. There have been some important achievements in the first 20 months of Starmer's leadership.

He has begun the journey towards rooting out antisemitism from his party, [suspending Jeremy Corbyn from the party](#) after he minimised the findings of the statutory regulator, the Equality and Human Rights Commission, on antisemitism in Labour. He has introduced rule changes that should help ensure future leaders are more appealing to Labour voters. And after a botched reshuffle last May, he has recently promoted promising talent to Labour's frontbench.

What he has not yet succeeded in doing, however, is communicating to voters how Britain would be different under a Starmer premiership. To be fair, this is difficult for any opposition leader to achieve in the first year or two of a new parliament and even harder when there is an ongoing national crisis that has quite rightly dominated the political discourse. But 2022 will be a make-or-break year for Starmer as to whether he can succeed in mustering enthusiasm among voters alongside their growing disenchantment with Johnson.

It is far too early to write him off altogether, but we begin 2022 with a glimmer of hope that there may be an end in sight to the corruption, hypocrisy and incompetence of Boris Johnson and the damage his premiership continues to wreak on Britain. That is sufficient to make the new year wishes for good health, wellbeing and prosperity glow with a political optimism that was absent 12 months ago.

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## OpinionClimate crisis

# The Observer view on Britain's climate crisis targets

[Observer editorial](#)

The UK's green energy initiatives are failing just at the moment when we hold the leadership of Cop26



Boris Johnson visiting the Moray wind farm, off the Aberdeenshire coast; but 2021 was notable for its low winds. Photograph: Jane Barlow/PA

Sun 2 Jan 2022 01.30 EST

Britain's electricity generation went through an unfortunate phase last year. According to the UK-based website Carbon Brief, it got dirtier for the first time in years as renewable sources failed to provide sufficient power to help the nation's economy recover from lockdown restrictions. More coal and gas had to be burned to generate electricity.

This jump occurred – in part – because 2021 was notable for its low winds. Wind farm output dropped by almost 15% from 2020, despite the fact that

more turbines had been installed across the nation. At the same time, nuclear power generation fell by almost 10% because of problems with ageing reactors.

It is a sobering reminder that the road to limit climate change is going to be a long one, though, in this case, the news is particularly unfortunate, given that Britain is still in charge of the negotiations that followed the Cop26 summit in Glasgow last year.

Indeed, the nation will remain in this position of leadership until Egypt takes charge at the end of 2022, when its Cop27 summit opens in Sharm el-Sheikh. Until then, the world will be looking to Britain to set a lead and to play a major role in ensuring that the promises made in Glasgow are fulfilled.

England's green homes grant scheme underperformed so badly, Dame Meg Hillier called it a 'slam dunk fail'

What other nations will have witnessed so far will not have made a good impression, however. The fact that the UK last year failed to clean up its power generation, one of the easiest ways to start on the business of cutting carbon emission, is bad enough. Sadly, there have been many other setbacks in the UK's attempts to fight climate change.

Another example was provided by the public accounts committee, which last month [savaged the government](#) over the failure of its green homes grant scheme in England. The programme underperformed so badly it risks damaging future efforts to deliver net zero, the committee warned. Hailed by Boris Johnson as a key plank in his green industrial revolution, the scheme was intended to help the public make their homes more energy efficient and less reliant on fossil fuel heating. This was to be done by providing grants for installing heat pumps and other equipment.

A total of 600,000 homes were targeted but in the end just 47,500 were upgraded, while only a small fraction of the expected jobs were created in the process. As Dame Meg Hillier, chair of the committee, put it: "This scheme was a slam dunk fail."

Power generation and carbon-friendly housing are clearly issues that need to be tackled urgently. But they are not the only problems that lie ahead. As another government body, the Climate Change Committee, [made clear last month](#), the UK desperately needs a strategy to reduce carbon emissions from agriculture and to review how tax policy can help deliver net zero. This last issue is particularly important because the Treasury is now under pressure to reduce VAT on gas in response to the energy crisis – at a time when it should be making it more expensive in order to discourage its use.

However, the committee's key message was even more direct: the UK must now focus on implementation rather than targets. In other words, we need action, not words, when it comes to tackling climate change in 2022 and that action should come not just from Alok Sharma, currently president of Cop26, but from all senior ministers, including [Boris Johnson](#).

Certainly, if they do not act firmly over the coming year, and provide international leadership, then the goal to limit global warming to 1.5C will be dead.

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**Observer comment cartoon**

**Boris Johnson**

## **Keeping a wary eye out for Boris Johnson in 2022 – cartoon**

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**Notebook**[\*\*Notre Dame\*\*](#)

## Notre Dame Disneyfied? Unlikely, but the devil will be in the detail

[Rowan Moore](#)



Renovations that include modern art and Mandarin biblical quotes will go ahead, despite anti-woke fulminations



Chimera gargoyles on Notre Dame. Photograph: Carol Di Rienzo Cornwell/Alamy

Sat 1 Jan 2022 12.00 EST

There was much wailing and gnashing of teeth a few weeks ago when the [Daily Telegraph announced](#) that the renovation of the fire-ravaged Notre Dame cathedral would turn it into a “politically correct Disneyland”.

As so often when that august publication buckles on its cuirass and bascinet in the War on Woke, it helps to look closely at its sources and evidence. In this case, it relied on the opinions of a conservative architect called Maurice Culot and sight of rather general proposals to install “modern art murals” in some of the side chapels and to project quotes from the Bible in languages that include Mandarin.

A more measured and [informed article](#) in the *Washington Post*, by the art historian Elizabeth Lev, later pointed out that these chapels were formerly “an ill-kept hodgepodge generally passed over by tourists” and there should be nothing very terrible about a cathedral communicating the scriptures in the world’s leading languages. France’s National Heritage and Architecture Commission has since [backed the proposals](#), with a couple of reservations. The work might yet be clumsy and inane or beautiful and thoughtful – it’s

just that convincing evidence of its monstrosity hasn't been produced by its detractors. The devil, so to speak, will be in the detail.

## Form over function



A Nightingale surge hub under construction in the grounds of St George's Hospital on 31 December 31 2021 in London. Photograph: Rob Pinney/Getty Images

Cedric Price was an architect and thinker whose insights, more than 18 years after his death, continue to resonate. One of these was to challenge the assumption of architects and their clients that erecting a building is the best solution to a given problem. A big shiny structure called The Centre for Ending Poverty (to use a hypothetical example) might not actually do what it claims. Price's wisdom is pertinent to the saga of the Nightingale hospitals, the facilities created with much fanfare and expense early in the pandemic, which treated fewer than 400 patients. Now Sajid Javid is doubling down on this less than triumphant idea by ordering eight "Nightingale surge hubs" – units in hospital car parks to deal with a possible wave of Omicron admissions. One obvious but unanswered question is where the staff might come from to run these hubs. Even more obviously, would it not have been better to implement policies that reduce this potential surge, so that the Nightingales would not be needed at all?

## BBC morals off course



Misguided interviewee: Alan Dershowitz. Photograph: Richard Drew/AP

I imagine the BBC's moral compass to be a handsome and substantial instrument, brass-trimmed and Latin-inscribed, kept in a Reithian marble vault deep in Broadcasting House. It seems, though, that someone has tunneled into its vicinity and placed a powerful electromagnet there, one programmed to switch on and off to an unpredictable synth funk beat. How else to explain its decision [to interview Alan Dershowitz](#) as an apparently objective commentator on the crimes of Jeffrey Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell, in particular on the credibility of the couple's victim Virginia Giuffre? Dershowitz, as the BBC failed to mention, was one of Epstein's lawyers and associates and is himself embroiled in lawsuits with Giuffre over her accusations that he was another of her abusers. In 2020, he wrote [an article](#) in the *Spectator*, "The Ghislaine Maxwell I know", which attacked the "one-sided narrative" of "lying witnesses" such as Giuffre. The case against Maxwell, he sagely concluded, "is far from over".

The BBC [acknowledged its error](#), but why make it in the first place? In case my electromagnet theory is not strictly accurate, here's another: the corporation is now so thoroughly browbeaten and disoriented by accusations

of liberal bias that it truly doesn't know north from south and east from west.

Rowan Moore is the Observer's architecture correspondent

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**Opinion**  
[\*\*Don't Look Up\*\*](#)

# Lighten up the satire? That's a tall order when life is out-crazying the most vivid fiction

[\*\*Catherine Bennett\*\*](#)



Critics panned *Don't Look Up* as ‘shrill’, but it was superb – and caught outlandish reality



Meryl Streep as President Janie Orlean in *Don't Look Up*. Photograph: Niko Tavernise/AP

Sat 1 Jan 2022 14.00 EST

In 1944, George Orwell got a letter [from TS Eliot](#), a director at Faber, rejecting his political satire, *Animal Farm*. There were several reasons. First, it was not the right time. Also, said the creator of *The Waste Land*, “the effect is simply one of negation”. The poet took issue, too, with the wholesale disrespecting of pigs, since they were logically the “best qualified to run the farm”, being the cleverest. “What was needed (someone might argue) was not more communism but more public spirited pigs.”

So, if some leading film critics watching Adam McKay’s *Don’t Look Up* (currently most-watched on Netflix) have hankered for a less satirical kind of satire, they are in distinguished company. TS Eliot might well have agreed with these reviewers that McKay’s savaging of a society too corrupt and deluded to save itself from an urgent threat to life on Earth, in the film’s case, a comet, could have been more cheerfully done. For instance, echoing Eliot on pigs, some of the more cartoonish leads could have been made more relatable. How about humanising lead villain Peter Isherwell (Mark Rylance being mesmerising), a creepy tech billionaire who, absurdly, intends to live forever? Meanwhile, McKay’s US president, the preposterous Janie Orlean

(Meryl Streep) has appointed her dreadful son chief of staff. Why can't these grievous weirdos with their silly dialogue be more like, say, Donald Trump, Mark Zuckerberg or Elon Musk?

Even the obscure scientists (Leonardo DiCaprio and Jennifer Lawrence) attempting to convince an irresponsible leader and a clicks-obsessed media that the Earth truly is in danger, should, it's been suggested, have been awarded intriguing personal journeys that would offset the more apocalyptic content. Implicit in the professional objections to this film – it is “angry”, “smug”, “sad”, “shrill”, “condescending”, “scattergun”, “disastrous”, “insensitive”, “unfunny”, “depressing”, “heavy handed” but also “toothless” – is the proposal that, if McKay wanted to jolt disengaged people into noticing, even talking about, collective complacency on global warming, some sort of gentler, more immersive approach could have been more effective.

How would that work? Maybe imagine Swift's *A Modest Proposal* if he'd cut all the heavy-handed sarcasm, stopped droning on about mirrors and considered how baby-eating made vegans feel. Or something akin to political cartoons minus any dung, pigs or insensitive face/body caricature.

That the film has, however, an approval rating of 77% against the critics' 55% (on Rotten Tomatoes) could indicate that the public has a relatively higher tolerance for angry, broad, insulting etc material, at least when this feels like a justifiable response to current politics. Though it helps if it's funny, biting, gleefully performed by an incredible cast and finally pulls off a massive tonal shift, from propulsive near-farce to stillness and regret. “We really did have everything, didn't we?” says DiCaprio's scientist. “I mean, if you think about it.” In fact, *Don't Look Up* ends, for all its irksome negativity, by telling us something unusually positive about satire. Maybe, for all the repeated announcements of its death or terminal feebleness, this genre can still be revived, as now, into vigorous, exhilarating life?

Sensitive audiences would probably have thought a Hancockian character in poor taste, heavy handed or unbelievable

After the disparaging reviews, scientists in particular responded that the film's depiction of their discipline being ignored and trivialised rings utterly true. Peter Kalmus, a climate scientist, [called it](#) "the most accurate film about society's terrifying non-response to climate breakdown I've seen".

"Keep it light, fun," the fictional scientists are exhorted, before discussing imminent extinction on a Fox-like chatshow. And "couldn't it have been more light, fun?" is a fair summary, by coincidence, of the advice for McKay from detractors.

Events dictated that his film offers an additional, aka "scattergun", commentary on leaders who in the pandemic favoured President Orlean's approach to an incoming health catastrophe: "sit tight and assess". No satirist could have anticipated Trump's bleach advocacy or his fellow fantasist Boris Johnson's view of the virus as an adversary to be, when he chose to acknowledge its existence, "wrestled to the floor". McKay's film doesn't feature a hilariously vain government figure shagging in the face of extinction: sensitive audiences would probably have thought a Hancockian character either in poor taste, heavy handed or simply unbelievable. "It was already a crazy script but I would say reality out-crazied us by like 10 to 15%," [McKay said](#). "Well done, reality."

It's largely because of this routine out-crazying by the usual suspects that satire became the subject of repeated obituaries. But given the professional bollocking administered to McKay's death-defying production it could also be that old-school, Swiftian satire – that is, not nice and not nuanced – has itself dwindled in appeal. Supposing, as Professor Robert Phiddian [has argued](#), contemporary academics find the conventions of satire frustratingly arbitrary and simplifying, it could be that certain viewers similarly bridle at a film whose authorial intention lies beyond productive dispute.

Though shamelessness in public life hasn't, as it turns out, rendered satire impossible, it hardly invites subtle treatment. How, with the recommended light touch, is a satirist supposed to ridicule a leader who, performing press-ups or other tricks for free editorial, counts his absurdity as a superpower? Nor, given Boris Johnson's likely successors, is his departure likely to reset satirical standards to those prevailing when *Dr Strangelove*, with which

McKay's film has been disobligingly compared, was having fun with double entendres.

Liz Truss, Johnson's would-be replacement, was posing in scarlet costumes and an eye-catching new pompadour well before Meryl Streep was accused by critics of overdoing it as the scarlet-suited, over-ringleted President Orlean. Actually, when compared with Truss's patriotic [cheese oration](#) ("That. Is. A. Disgrace"), President Orlean's rhetoric as she, too, poses as saviour of the free world, is notably sane. Truss won't be impossible to satirise, but any attempt that isn't at least unkind, angry, shrill, insensitive, preposterous and depressing is likely to look like PR.

Catherine Bennett is an Observer columnist

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## The shifting patterns of English Cricket

# May I have a word about making light of our cricket defeats

[Jonathan Bouquet](#)

Michael Atherton gave disheartened England fans witty crumbs of comfort with his Ashes commentary



Michael Atherton: dark humour. Photograph: Alex Davidson/Getty Images  
Sun 2 Jan 2022 02.00 EST

One of the pleasures of this Ashes series has been Michael Atherton's [daily despatches](#). (I see your eyes rolling at the word *pleasures* - I'm sure you have your own epithets.)

In his report on the second day of the Test in Melbourne, he managed to wrest some dark humour from another calamitous day with a couple of gags from Australian wits - on England failing to materialise - "Only one team at the ground? That's how it's been all series." Caught Covid? "About the only

thing they have caught this series, cobber.” In these dire sporting times, we must take comfort where we can.

I mentioned in [my last column](#) that my wife was doing an MA in medieval literature and was always turning up fascinating words. This week is no exception. She drew my attention to [a review](#) of *Personal Pleasures: Essays on Enjoying Life* by Rose Macaulay in the *London Review of Books*, in which the reviewer pointed up Macaulay’s passion for words and cited the following that particularly delighted her: cantiferous, sedilian, empathining and hagiary. Sadly, none of these made it into the OED and they pretty much fox Google, but I feel that we should celebrate her ardour.

There was a very decent line from Joanna Lumley in *Meltdown*, a Radio 4 play, last week: “Social media? Shouldn’t it be antisocial media?” Good point. Finally, to the reader who upbraided me for confusing Augean and Aegean (he wrote: “What a pity that Jonathan Bouquet spoilt his column by mis-spelling the filthy stables - the Augean stables were named after a king of Elis, and have no link with the photogenic Aegean Sea”). This was preceded by the phrase “the most wonderful malapropism”. There was a clue there.

Jonathan Bouquet is an Observer columnist

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

# For the record

This week's corrections

Sun 2 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

The company that twice incorrectly informed a grieving man he had been bequeathed £14,000 from his late sister's pension plan, and then mistakenly told the deceased's father to expect £19,000, was Legal & General, not NS&I as an article said ("[And the awards for the worst customer service of the year go to...](#)", 26 December, page 56). We apologise to NS&I for this error.

It is the average price that Londoners paid for properties outside the capital that has risen from £450,460 in 2020 to £486,890 in 2021 (according to estate agents Hamptons), not the average UK house price. The same research said Londoners bought more than 112,000 homes outside the capital last year, but incorrectly equated this figure to "creating two new cities roughly the size of Leeds" ("[Tired of life? No, just tired of London: record £55bn spent fleeing the capital](#)", 26 December, p24).

The headline of a letter said: "Let refugees work and we all win". As the writer made clear, their plea was for the rights of asylum seekers; people with refugee status are allowed to work in the UK ("[This week's issue](#)", 26 December, p48).

Homophone corner: "... the most likely scenario remains a second-round dual between [Macron] and Le Pen" ("['The right is back': Gaullists pick female candidate to take on Macron](#)", 5 December, page 30).

Other recently amended articles include:

[Bookseller Samir Mansour: "It was shocking to realise I was a target"](#)

[What questions should you ask when you hear a claim based on data?](#)

[Revealed: the secret ‘forced labour’ migration route from Vietnam to the UK](#)

[\\$10bn James Webb space telescope launches on ‘eternal search’ mission](#)

[Good chablis and ‘halfies’: life with the other Duchess of Argyll](#)

[Citrus-baked salmon with beetroot boiled potatoes by Lopè Ariyo](#)

*Write to the Readers’ Editor, the Observer, York Way, London N1 9GU,  
email [observer.readers@observer.co.uk](mailto:observer.readers@observer.co.uk), tel 020 3353 4736*

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## Observer lettersFood

# Letters: securing our food supplies is more vital than diets

It's easier than ever to go vegan, but there are other ways to reduce the impact of what we eat



Beetroot wellington: vegan recipes are plentiful. Photograph: Panther Media GmbH/Alamy

Sun 2 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

There are valid concerns about conventional livestock, but vegans also have blindspots (“[No meat please, we’re British: now a third of us approve of vegan diet](#)”, News). Stem-cell meat may feed richer countries some day and less conventional livestock such as snails, mussels and capybara may also help, but dramatic reductions in the impact per head of cattle, chickens, etc, are already possible via changes to feed and additives and regenerative methods.

Food security is also crucial. Crops can fail badly but free markets absurdly punish suppliers if surpluses are produced, land is used for short-term gain and there is still no defined responsibility for food security. Failure to restore fish stocks could prove suicidal if crops fail badly because of climate change, pests and diseases.

The whole “eat this, not that” approach is the wrong way round; naive idealism and factory farming apologists are opposite sides of the same counterfeit coin. Better supplies must be the priority, with future consumption based on this.

**Iain Climie**

Whitchurch, Hampshire

Going plant-based prevents animals from enduring miserable lives and violent, terrifying deaths. It's better for the environment and slashes the risk of suffering from cancer, diabetes, heart disease and strokes.

Fortunately, ditching meat, eggs and dairy has never been easier. Vegan options are plentiful in supermarkets, restaurants and takeaways. From plant-based eggs to vegan meat, dairy-free cheese, and ice-cream, the choice is huge and growing by the day. Eating vegan is a compassionate choice that stops suffering and can boost your health.

**Jennifer White**

Peta UK, London N1

## **Publicly fund political parties**

Michael Savage's piece about John Caudwell potentially withdrawing financial support for the Tories because he's disappointed with Boris Johnson raises the question – should anyone be funding any political party? ([“Top Tory donor slams Johnson as new poll shows strong Labour lead”](#), News) Surely the way to indicate our dislike of the direction a party is going is at the ballot box.

The idea that individuals or companies influence politics with money is distasteful. The main parties should receive funding solely from public funds so that they are beyond the influence of lobbyists and the wealthy. Should the wealthy have spare money they could over-pay their taxes, or contribute

to deprived areas of society rather than trying to influence power. Government should be to the benefit of all members of society.

**Robert Morgan**

Harlow, Essex

## **Do unto others...**

If the individualists are incapable of collectivist engagement then those of us who view this pandemic as a public health issue first and foremost can adopt their libertarian philosophy (“[Which philosophy helps us confront the crises that beset us... ‘we first’ or ‘me first’?](#)”, Comment).

Therefore, I exercise my right to not teach you, your children or husband or wife or partner who refuses to wear a face mask in class, to not stack the supermarket shelves with the food you want to buy, to not spend my money in sectors you think vital to the economy and beneficial to your consulting role or pension plan or dividend, to not drive your train and any other myriad roles where I serve you. Good luck on your own.

**Dr Michael Sheard**

Ingleby Arncliffe, Northallerton  
North Yorkshire

## **Put vouchers to good use**

As two of the 500,000 participants in the Covid-19 infection survey, led by the Office for National Statistics and the Department of Health and Social Care, my wife and I have been receiving initially weekly, and now monthly, £50 of vouchers (“[Infection survey hands out £210m in high street vouchers](#)”, News).

By donating an equivalent gift aided amount to an aid agency we will, over the year of the survey, have recycled £1,000 of the government’s own money back into overseas aid and so done something to mitigate the effect of its cut in funding last year.

If all participants in the survey did the same thing the government would have repaid, through us, a quarter-of-a-billion pounds. Negative test results

for us (so far) have turned into positive results for developing nations.

**Cliff Harris**

Bedford

## Underestimating Farage

David Olusoga is quite right to say that Nigel Farage made himself look a complete idiot over his attack on the RNLI (“[Culture warriors sallied forth, only to be defeated by their own ineptitude](#)”, Comment), and not for the first time. But let’s not underestimate him. After all, the Conservative party has allowed his ideology to take it over without the need to fire a shot.

**Dave Pollard**

Leicester

## The decline of insects

In David Spiegelhalter and Anthony Masters’ column on whether to trust statistics (“[What questions should you ask when you hear a claim based on data?](#)”, Comment), they throw doubt on whether the number of insects are declining as the researcher only looked for articles about decline.

I am afraid I am even less reliable as my belief in their decline is based on the fact that when we started holidaying on the west coast of Scotland, we would return with the car plastered with dead insects. Now they are barely noticeable. Only one case, but if they are declining on the narrow strip between Oban and St Andrews, then they *could* be declining everywhere.

**Margaret Squires**

St Andrews, Fife

## Pig-hoo-o-o-o-ey!

I’ve been reading William Keegan’s missives for many decades and this one trumps all of them for wit, intelligence and sheer mischief (“[Johnson’s pig-headed reign nears a tragicomic climax](#)”, Business). Who would have guessed how perfectly the Empress of Blandings could enlighten us upon the economic pickle we are currently wallowing in?

# **Robert Kelso**

## Frome, Somerset

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## **Headlines tuesday 28 december 2021**

- [Covid England will have no further restrictions before the new year, Boris Johnson says](#)
- [Live Covid: England hospitality bosses welcome lack of new restrictions](#)
- [Omicron Absences leave UK public services in a ‘perilous state’](#)
- [England Record 113,638 new Covid cases on Christmas Day](#)

## Coronavirus

# No new Covid restrictions in England before new year, Boris Johnson says

No extra curbs for New Year's Eve, with prime minister to put emphasis on personal responsibility

- [England reports record 113,638 new cases on Christmas Day](#)
- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



Boris Johnson's decision makes England an outlier in the UK. Photograph: Tolga Akmen/PA

*[Jessica Elgot](#) and [Nicola Davis](#)*

Mon 27 Dec 2021 15.56 EST

Boris Johnson will not introduce further Covid restrictions in [England](#) before 2022, giving mass events the go-ahead and leaving nightclubs open for New Year's Eve – in contrast with all other UK nations.

Scientists criticised the decision, which came as England recorded its highest number of Covid infections. They said it was the moment of “the greatest divergence between scientific advice and legislation” seen since the start of the pandemic.

The announcement came after advisers told Johnson that significant NHS pressures were coming from staff absences rather than overcrowded intensive care units. One model has predicted that in London, where Covid rates are highest, [up to 40% of staff could be absent](#) because of sickness.

Ministers are expected to continue to focus efforts on vaccination – including the booster rollout. Sources say most of the cases behind the rise in hospital admissions are people who are unvaccinated.

The decision not to introduce curbs makes England an outlier in the UK, after Scotland, Wales and [Northern Ireland](#) put limits on social gatherings and mass events.

Johnson’s cabinet rejected new measures before Christmas, as cases of the Omicron variant started to rise. Three cabinet ministers who spoke to the Guardian on Monday said they remained deeply sceptical that any further measures were necessary.

The health secretary, Sajid Javid, said people should take steps themselves to protect others. “We won’t be taking any further measures. Of course people should remain cautious as we approach new year celebrations and take a lateral flow test if that makes sense, celebrate outdoors if you can, have some ventilation indoors if you can,” he said.

The call for caution was reiterated by the prime minister in a series of tweets on Monday night. “We will continue to monitor the data carefully, but there will be no new restrictions introduced in England before the new year,” he

said. “However, I would urge everyone to continue to act cautiously given the rising number of Omicron cases.

“Most importantly I urge everyone to get their first, second or booster jab without delay to protect yourselves and your loved ones.”

England recorded 1,281 people admitted to hospital in England on Christmas Day – the most recent available figure – up from 1,020 the day before. Though it is the highest figure since mid-February, it is well below the highest in the pandemic when admissions reached 4,134 last January.

Downing Street has been hopeful that if admissions in London stay below 400 a day, NHS capacity should remain stable. According to the latest data, 364 patients were admitted to hospital with Covid on Christmas Day in London, down slightly from a high of 390 admitted on 23 December.

Case rates reached a new high of 113,628 on Christmas Day and fell to 98,515 on Monday, though the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage) has previously cautioned that data will be unreliable over the festive period as testing and hospital admission patterns change.

Johnson’s decision to rule out further curbs this year came after a crunch summit he chaired online from his Chequers residence, with England’s chief medical officer, Chris Whitty, and the government’s chief scientific adviser, Sir Patrick Vallance.

Messaging from government will instead put an emphasis on personal responsibility. “Nothing in the data around hospitalisations is showing we need to put our foot on the accelerator,” a Number 10 source said. “It is not accelerating as quickly as it might have done. We just need to keep a close watch.”

00:40

No new Covid restrictions for England before the new year says Sajid Javid – video

Javid said the most recent data showed there were disproportionate numbers of unvaccinated people being admitted to hospital and that there were 1.5m

vaccination slots available over the next few days.

“Can I please say to people, please do come forward,” he said. “Protect yourselves, protect your loved ones and protect your community.”

Officials monitoring the data suggested that although there was a climb in hospital admissions, there was a more positive picture emerging when officials examined how long people were staying in hospital and those admitted to intensive care, along with analysis from the UK Health Security Agency [suggesting Omicron was milder](#).

One Whitehall source said the data received by NHS Trusts showed a particularly stark disparity between vaccinated and unvaccinated admissions to hospitals. “Those who are in ICUs are unvaccinated. It really brings home that should be the priority.”

Chris Hopson, the chief executive of NHS providers – which represents trusts in England, said there were no reports of large numbers of patients requiring ventilators, and that the main pressure the NHS faced was staffing.

“Talking to chief executives this morning, the sense is that admissions are rising but not precipitously so,” Hopson said, adding that a number of asymptomatic patients are being admitted to hospital for other reasons and then testing positive for Covid.

“Trusts are not, at the moment, reporting large numbers of patients with Covid-type respiratory problems needing critical care or massively increased use of oxygen, both of which we saw in last January’s Delta variant peak.”

Prof Alison Leary, the chair of healthcare and workforce modelling at London South Bank University, said the NHS absence rate in the capital had risen by 30% on normal levels as of Christmas Eve. Leary said one scenario modelled had predicted about 40% of the workforce being absent in London.

Though the decision to rule out further restrictions before new year has delighted businesses, the move has divided scientists, several of whom said Johnson was gambling on an unclear picture during a period where data was often unreliable.

Simon Clarke, an associate professor in Cellular Microbiology at the University of Reading cautioned that the latest case figures did not include data for samples taken between Christmas Eve and Boxing Day, and that it would only become clear how the virus had moved through the population over the Christmas period in the coming week or so.

“While nobody wants to live under tighter controls, the public need to realise that if we end up with a significant problem of hospitalisations and mass sickness, it will be worse than if authorities had acted earlier,” he said.

Danny Altmann, a professor of immunology at Imperial College London said: “It does feel hard that, at a time when we need to all pull together to maximise all possible mitigations, we seem to have our greatest divergence between expert clinical/scientific advice and legislation.”

Wes Streeting, the shadow health secretary, said the government needed to develop a coherent strategy to combat staffing pressures in hospitals and schools.

“The government should publish, as a matter of urgency, the very latest data on hospitalisations and NHS staff absence rates, as well as up-to-date advice from Sage, so that the public can be reassured that they are genuinely following the data and scientific advice and that Boris Johnson is not simply capitulating to his own opponents in the Tory party,” he said.

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## Coronavirus

# US, UK, France, Portugal and Greece all break new daily cases records – as it happened

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## Coronavirus

# Omicron absences leave public services in ‘perilous state’

Unions, school leaders and local authorities warn Covid-related absences are putting staff under pressure

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



A nurse on a ward for Covid patients at King's College hospital. Up to 40% of NHS staff in London could be absent under the worst-case scenario envisaged. Photograph: Victoria Jones/PA

[Ben Quinn](#) and [Richard Adams](#)

Mon 27 Dec 2021 12.29 EST

Staff absences from the Omicron Covid variant are leaving public services in a “perilous state”, a union leader has said, amid new grim warnings about the variant’s impact on the [NHS](#) workforce.

As much as 40% of NHS staff in [London](#) alone could be absent because of rising Covid-19 infections under the “worst-case scenario” envisaged by experts, it emerged on Monday.

“We’d hope that’s a worst-case scenario, but because we are already seeing an increase, I think it wouldn’t be unrealistic to expect that to go up significantly,” said Prof Alison Leary, chair of healthcare and workforce modelling at London South Bank University.

London’s absence rate was up by about 30%, depending on the organisation, which included people who were isolating because of positive tests, she told BBC Radio 4’s World at One.

Dr Ian Higginson, vice-president of the Royal College of Emergency Medicine, told the programme that the number of staff absences in NHS emergency departments could “push us over the edge”.

Severe staff shortages could also undermine efforts to keep pupils in schools, with headteachers in England saying that they [may be forced to send children home](#) if they do not have enough staff.

Despite a pledge by Boris Johnson to avoid a [repeat of January 2021](#), when the government insisted that schools would remain open, only for them to be closed after a U-turn, school leaders are warning that the rapid spread of Omicron could lead to mass absences for members of staff when schools reopen.

Geoff Barton, the general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, told the BBC that staff absences had been at “unsustainable” levels at some schools, with up to 25% of staff off in the week leading up to the Christmas break.

Staff shortages are also being felt across the board in other sectors such as transport, where rail operators have been running reduced services and

implementing measures such as running longer trains.

The Rail Delivery Group, the British rail industry membership body, said that in the seven days to Friday 24 December, on average 5.4% of trains were cancelled, compared with an [annual average of 2.9%](#). More recent data has yet to be made available.

Local authorities are also concerned about staff absences, which are particularly acute in adult social care, children's services and waste collection services. Its membership body, the Local Government Association, said that councils were concerned that existing staff shortages "could get worse".

Covid-related staff shortages were already biting when it came to basic day-to-day services. Lewisham council in London tweeted on Monday that its reuse and recycling centre was closed until Wednesday, and that black bin collections would be prioritised in the event of delays to rubbish and recycling services..

Jon Richard, the assistant general secretary of Unison, whose 1.3 million members are work predominantly in public services, told the Guardian: "Key health, council, care and police services have so many staff off that lots are worried they will not be able to keep going.

"That's why extra measures to curb virus spread are of the utmost importance in the coming weeks. Years of cuts have left services with just enough staff to get by in normal times. Now Omicron has put paid to that, leaving services in a perilous state."

The National Police Chiefs' Council said that it had continued to closely monitor absence rates within policing, which was not currently having an effect on forces' ability to provide their normal service to the public.

Lucy Moreton, a professional officer at the Immigration Services Union, said Covid-related absences in frontline services were rising, but she added that this was also being accompanied by non-Covid-related absence, in particular workplace-related stress.

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## [Coronavirus](#)

# England reports record 113,638 new Covid cases on Christmas Day

Official data also shows 98,515 cases on Monday, but experts say figures may not reflect true trends

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



People walking in Covent Garden, London, on Boxing Day. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

*[Nicola Davis](#) Science correspondent  
[@NicolaKSDavis](#)*

Mon 27 Dec 2021 12.31 EST

Covid cases in England reached a new high of 113,628 on Christmas Day and 1,281 people were admitted to hospital – the highest daily figure since mid-February.

Official data on new Covid cases, which was delayed over the festive period, also showed 98,515 new confirmed cases reported in England on Monday. Data for Boxing Day from England and Wales combined revealed 108,893 daily cases reported.

Case numbers have also hit new highs in Scotland, where 8,252 cases were reported for Christmas Day, 11,030 on Boxing Day and 10,562 on Monday.

Hospital admissions have also risen, with 1,281 people admitted in England on Christmas Day – the most recent available figure – up from 1,020 the day before and 735 on 18 December. Hospital admissions in England were at their highest almost a year ago, on 12 January, when they reached 4,134.

The number of patients in hospital is rising too. There were 8,474 people in hospital with Covid in England on Monday, up from 7,536 the day before. At the height of the wave last winter, the figure was more than 34,000.

Politicians are watching the situation in London closely, because infection rates are particularly high in the capital. Downing Street has been hoping that if admissions in London stay below 400 a day, restrictions will not be needed.

According to the latest data, 364 patients were admitted to hospital with Covid on Christmas Day in London, down slightly from a high of 390 admitted on 23 December. The number of people in hospital in the city has, however, continued to rise, with 2,640 patients recorded for 27 December.

Experts have said data for the period around Christmas may not give a true picture of the current situation.

“Data will be unreliable over the festive period as testing and hospital admission patterns change. This will make it difficult to interpret any apparent trends over the next few days,” documents released on Thursday by the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage) said.

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## 2021.12.28 - Spotlight

- 'Good anti-sinking capacity, lifejacket optional' Journey of a 'refugee boat'
- How did I survive care and prison? I was luckier than the sharp, funny kids I grew up with
- Escape your comfort zone! I am terrified of driving – but behind the wheel I find new confidence
- 'Not if ... but when' Sinn Féin on path to power in Ireland



A group of migrants get on an inflatable dinghy, as they leave the coast of northern France to cross the English Channel, in Wimereux near Calais, France  
Photograph: Stéphane Mahé/Reuters

## **‘Good anti-sinking capacity, lifejacket optional’: journey of a ‘refugee boat’**

A group of migrants get on an inflatable dinghy, as they leave the coast of northern France to cross the English Channel, in Wimereux near Calais, France  
Photograph: Stéphane Mahé/Reuters

From a factory in China to an English beach, rubber dinghies are acquired by people-smugglers to transport desperate people

by [Lorenzo Tondo Luke Harding](#) and [Vincent Ni](#)

Tue 28 Dec 2021 02.00 EST

Against the backdrop of Dunkirk's busy port with its cranes and smoke, a collapsed, grey rubber dinghy lies on the shore, abandoned and washed in by the tide.

It is one of the many haunting signs of the thousands of desperate people who have attempted to cross the Channel from northern [France](#).

Nearby lies a red lifejacket and a shoe, half-filled with sand. The vessel bears the name MaRe Boote, a German firm based in the small western Rhineland town of Werne, about 400 miles from Calais. According to German police, at least 24 MaRe boats have been used by migrants to make the perilous journey.

In a compound in Dover, where [boats seized after being used to carry people from France](#) are stored, there are dozens of dinghies of the same or similar model. According to British and French authorities, smugglers buy them in Germany, ship them to France, then transport them to the beach a few hours before departure.

The Guardian has traced the journey of a number of different types of dinghies used by the people smugglers, most of which are produced thousands of miles from Dover in China, where they are generally ordered by smugglers over the internet to be delivered to the main migration routes to [Europe](#).



An abandoned dinghy on the beach at Dunkirk. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian



Plage du Braek, near to Loon-Plage, Dunkirk, where migrants who drowned in November are said to have set off before their dinghy capsized in the Strait of Dover. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

“Most of the dinghies, about 11 metres long, are designed to carry safely a maximum of 15 people. The smugglers push them into the vastness of the

ocean even with 50 people on board,” said Salvatore Vella, chief prosecutor of Agrigento, Sicily, who has led the majority of investigations against smugglers operating in Libya.

“The risk for passengers aboard these rafts is very high,” Vella added. “They are among the main causes of death at sea for asylum seekers, because it is difficult for these boats to reach their destination if they are not rescued. To cut costs, smugglers buy low-quality, inflatable boats, with prices ranging between \$500 [£377] and \$2,000.”

A MaRe Boote dinghy, of the type found at Dunkirk, can be bought for about £2,000. There is no suggestion that the Mare Boats are substandard for normal use, or that they market their boats to people smugglers.

In the past, crossings were attempted in old fishing boats, barges and wooden and glass fibre boats, which smugglers had bought from Libyan, Turkish, Tunisian and Egyptian fishers.

However, since the peak of the migrant crisis in 2015, the European military missions to combat illegal immigration have begun to destroy these boats, with the aim of preventing them from being reused for people-smuggling.

As a result, across the main sea routes, from the central Mediterranean to Turkey and from the Canaries to the coast of Dover, the inflatable dinghy has become the most-used type of vessel to reach Europe.

Some dinghies, built with poor materials, are prone to deflate after just a few hours of navigation. Gradually, all their air chambers can collapse, even when the boat is stationary in a calm sea. Even the more expensive and better made German-sold models are unsuited to a Channel crossing when overloaded with dozens of people.



An inflatable craft carrying men, women and children crosses the shipping lane in the Channel off the coast of Dover. Photograph: Dan Kitwood/Getty

Although the Channel route may seem more accessible than the Mediterranean, in reality it is one of the most lethal passages. At its narrowest point – about 21 miles across – the Channel is one of the busiest seaways in the world, with a constant traffic of cargo and fishing vessels, passenger ferries, yachts and coastguard boats.

Carrying no lights and no technology to broadcast their own location or monitor the positions of other vessels, the rafts grope in the dark, virtually invisible to other ships. Onboard for emergencies, passengers only have a bike pump in case of deflation, and plastic bottles for bailing out water.

Last month 27 people, most of them Iraqi Kurds, [died when their boat sank in darkness in the Channel](#). The two survivors said the dinghy began to deflate about three-and-a-half hours after they set off from a beach near Dunkirk.

Those onboard tried to keep the dinghy afloat but their pump broke, the survivors said, and the dinghy eventually flipped over. The survivors claim they had reached British waters by this point and rang the UK calling for

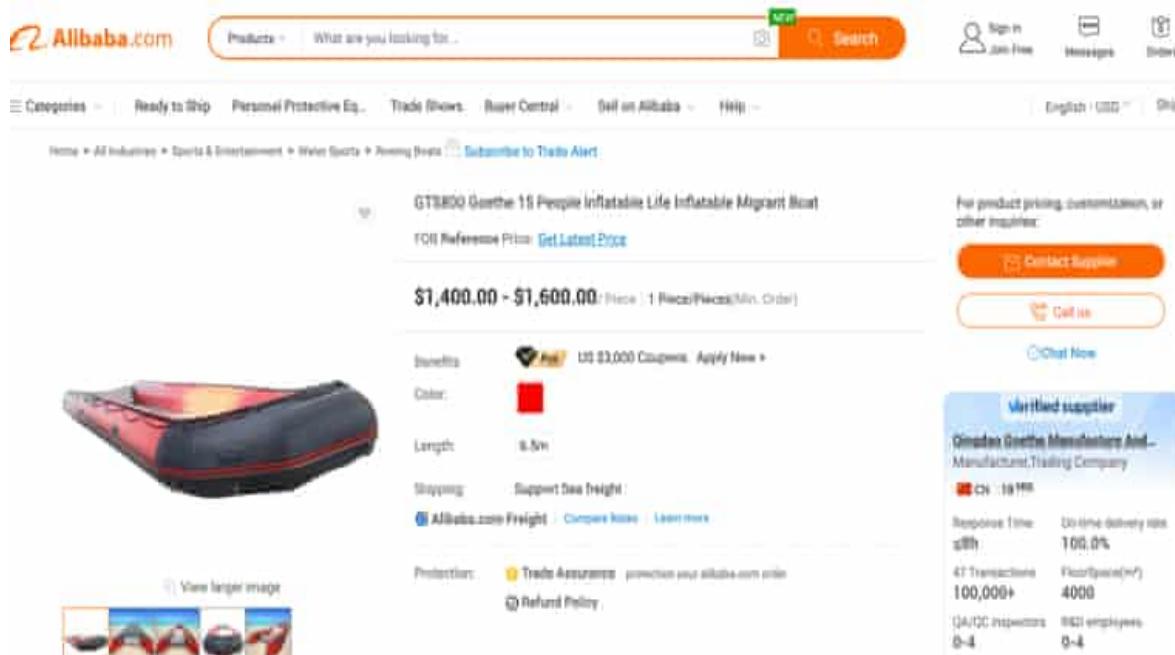
help – unsuccessfully. Eleven hours later, French fishers spotted bodies in the water.

“Costs for traffickers have dropped significantly with the use of rubber boats,” Vella said. “They can also be navigated by inexperienced men, chosen from among the migrants themselves. Plus, they’re easy to find. They can even be ordered on the web, in Asian markets.”

For many years the Chinese online shopping platform Alibaba.com offered inflatable boats for sale under the tag “refugee boat” or “migrant boat”.

A sales advert offered buyers a “high-quality refugee boat” for \$800 to \$1,100, for vessels made of plywood, aluminium and PVC that could carry up to 30 passengers and with lifejackets as “optional equipment”.

“The boat has a good anti-sinking capacity. When it is loaded to capacity (even if the boat is fully filled with water), it can still float,” read one of the ads seen by the Guardian.



A screenshot of a ‘migrant boat’ on sale on the internet (Alibaba.com).

After complaints from the EU, Alibaba.com said it would no longer “tolerate” sellers using its platform for this purpose. Since then, it says, most

references to “refugee boats” and “migrant boats” have been removed from its platform.

But a few weeks ago the Guardian found that links that contain “refugee boat”, “high quality refugee boat” and “inflatable migrant boat” were still valid on the e-commerce giant’s English-language website, even though most of the products listed under those pages no longer call themselves as such.

There was at least one advertisement that reads: “GTS800 15 People, Inflatable Migrant Boat, 6.5 metres long, with a 60cm diameter tube”. The supplier is a Qingdao-based company called Goethe.

A sales representative contacted by the Guardian said that 70% to 80% of the company’s sales had been to Europe this year – mostly to Germany and Greece. She said she was aware a Turkish customer had bought a boat for refugees a few years ago, but insisted this was “no longer happening” because of a Turkish government crackdown.

“We manufacture thousands of boats every year, with some 100 different models,” she said. “Inside China, [these] boats are made mainly in the Shandong and Guangdong provinces.”

But when asked about the “migrant boat” advertised on Alibaba.com, she said: “This is only a gimmick. It doesn’t mean very much.” She refused to disclose any details of Goethe’s clients, citing “corporate secret”.

Alibaba has since removed the pages found by the Guardian.

The Hangzhou-based company insists that it “will not tolerate those who seek to profit from this crisis”. “We are constantly engaged in efforts to ensure sellers on our platforms list products in an appropriate manner and in compliance with our policies,” it says in a statement to the Guardian.

A leaked EU-restricted document, written in 2016 by the officers of Operation Sophia, the EU’s mission to crack down on illegal people-smuggling routes across the Mediterranean, confirmed that Libya-based

smugglers were buying dinghies made in China and shipping them to north Africa via Malta.

The document cited an interception of about 20 packaged rubber boats “imported from China and transported to Malta and Turkey, in a container destined for Misrata, Libya”.

As there were no legal grounds for holding such shipments, the boats were released.



A group of migrants run on the beach with an inflatable dinghy near Wimereux, France. Photograph: Gonzalo Fuentes/Reuters

Vella said vessels used to take people to Greece are delivered to Turkey. Those that set off from Libya are sent to Malta or Turkish ports, from where they are shipped as cargo to Libya. The inflatables that cross the Channel are delivered to the heart of Europe, he said.

A report last month from the PAF border police (Police aux Frontières) found that “boats that come from China and are able to carry up to 60 migrants are stocked abroad, mainly in Germany”.

Marvin Reuter, the owner of MaRe Boote, the German firm whose logo has repeatedly appeared on some rubber dinghies attempting to cross the

Channel, agreed to speak to the Guardian.

The firm's [website says](#): "We build exceptional inflatables. High quality, individual, sporty, fast and uncompromisingly good."

Reuter said he felt "frustrated" after German police informed him that his inflatable boats, which cost about £2,000 each, were used by migrants to attempt the crossing from France to the UK. "I feel horrible about what these bad guys do with my boats," he said.

Reuter said the customers who bought the inflatables, which are manufactured in China, did so "legally", and took them away in a car, like everyone else.

Like other dinghy firms in Europe, Reuter said he was not able to determine if customers intended to use the vessels to transport people. "The problem is that customers who bought these vessels may have sold them to the bad guys."

Some smuggling gangs appear to be continuing to buy direct from China. Olivier Cahn, professor of criminal law at CY Cergy Paris University, said these included a well-organised criminal gang made up of Iraqi Kurds and operating from Calais. The gang was partially dismantled in November, with several arrests, after 27 people drowned.

The smugglers used dinghies ordered in China and shipped to Turkey, Cahn said. The vessels were then transported via the Balkans to Germany, where they were "unbundled" and handed over to teams of smugglers operating in Nord-Pas-de-Calais and Normandy.



Border force officials inspect an inflatable dinghy, discarded on a beach after being used by migrants to cross the Channel, in Walmer, Kent. Photograph: Dan Kitwood/Getty

Refugees the Guardian spoke to last month in a freezing camp on the outskirts of Dunkirk said smugglers charged €3,000 (£2,500) per person for the Channel crossing. In 2019, crossings intercepted by law enforcement agencies included an average of 12 individuals per boat; in 2021, this number rose to 27.

As the fees charged by criminal organisations are high, small “self-employed” groups are trying their luck, Cahn said. They expose themselves to the dangers of the sea on board makeshift dinghies, reinforced with sections of PVC attached with marine duct tape, or sheets of plywood fixed with screws.

Several large distribution companies in northern France, such as the sport equipment retailer Decathlon, no longer sell dinghies or canoes, to prevent migrants from attempting to use them to cross to England.

The rubber boats – after a journey of 6,000 miles, passing from the containers of cargo ships to the hubs of international airports, to the warehouses of European shops, from the hands of smugglers who fill them

with people – end up on the beaches of northern France and southern England, along with shoes and clothing.

The footwear and garments belong to men, women and children, whose fates, much of the time, remain unknown.

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## How I returned from rock bottomSocial care

# How did I survive care and being homeless? I was luckier than the sharp, funny kids I grew up with

After time in a children's home, and getting a criminal record, I got a break that helped me turn my life around and become a writer. Shamefully, I am a walking, talking anomaly



'Kids' homes felt more like prepping units for prison' ... Danny Lavelle aged 16.

[Daniel Lavelle](#)

Tue 28 Dec 2021 02.00 EST

My first time at rock bottom came early. I was an infant when my mum fled with me and my brother to a refuge, to escape violence at home. This period of fear was brief, but it left an indelible mark. The chaos and trauma from

these years manifested in my flailing limbs during desperate temper tantrums, in which my mum would hear every epithet I could think of while her whole bookcase crashed down our stairs.

For as long as I can remember, I have been told that there is something wrong with me, that I am different, naughty, need help; and that chemicals would make me better, make me good. Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder is the medicalised term for my condition, which proved incompatible with mainstream schools, where pirouetting in maths class like a drunk gymnast was not appreciated.

Academia and I went together like shards of glass on toast. My maths teachers assumed I had dyscalculia, my English teachers dyslexia. One teacher – let's call him Mr X – remarked that my grasp of grammar was “limp-wristed in the extreme”. (Mr X, if you are reading this, I started this sentence with a bracket, just for you – and now I am not going to close it.

I thought getting expelled from every mainstream school was my rock bottom, but I continued to fall. I was thrown out of my foster home and went to a children’s home, where I got my first taste of a police cell. A few kids had decided we should disassemble our wardrobes and launch them down the stairs because the staff, trying to prise us away from the telly after curfew, had turned off the electricity.

Kids’ homes in the 90s felt more like prepping units for prison. Bad behaviour meant being put “on basics”: no TV, stereo, sweets or pocket money. But those threats held no sway that evening. The staff, feeling they had lost control, dialled 999. We were twisted up and locked up. But our mischief nights only escalated. I visited the cells a few more times, earning a criminal record before I was 16. It is little surprise that children in care are far more likely [to become criminalised](#) than other children. But I still had further to fall.

The kids I grew up with were damaged by difficult lives, but they were sharp, resilient and funny

I spent most of my early adulthood unemployed. I was homeless before I turned 21. The library brought me a reprieve: I became an autodidact and eventually encountered real didacts when I made it to university at 23.

Finally, I thought, I had escaped the turmoil of my past, but it caught up with me. I had lived on my own since I was 17, but I had never learned – or been taught – to look after myself properly.

Over the three years at university, I racked up thousands of pounds of arrears, gained tens of pounds in weight and became a drink-sodden recluse. It ended with me graduating while living in [an Emmaus community for homeless people](#).

I have thought long and hard about how I bounced back from all this. If I am honest, I don't know. In a way, it doesn't matter. What matters more is that I am a walking, talking anomaly. How many people like me [write for national newspapers](#), or [write books](#)? We all have a lowest point, but many people can latch on to loved ones and resurface. Others fall too far to return undamaged. Almost everyone I lived with through the care system has been in and out of prison, strung out, off the map; some are dead.

We should judge a civilised society by how it treats its most vulnerable citizens – and the British state is an appalling parent. The children in its charge are more likely to be criminalised and exploited than other children; [teenage pregnancies](#) occur at a higher rate, as do [substance dependency and mental illness](#). Then, when the state's kids reach 18, they are expected to fend for themselves entirely. It should be no surprise that so many end up destitute, as I did.

I could write about how picking up a pen and expressing myself gave me purpose – and it did. But, in reality, I was just lucky. And it shouldn't be good fortune when a looked-after child makes it in our society. The kids I grew up with were damaged by difficult lives, but they were sharp, resilient and funny. Who knows what they could have become if the government had taken its parental role seriously? If we want the reason looked-after children can thrive to be down to more than chance, we must try harder – and care

more. Only then will more people with stories like mine make it back from their rock bottom.

The headline of this article was amended on 28 December 2021 because an earlier version wrongly indicated that the writer had spent time in jail.

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[Escape your comfort zone!Motoring](#)

## **Escape your comfort zone: I am terrified of driving – but behind the wheel I find new confidence**



On the road again ... Ammar Kalia behind the wheel. Photograph: Sarah Lee/The Guardian

After one too many rainy nights waiting for the bus, I decide to face my ultimate fear. Can I learn to drive, despite a disastrous attempt in my teens?



[Ammar Kalia](#)

Tue 28 Dec 2021 04.00 EST

It has been 10 years since I last stalled a car. I was 18 and drifting across several lanes of an A-road roundabout while my driving test examiner gripped his seat. It was my second attempt at taking the test and my brain had turned into sweaty spaghetti. As I casually cut in front of an HGV, the examiner gasped and demanded I take the next exit. I mirrored, signalled and manoeuvred, found a safe space to pull up, and promptly stalled metres from the curb.

I failed – of course I did – and didn’t get back in the driver’s seat in a hurry. I finished school and went to university, always deferring the prospect of booking another test. Years passed, priorities shifted, and even though I kept telling myself that driving is a scourge on the environment, a decade of scrounging lifts from my friends and family has taken its toll.

After one too many nights standing in the rain waiting for the bus, I decided it was time to get back behind the wheel. On a blindingly sunny but bitterly cold autumn morning, I emerge blinking into the light to meet my new

instructor, Vikram. I find myself feeling more nervous than I expected as he starts the car. Are people staring at me? Do they think it's embarrassing that I'm learning so late?

He begins by taking me through various safety features with the help of a laminated picture book. I want to tell him that I know all of this already, but I soon realise I actually never knew how to open a car door properly (using the arm that is furthest away from the latch, known as the Dutch reach). After what feels like an eternity of animated diagrams and looking into assorted mirrors, I get behind the wheel, fire up the engine, get into gear – and stall. But Vikram reassures me this is to be expected and, over the next five minutes, I cruise around the block.

Despite my approximately 10mph speeds, I return home exhausted yet full of adrenaline. When I meet Vikram again a week later, I am fizzing with fear and excitement. This time, I'm in the driving seat immediately, but the level of concentration needed reduces my communication to a pre-verbal gurgle.

I am merely a recipient of Vikram's calm instruction now, nervously taking him on a slow journey to nowhere. Yet, surprisingly, I don't falter; I'm in third gear and I feel I could take myself anywhere – as long as Vikram and his dual control pedals were there, too.

I keep driving for at least 45 minutes and, despite a police car following us down several streets, it's a success. I am frustrated that I left it so long before trying again but pleased to be back, giving it another go. Vikram assures me that "smart drivers take less time to pass", so I should be able to take my test again after only a dozen or so lessons. I'm not sure how much I can buy into that flattery yet – mentally or monetarily – but I feel more sure now that there is a time for everything, and that perhaps 18-year-old me just wasn't ready. In that spirit, I am re-booking my theory test for the new year, with dreams of driving myself to see friends far and wide by this time in 2022 – without stalling at the first roundabout.

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## Sinn Féin

# ‘Not if ... but when’: Sinn Féin on path to power in Ireland

The party is riding high in polls and could complete a seismic shift in Irish politics in three years’ time



‘I want to be taoiseach,’ the Sinn Féin leader, Mary Lou McDonald, told the party’s annual conference. Photograph: Damien Storan/PA

*[Lisa O'Carroll in Dublin](#)*

*[@lisaocarroll](#)*

Tue 28 Dec 2021 00.00 EST

Just 30 years ago the IRA was bombing Downing Street, launching three mortar bombs at No 10 while John Major presided over a cabinet meeting.

In 2021, [Sinn Féin](#), the political party associated with the IRA for much of the Troubles, has moved into pole position to lead the Irish government in

what could be the biggest shake-up of the state's politics since its foundation 100 years ago.

Ireland is three years out from the next general election and a victory for Sinn Féin or any other party is far from assured, but the slow seismic shift in Irish politics has barely merited a mention outside the country despite the change in dynamics it is already creating.

"It is not a question of if, it's when Sinn Féin will be in power," said one prominent businessman who did not want to be named.

Such is their transformation south of the border and the continued courting of the middle classes, that it is creating tensions over the party identity north of the border.

Before Christmas one of its most respected TDs, the spokesperson for housing, Eoin Ó Broin, called on [Gerry Adams to apologise for a Christmas sketch](#), joking about a slogan associated with the IRA. In a bygone era this subordination would have been a matter of discipline.

Commentators have put the party's remarkable growth south of the border partly down to the transformational powers of its leader, [Mary Lou McDonald](#), who has no connection with the Troubles era and is perceived as a radical break with the past.

But it is also down to a change in tactics – putting issues such as housing, the economy and health ahead of a united Ireland – that is seen as extending its appeal beyond the working-class estates that were formerly its stronghold.



Sinn Féin MPs Owen Carron and Gerry Adams with Christy Burke, the party's candidate for Dublin Central, in 1983. Photograph: Independent News and Media/Getty Images

Poll after poll shows it stretching its lead after a breakthrough year over the two parties that have dominated Irish politics for a century. According to a mid-December [Irish Times/Ipsos MRBI poll](#), support for Sinn Féin now stands at 35%, a seemingly unbridgeable gap for the two main parties of the coalition government – Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael – who were at 20% apiece. Previous polls have put Sinn Féin at 32% and 33%.

The Labour peer Andrew Adonis, who went to Dublin in October to observe the party at its conference and has written a 3,000-word piece for February's issue of Prospect on its rise, said: "You can see a political revolution taking place before your eyes.

"This is going to sound like an amazing thing to say but it is true, the thirst for power and the discipline behind the leader to win power reminded me of New Labour in the 1990s."

The businessman spoke of how the party was polishing its electability day by day, making pronouncements to remove traces of links to past darkness and announcing policies deliberately aimed at "detoxifying" Sinn Féin for

the middle classes. Notably, it did not fight the government on low corporate tax, and has said it will only increase taxes for “the top 3%”.

McDonald told the party faithful gathered for the *Ard Fheis* that the pandemic had exposed the broken housing system, a dearth of rental accommodation, the inadequate health service, and the rising cost of living. Soon after she flew to the US, where she gave speeches to the National Press Club in Washington DC and the New York Bar Association on the impact of Brexit on [Northern Ireland](#) and the potential for the unification of the island of Ireland.

The party has also been reaching out to business groups in an effort to detoxify its standing in corporate circles. A report in Ireland’s [Sunday Business Post](#) noted that while McDonald “likes to accuse the government of rolling out the red carpet for vulture funds and institutional investors”, its analysis of the lobbying register revealed that commercial entities who had previously avoided contact with the party were trying to open channels of communication.

Sinn Féin is a secretive and highly disciplined party, with its members rarely out of step with what the leadership commands. The report also said McDonald instructed its members to reach out to businesses, unions and sectoral groups as part of preparations for government.

The chance of a Sinn Féin in government in Dublin raises the prospect of the republican party in power both north and south of the border, something that could change the relationship with the UK dramatically and influence the debate, which is gathering pace south of the border, on the prospect of a united Ireland.

Polls show that it has a chance of being the largest party in the May 2022 elections for the Stormont assembly.



Sinn Féin souvenirs on sale before a 2020 public meeting at Liberty Hall, Dublin. Photograph: Lorraine O'Sullivan/Reuters

Its rise in the Republic was first signalled in 2020 when after a surge in support it won the most first preference votes in the February general election. The results did not translate into power because the party fielded 42 candidates in a race for 159, but “generated momentous shifts within the political landscape”, said Agnès Maillet, a politics lecturer at Dublin City University and author of *Rebels in Government*, a new book on Sinn Féin. “Until 2020, its progress could be described as a protest vote,” she said.

The historian Diarmaid Ferriter said 2020 marked greater success with middle-class and affluent voters and the party had evolved by “compromising and adapting”. “This is the party of Gerry Adams’ legacy. In many respects he is the architect of this in the sense that he adapted Sinn Féin for constitutional purposes ... He qualified their purist positions at various junctures from the 1980s onwards.”

Ferriter said the expediency of Sinn Féin was nothing new. The party used to abstain from politics in Westminster and Dublin, abandoning its stance on the latter in the late 1980s. Another important juncture was the 1998 referendum removing an article in Ireland’s constitution claiming

sovereignty over 32 counties to pave the way for the Good Friday agreement.

“Their acceptance of the existence of Northern Ireland was another juncture as they were accepting the principle of consent. All these compromises made them more palatable,” said Ferriter.

Sinn Féin’s future success will depend on how it fares in opposition over the next three years as popular policies on housing and health come under more scrutiny and the question of its past gets pushed to the fore.

Ferriter drew parallels with Fianna Fáil in the wake of the civil war and independence in 1921. It was marked as a party “in the shadow of the gunmen” but “got over that fairly quickly by emphasising they had impeccable conservative credentials and they weren’t communist and they weren’t godless”, he said.

“Sinn Féin will obviously be dealing with the legacies from the Troubles which crop up every so often but it doesn’t seem to dent their momentum, which suggests that this change is generational,” he added.

Kevin Cunningham, a former targeting and analysis manager for the UK’s Labour party who is now a lecturer in politics at Technological University Dublin, sees Sinn Féin’s rise as a function of a nation growing in confidence and shifting away from the politics of civil war that created the two main parties on the island.

“Since around 1980 and the decline in religiosity of Ireland, you see a fairly steady rise in the number of people voting for, or supporting, political parties that identify themselves on the left,” he said.

“Fianna Fáil plus the Fine Gael vote stood at around 80% all the way up to 1980 and then decade after decade it just steadily declined.

“Other parties existed on the left through those years. The [Social] Democrats and the Labour party, in particular, have been unbelievably weak but at the same time there has been a subset of the population self-identifying as being on the left and Sinn Féin’s capturing that and to some

extent that is the kind of normalisation of politics in Ireland.” He added: “When we ask people why they vote for Sinn Féin the dominant reason is that they want a change from Fianna Fail and Fine Gael. Very few people cite anything that the party or its leader is promoting”.

This article was amended on 28 & 29 December 2021. In an earlier version the quote from Kevin Cunningham referred to “the Progressive Democrats” when “Social Democrats” was meant. A further quote from Cunningham was added. Also a reference to Sinn Féin as “founded in 1905” was removed. To clarify: The republican movement founded in that year evolved into a number of organisations which carried the name. The party now led by McDonald was founded in 1970.

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## 2021.12.28 - Coronavirus

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## Schools

# England could fit Covid air filters to all classrooms for half cost of royal yacht

Scientists say air purifiers would help stop virus spreading in schools as fears grow of teacher shortages

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



Supplying an air purifier to every classroom in the UK would cost about £140m according to the Liberal Democrats. Photograph: Anthony Harvey/REX/Shutterstock

*Jessica Elgot* Deputy political editor

[@jessicaelgot](#)

Mon 27 Dec 2021 11.32 EST

England could fit an air purifier to every classroom for half the price of the new royal yacht, a move which scientists and campaigners say would significantly reduce the spread of Covid in schools.

The move would cost about £140m, according to calculations by the Liberal Democrats. Government sources have said there will be no delay to the start of the school term, despite [surging Omicron cases](#), and that any additional restrictions will not include classroom closures.

Schools, however, have said high numbers of teacher absences as a result of self-isolation could mean they are [forced to send whole year groups home](#). The education secretary, [Nadhim Zahawi](#), has called on retired teachers and those who have left the profession to help fill the gaps.

The general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, Geoff Barton, told the Telegraph that classroom closures could occur if schools had no alternative.

“If you have a fixed pool available of those who can teach young people, then the only final resort schools and colleges have is to start thinking about the certain year groups that should be prioritised in the short term,” he said.

Government guidance suggests teachers should open external windows and internal doors to improve natural ventilation and schools “should balance the need for increased ventilation while maintaining a comfortable temperature”. Opening windows is likely to be more difficult when schools return in cold January temperatures.

The Lib Dem education spokesperson, Munira Wilson, said the government’s advice to use CO2 monitors was less effective because they give information on where more airflow is needed but do not affect the flow itself.

Headteachers have also criticised the cost of the [government’s preferred supplier for air filters](#) – one of the units, made by Camfil City M, costs £1,170 and a Dyson model costs £424.82.

Wilson said schools should not be paying for the units at all. “Failure to act right now will fail our children in the future. The government has a week to solve this, otherwise pupils will be left out in the cold and missing out on vital learning once again,” she said.

“Nadhim Zahawi gave a cast-iron guarantee that schools would stay open. Unless he gets a grip on this quickly, he will be adding to the countless broken promises from this Government. Worse still, he will be breaking a promise to all our children.”

The German government invested £452m in October 2020 in improving ventilation systems in public buildings, including schools, including upgrading air conditioning systems and air purifiers, described by the then-chancellor Angela Merkel as “one of the cheapest and most effective ways” of tackling Covid spread.

New York City has also undertaken extensive ventilation surveys and distributed about 100,000 high efficiency particulate air (Hepa) purifiers.

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## Coronavirus

# US alarm at rise in child Covid infections sees school closures back on agenda

Omicron threat stokes fears coast to coast but leading public health expert says ‘We know how to keep schools open and safe’

- [Guilt and frustration of breakthrough Covid](#)



A pedestrian carries a child in Times Square in New York City. Photograph: John Angelillo/UPI/REX/Shutterstock

*[Edward Helmore](#) in New York*

Mon 27 Dec 2021 02.00 EST

As US regional health authorities reacted with alarm to a jump in child Covid infections that caused some school districts to announce returns to

remote learning, a leading public health official questioned the need for schools to close, saying: “We know how to keep schools open, we know how to keep them safe.”

Over the past three weeks, as Omicron-related cases soared in [New York](#) City and elsewhere, the number of children hospitalised in New York with Covid-19 quadrupled, the state health department said.

The California state epidemiologist Dr Erica Pan [wrote](#) on Twitter: “Unfortunately New York is seeing an increase in pediatric hospitalisations (primarily amongst the unvaccinated), and they have similar [five- to 11-year-old] vaccination rates.”

Across New York state, about 16% of five- to 11-year-olds and 71% of 12- to 17-year-olds are fully vaccinated.

“Please give your children the gift of vaccine protection as soon as possible as our case [numbers] are increasing rapidly,” Pan wrote.

Rising numbers of pediatric cases have convinced officials in some states to order a return to remote learning after the winter break. Around 300 schools in Maryland, [New Jersey](#), New Mexico and New York will remain closed.

In Mount Vernon, a New York suburb, virtual learning is scheduled until at least 18 January.

“I have been very reluctant to close schools but given the current trends in Covid cases it would be risky not to do so,” district superintendent Kenneth Hamilton wrote.

In [Maryland](#), Prince George’s county public schools, one of the 20 largest districts in the US, transitioned more than 136,500 students to virtual learning last week.

The district chief executive, Monica Goldson, told families staff “must be able to deliver in-person instruction and other activities in conditions that prioritise their own health, as well as the wellbeing of the school community.

“The increased positivity rates have significantly challenged the ability to do so, causing anxiety among many school communities and disruption to the school day.”

In New Jersey, Paterson public schools will start 2022 with two weeks remote.

“A surge of new cases has occurred in north-eastern New Jersey and it is expected that the trend will continue through the holiday break,” said the superintendent, Eileen Shafer.

Some officials have expressed frustration. Dan Domenech, director of the School Superintendents Association, [told Newsweek](#): “Just when we thought this past October – when we had about 98% of kids back in schools in person – that things were moving in the right direction, here we are right back where we were last year.”

On Sunday, a leading health expert questioned the need for any schools to close.

Ashish Jha, dean of the Brown University School of Public Health, told Fox News Sunday: “We know how to keep schools open, we know how to keep them safe. This really shouldn’t even be on the table. I’m disappointed to see this happening.

“We know that for kids being in school is the right thing for them, for their mental health, for their education. And we have all sorts of tools to keep schools open so I don’t really understand why school districts are [closing schools].

“... There could be times when you have such severe short staffing shortages that it may be hard to keep schools going. That really should be the only context I think at this point.”

Concern about Omicron infections among children remains high, however. On Friday, Christmas Eve, the New York health department [warned](#) healthcare providers of rising numbers of child hospitalisations around New York City, where Omicron was first recorded on US soil.

The department warned that admissions rose four-fold from the week starting 5 December to the week starting 19 December. Approximately half the admissions were of children under five and thus not eligible for vaccines. For the week starting 19 December, none of the five- to 11-year-old patients were fully vaccinated.

“The risks of Covid-19 for children are real,” said acting state health commissioner Dr Mary Bassett. “We are alerting New Yorkers to this recent striking increase in pediatric Covid-19 admissions so that pediatricians, parents and guardians can take urgent action to protect our youngest New Yorkers.”

The health department advised parents to protect “children who are five years and older by getting them fully vaccinated and protect children under five by making sure all of those around them have protection through vaccination, boosters, mask-wearing, avoiding crowds and testing”.

The California public health director, Dr Tomás Aragón, warned to expect rising admissions there.

“Why? Omicron is so contagious that it finds unvaccinated/non-immune people who are most vulnerable for hospitalisations and deaths.”

Throughout the pandemic, experts have said children are less likely to develop serious illness. For the week from 9 to 16 December, the American Academy of Pediatrics reported 169,964 pediatric Covid-19 cases, representing 1.8% to 4.1% of hospitalised patients.

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## [France](#)

# France cuts third booster jab delay to three months amid Omicron spread

Prime minister Jean Castex also announces limits on public gatherings and mandatory home working

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Jean Castex, France's prime minister, announces new measures to curb the spread of Omicron variant. Photograph: Stéphane de Sakutin/AFP/Getty Images

*Reuters in Paris*  
Mon 27 Dec 2021 14.45 EST

France has narrowed the delay for a third booster shot to three months from four in response to the rapid spread of [Omicron](#), but there will be no curfew for New Year's Eve.

Jean Castex, the French prime minister, also said that from Monday and for the next three weeks all public gatherings would be limited to 2,000 people for indoor events, and to 5,000 people for outdoor events.

Consumption of drinks and food would be banned in long-distance transport and home working would become mandatory for at least three days a week where possible, Castex said. The government also decided to make face masks mandatory outdoors in city centres, under the authority of local government representatives.

[France](#) reported 30,383 new cases of coronavirus on Monday.

"I know that it feels like a film without ending, but a year ago we started our vaccination campaign and now we are one of the best vaccinated and best protected people in the world," Castex told a news conference following a cabinet meeting.

[Graph showing an increase in the number of Covid cases in France.](#)

Castex said that the government's planned vaccine pass – which will require proof of vaccination, not just a negative test – would take effect from 15 January, if parliament approves a draft government bill.

Castex also said that food and drink in bars and restaurants would have to be consumed seated, not standing.

Unlike other countries that had delayed the return of pupils to school, French schools would reopen as planned on 4 January, Castex said.

Castex said that the Covid incidence rate – the number of infections per 100,000 people a week – was now well over 700 and at a record level since the start of the epidemic.

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## Teacher shortages

# Staff shortages could force schools in England to send some pupils home

Headteachers say absence caused by spread of Omicron variant could undermine government's effort to keep children in schools

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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The head of the Association of School and College Leaders said schools may have to prioritise classroom teaching for those year groups taking GCSEs and A-levels. Photograph: David Jones/PA

*[Richard Adams](#) Education editor*

Mon 27 Dec 2021 07.59 EST

Severe staff shortages could undermine the government's efforts to keep pupils in schools, with headteachers in [England](#) saying that they may be forced to send some children home if they cannot muster enough staff.

Despite a pledge by Boris Johnson to avoid a [repeat of January 2021](#), when the government insisted schools would remain open only for them to be closed after an abrupt U-turn, school leaders are warning that the rapid spread of the Omicron variant could lead to mass absences for teachers and other members of staff when schools reopen for the new year.

Geoff Barton, the general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, told the BBC that staff absences had been at “unsustainable” levels at some schools, with up to 25% of staff off in the week leading up to the Christmas break.

“We don’t know what next week will look like. We’re not catastrophising that but we are saying we must have a sense of realism around this,” he said.

Paul Whiteman, the general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, said it would be “naive” to think Omicron would not have an impact on schools when they reopen. “It does seem as though choppy waters lie ahead and that some form of disruption at the start of next term is looking sadly inevitable.”

Barton said he “absolutely agrees” with the government’s guidance allowing schools to restrict attendance only as a last resort, but argued that school leaders would need to make difficult choices if there were widespread staff absences.

“The problem is that if you are running a primary school, and you have got 20 staff and seven of them can’t come in next week, and the pool of supply teachers that you would normally call upon – that is, people have got a relationship with your school and therefore will come and step in at the last minute or a supply agency that will charge you money for doing that at a higher rate – that pool is limited,” Barton said.

“You will find yourself in a very difficult position of perhaps trying to teach two classes at once in the hall, stuff which will not be good for the quality of education, or you will be in the position of making a decision about whether some year groups should be in school while some aren’t.”

Barton said secondary school leaders could be faced with the dilemma of prioritising classroom teaching for year groups taking exams ahead of teaching for others, “because GCSEs and A-levels really need to go ahead if possible this year”.

Last week the [Department for Education](#) launched a public relations campaign to encourage former teachers in England to sign up with supply agencies, with the education secretary, Nadhim Zahawi, urging people “to come forward if they are available to temporarily fill absences in schools and colleges in the new year.”

The Daily Telegraph reported that DfE sources were unable to confirm how many had actually signed up with agencies so far, but that it was “at least hundreds”.

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## 2021.12.28 - Opinion

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- Telling people to ‘follow the science’ won’t save the planet. But they will fight for justice
- The true meaning of 6 January: we must answer Trump’s neofascism with hope
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What I changed my mind about in 2021  
Kent

## I moved to the coast for a better life – now I'm back in London where I belong

[Laura Barton](#)



Last spring, just when everyone else was fleeing the capital, I was returning, hungry for all its glorious chaos



Cliffs outside the Port of Dover, December 2020. Photograph: Justin Tallis/AFP/Getty Images

Tue 28 Dec 2021 01.00 EST

Most days I would walk along the coast road, past the bungalows facing the Channel, where the sea was implacably grey, and the gardens so neatly plotted that the space between each tulip, each daffodil, seemed to have been measured with graticule precision. Each day I would ask myself: “What am I doing here?”

I had left [London](#) in the summer of 2014. Having flirted with the idea of moving to Los Angeles, instead I chose the Kent coast, then in the early flush of regeneration. I was looking for something that felt more like a community, close enough for creativity to mingle. Somewhere, perhaps, to finally feel settled.

But last spring, I returned to London – sneaking back into the city just as everyone else seemed to be heading the other way. The media then was giddy with stories of those who had escaped to the country, giving up cramped east London flats for manor houses in Somerset with enough room for chickens and rainbow chard, or moving to Thanet and taking up early morning sea-swimming.

The figures seemed to back it up. At the start of this year, the accountancy firm PwC published a report predicting that [about 300,000 people](#) could leave London in 2021. The previous August, a [London assembly survey](#) was even more striking: 416,000 people planned to move out of the city in the following 12 months. There were many causes: lower international migration thanks to Brexit and the pandemic, fewer graduates moving to the capital, and the increased possibility of home working meaning the once office-bound could be pretty much anywhere.

I received countless messages in those months from colleagues gleefully announcing they were emailing from their new farmhouse kitchen or in their cottage by the sea. “I don’t even miss the city!” they would say. “The kids are so happy, and we have a garden, and I can work in my tracksuit. I don’t think I’ll ever go back to the old life.” I understood. I had been a version of this too, once.

I didn’t suddenly fall out of love with coastal life this year; it had been fading for some while. But this was the year I realised I absolutely had to get out. Before I vandalised my neighbours’ tulips, or walked out into the sea.

It’s easy, I think, for new arrivals to cluster together, bonding over a shared choices of schools, restaurants, social events. But this in turn kindles an insularity. As more and more people moved down from London, talking, endlessly, about the fact that they had left London, some days I could barely breathe with the sheer suburbanness of it all.

Everywhere hung the air of self-congratulation. It was cliquish, and gossipy, and parochial – I don’t think I’ve felt so excluded, or so sneered-at, since I was at secondary school. Meanwhile, the newcomers navigated endless squabbles, affairs, sourdough rivalries. “It has become The Archers,” a friend who still lives there told me recently.

I thought about the city and all the things I missed – galleries and gigs and theatres, city parks, city trees, architecture, friends, restaurants, 24-hour grocery shops stocked with everything from za’atar to rambutan, the pace of it, the constant evolution, the sheer multicultural wonder of it all. More than anything I missed people who talked about things other than themselves. The possibility it offered. The quiet, beautiful anonymity.

London might not be my city for ever, but this year it has been a joy to return – to be part of its glorious tangle again. The morning after I moved, I walked around my new neighbourhood, under the plane trees, past my new neighbours' gardens: cherry blossom, wisteria, hollyhocks, palms; giant ferns, hydrangea, parrot tulips springing at odd angles, and finally I exhaled. At last, I thought, I have escaped back to the city.

- Laura Barton is a writer and broadcaster specialising in music
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**Opinion****Climate crisis**

# Telling people to ‘follow the science’ won’t save the planet. But they will fight for justice

[Amy Westervelt](#)

The climate emergency has clear themes with heroes and villains. Describing it this way is how to build a movement



A protest during the Cop26 climate conference in Glasgow, Scotland, 10 November 2021 Photograph: Yves Herman/Reuters

Tue 28 Dec 2021 03.00 EST

The biggest success of the fossil fuel industry’s decades-long campaign to push doubt about climate science is that it forced the conversation about the climate crisis to centre on science.

It's not that we didn't need scientific research into climate change, or that we don't need plenty more of it. Or even that we don't need to do a better job of explaining basic science to people, across the board (hello, Covid). But at this moment, "believe science" is too high a bar for something that demands urgent action. Believing science requires understanding it in the first place. In the US, the world's [second biggest](#) carbon polluter, fewer than 40% of the population are college educated and in many states, schools in the public system don't have climate science on the curriculum. So where should this belief – strong enough to push for large-scale social and behavioural change – be rooted exactly?

People don't need to know anything at all about climate science to know that a profound injustice has occurred here that needs to be righted. It's not a scientific story, it's a story of fairness: people with more power and money than you used information about climate change to shore up their own prospects and told you not to worry about it.

That story is backed up by not only the [internal memos](#) of various oil companies, and the [discrepancies between those internal communications](#) and what they were telling the public, but also by their patents. In 1973, [Exxon secured a patent](#) for an oil tanker that could easily navigate a melting Arctic. In 1974, Texaco was [granted a patent](#) for a mobile drilling platform in a melting Arctic. Chevron [got a patent for its version](#) of a melting-Arctic-ready drilling platform that same year. Shell was a bit behind; it got its melting-Arctic drilling platform design [patented in 1983](#).

When she was shown this evidence of oil companies' preparations for a warming world, Lori French was shocked. French's family fish for crab off the coast of California, and their business has been rocked by warming waters over the past several years. But she and her husband are not big "believers" in climate catastrophe. "We're kind of both of the opinion that climate change has happened since the beginning of time," she says.

You might be surprised to learn that she told me this in 2019, shortly after her family and several other crabbers had signed on to support [a lawsuit by their trade association](#) against the 30 largest oil companies in the world for their role in delaying action on climate. Not because of science, but because

of fairness. They were shown various documents detailing how the fossil fuel industry had been preparing to not just weather climate impacts but continue to profit as the glaciers melted.

“When we saw that information, that was a definite gamechanger,” she told me. “It was like, oh there’s this higher thing controlling the choices you’re allowed to have. And I would like to believe, in my Pollyanna world, that most people are operating on an honest, level playing field. But they don’t.”

For French, it didn’t really matter whether climate change is caused by burning fossil fuels or natural planetary force. She sidestepped the origin story of climate change and instead focused on the injustice inherent in preparing your own business for trouble while telling everyone else not to worry.

Climate change is affecting fisheries all over the world, of course, and displacing entire communities. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), climate change is [already affecting](#) every region on Earth, in multiple ways, from rising seas to intensifying storms and wildfires. The [World Bank predicts](#) more than 200 million people are likely to migrate over the next three decades because of extreme weather events or the disappearance of their homelands. In 2020, 30.7 million people were [internally displaced](#) by disasters, over three times more than conflict and violence (9.8 million people). That displacement – like other climate impacts – is hitting communities in the global south first, and will [disproportionately affect](#) poor and working-class people all over the world.

Meanwhile, in the same decade during which scientists’ warnings about climate change have grown more dire, social science researchers [have discovered](#) that there is almost no correlation between public understanding of climate science and risk perception, and thus little to no relationship between grasping the science of climate change, believing the scientists’ warnings, and doing anything at all about it.

There [is a relationship](#), though, between Americans’ awareness of inequality or injustice and their willingness to support social change. [A Norwegian study](#) surveying the impact of various climate stories found that those with heroes and villains had “a large persuasive impact” on readers. [A study](#) of

students in six countries found that a justice framework spurred young people to act on the climate.

For more evidence that a righteous sense of indignation, rather than a scientific understanding of problems, drives social change, you need only look at history. The US entering the second world war (the war effort people most like to compare with what's needed to address climate change)? Check. The civil rights, consumer protection, women's rights, anti-war and gay rights movements? Check again. All driven by moral outrage at the power being wielded by the few over the many.

Climate crisis is not a scientific or technical problem, it is an issue of justice and political will. Acting on it calls into question not just our energy source, but our power structures, catalysing widespread social change. The only thing that's ever really succeeded in doing that are justice movements – public outcries over blatant injustice and a demand for change. If progressives and climate activists want to have any hope of spurring the kind of movement necessary to shift political and economic interests away from fossil fuels, it's time to put aside "believe science" and instead embrace a broad fight for justice.

- Amy Westervelt is a climate journalist and the founder and executive producer of the Critical Frequency podcast network
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[Opinion](#)[US Capitol attack](#)

## **The true meaning of 6 January: we must answer Trump's neofascism with hope**

[Robert Reich](#)



As the first anniversary of the Capitol attack nears, all decent Americans must commit to deprogram this Republican cult. Doing so will mean paying attention to those we left behind



Trump told the crowd at the 6 January rally: ‘We will never give up. We will never concede.’ Photograph: Shannon Stapleton/Reuters

Tue 28 Dec 2021 01.00 EST

6 January will be the first anniversary one of the most shameful days in American history. On that date in 2021, the United States Capitol was attacked by thousands of armed loyalists to Donald Trump, some intent on killing members of Congress. About [140 officers were injured](#). Five people died.

Even now, almost a year later, Americans remain confused and divided about the significance of what occurred. Let me offer four basic truths:

## **1. Trump incited the attack on the Capitol**

For weeks before the attack, Trump urged supporters to come to Washington for a “Save America March” on 6 January, when Congress was to ceremonially count the electoral votes of Joe Biden’s win.

“Big protest in DC on 6 January. Be there, will be wild!” he tweeted on 19 December. Then on 26 December: “See you in Washington DC on 6

January. Don't miss it. Information to follow." On 30 December: "JANUARY SIXTH, SEE YOU IN DC!" On 1 January: "The BIG Protest Rally in Washington DC will take place at 11am on 6 January. Locational details to follow. StopTheSteal!"

At a rally just before the violence, Trump repeated his falsehoods about how the election was stolen.

"We will never give up," he said. "We will never concede. It will never happen. You don't concede when there's theft involved. Our country has had enough. We will not take it anymore."

He told the crowd Republicans were constantly fighting like a boxer with his hands tied behind his back, respectful of everyone – "including bad people".

But, he said, "we're going to have to fight much harder ... We're going to walk down to the Capitol, and we're going to cheer on our brave senators and congressmen and women, and we're probably not going to be cheering so much for some of them, because you'll never take back our country with weakness. You have to show strength, and you have to be strong ... We fight like hell. And if you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore."

The Republican party is close to becoming a cult whose central idea is that the 2020 election was stolen from Trump

He then told the crowd that "different rules" applied to them.

"When you catch somebody in a fraud, you are allowed to go by very different rules. So I hope Mike [Pence] has the courage to do what he has to do, and I hope he doesn't listen to the Rinos [Republicans in Name Only] and the stupid people that he's listening to."

Then he dispatched the crowd to the Capitol as the electoral count was about to start. The attack came immediately after.

## **2. The events of 6 January capped two months during which Trump sought to reverse the outcome of the election**

Shortly after the election, Trump summoned to the White House Republican lawmakers from [Pennsylvania](#) and [Michigan](#), to inquire about how they might alter election results. He even called two local canvassing board officials in Wayne county, Michigan's most populous county and one that overwhelmingly favored Biden.

He asked Georgia's Republican secretary of state to "[find 11,780 votes](#)", according to a recording of that conversation, adding: "The people of Georgia are angry, the people of the country are angry. And there's nothing wrong with saying that, you know, um, that you've recalculated."

He suggested that the secretary of state would be criminally prosecuted if he did not do as Trump told him: "You know what they did and you're not reporting it. You know, that's a criminal – that's a criminal offense. And you know, you can't let that happen. That's a big risk to you and to Ryan, your lawyer. That's a big risk."

He pressed the acting US attorney general and deputy attorney general to declare the election fraudulent. When the deputy said the department had found no evidence of widespread fraud and warned that it had no power to change the outcome of the election, Trump [replied](#): "Just say that the election was corrupt + leave the rest to me" and his congressional allies.

Trump and those allies continued to harangue the attorney general and top justice department officials [nearly every day until 6 January](#). Trump plotted with an assistant attorney general to oust the acting attorney general and pressure lawmakers in Georgia to overturn election results. But Trump ultimately decided against it, after department leaders pledged to resign en masse.

Presumably, more details of Trump's attempted coup will emerge after the House select committee on 6 January gathers more evidence and deposes more witnesses.



Bennie Thompson, Liz Cheney, Stephanie Murphy, Adam Schiff, Zoe Lofgren, Adam Kinzinger and Jamie Raskin at a hearing of the 6 January House select committee. Photograph: J Scott Applewhite/AP

### **3. Trump's attempted coup continues**

Trump still refuses to concede the election and continues to say it was stolen. He presides over a network of loyalists and allies who have sought to overturn the election (and erode public confidence in it) by mounting partisan state “audits” and escalating attacks on state election officials. When asked recently about the fraudulent claims and increasingly incendiary rhetoric, a Trump spokesperson said the former president “supports any patriotic American who dedicates their time and effort to exposing the rigged 2020 presidential election”.

Last week, Trump announced he will be hosting a news conference at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida on 6 January.

“Remember,” he said, “the insurrection took place on 3 November. It was the completely unarmed protest of the rigged election that took place on 6 January.” (Reminder: they were armed.)

Trump could not get as far without deepening anger and despair in a substantial portion of the population

He then referred to the House investigation: “Why isn’t the Unselect Committee of highly partisan political hacks investigating the CAUSE of the 6 January protest, which was the rigged presidential election of 2020?”

He went on to castigate “Rinos”, presumably referring to his opponents within the party, such as representatives Liz Cheney and Adam Kinzinger, who sit on the 6 January committee.

“In many ways a Rino is worse than a Radical Left Democrat,” Trump said, “because you don’t know where they are coming from and you have no idea how bad they really are for our country.”

He added: “The good news is there are fewer and fewer Rinos left as we elect strong patriots who love America.”

Trump has endorsed a primary challenger to Cheney, while Kinzinger will leave Congress at the next election. Trump and other Republicans have also moved to punish [13 House Republicans](#) who bucked party leadership and voted for a bipartisan infrastructure bill in November.

#### **4. All of this exposes a deeper problem with which America must deal**

Trump and his co-conspirators must be held accountable, of course. Hopefully, the select committee’s report will be used by the justice department in criminal prosecutions of Trump and his accomplices.

But this in itself will not solve the underlying problem: a belligerent and narcissistic authoritarian has gained a powerful hold over a large portion of America. As many as 60% of Republican voters continue to believe his lies. Many remain intensely loyal. The Republican party is close to becoming a cult whose central animating idea is that the 2020 election was stolen from Trump.

Trump has had help, of course. Fox News hosts and Facebook groups have promoted and amplified his ravings for their own purposes. Republicans in Congress and in the states have played along.

But Trump's attempted coup could not get as far as it has without a deepening anger and despair in a substantial portion of the population that has made such Americans susceptible to his swagger and lies.

It is too simplistic to attribute this anger solely to racism or xenophobia. America has harbored white supremacist and anti-immigrant sentiments since its founding. The anger Trump has channeled is more closely connected to a profound loss of identity, dignity and purpose, especially among Americans who have been left behind – without college degrees, without good jobs, in places that have been hollowed out, economically abandoned, and disdained by much of the rest of the country.

Trump filled a void in a part of America that continues to yearn for a strongman who will deliver it from despair. A similar void haunts other nations where democracy is imperiled. The challenge ahead for the US as elsewhere is to fill that void with hope rather than neofascism. This is the real meaning of 6 January.

- Robert Reich, a former US secretary of labor, is professor of public policy at the University of California at Berkeley and the author of [Saving Capitalism: For the Many, Not the Few](#) and [The Common Good](#). His new book, [The System: Who Rigged It, How We Fix It](#), is out now. He is a Guardian US columnist. His newsletter is at [robertreich.substack.com](#)
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**OpinionMatt Hancock**

## **Why is Matt Hancock back in the limelight? Because penance is just a word these days**

**Mark Borkowski**

Politicians now seem immune to scandal. If the former health secretary plays it right, he could still become prime minister



‘Saturating the media with his rehabilitated smile will be enough to bring Matt Hancock back into the fold of mainstream politics.’ Photograph: Karwai Tang/WireImage

Mon 27 Dec 2021 07.03 EST

It seems like only yesterday that we were all enjoying the memes and videos parodying the decline and fall of [Matt Hancock](#). The incredible brevity of

his time in exile seems to strain the laws of PR physics, and suggests that the fallen minister still enjoys support at the highest levels of government.

A hasty press call, [a mea culpa in front of a bush](#): his resignation speech was haphazardly choreographed. The time-compressed media age seems to have eaten away our powers of recall. Public figures are sacrificed daily to the gods of Twitter. News items that, at their peak, command the collective consciousness quickly disappear (Remember [wallpaper-gate](#)? I don't).

The idea of penance – time spent away from ordinary life in repentance for one's sins – exists in all major religions. The Indian spiritual leader Meher Baba said: "When penance is carefully practised, it inevitably results in the revocation of undesirable modes of thought and conduct, and makes one amenable to a life of service." Different faiths prescribe differing levels of self-sacrifice according to the seriousness of the sin. Hancock, for his part, has spent a mere six months as a backbencher, and is reported to have also stayed in an £87-per-night hotel in Montreux. Is this enough time [to atone for the grope](#) that shook the cabinet?

The great [expenses scandal of 2009](#) for ever eroded the idea of politicians as highly credible public servants, replacing it with the image of [Sir Peter Viggers' duck house](#). We are far from the days of the John Profumo affair, when scandal could truly bring down a politician. Hancock would never be content tending a market garden in Norfolk. The world has changed a great deal.

Paradoxically, though online platforms are where he received the most ridicule, it is the range of tools that social media makes available that will enable Hancock to ascertain his best route forward. Having conviction, staying fast and loose with messaging, and saturating the media with his rehabilitated smile will – in my honest opinion – be enough to bring him back into the fold of mainstream politics. Hancock's affair may soon be a dimly remembered peccadillo in the Tory annals.

Gone are the days when a high-profile public figure outed by a red top could buy time in the Priory. Sentiment analysis can help decide between a social media post of toad-licking and a beautiful desert sunset, to see which resonates with the public and best says "I've rebooted my life via an out-of-

body hallucinogenic experience". Carefully measured clicks will decide Hancock's fate. But who is behind this resurrection? Given the current cabinet's churn, it would not be surprising if Boris Johnson were trying to expedite the rehabilitation of one of his loyal generals. Even with the prime minister as backer, full recovery will require Hancock to believe unflinchingly in his own fitness and purpose. The swiftness and intensity of Hancock's comeback demonstrates he has the self-belief necessary.

Today's "dispersed" media will give Hancock's camp one great benefit: it will allow him to stress-test a number of options. Part of this exercise will be gauging the strength of the hostility against him; the response will shape his strategy. Already you see different tones being trialled, the triumphant, the grovelling (apologetic tones on the BBC and [Times Radio](#)) and the scrappily indignant (tense and defensive on [Peston on 1 December](#)). The right cocktail – in combination with a charity campaign, such as that he is running on [dyslexia awareness](#) – will suffice to ensure no path is barred to him. He could even become prime minister.

For the plucky media strategist, success has the potential to become the story itself; if there is one thing comms folk love, it's a challenge of Hancockian proportions. Yet, they won't necessarily do it for free. Whoever is supporting the return of Hancock will anticipate future rewards. Success depends on whether Hancock can still play ball. For all the PR advice one can buy (or source from party ranks), the success or failure of his rehabilitation will ultimately depend on whether he can regain his footing and project effectiveness as a politician.

In all faiths, penance is meant to result in a personality reset, returning the individual from a life of arrogance and sin to one characterised by humility. Public servants stumble. Whether they recover or not is more than just a matter of convincing others they have changed – it is about taking what you learned in the desert to heart.

- Mark Borkowski is a crisis PR consultant and author

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- [Israel Bird flu outbreak kills 5,000 cranes and sparks slaughter of half a million chickens](#)
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- [US Crews find second apparent 1887 time capsule under Robert E Lee statue](#)

## [China](#)

# China berates US after ‘close encounters’ with Elon Musk satellites

Beijing urges US to act responsibly after two near misses that it says posed serious threat to astronauts’ lives



A model of the Chinese space station Tiangong orbiting Earth. Photograph: Alejandro Miranda/Alamy

*Rhoda Kwan in Taipei and [Jon Henley](#)*

[@jonhenley](#)

Tue 28 Dec 2021 07.35 EST

China has accused the US of ignoring international treaty obligations and engaging in irresponsible and unsafe conduct in outer space after two near misses between the Chinese space station and satellites operated by Elon Musk’s SpaceX company.

Zhao Lijian, a foreign ministry spokesperson, said on Tuesday that China “urges the US to act responsibly” after incidents involving SpaceX’s Starlink satellites, which he said had posed a serious threat to the lives and safety of astronauts.

In a note to the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer [Space](#) earlier this month, China said Tiangong, its new space station, had to manoeuvre to avoid one Starlink satellite in July and another in October.

Tiangong had to take “preventive collision avoidance control” during the two “close encounters” after the Starlink satellites had moved into orbits that obliged Tiangong’s operators to change its course, the document said.

“The manoeuvre strategy was unknown and orbital errors were hard to assess,” Beijing said of the satellite involved in the October incident, adding that it took action to “ensure the safety and lives of in-orbit astronauts”.

The note said the incidents “constituted dangers to the life or health of astronauts onboard the [China](#) space station” and asked the UN secretary general “to circulate the above mentioned information to all states parties to the outer space treaty”.

Starlink, a division of Musk’s private company SpaceX, has launched more than 1,600 satellites. It has permission from US authorities to launch a total of up to 12,000 in a programme aiming to provide internet access to most of the planet.

China’s note to the UN space agency in Vienna said state parties to the outer space treaty, which is the foundation of international space law, “bear international responsibility” for activities carried out by both government and non-governmental bodies in space.

Evasive manoeuvres to reduce the risk of collisions in space were becoming more frequent owing to the number and speed at which satellites were being launched, said Jonathan McDowell, of the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics.

“Starlink is a big part of that,” McDowell said, adding that it was “highly unusual” for a country to lodge a complaint through an “informational bulletin”. Any collision would be likely to “completely demolish” the Chinese space station, he said.

McDowell added that China was also a big contributor to space junk. The International Space Station “has several times over the past 10 years had to dodge pieces from the Chinese military anti-satellite test of 2007”, he said. “It’s not like the Chinese had a clean record here. The biggest debris event ever was the Chinese anti-satellite test.”

He said the incidents were a reminder the world had entered a new era in space. “There’s more debris and there’s more active satellites. Things are just getting a lot busier and a lot more crowded up there. It’s a commercially dominated space age … where we’re stressing the space environment for the first time.”

The core module of China’s station Tiangong – whose name means “heavenly palace” – entered orbit this year and is expected to become fully operational in 2022.

Beijing’s complaint prompted heavy criticism on Chinese social media of Musk, whose electric car firm Tesla sells tens of thousands of vehicles in China each month. Musk is widely admired in China, although Tesla’s reputation has been tarnished after a rash of recent crashes and scandals.

One hashtag on the Weibo social networking platform recorded 90m views on Tuesday. “How ironic that Chinese people buy Tesla, contributing large sums of money so Musk can launch Starlink, and then he (nearly) crashes into China’s space station,” one user said.

“Prepare to boycott Tesla,” said another Weibo user, echoing a common response in China to foreign brands perceived to be acting contrary to national interests.

Some speculated that Washington would have imposed sanctions if the roles were reversed. “Why don’t we just do what they do?” one wrote.

California-based SpaceX did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

This article was amended on 28 December 2021 because a reference to “the US space station” should have been to the International Space Station.

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**Israel**

## Bird flu outbreak in Israel kills 5,000 cranes and sparks slaughter of half a million chickens

Environment minister calls death of migratory cranes from virus ‘the most serious damage to wildlife in the history of the country’



Thousands of migratory cranes have died from bird flu in northern Israel, posing a crisis for the poultry industry. Photograph: Ronen Zvulun/Reuters

*Associated Press*

Mon 27 Dec 2021 23.12 EST

A bird flu outbreak in northern [Israel](#) has killed at least 5,200 migratory cranes and forced farmers to slaughter hundreds of thousands of chickens as authorities try to contain what they say is the deadliest wildlife disaster in the nation’s history.

Uri Naveh, a senior scientist at the Israel Parks and Nature Authority, said the situation was not yet under control. “Many of the birds are dead in the middle of the water body so it’s difficult for them to be taken out,” he said on Monday.

Environmental protection minister Tamar Zandberg called the crisis “the most serious damage to wildlife in the history of the country”. “The extent of the damage is still unclear,” she tweeted.

Yaron Michaeli, a spokesperson for the Hula Lake park, where the crane population is mainly based, said workers were removing the carcasses as quickly as possible, fearing they could infect other wildlife.

Dafna Yurista, spokesperson for the Agriculture Ministry, said half a million chickens in the area were being slaughtered to prevent the disease from spreading.

About 500,000 cranes pass through Israel each year on the way to Africa and a small number stay behind, Michaeli said. This year, an estimated 30,000 cranes stayed in Israel for the winter.

Michaeli said it was believed the cranes were infected by smaller birds that had contact with farms affected by outbreaks.



Israeli officials are retrieving crane carcasses as quickly as possible to contain the spread of the virus. Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock

Israeli media carried photos of workers in white hazmat suits collecting crane carcasses after the birds were first found to be sick about 10 days ago.

Michaeli said the deaths among cranes appeared to have stabilised in recent days. “This is a good sign,” he said. “They might be starting to get over this. We hope very much.”

Prime minister Naftali Bennett’s office said officials from the agriculture, environment and health ministries were monitoring the situation. There was no immediate information about infections among people, it said.

Naveh said the cleanup was going more slowly than expected. “We are trying to see if there’s any other solutions,” he said.

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## Ghislaine Maxwell

# Ghislaine Maxwell jury resumes deliberations after Christmas break

- Jurors consider evidence in Briton's sex-trafficking trial
- Maxwell, who has pleaded not guilty, tried on six counts



Judge Alison Nathan, who is presiding over Ghislaine Maxwell's trial.  
Photograph: Elizabeth Williams/AP

*[Victoria Bekiempis](#) and [Edward Helmore](#) in New York*

Mon 27 Dec 2021 15.28 EST

Jury deliberations [resumed](#) on Monday in Ghislaine Maxwell's sex-trafficking trial in federal court in Manhattan.

The trial began in earnest on 29 November. Maxwell, 60, is being tried on six counts for alleged involvement in her ex-boyfriend Jeffrey Epstein's sexual abuse of girls, some as young as 14. Maxwell has pleaded not guilty.

Epstein, a financier and convicted sex offender whose associates included Prince Andrew, Donald Trump and Bill Clinton, was arrested in July 2019 for sex trafficking girls. He killed himself in a Manhattan federal jail, where he was awaiting his own trial, about a month after his arrest.

Deliberations in Maxwell's trial [began last Monday](#), before a break for Christmas. On Monday morning, a week after the conclusion of closing arguments, members of the media resumed their long – and cold – vigil outside the courthouse in lower Manhattan.

The atmosphere was somewhat deflated, amid speculation that some jurors might return to the court Covid-positive, as the Omicron variant surges through the city.

It appeared the jurors avoided infection. Just before 10.30am, the panel sent the court a note. It requested a variety of office supplies, including "different color Post-its", white poster board and highlighters in different colors.

The jurors also asked to see testimony from Matt, the former boyfriend of Jane, the first Maxwell accuser to testify at trial, and asked for a definition of "enticement". Maxwell is accused of luring minors into Epstein's orbit.

The judge, Alison Nathan, said she would point the jurors to her instructions, and said she would tell them "entice means to attract, induce, or lure using hope or desire".

Just after 11am, jurors sent another note, requesting testimony from Gregory Parkinson, a former police officer who led a search of Epstein's property in Palm Beach, Florida, in October 2005. During his testimony, on 3 December, Parkinson walked jurors through a video of this search and answered questions about still images presented onscreen.

"Mr Parkinson, what is the green object?" the prosecution asked, in reference to one image.

“That is a portable, collapsable massage table,” Parkinson said.

During Parkinson’s testimony, the prosecution asked Judge Nathan for permission to take government exhibit 51 into the courtroom. A detective then walked in, carrying a folded massage table.

Parkinson got down from the witness stand, put on a pair of gloves and looked at the table while it was in its folded position. He returned to the witness stand. The detective who brought the massage table into court opened it. Parkinson was asked to describe what he saw.

“The table itself in an open position,” he said.

On Monday morning, Maxwell seemed to be in good spirits. When she walked into the courtroom moments before 10.30am, sporting a camel turtleneck and black pants, she hugged each of her lawyers.

One, Jeffrey Pagliuca, said: “Happy birthday.” Maxwell turned 60 on Christmas Day.

At about 3pm, jurors requested to see the transcript of testimony from David Rodgers, one of Epstein’s former pilots.

Before Nathan dismissed jurors around 5pm, she told them that if they didn’t reach a verdict on Tuesday, they should be prepared to stay late going forward.

- *Information and support for anyone affected by rape or sexual abuse issues is available from the following organisations. In the US, [Rainn](#) offers support on 800-656-4673. In the UK, [Rape Crisis](#) offers support on 0808 802 9999. In Australia, support is available at [1800Respect](#) (1800 737 732). Other international helplines can be found at [ibiblio.org/rcip/internl.html](#)*

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## Russia

# US and Russia to hold talks amid Ukraine tensions

Deal reached for talks on 10 January that are likely to be followed by discussions with Nato



Ukrainian service personnel patrol near the frontline with with Russia-backed separatists in the Donetsk region. Photograph: Andriy Andriyenko/AP

*[Andrew Roth](#) in Moscow and [Jon Henley](#)*

Tue 28 Dec 2021 10.11 EST

Russian and US officials will hold security talks in early January amid mounting tensions over [Ukraine](#), officials from both countries have confirmed.

The high-stakes discussions are expected to address Russia's military buildup on Ukraine's borders, while Moscow will press demands that Nato pledges not to admit Ukraine and roll back the alliance's post-cold war development.

A spokesperson for the Biden administration said late on Monday that Russia and Nato would hold talks on 12 January, with a broader regional meeting including Moscow, Washington and several European countries set for 13 January,

Russia's foreign ministry on Tuesday confirmed those dates and said Russia-US talks would take place in Geneva on 10 January , the state-run RIA news agency reported. The deputy foreign minister, Sergei Ryabkov, said he hoped they would begin a process that would give Moscow new security guarantees from the west.

The Russian foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, said Moscow would take a "hard line" in the talks, aiming to defend its interests and avoid "concessions". There was no immediate word on who would represent the two sides in the talks.

Moscow, which seized Ukraine's Crimea peninsula in 2014 and has since backed separatists fighting in eastern Ukraine, has unnerved the west by massing tens of thousands of troops near the border, sparking fears of a new attack, possibly including further seizures of Ukrainian territory.

Moscow has denied plans for an assault, saying the troop movements are to defend Russia against an encroaching western military, and has not explicitly tied the threat of an eventual assault to the failure of talks with the US.

But Vladimir Putin has said he would review "military-technical responses" if his demands – a [wishlist of security proposals](#), including a promise that Nato would give up any military activity in eastern Europe and Ukraine – are not met.

The US administration has [promised swift and brutal sanctions](#) in the case of a Russian incursion.

Ryabkov reacted negatively to reports that the White House was expecting to also discuss arms control and Russia's military buildup at the upcoming talks, saying there was "no need to invent an oversized agenda and to stuff it with issues, which have long been addressed through other channels, to serve one's own interests".

He said Russia would want to "concentrate exclusively" on two draft documents it has submitted, focusing on its draft treaty with [Nato](#), in which Moscow called for the military alliance to pledge not to admit Ukraine and to remove its troops and infrastructure from countries that had joined after 1997.

That document is particularly controversial in Nato's eastern flank, with those countries that joined after the fall of the Soviet Union seeing it as a de facto declaration of a Russian sphere of influence in eastern Europe.

Matters on the agenda besides a ban on Nato enlargement and the rollback of its infrastructure were "secondary", Ryabkov said. If other topics were put on the agenda, Russia would "conclude that the US is not prepared for a serious talk".

He said Russia was "calling for negotiations, which, by the way, need to be intensive and fast" since the problem is "not just ripe, it is overripe". Moscow has "said repeatedly we are no longer able to put up with the situation unfolding in the direct vicinity of our border, we cannot put up with the Nato enlargement," he said.

A spokesperson for the White House's National Security Council, who declined to be named, said on Monday: "When we sit down to talk, Russia can put its concerns on the table, and we will put our concerns on the table with Russia's activities as well."

"There will be areas where we can make progress, and areas where we will disagree. That's what diplomacy is about." No decisions would be made about Ukraine without Ukraine, the spokesperson said.

They added: "President Biden's approach on Ukraine has been clear and consistent: unite the alliance behind two tracks – deterrence and diplomacy.

We are unified as an alliance on the consequences Russia would face if it moves on Ukraine.”

The US president, Joe Biden, signed into law a large spending bill on Monday that, among other things, will provide \$300m for an initiative supporting Ukraine’s armed forces, and billions more for European defence broadly.

Ukraine’s border service said on Tuesday that the US would finance \$20m-worth of projects, including surveillance and monitoring equipment such as video recording systems and drones, to strengthen Ukraine’s borders with Russia and Belarus.

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**Virginia**

## Crews find second apparent 1887 time capsule under Robert E Lee statue

Long-sought-after item could contain artifacts, Confederate memorabilia and even a rare photo of Abraham Lincoln

01:11

1887 time capsule apparently found under Robert E Lee statue pedestal – video

*Associated Press*

Mon 27 Dec 2021 19.28 EST

Crews wrapping up the removal Monday of a giant pedestal that once held a statue of Confederate Gen Robert E Lee in Richmond found what appeared to be a second and long-sought-after time capsule, [Virginia](#) governor Ralph Northam said.

The governor tweeted photos of a box being removed from the site and said conservators were studying the artifact.

“They found it! This is likely the time capsule everyone was looking for,” he tweeted.

The governor said the box would not be opened Monday. It wasn’t immediately clear what kind of condition any contents might be in.

The development marked the latest turn in a months-long search for the capsule, which contemporaneous news accounts indicate was placed during a cornerstone-laying ceremony in 1887 attended by thousands of people. News accounts described its dozens of donated artifacts, including Confederate memorabilia. Based on historical records, some have also

speculated the capsule might contain a rare photo of deceased President Abraham Lincoln.

Earlier this month, crews dismantling the pedestal found [a time capsule](#) embedded in a granite block that some initially thought might have been the one placed in 1887. But after state conservators spent hours last week gingerly prying the box open, they didn't find the expected trove of objects related to the Confederacy. Instead, conservators pulled out a few waterlogged books, a silver coin and an envelope with some papers.



Crews removing the pedestal that once held a statue of Gen Robert E Lee found a long-sought-after time capsule. Photograph: Virginia Governor/AFP/Getty Images

The prevailing theory last week was that the lead box was left by a person, or persons, who oversaw the monument's construction.

The search for the 1887 time capsule resumed Monday.

Devon Henry, the contractor whose company was overseeing the removal, said the box was found inside a granite enclosure basically at ground level, surrounded by fill and other construction material. Workers pulled off the top of the granite enclosure to find the box, which appeared to be made of copper, sitting in water, Henry said.

The box was then covered in bubble wrap and transported by vehicle from the site for further study, he said.

The Lee statue, which depicted the general atop a horse, was erected on the soaring pedestal in 1890 in the former capital of the Confederacy. Its removal in September came more than a year after Northam ordered it in the wake of protests that erupted after the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis.

The Lee statue's removal was blocked by two lawsuits until a ruling from the supreme court of Virginia in September cleared the way for it to be dismantled. Crews searched for the time capsule then, digging and removing some massive stones, but were unable to locate it.

Henry said it was found Monday in the north-east corner of the pedestal, about 4ft (1.2 meters) below the area initially searched.

Northam's administration initially planned to leave the pedestal in place but announced in early December that contractors would remove the behemoth, now covered in graffiti, and transfer the grassy traffic circle it inhabited to the city of Richmond. The administration has said it will be stored until "next steps" have been determined.

Finalizing the removal work at the site will probably take another week, Henry said.

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# Headlines

- [England Hospitals asked to look for up to 4,000 emergency Covid beds](#)
- [Covid tests Johnson blamed for shortages as cases hit 183,000](#)
- [UK Another record rise in daily Covid cases reported](#)
- [Scotland Record case numbers reported as Omicron takes hold](#)

**NHS**

## Hospitals in England asked to look for up to 4,000 emergency Covid beds

NHS on ‘war footing’ as small-scale ‘Nightingale’ facilities being created at eight sites

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



‘All scenarios’ are being prepared for, said the health secretary, Sajid Javid.  
Photograph: Ian Forsyth/Getty

*[Rowena Mason](#) and [Aubrey Allegretti](#)*

Wed 29 Dec 2021 19.01 EST

Hospitals have been asked to identify sites for up to 4,000 emergency beds to deal with a potential wave of Omicron admissions in England, as cases hit

a record 183,000.

On Wednesday, more than 10,000 patients were in hospital with Covid, a figure not reached since March.

NHS England confirmed that it was creating new small-scale “Nightingale” facilities with up to 100 beds each at eight hospitals across the country. The health service said it had asked trusts to identify empty spaces to accommodate beds in places such as gyms or teaching areas. NHS managers are aiming to create up to 4,000 beds as surge capacity if needed, with work on the first tranche, in temporary structures, starting this week.

A number of huge temporary hospitals, called the “Nightingales”, were built in exhibition halls in the first wave of the pandemic but were dismantled without being used to capacity.

The new approach will ask for surge capacity to be built in the grounds of hospitals to make it easier for staff to move between new and old sites and keep patients closer to diagnostics and emergency care. The first sites will be at Preston, Leeds, Birmingham, Leicester, Stevenage, St George’s in London, Ashford and Bristol. There are currently almost 90,000 adult acute and general beds available in England, with occupancy at about 90% on 19 December.

The announcement came as new data showed there were 10,462 people in hospital in England with Covid as of Wednesday, although it is still unclear how many were admitted with the disease and how many are there for another reason while also testing positive.

### chart

The number of patients on mechanical ventilation has remained fairly stable in recent weeks and even reduced since November. On Wednesday the number of deaths reported was 57.

Boris Johnson returned from his Christmas break at Chequers on Wednesday with a visit to a vaccine centre to urge people to get their booster jabs, saying up to 90% of people in intensive care had not received their third

dose. He said people should celebrate New Year's Eve but called on them to exercise caution and take tests.

The prime minister also warned that Omicron continued to "cause real problems" even though it was "obviously milder than the Delta variant".

The NHS has called on people to have a "jabby new year", highlighting research [from the Intensive Care National Audit and Research Centre \(ICNARC\)](#) that found that at the start of last month about three out of five patients in London's intensive care units had not received a jab, a figure that it said was rising.

Prof Stephen Powis, the [NHS](#) national medical director, said the health service hoped never to have to use the surge beds but added: "Given the high level of Covid-19 infections and increasing hospital admissions, the NHS is now on a war footing."

Sajid Javid, the health secretary, also said it was "absolutely right that we prepare for all scenarios and increase capacity".

With the government still concerned about the possibility that the high case numbers of Omicron could overwhelm the NHS, Johnson is holding off from cutting the Covid isolation period to five days for those without symptoms.

The prime minister has come under pressure to reduce the UK's isolation period again, after the US decided to halve it for those without symptoms from five to 10 days as long as they wear a mask in public.

England reduced its quarantine period from 10 to seven days last week if people test negative by lateral flow, but some other countries around the world are now looking at going further.

Sir John Bell, regius professor of medicine at Oxford University and the government's life sciences adviser, has indicated support for a shorter isolation period "if it was supported by lateral flow data".

A No 10 source said everything was "kept under review" but insisted that there were "no immediate plans" to revise the quarantine period again so

soon.

Several Tory backbenchers called on the government to consider a move similar to the US. Andrew Bridgen urged Johnson to reduce the isolation period, saying the biggest threat to the NHS was “forced absentees due to self-isolation”.

David Davis, the former Brexit secretary, said a five-day isolation period followed by a lateral flow test “sounded sensible” for Omicron cases. “If the Americans are doing it, the question is why are we not doing it, not why we should,” he said.

Davis also called on the government to make sure it has enough doses of therapies such as Paxlovid that can reduce the risk of hospitalisation in severe Covid cases and to improve data on how many people are in hospital because of the coronavirus, rather than for another condition while also testing positive for the virus.

Lee Anderson, a 2019 intake Tory backbencher, said “all options to get people back to work quicker should be looked at”. Another MP added said “isolation could be a bigger issue than actual illness” and they would “support a review at the very least”.

Chloe Smith, the minister for disabled people, health and work, said on Wednesday there were “no current plans in England to change the period” for isolation. She told BBC Breakfast on Wednesday: “Of course, we have actually only recently taken it down from 10 to seven, and we want to look at that – we want to make sure that that is working as we believe it ought to. We think the current period, therefore, is the right one, so we haven’t any plans to change that further.”

NHS managers have said they are as worried about the impact on patient care of staff shortages from people having to isolate as they are about surging admissions from Covid.

The chief executive of NHS Providers, Chris Hopson, said the effect of greater social mixing over Christmas was still to come. He told BBC Breakfast: “We’re now seeing a significant increase in the level of staff

absences, and quite a few of our chief executives are saying that they think that that's probably going to be a bigger problem and a bigger challenge for them than necessarily the number of people coming in who need treatment because of Covid."

In response to the new Nightingale sites, Hopson said it "must be the right 'no regrets later' move to make these preparations now" but highlighted the difficulty of staffing them.

"Given the other pressures on the NHS and the current level of staff absences, staffing this capacity would be a major challenge," he said. "But co-location on existing hospital sites maximises the NHS's ability to meet that challenge."

This article was amended on 30 December 2021. England reduced its quarantine period from 10 to seven days under some circumstances last week, not "the UK" as an earlier version said.

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/dec/30/covid-hospitals-england-asked-look-4000-emergency-beds>

## Coronavirus

# Johnson blamed for Covid test shortages as cases hit record 183,000

Labour criticises PM over ‘total shambles’ of some essential workers being unable to access test kits

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



A succession of days of record Covid infection rates has created strong demand for tests. Photograph: Hollie Adams/AFP/Getty Images

*[Richard Adams](#), [Rowena Mason](#) and [Aubrey Allegretti](#)*

Wed 29 Dec 2021 14.28 EST

Boris Johnson has been accused of presiding over a “total shambles” as millions of people struggle to access Covid tests after a huge surge in

demand, leaving essential staff unable to work.

The prime minister had urged people to take precautionary rapid Covid tests before heading out for New Year's Eve, while the Omicron wave has pushed up demand for both lateral flows and PCRs. There were a [record 183,000 positive cases](#) confirmed on Wednesday, although this data included some delayed results.

With the huge increase in cases, the system was dogged by shortages and there were reports that key workers, including nurses and firefighters, were unable to access tests to allow them to do their jobs.

As medical staff experienced delays in PCR test results and problems accessing rapid tests, [NHS](#) Providers called on No 10 to consider reserving some tests for health workers. Some Tory MPs were also demanding answers from government ministers about whether there should be a priority ranking for who should get tests first.

Members of the public also complained that tests were hard to find, as pharmacies around England displayed signs that they had run out of lateral flow test (LFT) kits amid "patchy" deliveries and high demand.

For the second day in a row the government's websites showed at times that walk-in PCR tests were unavailable in parts of the country, such as Hartlepool, and in short supply in others, while by mid-afternoon ordering home deliveries of LFTs had again been halted.

The [overwhelming demand for tests](#) in England follows record levels of infection since the arrival of the Omicron variant. With worries that the health service could be overwhelmed, even though Omicron is milder than Delta, the NHS said it was looking to create up to 4,000 beds in "mini-Nightingales" at existing hospital as surge capacity, with 800 across eight sites to begin with.

The UK [Health](#) and Security Agency acknowledged there was unprecedented demand for tests and urged people not to order more than they needed. But the organisation said another eight million tests were being made available to pharmacists before New Year's Eve celebrations begin.

Pharmacists said demand has been driven by the government allowing vaccinated people out of self-isolation if they show repeated negative LFT results after a week, and among those stocking up on kits before New Year's Eve events.

Wes Streeting, the shadow health secretary, said Johnson's plea for people to take lateral flows when there were shortages showed "spectacular incompetence".

"Congratulations to Boris Johnson who has managed to appear on television today urging people to get tested when people are struggling to access them," he said.

"People are trying to do the right thing, follow the government's own advice, and test themselves regularly, but are prevented by the Conservative government's incompetence."

Daisy Cooper, Lib Dem health spokesperson, added that it was "now or never to get Covid tests to frontline workers".

"If the government doesn't get its act together today then vaccine centres could soon grind to a halt, and patient safety could be at risk from further NHS and care staff absences," she said.

Johnson's comments on testing have been repeated by other ministers, including the health secretary, Sajid Javid, and health minister Gillian Keegan, who advised new year's revellers: "Do be cautious, take a lateral flow test before you go out."

There were particular concerns about a lack of tests affecting staff absences in the NHS. Chris Hopson, chief executive of NHS Providers, said it was "vital that NHS staff get prompt access to the tests they need to ensure they can return to work as quickly as possible" and suggested "looking at whether we need to reserve dedicated testing capacity for NHS staff for a period".

Dr David Wrigley, the British Medical Association's deputy council chair, said: "In order to keep the NHS working, it is imperative that staff must be

able to regularly test for Covid 19 and so supplies of lateral flow tests for key workers should be prioritised.”

New London fire brigade data shows that a third of fire engines in London have been unavailable after more than 700 firefighters either tested positive or were having to self-isolate earlier this week.

Staff shortages meant a 64-metre ladder appliance, bought after the Grenfell Tower disaster, was unavailable for much of Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, while more than 15% of operational firefighters were off work because of Covid on 27 December.

The Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee, which represents NHS community pharmacies in England, said deliveries of LFT kits to pharmacies had restarted on Wednesday after four days of no service. But many of those that did receive them reported quickly exhausting their supplies.

Leyla Hannbeck, chief executive of the Association of Independent Multiple Pharmacies, said: “Pharmacies are reporting that every five minutes approximately somebody comes in to the pharmacy asking for a test.

“But, unfortunately, because of the issues around supply being patchy and inconsistent, it means that those who come for the test don’t always get it, which is very stressful not just for the pharmacy team but for the patient.”

In Devizes, Wiltshire, the branch of Boots had exhausted its supply of tests by 11am, with two other pharmacies in the town saying they had no kits at all.

But Maria Caulfield, the government’s junior health minister, insisted there were “plenty of tests”, in a post to a WhatsApp group of Tory MPs. Caulfield said the “constant speculation that we are running out of tests is just fuelling demand”, and urged colleagues to tell constituents they should “keep trying” to book tests online.

Javid is also understood to be preparing a memo for MPs confirming supplies of LFTs and PCRs were safe.

However, their assurances were undermined by Tory MPs reporting first-hand problems ordering tests. Roger Gale, the MP for North Thanet, tweeted that “Kent appears to be in Lateral Flow and PCR Test gridlock”.

Kent appears to be in Lateral Flow and PCR Test gridlock. Manston staff working flat out, no stocks in chemists and no East Kent delivery slots available. The Secretary of State in charge is not answering his phone, whilst I am trying to get help for constituents.

— Sir Roger Gale MP (@SirRogerGale) [December 29, 2021](#)

Gale later said he had spoken with Javid and been told “there is a world shortage of Lateral Flow & PCR test supplies, but we are buying all that’s available”.

A former minister called the situation a “shitshow” and added Javid’s letter “probably won’t immediately match reality”. A second Tory MP said availability of tests “definitely seems to be an issue”, and a third said a relative who was an essential worker had been unable to order one.

The UK Health Security Agency said tests were temporarily unavailable on the government website at points throughout the day due to “exceptionally high demand” and urged people not to order more tests before using the ones they have.

A spokesperson said: “During periods of exceptional demand there may be temporary pauses in ordering or receiving tests, to ensure we manage distribution across the system.”

This article was amended on 29 December 2021 to correct the location of Devizes; it is in Wiltshire, not Devon as an early version said.

## Coronavirus

# UK reports another record rise with more than 183,000 daily Covid cases

Figures are the first time since 24 December that all four UK countries have released daily case numbers

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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People queue at a Covid testing centre in Hayes, south-east London.  
Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian

*Nicola Davis* Science correspondent  
[@NicolaKSDavis](#)

Wed 29 Dec 2021 13.06 EST

There has been another record rise in the number of daily Covid cases in the UK, with 183,037 reported on Wednesday.

It is the first time since 24 December that data on daily case numbers has been made available for all four UK countries.

[According to data released by the Scottish government](#), 15,849 people have been reported to have tested positive for Covid in the last 24 hours, the highest daily total since the start of the pandemic, surpassing the previous record of 11,030 on 26 December. However the data comes with a warning that the figures include a backlog from before Christmas.

The daily figure for England also broke records, with 138,287 cases reported on Wednesday compared with 117,093 on Tuesday.

The figures refer to the number of cases by date reported, rather than by the specimen date, and reflect infections that are picked up through testing.

Experts have noted it could be several days yet before the impact of infections caught over Christmas becomes apparent in the data. Reinfections are not included in the figures.

Wednesday's total for the UK surpasses the 138,831 cases [reported the day before](#) for Scotland, Wales and England combined – itself a record even with data for Northern Ireland missing – although the figure for Wales in Tuesday's tally represented the combined number of cases that would have been reported on 25 and 26 December.

A total of 22,972 new cases were reported for [Northern Ireland](#) on Wednesday – which included a five-day backlog over Christmas – while 5,929 cases were reported for Wales.

Scotland's first minister, Nicola Sturgeon, said "It is reasonable to assume that we will continue to see steep increases in cases in the days and indeed possibly in the weeks ahead".

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## Scotland

# Scotland reports record number of cases as Omicron takes hold

Nicola Sturgeon urges eligible adults to book booster vaccinations and refuses to cut self-isolation period

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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Shoppers in Glasgow walk past a shop where Nicola Sturgeon appears on TV making a Covid-19 statement during a virtual sitting of the Scottish parliament. Photograph: Andrew Milligan/PA

*[Severin Carrell](#) Scotland editor*

*[@severincarrell](#)*

Wed 29 Dec 2021 10.41 EST

Scotland has detected a record number of 15,900 new Covid cases, with about 80% of those believed to be the highly infectious Omicron variant, [Nicola Sturgeon](#) has told MSPs.

In an emergency update to the Scottish parliament, the first minister said positive cases comprised 29% of all tests carried out on Tuesday. The previous Scottish record was reached on Sunday, when 11,030 new cases were reported.

Sturgeon said the [Omicron variant](#) was so infectious it was reasonable to assume there would be further “steep increases in cases in the days and possibly weeks ahead”.

She urged eligible adults to book booster vaccinations after disclosing that so far only 75% had received their booster or third doses. She hinted that the Scottish government may miss its target of getting 80% of adults boosted by Friday 31 December, a target date coinciding with Hogmanay.

“Please don’t delay,” she said. “Every booster jab administered now is a step on the road back to normality.”

Sturgeon indicated the slowing pace of booster vaccinations had influenced the Scottish government’s decision not to cut the self-isolation period for close contacts from 10 to seven days – a measure introduced by the UK government in England.

Facing intense pressure from the Conservatives and Labour to reduce the self-isolation time to ease staffing pressures on businesses and public services, Sturgeon said a careful balance needed to be struck between helping businesses and suppressing the virus.

Douglas Ross, the Scottish Conservative leader, said businesses across [Scotland](#) were struggling with high levels of staff absence and unable to plan ahead because of Sturgeon’s “dithering”. Some firms were shutting.

Big Hogmanay events, including Edinburgh’s street party and fireworks, and the Loony Dook swim at Queensferry, have been cancelled, with ministers [urging revellers to remain at home](#) or attend small parties.

Sturgeon said neither the Welsh nor Northern Irish governments had cut the self-isolation period, which showed there were doubts it was the best course of action. Her government was offering £375m in emergency support to businesses, including £16m for bus companies, £27m to the cultural sector and £17m to the events sector, she said.

“If Covid continues to spread rapidly, the economic impact in the form of staff absences and diminished consumer confidence will be severe. We’re already seeing those impacts. So doing nothing won’t help business,” she said.

“We must protect public health and the economy together – by slowing the speed at which Covid is spreading, while we complete the booster programme.”

She said 679 people were in hospital, an increase of 80 on Tuesday’s total, with three deaths reported of people confirmed to have had Covid. Over the past week, the number of cases had risen by 47%.

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## 2021.12.30 - Spotlight

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## When did I decide to stop living in denial? While lying on a plane gangway during a panic attack



‘It took a year of intensive treatment for me to be able to leave the house without fear.’ Illustration: Mark Long/The Guardian

I had refused to accept my PTSD had returned. But on a flight to Budapest it became impossible to ignore



[Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett](#)

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Thu 30 Dec 2021 02.00 EST

It is hard to pinpoint the worst moment of your life. But when I think about my lowest ebb, a certain image begins to solidify: me, lying in the gangway of a plane, the cabin crew administering oxygen via a canister and a mask as we descend to Budapest airport and other passengers look on (bemused or horrified, I couldn't say). A couple of minutes previously, a fog had descended on me as I sat in the seat next to my boyfriend; peculiar black clouds coalesced at the margins of my vision. I was passing out. "I need to lie down," I said, with some urgency. "I need to lie down, now."

Why does this image stand out? I suppose it is because, ultimately, it is about denial – and the point at which that stops being possible. The thing I didn't want to know was that I was ill. Again. I had no business being on a plane. I had only been able to get on the plane at all as a result of the large white wine and two co-codamol tablets I had necked at the airport. It was no

doubt the chemical effects of these that led to me almost blacking out. That and the fact I had been hyperventilating for the duration of the flight.

Those who have had panic attacks know that appealing to rationality rarely works. As far as I was concerned, being on that plane meant that I was about to die. There was no arguing with this. This didn't manifest only psychologically; physiologically, extreme anxiety has all kinds of dramatic effects. My body knew the score.

Since [the Paris terror attacks](#) two months prior, I had refused to accept that the post-traumatic stress disorder with which I had been diagnosed as a student – and which I had recovered from – had come back. The first time I had it was because I was strangled by a stranger on a dark street as I made my way home. But, with treatment, I had recovered well. For the most part, I put it behind me and got on with my life.

I spent the entire trip to Budapest convinced there were gunmen around every corner

Then, in my late 20s, I was in close proximity to the Paris attacks. Once more, I was forced to face the notion that I might be about to die. It sent my system into meltdown. The belief that I was safe, which had taken many hours of therapy – not to mention medication – to build back up, had been demolished. It was as though my mind and my body were not going to be fooled this time.

In a way, post-traumatic stress is like time travel. You are walking around, living your life in the present, but a part of you is back there in the traumatic event, reliving that night again and again, your body responding accordingly. I had convinced myself after Paris that I was simply in shock and that the symptoms would fade, but a part of me must have known in the run-up to the Budapest press trip that it wasn't a good sign that I was hearing French sirens in my sleep, that every time I got on a bus or went to a bar I expected to be shot dead.

I must also have known that I should see a doctor, get back on the meds, join the waiting list for therapy, but I was resisting. To do so would mean

admitting that I was ill. More than anything, I did not want to be ill again.

So, instead, I decided to carry on as though everything were normal. I continued to arrange the trip to Budapest despite feeling paralysing horror at the thought of it. Once I got there, after recovering enough to walk off the plane, I spent the entire time convinced there were gunmen around every corner. The only respite was the discovery that I could order very cheap, very strong martinis to our hotel room. This meant that, at least in the evenings, I was sufficiently tipsy not to feel afraid when I went out. I returned to the UK exhausted.

My experience on the plane was humiliating, but it was also the beginning of my acceptance of the fact that I was not OK. I had become interested in the psychology of trauma after I was attacked, but I didn't seem to be applying any of that knowledge to myself. My trip to Hungary, and its effects, changed that. It made me accept that I needed help.

It took a year of intensive treatment, including exposure therapy, for me to be able to leave the house without fear. I was very lucky to receive the help I did so quickly, and for the therapy to have continued past the usual 12 free sessions. Gardening and writing also helped; I spent much of the time confined to my home working on a novel about trauma.

The following January, I went to Vietnam and Cambodia, a trip that involved six flights, all of which I took without needing to self-medicate through the fear – unthinkable when I was at my most agoraphobic. I didn't have a panic attack that meant I needed to lie in the gangway; the plane didn't fall out of the sky. Not only did I live, but I got to see a bit of that world that I had been missing for those long months.

That year, my novel found a publisher and I got married. Since then, I have been writing another book and working on a creative nonfiction project that, among other things, looks at what it means to contemplate motherhood when you have experienced mental illness. I am wary of recovery stories, partly because I don't take it for granted that I will always be well.

When I look back on that young woman lying in the aisle of a plane, she isn't exactly a stranger, but she does belong to a different phase of my life.

And she taught me an important lesson: never deny yourself help out of fear and pride. If I get ill again, I will do my best to remember that.

*The mental health charity Mind can be contacted on 0300 123 3393 or by visiting [mind.org.uk](https://www.mind.org.uk)*

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## ‘People seem to be looking for another way of living’: how Taunton became property hotspot



Jack Battersby: ‘We’re getting customers from all over.’ Photograph: Jim Wileman/The Guardian

Growth in homeworking just one reason behind house price surge in Somerset's county town

- [\*\*UK house prices in 2021 show fastest growth rate in 15 years\*\*](#)



*[Steven Morris](#)*

*[@stevenmorris20](#)*

Thu 30 Dec 2021 01.00 EST

When Covid first hit, Jack Battersby, residential sales manager at Taunton's Wilkie May & Tuckwood estate agents, set up in his spare room and fretted that lean times were ahead.

"It didn't turn out like that. Business has been great," said Batttersby as his desk phone rang constantly and messages pinged on his mobile. "We're getting customers from all over – people from London and the south-east who since Covid are working from home so they might as well be here, but also people moving from places like Bristol and Exeter because they get more for their money."

Battersby was not surprised to see Somerset's county town [topping the Halifax's UK house price growth table](#), with a 21.8% increase to £315,759.

“There’s brilliant countryside all around but we’re also well connected.”



Taunton town centre. The average price of a house in the town has risen by almost 22% in a year. Photograph: Jim Wileman/The Guardian

Taunton is surrounded by high ground – Exmoor, the Quantock Hills, the Blackdown Hills – and the surfing beaches of north Devon and Cornwall are easy to reach. But the town is also just an hour’s drive from Bristol and by rail London Paddington is less than two hours away.

Hannah Thomas, a negotiator at another estate agency, Greenslade Taylor Hunt, said properties were snapped up within days. “It’s been a mad year in a good way,” she said. Thomas said families were keen to move into neighbourhoods on the edge of town in good catchment areas such as Trull, where an end-of-terrace Victorian cottage is on the market for £350,000.

“We’re also getting larger families moving in, for example three generations living together in a larger house. People seem to be looking for different ways of living.”

### Graph

Another reason for the property boom, according to Thomas, is the new nuclear power station Hinkley Point C, which is being built on the Somerset

coast 17 miles north of Taunton. Some employees who will be there for a while are buying homes, while investors are hunting houses to rent out rooms to temporary workers.

Taunton is also attracting retirees. Quantock House, for example, has apartments for the over-55s who can enjoy an in-house bistro, treatment rooms and balconies with views to the hills.

Hundreds more homes are being built as developers try to meet the demand. But this is causing disruption, puncturing the quiet that incomers crave. “The constant building and shutting down roads for the construction traffic is a pain,” said Nicky Heal, who owns Nicky’s Flower Studio.



Nicky Heal, who owns Nicky’s Flower Studio. Photograph: Jim Wileman/The Guardian

Chris Birch, who runs the upmarket ready meals shop, Cook, said he had moved from Surrey for the quiet life but warned Taunton was not perfect, reeling off the shops that have shut recently, including a large Debenhams department store. There has not yet been a boom in businesses such as trendy coffee bars that incoming Londoners might like. “Who would invest at the moment?” said Birch.

And anyone hoping for a cutting edge arts scene might find Taunton wanting. The town has a theatre and arts complex, Taunton Brewhouse, but few would claim hipness for the town. The tourist information centre flags up [its flower show \(est 1831\)](#) before its nightlife. Taunton has no top flight football or rugby club, though the town's skyline is dominated by the floodlights of the country cricket ground.

There are also losers from the booming property market. Charities who work with the homeless have reported a very busy Christmas getting emergency supplies out to the most vulnerable and the rising property prices are making it harder for younger people and those in poorer-paid employment to get on the property ladder.

Concerns are growing that local people could be pushed out by the rising prices – as they have been [in places like Bristol](#) and further west [like St Mawes in Cornwall](#).

Gross weekly pay in Somerset is £567 compared with £577 in the south-west as a whole and £613 in Great Britain. Figures released by the government in the summer revealed that more than 20,000 families in the south-west [were made homeless or threatened with losing their homes](#) during the first phase of the pandemic.



The Orchard shopping centre in Taunton. Photograph: Jim Wileman/The Guardian

Somerset West and Taunton council acknowledges that lack of affordable housing is an issue in the area and [is aiming to build 1,000 new council homes in the next 30 years](#). It [has also drawn up a plan to end rough sleeping by 2027](#) and has taken steps to try to tackle the problem such as leasing out affordable accommodation to medical students at a [new development called Coal Orchard](#) in the town.

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Property hunting in Taunton on Wednesday were the Procter family from Berkshire. Dad Peter said he, his wife and two young children were looking for a change of scene.

“It feels too busy where we live,” said Procter. “I could work from home and could get into the office in London once or twice a week if we lived here. It will be a bit of extra effort for me but it will mean we all have much fresher air, a slower way of life, which I think most people need just now.”

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## Romantic fiction writers creating a more diverse happily ever after



Author Talia Hibbert at home in Bingham, Nottinghamshire. Photograph: Fabio De Paola/The Guardian

How book-loving communities on social media are helping authors break barriers to become bestsellers



Aamna Mohdin

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Thu 30 Dec 2021 03.00 EST

Talia Hibbert was rewatching a Spider-Man film and eating a meal in her living room when she received life-changing news. Her romance novel *Act Your Age, Eve Brown*, which she wrote at the beginning of the pandemic, had entered the New York Times bestseller list.

The lighthearted romantic comedy, published this year, follows the escapades of a young black British woman who crashes into the life of an uptight B&B owner.

Hibbert had not expected readers outside her established fanbase to be interested in the book, which she describes as her most ridiculous one to date. But it did reach a much bigger audience, thanks in part to large book-loving communities on Instagram, YouTube and, most importantly, TikTok.

These communities, known as Bookstagram, BookTube, and Booktok, are not just spaces for people to share their passion for whatever their reading. They also have huge marketing power, driving books such as Hibbert's up the bestseller charts and reshaping the publishing world.

The phenomenon is being felt acutely in romance novels, particularly those with diverse characters and storylines, which have previously struggled to break through via traditional publishing routes.

Hibbert, 25, started reading romance novels when she was 12. At the time, the books available in the genre were not very diverse.

“I didn’t even think of trying to be traditionally published because I very much had the mindset that it wasn’t going to happen for someone like me writing characters like mine,” she said.

“I knew that if I was going to have a chance of being traditionally published, I had to be better than the best. And I just didn’t think I was. I thought I was good, but I didn’t think I was good enough to overcome not being white, essentially.”

She initially self-published and built a loyal fanbase. As well as having leading black characters, Hibbert also explores chronic illness and other forms of disability in many of her novels. “I’m really glad I did that because it enabled me to figure out what kind of writer I wanted to be and develop my own platform on my own terms,” she said.

She was able to get an agent and sold the three-part Brown sisters trilogy to the US publisher Avon. The books exploded on social media. Readers of all races and ages were raving about the series, and found their way to her other books.

Among them was Tolu Akingbade, a 22-year-old master’s student at Cambridge University, who started posting on TikTok at the beginning of the year. She now has more than 31,000 followers. She said many were people of colour and/or LGBTQ+, who often thanked her for the diverse romance recommendations.

“It’s really important to be able to see yourself and understand that you’re not invisible,” Akingbade said. “Authors like Talia Hibbert blowing up has shown people that black British people exist, which I know feels silly but at the same time it’s not their fault because when have we been shown?”

She loves books that simply show “black girls in love” and have joyful storylines. “I love romance stories that focus on community as well and talk about found family. I think that is something that we can really see in the black community, especially in the UK.”

Soniya Ganvir, who is one half of the Instagram account Brown Girls Read Books, says accounts like hers show publishers that there’s demand for these kinds of books from readers of all races.

“In the last year I’ve read more books with black and brown protagonists in the romance sector than I ever have,” the 32-year-old said. “And, increasingly, white authors of romance are including characters that aren’t white.”

While she has welcomed this increase, she says some of these books are being rushed out and many romance writers of colour are still being let down by their editors or marketing teams.

Sumayyah Malna, 32, the other half of the account, said: “And so part of how our account grew is to specifically showcase and promote writers of colour and those books that don’t get the attention that they deserve.

“We do read quite widely, and we don’t just exclusively read writers of colour. We read some amazing books by white authors, but there’s no point in us, as far as we’re concerned, promoting those because they get the promotion.”

They are both eager for further change, and call specifically for more books where women of colour are at the centre of a “pure romance” storyline.

Ganvir said: “I think it is great for people of colour to feature in stories without their race being an element of it. They can be characters who fall in love, they can be characters who beautiful, joyful things happen to them.”

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## My winter of loveRelationships

# My winter of love: I was on holiday with my boyfriend – and the B&B owner told me a horrifying home truth

We went for walks, marvelled at the views, saw baby eagles and had a lot of sex. But as the proprietor of the guest house could tell, not all was well between us



Fay Schopen in the Catskills. Photograph: Courtesy of Fay Schopen

[Fay Schopen](#)

Thu 30 Dec 2021 01.00 EST

Back in 2008, I lived in New York. I wasn't a total stranger to North American winters – my stepmother is from Michigan, and the one and only time she persuaded me to go on a family sledging outing I was so cold I bailed and went back to sit in the car, like the moody teenager I most

definitely was. But I'd never been on the continent for an entire winter. I bought a gigantic army surplus parka and resigned myself to months of wading through freezing slush, alternated with sitting in my studio apartment at night with the windows open because the ancient radiators had one setting: on. That was until I read an article in the New York Times travel section about upstate getaways. The mere mention of a charming B&B overlooking the Delaware River, where you could watch nesting eagles on a nearby bluff while sipping cognac, was all it took. Manhattan's dreary ice-bound streets slipped away momentarily, and I imagined myself on that very deck. I was in a long-distance relationship at the time, and what, I reasoned, could be more romantic than such a weekend?

It was February, the very worst part of winter, and any twinkle of New York City's seasonal cheer had well and truly died. My boyfriend was due a visit, and I was ecstatic at the prospect of a trip out of the city. We would go somewhere a hundred times more romantic than my apartment (which housed the world's smallest and most uncomfortable bed), a thousand times more interesting than the corner diner, and a million times more nurturing than the intersection of Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue. I could see it all: the icy river threading its way below the B&B's deck, the eagles soaring majestically above us, me and my boyfriend holding hands and laughing in the snow, pink-cheeked and very much in love.

The B&B was remote. It was technically in a hamlet. Even better, I thought. The trip there involved taking a train from Penn station to the nearest town, then hiring a car to drive the rest of the way. No problem.

I should have been alerted to potential trouble ahead when reports of snow and ice storms in the region started coming in. When I phoned the B&B to confirm we would still be coming, they seemed surprised and told us everyone else had cancelled. Being English, this didn't occur to me. But as I now know, American weather is different.

As the train headed north, it got quieter and quieter. Soon, we were the only passengers. It was absolutely freezing, and we were ill-equipped. We made it to the end of the line, picked up the cheapest hire car on offer, and proceeded to drive to our destination. Or rather tried to drive. With no snow tires on our crappy tin box, we slid all over the icy roads, some of which featured

terrifying drops on either side. I genuinely thought we were going to die. I had a panic attack, crouched in the footwell of the passenger seat, which I tried to alleviate by chanting. I have no idea what, but probably something like: “Oh God, please don’t let us die out here.” My boyfriend was stoically silent as he attempted to navigate the unfamiliar terrain and not kill us both. At least that’s how I remember it. He may have told me to shut up and let him concentrate on driving, and he would have been perfectly in his rights to do so.

Somehow, we made it the 18 terrifying miles to said charming, and yes, very remote, B&B, and we were indeed the only guests there. A captive audience, it turned out. The place was run by a gay couple, one of whom was sensibly still back in the city. The remaining proprietor took a keen interest in us, plying us with cocktails and nibbles. Relieved not to be in the death car any more, and emboldened by alcohol, I naively enquired how we could obtain dinner – thinking that given the magnitude of the weather disaster we were experiencing, we would generously be offered some sort of sustenance. “There’s a pizza place a few miles away. They don’t deliver,” he said. Upon realising we would have to get back on the road, I am unashamed to say I cried. And I can’t even drive.

So we took a deep breath and went up to our room to freshen up, for we were starving and after a near-death experience pizza sounded just the ticket.

Either the walls of the B&B were thin or the physics of sound travelling were affected by the absence of any other guests, but right there in our room, we could clearly hear the proprietor on the phone to his partner – and he was telling him everything about us. What I was doing in New York, what my boyfriend’s job was, how we had travelled to the B&B, how we had asked for dinner … If things weren’t uncomfortable enough before, they certainly were now. But we duly went to the pizza place, which was charming and wood-panelled, and we lost ourselves in food and wine.

The next morning, we started afresh. It *was* romantic, even if we felt like hostages. There was crisp, blinding white snow all around, beautiful valleys and the Catskill mountains. We went to an outdoor store, got properly equipped with snow-boots and warm hats, and went for walks: crunching through snow, marvelling at the views and the fresh air. We made a short,

Blair Witch-style film; we had a lot of sex. And we saw baby eagles through the telescope on the deck set up to view the nest – an amazing sight that I will always cherish.

The kicker to all this romance came at cocktail hour on the second and last night, however. I had relaxed somewhat into our hostage situation, and my guard was down. If our host didn't know literally everything about me from the first cocktail hour, he certainly did now. He sidled up to me as I was helping myself to some more spiced nuts. "Honey," he said, "he is never going to marry you. Never."

I was too taken aback and too polite, young and English to say anything much at all. I tried to casually shake it off, but his words burned into me. I didn't tell my boyfriend.

Long-distance relationships are hard. We had been fighting a lot. But I loved my boyfriend with a fiery intensity, and was planning to go back to the UK and move in with him. He was seven years older than me, with a grownup job, a grownup house, and generally a life I hoped I could be part of. He represented stability, success – and yes, I did want to get married, although I don't remember telling our host that, and certainly not in front of my boyfriend. I felt ashamed somehow – caught out, as if my desire for solidity, for togetherness, for marriage was emblazoned on my forehead.

But of course he was right. Our relationship ended up an utter fireball of disaster. There were breakups, there were reunions, and eventually I left him. But still, we'll always have the Catskills.

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## 2021.12.30 - Coronavirus

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## **France reports over 200,000 cases; eastern Europe's death toll reaches 1 million – as it happened**

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## US news

# US cities scale back New Year's Eve events and urge people to scrap parties

Americans face stay-at-home celebration again as some mayors scale back or cancel public events amid Covid surge



New Year's Eve souvenirs for sale in Times Square on 28 December, in New York. Photograph: Bryan R Smith/AFP/Getty Images

*[Edward Helmore](#)*

Thu 30 Dec 2021 02.00 EST

Americans are again facing a stay-at-home New Year's Eve as US political leaders and health advisers urge people to scrap party plans and avoid larger public events as daily Covid cases break previous records.

In [New York](#), attendance at the Times Square celebration known as the Ball Drop – in essence, tens of thousands of people watching a 12ft geodesic

sphere inlaid with Waterford crystal descend a long pole – has been capped at 15,000, down from pre-pandemic 60,000, with organizers encouraging revelers to watch it on TV or online.

The scaling back comes as the incoming New York mayor, Eric Adams, cancelled his inauguration party, and the outgoing mayor, Bill de Blasio, sees his last New Year's Eve party severely diminished. As recently as last month, before Omicron made headlines, de Blasio was in an end-of-two-terms party mood.

"Everyone come on down," he said on 16 November. "We can finally get back together again. It's going to be amazing."

But recently – on the same day New York reported its highest number of new virus cases ever – De Blasio said the city would scale back its New Year's Eve event. Attendees must be fully vaccinated and wear masks.

The changes are meant to "keep the fully vaccinated crowd safe and healthy as we ring in the new year", the mayor said in a statement.

In Chicago, the Illinois governor, Jay Pritzker, has not yet imposed restrictions or shut down the city's traditional fireworks show. But he warned Chicagoans this week that "Omicron and Delta are coming to your party".

"You need to think twice about how many people will be gathered together, keeping social distancing if you're at a party. And if you can't, leave," he added.

San Francisco has canceled its fireworks show over the Bay for the second year in a row. Mayor London Breed told residents that "we must remain vigilant in doing all we can to stop the spread of the Covid-19 Omicron variant".

Atlanta, too, has canceled its Peach Drop, where, for 30 years, revelers have gathered to watch a glittering fake peach descend to the ground.

The Atlanta mayor later issued a press release, announcing the decision.

“In consultation with public health officials, we have made the very difficult decision to cancel the Peach Drop,” the [Atlanta mayor, Keisha Lance Bottoms, said](#) in a press release. “As positive Covid-19 cases rise, I encourage everyone to be safe, get vaccinated and follow CDC guidelines.”

But Seattle has decided to go ahead with fireworks from the Space Needle and [Las Vegas](#) plans an eight-minute fireworks display along the Strip. Health experts and officials have explained that Las Vegas’s celebrations take place across the city – not in a tightly-packed area.

“It’s the entire city having this party,” Dr Brian Labus, an infectious disease epidemiologist at UNLV, [told KTNV](#). “We’ve been dealing with crowds coming to Las Vegas for the past two years. So, New Year’s Eve isn’t really anything new. It’s just kind of a bigger event.”

Las Vegas may turn out to be the devil-may-care exception. Events in Paris, London, Berlin have been canceled, while domestic US and international health officials urge caution.

The WHO director-general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, urged earlier this month for people to approach the holidays cautiously, even if that meant canceling or delaying a shindig. “An event canceled is better than a life canceled,” Tedros [told reporters](#). “It’s better to cancel now and celebrate later, than to celebrate now and grieve later.”

The Biden administration’s top health adviser, Dr Anthony Fauci, recently advised that a small limited gathering with vaccinated family members would be the safest way to celebrate.

“If your plans are to go to a 40-to-50 person New Year’s Eve party with all the bells and whistles and everybody hugging and kissing and wishing each other a happy new year – I would strongly recommend that, this year, we do not do that,” Fauci said during a White House update on the pandemic on Wednesday.

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## Coronavirus

# How can we measure the true scale of UK Covid hospital admissions?

The number of patients in hospital with Covid is rising, but how can we tell if they have been admitted because of the virus?

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A steady stream of patients have been arriving at the Royal London Hospital as Covid cases are rising. Photograph: REX/Shutterstock

*[Nicola Davis](#)*

*[@NicolaKSDavis](#)*

Wed 29 Dec 2021 13.14 EST

The number of patients in hospital with Covid is rising, but not all are admitted because of Covid.

Chris Hopson, chief executive of [NHS](#) Providers, which represents hospitals in England, has cautioned against overinterpreting hospital admissions data. “What our guys are saying is that incidental cases are about 25% to 30% of cases arriving ... They are seeing an increase in the number of hospital admissions, but it’s not going up in an exponential way,” he said.

But just how many people are actually being hospitalised because of Covid, and how should the numbers be counted?

### **What are the current figures for hospital admissions?**

The daily reported figure for Covid hospital admissions covers the total reported admissions to hospital and diagnoses while in hospital.

According to data from NHS England, the figure is rising, at 1,374 on 26 December compared with 926 on 19 December – a 48% increase over seven days.

### **Some reports suggest the majority of new hospital Covid patients are not “true cases”. Is that right?**

What is clear is that while numbers are increasing, admissions are not rising as fast as cases, even taking into account the time lags between infection and becoming severely ill.

However hospital admissions data is not separated into those admitted with Covid or because of it.

This means that getting a true handle on the proportion of hospital admissions because of Covid is tricky, but is it possible to gain some insights from the figures already available.

[The most recent available NHS England data](#) reveals that on 26 December there were 1,338 new hospital cases. Of these 1,082 were either admitted in the previous 24 hours for the first time with Covid or were diagnosed in

hospital in the previous 24 hours where the test was within seven days of admission.

In other words, 256 of the reported Covid hospital admissions – about 20% – were actually due to hospital-acquired infections, meaning the patients were originally admitted for different reasons.

This approach does not take into account those already infected with Covid but admitted for other reasons.

Dr David Strain, senior clinical lecturer at the University of Exeter medical school, said in his experience the vast majority of Covid patients are admitted because of Covid rather than the infection being an incidental finding.

And Hopson also suggested hospital bosses were reporting a figure of between 25 and 30%, so not the majority.

### **Should we be reassured that so many people are being admitted with Covid, rather than because of it?**

Not really. Even those patients admitted ‘with’ rather than ‘because of’ Covid may only have required hospital care because of the disease itself.

“We [have] seen many other people who have been otherwise stable [with] chronic diseases such as heart failure, ulcerative colitis etc that caught Covid and had a rapid deterioration. Although they are regarded as “incidental Covid”, this sudden deterioration in otherwise stable disease can be attributed to the virus,” said Strain, adding people who have Covid also have poorer outcomes after surgery.

An alternative is to look at the total number of patients admitted, not just those with Covid, with [Hopson noting](#) some trusts have not seen an overall rise in admissions. However Strain said his experience is that overall unplanned admissions have risen. What’s more, he said, the approach has drawbacks. “The problem with looking at all admissions is, if the hospital is full, we don’t admit the surgical patients or people who we should be bringing in for elective procedures,” he said.

## **Is there another way to look at the situation?**

As Hopson has noted, it is better to use numbers of Covid patients in hospital rather than new Covid admissions, as the data is more up to date. It also gives a more accurate picture of the pressures on the health service.

NHS England publishes a breakdown every week of the total number of Covid patients in hospital, together with the number who are being treated primarily for Covid.

The latest data gives figures up to 21 December – new figures are expected in the coming days. The data shows that of the 6,245 Covid patients in acute trusts in England on 21 December, 4,432 – or over 70% – were being treated primarily for Covid.

The remaining 30% of Covid patients in hospital were primarily being treated for another issue; however that does not necessarily mean they were not receiving some care for Covid as well.

### Incidental Covid patients

Dr Julian Tang, a professor of respiratory sciences at the University of Leicester, said that the proportion of people in hospital with Covid, rather than because of it, will vary a lot between different hospitals depending on factors including the local incidence of Covid.

NHS data reveals the situation varies by region, with about 22% of Covid patients in hospital on 21 December primarily being treated for another issue in the south-west, compared with 39% in the Midlands.

### **Should patients in hospital or admitted with Covid, not because of it, be discounted from the Covid data?**

Some have suggested including figures for patients with Covid is misleading as they may, for example, simply be receiving treatment for a broken leg.

But Covid can lead to more disease in those admitted for another reason, longer hospital stays, more frequent readmissions or outpatient visits and even – in some cases – death. Patients with Covid also need to stay in Covid

wards, putting pressure on bed numbers, and meaning elective surgery is postponed or cancelled.

Covid patients also pose a risk of passing the infection to others, including other patients and staff. At present the NHS is hard hit by staff sickness and isolation due to Covid.

“When it comes to burden on the healthcare system, we should absolutely not discount them,” said Strain.

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[China](#)

## Chinese police parade suspected Covid rule-breakers through streets

Four people are named and shamed – a banned practice – in city of Jingxi; WHO warns of ‘trade-off’ as countries cut back on isolation periods

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A screengrab from footage of alleged Covid rule breakers broadcast on Chinese TV on Thursday. Photograph: Ifeng News

*Staff and agencies*

Wed 29 Dec 2021 21.00 EST

Armed police in Jingxi, in southern **China**, have paraded four alleged violators of Covid rules through the streets, state media reported, a practice

that was banned but which has resurfaced in the struggle to enforce a zero-Covid policy.

The four men were accused of smuggling people across China's closed borders, and on Tuesday they were led through the streets wearing hazmat suits and bearing placards showing their name and photos. [The state-run Guangxi daily reported](#) the action was designed to deter "border-related crimes".

A common practice during the Cultural Revolution, public shaming has long since been banned in China, and the Communist party-affiliated Beijing News said the Jingxi incident "seriously violates the spirit of the rule of law and cannot be allowed to happen again".

The Global Times newspaper [said](#) that the courts and the Ministry of Public Security had issued various orders since the 1980s to ban the parading of criminal suspects, noting that officials themselves could now be punished. The most recent notice was issued by the ministry in February last year after a man in Hebei Province was tied to a tree for going out to buy cigarettes during lockdown.

Social media posts on the topic had received more than 350m views and more than 30,000 comments by Wednesday night, it reported.

Extraordinary videos circulating of suspected people smugglers being publicly paraded in southern Guangxi province - a practice evocative of times past. The full hazmat suits appear to be common these days for criminal suspects... /1 [pic.twitter.com/qtKaMKrkR4](https://pic.twitter.com/qtKaMKrkR4)

— Bill Birtles (@billbirtles) [December 29, 2021](#)

China is taking strict measures, including sweeping lockdowns affecting millions of citizens, to deal with a rise in cases. The nation reported 203 new daily cases on Wednesday, and one of the world's largest memory chip makers, Micron Technology, said that ongoing restrictions in the city of Xi'an could lead to delays in the global supply of its DRAM memory chips.

The **World Health Organization** (WHO), meanwhile, has cautioned against reducing Covid isolation times as a “tsunami” of cases driven by the Omicron variant threatens to overwhelm health systems around the world.

The highly transmissible variant propelled the **US, France and Denmark** to fresh records on Wednesday, with AFP’s tally of 6.55 million infections reported globally in the space of seven days through to Tuesday, demonstrating the unprecedented spread.

The figures were the highest since the WHO declared a pandemic in March 2020, underscoring the blistering pace of Omicron transmission, with tens of millions of people facing a second consecutive year of restrictions dampening New Year’s Eve celebrations.

“I am highly concerned that Omicron, being more transmissible, circulating at the same time as Delta, is leading to a tsunami of cases,” said WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. “This is and will continue to put immense pressure on exhausted health workers, and health systems on the brink of collapse.”

The surge, currently worst in [Europe](#), is forcing governments to walk a tightrope between imposing restrictions designed to stop hospitals from becoming overwhelmed and the need to keep economies and societies open two years after the virus first emerged in late 2019.

Spain said it would shorten the quarantine for positive cases from 10 to seven days, after US health authorities on Monday [halved the recommended isolation time](#) for people with asymptomatic infections from 10 to five days.

The WHO’s guidelines on quarantine are, for symptomatic patients, 10 days after symptom onset, plus at least three additional days without symptoms; and for asymptomatic cases, 10 days after a positive test.

“There is some data to suggest that the incubation period for Omicron may be shorter, but there will still be a very wide range,” WHO emergencies director Michael Ryan told a news conference. “It would be advisable at this

point if we don't see huge shifts, huge moves in reducing control measures for Covid-19 purely on the basis of initial or preliminary studies.

Ryan described "a trade-off between the science and being absolutely perfect in what you try to do, but then having the minimal disruption that you can possibly have to your economy and society – and governments are struggling to find that balance".

The **US**, where Omicron is already overwhelming hospitals, recorded its highest-ever seven-day average of new cases at 265,427, according Johns Hopkins University.

Harvard epidemiologist and immunologist Michael Mina tweeted that the count was probably just the "tip of the iceberg" with the true number of cases likely far higher, because of a shortage of tests.

But the country also appears to be experiencing a decoupling between infections and severe outcomes compared to previous waves, officials noted, as evidence accumulates of milder cases under the new variant.

**France** registered a new daily record of more than 200,000 cases – more than double the number recorded on Christmas Day – and extended into January the closure of nightclubs.

French police said that wearing face masks outdoors will become compulsory again in Paris from Friday for everyone over age 11 except those inside vehicles, cyclists, users of two-wheeled transport such as scooters, and those participating in sports.

**Denmark**, which has the world's highest rate of infection per person, recorded a fresh record of 23,228 new infections, which authorities attributed in part to the large number of tests carried out after Christmas celebrations.

**Portugal** also saw a record with nearly 27,000 cases reported in 24 hours, while **Lebanon** had 3,150 new infections – its highest daily tally since vaccines rolled out earlier this year.

The number of people in hospital with Covid in **England** topped 10,000, the highest total since March, as Britain hit a new record of 183,037 daily cases in the last 24 hours.

Studies suggest Omicron, now the dominant strain in some countries, carries a reduced risk of sending those infected to hospital, but the WHO still urged caution.

More than 5.4 million people around the world have died from Covid-19, but over the last week the number of deaths averaged 6,450 a day, an AFP tally found, the lowest since October 2020.

In Europe, where more than 3.5 million cases have been recorded in the last seven days, **Greece** banned music in bars and restaurants until 16 January, including on New Year's Eve while Cyprus banned dancing in public venues.

**Germany** has put restrictions on sports competitions and shut nightclubs, limiting private gatherings to 10 vaccinated people.

**Mexico** City's mayor cancelled the capital's massive New Year's Eve celebrations after a rise in cases.

In **Ukraine**, three people died after a candle lit by a hospital employee in memory of a patient who died of the virus started a fire in an intensive care unit in the western town of Kosiv.

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## 2021.12.30 - Opinion

- When Desmond Tutu stood up for the rights of Palestinians, he could not be ignored
- Big economies and markets fare well despite Covid but 2022 brings new risks
- This year I decided to not argue with my mum. Our relationship has transformed
- After a year of sloth, I've rediscovered the joy of immersing myself in a book

## Opinion**Desmond Tutu**

# **When Desmond Tutu stood up for the rights of Palestinians, he could not be ignored**

[Chris McGreal](#)

After visits to Israel and Palestine, Tutu used his moral authority to speak out and, despite abuse, refused to back down. He wanted liberation for everyone

- Chris McGreal is the former Guardian correspondent in Jerusalem and Johannesburg



Desmond Tutu at a press conference in Geneva after Israel blocked his UN mission to Beit Hanun in 2006. Photograph: Salvatore Di Nolfi/EPA

Thu 30 Dec 2021 04.00 EST

Even amid the torrent of praise for the revered former archbishop [Desmond Tutu](#) in the days since his death, the anti-apartheid champion is not being universally mourned. Alan Dershowitz, the renowned US constitutional lawyer and ardent defender of Israel, took a moment to brand Tutu as “evil” and “the most influential antisemite of our time”.

“The world is mourning Bishop Tutu, who just died the other day. Can I remind the world that although he did some good things, a lot of good things on apartheid, the man was a rampant antisemite and bigot?” he told Fox News.

Dershowitz accused Tutu of minimising the Holocaust and of comparing [Israel](#) to Nazi Germany – an extreme interpretation of the former archbishop’s statements that takes some convolutions to reach.

But Tutu’s real crime in the eyes of Israel’s most unrelenting supporters was to liken its rule over the Palestinians to apartheid and then refuse to back off in the face of an onslaught of abuse. On his visits to Israel and Palestine, Tutu would have immediately recognised echoes of his homeland in the forced removals, the house demolitions, the humiliations of checkpoints and systems of control on movement, the confiscation of land for Jewish settlements, and the confining of Palestinians to blobs of territory, reminiscent of the Bantustan black homelands. Above all he saw one people controlling another who, like black South Africans until 1994, had little say in their governance.

Tutu was not alone in his view. Former US president Jimmy Carter drew similarly vitriolic accusations from Dershowitz and others when he published his bestselling book, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, in 2006. But Tutu was harder to attack. He not only had the authority of a Nobel peace prize awarded for his courageous stand against white rule in South [Africa](#) but he knew apartheid when he saw it.

Nearly two decades ago Tutu told a conference in Boston: “I’ve been very deeply distressed in my visit to the Holy Land; it reminded me so much of what happened to us black people in South Africa.”

A few years later he was even more direct. “I know first-hand that Israel has created an apartheid reality within its borders and through its occupation. The parallels to my own beloved South Africa are painfully stark indeed,” [he wrote](#) in 2014 in a call for the Presbyterian general assembly in the US to back sanctions against Israel.

A figure of Tutu’s stature drawing parallels between a system constructed on racism and the reality of Israel’s domination of the Palestinians, and calling for boycotts to end it, alarmed the government in Israel. With the two-state solution moribund at best, Israel is faced with a growing movement that sees the conflict through the moral prism of civil rights and injustice – a framing that has historic resonance in the US in particular and has taken on additional significance in the age of Black Lives Matter.

While Tutu was critical of Palestinian attacks, his implicit likening of Israelis to white South Africans during apartheid challenged the Jewish state’s longstanding narrative to portray itself principally as a victim of Arab aggression and terrorism, and to exclude the part played by occupation and settlements in the conflict.

Others have made the charge, including a string of former Israeli cabinet ministers and officials who say they can no longer deny the reality that their country is practising a form of apartheid. Two former Israeli prime ministers, Ehud Barak and Ehud Olmert, have [drawn parallels](#) with [the old South Africa](#). But Tutu carried a moral authority wielded surpassed only by the man who epitomised the anti-apartheid struggle, Nelson Mandela.

Tutu [justified](#) the calls for a boycott of Israel in the Tel Aviv newspaper Haaretz. South Africa, he said, had extraordinary leaders at the time it mattered. “But what ultimately forced these leaders together around the negotiating table was the cocktail of persuasive, nonviolent tools that had been developed to isolate South Africa, economically, academically, culturally and psychologically,” he said.

The former archbishop knew that it would only happen if ordinary people mobilised, having witnessed considerable western collusion with apartheid. The US government listed the African National Congress as a terrorist

organisation while backing white South Africa's war in Angola. Margaret Thatcher was an ardent opponent of sanctions against the apartheid regime.

Separately, Tutu warned that it was not possible to be a neutral bystander. "Those who turn a blind eye to injustice actually perpetuate injustice. If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor," [he said](#).

All of this earned Tutu a particular ire from some of Israel's defenders. The Anti-Defamation League [accused](#) him of antisemitism over his boycott call. Others dug into the distant past and latched on to a call Tutu made for forgiveness during a visit to Jerusalem's Yad Vashem memorial for Europe's murdered Jews in 1989. "We pray for those who made it happen, help us to forgive them and help us so that we in our turn will not make others suffer," he said.

Dershowitz characteristically gave Tutu's call the most extreme interpretation by describing it as having "demanded that Jews forgive the Nazis for killing them". In reality, Tutu consistently sought to reassure Jewish communities around the world that he understood their history and their concerns, but he saw no reason not to continue calling the occupation as he saw it.

The former archbishop would have been pleased that others increasingly embraced his perspective. This year, [Human Rights Watch in the US](#) and Israel's most prominent human rights group, [B'Tselem](#), published groundbreaking reports describing Israel's domination of the Palestinians as apartheid.

But ultimately Tutu's intent was not to condemn. His calls for forgiveness fitted with his belief that it is an essential step toward justice and peace – a view central to his chairing of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Tutu saw how everyone was liberated, white people included, when apartheid ended in South Africa. He wanted Israelis to liberate themselves from the burden of apartheid too.

- Chris McGreal is the former Guardian correspondent in Jerusalem and Johannesburg
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## Project Syndicate economistsBusiness

# **Big economies and markets fare well despite Covid but 2022 brings new risks**

[Nouriel Roubini](#)

The pandemic is not over and the next 12 months pose geopolitical and systemic challenges



As 2021 draws to a close, financial markets remain frothy. Photograph: Andrew Kelly/Reuters

Thu 30 Dec 2021 02.00 EST

Despite dips and disruptions from new variants of Covid-19, 2021 turned out to be a relatively positive year for economies and markets in most parts of the world. Growth rose above its potential after the severe recession of 2020, and financial markets recovered robustly. This was especially the case in the US, where stock markets reached new highs, owing partly to the US Federal Reserve's ultra-loose monetary policy (though central banks in other

advanced economies pursued radically accommodative policies of their own).

But 2022 may be more difficult. The pandemic is not over. Omicron may not be as virulent as previous variants – particularly in highly vaccinated advanced economies – but it is much more contagious, which means that hospitalisations and deaths will remain high. The resulting uncertainty and risk aversion will suppress demand and exacerbate supply-chain bottlenecks.

Together with excess savings, pent-up demand, and loose monetary and fiscal policies, those bottlenecks fuelled inflation in 2021. Many of the central bankers who insisted that the inflationary surge was transitory have now conceded that it will persist. With varying degrees of urgency, they are planning to phase out unconventional monetary policies such as quantitative easing, so that they can start to normalise interest rates.

Central banks' resolve will be tested if policy-rate hikes lead to shocks in the bond, credit, and stock markets

Central banks' resolve will be tested if policy-rate hikes lead to shocks in the bond, credit, and stock markets. With such a massive buildup of private and public debt, markets may not be able to digest higher borrowing costs. If there is a tantrum, central banks would find themselves in a debt trap and probably would reverse course. That would make an upward shift in inflation expectations likely, with inflation becoming endemic.

The next year also brings mounting geopolitical and systemic risks. On the geopolitical front, there are three major threats to watch.

First, Russia is preparing to invade Ukraine, and it remains to be seen whether negotiations on a new regional security regime can prevent escalation of the threat. Although the US president, Joe Biden, has promised more military aid for Ukraine and threatened harsher sanctions against Russia, he also has made clear that the US will not intervene directly to defend Ukraine against an attack. But the Russian economy has become more resilient to sanctions than it was in the past, so such threats may not be the Russian president, Vladimir Putin. After all, some western sanctions – such

as a move to block the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline – could even exacerbate Europe's own energy shortages.

Second, the Sino-American cold war is getting colder. China increasing its military pressure on Taiwan and in the South China Sea (where many territorial disputes are brewing), and the broader decoupling between the Chinese and US economies, is accelerating. This development will have stagflationary consequences over time.

Third, Iran is now a [threshold nuclear state](#). It has been rapidly enriching uranium to near-weapons grade, and the negotiations over a new or refurbished nuclear agreement have gone nowhere. As a result, Israel is [openly considering](#) strikes against Iranian nuclear facilities. Were that to happen, the stagflationary consequences would probably be worse than the oil-related geopolitical shocks of 1973 and 1979.

The new year also brings several systemic concerns. In 2021, heatwaves, fires, droughts, hurricanes, floods, typhoons and other disasters laid bare the real-world implications of climate change. The Cop26 climate summit in Glasgow offered mostly cheap talk, leaving the world [on track](#) to suffer a devastating 3C of warming this century. Droughts are already [driving a dangerous spike in food prices](#), and the effects of climate change will continue to worsen.

Making matters worse, the aggressive push to decarbonise the economy is leading to underinvestment in fossil-fuel capacity before there is a sufficient supply of renewable energy. This dynamic will generate much higher energy prices over time. Moreover, climate refugee flows toward the US, Europe and other advanced economies will surge just as those countries are shutting their borders.

Against this background, political dysfunction is increasing in both advanced economies and emerging markets. The US midterm elections may offer a preview of the full-blown constitutional crisis – if not outright political violence – that could follow the presidential vote in 2024. The US is experiencing near-unprecedented levels of partisan polarisation, gridlock, and radicalisation, all of which poses a serious systemic risk.

Populist parties (of both the far right and the far left) are growing stronger around the world, even in regions such as Latin America, where populism has a disastrous history. Peru and Chile both elected radical leftist leaders in 2021, Brazil and Colombia may follow suit in 2022, and Argentina and Venezuela will remain on a path to financial ruin. Interest-rate normalisation by the Fed and other major central banks could cause financial shocks in these and other fragile emerging markets such as Turkey and Lebanon, not to mention the many developing countries with debt ratios that are already unsustainable.

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As 2021 draws to a close, financial markets remain frothy, if not outright bubbly. Public and private equity are both expensive (with above-average price-to-earnings ratios); real estate prices (both housing and rent) are high in the US and many other economies; and there is still a craze around meme stocks, crypto assets, and Spacs (special purpose acquisition companies). Government bond yields remain ultra-low, and credit spreads – both high-yield and high-grade – have been compressed, owing partly to direct and indirect support from central banks.

As long as central banks were in unconventional policy mode, the party could keep going. But the asset and credit bubbles may deflate in 2022 when policy normalisation starts. Moreover, inflation, slower growth and geopolitical and systemic risks could create the conditions for a market correction in 2022. Come what may, investors are likely to remain on the edge of their seats for most of the year.

*Nouriel Roubini, professor emeritus of economics at New York University's Stern School of Business, has worked for the IMF, the US [Federal Reserve](#) and the World Bank.*

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## What I changed my mind about in 2021 Parents and parenting

# **This year I decided to not argue with my mum. Our relationship has transformed**

[Saima Mir](#)

Our different interpretations of what being Muslim means caused a rift between us. Now, I am learning to understand her better



Saima Mir in 1980, with her sister, Fozia, on her lap and her mum, Rashida, and dad, Razaullah.

Thu 30 Dec 2021 01.00 EST

I've stopped arguing with my mum this year. I've been trying to get her to see my side for more than two decades. Almost every conversation we used to have would end with my insides twisted up like a pretzel. We would argue

about everything, from religion to patriarchy and family. No conversation was safe.

I've never had cause to doubt my mother's love. Maybe that's why it got so bad, and why Mum bore the brunt of my frustrations; I knew she wasn't going to leave me. But now in her 70s, weak from having battled cancer, and left with hearing loss, I'm acutely aware that we're running out of time. We've been standing at the opposite sides of a bridge, our arms outstretched, not knowing how to get to each other for too long.

Growing up, I trusted my parents. But the way I saw the world changed after my second arranged marriage ended in divorce. I felt betrayed by the choices they had made for me, especially my mum. I began to see injustices around me that I'd never noticed before. Small things, such as the men eating first at dinner parties, boys in the living room, girls in the kitchen. The men never offering to help. The advantages taken by extended family, and how these were only ever one-way.

I began calling things out. While Dad seemed to understand, this wasn't received well by Mum. She and I are both Muslim, but I found myself having different interpretations of what that meant. We look at texts, scripture, and theological stories through the lens of the culture we are raised in. My mum grew up in Pakistan and in Iran. I was born and raised in England. Urdu is her first language, English is mine. As we navigated the knotty problems of life, a lot of our adult relationship became lost in translation. We would argue about women's rights, about how men should be treated – and I felt she wanted me to accept the status quo too often. Mum believed the demise of my marriage was due to bad luck, I saw it as the symptom of something far bigger.

One day, halfway through a family visit, my eight-year-old son, exhausted with our arguments, said to me: "Mama, don't argue with Nani." I looked into his eyes. He was pleading with me. I had to find a way to stop.

So I did.

At the age of 47, I finally scratched the CD that Mum and I had been playing on a loop for years. I began ending conversations early to prevent rows, I

stopped filling silences, and I didn't ask questions that I knew I wouldn't like the answer to. As the dynamic between us shifted, so did my understanding of the woman who is my mother.

I did the painful work of looking at myself, and I began to see my mother as a person separate to me. Mum came to England from Karachi in 1973 when she was 23 years old. At the time, homes in Bradford still had outside toilets; in Karachi, my mum had lived in a sprawling house with several washrooms, and staff to clean them. She had arrived in a country where racism was rife, with a first-class degree that was not accepted here. I see now how frightening that must have been for her – and how much time must have been spent simply trying to survive here. She did not have energy to be angry like me.

This year, I have come to understand that my rage was not for her, but grief for the people and experiences that I feel I have lost, for having had to fight alone, for having had to fight at all. But my mum had also had her battles, and she'd done her best. We love each other, and love requires acceptance.

We're not fully there yet. I'm still raw, and I get the sense my mum is still nervous, but we are edging towards each other, and hopefully our hands will meet in the centre of that bridge.

- Saima Mir is a journalist, writer and author of the novel *The Khan*
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## What I changed my mind about in 2021Books

# **After a year of sloth, I've rediscovered the joy of immersing myself in a book**

[Emma Brockes](#)



It took my six-year-olds to shame me out of my pandemic rut, and now I'm back in love with the printed word



‘Penelope Lively’s Moon Tiger was exactly what I needed, reminding me that all things will pass.’ Illustration by Alan Vest

Thu 30 Dec 2021 03.53 EST

Since the beginning of the pandemic, a low-key but persistent source of irritation has been how impossible it is to focus. “I can’t do anything,” is a line I’ve exchanged with friends countless times, by which we mean anything more energetic than scrolling. For the past 12 months, at the end of most days, the scene has been exactly the same; I’m out cold on the sofa, dazed from hours of binge-watching, as a prelude to dragging myself to bed. It’s a dull, depressing and nutrient-free way to pass the time. It’s also a hard habit to break.

For many of us, the biggest casualty has been reading. Books – in particular, in my case, fiction – have seemed to require unearthly levels of engagement. For months at a time, no book has appealed, and every title picked up has been put down. Across my apartment, along with the unwashed cups and stray socks, is an archipelago of books started and abandoned. As the pandemic wore on, the New York public library system stopped charging fines for late returns, removing the single incentive I had to finish anything.

It's odd how disturbing this became. I remember looking at my bookshelves, full of books shipped, years ago and at enormous expensive, across the Atlantic from London. Via the order on the shelves, I could trace the years of my most voracious reading, when one volume led to another, and another, and another. I saw, too, how this energy had dwindled over the years to much more occasional enthusiasms.

There had always been lulls and lags, long periods in which nothing quite took. But it had never been like this. I wondered if it had as much to do with middle age as the pandemic. Perhaps I had entered that period – like the moment a Radio 1 DJ glides, seamlessly, into Radio 2 and then death – when things simply stopped interesting me. Perhaps, I thought with panic, this was it. I'd aged into some fundamentally incurious state, filled up my hard drive, irreversibly burned myself out.

The situation led to some desperate measures. Perhaps the way to jump-start this, I thought, was to be hardcore. All right, I'm not going to write a novel during the pandemic, but maybe I can force myself to actually read one. One night, after the kids were asleep, I resisted another episode of Friday Night Lights and cracked the spine on [Swann's Way](#), a book that, at a conservative estimate, has moved with me unread across three countries and seven addresses. "For a long time I would go to bed early." Aaaaand I'm out.

Other failures followed. If Proust was a bit much for my degraded system, how about the [Collected Short Stories of John Cheever](#), a book I've been meaning to read since picking it up in a secondhand bookshop in Provincetown, Massachusetts, eight years ago? I ploughed through seven short stories, all beautifully written, some a little dated, and none of which could persuade me to keep reading. I tried a comfort read: Valerie Grove's excellent biography of Dodie Smith, which I love, but couldn't settle to. Maybe horror was what I needed, to match the inside with the outside world. But Shirley Jackson's [We Have Always Lived in the Castle](#) dragged, and Thomas Ligotti, whom I'd half been looking forward to reading, didn't quite take off, either. The one success I had, last summer, was with Zadie Smith's [Intimations](#), six essays on the pandemic that briefly lifted me out of my slump. But it was over very quickly and didn't lead to anything else.

What fixed things, in the end, was shame. Every night, my two six-year-olds have a homework assignment of 25 minutes' set reading. They are frequently grumpy about it, and I'm frequently cross with them. "How come we have to read and you don't?" asked one, a few weeks ago, and she had a good point. While they read, I almost always scrolled on my phone in what parents have been taught to refer to as bad modelling. Reluctantly, I sat down with them on the sofa for the 25 minutes, and forced myself to read.

I opened Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, which has sat unread on my shelf for 10 years, and either through its brilliance, or the psychology of the timer, it instantly worked. After finishing, I flipped to Penelope Lively's *Moon Tiger*, which was exactly what I needed: the long view taken by an old lady dying in hospital, reminding me that all things will pass. Last week, I started [Elizabeth Taylor's Angel](#). A long time ago, I had loved books by Taylor, but from the cover this one looked aggressively boring and I was spitefully testing myself. Oh my god, books are amazing. It's impossibly good.

- Emma Brockes is a Guardian columnist
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## 2021.12.30 - Around the world

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## [Hong Kong](#)

# Hong Kong court denies bail to ex-editors after raid on news outlet

It comes as US secretary of state calls for release of Stand News editors, saying ‘journalism is not sedition’



Stand News acting chief editor Patrick Lam is taken away by police after his arrest on Wednesday. Photograph: Daniel Suen/AFP/Getty Images

*Rhoda Kwan in Taipei and agencies*

Thu 30 Dec 2021 10.05 EST

A Hong Kong court has denied bail to two former senior editors charged with conspiring to publish seditious materials, a day after [police raided Stand News](#), a pro-democracy media outlet, prompting its closure.

About 200 officers raided the office of the online publication on Wednesday, froze its assets and arrested seven current and former senior editors and

former board members, in the latest crackdown on the city's press.

Campaigners and some western governments including the US have criticised the raid as a sign of further erosion of press freedoms since [China](#) imposed a sweeping national security law in the former British colony last year.

A magistrate at West Kowloon court denied bail applications for the former Stand News chief editor Chung Pui-kuen and the acting chief editor, Patrick Lam. [Hong Kong](#) laws restrict media coverage of bail hearings.

Along with Best Pencil (Hong Kong) Limited, the corporate entity behind Stand News, the two men were charged with conspiring "to publish and/or reproduce seditious publications," according to the charge sheet.

Four former members of the Stand News board – Margaret Ng, a former democratic legislator and barrister, [Denise Ho](#), a pop star, and Chow Tat-chi and Christine Fang – were released on police bail pending further investigations.

Ng told reporters as she left the police station that "continuing to care for each other is very important". Ho, a Canadian citizen, left without comment.

Chung's wife, Chan Pui-man, formerly a senior editor with the pro-democracy Apple Daily newspaper, was already being held and remains in prison on separate charges.

The US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, has called for all seven to be released. "We call on PRC [People's Republic of China] and Hong Kong authorities to cease targeting Hong Kong's free and independent media and to immediately release those journalists and media executives who have been unjustly detained and charged," Blinken said. "A confident government that is unafraid of the truth embraces a free press."

Blinken said "journalism is not sedition" and that "by silencing independent media, PRC and local authorities undermine Hong Kong's credibility and viability".

Stand News shut down on Wednesday less than 10 hours after the police raid. The national security department confiscated boxes of evidence and froze HK\$61m (\$7.8m) of its assets.

Stand had been the most prominent remaining pro-democracy media outlet in the city, after Apple Daily was [forced to close in June](#) after a similar crackdown.

All members of staff have been dismissed, Stand said in a statement announcing its closure. The news site and all social media channels were erased late on Wednesday evening.

Hong Kong's Foreign Correspondents' Club said: "These actions are a further blow to press freedom in Hong Kong and will continue to chill the media environment in the city following a difficult year for the city's news outlets."

Peter Stano, the lead EU spokesperson for external affairs, tweeted that the raid marked a further deterioration of press freedoms in Hong Kong.

The UN Human Rights Office in Geneva expressed concern at the "extremely rapid closing of the civic space and outlets for Hong Kong's civil society to speak and express themselves freely".

Canada's foreign affairs minister, Mélanie Joly, expressed "deep concern" over the arrest of Ho, who is a Canadian citizen.

Taiwan's president, Tsai Ing-wen, also condemned the raid. "We in #Taiwan regret to see their detention & call on the international community to stand up for freedom & democracy in HK," she tweeted.

Hong Kong's leader, Carrie Lam, rejected calls for the seven to be released on Thursday, saying the arrests were law enforcement actions and not aimed at the media industry.

"These actions have nothing to do with so-called suppression of press freedom," Lam said. "Journalism is not seditious ... but seditious activities could not be condoned under the guise of news reporting."

Beijing's foreign ministry in Hong Kong also rebuffed international criticism, accusing the EU external affairs office and Hong Kong's Foreign Correspondents' club of "openly spreading harsh remarks" and "wantonly slandering the rule of law and freedom in Hong Kong".

A not-for-profit outlet, Stand News was founded in 2014 in the wake of the city's pro-democracy umbrella movement. It was known internationally for its livestreams during the months of pro-democracy protests that rocked the city in 2019.

*Reuters contributed to this report*

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## US foreign policy

# Biden to speak with Putin amid Russia's increased presence near Ukraine

Two leaders will discuss a range of topics, including ‘upcoming diplomatic engagements in Russia’



Vladimir Putin and Joe Biden in Geneva, Switzerland, in June. Photograph: Alexander Zemlianichenko/AP

*[Maya Yang](#) and [Andrew Roth](#) in Moscow*

Thu 30 Dec 2021 14.47 EST

Joe Biden will speak on Thursday with [Vladimir Putin](#) regarding the Russian president increased security demands in eastern Europe.

The two leaders will discuss a range of topics, including “upcoming diplomatic engagements in Russia”, said US national security council spokesperson Emily Horne in a [statement](#) announcing the call.

Thursday's talks come at the request of Russia amid Russia's increased security presence near [Ukraine](#) as the US and its allies watch on warily. The buildup of Russian troops near the Ukrainian border has grown to an estimated 100,000 and has fueled fears that Moscow is preparing to invade Ukraine.

Moscow has also announced it would hold new joint military drills with Belarus in February or March.

"This dialogue should, and we expect will, proceed on the basis of reciprocity. There will be topics where we can make meaningful progress and topics where we will have differences. That's the nature of diplomacy," said a senior Biden administration official in a background press call.

The Kremlin has said that Putin wants to speak with Biden as part of the preparations for a formal round of security talks set to begin between US and Russian delegations in Geneva next month.

Asked why the Kremlin had requested an additional phone call with Biden, Putin's press secretary Dmitry Peskov said: "This is because of the substance, the items on the agenda are extremely complicated."

Russia has demanded that Nato pledge not to admit Ukraine into the military alliance and that it remove its troops and military infrastructure from countries that joined after 1997. The United States has said it will not discuss issues that affect its allies' security without their direct participation and has sought to assuage their concerns ahead of the call.

On Wednesday, the US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, spoke with the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy.

According to state department spokesman Ned Price, Blinken "reiterated the United States' unwavering support for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity in the face of Russia's military buildup on Ukraine's borders".

"We have had very good discussions with the Ukrainian side in terms of short-term confidence-building measures that they have put on the table with

the Russian side... We have seen a real willingness on the part of the Ukrainian side to put forward proposals aimed at confidence building de-escalation,” the senior official said.

The talks between Biden and Putin will begin late on Thursday evening in Moscow and are expected to be conducted in private.

In a New Year’s greeting published by the Kremlin ahead of the call, Putin said: “I am confident that, following up on our agreements reached during the June summit in Geneva and subsequent meetings, we can move forward and establish an effective Russian-American dialogue based on mutual respect and consideration for each other’s national interests.”

Earlier this month, Biden and Putin held a [virtual summit](#) regarding the [Ukraine crisis](#) but made little apparent headway.

“The discussion between President Biden and President Putin was direct and straightforward. There was a lot of give and take, there was no finger-wagging. But the president was crystal clear about where the United States stands on all these issues,” said the US national security adviser, Jake Sullivan.

During those talks, Putin demanded “reliable, legal guarantees” that would prevent Nato’s expansion towards Russia or place missile systems in Russia’s bordering countries.

Shortly after the talks, Russia put forward a list of highly contentious security guarantees it says it wants the west to agree to in order to reduce tensions in [Europe](#) and defuse the crisis over Ukraine.

The [demands](#) include a ban on Ukraine from entering Nato and limiting troop deployment and weapons to Nato’s eastern flank. Russia has also asked Nato to not hold drills without previous agreement from Russia in Ukraine, eastern Europe, in Caucasus countries or in central Asia.

Peskov said the two leaders are expected to continue discussions that began at the video summit and that they would also discuss upcoming talks

between Russia and the US, Nato, and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe set to begin in mid-January.

Moscow has said that ignoring its interests will result in a “military response” similar to the Cuban missile crisis in 1962.

Putin announced this week that he will hold new joint military drills with Belarus, which also borders Ukraine. The drills are scheduled for February or March, Putin said after meeting with Belarus’s Alexander Lukashenko. He did not say how many troops would take part in the drills or what their objective would be.

On Sunday, Putin said he would consider a slew of options if the west fails to meet his push for security guarantees precluding Nato’s expansion to Ukraine.

In Wednesday’s statement, Horne said: “President Biden has spoken with leaders across Europe, and Biden administration officials have engaged multilaterally with Nato, the EU and the OSCE [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe].

“The Biden administration continues to engage in extensive diplomacy with our European allies and partners, consulting and coordinating on a common approach in response to Russia’s military build-up on the border with Ukraine.”

The senior official said that the US is “also prepared to respond if Russia advances with a further invasion of Ukraine”.

“We have made plans to reinforce Nato’s force posture in allied states in the event of a further invasion, and we are prepared to provide Ukraine with further assistance to defend its territory,” he added.

Nevertheless, he reiterated that Biden will emphasize to Putin that “there is a clear diplomacy path to de-escalating tensions in the region if President Putin is interested in taking it”.

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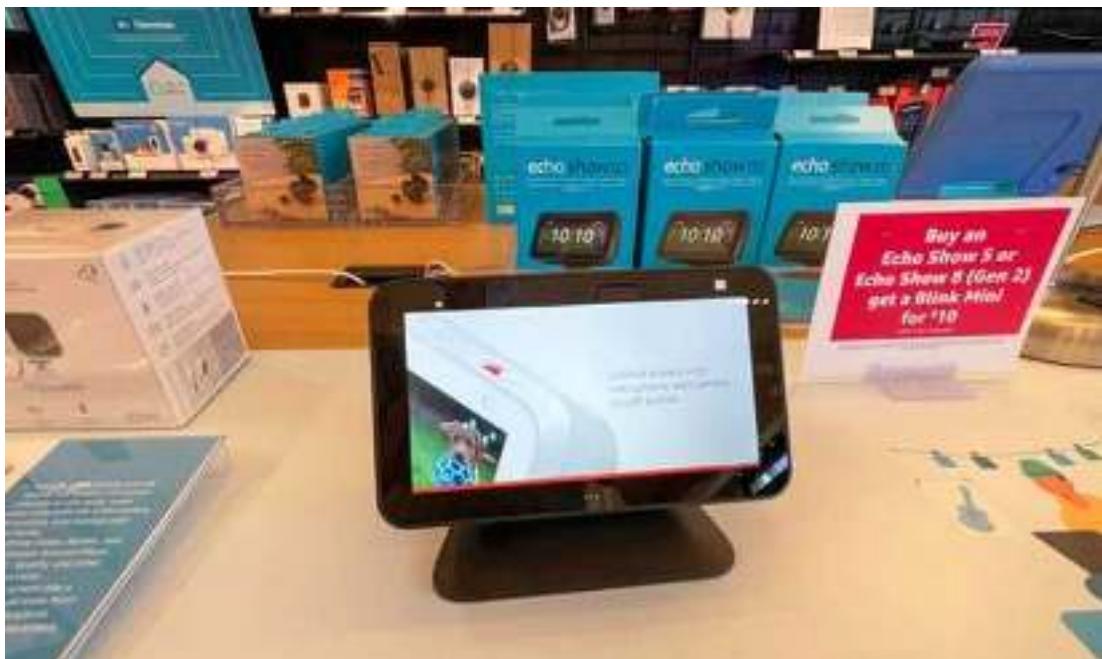
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## Amazon Alexa

# Amazon's Alexa device tells 10-year-old to touch a penny to a live plug socket

The child had asked the Echo smart speaker for a challenge, prompting her mother to post the response on Twitter



A mother tweeted her outrage after her Echo smart speaker told her young daughter to touch a penny to a live plug socket. Photograph: Mike Blake/Reuters

[Maya Yang](#)

Wed 29 Dec 2021 19.09 EST

Virtual assistants can set timers for people, play music, control smart home devices, respond to voice commands and set up reminders. As of Sunday, they have also proven their ability to challenge children to lethal dares.

Alexa, Amazon's virtual assistant, recently advised a 10-year-old girl to touch a penny to a live plug socket after she asked the Echo smart speaker for a challenge.

"My 10-year-old just asked Alexa on our Echo for a challenge and this is what she said," said user Kristin Livdahl in a [tweet](#) on Sunday. She accompanied the caption with a screenshot of Alexa's response.

"Here's something I found on the web. According to [ourcommunitynow.com](#), the challenge is simple: plug in a phone charger about halfway into a wall outlet, then touch a penny to the exposed prongs," read Alexa's response.

OMFG My 10 year old just asked Alexa on our Echo for a challenge and this is what she said. [pic.twitter.com/HgGgrLbdS8](https://pic.twitter.com/HgGgrLbdS8)

— Kristin Livdahl (@klivdahl) [December 26, 2021](#)

The challenge began circulating on TikTok around a year ago and often results in the person getting an electric shock, along with potential fires and serious lifelong injuries.

Users were quick to express their shock and dismay at the tweet, which has since garnered 17,000 likes and more than 3,000 retweets.

One user [tweeted](#): "Omg that's horrible."

Others poked fun at the incident. One [said](#): "Clearly AMZN's algorithm realize that by suggesting this challenge customers will later have to buy a lot of stuff to replace everything after the house burned down."

Another user [said](#): "What did you expect when you outsourced parenting to an AI?"

Amazon said they have since resolved the issue. A spokesperson [told](#) CNN: "Customer trust is at the center of everything we do and Alexa is designed to provide accurate, relevant, and helpful information to customers."

“As soon as we became aware of this error, we quickly fixed it, and will continue to advance our systems to help prevent similar responses in the future.”

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## Canberra

# Aboriginal Tent Embassy condemns protesters who lit fire at Old Parliament House

The front of the heritage-listed building in Canberra sustains extensive damage, with police yet to make any arrests



The front entrance to Old Parliament House has been extensively damaged after a fire took hold. Photograph: Lukas Coch/AAP

*Australian Associated Press*  
Thu 30 Dec 2021 04.06 EST

The Aboriginal Tent Embassy has condemned the actions of protesters that led to a deliberately lit fire burning the doors of Canberra's Old Parliament House.

Protesters have been outside Old Parliament House for more than a week and had begun a traditional smoking ceremony on Thursday.

ACT police commander Linda Champion said officials agreed to the small smoking ceremony as part of the peaceful protest but it had gotten “a little bit out of hand”.

“When ACT police went to respond, that’s when it was greatly escalated,” she said.

“If there is peaceful demonstrations, we fully support that. If there is any criminal activity, we will be taking action.”

Champion said pepper spray was used against protesters but had no effect on the fire.

In a statement, the tent embassy said the protesters’ actions and smoking ceremony was done without the “knowledge, consent or mandate” of the embassy’s council or traditional owners responsible for the embassy’s regulation.

“Although we support the concept of nonviolent direct action, we do not condone the destruction of public and private property,” the statement reads.

Emergency services were called to the scene just before midday and evacuated the building as a precaution.

Social media footage showed police dragging protesters away from the front steps of the building and a large fire burning at the doors. The front of the heritage-listed site sustained extensive damage.

Champion said there were no significant injuries and no arrests had been made as of Thursday afternoon.

“The investigation is still under way and should we find those responsible, they will be prosecuted,” she said.

Supt Sam Evans from ACT Fire and Rescue said the fire did not extend into the building, although the interior fire alarms were activated. “There is water

and smoke damage inside the structure,” he said.

Andrew Harper from the Museum of Australian Democracy, which is located at Old Parliament House, said he was devastated.

“We are very concerned about the damage,” he said. “We will be closed for some time but as soon as we can we will be back open sharing this iconic building with the public again.”

It remains unclear whether the original 1927 doors can be salvaged or how extensive the damage inside the building is, Harper says.

A group of anti-vaccine campaigners broadcast their protest and parts of the fire on social media.

One protester told Sky News the group was there “for positive reasons” but added they “had to burn that door down just to get the message across”.

The building was set on fire by protesters on 21 December and there have been daily protests outside it since 26 December.

The prime minister, Scott Morrison, said he was “disgusted and appalled” by the fire.

“It is disgraceful. Authorities should act swiftly in accordance with the law and people should face consequences of their actions,” he said.

The tent embassy will hold a three-day event between 25-27 January to mark its 50th anniversary and to “honour and mourn our past”.

Photos from Old Parliament House in Canberra show the front of the 1927 building severely damaged, with the ornate front doors completely destroyed by fire. Protestors and police still on the scene as well as shocked members of the public. [pic.twitter.com/MIPacMORgf](https://pic.twitter.com/MIPacMORgf)

— Siobhan Heanue (@siobhanheanue) [December 30, 2021](#)

The museum will remain closed until further notice, police said.

The opposition leader, Anthony Albanese, said it was a “very historic building”.

“It’s an important building and I just hope that there is only minimal damage,” he said.

The building, completed in the 1920s, was added to Australia’s national heritage list in 2006.

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/dec/30/fire-at-old-parliament-house-damages-entrance-to-historic-canberra-building>.

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## Technology sector

# Didi Global reports widening losses as Beijing restrictions bite

Ride-hailing firm's operating losses hit \$6.3bn as Chinese regulators pursue customer-data inquiry



Shares in Didi soared after its IPO in June, but have since slumped by 65%.

Photograph: How Hwee Young/EPA

*Guardian staff and agency*

Thu 30 Dec 2021 03.47 EST

The Chinese ride-hailing firm Didi Global has reported widening losses and a decline in third-quarter revenue, after its domestic business took a hit from a regulatory crackdown by Beijing.

The company said operating losses hit \$6.3bn (£4.68bn) in the nine months to the end of September, while revenue fell nearly 2% in its third quarter.

Chinese authorities have come down hard on Didi since its New York Stock exchange listing in June, demanding that it take down its software from mobile app stores while the Cyberspace Administration of [China](#) (CAC) investigated its handling of customer data.

The restriction came as a blow for Didi – co-founded in 2012 by former [Alibaba](#) employee Will Wei Cheng and backed by SoftBank Group – which was the dominant ride-hailing company in China. The company now faces stiff competition from ride-hailing services by automakers Geely and SAIC Motor.

Under pressure from Chinese regulators concerned about data security, Didi decided in December to delist in New York and pursue a Hong Kong listing.

Shares in Didi soared after its initial public offering (IPO), giving the company a valuation of \$80bn and marking the biggest US listing by a Chinese firm since 2014, but have since declined by 65%.

Didi said on Wednesday its board had authorised it to pursue a listing of its class A ordinary shares on the main board of the Hong Kong stock exchange. “The company is executing above plans and will update investors in due course,” Didi said.

The company also announced that Daniel Zhang, the chief executive officer of the Chinese e-commerce company Alibaba who had served as a director on Didi’s board since 2018, has resigned. He is succeeded by Yi Zhang, a senior legal director of Alibaba Group.

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This article was downloaded by [calibre](#) from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/dec/30/didi-global-reports-widening-losses-as-beijing-restrictions-bite>

## **Headlines monday 27 december 2021**

- [Environment Plans in England for car chargers in all commercial car parks quietly rolled back](#)
- [Live Covid: Johnson to examine hospital data; Australia passes milestone of 10,000 daily cases](#)
- [Covid PM to examine hospital data](#)
- [Exclusive One in four Britons ‘not confident NHS can care for them’](#)

## Electric, hybrid and low-emission cars

# Plans in England for car chargers in all commercial car parks quietly rolled back

Only new or refurbished commercial buildings should install charge points, the DfT says, citing fears over cost



Environmental campaigners and the car industry warn that public charger access will lag behind demand as sales of EVs soar. Photograph: Geoffrey Swaine/REX/Shutterstock

*Jasper Jolly*

*@jjpjolly*

Mon 27 Dec 2021 03.00 EST

The government has quietly backtracked on proposals to require every shop, office or factory in England to install at least one electric car charger if they

have a large car park, prompting criticism by environmental campaigners.

The original plan required every new and existing non-residential building with parking for 20 cars or more to install a charger. However, the Department for Transport (DfT) has now revealed it will only require chargers be installed in new or refurbished commercial premises amid fears over the cost for businesses, according to a [response](#) to a consultation.

The move has prompted concern in the car industry and among experts that [public charger access will lag behind demand](#), as sales of electric vehicles accelerate ahead of the 2035 ban on sales of new fossil-fuelled internal combustion engines. A quarter of new cars bought in the UK in November can be plugged in to recharge, according to industry data.

Greg Archer, the UK director of [Transport](#) & Environment, a campaign group, said: “Car parks are an ideal place for drivers of electric cars without driveways to charge. By failing to require commercial buildings with car parks to install a small number of charge points, the government has missed a simple opportunity to level up the charging available for less affluent drivers who park overnight on the road.

“It is inexplicable that a government committed to phasing out conventional cars has failed to follow through and implement its own proposals from more than two years ago, and instead say it needs longer to consider the options.”

[Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced plans last month](#) for a charging point to be required for every new or refurbished residential building from next year amid great fanfare, saying the regulations were “world-leading”.

However, the decision to drop the requirement for existing non-residential buildings means the UK could fall behind the EU, which is introducing a rule for existing buildings to install cable routes for chargers after 2025.

The government could still introduce more ambitious requirements for existing car parks – such as mandating a minimum number of chargers per parking space. The Office for Zero Emission Vehicles is considering

comments on a [separate consultation](#) that closed last month on the future of transport regulations.

The DfT's consultation response said it wanted to find "a more tailored approach" for existing non-residential buildings. Despite worries over the financial costs, the cost of about £1,500 for installing a charger point can be [recouped within a few years](#) by charging users for electricity.

The DfT declined to share the identities of those who objected to the policy on cost grounds. The consultation responses showed the most common objection was a lack of ambition for the number of charging points for larger premises. Only a "small number of respondents raised concerns about who would pay". The DfT said it would draft an alternative policy.

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All the large UK supermarket chains, led by Asda, Sainsbury's and Waitrose, have already started installing electric car chargers to try to lure shoppers – who can top up on energy while they shop.

A DfT spokesperson said: "We have recently introduced world-leading legislation which requires new homes and non-residential buildings, such as offices and supermarkets, with associated parking to have charge points installed.

"This will see the installation of up to 145,000 new charge points across England each year, ensuring consumers are able to buy homes ready for an EV future, and more charge points are available at shops and workplaces. With about 80% of all EV charging happening at home, this is a significant step forward as we accelerate towards our net zero targets and power up the electric revolution."

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/dec/27/plans-in-england-for-car-chargers-in-all-commercial-car-parks-quietly-rolled-back>

[Coronavirus live](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

## **England hospital Covid admissions highest since February; France announces new curbs – as it happened**

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2021/dec/27/covid-news-live-australia-case-rise-continues-omicron-grounds-1000-more-us-flights>

## Coronavirus

# Boris Johnson to examine hospital data before decision on Covid rules

Sources suggest No 10 leaning away from stricter curbs in England, as doctors' union says lack of response is 'ludicrous'

- [\*\*Coronavirus – latest updates\*\*](#)
- [\*\*See all our coronavirus coverage\*\*](#)



Ambulances outside the Royal London Hospital in London. A hospital doctors' trade union urged ministers to implement further measures without delay. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

*[Jessica Elgot](#) and [Denis Campbell](#)*

Sun 26 Dec 2021 13.17 EST

Boris Johnson is expected to examine crucial hospital data on Monday before making any new announcement on Covid measures, but has no plans to recall his cabinet, with ministers still deeply sceptical of further legal curbs.

Sources said the prime minister would “take stock” after being encouraged by improving data on Friday, a sign that No 10 is leaning away from stricter curbs in [England](#), but Downing Street sources said he would act quickly if there were new causes for concern.

Instead, Johnson will receive only his regular data briefing over the bank holiday with England’s chief medical officer, Prof Chris Whitty – expected to be knighted in the new year honours – and the chief scientific adviser, Sir Patrick Vallance.

Key evidence that the government will examine on Monday includes data on the length of stay in hospitals, the transition rates to ICU and new death figures. There is concern among some government figures about undeclared positive cases – including those asymptomatic but also those isolating after a lateral flow test whose results are not recorded by the NHS because they do not take a PCR.

However, cabinet ministers are still highly sceptical of further legal restrictions, a week after a tense three-hour cabinet meeting in which the majority pushed back against any new curbs.

One cabinet minister said the positive data on Omicron’s severity – a Health Security Agency analysis found those catching Omicron are 50% to 70% less likely to need hospital care compared with previous variants – proved they had been right to hold out.

“The data so far is still struggling to be persuasive of legal changes to be required,” one cabinet minister said. Another said it was “right that we didn’t rush last time given positive, early data”.

But a hospital doctors’ trade union urged ministers to implement further measures without delay to help the NHS, including limits on household

mixing and table service only in hospitality venues.

Dr Paul Donaldson, the general secretary of the Hospital Consultants and Specialists Association, warned Johnson that “it would be ludicrous” not to respond more decisively to Omicron, and that Christmas mingling would inevitably have spread Covid.

“There is a high probability we are moving too late,” said Donaldson, a consultant microbiologist.

“We will soon start to see the impact of Christmas. We are holding out hope that hospitalisations are at the lower end of projections. But given the uncertainty we face it would be ludicrous not to take additional precautions,” he added.

The HCSA also wants to see social distancing measures applied in retail and hospitality settings, such as mask-wearing, table spacing, limits on capacity and queueing systems, as well as social distancing and bubbles in all schools and continued working from home.

The NHS Confederation, which represents health service trusts in England, said any further steps would help the NHS, given the rising number of hospitalisations and staff off sick due to the virus. There were 1,171 people admitted to hospital across the UK in the previous 24 hours, the government disclosed on Friday.

“Any new restrictions which are brought in to help ease the pressure on the NHS need to be clearly explained to the public. Confusion and complacency can make any new restrictions ineffective,” said Matthew Taylor, its chief executive.

The prime minister has pledged to his restive backbenchers, a significant number of whom rebelled over the last set of restrictions, that he will recall parliament before implementing new restrictions but it is possible any vote could be retrospective, should the decision be taken later in the week.

Johnson faced significant opposition from his cabinet before Christmas during a three-hour meeting where the decision was taken to delay any new curbs until after the festive weekend.

The transport secretary, Grant Shapps, the foreign secretary, Liz Truss, and the business secretary, Kwasi Kwarteng, were said to be the most sceptical of restrictions, while the levelling up secretary, Michael Gove, and culture secretary, Nadine Dorries, have urged the most caution.

On Friday, papers released from government scientific advisers showed modelling for the impact of implementing “step 2” restrictions from Tuesday – a date now unlikely to be practicable. That would mean an end to indoor gatherings and introducing the rule of six outdoors, with bars and restaurants only able to serve outdoors.

The modelling suggested that restrictions could reduce deaths by 18% if kept in place until mid-January or 39% if retained until the end of March.

Cabinet resistance to further restrictions is also likely to be deepened by the collapse in Johnson’s own poll ratings over the scandal of No 10 Christmas parties and deep rifts with his own party over plan B restrictions to enforce home working, mask-wearing and new Covid passes for large venues.

Speaking to the Observer on Sunday, Conservative MPs suggested that those who wished to eventually replace Johnson should resist further Covid restrictions.

Johnson and the education secretary, Nadhim Zahawi, are said to be determined that schools reopen on time in January. Step 2 restrictions would allow schools to remain open, as well as non-essential shops, subject to social distancing rules.

New coronavirus restrictions come into force from Monday in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. From Boxing Day, a maximum of six people will be allowed to meet in pubs, cinemas and restaurants in Wales, as well as other restrictions on numbers for larger events.

In Scotland, up to three households can meet, with 1-metre distancing between groups at indoor and outdoor venues such as bars, restaurants, theatres, cinemas and gyms. Table service is also required at places where alcohol is served.

Northern Ireland is also recommending restricting socialising to three households, while up to six people can meet in pubs, bars and restaurants.

However, there are serious concerns in the NHS that the large number of frontline personnel falling sick as infections spiral because of Omicron is hampering the service's ability to provide care.

Staff absences in England due to Covid have been soaring during December, the latest official figures [showed last Thursday](#). The number of days lost to illness caused by Covid went up by 38% to 124,855 in the week to 19 December, while the number of staff off sick rose by 54% from 12,240 to 18,829, both compared with the previous week.

At some hospitals in London, which has been hit first and worst by the new variant, the number of staff off ill with Covid has trebled since the start of the month, NHS England's figures showed.

Taylor said that the service was facing a “double emergency” of sharply rising staff absences because of illness at the same time as the demand for hospital care was rising.

Chris Hopson, the chief executive of NHS Providers, has said that the loss of frontline staff to sickness is “a big worry” for hospital bosses who are facing growing demand from patients, especially as the NHS in England has almost 100,000 vacancies anyway.

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/dec/26/boris-johnson-to-examine-hospital-data-before-decision-on-covid-rules>

**NHS**

## One in four Britons ‘not confident NHS can care for them’, survey reveals

Exclusive: long waits for operations and GP appointments during pandemic likely to blame, experts say

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



The suspension of normal services during the pandemic appears to have undermined the public's faith in the NHS. Photograph: Peter Byrne/PA

*[Denis Campbell](#) Health policy editor*

Sun 26 Dec 2021 15.12 EST

One in four Britons do not believe that the [NHS](#) can care for them properly, new research into the public's attitude to the health service reveals.

When asked “how confident are you, if at all, in the NHS’s ability to give you the care you need?”, a quarter (26%) said they were not confident.

While only 15% thought the NHS was not coping well with treating coronavirus patients, many more – 41% – believed that it was not coping well with providing other services.

Experts said that increasingly long delays for operations and GP appointments, [Covid's disruption to normal NHS services](#) and longstanding staff shortages were likely to blame for the widespread lack of confidence in the health service’s ability to provide timely and effective medical treatment.

Sally Warren, the director of policy at the King’s Fund health thinktank, said that the pandemic had added to the pressure already being felt in the NHS and forced it to prioritise who received care.

### NHS confidence

“The impact of this reprioritisation has been clear for all to see through regular reports of NHS services struggling to cope. Once again this is at the forefront of many people’s minds as the Omicron variant brings back the threat of services being overwhelmed,” said Warren.

“But it’s not just media reports that change people’s perceptions of the health service, and many people have personal experience of struggling to access their GP or being stuck on a hospital waiting list,” she added.

The findings by the pollsters Ipsos Mori are based on questions it asked 1,032 adults aged 18 to 75 across Britain between 16 and 18 December. When the 41% who thought the NHS was not coping well with providing non-Covid care were asked who they held responsible, 48% said the government, 18% blamed patients and 8% identified the general public as the culprits.

The survey also found that people who were on a waiting list for routine hospital care themselves or who have had a relative on one were more likely to be “not confident” in the NHS’s ability to provide care.

Labour said the findings showed the effects of persistent and unaddressed staff shortages.

“The pandemic has put enormous pressures on the NHS. But the health service went into the pandemic hugely understaffed with patients already waiting too long for care. With record waiting lists, 100,000 NHS staff shortages and 112,000 vacancies in social care in 2019, the Tories left our health service criminally ill-equipped for Covid,” said Wes Streeting, the shadow health secretary.

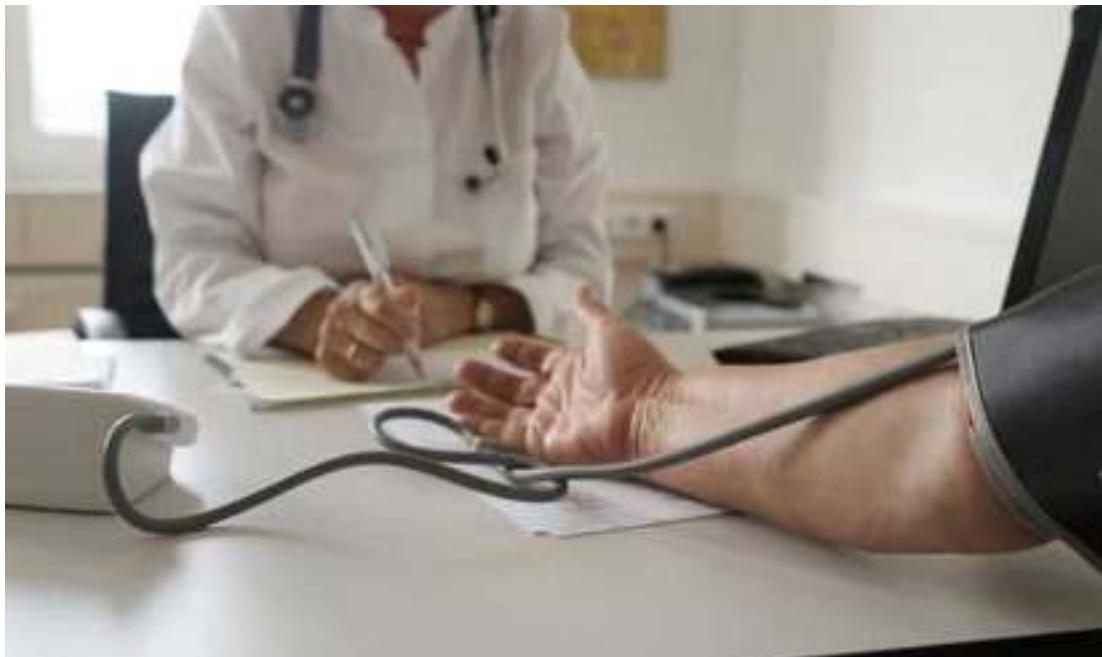
“None of this is the fault of our heroic health and social care workers, who are getting Britain through this pandemic. For our NHS to be able to provide the care patients expect the workforce needs to be properly valued, strengthened and provided with modern equipment and technology to ensure patients receive quality care quicker,” he added.

The pandemic – which led to the widespread suspension of normal NHS care and has seen [England's waiting list soar from 4.4 million to 5.8 million](#) – appears to have undermined the public’s faith in its ability to give them the care they need.

In the research, 37% of those questioned said they had less confidence that the NHS could give them the care they need since the pandemic while just 21% said they had more confidence.

Chris Hopson, the chief executive of NHS Providers, which represents hospitals in England, said the huge pressures the service was under were being felt by patients.

“The NHS has just been through the toughest two years in its history, and is being severely tested on multiple fronts.



Long waits for GP appointments were one likely cause for the lack of confidence in the NHS.

Photograph: RayArt Graphics/Alamy

“The public know the health service is pulling out all the stops to provide the care people need. A large majority are confident in the NHS’s ability to deliver that care. It’s understandable, given the scale of the pressures, that some will be worried,” Hopson said.

He cited the [Omicron variant](#), the record backlog of those waiting for surgery – which [NHS leaders admit will take years to clear](#) – and huge demand for A&E as examples of the growing strain.

Kate Duxbury, Ipsos Mori’s joint research director, said: “Overall, the public still think the NHS has the ability to give them the care they need, though this has been impacted by the pandemic and there are signs it will come under increasing pressure as more people find themselves waiting for NHS care.”

A Department of [Health](#) and Social care spokesperson declined to respond directly to the findings. But a spokesperson said: “While the pandemic has put enormous pressures on the NHS and caused waiting lists to grow, the

NHS is delivering the biggest vaccination rollout in history and more than 32 million people have been given their vital booster jab.

“Our record investment in the NHS includes an extra £2bn this year and £8bn over the next three years to cut waiting times and deliver an extra 9m checks, scans and operations ensuring patients get the treatment they need sooner.

“The NHS is also deploying more efficient, innovative ways of working, including opening new surgical hubs and at least 100 community diagnostic centres by 2025 to make getting checked quicker and more convenient.”

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## 2021.12.27 - Spotlight

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- I was a heroin addict and had given up on myself Then suddenly, briefly, I felt a desire to live

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## Ant and Dec trolling Boris, Andrew Scott snogging and Rose Ayling-Ellis: the TV moments of 2021



The cast of our 2021 TV moments of the year: Andrew Scott, Dermot O'Leary and Alison Hammond, George Webster, Ted Lasso, Rose Ayling-

Ellis and Giovanni Pernice, plus swimmer Tom Dean. Composite: BBC, ITV, Apple

From Ant and Dec's political punditry to Rose and Giovanni's powerful Strictly dance, here are the most amazing, moving and brilliantly bizarre things that happened on our screens

[Scott Bryan](#)

Mon 27 Dec 2021 01.00 EST

It has been a hell of a year, emphasis on the *hell*. Yet among all the sadness (and numerous revelations of Number 10 parties), there's also been an array of uplifting, engrossing and fantastically strange television moments this year. Here are some of our favourites.

## **Dermot O'Leary's 'brave' coming out**

The moment in question. Alison's reaction made it  
[pic.twitter.com/Xe5Zd3D07b](https://pic.twitter.com/Xe5Zd3D07b)

— James Briggs (@jamescbriggs) [November 26, 2021](#)

There were so many surreal, life-affirming clangers on This Morning in 2021. Presenter Josie Gibson hilariously [fell into a lake](#) and was dragged out live on air. Alison Hammond set herself up for a fall by asking Graham Norton whether [his lovely dog](#) was still alive ("no ... dead," Norton responded.) But the best was Barry Humphries mistakenly congratulating Dermot O'Leary – instead of Phillip Schofield – for coming out of the closet. Largely thanks to Alison Hammond's hysterical laughter.

## ***That* Rose and Giovanni Strictly dance**

This year saw the most diverse Strictly ever. While John and Johannes received widespread praise and proved that a same-sex partnership could actually enhance the show (rather than, as naysayers suggested, distract from

it), it was the eventual winners Rose and her partner Giovanni who captured our hearts. In a Strictly dance that will be remembered for years to come, Rose and Giovanni continued to move as the song faded away, as a tribute to deaf people. “There’s so many things that Rose’s win symbolises for Deaf people like myself,” journalist [Liam O’Dell told BBC News](#). “It goes to show how, with the right support, Deaf people can achieve anything.”

## **Clare Balding and the unintended innuendo of the year**

ICYMI - Clare Balding quizzing swimmers about their third leg  
[pic.twitter.com/BQAgfZgIrL](https://pic.twitter.com/BQAgfZgIrL)

— Ollie Samuels (@OllieSamuels) [July 29, 2021](#)

Usually for the best innuendoes you only have to switch on Bake Off. Yet it was Clare Balding who provided the best double entendre of the year, while presenting the BBC’s Olympic coverage. Having just congratulated Matt Richards and Tom Dean for their gold medal in the 4x200 metre freestyle at the start of an interview, she enthusiastically noted that Matt’s “third leg was just phenomenal.” Their faces said it all.

## **George’s debut on CBeebies**

To many adults, he was noted as the first BBC children’s presenter who has Down’s syndrome. To children watching, he is simply a bubbly and engaging presenter called George. His debut on CBeebies received widespread praise and was seen as a step forward for disability representation on television, but it was also the lack of special treatment George received that was celebrated. After his introduction, he merely told us about his fondness for cooking and his love of dancing. “I’m always super positive and always smiley and bubbly. I’m loving life,” he said in an interview with [the Guardian](#). “There’s nothing stopping me.”

## **Colin’s death on It’s a Sin**

Of all of the devastating moments in It's A Sin, Russell T Davies's blistering drama exploring the HIV/Aids epidemic in the UK in the 1980s, it was the unexpected death of the sweet, innocent Colin (Callum Scott Howells) that stuck with many viewers. Full of the joy of the big, bright city, so excited by finding his first set of LGBTQ+ friends, Colin's death was a reminder that being HIV positive was not a result of a promiscuous lifestyle. And the way he was treated when he became ill? Inhumane. Left isolated and abandoned in a locked ward, while his mother received hate and abuse in the mail. And yet, throughout all this, his friends fought to get him out of the ward. And his mother loved him, unconditionally. La!

## **When Ted Lasso Rickrolled Us All**

In a television first, the second series of the much-loved Apple TV+ sitcom Ted Lasso somehow managed to Rickroll everyone watching. In the middle of a eulogy, Rebecca (Hannah Waddingham) was unable to think up words to describe her father, so instead read aloud the lyrics of Never Gonna Give You Up to a packed church. And what did [Rick Astley think](#)? “I was completely blown away with what they did.”

## **Ant and Dec's 'Evening prime minister'**

Good evening, Prime Minister! ☺ ☺ [@antanddec](#) [#ImACeleb](#)  
[pic.twitter.com/cekIFiwx8N](https://pic.twitter.com/cekIFiwx8N)

— I'm A Celebrity... (@imacelebrity) [December 7, 2021](#)

Of all the things to have happened this year, Ant and Dec becoming a potent force for political resistance was certainly one of the most unexpected. After allegations of a Christmas party being held at 10 Downing Street during severe restrictions back in 2020, Ant and Dec captured the mood of the nation by using events taking place within the I'm A Celebrity camp to brilliantly mock Boris Johnson. “EVENING PRIME MINISTER ... for now,” warned Declan Donnelly.

## **Emma Thompson on An Audience with Adele**

OH MY GOD EMMA THOMPSON [#AnAudienceWithAdele](#)  
[pic.twitter.com/uMC2Tq5jAv](https://pic.twitter.com/uMC2Tq5jAv)

— Scott Bryan (@scottygb) [November 21, 2021](#)

An Audience with Adele, an ITV special featuring the singer performing songs from her latest album to a room packed with celebrities, featured many surreal moments. There was [Bryan Cranston](#) with his eyes closed losing himself to Something Like You. There was [Alan Carr](#), drafted in to perform Make You Feel My Love, in front of Samuel L Jackson and Harry Hill. But the most surreal was seeing Emma Thompson completely losing it to Rolling in the Deep, apparently researching a new role: relative at a wedding disco, after one too many gins.

## **Lord Merlin on The Pursuit of Love**

In a feat that can only be described as “Peak Andrew Scott”, the Sunday night BBC One drama The Pursuit of Love featured him, as the character Lord Merlin, entering a room to T. Rex, waltzing around in sexy pyjamas, necking champagne then proceeding to make out with whoever offered themselves. If only, *if only*, more period dramas were like this.

## **The Succession ending**

Essentially a corporate Red Wedding, the show generated a thousand memes with the scene where Roman, Shiv and Kendall unexpectedly console each other after a monumental twist and downfall. Not only did it wrongfoot its viewers with a storyline that no one – including its characters – saw coming, its masterstroke was that we should have. After all, they’d teased it with a promotional image released weeks ahead of the third season actually airing.

## **Sophie and Al finally get together in Stath Lets Flats**

The three series-long will they/won't they dynamic of Sophie (Natasia Demetriou) and Al (Alastair Roberts) was so unbelievably sweet that there was only one way they could finally get together: in the *shyest way possible*. One of the most adorably understated, heartwarming moments of television in 2021.

## Owain Wyn Evans and the BBC News theme

The BBC News theme like you've never heard it before! ☺

Performed by [#BBCBreakfast](#)'s [@OwainWynEvans](#) and 50 fellow drummers for his MAMMOTH 24-hour [#Drumathon](#). ☺

Send us your pics & videos of you joining in Owain's Big Bang ☺

Show your support at <https://t.co/gh0W5jM8bz>  
[pic.twitter.com/RwyeFdfYi0](https://pic.twitter.com/RwyeFdfYi0)

— BBC Breakfast (@BBCBreakfast) [November 12, 2021](#)

In the early days of the first 2020 lockdown, the immaculately dressed BBC weatherman Owain Wyn Evans went viral for performing the [BBC News theme](#) on his own drum kit. A surreal but uplifting orchestra of musicians playing the theme on the *actual* BBC News channel [soon followed](#). But it reached its climax with more than 50 drummers playing the theme, as part of a 24-hour drumathon to raise money for Children in Need. Who knew the news music could rock so hard?

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## Barbara Ellen's best TV of 2021



From left: Omari Douglas, Nathaniel Curtis, Olly Alexander, Callum Scott Howells and Lydia Wright in *It's a Sin*, 'a bruised, sparkling, tragicomic tour de force'. Photograph: Channel 4

Oprah's tête-à-tête with the Sussexes made history, and in a year of heartbreakingly dramatic dramas, Russell T Davies reigned supreme with *It's a Sin*

- [Sarah Crompton's best dance of 2021](#)
- [Read the Observer critics' review of 2021 in full here](#)



[Barbara Ellen](#)

Mon 27 Dec 2021 04.30 EST

We couldn't afford for television to let us down in 2021 and – SPOILER ALERT! – it didn't. It unleashed a torrent of inspiration, dedication and invention, not to mention defecting royals and deadly children's games.

With Covid uncertainty ever present, the most heartbreaking lockdown drama was Jack Thorne's care home tragedy [Help](#) (Channel 4), starring Jodie Comer and Stephen Graham. In pandemic documentaries, actor David Harewood stood out with the forceful [Why Is Covid Killing People of Colour?](#) (BBC One).

In a year that saw Channel 4 threatened with privatisation, and the BBC routinely castigated, there were outstanding documentaries, from BBC Two's compulsive docuseries [Blair and Brown: The New Labour Revolution](#) to Channel 4's harrowing [India's Rape Scandal](#). Another *Observer* choice, [Uprising](#) (BBC One) forensically outlined seismic shifts in 1980s race relations. Elsewhere, [Four Hours at the Capitol](#) (BBC Two) reconstructed

the post-Trump defeat invasion of Washington, while *[Gods of Snooker](#)* (BBC Two) delivered the waistcoats, pathos and glory of bygone pot blacking.

Oprah With Meghan and Harry was at once subpar TV journalism and undeniable TV history

With so much choice – which channel? What stream? If I sign up for everything, can I still afford to eat? – universal viewing becomes ever rarer. Sporting spectacles got us communing (Euro 2020; the Tokyo Olympics; Lewis Hamilton and Max Verstappen’s drama-soaked Formula One showdown in Abu Dhabi; British tennis ace Emma Raducanu winning the US Open), while South Korean Netflix smash *Squid Game*, a fitfully dubbed lethal comment on 21st-century capitalism, was an unlikely global phenomenon.

Still, for event TV nonpareil, it has to be ITV’s *[Oprah With Meghan and Harry](#)*. The “Megxit”-ing Sussexes sat on high-end Cali-chic garden furniture to discuss all (race, media, who made whom cry over bridesmaid tights). It was at once subpar TV journalism – Winfrey softballed and gaped like an office gossip on a work break – and undeniable TV history: a torpedoing of the British monarchy for the Zoom generation. Later, Prince Philip’s funeral was conducted without crowds in resonant Covid stillness.

Comedy-wise, Aisling Bea’s *[This Way Up](#)* resurfaced on needle-sharp form, and also from Channel 4, there was a fresh newcomer, *[We Are Lady Parts](#)* (all hail female Muslim punk bands!). Amazon Prime, meanwhile, delivered the patchy, innovative *Kevin Can F\*\*\*k Himself*. Included in my Top 10 picks, Sterlin Harjo and Taika Waititi’s *[Reservation Dogs](#)* (Disney+) showcased Oklahoman reservation life; Murray Bartlett and Jennifer Coolidge were every kind of glorious in Sky Atlantic’s whip-smart dramedy *[The White Lotus](#)*. And thanks to Sophie Willan’s ingenious, hilarious *[Alma’s Not Normal](#)* (BBC Two), Bolton is now, and for ever more, my cultural capital of the year.



From left: D'Pharaoh Woon-A-Tai, Devery Jacobs and Paulina Alexis in *Reservation Dogs*. Photograph: Shane Brown/FX

In drama, [\*Line of Duty\*](#) (BBC One) and [\*Succession\*](#) (Sky Atlantic) returned, weaving a tad, but still landing punches. Standout turns included Celine Buckens and Tracy Ifeachor in [\*Showtrial\*](#) (BBC One), while Gabrielle Creevy emerged from series two of BBC Three's magnificent, poignant Wales-based *In My Skin* as an actor to watch. There were career-best performances from Sean Bean and Stephen Graham (*Time*), Kate Winslet ([\*Mare of Easttown\*](#)), Olivia Colman ([\*Landscape\*](#)) and Lesley Manville, in *I Am... Maria* (Channel 4). Tahar Rahim was sinister in BBC One's exceptional *The Serpent*, while Colin Farrell exuded paunchy menace in BBC Two's undervalued *The North Water*. And, of course, there was our TV pinnacle of 2021, Channel 4's 1980s Aids-drama [\*It's a Sin\*](#), Russell T Davies's bruised, sparkling, tragicomic tour de force. What's left to say, but: [Olly Alexander](#), you are everything.

Disappointment? *That* ending of Netflix's [\*Behind Her Eyes\*](#) (no spoilers, but what a swizz!). There was a fond goodbye to Nicola Walker's DI Cassie Stuart in ITV's *Unforgotten*, and a wary hello to GB News, the "TV channel" (recollections may vary) that, last time I checked, appeared to have morphed into an anti-woke snuff movie starring a pint-sinking zombie called Nigel. All in all, a stellar year for television. 2022, it's game on.

# The top 10 TV programmes of 2021



Sean Bean and Stephen Graham in *Time*. Photograph: Matt Squire/BBC

## 1. [It's a Sin](#)

**Channel 4**

Russell T Davies's devastating, inspirational 1980s Aids epic.

## 2. [Time](#)

**BBC One**

Sean Bean and Stephen Graham excelled in Jimmy McGovern's powerful prison drama.

## 3. [Uprising](#)

**BBC One**

Steve McQueen's rousing docuseries exploring 1980s race relations.

## 4. [Mare of Easttown](#)

**Sky Atlantic**

Slow-burn brilliance from Kate Winslet in small-town US mystery.

## 5. [The White Lotus](#)

**Sky Atlantic**

Devilish dramedy set in an affluent holiday resort.



Lorraine Ashbourne and Sophie Willan in Alma's Not Normal.

#### **6. Alma's Not Normal**

**BBC Two**

Sophie Willan's coruscating comedy about dysfunctional Bolton life.

#### **7. The Serpent**

**BBC One**

Addictive psychodrama about sociopath Charles Sobhraj (Tahar Rahim) and the 1970s hippy trail.

#### **8. India's Rape Scandal**

**Channel 4**

Jess Kelly and Ramita Navai's haunting report about rape in India.

#### **9. Reservation Dogs**

**Disney+**

Groundbreaking comedy about an indigenous American teen gang.



Landscapers.

## 10. [Landscapers](#)

**Sky Atlantic**

Olivia Colman and David Thewlis as suburban killers in a radical shake-up of the true crime genre.

## Turkey

**GB News**

Launched claiming to speak for “real Britain”, but even Andrew Neil scarpered.

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## Liberal Democrats

# ‘It wasn’t a fluke’: North Shropshire MP Helen Morgan on byelection win

Fatigue with ‘Westminster Conservative bubble’ allowing party to turn Tory voters, says Morgan



Morgan says Conservative voters are angry about issues including ambulance waiting times and farming. Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

*[Jessica Murray](#)*

Mon 27 Dec 2021 04.28 EST

Voters have moved on from Brexit and are now more focused on electing MPs away from the “cheese and wine” Westminster bubble, the new MP for North Shropshire has said after her historic byelection victory.

Helen Morgan said the Liberal Democrats' win, which overturned a Conservative majority of nearly 23,000, was no fluke and that her party is capable of winning over more voters than people expect.

Speaking during her first few days in the new job, Morgan said her election builds on the party's success [in the Chesham and Amersham byelection in June](#), where they also took a former Tory safe seat in a shock result.

"We've won two big by-elections in just over six months. We've now proved the Chesham and Amersham result wasn't a fluke," she said.

"Everyone said that was about HS2, but in North Shropshire it was about issues that affect everyone in the country. I think it proves we can make a difference across a much wider area than people thought we might be able to."

She said the Lib Dems, who campaigned strongly against Brexit, have proved their popularity is no longer confined to parts of the country which voted Remain – Shropshire voted to leave the EU by 56.9%.

"The electorate has moved on and it seems to me that they recognise that voting for a Liberal Democrat who's very rooted in community politics, who is focused on listening, is a massive contrast to this Westminster Conservative bubble where they go to [cheese and wine parties](#) after work," Morgan said.

Revelations in the Guardian that Boris Johnson and 17 staff had a gathering in the Downing Street garden during the first pandemic lockdown prompted [fury](#).

Now that the dust has settled from the election result, Morgan, a former financial controller and parish councillor who moved to North Shropshire seven years ago, said she has had chance to reflect on the mammoth journey the party embarked on to secure their win against the odds.

A key factor was the amount of time and resource they poured into the campaign, and how quickly their activists got on the ground. "Owen Paterson resigned on the Thursday, and we were delivering leaflets on

Saturday morning, even though we hadn't selected a candidate at that point," she said. "We got 20,000 leaflets out over that first weekend and I think that enabled us to say to the people here: 'We are the challengers and we really want to take this seriously.'"

Although they knew early on that things were moving in their favour, Morgan said she was never quite sure they had done enough to win.

"I'm not sure at the beginning we would have expected to turn around a 22,000 Conservative majority but we thought we could get really close," she said. "I never allowed myself to imagine myself as the next MP, I just kept plugging away at the campaign. When it all came together on the last day, it's quite overwhelming. Obviously, I was thrilled, but there's a great sense of responsibility that comes with it."

Much post-election analysis had focused on the impact of the Downing Street Christmas parties scandal, as well as the degree of tactical voting among Labour and Green supporters. While Morgan admits these were key factors, she says it was the Lib Dem offer, and their relentless campaigning, that won the seat.

"I think it would be a bit unfair to the voters to say it was all about anger over the parties," she said. "And there's a lot of talk about tactical voting, but you can't win a seat like this that was 60% Conservative last time round unless you persuade traditional conservative voters to switch to you."

She said there were multiple issues, including anger at ambulance waiting times and concerns among the farming community, which helped swing the vote in her favour.

"There's a palpable sense of anger among farmers around the trade deals; they've created a real moment of danger for British farming," she said, adding the industry had also been badly hit by Covid. "We've had people pouring milk down the drains, which is completely unsustainable. I think there's a definite sense that [Boris Johnson](#) just really doesn't care about the farming sector."

In her election speech, Morgan launched a blistering attack on the government, describing Johnson's rule as a "nightly soap opera of calamity and chaos".

It's the "absence of leadership from government" that is mainly hurting the **Conservatives** on the ground, she said. "I think people are crying out for somebody to say: 'This is what we're going to do and we're going to lead from the front,' and it's absent."

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## How I returned from rock bottomDrugs

# **I was a heroin addict and had given up on myself. Then suddenly, briefly, I felt a desire to live**

At my lowest point, I sought self-annihilation. I was saved at the last moment by two of the few people I had not pushed away



‘What I heard at Narcotics Anonymous changed my life’ ... John Crace.  
Photograph: Pauline Keightley/Bridgeman Images



[John Crace](#)

[@JohnJCrace](#)

Mon 27 Dec 2021 02.00 EST

It was a Saturday night in early October 1986. My 30th birthday party, or what passed for it. Just a handful of junkies and my few remaining friends sitting on the floor of a grey, bare room in a flat in south London. I had thought it would be fun, as, for once, there was no shortage of heroin. Instead, I felt wretched.

I was in total despair, as a rare moment of self-awareness had kicked in. It wasn't just that I had trashed my entire 20s, achieving almost nothing of any note; it was also that I could see no prospect of any future. My self-destruction was complete. I had hit rock bottom. It was a terrifying moment, so there was only one thing for it. Take more and more drugs until I fell unconscious. Happy birthday to me.

For most drug users, heroin is the ultimate taboo. For me, not so much. I embraced it, actively sought it out. When I first took it, at 20, it was like connecting with an old friend. I felt warm, invulnerable. It was the barrier between me and the outside world that I had always been looking for. All

my feelings of low self-worth, failure and self-loathing swept aside. I didn't need anyone or anything else.

Not that I intended to become an addict. Like every other junkie I have met, I thought I could beat the system. I would be the one able to control my intake; the smack wouldn't control me, thank you very much.

For the first few years, I just about got away with it. I set myself strict limits, like taking heroin only on Saturdays. But everything became blurred. Saturdays rolled into Sundays. No real harm done. Then I didn't see why I shouldn't start on Fridays. Then Mondays. To take the edge off the weekend. Before long, I was taking it every day. Then, one morning, after a day in which I couldn't get any drugs, I woke up to find I was sweating, had severe cramps and needed to throw up. It took a while for it to dawn on me that I had a habit.

The next eight years were ones of not-so-steady decline, years in which I did all the things I had always sworn I would never do. Injecting heroin was only for real addicts, so I would never do that. Except I did. All the squalor, rip-offs and shabby betrayals associated with drug addiction became part of my everyday life. Lying and cheating became second nature. I did get a number of shitty jobs, but could never hold them down, as being a junkie was a full-time business. I lost count of the hours I spent hanging around in cars, pubs and street corners, waiting for dealers to turn up. There were no mobile phones; back then, you had to work for your habit.

I set limits, like taking heroin only on Saturdays. But everything became blurred. Before long, I was using every day

I tried to give up on countless occasions, either by slowly reducing my daily intake or going on a methadone cure, but nothing worked. I didn't know any addict who had managed to get clean. But with every failure, my self-esteem fell lower and my sense of futility grew. Above all was the sense of shame at what I had become. It is always the shame that gets you in the end. Almost everyone had given up on me. I had given up on me.

My rock bottom lasted for the best part of six months. The feelings of despair that had overwhelmed me on my 30th birthday grew steadily worse. I wanted to give up, but had no idea how to do it. So, increasingly, I sought self-annihilation. My using became worse and worse. I would shoot up, only to come round lying on the floor much later. Overdosing became a way of life – the only way I could medicate my self-hatred.

Then came a moment of clarity. Or a miracle. Call it what you will. I was challenged to stop by my wife – whom I had married in 1985 and who had stuck by me despite everything – and one of my last friends. And rather than just fob them off by saying I would do yet another methadone cure that I knew wouldn't work, I agreed to do whatever they suggested. My desire to live was, briefly, stronger than my desire to die. A few days later, they came back with the name of a rehab centre. I had barely heard of such a thing, let alone known someone who had been to one. Within a week, I had been admitted.

I can't remember much of my four-week stay in rehab, other than they made me go cold turkey – I was sick as a dog and barely slept for the first two weeks – and that I was astonished to hear that I would have to stop taking all drugs, including alcohol. There must also have been therapy groups, but by far the most important thing rehab gave me was an introduction to the [12-step programme](#).

I will never forget my first [Narcotics Anonymous](#) (UKNA) meeting. I sat at the back, shaking with fear and entirely mute. What I heard changed my life. Here were addicts with months and years of clean time – something that seemed an impossibility – whose stories were similar to mine and who were talking about feelings with which I could identify. I had never known such people existed or that recovery was possible. It was like a homecoming.

Meetings became a lifeline for me when I came out of rehab and I felt ridiculously proud when I was chosen to be the greeter, offering tea and coffee. Then again, I was the only person to volunteer. The meeting secretary later told me his heart had sunk when I had put up my hand, because he was certain I would last only a few weeks before relapsing and disappearing without trace.

I can't remember much of rehab – I was sick as a dog and barely slept for the first two weeks

But I kept coming back, made lasting friendships and slowly rebuilt something that approximated to a normal life. Finding work proved problematic: who would want someone with an unexplained 10-year gap in their CV? Yet after a couple of years of part-time jobs, I was inspired by a friend I admired in UKNA to write. I sent something off to the Independent on Sunday and they accepted it. Mainly, I think, because they thought I was the novelist [Jim Crace](#). No matter; I had an in. Soon I was writing regularly for the nationals and had been offered a book deal to write about cricket.

It took time for relationships to mend, for former friends and members of my family to trust that my recovery wasn't yet another flash in the pan. But slowly, after a lot of therapy – I am still with the same therapist 30 years on – things took shape. After five years, my wife and I even felt secure enough to start a family, that we had the resources to be decent parents. Our children are now 29 and 26 and are far more emotionally articulate and accomplished than I was after many years of giving up drugs. I could not be more proud of them.

Even so, recovery has not been easy. Many of my friends and acquaintances have died. Aids, hepatitis C, suicide and overdosing after a relapse accounted for many. Incidences of cancer and heart disease also seem far higher in recovering addicts than in friends who didn't spend years abusing their bodies. No one gets away scot-free.

My mental health is a tussle with depression and anxiety and I am often on the losing side. There have been many days when I can barely get out of bed because I am having a panic attack, while nightmares are an almost nightly occurrence. I regularly have dreams in which I am back taking drugs. Twice, things have got so bad that I have had to be admitted to a psychiatric hospital – most recently this summer. Even on the good days, low self-worth and a lack of self-confidence are ever present. The desire to disconnect, to disappear, can be overwhelming.

I am in little doubt that if I had continued taking the quantities I had been using in the last year of my active addiction, I would have been dead within six months. Just another junkie statistic. Mourned by a few and long since forgotten by everyone else. Yet here I am, nearly 35 years later, still buggering on, my life far fuller, richer and longer than I could ever have dared imagine at my rock bottom. I couldn't have done it without the love and support of so many people. To all of them I owe a debt of gratitude I can never repay.

*A Farewell to Calm* by John Crace (Guardian Faber, £9.99) is out now. To support the Guardian and the Observer, order your copy at [guardianbookshop.com](https://guardianbookshop.com). Delivery charges may apply

In the UK and Ireland, Samaritans can be contacted on 116 123 or by emailing [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org) or [jo@samaritans.ie](mailto:jo@samaritans.ie). The mental health charity Mind can be contacted on 0300 123 3393 or by visiting [mind.org.uk](https://mind.org.uk). In the US, the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org) is 1-800-273-8255. In Australia, the crisis support service [Lifeline](https://lifeline.org.au) is 13 11 14. Other international helplines can be found at [befrienders.org](https://befrienders.org)

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## **2021.12.27 - Coronavirus**

- [\*\*Omicron Give FFP3 masks to NHS staff, doctors say\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Explained What are the new Covid rules in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland?\*\*](#)

## Coronavirus

# Give FFP3 masks to NHS staff during Omicron, doctors say

Medical bodies say thin surgical masks do not provide adequate protection for frontline personnel



The FFP3 face mask is much more effective but expensive. The Department of Health and Social Care only recommends their use in limited circumstances. Photograph: Victoria Jones/PA

*[Denis Campbell](#) Health policy editor*

Mon 27 Dec 2021 01.00 EST

NHS staff treating Covid patients should be given much more protective facewear than thin surgical masks to help them avoid getting infected during the Omicron rise, doctors say.

The British Medical Association (BMA), Hospital Consultants and Specialists Association (HCSA) and Doctors' Association UK are calling for frontline personnel to be given FFP3 masks.

Making the much higher-quality face masks standard issue would save the lives of health workers who fall ill as a result of treating Covid patients, the BMA said. “At this critical point in the pandemic this is extremely urgent – a matter of life and death,” said Prof Raymond Agius, the acting chair of the doctors’ union’s occupational health committee.

FFP3 masks, also known as filtering facepiece respirators, have been [shown in a trial in Addenbrooke's hospital](#) in Cambridge to reduce the number of healthcare staff who become infected.

However, the Department of Health and Social Care's (DHSC) [guidance on personal protective equipment](#), updated last week, only recommends their use in limited circumstances.

“With a high transmissible new strain now circulating, and clear evidence that Covid-19 spreads in small airborne particles, healthcare workers must be given the best possible protection against the virus. Surgical masks don’t give the necessary protection against airborne transmission of Covid,” Agius said.

The BMA has written to every hospital trust in England demanding that any health professional treating patients who are or may be Covid-positive should be routinely issued with FFP3s, which are much more expensive than the surgical masks usually provided.

Surgical masks are “unsuitable” given the threat Covid poses, the BMA believes.

### [Graphic](#)

In its letter it has reminded hospital chief executives of their legal responsibilities as employers to keep their staff safe from harm, including by providing FFP3s.

A handful of hospitals are understood to already issued FFP3 respirators as standard, but most do not.

Dr Claudia Paoloni, the president of the HCSA, said that giving staff proper PPE would help reduce the fast-growing tide of sickness absence among frontline workers who are getting Covid.

“If we don’t get PPE right we risk contributing to a further wave of sickness absences when hospitals and patients can least afford it.

“The current reliance on inadequate fluid-resistant surgical masks is likely to leave staff vulnerable in enclosed hospital settings,” Paoloni said.

“The fear, as in 2020, is that we are seeing a cavalier approach to safety where infection control guidelines are once again being driven by supply issues and cost.

“We need hospitals to see sense and take a precautionary approach,” by making FFP3s available to anyone who wants to use one instead of a surgical mask, Paoloni added.

The BMA has also written to NHS England asking it to ensure all GP practices are also issued with FFP3s instead of surgical masks, particularly because family doctors often work in small, cramped surgeries.

“Healthcare workers in hospitals and GP surgeries are putting themselves and potentially their own families at risk, particularly with this new, highly transmissible Omicron variant,” said Dr Vishal Sharma, the chair of the BMA’s pensions committee.

The DHSC’s updated guidance, published last Tuesday, says “staff should assess any likely blood and body fluid exposure risk and ensure PPE is worn that provides adequate protection against the risks associated with the procedure or task being undertaken”. However, it only advises frontline staff to use an FFP3 if they are undertaking an aerosol-generating procedure, such as intubating a patient who is going on to a mechanical ventilator, and not with Covid patients generally.

A DHSC spokesperson confirmed that it does not plan to recommend routine use of FFP3 masks.

“The safety of the NHS and social care staff has always been our top priority and we continue to deliver PPE to protect those on the frontline.

“Guidance on the appropriate levels and standards of PPE is written by clinical experts. Updated infection prevention control guidance was published this month to reflect the latest scientific understanding on how to prevent transmission of Covid-19.

“Emerging evidence and data are continually monitored and reviewed and guidance will be amended accordingly if appropriate.”

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## Coronavirus

# What are the new Covid rules in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland?

Curbs to limit spread of Omicron come into force from Boxing Day while England still to decide

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



Table service in hospitality settings becomes mandatory from 27 December in Northern Ireland, which has already introduced Covid passports at some venues. Photograph: Charles McQuillan/Getty Images

*[Jessica Elgot](#)*

*[@jessicaelgot](#)*

Sun 26 Dec 2021 06.52 EST

New restrictions to control the spread of Omicron are coming in across large parts of the UK after Christmas, though Boris Johnson [has yet to decide](#) if he will impose fresh curbs in England. In Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, here are the rules that will apply.

## **Wales – from 26 December**

From Boxing Day, a maximum of six people are allowed to meet in pubs, cinemas and restaurants in [Wales](#). A total of 30 people are allowed at indoor events while 50 people will be permitted at outdoor events.

Two-metre social distancing is required in public premises and offices, and nightclubs will close. The rules come into force from 6am.

## **Scotland – from 26-27 December**

Restrictions begin on Boxing Day in [Scotland](#), where indoor events are limited to 100 people standing or 200 people sitting, and outdoor events are capped at 500 people. One-metre social distancing will be enforced.

From 27 December, there will be additional rules on household mixing. Groups must be limited to three households. There will also be social distancing of 1 metre enforced in hospitality venues such as pubs and restaurants, as well as theatres, cinemas and gyms. Table service will be required in venues that serve alcohol.

## **Northern Ireland – from 26-27 December**

Nightclubs have been closed and indoor standing events are banned. Further restrictions come in from 27 December, when table service will be mandatory in pubs, cafes and restaurants. A maximum of six people will be permitted to be seated together in hospitality settings. More than six will be permitted if they all belong to a single household, as long as it is not more than 10.

People are strongly advised to limit the number of contacts and to gather in groups of no more than three households.

## England

Ministers are expected to meet to discuss further restrictions on Monday – though there is no guarantee rules will change. Government sources have said they expect schools to remain open.

The government has been given modelling by Sage scientists which look at the effects of returning to stage 2 restrictions – which include the closure of indoor hospitality but allow pubs and restaurants to serve outdoors, as well as a ban on indoor mixing in homes and a return to the rule of six outdoors.

The models have examined imposing the measures for two weeks, four weeks and three months.

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## 2021.12.27 - Opinion

- I didn't want anyone else to look after Mum – until I realised what she wanted
- I thought I could plough through the pandemic without burning out. I was wrong
- Walking is a glorious, primal pastime – and far more radical than you think
- Desmond Tutu taught us all the true meaning of greatness

What I changed my mind about in 2021Parents and parenting

## I didn't want anyone else to look after Mum – until I realised what she wanted

[Simon Hattenstone](#)



My sister and I thought we knew best for our 93-year-old mother but we neglected something crucial: her independence



Simon Hattenstone's mum, Marje, with her care worker, Josie. 'Already, they are like mother and daughter, or sisters.' Photograph: Simon Hattenstone

Mon 27 Dec 2021 01.00 EST

There was always one thing I was sure of – I'd not let Mum go into a care home or be looked after by a stranger. Marje has always been a brilliant mother, forever loyal when others wrote me off. So come the day when she tired of living by herself in Salford, or couldn't cope, I'd be there for her.

I assumed she would come to live with me – or my sister Sharon – in London. She could stay in our house, or we could build her a granny flat. We'd even allow her to live in a flat nearby so long as we could pop in every day and take care of her.

There was only one problem with my plan – I hadn't thought about what she wanted. Just tiny things, like her house, her friends, her independence.

Marje is 93 now. Until last year she was in great nick. Although she was a shrunken version of her younger self, she was still warm, kind, curious, laugh-out-loud funny and fiercely independent. But earlier this year, she

slipped on her bathroom floor and broke her femur. Somehow, she crawled back to her bedroom to call us. The ambulance came, she was operated on and there followed a lengthy stay in hospital.

Suddenly, she seemed much older – almost her real age. She couldn't move, she lost weight, she got infections that sent her potty. Her short-term memory was shot and she couldn't focus. She was unhappy and in pain. After a few weeks in hospital, Marje was transferred to a rehab home. She lay in bed or sat in a chair and deteriorated even more.

Still, she insisted she didn't want to come stay with us in London afterwards. She wanted to return to her own home and get on with life. She was terrified of being a burden; of being unwanted. But there was more to it than that. Marje loved her mews house in the close that reminds me of a mini-Brookside. It was perfect for her – tiny, quiet, self-contained. She was part of the community she'd spent her entire life in (a five-minute walk from where she grew up and where she spent her married life). And her few remaining friends (invariably younger than her) meant a lot to her. London isn't her city, and never could be. It's where she used to come to visit family and have a break.

Eventually, I accepted she wanted to stay put. So, with a degree of horror, I started talking to my sister about a full-time carer for Marje. What kind of children farm out their mother to a carer? Was this how I returned the love she had shown me? Why spend all her money on the care we should provide? What if she and the carer didn't get on? What if the carer abused her? Sharon assured me the woman she had in mind came recommended. I trusted her and we all took the plunge.

Enter Josie – small, smart, smiley, funny, kind. In other words, she's very much like Marje.

Josie has now been with her for three months, and Marje is totally transformed. She is learning to walk again, her short-term memory has improved, she has put on weight because Josie's food is so delicious.

And, for the first time, Marje has accepted that she can't do everything for herself; that she's reached an age where she's earned the privilege of

relaxing – watching TV, reading, listening to music, going for wheelchair walks when she's got the strength. Josie cooks for her, helps her shower, sorts out her pills, deals with the nitty-gritty of running the house.

But the most astonishing and beautiful thing is the relationship she and Josie have developed. They sit on the sofa together, chat and giggle. Josie tells Marje about her childhood in the Philippines, her children and grandchildren, the 21 years she spent in Madrid working for a famous singer and the time she cooked for Plácido Domingo. Marje talks to Josie about her children and grandchildren, and the years she spent teaching children with special needs. Josie tries to teach her a bit of Spanish. Marje tries to improve her tenses in English.

Josie takes pictures of her, and sends us nice or funny ones. In one, she is wearing a fake fur coat, shades and is scowling – she looks like the angriest billionaire in Salford. (She isn't angry or a billionaire.)

Already, they are like mother and daughter, or sisters. Visitors occasionally pop in. Marje is glad of the visit, but she's often relieved when they leave and it's just her and Josie again. Josie feels as much family as Sharon and I do. Sometimes more.

Josie is a full-time, live-in carer, five days a week. (On the other two days Josie's daughter-in-law Marlene, who is also becoming like family, looks after Marje.) Often, Josie doesn't bother going home on her days off; she simply does more of her own thing.

Just a few weeks ago, Mum was frazzled. Now she is calm, secure and on the whole content. It was stupid of me to think I could ever look after Marje like Josie and Marlene do. I don't have their patience or skill set. In a way, it was selfish – more about a misplaced sense of duty than what was best for her – and could have ended up imprisoning Mum. Instead, thanks to Josie and Marlene, Sharon and I have peace of mind, and Marje has been given a new life.

- Simon Hattenstone is a *Guardian* columnist
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**OpinionCoronavirus**

# I thought I could plough through the pandemic without burning out. I was wrong

**Christine Berry**

Many people are facing Omicron feeling broken, our resilience worn down by unrelenting demands



Illustration: Eleanor Shakespeare/The Guardian

Mon 27 Dec 2021 03.00 EST

“When all this is over ...” These words started so many wistful sentences during Britain’s lockdowns of 2020. They carried the weight of our hopes and fears and grief and loss. When all this is over, we should have a national day of mourning for everyone and everything we’ve lost. When all this is over, we should honour our collective sacrifice by “building back better”.

When all this is over, we should have a huge party and celebrate being able to dance and hug and feel free again.

But for anyone who still doubted it, the rapid spread of the Omicron variant brings home the difficult truth: the moment isn't going to come "when all this is over". The pandemic isn't like a war, to be survived until the day when peace is made, and we can all exhale and begin picking up the pieces. It's [a new reality](#) that will, at best, gradually fade into the background as the threat recedes and our coping strategies improve.

The problem is that our bodies aren't designed to cope with this. As Emily and Amelia Nagoski point out in their book Burnout, our stress response is designed to help us run away from lions. It is something we are supposed to move through: it has a beginning, a middle and an end. One reason so many of us struggle with our mental health is that modern life is full of chronic stressors that we can't run away from, so we get stuck in a constant loop of edginess and fear. And the pandemic is the ultimate chronic stressor. When lockdown was lifted, instead of being told to "stay home", we were encouraged to "stay alert". But nobody can stay alert for two years straight, at least not without consequences.

I learned this the hard way when I burned out at the end of July. Like many people, I thought I could just plough on through the pandemic and still meet my own wildly unrealistic expectations of myself. In my case, this meant juggling parenthood with writing my first solo book and taking on a new senior leadership role. As it turned out, I was spectacularly wrong. After several months wrestling with anxiety, depression and fatigue, I finally faced up to reality and decided to step away from the new job. It was wrenching, but I just couldn't ignore the message my body was giving me: I had to slow down.

When I went public with my situation [in November](#), I was overwhelmed by the outpouring of supportive messages. It helped me enormously, but also made me a little sad: it seemed to confirm my hunch that so many others were struggling too, yet were no longer seeing those struggles validated in the public discourse. Now, instead of being given space to process our collective trauma and let our minds and bodies heal, we have been plunged into more uncertainty.

December is notoriously a month when the pressure to have fun can itself become a source of stress, when family tensions flare and relationships are strained. This year, the weight of expectation to make up for lost celebrations, alongside the risk of spreading the new variant and the prospect of further restrictions, [vaccine disagreements](#) and traumatic memories of 2020 are likely to put this on steroids. I'm sure that there are people out there who embraced the summer's return to normality; who had moments of catharsis and collective joy at festivals or weddings or gatherings, and enough rest and relaxation on summer holidays; who are feeling recharged and ready to deal with whatever the pandemic throws at them. But I'm also sure that I'm not the only one whose experience has been very different.

For many clinically vulnerable people, "[freedom day](#)" was anything but freeing, with the acceptance of sky-high infection rates making their lives even more restricted and dangerous. Those dealing with poverty or unemployment have faced cuts to universal credit and the tapering of support schemes, with many being pushed into debt. Frontline health and support workers are drained and traumatised. Even for those of us in more privileged positions, the experience of "freedom" may still have been one of fear and uncertainty, ushered in by the chaos of the "pingdemic". Navigating daily life involves new layers of administrative and emotional complexity. Sending children to school entails repeated cycles of cold symptoms, testing and isolation. Travel plans are haunted by the spectre of last-minute cancellations.

As a result, many are facing the "Omicron emergency" feeling broken and exhausted, our resilience worn down by two years of unrelenting demands. The country faces a deep mental health crisis, with nearly a quarter of a million people [expected to develop PTSD](#) and dramatic rises in [anxiety and depression](#). At least a million adults are suffering with [long Covid](#). In Germany, people struggling with such conditions can apply to go on a "[Kur](#)" – three weeks of treatments at a spa. In the UK, where mental health services are stretched to breaking point, you are doing well if you manage to get a phone call. I am incredibly lucky that I had the financial and social safety net to weather my burnout. Even so, I still had days when I doubted whether I would bounce back. I saw with terrifying clarity how easily someone can slip into a downward spiral of unemployment, debt and mental ill-health. I felt angry that we have built a society that allows this.

Such times call for leaders with emotional sensitivity, but instead we have the misfortune to be stuck with leaders who are emotionally stunted, too often adding to our pain and fear instead of calming it. Revelations about Downing Street parties prompted a [wave of grief and rage](#) from those who felt this made a mockery of their own heartbreakingly sacrifices. We have been told it is now our individual responsibility to manage our own Covid risks, even as government decisions fuel those risks in ways we cannot control. Instead of feeling held by [something larger](#), we are constantly being given the message: you're on your own.

So what can we do? We might not be able to deal with our stressors, but we can find ways to [deal with our stress](#), [calm our nervous systems](#) and [make our bodies feel safer](#). We can tell ourselves that we're not alone. Above all, this festive season, we can give ourselves and each other what our government steadfastly refuses to give us: the acknowledgment that we are hurting and doing our best in impossible times; gentleness, patience and kindness; a sense of safety and stability in an unsafe world. We can find refuge in our fundamental connectedness, our belonging to each other and to the Earth. In [the words of the Nagoski sisters](#), “The cure for burnout is not self-care. It is all of us caring for each other.”

- Christine Berry is a freelance writer and researcher based in Manchester

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## OpinionWalking

# **Walking is a glorious, primal pastime – and far more radical than you think**

[John Harris](#)



Despite its reputation as a bourgeois hobby, walking has been a lifeline for millions past and present



Illustration: Matt Kenyon

Sun 26 Dec 2021 07.00 EST

If Christmas is often synonymous with hours spent indoors, the lure of the sofa and endless screentime, our second festive season spent under the shadow of Covid is presumably taking those things to their extremes. The world has shrunk: our lives are full of cautious friends and relatives, cancelled trips and the imperative to stay where we are. The cold and dark complete the picture. Once again, this threatens to be a season of seclusion.

To temporarily escape, millions of us will be going for walks – that inbuilt part of many people’s Christmases, which also chimes with how many of us have coped with the past two years. According to [Sport England](#), between January and March this year, against the backdrop of another full national lockdown, 24.7 million people said they had recently engaged in “walking for leisure”, an increase of 5.2 million people compared with 12 months before. In September, the Department for Transport [published](#) research showing that in 2020 people in England walked an average of 220 miles (the highest figure since records began nearly 20 years ago) and that the number of walks of a mile or more had jumped by 26% in a single year. The Ramblers, the UK charity and membership organisation that does a huge amount of work around walking and access to open spaces, says that in the

second half of 2020 it recruited [30% more new members](#) than it had done a year earlier. These are all fascinating numbers: proof, perhaps, that when our leisure options are suddenly shut down, a lot of us instinctively seek solace in one of the most primal pastimes there is.

At which point, an admission. I walk, I am well aware of being fortunate enough to be able to do so, and I cannot imagine life without it. The habit has roots in my childhood; when I lived in London in my 20s and 30s, I eventually became a fairly committed urban walker. But it was not until I moved out of the city and became a parent that walking grew into a gloriously restorative weekly ritual.

With my two kids – who, I know, will sooner or later decide to leave me to it – I spend most Sunday mornings rambling around where we live in Somerset. Given more time, we have also visited plenty of other places: Dartmoor, the Brecon Beacons, the [South Downs](#) that run parallel to the coast between Winchester and Eastbourne. But over the past two years, as Covid restrictions have kept us at home, our wellbeing has been bound up with the modest pleasures of exploring our immediate surroundings, and discovering things that were just outside the front door: ancient burial mounds, abandoned canals, the fascinating geography of the old [Somerset coalfield](#).

Rural walking is a habit I acquired from my dad, who was a keen mountaineer and the son of a south Welsh miner. He got the bug from his older brother, back in the days when access to the countryside was an issue brimming with the raw class politics dramatised by the mass trespass of 1932 at [Kinder Scout](#) in the Peak District – the amazing act of organised civil disobedience that led to the creation of the UK's national parks, among other advances. The roots of rambling in this kind of activism – not to mention thousands of working-class lives – rather belie its latter-day reputation for being a thoroughly bourgeois pastime, and these radical undercurrents have never really gone away. In the everyday activities of [local footpath preservation societies](#) and local Ramblers branches, there is a constant echo of what brought the Kinder trespassers together, and how far there is still to go.

After all, there is one unfinished story at the heart of modern walking: the so-called right to roam, and the contrast between its dire limitations in England and Wales and the way that Scotland has been opened up, a change that still meets plenty of obstruction. Five years ago, one beautifully symbolic story centred on the Aberdeenshire “golf resort” owned by Donald Trump. Freedom of information requests made by the investigative website the Ferret unearthed police documents relating to the Trump organisation’s attitude to public access: “Their belief is that the land is private and that they will be able to restrict access unconditionally,” one said. “This is obviously not the case and this is a potential area of conflict that will need to be managed diplomatically.”

Almost by definition, walking any distance highlights the fundamentals of our relationship with our environment: small wonder, then, that something as seemingly innocent as a love of being outside and moving around still creates flashpoints.

Walking is also the focus of a growing story about the politics of diversity, and what still needs to happen to make it a genuinely popular pursuit. Just before Christmas, I had a half-hour conversation with Cherelle Harding, a youth worker who lives in Coventry and has recently founded an organisation called Steppers UK, which aims to help “black, Asian and ethnic minority communities to build positive relationships with the outdoors”. For some years, she told me, she was a smitten rural walker, but she reached a point where “I was a bit annoyed that I didn’t see more black people out hiking”. She talked about “systemic and generational barriers” – among them the absence from images of the great outdoors of black and brown people, and the fact that her parents and grandparents’ generation “had come to a very hostile country – going to places like the countryside just isn’t something they would have done”.

Her first taste of organised walking came via the inspirational group Black Girls Hike, founded in Manchester in 2019, and Steppers is about a similar ethos, made all the more vivid by people’s experience of the Covid crisis. “This has been a time when a lot of us have faced trauma, particularly people from black communities,” she said. “And what we’re doing is about joy.”

Here, perhaps, is the beautifully simple key to why walking – in both rural and urban surroundings – connects with something very deep within the people who do it. As the writer and devout walker [Iain Sinclair](#) said, moving around on foot entails “opening up your system to the world, making the skin porous, [and] letting all the impressions pour through.” We all know what gets in the way: prejudice, traffic, locked gates, signs painted with the dread words “private – keep out”.

I think also of those stories smattered through the past two years of overzealous police officers [stopping](#) people whose walking represented no threat to public health, and one of the few means of staying connected to a world beyond their four walls. Fresh air, inbuilt social distancing, and the modest wonders of getting from one point to the next: as an alternative to gloom and seclusion, who would argue with that?

- John Harris is a Guardian columnist
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## Opinion[Desmond Tutu](#)

# Desmond Tutu taught us all the true meaning of greatness

[Bob Geldof](#)

He was above everything a priest – albeit the funniest one I've ever known



Sir Bob Geldof with Archbishop Desmond Tutu at the One Young World summit in London, February 2010. Photograph: Zak Hussein/PA

Sun 26 Dec 2021 10.32 EST

I am lucky that in my life I knew [Desmond Tutu](#), one of the greatest men of our time. This tiny giant, this impish little priest, had the dangerously insane courage of the gods. And it was through his God that he found the voice to unremittingly challenge oppressors and speak endlessly, eloquently for the beaten down, the trodden on, the innocent and poor of this world. And later, when the righteous justice of his rhetoric had come to pass, he – along with his great friend Nelson Mandela – proposed the national dignity that only

forgiveness of the past and the vanquished can bestow.

An archbishop knows the root spring of their moral thought and spiritual teaching, and Tutu was above everything a priest – albeit the funniest one I’ve ever known. He was inexhaustible and exhausting in conversation, challenging every one of your cherished premises with either an irritable dismissiveness or a derisive giggle – which was extremely annoying!

He was brave beyond measure. His constant challenge to the ideology and agents of thuggish power put him in grave danger. Showing no fear, he railed against their iniquities and rallied his people, never allowing them to falter or doubt the legitimacy of their struggle. And yet his prayers, his speeches, while suffused with rage, preached peace. His rejection of violence as the instrument of the weak and frightened, of those who had nothing left but the club, whip and gun, was once again proved correct. He would not, he could not, be stopped or silenced. This along with the equally towering display of moral authority from Mandela, [his partner in change](#), allowed for the extraordinary and final peaceful exchange of power in South Africa.

It allowed also for the equally extraordinary, intellectually generous insight that advocated and organised the reconciliation commissions. Here, all would unburden themselves of their pains, sufferings and shameful pasts in a great national expression of forgiveness and healing that enabled Tutu’s new country to emerge with hope from its awful original sins.

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South African president Ramaphosa pays tribute to Desmond Tutu in address to the nation – video

This “turbulent priest” was protected by his collar. Unlike Mandela, it was much more difficult to put “a man of the cloth” into prison or exile. He was a prince of the Church of England, and wore its invisible but palpable, if sometimes patchy, cloak of immunity about his tiny frame.

The apartheid regime did not want to lose any more overseas friends than necessary, and so Archbishop Tutu ascended his pulpit stairs and in that

sing-song voice told stories to his people that spoke of inherent rights, of human dignity, of the equality of man and the inevitable defeat of injustice, and spoke plain and simply, about the brute realities of the oppressive regime under which his congregations laboured. And then he spelled out hope and the means to achieve it. Of course he got the Nobel peace prize.

He was a laugh. He was great fun to be with. He was indefatigable. Probably a total nightmare to be married to.

- Bob Geldof is a singer, songwriter, author and political activist
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## 2021.12.27 - Around the world

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## [India](#)

# **Jesus statue smashed in spate of attacks on India's Christian community**

Amid growing intolerance to India's Christian minority, several Christmas events were targeted by Hindu right wing groups



Christian devotees pray at a Church to celebrate Christmas in Guwahati, Assam. Violence against Christians is growing in India  
Photograph: David Talukdar/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

*[Hannah Ellis-Petersen](#) in Delhi*

Mon 27 Dec 2021 01.35 EST

Festive celebrations were disrupted, Jesus statues were smashed and effigies of Santa Claus were burned in a spate of attacks on India's Christian community over Christmas.

Amid growing intolerance and violence against India's Christian minority, who make up about 2% of India's population, several Christmas events were targeted by Hindu right wing groups, who alleged Christians were using festivities to force Hindus to convert.

In recent years, Christians have increasingly faced harassment around Christmas but this year saw a notable surge in attacks.

In Agra in Uttar Pradesh, members of right wing Hindu groups burned effigies of Santa Claus outside missionary-led schools and accused Christian missionaries of using Christmas celebrations to lure people in.

"As December comes, the Christian missionaries become active in the name of Christmas, Santa Claus and New Year. They lure children by making Santa Claus distribute gifts to them and attract them towards Christianity," said Ajju Chauhan regional general secretary of Bajrang Dal, one of the right wing Hindu outfits leading the protest.

In Assam, two protesters in saffron, the signature colour of Hindu nationalism, entered a Presbyterian church on Christmas night and disrupted proceedings, demanding that all Hindus leave the building.

"Let only Christian celebrate Christmas," said one of the men, in a video filmed during the disruption. "We are against Hindu boys and girls participating in Christmas function ... it hurts our sentiments. They dress up in church and everyone sings Merry Christmas. How will our religion survive?". The police have subsequently arrested both men involved.

In state of Haryana, on Christmas Eve, an evening celebration at a school in Pataudi was disrupted by members of a right wing Hindu vigilante group. Storming into the school shouting slogans such as "Jai Shri Ram", now a clarion call for Hindu nationalism, they claimed that the festive event, which included Christmas songs and dance and teachings of the bible, was being used for "religious conversion under the garb of celebrating Christmas" and alleged they were "brainwashing children through drama and speeches into accepting Christianity".

In the same state, the day after Christmas, a Jesus statue was torn down and the Holy Redeemer Church in Ambala was vandalised in the early hours.

A Christmas event that is held every year at Matridham Ashram in Uttar Pradesh was also targeted by a Hindu vigilante group who stood outside shouting slogans such as “stop conversions” and “missionary *murdabad*”, meaning “death to missionaries”.

Speaking to local media, Father Anand, a priest at the ashram, said the protests were indicative of the increased attacks that Christians in India have been facing in recent months, as allegations of forced conversion of Hindus to Christianity have become rampant and an anti-Christian hysteria has begun to grow across India.

“This is a symbol of what is happening because these people have impunity, and it creates tension,” said Anand. “Every Sunday is a day of terror and trauma for Christians, especially those belonging to those small churches.”

The Christmas attacks are only the latest examples of incidents of violence against Christians, part of a growing atmosphere of religious intolerance towards India’s non-Hindu minorities, namely Muslims and Christians, under the ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government.

Since the BJP came to power in 2014, attacks on Christians have been on the rise. According to a report by organisation Persecution Relief, crimes against Christians increased by 60% from 2016 to 2019.

In recent weeks, Christian missionaries have had their bibles set alight and Christian schools have been disrupted by right wing groups who allege that Christians are forcing Hindus into converting by offering them money and gifts. In the state of Chhattisgarh, the BJP have taken up the issue of alleged forced conversions, holding dozens of rallies. In the same state several pastors have been violently attacked and many church services now have to be conducted in secret for safety.

This month, the government of Karnataka state became the latest to pass a controversial “anti-conversion” law. Though it does not explicitly mention Christians, its provision against “unlawful conversions” has been used in

other states to target Christian pastors and the state has already seen a surge in attacks, with 39 Christian hate crimes just this year.

According to a report released in October, there were more than 300 documented attacks on Christians across India in the first nine months of 2021.

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## [Libya](#)

# UK's ambassador drawn into Libyan political crisis after elections called off

Parliamentary committee accuses ambassador of interference over tweet in support of recognising interim government



An electoral billboard in Tripoli reading in Arabic 'register and vote before missing your chance'. Photograph: EPA

*[Patrick Wintour](#) Diplomatic editor*

Sun 26 Dec 2021 10.14 EST

Libya's political crisis has taken on an increasingly international dimension after the UK was accused of defending corruption and interfering in internal processes by calling for the interim government to remain in power pending the rescheduling of [delayed elections](#).

The country's first presidential elections, scheduled for 24 December, were indefinitely postponed at the last minute, largely because fierce disagreements over who should be allowed to stand had not been resolved.

On the day the vote should have taken place, the UK in Libya Twitter account published a message saying it continued to recognise the interim government of national unity "as the authority tasked with leading Libya to elections and does not endorse the establishment of parallel governments or institutions".

In response the foreign affairs committee of the House of Representatives, Libya's parliament, accused the UK ambassador, Caroline Hurndall, of violating diplomatic norms and unwarranted interference. The committee said only the House of Representatives – which has been accused of seeking to delay and even disrupt any elections – could decide on the role of the interim government. Some tribes went further, calling for Hurndall to be expelled.

Fathi Bashagha, a presidential candidate and former interior minister, said: "Corruption is leading Libya to bankruptcy. We want to ask Britain a question: why does the British government apply the best anticorruption standards in its country, and want to protect corruption in Libya? Why is Britain defending the government and financial institutions in Libya?"

The vote was intended to mark a fresh start for the oil-rich country, a year after a landmark ceasefire and more than a decade after its 2011 revolt that toppled and killed the dictator Muammar Gaddafi. Libya's parliament is to meet on Monday to debate a new timeline and discuss the mandate of the current interim government, which was meant to end on Friday with the elections.

Various factions and international powers are jockeying for position, amid concerns the political vacuum will lead to the resumption of fighting.

The Tripoli-based unity administration is headed by Abdul Hamid Dbeibah, a tycoon who wants to run for president even though he pledged not to when he took up his current post. Analysts have suggested his rivals may wish to exploit the delay in order to put him out of the picture.

Two other would-be candidates are particularly controversial: [Gaddafi's son Saif al-Islam Gaddafi](#), a divisive symbol of the old regime who is wanted by the international criminal court over war crimes allegations, and [the warlord Khalifa Haftar](#), whose eastern-based forces staged a 16-month siege of Tripoli before last year's ceasefire.

The dispute over candidates' eligibility reflects a deeper east-west disunity that has not been resolved. Haftar has been credited at various times with the support of Egypt and the United Arab Emirates and has been opposed by Turkey, which has backed militias from the west defending Tripoli with fighters and arms.

It was not clear why the UK was singled out for such strong criticism given that a joint statement issued by the UK, France, Germany, Italy and the US also called for the current interim government to remain in power pending swiftly reorganised elections.

In an apparent reference to Dbeibah, the statement said: “To avoid conflicts of interests and to promote a level playing field, candidates holding roles in public institutions should also continue vacating them until the announcement of the electoral results.”

The western powers said they also backed the UN’s “call for disagreements on emerging political or military matters to be resolved without resorting to violence. We stand ready to hold to account those who threaten the stability or undermine the political and electoral process in Libya.”

Najla El-Mangoush, the interim government’s foreign minister, appeared to slow the drive to elections by saying national unity was a precondition.

“At this crucial moment in the history of Libya, we, Libyans and the international community, must realise that elections are a tool to achieve stability and not a specific goal,” she tweeted. “The elections should be based on the principle of reconciliation, a constitutional basis, and the unification of institutions.”

Some observers have long doubted whether free elections are feasible in a country in which as many as 20,000 foreign forces including mercenaries are

on the loose.

Referencing protests over the postponement, Fadel Lamen, another presidential candidate, [tweeted](#): “The demonstrations in Benghazi and Tripoli on Saturday are a real testimony to the will of the people and their insistence to have their voices heard and their votes counted. They voted with their feet to make sure that nobody domestic or intentional can deprive them.”

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## Roe v Wade

# Sarah Weddington, attorney who won Roe v Wade abortion case, dies aged 76

Texan lawyer and Linda Coffee won landmark 1973 case, safeguarding right now under threat from US supreme court

- [How dismantling Roe v Wade would threaten other rights](#)



Sarah Weddington in 1979. She accepted that she would be remembered primarily for her supreme court victory. Photograph: Diana Walker/Getty Images

*[Martin Pengelly](#) in New York*

*[@MartinPengelly](#)*

Mon 27 Dec 2021 08.49 EST

Sarah Weddington, an attorney who argued and won the [Roe v Wade](#) supreme court case which established the right to abortion in the US, has died. She was 76.

Susan Hays, a Democratic candidate for Texas agriculture commissioner, [announced](#) the news on Twitter on Sunday. The Dallas Morning News [confirmed](#) it.

“Sarah Weddington died this morning after a series of health issues,” Hays wrote. “With Linda Coffee, she filed the first case of her legal career, [Roe v Wade](#), fresh out of law school. She was my professor … the best writing instructor I ever had, and a great mentor.

“At 27 she argued Roe to [the supreme court] (a fact that always made me feel like a gross underachiever). Ironically, she worked on the case because law firms would not hire women in the early 70s, leaving her with lots of time for good trouble.”

The court [ruled on Roe v Wade](#) in 1973. Nearly 50 years later, under [a supreme court](#) packed with hardline conservatives, the right Roe established is under threat in part thanks to [a Texas law](#) that drastically restricts access and offers incentives for reporting women to authorities.

In 2017, [speaking to the Guardian](#), Weddington predicted such a turn of events. “If [Neil] Gorsuch’s nomination is approved, will abortion be illegal the next day? No. One new judge won’t necessarily make much difference. But two or three might.”

After steering Gorsuch on to the court, Donald Trump installed Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett. Barrett replaced the late Ruth Bader Ginsburg, a champion of women’s rights.



Sarah Weddington poses with a signed copy of the Roe v Wade decision in front of the US supreme court in 2005. Photograph: Karen Bleier/AFP/Getty

Weddington found her way to Roe v Wade soon after graduating from the University of Texas. Represented by Weddington and Coffee, Norma McCorvey became the plaintiff known as “Jane Roe” in Roe v Wade. McCorvey became [an evangelical Christian](#) and opponent of abortion. She [died in 2017](#). In a posthumous confession, she [said](#) anti-abortion groups paid her to take such a stance.

In her Guardian interview, Weddington said arguing the case in federal court “was like going down a street with no street lights. But there was no other way to go and I didn’t have any preconceived notions that I would not win.”

She did win, but the case continued.

“Henry Wade, the district attorney, unwittingly helped us,” she said. “At a press conference, he said, ‘I don’t care what any court says; I am going to continue to prosecute doctors who carry out abortion.’ There was a procedural rule that said if local elected officials continue to prosecute after a federal court had declared a law unconstitutional, there would be a right to appeal to the supreme court.”

Before the court in Washington, Weddington said, “it was impossible to read the justices’ faces. The attorney on the other side started by saying something inappropriate about arguing a case against a beautiful woman. He thought the judges would snicker. But their faces didn’t change a bit.

“I had to argue it twice in the supreme court: in 1971 and again in 1972. On 22 January 1973 I was at the [Texas](#) legislature when the phone rang. It was a reporter from the New York Times. ‘Does Miss Weddington have a comment today about Roe v Wade?’ my assistant was asked. ‘Why?’ she said. ‘Should she?’

“It was beginning to be very exciting. Then we got a telegram from the supreme court saying that [I had won 7-2](#) and that they were going to air-mail a copy of the ruling. Nowadays, of course, you’d just go online.

“I was ecstatic, and more than 44 years later we’re still talking about it.”

Weddington later revealed that she had an abortion herself, in 1967. “Just before the anaesthesia hit,” she said, “I thought: ‘I hope no one ever knows about this.’ For a lot of years, that was exactly the way I felt. Now there’s a major push to encourage women to tell their stories so people will realise that it is not a shameful thing. One out of every five women will have an abortion.”

Weddington predicted: “Whatever else I do in my life, the headline on my obituary is always going to be ‘Roe v Wade attorney dies’.”



Weddington when she was special assistant to President Jimmy Carter.  
Photograph: Bettmann/Bettmann Archive

In fact she achieved much more, as Hays [detailed](#). Weddington was “elected as the first woman from Travis county in the [Texas legislature] in 1972 (along with four other women: Kay Bailey, Chris Miller, Betty Andujar and Senfronia Thompson).

“She was general counsel of the United States Department of Agriculture under [Jimmy] Carter and enjoyed her stint in DC. Federal judicial nominations for Texas were run by her as a high-ranking Texan in the administration.

“A Dallas lawyer she knew sought a bench. She had interviewed with him while at UT law. He’d asked her, ‘What will we tell our wives if we hire you?’ She told him he was wasting their time and hers and walked out of the interview. He did not get the judgeship.

“Ever the proper preacher’s daughter, she would never tell me who the lawyer was. People don’t know that about Sarah. She was *such* a proper Methodist minister’s daughter. One of the few people I couldn’t cuss in front of.”

Hays also paid tribute to Weddington as a member of a “Great Austin Matriarchy” including the former Texas governor Ann Richards and the [columnist Molly Ivins](#).

Among other tributes, the University of Texas law professor Steve Vladeck said Weddington was “a remarkable woman [who had] a remarkable career and a remarkable life. May her memory be a blessing”.

Sherrilyn Ifill, president of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, said simply: “Rest in power.”

Weddington indicated she was at peace with being remembered for [Roe v Wade](#).

“I think most women of my generation can recall our feelings about the fight,” she told the Guardian. “It’s like young love. You may not feel exactly the same, but you remember it.”

This article was updated on 27 December 2021 to include tributes to Sarah Weddington from Steve Vladeck and Sherrilyn Ifill. Reference was also added to Norma McCorvey’s statement shortly before her death, but revealed only afterwards, that she changed her stance on abortion because she had been paid to do so by opposition groups.

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/dec/26/sarah-weddington-attorney-who-won-roe-v-wade-abortion-case-dies-aged-76>

## US Capitol attack

# Capitol rioter in Michael Fanone assault asks judge to let him use dating websites

Lawyer for Thomas Sibick tells judge he can be trusted to use social media to seek job and love during confinement at parents' house



Pro-Trump mob clash with police and security forces as they storm the US Capitol in Washington DC on 6 January. Photograph: Roberto Schmidt/AFP/Getty Images

*[Martin Pengelly](#) in New York*

*[@MartinPengelly](#)*

Mon 27 Dec 2021 01.00 EST

A New York man charged with assaulting a police officer during the deadly Capitol riot has asked a judge for permission to use dating websites while confined at his parents' house.

Thomas Sibick, of Buffalo, was part of a mob that Trump urged to “fight like hell” to overturn his election defeat by Joe Biden.

In a court filing on Christmas Day, his lawyer said he “realises that if he were to meet someone on a social media site, he would be unable to leave his home for the purpose of going to dinner or to participate in other events. He does, however, feel the need to establish some sort of connection with someone (if possible, in light of his situation).”

Five people died around events at the Capitol on 6 January, including a police officer and a rioter shot by law enforcement. Lawmakers hid or were hustled to safety as some rioters sought figures including Vice-President Mike Pence to capture or possibly kill.

Sibick, 36, awaits trial. He is alleged to have taken part in an “ongoing violent assault” of the former Washington police officer [Michael Fanone](#), “ripping off [his] radio – his lifeline for help – and his badge”.

Fanone was seriously injured and has become a leading voice seeking accountability for the rioters and those who urged them on, giving [emotional testimony](#) to the House select committee investigating the attack. He announced last week that he had resigned as a police officer, [to join CNN](#).

02:36

Capitol riot police officer: 'I was at risk of being killed with my own firearm' – video

Earlier this year, Sibick sought to escape the company of other Capitol rioters in a Washington jail, even [volunteering](#) for solitary confinement.

In October, Judge Amy Berman Jackson ordered Sibick to enter home confinement under supervision of his parents. He is not allowed to attend political rallies, use social media or watch talk shows on cable news.

“There will only be one chance,” Judge Jackson said then. “If you violate my conditions, it will indicate my trust was misplaced.”

Nonetheless, in a filing [first reported by Business Insider](#), Sibick sought permission to use social media to look for a job and to “interact with members of the opposite gender for the purpose of establishing a friendship”.

His attorney, Stephen Brennwald, wrote: “He is not seeking to use any social media application for any prohibited purpose, such as for political engagement, news reading, or any other activity that would violate not only the letter, but the spirit, of his release conditions.”

Sibick has [said](#) he now views the Capitol attack as “without question unconscionable”, a “disgrace to our nation” and “a scar Trump is ultimately responsible for”.

But he is among more than 700 people charged. Earlier this month, a man who attacked officers with a fire extinguisher was [sentenced to more than five years](#) in prison, the longest sentence yet handed down.

Robert Palmer, 54 and from Florida, [told a judge](#) he now recognised that Trump and others stoked the riot by “spitting out the false narrative about a stolen election and how it was ‘our duty’ to stand up to tyranny”.

“Little did I realise that they were the tyrannical ones desperate to hold on to power at any cost,” Palmer said, “even by creating the chaos they knew would happen with such rhetoric”.

Trump was impeached for a second time for inciting an insurrection. Ten House Republicans and seven senators turned against him but he was still acquitted.

Members of the House 6 January committee have indicated that they could recommend Trump [be criminally charged](#).

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[China](#)

## China replaces Xinjiang party boss associated with Uyghur crackdown

It is not known if Chen Quanguo's replacement by Guangdong governor Ma Xingrui signals fresh approach



Chen Quanguo was appointed party secretary of Xinjiang in 2016.

Photograph: Roman Pilipey/EPA

*[Vincent Ni](#) China affairs correspondent*

Sun 26 Dec 2021 08.08 EST

China has replaced the Communist party official widely associated with a security crackdown targeting ethnic Uyghurs and other Muslims in the far-west region of [Xinjiang](#).

The state-owned Xinhua news agency said in a brief announcement on Saturday that Ma Xingrui, the governor of the coastal economic powerhouse

Guangdong province since 2017, had replaced Chen Quanguo as the Xinjiang party chief. Chen will move to another role.

The change came amid a wider reshuffle ahead of next year's 20th party congress, scheduled for the autumn. It is not clear whether the move signals a rethink in China's overall approach to Xinjiang. Beijing would be sensitive to any interpretation that it was bowing to international pressure.

Some Chinese observers have noted Chen may be promoted further during the party congress. Others say his replacement, Ma, may focus more on the region's economic development.

Chen, 66, was appointed party secretary of Xinjiang in 2016. He is one of the 25 members of China's politburo and was placed on [a sanctions list last year](#) by the US.

On Thursday, Joe Biden signed into law a ban on imports from Xinjiang over Washington's concerns about forced labour. Beijing condemned the move.

Rights groups and the United Nations say about 1 million Uyghurs and other Muslims [have been detained](#) in re-education camps in Xinjiang in the name of combating religious extremism and terrorism.

Since 2017, Beijing's policy in the province has faced fierce criticism from abroad. Some western lawmakers and parliamentarians have described China's treatment of the Uyghurs as genocidal – a charge Beijing denies. There have also been calls for a boycott of the [Beijing Winter Olympics](#) in February.

Chen's replacement, 62-year-old Ma, has a background in the aerospace industry. Before becoming governor of Guangdong he served as the party boss in Shenzhen from 2015.

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## **Headlines friday 31 december 2021**

- [Vaccines Huge numbers of people in England ‘not turning up for Covid booster jabs’](#)
- [Omicron Wave has passed, says South Africa, as WHO chief sounds optimistic note for 2022](#)
- [UK Cases hit new record high of more than 189,000](#)
- [Explainer How Covid test shortages could affect staffing in schools and businesses](#)

## Vaccines and immunisation

# Huge numbers of people in England ‘not turning up for Covid booster jabs’

Health leaders report some clinics are only a third full as ministers claim to have met target

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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People in central London walk past a UK government advert encouraging people to book Covid booster vaccinations. Photograph: Dominic Lipinski/PA

*Sarah Marsh  
@sloumarsh*

Fri 31 Dec 2021 04.50 EST

A huge number of people in England are not turning up for their Covid vaccine appointments, health leaders have said, saying as many as 40% of bookings are missed.

The revelation comes as the government [claimed to have met its coronavirus booster jabs target](#), and that every adult in England had been offered a top-up shot.

The [NHS](#) Confederation said it was “encouraging” to see people coming forward and getting their Covid-19 jabs but that it was receiving reports that some sites were only a third full.

People have been urged to get the booster jab to tackle a growing number of cases of the Omicron variant of the virus. Confirmed daily Covid cases in the UK [hit yet another high on Thursday](#), with 189,213 reported in the past 24 hours, while the number of people in hospital and deaths have also risen, data reveals.

Evidence showed that having two doses of the Covid-19 vaccine does not provide strong protection against Omicron. However, a third dose provides about 70% protection against symptomatic infection.

Matthew Taylor, the chief executive of the NHS Confederation, said it had been informed by some primary care leaders that people were not showing up to as many as 40% of their scheduled bookings.

“It is encouraging to see people still coming forward for their first and second doses, as well as the massive achievement on boosters,” he said. “However, cases of Omicron are rising rapidly ... [Health](#) leaders are worried about the level of illness and demand that their staff across the NHS could have to respond to in January and so, it is vital that everyone who is eligible takes up the offer of a jab or booster shot.”

“Some primary care leaders are telling us their vaccination clinics are only a third full and that people are not turning up to as many as 40% of their booked appointments.

“While walk-ins continue to be on offer, they are calling on people to stick to their scheduled vaccine appointments and if they can’t for whatever reason that they cancel with notice as this will help manage pressures, particularly given the staffing crisis we are facing currently.”

On Friday, the health secretary, Sajid Javid, welcomed news the booster had been offered to all adults in England. He said these efforts meant that “tens of millions of people” got to see loved ones this Christmas.

He added that he was “incredibly proud” of the work the NHS had done to accelerate the programme, and thanked “the frontline staff, volunteers, armed forces and British public who have made it possible for us to meet this commitment”.

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/dec/31/huge-numbers-of-people-in-england-not-turning-up-for-covid-booster-jabs>

## Coronavirus

# Omicron-fuelled fourth Covid wave has passed, says South Africa, as it eases restrictions

Cases have dropped nearly 30% in a week, say authorities, as Israel approves fourth booster shot and New Year's Eve gatherings around the world are restricted

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A woman receives a dose of a COVID-19 vaccine at a vaccine centre, in Sandton, Johannesburg. Photograph: Luca Sola/AFP/Getty Images

*Staff and agencies*  
Fri 31 Dec 2021 01.35 EST

**South Africa** has lifted a nighttime curfew on people's movement with immediate effect, believing the country has passed the peak of its fourth coronavirus wave driven by the Omicron variant.

As the head of the World Health Organization sounded an optimistic note about beating the pandemic in 2022, the government in Pretoria removed the midnight-to-4am curfew based on the trajectory of the pandemic, vaccination levels and available capacity in the health sector, the government said on Thursday.

"All indicators suggest the country may have passed the peak of the fourth wave at a national level," a statement from a special cabinet meeting held earlier on Thursday said.

"While the Omicron variant is highly transmissible, there has been lower rates of hospitalisation than in previous waves," the cabinet statement said.

Data from South Africa's health department showed a 29.7% weekly decrease in new cases detected in the week ending 25 December, the government said. Hospital admissions have declined in eight of South Africa's nine provinces.

South Africa, with close to 3.5 million infections and 91,000 deaths, has been the worst-hit country in Africa during the pandemic on both counts, and was where the Omicron variant of the coronavirus was first detected last month.

The country is at the lowest of its five-stage Covid-19 alert levels.

Besides lifting the restrictions on public movement, the government also ruled that alcohol shops with licences to operate beyond 11pm may revert back to full licence conditions, a welcome boon for traders and businesses hard hit by the pandemic and looking to recover during the festive season.

However, public gatherings are restricted to no more than 1,000 people indoors, and no more than 2,000 people outdoors. Wearing of masks in public places also remains mandatory, with breaches considered a criminal offence.

The more optimistic note after two years of the global pandemic was echoed by the head of the World Health Organization, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, [who said on LinkedIn](#) that the world had the “tools to end this calamity”.

“After two years, we now know this virus well,” he wrote. “We know the proven measures to control transmission: mask use, avoiding crowds, maintaining physical distancing, practicing hand and respiratory hygiene, opening windows for ventilation, testing and contact tracing. We know how to treat the disease it causes and improve the chances of survival for people suffering serious illness. With all these learnings and capacities, the opportunity to turn this pandemic around for good is in our grasp.”

In **Israel** a fourth vaccine shot for vulnerable people has been approved, becoming one of the first countries to do so, amid a surge in Covid in cases driven by the Omicron variant.

Health ministry director general Nachman Ash said: “I did this in light of studies that show the benefit of the vaccine, including the fourth vaccine, to this population, and in light of the fear they are more vulnerable in this outbreak of Omicron.”

Israeli health authorities reported more than 4,000 new cases on Thursday, a high not seen since September. Health minister Nitzan Horowitz said Israel was in “a fifth wave”, with most cases probably related to Omicron.

Prime minister Naftali Bennett said Israel, which was among the first countries in the world to offer a booster shot to the public, would “lead the way” in offering a fourth jab. Booster shots have been administered to 4.2 million people out of a population of 9.4m Israelis.

Last week Chile announced it would offer a fourth shot to at-risk people beginning in February. Health authorities in the United Kingdom and Germany have also said they are considering fourth doses.

Also on Thursday, an Israeli El Al flight from Belgium landed in Tel Aviv carrying a shipment of Pfizer’s anti-Covid pill, Paxlovid, which Bennett

hailed as an “important addition to the arsenal in the war against the pandemic”.

“Thanks to our rapid action, the drugs have arrived in Israel quickly and will assist us in getting past the peak of the coming Omicron wave,” he said.

Ran Balicer, chairman of Israel’s national expert panel on Covid-19, said the Pfizer drugs could “dramatically reduce risk of severe illness, potentially thus also reducing the overall hospital burden”. He said the medications were critical, “in addition to vaccines and masks”.

In trials, the treatment has been shown to reduce Covid hospitalisations and deaths by 88% among at-risk people. The oral treatments block the virus’ ability to replicate and should withstand variants, experts say.

The US has paid \$5.3 billion for 10m courses of Pfizer’s new treatment, as well as \$2.2bn for treatment from rival Merck, whose pill appears to be less effective.

The European Union’s drug regulator has also allowed member states to use Pfizer’s Covid medications ahead of formal approval as an emergency measure.

Ash approved the booster after Israel’s Sheba Medical Centre launched a clinical trial Monday, giving 150 staff members a fourth jab to test the benefit of a wider national rollout of additional doses.

He also announced new health regulations, requiring people to wear masks at outdoor gatherings of more than 50 people.

Israeli health authorities have shied away from sweeping social distancing guidelines and lockdowns seen in the earlier days of the pandemic.

Meanwhile, the **United States** set a new global record for daily infections after [reporting 488,000 cases](#) as the Omicron variant spreads across the country, according to a New York Times database. However, even that figure is likely a serious undercount of the true numbers of positive cases, due to the rising popularity of home tests and people who are infected but asymptomatic.

## New Year's Eve gatherings curtailed

A New Year shorn of mass celebrations beckons for millions around the world as the number of daily new Covid cases worldwide crossed one million for the first time, according to an AFP tally on Thursday, with more than 7.3 million in the past seven days.

From Greece to Mexico, from Barcelona to Bali and across swathes of Europe, authorities have cancelled or curtailed public gatherings, either closing or imposing curfews on nightclubs. Only South Africa, the first country to report the Omicron variant, was bucking the trend.

In France, wearing masks outdoors will be compulsory while walking the streets of Paris from Friday for everyone over the age of 11. Nightclubs have been closed until well into January.

In Spain, public festivities have been cancelled across most regions and in the biggest cities except Madrid, where a stripped-down gathering is scheduled with the crowd limited to 7,000 people compared with 18,000 in 2019.

Britain's National Health Service said it would start opening temporary field hospitals to contain a possible overspill of patients in England, where the government stopped short of mandating curbs on New Year festivities. "Given the high level of Covid-19 infections and increasing hospital admissions, the NHS is now on a war footing," national medical director Stephen Powis said.

Indonesia, which has reported more than 4.2 million cases, warned that foreign travellers may be deported from the resort island of Bali if caught violating Covid rules that bar carnivals, fireworks and gatherings of more than 50 people. "Get ready to be kicked out," said Bali immigration office head Jamaruli Manihuruk.

Mexico City has cancelled its massive New Year's Eve celebrations as a preventative measure after a rise in cases.

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## Coronavirus

# UK Covid case numbers hit another record high at more than 189,000

Thursday's figure is new daily record, with the number of people in hospital and deaths also rising

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



People collect free Covid-19 test kits in Kingston-upon-Thames.  
Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian

*Nicola Davis* Science correspondent  
[@NicolaKSDavis](#)

Thu 30 Dec 2021 15.54 EST

Confirmed daily Covid cases in the UK hit yet another high on Thursday, with 189,213 reported in the past 24 hours, while the number of people in hospital and deaths have also risen, data reveals.

[On Wednesday 183,037 daily cases were reported for the whole of the UK](#) – a record at the time – although this figure included a backlog in some nations from before and during the Christmas period, with five days of case data included for Northern Ireland. Thursday's newly reported cases for Wales covered a two-day period.

But experts have warned daily case figures do not include reinfections and not everyone who is infected has symptoms and takes a test, meaning despite cases reaching new highs the true number of infections will be higher still.

The latest data also reveals that a further 332 people have died within 28 days of a positive Covid test.

The figures are a steep rise on the 57 deaths reported on Wednesday. Experts say the jump is, in part, because NHS England has not reported hospital deaths since 24 December.

The number of Covid patients in hospital has also increased in England, according to the latest data, with 11,452 reported on Thursday.

In Scotland, it was announced on Thursday that there were 810 patients in hospital with recently confirmed Covid, an increase of 19.3% compared with the day before.

[Commenting on Twitter](#), Scotland's first minister, Nicola Sturgeon, said the record case figures reflect that Omicron is highly infectious.

“Just as notable than cases is the steep rise in hospital occupancy, the largest single day increase in a while – a reminder that even if there is a lower percentage hospitalised through Omicron, sheer volume will still put acute pressure on NHS – and result in serious illness for many,” she wrote, adding that she was “appealing to everyone” to follow public health advice as the new year approached.

In a written statement Mark Drakeford, the first minister of Wales, said that the public health situation in Wales “has deteriorated in the last week as the Omicron wave has arrived”, adding that while hospitalisations are lower than in previous waves, they are also starting to increase.

According to the latest figures the number of Covid patients in hospital in Wales is now 446, a 49% increase compared with last week. However, Drakeford said Wales was not reporting a rise in the number of Covid patients needing critical care.

Prof Christina Pagel, director of UCL’s Clinical Operational Research Unit, said that reported case levels in England are now more than twice as high as the previous peak last January, and have not yet peaked, while cases are rising in all groups apart from under-10s. Hospital admissions, she added, are also rising in all age groups.

While data suggested fewer admissions are leading to intensive care, Pagel said the situation was worrying. “An NHS crisis based on the wards instead of ICU is still an NHS crisis,” [she tweeted](#).

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## Coronavirus

# Covid test shortages will affect staffing in schools and businesses, leaders warn

Explainer: Shortfalls as seen in the NHS and care homes could spread to education, transport and hospitality

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



The start of term could be delayed in English secondary schools due to the test shortages. Photograph: Ben Birchall/PA

*[Richard Adams](#)*

Thu 30 Dec 2021 13.52 EST

Schools and businesses will suffer next if [widespread shortages of Covid tests](#) continue, after staffing difficulties in hospitals and care homes.

With the government's website indicating no availability for PCR tests at walk-in services or by home delivery, and pharmacies continuing to struggle to meet demand for lateral flow test (LFT) kits, sector leaders say the shortages will have knock-on effects once the UK emerges from the holiday period.

### **Transport: train operators struggling to stay on track**

Train services have been disrupted by staff shortages caused by Covid. Great Western Railway said: "With rising numbers of staff unavailable to work because of positive Covid tests and having to self-isolate, we have taken steps to maintain service levels across the network. Unfortunately, this includes planned cancellations designed to minimise the impact on as many customers as possible."

West Midlands Railway said the Omicron variant was having "a significant impact" on its workforce. ScotRail said its services would be disrupted until 28 January because of a shortage of train crew, and services could be cancelled or changed at short notice.

A shortage of staff has led [Southern to halt services to and from London Victoria for two weeks](#). The routes had already been suspended this week due to engineering works, and the staffing problems mean the suspension will continue until 10 January at the earliest.

### **Schools: test shortages have potential to delay start of term**

The Department for Education announced in November that secondary schools in England would need to test all pupils twice on site before they can return to the classroom. Schools have been given flexibility over when to carry out the tests, with many expected to spread out returns over the latter half of next week.

Geoff Barton, the general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said: "Schools and colleges are able to order lateral flow device test kits through an online ordering system ... These orders are due to be

delivered in the week commencing 3 January, and we have not been notified by the government of any issues affecting supply.”

A DfE spokesperson said: “Schools and colleges use a different priority supply route to get their lateral flow tests. Most test kits have already been received for the start of the new term.”

Several headteachers who spoke to the Guardian said they had stockpiled enough kits to test pupils, but feared that shortages of tests for teachers and other essential school staff such as caterers were likely to be a bigger problem.

### **Care homes: slow results making staffing issues worse**

Some care homes have stopped allowing in visitors because of staff shortages, which have been affected by lengthening delays in getting results from walk-in tests. Care home staff are required to have two lateral flow tests and a PCR test each week.

Nadra Ahmed, the chair of the National Care Association, said care homes were reporting delays of four days in getting PCR results, meaning the results were out of date before they arrived. “Agency nurses are not turning up, managers are having to work day shifts and night shifts just to keep the service covered – it has been horrendous. We continue to support families visiting where it is safe but some providers have had to close to visitors because they don’t have the staff to support safe visiting,” Ahmed said.

Vaccinated residents who leave a home temporarily have to be tested for the following 10 days after they return, meaning availability of tests is crucial.

### **NHS: call for tests to be reserved for staff**

NHS staff are required to take twice weekly tests but are not given access to lateral flow tests from their institutions and must seek their own, after a change in guidance over the summer. The surge in demand has hit NHS staff’s access to LFTs, leading to fears of staff shortages.

Unison, one of the main unions representing health workers, said NHS leaders needed to “up the pressure” on the government to reserve tests for NHS staff if stocks were low. Helga Pile, Unison’s deputy head of health, said: “NHS workers are under enough pressure as it is without the additional worry of obtaining tests.”

The call for priority testing for NHS staff has been supported by the Royal College of Nursing, NHS Providers and the British Medical Association, after reports that NHS trusts are reporting high numbers of absences related to Covid.

### **Hospitality: tests needed for celebrations to go ahead**

A lack of tests in England could mean the efforts of restaurants, clubs and pubs to host [New Year's Eve celebrations](#) are in vain, industry representatives said.

With Boris Johnson and ministers telling the public that they needed a test before safely partying on 31 December, the hospitality sector said bookings remained at about half of that seen in a normal year. A lack of test kits could lead to that figure falling further.

Kate Nicholls, the chief executive of UK Hospitality, said: “We need to make sure people have access to tests so they can continue to come to work as well as partying.”

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## 2021.12.31 - Spotlight

- [Chaplin, Elvis and Batman return 25 films to look out for in 2022](#)
- [My winter of love I went to rescue my boyfriend from rabid dogs – and realised how brave I was](#)
- [Escape your comfort zone I am on a diving board the height of a two-storey building. Can I take the plunge?](#)
- [Sport Tom Jenkins's best photos of 2021](#)



Clockwise from top: Lingui, Top Gun: Maverick, Ali & Ava, The Batman.  
Composite: Guardian Design/Altitude/AP/ Paramount Pictures/Scott Garfield/Allstar/PR

[2022 culture preview](#)

## **Chaplin, Elvis and Batman return: 25 films to look out for in 2022**

Clockwise from top: Lingui, Top Gun: Maverick, Ali & Ava, The Batman.  
Composite: Guardian Design/Altitude/AP/ Paramount Pictures/Scott Garfield/Allstar/PR

Baz Luhrmann takes on the King with Tom Hanks, Jim Broadbent steals a masterpiece and Jessica Chastain plays an eccentric televangelist ... all in 2022's must-see movies

[More cultural highlights of 2022](#)

by [Peter Bradshaw](#)

Fri 31 Dec 2021 01.00 EST

## Licorice Pizza

Two newcomers become glorious movie stars in this comedy from Paul Thomas Anderson, set in 1970s Los Angeles. Cooper Hoffman (son of the late Philip Seymour Hoffman) is a fast-talking high-school kid with the nerve to start hitting on a 25-year-old woman – played by Alana Haim (of the pop band [Haim](#)), who has Barbra Streisand’s charisma and beauty. Their strange semi-platonic love affair plays out against this kid’s floundering dual careers as a child actor and waterbed salesman. Gorgeously made, with wonderful cameos from Bradley Cooper and Sean Penn.

Released in the UK on 1 January

## A Hero



Ironic ... A Hero. Photograph: Amirhossein Shojaei

The title couldn’t be more ironic. This subtle film from Iranian auteur Asghar Farhadi is about slippery Rahim (Amir Jadidi), imprisoned for debt and allowed out of prison on a weekend pass. His girlfriend has found some apparently valuable gold coins in the street: Rahim plans to sell them and give the money to his creditor to cancel his sentence. But when they turn out to be worth much less than he thought, Rahim cooks up an alternative scam to impress a charitable foundation: pretend he was always going to hand the

coins back to their owner.

7 January

## Cow

Audiences will experience a kind of agribusiness pastoral in this immersive documentary from Andrea Arnold, who takes us up close and personal with cows on a farm as they moo and trot around and give birth and stare with profoundly mysterious placidity into the camera. Arnold gets alongside her bovine stars as they give birth, and we don't see any humans until right at the very end, when we must confront the cows' awful destiny at the hands of the human carnivores. There is great poignancy and intimacy here.

14 January

## Memoria



Enigmatic ... Tilda Swinton in *Memoria*. Photograph: © Kick the Machine Films, Burning, Anna Sanders Films, Match Factory Productions, ZDF-Arte and Piano, 2021

The artist and Palme d'Or-winning film-maker Apichatpong Weerasethakul gives us his first movie from outside Thailand: a strange, exalted, visionary work. Tilda Swinton stars as a British expat in Colombia plagued by

hallucinatory sounds. Her search for their meaning leads her to an unearthly epiphany. Weerasethakul is a director concerned with the unsolved and unspoken mysteries of existence. *Memoria* is a beautiful and enigmatic picture – cinema that decelerates your pulse.

14 January

## **Belfast**

There's such terrific warmth and tenderness to Kenneth Branagh's movie about the Belfast of his childhood: spryly written, beautifully acted, and shot in a lustrous monochrome. This is a film consciously without the anger and despair generally considered indispensable for movies about the Troubles. Instead, we get generosity and wit. Jamie Dornan plays a Protestant carpenter who lives with his old mum and dad (Ciarán Hinds and Judi Dench), his wife (Caitriona Balfe) and sons (Jude Hill and Lewis McAskie). As the political situation gets worse, he must figure out how and when to leave Belfast.

21 January

## **Nightmare Alley**



Illusion ... Bradley Cooper in *Nightmare Alley*. Photograph: Netflix/Kerry Hayes/Allstar

Guillermo Del Toro gives his rich and exotic imagination full rein in this supercharged noir, a new version of the pulp shocker by William Lindsay Gresham, first filmed by Edmund Goulding in 1947 with Tyrone Power in the sleazy lead role. Now it's Bradley Cooper playing Stan, a criminal who needs to vanish into the underground and gets a job with a travelling troupe of carnies and con-men. The film shows us how his whole life is a fascinatingly tacky illusion heading for disaster.

21 January

## **Parallel Mothers**

The energy and creativity of Pedro Almodóvar continues to be a marvel. This new film is a baby-swap melodrama – at least on the surface. Penélope Cruz plays Janis, pregnant and determined to go it alone as a single mum; she befriends teen Ana (Milena Smit) who has the same idea, though without Janis's resources. Their babies get accidentally mixed up; their lives are intertwined; nature, nurture and ancestral burdens combine as a subplot tackles Spanish trauma over the civil war.

28 January

## **Ali & Ava**

Here's a social-realist love story from director Clio Barnard, set in Bradford, which is being compared to Ken Loach's [Ae Fond Kiss](#). Adeel Akhtar plays a likable, happy-go-lucky South Asian guy called Ali, who is secretly depressed at the end of his marriage. Then he runs into Ava, a white woman from an Irish background, recently widowed, whose late husband was an abusive bully. She's a sweet-natured soul looking for human warmth, and she and Ali fall for each other. The film is an essay in acceptance and love.

4 February

## **The Eyes of Tammy Faye**



Devoted ... Jessica Chastain in *The Eyes of Tammy Faye*. Photograph: Searchlight Pictures/Moviestore/Shutterstock

Jessica Chastain gives it her very considerable all in this biopic of televangelist Tammy Faye Bakker, the devoted wife of notorious fellow preacher, huckster and fraudster Jim Bakker. She learned her commercial vocation in the Lord from him and was utterly committed to their dual lifestyles of righteousness and wealth. But Tammy was also sincere and thoughtful in her own way, and was committed to LGBTQ+ rights in a style that the Christian right did not espouse.

4 February

## The Souvenir: Part II

One of Britain's pre-eminent new film-makers has elevated her reputation still further with the second part of her luminous autobiographical movie: a self-portrait of the artist as a young woman. Writer-director Joanna Hogg fictionalises herself as the insouciantly well-off film student Julie, played by Honor Swinton Byrne, now recovering from her destructive amour fou with the complicated man called Anthony we saw in the first film. Now she is planning to alchemise that pain into a movie.

4 February

## Lingui

African cinema is represented this year by the great Chadian director Mahamat-Saleh Haroun, part of his continent's great quietist, walking-pace tradition of film-making. Lingui is a Chadian word meaning "sacred bonds" – between man and woman, mother and child. These are tested when Amina, a woman who has to pretend her husband is dead to avoid scandal, finds that her teen daughter is pregnant and in the same situation that she was in not so very long ago.

4 February

## **Death on the Nile**



All-star cast ... Armie Hammer and Gal Gadot in Death on the Nile.  
Photograph: Pictorial Press/Alamy

When Kenneth Branagh had an enormous hit with his 2017 version of [Murder on the Orient Express](#), starring himself as the Belgian sleuth Poirot, British cinema re-learned a great truth: Agatha Christie is gigantic box-office. So now Branagh has done the same thing with Death on the Nile (which, like MOTOE, was a 70s movie hit), returning as Poirot and leading an all-star cast including Gal Gadot, Annette Bening, Sophie Okonedo and Armie Hammer.

11 February

## The Real Charlie Chaplin

Festival audiences have been thrilled by this in-depth documentary, which returns to the eternally fascinating subject of [Charlie Chaplin](#), the movie legend and former workhouse inmate whom Dickens would have loved and understood. He was the cinema genius who became the world's first and arguably most pervasive global celebrity in an era when silent cinema was understood by everyone. But during the second world war, he was punished by the US government for his outspoken leftist politics, and became an exile in Europe.

18 February

## The Duke

Here is the last movie from the late Roger Michell, [the director who died in September](#) – and it could be his masterpiece: a true-crime comedy of British manners about a politically motivated art theft in 1960s Britain, which tweaked the nose of the pompous establishment. Jim Broadbent plays plain-speaking northern socialist and chancer Kempton Bunton and Helen Mirren is his wife, Dorothy. Kempton is outraged when public money is spent on saving Goya's Duke of Wellington portrait for the nation when it could have been spent on needy working people. So he steals it from the National Gallery, a chaotic caper which electrified the country.

25 February

## **The Batman**

The definite article was first appended to Batman's name in the Christopher Nolan era as an indicator of something thrillingly primitive and elemental. Now it's actually going in the title. Robert Pattinson wears the pointy-eared mask. Has he been bulking up in the gym to match Christian Bale's presence? Or will this be a slighter, wirier [Batman](#)? At all events, he faces the giggling conundrum-creator of Gotham City, the Riddler, played by Paul Dano. Meanwhile, the Penguin is an unrecognisable Colin Farrell.

4 March

## Paris, 13th District



Zinging energy ... Paris, 13th District. Photograph: Shanna Besson

Jacques Audiard's freewheeling ensemble picture about Parisians in love – and set in the *treizième* – deserved more awards in Cannes than it actually got. It's adapted from American stories by the graphic artist [Adrian Tomine](#), transplanted to France. A young woman living rent-free in her dementia-stricken grandma's flat has a tricky relationship with her roommate-with-benefits, who in turn has a tumultuous row with his kid sister over her plan to be a standup comic. Another young woman is mistaken for an online sex worker, and turns to the real thing for help. The zinging energy of this film is a marvel.

4 March

## **The Worst Person in the World**

The year's best romantic comedy comes from the most unexpected source. Norwegian director Joachim Trier is known for his shocking and challenging dramas; now he has created a lovely relationship comedy in the tradition of Nora Ephron and David Nicholls. Renate Reinsve plays the heroine, Julie, and the movie breaks down her troubled romantic history. She hooks up with a rebellious graphic artist, played by Anders Danielsen Lie, and then cheats on him with a humble shop assistant. It's a sweet and funny film that insists on the importance of the romcom questions: who should you fall in love

with? Who is the one?

25 March

## Compartment No 6



Charming ... Compartment No 6. Photograph: Sami Kuokkanen Aamu Film Company

There's a great tradition of train journeys on film and this is a gem. Finnish director Juho Kuosmanen has created a charming 90s-set love story from unpromising elements. Laura is a sweet-natured young Finnish student of archaeology, in retreat from a stagnant affair with her professor, who embarks on an epic rail journey from Moscow to freezing Murmansk to view some mysterious rock drawings, thousands of years old. And in compartment No 6, she meets boorish, drunken, obnoxious Vadim, who starts out looking like a tough guy and ends up being the sensitive soul that she needs.

1 April

## Everything Went Fine

François Ozon brings us a beautifully crafted example of French cinema: an affecting but unsentimental film about assisted dying. Veteran character

actor André Dussollier plays André, a wealthy and well-connected industrialist who is suddenly reduced to a shadow of himself after suffering a stroke. His daughter Manue, excellently played by Sophie Marceau, has difficult memories of his cruelty during her childhood and even fantasised about killing him. So it is with mixed feelings that she receives the news he wants her to organise his euthanasia in Switzerland.

22 April

## **Operation Mincemeat**

One of the most extraordinary stories of the second world war is retold, adapted from the bestseller by Ben Macintyre. To conceal the Allied plan to invade Sicily in 1943, [British intelligence officers took the body of a dead homeless man](#), dressed him up in a captain's uniform and placed on him bogus documents detailing non-existent plans to invade via Greece and Sardinia. Then they allowed the body to wash up on the Spanish coast, confident it would be passed on to the Nazis, who would assume pure chance had given them their enemies' secret plans. Colin Firth and Matthew Macfadyen star.

22 April

## **Benedetta**



Nunsploration? ... Benedetta. Photograph: Guy Ferrandis/SBS Productions

Paul Verhoeven is a director whose wildly over-the-top creations have long been subject to revisionist cinephile praise, but there has been a division of opinion over this new nunsploration romp – based on the true story of a 17th-century French abbess, Benedetta (played by the estimable Virginie Efira), who was stripped of her authority because of her relationship with a fellow nun. There is much raunchiness here. Is it Showgirls in wimples? Kinda. For Verhoeven partisans, who insist the mockers and the nay-sayers just don't get it, this is the whole point.

22 April

## Top Gun: Maverick

Still speedy, still needy, still eerily boyish, Captain Pete “Maverick” Mitchell returns in this present-day sequel to [Top Gun](#). The US navy airman played by Tom Cruise could be piloting a desk by now, but he prefers to be a badass warrior of the skies. Jennifer Connelly plays Maverick’s love interest, a mere nine years Cruise’s junior. Miles Teller plays Rooster Bradshaw, the son of Goose Bradshaw from the first film, who was played by Anthony Edwards. Could it be that this film will include the homoeroticism famously imagined by Top Gun superfans Roger Avary and Quentin Tarantino? Probably not.

27 May

## **Elvis**

Tom Hanks plays Colonel Tom Parker, the notoriously super-controlling manager of Elvis Presley, in this new biopic of Elvis directed and co-written by Baz Luhrmann – and we can expect some storytelling fireworks from this high-energy film-maker. Austin Butler (who was the creepy Manson follower Tex in Quentin Tarantino’s [Once Upon a Time in Hollywood](#)) plays Elvis – though it is not yet clear if he will be doing his own singing.

24 June

## Nitram



Chilling ... Nitram. Photograph: Stan

The chilling [Port Arthur massacre of 1996](#) was one of the worst examples of mass murder in Australian history, and now director Justin Kurzel has made this movie about the stranger-than-fiction life-story of the killer, Martin Bryant, starting with the nasty nickname he acquired at school: "Nitram" – "Martin" spelled backwards. Having been let down by his parents, Bryant was bizarrely befriended and taken in by a wealthy and reclusive heiress (played by Essie Davis), who put him in her will before dying in questionable circumstances – making Bryant rich enough to indulge his passion for guns.

15 July

## Mission: Impossible 7

The non-appearing [No Time to Die](#) achieved a kind of mythic status during the lockdown. Something of the sort has also happened to Mission Impossible: 7, the long-awaited latest in the action-adventure series with Tom Cruise as daredevil Ethan Hunt – chiefly because of an illicit audio recording that surfaced in December 2020, in which [an extremely stressed Cruise can be heard berating the UK crew](#) for not observing social-distancing rules. Can anything in the film be as exciting as that? We must

hope so.  
30 September

*UK release dates may change*

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## My winter of loveRelationships

# My winter of love: I went to rescue my boyfriend from rabid dogs – and realised how brave I was

When I woke up alone, I was terrified he was in an alley somewhere, animals feeding on his face. I am forever grateful for what I learned that night



Sajna Singh and Adam. Photograph: Courtesy of Sanjna Singh

[Sanjna N Singh](#)

Fri 31 Dec 2021 01.00 EST

It was New Year's Eve, and we were in an unheated stone hut. Adam and I had hit it off at a silent meditation retreat in Minneapolis, and I'd invited him to spend Christmas break with me in India. At the time, ringing in 2018 in a little village framed by the granite formations and snow-streaked peaks of

the Himalayas had seemed like a fairytale. But that night the mercury dipped so low that my vital organs muttered “system failure” and powered down. I buried myself under quilts with concrete-level cotton padding.

“It’s 7pm,” Adam protested.

I moulded my frozen lips into a passable version of “goodnight” and passed out.

I woke up feeling strangely disoriented, like I’d been asleep for a hundred years. “Adam?” I said. No answer. I felt along the bed. No Adam. For a second, I panicked. Had I really pulled a Sleeping Beauty? How long had I been out? I groped for my phone. It was 11.20pm.

“Where are you?” I texted. I poked my head out of the door of the hut. “Adam?” I called out into the night. Prayer flags snapped in the wind. I rang his phone, feeling forlorn. No answer. My redhead Prince Charming was seriously MIA. Was he taking a walk? I’d warned him about the stray dogs here – docile by day, feral at night. A week ago, I’d seen men wash blood off the road where the beasts had attacked a tourist. Last year, a friend had been bitten in the calf. Was Adam in an alley somewhere, rabid dogs feeding on his face? Did I need to go and rescue him?

I really don’t want to do this, I thought, as I shoved on my coat, grabbed a stick and opened the gate. You’d better be dying. I started a slow sideways creep down the hill, my heart pounding drumbeats into my ears, my eyes darting left and right for murderous dogs. To my relief, I saw none. Maybe they were having a New Year’s Eve celebration. Or maybe they were busy feasting ... on Adam.

I shook the image out of my head, picked up the pace and continued walking. Just then, a low growl sounded at my back. I turned. Six yellow eyes glinted from a few feet away. I froze. Stupid, stupid, I thought. Now I’m dog chowder, too. Tentatively, I wagged the stick at them. They growled louder. If they lunge at me, I thought, I’ll just whirl my stick Crouching Tiger style and send them flying. Eh, who was I kidding? The blood they’d clean from the pavement would 100% be mine. Wasn’t the prince supposed to rescue the princess? Why was I the one facing the hounds of hell alone?

The phone pinged. It was Adam.

“Hey sweetie,” he wrote. “I’m at the cafe. They’re having a new year party!”

“You WHAT?” I screamed. “You inconsiderate jerk!” The dogs backed away. “I thought you were dead!” The dogs turned and fled.

“He’s gonna wish he’d met the dogs instead,” I muttered as I stalked down the road.

I entered the cafe, which glowed with candlelight. People were laughing and chattering around a long table, decorated with boughs of juniper and plates of chocolate cake. The smells of cider and champagne warmed the room.

Adam looked up, his face flushed. “Hey, baby, you came,” he said.

“Don’t talk to me,” I said, flinging myself into a chair. “I hate you more than life itself.”

“But why?” He laughed, spooning molten lava cake into my mouth. “I didn’t want to wake you.”

“Are you familiar with the concept of leaving a note?” I glared at him.

Already, though, my anger was waning. I was getting warmer. There was chocolate. I was not missing any limbs. And I had been pretty brave, all things considered.

The countdown began. “Happy new year!” we yelled. Bangs filled the air as we pulled crackers, and streamers flew everywhere. The dogs outside howled.

“To Prince Charming,” I toasted.

As Adam’s eyes lit up, I decided not to ruin the moment by telling him I’d meant me. And, although this fairytale romance didn’t make it past spring, I was forever grateful to realise that I didn’t need a white knight to slay my dragons.

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**Escape your comfort zone: I am on a diving board the height of a two-storey building. Can I take the plunge?**



Adharanand Finn learning to dive at the Plymouth Life Centre. Photograph: Jonny Weeks/The Guardian

I have always wanted to be a diver. So at the centre where Tom Daley once trained, I aim to graduate to a five-metre board – arms locked, bend, one, two, go ...

*Adharanand Finn*

Fri 31 Dec 2021 04.00 EST

I'm standing on a five-metre diving board – about the height of a two-storey building – preparing to throw myself off, headfirst. And I'm terrified. I take a determined step towards the end, lock my arms above my head and begin to tip forward.

I have always admired people who can dive, and secretly wished that I could do it. I watch them taking off from great heights, seemingly floating for a second, before arrowing smoothly into the water. How do they do that? When I get up there, the thought of leaping headfirst short-circuits my brain. Won't my neck snap? So I've come to one of the world's best diving centres, the [Life Centre in Plymouth](#), the former training pool of diving superstar Tom Daley. Hopefully, with a little help, I can become one of those elegant, effortless diving types.

My instructor, Fito, a former champion cliff diver, starts by getting me to dive from the side of the pool, before moving me on to the one-metre board. Following his instructions, I find myself plopping easily into the water. After just three dives, he says I'm ready for the three-metre board. I look up. Really? Already?

He comes up on to the board with me and we stand at the edge. It feels higher up here than it looks from below.

“It’s exactly the same process,” he says. Hands above my head, thumbs locked, tip forward and then jump. Except it’s not the same at all. I start to bend forward, but just at the tipping point, before the point of no return, I stop. I stand up, take a breath.

But Fito doesn’t give me time to overthink it. We start again. “Arms locked, bend ... one, two ... go.” Following his calm instructions I tip forward – and

I'm gone.

It's over in less than a second. I hit the water smoothly, going straight through it as if it's made of soft foam. No smack or slap, just a soft embrace sucking me in. Then I'm straight out of the water and back up the steps, like a child. This is incredible. It's so much easier than I expected. Again, I pierce the water cleanly, straight as an arrow.



Adharanand Finn making another dive. Photograph: Jonny Weeks/The Guardian

On the third dive, however, my concentration slips, my hands flail apart on impact, and my head hits the water with a smack. Fito tells me not to worry, that I have to do it wrong a few times in order to remember to do it right.

After about 10 more dives, some better than others, he motions to the five-metre board. If I can dive from there, I think, I'll have cracked it. I'm feeling confident as I scale the steps. But then I get on to the board and look down.

"You'll be fine," Fito says from below. I nod. Arms locked, legs locked. But it's so high. I suddenly feel dreamy. I have to remind myself where I am, that I'm about to dive. I step forward ... but I can't do it. I step back.

Fito encourages me again. "You can do it", he says.

“OK, I’m doing it,” I shout. I take a purposeful step forward, bend at the waist, look down at the shimmering water.

A childhood memory flashes through my mind. I’m sitting on my bike, about to tip over the edge of a stupidly steep woodland slope, about to smash myself to pieces. “No,” I say. Something, some invisible force, pulls me back.

“Take your time,” says Fito. But a safety alarm is ringing in my head. Earlier, talking about his cliff-diving days, Fito had told me that he is a thrill-seeker. But I’m not. I like to challenge myself, but rather than hurling myself out of my comfort zone, I prefer to expand its limits from the inside.

So I step back. Maybe after another session on the three-metre board, I would be ready. Maybe then it would feel like a natural progression. But this is as far as the road goes today. I dived from platforms three times higher than ever before. I’m content with that.

It’s only later, on the way home, that I feel a little pang of disappointment. Why didn’t I do it? In my memory, the platform height has already shrunk.

“Next time,” I think. “Next time.”

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Manchester City fans celebrate their Premier League title win outside the Etihad Stadium after their team were crowned champions after Manchester United's home defeat by Leicester.

## Tom Jenkins's best sports photos of 2021

Manchester City fans celebrate their Premier League title win outside the Etihad Stadium after their team were crowned champions after Manchester United's home defeat by Leicester.

The Guardian and Observer sport photographer Tom Jenkins selects his favourite images from the thousands of frames that he shot during 2021 and recalls the stories behind them

by [Tom Jenkins](#)

Thu 30 Dec 2021 19.01 EST

Normally the summer Olympics are the pinnacle event for me to cover, but this year was not at all normal and I decided to give Tokyo a miss. Not only did my family not want me going, there were other factors to discourage me, not least the new rules that meant I might have very limited access. So instead my year was dominated by football, the peak being the final of the Euros at Wembley, a game that brought the country to a standstill and became one of the most-watched moments in British television history.

## **West Bromwich Albion v Arsenal, The Hawthorns – 2 January**

*44mm lens 1/1600 f4.5 ISO 4000*



My year started off in a very cold fashion with a trip to the Hawthorns, the highest professional league ground in the country. Despite the freezing conditions I loved it. It is pretty rare to shoot a football match in snow, thanks to either modern heated pitches melting it, or the games getting called off due to safety concerns for spectators. Back in January that obviously wasn't the case as all games were being played behind closed doors.

It was quickly apparent that the home side probably wished it had been postponed. They lost 4-0 to Arsenal, a dismal performance indicative of

their season as a whole. The reason I like this picture is the bleakness of it all. Heavy snow falling in an empty stadium as all 10 outfield West Brom players, each one separate from the other, trudge back to the centre circle after conceding a goal. A very black and white image – perhaps a Christmas card for a Wolves fan?

## **Ealing Trailfinders v Saracens, Trailfinders Challenge Cup – 16 January**

*400mm lens 1/2500 f4 ISO 640*



In mid-January this special challenge match was the only senior men's rugby game in Britain as all the others had been cancelled for Covid reasons. Ealing are a Championship team, in the second tier of English rugby, and Saracens were just about to start their season at this new level following their demotion from the Premiership. Most rugby matches I usually cover are in large stadia with tall stands circling the pitch. This wasn't the case at Ealing and most of the pitch was bathed in low winter sun. Shooting backlit was beautiful, all I needed was the play to come near me into the right patch of light. For ages it seemed stuck at the other end, time ticking by and the sun rapidly descending. Eventually a maul formed where I needed it and I

managed to get a few frames before clouds rolled in and everything went dark.

## Arsenal v Manchester United, Emirates Stadium – 30 January

*560mm lens, 1/1600 f4 ISO 4000*



It was injury time at the end of this very dull 0-0 draw back in January. I was cold and had very few decent pictures. Suddenly the Arsenal striker Alexandre Lacazette launched himself at the ball across the back of Harry Maguire and flipped over in mid-air. It just goes to show you never know when something might happen to brighten up your day.

## Spurs v Chelsea, Tottenham Hotspur Stadium – 4 February

*105mm lens 1/1250 f4.5 ISO 4000*



One of the advantages of working in an empty stadium with a game played behind closed doors is that it gave me opportunities to put remote cameras in places I normally wouldn't be allowed to, such as here in the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium, on stairs right at the top of the massive South Stand. While I was down at pitch-level, I was setting off this camera up there. I love the view looking down on the goal, all neat symmetry and perfect lines. Even the groundsman with rubber gloves on, ready to pick up a loose ball from behind the goal, is standing right in the middle. As Jorginho stepped up to score a penalty for Chelsea, the only goal of this game, all the elements lined up perfectly. This frame is also a reminder of the pandemic age of football, a time when the game carried on without fans.

## **England v Italy, Twickenham – 13 February**

*560mm lens 1/1600 f4 ISO 2500*



The England captain Owen Farrell gets a fist in the face during his side's [41-18 victory over Italy](#) in the Six Nations. International rugby is such a hard, physical sport with a lot of close confrontations such as this. It is at moments like these that I often like to go in tight on the action with a very long lens. Sometimes it pays off, sometimes it does not.

## **Wales v England, Principality Stadium – 27 February**

*145mm lens 1/1600 f4 ISO 3200*



Normally for this game, which has always been one of my favourite fixtures, the Principality Stadium would be full of baying red-shirted fans. It is a perfect ground for rugby which, when full, crackles with intensity and passion. The Six Nations game there in February felt very surreal, the empty seats covered with giant waterproof sheets, one of which bore a fire-breathing dragon. I could not help but imagine what the noise would have been like as Wales won 40-24.

## **Lawrence Okolie, World cruiserweight boxing champion – 6 April**

*50mm lens 1/125 f1.6 ISO 400*



In 2012 Lawrence Okolie weighed 19 stone and was working in a McDonald's at London Victoria station. It was the final day of the London Olympics and in a break from flipping burgers he watched [Anthony Joshua](#) winning the heavyweight boxing gold medal on TV. The following day Okolie quit his job and vowed to be a boxer. In early April I went to photograph the 28-year-old from Hackney just a few days after he became the WBO world cruiserweight champion. I decided to photograph Okolie in the tiny gym at the bottom of his garden in Essex, cradling his newly-won world champion belt.

## **Rachael Blackmore wins the Grand National, Aintree – 10 April**

*28mm lens 1/2500 f11 ISO 1250*



In the hour before every Grand National there is always a buzz among the photographers at the course. Everyone asks “where are you going?” or “what’s your plan?” This year was no different and I remember talking to Steve Cargill, a racing specialist, as we headed out on to the track. In unison we both said: “What if Rachael wins?” and realised our goals were very similar, we had to be at the finish in case Blackmore created history and became the first female jockey to win the world’s most famous steeplechase race. I had photographed her success at Cheltenham the previous month, where she was crowned leading jockey, so knew she was in terrific form. Sure enough her horse, Minella Times, carried her to victory at Aintree. It was a real pity that spectators were not there to witness it, just a few owners watching on. It was quite eerie afterwards as she enjoyed the moment while at the same time caring for her horse, dousing it with water while the TV screen replayed her historic win in the background.

## Arsenal fans protest, Emirates Stadium – 23 April

*70mm lens 1/2000 f4.5 ISO 500*



For a couple of weeks of the [Premier League](#) season in April and May it seemed the news agenda was not being set by matters on the pitch but rather what was occurring outside grounds. It was the time of fans' protests, justifiably angered by six clubs announcing their intention to join a new European Super League. This radical proposal, which would have caused havoc to the game, came along when fans had been locked out for months. At Arsenal the fans' grievances were directed squarely at the club's owner, Stan Kroenke. Before a home match against Everton hundreds gathered. I went back inside the ground after photographing the demo. The game, in front of no fans, was desperate. Arsenal lost 1-0 but no one seemed that bothered with the result – the bigger news had been made outside.

## **Manchester City win the Premier League – 11 May**

*16mm lens 1/400 f4 ISO 3200*



Once I saw Caglar Soyuncu scoring the winner for Leicester at Old Trafford, I knew the most important pictures on that May evening would be taken on the other side of Manchester. United's defeat meant City had won the Premier League. So I quickly got in the car after the final whistle and headed over to the Etihad. Sure enough hundreds of City fans descended on their ground to celebrate the title victory. One of them, pictured here, played up beautifully for the cameras, holding a can of lager and a flare in one hand, while smoking a rollup in the other.

## **England v New Zealand, first Test, Lord's – 5 June**

*840mm lens 1/1600 f5.6 ISO 800*



There are times in Test cricket that are, let us just say, not quite as interesting as others. The third day of the first Test had been wiped out by rain, and the match was meandering towards a draw on the fourth afternoon. My mind started to wander. I had noticed, unusually for Lord's, that quite a few pigeons had been pecking away at the square. This sort of bird activity I have always associated with the Oval. Anyway, I thought I would try to create a picture with them. Slowly a number started to congregate on a patch not far from the wicket being used. Kane Williamson, the New Zealand captain, played a shot then shouted for a run. The pigeons took off in unison, all apart from one, who stubbornly stayed put.

## **England v New Zealand, second Test, Edgbaston – 10 June**

*115mm lens 1/1250 f7.1 ISO 800*



When the England players came out at Lord's for the national anthems before the first Test in early June, they all wore black T-shirts with slogans on the back. It was a moment, designed by the ECB, as a show of unity with people of all backgrounds. These slogans mentioned ageism, ableism, transphobia, homophobia and religious intolerance. I decided for the second Test in Edgbaston to try to show the players wearing these T-shirts together so I went up to the TV gantry to shoot down on to the backs of the England team. It was only after taking the picture that I realised something was missing – why no mention of racism on any of the shirts? Then, just a few months later, the story of Azeem Rafiq and his treatment at Yorkshire made the headlines and I could not help but think back to this picture.

## **England v Germany, Euro 2020 last 16, Wembley – 29 June**

*23mm lens 1/1600 f4.5 ISO 2000*



Raheem Sterling scores the first goal for England against Germany in their knockout match at the Euros. It may have been less than half-full but I cannot recall Wembley ever sounding louder than at that moment.

For all the matches at Wembley during the Euros, only 16 photographers were allowed pitchside due to Covid regulations and I felt very privileged to be there. However, rules that had prevented us from putting remote cameras right next to the net had been relaxed. It was great to be back shooting pictures such as this, after a Premier League season where these sort of cameras had been banished to behind the advertising boards.

## **Emma Raducanu, women's singles fourth round, Wimbledon – 5 July**

*400mm lens 1/1600 f3.5 ISO 4000*



I wish I had been there in New York when Emma shocked the sporting world by winning the US Open. This image, taken at Wimbledon in July, is not a nice picture and I did not like taking it but sometimes you have to photograph what is [the story of the day](#). The reason I am including it in this selection is to show what an amazing transformation Raducanu had in just a few months. From breathing problems and having to withdraw from her last-16 match at Wimbledon to winning the US Open as a qualifier without losing a set – remarkable.

## **Euro 2020 final, Wembley – 11 July**

*400mm lens 1/2000 f4 ISO 4000*



The England manager, [Gareth Southgate](#), consoles Bukayo Saka after missing the final penalty in the shootout, handing Italy the Euros title. When I look back at this picture now it stirs up so many feelings, mainly of sadness, but also of pride and hope for the future. When I am actually at a game like this, I deliberately try to divorce myself from too much emotion. This is easier said than done but somehow putting a camera in front of my face helps keep my equilibrium and gets me to focus on what needs to be done. In this case it was to show the heartbreak for England as they missed out on winning a first title in 55 years.

Once I saw Saka miss and then wander back towards the centre circle I stayed focused on him, ignoring the Italian celebrations. The 19-year-old buckled into the arms of his manager, burying his head deep into Southgate's shoulder. For one split moment their legs matched each other, united in their despair. The symbolism struck me immediately. Southgate, having missed a decisive penalty for England at Wembley in the 1996 Euros, knew exactly the anguish Saka was going through. He seemed to wrap his arms round the player in a protective manner knowing exactly the sort of abuse that was heading the young player's way.

## **Collin Morikawa, Royal St George's, Sandwich – 17 July**

*61mm lens 1/2000 f22 ISO 320*



It had been 10 years since I had photographed [The Open](#). This picture was one I definitely could not have taken in 2011. Thanks to my current cameras having a silent function, I can now take pictures during the swing whereas a decade ago, without a silent shutter, that was forbidden. Now I can be up close to the player, just a few feet away in this case, and fire the shutter at any time.

Royal St George's was quite hard work for pictures this year, but one thing was in the photographer's favour – the beautifully sunny weather. As Sandwich is the southernmost venue on the Open roster it also meant the sun set earlier than those courses in Scotland or northern England. This enabled me to get pictures such as this, as Morikawa, on his way to winning the title, teed off at the 18th on Saturday evening with the low sun sat perfectly behind him. With my shutter firing throughout his swing I manage to capture the beautiful bend of the club just before he hit the ball.

## **England v India, The Oval – 5 September**

*41mm lens 1/2500 f5.6 ISO 400*



The classic view of this ground for photographers has always been across the pitch to the gas holders behind but, due to building work both inside and outside The Oval, that is no longer possible. However a very different view has now opened up, one from high on top the new M.A.R. Galadari stand. It is spectacular up there, a bird's eye view of the pitch with the cluster of skyscrapers in the Vauxhall development shooting upwards. This image shows a small boy in Indian team kit as he peers over a wall, intent on watching every little moment of play, seemingly oblivious to the backdrop.

## **Cristiano Ronaldo scores, Old Trafford – 11 September**

*168mm lens 1/2000 f4 ISO 800*



Manchester United's home game against Newcastle in September was about one man. T-shirts for sale outside the ground proclaimed this match as "The Second Coming of CR7". It seemed a foregone conclusion that once Freddie Woodman, the Newcastle keeper, had spilled a shot just before half-time, you-know-who would be there to pounce on the rebound. One swing of the golden-studded boot and, 12 years after scoring his previous goal for Manchester United at Old Trafford, Cristiano Ronaldo had scored again.

## **Anthony Joshua's ring walk at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium – 25 September**

*155mm lens 1/500 f2.8 ISO 6400*



As he walked out of the tunnel to defend his world heavyweight titles against Oleksandr Usyk, Joshua turned around to adoring fans and tapped his glove on his heart. Looking uncannily like Muhammad Ali in his pristine white gown, the British boxer seemed confident and relaxed, soaking up adulation from the phone-waving spectators. They were all in for a very uncomfortable night as [Usyk defeated a lacklustre Joshua](#). Even though there is hardly any light where this photo is taken, what is there is very soft, a perfect balance from tunnel, television and phone.

## London Marathon – 3 October

*300mm lens 1/640th f2.8 ISO 6400*



This marathon has always been one of my favourite events to cover. After last year's elite-only race, it was great to see 40,000 runners on the capital's streets again. Instead of going to the finish or one of the famous landmarks, I decided to do something a little different, going to a location that is very unglamorous but notorious for being incredibly hard. Just about at the 24-mile marker, where the dreaded "wall" often kicks in, are a series of tunnels under railway stations. These can produce dramatic variations in light and in this picture, of the leaders in the elite men's race, I exposed for the dark conditions just as the runners entered the tunnel. Normally photographers like a dark background to show off the action but in this case it's the opposite. Outside the tunnel went white, producing this very graphic and unusual athletics image.

## **New York Jets v Atlanta Falcons, Tottenham Hotspur Stadium – 10 October**

*24mm lens 1/3200 f7.1 ISO 1000*



For the first time in two years, the [NFL](#) was back in London as the Falcons hosted the Jets. One aspect of the sport I like, and which often makes good pictures, is the way the home team are announced and they run out to a big fanfare, often through fireworks. I positioned myself in the corner from where the Falcons players would emerge. The obligatory dry ice started to pump all around me (quite a weird feeling) and then just before the big moment, the sun popped out from behind a cloud. Rather than shooting with the players running towards me, I spun round and shot them backlit, dashing away from me through the swirling smoke.

## Frankie Dettori, Newmarket – 11 October

*50mm lens 1/1600 f4 ISO 400*



In early October the writer Simon Hattenstone and I went to Frankie Dettori's house near Newmarket to do [an interview](#) that was timed for the release of his new book, Leap of Faith. I have photographed Dettori winning countless big races over the years and to see his trademark flying dismount off the most powerful of horses has always been a tremendous thrill. Before the shoot I asked Dettori to change into riding gear, so fair play to him for putting on the colours he wore to such great success on his favourite horse, Enable. After doing a few formal portraits just to warm him up, I steered him round to a paddock where I knew he had a couple of miniature donkeys called Pip and Plum. Well it had to be done. I asked him to pop on to Plum's back and he obliged. Plum wasn't having any of it and off Frankie came, stumbling as he exited. We all cracked up with laughter. From now on I don't think I will ever watch his flying dismount the same way again.

## **Newcastle fans v Spurs, St James' Park – 17 October**

*35mm lens 1/1600 f4 ISO 3200*



This was a pretty momentous day for Newcastle as they played their first game under their new Saudi owners. St James' Park was buzzing with fans' hope and anticipation. I was positioned in front of the Gallowgate End, Newcastle's traditional home end, where almost everyone wears black and white. For the first few minutes of the game, and as the ball was at the other end of the pitch, I turned round and focused on a fan in the front row, decked out in a headscarf. Then Newcastle scored. The place erupted, a sense that all those years of despair had been left behind and here was a different Newcastle. Spurs went on to win the game 3-2.

## **Marcus Smith, England v South Africa, Twickenham – 20 November**

*400mm lens 1/1600 f4 ISO 4000*



As the final whistle blew just moments after he had [kicked a last ditch penalty](#), England's new rugby union superstar celebrated beating the world champion Springboks. Marcus Smith was the figurehead for a much-changed England team this autumn. They emerged from a desperately poor Six Nations campaign earlier in the year to beat Tonga, Australia and South Africa in consecutive weeks. I am looking forward to seeing a lot more of Smith in the coming years. Not just for his inspired play but also because his hair flying everywhere makes for great pictures. Twickenham is a great place for shooting rugby, especially under lights. The backgrounds go nicely dark and because the crowd is so far back, the players stand out even more.

## **Sir Geoff Hurst, Cheltenham – 2 December**

*85mm lens 1/1600 f1.8 ISO 400*



In early December I went to Cheltenham to shoot a portrait of the England football legend and the only man to score a hat-trick in a World Cup final. It was Hurst's 80th birthday just a few days later and [Donald McRae had conducted a poignant interview](#) with him that had revealed some of the tragedies and hard times he had suffered alongside his many achievements.

It turned out to be a rather bizarre photo session in a local park near Hurst's home. The first thing he said to me, after seeing my various bags of kit, was "You going on holiday? This is just a quick snap isn't it." He quickly warmed up after chatting about how he did Joe Wicks' workouts in this very park. I took him past the swings and on to a spot near a duck pond, an area I thought would be a bit quieter. It was not. A constant stream of dog walkers passed by quizzically looking at us. Eventually one stopped and asked Hurst: "You seen George and the kids today?" He turned to her and replied: "No. He may have flown over with them to the other pond." Our national hero then proceeded to have a chat with this woman about the whereabouts of the park's resident swan and its cygnets. I am sure she had absolutely no idea who he was. Hurst also told me that a few days earlier another woman came up to him and said: "I know who you are. You're Glenn Hoddle," to which Geoff said "Yes I am" and walked off.

## **World Masters Cyclo-Cross Championships, Ipswich – 3 December**

*24mm lens 1/1250 f2.8 ISO 4000*



What makes someone in their seventies travel right across the world in the middle of a pandemic to race their bike through mud and freezing rain? When I saw the [2021 UCI World Masters Cyclo-Cross Championships](#) were being held in East Anglia, I could not resist having a look. The conditions were pretty grim, very dark and overcast, but it could have been a lot worse. It has been many years since I photographed cyclo-cross and I had forgotten what a brilliant but tough sport it is. I came away with the utmost respect for all the competitors even if I thought they were slightly mad.

## **West Ham's winner against Chelsea, London Stadium – 4 December**

*200mm lens 1/1600 f4 ISO 2000*



It was late in this hotly contested London derby, the two teams level at 2-2, when the West Ham left-back Arthur Masuaku swung an intended cross into the Chelsea penalty box. Somehow the mishit swerved in the air, deceiving the goalkeeper Édouard Mendy, who dived in despair. The ball flew into the top corner of the net. West Ham had won and their push to the top four of the Premier League had continued.

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## 2021.12.31 - Coronavirus

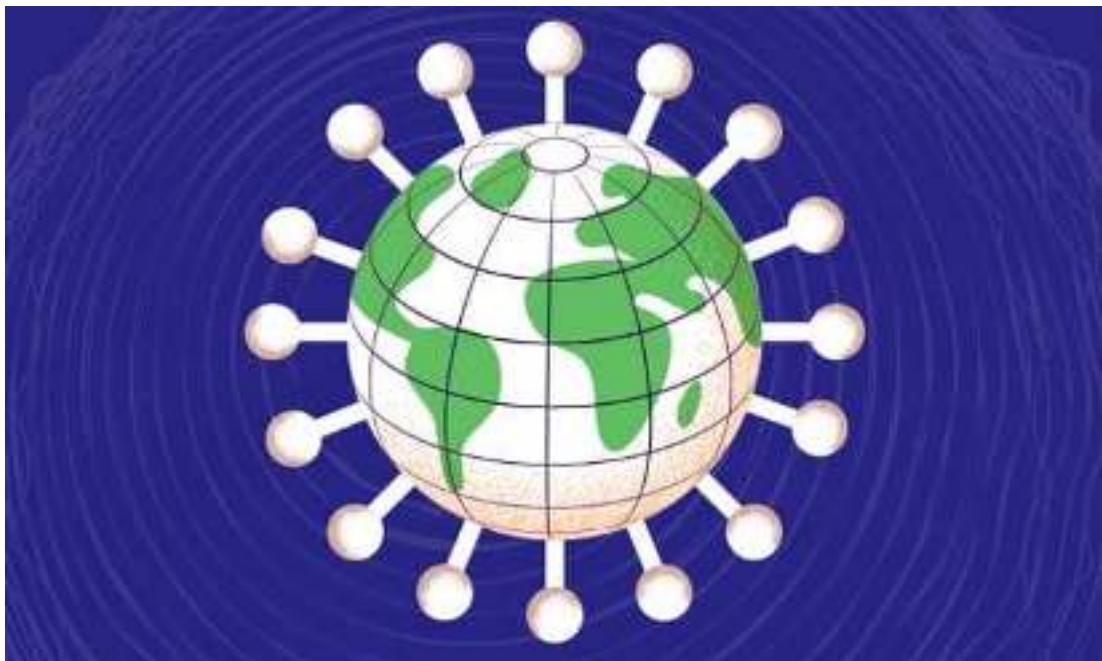
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- [Wales Government loans England 4m more Covid tests](#)
- [England ‘People are trying to be responsible’ – but there are no lateral flow tests](#)
- [Canada Isolating Quebec health staff may have to return to work early under new plans](#)

## Coronavirus

# Two years of coronavirus: how pandemic unfolded around the world

In December 2019 the WHO was told of a cluster of pneumonia cases in Wuhan, China. These charts show how Covid-19 has spread across the world since then

- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



Covid-19 has spread across the world. Illustration: Miles Probyn/Guardian Design

*[Ashley Kirk](#) and [Pamela Duncan](#)*

Fri 31 Dec 2021 03.00 EST

Two years ago today, as New Year's Eve fireworks lit up skies across the world, news reached the World Health Organization (WHO) about an

outbreak of “pneumonia” in Wuhan, China, the cause of which was unknown.

There had been several cases in December and possibly as far back as November in the region. But the subsequent [WHO announcement](#) was the first time that the world at large was made aware of its existence.

At first the announcement garnered little public attention: like the fireworks that had preceded the announcement, fears of potential diseases usually just flared then faded. But as it turned out the disease that came to be known as Covid-19 was something entirely different.

In the two years that followed, more than 5 million people worldwide have lost their lives to the virus; “lockdown” has become part of the world’s common vocabulary and governments and their citizens are still waiting for a “new normal” to emerge.

The virus has also exposed [inequalities](#) within countries in terms of the impact on lower-paid, public-facing employees, as well as exacerbating [global inequities as vaccine rollouts take place at vastly different rates](#).

This global retrospective shows, in graphics, the varying impact of Covid worldwide.

## **Europe and Americas have had the highest caseloads**

More than one in 10 people in Europe and America have tested positive for Covid at this stage in the pandemic, [according to figures from Our World in Data that run to 20 December](#). And even this is likely an underestimate, given that case figures do not capture cases that have gone under the testing radar.

Recorded cases rely on the number of Covid-19 tests carried out in a country. Still, we can get a sense of how the pandemic has spread – and how case rates have expanded and retracted – over the last two years by looking at case rates on continents.

The [highly infectious Omicron variant](#) has caused cases to surge in Europe in December, meaning the continent currently counts for 60% of all new cases being recorded worldwide.

This wasn't always the case, however. As the west reaped vaccine dividends to coincide with the northern summer, South America's case rates soared for several months, starting in April 2021. This was partly driven by consistently high case rates in Brazil, which have had an effect on the continent's numbers throughout the pandemic.

North America had the highest case rates at the end of 2020 as Trump's presidency came to a turbulent end. The country recently reported it had surpassed [800,000 deaths](#), the highest absolute figure reported anywhere worldwide.

### [Streamgraph: case rate by continent](#)

While Africa's recorded cases seem low, the continent has still been hit hard throughout the pandemic, most recently with the Omicron variant which was first reported in South Africa. Case rates are influenced by how much testing a country does, which in turn is influenced by the funding a country has available to combat Covid-19.

## **The vaccine rollout gave many countries cause for optimism ...**

As 2020 drew to a close the world's hopes were pinned on the vaccine rollout. As of 20 December, close to 8.8bn coronavirus vaccine doses had been administered to 4.5 billion people worldwide, of whom 3.7 billion were fully vaccinated. It provided real-life proof that vaccines [reduce the risk of a Covid-19 infection leading to hospitalisation or death](#).

After [signing a deal with Pfizer](#), Israel was the first major country to achieve strong vaccination coverage. The US and the UK also enjoyed early success in their rollouts, unlike the EU which took longer to pass regulations followed by supply delays.

Many countries have since outpaced the early leaders, among them Portugal, Chile, Cuba, Spain, China, Canada, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand, although another frontrunner, the United Arab Emirates, has managed to fully vaccinate more than 90% of its population.

The latest figures from [Our World in Data](#) show that dozens of countries have vaccinated at least two-thirds of the population.

## **... but the vaccine rollout has been inequitable**

While the [rollout of over 8bn vaccine dose worldwide](#) is a success, the distribution of these vaccines is unequal.

The latest figures to 20 December show that more than three-quarters of people in high-income countries have received two doses of the vaccine, compared with just 8% of those living in [low-income countries](#).

Data from October revealed how [more people have received a Covid booster vaccination in the UK](#) per head of population than are reported to have had their first shot in Africa. Rollout remains stubbornly low in some with dozens of countries – the vast majority in Africa – reporting double vaccination rates of less than 10%.

This doesn't only affect those countries in which vaccination rates are low: as Omicron has shown, uneven vaccination affords the [virus opportunities to adapt and spread](#) through new variants.

[Line chart: Vaccine coverage by income group](#)

## **Vaccine inequity moved the death burden from richer nations – but winter 2021 shows they're not out of the woods**

As vaccination campaigns started to cover the most vulnerable in wealthy nations, the impact was quick to see. [Data from late April revealed a record](#)

shift in the burden of global Covid-19 deaths to poor and lower-middle income countries.

However, in the months that followed a combination of a relaxation of restrictions, the emergence of the Delta variant, the northern hemisphere winter and vaccine hesitancy in some wealthier nations (most notably the US) has meant that high-income nations are once again recording high levels of deaths.

As 2021 comes to an end, close to half (47%) of all global deaths are being recorded in high-income countries. This is lower than the 57% recorded last winter, but far higher than the 8% recorded in July 2021 when some richer nations thought that they had vaccinated themselves out of the pandemic.

These deaths figures, from Our World in Data, are as reported by each country. As countries have different methodologies for counting and reporting a Covid-19 death these numbers need to be interpreted with care.

### Streamgraph: Proportion of global deaths, by income group

While large countries such as the US, Brazil and India have recorded the highest overall number of Covid-19 deaths, Peru, Bulgaria and Bosnia and Herzegovina are the countries that have the highest death tolls when population is taken into account. Peru has recorded 6,062 deaths per million people over the course of the pandemic.

### Bar chart: Top 10 countries with highest total deaths per million

Excess deaths figures can provide further clarity when doing international comparisons: this figure is the difference in the number of people who have died in a given time period compared with the average number of deaths that occurred in the same period in the previous years. Our analysis was conducted using the country-level reported deaths from Our World in Data as it provides the most frequent and current picture of what is being reported by each country.

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## Coronavirus

# Welsh government loans England 4m more Covid tests

Wales has now loaned the NHS in England 10m lateral flow tests as Westminster tries to secure supplies

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



The first minister, Mark Drakeford, said Wales had enough tests to meet its needs in the coming weeks. Photograph: Ben Birchall/PA

*PA Media*

Thu 30 Dec 2021 12.24 EST

The Welsh government has come to the aid of Westminster by loaning England 4m lateral flow Covid-19 tests, as ministers scramble to secure

supplies from around the world.

There has been a surge in demand for tests as people try to comply with advice to limit the spread of the [Omicron variant](#) by ensuring they do not have coronavirus before socialising.

But by 9am on Thursday, home delivery slots for lateral flow tests were unavailable on the gov.uk website. Pharmacies have also complained about patchy supplies of lateral flow kits.

The Welsh government has agreed to loan 4m more tests to the NHS in England, bringing the total the country has given England to a total of 10m. First minister Mark Drakeford said: “Wales has a significant stock of lateral flow tests, sufficient to meet our needs over the weeks ahead.”

In a letter to MPs, the UK health secretary, Sajid Javid, said the supply of lateral flow devices (LFDs) was being tripled in January and February from a pre-Omicron plan of 100m to 300m a month.

“To respond to anticipated demand over the coming few weeks we are buying hundreds of millions more LFD tests, bringing new products on board and accelerating their deployment to the public,” he said.

[But Javid added](#): “In light of the huge demand for LFDs seen over the last three weeks, we expect to need to constrain the system at certain points over the next two weeks to manage supply over the course of each day, with new tranches of supply released regularly throughout each day.”

Prime minister Boris Johnson [previously urged](#) people in England heading out for New Year’s Eve festivities on Friday to get tested.

Prof Peter Openshaw, who sits on the government’s New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (Nervtag), said the conditions at a New Year’s Eve gathering [were “perfect” for spreading coronavirus](#). “I think it’s very worrying indeed,” he told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme.

“We know the situations in which transmission happens and fortunately I don’t think we are facing the sort of lockdown that was necessary in order to

cope in the very earliest part of this year.

“But we do know that crowding together in poorly ventilated spaces, particularly if you are shouting over loud music and so on, is absolutely perfect in terms of transmitting this very, very highly transmissible virus.”

In England – unlike in other parts of the UK – nightclubs remain open and there are no limits on social mixing. The [NHS](#) Covid pass is required for entry to nightclubs but this can be obtained by people who are double-jabbed, rather than requiring proof of a negative test.

The UK [Health](#) Security Agency said on Wednesday that 8m lateral flow test kits would be made available to pharmacies by New Year’s Eve.

Prof Martin Marshall, the chair of the Royal College of GPs, has criticised “mixed messages” over the supply of Covid tests. He said the demand for tests has gone up “dramatically” as people seek to check their Covid status before socialising or coming out of isolation.

“It does seem to be that there’s some mixed messages here because the secretary of state said yesterday that there was a global shortage because demand globally in most countries for testing has gone up massively,” Marshall told Times Radio.

“But we’re also, as you say, told by the UK Health Security Agency that there’s a local logistics problem of delivering to pharmacies and delivering to the warehouses that supply the online suppliers of the testing.”

Sir John Bell, regius professor of medicine at Oxford University and a member of the Sage committee and Vaccine Taskforce, said there was no shortage of tests but the Omicron variant had “disabled” the workforce able to deliver the tests.

He told Times Radio: “There are more than ample tests in the UK, in storage, ready to be used, and I think the problem has been the same one other people have had and that is the number of delivery drivers.

“There’s a lot of people being quarantined. The workforce which you have to have to distribute those widely has been disabled by the Omicron

pandemic.”

Bell added: “I can promise you it is not a lack of tests.”

It comes as the NHS is setting up new Nightingale “surge hubs” at hospitals across England as it goes on a “war footing” to prepare for a potential wave of Omicron hospital admissions.

Work on a total of eight hubs, each with a capacity of about 100 patients, is set to begin as early as this week, according to NHS England. Further sites could also be identified to add a further 4,000 “super surge” beds.

A total of 755 deaths registered in England and Wales in the week ending 17 December mentioned Covid-19 on the death certificate, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

A total of 174,392 deaths have occurred in the UK where Covid-19 was mentioned on the death certificate, the ONS said.

This article was amended on 31 December 2021 to change the main picture. The caption on an earlier image of the Senedd confused the Welsh parliament with the Welsh government.

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## Coronavirus

# ‘People are trying to be responsible’ – but there are no lateral flow tests

We visited four pharmacies in Kingston, south-west London, and found one LFT between them

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



From left: Sally Arnold and Lisa Sanders with free test kits from the local council in Kingston market square. Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian

[Tom Ambrose](#)

Thu 30 Dec 2021 13.30 EST

As people across the UK prepare to ring in the new year, one thing that will be missing for many is a Covid lateral flow test.

Town-centre pharmacies' stocks have been wiped out as people seek assurance before attending parties or meeting vulnerable relatives.

While it's not unusual for shopping centres to be busy between Christmas and new year, with shoppers hitting the sales and enjoying festive markets, the most sought-after products are proving to be the tests.

On Thursday the Guardian visited four chemists in Kingston upon Thames, a busy shopping hub in south-west [London](#), and found that three were out of stock and the fourth had one kit left.



Beverley Bairstow picked up the council's free tests as she knew the pharmacies had none. Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian

Staff advised customers to come back tomorrow, with test kits also unavailable to order online. The NHS website allows users to search for tests by postcode but none of the recommended pharmacies in Kingston upon Thames had any in stock.

Boxes of 20 LFTs were available at a council-run testing facility. Some shoppers told the Guardian it was the only place they had been able to pick up tests.

"I've tried three different pharmacies in the high street where I live over the past couple of weeks and they've been all out," said Sally Arnold, from Surbiton. "It's also going to be make it tricky for people going back to work if you can't get hold of them, as we have to go in to the office."

Her friend Lisa Sanders, also from Surbiton, said: "I ordered some about a week ago and I'm still waiting for them to be delivered – every time I look on the app it says 'sorry, no deliveries'.

"I think people are trying to be responsible and to do the right thing but if you can't get hold of tests then what can you do? I was lucky, I saw my sister over Christmas in a different part of the country and she is able to get them and gave me a box, but you just can't get them anywhere round here."



Francesca Rowland with a box of rapid tests. Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian

A member of staff at the facility, who wished to remain anonymous, said LFTs had been available at the testing site throughout the year but footfall had "shot up" since the [Omicron variant](#) led to a sharp rise in recorded cases.

Ministers have been urging people to test before socialising, and the surge in demand has outstripped supply.

Beverley Bairstow, from Kingston, said she had come straight to the council facility after hearing about shortages at pharmacies closer to where she lives.

She said: “I didn’t even bother trying anywhere else because I heard they haven’t got them. We try to keep some in the house but now we have run out and were told our local chemist doesn’t have any left. We did also try online but there weren’t any available either. When we saw there were some here, we thought: great, at last.”



Lutz Amechi: ‘The only way we will get through this is constant, frequent testing. Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian

Francesca Rowland said she had stocked up on tests for friends and family as well as herself. “I haven’t been able to get any tests before today, and because I work in a school I need to be doing them every day,” she said. “It’s not been easy because we can’t order online now, but luckily I knew this was here.”

Lutz Amechi, from Kingston, said: “My belief is the only way we will get through this is constant, frequent testing, so we test every second day at home.”

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## [Canada](#)

# Isolating Quebec health staff may have to return to work early under new plans

Canadian province's government says measure will be required if staffing levels become too low during Covid surge

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



'If we had the staff we needed, we wouldn't have to do this,' said Quebec's health minister, Christian Dubé, during his announcement. Photograph: Canadian Press/Rex/Shutterstock

*[Tracey Lindeman](#) in Gatineau, Quebec*

Thu 30 Dec 2021 15.09 EST

Quebec healthcare workers exposed to Covid-19 may have to go to work sooner than expected if staffing levels in the Canadian province's facilities reach a critical point.

Quebec's health minister, Christian Dubé, made the announcement earlier this week, explaining that in a worst-case scenario the province would have no choice but to insist that isolating employees return to work.

Cases of the Omicron variant have surged in the province: on Thursday, a record-breaking 14,188 new cases were reported, with 939 Covid patients currently in hospital and 138 in intensive care. The Quebec newspaper [La Presse reported](#) that hospitals in the province were getting close to activating the contingency plan.

The Omicron wave has wreaked havoc on the province's healthcare sector, which is already stretched thin. "A few days ago, 4,000 [healthcare workers] were absent. Yesterday was 7,000. In the coming days, it will be 10,000," Dubé said at a news conference on Tuesday.

On Wednesday afternoon, government health officials explained how the employee recall process would work.

Asymptomatic employees who were randomly exposed to Covid – at a shopping centre or gym, for example – would not have to isolate at all. Instead, they would be asked to self-monitor their symptoms for 14 days and get tested every two or three days.

If they tested positive for Covid, they would be required to isolate for seven to 10 days, depending on staffing conditions. If they tested negative, they would have to return immediately. However, they would also have to isolate themselves at work for 10 days.

With testing capacities in the province currently overwhelmed, this could mean that staff who are asymptomatic but positive end up working in healthcare settings because they have not been able to obtain a test.

During the technical briefing, Dr Yves Jalbert, the medical director of Quebec's public health protection, said those employees would have to take

their coffee and lunch breaks in isolated rooms.

A media spokesperson for the health ministry told the Guardian that in situations where the worker had to be near uninfected colleagues or patients, personal protective equipment (PPE) would be required.

This new contingency plan applies to healthcare workers – along with other essential service staff such as first responders – who have had at least two vaccine doses.

Meanwhile, asymptomatic employees who have Covid in their household or who are in regular contact with an infected person will be required to isolate for seven days, regardless of their vaccination status.

However, double-vaccinated workers could be recalled sooner in urgent staffing conditions.

Public health representatives at the technical briefing said 98% of healthcare workers were double-vaccinated.

They said these measures were a last resort to prevent a total healthcare system breakdown. As Dubé noted on Tuesday: “If we had the staff we needed, we wouldn’t have to do this.”

Healthcare unions opposed Quebec’s decision, saying the measures put workers – as well as vulnerable patients – at too much of a risk.

Réjean Leclerc, the president of a union representing 120,000 Quebec healthcare workers, told Reuters that the province couldn’t even keep up with staff testing in the current situation. “The network is not prepared to face the risks of the government’s decision to bring asymptomatic infected staff back to work,” he said.

The government has not clarified how it will help hospitals and other healthcare facilities to create isolation rooms, nor how it would help exposed or infected workers who depend on public transit to get to work.

Other Canadian provinces, including Ontario, are [considering whether to follow](#) in Quebec’s footsteps because of healthcare staff shortages across the

country.

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## 2021.12.31 - Opinion

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- [Can white South Africa live up to Ubuntu, the African philosophy Tutu globalised?](#)
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- [We can vaccinate 70% of the world against Covid by mid-2022. Here's how](#)

OpinionLabour

## Is Keir Starmer's professed patriotism a strength or a weakness?

[Andy Beckett](#)

The Labour leader's talk of 'the national interest' echoes not only Attlee and Blair, but also Kinnock



Keir Starmer and his wife Victoria at the Uefa Euro 2020 final between Italy and England in London, July 2021. Photograph: John Sibley/EPA

Fri 31 Dec 2021 01.00 EST

Since Brexit, saying you represent the people against the establishment has been one of the most effective moves in British politics. In a country with little respect for politicians but still some reverence for voters, however erratic or flimsily based their opinions, invoking the people is one of the few reliable ways to achieve political momentum.

Despite the fact that in parliament, the press and much of business the [Conservatives](#) and their allies are the establishment – and have been since at least 2010 – this populist rhetoric has mostly been used by the right. However out of touch and contemptuous of democracy his government is in practice, Boris Johnson claims to speak for the people at every opportunity.

In recent years Labour has rarely dared to do likewise, except during the most energised moments of Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership, such as his campaigning “[for the many](#)” in the 2017 election. The party has been too lacking in confidence, too inward-looking – and simply too unpopular – to argue that its views and those of the country are in harmony. Unlike the Conservatives, Labour rarely assumes that its periods of success represent British politics in its natural state.

So the fact that this month Keir Starmer has started talking about “[the national interest](#)” and “the British people”, and trying to associate his party with them, feels significant. It suggests that after more than 18 months of cautious and defensive leadership – much of it taken up with sidelining colleagues and policies supposedly too radical for the public – Starmer finally believes that Labour can speak for the nation without being ridiculed.

“We are a patriotic party,” [he declared](#) in a TV broadcast supporting the Covid booster campaign, sitting behind a large, would-be prime ministerial desk with a union flag beside him. “The Labour party that I lead will always act in Britain’s best interests.” The clear implication – left unspoken because this was a broadcast officially about public health – was that the Conservatives have much less honourable, more partisan motives.

With Boris Johnson in Downing Street, this has become a pretty easy argument to make. So blatantly have his policies been designed to reward friends and punish enemies that even some voters who once tolerated, or even admired, his shameless brand of Conservatism have become repelled. Unlike previous slumps in support for his government, which mainly benefited the Liberal Democrats, many of these Tory voters now appear to be switching to Labour. For the first time under Starmer, this month Labour has achieved [large enough leads](#) over the Tories in the polls for a narrow win at the next election – or a hung parliament leading to a Labour-led coalition – to be more than a remote possibility.

In the past, a Labour leader adopting expansive patriotic language has sometimes been a sign of an imminent electoral breakthrough. During a campaign broadcast before the party's great victory at the 1945 election, [Clement Attlee argued](#) that, unlike the Tories, Labour represented "a good cross-section of the nation": both rural and urban Britons, employers and employees. Labour's share of the vote at that general election and the next two was not far short of 50%: huge by today's standards, and large enough to justify Attlee's claim.

During the early years of Tony Blair's leadership, [Labour](#) was almost as popular, and he often talked about "the people" reverently but also a little proprietorially – as if only he and his party understood or could carry out their wishes. Like Attlee, Blair led a government whose initial breadth of support right across England, Scotland and Wales was on a scale that makes Johnson's supposedly decisive electoral mandate in 2019 look narrow.

One way to interpret Starmer's still rather opaque leadership is as an attempt to apply the methods of the Blair and Attlee eras to today's world. Starmer's stern, rather formal manner, austere suits and haircut, and talk of a "shared national duty" all suggest a Labour politician from the 1940s. Meanwhile his recruitment of New Labour veterans such as Yvette Cooper and Deborah Mattinson and his bash-the-left approach to party management imply that Starmer still has faith in the controlling centrist politics of the 00s.

Given that these are the only two periods when Labour has achieved lasting dominance (Harold Wilson's election wins in the 1960s and 1970s were much less decisive), taking Blair and Attlee as role models seems reasonable, on the face of it. The fact that both led relatively competent governments with substantial domestic achievements – at least until they got involved in too many foreign wars – is also likely to appeal to Starmer. If he becomes prime minister, in what will probably be tough circumstances, he will be desperate to prove to voters that chaotic 21st-century government is a purely Conservative phenomenon.

But there is also a danger for Starmer in trying to sound and act like Blair and Attlee. It risks drawing attention to the great difference in strength between their political positions as Labour leaders and his. Only a few months ago, much of the talk at the Labour conference was about who was

going to replace Starmer, after months of bad election results and personal ratings, bodge Labour reorganisations and barely noticed policy launches. Inside as well as outside the party, Starmer was widely written off as a wooden and uncharismatic figure, unsuited to top-level politics: “a plodder”, as someone who has had decades of dealings with Labour put it to me.

Starmer’s performance has improved a little since. He is more aggressive in his attacks on the Conservatives, using franker words such as “corruption” and allowing flashes of anger to enliven his usually too controlled courtroom manner. And he seems more confident, as if relieved that his painstakingly assembled case against the government is finally being heard.

Yet most of his limitations as a politician have not gone away. The improvement in Labour’s position is not because he is doing his job much better, but because the government is doing its even worse.

And when he declares that only his party can serve “the people” and “the national interest”, he echoes not only Blair and Attlee but also other, less successful Labour leaders, such as Neil Kinnock, who often seemed to assert their patriotism not from a position of strength but of weakness: in a vain attempt to convince the Tory press and sceptical voters that Labour was respectable and not an alien threat. A more assured and rooted party – which was able to explain why Britain would benefit from regular rather than occasional left-of-centre governments – would not have to perpetually prove its right to exist.

Will Starmer end up as one of Labour’s patriotic failures? The jury is still out.

- Andy Beckett is a Guardian columnist
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## [OpinionSouth Africa](#)

# Can white South Africa live up to Ubuntu, the African philosophy Tutu globalised?

[Panashe Chigumadzi](#)

In failing to repair relations and right land dispossession as Ubuntu demands, there is yet to be meaningful reconciliation with Black people



A memorial to Desmond Tutu at St George's Cathedral in Cape Town, South Africa, 28 December 2021. Photograph: Nardus Engelbrecht/AP

Fri 31 Dec 2021 03.00 EST

Under a 1986 newsletter headline, “[Ubuntu, Abantu, Abelungu](#)”, Black Sash, the anti-apartheid organisation founded as the vanguard of white liberal women’s opposition in South Africa, reported surprising findings from a white fieldworker in their programme against forced land removals –

Black people of the land do not consider white people to be people. That is, we do not consider them to be *Abantu*. Instead, they are *abelungu*.

“Ubuntu, Abantu, Abelungu” appeared a few years before the late archbishop [Desmond Mpilo Tutu](#) thrust Ubuntu – the African philosophy best understood through the proverb found in Bantu languages across the continent, “*umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye bantu*” (a person is a person through other people) – into the global imagination as he presided over post-apartheid South Africa’s truth and reconciliation commission (TRC).

“Ubuntu is very difficult to render into a western language,” Tutu acknowledged in his book [No Future Without Forgiveness](#). In his earlier classic African Religions and Philosophy the Kenyan theologian John Mbiti famously rendered Ubuntu’s philosophy of mutual personhood as an African humanist analogue to Enlightenment humanism’s “I think, therefore I am” by translating “*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*” as “I am because we are”.

Mbiti’s classic humanist translation of Ubuntu obscures the fact that, in contrast to the western conception of the human, the African conception of the person is a social being who is always becoming. Ubuntu holds that to be a person, *umuntu*, among people, *Abantu*, one must continually uphold the personhood of others. It is for this reason that when I misbehaved, especially to the injury of others, my mother, like many other elders, reprimanded me in our mother tongue, Shona: “*Ita munhu!*” “Be a person!”

“[The] white man has become *umlungu* because of us,” dispossessed farmworker Aron Mlangeni stated in “Ubuntu, Abantu, Abelungu”. Mlangeni articulated what philosopher Ndumiso Dladla describes as “[Ubuntu as an African critical philosophy of race](#)” rooted not in biology, but in ethical historical and social relations. After centuries of conquest, the settler state formalised land dispossession through the devastating 1913 Native Land Act, which seized 87% of land for the white settler minority, leaving 13% to the Black majority, who were press-ganged into cheap mining and farming labour. Given white South Africa’s unjust historic land conquest and continuing relations of dispossession, it is unsurprising that Black people of the land, that is, we, do not consider white people to be *Abantu*. Instead, they are *abelungu*.

On the eve of Black majority rule, global whiteness held its breath in anticipation of a “night of long knives” for white [South Africa](#). Instead, South Africa gave a world at the end of history a “miracle” – the teleological release, a moral arc bending towards justice, a rainbow.

After the negotiated settlement secured Black political rights with the protection of white property rights, the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act mandated the creation of the TRC. Dutch conquest of the Cape in 1652 is the genesis of [genocide](#), [slavery](#), [indenture](#) and land dispossession, yet the TRC had the limited mandate to hear allegations of human rights abuses between 1 March 1960, the month of the [Sharpeville massacre](#), to 10 May 1994, the date of Nelson Mandela’s inauguration.

Without the mandate to right the historic conquest of land and people, Tutu’s impossible task was to wield Ubuntu to reconcile the conflicting worlds of *Abantu* and *abelungu* into a nation of what he called the “Rainbow People of God”. As Allan Boesak, the anti-apartheid leader and Black Dutch Reformed Church minister who, alongside Tutu, helped cement Black liberation theology’s centrality to the [Black Consciousness Movement](#), has shown, Tutu’s theology of grace and forgiveness was grounded in a Christianised Ubuntu. “African jurisprudence is restorative rather than retributive,” Tutu said, [describing](#) the rationale for amnesty at the TRC.

If white South Africa did not repent (the apartheid-era president PW Botha declared “[I only apologise for my sins before God](#)”) or make itself humble (white radio listeners’ objection to TRC stories [caused a rescheduling](#) to hours “when most of the farmers are no longer listening”), it was surprised by and grateful for Black South Africa’s lack of “bitterness” and “vengeance”.

“In some incredible way God has sown the seeds of a gracious attitude, of the spirit of Ubuntu, in the hearts and minds of the whole African community,” proclaimed Beyers Naudé, the Dutch Reformed Church minister who was one of the few Afrikaner leaders to publicly oppose apartheid.

Naudé’s awe at the seeming miraculousness of the transition revealed some of the ways in which even the more sincere, committed part of white South

Africa had failed to truly reckon with what the ethical demands of Ubuntu requires of them to have meaningful reconciliation with Black people and become *Abantu*.

As Black people we ask “*Uxolisa ngani?*” (“What are you atoning with?”), because it’s understood that *ukuhlawula*, paying reparations for injuries caused to others, is indivisible from *ukubuyisa*, the restoration of injured relations. Ubuntu demands costly forgiveness – you cannot receive forgiveness without giving something up as an act of your contrition. The TRC recommended reparations to victims and families who testified. Later, Tutu [called for a wealth tax](#) on all white South Africans. The government ignored both recommendations. Too often, calls for national reparation and restoration are conflated with retribution, but Ubuntu among *Abantu* requires the righting of relations through *inhlawulo yokubuyisa*, reparations for restoration.

Today, we Black people, [79% of South Africa's population](#), own 4% of agricultural land, while white South Africans, 9% of the population, [own 72% of agricultural land](#). In 2014, [Oxfam reported](#), two white men – Johann Rupert and Nicky Oppenheimer – owned as much wealth as the bottom half of the population. The [74% youth unemployment rate](#) – concentrated among Black “born frees” – is the world’s highest. It is unsurprising then, that in their statement to the South African Human Rights Commission’s 2015 hearings, Abahlali baseMjondolo, a Durban shack dwellers’ movement whose members have faced arrest, assault and assassination in their struggle for post-apartheid liberation, cried out that poor Black people “are not counted as human beings”.

In other words, despite the flourishing of Ubuntu in post-apartheid discourse, lending its name to software, businesses, books and philanthropic organisations, South Africa is a country in which we have, [as Dladla argues](#), Ubuntu without *Abantu*. Just as Black people have been dispossessed of their land, Ubuntu has been dispossessed of its deeply radical demands for ethical historical and social relations among people.

In a land left bereft by the loss of Tutu, it’s still common to hear Black people answer the question “*Ngumuntu na?*” (Are they a person?), “*Cha, ngumlungu.*” (No, they are white.)

For white South Africans to no longer be *abelungu*, settlers in Africa, and to become *Abantu*, people of Africa, they would have to restore that which made them settlers in the first place – the land. Restoration of the land would begin the national process of *ukubuyisa ngokuhlawula*, restoring relations through reparations, among *Abantu* and *abelungu* into a common world of people bound by Ubuntu.

Until there is a true reckoning with the reparations Ubuntu demands, Black and white South Africa will continue to live worlds apart as *Abantu* and *abelungu*. White South Africa, *nixolisa ngani*? What are you atoning with?

- Panashe Chigumadzi is the author of [These Bones Will Rise Again](#) and a doctoral candidate at Harvard University
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## Opinion**Ghislaine Maxwell**

# **The spotlight must now turn to the rich men Ghislaine Maxwell trafficked girls for**

[Gaby Hinsliff](#)



The woman who procured girls for Jeffrey Epstein and his friends will die in prison – but most of the men involved still walk free



Ghislaine Maxwell with Jeffrey Epstein. Photograph: Reuters

Thu 30 Dec 2021 13.20 EST

Ghislaine Maxwell is going to jail, and for a very long time indeed. Prince Andrew's good friend of many decades, and Donald Trump's regular guest at his [Florida retreat](#), has been convicted of grooming and trafficking girls for sex in a verdict that will reverberate through the highest reaches of the transatlantic establishment. No more invites to Balmoral for the woman who turned vulnerable teenagers into rich men's sexual playthings, and no more hobnobbing with friendly newspaper editors either. No more private jets or haughty instructions to staff to keep their mouths shut, even as they were picking up [discarded vibrators](#) from the bedroom floor. And presumably no more public sympathy of the kind Rachel Johnson expressed recently in the [Spectator](#), fondly recalling Ghislaine's "naughty eyes" as she flirted with a young Boris Johnson at Oxford, back in the days when none of them had ever heard of the paedophile Jeffrey Epstein. For all that Maxwell's lawyers sought to paint her accusers as gold-diggers chasing damages from Epstein's estate, the lesson many will draw from this case is that the rich are far more often protected by their money and connections than rendered vulnerable by them.

Well, now the world can finally see the seedy billionaire and his predatory girlfriend for what they were. Much like the guilty verdict handed to [Harvey Weinstein](#) almost two years ago, the result goes some way to restoring faith in the battered principle that nobody should be above the law. Yet there's something profoundly unsatisfying about it nonetheless. That the woman who procured girls for Epstein and his wealthy friends will now die in prison, while the men involved remain either free to live their lives or (in Epstein's case) beyond the reach of any mortal judge, provokes a nagging sense of unfinished business.

It goes without saying that Ghislaine Maxwell is not the victim here. Although her lawyers made much of the fact that [Epstein's prison suicide](#) left her to carry the can for his crimes, suggesting rage at him had been unfairly projected on to her, the prosecution argued more convincingly that she was in fact critical to the enterprise. A lone middle-aged man asking teenage girls to visit his ranch is creepy, but the same invitation from a couple feels respectable, even benevolent. From an early age, we drum into children the idea that if they're lost or scared they should seek help from a police officer first and, failing that, a woman. The girls Maxwell lured into her boyfriend's clutches were reassured by an older woman's presence and it's the betrayal of that female trust that feels so monstrous. While these vulnerable teenagers looked to her for support, she was grooming them for sexual exploitation, normalising the perverted anything-goes culture inside his mansion. Strip away the yachts and the servants and all the other trappings of a billionaire lifestyle, and there is frighteningly little separating Maxwell from that tiny but grotesque pantheon of female offenders seemingly so desperate to be loved that they collude in their partners' abusive fantasies, even to the point of helping persuade someone else's daughter into a car.

We may never know whether Maxwell got her own kicks from this twisted game or whether she was simply too damaged to resist it, conditioned perhaps as friends have suggested by a childhood in the [shadow of her bullying father](#), the late tycoon Robert Maxwell. But the "poor little rich girl" thesis sits uneasily with some of the stories her accusers told in court, which imply a woman accustomed to dealing with problems as only the rich can: by paying someone to make them go away.

Kate, who was 17 when she first met the couple, [recalled](#) Maxwell complaining about Epstein's voracious sexual appetite and asking "if I knew anybody who could come and give Jeffrey a blowjob because it was a lot for her to do", much as she might seek recommendations for a butler or a pool boy – except in this case it was imperative they be young. Carolyn, who was 14 when she was first paid to give Epstein one of his infamously sexualised massages, [described](#) how Maxwell felt her breasts and bottom much as if she were checking over livestock for sale, and concluded she had a "great body for Mr Epstein and his friends". And it's on those nameless "friends" that the spotlight must now fall.

First and most obviously in the firing line are the men against whom direct allegations have been made, chief among them Prince Andrew. Virginia Giuffre, who is currently [attempting](#) to bring a civil suit against the prince accusing him of a sexual assault he has vehemently and repeatedly denied, can only be encouraged by a verdict she welcomed with a pointed tweet, arguing that "Maxwell did not act alone. Others must be held accountable." Whether her lawsuit succeeds or fails, however, the unmasking of his good friend Ghislaine as a convicted sex trafficker makes it almost impossible to envisage a way back to royal ribbon-cutting duties for the prince.

But there are plenty more high-profile men who flew on Epstein's planes, enjoyed his lavish parties, even stayed overnight in one of those mansions hung with tacky erotic art, and say they saw nothing amiss. Was he simply so discreet that nobody could possibly have suspected a thing? Or could it be that a predilection for teenage girls simply didn't seem all that shocking, inside a rich man's world where trading in an ageing first wife for someone barely older than your daughter is no big deal?

Meanwhile, in the US, there are disturbing questions to answer about a long, oddly flat-footed investigation into Epstein that left victims fearing they would never get their day in court and conspiracy theorists emerging to fill a judicial vacuum. That Maxwell held her tongue even when she eventually came to trial, refusing to testify in her own defence in a way that meant she could be asked no incriminating questions about the household names peppering the victims' testimony, has only encouraged the latter.

Some still hope she might share whatever she knows now, given the conviction has left her with nothing much to lose. The family's decision to appeal makes that unlikely at least in the near future, and it remains to be seen whether a woman who has traded on her connections all her life is capable even now of turning on them. But she cannot be the only one who knows more than she is telling about that tainted circle through which so many powerful men have moved. Justice is surely neither done, nor seen to be done, until all their dirty little secrets are out.

- Gaby Hinsliff is a Guardian columnist
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**Opinion**[\*\*Global development\*\*](#)

# We can vaccinate 70% of the world against Covid by mid-2022. Here's how

Bipasha van der Zijde

The WHO's vaccination goal is achievable – but it will take proper funding, better vaccine distribution and jabs with longer shelf lives



A coronavirus vaccination centre in Abuja, Nigeria, where only 2% of the population is fully vaccinated, November 2021. Photograph: Gbemiga Olamikan/AP

Global development is supported by



[About this content](#)

Fri 31 Dec 2021 03.15 EST

While western countries scramble with their booster rollout to deal with the Omicron wave, [only 8.4% of people in low-income countries](#) have had at least one Covid vaccination dose.

The gap in the vaccination rates between high- and low-income countries is wider than ever. We cannot keep turning a blind eye to it.

The vaccines being distributed to African countries under the Covax scheme are often close to expiry and their delivery is [ad-hoc](#) at best. In Nigeria, where only 2% of the population is fully vaccinated, they just had to destroy more than a million vaccines that were close to [expiring](#).

Nigeria is not the only country struggling. In Ghana, where 7.4% of the population is vaccinated, Fred Osei-Sarpong, representative of the [World Health Organization](#) said: “The receipt of vaccines with a short shelf life puts excessive pressure on the staff and makes it difficult to adequately plan for effective vaccine delivery.”

These short shelf lives seriously impede the delivery of vaccines to rural areas. We have worked with Benjamin Ongeri, health supply chain specialist

with Crown Agents in Kenya – where 7.2% of the population is fully vaccinated – on the delivery of medicine for neglected tropical diseases (NTDs). He says: “There are enormous challenges in getting medicines to the last mile. We know this from years of working with NTDs. It is very hard to reach people who are most affected since they are vulnerable, often marginalised, and live in remote locations with poor roads and infrastructure.”



Covid vaccines on a dump in Abuja, Nigeria, December 2021. More than a million doses of expired vaccine were destroyed. Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock

The same challenges have slowed the uptake of Covid vaccines. And this is exacerbated by the fact that these vaccines require cold (or ultra-cold) chain logistics infrastructure that is often nonexistent in these areas.

It also doesn't help that the vaccines mainly being administered in [Africa](#) are those the west has decided not to accept.

“In Ghana, at the initial stage of the vaccine rollout, a high demand was generated,” said Osei-Sarpong. Then there were no vaccines. The break in the rollout affected communication efforts and this gap created the space for misinformation and rumours to thrive.

According to [the WHO vaccine strategy](#), published in October, the goal is to have 70% coverage across the world by June 2022. How can this target be achieved?

Will freeing up intellectual property rights, often cited as a possible solution, bridge the widening gap? Neither Osei-Sarpong nor Ongeri believes it is the answer. For a country to start producing vaccines from scratch would be a massive challenge. According to Ongeri: “Countries like Kenya have begun this journey by targeting the final filling of vaccine vials locally which is still quite challenging given the need for state-of-the-art pharmaceutical manufacturing plants that will guarantee safe production with no chance of contamination.”

A lot more will be required in terms of technology transfer and building the expertise needed to fully produce vaccines locally, these cannot be achieved in the short to medium term.

The answer lies in global funding mechanisms such as Covax – provided they can guarantee a pre-planned availability of vaccines. More equitable distribution of the jabs on a structural basis with longer shelf lives will allow for realistic and efficient planning.

“With the provision of funds for operations and the availability of vaccines, Ghana will be able to strategise and meet the coverage set by WHO,” says Osei-Sarpong.

Added to common elements such as the lack of sufficient vaccines with adequate shelf life, each country has its own unique set of circumstances that lead to a low vaccination rate. So, with funding made available, each country can tailor their efforts to combat those circumstances and make sure the vaccines can reach the last mile.

In Kenya, Ongeri says they need the resources to undertake door-to-door vaccination campaigns as they do for childhood immunisation.

Where there exists a well-functioning delivery system, nations have high vaccine delivery rates. Kenya, for example, has an estimated [80% coverage](#)

for childhood vaccines. In Ghana, it's above 90%. The goal set out by the WHO may not be as unreachable as it appears.

It is not just in the interest of the countries with a shortage of vaccines that urgent action needs to be taken. As the UN secretary-general, António Guterres, said: "None of us is safe until we all are."

- Bipasha van der Zijde is a marketing and communications adviser at KIT Royal Tropical Institute
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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/commentisfree/2021/dec/31/world-health-organization-who-we-can-vaccinate-the-world-against-covid-by-mid-2022>

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- [US Ted Cruz confuses Washington state with Western Australia in attack on Covid 'kill-joys'](#)
- ['Depends on what she has to offer' Speculation grows that Maxwell may try to cut a deal for reduced sentence](#)
- ['Relieved and grateful' Victims and others react to Maxwell guilty verdict](#)
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## Huawei

# Sanction-hit Huawei says revenues down 29% this year

Effects of the US-China trade war felt by the telecom were ‘in line with our forecasts, says chairman Guo Ping



Huawei has pivoted into new business lines to cushion the blow of US sanctions. Photograph: Chukrut Budrul/SOPA Images/REX/Shutterstock

*Agence France-Presse*  
Fri 31 Dec 2021 01.10 EST

Chinese telecom giant [Huawei](#) said on Friday its annual revenue had fallen by nearly a third from the previous year, as it continued to be weighed down by US sanctions that have hit its smartphone sales.

Huawei has been caught in the crossfire of a US-China trade and technology rivalry [after the administration of former president Donald Trump moved to](#)

cripple the company over concerns it could pose a cybersecurity and espionage threat.

The firm's revenue for this year fell by 29% year-on-year to 634 billion yuan (\$99.5 billion), said rotating chairman Guo Ping in an annual new year message.

"In 2021, despite all the trials and tribulations, we worked hard to create tangible value for our customers and local communities," Guo said.

"We enhanced the quality and efficiency of our operations, and expect to round off the year with a total revenue of 634 billion yuan."

He added that the telecom carrier segment had "remained stable" and "overall performance was in line with our forecasts."

Huawei's revenue has fallen in 2021 due in part to the offloading of its budget phone brand Honor, which was sold late last year.

Huawei is not publicly listed, and the message did not give any other financial specifics.

Guo said the company was on a "bumpy, but rewarding" road, adding that 2022 will come with "its fair share of challenges."

Huawei's travails have forced it to quickly pivot into new business lines including enterprise computing, wearables and health tech, technology for intelligent vehicles, and software.



Once a top-three smartphone producer, Huawei has fallen in smartphone rankings. Photograph: Future Publishing/Getty Images

The United States has barred Huawei from acquiring crucial components such as microchips and forced it to create its own operating system by cutting it off from using Google's Android operating system.

This month, the company launched a new foldable phone and said 220 million Huawei devices were running its HarmonyOS system.

The group is the world's biggest supplier of telecoms network gear and was once a top-three smartphone producer along with Apple and Samsung.

But it has fallen well down the smartphone ranks owing to US pressure.

In October, the group said its January-September sales volume had fallen 32%.

But a major complication for the company was solved this year with the return to [China](#) of chief financial officer Meng Wanzhou, the daughter of Huawei founder Ren Zhengfei.

[She spent nearly three years under house arrest in Canada on a US extradition warrant](#), which China said was motivated by politics.

Meng was released a month ago after US prosecutors announced an agreement under which fraud charges were to be suspended and eventually dropped.

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**Ted Cruz**

## **Ted Cruz confuses Washington state with Western Australia in attack on Covid ‘kill-joys’**

The US Republican mistook a Facebook post by the Australian state on New Year’s Eve party restrictions for an edict by the Democrat-run state



US senator Ted Cruz called Democrats in Washington state ‘power-drunk authoritarian kill-joys’ over Covid restrictions that are in place in Western Australia. Photograph: Chip Somodevilla/UPI/Rex/Shutterstock

**Martin Farrer**

Thu 30 Dec 2021 21.17 EST

US senator Ted Cruz has been ridiculed for posting a tweet in which he mixed up the American state of Washington with [Western Australia](#) while criticising Covid restrictions.

The Republican politician – who tried to win the party’s presidential nomination in 2016 – retweeted a post by the government of Western Australia, whose handle is [WA Government](#) – that appeared to advise a woman that dancing would not be permitted at a New Year’s Eve party at her home.

Cruz, who has campaigned against pandemic restrictions, took it as cue to attack the Democrat-led state of Washington, whose widely used abbreviation is also WA, saying that those in leadership were “power-drunk authoritarian kill-joys”. This was despite the fact that the original tweet did not mention Washington.

Cruz tweeted: “Blue-state Dems are power-drunk authoritarian kill-joys. Washington State: NO DANCING ALLOWED!!! Any rational & free citizen: Piss off.”

Cruz deleted the tweet but not before it was picked up by opponents who mocked him gleefully for his error.

Illinois Republican congressman Adam Kinzinger retweeted Cruz’s post and said that the Texas senator should “do your research before posting misinformation”.

Since [@tedcruz](#) deleted this, I’ll post as a reminder to all of us to DO YOUR RESEARCH before posting misinformation. WA means “Western Australia” not Washington state. [pic.twitter.com/jnZ2On7p9k](https://pic.twitter.com/jnZ2On7p9k)

— Adam Kinzinger (@AdamKinzinger) [December 30, 2021](#)

So [@tedcruz](#) deleted this angry tweet after realizing “WA Government” isn’t Washington State, it’s “Western Australia.”

FYI Deaths per million

- USA: 2529
- AUS: 86

But more outrage over a situation that doesn’t exist than the ~29X

higher death rate in America. Smh terrible.  
[pic.twitter.com/VUenSdnfwX](https://pic.twitter.com/VUenSdnfwX)

— Qasim Rashid, Esq. (@QasimRashid) [December 30, 2021](#)

US Democratic congressman Eric Swalwell also picked up on the error and tweeted: “Hey Ted, WA is Western Australia. But cool tweet.”

Jackpot. [@tedcruz](#) deleted his faux outrage tweet. Please stay on this phony. <https://t.co/dd65BLS88I>

— Rep. Eric Swalwell (@RepSwalwell) [December 30, 2021](#)

After Cruz had deleted the post, Swalwell returned fire by posting: “Jackpot. [@tedcruz](#) deleted his faux outrage tweet. Please stay on this phony”.

Western Australia has imposed strict border controls since the pandemic began and is still [closed to almost all Australians in other states](#).

Its Facebook message to the woman came after she had asked if she was allowed to hold a party for New Year’s Eve.

The reply read “masks are not required at private residences. Dancing is strictly not permitted”.

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## Ghislaine Maxwell

# Speculation grows that Maxwell may try to cut a deal for reduced sentence

Experts say any deal depends on whether US government believes it is worth investigating network that may have been involved



Maxwell would be aiming for a reduced sentence by naming powerful names when it comes to others involved in Epstein's crimes. Photograph: SDNY/Zuma/Rex/Shutterstock

*[Edward Helmore](#) in New York*

Thu 30 Dec 2021 13.12 EST

Now that the British former socialite Ghislaine Maxwell has been [convicted in her sex-trafficking trial](#), speculation is growing that she may try to cut a deal and become a government witness in any broader investigation into the elite social circle of her ex-boyfriend Jeffrey Epstein.

Maxwell would be aiming for a reduced sentence by naming powerful names when it comes to others who may be involved in Epstein's crimes.

But defense lawyers and sexual-crimes prosecutors have cast doubt on the government's appetite to strike a bargain. They question whether Maxwell has any vital information the government does not already have, and whether it represents a strategy Maxwell has previously attempted that has failed.

"It all depends on who she would be cooperating against, and what she has to offer," said Jeffrey Lichtman, the defense attorney who represented the Mexican drug trafficker Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán at trial two years ago. "I would not be surprised if she had already tried to cooperate and it had failed."

Maxwell, who is expected to appeal her conviction, was found guilty on five of six charges for her involvement in Epstein's sexual abuse of teenage girls. Prosecutors said Maxwell "preyed on vulnerable young girls, manipulated them and served them up to be sexually abused". She is expected to receive a significant prison term.

According to Lichtman, there are defendants who, in the eyes of the government, are so bad that it does not want to strike a deal in exchange for testimony. "They don't want to take the hand of someone involved a criminal operation and let them cooperate against people who are well below them."

"That may be the case here – they just feel that she's so bad they won't allow her to cooperate," Lichtman said.

But that does not preclude Maxwell and her lawyers from making an offer. "There's a tremendous amount of information she has on some very important people. Now that she's been convicted she may be more eager to discuss. She certainly should, in my mind, because a lot of people skated here, while she bore the brunt of the government's full wrath," Lichtman said.

Former federal and state prosecutor Elie Honig said on [Twitter](#): “Maxwell’s cooperation is not particularly likely, but it is possible. You’d need (1) Maxwell to be willing and fully on board, (2) SDNY to be fully convinced of her truthfulness, and (3) a realistic plan to use her information versus others.”

One obstacle to any state prosecution based on Maxwell’s cooperation would be the statute of limitations on criminal and civil sexual crime complaints. The civil case bought by [Virginia Giuffre](#) against Britain’s Prince Andrew only exists because of a briefly opened window under the New York Child Victims Act, which allowed accusers to sue beyond the statute of limitations.

But there is also pressure for high-profile visitors to Epstein’s properties in New York, Palm Beach and the US Virgin Islands to be held accountable for any potential crimes, particularly as the government’s case against Maxwell appeared to avoid reference to broader aspects of the conspiracy.

“Of all the people supposedly involved with Epstein, 99% of them never made it into the government’s evidence,” said Lichtman. “Perhaps they were trying to avoid any frolic by the jury – that they’d get distracted by the bold-face names – but many people didn’t get prosecuted here when it seems like they could have,” he added.

According to Wendy Murphy, a former federal sex crimes prosecutor who now teaches at Boston Law, the relative absence of Epstein from Maxwell’s conspiracy trial was part of the government’s strategy. “They didn’t need more to prove conspiracy,” she said. “They didn’t need to overdo it. There was some weakness in the victims testimony but it was more than offset by other evidence.”

The next chapter of the Epstein case, Murphy said, is likely to come through the civil action against [Prince Andrew](#).

“Prince Andrew may be the next shoe to drop, and it may be the only shoe,” she said. The windows have closed on lawsuits for the most part, and I don’t know of another lawsuit with the potential to expose information.”

But if more investigations do happen, Murphy said Maxwell could get time off her sentence if the government wants important information she has.

“I’m not sure the feds are asking and I’m not sure she’s willing to give. She’s probably not going to say anything, and they don’t need her to, because they already have a lot of information. If they don’t need anything, they’re not going to give her a discount.”

Ultimately, said Bennett Gershman, professor of law at Pace University in New York, much depends on whether the government feels there is political mileage in continuing the investigation and identifying high-profile people who may have been part of the scheme.

“It’s hard to say what the government is interested in further on. We can’t answer that. Are the victims and people who really care about this case satisfied now Maxwell has been convicted or do they want to see other people in the larger network investigated?”

He added: “They have limited resources and personnel, so does this case cry out for further investigation and prosecution? That’s a political decision by the US department of justice and the US attorney’s office.”

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## Ghislaine Maxwell

# ‘Relieved and grateful’: victims and others react to Maxwell guilty verdict

‘My soul yearned for justice and the jury gave me just that,’ said Virginia Giuffre of the outcome of the trial



Annie Farmer, left, and Courtney Wild accused Jeffrey Epstein of abuse. Farmer testified at Ghislaine Maxwell’s trial. Photograph: Drew Angerer/Getty Images

*Dani Anguiano in Los Angeles*

[@dani\\_anguiano](#)

Thu 30 Dec 2021 05.46 EST

A victim of Ghislaine Maxwell who testified at her sex trafficking trial has said she feels “relieved and grateful” about [the guilty verdict](#), while another woman who has accused Maxwell of involvement in her abuse said the former British socialite was “more evil” than Jeffrey Epstein.

Maxwell was found guilty on five of six charges for her involvement in Epstein's sexual abuse of teenage girls. Prosecutors said that Maxwell "preyed on vulnerable young girls, manipulated them and served them up to be sexually abused".

"I am so relieved and grateful that the jury recognized the pattern of predatory behavior that Maxwell engaged in for years and found her guilty," said Annie Farmer, one of the victims who testified at the trial. "She has caused hurt to many more women than the few of us who had the chance to testify in the courtroom. I hope that this verdict brings solace to all who need it and demonstrates that no one is above the law."

Farmer, one of four accusers in this case and the only one to testify under her full name, [told the court](#) that Maxwell gave her a nude massage at Epstein's New Mexico ranch when she was just 16. She met Epstein through her sister Maria, who worked for him as a fine arts painter.

"ANNIE AND I ARE SOBBING WITH JOY!!!," Maria Farmer [said on Twitter](#) after the verdict was announced.

Virginia Giuffre, another Epstein victim who has accused Maxwell of being involved in her abuse, described the Briton as "more evil than Epstein".

"What Ghislaine did to so many of us is unforgivable," Giuffre [told The Cut](#). "She used that charm, that wit, that smile to come off as somebody you want to trust."

Giuffre described the verdict as "a bittersweet emotion because I have been fighting for so long".

"Justice to me looks like holding all of these people involved in the sex ring, those who greased its wheels, named and shamed," she said. "I'm sick of carrying around that shame. That shame doesn't belong to me."

She separately [tweeted](#): "My soul yearned for justice for years and today the jury gave me just that. I hope that today is not the end but rather another step in justice being served. Maxwell did not act alone. Others must be held accountable. I have faith that they will be."



Virginia Giuffre, center, a victim of Jeffrey Epstein, expressed her relief at the Ghislaine Maxwell verdict. Photograph: Shannon Stapleton/Reuters

Giuffre is suing Prince Andrew in a civil lawsuit, claiming he had sex with her on three occasions two decades ago when, aged 17, she had been sexually trafficked by Epstein, allegations Andrew vehemently denies.

Teresa Helm, another of Maxwell's accusers, told the BBC Maxwell would "never again have the opportunity to take anything from anyone".

She said: "Justice takes the lead today. I am consumed with gratitude for every brave, courageous and justice-driven person that has fought for this outcome.

"Ghislaine Maxwell will never again have the opportunity to take anything from anyone. She will reside on the other side of freedom. Us survivors, we go free."

Damian Williams, the US attorney for the southern district of New York, hailed the verdict against Maxwell for "one of the worst crimes imaginable, facilitating and participating in the sexual abuse of children".

"The road to justice has been far too long, but today justice has been done. I want to commend the bravery of the girls, now grown women, who stepped

out of the shadows and into the courtroom,” Williams said.

Lisa Bloom, a lawyer for some of Epstein’s accusers, said she expected Maxwell to spend the rest of her life behind bars.

She told the BBC: “She is 60 years old, she has been lucky to have 60 years of freedom, it is far too much. We hope that she never walks free again … The trial showed she was no scapegoat - she wasn’t on trial for just hanging around with [Jeffrey Epstein](#), she was on trial for her own actions.”

01:32

'One of the worst crimes imaginable': Ghislaine Maxwell guilty in sex-trafficking trial – video

Dave Aronberg, the state attorney in Palm Beach county, Florida, where Epstein had a mansion at which he abused teenage girls, told CNN that Maxwell “just got what was coming to her”.

Sigrid McCawley, who represents several victims, said that with the verdict Maxwell has been held accountable and justice served.

“Today’s verdict is a towering victory, not just for the brave women who testified in this trial, but for the women around the world whose young and tender lives were diminished and damaged by the abhorrent actions of Ghislaine Maxwell,” McCawley said.

Maxwell did not speak or look at the jury as the verdict was read, the journalist Julie Brown, who spent years working to expose Epstein’s crimes, said on Twitter.

“As the verdict was read Maxwell struggled to stand, but said nothing,” [Brown tweeted](#). “Maxwell, 60, appeared shaken, she sipped a cup of water then slumped back in her chair. She did not shed a tear.”

Maxwell faces up to 65 years in prison. Late Wednesday, Maxwell’s brother, Kevin Maxwell, said the family stood by her and believed she would be

vindicated on during the appeals process. “We firmly believe in our sister’s innocence,” he said in a statement.

Bobbi Sternheim, Maxwell’s lead defense lawyer, said her team planned to appeal the verdict.

### *Agencies contributed reporting*

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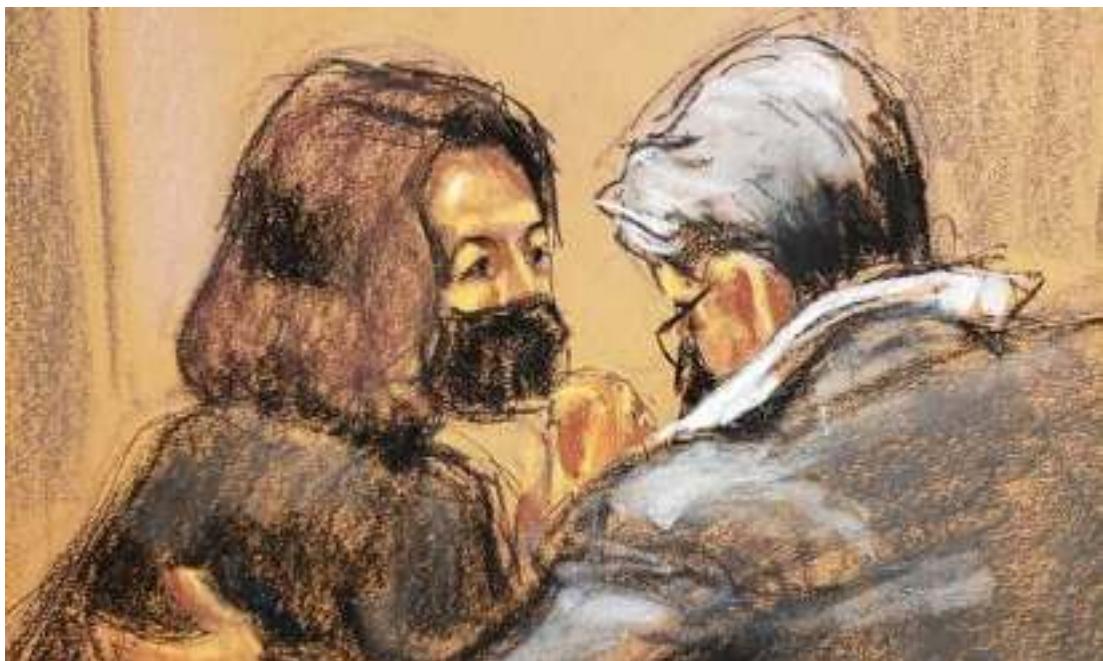
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## Ghislaine Maxwell

# Maxwell's attorney and family vow to appeal guilty verdict but face obstacles

Challenges will probably center on judicial rulings that prevented some defense witnesses from remaining anonymous



Ghislaine Maxwell speaks with Bobbi Sternheim, as seen in a courtroom sketch. Photograph: Jane Rosenberg/Reuters

*[Edward Helmore](#)*

Thu 30 Dec 2021 10.58 EST

Ghislaine Maxwell's lead defense attorney, Bobbi Sternheim, and members of her family vowed to appeal the [five guilty verdicts](#) on sex trafficking and conspiracy charges as they left court on Wednesday, but their efforts to clear her face considerable obstacles.

The challenges will probably center on judicial rulings during the defense presentation that prevented Maxwell's lawyers from putting some [witnesses on the stand](#) anonymously, and another that prevented defense attorneys from recalling two of Maxwell's accusers.

"We have already started working on the appeal, and we are confident that she will be vindicated," Sternheim told reporters outside the court.

To succeed in any appeal, the team would need to show that Judge Alison Nathan abused her discretion or violated rules of evidence. "It will be a difficult task for the defense to win on appeal," said New York appeals attorney Julie Rendelman. "Judge Nathan worked very hard to seat an impartial jury, and the defendant received a fair trial."

One area that Maxwell's defense could try and use as grounds for appeal is whether the jury felt rushed in their deliberations after they were told they would have to work through New Years and pressure from the risk of Covid interrupting deliberations.

"Did that play any role in their decision-making? At the same time, the jury was very expressive in their notes to the judge that they were taking the time they needed. The fact that they came back not guilty on one of the counts showed that they were taking the time to go through every piece of evidence," Rendelman said.

Another issue to be raised could be the role of compensation to Epstein's victims. Ahead of the trial, for instance, Maxwell's defense said they planned to call officials from the Epstein Victims Compensation Fund, which has awarded nearly \$125m to about 150 individuals.

The four witness against Maxwell received sums of up to \$5m, and Maxwell's defense had planned to introduce their statements to the fund to illuminate any inconsistencies in their testimony to the jury.

But lawyers say that even if an appeals court agreed to hear the case, Maxwell's lawyers would need to show that any violations were material to the trial's outcome.

A “harmless error” is not enough to overturn a conviction, Bennett Gershman, a professor at Pace Law School, told Reuters.

Appeals lawyers could also argue as grounds for a challenge Nathan’s instruction to the jury that Maxwell could be found guilty even if she had deliberately ignored evidence of Epstein’s wrongdoing.

Maxwell’s lawyers may also raise on appeal Nathan’s ruling preventing three defense witnesses from testifying anonymously.

“There’s precedent when it comes to sexual crimes for witnesses to have their names removed, but there’s no precedent in the defense’s request to have their witnesses testify under a pseudonym, so I think Judge Nathan felt she had no choice but to rule them inadmissible,” Rendelman said.

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## **Headlines saturday 1 january 2022**

- New year honours Covid experts including Chris Whitty knighted
- Tony Blair Ex-prime minister to be given most senior knighthood
- David Winton Harding Billionaire Tory donor knighted
- 'Inspirational' The young people recognised in this year's list

## New Year honours list

# New year honours feature Covid experts with Chris Whitty knighted

Tennis player Emma Raducanu, Olympians and Paralympians, and actor Daniel Craig also among 1,122 people receiving awards



Top row: Jonathan Van-Tam, Emma Raducanu, Daniel Craig, Jenny Harries.  
Below: Joanna Lumley, Chris Whitty, Hannah Cockcroft, Vanessa Redgrave.  
Composite: PA/Rex/Reuters/AP/EPA

*[Alexandra Topping](#)*

Fri 31 Dec 2021 17.30 EST

Leading figures of science and medicine during the coronavirus pandemic have been feted in the Queen's new year honours list, including the chief medical officer for England, Prof [Chris Whitty](#), who is to receive a knighthood for his role in battling Covid-19.

The CMOs for Scotland and Wales, Dr Gregor Smith and Dr Frank Atherton, are also to be given knighthoods, as is the deputy medical officer for England, Prof Jonathan Van-Tam, and the head of the UK Health Security Agency, Dr Jenny Harries, who becomes a dame. The UK chief scientific adviser, Sir Patrick Vallance, is elevated to the Order of the Bath.

The teenage tennis star Emma Raducanu – praised for her “remarkable achievement at such a young age” by the Queen after her remarkable US Open win – is to be awarded an MBE, after also being [crowned the BBC's Sports Personality of the Year](#).

After a [successful Tokyo Olympic Games](#) – in which Team GB equalled its London 2012 medal haul to come fourth in the table and excelled in new sports including BMX, skateboarding, and weightlifting – 78 Olympians and Paralympians are celebrated for services to sport this year.

Among them are the married Olympians [Laura and Jason Kenny who have received a damehood and knighthood](#) for services to cycling. Jason Kenny became Britain’s [most decorated Olympian](#) after winning gold in the men’s keirin at Tokyo 2020, while Laura Kenny [became the first British woman to win gold at three Olympics](#).



Tom Daley: OBE. Photograph: Adam Davy/PA

The wheelchair sprinter Hannah Cockroft, who took her Paralympic [gold medal tally to six this summer](#) after a decade at the top of her sport, receives an OBE. The swimmer Adam Peaty and the diver Tom Daley receive OBEs not only for coming home with gold medals but also for raising awareness of mental health and LGBT issues, while the sailor Hannah Mills gets an OBE for her prowess on the water and continued campaigning on marine pollution.

Other Olympians and Paralympians recognised include the cyclist Jody Cundy, who gets a CBE, and the sprinter and cyclist Kadeena Cox, who receives an OBE. There are MBEs for the diver Matty Lee, the BMX racer Bethany Shriever and the boxer Lauren Price, who said she was “gobsmacked” to receive the award. Price, a [champion footballer turned kickboxer turned boxer](#), dedicated the honour to her grandparents, with whom she has lived since she was a baby. “My gran and grandad have always supported me and encouraged me. If it wasn’t for them then I wouldn’t have achieved what I have today,” she said.

The actors [Joanna Lumley](#) and [Vanessa Redgrave](#) become dames for their services to drama, entertainment and charity, while [John Boorman](#), the director of Hollywood films including Excalibur, Point Blank and Deliverance, is also knighted.

In a move that may raise eyebrows in Whitehall circles, the actor [Daniel Craig](#) receives the Order of Saint Michael and Saint George (CMG) for outstanding contribution to film. It is the same award given to the fictional character he is best-known for playing, and one normally reserved for professional diplomats and intelligence officers.

The veteran soap stars June Brown and William Roache receive OBEs, and the actor Cherylee Houston gets an MBE for services to drama and to people with disabilities. The Loose Women star and activist Katie Piper, who sustained life-changing burns in an acid attack in March 2008, receives an OBE for her services to charity and victims of burns and other disfigurement injuries.

Elsewhere in the cultural sphere, Alistair Spalding, the artistic director of Sadler’s Wells, is awarded a knighthood for services to dance, saying the

award is an indication “that our vibrant dance culture goes from strength to strength”. John Gilhooly, the artistic director of Wigmore Hall, is honoured with a CBE for services to music, while the songwriter Bernie Taupin, best known for his long-term partnership with Sir Elton John, is awarded a CBE. Melanie Brown of the Spice Girls has been made an MBE for her work with the domestic violence charity Women’s Aid.

In the art world, Peter Murray, who founded Yorkshire Sculpture Park in 1977, is knighted while the large-scale installation artist Es Devlin, the first woman to design the UK Pavilion for Expo since its inception in 1851, is awarded a CBE.



Melanie Brown: MBE Photograph: Matt Crossick/PA

The prime minister, Boris Johnson, paid tribute to the 1,122 individuals celebrated – 361 at BEM, 508 at MBE and 253 at OBE – thanking them for their contribution to the nation.

“These recipients have inspired and entertained us and given so much to their communities in the UK or in many cases around the world,” he said. “The honours are an opportunity for us to thank them, as a country, for their dedication and outstanding contribution.”

The former prime minister [Tony Blair is appointed a Knight Companion of the Most Noble Order of the Garter, the oldest and most senior order of chivalry.](#)

Trevor Phillips, the former chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, has been knighted for services to equality and human rights. Frank Field, the MP for Birkenhead from 1979 to 2019 who now sits in the House of Lords, is made a companion of honour – where membership is limited to 65 people – along with Nobel Prize-winning geneticist Sir Paul Nurse.

In business, knighthoods go to Nigel Wilson, the chief executive of Legal & General, and Ian Livingstone, the co-founder of Games Workshop.

The veteran broadcaster Moira Stuart, who was the first African-Caribbean woman to read the news on British television, is recognised for her services to media. She said “it hasn’t been easy” but she was “moved and lifted” to be made a CBE.

The continued fight against coronavirus once again featured heavily in this year’s honours list, with vaccine chief Dr Emily Lawson made a dame for her work on the rollout programme, while June Raine – whom the committee said as head of the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency had ensured that laboratories stayed open and carried out viral work through the pandemic – also becomes a dame.



Dr Emily Lawson: damehood. Photograph: Ian Davidson/Alamy

After a summer in which the men's England football team reached a [Euros final for the first time](#) – only for key players to be subjected to racist abuse – the list honours the work of Gary Bennett, a former Sunderland footballer and one of the first three patrons of the charity Show Racism the Red Card.

"I've been overwhelmed and thankful for it, proud and honoured," said Bennett. But he added that 30 years after he experienced racist abuse as the first black captain of Sunderland, it was time that social media companies faced sanctions for allowing similar racist abuse on their platforms. "Social media [firms] need to be accountable and some form of punishment needs to be put out there," he said.

In the 2022 new year honours list, women represent 47.9% of the total honours (dropping to 35.9% of recipients at CBE level and above); 25.5% are from a lower socio-economic background; 15.1% come from a BAME background; 13.3% have a disability; and 3.5% identify as being LGBT.

Of those honoured, 799 (63%) have worked in their communities, including the youngest people ever to be included in the list: 11-year-old Tobias Weller and 12-year-old Max Woosley, who are recognised for their fundraising efforts during the pandemic. The oldest person on the list is 102-year-old

Henry Lewis, the honorary vice-president of the magicians' society The Magic Circle, who is given an MBE for services to fundraising and charitable causes.

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[Tony Blair](#)

## **Tony Blair to be given most senior knighthood in new year honours list**

The former prime minister will be made Knight Companion of the Most Noble Order of the Garter by the Queen

[New year honours feature Covid experts alongside actors and Olympians](#)



Tony Blair is first former prime minister to be knighted since Sir John Major. Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

*Press Association*  
Fri 31 Dec 2021 17.30 EST

Tony Blair is to be knighted with the highest possible ranking in the new year honours list, Buckingham Palace has said.

Blair, who held the keys to No 10 between 1997 and 2007, will be appointed a Knight Companion of the Most Noble Order of the Garter, the oldest and most senior British order of chivalry.

The appointment, which is made by [the Queen](#), has regularly been bestowed upon past prime ministers, with [Sir John Major](#) – Blair’s direct predecessor – the last to receive the honour.

[Blair](#), a former Labour leader, said: “It is an immense honour to be appointed Knight Companion of the Most Noble Order of the Garter, and I am deeply grateful to Her Majesty the Queen.

“It was a great privilege to serve as prime minister and I would like to thank all those who served alongside me, in politics, public service and all parts of our society, for their dedication and commitment to our country.”

Blair led New Labour to a landslide victory in 1997, winning two subsequent general elections before quitting Westminster a decade later, paving the way for his chancellor [Gordon Brown](#) to take over as prime minister.

The 68-year-old famously called Diana, Princess of Wales, the “people’s princess” after her death and was the UK’s leader during the [military invasions of Iraq](#) and [Afghanistan](#).

The former barrister became a Middle East envoy and set up his own non-profit organisation, the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, after leaving politics.

Each year, Royal Knights and Ladies of the Order of the Garter gather at St George’s Chapel in Windsor for a colourful procession and ceremony.

Watched by crowds of onlookers, they walk down the hill to the chapel from the State Apartments, dressed in blue velvet mantles, red velvet hoods, black velvet hats and white ostrich plumes.

Blair, who left Downing Street more than 14 years ago, is one of three new appointments announced by the palace. Appointments to the Garter are in the Queen’s gift and made without prime ministerial advice. They are for life

unless a knight or lady companion offends against certain “points of reproach”.

Founded in 1348 by Edward III, the garter is awarded by the sovereign for outstanding public service and achievement. It is said to have been inspired by events at a ball in northern France, attended by the king and Joan, Countess of Salisbury. The countess is believed to have dropped her garter, causing laughter and some embarrassment.

The king, however, picked it up and wore it on his own leg, uttering the phrase “Honi soit qui mal y pense” – “Shame on him who thinks this evil” – now the order’s motto.

The order’s emblem is a blue ribbon or garter worn by men below the left knee and by women on the left arm. There are now 21 non-royal companions in the order out of a maximum of 24.

The Queen has also appointed the first black person to the order, Buckingham Palace has announced.

[Valerie Amos](#), 67, a Labour member of the House of Lords, was also the first black person to become a cabinet member. According to the palace she will now be the first black person appointed Lady Companion of the Order, the oldest and most senior British order of chivalry.

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## New Year honours list

# Billionaire Tory donor knighted in new year honours list

Boris Johnson accused of ‘wrong priorities’ after David Winton Harding given award for services to philanthropy

[New year honours feature Covid experts alongside actors and Olympians](#)



David Harding, the founder of Winton Group, is well known for supporting research and science projects. Photograph: Micha Theiner/City AM/Rex Shutterstock

*[Rowena Mason](#) Deputy political editor*

Fri 31 Dec 2021 17.30 EST

A billionaire hedge fund founder who has given nearly £1.5m to the [Conservatives](#) has been knighted in the new year honours list, prompting accusations that Boris Johnson has “the wrong priorities”.

David Winton Harding, who has been funding the Tories since 2006, was given the award for services to philanthropy.

The founder and chief executive of Winton Group is well known for supporting research and science projects, having given the [largest single donation to the Science Museum](#), as well as multimillion pound donations to the [University of Cambridge](#).

A physics graduate from Cambridge, Harding pledged that some of the funds would be used to promote access for students from disadvantaged and minority ethnic backgrounds.

A financial backer of the remain campaign during the EU referendum, Harding most recently gave £100,000 to the Tories in April and handed £300,000 to the party in the autumn before the 2019 election.

Angela Rayner, the deputy Labour leader, said: “During the pandemic the public has rightly come together to celebrate the real heroes from all those keeping our NHS going, our vaccine volunteers, key workers and all those who went above and beyond to keep our communities thriving. This [Harding’s knighthood] just shows that once again the Conservatives have the wrong priorities.”

Anneliese Dodds, chair of the Labour party, said: “It seems the Conservatives are ringing in the new year in exactly the same way they’ve seen out the old: by rewarding their chums with gongs instead of our key worker heroes.

“If you want Boris Johnson to recommend you for a knighthood, don’t bother working long hours on low wages to help others – just become a hedge fund manager and donate half a million pounds to the Tories.”

Two longstanding Tory MPs – Bill Wiggin and Robert Goodwill – were also knighted for their “political service”. Wiggin has been an MP since 2001, largely as a backbencher, and previously served as a whip. He is now a member of the liaison committee that scrutinises the work of the prime minister. Goodwill has served as a minister in four departments.

In previous years, the Tories have given many more honours to donors, aides and politicians, prompting cronyism rows.

Harding and No 10 have been approached for comment. Harding has previously suggested he would back state funding of political parties. “I’ve given a bit of money to politics. I rather wish I didn’t have to,” he said in 2015. “I rather wish it was all funded some other way and that would remove the whole issue.

“I’m sympathetic to the Tories and their approach to raising money but I’m also sympathetic to people who don’t like that in the UK. The Lib Dems said it should all be state funded and I’d be perfectly fine with state funding.”

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## New Year honours list

# Inspirational young people recognised in new year honours list

Accolades for young people who led the way in fundraising efforts and helping out their communities

[New year honours feature Covid experts alongside actors and Olympians](#)



Max Woosey has been camping out for more than 21 months to raise money for the North Devon Hospice. Photograph: Aaron Chown/PA

[Alexandra Topping](#)

Fri 31 Dec 2021 17.30 EST

Young people who have acted as tutors, community leaders and fundraisers are among those honoured in the Queen's new year honours list. The youngest recipients – and the youngest people ever to receive an honour – are 11 and 12.

Max Woosey, 12, has captured the imagination of outdoors-loving young people by [camping out](#) for what is now 21 consecutive months to raise nearly [£600,000](#) and counting for the North Devon Hospice, which cared for his neighbour Rick Abbott who died of cancer aged 74 in March 2020.

Max, who inspired thousands of children around the world to camp in their own back yards, said receiving the honour felt “unreal”. “Getting an award like this for not being famous but for doing good things I think shows that we do have a good future, that young people can be role models, and it is all going to be all right,” he said.



Tobias Garbutt Weller alongside Olympic athlete Jessica Ennis-Hill (left) and his mother Ruth Garbutt in Sheffield in August. Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

Yet Max is not the youngest on the list, an accolade that goes to [11-year-old Tobias Garbutt Weller](#), from Sheffield. Inspired by Captain Sir Tom Moore, Tobias has completed two marathons and an Ironman challenge despite being unable to walk unaided. Starting when he was nine years old in March 2020, Tobias, who is autistic and has cerebral palsy, has [raised more than £150,000](#), and he is awarded the British Empire Medal (BEM).

As well as feats of endurance, young people are also recognised for stepping up to help their communities, such as 16-year-old Sahil Usman who [delivered essential items to vulnerable people in Blackburn](#) while undergoing treatment for leukaemia. As well as raising awareness about the impact of cancer on young people in presentations in schools, Sahil has hosted a radio show for local minority ethnic communities to encourage understanding of coronavirus.



Sahil Usman. Photograph: Handout

In Luton, Muhammad Kamil Ali turned himself into a tutoring machine during the pandemic. The 19-year-old, who is applying for medical school, taught every day for periods through the [BCPD Trust](#), and still regularly teaches young people whose education was disrupted as a result of Covid out of school hours.

“It’s a good feeling,” he said, on being awarded a BEM. “I’ve been doing it a long time now so it feels nice to have that recognised.” Asked what the awards to young people said about the UK, he added: “I think it shows that everybody has a skill, everyone is good at something. In life you should give back, and everyone can find their own way of doing that.”

Alice Jackson, 21, from Andover in Hampshire, said her BEM – awarded after she became a leading member of a group of volunteers helping their rural community in lockdown – was a reflection of a bigger group effort.

“[The award] is a reflection on the whole community coming together and looking out for other people,” she said. “At the time it just had to be done – I just thought it was an issue that needed solving and I had the time to do it.”

A Cabinet Office spokesperson said the 2022 list was one of the most diverse on record, and included a greater number of awards for young people. They said: “Young people have done some extraordinary things during the pandemic and it’s important that the country recognises that service.”

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## 2022.01.01 - Spotlight

- [Boris Johnson quits as world runs out of Greek letters? Our supporters' predictions for 2022](#)
- [New year, same old you! The secret to self-improvement is embracing your messy, imperfect life](#)
- ['Many hold Gove responsible' Education guru sets out what's wrong with England's schools](#)
- [A hearty start to the year Yotam Ottolenghi's recipes for brothy winter soups](#)

## World news

# Boris Johnson quits as world runs out of Greek letters? Our supporters' predictions for 2022

We asked the Guardian's 1m supporters to make their predictions for the year ahead. Here's what they said

New year, new resolve: [become a Guardian supporter](#)



Boris Johnson leaves following a media briefing in Downing Street.  
Photograph: Tolga Akmen/PA



[Mark Rice-Oxley](#) and *Guardian* supporters

[@markriceoxley69](#)

Sat 1 Jan 2022 03.00 EST

Boris Johnson steps down, to be replaced by David Frost – or Jeremy Hunt, or Michael Gove, [or Peppa Pig](#). French presidential elections are beset by civil unrest over pandemic restrictions. Russia mounts some kind of incursion in eastern Ukraine. China waits for an opportune moment to overrun Taiwan.

And the world runs out of Greek letters to attach to Covid variants.

Yes, it's the time for pundits and predictions – a new year stretching ahead and no shortage of views on what it will deliver. Some things seem dead certs: elections in Brazil, the US, Hungary and France. A new Covid wave to grapple with. A [platinum jubilee](#). A controversial World Cup – and Winter Olympics.

But what about the unknown unknowns? We asked the *Guardian*'s 1 million supporters to make their predictions. The picture painted by a colourful spray of submissions was an alternative foretelling of the year ahead – and not hugely cheerful.

Geopolitically, Ukraine and Taiwan seem most vulnerable, but there were also predictions of showdowns in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Ethiopia and Iran, of something stirring on Russia's border with the Baltic republics, and of deepening hunger in Afghanistan and parts of sub-Saharan Africa.

Donald Trump declares for the 2024 presidential race after the Republicans wrest back control of Congress; but populists and the far right fall into retreat elsewhere.



Is Trump preparing to run again? Photograph: Brian Snyder/Reuters

Everyone will have slightly more money – but that's just another way of saying inflation will march upwards. Higher interest rates cause consumer pain around the world, and a Chinese property market collapse has a palpable financial impact. Food shortages bite. The UK government has to nationalise electricity provision, amid the wretched decay of privatised industries struggling with underinvestment.

Businesses pursue purpose and sustainability like never before, mindful this is the best way to retain fleet-footed talent.

An incipient desertion of Facebook and Twitter becomes a proper exodus; cryptocurrencies collapse in value faced with the twin threats of regulation and the issue of official digital currencies. Airports, supermarkets and

lampposts become EV charging hubs. Gigabattery is voted word of the year, just ahead of [microbiome](#), [plyscraper](#), nanodrone and [wolf warrior](#). There will be digital daemons for all.

Rain patterns change and there are further startling weather events in unexpected parts. A cyberattack causes major infrastructure disruption. Billions of trees are planted, but not all of them in the right places. Horses are increasingly used as a method of transport.



A horse and carriage for hire in Rome. Photograph: Kirk Fisher/Alamy

Assisted dying becomes bigger business than ever, as planned death becomes something of a performance. There is a backlash against the availability of online pornography as a new social division emerges between sybarites and prudes. Fertility rates plummet amid [a crisis over sperm counts](#).

Overall, it will be a marginally better year than 2021. A survey of supporters found 50.5% optimistic about the new year, compared with 49.5% who were pessimistic.

## A selection of supporters' predictions for 2022

Europe will be facing two tricky crises: the refugee situation in Belarus and newly sparked tensions in Serbia, both potential candidates for another war in Europe. Extreme civil unrest due to the harsh Covid restrictions imposed by the governments. War between the US and China [over Taiwan](#). **Christine Brösenhuber**

Horses will begin to be used for travel and will appear in towns and cities. To enable this to happen, horse parks will be provided where owners can safely leave their horses while they pop to the shops, go to work, nip to the GP ... Horses run on grass – it makes so much sense. **Penny Nicholson**

Prediction of a repeat of the 1920s following the Spanish flu pandemic ... if it is correct it will result in increase in social disease, alcoholism and drug taking ... others much more relaxed will reap the benefits of an alternate life Covid-19 allowed them to see. **Elaine Hasty**



Volunteer nurses from the American Red Cross tend to influenza patients in 1918. Photograph: Edward A "Doc" Rogers/AP

You'll be able to personalise the sound of your electric car and the streets will become a cacophony of Clash meets Tchaikovsky. You'll be able to select your own online daemon to accompany you to online office meetings: it will sit in the corner of your screen and scratch, titter, scowl, chuck pips

etc while you nod seriously at your boss. Insects will be the new crisps, until people realise how gross insect farming is. **Coralie Wilson**

We'll start to see a more purpose-orientated approach in business and in working life. The "great resignation" has encouraged many people to seek out work that feels personally meaningful to them, and I expect this trend will continue in 2022. As employees start to realign their working lives around a sense of personal meaning, it will eventually become clear to employers that purpose is a priority. This will encourage business owners and leaders to take a more intentional approach to strategy and management, figuring out what they can offer their employees and stakeholders, and working to make a meaningful impact in the world. **Eloise Skinner**

Enough people will leave Facebook and Twitter to make them unviable.  
**Nick Jones**

There will be bigger splits across society with those vaccinated v anti-vaxxers. This will lead to further disinformation and probably further violence and inequalities across society especially where compulsory vaccines are introduced. **Gerry Lee**



Anti-vaxx protesters gather outside parliament in London last month.  
Photograph: Rob Pinney/Getty Images

Macron will be re-elected. A definite 55% of Scottish yes for independence. A fourth dose of vaccine starting in May. The relationship between France and the UK will turn even sourer. **Anna-Laure Damongeot**

I see two major universal trends. The first that one half of the population of human beings of this world will evolve into a kinder and more generous species, grateful to have survived the worst existential crisis in our recent history. The other half, which has sunk into an alternative reality of viewing fellow people as enemies of their race, will have a rude awakening and lose considerable ground because their own clans will desert them even as their predictions keep getting exposed as hate and not facts. **Aruna Hariharan**

A growing youth movement of authentic and knowledgeable activists who demand transformative change in our governance systems. **Steve Martin**

Sinn Féin/Alliance form Northern Ireland government at Stormont in May causing civil war in the Conservative party as their negotiating stance on the NI protocol with Europe collapses. Further Brexit issues with border controls and supply chain problems ramp up the pressure on Johnson. He does not rise to the challenge and further infighting results in a leadership challenge. **Paul Collins**

Julian Assange freed and allowed to return to Australia with his wife and two sons. **Mariam Dessaive**

I predict that Boris will further seek to weasel his way out of No 10 because he doesn't like being PM when it's difficult. **Kathy Duggan**

A major crypto crash, perhaps because of regulatory crackdowns and/or the introduction of one or more official digital currencies. **Geoff Barnard**

A significant decline of the far right in many countries. A bigger "normality" of our lives facing Covid-19 (vaccination and weaker variants). A more severe crisis between western countries and China and Russia. **Luiz Bastos**

I think that countries where there's no free speech, a lot of corruption, poverty and very high Covid deaths will face big trouble (India, Egypt, Iran,

even maybe Russia and China), if not in 2022 then in the next 10 years.  
**Erika Claus Petiot**

Due to political embarrassment of stories of exploitation of overseas workers in Qatar, Fifa moves World Cup location to the more sensitive choice of Saudi Arabia, only after Belarus turned down the opportunity. **Patrick Brosnan**

With four major Covid-19 variants in two years we can expect another two in 2022. Could be more with the lack of take-up of vaccines worldwide. Eventually, we'll run out of Greek letters. **Dave Bartlett**

There will be a series of scandals of older vulnerable people coming to significant harm as a result of the lack of social care availability. **Peter Loose**

We'll all move to the Orkneys to soak up the surplus electricity. As a result there will be a run on warm clothing especially puffer jackets. As a result of that the eider duck population will crash. **Jane Edmonds**

While the west is distracted by further Covid outbreaks, Russia invades Ukraine and China attacks Taiwan – simultaneously. The west subsequently does not know which way to turn. **George Stephens**

China will begin to take serious measures on climate emissions, and Australia and Canada's fossil industries will suffer accordingly. **Norm Mohamid**

There will be a major disruption caused either by a cyberattack or by failure of GPS – caused by a large solar storm or a system problem. We have become far too dependent on technology that is vulnerable to widespread failure. **Martyn Thomas**

More people than ever will give up on the US and Canadian costs of living and move to Mexico and Panama. **Suzanne Gravelle**

2022 is going to be significantly worse even than 2021 and 2020. Large increases in the price of food, fuel, energy, hospitality. Maybe even food shortages. More extreme weather events, including more, and worse, in the

UK. Terrifying clampdowns on freedom of speech and the right to protest – eg “protesters” being imprisoned for sharing views and communicating with each other online. And who knows what is going to happen with Covid? The shocking thing is that, even with 2020 and 2021 being as awful as they have been, they are better than any year we’ll see for the rest of our lives. **Cathy Eastburn**

The Covid variants will have to be named in Sanskrit, after we run out of Greek letters. **Mike Allen**

I hate to say this, but there will be an increase in tensions over the Ukraine, Taiwan, and Iran’s nuclear programme. This will not be triumph of the west. The US will retreat from these facedown, and Ukraine will fall into the orbit of Russia, Taiwan will fall to China, without a fight, at the early signs of invasion, and Iran will find itself on the receiving end of Israeli attacks on its nuclear programme. Whether it retaliates effectively, along with its allies Hezbollah and to a lesser extant Hamas, will determine Israel’s fate. The 2022 elections in the US will lead to a return to Republican majorities in both houses. **Harry Rajchgot**

The Queen abdicates, Charles sees the light and decides to retire to his potting shed, William stands down for the sake of his family, Harry says “no way”, everyone else in line looks the other way ... and a republic is declared. **Myanah Saunders**

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[New year, same old you](#)[Health & wellbeing](#)

## **New year, same old you! The secret to self-improvement is embracing your messy, imperfect life**

It's only when you learn to accept who you are, flaws and all, that you can make real, worthwhile change



Photograph: Kellie French/The Guardian, assisted by Harry Brayne. Set styling: Elena Horn. Model: Kaeleen Stammers at Bame Agency

[Oliver Burkeman](#)

[@oliverburkeman](#)

Sat 1 Jan 2022 03.00 EST

It's the time of year for reinventions – or, perhaps more accurately, preparing for reinventions. For buying the diet book, drawing up the new morning routine, bookmarking the therapists' websites or purchasing the storage

cabinets for the soon-to-be-perfectly-organised house. As with all attempts at personal transformation, at new year or otherwise, this is the fun part. You get to experience all the excitement of becoming an entirely different person, without having yet had to put in the effort – and without having failed. Like untrodden early morning snow, the vision of who you'll become remains pristine. Usually, though, something inside you knows the truth: in a few days' time, the whole thing will have turned into unpleasant grey slush.

Personal reinventions fail partly for the obvious reasons: you set your goals too high; or your existing obligations at work or home get in the way; or you find (who could have imagined it?) that the unimpressive level of self-discipline you've demonstrated for your entire life until this moment can't magically be tripled overnight. But there's also a deeper problem with quests for wholesale transformation, which explains why they rarely work as intended – and why, as 2022 begins, embracing the existing version of yourself, with all its messiness and imperfections, might be the most transformative thing you've ever done.

### Schemes for constructing a New You are inevitably devised by the Old You, who has some pretty glaring issues

The core of the trouble is that schemes for constructing a New You – whether in every area of life, or just one major one, such as your relationship with your children, or your physical fitness – are always devised by the Old You, who by their own admission has some pretty glaring issues. (Otherwise why would you bother to envision a new one?) You've got no good reason to trust this dubious character's thoughts about reinvention; indeed, it's likely they're using what looks like “reinvention” to reinforce old hang-ups instead.

And so, for example, your vow to become more productive this year might just stem from your old belief that you're obliged to fulfil every demand made by those around you, when a better way forward might be to start strategically letting a few people down. Likewise, your intention to make this the year you find your soulmate might simply represent your conviction that you don't have what it takes to cope on your own. Even if it works, the so-called reinvention will only end up entrenching the status quo.

“No one awakens in the morning, looks in the mirror and says, ‘I think I will repeat my mistakes today’ or, ‘I expect today I will do something stupid, repetitive, regressive and against my best interests,’” writes the Jungian psychoanalyst James Hollis. “But frequently, this replication of history is precisely what we do.”

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One consequence is that while you’ll fail to pull off a total transformation of your personality – that would entail the impossible feat of somehow jumping outside your own life – you probably *will* end up feeling worse about the life you have. “Focusing your mind on an imagined future where you’re someone different makes your now-self inevitably ‘less-than’,” says Jocelyn K Glei, host of the [Hurry Slowly](#) podcast, who recommends using the new year to take stock of the preceding year’s transformations instead.

The alternative to reinvention – making a wholehearted commitment to accepting who you already are – is liable to sound horribly cheesy, or at best like a matter of settling for a mediocre life. But as the celebrated psychologist Carl Rogers famously noted, the very opposite is the case: “The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change.” When you no longer imagine you *must* transform yourself, in order to justify your existence on the planet, you’re finally *able* to do so, in small ways and large. The stakes are lower, now that your self-worth no longer hangs in the balance.

What a relief: I get to drop that stupid fantasy and focus on the real world, which is where real changes can happen

“There’s a quiet power in forgiving our flaws, missteps and perceived shortcomings,” says Madeleine Dore, author of [I Didn’t Do the Thing Today: Letting Go of Productivity Guilt](#), out this month. “Often when we accept ourselves, we’re more likely to get the best from ourselves, because we’re better placed to look at what we need to thrive, rather than change.”

The psychotherapist Bruce Tift suggests a thought experiment: imagine whatever issue you struggle with now – the trait in yourself you wish you didn’t possess, the behaviour in which you wish you didn’t engage – persisting to the very end of your days. What if you’ll always be something of a procrastinator? What if you never entirely lose your tendency to lash out at others when upset at yourself?

When I run this experiment on myself, I feel deflated at first. Hold on – you mean I’ll *never* get to the part of life that’s problem-free? But then comes a sense of a burden being lifted. What a relief: I get to drop that stupid fantasy and focus on the real world, which is where real changes can happen. The self-help writer Mark Manson describes how this might work in the context of social anxiety: “Paradoxically, accepting that you’re just not a confident person and you’re always going to feel a little off around other people will begin to make you feel more comfortable and less anxious around others. You won’t judge yourself, and then you’ll feel less judged by them as well.”

There’s a kind of defeat that needs accepting here: a willingness to concede that, by the perfectionistic standards to which you’ve been holding yourself, you have already failed. There’s no going back. You’ll never unwaste the time you tell yourself you’ve wasted, or undo the bad things you’ve done. Which is great, because it means you get to stop trying to evade the unavoidable mess of existence and get stuck in to a few worthwhile and pleasurable activities instead.

The Zen teacher Shunryu Suzuki nailed the matter when he told his students: “Each of you is perfect just as you are – and you could all use improvement.” Yes, it’s a paradox. You’ll just have to deal with that, too.

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## Education policy

Interview

# **'Many hold Gove responsible': education guru sets out what's wrong with England's schools**

Fiona Millar

People are yearning for a new educational age, says Sir Tim Brighouse in his new book with Mick Waters



Tim Brighouse says England now has a fractured schools system, an unsuitable curriculum and too many exclusions. He proposes cross-party decision-making and a 10-year plan. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian



Sat 1 Jan 2022 04.00 EST

The veteran educationist [Sir Tim Brighouse](#) is in an optimistic mood. This may be a period of “doubt and disillusion”, especially as Covid threatens to disrupt another school year, but in his view such times inevitably lead to change. With that in mind, he has just co-authored a sweeping 600-page overview of modern education policy, with suggestions he hopes will contribute to a new direction.

Written with the curriculum expert [Mick Waters](#), [About Our Schools](#) divides recent history into two eras: a postwar age of “hope and optimism”, in which teachers were pretty free to do what they liked, followed by a post-Thatcher age of “markets, centralisation and managerialism”, in which the influence of inspections and league tables became all-pervasive and individual ministers could decide how skills such as subtraction should be taught in every classroom in England.

The language used to describe the two ages is so leading that you could be forgiven for thinking Brighouse was a fully paid-up member of what the former education secretary Michael Gove, who straddles the book like a malign colossus, used to dismiss as [“the blob”](#), after a 1958 science fiction

film in which a gelatinous life form (in this case the progressive education establishment) engulfs everything it touches.

But he is adamant that he would fit into either age. “I don’t want anyone thinking we are just romantic oldies looking back at a forgotten period,” he says. “Many good things about that postwar period were poor. Teaching wasn’t good enough and there was a less clear definition of what a good school was.



Mick Waters, former director of curriculum at the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and co-author of *About Our Schools*. Photograph: Susannah Ireland

“But reforms that helped to bring improvement have been poisoned by over-emphasis on autonomy and a devil-take-the-hindmost approach. Accountability has gone too far and become punitive.”

His own professional life is steeped in the old local education authority model – he was chief education officer (when such things existed) in Birmingham and Oxfordshire. He also led the [London Challenge](#), arguably one of the most successful education initiatives of the past three decades, and was a reformer who published exam results in Oxfordshire well before they were a national reality.

But, as the book painstakingly points out, schools in England now have too much central government control, an incoherent jumble of different academy chains and local authorities, exams with grading systems designed to write off a significant minority of children as failures, undervalued technical and vocational education, inadequate support for children with special needs, and performance measures that incentivise unethical behaviour, in particular exclusion and [“off-rolling”](#) of the most vulnerable pupils.

It's an accurate and disturbing picture – and should be a call to arms for anyone genuinely interested in effective policy-making. Brighouse and Waters' numerous solutions, which range from taxing private schools – to subsidise poorer children's education – to cracking down on admissions and exclusions “dirty tricks” and coaxing every school into some sort of local partnership trust (which sounds suspiciously like the mass academisation plan that had to be ditched by the Lib-Con coalition government), are logical and radical – so much so they seem unlikely to catch on, although Labour, with its current policy vacuum, might take note.

Attempting to tease out why such sensible and fair policy ideas may never see the light of day should be the question of the moment. The book sheds light on this, too, thanks to interviews with most of the education secretaries of the past three decades, plus a handful of Ofsted chiefs.



The former education secretary Michael Gove in 2011 announcing a review of the national schools curriculum. Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA Archive/PA Images

The problem is politics. When the former Labour prime minister Jim Callaghan made his famous [Ruskin speech in 1976](#) challenging the lack of accountability in education, in effect the starting point of reform, the secretary of state had only three powers over schools. Today he or she has more than 2,500.

Thousands of schools are now run from Whitehall through academy chains. Little real autonomy exists at a local level, and every head is at the mercy of whoever is in power and the appetite of Downing Street for dramatic change. So much so, that some professional interviewees were reluctant to be quoted for fear of the consequences.

The average life span of an education secretary is just over two years – enough time for a few “launches and logos”, according to the authors – and this has inevitably led to most simply tinkering with the direction of travel of their predecessors.

As the former Labour education secretary Charles Clarke explains, “realpolitik” interferes; ideas get abandoned or shoved into a “too difficult box” to be left to a successor, who then works through the same cycle. Dealing with the archaic system of grammar schools and the 11-plus test is just one example of this.

And while some education secretaries – such as Ken Baker, who ushered in an era of choice, league tables and inspections; David Blunkett, with his drive on standards; and Ed Balls, who widened his department’s focus to include children and families as well as schools – made a tangible difference, none really questioned the underlying problems with the system.

Talking to them for the book, “very few regretted anything they had done,” says Brighouse. “Most regretted things they hadn’t done and that they didn’t have more power. While all agreed that schools should be vehicles for greater equity, equality and social mobility, a lack of agreement about the

purpose of schooling makes it very hard to define what those aims actually mean in practice.”



The former Labour education secretary Charles Clarke: ‘realpolitik interferes’. Photograph: Martin Argles/The Guardian

And then there is Michael Gove. Even though he only answered questions from the authors in writing, and did express regret for the way he cancelled the [Building Schools for the Future](#) programme in 2010, the anecdotes of others are littered with his influence.

Whether it is Gove’s own assertion that “there is no such thing as a smooth revolution” (reform is by necessity untidy), or his former adviser Sam Freedman’s regret that more consensus was impossible because of Gove’s (and no doubt Dominic Cummings’s) penchant for waging a [public fight in the media](#), or the former Ofsted chief inspector Michael Wilshaw recounting that Gove did not want local authorities inspected because he wanted them to “wither on the vine”, Gove’s legacy is everywhere.

It has not been a positive one, conclude the authors. “Many people interviewed for the book hold Gove responsible for some of the fundamental problems with schooling today – the fractured system, high exclusions and unsuitable curriculum,” they write.

These are all problems Brighouse and Waters would seek to address at a post-Covid moment when people are yearning for what they describe as a “a new educational age – a time of hope, ambition and collaboration”.



The former Ofsted chief Sir Michael Wilshaw: Gove wanted local authorities to ‘wither on the vine’. Photograph: Felix Clay

But how to translate that yearning into real policy change? The book contains a telling anecdote from Brighouse’s days as the London schools commissioner, when he was asked by the then prime minister, Tony Blair, if there was anything he wanted to add to the London Challenge prospectus.

Brighouse’s suggestion that they should include something about the chaotic state of secondary school admissions in the capital was “greeted with an audible silence”, after which, he admits, he backed off the subject.

“I have no idea how often I spoke truth to power; I am not sure I did enough. I didn’t fight hard enough over admissions, and I am conscious now that I should have done more,” he says. “I have never felt that I am pleased with what I have achieved because we didn’t address admissions or exclusions and you see the results of that now in the children who are effectively forgotten by the system.”

This may explain why, amid all the “building back better” policy solutions that the book suggests, he instantly settles on a plan for the [“open school”](#), a parallel version of the Open University, as his top priority.

The open school would build on the pandemic’s lessons about digital learning and create a national virtual school to help offset disadvantage, include children who are out of school, and provide enhanced opportunities for all.

It would wrap around a system guided by very different principles from the ones we see today: a new consensus on the purpose of schooling, a national cross-party commission to take a balanced 10-year view of education policy, schools being judged in groups rather than alone, with inclusion and wellbeing incentivised as well as exam results. Naturally there would be an enhanced role for the local authorities, which would be responsible for holding the new partnerships to account, in effect restraining central government power.

Brighouse’s optimism is rooted in the parallels he sees between the moment of Callaghan’s Ruskin speech, a crucial starting point of the book’s journey, and today. “Everyone knew something had to change but it took a decade before the ideas were shaped into the [1988 Education Act](#),” he says.

“Change comes from a conjunction of individuals, ideas and an environment that is conducive,” he suggests, pointing to an example from his own local community about how this might work in practice. His wife, Liz, has long been an Oxfordshire county councillor and is now part of the [Fair Deal Alliance](#), a coalition cabinet of Labour, Liberal Democrats and the Greens.

In his fantasy future he sees a closer alliance between the opposition parties in favour of electoral reform and consensus on some big policy ideas, hopefully including some from the book.

“Today feels like 1976 when Callaghan made his speech. It took time, but change came in the end and this moment feels very similar, so even if it takes five to 10 years, we will have been happy to give these ideas a push and contributed to that.”

*About Our Schools* by Tim Brighouse and Mick Waters will be published on 7 January 2022 by Crown House

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[Yotam Ottolenghi recipes](#)[Food](#)

## A hearty start to the year: Yotam Ottolenghi's recipes for brothy winter soups



Yotam Ottolenghi's black-eyed peas with allspice and grilled onion salsa.  
Photograph: Louise Hagger/The Guardian. Food styling: Emily Kydd. Prop styling: Jennifer Kay. Food styling assistant: Valeria Russo.

The perfect sustenance: black-eyed peas with allspice, lamb noodles with sesame sprinkle, and hot-and-sour soup with cabbage and beansprouts

[Yotam Ottolenghi](#)

[@ottolenghi](#)

Sat 1 Jan 2022 04.30 EST

There are not many certainties in life, but one thing I do know is that any recipe column published on 1 January is going to be full of ideas for soups and broths. We all want dishes that sustain and nurture on day one of a shiny, new year, to warm our hands as much as our souls. And it's brothy soups I want right now, where the liquid element feels almost medicinal, and just what we need to power up and prepare for the year ahead.

## **Black-eyed peas with allspice and grilled onion salsa (pictured top)**

Here, the humble black-eyed pea is combined with heat, smoke and warming aromatics, and cooked low and slow, to leave you with a meal that is both nutritious and hearty with a seriously flavourful broth. You'll need to soak the beans overnight.

**Soak Overnight**

**Prep 20 min**

**Cook 1 hr 25 min**

**Serves 4**

**300g black-eyed peas**, soaked overnight in cold water to cover by 3cm and  $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp bicarbonate of soda

**3 tbsp olive oil**

**2 cinnamon sticks**

**4 fresh bay leaves**

**1 scotch bonnet chilli**, pierced with 2-3 small slits

**10 garlic cloves**, peeled and crushed

**2 tsp ground allspice**

**1 litre chicken stock**, or vegetable stock to make the dish vegan

## **Salt and black pepper**

**30g crispy fried onions**, shop-bought or homemade, chopped very roughly  
**1 tbsp coriander seeds**, toasted and roughly crushed in a mortar

For the grilled onion salsa

**2 red onions**, peeled and cut into 2cm-thick rounds (300g)  
**60ml olive oil**, plus extra for greasing  
**250g datterini (or cherry) tomatoes**, ideally a mix of red and yellow  
**4 tbsp (15g) roughly chopped parsley**  
**2-3 lemons**, 1 cut into wedges, to serve, the rest juiced, to get 2 tbsp

Heat the oven to 200C (180C fan)/390F/gas 6 and drain the soaked beans.

Put the oil, cinnamon, bay leaves and chilli in a medium-sized ovenproof cast-iron pan for which you have a lid, and set it over a medium-high heat. Once hot, add the garlic and cook, stirring, for a minute, until fragrant and lightly coloured. Stir in the allspice, cook for 20 seconds, then add the beans, stock, 200ml water and a teaspoon and a half of salt, and bring up to a simmer. Cover the pan, then transfer to the oven for 50 minutes, until the beans are soft but still retain their shape. Remove the lid, turn up the heat to 220C (200C fan)/425F/gas 7, then bake uncovered for 20 minutes more, so the liquid reduces slightly – it should still be quite brothy.

Meanwhile, make the salsa. Put a well-greased griddle pan on a high heat. Gently toss the onions in a bowl with a tablespoon and a half of oil and a pinch each of salt and pepper, then grill in the hot pan for four minutes on each side, until softened and nicely charred. Tip into a medium bowl, and roughly separate the rings. Toss the tomatoes with a half-tablespoon of oil, and grill for five minutes, turning regularly, until nicely charred and just starting to burst. Tip the tomatoes into the onion bowl, then add the parsley, lemon juice, the last two tablespoons of oil, a third of a teaspoon of salt and a good grind of pepper, and toss gently to combine.

In a small bowl, mix the fried onions and coriander seeds.

When the beans are ready, remove and discard the scotch bonnet, bay leaves and cinnamon; if you like, chop up half or all of the chilli and add it to the salsa, but beware: it is *very* hot.

Divide the beans between four bowls and top each serving with a large spoonful of salsa, a sprinkle of the fried onion mixture and a lemon wedge.

- UK readers: [click to buy these ingredients](#) from Ocado

## Lamb noodles with cumin and sesame sprinkle



Yotam Ottolenghi's lamb noodles with cumin and sesame sprinkle.

This broth is very comforting in its own right, without the noodles, and also works with plain rice instead. Make it up to a day ahead, if you want, not least because it tastes even better the next day. Add a few sliced fresh red chillies at the end, if you'd like some heat.

**Prep 20 min**

**Cook 2 hr 50 min**

**Serves 4**

**4 boned lamb necks (600g)**

**2 shallots, peeled and cut in half (100g)**

**7 garlic cloves, peeled**

**1 tbsp olive oil**

**30g coriander leaves**  
**1 cinnamon stick**  
**20g piece fresh ginger, peeled and roughly chopped**  
**3 star anise**  
**½ tsp black peppercorns**  
**2 tbsp Shaoxing rice wine**  
**Salt**  
**3 tbsp soy sauce**  
**4 tsp maple syrup**  
**4 noodle nests, cooked according to packet instructions**  
**1 lime, cut into quarters**

For the cumin and sesame sprinkle

**1 tbsp cumin seeds, toasted and lightly crushed**  
**1½ tbsp white sesame seeds, lightly toasted and slightly crushed**  
**¼ tsp flaked sea salt**

Put a large saute pan for which you have a lid on a high heat. Put the lamb, shallots and garlic on a tray and rub them all over with the oil. Sear the lamb in two batches for three minutes on each side, until nicely coloured, then set aside. Add the shallots and garlic to the hot pan, char for two to three minutes, stirring often, then set aside with the lamb. If there are lots of dark, burnt bits in the pan, wipe it clean.

Turn down the heat to medium and pour a litre and a half of boiling water into the pan. Chop the hard stems off the coriander and put these into the pan; save the leafy tops for later. Return the lamb, shallots and garlic to the pan, add the cinnamon, ginger, star anise, peppercorns, shaoxing wine and three-quarters of a teaspoon of salt, then cover and leave to simmer for two and a half hours, until the lamb is falling apart. Skim off and discard any froth that comes to the top while it's the cooking.

Meanwhile, put the cumin and sesame seeds in a mortar with the flaked sea salt, lightly grind until only partially broken up, then tip into a small bowl.

With a slotted spoon, carefully lift the lamb out of the broth and transfer to a tray. Put a clean tea towel in a large, fine-meshed sieve, set it over a large

bowl and strain the broth; discard the solids. Wipe clean the saute pan, pour in the sieved broth and keep warm on a low heat.

Using a fork, break up the lamb into large chunks. Put a large saute pan on a medium-high heat, add the soy sauce and maple syrup, and cook for three to five minutes, until bubbling and thickened. Return the lamb to the pan, toss gently to coat all over, then take off the heat.

Divide the broth and cooked noodles between four bowls, and arrange the lamb on top. Scatter over the coriander leaves, sprinkle a quarter-teaspoon of the cumin mix on top of each portion and serve with the rest in a small bowl on the side along with the lime wedges.

- UK readers: [click to buy these ingredients](#) from Ocado

## **Hot-and-sour soup with savoy cabbage and beansprouts**



Yotam Ottolenghi's hot-and-sour soup with savoy cabbage and beansprouts.

Sometimes, a light but nourishing soup is the only thing that will do, and this one ticks all the boxes without using very many ingredients. The cabbage

and beansprouts can be swapped for whatever vegetables you have to hand – just keep the net weight about the same.

**Prep 10 min**

**Cook 40 min**

**Serves 2**

**1 tbsp olive oil**

**4 spring onions**, trimmed, white and green parts cut into thin rounds and kept separate (70g)

**1 fresh makrut lime leaf**

**1 tbsp tomato paste**

**¼ tsp chilli flakes**

**1 litre vegetable stock**

**2½ tbsp tamarind paste**

**2½ tbsp soy sauce**

**10g fresh ginger**, peeled and thinly sliced

**½ tsp palm sugar**

**Salt**

**100g beansprouts**

**100g savoy cabbage leaves**, thinly sliced

**1 red chilli**, thinly sliced, pith and seeds discarded if you prefer less heat

Put a medium saute pan for which you have a lid on a medium-high heat. Once hot, add the olive oil, spring onion whites and lime leaf, saute for two to three minutes, until softened, then add the tomato paste and cook, stirring, for two minutes more, until the oil turns red; make sure the paste doesn't go dark, or the soup will turn out bitter.

Stir in the chilli flakes, stock, tamarind, soy sauce, ginger, palm sugar and an eighth of a teaspoon of salt, cover and bring up to a simmer. Turn down the heat to medium-low and leave to cook for 25 minutes.

Add the beansprouts to the pot, and cook for another five minutes, just until they have softened.

Divide the shredded cabbage between four bowls, ladle the hot soup over it and serve topped with the spring onion greens and the sliced red chilli.

- UK readers: [click to buy these ingredients](#) from Ocado
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## 2022.01.01 - Coronavirus

- [Live Covid: limits on freedom in UK 'last resort', says health secretary; India reports more than 22,000 infections](#)
- [UK Case numbers climb to almost 190,000 on last day of 2021](#)
- [Germany Optimism over Omicron as Europe dampens new year revelry](#)
- [Australia Hospitals resort to flying nurses in from overseas amid crisis](#)

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# Today's Covid news, as it happened: US Omicron uptick driven by young; England reports another record rise in cases

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## Coronavirus

# UK Covid case numbers climb to almost 190,000 on last day of 2021

Friday's figures also show 203 deaths as ONS estimates one in 25 people in England had Covid before Christmas

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An NHS 'grab a jab' bus in Slough town centre. Photograph: Maureen McLean/Rex/Shutterstock

*[Richard Adams](#)*

Fri 31 Dec 2021 11.55 EST

The number of confirmed Covid cases in the UK continued to rise on the last day of 2021, with a new record of 189,846 reported in the previous 24 hours.

It follows two consecutive days when the number of new cases was above 180,000, with 189,213 reported on Thursday and 183,037 on Wednesday – although the latter included a backlog in some nations of cases recorded before and during the Christmas period. Experts said the latest figures are likely to include the first infections arising from people socialising on Christmas Day and Boxing Day.

NHS England also revealed there were 2,370 hospital admissions with Covid in England on 29 December, a 90% week-on-week increase and the highest daily total since 29 January. In the last winter wave, admissions peaked at 4,134 on 12 January.

Experts say the daily case figures do not include reinfections and not everyone who is infected has symptoms and takes a test, suggesting the true number of infections is likely to be higher.

Friday's figures reported 203 people having died within 28 days of a positive Covid test. Thursday's data had 332 recorded deaths, a steep rise from 57 on Wednesday, explained in part by NHS England not reporting hospital deaths since 24 December.

The number of Covid patients in hospital in England increased to 12,395 on Friday, from 11,452 the day before. A total of 859 people were in hospital in Scotland with Covid as of Thursday, up from 810 the day before.

According to a [new estimate](#) on Friday from the Office for National Statistics (ONS), one in 25 people in England had Covid before Christmas, including one in 15 in London.

Based on swabs collected from randomly selected households in England, the ONS said an estimated 4% of the community had Covid in the week ending 23 December – equating to about 2,024,700 people. The week before, [about one in 35 people were estimated](#) to be infected.

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## [Coronavirus](#)

# German optimism over Omicron as Europe dampens new year revelry

Covid expert hopeful for ‘relatively normal’ winter 2022-23 but prevalence limits celebrations across continent

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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Pedestrians in Bremen, in northern Germany, where Omicron has become the dominant variant. Photograph: Focke Strangmann/EPA

*[Philip Oltermann](#) in Berlin and [Jon Henley](#) in Paris*

Fri 31 Dec 2021 11.04 EST

Germany’s leading coronavirus expert has expressed optimism that his country could expect a “relatively normal” winter in 2022-23 as Europe

prepared to ring in the new year in muted fashion, with many countries limiting celebrations.

As the highly transmissible [Omicron variant](#) fuels a record-breaking surge in Covid infections across the continent, many governments have curtailed mass public gatherings and either closed or imposed curfews on nightclubs.

But Christian Drosten, who heads the institute of virology at Berlin's Charité hospital, said on Friday that data from other countries suggesting Omicron infections were milder could take the pandemic into an "endemic situation" more comparable to a common cold or flu virus.

"Of course, it is a good situation if you have a virus that no longer makes you ill but transmits easily so that it can seek out and find all of the immunity gaps among the population and still trigger regular updates in immunity," Drosten said.

Nonetheless, the coronavirus expert said he expected indoor mask-wearing mandates and an updated top-up dose of a vaccine to be necessary to protect vulnerable people over the course of the coming year.

Germany was at a particular disadvantage because it had a higher percentage than other EU countries of people, especially over 60, who had been neither vaccinated nor infected with the virus, he said, adding: "Those are of course seriously at risk."

## [Graphic](#)

In his first new year's address, the [German chancellor, Olaf Scholz](#), will urge those citizens who have sat out the vaccination drive to change take the jab. As of Friday, 71.2% of Germany is considered fully vaccinated, the [lowest vaccination rate in western Europe](#) other than the UK and Switzerland.

"It's clear to all of us: the pandemic is not over", Scholz said in a pre-released transcript of a speech that will be televised on Friday evening. "I appeal to all of you: let yourself be vaccinated."

After days of sinking infection rates, Germany's disease control agency reported an increased seven-day incidence of 214.9 for every 100,000

people, with 41,270 new infections and 323 deaths reported in the last 24 hours.

Although deaths have not risen as fast as Omicron infections, fuelling hopes the new variant is milder, many countries in [Europe](#) and around the world have imposed New Year's Eve restrictions to help prevent healthcare systems from being overwhelmed.

Traditional firework displays have been called off at sites from the Acropolis in Athens to the Champs-Elysées in Paris, while a ban on large gatherings in Berlin means once again Silvester cannot be celebrated at the Brandenburg Gate.

Social gatherings across Germany have been limited to 10 people since 28 December, with no exception for New Year's Eve, while nightclubs are closed and entry to non-essential shops, restaurants and bars is restricted to fully vaccinated people.

In [France](#), the prime minister, Jean Castex, called on citizens to act responsibly by limiting the number of guests at parties, testing before attending them and respecting social distancing, but stopped short of imposing a curfew, as was the case last year.

Greece has banned music in commercial venues for the night, while in Italy, although no rules have been mandated for private New Year's Eve gatherings, mass outdoor events have been banned and nightclubs will stay closed until the end of January.

In [Belgium](#), communal celebrations such as the new year fireworks display in Brussels have been called off, and restaurants and bars must shut their doors at 11pm. The country's nightclubs were already closed.

The Netherlands' national lockdown, in force since 19 December, remains, with non-essential shops and bars and restaurants closed until 14 January – although people are allowed four visitors on New Year's Eve rather than the usual limit of two.

In [Austria](#), unvaccinated people – currently required to stay at home except for essential reasons – may join gatherings of up to 10 people for new year. For larger parties of up to 25, everyone must be vaccinated. Nightclubs and apres-ski venues remain closed until at least 10 January.

Bars and nightclubs were forced to close from Christmas Day and outdoor gatherings have been limited to 10 people on New Year's Eve in Portugal, while in Finland bars and restaurants in many regions will have to close at 6pm and limit numbers.

With countries around the world urgently seeking to increase the number of people to have received a third booster shot of a Covid-19 vaccine, [Israel](#) on Friday began giving an additional jab to people with weakened immunity.

The health ministry approved a fourth shot for immunocompromised people on Thursday and heart transplant patients were among the first to get this – to be followed by retirement home residents and geriatric patients.

“This decision was taken for fear of an increase in cases of contamination in such institutions that would endanger the health of these people,” the health ministry said.

The prime minister, Naftali Bennett, said Israel, which was among the first countries in the world to offer a third shot to the general public, will be a trailblazer for the fourth jab. “Israel will lead the way,” he said.

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## Health

# NSW hospitals resort to flying nurses in from overseas as staff are begged to take extra shifts amid Covid crisis

**Exclusive:** Leaked memo from major hospital lays bare desperate measures as it ‘can’t keep up with exposures and positive staff’

- [Follow our Covid live blog for the latest updates](#)
- [Australia’s Covid surge in four charts: NSW now has one of world’s highest infection rates](#)
- [What are the new rules on Covid isolation, close contacts and testing?](#)
- [Vaccine rollout tracker; cases and data tracker](#)



NSW health workers who are close contacts will be allowed back to work before completing isolation, if they are considered essential. Photograph: Jenny Evans/Getty Images

Elias Visontay

@EliasVisontay

Fri 31 Dec 2021 14.00 EST

Critically understaffed public hospitals in [New South Wales](#) are planning to fly in nurses from overseas, a leaked memo reveals, as managers beg staff to cancel leave and take on extra shifts amid surging Covid cases.

It comes as a state health policy change will allow health workers who are close contacts to be recalled to their jobs, the Guardian understands, before completing their seven-day isolation period, if they are considered essential. More than 2,000 health workers are currently isolating due to Covid exposure.

At St George hospital in Sydney's south, the burden of increased hospital presentations and isolation orders was laid bare in a grim end-of-year email sent to all nursing staff, pleading for them to cancel leave.

The internal email, obtained by Guardian Australia, warns the hospital “can't seem to keep up with the exposures and positive staff”, despite concerted efforts to source nurses.

“We have commenced the process for overseas recruitment,” the email stated.

The last resort had been taken after managers approached more than seven local nursing and midwifery labour agencies, an effort which yielded just one additional registered nurse.

Additionally, the hospital had approached private hospitals for workers and pulled back secondments, but had not been able to staff its wards sufficiently.

“Across the facility, the patients numbers in the departments are unprecedented,” the email stated, noting the hospital had been forced to reopen its second Covid ward again.

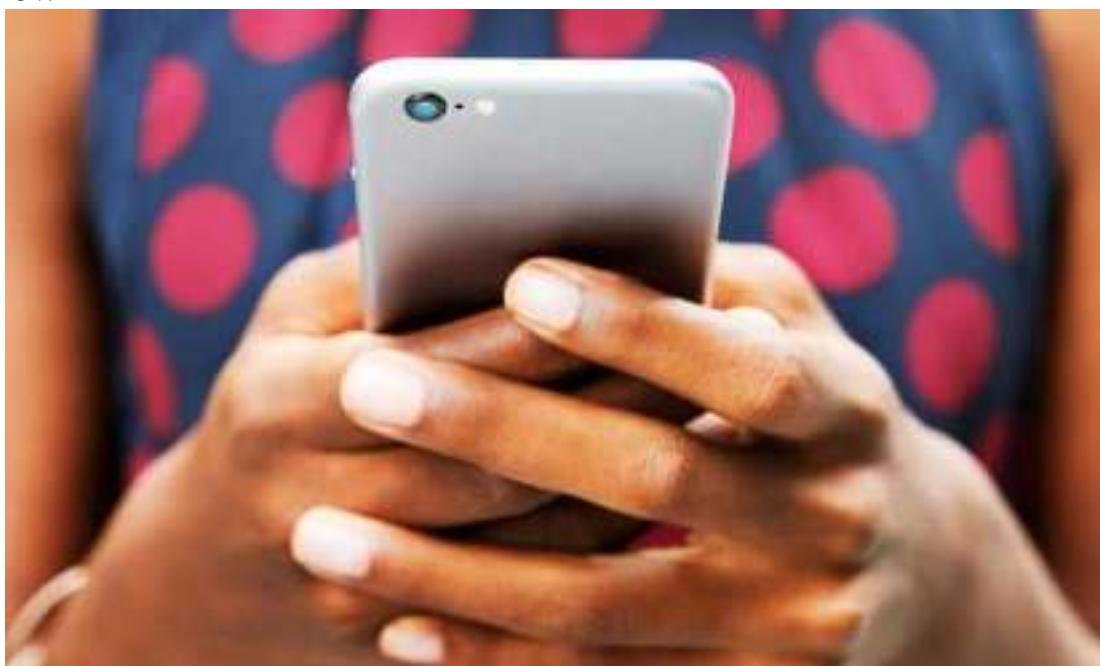
“It doesn’t really seem quite right to be wishing a happy new year,” the email said.

The NSW Nurses and Midwives Association general secretary, Brett Holmes, said hospitals were going to “extraordinary lengths” and managers were “turning themselves inside out trying to find staff”. “Overseas recruitment is a glimmer of hope right now,” he said.

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Photograph: Tim Robberts/Stone RF

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At St Vincent's hospital in Sydney's east, the facility's executive director, Kevin Luong, was reported to have sent an email to staff on Thursday, warning the hospital was in an "extremely vulnerable" position.

"Whilst we are trying our best to work around this, we are beginning to run out of options to maintain safe nursing staffing levels," the [email said](#), according to the ABC.

Guardian Australia has seen an email sent to St Vincent's staff pleading for nurses to work shifts on New Year's Eve and New Year's Day, offering a \$250 bonus on top of usual penalties as an incentive to work. The offer was extended for nurses in admin roles.

"Our current staffing vacancies in nursing is unprecedented and at crisis level," the email said.

The internal email also explained the hospital was "changing our model of care" to focus on emergency department presentations and ICU patients in the first instance. The email urged any nurses who had patients who could be suitable for discharge to do so as soon as possible.

Guardian Australia has also been told of concerning staffing ratios in the emergency department at the Royal Prince Alfred hospital in inner-Sydney, as well as at various hospitals across the city.

On Friday, NSW's Covid outbreak became one of the fastest growing in the world, with daily cases almost doubling to 21,151 on New Year's Eve. Six people died with Covid.

Hospitalisations in NSW grew to 832 on Friday, having more than doubled in the week since 382 were in hospitals the previous Friday. Intensive care hospitalisations were rising steadily, with 69 people in ICU beds – 39 of whom were unvaccinated.

A spokeswoman for the South Eastern Sydney local health district confirmed it had “approached several nursing agencies to recruit additional staff to join our healthcare team”, and that it was “standard practice” for an LHD to organise its own staffing, including choosing to recruit internationally.

Earlier, the premier, [Dominic Perrottet](#), claimed his state’s health system “remains strong”, and said the national close contact definition changes agreed to on Thursday would “put downward pressure in that space”.

“We have the best health system in the country, arguably the best in the world, and that is because of years of investment,” he said.

“We’ve seen a significant increase in case numbers, but what is pleasing is that our health system remains strong,” Perrottet said.



NSW premier Dominic Perrottet speaks to the media during a Covid update on New Year’s Eve. Photograph: Bianca de Marchi/AAP

However, Holmes said union members were “copping abuse” because patients were presenting to hospital expecting a smoother experience because of how Perrottet was describing hospital pressure.

“Patients and family members are presenting to hospital expecting a robust, high-functioning health system and become extremely agitated when they experience the widespread staffing crisis first-hand,” he said.

“Our members want the NSW premier and health minister to admit the current situation in our hospitals is dire and call on the public not to abuse health staff as the system struggles under increased demand,” Holmes said.

When asked by Guardian Australia how current pressures in NSW hospitals compared with the worst of the Delta outbreak, Holmes said “I think it’s there now”, noting that during lockdown, presentations for illnesses from car accidents and other life events diminished, but were occurring now.

“We’re now fully open, all of those normal everyday presentations are still occurring, and yet we’re still seeing large numbers of patients coming into the health system with Covid – as a result of this government’s decision to let it rip,” Holmes said.

Holmes said the current issues in hospitals were a combination of a surge in Covid cases, combined with Covid exposures forcing staff into isolation.

“Our members are going above and beyond, shift after shift. Despite everything that is being thrown their way. Enough is enough. The government cannot continue piling more upon nurses and midwives and ignore the conditions they are dealing with.”

The chief health officer, Kerry Chant, noted that while hospitalisations had more than doubled in a week, some of those recorded in the hospitalisation figure were in hospital for other reasons, and that this phenomenon was occurring given the extent of the spread of Omicron.

The NSW Ambulance commissioner, Dominic Morgan, also appeared at the premier’s Covid update on Friday and warned residents, even those who are Covid-positive, to reserve calling 000 for serious symptoms and illness.

He said one in three people who called ambulances currently were not deemed high enough priority for transport to hospital, and said people calling for PCR results and other non-emergencies “tie up our emergency

medical call takers and divert us away from the cardiac arrests, the chokings, the drownings”.

*Do you know more about pressure in the healthcare system? Contact [elias.visontay@theguardian.com](mailto:elias.visontay@theguardian.com). You can remain anonymous.*

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## 2022.01.01 - Opinion

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- How can Britain become a 'great cycling nation' when it's so scary to ride a bike?
- The Ghislaine Maxwell case raises a question some may think naive: why?
- Haiti's New Year's Day soup has made headlines. But let's not be naive about its symbolism

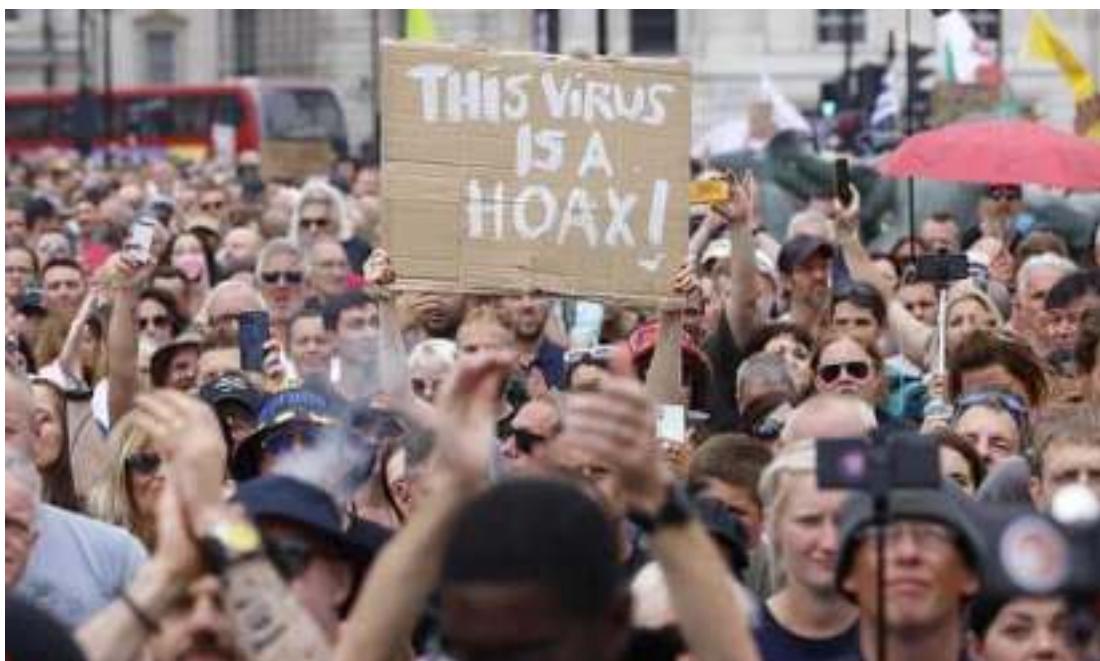
## OpinionCoronavirus

# I've been lied about and others get death threats. Covid has shown the power of misinformation

[Devi Sridhar](#)

Being a public health expert during the pandemic has been disheartening. When the next one comes, we must do better

- Prof Devi Sridhar is chair of global public health at the University of Edinburgh



‘One of the most unpredictable aspects of the past two years has been the rise of widespread misinformation.’ Covid protesters gather in Trafalgar Square, London, July 2021. Photograph: Mark Thomas/REX/Shutterstock

Sat 1 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

Before the experience of the past two years of Covid-19, I had assumed that a deadly viral outbreak would be quickly contained by governments. Especially in rich countries with good health systems, public health infrastructure, economic support packages and trust in public institutions. I thought there would be general consensus on what needed to be done, and that people would get their information directly from experts working in universities and public health authorities. I mean, who would want to risk getting a deadly infection?

Now, I wonder if an even more deadly virus – like a pandemic-ready version of Mers, a coronavirus [which killed 20%](#) of those it infected in South Korea before being contained in 2015 – would be treated the same way as Covid-19. Would thousands of people show up at protests because they had read on Facebook that Mers was a hoax? Would there be similar scenarios at every pandemic after that? After my experience of actively working through the Covid-19 pandemic, these possibilities seem horrifyingly possible.

One of the most unpredictable aspects of the past two years, and one of the most disheartening, has been the rise of [widespread misinformation](#). The line between facts and lies has disintegrated. Years of experience in infectious disease control and a doctorate or medical degree quickly became equivalent to the influencer on YouTube or Facebook who has garnered hundreds of thousands of followers by promoting exciting-but-untrue “facts”.

You can see this clearly in the rise of anti-vaccine sentiment, where popular conspiracists share stories about alleged side-effects such as how vaccines are microchipping our bodies, or changing our DNA, or poisoning us. This has gone far beyond social media chatter and personal resistance, becoming an [aggressive real-world campaign](#) that has led to protests at hospitals, health workers being attacked and scientists being mailed death threats.

I’ve personally learned that lies spread faster than truth. People have written entire blogs attacking my expertise and sharing clear falsehoods – such as the claim that I have no published scientific papers, or that I’m a global plant by the World Economic Forum or Gates Foundation, or that I am a philosopher rather than a scientist (because I have a DPhil from Oxford).

It's easy to laugh at such obvious untruths, until it sinks in that this clickbait gets shared thousands of times. People believe it, and then they too share it. And there is no way to counter every single falsehood. These lies carry more weight among some internet communities than the fact that Edinburgh University evaluated my expertise and granted me a professorship.

I always try to counter these claims by sharing my funding sources, being transparent about what data I'm using for my analyses and advice, and acknowledging that while I might get things wrong, I always have tried to conduct myself with integrity and academic professionalism.

But this isn't always enough. There are many people voicing strong opinions who aren't constrained the same way. Lots of politicians and leaders are seeking popularity, often by actively opposing basic public health measures. There are social media celebrities who build followings by sharing emotionally appealing lies. There are even academics who staked a claim with a certain camp early in the pandemic, and haven't shifted their thinking despite new tools such as vaccines, mass testing and antivirals becoming available.

The power of misinformation can be seen in the number of people appearing in hospitals, desperately sick with Covid-19 and struggling to breathe, who still say it is a hoax, and don't believe that this is an actual virus (like many other viruses) that infects humans and makes us ill. A basic fact that somehow is harder for them to believe than the idea that this is a global conspiracy for government takeover of citizens.

How is someone supposed to sift facts and real data from manufactured and glitzy stories on social media? There is little to no regulation of quality of data or sources on the internet. Some of the small lessons I've learned are to explain science clearly and simply so that it is comprehensible to everyone, and to try to reach people in small groups or at an individual level; fighting misinformation on social media is a losing battle. Important too is for experts to engage with TV, radio and newspapers, as mass media still carries considerable influence.

Now is the time to understand and address these problems. [I've written a book](#) – out next year – about the experience of advising government and trying to communicate the fast-moving science and policy of the pandemic to the public, and hopefully how to do everything better next time. Reflecting and thinking ahead isn't a theoretical exercise because we know that the next pandemic is coming – whether it is Mers or Sars or something else – and there may not be a quiet time to do it. Like everything else in the past two years, we have to learn these lessons as we go.

- Prof Devi Sridhar is chair of global public health at the University of Edinburgh
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## OpinionCycling

# How can Britain become a ‘great cycling nation’ when it’s so scary to ride a bike?

[Adam Becket](#)

I cycled 5,000 miles this year, and the driver abuse, intimidation and terrible infrastructure has to change

- Adam Becket writes for Cycling Weekly



‘It is simply accepted that you take your life in your hands every time you get in the saddle.’ A cyclist in London. Photograph: Scott Hortop Images/Alamy

Sat 1 Jan 2022 03.00 EST

There is a pothole on the Bristol Road just north of Nailsea, north Somerset, which I cycled over at about 30mph back in June. It casually blew out both my tyres; somehow I managed to skid, on my two flats, to a stop. It is in moments like this that your vulnerability as a cyclist comes into focus, and you realise how little there is between you and death: a bit of plastic on your head, a thin bit of Lycra, your wits and skill on the bike.

Britain's roads are [in a terrible state](#) thanks to austerity. According to the RAC, 6% of B and C roads [are in need of repairs](#), a proportion that has remained the same for the past five years. It is bad for cars, but even worse for cyclists riding in the gutter.

One thing you quickly learn when out riding, as I have been for more than 300 hours this year, is you have to pay attention. Vehicles can appear at any point and will do anything. I have been pushed into hedges by two-tonne SUVs, almost T-boned by hatchbacks, forced to dice with death in narrow bike lanes. It is simply accepted that this is what cycling is: taking your life in your hands every time you get in the saddle.

I have not always been a Cyclist with a capital C. I used my bike to get to school, to commute to work in London, to just get around. That all changed thanks to the pandemic. I suddenly had nothing to do and seemingly endless time to explore new places by bike.

I found that cycling was not only something to occupy my time, or even just to keep me fit; it benefited my mental health enormously. Last year I cycled 4,039 miles around Southampton and then Bristol; this year I reached 5,000 miles, mostly in the south-west. I have been to Wales, to Cheddar Gorge and the New Forest on my steed. It truly is the best way to explore, to understand the geography of a place. Pacing along country lanes, almost at one with nature, never gets old. The freedom that comes with my bike also opens up my mind. It is not too much of a stretch to say I might not have survived the pandemic without it.

As thrilling as it can be, road cycling in the UK is still incredibly perilous, and there is evidence the pandemic has made matters worse. New data from

the Department for Transport showed that [89 cyclists](#) lost their lives on rural roads in 2020, compared with 60 the previous year.

Britain is dominated by the private car – but it doesn’t have to be this way. Last year during the height of the first lockdown, [Boris Johnson said](#) that he would usher in a “golden age” for cycling: £2bn was promised, with £250m of that forming part of an emergency “active travel” fund to be used by councils to build “protected space for cycling”. Cycling was so much nicer during those halcyon days of spring and summer 2020, when cycle lanes were temporarily installed on largely empty roads, and active travel seemed to be a genuine priority.

Comparatively, though, [£27bn](#) was put towards roadbuilding in the 2020 budget, which includes 50 projects, from a tunnel on the A303 near Stonehenge to a Lower Thames Crossing linking Kent and Essex. While this investment was reviewed thanks to the pandemic, it is clear where the Conservative government’s priorities lie.

The truth is that cycling infrastructure is still seen as something to be tacked on. It is a token gesture towards a greener and healthier country; often as weak as a painted white bicycle on the asphalt. These drawings offer surprisingly little protection against the SUV roaring past you at 60mph. I have lost track of the amount of times a driver has had a go at me for holding them up, or not pulling over – for simply existing. It is all too usual for someone to pass me so close that I wobble, and all I can do is shout expletives into the wind. Cyclists are forced to share the road space with everyone else, and are then abused, intimidated and even spat at – as I have been three times this year – just for having the temerity to be precariously occupying a tiny amount of that shared space.

How can we become a “great cycling nation”, as Grant Shapps put it in May 2020, when it is so scary to ride a bike? It is fine for me to pontificate about all the benefits of cycling, but without the provisions to ride safely, many will never try it. [Cycling](#) isn’t the preferred activity for millions in the Netherlands because it is a flat country: it is because there has been consistent investment in infrastructure there. According to the 2018 book Building the Cycling City, the Dutch government spends £22 per person, a year, on cycling – 15 times the amount spent in England. The Netherlands

has 35,000km (21,750 miles) of fully separated cycle lanes – infrastructure that separates the motor vehicle from the bike, and both from pedestrians at the same time.

We need more people on bikes. For the sake of the environment, obviously, but also for the sake of public health. My addiction to pedalling is not going to abate anytime soon – I am hooked now – but cycling needs to be taken seriously if we are to achieve a better world. The bicycle is an emancipatory machine, and it should be safe for everyone to use one on our roads.

- Adam Becket is digital staff writer for Cycling Weekly
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**OpinionGhislaine Maxwell**

## **The Ghislaine Maxwell case raises a question some may think naive: why?**

[Jonathan Freedland](#)



Faced with profound human wickedness, the most basic question of all is the one we rarely ask



Ghislaine Maxwell and Jeffrey Epstein. Photograph: SDNY/Zuma Press Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

Fri 31 Dec 2021 11.40 EST

The Ghislaine Maxwell case raises so many questions, and yet scarcely discussed is the one that perhaps matters most. Naturally, there's huge interest in whether Maxwell, [convicted this week](#) of recruiting and grooming teenage girls for sex with her one-time boyfriend Jeffrey Epstein, will seek to reduce her sentence by naming names – opening up the pair's notorious [little black book](#) and telling prosecutors who else among the rich and powerful abused the vulnerable minors Maxwell trafficked for sex.

In Britain, much of that interest focuses on Epstein's longtime pal, Prince Andrew, who was so close to the couple he invited them on visits to [Balmoral](#), Sandringham and Windsor: it's lucky the [prince doesn't sweat](#), because if he did, he might be drenched now. So far he has refused to answer US investigators' questions – not for his own sake, you understand, but according to multiple reports, to save the Queen from embarrassment. Because a 61-year-old man hiding behind his 95-year-old mother would not be in the least bit mortifying.

There are other questions, such as: how many others enabled the travelling child abuse ring that Epstein and Maxwell operated, turning a blind eye to what was surely obvious? Or: when else would the BBC respond to the conviction of a child sex offender by interviewing a [brother of the offender](#) who refused to accept the verdict of the court? And how come that Today programme interview with Ian Maxwell came so soon after the BBC had given a platform to [one of Epstein's lawyers](#), presenting him as if he were merely a neutral expert?

All those questions matter, and yet the one that preys on my mind is more timeless. It's the question that arises in all such cases of human cruelty yet which one hesitates to ask, lest the inquiry seem naive: why?

The coverage of Maxwell has probed that a bit, suggesting for example that [Ghislaine Maxwell](#) was conditioned, as the daughter of the publishing magnate Robert Maxwell, to cater to the whims of a monstrous man, and simply transferred her allegiance, and her service, from one monster to another. Growing up surrounded by wealth and power, where the deference of officialdom was taken for granted, would have had its effect too. Ghislaine Maxwell may well have assumed that people like her and Epstein were granted a special kind of impunity, that they could break the laws that restrained the appetites of lesser mortals, because for most of her life that had indeed been the case.

And yet, both those answers are unsatisfying as explanations. There are plenty of abusers who did not grow up with either a Maxwell-style father or Maxwell-level wealth and, conversely, there are people whose upbringings were comparable to Ghislaine Maxwell's but who did not go on to commit terrible crimes.

So the why question lingers, just as it did in sharper and more horrific form at least twice in the last month alone. December 2021 began with convictions for the father and stepmother of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes in a case so appalling, I confess at the time I could barely read accounts of it. The six-year-old was subjected to a [regime of sustained torture](#) which was, incredibly, filmed by those who inflicted it. The little boy was made to stand in isolation for up to 14 hours at a time, without anything to eat or drink. He

was beaten. To punish him, his father took the football shirts he loved and cut them to shreds in front of him. Perhaps most unbearable of all, the jury was shown footage of a weak and frail Arthur shortly before his death saying: “No one loves me. No one is going to feed me.”

When the man and woman guilty of destroying Arthur’s brief life were found guilty, there was revulsion, of course – and on Friday their sentences were referred to the court of appeal for being too lenient – but the public conversation moved without pause for breath to the policy implications. There was intense debate about the state of children’s services, about the damage done by austerity, about target-driven culture, about the recruitment and retention of social workers and so on. But what was missing was a much less sophisticated question. Why would two people do such terrible things to a defenceless child? How could a father cause such pain to his own flesh and blood?

There was a similar reflex 11 days later, following the verdicts in the equally soul-draining case of Star Hobson, a child, a baby really, who died at just 16 months, having been punched to death by her mother’s partner as her mother did nothing to save her. Once again, the pair filmed their months of cruelty against the little girl, apparently finding the videos amusing enough to send to friends. And yet the immediate talk was not of how two people could do such a thing, but of a local “child safeguarding practice review” and whether control of children’s services should belong with the local council or the Department for Education.

I understand the impulse to concentrate on these institutional, bureaucratic issues. The assumption is that there will always be people capable of horrendous brutality, that that fact will never change, and so the sensible focus of our attention should be on prevention. I get that. And yet the sheer speed with which we move to technocratic answers, barely even asking the harder human questions, begins to look like displacement activity. It’s as if we can’t bring ourselves to contemplate the puzzle of what humans are capable of, because we have no idea what we’d say.

Earlier, God-fearing generations did not find this so difficult. Nor do those who still have traditional faith. They have recourse to a vocabulary that

includes the notion of evil and wickedness and that allows them to talk about it. But those words don't trip so easily off the secular tongue.

Instead, we look for explanations in psychology or economics, assuming, to adapt [Stephen Sondheim's lyric](#), that if people are depraved it's because they're deprived, whether of love or money. That view persists. There was an echo of it in [the closing argument](#) from Maxwell's defence lawyer, when she asked "why an Oxford-educated, proper English woman would suddenly agree to facilitate sex abuse of minors". Only the poor or poorly educated behave badly.

We can see the flaw in such reasoning, even before you get to the insult it delivers to all those who endured great privation, emotional or material, without becoming abusers. And yet, the absence of easy answers does not give us a licence to stop asking hard questions. We need to be able to stare wicked acts and evil deeds in the face, rather than to comfort ourselves that they exist solely as functions of failed systems, errors that could be eliminated given the right policy tweak.

This need not be a bleak endeavour. I think of Julie K Brown, the Miami Herald reporter without whose fearless [pursuit of Epstein's crimes](#) this week's reckoning might never have come. I think of the courage of the victims, who kept up the fight for justice at great cost. Unfathomable evil is part of the human story, but so too is unimaginable good.

- Jonathan Freedland is a Guardian columnist
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## OpinionHaiti

# Haiti's New Year's Day soup has made headlines. But let's not be naive about its symbolism

Lyonel Trouillot

Sharing soup joumou on 1 January represents what Haitians bring to the world – but remembering that inequality prevails is arguably more important

- [Culture in a bowl: Haiti's joumou soup awarded protected status by Unesco](#)



Soup joumou was awarded protected cultural status by Unesco last year. But it is a tradition that many Haitians cannot afford. Photograph: Unesco

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Sat 1 Jan 2022 04.15 EST

Whispers. Curfews. Never-ending military parades and shows of arms. Opponents' bodies exposed for children to see as some sort of macabre art. And always, that nasal voice of "Papa Doc", [François Duvalier](#), chanting on all radio stations. Those were the days of my childhood under a dictator in Haiti.

But on 1 January, Independence Day, there were three things that made a difference.

Children in domestic service would visit their godmother and godfathers' houses, where an envelope containing a few *piastres* (money) was waiting for them, probably the only gift they would receive during the year.

Patriotic verses and folkloric songs slipped into the official ceremonies. A touch of art between long and scary diatribes against "the enemy" and unconditional pledges of allegiance to the "chief".

The third was the "joumou", a soup traditionally shared on the first day of a new year.

At the time, the soup only meant to me that my parents had not made new friends. The same faces were invited to eat it together every year: a very tall judge, a one-eyed lawyer who claimed to be able to communicate with the dead, and selected members of the larger family.

When I was old enough to invite people to my place to share the 1 January soup joumou, I realised it was a difficult decision. I too had a very short list of people, with few changes from one year to another. I became my parents – no new friends, which was understandable if by “friends” one means people with whom you have shared ordeals and hopes, in the company of whom you feel not only happy but safe. [Soup](#) joumou, even for a confirmed atheist, is the centre of a sacred gathering. It would be among your worst memories to remember you shared the soup joumou with someone who was, in fact, a traitor.

Between eight and 10 in the morning when it is served, soup joumou is a symbol of what we, as Haitians, bring to the world. Against the savagery of colonialism and modern slavery, we created [Haiti](#), our language, and with it goods, ideas, ways of being, art and artefacts.

What is soup joumou to me personally? I do not ask myself. The great poet René Philoctète wrote a beautiful poem about the questions he does not ask himself: “why I stay here, why I do the things I do”. The answer is too simple: because that is the way of being myself. Without my soup joumou, I would feel odd or incomplete.

Now that everybody seems to want to talk about soup joumou, since its [international recognition](#), the lack of confirmed historical references about its origins leaves the door open to recreations of the beginning of the tradition.

But one thing, at least, is for sure – lots of Haitians, descendants of its creators, cannot afford it. We should not forget that the elites and oligarchies – with the complicity of dominant capitalist states – derailed a revolution of modern times and made of Haiti a country in which [social injustice](#), economic exploitation and cultural exclusion prevails.

Let us not be naive and make soup joumou the symbol of a togetherness that barely exists.

The soup is waiting, but a true national feast celebrating equality among Haitians is yet to come.

*Lyonel Trouillot is a Haitian novelist and poet*

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**Prince Andrew**

## **Giuffre lawyers seek details on Prince Andrew's claimed inability to sweat**

Royal's legal team say some of the disclosure requests in Virginia Giuffre lawsuit are 'overbroad and oppressive'



Prince Andrew denies Virginia Giuffre's claims that he sexually assaulted her when she was a teenager. Photograph: Lindsey Parnaby/AFP/Getty Images

*Sarah Marsh  
@sloumash*

Fri 31 Dec 2021 10.28 EST

Lawyers representing a woman who has accused [Prince Andrew](#) of sexual abuse are demanding that he hand over documents explaining why he does not sweat.

Virginia Giuffre's legal team have requested a wealth of information from Andrew's lawyers in response to his [BBC Newsnight interview](#) in 2019 when he said he visited a Pizza Express on the day of the claimed sexual encounter.

Giuffre is suing the Queen's son for allegedly sexually assaulting her when she was a teenager. She claims she was trafficked by the disgraced financier Jeffrey Epstein to have sex with the duke, and was pictured with the royal and his friend Ghislaine Maxwell during the period when the alleged intercourse is said to have taken place.

Andrew has denied all the allegations.

In the Newsnight interview, Andrew claimed he never got sweaty on a dancefloor with Giuffre in 2001, an argument used as evidence that he had never met her.

Giuffre's lawyers said in court documents that they want Prince Andrew to give them information about his "alleged medical inability to sweat".

"If Prince Andrew truly has no documents concerning his communications with Maxwell or Epstein, his travel to Florida, New York, or various locations in London, his alleged medical inability to sweat, or anything that would support the alibis he gave during his BBC interview, then continuing with discovery will not be burdensome to him at all," the documents state.

Andrew claimed that he did not sweat because he had an "overdose of adrenaline in the Falklands war, when I was shot at ... it was almost impossible for me to sweat."

In the court documents, Giuffre's lawyers also ask for information from the royal including any documents around "allegations of sexual abuse" or "extramarital sex" made against the duke.

This week, [Maxwell was found guilty](#) on five of six charges for her involvement in Epstein's sexual abuse of teenage girls. Prosecutors said Maxwell "preyed on vulnerable young girls, manipulated them and served

them up to be sexually abused.” She is expected to receive a significant prison term, and is expected to appeal.

The documents filed by Giuffre’s lawyers include a list of what they want from Andrew during the process of discovery, a pre-trial procedure through which each side can obtain evidence from the other.

One of the requests is for “all documents concerning your alleged medical condition of anhidrosis, hypohidrosis, or your inability to sweat”.

Andrew’s lawyer, Andrew Brettler, has rejected this request on the grounds that it is “harassing and seeks confidential and private information and documents that are irrelevant, immaterial and not reasonably calculated to lead to the discovery of admissible evidence”.

Giuffre’s lawyers also want information on Andrew’s schedules and meetings in 2001, when the alleged abuse took place. Another request made is for “all documents concerning defendant’s travel to or from, or presence in or on: a) Epstein’s planes; b) Florida; c) New York; d) New Mexico; e) the United States Virgin Islands; f) a Pizza Express located in Woking, England; or g) the Club Tramp nightclub, located in London, England”.

Pizza Express is where the duke said he was the night Giuffre claims they had sex in London. Another request is for communications between Andrew and Epstein or Maxwell and their lawyers concerning “sexual abuse”, a request rejected by Andrew’s lawyers as “overbroad, burdensome and oppressive”.

Andrew’s legal team have rejected the requests for the documents citing various reasons including that the information is protected from disclosure by rights of privacy under the US constitution and article 8 of the European convention on human rights. His lawyers also state in papers filed to a New York court that some of the documents requested are already publicly available.

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**Emmanuel Macron**

## **‘Turning point for Europe’: Macron takes EU helm as French election looms**

France takes over EU presidency, with Macron announcing an ambitious agenda while eyeing domestic re-election



Emmanuel Macron delivers his New Year’s Eve national address, with France taking over the EU presidency. Photograph: SIPA/Rex/Shutterstock

*Agence France-Presse*  
Fri 31 Dec 2021 23.57 EST

Emmanuel Macron has declared “the year 2022 must be a turning point for Europe” as France took over the rotating presidency of the European Union.

In a New Year’s Eve national address, the French president hailed the EU’s role during the Covid-19 crisis and announced an ambitious agenda for the bloc that could also serve his domestic campaign for re-election.

He vowed that “you can count on my complete commitment to ensure that this period, which comes around every 13 years [for France], is a time of progress for you”.

The centrist, who made his Europhile views a key part of his campaign when winning the presidency in 2017, is hoping it will again serve him in elections scheduled for April.

“The EU presidency gives him a welcome platform to put his European record to the forefront and differentiate himself from his rivals and bring new proposals, new ideas to the table,” said Claire Demesmay from the Centre Marc Bloch thinktank in Berlin.

Prominence on the international stage has also long been a popular move for any French president.

“The French like nothing more than the image or impression of France being ‘at the controls’,” said Pierre Sellal, a former diplomat at the French mission to the EU.

Sébastien Maillard, director of the Jacques Delors Institute, a pro-EU thinktank based in Paris, said Macron will also face pressure to deliver after having ramped up expectations.

“He can’t get to the first round [of the presidential election] on 10 April without having obtained some results from the European presidency,” Maillard said. “That’s the challenge for him, but it can also be a real opportunity.”

European leaders are set to meet in Paris on 10-11 March, which could be a chance for them to agree on a major reform of the bloc’s budget rules.

Much will depend on Germany’s new chancellor, Olaf Scholz, whose [coalition government](#) is seen as sceptical on budget reforms, but supportive of Macron’s agenda.

France’s presidency is “an important opportunity we want to seize together to strengthen Europe and make it fit to rise up to tomorrow’s challenges”,

the German foreign minister, Annalena Baerbock, said.

Sellal said France's partners would take a dim view of "attempts to instrumentalise the presidency for electoral reasons".

Domestically, opponents have already accused Macron of electioneering and say he should have delayed France's turn at the helm until after the elections.

"It's a mistake. He's doing it for his own interests, not those of France," his [rightwing rival Valérie Pécresse from Les Républicains party](#) said last month.

Eurosceptic opponents such as far-right figures Marine Le Pen and Éric Zemmour will also waste no opportunity to portray the whole exercise as meaningless.

"It's been four and a half years that he's been in power and he's obtained nothing and done nothing in the European domain, apart from achieving a sort of submission to Germany in the name of the Franco-German couple," Le Pen told RMC radio in mid-December.

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## North Korea

# North Korea's Kim Jong-un warns of 'life-and-death struggle' in 10th anniversary speech

Kim's focus on food and factories rather than nuclear weapons or US underscores country's economic crisis



North Korean leader Kim Jong-un at the central committee meeting. He has warned the country is facing a 'great life-and-death struggle'. Photograph: KCNA/Reuters

*Reuters*

Fri 31 Dec 2021 20.41 EST

The North Korean leader, [Kim Jong-un](#), has capped off his 10th year in power with a speech that made more mention of tractor factories and school uniforms than nuclear weapons or the United States.

North Korea's main goals for 2022 will be jump-starting economic development and improving people's lives as it faces a "great life-and-death struggle", Kim told a meeting of the ruling party's central committee on Friday.

The meeting coincided with the 10th anniversary of Kim effectively assuming leadership of the country after the death of his father in 2011.

Kim has used previous speeches around the new year to make major policy announcements, including launching significant diplomatic engagements with South Korea and the US.

But summaries of his speech published in North Korean state media made no specific mention of the US, with only a passing reference to unspecified discussions of inter-Korean relations and "external affairs".

The domestic focus of the speech underscored the economic crises Kim faces at home, where self-imposed anti-pandemic border lockdowns have left North Korea more isolated than ever before.

"The basic tasks facing the part and the people the next year are to provide a firm guarantee for implementing the five-year plan and make remarkable changes in the national development and the people's living," Kim was quoted as saying.

Kim spent the majority of his speech detailing domestic issues from an ambitious plan for rural development to people's diets, school uniforms and the need to crack down on "non-socialist practices".

He cited unspecified military advancements as a major achievement of the past year and discussed "militant tasks" facing national defence in 2022. The tractor factory he discussed in the speech is also likely to be used to build launch vehicles for missiles, foreign analysts have said, and North Korea is believed to have expanded its arsenal despite the lockdowns.

The big focus on rural development is likely a populist strategy, said Chad O'Carroll, founder of NK News, a Seoul-based website that tracks North Korea.

## Conclusion?

North Korea is more or less in survival mode for 2022 -- and doesn't really know what to do re: foreign policy right now.

— Chad O'Carroll (@chadoc1) [December 31, 2021](#)

“Overall, Kim might be aware that revealing sophisticated military development plans while people are suffering food shortages and harsh conditions outside of Pyongyang might not be such a good idea this year,” he wrote on Twitter.

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## Kashmir

# Kashmir stampede at Hindu shrine kills at least 12 people

Night-time tragedy at revered site in Indian-administered Kashmir happened as thousands of pilgrims massed to offer prayers



A packed crowd of devotees at the Vaishno Devi shrine, in Indian-administered Kashmir on the night a stampede at the shrine killed at least 12 people. Photograph: NNIS/AFP/Getty Images

*Staff and agencies*

Sat 1 Jan 2022 02.37 EST

At least 12 people have died and 13 were injured in a stampede at a religious shrine in Indian-administered [Kashmir](#) as thousands of pilgrims massed to offer prayers.

The disaster happened around 3am on New Year's Day while it was still dark on the route to the Vaishno Devi shrine, one of the area's most revered Hindu sites.

"People fell over each other ... It was difficult to figure out whose leg or arms were tangled with whose," witness Ravinder, who gave only one name, told AFP. "I helped pick up eight bodies by the time ambulances arrived after about half an hour. I feel lucky to be alive but am still shaking with memory of what I saw."



The Vaishno Devi shrine, deep in mountainous Indian Kashmir. Photograph: Vijay Mathur/AFP/Getty Images

One official said that there was a rush to offer special prayers for the new year but this was not confirmed by others.

Mahesh, a devotee who gave only one name, told Associated Press the stampede occurred near one of the gates where pilgrims entered and exited the route to the shrine.

"Something happened near one of the gates and I found myself under a crush of people. I suffocated and fell but somehow managed to stand up," he said. "I saw people moving over the bodies. It was a horrifying sight, but I managed to help in rescuing some injured people."

Another devotee named Priyansh said he and 10 friends from New Delhi arrived on Friday night to visit the shrine and that two of his friends died in the incident.

“I have never seen anything like this,” he said.



Police load a coffin of a victim of the stampede in the nearby town of Katra.  
Photograph: Channi Anand/AP

The Indian prime minister, Narendra Modi, expressed his condolences on Twitter. “Extremely saddened by the loss of lives due to a stampede,” Modi wrote.

Before the pandemic, every day about 100,000 devotees would trek up a steep winding track to the narrow cave containing the shrine to Vaishno Devi, about 60km from the city of Jammu. Authorities had capped the daily number to 25,000 but witnesses and press reports said that this may have been exceeded several times over.

Two stampedes in as many months in 2008 – one in [Rajasthan](#) and one in [Himachal Pradesh](#) – left more than 370 people dead. Others in [Kerala](#) in 2011 and in [Madhya Pradesh](#) two years later each killed more than 100.

In the latest incident, other reports suggested an argument had broken out between devotees.

Rescue operations started immediately and the injured – some of whom were reported to be in a serious condition – were taken to hospital.

Video footage on social media showed small minivan ambulances with flashing lights rushing to hospitals while it was still dark, as well as massive crowds.

J&K DGP Dilbagh Singh, Union Minister Jitendra Singh on Vaishno Devi stampede that killed 12 people;

India Today's [@sunilJbhat](#) speaks to eye-witnesses [#India](#) [#Jammu](#) [#VaishnoDevi](#) [#VaishnoDeviStampede](#) [pic.twitter.com/6AnXbhkldZ](https://pic.twitter.com/6AnXbhkldZ)

— IndiaToday (@IndiaToday) [January 1, 2022](#)

Access to the shrine was halted after the stampede but later resumed.

Witness Ravinder said the crush happened at a point where huge crowds of people coming down from the shrine meet those going up. He estimated that there were at least 100,000 people.

“No one was checking registration slips of the devotees. I have been there many times but never seen such a rush of people,” he said. “It was only when some of us managed to lift a dead body up with our hands that people could see [what was happening] and made space for moving the bodies out,” he said.

*With Agence France-Presse and Associated Press*

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## [Spain](#)

# **24C in Spain, 15C in the Alps: oddly warm end to 2021 in parts of Europe**

Records broken in Bilbao and Segovia, and avalanche warnings in Alps where it is too warm even for fake snow



People on Malvarrosa beach in Valencia, eastern Spain, on Wednesday, when temperatures reached 19C. Photograph: Kai Foersterling/EPA

*[Angela Giuffrida](#) and [Ashifa Kassam](#)*

Fri 31 Dec 2021 12.28 EST

[Spain](#) registered record-breaking temperatures this week and areas of the Italian Alps are forecast to reach up to 15C above the seasonal average in the coming days as much of Europe experiences an anomalously warm start to the new year.

In Bilbao, northern [Spain](#), temperatures hit 24.7C, a high not seen since record-keeping began in 1947. In Segovia, near Madrid, 22.7C was recorded, the highest since 1920, and nearby Avila reached 20.2C, its highest since 1983.

“These high temperatures are not normal,” said Rubén del Campo, a spokesperson for the state meteorological agency AEMET. “These are temperatures that you would normally see in the month of April.”

He attributed the year-end heat to a mass of hot air over Spain combined with high pressure. “It’s a normal phenomenon that we do see, but what’s strange this time is the high temperatures we’re seeing.”

Scientists have long predicted that the [climate crisis](#) and global heating would lead to more frequent extreme weather, although random extreme events occur naturally.

The high-pressure anticyclone has shifted to [France](#) and Italy, and alpine rescuers have warned of a risk of avalanches.

Luca Mercalli, a meteorologist, said: “At the moment it is about 15C in areas of the Alps at an altitude of 1,600 metres and is not hitting zero beneath 4,000 metres. It hasn’t even been freezing at night – the temperature has not dropped below 10 degrees, and this is very unusual.”

Temperatures in some of Italy’s best-known ski resorts, including Cortina d’Ampezzo and Courmayeur, are forecast to be 13-15C above the seasonal norm on New Year’s Day, and the balmy weather is expected to linger until 3 January.

Ski resorts at an altitude of up to 2,000 metres are bereft of snow. “And they can’t produce artificial snow as the temperature is too warm,” said Mercalli.

Italy’s alpine rescue service has advised skiers to regularly check weather bulletins owing to the risk of avalanches. “The elevated temperature combined with strong winds create the conditions for avalanches,” Mercalli said.

The rest of Italy is also experiencing abnormally warm conditions, with a high of 18C expected in Rome on Saturday and 22C in the Sicilian city of Catania by the middle of next week.

In Spain, the high temperatures cap off a year that began with a deadly snowstorm that blanketed large parts of the country in snow and brought Madrid to a standstill.

“It’s been a year of extremes,” Del Campo said. The snowstorm left some municipalities grappling with temperatures as low as -25C, while days later the coastal city of Alicante hit 30C.

“We’ve never seen -25 and nearly 30C in the same month,” said Del Campo. “That’s not something we’ve ever seen in Spain.”

Italy also experienced extreme weather events in 2021, with Siracusa in Sicily believed to have broken the European record for the highest temperature, reaching 48.8C in August.

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