

The Guardian

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Names in the news**Bono**

Bono, don't be ashamed of U2, they put on a great show

[Rebecca Nicholson](#)



For razzle-dazzle they can't be beaten and we could all do with more of it these days



Bono: 'I'm just embarrassed.' Photograph: Matt Baron/REX/Shutterstock

Sat 22 Jan 2022 10.00 EST

It is too easy to fall down rabbit holes of old festival sets on YouTube. I've revisited the ones I first saw on TV – PJ Harvey in a pink catsuit, singing Down by the Water at Glastonbury, broadcast on Channel 4 in 1995 into my childhood front room, changing my tastes forever – and later, the ones where I can try to see if I was in the crowd, while suspecting it's probably best to not know.

There is something that almost every one of the shows that took place before, roughly, the mid-00s, has in common: they are strikingly un-produced. [Nirvana at Reading](#) festival in 1992 is music history, but watch it again now: it's three blokes playing their instruments on a vast, open stage. The razzle-dazzle, arena-show-style spectacles we've grown used to, the big screens, light shows, costume changes, fireworks that put New Year's Eve to shame, are relatively new.

I mention all of this because of Bono, who has just admitted to not really liking the name U2, or his own voice on many of his records, or a lot of his lyrics, and to turning "the colour of scarlet" if one of U2's songs come on the radio when he's in a car. "I'm just embarrassed," he told the *Hollywood*

Reporter's [*Awards Chatter*](#) podcast, in an interview to discuss their new song for the animated children's film *Sing 2*.

Generally, I lack patience with artists who criticise their most popular work. It seems rude to the people who love it, have cried to it or walked down the aisle to it (although the latter is unlikely to be a problem for Radiohead's beef with Creep, for example). But [Bono](#) went on to explain that being embarrassing is probably part of what makes U2 so successful. "I do think U2 pushes out the boat on embarrassment quite a lot. And maybe that's the place to be as an artist."

U2 are never knowingly understated, not the kind of act who would turn up for a big show with just their instruments. Not many artists at a certain level would any more. When I did see [U2 at Glastonbury](#), they not only brought the razzle-dazzle of a massive production, despite the rain, but got an astronaut on the International Space Station to beam down to Earth to introduce Beautiful Day. There is a kind of blind sincerity to a gesture as grand as that.

They are an all-or-nothing band and thrive on it, on pushing out the boat on embarrassment. And there are far worse band names than [U2](#).

Vicky McClure doesn't need a bra to defuse a bomb



Vicky McClure: 'I didn't want the character to make a big deal about the way she looks.' Photograph: Jake Walters/The Observer

During the first lockdown, some began to sound the death knell for the bra. For women who could work at home, an uncomfortable bra seemed increasingly pointless. Who needed the sweet relief of removing one at the end of the day if you didn't have to put one on in the first place?

According to YouGov, around one-third of women reported wearing a bra less often than usual. But [bras did not die](#). They evolved. In the US, sales increased, thanks to a growing appetite for sports bras and bralettes. The only thing on the way out was the underwire.

It makes perfect sense, then, for Vicky McClure to opt for no makeup and a crop top when playing her latest character, a bomb disposal expert, in the new series *Trigger Point*. The trailer has been running since Christmas and it makes a panic attack look like a spa weekend. It's from the makers of *Line of Duty*, who know a thing or two about tension, and with the added pressure of regular explosions, I imagine it won't be laid back. McClure told the *Radio Times* that [her choices](#) were to make the character "human". "I didn't want the character to make a big deal about the way she looks," she said.

I tried to imagine the alternative, a woman with a full face of slap and a cleverly enhanced cleavage, rolling around in dust, trying to snip the right wire. It says something that it's too ridiculous to even conceive of it. The *Tomb Raider* days of action heroines who look as if they're more likely to totter over than win a fight are long gone – it's the Ellen Ripley model that has endured.

Zara Rutherford's glorious trip will inspire girls all over the world



Zara Rutherford: flying high. Photograph: John Thys/AFP/Getty Images

Zara Rutherford landed in Belgium and set a world record, becoming the [youngest woman](#) to fly around the world solo, at the age of 19. She flew 32,000 miles in 155 days, including a two-month delay, getting stuck in Russia and Alaska as a result of adverse weather and visa issues. It sounds like a wild and at times perilous adventure. She flew through wildfire smoke in California and -20C air over Siberia. The video of her climbing out of the cockpit at the end of her journey and [hugging her family](#) (both parents are pilots) is utterly delightful and lovely.

My favourite novel of last year was [Great Circle](#), by Maggie Shipstead, which told the story of a fictional early 20th-century aviator and her struggle

to complete her own circumnavigation of the globe. It consumed me. Rutherford wants to use her trip to nudge more girls and young women into science, technology, engineering and maths careers. Certainly, aviation could do with the help: only [5.8% of commercial pilots worldwide are female and 4.7% in the UK](#). Rutherford's journey, and Shipstead's imagination, may begin to sow the seeds of possibility in young women's minds.

Rebecca Nicholson is an Observer columnist

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Opinion[**Boris Johnson**](#)

The Observer view on the use of dirty tactics to bolster Boris Johnson

[Observer editorial](#)

This corrupt government risks damaging public trust in democratic institutions



Boris Johnson. During a pandemic, it is critical the public trusts the government to take decisions for the right reasons. Photograph: Andrew Matthews/PA

Sun 23 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

Are there no tactics to which a disgraced and unpopular prime minister will not sink in his desperate attempt to cling on against the odds? For [**Boris Johnson**](#), it would seem not. In the last week, there have been further revelations about the underhand tactics his whips have deployed to keep MPs loyal: threats of placing hostile stories about their private lives in the press or of withdrawing planned funding to the detriment of their

constituents. Meanwhile, the government has pushed out story after story to try to distract from critical headlines; policymaking has become no more than an instrument to try to save Johnson's skin, regardless of the consequences.

Just over a decade ago, the parliamentary expenses scandal exposed the gulf between what MPs thought was acceptable and what the public was willing to accept. Too many parliamentarians saw the manipulation of expenses loopholes as compensation for their public office; voters saw it as greed and corruption. The row that has erupted over the parliamentary whipping exposes a similar dynamic. Allies of the prime minister and Westminster stalwarts argue putting pressure on MPs to express support or vote with the government is just part of the rough and tumble of politics. But voters quite rightly do not expect a government to extract loyalty from its backbenchers by threatening constituency funding or warning that if they rebel there will be nasty stories in the press.

Everything Johnson and his government are now doing is driven by panic and narrow political interests

Christian Wakeford, the Conservative MP for Bury South who defected to Labour last week, claimed he was threatened with the withdrawal of funding for a new school in his constituency if he did not vote with the government against summer holiday meals for pupils from low-income families. The Conservative backbencher William Wragg has revealed that colleagues have come to him reporting that the whips had attempted to blackmail them into continuing to support Johnson; he will be meeting the Metropolitan police to discuss these allegations. Chris Bryant, the Labour chair of the Commons standards committee, says he has heard MPs alleging that Johnson himself has been involved in this blackmail. At best, this is political corruption, at worst, criminal conduct. There urgently needs to be an independent inquiry into these allegations. But such an endeavour is vanishingly unlikely from a government whose main focus at the moment is avoiding accountability for the culture of boozy parties that has ended up with the prime minister himself being accused of breaking lockdown laws and of misleading parliament.

Everything Johnson and his government are now doing is driven by panic and narrow political interests. Nothing is sacred, everything is fair game. The distraction techniques over the last week, dubbed by his allies as “Operation Red Meat”, have involved the culture secretary, Nadine Dorries, launching a politically motivated attack on the BBC, unilaterally announcing a [two-year funding freeze](#) and implying that the licence fee would be abolished altogether in 2027, from which she later [rowed back](#).

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Culture secretary Nadine Dorries addresses parliament over BBC licence fee freeze – as it happened

The BBC is a vital national institution that has already made significant cutbacks; it cannot afford a funding cut. The home secretary, Priti Patel, has announced that the armed forces would take charge of operations to limit the number of asylum seekers trying to cross the Channel, in a move the defence select committee chair has described as “rushed” and a [massive distraction](#) for the armed forces. Yet another country – this time Ghana – has been forced to [call out](#) the government’s false claims that it is in talks with it to process migrants offshore, a move that would anyway probably contradict international law. Meanwhile, the transport secretary, Grant Shapps, aimed for the front pages with his announcement he would be clamping down on excess [train announcements](#), to the bewilderment of people affected by far more pressing transport issues across the country.

The longer this corrupt and hypocritical government limps on, the greater the risk it does long-term damage to public trust in the institutions of democracy. How can citizens trust a government to act in their interest while it wheels out ludicrous announcements that serve no purpose other than attempting to bolster a prime minister mired in crisis after crisis?

Nowhere is this true more than with Covid. During an ongoing national emergency, it is critical the public trusts the government to take decisions for the right reasons, based on evidence rather than its desire to capture the news cycle. It is extremely good news that Omicron infection rates are falling. But is the government dropping plan B measures – including the compulsory wearing of masks – this week because the data indicates this is appropriate

or for the purposes of generating a feelgood news story? The cynicism Johnson is embedding in the electorate will not evaporate with the end of his premiership.

Johnson may last another month; he may last another year. But he is prime minister of this country in name alone: despite winning a large majority just two years ago, his authority has leached away entirely as a result of his incompetence and lack of integrity. The longer the Conservative party props him up, the more he undermines the notion of standards in public life.

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OpinionUkraine

The Observer view on US-Russia talks and tensions in Ukraine

[Observer editorial](#)

Diplomatic talks calm tensions for now but Europe is left looking feeble and irrelevant



The US secretary of state, Antony Blinken (left), and the Russian foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, meet in Geneva, Switzerland. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty

Sun 23 Jan 2022 01.30 EST

Talks about the Ukraine crisis between senior US and Russian diplomats, held in Geneva at the end of last week, appear to have calmed tensions, at least for now. The situation on Ukraine's land and sea borders, where Moscow has amassed troops and powerful military assets, [remains grave](#). But alarmist predictions of imminent, large-scale conflict have proved wide of the mark.

The dogged insistence of Antony Blinken, the US secretary of state, on pursuing diplomatic means to address Russia's security concerns clearly made an impression on his notoriously intransigent opposite number, Sergei Lavrov. Russia's foreign minister said the talks had been "[constructive and useful](#)" and agreed to continue them this week.

This may turn out to be a temporary reprieve. All the noxious factors that precipitated this crisis remain in play. President Vladimir Putin's overarching aim is to undermine agreed, post-Soviet security structures in Europe and recreate a [sphere of influence](#) beyond Russia's borders. He is desperate to stop Ukraine becoming a successful, fully independent, pro-western democracy whose example puts his corrupt, oppressive regime to shame.

To this end he wants Nato, in effect, to withdraw from countries on Russia's western periphery that joined the alliance after the Soviet collapse. His [list has now expanded](#) to include Romania and Bulgaria as well as Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. He is also demanding written pledges that Nato will never invite Ukraine, Georgia or Moldova to join and that the allies will pull back troops and defensive missile systems from eastern Europe.

02:03

Ukraine: Blinken says talks with Russia's Lavrov were 'frank and substantive' – video

The western democracies have stated plainly that they will not accept such blackmail. Yet, sadly, that is where consensus ends. There is no agreement, [and much discord](#), about what to do if Russia does attack Ukraine, either directly by land, sea and air or indirectly, using asymmetric warfare methods, covert ops, special forces and "technical" countermeasures.

European leaders jointly bear responsibility for this lamentable state of affairs, which emboldens Putin. The performance of the US president, Joe Biden, has been less than totally impressive. He made a dangerous gaffe last week when he implied a "minor incursion" by Russia might be tolerated. But overall he has been admirably firm in resisting Russian pressure and [seeking de-escalation](#).

Not so the European democracies, which have no joined-up policy at all. The German coalition is split between the Greens, who, for example, want to [scrap the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline](#) from Russia, and pro-Moscow Social Democrats. In France, a huge gap is opening up between President Emmanuel Macron's bold ideas about EU "[strategic autonomy](#)", propounded again at a chaotic European parliament session in Strasbourg last week, and the reality of EU feuding, impotence and irrelevance.

Given he is deeply distrusted and disliked in many EU countries, it is unclear how Boris Johnson's vow to knock European heads together and take charge of a united front to deter Putin, outlined in extraordinary Downing Street weekend briefings, can work. This sudden lurch into Churchillian war-fighting mode looks suspiciously like another attempt to distract attention from "partygate". By exploiting international tensions in this way, Johnson and his Thatcher-imitating foreign secretary, Liz Truss, who has been missing in action so far, may only make matters worse.

The [Ukraine](#) standoff, having reached this extreme pitch, will not be resolved quickly. Even though few people actually want it, a conflict could be triggered accidentally. Hopefully, US diplomatic efforts will succeed – because a bypassed Europe, ignored by Russia and patronised by America, appears unable to help itself. Whether or not Putin ultimately gets his way or his war, Europe has already lost.

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NotebookPublishing

A courageous reissue in the not-so-brave new world of publishing

[Rachel Cooke](#)



Kay Dick's They is a forgotten dystopian novel from 45 years ago, but still contentious in an age of social media bullying



Kay Dick: ‘She didn’t write much, and what she did is either quite peculiar or quite bad.’ Photograph: University of Bristol/ArenaPAL

Sat 22 Jan 2022 12.00 EST

A parcel arrives, inside which is a copy of [Kay Dick’s](#) dystopian novel of 1977, *They: A Sequence of Unease*, and a letter informing me that [Faber is to reissue it](#) next month. Crikey, but isn’t this amazing? Dick, who died in 2001, is something of a minority interest at this point. She didn’t write much and what she did is either quite peculiar or quite bad, though I’ll always be fond of *Ivy and Stevie*, a collection of interviews with Ivy Compton-Burnett and Stevie Smith that wears its eccentricity like some crazy hat (“I realised that she had lovely legs because, quite often, she would delve under her skirt for her handkerchief, which she tucked into her knickers,” Dick writes of the former, on whom she first “called” in 1950.)



They by Kay Dick

But if this book’s reappearance is surprising, it’s also ironic. In *They*, Britain is in the grip of a mercilessly cruel group of philistines: a mob that burns books and paintings, punishing all those who resist. Faber hopes, very laudably, to bring it to a “new generation” of readers and to help it do so, [its edition](#) comes with praise from Margaret Atwood and an introduction by Carmen Maria Machado.

The wicked thought occurs to me, however, that it’s really publishing itself that most needs this book right now. As Machado notes: “Censorious impulses... and soft bigotry are hardly the exclusive property of the right.”

Dick’s novel is reborn in a world in which some imprints (not Faber, I hope) are content to excise completely writers they were delighted to publish only five minutes ago; in which social media seems more and more utterly to terrify editors; and in which, at certain moments, the Society of Authors falls oddly silent. Oh, well. The good news is that this scary little novel can now be theirs – or anyone’s – for just £8.99.

Preying on our fears



'I find myself transfixed by the ads in my carriage.' Photograph: Amer Ghazzal/REX/Shutterstock

Out in the world again, everything is at once the same and subtly different. On the tube, I find myself transfixed by the ads in my carriage, which now speak with one voice of the pandemic. Like a dandelion poking through a crack in a paving stone, capitalism determinedly locates our weaknesses and anxieties, the better that it might brazenly exploit them. Personalised vitamins ("we know you are weary"), a strange concoction for the turbulent gut, mindfulness delivered to your door in a little cardboard box. Be warned: the snake oil merchants are out in force.

Come to the Cabaret...



Eddie Redmayne and Jessie Buckley in Cabaret. Photograph: Marc Brenner

By the time you read this, I will finally have seen Rebecca Frecknall's new production of *Cabaret*, starring [Eddie Redmayne](#) and Jessie Buckley, a night out I had to remortgage the house to afford. (Those ticket prices really do evoke the Weimar, I can tell you.) Will I be as high as a kite or suffering from the mother of all anticlimaxes? I don't know. But either way, at least my pre-show nerves will at last be gone.

The emails from the theatre last week were enough to bring on an attack of the vapours, their anhedonic tone somewhat at odds with the fact they purport to be from the Kit Kat Club, as if the place really exists. "Action required!" they command, after which there follows a long list of instructions involving Covid tests and arrival times. We have been told to appear a full 75 minutes before curtain up, which seems completely mad, especially since I couldn't get two seats next to one another. Will we both be allowed to go to the same bar? Or will one of us end up – I'm reading the small print now – at the place that only serves schnapps?

Rachel Cooke is an Observer columnist

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Observer comment cartoon

Boris Johnson

Partygate, scapegoats and an end to plan B – cartoon

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[Opinion](#)[Monarchy](#)

What luck for the royals that next to the Tory party they look like paragons of virtue

[Catherine Bennett](#)



The House of Windsor is getting off lightly thanks to the antics of the incumbent at No 10



The Queen and Boris Johnson before a reception at the Eden Project during the G7 summit in Cornwall in 2021. Photograph: Jack Hill/The Times/PA

Sun 23 Jan 2022 02.00 EST

Whatever the damage to his party, his country and dependent relations – should the crowdfunding start now? – the premiership of [Boris Johnson](#) increasingly looks, for the royal family, like an unprecedented blessing.

Imagine that you are continually reviled for being democratically illegitimate, lazy, greedy, philistine, pointless, absurd, spongeing, hypocritical, creepy, unprincipled and racist – when, as if to put the above in perspective, along comes an actual elected world king who is endowed with all these defects plus others unusual in UK monarchs since Charles II's children almost doubled the size of the aristocracy. Better still, for the royals, the continuing insights into Johnson's character coincide with a campaign for a new debate on the monarchy, "[a broken institution](#)" as *Republic* calls it, before Charles gets his hands on the crown.

With Andrew finally expelled, along with [Charles's former valet](#), in a pre-jubilee clearout, the prime minister's incumbency could not have been better designed, like some inverted glorious revolution, to further beatify the Windsors and discredit the usual alternatives. Should the royal luck hold,

they might even enjoy a Johnson-free jubilee; if he does feature in the pageantry, it can only be in a capacity guaranteed not to remind the royals of a funeral eve, a broken swing, a clinking wheelie suitcase. They have probably forgotten, by now, [Jennifer Arcuri's revelation](#) that he was almost late to welcome them to an Olympics ceremony in 2012, being delayed by an inaugural sexual assignation with the talented tech entrepreneur.

Can a country that elected Boris Johnson ever be considered safe from electing a head of state like Boris Johnson?

It seems a pity Princess Margaret, generally admitted to be one of the most loathsome royals, could not have lived to see this rekindled dream of indefinite royal ease. Always, the rejoinder to anti-monarchists is: “Who would you rather then, Tony Blair?”, or its variant, “it can’t always be Betty Boothroyd”. Even a lifelong republican can see that the objection has recently gained a bit of purchase. Can a country that elected prime minister Boris Johnson ever be considered safe from electing a head of state like Boris Johnson? With his or her latest iteration of Mrs Johnson, their thirsty court and extended family also serving for some lengthy term as fellow figureheads in need of extensively refurbished accommodations?

True, a known associate of a paedophile and a sex trafficker is unlikely, in such an election, to be either a contender or beneficiary in the style too long enjoyed by Prince Andrew. His recent erasure may have been sufficiently thorough enough, however, to indicate an attractive new direction in royal brand renewal. Well before he was dispatched, the deployment of Wholesome William and Thrifty Kate, with their ever-so-humble royal ways, suggested some careful revival of the Victorian royal template. News that the wallpaper queen was too sensitive for the Downing Street flat coincided with the duchess’s reinvention as a moral leader whose £7 Accessorize earrings will always say more about her than any [free fort](#) that might become available.

From Johson’s arrival, the Queen benefited from the concern you’d feel for any very elderly person suddenly subjected to weekly visits from the sort of degenerate and unkempt-looking individual you would not wish to see prowling around sheltered accommodation. Was her handbag, you

wondered, always in sight and firmly closed? Had secret cameras been concealed in pot plants? Had Johnson even washed his hands? Probably not. Dominic Cummings had to intervene in March 2020 to stop Johnson potentially infecting the Queen with Covid. There may have been some amusement on her part in being able to compare the Churchill impersonator with the real thing. And it's not impossible she found Johnson preferable, initially, to Cameron, who had once said she'd "[purred](#)" at him, then further overshared in his autobiography.

To the insult of his appearance, Johnson would shortly add the professional courtesy of [illegally_proroguing_parliament](#). John Major, demanding an apology, warned Johnson: "No prime minister must ever treat the monarch or parliament in this way again." Opting, as per, to defend the indefensible, Johnson thereby pulled off the notable feat for an elected politician of appearing less constitutionally observant than Prince Charles. Who has also grown in stature recently, in inverse proportion to his appearances.

Johnson pulled off the notable feat for a politician of appearing less constitutionally observant than Prince Charles

Whether or not the Queen cares about the behaviour of Johnson's intoxicated and anarchic functionaries during the "period of national mourning" he had recommended, that too has been another valuable service. The reports allowed for a pointed updating of the Queen Mother's "I'm glad we've been bombed. It makes me feel we can look the East End in the face."

Thanks to the No 10 revels, we learned the Queen had declined the offer of a royal exemption from the lockdown mourner-limit on the grounds, according to *Private Eye*, that "it would be unfair... The palace told Downing Street that she wanted to set an example rather than be an exception to the rules." If it was less impressive that the Queen subsequently allowed Andrew, semi-disappeared since his *Newsnight* interview, to stage a post-funeral comeback, then the palace compensated when his evasions were exhausted with an obliteration of exemplary ruthlessness.

Modern technology rules out a Stalinesque Andrew-vanishing from royal balconies, but the family website did its best, consigning him so firmly to

the past that you wonder if it's actually legal, what with the government's [new rules](#) about never throwing anything out. "An important part of the Duke of York's role was to support the Queen's work as Head of State," the family all but obituarises its demi-late duke. He "would attend a number of important occasions..."

Compared with this, the Tory party, still unwilling to evict an individual so colossally harmful to its elderly brand, is practically begging for abolition. If Boris Johnson makes the royals almost tolerable, the transaction works, alas, both ways. The royals have made his outfit look even worse.

Catherine Bennett is an Observer columnist

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For the recordUK news

For the record

This week's corrections

Sun 23 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

A recipe for pork and crab dumplings to celebrate lunar new year was illustrated with a photograph that showed a sheet of joss paper next to the dish. Such paper is burned for the dead at funerals and in other rituals in China and other parts of Asia. We apologise for this cultural error and would also like to clarify that chef Ching-He Huang, who created the recipe, was not involved in the mistake ([Over the moon](#), 16 January, Food Monthly, p34).

Many readers noted that a Speedy crossword clue – US WWII general, later President (8) – called for a solution that erred in both spelling and length (“No 1,372”, 16 January, p59). While solvers wanted, correctly, to write “Eisenhower”, the grid was calling for “Isenhour”. The [online version](#) of the clue, 6 down, has been replaced.

A [profile of Antony Jenkins](#) referred to him as chief executive of 10x Future Technologies. The company is now known as 10x Banking (16 January, p50).

We said the hotel No 1 by Guesthouse was opening in York later this month; in fact, its doors opened in December ([Making an entrance](#), 9 January, Magazine, p35).

A picture caption misdescribed Democrat Stacey Abrams as “now governor of Georgia”. Abrams, who is running for governor in 2022, lost her 2018 bid to Republican Brian Kemp ([How did he do? Biden one year on](#), 9 January, New Review, p8).

Homophone corner: “These are voters who leant their vote to the Conservatives in 2019 and hoped to see a ‘levelled-up’ country.” ([The end?](#), 16 January, p29).

Other recently amended articles include:

[England’s north-south divide is deepening, says new report](#)

[Trail of African bling reveals 50,000-year-old social network](#)

[Archaeology’s sexual revolution](#)

[Bambi: cute, lovable, vulnerable ... or a dark parable of antisemitic terror?](#)

[How antivirals provide hope to vulnerable Covid patients](#)

*Write to the Readers’ Editor, the Observer, York Way, London N1 9GU,
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[Observer letters](#)[Housing](#)

Letters: garden villages fill me with despair

Why build on green fields when there are plenty of brownfield sites crying out for development?



Chartwell: what would Winston Churchill have thought of the urbanisation of the garden of England? Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian

Sun 23 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

The words “garden village” give rise in me to feelings of helplessness and despair. This was certainly the case after reading the article “[Uproar in the garden of England as homes plan swallows up villages](#)” (News).

Stuck on to the south of Carlisle, a so-called garden village comprising 10,000 houses will be built in the near future. The destruction of agricultural land, woodland areas and other aspects of the rural Cumbrian landscape is apparently of no importance. Also of little importance appears to be the fact that within Carlisle there are 1,000 empty houses. In the nearby market town

of Wigton, more than 100 empty houses are quietly mouldering. If this is the situation in Cumbria, it is probably the same dismal picture all over the UK – decaying empty buildings and brownfield sites put to no good use.

Many years ago, I lived in Kent. As a schoolgirl, I and a close friend spent happy hours cycling in the countryside, and one of our favourite haunts was a steep hill near Westerham. In the distance we could see Chartwell, Churchill's country pile. I wonder what he would think of the urbanisation of the garden of England. It might have brought on one of his bouts of depression.

Alison Thompson

Thursby, Cumbria

Why does Gareth Rubin assume the planned houses in Kent will be a bad thing? Please don't listen to the nimbys. No one wants more high-rise flats but if we build traditional houses with decent gardens, the birds, bees and insects will be fine. Just plant trees and lavender. Or even weeds; bees love dandelions.

Angela Singer

Cambridge

Short shrift

Re “Catholics who aren’t religious” ([Letters](#)): 20-odd years ago, when Clare Short was secretary of state for international relations, she went on a fact-finding mission to former Yugoslavia, where she met groups of “ethnic Muslims”. On her return, she said that she’d discovered from that encounter that she was an “ethnic Catholic”.

Pam Lunn

Kenilworth, Warwickshire

Plan for a fairer society

The Institute for Public Policy Research report highlighting the worsening north/south divide and the inequality of public investments in the two regions draws attention to how public investments affect land value and

therefore land wealth, which is concentrated in the ownership of a few (“[Levelling up? No... figures show divide is widening](#)”, News).

Economists and politicians have enough evidence to show how good public investment in transport, education, healthcare, green spaces etc makes areas more desirable for homes and businesses to locate, pushing up land values. Given that taxpayers from all over the UK pay for public investments, why don't taxpayers all over the UK share equally in the economic benefits such investments bring about?

If our distorted and unfair tax system were changed to one based on returning all land and other natural resource wealth to the public purse, then we could have equality and fairness in society and a sustainable source of funding for maintaining and developing our public services and an economy that makes us use our land and other natural resources sparingly helping provide a clean environment to all.

Heather Wetzel

Hanworth, London

House design is child's play

The inspiration for the Red House in Dorset is not CFA Voysey or Louis Kahn, it is Bayko, the British construction toy popular in the 1940s and 50s ([Architecture](#), the New Review). The pitched roof, arched entrance, curved bay windows and brick panels will be unmistakable to anyone who created model buildings using Bayko's red, white and green Bakelite pieces.

John Cottrell

London NW1

Prison no place for pregnancy

The appalling case of a baby stillborn in a prison toilet shows it is high time we followed the lead of other countries that have had the common sense to pass legislation preventing imprisonment of pregnant women (“[Trauma of jailing pregnant women puts babies at risk, study warns](#)”, News).

The Swiss Criminal Code allows a “departure from the rules governing the execution of sentences in the favour of an inmate in the event of pregnancy”. Swedish law allows sentence postponement when a female inmate is pregnant, the duration of which is determined by what is considered to be reasonable. Even in China, the law allows for a woman sentenced to imprisonment to temporarily serve her sentence outside prison while pregnant. Prison is not, and will never be, a safe place for pregnant women. Inmate healthcare is evidently a grey area in UK legislation and when the NHS, responsible for the provision of healthcare in detained settings, last published a report summarising strategic directives for improving healthcare in the justice system, pregnancy was not even mentioned.

Emilie McRae

Trowbridge, Wiltshire

Arts and the man

Where will it all end – do we have to remove Picasso’s work from public view because he was a deeply unpleasant man (“[Sometimes a statue is indefensible – the BBC should get rid of Eric Gill](#)”, Comment)? Human beings are often nasty, messy, contradictory, complicated, wonderful beings. Often within the same person. We have to be able to separate these qualities and appreciate that which is of great value while rejecting that which is unacceptable. Without diminishing either.

Kris Watson

London N8

The residents of one of the apartment buildings on Bellway Homes’ Printworks development in Reading might want to consider renaming their building. All three are named for popular typefaces: Lucida and Helvetica are fine; the other one is Perpetua, a beautiful typeface designed by Eric Gill.

Pauline Caldwell

Derby

Take back control? No chance

Louisa Young claims the heart and penis are the only human organs that move other than under voluntary control (“[Hindu gods, Aztec rites, Blondie hits... why the heart is humanity's eternal symbol](#)”, Focus). Has she never seen an episode of *Call the Midwife*, all of which portray the ability of the uterus to move of its own accord?

Also, our intestines and other organs shift our food along the alimentary canal with little regard for our wishes. Finally, the skin, has the ability to – quite literally – make our hair stand on end. As in other aspects of life, there are limits to how much one can take back control.

Tim Forcer

Southampton

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/commentisfree/2022/jan/23/observer-letters-garden-villages-fill-me-with-despair>

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OpinionLaw

No one is safe from the rich elite's abuse of British law. Just ask Charlotte Leslie

[Nick Cohen](#)



The Conservative Middle East Council director knows the cost of oligarchical power



Charlotte Leslie, director of the Conservative Middle East Council, has been sent scores of legal letters after challenging Tory donor Mohamed Amersi.
Photograph: Sam Frost

Sat 22 Jan 2022 14.00 EST

Charlotte Leslie has been hit with threats that would have broken a lesser woman. The former Conservative MP for Bristol North West crossed a Tory donor, Mohamed Amersi. Now she has learned what journalists and whistleblowers already know: when you challenge the moneyed elite, oligarchical Britain's legal system will throw you into "a world of pain".

"We both know you're in a great deal of trouble," [Carl Hunter OBE](#), a party fixer and adviser to Tory ministers told her in February 2020. "I think you need to consider your position, as in being able to walk the dog at night, being able to sleep well at night."

In the unlikely event she had missed his meaning, the recordings Leslie made to protect herself show Hunter telling her: "Mohamed feels somebody has written an anonymous letter.

"You're looking into a world of pain on this... If you are not careful this will keep you up at night, monopolise your life, for as long as it lasts."

Amersi denies that he was aware of what Hunter was saying or that Hunter was operating on his instructions.

He met Leslie in her capacity as the director of the Conservative Middle East Council, an influential group that promotes better relationships with a region that is both strategically sensitive and, of course, awash with oil wealth.

Amersi and Leslie discussed in March 2020 the possibility of Amersi becoming its chair. After Leslie and the council's president, Nicholas Soames, decided not to work with him, Amersi set up a rival organisation. Leslie and Soames sent a private due diligence note setting out their concerns to Ben Elliot, the Tories' co-chair, and to a handful of political and intelligence sources: this is apparently the "anonymous letter" Hunter referred to in his threatening phone calls. Although we do not know its contents, Leslie said she compiled it from publicly available sources. Amersi said its claims were "defamatory and inaccurate" and Leslie was "damaging his reputation" in the eyes of the people who mattered most to him.

In a [Commons debate](#) on Thursday about the ability of the extremely wealthy to abuse the law, David Davis noticed Amersi had announced that he was "driven by a desire to create a world that's better for everybody. Let's test that against public domain facts, shall we?"

In 2002, while Amersi was a solicitor, Mr Justice Peter Smith [described Amersi's conduct](#) as "lamentable" and his evidence as "unreliable", "unconvincing" and "unsatisfactory". In 2005, Amersi made £4m helping a Luxembourg company buy a Russian telecoms business. The following year, a Swiss judge concluded the company was secretly owned by what Davis described as a "[top crony](#)" of Vladimir Putin. As the [Guardian](#) and the BBC reported, the Pandora papers showed Amersi was involved in the structure of a deal for the Swedish firm Telia that was later found to include a \$220m (£162m) bribe for the daughter of the then president of Uzbekistan. (At the time, Amersi's lawyers said he had "no reason" to believe it might be a bribe and that the underlying arrangements for the deal had been put in place before his involvement.) Despite all this information being publicly available, Davis concluded, "Amersi has used his wealth and influence to try to bully Charlotte Leslie into silence".

The taped calls from Hunter, revealed last week by Simon Walters of the *Mail*, are [horrible to hear](#). Leslie is desperate to escape from the “world of pain”. At one stage, she offers to apologise if that will get Amersi off her back, but her contrition does not satisfy Amersi or his lawyers.

Wealth, monarchy, government and law mix so thoroughly that the boundaries disintegrate into a foaming broth

Amersi told the *Observer* he condemned “any language that was threatening”. As far as he was concerned, Hunter was an honest broker trying to settle a dispute. He told the *Mail* that Leslie was “trying to portray herself as the victim when the reverse is true” and that MPs had “hidden behind parliamentary privilege to recycle false allegations”.

Meanwhile, Hunter told the *Mail* “he did not recollect” suggesting it would not be safe for Leslie to go out at night. He said he was trying to help her. The Metropolitan police are examining allegations of malicious communications and harassment.

No one, however, can deny the scale of the legal pressure rich men can apply in the UK. Charlotte Leslie has had scores of threatening legal letters from Amersi’s solicitors, Carter Ruck. In a pattern familiar to [Carole Cadwalladr](#), my colleague who investigated the Leave campaign, [Catherine Belton](#), the exposer of Putin’s cronies, and [Tom Burgis](#) of the *Financial Times*, who examined the power of a Kazakh mining conglomerate, Amersi is suing Leslie personally, along with her employer.

First, he alleged that Leslie had breached his rights under the Data Protection Act. As David Davis said: “Usually, the information commissioner deals with such disagreements, but when a rich man wants to silence and destroy someone, they go to the courts.” Mrs Justice Tipples [threw out his case](#), saying that Amersi and his lawyers had not “taken the trouble to follow the correct procedures”. Undeterred, Amersi is bringing another data protection case and is threatening a libel action, not only against Leslie but against colleagues on the council who have stood by her.

During the Commons debate, the Conservative MP Julian Lewis told a hapless government minister that Leslie was threatened with financial ruin for checking whether someone who “wanted to take over a political organisation within the Conservative party was clean or dirty”. If the minister could not understand why Leslie and people like her needed protection, “then he needs to... restudy his brief”.

The minister said the government would respond. But I don’t see how it can. The Conservative party is the beneficiary of a system Amersi himself described as “access capitalism”. He paid money to Ben Elliot whose Quintessentially “concierge” company provides the super-rich with any luxury they desire. Elliot is Prince Charles’s nephew and Amersi went on to become a trustee of the Prince’s Trust. Like hedge fund managers and Russian oligarchs, Amersi and his Russian-born partner, Nadezhda Rodicheva, have donated lavishly to the Tory party.

Wealth, monarchy, government and law mix so thoroughly that the boundaries disintegrate into a foaming broth. Do not in these circumstances be surprised by the Conservative attacks on rights to vote and demonstrate and threats to destroy the BBC. Oligarchical money is of a piece with oligarchical politic and Charlotte Leslie won’t be the last person it sends into a world of pain.

Nick Cohen is an Observer columnist

This article was downloaded by calibre from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jan/22/no-one-is-safe-from-rich-elite-abuse-british-law-ask-charlotte-leslie>

Headlines friday 21 january 2022

- [Conservatives Blackmail allegations need to be investigated, says Kwasi Kwarteng](#)
- [Live Minister says blackmail has ‘no place in British politics’ after allegations](#)
- [Conservatives Tory whips accused of intimidating MPs who oppose Boris Johnson](#)
- [Liz Truss Foreign secretary backs PM but sidesteps leadership question](#)

Boris Johnson

Blackmail allegations need to be investigated, says Kwasi Kwarteng

Minister says ‘any form of blackmail and intimidation of that kind simply has no place in British politics’



Kwarteng said he finds it ‘very unlikely that these allegations are true’.
Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

Matthew Weaver

Fri 21 Jan 2022 05.24 EST

The business secretary, [Kwasi Kwarteng](#), has said allegations of blackmail by government whips against Tory rebels need to be investigated but are unlikely to be true.

Speaking to Sky News, Kwarteng said: “Any form of blackmail and intimidation of that kind simply has no place in British politics.” He added:

“We need to get to the bottom of the matter. I’d find it very unlikely that these allegations are true.”

On Thursday, William Wragg, the chair of the public administration committee, claimed there had been attempted blackmail involving threats to funding in the constituencies of his fellow Conservative MPs who backed a confidence vote on Boris Johnson’s leadership.

No 10 dismissed the allegations and said they would only be investigated if any evidence was presented.

Although Kwarteng was sceptical of the allegations, he suggested they should be investigated. He said: “I find it strange because the whip’s office doesn’t actually have the power over spending in that way. But obviously, we’re going to take the allegation seriously and we need to look [get] to the bottom of it.”

He added: “I’ve been an MP for 12 years now and I’ve never heard of the kind of allegations that have been made: blackmail, the idea that somehow money is being withheld from communities that need it on account of the behaviour of the MPs, I’ve never heard of anything like that.

“It’s really important that whips get on with MPs – it’s a really important relationship. So I was very surprised to see the allegations. I haven’t seen any evidence to back them up. But obviously we have to look and see what’s actually gone on.

“I don’t want to get drawn into what will happen if unsubstantiated allegations [are] proven true. All I would like to say is that it’s completely unacceptable. And we need to get to the bottom of the matter.”

Christian Wakeford, the former Tory MP who defected to Labour on Wednesday, said the whips had threatened to withhold money for a school in his Bury South constituency when he was considering rebelling against the government.

Kwarteng told Sky: “He’s a Labour MP now, and of course, part of his job is to try and discredit the government.”

Asked later by BBC Radio 4's Today programme about Wakeford's allegation, Kwarteng said: "I'm sure it will be investigated if it's not being so already ... I think Christian Wakeford will be aware that the whips don't have authority to spend money in local communities. I don't think it is true."

He added: "I think the claims have been unsubstantiated, as the prime minister said, he hadn't seen any evidence. I haven't seen any evidence of this. Any allegation of that seriousness should be looked into and would have consequences if it is found to be true."

The claims over whipping tactics came as Johnson battled to remain in power before the outcome of an inquiry by the senior civil servant Sue Gray into allegations of rule-breaking partying at Downing Street during coronavirus restrictions.

The Times [reported](#) that rebels were considering releasing texts or recordings of their conversations with whips to show their tactics.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/jan/21/blackmail-allegations-need-to-be-investigated-says-kwasi-kwarteng>.

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

[**Politics**](#)

No 10 resists investigation into ‘blackmailing’ of Tory MPs critical of Johnson until ‘evidence’ found – as it happened

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Conservative leadership

Tory whips accused of intimidating MPs who oppose Boris Johnson

PM optimistic he can overcome a confidence vote as whipping alleged to veer into blackmail

01:18

Boris Johnson: I've seen no evidence to support blackmail claims – video

[Jessica Elgot](#), [Peter Walker](#) and [Josh Halliday](#)

Thu 20 Jan 2022 18.43 EST

Tory whips were accused on Thursday of using dirty tactics to intimidate rebels as [Boris Johnson](#) was said to be increasingly convinced he could see off a vote of no confidence.

Though allies of Johnson believe a vote is almost inevitable after the inquiry into Downing Street parties is published next week, one cabinet minister said on Thursday there were now significant doubts among the rebels about whether they could defeat the prime minister.

The Guardian has been told of at least five MPs who have expressed concerns about the government threatening funding for their constituency or encouraging damaging stories to be published in newspapers.

MPs said the tactic had been used not only during the so-called partygate scandal, but ahead of the votes on Uighur genocide, cutting international aid, free school meals and the rise in national insurance. The Times reported that rebels were considering releasing texts or recordings of their conversations with whips to show their tactics.

A No 10 spokesperson said: “We are not aware of any evidence to support what are clearly serious allegations. If there is any evidence to support these

claims we would look at it very carefully.” Johnson said he had “seen no evidence” of those threats.

The row over whipping tactics came amid other developments as:

- A significant email from a senior official warning Martin Reynolds not to hold the summer party on 20 May has now been obtained by the inquiry by Sue Gray.
- Anger among Johnson critics escalated after sources briefed that rebels were losing their nerve. MPs denied that letters of no confidence had been withdrawn, calling it spin by Number 10.
- Leading Brexiter Steve Baker said it looked like “checkmate” for the prime minister.

As allies of Johnson claimed the prime minister was being given a reprieve before the Gray report, senior Tory William Wragg, who chairs a government scrutiny committee, claimed there was attempted blackmail against some colleagues involving public money.

He urged MPs to report government ministers, whips and advisers to the Speaker – and even the police.

Two of the MPs, the Tory defector Christian Wakeford and Andrew Bridgen, another Johnson critic, spoke publicly on Thursday about the tactics they claim had been deployed against them.

Wakeford backed up the claims by Wragg that threats involving public money were made by the whips.

“I was threatened that I would not get a school for Radcliffe if I did not vote in one particular way,” he said. “This is a town that has not had a high school for the best part of 10 years.

“How would you feel when they hold back the regeneration of a town for a vote. It didn’t sit comfortably. That was the start of me questioning my place, where I was and ultimately to where I am now.”

00:35

Christian Wakeford claims he was threatened with loss of funding over vote – video

Wragg, who chairs the public administration and constitutional affairs committee (PACAC), which looks into the work of government and the civil service, said it would breach the ministerial code “in threatening to withdraw investment from members of parliaments’ constituencies which are funded from the public purse”.

He said encouraging the publication of stories in newspapers would also be a breach. “The intimidation of a member of parliament is a serious matter,” he added. “Moreover, the reports of which I’m aware would seem to constitute blackmail.

“As such it would be my general advice to colleagues to report these matters to the Speaker of the House of Commons and the commissioner of the Metropolitan police.”

Bridgen, a Conservative backbencher who was among the first MPs to call for Johnson to go, said he believed a story in the Times on Monday detailing his links to a Ghana-based timber company had been inspired by No 10.

“Not only am I confident that happened, but so are all my colleagues,” Bridgen, MP for North West Leicestershire since 2010, told the Guardian. “One of them told me, ‘It’s not even subtle nowadays.’”

One former minister said he was incensed by the tactic of threatening to cut funding to seats. “It has unusually high leverage with our newer colleagues. We have young, new members with marginal seats in poor areas.

“That’s precisely the area where the seat is dependent on allocations of money and the levelling up regime. The scope for this kind of threat is much more than it would have been. If you use this tactic all the red wall are susceptible to it.”

The Speaker, Lindsay Hoyle, said allegations about potentially criminal offences would be a matter for the police.

Angela Rayner, Labour's deputy leader, said the alleged threats to withdraw investment to force support for Johnson were "disgusting" and Ed Davey, the Lib Dem leader, said Johnson was "now in full scorched earth mode".

One cabinet minister said Johnson was increasingly confident that he could "probably win" in a vote of no confidence and called the whipping row "a sideshow".

He said colleagues were beginning to think it was "electoral suicide" to depose Johnson. "When you start to put it to people that the prime minister who got us this huge majority might have to go over cheese and wine – well it starts to look ridiculous."

But other MPs said Johnson was still in deep peril. "There are a lot of people who do not like these kinds of threats; they don't like bullies," one MP said. Another MP opposing Johnson denied that letters of no confidence had been withdrawn after [Wakeford defected](#) to Labour.

"These briefings of withdrawals are pure invention from No 10," one said. "Wakeford may have stayed some people's hands yesterday but this isn't going into reverse."

Johnson is understood to be keen for Gray's report to be published by Tuesday, to allow him to make a statement before facing another PMQs on Wednesday.

A significant email from a senior official warning Martin Reynolds not to hold the summer party on 20 May has now been obtained by Gray, first reported by ITV.

Cabinet Office sources said she had already been given the authority to search email records – which are retained even from departing officials. A Whitehall source said Gray is nearing the end of her inquiry and publication next week was very likely.

Baker, a key Westminster figure who often led rebellions including on Brexit and Covid, said he would not be organising against the prime minister but said he should resign if he broke the law or misled parliament.

“I’m appalled we’ve reached this position,” he told the BBC’s Political Thinking podcast.

“At the moment I’m afraid it does look like checkmate but whether he can save himself, we’ll see … I’m very clear that if he’s broken the law or lied at the dispatch box, then he must go. But one thing I would say I’m not going to organise against Boris Johnson, my heart wouldn’t be in it.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/jan/20/boris-johnson-ministers-confidence-vote-whipping>.

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Liz Truss

Liz Truss says Boris Johnson is doing a ‘fantastic job’ but sidesteps leadership question

The foreign secretary, in Sydney for ministerial-level talks, says the embattled PM has her support and should stay in No 10 ‘as long as possible’



Liz Truss and defence secretary Ben Wallace are in Sydney for talks with Australian foreign minister Marise Payne and Australian defence minister Peter Dutton. Truss said Boris Johnson ‘has my 100% support’. Photograph: Bianca de Marchi/AFP/Getty Images

[Ben Doherty](#) in Sydney

[@bendohertycorro](#)

Thu 20 Jan 2022 23.39 EST

The foreign secretary, Liz Truss, has backed [Boris Johnson](#), saying he is doing “a fantastic job” as prime minister, that he has her “100% support”, and should remain in Number 10 “as long as possible”.

Truss, in Sydney for a series of ministerial talks with her Australian counterpart, was asked on Friday whether the prime minister’s leadership remained tenable, given the [unfolding anger](#) over a series of parties in Downing Street while the UK was under a strict Covid lockdown.

“The prime minister has my 100% support. He is doing an excellent job,” Truss said during a press conference in Sydney. “I want the prime minister to continue as long as possible in his job. He is doing a fantastic job.”

Truss, seen a potential leadership candidate should Johnson be forced out, did not answer a question about whether she would run for prime minister if a leadership ballot was held.

“There’s no leadership election,” she said.

Asked about the rising anger across Britain over No 10’s apparent consistent defiance of Covid lockdown laws, Truss said Johnson had acknowledged the error and that the British people were focused on the country’s economic recovery.

“The prime minister apologised and said mistakes were made. He is working to open up the economy and deliver for people across Britain and that is what is important … and that is what people are focused on.”

Truss was also asked about [allegations of blackmail](#) by Tory whips, accused of intimidating rebel backbench MPs who had spoken out against Johnson or defied the party line on votes. “I’ve already commented on the situation in the United Kingdom,” Truss said, “and I do not have any information about what is happening on the subject you raise.”

Truss was in Sydney, along with defence secretary Ben Wallace, for the annual “Aukmin” talks between with Australia’s defence and foreign ministers.

Truss said the UK and Australia, as historic allies, were “facing global challenges with multiple aggressors”.

“We are seeing increased economic coercion from China, we are seeing increased aggression from Russia, we are seeing Iran in danger of obtaining nuclear capability and we need to work with all of our friends and partners around the world, and Australia is an absolutely crucial ally and friend.”

Australia’s defence minister, Peter Dutton, said UK submarines will be making more trips to Australia and the Indo-Pacific. “We will see greater rotations, as we’ve already seen from the strike carrier group and from the nuclear sub visit out of the UK,” he said.

“We will see more, not just from the UK, but from the United States. We’re seeing greater interest, of course, from even the Germans and other European nations, more people that understand what is happening in terms of the coercion and bullying taking place within the Indo-Pacific.”

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2022.01.21 - Spotlight

- ['I was so close to the sky. It was spiritual' Sonny Rollins on jazz landmark The Bridge at 60](#)
- [You be the judge Should my brother give me better birthday presents?](#)
- ['The Greens want to take our meat away' Europeans go to war over their dinner](#)
- ['They cut him into pieces' India's 'love jihad' conspiracy theory turns lethal](#)



Sonny Rollins plays his saxophone on the Williamsburg Bridge in New York. Photograph: New York Daily News Archive/NY Daily News/Getty Images

'I was so close to the sky. It was spiritual': Sonny Rollins on jazz landmark The Bridge at 60

Sonny Rollins plays his saxophone on the Williamsburg Bridge in New York. Photograph: New York Daily News Archive/NY Daily News/Getty Images

It's one of the most romantic stories in music: the jazz star rejecting fame to practise on a New York bridge for two years. Now 91, Rollins recalls those long cold days – and how he has coped after losing the power to play

by [John Fordham](#)

Fri 21 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

If you happened to be gazing idly from a window of New York City's J train crossing the East River on the Williamsburg Bridge, most days between the summer of 1959 and the autumn of 1961, you might have glimpsed a lone saxophonist huddled into a cranny of the gigantic steel skeleton.

Travellers on the footway might have got close to the sound of him, too: an astonishing tumult of fast tumbling runs seeming to echo the chatter of the wheels on the subway tracks, honking low-tone exclamations exchanged with the hoots of the riverboats, snatches of blues, pop hits, classical motifs, calypsos. Few witnesses to those torrential monologues will have shrugged him off as just another busker; this was an intuitive master of his instrument who, for some reason, had chosen to tell this multitude of stories to the sky instead of a rapt roomful of fans.

"What made me withdraw and go to the bridge was how I felt about my own playing," reflects that saxophonist today, 91-year-old [Sonny Rollins](#). "I knew I was dissatisfied."

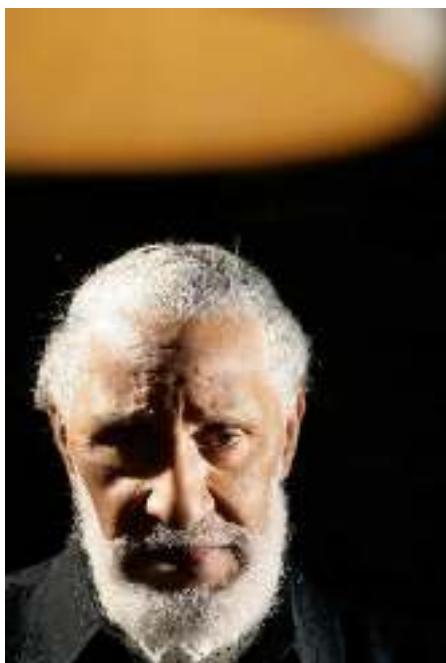
He climbed the steep iron steps within two blocks of the apartment he shared with his wife, Lucille, at 400 Grand Street in Manhattan, and was thrilled by the space, light and noisy solitude they led to. Rollins was 28 and already one of the undisputed giants of the subtle and sophisticated modern-jazz advances known as bebop that had taken off in the 40s – even though [Miles Davis](#), [John Coltrane](#) and [Ornette Coleman](#) were close on his heels with radical new approaches to how melody, harmony and rhythm could dance spontaneously together.

Between 1956 and 1958, after a series of brilliant small-band albums including *Saxophone Colossus* and *Way Out West*, Rollins was acclaimed by the *New Yorker's* [Whitney Balliett](#) as "possibly the most incisive and influential jazz instrumentalist since Charlie Parker", while the jazz/classical musicologist [Gunther Schuller](#) wrote that the thematic fertility and coherence of the young genius's off-the-cuff improvisations "held together as perfect compositions".

In the summer of 1959, though, Rollins disappeared from the radar and stayed off it for the next two years – instead playing the saxophone on the

bridge day and night, rain or shine, in solitary sessions of sometimes 15 hours or more. This month is the 60th anniversary of his return to the recording studio, when he entered RCA Victor's Studio B in New York on 30 January 1962 with a classy rhythm section and an even classier frontline partner in Jim Hall – one of the subtlest jazz guitarists of the era. That January session, and another a fortnight later, produced Rollins' eagerly awaited comeback album, [The Bridge](#).

Down the phone from his home in upstate New York, Rollins sounds as sprightly as he has in the handful of conversations we have had down the years – always curious, sharp of memory and generous about everyone who makes music. He hasn't played the saxophone since 2014, due to a respiratory condition. But memories of the long days and changing seasons on the bridge are vivid, as are the reasons that propelled him there, when logic suggested staying in the public eye.



Sonny Rollins in 2007. Photograph: Seth Wenig/AP

"I was getting a lot of publicity for my work at that time, but I wasn't satisfying my own requirements for what I wanted to do musically," he says. One of his neighbours at the time was an expectant mother, so "there was an immediate reason, too: it was difficult to practise a loud horn like the tenor saxophone in my apartment without disturbing somebody".

Rollins had withdrawn from jazz before, in the early 50s, when heroin addiction had taken him into a stretch of hard-labour rehab at the Lexington Narcotics Farm in Kentucky. In 1956, the year after he got clean, the exultant [Saxophone Colossus](#) session emerged. So Rollins understood the liberating potential of focused, relentless hard work, away from gigging and hanging out. But he also knew how fresh and different the new music of Coltrane, Coleman and Davis was sounding by 1959 (the year in which those three made the groundbreaking albums *Giant Steps*, *The Shape of Jazz to Come* and *Kind of Blue*) and felt he needed to provide answers of his own.

Did he worry about the disappointment his withdrawal might bring to his fans? “Am I playing music for other people, you mean?” Rollins inquires. “Yes I am, in a way. But I’m playing for myself. I have to sound good. I don’t want to make my public feel I’m great if I don’t feel like that. Also, I’ve always loved practising – as much as I did performing. Wherever I was, on tour or whatever, I always wanted to find some place to practise, because that’s in my DNA, to keep improving myself.”

I’ve always loved practising. It’s in my DNA, to keep improving myself

Every scrap of music Rollins heard from his youth in jazz-steeped Harlem onwards seemed to get stored in the random access memory of his mind, to be inverted and reshuffled on the fly in performance. His neighbourhood friend [Thelonious Monk](#) would smuggle him underage into clubs, he would pass the world-famous [Cotton Club](#) on his walk to school, and he would internalise it all, plus snatches of his siblings’ classical practice, jukebox hits and more. Reappraising and digging into all that material in his head, away from the pressures of gigging and travel, seems to have been a trigger for Rollins ascending to the bridge.

“I just happened to be out walking and I saw some steps and I thought: let’s see what’s up there,” Rollins says. “And when I got up to the top, I just saw all this fantastic open space. No one was up there. It was busy, sure – the subway trains and cars were going over and the boats going underneath – but there weren’t many people walking on it in those days; it’s much busier

now. There were a lot of pillars and abutments back then, where I could find spaces where people couldn't see me, though they could hear me. The only people who could see me were the few who were walking across the bridge. And not many of them would stop to talk. I guess they mostly thought: who's that crazy guy?"



Rollins in the early 60s. Photograph: Gilles Petard/Redferns

Presumably calls of nature and inhospitable weather must have intervened now and then? "Well, I would play for a long time every day, often 14 or 15 hours. Of course, sometimes I'd come down to go to the bathroom, or I'd go to a bar I liked where I might have a cognac, but then I'd go right back up. If it was cold, I'd play with gloves on; that was not a problem.

"It was so wonderful to be so close to the sky up there, any time of year. Maybe this might sound a little bit corny to people, but it was a spiritual feeling to me. Years later, I remember playing an open-air concert, somewhere in Buffalo or Maine, and I looked up at the sky and felt that communion with some kind of spiritual element. It felt great to me – that distance thing, reaching out to something beyond the people."

Rollins felt ready to return to the stage in autumn 1961, concerned that Lucille was bearing the brunt of supporting them both in her secretarial job

at New York University. When *The Bridge* came out the following year, it didn't reveal the radically reinvented Rollins, possibly leaning toward free jazz, that some of his admirers were anticipating. But nonetheless, this was not the same Rollins as the ruggedly freewheeling one of three years earlier.

His own compositions, the staccato, exclamatory John S and the balefully stripped-down title track, mixed brittle short-note themes (resembling percussion patterns) with clusters of dense melody, opening out into improvisations that suggested his rival Coltrane's *Giant Steps* had not gone unnoticed. But his handling of the 30s Billie Holiday ballad God Bless the Child harked back to the muscular lyricism of the tenor sax pioneer [Coleman Hawkins](#), albeit with a characteristically Rollins-spiced sardonic bite. His tonal range seemed broader, his ear for telling detail sharper.

Rollins then made some uneven but intriguing recordings for the free-jazz-oriented label Impulse! in the mid-60s, before taking a second sabbatical in 1968-71 for philosophical study, Zen meditation and a retreat to a monastery in India. As he entered his 40s, the restless self-inquisitor then seemed ready to concede a middle ground between his own improvisational wilfulness and his audiences' hopes for a catchy tune.

From the early 70s to his retirement in 2014, Rollins explored bop, swing, funk, Latin and Caribbean music, striding the world's sold-out concert stages with "the greatest living improviser" emblazoned on the posters outside – a line endorsed by seamlessly flat-out, unaccompanied sax improvisations that would pull cheering crowds to their feet. No more than a handful of jazz musicians since the emergence of the genre in the early 20th century had enjoyed such acclaim.



On stage in 2012. Photograph: Jack Vartoogian/Getty Images

Seemingly unstoppable, Rollins hurtled on into his 80s, but, although he endured the initial effects of the rare lung-scarring disease pulmonary fibrosis, he was finally forced to concede in 2014. I ask him if he had considered less full-on approaches to performance at that point. “In my case, it was that I couldn’t play at all,” he says. “Blowing the horn made me sick. Believe me, I tried to play for a long time before I realised I just couldn’t play any more.

“People suggested electric instruments, but I just wanted to blow into the horn the way Coleman Hawkins did, Charlie Parker, John Coltrane, Lester Young, all of these great people whose music still makes them feel alive to me, even though they’re not here in the flesh. And I had that for a good portion of my life and I have accepted it now. But at first I was very distraught. It took me quite a while to find a way where I wouldn’t end up in the insane asylum. Because all I ever wanted to do was play. It took me a while to find another reason for living, and I found it in meditation and eastern philosophies.”

Was the thought that he had given so many people pleasure, and inspired many fine musicians to play, a help in this search? “Well, if somebody has heard me playing and it gave them an inspiration to do something, then I’m

happy about it for them,” Rollins says. “But I’m not happy about it for me, because I’ve always just been trying to get my act together, so to speak. You know what I mean? But, of course, I realised that I had to be grateful that I’ve had the opportunity of playing for a long time in some of the greatest music of my era, and that perhaps there are people whose playing I maybe inspired somehow, so I shouldn’t be mad at the world because I had to stop. So I was eventually able to deal with it, and my meditational practices and spiritual interests did help me not to feel sorry for myself.”



With Miles Davis in 1957. Photograph: Bob Parent/Getty Images

As we part, I ask a cheesy question I know that, as a believer in reincarnation, he will have been asked many times: does he want to come back as a musician in his next life? This occasions his deep, rumbling chuckle. “I try to envision the eternity of the universe,” Rollins says. “I guess that’s bigger than thinking of coming back as a musician again, maybe next time around just playing a little better. I think it’s that this life made me think more about what it means to be a human being, a good person. I was taught the golden rule as a boy: do unto others what you would want them to do unto you.

“I didn’t always do that when I was young. In the jazz world back then, Charlie Parker was into drugs – and a lot of people that were following him

started to use drugs because he did. That was the worst thing that Charlie Parker felt about himself; it was what destroyed him. He was so torn up by all the young guys that were following him into using drugs. I know that, because I experienced it from him.

“But I think, while a lot of us did stupid things, once you’re playing music, there’s something special you’ve been given by the gods above, or whatever it is.” Like Rollins on that bridge, his peers also were playing to the sky. “I’ve heard people saying: ‘No, he’s not a good human being,’ about some of the musicians I’ve known, but I never found that. Every one of them – Monk, Miles, Coltrane – was good to me, and I realised that they were all spiritual people and great human beings.”

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You be the judgeSiblings

You be the judge: should my brother give me better birthday presents?

We air both sides of a domestic disagreement – and ask you to deliver a verdict

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



Illustration: Joren Joshua/The Guardian

Interviews by [Georgina Lawton](#)

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Fri 21 Jan 2022 03.00 EST

The prosecution: Elsie

My brother is really tight with spending on birthdays, and refuses to make an effort

Ollie, my younger brother, is a nightmare every time a birthday in our family rolls around, but he's especially bad with mine. I am thinking of banning presents between us as it has caused a few arguments.

He doesn't put in the same amount of effort as I do for him. For years he wouldn't even get me a card, whereas I go all out. I know it's partly because I'm five years older than him, so when we were kids I wouldn't expect much. But now that he's 24, it offends me. Over the years I have given him designer shirts, clothing vouchers and electronics he's asked for. He has bought me a cheap supermarket card with the sticker still on, a scented candle that smelled of nothing and a horrible scratchy scarf.

A few years ago I snapped, and told him his gifts weren't up to scratch. Ollie apologised, but then last year I got a text on the day and a cheap bouquet of flowers a month late. That year I had bought him some [AirPods](#).

Birthdays are a time to show a loved one that you care. He's known me for more than 20 years – he should know what to get me

For his 21st birthday, I bought him an expensive engraved gold necklace. He was really grateful, but that year I didn't even get a birthday card – he completely forgot. I texted him the day after saying, sarcastically, "Thanks for your birthday message", and he said he was sorry – he'd been stressed with his new job, but I don't think that's a valid excuse.

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Our youngest brother is really close with Ollie and they swap decent gifts all the time. Maybe it's because they are boys, or because Ollie just knows what to get him. As the older sister it feels like the responsibility is always with me to keep up with birthdays, and his lack of effort makes me sad. Birthdays are a time to show a loved one that you care.

He has known me for more than 20 years – so he should know what to get me. It's especially important as we grow up. He needs to start being more thoughtful with gifts or it's going to continue to affect our relationship. I feel as if I should start spending less and be less thoughtful, which is horrible, but what other solution is there?

The defence: Ollie

I admit I could do better at giving birthday gifts, but Elsie never tells me what she wants

I am terrible with presents, but it's usually because I forget Elsie's birthday, or I'm preoccupied. This year I have put the date in my calendar, but I should have done that before.

Girls are really hard to buy for and Elsie never tells me what she wants. I don't have a girlfriend, so how am I supposed to know what to do? In the past, when I've tried to keep things simple with presents, Elsie has been offended.

The time I got her a scented candle she was thankful to my face, and then months later I heard from our younger brother that she had actually been annoyed about it. She won't tell me until long after the birthday has passed. I would love her to make a few gift suggestions so I have a rough idea of what to get her.

Elsie secretly wants me to repay her for all the presents she gets me, but I'm in a low-paid entry-level job – Elsie is a manager

Over the years she has let rip at me when I've forgotten her birthday. She's like: "I don't know why I bother." That's her favourite line. I sent her flowers in the post last year but they were late: it was lockdown, everyone was stressed. She wasn't impressed but at least I did something. I think she also holds a bit of a grudge when I give our brother, Michael, a good gift, but he's easier to buy for because we're closer in age and he's a guy.

It's true that Elsie is really good with my birthday. She has always been a super-thoughtful big sister. One year she got me this amazing gold chain that I had wanted for ages. I thought my parents were getting it for me, but Elsie told me she wanted it to be from her. She loves the feeling of being a good gift-giver, and I wouldn't want to take that role away from her. It's just that Elsie secretly wants me to repay her for all the presents she gets me and I am just not on her level.

I also don't have her budget: I'm in a low-paid, entry-level job, while Elsie is a manager. I'll try to step it up, because I want to preserve our relationship, but she can't expect me to match her. That's not what giving presents is about, after all.

The jury of Guardian readers

Should Ollie make more effort when buying gifts?

It's Ollie's lack of effort that upsets Elsie most, not the price tag – especially as he makes more of an effort for their brother. Ollie is aware his thoughtlessness upsets Elsie, so there is no excuse. He is guilty and should up his game.

Nadine, 56

Elsie is looking for commercial solutions to what is an existential problem. She should consider having an actual conversation with her brother rather than papering over the cracks in their relationship with vouchers.

Jac, 29

Overall, I side with Ollie. You give gifts because you want to give, not because you want something similar in return. Not everyone shows their feelings for others like this, so Elsie should take a broader perspective. However, Ollie should mark her birthday somehow as it clearly matters to her.

Michael, 52

Ollie's excuse of "girls are really hard to shop for" is really poor. Aside from this, Elsie needs to accept that gift giving is dependent on our ability to

spend. She's thoughtful and puts her heart into it, but her demand for equal gifts takes some of that away.

Nicole, 35

Elsie says "he should already know what to get me". Why should he? He is a 24-year-old single bloke! They need hints, or a list of possibilities. Maybe Elsie could prime her mum with a few suggestions in advance (within Ollie's price range, of course) and she could tactfully pass them on.

Carol, 83

You be the judge

So now you can be the judge, click on the poll below to tell us: should Ollie get Elsie better birthday presents?

The poll closes Thursday 27th January, 9AM GMT

We'll share the results on next week's You be the judge.

Last week's result

We asked if Annabelle should stop hogging the television, as it annoys her dad, Mick.

61% of you said no – Annabelle is innocent

39% of you said yes – Annabelle is guilty

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Meat industry

Greens v ‘beefatarians’: Europeans go to war over their dinner

With meat consumption twice the global average, citizens of EU27 have to reconcile environmental concerns and culinary traditions



Customers wait at the counter of a ham store in Madrid. Photograph: Denis Doyle/Getty Images

[Jon Henley](#), [Sam Jones](#), [Angela Giuffrida](#) and [Philip Oltermann](#)

Fri 21 Jan 2022 05.30 EST

A row over meat consumption in Spain over the last month is just the most recent eruption of the debate all over [Europe](#), as the continent grapples with making its famous cuisines more sustainable.

Food is inextricably intertwined with national identity for countries in continental Europe; a good steak, with perfect *frites* stacked beside it; a plate

of wafer thin *carpaccio*, drizzled with dressing or plain old olive oil; wurst, served with good mustard; *jamón ibérico* laced with creamy white fat.

Europeans love their meat, and they eat a lot of it. About 1.5kg a week is consumed by the [average citizen of the EU27](#) – that's twice the global average.

But it is also clear that if there is to be any hope of reducing the impact of global heating, that consumption level will have to fall rapidly. [Greenpeace estimates](#) that it will need to drop by 70% by the end of the decade, and down to 300g by 2050. That translates (since not all the meat that leaves slaughterhouses ends up being either sold or eaten) to each European actually eating, per week, a quantity of meat equivalent to about two good-sized hamburgers.

The response to this news? Unenthusiastic, to say the least. Politically, balancing the priorities of environmental action against the clout of often powerful farming lobbies and the expectations of populations accustomed to consuming large quantities of unrealistically cheap meat looks nearly impossible.

In Spain, for example, which holds the dubious honour of being the EU member state with the highest per capita meat supply in the bloc (more than 100kg per person, per year) the consumer affairs minister, Alberto Garzón, was engulfed in a national row last July after calling on his compatriots [to eat less meat](#) for the sake of the environment and of their own bodies. “Our health and the health of our families is at stake,” he said. “Eating too much meat is bad for our health, and for the planet.”

Within hours, he had been slapped down not just by the agriculture minister, but by the prime minister, Pedro Sánchez. Asked what he made of Garzón’s plea, Sánchez observed: “Speaking personally, a medium-rare steak is hard to beat.”

There is evidence that many Europeans are taking the issue seriously. One recent [survey showed](#) almost half (46%) of European consumers are now eating less meat than they once did, while 40% are planning on reducing their meat consumption in the future.

The EU-backed study, of more than 7,500 people in 10 European countries, found a third actively sought to minimise their meat consumption – with 73% of that group saying they had “substantially” reduced their meat intake over the past months.

But in its [latest document](#), the European Commission suggests that despite clear and growing public awareness of the importance of sustainability, EU meat consumption per capita, left to its own devices, is likely to fall by little more than 3kg a year.

Government intervention, then, will be essential, but, judging by Spain’s example, difficult. Garzón again [told the Guardian](#) in December that people had to reduce their meat consumption, and contrasted meat from traditional, extensive farming with that produced on intensive megafarms, but parts of Garzón’s interview were seized on by the conservative People’s party and the far-right Vox party, who have demanded he resign for what they portray as an unforgivable attack on Spain’s important meat industry and the quality of its exports.

The consumer affairs minister has stuck by his words, accusing “the lobby of certain big companies which promote polluting megafarms” of deliberately distorting what he said. His comments, moreover, do not differ wildly from official government policy. The ministry for ecological transition wants extensive production systems promoted, and well-adapted native breeds used more. The agriculture minister has praised small family farms, and some regional governments have already acted to limit intensive farming.

In [Germany](#), traditionally among the EU’s biggest consumers of animal-based products per capita, meat-eating has declined steadily over the last two decades, but here too the politics are sensitive.

The Green party, part of the new three-party coalition with the centre-left SPD and the liberal FDP, might have been expected to throw itself into accelerating the falling trend, but has so far held back.

The hesitancy comes from painful political experience. Germany’s Greens have suffered in recent years from being seen as a *Verbotspartei*, intent on banning the joys of life. A 2013 “veggie day” initiative for meat-free days at

state-subsidised canteens saw the tabloid Bild complain that “the Greens want to take our meat away”.

Instead, the environmental party has used its first weeks in power to initiate a less politically exposing campaign against junk meat sold for junk prices. The new agriculture minister, Cem Özdemir, told Bild Germans were losing out because food quality and food prices were too low.

Junk prices, often imposed by all-powerful supermarket chains, he said, “drive farms to ruin, prevent animal welfare, promote species extinction and burden the climate. I want to change that.” The price of food should, he said, echoing the findings of a commission set up by the previous government, reflect the “ecological truth” and consumers must get used to paying a fair price for better quality.

But this approach, too, is far from universally popular: the new government’s attack on cheap meat was criticised by the Paritätische Gesamtverband, an umbrella group for Germany’s social welfare organisations, which argues higher food prices must be accompanied by compensation payments for those on low incomes.

And in [Italy](#), the environment minister, Roberto Cingolani, triggered a fiery debate last year by saying excessive meat consumption was harmful to health and the environment, adding that encouraging Italians to eat less meat would be central to his plans.

“Changing our diet will have the combined benefit of improving public health, decreasing water use and producing less CO₂,” Cingolani said. Farmers hit back instantly, saying annual meat consumption per capita in Italy is among the lowest in Europe and meat was an important part of a balanced diet.

Activists including Luca Mercalli, a well-known meteorologist, are keeping the debate alive, arguing that better quality meat produced closer to home and consumed in smaller quantities would make a significant difference to the environment.

“A proportion of Italians are sensitive to the topic and have changed their diets, either due to concerns about the climate or dietary motives,” Mercalli said. “The problem in Italy is the debate often turns toxic, with vegetarians becoming very judgmental of meat-eaters, which in turn alienates 90% of the population.”

The onus should be on the government to provide clearer information, he said. “The message should be: eat less meat, but when you do, buy locally produced meat that is more sustainable. Even if you pay more, eating better quality meat once a week is far better than eating a cheap hamburger every day.”

French meat consumption has also been [falling steadily](#), with [surveys suggesting](#) half the population has reduced their meat consumption over the past three years and that 30% would like to continue doing so over the next three. And yet howls of outrage greeted the launch of France’s [national low-carbon strategy](#), adopted in 2020, which aims to cut greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture – which represent 20% of the country’s total, with fully 80% generated by livestock farming – by 19% by 2030 and 46% by 2050.

EU countries that have tried to implement concrete meat reduction policies have faced instant backlashes. The Danish government was forced in 2020 to reverse a ban on state canteens serving meat for two days every week after trade unions and the food industry objected, and the government has now instead switched its focus to boosting non-meat food production, approving [a climate agreement](#) that features the EU’s largest investment in plant-based research and development, including an annual fund to support the transition to a nationwide dietary shift. In the Netherlands, in an attempt to prioritise tackling the major environmental issues long caused by its intensive pig and other farms, the new government features a minister for nature and nitrogen affairs, Christianne van der Wal-Zeggelink.

And all of this is no less true for the European Commission itself, struggling with the incompatibility of ambitious carbon emission reduction plans and the vast common agricultural policy subsidies that [account for nearly a third](#) of the EU’s budget. Greenpeace has [broken down the numbers](#) and calculates that a fifth of the EU’s entire budget is spent on livestock.

As recently as 2020, the EU was still spending money to promote meat eating with a controversial and frankly slightly mad ad campaign [exhorting people to become Beefatarians](#). “If the sound of beef sizzling on the grill brings tears to your eyes, you’re a real Beefatarian,” coos the ad. Confused? It’s only going to get worse.

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India

‘They cut him into pieces’: India’s ‘love jihad’ conspiracy theory turns lethal

Hindu extremists are carrying out violent attacks to stop interfaith relationships with Muslims

14:32

Love jihad: India's lethal religious conspiracy theory – video

[Hannah Ellis-Petersen](#) and [Ahmer Khan](#) in Belgaum

Fri 21 Jan 2022 00.00 EST

It was dark and pelting down with rain as Sameer Parishwadi ran along the railway tracks. Up ahead, as torches darted across the tracks, they shone on to a pair of feet.

A few metres away, sliced clean from the body, was a head, one that he recognised. It was Arbaaz Aftab Mullah, his cousin and best friend from childhood.

Parishwadi turned over his cousin’s body and saw that his hands were tightly bound. “I knew then that this was 100% a murder,” he said. “He had been tortured and then cruelly killed.”

Wiping his eyes, Parishwadi added: “He had not committed a crime by loving someone, yet he paid the ultimate price.”

Mullah, a 24-year-old Muslim man from the southern Indian state of Karnataka, was killed in September – allegedly for falling in love with a Hindu girl.



Sameer Parishwadi at the place where he found the body of his cousin Arbaaz Aftab Mullah. Photograph: The Guardian

In India, interfaith marriages have always carried a social stigma and faced resistance by all faiths as they often require religious conversion.

But, in recent years, since the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata party (BJP) came to power, such unions – particularly between Hindu women and Muslim men – have become a dangerous political flashpoint due to a discredited but pervasive conspiracy theory known as “love jihad”.

Those who believe in the theory claim that Muslim men are luring Hindu women into marriage on false pretences, in order to convert them to Islam and ensure Muslim dominance over the Hindus in India.

According to India’s national investigation agency, there is no evidence for “love jihad”, nor is it reflected in India’s population data, where Hindus continue to make up about 80% and Muslims 14%.

But what was once a fringe extremist theory has now been brought into the political mainstream and, last year, numerous BJP-ruled states, including Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, passed legislation to clamp down on

conversion for interfaith marriages – laws colloquially known as the “love jihad” laws.

While the legislation covers all religions, over the past year it has predominately been used to target minorities as well as emboldening rightwing Hindu vigilante groups to halt interfaith marriage.

In Uttar Pradesh, Muslim men who have attempted to marry consenting Hindu women have been violently attacked, forced into hiding or sent to jail. Of the 208 people arrested under the new anti-conversion law between November 2020 and August 2021, all were Muslim. None have been convicted so far.



Tensions between Hindus and Muslims can run high. Photograph: The Guardian

Asif Iqbal, who runs Dhanak For Humanity, an organisation that assists interfaith couples facing hostility, said he had seen a rise in those seeking help in the past year.

“They fear society, they fear their families, they fear they might get killed by these fanatic groups and now they have the added fear of false police cases being filed,” he said.

In Bareilly, the area of Uttar Pradesh which has had the highest number of love jihad arrests since the new law was passed, Ashu Agarwal, 52, a local leader of one of the most active rightwing Hindu groups, Vishva Hindu Parishad, claimed families approached them “day in, day out” for help in preventing interfaith marriages and love jihad cases.

“For the last 50 years, we have known about love jihad but we weren’t able to express ourselves and the issue was swept under the carpet,” said Agarwal.

Agarwal pointed to a recent case of an alleged internationally funded “love jihad syndicate” in Bareilly, led by a local Muslim man, Syed Nizam, as proof of the problem.

But Nizam’s family said the case was trumped up and being used to punish him for getting involved with an older Hindu woman. Nizam was allegedly kidnapped and beaten by the woman’s relatives, then handed over to the police, beaten in jail until he made a video confession that he was accepting money from abroad to rape and convert Hindu women.



Students take part in a protest against love jihad in front of Academy of Fine Art in Kolkata on Valentine’s Day last year. Photograph: Dipa Chakraborty/Pacific Press/Rex/Shutterstock

Nizam has now been behind bars for more than five months. “He was a father of three and was [not] involved in conversions, he wasn’t even very religious. This is a false case but we are Muslim, we can’t do anything,” said his mother, Latifan Begum.

Karnataka is one of the states also proposing to bring in a “love jihad” law, but, in the interim, rightwing Hindu groups have been active themselves. It was one such group, Shri Ram Sena Hindustan, that got wind of the relationship between Mullah, a Muslim, and Shweta Kumbhar, a Hindu, in the city of Belgaum.

Mullah and Kumbhar lived opposite each other and became romantically involved in 2019. She would bring tiffin boxes of food over to his house, and they would go on long walks together.

Though they knew their love was frowned upon, they felt no need to be discreet: their phones were filled with selfies of each other and Mullah would talk of her often to his friends.

Mullah’s mother, Nazima Shaikh, tried desperately to intervene. “I told him to stay away from the girl, that it was dangerous,” she said. When he refused, Shaikh moved the family to a new house. But still the couple organised secret meetings and spoke regularly on the phone.

But last year, Mullah began to get threatening phone calls, allegedly from Kumbhar’s family and then from members of Shri Ram Sena Hindustan.

On 26 September, two leaders of the group summoned Mullah and his mother to a meeting on a bridge, where they warned him to end the relationship and sever all contact, or face the consequences. They broke Mullah’s sim card and deleted all photos of Kumbhar from his phone.

Two days later, while his mother was away travelling, he tried to call Kumbhar again. According to police, that night two members of Hindu Shri Ram Sena Hindustan were paid by Kumbhar’s family to murder their daughter’s Muslim lover.

They allegedly stabbed him to death, then transported Mullah's body to the railway tracks in Khanapur, where they dismembered it to make it look like he had jumped in front of a train.

Ten people have been charged, including at least two known members of Shri Ram Sena Hindustan and Kumbhar's parents.

Ramakant Konduskar, the founder and leader of Shri Ram Sena Hindustan, denied any involvement of his organisation in the killing. "Those who were arrested were doing great work for Hindutva [Hindu nationalism] and that's how they got trapped in this case," he said.

Konduskar alleged there was "big conspiracy of conversions happening across the country", and said that while Mullah's case was "tragic ... everyone should love their own religion and not act against the religion of others".

Shaikh said she would fight for justice for her son until her last breath. "How are there such hard-hearted people in this world? He didn't do any wrong to anyone and yet they cut him into pieces," she wept. "I cannot sleep, I cannot eat, my son's image is always with me."

Mohammad Sartaj Alam contributed reporting

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2022.01.21 - Coronavirus

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- [Schools Masks to stay in many secondary schools despite England rule change](#)
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Coronavirus

Mixed messages? How end of Covid plan B could change behaviour in England

Analysis: Experts say when the rules are relaxed there tends to be a gradual erosion of protective behaviours



A public health notice in London. Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

Hannah Devlin Science correspondent

@hannahdev

Fri 21 Jan 2022 02.00 EST

[All plan B measures](#) in England will be lifted next week, meaning an end to compulsory mask-wearing in shops, vaccine certificates for entering venues, and guidance to work from home. But are the public ready to embrace these

freedoms just weeks after Covid cases in the UK hit a record high and with daily deaths higher now than when the measures were introduced?

Some are likely to feel more than ready to cast aside restrictions that have been financially and personally cumbersome, while others may fear things are moving too quickly. Regardless of the range of attitudes, changing the rules will shift behaviour.

“The research so far has shown that it has been rules that have been the dominant feature in driving behaviour,” said Prof Robert West, a behavioural scientist at University College London (UCL). “When you take the rules away, it won’t happen immediately, but what we’ve seen previously is a gradual erosion of protective behaviours even when attitudes are not changing that much.”

West points to a steady decline in the number of people adhering to advice to wear masks once it is not longer a requirement. “People still said they thought it was a good idea, but fewer and fewer people were actually doing it.”

West said that indications that the government would allow the legal requirement to self-isolate to lapse did not necessarily mean that people would jump the gun and change their behaviour in advance of this rule change.

“From data earlier in the pandemic we did not see substantial rule-breaking ahead of relaxations but in any event the adherence to self-isolation requirements has been low – one of the reasons why we have done so badly in the UK,” he said. “Thinking about other relaxations of legal restrictions, such as changes to cannabis laws in the US, I am not aware of major changes to behaviour ahead of the change.”

Once a certain threshold is crossed, the social norm can shift, hastening an overall change in behaviour. However, society does not move as a cohesive group, reflecting the very wide differences in risk faced by different groups and also shaped by personal experiences during the pandemic.

“You’ve got many groups of people, including about a quarter who are clinically vulnerable because of their age and/or health status,” said Prof Susan Michie, the director of the Centre for Behaviour Change at UCL. “Many have stopped going out to restaurants and bars and are living very restricted lives. That’s not to do with the rules, it’s to do with the level of infection that has been allowed to surge and stay high over many months.”

By contrast, Michie said, young men have been the least likely to adhere to rules and are the group most likely to shift to less cautious behaviour once rules are lifted.

People also respond to messaging as well as the letter of the law. Simon Williams, a senior lecturer in people and organisation at Swansea University, said that on this front people may have been left feeling uncertain about what behaviours were now recommended.

“As the government mentions, caution is still important, since, despite the positive trend, rates are still high,” he said. “However … the problem with the general advice to ‘be cautious’ is that it is too vague and conflicts with the message that is sent by the removal of all policy measures and protections.

“Throughout the pandemic there has been a feeling amongst many that there have been ‘mixed messages’ – often a result of policies and messages not matching up.”

Prof Stephen Reicher, a behavioural scientist at the University of St Andrews, noted that behaviour depends not just on people’s eagerness to be out and about, but also on the extent to which choices are available. If working from home is no longer government guidance, it may no longer be an option for many employees, for instance. And when the requirement to self-isolate ends in March (or before then), along with test-and-trace support grants, some of those on low incomes who relied on these payments may not feel they have a choice.

“We concentrate a lot on the issue of motivation – will the public want to or not want to go out,” said Reicher. “But actually, when you say ‘it’s up to

you', it means it's up to you if you've got the resources to do it; if not, bad luck."

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/21/mixed-messages-how-end-of-covid-plan-b-rules-could-change-behaviour>

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Schools

Masks to stay in many secondary schools despite England rule change

Headteachers across England say they plan to encourage pupils to keep wearing masks during Omicron spread

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



Head teachers say Boris Johnson's announcement on Wednesday that the government would no longer advise wearing masks in classrooms took them by surprise. Photograph: Kevin Coombs/Reuters

[Richard Adams](#) and [Sally Weale](#)

Thu 20 Jan 2022 13.26 EST

Secondary schools across England say they will encourage students to wear masks indoors while the Omicron variant continues to spread rapidly, despite the government's announcement curtailing the wearing of masks in classrooms this week.

The move comes as many schools report severe staff shortages, with some primary schools asking parents to conduct daily lateral flow tests on their children before coming to school.

Headteachers say [Boris Johnson's announcement](#) on Wednesday that the government would no longer advise wearing masks in classrooms took them by surprise and gave them no opportunity to consult parents or local authorities.

Schools North East, a network in the north-east of [England](#), said 80% of schools in the region planned to retain some Covid-related measures, with many secondary schools retaining face masks in classrooms and communal areas. Case rates in England remain highest in the north-east, with 1,410 reported per 100,000 people.

A majority of schools in the region reported that more than 10% of staff and students were absent, while one in four said 20% or more of their staff were off.

“Schools are still facing real challenges in getting staff cover, increasing staff workload and stress and impacting negatively on wellbeing. There are serious concerns for schools, with local pictures often radically different from the national picture,” said Chris Zarraga, the director of [Schools](#) North East.

St Peter’s Church of England school in Exeter is among those that has told parents it plans to continue with masks worn indoors, citing predictions that Covid cases would continue to increase around Devon.

“Despite the prime minister’s announcement [on Wednesday] regarding wearing of face masks in classrooms, I will be requesting that students do wear them in classrooms as well as corridors in line with other local and

national schools,” the headteacher, Phil Randall, said in a message to parents.

Wearing a mask was “a kind and thoughtful approach that supports our school community and our families, many of whom have vulnerable children and adults living with them,” Randall said.

Andy Byers, the headteacher of Framwellgate school in Durham, said face masks were still needed because Covid rates in the region remained high.

Byers wrote to parents on Wednesday evening notifying them of the decision, telling them that more than 60 students at the school were currently absent due to Covid, as well as 10 members of staff.

“Speaking to colleagues in other local secondary schools, we are all in a similar position,” with high levels of absence, some students missing important face-to-face teaching and a reliance on temporary supply teachers to fill in for absent staff, Byers said.

Other schools, including those in the Harris Federation multi-academy trust, said that masks would be optional for pupils who wanted to wear them.

The rate of new cases of Covid-19 among primary schoolchildren in England has reached record levels, according to new data from the UK Health Security Agency. The figures show 1,936 cases per 100,000 five to nine-year-olds in the week to 16 January, up 41% from the previous week.

While masks have never been advised for primary school pupils, headteachers are taking other measures. Helmshore primary school in Rossendale, Lancashire, this week asked parents to give their children lateral flow tests every day, after six staff members and 26 pupils at the school tested positive.

Greatfield Park primary school in Cheltenham has also asked parents and carers to test their children every morning.

Worcestershire county council said it has been working with 41 schools for “Covid-related support” since Monday. Hanley Castle high school in Worcestershire is among those retaining mask-wearing indoors, with head

teacher Lindsey Cooke [telling the BBC](#) the school wanted more time to see if local infection rates were falling.

“Our year 11 and year 13 exam groups have missed so much school already, what we do not want to do is to rush into taking masks off and then get another outbreak in those year groups,” Cooke said.

The government’s advice since the start of the school year has been for pupils in year 7 and above to wear masks in communal areas such as corridors. When schools reopened after Christmas, the advice included wearing of masks in classrooms.

But Johnson told MPs on Wednesday that the advice for classrooms would be withdrawn the next day, while the advice to wear masks in communal areas would end on 27 January, along with other plan B measures.

Sajid Javid, the health secretary, defended the decision because of national falling case numbers and the impact of mask-wearing on learning.

“The government’s job is to take a balanced and proportionate decision, in this case balanced against the best interests of children. It is harder to teach children and it will have an impact on their education if they are required to wear masks,” Javid said.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2022/jan/20/masks-to-stay-in-many-secondary-schools-despite-england-rule-change>

[China](#)

‘Not sustainable’: Omicron tests China’s zero Covid policy as first cases detected

With the Winter Olympics imminent, experts predict more extreme measures but question strategy’s wisdom

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



Beijing has reported fewer than 10 cases of the Delta and Omicron variants since 15 January. Photograph: Noel Celis/AFP/Getty Images

Vincent Ni, China affairs correspondent, and Helen Davidson in Taipei
Fri 21 Jan 2022 00.00 EST

Like many middle class Chinese, the 26-year-old banker from Beijing spent the first two weeks of January celebrating the new year. She visited Dior, shopped at Walmart and lunched at Quanjude, the city's best-known Peking roast duck restaurant. One evening, she watched a standup comedy show. And on one weekend, she drove with friends to a ski resort on the outskirts of the capital.

Last week it was announced she was [Beijing's Omicron "patient zero"](#). Authorities released a detailed account of her itinerary dating back to 31 December, and her mundane – if a little extravagant – lifestyle became the talking point of China. Authorities also noted that she had been [triple vaccinated with Sinovac](#).

In a country striving to “eliminate” coronavirus, this meant that more than 13,000 people, and all the places visited by the young woman in Beijing – including the ski resort – have been swiftly tested. Her block of flats and workplace were also sealed off. In press conferences, officials urged caution to residents in the city of more than 20 million as they reassured them of the efforts they were taking to keep them safe.

[Omicron](#) is unlike previous variants. Chinese public health officials, like western scientists, admit it is highly transmissible and difficult to detect. At least nine cities across six provinces in mainland China have reported Omicron cases. Since 15 January, Beijing has reported fewer than 10 local infections of the Delta and Omicron variants. They are a tiny case count compared with the rest of the world but enough to raise alarm in the Chinese capital.

The reporting of cases in Beijing has come less than three weeks before the opening ceremony of the [Winter Olympics](#) on 4 February. On Monday, China's president, Xi Jinping, vowed in a virtual speech at the [Davos World Economic Forum](#) that his country would present “a streamlined, safe and splendid Games to the world”.

There is a clear sense of urgency in the Chinese capital, partly because of the lunar new year celebrations, which begin on 1 February. The official holiday travel period began on Monday, and is expected to be busier than the

previous two years but still nowhere near pre-pandemic levels. People have been asked not to travel, but few mandates are in place.

Instead, there are myriad rules and regulations, which students and migrant workers, in particular, are furiously studying to see if they can get home for the holiday. Some worry they will be blocked from returning to Beijing after the holiday, or sent into unaffordable hotel quarantine.

A 39-year-old delivery driver, who gave the pseudonym Zhang Wei, said he had heard of the calls to stay in place for the holiday but didn't know specifics. His company has offered overtime pay and other subsidies for those who stay back and work.

Zhang told the Guardian he has lived as a migrant worker in Beijing for 14 years, and sometimes wouldn't get home for a year, but this year will be the third year in a row he hasn't made it home for Spring Festival.

"Of course I miss [my family], but my job requires me to stay here, I don't have any solutions," he said.

"My home is close to Xi'an, and Xi'an has a serious situation. If we pass by Xi'an, our health code might become yellow and we might have to be quarantined. There is a lot of inconvenience, but (the policy) is necessary."

The outbreak was scary, he said, but he thought it was being well controlled in Beijing.

Authorities are showing little tolerance, suspending flights and rail routes, and [canceling Olympic ticket sales](#) for the general public. Some cities and provinces have also banned some entrants coming from virus hotspots, while others have enacted mandatory testing, entry applications, or other measures.

"There have been no epidemics in the places I've stayed or the street I live on, and I've done a nucleic acid test more than 10 times," said one netizen hoping to travel home from Shaanxi province. "Why can't I go back yet, still?"

On Monday, Beijing authorities blamed the city's first case on a package from Canada and urged citizens not to order goods from abroad, a claim that

public health officials in Ottawa and numerous scientists dismissed as “extremely unlikely”. Regardless, officials went on to say they had found the virus on six other packages sent from Toronto.

It is still unclear whether Beijing will avoid an outbreak such as in nearby Tianjin in the next few weeks. Instead, it once again puts China’s zero-tolerance Covid containment strategy under a renewed international spotlight.

In the past two years, this controversial method achieved much success – although the personal and societal cost was high.

“[The] detection of [Omicron variant](#) in many cities in China including Beijing shows how difficult it could be to maintain the zero Covid policy,” said Prof Jin Dong-yan, of Hong Kong University’s School of Biomedical Sciences.

Without changing course (and it is probably already too late before the winter Games), experts expect more extreme measures to be announced in the coming weeks. Earlier this month, the Beijing municipality’s traffic management authority asked people to stay away from the special vehicles used to ferry athletes to and from the [Winter Olympics](#) venues in the event of a car incident.

Jin said that because the winter Games would be conducted in a “bubble” – meaning athletes will not be allowed to leave venues and tickets will only be distributed to a selected few – Omicron “might not affect the Winter Olympics significantly”.

In the long run, however, the zero tolerance policy is “not sustainable and unnecessary, and the arrival of Omicron might make it even more challenging”, he said. “But China is too big a ship to change direction. It does not have the wisdom or capability to do it as neatly as Hong Kong or Taiwan. It is challenging and costly either to maintain it or to give it up.”

Chen Xi, a public health expert at Yale school of public health, said that although China kept insisting on the “zero Covid” policy, the authorities

were also hedging their bets. “Many think China is only using the zero tolerance policy, but in my view, it is also waiting and seeing,” he said, adding that Chinese experts have realised the nature of the disease is also evolving.

“In fact, a number of Chinese thinktakers are now watching closely to (see) what extent this new variant would result in the damage of the health system, and how prepared China would be in meeting the challenge should it spread,” he said. “It is important to have such data before Beijing eventually decides to gradually open up.”

In the last few weeks, Chinese experts have been urging citizens to receive their booster jabs. In [a widely publicised speech](#) early this month, [Zhang Wenhong](#), one of China’s best-known infectious diseases experts, explained why vaccines helped reduce hospitalisation and death.

“We should allow arguments over inoculation, but we should also realise that the role of the vaccines should not be underestimated,” he told an audience in Shanghai. “If we do not actively get vaccinated and build a strong immunity barrier, we’d return to the pandemic that occurred in 1918.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/21/not-sustainable-omicron-tests-chinas-zero-covid-policy-as-first-cases-detected>

DatablogAustralia news

Australia has had its deadliest day yet of the pandemic – here's what we know about who is dying

As the nation reaches the deadliest stage of the entire coronavirus pandemic, the protective effects of the vaccine remain clear

- [Follow our Australia news live blog for the latest updates](#)
- [Covid vaccine rollout tracker](#)
- [Get our free news app; get our morning email briefing](#)



Ambulances outside St Vincent's hospital, Melbourne. Older Australians continue to be overrepresented in the death toll in Australia's third large Covid wave, even as younger people record far more cases. Photograph: Luis Ascui/AAP

[Josh Nicholas](#) and [Nick Evershed](#)

Thu 20 Jan 2022 22.22 EST

The last two weeks of the Omicron outbreak have been the deadliest of the entire coronavirus pandemic, with four of the five highest daily death tolls all in the past week alone, figures reveal.

However, despite the rising numbers, [experts say we still don't know enough about who is dying and why.](#)

Here, we've pulled together the information we do know about deaths from various government sources.

The data shows that for Australia's third large Covid wave, older Australians continue to be overrepresented in the death toll, even as younger Australians record far more cases.

And in New South Wales, where more detailed data is available, the protective effect of vaccines remains clear, with serious outcomes – deaths and ICU admission – far less likely for vaccinated people with Covid, across every age group.

There were 1,653 deaths across Australia from the beginning of the pandemic up to 27 November, which is when the [first](#) recorded case of Omicron in Australia was announced. Since then, [with a mix of the Delta and Omicron variants circulating over this time](#), there have been over 1,100 deaths:

[Australia Covid daily deaths](#)

There were 78 deaths reported on Tuesday alone this week. Before the current wave the highest daily death toll was in September 2020, [when Victoria recorded 59 deaths.](#)

Those aged 70 and over [accounted](#) for almost 80% of the deaths in the initial waves up to August last year, and once again make up a similar share of deaths in the current wave:

deaths by age group

Data from the federal Department of [Health](#) shows that the skew in deaths towards older age groups is happening despite younger Australians representing a much larger proportion of infections:

deaths v cases

The government does not publish the number of booster vaccinations by age group in its daily statistics, so it is unclear what proportion of older people are protected by a third vaccine dose or not.

In NSW, which publishes much more detailed information than the federal government or other jurisdictions in its [weekly surveillance reports](#), we can see how the risk of serious outcomes changes with both age and vaccination status.

Figures from the report show the number of deaths or ICU hospitalisations – called “severe outcomes” in the report – as a proportion of total Covid cases, split up by age group and vaccination status. So, for example, of 708 unvaccinated Covid cases in the 70-to-79 age group, there were 171 people who either died or ended up in ICU, giving a severe outcome rate of 21.9%, compared with a rate of 1.8% for vaccinated people.

These numbers show that older people face a higher rate of serious cases even while vaccinated. However, importantly, they also show vaccinated people of all age groups are less likely to die or require treatment in intensive care:

severe outcomes by age and vaccination status

The NSW data defines an unvaccinated person as anyone who has not had a single dose of a Covid vaccine and so includes those who were ineligible.

The NSW Health [surveillance report](#) also shows that the vast majority of deaths up to 1 January 2022 have occurred in hospitals. Relatively fewer people have died in aged care or at home in NSW.

deaths by location, NSW

Notes and methods:

- Covid deaths by jurisdiction and age scraped daily from the federal health department's Covid statistics page since the beginning of October by Guardian Australia. Data preceding this was scraped by Ken Tsang
- Daily and weekly Covid death calculations used data from CovidLive.com.au
- The health department defines a Covid death as a death in a probable or confirmed case where there is no clear alternative cause of death, such as a car accident. There should be no period of complete recovery from Covid-19 between illness and death

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/datablog/2022/jan/21/australia-has-had-its-deadliest-day-yet-covid-omicron-heres-what-we-know-about-who-is-dying>

2022.01.21 - Opinion

- I've been protesting all my life. It can feel futile, yet doing nothing is much worse
- Incentives used to entice NHS consultants to do private work must be disclosed
- Female leadership is good for the world. Just look at Barbados
- Labour can't afford to turn its nose up at defectors. To win, it needs them

OpinionProtest

I've been protesting all my life. It can feel futile, yet doing nothing is much worse

[Polly Toynbee](#)



The Tories are trying to ban the activism that has shaped me – from Greenham Common to UK Uncut. They must be stopped



Polly Toynbee at a protest against corporate tax policy at a Starbucks branch in central London, 2015. Photograph: Antonio Olmos/The Observer

Fri 21 Jan 2022 03.00 EST

What a miracle that the House of Lords rose up and [rebelled this week](#) against the government's assault on protest. Labour had no idea how many peers on the crossbenches, let alone the Tory benches, or even among their own rapidly ageing and frail cohort would be there to vote against draconian new laws that are more redolent of Hong Kong than Britain. If the Lords is the last backstop against the arbitrary powers of an elective dictatorship, it relies on the thin safety net of enough members' individual sense of justice in that 800-strong chamber – motivating them to turn up and stay late to vote. And this time, they did.

This week the women's rights activists Reclaim These Streets are [in the high court](#) arguing that the Metropolitan police breached human rights by banning a vigil on Clapham Common for Sarah Everard, who was murdered by a Met police officer. The group also allege that Met police officers used force while threatening protesters with £10,000 fines for breaching lockdown rules.

The spectacle of police charging into the spontaneous outpouring of anger and grief that night should have been shocking enough to stay the government's hand in its attempt to ban virtually all effective protest. But no. In a parliamentary coup, after the police, crime, sentencing and courts bill went through the Commons, the government bypassed MPs by adding 18 pages of new anti-protest laws for the Lords. It was this outrageous procedure, as much as the laws themselves, that caused the Lords rebellion. In a clear attempt by the government to stifle protest groups such as Extinction Rebellion and Insulate Britain, the new clauses would have made it an offence to disrupt infrastructure, including (rightwing) newspaper printers, with tougher sentences for blocking a highway. Police would also have been given the right to stop and search anyone at a protest without cause for suspicion, looking for people who may be planning to "lock on" to objects – a vital part of protest. Perhaps most shockingly, courts could ban anyone "with a history of causing serious disruption" from attending specific protests at all, even if they have committed no offence.

Ignoring the result of the vote, the justice secretary, Dominic Raab, says he is bringing controversial measures to restrict noise at protests – which were defeated in the Lords – back to the Commons in a new bill. He told the BBC's Today programme that noisy protest "cannot be allowed to interfere with the lives of the law-abiding majority".

These freedom-loving libertarian Tories do a lot of venting about escape from the state's illiberal powers to make them wear masks or seatbelts, or stop them from smoking indoors, or whatever other imaginary curtailments of their personal "freedom" irritate the readers of the Telegraph, Daily Mail and Spectator – reckless of public welfare. Yet they make not a bleat about the silencing of protest that is a cornerstone of liberty.

What's the point of protest? Anyone who has ever marched, sat down or locked on has asked themselves that. Few indeed are the marches that change a law, though specific and local ones can: fracking at Balcombe was stopped by Tory voters in the heart of Tory land. A million marching against the Iraq war didn't prevent it. But as with the Chartists, mass protest does change how history looks back on events. Would Iraq be seen as such an unequivocal and illegal disaster without the spectacle of a government

ignoring that biggest-ever demonstration of opposition? A giant [Countryside Alliance protest](#) seemed to frighten New Labour more.

I went on the first nuclear disarmament march as a child with my father (that time, he stopped at the Bunch of Grapes in Knightsbridge and we went no further). I carried on protesting in my teenage years – marching four days every Easter with friends to the [atomic weapons research station at Aldermaston](#). That marked my teenage calendar much like rock festivals are teen rites of passage now. Yet despite the [Greenham Common](#) years, the bomb stays unbanned, with this government [planning to increase](#) its nuclear arsenal. Suffragettes won, says history – though the more [moderate suffragists](#) claimed suffragette violence against property delayed that success.

So, what protest does work? There is surprisingly little research, says David Mead, professor of human rights law at the University of East Anglia: “There’s no easy way to measure a causative link”. Steven Fielding, professor of political history at Nottingham University, says the myth of the [Jarrow hunger marchers](#) is overdone: they changed nothing. “The poll tax riots didn’t finish Margaret Thatcher, middle England complaints in Tory seats did.”

Nothing works without capturing public attention – the press – and that takes wit, imagination, blocking streets, criminal damage or riots. The satirical collective Led By Donkeys is brilliantly subversive and effective, both [online](#) – as in its current [Line of Duty spoof](#) – and with its billboards and messages projected on to buildings.

In the post-2010 austerity years I took part in UK Uncut protests that cleverly juxtaposed public cuts with private companies the group claimed avoided paying fair taxes: I joined an occupation of a Barclays branch to set up a “library”, a Boots to set up a “medical centre”, a Pret a Manger and a Top Shop protest, setting up a token “swimming pool” (a paddling pool) and a “nursery” inside tax avoiders’ premises, as emblems of all the losses they caused. Alas, UK Uncut vanished. Such groups rise and fall, new ones refreshing ways to make a mark.

Does it do any good? Action solidifies opposition, encourages solidarity instead of despair among isolated objectors watching the climate reach boiling point. Pro-EU marches reminded us how close that vote was, how many were not consumed by Brexit lies, sending an affectionate message to Europe. Joining a march can feel futile, yet doing nothing feels worse. Protests can be annoyingly captured by the tiny Socialist Workers' party's bulk manufacture of placards, "usual suspect" imagery damaging the impact.

But here we are with effective protest destined to be banned, allowing only staid, quiet, police-backed marches, whose dullness guarantees no press coverage. This is the real cancel culture, where toppling a statue could earn a 10-year sentence. It took the rebellion of a jury against bad laws to save the [Colston Four](#). Maybe the many rowdy protests around the country against the bill encouraged this week's Lords rebellion. But that's just a stay of execution, as the government presses on. As with all present policies, expect no new leader selected by this generation of Tories to turn liberal. They have their own perverse interpretation of liberty.

- Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist
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NHS

Incentives used to entice NHS consultants to do private work must be disclosed

[David Rowland](#)

Joint ventures and other schemes mean access to certain operations is being determined not by need, but ability to pay

- [Hundreds of England's NHS consultants have shares in private clinics](#)



For the first time, more orthopaedic activity, such as hip replacements, took place in private hospitals than in the NHS in 2021. Photograph: James Thomson/University Hospital Southampton/PA

Fri 21 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

In January 2021, as London buckled under the weight of treating thousands of Covid patients, the medical directors of the main NHS hospitals [wrote to their medical consultants](#), pleading with them to stop doing non-urgent private work and to turn their attention to high-priority NHS cases.

Under the 2003 [NHS](#) consultant contract, there should have been no reason to issue such a plea. NHS consultants can only do paid work in the private sector with the permission of their NHS employer and only if it does not cause a detriment to NHS care.

In doing so, the medical directors publicly acknowledged something many people have long suspected, namely that the lure of highly lucrative private work, particularly in large cities, can pull a sizeable number of NHS consultants away to focus on those who are prepared to pay.

As NHS waiting lists have soared during the pandemic, so has the demand for fee-paying private work, with waiting lists for treatment now also occurring in the private sector, a further pull on the loyalties of NHS medical consultants.

In 2021, for the first time since 1948, more orthopaedic activity – such as hip replacements – [took place in private hospitals](#) than in the NHS. This fact can only mean that last year a significant number of consultants were doing more hip and knee replacements privately than for their NHS employers, since

there is only one pool of (mainly) NHS consultants to treat both NHS and private patients.

It also means that since the pandemic hit, access to certain operations is being determined not by need, but ability to pay.

The private hospital companies have for many years clocked the need to keep NHS consultants close to them, showering them with lavish corporate hospitality and offering them financial incentives, such as share ownership schemes and [joint ventures](#) to encourage them to do work in their hospitals.

Under such schemes the more private work they do, the more the business benefits and the greater the dividend pot which the consultants can draw from. Similar schemes are also in operation in the more controversial area of private cancer care.

The current strategy of many of the healthcare multinationals operating in the UK is to exploit the dire state of NHS cancer services and to use financial incentives to lock in NHS consultants to do work for them. It is a strategy that is succeeding – in 2017 cancer care became the biggest earner for private hospitals in London for the first time.

Yet the growing role of for-profit cancer care in the UK is something parliament and the public are yet to engage with. As cancer treatment is given to patients who are often very vulnerable, the existence of the profit motive in this form of care requires a robust system of regulation to protect patients from harm.

The very worst form of abuse happened in for-profit cancer care when the now jailed [breast surgeon Ian Paterson](#) deliberately misdiagnosed cancer in hundreds, potentially thousands of mainly female patients and as a result carried out mastectomies and other surgery for financial gain.

However, to date, the government has made only the very scantest of efforts to reform private healthcare in the light of this scandal by failing to act on the Paterson inquiry recommendations.

That NHS consultants are benefiting financially from the demand for private treatment caused by the pandemic is a highly sensitive issue the medical profession too often dodges.

But the backlog of NHS care can only be addressed if NHS consultants are compelled to give priority to NHS patients and if the financial incentives used by multinationals to encourage them to do private work are fully disclosed with any potential conflicts of interests affecting patient care firmly prohibited.

David Rowland is director of the Centre for [Health and the Public Interest](#)

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OpinionWomen's rights and gender equality

Female leadership is good for the world. Just look at Barbados

Mandeep Rai

Mia Mottley is just one of a raft of strong women across the Caribbean and South America tackling society's most pressing issues. The world could learn a lot from them



‘Mia Mottley has put issues such as the climate crisis to the front on the world stage.’ Photograph: Randy Brooks/AFP/Getty

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[About this content](#)

Fri 21 Jan 2022 02.45 EST

There is a common misconception that the developing world is full of archaic values and that women struggle to have their voices heard. The more countries I visit and the more female leaders I speak to, the more I am convinced the contrary is true.

In fact, those in positions of power worldwide could learn important lessons from these strong women when it comes to tackling some of society's most pressing issues, including pandemics, the climate crisis, education and infrastructure.

These women are finding solutions to pressing global challenges with purpose, passion and people at the fore

Of course, successful female leadership in the developing world isn't new. During her time as prime minister of India, Indira Gandhi was famously strong. In Africa, I met the highly respected former Liberian president [Ellen Johnson Sirleaf](#), who was recognised among [Time Magazine's Top 100 Women of the Year in 2020](#) for her role in picking up the pieces of a damaged nation when she was elected in 2006.

I am writing from South America and the Caribbean, having interviewed many female leaders, most recently from Suriname, Guyana, [Trinidad and Tobago](#) and Barbados. The level of respect for female political and business leaders here is partly because they have had to dig deeper to prove themselves, which I believe is one key to their success – particularly during turbulent times.

Since taking up office, Barbadian prime minister [Mia Mottley has changed the face of democracy in the country](#). She has been transparent, stands up publicly against injustices, and has created authentic ties between Caribbean countries. It is difficult to overstate what her commitment to collaboration across the region and internationally has done for Barbados, securing investment and developing infrastructure to enable a stable and sustainable economy during the Covid crisis. Countries like Barbados are often not the protagonist, yet Mottley put issues such as the climate crisis and international development to the front on the world stage.

Such is the level of support for Mottley within the region that it is not uncommon for the president of Guyana, Irfaan Ali, to wake up at 5am to cook his famous fish curries and have them delivered by the next flight, as a gesture of care and support for her.

I have also been struck by the role a “first lady” can play in sharing leadership. In Suriname, Mellisa Santokhi-Seenacherry has helped ensure that, through government policy, no one is left behind. A successful lawyer, she has promoted female leadership, empowerment and mental health with rigour.

Guyana’s first lady, Arya Ali, has brought family back into the state house and work. She is committed to inclusivity, setting up countrywide schemes that support women and girls, those with disabilities and children, and is not afraid to look at the challenging issues of domestic violence and rape. This takes courage and heart – and she has these in abundance.

In other spheres, Guyana’s Annette Arjoon has been widely recognised for her environmental and community work. Arjoon is responsible for establishing one of the country’s first, and most successful, conservation

NGOs, the Guyana Marine Turtle Conservation Society – leading the way in preserving the natural environment for future generations.

Trinidad and Tobago has this form of leadership in the private sector – the representation of female CEOs is greater here and in Jamaica than in the US. Trinidad and Tobago [Business Hall of Fame award winner Angela Lee Loy](#) continued to invest in training her employees during Covid and supporting them through the challenges of home working, giving parents the flexibility to work around home schooling, for example. “I firmly believe that if their home life needs support, then that should be our domain and area of concern, too,” she says. This approach certainly paid off. Her staff have remained engaged and loyal.

It is not easy, and there has never been a linear upward path for female leaders. However, the women highlighted here are courageously carving a path and are a brilliant example to the world. The unprecedented disruption of the past two years has thrown a spotlight on leadership. These women are finding solutions to pressing global challenges with purpose, passion and people at the fore, and are improving the lives of their communities through harnessing the very qualities that make female leaders so successful.

- [Mandeep Rai](#) is the author of *The Values Compass: What 101 Countries Teach Us About Purpose, Life and Leadership*

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OpinionLabour

Labour can't afford to turn its nose up at defectors. To win, it needs them

[Gaby Hinsliff](#)



Christian Wakeford's journey across the aisle may be hard to swallow. But Keir Starmer still needs to welcome him aboard



Keir Starmer greets Christian Wakeford: 'He says he's wrestled for months with his unease at Conservative decisions.' Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

Thu 20 Jan 2022 12.54 EST

To leave feels unthinkable but to stay would be worse. Like ending a marriage or quitting a job you loved, abandoning one's political tribe is never easy. But after months of agonising, the final break often brings with it a giddy feeling of relief. Odd, then, that there was so little sense of catharsis in Christian Wakeford's "[welcome to Labour](#)" photocall with Keir Starmer, in which the [defecting MP](#) for Bury South looked like a man whose sleepless nights were just beginning.

Perhaps he was worrying about his former colleagues scrolling furiously through their phones for old text messages with which to embarrass him. Or maybe he was anticipating a furious denunciation from the left, the minute they checked his voting record. (Young Labour [swiftly obliged](#), tweeting that he shouldn't be allowed to join the party, while Laura Pidcock – who lost what had been a safe seat for Labour in 2019 – tweeted that her former colleagues' cheers for a defector swelling their ranks were a "[deep insult to all](#) of those fighting this disgraceful government".)

Wakeford's personal journey is certainly harder to follow than some. [Quentin Davies](#), who [crossed the floor](#) to Labour in 2007, was a passionate pro-European exasperated by his leader's flirtation with Euroscepticism. Shaun Woodward, the suave millionaire Tory who [defected to Labour](#) in 1999, did so after [being fired](#) from the Tory frontbench for his support for gay rights (and, many years later, [came out](#) as gay himself). Their stories made instinctive emotional sense. Wakeford, meanwhile, says he has wrestled for months with his unease at Conservative decisions on issues such as free school meals and the universal credit cut. But if so, why not rebel? The whips, he says, threatened to withhold a new school from his constituency if he didn't fall into line on at least one vote, the kind of strong-arm tactics that will rightly shock his constituents but which rebels in the past have had to defy.

Nor is it lost on either side that he had a paper-thin majority in Bury South, a seat he won only after the outgoing Labour-turned-independent MP, Ivan Lewis, [urged constituents](#) to vote Conservative in protest against antisemitism in the Labour party. For many on the left, welcoming him aboard while continuing to deny Jeremy Corbyn the whip just rubs salt into their wounds. Yet welcomed he must be, albeit with a silent prayer that due diligence was done first, and that's not the worst of it. They're going to have to take at least part of his advice, too.

00:35

Christian Wakeford claims he was threatened with loss of funding over vote – video

Wakeford's defection has spooked his colleagues into briefly suspending their plotting against Boris Johnson, partly for practical reasons – if there was one spy in the rebel camp, then there might be others, just waiting for their moment to decamp to Labour and take all the party's secrets with them – but also for more emotional ones. Watching one of their own choose a new party over a new leader as the best way out of the current mess was a brutal reminder that voters could easily do the same, coming as it did just as Theresa May's former pollster James Johnson [released polling](#) giving Labour an [11-point lead](#) in the so-called “red wall” seats captured by the Tories in 2019. It's not Wakeford himself that matters but all the other Wakefords: the countless Conservative voters who share his stirrings of

unease, aren't yet sure what to do about it and are watching closely now. The last thing they need to see is a Labour party recoiling in disgust at the very idea that such people might be attracted to them.

For that fat [Labour](#) poll lead hides a large pool of formerly Conservative voters who have shifted only as far as the “don’t know” column, where they’re waiting to see what happens next. Starmer’s job now is to seal the deal with these hovering voters before a punch-drunk government, which is willing to do whatever it takes to get them back, has time to scrape itself off the floor. If parts of the Labour movement can’t conceal their distaste for that project, then they have forgotten what politics is for.

To the horror of some who backed Starmer for leader and the delight of others, last autumn he came off the fence on which he has been sitting since the leadership contest and landed, with a thud, on the side of doing what it takes to win. The playbook is familiar to anyone old enough to remember pre-Corbyn Labour – speeches on patriotism, claims to be “the party of business” – but this isn’t 1997 all over again. Many of the Conservative voters Starmer needs to win over aren’t alien to Labour traditions; rather, they *are* its tradition. They’re people who voted Labour all their lives before taking a punt on Boris Johnson and regretting it. Tales of boozing through lockdown made them feel taken for fools, and Labour’s task is to connect that anger, which crosses party lines, to an economic argument that resonates equally widely but moves the battle on to Johnson’s likely successors. In a week when [inflation topped 5%](#), that no longer looks impossible.

In talks before he defected, Wakeford reportedly advised Starmer to focus on rocketing energy bills, telling him that “we’ve got nothing” in response. Here, political necessity marries happily with gut Labour instincts. Soaring food and heating costs will force the poorest into unimaginably [dire straits](#); who on the left isn’t incensed by that? But higher heating bills will also be keenly felt by pensioners on fixed incomes, businesses at a fragile point of post-pandemic recovery and ordinary families who were managing until the price of everything started going through the roof.

So where is the chancellor? For weeks, Rishi Sunak has sidestepped all the scandal by piously insisted he’s just getting on with the day job. What has he got to show for it? Where’s the plan to soften the blow everyone knows is

coming this spring, when soaring energy bills meet national insurance rises? Rachel Reeves, his Labour shadow, has been weeks ahead of him with [detailed proposals](#).

Winning over former Tory voters won't always be this easy. Obviously there are painful conversations to come, on issues that threaten to split the Labour party all over again. But right now a government waiting for Sue Gray to put it out of its misery is in no fit state to set the agenda and Labour has a priceless chance to show its concerns are the country's. If it throws that away in favour of yet more glorious infighting, then frankly it deserves to lose.

- Gaby Hinsliff is a Guardian columnist

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2022.01.21 - Around the world

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- [India Nestle withdraws Hindu KitKat range over accusations of disrespect](#)
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- [US Michael Flynn allies allegedly plotted to lean on Republicans to back vote audits](#)
- [Australia One firefighter dead and another seriously injured in South Australia bushfire](#)

[Ghana](#)

At least 13 killed after immense explosion rocks western Ghana

The blast, which flattened hundreds of buildings, followed a collision between a truck carrying mining explosives and a motorcycle

01:08

Deadly explosion in Ghana leaves huge crater after a mining truck accident – video

[Emmanuel Akinwotu](#) and agencies

Fri 21 Jan 2022 20.51 EST

At least 13 people have been killed after a truck carrying mining explosives collided with a motorcycle in western [Ghana](#), sparking an explosion that has left hundreds of buildings destroyed.

The accident happened around noon in Apiate, near the mining city of Bogoso, 300km (180 miles) west of the West African country's capital, Accra.

A large crater was left following the explosion, after a truck that was travelling between two goldmines in the mineral-rich region hit a motorcycle.

Kwesi Ofori, director of public affairs for the [Ghana](#) police service, told reporters on Friday that the transport of the explosives had followed proper procedure, and the truck had a police escort.

The death toll could have been much worse, he said, but teachers in a nearby school managed to evacuate their pupils.

The government earlier on Friday said the death toll was 17, mistakenly counting four people who are alive but in critical condition, Ofori said.

At least 57 who were injured had been taken to local hospitals, emergency officials said. Dr Joseph Darko, working at Apiate hospital, told AFP that five of the casualties had been taken there, “including a five-year-old child who is in a life-threatening condition”.

More than 500 buildings had been destroyed, said Seji Saji Amedonu, deputy director general of the national disaster management organisation.



People around the blast site. Photograph: BNO News

Graphic images and footage posted by local media and witnesses showed dead and injured bodies on the ground, and homes levelled and destroyed.

Ghana's president Nana Akufo-Addo said the blast was “a truly sad, unfortunate and tragic incident”, adding in his statement that it had caused “the loss of lives and the destruction of properties”.

The extent of the destruction and casualties caused by the blast has sent shock waves through Ghana.

Emergency services said were continuing rescue efforts in the town and most of the surviving victims had been rescued – many found trapped in collapsed homes and buildings.

“Some of them were in their rooms, and then they were trapped,” Dsamani said. “We were able to rescue some of them. Some of them too, unfortunately before we rescued them they had already gone.”



A screengrab of the crater after the blast. Photograph: Joseph Kabenlah Amihere via Reuters

Witnesses told local officials that following the collision, a driver involved in the accident tried to warn local residents to flee after the motorcycle caught fire.

“So the driver got down and was telling people to run away,” Dsamani said. “And some people was trying to find out what was really happening. While the driver was shouting that people should run away ... in about 10 minutes’ time, the whole thing exploded. So people who had tried to arrive to the scene were the people who were mostly affected.”

A statement by police said: “Preliminary investigation has established that a mining explosive vehicle ... collided with a motorcycle resulting in the

explosion.

map

“The public has been advised to move out of the area to nearby towns for their safety while recovery efforts are under way.”

Nearby hospitals and clinics were overrun with victims, local officials said. Police have asked surrounding villages to open their schools and churches to accommodate any additional casualties.

Reinforcements had been deployed to the scene, police added, while appealing for calm.

Dr Joseph Dark, working at Apiate hospital, told Agence France-Presse that five of the casualties had been taken there, including a “five-year-old child who is in a life-threatening condition”.

The truck carrying explosives was en route to the Chirano gold mine, run by the Toronto-based Kinross. A Kinross spokesperson confirmed the incident, saying it occurred 140km (87 miles) from the mine.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/20/ghana-explosion-apiate-mining-vehicle>

[India](#)

Nestlé withdraws Hindu KitKat range in India over accusations of disrespect

Many people expressed outrage that wrappers, featuring Hindu gods, could be thrown in bins or trodden on



One of the KitKat wrappers that has drawn criticism in India for featuring Hindu deities. Nestlé has recalled the range from sale. Photograph: Sanjeeb Kumar Shaw/@sanjeebshaw1/Twitter

[Hannah Ellis-Petersen](#) in New Delhi

Fri 21 Jan 2022 02.01 EST

Nestlé has withdrawn a special range of KitKats in India which featured images of sacred Hindu deities on the wrapper, after accusations of hurting religious sentiments.

The limited range of the well-known chocolate bar had been launched as part of the global “KitKat travel breaks” range, where photos of artwork by local artisans were printed on the wrappers.

But the Indian version of the range, which was designed to celebrate the crafts of the Indian state of Odisha, provoked an online backlash as they featured images of Hindu deities Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra and Mata Subhadra.

Many expressed outrage that the wrappers might end up in “dustbins, drains, gutters” or trodden underfoot, which would be disrespectful of the gods and the Hindu faith.

As Hindu nationalism has been [on the rise in India](#), there has been a heightened sensitivity towards the depiction of the Hindu faith in the public sphere and recent accusations of hurting religious sentiments have been levelled at books, films, [TV shows](#) and [advertisements](#).

It is a honor to see our Odisha culture & lord jagannath, balabhadra & subhadra on [##KitKat](#) but plz think once, whn some1 will eat ☐ & will throw the wrapper into dustbins, drains, gutters & many will walk on it 🙄 . Jagannath family will be happy with it. [@CMO_Odisha](#) [@PMOIndia](#) pic.twitter.com/10xPKsdz5c

— Sanjeeb Kumar Shaw (@sanjeebshaw1) [January 16, 2022](#)

Nestlé said the intention had been to “celebrate the culture of Odisha with designs on packs representing ‘Pattachitra’, an art form uniquely identifiable by its vivid imagery”.

Nestlé said that as “pre-emptive action”, it had now recalled the KitKat range from the market.

“We wanted to encourage people to know about the art and its artisans. We do understand the sensitivity of the matter and regret if we have inadvertently hurt people’s sentiments,” the company said in a statement.

It is not the first time the KitKat travel range has landed Nestlé in hot water. Last year Nestlé apologised for packaging that incorrectly depicted Lamjao National Park to be in the state of Meghalaya rather than Manipur, and featured a red panda, a species not found in the park.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/21/nestle-withdraws-hindu-kitkat-range-in-india-over-accusations-of-disrespect>

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[Netflix](#)

Netflix's market value tumbles as it predicts subscriber slowdown

Shares plunge by almost 20%, with pandemic-fuelled streaming boom fizzling out and competition growing



Leonardo DiCaprio and Jennifer Lawrence in a scene from Netflix's Don't Look Up. Photograph: Niko Tavernise/AP

[Mark Sweeney](#)

[@marksweney](#)

Fri 21 Jan 2022 03.44 EST

Netflix has stoked fears the [pandemic-fuelled streaming boom is fizzling out](#), saying it expects to report the lowest number of new subscribers in the first quarter in more than a decade, as competition from newer rivals such as Disney+ grows.

Netflix expects to add only 2.5 million new subscribers globally in the first three months of the year, well down on the 4 million new sign-ups in the first quarter of 2021, and almost half the number expected by analysts.

The company has not reported such a low number of new subscribers in the first quarter since 2010, in the past seven years it has always managed to attract at least 4 million new sign-ups, according to research firm Ampere Analysis.

Shares in the streaming company plunged by almost 20% on Friday, wiping almost \$45bn (£33bn) from its value, as investors took fright at the unexpected slowdown in growth.

“While retention and engagement remain healthy, acquisition growth has not yet re-accelerated to pre-Covid levels,” Netflix said, pointing to “Covid overhang and macroeconomic hardship” in parts of the world such as Latin America.

Netflix added 8.3 million new subscribers in the final quarter of last year, thanks to hits such as the Leonardo DiCaprio and Jennifer Lawrence film *Don’t Look Up*, and *Squid Game*, broadly in line with analyst expectations.

Overall, Netflix added 18.2 million new subscribers last year, [half the number it gained in 2020](#) when the pandemic fuelled a streaming boom as the public sought to alleviate boredom during lockdowns.

Netflix admitted that the streaming wars against rivals such as Disney, Apple, HBO Max, Peacock and Amazon, which on Wednesday announced details of its [mega-budget Lord of The Rings TV adaptation](#), is intensifying but that it remains in growth in all territories.

“Consumers have always had many choices when it comes to their entertainment time – competition that has only intensified over the last 24 months as entertainment companies all around the world develop their own streaming offering,” the company said.

“While this added competition may be affecting our marginal growth, we continue to grow in every country and region in which these new streaming

alternatives have launched.”

Last year, Netflix added the [fewest number of UK subscribers](#) since it launched in 2012.

Netflix’s disappointing results were accompanied by Peloton, the maker of exercise bikes and running machines which has been another pandemic winner, which suffered an almost 25% slump in its market value after a report that it has experienced a slump in demand.

The company’s chief executive, John Foley, told its 3,200 staff that it needs to “evaluate” the size of its workforce and indicated that production is to be scaled back.

“We feel good about right-sizing our production, and, as we evolve to more seasonal demand curves, we are resetting our production levels for sustainable growth,” he said.

Netflix and Peloton are among a number of companies that have thrived under lockdown conditions, but are now being dumped by investors as the stay-at-home boom fizzles out.

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Zoom, the video-conferencing app that became indispensable during the pandemic, and Netflix’s rival Roku have both seen their market value fall by 60% over the past 12 months.

Nevertheless, Netflix pointed to a number of big releases, including Ozark, Bridgerton and Stranger Things, later in the first quarter that it expects to drive a return to stronger growth.

“As an increasing number of subscription- and ad-based video services entered the fray, Netflix knew it would have to spend big on high-profile, original content to compete with not just legacy platforms but newer services, too,” said Ryan Cook, the UK managing director of the advertising technology company Criteo.

“While price increases across regions will offset this flood of content to some degree, Netflix may find itself looking over its shoulder at other advertising-funded video-on-demand services for inspiration. This could mean opening its platform up to ad-funded models for a reduced subscriber fee.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2022/jan/21/netflix-market-value-tumbles-as-it-predicts-subscriber-slowdown>

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Donald Trump

Michael Flynn allies allegedly plotted to lean on Republicans to back vote audits

Ex-whistleblower says group enlisted his help to seek potentially damaging information on two members of Congress to prod them to back audits in key states Trump lost



Michael Flynn, Trump's disgraced former national security adviser.
Photograph: Carolyn Kaster/AP

[Peter Stone](#) in Washington

Fri 21 Jan 2022 02.00 EST

FBI agents and the House panel investigating the January 6 attack on the Capitol have both learned of an alleged plan by allies of retired army Lt Gen Michael Flynn to gather “intelligence” on top [Republicans](#) to “move” them to back election audits in key states Trump lost, said ex-whistleblower Everett Stern who talked to the panel and the FBI.

Stern, who runs the intelligence firm Tactical Rabbit and is a Republican vying for a Senate seat in Pennsylvania, in multiple interviews with the Guardian said two Flynn associates with the rightwing Patriot Caucus group enlisted his help in April in a scheme to seek potentially damaging information on two Republican members of Congress to prod them to back an audit of the 2020 vote that Joe Biden won.

Stern told the Guardian he spent several hours in November telling House panel investigators about the alleged drive by Flynn associates who sought campaign finance and other dirt on Pennsylvania's Senator Pat Toomey and Congressman Brian Fitzpatrick to win their support for an audit to bolster Trump's debunked charges that Biden's win was fraudulent.

A long-shot candidate to succeed the retiring Toomey, Stern said he alerted the FBI in June when he learned more details of the bizarre drive by Flynn allies to specifically target the two Republicans, both of whom backed impeaching Trump after the January 6 insurrection.

The efforts by Flynn's Patriot Caucus allies were launched after Trump failed to block Biden from taking office, and are part of a wider drive by Trump loyalists and Flynn to help boost Trump's political fortunes via more state audits nationwide into false charges that Biden's win was rigged, and elect like-minded candidates in key states to top electoral offices.

Stern provided text messages, emails and other documents revealing he had multiple contacts with one of the Patriot Caucus members, Velma Anne Ruth, and two other influential Flynn allies, Houston real estate mogul Al Hartman and former army Green Beret Ivan Raiklin, who were pushing audits in several key states.



Ivan Raiklin, a former army Green Beret, allegedly pushed audits in several key states that Biden won. Photograph: Brian Snyder/Reuters

Stern said Flynn's Patriot Caucus associates first approached him in Pennsylvania for possible help after an April Republican party event, and soon after told Stern in phone calls they worked with Flynn and the Patriot Caucus, and planned to recruit "former domestic and foreign intelligence officials" to facilitate their scheme.

The plan by Flynn's allies alarmed Stern, but as a former whistleblower involved in exposing a large bank money laundering scandal by HSBC in 2012, he told the Guardian he decided to play along for a few months to glean information to expose the Trump allies' scheme.

Stern expressed dismay that Flynn's Patriot Caucus associates "don't understand that Biden is the president. They wanted to collect information through Tactical Rabbit and my campaign" to turn up the heat on Toomey and Fitzpatrick to back an audit which Stern viewed as potentially "extortion".

Stern gave the Guardian a voice mail he received in which Hartman talked about leaning on moderate Republican "Rinos" in Pennsylvania to gain

support for an audit of that state's vote which Biden won by over 80,000, and Hartman said a similar drive in Michigan was needed.

Stern said Hartman wanted to use Tactical Rabbit's intelligence gathering tools and his campaign to dig up potentially embarrassing campaign finance information and other dirt about the Pennsylvania members, plus Republican political figures in Michigan who were also resisting audits.

Hartman and Raiklin also talked with Stern about meeting Flynn, Trump's disgraced ex-national security adviser, and proposed compensating him for his information via campaign donations, said Stern.

In an April exchange of Hartman text messages seen by the Guardian, Hartman asked a Flynn scheduler to help "connect" Flynn with Stern whose Senate campaign and credentials he touted highly, calling Stern a "strong believer", in their cause.

Although Stern tipped off the FBI in June about what he deemed a threat to national security and he said he met with agents again in November, it's not clear if his allegations are still being pursued.



Flynn associates allegedly sought campaign finance and other dirt on Senator Pat Toomey, Republican of Pennsylvania. Photograph: REX/Shutterstock

Stern's allegations have echoes of Flynn's scheming with Trump and other loyalists in late 2020 to thwart Biden's win, efforts that included a White House meeting with Trump where Flynn proposed declaring martial law in several states Biden won and then rerunning the election there.

In November, the House panel investigating the January 6 Capitol attack subpoenaed Flynn who Trump had pardoned post-election even though he had pled guilty twice to lying to the FBI during the Russia investigation. In response to the subpoena to testify and turn over documents, Flynn sued the panel but a judge quickly dismissed his lawsuit last month.

John Sipher, who was in the CIA's clandestine services for 28 years, shares Stern's view of Flynn, who he knew in the military and shortly thereafter. "I am appalled by what he has become," Sipher said in an email.

Asked if he thought the FBI was pursuing Stern's charges, Sipher said: "I would hope and assume they are taking this seriously."

While Fitzpatrick and Toomey were the main "targets" Stern said other Pennsylvania officials including judges were also being targeted by the Flynn allies as they sought to ramp up pressure for an audit in the state.

Neither Fitzpatrick or Toomey's offices replied to multiple requests for comment.

The Patriot Caucus, a coalition of Patriot and other rightwing groups in some two dozen states with which Raiklin and Hartman have ties, according to Stern and documents, has worked with Trump loyalists like Flynn to push audits in key states Biden won, and backed Trump allies for governor, and other top posts in states like Pennsylvania and Arizona Trump lost.

Flynn himself on 7 January publicly endorsed another Trump ally and election audit promoter, Doug Mastriano for governor in Pennsylvania, at a campaign rally also attended by Raiklin.

Flynn has also endorsed two Trump backed candidates in Arizona: Kari Lake, an ex-Fox News figure, for governor, and Mark Finchem, a state

representative who attended the January 6 Stop the Steal rally, for secretary of state.

To coordinate national efforts, Raiklin and Hartman on 3 July spearheaded one of a series of “Election Integrity” calls with Trump loyalists, lawyers and donors to discuss the status of audits efforts in several states and other plans to cast doubt on Biden’s win, according to an Arizona senate document shared by the watchdog group American Oversight.

“Join us every second Saturday for SITUATION UPDATES and COLLABORATION from active leaders in the election remediation process at state level – attorneys with Mike Lindell and Patrick Byrne, data analysts, state legislators, gubernatorial candidates, and grassroots activists whose goal is completing a cyber forensic audit in their state,” the Arizona document reads.



Congressman Brian Fitzpatrick, Republican of Pennsylvania, backed impeaching Trump after the January 6 insurrection. Photograph: Allison Bailey/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

A who’s who list of Trump loyalists and groups invited to join these calls included the America Project and America’s Future, both of which Flynn played key roles with as they poured some \$2m into a discredited audit of

Arizona's largest county, plus the Patriot Caucus' Velma Anne Ruth, Finchem and Byrne, the millionaire chief financier of the Arizona audit.

Hartman in emails with Stern obtained by the Guardian invited him in June to attend a religious far-right meeting known as Ziklag in Dallas where he could meet separately with Flynn. Stern said Hartman told him a "private meeting was going to be arranged with Flynn" who Stern was told wanted to meet him.

After indicating to Hartman he would attend, Stern opted to cancel at the last minute after his lawyer indicated there could be legal repercussions from a meeting with Flynn. "I thought it was extremely dangerous to meet with a three star general who I believed had broken the law."

"They planned to give my campaign funds to help me" develop damaging information on Toomey and Fitzpatrick, Stern claimed. "It was like a wink, wink. Hartman is the man behind the curtain. He's an operative and financier," promoting audits.

Hartman has long been a donor to the right. He is on the advisory council for the pro-Trump Turning Point USA and has been active in the conservative donor network led by oil billionaire Charles Koch.

Raiklin, an army reserve officer who reportedly has known Flynn since 2014, is facing an internal army reserve investigation into possible violations of rules barring partisan political activity, according to a military official who spoke to Reuters last month.

Raiklin in December 2020 outlined a wild scheme in tweets and a podcast to thwart Biden's win, charging a vast conspiracy that included Pence, intelligence, China and Big Tech, as Reuters reported. Raiklin told Trump to "activate the emergency broadcast system" and deployed the hashtag #FightLikeAFlynn, stressing that "we the people are going to force this plan on them".

Neither Hartman or Raiklin replied to multiple calls seeking comment.

A Flynn scheduler did not respond to questions for the story.

Velma Anne Ruth with the Patriot Caucus, who was photographed with Stern at a June event in Pennsylvania where she wore a tank top that said General Flynn, called Stern's charges "delusional, fabricated and defamatory", in a text message. Stern said he shared the photo and other documents involving exchanges he had with Ruth with the FBI.

Senior ex-prosecutors and intelligence officials say Stern's allegations merit law enforcement attention.

"Stern's allegations suggest serious crimes," said ex-prosecutor Paul Rosenzweig, who worked on Ken Starr's team during the impeachment of Bill Clinton. "If his allegations were corroborated by extrinsic evidence they clearly would warrant investigation."

Former CIA official Sipher, who has spoken with Stern before, said: "Everett is someone with a strong sense of right and wrong, and willing to suffer the consequences of doing the right thing. We would be better served to have more people like Everett in public life."

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South Australia

One firefighter dead and another seriously injured in South Australia bushfire

Incident occurred when a tree collapsed on a fire truck as crews battled an out-of-control blaze at Coles



A firefighter in 2019. More than 150 firefighters are monitoring the blaze at Coles, which has been burning for several days Photograph: Brett Hemmings/Getty Images

Australian Associated Press
Fri 21 Jan 2022 02.22 EST

One firefighter has died and another has been seriously injured after a tree collapsed on a fire truck battling an out-of-control bushfire in South Australia's south-east.

The incident occurred at the firefront at Coles, near Lucindale, where the blaze was running uncontrolled through bluegum plantations, scrub and grassland, a spokeswoman for the state's Country Fire Service said.

The injured firefighter has been rushed to hospital. His condition is unknown.

"Family and other personnel have been informed and are being offered support at this time," the CFS said in a statement.

"The safety and wellbeing of our people is our highest priority and our thoughts are with our CFS family at this time."

We are saddened by the heartbreak news from the Coles bushfire in South Australia, and offer our support and condolences to all impacted by this tragedy, including our [@CFSTalk](#) colleagues. □ □
<https://t.co/9CE37FzfOs>

— SA Metropolitan Fire (@SA_MFS) [January 21, 2022](#)

Jason Heffernan, the chief officer of Victoria's Country Fire Authority, said: "CFA is devastated by the tragic death of a South Australian Country Fire Service firefighter and injury to another CFS member on the Coles fireground.

"We extend our deepest condolences and sympathies to the family, friends and colleagues of the firefighters.

"Firefighting is an inherently dangerous activity and I am grateful and proud of the commitment and sacrifices that Australian firefighters make every day.

"CFA stands with our CFS colleagues on the fireground, and in grief."

More than 150 firefighters are monitoring the blaze, which has been burning for several days but is not considered an immediate threat to lives or homes.

An emergency warning was issued on Thursday night, when the fire broke through containment lines, but that was downgraded on Friday to an advice message. About 2,000 hectares have been destroyed so far.

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South Australian firefighters are being supported by crews from Victoria along with forest industry units and local farmers. Water bombing aircraft have also been deployed.

“Crews will continue working along the fires’ perimeter and to actively fight any areas that may flare up due to the daytime weather forecast,” the CFS said.

“Whilst overnight conditions eased slightly, an increase in temperature and wind today is expected, which could hinder the efforts of crews on the ground.”

The CFS said locals should stay vigilant and monitor conditions throughout the next few days as it was expected that the conditions will continuously change.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/jan/21/one-firefighter-dead-and-another-seriously-injured-in-south-australia-bushfire>

Headlines tuesday 18 january 2022

- [Boris Johnson Raab admits lying to parliament a resigning matter amid claims PM misled MPs](#)
- [Live UK Covid: Raab says Cummings' claim Johnson lied to parliament is 'nonsense'](#)
- ['Operation Rinka' Rebel Tories up pressure on Boris Johnson to resign](#)
- [Dominic Cummings Johnson lied about lockdown party, says ex-aide](#)

Dominic Raab

Lying to parliament a resigning matter, says Raab, amid claims PM misled MPs

Justice secretary says allegations that Boris Johnson lied about No 10 lockdown party are ‘nonsense’

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



Dominic Raab: ‘If it’s lying … it would normally, under the ministerial code and the governance around parliament, be a resigning matter.’ Photograph: Reuters

Jessica Elgot
[@jessicaelgot](https://twitter.com/jessicaelgot)

Tue 18 Jan 2022 04.42 EST

Dominic Raab has admitted that lying to parliament is “normally” a resigning matter, amid claims that the prime minister deliberately misled MPs over his knowledge of a Downing Street party.

Boris Johnson’s former senior aide [Dominic Cummings had earlier accused the prime minister of lying](#) when No 10 denied Johnson had been warned against allowing a “bring your own booze” garden party during lockdown.

The justice secretary said it was “nonsense” that Johnson had lied to MPs, saying he felt the prime minister’s account was to be believed. But he added that any deliberate falsehood in the Commons would leave Johnson in jeopardy.

“If it’s lying, deliberate in the way you describe, if it’s not corrected immediately, it would normally, under the ministerial code and the governance around parliament, be a resigning matter,” Raab told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme on Tuesday.

Raab had said on Sky News earlier that Johnson was “confident he’s been straightforward” with parliament and said the “PM has been very clear” that Cummings’ claims were “not true or accurate”.

00:32

'So it was a party?': Dominic Raab questioned about Downing Street drinks – video

Johnson admitted to parliament last week that he attended drinks in the Downing Street garden on 20 May 2020 but [claimed he had not realised it was a social gathering](#).

Cummings [wrote a blogpost](#) on Monday challenging that account. He said he told Martin Reynolds, a senior official, that the invitation broke the rules and claimed Reynolds replied: “So long as it’s socially distanced I think it’s OK, I’ll check with the PM if he’s happy for it to go ahead.”

Cummings said in his blogpost: “Not only me but other eyewitnesses who discussed this at the time would swear under oath this is what happened.”

Sue Gray, the senior civil servant in charge of the inquiry into Downing Street lockdown parties, could make a formal request to interview Cummings, Whitehall sources confirmed. It is within the remit of the inquiry to approach former members of staff if their evidence might be relevant.

No 10 staff had hoped that the inquiry, which is examining more than 15 separate allegations of illegal gatherings in Downing Street, would conclude this week. Because of the constant drip of new parties and developments, officials believe it may not report until next week.

Cummings then said that, during a discussion over the future of the cabinet secretary and Reynolds, he had said to the prime minister something like: “Martin’s invited the building to a drinks party, this is what I’m talking about, you’ve got to grip this madhouse.”

Cummings added: “The PM waved it aside. I had told him repeatedly the PPS [parliamentary private secretary] should be replaced, as had other competent officials who knew the whole structure needed a huge upgrade in personnel and management.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/jan/18/raab-admits-lying-to-parliament-a-resigning-matter-amid-claims-pm-misled-mps-boris-johnson>

[Skip to key events](#)

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

Johnson denies he was warned No 10 event in May 2020 was against rules and says he did not lie to parliament – as it happened

PM says '[nobody told me that what we were doing was against the rules](#)' and says [he did not tell lie in Commons](#). This live blog is now closed – for coronavirus updates, [please follow the Covid live blog](#)

- [Boris Johnson: nobody warned me No 10 party was against the rules](#)
- [Six takeaways from Johnson's interview with Beth Rigby](#)
- [Sunak says he believes Johnson – but he should resign if he lied to MPs](#)
- [Raab: ministers to reverse Lords defeats on plans to curb noisy protests](#)
- [All 14 government defeats in Lords on police bill – and what they mean](#)
- [Tory MPs criticise plan for military to take charge of Channel crossings](#)
- [Javid 'cautiously optimistic' Covid restrictions can be reduced](#)

[Andrew Sparrow](#)

Tue 18 Jan 2022 13.09 EST

01:45

Boris Johnson denies Cummings' claims he was warned about Downing St party – video

[Andrew Sparrow](#)

Tue 18 Jan 2022 13.09 EST

First published on Tue 18 Jan 2022 04.31 EST

Key events

- 5 days ago [Six takeaways from what Labour call the PM's 'end of the road' interview](#)
- 5 days ago [Early evening summary](#)
- 5 days ago [Tory MPs criticise plan for military to take charge of dealing with Channel crossings](#)
- 5 days ago [Sturgeon says Scotland's Omicron restrictions to be lifted from next Monday](#)
- 5 days ago [Javid says he is 'cautiously optimistic' Covid restrictions in England can be substantially reduced next week](#)
- 5 days ago [Johnson denies lying to parliament about No 10 party](#)
- 5 days ago [Labour says it's 'end of the road' for PM and that he didn't need anyone to tell him party was against rules](#)

Live feed

[5d ago 18:07](#)

Early evening summary

- [Boris Johnson has claimed “nobody warned me it was against the rules” for a drinks party to be hosted in Downing Street during the first lockdown, but also refused to deny the possibility he could resign should he be censured by the inquiry into rule-breaking.](#) Responding to Johnson’s interview, Labour’s deputy leader, [Angela Rayner](#), has said it shows he knows he’s at “the end of the road”. (See [1.53pm](#).)
- [Sue Gray, the civil servant investigating the partygate scandal, has said she will interview Dominic Cummings, the former No 10 aide](#)

who says he is willing to give evidence on oath that Johnson has lied about the Downing Street drinks party on 20 May 2020. (See [5.42pm](#).)

- Christian Wakeford has become the seventh Tory MP to publicly call for a no confidence vote in Johnson. (See [5.40pm](#).) MPs have been meeting to discuss their next steps, and there is increasing speculation that 54 letters demanding a confidence vote will soon be with the 1922 Committee chairman, Sir Graham Brady, meaning the threshold for a ballot would have been met.
- [Dominic Raab has admitted that lying to parliament is “normally” a resigning matter, amid claims that the prime minister deliberately misled MPs over his knowledge of a Downing Street party.](#)
- [Restrictions brought in before Christmas to stem the Omicron surge across Scotland are to be lifted from next Monday, Scotland’s first minister, Nicola Sturgeon, has said.](#)
- [Controversial measures including police powers to stop noisy protests could be brought back to the Commons by the government after a series of late-night defeats in the Lords, the justice secretary has said.](#)
- [The court of appeal has overturned a ruling that found that a government contract given to a polling company with links to Dominic Cummings was unlawful.](#)

- Labour has called on the government to immediately withdraw a proposed law that would allow the Democratic Unionist party leader to “double job” at Westminster and Stormont.

That's all from me for today. But our Covid coverage continues on our global live blog.

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5d ago 17:46

And this is from the Times' **Steven Swinford**, reporting the response of a Boris Johnson supporter in cabinet to news that "red wall" Tories are plotting against him.

The Red Wall plot to remove Boris Johnson - with Tory MPs meeting to discuss submitting letters - is not going down well in Cabinet

'It's pretty sickening. They were only elected because of him. Most of them are a load of fucking nobodies. It's nuts'

— Steven Swinford (@Steven_Swinford) January 18, 2022

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Updated at 13.00 EST

5d ago 17:42

Sue Gray, the civil servant investigating partygate, will interview Dominic Cummings as part of her inquiry, the Mirror's **Pippa Crerar** reports.

EXCL: Whitehall enforcer Sue Gray WILL interview Dominic Cummings over his explosive party claims.<https://t.co/KVZ32bsg7q>

— Pippa Crerar (@PippaCrerar) [January 18, 2022](#)

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Updated at 13.00 EST

[5d ago](#) 17:40

The Conservative MP **Christian Wakeford** says he has submitted a letter calling for a no confidence vote in [Boris Johnson](#), Yahoo News's **Nadine Batchelor-Hunt** reports. He is the seventh Tory MP to publicly say a contest is needed.

EXCL: 2019 Red Wall MP [@Christian4BuryS](#) confirms to me that Red Wall MPs met today to discuss the PM's future

Wakeford, who submitted his own letter on Thursday, says there are more Tory MPs that have letters ready to go to in

— Nadine Batchelor-Hunt (@nadinebh_) [January 18, 2022](#)

Alarmingly for the PM, Wakeford said there are other MP's who "have written the letters but haven't sent them in yet".

It comes following a desperately uncomfortable interview for the PM today and his estranged special adviser prepared to swear under oath he knew about parties.

— Nadine Batchelor-Hunt (@nadinebh_) [January 18, 2022](#)

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Updated at 12.44 EST

[5d ago](#) 17:15

Tory MPs criticise plan for military to take charge of dealing with Channel crossings

Tory MPs have warned the Royal Navy will be operating a “taxi service” for people crossing the Channel in small boats under “Operation Dog’s Dinner”, PA Media reports. In a Commons urgent question earlier ministers came under fire from some on their backbenches for not seeking to push back small boats trying to reach England from France. PA says:

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) is expected to take over command of the operation from Border Force by the end of the month in a move signed off by Boris Johnson.

Defence minister **James Heappey** said military involvement is part of a wider plan from the government, which will be announced in the coming weeks.

The current details are believed to have been announced as part of a government bid to offer “red meat” to Tory MPs in a bid to drive attention away from Downing Street party allegations.

But Conservative former minister **Sir Edward Leigh** warned: “In the absence of ministers having the political will to use pushback, what is the point in appointing a Royal Naval admiral to help Border Force to be a more efficient taxi service so that the migrants will know that now ‘we have got the Royal Navy going to pick us up and we will be taken safety to the UK, and we will be put in a hotel and we will never ever be sent home’? This is just an embarrassment.”

“Will the minister now coordinate with his colleagues to do what we have been suggesting for months now and that we get rid of the pull factors, namely we reform any piece of legislation that is necessary, including the Human Rights Act, and people who do this illegal crossing are arrested, put in a prison, and then deported?”

Heappey replied: “His exhortations and those of colleagues have been heard.”

Conservative MP **Philip Hollobone** added: “This isn’t Operation Red Meat, it’s Operation Dog’s Dinner. This is going to incentivise people traffickers, they’ll see the Royal Navy ship on the horizon and they’ll say ‘point your dinghy in that direction, you only need to get halfway’ and the Royal Navy will pick them up. The only way this will work if the Royal Navy intercepts asylum seekers and returns them back to France. Without the second bit, this simply won’t work.”

Heappey replied: “The last bit would be impossible without French permission and French permission has not been given. But I don’t accept his characterisation of what is being spoken about today. The MoD’s mission is to make sure nobody arrives in the UK on their own terms.”

Tobias Ellwood, Conservative chairman of the defence committee, warned: “There is a real danger of mission creep here, with further naval assets being sucked into this challenge.”

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Updated at 12.19 EST

5d ago **17:00**

Gavin Barwell, chief of staff in Downing Street under Theresa May, and a regular critic of Boris Johnson’s, says his latest excuse for attending the party in the Downing Street garden is “absolutely hopeless”.

This defence is absolutely hopeless. Nobody should have needed to tell him that lots of people having drinks together outside was against the rules. *He made the rules* pic.twitter.com/uB7qrshAGf

— Gavin Barwell (@GavinBarwell) [January 18, 2022](#)

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[5d ago](#) [16:51](#)

My colleague **Jessica Elgot** also reports that among Conservative MPs patience with [Boris Johnson](#) is running out.

No one can be sure but two MPs have told me today they believe the threshold for a leadership challenge may soon be reached, a major turn of fortune from even yesterday. Both of them were not part of the 2019 group meetings that took place yday and today.

— Jessica Elgot (@jessicaelgot) [January 18, 2022](#)

One said the mood is “hardening” and disquiet coming from a number of different wings, new MPs but also experienced, sober types who believe a quick change is their best saviour. Who knows, only Graham Brady...

— Jessica Elgot (@jessicaelgot) [January 18, 2022](#)

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Updated at 12.09 EST

[5d ago](#) [16:45](#)

And Sky News’s **Mollie Malone** says Tory MPs may be closer than people think to getting the 54 letters needed to trigger a confidence vote in the prime minister.

One Tory MP this afternoon tells me they think they are “nearly there” when it comes to letters, that numbers far exceed what whips think, that this weekend was a turning point, and that they give the PM “a week.” Says PM should go before SG report.

— Mollie Malone (@Mollie_Malone1) [January 18, 2022](#)

At the weekend there were reports that around 35 letter might already have been submitted to the 1922 Committee chairman, Sir Graham Brady, but the real figure is a closely-guarded secret, and so most estimates involve an element of guesswork.

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[5d ago](#) [16:40](#)

Tory MPs from the 2019 intake have been meeting to discuss getting rid of [Boris Johnson](#), my colleague **Aubrey Allegretti** reports.

Sources say about a dozen 2019ers met in one Tory MP’s office this afternoon to talk about submitting letters of no confidence - some at different stages than others but am told “wheels are in motion”.

— Aubrey Allegretti (@breeallegretti) [January 18, 2022](#)

More detail on this meeting:

I'm told the number of 2019 Tories was two dozen. They discussed the present Partygate chaos, how to vote in a Vote of No Confidence they fear opposition could table next week, and letters.

One present says: "Most have written a letter or will do."

— Aubrey Allegretti (@breeallegretti) [January 18, 2022](#)

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[5d ago](#) [16:37](#)

Here is my colleague Jessica Elgot's analysis of Dominic Cummings' claims about Boris Johnson.

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[5d ago](#) [16:34](#)

Ten more universities have voted to join industrial action on UK campuses, taking the total to 68 institutions expected to go on strike later this year. The **University and College Union** (UCU) said that after reballotting, universities including Newcastle, Queen Mary London, Strathclyde and Swansea all passed the 50% thresholds required to support strikes.

In early December 58 universities saw UCU members [strike for three days](#) over a variety of causes, after two ballots. One ballot was on pay and employment conditions, while the other was against proposals for the Universities Superannuation Scheme that UCU says would result in substantial pension cuts.

Jo Grady, UCU's general secretary, said:

We truly hope that further disruption can be avoided - that is what staff and students alike all want. But this is entirely in the gift of employers who simply need to revoke their devastating pension cuts and take long-overdue action over deteriorating pay and working conditions.

Raj Jethwa, chief executive of the **Universities and Colleges Employers Association**, said there would be "widespread dismay" at the prospect of further strikes six months after agreement on a 1.5% pay increase.

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5d ago16:32



Activists from anti-poverty ONE Campaign at Westminster today staging a protest calling for the sharing of coronavirus vaccines with developing countries. Photograph: Vickie Flores/EPA

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5d ago16:28

And here is **Dominic Cummings** replying to the interview in which Boris Johnson responded to [claims from Cummings](#) that he lied to MPs about the Downing Street party.

Like many of Cummings' tweets, it need translating. OODA is [OODA loop](#), a US military concept highlighting the importance of the “observe, orient, decide, act” cycle. Fkd probably needs no explanation. For your OODA loop to be fkd is not good, at least, in Cummings’ book.

When your [#OODA](#) is fkd...

3/ Your best line of defence is ... catastrophic, and the more media you do defending yourself the more you destroy your own support & hasten the inevitable [#RegimeChange](#) pic.twitter.com/jbrPIPMJad

— Dominic Cummings (@Dominic2306) [January 18, 2022](#)

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Boris Johnson

‘Operation Rinka’: rebel Tories raise pressure on Boris Johnson to resign

Nicknamed after dog shot in Thorpe affair, plan afoot to oust PM over Downing Street parties scandal



One MP named the campaign to remove Boris Johnson after the great dane shot on Exmoor in 1975, an incident that led to the fall of the Liberal leader Jeremy Thorpe. Photograph: RalfWeigel/Getty Images/iStockphoto

[Aubrey Allegretti](#), [Jessica Murray](#), [Steven Morris](#) and [Mark Brown](#)

Tue 18 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

Rebel Tories are raising pressure on [Boris Johnson](#) to quit over the Downing Street parties scandal, with one naming the plan “Operation Rinka” in reference to the dog killed in the Jeremy Thorpe affair in the 1970s.

While Downing Street insiders have reportedly devised a plan to sack officials and save Johnson, referred to as “Operation Save Big Dog”, some Tory MPs are stepping up pressure on colleagues to submit letters of no confidence in the prime minister.

One backbencher nicknamed the campaign to oust Johnson Operation Rinka after the great dane shot dead on Exmoor in 1975 – an incident that eventually led to the Liberal leader Jeremy Thorpe standing trial for conspiracy to murder.

Another backbencher recalled a phrase favoured by the former US president Ronald Reagan – “dance with the one that brought ya”. Suggesting Johnson had failed to deliver on the policies he pledged at the last election, the MP said: “He’s not dancing with the people that brought him into Downing Street.”

Among the groups being lobbied to submit no confidence letters was the 2019 new intake of Tory MPs, many of whom felt they owed their electoral success to Johnson. However, some are similarly frustrated that attention on the parties during lockdown has distracted from delivery on key policies. Two MPs elected in 2019 said they knew of about a dozen colleagues in the same intake who had put letters in.

Johnson faced further fury from MPs as they arrived back at Westminster on Monday, having been pilloried by Conservative associations and constituents. Some reported receiving nearly 1,000 emails from angry voters, though others suggested they were pleasantly surprised at hearing few mentions of “partygate” during constituency surgeries or over the weekend.

A senior government source said Johnson’s problem was different from the days of Theresa May’s turbulence when there was then just one group – Brexiters – whose anger had to be quelled.

The source said multiple groups were angry with Johnson: lockdown sceptics, disgruntled ex-ministers and MPs from former Labour red wall seats who judged him to be failing to deliver on the levelling-up agenda. “It only takes a dozen letters from each group to get you close to the 54 you

need [to trigger a no confidence vote in the prime minister], so it's harder to keep them all down at once," the source said.

Steve Baker, a longtime thorn in the side of Conservative governments who helped bring down May, refused to say whether he had submitted a no confidence letter but said: "People are very upset and angry."

He said MPs were "mostly waiting for Sue Gray's report" before deciding Johnson's fate, referring to the investigation by the senior civil servant into the multiple alleged breaches of Covid rules inside Downing Street and Whitehall over the past 18 months.

But asked whether Johnson would lead the [Conservatives](#) into the next election, Baker said: "In a situation as volatile as this, I think it's impossible to say and I regret that very much. I would still prefer that Boris Johnson were a roaring success. But right now, listening to the public who remember very well all the sacrifices they made, I think people may well be too angry to forgive – but it remains to be seen."

Other MPs said their inbox was "off the scale" with complaints about Johnson, particularly from local Conservatives who hoped he would be replaced before local elections on 5 May.

- *Join our journalists for a Guardian Live online event on the No 10 lockdown party and Boris Johnson's future on Wednesday 19 January.*
[Book here](#)
-

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/jan/18/operation-rinka-rebel-tories-up-pressure-on-boris-johnson-to-resign-downing-street-parties>

Boris Johnson

Boris Johnson lied about lockdown party, Dominic Cummings claims

Johnson told MPs he did not realise 20 May 2020 event was social gathering but ex-aide says PM was advised not to allow it

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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Boris Johnson and Dominic Cummings, pictured in 2019. Photograph: Peter Summers/Getty Images

[Rowena Mason](#), [Heather Stewart](#) and [Rajeev Syal](#)

Mon 17 Jan 2022 14.26 EST

Dominic Cummings has accused Boris Johnson of lying after No 10 denied the prime minister was warned against allowing a “[bring your own booze](#)”

party during the first lockdown.

Johnson admitted to parliament last week that he attended drinks in the Downing Street garden on 20 May 2020 but claimed he had not realised it was a social gathering.

The event was organised by Johnson's principal private secretary (PPS), Martin Reynolds, who told people to "bring your own booze" – but No 10 denies that the prime minister saw the emailed invitation to about 100 staff.

It has also denied allegations that two senior staffers warned Johnson not to go ahead with the drinks event, saying this was "not true".

But Cummings, a former senior aide to the prime minister, wrote a new blog post on Monday challenging that account. He said he personally told Reynolds that the invitation broke the rules and claimed Reynolds replied: "So long as it's socially distanced I think it's OK, I'll check with the PM if he's happy for it to go ahead."

Cummings said in his blogpost: "Not only me but other eyewitnesses who discussed this at the time would swear under oath this is what happened."

Sue Gray, the senior civil servant in charge of the inquiry into Downing Street parties, could make a formal request to interview Cummings, Whitehall sources confirmed. It is within the remit of the inquiry to approach former members of staff if their evidence might be relevant.

No 10 staff had hoped that the inquiry, which is examining more than 15 separate allegations of illegal gatherings in Downing Street, would conclude this week. Because of the constant drip of new parties and developments, officials believe it may now report next week.

The inquiry is expected to outline when each alleged party occurred, how many people were present and who was involved in organising them. It will also outline the regulations at that time, and could suggest whether each event appears to have broken the regulations at that time.

The Gray report is not expected to recommend a criminal investigation.

Cummings then said that during a discussion over the future of the cabinet secretary and Reynolds, he had said to the prime minister something like: “Martin’s invited the building to a drinks party, this is what I’m talking about, you’ve got to grip this madhouse.”

Cummings added: “The PM waved it aside. I had told him repeatedly the PPS should be replaced, as had other competent officials who knew the whole structure needed a huge upgrade in personnel and management. ‘He’s MY guy, I don’t want you replacing him with YOUR person.’ (Yes, this says a lot.) I went home to bed at 3ish, still very ill from Covid.”

[Contact](#)

He claimed Reynolds had checked with Johnson whether the party should go ahead, the prime minister agreed it should and they both went to the party.

Another former Downing Street staffer told the Guardian: “It is inconceivable: there is no way Martin would go ahead without checking with Boris. There is no way any PPS would. If two senior people come to you and say, ‘this shouldn’t happen’, you don’t then proceed with it without speaking to the principal.”

Asked about Cummings’s latest claims, a No 10 spokesperson pointed to an earlier statement, saying: “It is untrue that the prime minister was warned about the [20 May] event in advance. As he said ... he believed implicitly that this was a work event. He has apologised to the house and is committed to making a further statement once the investigation concludes.”

The party on 20 May has emerged as the most contentious event for Johnson out of all the allegations that lockdown rules were broken in Downing Street.

With Tory MPs openly questioning Johnson’s future as party leader, there are worries among backbenchers about a drip-drip of further damaging revelations causing harm to the government’s reputation.

John Crace will join a Guardian Live online event about the No 10 lockdown parties and Boris Johnson’s future this Wednesday 19 January

from 8pm to 9pm GMT. [Book here](#)

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2022.01.18 - Spotlight

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- 'We've been forgotten' The British embassy security guard left behind in Kabul
- 'She will not become dull and unattractive' The charming history of menopause and HRT
- How to kill a god The myth of Captain Cook shows how the heroes of empire will fall

Memories of office lifeLife and style

Memories of office life: I was trapped in the longest, most anarchic meeting of my life

I had always done my best to avoid ‘all-nighters’ – but as the hours spun out I began to enjoy the surreal experience



‘The hours spun out, shapeless and full of percentages I didn’t understand. Midnight came and went.’ (Posed by models.) Photograph: fizkes/Getty Images/iStockphoto



[Emma Beddington](#)

Tue 18 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

I was sent to Brussels early in my ill-fated career as a City solicitor, to an office in a stunning Belle Époque building with a murky colonial past and beautiful stained-glass windows. It was thrillingly foreign, with office lunches that put Boots' meal deals to shame and sparkling wine at the weekly "tea time". I was delighted, but convinced it was a clerical error. Foreign postings were supposed to reward the best; I devoted most of my time and energy to evading work.

I was also irrationally terrified of the fabled "all-nighter", a corporate law rite of passage. I think I believed that, gremlin-like, something terrible would happen if I was exposed to spreadsheets after midnight – I would reveal I didn't actually understand them, perhaps. I had developed hacks to ensure this never happened: dodging notorious taskmasters, fibbing about my workload, and leaving my computer on when I went home.

This kind of subterfuge was impossible in Brussels. The antique tiles echoed when I tried to sneak out and I was sharing an office with my new boss, J, an ultra-ambitious workaholic. Shortly after arrival, I was caught muttering: "Fucking hell, Sharon," on a call to a lawyer who made me stay late: I had to

pretend I was swearing at the printer. I needed to step up and prove my after-hours mettle.

The opportunity arose rapidly. J said yes to yet another job – an urgent regulatory filing for a chemical manufacturer – and scheduled an all-day client meeting to finalise it with me, another junior lawyer and our brilliant paralegal. Usually, our clients were sleek and terrifying, like sharks, but these two, straight from a chemical plant in rural Germany, had a different vibe. They were as jolly as a two-man oompah band, and in no apparent hurry, firing off dubious jokes and asking for beers as we settled in to crunch the numbers.

We knew it would be a long meeting, but it was surreally, incomprehensibly long. We made no progress over the duration of several meals, many hours and many more spreadsheets, as every sentence or figure was chewed over by the double act. About 7pm, J had to leave to fly to another meeting, leaving the rest of us to wrap things up.

Without any “grownups” around, we were powerless to stop the chemical brothers from diving off on numerous tangents, changing their minds continuously and trying to type on our laptops with their arms around our shoulders. The hours spun out, shapeless and full of percentages I didn’t understand. Midnight came and went. At one point, the paralegal, undoubtedly the calmest and most competent woman I knew, walked out, quietly. Curious, I followed her. She was standing shaking with hysterical laughter in the corridor. I think that was the moment I finally relaxed and started to enjoy the absolute anarchy of it all. I had not gone gremlin: I was bewildered and resentful and had definitely messed up some exchange rate calculations, yes, but that was my normal state. Actually, it was getting so silly, it was almost ... fun?

The meeting eventually fizzled out. We went home, exhausted and semi-hysterical, in the small hours; the chemical brothers ended up in a hotel that, they claimed gleefully, turned out to be a brothel. Months later, their boss complained about the bill and our “needless physical presence” at the meeting. J stood up for us all, even me and my dodgy exchange rates. Forged in the fire of our ridiculous nearly all-nighter, I was properly one of the team now.

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Interview

‘We’ve been forgotten’: the British embassy security guard in Kabul

As told to [Amelia Gentleman](#)



Abdullah is afraid of being attacked by the Taliban if he leaves his house.
Illustration: Guardian Design

Abdullah says guards who risked their lives for the British cannot understand why they have been abandoned



[@ameliaagentleman](#)

Tue 18 Jan 2022 04.00 EST

Abdullah, 34, was a security guard for the British embassy, employed under contract by GardaWorld, and had a senior management role, looking after other locally employed embassy guards. He and about 180 colleagues had hoped to be evacuated to the UK at the end of August, but the evacuation was stopped by a bomb at the airport. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) made a clear commitment that all GardaWorld staff would be allowed to travel to the UK, but this has not happened.*

Quick Guide

Afghanistan: the left behind

Show



Afghanistan: the left behind

The crowds fighting to get into Kabul airport for evacuation [dispersed months ago](#), but while the scramble to leave Taliban-controlled Afghanistan became less visible when the last foreign troops left in August 2021, it got no less desperate.

Since then, reprisal killings have regularly been reported from across the country, including dozens detailed in a [recent report](#) from Human Rights Watch.

For those still in [Afghanistan](#), living in hiding or in permanent fear for months now, the dangers seem to be increasing as the options for escape narrow.

The UK government [has tightened rules](#) for its ARAP visa programme for former employees.

A second scheme offering a path to safety to a wider section of Afghans at risk was [heavily promoted](#) by the government but it only [began operating this month](#), and there are no details of how individuals can apply.

And while the [Taliban](#) have largely kept a promise to allow those with tickets and documents to fly out, Afghan passports are difficult to secure , visas are even more challenging, and flights are still prohibitively expensive.

This series features the stories of those who are trapped, in Afghanistan or in limbo as they search for safe haven, fearing for their lives from Taliban attacks or through hunger because they cannot work.

[**Emma Graham-Harrison**](#)

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

We've heard nothing from the Home Office or the FCDO and life is becoming very hard for everyone who worked for the British embassy. Surviving when there is no income and no work is very difficult. We're still hoping we will get an email about evacuation plans, but we haven't heard anything. The UK government is helping footballers and writers to leave the country, but there has been no help for us. We feel like we should be first in line because we risked our lives [for the British government](#). It's a huge disappointment for all of us.

All of the guards from the French embassy have been evacuated; the German and Australian governments are still evacuating embassy staff now; the Canadian government has even evacuated the cleaners and carpenters; but the British embassy, which was one of the largest embassies in Kabul, has left us. We wonder why we've been forgotten. Do they see us as a threat to them?

Most of us have already sold our possessions – televisions, carpets, everything – so that we've got money to buy food. People are out on the streets selling things every day, but you can't get much for your things, you have to accept about 30% of the real value. I've sold our car, and have managed to get the landlord to halve our rent from \$400 to \$200 a month, and I'm lucky to have a brother in the UK who is able to send a bit of money to support us. But everything has become so expensive in the markets, the money won't last long.

One of the guards called me last week, crying, and said he had sold everything apart from the mobile he was talking on; he said he was keeping it so he could check for an email from the British government with news of an evacuation plan. We're sending emails every day, but they just say: you have to wait. My daughter is four and a half, and should be going to nursery, but there's nothing. We keep her and her brother, who's two and a half, at home most of the time because it doesn't feel safe to go out. If anyone found out I had worked for the British government it would be very dangerous; one of my former colleagues has already been badly beaten. We don't leave the house very often now.

A UK government spokesperson said: “The government will honour its commitments to resettle those British Council workers and GardaWorld employees who are at risk.”

*The name has been changed for this article.

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New Zealand

‘She will not become dull and unattractive’: The charming history of menopause and HRT

HRT was first successfully marketed as a ‘cure’ for menopause in the 1940s before a misreported study crashed sales in 2002



Ads for early versions of HRT included assurances for husbands, who were told hormone pills made a woman ‘pleasant to live with once again’. Photograph: Tero Vesalainen/Alamy

Niki Bezzant

Mon 17 Jan 2022 20.30 EST

For centuries the symptoms of menopause were documented, but women went through it with little intervention. It wasn’t until the advent of science as we know it that physicians (all male at the time obviously) started more

commonly “treating” its symptoms. It’s clear now they had no idea what they were dealing with, since treatments ranged from the benign (cupping, cold water) to downright mutilation (clitoridectomy, anyone?).

Suffice it to say, the history of misogyny in medicine goes way, way back; all founded in the idea of women as inferior, and of menstrual blood as evil and poisonous. Fast-forward to the early 20th century, when it was discovered that oestrogen, in the form of conjugated equine oestrogen – yes, from horses – could be used as a hormone treatment for the symptoms of menopause. In 1942 the first oestrogen product was marketed under the name Premarin.

Premarin was marketed as not only a “cure” for menopause (which had by this time started to be framed as a disease to be treated) but as a fountain of youth. And it was promoted in ways that to our modern eyes are pretty sexist. Advertising of the era speaks of women’s misery and fear. One ad I found spells it out: “[A woman] is likely to feel that her charm is gone, and the golden days of her womanhood are irrevocably past”.

There were also ads targeted at men, who were obviously the real victims here. “Husbands, too, like Premarin,” said one ad from the 1950s. The hormone pills, men are assured, make a woman “pleasant to live with once again”. A particularly low point was the publication in 1966 of *Feminine Forever* by Robert A Wilson, an American gynaecologist. In the bestselling book, he called menopause “a serious, painful and often crippling disease”. Even more alarming: “All post-menopausal women are castrates”. Charming.

But no worries – all could be solved. HRT meant a woman’s “breasts and genital organs will not shrivel. She will be much more pleasant to live with and will not become dull and unattractive.” These misogynistic assertions did the trick; the drug companies making HRT – one of which, it was later revealed, had paid Wilson for his trouble – got great value from their stealth salesperson. Sales of HRT quadrupled in the years after the release of Wilson’s book.

One of the most prescribed drugs in the US

From the 40s through until the mid-1970s, oestrogen for menopause was given to women on its own. But in 1975, evidence started to emerge that without another hormone – a progestogen – “unopposed” oestrogen therapy led to an increased risk of endometrial cancer.

Sales of Premarin nosedived, until it was found that adding a progestogen to a lower dose of oestrogen mitigated this risk. The result was combined oestrogen– progestogen therapy, marketed as Prempro.

Sales of HRT took off again, along with aggressive marketing. This was helped by popular culture promoting the idea of menopause as a terrible disease of decline that needed treating. By the early 90s, Premarin was one of the most prescribed drugs in the US.

Evidence over the first decades of its use backed HRT as an effective therapy, not only for menopause symptoms but also as a preventative treatment for some chronic diseases. Studies showed it as useful for bones and heart health. In 1988 it was approved by the US Food and Drug Administration as a preventative treatment for osteoporosis. There was emerging evidence around HRT’s possible benefit in preventing heart disease, and so in 1991, a big study was started that changed the course of how HRT would be perceived for the next 30 years.

A ‘huge disservice’ to women

The Women’s Health Initiative (WHI) trial was the largest randomised study to date on HRT, and it would be a gamechanger. Unfortunately, not in a good way. It was, according to endocrinologist Megan Ogilvie, “one of the worst things to happen to women’s health in a long time. It did a whole generation of women, and probably two generations of women, a huge disservice.”

The reasons for that are many. The WHI was set up to find the effect of HRT (along with other, non-HRT-related interventions) on the most common causes of death and disability in post-menopausal women: things like cardiovascular disease, cancer and osteoporosis. It’s important to note that this study wasn’t about testing HRT’s effectiveness in treating actual menopause symptoms. What the researchers wanted to know was whether

HRT could be used in other ways – to prevent other diseases that happened to women after menopause.



New Zealand author Niki Bezzant. Photograph: Reuben Looi

In 2002 a shocking announcement came from the researchers running the WHI study: the HRT arm of the study was being stopped early, after just five years.

In those first trial results, the researchers had observed that in women with a uterus who were taking combined HRT, there was an increased incidence of coronary heart disease and breast cancer. There was also, incidentally, some good news: a reduction of osteoporotic fractures and in incidence of colorectal cancer. Still, they concluded, it seemed the risks outweighed the benefits, and the trial was prematurely discontinued.

At the time, this was big news. The media published stories with sensational headlines and the message women – and doctors – took from them was that HRT was dangerous.

The effect was large-scale stopping of HRT. Women threw away their pills, and doctors – newly afraid of prescribing something that might do more harm than good – stopped prescribing HRT. The drug companies were spooked too – not least because, predictably, they started getting sued.

There's nothing like a lawsuit to make a drug company wary of developing new drugs in the same area. Predictably, funding for and interest in research and development for HRT, and midlife women's health in general, waned.

'Pandering to women's greatest fear'

However, the results of the WHI study were misreported – even by the people who wrote the initial results paper.

This emerged as a bit of a scandal, in a 2017 paper written by one of the WHI study's authors, Prof Robert D Langer. In it he revealed that "highly unusual circumstances prevailed" when the WHI trial was stopped prematurely.

He went on to detail how he and other researchers were "aghast" at what they read in the paper that had been submitted in their names to the Journal of the American Medical Association, which they only saw for the first time when the paper was about to be published. Though they tried to submit edits to correct the misinterpretations and reword the press release, it was too late. The paper was published, the press conference held, and the rest is history.

"That headline," wrote Langer, "pandering to women's greatest fear – the fear of breast cancer – ensured that word of the study would spread like wildfire. And it ensured that the conversation would be driven much more by emotion and politics than by science."

The WHI reporting meant that many doctors were too scared to continue prescribing HRT to any woman. Now, they told women, basically, you're on your own. Government health bodies didn't help; they issued new advice to doctors to only prescribe HRT to the most severely affected women, and then in the lowest possible dose, for the shortest possible time.

Prescribing rates went down all over the world. What this also meant was that doctors stopped learning much at all about menopause and its potential treatments.

“One of the things the WHI reporting did is it allowed menopause education to be removed from medical schools,” notes Ogilvie. “And it lost us funding on a lot of different HRT products.”



This Changes Everything by Niki Bezzant. Photograph: Penguin Random House

Even now, there’s limited education on menopause for trainee and practising doctors, unless they seek it out or are particularly interested. This is really sad, because it can lead to women suffering unnecessarily. As Langer noted in his 2017 paper, “the ‘facts’ that most women and clinicians consider in making the decision to use, or not use, HRT, are frequently wrong or incorrectly applied.”

This is an edited extract from *This Changes Everything: The Honest Guide to Menopause and Perimenopause* by Niki Bezzant (Penguin, NZ\$37)

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An engraving of Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg's The Apotheosis of Captain Cook by John Thane and John Webber. Photograph: Royal Academy of Arts

[The long read](#)

How to kill a god: the myth of Captain Cook shows how the heroes of empire will fall

An engraving of Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg's The Apotheosis of Captain Cook by John Thane and John Webber. Photograph: Royal Academy of Arts

In the 18th century, the naval explorer was worshipped as a deity. Now his statues are being defaced across the lands he visited

by [Anna Della Subin](#)

Tue 18 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

In a type of neoclassical painting one might call The Apotheosis of X, the dead hero is bundled up to heaven by a host of angels, usually in a windswept tumult of robes, wings and clouds. A crowd of grieving mortals watches from below as their hero becomes divine. It's a celestial scramble: in Rubens' sumptuous [Apotheosis of James I](#), heaven is chaos and James looks terrified at having arrived.

In Barralet's Apotheosis of Washington, [the dead president has his arms outstretched](#) in a crucified pose, while Father Time and the angel of immortality bear him up to heaven. In a [mid-1860s Apotheosis](#), a freshly assassinated Lincoln joins Washington in the sky, and clings to him in a tight hug. In Fragonard's [Apotheosis of Franklin](#), the new god reaches back to Earth with one hand while a stern angel, grasping his other hand, drags him upward.

In 1785, in a Covent Garden theatre, a spectacle premiered depicting Capt James Cook's voyages in the South Pacific. During the final scene of Omai, or A Trip Around the World, at the words "Cook, ever honour'd, immortal shall live!" an enormous oil painting descended from the ceiling – [Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg's Apotheosis of Captain Cook](#), commissioned for the occasion. Cook is carried up to heaven by the angels Britannia and Fame, but his gaze is directed back at the vertiginous earth, where ships and canoes are facing off in Hawaii's Kealakekua Bay. His expression is queasy and his eyes seem to plead: "Don't drop me!"

Cook had been a revered figure among British seamen. "Wherever he goes he plants English gardens," noted a Sri Lankan anthropologist, not without some disgust. Cook's ship was an ark, heavy with sheep, cattle and potted plants, ready to domesticate any savage land he spied. Whenever he took possession of a new South Pacific island for the crown, Cook would sow seeds and set loose pairs of animals "almost in a loving fashion". Among his crew, Cook was allegedly adored as a father, who cared deeply for his sailors' health, and rarely lost a man. In England, he was renowned as the navigator who determined the boundaries of the habitable world, and was praised for his humane conduct in dark, faraway waters.

But on his third voyage, on the quest to find the Northwest Passage, Cook had begun to drown in some unseen, interior deluge. He sank into a black

mood, lost touch with reality and inflicted punishments on his crew at the slightest whim. He paced the deck and flew into rages that the sailors called *heivas*, after a Tahitian stomping dance. He spread terror across the islands, torching entire villages and carving crosses into natives' flesh in revenge for petty crimes. Even before he became a god, Cook had staked out the true space of divinity: violence, of the arbitrary kind. After weeks at sea, as supplies of food and water began to run low, his ship, the Resolution, sighted a paradisal shore. Rather than landing, Cook insisted, for no reason at all, that they keep sailing, interminably, around the coast. As the unhinged captain circled the island, the year turned from 1778 to 1779. Eyes watched from the beach.

On 17 January, the Resolution cast anchor at last in a black-sand bay and a crowd of 10,000 gathered to await it. Five hundred canoes, laden with sugar cane, breadfruit and pigs, glided up to the ship. Histories narrate that for the people of [Hawaii](#), the arrival of Cook was no less than an epiphany. "The men hurried to the ship to see the god with their own eyes," wrote the 19th-century Hawaiian historian Samuel Kamakau. "There they saw a fair man with bright eyes, a high-bridged nose, light hair and handsome features. Good-looking gods they were!" An elderly, emaciated priest went on board the Resolution and led the deities ashore. Thousands fell to their knees as Cook passed by. The priest led the captain to a thatched temple, wrapped Cook in a red cloth and sacrificed a small pig to him, as the people recited lines from the Hawaii epic Kumulipo, a creation myth.

According to the late anthropologist Marshall Sahlins, among others, Cook's arrival marked an extraordinary coincidence. A ritual known as the Makahiki was taking place on Hawaii at the time, in which the god Lono is said to reappear from the distant land of his exile, and to seize power over the Earth from the king, for a period of time. As it circled the island in a clockwise direction, the Resolution had inadvertently traced the path of the effigy of Lono as it was borne in a procession around the coast. The idol is made of a pole and crosspiece with white cloth hanging from it, resembling a sail. And Cook, as if following the script of a myth he could not have known, had landed in the bay said to be the god's home. His sailors reported that the captain was hailed variously as Lono, Orono, Rono, Eroner – "a Character that is looked upon by them as partaking something of divinity," the ship's surgeon related, echoing a biblical phrase describing Christ.

Another word used to greet Cook was *akua*, a Hawaii term that was translated as “God”.



An engraving of a Hawaiian dancing for Captain Cook in 1788, after John Webber, 1844. Photograph: Album/Alamy

The Hawaiians fashioned a special idol in Cook's honour, recorded the sailor Heinrich Zimmermann, but using "white feathers instead of red". The mariner John Ledyard wrote that the natives "observed that the color of our skins partook of ... the white from the moon and stars", and concluded that the strangers must have some connection with the heavenly bodies. The white men remained on the island for three weeks. They dismantled part of the temple at Hikiau for firewood, and turned the rest into an observatory housing their astronomical equipment, which they would take out, now and then, to stare up at the sky. Each day the priests ceremoniously presented the British with a barbecued hog. The people would gather all the fruits of their land – sweet potatoes, coconuts, bananas and taro – for these gods from a heaven where food had run out.

Can one become trapped, unaware, inside another's myth? During the Makahiki festival, after the Lono effigy has sailed around the island, a ritual is performed known as *kali'i*, meaning "to strike the king", in which Lono and the king fight a theatrical sham battle. According to Sahlins, Cook

continued, unwittingly, to perform the Makahiki script. On 3 February, the Resolution departed Hawaii to continue its explorations in the north, yet was struck by a severe storm and forced to turn back. When the British anchored again in Kealakekua Bay, eight days after they had departed, a fog of suspicion and hostility settled over the island as the people attempted to discern the strangers' reason for returning. The tension soon erupted into violence; two Hawaii chiefs were killed, and Cook decided to take the king, Kalani‘ōpu‘u, hostage. When the captain waded ashore, hundreds of warriors fell upon him with iron daggers and clubs.

Following Cook's death, the captain was accorded the traditional rituals for a vanquished chief. His corpse was dismembered, his flesh roasted and his bones separated and portioned out, with his lower jaw going to Kalani‘ōpu‘u, his skull to somebody else, and so on. Among Cook's sailors, who had fled back to the Resolution, "a general silence ensued", wrote the officer George Gilbert; it was "like a Dream that we could not reconcile ourselves to". Two priests rowed to the ship with a bundle containing a large chunk of the captain's thigh.

Along with their charred offering, they brought with them "a most extraordinary question". They wished to know when Cook would return to the vessel "and resume his former station". Would it be in – a very Christlike estimate – "three days' time?" The two men "shed abundance of tears at the loss of the Erono", Lt James King recorded, and they asked, "what he would do to them when he return'd". On shore, other islanders "asserted that he would return in two months & begged our mediation with him in their favor", according to Mid James Trevenan. The German sailor Zimmermann recorded a prophecy: "The god Cook is not dead but sleeps in the woods and will come tomorrow," as translated by an interpreter. Over the following years, the idea seemed to persist that Cook would resurrect.

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According to the sailor Edward Bell, who visited the bay in 1793, Cook's death had become the definitive frame for the Hawaii sense of time. "The Natives seem to consider that melancholy transaction as one of the most remarkable events in their History," Bell wrote, and reported that they use it

as a date to assist their calendrical calculations. “They still in speaking of him style him the Orono and if they are to be believ’d, most sincerely regret his fate.” The accounts by later British travellers to Hawaii emphasise the surprise and guilt felt by the islanders at Cook’s death, as if they had imagined it to be a play, with no consequence. “The natives had no idea that Cook could possibly be killed, as they considered him a supernatural being, and were astonished when they saw him fall,” reported the English explorer William Mariner in 1806; despite having killed him, “they esteem him as having been sent by the gods to civilise them”.

These stories, told and retold over generations, ignore one obvious fact: Cook was killed because he acted rashly and violently, slaughtering chiefs, kidnapping the king and giving the impression the British had returned to conquer the island. The fur trader James Colnett, who arrived in Hawaii in 1791, reported that ever since the British first appeared, the islanders had been constantly at war and devastated by strange, unknown illnesses, all of which they attributed to Cook’s revenge. Two volcanoes had awakened and burned night and day, the work, they contended, of the vengeful god. “They made strict inquiry of me, if ever he would come back again, and when I saw him last,” Colnett wrote.

When the first missionaries arrived in Hawaii from New England in 1820, they used the cautionary tale of Cook as a potent parable. “How vain, rebellious, and at the same time contemptible, for a worm” – meaning Cook – “to presume to receive religious homage and sacrifices from the stupid and polluted worshippers of demons,” thundered Hiram Bingham, the Calvinist leader of the first evangelical mission. After six months at sea, the Calvinists anchored at the archipelago and found it beset by the “thickest heathenism”, its sun-drenched landscapes masking terrible despair. Viruses introduced by the British were killing off entire families and villages, and survivors had taken to drinking themselves to death.

The great Kamehameha, founder and first king of the newly unified Kingdom of Hawaii, had died the previous year, and his son had recently abolished the *tabu* system, the strict codes that had structured daily life for centuries, and which had unravelled after the British arrival. A crisis of faith seemed to grip the islands, as temples fell into ruin and the totems of the old

gods were destroyed. “The nation, without a religion, was waiting for the law of Jehovah,” according to one early missionary. The Calvinists blamed the rampant disease and malaise on the Hawaiians’ immorality, sexual promiscuity, idol worship and on their reverencing of Cook.



A 1784 engraving of Hawaiians bringing gifts to Captain Cook by John Webber. Photograph: Alamy

Under the stern Calvinists, the Hawaii language was alphabetised, the Bible was translated and novel Christian concepts were mapped on to old Hawaii words. Schools and seminaries were opened and draconian morality laws introduced across the islands. The queen of Hawaii was among the first to convert, and much of the population followed her; a broom dipped in water baptised 5,000 Hawaiians at once. The myth of Cook-as-Lono lived on in the history books and school primers the evangelists produced, a tale that perpetuated the whiteness of divinity, while simultaneously affirming that Cook and all those who worshipped him were idolators of the worst kind.

Along with their indignations, the Calvinist missionaries brought with them a novel concept of private property, simply appropriating whatever land they desired. They were, after all, apostles of a God who possesses the Earth. “To the LORD your God belong the heavens … the earth and everything in it,” Moses had declared. Their children went on to establish enormous sugar

plantations, securing international markets for their lucrative crop. “The world is to be Christianised and civilised,” the evangelist Josiah Strong would assert, capturing the mood of the century, “and what is the process of civilisation but the creating of more and higher wants? Commerce follows the missionary.”

In 1840, with the looming threat of an invasion by France, Hawaii sought to clarify its ambiguous territorial status and seek nationhood. The king sent a delegation to the United States and Europe, and three years later Hawaii was officially pronounced an independent nation. However, the plantation owners, eager to sell their crop tax-free in the US, deeply resented the prospect of Hawaii sovereignty.

During the US civil war, with sugar production halted in the south, the wealth of the white Hawaii oligarchy soared, enabling it to consolidate its grip on the archipelago’s economy, from banks, utilities and steamships to local commerce and trade. Beset by illness and poverty, the native Hawaiian population had shrunk to a fifth of its former size. The industrialists deemed Hawaii workers to be lazy and unemployable, casting them aside in favour of labourers from China and Japan whom they could pay even lower wages. In 1893, the sugar cartel, along with a regiment of US Marines, overthrew the Hawaii queen Lili’uokalani, in an act that even the US president at the time, Grover Cleveland, condemned as unconstitutional. The American military occupation of the archipelago had begun.

In the American press, racist cartoonists deployed their anti-black arsenal of caricatures to sketch the Hawaii sovereign grinning as she heated a cannibal cooking pot. They claimed Lili’uokalani was the child of a “mulatto shoemaker”, who illegitimately lorded over her “heathenish” people. With such colouring, it was argued, she was clearly unfit by nature to rule. Along with the queen, the US occupiers arrested newspaper editors who supported her and clamped down on the opposition press. This meant that the only news that came out of Hawaii was delivered by the coup’s spokesmen, who announced that the queen had willingly surrendered her kingdom and her claim to the land.

To this day, the myth that Hawaiians passively accepted the loss of their nation, without resistance, lives on. Historical accounts make little mention

of the fact that 40,000 Hawaiians petitioned against the occupation and protested in the streets. A century later, in 1993, thousands of Hawaiians marched on the queen's former palace in Honolulu, again calling for independence. Yet the American public imagination rarely questions whether Hawaii wants to be part of the US; there is the assumption that Hawaiians, in a distant paradise, must be content. Didn't they venerate a white man as a god? Didn't they prostrate themselves before him, dress him and feed him with all the fruits of their land? They killed him in a ritual but, not knowing what they had done, didn't they, with guilty tears, impatiently await his return?

When news of Cook's death finally reached London in January 1780, 11 months after the captain was killed, it was met not with a public outpouring of grief but a rather morbid fascination at the exotic details. The success of Omai, which starred alongside the Apotheosis painting 80 dancing "savages", some in blackface, inaugurated a new European ritual of slaying Cook onstage. In 1788, the wildly popular [Death of Captain Cook; A Grand Serious-Pantomimic-Ballet](#) premiered in Paris, before going on to tour the continent, England, and the US.

By all accounts, the ballet was violent, chaotic, "horrid", overwrought with emotion – and a great triumph. Year after year, it was revived, and the captain's death re-enacted, like a blood offering the imperial powers continued to make to guarantee their own ascendancy. Cook was killed in Yarmouth, Bungay, Leeds and nine times in Norwich; he was bludgeoned to death in Dublin, clubbed in Quebec, speared on Greenwich Street in Manhattan and again in Charleston, South Carolina. Navy men got death-of-Cook tattoos and aristocratic women wore dresses inspired by "the Indian who killed Capt'n Cook with His Club", as the society diarist Mrs Hester Thrale noted.

By the mid-19th century, PT Barnum would joke that the celebrated blunt instrument had multiplied itself, securing a treasured place in every museum vitrine. The poet Anna Seward heaved the captain up to heaven in her 1780 Elegy on [Captain Cook](#), To Which is Added, An Ode to the Sun. "To put it bluntly," wrote the anthropologist Gananath Obeyesekere, "I doubt that the natives created their European god; the Europeans created him for them."



A defaced statue of Captain Cook in Melbourne, Australia, January 2018.
Photograph: David Crosling/AAP

An apotheosis can arise in an epiphany or in an act of prostration, and it can also happen through poetry and painting, through pantomime and translation. What word do you take for God? The Hawaiian syllables were *akua*, but this is misleading, for in its original sense the word could refer to any number of sacred beings, objects, or living persons – anything possessing immense power. So, too, with the word Lono: the crew of the Resolution was never able to figure out its precise meaning. “Sometimes they applied it to an invisible being, who, they said, lived in the heavens. We also found that it was a title belonging to a personage of great rank and power in the island,” Lt King recalled. Not only Cook but the Hawaiian king, too, was greeted with shouts of “Lono!” Misinterpretations create gods.

Kamakau, the historian, wrote of the coming of Cook in his 1866 *Mo’olelo* or “History”, a text widely esteemed as the authoritative “native” account. It was eventually published in English in 1961, after decades of work by a team of translators that included the 19th-century Australian-born settler and former sugar plantation worker Thomas Thrum. In the English edition, the story was heavily doctored, ostensibly to conform to “western” standards of history-writing, as the Hawaiian scholar Noenoe Silva has shown. Before his

description of the arrival of Cook, Kamakau details, over 17 pages, other foreigners who had already arrived by sea, some with pale skin, some with brown. The translators, however, omitted the entire section, transforming the narrative of the appearance of Cook and his ark into a magical, utterly unprecedented event. In the original, Kamakau emphasises the violence, fighting and hostage-taking that culminated in the killing of the captain, and concludes with a list.

“The fruits and seeds that Cook’s actions planted sprouted and grew, and became trees that spread to devastate the people of these islands:

1. Gonorrhea together with syphilis.
2. Prostitution.
3. The false idea that he was a god and worshipped.
4. Fleas and mosquitoes.
5. The spread of epidemic diseases.
6. Change in the air we breathe.
7. Weakening of our bodies.
8. Changes in plant life ...”

“The best part of Cook’s visit was that we killed him,” the Hawaiian activist Lilikalā Kame‘elehiwa writes. If man imagines that a god resembles himself, then the god, eventually, must die. Cook has been killed again and again, on the beach, in the theatre, on the page, but the myth of his alleged divinity lingers. With every new death, it lives on.

Deicide is on my mind. How do you kill a god, if not by bludgeoning, stabbing, piercing, splitting, dismembering, boiling, roasting, distributing? Is it through rewriting history, by exposing the machinations beneath myths, by breaking open syllables so that whatever is sacred inside spills out?

Is it by tearing down His image? In the 21st century, across New Zealand, Australia and Hawaii, statues of Cook have been defaced. Strutting across a pedestal in his breeches, telescope in hand, a defaced Cook wears a spray-painted bikini; around the neck of another Cook hangs a large, canvas sign that reads, simply, “Sorry”. The forecast calls for more. White gods will fall like raindrops. It feels as though the heavens are about to open up.

This is an edited extract from Accidental Gods: On Men Unwittingly Turned Divine, published by Granta. To order a copy, go to [guardianbookshop](#)

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‘It’s a total disaster’: Omicron lays waste to India’s huge wedding season



A couple await their marriage ceremony before India’s Omicron surge that has put paid to mass attendance on the big day. Photograph: Pradeep Gaur/SOPA Images/REX/Shutterstock

Distraught couples face prospect of cutting guest lists from more than 600 people down to just 20 after coronavirus variant took hold

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Amrit Dhillon in Delhi

Mon 17 Jan 2022 20.03 EST

Until 28 December, Heena Vashisht was a happy bride-to-be. The 28-year-old was pleased her family had put in place early all the arrangements for her wedding on 10 February, right down to the last candle. But her plans have been shredded by India's Omicron surge. The nuptials can go ahead in New Delhi as planned, but only if she cuts her guest list down from 650 to 20.

"My own immediate family is 80. How can I reduce the guests to 20? The tension in my family is unbearable right now. No one knows what to do and my mother's blood pressure has shot up with all the tension," says Vashisht.

With India's [Omicron-driven third wave](#) firmly under way, the New Delhi government has, along with other restrictions, limited wedding guests to 20, dealing a huge blow to India's traditional wedding season, which runs from November to March.

Thousands of families are in the same agony of uncertainty as Vashisht, with most of the arrangements paid for, either in full or in part.

Vashisht's father has paid for the venue at Tivoli Farms on the outskirts of the city in full. "I wanted to be prepared for every small thing so it has all been decided and advances paid. When I ask about postponing the date, all the vendors say if I do that, they may not be able to do it at the same price," says Vashisht.

In pre-pandemic times, some December weekends could see more than 20,000 weddings taking place in the capital in a single day, choking the

roads with traffic. It is in this November-March period that the industry makes the bulk of its money because the weather is more temperate.



A bride searches for her coronavirus vaccination certificate to show it to a healthcare worker at her wedding venue. Photograph: Amit Dave/Reuters

Before the latest wave, when cases were almost absurdly low, pandemic fatigue had given rise to “revenge weddings” that were even splashier and more luxurious than normal. November was packed with destination weddings: after two years of little or no travel, people wanted to get out to a different city.

‘You can’t celebrate with 20 people’

The industry’s suppliers are also staring at crippling losses. Its revenues have previously been put at about \$50bn, and New Delhi is one of the biggest wedding markets. On one “auspicious” day alone – 14 November – around 5,000 weddings took place in the city as the industry sought to recover. Flights to honeymoon destinations such as Goa tinkled with the sound of brides wearing their traditional red wedding bangles on both arms.

Rajeev Jain, managing director of event management company Rashi Entertainment, believes the industry is a “soft target” for coronavirus

restrictions. Employees at most venues and vendors are fully vaccinated, he says. The industry, he says, had taken all precautions because otherwise it “would die its own death” and all the government has to do is insist that all guests are vaccinated.

Abhishek Mishra, co-founder of Seasons Catering, agrees, saying the crowds at airports and railway stations are far bigger than at weddings. “I was at Indore airport the other day and there was barely room to stand. Election rallies are being held attended by tens of thousands of people. The markets are full of crowds, but no, weddings must be cancelled,” says Mishra.

Mishra’s phone has been ringing with distraught families asking for refunds. Some have been waiting over 18 months to have a wedding without pandemic restrictions. He intends to give the refunds because of their distress and “for the sake of our reputation”. He also has to pay the salaries of hundreds of employees, permanent and casual.

“It’s a total disaster. There are hundreds of small vendors involved in a wedding. They are not in a position to absorb losses,” he said.

Another couple, who did not want to be identified, were set to fly into New Delhi from London for the big day on 23 January. More than 500 guests were going to celebrate by the pool of a five-star hotel. Except for the flowers, large advances had been paid for most things – the caterers, the DJ, an entire wing of the hotel, the decorations, the outfits.



A wedding guest gets a Covid vaccine dose during a quiet moment.
Photograph: Amit Dave/Reuters

“Everyone had booked their flights, the hotel rooms, the rented cars, the photographer, the band, everything. We have postponed it indefinitely because you can’t celebrate a wedding with 20 people,” says the bride-to-be.

India has enjoyed a halcyon period since June. As late as November, the capital of 20 million people was recording a mere 35-45 fresh infections a day. But with Omicron fuelling a sudden surge the government has reimposed restrictions. India is recording around 258,000 cases daily nationally, with New Delhi recording 18,286 cases on Sunday.

Sahiba Puri, of XO Catering by Design in Delhi, understands the need for the restrictions but has no idea what to do with the cooks who have flown in from different parts of India for a pre-wedding function at the weekend.

“The bride’s family wanted to treat guests to all kinds of regional cuisines so these cooks have come and have bought so many of the ingredients. Where do they go? They are paying rent for where they are staying and other expenses,” says Puri.

With the industry staring at yet another disaster, Mishra and others plan to ask the government to relax the 20-guest rule. The Confederation of All

India Traders has also written to the government asking for a relaxation.

However, given the current explosion in cases, any relaxation is unlikely. Wedding card printer Arnav Gupta says: “Everyone is so haunted by the brutal second wave that no politician is going to take any chances.”

Vashisht has decided she cannot uninvite 630 guests. She has no choice but to postpone, but planning a later date is proving impossible too. “Who knows when this wave will end? It’s only just got going. Do I tentatively look at a date in March? April? May? I mean, who knows? This limbo is killing me.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/18/its-a-total-disaster-omicron-lays-waste-to-indias-huge-wedding-season>

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Pharmaceuticals industry

Moderna aims to launch single Covid and flu booster jab within two years

Combined vaccine should be ready in time for winter infectious season in 2023, says drug firm's chief executive



Moderna is developing a combined jab that will protect against Covid, influenza and the respiratory virus RSV. Photograph: Dado Ruvić/Reuters

[Mark Sweeney](#)

[@marksweney](#)

Mon 17 Jan 2022 12.46 EST

Moderna is aiming to launch a single booster vaccination that will protect against both Covid-19 and flu within two years, its chief executive has said.

Stéphane Bancel said that the combined vaccine – which will protect against Covid-19, influenza and RSV, a common respiratory virus – could be

available before the winter infectious season in 2023.

“Our goal is to be able to have a single annual booster so that we don’t have compliance issues where people don’t want to get two to three shots a winter,” he said at a panel session at the World Economic Forum in Davos. “The best-case scenario would be the fall of 2023.”

Last year, the NHS moved to reassure the public that getting jabs for flu and Covid at the same time did not affect the body’s immune response.

The UK government has been encouraging the public to get a third dose of a Covid-19 vaccine, especially those in more vulnerable groups such as older demographics or those with weakened immune systems. Its efforts include launching a [nationwide mobile text message campaign on Boxing Day](#).

Bancel has previously said that people may need a fourth shot of a vaccine this autumn as protection from booster shots declines over the coming months.

This month, Israel became the first country in the world to offer a [fourth dose of the coronavirus vaccine](#) to people aged 60 and over.

The US president’s chief medical adviser, Anthony Fauci, also speaking at Davos on Monday, said there was no evidence that repeat booster disease would overwhelm the immune system.

“Giving boosters at different times, there is really no evidence that’s going to hinder” immune response, he said.

Fauci said the goal should be a booster that induces a response against multiple potential variants.

Bancel also said Moderna’s vaccine candidate specifically targeting the Omicron variant of coronavirus has almost finished being developed and will enter clinical development imminently. The US drug company expects to be able to share data with regulatory authorities around March, he added.

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“The vaccine is being finished,” he said. “It should be in the clinic in the coming weeks. We are hoping in the March timeframe to be able to have data to share with regulators to figure out next steps.”

This month, Darius Hughes, the UK chief executive of Moderna, said it would be a “stretch” for a combined flu and Covid vaccine to be available by winter 2023.

“Our number one priority for 2022, after getting the right Covid vaccine for the Omicron variant, is to try to really drive forward our flu and RSV programmes to see if we can get a combination, single-dose respiratory vaccine,” he said. “The benefit for the NHS, and all the vaccination services, and ultimately patients, we think, is going to be huge.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/jan/17/moderna-aims-to-launch-single-covid-and-flu-booster-jab-within-two-years>

Coronavirus

New York and other north-eastern US states see a rapid fall in Covid cases

Despite decreasing positivity rates, hospitals continue to struggle amid a surging patient load and staff shortages



New York City and some north-eastern US states are experiencing a sharp decrease in Covid-19 cases. Photograph: Carlo Allegri/Reuters

[Edward Helmore](#)

Tue 18 Jan 2022 02.00 EST

New York City and some north-eastern US states appear to be seeing rapid decreases in their numbers of Covid-19 cases in recent days, raising the possibility that the Omicron wave has now already peaked in some parts of America.

In New York City the rolling seven-day average of new cases was less than 28,000 a day on 16 January, down from an average of more than 40,000 on 9 January.

Similar patterns were being observed in the state as a whole and other nearby regions.

“The Covid forecast is improving … the Covid clouds are parting,” said Kathy Hochul, the New York governor, in a statement Sunday after releasing figures that showed positivity rates in the state are falling sharply. “Overall, the prognosis, the forecast, for Covid is much brighter than it had been before.”

Some 400,000 tests were conducted in New York on Saturday, with a positivity rate of 12.9%. Just one week ago, on a similar number of tests, the positivity rate was almost 20%. The state reported 51,264 new cases on Saturday, down from the peak of more than 90,000 a week earlier, according to [a New York Times database](#). The number of people hospitalized fell for a fourth straight day.

Several other north-east states – including New Jersey, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island – may be heading in a similar, [down-trending direction](#).

But in certain areas, including the Bronx in New York City, staff at hospital facilities have issued calls for help, saying they were struggling to treat a surging patient load.

“Patients are lying in the hallway on stretchers that are touching each other,” said Karen Lam, an emergency room nurse in the Bronx. President Joe Biden and Hochul said military medical and National Guard teams would be dispatched to help.

Over the weekend US surgeon general Vivek Murthy, warned that despite its rapid spread, Omicron had not yet peaked in the US as a whole. On a national level, the seven-day rolling average of new cases was still around 800,000 cases a day on 16 January, as it had been for the previous two days.

Murthy warned that infections are set to continue to increase in much of the country and the “[next few weeks will be tough](#)”. The rates of infection and levels of hospitalization are set to be much higher in unvaccinated populations.

“The challenge is that the entire country is not moving at the same pace,” [Murthy said on CNN’s State of the Union](#). “The Omicron wave started later in other parts of the country. We shouldn’t expect a national peak in the coming days.”

The [Biden administration](#) has been battered by accusations that it failed to anticipate demand for testing after a national vaccine and re-vaccination or booster drive showed clear signs of faltering. The administration has also faced criticism that it failed to anticipate demand for therapeutic antiviral treatments.

The CDC, too, has faced criticism. With little available data on Omicron, the agency has attempted to move faster with recommendations, including by cutting the isolation periods and drop a negative test result as a requirement for leaving isolation.

But that was offset by employers requiring a negative test before infected Americans could return to work, creating pressure on testing capacity that authorities have struggled to meet.

CDC director Rochelle Walensky [told the Wall Street Journal](#) in an interview published Monday that she was committed to communicating CDC policy more clearly. “I think what I have not conveyed is the uncertainty in a lot of these situations,” Walensky said. “We felt the need to take action before we had Omicron-specific data,” she added.

[In a statement last week](#), the White House said it would purchase \$1bn tests to distribute free. A half-billion would be available for order on 19 January and mailed directly on request, with up to four free tests per residential address.

“This program will ensure that Americans have at-home, rapid COVID-19 tests available in the weeks and months ahead—in addition to the number of

other ways they can get tested,” the White House said.

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Covid-19: the Omicron wave is slowing – what lies on the other side?

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2022.01.18 - Opinion

- Gambling killed my husband. We must stop this predatory industry claiming more lives
- Office drinking culture slowed down in the 90s. But not for journalists – and now they are running the country
- As long as party donations can be obscured, British politics will not be clean
- Even if the Tories want Boris Johnson to go, no one's ready to wield the knife

Opinion**Gambling**

Gambling killed my husband. We must stop this predatory industry claiming more lives

[Annie Ashton](#)

Luke was targeted by adverts for ‘free bets’ to lure him back to gambling after he had quit. I’m campaigning to have this kind of marketing banned



‘My children will never see their father again.’ Luke and Annie Ashton.
Photograph: Family handout

Tue 18 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

This time last year, my husband Luke and I had everything we wanted: each other, a lovely house and two wonderful children. Three months later, this life was shattered. On 22 April 2021, Luke took his own life.

About two years before his death, Luke developed a gambling disorder. He started gambling with friends on a Saturday, placing bets at a local bookies while watching Leicester City, his football team. At the time, I didn't think it was dangerous – I had no idea that gambling [kills so many people](#).

Soon, Luke began to bet online. He opened multiple accounts, taking advantage of “free bets” – aggressive marketing offers used by online bookmakers to lure people into gambling. From there, he was encouraged to bet on sports, like horse racing, that he knew little about. It didn't take long for him to get into a lot of debt and start chasing his losses.

If you knew Luke, you'd find it hard to comprehend that he gambled. My husband was sensible and careful with money. He would save whenever he could, and bills were always paid on time. As a warehouse manager at a local family printing firm, he often found ways of saving the company money, something he was held in high regard for.

I only became aware he was in trouble after I noticed he was struggling to pay for cinema trips or meals out. [Gambling](#) on a phone is very isolated, and it took me a year to understand he was gambling so much. We had just sold our house, so luckily we could pay off the debts he had accumulated and, much to my relief, Luke closed his gambling accounts. This seemed enough. Luke had never had issues with gambling before and I had no reason to think he would again.



Luke and Annie Ashton

But in 2020, Luke was furloughed because of the pandemic. He began gambling again in secret, reopening his old accounts. I remember him often commenting on how relentless the marketing emails he was getting were; he was concerned about the impact they would have on people who were already struggling with money. Naively, I thought this meant Luke could stop gambling when he wanted to – like the GambleAware slogan: “When the fun stops, stop.”

Three weeks after his suicide, the police gave Luke’s phone back to me. It was then that I realised his gambling disorder had returned. His relapse was so rapid that I still cannot believe it was never picked up by these gambling companies who – at the start of the pandemic – had promised to do more to protect vulnerable customers like Luke. On one account he reopened during the pandemic, the pattern of his gambling was obviously harmful. He took advantage of a free bet offer, deposited money, lost money, was immediately advertised another free bet offer, and the cycle would begin again.

It is not in the gambling industry’s interests to stop people developing gambling addictions. It spends £1.5bn a year on advertising to bring in customers to get hooked on its products for profit. Some 60% of its profits come from from 5% of customers who are already problem gamblers, or are

at risk of becoming so. And they are huge profits – the UK industry is worth about £14bn. These companies know a staggering amount about their customers – in some cases they will know if someone earning £30k a year has gambled £60k in a few months, and do nothing to stop it. They track their habits and patterns and vulnerabilities online to find out when best to advertise to them and what kind of emails they are most likely to open. They could, if they wanted to, use this information to help people, to block their accounts; but often they use it to drag them further into addiction. When people like my husband try not to gamble, they are targeted more aggressively. One gambler who got his data back from an online gambling company and shared it with the [New York Times](#) found that as someone who had given up gambling, he had been profiled as a customer to “win back”.

How do these gambling companies get away with it? Because they can. The entire industry is fuelled by a money above all else mentality that is devoid of morality.

In a 2021 report, Public Health England estimated that there are more than [409 gambling-related suicides](#) in England every year. That is more than one life lost every single day. That is why I am campaigning for “[Luke’s law](#)” – to ban gambling incentives such as “free bets”. Luke found that being bombarded with ads from that 24-hour bookies and casino in his pocket made it a problem that became impossible to escape. Banning these incentives may go some way to alleviating the misery that gambling companies cause families like ours with their predatory actions.

The gambling lobby is very powerful – just look at all the MPs who get [paid off](#) with tickets to sports games to speak in its favour. But unlike so many who caution against change to gambling regulation, I am not on anyone’s payroll. I would give anything for this catastrophe to not have happened to me and my family. It has been traumatic and the fight is draining, but I do not feel I have a choice. The government is currently reviewing gambling legislation – laws that were drawn up before smartphones. This is a real chance to make changes that could benefit everyone – not just the few who are making money from misery.

We banned tobacco marketing; we can do the same for gambling.

My children will never see their father again. But I hope that by getting Luke's law passed, he may have saved others from falling for the same fate. It gives me some small solace, and I hope it gives our children that too among their grief.

- Annie Ashton campaigns to raise awareness of gambling addiction
 - If you've been affected by gambling-related suicide, contact [Gambling with Lives](#) on support@gamblingwithlives.org. In the UK, Samaritans can be contacted on 116 123 or email jo@samaritans.org
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[Opinion](#)[Politics](#)

Office drinking culture slowed down in the 90s. But not for journalists – and now they are running the country

[Zoe Williams](#)



Spirits at work were common in the 60s, and pints at lunchtime were normal in the 80s, but most workplaces sobered up



‘The problem runs deeper than a wheelie suitcase full of prosecco’ ... a group of men dressed as Boris Johnson stage a mock lockdown party protest outside Downing Street on 14 January. Photograph: Amer Ghazzal/Rex/Shutterstock

Tue 18 Jan 2022 02.00 EST

The time to be alive, if you wanted to drink hard liquor at work, was the 60s, but it actually is not possible to drink spirits all day without something terrible happening. Not “rude remark” terrible, not “accounting mistake” terrible, but “falling out of a window” terrible. To drink like this, you would have to be both in the 60s and in a film.

Nevertheless, a couple of pints at lunchtime, even in reputable careers such as teaching, was still commonplace in the 80s. By the 90s, it had mainly been phased out – except if you were a journalist. When I got my first job on a paper in 1994, it was routine to arrive at 10am, go to lunch at 12.30pm, come back to the office at 2pm to leave your jacket on the chair (the universal camouflage of the presentee), go back to the pub, then regroup in the office at 4.30pm to collect your jacket. When the nation decided to put [in charge of the country](#) a bunch of men whose formative professional years were 80s and 90s Fleet Street, the obvious risks were that they would run the place like a newspaper column, with tiny amounts of knowledge parlayed

into huge statements that, unlike a column, would turn into concrete acts, and have consequences for millions of lives. That turned out to be devastatingly true, but what, weirdly, none of us predicted was that it would also turn Downing Street into a year-round Oktoberfest.

Picking over the finer details of the Downing Street drinking culture, though, there are bits that I just do not recognise. Never, in the most outlandish excesses, did I ever see anyone sleeping overnight at work; playing Pictionary until midnight; or leaving drink dregs at their desk for the cleaner to deal with. The government is apparently run by people who don't have *other* lives: they have nobody they want to rush back to, nobody waiting at home who cares where they are; they can't even wrap their heads around the dignity of the cleaners, the people they see every day. The problem runs a bit deeper than a wheelie suitcase full of prosecco.

- Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist
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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jan/18/office-drinking-culture-slowed-down-in-the-90s-but-not-for-journalists-and-now-they-are-running-the-country>.

OpinionParty funding

As long as party donations can be obscured, British politics will not be clean

[Liam Byrne](#)

The UK is defenceless to stop a tide of questionable funding – that's why I'm calling for 'Pandora amendments' to the elections bill

- Liam Byrne is the Labour MP for Birmingham Hodge Hill



Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak in the House of Commons, 8 September 2021. Photograph: Jessica Taylor/UK PARLIAMENT/AFP/Getty Images

Mon 17 Jan 2022 11.09 EST

We can't have clean politics if politics is awash with money from obscure sources. That's why MPs have today tabled the "Pandora amendments" to the [elections bill](#) to stop millions of pounds pouring into British political parties from secretive offshore locations.

Thanks to the Guardian's courageous reporting of the [Pandora papers](#), we now know the staggering scale of generous donors with offshore accounts and a fondness for a Brexiteering Tory party.

Take the Chernukhins. Lubov Chernukhin has now [donated £2.1m](#) to the Conservative party. Yet the BBC revealed her husband, Vladimir Chernukhin (appointed deputy chairman of Vnesheconombank by Vladimir Putin) [received \\$8m](#) from Suleiman Kerimov, a Russian billionaire who has been [sanctioned by the US treasury](#) on the grounds of his associations with the Russian government. The transfer came on 29 April 2016, shortly before the majority of Lubov Chernukhin's donations to the Conservatives. (She has denied ever receiving money deriving from Kerimov, and says that her Tory donations "have never been tainted by Kremlin or any other influence".)

Then there's Alexander Temerko, who operated at the top of the Russian arms industry and had [connections high up](#) in the Kremlin before moving to the UK in 2005. OpenDemocracy reported that he [donated more than £1.2m](#) to the Tories between 2012 and 2019.

Next there's Mohamed Amersi who, with his partner, has [given £793,000](#) to the Conservative party. [As the BBC reported](#), Amersi advised one of the parties involved in "one of Europe's biggest corruption scandals", which saw \$220m being paid to a Gibraltar-based company that was secretly owned through an offshore company by Gulnara Karimova, the daughter of the then president of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov. (Amersi has denied any wrongdoing.) The Financial Times reported that Amersi "[received \\$4m](#) from a company he knew to be secretly owned by a powerful Russian who was at the time a senior member of Vladimir Putin's regime" – Leonid Reiman, then Putin's telecoms minister. In response, Amersi said he "wasn't aware" that Reiman owned the company, and he has always maintained that his donation to the Conservatives came from his own UK profits.

Meanwhile, some generous donors are good friends with the new Tory chairman, “Bonanza” Ben Elliot, who has [promised the wealthy access](#) to Tory politicians in exchange for donations.

Right now, Britain is defenceless to stop this tide. Carole Cadwalladr’s investigations helped expose the fact that Arron Banks’s donations to [Leave.EU were financed](#) with multimillion-pound loans from his Isle of Man-based firm, Rock Holdings. The National Crime Agency eventually dropped its investigation but failed to explain just how the money arrived in Rock Holdings in the first place. Bluntly, why didn’t it tell us where the cash came from? Surely we have a right to know? The Electoral Commission was so worried by the NCA’s conclusion in the Banks case that it warned the outcome raised concerns about the “[apparent weakness](#)” in the law that risks allowing “overseas funds into UK politics”.

That’s why a cross-party group of MPs has tabled the “Pandora amendments” to insist that party donations must come from profits made in the UK, and to establish a new call-in regime that allows the Electoral Commission to investigate suspicious donations on national security grounds. The government has just introduced this regime for investments in critical national infrastructure, so why not “investments” in political parties too?

When it has been approached with questions about the provenance of certain donations, the Conservative party has said that fundraising is a “legitimate part” of the democratic process, and that all donations have been properly declared to the Electoral Commission.

Yet the warnings are loud and clear. Last month, the Chatham House thinktank warned that “Westminster – and the Conservative parliamentary party in particular – may be [open to influence](#) from wealthy donors who originate from post-Soviet kleptocracies, and who may retain fealty to these regimes”. Parliament’s intelligence select committee has questioned whether the Electoral Commission has sufficient powers to ensure the security of democratic processes where hostile state threats are involved. “If it [the Electoral Commission] is to tackle foreign interference, then it must be given the necessary legislative powers,” the committee concluded.

The time for delay is over. It is now time to act.

- Liam Byrne is the Labour MP for Birmingham Hodge Hill
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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jan/17/party-donations-british-politics-funding-pandora-amendments-elections-bill>

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OpinionBoris Johnson

Even if the Tories want Boris Johnson to go, no one is willing to give him a push

Katy Balls



MPs may be waiting until May's local election results to make their move – unless the crisis spreads to the Tory brand



‘For all the anger, it’s still unclear how Boris Johnson would actually go.’
Photograph: Hannah McKay/Reuters

Mon 17 Jan 2022 12.20 EST

When the former Downing Street pollster James Johnson [ran a focus group](#) on “partygate” in the red wall seat of Bolton North East, the feedback wasn’t exactly encouraging for No 10.

Some of the disparaging comments from those voters who backed the Tories for the first time in 2019 included: “I think he’s completely lost everyone’s trust”, “he needs to resign” and “I don’t really see how he can carry on”. When people were asked whether they would vote for [Boris Johnson](#) now, not a single person put their hand up.

That reaction won’t come as much of a surprise to Tory MPs in Westminster after a weekend in their constituencies. While the prime minister and his team have tried to win over the parliamentary party with regular trips to the tearoom and “Operation Red Meat”, which aims to please the base with rightwing policies, the charm offensive is yet to work on the grassroots.

“It’s bleak,” says one loyalist MP. The problem is it is not the usual suspects. Instead, “it’s our core base”, according to someone on the government

payroll. New revelations on Friday that No 10 staff were partying on the eve of Prince Philip's funeral have driven many MPs to distraction. As one points out, members of their associations often belong to other community organisations and take an extremely dim view of lax attitudes to the rules.

"There is something almost impressive about managing to piss off absolutely every group of society," observes a former adviser. In the face of criticism from even usually supportive newspapers, MPs are discovering new coping mechanisms. One senior Tory had a media blackout at the weekend – the complaints from his constituents were enough.

Yet for all the anger, it's still unclear how Johnson would actually go. MPs fall roughly into two camps: those who want him out before the local elections and those who think he ought to be given until then to turn things around.

The group most eager to see the back of the prime minister is made up of those who have council seats up for grabs in May. Candidates are talking of dropping out and are warning of electoral oblivion. In order to avoid this fate, they argue that a new leader is required at the national level.

They are backed by longtime Johnson critics, Scottish Tories and increasingly MPs in Liberal Democrat/Tory marginals. Given the Liberal Democrats managed to overturn chunky Conservative majorities in the Chesham and Amersham and North Shropshire byelections, this group don't feel as though they need to wait until May.

However, many MPs believe Johnson will cling on until then – bar no new damaging disclosures. First, the next Tory leadership contest will not be a tidy affair; there is no unity candidate. The two frontrunners, [Rishi Sunak](#) and Liz Truss, have their supporters – but also ample critics. Already a "Stop Truss" contingent is forming – MPs keen to either keep Johnson in place to avoid this fate or to work to stop the foreign secretary reaching the membership in any contest. Given she is a grassroots favourite, they view it as too risky to have her in the final two.

With potential candidates being tipped to run including the education secretary, Nadhim Zahawi, former defence minister Penny Mordaunt, the chair of the foreign affairs select committee, Tom Tugendhat, and former health secretary Jeremy Hunt, the contest is already looking rather crowded. “To get to 54 letters and then start and complete a leadership contest between now and April is overly ambitious,” says a member of the government.

There are also self-serving reasons ministers are keen to put off a contest. The mantra “he who wields the knife never wears the crown” is weighing heavily on contenders. Such a move could lead to a backlash among Johnson loyalists and make an entry in a leadership contest more difficult. “A lot of colleagues want him to take us into the local elections and let the public vote on him,” says someone on the payroll. “It’s a neater way of doing things.” Another MP argues that those activists who support Johnson need to see proof that he is no longer an electoral asset.

But that calculation could change. While the fact there is no obvious successor is helping Johnson stay in position, things could get so bad that MPs ultimately decide it’s best to get rid of the problem then work on the solution afterwards.

While Downing Street aides are optimistic he will survive Sue Gray’s report, MPs will be carefully studying his reaction. Johnson’s falling poll ratings suggest many voters have already made up their minds – any more denying reality or making excuses will feed into the very complaints that were raised in that Bolton focus group.

The issue for the prime minister is that the partygate crisis is not yet a Conservative-wide scandal, it’s a Boris Johnson scandal. If MPs conclude they need to move fast in order to stop it contaminating the whole Tory brand permanently, he will be out sooner rather than later – even if the question of who will succeed him remains up in the air.

- Katy Balls is the Spectator’s deputy political editor

- Join our journalists for a Guardian Live online event on the No 10 lockdown party and Boris Johnson's future on Wednesday 19 January.
[Book here](#)
-

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[China](#)

China forced 2,500 ‘fugitives’ back from overseas during pandemic, report finds

Methods used in Sky Net program range from family intimidation to state-sanctioned kidnappings, says rights group



The report claims China brought back 2,500 ‘fugitives’ from overseas during the pandemic. Photograph: Philip Fong/AFP/Getty Images

[Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei

[@heldavidson](#)

Tue 18 Jan 2022 02.00 EST

Chinese authorities captured more than 2,500 “fugitives” from overseas and brought them back to [China](#) during the pandemic, under a program using methods ranging from family intimidation to “state-sanctioned kidnapping”, according to a new report.

Human rights group Safeguard Defenders estimates in its report published on Tuesday that the continued repatriations now total more than 10,000 since Beijing launched operation Fox Hunt in 2014, followed by Sky Net in 2015.

During the pandemic, at least 1,421 people were brought back to China in 2020 and 1,114 in 2021, based on government figures, despite international lockdowns and travel restrictions. The figures only include those captured for purported economic crimes or crimes related to their official duties.

In December 2021 the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) described the year's operation as "fruitful".

In 2018 Sky Net was moved under the control of the newly formed non-judicial body, the National Supervision Commission. In February 2021 the commission relaunched the program, expanding it to fugitives in the fields of political and legal affairs, and civil affairs. Human rights groups believe activists and dissidents are now often targeted, including Uyghurs and Hongkongers living overseas. In July the Uyghur Human Rights Project documented 395 cases of Uyghurs being deported, extradited, or rendered back to China.

"Since Xi Jinping came to power the Chinese government intensified the crackdown on civil society," said US-based human rights activist Teng Biao. "They have targeted lawyers and dissidents, bloggers, journalists, Tibetans, Uyghurs, Hong Kongers, everything in civil society."

The methods to force someone back to China, outside formal bilateral agreements on extradition and deportation, can range from refusing to renew a passport, to misusing the Interpol red notice system to have international warrants issued, the report said. They also include exit bans and intimidation of targets' family members in China, and in-person threats by Chinese agents operating on foreign soil. At the more extreme end of the scale are acts which Safeguard Defenders termed state-sanctioned kidnappings, but which Beijing calls "irregular methods". These sometimes involved covert operations in conjunction with host country forces, the report said, or

tricking the target into going to a third country where they could be extradited.

Safeguard Defenders mapped 80 cases of attempted apprehension, of which it said about half were successful. It identified targets across dozens of countries, including the US, UK, and Australia.

Instances of family intimidation have been widely reported among the Uyghur diaspora, particularly those who are politically active outside China, lobbying for international action on the human rights abuses being committed in Xinjiang.

In 2021 reports revealed Mihray Erkin, a young Uyghur woman, was believed to have died in detention in Xinjiang, in 2020. Erkin had been working in Japan as a scientific researcher until she returned to Xinjiang in 2019, allegedly after her parents were pressured to call her home. Also last year, 19-year-old Wang Jingyu, a US permanent resident who was [wanted in China over online comments](#) after he criticised the government on Weibo, claimed his parents were repeatedly harassed and detained in an attempt to have him return.

Teng said he'd come across many cases of family intimidation, including jailing family members in China to pressure overseas targets.

"Sometimes they were arbitrarily arrested or detained, followed by secret police, interrogated, sometimes forced to make a video phone call with their wife or husband or children who live overseas," he told the Guardian.

"Because it's a totalitarian system the government has the power – not legal power, but power that is above the law – and they can force a company or work unit to fire anyone they want."

Chinese authorities have publicly lauded the program, with a 2015 notice from the CCDI claiming more than 70 "working groups" had been sent to 90 countries and regions, with the special operations "fully supported by overseas law enforcement agencies, Chinese embassies and consulates abroad, and police liaison officers".

Safeguard Defenders called for world governments to end extradition treaties with China, and to evaluate and terminate any bilateral judicial cooperation arrangements with the NSC.

“While there are legitimate reasons for, albeit cautiously, engaging in international judicial cooperation with Beijing, China’s violations of other nations’ judicial sovereignty and breaking customs in international judicial cooperation undermines the trust required for entering into such cooperation, or continuing existing cooperation,” it said.

Yaqiu Wang, China researcher for Human Rights Watch, said host countries had to be careful about China-requested extraditions.

“They should ensure individuals residing in their countries that are wanted by the Chinese government have adequate protection, and investigate possible harassment and other abuses by Chinese officials or their agents against these individuals or their family members,” she said.

“Authorities should also provide them with adequate opportunity to contest the extradition, and not return anyone to China if they are likely to face persecution, torture or ill-treatment there.”

China has always denied its actions are kidnappings, or that it violates foreign and international laws.

“In the process of carrying out its international anti-corruption operations, China has always strictly abided by the domestic laws of the target countries, international laws and international judicial and law enforcement practices,” the CCDI said in a state media report in November 2020.

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Indonesia

Indonesia names new capital Nusantara, replacing sinking Jakarta

Government offices will relocate to province of East Kalimantan, easing burden on Java metropolis as it battles environmental problems



Vehicles are caught in congestion during rush hour in Jakarta, Indonesia. A new capital called Nusantara hopes to alleviate some of Jakarta's woes.
Photograph: Achmad Ibrahim/AP

[Rebecca Ratcliffe](#) South-east Asia correspondent

Tue 18 Jan 2022 01.50 EST

Indonesia plans to name its new capital Nusantara, which translates as “archipelago”, when government offices are relocated to the province of East Kalimantan from Jakarta, on the island of Java.

President Joko Widodo first announced the [plan to move Indonesia's capital in 2019](#), in an effort to relieve the huge environmental challenges facing Jakarta, and to redistribute wealth. The move has been delayed due to the pandemic, but could go ahead in 2024.

The government hopes it will reduce the burden on Jakarta, a city of 10 million, which is notoriously congested, suffers regular flooding, and is one of the fastest sinking cities in the world due to the over extraction of groundwater. Parts of north Jakarta are falling at an estimated 25cm a year, due to subsidence – including even the seawall designed as a buffer for communities.

The new name had been selected from more than 80 options by Widodo and was chosen because it reflected Indonesia's geography, and was iconic internationally, said Suharso Monoarfa, the national development planning minister.

Some have pointed out that the choice could prove confusing since Nusantara is also used to refer to the archipelago nation as a whole. Others have questioned why Nusantara, an old Javanese term, was selected when the new capital was being built in Kalimantan.

Construction could start this year, after a bill on the new capital was approved by parliament on Tuesday.

By relocating the capital, the government also hopes to redistribute wealth. Java is home to 60% of the country's population and more than half of its economic activity - even though Kalimantan is almost four times bigger.

Under the project, Jakarta will remain the country's commercial and financial centre, but government administrative functions will move to East Kalimantan, about 2,000km (1,250 miles) north-east of Jakarta. The new capital will be based in the regions of North Penajam Paser and Kutai Kartanegara.

Environmentalists have warned the move risks accelerating pollution in East Kalimantan, and contributing to the destruction of rainforests that are home

to orangutans, sun bears and long-nosed monkeys.

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[Russia](#)

Russia moves troops to Belarus for joint exercises near Ukraine border

Move likely to stoke invasion fears as war games also planned near borders of Nato members Poland and Lithuania



The two countries also took part in joint exercises in the Nizhny Novgorod region of Russia in September last year. Photograph: Vadim Savitskiy/AP

[Andrew Roth](#) Moscow correspondent

Mon 17 Jan 2022 13.16 EST

Russia has begun moving troops to Ukraine's northern neighbour Belarus for joint military exercises, in a move likely to increase fears in the west that Moscow is preparing for an invasion.

The joint military exercises, named United Resolve, are to take place as Russia also musters forces along Ukraine's eastern border, threatening a

potential invasion that could unleash the largest conflict in [Europe](#) for decades.

Social media videos from [Belarus](#) appeared to show artillery and other military vehicles arriving on flatbed carriages owned by the Russian state railway company, and Alexander Volfovich, the head of Belarus's security council, said in a briefing that troops were already arriving before exercises scheduled for February.

Some military analysts have suggested [Russia](#) could send its forces through Belarus in the case of a broad invasion, effectively stretching out Ukraine's defences by taking advantage of the two countries' nearly 700-mile border. Others believe Belarus would not play a serious role in the conflict if Russia were to launch an attack on Ukraine.

The Belarusian leader, Alexander Lukashenko, has responded to international pressure and isolation by strengthening ties with Russia, giving vocal support for Putin's military buildup as he receives diplomatic and economic support from the Kremlin to battle western sanctions. He has also abandoned his country's supposedly neutral stance on the Ukraine conflict and publicly endorsed Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea.

The exercises are to be held in the west of Belarus, near the borders of [Nato](#) members Poland and Lithuania, and its southern flank with Ukraine, Lukashenko said.

“Set an exact date and let us know, so we aren't blamed for massing some troops here out of the blue as if we are preparing to go to war,” he told top military officials.

Reports from Russia have also shown more military equipment, including tanks and short-range ballistic missiles, being transported across the country toward Ukraine within the last week.

The German foreign minister, Annalena Baerbock, said before a meeting with her Russian counterpart on Tuesday that she hoped the tensions could

be resolved by diplomacy but if not Moscow would pay a “high price” for aggressive acts toward Ukraine.

No concrete troop numbers or timeframe have been named for the joint Russia-Belarus exercises, which Putin announced during a summit with Lukashenko in late December. Lukashenko said on Monday that the exact dates in February were still being determined.

He said during the briefing that the exercises were needed because of the presence of Nato forces in neighbouring Poland and the Baltic states, as well as Ukraine’s deployment of troops to the border in response to the migrant crisis that he helped create last year.

Scenarios for a Russian invasion of Ukraine

“Why are we and Russia being reproached for holding manoeuvres, exercises and so forth when you’ve come from far away?” said Lukashenko in heated remarks in which he said western countries had stationed nearly 30,000 troops near his country’s borders. “There are some hot-heads calling for war. We hear these statements.”

He also echoed aggressive Kremlin rhetoric that may be used to justify a military intervention in Ukraine, claiming that Kyiv was preparing battalions of “radical nationalists”. A Ukrainian official called the remarks manipulative and “part of an information war”.

Volfovich said the exercises would involve Belarusian and Russian soldiers training to repel air and land attacks, neutralise enemy saboteurs and practise other manoeuvres. He also played down the significance of their timing, saying that there was “nothing extraordinary” in them because they were announced late last year, according to a report in the state-run Belta news agency.

There are signs, however, that Belarus has taken a more active role in its support of Russia in its ongoing conflict with Ukraine and the west.

Kyiv initially said it believed a hacking team tied to Belarusian state intelligence may have played a role in a major cyber-attack on government

websites late last week, and Russian nuclear-capable bombers have recently flown over western Belarus.

Lukashenko has strengthened ties with Putin since 2020, when he launched a bloody crackdown on protests sparked by vote-rigging during presidential elections. He was driven further into international isolation after he grounded a RyanAir flight in order to arrest a critic of his government and helped manufacture a migrant crisis on EU borders, prompting a humanitarian emergency.

Belarus adopted an ostensibly neutral position in 2014 and avoided recognising Russia's annexation of Crimea, but the dynamic has changed considerably as the country has relied more on Russian diplomatic and material support in the last two years.

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Germany

Russia would pay ‘high price’ for attack on Ukraine, says German minister

Annalena Baerbock says Germany will not compromise on ‘basic principles’ ahead of meeting with Russian foreign minister



Baerbock said Moscow, which has massed troops on Ukraine’s borders, would suffer if it launched an attack, adding: ‘Diplomacy is the only way’.

Photograph: Fred Tanneau/AFP/Getty Images

[Patrick Wintour](#) Diplomatic editor and [Philip Oltermann](#) in Berlin

Mon 17 Jan 2022 08.32 EST

The new German foreign minister, Annalena Baerbock, sought to reassure a nervous [Ukraine](#) that she will not allow Germany to compromise on the basic principles of Ukraine’s territorial sovereignty when she meets the Russian foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, in Moscow for the first time on Tuesday.

Baerbock, a member of the Green party, said on a visit to Kyiv she was ready for serious dialogue with [Russia](#) about mutual security, but was not willing to backtrack “on basic principles such as territorial inviolability, the free choice of alliances and the renunciation of the threat of violence”.

She said Moscow, which has massed troops on Ukraine’s borders, would suffer if it launched an attack. “Each further aggressive act will have a high price for Russia, economically, strategically, politically,” she told a news conference with her Ukrainian counterpart, Dmytro Kuleba. “Diplomacy is the only way.”

Her visit is being watched warily by European, UK and US administrations for signs that [Germany](#) may revert to its traditional role of seeking independent dialogue with Russia in preference to firmness.

Baerbock is seen as part of younger generation of German politicians strongly committed to projecting human rights in foreign policy and determined to take Germany away from its historic willingness to compromise with Moscow, but the SPD-led German chancellery is thought less inclined to break with the policy of the former German chancellor Angela Merkel. It will be deeply frustrating for some other western states if Germany continues to act as a drag anchor as [Europe](#) and the US have been making strenuous efforts to present a united front inside Nato.

Her visit comes after three high-level diplomatic meetings last week ended with Russian troops still on Ukraine’s borders, but no definitive sign whether Putin would risk a military incursion or instead start talks with the US about arms control in Europe, a more limited agenda than his call for a redrawing of the security architecture of Europe.

Parts of the eastern Ukrainian regions of Luhansk and Donetsk have been controlled by pro-Russian separatists since 2014. Despite the Minsk peace plan negotiated under Franco-German mediation, the conflict continues and the terms for elections in the regions are disputed.

Baerbock said in Kyiv she would explore in Moscow if there could be a return to the four-way Normandy format negotiations with Russia, Ukraine,

Germany and France that have been on hold for a long time. There has been talk the US may join the talks to restore some energy into them.

“I want to find out on the ground whether there is a willingness to find solutions through diplomatic channels – above all, to breathe life into the Normandy process again and finally make progress in implementing the Minsk agreements,” she said.

“The most effective lever we have to back Ukraine is the unanimous commitment of the EU, the G7 and Nato that any further aggression would come at a high price for the Russian regime [...] And we mean that very seriously,” she said.

“No country has the right to dictate to other countries which direction they may take, which relationships they may have and which alliances they may enter into. Ukraine’s sovereignty can and will never be subject of negotiations.”

She rejected calls for Germany to supply arms to Ukraine, citing a “historical responsibility” for Germany not to export weapons to conflict zones, but said Berlin was willing to provide technical expertise to help Ukraine defend itself from cyber-attack.

Andrij Melnyk, the Ukrainian ambassador to Germany, said earlier in comments to the dpa press agency he found the ban “very frustrating and bitter [...] the world is currently facing the greatest danger of a huge war in the middle of Europe, the worst since 1945.”

The debate in Europe on Russia and Ukraine is playing out on three levels: the continued political viability of the Nord Stream pipeline from Russia to Germany given Europe’s gas shortages; whether Germany should relax its ban on sending weapons to Ukraine; and finally, the extent of the economic sanctions that should be placed on Russia if it did invade Ukraine.

Baerbock is aware that Joe Biden last week fought off a Republican attempt in the Senate to slap sanctions back on Nord Stream 2, which bypasses Ukraine, largely because he wanted to stay in harness with Germany. If there

is no reciprocation from Germany, the Biden team will have to review its strategy.

The pipeline is complete but cannot be used since German and EU regulators have yet to decide if it breaches either German or EU competition laws. The delay allows the German coalition government to avoid an internal split on the issue, but it is clear the SPD want it to go ahead while the Greens, who are in charge of the foreign and climate change ministries, do not.

Yuriy Vitrenko, the head of the Ukrainian energy company Naftogaz, has claimed Germany would have economic advantages if Nord Stream 2 made it the most important distribution point for Russian gas but the whole point of the pipeline was for Putin to punish Ukraine for choosing Europe over Moscow. “After we signed the Association Agreement with the EU, Russia decided to build Nord Stream 2. So that we lose revenue from gas transportation. If Germany benefits economically from Russia’s punishment of Ukraine – do you call that fair?” he asked.

The claim by the new German chancellor, Olaf Scholz, that the project is purely commercial is not shared in Poland, France or the UK.

Bruno Le Maire, the French finance minister, said Europe needed to be less dependent on Russian energy. “Our economies must not depend on the geopolitical considerations of Russia, Ukraine or other parts of the world,” he said.

Baerbock, who at one point referred to the Russian regime, as opposed to the government, in her Kyiv press conference also repeated a German offer to help Ukraine develop hydrogen technology as an alternative to gas.

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Headlines thursday 20 january 2022

- [Live Boris Johnson: Wakeford defection has made Tories think twice about confidence vote, MP says](#)
- ['In the name of God, go' Tory fury spills over as Boris Johnson clings on](#)
- ['Feels a bit ridiculous' Bury South on MP's defection to Labour](#)
- ['It is indefensible' What Tory MPs said about partygate](#)

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

[**Politics**](#)

Tory MP claims No 10 ‘blackmailing’ rebels as Wakeford says funding was threatened before he defected – as it happened

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Boris Johnson

‘In the name of God, go’: Tory fury spills over as Boris Johnson clings on

Former minister demands PM’s resignation in Commons, one Conservative MP defects and others clamour for concessions

0

'In the name of God, go': Tory MP David Davis urges Boris Johnson to resign – video

[Rowena Mason](#) and [Jessica Elgot](#)

Wed 19 Jan 2022 15.22 EST

Boris Johnson has faced a defection and a demand to quit from one of his most senior MPs during a dramatic day in Westminster, with even allies of the prime minister warning the current situation cannot go on.

David Davis caused shockwaves when [he told Johnson in the Commons](#): “In the name of God, go.” Less than an hour earlier, Christian Wakeford, the MP for Bury South, [quit the Conservatives](#) and joined Labour in fury at the Downing Street parties scandal.

The prime minister vowed to battle on in No 10 and his supporters insisted he now had the breathing space for a fightback, with many MPs awaiting the outcome of the Sue Gray inquiry.

But Johnson faces a growing clamour from Tory backbenchers to buy their support in any confidence vote by ditching a £12bn-a-year tax rise this spring. [National insurance contributions are due to increase](#) from April to fund health and social care and any U-turn could risk a showdown with the chancellor, Rishi Sunak.

Johnson managed to get through the day without a confidence vote being triggered. Tory MPs estimated that as many as 30 letters may have been submitted of the 54 required, with more expected to come in after Gray, a senior civil servant, delivers her finding on alleged rule-breaking in Downing Street next week.

The Guardian understands that members of the 1922 Committee of backbenchers are looking at shortening the period where a leader is immune from another vote of no confidence from 12 months to six. The same move was considered when Theresa May faced a no confidence ballot in December 2018 but survived.

The rebellion has so far been led publicly by [disillusioned 2019-intake MPs](#) worried about the plunge in support in their seats. But sources said the next wave of letters was likely to come in from “One Nation” Conservatives from the centrist wing of the party if the Gray report is sufficiently damning of Johnson’s conduct.

[Contact](#)

Tory MPs said Johnson was not out of the woods, with two ministers describing the current situation as a “shitshow”. One minister said he was reserving judgment until after the Gray findings but the prime minister did not have “carte blanche” to continue in post.

The decision of many colleagues about whether to continue backing the prime minister may hinge on whether they think he will seriously harm the party’s chances in the local elections, he added.

Numerous Tory MPs described to the Guardian a deluge of angry letters from constituents, ranging from 250 to 2,000 in one case – surpassing the anger at the lockdown-busting trips of the former No 10 aide Dominic Cummings.

Johnson held meetings with MPs on Wednesday in an effort to persuade them to hold off from submitting no-confidence letters and tried to curry favour with his backbenchers by announcing an [end to Covid regulations in England](#).



David Davis speaking during Prime Minister's Questions on Wednesday.
Photograph: UK parliament/Jessica Taylor/PA

However, backbenchers said he would need to do more and many remain undecided about whether he should continue in the job. One senior MP who is strongly supporting the prime minister said if he were to survive, he would need new senior staff in No 10 to “put him in a straitjacket”.

The MP also advised a new “cabinet enforcer”, a reshuffle to remove disloyal cabinet members and a move to address the cost of living crisis by ditching the rise in national insurance contributions. “Is he mortally wounded? That is the question. He is wounded. But if anyone can turn this around, he can,” he said.

A cabinet minister tried to claim Wakeford’s move had a “unifying” effect among Tories and could “draw a line under the whole thing” – but another said the prime minister’s position remained “precarious”.

Senior Labour sources said they were in touch with other “very unhappy” Tory MPs about the prospect of potentially joining Labour, which would be a further serious blow to the prime minister’s authority.

The defection happened just before a [chaotic prime minister's questions](#), with Wakeford crossing the floor to sit with Labour and blaming Johnson’s

own “disgraceful” conduct.

After a fierce set of exchanges [between Johnson and Keir Starmer](#), the Labour leader said: “Doesn’t the country deserve so much better than this out-of-touch, out-of-control, out-of-ideas and soon to be out-of-office prime minister?”

There was then silence in the Commons as Davis rose to tell Johnson that he had spent weeks defending him from “angry constituents” but that repeated reports about lockdown-breaching parties were too much.

The former Brexit secretary and leadership contender said: “I expect my leaders to shoulder the responsibility for the actions they take. Yesterday he did the opposite of that.

“So I will remind him of a quotation which may be familiar to his ear, Leo Amery to Neville Chamberlain: ‘You have sat there too long for all the good you have done. In the name of God, go.’”

Asked by the Guardian afterwards what had motivated him to make an intervention, Davis said Johnson’s [interview](#) to Sky News on Tuesday was “not what I expect from a leader”.

“Up until now I had been supporting him … but it’s not leadership,” he said. “Yesterday’s interview was an attempt to escape responsibility, not to shoulder it. And that is a test of leadership.”

Junior colleagues are understood to have been pressing Davis to make a statement publicly calling for the prime minister to go, saying the situation needed a “big figure” to intervene.

Johnson insisted in the Commons that he had no intention of resigning, while his press secretary afterwards told reporters that he would fight to carry on if any confidence ballot is triggered.

The prime minister also revealed that Gray’s report is likely to be published early next week amid speculation it could come this week. With the party’s

limbo continuing until then, many Tory backbenchers sounded despairing about the ongoing situation.

“Where are the leaders? Where are the strategists to navigate our way through this?” said the Tory MP and former minister Tobias Ellwood. “Instead we have this blue on blue.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/jan/19/boris-johnson-faces-growing-demands-to-quit-from-tory-backbenchers>

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[UK news](#)

‘It feels a bit ridiculous’: Bury South on Christian Wakeford’s defection to Labour

In Prestwich town centre, voters from across the political spectrum would like to see their MP tested at the polls



The shuttered constituency office of MP Christian Wakeford in Radcliffe, Bury. Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

[Maya Wolfe-Robinson](#) North of England correspondent
Thu 20 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

[Christian Wakeford](#) said he was elected as a centrist and remains a centrist after his [defection to the Labour party](#), amid calls in his Bury South constituency for a byelection.

Wakeford, who supported a backbench bill in 2020 that called for any MP who switches parties to face a recall petition, said it's "quite clear" his former party would lose the seat at a by-election.

"I think it was quite clear that even the prime minister wasn't calling for a by-election today, and I think it's been quite clear that they know they'd lose", he told broadcasters.

However, in Prestwich town centre, voters from across the political spectrum would like to see that belief tested at the polls, a view also endorsed by Jamie Driscoll, Labour's mayor in the North of Tyne. In a letter to [Boris Johnson](#) released on Wednesday afternoon, Wakeford said he believed "the policies of the Conservative government that you lead are doing nothing to help the people of my constituency and indeed are only making the struggles they face on a daily basis worse".



Local businessman Sham Raja, 50, chair of the North Manchester Conservative Association. Photograph: Richard Saker/The Observer

Sham Raja, chair of North Manchester's Conservative Association, said he had been watching PMQs when Wakeford crossed the floor to sit with Keir Starmer's party. The MP, elected in 2019, made his shock announcement just minutes before.

Raja found the defection “completely disgraceful”, calling for a byelection to see if Wakeford would still win under a “Labour banner”. “We won several seats in Greater Manchester because of Boris Johnson, because of Brexit and because of the Conservative party, and they should be grateful.”

Pamela McArdle, 73, who has voted Conservative for decades but had not had a local Tory MP since 1997, said she was “cross” with Wakeford, who said that the prime minister “is running out of road and he is running out of brass neck to hide behind”.

“Boris Johnson is one person,” McArdle added. “You don’t walk away because you disagree with them.”

Rachel Hopkins, who normally supports Labour, echoed calls for a byelection. “It would be a better outcome than somebody changing colours in such an extreme way. If he was going to the Lib Dems, it would be a bit more credible, but going from Tory to Labour feels a bit ridiculous. I don’t really buy it”.

Molly Griffiths, a 29-year-old staff nurse, welcomed the news as she enjoyed a pint in the sun. “I’m very Labour, so it’s good news. But it’s not a good look in the way that one day he wanted the vote of no confidence for [Conservatives](#) and then the next he changed to Labour. Is he still going to hold the same Conservative views?”



Molly Griffiths, 29, with Tom Mitchell, 54, in Prestwich town centre.
Photograph: Richard Saker/The Observer

Wakeford referenced issues such as free school meals, cuts to universal credit and the cost-of-living crisis, as well as scandals related Dominic Cummings and Owen Paterson, that had led to his decision.

The MP, who worked in the insurance industry and as a local councillor before his election, said the decision had taken “a lot of soul searching” after “many sleepless nights”. “This is something that has taken many months to come to and it’s not been an easy decision, if anything it’s been the most difficult decision I have ever had to make. But I do think it’s the right decision for me, I think it’s the right decision for Bury South.”

Claire Richards, 35, who said Wakeford had helped her with a problem, agreed it was a good move for the area. “I’d vote for him whatever. He seemed a good guy”.

Although greeted with cheers from the Labour benches in Westminster, and a [“warm welcome” from Greater Manchester mayor Andy Burnham](#), a local Labour party source said the news had not “gone down well with local members. None of them voted for him to be the MP, so it will be hard to

now embrace him as one of our own. This might be positive news nationally but locally it is not going to end well.”



Lol Grant, 51, in Prestwich town centre. Photograph: Richard Saker/The Observer

“He was worried about his P45, wasn’t he?”, said Lol Grant, 51, in reference to Wakeford’s wafer-thin majority of 402 votes. Grant, who works with children with special educational needs, was particularly aggrieved after [Wakeford voted against placing a legal duty on water companies](#) not to pump sewage into rivers. “Now he’s behaving like that shit that he voted to allow flow in our pipes and he’s flowing out from one side of the chamber to the other.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/jan/20/it-feels-a-bit-ridiculous-bury-south-on-christian-wakefords-defection-to-labour>

Boris Johnson

‘It is indefensible’: what Tory MPs said to constituents about partygate

Politicians have been telling members of the public of their anger and disgust at revelations about Boris Johnson’s No 10

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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A protester's placard outside parliament on Wednesday. Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

[Jessica Murray](#)

Wed 19 Jan 2022 12.31 EST

Conservative MPs have revealed their anger at the Downing Street party scandal in response to emails from concerned constituents, as support for the

prime minister across the party continues to drain away.

In a number of emails to constituents seen by the Guardian, Tory MPs said they were “appalled”, “embarrassed” and “disgusted” by the revelations, with many saying they were not prepared to “defend the indefensible”.

Although many MPs said they were withholding judgment until the outcome of the Sue Gray inquiry, others said they doubted any findings would be enough to restore public confidence in the leadership.

Many said they had been inundated with hundreds of emails from constituents on the subject, detailing their own personal sacrifices during Covid and showing “the strength of anger and distress” over the issue.

Below are some excerpts from their responses:

Stephen Crabb, MP for Preseli Pembrokeshire

“The multiple revelations suggest a culture of casual disregard for some of the most intrusive and restrictive rules imposed on the British public since the second world war. Everyone has a right to be angry about this. I hope the Metropolitan police will investigate these gatherings … it makes me feel extremely disappointed and genuinely let down.”

James Sunderland, MP for Bracknell

“I am furious at the apparent lack of grip shown by government officials. Something has also clearly gone wrong with the political machine at No 10.”

Paul Beresford, MP for Mole Valley

“The PM’s decision to attend [the 20 May 2020 gathering] was amazingly stupid. I expect those staff who organised or attended [the party the night before the Duke of Edinburgh’s funeral] to be removed without delay. Both their judgment and level of maturity is clearly such that they have nothing worthwhile to contribute to the governance of this country. As we await the full report on events, and in all likelihood for the foreseeable future, I and

many of my parliamentary colleagues will regard the prime minister as being ‘on licence’. He has behaved foolishly and is undeniably a diminished figure now.”

Peter Aldous, MP for Waveney

“Personally, I found [the prime minister’s] defence that he was ignorant as to the nature of the gathering difficult to comprehend. I cannot, at present, see how [the Sue Gray] report could exonerate the prime minister and alleviate public anger. If he is found to have actively misled parliament, or if he faces criminal sanction [or both], his position is untenable and he should resign. I would hope that he would do this without the need for a formal vote of no confidence by Conservative MPs.”

Duncan Baker, MP for North Norfolk

“It is indefensible and I have made my thoughts very clear internally. For those at the heart of government to show such a total lack of empathy and awareness to the rules is wholly irresponsible. I hope you will respect my decision to not publicly be telling anybody whether I have or have not written to Sir Graham Brady at this stage – even my wife will not know that information! But as you have seen from my previous actions, I am not a person who is appalled and takes no action.”

Martin Vickers, MP for Cleethorpes

“It was irresponsible, reckless and unacceptable and disciplinary actions, and possibly prosecutions, should follow.”

Andrew Selous, MP for South West Bedfordshire

“Like you, I am angry and upset to learn about this latest revelation. I want every one of these allegations to be fully and independently investigated, if necessary, by the police and I want all of those, however senior, who have broken the law or government guidance to be appropriately punished.”

Tom Hunt, MP for Ipswich

“I must say that I’ve been appalled. The fact that a big bash was organised the night before Prince Philip’s funeral fills me with disgust. This is not an isolated example of modest rule-breaking. It’s clear to me that whatever happens there needs to be almost a total clearout of No 10 and all of those who were in any way connected with what appear to be clear rule-breaking events need to properly be held to account.”

Paul Maynard MP for Blackpool North and Cleveleys

“It is hard to believe the current stream of revelations, and I have no intention of mounting any defence. Not only am I disappointed at the behaviour of the Downing Street operation (including civil servants who should know better) but, as I have had to say too often before, events of recent months have dented my confidence in the prime minister to say the least, and I feel he has seriously let the country as a whole down.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/jan/19/it-is-indefensible-what-tory-mps-said-to-constituents-about-partygate-boris-johnson>

2022.01.20 - Spotlight

- 'Let them talk for a wee bit, then go in for the kill!'
Lorraine Kelly on tough interviews and going rogue
- 'Hanging by a thread' What the papers say about Johnson's fight to stay in power
- 'The Taliban hate us' A former senior female police officer
- Liz Truss The 'human hand grenade' Tories have taken to their hearts

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Interview

‘Let them talk for a wee bit, then go in for the kill!’ Lorraine Kelly on tough interviews and going rogue

[Tim Jonze](#)



‘You should allow yourself to be challenged’ ... Lorraine Kelly. Photograph: Suki Dhanda/The Guardian

She has been a cheery face on daytime TV for nearly 40 years – all the while tackling big issues and making evasive guests squirm. She discusses going viral, covering tragedies and fighting the taxman



[@timjonze](#)

Thu 20 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

Lorraine Kelly is pulling at her hair and shrieking: “Aaarrrgghhh!”

It is the morning after news leaked about [Downing Street’s bring-your-own-booze party](#), held during those painful early months of lockdown and attended by the rule-flouting prime minister himself. Even after discussing it on her weekday breakfast TV show, Lorraine, the presenter is still trying to process the revelations. “Just when you think you can’t make it up!” she says. “Jesus, honestly, if they told me now that they’d had a masked ball for 1,000 people, like the Met ball or something, I’d just go: ‘Yeah, yep.’ And why on earth do they need [an inquiry into it](#)? If I said to you: ‘So, you went for a wee coffee today at Starbucks?’ you either did or you didn’t; you don’t need an inquiry into that!”

You can probably trust Kelly when it comes to taking the country's pulse: she has been a regular fixture on our TV screens for 37 years. She says scandal such as this gets to her because she has spent time over the past two years speaking to those who couldn't say goodbye to loved ones, or had to limit numbers at funerals. "And we tried, when things were really dark, to find something to hold on to, whether it was amazing NHS workers or [Captain Sir Tom](#). There was a sense of communities coming together. But we've kind of lost that a bit and it's become toxic and fractured again, which is really disheartening."

Kelly is known for her on-screen warmth – smiley eyes, that melodic Scottish lilt – and those qualities certainly help camouflage her no-nonsense interviewing approach. Piers Morgan once called her an "iron fist in a velvet glove" and she admits to liking that; there are plenty of public figures who have sat on her sofa unprepared for the punchy line of questioning. She says her approach comes from her early reporting days. "I started on local papers and you did *everything*," she says. "Some of the Scottish football managers back then looked a bit askance at a woman doing sport, but it was great, because they were totally disarmed."

'You didn't answer any of the questions' ... Kelly takes Jennifer Arcuri to task.

I am certainly disarmed by Kelly's video-call setup, which is almost as makeshift as my own: camera aimed up her nose, a tangle of coats hanging in the background, a picture of Spock framed in the corner of the screen. ("Oh that?" she says, spinning around with a grin. "I'm the geekiest geek there ever was.") Chatting to her is a joy – her answers tend to pick up steam, barrelling downhill until I have to step in to ask the next question, at which point she slows herself down, beams a big smile and tackles the next one.

We speak shortly after her live morning show has aired. Today's involved a spot of hula-hooping with Dr Hilary Jones ("My pelvis won't thrust!"), a chat with [Martin Lewis](#) about the cost-of-living crisis, a feature on a dog that has learned to talk, encouragement for people to get their [Covid booster shots](#) and some innuendo about playing with balls.

Our own chat ping-pongs around in a similar way, from space travel to transgender rights, via knitting and her experience covering national tragedies such as Lockerbie and Dunblane. We even alight on her tax affairs, which have been a source of amusement – and criticism – since a judge [ruled in Kelly's favour](#) against HMRC in 2019. The judge said Kelly was not liable for the bill in question because she was a “theatrical artist” performing the “friendly, chatty and fun” role of Lorraine Kelly on TV.

Before all that, though, we discuss the show’s viral social media clips. In recent years, these have focused on the times when Kelly’s sunny on-screen persona has been tested beyond breaking point. In 2019 alone, she dismissed [an awful Jennifer Arcuri interview](#) with a caustic: “S’point in that?” and caused the temperature in the GMB studio to drop by several hundred degrees when she was asked by the host Susanna Reid if she remembered working with the Tory MP Esther McVey during her days on GMTV. Kelly responded with a stone-faced: “Yep … yes, I do.” Is it fair to say that the past few years have seen Kelly go rogue?



‘I’ve got this glorious freedom to speak my mind’ … hosting her show in November. Photograph: Ken McKay/ITV/Rex/Shutterstock

“I think I’ve always done that,” she says. “It’s interesting, people’s perceptions of what I do. People, especially politicians, think they’re coming

on to do a cosy little show, and it's really not! If you've done something wrong, you will get held to account. So, when Jennifer Arcuri was in ... honest to God, I was sat in the studio watching her being all coy, going [here, Kelly does what can only be described as a moronic tittering noise] and she said literally nothing. So I just said: 'What's the point of you being on?' Who do you think you are to do that to the viewers? You should never take them for granted like that."

Did she plan to say her bit to Arcuri in advance? "You can't plan it! It's a live show. Most things that make the headlines are off the cuff. Of course, you have to have an edit button – and that's where the training and experience comes in. I know the legals, how far you can go, because I've been doing it for a very long time. But at the same time I've got this *glorious* freedom to speak my mind."

Kelly says she only thinks about the show, not how a 20-second clip might look on Twitter, although that is undeniably how many people get to see her highlights these days. Her frosty encounter with McVey was a particular hit, with many wanting to know the story behind it. McVey has implied that it stems from the fact that, back in the day, she was promoted to partner Eamonn Holmes, but Kelly maintains it was McVey's stance on gay rights that got her goat.

You couldn't even say the word 'cancer' on TV when I started. It was nuts! Now we have breast and testicle exams on the show

Kelly is a longstanding LGBTQ+ ally who received Attitude magazine's Honorary Gay award in 2015 and has appeared on RuPaul's Drag Race UK as a guest judge. "I thought to myself: she's come out and said the most appalling things about a section of society that are really hard done by and have enough going on without someone like that having a pop at them. And I didn't really say anything, did I? But isn't it amazing what you can say without saying anything?"

Recently, Kelly has been getting a different kind of reaction – abuse from anti-vaxxers, because of her insistence that viewers should get a booster.

“Loads and loads,” she says. “But even if I disagree vehemently with someone, you still have to have the debate.”

This idea of no-platforming people leaves her uncomfortable. “Debate helps crystallise your own thoughts – and you should allow yourself to be challenged. There are some times when it’s not the right thing to do, but in general you can’t just say: ‘I hate you, I don’t want to engage with you, goodbye.’”

“You don’t want is to make martyrs of people who have opposing views. You don’t want them to be … well, we call it ‘cancelled’, but what really is cancelled? Sometimes it’s better to give people space to talk, particularly toxic politicians. Let them talk for a wee bit; they’ll tie themselves up in knots and contradict themselves, then you can go in for the kill.”

When Kelly invited Kathleen Stock on to her show, she again seized the chance to debate someone with whom she disagreed. Formerly a professor of philosophy at the University of Sussex, [Stock resigned from her post](#) last year amid campus furore over her gender-critical stance on trans rights. “I thought: let her speak,” says Kelly. “You’ve got to.” During the interview, Kelly questioned whether Stock had been “cancelled”; Stock agreed that she had a bigger platform now than before (“And I intend to use it”).



‘Even if I disagree vehemently with someone, you still have to have the debate’ ... interviewing Kathleen Stock in November. Photograph: Ken McKay/ITV/Rex/Shutterstock

Kelly is proud that they were able to have the conversation on national TV. “I was able to disagree with her. Because I think trans women are women and trans men are men. That’s my belief. And, at the end, people can make their own mind up. But it was important for me to say that and to show my support.”

When I watched [the clip](#), I wondered if there had been a moment that crystallised Kelly’s advocacy of trans rights. Speaking now, she offers one up. “I remember getting the school bus to school in East Kilbride and the driver was a lady called Jane. Jane was a trans woman and she was going through the process of transitioning. And you can imagine the abuse she got, because it was the 70s. But I used to chat to her, got to know her as a person, and she was a *brilliant* woman. I often wonder what happened to her.

“But I’ve got a lot of pals who happen to be trans or they happen to be whatever ... who cares?! They’re all just human and that’s a part of who they are.” She sighs. “People should just be a bit more tolerant, because trans people are currently going through, I think, what gay people went through. It’s a hard road, it really is.”

Kelly was born in 1959 to two working-class teenagers from the Gorbals area of Glasgow. Her mum, a homemaker, was a Catholic; her dad, a TV repairer, was a Protestant. Her maternal grandmother thought they should put her up for adoption, but her parents were in love and held firm. Their house was tiny, with an outside toilet, but full of love and books. Kelly had planned to study English and Russian at university, but instead went to work on the East Kilbride News (it is a point of pride that, in 2004, she was made the rector of the University of Dundee, so her mum could finally have a picture of her in a gown up in the house).

Keir Starmer seems a very decent man, but maybe needs a wee bit of a rocket up his bum?

After moving to TV, Kelly reported on two major tragedies in 1988, the Piper Alpha oil explosion in the North Sea (“I really don’t know how anyone got out of that alive”) and the Lockerbie air disaster. “Weirdly, the thing I remember most was not the horror and the smell and the devastation – but everybody in town taking down their decorations. It was just before Christmas and when I saw people doing that it suddenly hit me. I went back to the place I was staying and just howled.”

After Lockerbie, Kelly thought she would never have to do anything harder. “But Dunblane was the worst by a mile,” she says of the school massacre in 1996. “That hit really hard.”

It is a mark of Kelly’s approachability that one of the bereaved mothers, Pam Ross, got in touch with her after the tragedy – not for TV, but to talk privately. Ross had lost her five-year-old daughter, Joanna, and invited Kelly to attend the funeral at her home. “I was there in the house. And Joanna was also in the house, upstairs, in her bed, in a little white coffin with her wee nightie on. And one thing I always remember is that her handprints were still on the window.”

Kelly is still in touch with Ross; proper friends even after all these years. “She’s got a big birthday coming up!” she beams, before returning to the tragedy. “A lot of people think that after Dunblane there was an instant ban on guns. There wasn’t. The parents had a massive, massive fight on their hands and they were told by one Tory in particular that it was all a kneejerk reaction. And do you know who that was? Boris Johnson.” (“Nanny is confiscating their toys,” Johnson wrote in 1997. “It is like one of those vast Indian programmes of compulsory vasectomy.”)

Kelly has seen it all during her time on the breakfast sofas. Daytime TV has been pioneering, she says proudly, because it talks about things a lot of other media ignores. “You couldn’t even say the word ‘cancer’ when I started. It was nuts! Now we have breast and testicle examinations on the show.” She proudly namechecks its [Change + Check breast cancer campaign](#), which has helped save 53 women’s lives since it launched. With her trademark being down to earth, the tax ruling caused problems for her. She says she is happy to address this, “because I’ve never got my chance to put my side of the story across”.



‘That hit really hard’ ... covering the Dunblane massacre with Eamonn Holmes in 1996. Photograph: Alaska TV

Despite all the media coverage around whether or not she was “performing” the role of Lorraine Kelly, the case rested on whether she was an employee of ITV or a freelancer, as Kelly and ITV believed she was. At one point, she was prepared to pay the outstanding fee, which was only a fraction of the total bill of £1.2m quoted in reports. But then, she says, the tax office started demanding interest on it. “So I thought: no, not having this. So we took them to a tribunal and it got thrown out. The judge said it wasn’t a borderline case and we shouldn’t have ever had the hassle.

“I don’t want people to think I would do anything to get out of paying what I should be paying. That goes to the core of who I am and how I was brought up. I’m a firm believer in the NHS, a firm believer in better education and housing and looking after people who can’t help themselves. I was brought up in a very working-class background where you pay your dues.”

So where did this notion of Kelly being an actor playing the Lorraine Kelly role come from? “Now *that* I can laugh at,” she says. “It was, sadly, a bit of a misinterpretation, but I knew what [the judge] meant. Obviously, it’s given people great hilarity and I can live with that.”

Tax issues behind her, Kelly is looking ahead positively. Lockdowns attracted a bigger, younger audience to her show and Kelly says it has managed to hold on to a lot of those. Amid all this Tory drama, I wonder what she thinks about the opposition – and Keir Starmer in particular.

“He seems a very decent man, but maybe needs a wee bit of a rocket up his bum?” she says. “Because there are times where there does seem to be an open goal and you’re like …” She grabs at her hair again and shouts: “Aaarrrgghhh!”

Lorraine is broadcast on ITV on weekdays from 9am and on ITV Hub

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2022/jan/20/let-them-talk-for-a-wee-bit-then-go-in-for-the-kill-lorraine-kelly-on-tough-interviews-and-going-rogue>

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Boris Johnson

‘Hanging by a thread’: what the papers say about Johnson’s fight to stay in power

On a day of drama, demands and a defection, the newspaper front pages reflect the political battle lines being drawn



UK newspaper front pages on Thursday. Composite: Various

[Virginia Harrison](#)

Wed 19 Jan 2022 22.49 EST

A fiery demand by former minister David Davis for [Boris Johnson](#) to resign fills many front pages, while others hone in on the prime minister’s defiance in the face of a Conservative rebellion.

The **Guardian** splashes with “[In the name of God, go](#)”: Tory anger builds as Boris Johnson clings on”. Davis’s outrage came on the heels of Christian Wakeford, the MP for Bury South, [quitting the Conservatives](#) to join Labour. The prime minister vowed to battle on in No 10 and his supporters insisted he now had the breathing space for a fightback, with many MPs awaiting the outcome of the Sue Gray inquiry into the parties at No 10.

Guardian front page, Thursday 20 January 2022: 'In the name of God, go': Tory anger builds as PM clings on [pic.twitter.com/PAgujtvkVc](#)

— The Guardian (@guardian) [January 19, 2022](#)

The **Independent** also leads with “In the name of God, go” writing that the prime minister faced an angry Commons as a Tory defected to Labour.

Thursday's Independent: Face masks and isolation axed in end to plan B [#TomorrowsPapersToday](#) [#Independent](#) [#IndependentDigital](#) [pic.twitter.com/d28El2rX4Q](#)

— Tomorrows Papers Today (@TmorrowsPapers) [January 19, 2022](#)

The **Mirror** too goes with the Davis quote. Johnson “hanging by a thread”, it writes, above the headline “In the name of God, go”.

Tomorrow's front page: In the name of God, go!
[#tomorrowspaperstoday](#) <https://t.co/ZOIyYFFkL7>
[pic.twitter.com/5ZlTsW5E6W](#)

— The Mirror (@DailyMirror) [January 19, 2022](#)

And the **Metro**'s take is “In the name of God GO!” squeezed between pictures of Davis and Johnson.

Thursday's Metro: Return To The Office [#TomorrowsPapersToday](#) [#Metro](#) [pic.twitter.com/emhmlE8SHo](#)

— Tomorrows Papers Today (@TmorrowsPapers) [January 19, 2022](#)

The embattled PM finds support in other papers, notably the **Mail**. It splashes with “Boris and Carrie’s baby hit by Covid”, reporting that six-week old Romy was badly ill but is now on the mend, alongside a picture of smiling Carrie Johnson. Above that story the paper hits out at the “narcissistic rabble of Tory MPs” trying to topple the PM “who’s leading us out of Covid”. Pointing to a comment piece inside the paper, the Mail offers its twist on the Davis demand: “In the name of God, grow up!”

Thursday's [@DailyMailUK](#) [#MailFrontPages](#)
pic.twitter.com/tAoTYvrmN8

— Daily Mail U.K. (@DailyMailUK) [January 19, 2022](#)

The **Express** follows a similar sentiment with its lead: “In the name of party unity, go ... and back the PM!”. The paper says allies of Johnson rallied to his defence after suffering devastating blows from his own MPs.

Thursday's Express: In the name of party unity, go...and back PM!
[#TomorrowsPapersToday](#) [#DailyExpress](#) [#Express](#)
pic.twitter.com/e7xZXVGqt8

— Tomorrows Papers Today (@TmorrowsPapers) [January 19, 2022](#)

The **Times** has “PM fights on as plotters pull back from the brink” as Johnson survives a defection and the Davis attack. The paper says the prime minister has been granted a reprieve by MPs plotting to oust him as concern builds that the Gray inquiry will be more critical of the prime minister than expected.

Thursday's Times: PM fights on as plotters pull back from the brink
[#TomorrowsPapersToday](#) [#TheTimes](#) [#Times](#)
pic.twitter.com/BQKEjE3hkc

— Tomorrows Papers Today (@TmorrowsPapers) [January 19, 2022](#)

The **Telegraph** leads with Johnson's defiance, "Johnson: I won't quit if rebels force vote". Davis is pictured as it reports the senior Tory says the PM will have to be dragged "kicking and screaming from office".

The front page of tomorrow's Daily Telegraph:

'Johnson: I won't quit if rebels force vote'[#TomorrowsPapersToday](#)

Sign up for the Front Page newsletter<https://t.co/x8AV4Oomry>
pic.twitter.com/vCbqqYZTOi

— The Telegraph (@Telegraph) [January 19, 2022](#)

The **Sun** plays with the theme of the so-called pork pie plotters, a group of the 2019 intake of Conservative MPs mobilising against him. "As our Bojo pork pie chart shows ..." it writes, underneath the headline "Battling PM crust ahead" and a shot of a pie sliced up according to the pressing issues of the day. The paper says Johnson battled a day of extraordinary drama, coming out just ahead of the plotters.

Tomorrow's front page: Boris Johnson battles through a day of extraordinary drama - coming out just ahead of the Pork Pie plotters
<https://t.co/wDc3hPcL2y> pic.twitter.com/KwSPA4k63D

— The Sun (@TheSun) [January 19, 2022](#)

The **FT** splashes with "Johnson buys time after defection to Labour rallies restive Tory MPs" and reports the PM secured a "fragile" truce.

Thursday's FT: Johnson buys time after defection to Labour rallies restive Tory MPs [#TomorrowsPapersToday](#) [#FinancialTimes](#) [#FT](#)
pic.twitter.com/ITTJsgTEOL

— Tomorrows Papers Today (@TmorrowsPapers) [January 19, 2022](#)

The **i** paper has a similar feel with “Johnson clings on to power ... for now”. Conservative backbenchers do not expect an immediate vote of no confidence in Johnson, it writes, waiting until the Gray report on his conduct next week.

Thursday's i: Johnson clings on to power... for now
[#TomorrowsPapersToday #iNewspaper pic.twitter.com/zgMeOG69HW](#)

— Tomorrows Papers Today (@TmorrowsPapers) [January 19, 2022](#)

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Interview

‘The Taliban hate us’: a former senior female police officer

As told to [Emma Graham-Harrison](#) and [Akhtar Mohammad Makooi](#)



Fahima worked in the Afghan police for 10 years and says Taliban talk of an amnesty is a lie. Illustration: Guardian Design

Fahima fears she is being targeted because of the role she had, which included recruiting other women

Thu 20 Jan 2022 04.00 EST

**Fahima was the most senior policewoman in her province. Since the Taliban took over, women who worked in the police force have been targeted for [assassination](#) and [beatings](#). She believes Taliban officials are particularly focused on tracking her down because of both her seniority and her role recruiting other women.*

Quick Guide

Afghanistan: the left behind

Show



Afghanistan: the left behind

The crowds fighting to get into Kabul airport for evacuation [dispersed months ago](#), but while the scramble to leave Taliban-controlled Afghanistan became less visible when the last foreign troops left in August 2021, it got no less desperate.

Since then, reprisal killings have regularly been reported from across the country, including dozens detailed in a [recent report](#) from Human Rights Watch.

For those still in [Afghanistan](#), living in hiding or in permanent fear for months now, the dangers seem to be increasing as the options for escape narrow.

The UK government [has tightened rules](#) for its ARAP visa programme for former employees.

A second scheme offering a path to safety to a wider section of Afghans at risk was [heavily promoted](#) by the government but it only [began operating this month](#), and there are no details of how individuals can apply.

And while the [Taliban](#) have largely kept a promise to allow those with tickets and documents to fly out, Afghan passports are difficult to secure , visas are even more challenging, and flights are still prohibitively expensive.

This series features the stories of those who are trapped, in Afghanistan or in limbo as they search for safe haven, fearing for their lives from Taliban attacks or through hunger because they cannot work.

Emma Graham-Harrison

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

I fled to another city just two days after the country fell to the [Taliban](#), because I knew they were looking for me in my home province. They found my address, and have been to my house and asked my family about me.

I was getting threats over the phone, too – the very first night I got calls. They rang me up, and I told them I had left our province but they said: “You’re lying, come and hand yourself over, give us your cars and guns. We know you have corrupted so many women in [Afghanistan](#).”

It took a long time to travel here. I was in minibuses, wearing a burqa to cover my face so they wouldn't recognise me.

There were several dozen women in the police – nobody is working now, they have all been told to just stay in their homes. Many went to Iran, some came to other cities like me, some are still living in our province.

But I was a senior police officer in the province, that's why there are so many threats directed at me. They are looking for me because I was senior, and responsible for recruiting women, I worked in the police for 10 years and there were no women more senior than me in the province.

They hate us and say we are not Muslim, because we got a salary from foreigners [western funds supported the security forces including for salaries] and we worked alongside men. They hate us more than other women. I don't even tell my neighbours here that I was a policewoman before.

When the Taliban talk about an amnesty they are lying, they didn't fulfil those promises. Just a few minutes ago, some neighbours called to warn me they are coming every day to the house [where I used to live] and ask where I am.

Even here I am moving from one place to another, changing where I stay every couple of nights. If they get me the only way I will be able to get out of their prison is death.

We had a WhatsApp group with other senior women. We were in touch regularly but some left the group and I have had no news about them now for several months.

I sent several requests to countries including the US and UK but I got no response, so I am living in limbo. I am married with no children and my economic situation is also extremely bad – I haven't been paid for three months' work I did under the old government, and now under the Taliban.

Thank you for being my voice, please share my story to anyone who will listen. I am living in such a difficult situation.

**The name has been changed for this article.*

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Conservative leadership

Liz Truss: the ‘human hand grenade’ Tories have taken to their hearts

Party members love her, but in the leadership stakes some say the foreign secretary went off too early



Many MPs feel Truss would need a major turn in fortunes to make it on to a leadership ballot paper. Photograph: WPA/Getty Images



[Jessica Elgot](#)

[@jessicaelgot](#)

Thu 20 Jan 2022 02.00 EST

In her early years in Whitehall, Liz Truss was known to civil servants as the “human hand grenade”, a nickname for her that Boris Johnson has since adopted. Like many of the memes around Truss, it is one she has embraced with gusto.

Those close to the prime minister say it was not always intended as an accolade. “She does tend to blow things up. He used to say anything passed her way needed to be handled with care,” one staffer recalled.

But with Johnson on the verge of blowing up his own premiership, it may be the human hand grenade waiting to pick up the pieces. The foreign secretary, who was an early Johnson loyalist, is the other name mentioned in the same breath as Rishi Sunak in the fight to be Johnson’s successor.

Truss, 46, is often described as the party members’ darling, for many months topping ConservativeHome’s poll of members asked for their favourite minister. “The role Liz has always said she wanted is chancellor. I think that

could still be where her heart lies, but when she kept topping those polls, it turned her head,” one former aide said.

But when it comes to a leadership challenge – rather than their pet favourite – the mood of members seems to change and Truss is suddenly the underdog. In an Opinium poll of Conservative members, Sunak beats his closest rival by 28 points. The stats get even worse when you go to the country: Truss is the 23rd most famous Tory politician, according to YouGov, with Sunak and other potential rivals such as Jeremy Hunt, Michael Gove and Sajid Javid all in the top 10.



Liz Truss leaving 10 Downing Street after being appointed as environment secretary in 2014. Photograph: Suzanne Plunkett/Reuters

Those close to Truss say none of this will daunt her. “People have underestimated her for her entire political career,” a former aide said.

In many ways her strategy has been similar to Johnson’s, who courted sceptical MPs over many months with dinners hosted by Jacob Rees-Mogg. Truss has been hosting social events for MPs that have become known as “fizz with Liz”, though her allies swear she doesn’t use the term herself.

Scottish Tories including Douglas Ross, who [called for the PM to resign](#), had drinks with Truss last week. Another group met the foreign secretary on

Monday night before she flew to Australia for a tour. Each Monday she holds surgeries in the Commons tea room for MPs to bring their concerns.

“She pressed the button on leadership stuff around three months ago,” one MP said. “But the problem is that everyone knows about it now. She went too early.”

Sources close to Truss deny her contact with MPs amounts to electioneering. “She has always hosted these meetings, since she was trade secretary, because she values what MPs think. She is more in touch than many.”

Many MPs feel she will need a major turn in fortunes to win enough support to make it on to the ballot paper. There are already rumours of a deal between other candidates to keep her out.

“I would be very surprised if she would get through,” one minister said. Another colleague added: “MPs base their decision on whether the person will keep them their seat and whether they actually like the candidate. You need at least one of those two. I’m not sure she fits either of those categories for many people.”

“The party will not choose Liz,” a Tory adviser said. “She is flag-waving, sure, but she doesn’t have the charisma of Boris. She appeals to the TaxPayers’ Alliance and IEA wing of the party but she has no crossover appeal,” they added in reference to the Institute of Economic Affairs free-market thinktank.

Yet many colleagues also dismissed Johnson’s chances of making the ballot paper, such was his unpopularity among them.

Like Margaret Thatcher, Truss has an intriguing backstory, unlike Sunak’s Winchester, Oxford, hedge fund trajectory. She grew up in Leeds with leftwing parents, attended a high-achieving comprehensive, and her mother took her on peace marches.

At Oxford she chaired the Lib Dems but began to develop a new philosophy – of the need for individuals to keep their own money to ensure personal freedom. That drew her to the [Conservatives](#), she has said.

Selected for the plum South West Norfolk seat in 2010, her career in politics almost came to an abrupt end after members found out – and objected to – her [affair with the MP Mark Field](#).

“It’s quite a credit that she’s managed to turn that reputation around and become the membership’s darling, but that’s because she gets what’s important to them: pride, optimism, a belief in the power of the individual,” the staffer said.

Under David Cameron, her first cabinet post was as environment secretary, leading to her infamous viral speech at the Conservative conference in 2014 – a [rage against cheese imports](#) in which she exclaimed: “That is a disgrace!”

“I think that did change something for Liz, it actually meant she was one of the first politicians of this generation to spot the potential of social media,” the former adviser said.

When she arrived as international trade secretary, staff handed her social media strategies for Twitter and LinkedIn but she told them: [“Instagram’s my thing.”](#) She taught aides to use Boomerang, a setting on Instagram to create short clips.

In recent years, images of her – in red and blue pantsuits, hair tightly curled, boarding jets, strolling purposefully past famous buildings or riding in a tank in Estonia – have been [carefully curated](#). Even a picture of her daughter’s birthday cake carries the caption [“You can’t stop progress”](#). The posts are littered with hashtags such as #freeworld #selfdetermination and #nolimits.

Truss’s other moment of political crisis – after her battle in her constituency and awkward cheese speech – followed her appointment by Theresa May as justice secretary during the legal row over the triggering of article 50 and the Daily Mail’s [infamous front page](#) declaring three high court judges “enemies of the people”.



Truss is sworn in as lord chancellor in 2016. Photograph: Mark Thomas/Rex/Shutterstock

The story broke when Truss was dining in one of London's Inns of Court, surrounded by senior members of the judiciary. "She will not have been lacking in advice. But the statement she came out with was mealy mouthed. And she couldn't recover from it," one senior legal figure said.

"Theresa came to realise that it was not a wise appointment," one former cabinet minister said. ["She forfeited the confidence of the judiciary."](#)

Within 11 months, Truss had been reshuffled to become chief secretary to the Treasury, ostensibly a demotion, but one which allowed her to set out her stall as a free-market thinker in a number of high-profile speeches.

One ally said: "People often say about Liz: 'I'm not sure what she stands for.' And that could not be further from the truth; she has set out exactly what she stands for."



Boris Johnson listens to Truss during a panel event and reception to mark International Women's Day in 2020. Photograph: Reuters

“Britain is a nation of Uber-riding, Deliveroo-eating, Airbnb-ing freedom fighters,” she said in one speech, a retort to critics of the gig economy. “And to turbocharge our future we need to champion these values, and let people off the leash by liberating every corner of the economy.”

She took swipes at environmental regulation, the banning of plastic straws and cups, with digs at enjoying “the warm glow of wood-burning Goves” when her colleague Michael Gove was at the environment department.

In the Treasury she often told colleagues the answer to their problems was not more public spending but freedom for the market. “I aim to be the disrupter in chief; I want to challenge those who aim to block change, stop development and restrict success.”

Yet when serious challenge has been made to her low-tax beliefs, Truss has been pragmatic, speaking out in private against Sunak’s national insurance rise in late summer last year but then, once it was policy, declining to join [Jacob Rees-Mogg in January urging Sunak to cancel the rise.](#)

If the choice does come down to Truss or Sunak, one contrast will be Truss’s closeness and loyalty to Johnson. Asked at Conservative party conference

last year to name her favourite foreign secretary from history, Truss did not miss a beat. “Boris Johnson.”

On Thursday evening last week, after a brutal day for the prime minister, Truss defended him in the media, saying Tories should support him “100%”.

In 2019 she was his first cabinet backer. Before that, Johnson was struggling to attract names for his leadership campaign. Those who had publicly backed him were low-grade backbenchers, some with dubious reputations.

He was becoming agitated with his team, and seeking higher-profile support. Truss broke cover to declare her allegiance, going on BBC Radio 4 to defend Johnson on a litany of awkward topics, from extramarital affairs to the imprisonment of [Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe](#).

“She was canny, she decided Johnson could win, unlike Priti [Patel] who ummed and ahhed about it for ages,” one senior member of the team recalled.



Truss speaking to the US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, during the G7 summit in Liverpool in December. Photograph: Anthony Devlin/AP

Though campaigners are hesitant to class her as part of the inner team, she attended a number of the preparations for government meetings, off-grid

with key advisers such as Lord Frost, to discuss priorities. “Some of it was to keep her busy,” the staffer recalled.

During the 2019 election, Truss pitched to Johnson that a US trade deal should be one of the key pledges of the campaign. The senior team in Downing Street were gobsmacked, believing it would give Jeremy Corbyn an open goal to talk about selling off the NHS to the US.

“How about we do not talk about this at all?” one said. Another said: “She wanted to show what great things could be achieved post-Brexit – it’s typical Liz optimism – but the problem is we weren’t going to get one.”

Many of those close to Johnson now consider Truss was a success as international trade secretary despite some initial reservations. Under her, the UK signed a deal with Japan and rolled over a number of strategically important deals – with Canada, Israel, Singapore and others.

“She has been much better in the roles that suited her – in the Treasury, at trade and she may well be better at [the Foreign Office]. It plays to her strengths,” the former cabinet minister said.

Others more dismissively consider her as just a valuable frontwoman. “She was good at getting out there, talking about great British produce, and the actual work is done by officials,” a senior No 10 official said. “It’s like putting someone in for a driving test in a self-driving car.”

One Whitehall source said that was unfair. “She is an economist, and in the negotiations she had serious grip of the detail. She knew what tweaks she wanted to make. And she often got her own way.”

If Johnson wanted to keep his rival busy, he has succeeded. Truss’s brief is enormous: foreign secretary, Brexit negotiations, international development and equalities minister. Truss may now be in the job which comes with maximum peril for her leadership chances, but any success is likely to significantly bolster her standing.

“Ireland is going to kill her,” a former Foreign Office official predicted. “She wants to prove her Brexiter credentials but there is no way to win with

this strategy. That [threat in the Sunday Telegraph](#) [on triggering article 16] was not the correct approach.

“Now, if she caves in, the right will abandon her, and that’s the very constituency she needs for the leadership.”



The foreign secretary and her team head past Downing Street minutes before Boris Johnson left for his first prime minister's questions of 2022.
Photograph: Guy Bell/Rex/Shutterstock

Though many MPs consider true Brexit believer status to be less important, Truss backed remain in the 2016 referendum, speaking about not wanting her own daughters to “need a visa or permit to work in Europe, or where they are hampered from growing a business because of extortionate call costs and barriers to trade”.

“She has done incredibly well at erasing her remainder past,” a senior Conservative said. “But I think when we get to a leadership contest, she will have a huge challenge going against Rishi Sunak, Michael Gove, Nadhim Zahawi.

“Not particularly because they were true Brexites but more because the question will be: are you true to yourself? Rishi, Michael and Boris too, they all took personal hits for their beliefs. She will never do that.”

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US news

US children's Covid vaccinations lag despite record infections

Nearly a million new Covid cases were confirmed in children in the week ending 13 January, a 69% increase from the week before



A seven-year-old child holds a sticker after getting the Covid vaccine in Novi, Michigan, in November. Photograph: Jeff Kowalsky/AFP/Getty Images

[Melody Schreiber](#)

Thu 20 Jan 2022 02.00 EST

As the [Omicron variant](#) rips through the US, children are being infected with Covid-19 in record numbers – yet their rate of vaccination has lagged, creating a surge in hospitalizations and undermining in-person schooling.

Nearly a million new Covid cases – more than 981,000 – were confirmed in children in the week ending 13 January, a 69% increase from the week before and four times higher than last winter’s peak, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics. That means one in 10 Covid cases among children in the entire pandemic have happened in the past week, the organization [said](#).

Adult rates have shot up, too, with an average of more than 870,000 confirmed cases a day in the US – but children have much lower vaccination rates. Only 18.8% of kids aged five to 11, and a little more than half of 12- to 17-year-olds, are fully vaccinated, [according](#) to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Hospitalizations for kids are [soaring](#), although severe illness and death are much less likely for children than adults.

“Tons and tons of kids are getting infected this time,” said Almaz Dessie, assistant professor of pediatrics in emergency medicine at Columbia University medical center.

Yet vaccinations are lagging. After a short burst of children’s vaccinations soon after the shot was authorized for the five to 11 age group, progress [dropped significantly](#).

At the New York emergency department where she sees patients, Dessie offers Covid-19 vaccines for kids who come in with non-Covid issues, such as sprained ankles or broken bones.

“We’re seeing a pretty low level of uptake, even now,” she said.

The biggest surprise for Dessie has been talking to vaccinated adults who inoculate their kids against other diseases – but are [holding off](#) with Covid.

“People just want a little more time just to see what happens with the vaccine, because it’s so new,” Dessie said. But when it comes to vaccination, she notes, “the benefits are pretty substantial, both to the individual child and to their community”.

Paul Offit, a professor of pediatrics in the division of infectious diseases at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, recently cared for children being admitted with Covid complications. "None of them were vaccinated. No one over five was vaccinated," he said.

Although Covid complications for children are rarer than for adults, they still happen, and more cases means more chances for kids to become seriously ill.

For example, multi-system inflammatory disease in children is one rare but severe outcome from Covid infection that "can be serious and fatal", Offit said.

Lagging vaccination rates have also contributed to schools struggling to stay open, as students and staff are sickened by the more-transmissible variant.

Offit was recently asked about parents who are worried about sending their children to school during the Omicron surge. "OK, then vaccinate them," he said. "We're talking about trying to keep them safe. Here's an idea: vaccinate your children."

Vaccines for eligible children don't just protect their health and the health of those around them, Dessie said: they can also keep schools open and the rest of society functioning.

"There are so many things that children need from school: the socialization, the social supports for low-income children, all of that," she said. "We need kids in school, and reducing transmission in school will be most easily be achieved by having all children be vaccinated who are eligible."

Experts say that layering all precautions together – vaccines and boosters, masks, tests, better ventilation and physical distancing – can keep schools safer, but some school districts have been unable or unwilling to do so. In Oregon, hit by a 400% increase in cases in the past two weeks, a group of school nurses have decried the lack of effective precautions.

"Messaging that schools are safe – without taking the steps to make them safe – does not keep children safe," the 36 nurses [wrote](#) in a letter to

Portland public schools on Sunday.

School nurses have been on one of the frontlines of the pandemic, said Linda Mendonça, president of the National Association of School Nurses.

“It’s been very challenging,” she said. “They’ve had to really jump into high gear and do things that they normally don’t do on a daily basis.” School nurses frequently trace contacts, test, implement mitigation strategies and run vaccination clinics – all on top of their usual work, which has already become more difficult given the pandemic’s immense physical and emotional burdens.

Implementing every layer of safety is “absolutely” key to continuing in-person learning safely, she said. “Vaccination is one of the [major] public health strategies we have in our toolbox to help fight this pandemic.”

Dessie said she understands [families’ hesitations and fears](#): “They want the best for their kids.

“It’s scary to be a parent right now, and it’s scary to constantly have to make decisions for your child. Everything feels like a risk,” she said.

But the vanishingly rare side-effects of vaccines “are so small compared to the risk of Covid and severe disease from Covid – and all the people they can affect if they get Covid themselves”.

It’s important to explain the safety and effectiveness of the vaccines, she said, and to discuss all questions families have – including the unknowns of what happens if you get Covid while unvaccinated.

“We don’t know, even with mild Covid, what that means for kids,” she said. Long Covid, too, remains little understood, including in children.

Vaccinating everyone, including children, is a crucial part of ending the global spread of the virus, Dessie said. “The more vaccinations you have, across our country and globally, the less likely we are to have the emergence of those new variants like what we just saw the last few months.”

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Health policy

Removal of Covid rules in UK risks premature signal of victory

Analysis: Many scientists expect ‘exit wave’ of infections if behavioural guards drop too fast



The government has declared the end of compulsory mask-wearing in shops and on public transport next week. Photograph: Dominic Lipinski/PA

[Ian Sample](#) and [Sally Weale](#)

Wed 19 Jan 2022 14.46 EST

Boris Johnson’s decision to [remove all plan B measures](#) in England – and to signal the end of the legal requirement to self-isolate – comes as the Omicron surge in the UK [appears to have peaked](#).

The move means compulsory mask wearing in shops and on public transport, guidance to work from home and vaccine certificates will be

scrapped in England next week, with the need to self-isolate lapsing on 24 March if not before.

What impact will this have on the epidemic? One question scientists have yet to nail is the extent to which different factors are driving infections down. High levels of immunity due to vaccines, boosters and runaway infections play a big role, but that protection is more effective against hospitalisation and death than against catching the virus.

Another major force that has shaped the Omicron wave is people's behaviour, which extends far beyond plan B. Monitoring by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) showed this week that people reduced their contacts throughout the autumn and have [kept them low](#) in December and January, with adults reporting fewer than three contacts a day. There is plenty of room for socialising, and infections, to bound back.

Many epidemiologists expect infections will pick up again in England. Modelling from the University of Warwick suggests that such a rise could drive an "[exit wave](#)" of hospitalisations in April and May. Admissions are unlikely to reach the levels hit this winter, but one concern is that the rise in cases could coincide with waning booster immunity in older and more vulnerable people. Hospitalisations are not the only issue: there is still huge uncertainty around how much Omicron will increase the prevalence of [long Covid](#).

Behaviour has helped Omicron peak in other ways, too. In the run-up to Christmas, routine lateral flow testing became widespread and a large proportion of reported cases were detected that way. If people interpret falling cases as the end of the crisis – and scrapping the legal requirement for self-isolation might encourage that view – they may pose a greater risk to others.

"I suspect this has been one of the most important contributors to the Omicron wave being smaller than predicted," said Prof Mark Woolhouse, an infectious disease epidemiologist at Edinburgh University. "This is

particularly important for anyone planning a contact with a vulnerable person and will remain so for the foreseeable future, in my view.”

While cases are falling at the UK level, the picture is mixed nationally and regionally. It is unclear whether infections are falling in Northern Ireland, or in north-east and south-west England, for example.

Going into the spring, more fine-grained data is going to be crucial to reveal whether Omicron is holding on, or has begun to rise again, in particular areas. “We shouldn’t be looking at averages any more,” said Martin McKee, a professor of European public health at LSHTM and a member of the Independent Sage group. “There are still a hell of a lot of people not vaccinated in the UK. There are parts of the country where a lot of people are living in very difficult circumstances, with overcrowding and all the conditions where the virus spreads, and I am very worried about that.”

How Covid persists in different age groups will also be important to monitor. As of last week, infections were falling in all age groups in England except children aged two to 11 – the unvaccinated young – prompting concerns about Covid in schools. Boris Johnson’s announcement means that from Thursday staff and pupils in schools in England will not be required to wear masks in classrooms. They will continue to wear them in communal areas until next Thursday, and where there are significant outbreaks public health directors can recommend a return to face masks.

Face coverings have been a source of growing dispute in schools, as heads have struggled to enforce the latest government advice. Many school leaders will be glad to see them go but there is concern in the sector that the announcement is premature with cases still high in some areas.

“Removing measures such as masks in schools is crazy,” said Prof Stephen Reicher, a behavioural scientist at the University of St Andrews who advises Sage and Independent Sage. “This has much more to do with appeasing those who might otherwise be writing to the 1922 Committee [to try to oust the prime minister].”

Behavioural scientists have shown throughout the crisis, and in previous pandemics, that people act according to the risk they perceive. Telling

people they will no longer have to self-isolate sends a message that “it’s all over”, said Reicher. “This will impact all behaviours including – critically – the need to get vaccinated and boosted. The government’s approach will undermine even the steps they still acknowledge are important.”

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Novak Djokovic

Djokovic has 80% stake in biotech firm developing Covid treatment

QuantBioRes is working on a treatment not a vaccine, but CEO says tennis star is ‘not anti-vax’



Novak Djokovic was deported from Australia on Sunday after losing a bid to stay to defend his Australian Open title despite not being vaccinated against Covid. Photograph: Darko Bandić/AP

[Mark Sweeney](#)

[@marksweney](#)

Wed 19 Jan 2022 13.29 EST

Novak Djokovic is the controlling shareholder in a Danish biotech firm aiming to develop a treatment for Covid-19 that does not involve vaccination, it has emerged.

The world No 1, who was deported from Australia this week after the government cancelled his visa in a dispute over a medical exemption relating to his unvaccinated status, bought an 80% stake in QuantBioRes in 2020.

Ivan Loncarevic, the company's chief executive, confirmed the investment to Reuters. He subsequently told the Financial Times that he had not spoken to Djokovic, who has won more than \$150m in prize money, since November and that the tennis star was "not anti-vax".

Quick Guide

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Djokovic flew out of Australia on Sunday after losing a legal challenge to overturn the cancellation of his visa by Alex Hawke, the country's immigration minister, who said Djokovic's presence in Australia might risk "civil unrest" as he was a "talisman of anti-vaccination sentiment".

QuantBioRes has about 11 researchers working in Denmark, Australia and Slovenia, according to Loncarevic, who stressed the company was working on a treatment, not a vaccine. The company's website says it started developing a "deactivation mechanism" for Covid-19 in July 2020.

Djokovic, who may also be barred from defending his French Open title in Roland Garros in May after the French government ruled on Monday that all athletes will have to be vaccinated in order to attend and compete in sporting events, acquired his stake in the company in June 2020.

04:07

Novak Djokovic deported from Australia: how the controversy unfolded – video

The company is developing a peptide, which inhibits the coronavirus from infecting the human cell, and it expects to launch clinical trials in Britain this summer, Loncarevic said.

A spokesperson for Djokovic did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The headline of this article was amended on 20 January 2022, changing “drug” to “treatment”

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2022.01.20 - Opinion

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Opinion[Boris Johnson](#)

It's not just Johnson: the whole culture that cheered him on needs booting out

[Aditya Chakrabortty](#)



I was mourning my mother as Downing St partied. But even I can't blame this morally bankrupt prime minister alone



Boris Johnson, then mayor of London, receives a standing ovation at 2015 Conservative conference. Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty Images

Thu 20 Jan 2022 02.00 EST

On the last Sunday before the 2019 general election, the Sunday Times cast its vote. “Mr Johnson is regarded with some suspicion by voters,” [its editorial admitted](#). “He has an on-off relationship with the truth,” often preferred “bluster to grasp of detail”, and had a “colourful private life more typical of a French president”. Nonetheless, the paper urged its readers to put a liar, a bullshitter and a renowned moral incontinent in charge of the country. In making this argument, it was joined by the vast majority of national newspapers, and by the end of that week they got their wish.

Over the past few days, those very same papers have discovered that a liar, a bullshitter and a moral incontinent runs the government. They are, naturally, horrified.

The [furies are now descending](#) upon this prime minister. Having thoroughly chewed him up and digested every last point of polling advantage, the party he led to its first serious majority in 30 years is about to spit him out; the very MPs who most directly owe him their seats are plotting his demise. The obit already being written is about how one man, beset by monstrous flaws

of character, presided over a rotten, insensate culture in Downing Street. Scarcely a word is said about how a rotten political culture chose this cracked actor to be prime minister in the first place.

Even to ask the question is to divert from Westminster's splendid game of Pop Goes the Weaselly Politician. Yet look around and count the examples of a truly ulcerous politics. Here are the columnists, gravely warning that to cling on to Boris Johnson is to endanger democracy – two years after excusing his attempts to [shut down parliament](#) and ram through his Brexit. Over there are the backbenchers, mutinying not because their leader broke his own lockdown rules but over how this might affect their careers. Heckling from the wings is breachfinder-general Dominic Cummings, apparently unencumbered by any shame over his own eye test at Barnard Castle. Centre stage is, of course, Johnson, on trial not for racking up the [highest Covid death toll in Europe](#), but for telling people to follow one rule and doing precisely the opposite. For, in other words, hypocrisy – one of the few things, as Alan Bennett has [observed](#), at which the English still lead the world.

In saying this, I am not making light of the Downing Street parties. In spring 2020, my mother passed away. It is part of my culture for friends to come over with meals for the bereaved, to sit with them in mourning. Friends handed over carrier bags of food from the road. Given the public health emergency, there was no question of them coming inside. My wife and I sat alone. More fool us.

Yet, even as I recall that painful period, the charges on which Johnson is now arraigned still strike me as odd. Winking at rules, lying about it afterwards ... what did people think he was going to do? He practically bragged about his ability to pull off such feats. He converted what most of us would consider vices into political virtues, which is partly why the election of 2019 was an event of such consequence. Bringing great institutions into disrepute? It was much-corroded institutions that cheered him into No 10. Johnson won every single ballot of Conservative MPs in 2019, and swept the vote of party members. He repaid the debt by filleting the parliamentary party of many of its most competent members, on the grounds they disagreed with his hastily scrawled plan for Brexit.

During an election campaign in which he [hid from an interviewer](#) in a giant fridge, and [pocketed a journalist's mobile phone](#) after refusing to look at a photo of a sick child sleeping on a hospital floor, most of the media persisted in treating him not as a threat to freedom of the press but as the best standup on the Leave circuit.

What fuelled Johnson's ascent was how well he learned a lesson of predecessors on the right: you could break the institutions that held the UK together as a social democracy and dissolve its political trust. You could be a political vandal, an economic bulldozer and a class bully, and still the press would praise you as statesmanlike, while the public handed you a landslide. From Margaret Thatcher onwards, the right has broken up the public sector into something the lobbyists, the consultants and the profiteers can freely loot. Electricity, water, council housing, the railways: all have been turned into so many troughs for the pinstripe hordes to sup at. Underneath the blond mop and behind the great toothy grin, Johnson's pitch has always been that he will destroy the rest. Of course he's bad at government: he believes government is bad.

To stave off the inevitable, Johnson has come up with an escape plan of rightwing policies, charmingly referred to by the government of Ghana – which would apparently be receiving some of Britain's asylum seekers – as [Operation Dead Meat](#). It is the same programme of bulldozing institutions, but this time played at manic intensity and speed. Scapegoating senior civil servants for the [wine suitcases in Downing Street](#), [Freezing the BBC licence fee](#) and warning Auntie that soon the cupboard will be entirely bare. Almost certainly the next thing to be thrown overboard will be parts of the [net zero programme](#). These aren't aimed at winning back the public, but kissing up to the rightwing press and the Tory headbangers who can keep him in No 10. What's left is a punitive state: the military supposedly seeing off desperate Afghans in small boats, the police deciding who is or isn't entitled to go on a demo.

The antithesis to all this is not a return to normalcy led by the political management class, whatever the talking heads might say. The Right Hon Member for Greensill or the chancellor for BlackRock were just as determined at trashing the public sector. All those decrying Johnson as a sociopath would do well to read the recent paper in the peer-reviewed BMJ

Open, [which finds](#) that over just four years in England alone David Cameron's austerity was responsible for more than 57,000 deaths.

The route out of this debacle begins with recognising that a mere change in personnel at No 10, even at the very top, will alter next to nothing. It would be far better to repair the country's shattered institutions, and allow communities to build their own, both economic and political. This also means a dramatic shift of power away from Westminster. Until then, we are left with the pathetic sight of a rule-breaker who vows more law and order. A public-school populist who dissembles like any other politician. An authoritarian whose authority has drained away.

- Aditya Chakrabortty is a Guardian columnist
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The politics sketch**Boris Johnson**

Big Dog's contempt comes back to bite him

[John Crace](#)



At PMQs Boris Johnson tried to bluff through a defection, Keir Starmer's ridicule and David Davis's Cromwellian condemnation



Boris Johnson ‘claimed to be proud of the work his staff at No 10 had done while boasting about how many he was going to sack to save his skin’.

Photograph: Jessica Taylor/UK Parliament/PA

Wed 19 Jan 2022 13.58 EST

What a difference a day makes. On Tuesday [Big Dog had been Hang Dog](#). Not remorseful exactly, as that would require a level of empathy and self-knowledge that is well beyond him. But certainly abject. Sorry for finding himself in such a mess, if not for causing it. Sorry that he had reached the end of the road.

Come prime minister’s questions, the trademark defences were back in place. The desperation of a leader, already on borrowed time, who is having to beg for yet another last chance. It’s a sight with which countless betrayed wives and girlfriends are all too familiar. First there was the surefire tell that [Boris Johnson](#) is about to start lying: the smirk (though these days it’s rarer to find a time when he’s telling the truth).

Then there were the desperate and petulant displays of temper, masquerading as banter, from someone who hates to be challenged. A man who consistently mistakes arrogance for genuine self-worth. Finally, there was the contempt. Not just for opposition MPs but also for his own.

Especially for his own. He has even less respect for those who buy his crap than those who call him out for the chancer he knows himself to be. Mostly, though, the contempt is for himself. Deep down, at a subconscious level, Boris knows better than anyone that he degrades both his position and the country.

PMQs opened with Christian Wakeford, the former Conservative MP for Bury South, [defecting to Labour](#) by taking his seat behind Keir Starmer on the opposition benches. A few Tories jeered as the Labour leader welcomed Wakeford to the party, and Starmer ad libbed that the chief whip must have told them to bring their own boos. That stung. It was meant to be their man, their Big Dog, who told the best gags. Now they didn't even have that.

This was Starmer at his most relaxed. He wasn't that bothered if Johnson went that day or in a week or month's time. The exit was now priced in, so he would make the most of it and just have some fun with the prime minister along the way. He ran through Big Dog's catalogue of excuses.

First there had been no parties. Then he had been sickened and furious that others in Number 10 had had parties. Then he had been at some of the parties. Then he hadn't realised the party he had been at had actually been a party. And in any case he had spent the 25 minutes at the party in a totally dissociated state, so he hadn't noticed there were tables laden with food and booze and people getting pissed.

Then when he had come to his senses and realised he was at a party, he had no idea such gatherings were illegal as no one had bothered to tell him what the rules were. Even though he had made them up and had spent an hour a day at press conferences telling the country what the rules were. The five stages of coming to grief.

Big Dog tugged at the toddler haircut and waved a paw dismissively. It all made perfect sense, only the entire country was too stupid to see it. "You'll just have to wait for the Sue Gray inquiry to report back," he said. Though even if Gray doesn't directly apportion blame, it's hard to see how Johnson comes out of an inquiry with a shred of credibility. Just imagine. The best Gray could say about the prime minister was that he had either been in a

fugue state or that he was incapable of distinguishing between a party and a work meeting.

Starmer continued to expose the absurdities of Johnson's lies and all Big Dog had to offer in return was more and more lies. He claimed the Tories had fixed the cost of living crisis when only that morning [inflation had risen to 5.4%](#). He claimed to be proud of the work his staff at Number 10 had done while boasting about how many he was going to sack to save his skin. Keep it classy.

He claimed it had been him alone who had made all the right calls on Covid when in the first year he had got most things wrong. He lied about the UK having the highest booster take-up in Europe. We don't. The SNP's Ian Blackford mentioned the record-breaking 175,000 who had died. Big Dog just sniggered, pulled faces and played with his watch. Still keeping it classy.

There was a small band of Boris loyalists, but most Tories were as unimpressed with their leader as the opposition MPs. None who spoke showed any flicker of support, preferring to keep things neutral. Though not David Davis. He went nuclear. Enough was enough. Quoting both Oliver Cromwell to parliament and Leo Amery to Neville Chamberlain, [he said to a hushed chamber](#): "You have sat too long here for any good you have been doing. In the name of God, go."

This wasn't your average Tory malcontent. It was a respected old-timer, an arch Brexiter and longtime Johnson supporter who saw through Big Dog's pantomime theatrics. Boris tried to shrug off the attack but was visibly shaken. He even said he had no idea where such a famous quotation came from. It makes you wonder if he actually wrote – let alone read – the passages in his book about Churchill that cover the early years of the war. Johnson the Great Pretender. Who can't even cut it as a pound-shop Churchill.

It was telling that after this, only a few Big Dog diehards bothered to stay for his statement declaring that Covid was as good as over. Boris ploughed on regardless. Even though 438 people had died the day before and the NHS was stretched to breaking point, Johnson was [removing all remaining](#)

restrictions because that was popular with his party. Besides, if you're incapable of sticking to the rules, you might as well get rid of them.

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[**Opinion**](#)[**Universities**](#)

Do university applications favour middle-class kids? Yes – because their parents write them

[Adrian Chiles](#)



Britain's only social mobility professor says personal statements should be scrapped. But the problem takes root much earlier



‘My offer of assistance with my daughter’s offering was rejected in the strongest terms.’ (Posed by models.) Photograph: Tempura/Getty Images

Thu 20 Jan 2022 02.00 EST

It wasn’t until my elder daughter applied for university that I became aware of [personal statements](#) – 4,000 characters (about 600 words) with which the applicant can persuade the seat of learning that they are made of the right stuff. I sought guidance from an old friend whom I happened to be catching up with, an eminent lawyer with several university-educated children. Are these statement things important, I asked. “Yes, they are,” he harrumphed. “Certainly far too important to leave to some daft 18-year-old to write.”

At around the same time, I was assured by an admissions tutor at a Russell Group university that these statements were hardly ever read; they just looked at the predicted grades.

So, take your pick. My offer of assistance with my daughter’s offering was rejected in the strongest terms with the kind of industrial language I hoped she would not use in the statement itself.

[Lee Elliot Major](#), Britain’s first professor of social mobility, said this week that personal statements have become “a systematic disadvantage to poorer

students”, as it’s the middle-class applicants getting all the help. He is quite right, of course. But that problem takes root at a much younger age.

A friend was the deputy head of an elite girls’ private school in London, with responsibility for admissions. I asked her what on earth she asked 11-year-olds. To her despair, most of them seemed to have memorised a script prepared by their parents. “There was stuff about geopolitics I really couldn’t follow. One girl told me what kind of hedge fund she wanted to run,” my friend wailed. She said the best answer she ever got to the question: “Why do you want come to this school?” came from a girl who said: “It’s on the Piccadilly line.”

This would be my advice, certainly: keep these things simple.

Adrian Chiles is a broadcaster, writer and Guardian columnist

This article was amended on 20 January 2022. An earlier version said university applicants can use up to 4,000 words in their personal statements. In fact, they can use up to 4,000 characters.

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OpinionFashion

André Leon Talley was a heroic outsider – and embodied the fashion industry at its best

[Priya Elan](#)



The late creative director of Vogue used his work to transcend racism, and transformed the way we dress along the way



‘None of my contemporaries have seen the world through black eyes.’
André Leon Talley in 2017. Photograph: Cindy Ord/Getty Images

Thu 20 Jan 2022 04.00 EST

When I started working in fashion in 2016, one thing was clear: this was a white, female and thin industry. André Leon Talley, who died [on Tuesday](#), at 73, was defiantly, unapologetically and fabulously none of these things.

Talley’s passing isn’t just the tragic end to the life of a figure who revolutionised perspectives towards clothes. It’s also the silencing of a voice who represented what fashion could be: the triumph of the outsider in a world of cookie-cutter conformity. People of colour, like myself, are constantly being told to make ourselves smaller and to hide our true selves if we are to survive unscathed in an overwhelmingly white world. Talley was heroic because he never followed these rules. He never apologised for his booming voice, which pronounced in sing-songy staccato sentences, his unconventional body shape or his blackness, despite knowing that racism is “part of the fabric of our existence”, as he wrote in his memoir, [The Chiffon Trenches](#).

Like many creative aesthetes, Talley survived the cruelties of his childhood (including sexual abuse) by escaping into a world of culture. He grew up in

North Carolina, living with his grandmother, as was the norm for many in those days in the black community (he called her “Mama”). He craved to live in the world painted for him by Diana Ross, Nina Simone and Laura Nyro. While he yearned for the elegant luxuries depicted in a book about the Titanic, which he found at his aunt’s house, copies of [Vogue](#) provided him with an aspirational safe space, where, he said, “bad things never happened”. At Brown University, Talley’s mind was expanded by Rimbaud and Baudelaire, while he found a new aesthetic freedom to express himself through his style.



André Leon Talley, left, during New York fashion week in 2010 with Serena Williams, Anna Wintour, Virginia Smith and Grace Coddington. Photograph: David Fisher/Rex/Shutterstock

Inspired by Naomi Sims, the first black model he saw in *Vogue*, Talley took to wearing makeup from the Japanese kabuki theatrical tradition, and a floor-length admiral’s coat. When he returned home to North Carolina for a holiday, Talley’s mother refused to attend church with him and scorned, or “shaded”, his “Phantom of the Opera look”. Ouch. But, no matter – the bird was out of its cage, and he moved to New York and found work as an unpaid assistant to Diana Vreeland at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Through Vreeland’s patronage, Talley found reception work at Andy Warhol’s *Interview* magazine, before becoming the publication’s resident fashion

expert. Deep friendships with Karl Lagerfeld and Halston intertwined with jobs at WWD, W, Ebony and, later, Vogue, where he became creative director under [Anna Wintour](#), having started as a fashion news director in 1983. It was a momentous first for fashion: “As an African American born in the ugly and racist Jim Crow south, I understood how monumental this was,” Talley wrote. “I was the first.”

His presence and perspective at Vogue prefigured today’s reality, in which there are more people of colour in fashion editorial, and inclusivity has become a growing norm on the catwalk (if not in fashion magazines), while, at the very least, conversations about diversity are not laughed out of the boardroom. But for many of the years between 1983 and 2018, when Beyoncé appeared on the cover of Vogue’s September issue, [shot by Tyler Mitchell](#), the first black photographer to shoot a cover in the magazine’s 130-year history, Talley was the only person of colour on the front row at fashion shows. As he wrote in *The Chiffon Diaries*: “none of my contemporaries have seen the world through black eyes”. Through fashion writing, Talley transcended this racism. “My blackness was not important,” he said, reflecting on writing up a particularly electrifying Yves Saint Laurent show report. “What mattered was that I was smart.”

Talley was always a larger than life figure, whose theatrical presence thrummed with a joie de vivre: he would sashay in the face of the glacial, mannered world in which he worked, and described the racism and homophobia he experienced in fashion as “subtle” and “casual” (he was nicknamed “[Queen Kong](#)” in Paris fashion circles). And yes, Talley never compromised on what he felt was important: a fierce advocacy for the vision of the fashion designer. His death is the extinguishing of a unique, inspirational light.

- Priya Elan is the Guardian’s deputy fashion editor

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Joe Biden

Joe Biden says his administration has ‘outperformed’ in bruising first year

President touts coronavirus relief aid and infrastructure law but acknowledges pandemic is unfinished job

‘I don’t believe the polls’: Biden gives testy press conference

02:04

‘What are the Republicans for?’: Joe Biden says Trump ‘intimidating’ entire party – video

[Lauren Gambino](#) in Washington

[@laurenegambino](#)

Wed 19 Jan 2022 18.18 EST

Joe Biden on Wednesday conceded that the unshakable threat of the Covid-19 pandemic had left many Americans demoralized, but insisted that his administration had “outperformed” expectations despite the myriad crises facing the nation during his first year in office.

Speaking to reporters in the East Room of the White House for his first news conference in months, the US president said he was confident Democrats could pass “big chunks” of his sprawling domestic policy bill currently stalled in the Senate before the 2022 midterm elections.

“It’s been a year of challenges but it’s also been a year of enormous progress,” Biden said, outlining the administration’s early successes: passing coronavirus relief aid that slashed child poverty rates and a bipartisan infrastructure law that will shower funding for major public works projects on every state in the nation.

Biden was also realistic about the difficult road ahead, as the extremely contagious Omicron variant of the coronavirus overwhelms hospitals, inflation rises and his agenda languishes before a Congress controlled by Democrats.

“After almost two years of physical, emotional and psychological impact of this pandemic, for many of us, it’s been too much to bear,” he said. “Some people may call what’s happening now ‘the new normal’. I call it a job not yet finished. It will get better.”

Grading his efforts to combat the pandemic, Biden insisted the US was better positioned now than when he took office, while acknowledging mistakes, such as not ordering more tests earlier. He vowed the US would not go back to the earliest days of the pandemic when lockdowns and school closures were widespread.

“I didn’t overpromise,” he said. “I have probably outperformed what anybody thought would happen.”

Wednesday’s press conference was his 10th since taking office, far fewer than his most recent predecessors. Only a limited number of journalists were credentialed for the press conference, and all were required to wear masks, a reminder of the virus’s continuing threat.

In a revealing split screen, Biden’s press conference took place as Senator Joe Manchin, a conservative Democrat and key holdout on much of Biden’s agenda, took to the floor of the Senate to denounce his party’s efforts to amend the filibuster rule to pass voting rights protections. Biden defended his pursuit of what appeared to be a hopeless effort to pass the bills, which are all but certain to fail without full Democratic support in the evenly divided Senate.

Biden said he was still hopeful that the Congress would find a path forward on voting rights legislation, and as such wasn’t prepared to divulge possible executive actions he might take on the issue. The bills, Biden argued, were urgently needed to counter voter suppression and subversion efforts being carried out in Republican-led states. Lacerating speeches by the president on the need for these protections failed to move Republicans.

In the coming months, Biden said he would travel to states and districts across the country to promote his agenda and sell his administration's accomplishments, trying to correct what he described as a communication failure on his part. Citing the coronavirus and his work in Washington, he lamented not being able to leave Washington more frequently during his first year to "do the things I've often been able to do pretty well – connect with people".

He believed key pieces of his Build Back Better agenda could pass the Senate, including popular plans to combat climate change and create a universal pre-kindergarten program.

Plans to extend a monthly child tax benefit expanded temporarily as part of the \$1.9tn pandemic relief package may not be included in a scaled-back version of the bill, he indicated. The payments, which expired in December, helped keep millions of children out of poverty during the pandemic.



Joe Biden arrives to speak during a press conference in the East Room of the White House. Photograph: Oliver Contreras/EPA

To the chagrin of many Democrats, Biden, a veteran of the US Senate, said he failed to anticipate that there would be "such a stalwart effort" by congressional Republicans to obstruct his agenda.

“One thing I haven’t been able to do so far is get my Republican friends to get in the game at making things better in this country,” Biden said. He assailed the Republican party for its deference to Donald Trump, wondering how “one man out of office could intimidate an entire party?”

Previewing a line of attack he will use against the party in the midterms, he accused Republicans of lacking a policy core or a set of guiding principles. “What are Republicans for? What are they for? Name me one thing they’re for.”

Biden bristled at the notion that his agenda was radical in any way. “I’m not asking for castles in the sky,” he insisted. “I’m asking for practical things the American people have been asking for for a long time.”

At ease behind the lectern, Biden sparred with reporters for nearly two hours. At one point, he checked his watch, smiled and agreed to take questions for 20 more minutes.

The range of questions he fielded – on the pandemic, rising inflation, Russian aggression, the chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan, a daunting electoral landscape, his falling approval ratings – underscored the extent of the challenges that lie ahead for the administration as it aims to recalibrate after a string of setbacks.

Addressing the brewing threat at the Ukrainian border, where Russia has amassed tens of thousands of troops, Biden predicted that Moscow would invade Ukraine and promised Vladimir Putin would pay a “dear price” if he moved forward with an attack. He also appeared to suggest that a “minor incursion” would draw a lesser response from Nato than a full-scale invasion.

Moments after he spoke, the White House press secretary, Jen Psaki, sought to clarify the remark, saying that any act of aggression by Russia, including cyber-attacks and paramilitary tactics, would be “met with a decisive, reciprocal, and united response”.

On Afghanistan, Biden said there was no easy way to leave the country after 20 years of war: “I make no apologies for what I did.” And asked about talks

with Iran, he said now was “not the time to give up” on efforts to revive the 2015 nuclear deal.

Pressed on the economy, he said it was the “critical job” of the Federal Reserve to tame inflation, but touted his domestic agenda as a remedy for rising costs, which has left voters pessimistic about the state of the economy and Biden’s ability to improve it.

But Biden was bullish: “I’m happy to have a referendum on how I handled the economy.”

Looking ahead, he was unequivocal when asked whether Vice-President Kamala Harris would again be his running mate in 2024. “Yes,” he replied.

In one exchange, a reporter with a rightwing news outlet asked why some Americans view Biden as mentally unfit to run the country. “I have no idea,” he replied tartly.

In another, he pushed back on the notion that he was trying to pull the country leftward. “You guys have been trying to convince me that I am Bernie Sanders. I’m not,” Biden said, asserting that he was a “mainstream Democrat” as he always had been.

Asked how he could win back independent voters who supported him in 2020 but have become disillusioned with his leadership so far, Biden pushed back. “I don’t believe the polls.”

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The fight to voteUS voting rights

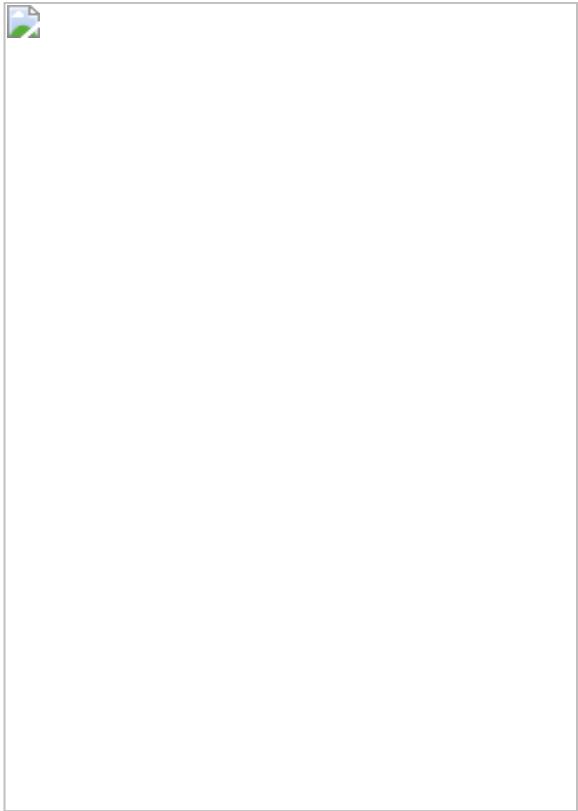
Democrats fail to advance voting rights law as Senate holdouts defend filibuster

Sweeping protections for voters, already passed by House and backed by Biden, fail to clear 60-vote procedural hurdle



Ilhan Omar and other members of the Congressional Black Caucus talk outside the Senate about voting rights legislation on Wednesday.
Photograph: Brendan Smialowski/AFP/Getty Images

The fight to vote is supported by



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[Sam Levine](#)

Thu 20 Jan 2022 08.27 EST

Senate [Democrats](#) failed again to pass sweeping new voting protections on Wednesday, in what may be the most brutal blow yet to efforts to strengthen protections for voters at a perilous moment for US democracy.

Just as they have done four other times in recent months, all 50 Republicans united in their opposition to the measure. They relied on the filibuster, a Senate rule that requires 60 votes to advance legislation to a final vote.

Despite heavy pressure from Joe Biden and fellow Democrats, two senators, [Joe Manchin](#) and Kyrsten Sinema, have dug in defending the measure, preventing Democrats from getting rid of it.

In a rebuke to Biden, [Sinema gave a speech](#) on the Senate floor last week making it clear she would not support changes to the filibuster. Manchin has also consistently made his support clear. “I will not vote to eliminate or weaken the filibuster. The filibuster plays an important role in protecting our democracy from the transitory passions of the majority and respecting the input of the minority in the Senate,” he said in a speech on Wednesday.

Their opposition set up a showdown as the ultimately doomed bill was taken up for discussion on Wednesday. Late in the evening, Republicans used the filibuster to vote to end debate on the bill, effectively blocking it from advancing. Immediately afterwards, Democrats moved to hold a vote to try and change the filibuster rules anyway. The effort failed 52-48, with Manchin and Sinema voting with all 50 Republicans to preserve the filibuster. Sinema loudly said “aye” when it was her turn to vote in favor of preserving the filibuster changes.

“I am profoundly disappointed that the United States Senate has failed to stand up for our democracy. I am disappointed — but I am not deterred,” Biden said in a statement.

“Our Administration will continue to fight to pass federal legislation to secure the right to vote. We will not stop fighting against the anti-voter legislation that Republican legislatures continue to push at the state level—and to champion and support state and local elected officials who work to enact pro-voter legislation,” Kamala Harris said in a separate statement.

“Isn’t protecting voting rights, the most fundamental wellspring of this democracy, more important than a rule?” Chuck Schumer, the Senate majority leader, said just before the vote on the filibuster change.

Speaking on NBC’s Today show on Thursday morning, Harris also said: “We as Americans cannot allow this blatant erosion of democracy, that’s the topic and let’s not get distracted by political gamesmanship.” She added that foreign leaders “are asking what is going on with voting rights in America.”

Senator Tim Kaine of Virginia said Democrats were seeking to restore a “talking filibuster”, where senators have to hold the floor of the US senate to prevent a vote on legislation.

“We’re going to take up a rules reform proposal that will not blow up the senate,” he said on the Senate floor Wednesday evening. “It switches the secret filibuster into a public filibuster. It makes both parties work on the floor to get the kind of extended public debate we joined together to seek.”

Senator Angus King of Maine, who once defended the filibuster, said the process that was in place was a “second cousin once removed of the filibuster”.

“I’d venture to say if we had the rules we have today, we wouldn’t have the Voting Rights Act and the Civil Rights Act,” he said.

Mitch McConnell, the Republican leader, described Wednesday as “in all likelihood, the most important day in the history of the Senate.” He said the Democratic proposal was just “smoke and mirrors”, and accused Democrats of undertaking a plot to “to break the Senate”.

The voting rights measure has failed before, but Wednesday marks the first time they have taken a formal vote on changing the filibuster. Its likely failure marks a profound setback for Biden’s presidential agenda. The president spent an enormous amount of political capital in recent weeks pressuring Manchin and Sinema to support rule changes to the filibuster, [giving a speech in Atlanta](#) and traveling to Capitol Hill to try to get support.

In stirring remarks just before the vote on the voting rights bill, Raphael Warnock, a Democrat from Georgia, said senators could not praise the legacy of Dr Martin Luther King, Jr while voting against voting rights. “You cannot remember MLK and dismember his legacy at the same time,” Warnock said. “I will not sit quietly while some make Dr King a victim of identity theft.”

“Those of us who are students of Dr King, I know I have, often wonder ‘what would I have done if I was alive during the civil rights movement?’ I know that we all would like to think we had a fraction, just a small fraction

of the courage it took for John Lewis to cross that Edmund Pettus Bridge,” he said. “Well, for those of us who serve in the United States Senate in this moment, in this moral moment, we do not have to wonder … we don’t have to wonder what we would have done. I submit that what we would have done back then we are doing right now. History is watching us.”



Kamala Harris reacts to a failed procedural vote in the Senate on voter rights legislation on Wednesday. Photograph: Brendan Smialowski/AFP/Getty Images

The bill that failed on Wednesday, Freedom to Vote: John R Lewis Act, combined two major voting rights bills into a single mega bill.

It would have set a national baseline for election access, guaranteeing 15 days of early voting as well as online voter registration. It protected local election officials from harassment and partisan interference in their jobs and curbed gerrymandering, the severe distortion of partisan district lines. It also restored a key piece of the 1965 Voting Rights Act that required places with a history of voting discrimination to get their changes approved by either the justice department or a federal court in Washington before they go into effect.

The bill's failure comes as states across the US have waged an aggressive effort to restrict voting access after the 2020 election, which saw record turnout. In total, [19 states have passed 34 bills](#) that restrict voting access, making it harder to request and return a mail-in ballot, among other measures, even though there was no evidence of fraud, either in mail-in voting or otherwise, in 2020.

Many of those efforts are obviously aimed at Black and other minority voters who helped Democrats win in 2020, activists say.

At the same time, Republicans in state legislatures are redrawing electoral districts at the state legislative and congressional level to virtually guarantee their re-election for the next decade. Seeing Democratic gains in traditionally Republican districts, Republicans have redrawn the lines to simply make many districts uncompetitive for the next decade, [according to the Brennan Center for Justice](#).

There is also growing concern about what experts call election subversion – efforts to inject more partisanship into election administration and counting votes.

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Biden administration

Biden nominates wealthy Democratic donor as US ambassador to UK

Jane Hartley nomination continues practice by both parties in recent decades of appointing wealthy donors to prestigious job



Jane Hartley in 2015. She served as ambassador to Paris in the Obama administration. Photograph: Kamil Zihnioglu/AP

[Julian Borger](#) in Washington

Wed 19 Jan 2022 16.18 EST

Jane Hartley, a businesswoman and Democratic party fundraiser, has been nominated as the next US ambassador to Britain, continuing a practice by both parties in recent decades of appointing wealthy donors to the prestigious job.

Hartley, who served as ambassador to Paris in the Obama administration, is a business executive, and is married to an investment banker, with a record of large-scale fundraising for Democratic candidates.

She has been a campaign “bundler”, meaning she has solicited and coordinated over \$100,000 in contributions to the party from groups of donors. During the presidential campaign, [Joe Biden](#) had said he would break from the practice of handing out ambassadorships as rewards for the wealthy faithful.

“I’m going to appoint the best people possible,” he promised. “Nobody, in fact, will be appointed by me based on anything they contributed.”

Despite that campaign pledge, 25 of Biden’s ambassador picks are former “bundlers”, a third of the total, according to a Washington Post analysis published before the Hartley announcement.

That is a higher proportion of fundraisers than either Barack Obama or George W Bush appointed in their first year. Donald Trump did not disclose the figures for the number of “bundlers” he made ambassador, but he made a higher percentage of political appointments than his predecessors.

Hartley, 71, will now face confirmation hearings in the Senate. She was a White House staffer in the Jimmy Carter administration but later went in to business and rose to become chief executive officer of the G7 and Observatory Group consulting firms. Her husband Ralph Schlosstein is the CEO of Evercore Partners, a global investment banking advisory business.

The main controversy during Hartley’s ambassadorial stint in Paris was her decision to commission Jeff Koons for a monument commemorating the [2015 wave of terrorist attacks](#) in the French capital. Koons produced a giant metal hand holding a multicoloured [bouquet of tulips](#), which triggered an uproar of complaints over its appropriateness, both in style and location.

The venue for the 35-tonne sculpture was in a very wealthy area just off the Champs-Élysées and not in the poorer 11th arrondissement where the murders took place in and around the Bataclan theatre. French cultural

figures wrote an open letter condemning it as a “opportunistic, even cynical” project.

“It’s really shocking that Biden has put forward so many with so little diplomatic experience,” Brett Bruen, the director of global engagement in the Obama White House. “In the past, when Hartley served, the stakes were not so high for an ambassador. But, now with the very credibility of our country on the line, with the confidence in our leadership at historic lows, we cannot be sending amateur diplomats abroad.”

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Bernie Sanders

Bernie Sanders suggests he may support primary challengers against Manchin and Sinema

Progressive Vermont senator believes ‘there’s a very good chance’ Democrats will face challenges over their filibuster stance



Senator Bernie Sanders speaks to striking Kellogg's workers in downtown Battle Creek, Michigan, in December. Photograph: Seth Herald/AFP/Getty Images

[Joan E Greve](#) in Washington and agency

[@joanegreve](#)

Wed 19 Jan 2022 11.12 EST

Bernie Sanders has said he may consider supporting primary challengers against colleagues Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema, the two Democrat

holdouts in debate over whether to amend the filibuster to pass voting rights legislation.

The progressive Vermont senator [told reporters on Tuesday](#) that he believes “there is a very good chance” that Manchin, a West Virginia Democrat, and Sinema, a Democrat from Arizona, will face primary challenges because of their stance on the filibuster.

He said home-state voters would be disappointed that the pair have refused to support changing Senate rules to overcome a Republican filibuster against major voting legislation while also balking at the massive, Biden-backed spending and social plan known as Build Back Better.

When asked if he would consider backing such primary challengers, Sanders replied, “Well, yeah.”

Sanders, an independent who caucuses with Senate [Democrats](#), didn’t elaborate on his comment, but it is unusual for senators to suggest they would be willing to campaign against colleagues from their own party.

Sanders’s sentiments also lay bare progressives’ growing frustrations with the more conservative senators, Manchin and Sinema, whom the left has blamed for stalling many of Biden’s top legislative priorities.

Manchin and Sinema say they support the legislation but are unwilling to change Senate rules to muscle the legislation through the chamber over Republican objections. With a 50-50 split, Democrats lack the 60 votes needed to overcome the Republican filibuster.

Manchin is expected to deliver a floor speech on Wednesday afternoon outlining his position on changing chamber rules to allow voting rights legislation to move forward. Yesterday he countered Sanders’s comments, saying he would not be bothered by a primary challenger.

“I’ve been primaried my entire life. That would not be anything new for me,” he said Tuesday, when asked about fellow Democrats urging voters not to back him in a primary. “I’ve never run an election I wasn’t primaried.

This is West Virginia, it's rough and tumble. We're used to that. So bring it on.”

Sanders remains one of the nation’s leading progressive voices after strong Democratic presidential primary bids in 2016 and 2020 – and is still popular enough nationally to potentially affect Senate primaries around the country.

Manchin and Sinema are not up for re-election until 2024, but both could face serious primary challengers then. Democratic representative Ruben Gallego of Arizona, who has sharply criticized Sinema for not supporting the voting rights legislation, has not ruled out launching a challenge against her.

Manchin and Sinema are also experiencing some external pressure as they resist efforts to change the filibuster to pass voting rights legislation. Emily’s List, the progressive group that backs female candidates who support abortion rights and has deep ties to Democrats, said it would withhold its endorsement from Sinema because of her stance on filibuster reform.

“Our mission can only be realized when everyone has the freedom to have their voice heard safely and freely at the ballot box,” Emily’s List’s president, Laphonza Butler, said in a statement released on Tuesday.

Naral Pro-Choice America, which supports abortion rights and is also influential in top Democratic circles, released its own statement suggesting it would no longer support or endorse Manchin or Sinema because of their stances on the legislation.

The voting rights legislation in question is the Freedom to Vote: John R Lewis Act, which civil rights activists say is vital to safeguarding American democracy as Republican-led states pass new restrictive voting laws. It would make election day a national holiday while ensuring access to early voting and mail-in ballots – both of which have become especially popular during the Covid-19 pandemic. The package also seeks to let the justice department intervene in states with a history of voter interference, among other changes.

- *Associated Press contributed to this report*
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- [Boris Johnson Zahawi denies government is launching policy push to save PM](#)
- [Analysis PM prepares a populist offensive to save his skin](#)
- [BBC What could replace the licence fee?](#)

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

BBC calls licence decision ‘disappointing’ after Nadine Dorries confirms two-year fee freeze – as it happened

[Culture secretary rebuked by Speaker for tweeting announcement on Sunday](#) as BBC says decision [will impact on programming](#). This live blog has now closed – [please follow the global coronavirus live blog for Covid updates](#)

- [No final decision made on BBC licence fee, says Nadine Dorries](#)
- [Ending licence fee ‘effectively end of BBC as we know it’, says Labour](#)
- [No 10 denies PM was warned in advance party on 20 May was mistake](#)
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[Andrew Sparrow](#)

[@AndrewSparrow](#)

Mon 17 Jan 2022 13.26 EST



Nadine Dorries has frozen the BBC licence fee for two years. Photograph: PRU/AFP/Getty Images

[Andrew Sparrow](#)

[@AndrewSparrow](#)

Mon 17 Jan 2022 13.26 EST

First published on Mon 17 Jan 2022 04.10 EST

Key events

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- 6 days ago [Labour says linking funding review to impartiality shows government acting like 'tinpot dictatorship'](#)
- 6 days ago [BBC describes licence fee freeze as 'disappointing' and says it will affect programming](#)
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- 6 days ago [Dorries hints she no clear alternative to licence fee in mind yet](#)
- 6 days ago [Nadine Dorries's statement to MPs on BBC licence fee](#)

Live feed

[6d ago 18:19](#)

Early evening summary

- Nadine Dorries, the culture secretary, has signalled the government does not have an alternative funding model for the BBC in mind as it commits to a review of the licence fee. (See [4.59pm.](#)) In a statement to MPs, she also hinted she may have gone further than intended when she said yesterday the licence fee was definitely being abandoned. Today she just said she could not see the review allowing it to continue. (See [5.23pm.](#)) The BBC has described the parallel announcement that the licence fee will be frozen for two years as “disappointing”. (See [5.17pm.](#))
- Dominic Cummings, the PM’s former chief adviser, says he is prepared to give evidence on oath proving Boris Johnson has been lying about the party held in Downing Street on 20 May 2020. (See [6.08pm.](#))
- [There is “massive anger” among grassroots Conservative party supporters over the Downing Street parties scandal, the head of a leading group has said as its survey found 40% thought Boris Johnson should resign.](#)

- Downing Street has said Boris and Carrie Johnson followed Covid guidance when the prime minister was “commuting” from Chequers to No 10 during the first lockdown in 2020 – but declined to answer further questions, including whether the pair held social events.
- Nadhim Zahawi has denied the government is rushing out a series of policy ideas in an attempt to save Boris Johnson, arguing that the prime minister is safe in his job despite a string of Downing Street parties during lockdowns.
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Updated at 13.26 EST

6d ago 18:08

Cummings says he is willing to give evidence 'under oath' PM has lied about 20 May drinks party

Dominic Cummings, Boris Johnson's former chief adviser, was the first person to publicly reveal the fact that a drinks party took place at Downing Street on 20 May 2020. Boris Johnson attended and it was this that propelled partygate - already deeply damaging - into territory where it seems quite likely to be career-ending.

In an update this afternoon to a post on his Substack blog, Cummings says that he personally was one of the people who warned Johnson that the proposed party was a mistake. This is what he says, writing about 20 May 2020, which he says was a “pivotal day” at No 10 because big arguments were taking place about how it was run.

Amid discussion over the future of the cabinet secretary and PPS himself, which had been going on for days, I said to the PM something like: Martin's [Martin Reynolds, Boris Johnson's PPS] invited the building to a drinks party, this is what I'm talking about, you've got to grip this madhouse.

The PM waved it aside. I had told him repeatedly the PPS should be replaced, as had other competent officials who knew the whole structure needed a huge upgrade in personnel and management. 'He's MY guy, I don't want you replacing him with YOUR person.' (Yes, this says a lot.)

No 10 again denied this morning that Johnson did receive any warnings of this nature. (See [1.13pm](#).) Cummings says he and other witnesses would "swear under oath" Johnson is lying. He writes:

The events of 20 May alone, never mind the string of other events, mean the PM lied to parliament about parties.

Not only me but other eyewitnesses who discussed this at the time would swear under oath this is what happened.

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Updated at 13.10 EST

[6d ago](#)[17:45](#)

Sonia Khan, who worked as an adviser in Downing Street when David Cameron and Theresa May were in office, told the World at One today that there was a drinking culture in the building. She said drinks were often used as a means of thanking people for working long hours. She said:

Usually these drinking sessions are sandwiched between pieces of work, so it feels like a very, very routine thing.

Drinks could start at lunch time, they could start a little bit later in the day - different teams do things very differently - but the idea of mini fridges or having drinks underneath your table wasn't uncommon.

This prompted this tweet from **Dominic Cummings**, for whom no vendetta is too minor to keep pursuing.

If you're babbling about 'drinking culture' - which did not exist May 2020 & would anyway be irrelevant to the fact that *the [redacted] knew he was at a drinks party cos he was told it was a drinks party and it was actually a drinks party* - you're a useful idiot for the [redacted] spin doctors

— Dominic Cummings (@Dominic2306) [January 17, 2022](#)

Khan was sacked by Cummings, who had her escorted out of Downing Street by the police. [She subsequently received a payoff after claiming unfair dismissal](#)

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Updated at 12.47 EST

[6d ago 17:37](#)

Chris Bryant (Lab) says £159 a year is a lot of money to his constituents. But he accuses Dorries of “crocodile tears” over this. If she was really worried about the cost of living, the government would not be putting up national insurance, which will cost his constituents almost exactly the same amount, he says. He accuses the government of dismantling one of the great British treasures.

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[6d ago 17:26](#)

Catherine McKinnell (Lab) asks for an assurance that Dorries is not seeking to undermine a great British institution just to save the PM's skin. "I'm not," **Dorries** replies.

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6d ago **17:23**

Asked again about [her tweet yesterday](#), **Dorries** says when she posted the message on Instagram she said this was "likely to be" the last licence fee announcement, not that it would definitely be the last one (as her tweet said). She says she cannot see how it will continue.

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6d ago **17:19**

Dorries says she understands the importance of [BBC](#) World Service because she ran a school in Africa for a year, and used to listen to it then.

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6d ago **17:19**

Kevan Jones (Lab) asks if the cabinet signed off on this, or if it was announced in a rush.

Dorries says the cabinet has signed off on this. She says she is legally obliged to make the announcement as early as possible, to give the [BBC](#) time to prepare.

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Updated at 12.20 EST

[6d ago](#)[17:17](#)

BBC describes licence fee freeze as 'disappointing' and says it will affect programming

The [BBC](#) says the licence fee freeze is “disappointing” and will impact on programming. In a statement its chairman, **Richard Sharp**, and its director general, **Tim Davie**, said:

A freeze in the first two years of this settlement means the BBC will now have to absorb inflation.

That is disappointing - not just for licence fee payers, but also for the cultural industries who rely on the BBC for the important work they do across the UK.

The BBC’s income for UK services is already 30% lower in real terms than it was 10 years ago. We will set out the implications of the settlement later, before the end of the financial year, but it will necessitate tougher choices which will impact licence fee-payers.

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Updated at 12.21 EST

[6d ago](#)[17:13](#)

Valerie Vaz (Lab) asks Dorries if she agrees that 43p per day is value for money for the [BBC](#).

Dorries says, if working families cannot afford the licence fee, they would not agree. For some people it is difficult to pay, she says.

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6d ago 17:11

John Redwood (Con) says non-payment of the licence fee should be decriminalised.

Dorries says this is being kept under review. But she questions whether it is right for people to be made to pay the licence fee under threat of prosecution.

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6d ago 17:08

John Whittingdale (Con), the former culture secretary, says although more and more young people say they do not watch the [BBC](#), we will still need public service broadcasting. He says the debate about a future funding model should be about, not undermining it, but ensuring it can survive.

Dorries agrees that the question is not whether or not to have a BBC; it is how to fund it.

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6d ago 17:05

Here is the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport's [news release](#) about Dorries's announcement.

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Updated at 12.08 EST

[6d ago 17:03](#)

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Lab) says it was “reckless” of Dorries yesterday to say, in her tweet, the licence fee will definitely go when the government does not have an alternative model.

Dorries says the government has a lot of time to think about this.

In response to further questions on this, she says it is not for her to decide what the alternative model should be.

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[6d ago 16:59](#)

Dorries hints she no clear alternative to licence fee in mind yet

Damian Green (Con), the former first secretary of state, says the licence fee is something that “may not work in theory, but works really well in practice”. He asks if the government has a strong alternative model in mind. If it doesn’t, it should keep the licence fee for the next charter period (from 2028 to 2038).

Dorries says the government has six years to find one.

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Updated at 12.04 EST

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Boris Johnson

Zahawi denies government is launching policy push to save Boris Johnson

Education secretary says he believes prime minister is safe in his job despite ‘partygate’ revelations

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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Nadhim Zahawi. He rejected the idea that ministers had been attempting to deflect attention from Johnson. Photograph: Tayfun Salcı/Zuma/Rex/Shutterstock Photograph: Tayfun Salcı/ZUMA Press Wire/REX/Shutterstock

*Peter Walker Political correspondent
@peterwalker99*

Mon 17 Jan 2022 04.33 EST

Nadhim Zahawi has denied the government is rushing out a series of policy ideas in an attempt to save Boris Johnson, arguing that the prime minister is safe in his job despite a string of Downing Street parties during lockdowns.

“I think [Boris Johnson](#) has done the right thing to apologise,” the education secretary told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme, saying the prime minister should get credit for having correctly called “big, big decisions” in areas such as Brexit and vaccines.

Asked three times if Johnson was safe, Zahawi eventually agreed, saying: “Yes, he is, because he’s human and we make mistakes.”

He rejected the idea that ministers had been attempting to distract attention from Johnson’s political woes by briefing friendly newspapers on policies such as [involving the Royal Navy](#) in an attempt to stop small boat crossings in the Channel, and the likely [end to the BBC licence fee](#).

“I’m glad you recognise that all this stuff about the government bringing stuff in the weekend is not true, because we work through policies based on our manifesto commitment,” Zahawi told Today.

In an earlier interview with Times Radio, Zahawi rejected the wider idea that No 10 had launched a fightback to save Johnson’s job under titles such as [Operation Save Big Dog](#) or Operation Red Meat.

“Honestly, I’m the secretary of state for education, I’m a member of the cabinet,” he said. “I don’t recognise that language about red meat or big dogs. All I can say to you is the prime minister’s focused on dealing with the big issues.”

Questioned repeatedly on Today about whether the string of revelations about apparent social events in Downing Street during Covid restrictions meant Johnson had to change his approach or be ejected, Zahawi refused to agree, arguing it was not possible to determine if the prime minister had done anything wrong before the publication of a report by the senior civil servant Sue Gray.

“It’s right that the prime minister recognises the level of anger and, of course, the feeling of unfairness, which is why he was right to apologise,” Zahawi said. “I would say that, actually, the value of fairness matters to people. Yes of course they’re feeling angry, feeling upset. They can’t turn the clock back. What we do about it is the fairness argument. And I think it’s important that you don’t condemn a man before you’ve had the investigation.”

Asked how Johnson could persuade people he was serious about the issue, Zahawi said: “It begins with an apology, it begins with recognising that we need to get the evidence, and the investigation is going to be important. Because how do you change a culture if you don’t have the evidence?”

01:17

'I'm going to ask one last time': Zahawi repeatedly questioned on whether PM should resign – video

In an echo of Downing Street’s defence of Johnson over one of the most damning allegations, that he spent 25 minutes in the Downing Street garden as staff held a [“bring your own booze” party on 20 May 2020](#), Zahawi said the prime minister “implicitly” believed he had not broken any rules.

Asked why he had caveated his argument with “implicitly”, a word he had also used in earlier interviews, Zahawi said: “I’m repeating to you what I heard the prime minister say at the dipatch box in the chamber for his statement [last Wednesday]. He thought he was going outside for 25 minutes to motivate his workforce, and come back in and continue to work, and he apologised for it.”

He added: “If somebody thought that they were going outside to motivate their staff – that is what he thought, that he wasn’t actually breaking the rules.”

Boris Johnson

Boris Johnson prepares a populist offensive to save his skin

Analysis: scandal-tainted PM hopes barrage of right-wing policy plans will provide cover for his greatest escape yet



Boris Johnson hopes to redirect political attention from what ministers are calling the ‘purgatory’ of lockdown party stories. Photograph: Henry Nicholls/Reuters

[Heather Stewart](#)

Sun 16 Jan 2022 12.32 EST

Boris Johnson’s plan for salvaging his premiership has become increasingly clear: acknowledge a “culture” of drinking in Downing Street – but not that it stemmed from the top – and then change the subject, by announcing a slew of populist policies.

Nadine Dorries' announcement that [the BBC licence fee will be frozen, then abolished](#), had been in the works for a while; but the timing was highly convenient, giving Tory right-wingers something to cheer as Johnson's future hangs in the balance.

Other plans expected in the coming days, according to the Sunday Times, include sending in the military to help tackle cross-Channel migration; training schemes for universal credit claimants – whose benefit was recently cut by £20 a week – and the much-delayed “levelling up” white paper.

The lifting of Covid restrictions on 26 January, [if the Omicron wave continues to abate](#), would also give Johnson a platform to deploy his customary boosterism.

The hope appears to be to convince the public – and Johnson's own mutinous backbenchers – that he is ready to [draw a line under all the scandal](#), and get on with government.

What is unclear is whether Tory MPs are willing to give him the chance. Having spent the weekend hearing from constituents and grassroots members, they are unlikely to return to Westminster on Monday in a more forgiving mood.

Former minister Tim Loughton became the latest MP to call for Johnson to resign this weekend, saying the prime minister had resorted to “obfuscation, prevarication and evasion” over partygate.

He is one of six MPs who have publicly said they are unwilling to wait for Sue Gray's investigation to be published and want Johnson to go, but many more are hanging their decision about his future on her findings.

Gray is expected to censure senior officials for their role – including, presumably, Martin “bring your own booze” Reynolds. But where Johnson's actions are concerned, she is expected to stick to setting out the facts as she understands them.

It may be impossible for her to judge whether he really “believed implicitly” the 20 May garden party was a “work event”, for example – leaving the

ultimate judgment about his culpability up to politicians to make.

And the emergence of more gatherings for her to investigate is likely to delay the report beyond this week, extending a period ministers were already calling “purgatory”.

The outlines of the prime minister’s likely response to Gray’s findings, however, were already evident from Conservative party chair Oliver Dowden’s broadcast round on Sunday morning.

He said Johnson felt a “sincere sense of regret” over what had happened – and suggested the prime minister was now the man to clean up “the underlying culture” in No 10.

Johnson’s colleagues will have to decide whether the public will think that a remotely plausible idea – or whether he is irrevocably tainted in voters’ minds by the drip, drip of stories about lockdown-busting social events.

They won’t have been reassured by the latest [Opinium poll for the Observer](#), which showed his popularity ratings lower than Theresa May’s.

Tory MPs also fear that more revelations are to come as they steel themselves to hit the campaign trail for May’s local elections. In particular, new facts could yet emerge that destroy Johnson’s claim to have attended just a single party – and that accidentally.

Meanwhile, the problem with his plans for a flurry of rightwing announcements to tempt true-blue backbenchers is that his main rivals, Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak, are if anything more rightwing – but unburdened by the taint of scandal.

And the backdrop for a new year relaunch is hardly auspicious, with a national insurance rise coming in April to coincide with rocketing energy bills for consumers.

Johnson is a great political survivor, and some Conservative veterans were insisting this weekend he could still be in Downing Street by the autumn; but his escape route from the deep predicament he finds himself in now looks very narrow indeed.

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BBC licence fee

What could replace the BBC licence fee?

Analysis: Latest Tory attack on broadcaster means deep cuts as well as hunt for alternative funding model



The placard outside BBC Broadcasting House in central London. The government has announced it intends to abolish the TV licence fee.
Photograph: Leon Neal/Getty Images

[Jim Waterson](#) Media editor

[@jimwaterson](#)

Sun 16 Jan 2022 12.02 EST

Nadine Dorries' announcement of major changes to the BBC's funding model is just the latest attack on the broadcaster by Conservative ministers over the past 12 years. There have been [repeated attempts to decriminalise non-payment of the licence fee](#), [enormous real-terms funding cuts](#) and the

decision to [make the BBC take the blame](#) for abolishing free licences for over-75s.

In the short term, the more damaging news for the [BBC](#) is the government's intention to freeze the cost of the licence fee for two years. This dooms the broadcaster to another round of deep cuts to its output that will weaken its offering to the UK and the world.

In the long term, the bigger issue is the government wants to abolish the BBC's existing funding model when the broadcaster's royal charter expires in 2027.

Households with a television used to receive live broadcasts (or watch iPlayer) are charged £159 for a licence, raising £3.2bn a year for the BBC and the Welsh channel S4C. Yet there are hundreds of thousands of prosecutions a year for non-payment of the licence fee – [disproportionately affecting women](#) who are at home when inspectors call. Also the number of households that pay the fee is declining.

Yet with countries around the world phasing out their television licence fees, the writing has been on the wall for the British version for some time – even if the [exact timing and format of its replacement is unclear](#).

Here are some of the alternative funding models:

Charge a levy on every broadband connection

The existing television licence is levied on the device traditionally used to receive most BBC content. A more modern equivalent would be a [levy on every broadband connection](#) in the UK used to fund public service media. This could be relatively easy to enforce, with the money collecting through existing broadband providers and has the benefit of being a near-universal. But adding £13 a month to the cost of a broadband connection could make internet access prohibitively expensive for some households.

Introduce an annual grant from the government

Rather than have an entire bureaucracy dedicated to collecting the licence fee, why not simply have the government fund the BBC directly? This model has been used to fund Australia's ABC for most of its existence, although it also leaves the broadcast [at the mercy of the government of the day](#). There would also be questions about how to enshrine the BBC's editorial independence if the broadcaster's funding was decided alongside other spending commitments in the chancellor's budget.

Allow the BBC to carry advertising

The BBC already takes advertising on its services outside the UK, so why not in Britain? Other national broadcasters around the world carry adverts, as do British public service broadcasters such as ITV and Channel 4. Yet it is unlikely advertising revenue would be enough to sustain the BBC's current range of services and it would inevitably lead to a focus on programmes that bring in viewers as well as the curtailment of some bits of output that are highly valued by niche audiences.

Charge a special tax on income to fund public service media

This model has gained popularity in Scandinavian countries that have abolished their licence fees. Sweden chose this approach in 2019, abolishing the 2,400 krona (£194) licence fee and replacing it with a tax on all working adults, charged at 1% of income up to a maximum of 1,300 krona a person. This money is then paid into a dedicated funding pot for public service media, which helps reduce the risk of government interference. A British equivalent would mean a new tax appearing on payslips next to income tax and national insurance contributions – something that could be politically challenging.

Turn the BBC into a subscription service

This is the rallying cry of many Conservative MPs who see the enormous popularity of Netflix and wonder why the BBC could not adopt the same model. The biggest challenge is technical. While Netflix offers a single

product – an app and website that are easily password-protected – the vast majority of BBC content is still consumed through free-to-air television and radio broadcasts that are impossible to put behind a paywall. A subscription model would inevitably kill the universal free-to-access BBC as we know it.

Privatise the commercially viable parts and keep a much smaller public service news organisation

Privatise BBC iPlayer, stick it behind a paywall and charge a subscription fee for high-end dramas and David Attenborough programmes. Sell off the corporation's radio stations and allow them to chase audiences to please advertisers. And then provide a much-reduced package of central government funding to cover the BBC's unprofitable news output on a free-to-air basis.

Abolish the BBC altogether

With news increasingly distributed through Facebook-owned social media platforms, Piers Morgan about to launch television channel talkTV on behalf of Rupert Murdoch and the growing popularity of private sector radio stations such as LBC, do we really need the BBC? The government could simply follow the US model, let the free market take control and allow private companies to shape the nation's media consumption.

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2022.01.17 - Spotlight

- ['How lucky was I?' The Good Fight's Christine Baranski on Sondheim, stardom and snobbery](#)
- ['Not knowing is heartbreaking' Sleepless nights among Tongan diaspora after volcano cuts off country](#)
- [A new start after 60 I took up ballet at 62 – and it felt like coming home](#)
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Interview

‘How lucky was I?’: The Good Fight’s Christine Baranski on Sondheim, stardom and snobbery

[Hadley Freeman](#)



‘I’m living my image of the kind of woman I wanted to be’ ... Baranski.
Photograph: Al Seib/Contour RA

As she prepares to star in the new ‘American Downton’, the 69-year-old actor talks about her blue-collar roots, her friendship with Stephen Sondheim — and the pleasures of late-career fame



[@HadleyFreeman](#)

Mon 17 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

Christine Baranski is an “Oh, her ...” kind of actor. Casual observers might not recognise her name, but they always, instantly, know her face. “Oh, her,” they say, when they see her starring in [The Good Fight](#), the successful spin-off to the TV drama [The Good Wife](#), in which she also co-starred. “It’s the woman who played Leonard’s mother on [The Big Bang Theory](#) and Meryl Streep’s high-kicking friend in *Mamma Mia!*” “Oh, her,” they say, when they spot her in comedy classic *Bowfinger*. “It’s the woman who brings sass and class to whatever she’s in.” Exactly. That’s her.

With her high-toned enunciation and elegant bearing that verges on regal, [Baranski seems like the human embodiment of Manhattan’s Upper East Side circa 1955](#), and when we connect via video call she initially fulfils all

preconceptions. “Now, tell me about *London*, how are things *going* there? Oh, I’m so *sorry*,” she says.

Her emphases and enunciations – “what” is “w-hat”, “gorgeous” is “gor-geous” – make her a little reminiscent of theatrical characters from bygone eras, such as those in the musical *Mame* and the women in *Follies*. Baranski has appeared in both of those shows because, alongside her TV and movie career, she is a theatrical force, as at home in Broadway musicals as she is in TV dramas, and she has two Tony awards alongside her Emmy and SAG awards to prove it.

Today, she is sitting in her elegant apartment on, yes, Manhattan’s Upper East Side, decorated with expensive looking wall-hangings and chic patterned curtains. The 69-year-old is looking pretty expensive and chic herself, with a trim dancer’s figure that suggests she’s not really one for big lunches.



Baranski as Diane Lockhart in *The Good Fight*. Photograph: CBS Photo Archive/CBS/Getty Images

But she’s far warmer than her glossy exterior suggests, cooing delightedly when I apologise for the noise of my children (“Oh, your babies!”) and

fretting that she won't give me good enough copy. In fact, she is a far cry from the well-born lady she looks like – and invariably plays.

"Even when I was studying acting at the Juilliard, I was often cast as the sophisticated best friend with the witty line, and it's so funny to me because I do not come from a wealthy background. I'm from a blue-collar neighbourhood in Buffalo, New York, and if you're writing for the Guardian, you could say that's like Manchester," she adds helpfully (although I reckon Newcastle is a closer English equivalent to Buffalo).

Baranski grew up "a latchkey kid", the daughter of a working mother who struggled to pay the bills after Baranski's beloved father died when she was only eight. Her grandparents were Polish immigrants and she grew up in a Polish-American community. I tell her that I, too, am [third-generation Polish](#) and no one in my family sounds like her.

"You know, I remember even in high school people would say: 'You don't sound like us, you sound English.' I think I decided early on that I wanted to speak a certain way, and it was a projection on my part. I wanted to go to New York and be a theatre actress, and I'm living my image of the kind of woman I wanted to be," she says.

Was she rebelling against her background? "It wasn't a rebellion, but by junior high [12 to 13 years old] it was clear to me I wasn't going to stay in Buffalo. I was on fire once I realised how empowered I felt on the stage."

When she was a teenager, Baranski's idol was Maggie Smith. Now, pleasingly, Baranski is playing what can be described as "the Maggie Smith role" in Julian Fellowes' new HBO series, *The Gilded Age*, which can equally be called "American Downton". It is set in New York, and in the 1880s as opposed to the war years. But otherwise, it's got all of Fellowes' hallmarks: bossy mistresses of the house, grumbling servants and fascinatingly bizarre snobberies.



As Agnes van Rijn in *The Gilded Age*. Photograph: Alison Cohen Rosa/HBO

Here, the biggest snob is Baranski's character, Agnes van Rijn. She refuses to let her young niece (Louisa Jacobson), who has just arrived in New York, mix with any of the "new people", ie those whose ancestors arrived more recently than 200 years ago. Baranski fits the role like a lady's hand in a satin glove. "Does anyone write a snob better than Julian Fellowes? That class of people who don't even know what a weekend is," she says, with relish.

Fellowes had Baranski in mind when he created the part because years earlier, when they'd met at an industry event, she had told him she was a fan of Downton. She also mentioned that her husband's grandmother was the author and heiress Elizabeth Drexel Lehr, "and Julian knew the Drexels well", which is more than I do (quick research reveals they were an old American banking family).

Baranski had never been in a period film or TV show, but has done plenty of restoration comedies and Shakespeare on stage, "so I know my way around a corset and wig". When Fellowes finally finished writing *The Gilded Age* and came knocking, Baranski had only three words for him: "Yes, yes, yes."

As well as *The Gilded Age*, Baranski is the star of *The Good Fight*, which will soon release its sixth season. Between *The Good Wife* and *The Good Fight*, she has played the [wildly adored](#) liberal lawyer Diane Lockhart for 13 years. The danger of doing anything for so long, she says, “is you run out of colour, but we react to current events. We could be on until the ice caps melt.”

As careers go, it’s not bad for a woman on the verge of 70, who didn’t even start acting on TV until her early 40s. “I can look back and think: ‘How often did I not get a role because I wasn’t pretty enough?’ But look at the position I’m in now – two great roles, [my characters are] both No 1 on the call sheet. I’m like: ‘Damn! Late 60s and here I am.’ There is progress!” she laughs.



With Julie Walters and Meryl Streep in *Mamma Mia!*, 2008. Photograph: Universal Pictures/Allstar

There is progress, but there is also Baranski, who has always felt more like an exception than a rule. After graduating from the Juilliard, she won her first Tony in her second Broadway play, when she played Charlotte in Tom Stoppard’s *The Real Thing*, in which Cynthia Nixon – who now plays her sister in *The Gilded Age* – played her daughter. [Stephen Sondheim](#) spotted

her soon after, and she not only worked on most of his musicals, from Company to Assassins, but she also became his friend.

“I was playing Mrs Lovett in Sweeney Todd in Washington, and Steve came to see our first run-through, which happened to be on my 50th birthday. Afterwards, I went out to a fish restaurant with my cast. Then, suddenly, Steve turned up! He said: ‘I never miss a 50th, and he drank glass after glass of wine, talking about what it was like to be part of West Side Story. I thought: ‘Who gets a birthday like this?’” she says.

Although Baranski has an apartment in New York for work, her main home is in Connecticut, and it sounds as if she lives in a particularly exciting corner of the state, given that her neighbours include Meryl Streep, Patti LuPone and – until his death in November – Sondheim. “After Meryl and I did Into the Woods,” she says, referring to the 2014 film adaptation of Sondheim’s musical, in which she played Cinderella’s wicked stepmother and Streep starred as the witch, “I’d say to her: ‘Let’s get together with Steve!’ So I had the pleasure of some long dinners with him.”



With Cybill Shepherd in Cybill, 1995. Photograph: CBS Photo Archive/CBS/Getty Images

Baranski met her husband, Matthew Cowles, who was also an actor, when they appeared in Ibsen's Ghosts in 1982. He offered her a lift home on his motorcycle "and the rest is history", she says. They moved to Connecticut because he inherited his family home there, but raising their two daughters on theatre actors' wages wasn't easy. So, when Baranski was offered a role on Cybill in the mid 90s, the money was tempting, but the prospect of commuting to LA every week was not. The money won. "It was a very anguished decision. My girls were five and eight, I think, and Matthew stayed home with them. But when I read the script by Chuck Lorre, this guy I'd never heard of, and saw how he'd written the character Maryanne, with the dry wit and martinis, I thought: 'Oh, I know how to play this.'"

She did. The show was supposed to be a star vehicle for Cybill Shepherd, but Baranski instantly stole it, and at the end of the first season she won an Emmy. Shepherd did not. Lorre has since [claimed](#) that Shepherd was jealous of Baranski. Shepherd put it differently in her memoir, Cybill Disobedience, insisting that the reason she and Baranski didn't get on was because Baranski was unfriendly. Alicia Witt, who played Shepherd's daughter, [later said](#) that Shepherd "kinda said some pretty mean things about pretty much everyone she worked with, as I understand". The show ended after four seasons.

"I have never publicly gone into that," says Baranski when I ask about Shepherd. "Yes, there were issues, but I prefer to take the higher ground and say, look, that show gave me so much. I was fine working with her. Politically, it did get difficult, but I wish her well." And clearly she got on with Lorre better than Shepherd did, given that he later put her in his world-dominating sitcom, The Big Bang Theory.

Even before Cybill ended, Baranski was getting offers of roles in films. One of the first she accepted was in the American remake of the French comedy classic, La Cage aux Folles, which was re-titled The Birdcage and directed by Mike Nichols, playing Robin Williams' sort-of ex. Did she and Williams stay friends afterwards?



With Robin Williams in *The Birdcage*. Photograph: Frank Trapper/Corbis/Getty Images

“Not friends exactly – he was already a huge star and I lived back east. But he did give me a beautiful book at the end of shooting, about [the theatre actor] Katharine Cornell, who was also from Buffalo. Anyone who knew him would say he had the most extraordinary beauty, a kind of warmth and sweetness …” she trails off fondly.

In *The Birdcage*, she has an especially memorable scene in which she – in the world’s tiniest miniskirt – and Williams [dance](#), and I tell her it’s astonishing how she looks basically the same in that as she does in her [dance scene](#) in *Mamma Mia!*, despite the two decades between the two films.

“I find it a professional obligation to stay in shape. If we’re talking girl talk, I do pilates, because it keeps me toned and strong. As an actor, you have to protect your instrument, so I wouldn’t smoke now because it affects the voice. You have to be able to do whatever they need you to do, even after 14 hours of work,” she says.

Baranski is, to use that very old-fashioned theatrical term, a trouper. But given that we’re talking girl talk, I say, was it ever hard for her husband that

she was so much more successful than him? She considers her words carefully before answering.



With her husband Matthew Cowles, 2009. Photograph: Ben Hider/Getty Images

“All successful women know this: you pay a price for being the person who gets more wattage. I remember once, on the red carpet, a photographer actually shouted at him: ‘Get out of the way, you’re standing in her light.’ Matthew was so gracious, saying: ‘Of course, of course.’ But I just cringed inside, it was my Judy Garland moment,” she says, referring to the scene in 1954’s *A Star is Born*, when James Mason is shoved aside by photographers to get a photo of Garland.

“I think every marriage is supremely challenging, but my late husband was enormously supportive and very proud of me, and I think we managed it quite well. He was an exceptional person.” She starts to recall a time when he encouraged her to take a part when she was wavering, but suddenly breaks off, crying. Cowles died in 2014.

We turn to more cheerful subjects, namely, their daughters, Lily, who is an actor, and Isabel, “who has given me three beautiful grandsons. They. Could.

Not. Be. Cuter!" she says with emphasis, but the tears are still there. I apologise for bringing up painful memories.

"Oh no, I'm happy to know that the love I have for him is still so real. Too often, we look at our lives and we have regrets, and what makes good copy is people bad-mouthing each other and talking about how hard it was. But I'm not that person. I look at myself and I say: 'How lucky was I?'"

The Gilded Age will be available from 25 January on Sky Atlantic and streaming service NOW.

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‘Not knowing is heartbreaking’: sleepless nights among Tongan diaspora after contact with country cut off



Seini Taumoepeau, who lives in Sydney, has been unable to contact family members in a small town in Tonga’s Tongatapu division since the volcano

erupted on Saturday, triggering a tsunami. Photograph: Carly Earl/The Guardian

Communications blackout from undersea cable's apparent damage prompts some to turn to Facebook livestreams from outside Tonga for updates

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[Kate Lyons](#) in Sydney and [Tess McClure](#) in Auckland

Sun 16 Jan 2022 23.17 EST

Since the Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai volcano erupted on Saturday, Seini Taumoepeau has barely slept.

"I would say I've had four hours [of sleep each night] at the most," says Taumoepeau, a Tongan-Australian artist and activist based in Sydney.

Many in the Tongan diaspora community feel the same. Some, like Taumoepeau, have been tuning in to Facebook livestreams from Tongan churches, media outlets and community groups based in Australia, [New Zealand](#) and the US.

“The first night I tried to force myself to sleep, and I couldn’t, so I tuned in to an online broadcast … Basically it was just a vigil [from New Zealand]. They said: ‘We’re going to pray and play music and wait,’ so everyone was waiting online together through the night.”

On Saturday, the Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha‘apai undersea volcano, 65km north of Tonga’s capital of Nuku’alofa, erupted in what is thought to be the largest volcanic event in 30 years.

Satellite photographs showed a huge grey mushroom cloud billowing over the Pacific Ocean and the reverberations of the eruption could be heard in Vanuatu and Fiji. Some people reported mistaking the noise for thunder, or an eruption of their own – much nearer – volcano, and of feeling buildings shake for hours. The blast could be felt as far away as New Zealand, more than 2,000km away.



Seini Taumoepeau has spent hours contacting family members around the world trying to get information on her relatives in Tonga. Photograph: Carly Earl/The Guardian

Then came the tsunami. Waves of up to 1.2m washed ashore in Tonga, with videos showing water swirling around buildings, through city streets, crashing into a church full of worshippers.

Pictures emerged of the sky turned black in the middle of the day; ash and pebbles rained down on cars while long lines of traffic snaked through Nuku'alofa as people fled the city for higher ground.

And then there was silence. The all-important subsea communications cable, which is key to Tonga's communications network, was apparently damaged and almost all contact cut off.

01:29

Tongans in Australia fear the worst amid a void in communications after tsunami – video

For Australia's 15,000-strong Tongan-Australian community and the more than 80,000 people who identify as Tongan in New Zealand, the wait for news has been heartbreakingly long.

"We've heard nothing at all," Taumoepeau says in Sydney. Her main concern is her uncle, who is paralysed and in a wheelchair and lives in Nukunuku village on the main island of Tongatapu.

"He's an important person, so we're lucky in that regard," she says, referring to Tonga's strongly hierarchical social system. "He's chiefly, so there are people strongly obliged to help him, even in a tsunami. So that's very lucky – that's a cultural obligation."

Even so, people are worried.

"We weren't able to contact him." Normally, she hears from him daily. "I'm in contact with him every day via Messenger, not only because he's a disabled person but also because my parents have already passed, so he's my parent."



Steve Takaetali Finau and his wife Mele Finau, whose niece, Seini Taumoepeau, has been unable to reach him since the volcano eruption.
Photograph: /Seini Taumoepeau

Initial reports coming out of Tonga are hopeful. On Sunday Jacinda Ardern said no reports of casualties had been communicated to her as New Zealand stood by ready to assist its Pacific neighbour.

Jenny Salesa, the Labour party MP for Panmure-Ōtāhuhu, in Auckland, said she had been able to speak to a Methodist minister on the Tongan island grouping of Ha'apai on Sunday who reported there had been no casualties on Ha'apai's main island.

When she shared that news on Twitter, it was greeted with emotional replies from people with family in Ha'apai, who have been waiting, desperate for news.

Salesa told the Guardian communication and internet lines were still down with the other islands.

"Just not knowing is actually really heartbreaking for a lot of our families. It's good news from Ha'apai that at least the main island has no casualties," she said. "But we're still waiting to see the effect of the tsunami on those

coastal areas and the main island.

“There are thousands of people ... that live here and they are still waiting to hear whether their own family members are all right. We’re waiting very patiently and hoping – everything crossed – that not too many lives have been lost or washed out to sea.”

Salesa said that from Ha’apai, there were reports of thick ash covering the ground, and concerns that drinking water would be contaminated.



Tsunami flooding strikes Tonga after the eruption. Photograph: /Dr Faka’iloatonga Taumoefolau

Taumoepeau said that without news from people on the ground in Tonga, diasporic Tongans have become the mouthpiece of the crisis, and have had the responsibility of keeping the disaster front of mind for international media, and keeping people anxious for news informed.

“I found out and got to work and basically I haven’t stopped since then,” she said. “Given that there’s no communication from the country, the onus is on Tongans in countries where we have access to communication ... Some individuals in communities have become news outlets. My Facebook page became the news outlet.”

But Taumoepeau knows that the real work – of rebuilding, recovery and supporting family members – is still to come.

“I say that I’ve been working non-stop, but really I’m spinning my wheels in my house in Sydney, on my social media feed. None of my plans with any of the Tongans I’m talking to has any effect on anything on the ground. That’s where the frustration is: the futile nature of all this energy being expended.”

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[A new start after 60Ballet](#)

A new start after 60: ‘I took up ballet at 62 – and it transformed my life’



‘Ballet is all the therapy I’ll ever need’ ... Tina Leverton (*second right*) at her weekly class. Photograph: Francesca Jones/The Guardian

As a child, Tina Leverton dreamed of being a ballet dancer, but her parents couldn’t afford the lessons. Learning to dance decades later has been joyful

– it feels like coming home, she says

[Paula Cocozza](#)

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Mon 17 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

Tina Leverton was 62 when she bought her first pair of ballet shoes. She says slipping her feet into the soft leather was very emotional. “I felt utterly transported. I took a photo of them and sent it to my daughter. I said: ‘I’ve waited a long time for these.’”

A few weeks earlier, Leverton had taken the first ballet class of her life, after an advert in a freesheet caught her eye. It showed older women at the barre. “It really evoked a strong memory from when I was a child. I thought: ‘Let’s go for it.’” The class was near Leverton’s home in Mumbles, on the Gower peninsula in south Wales. “As I came in the door, I twirled around,” she says. “Big smile on my face. From the minute I started, it was wonderful. It felt like coming home.”

Leverton had longed to dance as a child. From the age of four, she repeatedly drew pointe shoes, although she has no idea where she saw them or how she learned their “beautiful shape”. If an adult asked what she wanted to be, she always answered: “Ballet dancer.” When she was nine or so, she accompanied a friend to classes. The friend danced. Leverton watched, “all the time imagining I was dancing with her”.

Leverton’s parents were first-generation immigrants, born in India before partition. Her father was a train driver on the underground in London; her mother held two cleaning jobs and worked in a cafe near the family home in the north of the city. “We were poorer than other people, but it never bothered me,” Leverton says – not even when her parents told her they couldn’t afford ballet. “They were so busy trying to survive.” Nonetheless, she harboured dreams of being a ballerina. “But they were just that: dreams.”



‘It’s come at just the right age for me.’ Photograph: Francesca Jones/The Guardian

Although her parents felt shame – at the shortage of money, at being immigrants – it didn’t pass on to her. “I guess I’ve just got a really lucky disposition. I’m generally quite contented. My mother used to say: ‘If anyone asks, tell them you’re Spanish or Portuguese.’ It’s only when I met my current husband, who’s a psychotherapist, that we explored that together. It was very emancipating to say to people: ‘Actually, I’m from Pakistani heritage.’”

Leverton went to art school, then veered towards customer service. Eventually, she stopped drawing. Then, when her daughter was three, Leverton took her to ballet. “She loved it. And I loved it. I was living vicariously through her.” She sees now that her love of ballet “has been lying dormant. It’s come to the forefront at just the right age for me.”

Had she known as a child that dancers with low arches and “poor turn-out from the hip” rarely excel, she “would have been crushed”. Instead, she has watched herself grow.

At first, a grand plié – lowering to the floor with bent knees – was out of the question. “I’d bend down and couldn’t get up again,” Leverton says,

laughing. It has taken three months to master the pirouette, while leaping and landing on one foot presented “a psychological barrier”. Being overweight, Leverton feared her ankles wouldn’t take it. “But they can,” she says.

“I love the struggle, the challenge, learning something new. When I get it, I feel absolutely elated,” she says. “People in their 60s have a lot of self-limiting beliefs: ‘I can’t do it,’ ‘I’m not good enough.’ And maybe they’re not good enough. But it doesn’t matter,” she says.

Ballet has been transformative. At a medical appointment a few months after Leverton’s first class, a nurse measured her at 163cm (5ft 4in) – half an inch taller than she had thought. She made the nurse double-check. She attributes the discrepancy to improved posture. Her muscle tone has improved, too, and her lower back pain has eased.

Dancing has brought new friends, a “sisterhood of older, more independent women”, working towards a team award with [the Royal Academy of Dance](#). And then, of course, there is “the feeling, the joyfulness. Ballet is all the therapy I’ll ever need.”

Leverton now plans to buy some pointe shoes: “I will get some – and I’ll draw them.”

[Tell us: has your life taken a new direction after the age of 60?](#)

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Interview

'I was expecting the government's help': British taxi driver stuck in Afghanistan

As told to [Amelia Gentleman](#)



Nasir is worried, he says, because his six-year-old son is a kidnap target.
Illustration: Guardian Design

Nasir is stranded in Jalalabad with his family and says he feels let down by the UK Foreign Office



[@ameliaagentleman](#)

Mon 17 Jan 2022 04.00 EST

Nasir, 43, is a British citizen, stuck in Jalalabad with his six-year-old son, also a British citizen, and his wife, who is an Afghan national.*

Quick Guide

Afghanistan: the left behind

Show



Afghanistan: the left behind

The crowds fighting to get into Kabul airport for evacuation [dispersed months ago](#), but while the scramble to leave Taliban-controlled Afghanistan became less visible when the last foreign troops left in August 2021, it got no less desperate.

Since then, reprisal killings have regularly been reported from across the country, including dozens detailed in a [recent report](#) from Human Rights Watch.

For those still in [Afghanistan](#), living in hiding or in permanent fear for months now, the dangers seem to be increasing as the options for escape narrow.

The UK government [has tightened rules](#) for its ARAP visa programme for former employees.

A second scheme offering a path to safety to a wider section of Afghans at risk was [heavily promoted](#) by the government but it only [began operating this month](#), and there are no details of how individuals can apply.

And while the [Taliban](#) have largely kept a promise to allow those with tickets and documents to fly out, Afghan passports are difficult to secure , visas are even more challenging, and flights are still prohibitively expensive.

This series features the stories of those who are trapped, in Afghanistan or in limbo as they search for safe haven, fearing for their lives from Taliban attacks or through hunger because they cannot work.

[**Emma Graham-Harrison**](#)

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

I moved to the UK as a refugee in 2000, because I was having a lot of problems with the Taliban, and I had been arrested, so I knew it was time to leave. I claimed asylum in Britain and have lived there for about 21 years. To begin with I worked as a motorcycle mechanic, and then as a pizza delivery driver, and later for Addison Lee and after that as an Uber driver. I've been supporting my mum and my sisters in [Afghanistan](#) for years, sending money back. I've been spending six months in the UK earning money and six months with my family in Afghanistan.

I got married in Jalalabad and we had a son in 2015. I've been trying to move my wife to London with me since then; I was here with them in the summer as the [Taliban advanced](#). I told the Foreign Office in July that I needed to leave urgently with my wife and son. They issued a visa waiver so my wife could travel, and we were able to book flights to London.

Unfortunately the Taliban arrived in Kabul before our departure date, and the flights were cancelled. I was told to travel [to Kabul airport](#) to get on a British evacuation flight but we couldn't get anywhere near the gates.

It's a dangerous time to be here as a British citizen. The [Taliban](#) came to my house and asked for me when I wasn't there; they arrested a close family member and he was imprisoned for a few days. I called the Foreign Office to tell them, but they said there's nothing we can do for you.

I feel scared and I was expecting the British government to help me. I went into hiding for a while. I've tried asking Foreign Office staff if my wife's visa waiver is still valid, but no one seems to know. They just say: you need to wait for the new Afghan resettlement programme to open and there are no clear details on when that will be.

My son should be in school, but at the moment we're not letting him out of the house because he is a kidnap target. People think British citizens are rich, and there's a real risk he could be kidnapped. I'm getting more and more into debt the longer I'm here because there's no work. So far I owe friends about \$10,000 (£7,300).

People are struggling; the only work is in shops or driving taxis. It is very depressing and it's also very dangerous. Everyday in Jalalabad there are reports of Isis attacking the Taliban. I've never seen a situation like this before.

It's breaking my heart that I haven't been helped by Britain to leave. I'm in touch with over 200 other British passport holders who are stuck like me, and we're messaging each other most days, trying to find out if there is any news.

About 15 have managed to get back to Britain, but they are the ones who didn't have wives or children here, they were just back visiting parents. I think of Britain as my own country, but I'm being treated like a second-class citizen. I feel very let down.

A UK government spokesperson said it could not comment on individual cases, but added: "The UK has supported over 3,000 people to leave Afghanistan since the end of Operation Pitting, including over 1,200 British nationals and eligible dependants. We continue to do all we can to help remaining British nationals and their eligible family members to safety. A fiance, partner, and children under the age of 18 are able to join a British national or settled person in the UK, provided they meet the requirements under the family rules."

*The name has been changed for this article.

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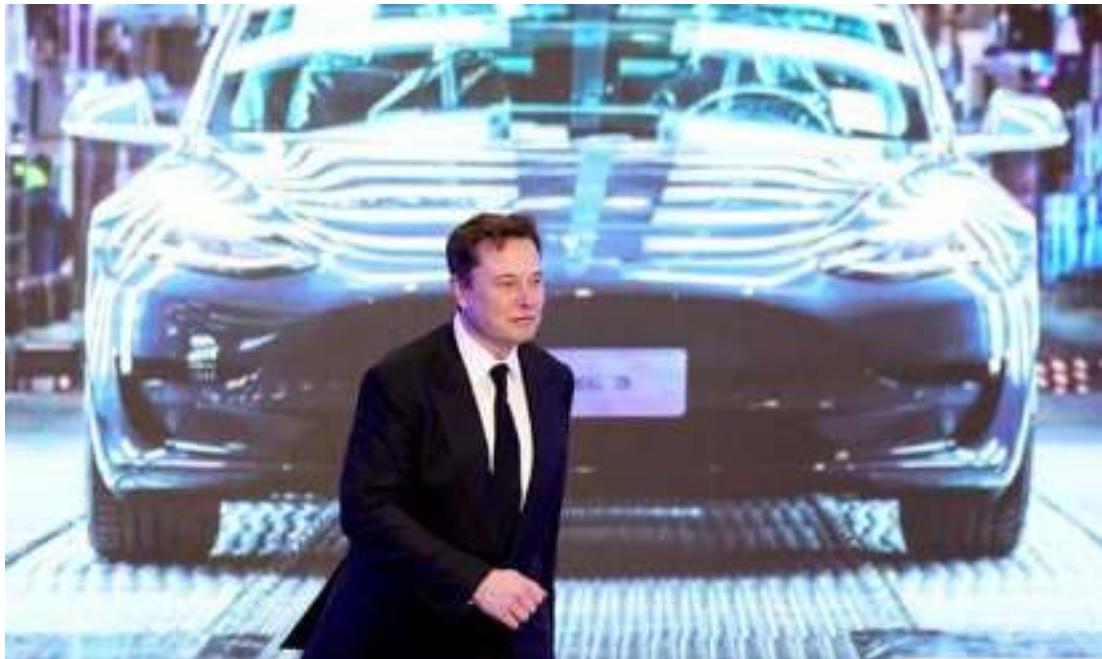
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Rich lists

World's 10 richest men see their wealth double during Covid pandemic

Oxfam calls for windfall tax as 99% of world population takes a pay cut while top 10 incomes grow by \$1bn a day

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Elon Musk, the founder of Tesla, became the world's richest man during the Covid crisis. Photograph: Aly Song/Reuters

[Larry Elliott](#)

Sun 16 Jan 2022 19.01 EST

The 10 richest men in the world have seen their global wealth double to \$1.5tn (£1.01tn) since the start of the global pandemic following a surge in

share and property prices that has widened the gap between rich and poor, according to a report from [Oxfam](#).

Urging governments to impose a one-off 99% wealth tax on Covid-19 windfall gains, the charity said World Bank figures showed 163 million more people had been driven below the poverty line while the [super-rich were benefiting](#) from the stimulus provided by governments around the world to mitigate the impact of the virus.

Oxfam projects that by 2030, 3.3 billion people will be living on less than \$5.50 per day.

The charity said the incomes of 99% of the world's population had reduced from March 2020 to October 2021, when Elon Musk, the founder of the electric car company Tesla, and the other nine richest billionaires had been collectively growing wealthier by \$1.3bn a day.

[net wealth](#)

Musk, according to figures taken from Forbes magazine's billionaires list, saw his wealth increase 10-fold to \$294bn in the first 20 months of the pandemic, catapulting him above Jeff Bezos, the founder of Amazon, to be the world's richest person.

During a period when technology stocks were soaring on Wall Street, Bezos's net wealth rose 67% to \$203bn, Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg's wealth doubled to \$118bn, while the wealth of the founder of Microsoft, Bill Gates, increased by 31% to \$137bn.

The charity urged governments to levy taxes on capital and wealth in a report – Inequality Kills – intended to coincide with the [now-postponed gathering](#) of the global elite at the World Economic Forum in Davos.

Oxfam said a one-off 99% windfall tax on the Covid wealth gains of the 10 richest men could pay for enough jabs to vaccinate the entire world and provide the resources to tackle climate change, provide universal healthcare and social protection, and address gender-based violence in 80 countries.

Even after a 99% levy, the top 10 billionaires would be \$8bn better off between them than they were before the pandemic, the charity said.

Danny Sriskandarajah, the Oxfam GB chief executive said: “The explosion in billionaires’ fortunes at a time when poverty is increasing lays bare the fundamental flaws in our economies. Even during a global crisis our unfair economic systems manage to deliver eye-watering windfalls for the wealthiest but fail to protect the poorest. It is an avoidable tragedy that every day people die because they lack essentials such as food and healthcare.

“Today’s generation of leaders can start to right these wrongs by implementing progressive taxes on capital and wealth and deploying that revenue to save lives and invest in our future. They should make sure that Covid-19’s long-term legacy is quality universal healthcare and social protection for all. Governments have an historic opportunity to back bold economic plans based on greater equality that change the deadly course we are on.”

Share prices fell sharply in the early weeks of the pandemic but were then boosted by the stimulus provided by central banks and finance ministries around the world. Cuts in interest rates to record low levels and massive increases in the supply of money through the bond-buying process known as quantitative easing sent stock markets soaring, with technology companies such as Amazon, Google, Apple and Facebook boosted by an increase in working from home and online shopping during the pandemic.

While people on more modest incomes have also seen their assets rise in value during the pandemic, Oxfam said the 10 richest men own six times as much wealth as the bottom 40% (3.1 billion people). It would take the 10 billionaires 414 years to spend their combined wealth at a rate of a million dollars each per day, the charity added.

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The threat posed by inequality was highlighted last week by David Malpass, the president of the World Bank, when he announced his organisation’s [latest forecasts](#) for the global economy.

“Developing countries are facing severe long-term problems related to lower vaccination rates, global macro policies and the debt burden,” he said.

“There’s a growing canyon between their growth rates and those in advanced economies. This inequality is even more dramatic in per capita and median income terms, with people in the developing world left behind and poverty rates rising. We’re seeing troubling reversals in poverty, nutrition and health”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/jan/17/world-10-richest-men-see-their-wealth-double-during-covid-pandemic>

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Credit Suisse

Credit Suisse boss António Horta-Osório resigns over Covid breaches

Former chief executive of Lloyds attended Wimbledon when he should have been in quarantine

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



António Horta-Osório attended the Wimbledon tournament on 10 and 11 July. Photograph: Stefan Wermuth/Reuters

*Jasper Jolly
@jjpjolly*

Mon 17 Jan 2022 08.14 EST

The chairman of Credit Suisse, António Horta-Osório, has resigned after the Swiss bank found that he had broken Covid-19 quarantine laws, [with attendance at the Wimbledon tennis tournament](#) thought to be among the allegations.

Horta-Osório, the former chief executive of Lloyds [Banking](#) Group, said in a statement that his “personal actions” had made it more difficult for him to represent the bank. He had also admitted breaking Swiss quarantine rules.

It means that Horta-Osório managed less than a year in the job, after he was brought in to steady the bank after a series of expensive failures, including its involvement in the [collapse of Archegos](#), an investment company, and Greensill Capital, a supply chain finance firm.

“I regret that a number of my personal actions have led to difficulties for the bank and compromised my ability to represent the bank internally and externally,” Horta-Osório said in a statement issued by [Credit Suisse](#) on Monday.

“I therefore believe that my resignation is in the interest of the bank and its stakeholders at this crucial time.”

The board held talks with Horta-Osório over the weekend informing him of the findings of its investigations into a series of alleged breaches of Covid-19 rules, according to a person briefed on the issue. It is understood that Horta-Osório decided his position would be untenable after being informed of the findings.

The alleged UK [breach emerged in December](#), after Reuters reported it had been discovered through a preliminary investigation by Credit Suisse’s legal team. The news came just weeks after Horta-Osório admitted that he had breached Covid rules in Switzerland, having flown out of the country within three days of arriving on 28 November despite being required to quarantine for 10 days.

The alleged Swiss breaches were first reported in the national press. Swiss newspapers also alleged that Horta-Osório had consulted a senior politician

to try to secure an exemption from rules, despite his apology later describing his error as “unintentional”.

Credit Suisse confirmed on Monday that Horta-Osório had resigned after an investigation commissioned by the board but did not give any details of the findings.

The bank has appointed Axel Lehmann, formerly a senior executive at its Swiss rival UBS and the Swiss insurer Zurich, to take over as chair of its board.

Lehmann said the bank had “set the right course with the new strategy” that Horta-Osório had overseen, and added it would carry it out in a “timely and disciplined manner, without distraction”.

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Horta-Osório attended the [Wimbledon](#) tennis tournament on 10 and 11 July 2021, having flown to the UK from Switzerland. At that time Switzerland was on the UK government’s amber list of countries that required arrivals to isolate for 10 days.

Breaching quarantine rules was a criminal offence, according to UK government guidance, which stated that police could issue offenders with fines starting at £1,000 and rising to £10,000 for repeat offences.

The Portuguese executive had been [brought in by Lloyds in 2010](#) as chief executive after the bank’s government bailout during the financial crisis. The government [sold its last remaining shares](#) in May 2017 under his watch, but Horta-Osório had already drawn criticism for large bonus payments.

Lloyds announced his departure in 2020, and Credit Suisse reported his appointment six months later. Horta-Osório was brought in to steady the ship after the bank admitted hiring private detectives to spy on executives. Just as he was due to start in the role, Credit Suisse’s prime broking arm was hit by a loss of £3.4bn related to Archegos, a previously little known hedge fund that borrowed from banks to make a series of disastrous bets. It was swiftly

followed by the collapse of Greensill Capital, a supply chain finance fund run by Australian banker Lex Greensill.

Horta-Osório had been tasked with overseeing a strategy relaunch, including a clearer focus on managing the risks posed by clients. He had also worked with the Credit Suisse chief executive, Thomas Gottstein, on replacing several senior managers.

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Coronavirus

‘Encouraging signs’ plan B Covid measures may soon be lifted in England

Minister hints that some or all restrictions may be removed after review on 26 January

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



Guidance to work from home and the widespread use of face coverings were imposed in early December to help tackle the spread of Omicron in England.
Photograph: Maureen McLean/Rex/Shutterstock

[Andrew Gregory](#) Health editor

Sun 16 Jan 2022 12.26 EST

Ministers are seeing “encouraging” signs that plan B coronavirus restrictions in England could be lifted in 10 days’ time, the co-chair of the Conservative party [Oliver Dowden](#) has said.

Current measures in England, including guidance to work from home and the widespread use of face coverings, were [imposed in early December](#) to help tackle the spread of Omicron. They are set to be reviewed on 26 January.

In the clearest hint yet that some or all of the measures will be removed on that date, Dowden, who also serves as minister without portfolio, said that while the government would review further data this week before making a decision, the “signs are encouraging”.

Covid cases continued to fall on Sunday, with a further 70,924 lab-confirmed Covid-19 cases recorded in the UK as of 9am. The figure represents a 50% fall from the 141,471 cases reported the previous Sunday, although the new figures do not include data from Scotland, because of an IT problem.

Dowden’s comments came after health and scientific experts expressed cautious optimism this weekend that the Covid situation was improving.

Dr Susan Hopkins, the UK [Health](#) Security Agency (UKHSA) chief medical adviser, said cases appeared to be “plateauing” in parts of the UK, and added that while cases were still relatively high, there had also been a slowdown in hospital admissions.

Prof Linda Bauld, a professor of public health at the University of Edinburgh and chief social policy adviser to the Scottish government, said Omicron cases in the UK appeared to be “stabilising”. Dr Chris Smith, a consultant virologist and lecturer at Cambridge University, said the latest data gave him “great cause for optimism”.

Meanwhile, the amount of time people with Covid-19 in [England](#) have to spend in self-isolation is to be cut to five full days from Monday.

The NHS will also roll out booster vaccines to children aged 12 to 15 who are most at risk from coronavirus from today. Clinically at-risk 12- to 15-year-olds or those who live with someone who is immunosuppressed are entitled to their booster three months after their two primary doses, with those who are severely immunosuppressed able to get their booster after a third primary dose.

Dowden told Sky News' Trevor Phillips on Sunday programme: "It has always been my hope that we would have the plan B restrictions for the shortest period possible. I'm under no doubt the kind of burdens this puts hospitality, wider business, schools and so on under, and I want us to get rid of those if we possibly can. The signs are encouraging but, clearly, we will wait to see the data ahead of that final decision."

Sir [Keir Starmer](#) said he hoped plan B restrictions could be lifted "as soon as possible". Speaking on the BBC's Sunday Morning programme, the Labour leader said: "I think the sooner we can lift the final restrictions, the better. I think that's what the whole country want. It's important that we're led by the science on this. We had access to the government scientific and medical advisers, and that's helped us form our views.

"I hope those restrictions can be lifted as soon as possible, but I want them to be lifted because the medical science says they should be lifted, not simply because the prime minister is in a real mess and he's desperately trying to get out of it.

"So, if it's the right thing to lift those restrictions, we will vote to lift those restrictions. But we'll be led by the science as we always have been, not by the politics of propping up a broken prime minister."

The shadow health secretary, Wes Streeting, said he could not be confident the government was not looking to lift plan B measures in an attempt to shore up Boris Johnson's leadership.

He told Trevor Phillips on Sunday: "If the prime minister or the health secretary from the Conservative party is coming forward saying, 'We're

going to remove plan B measures', I want to be absolutely confident they are making that decision in the national interest and not in the party interest, for party management reasons. I don't have total confidence about that."

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/16/encouraging-signs-plan-b-covid-measures-may-soon-be-lifted-in-england>

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[**TUC**](#)

TUC says more than 250,000 workers self-isolating ‘without decent sick pay’

Those on low or no sick pay face ‘impossible choice’ between hardship and potentially spreading virus



TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady said reducing the self-isolation period to five days will not fix the country's 'sick pay problem'. Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

PA Media

Sun 16 Jan 2022 19.00 EST

More than 250,000 workers were self-isolating last month [without decent sick pay](#) or any sick pay at all, a trade union study has suggested.

The Trades Union Congress (TUC) said reducing the self-isolation period to five days will not fix the country's "sick pay problem".

The union organisation said workers on low or no sick pay face the “impossible choice” of self-isolating and facing hardship, or putting food on the table but potentially spreading the virus.

The TUC said its research estimated that about 267,800 workers in private firms were self-isolating without decent sick pay or any sick pay at all in mid-December.

Almost 210,000 workers had to rely on statutory sick pay and 57,900 got no sick pay at all, said the report.

The analysis of official data estimates that 2.7% of the private-sector workforce – about 723,900 people – were off work with Covid-19 in the two weeks up to Boxing Day.

Unions have complained that the UK has the least generous statutory sick pay in Europe, worth £96.35 a week – about 15% of average earnings, compared with an Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development average of over 60% – and is only available to employees earning £120 a week or more, meaning 2 million workers, mostly women, do not qualify.

The TUC has also warned against employers cutting sick pay for unvaccinated staff, saying it will not encourage take-up.

The TUC general secretary, Frances O’Grady, said: “No one should be forced to choose between doing the right thing and self-isolating or putting food on the table.

“But that was exactly the choice facing a quarter of a million private-sector workers last month, as the Omicron variant raged across the country. This is a serious public health failure.

“It beggars belief that two years into the pandemic statutory sick pay is still too little to live on and 2 million workers can’t get any sick pay at all.

“Ministers can’t continue to turn a blind eye to this vital public health tool. We need decent sick pay – paid at the real living wage – available to

everyone. Unions have been encouraging everyone to get vaccinated and boosted, but cutting sick pay is no way to encourage workers to get the jab. It would be an own goal for public health, risking further transmission of the virus.”

A government spokesperson said: “It’s up to employers to determine their sick pay policies but we have been clear that employees who can’t work because they’re self-isolating may qualify for statutory sick pay.

“Many employers choose to pay more than the minimum level and there is also a comprehensive package of financial support in place for workers who need to self-isolate – including a £500 payment for those on the lowest incomes who have been contacted by NHS test and trace.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/jan/17/tuc-says-more-than-25000-workers-self-isolating-without-decent-sick-pay>.

2022.01.17 - Opinion

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OpinionBBC

The BBC must defend itself with all its might against this mortal threat

[Polly Toynbee](#)



The culture secretary's plan to freeze funding and axe the licence fee is pure political vandalism



Rose Ayling-Ellis and Giovanni Pernice during the final of Strictly Come Dancing 2021. Photograph: Guy Levy/BBC/PA

Sun 16 Jan 2022 12.57 EST

This Sunday, culture secretary [Nadine Dorries](#) tweeted out a death sentence for one of the most respected and popular broadcasters in the world. “This licence fee announcement will be the last,” she wrote, along with a link to the Mail on Sunday’s splash. “The days of the elderly being threatened with prison sentences and bailiffs knocking on doors, are over. Time now to discuss and debate new ways of funding, supporting and selling great British content.”

She was [doing her master’s bidding](#), as Boris Johnson thrashes around for anything to shift the narrative away from his own tumbling fortunes. Johnson demands “[red meat](#)” to mollify his MPs, who are in savage mood after a harrowing weekend in their constituencies listening to local people demanding his head on a plate. Axing the BBC is easy pickings, he thinks. But he may turn out to be as wrong about that as he is on just about everything else.

Thus spoke a Tory MP I talked to on Sunday, rolling their eyes in despair: “Here’s yet another national institution Boris wants to bring down with him,

slashing and burning as he goes.” But will they speak out? No, not a single Tory MP dares back the [BBC](#) publicly yet, even if what some say in private is another matter. Will this assault on the corporation be as popular as Johnson imagines? That depends partly now on the BBC’s boldness in reminding people of its national worth, including what good value everyone gets for 43p a day. With such a weak government so blatantly looking for scapegoats, the broadcaster has no need to be craven.

The Brexit promise was of “Global Britain”, yet Johnson is wrecking all the soft powers to make that possible. The BBC is trusted and admired for the honesty of its news across the world, especially in countries where reliable journalism may be hard to come by. Its best programmes are our best ambassadors. Britain’s influence has been deliberately vandalised by Conservatives who talk mindlessly of “patriotism” while demolishing all the vehicles of national pride abroad: foreign aid has been cut right back, while the British Council – almost as old as the BBC – is to [close 20 offices](#) around the world. British academic influence has been battered by the needless withdrawal from the Erasmus programme, and [scientists are locked out](#) of Horizon research funding. Now the BBC is mortally threatened – just as, in the words of the [University of Westminster’s Steven Barnett](#), its global reach is poised to “hit a weekly figure of half a billion people in its centenary year”.

The BBC is often considered the most respected media outlet in the world, with the World Service [reaching](#) 279 million people a week and the BBC News website the world’s most visited. What wouldn’t other countries give for such soft power? Instead, this global asset is tossed aside in the ideological mayhem created by this strange generation of nation-destroying Tories.

Mesmerised by the noise made by its detractors in the rightwing press, Johnson thinks the BBC is some preserve of the metropolitan liberal elite. But he may find that he is actually being deceived by his own echo chamber, increasingly detached from the world outside. The likes of Defund the BBC, the TaxPayers’ Alliance and the Institute of Economic Affairs attack this emblem of British culture, yet never identify their funders, so who knows who or what they represent – business or governments at home or abroad?

On Christmas Day, eight out of the 10 most watched programmes were on BBC One, with a [record 141m programmes streamed](#) on BBC iPlayer between 27 December and 3 January. The broadcaster is used by 90% of adults and 80% of 18- to 34-year-olds a week, [according](#) to the National Audit Office, making it by far the most used media brand in the UK. Leave it to the US streaming giants and there would be little British content, just a monoculture of globalised programming. Who would pay for its news, or children's programmes or the BBC Bitesize Education service that was used by [5.8 million children](#) during lockdown? How would we pay for the immeasurable riches of BBC radio or the regional stations that are one of the last bastions of local reporting?

When I speak to the shadow culture secretary, Lucy Powell, she jumps to defend the BBC Charter. The organisation has suffered cuts of [30% since 2010](#), and worse is to come following Dorries's announcement of a funding freeze. The entire edifice is demolished just "because they don't like its journalism", Powell says. The Mail on Sunday article noted that government figures were "incensed" by the corporation's reporting of Johnson's partygate scandals – but the most outspoken coverage has come from the Tory press itself. Powell, as a Manchester MP, points to the "levelling up" effect that the BBC has on the country, with its operations in Salford, Cardiff and around the country. No other broadcaster would put more than [half its jobs and producers](#) outside London

The licence fee is not the only viable way to pay for it: possible alternatives might be a household tax, as in [France and Germany](#); but it certainly shouldn't be looking for funds in the Treasury's pot, as it would then be left to compete in every budget with the NHS and defence. The principle that matters is that everyone pays in, so it costs far less for a panoply of programming right across the taste spectrum than could ever be funded by subscriptions from a few.

If the BBC, and its users, make a trenchant and confident case for what everyone would lose without it, it will survive and thrive. So the country has to ask itself what it values most: a great national broadcaster with such a wealth of programmes at the cheapest rate, or the political posturing of a lame-duck prime minister?

- Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist
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Opinion[Boris Johnson](#)

For the Tory party, Boris Johnson is a blip not a crisis

[Nesrine Malik](#)

Do not mistake changing polls and rising public anger with anything that will bring meaningful change to Britain



‘What is the alternative to this current Conservative contract?’ A journalist outside 10 Downing Street. Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

Mon 17 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

Any minute now, no? Surely this is it for Boris Johnson. The party is over. He has managed to get away with it before, but, as someone yelled with relish at [prime minister’s questions last week](#): “Not this time!”

The polls do indeed look bad for the first time in a long while, and a more troubling portent for the prime minister is how the “r” word – resignation –

has become thrown about not as a far-fetched demand but as a real possibility.

But little of this should be confused with a meaningful and long-term change in voters' attitudes towards Johnson and the Conservative party. That is an easy thing to miss amid the media circus of analysis and fortune-telling. The period after a large breaking political story involves such breathless commentary that it creates its own fables of fallen gods and a seething populace.

But look closer, and there appears to be much less pressure of the kind that we have been told has been "building" for days, weeks, months now, and which would be needed to topple Johnson. Listen to phone-in radio callers and you will hear people in despair at what they had to go through while No 10 was partying, but also many who, despite acknowledging that the optics are bad, do not think they amount to that much. "It's disgusting," a longtime Labour supporter who voted Tory for the first time in 2019 [told](#) the Guardian. "People aren't going to stick to the rules when they hear stuff like that." Then he added that he would probably still vote Conservative at the next general election.

To such voters, No 10's parties can be infuriating but, at the same time, irrelevant. In the list of offerings that Johnson and his party made to the country, his uprightness did not feature in the brochure: moral fibre isn't really what he and the government were elected for.

In that sense, Johnson is a contracted private service provider – as long as he delivers, then as clients, his supporters don't really care what he gets up to outside of the tasks he has been hired for. Those tasks are broadly Brexit and a shiny, prosperous country where jobs and funds have been cut or confiscated from those less deserving.

Those two tasks, at heart, are about contempt for communal rule of law, and limiting sharing resources with others. They are about making our own minds up regarding which laws we would like thank you very much, and creating two classes of people. Flouting rules, and having a party because a privileged few enjoy rights that others don't, seems not an aberration but

quite in keeping with the English exceptionalism values that resonated with so many in 2016 and 2019. It is no wonder Tory supporters are not storming the gates of Downing Street.

In 2019, in the middle of a government shutdown triggered by Donald Trump's demand for funding for a border wall with Mexico, one news report produced a chilling quote. Crystal Minton, an employee at a prison affected by the shutdown, [told a reporter](#) that she did not object to Trump's objective of building a border wall with Mexico, just the way he has gone about it. "I voted for him, and he's the one who's doing this," she said. "I thought he was going to do good things. He's not hurting the people he needs to be hurting."

To Trump voters, there was a transaction, a sort of informal constitution, that ran parallel to all the codified principles of government and protocols of office. You take care of us, and reserve cruelty and disdain for others. At its heart, this transactional relationship is the one that binds many Conservative voters to Johnson, and his post-Brexit party.

The terms of this transaction are not even subtle or dog-whistled. "Taking back control" and "getting Brexit done" became the sum total of the government's promises and manifestos. Over at the border, home secretary Priti Patel not only designs evermore cruel means of making life difficult for refugees, she performs that cruelty, [marketing](#) herself as a no-nonsense sheriff who is cleaning up this town.

The sub-clauses in the contract that flow from these two headline items all, one way or another, are about preserving the financial and cultural assets of Conservative voters. Maintaining an economy built on protecting private capital and property values, shifting the blame for low wages and unemployment on to immigrants rather than poor regulation of employers, and forging a synthetic supremacist national identity through relentless culture war posturing on colonial history, statues, flags and national anthems.

The strength of the deal is not just in its promises. Let's assume partying in lockdown and cronyism do "cut through". What is the alternative to this current Conservative contract? It might fray, but there is a vacuum in its

absence. On the right, there is no other vision, other than perhaps one that only firms up the brutal terms of this transaction under members of the cutthroat Free Enterprise Group of MPs, who have none of the supposedly softening geniality of Johnson. So MPs will express disgust in private and come out to bat for him in public. The rightwing press will yell at him for letting the side down like a pantomime villain, but never contemplate a true alternative that will get in the way of their lucrative pushing of myths about the woke and immigrants. They will simply scold him then tell him to get his act together.

Even Labour has embraced the terms of the agreement, rather than challenged it. Keir Starmer's criticism is laser-focused on Johnson's character, but otherwise writes his own contract to the country around a cold financial logic that still trades in the same promises of deserved reward for hard work, where people get the share of the pie they are entitled to, rather than promoting an economy where dignity and prospects are a shared endeavour.

And then there is Johnson's ubiquity – the way he seems to be everywhere in the country's political and cultural life – and the numbed resignation that it breeds. In the same way that one death is a tragedy and millions are a statistic, one Johnson or Tory lie is a crime but several is just how things are, is how the game is played. The impunity that got him this far normalises his behaviour, lends it an almost affectionate sense of familiarity, and results in even more indifference to what he does.

I make no prediction. Public sentiment is not a science, and things can change quickly. But I'll make a wager. As long as the Tories hurt only who they “need to be hurting”, no frivolity or recklessness will be terminal. That is an indictment of Johnson and the Tory party, of course – but even more so of those who, whether comfortable in wealth or struggling in scarcity, have come to the conclusion that for them to win, others must lose.

- Nesrine Malik is a Guardian columnist

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Guardian and Observer charity appeal 2021Climate crisis

Thank you for giving generously to the Guardian and Observer charity appeal

[Katharine Viner](#)



This weekend is the last chance to donate to our 2021 appeal supporting those on the frontline of the climate emergency

- [Guardian and Observer charity appeal 2021: the fight for climate justice](#)
- [Donate to our charity appeal here](#)



Thanks to your donations, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew will pursue its work to preserve biodiversity in Madagascar. Photograph: Matthew Williams-Ellis/Universal Images Group/Getty Images

Sat 15 Jan 2022 02.00 EST

In this year's [Guardian and Observer charity appeal](#) we have supported communities and individuals hit hardest by the climate emergency, people who have seen their lives upended and livelihoods lost by extreme weather. It's a topical issue, and not going away – and there is still time to donate: so far we have raised over £800,000.

Our appeal is shaped by [vivid stories of climate emergency](#): floods, drought and wildfires; from [reindeer killed by unnatural arctic heat](#) to chronic [crop failure by the shores of Lake Victoria](#). At its heart, however, lies inequality and poverty: the stark truth is the countries least responsible for global emissions have by far suffered worst from climate-induced disasters.

Thousands of readers have so far given generously to the appeal – and hundreds of you have emailed us to tell us why. You told us the climate crisis is the most urgent issue facing the planet, and that world's wealthiest economies – as many delegates at the recent Cop26 climate conference in

Glasgow made clear – have a moral responsibility to help the poorest cope with increasingly grave climate challenges.

Giving to the appeal felt for many readers like a way of registering support for wider change. As one said: “My donation is a tiny contribution to the efforts of all those working to preserve this precious world we live in.” It was also, many of you said, an acknowledgment that even a relatively small charitable investment in local expertise, resilience and innovation can deliver social dividends.

Other donors said they were inspired by reading about our partner charities. Some described the alarming impact of extreme weather on family and friends who lived on the front lines of climate change. Giving was for some donors a small but important protest against government climate policy, or aid budget cuts, or the excesses of western consumption and material exploitation.

Whatever your reasons, the money we raise together will be shared among our four fantastic charities: [Practical Action](#), [Global Greengrants Fund UK](#), [Royal Botanic Gardens Kew](#), and [Environmental Justice Foundation](#). All do brilliant work to help tackle the climate emergency, and offer important hope and optimism for the future.

Thanks to your generous donations, Practical Action will continue to invest in local communities with innovative [tools and adaptations](#), from agricultural technology to flood warning systems. Environmental Justice Foundation will continue to provide powerful testimony of the human impact of climate change and fight for the rights of climate refugees.

Global Greengrants Fund UK will distribute its share of donations to grassroots climate projects in the global south, reminding us that “[small farmers cool the planet](#)”. Royal Botanic Gardens Kew will pursue its vital work to [preserve biodiversity](#) and revitalise denuded land on the island of Madagascar.

As ever, I’d like to appeal to those of who have not yet given to consider doing so – and to thank the more than 7,000 of you who have already done

so. We appreciate your generosity, spirit, and your commitment to a fairer, greener and more just world. Your donations are inspiring – and they will make a difference.

The appeal is scheduled to close at midnight on Sunday. You can donate online [here](#).

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[Guardian and Observer charity appeal 2021](#)[Climate crisis](#)

Finding a future that is sustainable for everyone on our planet

Those worst affected by the climate crisis will show us the way forward – if they are given enough support to survive it first

- [Help us support those on the frontline of the climate emergency](#)
- [Donate to our charity appeal here](#)



Reindeer belonging to the Indigenous Sami people at their winter pasture in Sweden. Photograph: Jonathan Nackstrand/AFP/Getty Images

Sun 16 Jan 2022 01.00 EST

Over the past month, the *Guardian* and *Observer* [charity appeal 2021](#) has raised more than £830,000 for climate justice, partnering with [four brilliant](#)

charities. As the appeal prepares to close, the charities talk about their missions – and the future of the planet.

Steve Trent, chief executive, Environmental Justice Foundation

“We’ve almost lost our winters, the rainy season does not start on time and, when it does rain, we have too much. We want to stay here, but it will be difficult,” says Abdul Zuffer. We’re in his home in southern Bangladesh, which he had to rebuild after cyclone Aila. As a rice farmer, he tells us of the struggles to cope with the erratic weather and changing climate.

Half the world away, in Sweden, reindeer herder and Indigenous Sami leader Lars-Ánte Kuhmunen tells us an eerily similar story. “We have short winters now, and it rains [rather than snows]. It’s hard to predict.” As we film him checking the herd, he stops abruptly in the snow and pulls out a calf, frozen stiff. “This one was starving to death. That’s climate change.”

EJF works across the world to amplify the voices of those losing their livelihoods, communities and homes to the climate crisis. Alongside their powerful testimony, we use groundbreaking reports and strategic advocacy to call on leaders for an urgent, society-wide transition to zero carbon and a robust international agreement protecting the rights of climate refugees.

We meet with heads of state and decision-makers across the globe, and our films and photography exhibitions have reached hundreds of thousands of people. We also advance the solutions: training and supporting grassroots activists, and working with policymakers. We need to lay out a clear roadmap to a just, sustainable future for people and planet.

Sarah Roberts, chief executive, Practical Action

A key lesson of tackling environmental catastrophe is that the people worst affected are already leading the way in adapting their lives to their new climate reality. They just need the right tools to enable them to thrive and not just survive. This is at the heart of Practical Action’s work.

Our support has [helped farmers in Kenya](#) develop resilient and innovative agricultural approaches in the face of erratic weather patterns and farmers in Bangladesh [adapt to catastrophic cyclones](#) and flooding.

Achieving a global economy that has nature, people and planet at its heart has always driven us and aligns with the ethos of our founder, the visionary economist EF Schumacher. Other examples include our work in [Peru with coffee farmers](#), in [Rwanda with Yogi Tea](#), and in [Malawi with female farmers](#).

After the [Cop26](#) climate talks in Glasgow, this year is more important than ever in terms of ensuring financial commitments are met and inequality challenged.

A better world is possible, but no individual or institution can do it alone. Only by working together can we make that happen.

Eva Rehse, executive director, Global Greengrants Fund UK

The people most affected by the climate crisis are also the least responsible for it. Smallholders, fishing communities and Indigenous peoples across the world rely on natural resources and ecosystems that are being disrupted and destroyed by global heating at a terrifying rate. They are disproportionately likely to live in the “sacrifice zones” of fossil-fuel extraction, and to be affected by extreme weather events such as wildfires, flooding, cyclones and drought.

But these same individuals and communities also have the power to resist extractivism, to become more resilient against the effects of the climate crisis, and to enact alternative economic and political approaches rooted in local knowledge and practice.

These locally-led “climate solutions” – communities mobilising against coal power, Indigenous activists defending their forest lands, farmers taking up regenerative agriculture – are what Global Greengrants Fund and our partners at the [CLIMA Fund](#) were set up to resource and strengthen. By

channelling small-scale, flexible funding to [grassroots initiatives](#), we shift resources and power to [communities and movements](#) who are often unable to access any other external support. By trusting people on the frontlines to take the lead, we help to nurture new, bold ideas that are valuable tools in the struggle against the climate crisis.



Madagascar is experiencing drastic change to its weather patterns.
Photograph: Michele Burgess/Alamy

Hélène Ralimanana, manager, Madagascar Conservation Centre, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew

Climate change has thrown our beautiful [Madagascar](#) into crisis. Dramatic changes to our weather patterns have increased poverty and driven people to deforest precious habitats in order to survive.

We have seen a big shift in our seasons over recent years. We now experience much longer dry seasons with less rain, which has a devastating impact on agriculture and communities. When the rainy season does come, it can bring flash floods that destroy the rice fields, the main food staple for the majority of the country. This is one of the factors leading to a famine in the south, and increased degradation of the environment as people migrate to other areas.

The *Guardian* and *Observer* appeal will enable us to expand projects helping local people adopt sustainable techniques to cultivate yams – a vital crop for nutrition during drought – as well to improve soil quality and increase income through cash crops. We also hope to speed up seed banking across the island, collecting more endemic and precious species, and using these to skill up local communities to restore forests.

At the Madagascar Conservation Centre, we document and preserve the country's biodiversity, so crucial to improving resilience in a changing climate. We believe our projects can transform lives while protecting Madagascar's precious biodiversity.

The 2021 Guardian and Observer charity appeal is scheduled to close at midnight on 16 January

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OpinionPollution

This is what ‘cutting red tape’ gets you: rivers polluted without consequence

[John Vidal](#)

England’s water is bad and getting worse, with regulators too poor or politically cowed to do anything about it



A polluted River Thames floods a picnic area in Datchet, Berkshire, February 2021. Photograph: Maureen McLean/Rex

Mon 17 Jan 2022 03.00 EST

Last year the [Environment Agency](#) received more than 100,000 reports of water, air and land pollution in England. The public told of rivers flowing with human faeces, chemicals dumped, fish killed, factories emitting dangerous fumes, nature reserves and the countryside trashed, as well as unbearable noise and dirty air.

Nearly all these reports were ignored and now we know why. According to shocking leaked documents, the agency, which is the statutory protector of England's natural environment and therefore of much of its health and safety, [had ordered its staff to ignore](#) all but the most obvious, high-profile incidents. Its staff were sent to observe only 8,000 of the 116,000 potential pollution incidents and only a handful of companies were taken to court.

In effect, there is now no one in authority even questioning the pollution that blights much of Britain, causes disease, destroys the natural world and costs billions of pounds every year to clean up. That toxic waste dumped at the bottom of your street? Forget it. Your local nature reserve or park despoiled? Don't worry. That factory illegally belching formaldehyde? Look the other way.

Fighting pollution is no government's strong point, but protection against the destruction of nature has been bitterly fought for. Now it is being wilfully trashed. At least in the 1980s, when environment secretary Nicholas Ridley was dubbed the "minister against the environment" and Britain was the "dirty man of Europe", the EA was more or less independent of government, science-based, and quick to jump on polluters and to prosecute. Anyone fouling a river was likely to be investigated and at least admonished. The problem then was that the fines imposed by the courts were so minimal that the law was flouted at will.

To understand what is happening now, go back to 2011, shortly after David Cameron was elected. In his [autumn statement](#) the chancellor, George Osborne, said that he wanted to remove the "ridiculous" social and environmental costs of business. A [list emerged](#) of 174 regulations he wanted scrapped, watered down, merged, liberalised or simplified, and the prevailing governing coalition – shame on you, Nick Clegg – knowingly set about trying to abolish controls on asbestos, invasive species and industrial air pollution, as well as protections for wildlife and restrictions on noise pollution.

It was war on the environment and public safety. The forests were to be sold off, badgers exterminated and the land fracked. The climate crisis was not to be addressed at the expense of business, and profit was not to be subservient

to nature. Even as the crisis was building, and nature everywhere was known to be in steep decline, government was ideologically obsessed with deregulation and actively making a grim situation even worse.

Thanks to fierce opposition, not least from some of his own backbenchers and EA staff, not all of Osborne's anti-red tape measures could be shovelled through. But faced with opposition, the government simply strangled, muzzled or frightened the major regulatory bodies that together have been charged with protecting people.

The leaked document shows the extent of the damage done. Over the past 10 years, the EA has had its budget slashed, its staff massively reduced and its powers weakened. Polluting businesses are now expected to self-regulate and report their own transgressions, prosecutions are rare, and the agency admits that it has neither the staff nor the money to do anything other than scratch the surface of control. In words destined to become as notorious as when disgraced environment minister Owen Paterson said "[the badgers have moved the goalposts](#)", the agency now warns, "you get the environment you pay for".

Last week, too, the environmental audit committee reported that a "chemical cocktail" of raw sewage and slurry was polluting many of England's rivers. According to watchdog group [Unchecked UK](#), between 2011 and 2016, the agency's protection budget fell by 62% and staff numbers were cut by nearly a quarter. Prosecutions fell by 80%, the number of pollution incidents logged dropped 29% and water samples taken by the EA fell by 28%. Meanwhile, nearly half of England's sites of special scientific interest – the jewels in the crown of nature – haven't been checked for many years.

Nor is it only the EA, or England. Taking cues from Donald Trump in the US, all other protection agencies have been neutered, including Natural England, the Forestry Commission, Natural Resources Wales and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency. Funding for the Food Standards Agency was [slashed by half](#) between 2009 and 2019, , and that of the Health and Safety Executive, which oversees workplace safety, by 53%. Proactive inspections by local authorities have been almost abandoned and prosecutions have plummeted.

The obsession with cutting “red tape” has been ruinous. Deregulation of the construction industry contributed to Grenfell and the cladding scandal, and allowing water companies to use rivers as sewage dumps – even as they were allowed to cut investment and reward shareholders – will cost tens of billions. Public outrage and the courts may have forced small improvements in air pollution, but tens of thousands of people still die needlessly every year because ministers refuse to bring standards up to the minimum World Health Organization levels.

It is now just a matter of time before another major chemical incident like that at Camelford, in Cornwall, in 1988 – when water was contaminated and up to [20,000 people poisoned](#) – takes place. Proposed new rules buried on a [government website](#) suggest that the new post-Brexit British chemicals regulator will have only limited powers and that Britain may become a dumping ground and a laboratory for toxic chemicals. The proposals will not be subject to [public consultation](#) and will not require a vote in parliament.

Supposedly overseeing the almighty regulatory failure of the past decade will be the new Office for Environmental Protection. This new public body is to report to parliament and be theoretically independent from government. But the secretary of state will appoint the chair and other board members, there is no guarantee it will be adequately funded, and it will not take on all functions of the EU institutions that previously protected the public.

Britain is already one of the least safe places to live in Europe. From now on, the government can introduce damaging policies with little fear of official comeback and companies are more or less free to abuse the environment. With cash-strapped, politically cowed regulators muzzled, few inspections likely and little danger of prosecution, we can look forward to a pandemic of pollution.

- John Vidal was the Guardian’s [environment](#) editor

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[China](#)

China's population growth rate falls to 61-year low

Beijing announces major reforms to address decline, including three-child policy and raised retirement age



A child sits on a bridge in China's Hunan province. The country's birthrate has fallen to its lowest level in six decades. Photograph: Xinhua/Rex/Shutterstock

Helen Davidson in Taipei

@heldavidson

Mon 17 Jan 2022 13.46 EST

China's population growth rate has fallen to its lowest level in six decades, barely outnumbering deaths in 2021 despite major government efforts to increase population growth and stave off a demographic crisis.

Across China, 10.62 million babies were born in 2021, a rate of 7.52 per thousand people, the national bureau of statistics said on Monday. In the same period 10.14 million deaths were recorded, a mortality rate of 7.18 per thousand, producing a population growth rate of just 0.34 per thousand head of population.

The rate of growth is the lowest since 1960, and adds to the findings of last May's once-a-decade census, which [found an average annual rise of 0.53%](#), down from 0.57% reported from 2000 to 2010.

China, like much of east Asia, is in the [grip of a population crisis](#), with lowering birthrates, and predictions of imminent negative population growth and an ageing population. Monday's figures showed the proportion of over-60s in China rose from 18.7% in 2020 to 18.9%.

“The demographic challenge is well known but the speed of population ageing is clearly faster than expected,” said Zhiwei Zhang, the chief economist at Pinpoint Asset Management.

“This suggests China’s total population may have reached its peak in 2021. It also indicates China’s potential growth is likely slowing faster than expected.”

Beijing has announced major reforms to address the decline, including raising the retirement age. [A three-child policy](#) has replaced the two-child policy that was introduced in 2016 and had sparked a slight increase in births before falling again.

The high cost of living, delayed marriages and lack of social mobility are frequently cited as contributing factors to young Chinese people’s reluctance to have children. In response, Beijing has [banned expensive private tutoring](#), and pledged better access to childcare and maternity leave.

Prof Wang Feng, from the University of California Irvine and who specialises in Asian demographics, said the results showed the root causes ran deeper than the policymakers realised.

“The policies announced last year are mostly rhetoric, or at most like Band-Aids,” he told the Guardian.

“Without addressing the deeply rooted causes discouraging young Chinese from getting married and having children, from gender inequality to high living cost, what we are seeing now is likely just the beginning of a further decline in birthrate and a prolonged process of population decline in China.”

China also faces potential instability on the economic front, with GDP data published alongside the population findings revealing a dramatic slowdown in the final months of 2021.

China, the world’s second-largest economy, reported a higher-than-expected GDP rise of 8.1% year-on-year, beyond the government’s predictions of 6%, but with the growth concentrated in the first half of the year. In the fourth quarter it rose by 4%, down from 4.9% in the third quarter.

“The domestic economy is under the triple pressures of demand contraction, supply shock and weakening expectations,” said bureau spokesman Ning Jizhe.

The last year has seen extraordinary levels of change in consumer habits and of government intervention in major Chinese industries. Retail sales growth dropped from 3.9% in November to 1.7% in December.

“Economic growth is clearly under pressure, (and) recent Omicron outbreaks in China exacerbated the downside risk,” said Zhang.

Construction has slumped and property sales were battered amid a crisis in development, most notably the [ongoing financial difficulties of major firm Evergrande](#).

Government intervention into the \$1bn private tutoring industry and continued crackdowns on the tech sector have also seen waves of layoffs. An emissions-reduction push coupled with supply chain issues and bans on some imported coal have been blamed, alongside rising power prices for power cuts.

The headline and first paragraph of this story were amended on 17 January 2022. It is the population growth rate, not the birthrate, that has reached its lowest level in six decades. The birthrate is at its lowest since 1949.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/17/chinas-birthrate-falls-to-61-year-low-despite-moves-to-stave-off-demographic-crisis>

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Whales

Entangled humpback whale's sad fate has researchers calling for action on fishing nets

Animal lacking dorsal fin last seen in Antarctic labouring to swim and considered unlikely to survive

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Researchers observed a humpback whale in Antarctica entangled in fishing nets. Photograph: Logan Pallin

Royce Kurmelovs

@RoyceRk2

Mon 17 Jan 2022 02.26 EST

A juvenile humpback whale has been spotted in the Antarctic entangled in fishing gear, leading to calls from conservationists for better protections along migration corridors.

The sighting last Wednesday by scientists aboard the Crystal Endeavour occurred at Mikkelsen Harbour on Trinity Island, on the western side of the Antarctic peninsula.

University of California Santa Cruz PhD candidate Logan Pallin and Dr Natalia Botero-Acosta from the Colombian Antarctic program, approached the small whale to take a skin biopsy to help determine its genetic origin, sex, cortisol levels and diet.

Pallin noticed the whale's dorsal fin was missing, and it was trailing fishing gear and several buoys that had become wrapped around the fluke – the tail – where it was causing abrasions and cutting into the skin.

The whale's age is unknown but it is estimated to be about 18 months. As it was likely on its first migration alone, it had likely carried the gear over thousands of kilometres down the South American coast.

It was last seen labouring to swim and is considered unlikely to survive.



The humpback whale entangled in fishing nets has no dorsal fin.
Photograph: Logan Pallin

With humpback whale numbers now rebounding after being decimated by whaling, and climate change affecting the availability of food, the animals are increasingly moving through areas with higher levels of human activity.

Simon Miller, an Australian Marine Conservation Society fisheries expert said it was difficult to tell what sort of net had entangled the whale and whether it was active or a “ghost net” that had been abandoned, broken or cut loose.

“If they become wrapped up in a net like this juvenile, they are effectively dragging an anchor behind them which spells an untimely end unless they are freed,” Miller said.

While it is possible to cut away the fishing gear, the process requires specialised equipment and trained teams as the manoeuvre is dangerous for both those carrying out the task and the whale. These are generally unavailable in the Antarctic.

A report of the entanglement was circulated to other vessels in the area in an effort to monitor the whale, but Prof Ari Friedlaender of University of California Santa Cruz’s ocean sciences department said more needed to be done to stop a repeat in the future.

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“My hope is that the more this type of situation is brought to light, the more can be done to minimise these interactions from happening,” he said. “Because nobody wants to see whales harmed like this, nobody wants to see people who fish have their livelihood dragged away as well.”

Friedlaender said entanglements can be reduced with modifications to fishing gear to make it less likely to become caught, tangled and dragged and more information for fishers to better time operations.

Miller said the incident shows the “vast reach impacts like fishing can have on threatened species”.

“Whale entanglement can be avoided to an extent by not setting high risk fishing gear like lobster pots with long head ropes or gillnets in the areas through which humpbacks are known to migrate and congregate,” Miller said.

“As humpback migration patterns and timings are regular, fishers should know where and when not to set their nets.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/jan/17/entangled-humpback-whales-sad-fate-has-researchers-calling-for-action-on-fishing-nets>

Petro Poroshenko

Former Ukraine president returns to Kyiv to face treason charges

Prosecutor claims Petro Poroshenko was involved in financing of Russian-backed separatists in 2014-15



Ukraine's former leader Petro Poroshenko waves at a rally outside the airport upon his arrival in Kyiv on Monday morning. Photograph: Genya Savilov/AFP/Getty

[Luke Harding](#) in Kyiv and agencies

Mon 17 Jan 2022 12.50 EST

Ukraine's former president [Petro Poroshenko](#) has appeared in court on treason charges he says are politically motivated in a case that has dismayed the country's western allies.

Poroshenko flew home on Monday from Warsaw after spending a month abroad and says he intends to clear his name. Several thousand cheering supporters greeted him at Kyiv airport. Some carried banners saying, “We need democracy” and “Stop repressions”.

From the airport, Poroshenko headed straight to court. According to news reports, prosecutors said he should post 1bn hryvnia in bail (£26m) or be remanded in custody for two months pending investigation and trial. They also demanded he surrender his passport and be banned from leaving Kyiv.

The charges allege that Poroshenko, the owner of the Roshen confectionery empire and one of Ukraine’s richest businesspeople, was involved in the sale of large amounts of coal that helped finance Russian-backed separatists in eastern [Ukraine](#) in 2014-15. His assets have been frozen as part of its investigation into the allegations of high treason, and he faces up to 15 years in prison if convicted.

Poroshenko, a pro-European politician who has been critical of Moscow, has denied the allegations and accused the prosecution of acting “shamefully” and of “dividing” the country.

He accuses his successor, [Volodymyr Zelenskiy](#), of seeking to discredit him politically to distract from Ukraine’s widespread problems, including economic woes and rising deaths from Covid-19.

The former president also claims Ukrainian oligarch Igor Kolomoisky is behind the case. Kolomoisky’s TV channel broadcast popular comedy shows in which Zelenskiy starred before he entered politics. On Monday Poroshenko [referenced the Pandora Papers](#), a leak that appeared to show Zelenskiy [owned an offshore company he had not declared](#).

The charges are the latest in a string of accusations levelled against Poroshenko since [he was defeated](#) by Zelenskiy in spring 2019. The allegations have generated concerns of undemocratic score-settling and alarmed the international community, at a time when Russia has sent 100,000 troops and heavy weapons to Ukraine’s border.

The former Swedish prime minister Carl Bildt described the charges as “clearly political”. Bildt said any attempt to put Poroshenko under house arrest would be “hugely damaging” to Ukraine’s internal cohesion.

In Kyiv ☐☐ people are gathering at the airport awaiting the arrival of opposition leader [@poroshenko](#). President [@ZelenskyyUa](#) seems to have the intention to put him under house arrest on charges that are clearly political. It would be hugely damaging to the cohesion of ☐☐.
pic.twitter.com/JNbLPQF4rW

— Carl Bildt (@carlbildt) [January 17, 2022](#)

The Kremlin has threatened to take “military-technical” measures if its security demands in eastern Europe are not met. These include an assurance from the US that Ukraine will never join Nato. The Biden administration has voiced concerns that the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, is planning a further Ukraine invasion after the 2014 annexation of Crimea.

Poroshenko was defeated by voters after a corruption scandal and a mixed record on reforms, but he emerged with strong patriotic credentials for his work in rebuilding the Ukrainian army as it fought Russian-backed insurgent fighters in the east.

Thousands of his supporters demonstrated on Monday outside the Pecherskyi court building in the capital, banging drums and waving banners.

Zelenskiy says he is waging a fight against oligarchs that is aimed at reducing their influence in Ukraine’s political and economic life.

Poroshenko has been outside Ukraine since mid-December, meeting with leaders in Brussels, Berlin and other European capitals.

Outside Kyiv airport on Monday, the former president greeted a large crowd of supporters and delivered an elaborate speech, urging them to follow him to the courthouse. He called the charges against him “a challenge to all of us”.

“[The authorities] are setting us back 10 years. We’re here not to defend Poroshenko, we’re here to join forces and defend Ukraine,” he said. “United Ukraine is strong, and a strong Ukraine is capable of pushing back (against) Putin.”

His supporters believe the charges against him are politically motivated. “It is a revenge of the authorities and an attempt by Zelenskiy to eliminate his biggest rival in Ukraine’s politics,” Anton Ivashchenko, 42, said at the airport.

“Persecution of Poroshenko sows animosity and discord among those who push for … Ukraine’s closer ties with the west.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/17/petro-poroshenko-former-ukraine-president-kyiv-treason-case>

Seascape: the state of our oceansFish oil

Revealed: many common omega-3 fish oil supplements are ‘rancid’

Independent tests find that a number of products on the market use oxidised oils, with the rancidity often masked by flavourings

[‘It’s mind-boggling’: the hidden cost of your obsession with fish oil pills](#)



More than one in 10 fish oil supplements were found to be rancid in independent tests. Some had levels that were 11 times higher than recommended limits. Photograph: Mstock/Alamy

Seascape: the state of our oceans is supported by



[About this content](#)

[Richa Syal](#)

Mon 17 Jan 2022 01.45 EST

More than one in 10 fish oil supplements tested from among 60 large retail brands are rancid, while nearly half are just under the recommended maximum limit, according to [independent tests](#).

Conducted over several years by Labdoor, which analyses vitamins and supplements based on criteria such as purity, label accuracy and nutritional value, the tests measured common US-branded fish oils, available globally, against international voluntary standards of rancidity.

Some fish oils recorded levels 11 times higher than recommended limits.

Rancidity arises when a product becomes oxidised. In fish oil, a rancid example can involve a strong fishy taste and rotten smell.

“It was fairly frequent,” said Dan Mark, Labdoor’s research director. “For us, they would start to smell and feel off.”

The rancidity is often masked by flavourings, which are added to most fish oils to reduce the fishy taste and smell.

Other evaluations are producing similar results. A [combination of global studies](#) since 2015 showed that an average of 20% of fish oil products have excess oxidation.

“That means if you go out and buy fish oil, there is at least a one in five chance of you getting an oil more oxidised than the recommended level,” said Dr Ben Albert, fellow at the University of Auckland, whose research focuses on the health effects of fish oil.

Fish oils are [extremely popular](#), particularly in the US, where they are consumed by more than a third of adults [who use dietary supplements](#). They are touted as an alternative to eating fish for getting omega-3 nutrients, and as beneficial for heart disease, improving brain function and strengthening metabolism. Many have flavourings added.



Vitamins and health supplements at a Walmart store in the US, where fish oils are a very popular supplement. Photograph: RSBPhoto/Alamy

“Flavouring is added to fish oils to help mask fishy smell and taste, and ... might make more oxidised oils more palatable for people to take, so it could also be used to hide oxidation of the oil,” said Albert.

Albert said smell was not a reliable indicator of oxidation. “Some fish oils will smell more than others, but if they don’t smell bad, that doesn’t tell you it’s not oxidised,” he said.

Given that the supplement market is [largely unregulated](#), voluntary limits for oxidative quality were created by the Global Organization for EPA and DHA Omega-3 (GOED), an industry body with about [170 members](#) that aims to increase consumption of omega-3s.

The recommended limit was set at 26, an arbitrary and unitless measure of oxidation, and is the most common and strictest worldwide benchmark for fish oil quality. So, the higher the number, the more rancid the oil, though it is important to note that it is an indication of quality, not safety.

The GOED maintains that the majority of its members’ fish oil products are within the limits.

But according to Labdoor’s analysis, conducted on products between 2014 and 2018, fish oils under the brand names [Carlson Labs](#) and [Puritan’s Pride](#), which retail in chains such as Walmart and Amazon, had rancidity grades significantly higher than the suggested limits: 281.8 for Carlson’s Norwegian cod liver oil and 37.1 for Puritan Pride’s soft-gel fish oil.

Other brands that exceeded limits were [Oceanblue](#), with an oxidation value of 73.9, and Nature’s Answer, which tested at 34.4. Half of all products tested by Labdoor bordered on the GOED limit, at an average of 24.4.

Oxidation is a normal process in all oils that contain polyunsaturated fatty acids. [Fish oil](#) is particularly susceptible to oxidising, which happens faster when exposed to heat, air or light.

It is also prone to oxidisation because of its long supply chain, which often lacks appropriate preventive measures. Most fish oil comes from anchovetas in Peru. Annual catches exceed 4m tonnes, mainly used for aquaculture, with an estimated 38,000 tonnes of [anchovy oil extracted for supplements, according to GOED](#).



Unloading anchovies at Peru's northern port of Chimbote. Most fish oil comes from Peruvian anchovetas. Photograph: Enrique Castro-Mendivil/Reuters

Once harvested, the oil is often sent to China for extraction and distillation, before coming back to North America or Europe to be packaged. At each step, the oil must be handled quickly and at low temperatures.

“To prevent oxidation, you have to focus on it from the beginning when the fish is caught, because when the oil is oxidised you can't restore it back to freshness,” said Bo Martinsen, an omega-3 specialist and co-founder of the fish oil company [Omega3 Innovations](#).

Whether rancid fish oil is harmful remains unclear. So far, [sporadic studies](#) have shown that highly oxidised fish oil capsules can have a negative impact on cholesterol levels. When [tested in high doses in animals](#), the oils were shown to have toxic effects.

“It certainly tells us that oxidation changes the way these oils work,” Albert said. “The fact that we know from animals that the effects change when it's oxidised would mean that a reasonable human consumer would want to avoid oxidised oils – but they can't do that themselves.”

Whether it is harmful or not, rancid oil is likely to be less effective than fresh fish oil, according to Martinsen. He points to [changes in the chemical composition](#) of highly oxidised oils that may reduce their benefits. Again, however, the research is not conclusive.

The GOED has been pushing back on criticism for years. After a [2015 study by Albert](#) noted that 92% of products in New Zealand exceeded one of the recommended oxidation limits, it conducted its own [replication study](#) in 2017 and the results were much lower, with less than 20% of the products exceeding the limits.

Gerard Bannenberg, director of technical compliance at GOED, said: “I don’t think people need to be concerned about oxidation. The level we’re talking about is very low. Even if the product is slightly oxidised, it’s very unlikely that it will harm our health.”

Only Nature’s Answer responded to the Guardian’s request for comment, maintaining that typical results for their fish oil ranges have a total oxidation value of 10. Any results over 25, such as in Labdoor’s tests, indicate improper handling and storage, they say, which is likely to be in the supply chain before being tested.

Albert said: “The GOED recommended limit is not a magical number that means something important for how that pill will act in your body. In principle, we should have regulatory levels at which health effects change, but we don’t know those levels.”

In general, he warned, fish oil supplements are hard to trust.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/jan/17/revealed-many-common-omega-3-fish-oil-supplements-are-rancid>

Novak Djokovic

Djokovic case exposes ‘dysfunctional and dangerous’ Australian visa rules, experts say

Migration law experts say tennis No 1’s visa cancellation sets a precedent that could see more deportations on political grounds

- [Novak Djokovic deported for trying to breach Australia’s border rules, PM says](#)
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Novak Djokovic’s deportation has drawn attention to the immigration minister’s ‘God powers’ which allow them to summarily cancel visas.
Photograph: James Ross/AAP

[*Ben Doherty*](#)

[@bendoherhtycorro](#)

Sun 16 Jan 2022 22.45 EST

Australia's visa cancellation regime has been exposed as "dysfunctional and dangerous" by the [Novak Djokovic](#) case, legal experts have said, arguing his expulsion is a "terrible precedent" that could lead to "political and populist" deportations.

The Djokovic case has drawn public attention to the so-called "[God powers](#)" held by Australian immigration ministers, granting them extraordinarily broad powers to summarily cancel visas.

Migration law experts say the Djokovic case – his visa was cancelled because the government believed he was a "[talisman of anti-vaccination sentiment](#)" – demonstrates the laws could be used to exclude a person who has previously expressed political views the government did not agree with.

"Deportation of a person because of a purported risk as to how others might perceive them and then act sets a terrible precedent," Michael Stanton, the president of Liberty Victoria said.

"It can and will be used in the future to justify the suppression of legitimate political expression because others might engage in unrest."

"One danger of largely unfettered discretions, or 'God powers', is that decision making just becomes political and populist ... eroding the integrity of the executive and the rule of law."

Liberty Victoria said thousands of visa cancellations had been summarily made since the Migration Act was amended in 2014, but are often legally defective, and carry severe consequences for those affected, including separation from family, indefinite detention and even forcible return to harm.

The organisation said Djokovic was an exceptional case: the world's number one tennis player had significant institutional support, the resources to mount a strong legal defence, and massive media attention on his case.

“Because of the regime’s complexity, the timeframes, a lack of support and advice, and a lack of access to review, we cannot know how many people have been subject to unlawful decisions that they could not challenge. Even when people are able to challenge a decision, there is a clear inequality of arms given the vast resources of the commonwealth.”

Greg Barns SC, spokesperson for the Australian Lawyers Alliance, said the government had established, for itself, a “very low bar” for excluding a person from Australia, “troubling in a society supposedly committed to freedom of speech and freedom of thought”.

“The federal government’s attitude could see other high-profile visitors to Australia refused entry in an attempt to suppress alternate views. If, for example, a high-profile visitor to Australia expressed negative views about the Australia-US alliance, would the government ban this person because this view may encourage people to protest at Pine Gap?

“This government’s obsession with harsh border policies combined with its arbitrary approach to visa cancellation and detention has created a debacle this week but, more importantly, risks setting a very dangerous precedent.”

The immigration minister, Alex Hawke, cancelled Djokovic’s visa, arguing that his previously held views expressing scepticism about Covid-19 vaccines could incite “civil unrest”, encouraging others to eschew vaccination or protest publicly.

In rejecting Djokovic’s appeal against the cancellation, the full bench of the federal court expressly said its decision did not reflect “the merits or wisdom of the decision” but only whether it was so irrational as to be unlawful.

“Our concern is the federal government’s view that it did not have to prove that Mr Djokovic would foster views about vaccination that are contrary to the government, but simply that he may foster those sentiments,” Barns said.

“This is a very low bar for excluding a person from Australia particularly in circumstances where the power to review or appeal the decision is so limited.”

Djokovic, the defending Australian Open champion, cannot compete at this year's event: it started Monday morning without him. But he might never play in the tournament – which he has won a record nine times – again.

Because his visa was ultimately personally cancelled by the minister under section [133C\(3\) of Australia's Migration Act](#), he has been automatically [banned from applying to re-enter the country for three years](#).

There are grounds for this ban to be overturned but they are defined narrowly, as extraordinary circumstances “[that affect the interests of Australia](#) or compassionate or compelling circumstances affecting the interests of an Australian citizen”.

The home affairs minister, Karen Andrews, confirmed that Djokovic is now subject to a three-year exclusion.

“It can be waived in compelling circumstances but that’s not a matter for today or tomorrow, that’s a matter for some time in the future,” Andrews [told Sky News](#).

“Anyone who has been excluded from entry to Australia or who had their visa cancelled; it is not going to be an easy or a straightforward process to get any entry into Australia.”

The Visa Cancellations Working Group, the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, and the Refugee Advice & Casework Centre have repeatedly [argued for an urgent inquiry](#) into Australia’s “dysfunctional and dangerous visa cancellation regime”.

Ministerial visa cancellation powers were vastly expanded in 2014 – when the prime minister, Scott Morrison, was immigration minister.

“Since then, there has been a huge increase in visa cancellations, including in ‘immigration clearance’ at the airport. The system is now cumbersome, opaque, and alarmingly prone to error and injustice.”

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Visa cancellations made in “immigration clearance” at the airport – such as Djokovic’s – cannot be reviewed on their merits, they can only be challenged through the courts on narrow legal and procedural grounds.

“At the airport, people are given as little as 10 minutes to respond if their visa is being considered for cancellation, often after a long flight or at irregular hours. They are not given access to legal advice or other support. As a result, visa cancellations made under a veil of secrecy remain unchallenged, and visa holders are summarily removed from the country and barred from re-entry.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2022/jan/17/djokovic-case-exposes-dysfunctional-and-dangerous-australian-visa-rules-experts-say>.

Headlines saturday 22 january 2022

- Boris Johnson PM facing calls to ensure all evidence is published in No 10 parties inquiry
- William Wragg MP to discuss No 10 'blackmail' allegations with police
- No 10 inquiry When will Gray report and what happens next?
- Mark Drakeford PM's history 'catching up with him'

Boris Johnson

PM facing calls to ensure all evidence is published in No 10 parties inquiry

Labour and Lib Dems call for full transparency as it emerges Sue Gray's report may just summarise findings

- [No 10 parties inquiry: when will Sue Gray report and what happens next?](#)



Boris Johnson leaving Downing Street on Wednesday. Sue Gray's report is expected next week. Photograph: Matt Dunham/AP

[Rowena Mason](#) Deputy political editor

Fri 21 Jan 2022 14.09 EST

Boris Johnson is facing calls to ensure all evidence on the Downing Street parties is published with the Sue Gray inquiry, as it emerged the pivotal

report is likely to amount to a concise summary of findings.

Labour and the Liberal Democrats called on Friday for the report to be published along with its accompanying evidence – including emails and witness accounts – to give full transparency around more than 15 alleged parties under investigation [by Gray, a senior civil servant](#).

The publication is expected to have huge political ramifications as many Conservative MPs have said they will await its findings before deciding whether to back Johnson to stay on as prime minister. If they are unsatisfied, he could face a no-confidence ballot.

Government sources said the report was likely to be ready at some point in the middle to end of next week, and Gray would hand it to No 10. It is understood Johnson will get advance sight of the report but then be expected to make it available to the public and parliament within hours.

[Contact Guardian Politics](#)

The terms of reference of the investigation make it clear that “findings” will be made public. However, the Guardian understands that does not include accompanying evidence such as emails, text messages or transcripts of interviews, or precise details about what happened at any of the alleged gatherings.

Government sources pointed to the outcomes of the investigations into [Priti Patel](#), the home secretary, and [Damian Green](#), the former deputy prime minister, as examples of how such findings tend to be set out. Both ran to less than two pages.

The investigation file, including the evidence on which the findings rely, is unlikely ever to be published, the sources said.

This may mean an email allegedly sent by a senior official warning Johnson’s principal private secretary, Martin Reynolds, not to have drinks in the No 10 garden on 20 May 2020 may never be made public.

The email is crucial, as [Johnson insists](#) he was not warned that the “bring your own booze” event might be against the rules, and that he was unaware

it was a party when he spent about 25 minutes there speaking to staff, believed to number 30 to 40.

The findings will instead be statements of fact about what happened, while leaving the matter of any disciplinary action to the civil service and the prime minister. Johnson could decide to refer himself and any other ministers to the independent adviser on ministerial interests, Lord Geidt. Redactions from the findings of the names of junior staff and the potential for any disciplinary action against them are also possible.

Angela Rayner, the deputy leader of the [Labour](#) party, called for a greater degree of transparency around the parties, which have provoked outrage across the country, from members of the public to Tory MPs.

“Boris Johnson cannot be allowed to cover up or obscure any of the truth when he has insisted on a hugely protracted internal probe to tell him which parties he attended and what happened in his own home. The Sue Gray report must be published in its entirety with all accompanying evidence,” she said.

Rayner said transparency in government has been eroded under the prime minister. “The [Conservatives](#) have shown us how little respect they have for the rules, we’ve seen private WhatsApps, missing phones, a freedom of information clearing house, lost minutes of lobbying meetings – their cover-up culture has lost the trust of the British public.”

Ed Davey, the Lib Dem leader, also joined calls for more transparency around the report. He said: “Trust is at an all-time low, so this report must be open to scrutiny from all those who’ve lost loved ones and all those who stuck to the rules. Aside from personnel and employment issues, Boris Johnson owes it to parliament, and above all to the people, to publish this report and the transcripts in full. Anything else will be seen as the usual lies and bending of the rules.”

Despite the decision not to publish accompanying evidence, several current and former civil servants who know Gray said they believed the report

would still be an accurate and potentially damning account of the parties that would not shy away from difficult conclusions.

They pointed to the Green investigation, which she led as head of the propriety and ethics team, and resulted in his resignation in 2017. However, other former civil servants highlighted her ability to navigate her way through tricky political problems, which has led to the nickname “Sue Gray Area”.

Gray’s investigation has consistently been described as “independent” despite her being a senior civil servant reporting to the prime minister.

Asked whether the probe was independent, Johnson’s deputy official spokesman said on Friday: “Yes, it is. It is for that inquiry, that team, to establish the facts, we’ve said before … it’s an independent investigation team, I think we’ve set that out from the start.”

The spokesman was asked what about the inquiry made it independent, and he said: “Well, as we’ve set out, it’s being run independently by a civil servant who’s been asked to establish the facts.”

On Friday night new details emerged about the two parties allegedly held in No 10 on 16 April last year for the departure of James Slack, then Johnson’s director of communications, and a Downing Street photographer. Slack has since apologised “unreservedly”.

About 30 people attended both gatherings, with the photographer’s taking place in the basement of No 10 while Slack’s colleagues met in the press area. Both groups later met up in the garden, the Daily Telegraph reported. The newspaper was also shown a photograph of revellers in the basement, although it is unknown if this or any related texts have been seen by Gray.

The basement party reportedly went on for at least seven hours until 1am, according to text messages seen by the Telegraph. Wine was spilt on a government printer as music bellowed from a laptop. A takeaway pizza was ordered into No 10, it is alleged, with slices handed around the garden – while other partygoers took turns on a slide bought for the Johnsons’ infant son, Wilfred.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/jan/21/pm-facing-calls-to-ensure-all-evidence-is-published-in-no-10-parties-inquiry>.

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Conservatives

William Wragg to discuss No 10 ‘blackmail’ allegations with police

Tory backbencher says he will meet with Scotland Yard detective in the Commons over alleged threats

01:25

Senior Tory alleges MPs facing intimidation from No 10 over opposition to PM – video

PA Media

Fri 21 Jan 2022 17.46 EST

The senior Tory backbencher who accused No 10 of trying to “blackmail” MPs seeking to oust [Boris Johnson](#) is to meet police to discuss his allegations.

William Wragg said he will be meeting a Scotland Yard detective in the House of Commons early next week, raising the prospect police could open an investigation.

The disclosure came after Downing Street said it would not be [mounting its own inquiry into the claims](#), despite calls to do so by Conservative and opposition MPs.

A No 10 spokesperson said it would only open an inquiry if it was presented with evidence [to back up Wragg’s assertions](#).

However, the MP, who chairs the Commons public administration and Constitutional affairs committee, said he believed an investigation should be for the “experts” in the police.

He told the Daily Telegraph that he would outline “several” examples of bullying and intimidation, in some cases involving public money.

“I stand by what I have said. No amount of gaslighting will change that,” he told the newspaper.

“The offer of No 10 to investigate is kind but I shall leave it to the experts. I am meeting the police early next week.”

A Metropolitan police spokesperson said: “As with any such allegations, should a criminal offence be reported to the Met, it would be considered.”

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Boris Johnson

No 10 parties inquiry: when will Sue Gray report and what happens next?

Boris Johnson's political future is riding on the report, with Tory MPs poised to submit letters of no confidence



Boris Johnson clapping for the NHS outside No 10 on 21 May 2020, the day after the 'bring your own booze' event. Photograph: Mark Thomas/Rex/Shutterstock

Rowena Mason

Fri 21 Jan 2022 14.11 EST

What is the investigation into staff gatherings in No 10 Downing Street?

The inquiry was launched last year after allegations emerged about a series of parties in Downing Street in the winter lockdown of 2020, including a Christmas party and a leaving do, as well as a drinks event at the Department for Education. Initially, it only covered these three events and was due to be conducted by cabinet secretary Simon Case.

Why did the prime minister order an inquiry?

Boris Johnson ordered Case to investigate because he was coming under political and public pressure over the parties. No 10 believed commissioning an investigation would help to draw a line under the affairs. However, with more revelations about gatherings and the prime minister's own involvement, the scope of the inquiry has kept swelling and implications become more serious for Johnson.

Why is Sue Gray now in charge and who is she?

When it emerged that [the private office of Simon Case may have had their own gathering](#), Johnson handed over responsibility to another senior civil servant. Sue Gray, currently second permanent secretary in the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, was formerly head of propriety and ethics in the Cabinet Office and is known for carrying out such work. She has a fearsome reputation, with some praising her fairness and others claiming she works in an untransparent manner.

What is she now investigating?

The terms of reference still only mention three parties but the remit has now widened to [cover up to 16 alleged gatherings](#), including two in the garden of No 10 in May 2020 where the prime minister was in attendance for a short time, and two held by No 10 staff [on the eve of the Duke of Edinburgh's funeral](#) in April 2021.

How and when will the report be published?

Gray's findings will next week be handed to the prime minister, who commissioned the inquiry. They are likely to be statements of fact, and will

not include accompanying evidence such as transcripts or correspondence. Johnson will be given advance sight of the summary and then he will be expected to make it public and give a statement to the House of Commons.

Will she make a judgment on wrongdoing?

Government sources say Gray's findings will be factual, but it is possible they could edge into finding a factual breach of guidelines or even the law. However, the terms of reference say any suspected criminal wrongdoing would be handed to the police and the inquiry would be paused – which so far has not happened. As for any disciplinary action as a result of the findings, that is a matter for the Cabinet Office if it relates to No 10 staff, or the prime minister if it relates to ministers – including himself. Johnson could end up referring the findings to Lord Geidt, the independent adviser on ministerial interests, if his own conduct in relation to the ministerial code is questioned by Gray.

What will the political consequences be for Johnson?

Johnson's political future is riding on the Gray report. If he comes out of it badly, MPs could well launch a leadership challenge against him by submitting letters of no confidence in him to Sir Graham Brady, the chairman of the 1922 Committee of backbenchers. If it finds Johnson behaved unwisely or foolishly, without saying or implying that he broke the rules or ministerial code in terms of his openness and honesty, then it is possible that he may avoid an attempt to topple him. Numerous Tory MPs have made clear they are awaiting the outcome of the report before they decide whether to continue backing Johnson as prime minister or not. Either way, there is a huge amount riding on what Gray says.

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Boris Johnson

Boris Johnson's history is catching up with him, says Welsh first minister

Mark Drakeford highlights that prime minister has been sacked from two previous jobs for lying



Boris Johnson, the prime minister, has been criticised by Mark Drakeford.
Photograph: John Sibley/Reuters

[Steven Morris](#)

[@stevenmorris20](#)

Fri 21 Jan 2022 12.41 EST

The Welsh first minister, Mark Drakeford, has launched a fierce attack on Boris Johnson, claiming “his history is catching up with him” and suggesting the easing of Covid restrictions in England is designed to distract attention from the [crisis the prime minister is facing](#).

In sustained criticism of Johnson, Drakeford highlighted that Johnson had twice been sacked from previous jobs for lying and said he believed that everything the Conservative UK government was currently doing was about protecting his position.

Speaking at a press conference in Cardiff, Drakeford, who leads a Labour administration, said: “The prime minister is someone who’s been sacked from two previous jobs for not telling the truth.”

He flagged up a newspaper editorial on the eve of the December 2019 election that spelled out Johnson’s flaws, adding: “In many ways, I think what you see is his history catching up with him.”

It is believed he was referring to a [Sunday Times editorial](#) that said Johnson had an “on-off relationship with the truth” and often preferred “bluster to grasp of detail”.

In 2004 Johnson was [fired by the then Tory leader, Michael Howard](#), from positions as shadow arts minister and party vice-chair for lying about an extramarital affair. In the late 1980s, Johnson was sacked by the Times over a front-page article in which he allegedly invented a quote.

Drakeford claimed the decision this week to lift coronavirus restrictions in [England](#) was about distracting the public’s attention from the scandal engulfing Johnson.

“Everything that goes on in Whitehall and Westminster at the moment for the UK government is seen exclusively through the lens of: how does this make a difference to the efforts that are being made to shore up the position of the prime minister?

“This is a government that at the moment is simply not capable of doing the ordinary business of government in a competent and sensible way because it is overwhelmed by the headlines that surround dreadful events that went on in Downing Street.”

Drakeford said [Wales](#) had passed the peak of the Omicron storm and more restrictions such as limits on sporting events have been lifted. The country is

due to return to alert level 0 – under which more restrictions are eased – on 28 January as long as the situation continues to improve.

The first minister's attack on Johnson was in turn strongly criticised by the Tories, who accused him of playing politics and trying to distract people from the ongoing restrictions in Wales.

The Welsh Conservative Senedd leader, Andrew RT Davies, said: “These are completely unnecessary and inappropriate comments by the first minister and is further proof that it’s always been about the politics, and not the science, for his Labour administration.

“They are a straightforward deflection tactic from a government that has punished Welsh families and businesses with the harshest restrictions in the UK throughout the pandemic.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/jan/21/boris-johnson-history-catching-up-welsh-first-minister-drakeford>

2022.01.22 - Spotlight

- 'I'm following a dream – giving people my soul food' The global restaurants bringing life to British streets
- 'You can't ask people to forget' Pedro Almodóvar on Spain's tragic past
- Samira Ahmed 'I gave the V sign to a rude driver – it turned out to be a police car'
- Dangerous game? Football clubs look to mine fans' cash with crypto offerings

‘I’m following a dream – giving people my soul food’: the global restaurants bringing life to British streets

These 15 small venues – all run or founded by immigrants to Britain – are part of the fabric of the nation’s high streets. But after two hellish years, can they survive?

Plus 15 great recipes – from Scandinavia to Tibet, via the Caribbean and Cambodia

[Yotam Ottolenghi on his favourite ingredient](#)

by [Deborah Linton](#). Portraits: Fabio De Paola

Sat 22 Jan 2022 03.00 EST

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North African: Los Moros, York

Tarik Abdeladim, 51



Tarik Abdeladim with his cassoulet: ‘All the cultures that shaped my taste buds exist on my menu.’ Photograph: Fabio De Paola/The Guardian

“When I started out, getting harissa in York wasn’t easy,” says Tarik Abdeladim. “There was one stockist.” [Chefs](#) have been frantic since reopening after lockdown, he says. “The combination of Brexit and the pandemic has been like a tsunami hitting our industry. We’re a tourist city. European staff, especially those without families here, have gone home.” He employs 20 mostly local workers.

“People used to drop their CVs in all the time. I recently advertised for chefs and didn’t have one response. That’s a huge geographical and emotional shift; people no longer want to work long kitchen hours away from home.”

Abdeladim moved to London from Algiers in 1990, aged 20: “We’d visit Paris when I was young and I worked in kitchens on the Côte d’Azur, so Europe was always on my radar. I visited a friend in London and fell in love with British culture, history, music, football. I never went home.”

Having worked first as a pot washer, then later as a waiter and front of house, he moved to York in 1997, after visiting the city. “As an immigrant, language is a barrier to jobs,” he says, “but being in restaurants was what I

knew. The pot wash suited me till I knew enough to speak to customers and take orders.”

His falafel wraps and fiery merguez sausage, served with harissa on hot baguettes, quickly became the city’s top-rated food on Tripadvisor, after he opened a stall on Shambles Market in 2015. When a regular offered to sell him their restaurant three years later, he established [Los Moros](#) – a Spanish nod to his Berber heritage – serving modern north African cuisine. Its picturesque British exterior belies the colours and aromas of an Algerian souk you’ll find within.

Abdeladim’s food is steeped in the legacies of Algeria’s invaders. He says: “My indigenous Berber family cooked tagines. My grandmother sat for hours at our kitchen table making kilos of couscous from semolina. The Romans brought olives and citrus; the Arabs brought spices; the Turks came to defend us, bringing coffee and baklava; and, finally, the French, with the croissants I ate for breakfast back home. All the cultures that shaped my taste buds exist on my menu.”

They include the merguez he first cooked for his stall, now served in a butter bean dish his mother used to make: “My father would go to the best butcher in Algiers.” Abdeladim says. “It’s the food of my childhood. When I came here at 20, I was young and adventurous, I wanted to discover and learn. My own business was never part of the plan. A guy from the Michelin guide tweeted about my food last year. I never envisaged that.”

Algerian cassoulet (merguez and beans)



Serves 4

2 tbsp olive oil

1 large white Spanish onion, peeled and finely chopped

2 garlic cloves, peeled and finely sliced

1 tsp sea salt

1 tsp freshly ground cumin

1 tsp paprika

½ tsp ground coriander

½ tsp ground ginger

½ tsp turmeric

½ tsp ground chilli (or more, if you like it hot)

1 x 400g tin chopped tomatoes

1 tbsp tomato puree

500g merguez sausages, each cut into 3 equal pieces

**500g drained, cooked butter beans (ie from 2 x 400g cans – we use
Navarrico large butter beans)**

1 handful each flat-leaf parsley and coriander, roughly chopped

Crusty baguette to serve

Heat the oil in a large, heavy-bottomed saucepan. add the onion, garlic and salt, and fry until translucent. Add the spices, cook for a further minute or

two, then stir in the tomatoes, tomato puree and half a pint of water, and cook on a medium heat for 10-15 minutes.

Throw in the chopped merguez and cook for another 15 minutes until the sausages are cooked, then add the beans and cook on a low heat until the sauce turns nice and thick.

Adjust the seasoning to taste, stir in the chopped herbs and serve with a crusty baguette to mop up the sauce, Algerian style.

Cambodian: Kambuja, Marple, Greater Manchester

Y Sok, 45



Y Sok with her cha kroeung chicken: ‘I wanted to change the perception of Asian food.’ Photograph: Fabio De Paola/The Guardian

“Hunger pain never leaves you,” says Y Sok, who was raised in a refugee camp in Cambodia during the Khmer Rouge civil war, where Red Cross food parcels sustained her family before they moved to America. “Every day there was a lottery system for a new life in France, the US or Australia. My father chose America.”

She moved to the UK in 2014, aged 37: “I remember hanging up our sign and someone saying, ‘We’ll see how long that lasts.’ I wanted to change the perception of Asian food, the racism around it. People grew up eating £5 Chinese meals from the chippy but wouldn’t blink at paying triple for pasta. I wanted the suburbs to discover what ethnic food really is.”

Sok’s 20 staff, who also run a market outpost, are mostly South Asian or Cambodian. She wants to sponsor skilled-worker visas for another two. “It is hard to find a Cambodian chef from our tiny UK population,” she says. “I have found loyalty in immigrant staff, who come looking for better opportunities. If you treat them well, give full benefits and respect, most tend to stay.”

The restaurant, where walls are adorned with framed vinyls – it was formerly called Angkor Soul because of her husband’s record store downstairs – served takeaways during the pandemic. Sok says: “The supply chain has been horrible. I spent days driving round, looking for products.”

Dishes include cha kroeung, a curry with lemongrass, galangal and turmeric, and loc lac, a French colonised dish.

Growing up among Cambodian refugees, in Boston, then Los Angeles, where she would cater dinner parties and small weddings, food provided comfort for Sok’s community. Kambuja returned her to her roots. “As an immigrant kid, I wanted to eat American mac’n’cheese to assimilate,” she says. “I took the Cambodian food my mother cooked for granted. My restaurant brought me back to a place I had been away from for so long.”

Cha kroeung chicken (spicy lemongrass stir-fry)



Serves 4-5

2 tbsp vegetable oil
400g boneless chicken breast or thighs, thinly sliced
1 onion, in 1cm-wide slices
1 red pepper, stem, seeds and pith discarded, flesh cut into 1cm-thick slices
150g green beans, topped, cut in half
100g roasted peanuts, roughly chopped
1 large handful sweet holy or Thai basil
Sliced spring onions

For the lemongrass paste

3 lemongrass stalks, outer leaves removed, roughly chopped
6 garlic cloves, peeled
3 shallots, peeled
6 Thai red or green bird's eyes chillies (or fewer)
2½ cm piece (about 15g) galangal, peeled and sliced, or ginger
5 fresh or frozen makrut lime leaves, sliced
2 tsp turmeric powder

For the seasoning

3 tbsp oyster sauce

2 tbsp fish sauce

2 tbsp palm sugar (or any other sugar or honey)

1 tbsp tamarind paste or lime juice

Blitz paste ingredients in a blender, adding enough cold water to make a smooth paste. Heat the oil in a wide pan until smoking hot, add the paste and cook, stirring, for eight to 10 minutes, until dry. Add chicken, veg and seasoning ingredients, and stir-fry until chicken is cooked. Add peanuts and, off the heat, basil. Garnish with spring onions; serve with steamed jasmine rice.

Caribbean: Buzzrocks, Manchester

Buzzrock, 72, and Farida Anderson, 60



Farida and Buzzrock Anderson with their jerk chicken: 'We have put in a lot of hours to get here.' Photograph: Fabio De Paola/The Guardian

Two decades after his parents arrived in the UK with the Windrush generation, Buzzrock came to Britain from Jamaica, in 1976, age 27, holding only a photograph of his mother. Raised by an aunt, Buzzrock

(known as Buzz) was the last of his family to emigrate, following his three sisters, once his father – a second world war veteran – had made enough money.

Buzz established his name in the shebeens and all-night Caribbean clubs of Manchester’s Moss Side where he met his wife Farida – the daughter of a Somali immigrant, now an MBE – and cooked up a taste of home for the city’s Jamaican community, including the tightly packed dumplings he is named after.

Now [his cafe](#), where meat marinates from 6am and punters queue before noon, dishes up 300 plates of island food a day. “Our customers are British, Irish, Asian, Caribbean – 80% are white. It gives me a buzz to see all of them with ‘dem belly full’.” (They sell T-shirts carrying Buzz’s slogan in [their online shop](#).)

“Buzz and I have put in a lot of hours to get here,” Farida says. “When they called the area ‘[Gunchester](#)’ we’d dodge bullets, serving food from our trailer. We fought for eight years to get our premises, experiencing racism as black shop owners.”

The pandemic has had an impact, too. “Meat is 30% more expensive. I spent last summer policing the door, getting people to wear masks and sanitise.”

In the shebeen days, Buzz’s cooking fuelled illicit gambling dens and a sideline supplying cannabis. He started the business following a two-year prison sentence for drugs offences and the (now expired) threat of deportation. Farida – later a [campaigner for prisoners’ families](#) – fought for him to remain. Now, they employ ex-offenders and prisoners on day release. “We believe in second chances,” Farida says.

Thirty years after he started feeding crowds from a gazebo at Manchester’s Caribbean carnival, Buzz is still serving the same jerk recipe, salt fish patties, flavoursome gravy and curried goat (actually lamb, because British palates “don’t like the bones in goat”) in the shop the couple opened in 2007. “Consistency is the thing,” Buzz says. “People say they’ve been to many places but never tried jerk like I make it.”

Barbecue jerk chicken with rice and peas



Serves 5-6

For the jerk chicken

4-6 full chicken legs

3-4 tbsp lemon juice or vinegar

100g Buzzrocks all-purpose seasoning (Buzzrocks products all available from buzzrockcaribbean.co.uk)

Buzzrocks jerk marinade or mild jerk marinade

For the rice and peas

180g dried kidney beans – rinsed, soaked overnight and drained (you can use tinned beans, but it will affect the flavour)

1 small onion, peeled and finely chopped

2 spring onions, trimmed and finely chopped

1 tbsp garlic paste

2 tbsp Buzzrocks all-purpose seasoning

4 sprigs thyme

1 scotch bonnet chilli

2 tsp salt

1 tsp pepper
400g long-grain rice

Rub lemon juice or vinegar all over the chicken, to add flavour, then season lightly with our all-purpose dry rub.

Pour the jerk marinade into a large bowl, add the chicken and turn to coat. Cover and refrigerate overnight, or for at least 30 minutes, and bring back to room temperature before grilling.

Light your barbecue. Grill the chicken over a medium fire, turning occasionally, for 30-40 minutes, until well browned all over.

Put the beans in a large pot, cover with 750ml water and bring to a boil. Stir in the onion, spring onions, garlic paste, all-purpose seasoning, thyme, scotch bonnet (pierce a hole in the chilli – this will stop it splitting and adding too much spice), salt and pepper, then cover and cook gently for about an hour, until the beans are tender. Stir in the rice, cover and simmer over a low heat for another 30 minutes, until cooked.

French: L'Escargot Bleu, Edinburgh

Frederic Berk Miller, 51



Frederic Berkemiller with his beef bourguignon: ‘I like to cook by my mood.’
Photograph: Fabio De Paola/The Guardian

“I have seen staffing problems in restaurants for years,” says Frederic Berkemiller, who established a French-Scottish training exchange for young chefs in 2011, long before Brexit and the pandemic triggered an exodus of foreign and casual workers.

“Chefs say all the time that they can’t get waiting staff now foreigners have left. We have to build our own ecosystem. Young people brought up on chips, curry sauce and supermarket food will not aspire to cook and work with fresh fish or vegetables they’ve never seen before.”

Since lockdown, he has slimmed his staff from 30, across two sites, to six, including chefs who have been with him for years. “The work is hard, so I look after my chefs,” he says. “We’ve been working four days on, three off, for 15 years.”

Born in the Loire valley, Berkemiller moved to London in 1988, then to Edinburgh in 2004. He works to a sustainable, “producer to pass” ethos, farming himself and using nearby growers and suppliers for the dishes plated up at his chef’s pass. He serves classic French cuisine from a locally sourced Scottish larder and four-acre garden, employing skills he learned as

a teenager. “School didn’t like me and I didn’t like school. At 14, I was sent to live in as an apprentice in a restaurant where food was hunted, picked and cooked on site.”

L’Escargot Bleu is an authentic, charming bistro, with a blue frontage and a wood-panelled bar, tablecloths, a blackboard with the day’s menu and large, classic French advertisements on its walls. “I like to cook by my mood,” Berkmiller says. “My dream restaurant would have no menu. Time-intensive beef bourguignon and veal blanquettes are disappearing, but I’m a great defender of classic French cooking – it’s my origin.”

Bourguignon of beef cheeks with garniture grand-mère



Serves 4-6

4-6 beef cheeks

Olive oil, for frying

2 tbsp plain flour

1 litre demi-glace or good beef stock

For the marinade

2-3 bottles red wine

2 onions, peeled and cut into large dice

2 large carrots, peeled and cut into large dice

2 celery stalks

1 large bouquet garni

10 black peppercorns

2 generous soup spoons cognac

For the garniture grand-mère

2 knobs butter (approx 25g each)

200g button mushrooms

200g lardons, or diced smoked bacon

200g silverskin onions

20g caster sugar

Plan ahead – marinading can take up to five days. Pour 80% of the wine into a large container, then add the onions, carrots, celery, bouquet garni, peppercorns and cognac. Cover with clingfilm or a lid, and refrigerate for two days.

Add the beef cheeks to the marinade and return to the fridge for a further two or three days, turning the meat every day. When the beef has marinated, lift it out of the marinade, keeping the wine and vegetables, put on a tray between two cloths and pat until it is very dry.

Heat the oven to 130C (110 fan). Put a splash of olive oil in a large, cast-iron casserole pan on a very high heat, then brown the meat all over, until golden. Lower the heat and sweat the drained vegetables (but not the bouquet garni) from the marinade, until the onions are softened. Return the beef to the pot, sprinkle over the flour, then pour over the marinade juices. Bring to a boil, season, then add the bouquet garni and the demi-glace or stock. Cook in the heated oven for two to three hours. (If you want to add even more flavour, spread the cooking time over two days: cook for one hour on day one, leave to cool, then refrigerate, and cook at the same temperature for another hour the following day. This is how my grandmother always cooked this dish.)

When the beef is cooked, it should be almost falling apart. When it gets to this stage, lift it out of the pan and place on a tray. Pass the sauce through a strainer into another pan. Place the pot on the heat, bring the sauce to a boil and reduce until it has a good consistency, thick enough to cover the back of

a spoon. Season to taste, then return the meat to the sauce and serve the same day, or cool and refrigerate for a day or two, before reheating.

To make the grand-mère garnish, heat the butter and a splash of olive oil in a frying pan, sauté the mushrooms until well coloured, then lift out into a bowl. Do the same with the lardons, then put with the mushrooms. Add the silverskin onions and sugar to the hot butter and toss until glazed and golden. Drain, then sauté all the garnish ingredients together to heat through.

When you are ready to eat, pour the reserved wine into the beef pot and gently bring up to a simmer. Stir in the grand-mère garnish and serve with boiled potatoes such as ratte or pink fir, or an earthy, creamy mashed potato.

Scandinavian: Hjem, Hexham, Northumberland

Alex Nietosvuori, 29



Alex Nietosvuori with his baked cod: ‘Our ambition is to be the best in the world.’ Photograph: Fabio De Paola/The Guardian

“It can be hard to find a passion for working kitchen hours among local boys and girls,” says Alex Nietosvuori, the Swede behind newly Michelin-starred [Hjem](#), which he established in 2019 with his Northumbrian fiance Ally

Thompson, 37; they also run the Hadrian hotel and a gastro pub in the north-east market town.

While their fine-dining staff have expanded to a team of eight, lockdown triggered departures elsewhere in the business. “A lot of people are in our industry for convenience or to pay their way through uni,” Thompson says. “They realised there’s probably an easier way to live than working till midnight everyday.”

Nietosvuori, who emigrated from Sweden in 2015, is matter of fact. “At the end of the day, if people leave, we don’t need them here,” he says. “We want all of our business to reflect the standards of our restaurant.”

It compounded a problem started by Brexit, Thompson adds: “There are no applications from Europeans now. Our last stage [intern], an Italian, left before lockdown. Our two Polish chefs have said the vote made them feel unwelcome. I fear we will see fewer European chefs wanting to open here.”

Hjem – both a Norwegian translation and Northumbrian dialect for “home” – sits on the same latitude as Nietosvuori’s native Skåne, in the south of Sweden. The same berries, mushrooms and plants go into the recipes on his tasting menus, including crisp croustades; pearly, white river cod; and the restaurant’s signature horseradish sorbet with spelt crumble and warm apple caramel served inside a wooden apple crafted by Thompson’s father.

“In Sweden you can forage on anyone’s land,” Thompson says. “Alex will often be walking the dog and pull containers out from his backpack.”

Nietosvuori, whose career began 12 years ago, making pies in Malmö, says: “Our ambition is very simple: to be the best in the country, then the world. Last time we opened bookings, they were gone in two minutes. I couldn’t care less about food when I was young. Now, food is everything.”

Baked cod and Northumbrian ’nduja sauce



Serves 4

1 cod fillet, around 40cm

100g salt, for the brine

2 heads of broccoli, washed

500g spinach, washed

350g butter

50g 'nduja (we use [Rachel Hammond's Northumbrian 'nduja](#))

300ml good chicken stock

150ml double cream

Plan ahead, as the cod needs to go in the fridge for 24 hours. Cut out the thickest part of the fillet and take off the skin; the rest of the fillet – the thinner part – is perfect for fish and chips later in the week. Measure out 2 litres of water, add 100g salt and whisk to dissolve. Put the cod in the brine and soak in the fridge for 24 hours.

Next day, lift out and pat dry the fish, then place on clingfilm and roll into a sausage shape, twisting the ends to keep it as tight as possible. Wrap in foil to make a cylindrical shape. Bake at 110C, then remove and put it straight into ice water – still wrapped – to cool it down and stop any further cooking,

then refrigerate overnight. The next day, slice the cod into 2cm-thick portions.

Cook the broccoli in boiling water for about 10 minutes, adding the spinach for the last 30 seconds, then strain, put in a blender with 100g of the butter and blitz to a smooth puree (you might need to add a little water), then refrigerate.

In a frying pan, sweat off the 'nduja without colouring it, to release some of the aromas, then add the chicken stock and reduce by half. Stir in the remaining 250g butter and blitz it all together.

Put the slices of cod on a baking try and heat gently in a 150C oven for about three minutes, until just warm. In a pan, warm up the broccoli puree. In a separate pan, warm up your 'nduja sauce. Put a slice of cod in the base of four shallow bowls, top with a tablespoon of broccoli puree, pour over 2 tbsp of the warm sauce and serve.

Chinese: The Welcome, Belfast

San Wong, 69, and his sons Charlie, 44, and Michael, 42



Charlie Wong: ‘People have been stockpiling ingredients.’ Photographs: Rob Durston/The Guardian

Charlie’s father, San, was 16 when he left Tai Po, Hong Kong, with his parents. “We couldn’t make a living in the New Territories,” San says. “My father left first; I followed six months later.”

His 70-cover Chinese restaurant, situated on Stranmillis Road in Belfast, bills itself as the longest established in Northern Ireland (the first Welcome opened in Portadown in 1973; it switched location to the Belfast site in 1982) and passed to his sons, Charlie and Michael, five years ago.

“We still use sauces from Tai Po, but the pandemic has hit the supply chain hard,” Charlie says. “People are stockpiling imported ingredients. You have to buy up what you can from Chinese supermarkets. Consistency is important.”

During the Troubles, San stayed, while other families left. “Many Indian and Italian restaurants closed. Those were dark days, but they presented an opportunity to make our name. As an Asian family, we would be waved through road blocks while both sides of the city fought.

“Today we have families who’ve been coming for three generations. I’ve turned away rock stars and politicians to honour bookings from my regulars.”

Steamed mussels in black bean sauce



Serves 1-2

1 spring onion, trimmed

1 chilli (red or green)

300g dry black beans

50ml cooking oil (vegetable is fine but not olive), plus 10-20ml extra to finish

100g sugar

30g salt

20ml light soy sauce

10ml dark soy sauce

50g garlic, peeled and minced (or garlic paste)

7-10 frozen New Zealand mussels, in the half shell

Cut the spring onion into thin strips, and slice the chillies into thin rounds, then set aside.

Use a spoon to mash the black beans in a bowl. Put the oil into a pan on a low heat, then add the beans, sugar, salt, both soy sauces and garlic, stir to combine and cook slowly until they form a smooth paste. Take off the heat and set aside to cool.

Put a steamer pan on to boil. Put the mussels on a plate and put a teaspoon of the black bean paste on each one. As soon as steam comes out from the steamer, put in the mussel plate, cover the steamer and leave to cook for seven to eight minutes, just until the flesh is bouncy, not squishy.

To finish, heat 10-20ml cooking oil in a pan. Scatter the chopped spring onion and chilli on top of the mussels and, once the oil is hot, pour it all over the top so everything sizzles (this will add a sheen to the dish, too). Sprinkle over a drizzle of dark soy sauce, to add colour, and serve hot.

Indian: Dastaan, Epsom, Surrey

Nand Kishor, 47



Nand Kishor with his lamb chops: 'I cook the food I ate at home in India.'

Photograph: Fabio De Paola/The Guardian

The pandemic dealt the worst possible blow to staff at [Dastaan](#) who lost their senior chef, Balam Singh, to Covid last January.

"He was my right-hand man, my friend, we miss him terribly," says chef-owner Nand Kishor Semwal, born in Dehradun, in the Himalayan foothills. Half of his 22 employees were taken ill over Christmas 2020.

The 52-cover restaurant, born of a friendship between Semwal and co-owner Sanjay Gour, both former head chefs at the Michelin-starred Gymkhana in London (where Singh also worked), is operating at 30 covers with a delivery driver, post-pandemic. “We’re lucky – our staff have been here for years, but I’m paying £2-3 more per kilo of lamb, and a box of chillis is up 50%.” The name Dastaan is taken from the Urdu for fable or tale. The unassuming shopfront on a Surrey high street belies a vibrant, talked-about and beautifully plated menu served in simple surrounds.

Semwal moved to England, for work, in 2003, having cooked in Mumbai’s best kitchens. His lamb chops with mustard relish remind him of the meat his mother and grandmother prepared. “I cook the food I ate at home in north India and cooked in kitchens in the south. I was always fascinated by food. My dream came true.”

Lamb chops



Serves 2

**4 thick lamb chops
50g melted butter, to serve**

For the first marinade

**2-3 x 4cm pieces ginger, unpeeled and bashed to bruise
45g ginger and garlic paste
5g ground kasuri methi
7½g salt
40g Kashmiri chilli powder
25ml lemon juice
45ml mustard oil**

For the second marinade

**200g Greek yoghurt, strained
20g ginger and garlic paste
5g ground kasuri methi
40g Kashmiri chilli powder
15g garam masala**

Plan ahead as the marinades take two days.

Put the lamb in a container in which it will sit in one layer and add all the ingredients for the first marinade. Toss to coat, rub the marinade into the meat with your hands, then refrigerate for at least 12-18 hours. Next day, combine all the ingredients for the second marinade and again rub into the lamb, then refrigerate for six to 12 hours.

Heat the oven to 170/180C (150/160 fan). Thread the chops on to skewers, passing them through each one two or three times, to secure. Roast for nine or 10 minutes, then turn and cook for four minutes. Remove, drizzle with melted butter and serve.

Tibetan: Taste Tibet, Oxford

Yeshi Jampa, 42



Yeshi Jampa with his momos: ‘Ours is a place where a rich man can eat the same food as a poor man.’ Photograph: Fabio De Paola/The Guardian

“We need more staff but we know it’s not a good time,” says Yeshi Jampa, who started up his canteen-style restaurant in November 2020, after six years serving up east Tibetan soul food at fairs and festivals, including Glastonbury. “There aren’t enough skilled workers around, or the time to train them.”

Jampa and his wife, Julie, opened [Taste Tibet](#)’s distinctive blue front door, on a residential street, mid-pandemic. “It’s been really hard,” he says. “Suppliers didn’t want to come for our relatively small orders. I was going round shops buying chicken.”

Their kitchen is open Wednesday to Saturday, with five employees, including staff from Tibet and Timor-Leste. “With more people, we’d be able to be open more often,” says Julie, who met her husband while working in India.

Jampa had a semi-nomadic upbringing, followed by an accidental immigration. At 19, he crossed the Himalayas to help his brother join an Indian monastery. “I walked for 24 days. The journey was so hard, it was 17 years before I returned home.”

He met Julie and moved to Oxford, where she worked, in 2011. “I’d never seen food covered in plastic or sold in such small quantities,” he says.

Photographs of the mountainsides where he grew up, rearing yaks and cattle in summer and storing produce for winter, decorate the brick walls of his restaurant. The queue for his steamed momo dumplings hasn’t dissipated since he first pitched up on Gloucester Green market, in Oxford, in 2014. During lockdown, they used their premises, and customer donations, to send food to frontline workers and vulnerable people. A [cookbook](#), Taste Tibet, follows on 17 March.

Jampa says: “My driving force is to educate people about Tibet; food is a big part of that. Our canteen is a place where a rich man can eat the same food as a poor man. Being a refugee influences that. Where I grew up, the signs in schools said ‘Others before self’. That ethos, karma, is important in Tibet.”

Heavenly vegan momos



Makes 40

For the dough

500g self-raising flour, plus extra for dusting (or buy ready-made dumpling wrappers at a good Chinese supermarket)

For the filling

1 small sweetheart cabbage, about 500g, finely chopped

200g spinach, finely chopped

2 tsp salt

2 tbsp cooking oil

200g Chinese chives, finely chopped

For the dough, put the flour in a large bowl and slowly pour in about 250ml of warm water, while mixing it in with your other hand, to make a not-too-sticky dough. Knead until it forms a ball, cover and set aside for 15-20 minutes.

Meanwhile, make the filling. Put the cabbage and spinach in a bowl, add the salt and oil, squish it through the vegetables (to draw out excess moisture), then set aside for five minutes. Tip the vegetables into a colander and press down firmly to drain off as much liquid as possible. Return the vegetable mixture to the bowl and stir in the chives.

Knead the dough again for a minute to ensure it's soft and smooth, then divide it into four, and cover to stop it drying out. Sprinkle a little flour on a work surface, but don't overdo it – too much can stiffen the dough. Roll one piece of dough into a 25cm-long sausage shape, then cut into 10 equal slices, lightly flattening each one with your hand. Using a rolling pin, and making one wrapper at a time, push and pull the flattened piece of dough up and down quickly and firmly, holding it with your spare hand and turning it as you go, until it's the size of your palm with the centre a bit thicker than the outer edges; it doesn't need to be a perfect circle. Repeat with the rest of the dough.

Lay a wrapper on a chopping board, spoon a tablespoon of filling into the centre, gently fold one side of the circle over the filling to meet the other side and, starting in the middle, use your fingertips to press the edges together. (If you're using shop-bought wrappers, you'll need to wet the edges before sealing.) If the momo is not completely sealed, the juices will escape during steaming, so ensure there are no gaps. Place the filled momo on a lined baking tray, cover with a tea towel, then repeat with the remaining wrappers and filling; keep the filled momos at least 1cm apart, covered with the tea towel to stop them drying out.

If you're using a metal steamer, lightly brush each basket with oil or line with greaseproof paper; if you're using a bamboo one, line with greaseproof paper. The water in the base of the steamer, or in a wok, should be boiling when the baskets go in. Steam the momos in batches (and depending on the size of your steamer) over a high heat for 13-16 minutes. To test whether they're ready, press gently: if the dough doesn't stick to your finger, they're done. Serve with chilli dips.

Māori/Malay: Kota and Kota Kai, Porthleven, Cornwall

Jude Kereama, 48



Jude Kereama with his Singapore crab bao bun: 'My menu was a culture shock here.' Photograph: Fabio De Paola/The Guardian

The last two years have given hospitality workers time to take stock, according to Jude Kereama: "I think a lot have really enjoyed being at home with their families. That's had a big impact on attitudes towards working in this industry. I'm lucky to have had loyalty from mine."

He employs 10 people across his two restaurants on Porthleven's Harbour Head. "Brexit and the pandemic have also taught us we must change the way

we cook. Fish prices are four times what they should be. It's no longer sustainable to demand overfishing and huge pieces of cheap meat on meals."

Born in New Zealand to a Māori father and Chinese-Malay mother, Kereama has seen a lot of changes in the Cornish food scene. "When we moved here, everything around us was pubs. My menu was a culture shock."

After rising through the ranks of New Zealand hospitality, he came to England on a two-year working visa, aged 24, and fell in love with his restaurant manager wife, Jane. They converted a west Cornwall boat shed into [Kota](#) in 2006, and opened family-friendly [Kota Kai](#) in 2011. Jane died of cancer in 2019.

His Kota menu pays homage to his childhood. Soft-shell crab in a bao bun, with Asian slaw and seaweed mayo, is a bestseller. "My siblings and I would catch blue swimmer crabs on Waikanae beach," he says. "Mum would throw them in chilli paste and we'd dip in white bread and butter." Tempura oyster, served at the restaurant, is inspired by the taste of his dad's battered oyster, enjoyed with fish and chips every Friday, on the beach back home.

"In New Zealand, everyone had an abundance of garden veg and fruit trees. We'd harvest everything. Dad taught us bushcraft and foraging. Mum brought Malaysia's fusion flavours and had an open-door policy. Friends would walk past at 6pm, knowing they'd get an invite to dinner," says Kereama, a finalist on the BBC show Great British Menu, whose dream is to cook for the Queen. "Immigration is about following a dream. I try to give people my soul food, something that comes from my upbringing, my journey, and no one else's."

Singapore crab bao bun



Seves 4 as a starter

For the soft-shell crab

4 soft-shell crabs
200ml buttermilk
1 tbsp Sichuan pepper
1 tbsp Cornish sea salt
250g plain flour

For the bao buns (makes 24, which can be frozen once cooked)

3g dried yeast
170ml warm water
25g sugar
1/2 tsp vegetable oil
1/4 tsp baking powder
1/4 tsp baking soda
1/2 tsp salt
300g strong flour
Vegetable oil for brushing

For the Singapore chilli sauce

10 large dried red chillies, rehydrated, deseeded and diced (I like

Sichuan long-dried chilli)

5 serrano chillies, diced

1 tbsp shrimp paste, roasted for 5 minutes

1 thumb of galangal, diced

1 stick lemongrass, diced

1 banana shallot, peeled and diced

3 garlic cloves, peeled and crushed

1 tbsp finely chopped ginger

25ml vegetable oil

3 tbsp tomato ketchup

1 tbsp black bean sauce

1 tbsp sugar

¼ tsp salt

3 spring onions, trimmed and chopped

2 tbsp chopped fresh coriander

For the Asian slaw

100g chopped Chinese cabbage

100g carrot, julienned or grated into matchsticks

3 spring onions, trimmed and chopped

6-7 tbsp (25g) chopped fresh coriander

4 tbsp mirin

1 tbsp brown muscovado sugar

60ml rice-wine vinegar

1 tsp golden sesame oil

1 tsp light soy sauce

1 lime, juiced

For the seaweed mayo

2 sheets nori

200g mayonnaise

Juice of ½ lemon

To garnish

12 slices cucumber

Coriander micro-cress (or large picked coriander leaves)

1 lime, cut into wedges

For the deep-fried soft-shell crab, soak the crabs in the buttermilk. Toast the Sichuan pepper in a frying pan for about a minute, then let it cool down. Grind the pepper with the salt, then season the flour. When needed, take each crab and let the excess buttermilk drip off, then dredge in the flour to coat. Deep-fry (at 180C if you can measure temperature) until crispy.

For the bao buns, mix the yeast, water, sugar and vegetable oil in a mixing bowl and leave to react. Mix all the other dry ingredients together. When the yeast is activated, add everything together to make a dough. Knead for a good 10 minutes, then cover with a damp cloth and leave in a warm place to prove for about 1 1/2 hours. Knock the dough back and divide into about 24 even balls. Leave to prove for another 30 minutes.

In the meantime, cut out 24 greaseproof paper squares (approx 10x10cm). When the dough balls are ready, roll them out into ovals. Take an oiled chopstick and place in the middle of the ovals, fold over the ovals to make a bao shape, then withdraw the chopstick. Place on the greaseproof paper and let them rise for another 30 minutes. When ready, steam the buns in batches for 10 minutes.

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For the Singapore chilli sauce, mix the chillies, shrimp paste, galangal and lemongrass, then blend to a paste. Saute the shallot, garlic and ginger in the vegetable oil until golden. Add the chilli paste, ketchup, black bean sauce, sugar and salt, then take off the heat and stir in the spring onions and coriander.

For the Asian slaw, put the cabbage, carrot, spring onions and coriander in a bowl. Combine the remaining slaw ingredients to make the dressing, whisk, then toss through the chopped vegetables.

For the seaweed mayo, dry the nori in a cool oven until very crisp, then blitz to a powder. Season the mayonnaise with the lemon juice, then mix in ½ tsp of the nori powder.

To assemble, open up the bao buns, smear chilli sauce to taste on the base, followed by slices of cucumber and a heap of coleslaw. Lay some crab meat on next, followed by a small dollop of mayo and, if you like it hotter, another smear of chilli sauce on top. Garnish and don't forget to squeeze the lime over before eating.

Ethiopian: Beza, London

Beza Berhanu, 44



Beza Berhanu with her misir wot: 'Now everyone wants to sit at my table.'
Photograph: Fabio De Paola/The Guardian

"My staff are students or mums who need some hours," says Beza Berhanu, who was 16 when she followed her cousin to the UK. [Her vegan restaurant](#) in Elephant & Castle opened six months before the pandemic. During lockdown, locals and her landlord funded cooking for NHS staff, the homeless and those out of work. "When I came here I wanted to do something that helped people. I came for opportunity. Look at me now," she says.

Berhanu grew up in Addis Ababa. Weekends and the winter were spent away from the city, at her grandmother's, where the table was full of colour

— spinach, tomatoes, green beans. “She grew everything you can think of on her land. My grandmother was an Orthodox Christian who knew all the health benefits of vegan food, or what we knew as ‘fasting food’. She was over 100 when she died.”

Berhanu studied as a nutritionist in London, and started making juices, then batches of red lentil and spinach, to sell at Camden market. “When I started cooking, all that my grandma taught me came back to me. Ethiopian food was new to my customers — they were full of wonder.”

Long queues led to the offer of a 25-seat premises in another part of London, which has all the colour and flavours of her grandmother’s table. In fact a round, Ethiopian-made replica table, crafted from dyed grass and palm leaves, hosts her customers. “In my culture, if you have one meal, you share it with someone. My family would sit around my grandma’s table and tell each other about our day. Now everyone wants to sit at my table.

“Sometimes I sit in my kitchen and think: ‘Now people know my culture.’ I still go back home to fill my suitcase with the berbere spice that my mum makes, to use at my restaurant.”

Misir wot (spiced red lentils)



Serves 2, generously

3 tbsp oil of your choice
2 big red onions, peeled and finely diced
3 cloves garlic, peeled and finely diced
1in piece ginger, minced
70g berbere spice mix (from the spice or world food section of big supermarkets) or paprika and cayenne pepper
1 tsp black pepper
500g red lentils
Salt to taste
Flatbread or injera to serve

Place oil in a medium stock pot on a medium-high heat, add onions, garlic and ginger, and cook, stirring, for eight to 10 minutes, until golden brown. Add berbere spice and pepper, and cook, stirring, for five to seven minutes more; turn down heat, if need be, to prevent it catching. Add 250ml cold water and lentils, turn down heat and cook, stirring, for 20-25 mins, until it turns thick. Simmer for two minutes more, add salt and serve on flatbread (we use Ethiopian injera bread).

Italian: Casanova, Cardiff

Antonio Cersosimo, 45



Antonio Cersosimo with his ragù: ‘Goat and octopus are our bestsellers now.’ Photograph: Fabio De Paola/The Guardian

“I wanted to live abroad and being in the EU made that easy,” says Antonio Cersosimo, who was a physics student when he left Italy for Wales in 1999, aged 22, to improve his English. Now he runs one of the country’s best, authentically [Italian restaurants](#), where regulars visit twice a week and the menu uses a mix of local ingredients and Italian imports, including wine, truffle and salami, which are increasingly hard to come by. “The ripple effect of Brexit, coronavirus and the Suez canal blockage has been chaos,” he says. “Prices have gone up. In some cases we’re the only ones in the UK buying from small, family producers, so they simply had to stop exporting to us.”

When he opened in 2005, it marked a departure from the garlic bread and lasagne served in Wales’s Italian cafes. “I’d never had garlic bread in my life. In my grandparents’ village in Calabria, we ate polenta or risotto. In Milan, where I was raised, my mother made her own passata and sourdough.”

He says successive generations of immigration to the UK have changed attitudes to new cuisines. “When we first opened, I’d put goat and octopus in the bin every week because people wouldn’t try them – now they’re our bestsellers.

“I was part of the second wave of immigrants. We came not because we had to but through choice, so we brought a different approach – less need to assimilate. I could make bolder choices with the food I cooked because, if it didn’t work, I could go home.”

Ragù di agnello e fave (ragù of Welsh lamb and broad beans)



Serves 4

For the ragù

- 1 small onion, peeled and finely diced**
- 2 small carrots, trimmed and finely diced**
- 3 sticks celery, finely diced**
- 1 small leek, trimmed and finely diced**
- 1 tsp dried mint**
- Extra-virgin olive oil**
- 400g Welsh lamb shoulder, trimmed and cut into small cubes**
- 250ml white wine**
- 1 large tomato, peeled and roughly chopped**
- 400g broad beans, shelled (or frozen and defrosted)**

For the gremolata butter

- 30 fresh mint leaves**

Zest of 1 orange
1 clove garlic, peeled
100g unsalted butter, at room temperature

To finish

400g orecchiette
Grated pecorino

If possible, make the ragù the day before and store it in the fridge, because it improves the flavour.

In a thick-based saucepan or casserole dish, sauté the chopped onion, carrot, celery, leek and dried mint, stirring often, for five minutes. Meanwhile, fry the lamb cubes in a frying pan, in extra-virgin olive oil, in batches if need be, until nicely coloured, then add to the vegetable pan.

Deglaze the lamb pan with the wine, then pour over the meat, add the tomato and cook very gently for an hour and a half, until the lamb is very tender. (If the meat looks as if it's drying out too much, add a little water.)

Finely chop the fresh mint, orange zest and garlic clove for the gremolata, then stir into the soft butter.

In a large saucepan, bring five litres of salted water to a rapid boil, add the pasta and cook for at least two minutes less than the stated cooking time – for this recipe, you want it very al dente.

Drain the pasta, reserving a little of the cooking water, then return the pasta to the saucepan, pour in the ragù and broad beans, and cook gently, stirring, on a low heat for two to three minutes. Turn off the heat and stir in the gremolata butter.

Serve in large pasta bowls, topped with the grated pecorino and a generous drizzle of extra-virgin olive oil.

Gambian: Parkers Arms, Newton, Lancashire

Stosie Madi, 51



Stosie Madi with her fatayer: ‘I dream in ingredients.’ Photograph: Fabio De Paola/The Guardian

At the height of summer, pre-Brexit and pre-pandemic, Stosie Madi’s multi award-winning pub would cook for 300 people over a weekend, opening six days a week. This summer’s staffing shortage has halved their week and their capacity. “It is heartbreaking. We could still be cooking for those numbers – we have the demand – but we don’t have the staff. After being closed for 18 months, we have not been able to capitalise on the boom that followed.”

With no local transport, and based in a wealthy hamlet where teenagers are not looking for work, Madi has relied heavily on staff from eastern Europe, often living on site. Her four core staff are Brits and one Romanian, who has been there for four years. “Brexit has been a nightmare. It stripped that workforce away. If something doesn’t change drastically, I can’t see how independent restaurants can survive.”

Madi describes herself as a “French-born Gambian with Lebanese origins”. She was born at the end of colonial rule in West Africa and followed her parents into hospitality, opening a jazz club in her 20s, then a restaurant.

The political situation forced them out when her daughter Laudy was 10. “We witnessed defenceless children being shot at in front of us. Seeing poverty around us worsen, people disappearing, friends and colleagues threatened or jailed for political opinions was the last straw.”

Rural Lancashire, the home of her long-standing friend and business partner Kathy Smith, became an unlikely new start and a culinary success. Its location, in the Forest of Bowland, was pivotal when they took on the [Parkers Arms](#) in 2007: “We wanted to cook food from the land around us, to be self-sufficient.” Citrus is one of their only imports and everything from ice-creams to bread, chutneys and pies is prepared on site: “I dream in ingredients. My cooking draws from my multinational background and my new, British one. One dish always on my menu is a pie – a dish from Middle Eastern culture, made with northern veg and the same pastry recipe I ate at school in Africa. Yet what could feel more British?”

Beetroot, beet leaves and herb fatayer



Makes 4 large pies

1 bunch beetroot with 3-4 beets and vibrant leaves

1 small bunch coriander, roughly chopped

1 small bunch mint, leaves picked and left whole

**1 small bunch thyme, leaves picked
1 small bunch flat-leaf parsley, roughly chopped
4 large garlic cloves, peeled and finely chopped
2 red chillies, finely chopped (pith and seeds discarded for less heat)
1 large red onion, peeled and finely sliced
1 tbsp ground cumin**

For the dough

**375g wholewheat stonground flour
1 tsp salt
50ml rapeseed oil
125g warm water
100g live sourdough (or 7.5g instant dried yeast or 15g live yeast)**

Pick the beetroots off the bunch, reserving the stalks and leaves. Cover beets with cold water, bring to a boil, then simmer until soft but still holding their shape. Drain, leave to cool, then peel, chop and put aside.

Mix the flour and salt in a bowl, add oil and rub through. Pour the warm water on to the sourdough starter, stir gently to dissolve, then pour into the flour mix and bring together into a ball. Cover with a cloth and leave in a warm place for 30-60 minutes until doubled in size. Turn out and knead for five to 10 minutes (or work for five minutes in a food processor with a dough hook). Put in a lightly oiled bowl, cover with a clean cloth and leave in a warm place overnight, until doubled in volume. (The dough can now be frozen for up to three months; just defrost before using.)

Toss all the filling ingredients together well, check seasoning and allow to sit for 30 minutes to wilt the herbs and leaves, and create a sauce. Stir well and proceed to fill the pies.

Gently deflate dough before portioning. For four large pies, divide into 160g balls (65g balls for 10 small pies), then cover with lightly oiled greaseproof paper.

Roll dough into circles on a lightly floured surface. Place a spoonful of filling in the middle. Bring two sides together and pinch to close. Bring the third side up so it looks like a triangle and pinch shut. (You can freeze at this

stage for up to three months; bake straight from frozen following the method below, but add 5-8 mins baking time.)

To bake, brush lightly with rapeseed oil, sprinkle with sesame seeds and sea salt (optional) and place on lightly oiled nonstick trays, then bake in a pre-heated oven at 200C (180 fan) for 10-12 mins, until golden brown and crisp. (The pies can be frozen for up to three months; just defrost and reheat until crisp.)

Delicious hot or cold, with whipped tahini or spicy tomato sauce and a crisp salad.

Nepalese: Yak Yeti Yak, Bath

Sera Gurung, 58



Sera Gurung with his bhutuwa: 'It is still my favourite dish on my menu.'
Photograph: Fabio De Paola/The Guardian

Sera Gurung opened [Yak Yeti Yak](#) with his wife, Sarah, 18 years ago to satisfy his desire for an authentic taste of home. He grew up in Armala, northern Nepal, without electricity or tap water. "Fresh vegetables grew

outside and we kept buffalo and goats. My siblings and I would watch our mother cook on the open fire in the middle of the house.”

Meat was a luxury and pork was forbidden. “As a boy, I’d travel to get it, then cook it on a fire by myself. It is still my favourite dish on my menu.”

Gurung was studying business in London when he met Sarah in 1989. They returned to Nepal together for five years, before settling in the UK.

At Yak Yeti Yak, tucked away in the basement of three Georgian townhouses, their core team has been with them more than a decade, serving customers on floor cushions, under walls adorned with rice dollies, fish traps, nets and Nepalese art.

At this point in the pandemic, Sarah says, they are still in survival mode. “A few younger, newer staff liked furlough too much,” she says. Young employees saved their wages in lockdown and left when it was time to reopen. “Finding new staff to replace them and extra staff to keep up with Covid sanitation is difficult,” she adds. This has limited their capacity.

Gurung says: “I’ve had people travel to Nepal after eating here, then come back to tell me my food is better. One Michelin chef sends his kitchen porter for takeaway at the end of his shift.

In our culture, a guest is like a god, to be respected. To hear they love the food of my home country feels wonderful.”

Pork belly bhutuwa



Serves 4 with rice, dal and a vegetable dish, or a generous 2 with just rice

450g pork belly strips

1 medium onion, peeled

1 tomato

3-4 spring onions

60ml rapeseed or vegetable oil

1 tbsp ginger, finely grated

½ tbsp garlic, finely grated

2 ½ tsp Kathmandu masala ([thehimalayanspice company.com](http://thehimalayanspicecompany.com)) or garam masala

1 tsp salt

60ml water

Cut pork into 3cm squares. Cut onion into quarters from tip to root. Roughly chop tomato. Trim and cut spring onions into 4cm lengths.

Heat oil in a large, heavy-based pan or wok until shimmering, then stir-fry pork belly until browned all over. Add onion, ginger and garlic, fry, stirring, until the onion is translucent, add the masala and salt, and cook for up to a minute, until the spices start sticking to the bottom of the pan. Add water, stir to lift any bits stuck to the bottom and reduce the heat to medium. Cover

and cook until the pork is cooked through (it should give off lots of juice; if not, add 60ml more water).

Remove the lid, return heat to high and cook until liquid evaporates, pork sizzles and the juices caramelise on the bottom of the pan. Stir and scrape the caramel to prevent it burning; as soon as you have difficulty scraping the caramel from the pan, stir in the tomato, which will lift it as it cooks. Add spring onions, cook long enough to soften slightly, then taste for salt, adjust and serve.

This is a lovely, rich curry that goes well with fried rice, pilau rice or flatbread. As with most Nepalese curries, it is dry; for gravy, add 250ml water and 2 tbsp light soy sauce with the spring onions, and stir well.

Syrian: Arabic Flavour, Aberystwyth

Ghofran Hamza, 23



Ghofran Hamza with her stuffed vine leaves: ‘In Lebanon, I went without food; now I cook for others.’ Photograph: Fabio De Paola/The Guardian

“I didn’t even have time to switch on the kitchen equipment before the pandemic hit,” says Ghofran Hamza, a refugee of the Syrian war who

planned to open Aberystwyth's first Arabic restaurant in March 2020. When she did eventually open the doors, a year later, 200 people queued to eat there. "I will never forget that day," she says.

After leaving her home, in north-east Syria, for Lebanon in 2012, Hamza's family relied on UN food parcels. "When war started, we would go out and never know if we'd make it home," she says. "In Lebanon, we went a long time without work. The house we were in wasn't fit for animals."

They were given a home in the UK in 2018. Hamza cooked with her mother and brother (she also has two younger siblings) to raise money for refugee families.

"There is a Syrian community here of about eight families. We wanted to buy children clothes and send them on summer activities. The town loved our food."

[A restaurant](#) was never part of the plan. "But Mum and I walked past a place for rent and called the landlord. He kept rates low for us. People warned me that running a business when we'd been here just a few months would be too much for a young woman, but I saw a chance to create something."

Hamza is studying for a degree in international politics and Spanish while running the restaurant. She employs two staff – one local person and one student. "Locally, there were many people looking for work but to find someone who has grown up eating or cooking the same food is hard," she says. "As a girl, I would watch my mum prepare stuffed vine leaves from scratch. When we moved here, she taught me how to cook. Now you can't tell the difference between her food and mine."

"In Lebanon, I went without food; now I cook for others. My journey has come full circle. It's hard to think of my friends back home, but when I cook, it's a little bit of the food we shared."

Stuffed vine leaves



Serves 6

1 large jar (908g) vine leaves in brine (you can get them at any Middle Eastern food shop; the quality makes a big difference to the dish, so get the best you can afford – I use [California Gardens](#))

For the filling

420g short-grain rice

100g parsley, finely chopped

6 tomatoes, finely chopped

2 big onions, peeled and finely chopped, or 1 bunch spring onions, finely chopped

5 garlic cloves, peeled and finely chopped

60ml olive oil or vegetable oil

For the spice mix

You can use any spices you wish, but the essentials are:

2 tbsp tomato paste

1 tsp black pepper

2 tsp citric acid, or the juice of 4 lemons

1 tbsp salt

In addition

**Enough discs of sliced tomato, potato and onion to line your pan
(around four slices for a medium pan)**

Put all the filling ingredients in a bowl and stir to mix. Before adding the spice mix, try some so you know whether to adjust the flavour by adding more lemon or salt. It should be a bit salty and sour. Combine the filling with most of the spice mix, leaving a little spice back for later. Drain and wash the vine leaves. Lay a leaf soft side down on a board, with the hard side facing up. Spoon the same amount of filling into each leaf, then fold it in at the sides first before rolling it up like a wrap. (The process is quite time-consuming.)

At the bottom of a large, heavy pot, put slices of tomatoes, potatoes or any vegetables you like to prevent the leaves from burning, then cover with a layer of stuffed vine leaves. Add the remaining spice mixture at the bottom of the pot or between each layer of vine leaves to retain flavour. Repeat in layers until all the vine leaves are in the pot. Add water to cover and seal with a plate (you might want to place something heavy on top to keep it in place).

Bring up to a boil, reduce the heat to medium and leave to cook for at least an hour. If they are soft, they are ready; if not, cook for up to 30 minutes more, then serve at room temperature, to six people as a main dish, 12 as a side.

Mexican: Mestizo, London

Roberto Alvarado Rios, 71



Roberto Alvarado Rios with his enchiladas: ‘We are ambassadors for the flavours of home.’ Photograph: Fabio De Paola/The Guardian

In autumn, a competitor walked in and tried to poach the Spanish staff at [Mestizo](#), a bright, cosy restaurant and tequila bar in Camden, near Regent’s Park in London. “I was shocked,” says owner Marysol Alvarado. “I would never do that. It shows how desperate the industry is. We had already lost staff from the floor, the kitchen. They left because of the pandemic and never returned because of Brexit. Every restaurant owner is struggling.”

Marysol and husband Roberto came to the UK from a restaurant background in Tecamachalco, central Mexico, in 1997 and opened Si Señor, in Soho, with an ambition to deliver traditional cuisine to Brits. In 2001, though, they were forced to close when the rent went up.

The pandemic threatened financial ruin again – the family put their entire savings into keeping their restaurant, and the Mexican market next door, going. “The supply chain has been menacing,” Marysol says. “The customer may never feel this, and perhaps gets mad about not being able to get served their favourite tipple, but certain food and drink items are just not available any more.”

Now the lively, 80-cover spot is thriving again, thanks to loyal locals and a solid reputation – a favourite dish is mole poblano (meat in a chocolate and chilli sauce). “Our menus are inspired by all parts of Mexico, by my mother and mother-in-law,” Marysol explains. “We are not fancy, but we are ambassadors for the food, flavours, colours of home. When Mexicans come to eat here, they remember when their grannies cooked for them: *Mi casa es su casa.*”

Chicken enchiladas



Serves 2

300g chicken breast

1 bowl (size to your liking) cooked whole black beans

Cooked rice (amount to your liking)

A little olive or vegetable oil

4 corn tortillas (2 per serving)

300ml salsa verde for enchiladas (ready made from mestizomarket.com)

Roast or poach the chicken with your preferred seasoning and/or spices, then shred. Heat the beans and rice, ready to be served as sides. Once done, grease a pan with oil and put on a high heat. When the oil is hot, soften the tortillas by dipping them in for five seconds (use tongs), taking care not to

leave them too long, as they will go crisp and won't fold easily. In another pan, warm the salsa verde. Stuff the tortillas with the shredded chicken, roll to enclose the filling, then cover in the hot salsa verde. Serve with the rice and beans.

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Pedro Almodóvar

Interview

Pedro Almodóvar on Spain's tragic past: 'You can't ask people to forget'

[Simon Hattenstone](#)

With his new film *Parallel Mothers*, the director dials down the camp to address the shadow of fascism hanging over his homeland



Man of La Mancha ... *Parallel Mothers* director Pedro Almodóvar.



Sat 22 Jan 2022 04.00 EST

Pedro Almodóvar is in Madrid at his production company El Deseo (The Desire). El Deseo could not be a more fitting name: desire has been at the heart of his films. All sorts of desire: for love, sex, justice, acceptance and truth. Behind him are DVDs, books and a phalanx of awards. He has five Baftas, five Goyas and is the only Spanish director to have won two Oscars (best foreign film in 1999 for *All About My Mother* and best original screenplay for *Talk to Her* in 2002).

He is sitting on a purple chair, wearing a pink jumper, his hair quiffed into a punky white meringue. You suspect that every colour in Almodóvar's life has been carefully handpicked – just as in his films. His back is ramrod straight, his manner both warm and regal. Almodóvar is a man used to being in control, and today there is a translator (despite his fluent English), assistant and publicist at his service. When I met Almodóvar previously, in Madrid in 2004, he was tense throughout our conversation, and only began to relax after the interview. At the end, he gave me a copy of a calendar I had admired, featuring pictures he had shot on location. He signed it "Things are simpler and yet more complicated". Somehow, it seems to sum up his films and worldview perfectly.

Things are rarely as they first appear in Almodóvar's films. Transformation is a recurring theme in Parallel Mothers as it is in all his work: characters are changed by surgery, mishaps, performance (his protagonists are often actors by profession) and gender fluidity.

The young Almodóvar wanted to observe and celebrate the new Spain, then in the midst of La Movida [Madrileña](#) (known as the Movement or the Happening), Madrid's counter-cultural flourishing that developed in the transition to democracy and in opposition to all that had gone before. La Movida was punk, promiscuous, queer, anti-clerical and rampantly hedonistic – just like Almodóvar's films.

“When I was making my first films, everyone around me was really young and wanted to live their lives and enjoy themselves. The first couple of films I made, *Pepi, Luci, Bom* and *Labyrinth of Passion*, had their genesis in a time. For me that was apolitical.” Being apolitical at the time was effectively a political statement, he tells me over Zoom.

So he made films that celebrated the present. Almodóvar didn't just satirise nuclear families as his compatriot Luis Buñuel had done a few years earlier – he obliterated them. In early films such as *Dark Habits*, *Law of Desire* and *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* he created his own families of pregnant nuns, transgender prostitutes, mariticial wives, drug-dealing sons, and bullying patriarchs destined to be seen off with a cosh to the head in the first act. His films played out in their own moral universe: women tended to go unpunished for crimes committed against men who'd simply got their just deserts; a man who rapes a comatose woman is portrayed sympathetically in 2002's *Talk to Her* because he loves her (the rape awakens her and allows her to live again). Almodóvar has the ability to shock people of all political persuasions.



From here to maternity ... Milena Smit and Penélope Cruz in *Parallel Mothers*. Photograph: Iglesias Más/Sony/AP

Yet behind all these cinematic celebrations of the present was a ghost. When Almodóvar started making films, he promised himself one thing: his movies would give the Spanish dictator Francisco Franco the ultimate two-fingered salute. They wouldn't explicitly condemn his fascist politics; they wouldn't ridicule the general who ruled Spain for 39 years until his death in 1975; they would simply act as if he had never existed. As a director, he says, he didn't want to think about fascism and Franco back then: "It was my way of getting revenge on him. But it didn't mean to say I'd forgotten."

But now Almodóvar has had a change of heart. He is speaking in long, fiery sentences with few pauses – a very different passion from the high-camp passion of his younger days. He is not only now willing to discuss Franco, he thinks it is essential. Now, he says, is the time to remember Franco lest his victims be forgotten. And *Parallel Mothers*, which received a nine-minute ovation when it premiered at the [Venice film festival](#) last September, does just that.

In one way it is a typical Almodóvar film: vibrant, sexy, subversive and emotional. A pregnant woman in her 40s (played by Almodóvar regular Penélope Cruz) befriends a pregnant teenager, Ana (the wonderful

newcomer Milena Smit), in the maternity ward, and all kinds of craziness develops. Alongside this runs a very different story. Cruz's character Janis believes a mass grave outside her local village contains the bodies of those executed by Franco and the fascist Falange party in the Spanish civil war, including her great-grandfather. She is fighting to have them exhumed. It is an issue that is currently being discussed with some urgency throughout Spain, and one that Almodóvar felt he had to tackle before it was too late.



Buried secrets ... Janis (Penélope Cruz) leads the search for her great-grandfather's grave in *Parallel Mothers*. Photograph: Iglesias Más/AP

Only 19,000 of the estimated 114,000 civilians who disappeared during the 1936-39 civil war, and throughout Franco's dictatorship, have been recovered since his death. Many are thought to have been dumped in mass graves – and time is running out to get to the truth. "The whole issue of these common graves from the civil war is becoming more pressing as the days go by," Almodóvar says. "Those remains have been in the mass graves for so long that they may not even be identifiable any more when they are exhumed. There may be no family members left to identify them."

Born in 1949, Almodóvar grew up in rural, traditional La Mancha. His father ran a petrol station, his mother a bodega where she sold her own wine. His parents hoped he would become a priest and sent him to a religious

boarding school at the age of eight, where he developed a hatred for religion and a love of cinema. After watching Warren Beatty in *Splendor in the Grass* he realised he was attracted to men (though for many years he was bisexual). In 1967, he moved to Madrid, against his parents' wishes, to escape poverty and become a film-maker. For 12 years he worked as an admin assistant at the phone company [Telefónica](#) to support himself financially.

I ask how Franco's reign affected him as a child. "When you're a boy, your life is different. I was very happy when I was young. I wasn't aware really of what was going on around me. I was aware we didn't have any money, but life is full of treasures when you are young – and they are not material treasures."



Altar egos ... Almodóvar directs *Bad Education* (2004). Photograph: Sony Picture Classics/Allstar

He became aware of Franco when he was sent away to school. Franco aligned himself with Spain's Catholic church to forge a dual dictatorship, and it didn't take Almodóvar long to realise he would never become a priest. "The schools were run by priests and that was a nightmare." He says he was lucky – he was not sexually abused, but plenty of his friends were.

This is a subject he addressed in the 2004 film *Bad Education*. “So many boys were abused by these priests in all the schools. As well as the impoverished education, I spent the whole time at school terrified that the priests would molest me. All my life since then I’ve fought against that Judaeo-Christian education. That’s the thing I most deplore in all my childhood.”

As a teenager, he started to understand how oppressive life was. “I felt afraid of the ‘Grey Uniforms’ as we call them, the national guard. The policemen were the ones repressing us. I realised that there were films we could never get to see in Spain, there were books that never got to us, there were things we couldn’t buy. I remember the total darkness of that time.”

Then came the liberation of *La Movida*. The late 1970s and 1980s was a wonderful time to be young, he says. Madrid became known as “the city that never sleeps” – everything was possible, nothing taboo.



Women on the verge ... Almodóvar directs Milena Smit (Ana) and Penélope Cruz (Janis) in *Parallel Mothers*. Photograph: Iglesias Más/AP

The two women at the heart of *Parallel Mothers* could represent the two Almodóvars – of yesteryear, and today: Cruz’s Janis and the younger Ana sum up the debate dominating Spain in a simple, impassioned exchange.

Ana tells Janis you have to focus on the present to live a fulfilling life; a furious Janis replies you can only make sense of the present if you understand the past – and to fail to do so is a betrayal of your ancestors.

After Franco's death the political parties of Spain forged the Pact of Forgetting. The pact stated that in order for there to be a smooth transition to democracy, there would be no prosecutions for those responsible for human rights violations or similar crimes committed during the Francoist era. Not surprisingly, it was controversial. Today, Almodóvar says the notion of forgetting is nonsense. "You can demand it in a symbolic way. What you can't do is ask people to forget. The families of victims of the civil war will never forget them. Remembering is part of the soul of who we are."

Back then, many on the left believed there would be another coup without the pact, not least because many Franco loyalists were still active in politics. Indeed, there was an attempted coup by some police and military officers in 1981, four years after the pact was signed.

Almodóvar believes that the pact was pragmatic at the time, but should have been challenged as soon as democracy was re-established. "After the left had been consolidated in political power, we should have gone back to the whole scene of the mass graves and all those crimes from Franco's dictatorship that were still unresolved. What Franco did was bury those people so deep into the ground that he almost denied their very existence."



Tale of the unexpected ... Javier Camara and Leonor Watling in *Talk to Her* (2002). Photograph: AF archive/Alamy

Last year, the leftwing government approved a new Democratic Memory bill to tackle the legacy of Franco's dictatorship and the civil war that preceded it, with measures to honour those who suffered persecution or violence. If it comes into law it will create two remembrance days to honour the victims and the exiled, and an official registry of the victims will be set up. It will also promote the search and exhumations of victims buried in mass graves.

Does Almodóvar think the Democratic Memory bill has come too late? "I'm not sure if it's too late, but better late than never." He points out that the left still doesn't think the new law goes far enough because it will not redress all the property and assets that Franco stole from the victims. But Almodóvar also worries that Spain is returning to the darkness. As with so many countries, the populist far right is on the rise, and politics is becoming increasingly polarised.

The far-right Vox is now the third-largest political party in parliament, and Almodóvar is alarmed by its influence. Hard-won freedoms and truths are already being reversed, he says. "What they are doing is revisiting and revising what happened. They are telling the civil war history from their ideology, which is totally Francoist in nature." Vox's historical revisionism

blames the Second Republic, which brought democracy to Spain in 1931, for the civil war, rather than Franco's military coup. "It's really important for people to be able to make this distinction between the truth and fake news." He pauses. "The expression 'fake news' falls short of what they are doing with these lies."



Rain and Glory ... Cecilia Roth in Almodóvar's 1999 Oscar-winner All About My Mother. Photograph: Columbia Tristar/Allstar

I'd love to say I don't fear that there may be a return of fascism in Spain

Does he fear a return to fascism in Spain? "I'd love to say I don't fear that there may be a return of fascism, but I think that might be going too far. We certainly have to understand the importance of the fact we have Vox now in politics. That we have a far-right party which is now the third political force here is unbearable, and unacceptable."

The bigotry that is reflected in the rise of Vox can now be seen in everyday life, Almodóvar says. "The last 30 years we never saw the homophobic attacks we're starting to see on the streets of Spain now. This party is seriously homophobic, anti-women, extremely racist. I wouldn't say I'm afraid, but I am very worried about them."

For all its labyrinthine plotting and breathless romance, *Parallel Mothers* is probably the closest Almodóvar will ever get to a polemic: a simple plea to honour the victims of Franco. “There is a moral debt now in society to the families of these victims who were fellow citizens fighting to defend our democracy, which is why it’s so timely to have this theme in my film today.”



Antonio Banderas as Salvador Mallo in *Pain and Glory* (2019). Photograph: Alamy

Almodóvar is not only aware that time is running out to redress the crimes of Franco; he knows that if he hadn’t addressed the issue now, it might well have become too late for him, too. He has been conscious of ageing and obsessed with death ever since he was a young man. Before *Parallel Mothers*, he made *Pain and Glory*, a film about an ageing director Salvador Mallo (played by Antonio Banderas) in an existential and physical rut, suffering migraines, backaches, depression, tinnitus, the works. “Without film-making my life is meaningless,” Salvador says. Almodóvar has said the movie is autobiographical.

The difference between Salvador and him is that the fictional director was suffering writer’s block. By contrast, Almodóvar has spent the past quarter century creating classic after classic. He consistently draws phenomenal performances from his regular actors. Most of them are women. Some have

gone on to become huge Hollywood stars, such as Cruz (he once said only Cruz could make him reconsider whether he is gay), Antonio Banderas and Javier Bardem. There is an astonishing sensuality in his films: everyday acts such as chopping vegetables or making a cup of coffee leave you purring with pleasure. His stories are as rich as the colours and imagery he uses to illustrate them.

Over the years his movies have remained as outre as ever, but they have become more serious and affecting. His genius has been to make the outlandish believable. And again he pulls it off in *Parallel Mothers*.



He's so excited ... Almodóvar celebrates his win for *All About My Mother* with Antonio Banderas and Penélope Cruz at the Oscar ceremony in 2000.
Photograph: Héctor Mata/AFP/Getty

What gives his films their heart is his love for his protagonists and their optimism. However tough their lives, they tend to pull through in one way or another, their hope still intact. There is a profoundly moving scene at the end of *Parallel Mothers* that unites past and present, victims and survivors. Action triumphs over quiescence, remembrance over forgetting, hope over fear.

I ask whether Almodóvar shares the optimism of his characters. He has been so solemn talking about Franco's legacy, but finally I see a familiar twinkle in his eye. "Yes. Although the current times we are living through, the economic circumstances, the political circumstances, the health circumstances are not the best of times any more, every single morning I get up I make myself feel optimistic because you always gain from it."

He allows himself a smile. "Yes, for me, optimism is something I am an absolute activist about."

Parallel Mothers is in UK cinemas from Friday.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2022/jan/22/pedro-almodovar-on-spains-tragic-past-you-cant-ask-people-to-forget>

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The Q&ATelevision & radio

Interview

Samira Ahmed: ‘I gave the V sign to a rude driver – it turned out to be a police car’

Rosanna Greenstreet

The broadcaster on making a stand, meeting Paul McCartney, and a solo shopping trip at the age of two



Samira Ahmed: ‘The furrow in my forehead is a battle scar from thinking.’
Photograph: Suki Dhanda/The Guardian

Sat 22 Jan 2022 04.30 EST

Born in London, Samira Ahmed, 53, began her career as a BBC trainee and rose to present news, current affairs and arts programmes on radio and television. In 2020, she won the Broadcasting Press Guild’s audio

broadcaster of the year for Front Row on Radio 4 and her podcast [How I Found My Voice](#). In January 2020, she won a landmark sex discrimination employment tribunal against the BBC for equal pay on the television show Newswatch. She features in Tamesis Street: Thirty Authors Tell One Story of a Climate Disaster, available through [ShelterBox Book Club](#). She lives in London and has two children.

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When were you happiest?

On stage, [interviewing one of my heroes, Paul McCartney](#), at the Royal Festival Hall last November.

What is your greatest fear?

Not sorting climate change when we have the chance.

What is your earliest memory?

Leaving home to go shopping aged two with my dolly in a pushchair while my dad was washing the car on the driveway. All the neighbours came out to help my distraught parents hunt for me. Being independent has always been important.

Describe yourself in three words

Hardworking, ethical, unafraid.

What would your superpower be?

Speaking every language beautifully.

What makes you unhappy?

That women are still fighting the same battles as our mothers.

What do you most dislike about your appearance?

Nothing. The furrow in my forehead is a battle scar from thinking.

Who would play you in the film of your life?

Julie Andrews.

To whom would you most like to say sorry, and why?

My maternal grandmother, who lived with us for many years. I was a moody teenager and sometimes impatient and rude. Yet she was the person I feel I'm most like. I really miss her.

Which words or phrases do you most overuse?

Fab. Fascinating. Utter wanker (the last not usually out loud).

What has been your biggest disappointment?

When I was a 26-year-old news correspondent, the head of [BBC](#) news gathering, Chris Cramer, refused to let me take up a six-month attachment on the foreign affairs programme Correspondent. He said: "I think it's too soon; you could do it later." He'd never have said that to a man.

If you could edit your past, what would you change?

That decision.

When did you last cry, and why?

Meeting [Richard Ratcliffe](#) outside the Foreign Office during his hunger strike to try to get action to free Nazanin. I'm moved by the loyalty and strength of that couple and their family.

When was the last time you changed your mind about something significant?

In the last month. Over [museums taking funding from fossil fuel companies](#).

What single thing would improve the quality of your life?

A 50-metre lido that was always empty when I went.

What has been your closest brush with the law?

Getting pulled over in my car at Hyde Park Corner after giving the V sign to what I thought was a rude and aggressive driver. It turned out to be a police car.

What is the most important lesson life has taught you?

Join a union and make a stand.

What happens when we die?

It's all over. But hopefully we leave a legacy in our deeds.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2022/jan/22/samira-ahmed-interview-v-sign-rude-driver-police-car>

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[Cryptocurrencies](#)

Dangerous game? Football clubs look to mine fans' cash with crypto offerings

Digital tokens seen as new wealth stream as TV rights and sponsorship level off but not everyone is happy at the new signings



FC Barcelona has 3.5m fan tokens in circulation. Photograph: Laurence Griffiths/Getty Images

[Rob Davies](#)

[@ByRobDavies](#)

Sat 22 Jan 2022 02.00 EST

When FC [Barcelona](#) took to the pitch for the 2021 Spanish Super Cup final, the trophy wasn't the only prize at stake.

Thousands of *blaugrana* fans were also keeping an eye on the market for FCB's "fan token", the club's very own cryptocurrency. [Socios, the web-](#)

[based platform that pioneered fan tokens](#), had promised to “burn” 20,000 tokens for every goal Barcelona scored – and 40,000 if they lifted the cup.

In theory, success on the pitch would increase the scarcity of the currency, boosting its value. In practice, Barcelona lost the game and, footballing passions aside, it didn’t make much difference anyway. With 3.5m of the tokens in circulation, not to mention millions more retained by the club for future issuance, a few thousand here or there wouldn’t have moved the needle.

Q&A

What is cryptocurrency?

Show



Cryptocurrencies are an alternative way of making payments to cash or credit cards. The technology behind it allows the ‘money’ to be sent directly to others without it having to pass through the banking system. For that reason they are outside the control of governments and are unregulated by financial watchdogs – and transactions can be made in a way that keeps you reasonably pseudonymous.

If you own a crypto-asset you control a secret digital key that you can use to prove to anyone on the network that a certain amount of that asset is yours. If you spend it, you tell the entire network that you have transferred ownership of it, and use the same key to prove that you are telling the truth. Over time, the history of all those transactions becomes a lasting record of who owns what: that record is called the **blockchain**.

Bitcoin was one of the first and biggest cryptocurrencies and has been on a wild ride since its creation in 2009, sometimes surging in value as investors have piled in – and occasionally crashing back down. Dogecoin – which started as a joke – has also seen a stratospheric rise in value.

Sceptics warn that the lack of central control make crypto-assets ideal for criminals and terrorists, while libertarian monetarists enjoy the idea of a currency with no inflation and no central bank.

The whole concept of cryptocurrencies has been criticised for its ecological impact, with "mining" for new coins requiring vast energy reserves and the associated carbon footprint of the whole system.

Richard Partington and Martin Belam

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

But the stunt symbolised something more, the burgeoning love affair between football and cryptocurrency, an alliance that holds the promise of new revenue streams for a game that is already awash with cash but always wants more.

Football finance expert Kieran Maguire thinks clubs have latched on to crypto because revenues from other sources are starting to level off, having risen reliably for decades.

"Football clubs have realised that we're now at max broadcast revenues, with modest growth at most to look forward to," he said.

“As far as commercial sponsors are concerned, we’re seeing deals being renewed but not with increased money. The only way to increase matchday sales is to increase prices and fans are reluctant.”

Manchester United – whether one believes the club or not – claims to have 1.1 billion fans on the planet. With revenue of £488m in 2019-20, that’s just 45p per year, per fan.

“Clubs are thinking: ‘Can we ‘find another way of extracting money out of that huge fanbase?’ That’s where tokens come in.”

When AC Milan launched a token in early 2021, it raised \$6m (£4.4m) in under an hour, or about 12% of the value of the club’s record signing, Leonardo Bonucci. Paris Saint-Germain’s token, the most valuable, has a market value of \$45m.

In the murky and unregulated world of crypto though, it’s hard to know how much clubs are actually making. Socios said last year it had sold \$300m worth of fan tokens but would not say how much of that went to the clubs with which it partnered.

Other platforms, such as Binance, are also moving into the fan token market, indicating there is room for growth, particularly given that only a few dozen clubs have entered the market in any meaningful way.

Pedro Herrera, senior blockchain analyst at DappRadar, a marketplace for blockchain-related apps, said that most fans buy tokens for the associated perks, such as votes on small decisions about which song to play over the stadium tannoy after a goal, or entry into a draw to win a signed shirt.

“It’s a win for the fan because they feel more involved; it’s a win for the team because it’s adding a layer of monetisation; and it’s a win for the [crypto] industry because you attract the masses and it’s one step closer to mass adoption.”

Maguire isn’t against crypto but adds a more sceptical tone: “Lots of fans love crypto and in its purest form it’s great. Banks have been overcharging

people for years in terms of transaction fees and if crypto can reduce those fees that's fantastic.”

“The problem is when unscrupulous traders, particularly via social media, seek to exploit fans who think a token is a serious investment product, rather than a glorified collectible.

“It’s magic beans. So long as it’s sold as a digital Panini card, it’s OK. But when it’s being seen as a form of investment, it’s moving into uncomfortable territory.”

“It’s unregulated, it’s volatile and it’s subject to manipulation by people who own large amounts of the asset.”

Fan tokens, though, are a mere paragraph in football’s rapidly unfolding crypto saga.

In 2021, crypto sponsors piled into football and were welcomed with open arms by cash-hungry clubs, leagues and players.



Watford have perhaps England's biggest crypto deal, a front-of-shirt sponsorship from Stake.com, which offers crypto gambling. Photograph: Tess Derry/PA

Exchange app Crypto.com sponsors Italy's Serie A, one of the world's most glamorous leagues, while Socios is Internazionale's shirt sponsor. EToro, a trading platform that facilitates investment in multiple cryptocurrencies, has deals with more than half of the clubs in the [Premier League](#).

Southampton players are understood to have been offered the option to be paid bonuses in bitcoin, as part of a £7.5m-a-year deal with Coingaming Group. And in January 2021, striker David Barral made history when he became the first player in a major league to be signed with bitcoin, albeit in Spain's third tier with Internacional de Madrid.

Much better-known players and ex-pros, [such as Paul Pogba](#) and John Terry, are promoting cryptocurrencies, trading platforms and [non-fungible tokens \(NFTs\)](#) – the controversial digital art form – too.

This should come as no surprise given the reach that big-name stars have via social media and the money they can make from promotions. Other partnerships are perhaps more unexpected. Visitors to the Twitter profile of former Republic of Ireland international Tony Cascarino might have been wrongfooted by the former striker's sudden change of pace midway through 2021. One moment he was musing on the latest developments in the Premier League, the next he was evangelising about blockchain bank Babb (no relation to former Ireland teammate Phil) and musing that the “crypto market is on fire”.

Even in its infancy, the reputational risks of this new commercial pact between crypto and football have become all too clear. Last year, Manchester City's deal with a mysterious firm called 3Key Technologies [fell apart](#) in a matter of days as it emerged that [nobody seemed to know anything about the company](#) or its executives.



The Advertising Standards Authority banned Arsenal FC ads promoting fan tokens. Photograph: ASA/PA

In December, Arsenal were rapped on the knuckles by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), which [banned a club promotion](#) that it said was exploiting fans’ “inexperience or credulity, trivialising investment in crypto assets, misleading consumers over the risk of investment and not making it clear the ‘token’ was a crypto asset”.

“For those in sport looking for sponsorship, it’s a whole new market of opportunity but it’s a bit of a landmine you’re dealing with,” said Bill Esdaile, managing director of sports marketing agency Square in the Air.

“My gut feeling is that such a small percentage of people understand how [crypto] works that too many decisions are made on trust, thinking that if [crypto firms] say they’ve got the money, they do.”

The amounts on offer appear to be going up.

Premier League strugglers [Watford](#) have perhaps the country’s biggest crypto deal, a front-of-shirt sponsorship from Stake.com. The site offers crypto gambling, which isn’t legal in the UK but may appeal to the league’s hundreds of millions of viewers around the world.

The arrangement even means that Watford players' shirt sleeves bear the logo of [Dogecoin, a “joke” currency](#) whose value swings around wildly, often in response to tweets by Tesla multibillionaire Elon Musk.

Tesla merch buyable with Dogecoin

— Elon Musk (@elonmusk) [January 14, 2022](#)

Kieran Maguire estimates that the shirt deal could be worth up to £8m, based on the typical value of such partnerships, while an insider at Watford told MSN in August that the Dogecoin sleeve display added £700,000 into the mix.

Sums like these will become increasingly difficult for clubs to ignore, he thinks, particularly if the government goes ahead with a [root-and-branch overhaul](#) of gambling regulation that could see [football lose the cash cow](#) of shirt deals with betting firms.

“They [clubs] see the token market as slightly to one side, it won’t get picked up by the gambling review and it will help fill the gap,” says Maguire.

“Those deals of £5m to £8m could be replaced by NFT advertising and by crypto.”

In a [recent paper](#), psychology researcher and gambling expert Dr Phil Newall warned that football sponsorship may be about to swap one risky product for another.

“Research has found that [cryptocurrency traders are likely to have problem gambling symptoms](#), and has identified psychological similarities between cryptocurrency trading and online sports betting,” wrote Newall. He believes removing gambling advertising may create more space in which to legitimise equally dangerous products.

As they burn through cash in the pursuit of glory, it seems unlikely that clubs will worry about that.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/jan/22/dangerous-game-football-clubs-look-to-mine-fans-cash-with-crypto-offerings>

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- [**England Boris Johnson tells schools to end mask-wearing policy**](#)

Coronavirus

‘More people will die’: fears for clinically vulnerable as England axes plan B

Coronavirus pandemic’s finishing line has not yet come clearly into focus for millions of people

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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The national Covid memorial wall in London. Those with suppressed immune systems get less protection from vaccines. Photograph: Xinhua/Rex/Shutterstock



Hannah Devlin Science correspondent

[@hannahdev](https://twitter.com/hannahdev)

Sat 22 Jan 2022 03.30 EST

“We must learn to live with Covid in the same way we have to live with flu,” Sajid Javid told the nation this week. For most people, the parallel with flu is now valid: vaccinations and acquired immunity have defanged Covid to the point that there is no longer much risk of becoming severely unwell.

However, the pandemic’s finishing line has not yet come clearly into focus for a sizeable minority in society. In England, 3.7 million people fall in the clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) category, including those with blood cancers, an organ transplant, kidney disease and other conditions linked to immunosuppression.

“It feels to me that lying behind the [lifting of restrictions] is the idea that probably everyone’s going to get it and everyone will be all right,” said Gemma Peters, the chief executive of Blood Cancer UK. “In our community, that isn’t true. If more people get it, more people will die.”

Starting from a far higher level of risk, those with suppressed immune systems also get less protection from vaccines and are accounting for an

increasing proportion of ICU admissions and deaths. Yet many feel like a “forgotten minority”, according to Maggie Wearmouth, a GP and member of the government’s Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI).

“It’s fairly mind-blowing,” Wearmouth said. “They are an important and hugely vulnerable group that have been forgotten. I feel quite angry on their behalf.”

According to Wearmouth, this is not simply a case of these people being fundamentally frailer and more susceptible to all illness – although this will be true for some. Many of those with slow-growing blood cancers, for instance, would outwardly appear healthy and have lived essentially normal lives pre-Covid. Some felt no need to disclose their condition to friends, or even their children, before the pandemic.

The emergence of a new virus changed things for this group because it required building up immunity from scratch at a point in life when the immune system was compromised either through illnesses or treatments.

Early vaccine data for blood cancer patients – of whom there are 250,000 in the UK – found little or no antibody response to the first dose of vaccine. More recent data, [published this week in the Lancet](#), showed that for dialysis patients, even after two doses of the Oxford/AstraZeneca jab and one dose of Pfizer/BioNTech, more than half did not have detectable levels of antibodies against the Omicron variant.

This is not to say that vaccinations “don’t work” for these groups, but that immunity needs to be built up over repeated doses and may never be as robust.

Michelle Willicombe, a nephrologist and senior clinical lecturer at Imperial College Healthcare NHS trust, said: “Covid infection still remains a real threat to immunosuppressed patients in particular within the clinically extremely vulnerable groups. Not all immunosuppressed patients have mounted immune response to vaccinations, even after four doses.”

“Life for them can’t carry on as normal,” she added.

Despite the lower efficacy of vaccines in vulnerable groups, the roll-out of third doses before the Omicron wave struck was slow, meaning that many are yet to have a fourth dose, which they would now be eligible for if things had moved quicker in the autumn. According to UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) data, 84% of those in the extremely vulnerable category have had a third or booster dose, but the figure is expected to be far lower for [fourth doses](#) (UKHSA did not have available data).

“I’ve got a real worry about this,” said Peters. “Probably half the calls to our support line are people who are struggling to get their fourth dose.”

There is a viable pathway to a more normal life, despite it being a longer and more difficult one, according to Peters. Newly available antiviral drugs, including [Pfizer’s Paxlovid and Merck’s molnupiravir](#), significantly reduce the chances of hospitalisation and death if taken during the first few days of illness and are now available to those in the vulnerable category.

Some countries, although not the UK, are using [monoclonal antibodies](#) as prevention against infection in immunosuppressed people who have not mounted an immune response to vaccines. Some argue they should be made available in the UK, particularly if new immunity-evasive variants emerge. There is also a concern over whether free lateral flow tests will remain available to those in the vulnerable group so that they can continue to ask family and friends to test before meeting up.

“If we had all of that in place it would give people a roadmap to a world where it becomes endemic and they can still see their friends,” said Peters.

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Coronavirus

Shielders say lifting of England's Plan B restrictions 'complete nightmare'

Among the 3.7 million clinically extremely vulnerable people in England, the removal of Covid restrictions has raised concerns



Many people have been shielding since March 2020 due to serious health conditions or being immunosuppressed. Photograph: Louis-Paul st-onge Louis/Alamy

[Alfie Packham](#)

[@alfiepackham](#)

Sat 22 Jan 2022 03.30 EST

The government has announced the [lifting of all plan B restrictions](#) in England from 26 January, which include compulsory mask-wearing in shops and on public transport, and the guidance to work from home.

Among the 3.7 million clinically extremely vulnerable people in [England](#), the removal of these measures has raised concerns around their health and welfare. Three people who have been shielding throughout the pandemic told the Guardian about their experiences.

‘I can’t see myself going out in the near future at all’

Lesley Brown, 60, a former IT business analyst from Stockport who retired last year, lives with her 27-year-old daughter who has Down’s syndrome. Both are clinically extremely vulnerable and have shielded together since March 2020.

“I’m immunosuppressed due to the drugs I take for rheumatoid arthritis, so we’ve been shielding even when official restrictions have been lifted,” said Brown. “We’ve just not been anywhere for two years: pubs, cinemas, theatres, not even shops really.

“The lifting of plan B restrictions is appalling,” she said. “I can’t see myself going out in the near future at all if people aren’t wearing masks now. My plan for retirement was to travel around the world, but my trip to India was cancelled. Even travelling on a plane would be stressful because the air on the plane is circulated, so we haven’t taken that risk at all.”

Brown has coped with the isolation by going on twice-daily walks with her dogs, Rosie and Otis, and by talking to her other daughter and son regularly on Zoom. But she is concerned that her daughter has lost independence.

“My daughter lost the opportunity to have her own flat. I’ve been trying for years to get her into her own accommodation, and the opportunity finally came up in Christmas 2020, but they wanted her to move in shortly before the lockdown. I wouldn’t have been able to visit her for several months, so we missed that opportunity and she’s still living at home.”

‘It’s the worst point in the year to lift restrictions’

Kate*, 49, who works for a university in the Midlands, is clinically extremely vulnerable after her spleen was removed after an acute illness in 2019. She started shielding when she took up her role at the university, a week before the government's shielding programme officially began in March 2020.

“To be fair to the government, they did try in the beginning,” said Kate. “Shielding was handled well. We had letters to show to employers saying we should not be forced back to work. We had offers of support, and the uplift in universal credit was good for those who needed it. But over the last 12 months there has been almost nothing.”

Kate calls the lifting of plan B restrictions “a complete nightmare”. “I think this is the worst point in the year to be doing this. For them to say everyone can skip wearing masks again is genuinely frightening.

“Luckily for me, my employer has assumed I am continuing to shield, even though the government doesn’t support it. But I’m in support groups on Facebook where people in my sort of situation have been forced back into customer-facing jobs, which is appalling. You have the right to ask your employer not to do this, and there’s disability discrimination law, but there’s only so much you can do. Most people don’t have the money, time or the energy to fight it.

“In my previous job, I probably would have been back in the workplace six months ago, and been ill as a result. It shouldn’t be a case of luck; there should be a clear policy for the clinically extremely vulnerable. We’ve had new starters in my team and I’ve had to explain that they won’t be seeing me as I have a dispensation to work from home. But that shouldn’t be something I have to explain.”

‘It’s easier to shield in France’

Like Lesley Brown and Kate, Dave, a 66-year-old retired social services worker from Devon, has been shielding since March 2020 due to a history of leukaemia and heart problems. “From the outset, my wife and I completely closed down,” said Dave. “Apart from going out for walks, neither I or my wife have really socialised since it all began. We just didn’t see family

except for WhatsApp, until some contact very recently. They've been very responsible with tests and so on – but even then we only met outside for a picnic.”

In the summer of 2021, Dave moved to rural France, a decision he had planned before the pandemic. Dave says he “feels safer” living in France than in Devon. “The difference was palpable when we arrived and saw people were wearing masks. It’s easier to shield in France because here there are Covid vaccine passes. For people like me, the vaccines have little or no effect, but I live in a rural area, so I can sometimes go to the food shop and the pharmacy when it’s quiet.

“In England, there has been more emphasis on personal freedom,” he said. “While there have been controversies about restrictions in France, there seems to have been more emphasis on pulling together here. I feel the medics, social workers and care workers aren’t being listened to in the UK, and the country would get behind them if the government gave them more credence and there was more awareness of the medically vulnerable.”

Some names have been changed.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/22/shielders-say-lifting-of-england-plan-b-covid-restrictions-complete-nightmare>

Schools

Boris Johnson tells schools in England to end mask-wearing policy

PM removes requirement for face masks to be worn in schools despite headteachers' concerns

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Students at Hailsham community college in East Sussex wearing masks in the classroom. Photograph: Anthony Harvey/Rex/Shutterstock

[Richard Adams](#) and [Rowena Mason](#)

Fri 21 Jan 2022 12.21 EST

Boris Johnson has told schools in England to end the wearing of face masks by pupils, as parents and teachers continued to report infections spreading

within schools at a rapid rate.

Johnson's demand to "follow the latest guidance", made through his No 10 spokesperson, came after headteachers at secondary schools across England said they would encourage their students to keep wearing masks despite the government withdrawing advice for them to be [worn in classrooms](#).

The prime minister's spokesperson said: "Children have been one of the hardest hit as a result of the disruption throughout the pandemic and we recognise the impact it has had on their education. The prime minister believes it is vital that children are receiving face-to-face education and can enjoy a normal experience in the classroom and the prime minister also thinks that the schools should follow the latest guidance."

"We've been clear that we removed the requirement for face masks to be worn in classrooms and we will remove advice for face masks to be worn in communal areas from 27 January."

Johnson's intervention is likely to further confuse the issue, with school leaders pointing out that official guidance from the Department for Education (DfE) specifies that masks can still be required in schools. The DfE's advice to parents, [updated on Thursday](#), states: "Your nursery, school or college might advise you that face coverings should temporarily be worn in communal areas or classrooms (by pupils, staff and visitors, unless exempt)."

Meanwhile, the education secretary, [Nadhim Zahawi](#), told Conservative MPs that he had agreed with directors of public health to consult with him over reintroducing face masks in schools in the event of "extraordinary" local outbreaks, "so that we can assess evidence and data to ensure any extra measures are proportionate".

The Welsh government said it intends to retain face masks in secondary schools and colleges for another month. Mark Drakeford, the first minister, said pupils in Wales are likely to wear masks in classrooms until at least the February half-term.

The prime minister's comments come as it was announced there were 95,787 new cases of Covid-19 reported in the UK on Friday, down from 107,364 the day before. A further 288 people have died within 28 days of testing positive for Covid-19.

But headteachers who spoke to the Guardian said that they were not seeing a drop in cases among students despite the improved picture nationally. Shuttleworth College in Burnley was among the schools that told parents they would be retaining masks owing to high numbers of Covid infections.

Jonathan Hopkins, the head of Barton Court grammar school in Canterbury, told parents that pupils should continue wearing face masks for another week in order to protect staff from infections in every year group of pupils.

Primary schools have been especially hard-hit, with the most recent data from the UK Health Security Agency showing new Covid cases among schoolchildren in [England](#) rose 41% in the space of a week, to 1,936 cases per 100,000 five- to nine-year-olds.

Paul Whiteman, the general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, said “simplistic” statements from the government could jeopardise efforts to tackle outbreaks in schools.

“No one want to see masks worn in schools for longer than is necessary. But it is important to remember that some schools are still dealing with very high levels of Covid in their communities, which is in turn leading to high levels of pupil and staff absence,” Whiteman said.

“Simplistic public messaging from the government really is not helping matters. As the government’s latest guidance makes clear, Covid measures may vary between regions and local public health directors have been given authority to reintroduce face masks in communal spaces when they feel that is required. The government has a duty to be clear with parents on this.”

Johnson’s comments steered clear of any threats against schools that retained mask wearing for pupils, with the DfE having no obvious legal powers to enforce its guidance.

Geoff Barton, the general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said: “The government’s own guidance says that directors of public health may advise that face masks are needed in classrooms in response to local circumstances, but schools are unlikely to have had any time in which to consult them, or in which to communicate the changes with parents and staff.

“It is therefore not surprising if some schools have continued to use face masks for the time being while they resolve these issues.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2022/jan/21/boris-johnson-tells-schools-england-end-mask-wearing-policy>

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OpinionConservatives

This scandal reveals a Conservative party corrupted by Boris Johnson – and by Brexit

[Jonathan Freedland](#)



Whether it's the monarchy, the union or the BBC, today's Tories are trampling on the values they once claimed to cherish



‘Vandalism became a Brexit habit – hardly surprising for a project dedicated to uprooting a tangle of connections.’ Photograph: Vuk Valcic/SOPA Images/REX/Shutterstock

Fri 21 Jan 2022 11.41 EST

Just because Boris Johnson approaches every issue thinking only of Boris Johnson does not mean we have to do the same. Even the crisis that now engulfs the prime minister, and sees his fate hang on Tory MPs’ reaction to a [Sue Gray report](#) that could come next week, is not only about him. It’s tempting to see it that way – to look for the roots of the partygate scandal in Johnson’s arrogance, entitlement and narcissism – but it’s a double mistake.

As a matter of politics, it’s unwise because it would allow the [Conservatives](#) to ditch Johnson, pick a successor and claim to be a new government exorcised of its demon, with no need for the electorate to turn to Labour. But it’s also wrong.

For Johnson may be a loner, but he did not act alone. That’s narrowly true, in the sense that there were plenty of others who knew about or attended those rule-breaking parties and plenty more who are covering for him now. Every Conservative MP who [defends Johnson](#), every activist or donor who

does not demand his resignation, makes themselves complicit in the damage his actions have caused.

But it's true in a deeper sense, too, in that the shaming events in Downing Street are a function of a Conservative party that is now something else. Despite the name, that organisation is no longer conservative in the way that was previously understood and in which it once took great pride.

Consider the [two parties](#) that Johnson himself did not attend, the ones that rocked the basement and saw a suitcase full of booze wheeled into No 10 the night before the Queen buried her husband. Forget Covid and the restrictions that were broken. There was a time, not so long ago, when no Conservative would have dreamed of partying in a government building on the eve of a royal funeral, even if there was no pandemic. They would have been affronted by the very idea of it.

Or take the actions of two of Johnson's most loyal cabinet ministers as they moved to save their boss. The culture secretary, Nadine Dorries, announced [the end of the licence fee](#), essentially passing a death sentence on the BBC as we know it. Admittedly, Tory ministers have always enjoyed bashing the BBC, threatening to take it down a peg, but they have not called for its effective destruction. Yet now a minister who calls herself a Conservative can look at a world-class, century-old institution that all but defines Britishness, and think her mission is not to preserve and protect that institution but to smash it into pieces.

Meanwhile, Jacob Rees-Mogg, who likes to cosplay as an Edwardian high Tory, sought to defend Johnson by attacking the elected leader of the Scottish Conservative party as "[a lightweight](#)", thereby belittling the Scottish Tories who had chosen him. Once upon a time, a member of the Conservative and Unionist party would have understood that the fate of the union is imperilled if Scottish voters believe Westminster regards them with contempt. But Rees-Mogg couldn't care less.

The origin of all this – a Conservative party happily trampling on the union, the monarchy and the cultural organisation that binds these islands together like no other – is not hard to fathom, though it has become impolite to mention it. It's [Brexit](#) that transformed the Conservative party.

Where once Tories revered tradition, Brexit filled them with revolutionary zeal. Suddenly, and in a reversal of the teaching of the [conservative theorist Michael Oakeshott](#), they preferred the unknown to the familiar, the untried to the tried, the possible to the actual, utopian bliss to present laughter.

Brexit saw the Tories succumb to the lure of abstract nouns – Freedom! Sovereignty! – and supposedly creative destruction. One minister can't shake the image of Dominic Cummings, minutes after the referendum result came through, leaping on a table at Vote Leave headquarters, giving a speech and then [punching a hole](#) in the ceiling: “Destructive fervour in his moment of triumph.”

Vandalism became a Brexit habit – hardly surprising for a project dedicated to uprooting a tangle of connections with our continental neighbours that had grown dense and thick over half a century – and this is the Brexit government. Like all revolutionary endeavours, it believes that the end justifies all means, no matter the damage to those things conservatives once cherished. This, remember, was the movement that promised to restore parliamentary sovereignty – only to [suspend parliament illegally](#) to get its way.

So we should not be too surprised that the Vote Leave Downing Street behaved the way it did. Of course it had contempt for the rules, even those it wrote itself. This was the government that boasted on the floor of the House of Commons of its willingness to [break international law](#), if that's what its purist Brexit required.

And naturally it bridled at restrictions of any kind, even those essential to keeping our fellow citizens alive. A crude libertarianism always ran through Brexit, with Brussels seen as the source of pettifogging rules imposing a nannying health-and-safety culture on John Bull. No wonder Johnson, Cummings and the others thought they were above such things. Freedom was always their rallying cry, and they were going to damn well have it, even as they were denying it to everyone else.

Besides, they saw themselves as granted a special licence that put them beyond the reach of the usual constraints. The Brexiteers believed the

referendum result had given them a super-mandate that trumped any conventions or norms: it made them anointed instruments of the will of the people, who could brook no challenge. The landslide victory of 2019 reinforced that conviction. It was a toxic combination: part Marie Antoinette drinking and laughing while outside the walled garden the obedient public were dying lonely deaths, part revolutionary politburo convinced that whatever satisfied its personal interests served the cause of the people.

We need have no illusions about the Conservative party of old. We know its record. We know that Margaret Thatcher had her own kind of revolutionary zeal, just as we know the destructive impact of David Cameron's austerity. But there were lines it dared not cross, monarchy and the union among them. This is a different animal. Brexit transformed it from a conservative party into a national-populist party. Its instincts now are those of Viktor Orbán, [funnelling public money and jobs](#) to ideological allies, ready to burn down even the most valued institutions that stand in its way. Of course, it has contempt for the people, as all populists ultimately do. It even had contempt for the Queen on the night of her greatest grief. So let's not pretend these faults were Johnson's alone. Brexit is the virus. Boris Johnson was only ever its most visible carrier.

- Jonathan Freedland is a Guardian columnist
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OpinionTransport policy

Walking and cycling must be made safe in England. Here's our plan to do just that

[Chris Boardman](#)

My mother was killed by a driver while I was campaigning for safer cycling.
Now I've helped create a national travel strategy



People cycling in central London, November 2020. Photograph: Justin Tallis/AFP/Getty Images

Sat 22 Jan 2022 02.00 EST

A little over a decade ago my daughter Aggie asked me a question that changed the path of my working life. She asked: “Can we ride to the park?” It wasn’t her question that altered everything, it was my answer – which was: “No.”

We live in a typical northern seaside town, and the park in question was – I know because I measured it later – 549 metres away, a distance that takes a little over one minute to ride. I, an ex-Olympic cyclist, didn't feel I could keep my daughter safe on our roads for one minute. And that felt very wrong. It wasn't what I wanted for her, and it wasn't the place I wanted to live. So I decided to do something about it.

It quickly became clear that advocating for cycling wasn't hard. I could pick almost any topic in the news and more cycling made it better: health, climate, cost of transport, levelling up – the list goes on. [Cycling](#) was an easy cause to love.

It was a terrible irony then, that in 2016, while I was campaigning for safer cycling, my mother, Carol, was [killed by a driver](#) while out on a ride. The devastating experience galvanised my desire to ensure that anyone getting around on foot or by bike could be confident of doing so safely.

In 2017 a phone call from the mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham, gave me the opportunity to do just that and I became his [cycling and walking commissioner](#). He and the region's leaders had seen that active travel was the logical foundation for a sustainable, healthy transport system – as it is in towns and cities across the world. Over the course of the next four years, we planned a 1,800-mile network for the city region, not for “cyclists” but to enable people, doing everyday things in normal clothes, to do so without cars if they chose.

Mark from Stretford's story is exactly what this is all about. As it does for millions of people, his day began by bundling his two boys into the back of the car and driving them less than a mile to the school, a stressful round trip at rush hour that could easily take half an hour even without having to find a parking space. Two round trips every day. A total of 190 hours – more than a week – of his and his sons' lives spent in a car every year.

Then, as part of a local active neighbourhood, his council put in some planters and he realised he could now get to the kids' school on quiet streets via a local park and avoid the morning melee. Mark now walks to school with his kids, who ride or scooter, every day. The trip takes just 10 minutes

and it's better than stress-free; it's actually enjoyable with a bit of daily exercise thrown in for good measure.

Seeing what making safe space could do was incredible, so I was delighted when the national government produced its “Gear Change” strategy for England, setting out a clear roadmap to give everyone in the country the same choice as Mark. New national standards to make sure all cycling infrastructure is safe, an inspectorate to ensure councils adhere to the guidelines and training provision so local authorities could start doing this as a matter of course, were all part of the plan.

When the transport secretary asked me to [help set up Active Travel England](#), the new executive agency that will be charged with delivering this vision, it was the most natural choice in the world to accept.

The body is exactly what is needed to give people the option to travel actively, to feel able to leave the car at home more often and help children get to school under their own steam. And to make sure this becomes an embedded part of our transport futures, it will act as a statutory consultee for all major developments, meaning developers will have to make high-quality provision for those who want to walk, wheel or ride.

We will give people the choice to enjoy rather than endure journeys and to kick off their day fresh and invigorated, not frustrated and irritated.

That's the future Mark has now for himself and his two boys and it's the one I want to help make for Aggie. I intend to make sure that when she has a family, she'll be able to say “Yes” when they ask if they can ride to the park.

- Chris Boardman is the interim commissioner of Active Travel England
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Guardian Opinion cartoon

Boris Johnson

Martin Rowson on Boris Johnson's position as Europe faces war — cartoon

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[**OpinionLaw \(Australia\)**](#)

The Djokovic shambles highlights what refugees have long known – Australia’s ‘God powers’ are dangerously broad

Ian Neil and Nicholas Saady

Too much discretionary, unreviewable power has been allowed to be concentrated in the hands of the immigration minister



‘The minister did not have to consider whether Djokovic’s presence in Australia would in fact encourage anti-vaccination sentiment. It was enough that he be satisfied that it “might”.’ Photograph: Tess Derry/PA

Fri 21 Jan 2022 14.00 EST

Australia has some of the strictest border laws in the world. The immigration minister has some of the broadest, and least reviewable, powers of any of his

global equivalents. The shambolic Djokovic affair has confronted Australians with the true extent of those powers, and many are bewildered.

Discretionary powers under the [Migration](#) Act enable the minister to cancel a visa – in some circumstances without affording due process – because, a “person’s past and present general conduct” suggests “the person is not of good character”; because “there is a risk that” the person’s presence represents “a danger to the Australian community … in any … way”; or because the person “might be … a risk to the health, safety or good order of the Australian community.”

The merely contingent and speculative quality of the assessments that can trigger the minister’s cancellation powers were highlighted in the Djokovic case. The minister did not have to consider whether Djokovic’s presence in Australia would in fact encourage anti-vaccination sentiment. It was enough that he be satisfied that it “might”.

Considered in the context of the other provisions – which allow the minister to cancel a visa because of reasons including being suspected of, or posing a risk of committing, various types of criminal activity; providing incorrect or untrue information; or contravening a visa condition – there is no clear justification for the breadth of these powers.

The problem is more acute because these drastic powers ultimately rest on the subjective state of mind of one person, with severely limited grounds of review by the courts. Leaving aside the Djokovic case, it may be asked, could one have their visa cancelled because the minister disagrees with their religious or political opinions? As the Australian Lawyers Alliance pointed out this week, the extraordinary powers “could see other high-profile visitors to Australia refused entry in an attempt to suppress alternate views.”

These powers rest on the subjective state of mind of one person, with severely limited grounds of review by the courts

These considerations lead the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants to say that the powers granted under the Act could “risk a

politicised and biased use of controls, and be in violation of the principles of legality”, because they were not matched with “the appropriate level of oversight to the country’s judiciary”. As the president of Liberty Victoria observed in the wake of Djokovic’s expulsion: “One danger of largely unfettered discretions, or ‘God powers’, is that decision making just becomes political and populist … eroding the integrity of the executive and the rule of law.”

Remarkably, the minister may overrule a contrary decision of the administrative appeals tribunal, while the minister’s decision is subject to severely limited review by the courts. There must be proof that the minister’s decision was infected by an error of law to overturn it – a notoriously difficult task, as Djokovic discovered.

Many refugees and asylum seekers have felt the full force of these powers over the years – finding themselves denied access to Australia – for reasons much less compassionate, in circumstances much more inhumane, and with consequences more drastic, than Djokovic.

Djokovic’s standing, resources and mouthpiece kept him on the front pages for a week. But what of those who don’t have those advantages, or Djokovic’s money and support?

What of the refugees and asylum seekers, fleeing genocide, war and violence, only to be detained once they arrive in Australia, possibly indefinitely, in cruel and hopeless conditions, with lengthy court delays and limited access to legal representation? Just think of those still at the Park hotel, essentially forgotten until Djokovic briefly shared their confinement.

Djokovic’s case was dealt with from start to finish in less than a week. Many refugees and asylum seekers wait months, if not years. Djokovic was allowed to leave detention while his case was pending, despite its brevity. Many refugees and asylum seekers remain locked up for much of the process. Djokovic had swift and consistent access to high quality lawyers and was allowed to meet them face-to-face. Many refugees and asylum seekers struggle to find representation and rarely meet their lawyers face-to-

face. Djokovic commanded news feeds for weeks (and still does). Most of those in detention languish unnoticed.

For decades, Australians have tolerated – even encouraged – policy choices about immigration controls that favour real or imagined concerns about security over humanitarian principles.

The sorry saga of Djokovic's visa is a vivid demonstration – if more be needed – that we have allowed too much discretionary, and essentially unreviewable, power to be concentrated in the hands of one person.

As John Adams observed, “Power must never be trusted without a check.”

- Ian Neil SC is a Australian barrister and Nicholas Saady is an Australian and US lawyer
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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jan/22/the-djokovic-shambles-highlights-what-refugees-have-long-known-australias-god-powers-are-dangerously-broad>

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Draft Trump order told defense chief to seize swing-state voting machines

Unpublished executive order, obtained by Politico, among documents provided to January 6 panel after court ruling

- [US politics – live coverage](#)



Detroit election workers count absentee ballots in November 2020.
Photograph: Jeff Kowalsky/AFP/Getty Images

[Ed Pilkington](#) in New York

[@edpilkington](#)

Fri 21 Jan 2022 15.54 EST

In the heady days between Donald Trump's defeat in November 2020 and the January 6 insurrection at the US Capitol, an executive order was

prepared. It commanded the defense secretary to seize voting machines in battleground states, as part of Trump's "big lie" that the vote was rigged.

The draft executive order, obtained and [published](#) by Politico, was never sent and its author is unknown. It was part of a cache of documents handed over to the House committee investigating the January 6 violence, after the [supreme court ruled](#) this week that Trump could not shield himself from oversight on grounds of executive privilege.

The disclosure of the draft order adds to evidence of the lengths to which Trump and his close advisers were prepared to go to keep him in the White House, against the will of the American people. Under the draft order, the defense secretary would have been required to carry out an assessment of the voting machines "no later than 60 days from commencement of operations".

That would have pushed the chaos that Trump assiduously attempted to sow around Joe Biden's legitimate victory well beyond the handover of power at the inauguration on 20 January.

The publication of the document will provoke intense speculation as to who wrote it. Politico pointed out that at the time the draft order was dated, 16 December 2020, the idea of seizing voting machines in key states was being vigorously promoted by Sidney Powell, a controversial lawyer who had Trump's ear at the time.

The document outlines the seizure of voting machines by the Pentagon under federal emergency powers. That would in itself have been incendiary, as it would have amounted to a dramatic display of federal over state power of the sort normally fiercely resisted by Republicans.

The author of the draft order seeks to justify such a contentious move by regurgitating conspiracy theories. For example, pointing to voting machines, the document says there is "evidence of international and foreign interference in the November 3, 2020, election".

It names Dominion Voting Systems, a leading provider of voting machines that has become the target of rightwing conspiracy theorists and big lie

merchants. Dominion has sued several purveyors of false claims that its products were used to swing the election from Trump to Biden.

“Dominion Voting Systems and related companies are owned or heavily controlled and influenced by foreign agents, countries, and interests,” the draft order falsely claims.

The draft also singles out Antrim county, Michigan. Claims that voting machines in that county were compromised have been thoroughly rebutted, including by state election authorities.

A second document was also leaked to Politico from the new mountain of paperwork received by the January 6 committee. Titled Remarks on National Healing, it appears to be the text of a speech Trump never delivered.

The tone of the speech is striking because it stands in stark contrast to the approach Trump actually adopted in the wake of the Capitol violence. Still president for two weeks, he attempted to belittle the significance of the day.

Had this alternative speech been given, Trump would have sent out a very different message. It describes January 6 as a “heinous attack” that left him “outraged and sickened by the violence, lawlessness and mayhem”.

The text added: “The Demonstrators who infiltrated the Capitol have defiled the seat of American democracy.”

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[Republicans](#)

Republican resistance to Trump rings hollow as ‘moderates’ say no on voting rights



Senator Mitt Romney during a vote at Congress on 20 January. Photograph: Elizabeth Frantz/Reuters

Romney, Cheney and others were hailed as the conscience of the party but their deeds in the Senate have provoked accusations of hypocrisy



[David Smith](#) in Washington

[@smithinamerica](#)

Sat 22 Jan 2022 02.00 EST

They have been hailed as the conscience of the Republican party, heroes of the resistance to former US president Donald Trump's hostile takeover.

But Senator Mitt Romney, Congresswoman Liz Cheney and others this month helped [kill off a voting rights bill](#) that Democrats say is essential to protecting democracy from a Trump-driven onslaught.

The blanket opposition from these [Republicans](#) is provoking criticism that their professed rejection of the ex-president rings hollow and, despite their lofty words, they are ultimately helping further his authoritarian agenda.

“They might not like Trump but they have the character of Trump,” said [LaTosha Brown](#), co-founder of Black Voters Matter. “The reason why Trump was able to lead their party is because he is a good representation. He’s a liar; they lie. They’ve decided to use any means necessary to maintain

power. If that means political corruption, they decide that they're going to go that route.”

Black Voters Matter and other groups warn that Republican-led states across the country are [passing laws](#) making it more difficult for African Americans and others to vote by consolidating polling locations, requiring certain types of identification and ordering other changes.

In response Democrats in the House of Representatives last week passed the Freedom to Vote: John R Lewis Act, which would make election day a national holiday, ensure access to early voting and mail-in ballots and enable the justice department to intervene in states with a history of voter interference.

The legislation was also supported by all 50 Democrats in the Senate but [collapsed this week](#) when Republicans used a procedural rule known as the filibuster to block it in the evenly divided chamber. Chuck Schumer, the majority leader, then called on a vote on changing Senate rules to allow the chamber to pass the bill by a simple majority vote. Again all Republicans were opposed, and now they were joined by Democrats Joe Manchin of West Virginian and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, ensuring a 52-48 defeat.

It was a bitter defeat for Joe Biden just hours after he held [a marathon press conference](#) on Wednesday marking the end of his first year in office. “I am profoundly disappointed,” the president said in a statement.

Much liberal fury was focused on Democratic holdouts [Manchin and Sinema](#). But their intransigence only mattered because all the Republicans – including so-called moderates – stood firm against legislation that aims to combat voter suppression, which largely impacts communities of color. Even those who claim to be fiercely anti-Trump.

Romney, a former presidential nominee, is a prime example. He was the only senator to break with his party by voting to convict Trump for abuse of power in his first impeachment trial in 2020. He was then one of seven Republicans to find Trump guilty of incitement of insurrection at his second impeachment trial last year.

“Well, I like Mitt,” Biden told reporters [at the press conference](#) lasting nearly two hours. “Look, Mitt Romney is a straight guy.”

Yet by then Romney, senator for Utah, had already spelled out his opposition to the voting rights legislation, dismissing it as a partisan takeover of federal elections and even comparing it to Trump’s false claim of election rigging in 2020.

Romney was not alone. Senator Ben Sasse of Nebraska, who also voted to convict Trump at last year’s impeachment trial, described the push to defend voting rights [as a “charade”](#) to satisfy a minority “addicted to rage on Twitter”, adding: “It’s bad for America. It’s just as undermining of public trust in elections as what Donald Trump did last year.”

Senators Susan Collins, Lisa Murkowski, Rob Portman and Tim Scott, all of whom have spoke out against Trump at various times, opposed the bill. In the earlier House vote, NeverTrumpers Liz Cheney and Adam Kinzinger also toed the party line.

Cheney, vice chair of the House select committee investigating the January 6 insurrection at the US Capitol, has earned bipartisan admiration from some unlikely quarters. New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman even [floated the idea](#) of her becoming Biden’s running mate in the 2024 election.

But the daughter of former vice president Dick Cheney made clear last year she did not see connection between Trump’s “big lie” about 2020 and the blitz of voter restrictions imposed by Republican state legislatures. “I will never understand the resistance, for example, to voter ID,” [Cheney told Axios on HBO](#).

Some commentators agree that there is nothing inconsistent about decrying Trump’s assault on democracy and rejecting Democrats’ sweeping proposals.

[Michael Steele](#), the first African American to serve as chairman of the Republican National Committee, said: “You can be against Donald Trump and have a policy view on voting rights – I would personally maybe disagree

with it – that would not lead them to support the proposed legislation in the House or the Senate.”

But some conservative critics of Trump admit that the reforms, which they regard as an example of government overreach at the expense of states’ autonomy (even though article I of the constitution explicitly authorises Congress to set federal election rules), put them in a quandary.

Joe Walsh, a former Republican congressman from Illinois, said: “I am vehemently anti-Trump, but anti- what the Democrats are trying to do at the federal level, so I’d be in the same grouping. Republicans are doing a bunch of shit but the answer to that in my mind is not bad, unconstitutional federal legislation.”

But Walsh objects to Romney’s attempt to equate Trump’s lies with Biden’s policy. “I disagree with Mitt and any other Republican that’s making any sort of comparisons between what Trump did to our elections and what Democrats are doing.”



Liz Cheney with her father Dick at the Capitol two weeks ago. Photograph: Evelyn Hockstein/Reuters

This week’s vote was also the latest marker of the Republican party’s transformation in the Trump era. Sixteen of its current senators voted to re-

authorise the Voting Rights Act in 2006 but opposed the latest bill, which would update the most powerful part of the law. Republican presidents Ronald Reagan, George H W Bush and George W Bush all supported its renewal.

[Antjuan Seawright](#), a senior adviser to the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, took issue with Romney and colleagues' claim that Republicans are not making it harder for minorities to vote.

"It's intellectually dishonest for anyone to say that there's not an effort to suppress, suffocate and silence the votes of Black people in particular around this country. All you have to do is look at the bills that have been filed and where they have been filed," he said.

With the voting rights measures aimed at safeguarding democracy now apparently dead in the water, it may be harder for independents, liberals and others to heap praise on anti-Trump Republicans in quite the same way as before.

[Kurt Bardella](#), an adviser to the Democratic National Committee, argues that doing the right thing once does not make them heroes. "Just because you're anti-Trump doesn't mean you're still not part of the anti-democratic effort that's being spearheaded by the Republican party in America."

Bardella, a former senior advisor to Republicans on the House oversight committee, added: "For Republicans like Mitt Romney and Liz Cheney, it says everything that they're still willing to be called Republicans, and it is the Republican party's position to make it harder for minorities in America to vote. You look at the closing of voting locations in states like Georgia, where locations that have the highest density of minority voters are now having less options to go vote.

"That's pretty straightforward. That's pretty racist. It demonstrates the white privilege in play for people like Mitt Romney and Liz Cheney to not see that. The reality is, if they're not willing to move forward and assist in the effort to enact voter protections in America, then they're Donald Trump's biggest ally."

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US Capitol attack

Texts show Fox News host Hannity's pleas to Trump aide after Capitol attack

Messages said there should be 'no more stolen election talk' and 'no more crazy people' should be admitted to president's orbit

- [US politics – live coverage](#)



Fox News host Sean Hannity. Photograph: Bloomberg/Getty Images

[Martin Pengelly](#) in New York

[@MartinPengelly](#)

Fri 21 Jan 2022 16.01 EST

In the aftermath of the deadly attack on the US Capitol last year, the rightwing Fox News host Sean Hannity pledged with a top aide to Donald

Trump that there should be “no more stolen election talk” and “no more crazy people” should be admitted to the president’s orbit.

Kayleigh McEnany, the White House press secretary, agreed – but to little effect.

More than a year after the riot, around which [seven people died](#) as Trump supporters sought to stop certification of electoral college results, Trump continues to lie that the 2020 election was stolen by Joe Biden.

He also continues to keep company with far-right conspiracy theorists including Mike Lindell, the MyPillow founder who in a lawsuit this week was accused of being “crazy like a fox”.

Hannity has also long been [close to Trump](#), as an informal adviser and sometime rally guest. Though he has been revealed to have been shaken by the attack on the Capitol, he has spent the year since the riot supporting Trump’s version of events.

The House committee investigating January 6 has asked for Hannity’s cooperation, a request a lawyer for the host said raises “first amendment concerns regarding freedom of the press”.

Hannity has previously said he does not [claim](#) to be a journalist.

Excerpts of his messages to McEnany on 7 January 2021 were included in [a letter](#) from the January 6 committee to Ivanka Trump, the former president’s daughter and adviser whom the panel also [wishes to question](#).

“First,” the letter said, “on 7 January, Mr Hannity texted Ms McEnany, laying out a five-point approach for conversations with President Trump. Items one and two of that plan read as follows:

“1 – No more stolen election talk.

“2 – Yes, impeachment and 25th amendment are real, and many people will quit...”

McEnany, the letter said, responded: “Love that. Thank you. That is the playbook. I will help reinforce...”

If McEnany did follow Hannity’s playbook, it did not produce a touchdown or even a reasonable punt.

It has been widely [reported](#) that invoking the 25th amendment, which provides for the removal of a president deemed incapable of carrying out his or her duties, was seriously discussed among cabinet and White House officials.

That came to nothing but Trump was impeached a [second](#) time. He was [acquitted](#) when enough Senate Republicans stayed loyal.

On Friday, Politico published the [text of a draft executive order](#) for the seizure of voting machines and the text of a speech in which Trump would have condemned the Capitol rioters – but which he never gave.

According to the January 6 committee, Hannity also told McEnany: “Key now. No more crazy people.”

McEnany said: “Yes. 100%.”

A footnote to the letter says Katrina Pierson, another rightwing commentator, “also uses the term ‘crazies’ in her text messages, apparently to describe a number of the president’s supporters”.

Lindell continues to insist he has evidence the 2020 election was stolen, recently claiming his work could lead to the imprisonment for life of “[300 and some million people](#)”.

That prompted the Washington Post to [ask](#): “Are you one of the one in 11 Americans Mike Lindell doesn’t want to arrest?”

In remarks at a Trump rally in Arizona last weekend, Lindell took aim at Hannity’s employer.

“When was the last time you saw anyone on Fox talk about the 2020 election?” [he asked](#).

Fox News has [continued](#) to stoke conspiracy theories about the Capitol riot but Fox Corporation faces [lawsuits](#) regarding [claims](#) of a stolen election.

This week, Lindell joined Fox in being sued by [Smartmatic](#), a maker of election machines.

In the suit, the company [accused](#) Lindell of knowing what he was doing – namely, trying to sell pillows – when spreading election lies.

He was, the company said, “crazy like a fox”.

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Kyle Rittenhouse

Kyle Rittenhouse seeks return of AR-15 style rifle used in Kenosha shootings

Lawyer Mark Richard files request for return of gun and other items ‘to ensure firearm in question is properly destroyed’



Kyle Rittenhouse during his trial in Wisconsin in November. Rittenhouse was acquitted of all charges. Photograph: Reuters

[Maya Yang](#)

Sat 22 Jan 2022 02.00 EST

Kyle Rittenhouse, the Illinois man acquitted last year of fatally shooting two men and wounding a third during racial justice protests in Kenosha, Wisconsin in 2020, is requesting the return of the gun.

Rittenhouse killed Joseph Rosenbaum, 36, and Anthony Huber, 26, and wounded Gaige Grosskreutz, 27, when he shot them with an assault rifle as he roamed the streets of Kenosha with other armed men acting as self-described militia during protests over the shooting of a Black man, Jacob Blake, by a [white officer](#).

Rittenhouse's highly contentious trial – and acquittal – was widely seen as a test case for US justice.

The trial revealed contrasting attitudes of law enforcement when confronted with white men or teens who claimed to be acting as vigilante-style informal security personnel, armed with assault rifles, and Black members of the public or those protesting in support of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Now 19, Rittenhouse has been [feted](#) on the political right.

On Wednesday his attorney, Mark Richards, filed court documents in Kenosha county seeking the return of the AR-15-style rifle [Rittenhouse](#) used on the evening of 25 August 2020, along with other items.

“Mr Rittenhouse further wishes to ensure that the firearm in question is properly destroyed,” Richards [wrote](#).

Although the rifle Rittenhouse used belonged to a friend who helped the then 17 year-old purchase it as he was too young to buy and possess his own, Rittenhouse’s attorneys now [maintain](#) he is the gun’s lawful owner “per the verbal contract enacted” with the friend, Dominick Black.

“As established through the trial testimony of Dominick Black and Mr Rittenhouse, the Smith & Wesson M&P 15 rifle ... was purchased by Dominick Black but was to become the legal property of Kyle Rittenhouse upon his 18th birthday,” Richards’ filing [said](#).

In an interview with the [Journal Times](#), David Hancock, the Rittenhouse family spokesman said: “Kyle has requested that the firearm be destroyed ... there’s nothing to celebrate about that weapon. There isn’t. Kyle has no interest and no want to recover that weapon, and absolutely no interest to sell it or anything.”

Rittenhouse is also attempting to retrieve ammunition, a sling and magazines, his iPhone, a cloth mask, and a \$1 bill. He is also looking to retrieve the clothing he wore the night of the shooting, including boots, a baseball cap, jeans, socks, a belt and a T-shirt.

The gun may not be handed back immediately. Under Wisconsin law, firearms seized by police as part of an investigation are kept as evidence until the investigation is over. Although Rittenhouse's trial is over, Dominick Black is still on trial.

"Though the case involving Mr Rittenhouse has been concluded, the firearm is still being held in evidence as Mr Black's property until the time his case is resolved," said Sgt Leo Viola of the Kenosha police department.

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