

# The Guardian

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## 2022.02.27 - Opinion

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## OpinionUkraine

# Last time I saw Andriy he was in high heels. Now, like many of my friends, he's taken up arms

Diana Berg

It was a week when Ukrainians saw their lives upturned. The celebrated artist reveals her fears but also the pride felt in the resilience of her peers



A woman takes part in a military drill for civilians in western Ukraine.  
Photograph: Future Publishing/Getty Images

Sun 27 Feb 2022 02.00 EST

We didn't want to believe that a real, massive invasion would happen because it's so illogical. But then Putin is illogical and insane. I have been torn between a rationalisation – what will Russia benefit from this invasion? – and a memory from eight years ago when my city, Donetsk, was occupied and my home taken from me.

It has been a tense month and we became ready for any kind of scenario. Every day, we were ready to go, to escape. You drink too much coffee in the morning to stay focused and at night you really want to drink some alcohol but are afraid to do so. What if you have to drive your car urgently at night?

But on Tuesday there was beautiful rain in the evening and it smelled like spring, and I thought we could relax at least for the night. They would not invade Mariupol under the rain – so I finally had that beer. A further mistake was to be sure that Mariupol would be the first place to be invaded because of our proximity to the occupied territories and Russia.

I woke to hear that the main cities were being attacked. We'd also heard some shelling, some gunfire, but I've heard that for years – the frontline is very close, 15km away. And there has been a lot of firing in the last week. But I can't imagine the feeling of those in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Sumy that morning...

My husband and I discussed what we would do, because I am on the Russians' wanted list

I was starting an art residency project. We were waiting for the artists to arrive. My first thought – it seems funny now – was: “Are we cancelling the project?”, because I'm very responsible. But of course the artists were coming from a city that is being shelled, so slowly it dawned on me that it probably wasn't going to happen.

Instead, we had a security coordination meeting to discuss our plans for occupation. Someone said they were leaving for western [Ukraine](#) at sunset. My husband and I discussed what we would do, because I am on the Russians' wanted list.

We had spoken about this idea of flight many times before. My idea was that in case of a real invasion, we would take the car and just go. But as it happened, I didn't feel like that yesterday. And I don't feel like that today.

I remembered fleeing [Donetsk](#) eight years ago. I was made to flee – I didn't want to go. I had been part of a rally, a grassroots group, Donetsk Is

Ukraine. Pro-Russians attacked our meeting; they distributed information about those of us who organised the movement and posted our portraits all over the city. It became dangerous to even go out in the streets.

It was my mother who convinced me to go because they were looking for me. "Just for one week," she promised me. If she hadn't begged, I would have been put in jail. All the activists who stayed were jailed.

I went to Odesa first and then to Lviv in the west. I spent three months there because obviously I couldn't go home.

I just remember the feeling of being far away, scrolling through the news, even though Lviv is very beautiful, safe, quaint, with Ukrainian flags everywhere. (In Donetsk, we could be killed for carrying that flag.)

I imagine if I run now, I will feel the same. I will be living in safe and beautiful and peaceful Lviv, but my heart will be here.

I am amazed at just how brave the Ukrainian people are

Don't get me wrong – it's very scary. The Russian army is very powerful and has already taken many places. And though there are not enough sanctions (the no-fly zone is still not implemented and [Swift](#) is still operating), they don't care about them.

But during these three days of war I have also been seeing something new, something beautiful, powerful and inspiring from all Ukrainians - who feel that instinct to stay at home and fight for the nation. I am amazed at just how brave the Ukrainian people are. I never expected so many regular civilians to join the territorial defence. Everyone I know in Kyiv has gone to enrol.

Many of my friends are artists. I have always been an artist and an activist and sometimes I'd laugh at my artist friends a little bit, thinking they are beautiful, very philosophical but essentially toothless.

It turns out not to be true. The last time I saw one of them, Andriy, he was wearing high heels and glitter, modelling for this crazy and provocative fashion theatre of freak designer Mikhail Koptev. He went to join the

military, but they wouldn't take him because he has a Russian passport (he's originally from St Petersburg). So he went to another town close by and was taken on.

So Russia has brutal power. And those Russian soldiers, they are just meat to Putin, sent to die. There are a lot of them, a lot of armour and our skies are open. We are really vulnerable.

But we have the spirit. They may take us brutally and violently, but they cannot take us back. Even the older people, those Ukrainians who might have some Soviet nostalgia, will have changed their view after this.

After the [death of the soldiers on Snake Island](#), targeted by a Russian warship, no one will forgive that. Nor will we forget the [man who blew himself up to destroy a bridge and stop the Russian advance](#). And, unfortunately, there will be more like them.

Each and every one of these sacrifices will make us more distant from the Russians. They might close in on us, but mentally, we will move further away, our identity ever more removed.

Diana Berg is an artist and activist. She runs a creative organisation in Mariupol

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## OpinionUkraine

# The Observer view on Russia's invasion of Ukraine

[Observer editorial](#)

We must keep cool heads and wise counsel as we face down Vladimir Putin on the frontline of democracy



A protester in Istanbul, Turkey, holds a picture depicting Russian President Vladimir Putin as Adolf Hitler. Photograph: Ozan Köse/AFP/Getty Images

Sun 27 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

The frightful noise of gunfire, bombing and children's screams in the cities of Ukraine [reverberates across Europe](#). The full-scale Russian invasion launched last week is an unprovoked, heinous crime perpetrated against Ukraine's citizens, their sovereign democratic state and all the free peoples of the world. The 24th of February is a day that will live in infamy. It will not be forgiven. It will surely never be forgotten.

Reports so far suggest Russia has failed to gain the swift victory it expected. Fierce street fighting in Kyiv and other cities speaks to the bravery of the country's soldiers and ordinary Ukrainians determined to defend their land. In the east, the invaders are pinned down. But they are better equipped and armed. They have control in the air. If a thwarted Kremlin orders its forces to step up attacks, a bloodbath of Ukraine's citizen fighters could ensue.

At this moment of maximum danger, it's imperative that [Vladimir Putin](#), Russia's president and sole architect of this needless calamity, implement an immediate ceasefire. Militarily, he has miscalculated. Diplomatically, he is isolated, as the UN security council's condemnation of Moscow's actions shows. Even his ally, China, refused to support this vile aggression. Politically, at home, Putin's war is provoking widespread protests and unrest.

Now is a time for cool heads and wise counsel in western capitals. The longer the fighting continues, the higher will be the number of people killed and maimed, the wider the political gulf and the greater the prospect that this conflict may spill into Poland and other nearby countries. As Nato [reinforces its eastern flank](#) and tensions rise across the board, the risk of confrontation between Russia and the western alliance grows.

Help is urgently needed for Ukrainian families who are fleeing westwards in ever growing numbers to escape indiscriminate Russian attacks in civilian areas. Aid agencies predict a large-scale humanitarian and refugee emergency. Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Moldova and Romania cannot manage this terrible human crisis alone. Britain and all the EU countries must be [generous in offering assistance](#) and, hopefully temporary, asylum to Putin's victims.

The attempted crushing of an independent state by the stormtroopers of a delusional dictator recalls the Nazi era

The western democracies face a moment of truth. For years, they have watched the worldwide, polarising advance of authoritarianism. If the global order established after 1945 – guaranteeing the sovereign right to national

self-determination, the rule of law and basic human rights – is not effectively defended now, then no individual, no people and no state will in future be safe from malign powers. Ukraine is democracy's frontline.

Grandiose pronouncements about epic watersheds and historic turning points in world affairs are often made and just as often wrong. But for once, this is no exaggeration. Not since Soviet tanks rolled into Prague in spring 1968 has [Europe](#) seen anything like this and not even that grimly remembered horror offers an exact analogy. Not since Hitler has Europe seen the leader of a major country behave in such predatory fashion.

The attempted crushing – in truth, the attempted extinction – of an independent state and its freewheeling, multi-ethnic traditions by the stormtroopers of a delusional dictator inevitably recalls the Nazi era. How extraordinary, how barely believable, that Europe should be thrust back into that dark place. The sense of shock and outrage, [not least in Russia](#), where 20 million people died in the fight against fascism, is palpable.

## Fighting for survival

How much greater still must be the bewilderment felt by European generations born after 1989, after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the cold war. Unlike baby boomers, they did not grow up in the shadow of nuclear Armageddon. How to explain that another aggrieved and angry little man – a contemptible KGB throwback who daily mourns the demise of the Soviet Union – is now threatening them with [nuclear annihilation](#)?

In one sense, this moment has been coming ever since Putin cruelly suppressed Chechen separatists, levelling the city of Grozny in 1999-2000 without a thought for its inhabitants. In Georgia, in Syria and in Crimea and the Donbas in 2014, he repeatedly acted with similarly callous brutality and reckless disregard for consequences. His record is that of an [international hooligan](#).

Putin may or may not be crazy. But he is certainly a thug. Force is his only argument. Lies are his ammunition. He appears determined to transform Ukraine into a mere buffer, run by a puppet regime. US [reports](#) that the Kremlin has a list of public figures to be jailed or assassinated are credible.

If Putin succeeds, he will build an open-air jail with torture chambers akin to benighted Belarus. Ukraine as an idea will cease to exist.

Ukraine's people, its leaders and its army know they are fighting for survival. So far, they are doing exceptionally well. They have slowed the advance, causing real damage to Russian forces. Stories abound of extraordinary individual courage and sacrifice. All men aged 18 to 60 have been called to arms and they willingly respond. Civilians have queued for guns and mixed molotov cocktails to throw at Russian tanks. The irony will probably be lost on Putin.

All the same, logic and numbers suggest Ukrainians cannot indefinitely resist a significantly stronger enemy. President Volodymyr Zelenskiy is demanding western military assistance while sympathetic Tory MPs propose a no-fly zone over Ukraine patrolled by UK and Nato aircraft. There is also talk of arming a semi-permanent, irregular resistance force. This is all highly problematic. As the UK defence secretary, Ben Wallace, has said, a no-fly zone could lead to Nato clashes with Russian forces and a possible wider war. It is not a workable idea. More broadly, having insisted that Nato would not fight for a non-Nato country, the west has little choice but to stick to that position – even as pressure grows, as it certainly will, to protect Ukraine's beleaguered people.

## Corrupt regime

This situation all but guarantees Putin's superior forces will prevail in the near term. But that does not necessarily mean the bigger, longer battle is lost. It is not true to say, as Zelenskiy does, that Ukraine stands alone. The outpouring of support for Kyiv around the world is powerful. Putin is execrated on all sides. The US, UK and others are rightly upping the supply of defensive weapons. And then there are sanctions.

The punitive measures imposed on Russia last week by the US, UK, EU and other countries are unprecedented in scope. Moscow has attempted to shrug them off. They will have little immediate impact. But as a concerted, collective exercise designed to isolate, degrade and eventually impoverish Russia's economy, finances and Putin himself, it has no equal.

If maintained and reinforced, as they must be over time, sanctions could help bring down Putin's corrupt regime

That said, more could and should be done. It is wrong to exempt Russia's oil and gas exports. Energy revenue is the regime's main source of income. It pays for the wars it wages and the regressive policies it pursues. It keeps Putin in warm socks and luxury yachts. Of course, Europe will itself pay a high price if Russian energy is cut off. But it's a price that must be paid. It is to be welcomed that Germany appears close to agreeing that Russian banks should be barred from the [Swift payments system](#).

These swinging sanctions and the UN vote make it official: Putin's Russia is a pariah state. If maintained and reinforced, as they must be over time, sanctions could help bring down his corrupt regime. Putin, plainly, has overreached. This war and the limitless political and economic damage it will do to Russia may finally force an overdue reckoning between the Russian people and their oppressive president – and bring to a thankful end the shaming Putin era.

Britain showed a lead in lobbying reluctant Germany and Italy over Swift, just as it has in ensuring defensive weaponry reaches Ukraine's army. Promises by Boris Johnson and the foreign secretary, Liz Truss, to finally clean up the Russian dirty money laundromat in London, and penalise Putin's oligarch pals, are welcome, if kept – though questions remain about [Tory funding](#).

The Ukraine crisis has undoubtedly boosted Johnson. By playing international statesman, he has dodged, for now, the mess he's made at home. It's heartening, meanwhile, to see Keir Starmer's Labour back in the mainstream, standing four square behind Nato and vanquishing the pale ghosts of the Corbyn era. Unlike before the Iraq war, western [intelligence assessments](#) of Russia's intentions have proved highly accurate.

It remains the case, however, that post-Brexit Britain is a secondary player. The US president, [Joe Biden](#), says the invasion marks the total rupture of western relations with Russia. This break has serious implications stretching beyond Ukraine to, for example, Taiwan, which fears China may emulate

Putin. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, vulnerable former Soviet republics, and other east European states also worry they may be next – if Putin succeeds.

He must not. It's possible that the Ukraine crisis will shift the international balance of power and permanently remake the security map of Europe. But that's a question for the future. Right now, it's vital, as Johnson says, that Putin fails and be seen to fail. Right now, today, Ukrainians are dying in a vicious war of Russia's choosing. Putin says he's ready to talk. That's a trap. The tyrant must understand: dialogue can only begin when the shooting stops.

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NotebookTransgender

## The wisdom of youth: twentysomething MP gives an object lesson in leadership

[Rowan Moore](#)



In a debate on transgender rights, Mhairi Black showed how to avoid Twitter storms and address the real issues



Scottish Nationalist MP Mhairi Black: didn't seek to diminish her opponents. Photograph: Jeff J Mitchell/Getty Images

Sat 26 Feb 2022 12.00 EST

It's often said that debates on transgender issues are polarised and intolerant to a degree that helps no one. Last week, in a Westminster Hall debate on reform of the Gender Recognition Act, the Scottish National MP [Mhairi Black](#) showed how it could and should be done. At stake were the difficulties trans people have in getting their identities legally recognised. With this issue come the fears raised by those who oppose simplifying these processes, that dangers to women would arise as a result of people born with male bodies being able to enter lavatories, changing rooms and other single-sex spaces.

Black's support for reform was clear. The current process, she said, "is deeply invasive, traumatising, unnecessary and dehumanising", while arguing out that possession of a gender recognition certificate, the end point of it all, is actually irrelevant to access to single-space spaces.

"I am a woman," she said, and "I don't feel threatened. If anything, the thing that makes me feel most threatened is quite often the very aggressive and

often male anonymous accounts that proclaim to be defending me from something.”

Trenchant though she was, she didn’t seek to diminish her opponents. “I don’t doubt that there are legitimate concerns,” she said, “but the answers are also out there.” Whether or not you agree, her words demanded that you engage with the substance of her arguments, not at the level of a Twitter spat.

Black first made the news in 2015, when she was elected to parliament at the age of 20. Now 27, she continues to show a degree of maturity beyond many of her elders.

## Spaced out



A computer-generated image of St John’s House: ‘an eyesore is an eyesore in any style’. Photograph: Courtesy Sotheby’s/SWNS

St John’s House, a project billed as the UK’s “[largest new home for over a hundred years](#)”, has been proposed for a site near Chipping Norton in the Cotswolds. Its floor area of 6,692 square metres would, according to space standards set out by the mayor of London, be enough to make 111 two-bedroom flats. It is a vast cliff of masonry designed by the Winchester-based

practice of Adam Architecture, an inverted quarry in a classical style. It is garnished, according to the official computerised images, with a landscape of pink-blossoming blobs, which is their primitive conception of trees.

The project is not quite Putinesque, in that the Russian dictator might want this much space just to store his ice-hockey gear, but it does go to show that an eyesore is an eyesore in any style, classical or modern. It also raises the question: why? What could any person who is not deranged want to do with all this volume? If you are that person, apply to Sotheby's International Realty, which will happily sell you the site.

## Bang on time



The O2 arena, London, after Storm Eunice. Photograph: Dominic Lipinski/PA

In 1997, flush with victory, Tony Blair's government had a decision to make. Should they proceed with a Tory plan to commemorate the coming millennium with a large dome on the Greenwich peninsula in [London](#)? They did, rebranding it as a triumph of New Labour optimism, on one condition: the roof covering proposed for the structure, which had been decried by Greenpeace for its short life expectancy, would be replaced by one lasting 25 years.

Recently, Storm Eunice, like a toddler ripping at wrapping paper, shredded that same covering, on what is now called the O2. It's not quite a quarter-century since the material was installed in 1998, but by the standards of promises about timing, in both politics and construction, you can only be impressed by the precision with which the one about its lifespan has been kept.

Rowan Moore is the Observer's architecture correspondent

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## The Russian bear advances on Kyiv – cartoon

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**Names in the newsPeaky Blinders**

## **With Peaky, Steven Knight has played a blinder in restoring Brum's pride**

[Rebecca Nicholson](#)



If a TV series is what it takes to raise our less-loved cities from ‘cultural cringe’, how about a thriller in, say, Hull?



Steven Knight at the unveiling of a Peaky Blinders mural by artist Akse P19 in Birmingham. Photograph: Jacob King/PA

Sat 26 Feb 2022 10.00 EST

*Peaky Blinders* is back and, with it, the largest number of Brummie and Brummie-ish accents you're likely to hear on TV all year, at least until *MasterChef* makes its recently announced move to Birmingham and Gregg Wallace is forced to start calling everyone "bab". In the [Radio Times last week](#), [Peaky Blinders creator Steven Knight](#) had a chat with Adrian Chiles about how the series has revived a sense of mythology around the city. "I did think very consciously that what we don't do in Birmingham – and, in fact, in England as a whole – is mythologise our own environment and be bold about it," Knight said.

It's certainly true that *Peaky Blinders* has created a whole mythological industry around it. I've written before about the proliferation of *Peaky Blinders*-themed pub crawls, how you'd be hard pressed to go out in the West Midlands (and beyond) on a Saturday night without seeing at least one flat cap and a waistcoat. Last year, I test-drove a car around a village that the garage owner swore had been a *Peaky Blinders* filming location and though nothing on Google or, for that matter, on screen could confirm his story, that sense of local pride was palpable.

Knight mentioned “a sort of cultural cringe”, pointing out that Americans write songs about almost all of their cities, while we seem a bit embarrassed about some of ours. Cultural cringe was coined by the academic AA Phillips in 1950, who used it to describe an Australian sense of inferiority about the country’s culture. In the UK, there are plenty of cities without an inferiority complex. The cultural giants such as Manchester and Liverpool are happy to celebrate their histories and you can’t turn on the telly at the moment without getting stuck in the six-hour vortex of an edgy drama set in Bristol.

But the attention is lopsided. I say this as someone who comes from Lincolnshire, largely celebrated for being flat, and I can’t think of many songs or TV series that mythologise that. Tinie Tempah mentioned Scunthorpe in a song, but only to say he’d never been there. British humour is largely based on taking the piss, specifically out of ourselves, and I suppose that makes it harder to celebrate much of anything.

But British cities are bursting with character and it is a shame to limit stories to the usual ones. Where are the Lichfield romcoms? Why aren’t there more thrillers set in Hull? Knight has proved that we only have to make an effort to instil a bit of local pride and more of it will follow.

## **Oti Mabuse: the show’s over when you out dazzle the ‘stars’**



Oti Mabuse: Strictly's loss. Photograph: Jim Dyson/Redferns

After seven years and two victories, Oti Mabuse has [announced her departure](#) from *Strictly Come Dancing*. “She leaves a dazzling legacy behind her, as the only professional dancer to lift the glitterball trophy in two consecutive years,” ran the BBC’s official statement, which was sweet, even if it read a bit like an obituary. The ever-popular Mabuse managed to win across the talent divide, securing victories as partner to both Kelvin Fletcher and Bill Bailey; her range is unparalleled and it doesn’t feel like it will be quite the same show without her.

Yet for a while now, Mabuse has been more famous, arguably, than half of the celebrity contestants who do *Strictly*. She is all over TV, on every channel, presenting, guesting, doing *Tipping Point*. At the start of a new series, differentiating between pro dancer and famous person is never the easiest of tasks, and sometimes it can feel like the toss of a coin. (If there’s a mention of either TikTok or the word “YouTuber”, I know I’m in trouble.) Watching her team up with someone who once appeared in *Hollyoaks* in 2009 would feel strange now. She will be missed, but surely it’s time for her next step.

## ‘Simon Leviev’: you saw the swindle, now get the T-shirt



Shimon Hayut, the Tinder Swindler. Photograph: Tore Kristiansen/AFP/Getty Images

Viewers who caught the jawdropping [Netflix documentary](#) *The Tinder Swindler* will be familiar with Simon Leviev, whose real name is Shimon Hayut, a man alleged by the film to have pulled off a whopping con that parted several women from an awful lot of money.

According to the documentary, he claimed to be the billionaire son of a diamond dealer, wooed women he met on the dating app by flying them around Europe, told them he and his bodyguard, Peter, were under attack, then asked them to send him tens of thousands of dollars. What’s amazing – and tragic and heartbreakng – is that they did.

As the story indicates, we are living through an age that has a complicated relationship with the concept of shame. Leviev, meanwhile, has turned himself into a celebrity. It was wearily inevitable. An American talent agency has signed him up. His website flogs T-shirts with “catchphrases” from the film, charmingly reviving his panicked message, “Peter’s hurt, send

money”, by emblazoning it on the chest; you can add a personalised video for \$200.

I wonder if he’d do an impression of the women who thought they loved him sobbing at the mountain of debt they racked up so he could have a lavish holiday in Mykonos with a new girlfriend. In his first interview since the film, he denies being a conman as alleged – the two years in prison in Finland for fraud must have been an anomaly – but then again, he is selling NFTs (non-fungible tokens), which does seem like a reliable indicator of character. The women who spoke on the documentary about their experiences, meanwhile, have been trolled.

Rebecca Nicholson is an Observer columnist

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## For the recordUK news

# For the record

For the record

Sun 27 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

An article said the British Virgin Islands “does not disclose company owners”. To clarify: it does not disclose that information on a public register but it is accessible to law enforcement authorities and international agencies ([Starmer: Russians hide cash in ‘soft touch’ UK](#), 20 February, p4).

The farmer who reintroduced Dorset blue vinny cheese in the 1980s was Mike Davies, not Mike Reid ([The return of the OFM 50!](#), 20 February, Food Monthly, p16).

Paul Winstanley’s Art School series, which features in an exhibition at London’s Whitechapel Gallery, is a body of paintings, not photographs ([Where the magic happens](#), the New Review, p26).

A photo in a theatre review roundup showed Paul McGann on stage in *The Forest*, not fellow cast member Toby Stephens ([Fibbing siblings and the Windrush backwash](#), 20 February, New Review, p31).

The Beach House album *Once Twice Melody* is released on the Bella Union label, not on Sub Pop as a [review](#) said (20 February, the New Review, p33).

There are five variants of virus that cause hepatitis, not three as a book review said ([The human cost of finding a cure](#), 20 February, the New Review, p42).

The apple tree with links to Isaac Newton that came down during Storm Eunice was in Cambridge University Botanic Garden, not the grounds of Trinity College, Cambridge ([Travel chaos, power cuts... battered Britain still reels from storm havoc](#)” 20 February, p8).

Other recently amended articles include:

**'Openly British' Kenworthy signs off with criticism of IOC over human rights**

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

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## Observer lettersSerial

# Letters: the catastrophic effect of the Trojan Horse Affair

The podcast about the 2013 allegations that there was an Islamic plot to take over Birmingham state schools was misleading and wrong



Birmingham schools were damaged. Composite: Sean Pressley/ David Sillitoe/Getty

Sun 27 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

I want to thank you so much for Sonia Sodha's article ("[The Trojan Horse Affair: how Serial podcast got it so wrong](#)", Focus). I was dismayed and depressed to listen to this *New York Times* podcast, which is one-sided, misleading and, in many instances, wrong.

As a senior leader in one of the schools involved, I saw first hand the damage inflicted by, in our case, several rogue members on our governing body working with others beyond the school to undermine the curriculum, the leadership team and the social cohesion the school had cultivated so

carefully and successfully. What they did had a catastrophic effect on the health and career of one senior colleague, caused anxiety and division among the staff, alarm and worry to pupils and their parents and the school, previously rated “good”, was eventually put into special measures. At least it meant the governing body had to go and we could begin to recover.

### **Name and address supplied**

Sonia Sodha seems to acknowledge, albeit grudgingly, that the Trojan Horse Affair was indeed overshadowed by a “false narrative” of violent extremism in some Birmingham schools, a narrative that was fuelled by a phantom letter and relied on false tropes of regressive Muslim attitudes. The allegations stoked [Islamophobia](#) on a national scale and Muslim communities are still living with the consequences. Concerns about child protection, governance and the role religion and culture play in schools are valid and should be discussed openly. Parents, teachers, governors and education officials could have come together through mutual respect to navigate expressions of faith in our school system in an inclusive way. Instead, policymakers and the media were blinded by a moral panic about Muslims, a suspicion of their motives and sheer prejudice about their beliefs and customs. To put it simply: the Trojan Horse hoax was weaponised, compounding institutional racism.

**Zara Mohammed**, secretary general of the Muslim Council of Britain  
London E1

Thank you for filling the gaps in the Trojan Horse [Serial](#) podcast. The political motives of the initial investigation and origins of the letter could have been questioned while also shining a spotlight on how the systematic implementation of a religiously conservative ideology was affecting staff and pupils, particularly girls and women. These issues, including safeguarding, continue to be downplayed or portrayed as lies in a bid to exonerate the men. I sent Serial podcast our 2014 media statement, which was ignored, even though we spoke to Muslim witnesses directly. Among other things, segregation and girls wearing hijab were portrayed as choices but they were shamed into complying, otherwise they would not be good Muslims. Shaming into silence is a running theme even now but this time character assassination of critics like me on social media.

I am glad the “old Muslim boys’ network” was dismantled but wish it had been exposed another way and not through the lens of extremism and Trojan Horse, as this conversation would have looked very different.

**Shaista Gohir**, executive director of the Muslim Women’s Network UK  
Birmingham

## Picasso was all man

I very much enjoyed Laura Cumming’s article on the exhibition A Century of the Artist’s Studio: 1920-2020 at the Whitechapel Gallery (“[Where the magic happens](#)”, the New Review). I was intrigued by the comment on the photo of Picasso, “his masculinity barely concealed by a toga”. Was this some prophetic take on gender by Picasso? When I visited the show yesterday I saw that it’s Picasso’s genitals that are concealed by the toga; his masculinity looked as evident as ever. Maybe a bit less euphemism next time? Still, a great show with an inspiring recommendation.

**Karen Byrne**  
London SW17

## Islands are no soft touch

Your article “[Starmer: Russians hide cash in ‘soft touch’ UK](#)” (News) does not paint a proper picture of the link between the British Virgin Islands and Russian investment in UK property.

The BVI has some of the strictest controls of any financial centre globally. We hold a beneficial ownership register for all companies in our territory that own property. Unlike many other jurisdictions, including the UK, only licensed corporate service providers can incorporate companies and by law they must conduct customer due diligence, including enhanced checks for politically exposed people. This beneficial ownership list is accessible by UK law enforcement and international agencies via our beneficial ownership secure search system.

There is no evidence of illicit use of BVI companies being used (by Russian or other nationalities) to purchase property in the UK. The BVI does not have a disproportionate number of Russian companies compared with other

financial centres; only 3% of the BVI companies worldwide are owned by Russians.

The BVI is actively implementing UK-imposed sanctions on Russia Ukraine. As a leading financial centre, we will continue to tackle money laundering and corruption, while making a positive economic contribution globally, in the UK and in the BVI.

**Elise Donovan**, chief executive officer, BVI Finance  
Road Town, British Virgin Islands

## Our vision for food

The food strategy white paper is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for the UK government to set out a single visionary plan to transform England's food system for our health, the economy and the planet. Recent gas and commodity price increases, CO2 shortages, tighter border controls and labour shortages have shown how important a coordinated approach to the food system is. It is only by taking an integrated, cross-government approach, building on the recommendations laid out in the National Food Strategy, that the government can lead the food system reform necessary to achieve its net zero and nature-positive commitments, tackle obesity and reduce inequalities.

To do this, the white paper must commit first and foremost to new primary legislation demonstrating the government's ambition in this space by putting in place the food system impact targets and long-term levers that will support the cross-government action that is needed to transform the food system for future generations. Through smart investment, aligned trade policy, standards and the right targets and laws in food, the government can unlock innovation and build resilient, sustainable supply chains and progressive partnerships with the best producers.

The white paper, coming after the Cop26 climate summit, is a line in the sand moment to reduce the environmental impacts of England's food system, increase access to and affordability of a healthy diet and support farmers, businesses and others to accelerate their transition towards more healthy, sustainable practices while providing high-quality employment in all parts of the country. With food system strategies and legislation under

way in all the devolved nations, this is an excellent opportunity to consider how legislation introduced in Westminster could benefit everyone.

We are calling on the government to commit to new primary legislation and champion food system change.

**Sustain; Food Foundation; WWF-UK**

**Hubbub; Compassion in World Farming; Eating Better; Friends of the Earth; Alexandra Rose Charity; Food Ethics Council; Food, Farming and Countryside Commission; Royal Society for the Protection of Birds; National Trust; Soil Association; The Landworkers' Alliance; Bite Back 2030; Sustainable Food Trust; School Food Matters; Consensus Action on Salt, Sugar and Health; Real Farming Trust; Farm Wilder; CSA Network UK; PAN UK; The Food Teachers Centre; Pipers Farm; Dr Rosemary Green, associate professor in sustainability, nutrition and health, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine; Leeds City Council; Chefs in Schools; World Cancer Research Fund; Dr Rosalind Sharpe, director, Food Research Collaboration, Centre for Food Policy, City, University of London; Farms To Feed Us; Alliance to Save our Antibiotics; Trade Justice Movement; Slow Food in the UK; English Organic Forum; Farms Not Factories; Sustainable Restaurant Association; The Open Food Network; ProVeg UK; Plant-based Food Alliance UK; Dr Tara Garnett, University of Oxford; Humane Society International UK; Professor Tom MacMillan, Royal Agricultural University; SOS-UK; Black Butterfly; Forum for the Future; Wildlife and Countryside Link; Organic Farmers & Growers CIC; FOUR PAWS UK; Nature Friendly Farming Network; Diabetes UK; Wildfarmed; British Heart Foundation; Better Food Traders; Growing Communities; Changing Markets Foundation; G's; Global Justice Now; Peas Please; Scrap Factory Farming (Humane Being); Bristol Food Producers; Feedback; Organic Research Centre; Professor Martin White, professor of population health research, University of Cambridge; Dr David Strain, chair of CMA Board of Science, British Medical Association; Bristol Food Network CIC; Professor Steven Cummins, Professor of Population Health & NIHR Senior Investigator, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine; Professor Richard Smith, Deputy Pro-Vice Chancellor and Professor of Health Economics, University of Exeter; Professor Kate Pickett, co-director, Centre for Future Health, University of York; Dr Christopher Yap, Centre For**

**Food Policy, City, University of London; British Dental Association; Professor Peter Ball, professor of operations management, University of York Management School; UK Association for the Study of Obesity; Dr Maria Bryant, reader in public health nutrition, University of York; N8 Research Partnership; Professor Katherine Denby, Centre for Novel Agricultural Products, University of York; Professor Bob Doherty, FixOurFood, University of York Management School; Royal Academy of Culinary Arts' Adopt a School Trust; Greenpeace UK; The Equality Trust; OmniAction.org; Quota.Media; Asylum Support & Immigration; Resource Team (ASIRT); Geoff Tansey, curator, Food Systems Academy; Hull Food Partnership; Dr Kerry Ann Brown, senior lecturer in public health nutrition, College of Life & Environmental Sciences, University of Exeter; Professor Peter Jackson, professor of human geography, University of Sheffield; Dr Rachel Loopstra, lecturer in nutrition, King's College London; Sustainable Soils Alliance (SSA); Pasture for Life; Dr Isabel Fletcher, senior researcher, Science Technology and Innovation Studies, University of Edinburgh; Social Farms & Gardens; The Vegan Society; Dung beetles for farmers; CLEAR – The Consortium on Labelling for the Environment, Animal welfare and Regenerative farming; Aldi; Bidfood; Co-op; Compass UK & Ireland; Food4innov8ions Ltd; Greencore; Greggs; Lidl GB; M&S; Perfectly Fresh Ltd; Sainsbury's; Sodexo; Sysco GB; Tesco; Waitrose; Young's Seafood**

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/commentisfree/2022/feb/27/letters-catastrophic-effect-trojan-horse-affair>

## OpinionLaw

# **Putin has used British rich man's law to avoid scrutiny, at a crippling cost to us all**

[Nick Cohen](#)



The price of justice in the UK has helped the Russian super-rich stay fixtures in our culture



Russian businessman Roman Abramovich. Photograph: Dmitry Astakhov/TASS

Sat 26 Feb 2022 14.00 EST

Truth is meant to be the first casualty of war, but in Britain the ability to tell the truth about [Russia](#) was gunned down before Putin ordered his armies to advance.

You need to write about Russian power to understand fully the anger and shame plutocratic censorship brings. Anger because Britain is our country, and claims to be a free country, and yet foreign oligarchs can manipulate the truth here as surely as Putin can in Russia. Shame because we cannot perform the first duty of journalists and speak in plain English without our newspapers accepting the risk of staggering legal costs.

In the safe space of the House of Commons, Labour MP Chris Bryant quoted from leaked government documents, which stated [Roman Abramovich](#) should be watched because of “his links to the Russian state and his public association with corrupt activity and practices”. God help anyone who says as much outside when the government has not put him on its sanctions list.

Bear the costs of challenging wealth in mind when you wonder how London became a centre of corruption. Anglo-Saxon law brings class justice rather than real justice. The verdicts of individual judges are not to blame – whatever their faults, they do not take bribes. But the price of reaching a verdict is so high that few dare run the risk of being left with the bill. A system can be rigged even if the people in charge of it are honest, and there is institutional prejudice in the English justice system in favour of wealth that is as pervasive as institutional racism in the police.

Let one example stand for thousands. The Parisian intellectual Nicolas Tenzer tweeted that the French equivalents of [George Galloway](#) and [Nigel Farage](#) acted as the Kremlin’s “useful idiots” when they appeared on Putin’s propaganda channel RT. RT [sued](#), claiming that not only had Tenzer libelled the station but that he was guilty of an “encroachment on the dignity” of its journalists – as if security guards did not strip its hacks of dignity every time they went to work. Naturally, the French courts found against RT. Astonishingly to anyone involved in the struggles for free speech in the UK, the cost of the case was just €10,000 (£8,400).

Compare that with the price of writing about the Putin regime in the UK. In January 2021, after Putin’s agents had poisoned him but before he was jailed, the Russian opposition leader [Alexei Navalny](#) praised Catherine Belton’s *Putin’s People*. It is indeed the book of the moment, which shows how KGB men created the world’s most dangerous rogue state. Abramovich, three other Russian billionaires and Putin’s energy company Rosneft sued.

The case was trivial. Belton’s publishers HarperCollins settled it agreeing to make changes to the text most readers wouldn’t notice. Yet although it never went to a full hearing, the case, it was revealed to me, cost HarperCollins £1.5m – 178 times the price of the libel trial in France. In effect, HarperCollins was fined a small fortune for publishing an anti-Putin book by the English legal system.

If we were capable of feeling shame at the misery Britain’s corruption inflicts, we would radically reform the law

You may not care about journalists when it is the police's job to arrest the corrupt. "Our" rich man's law ensures, however, that the police have pretty much given up. The government introduced [unexplained wealth orders](#) in 2018 as a "full-spectrum" assault on illicit wealth being laundered through the property market. It did not realise that the fantastically wealthy could hire London's best lawyers, who are more than a match for the barristers the state can afford.

When the National Crime Agency lost a case against the family of Rakhat Aliyev, a former deputy chief of the Kazakh state security service, it had to pay [£1.5m in legal costs](#), which seems to be becoming a standard charge in the high court. Its annual budget for tracking down money launderers was all but wiped out.

The story of the world in the 21st century is of a rise in the power of dictatorial states and their accomplices and the collapse in the power of democratically accountable police forces and journalists who are meant to combat them.

If we were capable of feeling shame at the misery that Britain's corruption inflicts on the world, we would radically reform the law. We would move closer to a continental legal system. We would make judging a career in its own right and phase out the recruitment of judges from the ranks of barristers and solicitors, who appear to think obscene costs are reasonable. We would stop selling English law as a luxury service in the global marketplace and say its first duty should be to meet the needs of the people of this country. And we would impose limits on the fees the lawyers of the super rich can charge in the high court.

As it is, I suspect nothing will happen. Aside from *Private Eye* and a handful of [patriotic MPs](#), no one highlights how a section of legal London profits from Russian billionaires. The lawyers who went for Catherine Belton included [Hugh Tomlinson](#), who is on the board of Hugh Grant's Hacked Off, which says it wants to hold "[power to account](#)", not act as its servant, and [Geraldine Proudler](#), who until recently was on the board of the Scott Trust, which regulates us here at the *Guardian* and *Observer* and ensures we maintain the highest ethical standards.

Get off your high horse, lawyers tell me when I raise an eyebrow. Everyone would do the same if they had the chance.

And if not everyone, then many would and do. It's not only lawyers who simper pieties about respecting human rights while slipping wads of oligarchical cash into their pockets. Politicians, footballers, estate agents, private school head teachers, hedge fund managers, bankers, art gallery owners and whole sections of the professional class are hooked on dirty money.

The Treasury opposes every anti-corruption measure because, I suspect, it sees their dependence clearly. It regards the British economy with deep pessimism. It notes the poor quality of our managers and entrepreneurs, and the self-inflicted wound of Brexit, and concludes that dirty money is better than no money.

As Russian tanks roll across Europe, a true cause for anger and shame is that at no point have we had a public debate about whether we want a future where we are living off immoral earnings and are so frightened of immoral lawyers we no longer dare describe what this country has become.

Nick Cohen is an Observer columnist

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/feb/26/putin-british-rich-mans-law-avoid-scrutiny-crippling-cost>

# Headlines

- ['Completely contradictory' Farmers' leader attacks UK government's post-Brexit policies](#)
- [Cost of living crisis Homelessness set to soar in England](#)
- ['It is ridiculous' Supermarkets wasting 200,000 tonnes of food that could go to needy, say charities](#)
- [Coronavirus Restrictions and free mass testing to end in England](#)
- [Analysis Tory row over testing casts shadow over announcement](#)

## Farming

# ‘Completely contradictory’: NFU leader attacks UK farming policy

Minette Batters says industry is in crisis because of government failures over staff shortages, Brexit red tape and cheap imports



The NFU president, Minette Batters, seen here on her farm near Salisbury with her herd of Simmental Cross cattle, will make an unprecedented attack on government farming policy. Photograph: Adrian Sherratt/The Observer

*[Fiona Harvey](#) Environment correspondent*

Tue 22 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

The government has shown a “total lack of understanding of how food production works”, introduced “completely contradictory policies” on farming, and risks “repeatedly running into crises” through the lack of a post-Brexit plan for UK farming, the leading representative of British farmers will say today.

Minette Batters, president of the National Farmers' Union, will make a scathing attack on ministers' failures, unprecedented in recent memory in its ferocity from a farming leader.

Her withering assessment of the government's actions reflects widespread anger and alarm among many sections of the UK's farming and food production industries, one of the country's biggest manufacturing industries and employers. Farmers have suffered from plunging exports and reams of new red tape owing to Brexit, staff shortages as EU seasonal workers have left, and the prospect of floods of cheap low-quality imports after post-Brexit trade deals.

Batters will highlight the fate of the pig industry – which is facing near-collapse under rising costs and staffing shortages – and warn that similar disasters will hit other branches of farming unless the government acts.

She will tell the NFU conference in Birmingham: “We need a plan that pre-empts crises, rather than repeatedly runs into them … this country needs a strategy and a clear vision for what we expect from British farming. We have completely contradictory government policies. It is raising the bar for environmental standards at home but pursuing trade deals which support lower standards overseas. It is claiming to value domestic food production but making it difficult to find workers to harvest or process it. It is stating there are many export opportunities for British food but failing to prioritise the resources to open up those new markets.”

She will call for “certainty, commitment and consistency” in government policy, and point to the successes of British farmers in raising animal welfare and food production standards, improving the environment and pushing to reach net zero greenhouse gas emissions.

But, in excerpts from her speech distributed on Monday night, she pulled few punches in criticising ministers for their lack of planning, and failure to respond to recent problems in farming.

Pig producers are looking after 200,000 pigs that should have been sent to slaughter, but cannot be because of a lack of staff in abattoirs. Keeping the

pigs on their farms costs farmers dearly, wiping out their potential profits. About 40,000 pigs have had to be culled, which creates a further cost to farmers, as well as being a waste of resources.

This “disaster” in the pig industry “should have and could have been avoided”, according to Batters. The situation for pig farmers “truly is an utter disgrace”, she will say. “This is down to the government’s poorly designed change to immigration policy and what I can only say appears to be its total lack of understanding of how food production works and what it needs.”

The prime minister, Boris Johnson, angered many farmers last year when he appeared to make a joke of the crisis in pig production, [telling the BBC that pigs raised for food were destined to die anyway](#). This appeared to ignore the costs to farmers, and their distress at having to put down healthy animals for no purpose.

George Dunn, chief executive of the Tenant Farmers Association, also called for more focus from ministers, particularly in relation to the reforms to post-Brexit subsidies, which will see farmers paid “public money for public goods” through the [replacement of EU subsidies with environmental land management contracts \(ELMs\)](#), whereby farmers are paid for reaching certain environmental improvement goals.

Dunn said: “We need to see a bit more strategy from the government as to how its various policy strands fit together into a consistent whole. ELMs is only one part of a panoply of initiatives including support for new entrants, farming resilience, food policy, standards in trade, regulation and enforcement and supply chain measures which at best continue to be developed in silos. Currently, it feels like there are few threads bringing the [patchwork quilt of initiatives together](#). Farmers need to plan for the long term and want to be in line with wider public policy – however, until that becomes clearer we run the risk of a lack of alignment.”

The NFU wants the government to invest in British farming to sell more homegrown food within the UK, and help farmers to export it; to ensure farmers can get a fair deal with supermarkets, which currently often use their market dominance to squeeze farmers’ profit margins; to reform

immigration policy to allow more seasonal farm workers; and to reform farm subsidies in a way that encourages food production as well as meeting environmental objectives.

Batters will say: “Above and beyond everything, we need to all be working to the same objectives and aiming for the same outcome. There needs to be a plan. A plan which enables Britain to keep on farming and to continue to be world leaders in high quality, safe and sustainable food.”

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/feb/22/completely-contradictory-nfu-leader-attacks-uks-farming-policy>.

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## Homelessness

# Homelessness set to soar in England amid cost of living crisis

Rise in number of sofa surfers expected to drive the increase as councils warn of ‘tidal wave’ of need



More than 66,000 more people will become homeless by 2024, according to the housing charity Crisis. Photograph: Maureen McLean/REX/Shutterstock

*[Robert Booth](#) Social affairs correspondent*

Tue 22 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

The number of people homeless in England is predicted to jump by a third by 2024 as councils warn of a “tidal wave” of need caused by benefits freezes, soaring food and energy bills and the end of Covid eviction bans.

More than 66,000 more people will be homeless by 2024, with the bulk of the increase being among people forced to “sofa surf”, according to annual

forecasts by the housing charity Crisis and Heriot-Watt University. There will be 8,000 more people rough sleeping and 9,000 people forced into unsuitable temporary accommodation.

The chief executive of Crisis, Matt Downie, described the findings as “a huge cause for concern”, as a survey of 155 English councils also found that nine out of 10 town halls expect to see an increase in evictions from private rented homes over the next year. Eight out of 10 fear increases in homeless children.

“We are expecting a tidal wave, to put it mildly,” an official at one council in southern England told the researchers. “It is going to be a very, very busy couple of years.”

Councils in London, where living costs are highest, are predicting the biggest surge.

The bleak projections come as government measures to prevent homelessness during the pandemic unwind. Core homelessness in England – a concept which captures the most acute forms of homelessness – is estimated to have totalled 203,400 in 2020, down 5% on 2019 levels.

This was primarily due to the widely praised “Everyone In” initiative during the pandemic which saw rough sleepers housed in hotels. But this measure is now predicted to rise to 270,000 by 2024 and reach close to 300,000 by 2036, unless further countermeasures are taken.

### Graphic

Evictions slumped during the pandemic, as ministers paused court proceedings, but are now increasing again. There were more than 14,000 possession claims between October and December last year, a 42% rise on the previous quarter.

Energy price rises this spring forecast at over 40% will hit single-adult households on low incomes hardest. They could be forced to spend 54% of their income on bills compared with 6% for a middle-income family, according to [estimates by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#).

“It doesn’t have to be like this,” said Downie. “The protections put in place during the pandemic helped thousands of people off the streets and prevented many more from facing homelessness. It would be shameful for this progress to unravel before us, at a huge human cost and a financial one for the local councils left to foot the bill.”

In December, the government [announced](#) a £316m homelessness prevention fund for councils for the next financial year that it said would protect tens of thousands of people from homelessness. It was welcomed by Crisis and the founder of the Big Issue, John Bird.

But Crisis is calling on the government to further increase the Local [Housing Allowance](#) – the amount the state will pay to cover rent for people on benefits – so it truly covers the cost of rent across the country. The allowance was rebased at 30% of market rents in spring 2020 but was frozen from April 2021.

It also repeated its call for more social housing to be built. Only 5,955 new homes for the cheapest social rents were provided in England 2020/21, down from nearly 40,000 a year a decade ago.

A Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities spokesperson said: “Government interventions have prevented almost 450,000 households from becoming homeless since 2017.

“This year, councils have been given an extra £65 million to support low income households with rent arrears.

“We’re also banning no-fault evictions, and a £316 million homelessness prevention grant will help people who are homeless or at risk of losing their home to find a new one, get help with evictions or move into temporary accommodation.”

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/feb/22/homelessness-set-to-soar-in-england-amid-cost-of-living-crisis>

## Supermarkets

# Supermarkets wasting 200,000 tonnes of food that could go to needy, say charities

Contracts with large charities mean smaller ones miss out on own-label products that end up as animal feed



Volunteers from The Bread and Butter Thing in Ashton-under-Lyne, Greater Manchester. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

[Sarah Butler](#)  
[@whatbutlersaw](#)

Tue 22 Feb 2022 02.00 EST

Hundreds of thousands of tonnes of surplus food that could be going to hungry families is going to waste as supermarkets restrict who their suppliers can give it to, according to food distribution charities.

Several independent charities, which are grouped together under the Xcess network, say they struggle to source unwanted edible food from manufacturers and processors because of supermarkets' rules about the handling of their own-label products.

At least 200,000 tonnes of own-label food fit for human consumption ends up as animal food or is used to generate energy, according to research by the sustainability group Anthesis, because of difficulties in getting it to the right place.

Mark Game, the chief executive of the charity The Bread and Butter Thing, a food club that hands out heavily discounted food parcels to 25,000 registered members, said: "Retailers hold the cards – unless they say yes to manufacturers, they just can't give [the food] out.

"Demand constantly outstrips supply and we are having to let people down, and if we had this food we could do more."

David France, the manager of the Lancaster-based community food club Eggcup, said it was impossible to get hold of the food without the retailers' permission.

"As a fairly new organisation with a tremendous level of growth, we have not been able to establish relationships with larger organisations," he said. "It is ridiculous how much food is being thrown away because retailers have contracts with larger [charities], which aren't always able to use that surplus."

About half the food we buy every year comes from supermarkets' own brands, and it is estimated that they make up more than 72% of edible surplus food in supermarkets' supply chains, according to the Anthesis research.

However, with suppliers often packing own-label products for multiple retailers, it is not clear who has ownership of the waste, and it is difficult to get permission from each supermarket involved to hand on unwanted items.

Wrap, the government-backed recycling body, highlighted the issue last summer and issued new guidance calling on retailers to rethink rules that largely limit the redistribution of their unwanted own-label foods to two large charities, FareShare and Company Shop.

It called on retailers to share information so that their suppliers are automatically mandated to directly hand surplus food to a list of smaller charities, including The Bread and Butter Thing, which have already passed tests showing they meet established standards on food safety and redistribution.

Since then, only Sainsbury's has changed its setup to enable all its own-label suppliers to pass on goods directly without signing numerous local agreements.

Tesco and Asda currently only allow suppliers to hand out surplus own-label food to small charities via FareShare and Company Shop or if audited by FareShare. Morrisons allows its suppliers to give direct handouts to a wider number of named groups but charities and suppliers say they have to cut individual deals rather than gaining easy access via a national mandate.

Game said the change from Sainsbury's was welcome but many suppliers would not separate out waste food by the supermarket it was packed or processed for, as this added costs and time for hard-pressed businesses. He said a step change in the handling of food waste would not be possible until all the major grocers changed their approach.

Andy Mitchell at Worldwide Fruit, which supplies a wide range of produce including apples, pears and nectarines to big supermarkets, said: "We supply FareShare but they can only take a certain amount of volume."

He said working directly with The Bread and Butter Thing had enabled the company to increase the amount of edible surplus food it redistributed by a third. It had been able to work with the charity to deal with more difficult-to-process waste, such as end-of-season fruit that was not usually economic to pick or produce and was packed in a way that did not suit FareShare's systems.

“Having more than one charity in the mix makes a significant difference in the flexibility to take product,” he said.

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A spokesperson for Asda said it was in the process of changing its systems to meet Wrap guidelines: “We are already adopting the broader elements of the Wrap guidelines and onboarding charities such as The Bread and Butter Thing and City Harvest and others so they can receive food direct from our suppliers as well as from our stores, depots and FareShare as they do already.”

A Tesco spokesperson said: “We are fully compliant with Wrap’s food donation guidelines and are part of their working group which helps to create the guidance.

“Our food donation programme is the largest of its kind in the UK and to date we have provided more than 135m meals to FareShare, supporting thousands of independent charities and food banks in communities across the UK.”

A spokesperson for Morrisons said: “We work with hundreds of small independent food distribution groups up and down the country, together with the larger groups such as The Bread and Butter Thing on a national and regional level. Both of these initiatives allow for surplus own-label food to be redistributed in a thoughtful and impactful way.”

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/feb/22/supermarkets-wasting-200000-tonnes-of-food-that-could-go-to-needy-say-charities>

## Coronavirus

# Covid restrictions and free mass testing to end in England

Announcement by Boris Johnson shows Rishi Sunak has won out over Sajid Javid in cabinet battle over funding

- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)

02:17

Boris Johnson announces end to Covid restrictions – video

*[Rowena Mason](#), [Jessica Elgot](#) and [Ian Sample](#)*

Mon 21 Feb 2022 12.42 EST

Covid laws and free mass testing are to be swept away across England after Rishi Sunak won a [cabinet battle](#) on cutting the cost of the pandemic, prompting fears that the poor and vulnerable will pay the price.

Boris Johnson announced plans to end free testing for the general public from 1 April, saying it was time for people to “get our confidence back”.

People who test positive for Covid will no longer have to isolate by law from this Thursday – and from April will not even be advised to stay at home if infected, the prime minister said.

The chief medical officer, Chris Whitty, and the chief scientific adviser, Patrick Vallance, struck a more cautious note, however, urging people to keep taking precautions such as isolating and wearing masks while infections remain high.

Speaking alongside Johnson at a Downing Street press conference, they emphasised the need to keep monitoring for new variants, with Whitty warning that Covid could still cause “significant problems” and cautioning that it is not a “trivial” illness.

The prime minister unveiled the changes after Sunak, the chancellor, won his fight to slash the cost of Covid testing, which has topped £15bn in the past year, by up to 90%.

Sajid Javid, the health secretary, had pushed for £5bn to £6bn to fund more community testing and surveillance studies, but failed. After last-minute wrangles that delayed a cabinet meeting by more than two hours, additional funding will now have to be found from his own department’s budget. No 10 insisted that efforts to reduce the NHS waiting list backlog would not be affected.

Tory MPs opposed to Covid restrictions were delighted at Johnson’s move, but it was greeted with dismay by some medics, scientists, charities and unions. Many raised concerns that the low-paid will not be able to afford tests and may come under pressure from employers to work when ill with Covid.

Those on low pay will no longer get financial support to isolate if they test positive, and sick pay will revert to the pre-pandemic rules, with eligibility from day four of illness rather than day one.

Charities said the end of free tests was also a blow to clinically vulnerable people and older age groups, warning that they may lose confidence about going out in public, while business groups expressed frustration that they would have to take decisions on testing and isolation policies for their own staff.

The government said “a small number of at-risk groups” and care home staff will continue to get free lateral flow tests (LFTs), possibly the over-80s, but No 10 admitted the details of who will be eligible and its funding had yet to be worked out.

Johnson emphasised “personal responsibility” for Covid in future, rather than the government setting restrictions to control it. He said “pharmaceutical interventions”, such as antivirals and vaccines, would be the primary line of defence from now on.

“We don’t need laws to compel people to be considerate to others. We can rely on that sense of responsibility towards one another,” he told the Commons. Other changes announced by the prime minister included:

- Contact tracing will end from Thursday and contacts of people testing positive will no longer have to test or isolate.
- Schools and other education settings will no longer be advised to test twice-weekly, with immediate effect.
- NHS and social care staff will no longer get asymptomatic testing but this is expected to continue for patients and care home residents.
- Covid passports will be scrapped from 1 April, with venues no longer recommended to use them. They will still be available for international travel.
- The Office for National Statistics survey of Covid in the community will be maintained but in a slimmed-down version.
- The Vivaldi study on care homes and Panoramic study on antivirals will continue, the government insisted, although it was not clear how they will be funded and whether enough testing is being done to support them.

At Johnson’s first press conference since 19 January, Whitty and Vallance emphasised that the ability to maintain surveillance and “ramp up” testing again would be crucial in future. Whitty stressed that people with Covid should still self-isolate, even though the government has not committed to renewing that advice beyond April.

Johnson insisted there was no division on the “living with Covid” strategy. “I don’t want you to think that there is some division between the gung ho

politicians and the cautious, anxious scientists. We have a very clear view on this, that this has not gone away,” he said.

Vallance suggested he was concerned about the rates of infection once people returned to pre-pandemic behaviour. “In terms of the current situation, I’d like the prevalence to be lower, I’d like rates of infection to be lower … We are not back to pre-pandemic behaviours yet. And as those returns you would expect the pressure and transmission to increase.”

The changes were met with scepticism from Labour, who accused the prime minister of weakening sick pay in a way that will “hit the lowest paid and the most insecure workers the hardest”.

Keir Starmer said: “We can’t turn off Britain’s radar before the war is won. ‘Ignorance is bliss’ is not a responsible approach to a deadly virus. It actually risks undoing all the hard won progress the British people have achieved over the last two years.”

Some scientists said it was right to begin winding down the pandemic response now the Omicron peak has passed but others expressed worries about the consequences of an abrupt end to free testing. Prof Stephen Reicher, a member of Sage’s behavioural science subgroup, said he was concerned it “exacerbates inequalities for those who can’t afford to test or to self-isolate”.

“All the rhetoric about freedom, and about choice and about allowing people to exercise ‘personal responsibility’ hides the fact that those freedoms and choices are limited to those who have the means,” he said.

“Johnson’s removal of support for self-isolation and testing takes choice away from those who cannot afford to stay home or buy testing kits. Johnson exposed the fallacy of his argument in asserting that ‘anyone who wants to can buy a test’. No they can’t. if you are already having to choose between eating and heating, tests are an impossible luxury.”

Following the announcement, free government LFTs appeared to have run out, with a message saying “there are no home delivery slots for these tests right now”.

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## Coronavirus

# Tory row over testing casts shadow over PM's Covid announcement

Analysis: cabinet colleagues horrified over wrangling between Rishi Sunak and Sajid Javid



Boris Johnson in the Commons as he updated MPs on the Covid-19 situation. Photograph: Elena Fusco/AFP/Getty Images

*[Jessica Elgot](#) Chief political correspondent*

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Mon 21 Feb 2022 14.59 EST

Cabinet ministers were already waiting in No 10 on Monday morning when it became clear the sign-off for the prime minister's much-anticipated end to Covid regulations was not going to be as perfunctory as they had imagined.

A festering row between [Rishi Sunak](#)'s Treasury and [Sajid Javid](#)'s health department was responsible, first [reported](#) by the Guardian last week and still unresolved.

Few cabinet colleagues had much sympathy with Javid's demands for extra cash to continue some Covid testing programmes beyond next month. "We are pushing through a hugely unpopular tax rise for his budget," one cabinet minister said of the impending [£12bn healthcare levy](#), funded by a national rise. "He's got a budget that is triple the defence budget. No one can say he is being squeezed."

But privately some were horrified by the scramble to agree a deal between the Treasury and Department of [Health](#) and Social Care (DHSC) just hours before the prime minister's announcement. One Tory MP called it a "shambles" and said it returned doubts about the No 10 operation to the forefront of colleagues' minds.

"We thought this had been signed off days ago," one grumbled. "Why is the prime minister calling a cabinet meeting when the details aren't finished?"

As word leaked out that ministers were being turned away from the delayed meeting, No 10 began by suggesting Boris Johnson's briefing on Ukraine had overrun. But it soon became apparent that there was ongoing wrangling between Javid and Sunak over the future of testing for NHS staff in particular, and Covid surveillance programmes.

It was an awkward few hours before the final agreement was done. The cabinet was hastily reconvened on Microsoft Teams, with ministers given less than 10 minutes' notice of the 1.30pm meeting.

Although his department has consistently denied requesting more cash, multiple sources said Javid was fighting to keep billions of pounds extra in funding to continue some free testing, including free lateral flow tests for symptomatic over-50s, but this was rejected by the Treasury.

Over the previous week, sources said Javid had reduced his demands for additional funds but argued consistently for maintaining testing programmes

designed to monitor new variants and surges. In the end, both sides claimed victory, with health sources saying Sunak had wanted to scrap the surveillance system completely.

But one cabinet minister called the result a “total victory” for Sunak, saying the Treasury stuck to its original plans to cut Covid budgets by almost 90% and that Javid had to find the funds from his existing healthcare settlement. Johnson gave his backing to the chancellor’s refusal to agree further funds.

Javid now faces the unenviable task of finding funding within his budget to continue surveillance programmes like the Office for National Statistics survey without hitting funds designated to clear the NHS backlog.

A health source said Javid had always been arguing to be able to “reprioritise” within his budget, saying the health secretary understood the “fiscal case” to end most free testing.

Yet as Johnson appeared before MPs to loud criticism from Labour and the SNP for the decision to end free Covid tests, several ministers remarked at how isolated Javid had been at cabinet for his push to retain some free testing. “Cabinet is pretty united on this direction,” one source said.

Those Tory MPs who have doubts about whether the strategy is shortsighted have largely remained quiet. Greg Clark, the former cabinet minister, asked tentatively in the Commons how long it would take to restart mass testing should it be needed, but did not make the case to retain more of the programme.

For the most part, as he announced the end of a testing regime which Johnson had once heralded as the envy of the world, Tory MPs cheered him on – arguably the most united the government benches had been in months.

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## 2022.02.22 - Spotlight

- The long read ‘In my 30 years as a GP, the profession has been horribly eroded’
- This Is Going to Hurt’s Ambika Mod Whenever I did a caesarean I was buzzing!
- A worker in winter The hidden life of a farmer: playful cows, imperious sheep – and a grinding struggle for survival
- ‘We’re quite fed up’ Britons on weathering the aftermath of three storms
- ‘We’re devastated’ Yorkshire town hit by floods for third time in decade



Clare Gerada. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

[The long read](#)

## **'In my 30 years as a GP, the profession has been horribly eroded'**

Clare Gerada. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

As I finished the final house calls of my long career in general practice, it struck me how detached I am from my patients now – and that it was not always like this. Where did we go wrong, and what can we do to fix it?

by [Clare Gerada](#)

Tue 22 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

In December, I did my last day on call. My last ever out-of-hours session in general practice. In a 13-hour shift on Boxing Day, I did a lot of home visits, during which I offered advice and treatment for rashes, pains, Covid, injuries and infections. I saw newborn babies and I certified deaths. In addition to

the usual workload, the pandemic meant filling in for absent colleagues who were shielding or infected with the virus. From 8am to 9pm, at the out-of-hours centre and on home visits, I didn't stop. The plastic container of leftover Christmas dinner I had brought with me remained unopened.

This last day was in many ways symptomatic of the changes I have seen over the course of 30 years. Today, with advances of medicines and technology, patients are living longer, often with three or even four serious long-term conditions, so having one patient with heart failure, chronic respiratory problems, dementia and previous stroke is not at all unusual, whereas 30 years ago the heart failure might have carried them off in their 60s. This makes every patient much more complex, and it can be much harder to manage them and to get the balance of treatments right.

Today, unlike 30 years ago, all patients are strangers and, as my catchment area now extends into different London boroughs, even the places I go are unfamiliar. Gone is the relationship between my community and me. Instead, I am part of a gig economy, as impersonal as the driver delivering a pizza. I ended the shift with a profound sense of loss and sadness.

One of the patients I saw was a man in his 90s, with a history of dementia, living with his adult children and grandchildren. The call had come in that he was not drinking or eating, and had not passed any urine for 24 hours. I wasn't expecting to be able to offer much. I knocked loudly. By now it was raining and very cold, and I waited shivering while someone came to let me in. The patient's room had been taken over by the clutter of ill-health. A hospital bed, commode, wheelchair, a table covered with medicines and surgical dressings. Incontinence pads (unused) lay piled on the floor, and used ones in a sanitary bin in the corner of the room contributed that unmistakable odour of old age. My patient sat sleeping in a chair. The story, as told to the call centre that arranged the visit, was a background of dementia and infirmity, recent Covid, previous stroke, and now not drinking.

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I was puzzled as to why I had been called. What was I expected to do? This man was dying, here, now, in front of his family. They had struggled over the Christmas period to care for him on their own – community services had peeled away owing to holidays and pandemic-induced shortages. I offered options: get him back to hospital, try to admit him to a hospice, or keep him at home and make him comfortable in the hospital bed provided by social services – although an ambulance would have taken hours to arrive, and organising an emergency palliative care bed in the middle of the holiday season would have been almost impossible. Fortunately, they chose to keep him where he was.

The next visit was to a nursing home, the fourth that day. Each had different Covid requirements. One allowed me straight in after asking if I had had a negative lateral flow test that day (I had); one had asked if I had recently visited a known Covid-infected person (of course I had). This one asked to see my vaccine certificate and took my temperature, then ushered me straight in.

This patient was another elderly man, but there was nothing I could do for him. He had died earlier in the day, and my role was to confirm this. It was what was called an “expected death”. I was led into his darkened room. The curtains were drawn, and a paper sheet had been placed over his body. Over the years I have been present at the bedside of patients at that moment of transition from life to death. It is an extraordinary moment that has never stopped amazing me.

Being invited by family members to be present at that most intimate time represents the culmination of my role, which is caring for the patient from cradle to grave. But this death was different. This man had died alone, with no friends or relatives at his side, all long since dead. I checked for signs of breathing or a heartbeat. I examined his eyes for fixed dilated pupils. I stroked his hand, not as part of any examination, but just to pay my respects to his passing. I signed the necessary paperwork, made a note of the time that I pronounced life extinct, and offered my condolences to the care home workers.

My last patient of the day lived with her adult relatives. Terminally ill and recently discharged from hospital, she was restless and clearly in pain. She

needed pain relief, something to ease her passage from life to death. I looked helplessly at her family. What could I do? My doctor's bag provided by the out-of-hours service contained nothing that could ameliorate her suffering.

She needed a syringe driver – a pump that allows for small quantities of powerful medicines to be given via a small needle placed just under the skin. This isn't something that GPs carry, and even if we did, we wouldn't have the medicines to put into it. When I started out as a GP, my doctor's bag contained ampules of morphine, pethidine and other painkillers I might need on my visits. But the days of carrying strong medication are long gone, since the restrictions imposed after the murderous actions of [Harold Shipman](#).

I felt angry. Why had the hospital not arranged care before discharging her? Covid had meant that many patients were discharged as quickly as possible to clear beds for the expected surge but without, it seems, a thought as to what provision they needed in the coming days. That evening, I was all there was. My only option was to suggest a transfer back to hospital, to a busy accident and emergency department. I, but more importantly the system, had failed her in her final hours of need. My deep shame was hidden behind my mask.

I do not know what happened to this patient. Each patient I saw that day was a stranger, and each contact an isolated encounter. We would never meet again. They were single episodes and, unless I made an error resulting in a complaint (and this is a constant anxiety), I would never know the outcome of my actions.

Driving home at the end of the evening, I shed tears of exhaustion, and helplessness. It wasn't that I had done a bad job. I had attended as best as I could, had consulted where needed with relatives, care workers and even hospital practitioners to seek additional advice. My sadness came from how things had changed, how different this day was, compared to my first day on call – and how much more personal my job had been in the past.

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Back then, in 1991, in my first trimester of pregnancy, and armed only with an A to Z, coins for the public phone box and my Gladstone bag, I raced

around my “parish” in south London seeing patients whose lives I would still be involved with decades later.

I learned the rules of home visiting very early in my career. Even with the invention of Google Maps and mobile phones, they haven’t changed substantially.

The first rule is that the home you are looking for is always the hardest to find. Door numbers stop being sequential; 15 Maple Street is never between 13 and 17. Instead, it is to the left, along a bit, up a flight of stairs and next to number 55. Before mobile phones, the only possible help, if I was really lost, was a detour to the local police station. Today, we have an [NHS](#) driver, but back then we had no one to help navigate, or to mitigate the fear of going into the unknown, of wandering around at the dead of night, carrying the doctor’s bag.

The second rule of home visiting: treat each home visit as if you are a guest. Even though you’ve been invited to cross your patient’s threshold, remember that it is a privilege to do so. At patients’ homes, we learn more about the social aspects of their ill health than the snippets we glean when they attend the clinic. Even after 30 years, I feel a surge of excitement as I enter the home of another. I’d like to think this is evidence of my compassion, but it’s probably just my natural nosiness.



Clare Gerada as a recently qualified GP in 1992. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

There is nothing more humbling, especially when coming from the privileged position of a well-paid doctor, than to see how others live: in overcrowded spaces with parents and children sharing a bedroom; without heating, because they can't afford it; or in a mess, more preoccupied with surviving day to day than keeping a tidy home. I have had my fill of shocks: having to navigate my way through rooms cluttered with the paraphernalia of drug misuse, or seeing a patient, recently deceased, sitting on the lavatory (it is not uncommon when having a fatal cardiac event or clot in the lung to have an overwhelming urge to open one's bowels).

My third rule: don't rush. Practically the only tool we have when we visit a patient in their home is time. Time to listen to their problems. Time to examine them, to observe them, to think and share one's thoughts about what needs to happen next.

Back then I had access to a cottage hospital where I could admit patients just because they were "off their feet". If this provision had still been available today, I could have admitted that last patient on Boxing Day. She would have been placed in a single room, overlooking a well-kept garden, and she could have died in a far more dignified manner. But successive

reorganisations of the NHS and cost-cutting have removed our small, GP-run hospitals and not replaced them with enough community services to fill the gaps.

Back in 1991, each on-call shift would be 24 hours long – a rota of one day in five, sharing the burden with my partners. Our patch was a large area of south London, stretching north to the South Bank at Waterloo, south to Brixton, to nearby Camberwell and all the way east to London Bridge. Our practice was only a mile away from Westminster, meaning that many members of parliament lived within our catchment area, able to make a quick dash to the House of Commons if the division bell rang, summoning them for a vote. The surgery was in the bottom two floors of a 22-storey block of flats and backed on to the local housing estates.

This was my practice, my partnership, the culmination of 10 years of training and a job that I had wanted to do for as long as I could remember. My father had been a general practitioner and I had wanted to follow in his footsteps since I was a little girl, witnessing him work from the front room of our family home. He would take me on home visits to the postwar estates of Peterborough. I witnessed first-hand the care and attention he gave to his patients and the love and respect he received back from them. He was the family doctor: someone who could be relied on to be there, day or night; my role model and my teacher.

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My first ever day on call, in February 1991, started with a Saturday “emergency” surgery. About 20 people drifted in with coughs, colds, infections and the occasional serious problem needing a referral to hospital. None of it was usually overly taxing, and by mid-morning home visits began. That first day, I had three calls to make.

The first visit was not far from my home, in a block of flats at the back of the surgery. I knew from the brief information I had received that the call came from a member of parliament who was complaining of severe abdominal pain.

I had already run through my initial diagnosis. [GPs](#) work backwards, eliminating what could be the worst reason for the problem first. As I

walked around the block, I wondered whether his pain was due to a dissecting aortic aneurysm. The aorta is a massive vessel which runs centrally down the body. In some people it can bleed and cause severe pain and, if untreated, death.

My diagnostic armoury was then, much as it is today, simple dipsticks to check urine for blood or sugar or possible infection, finger-prick testing for blood glucose levels, a blood-pressure machine, a thermometer, an otoscope to look in the ears and an ophthalmoscope for the eyes. Today, I can add an oximeter, a simple device that clips on the fingertip to measure the oxygen content of the blood. Otherwise, then as now, I had to rely on my clinical acumen – clues derived from observing the patient, listening to their story and examining them.



Clare Gerada today. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

I found the flat. As I knocked on the door, my assessment began. Slowly I could hear him unlocking multiple locks. When at last the door opened, facing me was a middle-aged man in dressing gown and slippers. His face was ashen and unshaven, and he ushered me in quickly. I noted: he was well enough to answer the door, to stand, to give a coherent story; not confused or collapsed.

He began to tell me about what troubled him: pain, all night, from loin to groin; pain passing urine. A quick check of his urine showed blood. After I examined his abdomen, I arrived at the diagnosis – renal colic, no doubt due to a small stone passing through his renal tract. Treatment: painkillers, given as a suppository; antibiotics to treat any underlying infection; and the instruction to drink plenty of fluid to help flush through the stone.

The most likely outcome was that he passed the stone and nothing more would be required. I would follow up the next day with a phone call. I inserted the first suppository, stayed until I was sure the pain was subsiding and made sure he had fluid next to him. (He later sent me a thank you letter, which I have to this day.)

The next visit was in an altogether different area: a hostel in Camberwell. I knew the place well, as before I started general practice, I had run an outreach service for its residents – all men, and all recovering intravenous drug users. It was a grubby place, smelling of disinfectant and the stale, musty odour of dirty clothes. The door was opened by one of the residents and he took me to Charlie, a young man in his 20s lying in bed in his small single room.

He was shaking and unwell. I could see he had a high temperature. I held his hand while I took the story as best as I could. How long had he been unwell? When was his last drink of alcohol? (This could be the effects of withdrawal.) He was breathless. It quickly became apparent that his problems were due to pneumonia, and when I listened to his chest there were audible crackles: unmistakable signs of infection. I wondered about HIV infection, which was by now rampaging through intravenous drug users. I asked him about needle sharing (no) and whether he had been tested for HIV (yes, negative).

I told him I would need to send him to hospital for a chest X-ray, blood tests, intravenous antibiotics and fluids. He was fearful, convinced that he was being sent to the hospital to die. He was also worried that he would not receive his methadone, needed to offset withdrawal symptoms from heroin. He didn't want to leave the sanctuary of the hostel. We agreed on an alternative plan. I gave him a double dose of oral antibiotics and left him further doses for the following days. I filled the water jug next to his bed,

put a straw in his glass and recruited one of the residents to check on him every hour or so. I left, promising to return later that day, and if he was no better then we needed to reconsider admission to hospital.

My final visit that day was to a more affluent part of town, a tree-lined square in one of the most sought-after areas of my parish. This was for a child with earache. She had been crying all day and the family were now concerned as they couldn't get her temperature down. Examination confirmed an infection of the inner ear, treated simply enough with antibiotics. I gave the mother a starter pack from my bag and a prescription to be collected at a nearby pharmacy. They were grateful and thanked me for coming so quickly.

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It is hard to put my finger on the reason for my sense of sadness when comparing my shifts in 1991 and 2021. If I'm honest, my relationship with my patients has been gradually eroded and devalued – sacrificed on the altar of efficiency and expediency. In the later years of my career, it was no longer possible to build an understanding of each patient's personal context, their family and community. Even when I was working in large GP cooperatives, sharing the out-of-hours workload, it was different, more personal, and one felt that "something could be done", even if it were only to offer compassion.

But there is nothing much I can offer to the patients I attend to nowadays. I cannot make them better, or reverse the effects of old age or serious illness with simple painkillers or antibiotics. The problems I saw could not be dealt with by me alone, yet gone were the support systems I could rely on in the past. Gone were the district nurses whose names I knew.

Home visiting is an integral part of general practice in the UK, and should remain so. But given the current pressures on GPs, we have to find ways of using our profession for maximum effect. The patients I saw on Boxing Day in 2021, unlike those I attended to in 1991, needed more than I could offer. It is time to introduce different ways of delivering out-of-hours care that better meet the needs of our patients. We need specialist teams, with elderly care, specialist nursing and other practitioners working alongside the GP – making sure that, wherever possible, we can keep the patients safely cared

for out of hospital. We need virtual wards, respite care, new forms of cottage hospitals where patients can be observed and cared for over time. A home-visiting GP cannot fill these gaps. Where I am of most value is providing continuity of care to the patients on my practice list, and we must restore this.

Maybe my sadness is that an era of my professional life is now over; and my mourning for the past has coloured my reflection. I am not hanging up my stethoscope yet (only for out-of-hours work), but my days of being a clinician are coming slowly to an end. No matter how hard my last day of visiting was, it has been a privilege to have worked as a GP, in clinic and out of hours, and I could not have chosen a better career.

*Details have been changed to ensure confidentiality. The fee for this piece has been donated to the charity [Doctors in Distress](#)*

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## Stage

Interview

# This Is Going to Hurt's Ambika Mod: 'Whenever I did a caesarean I was buzzing!'

[Rachael Healy](#)

Playing junior doctor Shruti is a far cry from the standup's 'really silly' sketch comedy but her improv background helped her find moments of levity in Adam Kay's NHS drama



'Adam said: "If Shruti doesn't make sense to you, she's not going to make sense to anyone"' ... Ambika Mod. Photograph: Samuel C Kirkman



Tue 22 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

When Ambika Mod was cast in [This Is Going to Hurt](#), Adam Kay's TV adaptation of his [diaries as a junior NHS doctor](#), it was late 2020 and health workers were facing a new Covid wave. "It felt like, now more than ever, it was an important story to tell," she says. "I was filled with fear because of the sheer responsibility."

Mod plays Shruti Acharya, a junior doctor under the tutelage of Adam (played by [Ben Whishaw](#)). "It's so rare to see a well-written, complex, young south Asian female character," she says. "Her arc is so brilliant." The character is an amalgamation of people Kay worked with. "I share a lot in common with Shruti," says Mod. "We're both young Indian women, we're both children of immigrants, so Adam was really receptive to my thoughts. I remember him saying: 'If Shruti doesn't make sense to you, she's not going to make sense to anyone.'"

[The series](#), set on the obstetrics and gynaecology ward of a London hospital in 2006, follows Adam and Shruti as they negotiate an under-resourced NHS. We see, in excruciating detail, the personal sacrifices staff are expected to make.

The pandemic meant shadowing real doctors was impossible. Instead, Mod read books and articles, watched documentaries, listened to podcasts, and called friends of friends who are currently junior doctors.



'I was filled with fear because of the sheer responsibility' ... Ben Whishaw and Ambika Mod in This Is Going to Hurt. Photograph: Anika Molnar/BBC/Sister/AMC

She was struck by the physical toll the job takes: "They will often not pee for 12 hours, they might not drink any water, or they won't have sat down from the moment they start their shift to the moment they finish. Those minute details really helped when we were on set."

Visceral scenes show the doctors' exhaustion (Shruti studying through the night, Adam asleep at his steering wheel), how that can lead to compassion fatigue and compromised decision-making, and the way intrusive thoughts can haunt you when things go wrong at work. "Tiredness is not something to be underestimated," Mod says. "In Shruti's case, it's a large factor in her mental decline."

Ben Whishaw was everything you would want the voice of Paddington to be

It's heavy stuff. Yet this is Mod's first serious acting role. Until Shruti came along, she was a comedian. "I've wanted to be an actor since I was a kid, but I found comedy and it swept me away," she says. She was part of the Durham Revue ("like the Durham version of the Footlights"), whose alumni include Nish Kumar, and it was there that she discovered: "There's no better feeling than standing on stage and making people laugh."

After university, she got a day job and did standup and improv at night, plus sketch comedy with Andrew Shires under the moniker [Megan from HR](#). A successful Edinburgh fringe in 2019 saw their seance-themed show scouted by Soho theatre. Their style is "really silly", she says. "We've never gravitated towards big issues ... our objective is to just make people laugh."



'Comedy was definitely my way into this role' ... Ambika Mod.  
Photograph: Samuel C Kirkman

This Is Going to Hurt, despite tackling racism, abusive relationships and mental health crises, is cut through with a dark humour familiar to medical professionals. "Comedy was definitely my way into this role," Mod says. "Shruti is nowhere near the funniest character in the show but it was about finding moments where I could add levity."

In live comedy you're often doing everything yourself. Playing Shruti, Mod was one piece of a puzzle. Whishaw helped her acclimatise: "He was everything that you would want the [voice of Paddington](#) to be. He's so talented, lovely and humble. In the same way that Adam took Shruti under his wing, he really looked after me. I mean, in a much kinder way!"

Shruti's storyline is intense, but experts were provided to help Mod understand her character's mindset. Medical details had to be realistic, too. There were three medical advisers on set, while the prosthetics team created convincing components of childbirth, surgery and bloodshed. To portray a forceps delivery, the actor playing the mother lay on the top half of a bed with her legs hidden, and a fake lower body was installed: "It looked like her legs and her vagina. You would never have guessed it wasn't real."

Shruti conducts multiple caesareans, so Mod had the chance to mimic the procedure. "All the layers that would be in a real body, we actually had to cut through. I loved that. Whenever I was going to do a caesarean I was buzzing." Some viewers have been shocked by the graphicness: "But childbirth is not an aesthetic experience. It is messy and gory."

After filming, Mod returned to standup, where she does "self-deprecating" material. She loves it but realised being a full-time comedian is not her goal. "I did have a bit of an identity crisis. Am I a comedian? Am I an actor?" she says. "But in my heart of hearts, I really do want to be an actor." Many writer-performers such as Rose Matafeo, Mae Martin and Aisling Bea have created their own hugely successful TV shows recently. "That's something I hope to pursue some day," she says.

Until then, Mod's being bombarded with messages about This Is Going to Hurt. Those from [NHS](#) staff are "humbling", with many praising the accuracy of the show. "That means the world. That was our intention first and foremost. Obviously, you want to make good television, but this show is so much bigger than any of us."

- This Is Going to Hurt is on [BBC iPlayer](#).
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‘It’s hard work, but we take pride in what we do’ ... Rachel Hallos at Beeston Hall Farm in Yorkshire. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

[A worker in winter](#)

## **The hidden life of a farmer: playful cows, imperious sheep – and a grinding struggle for survival**

‘It’s hard work, but we take pride in what we do’ ... Rachel Hallos at Beeston Hall Farm in Yorkshire. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

The UK has some of the cheapest food in the world, but thanks to spiralling costs and the effects of Brexit, farmers like Rachel Hallos are on the edge. She explains why she could soon lose the way of life she loves – and her family depends on

by [Sirin Kale](#). Photographs by [Christopher Thomond](#)

Tue 22 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

The stereotype is that farmers are up with the crowing cockerel, but that's only really dairy farmers. Most days it is not until 7.45am that you'll find Rachel Hallos swinging open the door of Beeston Hall Farm in Ripponden, Yorkshire. Beeston Hall is a hill farm overlooking Baitings reservoir, which lies in the valley of the River Ryburn. The 800-hectare (2,000-acre) farm consists of steep fields demarcated by dry stone walls that crumble in a squall. The hill is crested by heather-covered moorland that turns purple in summer and copper in autumn. Hallos lives in a traditional Pennines farmhouse made out of handsome slabs of grey Yorkshire gritstone. A Brontë house, for Brontë country. Inside, wan light streams through single-pane windows on to a well-trodden oak staircase that creaks.

Hallos steps outside, dressed in a padded waterproof coat and wellies. She is met by a cacophony of noise. Her terrier Jack yaps with shrill urgency. Jim, a border collie, barks incessantly. Hallos feeds the dogs and then the two scrawny black-and-white cats, which sleep in the outbuildings and yowl for treats at the kitchen window. She fills a sack with hay that is sweet-smelling and almost yeasty, from the fermentation process that takes place when it is stored in plastic for the winter months. She hoists the sack on to her shoulder like Father Christmas and takes it to feed Aiden and Danny, her dun geldings.

It is late October 2021. Autumn is Hallos's favourite season. The trees around the reservoir are gold-flecked, ochre and vermillion. Her herd of 200 cows and calves and flock of 400 sheep are out in the fields. The cows will return when the frost sets in; the sheep stay out all winter. Hallos usually feels a sense of quiet satisfaction this time of year. The autumn calves are grazing beside their mothers in the fields. The sheds have been power-hosed and disinfected, ready for winter. There's a bit of breathing room, after the rigours of summer: the never-ending hay baling and attending to the newborn calves and lambs. In autumn, Hallos can start to plan for the spring calves and lambs. Which tup will go with which sheep, and which bull with which cow?



- The farm overlooks West Yorkshire moorland.

But this autumn feels different. Hallos just bought in a load of straw, for the herd's winter beds, and beef nut to supplement their diet in winter, when the grass stops growing and the last of the summer hay has been eaten. Feed has gone up by £90 a tonne. Diesel for the tractors has increased by 20p a litre. When she last ordered the diesel, Hallos asked for a quote, but the supplier told her they couldn't give her one, because the prices change every day. "The costs are getting a bit scary," she says.

Because they are tenant farmers, they can't rely on land rents to subsidise their farming operations. Because they are primary producers, they can't pass on their costs to anyone below them in the supply chain. Their calves and lambs are taken twice a year to Skipton auction market, and the price they get is the price they get.

Already Hallos, who is 51, and her husband, Steve, 60, live a frugal life. They pay themselves just £250 a month each out of the business as a stipend, to cover their household expenses. Hallos's one frivolity is a fortnightly manicure, so you can't see the muck under her fingernails, and

also because it makes her feel good. Their two grownup children, Anna, 22, and Sam, 25, work on the farm, and receive the minimum wage.

Hallos is worried about how she will heat the farmhouse this winter. In September, energy prices [increased by](#) 12%. In April, they will [increase by](#) 54%, an average of £693 a year a household. “It’s a beautiful house, but cold and draughty,” she says. In addition to these increased costs, Beeston Hall Farm will lose its EU-funded basic payment scheme grant of £60,000 a year in 2027, as part of the UK’s post-Brexit transition.

But Hallos is always ebullient, no matter what she faces. She does this job not for the money, but for the love of it. “How lucky we are,” she says, in a broad Yorkshire accent. “It’s hard work. But we can walk outside and take pride in what we do. We keep a nice tidy farm with healthy animals. A lot of people just jump in their car and go to work. It’s a sense of belonging.”

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They bring in the first lot of cattle in the first week of November. Sixty spring-calving cows and calves amble down from the top of the hill into the sheds, which have been prepared with fresh straw that is replaced daily. The rest of the herd will return over the coming weeks. Many herds stay out all winter, but in this part of the world, and this landscape, the grazing season is short.



- The pedigree salers and charolais cattle feeding in the sheds where they are housed over winter.

Ripponden is windy and wet. When it rains, water streams off the hills. The soil here is clay and peat bog, which turns to mulch in winter. If left out in winter, the cattle's manure could leach into the water supply. And besides, there's nothing for the herd to eat: when the temperature drops beneath 6C, grass stops growing. Hallos is considering replacing the grass in the lower fields, which is Yorkshire fog, with a genetically modified variant that is hardier and sweeter, but she's not sure. "We're a traditional farm," she says. "It's old-fashioned grass."

Theirs is a pedigree herd of salers and charolais. Salers have curly red-brown coats, calve easily and produce high-quality, lean meat, although not as much as the golden-coloured charolais, which grow quicker and produce a high number of saleable cuts.

Sam drives a tractor down the cattle shed, blasting fresh hay over the tops of the cows and calves. Sometimes, the calves dance in the spray. Later, they will eat the straw, which scratches the rumen, their largest stomach compartment, and aids digestion. Hallos surveys the herd carefully, watching for any signs of sickness or stress. This is called stockmanship.

"A lot of a farmer's time," Hallos says, "is just looking. Is there one cow in the corner, facing the other way? You can tell from their eyes and ears that they're sad. If that happens for a few consecutive days, you think: something's not right."

Stockmanship is knowing when a cow is being bullied by the rest of the herd, or when she is lame, or in pain. Cows can be bullies. One might block another from eating; the victim will grow thinner and weaker. When that happens, Hallos pulls the cow out of the herd and places her with the younger calves, so she can eat and build her strength back.

Short-faced heifers are playful. They like to tug at Hallos's sleeve. Even Oakley the bull is gentle enough, if you treat him right. More than anything,

he loves to have his coarse hide scratched, especially on his back. Sometimes, he will drool with pleasure.

Farmers can't afford to be sentimental, but they all have their favourites. Steve's was Octavia. "She was a leader," Hallos says. "You could get the rest of the herd to follow her, if you'd give her bits of corn." Narissa was hers. "I just loved her. She was a queen. She would stand in the field with so much presence." They used to do the show circuit together. Hallos trained her to stand square and straight for the display, to walk around the pen when called upon, to be calm and content in the trailer home. She grew lame as she got older. It's a stiff climb to the higher grazing land, up on the moor, and Narissa would strain herself to get up there. It wasn't fair on her.

Hallos couldn't bear to take her to market and see a stranger lead her away. "Not like that," she says. "She produced a calf for us every year. She did her bit. More than her bit." On their last day together, Hallos had a few quiet words with Narissa. She told her thanks for the good times. Hallos then handed her over to the slaughterhouse man. She trusted him and knew that when they arrived at Narissa's final destination, a 10-minute drive away, he would back up the trailer, lead her out, and then it would happen. It would be quick. "People think that farmers don't care," says Hallos. "But we want it to be right for them. We do."

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For Britain's shepherds, Bonfire Night is traditionally tupping time, when the males impregnate the ewes for an April lambing. Hallos's flock is a mixture of Scottish blackfaces and texels. The blackfaces are a hill breed most commonly found in the north of England and Scotland. They have black faces, curling horns and a shaggy, coarse coat. They are hardy and well suited to the whipping wind and sideways rain of a Yorkshire hillside in winter. The texel is a Dutch breed that is faster-growing and bred for meat. They live in the greener ground, closer to the farmhouse, which is more sheltered from the elements; the blackface are up on the moor.





The tups can smell when the ewes are in heat. It's best to get them going early in the day, so that they have calmed down by the evening. Rachel and Anna lead the tups into a sheep crush, which sounds painful, but is simply a metal enclosure, and paint their genitals in either pink or purple, so that they will know which tup has mounted which ewe. It's a sunny autumn day. Afterwards, the newly impregnated ewes gambol over the hills, and the weary-looking tups swagger home alone, through the fields, tails swinging from side to side.

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In mid-November, Hallos travels to Scotland to collect a bull from a cattle sale. The bull came from Northern Ireland, which, in a post-Brexit economy, is a more complicated transaction than it used to be. "No one knows what paperwork you need," she says.

Hallos is a gregarious presence who's a regular at the cattle sales of Scotland's south-west coast. She knows everyone and everyone knows her. But the atmosphere is grim. One experienced farmer tells her that he's just aiming to be in the second wave of farmers that go bust, not the first.

These conversations tug at her like fleece on a barbed wire fence. When Hallos and her husband took Beeston Hall on after the death of Steve's father in 2000, the finances were a mess. The bank wanted to repossess.

Anna was just a baby at the time. Hallos found the number for the head of the bank's agricultural department and pleaded with him to give them a chance. "We thought: 'What have we got if we walk away, apart from debt? We might as well fight it out.'"

It took them a decade to get out of that debt, and another decade to earn enough money to throw up the outbuildings they needed to house their livestock, and purchase equipment. Even now, Beeston Hall is far from profitable. It will probably never be profitable, unless they diversify, like [many farmers across the UK](#). In 2018, they bought a holiday cottage next door, which provides a [much-needed second source](#) of income. Her landlord, Yorkshire Water, wants the family to continue to diversify.

Hallos is considering selling beef directly to consumers, but it's not as straightforward as simply keeping back some calves for slaughter. "We aren't a factory floor," she says. "It's a long process." Beeston Hall doesn't "finish" its calves, meaning fatten them up before slaughter, instead it sells them at 11 months old to a finisher. This is because it's not a mixed farm, that grows barley or wheat, which could be fed to the animals. To pivot to a direct-to-consumer model would require a complete restructuring of their business model.

What Hallos doesn't understand, after all these years, is what has happened to our food system. "How have we got it so wrong?" she says. "Because when something becomes too cheap, you don't value it. But then there are genuine issues in this country where people can't even afford it when it's as cheap as it is. So how do you ever get people like us, who are right at the bottom of the supply chain, to get a fair price for our meat?"



- Anna leads the ewes off the hills for pregnancy scans.

The UK has some of the cheapest food in the world, largely due to the colossal buying power of our supermarket chains, which compete with each other to drive down prices. “Farmers have always been a pawn in the retail price war,” says Tom Bradshaw, the vice-president of the National Farmers’ Union (NFU). “Because they are often small, disparate producers. They don’t have the power to influence up the supply chain.”

Hallos agonises all the time over whether it’s the best thing for Anna and Sam to continue the family business, or whether it wouldn’t be better for them to do something more stable. Consumer price inflation has reached 5.1%, the highest rate since September 2011. “We’ve got our borrowing down as much as we possibly can, but there’s only so long you can hold tight,” she says.

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In late November, Hallos arranges the provisional sale of six heifers to another farmer, for finishing, subject to health checks. They go for £1,500 apiece. “That’s a good price,” she says, “which is helpful, bearing in mind

that everything else is getting expensive.” Diesel has gone up from 58p to 79p a litre.

Hallos is also a representative for the NFU, and she spends weeks driving around farmers’ annual general meetings, canvassing the mood. These meetings typically take place in the backroom of a pub, and they almost always go the same way: the farmers want to vent. Sometimes, they feel like therapy sessions.

Arable farmers are stressed out because fertiliser prices have [gone up from](#) £200 to £700 a tonne. Fruit and vegetable growers are stressed because gas to heat the greenhouses [is up](#) by 17%, and they can’t get hold of CO2 to extend the shelf life of their produce, due to an international shortage. After Brexit, EU workers [have returned](#) to the continent, and UK farmers can’t recruit labour to replace them. And inflation keeps going up.



- Steve climbs a gate.

“We’ve never seen the uncertainty we’re seeing now,” says Bradshaw. The main driver of anxiety is the end of the common agricultural policy – 2021 is the first year in which EU payments to farmers have been cut; 42% of

English farms rely upon the policy to be profitable. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is [piloting](#) the [sustainable farming incentive](#), which will pay grants to farmers that meet certain biodiversity and environmental obligations, but details are vague.

“They’re still making the policy,” says Dr Ruth Little, a lecturer in human geography at the University of Sheffield. “But this is the biggest change to agriculture in over a generation, and agriculture works on long timescales. The worst thing for farmers is uncertainty. If you don’t know what you have to deliver, how are you supposed to plan?”

Tenant farmers such as Hallos are most vulnerable to this post-Brexit period of adjustment. “They don’t have the asset base to get through this period of change,” says Bradshaw. Hallos feels the pressure, even if she tries to stay upbeat. “Just tell us what you want from us,” she says. “Because none of us know any more.” She has asked Sam and Anna to try to find a replacement source of income for their £60,000 basic payment. Anna is working shifts in the local pub, while Sam grits roads and works as a contractor, using their equipment on neighbouring farms.

At one meeting in a pub in South Yorkshire, a young farmer asks Hallos when the general public will stop blaming them for everything: climate change, food prices, the rest of it. She tells him that most of the population have subcontracted their ability to feed themselves out to a small group of people called farmers. She tells him that they need to get better at explaining what they do on their farms, and how they look after their animals, to the public. She tells him not to be disheartened.

“There was a silent epidemic of mental health problems in the agricultural sector pre-Covid,” says Little. “Covid plus Brexit uncertainty is a perfect storm. There needs to be support mechanisms in place for the agricultural sector.” She is particularly worried about farmers who may not want to embrace the government’s environmental-centred approach to farming. “We’re moving from a system where farmers like to produce good stock and have tidy fields, and part of their identity is about being a good farmer, meaning, a good food producer,” says Little. “This new system sets them up more as environmental stewards rather than food producers. People need to

see themselves in the future of agriculture. We need to think about the reasons why people farm.”

Hallos drives home in the dark, down winding country roads. It’s pitch-black, and cold. As she’s driving, sleet starts coming down. “It’s definitely winter. Here we go.”

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The weather in December is awful. Horizontal rain that makes your nose stream and your lips go numb. Rachel, Sam, Steve and Anna go to fetch in the last of the cows from the moor. The breeding cows know what’s coming, and start to trot home. Their calves follow. Crossing the A58, which traverses the farm, is always hairy, but they manage it OK. The cows bring themselves into the field and straight into the shed. They remember the way, from years gone past. “As if to say,” says Hallos, “thank God for that. We’re home.”

The cows are able to pick their way home without prompting because they have hefted to the moor. “Hefted,” Hallos says, “means an animal understands the boundaries of the land, without there being physical barriers. It’s their sense of belonging. They know the routes and where to go to shelter from the weather. They know that because their mother taught them.”



- Jim the border collie.

In mid-December, Anna finds a sheep dead in a field. There's no explanation: this just happens sometimes. It might be a heart problem, or cancer. In heavy snowfall, sheep may hide beside a drystone wall. The snow blows over the top of them, and they get stuck. They die standing up.

Anna fetches a tractor, puts the dead sheep into a bucket fixed to the front, and drives it home. She stores it in an outbuilding and slings a tarp over it. Hallos rings [the knackerman](#), who collects and disposes of dead livestock. Normally, he would arrive the following day, but he's struggling with staff shortages, due to Covid. He takes a week to collect it.

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Hallos is sitting in her kitchen, having a cup of tea and thinking about how much she's looking forward to Christmas, when she gets a phone call from a private number. It's a representative from the Animal and Plant Health Agency, a government department. A breeding cow she sold a few weeks ago was slaughtered, and the butcher found lesions inside it, meaning that it has bovine tuberculosis. Hallos's stomach flips. She wants to say it's a mistake, but the man on the end of the phone is clear.

This has never happened to her before, in two decades of livestock farming. The impact on the business will be catastrophic. Best-case scenario, the entire herd has to be tested for TB. If the tests come back negative in 60 days, normal business can resume. Worst-case scenario, TB is found to be endemic throughout the entire herd – all the animals will have to be slaughtered. “We don’t own any land,” says Hallos. “Everything we own is walking around in the fields.” To make matters worse, it’s a nightmare trying to get hold of a vet, due to a nationwide shortage.

The vet eventually arrives on a frigid January morning. All of the cows are brought out of the sheds and walk into a cattle crush. The vet shaves two small sections of the animal’s neck, and then pinches the skin together to measure the thickness. She performs the tuberculin skin test, injecting a combination of proteins into the skin of the neck. If the cow has been exposed to TB, this will trigger an immune response, and a lump will develop at the injection site.

Three days later, the vet returns to check for lumps. It's bad news. One of the cows has a lump on her neck. But the test result is inconclusive, meaning the vet has to return in March to do it again. Until she passes the test, none of the herd can leave the farm. Rachel quarantines the cow with her calf in a side shed. To make matters worse, they lose the sale of the six heifers. It's a £9,000 loss, plus the associated costs of raising the heifers into cows.

Hallos is trying to stay positive. She looks out of the living room window and sees four lambs in the front field. They're running. For a moment, she wonders if a fox has got into the field and is chasing them, but then she realises that they are playing. It's a beautiful, sunny day, and the animals take pleasure in it. She resolves to take pleasure in it also.

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Hallos brings in the hoggs from the fields. They are what's left of last year's spring lambs – the females who have been kept back for breeding. They are in to be haybitten. Because the lambs have never eaten hay – only grass or milk from their mothers – if offered, they will refuse it. But in the depths of winter, when the ground freezes and the grass stops growing, the farmers drive hay out into the fields to supplement the diet, especially when the sheep are carrying lambs and need extra energy. "If you don't haybite them," Hallos says, "the sheep will refuse to eat the hay and grow thinner and thinner."

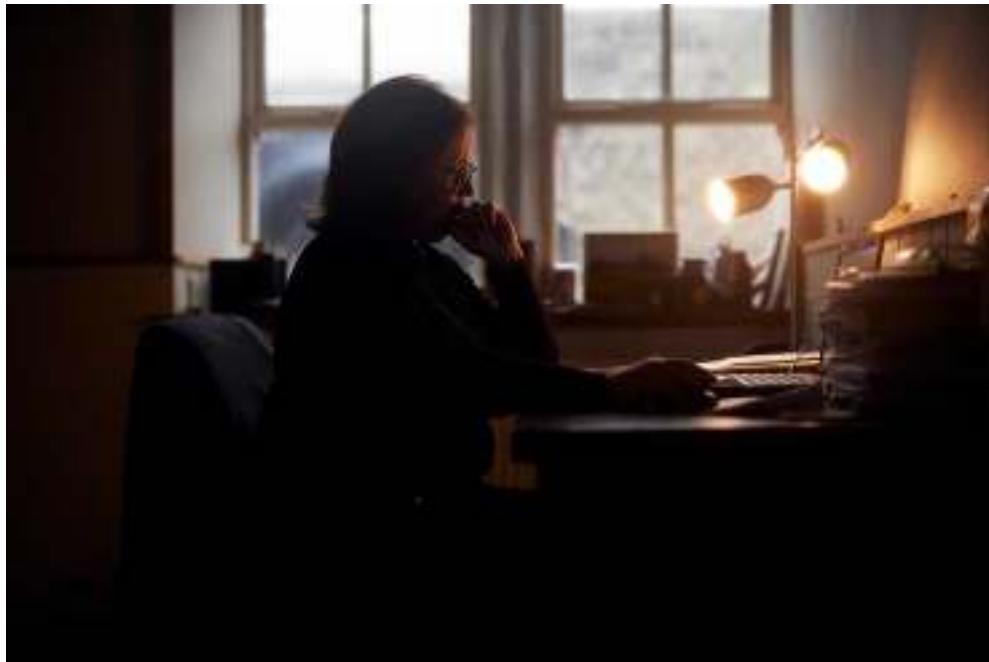


Leading them into the shed, where they will live for a month, Hallos can smell the lanolin in the wool. A greasy, sour odour. She's sensitive to smell; she can't bear to eat roast lamb, because it reminds her of lambing season, and how the violent stench of afterbirth lingers on your clothes and your hands, no matter how much you wash.

All the sheep have to be sheared in the summer, for welfare reasons. Blow flies lay their eggs in the wool, and maggots hatch and cause fly strike, an infection that can prove fatal if untreated. In pre-pandemic times, Hallos would take the wool to the British Wool Marketing Board, and it would auction it off to be spun into carpets for cruise ships and hotels. But when the pandemic started, the global wool market crashed. Hallos will get pennies on a tonne, if she's lucky. "You think: 'Hang on a minute. We're meant to be living in a world where we want to use more sustainable materials. Why aren't we doing anything with all this wool?'"

A blackface hogg has climbed on top of the corn feeder and towers above the other animals. She is totally still, as watchful and imperious as a shaman officiating at a ceremony. There's always one hogg that likes to dominate the rest. Like cows, sheep can be bullies, but they can also be arrogant, playful and smart. The sheep in the fields recognise the noise of the tractor in winter, and know it means Steve is bringing them hay, and they race over and jostle for prime position.

In a fortnight, Hallos will scan the sheep, to see which are carrying lambs, and how many. The ones that aren't pregnant will be sold. The frost will drain off the hills and the first leaf buds will appear on the trees around the reservoir. Hallos will prepare for the arrival of the spring calves and the lambs. She will deal with the vet, and the outcome of the TB scare, whatever may come.



- Hallos ponders the farm's future.

She will build up the farm, bit by bit, like a drystone wall that has collapsed in a gale. Dug deep, for a strong foundation. Stones stacked neat and flush as books on a bookshelf. But even a talented and conscientious farmer such as Hallos cannot protect her farm from the buffeting winds of Covid, Brexit, an increasingly globalised supply chain and inflation. The wall crumbles even as she restores it by hand. Another gust might bring down the whole thing.

“It’s so demoralising sometimes,” says Hallos. “You think: ‘What is the point?’ But then you have to pick yourself up.”

There are animals to be fed, and attended to. Sheep to be sheared, hay to be stacked, and then, when it is all over, a horse ride across sloping country fields on a sun-dappled evening. No other life would bring such joy. No other life would bring such difficulty.

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## Flooding

# ‘We’re quite fed up’: Britons on weathering the aftermath of three storms

From waterlogged cars to crushed roofs and powerless homes, the UK has been in a state of climate siege



A man alongside a stranded car in flood water as a dog plays along the A6 near Milford, Derbyshire. Photograph: Jacob King/PA

*[Clea Skopeliti](#)*

Tue 22 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

Flooding, power cuts and destruction to homes continue to impact people in parts of the country after three named storms struck the UK in a week.

In Ashford in the Water, Derbyshire, cars remain stuck in a flooded road after Storm Franklin hit on Sunday. Martin Crapper, 62, said people in “countless cars” were trapped “in the freezing cold flood water in the dark” on the main road from Matlock to Buxton.

The health and safety manager said that mountain rescue had to help an elderly man on Sunday evening. “Then there were other people who got stuck, and they didn’t venture out [of their cars] – they waited for four or five hours for rescue to come and drag them [the vehicles] out.” He added that local people “tried to help as best as possible with cups of tea and opening [their] homes for warmth and shelter”.



Flooded road from Matlock to Buxton in Derbyshire Photograph: Martin Crapper

The council closed the road on Sunday evening, but some drivers have ignored the signs and continued driving through the area, Crapper said, creating “huge tidal waves causing more risk to trapped cars”. “The trouble is, it’s on a blind bend, so with the dark, you come round the corner and you’re in it before you know it.”

Crapper explained that though the area is aptly named and tends to flood, it’s the worst flooding he has witnessed in the five years he’s lived there. “Last

January was bad, but this is even worse. My neighbour next door but one, he's lived here for over 10 years – he's never seen anything like this," Crapper said.

Pippa Palmer, 59, was at home sheltering from Storm Eunice in London on Friday when she heard a "deafening" cracking noise. "I was sitting there trying to reassure my dog that nothing was wrong. He'll never believe another word," Palmer said. In the garden four doors down from Palmer, a research strategist, is a giant mimosa tree: "It is 25 ft, 7.6 metres. It's bloody huge," she said.



Mimosa tree in London after Storm Eunice Photograph: Pippa Palmer

After hearing the crash, Palmer said she went into the garden and just saw a branch down. "I thought, that made a loud noise. Then I turned around and was like, oh my Christ there's a tree on my house."

The 25-ft tree is now horizontal, having crashed through three fences in neighbours gardens. "The top boughs hit my house with almighty force," Palmer said, adding that she has filed an insurance claim and that people are coming tomorrow to start "carving" the tree up. "It has crashed through my bathroom roof and crushed my artist's studio in the garden. The tree's

holding the roof on to the studio. We're worried about what's gonna happen when the tree is taken off."



The tree crashed through the studio roof Photograph: Pippa Palmer

When the power went off in Yvonne Turner's home in Aberdeenshire on Monday morning, it was the third time in as many months. Fortunately, it was just for a few hours this time, but recent storms Arwen, Corrie and Malik have seen their area cut off for days on end. "We are feeling quite fed up," Turner, 58, said, explaining that outages keep occurring because trees are knocked over on to power lines.

For Turner, losing power is "doubly a pain" as it also means having their water supply cut off, as the domestic supply is pumped from a borehole. Finding drinking water during Storm Arwen proved difficult: all the supermarkets had "completely sold out". "We had a bit of a struggle, but eventually found a welfare van in town, and we were able to get some water on the second day. When you have no electricity and no water, and it's wintertime, it's quite tough."

As Turner grows her own produce and keeps livestock, the frequent power cuts are particularly stressful. "We fill our freezer with produce at the end of the season and it lasts for the rest of the year. So when the power goes down

for several days, it's really quite a problem – we're faced with losing all of our year's work."

In Gloucestershire, Douglas Campbell, 63, has been without power for more than 72 hours after Storm Eunice hit on Friday. Campbell, a 63-year-old company director, and his family of four moved to a nearby hotel on Sunday, as the property was "uninhabitable". "Everything is fired by electricity, so no hot water, no light, no heat, no nothing. It's been a terrible time," he said, adding that he's been "reliably informed" by his provider, Scottish Power, that electricity will be back by 11pm on Monday. "We had no choice but to move out."



Two trees on Douglas Campbell's property were uprooted by storm Eunice  
Photograph: Douglas Campbell

"We waited because we hoped and hoped that it would get better but by the time Sunday morning came, there was no way to boil water or have a wash," Campbell said, adding that they were doing everything with "candles, like the dark ages". "It was hopeless so we had to move on." The 63-year-old said the storm has not damaged their home, but two trees in the garden have been uprooted. "It's the worst storm in recent memory," Campbell, who has lived in the area for 30 years, said.

“[The power] is due to be restored at 11pm on Monday, but it’s taken them a very, very long time,” Campbell said. “If it doesn’t come back on today, we’ll have to try and ring the bell a bit harder. But at the end of the day, I suppose thousands of people are in the same boat.”

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## Flooding

# ‘We’re devastated’: Yorkshire town hit by floods for third time in decade

Residents of Tadcaster react to more heartbreak as Storm Franklin leads to flooding of over 60 properties



Tadcaster in North Yorkshire on Monday, where the River Wharfe burst its banks again. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

*[Josh Halliday](#) North of England correspondent*

Mon 21 Feb 2022 12.14 EST

As Storm Franklin raged through the night, Mick Malkinson, 72, lay awake with a familiar sense of fear about what the morning would bring.

From his riverside home in Tadcaster, a [Yorkshire](#) market town, he heard the “thunderous” noise of metal kegs crashing to the floor as the River Wharfe

tore through a brewery warehouse nearby. “The noise was horrendous,” he said. “It was like a world war. There was no sleep at all last night.”

By dawn, the house he shares with his wife, Elizabeth, and their one-year-old cocker spaniel Miska, was among three properties completely cut off by several feet of flood water. “All we can see is a vast lake of water. We can’t get out. It will be up to my neck at the end of my drive. We will be stuck here for a couple of days now.”



A woman and her dog jump the flood water in Tadcaster. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

It is the third time in 10 years that Tadcaster has suffered significant flooding. The last time, in 2015, nearly 100 homes and businesses were damaged when Storm Eva roared downstream, partly demolishing the 18th-century bridge that connects the two sides of the town.

Many of the families and businesses that suffered seven years ago woke to the same fate on Monday: Storm Franklin had led to the flooding of about 60 properties, including a butchers, an estate agent and a beauty salon on the high street. The river level did not rise as high this time as during Storm Eva – peaking at nearly 4 metres compared with 4.51 metres in 2015 – but that was little consolation to those affected.



More than 60 properties were flooded in Tadcaster. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

“We’re devastated. It’s heartbreaking to see it like this. It’s higher than we expected,” said Andy Charlesworth, the chairman of Tadcaster Albion Football Club, whose historic 2,000-capacity stadium was under water for the third time in seven years.

The club has played football on the banks of the Wharfe since its foundation in 1892. Like many of its neighbours, however, it has been looking for a new home because of the ruinous cost of flooding. Few if any local businesses are insured in the event of flood damage – a [familiar tale](#) in towns prone to such disasters, despite calls for better protection for small firms.



Tadcaster Albion was also hit by flooding in 2015 and 2020 (pictured).  
Photograph: Tadcaster Albion/PA

Charlesworth said the club was looking at between £50,000 and £80,000 worth of damage: “What we really could do with is a Premier League footballer to give us a week’s wages. That would just sort it. They’re not exactly strapped for cash.”

Brian Bartle, 72, leapt out of bed in the early hours to try to salvage what he could from the estate agent founded by his family in 1978. By mid-morning his shop was under water.

“It’s pretty grim,” he said, watching helplessly from 300 metres away, at the edge of the water. It took a year to recover from the 2015 storm, he said, and now he was “back to square one”.



People in Tadcaster survey the damage. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

“Last time it was pure neglect by the Environment Agency because the bridge was blocked with trees,” he said. “This time it’s just vast water flow coming down too fast.”

Many local people questioned why it had taken so long to improve the town’s flood defences after the devastation caused by Storm Eva. A report by North Yorkshire county council [last June](#) revealed that the works, led by the Environment Agency, had been delayed until 2024 due to “inaccuracies” with the hydrological model behind the plans.

Richard Sweeting, a Conservative district councillor for Tadcaster, said he was “devastated and heartbroken” that the town had been hit again. “The government need to look closely at getting some kind of flood prevention in our town,” he said. “They need to get their act together and put Tadcaster as a priority.”



Flooding in Tadcaster after the River Wharfe burst its banks. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

Zoe Devine, 48, co-owner of the flooded Devine Meats, said millions of pounds had been allocated to flood defences, but the work appeared to have been delayed by the Covid pandemic. “You know that the people you are going to get angry at are the very people who will be out helping you, so getting angry is no good,” said Devine. “We’ve been here and done this before.”

Malkinson, meanwhile, was preparing to spend days trapped in his home. The retired agricultural engineer had tried twice to sell the house after Storm Eva wrecked their ground floor, but it was “basically impossible” owing to the flood risk.

When the flood sirens sounded on Sunday, they had nowhere to go so stayed put and prayed for the rain to stop. No one from the authorities had checked up on them by Monday afternoon, he said: “It is disappointing, especially when they know that our houses are at risk. I’m sure they’ve got a lot on their plate, but it irks sometimes.”

An Environment Agency spokesperson said: “We are aware of a small number of flooded properties in Tadcaster and are working closely with the

emergency services and other agencies to keep the community safe.

“A review of the planned flood risk management scheme in Tadcaster highlighted inaccuracies in the complex modelling of the design. This has unfortunately delayed the start of construction but we are working to progress the scheme as quickly as possible to better protect the community from flooding and extreme weather.”

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## 2022.02.22 - Coronavirus

- Live Covid: Omicron variant ‘75% less likely to lead to severe illness’; clashes continue in NZ over measures
- The Queen PM to give virtual weekly update during Covid self-isolation
- ‘People are dying on the floor’ How Covid has devastated the Solomon Islands
- ‘Living with Covid’ Unions: strategy will do more harm than good

[Coronavirus live](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

## **UK reports 205 new coronavirus-related deaths and 41,130 cases; Ireland to drop most curbs – as it happened**

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## The Queen

# Queen to speak to PM in weekly update from self-isolation

UK monarch tested positive for Covid, which is manifesting in ‘mild cold-like symptoms’

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



Queen Elizabeth II is in self-isolation in Windsor Castle. Photograph: Steve Parsons/AP

*Ben Quinn  
@BenQuinn75*

Mon 21 Feb 2022 13.10 EST

The Queen is expected to speak to [Boris Johnson](#) on Wednesday for her regular weekly update from the prime minister as she continues to recover from Covid-19.

Audiences with foreign ambassadors are expected to go ahead – also on a virtual basis – as the monarch remains in self-isolation at her home in Windsor.

A day after testing positive for the virus – which Buckingham Palace [said on Sunday](#) was manifesting itself in the form of “mild cold-like symptoms” – the Queen was still undertaking light duties in her capacity as head of state.

Messages of goodwill continued to roll in from in the UK and overseas, while Boris Johnson told MPs in parliament that the Queen’s positive test was a reminder that the virus “has not gone away”.

Her work on Monday included sending condolences to the people of Brazil after flooding in the city of Petrópolis. “I am deeply saddened to hear of the tragic loss of life and destruction caused by the terrible floods in Brazil,” she wrote in a message posted on the royal family’s official Twitter account.

“My thoughts and prayers are with all those who have lost their lives, loved ones and homes, as well as the emergency services and all those working to support the recovery efforts.”

But while the Queen’s conversation with the prime minister on Wednesday will not take place face to face, campaigners and advocates for elderly people said that many of those among a cohort of more than 1.3 million people who continued to work over the age of 65 included some in public-facing roles who had no choice but to keep on working.

The [relaxation of Covid restrictions](#) and the ending of self-isolation was a source of worry for many people aged 65 and over, said Morgan Vine, head of policy and influencing at Independent Age. “We are concerned that this sudden change in direction of public safety is likely to increase anxiety among older people, and even cause some to shield themselves and limit daily activities.”

The charity added that recent research – between 9 and 13 February – had shown that the challenges faced by those in later life due to the pandemic had worsened many people's mental health.

"If the requirement to isolate is removed, this fear is likely to increase alongside the likelihood of coming into contact with someone who has Covid," said Vine, speaking a few hours before Johnson's announcement that the requirement to self-isolate after testing positive in England would end on Thursday.

Concerns that many in the older population were deeply anxious about making a transition back to a more normal way of life were also echoed by the UK's largest charity for older people, Age UK.

Ruth Isden, head of health and care influencing at Age UK, said it was going to take time and effort to reassure people and that it was important that government messaging carefully explained the next steps when it came to elderly people and the clinically vulnerable.

"We are in a very different position, and vaccines have made a huge difference, but it's important that the government explains and reassures people as it moves forward with its plans.

"If you are in an older age group and have had your vaccinations, and then have kept them up to date, then you are in a much better place, but we have to keep on reassuring people, as well as recognising that it's not just simply a case of how we feel about ourselves. We need to be cautious and careful when it comes to others."

Rowan Hardwood, professor of geriatric medicine at the University of Nottingham, reiterated the message of other experts that those who have been vaccinated and had kept it up to date, at no matter what age, were in a radically different position from anyone who had not had a jab.

But he added: "It is important to recognise that the situation with older people can vary much more than other groups. Virtually anyone by the age of 90 is frail, and by frail, we mean vulnerable and prone to deterioration.

“If you have contracted the virus and are quite well to the extent that you are managing to do daily activities, then the vaccine will stand you in good stead. That would apply to anyone of any age.”

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## The Pacific projectSolomon Islands

# **‘People are dying on the floor’: healthcare workers tell of Covid devastation in Solomon Islands**

The Pacific country was coronavirus-free until last month but an outbreak of thousands of cases is overwhelming the health system



The National Referral Hospital in Honiara, Solomon Islands, which healthcare workers say is overwhelmed with Covid patients. Photograph: Charley Piringi/The Guardian

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## About this content

*Charley Piringi in Honiara*

Mon 21 Feb 2022 15.00 EST

Frontline health workers in [Solomon Islands](#) have warned that its health system is on the brink of collapse as the country struggles to deal with a devastating outbreak of Covid-19.

A senior doctor and two nurses at the National Referral Hospital (NRH) in the capital of Honiara have told of how there are no beds for Covid patients – leading to people dying on the floor of the wards – as well as a lack of facilities and staff shortages that have led to Covid-positive nurses being recalled to work and probationary nurses tending to critically ill patients solo, when they should be supervised by a more senior nurse.

“People are dying on the floor, the hospital is overcrowded … Sick people and dead bodies were all over,” a senior doctor at NRH said. “The morgue is full. It’s a sad experience. I have never seen this before.”

Solomon Islands, a country of about 700,000 people in the South Pacific, had [remained Covid-free throughout the pandemic](#), without a single case of

the virus in 2020 and 2021. However, since Covid arrived in the country in mid-January, the country has recorded nearly 6,000 cases and around 70 deaths.

The doctor, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the true number of deaths was likely to be much higher.

“We have witnessed that there are deaths at home, not brought to hospital because of the fear that any dead body that comes to the hospital will be swabbed and once tested positive will not be allowed to be taken out by the relatives,” he said. “So some deaths are kept at home and it’s a sad and terrible thing to happen.”



An Australian airforce plane delivers medical stores, including RATs and PPE, to Kirakira, capital of Makira-Ulawa Province to assist with the Covid outbreak in Solomon Islands. Photograph: Photo credit ADF, DFAT, Ausmat

## **‘We don’t have enough nurses’**

The doctor warned that healthcare facilities were struggling to cope, with the 56-bed Central field hospital fully occupied. He said that while tents had been prepared outside the hospital for the treatment of Covid-19 patients,

they had no toilets, shower rooms or air-conditioning, which he alleged showed the government's lack of preparation.

"I would say that the government has failed this nation."

NRH has turned its orthopaedic ward into a "red zone" Covid ward, where critically ill patients needing oxygen are treated. But both he and a nurse in the hospital confirmed there were Covid patients across other wards in the hospitals.

Staff were completely overwhelmed by the number of cases, the doctor said.

"We do not have enough nurses to look after the Covid-19 patients, meaning there's no proper observations and monitoring will take place on sick patients."

### Cases of Covid-19

A registered nurse, who wished to remain anonymous, said staff were so overstretched that Covid-positive nurses were being called in to work.

"In the past weeks, we have had no option but to recall those tested positive yet asymptomatic to come back to work as we can't handle the increasing Covid-19 cases daily."

A newly-graduated probationary nurse who is working at NRH said junior nurses, who are meant to be supervised, were looking after critically ill patients by themselves.

"We were newly graduated ... we badly need supervision at all times. And this is a risky undertaking, especially when manpower is overstretched, which means we have to handle the cases ourselves."

The doctor warned that patients suffering from other illnesses and conditions, such as cancer, diabetes, high blood pressure, and those requiring surgery were not getting treatment, monitoring or medication, potentially leading to more deaths.

“There are lots of people with illnesses that did not follow up because of their fear of Covid-19,” the doctor said. “They are simply afraid of coming to the hospital … This results in some dying at home; some presented at the emergency and died.”

Last week, the government issued a statement saying the rapid spread of Covid was beyond the testing capability of health authorities, contributing to under-reporting of actual case numbers since the outbreak began.

The health minister, Dr Culwick Togamana, warned last week that the health system could not cater for all the people who tested positive or were showing symptoms of Covid.

“That is why we have advised those with mild symptoms to strictly isolate at home and only moderate to severe cases [be] brought to health facilities for clinical management,” he said.

At the end of 2021, Solomon Islands had a very low vaccination rate, with about 20% of adults fully vaccinated.

Since the outbreak, vaccination sites that remained empty all of last year are now experiencing massive turnout from the public, and the health minister said there had been allegations of medical practitioners selling vaccines to people.

The ministry of health did not respond to questions.

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## Coronavirus

# ‘Living with Covid’ strategy could do more harm than good, say businesses and unions

Removal of Covid support as well as safety rules risks more outbreaks and uncertainty, workplace leaders warn

- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



Free Covid testing will be removed from 1 April, the government has announced. Photograph: Nathan Stirk/Getty Images

*[Richard Partington](#) Economics correspondent  
[@RJPartington](#)*

Mon 21 Feb 2022 14.49 EST

Business leaders and unions have warned the government that scrapping free Covid tests in England and watering down sick pay will discourage workers from self-isolating and could damage the economy.

Although welcoming Boris Johnson's ambition to ease restrictions almost two years into the pandemic, company bosses said the prime minister's newly unveiled "living with Covid" strategy came with major risks and could do more harm than good.

Claire Walker, co-executive director of the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC), said the changes inched companies closer to pre-pandemic conditions. "However, for many firms, this move will not be without its challenges, and government must not pass public health decisions on to the business community, who are not public health experts."

The prime minister [announced on Monday](#) that people testing positive for Covid-19 would no longer legally have to isolate from this Thursday, while free testing would be removed from 1 April. Self-isolation support payments are to be jettisoned, while sick pay rules will revert to less generous pre-Covid arrangements, which will mean workers are paid from day four of any absence through illness rather than day one.

Johnson told the Commons: "Restrictions place a heavy toll on our economy, our society, our mental wellbeing and on the life chances of our children. And we do not need to pay that cost any longer."

However, business groups said the economic benefit of looser restrictions would be undermined by the end of free Covid tests and support for those who self-isolate.

Matthew Fell, chief policy director at the Confederation of British Industry, said: "While free testing cannot continue for ever, there is a balance to be struck between confidence-building and cost-cutting. Mass lateral flow testing has kept our economy open and firms continue to believe the economic benefits far outweigh the costs."

Frances O'Grady, the Trades Union Congress general secretary, said low-income workers would suffer the most at a moment of mounting pressure on households. "Charging for Covid tests in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis is a crazy decision," she said. "Ministers have been warned again and again by unions, businesses and public health experts not to scrap free Covid tests. But they have ignored these pleas."

The government said it would move away from deploying regulations and requirements in England and replace specific interventions for Covid-19 with public health measures and guidance, further details of which are expected later this week.

However, the move raises the prospect of the government guiding workers who test positive for Covid-19 to self-isolate, while also dismantling the financial support and testing infrastructure to help them to do so.

Christina McAnea, the general secretary of the union Unison, said ending free testing was a "foolish move" because people wouldn't be able to afford to check their Covid status. "The government has taken leave of its senses. Ditching every last Covid safety rule while thousands are still catching the virus every day is irresponsible," she added.

Business leaders said that while infection rates had fallen from a recent peak, there was still a risk of future outbreaks. Walker said: "Firms will only truly be able to 'live with Covid' when they are confident that a plan is in place for future outbreaks.

"Uncertainty will put a brake on investment and the shadow of the pandemic could continue to loom over our economy for some time to come."

Hospitality leaders said removing restrictions could help pubs, clubs and bars, although they cautioned that ongoing financial support was vital for building back from the health emergency.

Michael Kill, chief executive of the Night Time Industries Association, said extra measures were necessary at next month's spring statement from the chancellor, Rishi Sunak. "This is a sector that has sacrificed more than just about any other part of the economy, and it seems right that continued

support is commensurate with the scale of hit that we took during the pandemic.”

Kate Nicholls, the chief executive of trade body UKHospitality, said many venues would still err on the side of caution despite the end of self-isolation rules. “We have a greater burden of care because we’re dealing with situations where, if hygiene is lax, there are big ramifications,” she said.

“Just because something isn’t there in law, doesn’t mean it won’t be there as part of normal mitigation and risk assessments.”

Unions responded with fury to the news that statutory sick pay will revert to pre-Covid rules. The TUC has warned that the UK has the lowest statutory sick pay in real terms for almost two decades and is the least generous in Europe. Under the rules, employees are paid £96.35 a week by their employer if they are too ill to work.

Dan Shears, national health and safety director at the GMB trade union, said: “Today’s nonsensical announcement guarantees workers will attend the workplace with Covid.

“This will prolong the pandemic with more outbreaks. Asking people to exercise responsibility whilst taking away a key workplace provision for them to do that just shows how incompetent this government is.”

*Additional reporting by Rob Davies and Sarah Butler*

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## 2022.02.22 - Opinion

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- [We're back arguing about fur and foie gras – I feel like I'm 14 again](#)
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## OpinionTax

# **How to save our precious public services? A windfall tax on those who got rich from Covid**

[Polly Toynbee](#)



Rowan Williams is right. A one-off charge on the 1% who boosted their incomes during the pandemic is urgently needed



A Covid-themed mural in Birmingham. Photograph: Jacob King/PA

Tue 22 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

Windfall-tax the rich, Rowan Williams, former archbishop of Canterbury [proclaims](#). Start with a one-off seizure from the top 1% and then bring in a 1% wealth tax that could yield at least £70bn a year. Time at last for the poor to inherit the Earth – or at least a little sliver of it.

The last two Covid years have seen [tidal waves of wealth](#) wash into the pockets of those already possessing it, just as the cost-of-living disaster drains funds from low- and middle-income households. The pandemic should open our eyes to an already grossly unequal country suddenly engulfed in extra unearned excess.

Williams's forceful words are actually moderate in the context of what's happening right now: property prices are rising at the [fastest rate on record](#) and the [stock market is rocketing](#), while low earners [fall into debt](#). “Spiralling inequality,” he says, is “deeply damaging to our collective morale and trust”. The super-rich with “vastly disproportionate rewards” should welcome a windfall tax not as a burden but as an “opportunity to build a sustainable economy that works for everyone”. That’s optimistic. But

if the rich don't see his commendable plea in that light, surely the top 1% can be ignored electorally? There are only [250,000 households](#) in this bracket, owning a minimum of £3.6m (although many are worth vastly more). And squeezing the very rich is electorally popular: Denis Healey denied saying he'd squeeze them "until the pips squeak", though he did it.

Yet the electoral power of plutocrats is not in their puny voter numbers but in the command they hold of the ears of Tory ministers – especially those hyper-donors who [allegedly buy their way](#) into Boris Johnson's secret "advisory board". Keir Starmer, [in the Observer](#), asks why nothing is done to clean up London as the "money-laundering capital of the world"? He suggests "Perhaps the answer can be found in the Tory party's accounts".

The Tories operate in a world of extreme money, bolstered by Conservative party co-chairman Ben Elliot, whose luxury concierge service, Quintessentially, has helped him bring in a stack of mega-rich – [and at times questionable](#) – donors since Johnson appointed him in 2019.

Meanwhile, the government turns a blind eye to the extraordinary winnings made by some in the Covid years. What will voters think of six companies alone making [£16bn in excess profit](#) from Covid? Rio Tinto, recently in the news for blowing up [two ancient Aboriginal caves](#) in Western Australia, is handing out a [\\$16.5bn \(£12bn\) dividend](#). FTSE mining companies have made [£42bn in extra profits](#). The big four banks are expected to announce annual profits exceeding £34bn – and [pay £4bn in bonuses](#). Shares in the manufacturer Premier Foods, home to Mr Kipling, have [risen by 237%](#) during the pandemic. Gambling [profits have soared](#). These are just a few examples.

As everyone knows, while energy bills scorch households, oil and gas profits are rocketing, putting [\\$38bn in profits](#) into share buybacks for investors, not green investments. Labour would [windfall-tax that excess](#): companies drilling in the North sea that can't flee abroad to avoid tax. Labour's last windfall tax, highly popular in its 1997 manifesto, recouped [£5.2bn from privatised utilities](#) sold off too cheaply in the 1980s. That shows what can be done if backed by public opinion.

In this explosion of asset values, Williams is calling for a windfall tax on wealth of a much greater magnitude. He is right that extraordinary times call for radical remedies. National debts are stretching towards second world war proportions – and yet unlike in wartime, the government is making no call on private wealth contributions. In wartime, wealth was conscripted, so why not now? Covid greatly widened the wealth gap, the [Resolution Foundation](#) tells me, which will have profound consequences for social mobility and income inequality in the future.

Instead, Tory MPs clamour for tax cuts, ignoring stricken public services. NHS waiting lists will rise for years. Despite urgent skill shortages, further education funding will still be far behind [2010 levels](#) by 2025. Teachers and nurses are paid less in real terms [than in 2010](#). Pupils have [9% less](#) spent on them in real terms than in 2010, their music, arts, sport and drama devastated. Early years are perilously neglected. “We don’t promise the moon on a stick,” the chancellor, Rishi Sunak, [said recently](#), boasting of his prudence. Indeed he doesn’t. To him, “build back better” is all moonbeams.

A one-off windfall tax of 10% on UK wealth would [yield £1tn](#), says Prof Arun Advani of Warwick University. That’s how relatively little taken from relatively few, just once, could fund the regeneration of everything around us that matters. But that’s probably only useful as a thought experiment in this most tax-averse country, where we are taxed less than our EU neighbours. Ed Miliband’s modest [mansion tax](#) was a lesson in how reasonable steps are blown away by lobbyists and thinktanks funded by the rich. Take inheritance tax, the fairest and most hated: only [one in 20 estates](#) pays, mostly those worth more than £1m – yet the rich and their newspapers scare ordinary homeowners that it’s coming for them. Would they do that to something branded a “wealth windfall tax” on individuals?

Follow the dictum of Jean-Baptiste Colbert, Louis XIV’s finance minister: pluck maximum feathers from the goose with minimum hissing. The Institute for Fiscal Studies’ deputy director, Helen Miller, lists less hiss-inducing tax reforms with her elegant [TaxLab](#) showing how taxes are raised, with grotesque anomalies. Council tax revaluation would see bills in the north of England fall by 20%, because southerners pay a fraction of their true property values. Levelling up capital gains and rents so that all unearned

income pays the same tax and national insurance would stop plutocrats disguising their income.

Basic fairness is the first step, but a loud shout from a former archbishop for windfalling the wealthy is welcome. Deliberate misinformation means too few know about undertaxed riches cascading into the pockets of the few, bolstering the life chances of their heirs.

- Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist
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## We're back arguing about fur and foie gras – I feel like I'm 14 again

[Zoe Williams](#)



The government are considering a U-turn on their pledge to ban the import of fur and foie gras, thanks to opposition from their own MPs. Is there nothing that can't be turned into a culture war?



Imports of foie gras, controversially produced from geese, had due to be banned. Photograph: javarman3/Getty Images/iStockphoto

Mon 21 Feb 2022 12.24 EST

When I was young – this was, of course, many scores of years ago – we spent a lot of time arguing about fur. On one level, it was a pretty crude political awakening (animal cruelty, for or against?); on another, an early introduction to meaningless position-taking, and how enjoyable it can be (if you could never afford a mink coat, does it matter whether or not you agree with buying one? Well, yes, as a matter of fact, it does!). Philosophically, the knottiest bit was whether you were allowed to buy fur secondhand, considering the fox had already died, most likely in the 1940s. Then someone looked up [how astrakhan was made](#) and it was so brutally disgusting that it killed all conversation stone dead and we moved on to arguing about vivisection.

I hope I speak for my entire generation, then, when I say how delighted I am to find the controversy reawakened by [Jacob Rees-Mogg](#), along with a similarly familiar one about the sale of foie gras. Ah, the smell of ethics-napalm in the morning. It's like being 14 all over again. This must be how boomers feel when they trawl through Facebook and find posts about the good old days, when men could be men, and women understood that when a

stranger squeezed their arse they meant that in a nice way. Thrilling rage and exhilarating disbelief; these, plus maybe snakebite and black, are what lost youth smells like.

It was the British government's pledge to ban the import of fur and foie gras, part of a drive to make the UK the least cruel nation in the world. This was intended as an element of our sweet sovereignty, the bliss of being emancipated from the EU. Naturally, we had the freedom to outlaw these products at any time, but let's not get bogged down in things that are real. We wasted the past five years doing that. And now the government is thinking of ditching the pledge after opposition from within the cabinet.

The next five years are going to play out roughly like this: every day will throw up a technical hitch or a broken promise. Perhaps the promise was made with no heed to the technicalities behind it, or maybe its fulfilment was never part of the plan in the first place. It might be a huge promise, such as frictionless trade and boosted prosperity, or it might be a vague one, such as "your oranges will stay exactly the same (probably)", or "genetically engineered food is nothing to worry your pretty head about". Sooner or later it will be derailed, and then the Rees-Moggs and Trevelyan and Trusses of this world have two options. They can hope that we all get bored of the details and wander off. Deep down, they know that won't happen. Even if the vast majority of us are already bored, there will always be one disgruntled remainder, looking up the [side-effects of imazalil](#), or doing a deep dive on why the EU bans ractopamine in pigs.

Luckily, there's an alternative: to drag every issue, from the collapsing food and drink export industry to the made-up market demand for mink, into a culture war, pitting the woke army of generation X against the boomers who've been radicalised by the Daily Express. All that's required of ministers thereafter is to sit back and watch the fireworks – the explosions, hopefully, being a lot livelier and more dangerous, now we're free of the EU and all their boring safety and whatnot. It's so predictable, and so basic. The problem for all of us in the woke army will be staying awake.

- Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist

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## Opinion**Land ownership**

# Dreaming of an escape to the country? Be careful what you wish for

[Vron Ware](#)

The English countryside is not a blank slate for the whims of city-dwellers — it has a hidden history of politics and power



A view of rolling hills in Hampshire. Photograph: Loop Images/Chris Button/Getty Images/Passage

Tue 22 Feb 2022 03.00 EST

No one expects to see pastoral scenes at Finsbury Park, north London, when they've just emerged from the underground. But there it was last Christmas: a huge billboard depicting the English countryside as one big meadow – a grassy landscape devoid of people, buildings or roads, imprinted with the words “Explore the life that could be ...” Advertising Rightmove, the UK’s

largest property-listings website, this was an invitation to Covid-weary commuters to opt out of stressful city life and run for the hills.

The pressures of lockdown life and the realities of working from home have been inducing many to [move away from cities](#) to smaller towns and villages. By the end of 2020, the words “detached”, “rural” and “secluded” were Zoopla’s fourth, fifth and sixth [most common search terms](#). Estate agents have been reporting this phenomenon throughout the UK since mid 2020, and the same is true across the EU and in North America too. More recently, however, evidence of rural buyers’ remorse [has emerged](#).

Dissatisfied customers complain about the need to drive everywhere. They miss coffee bars and deplore the fact that everyone in the village sends their kids to private school. But what were they expecting? Could it be that they fell for the vision of rural life offered by sites such as Rightmove: fresh air, great views, unlimited access to nature?

The English countryside isn’t a blank slate for restless urbanites; nor should it be reduced to an amenity for leisure and recreation. It is a complex and real place, suffused in history, politics, power. Understanding this would be the first step in making it more accessible and less mysterious.

In his book about the toxic politics of English nationalism, [New Model Island](#), Alex Niven writes, “the great divide in English life is between the cities and everywhere else”. This is partly a matter of demography and the political choices associated with an older, whiter population. In 2020, the most prominent age group in rural areas [was 50 to 59](#); in urban areas the corresponding figure was 25 to 34. Rural constituencies are much more likely to be represented by Conservative MPs. There is less ethnic diversity outside major towns and cities, and [marginally more people](#) voted to leave the EU in rural areas than the national average.

Then there’s the question of access to the land. The Rightmove billboard depicts miles of open country, but as the campaign group [Right to Roam](#) points out, the public is excluded from more than [90% of the English countryside](#) and almost 100% of rivers. Meanwhile, English farmland has been turned into a lucrative [investment opportunity](#), particularly since the

Tories decided to waive UK inheritance tax on agricultural property in 1984. Much of the English countryside has already been sold off as a result.

The absence of animals or any sign of cultivation in the billboard is indicative of the crisis in farming too. Regardless of where you live, it is very hard to understand the politics of agriculture today, especially post-Brexit. Little of what we eat or buy from supermarkets is wholly produced in the UK, and farmers are blamed wholesale for wrecking the environment and destroying wildlife.

One solution to these problems is to listen to the land itself. Just one single field – even the one in the billboard – can contain clues that help to explain the urban-rural divide that persists today. Leaving aside ancient or prehistoric patterns of human settlement, often visible to the naked eye, the [question of ownership](#) is the first key to unlocking the history of a particular patch of ground.

I grew up in a small village in north-west Hampshire and returned to investigate a remnant of heathland a mile or two outside. I was intrigued by the idea that it had once been common land. Having discovered that it was part of a larger area enclosed by a wealthy Scottish family from a neighbouring parish in 1818, it took one click to [learn](#) that they had made their fortune from owning a sugar plantation in St Kitts in the Caribbean. The [colonial countryside](#) evidently means more than prestigious stately homes.

War has also shaped local landscapes over centuries in ways that are quickly forgotten. The patch of land was handed over to a local farmer in 1942 after the Ministry of Agriculture ordered the requisition of unproductive land for cultivating food. In 1991, on the farmer's death, local residents fought a vigorous campaign to restore its status as common land. However, the field was sold to a private buyer after the government, according to press reports at the time, deemed that “the maximum amount of money should be obtained from the sale of land of this type”.

However, almost more surprising is the fact that there are still small patches of common land where villagers are entitled to gather firewood. Looking over the hill, I discovered further relics of a feudal era. Many of the large

agricultural estates in the area are owned by wealthy investors, some of whom have had very colourful pasts.

In the late 1970s a mystery man called Tim Landon acquired the whole village of Facombe, about a mile farther east as the crow flies. He was known locally as “The Brigadier” in a reference to his shadowy military connections to Oman. He had supported Sultan Qaboos as he ousted his father, Said, in a well-planned coup. Landon then stayed on as adviser to Qaboos, a service for which he was handsomely rewarded.

These fragments of history show connections between rural England and elsewhere: that is part of their value. The Rightmove billboard is insidious because it promotes the fantasy that the country’s unbuilt environments are there to be colonised – ripe for property developers, reserved for nature lovers or simply a haven for those who like a quiet life. It’s never been more important to challenge the commodification of the English countryside, and the way to start is to understand exactly how this process has happened.

- Vron Ware is the author of [Return of a Native: Learning from the Land](#)

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## OpinionSwitzerland

# Credit Suisse has allowed the morally bankrupt to steal from the poor for too long

[Joseph Stiglitz](#)



How many exposés will it take for Switzerland and other countries to change their laws on banking secrecy?

- Joseph E Stiglitz is a Nobel laureate in economics



‘It is countries like Switzerland that are the key enablers.’ Credit Suisse Group headquarters in Zurich. Photograph: Bloomberg/Getty Images

Mon 21 Feb 2022 12.00 EST

The bombshell revelations of the [Suisse secrets](#), reported by the Guardian and a number of international outlets, are a continuation of the path-breaking work of the [Panama Papers](#) and the [Paradise Papers](#). In one sense, it’s the same old story over and over again. Every time journalists lift the financial sector’s curtain of secrecy, a web of corruption and nefarious activities is revealed, disproportionately from shady customers and families of dictators, with a smattering of seemingly respectable politicians in democracies caught in the net.

But this time, there’s something different. This time it’s not a small, obscure offshore island or a struggling developing country trying to figure out an alternative business model to drugs. It’s a major bank in the middle of Europe, in one of the most prosperous countries in the world; a country where the “rule of law” is *supposed* to reign supreme. Even more disappointing, given that the country and bank involved have [made promises of transparency](#) and doing better. And that’s the point: without more transparency, there can’t be accountability.

In fact, Switzerland's position increasingly appears two-faced, with a legal framework that penalises those who attempt to pierce its secrecy. Countries around the world have passed whistleblower laws, recognising how hard it is to uncover untoward behaviour. Frances Haugen's [exposure of Facebook's misdeeds](#) probably wouldn't have been possible without the US's strong whistleblower laws. But Switzerland, one of the oldest democracies in the world, seems to have doubled down on its commitment to secrecy, regardless of the incentives it provides for bad behaviour, by threatening journalists and others who try to access data showing what is going on in the dark shadows of its financial system.

## Quick Guide

### Suisse secrets

Show

#### **What is the Suisse secrets leak?**

Suisse secrets is a global journalistic investigation into a leak of data from the Swiss bank Credit Suisse. It comprises more than 18,000 bank accounts that were leaked to Süddeutsche Zeitung by a whistleblower who said Swiss banking secrecy laws were "immoral". The data, which is only a partial capture of the bank's 1.5 million private banking clients, is linked to more than 30,000 Credit Suisse clients. The leak includes personal, shared and corporate bank accounts – holding, on average, 7.5m Swiss francs (CHF). Almost 200 accounts in the data are worth more than 100m CHF, and more than a dozen are valued in the billions. While some accounts in the data were open as far back as the 1940s, more than two-thirds were opened since 2000. Many of those were still open well into the last decade, and a portion remain open today.

The Guardian was among more than 48 media partners around the world including journalists at Le Monde, NDR, the Miami Herald and the New York Times. They spent months using the data to investigate the bank, in a project coordinated by Süddeutsche Zeitung and the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP). They unearthed evidence Credit Suisse accounts had been used by clients involved in torture, drug

trafficking, money laundering, corruption and other serious crimes, suggesting widespread failures of due diligence by the bank. It is not illegal to have a Swiss account and the leak also contained data of legitimate clients who had done nothing wrong. In [its response](#), Credit Suisse said it "strongly rejects the allegations and inferences about the bank's purported business practices".

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

Regrettably, but not surprisingly, no Swiss outlet was able to join the global journalism collaboration due to the danger of severe legal consequences under the country's [banking secrecy laws](#). But journalists in other countries should be given kudos too, for risking the possibility of Swiss authorities' prosecution. Surely, Switzerland must know the chilling effect of its legislation: perhaps its very intent was to preserve its business models as long as possible, of taking a little slice of the ill-gotten gains of others, in return for providing a safe and secret place to hoard and store the geld.

The Suisse secrets have two particularly alarming aspects. The international journalistic collaboration only saw a small portion of the bank's client data, but if in this tiny portion are already so many problematic customers, including dictators and their families, suspected war criminals, intelligence officials and chiefs, a human trafficker, sanctioned businessmen and human rights abusers – a true rogues' gallery – what would we see if the window into the bank were larger?

Second, it appears the countries that suffer the most from the bank's assistance to bad actors are developing countries and emerging markets. The revelation confirms what experts have warned of for a long time: [Switzerland](#) agreed to an automatic information exchange mostly with other advanced countries, but not with poor countries, and especially those that might be the home to these illicit activities. As a result, kleptocracy and corruption can still flourish.

It's good to see that journalists believe in their duty to report, and that they fight for "the right to know" of the citizens of countries such as Switzerland,

who can't control what their politicians hide. Politicians in advanced countries are fond of making speeches condemning corruption elsewhere. But it is countries like Switzerland that are the key enablers: that provide the haven, ensuring the long-term returns.

We should be clear: Switzerland is not alone. It rightly complains that closing the door there will simply shift the activities to real estate and finance in Miami, London or other money-laundering centres. Still, there is something morally repugnant about those in the US, UK or Switzerland living off spoils stolen from those so much poorer. And those countries like Switzerland that have designed a legal code that makes this system flourish should be especially embarrassed.

How many stories, how many revelations, how many exposés, will it take for Switzerland, the US, UK and other countries to change their laws on secrecy in banking and real estate, and all the other activities that facilitate money laundering and promote crime and corruption? While this treasure trove showed Switzerland benefiting from a flow of money from poor countries, the system itself is corrupting: the rot of tainted money spoils all that it comes in touch with.

Hopefully, the Suisse secrets, this enormous achievement of honest and honourable journalism, will put to shame those who have resisted creating a more transparent financial and economic system.

- Joseph E Stiglitz is a Nobel laureate in economics and a professor at Columbia University
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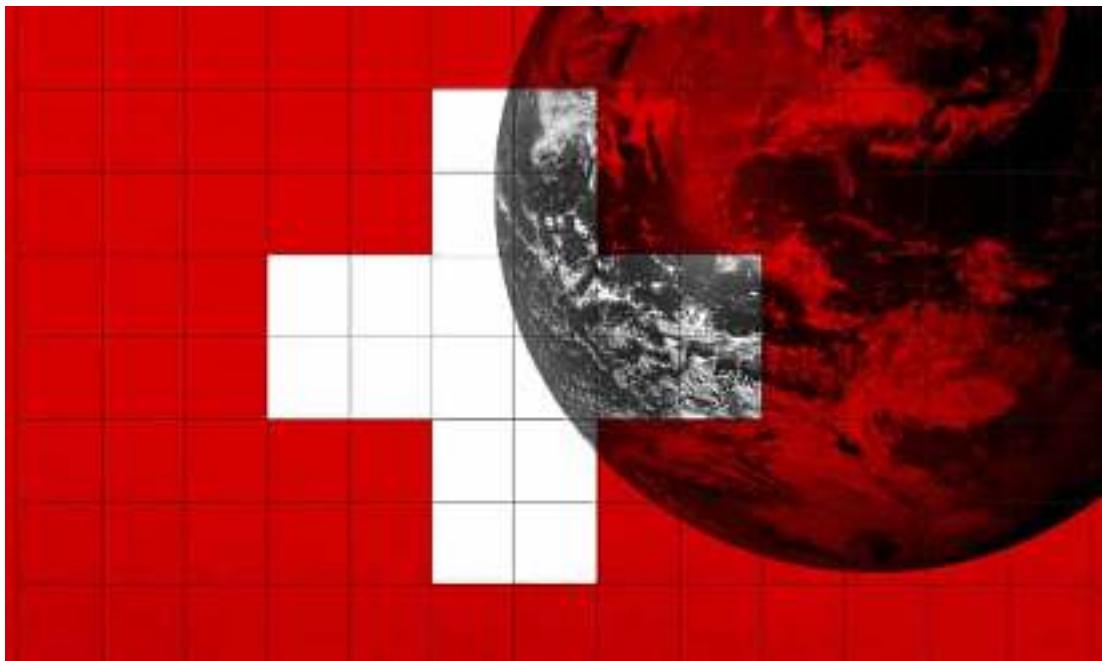
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## Switzerland at risk of EU blacklist after Credit Suisse leak



A move to the blacklist would mean Switzerland would face the kind of enhanced due diligence applied to transactions linked to rogue nations including North Korea. Composite: Guardian

Apparent due diligence failures by Swiss bank prompts centre-right calls for EU to review relationship with Switzerland

- [Credit Suisse leak unmasks criminals, fraudsters and corrupt politicians](#)
- [What is the Suisse secrets leak and why are we publishing it?](#)

*[Kalyeena Makortoff](#) and [David Pegg](#)*

Mon 21 Feb 2022 09.58 EST

The fallout from a huge leak of [Credit Suisse](#) banking data threatened to damage Switzerland's entire financial sector on Monday after the European parliament's main political grouping raised the prospect of adding the country to a money-laundering blacklist.

The European People's party (EPP), the largest political grouping of the European parliament, [called](#) for the EU to review its relationship with Switzerland and consider whether it should be added to its list of countries associated with a high risk of financial crime.

Experts said that such a move would be a disaster for Switzerland's financial sector, which would face the kind of enhanced due diligence applied to transactions linked to rogue nations including Iran, Myanmar, Syria and North Korea.

“When Swiss banks fail to apply international anti-money-laundering standards properly, Switzerland itself becomes a high-risk jurisdiction,” said Markus Ferber, the coordinator on economic affairs for the EPP, which represents Europe’s centre-right political parties.

“When the list of high-risk third countries in the area of money laundering is up for revision the next time, the European Commission needs to consider adding Switzerland to that list.”

The EPP released the proposal after media outlets including the Guardian, Süddeutsche Zeitung, the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), and Le Monde revealed how a massive leak of Credit

Suisse data had uncovered apparently widespread failures of due diligence by the bank.

## Quick Guide

### Suisse secrets

Show

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Was this helpful?

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The investigation, called Suisse secrets, identified clients of the Swiss bank who had been involved in torture, drug trafficking, money laundering, corruption and other serious crimes.

“Bank privacy laws must not become a pretext to facilitate money laundering and tax evasion. The Suisse secrets findings point to massive shortcomings of Swiss banks when it comes to the prevention of money laundering,” Ferber said. “Apparently, Credit Suisse has a policy of looking the other way instead of asking difficult questions.”

He added that the close ties between EU and Swiss banks meant that anti-money-laundering deficiencies in Switzerland’s banking industry “also pose a problem for the European financial sector”.

Credit Suisse said [in a statement](#) it “strongly rejects the allegations and inferences about the bank’s purported business practices”, arguing that the matters uncovered by reporters were largely historical and based on “selective information taken out of context, resulting in tendentious interpretations of the bank’s business conduct”.

Its lawyers told the Guardian any past individual failings by the bank did not reflect its current business policies, practices or culture. The bank has since announced it has set up an internal taskforce to investigate the leak. “We have robust data protection and data leakage prevention controls in place to protect our clients,” it said.

Switzerland’s government declined to comment on the EPP statement, but said the country meets international standards around exchange of tax information, money laundering, terrorist financing and corruption.

The country’s addition to the EU high-risk third countries list would mean regulated professions, such as bankers, lawyers and accountants, would be required to conduct enhanced due diligence on any transaction or commercial relationship with a person or company in the country.

Tom Keatinge, the director of the Centre for Financial Crime and Security Studies at the defence thinktank RUSI, said that being added to the EU list could have a significant and far-reaching impact on Switzerland's banks, as well as its broader financial sector. "There is the potential for considerable collateral damage," he said.

The Credit Suisse data was leaked to Süddeutsche Zeitung by an anonymous source who complained about "immoral" Swiss banking secrecy laws.

In Switzerland, politicians and media organisations reacted angrily to the discovery that Swiss investigative journalists had been prevented from participating in the Suisse secrets investigation because of the country's notorious banking secrecy law.

Swiss law has for decades criminalised the disclosure of banking information by financial professionals. However, in recent years it was expanded to cover outsiders receiving banking data, potentially including investigative journalists.

Amid international controversy, Andrea Caroni, a Swiss politician who in 2015 advocated expanding article 47, the infamous section of a 1934 banking law that introduced extreme secrecy regulations, accepted on Monday that "maybe the rules are not set perfectly" and suggested he would be open to considering a review.

Samira Marti, a national councillor for the Swiss Social Democratic party, said the group would submit a proposal to combat article 47's "censorship" in the spring session of the Swiss parliament, and called on the country's centrist party, Die Mitte, and the Green Liberal party to support them.

The Green Liberals said they would back Marti's call for action. "Journalism plays an essential role in uncovering illegal practices," said Julie Cantalou, a co-secretary general of the party. "We are therefore supportive towards the idea to reform article 47, and look forward to working with Samira Marti on this important matter."

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Meanwhile, Switzerland's Green party [announced](#) that it had tabled a legislative proposal for immediate reform of article 47.

"The Suisse secrets show once again that Swiss banks continue to do business with dictators, autocrats and criminals," the party said in a statement. "With a proposal submitted today, the Greens are now campaigning for an immediate revision of the [Banking Act](#)."

In what could be the first step towards a formal investigation into the Suisse secrets disclosures, Finma, the Swiss financial regulator, confirmed this morning that it was "in contact" with Credit Suisse concerning the investigation, but refused to be drawn on the details of its conversations with the bank.

One Swiss commentator described the timing of the leak as "catastrophic" for Credit Suisse, which last year suffered a series of rolling scandals that battered its share price.

Samuel Gerber, the deputy editor of the Swiss financial publication Finews, also [warned](#) that the bank's latest controversy could jeopardise an international review of Switzerland's anti-money-laundering measures expected to take place later this year.

Referring to past scandals, Daniel Thelesklaf, the former head of Switzerland's anti-money-laundering body, said Credit Suisse had "already lost a lot of its reputation".

"This can become another crack in the wall," he said. "Unless Credit Suisse undergoes a massive change of culture, it will lose the trust of its remaining clients soon."

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**Business live**

**Business**

# **Oil prices hit seven-year highs close to \$100 after Russia moves troops into Ukraine – as it happened**

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## Global development

# Colombia legalises abortion in move celebrated as ‘historic victory’ by campaigners

Colombia has decriminalised abortion during the first 24 weeks of pregnancy, following rulings in Mexico and Argentina that improve access to abortion

00:57

'This is historic': pro-choice campaigners celebrate legal abortion in Colombia – video

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Mon 21 Feb 2022 20.05 EST

Colombia has decriminalised abortion during the first 24 weeks of pregnancy, adding to a recent string of legal victories for reproductive rights in Latin America.

The South American country's constitutional court ruled five against four to decriminalise the procedure on Monday evening. The decision follows a [series of rulings in Mexico and Argentina](#) that lowered barriers to abortion.

Previously, abortion in Colombia was allowed only where there was a risk to the life or health of the pregnant mother; the existence of life-threatening foetal malformations; or when the pregnancy was the result of rape, incest or non-consensual artificial insemination.

“We celebrate this ruling as a historic victory for the women’s movement in Colombia that has fought for decades for the recognition of their rights,” said Erika Guevara-Rosas, [Americas](#) director at Amnesty International, in a statement. “Women, girls and people able to bear children are the only ones who should make decisions about their bodies.”

“Now, instead of punishing them, the Colombian authorities will have to recognise their autonomy over their bodies and their life plans,” Guevara-Rosas, went on to say.

As the ruling was handed down, protesters in favour of access to abortion clad in green – the colour adopted by the pro-choice movement – celebrated in front of Colombia’s constitutional court in downtown Bogotá, the capital. Anti-abortion protesters also demonstrated against the ruling.

Abortion rights groups, collectively known as the Green Wave, sued to have abortion removed from the penal code. The movement had previously seen the constitutional court decide not to rule on the matter several times in the past two years.

Reproductive rights groups estimate that as many as 400,000 abortions are performed each year in Colombia, with only 10% carried out legally. During 2020, at least 26,223 unsafe abortions were carried out across Colombia, according to Profamilia – a local reproductive healthcare provider.

According to Causa Justa, a Colombian women's rights coalition, at least 350 women were convicted or sanctioned for abortions between 2006 and mid-2019, including at least 20 girls under the age of 18.

Latin America, a traditionally conservative region with a powerful Catholic and evangelical Christian lobby, has some of the world's most restrictive abortion laws, often banning the procedure outright. In El Salvador, dozens of women have been jailed for homicide after suffering obstetric emergencies.

"We applaud the constitutional court's legal and political courage in recognising that women and girls are not second-class citizens," said Paula Avila-Guillen, an international human rights lawyer and executive director of the Women's Equality Center, based in New York. "In constitutionally protecting our autonomy over our own bodies and lives, the court is changing the lives of millions of vulnerable women and girls disproportionately harmed by abortion restrictions."

"We celebrate with Colombia's Green Wave movement as the country becomes the third Latin American country to decriminalise abortion in the last two years," Avila-Guillen said. "We know this will have a ripple effect in other countries in Latin America that have yet to take this step toward human rights and social justice."

Mexico's supreme court decriminalised abortion last year, while parliamentarians in Ecuador last week eased regulations which now allow access to abortion in cases of rape.

"While today we are celebrating this historic decision, the Green Wave is strong and growing, and the fight for reproductive rights and justice will not end until every person can access high-quality sexual and reproductive healthcare when and where they need it," said Eugenia Lopez Uribe, the International Planned Parenthood Federation's regional director for Americas and the Caribbean region, in a statement.

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[\*\*Rights and freedom\*\*](#)[\*\*Global development\*\*](#)

## **‘Shoot them’: Indian state police accused of murdering Muslims and Dalits**

Ahead of key Uttar Pradesh elections, state police accused of being ‘mercenaries’ of hardline Hindu nationalist government



Fatima Begum’s son, Altaf, was said to have hanged himself in prison, but his family tell a different story. Photograph: Shaikh Azizur Rahman/The Guardian

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# HUMANITY UNITED

[About this content](#)

[Hannah Ellis-Petersen](#) and [Shaikh Azizur Rahman](#) in Uttar Pradesh

Tue 22 Feb 2022 01.45 EST

According to police in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, it was suicide. The young Muslim man they had brought into their custody had, out of despair, killed himself in the police station toilets. But, as photos of the scene emerged, so too did suspicions.

The 22-year-old man, Altaf, was 165cm (5ft 5in) tall and weighed 60kg (9.5 stone), but the toilet tap he had supposedly hanged himself from was just 76cm off the ground and made of flimsy plastic. And why, as the police later claimed in court, was the CCTV in the police station mysteriously not working that day?

Family and friends tell a very different story: that Altaf, a Muslim man living in the town of Kasganj, was in love with and planned to marry a Hindu girl. That powerful local Hindu vigilante groups [opposed to interfaith unions](#) found out and reported him to the police. And that on 9 November 2021, Altaf was arrested and tortured to death in police custody and his family pressured to keep quiet.

“The police murdered my son and then gave me money to say he was depressed and took his own life,” says Altaf’s father, Chand Miya, an illiterate mason who has taken the case to the state high court. “But I will not stay quiet, I want justice.”

Last Friday, the courts ordered Altaf’s body to be exhumed and a new postmortem examination to be carried out.

## Quick Guide

### Why elections in Uttar Pradesh matter

#### Show

This month, Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state and **home to more than 200 million people** – similar to the population of Brazil – goes to the polls in a state election that will continue until early March.

Since 2017, the state has been ruled by the **Bharatiya Janata Party** (BJP) which also controls India's central government, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The election is being viewed as a **vote on Hindu nationalist politics** on a state and national level. BJP's Yogi Adityanath, a hardline Hindu monk with a history of allegations of hate speech, has denied any prejudice towards Muslims.

It comes ahead of **India's general elections in 2024**.

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

Altaf was not the first to die in such circumstances in Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state, which is holding a [high-stakes election this month](#).

In six cases examined by the Guardian of deaths in custody and police shootings of suspects, allegedly in self defence, from 2018 onwards, those accused of carrying out and covering up killings are the same: the Uttar

Pradesh police, under the rule of the state's chief minister, Yogi Adityanath, and his Bharatiya Janata party (BJP) government.



Polls this month will decide if Yogi Adityanath, who has pursued a fiercely Hindu nationalist agenda, will remain Uttar Pradesh's chief minister. Photograph: Sanjay Kanojia/AFP/Getty

The victims of these alleged unlawful killings were all from the communities that Adityanath's government, with its sectarian [Hindu nationalist agenda](#), is accused of routinely targeting and oppressing: Muslims, who make up 20% of the state's population and who have been subjected to increased [lynchings, hate speech and prejudicial legislation](#), and Dalits, who are at the bottom of India's oppressive Hindu caste system and were previously referred to as "untouchables".

The elections will decide whether to return Adityanath's state government to power for another five years. It is being seen as a referendum on Hindu nationalist politics – the push for India to become a Hindu, rather than secular, nation – on both a state and national level, and is happening against a backdrop of [rising religious intolerance](#) and anti-Muslim hate speech in India.

Not one officer who fatally shot someone in Uttar Pradesh in the past five years faced disciplinary action

Not long after he took office in 2017, Adityanath, a hardline Hindu monk, made it clear that his agenda would be twofold: a fierce promotion of Hindu nationalism and a tough crackdown on crime. “*Agar aparadh karenge, toh thok diye jayenge* [If anyone commits a crime, he will be knocked down],” he said in June 2017.

From that point on, lawyers, activists and ex-police officers allege that “*thok denge*” – slang for “shoot them” – became unofficial policy in Uttar Pradesh. Police allegedly began carrying out “instant justice”, maiming or executing those they deemed to be criminals, and were professionally rewarded for doing so.

Lawyers and families of victims describe an [atmosphere of terror in Uttar Pradesh](#), where Muslims and lower-caste men are picked up on the streets and killed with alleged impunity by police, either in what are known as “encounter killings”, in which officers fatally shoot their captives and claim it was in self-defence, or in police custody, where they are beaten or tortured to death.

14:32

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

The same police accused of the murders are often then responsible for the investigations. Subsequently, police reports are often not lodged, evidence and CCTV footage routinely disappears, charges filed to the courts are watered down to “accidental death” and some cases disappear altogether.

“The police are now mercenaries of the Yogi government,” says Rajeev Yadav, an activist running for a seat in the forthcoming election in Azamgarh, which has a large Muslim population and has experienced multiple “encounter killings” by police.

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In the past five years, according to the government, there have been more than 8,700 shootings by police in the state, including more than 3,000

incidents when allegedly escaping suspects were shot, often in the knees, and more than 150 deaths. There are rarely any eyewitnesses to these encounters, according to human rights organisations that have [examined many of the cases](#). Not [a single officer](#) who fatally shot someone in Uttar Pradesh in the past five years has faced disciplinary action.

Two former police officers told the Guardian that in their experience most so-called “encounter killings” were falsified by police.

In the case of Kamran, a 40-year-old Muslim water-seller from Azamgarh, police claimed he was apprehended on his way to commit a crime in Lucknow, 200 miles from his home, and then killed after a shootout with an anti-terrorism unit.



Nasim Ahmed with a photo of his dead son, Kamran. Police say Kamran died in a shootout, but his family say he was tortured and killed in custody.  
Photograph: Shaikh Azizur Rahman/Guardian

But a lawyer, Ashma Izzat, says the evidence, including a leaked police photograph that appears to show him alive and in police custody – a direct contradiction of the police account of events – demonstrated the events in November 2021 were covered up.

Kamran's body was returned to his family with signs of torture. "He had a perforated eye, dark bruising around his neck and body, a broken collar bone and leg, and four of his front teeth knocked out," said his 87-year-old father, Nasim Ahmed.

Police later filed a report that Kamran had been an absconding criminal in multiple cases with a 25,000 rupee (£250) reward on his head. But Kamran made daily visits to the police station to deliver water as part of his job, including on the day he was killed.

Uttar Pradesh has the [highest number of deaths in police custody](#) in the country. Officially, there have been 23 deaths over the past three years but Mehmood Pracha, one of the few lawyers who has taken cases of custodial killings to India's highest court, said this was likely to be a "significant undercount".

"The police hide these custody deaths when they can get away with it, and won't even tell the family," says Pracha.

In several cases, grief-stricken families said they have been pressurised or threatened by police to withdraw charges and stay silent. Faisal Husain, an 18-year-old Muslim vegetable seller from Unnao, was among those allegedly beaten to death in police custody in May 2021. The case is now in the supreme court and the Guardian listened to recordings of threats and offers of money made to Hussain's sister, Khushnuma Banu, 28, over the phone, to pressure her to withdraw the case.



Kamla Devi's son, Arun Valmiki, died in custody. Police say he died of a heart attack, but have withheld the postmortem report. Photograph: Shaikh Azizur Rahman/Guardian

In another two cases of killings in custody examined by the Guardian, the police had not given families details of the postmortem examination, despite them being legally bound to do so.

Police claim that Arun Valmiki, a 30-year-old Dalit man from Agra, died of a heart attack in police custody in October 2021, but withheld the postmortem report from his family, who allege he was tortured and electrocuted to death by police. "Police put pressure on me to say that my brother had heart problems but it's not true – he was strong and healthy," says his brother Sonu Narwal.

Ziauddin, a 38-year-old Muslim businessman, died in police custody in March 2021 after being picked up by police for alleged theft. The police claimed he died from a heart attack during questioning despite him being in robust health.

When Ziauddin's body was returned to his family, it was covered in torture wounds, including cigarette burns, bruises around his neck and across his body, and signs he had been electrocuted, visible in photographs viewed by

the Guardian. Despite almost a year of requests, the police continue to withhold the postmortem report from his family and have not submitted the legally mandated “charge sheet” to the courts. The family say they were offered money by the police to withdraw the case.

Police put pressure on me to say that my brother had heart problems but it’s not true – he was strong and healthy

*Sonu Narwal*

“He was the most kind, honest, gentle man, who had never committed a crime,” said Alauddin, Ziauddin’s father. “I feel so terrible that he was murdered and we will never get justice for him.”

The Uttar Pradesh government denied all the allegations. “There are judicial systems in place and no extrajudicial killings have taken place. This narrative is totally false and we deny such baseless accusations,” it said in a statement.



A police ‘flag march’, or show of strength, in Noida, a town in Uttar Pradesh near Delhi, last month ahead of the forthcoming state election. Photograph: Sunil Ghosh/Hindustan Times/Getty

Prashant Kumar, the additional director general of police in Uttar Pradesh, said the Uttar Pradesh police strictly follow all procedures and guidelines laid out by the courts and the [National Human Rights Commission](#).

Kumar described a “zero-tolerance” approach to custodial killings in which guilty officers are always suspended and jailed. However, in several of the custodial death cases examined by the Guardian, junior officers were suspended but none were in prison. No senior officer or government official under the Adityanath government has faced disciplinary action for either “encounter killings” on the street or deaths in police custody.

Kumar said there was no religious or caste bias in the police force, and no culture of silencing victims. “How can we distinguish between our own citizens? It is not possible and it is wrong,” he said. “No government can ask us to do anything which is wrong or illegal.”

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## Global development

# Kenya to use solar panels to boost crops by ‘harvesting the sun twice’

Successful trials found growing crops beneath panels – known as agrivoltaics – reduced water loss and resulted in larger plants



A research collaboration between the University of Sheffield and the Latia Agripreneurship Institute in the semi-arid Kajiado county had promising results. Photograph: Christine Lamanna/Icraf

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[About this content](#)

*Geoffrey Kamadi in Nairobi*

Tue 22 Feb 2022 04.51 EST

Solar panels are not a new way of providing cheap power across much of the African continent, where there is rarely a shortage of sunshine. But growing crops underneath the panels is, and the process has had such promising trials in Kenya that it will be deployed this week in open-field farms.

Known as agrivoltaics, the technique harvests solar energy twice: where panels have traditionally been used to harness the sun's rays to generate energy, they are also utilised to provide shade for growing crops, helping to retain moisture in the soil and boosting growth.

An initial year-long research collaboration between the [University of Sheffield](#), [World Agroforestry](#) and the Kajiado-based [Latia Agripreneurship Institute](#) has shown promising results in the semi-arid Kajiado county, a 90-minute drive from the Kenyan capital of Nairobi and this week the full project will be officially launched.

For example, cabbages grown under the 180, 345-watt solar panels have been a third bigger, and healthier, than those grown in control plots with the

same amount of fertiliser and water.



Judy Wairimu at Latia Agripreneurship Institute Photograph: Geoffrey Kamadi

Other crops such as aubergine and lettuce have shown similar results. Maize grown under the panels was taller and healthier, according to Judy Wairimu, an agronomist at the institute.

“We wanted to see how crops would perform if grown under these panels,” said Wairimu. But there is another pragmatic reason behind the technology: doubling up the output of the same patch of earth to generate power and cultivate food can go a long way towards helping people with limited land resources, she said.

According to Dr Richard Randle-Boggis, a researcher at the University of Sheffield’s [Harvesting the Sun Twice](#) project, the trial initiative will determine the potential of agrivoltaic systems in east Africa.

“We needed to build a test system to see if this technology will be suitable for the region,” Randle-Boggis said, reiterating that, unlike conventional solar mini-grid systems, agrivoltaics have the additional benefits of improving food and water security, while strengthening people’s resilience against the climate crisis, as well as providing low-carbon electricity.

The solar panels do not just reduce water loss from plants and the soil – their shade mitigates some of the stress experienced by plants due to high day temperatures and UV damage, Randle-Boggis said.



Agrivoltaic energy systems can combine solar power, crop production, and rainwater harvesting on the same land area. Photograph: Chloride Exide Ltd

Agrivoltaics can have a notable impact on household income in remote locations such as Kajiado. “Women here can spend up to 300 Kenyan shillings (£2) on a *bodaboda* (motorcycle taxi) fare to the market just to buy vegetables worth 100 Kenyan shillings,” said Anne Macharia, head of training at Latia Agripreneurship Institute.

The solar panels can be placed three metres from the ground, providing ample room for a farmer to work below, or higher in bigger systems to allow access for agricultural machinery.

Randle-Boggis acknowledged the technology has limitations, but says that in “areas of Kenya which are not currently suitable for horticulture, it may be possible to grow other crops under the improved environmental conditions under the panels”.

In other countries including France, the [US](#) and [Germany](#), the technology has been employed successfully.

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## Seascape: the state of our oceansEnvironment

# **Plastic summit could be most important green deal since Paris accords, says UN**

World leaders to gather in Nairobi next week to discuss first global treaty to combat plastic waste



Clothing and plastic waste chokes a beach in Accra, Ghana. Plastic breaks down into tiny particles found everywhere from the seafloor to the Artic ice pack. Photograph: Muntaka Chasant/REX/Shutterstock

Seascape: the state of our oceans is supported by



[About this content](#)

[Karen McVeigh](#)

[@karenmcveigh1](#)

Fri 25 Feb 2022 01.01 EST

World leaders will come together online and in Nairobi, Kenya, next week, in what is described as a “critical moment” in progress towards the first ever global treaty to combat plastic waste. Inger Andersen, director of the UN Environment Programme, said an agreement at the UN environment assembly could be the most important multilateral pact since the Paris climate accord in 2015.

Public disgust and impatience over the growing mountain of plastic waste has led to an unprecedented “degree of focus” that could see member states agreeing a blueprint for a legally binding treaty to control plastics “from source to sea”, she said.

“Public impatience is something that is very powerful,” Andersen told the Guardian. “The public has had enough. We are all dependent on plastic, but they obviously want to see some resolution of this issue.”

Earlier this month, the US, which generates more plastic waste per person than any other country in the world, joined with France in calling for a global agreement that recognises “the importance of [curbing \[plastic waste\] at its source.](#)”

A key goal of the fifth UN environment assembly, from 28 February to 2 March, is to thrash out broad terms for a global agreement on plastic pollution and to form an intergovernmental negotiating committee (INC) to broker a final deal. If member states can agree on a framework, the INC would then negotiate a final treaty to be signed.

[Only 9% of plastic waste](#) is recycled. It is difficult to recycle, slow to decay, expensive and polluting to burn, and breaks down into tiny particles that enter the food chain and cause harm to animals. These microplastics are ubiquitous, from the deep seafloor to the Arctic ice pack.

Addressing delegates on Wednesday, ahead of the summit, Andersen said: “The world is watching with anxiety but also with hope – because for the first time in history, we are seeing unprecedented global momentum to tackle the plague of plastic pollution.”

“From the 1950s to today, we have produced around 9bn tonnes, and 7bn tonnes of that is waste,” said Andersen. “That waste doesn’t disappear. We may feel good when we put it into the recycling bin, but it doesn’t all get recycled … 76% ends up in landfills and then the rest is incinerated, which causes toxic emissions as well as carbon dioxide.”

If the UN does not agree on a treaty to curb production and use of plastic, ocean plastic pollution could quadruple by 2050 and there will be widespread ecological damage, according to a WWF [report](#) earlier this month.

Reducing use of plastic, made from oil and gas, has implications for the climate as well as pollution levels, Andersen said.

“If we manage to land it [an agreement], it will be the biggest thing we have done as a global community in a new multilateral environment agreement.

We haven't dealt with this issue with this degree of focus before. It is a very significant moment, and it is absolutely critical."

This week, negotiators in Nairobi are looking at two main resolutions, one from Rwanda and Peru, which addresses the full lifecycle of plastics and has the backing of more than 70 countries, including 27 from the EU. The other, from Japan, backed by Cambodia, Palau and Sri Lanka, prioritises waste management interventions and limits its scope to marine litter.

More than 300 scientists and research organisations are calling on all UN member states to accept nothing less than the key elements of the stronger Rwanda-Peru resolution. And 90 business leaders, including fast-moving consumer goods companies, key producers of plastic waste, have also called for an agreement.

Andersen's wishlist for the agreement is that it covers the whole lifecycle of plastic, not just marine litter, includes monitoring and targets, and has a financial element, to help developing countries less able to recycle.

"What's interesting is that 90 CEOs have signed up, calling for a legally binding agreement. That includes PepsiCo and Coca-Cola and Procter & Gamble and Unilever. And then you ask, 'Well, why?' Because [of] shareholders and consumers, that's where the lever is. There are many, many more who want to see that shift."

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## Biodiversity

# Natural England chair backs ‘biodiversity net gain’ plan to boost wild areas

Tony Juniper says he has high hopes for scheme obliging new developments to factor in 10% nature increase



Juniper says his agency must act now to ‘increase the supply of nature’.  
Photograph: David Rose/Rex/Shutterstock

*[Patrick Barkham](#)*

*[@patrick\\_barkham](#)*

Fri 25 Feb 2022 02.00 EST

Demand for nature is exceeding supply but new wildlife areas can be created by regulations to ensure housing estates bring about “biodiversity net gain”, according to the chair of England’s nature watchdog.

Tony Juniper said the post-pandemic surge in people visiting wild places for their mental and physical wellbeing – and to walk lockdown puppies – was concentrating footfall in relatively few nature reserves, which were increasingly used [like public parks](#).

But Juniper, who has been reappointed as [chair of Natural England](#) for a second three-year term, said his agency must “increase the supply of nature”.

“Part of the challenge post-lockdown – the footfall in relatively few sites – makes you wonder how we’re going to cope with that increased demand for nature when nature is depleted and fragmented,” he said. “Visitor pressures on protected sites [such as national nature reserves] is a supply and demand question.”

Juniper, a former executive director of Friends of the Earth, has been credited with restoring morale – and adding [a 47% budget increase this year](#) – to beleaguered Natural England, which had been [decimated by a decade of cuts](#).

But after three years “[building the picture](#) and getting the toolkit and resources to deliver it” he said it was time for him and Natural England to deliver on “the gargantuan task of nature recovery” to help the government meet its ambitious wildlife targets.

The government’s target to [protect 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030](#) was “a big stretch”, he said. “We have targets coming on species abundance and nature recovery, and if we are going to get to those 2030 targets we need to start really hitting the ground now.”

The new “[public money for public goods](#)” [farm subsidy system](#), although not fully finalised, should help, according to Juniper, who said he was also hopeful that wildlife could be restored via biodiversity net gain, which from 2023 obliges every housing and infrastructural development to create 10% more nature than was there before.

One-fifth of Tory party donations [come from major developers](#) but Juniper said [biodiversity net gain was not](#) “just a licence to trash” wildlife. “It isn’t, because we’re not abandoning anything we already have in terms of the existing protections and tests [for wildlife] that need to go through the planning system,” he said.

He admitted there were “tensions” between developers providing nature-friendly spaces close to new homes or boosting wildlife in distant sites. “On the one hand we want more [bigger, better, more connected](#) nature-rich places, on the other we want to improve the environments around where people are living,” he said.

Speaking during a tour of 25 acres of arable farmland acquired for restoration to wildlife-rich chalk grassland by the charity [Cambridge Past, Present and Future](#), Juniper said it was important to plan a network of new nature-rich places close to new homes.

The restoration will increase [Wandlebury country park](#) by 20% but Cambridge’s population has grown by 20% this century, with an ongoing jobs, development and population boom.

“There’s limited semi-natural habitat around here so creating more of it to be able to serve that population makes sense,” said Juniper. “But doing it in the best possible way to get the biggest strategic impact is the key thing. We don’t want little pocket parks scattered all over the place randomly. We’d like to see the coherent construction of a [nature recovery network](#) which is not only taking account of biodiversity net gain but also the existing protected areas and blend that with the new agricultural schemes. It’s a jigsaw to piece together.”

While Juniper has helped win an enhanced role and funding for Natural England, and said he was hopeful of “further increases this year because the work is expanding”, [Natural England staff went on strike](#) in January over a decade of pay freezes and below-inflation rises.

Juniper said Natural England’s executive was doing all it could to push for more money for staff. “We’re very aware of the issues being raised by staff around pay. Since I’ve been there we’ve consistently done the maximum we

could each year in terms of staff rewards and pay but the big picture is constraint – we have the rules set by the Treasury.”

In his next three years, Juniper said he hoped to create more big national nature reserves and said the issue of out-of-control dogs in wild spaces was raised wherever he went. He said it was still possible to make more space for wildlife and for people.

“Everyone at Natural England is convinced it’s not nature recovery or public access – it’s both. With some limits during the bird breeding season, raising awareness and management, I think we can do that.”

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## Ukraine

# Ukraine: bombs and bureaucracy thwart couple's quest for UK spousal visa

Visa red tape sent Fozan Dar and Ukrainian wife Iryna on fruitless 12-hour round-journey to Kyiv just as Russian bombs began to fall

- [Russia-Ukraine crisis: live news](#)



Fozan and Iryna Dar, who took a midnight train to Kyiv for a biometric registration just as Russian rockets began targeting the city, then had to make their way back to Dnipro empty-handed. Photograph: Anton Skyba

*[Emma Graham-Harrison](#) in Kyiv*

Fri 25 Feb 2022 00.00 EST

A British man and his Ukrainian wife spent 12 hours shuttling between cities targeted by Russian bombs on Thursday in a desperate but failed bid to complete her biometric registration for a UK spousal visa.

Fozan and Iryna Dar left the central city of Dnipro, where they live, on a midnight train on Wednesday, in a last-ditch attempt to reach the processing centre in Kyiv. Soon after, the city's airport closed and bombing began, there and in other cities.

Their train shuddered to a halt in a distant suburb of the Ukrainian capital as the city was hit by Russian airstrikes. Eventually, the couple decided to get off the train there, pay more for a taxi than they had for the train tickets, and head to the biometric registration centre.

When they got there, a handwritten sign on the door said: “Today we aren’t working, sorry for the inconvenience.” They called the embassy, who first said the centre was open, then said there was nothing they could do, as the collection of biometric data had been contracted out.

Iryna had originally applied for a UK visitor’s visa two days before the British embassy advised citizens to leave [Ukraine](#), hoping to meet her husband’s extended family after Covid restrictions forced them to have a small wedding.

Because the embassy held her passport, the couple could not leave. Fozan studies medicine at a university that has already evacuated many of its international students, but he refused to go without his wife. “There is no way in hell I’m leaving her behind, it’s not up for debate. I have to protect her,” he said.

As the situation in Ukraine got more serious, the couple decided to switch their application and ask for a spousal visa.

Visitor visas cannot be used for more than six months. As warnings of invasion came, they feared it might not be possible to return to Dnipro for longer than that, and Iryna didn’t want to be in the UK on a restricted visa for an unknown period of time.

But the embassy kept her passport and told her that the biometric details collected for her visitor visa could not be used for her latest application, she said. After 10 days of increasingly desperate calls to a consular helpline, her passport was returned on Tuesday and they told to redo her biometric registration in Kyiv.

So they bought train tickets that would get them to the Ukrainian capital the first possible day: Thursday morning. “We were woken up on the train at 5am by friends calling, who said they were in hiding in the basement, and the shelling went on for over an hour,” Fozan said.

Despite those attacks, and fear of more violence, the couple have decided to return to Dnipro again, because it’s their home, they have family there, and they hope the university where Fozan studies might include them in any further evacuation.

As they waited for their train, the couple spent several hours as a kind of unofficial advice bureau to other foreigners milling around the station in desperation after tickets sold out.

“People noticed we were speaking English to each other, and I looked Ukrainian, so they asked us for help with things like reading the timetable,” she said.

The people they helped included Germans and Pakistanis and a man from Manchester who got trapped when his overnight layover coincided with Russia’s invasion, and his flight out of Kyiv was cancelled.

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## Immigration and asylum

# Charities urge UK to welcome refugees fleeing Ukraine conflict

Government says priority is to support British nationals and families in Ukraine first and people should go to first safe country

- [Ukraine invasion: latest updates](#)
- [Day two: what we know so far](#)



Refugees from Ukraine spend their first night in Poland at the train station in Przemysl. Photograph: Attila Husejnow/Sopa Images/Rex/Shutterstock

*Rachel Hall*

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Fri 25 Feb 2022 03.32 EST

Charities have urged the UK government to welcome refugees from the conflict in [Ukraine](#) on the same scale as the thousands of families from the Balkans resettled during the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s.

In a letter to [the Times](#), the charities, which include Save the Children, Amnesty International and the Refugee Council, asked the UK to lead international cooperation to “handle a sudden increase in the number of people forced to flee” the conflict, which threatens to be the most significant in Europe since the collapse of Yugoslavia.

The US has warned that 5 million people could be displaced by the conflict.

The UK government said its priority was to support British nationals and their families in Ukraine, and the government position was that people fleeing persecution should seek safety in the first safe country they reach.

An [estimated 100,000 Ukrainians](#) are already internally displaced after fleeing their homes to escape attack, while footage on social media shows lines of cars heading west into neighbouring Poland, Moldova, Romania, Slovakia and Hungary. The UN has appealed to neighbouring countries to keep their borders open to people seeking safety.

The letter from dozens of charities urged the government to implement a “well-resourced initiative working with councils across the country” to support Ukrainians in search of sanctuary, similar to the evacuation and resettlement programme during the Balkan conflict.

Visa applications from Ukraine for people who are not related to British nationals are currently suspended, meaning there is no legal route for them to enter the UK and claim asylum. A source told the BBC the government was “scenario-planning” for an increase in asylum seekers from Ukraine.

The charities said the crisis “illuminates the crucial flaw” in the nationality and borders bill, which discriminates against refugees who reach UK shores by illegal means, such as by boat across the channel.

The charities wrote: “We urge the government to rethink this harmful bill and uphold our proud record of helping those fleeing war and oppression.”

The prime minister has announced that the UK has 1,000 military troops on standby to support a humanitarian crisis in [Europe](#), should they need to be called upon.

On Thursday, the Home Office confirmed that work, study or visit visas would be temporarily extended for some Ukrainians in the UK, or they would be able to apply for family visas or points-based immigration without leaving the country. This would grant them additional time to potentially find a job and stay in the UK for longer.

Those already on the point-based system will be able to stay longer and seasonal agricultural workers will have their visas automatically extended until the end of the year.

A government spokesperson said: “Our priority has been to support British nationals and their families in Ukraine. This has included temporarily waiving application fees for those eligible under the family migration route, allowing entry for 12 months for others who did not meet the requirements and fast-tracking visas.

“We continue to work with our international partners on a range of issues as the situation develops, including migration.”

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## 2022.02.25 - Spotlight

- [Peter Sarsgaard ‘Have we reached superhero saturation? Probably’](#)
- [Going the distance The ‘Boris bikes’ being spotted around the world](#)
- [‘Her blood... his hands’ What the papers say about Russia’s invasion of Ukraine](#)
- [Politics Weekly UK Russia invades Ukraine](#)
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Interview

## Peter Sarsgaard: ‘Have we reached superhero saturation? Probably’

[Ryan Gilbey](#)



‘Movies have a responsibility to reflect something real about the concerns people face in their lives’ ... Peter Sarsgaard. Photograph: Taylor Jewell/Invision/AP

He may star in *The Batman*, but his taste is more arthouse thrillers and experimental theatre. He discusses overacting, bad accents – and being cast as a charmer by his wife

Fri 25 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

Peter Sarsgaard peers into the webcam, half-man, half-beard. “I’m in the Kenny Rogers camp right now,” says the 50-year-old actor. “I look like a dropout. Whenever I’m not working, I feel like I’m growing hair in case I need it for the next movie.”

His sleepy grin matches the rest of him: bed head, bed eyes, bed voice. It is this apparent languor that makes his glinting wit and flashes of cruelty stand out sharply on screen. He can be creep, charmer or both. “I don’t tell myself I’m the antagonist or the protagonist,” he says. “They can figure that out later.”

He has played, among other things, a magazine editor who unpicks his colleague’s lies (*Shattered Glass*), a suave adulterer (*An Education*) and a transphobic killer (*Boys Don’t Cry*). His wife, Maggie Gyllenhaal, with whom he has two children, recently directed him in *The Lost Daughter* as a professor who falls for a married academic, played by Jessie Buckley. “I was nervous, because I wanted to do a good job in her movie,” he says. “I didn’t want people to say: ‘Too bad she cast her husband as the object of desire, because that doesn’t make any sense.’” No one did. Although Sarsgaard has only a few minutes to persuade us that a woman would leave her family for him, he is convincingly shrewd, seductive and ravenous.

‘You feel really liberated as an actor wearing a mask’ ... watch the trailer for *The Batman*.

His tendency to seem half-asleep and harmless until – snap! – he has you in his teeth, like a Venus flytrap, serves him well in the world of *The Batman*. Robert Pattinson plays the caped vigilante, while Sarsgaard is Gil Coulson, the shady, shaven-headed district attorney of Gotham City. “Gil is leading a double life,” he says. “He is protective of his family, but he’s involved in

some things that are not legit.” The mix of sweet and sour appeals. “It creates more conflict. What if the biopic of Donald Trump showed how he made a damn good cherry pie on Thanksgiving, and sang songs with his family, but then he did all this other stuff?”

While filming [The Batman](#), he marvelled at Colin Farrell, who was unrecognisable beneath the Penguin’s prosthetics. “I said to Colin: ‘It’s a blast in there, isn’t it?’” Sarsgaard thought fondly of his own experience on The Green Lantern, in which he played a deranged scientist whose head swells up like a Macy’s Thanksgiving Day parade balloon. That maligned film gave him “the most variety I’ve ever had. Probably because I had this crazy 8lb [3.6kg] thing that took four hours to put on. You feel really liberated as an actor wearing a mask.” He is big on freedom and never discusses his creative choices before the camera rolls. “You need to give yourself agency as an actor. Don’t ask for a dancefloor – create one.”

He is no superhero devotee, although his wife appeared in an earlier Batman film (*The Dark Knight*), while her brother Jake was the villain in [Spider-Man: Far from Home](#). “So I’ve seen those,” he says. His viewing habits tend towards the esoteric. On one occasion, he was trusted by his high school friends to choose the evening’s entertainment and brought home Peter Greenaway’s transgressive arthouse thriller [The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover](#). “They had the beer ready. They were all set. Then afterwards, they were like: ‘Peter is *not* picking the movie any more.’” He giggles impishly.



'I wanted to do a good job in her movie' ... promoting *The Lost Daughter*, which was directed by his wife, Maggie Gyllenhaal. Photograph: Astrid Stawiarz/Getty Images for Netflix

The surprise is that an actor who has been vocal about his scepticism about superhero films has made two of them. In 2009, he declared himself "a little suspicious" of them: "I've always wondered, if there were no money in playing superheroes ... [whether] actors would still be as drawn to them."

How does he feel now? "The same way," he says. "But there's also the idea that we could do the most obscure, interesting thing in a basement somewhere – I joke with my wife that one day we'll just do experimental theatre in some socialist country – and yet you want to share what you do with the largest number of people."

Have we reached saturation point with superhero films? "Probably," he shrugs. "So, if you're going to do one, you'd better be damn sure Matt Reeves is directing it." Regardless of which film-maker is at the helm, the ubiquity of these blockbusters can only harm the kinds of films that Sarsgaard adores. When *The Batman* opens, it will swamp all available cinema screens; the latter-day equivalent of *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* won't get a look-in. "Right, right," he says. Then a note of

concern: “Do you think *The Lost Daughter* would be on the screen next to *The Batman*? ”

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Still, an actor needs to eat. Sarsgaard does a better job than many of balancing superior schlock – he menaced Jodie Foster in *Flightplan* and was superb as the credulous father of a violent adoptive daughter in the horror movie [Orphan](#) – with searching, socially conscious fare such as the tragic, Soviet-era true story [Mr Jones](#) and the eco-thriller *Night Moves*, as well as TV series including [The Looming Tower](#) (about the events leading up to 9/11) and [Dopesick](#) (the US opioid crisis). Unease sets in if he is required to be himself. “Doing this is foreign to me,” he says, referring to the interview. Acting, though, he has always adored. “Since the moment I started, I’ve found comfort in it.”

The roles themselves have rarely been soothing. For his film debut, he was murdered by Sean Penn in *Dead Man Walking*. “I wept during the audition. I think I wept because I wanted the part so badly.” Then he was John Malkovich’s son in *The Man in the Iron Mask*. “John asked me on set: ‘You know why they cast you, don’t you?’ I said: ‘No.’ He said: ‘It’s because you sound like me.’ I was like: ‘Oh. Bummer.’ I didn’t want that to be the reason.” Another high giggle slips out.

It is true that they sound alike. But was Malkovich screwing with him? “Maybe. His whole sense of humour is based on that tension.” Has Sarsgaard done that to other actors? “Probably. I’ve been in situations where I couldn’t figure out how to work with another actor – and I’m not somebody who gives up – so I’ll encourage us to hang out together to find a connection so that we can at least drag *something* on to the screen.” Any examples? “Nuh-uh,” he says with a lopsided smile. “But it was worth asking.”



‘It was challenging to give myself permission to be a dick’ ... Sarsgaard, Hilary Swank and Brendan Sexton in Boy’s Don’t Cry. Photograph: 20th Century Fox/Allstar

His breakthrough came in 1999 with Boys Don’t Cry, although the shoot got off to a shaky start. After Sarsgaard’s first few takes as the real-life murderer John Lotter, the director Kimberly Peirce took him aside. “I thought I’d hired a man,” she said. “Turns out I’ve hired a pussy. So what are you going to do about it?”

He gives a rueful look. “I was like: ‘Huh. OK. You wanna see a man?’ It struck me really hard. I’m not somebody who goes around like that character, lording it over people and being the sheriff in the room, so it was challenging for me to give myself permission to be a dick.”

His newfound swagger spilled over when he was out with Chloë Sevigny and the rest of the cast at a “not-fancy” bar in Texas. “We ordered margaritas. Chloë took a sip and said: ‘Oh, it’s too sweet,’ and everyone sat there bummed-out for a second. I picked up the tray of drinks, took it back to the bar and said: ‘These are awful. We want tequilas and we’re not paying for these.’ And I’m someone who never even returns corked wine.”

How long did he carry that confidence with him? “A while. What stays with you as an actor after you’ve finished work are the things that are enjoyable. I don’t sit around trying to hold on to stuff from my work day. But things like *that* will stick.” He makes it sound like the body drawing nutrients out of food. “It definitely is. When you’re deciding whether to play a role, you ask questions such as: ‘Does this pose an interesting challenge?’ and: ‘Will it enable me to be a better actor, or to be wealthier?’ Hopefully, it checks several boxes. It’s not just: ‘Yay, I’m richer,’ or: ‘Yay, I’m doing experimental theatre in some country no one’s ever heard of.’”



‘Since the moment I started, I’ve found comfort in acting’ ... with Carey Mulligan in *An Education*. Photograph: BBC Films/Allstar

Unusually among actors, he enjoys watching himself on screen. “That’s not to say I could direct it while I act, but I know what I think works.” In a word: understatement. “I’d be like: ‘This moment’s good, but get rid of the part where I react to the big thing.’” Take *The Man in the Iron Mask*, in which his character is killed by a cannonball.

“They’re waving a flamethrower in front of me to make this blinding heat and they want me to act like I can see the cannonball coming. Now, that is never going to look OK to me. What they wanted was *this*.” He widens his

eyes in horror. “Whereas, if I were directing the movie, it would be more like *this*.” He stares blankly at the laptop screen. He doesn’t even blink.

It reminds him of Liam Neeson’s advice on the set of Kathryn Bigelow’s *K-19: The Widowmaker*. Sarsgaard’s character had to embark on an apparent suicide mission to repair a nuclear reactor; Neeson suggested beforehand that he shouldn’t overdo the fear, since everyone in the audience would already be scared on his behalf. “That movie was a real acting lesson for me, to be around Harrison Ford and Liam and see how they approached all this technical stuff,” he says. “None of us knew what the hell we were saying: ‘Shut down No 3 generator, blah-blah-blah.’ Do you give up on that or do you try to find some meaning for yourself? Well, everything has meaning to Harrison Ford. I never saw him throw something away.”

Not even his Russian accent? “No one *wants* to do an accent,” he protests. “Harrison and I did midwestern Russian. Liam did Irish Russian.” When I mention that Dennis Lim in the *Village Voice* described Ford’s performance as “acting without a *nyet*”, he roars with laughter. “Oh my God! That’s cruel. But awesome. Anyway, you could say the same about me in that movie.”

One of Sarsgaard’s pieces of advice to young actors is: have a point of view. What is his? “I think movies have a responsibility to reflect something real about the concerns people face in their lives. If you can make that compelling, it’s going to be worthwhile to me. But I also like movies that are timeless, that exist outside social commentary.” Such as? “My wife’s movie. I was on a talkshow and they said: ‘Can you explain what’s happening before we show the clip?’ I was like: ‘Nuh-uh. I don’t think I can.’ That’s the sort of movie I love. One that you can’t set up.” He is right: *The Lost Daughter* is complex, enigmatic and resistant to precis. Rather like him.

The Batman is released in Australia on 3 March and in the UK and the US on 4 March

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[TfL](#)

## Going the distance: the ‘Boris bikes’ being spotted around the world

Stolen London hire-scheme bicycles sighted in unlikely destinations as annual thefts rise



The bikes have been spotted in countries including Australia and Jamaica.  
Photograph: Akira Suemori/Rex/Shutterstock

*[Peter Walker](#)*

*[@peterwalker99](#)*

Fri 25 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

They have been a feature of London’s streets for nearly 12 years: the docked public bikes for sharing that are billed as one of the easiest and quickest ways for people to make shorter journeys. Or in some cases, it seems, considerably longer ones.

Among the hundreds of bikes that go permanently missing from the 14,000-plus fleet every year, a handful have been tracked down to distinctly non-London locations, including Australia, the Gambia and Turkey, a freedom of information request has disclosed.

Other foreign locations in which the bikes have been officially spotted are Jamaica, Romania and the Republic of Ireland.

According to [the FoI response](#) from Transport for London (TfL), which operates the Santander Cycles scheme, the rogue Irish bike was recovered with the help of garda officers, while the British Transport Police has helped to bring back models from Cornwall, Southend-on-Sea and Brighton. There was no news about the fate of the others.

### Sightings of the bikes have been reported around the world

TfL is reluctant to discuss the theft of what many still refer to as “Boris bikes” after the London mayor in office at [the time they were introduced](#), even though the scheme originated from Boris Johnson’s predecessor, Ken Livingstone.

While the London hire scheme is seen as a huge success, [recording its 100 millionth journey](#) just over a year ago, the number of bikes lost permanently is gradually rising, albeit from a total number that has more than doubled since it was launched.

In 2013, the first year records are available, 108 bikes went missing – this rose to 950 bikes in 2020 and 851 in the first seven months of last year.

TfL declined to give further details about the particularly exotic places in which some bikes were found, beyond to say that they were identified through a mixture of reports from the public, social media and GPS. From the start of 2020, [TfL](#) has trialled GPS tracking for some of the bikes as a way of reducing overall theft numbers.

However, details about some of the examples have previously emerged. Footage from Jamaica showing one of the bikes, in the red livery of

Santander – the bank that sponsors the scheme, has been widely shared on social media in recent weeks.

The example from the Gambia appears to be [a much earlier case](#). In 2013, a staff member from the charity Oxfam in the west African country took a photo of one of the bikes, in the blue colours of then sponsor Barclays, being ridden down a dirt road. There was speculation that the bike could have been donated but it was unclear.

Theft and vandalism have created a significant barrier to other bike share schemes in the UK, particularly companies that offered dockless bikes that could be left on the pavement or street after a ride.

In 2018, the Chinese firm Mobike [pulled out of Manchester](#) because of what it called “unsustainable” losses from theft and vandalism. It has since ceased all UK operations, but for wider commercial reasons.

In contrast, the TfL scheme requires customers to take bikes from fixed docking points, using either membership or a bank card, and charges up to £300 if a bike is not returned.

The scheme has proved increasingly popular, in part due to the construction of more cycling infrastructure around London, but also, more recently, because of people avoiding public transport due to Covid. The system [reported a record number](#) of 10.9m hires in 2021.

David Eddington, TfL’s head of cycle hire, said: “We take cycle theft extremely seriously and are taking measures to deter it, including installing GPS trackers on bikes, installing cameras at select docking stations and checking equipment at docking stations to ensure bikes are returned properly.”

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/feb/25/going-the-distance-the-boris-bikes-being-spotted-around-the-world>

## Media

# ‘Her blood ... his hands’: what the papers say about Russia’s invasion of Ukraine

Photograph of teacher bloodied by Russian attack on Ukraine dominates front pages as Putin sends his troops to war

- [Russia-Ukraine invasion latest news: follow live updates](#)



A photograph of one woman bloodied by an attack during Russia’s invasion of Ukraine featured on front pages around the world. Composite: Various

*[Martin Farrer](#)*

Thu 24 Feb 2022 20.50 EST

The front pages in Britain and around the world are devoted to the shocking events in Ukraine, with graphic images of the destruction unleashed by

## Vladimir Putin.

A photograph of a woman with a bloodied and bandaged head in the wake of a Russian attack dominates the front of the **Guardian** with the headline “Putin invades”.

Guardian front page, Friday 25 February 2022: Putin invades  
[pic.twitter.com/byor4AqWCU](https://pic.twitter.com/byor4AqWCU)

— The Guardian (@guardian) [February 24, 2022](#)

The picture appears set to become a defining image of the conflict and features on many other front pages, including the **Mirror** which juxtaposes the injured civilian with the “power-crazed” Russian president: “Her blood ... his hands”.

Tomorrow's front page: Her blood... his hands  
[#TomorrowsPapersToday](#) [https://t.co/UL7tQTkp9h](https://https://t.co/UL7tQTkp9h)  
[pic.twitter.com/KsvnZ8HkkQ](https://pic.twitter.com/KsvnZ8HkkQ)

— The Mirror (@DailyMirror) [February 24, 2022](#)

The **Sun** goes for almost exactly the same formulation with “Her blood on his hands”.

On tomorrow's front page: [pic.twitter.com/UcUucLehly](https://pic.twitter.com/UcUucLehly)

— The Sun (@TheSun) [February 24, 2022](#)

The closeup image of the injured woman is used in the same way by the German tabloid, **Bild**, which goes with the headline: “Putins blood”.



Photograph: Bild

The **Express** also has the picture and the headline “Redrawing map of Europe in blood”.

Friday's Express: “Redrawing map of Europe in blood” [#BBCPapers](#) [#TomorrowsPapersToday](#) <https://t.co/vAFZSsJ5be> <pic.twitter.com/GBTLrIeCrS>

— BBC News (UK) (@BBCNews) [February 24, 2022](#)

The **Daily Mail**, meanwhile, reports that “Putin to seize capital in days”, and also features a photograph of a mother and her young child as they attempt to flee Kyiv by bus.

Friday's [@DailyMailUK](#) [#MailFrontPages](#) <pic.twitter.com/GaTRugxkFU>

— Daily Mail U.K. (@DailyMailUK) [February 24, 2022](#)

The **Telegraph** goes with the headline “New cold war as Putin strikes”, and also carries an opinion piece by its columnist Fraser Nelson calling this

“Europe’s 9/11”. He says “naivety” has left us exposed to the threat of Putin, which was hiding in plain sight.

□The front page of tomorrow's Daily Telegraph:

'New cold war as Putin strikes'[#TomorrowsPapersToday](#)

Sign up for the Front Page newsletter<https://t.co/x8AV4Oomry>  
[pic.twitter.com/6YRooTgjTJ](https://pic.twitter.com/6YRooTgjTJ)

— The Telegraph (@Telegraph) [February 24, 2022](#)

The **Financial Times'** splash headline says “Putin’s forces storm Ukraine” and it also carries a story on its front noting that former leaders of Italy and Austria are among those now resigning from the boards of Russian companies.

Tomorrow's [#FT](#) Front Page ..  
incl. story on former leaders resigning from Russian boards.

btw, [#BP](#)'s CEO currently remains on [#Rosneft](#) board<https://t.co/ZknZ1f54yd#BP> is “one of the biggest foreign investors in [#Russia](#)”  
& owns 19.75% of Rosneft shares <https://t.co/NCTcUTbXx0>  
[pic.twitter.com/TeUCDA0LUE](https://pic.twitter.com/TeUCDA0LUE)

— Charterhouse Square (@CharterhouseSq) [February 24, 2022](#)

The **Metro** has “War in Europe” which is a label that translates very well across the continent. Among the other papers choosing this stark headline is **Süddeutsche Zeitung**: “Krieg in Europa”.



Photograph: SD

The French paper **Libération** has a similarly simple headline on its front page laid over a picture of a huge explosion somewhere in Ukraine: “L’impensable”, it says, “the unthinkable” fact of a major war in Europe.

À la une de Libération ce vendredi :

□ L’impensable <https://t.co/nj2k4mQp7h> #Ukraine #Russie  
[pic.twitter.com/o6TXKeVNHM](https://pic.twitter.com/o6TXKeVNHM)

— Libération (@libe) [February 24, 2022](#)

In Spain, **El País**’s front page says “Putin lanza un ataque masivo contra Ucrania”, or, “Putin launches massive attack against Ukraine”.

The American papers managed to report the story in their Thursday editions and the New York Times’ headline reads “Russia attacks as Putin warns world; Biden vows to hold him accountable”.

The front page of The New York Times for Feb. 24, 2022.

Follow our updates on the Ukraine crisis.<https://t.co/iby21x1qmI>  
[pic.twitter.com/VHhRx258hO](https://pic.twitter.com/VHhRx258hO)

— The New York Times (@nytimes) [February 24, 2022](#)

The **LA Times** says “Ukraine under attack”.

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2022/feb/25/her-blood-his-hands-what-the-papers-say-about-russias-invasion-of-ukraine>

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**Politics Weekly UK**

**Politics**

# Russia invades Ukraine

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## You be the judgeRelationships

# You be the judge: is it OK for my boyfriend to keep butter in the cupboard?

She thinks butter belongs in the fridge; he thinks it's fine sitting out. 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

Fri 25 Feb 2022 03.00 EST

## The prosecution: Ruby

*My boyfriend insists on keeping butter in the 'pantry'. To me it's strange and unhygienic*

My boyfriend Stewart has grown up keeping the butter in the cupboard. I fundamentally disagree with this – in my opinion, it should always be refrigerated.

We moved in together five months ago, and Stewart would always put the butter in a little cupboard in the kitchen. He occasionally refers to it as “the pantry”, which I find hilarious. What are we, Victorians? When he tried to store the butter there the first time, I immediately challenged him and said it belonged in the fridge.

He said: “What are you talking about? Butter stored at room temperature is perfectly fine, I’ve always done this.” He thinks that it tastes better on his toast when it’s softer and more spreadable. But dairy products degrade quicker when left at room temperature.

It’s now an ongoing battle – with the butter moving back and forth between the two locations

### *Ruby*

I was adamant that the butter wouldn’t live in the “pantry”, it’s disgusting. But when I put the butter in the fridge, the next day I’d discover that Stewart had moved it back into the cupboard. It’s now an ongoing battle, with the butter moved back and forth between the two locations. I do most of the cooking in the house, so I feel I should have the final say.

When summer comes, I’m worried that the butter will be disgusting. I’ve never come across rancid butter and I don’t want to. Stewart likes a more traditional way of living: he wanted this flat because it comes with a little garden where he grows vegetables. But a fridge is a great invention and Stewart needs to use ours more.

When we started dating a few years ago, I realised Stewart was a bit posher than me. When we moved in together it became more apparent. He likes to buy scones and crumpets – I never eat them. He also grew up on a farm and his family kept their butter and eggs in a big pantry, which is why he wants to do the same. I’ve seen his family let their milk sit out all day on the table

in a little jug. Leaving perishables out of the fridge isn't cute, it's unhygienic and poses a health hazard. Most people I meet agree with me.

## The defence : Stewart

*It's fine to keep butter in the cupboard. Ruby should compromise now that we share a home*

When we first moved in together, Ruby couldn't believe that I didn't refrigerate certain dairy items. She was like, "You're disgusting. You're going to make us ill." I found that reaction a bit much. I told her, "There's no issue here. Let's be logical about this," but she wouldn't listen.

It's perfectly fine to keep butter at room temperature: families have done this for generations, including mine. No one has ever died.

Ruby and I also mainly buy salted butter, which is extra safe because the salt adds additional protection against bacterial growth. We don't live in a hot country. Ruby needs to realise there are different ways of living. She should be more open to compromise now that we share a home.

Ruby often jokes that this issue reveals our different class backgrounds, but I don't think that's strictly true

*Stewart*

I don't take her opposition to my butter-storing habits personally, but I have grown up keeping butter, eggs and some cakes and pies in the cupboard instead of the fridge. It's a matter of taste: pastries dry out more quickly when refrigerated, and room-temperature butter spreads more easily on bread.

I admit that I have been a bit petty and moved the butter back into the cupboard after Ruby put it in the fridge, but only because Ruby doesn't eat as much butter as I do. When she cooks, she uses low-fat oils as she's more health-conscious. I eat buttered toast nearly every morning. Why is she so bothered about my butter? Leave it alone.

Ruby often jokes that this issue reveals our different class backgrounds, but I don't think that's strictly true. I'm not from old, posh money, I just grew up on a farm where we tried not to waste food and stored perishables differently.

There's nothing wrong with calling our little cupboard a "pantry" either; that's what my parents and grandparents called it. I'm not sure why this is so amusing to Ruby. She needs to adapt to my way of living and realise that keeping butter and eggs in the cupboard won't kill her.

In the alt text AND caption, copy and paste: Sign up to our Inside Saturday newsletter for an exclusive behind the scenes look at the making of the magazine's biggest features, as well as a curated list of our weekly highlights.

## The jury of Guardian readers

### **Is the fridge the best place for butter?**

Stewart, let's start by looking at what butter is – a block of old lumpy cream – so we are already on a back foot here, aren't we? Don't tell me that you can't taste the cheesiness when the butter is so soft that it needs a spoon. Eww. Get it in the fridge, lad.

**Joni, 49**

It seems that both parties' strong feelings are linked to their sense of identity. But ultimately Stewart, as chief butter eater, should have the final say. To keep the peace, I suggest two packs of butter, one kept in the pantry and the other in the fridge.

**Jessamyn, 39**

Is this really about the butter, or is it about somebody trying to prove they're right? The science of butter backs Stewart; Ruby is objectively wrong. Ruby talks in absolutes, and belittles her partner. Won't somebody please think of the toast!?

**Jack, 28**

I'm with Stewart. If Ruby doesn't use the butter, it shouldn't matter where Stewart keeps it. And Ruby says she's never encountered rancid butter – which suggests that Stewart's approach is working for now.

**Melanie, 63**

Ruby is wrong. I also live in a cool climate, and store butter in the cupboard. The simple solution is for Stewart to keep his butter in the pantry and Ruby hers in the fridge. Ruby should also examine her defensiveness about Stewart being posh.

**Colleen, 59**

## You be the judge

So now you can be the judge, click on the poll below to tell us: should Stewart stop leaving the butter in the cupboard?

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

**The poll will close on 3 March at 9AM GMT**

## Last week's result

We asked if Peter should keep his [motorbike inside the house](#), something that annoys his wife, Sandy.

75% of you said no – Peter is guilty

25% of you said yes – Peter is innocent

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2022/feb/25/you-be-the-judge-is-it-ok-for-my-boyfriend-to-keep-butter-in-the-cupboard>

## 2022.02.25 - Coronavirus

- [Lockdown lifestyles How has Covid changed lives in the UK?](#)
- [Live Covid: US set to ease mask guidelines; Hong Kong building more isolation facilities](#)
- ['People won't know if they are infected' Britons on the end of Covid controls](#)

## Health & wellbeing

# Lockdown lifestyles: how has Covid changed lives in the UK?

Nearly two years after the first lockdown was implemented, legal restrictions related to coronavirus are finally being lifted. Here we chart what has changed in people's lives

[Ashley Kirk](#), [Pamela Duncan](#), [Georgina Quach](#), [Miles Probyn](#), [Pablo Gutiérrez](#) and [Rachel Hall](#)

Fri 25 Feb 2022 03.43 EST

It's nearly two years since the prime minister, Boris Johnson, announced the first national Covid lockdown and, for many Britons, life feels close to normal.

As of Thursday, there are no longer any restrictions in England – no legal requirement to wear masks or to self-isolate after a positive Covid test. But have our lives changed in other ways that will outlive the pandemic? Have our habits changed for good?

## Working from home

*The pandemic has given us a new shorthand: WFH. And it's here to stay, with one-third of people still working from home at least some of the time. Many companies are now planning to introduce a hybrid*

## ***model that combines days in the office with time spent working at home.***

The government's guidance that Britons should work from home where possible was scrapped in January after a [few false starts](#). But not everyone is in a rush back to conversations around the water cooler.

People in the UK are still spending more time at home and less time in offices, according to data from [Google's community mobility reports](#).

There has been some recovery in footfall at stations and workplaces since the first lockdown. However, the latest figures for the week to 11 February 2022 show that activity still remains 29% and 21% below pre-pandemic levels.

### [Google mobility line chart](#)

[ONS](#) data shows that around a third of working adults did their jobs from home in 2022. That figure fell from 36% at the end of January to 31% in mid-February, suggesting that some employers are encouraging their employees to return to the office.

Many employers plan to implement a hybrid model in future to respond to their employees' demands for more flexible schedules following the pandemic. Daniel Wheatley, a researcher specialising in work-life balance at Birmingham University, thinks this is a good idea, since workers benefit from extra personal time and employers from improved morale and retention.

But he said this would only work in the long term if employers redesign jobs, for instance by focusing office time on collaboration and teamwork and home-working on task completion, and if they trust their employees to perform.

### [ONS line chart of % WFH](#)

Some employers are likely to be resistant, especially those who are driven by “micro-management and assumptions that effort has to be extracted from

workers rather than them offering it willingly”, he said.

Although the exact blend of home and office is a personal preference, one thing is clear: working from home will be a feature of some jobs for a long time after the pandemic has ended.

## Escape to the country?

***The pandemic prompted an exodus to the country as people working from home became eager for bigger living and garden spaces, which resulted in rural house prices and rents shooting up. However, there are early signs that people are returning to cities.***

Covid and lockdowns made many rethink their work/life arrangements. Rural house prices in England and Wales soared, resulting in fears of an affordability crisis in some areas.

This was especially true of London-dwellers who fled the capital in large numbers and helped push prices outside the capital to record levels. Londoners spent an average of £487,000 on properties outside the capital last year, according to estate agents Hamptons.

### Bar chart of Londoners moving to countryside

They also benefited from a temporary [stamp duty holiday](#) introduced by the government to buoy the housing market after the first lockdown, which gave would-be movers an incentive to buy in late 2020 and early 2021.

David Fell, a senior analyst with Hamptons, said 2021 marked “the single largest migration out of London in a generation”.

He predicted that this year numbers would return closer to 2019 levels as a result of fewer sales taking place and a lack of available countryside

properties, but that they would remain higher than pre-Covid times. “We’re also expecting the price gap between London and the commuter belt to continue shrinking, meaning London equity will go less far than five years ago,” he said.

Fell says early data from 2022 indicates that London’s first-time buyers are more open to moving further out to take advantage of cheaper property prices as they spend more time working from home. Just under half of first-time buyers living in London have bought outside the capital in the year to date, more than double the proportion 10 years ago.

While a long-term exodus from big cities may not materialise, the shift from offices to home working may shape the future of the housing market.

## Struggling or saving?

*While lockdown allowed people in stable office jobs to work from home and save money on commuting and sandwich-shop lunches, others burned through their savings. The result is a growing divide in the financial health of the nation, with more families than ever living in the red.*

With lockdown spelling a temporary end to restaurants, pubs, clubs, cultural venues and foreign travel, lots of people unexpectedly found it easier to save.

Estimates by Capital Economics and Refinitiv suggest Britons collectively saved £4.6bn a month in 2019. But between March 2020 and the end of 2021, the average amount saved each month climbed to 2.6 times the 2019 average.

[Bar chart of UK excess savings](#)

However, these gains were far from universal. A [Bank of England survey](#) from autumn 2020 found that 42% of workers in high-income households had increased their savings since the beginning of the pandemic compared with just 22% of those on low incomes.

Jonquil Lowe, an economist specialising in personal finance at the Open University, said the reason for this disparity was that low-income households spend a higher proportion of their income on essentials, which can't be cut back. [ONS data](#) suggests the poorest tenth of households usually spend 43% of their income on food, housing and bills, compared with 24% for the richest tenth.

This has “exacerbat[ed] the inequalities that already existed in the UK economy” and the savings gap would only grow wider in the coming years given rampant price inflation, she said.

### [Bar chart of pandemic savings change by socioeconomic group](#)

Lowe said that constructive solutions to the savings gap would be for the government to pay for the pandemic by taxing the income and wealth of richer people, instead of replicating the response to the 2008 financial crisis and cutting benefits, public services and public sector pay, or offering “hollow advice” to poorer households to build up their savings.

“Despite being battered by Brexit and the pandemic, the UK is still one of the wealthiest economies in the world and it is shameful that 11.7 million are living in absolute poverty,” she said.

## **International travel**

*Foreign holidays were banned or curtailed for much of the pandemic, while business travel ground to a halt. Will our taste for domestic holidays and Zoom conferences endure?*

Alongside hospitality, travel was one of the sectors hardest hit by the pandemic, underlined this week by Heathrow's passenger numbers falling to their [lowest level in almost 50 years](#).

Planes were grounded in early 2020 as countries imposed tough international travel restrictions. This was followed by constantly shifting international travel policies, such as testing regimes and the UK's traffic-light system, that confused many travellers.

Daily UK flights – both international and domestic – stood at an average of 664 between April and June 2020, according to [ONS](#) data. This was just 10% of the daily average for the same months in 2019.

Two years on, flight numbers have not returned to previous levels. The latest ONS data shows that in the month to 13 February 2022, there was a daily average of 3,067 flights. While this is an improvement on 865 in that same period in 2020, it is still just 61% of the pre-pandemic level of the 2019 figure of 5,039.

### [Line chart of UK international flights](#)

Indeed, industry predictions suggest that there won't be a return to pre-Covid numbers until 2023-24. Leon Davis, an academic at Teesside University researching the impact of Covid on tourism, said that although the UK government was predicting an earlier return, consumer confidence had been knocked by the Omicron variant, and people remain confused by countries' differing entry rules.

“This will continue in the winter of 2022/23 as it is highly unlikely there will be a full global lifting of restrictions, and particularly if cases rise in different parts of the globe,” he said.

Lots of people opted for UK-based holidays during the pandemic, and a 25% increase in visitors is expected this year compared with 2019, but Davis expects that the cost of UK travel and accommodation, and its limited availability, will encourage people to return to overseas trips.

While lots of businesses have adapted to hybrid conference models, many will return to in-person attendance since this tends to be better for marketing and advertising, he added.

## Shopping habits

***The pandemic has changed the way we shop. More people do grocery shopping online and demand for delivery services has shot up. Since lockdown has lifted, footfall in shops remains below pre-pandemic levels.***

Brits already loved to shop online pre-pandemic, but during lockdown – when non-essential businesses were closed and we were advised to avoid leaving home – ordering groceries and luxuries online became even more popular.

While official figures show a recent fall, [online sales still account for over a quarter of total retail sales](#). According to the ONS, online sales jumped from 21% to 31.5% of total retail sales between the first and second quarter of 2020. This peaked at 36% in early 2021 after England's third national lockdown. This was the highest level recorded since the data was first collected in 2007.

### [Line chart of internet sales as a share of total retail sales](#)

In January, the share of internet sales within retail fell to 27%, continuing a broad downward trend since its peak in January 2021.

Retail analyst Bryan Roberts said the popularity of online shopping was plateauing as people returned to their pre-pandemic behaviours. “A decent chunk of shoppers will continue to allocate more of their spending online, but we need to remember that shopping is also a fundamental leisure

activity, with trips to high streets and shopping centres still part of people's routines," he said.

"Some of the online shift, both in food and non-food, will be permanent. Many shoppers tried online food for the first time and will have liked what they found in terms of convenience. Other shoppers will have joined schemes like Amazon Prime and will continue to shop for the majority of general merchandise through Amazon and other retailers.

"That said, online will continue to decelerate as people return to pre-pandemic behaviours such as trawling round the shops at the weekend. Also, online is supremely convenient if you're at home seven days a week, less so if you're back in the office three or four days a week."

## Not going out

*We watched more TV than ever before, and industry experts warn that cinemas and theatres may never be as popular again. Meanwhile, people replaced pubs and restaurants with home cooking and takeaways. Will they ever go back?*

Lockdown massively disrupted our social lives, with after-work pints, restaurant visits, cinema trips and music gigs all ending abruptly.

Data published by the ONS from OpenTable show that bookings evaporated in March 2020, then rose as lockdown was lifted and reached a 2020 peak at the time of Rishi Sunak's "eat out to help out" scheme in late August. They dried up again in December as Delta hit, before recovering slowly but steadily as summer 2021 approached. In mid-December 2021, there was a sharp dip when people cancelled Christmas bookings due to the Omicron variant.

The latest data indicates that Britons have fully regained their appetite for indoor dining, with bookings exceeding 2019 levels before and after the Omicron peak.

Cinemas also suffered during the pandemic. After several months of no attendance as a result of their forced closure, data from the [UK Cinema Association](#) shows that they enjoyed a bounceback in December, with monthly attendance figures exceeding 13.5m. Yet this represents just 73% of the audience cinemas attracted in December 2019, and ticket sales in January were only 49% of those sold in January 2020.

### Line chart of cinema attendances

Cinemas' losses were streaming platforms' gains as viewers shifted indoors.

Streaming was already growing in popularity pre-pandemic with a total of 24m subscriptions to platforms in 2019, rising to 33m a year later. Projections by Ampere suggest that figure will rise further, boosted by the UK launch of Disney+ in the first national lockdown in March 2020.

### Bar chart of streaming subscriptions

As TV critic and broadcaster Scott Bryan notes, “the pandemic resulted in five years’ worth of trends in about one year”.

“Streaming services saw substantial growth as many of us were having to spend our days staying in. Disney+ and Netflix were clearly big winners and there’s also been a change of mindset. We’re now more used to watching television when it suits us, rather than rotating our lives around the television schedules.”

However, he noted that cost of living increases, plus the fact that people are now going out a bit more, mean we might not be willing to pay for this into the future.

“Even though it is easier to unsubscribe from streaming services rather than cable or satellite, it can become prohibitively expensive to pay for them all individually. The growth of some streaming services has also slowed to a

crawl, with Netflix announcing underwhelming growth in late 2021 and projecting equally underwhelming growth in 2022.”

## Zooming in

***Physical distancing rules meant that we socialised a lot less during the pandemic. Video calls replaced face-to-face meetings for work, while lots of social activities moved outdoors or online. But was any of this good for us?***

When the first lockdown hit and people were asked to stay indoors, most people drastically cut down the number of people they encountered unless they worked in a frontline job.

Some of the biggest winners in this brave new world were video-conferencing platforms, with one company ruling them all: Zoom. As people were asked to reduce face-to-face contact, the [company's fortunes](#) went through the roof, although they have since [declined](#) as normal life has resumed.

While many people have been able to continue socialising during the pandemic by shifting communication online, psychologist Doreen Dodgen-Magee warns that this was not the case for everybody, which could have a lasting impact on mental health.

“Technology enabled people to connect regardless of where they live, thus expanding social circles. But for those sheltering entirely alone, uncomfortable in the digital domain or lacking reliable access to it, feelings of loneliness have grown since Covid,” she said.

[Line chart of share of people socialising indoors](#)

She added that as our work and social activity migrated to Zoom, the lines between our in-person and digital lives increasingly became blurred.

“We’ve been able to toggle between digital spaces – between school or work screens, video games and Netflix – but doing so impacts the way our brain can help us get settled and focus on one thing at a time. We’ve also overstimulated ourselves, when what we really thought we were doing was soothing ourselves.”

Many people were glad to see the back of Zoom catch-ups as restrictions on socialising were eased, since most people do not consider them a genuine replacement for in-person contact, though people who are vulnerable or anxious about Covid have been left with no other option.

Two years later, most people are gradually returning to face-to-face contact, according to [ONS data](#). Although no comparison is available with levels before the pandemic, the figures show that most people are happy to meet with friends and family indoors.

But Darian Nugent, senior strategic foresight writer at futures consultancy the Future Laboratory, says that a widespread shift in our work, living and socialising routines means that “the future of our working lives is a hybrid one”.

“Across Europe, the majority of those that adopted a hybrid routine note huge improvements in their flexibility, free time and relaxation, and its technology – and the growing sophistication of platforms like Zoom and Teams – that is really facilitating that.

“IRL meetings and conferences will return – these are still crucial to our relationships and wellbeing – ... [but] businesses know that virtual processes have allowed them to make huge strides in accessibility, inclusivity and global reach.”

## Looking to the future

***Many people planned for the worst during the pandemic, with a sharp rise in the numbers writing a will. With restrictions lifted and the prime minister heralding a new era of living with Covid, ONS data shows people are still not optimistic about the future, with a third saying they expect the pandemic to continue for another year.***

With the vaccine rollout at the start of 2021 came hope that the pandemic would soon come to an end. However, an ONS survey designed to capture the public's attitudes throughout the pandemic shows that this optimism has since dissipated. The [latest data from the ONS](#) shows that, by the year's end, more people thought it would take over a year for life to return to normal than in 2020.

[ONS data](#) also revealed that, in the two weeks leading to 13 January 2022, 13% of British adults thought life would never return to normal, while just 7% thought it would take less than six months for life to return to normal.

### [ONS pandemic polling chart](#)

One indicator of the pessimism felt by people during the pandemic was how many wrote their wills to ensure that if they died people would know what to do and where to distribute their savings.

According to [Farewill](#), which says it is the UK's biggest will writer, the number of Britons making financial plans for after they die almost tripled in 2020. The biggest increase was among under-35s, with a 23% increase in will-writing among Generation Z, those aged 10-25.

Dan Garrett, CEO and co-founder of online will provider Farewill, said: “Writing your will is a task people always want to put off – but the pandemic gave people a reason to plan their will and funeral, because they were worried about dying. This will have an irreversible and positive impact on people’s attitudes towards death, dispelling the stigma.”

Farewill analysis found a strong connection between news events and will writing. For example, Prince Philip's admission to hospital last year resulted in a 148% increase in people penning their wills, and the day the most wills were written in 2020 was when Boris Johnson was taken into intensive care. Charity donations in people's wills surged, too.

"People are being more generous and selfless than they were before. During the pandemic, most conversations were about protecting other people," said Garrett.

## Methodological notes

Working from home: [Google's community mobility reports](#) compare each day's movement to a "baseline day", which represents a normal value for that day of the week. This is the median value from the five-week period from 3 January to 6 February 2020.

Not going out: the streaming platforms covered by the Ampere analysis were Lovefilm, Netflix, Now TV, Amazon, Disney Life, ITV Hub+, Discovery+, Disney+ and BritBox.

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[Coronavirus live](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

## Covid: Sweden ‘should have clamped down harder’ as pandemic hit; US set to ease mask guidelines – as it happened

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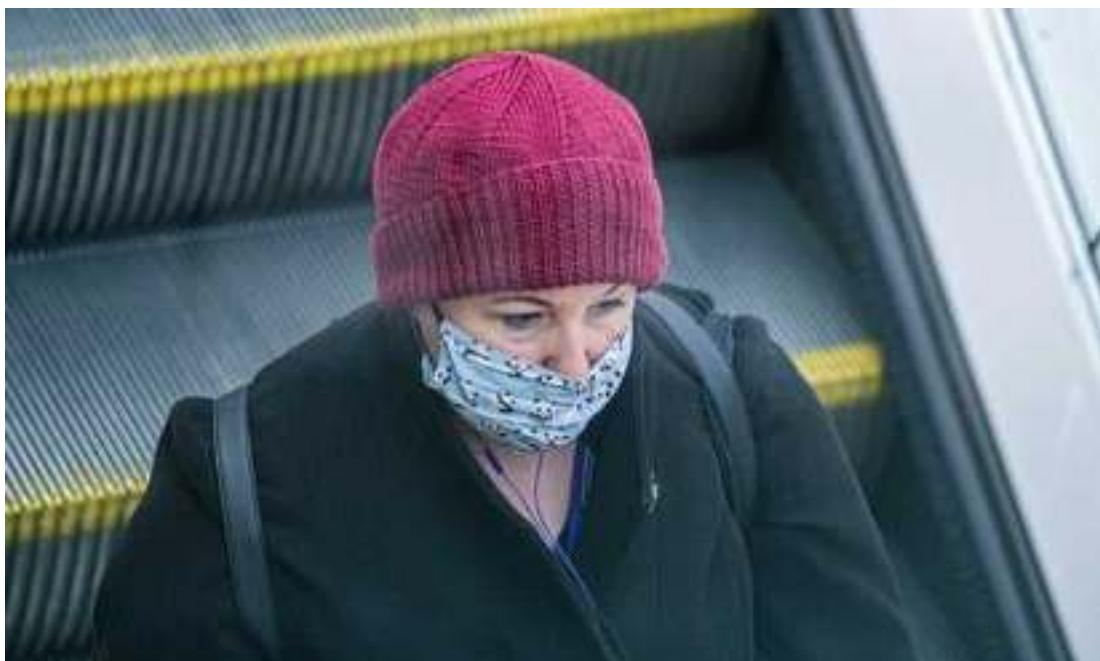
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## Coronavirus

# ‘People won’t know if they are infected’: Britons on the end of Covid controls

As the government continues to lift pandemic safety measures, five people share their outlook on ‘living with Covid’

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



A masked commuter heads down an escalator at Waterloo station  
Photograph: Amer Ghazzal/Rex/Shutterstock

*[Euan O'Byrne Mulligan](#), [Rachel Obordo](#) and [Alfie Packham](#)*

Thu 24 Feb 2022 14.33 EST

From Thursday, people who test positive for coronavirus are no longer required to self-isolate by law in England. Free mass testing for the general public in England [will end on 1 April](#).

The change is part of the government's new "living with Covid" plan, announced earlier this week, which will see the end of all pandemic regulations.

Five people share their reactions below.

### **'If I knew I had Covid, I would not go out with it'**

"I wouldn't go out if I tested positive for Covid. I'd worry about spreading it to people who could suffer dire consequences. There's still a high death rate and a lot of people who are compromised, who haven't got much freedom to be on public transport or in the workplace. So if I knew I had Covid, I would certainly not go out and about with it."

"I have the luxury of taking that view, because my employer would accommodate it and I also have sick pay. It just worries me that other people won't have that choice."

"I think, by and large, people are trying to be decent and mutually protect each other. In a way, we're being exhorted to drop that, but I think people will continue to do their best." **Kathy, 59, administrator, London**

### **'I am worried about people at work testing positive'**

"I've been shielding for two years, but think I will be returning to the office part-time in the middle of next month. I am worried about people at work testing positive. The current plan is that I will be working a good distance from everyone else at a desk right beside a large window I can open. I will probably remain masked, too. But the problem will be after April, when people won't know if they are infected."

“My greatest anxiety is about commuting on public transport and being in close contact with unmasked people. I also have to deal with members of the public in my role, but I have been assured that I will not be required to meet them face to face. My employer has been quite understanding so far and if the work from home guidance hadn’t been withdrawn then I think they would have kept me at home. **Harry\*, 34, working in local government, Durham, who is considered clinically extremely vulnerable**

## ‘I’ve never been testing’

“I’ve not been testing and never have. The only time was when I came back from Spain because I had to in order to travel. I want to stress that I’m not anti-vaxx, as I’ve had all my jabs.

“It’s all madness. This ridiculous desire to test for Covid is insanity and has really affected people’s mental health and should’ve stopped a long time ago. If I’m unwell, whether it’s with Covid or the flu, I will just stay at home until I feel better. It’s the way I’ve done it in the past and I seem to have survived.

“I know asymptomatic transmission of Covid is possible, but it seems to be very, very unlikely. The only time I would really have an issue with it is if someone came out with a streaming cold when they should be at home.”

**Norma, Cotswolds**

## ‘I wouldn’t want to pass any illness on to anyone else’

“I guess I would fall into the more cautious spectrum, in terms of Covid. And so, I’ve been pretty careful all the way through. I don’t think I’ve had it, and I don’t think I would want to go out if I was ill, let alone the risks to the rest of the population.

“If I contracted Covid, I wouldn’t be wanting to pass it to anyone else. I wouldn’t want to pass any illness on to anyone else now we’ve gone through this.

“I received an email from my work today saying that, even though the rules have changed, the company will continue to follow the guidance. That sort of sensible, head-screwed-on approach is, as I see it, the way forward for the time being until something changes. **Ben, 42, Bristol, record label employee**

## ‘People aren’t going to be aware that they’re positive’

“There’s no way I would go out infecting other people, and I think everyone should be supported to make that choice. I just feel that it’s very unfair. We’re in a situation where we had children perhaps later than we would have liked, which meant we’ve been able to pay off our mortgage. We can make decisions that better protect my mother, ourselves and society.

“Others aren’t in that position. Statutory sick pay is just [under] £14 a day. Testing is going to be something that people have to pay for. People aren’t going to be aware that they’re positive, and they’re not going to be able to afford to stay at home even if they want to. The message is ‘Just get on with life. It’s just like the flu.’ It’s clearly not. It’s clearly still causing a lot of damage. It just seems barbaric really.” **Sarah, Nottingham, 44, teacher and stay-at-home parent**

\*Name has been changed

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## 2022.02.25 - Opinion

- [Eight sobering realities about Putin's invasion of Ukraine](#)
- [Simon Jenkins Who can prevail on Putin now war has begun?](#)
- [Anonymous As a Russian, I don't know how to live with the shame of Putin's aggression](#)

## OpinionRussia

# Eight sobering realities about Putin's invasion of Ukraine

[Robert Reich](#)



The US and allies must be clear-eyed about this: what might the economic and political ripple effects of the war be?



‘Will stronger sanctions weaken Putin’s control over Russia? Possibly. But they could also have the opposite effect.’ Photograph: Ümit Bektaş/Reuters

Thu 24 Feb 2022 11.07 EST

We must do what we can to contain Vladimir Putin’s aggression in Ukraine. But we also need to be clear-eyed about it, and face the costs. Economics can’t be separated from politics, and neither can be separated from history. Here are eight sobering realities:

**1. Will the economic sanctions now being put into effect stop Putin from seeking to take over all of Ukraine?** No. They will complicate Russia’s global financial transactions but they will not cripple the Russian economy. After Russia annexed Ukraine’s Crimean peninsula in 2014, the US and its allies imposed economic sanctions which slowed the Russian economy temporarily, but Russia soon rebounded. Since then, Russia has taken steps to lessen its reliance on foreign debt and investment, which means that similar sanctions will have less effect. In addition, the rise of cryptocurrencies and other digital assets allow Russia to bypass bank transfers, which are the control points for sanctions. Bottom line: the sanctions already imposed or threatened could reduce Russia’s gross domestic product, but only by a few percentage points.

**2. What sort of sanctions *would* seriously damage Russia?** Sanctions on Russia's enormous oil and gas exports could cause substantial harm. Russia produces 10 million barrels of oil a day, which is about 10 percent of global demand. It ranks third in world oil production (behind the United States and Saudi Arabia). It ranks second in natural gas (behind the US), according to the US Energy Information Administration.

**3. Then why not impose sanctions on *them*?** Because that would seriously harm consumers in Europe and the US – pushing up energy prices and worsening inflation (now running at 7.5% annually in the US, a 40-year high). Although the US imports very little Russian oil or natural gas, oil and natural gas markets are global – which means shortages that push up prices in one part of the world will have similar effects elsewhere. The price of oil in the US is already approaching \$100 a barrel, up from about \$65 a year ago. The price of gas at the pump is averaging \$3.53 a gallon, according to AAA. For most Americans, that gas-pump price is the single most important indicator of inflation, not just because they fuel their cars with gas but because the cost is emblazoned in big numbers outside every gas station in America. (The biggest beneficiaries of these price increases, by the way: energy companies like Halliburton, Occidental Petroleum and Schlumberger, which are now leading the S&P 500. Anyone in favor of putting a windfall profits tax on them?)

**4. Will stronger sanctions weaken Putin's control over Russia?** Possibly. But they could also have the opposite effect – enabling Putin to fuel Russia's suspicions toward the west and stir up even more Russian nationalism. The harshest US measures would cause the average Russian to pay higher prices for food and clothing or devalue pensions and savings accounts because of a crash in the ruble or Russian markets, but these might be seen as necessary sacrifices that rally Russians around Putin.

01:56

Russia has invaded Ukraine: what we know so far – video report

**5. Any other foreign policy consequences we should be watching?** In a word: China. Russia's concern about the west has already led to a rapprochement with China. A strong alliance between the two most powerful world autocracies could be worrisome.

**6. What about domestic politics here in the US?** Foreign policy crises tend to drive domestic policy off the headlines, and weaken reform movements. Putin's aggression in Ukraine has already quieted conversations in America about voting rights, filibuster reform, and Build Back Better – at least for now. Large-scale war, if it ever comes to that, deadens reform. The first world war brought the progressive era to a halt. The second ended FDR's New Deal. Vietnam stopped Lyndon Johnson's Great Society.

Wars and the threat of wars also legitimate huge military expenditures and giant military bureaucracies. America is already spending \$776bn a year on the military, a sum greater than the next 10 giant military powers (including Russia and China) *together*. Wars also create fat profits for big corporations in war industries.

The possibility of war also distracts the public from failures of domestic politics, as the Spanish-American war did for President William McKinley and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq did for George W Bush. (Hopefully, Biden's advisers aren't thinking this way.)

**7. Could the sanctions lead to real war between Russia and the west?** Unlikely. Americans don't want Americans to die in order to protect Ukraine (most Americans don't even know where Ukraine is, let alone our national interest in protecting it). And neither Russia nor the US wants to be annihilated in a nuclear holocaust.

But international crises such as this one always run the risk of getting out of hand. Russia and the US have giant stockpiles of nuclear weapons. What if one is set off accidentally? More likely: what if Russia cyber-attacks the US, causing massive damage to US utilities, communications, banks, hospitals, and transportation networks here? What if Russian troops threaten Nato members along Ukraine's borders? Under these conditions, might the US be willing to commit ground troops?

Those who have fought ground and air wars know war is hell. Subsequent generations tend to forget. By the eve of the first world war, many in America and Britain spoke of the glories of large-scale warfare because so few remembered actual warfare. Today, most Americans have no direct

experience of war. Afghanistan and Iraq were abstractions for most of us. Vietnam has faded from our collective memory.

**8. What is Putin *really* after?** Not just keeping Ukraine out of Nato, because Nato itself isn't Putin's biggest worry. After all, Hungary and Poland are Nato members but are governed in ways that resemble Russia more than western democracies. Putin's real fear is liberal democracy, which poses a direct threat to authoritarian "strongmen" like him (just as it did to Donald Trump). Putin wants to keep liberal democracy far away from Russia.

Putin's means of keeping western liberal democracy at bay isn't just to invade Ukraine, of course. It's also to stoke division *inside* the west by fueling racist nationalism in western [Europe](#) and the United States. In this, Trump and Trumpism continue to be Putin's most important ally.

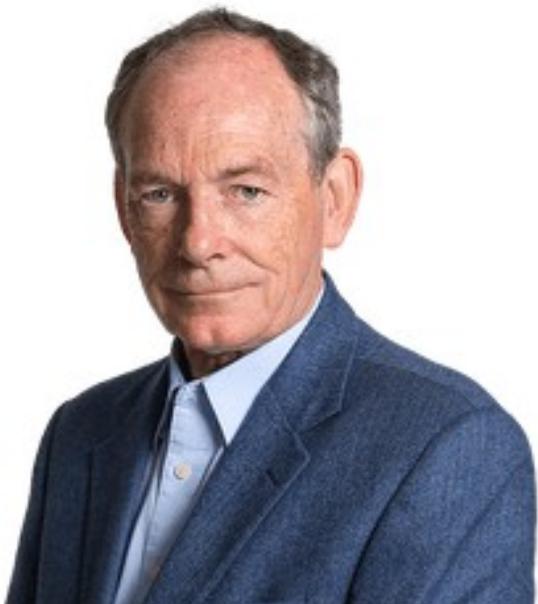
- Robert Reich, a former US secretary of labor, is professor of public policy at the University of California at Berkeley and the author of [Saving Capitalism: For the Many, Not the Few](#) and [The Common Good](#). His new book, [The System: Who Rigged It, How We Fix It](#), is out now. He is a Guardian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

# Who can prevail on Putin now war in Ukraine has started? Peace depends on it

[Simon Jenkins](#)



The Russian leader listens to China's Xi Jinping and a circle of rich cronies. Only they may be able to prevent huge bloodshed



Russian president Vladimir Putin with Chinese president Xi Jinping in Beijing, China, 4 February 2022. Photograph: Alexei Druzhinin/AP

Thu 24 Feb 2022 05.10 EST

All Europe must have awoken this morning and heard the news with horror. Sometimes history refuses to die. The fate of 44 million Ukrainians at the mercy of Russia and its vast army is appalling to contemplate. Indeed, so wild and mendacious are the utterances of [Vladimir Putin](#) in the past 24 hours that they suggest a dictator deranged and out of control. It is precisely the danger that was forecast by strategic theorists at the dawn of the nuclear age.

As of this morning, Putin's declared intention is to "[demilitarise](#)" Ukraine and assert Russia's de facto sovereignty over the [Donbas east of the country](#). The latter is chiefly an exaggeration of what Russia has done covertly since 2014. The former is hard to see other than as formal conquest. This is no longer some border dispute or separatist uprising, but the concerted assault of a great power on a substantial neighbour.

Ukraine's friends and sympathisers have been fulsome in offering comfort and "support". Ever since 1989, western Europe has been eager, perhaps

over-eager, to welcome former Soviet bloc countries into its embrace. Many thought this a mistake. Offering Nato and EU membership up to Russia's border was certain to inflame that country's well-known sense of insecurity, but the risk was taken. At the same time any idea of including [Ukraine](#) and Georgia in that embrace was rightly thought a risk too far. Putin has now grotesquely proved that risk.

Russia's attack on Ukraine might be thought an aggression so outrageous as to outrank any consideration of treaties and alliances. But though the west has offered Kyiv ferocious [moral support](#) and will of course respond with humanitarian aid, it has been adamant that it is not obliged by Nato to fight in its cause. That must be sensible. But at such times words must be used with care.

Belligerent support can look uncomfortably close to hypocrisy – as some Ukrainians are pleading. The west must distinguish outright condemnation of [Russia](#) from crowd-pleasing verbal aggression. Reality is sober. For Nato's armies to go to war with Russia in Ukraine would for sure escalate to an atrocious cost in lives and destruction. We should also remember that the west and Nato have a dreadful recent record of such interventions, of an inability to judge their worth and when and how to end them.

No war is like any other. Ukraine is not Cuba or Afghanistan or Syria – any more than Putin is a Hitler or Kyiv's inhabitants Nazis. I heard not one speaker in Britain's parliament this week counselling sobriety or peace. Belligerence – [even from Keir Starmer](#) – had not just the best tunes but the only ones. Inflicting that pathetic and ineffective weapon of [modern interventionism, sanctions](#), is not toughness but the opposite. It is pretend toughness – short of actually getting tough. That is the danger. The shriller the threats, the more cowardly seems the refusal to fight.

This is not yet a critical moment in relations between Russia, or at least its leader, and the west. It is critical in relations between Russia and a Ukraine with which it has had a long and historically turbulent relationship. There is, or was, a way out: the [Minsk agreement of 2015](#) between Kyiv and Moscow, recognising Donbas autonomy. The failure of both sides to implement Minsk is the cause of the present collapse, but it cannot become the cause of some wider European conflagration.

Serious talk is now known to be taking place on how to reach Putin, thrashing demented in his isolated citadel. He apparently listens to almost no one, but he does listen to China's [Xi Jinping](#) and a tiny circle of rich cronies. It is obscene that peace in eastern Europe should depend on such people. But they must be reached. That is the true failure of European diplomacy over the past 30 years.

- Simon Jenkins is a Guardian columnist
  - Join a panel of journalists, hosted by Michael Safi, for a livestreamed event on the Russia-Ukraine crisis. On Thursday 3 March, 8pm GMT | 9pm CET | 12pm PST | 3pm EST. Book tickets [here](#)
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## OpinionUkraine

# As a Russian, I don't know how to live with the shame of Putin's aggression

[Anonymous Russian](#)

Younger Russians condemn all violence against Ukraine. But protest is impossible: we feel like hostages in our own country



Ukrainian police inspect an area after an apparent Russian strike in Kyiv today. Photograph: Emilio Morenatti/AP

Thu 24 Feb 2022 07.53 EST

This morning everything has changed. Here in Russia, over images of tanks rolling into [Ukraine](#), broadcasters tell us that our actions are a response to Ukrainian military aggression.

I spoke to my father recently about the conflict in Ukraine. Any situation that involves aggression, injustice or war worries me. My father, though,

was angry and sharp. He believed everything the authorities were doing was right. According to him, Ukraine was built with Soviet money, and it belongs to [Russia](#). If it is occupied, the Ukrainian people are simply being saved from their government. And Russia's borders will be more secure.

My father is an educated person. He is middle class. He doesn't work for one of the government agencies or businesses. He even has Ukrainian roots. But his opinion completely coincides with the opinion of [Vladimir Putin](#).

As missiles attack Ukraine's infrastructure, he holds strong in his belief that the country should unite and prove itself – once again show its strength and power, and not step back. The west should understand who it is dealing with, and that Russians do not throw words to the wind and you cannot negotiate with us with ultimatums.

Among my friends, relatives and colleagues, there were few who would publicly discuss Russia's actions as an act of aggression. Many because they think it's better not to discuss and think about it. Many did not believe there would be a war.

Instead people talked about the small things in their lives that will be affected. Sanctions. Again. Our ability to travel. How things will be more expensive in dollars and euros. And how people in [Europe](#) will dislike us even more now.

Today's news has shocked them. Now, everyone is afraid that they will no longer be able to leave the country. They finally realised that all this will affect each of them. The first feeling that they have experienced is shame: shame about what is happening and shame of being the citizen of an aggressor.

For many months, if you looked at the mainstream media, they have been saying the west had insidious plans that would end with war. The enemy at the gate is the United States, Nato, or Europe. They said that the west had plans to deploy nuclear weapons to Ukraine and take away our nuclear arsenal. Ultimately to take over Russia: divide it, destroy it and take it apart.

This is said not just on state news, but discussed all day on big talk shows like [Time Will Tell](#). There is a sense that we are an underdog – we are not loved, we are insulted, we are underestimated, we are not accepted. The world needs to respect us again – we could regain the power of the Russian empire or even the Soviet Union.

And for years, the foreign voices and faces we have been shown are unhappy pro-Russian residents of Donbas. They are shown begging for help, pleading for recognition and saying how badly they are treated in Ukraine. (We never hear about how we – or the Russian government – has financed the conflict in the region.)

There have been many reasons people go along with this or fully support it. Older people still have memories of the Soviet era; silence was survival, and it still weighs on them. There are many people, especially in rural areas, where a lot of work is in the public sector, and there are more rules about speaking out. They are afraid of losing their livelihood.

Many younger people born during or after [perestroika](#) want to leave, and many have become passive. They don't think they can change the situation. The system established a harsh criminal responsibility for expressing one's own opinion: up to five years in prison for protests or publications on the internet. The economy is stagnant. We are dependent on fossil fuel industries, many sectors are corrupt and full of cronyism. The takeover of business by criminal oligarchs is obvious to everyone. It is easy to believe nothing can change. This is the little man's complex, instilled by the authorities for years – that I am a small insignificant person who can do nothing.

Still, I think that like me, many younger people don't believe the superficial propaganda about Ukraine. We condemn all forms of aggression. We believe the attack on Ukraine was clearly planned in advance – all my friends share this belief. There are many ways to get information and to think for yourself, if you can look and you have brains – for younger people, especially. There are Telegram channels. Brave bloggers and YouTubers. There are many ways to get news from other countries and to find people who will criticise what is happening.

I believe, and hope, that there will be no escalation of the conflict, but sanctions for Russia will be monstrous. There will be global isolation for us. The official position of the Kremlin is the demilitarisation and denationalisation of Ukraine. I don't know how to live with this: it's a shame and disgrace. But no form of protest is possible with us. Absolutely none. It's the feeling of a helpless hostage.

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## 2022.02.25 - Around the world

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## ‘Lot of determination’: Ukrainian Americans rally for their country



People gather at the Russian mission during a stand with Ukraine rally in New York City. Photograph: David Dee Delgado/Getty Images

The Ukrainian diaspora has mounted several efforts in light of Russia’s invasion to raise resources for their compatriots

[Maya Yang](#)

Fri 25 Feb 2022 03.30 EST

Members of the Ukrainian diaspora across the United States have been responding with grief, rage and solidarity with their compatriots as Russian president Vladimir Putin ordered an invasion of their country.

Ukrainian Americans from [New York](#) City to Sacramento have been expressing their growing anxiousness towards the escalating conflict, singing prayers, launching fundraisers and organizing solidarity rallies.

There are more than 1.1 million members of the Ukrainian American diaspora. Ukrainians have been immigrating to the United States since the late 19th century, when many [arrived](#) in 1877 to work in the Pennsylvania mines. However, the largest immigration wave came after the second world war when thousands of displaced Ukrainians sought refuge in large American cities including New York, Philadelphia, Detroit and Chicago.

Many more fled during the cold war and its aftermath, immigrating to the United States and Canada. In 2019, Ukrainians were one of the [top groups](#) resettled as refugees in the United States under the Trump administration.

### [More than a million Ukrainians live in the US across a wide diaspora.](#)

In the Ukrainian American community in [Detroit](#), one of the country's largest and most active Ukrainian diasporas, people have been organizing prayer services and speaking with elected officials to urge them to speak up against Russian aggression.

According to Mykola Murskyj, chair of the Ukrainian-American Crisis Response Committee of Michigan, there are about a dozen Ukrainian churches in south-eastern Michigan, with many more Ukrainian Saturday schools, credit unions, grade schools and cultural centers in metro Detroit.

These organizations have already been hosting rallies and launching fundraisers, said Murskyj, whose grandparents emigrated from [Ukraine](#) when it was part of the Soviet Union.

“There’s a lot of anxiety and there’s a lot of determination,” she told the Detroit Free Press.



People gathering in solidarity with Ukraine at the Texas state capitol on Thursday. Photograph: Sara Diggins/AP

Olena Danylyuk, vice chair of the Ukrainian-American Crisis Response Committee said she watched in horror as Russia invaded Ukraine on early Thursday morning.

“It is hard to watch … We are extremely disturbed, saddened, and angered by the senseless violence,” she said. Danylyuk, a Ukrainian immigrant herself, told the Detroit newspaper that one of her sisters and her children have fled Kyiv, Ukraine’s capital, and are hiding in a small town.

In New York City, members of the Ukrainian diaspora said their friends and families in Ukraine are prepared to fight. Oleksandr Matsuka, a retired United Nations diplomat whose stepson recently enlisted in Ukraine’s territorial defense forces and whose wife’s brother was preparing to leave retirement and return to the army, said, “Everyone does whatever he can.”

“Ukrainians are not panicking. They are prepared to fight,” he said to members of the Self-Reliance Association of Ukrainian Americans, a seminar group nestled in the city’s East Village.

New York's East Village is home to the city's largest Ukrainian diaspora and was once known as Little Ukraine, as over 60,000 Ukrainian immigrants lived in the community at one point.

Andrij Dobriansky, co-chair of the United Ukrainian-American Organizations of New York has been inundated with text messages from Ukrainian friends who are in shock. "I have so many just single texts in my phone from people who are like, 'I have no words' and that's it. This is not something anybody imagined could happen – to roll back the independence of a country," Dobriansky [said](#).

It's sad to hear that it's happening to our own people. As a church, we're praying for them. We're thinking about them

*Yuri Shimko*

In Sacramento, [California](#), which is home to approximately 100,000 Slavic immigrants – most of whom came from Ukraine – many Ukrainian Americans are finding solace through prayers.

Yuri Shimko, who arrived in the US when he was six years old, is a part of a local Ukrainian church and has been praying for peace since the Russian invasion. "It's sad to hear that it's happening to our own people. As a church, we're praying for them. We're thinking about them," he [told](#) Sacramento's ABC10.

Erik Latkovskii, the lead pastor secretary at Sacramento's Spring of Life church, has opened up the church as a space for support and solidarity for Ukrainian Americans. "I'm far away. And it's hard for me to do something right now, but I will pray to God," Latkovskii [said](#).

Other members of the diaspora in Sacramento are fraught with confusion and fear. [According to](#) Ruslan Gurzhiy, editor-in-chief of Slavic Sacramento, "People are confused. People are fighting in comments with each other, arguing with each other, a lot of anger, a lot of fear, a lot of blaming each other."

As Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy asks for [donations](#) to the Ukrainian military and the country's billionaires [return](#) to Ukraine to pledge their support, numerous Ukrainian Americans have also been launching fundraisers stateside to assist with relief efforts.



People take part in a vigil to protest the Russian invasion of Ukraine in front of the White House. Photograph: Andrew Harnik/AP

The Revived Soldiers Ukraine campaign, based in Orlando, Florida, has been raising funds for Ukrainian soldiers injured on the frontlines. "I want our Ukrainian army to know that we, the Ukrainian diaspora of the United States, stand with them shoulder to shoulder," [said](#) Irina Discipio, the campaign's organizer.

In Belmont, Massachusetts, Katya Malakhova is organizing the Sunflower of Peace fundraiser in which tactical backpacks filled with medical supplies are provided to Ukrainian marines and special forces units.

Nova Ukraine, a non-profit organization based in Palo Alto, California, has been identifying areas in Ukraine that are most in need of humanitarian efforts and has been raising funds to provide relief including gasoline, candles, diapers and food.

The organization is raising money to buy dry food for children at the Donetsk Oblast orphanage in Donetsk. “We need your support as never before,” the group [posted](#) on their Facebook page.

Across the country, numerous solidarity rallies have been [planned](#) by Ukrainian diaspora communities, with many set to take place in large cities including Atlanta, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, Philadelphia and Washington DC in the coming days.

Nataliia Onyskiv, head of the Georgia branch of the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America, [told](#) the Atlanta Journal Constitution that she has been touched by all the support coming in from beyond the Ukrainian community in the city.

“From my personal experience, it means a lot. If you know a Ukrainian, make sure to tell them your heart is with them,” she said.

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**Joe Biden**

## **Biden imposes new sanctions on Russia: ‘America stands up to bullies’**

President takes aim at Russia’s largest banks and companies but is emphatic US troops will not engage in conflict in Ukraine

- [Russia-Ukraine invasion latest news: follow live updates](#)



Joe Biden addresses the Russian invasion of Ukraine saying, ‘Putin and his country will bear the consequences.’ Photograph: Brendan Smialowski/AFP/Getty Images

*[Lauren Gambino](#) in Washington  
[@laurenegambino](#)*

Thu 24 Feb 2022 16.49 EST

Joe Biden on Thursday unveiled a fresh round of what he said would be crippling sanctions on Russia after its invasion of Ukraine, declaring that [Vladimir Putin](#) “chose this war” and that he and his country would bear the consequences.

The harsh new sanctions target Russia’s largest banks and companies, effectively cutting them off from western financial markets, while imposing restrictions on the exports of advanced technology used to power the country’s military and tech sector.

“Putin is the aggressor. Putin chose this war,” the US president said. “And now he and his country will bear the consequences.”

Part of a coordinated response, Biden said the measures taken by the US and allied nations around the world were meant to “maximize a long-term impact” on Russia, extracting severe costs on Moscow immediately and over time for what Biden called its “brutal assault” on a sovereign nation.

Biden warned that Putin’s “desire for empire” extended beyond [Ukraine](#), saying the Russian leader sought to re-create the former Soviet Union.

The president was emphatic in his vow that US troops would not engage Russia in Ukraine, but he again affirmed the US would defend “every inch of Nato territory”. The commitment was underscored by an announcement that Biden had authorized the deployment of additional US troops to Germany as part of Nato’s response.

As Biden addressed the nation from the East Room of the White House, the Ukrainian government reported mounting casualties as Russian troops unleashed a punishing offensive on the nation, advancing on the nation’s capital, Kyiv.

Biden’s remarks came hours after he held a virtual meeting with the leaders of Britain, Canada, France, Italy and Japan. European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen, European Council president Charles Michel, and Nato secretary general Jens Stoltenberg were also in attendance. Earlier on Thursday, Biden convened a meeting of the US national security council.

01:21

'Putin will bear the consequences': Biden addresses Russia's invasion of Ukraine – video

In the afternoon, Biden spent an hour on the phone with the Democratic and Republican leaders in Congress, briefing them on the situation in Ukraine and the administration's response to date.

The White House has been threatening severe sanctions for weeks, in hopes of deterring Putin from waging war on Ukraine. Earlier this week, when Putin made clear he intended to invade, the White House levied an initial "tranche" of sanctions in response. The penalties imposed on Thursday were designed to further destabilize Russia's financial system while starving the country of technology critical to its economy and military, such as semiconductors.

The US Treasury said the latest round of sanctions against Russia would affect nearly 80% of all banking assets in Russia, fundamentally threatening its economy and weakening the Kremlin's geopolitical posture.

"Treasury is taking serious and unprecedented action to deliver swift and severe consequences to the Kremlin and significantly impair their ability to use the Russian economy and financial system to further their malign activity," said Janet Yellen, the Treasury secretary.

Touting the unity among allies and partners, Biden said the sanctions would limit "Russia's ability to do business in dollars, euros, pounds and yen to be part of the global economy".

But they are not as forceful as some elected officials in the US and Ukraine have called for, steps that would include removing Russia from the Swift international banking system and targeting Russia's energy sector or leveling sanctions against Putin personally.

"We demand the disconnection of Russia from Swift, the introduction of a no-fly zone over Ukraine and other effective steps to stop the aggressor," Ukraine president Volodymyr Zelenskiy said in a tweet.

On Thursday, congressman Adam Schiff, the chairman of the House intelligence committee, called on the US to “dramatically escalate” its response to Moscow and endorsed calls to remove Russia from the international banking system and its ability to access western capital.

Biden argued that time was needed to allow the current round of sanctions to take their desired effect, and said the US was “prepared” to impose more severe penalties on Russia.

The president defended his administration’s response. For several weeks, the US has declassified and made public Putin’s secret plans, while moving quickly to blame Russia for a series of cyber-attacks against Ukrainian banks and agencies. The purpose of the approach was to expose the Kremlin’s justification for war as baseless, he said.

“Now, it’s unfolding largely as we predicted,” the president said.

Asked by reporters whether he was consulting China to isolate Russia, Biden would not comment. He also said he was working to persuade India to join the western-led push against Russia.

Biden said he had no plans to talk to Putin.

During the White House briefing on Thursday, White House press secretary Jen Psaki downplayed the threat of a nuclear attack, after Putin warned that countries that interfered with Russia’s invasion would face “consequences you have never encountered in your history”. Some analysts interpreted Putin’s comments as a warning that he was prepared to use the country’s nuclear arsenal.

“We don’t see any increased threat in that regard at the present time,” Psaki said.

As [thousands of Ukrainians](#) flee the country, Psaki said the US was prepared to welcome Ukrainian refugees to the US, but expected that the vast majority of them would prefer to remain in Europe. She said the US was working to support humanitarian efforts in neighboring countries, where the European Union is preparing for a large number of displaced people.

Psaki also said the US was “outraged” by “credible” reports that Russian soldiers were holding staff hostage at the Chernobyl nuclear site, near Kyiv.

“This unlawful and dangerous hostage-taking, which could upend the routine civil service efforts required to maintain and protect the nuclear waste facilities, is obviously incredibly alarming and deeply concerning,” she said. “We condemn it and request their release.”

The US president also urged resolve among the American people, who he said would probably face economic consequences as a result of what Biden called Putin’s “naked aggression”. The US has also warned government agencies and operators of critical infrastructure to take pre-emptive actions to safeguard against a possible Russian cyber-attack.

In a stark contrast to Donald Trump, who has repeatedly assailed Biden during the escalating crisis while badly mangling the facts surrounding Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, Barack Obama called on “every American, regardless of party” to support the president’s efforts to punish the Kremlin.

Echoing Biden, Obama acknowledged that there would be economic consequences for Americans, but that it was a “price we should be willing to pay to take a stand on the side of freedom”.

As Biden has warned throughout his presidency, he said democracies around the world were being tested and threatened by Putin’s “sinister vision for the future of our world”. He said there was never a question that the US would respond to Russia’s assault on Ukraine.

“This aggression cannot go unanswered,” Biden said. “America stands up to bullies. We stand up for freedom. This is who we are.”

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## Ukraine

# Russia unleashed data-wiper malware on Ukraine, say cyber experts

UK government and banks on alert for new form of electronic attack said to have infected hundreds of machines

- [Russia-Ukraine invasion latest news: follow live updates](#)



Distributed denial-of-service attacks were also launched on Ukrainian targets including Privatbank. Photograph: Beata Zawrzel/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

*[Dan Milmo](#) Global technology editor*

Thu 24 Feb 2022 17.28 EST

Cyber experts have identified a new strain of computer-disabling malware unleashed on Ukrainian targets as part of [Russia's offensive](#), as the UK

government and banks said they were on alert for online attacks.

Russia was widely expected to launch a cyber assault alongside its military campaign, and the run-up to the invasion of [Ukraine](#) was marked by the deployment of “wiper” malware . A distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attack, which paralyses websites by bombarding them with spurious information requests, also hit Ukrainian government sites.

On Thursday, requests for volunteers from Ukraine’s hacker underground began to appear on forums in a bid to help protect critical infrastructure and conduct cyber spying missions against Russian troops, Reuters reported, citing two sources.

“Ukrainian cybercommunity! It’s time to get involved in the cyber defense of our country,” one post read. Yegor Aushev, co-founder of a cybersecurity company in Kyiv, told Reuters he wrote the post at the request of a senior defence ministry official who contacted him on Thursday. Aushev’s firm Cyber Unit Technologies is known for working with Ukraine’s government on the defence of critical infrastructure.

On Wednesday, ESET Research Labs, a Slovakia-based cybersecurity company, said it had detected a new piece of data-wiping malware on hundreds of machines in Ukraine.

ESET said large organisations had been affected, while security experts at Symantec’s threat intelligence team said the malware had affected Ukrainian government contractors in Latvia and Lithuania and a financial institution in Ukraine. ESET has called the malware, which renders computers inoperable by disabling rebooting, HermeticWiper.

The [NotPetya attack](#) of 2017, which devastated Ukrainian businesses, was a wiper attack that encrypted computers irretrievably and spilled over into other countries, causing \$10bn (£7.5bn) of damage worldwide.

Alexi Drew, a senior analyst at RAND [Europe](#), a research institute, said cyber offensives carried the risk of escalating rapidly if attacks spill over widely into other countries, although in the case of HermeticWiper the

malware does not appear to be self-propogating, whereas NotPetya was able to spread. Further attacks, however, could be different, she added. “There’s a history of cyber-attacks not staying where they’re meant to go. If you look at NotPetya, the splash damage there was significant. There is a danger here of escalation because offensive cyber activity is fundamentally not very good at staying where you put it.”

Priti Patel said officials were on alert for cyber-attacks and disinformation campaigns from Moscow. “As we monitor developments, we will be especially mindful of the potential for cyber-attacks and disinformation emanating from Russia,” the home secretary said.

03:37

Why has Putin’s Russia waged war on Ukraine? – video explainer

The chief executive of Lloyds Bank, Charlie Nunn, said on Thursday the lender was on “heightened alert … internally around our cyber risk controls, and we’ve been focused on this for quite a while”. Preparation for potential cyber-attacks was discussed in a meeting between the government and banking industry leaders on Wednesday, Nunn added.

According to Symantec, the wiper attack that hit Ukraine this week had been planned for some time. One Ukrainian organisation suffered an initial hack in December last year that was related to the recent attack.

DDoS attacks were also deployed ahead of the military offensive in order to spread confusion, according to the US cybersecurity firm Mandiant. In a DDoS attack, websites are deluged with vexatious requests for information and become unreachable. The targets on Wednesday included the Ukrainian defence ministry and PrivatBank, Ukraine’s largest commercial bank.

“It’s not so much the technical disruption, it’s what it does to undermine confidence, like in the financial sector. It gets people quite nervous. It’s more that kind of secondary impact,” said Jamie Collier, a Mandiant consultant, who described a DDoS as akin to stuffing a thousand envelopes through a letterbox every second.

However, Dr Lennart Maschmeyer at the Center for Security Studies at the Swiss university ETH Zurich, said Russia's cyber strategy so far seemed more improvised. "A plausible scenario for more devastating cyber-attacks was that Russia had planned this invasion for a long time, and prepositioned implants across Ukraine's critical infrastructure in order to cause mass disruptions coinciding with the military invasion. That does not seem to be the case. The cyber operations we have seen do not show long preparation, and instead look rather haphazard," he said.

*This copy and headline was amended on 24 February to make clear it was a malware incident, not a virus*

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## Commodities

# Ukraine crisis: commodities prices surge as stock markets slump

Russian invasion of Ukraine fuels near-40% rise in gas price and oil to \$105 per barrel as European stock markets tumble

- [Oil rises above \\$100, markets plunge – business live](#)
- [Russia-Ukraine invasion latest news: follow live updates](#)



The Ukrainian gas station at Volovets in western Ukraine in 2015.  
Photograph: Pavlo Palamarchuk/AP

[Phillip Inman, Rob Davies and Julia Köllewe](#)

Thu 24 Feb 2022 12.27 EST

Global markets were thrown into turmoil on Thursday as the outbreak of war on European soil sent prices of commodities from oil and gas to wheat

surging, while stock market plunged.

The ramifications of a potentially prolonged conflict involving Europe's primary supplier of gas sent a chill through markets, affecting prices across a broad spectrum of asset classes and investments.

## Oil

Brent crude hit \$105 a barrel for the first time since August 2014, following a rise of more than 8% on international energy markets. The increase signalled a further rise on garage forecourts to record-breaking retail price for unleaded petrol of more than 155p a litre.

Russia is the world's second-largest oil producer and sells most of its crude to European refineries. It is also the largest supplier of natural gas to [Europe](#), providing about two-fifths of its supply.

Oil prices have surged more than \$20 a barrel since the start of 2022 as the [Ukraine](#) crisis went unresolved, with fears that the US and Europe would impose sanctions on Russia's energy sector, disrupting supplies, should the situation escalate.

## Gas

The price of British gas for next-day delivery jumped 53% to 326p per therm as the invasion stoked fears of a disruption to global energy supplies. Dutch futures, a closely watched measure for European prices, were up 57% on contracts for delivery in March.

Analysts at Investec think the renewed surge in gas price could force the energy regulator Ofgem to increase the household bills price cap to £3,000 in October. The [54% increase to nearly £2,000 announced earlier this month](#) has already caused significant political fallout and sparked warnings of families having to choose between food and heating.

## Gold

Typically seen as a safe haven in times of crisis, gold moved through \$1,950 (£1,460) per ounce at one point before settling back, reaching levels not far away from its 2020 all-time high of \$2,067.

Russia and [Ukraine](#) are also large producers of important industrial metals such as palladium, nickel and aluminium, which analysts said could be in short supply over the coming months unless the war ends quickly. Russia produces 6% of the world's aluminium and 7% of its mined nickel. Aluminium rose more than 5% to hit a record high of \$3,466 a tonne in London. Nickel hit its highest level since May 2011 at \$25,240 at one stage. Palladium, used in catalytic converters for cars, was trading more than 5% higher on Thursday afternoon, after touching \$2,695.57 an ounce in the morning, up 7% to the highest level since August.

## **Wheat**

Between them, [Russia](#) and Ukraine export a quarter of the world's wheat, with Ukraine in particular known as the "breadbasket of Europe". Short-term European wheat prices neared record highs on Thursday afternoon. Ukraine is also a major exporter of corn and barley, as well as a key source of cooking oils.

## **Stock markets**

There was a broad sell-off of shares across Europe, and banks with big operations in Russia were especially hard hit, such as Austria's Raiffeisenbank, Italy's Unicredit and France's Société Générale, following moves by governments across the continent and in the UK to impose sanctions on Russian banks and wealthy Russian individuals.

The FTSE 100 index in London tumbled 291 points, or 3.8%, to 7,207, while the Dax in Frankfurt lost nearly 4%, the Cac in Paris dropped 3.8% and the Italian borsa in Milan closed 4.1% lower. On Wall Street, the Nasdaq pared earlier losses and was flat in the afternoon while the S&P 500 was down 0.9% and the Dow Jones slid 2%.

Russian stocks plummeted as much as 50% when trading resumed on the Moscow stock exchange on Thursday morning following a temporary suspension. The dollar-denominated RTS index tanked 49.93% in early trading, and later traded 39% lower. The rouble-denominated Moex index fell 45% to 1,690.13, and was later down 33%.

Thirty-one Russian companies are traded on the London Stock Exchange. State-owned banks Sberbank and VTB, along with state-backed oil and gas producers Gazprom and Rosneft have secondary listings in the UK while their primary listings remain in Moscow.

A freeze on Russian bank assets in the UK announced by Boris Johnson sent shares in Sberbank plunging 74% while VTB held its value following a 30% drop since January. Gazprom, the mainly state-owned Russian energy company that trades some of its shares in London, was down 30%. Rosneft, the oil major which is 20%-owned by BP, dropped 50% and Lukoil fell 43%. The Anglo-Russian miner Polymetal was the top faller on the FTSE 100, down 38%, with the Russian mining group Evraz in second place, down 30%.

## Economic Impact

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A prolonged war could pile pressure on economies including the UK, with the cost-of-living crisis a particular concern.

Inflation is already at a 30-year high of 5.5% but with oil, gas and food ingredients all rising on the back of the Ukraine conflict, economic analysts are warning it could go still higher, while growth could be affected too.

Tatiana Orlova, an economist at Oxford [Economics](#), said: “We will incorporate higher European gas, oil and food prices over the medium term in our baseline, as well as more financial market disruption and tougher EU and US sanctions on Russia. The impact of these changes on our forecast for the global economy is significant, cutting 0.2 percentage points from GDP growth in 2022 and 0.1ppts in 2023.”

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# Headlines

- [Cost of living crisis UK households face biggest fall in living standards since 1950s, say experts](#)
- [Energy bills Britons in shock as suppliers confirm price rise](#)
- [Bill rebate Pay council tax by direct debit to get £150 relief in England](#)
- [Savings Zopa launches account that lets users lock in at better rates](#)

## Inflation

# UK households face biggest fall in living standards since 1950s, say experts

Russian invasion of Ukraine could further hike global energy prices and cut real incomes by 3.1%, economists fear



Rising energy bills are likely to further push up inflation, economist predict.

Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

*[Richard Partington](#) Economics correspondent*

*[@RJPartington](#)*

Sat 26 Feb 2022 02.00 EST

UK households could suffer the biggest annual decline in their living standards since the 1950s as the Russian invasion of Ukraine pushes up global energy prices, experts have warned.

With inflation already at the highest rate for 30 years, analysts said a sustained rise for wholesale oil and gas markets would further add to the squeeze on families from soaring utility bills.

Analysts at [Bank of America](#) said that under such a scenario household real income could plunge by 3.1% in 2022 compared with a year earlier, in the biggest annual drop since at least 1956, the year of the Suez crisis.

In what would mark a worse squeeze than during the oil shock of the 1970s, it comes after wholesale European gas prices rocketed on Thursday after [Russian tanks rolled over the border in a full-scale invasion](#).

Although gas prices fell back on Friday on a calmer day for financial markets, analysts warned they remained higher than the start of the week and could surge higher again should tensions between Moscow and the west escalate further.

European stock markets closed higher on Friday with the [FTSE 100](#) up 260 points, or 3.6%, while commodity prices reversed some of Thursday's leaps. The [oil price fell back from almost \\$106 per barrel to about \\$98](#), while wholesale gas prices dropped from 350p per therm to about 250p.

However, this week's increases have fed through to petrol and diesel prices at filling stations across Britain. The RAC said prices rose to new record highs for the fourth time this week, with unleaded at almost 150p per litre and the price of diesel above 153p for the first time ever.

It comes with inflation already at the highest level since 1992, [having reached 5.5% last month](#) as the world economy grapples with the fallout from Covid-19. Even before the Russian invasion, the [Bank of England forecast inflation would reach more than 7% in April](#) when Ofgem, the UK energy regulator, increases its household price cap by 54% to reflect a winter surge in gas prices.

However, analysts warned the conflict in Ukraine could drive up the inflation rate further still, possibly to more than 8% this year and remaining above the Bank's 2% target rate for longer than previously thought.

Should gas, electricity and oil prices persist at levels reached on Thursday, Bank of America said inflation could be about 1.9 percentage points higher than previously thought by the end of the year, sticking close to 6%.

With growth of workers' pay, benefits and other sources of income failing to keep pace, real household income could fall by 3.1% this year, "comfortably the largest calendar year fall since at least 1956", according to the US bank.

Robert Wood, UK economist at Bank of America, said: "There is a lot of volatility. Energy prices have subsequently dropped very sharply today, so the numbers wouldn't look as negative for real incomes. It's a risk scenario based on where energy prices got to on Thursday. We're substantially below that now but there is always a risk they could go up again."

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"If inflation is higher there is a bigger fall for real incomes. We're looking at this year a very large reduction in households spending power compared with previous years. How the economy navigates through that is quite uncertain."

The hit to living standards is expected to [affect poorer households most](#), as lower-income families spend proportionally more on essentials such as energy and food than richer households.

Weaker consumer spending power is also likely to act as a drag on economic growth, slowing the UK economy and raising questions over the Bank of England's plans to raise interest rates and the government response to the cost of living crisis.

"In time the conflict will also broaden and deepen the living standards squeeze here at home," said Torsten Bell, the chief executive of the Resolution Foundation thinktank. "The chances of low- and middle-income households getting some respite from the growing squeeze on living standards later this year are receding rapidly."

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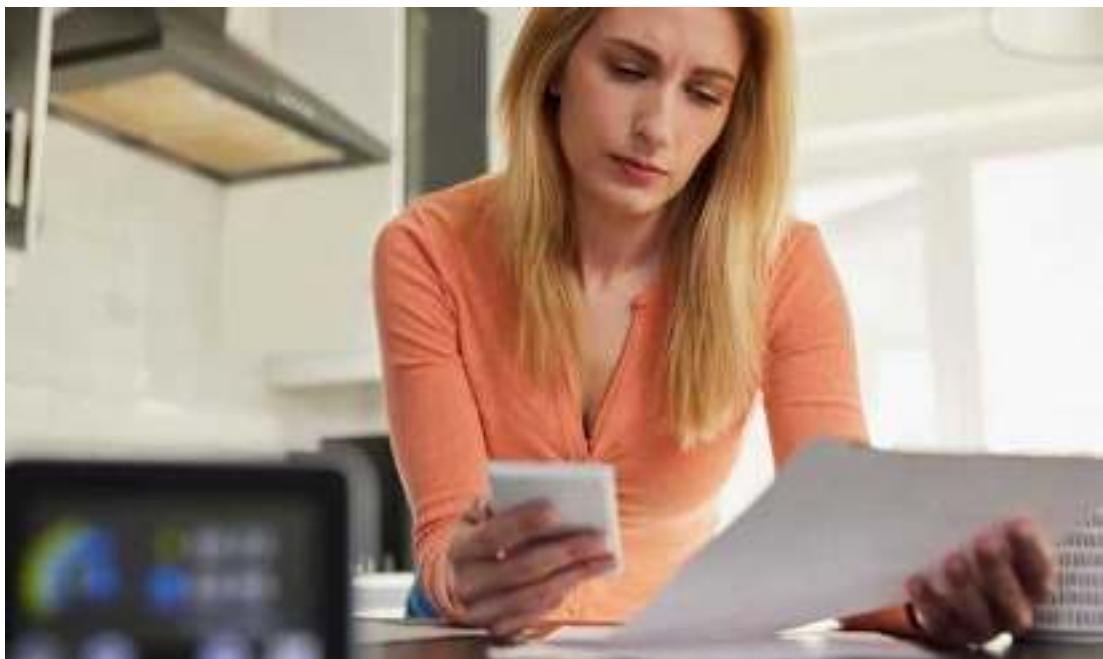
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## Money

# Energy bills: Britons in shock as suppliers confirm price rise

Households face a jolt of reality as providers move their gas and electricity charges up to the limit



Keeping watch on how much energy is used is crucial as annual bills threaten to rise to £2,500. Photograph: Daisy-Daisy/Alamy



[Miles Brignall](#)

Sat 26 Feb 2022 02.00 EST

Consumers may have been shocked to have received details of the new gas and electricity prices they will start paying on 1 April, including daily standing charges as high as 51p a day.

Last month the energy regulator, Ofgem, revealed the [new caps on prices](#) and warned that the average household will be paying just under £2,000 a year to heat and light their home – a 54% increase.

While that figure may have seemed rather abstract, householders have received a jolt of reality as the actual unit prices have been published.

Although providers can charge less than the cap, those who have been in touch with customers so far are moving prices up to the limit, which means £700-a-year-plus increases are on the cards for millions.



The energy regulator for Great Britain, Ofgem, has warned that the average household will be paying just under £2,000 a year to heat and light their home. Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

That could just be the start. Wholesale gas prices rose 28% on Thursday's news that Russian forces had invaded Ukraine. If those are sustained, [Ofgem](#) will have to substantially increase prices again when it reviews the cap for the autumn. That raises the prospect of gas and electricity bills of more than £2,500 a year.

British Gas [has told customers on its capped tariffs](#) that from 1 April they will pay 28p-30p per kWh for electricity. There will be a 45p-51p daily standing charge for electricity, and 27p-37p for gas.

Those who pay by direct debit will pay the least. Customers paying by cash or cheque on receipt of their bill, or because who have a prepayment meter, will be charged more. These are average prices, and will vary very slightly according to where you live.

Shell Energy wrote to its customers this week outlining very similar rates, and earlier this month EDF announced its prices would also go up in line with Ofgem's cap.

Only those on long-term fixed tariffs signed with a supplier that has not failed will avoid the rises.

Ofgem [allows suppliers to set their prices](#) as long as the overall price comes in below or at the cap – the maximum they can charge.

From 1 April a British Gas dual-fuel customer paying by direct debit will pay £262 a year in standing charges alone, or £318 if they have a prepayment meter. And that is before they have consumed a single unit.

The cost of those units is also rising alarmingly. In the east of England, Shell Energy is raising the price of 1kWh of electricity from 20.871p to 29.239p. At the same time, its gas rates will change from 4.055p to 7.344p per kWh – about double those charged on average as little as a year ago.

Only those on long-term fixed tariffs signed with a supplier that has not failed will avoid these increases

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## Energy bills

# People in England told to pay council tax by direct debit to get £150 rebate

Government payment is designed to help offset some of the huge rise in gas and electricity prices



About 80% of UK households will qualify for help with their energy bills

Photograph: True Images/Alamy

*Hilary Osborne*

Fri 25 Feb 2022 19.01 EST

Councils across England are urging householders to set up a direct debit payment for their council tax so that they can automatically receive [the government's £150 energy rebate in April](#).

The payment is designed to help offset some of the huge rise in gas and electricity costs due to take effect the same month and will be paid to those

living in properties in council tax bands A-D.

About 80% of households qualify for help, but while the money will be paid straight into the bank accounts of those who have a direct debit set up with their local council, anyone paying by any other means will need to make a claim.

The Local Government Association said this meant the payments would take longer as councils would need to first contact the households and then make pre-payment checks before giving the rebate.

It said in some parts of the country, thousands of households were not set up to receive the payment automatically.

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Hull city council, for example, has estimated that it does not have bank details for 60,000 households, while Dartford council has reported [that 15,000 households do not pay by direct debit](#).

Shaun Davies, the chair of the LGA's resources board, said: "This year will be tougher than most, particularly for those on lower incomes, so it is good that the government is stepping in to provide financial support to help ease these pressures."

He added: "You can still get the money if you don't have a direct debit set up, but it could take longer as your council will have to contact you and then you'll have to make a claim."

Charities have expressed concern that the way the payments will be distributed means those most in need could miss out.

When the policy was first announced, [Citizens Advice said](#) it was "a complicated lottery that means support is not targeted at people who really need it", and called on the government to use the benefits system to deliver the money.

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## Savings

# Savings: Zopa launches account that lets users lock in at better rates

Customers able to earn up to 1.05% with Smart Saver by holding some of money in linked ‘pots’



Zopa's Smart Saver account is only available via a mobile phone app.  
Photograph: True Images/Alamy

*[Hilary Osborne](#)*

Sat 26 Feb 2022 02.00 EST

The online bank Zopa has launched a market-leading instant access account that also allows savers to lock in some of their money for a fixed-term at a higher interest rate.

The Smart Saver account pays 0.72% on balances from £1 to £15,000 but accountholders can earn up to 1.05% by holding some of their money in

linked “pots”.

However, because the account is being targeted at younger customers, it is only available via a mobile phone app.

Customers who pay into the account can create different pots of money for different savings targets, and see them all in one place.

To get the highest interest rate, they need to “boost” the pot and agree to give 95 days’ notice to make a withdrawal. Two other options are available: a notice period of 31 days and an interest rate of 0.85%, and a seven-day notice period with a rate of 0.75%.

Zopa [launched as a peer-to-peer lender](#), offering savers the chance to make returns by matching them with borrowers who paid them interest.

It [closed that part of its business late last year](#) after getting a banking licence, and is offering fixed-rate savings accounts alongside the Smart Saver.

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## Flat cap nation: how Peaky Blinders went from a TV show to a way of life



If the cap fits ... young fans at the 2019 Peaky Blinders festival. Photograph: Andrew Fox/The Guardian

In the space of six series, the crime drama set in 1920s Birmingham has become a ratings hit, spawning theme pubs, fashion lines and festivals. How

did it become a cross-cultural phenomenon?

Simon Usborne

Sat 26 Feb 2022 04.00 EST

When Shane Milligan picks up the phone, the plasterer and part-time magician from Kent launches straight into an impression of a character he feels he embodies so fully that he sometimes loses sight of himself. “By order of the [Peaky Blinders](#), this place is under new management!” he bellows in guttural Brummie from his home in Gravesend.

The line comes early on in Peaky Blinders, the Birmingham-set gangster drama that is about to come to a presumably bloody conclusion in its sixth series on BBC One and Netflix. In the episode, Arthur Shelby (played by Paul Anderson), the tortured brother of crime boss Tommy (Cillian Murphy), has just violently taken over a London jazz club owned by Italian capo Darby Sabini.

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The scene, set in 1921 and written by the show’s creator Steven Knight, is classic Peaky. Arthur wears his sharpest tweed three-piece suit and tailored coat, his violent rage only slightly dislodging his tie from its penny collar. His trademark Peaky haircut – shaved back and sides, mop on top – is just so. There are screams and slow-motion sequences as the gang terrorise rich people in dinner jackets.



If the cap fits ... Shane Milligan dressed up as Arthur Shelby from Peaky Blinders.

“Most days I’m dressed as Arthur,” Milligan says, returning to his Kent accent. He started as a fan of the show – and of Arthur – but was soon throwing out most of his modern clothes and picking up 1920s suits in vintage shops. He has the haircut and a dozen baker boy caps, albeit without the razor blades that, the myth goes (it’s not true), a real Birmingham gang of the same name used to weaponise their headgear. He has even turned up to work on building sites in his outfits, while also doing turns as a lookalike. “Even my nieces call me Uncle Arthur, it’s crazy,” he says. “But when I’ve got the gear on, I get that swagger, that walk. It gives me purpose.”

Since it landed on BBC Two in 2013, Peaky Blinders has become a huge popular hit while somehow retaining cult appeal. The fifth series premiered in 2019, in its first prime-time BBC One slot, reaching a total audience of 6.2 million. Netflix picked up the show in 2014, turning it into a global success. But what is striking is the extent to which it has penetrated and shaped the culture way beyond the West Midlands.

“I wish I could have a dime for every Peaky haircut I see here in Soho,” says Caryn Mandabach from her office in London. The American TV producer moved to the UK 15 years ago after producing US comedies including

Roseanne and The Cosby Show, and her eponymous UK production company owns and produces Peaky Blinders.

There are no royalties in haircuts but Mandabach now commands a branding juggernaut. Peaky has spawned official festivals, video games, beers, escape room experiences, grooming products and Monopoly boards, as well as less official club nights, merchandise and vintage clothing lines. In 2018, the show was credited in the UK with boosting the popularity of the baby names Arthur and Ada (Ada Thorne is Tommy and Arthur's sister).

The biggest fans don't just watch Peaky Blinders, but lap up its stylised aesthetic and gangster mythology. "We had a group of 50 up from Birmingham just last night, all dressed up," says Scott Blowers, a landscape gardener and Tommy Shelby lookalike. He gets paid every Saturday to drink in character and pose for selfies at Peaky Blinders, an unofficial themed bar in Manchester where £9 cocktails include "Arthur's Punch".



Stepping razor ... Members of the Rambert dance company at the Peaky Blinders festival in 2019. Photograph: Jacob King/PA

So while series six will be the last, the franchise will live on. A dance-theatre production, written by Knight and choreographed by the Rambert dance company, is due to open at the Birmingham Hippodrome later this

year before a nationwide tour. A feature film is in the works. Knight has said it may spawn further TV shows.

Knight, a blacksmith's son who grew up in Birmingham, has himself co-opted Peaky mania. In an unlikely sideline for an Oscar- and Bafta-nominated screenwriter who says he has no dress sense, he launched his own clothing line in 2016. Garrison Tailors (it's named after the Shelbys' pub) sells three-piece suits for £755 and caps for £69. "It's astonishing that it's had this effect," he says of the show. "At no point did I ever think it would be like this."

Mandabach remembers being disappointed by early audience figures. She and her production office had planned to pick a restaurant for a celebratory dinner with prices to match the launch ratings. "I forget where we went but it was pathetic," she says. Vindication came quickly when a friend told Mandabach that her husband had tuned in with their 18-year-old son. "She said it was the first time they had talked about something together," the producer recalls. "There was a depth to the way people liked it. They talked about it, it mattered ... there was an affinity."

Milligan was immediately sucked in. In the first series, set in 1919, a working-class family with Irish Traveller and Romany Gypsy heritage, amazing cheekbones and battlefield trauma from the first world war, fight and scheme (and invariably murder) their way out of poverty in the Small Heath slums of Birmingham. Eventually, they build a criminal empire and Tommy becomes an MP.

"The Shelbys are a family that do bad things but they're trying to survive," says Milligan, a youthful 61. He is from an Irish Traveller family and was bullied at school – until he started to fight back. He compares the Shelbys' paradoxical working-class appeal as violent criminals in suits to that of the Krays. He is old enough to feel nostalgic about what he sees as a lost British era, but at Peaky events he's struck by how many younger fans feel the same way.



Dramatic effect ... Actors perform scenes inspired by the TV series at the Peaky Blinders festival in 2019. Photograph: Andrew Fox/The Guardian

“A lot of youngsters are drawn in by the gangster glamour,” says Carl Chinn, a professor of community history at the University of Birmingham, who grew up in the city in a family of backstreet bookmakers. His great-grandfather was a real-life Peaky Blinder. He now gives Peaky tours and talks in schools. Peaky Blinders draws on mafia tropes in which gangsters are “kind to children, respectful to the elderly, and look after women and their community”, adds Chinn, also the author of *Peaky Blinders: The Real Story*. “Poorer men owned nothing except their street. And masculinity becomes important in that; you show yourself to be harder than other people, that your street is tougher than the next street.”

Celebrity Peaky fans include Brad Pitt, Idris Elba, Tom Cruise and David Bowie, who once asked Knight to include his music in the show. David Beckham launched a Peaky-inspired line at Kent & Curwen, the old menswear brand he co-owned, at London fashion week men’s in 2019. “It just has this resonance all over the world,” Knight says. There are fan sites and Facebook groups originating in Brazil, Indonesia and South Korea. “But the moment I knew it was different was when Snoop Dogg asked to meet me and we spent three hours talking about Peaky Blinders and how it reminded him of South Central LA.”

Peaky's biggest impact has been in Birmingham itself, where civic pride is fierce but rarely projected. "I think as technology and the economy moves on, a lot of people like to think about the origins of this place," says Andy Street, another Birmingham boy and now mayor of the West Midlands. "There is a real affection that the show has tapped into."

These were not handsome, charismatic men; they were vicious, vile men

Before the pandemic, Birmingham was in the grip of a tourism boom that Street put partly down to Peaky mania. The city is on Hollywood's map; Cruise was there last year to film his latest impossible mission. Knight is poised to announce plans for a new film studio in Digbeth, a thriving former industrial area close to Small Heath. "I don't think any of this could've happened without Peaky Blinders," Street says.

In 2019, the mayor himself wore a baker boy cap and joined 20,000 other fans in Digbeth for the first official Peaky Blinders festival. It included mock bare-knuckle fights, free haircuts and a fashion show for Garrison Tailors. Primal Scream and Liam Gallagher played – a nod to Peaky's era-bending soundtrack. A sea of flapper dresses and furs showed that Peaky's appeal is far from solely male. Women in their 20s dressed as Polly "Aunt Pol" Shelby (the late Helen McCrory), mob matriarch and head of a cast of strong female characters. "The whole district came to life," Street recalls.

The Peaky look – increasingly available off the shelf (Birmingham's branch of Primark did an official Peaky line in 2019) – clearly has a broad contemporary appeal. Tommy Shelby in particular has become, with a lot of help from Cillian Murphy's face, an influencer a century before his time. There are also overlaps with other trends; Milligan is into steampunk, the retrofuturist steam-age aesthetic. The show's interwar setting, which comes decades after the real Peaky Blinders' reign, lets it explore not only the effects of shellshock, but the glister of the jazz age (think Gatsby goes to Digbeth).

"It's not just about the look," says Tony Williams, who in 2017 turned his successful party band (he played at Elon Musk's second wedding, among

other gigs) into Cheaky Blinders, a tribute act. “I’ve noticed that a lot of fans are people looking to be accepted. Dressing up makes them feel part of something, like they belong. It’s like being a football fan.”

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The elephant in the blood-spattered room is violence. Peaky Blinders is brutal in the grand, blood-letting tradition of on-screen gangsterism. When Arthur announces that the jazz club is under new management, he does so while holding the limp body of its outgoing manager, whose face we have just watched him destroy with a broken wine bottle.

The show has periodically faced criticism for wobbling on the line between glorification and consequence. In an academic paper in 2019, George Larke-Walsh, of the University of Sunderland’s Faculty of Arts & Creative Industries, said Peaky promoted the “unashamed glorification of criminality”, using the excuse of postwar trauma and the romance of an underclass rebellion as a cover for gore.

The paper caused a stir, which surprised Larke-Walsh. When I call her, she says she is a fan not a critic. “I think the inclusion of the motivation of the war was brilliantly done,” she says. If anything, she adds, the balance the show does strike is suitably British; the Shelbys, she wrote, “play out the continual and contradictory conflict that occurs within this presentation of British national identity as simultaneously progressive and regressive”.



Bad influencer ... Cillian Murphy as Thomas Shelby in Peaky Blinders.  
Photograph: Robert Viglasky/BBC/Caryn Mandabach Productions/Tiger Aspect

Chinn, the historian, is quick to try to educate the Peaky fans he meets. “Gangsters are always portrayed as flawed characters with admirable qualities – antiheroes who look after their own,” he says. “The real Peaky Blinders turned over their own community, preyed upon the poor and ruled the back streets with a reign of terror. These were not handsome, charismatic men; they were vicious, vile men.”

Chinn, who also celebrates the show’s impact on Birmingham, argues that any admiration should go to the women of the era, whom he credits for his own success. He says his Blinder great-grandfather was a domestic abuser. “The real heroes are the mums, the grandmothers, the big sisters, who daily strove for respectability and for a better world for their children.”

Murphy has admitted that Peaky is “working within the limitations of the gangster genre and things are heightened”. But Knight insists he is more interested in the scars – particularly the emotional ones – than the violence itself. “The biggest example is the violence of the first world war, the

consequence of which carries on through six series,” he says. “It’s ugly, so we try to depict it as ugly.”

Knight has been amazed – at the festival and just while walking past the haircuts and caps during any stroll through Birmingham – to observe the impact of the world he has now nurtured for a decade. “But the great thing is, and I think this is an element of Englishness, is that everyone’s aware of their own absurdity, including me,” he says. “They’re not detached from reality.”

Milligan, who met Knight at the Birmingham festival, sits at the keenest end of Peaky fandom. Yet for all the sense of pride and belonging the mythology has brought him, he says it’s mostly just a bit of fun. He’s often heckled while walking around town in his Shelby get-up. “There’ll be lads walking down and they’ll say: ‘Oi! Are you really Arthur Shelby?’” Milligan prepares to switch back to Arthur’s Brummie drawl. “I’ll turn to them and I’ll say: ‘Whadda you think!’ And we’ll all have a laugh.”

*Peaky Blinders returns on 27 February on BBC One.*

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Interview

## Daisy Edgar-Jones on life after Normal People: ‘Should I be living it up more? Is this how our 20s are supposed to be?’

[Tom Lamont](#)



Daisy Edgar-Jones wears dress, Talia Byre. Trousers, Nanushka. Earrings, Sophie Bille Brahe. Photograph: Gustavo Papaleo/The Guardian

The steamy lockdown smash turned the actor into a star overnight. Just one problem: she couldn't leave the house. Can she belatedly adjust to fame?



Sat 26 Feb 2022 03.00 EST

‘I’ve been told,’ says Daisy Edgar-Jones, ‘that the trick for posing at film premieres is to put one foot forward, lift your chin, and basically try to emanate with your face that you’re a top-class lawyer who’s won a big case.’

We’re standing together in a London park, not far from where the 23-year-old actor grew up, on a cold but sunlit morning in February. Soon, Edgar-Jones will fly to Los Angeles for the premiere of a gory and provocative new thriller she has made called [Fresh](#). Although her career exploded in spring 2020, when she starred with Paul Mescal in the TV adaptation of Sally Rooney’s [Normal People](#), the years since then have been Covid-straitened and quite weird (“smudged” is how Edgar-Jones puts it), and she has not yet had any red carpet practice. This will be her first premiere.

Have a practise now, I suggest?

“Here?” She glances over her shoulder. We’re by a boating pond, on the gloopy waters of which there are chained-up pedalos in the shapes of unicorns and swans; a disconsolate sight, we agree. A few dog-walkers are making circuits of the park, but nobody’s watching. “All right,” she says, and she puts one white-trainered foot in front of the other. She lifts her chin. She adopts a fierce, lawyerly scowl ...

We were supposed to be meeting for a coffee in the park’s cafe, only it’s out of season and the doors are firmly shut. Edgar-Jones, who knows the local terrain well, ponders our options. Brisk walk, to keep off the cold? Brave it out on a bench? Climb aboard an anchored pedalo? On closer inspection, she notes, all of the pedalos are covered with bird droppings. Walk it is!

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She wraps herself tighter inside a camel-coloured coat and leads the way. We zigzag around the muddy paths of the park, completing a few circuits, eventually passing within sight of her family home. She waves an arm: “Over there.”

When *Normal People* appeared on BBC iPlayer, becoming a sensation in the middle of that strange and scary first lockdown, Edgar-Jones was living in a London flatshare. As soon as the world opened up, she went off to work, capitalising on elevated acting stock to make *Fresh* (filmed in Canada) then an adaptation of the bestselling novel *Where the Crawdads Sing* (shot in Louisiana), then a mini-series called *Under the Banner of Heaven* (Canada again). She spent a year abroad, much of it masked, on Covid-wary sets, living in solitary rentals. She has just got back to London and has been staying with her parents, rehumanising with Sunday roasts and free lifts.



Daisy wears suit, Etro. Jumper, Matthew Duffy. Shoes, Jimmy Choo. Earrings, Aeyde. Styling: Simone Konu-Rae at One Represents. Hair: George Northwood. Makeup: Naoko Scintu. Styling assistant: Roz Donoghue. Digi tech and lighting: Joe Stone. Photograph: Gustavo Papaleo/The Guardian

Has she come back with a bump, I ask? Or a sigh of relief?

A bit of both, Edgar-Jones says. “As much as I loved and am grateful for a year of consistent work, there were times when I was lonely. Really missed my friends. I just haven’t seen them. I was away for something like 10 and a half months out of the 12. And that little bit of time I was home, I was jet-lagged. Bad company.”

Happily for me, she is good company today, a rapid talker and rapid walker, one of those people who prefers to look at you as they speak and so pounds along without seeing where they’re going. Of the astonishing success of *Normal People*, she says: “I think I’m still processing it, to be honest. I haven’t worked out what it all means – if it means anything at all.” But enough time has passed that she will get stabs of nostalgia, she says, whenever she thinks about it. She still swaps texts with the friends she made on set, including Mescal. “But I haven’t seen anyone I made it with for two years now.”



With Paul Mescal in *Normal People*. Photograph: Enda Bowe/BBC/Element Pictures/Hulu

I suggest it must feel a bit like having made very close friends on holiday before everyone disperses to their separate homes.

“That’s right, a holiday feeling. Filming was so intense. So full-on and all-consuming. Only you and that specific group of people know what it was like. A very insular experience that I now have this massive nostalgia for.”

Like Mescal, Edgar-Jones has been following the news from a distance while the creative team from *Normal People* adapt another Sally Rooney novel, *Conversations With Friends*. On the day I meet Edgar-Jones, a trailer for that series has just been released online: “It looks so-o-o beautiful,” she says. She was in Calgary last autumn when Rooney’s third novel, [Beautiful World, Where Are You](#), came out. “I cycled to a bookshop that first day. I sat in a park in the sun and read it in one go.” Edgar-Jones had got to know Rooney well enough, during pre-production meetings for *Normal People*, to pop her a quick email of congratulations after she read the new book. “And can you imagine how well she writes an email in reply? I wanted to frame it.”



Daisy wears suit, Aje. Top, Stella McCartney. Photograph: Gustavo Papaleo/The Guardian

As she read that day, Edgar-Jones says, she couldn't help but imagine how she would perform one or other of Rooney's new characters. "I think as soon as you've seen the man-behind-the-curtain, you can't go back," is how Edgar-Jones explains this impulse. "You want to read the new novel and lose yourself. But it's hard to disconnect. Your work brain is picturing 20 people behind a camera, and a boom mic hovering over them. You find yourself wondering whether it would make a better film or miniseries . . . "

Actually, the main result of her reading that day, she says, was to make her communicate more richly with her friends from home. *Beautiful World, Where Are You* is centred on a series of long, confessional emails between two friends in their late 20s and, while she read, Edgar-Jones suddenly realised that her own conversations with friends had reduced to a series of hellos, I-miss-yous, be-good-to-catch-ups, over text.

So she went back to her rental and wrote a long email to her best friend back home, expressing what I imagine a lot of young people have felt over two stunted, isolation-heavy years: that important aspects of their youth have been spirited away from them. Edgar-Jones summarises what she wrote: "I'm here in my apartment. I've just watched another season of *Below Deck*.

I've had another meal of order-in food. I bought a candle and I felt ... joy? But is this enough? Should I be living it up more? Is this how our 20s are supposed to be?"

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Distraction comes in the form of a wooden hut. A man is selling hot drinks from a hatch. Appalled by my order – I ask for something frothy with half the advertised amount of caffeine – Edgar-Jones leans in to confer with the man, agreeing that her own cup will contain the usual amount of coffee, maximum coffee, *all* the coffee. She turns to me and says: "Sorry. But."

Edgar-Jones's mother, Wendy, grew up in Northern Ireland. Her father, Philip, a media executive who runs entertainment at Sky TV and the Sky Arts channel, is Scottish. Her family are based in the same part of London that I grew up in, right where the northern suburbs begin. I thought I knew the accents of this part of the city as well as anyone, but Edgar-Jones's way of speaking confounds me. There are Irish vowel sounds, Scottish vowel sounds. If she wants to, she can sprinkle her conversation with enough variations of the word mate ("Mate! ... *Maaaaate* ... Mate?") to pass muster as a Londoner, but at the same time she says "wee" not "little", "gosh" more often than "God", "ach!" instead of "oh!".



'I was very green as an actor. There were times I thought, I don't know what I'm doing, I'm too wee.' Photograph: Gustavo Papaleo/The Guardian

While we wait for our coffee, she tries to explain this patchwork accent. She is an only child and her parents, two of her closest friends, have always had a strong influence on her. “My grandad moved in with us when I was about 11 as well. He died when I was 16. He had a very strong Northern Irish accent. Another big influence.” She has started to wonder, as well, if it’s a defensive thing. “I’ve played a lot of characters with accents, and I feel like I’ve sort of kept bits of them in my subconscious. Whenever I get shy, whenever I find it hard to speak as myself, little pieces of these accents sort of creep out.”

Coffees in hand, we carry on with our walk, talking over the beginnings of Edgar-Jones’s career. Her first acclaim came aged about seven, when she won a local ice-dancing competition. “I was dressed as Macavity from Cats. I did a sort of cartwheel on the ice. I think that’s what swung it.” She was educated at a private school and a state sixth-form college where she got decent grades at A-level. She decided not to go to university in order to have a stab at acting. After some earlier training with the National Youth Theatre, she signed with an agent while still a schoolgirl, working on ITV’s reboot of [Cold Feet](#) at 17. Before Normal People, she made an independent film, [Pond Life](#), and filmed two series of a UK/French co-production of War of the Worlds.

By the spring of 2019, when she turned 21, work was going … all right? Regular auditions. Intermittent yesses, lots of nos. There was one big part that Edgar-Jones was up for, which she came very close to landing, but missed. She won’t say what, but rejection stung as badly as being dumped, and she immediately went away in a funk and got the actors’ equivalent of a break-up haircut. It was only a new fringe, but what a bizarrely consequential new fringe. To this day she is convinced that this angry new haircut helped her land the part as Marianne, the high-minded nonconformist of Normal People.

She found the obsession with Connell’s necklace funny – ‘this piece of jewellery I hadn’t thought about during all of filming’

Her knack for switching between accents must have helped, too. Edgar-Jones was one of the last actors to be cast in Normal People, and an unusual

choice in that she was not based in Ireland. After a series of solo auditions, she secured the gig after a “chemistry read” with Mescal, already cast as the other lead, Connell. *Normal People* became a defining show of an era, in part because of its cool, even-handed script by Rooney and Alice Birch, in part because of directors Hettie Macdonald and Lenny Abrahamson’s unhurried pacing and technical dazzle. But this particular story (“First love, first heartbreak, stripped down to just that, in all its rawness,” as Edgar-Jones summarises it) was always going to live or die on the co-stars’ chemistry.

How bad were the nerves, that first week of filming, I ask? Edgar-Jones blinks and says she was like the duck in that oft-used analogy: “Above the water you have to appear absolutely chilled. But underneath your legs are flapping like billyo.” They shot from May to October 2019, in Dublin and Sligo mostly, but also in Italy and Sweden. “Real highs,” Edgar-Jones recalls, “some lows. I was very green as an actor. There were definitely times I thought, my God, I don’t know what I’m doing, I’m too wee. There was this thought that if I had one bad day at work I’d have to live with the results for the rest of my life.” She grew in confidence, helped on by the close friendships she was forming on set. “It was like a cosy romance, just with lots and lots of people. We almost forgot we were making something that was going to be seen.”

When she returned in autumn 2019 to her London flatshare, her friends put up a handmade sign, welcoming her home. She had lined up a part in a revival at the Almeida theatre of Mike Bartlett and Rupert Goold’s play, [Albion](#). She spent the winter in rehearsal before opening night in February 2020. Her main fear was that the audience wouldn’t laugh in response to her occasional jokes. “Hard to come back from that silence, or, even worse, that polite little ‘Hrm-hrm’ that people do out of their noses when they don’t find a joke funny.” But by the end of the run she was listening out for different noises altogether. “Any time we heard a cough, we thought, ‘Uh oh.’”



‘My dad told me to remember that it’s all a little bit silly. He said, “Take it seriously, but wear it lightly.” I’m still trying to do that now.’ Photograph: Gustavo Papaleo/The Guardian

Despite the subsequent national lockdown, *Normal People* appeared as scheduled in April 2020. Before its release her flatmates made another banner, congratulating Edgar-Jones for being a part of this cool-sounding show, however successful it might be. “I think it went online at 6.30am on a Sunday. I woke up to a couple of texts, people saying they’d just watched it, they loved it. That positive response, it was pretty immediate.” One of her flatmates made pancakes. They sat in the lounge and binge-watched the whole thing in six hours.

Within days, the [puffy fringe](#) that Edgar-Jones wore on screen as Marianne was being discussed in national newspaper thinkpieces. Her co-star, Mescal, was briskly established as one of the most fancied men on the planet. There were novelty social media accounts devoted to obscure aspects of the show, including the [chain necklace](#) that Mescal wore. “I think I found it funny?” she says, of this obsessional aspect. “I learned in a hurry that I had to part with my idea of *Normal People* the moment it landed. That people were going to have their own relationship with, I dunno, a piece of jewellery I hadn’t thought about during the whole of filming. Because the show was theirs now.”

She does remember an early FaceTime with her parents, as the noisy enthusiasm for the show began to take the form of a sort of national mania. Before her father worked at Sky, he had been a producer behind the original Big Brother run in the early 00s. Edgar-Jones was a toddler then, blissfully unaware of her father's role in a UK media obsession. Belatedly, though, she was able to call on him for advice. "He told me to remember that it's all a little bit silly. He said, 'Take it seriously, but wear it lightly.' I'm still trying to do that now."

So many of my friends finished uni from their bedrooms. I feel like we've all been left in the lurch, unable to full-stop things

Certain faces, films, books impressed themselves very deeply on the cultural hive-mind during 2020. "The stuff we read, the TV and films we watched," Edgar-Jones says, "they all held a little more weight during those months, right? For a lot of people, that was the only escape we had." She lost herself in [Michaela Coel's I May Destroy You](#), she remembers, and books including Delia Owens' *Where the Crawdads Sing*, one of the great literary successes of the year. She wound up auditioning for the lead in an adaptation of *Crawdads* towards the end of 2020, shooting the movie the following summer. It meant another beloved literary character to try to peel off the page and do justice to on screen – or, as Edgar-Jones puts it: "Pressure! You're coming to scenes that people have already formed a deep relationship with, and you've got a couple of hours in front of a camera to get it right for them."

She tried to take encouragement and energy from Owens' source text, treating it as she had once treated a well-thumbed copy of Rooney's novel, as a beautifully written crib sheet. One of the appeals of *Fresh*, her new thriller was that it had an original (read: not-yet-obsessed-over) screenplay. "If I didn't nail exactly what was there on the page? Fine. Because hardly anybody had read what was there on the page." Co-starring Sebastian Stan, *Fresh* is quite bloody, quite funny, quite shocking – and almost impossible to describe without ruining an early plot twist. Let's just say that it deals with the trials, indignities and potential dangers of modern dating.



With Sebastian Stan in her new thriller Fresh. Photograph: AP

Edgar-Jones, who drew on friends' online experiences for the part, says she has never been on a dating app herself. This is about as far as she's willing to go in discussion of her romantic life, at least with a notebook-wielding interviewer; instead, she offers a more general perspective on what the current dating scene looks like to people her age. "We shop for each other. We scroll. 'I don't want that. I don't want that.' You go on the date and you probably know within the first 30 seconds whether it's right. But you can't get out for at least two hours."

It sounds pretty awful when you put it like that, I say.

And yet, she shrugs, this is the reality. "All my friends' partners are people they've met by app. It does seem to be the only way people do it."

In Fresh, there is one bad dating choice imagined forward to violent and sexual extremes. Edgar-Jones has spoken before about how the sexual content of Normal People was arranged and filmed with such tact and sensitivity that she and Mescal came to think of it as the "gold standard": a way that all actors, particularly young and inexperienced actors, could and should be treated when filming sensitive scenes in future. "Even while we were shooting, I knew deep down I was being spoiled. That it can't always

be like that. I've continued to be lucky in that I'm yet to work with a group that aren't *nice* ... But I'm not naive. I know that's probably going to happen. I'm better prepared for it, I think."

How so?

"I would feel safe to tell someone: 'No,'" she says. "And for that to be a full sentence."

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By now we've completed many loops and figure eights around the park. It's almost time to say goodbye, but before we do I ask Edgar-Jones about those long, Rooney-ish emails she wrote to a friend. Did she ever get an answer to that question: is this how a person's 20s are supposed to be?

Edgar-Jones shakes her head. "Nope. Not yet." She wonders, though, if one of the things that people her age feel as though they've missed out on is a sense of closure for their youth. "So many of my friends finished uni from their bedrooms, y'know? I've been thinking a lot about being in plays, for some reason. How, at the end of a play, there's applause from the audience. The actors bow. There's something about that, a conclusion like that, saying and hearing, 'Thank you for this experience' – it full-stops things. And I feel like for us, maybe we've all been left in the lurch. I don't feel we've been able to full-stop things."

She leaves the thought there. We've arrived back at the boating pond and Edgar-Jones has a train to catch, to visit friends and family out of London. Then she'll fly to LA for that nervy red-carpet debut. There's just enough time for her to practise her hotshot-lawyer pose by the water's edge once again. Actually, she admits, raising her chin, it was her mum and dad who suggested this whole pretend-you've-just-won-a-case thing. "They were teasing me, trying to get me to be less nervous. They don't have any more of a clue about stuff like this than I do."

She wonders about abandoning the poised, one-foot-forward thing – instead taking to the red carpet purely as herself when the time comes. Next to the pond, she practises that pose, dropping her shoulders, grinning like a slightly shellshocked and baffled twentysomething who has spent the better part of

two years in isolation, goofily throwing up both thumbs for good measure, finally collapsing into self-conscious laughter. Which of the poses to use? Edgar-Jones wanders off home to her folks, thinking it through.

Fresh is available on Disney+ from 18 March.

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Warsan Shire: ‘Class has always been something I’ve been very aware of.’

Photograph: Shaniqwa Jarvis/The Guardian

## **Warsan Shire talks to Bernardine Evaristo about becoming a superstar poet: ‘Beyoncé sent flowers when my children were born’**

Warsan Shire: ‘Class has always been something I’ve been very aware of.’

Photograph: Shaniqwa Jarvis/The Guardian

One is a breakout poet, the other is a Booker-winning champion of Black talent. They swap notes on class, impostor syndrome and the day pop’s biggest star came knocking

by [Ellen E Jones](#)

Sat 26 Feb 2022 04.45 EST

When an email from Beyoncé's office first landed in Warsan Shire's inbox, she assumed it was some kind of prank. It wasn't. Beyoncé – *the real Beyoncé* – was inviting Shire, a 27-year-old British-Somali poet from Wembley, north-west London, to collaborate. The result was the revolutionary 2016 visual album [Lemonade](#), on which Shire is credited with “film adaptation and poetry”; her verses are read aloud between songs. Shire has also since contributed work to Beyoncé's 2020 film Black is King and wrote a specially commissioned poem, I Have Three Hearts, to announce the singer's 2017 pregnancy with twins.

But even before [Beyoncé](#) came knocking, Shire was starward bound. After a responsibility-laden adolescence, spent combining writing with co-parenting her three younger siblings, Shire published her debut chapbook of poems, Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth in 2011, aged just 23. In 2013, she was appointed the first Young People's Laureate for London and in 2015, her poem Home became a viral anthem for the refugee crisis. Shire's first full poetry collection, Bless the Daughter Raised by a Voice in Her Head, comes out next month. In between these professional milestones, she also found time to meet and marry a Mexican American charity worker called Andres, move continents, and have two children.

For the bestselling author Bernardine Evaristo, all this is a delight but no surprise. “Beyoncé chose to collaborate with Warsan because of the richness of her work,” she says. “It transcends these perceived barriers and boundaries around women's experiences.” Evaristo was 60 in 2019 when she found her own global fame, by [winning the Booker prize](#) with her eighth book, Girl, Woman, Other. Evaristo's route to the top had been slow and winding, so she determined to blaze a more direct trail for those who came after. With young talent exactly like Shire in mind, she initiated [The Complete Works](#) poetry mentoring scheme in 2007 (Shire was a mentee) and founded the Brunel International African Poetry prize in 2012 (Shire was the inaugural winner). This year, Evaristo completes her trek to the apex of the British literary establishment, by assuming the presidency of the Royal Society of Literature (the same august organisation that in 2018 [elected Shire](#) as its youngest fellow).

Now, on the occasion of the publication of Shire's collection, she and Evaristo have come together to swap notes on their influences, ideal writing conditions and occasional bouts of impostor syndrome. There was a time when these two women would regularly run into each other at poetry readings and publishing events, but since Shire now lives in Los Angeles, it's been a while. So when we arrive on the Zoom call – Evaristo from her airy, art-filled London living room and Shire from what looks like a hastily grabbed hiding place in the basement – they get immediately stuck into conversation. It's full of laughter, mutual admiration and gratitude for the wonders of a life lived in literature. *Ellen E Jones*

**Bernardine Evaristo** There's so much to ask you about your journey to where you are now – I mean, it's just been incredible, hasn't it? But maybe I'll kick off with *Bless the Daughter Raised by a Voice in Her Head*: how does it feel to finally have your first full collection published?

**Warsan Shire** I remember the advice you gave me, to take my time and not rush it. I think, starting off young, I wanted to make sure I didn't burn out quickly and just release something that I wasn't really proud of. Also, poetry was always linked to my mental health, as an outlet, so it feels very cathartic to finally let go of this collection. I was writing this book on the precipice of starting my own family. It feels really massive, like I went from a girl to a woman in the middle of writing it.

**BE** This is why you are a really serious writer, because you could have ridden the wave of *Lemonade* and put out a collection then, but you knew you wanted it to be the best it can be. I really respect that. I think many other people would have thought that if they don't exploit the moment, it's gonna pass them by. So, let's go back to the beginning. Did you start off with Jacob Sam-La Rose's [Barbican Young Poets](#)?

Before I knew Black writers, I thought becoming one was as likely as becoming a Hollywood star

*Warsan Shire*

**WS** When I was about 15, Jacob came to a youth club where I lived, in Wembley Central. Because I raised my sisters, it was really difficult to get

out, so I had to lie and do all these things to get to the workshop, and I got there a little bit late, stumbled in, but that's how I met Jacob. After that day, my life was completely changed because I'd met a real-life poet. He introduced me to the works of really amazing Black British poets and writers, and then I was able to actually meet them. So that's how I got to know Nii [Parkes, poet and co-founder of Shire's first publisher, Flipped Eye], and that's how my first chapbook came through.

**BE** That's such a wonderful introduction to the arts, because you weren't alienated from the material, y'know? Whereas, with me, when I was your age, it was all white. The struggle for me, as I grew older, was to find Black writers, Black theatre and, in the end, I had to create my own through Theatre of Black Women in the 1980s. The way in which you became part of the poetry community was through a kind of mentoring, wasn't it? Through Jacob and Nii and then through [Pascale Petit](#) and The Complete Works, and it's so important, when we're coming from the kind of backgrounds that are underrepresented in literature.

**WS** There's not a day that goes by when that's lost on me. I can only imagine how you felt, because before I got to know these people, I thought that becoming a writer was as likely as becoming a Hollywood star. That's why it's such an honour to be speaking with you today, because people like you were the reason why any of us have any opportunity at all. I'm just so, so grateful! I hope that I can do something like that for younger writers as well.

**BE** Yes, I think that's something else that we share. Even though writing is something that's deep within us, we are still also about our communities. It's not just art for art's sake, is it? It's about being a voice in the world as a Black woman. I mean, do you feel that responsibility?

**WS** I would love to speak to somebody who is from our kind of background, who *doesn't* feel the responsibility, because how is that possible? I think whenever you come from a people who don't have a voice, and you have a voice, how could you not? For those who don't have to, that is wonderful. I mean, how great that you can write a poem only about garden gnomes and it means nothing other than the beauty of the garden gnome! Like, how

gorgeous that you can do that! But also, I want to speak for people. Not only is it necessary and important, it's also fun!



‘The best thing that could happen is that your work is used to raise awareness.’ Photograph: Shaniqwa Jarvis/The Guardian. Tunic: [Valentino](#). Top: [Tyler McGillivray](#). Earrings: [Mondo Mondo](#)

**BE** Yes, that’s right. It’s not a burden that we carry, is it? It is something that we embrace as really positive. But you see, I grew up in a political family. Both my parents were political activists. My Nigerian immigrant father was a Labour councillor and a socialist, my parents went on demonstrations ... You also grew up with politics. I mean, you were in Britain because of the politics of [Somalia](#), right?

**WS** Yes, and my mum has always been this natural feminist, even though she spent her life as a housewife and didn’t really get to go to school. She always relished seeing me be free. My family is a Muslim family, so at times when I would be told: “Hey, you need to wear a hijab,” it would be my mum who’d be like: “She’ll do it when she wants to.” So that just made me feel formidable. My dad’s a writer and he was the reason why we had to leave [Somalia](#). He was writing this book about the corruption in the Somali government, there were threats and intimidation, and ultimately, we had to leave just before the war broke out. He was the first person that introduced

to me the idea of being Afrocentric, pan-Africanism, and the history of Somalia. He made me feel really proud to be Black from a very young age. And he also put in me the importance of writing and sharing your stories. So that, mixed with growing up with the backdrop of a civil war – and constantly looking after and meeting traumatised family that had just come from war – all of that came together to create in me this urgency to write.

You had poetry as part of everyday life, your dad's politics, your mum's feminism – I'm psychoanalysing you here!

*Bernardine Evaristo*

**BE** I remember you said years ago that everybody in Somalia is a poet: is that true?

**WS** Yeah, it's very true. That's why, when I met Jacob, I was like: "Oh, you can do this for a *job*?" Because, before then, in my home, I was around people just reciting poetry, all willy-nilly. We call it "*gabay*" in Somalia, and it's used when a child is born, when somebody dies, when we go to a wedding, when you're courting somebody, when you're cursing somebody, when you're beating your children – there's something for every single activity in life. When I was born, my grandmother wrote me a poem about how one girl is better than a thousand boys, basically, because everybody wanted the first child to be a boy – y'know, sexism and everything – so, to counteract that, she wrote me this poem.

**BE** So you had the poetry, which was just part of everyday life, and then you had your dad's politics, your mum's feminism – I'm psychoanalysing you here, Warsan! And you've got the grandmother who says to you, "One girl is equal to a thousand boys" – I mean, how amazing is that?! In my case, it was a Nigerian father, and he spoke broken English, which I didn't realise until I was in my late 20s, and I interviewed him on tape and then I heard it back. I think somehow that has affected me as a writer, because I do like capturing the vernacular with my characters. And then Catholic church, where I went every Sunday for 10 years of my life. Torture! But I was absorbing the rich, poetic language of the Bible. When I started writing, it came out as poetry and I always thought it was some kind of miracle, but actually, it was rooted in the church. I also want to ask another question about voices ... With your

book, to me it's obvious that you're drawing on all these different women's experiences and it is, in a sense, poly-vocal. So can you talk a bit about that?

**WS** Yeah, definitely. I think it was sitting down and listening to all the women that came through my home, which felt like hundreds and hundreds. My mum is a big-time social butterfly so, from a young age, I was privy to these private conversations, which as I got older turned into these women talking to me directly, and nobody seemed to care about it being inappropriate, because I'm the eldest, so it was just like: "Oh, she can deal with it." So I really heard about people's private lives, people's marital issues ... I heard about the complications and consequences of female genital mutilation, things that people will not tell anybody else – especially from my culture. They knew that I was interested in writing and it was like: "Oh yeah, she's gonna be a writer, so let's tell her all our stories." It was really, really sweet how they championed me, and I just wanted to honour that.



'I grew up listening to Beyoncé, so it was very surreal. I was very starstruck.' Photograph: Shaniqwa Jarvis/The Guardian

**BE** Sometimes I draw on people I've known, and I'm always really entertained [to discover] the people who don't read my books, because I

know that they might recognise themselves, but they don't read the books! So I can say what I like!

**WS** Has anybody ever come to you and said please stop writing about me?

**BE** Oh yeah, I've been heckled! One of my characters was kind of inspired by somebody I used to know and they came to an event and started shouting out, having a go at me. And it was a really smart, prestigious event! That was the worst. But, as writers, I think we are ruthless, to a certain extent. Y'know, if you're not somehow drawing on the people around you, then what are you going to draw on? I've just published a memoir [[Manifesto: On Never Giving Up](#)] and I really worked hard to disguise people. I had to stay true to the experience I had with them, but somehow obscure their identity. So, like, somebody might, for example, be living in America, but I maybe put them in the north of England.

**WS** Witness protection! You have to witness-protect your exes! There are some family members of mine that I just won't touch, because I know that they'll hunt me down.

**BE** Another thing that's interesting about your process, I remember you telling me that you write while watching television? We know writers talk about their noise-cancelling headphones, and no distractions and so on, and here you are; I think you said you wrote in bed, watching television?

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**WS** Yeah! These are the places that I write: I write in the cinema, in the loudest coffee shop in the world. I used to really love writing in Ikea, because it's so loud. I love when children are screaming, so now that I have kids, it's really inspiring! The more noise, the better! It's because I was parent-ified from a young age and had to look after my sisters. I just had to get on with it. If I was gonna write, I was gonna have to write in the middle of three screaming children, in the middle of cooking and cleaning and doing my schoolwork and finding a little boyfriend in the street and hanging out with my friends. And I needed to do everything. I knew that I had all this

responsibility, but I knew that I also wanted to be young while I was young, because I could see in my mother the repercussions of giving up your youth, and how it catches up with you later. So I was gung-ho about having all the experiences.

**BE** That's really inspirational for aspiring writers, because the myth is that you need to have your own desk in a quiet room. And that's not going to work for everybody! I grew up in a large family with eight kids, so it was a noisy household, but as a middle child, I didn't have to take responsibility for anybody except for myself. I would retreat into reading books. I didn't have a room of my own until I left home when I was 18. So it's a class thing as well, isn't it? Now, I want to move on to America. You abandoned us! You eloped with the Mexican guy. Explain yourself!

**WS** *Maaaan* ... OK, so let me speak honestly: I think that sometimes you're faced with this decision to either take care of those that you've taken care of your whole entire life, and sacrifice your life, in a way. Or you can make a choice – which is what I did – to, for the first time ever, put myself first. That was really hard. And also, y'know, I fell in love! I needed to know whether or not this was going to work. I didn't want to look back on my life later and feel resentment towards my sisters. I didn't want to feel like Miss Havisham, up in the attic, and be like: "I gave up everything for you guys!" I want them to have these amazing, bright, vibrant, fulfilled lives, but if I stayed I'd be resentful. I knew that could happen to me very easily because it's happened to women in my family over and over again. Then what happened was that Trump became president shortly after I moved, and then there was the whole "Muslim ban" thing, and then the pandemic ... So back-to-back stuff has happened, which meant I couldn't travel. Although it seems like I didn't want to come back, I really have missed London so much.

**BE** And then, Beyoncé!

When I hear other writers speak, I feel like: 'Oh, OK, I must be a hoodrat, because I can't speak that way!'

*Warsan Shire*

**WS** So the Beyoncé thing happened very randomly, honestly. I opened up my email and there was one from Parkwood, which is Beyoncé's company. I thought somebody was pranking me, but it turned out to be actually them. They thought I was in London, and I said: "Actually, coincidentally, I happen to be in LA right now ..." So it all happened very quickly. I woke up that morning, and that afternoon, I was sitting with Beyoncé listening to the album [Lemonade]. I grew up listening to [Destiny's Child](#) and Beyoncé, so it was very surreal. I was very starstruck. I thought, finally, the mental health issue that my mum has always talked about on my dad's side of the family had kicked in, and what a beautiful psychosis this is! Of all the ways to lose my mind, this is a great one. And then it turned out to be real. It was a really beautiful experience, in that she made me feel just safe and special. She was very, very kind to me and she's really sweet – she sent me flowers after the births of both my children – but yeah, then I just went back to writing. I don't really think about it much.

**BE** That's because you're so grounded. It hasn't gone to your head. But I think it's testament to your work, that she chose you, out of all the poets around. You write with such empathy and compassion that your work transcends these perceived barriers and boundaries around women's experiences. You write beautifully about loss and displacement, the bond between women, and these are all things that women around the world can relate to. I think this book will have incredible global reach. Your work is not depressing; even though you are tackling some really serious subjects, it's uplifting. I think that's a really special skill.

**WS** Thank you! It means *so* much coming from you, you don't even know.

*The conversation turns to Shire's 2009 poem Home, which became a viral sensation around 2015, when Benedict Cumberbatch [recited lines from it as part of a charity fundraising single](#) in response to the Syrian refugee crisis: "No one leaves home unless / home is the mouth of a shark."*

**WS** I remember when I wrote that poem, it came from visiting Italy and meeting some Somali [refugees](#) who lived in the old, abandoned Somali embassy there. There was no electricity, no running water and a young man had, the night before, jumped to his death from the top of the building. I was seeing first-hand, and hearing straight from the people who were

experiencing it, how difficult it was to be a refugee or an immigrant. So that poem came out of that. I think it was [André 3000](#) that said: “Across cultures, darker people suffer the most, why?” And so I think it’s really great, obviously, that this poem has spread far and wide, but it’s not lost on me that it only started to get traction when the refugees in question had lighter skin from those that I was speaking about to begin with. That said, obviously, the best thing that could happen is that your work is used, not only to raise awareness, but to raise funds. I get contacted by synagogues and churches all over the world [wanting to do that]. I do think it’s really odd, that it takes all that for people to understand how hard it is to be a fucking refugee! You have to really, really drum it in! And although it’s a beautiful thing that everybody can come together to connect with these words, and have more empathy, the downside of it is that whenever I see it’s being shared, I know it’s because something really horrible has happened, like all these people have just drowned.



Photograph: Shaniqwa Jarvis/The Guardian. Styling: Anna Su at Art Department. Hair: Ash Nicole. Makeup: Eliven Quiros. Dress: [Mara Hoffman](#). Shoes: [Charlotte Stone](#). Glasses: [Gucci](#). Earrings and cuff: [Mondo Mondo](#)

**BE** Obviously, that poem is so powerful and so quotable, but I think a lot of your poetry is quotable, actually. I think that's one of its strengths. It's

complex and multi-layered, and can take rereading, but at the same time its reach is beyond poetry readers.

**WS** People say quite a bit: “I don’t really like poetry, but I like your work.” I, personally, really love poems that are difficult to get into and take time to understand. I think, though, maybe what’s making it accessible to those who aren’t that interested in poetry is that I’ve always felt like I’m a writer who’s not very academic, not very intellectual. When I hear other writers speak, I would feel like: “Oh, OK, I must be a hoodrat, because I can’t speak that way!” So maybe some of that goes into it. I don’t know. I think class has always been something I’ve been very aware of and, at times, has made me feel like an impostor, because I don’t sound like how I imagined a writer would sound.

**BE** I want to pick you up on this idea that you’re not intellectual, Warsan, because you are! But we’re brainwashed in this society to think that unless you were privately educated and went to Oxford and draw on certain literary or cultural references, then you are less sophisticated, less intelligent, less cultured than those who have gone through that system. I have had that. I don’t have it any more because I do what I do and that’s it; I am myself. You are most definitely yourself, and the way you write, your process, your cultural references are valid and true to who you are, and that’s the most important thing that we can be as writers. Your communication is incredibly effective.

**WS** Oh, thank you. You gave me a therapy session there! I really appreciate it. You’ve worked really hard to create space in publishing and literature for Black and non-white writers. I know you’ve done so much to make it possible for our voices to be heard. How does it feel to see the needle move just a little tiny bit?

**BE** Y’know the needle has shifted quite a lot, actually. Right now, it’s quite ... I don’t want to use the word “fashionable”, but certainly I think publishers want to have diverse lists now and before they didn’t care. Now there are so many new writers coming through I’ve lost track, whereas before I knew literally everybody. So it feels really good. But what I’m really interested in, at this stage, is that people should have long careers. I

don't want us to find that in 10 years' time, there are only, like, three writers remaining, continuing to publish ... What is the scene like over there? Are you reading American writers?

**WS** No, to be honest I haven't stayed on top of it ... The last book I read was *The Republic of Motherhood* by [Liz Berry](#) and then before that it was [Jay Bernard's Surge](#). I still drink PG Tips. I watch Gogglebox, I still watch EastEnders. I have started a deep love affair with Karl Pilkington, who I listen to every single night before I go to sleep. It's really important for me to remember where I come from, y'know? My nightmare is to get an American accent.

**BE** Which you haven't got, so that's OK.

**WS** No, listen, I don't speak to Americans! The only American I speak to is the one I'm married to.

**BE** And Beyoncé!

**WS** Oh yeah, and Beyoncé.

*Bless the Daughter Raised by a Voice in Her Head* is published on 10 March, at £12.99, by Chatto & Windus in collaboration with Flipped Eye. To support *The Guardian* and *Observer*, order your copy at [guardianbookshop.com](#). Delivery charges may apply.

Warsan Shire will be appearing at the Women of the World festival at Southbank Centre, London, on 12 March. [Buy tickets here](#).

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**Blind date: ‘He wasn’t drinking, but looked lovingly at – and sniffed – my glass of wine’**



Photograph: Christian Sinibaldi/The Guardian

Julia, 28, arts and learning manager, meets Dean, 34, actor and writer

Sat 26 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

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## **Julia on Dean**



### **What were you hoping for?**

If not the love of my life, then at least a couple of good anecdotes.

### **First impressions?**

Tall! Easy to chat to and equally as curious about how the Guardian's matchmaking works.

### **What did you talk about?**

Creative careers. Holidaying vs travelling. Family. Climate dread. His chocolate addiction and screenwriting ventures.

### **Any awkward moments?**

When he said he wasn't drinking due to an extended dry Jan and I was halfway through a glass of wine.

### **Good table manners?**

Definitely. He was keen to share lots of food and even let me take home our

barely drunk bottle of wine.

**Best thing about Dean?**

He was interested in lots of things, so we had plenty to talk about.

**Would you introduce him to your friends?**

Most of them.

**Q&A**

**Want to be in Blind date?**

Show

Blind date is Saturday's dating column: every week, two strangers are paired up for dinner and drinks, and then spill the beans to us, answering a set of questions. This runs, with a photograph we take of each dater before the date, in Saturday magazine (in the UK) and online at [theguardian.com](http://theguardian.com) every Saturday. It's been running since 2009 – you can [read all about how we put it together here](#).

**What questions will I be asked?**

We ask about age, location, occupation, hobbies, interests and the type of person you are looking to meet. If you do not think these questions cover everything you would like to know, tell us what's on your mind.

**Can I choose who I match with?**

No, it's a blind date! But we do ask you a bit about your interests, preferences, etc – the more you tell us, the better the match is likely to be.

**Can I pick the photograph?**

No, but don't worry: we'll choose the nicest ones.

**What personal details will appear?**

Your first name, job and age.

**How should I answer?**

Honestly but respectfully. Be mindful of how it will read to your date, and that Blind date reaches a large audience, in print and online.

**Will I see the other person's answers?**

No. We may edit yours and theirs for a range of reasons, including length, and we may ask you for more details.

**Will you find me The One?**

We'll try! Marriage! Babies!

**Can I do it in my home town?**

Only if it's in the UK. Many of our applicants live in London, but we would love to hear from people living elsewhere.

**How to apply**

Email [blind.date@theguardian.com](mailto:blind.date@theguardian.com)

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

**Describe Dean in three words?**

Tall, interesting, easygoing.

**What do you think he made of you?**

Hard to tell – he didn't ask a lot of questions so I felt like the one doing all the interrogating. Although he did look disappointed when I said Dune was an average film ...

**Did you go on somewhere?**

Nope.

**And ... did you kiss?**

No.

**If you could change one thing about the evening what would it be?**

I think Dean would have liked a drink, because he looked lovingly at, and sniffed, my glass of wine.

**Marks out of 10?**

7.

**Would you meet again?**

I don't think the vibe was there, but sure, everyone deserves a second chance.

---

**Dean on Julia****What were you hoping for?**

The love of my life.

**First impressions?**

I wasn't attracted to her and knew that wouldn't change, so I decided to enjoy the meal and conversation instead.

**What did you talk about?**

The workings of Guardian Blind Date. Galleries. Julia's cheesemaking. She asked a lot of questions, which made me conscious that the conversation was a little one-way at times, but she seemed genuinely interested in my life as a freelancer.

**Any awkward moments?**

We both struggled to work out the menu.

**Good table manners?**

I was too busy shovelling food in my mouth to notice any glaring faux pas.

**Best thing about Julia?**

Easygoing. She seemed like quite a sweet person and knew how to keep the conversation flowing.

**Would you introduce her to your friends?**

It wouldn't get that far, I'm afraid.

**Describe Julia in three words?**

Open, unassuming, polite.

**What do you think she made of you?**

It had been a long day and she said I perked up when dessert arrived, so maybe I was a tad lacklustre.

**Did you go on somewhere?**

No, we walked together to the tube.

**And ... did you kiss?**

No. I think it was clear from the off that there was no chemistry.

**If you could change one thing about the evening what would it be?**

A more suitable match.

**Marks out of 10?**

6.

**Would you meet again?**

I wouldn't.

*Dean and Julia ate at [the White Horse in Mayfair, London W1](#). Fancy a blind date? Email [blind.date@theguardian.com](mailto:blind.date@theguardian.com)*

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## 2022.02.26 - Coronavirus

- 'End of the Chris and Patrick show' Vallance and Whitty to step out of spotlight as Covid restrictions end in England
- Vallance and Whitty's best bits PowerPoints and exponential curves
- Coronavirus Government has abandoned its own health advice, leak reveals
- 'So many rabbit holes' Even in trusting New Zealand, protests show fringe beliefs can flourish

## Health

# Vallance and Whitty to step out of spotlight as Covid restrictions end in England

Chief scientific adviser and England's chief medical officer will focus on health inequalities and emerging technologies

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



Sir Chris Whitty, left, and Sir Patrick Vallance. Composite: Guardian Design/Getty Images/Crown Copyright/10 Downing Street/PA/AP

*Ian Sample* Science editor

*@iansample*

Sat 26 Feb 2022 02.00 EST

The government's two most senior advisers in the pandemic will turn their attention to health inequalities, the state of the UK's air and emerging technologies following the milestone decision to end all legal Covid restrictions in [England](#) this week.

While the pandemic is far from over, Boris Johnson's announcement on Monday of the "living with Covid" plan is expected to be the last time Sir [Patrick Vallance](#), the chief scientific adviser, and Sir Chris Whitty, England's chief medical officer, will flank the prime minister to explain the UK's response.

As the country moves beyond the emergency phase of the crisis, Vallance and Whitty are expected to slip out of the spotlight and make headway with other projects.

"We are not witnessing the end of Covid, but we are probably witnessing the end of the Chris and Patrick show," said Prof Jack Stilgoe, a specialist on the governance of emerging technologies at University College London. "It is easy to forget how strange it is to have senior scientists showing powerpoint slides on the nightly news."

Not that the Covid work is going away. Vallance and Whitty will continue to follow the data on infections, hospitalisations and deaths, the effectiveness of vaccines, and whether further doses or different shots are needed. With the end of free tests for the general public, the GP-led surveillance system for "influenza-like illness" is being adapted to detect new variants of Covid.

Prof David Heymann, the former chair of the [Health](#) Protection Agency, said Whitty and Vallance will probably focus on three key areas. First, strong public health capabilities are needed to identify, investigate and close down future outbreaks – with precision lockdowns if needed. Second, the NHS needs beefing up to withstand a surge in admissions alongside routine patient loads in the event of a future pandemic. Third, more must be done to make the population more resilient, through promotion of healthier lifestyles and perhaps tobacco-like taxes on unhealthy products, Heymann said.

Whitty already has work under way on health inequalities, tragically exposed in the pandemic, and will look in particular at problems in coastal towns. A report on air quality is also in the pipeline – an issue that overlaps with health inequality and the underlying issues of [deprivation](#), housing, lifestyle and employment.

As the chief scientific adviser, Vallance has a wider role and in recent months has taken on the title of national technology adviser and set up two new government bodies, the National Science and Technology Council and the Office for Science and Technology Strategy. The aim is to help ministers understand, and know how to exploit, emerging science and technology to help achieve net zero emissions, improve public health and strengthen national security. As Prof James Wilsdon, an expert in research policy at the University of Sheffield, points out, “it will take time and effort to make them work effectively”.

With a public inquiry into the Covid response looming, Wilsdon believes Vallance will want to lead a “root and branch review” of the UK’s science advisory system and the lessons to be drawn, good and bad. According to Stilgoe, that inquiry will want to apportion blame and with politicians normally better at playing the blame game than scientists, he warned: “Science will need defending from politicians who will claim they were just doing what the scientists told them.”

Several experts believe Whitty is well placed to help the NHS clear its backlogs and recover from the carnage of the pandemic, but it is unclear how much influence he will have on this. “The biggest challenge for Chris will be to have a role in the priorities for clearing health backlogs,” said Prof David Salisbury, former head of immunisations at the Home Office. “Although superficially the work of NHS England, the prioritisation of tasks and capacity to respond become public health issues as well as just capacity topics.”

England’s deputy chief medical officer, Prof Sir Jonathan Van-Tam, will stand down at the end of March, but it is unclear how long Vallance and Whitty will remain in their posts. Wilson speculates that Vallance could take over from Sir Jeremy Farrar as director of the Wellcome Trust next year, or become president of the Royal Society in 2025. “Whitty is harder to

predict,” he said, and may continue as CMO for “some years to come”, or step back into a chief scientific adviser role in a government department.

While Vallance and Whitty will welcome stepping out of the spotlight, Heymann believes neither should disappear from public view. “It would be good for them to appear periodically to remind people what needs to be done, both to prepare for the next pandemic should it occur and also what needs to be done with other problems,” he said. “They’ve got the trust of the population and they should use that.”

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## PowerPoint slides and exponential curves: Vallance and Whitty's best bits



Chris Whitty, Boris Johnson and Patrick Vallance. Composite: Guardian Design/AFP/Getty Images

‘Living with Covid’ plan means government’s chief scientific adviser and chief medical officer will step back

Tobi Thomas  
@tobithomas

Sat 26 Feb 2022 02.00 EST

Sir [Patrick Vallance](#), the government's chief scientific adviser, and Sir Chris Whitty, England's chief medical officer, became household names after they were propelled into the spotlight by the Covid pandemic. For the past two years, they have flanked Boris Johnson at Downing Street briefings armed with PowerPoint slides and exponential curves. But with the announcement this week of England's plan for "living with Covid" the advisers are expected to take a step back. Here are some of their most memorable moments.

## **Vallance says UK has 'herd immunity' strategy**

00:30

Sir Patrick Vallance: approach to Covid is to build up 'degree of herd immunity' – video

Early in the coronavirus pandemic, Sir Patrick Vallance suggested that building herd immunity in the UK through widespread transmission could be the UK's strategy for handling the pandemic.

On 13 March 2020, Sir Patrick Vallance, speaking to the BBC's Today show, said the key things the UK needed to do was to fight the pandemic was to "build up some degree of herd immunity", saying that because the vast majority of people with coronavirus get a mild illness, herd immunity would mean that more people are immune to the virus and transmission would be reduced.

The concept of building herd immunity through exposure prompted backlash and was [criticised by figures such as former health secretary Jeremy Hunt](#).

## **20,000 deaths would be a 'good outcome', says Patrick Vallance**

00:46

Sir Patrick Vallance: 20,000 deaths or below would be a 'good outcome' – video

Speaking to the health select committee on the 17 March 2020, Sir Patrick Vallance stated that if the number of coronavirus deaths reached 20,000 or below, that would be a “good outcome”, although it would still be “horrible” and “an enormous number of deaths”.

Of course, the UK’s total coronavirus death toll greatly surpassed this prediction. As of 25 February 2022, there were a total of 161,104 deaths recorded within 28 days of a positive test.

## **Whitty and Patrick Vallance say they don't want any part of the politics**

Amid the controversy over Dominic Cummings's journey to Durham during lockdown, Whitty and Vallance were asked whether they were "entirely comfortable with the prime minister telling you you can't answer questions about Dominic Cummings".

In response, [Chris Whitty](#) said: "I can assure you, the desire not to get pulled into politics is far stronger on the part of Sir Patrick [Vallance] and me than it is on the prime minister".

Vallance added: "I'm a civil servant, I'm politically neutral and I don't want to get involved in politics at all".

## **Whitty acknowledges mistakes were made at the start of the pandemic**

0

Chris Whitty acknowledges mistakes made at start of Covid outbreak – video

On 10 June 2020, When looking at specific ways the UK could have improved their response to the coronavirus pandemic when it first emerged, Whitty said that if he had to choose one issue, it would be "looking at how we could speed up testing early on in the epidemic".

"There are many good reasons why it was tricky, but if I was to play things again, and this is largely based on what some other countries were able to do, in particular Germany, I think that's the one thing we would have put more emphasis on at an earlier stage".

In April 2020, the [UK's daily coronavirus testing rate had only just passed 10,000.](#)

## **Whitty describes Covid-denier as ‘young lad’ who will be ‘model citizen in due course’**

00:44

'A model citizen in due course': Chris Whitty responds to verbal abuse by Covid denier – video

In June 2021, a video was widely shared on social media of [a man putting Whitty in a headlock](#) when he declined to be in a photograph with him.

Whitty later said that he did not “think anything of it” and was “surprised that the media picked up on it”.

“I’m sure he will become a model citizen in due course,” he added.

Both Lewis Hughes and Jonathan Chew, who were both involved in the incident and appeared in the video, were prosecuted.

Jonathan Chew was sentenced to [eight weeks in prison in January after admitting harassment](#) of Whitty on 29 June 2021.

Lewis Hughes, who was sacked from his job as an estate agent after the incident, [received a suspended sentence last July for his involvement](#).

## **Whitty says people like Nicki Minaj should be ashamed of ‘peddling untruths’**

01:07

'They should be ashamed': Chris Whitty condemns Covid myth spreaders – video

Asked about claims by the rapper Nicki Minaj that [the coronavirus vaccine could make you impotent](#), Whitty said that people who “know they are peddling untruths … should be ashamed”.

He said: “There are a group of people who have strange beliefs, and that’s fine … but there are also people who go round trying to discourage other

people from taking a vaccine which could be life saving.

“And many of those people, I regret to say, know that they are peddling untruths, and still do it. And in my view, they should be ashamed.”

## Whitty tells people to prioritise what matters to them at Christmas

00:57

Covid: people should cut down on socialising, warns Chris Whitty – video

In December last year, as the Omicron wave started taking off, Whitty said that “people should prioritise what matters, and that by definition means de-prioritising other things”.

“I think I would recommend that, and most people would recommend that, and you don’t need a medical degree to realise that is a sensible thing to do with an incredibly infectious virus”.

At the time of Whitty’s comments, Independent Sage published a statement calling for an emergency circuit break lockdown given the rise of the Omicron variant, with numbers of infections doubling in England every two days.

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## Coronavirus

# UK government has abandoned its own Covid health advice, leak reveals

Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak said to have agreed to decision not to follow public health advice on testing in vulnerable settings



Civil service leaders across Whitehall have been advised there is no expectation in future their departments will follow public health advice in full. Photograph: Daniel Leal-Olivas/AFP/Getty Images

*[Rowena Mason](#) Deputy political editor*

Fri 25 Feb 2022 12.24 EST

Public health advice is no longer being followed under Boris Johnson's "living with Covid" strategy to end mass testing, senior civil servants have acknowledged in a leaked account of a cross-Whitehall briefing.

The briefing by a senior member of the Covid taskforce was delivered to civil service leaders across Whitehall on Thursday afternoon, making clear that following public health advice was no longer the sole priority.

The senior official said public health advice would not be met in NHS or social care settings in relation to the testing of staff, and that was a “decision that the PM, chancellor and indeed the cabinet have agreed to”.

On the call, he said: “It will be the case from 1 April that testing in DH own settings including the NHS and adult social care will not fully match the public health advice because of spending considerations. We will not be testing adult social care staff or NHS staff at the frequency recommended by clinicians because there is not the funding to pay for it.”

Johnson has repeatedly stressed throughout the pandemic that he would “follow the science” and listen to his public health experts. However, that appears to have ended with the “living with Covid” strategy, which set out a timetable for winding down testing and scrapping mandatory isolation.

The government has not published its public health advice from the UK [Health](#) and Security Agency but it is understood its advisers did not recommend winding down testing unless the prevalence of Covid was at a low level in the UK and that the pandemic was in a “steady state” near to endemicity. The government’s experts do not believe that state has currently been reached.

Chris Whitty, the chief medical officer, and Patrick Vallance, the chief scientific officer, stood beside Johnson in a press conference as he announced the strategy but they struck a much more cautious note, urging people to carry on washing their hands and wearing face masks in enclosed spaces.

The strategy to end mass testing was published after a row between Sajid Javid, the health secretary, who wanted up to £5bn more for testing, and Rishi Sunak, the chancellor, who insisted there would be no more cash after spending £15bn over the last year.

The strategy ends most symptomatic and all asymptomatic testing for the general population, as well as for NHS staff. It will be decided over the next month whether very elderly people and some vulnerable people will get free lateral flow tests if they are symptomatic. Medical settings should also get access to testing for symptomatic patients and care home residents as well as symptomatic social care staff.

In the briefing, civil service officers were told there would not be additional funding from the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) or the UK Health and Security Agency (UKHSA) to cover testing in vulnerable settings overseen by their departments where there was a risk of outbreaks.

This could include settings such as prisons, schools, children's homes, detention centres, accommodation for asylum seekers and homeless shelters. Cabinet ministers will in future have to decide whether their budgets can stretch to additional testing in their areas and the senior civil service officials from departments across Whitehall were advised there was no expectation in future that they would follow public health advice in full.

The senior official told them he was sure there would be "plenty of other areas across government where ministers decide on balance the funding does not exist to follow the public health advice in full when it comes to recommended testing protocols."

He made clear that the government was moving from a world where "public health advice is to be followed at all costs, and whatever the fiscal consequences money will be found to do exactly as clinicians recommend, towards a world where public health advice is one of several considerations to be taken into account and balanced decisions need to be made that consider public health advice but don't necessarily follow it in all cases". He added: "I think that is going to require a mindset shift across Whitehall."

A senior official on the Treasury Covid response was also present at the meeting, spelling out that it was considered acceptable for the public health advice on testing not to be followed in vulnerable settings. "Ministers [the prime minister, chancellor and chancellor of the duchy of Lancaster] are not expecting to be continuing testing in these types of setting in the main," she said.

Civil service officials on the call raised concerns that departments would find it difficult to make decisions about matters of public health on their own, weighing them up against financial considerations. There was also a worry that the costs of testing would have to continue to be absorbed by departmental budgets even if there were a new variant or spike.

The Cabinet Office and Treasury had no comment on the leaked account of the meeting.

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## ‘So many rabbit holes’: Even in trusting New Zealand, protests show fringe beliefs can flourish



Experts fear the anti-Covid mandates protest outside parliament in Wellington, New Zealand could act as a recruitment ground for extremists.  
Photograph: Dave Lintott/REX/Shutterstock

Researchers say country's successful Covid pandemic response and high-trust society is no inoculation against misinformation

*Tess McClure in Wellington*

*@tessairini*

Fri 25 Feb 2022 13.00 EST

New Zealand's anti-vaccine convoy is hoping to be there for the long haul. Once a ragtag collective of tents, it has become a fully fledged encampment: it has free clothing tents, admin checkpoints, yellow-vested security guards, portable toilets, tents for charging phones, and a "blues lounge" where the band plays a light, jazzy reimagining of Pink Floyd's Brick in the Wall. "We don't need no vaccination, we don't need no thought control," a woman croons, tapping the bongos.

On the surface, the occupation of parliamentary grounds evokes a poorly planned but amiable music festival, but an undercurrent of violence – or its threat – throbs below. As well as chalked messages of peace and love, some protesters came bearing nooses, promises of a "war crimes trial" for politicians, journalists, and scientists, or outright demands to "hang them high".

On Wednesday, a man was arrested after driving a car directly at police lines. Police allege protesters have thrown faecal matter and acid over officers [some protesters say this never happened, or was a false flag operation to discredit them]. Despite the encampment's commitment to being alcohol free, at least one fight has broken out between intoxicated campers. There have also been credible reports of police brutality, with one demonstrator alleging an officer gouged his eyes.

New Zealand has endured most of the pandemic with little experience of the death, mass unemployment, political incompetence or furious partisan infighting that has plagued other countries. Its pandemic response has been characterised by remarkable levels of social cohesion and consensus. Support for pandemic measures – including highly restrictive ones like lockdowns and border closures – have often polled at more than 80%. New

Zealanders' trust in scientists and one another rose during Covid-19, to [become the highest in the world](#). The convoy of furious citizens that have arrived on parliament lawns are the most confronting splintering of that vision. They are an uncomfortable reminder that even as much of the country has come to trust its leaders, scientists and fellow citizens, a vocal minority have come to opposite conclusions. As the occupation continues, researchers fear that it has become a radicalisation device, and a recruiting ground for extremist groups.



Anti-Covid mandate protesters outside parliament in Wellington. On the surface, the occupation evokes an amiable music festival. Photograph: Dave Lintott/REX/Shutterstock



New Zealand's pandemic response has been characterised by remarkable levels of social cohesion and consensus. Photograph: Dave Lintott/REX/Shutterstock

## Distrust, trauma, extremism

“This is world war three,” says Angela\*, taking a large bite of avocado salad. A chatty, retired kindergarten teacher from Mangawhai, she believes New Zealand’s political parties are involved in a plot to use vaccines to thin the population, and will eventually face consequences for their crimes. “It’s much more serious – well, not more serious, but a different kind of war from the first world war or second world war. It’s basically a depopulation agenda.” She is reluctant to say whether prime minister Jacinda Ardern or other government officials should be executed, as she doesn’t like the idea of people dying. “But when the truth comes out, then they will have to be dealt with,” she says.

For some protesters, distrust of the government has long roots. Alex\* is manning the protest frontlines, standing with an enormous black motorbike behind the concrete bollards installed by police. At his feet is a large dog, whom he introduces as Jaws.

Alex says that his brother in-law suffered a heart attack in the weeks after his booster shot. “The trauma of that and the damage of that is still resounding within our family,” he says. Data indicates heart problems are far more common as a result of Covid-19 infection than of vaccination, but Alex saw the booster and heart attack as connected. He believes Covid-19 was released deliberately, as part of a “plandemic” to enable millionaires, pharmaceutical companies, and world leaders to control the global population.

Alex is from Ngati Maahanga, Waikato, where the crown committed atrocities and confiscated more than 485,000 hectares (1.2m acres) of land in the mid-1800s. Indigenous people have plentiful historical reasons not to trust state promises of protection. That history flows through to the present, Alex says, where Māori make up a significant portion of protesters today.



Police allege protesters have thrown faecal matter and acid over officers.  
Photograph: Dave Lintott/REX/Shutterstock

Those calling for trials and executions, Alex says, don’t represent the majority. “When it comes to those who make extreme claims about retribution and stuff like that – those people have a belief of their own, that [it’s] the only way to get justice for the injustices they feel have been perpetrated against them,” he says. “That is solely and completely their own

narrative. ... We are definitely not about that. What we want is the mandates dropped.”

Many say their views have been misrepresented – that heavy-handed views like a “Nuremberg 2.0” trial are a small minority, not reflective of the wider group. But on Thursday night, the protesters conducted some – admittedly unscientific – internal polling of their own. In a poll posted in the protesters’ internal Telegram group, they asked “Should all members of parliament & media face crimes against humanity charges?” About 1,400 participated. Ninety-four per cent voted yes. Asked more specifically about civil uprisings, the vote was split – around half voted for “only peaceful” disobedience, and around half for uprisings.

On encrypted messaging apps, more extreme views surface. Some supporters compiled lists of names – politicians, prominent scientists, journalists – who were due for trial for crimes against humanity. Others ridiculed those calling for peaceful demonstrations. “The banners should be saying: hang the traitors. Hang Jacinda. Hang the demon midget [Covid-19 response minister Chris] Hipkins. Hang these people,” one participant said in a series of voice messages broadcast to the group.



Children play in front of a barricade erected outside parliament in Wellington. Photograph: Dave Lintott/REX/Shutterstock

## Conspiracies no different to ‘learning a language’

Some researchers fear that the protests and their attendant online groups are acting as a whirlpool of radicalisation, and a recruiting ground for extremist or far-right groups. As well as those who are simply vaccine-hesitant or anti-mandate, they say the protests have been infiltrated by darker ideas: antisemitism, misogyny, neo-fascism and calls for violence. The moderate or curious turn up, and can be exposed to increasingly extreme discussions.

“It’s what you call total immersion,” says Dr Sanjana Hattotuwa, an extremism specialist at research centre Te Pūnaha Matatini. “It actually isn’t any different to learning a language. The best way to learn a language is to put yourself in and try to navigate a context or environment where you don’t speak the language, where you’re forced to learn it in order to just basically get out and move around,” he says. “The same applies when you’re surrounded by conspiratorialism.”

I hear really wacky things. But it’s like, some of them just resonate  
*Lisa*

Lisa\*, a softly-spoken 67-year-old, opted not to get the vaccine as she does not believe in pharmaceuticals, she says, and came to the protests because she believes vaccine mandates are “inhumane”. Since turning up, however, she has heard many more conspiratorial ideas.

“There are so many rabbit holes. I listen to the rabbit holes, and some of them scare me deeply,” she says. “Because they make so much logical sense.”

Lisa says that over her time at the protest, her own perspective has shifted, as she has been exposed to the theories of others. She is increasingly convinced that there are wider things at play. “These people have been researching and thinking about this for quite some period of time,” she says. “I hear really wacky things. But it’s like, some of them just resonate.”



Some researchers fear the Wellington protest could be a recruitment ground for extremists. Photograph: Dave Lintott/REX/Shutterstock

More moderate arrivals at the protest, Hattotuwa says, are plunged into an environment thick with ideas that would otherwise be fringe. Over time, the group can concentrate, like a solution boiling down: moderate attenders start to peel off, and the core that remains can harden, build solidarity, and feel increasingly alienated.

The trajectory of these groups is not always predictable, Hattotuwa says, but they tend to veer increasingly extreme. The extremism-monitoring project he works on has recorded an explosion of conspiracy theories and extremist rhetoric online, with sharing and engagement of misinformation vastly eclipsing the flow of information from reliable sources.

“Looking at every measurable day on day … nothing indicates or suggests, or gives an iota of hope that the moderates or moderate viewpoints, or a shared reality is winning out.”

Hattotuwa, originally from Sri Lanka, says he sees worrying trends that remind him of fissures in his home country. New Zealand being a high-trust society, he says “is not an inoculation” against extremism or misinformation. “High trust does not mean that you have a greater handle on truth.”

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If New Zealand's convoy protest ends, it is likely to be by attrition. Police have established a strictly enforced border: cars can leave, but not enter. Protesters on social media reported exhaustion, tension, malaise, and mild skin rashes. Many blamed the symptoms on an electric wave weapon, rather than side-effects of 15 days in a sodden, crowded campsite.

On the main stage, an organiser entreats the crowd to stamp out bad behaviour toward police, abuse of passersby, and splintering into factions. "It can't continue," he says. "I'll tell you this – if it does continue and you don't start cleaning up the fringes, you're going to have Wellington against you, and you're going to have the people of New Zealand against you."

In the straw in front of him, a discarded, contextless piece of signage with the words "Neo-Nazi???" drifts across the ground.

\*Names have been changed

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## OpinionRussia

# The west has a duty to help defend Ukraine – and to help Russia by ensuring its defeat

[Keir Giles](#)

A significant military setback would force Russia to finally reassess its place in the modern world



Demonstration at the Russian embassy in Warsaw, Poland, against Russia's invasion of Ukraine, 24 February 2022. Photograph: Piotr Łapiński/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

Fri 25 Feb 2022 09.30 EST

The die is cast. Russia has mounted [a major assault](#) on a neighbour in pursuit of Vladimir Putin's claims on the territories of the former Russian empire.

But if Russia were to fail badly at this, and suffer an unambiguous setback, that would be exactly the shock the country needed to start the long, hard process of transitioning from a frustrated former imperial power to a normal country that can coexist with [Europe](#).

In contrast to other European imperial powers, for [Russia](#) the end of empire was postponed. It came not at the end of the first world war, or of the second, but at the end of the cold war.

Russia is not the only former colonial power to have complex relations with its former dominions in the wake of imperial retreat. However, even given its late start, it has not travelled as far along the path of post-imperial normalisation as countries such as the United Kingdom, France or Portugal had a quarter-century after the end of empire.

Today, Russia sees its relations with its former dominions in the way that France or Britain did in the first few years after their power was curtailed – before they suffered the defeats and setbacks that drove home the new limits of their ability to shape the world beyond their own borders. At the same point in this post-imperial trajectory, Britain had [waged a successful campaign](#) against communism in Malaya, but had not yet suffered the [humiliating setback of Suez](#).

Russia has achieved success in small wars in Chechnya and Georgia, and projected power more recently in Syria, [Kazakhstan](#) and across Africa. Successful military adventurism both close to home and farther afield prolongs Russia's belief in its power and [its right to dominate others](#).

But the first military defeat would have far-reaching consequences. With its control of the information space at home, Russia can spin or explain away political reverses abroad, but not an unarguable military setback that calls into doubt either Russian military power itself or the ability to exercise it unchallenged. It is only this that can constrain Russia's future ambition to reassert itself as the dominant power across the countries of eastern Europe, which it sees as its birthright. And it is only significant failure that will lead Russia's leadership eventually to start to reassess its place in the world.

Ukraine is unlikely to be able to halt Russia on its own, so it is the duty of the west to help Russia by ensuring its defeat. So far, it has shirked that duty. Even after the [US and UK ruled out](#) direct defensive support to Ukraine, it would have been possible to put in place no-fly zones or maritime exclusion zones, or even to deliver a genuine peacekeeping force to Ukraine to match Russia's promise to send in its own fake "peacekeepers" in the east of the country. But now the invasion has begun, any of these measures would constitute major escalation by western powers. Instead of simply arriving in Ukrainian airspace to protect it, western air forces would have to fight their way in.

Having failed to deter Russia in advance, western efforts now seem focused on finding ways to punish it after the fact. But in addition, the US and its European allies must urgently step up efforts to help [Ukraine](#) defend itself, providing weapons, supplies and intelligence to assist in stalling the Russian invaders. Providing indirect support to Ukraine in cyberspace and maintaining pressure on Russian interests and operations away from Europe will also help to put pressure on Moscow.

For now, Russia's behaviour is driven by the fact that it is the only country among the [15 former Soviet republics](#) that is unhappy about the fall of the Soviet Union. The other countries took the events of 1991 as a new opportunity – as a chance to regain independence that was lost decades before. Russia is different. It's the only country with a leader who [openly describes](#) the events of 30 years ago as a catastrophe.

Many of Russia's actions against its neighbours stem from an inability to adjust to the idea that Moscow no longer rules over lands beyond its borders.

They also stem from Russia's distinctive ideas about its own status as a "great power" – in a sense that we associate with the 19th century – and of how exactly the cold war came to an end. President Putin has convinced himself that Russia was a joint "winner" of the cold war, and was entitled to share the rewards of victory with the west.

President Putin and his foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, have pointed to precedents for constructive Russian involvement in European politics that led to periods of extended peace and stability. The problem is that the

precedents they choose, the [Congress of Vienna in 1815](#) and the [Yalta conference agreements in 1945](#), are examples of victorious powers in a world war agreeing among themselves how to run the world over the heads of smaller or defeated states. With or without Russia, this template just doesn't fit with European notions of relations between states in the 21st century. And it completely misses the point that Russia did not emerge victorious from the cold war.

This leads directly to another factor augmenting the danger of current Russian behaviour: overconfidence by Putin and his entourage. Putin has had such a long series of wins that he may have started to believe his own propaganda – that Russia can push forward unopposed, and that the weak, decadent west is in [rapid and inevitable decline](#).

It may also have led Russia to underestimate the potential for Ukrainian resistance during the invasion and in the event of possible occupation. But it is precisely the way Russia continues to get it wrong that puts at risk the fragile freedoms that Russia's other former imperial possessions regained just 30 years ago.

Because if Putin is to be believed – and so far he has acted on his convictions – Russia will not stop its drive to reconquer its [former possessions](#) at Ukraine.

What stops Russia, and has done reliably over centuries, is credible military force being present and ready in advance. Dialogue and diplomacy, the first resorts of western statecraft, have been shown to have no impact on a country that is operating on a different plane of reality and in a different century. Russia's confidence to act against Ukraine stems from the failure of deterrence by the west overall. It is vital that the west relearns what it takes to put up a stop sign for Moscow.

- Keir Giles works with the Russia and Eurasia programme of Chatham House. He is the author of *Moscow Rules: What Drives Russia to Confront the West*

- **Guardian Newsroom: the Russian invasion of Ukraine.** Join a panel of journalists, hosted by Michael Safi, for a livestreamed event on the Russia-Ukraine crisis. On Thursday 3 March, 8pm GMT | 9pm CET | 12pm PST | 3pm EST. Book tickets [here](#)
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## **Look at the fall of a brilliant Labour leader – and see why so many shun public service**

[Polly Toynbee](#)



Throughout the harshest years of austerity, Nick Forbes kept Newcastle going with ingenious measures. We need more like him



'London-based journalists rock up in Newcastle, hear Forbes's list of the city's thriving inward investments and jobs created – but go home to write only about grinding poverty.' Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty Images

Sat 26 Feb 2022 03.00 EST

Political talent is in short supply. So is a willingness to step up and take the burdens and the blows of office. The leader of Newcastle city council, Nick Forbes, [has been toppled](#) as a result of destructive tribal shenanigans, likely to deter others from giving up most of their life to become councillors. All political careers end in failure, goes the old dictum, and it's usually so.

But Forbes's career has been no failure. As leader of the council for 11 years, he steered his city through the lost decade's savage cuts, protecting vulnerable people where he could and upholding Newcastle's pride with ingenuity and political imagination.

One of a generation of outstanding Labour council leaders, he was deselected from his seat in Arthur's Hill ward, which he represented for 22 years, after an ambush this month. His deselection is reported to have been the result of a clash with the former Labour chief whip, local MP Nick Brown. Rules may have been breached in the process, and [the party will](#)

[investigate](#), ChronicleLive reports. But Forbes prefers to walk away with his dignity intact, he tells me, not fight over rulebooks. What's more, his tenure in office shouldn't be defined by the petty factionalism that ended it, but by the hard task of preserving his city in an age of austerity, against vicious odds.

Does his downfall show he was a failure? Financially, some might say: at 48, he received total pay of £27,600 a year, with no pension, for the past 11 years for heavy responsibilities. But he walks away reflecting on how he navigated killer cuts of 40% of Westminster funding. Labour leaders are trapped by the Tories' gleeful ploy to "devolve the axe", forcing local authorities to make agonising choices with shrunken budgets, taking the full blast of local blame. Right from 2010, Labour cities – the poorest places – [took the hardest hit](#), Tory shires the least. Now with "levelling up", funds again are diverted to Tory towns – often not the poorest – rather than the most deprived cities.

What should they do? Protest, certainly. But they still have to carry out the cuts, find clever ways to raise funds and try to protect the weakest. "That's our tightrope," Forbes tells me, "to highlight the hardship of cuts without damaging the city's reputation." At election time, despite the blows, they still have to proclaim achievements – and Newcastle still dazzles its visitors.

Survival meant dealing with the enemy: he struck an early "city deal" with central government, he tells me, allowing Newcastle to keep business rates fixed for 25 years and to borrow to build. He also claims that they have built more council housing in the last 10 years than in the previous 30. "Aggressively pursuing" vacant owners, [hundreds of empty properties](#) have been brought back into use.

Defending families against the monstrous bedroom tax, they built homes with a "hobby room" rather than a spare bedroom. With the 2011 abolition of the education maintenance allowance, which supported poor children staying on in sixth forms, they found [£15 a week for the neediest](#).

Newcastle council had a living wage long before the rest of the UK. Partnerships with the private sector have been key: that includes a "good

work pledge”, where hundreds of employers agree union representation, pensions and no zero-hours contracts. “The government dismantled the welfare state, so we had to create our own.” Of course, it was slender protection against tidal waves of poverty from the [£37bn national benefit cuts](#), money that was taken from pockets of the poor and from the city’s economy. When a large number of England’s 3,500 Sure Starts were lost, Newcastle [kept them](#) for 30% of the poorest. Only when Forbes cut the arts did national celebs protest, not about lost nurseries and youth clubs. Newcastle is a “[city of sanctuary](#)” for asylum seekers and unaccompanied refugee children, despite far-right marches and demos outside mosques. Its Labour councillors were mainly male and white, now half are women, with more ethnic minority members, including the UK’s first Roma councillor. As an LGBTQ+ leader, Forbes has taken [shedloads of homophobic abuse](#).

He grumbles that London-based journalists rock up in Newcastle, hear his list of the city’s thriving inward investments and jobs created – but then go home to write only about grinding poverty, featuring “grim up north” scenes from Byker and Benwell. I plead partly guilty, because there’s no escaping the [brutal effects](#) of Westminster-induced hardship, though I reported on the Forbes administration’s enterprise and inventiveness too.

His detractors accused him of spending too long out of his ward – but those against “moderates” resented his place attending “moderate” Keir Starmer’s shadow cabinet. Each shadow minister now has a local [Labour](#) leader as part of their team, at last drawing on Labour’s formidable local strengths. Forbes will be gone from there, no longer chairing the Convention of the North and sitting as a member of the Northern Powerhouse Partnership.

Forbes should be remembered not for his fall amid red-on-red factionalism, but for his public service, even in the harshest years and against the odds. What a pointless and destructive waste.

- Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist

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## OpinionUkraine

# War in Ukraine is a severe test of China's new axis with Russia

[Yu Jie](#)

Beijing will tread carefully, and weigh up whether its strategic alliance with Moscow is worth the cost of this reckless invasion



Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping at their meeting in Beijing earlier this month.  
Photograph: Alexei Druzhinin/Tass

Fri 25 Feb 2022 10.00 EST

President Vladimir Putin's full military escalation in Ukraine has unsettled his seemingly best friend in international affairs, the Chinese president, Xi Jinping, who has invested in the bilateral relationship personally and politically. Beijing's axis with Moscow was recently strengthened during the 2022 Winter Olympics, with their joint declaration to proclaim "their cooperation with no limit". The western foreign affairs community then

rushed to conclude that Moscow and Beijing were forming – if one had not already been formed – a “strategic alliance” aimed at destabilising the liberal, rules-based world order. Some in the west assume Beijing will inevitably support Russia’s military actions in Ukraine.

However, cooperation would have to come with some substantial limits to avoid undermining Beijing’s own priorities and interests in the eyes of Chinese foreign policy planners. For various reasons, the Kremlin’s latest military exercise is both a conundrum and a source of equally unexpected opportunities for Beijing.

In line with a difficult balancing act, the Chinese foreign minister, Wang Yi, had publicly stated that all countries’ sovereignty and territorial integrity should be protected, including Ukraine’s; and Russia and [Ukraine](#) should return to the negotiating table. That is widely regarded as the most clearcut position China has delivered on the current situation and was echoed by a phone call between Xi and Putin today.

China’s stance crystallises two elements: first, it does not support the Kremlin’s move against Ukraine, and views Moscow’s actions as a violation of national sovereignty and the UN charter – one of the cardinal principles of Beijing’s foreign policies since 1949. Second, and most important, [China](#) strongly implies there is no comparison between Ukraine and Taiwan – the former is a sovereign state and the latter is not a full UN member but a unique polity, seen as a renegade province by Beijing. But China will carefully watch the west’s willingness and resolve to respond to the situation in Ukraine, which may well serve as a reference to Taiwan later.

The Kremlin’s military adventurism will also damage China economically to some extent. As Russia’s biggest trade partner, China has significant investments and financial ties with [Russia](#) that will be exposed to the west’s sanctions. Such sanctions most certainly come with an acute pain for many fossil fuel-focused state-owned enterprises. Equally, Beijing is Kyiv’s top trade partner, and has enjoyed friendly ties with Ukraine, which is a source of grain and military equipment.

Nonetheless, Beijing will measure its reaction to Ukraine through the lens of US-China competition. To this end, the Ukraine crisis provides two unexpected opportunities for President Xi. China views the Ukraine situation as a timely distraction that will draw the US away from the Indo-Pacific region and back to [Europe](#), at least prior to the US midterm elections in November. This offers an unexpected sigh of relief to China as the primary strategic rival to the US. Without deliberate coordination, Beijing and Moscow have already acted as force multipliers to undermine the US's capability through their individual actions.

It is correct to assume that Russia and China see world affairs in a similar light, not least in their antipathy to liberal values. Deepened bilateral cooperation allows the two countries to demonstrate great power status on the world stage, either to counterbalance the dominance of the US or to further their own geopolitical aims.

However, Beijing will have to consider the balance sheet for this current alignment carefully. If the cost of alignment comes at a far greater price than the actual benefit, Beijing must reach its own conclusion and tread carefully.

Beijing hoped that Russia would offer full diplomatic support to its various global initiatives under a plethora of UN-led platforms, in the context of competition with the US. But Moscow's current move has made China's wishes more problematic. Russia's recklessness serves as a spur for China to rethink its return on its alignment with the Kremlin, and it may wish to minimise the risks associated with Russia's fraught relations with the west. China may well prepare a discreet course correction to soften its harsh diplomatic rhetoric, and a pathway of less hostile ties with the west to demonstrate its maturity in dealing with a major world crisis.

History does serve as a good lesson for the Chinese Communist party: Nikita Khrushchev withdrew all assistance to support China's nascent industrial development because Beijing refused to become a junior partner of Moscow in political and military terms in the 1950s. The Sino-Soviet split of the 1950s and 60s took place in a very different world, but its spectre remains alive in Beijing and Moscow, and is unlikely to be exorcised in the near future.

- Dr Yu Jie is senior research fellow on China at the Asia-Pacific Programme of Chatham House
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Opinion**Fossil fuels**

## This is how we defeat Putin and other petrostate autocrats

[Bill McKibben](#)

After Hitler invaded the Sudetenland, America turned its industrial prowess to building tanks, bombers and destroyers. Now, we must respond with renewables



‘Imagine a Europe that ran on solar power and windpower. That Europe would not be funding Putin’s Russia, and it would be far less scared of Putin’s Russia.’ Photograph: Peter Byrne/PA

Fri 25 Feb 2022 06.18 EST

The pictures this morning of Russian tanks rolling across the Ukrainian countryside seemed both surreal – a flashback to a Europe that we’ve seen only in newsreels – and inevitable. It’s been clear for years that Vladimir

Putin was both evil and driven and that eventually we might come to a moment like this.

One of the worst parts of facing today's reality is our impotence in its face. Yes, America is imposing sanctions, and yes, that may eventually hamper Putin. But the Russian leader made his move knowing we could not actually fight him in Ukraine – and indeed knowing that his hinted willingness to use nuclear weapons will make it hard to fight him *anywhere*, though one supposes we will have no choice if he attacks a Nato member.

But that doesn't mean there aren't ways to dramatically reduce Putin's power. One way, in particular: to get off oil and gas.

This is not a “war *for* oil and gas” in the sense that too many of America's Middle East misadventures might plausibly be described. But it is a war underwritten by oil and gas, a war whose most crucial weapon may be oil and gas, a war we can't fully engage because we remain dependent on oil and gas. If you want to stand with the brave people of Ukraine, you need to find a way to stand against oil and gas.

Russia has a pathetic economy – you can verify that for yourself by looking around your house and seeing how many of the things you use were made within its borders. Today, 60% of its exports are oil and gas; they supply the money that powers the country's military machine.

And, alongside that military machine, control of oil and gas supplies is Russia's main weapon. They have, time and again, threatened to turn off the flow of hydrocarbons to western Europe. When the Germans finally this week stopped the planned Nordstream 2 pipeline, Putin's predecessor, Dmitry Medvedev , said, “Welcome to the new world where Europeans will soon have to pay 2,000 euros (\$2,270) per thousand cubic meters!” His not very subtle notion: if the price of keeping houses warm doubles, Europe will have no choice but to fold.

Today, 60% of Russia's exports are oil and gas. Control of oil and gas supplies is Russia's main weapon

Finally, even the Biden administration – which has been playing its hand wisely in the lead up to the invasion – is constrained by oil and gas. As we impose sanctions, everyone’s looking for an out: the Italians want to exempt high-end luxury goods and the Belgians diamonds, but the US has made it clear that it doesn’t want to seriously interrupt the flow of Russian oil for fear of driving up gas prices and thus weakening American resolve.

As one “senior state department official” told the [Wall Street Journal this week](#), “doing anything that affects … or halts energy transactions would have a great impact on the United States, American citizens and our allies. So our intention here is to impose the hardest sanctions we can while trying to safeguard the American public and the rest of the world from those measures,” the official said. It’s obviously not an idle fear: as of this morning Tucker Carlson was [attacking](#) Russia hawk Lindsey Graham for supporting a conflict that will bring “higher gas prices” while he has a “generous Congressional pension”. If you’re an apologist for fascism, high gas prices are your first go-to move.

So now is the moment to remind ourselves that, in the last decade, scientists and engineers have dropped the cost of solar and windpower by an order of magnitude, to the point where it is some of the cheapest power on Earth. The best reason to deploy it immediately is to ward off the existential crisis that is climate change, and the second best is to stop the killing of nine million people annually who die from breathing in the particulates that fossil fuel combustion produces. But the third best reason – and perhaps the most plausible for rousing our leaders to action – is that it dramatically reduces the power of autocrats, dictators, and thugs.

Imagine a Europe that ran on solar and wind power: whose cars ran on locally provided electricity, and whose homes were heated by electric air-source heat pumps. That Europe would not be funding Putin’s Russia, and it would be far less scared of Putin’s Russia – it could impose every kind of sanction, and keep them in place until the country buckled. Imagine an America where the cost of gas was not a political tripwire, because if people had to have a pickup to make them feel sufficiently manly, that pickup would run on electricity that came from the sun and wind. It would take an evil-er genius than Vladimir Putin to figure out how to embargo the sun.

These are not novel technologies – they exist, are growing, and could be scaled up quickly. In the years after Hitler invaded the Sudetenland, America turned its industrial prowess to building tanks, bombers, and destroyers. In 1941, in Ypsilanti, the world's largest industrial plant went up in six month's time, and soon it was churning out a B-24 bomber every hour. A bomber is a complicated machine with more than a million parts; a wind turbine is, by contrast, relatively simple. In Michigan alone ("the arsenal of democracy"), a radiator company retooled to make 20m steel helmets and a rubber factory retooled to produce the liners for those helmets; the company that made the fabric for Ford's seat cushions stopped doing that and started pushing out parachutes. Do we think that it's beyond us to quickly produce the solar panels and the batteries required to end our dependence on fossil fuel?

Imagine a Europe that ran on solar and wind power. That Europe would not be funding Putin's Russia

It's not *easy* – among other things, Russia has a good deal of some of the minerals that help in renewable energy production. (Nickel, for example.) But, here again, the example of the second world war is helpful – with the Axis in control of commodities like rubber, we quickly figured out how to mass produce substitutes.

It's true that we could produce carbon free energy with nuclear power too, as long as we were willing to pay the heavy premium that technology requires – and right now Germany is probably regretting its decision to hastily shut down its reactors in the wake of the Fukushima accident. But if you think about the scenario now unfolding across Europe, you're reminded of another of the advantages of renewable power, which is that it's widely distributed. There are far fewer central nodes to attack with cruise missiles and artillery shells – targeting reactors is pretty easy, but driving your tank across Europe from one solar panel to the next so you can get out to smash it with a hammer is comical.

At the moment, big oil is using the fighting in Ukraine as an excuse to try to expand its footprint – reliable industry ally Kristi Noem, the governor of South Dakota, went on Fox this week to argue that stopping the Keystone XL pipeline had empowered the Russian leader, for instance, and the

American Petroleum Institute today called for more oil and gas development. But this is absurd – we may need, for the remaining weeks of this winter, to insure gas supplies for Europe, but by next winter we need to remove that lever. That means an all-out effort to decarbonize that continent, and then our own. It's not impossible.

We have to do it anyway, if we're to have any hope of slowing the climate change. And we can do it fast if we want: huge offshore windfarms in Europe have been built inside of 18 months without any wartime pressure.

We should be in agony today – people are dying because they want to live in a democracy, want to determine their own affairs. But that agony should, and can, produce real change. (And not just in Europe. Imagine not having to worry about what the king of Saudi Arabia thought, or the Koch brothers – access to fossil fuel riches so often produces retrograde thuggery.) Caring about the people of Ukraine means caring about an end to oil and gas.

- Bill McKibben is the Schumann distinguished scholar at Middlebury College. He is the founder of Third Act, organizing people over 60 for progressive change
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- [US Biden nominates Ketanji Brown Jackson to become first Black woman on supreme court](#)
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## Ketanji Brown Jackson

# Biden nominates Ketanji Brown Jackson to become first Black woman on supreme court

- White House praises ‘exceptionally qualified nominee’
- Jackson, if confirmed, will replace retiring Stephen Breyer



Ketanji Brown Jackson at the White House as Joe Biden announced his supreme court nomination. Photograph: Drew Angerer/Getty Images

*[Lauren Gambino](#) in Washington*

*[@laurenegambino](#)*

Fri 25 Feb 2022 13.31 EST

Joe Biden on Friday nominated Judge [Ketanji Brown Jackson](#) to the supreme court, seeking to elevate a Black woman to the nation’s highest

court for the first time in its 232-year history.

Biden's decision to nominate Jackson to succeed Justice Stephen Breyer, for whom she clerked, sets up a fierce confirmation battle in the deeply partisan and evenly-divided Senate. Breyer, 83, the most senior jurist in the court's three-member liberal wing, will retire at the end of the court's current session this summer.

Speaking from the Cross Hall of the White House, the president introduced the 51-year-old Jackson to the nation as "the daughter of former public school teachers" and a "proven consensus-builder" who has displayed "a pragmatic understanding that the law must work for the American people".

Her nomination comes exactly two years to the day after Biden, then struggling miserably in his third campaign for the presidency, vowed to nominate a Black woman to the supreme court if elected president.

"For too long, our government, our courts, haven't looked like America," Biden said, flanked by Jackson and vice-president Kamala Harris, the first Black and Asian American woman to serve as vice president, whom the president said was influential in helping him make this consequential decision. "I believe it's time that we have a court that reflects the full talents and greatness of our nation."

Jackson, who was widely considered a frontrunner for the nomination, sits on the powerful US court of appeals for the DC circuit, after winning bipartisan approval during her Senate confirmation last year, when Biden elevated her from the federal district court in the District of Columbia.

Born in the nation's capital and raised in Miami, Jackson clerked for Breyer during the supreme court's 1999-2000 term. She is a graduate of Harvard College and Harvard Law School, an elite background that matches the resumes of several justices on the supreme court but which Republicans have sought to paint her as out-of-touch.

In Jackson, Biden said he found a nominee who shared a "uniquely accomplished and wide ranging background" as the justice she would

replace if confirmed. In her remarks, Jackson praised the retiring justice for exemplifying “civility, grace, pragmatism and generosity of spirit”.

“Members of the Senate will decide if I fill your seat,” she said. “But please know that I could never fill your shoes.”

Across her broad legal career, Jackson worked as a public defender, an experience that sets her apart from most judges sitting on the federal bench. She previously served as vice-chair of the US Sentencing Commission, where she focused on reducing sentencing disparities as part of the agency’s work setting sentencing guidelines in federal criminal cases.

In its statement, the White House said Biden sought a nominee “who is wise, pragmatic, and has a deep understanding of the constitution as an enduring charter of liberty”.

It added: “The president sought an individual who is committed to equal justice under the law and who understands the profound impact that the supreme court’s decisions have on the lives of the American people.”

Jackson’s confirmation would not affect the ideological composition of the court, controlled by a conservative super-majority of six justices, including three appointed by Donald Trump, but it does secure a liberal seat on the bench probably for decades to come.

The opportunity to name a justice to the supreme court is a welcome bright spot for the president, whose approval ratings have fallen to record lows as he confronts myriad crises at home and abroad. It is also his most significant opportunity yet to shape the federal judiciary, which remains overwhelmingly white and male. In his first year, Biden nominated a record number of district and appeals court judges from a range of racial, ethnic, geographical and legal backgrounds.

When Breyer announced his retirement in January, Biden vowed to nominate a jurist with “extraordinary qualifications, character, experience and integrity”. And, reaffirming his campaign pledge, he added “that person will be the first Black woman ever nominated to the United States supreme court.”

Urged by congressman Jim Clyburn of South Carolina ahead of his state's primary, Biden made the pledge during a debate. Days later, with Clyburn's endorsement, Black voters [lifted](#) Biden to a resounding victory in the South Carolina primary that set in motion a string of successes that ultimately earned him the nomination and later the White House.

The promise divided Republican senators, some of whom argued that race or gender shouldn't play a role in the selection process, despite similar commitments from Republican presidents Ronald Reagan and Trump.

Democratic leaders on Capitol Hill have said they intend to move forward quickly with the confirmation process.

Senate leader Chuck Schumer said: "The historic nomination of Judge Jackson is an important step toward ensuring the supreme court reflects the nation as a whole. As the first Black woman supreme court justice in the court's 232-year-history, she will inspire countless future generations of young Americans."

Schumer added: "With her exceptional qualifications and record of evenhandedness, Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson will be a Justice who will uphold the constitution and protect the rights of all Americans, including the voiceless and vulnerable."

Jackson has successfully navigated the Senate confirmation process on three occasions, winning support from both parties each time. But nothing compares to the glare of a supreme court nomination hearing. Already, her nomination is being met with resistance from Republicans.

South Carolina senator Lindsey Graham, one of the three Republicans who voted to confirm her to the court considered the second highest in the land in 2021, said her nomination suggested the "radical left has won President Biden over yet again".

He had expressed a preference for J Michelle Childs, a US district judge in his home state of South Carolina.

Unlike for most major pieces of legislation, Democrats can confirm Jackson with their 50 votes and Harris breaking the tie.

If confirmed, Jackson would become the sixth woman to serve on the court and only the third Black justice, both men. They are Clarence Thomas, a conservative who was appointed in 1991 and is still serving, and Thurgood Marshall, the first African American supreme court justice.

It will be the first supreme court confirmation hearing for a Democratic president since Elena Kagan was nominated by Barack Obama 12 years ago. Republicans refused to hold a hearing for Obama's nominee, Merrick Garland, which further poisoned what has become scorched-earth affairs.

On the appellate court, Jackson served in the seat held by Garland, after he became the attorney general.

But there are already early signs that this confirmation may be different, as Republicans weigh how aggressively to confront Biden's nominee, particularly when it will not affect the balance of the court.

With their agenda stalled and the president unpopular, Democrats are hopeful the nomination will energize their base as they brace for a political backlash in this year's midterm elections.

Closing her remarks, Jackson acknowledged the historic nature of her nomination by noting an “interesting coincidence”: she shares a birthday with Constance Baker Motley, the first Black woman to become a federal judge.

“Today, I proudly stand on Judge Motley’s shoulders, sharing not only her birthday, but also her steadfast and courageous commitment to equal justice under law,” Jackson said.

And if confirmed, she concluded, “I can only hope that my life and career, my love of this country and the constitution and my commitment to upholding the rule of law and the sacred principles upon which this great nation was founded, will inspire future generations of Americans.”

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## Ketanji Brown Jackson

# Ketanji Brown Jackson's nomination is rare moment of celebration for Biden

Biden is embattled on all fronts – from a stalled domestic agenda to international order – but a supreme court pick is an enduring act



Ketanji Brown Jackson in April 2021. Photograph: Reuters

*[Lauren Gambino](#) in Washington*

*[@laurenegambino](#)*

Fri 25 Feb 2022 16.02 EST

Two years ago exactly, [Joe Biden](#) stood on a debate stage in Charleston, South Carolina, his candidacy on the ropes, and made a promise: if elected president, he would nominate the first Black woman to the supreme court.

Days later, Biden won the South Carolina primary on the strength of his support among Black voters. The victory propelled him to the Democratic

nomination and then to the presidency. Last month, Justice Stephen Breyer announced his retirement, presenting Biden with an opportunity to fulfill that campaign commitment.

On Friday, Biden stood before a podium in the White House's Cross Hall to nominate Judge [Ketanji Brown Jackson](#) to supreme court, declaring that the highest court in the land should reflect "the full talent and greatness of our nation".

If eventually confirmed by the senate, she will be the first Black woman to serve on the supreme court in its 232-year history.

It was a rare moment of celebration for Biden, embattled on nearly every front. His once hugely ambitious domestic agenda is stalled, perhaps permanently; the Democrats' tenuous control of Congress faces historic headwinds in this year's midterm elections; and the international order that Biden spent much of his political career defending faces its gravest threat in decades after the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

But the nomination of a supreme court justice is one of the most enduring acts of any president's legacy. And for Biden, it is particularly resonant.

Biden has said that he hopes the diversity he has brought to the federal government will be long-lasting. After serving as the vice-president to the nation's first Black president, he chose Kamala Harris to be his running mate, which led her to become the first Black and Asian American woman to serve as vice-president.

His cabinet is the most diverse in US history. And in his first year, Biden nominated a record number of district and appeals court judges from a range of racial, ethnic, geographical and legal backgrounds.

Black voters, and Black women especially, were the driving force behind Biden's nomination and his presidency. [According to exit polls](#) in 2020, Black women were his most loyal supporters, with 90% casting their ballots for him.

In January 2021, Black female organizers in Georgia helped Democrats win two Senate runoff elections, cementing the party's control of the chamber and delivering to Biden narrow but meaningful congressional majorities.

Yet Biden has failed to enact much of his racial justice agenda. Democrats failed to overcome a Republican filibuster of voting rights legislation, designed to combat the raft of restrictive voting laws being enacted by conservative legislatures across the country. Attempts at policing reform sputtered last year, while the economic provisions of his Build Back Better agenda intended to combat soaring income inequality remain stalled in the Senate amid opposition from his own party.

In that sense, Jackson's nomination is a rare opportunity for Biden to make good on a promise to Black women.

Democrats alone could confirm Jackson to the supreme court, with Harris breaking the tie. When Jackson was confirmed to the appeals court last year, she won the support of three Republican senators. But one of them, Senator Lindsey Graham, already criticized her nomination, saying it was a sign that the "radical left has won President Biden over yet again".

But for many, and especially for Black women, Jackson's nomination, at the end of Black History Month, was a moment of vindication and pride.

"She is eminently qualified to serve our nation on our highest court," said Harris, a former federal prosecutor. "And while she will be the first Black woman on the supreme court, Judge Jackson will not be the last."

Barack Obama, who nominated Jackson to serve as a district court judge in Washington DC, said the judge had "already inspired young Black women like my daughters to set their sights higher and her confirmation will help them believe they can be anything they want to be".

In a statement announcing his decision to nominate Jackson, Biden recalled a formative exchange between a teenage Jackson and her high school guidance counselor.

When Jackson, the daughter of public school teachers whose parents grew up in the segregated south, told her counselor that she wanted to attend Harvard, the counselor warned her that she should not set her expectations “so high”.

“That didn’t stop Judge Jackson,” Biden said. Jackson graduated at the top of her class from Harvard College, then attended Harvard Law School, where she excelled as an editor of the Harvard Law Review.

Now, she is poised to make history as a supreme court justice.

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## Ketanji Brown Jackson

# ‘Historic day’: Democrats praise Biden supreme court pick Ketanji Brown Jackson

Some Republicans are less enthused, claiming that race and gender shouldn’t play a role in the nomination



If confirmed, Jackson would be the first Black woman to serve as a supreme court justice. Photograph: Tom Williams/AFP/Getty Images

*[Gloria Oladipo](#)*

*[@gaoladipo](#)*

Fri 25 Feb 2022 14.09 EST

Democrats enthusiastically welcomed Joe Biden’s supreme court nominee, [Ketanji Brown Jackson](#), who if confirmed would serve as the first Black woman on the United States’ highest court.

As reactions poured in from both sides of the political aisle, Barack Obama shared his congratulations about the news of Jackson's nomination.

"I want to congratulate Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson on her nomination to the Supreme Court," said Obama in a statement. "Judge Jackson has already inspired young Black women like my daughters to set their sights higher, and her confirmation will help them believe they can be anything they want to be."

The Senate majority leader, Chuck Schumer, shared his support [via Twitter](#): "With her exceptional qualifications, Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson will be a Justice who will uphold the constitution and protect the rights of all Americans, including the voiceless and vulnerable."

Senate majority whip Dick Durbin of Illinois, who is also chair of the Senate judiciary committee, also praised Jackson' selection. He said: "To be the first to make history in our nation you need to have an exceptional life story. Judge Jackson's achievements are well known to the Senate judiciary committee as we approved her to the DC circuit less than a year ago with bipartisan support. We will begin immediately to move forward on her nomination with the careful, fair, and professional approach she and America are entitled to."

South Carolina representative James Clyburn, who helped get Biden to make a pledge for a Black woman supreme court nominee, also celebrated Jackson's nomination, writing in a statement: "Ketanji Brown Jackson, an outstanding judge on the DC circuit court of appeals, has been nominated by president Joe Biden to become the first African American woman on the [US supreme court](#). This is a glass ceiling that took far too long to shatter, and I commend President Biden for taking a sledgehammer to it. I congratulate Judge Jackson and offer my full support during the confirmation process and beyond."

"This is a historic day for women, for BIPOC representation, and for our Judiciary," tweeted [Florida representative and co-chair of the Democratic Women's Caucus](#) Lois Frankel.

Progressive Massachusetts representative Ayanna Pressley also added her voice, [tweeting](#): “Bold. Principled. Qualified. Dedicated to justice. POTUS has met the moment with the historic nomination of Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson and we must have swift confirmation.”

“233 years. That’s how long we have waited to have a Black woman nominated to the supreme court,” [wrote Missouri representative Cori Bush about Jackson’s nomination](#). “There are no words to describe how my soul is moved by witnessing her nomination.”

Progressive advocacy groups similarly shared their congratulations.

“We need a justice on the bench who will uphold reproductive freedom. This historic nomination is a chance to shape the court for decades to come,” [tweeted the pro-choice group NARAL Pro-Choice](#), alluding to important abortion cases that the supreme court has heard recently, including the Texas abortion ban and [an upcoming case that will decide the fate of Roe v Wade](#).

Some Republicans seemed notably less joyous about Jackson’s nomination, following on their complaints that race and gender should not play a role in the selection process despite similar commitments from past Republican presidents.

“If media reports are accurate, and Judge Jackson has been chosen as the supreme court nominee to replace Justice Breyer, it means the radical Left has won President Biden over yet again,” [tweeted South Carolina senator Lindsey Graham](#), adding that Democrats potentially blocked the nomination of Judge J Michelle Childs.

Childs, a judge in the US district court for the district of South Carolina, had notable bipartisan support from her state’s congressional delegation due to her non-Ivy league education and judicial reputation. But she had less support from some progressives, who questioned her work at a private law firm defending employers accused of race and gender discrimination as well as sexual harassment.

Graham previously voted to confirm Jackson to the DC circuit court last June.

In his statement, Clyburn, a close Biden ally, also acknowledged Childs as a potential Biden pick, writing: “Although not the finalist, Judge Childs’ inclusion among the three that were interviewed continues her record of remarkable contributions to making this country’s greatest accessible and affordable for all. And, she continues to make all South Carolinians proud.”

Senator Susan Collins of Maine, another Republican senator who confirmed Jackson to the DC circuit court, also released a statement on Jackson’s nomination, writing: “Ketanji Brown Jackson is an experienced federal judge with impressive academic and legal credentials. I will conduct a thorough vetting of Judge Jackson’s nomination and look forward to her public hearing before the Senate judiciary committee and to meeting with her in my office.”

Republican senator Mitt Romney of Utah, a potential yes vote for Jackson’s nomination, also released a statement on her selection: “One of my most serious constitutional responsibilities as a senator is to provide advice and consent on a supreme court nomination, and I believe our next justice must faithfully apply the law and our constitution – impartially and regardless of policy preferences.

“Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson is an experienced jurist, and I know her historic nomination will inspire many. I look forward to meeting in person with Judge Jackson, thoroughly reviewing her record and testimony, and evaluating her qualifications during this process.”

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## Republicans

# More Republicans have negative view of Biden than of Putin, poll finds

Findings from Fox News poll point to deep domestic divisions as well as splits over Biden's handling of Ukraine crisis



Trump with Putin in Helsinki in July 2018. Trump has repeatedly praised Putin and criticised Biden. Photograph: Anatoly Maltsev/EPA

*[Martin Pengelly](#) in New York*

*[@MartinPengelly](#)*

Fri 25 Feb 2022 11.00 EST

More Republicans have a negative view of Joe Biden than of [Vladimir Putin](#) and more Democrats have a negative view of Donald Trump than of the Russian leader, according to a new poll.

The findings point to deep domestic divisions as well as disagreement over Biden's handling of the Ukraine crisis.

Fox News [released the poll](#), which it said was carried out before Russia invaded Ukraine.

It said 92% of [Republicans](#) had a negative view of Biden while 81% had a negative view of Putin. Among Democrats, 87% had a negative view of Trump and 85% a negative view of Putin.

Biden has condemned the Russian invasion and introduced tough economic sanctions, in concert with other world powers.

Trump has repeatedly praised Putin and criticised Biden, on Thursday adapting a favorite golfing metaphor to claim the Russian leader was playing his counterpart "like a drum".

Trump's attacks are in line with those from Republicans in Congress, who claim Biden has been too weak on Russia, both as president and as vice-president under Barack Obama from 2009 to 2017.

In the [Fox News](#) poll, 56% said Biden had not been tough enough on Russia, 8% said he had been too tough and 29% said he had been about right.

Among [Democrats](#), 42% of respondents said they wanted Biden to be tougher and 47% said his actions were about right.

Fox News said Biden's numbers tracked closely to the same question about Trump when he was in power. In July 2018, 53% said Trump was not tough enough, 5% too tough and 35% about right.

That month, Russian election interference in Trump's favor and his links with Moscow were the subject of an investigation in which the special counsel, Robert Mueller, ultimately said he could not say Trump did not seek to obstruct justice.

Also in July 2018, at [a summit in Helsinki](#), Trump and Putin conducted a meeting behind closed doors and with no close aides. What was discussed is not known.

Trump was impeached in 2020, for attempting to blackmail Ukraine, withholding military aid while requesting dirt on Biden. At trial in the Senate, only one Republican, Mitt Romney, voted to convict.

As the Republican nominee for president in 2012, Romney took a more hawkish position on Russia than Obama.

Amid the Ukraine crisis, Republicans have pointed to Romney's stance on Russia. They have been less keen to mention his vote to convict Trump over Ukraine.

The Utah senator also voted to convict Trump in his second impeachment trial, for inciting the insurrection at the US Capitol on 6 January 2021.

The Fox News poll returned closely matched favorability ratings for the 45th and 46th presidents, Trump on 45% and Biden 43%.

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- [Russia US embassy urges Americans to have evacuation plans](#)

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# Luhansk and Donetsk regions recognised as independent states by Russia – as it happened

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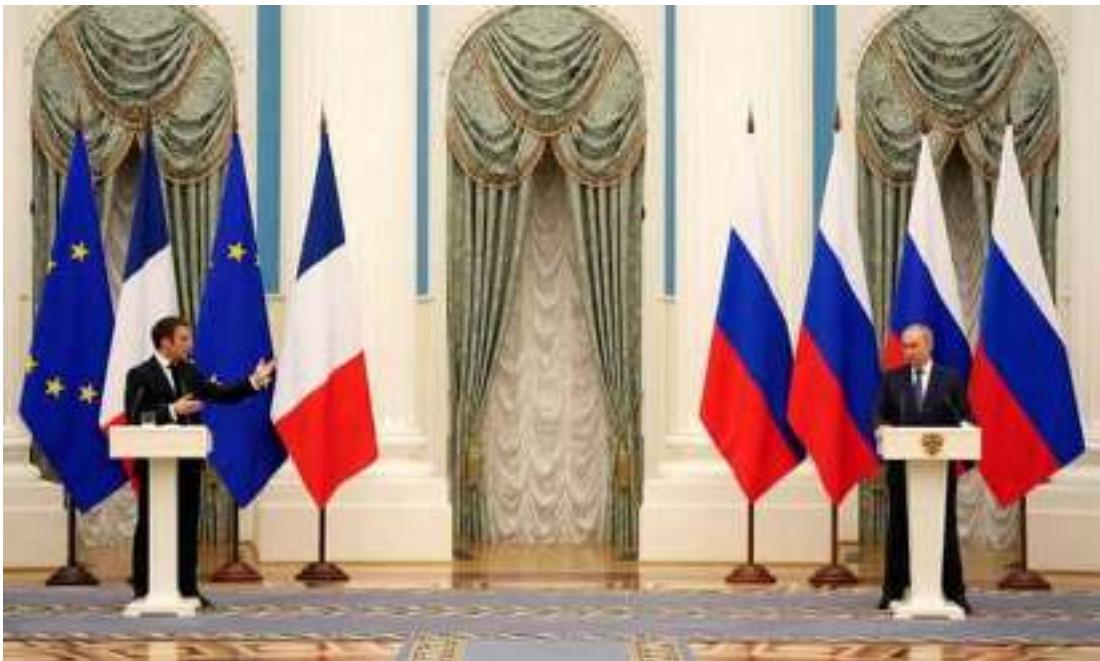
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## Ukraine

# Macron paves way for potential Putin-Biden summit on Ukraine crisis

Flurry of phone calls by French president leads to ‘in principle agreement’, as US warns war is imminent

- [Ukraine-Russia crisis latest news – live updates](#)



Vladimir Putin and Emmanuel Macron. The Kremlin said the Russian president had expressed serious concern over the sharp deterioration of the situation on the line of contact in Donbas. Photograph: Reuters

*[Patrick Wintour](#), [Jon Henley](#) in Paris and [Julian Borger](#) in Washington*  
Sun 20 Feb 2022 20.16 EST

The French president, [Emmanuel Macron](#), has invited Vladimir Putin and Joe Biden to attend a summit aimed at de-escalating the Ukraine crisis, and

the leaders have agreed in principle, Macron's office has announced, amid further US warnings that war is imminent.

The Élysée Palace put out a [statement](#) on Sunday evening following last-minute diplomatic efforts by the French president to try to dissuade Russia from invading Ukraine.

"Presidents Biden and Putin have each accepted the principle of such a summit," the statement said. "Its content will be prepared by secretary of state Blinken and Minister [Sergei] Lavrov during their meeting on Thursday 24 February. It can only be held if Russia does not invade [Ukraine](#)."

The White House confirmed Biden's readiness to hold a summit, but made clear it was wary about the sincerity of the offer.

"President Biden accepted in principle a meeting with President Putin following that engagement, again, if an invasion hasn't happened, the White House spokeswoman, Jen Psaki, said. "We are always ready for diplomacy. We are also ready to impose swift and severe consequences should [Russia](#) instead choose war. And currently, Russia appears to be continuing preparations for a full-scale assault on Ukraine very soon."



A satellite image taken on Sunday showing troops deployed along the tree line near Belgorod in Russia. Photograph: Maxar Tech/AFP/Getty Images

There was no immediate comment from the Kremlin or the office of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy.

Macron spoke twice to Vladimir Putin overnight, for a total of nearly three hours, consulting [Joe Biden](#) for 15 minutes in between the two calls. Amid a rising sense of urgency, the second Macron-Putin call was announced well after 2am in Moscow.

The French president said he was seeking to establish a cease-fire in the east of the country, and that the two leaders had agreed to hold discussions in the hope of organising a leaders' summit to review the future of European security arrangements. But the Kremlin account of the conversation focused on Putin's allegations of Ukrainian escalation and shelling on the eastern front lines – claims contradicted by reports from the region. It did not respond to an offer of direct talks from Volodymyr Zelenskiy, the Ukrainian president.

Moscow rescinded its undertaking to end military exercises in Belarus which were due to conclude on Sunday, and the Belarus defence ministry said the Russian troops would remain there indefinitely. Satellite images showed more and more Russian combat units advance from staging area to within a few kilometres of the Ukrainian border, in many cases concealing themselves in forests. More than 150,000 Russian troops are estimated to be deployed around Ukraine, while substantial naval forces are off its Black Sea coast.



A satellite image taken on Sunday showing an armour battalion heading south near Soloti in Russia. Photograph: Maxar Tech/AFP/Getty Images

Biden had been planning to travel to Delaware for a family event on Monday, a public holiday in the US, but canceled the trip on Sunday evening following a rare Sunday meeting of the national security council. US news networks cited intelligence assessment saying that Moscow had issued attack orders to commanders on the ground.

The US secretary of state, Anthony Blinken, said: “Everything we are seeing suggests that this is dead serious, that we are on the brink of an invasion.”.

He added: “...Until the tanks are actually rolling, and the planes are flying, we will use every opportunity and every minute we have to see if diplomacy can still dissuade President (Vladimir) Putin from carrying this forward.”

### Graphic showing buildup of Russian forces near Ukraine

Earlier, the British prime minister, Boris Johnson, who also spoke to Macron on Sunday, warned that Russia plans to launch the biggest war in Europe since 1945 by attacking Ukraine in a [“bloody and protracted conflict”](#). He said the west would use “all the pressure we can bring” to “make sure that this venture does not succeed”.

The chink of diplomatic light came after Putin spoke on the phone with Macron, his favoured western interlocutor, on Sunday morning, and the outcome, broadly confirmed by the Kremlin, suggests Putin might be willing to step back from the brink of a full invasion of Ukraine to allow renewed diplomatic discussions. If he is not, he is instead involved in an elaborate deceit of the French.

Under the plan, the French foreign minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian, will meet with his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, on Thursday to work on the possible summit at the highest level with Russia, Ukraine and allies, the Élysée said.

The two leaders also agreed to resume work on a separate meeting “within the framework of the [Normandy format](#)”, meaning the participants will be Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany, Macron’s office and the Kremlin said.

Putin and Macron would also work “intensively” to allow the Trilateral Contact Group – which includes Ukraine, Russia and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe – to meet “in the next few hours” in an effort to secure a ceasefire in eastern Ukraine where government troops and pro-Russian separatists are facing each other, according to the Elysée statement.

It is too early to say if Macron has pulled off a last-minute diplomatic coup, or if he will have the full support for his initiative from London. So far, most of the French president’s diplomatic moves have been coordinated with the White House.

Gérard Araud, a former French diplomat, defended Macron, saying: “he is today the only western leader actively engaged in finding a peaceful way out of the current crisis. He does know that he may fail, and probably will, but he is right to try, and deserves our support and understanding.”

The Élysée statement said “intense diplomatic work will take place in the coming days”, including several consultations in the French capital, adding that the two leaders also agreed on “the need to favour a diplomatic solution to the ongoing crisis and to do everything to achieve one”.

An Élysée official confirmed further talks between the two leaders were scheduled, but said Putin and Macron clearly had “different interpretations” of what was happening in the Donbas region and who was to blame, with the French president arguing that pro-Russian separatists were responsible, and the Russian leader insisting it was Ukrainian forces.

The Élysée official said Macron would be talking “in the next few hours” to the German chancellor, Olaf Scholz. Further calls were likely to be placed to Johnson, the Italian prime minister, Mario Draghi, and other close partners, the official said.

They added that Putin had reiterated that Russia “intends to withdraw its troops” from Belarus once ongoing exercises were complete. “All this will have to be verified, and that could take some time,” the official said, noting that statements by the Belarus authorities “do not appear to match Putin’s words”.

The Belarusian defence minister said [Russia and Belarus were extending military drills](#) that were due to end on Sunday, in a step that further intensifies pressure on Ukraine.

The Kremlin said that in the phone call, Putin had expressed serious concern over the sharp deterioration of the situation on the line of contact in Donbas.

The Russian statement added: “Taking into account the acuteness of the current state of affairs, the presidents considered it expedient to intensify the search for solutions through diplomatic means through the foreign ministries and political advisers to the leaders of the countries participating in the Normandy format. These contacts are designed to help restore the ceasefire and ensure progress in resolving the conflict around Donbas.”

The Kremlin insisted Putin was not withdrawing any of his wider demands, saying he “reiterated the need for the United States and Nato to take Russian demands for security guarantees seriously and respond to them concretely and to the point”. It made no reference to Macron’s proposed leaders’ summit.

The statement added that Putin blamed the escalation in Donbas on the provocations of the Ukrainian security forces, and that he complained of the continuing provision of modern weapons and ammunition to Ukraine by Nato countries, “which is pushing Kyiv towards a military solution to the so-called Donbas problem”.

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## Ukraine

# Russia is creating lists of Ukrainians ‘to be killed or sent to camps’, US claims

Leaked letter from US ambassador to UN warns of ‘human rights catastrophe’ in event of invasion

- [Ukraine-Russia crisis latest news – live updates](#)



Thousands of people march through Odessa in a show of unity on Sunday, the date on which, eight years ago, more than 100 people were killed during Ukraine's Maidan revolution. Photograph: Emilio Morenatti/AP

*Dan Sabbagh and agencies*

Mon 21 Feb 2022 13.08 EST

Russian forces are “creating lists of identified Ukrainians to be killed or sent to camps” in the event of an invasion, according to a letter sent by the US to

the UN human rights chief, Michelle Bachelet.

Citing “disturbing information recently obtained by the United States” the letter, from the US ambassador to the UN, Bathsheba Crocker, warns that “we have credible information” that target lists have been drawn up by “Russian forces”.

It warns that a Russian invasion of [Ukraine](#) would create a “human rights catastrophe” and that further abuses are being planned, which have previously included “targeted killings, kidnappings/forced disappearances, unjust detentions, and the use of torture”.

A few hours later Jake Sullivan, the US national security adviser, said that Russia’s plans for Ukraine were “extremely violent” – and it was necessary to lay out the threat in the letter for the UN.

“We also have intelligence to suggest that there will be an even greater form of brutality because this will not simply be some conventional war between two armies. It will be a war waged by Russia on the Ukrainian people, to repress them, crush them, to harm them,” he said.

Evidence to back up the US statements is relatively limited. The warnings are part of the wider western strategy to highlight what are believed to be Putin’s intentions towards Ukraine, partly in an attempt to dissuade him from an invasion, and the Crocker’s letter is the latest in a string from western intelligence about the plans the Russian FSB and GRU agencies have for acting in concert with the Russian military.

Last week, Foreign Policy reported that US officials had concluded that lists had been drawn up containing anybody that it believed could challenge Russia, and reported similar conclusions were being drawn by the UK and other anglophone Five Eyes intelligence partners.

Britain has made more measured warnings. Earlier this month it emerged that the UK believed that the FSB has been given the task of engineering coups in Ukraine’s major cities in the immediate aftermath of any invasion.

The broader plan would see Russian forces would encircle Kyiv and other major cities, leaving the spy agency the task of delivering them, as part of a strategy of “regime change” across Ukraine.

Crocker, in her letter, says she was writing to the UN high commissioner for human rights because of its mandate and its presence in Ukraine.

The [letter states](#) that those most likely to be targeted include “Russian and Belarusian dissidents in exile in [Ukraine](#), journalists and anti-corruption activists, and vulnerable populations such as religious and ethnic minorities and LGBTQI+ persons”.

The letter emerged after the latest flurry of diplomacy, which saw Joe Biden and Vladimir Putin approve in principle the idea of a summit between the two leaders, aimed at de-escalating the Ukraine crisis.

The step – conditional on Russia not invading Ukraine – was [taken with the help of the French president, Emmanuel Macron](#), after calls on Sunday night with the two leaders. A format for the summit is to be decided at a meeting between the US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, and the Russian foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, on Thursday.

Further details also emerged of US sanctions plans, with Reuters reporting that the US intends to bar US financial institutions from processing transactions for major Russian banks in the event of an invasion.

The report, which cites three sources, said the measures aim to hurt the Russian economy by cutting the “correspondent” banking relationships between targeted Russian banks and US banks that enable international payments.

While the threat of sanctions had already been floated, the plan to cut correspondent banking ties, which underpin global money flows, had not been previously reported.

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## [Russia](#)

# **US embassy in Russia urges Americans to have evacuation plans**

- Threat of attacks in Moscow cited as Ukraine crisis deepens
- [Ukraine-Russia crisis latest news – live updates](#)



A national flag flown outside the US Embassy on Novinsky Boulevard in Moscow. Photograph: Vladimir Gerdo/TASS

*Reuters in Moscow*

Sun 20 Feb 2022 15.38 EST

The US embassy in Russia has cautioned Americans to prepare evacuation plans as the crisis over [Ukraine](#) deepens, citing the threat of attacks in Moscow and along the border with the neighbour Russia seems likely to invade.

The move drew a rebuke from the Russian foreign ministry.

In a message to Americans in Russia on Sunday, the US embassy said: “There have been threats of attacks against shopping centres, railway and metro stations, and other public gathering places in major urban areas, including Moscow and St Petersburg as well as in areas of heightened tension along the Russian border with Ukraine.

“Review your personal security plans. Have evacuation plans that do not rely on US government assistance.”

A spokeswoman for the Russian foreign ministry, Maria Zakharova, questioned if the US had passed on the information about possible attacks to Russia.

“And if not, how is one to understand all of this?” Zakharova said.

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## 2022.02.21 - Spotlight

- Joanna Scanlan ‘Hollywood glamour doesn’t feel like me at all’
- Charlie Brooker ‘Mr Dystopia? That makes me sound like a wrestler’
- Reef ball burials The new trend for becoming ‘coral’ when you die
- A new start after 60 ‘After 35 years of teaching, I became Magic Frank – and I’ve never been happier’

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Interview

## **‘All that Hollywood glamour doesn’t feel like me at all’: Joanna Scanlan on self-doubt, sexism and being the red-hot favourite at the Baftas**

Emine Saner



Joanna Scanlan at Aberglasney Gardens, in the Twyi Valley, Carmarthenshire, Wales. Photograph: Francesca Jones/The Guardian

After years of great roles in comedies such as *The Thick of It* and *Getting On*, the actor is now being feted for her devastating dramatic performance in *After Love*. She talks about ‘serious’ acting, a breakdown in her 20s and learning to fight for herself

Mon 21 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

When Joanna Scanlan arrives, she is hidden beneath a yellow raincoat, glasses steamed up, blown through the door as if the gathering storm outside has washed her ashore. “I am so sorry for dragging you out here,” she says, laughing slightly hysterically, as she sheds the layers. Scanlan is filming in rural Wales – she, her husband and their dog are renting a cottage nearby – and this cafe, also in the middle of nowhere, was her suggestion. Even the women who work in the cafe were surprised to be called in. We are the only customers, but there are pots of tea and welsh cakes, and Scanlan is great company, so all is well.

She grew up in Wales, so this job – filming *The Light in the Hall*, a psychological thriller, for which she has had to learn some Welsh – is something of a homecoming. Being here is also a detachment from London, and everything that goes with her job outside of being on set or stage – the bit, you sense, she could take or leave. And so she’s a bit distanced from the buzz around her [Bafta nomination for best actress](#) for her role in the extraordinary film [After Love](#). “When you sit here in Tywi Valley, just learning your lines for tomorrow, it’s hard to take that in,” she says. “I feel very long in the tooth to be coming to this sort of prominence.”



Grief and betrayal ... Joanna Scanlan in After Love. Photograph: RÅN studio / BFI

Scanlan, who is 60, came to acting relatively late and her roles have largely been in comedy – she was the brilliantly awful civil servant [Terri Coverley in The Thick of It](#), the bolshie [DI Viv Deering in No Offence](#) and Ma Larkin in The Larkins, ITV’s recent remake of The Darling Buds of May. Getting On, the comedy she wrote with her co-leads Vicki Pepperdine and Jo Brand, is still the funniest and most painful portrayal of the NHS. Although Scanlan has had smaller roles in films, to have her work recognised as the lead in a weighty film feels like a shift. The Baftas – “all that kind of cliched sort of Hollywood glamour” – doesn’t, says Scanlan, “feel like me at all. I feel like I’m just a working character actor. It’s lovely, of course, but it’s hard to place yourself inside that.” It feels, she says, “surprising”.

It won’t be a surprise to anyone who has seen Scanlan’s quietly devastating performance in After Love (the Guardian’s critic, Peter Bradshaw, called it [“the best of her career so far”](#)). The film has also picked up other nominations, including for its writer and director Aleem Khan, and has been [winning awards](#) on the festival circuit. Scanlan has a healthy attitude to the general absurdity of prizes – “you can’t quite put the model of sport on to the arts, this sort of runners and riders ... it’s not a sport, because it’s about

how it hits the heart, and the senses, and that is subjective” – but if the renewed focus on the film means than more people see it, then great.

People laugh at me, but it’s always when I’m doing something that I didn’t intend to be funny

Scanlan’s comedy career seems accidental, even if, alongside Getting On, she and Pepperdine wrote another comedy, [Puppy Love](#), set in the world of dog training. Drama has always been her love. “I don’t want to diss comedy,” she laughs. “I’ve spent my career working in it and I don’t want anyone to think that I don’t appreciate it. But I guess what I like in comedy is when it is really truthful – and that’s not so far from drama.” For all that she’s warm, generous with her laughter and expressive – her face is beautiful and luminous, hands shooting up to emphasise a point – she is also thoughtful, and takes her work seriously. “I feel like I’m a serious person,” she says. “People laugh at me, but it’s always when I’m doing something that I didn’t intend to be funny. The more earnest I seem to be, the more people laugh at me. I’m not very light. I wish I was; I wish I could just relax.”



Bolshie ... Scanlan in No Offence. Photograph: Ian Derry/Channel 4

In *After Love*, Scanlan plays Mary who, in the midst of grief after her husband's sudden death, discovers he has a second, secret family. Khan's skill, making his first feature film, is in packing so much big stuff into a film with a tiny cast, and an almost entirely domestic setting – it covers love, grief, faith (Mary is a Muslim convert), identity, betrayal, class, motherhood. Ahmed, Mary's husband, was a ferry captain and they appeared to have a happy life on the Kent coast – but when she goes through his things, after he dies, she discovers evidence of another woman, Genevieve (played by Nathalie Richard), who lives across the Channel in France. If Ahmed is not who Mary thinks he was – not committed to her, not committed to his faith – then, who, now, is she? Certainty crumbles, like her visions of the white cliffs of Dover collapsing into the sea.

Mary manages to inveigle her way into Genevieve's life in a way that exposes the other woman's prejudices around class, size and devout Muslim women. But Mary also betrays Genevieve's trust. "She finds out she's not as nice a person as she thought she was," says Scanlan. "Confronting who you actually are, compared with who you want to think of yourself as being, that horrible tension inside her, that was quite tricky to negotiate." She found the shoot, though short, very intense: "That state of betrayal, grief, misery." She would plead, she says, half-smiling, with the producer, begging him to sack her. "And he would say, 'I would sack you, it's just that it does seem to be working.'" She does seem prone to moments of self-doubt: on the TV series she is filming, in which she plays a grieving mother, she found learning Welsh too hard and was about to pull out. Her husband – an accountant – sensibly talked her down, pointing out that the thing about acting she cared most about was stretching herself.

Culture puts brackets around older women's sexuality – and says, 'this is surprising or aberrant'

Khan has said that he was interested in bringing a character to the screen who is not often portrayed: "An older woman of a certain size, who wears the headscarf – we never get to see the full interior spectrum of a character like this on screen." The story is fictional but Mary is inspired by Khan's own mother, a white English convert to Islam, who Scanlan spent time with. "He adores his mum and she's so worthy of that adoration – she's a really

special person. To him, she was this brilliantly rich, fully 4D person, and he wanted to put that on the screen.” Khan is not attached, she says, to received ideas about “what is cinema and what isn’t cinema”, and the idea of glamour and allure that goes along with it, although, she adds, Genevieve – blond, elegant, French – “does represent some of those qualities”. But still, Genevieve is a middle-aged woman who is allowed to be seen as sexy. Scanlan agrees: “To me, that doesn’t seem abnormal, because I’m old. It doesn’t seem abnormal to be sexual, because we still are,” she laughs. “But you forget that culture as a whole puts brackets around older women’s sexuality – and says that ‘this is surprising or aberrant’.”

Scanlan grew up in north Wales, where her parents ran a hotel. She had discovered acting at school and went to the University of Cambridge – not her first choice, she says, but she was rejected from everywhere else – because of its drama opportunities In 1980, she was one of her college’s first intake of women. What was that like? “It was,” she says, pausing while she searches for the word, “frankly, an ordeal. I had a few feminist teachers when I was at school who were really influential on me. The feeling [then] was about storming the parapets and getting into environments that we had previously been excluded from.” So she liked the thought of joining a pioneering group. “The reality was really different, and that was partly because I had been at a girls’ boarding school and did not know anything very much about how to deal with male culture.”

Men, she says, “would do things like come into the bar, stand on the table, pull down their flies, and piss into a beer glass that was on your table”. There was sexual harassment, and once a man climbed in through Scanlan’s bedroom window – she found him asleep on the floor. It felt, she says, unsafe. For almost the whole of her first year, she hid away. “I just stayed in my room, smoking, drinking, and avoiding everything, avoiding people completely.”



Brilliantly awful ... Scanlan (*second left*) in *The Thick of It*, with James Smith, Rebecca Front, Peter Capaldi and Chris Addison.

Photograph: BBC

She didn't want to be visible, or attract attention from men. "I remember thinking [Andrea Dworkin](#) dungarees suddenly seemed like a great idea in that environment," she says. And it meant she didn't put herself forward for drama auditions until nearly the end of that first year, in which she describes herself as being "almost in shock. I'm not sure everyone had my experience, but I was just very unprepared." She had been sheltered and naive. "It took me until doing therapy in my 30s to actually understand and learn that ..." She pauses. "You have to fight for yourself. It, perhaps, is a slight exaggeration, but that no one else is going to be the person who makes sure everything's OK."

Scanlan did join Footlights, the university's comedy theatre club, but soon left it for a more serious drama club. "Don't think I'm not aware of the levels of privilege we're talking about here," she laughs. That choice of drama over comedy at that moment proved fairly momentous in terms of her career, which is to say that it stalled it.

She spent the rest of her 20s trying to get acting work and getting constantly rejected. In the meantime, she volunteered with community theatre projects,

then went to the then Leicester Polytechnic to teach drama, until she had a breakdown. She went back to live with her parents, not able to do much except walk their dog when she felt up to it. “Because I had chronic fatigue syndrome, I had no energy. And that was mental energy, physical energy, emotional energy. It was like a complete battery drain. I remember being able to mark the distinction between the effort required to sit up as opposed to lie down.” It was her GP who, realising just how much acting meant to her, suggested she try to make a return to it. Even if she never made it, by conventional standards of success, she realised she would still be happier doing it.

I’m lucky enough to be in an era where stories are told about people who are ordinary

She started working as an administrator for Arts Council England, while writing her own scripts, and was 34 when she got her first professional job, on the TV drama Peak Practice. She says she doesn’t look at other actors and feel envious: I had asked, jokingly, if there was a sense of relief when Olivia Colman didn’t also get nominated for a Bafta. Scanlan laughs, then says: “I thought her performance in The Lost Daughter was almost the best performance I’ve ever seen her give.” But, there are roles she wished she could have played as a younger actor: “I think theatre is probably where I missed out, and by the time I came back into it, when I started again in my mid- to late-30s, I hadn’t developed relationships with theatre directors, and I never really cracked it.” But, she says, even when she was 12, she was playing 40-year-olds. “I never had that ingenue quality, so maybe it’s a regretful dream that really is a fantasy.” Had she fit a more conventional image, “I would have played more drama than comedy, probably.” Instead, she says a few times, smiling, she brings her “umpy real shtick”.

Scanlan seems to have very little vanity, particularly in her work. In After Love, especially, her face is raw and close up; there is one moment when she stands in the mirror in her underwear and surveys her body, grabbing her flesh. “The age on the face, and rolls of fat and stretch marks, that’s telling the story about this woman’s experience,” she says. “I do think that our lives are in our bodies, our experiences, and therefore, whatever that is, I try not to be judgmental about it myself. We get sold this idea that you’re totally

unacceptable if you don't fit a certain number of female role models – if you're not slim enough, if you haven't had your lips done or whatever. And, then, my experience constantly contradicts that, because when I see somebody, I'm not seeing what's on the outside. Maybe for a fleeting few seconds, but very quickly, something else is happening that's speaking so much louder than how they look." She knows, she says, "the narratives around beauty and lovability are all around size in our society. It's not that I've tried for it not to define me, because I haven't, but I've had to hope that something else of me has spoken more."



Scanlan as Catherine Dickens in *The Invisible Woman*. Photograph: TCD/Prod.DB/Alamy

She remembers going to a group therapy session once, where all the other women were conventionally beautiful. "Every one of them spoke about how disempowered they felt, and I suddenly realised, if you get things because people think you're beautiful, then what you think is: 'They don't like me for who I really am.' That must be a very painful place to be."

She is, though, operating within a notoriously sexist, sizeist industry. "I am, but you've got to buck the trend sometimes. I just think there is an appetite – forgive the pun – to look at a wider range of experiences. People are watching this film, they're finding a story that they can relate to. The

normative hasn't prevailed in this case." It's real, she says, "it's what other people are. People struggle with their weight, people struggle with their frailties. I'm lucky enough to be in an era where stories are told about people who are ordinary."

Is she confident that there are enough of those roles? "No. But I honestly will take what I'm given." She laughs. "If it doesn't come, it doesn't come. I can't control it." It seems unlikely, of course, that Scanlan won't be in high demand – how gratifying, after everything, to have a career that is racing along – but there is a self-reliance to her. If roles don't go her way, she'll write something (she has a production company with Pepperdine), or work in community theatre or dance, or make videos with her phone. "It's more of a real compulsion to be creative, and a huge part of me," she says. "That's why those years when I was not acting or writing, that's why they were agony, and why my life just didn't work."

*The Bafta film awards are on 13 March 2022; After Love is available to stream now*

This article was amended on 22 February 2022. Scanlan starred in Getting On, not Moving On as a previous subheading stated.

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Interview

## Charlie Brooker: ‘Mr Dystopia? That makes me sound like a wrestler’

[Zoe Williams](#)



Charlie Brooker: ‘Mr Dystopia? That makes me sound like a wrestler’  
Photograph: Michael Wharley

As he releases the latest fruits of his new megabucks deal with Netflix – an interactive cartoon about a cat – the Black Mirror creator discusses gaming, nuclear war, and why his generation has wrecked the UK



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Mon 21 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

Charlie Brooker is sitting at a desk, a big cardboard box in the background, miscellany spilling out of bookshelves. “What you can’t see,” he says, since we’re on Zoom, “is all the shit all over my desk. I’m shambolic.”

He got his first gig doing a comic strip when he was 15, for 80 quid a week; he dropped out of Westminster University as the only dissertation he wanted to write was on video games, and scrambled into [a career in journalism](#) – “there was no planning, I wasn’t somebody who was out hustling” – via working in a shop and writing video game reviews. He shifted, via Screenwipe, Gameswipe, Newswipe and Weekly Wipe, into screenwriting, and achieved astonishing success with the anthology series Black Mirror. His production company with Annabel Jones, Broke and Bones, has just been bought by Netflix for an unspecified sum; the [rumour is](#) that it’s so enormous that, well, I had to get out a calculator to work out what “nine

figures” over five years means (\$100,000,000). I just can’t wrap my head around why he still has Billy bookcases from Ikea.

He treats this question respectfully, as is his nature. There’s a very deep courtesy under all the swearing. “Check your Ikea catalogue. They’re not Billy. They’re Kallax.” Isn’t it ironic, I ask later, that he started a company called Broke and Bones which he then sold for *all the money in the world*? “It’s not like they go, ‘Here’s a pile of money for you,’” he explains. “It’s more like, ‘that’s an investment for you to make things.’ Also, I’m so clueless on the business side of things. Probably, if you look at the paperwork, I’m going to get paid in rice.”

His first project since signing the new Netflix deal is [Cat Burglar](#), a quirky idea and not at all what you’d expect. At heart, it’s a love letter to animators Tex Avery and [Chuck Jones](#) and the golden age of cartoon making, Wile E Coyote and all that. “Not only are the visuals and the sound extremely evocative, extremely true to time,” he says, “the visual gags, the pace and the anarchy – those hold up today. You get hit by a broom, you smash into a door or your skin falls off, or whatever. They tend to be quite physical and brutal. They’re not really about dialogue.”

So, a cat is trying to break into a museum for a priceless artwork and a dopey dog is trying to stop him; except there’s a twist. Every few minutes, questions will flash up that you have to answer with your remote, “almost like a pub trivia quiz machine”, he says. It might be “Words you’d associate with the 90s”, or “Which film won the Oscar?” Getting them right or wrong affects the outcome so, “you’re controlling the luck of the character, rather than the decisions they’re making, if that makes any sense.”



Brooker reporting from the Glastonbury festival [for the Guardian](#) in 2007, with Aisleyne Horgan-Wallace from Big Brother 7. Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian

It takes about 15 minutes to get to the end but you can cycle through hundreds of possible permutations. “It’s a curious experiment,” he says, dispassionately, “and I can’t quite work out how it will be received. It’s not aimed at children, although the idea was it’s not necessarily massively off-putting to children.” You’ll never hear him do a hard sell, even about a show he’s actively selling. He has a lab-boffin, it-might-work-it-might-not tone, an experimenter at the frontiers of telly – is it a game, is it a show, would it work better on a console?

Brooker has been interested in interactivity for ages (if there’s a message to the viewer in Cat Burglar, he says, it’s: “You do your bit, mate. Don’t just sit there”). His first foray was [Black Mirror: Bandersnatch](#), in 2018, also for Netflix. This was where he discovered that he could work with the platform, without it sticking its oar in. “That was their first big, interactive drama. It was an expensive proposition, risky, difficult, they wrote loads of code to make it work … looking back, why didn’t they want something like a Bond movie? This was very niche: it’s about someone writing a game in his head, on a Spectrum. The biggest set piece was him walking in to WH Smith in 1984. It would have been easy for Netflix to say: ‘Could you set this in

America, make it a Tandy computer and make it more like War Games starring Matthew Broderick? Can it be a bit more glamorous?' There was none of that."

Bandersnatch is incredibly atmospheric, haunting, even. "From a technical point of view, I was satisfied," Brooker says, again, quite dispassionately. But originally he wanted it to be like an escape room, with a puzzle at the centre which the viewer would solve by repeatedly failing, each failure delivering another digit in a phone number. "The problem was, and this is a damning indictment of humankind, people couldn't remember a five-digit number for more than five seconds. So we had to take that out. Which basically meant that you weren't quite sure when it had finished."

He takes gaming incredibly seriously, still plays massive, 55-hour games, hates the word "gamer" ("It's infantilising, isn't it? You wouldn't call yourself a 'filmer'"), and is "always just bewildered by the skill and intelligence that's gone into a game". The underpinning philosophy of gaming seems to have permeated his approach to life: try everything, failure is at least half the point, and maybe the most interesting half. It's a cute paradox that this attitude has begat a huge amount of success, that he tends to shrug off. "I have a strange attitude to success," he says. "It's like going to an award ceremony. If you don't win, it's a bit of a waste of an evening. If you win it's nice, but it's also sort of meaningless." He's like an inverted Samuel Beckett. Ever tried? Ever succeeded? No matter. Try again. Succeed again. Succeed better.



‘It’s nice but it’s also sort of meaningless’ ... Brooker and co-producers Annabel Jones and Russell McLean in 2019 with their Emmy awards for Black Mirror: Bandersnatch. Photograph: Frazer Harrison/Getty Images

Before he was Mr Interactive, Charlie Brooker was Mr Dystopia, creating disturbing, prescient vistas of the very near future. [What if the prime minister had to have sex with a pig](#), live on air? What if anxious modern parenting turned into 24-hour hyper-surveillance? Even Nathan Barley, his 2005 comedy co-written with Chris Morris, [came eerily to pass](#). That eponymous, portfolio-careered hipster could have been written yesterday. “That makes me sound like a wrestler,” Brooker says, not without satisfaction. “A really mean, horrible wrestler. Here he comes, in the blue corner: Mr Dystopia.”

It’s not so much that he predicted things, and then they happened, he says. Rather, Black Mirror plots were “extrapolations of whatever was already happening”. The pig plot was inspired by [Gordon Brown’s Gillian Duffy](#) moment, when he called a Labour voter a bigoted woman and “had to go and apologise, and it became this bizarre circus of calamity. I was just watching it thinking, ‘No one’s in charge here.’”



'It's a curious experiment' ... Rowdy (voiced by James Adomian) and Peanut (Alan Lee) in Cat Burglar. Photograph: courtesy of Netflix

Brooker is 50. Growing up near Reading in the 70s and 80s, he had – in common with the lot of us – a powerful terror of nuclear apocalypse, coupled with the more idiosyncratic phobia of vomiting, which he has to this day. He drolly describes the way these fears combined in his childhood mind. "The thing that terrified me more than anything else was that if you survived the blast you got radiation sickness. Oh no! There's a bomb that would give me a bad tummy? I wasn't really thinking about the big picture." In that context, he remembers taking comfort from shows such as *Spitting Image*, thinking that if the adults are joking about it, it'll probably be OK. "Then, on 2016 Screen Wipe, we had some jokes about Trump, who had just been elected and started casually talking about a nuclear bomb. I was in that position as the adult, being funny and reassuring. But I was shitting myself."

Rumbling, amorphous anxieties continue to plague him, but always laced with this sense of the absurd that keeps him, well, more than sane, happy. "In the UK, because I've been known for writing acerbic columns and comedies, people know that I'm not taking myself that seriously. Then I get to the US and they think I'm the king of dystopia. But still in my head, it's all the same stuff. Comedy, horror and sci-fi are such close bedfellows."

He's sick of one thing, though: the jokes should have stayed on the screen, or the page; they should never have migrated to politics. "It is bizarre that we've got [Keith Lemon](#) running the country. We've got a character, a shit comedy character, running the country. And we let that happen. Our generation let that happen. They are us! They're our peers. Fucking hell." An interactive drama, in which you can rid politics of ludicrous, empty characters: that I would watch (or play) for ever.

- [Cat Burglar is on Netflix from 22 February.](#)
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## Seascape: the state of our oceansMarine life

# Reef ball burials: the new trend for becoming ‘coral’ when you die

Do underwater cremation memorials help people regenerate marine habitats in death or are they a ‘greenwashing’ gimmick?



A reef ball that has been colonised by various marine life. The rough surface helps coral and algae grow on it. Photograph: Eternal Reefs

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[Abby Young-Powell](#)

Mon 21 Feb 2022 02.45 EST

Janet Hock is a former dentistry professor who lives in Indianapolis. She is also an avid scuba diver, with a long love of the ocean. “We plod around on Earth, but there’s this whole other world that teems with life – or used to,” she says.

So when Hock, 77, updated her will in 2020, she added that she wanted to become part of a coral reef when she died. The unusual request means her cremated remains will be mixed into a perforated concrete dome, known as a reef ball. She will then become part of an artificial reef, having a second life on the seabed.

“You’re providing structure for fish to swim through and a place for plants to grow,” says Hock. “My first impression was that they’re really ugly. Then I thought: ‘Oh, it would be so nice to be down there, with little orange fish darting through the holes in my ball.’”

The service is provided by Eternal Reefs, a Florida-based charity that says it offers a “way to give back after life by replenishing the dwindling natural reef systems”. It places reef balls made of pH-neutral concrete, along with human ashes, in regulated areas of the seabed around the US. Family and friends are given the GPS coordinates of where their loved one’s “grave” is located.



Reef balls can attract a host of marine life to largely barren seabed. One near Florida is now home to 56 species of fish, as well as crabs, sea urchins, sponges and coral. Photograph: agefotostock/Alamy

The charity says it has seen the number of requests triple during the pandemic, mostly from people who love the sea – and the notion that in death they can help regenerate marine life.

A desire to return to the ocean goes back millennia, with evidence of sea burial in ancient Egypt and Rome. In the South Pacific, bodies would be placed in canoes and pushed out to sea, while scattering ashes in the ocean has long been widely practised in Asia. And tales of fallen Viking heroes' boats set ablaze have persisted in popular culture.

Today, the idea of an ocean burial chimes with a [search for eco-friendly alternatives](#) to traditional burial and cremation. While the reef model still requires cremation, the idea is that the structures will help restore marine habitats by mimicking some characteristics of a coral reef.

Most of the world's reefs are at risk – from ocean warming and acidification, pollution and overfishing – according to the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#). Reefs are essential to protect shorelines and maintain marine ecosystems, as well as providing work for local communities and even helping scientists to [produce new medicines](#).

Eternal Reefs works with the Reef Ball Foundation and Reef Innovations, which constructs the balls. At more than a metre high and two metres wide and weighing 250kg-1,800kg (550lb-4,000lb), the balls have a rough surface that allows marine plants and animals such as corals and algae to grow on them. The organisation has so far sunk close to [3,000 memorial reefs across about 25 sites](#), from Texas to New Jersey.

There was a real diversity of invertebrates covering the stones

*Marcus Darler, Solace Reefs*

Murray Roberts, professor of marine biology at Edinburgh University's school of geosciences, thinks it is a good idea. "Corals and all sorts of animals grow better on structure," he says. "I can't see an obvious downside."

Roberts says incorporating human ashes into artificial reefs could help shield them from destruction, as well as highlighting the damage we do to the ocean. “When you have artificial reefs that contain human remains, imagine the consternation there would be if that area was trawled up,” he says.

Dr Ken Collins, of Southampton University’s National Oceanography Centre, agrees. “It is a designated bit of seabed which remains undisturbed,” he says. Collins, whose specialism is artificial reefs, sees no problem with marine concrete and is involved in a UK memorial reef himself. “Any impact disappears within days,” he says.

Eternal Reefs says the money people such as Hock pay for reef balls – which cost between \$3,000 and \$7,500 (£2,200-£5,500) – helps fund more artificial reefs. “We consider ourselves to be reef-builders. [That’s] what our goal is,” says George Frankel, chief executive of Eternal Reefs. “And we’re using memorialisation as the tool.”



Incorporating human ashes into artificial reefs could protect them, as well as highlighting the damage done to the ocean, says a marine biologist. Photograph: Eternal Reef

It is not the only such project in the ocean: the company behind the [Neptune Memorial Reef](#), in Florida, says it “creates life after life” in the ocean and

also provides memorials made of concrete and cremated remains, which cost from \$1,295, to generate funding. “Building a reef costs money – lots of it,” says Jim Hutslar, its operations director.

Hutslar says the artificial reef is home to 56 species of fish, as well as crabs, sea urchins, sponges and coral. When complete, it will comprise 250,000 memorials covering more than 6.5 hectares (16 acres), making it one of the world’s largest human-made reefs.

The idea has also been adopted in Dorset, as part of a scheme to attract divers to the county. Two local divers, Marcus Darler and Sean Webb, gained permission from the Crown Estate ([the monarchy owns the UK seabed](#)) to obtain a square-kilometre site off the coast of Weymouth and Portland for a reef to help regenerate the local lobster population, as well as act as a dive site. “To help with funding, we came up with the idea of [Solace Reefs](#),” Darler says.

With Collins’ support, they created perforated domes out of crushed Portland limestone and human ashes. Since 2014, they have deposited 16. After diving around the site, a marine biologist reported: “There was a real diversity of invertebrates covering the stones [...] it has become a new ecosystem.”

It appeals to me – the thought of regrowing something that’s been destroyed

*Janet Hock*

Both Frankel and Hutslar say many people are interested in replicating the model. “I get calls on a regular basis,” Frankel says. “The problem is they all think it’s a get-rich-quick scheme.” Still, he says there’s “no question in my mind that it will be mainstream”.

Not everyone is convinced, however. The model still involves cremation, which, on average, [releases 400kg of carbon dioxide](#) into the atmosphere for each body. “If people want to seriously make a difference, then don’t choose cremation,” says Rosie Inman-Cook, manager of the [Natural Death Centre](#) charity. “Cremation is a disaster.”

The artificial reefs also use concrete, the manufacture of which is responsible for up to [8% of global CO2 emissions](#). Concrete has a huge environmental cost, says Michael Steinke, a marine biologist at Essex University, “so from that point of view it might not be the best idea, if you’re really environmentally minded.”

Inman-Cook is wary of what she calls “gimmicky” burial products and services. Environmental concerns have led to quirky innovations, from [“living coffins” made from mushroom fibre](#), to egg-shaped “seed” urns, which [grow a tree](#) on your remains. “It’s tinkering at the edges,” she says, arguing that such ideas are a distraction from more fundamental changes needed. Inman-Cook says natural burial is best for the environment.

Hock says she was also sceptical about some of the new ideas for burial, but was impressed by the marine life living on some of the new reefs and felt it would be less difficult for her family than tending to a grave.

“The video I watched showed how quickly these peculiar-looking balls were repopulated with fish, so the concept seemed to work,” she says. “It appeals to me – the thought of regrowing something that’s been destroyed.”

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## A new start after 60: ‘After 35 years of teaching, I became Magic Frank – and I’ve never been happier’



Frank Farrell: ‘I can genuinely call myself a magician, because people are paying me to do it.’ Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

Frank Farrell had loved magic since he was a child. But it was only after retiring that he began to perform professionally. Now he is living exactly the life he wants to live

[Paula Cocozza](#)

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When Frank Farrell's retirement day came in 2018 – after 35 years of teaching – everyone thought he “would be straight down the pub to celebrate”. Instead, he stayed sober and prepared his materials: the next day he began his new career as a magician. He was 60, and he didn't yet *feel* like a magician, but that weekend Mr Farrell the English teacher gave way to Magic Frank. Under this stage name, he performed 10 shows at a Harry Potter convention in Manchester.

Farrell had been dabbling in magic since his 30s, but the scale of these gigs – he was paid nearly £2,000 – struck him as “a mark of respect” and validation. “I started to consider myself a magician, not someone who does a bit of magic on the side.”

With magic you get immediate feedback if it works well. In teaching, that moment might never come

A mentalist who specialises in card tricks, Farrell performs “parlour shows” at weddings, birthdays or Women's Institute gatherings. The audience's gaze is so intense, he feels his hands burn. Applause breaks from this “sense of wonder … Someone has seen something that logic tells them cannot happen, but which they've just seen happen,” he says. “Usually people start laughing. It makes me laugh as well. It feels good.”

As a child, Farrell loved magic. The son of Irish immigrants – his father worked in building foundations, his mother as a home help – he grew up in Romford, Essex. Occasionally he trekked to the joke shop on Tottenham Court Road in London to splurge his pocket money on a stink bomb or two,

or a device to vanish a ha'penny. "But it fizzled out because there was nothing to nurture it," he says. "I didn't know that there's thousands of books on magic."

Instead, he got into acting. "I think you can see a theme here," he says, sounding every inch the English teacher. "A need for an audience."

He reprised the magic in his 30s after he and his wife, Sheila, returned from a trip to India. Sheila had impressed some children with an illusion in which she seemed to pass a thread through her neck. Farrell thought: "When I get home I'll learn some. It's a useful thing if there's children around."

He bought a magic book, practised tricks, even found a magic club in Manchester. He and Sheila had two boys, who were mostly unimpressed by the tricks as children. Farrell never worked his magic at school, except as an activity during enrichment week, when pupils had a chance to learn something different to their normal lessons.

In some ways, maybe teaching was another parlour show, though. Farrell's style was "a bit offbeat ... I played music. I tried to bring comedy into the classroom." He put on voices, loved wordplay, and for minor misdemeanours asked students to apologise to his pot plants. At his final summer fair, some of the students wore masks with his face on.

Teaching, like magic, is transformative – albeit "a much slower process of transformation", he says. "With magic you get immediate feedback if it works well. In teaching, that moment might never come. Even if you have had that effect, you might not know." At first it was a shock to live life without a timetable. But Farrell now rehearses for an hour a day, has up to nine bookings in a month, and spends the rest of the time pitching, handling enquiries and deepening his art.

He has finally shaken off any sense of being an impostor. "I can genuinely call myself a magician, because people are paying me to do it."

Clearly, he says, needing validation is a bit of a theme, but he is unsure why and doesn't like to "navel gaze". Maybe it "came from having a very

ordinary background”, but adds: “Don’t we all want to feel special?”

The ability to transform and to create wonder are important to Farrell, and I ask what, in himself, has caused him the greatest wonder?

“I find the process of becoming older quite amazing,” he answers. “I have discovered that I am far more self-confident, more relaxed ... I am living exactly the type of life I want to live.” When people ask about his retirement he likes to reply: “I’ve always been happy but never been happier.”

*Tell us: has your life taken a new direction after the age of 60?*

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## 2022.02.21 - Coronavirus

- 'Today we rejoined the world' Hugs, tears and Vegemite as Australia reopens international borders
- Live Covid: New Zealand to end vaccine mandates after Omicron peak
- New Zealand Restrictions will only lift well after peak, PM Ardern says
- Analysis How much risk does Covid pose to the Queen?

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## ‘Today we rejoined the world’: hugs, tears and Vegemite as Australia reopens international borders



Yin and Chi Lam (right) meet their granddaughter for the first time after their daughter Michelle touched down from New York at Sydney international airport after Australia reopened its border. Photograph: Blake Sharp-Wiggins/The Guardian

Emotional scenes at Sydney airport as families, friends and lovers reunite after 704 days of Covid restrictions

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*[Caitlin Cassidy](#)*

Sun 20 Feb 2022 21.28 EST

There were tears, DJs, Vegemite and drag queens as families, friends and lovers reunited at [Sydney airport](#) after the resumption of all international travel to Australia.

While a number of expert bodies including the [US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) and the [European Council](#) have warned against travel to Australia due to soaring Covid-19 case numbers over summer, the federal government has vowed to keep the borders open.

The federal minister for trade, tourism and industry, Dan Tehan, who was at the airport on Monday morning, said it was a “great day” for Australia’s tourism industry – battered by years of shutdowns.

“It’s been a party out here at [Sydney](#) airport,” Tehan said, a bright blue T-shirt emblazoned with the words “Welcome back” visible underneath his suit jacket.

“To see the way people have been united – the hugs, the tears – has been wonderful. The future is looking very, very bright.

“I’ll do everything possible to keep the border open.”



Travellers arrive at Sydney international airport on Monday morning.  
Photograph: Blake Sharp-Wiggins/The Guardian



A DJ greets the overseas arrivals. Photograph: Blake Sharp-Wiggins/The Guardian

At 6.20am, a Qantas flight from Los Angeles was the first to touch down at Sydney airport, marking the end of 704 days of restrictions on international travel.

Fifty-six flights were expected to arrive in Australia on Monday, more than half of them landing in Sydney.

The [New South Wales](#) premier, Dominic Perrottet, said there was a “buzz and excitement” in the air as the state rejoined the world.

“It’s been a long journey, a long journey through Covid,” he said.

“But having our borders open, not just here, but around our country will make a real difference in people’s lives; we’re seeing families being reunited ... international students return.

“Today we rejoined the world, and what a positive thing it is.”



A welcome home message. Photograph: Blake Sharp-Wiggins/The Guardian

At the arrivals hall, travellers were greeted with koala and kangaroo toys, Vegemite and eucalyptus sprigs, while a DJ atop a bus played Australian hits such as Men at Work’s Down Under and Yothu Yindi’s Treaty.

Friends and family clutched “welcome home” balloons and bouquets as the music played.

Sam Brain arrived on Monday morning from London after two years apart from friends and family.



Sam Brain with her friend Emma at Sydney international airport.  
Photograph: Blake Sharp-Wiggins/The Guardian

Her school friend Emma was there to greet her with a tearful hug. Sam was planning to surprise her mother – who'd been fooled into thinking she was catching up with Emma for coffee – later that day.

“It’s been an amazing experience coming back, quite overwhelming with everyone here”, she said. “And a DJ. The whole process getting here was so worrying ... but I’ve made it.

“My mum has no idea, she’s going to have a heart attack.”

01:09

Emotional reunions as Australia's international borders reopen to tourists after two years – video

Rishm Singh arrived from Toronto in the early morning with her children and couldn't wait to spend time with her family.

“I was feeling a lot of anticipation – are we going to make it?” she said.

“But we have, and I feel so grateful … the past two years were horrendous, heart-wrenching.”



Rishm Singh embraces her family after flying in from Canada. Photograph: Blake Sharp-Wiggins/The Guardian

Sonnica was arriving from Spain to be with her Australian partner, Jay, after two-and-a-half years apart. The pair met in Spain while Jay was teaching English, and Sonnica said their relationship had survived with lots of phone calls.

“We’ve kept in contact through WhatsApp – technology makes it easier,” she said. “But it’s been hard.”



Sonnica greets her partner Jay after being separated for more than two years.  
Photograph: Blake Sharp-Wiggins/The Guardian

Yin and Chi Lam were eagerly awaiting the arrival of their daughter Michelle and her baby, due to touch down from New York after almost three years.

The Sydney couple were yet to meet their granddaughter, born 13 months ago during the pandemic.

“We’re so, so excited,” Yin said. “I feel very happy.”

Beside them, drag queens adorned in bedazzled face masks, with sky-high heels and glittering Australian flag capes, greeted arrivals with cheers.

“If you get handed Vegemite, don’t eat it by the spoon,” one told a slightly dazed-looking traveller.

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[Coronavirus live](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

## **Germany to begin rollout of Novavax's jab; New Zealand to end vaccine mandates after Omicron peak**

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/feb/21/covid-news-live-boris-johnson-end-restrictions-england-new-zealand-vaccine-mandate-omicron-coronavirus>

## New Zealand

# New Zealand will lift Covid restrictions only when ‘well beyond’ peak, Jacinda Ardern says

Prime minister says now is not the time to ‘remove our armour just as the battle begins’ despite pressure from protesters

- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



Prime minister Jacinda Ardern says New Zealand will only lift Covid restrictions when it is ‘well beyond’ the current Omicron wave’s peak. Photograph: Dave Lintott/REX/Shutterstock

*Eva Corlett*

*@evacorlett*

Sun 20 Feb 2022 23.56 EST

New Zealand prime minister Jacinda Ardern has said Covid-19 restrictions, including mandates and vaccine passes, will begin to lift once the country gets “well beyond” the Omicron outbreak’s peak.

At a post-cabinet press conference on Monday, Ardern said case numbers were likely to peak in mid-to-late March, or three to six weeks away. Case numbers were expected to double every three to four days.

“It’s likely then, that very soon, we will all know people who have Covid or we will potentially get it ourselves,” she said.

Ardern said at an earlier stage of the pandemic, this prospect would have been “scary”, but now there are three main reasons why it is less so: the highly vaccinated population; Omicron being a mild to moderate illness due to high vaccination rates and boosters making hospitalisation 10 times less likely; and public health measures like masks, gathering limits and vaccine passes slowing down the spread to ensure everyone who needs a hospital bed can get it.

“So far, that plan is working. We had 46 cases per 100,000 people compared to 367 in New South Wales, and 660 in Victoria, at the same point in the outbreak.”

The country recorded 2,365 new cases of the virus in the community on Monday, 116 people in hospital and two further deaths, bringing the total number of deaths since the start of the pandemic to 55.

After the Omicron wave peaks, there will probably be a rapid decline, followed by cases stabilising at a lower level, Arden said. It is then that government can consider easing public health measures, beginning with loosening restrictions on gathering sizes, and later, moving on from using vaccine passes and mandates where vulnerable people are less likely to be affected.

“If we hadn’t had vaccine passes, as we managed Delta, we would have had to instead use more general restrictions across the whole population. They

have always been the least bad option. But while they have been necessary, as I've always said, they have also been temporary.”

“They will remain important in some areas though, for some time,” she said.

Arden said it is difficult to set an exact date for easing mandates, but indicated the government needs to be confident New Zealand is “well beyond the peak” and that the pressure on the health system is manageable.

The announcement comes as hundreds of anti-mandate protesters enter their 14th day of occupying parliament’s grounds. The protest has also operated as a vehicle for anti-vaccine sentiment, QAnon-style conspiracy theories, antisemitic views, and calls for the execution of journalists, politicians and health officials.

Ardern directed a message to the protesters: “Everyone is over Covid. No one wants to live with rules or restrictions. But had we not all been willing to work together to protect one another, then we all would have been worse off as individuals, including losing people we love.

“That hasn’t happened here for the most part and that is a fact worth celebrating, rather than protesting.”

Restrictions will ease when doing so would not compromise the lives of thousands of people, and not because the protesters demanded it, Ardern said.

“Now is not the time to dismantle our hard work and preparation, to remove our armour just as the battle begins.”

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/21/new-zealand-will-lift-covid-restrictions-only-when-well-beyond-peak-jacinda-ardern-says>

## The Queen

# Royal protection: how much risk does Covid pose to the Queen?

Doctors likely to consider antiviral medication for monarch who has Covid to minimise chance of severe disease

- [The Queen tests positive for Covid](#)
- [Covid antivirals an option for the Queen under care of medical household](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



The Queen, who followed public health guidance throughout the pandemic, alone at Prince Philip's funeral last year. Photograph: Jonathan Brady/PA



*Hannah Devlin* Science correspondent

[@hannahdev](https://twitter.com/hannahdev)

Sun 20 Feb 2022 12.26 EST

The image of the Queen sitting alone while mourning the death of Prince Philip has become a symbol of public sacrifice during the pandemic. And the 95-year-old monarch appears to have been fastidious in abiding by public health guidance, routinely wearing a face mask, scaling-back Christmas celebrations and publicly confirming her vaccination status. However, with continuing very high levels of Covid-19 in the community, even the most cautious are at risk of infection.

Throughout the pandemic, older people have been disproportionately at risk from Covid-19. During the first wave, about 10% of those aged 80 years and over who were infected died. And since March 2020, [more than 5% of England's population of those over 90 years old](#) have died within 28 days of a positive Covid test. But during the past year, things have improved dramatically for the oldest people in society.

Vaccination has offered a crucial wall of defence. [The Queen](#) had her first vaccine in January 2021 and is thought to have had all her follow-up doses.

Early on, there was concern that vaccines would be less effective in older age groups due to the immune system being less responsive. And it does seem likely that older people are more susceptible to infection, even when vaccinated.

[A study of more than 200,000 people](#) published this week, found that older people have significantly lower concentrations of antibodies in their blood after vaccination than younger people and their levels of antibodies wane more quickly. But lower rates of infection suggest that older age groups more than compensate for this higher susceptibility by behaving more cautiously and having fewer social contacts.

Protection against severe disease in older age groups appears to be holding up well. [Research by the UK Health Security Agency](#) shows that around three months after they received the third jab, protection against mild infection among those aged 65 and over dropped to about 30%. But protection against hospitalisation remains at about 90%. Omicron has also turned out to be a milder variant, with the chance of hospital attendance in those over 70 years being reduced [by more than one-third](#).

In January, the prevalence of Covid infections in the over-70 category rose above 3% – the highest at any time during the pandemic – and remain hovering above 2%. But there has not been a huge surge in deaths.

Buckingham Palace indicates that the Queen's symptoms are mild. Even so, there are other protections that the Queen's doctors may be considering. In a recent trial, the Pfizer antiviral pill, Paxlovid, reduced the risk of hospitalisation or death by 88% when given within five days of symptoms. The pill, along with another antiviral made by Merck, is automatically available to clinically extremely vulnerable people who test positive on a PCR test.

Outside this high-risk category, the drugs can also be accessed by those aged over 50 who have a health condition, such as heart disease or asthma, or who are considered by their doctor to be vulnerable, through the [Panoramic trial](#). Doctors also sometimes recommend monitoring for more vulnerable patients using an oximetry device to keep track of blood oxygenation at home.

Prof Paul Hunter, an infectious disease expert at the University of East Anglia, said someone in their 90s would be at increased risk of severe disease compared with younger people, even if they had been triple vaccinated.

Nearly all severe Covid infections begin with mild symptoms, he explained. Prof Hunter told the PA news agency: “With somebody in their mid-90s, even if they’re triple vaccinated you are concerned that they could gradually deteriorate over coming days and so you would need to keep a very careful eye on them.

“You would, I think, almost certainly be considering giving antiviral drugs, of which there are a number around at the moment.”

He added: “If you do get them early enough it does reduce the risk of severe disease developing so I would imagine any doctor for a patient in their 90s would be considering giving these antivirals out.”

The Queen’s diagnosis comes as the government plans to lift all remaining Covid restrictions, including the legal requirement for people who test positive for Covid to self-isolate, in the coming days.

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## 2022.02.21 - Opinion

- [Scared to be ‘woke’? It’s time for progressives to take a stand in the culture wars](#)
- [Fracking won’t solve the energy crisis – and campaigners like me won’t stand for it](#)
- [A post-Covid world is coming into view – but where is the payback for two years of death and suffering?](#)
- [Leave Putin in no doubt: Russia will be economically crippled – and he may be tried for war crimes](#)

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## OpinionLabour

# Scared to be ‘woke’? It’s time for progressives to take a stand in the culture wars

[Nesrine Malik](#)

Topics such as empire and racism cannot be reduced to a threadbare concept like ‘wokery’. Labour must campaign for social justice on its own terms



Illustration by Matt Kenyon.

Mon 21 Feb 2022 02.00 EST

There are two lines of attack in the current culture wars. The first is slow, steady and discreet, marching by stealth through Britain’s institutions. The second is a brazen, loud artillery attack armed with clichés and buzzwords that are fired out across the media.

The [recent speech](#) from the Conservative party chair, Oliver Dowden, to the Heritage Foundation in Washington is an example of the latter. It was a word salad into which he lazily and dispassionately (repeating this stuff really must get very boring) tossed a target list of vague and intangible concepts such as “cancel culture”, “woke psychodrama”, “obsessing over pronouns” and attempts to “decolonise mathematics”.

If the purpose of this kind of quick-fire attack is recruitment, then the slower, more covert attacks are for annexation. An example of the latter also came about recently, in the form of [new guidance](#) by the Department for Education on political impartiality in England’s classrooms. The document singled out topics such as empire, racism and the climate crisis as “political issues” that should be treated with care, moving the parameters of what teachers and students perceive as “neutral” and what is “ideological” another inch to the right. This side of the culture wars takes its time to cover ground by influencing education and culture.

Those advancing this line of attack in government often act behind closed doors, so that by the time their goals are made public it’s too late to challenge them. Last month, the government announced that BBC funding from the licence fee would be frozen for the next two years, raised concerns about the BBC’s “impartiality and groupthink”, and [suggested](#) that its public funding model could face abolition (although it later softened its stance). So opaque was the process that Richard Sharp, the chair of the BBC, said the broadcaster was blindsided by the decision being announced not to those concerned at the BBC itself, but via briefings to the Sunday papers. He told BBC Radio 4 that he “hadn’t anticipated learning what I learned over the weekend” as discussions had been ongoing with the government and were, as far as he knew, inconclusive. But discussions had been concluded elsewhere. At the end of 2020, a 10-person panel [was appointed](#) to help decide the BBC’s future and funding model. It was not set up under Cabinet Office guidelines, met only in secret, and freedom of information requests for a record of the proceedings were refused.

Loud and quiet goes the pattern of culture war advance, like the [children’s song](#): “loud and quiet, fast and slow.” Of recent wins, the expropriation and ubiquitisation of the word “woke” has been the quickest. [Most people](#) don’t

actually know what “woke” means. But, to quote [Will Ferrell in Blades of Glory](#) explaining the nonsensical lyrics to a song: “Nobody knows what it means but it’s provocative. It gets the people *going*.” All that matters is that people pick up on its implications and intimations.

Different permutations of “wokeness” have always been useful, leveraged by the right to portray any social change as a matter of exuberant and unhinged vandalism to the status quo. This is not a new tactic (little in the culture wars is): wokeness is the new “loony left” or “PC gone mad”, a swapping of terms to portray the left as an absurdity and threat which has been around since at least the 1950s.

What is frustrating is that for a tactic that has been used for so long, progressive politicians still do not seem to have understood that the only way to beat the charge is to own it. To say when confronted with an issue presented as a matter of wokeness: “What do you mean by woke?” To expose and mock the term for its threadbareness, or to question its very pejorative use. I’ll take anything really at this point, as long as it is delivered with authenticity and swagger. Imagine hearing a politician say something like: “If by ‘woke’ you mean ending racism and inequality, reforming our curriculums so that they are factual and representative both of historical truth and how Britain is changing, and striving for a world where your chances in life are determined as little as possible by your birth, then sign me up.” I would think I was hallucinating.

The signal the left sends by letting the term be claimed by the right is so powerful that Labour politicians are now in the bizarre position of denying the existence of the culture wars but being simultaneously afraid of being called woke. In an interview with [the Telegraph](#) earlier this year, Labour’s shadow culture secretary, Lucy Powell, showed how cornered and defeated progressives can be by letting the term “woke” go uncontested, while being entirely pinned down by its assaults. She said there is a lot of “false division” created by the right on matters such as statues that she would not indulge as culture secretary. She then fell right into the biggest false division of all. “I wouldn’t say I’m woke. I’m not woke, but I’m not anti-woke either,” she said, like Schrödinger’s cat. “I’m just kind of fairly ordinary. I will absolutely sort of cry my eyes out at Strictly Come Dancing where a

deaf woman wins it and a same-sex couple are the runners-up. I think that was a fantastic kind of illustration of where woke and anti-woke meet.”

Don’t laugh – “woke and anti-woke” is actually a good summary of Labour’s response when it comes to the culture wars. It’s risk avoidance. What it really means is that the party is taking the moral high ground on the basis that it cares only about tangible issues that impact people’s lives in a strict economic sense, but is otherwise, to put it bluntly, frit. To engage in clear, studied defendable positions on hot button issues such as racism and colonialism that influence school policy, the media, and cultural institutions risks them being smoked out in the open about things that, through Labour’s appeasement in the culture wars, may well be poll kryptonite and tabloid ammunition.

What helps this state of acquiescence is that there are lulls, missteps and retreats in the culture wars, inviting speculation that it’s all a distraction or “running out of steam”, an artefact of an ebullient post-Brexit Conservative party. And yes, sometimes it is a distraction, sometimes these issues do go away for a while. But the potential for new momentum is always there, ready to be accelerated further by a media that loves a good war, whatever the speed. Just look at the vigour with which newspapers ran front pages on the education secretary, Nadhim Zahawi’s, latest guidelines and Dowden’s Washington speech, [amping them up to claim](#) that Black Lives Matter’s “biased” views are to be avoided (the Times), that students are being [indoctrinated](#) (the Daily Mail), and that Dowden’s words must be [translated](#) into “action” (the Telegraph). You don’t have to have a sophisticated grasp of what “woke” means to absorb the message being sent here: if you don’t vote for the Conservative party again and again, bad things are going to happen.

With a zombie prime minister and a Brexit wrung of populist opportunities, culture wars campaigning will likely intensify in the lead-up to the local elections in May – and the next general election. There will be a lot of “Mr Dowden goes to Washington” silliness about woke maths, but there will also be a lot of gravely serious, opinion-forming, institution-changing propaganda and policy that we on the left cannot simply pretend we are rising above. In fact we are just hiding, hoping and praying that these moves

won't be crucial to refreshing the chances of a desperate government out of ideas. That sounds pretty risky to me.

- Nesrine Malik is a Guardian columnist
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## OpinionFracking

# We banished fracking once in Lancashire, and we'll do it again

[Barbara Richardson](#)

As a campaign veteran, I know people here won't stand for the latest attempt to use the energy crisis to save a dying industry



‘At the end of the day the Conservatives don’t want to lose votes over fracking.’ Anti-fracking protesters at Preston New Road, Lancashire.  
Photograph: Gary Calton/The Observer

Mon 21 Feb 2022 04.00 EST

We thought fracking in England was over after the government banned it in 2019. So the [call](#) by more than 30 Conservative MPs, along with the fracking company Cuadrilla, to reopen exploration in Lancashire is disappointing. It is also desperate: a last-minute attempt to use the recent energy crisis to save a dying industry.

And the people of [Lancashire](#) won't stand for it. Nor will other communities threatened by this damaging industry. Neither the company nor this minority of MPs seem to understand how united people are against fracking. It's telling that nobody who is publicly backing the letter is from an area directly threatened by fracking. Most are from the south, not the "industrial" north, as it is perceived to be. These MPs and their allies are at best misinformed and at worst delusional.

The issue should be settled: fracking isn't safe, it isn't sustainable, and it simply isn't supported, certainly not by local communities and local government. Even former backers like [George Osborne](#) have recently said it would have little impact on energy prices or supply.

This is all familiar ground for us. One of the main reasons companies like Cuadrilla are on the back foot – forced to [plug their remaining wells](#) in the area and prevented from opening more, lobbying for thin support in Westminster – is the local protest movement that played a huge role in securing the 2019 moratorium.

When Cuadrilla first announced plans to frack in Lancashire in 2014, most people in the community – myself included – had an open mind. I was an ordinary retiree who had never protested about anything in my life. I heard about the proposed gas exploration at the Preston New Road site, just outside Blackpool, and at Roseacre Wood, just 600 metres from my home. I wasn't necessarily against it at first. There was lots of company PR and plenty of glossy brochures. I resolved to do my own research and make up my own mind – reading papers, speaking to scientists, and contacting the British Geological Survey and other experts.

I realised other residents were also anxious, so we formed the Roseacre Awareness Group that March to share our concerns and let people know what was going on. This led to us contacting other local groups, and we formed an umbrella organisation, Frack Free Lancashire. We really started to understand how much damage fracking could do and became resolute in stopping it.

The thing is, the more you learn about fracking, the more you realise how potentially damaging the effects are, at every level. Locally it's obvious we would be concerned about the large numbers of HGV vehicles, the noise, the lights, the potential for air and water pollution, along with possible earthquakes. Then we began to realise that there would be cumulative impacts across the whole country. Hundreds of sites and thousands of wells would be needed to have any significant effect on the UK gas market; so that's hundreds of communities, mainly across the north, that would be affected. Then there's the impact of fossil fuel projects on climate change, affecting not just the UK but the whole world in terms of carbon emissions. You start to see how important this is in the big picture.

So we fought it on every level. Local people who had never protested before got involved in direct action, holding protests and blocking site entrances. We raised money to support our campaign, producing information leaflets, banners and other materials. We lobbied at every level of government, from parish councils to local planning authorities, targeting MPs directly and even giving written evidence in parliament – including two all-party parliamentary groups on shale gas in 2016 and 2018.

At first we had trouble getting attention, but we were committed, and we kept building more and more local support, holding rallies and public information events. National groups with green credentials, like Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace, took an interest and helped our campaigning. Other environment and nature groups like the countryside charity the Campaign to Protect Rural England, the National Trust and the Wildlife Trusts also started to get involved. We made people realise it was the wrong time and place for fracking, and that creating a whole new fossil fuel industry was a move in totally the wrong direction.

And we saw real political change. Lee Rowley, the Conservative MP for North East Derbyshire, openly opposed fracking in his constituency. He told the party in 2018 they could lose seats over it. Our own MP, here in Fylde, is Mark Menzies, as true blue a Conservative as there is, but he agreed Roseacre wasn't a suitable site. I believe he realised how damaging this could be politically, seeing how many people were opposed and the depth of feeling of local residents. Boris Johnson wants to be seen as green now. At

the end of the day they don't want to lose votes over fracking, and they know they will if they pursue it.

When we won the moratorium in 2019 we were elated. I had a chance to relax and spend time with my family. Fighting fracking and winning had already taken up five years of my life. I was still a bit skeptical. I don't trust the industry, and I knew they would be trying to convince the government to lift the moratorium.

So I was despondent but not surprised to learn that Cuadrilla is leading the charge to frack again. I want to feel we're safe, and I want to see a real positive energy policy that will address the climate crisis and bring us net zero. Instead we get a desperate industry clutching at straws, trying to turn back time.

I was especially incensed to see us referred to as “the green blob” by Andrew Neil in the Daily Mail. That's an insult to all the communities and campaigners who rose up to fight this. But overall, I feel positive. We've already won before, and we'll do it all over again if we have to.

- Barbara Richardson is a retired IT professional and a member of Frack Free Lancashire and Roseacre Awareness Group

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**OpinionConservatives**

# A post-Covid world is coming into view – but where is the payback for two years of death and suffering?

[John Harris](#)



As restrictions end in England, the Tories' promise to 'build back better' is nowhere to be seen



‘On Thursday, most remaining Covid rules and restrictions in England will be lifted.’ Photograph: Peter Cziborra/AFP/Getty Images

Sun 20 Feb 2022 12.00 EST

This week, England arrives at a moment that will fit the Boris Johnson era to perfection. Even if the pandemic is not quite over – something symbolised by news of the [Queen testing positive](#) – everything is being arranged to convince us that it is. On Monday, the prime minister is expected to explain his government’s “living with Covid” strategy, and on Thursday, most remaining Covid rules and restrictions will be lifted.

Although Northern Ireland seems to be taking a similar route, [Scotland](#) and Wales are once again sticking to more cautious policies, but that is presumably the way Johnson likes it. Here is an opportunity for him to show the libertarian, Brexity backbench hardcore which seems to now run the Conservative party that their home country is blazing a trail towards the dazzling uplands of freedom and easy living, and all is once again well.

Clearly, it isn’t. This latest set of moves only highlights a basic fact of life in early 2022 that has been strangely overlooked. Thankfully, the pandemic is winding down, but after two years of sacrifice, bereavement and hurt, there

is no sign of any political payback for what people have suffered. The worsening situation in Ukraine may make such talk look rather misplaced, but we were chivvied through the worst of the Covid crisis with endless [comparisons to wartime](#) and the supposed glories of the Blitz spirit, our equivalent of “peace” is impossible living costs, cuts to public spending and the inertia of a government completely consumed with its own problems. If the public mood feels almost numb, this is a big part of the reason why.

As ever, the everyday state of things is highlighted by the position of city and local government. A new financial year looms, and any extra money from Whitehall does not meet the rising need for the most basic local services, nor cover financial deficits caused by the Covid crisis (a good example is the loss of town and city centre parking charges). So, Nottingham city council has to [hack £28m](#) from its spending, and is shutting children’s centres and youth services. In [Sheffield](#), they are reviewing library services and considering cutting vulnerable people’s home care; in Croydon, the council is about to get rid of the council tax support worth up to £29 a week to thousands of the borough’s [most vulnerable people](#). Tory-run Hampshire, meanwhile, is trying to somehow [save £80m](#) over two years, which means cuts to children’s social care, work with young offenders, education services and school transport.

Through 2020 and 2021, the government endlessly employed a slogan that had been in sporadic circulation for at least 15 years, and was soon adopted by Joe Biden: “[Build back better](#)”. Now, at the very point you might have thought those three words would be more ubiquitous than ever, they are nowhere to be seen. We all know that Covid infections and perhaps death rates were [made worse](#) by poor and overcrowded homes, but the Conservative approach to the one thing that definitely needs to be built remains as standoffish as ever. Between March 2020 and April last year, about 6,000 homes for social rent were delivered in England, amounting to roughly one for every 190 households stuck on waiting lists. Our Covid death toll highlighted the often [appalling state](#) of public health in the UK, but that issue seems to be simply grinding on. During our three national lockdowns, it was briefly fashionable to focus on the [huge sacrifices](#) made by children and young people and imagine some kind of programme of reparations, but nothing has materialised. All told, the government’s pandemic story seems to be yet another case study in that very English habit

of undergoing trauma and misery, being reminded that everything rests on the ricketiest of foundations, and then pretending nothing has happened.

More than ever, Johnson says whatever he thinks suits the moment and then moves on to something else. But even if he was halfway serious about using the state to radically rebalance the economy and society, Rishi Sunak's Treasury would balk at the kind of spending involved – and in any case, an ideological shift is afoot in the Conservative party that looks likely to jettison even the meek kind of interventionism laid out in the recent “levelling up” white paper. Johnson's new chief of staff, the MP Steve Barclay, [says](#) that the prime minister is now “taking a close look” at how the government can be hacked back, and that “it is a priority to restore a smaller state – both financially and in taking a step back from people's lives”. For these Tories, the pandemic's sudden burst of interventionism and collectivist thinking was terrifying: now they are reaching for the rewind button.

Labour clearly has different intentions, but still risks being complicit in Westminster's state of willed amnesia. Keir Starmer currently seems to be deep into the “I'm not Jeremy Corbyn” stage of his leadership, which is understandable but is also getting in the way of him convincingly speaking to the moment. His [three watchwords](#) are “security, prosperity and respect”, all abstract nouns, presumably chosen because they come up in focus groups, but not exactly brimming with meaning or topicality. In a technocratic lingo reminiscent of the 1990s, Labour's plans for the economy [promise](#) a “learning”, “investing”, “innovating” and “trading” Britain, too often omitting the moral aspects of life and work that Covid has pushed to the surface. From time to time, Starmer [talks](#) about what we have all been through, but there is still no real sense of a centre-left party confidently speaking to a country reeling from the loss of 180,000 people, and the experience of every aspect of its collective life being upended.

If you want to instantly understand the normality we are returning to, consider the weekend's reports in the [Sunday Times](#) about the Conservative party's “advisory board” of 14 unbelievably wealthy donors, and allegations that some of them lobbied ministers to prematurely relax “measures designed to stop [Covid] transmission”, as well as voicing their opposition to “higher tax for the ultra-rich”. When I read that, I thought straight away of

something George Orwell wrote in 1941, about the kind of Tory who believed that when the second world war was over, the country could be pushed “back to ‘democracy’, ie capitalism, back to dole queues and the Rolls-Royce cars, back to the grey top hats and the sponge-bag trousers”. England is a country with a tragic habit of simultaneously being obsessed with tradition and forgetting its own history.

It says something about where we have arrived that those words sound less like a blast from the past than a very urgent warning.

- John Harris is a Guardian columnist
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## OpinionRussia

# Leave Putin in no doubt: Russia will be economically crippled – and he may be tried for war crimes

Andriy Zagorodnyuk

We Ukrainians are ready to fight. But war can still be averted if the west shows the Kremlin what Russia has to lose

- Andriy Zagorodnyuk is a former Ukrainian defence minister



‘Thousands of politicians, observers and journalists are now trying to understand what is in Vladimir Putin’s mind.’ Putin in St Petersburg, July 2021. Photograph: Alexey Nikolsky/Sputnik/AFP/Getty Images

Sun 20 Feb 2022 15.37 EST

The situation in and around [Ukraine](#) is extremely tense. We have 150,000 Russian troops scattered near our borders – from Belarus to Crimea and the Black Sea. There are tens of navy vessels and thousands of planes, tanks, artillery units and other equipment, ready to be engaged within hours. There is strong evidence that the Russian government is seriously considering engaging all of these capabilities against Ukraine. We believe all preliminary decisions have been made, so the decision rests now with the president.

If a campaign does start, it will mean a joint forces operation in all domains: land, air, navy, cyber, information and special operations. It will be a war on a scale unseen in [Europe](#) since the second world war.

Thousands of politicians, observers and journalists are now trying to understand what is in Vladimir Putin's mind. Since this is impossible to know, we are now concentrating on what would still deter the Kremlin from war.

Putin has been moving step by step to this moment for years by challenging international law and getting away with it. He occupied part of Georgia in 2008 and the world barely noticed. He occupied Crimea and started an ongoing war in east Ukraine and the world almost forgot about that a few years later. He amassed troops around Ukraine in the spring of 2021 and the only consequence was that he got a grandiose meeting with the US president, Joe Biden, in Geneva with attention unseen by any other world leader.

Sanctions against the [Nord Stream 2](#) gas pipeline project, connecting Russia and Germany, were almost [removed in July](#) 2021. While the world was getting on with business as usual for all these years, Ukraine has been [losing its service people](#) every few days, while Russia tells the world that they were killed by “independent rebels”. The west has known for years that those rebels were proxy forces funded, recruited, trained and operated by Russia, but they were comfortable to continue dealing with Putin. Now, we are seeing what turning a blind eye for so long can lead to.

So, what are the options and is it too late to stop it all?

We believe, even with the very short time available, that it is still possible to stop Putin from starting war. But that largely depends on the steps made by world leaders in the next day or two.

We know from studying the Russian decision-making process for years that they always choose from a few options available. While being very persistent with his end goals, Putin has adopted an agile approach: when he meets serious resistance, he will step back and adjust his actions.

World leaders need to demonstrate to Putin that this will not be a quick victorious war, but a disaster that will lead to Russian political isolation, sanctions that will destroy its economy, and a humiliating military defeat. Ultimately, it could mark the end of Putin's political career, leaving his place in history as the architect of Russia's decline instead of a period of grandeur.

The steps the west could take to persuade him of this are clear. Sanctions must be imposed to stop Russia having an active role in the global economy. Russia makes a lot of money from the west, its businesspeople reside in the UK, US and Europe, it is a member of western capital markets, a major supplier of commodities, and enjoys the perks of that involvement. At the same time, it violently challenges the very principles upon which western democracies are founded. Russian society needs to understand that the west will stop it. The sanctions must not just be hard, they must be devastating.

Putin also needs to understand that there is a real chance of him becoming a convicted war criminal. Ukraine has done nothing to justify this war, and there is no credible explanation why it should take place at all. Unjust wars are illegal.

Putin's military plans are based on two critical assumptions: that he has large numbers of Russian troops placed in strategic positions and an undisputed advantage in some critical capabilities (combat aviation and navy most of all).

However Ukrainian forces are not an easy target. Our troops have combat experience from the last eight years of fighting on our borders, they are motivated, know the terrain of their country much better than the Russians and – crucially – have mass support among the local population. More than [a](#)

third of Ukrainians said they would sign up to fight in the resistance if Russia invaded their country, according to a recent poll.

A possible assault on Kyiv is still a hot topic, but Ukraine will continue to exist even if it must move its capital city to the west of the country. Kyiv's complex geography means it is impossible to seal the city off. However, even if Russian troops do take Kyiv, which would be very hard, they will face a strong attack from Ukraine's army units in return.

Ukraine has been fortunate to have partners (the US and UK as well as several other supporting nations) supplying hundreds of tons of equipment to destroy Russian capabilities on ground. Ukraine has never requested and does not require western troops to come to Ukraine to fight. It has hundreds of thousands of skilled servicepeople. But it does need equipment. We are on the right path: I believe Ukraine already has more anti-tank weapons than Russia has tanks. A ground invasion would be a disaster for Russia, but western leaders need to tell Putin that he is guaranteed to fail. That will be the greatest deterrent and now is the crucial moment for him to be told.

Of course, we realise that sealing off the Russian economy will be very tough on many western businesses. But the cost of these economic measures, as well as equipment, would be nothing compared to the potential cost of major European war. When it comes to potential damages, the price of peace is free.

We need the west to take this action now, today, before we wake up in a new dark reality.

- Andriy Zagorodnyuk is a former Ukrainian defence minister and chairman of thinktank the Centre for Defense Strategies in Kyiv
- This article was amended on 20 February 2022. Nord Stream 2 is a gas pipeline, not an oil pipeline as we said earlier.

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- [Live Rouble recovers on hopes for Biden-Putin talks, flash PMI surveys in focus](#)
- [Belgium Call for Brussels statue to be melted and made into memorial for Congo victims](#)
- [Global development Kurdish transgender woman shot by brother had been hiding from family](#)
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## Myanmar

# Myanmar junta takes place of Aung San Suu Kyi at Rohingya hearing

Military, which seized power in February 2021, seeks to throw out UN case alleging it committed genocide



The charge of genocide on the Rohingya ethnic minority was brought against Myanmar by the Gambia in 2019. Photograph: Min Kyi Thein/AP

*[Rebecca Ratcliffe](#) South-east Asia correspondent*

Mon 21 Feb 2022 12.14 EST

Myanmar's military junta has appeared in place of the detained [Aung San Suu Kyi](#) at the UN's top court, where it sought to throw out a case alleging that it committed genocide against the country's Rohingya minority.

The decision to allow the junta to represent the country in court, after it seized power in a coup last year, was strongly criticised by advocacy groups

and a former UN special rapporteur, who warned that it risked delaying justice.

The claim that Myanmar's military carried out genocide was [brought to the international court of justice \(ICJ\) by the Gambia](#) after a brutal 2017 military crackdown that forced an estimated 700,000 Rohingya to flee over the border to neighbouring Bangladesh. UN investigators have since alleged the military's operations were carried out with "genocidal intent".

Previously, [Aung San Suu Kyi travelled to the court](#) to defend Myanmar against claims the military carried out mass murder, rape and destruction of Rohingya Muslim communities. She is now being held in detention at the behest of the military, which seized power in February 2021 and charged her with a raft of offences.

Aung San Suu Kyi was replaced in court by the junta's minister of international cooperation, Ko Ko Hlaing, and its attorney general, Thida Oo. Both are subject to US sanctions prompted by the military's use of brutal violence to repress opposition to the coup.

The national unity government (NUG), formed by elected lawmakers, ethnic minority representatives and activists, had said it intended to represent [Myanmar](#) at the ICJ. It said it had withdrawn preliminary objections – unlike the junta, whose representatives argued on Monday that the Gambia did not have the legal right to file the case.

Yanghee Lee, a former UN special rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar, called the hearings a disgrace. "The court should instead recognise the NUG's authority, formally dismiss the objections, and move swiftly to dealing with the actual substance of the case, the atrocities against the [Rohingya](#) people."

The junta's lawyers outlined several objections, including claims that the Gambia was acting as a "proxy" for the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, and therefore lacked standing because the ICJ only rules on disputes between states.

Ko Ko Hlaing told the court that the junta, which he referred to as the government of Myanmar, was determined to solve the problems in Rakhine state “through peaceful means of negotiation and reconciliation”.

Rights groups point out that the military is in the midst of a deadly campaign of violence against the public. Over the past year alone, in the aftermath of the coup, its has torched villages, massacred civilians and carried out airstrikes across the country to silence opposition.

Tun Khin, president of the Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK, said the military had totally failed to comply with a previous order issued by the court, which said [Myanmar must prevent genocidal violence](#) against Rohingya and preserve any evidence of past crimes.

“The Rohingya in Myanmar today are subjected to daily harassment and intimidation by authorities, while there are also state-enforced restrictions on their movement, as well as their access to healthcare, education and livelihoods,” Tun Khin said.

The junta was also blocking humanitarian assistance, leaving many Rohingya on the brink of starvation, he added.

A representative of the Rohingya Student Network, who spoke from Cox’s Bazar in Bangladesh, told the Guardian the ICJ case represented not only the prospect of justice for Rohingya people, but also the “hope to bring a federal democracy in Myanmar for all those who are fighting [for an end to military rule] in Myanmar right now”.

The military’s seizure of power has prompted a shift in attitudes towards minorities. Previously there was little solidarity with Rohingya, but since the coup some protesters have apologised for not standing by Rohingya or believing their claims of persecution.

“They joined our fight from 1 February,” said the Rohingya activist, who asked not to be named due to security concerns, referring to the date of last year’s coup. “They just joined our fight, that we [have been] fighting for decades.”

Akila Radhakrishnan, president of the Global Justice Centre, said she did not believe the junta's appearance before the court would lend legitimacy to the military. It was likely to simply reflect a continuation of the status quo in court procedures, she said.

Radhakrishnan added: "There is such a strong link between impunity and the coup occurring, and the fact that the military has very rarely faced any direct consequences, that I think there is import to the fact that they are learning that they will be hauled into court – and this time around, unlike 2019, they can't hide behind Aung San Suu Kyi and the civilian government."

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**Business live**

**Business**

# UK business activity strongest since June, led by travel and leisure; prices surge – as it happened

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## Belgium

# Call for Brussels statue to be melted and made into memorial for Congo victims

Expert group offers two options for statue of King Léopold II that pay tribute to millions who died under his colonial rule



The statue became a flashpoint for protesters during demonstrations against racism in Brussels in 2020. Photograph: Yves Herman/Reuters

*[Jennifer Rankin in Brussels](#)*

Mon 21 Feb 2022 02.00 EST

A bronze statue of 19th-century Belgian king Léopold II in the centre of Brussels could be melted down and turned into a monument to the millions who died during his brutal rule of the Belgian Congo and other victims of colonialism, an expert group has suggested.

The group of historians, architects and other specialists, commissioned by the Brussels regional government, also suggests a second option for the Léopold II bronze: creating an open-air statue park to house the equestrian work, along with other controversial monuments to figures of the colonial past.

The two scenarios were proposed in a 256-page report on the “decolonisation” of public space in the Belgian capital, which was commissioned by Brussels after Black Lives Matter protests swept across the city in 2020.

The Léopold II equestrian statue, close to the Royal Palace, became [a flashpoint for protesters](#) during what became the largest demonstrations against racism in Brussels that participants could remember.

Brussels has scores of monuments and streets named after the men who built Belgium’s empire in the late 19th century “scramble for Africa”. King Léopold II ran the Congo as his personal fiefdom from 1885 to 1908, when millions of people died of brutal treatment, hunger and disease. The Belgian state [took over the Congo from 1908 until 1960](#), gaining colonies in modern-day Rwanda and [Burundi](#) from Germany after the first world war.

Belgium’s colonial legacy, including violence against African populations, the theft of natural resources and anti-black racism are “established historical facts that are not always recognised and fully acknowledged by [Belgium](#),” states the report.

The group does not recommend tearing down all statutes, but proposes a case-by-case approach on what to do with them. Some monuments could be removed to museums or a statue park; others could be renamed or put in context with information plaques.

“A decolonised public space is not a space in which all colonial traces have been effaced,” stated the report, “but free of material elements that promote then and now the asymmetric relation between the former white ‘civiliser’ and the former colonised black person, perpetuating a racist ideology and inequalities”.

The Parc du Cinquantenaire, a monumental green space built to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Belgian state, financed by wealth pouring in from Congolese rubber, should be redeveloped, the expert group suggested. A monument in the park to the “Belgian pioneers” of the colonies should be renamed “monument to the deconstruction of Belgian colonial propaganda”, they suggested.

The expert group also proposed a memorial to the victims of colonisation, as well as a museum or documentation centre where people can learn about Belgium’s imperial past.

It warns against changing names by public vote, however, highlighting the furore when the Léopold II tunnel in Brussels was renamed after the late Belgian singer Annie Cordy in 2021.

The singer, who died in 2020, came top of a public vote on renaming the tunnel, but the choice was controversial. Some criticised her old hit Hot Chocolate for its crude racial stereotypes, although her family strongly denied she had racist intentions. Others deplored the decision to name the tunnel in bilingual Brussels, after a singer far better known among Francophone Belgians than Dutch speakers. While fans said the decision to give an “ugly, dirty” tunnel her name was an “insult to her memory”.

Pascal Smet, the minister in charge of urban planning for the Brussels capital region, said the group had taken a nuanced approach in addressing colonial monuments. “The easiest thing would be to get rid of all the statues, but they didn’t choose that,” he said.

“Of course we all know for the individuals that are living in our city today, nobody is responsible for the colonisation, so there is no question of culpability, but it’s a question of a collective responsibility,” he said. “I think it very important, especially in the times that we are living now ... not be stuck in history, but to understand history.”

Many Brussels residents did not realise the significance of some colonial-era monuments and street names, he said. He had been unaware that the large thoroughfare, rue Général Jacques, had a link with the Congo. The street commemorates Jules Jacques, who organised punitive expeditions against

Congolese workers who resisted Belgian-imposed rubber collection, but was later celebrated as a national hero during the first world war.

Smet, who signs the permits to erect and dismantle monuments, hopes to publish an action plan by September, with the first decisions on individual monuments taken at the end of the year.

A memorial to the victims of colonisation could be funded by the Belgian public sector and companies that profited from empire, he suggested. It was clear “something has to be done” with the Léopold II statue in central Brussels, but further debate was needed, he said.

Belgium’s federal government, the owner of the central Brussels Léopold II bronze, would take the final decision, while choices on street names fall largely to local authorities in Brussels’ 19 communes.

Smet promised the report would not languish. “This is not going to be a report that we have and say ‘ahh that’s interesting’ and then we put it on the shelf. This is going to be a report that has to be followed up.”

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/21/call-for-brussels-statue-to-be-melted-and-made-into-memorial-for-congo-victims>

## Global development

# Kurdish transgender woman shot by brother had been hiding from family

Friends of Doski Azad said the 23-year-old makeup artist had received repeated death threats from male family members



Doski Azad who had been supporting herself by working as a makeup artist since her family turned her back on her as a teenager.

Global development is supported by



[About this content](#)

[Saeed Kamali Dehghan](#)

Mon 21 Feb 2022 01.30 EST

The Kurdish transgender woman Doski Azad [shot dead by her brother](#) last month had been living in hiding from her family after repeated death threats, friends have said.

According to friends, Azad had had to move home regularly after several death threats by male members of her family.

Three weeks ago, her body was found dumped in a ditch outside of the city of Duhok, in the Iraqi autonomous Kurdistan region. Her hands had been tied and she had been shot twice. Police have issued an arrest warrant for her brother, who is believed to have travelled from his home in Germany to carry out the killing.

A talented makeup artist, the 23-year-old had supported herself since her family turned its back on her when she was a young teenager. She went to brides' homes to prepare them for their weddings and built a reputation that earned her a job at a salon in Duhok.

“She was such a nice person, and everyone loved her so much,” said a close friend, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

“She lived alone because when she went to her family home, they said to Doski, ‘Get out’,” the friend said. “They said, ‘When we see you alone, we will kill you’.”

According to [the Duhok police](#), Azad was killed by one of her brothers in what was [described](#) as an “honour killing”.

Police were called to the village of Mangesh, 12 miles (20km) north of Duhok, [according to Iraqi-Kurdish news site Rudaw](#), by another of Azad’s brothers. The killer had allegedly already returned to Germany.

“Our investigation so far suggests that Doski Azad was killed by her brother at a location just outside the city before he managed to flee the crime scene,” Duhok police spokesperson, Hemin Suleiman, [said](#).

Azad’s friend said attempts had been made on her life before. “When I called her [a while ago] she didn’t answer me, and later I said, ‘Doski, where you have been?’ And she said, ‘My brother came to kill me and I went to the police.’”

Another Kurdish transgender woman was murdered last year by family members, [Rudaw reported](#).

Yeksani, a Kurdish rights group, [said](#): “Hate crime against LGBT+ community in the Kurdistan region is on the rise.” The group’s director Zhiar Ali said Azad was one of a few openly transgender women in Kurdistan.

“This level of freedom in Kurdistan comes at a risk, and we witnessed this in Doski’s case,” Ali said. “Living openly as an LGBT+ person is deeply stigmatised.

“Honour killings are very prevalent. We have hundreds of nameless graves, they are marked with numbers. The victims are so disrespected that, not only are they blamed, but they disrespect them even when they are dead.”

Ali was critical of the Kurdish media's coverage of Azad's death, some of which used derogatory language.

"It was a completely irresponsible and disastrous reporting by the Kurdish media," Ali said, primarily about the Kurdish-language coverage.

Rasha Younes, a researcher at Human Rights Watch, said the murder signalled the "climate of impunity" afforded to perpetrators of anti-LGBTQ+ violence, empowered under Iraq's penal code to cause harm under the pretext of "honour".

"This has a chilling effect on LGBT Iraqis, for whom the law does not offer protection, rendering any 'suspicion' of homosexuality or gender variance a cause for potential violence, which not only results in the death of LGBT people but makes their lives unliveable," she said.

Kurdish activist Amed Sherwan said most hate crimes were not reported.

"It is very tragic that someone must pay such a price for being herself. It makes me very sad," he said.

The US, French and German consulates in Erbil condemned the murder on [Twitter](#), as did the UN assistance mission for Iraq and the [Canadian mission to Iraq](#).

The Kurdistan regional government did not respond to a Guardian request for comment.

In the US, the [domestic violence hotline](#) is 1-800-799-SAFE (7233). In the UK, call the national [domestic abuse helpline](#) on 0808 2000 247, or visit [Women's Aid](#). In Australia, the national [family violence counselling service](#) is on 1800 737 732. Other international helplines may be found via [www.befrienders.org](http://www.befrienders.org)

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## US voting rights

# Indigenous nations sue North Dakota over ‘sickening’ gerrymandering

The suit charges that diluting Indigenous power violates their voting rights and will handicap tribe members who run for office



North Dakota's Republican governor, Doug Burgum, quickly signed the disputed map into law. Photograph: Dan Koeck/Reuters

*[Hallie Golden](#)*

Mon 21 Feb 2022 17.27 EST

Days before a new legislative map for [North Dakota](#) was set to be introduced in the state house, leaders of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa and Spirit Lake Nation sent a letter to the governor and other state lawmakers urging them to rethink the proposal.

“All citizens deserve to have their voices heard and to be treated fairly and equally under the law,” they wrote, arguing that the proposed map was illegal, diluting the strength of their communities’ voice.

But instead, in early November, the Republican-controlled legislature approved the map, with only minor changes. And the Republican governor, Doug Burgum, quickly signed it.

“Our voice is going to be muffled once again,” the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa chairman, Jamie Azure, told the Guardian. “It’s getting a little sickening, tell you the truth.”

The nations have sued the state, alleging that the map, which was meant to account for population changes identified in the 2020 census, doesn’t comply with section 2 of the Voting Rights Act.

The lawsuit, filed earlier this month, claims the map packs some Indigenous voters into one House subdistrict, while putting other “nearby Native American voters into two other districts dominated by white voters who bloc vote against Native Americans’ preferred candidates”. It adds that complying with the [Voting Rights Act](#) would mean placing the two nations in a single district, where they would “comprise an effective, geographically compact majority”.

Azure said: “We never want to enter into lawsuits; we never want to do these things. But, you know, at a certain point, the goodwill just goes out the window. And, you know, we’re tired of being disrespected. And that’s how we feel with this lawsuit.”

North Dakota’s secretary of state, Al Jaeger, the top election official for the state, told the Guardian in an email that they do not comment on ongoing legal cases.

Indigenous people in the US have faced generations of voting restrictions. Although Indigenous people were granted citizenship in 1924, it took more than three decades before they were considered eligible to vote in every state.

Since then, they have continued to face a host of roadblocks in the form of scarce polling locations, lack of access to the internet and language barriers. The [National Congress of American Indians](#) reported that they have the lowest voter turnout in the country, with 34% of Indigenous people not registered to vote.

In North Dakota, the state only recently reached a settlement with two nations over a law requiring voters to have a valid identification card with a home address (many homes on reservations don't have a street address). The state ultimately agreed to allow Indigenous people to vote without a residential address.

In this new case, the legislative map divides District 9, which includes Turtle Mountain, whose members tend to favor candidates on the political left, into two subdistricts. Since they have a majority in one subdistrict, but not the other, the result is the nation has one less House seat in which to elect their candidate of choice, explained Michael Carter, staff attorney at the Native American Rights Fund, one of the groups representing the plaintiffs in the lawsuit.

It also moved the Spirit Lake Reservation to District 15, grouping it with counties farther north. Spirit Lake tribal members are also known for favoring progressive candidates, while this area tends to be more conservative, Carter explained. The result, he said, would be an Indigenous candidate of choice winning about 5% of the time.

"This is just another one of those loopholes that they're throwing around at us. But we have remedies for it. The remedy that is proposed would work for us and the state," said the Spirit Lake Tribal chairman, Douglas Yankton, Sr, referring to the proposal to put both nations into a single district.

Jean Schroedel, political science professor at Claremont Graduate University and author of *Voting in Indian Country: The View from the Trenches*, described the redistricting as a "violation in what has previously been the interpretations of section 2 of the Voting Rights Act".

But, she added, "the court seems to be moving very much away from that." She cited the recent supreme court decision stating Alabama did not have to

redraw its congressional map before the 2022 midterm elections despite a lower court ruling the map [discriminated against Black people](#).

North Dakota is home to five federally recognized nations, with American Indian and Alaska Native people making up about 6% of the state's population. Some tribal members in the state do support the new map, as the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation in western North Dakota was placed in a subdistrict, as it requested.

But for Yankton, who said committee members never came to the Spirit Lake or Turtle Mountain reservations during the redistricting process despite requests, the map is the latest voting rights injustice for Native people: "It's violating our democratic right, as citizens of North Dakota, to participate and support people who choose to run for whatever offices. And it hinders us from even having a chance as [Native Americans](#) to run for offices."

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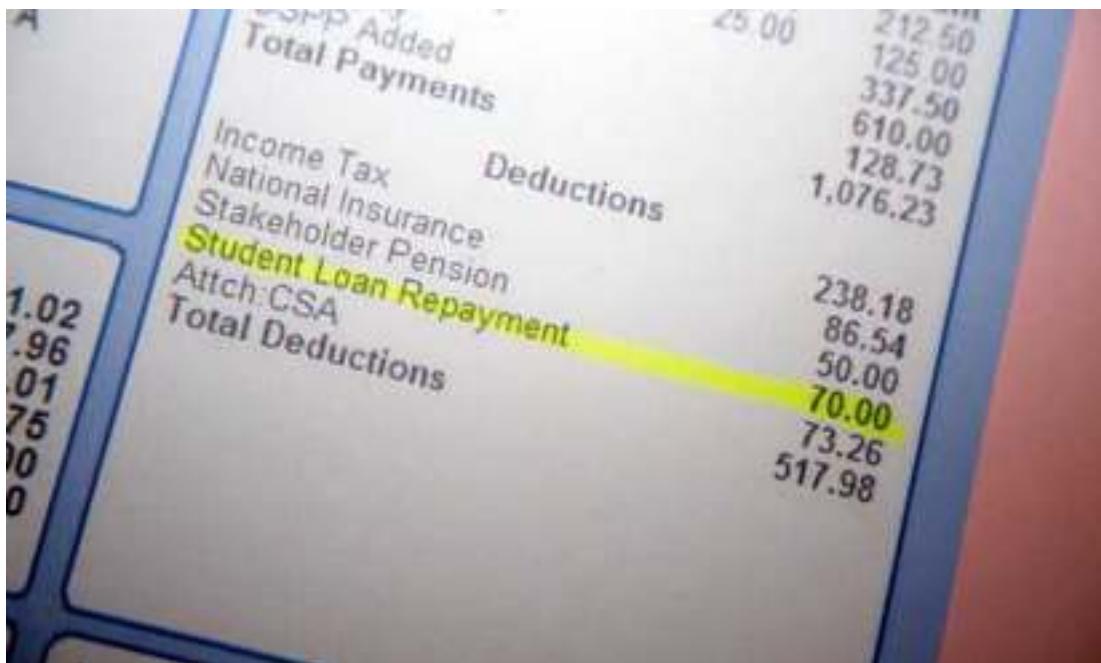
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- 'Lifelong graduate tax' Students in England to pay back loans over 40 years instead of 30
- Analysis UK government prioritising savings in review of post-18 education
- Cancer Vegetarians have 14% lower risk than meat-eaters, study finds
- Fossil fuels North Sea oil exploration should not proceed but can, says UK's climate committee

## Student finance

# Students in England to pay back loans over 40 years instead of 30

Change will see many paying for their degree until retirement in what has been called a ‘lifelong graduate tax’



The number of students expected to pay back their loan in full is expected to double from under a quarter (23%) to more than half (52%) as a result of the changes. Photograph: Jeffrey Blackler/Alamy

*[Sally Weale](#) Education correspondent*

Wed 23 Feb 2022 19.01 EST

Students in England will have to pay back university loans over 40 years instead of 30 under swingeing reforms designed to save the Treasury tens of billions of pounds.

The number of students expected to pay back their loan in full is expected to double from under a quarter (23%) to more than half (52%) as a result of the changes, which will see many graduates paying for their degree until retirement in what was described as a “lifelong graduate tax”.

In a move designed to sugar the pill, interest rates on student loans will be slashed for new borrowers and set at no higher than the rate of inflation from next year – but experts said this would disproportionately benefit higher earning graduates.

The controversial measures form the backbone of the government’s long-awaited response to the [Augar review](#) of post-18 education and funding, which will be detailed in a statement to parliament on Thursday.

In a double whammy, graduates will also be asked to start paying off their debt sooner after the government confirmed the [repayment threshold will be cut from £27,295 to £25,000](#) for new borrowers starting courses from September 2023.

Annual tuition fees will be capped at £9,250 for a further two years, keeping costs down for students but hitting universities, which have seen the value of tuition fees eroded over the years due to inflation.

The Department for Education (DfE) said the changes would “rebalance the burden of student loans more fairly between the student and the taxpayer and ensure that in future graduates don’t pay back more than they borrowed in real terms”.

But Martin Lewis, founder of MoneySavingExpert.com, warned that most university leavers would pay thousands of pounds more for their degrees over their lifetime than they do now. “It’s effectively a lifelong graduate tax for most,” he said.

“Only around a quarter of current [university] leavers are predicted to earn enough to repay in full now. Extending this period means the majority of lower and mid earners will keep paying for many more years, increasing

their costs by thousands. Yet the highest earners who would clear [their debt] within the current 30 years won't be impacted."

Bridget Phillipson, Labour's shadow education secretary, accused the government of delivering another stealth tax for new graduates which will hit those on low incomes hardest.

The student finance measures are aimed at stemming the soaring cost of student loans. At the end of March last year the value of outstanding loans stood at £161bn and is forecast to rise to about £500bn by 2043, the DfE said.

While currently the department anticipates that graduates will pay back 59p in every £1 over the lifetime of their loans, under the reforms the DfE calculates borrowers will repay 81p, with a graduate earning £28,000 repaying about £17 a month.

In addition to the changes to student finance, the government will also launch two consultations on Thursday.

The first will seek views on controversial proposals to [introduce minimum eligibility requirements to access student loans](#) – either by requiring students to have a grade 4 pass in GCSE English and maths, or two Es at A-level – and student number controls to clamp down on what the government describes as poor-quality, low-cost courses.

The second sets out plans for a lifelong loan entitlement for the equivalent of four years of post-18 education (£37,000 in today's fees) to support students to study at any stage in their life through modular courses.

Announcing the reforms, the education secretary Nadhim Zahawi said: "This package of reforms will ensure students are being offered a range of different pathways, whether that is higher or further education, that lead to opportunities with the best outcomes – and put an end once for all to high interest rates on their student loans."

Higher and further education minister Michelle Donelan added: "We are delivering a fairer system for students, graduates and taxpayers as well as

future-proofing the student finance system.”

Sir Philip Augar, who chaired the original post-18 education review, welcomed the reforms which he described as fair and sustainable. “The package … forms the basis of a properly connected further and higher education sector. That connection is long overdue,” he said.

But Larissa Kennedy, president of the UK National Union of Students, said: “The minister is saddling young people with unimaginable debt for the next 40 years of their lives. This is nothing more than an attack on opportunity.”

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## Universities

# UK government prioritising savings in review of post-18 education

Analysis: As well as funding reforms Augar review marks a shift away from the idea of university as the best choice for all students



Student loan repayments for students in England will be extended from 30 to 40 years. Photograph: Chris Ison/PA

*[Sally Weale](#) Education correspondent*

Wed 23 Feb 2022 19.01 EST

When the Augar review of post-18 education and funding in England was announced by former prime minister Theresa May [in February 2018](#), it was seen by many as a kneejerk response to Labour's better than expected performance in the 2017 general election, buoyed up Jeremy Corbyn's pledge to scrap student tuition fees.

It was a time of mounting concern about spiralling levels of student debt and the loss of maintenance grants for the most disadvantaged. But while those concerns rightly persist today, the overriding drive behind the reforms unveiled by the government on Thursday will undoubtedly have been to lower the cost to the Treasury of financing England's increasingly unwieldy student loan system.

The figures are eye-watering. According to the Department for Education, the value of outstanding loans by the end of March 2021 was £161bn and it is forecast to rise to half a trillion pounds by 2043.

To help tackle the debt, the student loan repayment period will be extended to 40 years and the repayment threshold lowered to £25,000. It will hit graduates – particularly lower earning graduates – hard, but will save the Treasury and the taxpayer billions.

But behind the long-awaited finance reforms, there has also been a shift away from the idea of university as the best choice for all students and a rowing back on earlier Labour ambitions to get 50% of 18-year-olds into universities.

A new consultation on a minimum qualification requirement to access loans to go to university has already been branded an attack on social mobility and disadvantaged students. Under the proposals, students who fail to gain a grade 4 GCSE pass in maths and English, or two E grades at A-level, will be blocked from accessing student loans and therefore going to university. In 2021 fewer than 5,000 students entered higher education without GCSE passes in English and maths.

In a briefing to the media, higher and further education minister, Michelle Donelan insisted it was not a “definite” direction of travel: “But it is something that I think it’s right that we explore as an option. We used to have an entry requirement in this country of two Es,” she said.

“We all know that there are young people that get three Es every year that feel compelled and pushed to go to university before they’re ready, and I

think that that is doing them a disservice.”

The government will also be keen to use its reforms to crack down on what they describe as “low value” courses which they say saddle students with debt while doing little to increase their earnings – and crucially their ability to pay off their loans. The government is keen for students to study the kind of degrees which will guarantee graduate earnings.

There is also a new consultation seeking views on a lifelong loan entitlement for people to retrain flexibly at any time in their lives, worth the equivalent of £37,000, or four years of post-18 education. According to one sector insider it could be “the most significant education reform of the 2020s so far”, though it may well end up being significantly watered down.

While the headlines will focus on changes to loan repayments and minimum entry requirements, the government’s reforms also include interesting plans to cut the cost of foundation year courses and a new national state scholarship to support high-achieving students from disadvantaged backgrounds access higher education, further education and apprenticeships.

“Overall, people who hate the government will claim today’s package lets students, graduates and universities down,” said Nick Hillman, director of the Higher Education Policy Institute and a key government adviser when the current loan system was set up. “Meanwhile, those who love the government will claim it is a bold set of reforms. In reality, it is a quite carefully balanced package that sends some powerful signals about the government’s priorities.”

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## Vegetarianism

# Vegetarians have 14% lower cancer risk than meat-eaters, study finds

Oxford University research also finds pescatarians have 10% reduced risk compared with those who eat meat regularly



‘Being a low meat-eater, fish-eater or vegetarian was associated with a lower risk of all cancer sites when compared to regular meat-eaters,’ the analysis found. Photograph: MB Photography/Getty Images

*[Denis Campbell](#) Health policy editor*

Wed 23 Feb 2022 20.00 EST

Vegetarians have a 14% lower chance of developing cancer than carnivores, according to a large study that links meat-eating to a heightened risk of the disease.

A team of researchers from Oxford University analysed data on more than 470,000 Britons and found that pescatarians had a 10% reduced risk. Compared with people who eat meat regularly – defined as more than five times a week – those who consumed small amounts had a 2% lower risk of developing cancer, the study found.

“In this large British cohort, being a low meat-eater, fish-eater or vegetarian was associated with a lower risk of all cancer sites when compared to regular meat-eaters,” the analysis found.

However, the authors, led by Cody Watling from Oxford’s population health cancer epidemiology unit, made clear that their findings did not conclusively prove regular meat-eating increased the risk of cancer. Smoking and body fat could also help explain the differences found, they said.

Their study of participants in the UK Biobank study also found that:

- Low meat-eaters – who consume meat five or fewer times a week – had a 9% lower risk of developing bowel cancer than regular meat-eaters.
- Vegetarian women were 18% less likely than those who ate meat regularly to develop postmenopausal breast cancer, though that may be due to their lower body mass index.
- Vegetarian men have a 31% lower risk of prostate cancer while among male pescatarians it is 20% lower.

“The results ... suggest that specific dietary behaviours such as low meat [and] vegetarian or pescatarian diets can have an impact on reducing the risk of certain cancers; in this case bowel, breast and prostate,” said Dr Giota Mitrou, director of research and innovation at World [Cancer](#) Research Fund International (WCRF), which co-funded the study with Cancer Research UK.

[chart](#)

The results confirm WCRF's longstanding advice that people should limit their intake of red and processed meat and eat more wholegrains, vegetables, fruit and pulses, she added.

The Oxford study authors said: "The lower risk of colorectal [bowel] cancer in low meat-eaters is consistent with previous evidence suggesting an adverse impact of meat intake. Vegetarian women's lower risk of postmenopausal breast cancer is likely to be "largely" explained by their lower BMI.

"It is not clear whether the other differences observed for all cancers and for prostate cancer reflect any causal relationship or are due to other factors."

While the researchers found that "being a low meat-eater, pescatarian or vegetarian was associated with a lower risk of all cancer", they added that this "may be a result of dietary factors and/or non-dietary differences in lifestyle, such as smoking". Their results are published on Thursday in the journal BMC Medicine.

Richard McIlwain, chief executive of the Vegetarian Society, said: "This study adds to a growing body of research reinforcing the positive, protective effects of a vegetarian diet.

"With cancer now affecting one in every two of us across the country, adopting a healthy vegetarian diet can clearly play a role in preventing this disease. Indeed, evidence from previous surveys suggests a balanced vegetarian diet can also reduce the risk of heart disease and diabetes, in addition to cancers."

Watling and his colleagues are undertaking further research among vegetarians, pescatarians and vegans to examine more closely the relationship between diet and cancer risk.

Between 5% and 7% of Britons are thought to be vegetarian and 2-3% follow a vegan diet, according to [surveys by YouGov](#).

Dr Julie Sharp, Cancer Research UK's head of health and patient information, said that while reducing intake of processed meat has been

proven to reduce the risk of bowel cancer “having some bacon or ham every now and then won’t do much harm”, adding: “If you are having a lot of meat a lot of the time then cutting down is a good idea, but a vegetarian diet doesn’t always mean someone is eating healthily.”

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## Fossil fuels

# North Sea oil exploration should not proceed but can, says UK's climate committee

Net zero advisers say refusing new licences would signal green ambition, but final decision must be for ministers



The chair of the Committee on Climate Change said he would ‘favour’ a moratorium on North Sea exploration but the decision went beyond climate policy. Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

*[Fiona Harvey](#) Environment correspondent*

Thu 24 Feb 2022 02.00 EST

The prospects for an [expansion of oil and gas drilling in the North Sea](#) have cleared a major hurdle, as the Committee on Climate Change said “stringent

tests” must be applied to any new exploration licences but stopped short of saying they could not be issued.

New drilling would not reduce energy bills for UK consumers, the committee found, and its chair, former Conservative environment secretary Lord Deben, said he would “favour” a moratorium on North Sea exploration.

He said refusing new licences would “send a clear signal to investors and consumers that the UK is committed” to its climate goals, and help to “strengthen climate ambition internationally”.

But the committee, which is the statutory adviser to the government on the net zero goal, concluded that as it could not establish clearly whether new exploration would significantly increase greenhouse gas emissions globally, and as considering the UK’s energy security went beyond its remit, any decision on new licences must be taken by ministers.

“Weighing these advantages is an inherently political decision, which goes beyond climate policy and sits rightly with government, not with my committee,” wrote Deben, in a letter to business secretary Kwasi Kwarteng published on Thursday.

He also made clear that producing more North Sea oil and gas would do little or nothing to help UK consumers cope with high energy prices. “Any increases in UK extraction of oil and gas would have, at most, a marginal effect on the prices faced by UK consumers in future,” he wrote.

Despite these warnings, the committee’s conclusion is likely to boost controversial government plans to license new oil and gasfields in the North Sea.

Green campaigners said any exploration for new oilfields, to rejuvenate the North Sea’s declining production, would have disastrous impacts on the climate.

Tessa Khan, director of Uplift, which campaigns for an end to fossil fuel extraction, said: “The committee’s opposition to continued North Sea

exploration is a clear acknowledgment that there is a limit to what we can safely burn. There's no justification for these developments, which will see the oil in them exported. They won't lower bills or contribute to UK energy security. All they'll do is increase industry profits."

The UK hosted the [Cop26 UN climate summit last November](#), and will continue to direct international climate efforts this year as president of the UN negotiations. Deben made it clear that allowing new oil and gas extraction would have a "material" impact on the UK's ability to encourage other countries to improve their climate targets.

"Continuing to allow extraction may weaken UK diplomacy to encourage other countries to adapt ambitious climate policies. It is also important on a domestic scale for there to be a perception that government policy is fully aligned with net zero, rather than being undermined by questions such as seen over the last year with the proposed coal mine in Cumbria and the Cambo oilfield," he wrote.

Caroline Lucas, the Green party MP, warned of the impact on the UK's attempts to bolster the achievements of Cop26. "New North Sea oil and gas developments send out totally the wrong signals both to UK businesses and consumers and the wider world," she said.

"The UK Cop president, Alok Sharma, is [being cut off at the knees in his diplomatic efforts](#) to keep [the global heating limit of] 1.5C alive – the key objective of the Glasgow climate pact. These licences don't make climate sense, they don't make diplomatic sense and they don't make financial sense, and no amount of so-called climate compatibility tests will change that."

However, the committee's advice that climate tests should be applied to licences that have already been issued, such as [that to the Cambo oilfield](#), was welcomed. Danny Gross, campaigner at Friends of the Earth, said: "It's reassuring that the government's plan to apply climate tests only to new licensing rounds is totally wrong in the committee's view. This loophole would allow dozens of carbon-intensive projects that have already been licensed, but not yet approved, to escape these tests."

The government is consulting on a “[climate checkpoint](#)” that would require any new oil and gas licences to pass a series of tests on their environmental impact. Kwasi Kwarteng, the business secretary, is expected to review at least six applications for [new drilling licences in the North Sea](#) this year, after a similar number were approved last year.

A spokesperson for the Department for Business, [Energy](#) and Industrial Strategy said: “There will continue to be ongoing demand for oil and gas over the coming decades as we transition to cleaner and cheaper forms of energy generated in this country. Turning off North Sea gas overnight would put energy security, British jobs and industries at risk and we would be more dependent on foreign imports. We welcome the committee’s acknowledgment that carbon budgets can still be met if new oil and gas fields are developed in the UK.”

The committee also emphasised the [role of insulation](#) and renewable energy in cutting energy bills. Scrapped housebuilding regulations would have knocked about £40 off energy bills, and if the 2030 target for offshore wind had been brought forward sooner, consumers would be £100 a year better off.

Rosie Rogers, head of oil and gas transition for Greenpeace UK, said: “Anyone who’s read this advice and thinks the North Sea’s future lies in oil and gas is utterly deluded, because it will take decades and won’t ease energy bills. What we need to tackle bills and climate change is home insulation, heat pumps, electric vehicles and renewable power.”

She added: “The future of the North Sea is in renewables. Our economy, our energy security and our climate depends on it.”

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Interview

## **‘I was filled with self-loathing’: Yellowjackets’ Melanie Lynskey on insecurity, ambition and her idol Kate Winslet**

[Emine Saner](#)



Melanie Lynskey – finally in the spotlight. Photograph: Matt Sayles/Invision/AP

After 30 years of critical acclaim, the actor has finally found mainstream success at 44. She talks about Hollywood's dangerous beauty standards, turning down misogynistic scripts – and why her TV show about possible teenage cannibals is so much fun



[@eminesaner](#)

Thu 24 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

It would not surprise me if [Melanie Lynskey](#) had deliberately matched her pale blouse to the pale curtains behind her, and her pale complexion, the better to blend into the background. After 30 years of critical acclaim, but not mainstream fame, Lynskey is getting noticed and it feels very, very strange to her. Her show, [Yellowjackets](#), has steadily become a hit. Lynskey is not quite the lead in this ensemble piece, but near enough, as one of four fortysomething women who survived a plane crash as teenagers, and went through some savage stuff, involving murder and almost certainly cannibalism.

Likened to a mix of Lord of the Flies, Lost and Mean Girls, with a pleasing amount of 90s nostalgia, it has become one of the most talked-about shows

of the moment. “It’s funny to be on something that people are watching,” Lynskey says with a laugh. “It’s a different experience.”

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A concerned friend recently texted her to ask how she was dealing with that. “I said, I actually feel very nervous,” she says when we speak over Zoom (she is in Atlanta, where she is filming a crime drama with Jessica Biel). She is low-key and gentle. “It’s a lot easier to stay under the radar, have people be like, ‘You should get more attention, you should have more roles’ or whatever. It’s weird to have been doing this for 30 years and then all of a sudden ...” She smiles. “I didn’t think this would happen. I thought if it was going to happen, it would happen in my 20s. So I’m grateful, and it’s really nice to have choices. But it feels vulnerable.”

Lynskey has worked a huge amount, in a career that might have lacked attention but not quality – she was in the HBO series *Togetherness* and the recent BBC drama [\*Mrs America\*](#), and independent films such as *Hello I Must be Going* and [\*I Don't Feel at Home in This World Anymore\*](#). I suspect this is how she likes it. She is wary of fame – until now, one of her most high-profile roles was as a stalkerish neighbour in the sitcom [\*Two and a Half Men\*](#), but she left when she felt the role might provide too much exposure or threaten to typecast her, and went on to infinitely more interesting, if much lower-paid, roles instead.

It’s her husband, the actor Jason Ritter (they have a three-year-old daughter), who gets recognised when they’re out. Lynskey is the one who takes the pictures for fans, she says with a laugh. That is surely about to change, but those low expectations can be hard to shrug off, even in the face of long-overdue recognition. “We’ll see,” she says.



Lynskey, left, with Kate Winslet in *Heavenly Creatures*. Photograph: SNAP/Rex Features

She had an astonishing start. In the early 90s, she was a high school pupil in New Zealand when the director Peter Jackson, having exhausted his search of actors for a film, started trawling schools. Lynskey was chosen, and she turned 16 while shooting [Heavenly Creatures](#) alongside the then-unknown Kate Winslet, based on a true story about two teenage girls whose intense relationship has catastrophic consequences. One became a megastar, the other ... went back to school, then spent years on the periphery of Hollywood, had successful supporting roles (from *Coyote Ugly* at the beginning of her career, to the recent Netflix film [Don't Look Up](#)), put in some excellent performances in acclaimed indie films, and now, at 44, has become a primetime lead.

"I learned so early on not to have expectations," says Lynskey. But she liked what she read when she got the script for [Yellowjackets](#) (it's the name of the girls' football team; they were on their way to a tournament when their plane crashed), and she had a conversation with the creators who had a clear plan for her character and about five seasons' worth of material. She felt, she says, that it could work.

“I wonder if we’ve all just gone through this collective trauma and everyone’s feeling a bit shaken up and they don’t really know how to put the pieces back together. This plane crash and these people surviving – I feel like people are interested in that. I think people can relate to that kind of general feeling right now. But I also just think it’s fun.”

Lynskey’s character Shauna is unassuming, but it’s a thin, fragile layer – she also has some dubious sexual fantasies, and an unforgiving attitude to pest control (and blackmail). There is something so compelling about the rage of middle-aged women. “It’s very common and it’s also very common to not know what your outlet’s allowed to be for your rage,” says Lynskey. “I think a lot of us were raised having to squash those feelings down, and you get to a particular age and you’re like, it’s coming up and I don’t know how to healthily let go of it.”



Lynskey as Shauna in *Yellowjackets*. Photograph: Paul Sarkis>Showtime

Shauna might come across as someone with self-doubt, but it’s not really true, says Lynskey, even if her life hasn’t turned out the way she might have hoped. “I think she still believes: ‘I’m a confident, sexual, interesting person, and I deserve a lot.’” With self-doubt, says Lynskey, “it’s very hard for it not to creep in, in middle age – you’re being told everywhere you look

you're not of any value any more, nobody's interested. But I think within herself, she believes that she's worthy."

Lynskey knew she wanted to be an actor from the age of six. She grew up in New Plymouth, in New Zealand, the eldest of five; her father was a surgeon, her mother a nurse. Lynskey was, she says, "very, very shy. I'm still very shy." Getting a part in a school play was a revelation. "It was so freeing, having someone give me the words to say and not being myself for a minute. It just felt like a weight was lifted off my shoulders. I wasn't consumed with anxiety. Then I just was addicted – I did whatever I could."

When she was cast in *Heavenly Creatures*, they were already close to shooting. She was given a day on set to learn the basics of screen acting – things like how to avoid looking at the camera – and an acting coach was hired to help her access emotions, but she found the woman's methods brutal: "It just put me in absolute panic." Jackson hired another coach, "who was a lot kinder, thank God. But that was how I started out, that was my first day of rehearsal."

Despite being two years younger than her co-star, and inexperienced, Lynskey gives an incredible performance. She carries the film. Yet it was Winslet's career that took off. Lynskey remembers the excitement around them. Winslet was ready for it. "I wasn't. I'd never done anything before, and I was very shy." She didn't – doesn't – begrudge Winslet any of it. "I adored her and I admired her so much. There wasn't a part of me that thought it could have happened to either one of us. It felt like it was supposed to happen to her. She's a movie star – there's a glow. I'd never met anybody like that in my life."



Lynskey with Elijah Wood in *I Don't Feel at Home in This World Anymore*.  
Photograph: Netflix/Allstar

All the same, she says, “it was a little hard to have absolutely nothing happen for me. It would have been easier if some agents were interested, but there was nothing. It was hard to not feel like I had failed in some way.” She had to learn, she says, “how to be OK with the good things that had happened and not hope for more. That was the beginning of me lowering my expectations.”

She was a cinema geek, though, and for years had been subscribing to serious film magazines. Having critics she respected praise her performance gave her a glimmer of hope, so after a year of university, she got an agent and started going to Los Angeles for auditions. One was for *The Crucible*, the Daniel Day-Lewis film, which she didn’t get “but it went well, and that built my confidence a little bit”. She got others, including a stepsister in Drew Barrymore’s *Cinderella* film, *Ever After*, and weighty films such as *The Cherry Orchard* “with some of my favourite actors of all time, like Katrin Cartlidge, Alan Bates and Charlotte Rampling. I was so grateful to be working, I didn’t need much – I had been living on nothing. I understood that I was building it from the ground up at that point, and I felt lucky that the door had been opened again.”

But it was also disheartening. “I felt like so much of the stuff I was reading would have required me to really compromise myself in some way,” says Lynskey. “There was so much that was just straight-up misogynistic, sexist, disappointing.” She was, she says, “unhappy a lot of the time”. Lynskey is, as anyone can see, beautiful, but in the late 90s and the early years of this century, the infamous size zero was the look. She kept getting put up for best friend-type roles in dross. “I’d get another script to be like, ‘the fat character just sitting in the corner eating a chocolate bar, while the pretty girls are all at the dance’ or whatever. I was like, ‘No’. It’s so irresponsible that there are scripts like this at all.” She asked her agency not to keep sending her stuff like that. When it did, she left.

Throughout this time, Lynskey had developed an eating disorder, restricting herself to a certain number of calories a day, and if she went over, she would make herself throw up. She was also exercising obsessively. She was living with her boyfriend at the time and says, “it just broke his heart. It was the first time somebody had really noticed and cared. He did this weird thing, which sounds controlling but wasn’t, where he would cook but not let me be in the kitchen.” Or they’d go out for dinner and he would try to stop her going to throw up in the bathroom as soon as they’d finished. “We had fights in restaurants because I was like ...” She pauses. “I remember one day, he said: ‘It’s just so violent, what you’re doing to yourself.’” Lynskey broke up with him. “I suppose I was too filled with self-loathing. But I’m very grateful [to him]. That was the beginning of me being able to work my way out of it, and feel worthy. Something about him saying that it was ‘violent’. And I was such a young feminist – I read the 70s feminists, and all the newer feminists that were coming up in the 90s. I was aware of what I was participating in, but I just couldn’t stop it.”

It wasn’t even as if the thinner she got, the more successful she became. She couldn’t win. “Even me at my sickest and thinnest, I looked pretty normal. I’m just built a particular way and that was exhausting, where it doesn’t matter how hard I exercise or how little I eat ... I really had to learn to start being OK with how I was made.” It also made her angry. “To have been so unkind to my own body for so long, I was furious about how Hollywood was working.” It just didn’t reflect what she saw and felt in real life – the idea that only thin women could be attractive or lovable patently wasn’t true.

“They’re telling women that this is how you have to be, and it’s just not reality. There’s just so much about it that infuriated me. I felt a responsibility to not perpetuate it and so even when there was nothing else on the table, and I had no other options, I just wouldn’t play that part.”

There is more diversity now – you could easily argue not enough – but in an [interview with Rolling Stone](#) last month, Lynskey said someone on the *Yellowjackets* production had made a comment about her size, which prompted her co-stars to step in to support her. “Overwhelmingly on *Yellowjackets*, I felt supported,” she says. At the end of the shoot, Lynskey wrote to an executive to thank them for not making her feel as if she had to lose weight. The executive was confused. “She was like: ‘It never crossed my mind. Everyone thought you looked real and sexy.’ How funny that I feel the need to thank someone. It’s just so ingrained.”



Lynskey with her husband, the actor Jason Ritter. Photograph: David Livingston/Getty Images

Some of the public response though, she says, “has been a bit interesting”. People online have commented on how she looks (Lynskey took to Twitter a few weeks ago to complain that it was “the story of my life since *Yellowjackets* premiered”). “It’s trying to tune out that stuff and just listen to

the women who say: thank you for just being on screen and not pinching your tummy, or being like: ‘I wish I was thinner.’”

It’s still rare enough to see a woman in her mid-40s having such a rampant sex life on screen, as Shauna does, that it feels refreshing. Lynskey smiles. “I started to get to a point reading the script where I was like: ‘Oh my God, I’m having sex again!’ Then I was like: ‘How great that I’m the one who’s having all the sex!’ Because it happens. It’s just so funny to me, this narrative that you ...”

She smiles and says she loves the Amy Schumer sketch about actresses marking their “last fuckable day”, usually somewhere in their 40s. Like so much else popular culture has tried to tell us about women, she says, a hint of rage simmering beneath her preternaturally calm manner, “it’s not a real thing”.

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Composite: Alamy/Guardian Design

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## Hustle and hype: the truth about the influencer economy

Composite: Alamy/Guardian Design

More and more young people are enticed by the glittering promises of a career as an influencer – but it's usually someone else getting rich

by [Symeon Brown](#)

Thu 24 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

I was a 14-year-old schoolboy when the rapper 50 Cent released *Get Rich or Die Tryin'*. The most precocious kids in class declared the debut hip-hop album an instant classic and hailed the rapper's legend: "He's been shot nine times, you know?" The failed attempt on 50 Cent's life was at the centre of his sales pitch as the bulletproof king of gangsta rap. My friends and I were

easily sold. His debut was the bestselling album of 2003, selling 12m copies worldwide. Curtis Jackson may have been born black and poor in New York, but as 50 Cent, he was now [worth \\$30m](#).

There are few things we find more compelling than a fable of overcoming the odds and achieving self-made success. Everyone loves an outsider, because deep down most of us believe we are one, and each generation has its own version for inspiration. For me, it was the constant reinvention of the hustler made good in hip-hop that stuck.

I grew up in Tottenham, north London, a multiracial area between the city and the Hertfordshire suburbs with a character defined by its then underperforming football club and its Caribbean, Ghanaian and Turkish Cypriot communities. My whole life, this corner of the city has been notorious for the [anti-police riots](#) that broke out in the 1980s. A Jamaican-born mother had died after her home was raided by police officers, a policeman was killed in the ensuing revolt, and the tension between the residents and the authorities has festered ever since.

By 2003, much of the area could have slipped with ease into the background of a rap video in Queens. My friends and I wore American hip-hop streetwear: baggy Akademiks jeans, Fubu tops and Timberland boots. New-Era baseball caps felt like part of our school uniform. My school had a high intake of students poor enough to qualify for free school meals, but even the poor kids wore luxury streetwear. In the year I completed my GCSEs, 75% of my fellow students failed to get the five A\*-C grades necessary to go on to further education. It is unsurprising that the hustler was an inspiration to a student body of underdogs.

At the time we started school, the prime minister, Tony Blair, was announcing his plan to create a knowledge-based economy, and his ambition to get 50% of young people through university. “Aspiration” had become the political buzzword. When there were outbreaks of violence in urban communities like mine, the government blamed a lack of drive, and in 2007, it launched the Reach mentoring scheme, with the focus on “raising the aspirations and achievement among black boys and young black men, enabling them to achieve their potential”.

The problem, certainly in my neighbourhood, was that it was aspiration itself, rather than the absence of it, that drove young men to desperate measures. In recent decades, aspiration has been heavily wrapped up not in what we aim to do, achieve or create, but in what we can afford to buy. Young adults and teenagers have been under more and more pressure to be successful, with fewer means to do so.

Over the past century, political parties and brands have spent vast sums of money on trying to get our attention and influence our decisions. Today, that attention is increasingly in the hands of a new type of hustler. Influencers with thousands or even millions of social media followers can convert their following into an income by making their feeds a living billboard or a peep show you pay to subscribe to. Ten years ago, this pseudo-profession hardly existed, and now the highest-earning influencer, Kylie Jenner, [can earn up to \\$1.2m](#) from a single post on Instagram. Social media introduced a profit motive into our social lives, with a profound impact on the way we behave.

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Since I left university, the economic promise made to middle-class millennials has turned to dust. In 2008, I was an economics undergraduate learning about how boom and bust had been banished. We all know what happened next: the global economy crashed. Graduate schemes disappeared before my eyes and the next decade did not live up to the promises made in the one before. As wages dropped and employment opportunities fell, our consumer spending got higher and personal debt rocketed. And this was before Covid-19 struck and making money from home became the only game in town.

It is in this climate that “influencing” seems a viable career, providing a potentially luxury lifestyle with a low entry threshold. Once you have figured out how to get people’s attention, you can monetise yourself as both product and salesman. Often we do not even think of the most successful influencers as digital workers, since they market themselves as relationship gurus, financial experts and activists. Some influencers even offer teaching on how you can emulate their success. One YouTuber named Patricia Bright,

who has more than 2.8 million subscribers, has written a book titled Heart & Hustle, which promises “to show you how to hustle like I do”.

The problem is that success in this world is not as attainable as some make it seem, and addiction to accruing followers by any means necessary is warping human behaviour on and offline. For many influencers, deception is lucrative, and becoming increasingly extreme. There are some feigning their wealth, their followers and even their ethnicity while hawking dubious products to their followers. In recent years, influencers have sold laxatives as health drinks, promoted music festivals that never happened and been caught up in serious fraud and multimillion-dollar Ponzi schemes. Companies that sell regulated products such as cosmetic surgery procedures and financial services have increasingly turned to influencers to market their goods, away from scrutiny by the authorities.

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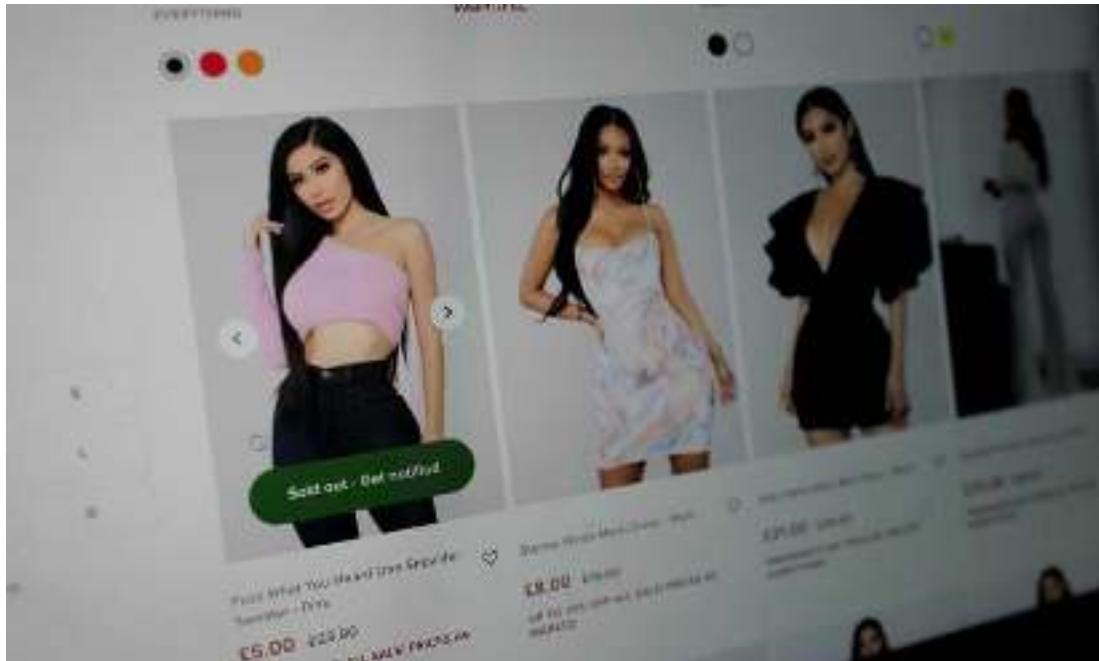
The instore music complements the skimpy clothes that have made Fashion Nova in Los Angeles a market leader in ghetto chic and timeless hoochie wear. You can buy similar styles in the store next door, an unbranded clothes shop called Mode Plus, or in the budget womenswear shop opposite, called Queens (the menswear shop next door is Kings). The same tight party dresses produced for cents and sold for dollars are for sale in all of them, and can be found in any other makeshift store in low-income Latina communities from Los Angeles to London. However, Fashion Nova has come a long way from its humble first store in LA’s Panorama City Mall.

The company’s impact could not have been predicted when that store was opened in 2006 by an industrious Iranian American named Richard Saghian. But Saghian knew the world was changing. He wanted his company to target the kind of girls who went to clubs to dance to hip-hop and desired to be on a VIP table – girls who wanted to be famous. Most importantly, they had to be able to turn heads on [Instagram](#).

From about 2013, Fashion Nova began recruiting micro-famous brand ambassadors who fitted the vision. Young women with big followings were given free clothes, and those with huge ones were paid a fee to post online. They were told to always tag Fashion Nova to help its followers grow and boost awareness. Some ambassadors were also allowed to earn money from

sales of clothes via a discount code that paid them a commission. Where the company achieved major success was in its aggressive penetration of the hip-hop scene. It paid rappers for shoutouts in songs and signed up artists such as the reality TV star turned rapper Cardi B as highly paid brand ambassadors. It even gave the African American and Latinx entertainers who now dominate US pop culture their own Fashion Nova lines. The company had bought a seat at the table. But it also stole scraps from it, too.

In February 2019, only a day after Kim Kardashian was [photographed](#) in a gown by the exalted French designer Thierry Mugler, Fashion Nova began selling a replica. When Kim's younger half-sister, the even more influential Kylie Jenner, threw a star-studded 21st birthday party, dresses worn by guests were cloned within hours. Fashion Nova was not just fast fashion, it was the fastest. The process of recycling runway designs is well known and widely practised, says Bimi Fafowora, who worked for Nova for nine months overhauling their marketing and branding. "Celebrities wear these gorgeous gowns, they release it on social media, fast-fashion brands pick up on it, release it to the mass audience," says Fafowora. "These people wear them for about a day ... because on Instagram you can't wear anything twice." (Fashion Nova did not respond to a request for comment.)



The Fashion Nova website in February 2022. Photograph: Sarah Lee/The Guardian

As Fafowora and I sat on the roof of the Nomad, a luxury London hotel frequented by holidaying footballers, she remarked, “I think we’re in an age where people aspire to something greater, something higher, more famous, more popular, more loved, and fast fashion has allowed for that. It’s allowed for people to shorten the gap between [them and] unattainable celebrities.”

In 2021, Fashion Nova surpassed 20 million Instagram followers. Three years earlier, it had become the internet’s most-Googled fashion brand, and the company posted revenues of \$294m. Fashion Nova invites aspiring influencers to buy and model its clothes, then tag their photos @fashionnova and #NovaBabe. More than 10m posts have been made by ordinary young women auditioning to get the brand’s attention. Each is hoping to become a paid “NovaBabe”, an ambassador who receives free clothes, the Instagram equivalent of being on the VIP table.

Fashion Nova’s website has a callout for aspiring influencers: “Wannabe a #NovaBabe? Do you have what it takes to be a #NovaBabe? Are you the OOTD [outfit of the day] queen who can literally rock anything?! Do you have your own style that is admired by others?? If that’s you, we want you to join our #NovaSquad!”

Many aspiring influencers pay for hauls of Fashion Nova clothes to review and model, viewing it as an investment in what they hope will become a job. In reality, they’re providing the company with free labour as promo girls, giving the brand adverts they did not have to pay for. The small number of women the company actually hand-picks for free clothes tend to have a similar aesthetic. They are young, most of them with narrow waists, wide hips and thick lips. Many have hourglass figures and wear clothing that clings to their skin: an aesthetic known as “Insta baddie”. If these women are black, they looked mixed-race or light-skinned, and if they’re white, they mostly have dark hair and bronzed skin.

Today, Fafowora runs a boutique branding firm that recruits models and provides marketing content for new fashion labels trying to replicate Fashion Nova’s success. I ask her how the brands choose their models. “They base it on the look that’s trending right now: the Kardashian look,” she replies. “It’s very curvaceous, mostly racially ambiguous.”

A new wave of pop-up talent agencies such as the London-based Above and Beyond Group swipe through social media to scout for models and influencers who match this brief. Their rosters looks diverse, but although most are not white, there is a homogeneity of ambiguous beige and light brown.

Fashion Nova may not have created this trend, but it has reinforced it. Fast-fashion companies throw vast amounts of money and products at the young women they pick to wear their clothes, and they have created a new economy that appears to offer easy jobs to the prettiest girls on the internet. Beauty has always been a commodity, but now it is far easier for women to monetise it themselves – if they have the right look. The belief among many young women that being desirable pays has led them to not only surgically change their shape, but in some cases to even fake their ethnicity.

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At the age of 19, Aga began noticing that the pictures she took of herself and posted online were getting more and more attention. “I didn’t really have an approach. If I went out and I liked how I looked, I would take a picture.” The grid on her Instagram page has an all-too-familiar grammar.

Aga’s outfit of the day – whether fitted jeans with a crop top, a jumpsuit or a patterned polyester dress – hugs her full hourglass figure. Underneath each image she writes a playful caption such as “A daily dose of your thickums”. Her skin is a light caramel brown and her hair is dark. Most of the selfies are taken in front of her bedroom mirror.

Aga, from east London, told me she had no desire to be internet-famous, but popular theme pages celebrating curvaceous women found her pictures and reposted them. One post was viewed over 147,000 times, and soon thousands of men began following her. Aga became a local pinup. “I think nowadays people just love thick [curvy] girls,” she says.

In 2018, Aga’s pictures also caught the attention of fast-fashion companies and brands investing heavily in influencer marketing. It was then she started to think, “Let me try to make more out of this.” She was studying accounting, but saw providing promo as a potential side hustle. She turned her Instagram page into a business account that gives users metrics about

who is looking at their page, and then began tagging fashion brands including Fashion Nova. Not long after, they started giving her clothes, as did its arch-rival Pretty Little Thing. Aga had the desired aesthetic and the right audience. She also began working as an affiliate for Protein World, a supplements company, which gave her a discount code to promote to her followers. She got paid a commission for everybody who used her code on purchases.

When I interviewed Aga in 2019, she had 50,000 followers. Months later she surpassed 250,000. At the time of writing, most of the money she makes online is from ads and affiliate work for local companies. She became one of a dozen ambassadors for a London-based chauffeur company targeting those in the inner city desperate to present themselves as successful. (Cars could be rented by the hour. They didn't need to go anywhere.) The company regularly recruits attractive young women with significant numbers of followers to act as digital promo girls for their largely male audience. Each ambassador generates an income from the people who use their discount code. The ambassadors have an almost uniform aesthetic – light brown or of mixed heritage and ethnically ambiguous. Aga fitted in.



Cardi B in 2019, performing at a Fashion Nova event in Los Angeles.  
Photograph: Presley Ann/Getty Images for Fashion Nova

In September 2018, the teenager photographed herself in an outfit composed of items she had been given to promote: clothes, phone case, eyelashes, and even hair, which came courtesy of a small afro hair store based in the east Midlands. In the picture, she is standing in her trademark pose. Her hips are wide and her waist is so narrow it looks like an optical illusion. Her skin is brown, her lips are full and her wavy black hair is in cornrow braids, a popular afro hairstyle. She is the picture of a confident and beautiful young black woman. The only problem is, Aga is not a black woman. She was born in Poland and would become one of the many white influencers accused of “blackfishing”.

In November 2018, a young writer named Wanna Thompson fired the first shot with the tweet: “Can we start a thread of all the white girls cosplaying as black women on Instagram?”

A post was shared thousands of times with the before-and-after pictures of young white women between the ages of 17 and 21 who had transformed themselves from having pale skin, straight hair and narrow features into having brown skin, full lips and wavy hair with the help of dark makeup, contouring and wigs. There are even YouTube videos showing you how to do it. Emma Hallberg, a Fashion Nova ambassador with the appearance of dark brown skin, had built up a loyal base of over 300,000 followers, many of whom believed she was of mixed heritage and who followed her for beauty tips.

When she was included in the list, her stunned followers messaged her to ask if it was true. Could she really be white? Hallberg replied that she had never claimed to be anything else. Some of her followers tweeted that they felt deceived.

For Aga, the [controversy](#) led to a huge increase in activity on her Instagram page. She was accused of pretending to be black, of racism, and even minstrelsy, referring to the old performance where white entertainers darkened their skin to mimic and mock black people.

“I did understand where people were coming from,” said Aga. “I’m a millennial. I am on social media. I see the trends and stuff like that, it’s not

“like I looked at my picture and thought they’re making up things from thin air, but what can I do about that?”

Aga is part of a generation that has only known a world in which the internet is supreme and the dominant aesthetic in youth culture is hip-hop. The genre’s music and fashion dictate not only what and who is desirable, but also the part you can play in its billion-dollar industries and the clothing companies attaching themselves to it for clout. To be shapeless and pale with narrow European features has little currency in the part of the internet where a Fashion Nova ambassador gig makes you a VIP. Today, many young white women in their teens and early 20s are conforming to this standard by contouring, and their racial transformation has an economic incentive, too: this cosplay actually pays. The ethics and politics of beauty trends are rarely discussed in a world where influencers happily sell their following to the highest bidder.

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Fashion Nova has a simple model: it buys cheaply manufactured clothes and manages to glamourise them enough to sell them for a substantial profit. It would almost certainly not be the juggernaut success it is without the stardust of influencers. The brand captures all the contradictions of California, where its clothes are presented on the bodies of Los Angeles’s finest, but many of them are manufactured in the city’s hidden sweatshops.

Scattered across downtown LA, according to advocacy group the Garment Worker Center, an estimated 3,000 small factories employ Latina migrants to fill orders for brands like Fashion Nova. Demand is high, and yet, in the UK alone, more than 300,000 tonnes of the clothes produced [end up in household bins](#) each year, with less than 1% recycled. Aside from the environmental concerns, the industry also has a record of labour exploitation. From Leicester to LA, poorly paid workers are turning around the must-have celebrity dress of the day before tomorrow’s new flavour arrives. Influencers dress up to market these clothes under the banner of self-expression, but for the most part, the workers manufacturing them have little voice.



The garment district of downtown LA in June 2020. Photograph: Genaro Molina/LA Times/Rex/Shutterstock

According to Marisa Nuncio, the director of the Garment Worker Center, 85% of factories in the industry are paying under the minimum wage. “Through our casework we’ve seen an average of \$5.50 an hour,” said Nuncio. The minimum wage in California is \$13.25 an hour. Undocumented workers are easy to exploit, not just because they are willing to work for less, but because they are too scared to mount wage disputes for fear of reprisals that could get them deported.

The Garment Worker Center soon noticed one company popping up again and again in complaints by factory workers: Fashion Nova. Overnight, it had become the company that sweatshops were fighting to win contracts with, and as they competed for work, their fees went down. Although numerous companies who supply garments for Fashion Nova have been found (in an [investigation](#) by the US Department of Labor) to have withheld and underpaid wages, Fashion Nova says it is not responsible for the practices of their suppliers. After they had been contacted by the labour department, in a [statement](#) to the New York Times, Fashion Nova said it had an “ongoing commitment to ensuring that all workers involved with the Fashion Nova brand are appropriately compensated for the work they do”.

Fashion Nova did not invent the fast-fashion model, but it appears to be better than any of its competitors at driving the demand for clothes manufactured to be worn just once, by turning a generation of young women into mass marketers without a care for what it is they are selling.

“Their model is built on creating the demand,” said Nuncio. “I feel like it is not even that someone like Fashion Nova is lying about who they are. They are actually creating [an] environment [where] people don’t care.”

In Fashion Nova’s flagship store in Panorama City Mall, the clothes on sale profit from messages of female empowerment. The brand promises that women can be as successful as NovaBabes like Cardi B. The rapper’s own fashion line sold out within hours. In the store, colourful tops proudly sport slogans such as “Equality” and “Independent Woman”, and yet Fashion Nova is a company owned and run by a man accused by garment workers’ representatives of profiting from clothes kept cheap by the exploitation of vulnerable women in his supply chain.

The customer service could be so poor that some fashion bloggers have accused the company of being scammers. Last April, Fashion Nova was fined \$9.3m to settle [charges](#) that the company failed to refund buyers whose orders failed to arrive on time, or were never dispatched at all. In January this year, Fashion Nova reached a [settlement](#) with the Federal Trade Commission over allegations it had suppressed negative reviews, and was ordered to pay \$4.2m. (The company continues to deny it had manipulated reviews.) However, none of this has stopped its boom in sales, or the queues of young women desperate for a Fashion Nova brand deal, or even just some free clothes. When it comes down to it, the company’s greatest success is as a dealer in hype.

*This is an edited extract from Get Rich or Lie Trying: Ambition and Deceit in the New Influencer Economy by Symeon Brown, published by Atlantic books on 3 March and available at [guardianbookshop.co.uk](#)*

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## Global Radio

# The rise of LBC's owner Global and how it is now poaching BBC stars

Emily Maitlis and Jon Sopel became the latest high-profile presenters to join the commercial radio giant



The pair will host a new podcast and a radio show for Global's LBC station.  
Photograph: Global/PA

*[Mark Sweeney](#) Media business correspondent*

*[@marksweney](#)*

Thu 24 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

Fifteen years ago a then 30-year-old Ashley Tabor-King sparked a British radio revolution striking the first of a series of deals totalling more than £600m that would ultimately create Europe's biggest commercially funded group, owner of stations from Capital and Heart to LBC and Classic FM.

Earlier this week, Tabor-King's Global once again flexed its financial muscle by [signing deals with BBC stars Emily Maitlis and Jon Sopel](#), who will join [former colleague Andrew Marr at LBC](#), reportedly doubling their salaries in the process.

The move is classic Global: spend big to get bigger by exploiting opportunity in the market, backed by a seemingly unlimited reservoir of cash bankrolled by its controlling shareholder – Tabor-King's father.

In the mid-noughties Tabor-King – who had worked at [Capital Radio](#) in the 1990s before setting up a music company where he worked with acts including Corinne Bailey Rae and The Wanted – spied a looming sea change in British radio.

The inexorable switch to digital radio would help level the playing field with the [BBC](#), which had dominated with the prime FM and AM spectrum, while consolidation among commercial players would give the scale needed to compete and take advantage of a future iPhone, smart speaker and podcast generation of listening.

“Daddy basically bought the company,” says one industry executive, referring to Tabor-King’s £375m deal to [buy the owner of Capital Radio in 2008](#), then the biggest commercial operator in the UK. “That doesn’t mean their strategy isn’t sound and well-executed, but it definitely helps having deep pockets though.”

Tabor-King, who changed his name on marrying his partner George King in 2019, is the son of Michael Tabor. Monaco-based Tabor has made a fortune estimated by the Sunday Times at more than £600m from a [combination of investments](#) in gambling, buying BetVictor in 2014, plus a string of thoroughbred racehorses.

In 2007, Global made its first move [buying Chrysalis Radio](#), home to Heart, Galaxy and LBC, for £170m. At the time the deal was reported to be [backed by Tabor and wealthy Irish businessmen including John Magnier and JP McManus](#), his fellow partners in the Coolmore Stud racing stable. Former

ITV chief executive Charles Allen, later Lord Allen of Kensington, assumed the role of chairman of Global, a position he still holds.

Five years later a final major deal, a [fiercely contested £70m bidding war for GMG Radio](#), then third-biggest player in the UK and part of the group that owns the Guardian, cemented Global's place as the biggest commercial player in British radio.

Global, which takes half the £700m spent on radio advertising annually in the UK, made £358m in revenues in the pre-pandemic year to the end of March 2020.

While operating profits hit £60m, the business continues to make significant losses at a pre-tax level. This is in part due to a structure whereby Global, which is ultimately incorporated in Jersey, is financed by £1.7bn loans from the Tabor family and banks.

“The group is primarily funded by debt and although both shareholder and bank loans have increased during the year, the group’s operations are cash generative,” the company said in its most recent annual financial filing to Companies House.

This financial freedom has allowed Global to aggressively invest and grow through good times and bad, under the group chief executive, Stephen Miron, who joined from the publisher of the Daily Mail in 2008.

Global has had the deep pockets to be able to strike a raft of deals to secure must-listen stars in recent years, including Kate Garraway, Amanda Holden, Moira Stuart, John Humphrys, Alexander Armstrong and Eddie Mair.

Maitlis, who secured the famous [Prince Andrew interview](#), will work alongside former North America editor Sopel to front the [new podcast for Global Player](#) and host a radio show together on LBC. They will work with [Dino Sofos](#), the founder and chief executive of the audio production company Persephonica, a former head of BBC news podcasts and the creator of Brexitcast, Newscast and Americast.

With 18 brands, including a growing number of extensions from Capital Dance and Smooth Country to Heart 80s, Global is able to commercialise 26m weekly listeners which account for 24% of all radio listening.

While the pandemic fuelled a precipitous decline in revenues as commuting by car ground to a halt, a key commercial radio audience, the industry bounced back rapidly as listening to radio and podcasts at home boomed.

Online listening, including via smart speakers, now accounts for 17% of all listening time. Digital listening, including DAB radio, represents 65% of all radio listening.

By the first quarter of last year, which proved to be the biggest ever for annual radio revenues at £718m according to the Radiocentre, Global's radio operation saw revenues climb 3% over pre-pandemic levels.

The company does not reveal details of the performance of podcasts, but points to significant success with originals including John Sweeney's Hunting Ghislaine, Rachel Johnson's Difficult Women and Vogue Williams' My Therapist Ghosted Me.

“Younger adults, especially the under-24s, are listening to much less radio overall than previously, and the sector will find it difficult to draw these people in as they get older,” says Gill Hind, a director at Enders Analysis. “Hence their investments in podcasts and streaming services.”

Four years ago Global made another audacious move to diversify and strengthen its overall media business by striking a number of deals for outdoor advertising companies including Exterion, which runs the £1.1bn contract for Transport for London including London Underground, the biggest of its kind in the world.

The sector was one of the worst-hit during the pandemic as cities effectively shut down but it is recovering rapidly, giving Global more than a third share of a £1bn-plus UK outdoor advertising market, and boosting the company's overall annual revenues well over £700m.

While the BBC faces having to find as much as £2bn in savings over the next six years as the government squeezes licence-fee income, occasional glimpses into the life of low-profile Tabor-King gives a stark insight into the differing financial fortunes the two radio giants find themselves.

As well as having held New Year's Eve parties at the family's Sunset Reef home in Barbados, reportedly attended in the past by Simon Cowell and Sir Philip Green, Tabor-King made headlines in 2017 when he was refused permission to knock together two flats in Knightsbridge to create a £200m penthouse flat.

Still, Global's 2,000 employees can take some solace that they weren't forgotten when Tabor-King was awarded an OBE for services to the media industry the same year, when he tweeted: "This one is for everyone @global".

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## Global development

# Catching the bug: are farmed insects about to take off in Africa?

Tasty, cheap, but often difficult to catch in the wild, this source of protein is increasingly being seen as a possible answer to food insecurity



Nsenene, or bush crickets, are just one of 2,100 known edible insects species, a quarter of which are consumed in Africa. Photograph: Eugénie Baccot

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[Emilie Filou](#)

Thu 24 Feb 2022 04.00 EST

The boarding of Uganda Airlines flight 446 from Entebbe to Dubai was momentarily disrupted at the end of last year when two of the passengers started hawking bush crickets in the aisles.

Their fellow travellers couldn't believe their luck: *nisenene* are a prized delicacy in Uganda, but despite November usually being peak season for the insects, there had been hardly any around.

The video from the plane went viral; there were grumblings about security breaches, but Uganda Airlines seemed sympathetic and spotted an opportunity to turn the crisis into an opportunity. "We understand that [nisenene] was not in plenty this season, hence the excitement. We are considering adding nisenene to our menu for regional and international flights on request," it said in a statement.



A video that went viral showing a man selling crickets on an airliner last November. Photograph: YouTube

Nsenene are just one of 2,100 known edible insect species, a quarter of which are consumed in [Africa](#). Most are highly prized – often costing more than beef or chicken by weight – and most are harvested from the wild.

Catching them is often difficult, they are seasonal and can be unavailable when most needed, said Dorte Verner, lead agriculture economist at the World Bank's food and agriculture global practice. They can also be over-harvested or contaminated with pesticides.

However, with rising food insecurity, safeguarding this nutritious source of protein has become critical. "In 2021, 21% of people in countries affected by fragility, conflict and violence did not have access to nutritious food," said Verner. "Also, food production per capita has been falling since 2014."

Farming the insects is one solution. A recent report, published by Verner and World Bank colleagues, on the [potential of hydroponics and insect farming](#) in Africa, found 849 farms in 10 of the 13 countries they surveyed. While still in its infancy – most farms were set up in the last decade – the industry has clear potential: not only would insects be available all year, it would

create jobs, help manage food waste, which is used as feed, and insect manure, or frass, could create fertilisers.

The World Bank has estimated that within a year, black soldier fly (BSF) farming could generate crude protein worth up to \$2.6bn (£1.9bn) and biofertilisers worth up to \$19.4bn. The process would recycle 200m tonnes of crop waste.



Bush crickets are fried at a stall in Uganda's capital, Kampala, during the rainy season. Photograph: Stephen Wandera/AP

Although the bulk of existing farms produce insects for human consumption, there has been growing interest in insects as animal feed. Demand has trebled in the last decade in Kenya alone, and feed manufacturers have been increasingly looking for alternatives to soya and fishmeal, which are plagued by volatile prices, variable quality and poor environmental records.

Research suggests that animals fed insect protein, notably BSF, achieved faster growth rates and better-quality meat than with soya or fishmeal. Production costs are relatively stable, and will go down as operations are scaled up, said Talash Huijbers, founder of InsectiPro, one of the largest BSF farms in Kenya. “With the pandemic, people are starting to appreciate the value of local protein production,” she said.

Shobhita Soor, head of Legendary Foods, a palm weevil farm in Ghana, has seen similar trends. Many of her customers want to eat “made in Ghana” products.

Soor’s ambition is to “deliver the nutrition of meat at the price point and sustainability of plant”, a mission that has led to a relentless search for efficiency gains. “Last year, we managed to reduce our costs of production by 40%. If we want to be as ubiquitous as chicken, it’s incumbent on us to do the R&D to continue to optimise our production.”

She is looking to raise \$5m this year to build her first large-scale plant, while InsectiPro is planning an \$11m expansion: it has already opened two more BSF facilities in Kenya and wants to expand in Uganda and Rwanda.



Charles Amonyu, 8, collecting flying ‘white ants’, or termites, to eat in Uganda. They are either fried or dried and mixed with peanuts. Photograph: Dan Chung/The Guardian

Only 16 species are farmed in Africa, but the International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology in Kenya has been looking at how to raise various insect species since 2014 and has trained thousands of would-be “entrepreneurs”.

Publications such as the World Bank report are vital to put insect protein on the radar of governments – insects do not appear in any national food strategy. Other large development finance institutions, such as the [International Finance Corporation](#) and the US Agency for International Development, are also looking into insect farming. Meanwhile, the World Bank is planning pilot investments in South Sudan, Malawi, Kenya and Zimbabwe.

“From the number of meeting requests I have received since the publication of the report, I can tell you that [people] are really interested,” said Verner.

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## 2022.02.24 - Coronavirus

- Live Covid: Hong Kong calls for medical staff from China as hospitals are overwhelmed
- Vaccines Sanofi and GSK seek approval for Covid-19 jab
- Six Nations Stay away from Twickenham if you have symptoms, pleads RFU
- US An ER doctor during Covid: ‘People walk in, throw their garbage at you, and walk out’

[Coronavirus live](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

# Covid: Iceland to lift all remaining curbs; coronavirus isolation rules end in England – as it happened

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## Business

# Sanofi and GSK seek approval for Covid-19 vaccine

The drugmakers hope to catch up with rivals after reporting positive results from late-stage clinical trials



The vaccine was delayed for various reasons, including an early dosing error during trials. Photograph: Joel Saget/AFP/Getty Images

*[Julia Kollewe](#)*

Wed 23 Feb 2022 12.26 EST

The French and British drugmakers Sanofi and GSK are ready to seek approval from regulators for their Covid-19 vaccine after reporting positive results from late-stage clinical trials.

The firms are hoping to catch up with rivals after falling far behind in the race to develop Covid-19 shots. [Their product was delayed](#) by an early

dosing error during trials, [initially disappointing results in older people](#) and other issues. It will be available as a two-dose vaccine and as a booster.

The companies will now file for approval from regulators, including the US Food and Drug Administration and the European Medicines Agency, while a rolling review with the UK regulator, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency, is already under way.

Sanofi developed the jab, while GSK, the world's biggest vaccine maker by sales, is supplying its adjuvant technology, to boost the body's immune response.

It relies on a conventional protein-based approach, compared with the newer mRNA technology used by Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna, which makes it easier to store and transport.

The companies said the phase 3 efficacy trials showed that two doses of the jab provided 100% efficacy against severe Covid-19 disease and hospitalisations; 75% efficacy against moderate or severe Covid-19 disease; and 57.9% efficacy against any symptomatic Covid-19 disease. They said the latter is in line with expected vaccine effectiveness given the emergence of several variants of concern, such as Omicron, and similar to other vaccines.

A separate trial showed that the jab boosted antibody levels against the virus 18 to 30 times across all age groups, when used in people who had been given two doses of other vaccines such as the Pfizer/BioNTech, Modern and Oxford/AstraZeneca shots.

Thomas Triomphe, the executive vice-president of Sanofi Vaccines, said: "The Sanofi-GSK vaccine demonstrates a universal ability to boost all platforms and across all ages.

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"We also observed robust efficacy of the vaccine as a primary series in today's challenging epidemiological environment. No other global phase 3

efficacy study has been undertaken during this period with so many variants of concern, including Omicron, and these efficacy data are similar to the recent clinical data from authorised vaccines.”

Roger Connor, the president of GSK’s vaccines arm, said: “We are confident that this vaccine can play an important role as we continue to address this pandemic and prepare for the post-pandemic period.”

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## Six Nations 2022

# Stay away from Twickenham if you have Covid symptoms, pleads RFU

- More than 80,000 expected for Wales game
- RFU urges fans to self-police to prevent new outbreak



The fixture two years ago was the last time Twickenham hosted a crowd in the Six Nations. Photograph: Tom Dwyer/Seconds Left/Shutterstock

*[Gerard Meagher](#)*

Wed 23 Feb 2022 14.21 EST

The [Rugby Football Union](#) is banking on supporters to self-police and stay away from Twickenham on Saturday if they have a confirmed case of Covid-19, or any symptoms, with no plans to check vaccine passes with restrictions in England to be lifted on Thursday.

The match on Saturday will be the first major international sporting event in England since restrictions were lifted with more than 80,000 supporters due at Twickenham. It will also be the first [Six Nations](#) match at Twickenham at full capacity since the same fixture two years ago, which took place just days before the UK was plunged into its first lockdown and with England's subsequent trip to Italy already postponed.

Any fears around the fixture on Saturday will be heightened by the fact that England's victory against South Africa in November – the last Test to take place at Twickenham – was initially highlighted as a possible epicentre for the UK's Omicron outbreak and subsequent rise in cases.

During the autumn, the RFU conducted spot-checks for Covid vaccine passes – which all spectators were required to have – but from Thursday, the government has decreed that anyone with a confirmed case of Covid-19 in England is no longer legally required to self-isolate. The government continues to advise that anyone with a positive case stays at home but in the absence of a legal requirement, that advice could effectively be ignored.

An RFU spokesperson said: “With the lifting of government restrictions, we will not be carrying out mandatory NHS covid pass checks. However, we expect anyone with a confirmed case of covid or with covid symptoms to protect others and not attend the game.”

The RFU's guidance for supporters also includes wearing a cloth face covering at all times as well as following good hygiene practices at all times in line with the latest government and public health guidance. Supporters with symptoms, or a positive covid case, will be able to sell their tickets via the RFU's exchange programme until 5pm on Friday.

Meanwhile, the England squad will still be subject to existing Covid protocols for the remainder of the competition despite the lifting of restrictions. During the championship the Six Nations organisers are responsible for introducing uniform protocols and given different competing countries have different levels of restrictions it is not seen as viable to relax the measures imposed on Eddie Jones's squad.

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## My life as an ER doctor during Covid: ‘People walk in, throw their garbage at you, and walk out’



‘Would the officer have been so nonchalant if the same man had threatened to terrorize a school or an airport? Why should our lives matter less?’  
Illustration: Jorge Cuadal Calle/The Guardian

As the pandemic has worn on, patients are angry, and threats to healthcare workers are on the rise. I've seen it first-hand

*Yoojin Na*

Thu 24 Feb 2022 04.00 EST

When I walked into work last October, the ER was in its usual state of organized chaos, with EMTs lined up in the ambulance bay and patients already crowding the hallways.

Not long after I sat down at my desk, I heard a commotion. I turned my head towards the noise and caught a glance of a youngish, medium-statured man. He was yelling obscenities and dragging his feet as security guards led him to the exit.

Around midnight, I overheard the head nurse pleading on the phone, “You *really* can’t do anything? We need an officer parked in front of the ER!”

The same man had called the hospital’s operator and made threats to return with a gun.

I called the police myself and did my best to exude the confidence of a doctor in charge, but their answer remained the same. The officer explained they had checked the man’s apartment for firearms, but that was about all he could do. When I insisted that the police either send us reinforcements or keep an eye on the would-be shooter, the officer said flatly, “he said he was sorry.”

I felt dumbstruck. Would the officer have been so nonchalant if the same man had threatened to terrorize a school or an airport? Why should our lives matter less? What about our patients?

I immediately discharged everyone who was well enough to go home and gathered my nurses for a huddle.

“When he comes, we will only have a couple of minutes. The patients who can walk, we take with us. The ones who can’t, we close their doors and throw cart, stretcher, whatever we can find in front. We have to get to safety before he breaks into the main ER. Don’t dally,” I said.

“He left through the ambulance bay, so he knows it’s there,” one of the nurses chimed. She was right. The last thing I’d want was to come face-to-face with the shooter while trying to make my way out.

“What about the med room?” I asked.

“No, the door has glass. He can just shoot through it,” another nurse retorted.

“Right! Then, how do we get out?”

“The back door,” they said in unison.

This huddle was our first time gathering to discuss the matters of *our* life and death, yet it did not feel spur-of-the-moment. All of us have been thinking about this exact scenario for months.

I first noticed the shift about a year ago. Our New York state patients were accustomed to modern facilities and efficiency, and they did not always adjust well to the new realities of the pandemic. Some dealt with their disappointment by pacing, yelling, and cursing until they got their way. Others with more clout called administrators they had on their speed-dial.

Gillian Schmitz, the president of the American College of Emergency Physicians, had a similar experience in July 2018. She was working an overnight shift at First Choice ER in Texas when a man came in at two o’clock in the morning with a strange request. He wanted to see the cat scanner and tour the facility.

Tensions came to head in September when a patient returned to our ER with rocks from the hospital garden

She suspected that he might be looking for narcotics and other pharmaceuticals on site. The man left but then pulled out a gun outside the facility and shot a person across the street. “I was terrified that he was gonna come right back,” said Schmitz.

When the police arrived 30 minutes later, they told her: “Well, we can’t stay here all night. We don’t know where this guy is. He might come back, but he might not. We’ve got other people to take care of.” Thankfully, the shooter did not return. “It is sort of an unsaid rule,” Schmitz says. “People think that this is part of our job, that part of being frontline providers is to bear the brunt of this [violence].”

Such incidents have been on the rise in the past decade, but even more so since the pandemic. Last year, when 7,411 adults were surveyed, it transpired that healthcare workers were [50% more likely](#) than others to have been harassed, bullied, or hurt as a result of Covid-19. “Physicians are unfortunately fighting a two-front war,” [noted](#) Susan R Bailey, the 175th president of the American Medical Association.

In response, a hospital in Missouri [planned](#) to distribute 300 panic buttons to its staff. Another hospital in Ohio implemented [Code SOS](#), an ER protocol to quickly de-escalate when patients begin showing signs of agitation.

Lawmakers, too, tried to address this problem. In April, the US House of Representatives passed [HR 1195](#) – the Workplace Violence Prevention for Healthcare and Social Service Workers Act – but the changes may not be coming fast enough to stop the exodus of burned-out healthcare workers.

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I rarely worried about my physical safety until an incident over the summer. During a night shift, I found one of our nurses visibly upset. When I asked her what happened, she told me that a patient pulled out a knife and tried to attack her.

Triage, once a routine process to assess the patient’s acuity, evolved into a dangerous task since it’s come to include questions about Covid-19 symptoms, exposure, and vaccination. Nurses now had to brace themselves for unpredictable reactions.

“Tensions are higher. People’s fuses are a lot shorter. The pandemic definitely accelerated that,” Schmitz noted. “It’s like the perfect storm when you combine increased wait times with politicization of everything.”

Tensions finally came to head in September when a disgruntled patient returned to our ER with rocks gathered from the hospital garden. The first one broke through the glass of our front entrance. He then threw the rest directly at staff members manning the front desk. He then targeted the entrance to the main ER. To prevent him from charging through, one of the doctors used his body as a shield against the door. The police eventually arrived and arrested him, but the man returned two weeks later and made additional threats.

I learned such issues extend beyond my workplace when I spoke to Claire, an ER nurse at a large academic center in Manhattan. I showed up at her apartment in late November and was surprised to find her in a splint. She explained a patient grabbed her while she was trying to attempt an IV. She could not yet move or bear weight without pain.

The most recent National Nurses United survey, published in September 2021, showed that Claire isn’t alone. Nearly a third of nurses (31%) reported that workplace violence recently increased. Claire and I agree some root causes are more obvious than others. With multiple waves of Covid, patients were seeking medical care in unprecedented numbers while restrictive visitor policies, crowded spaces, and increased staff turnover continued. Moreover, misinformation about the virus, fear of catching Covid in hospitals, and limited mental health resources have only intensified patients’ distrust of the healthcare systems.

But there were aspects of the public’s misplaced anger that we could not quite comprehend.

“People will walk into the ER, throw their garbage at you, and walk out. One nurse got dog poop thrown at her. They’ll just walk up to you, say ‘F you,’ and walk out. People just don’t understand. The homeless or the untreated mental health patients that are walking around with schizophrenia are my favorite ‘violent patients’ because they don’t have insight or

capacity. Worse are entitled patients who come in and treat you like you're not human."

Nearly a third of nurses reported that workplace violence recently increased

Even with her injury, Claire tried to return to work the next day; she knew her colleagues were already stretched thin. She asked her supervisor to assign her to a less physically demanding role, but her supervisor refused. She then had to navigate bureaucratic red-tape and passive-aggressive emails from risk management in order to report what happened.

Claire's experience is hardly unique. Many institutions, reliant on patient satisfaction metrics for reimbursement from Medicare, tout the "[customer is always right" mentality](#), and administrators discourage staff from reporting incidents of violence or harassment. A [2019 brief](#) from the American Nurses Association cites "fear of being accused of inadequate performance or of being blamed for the incident, and fear of retaliation by the offender and or employer" as one of the causes of under-reporting.

At Claire's year-end review, she received average marks despite her meeting and exceeding expectations. When she inquired as to why, her managers explained that everyone, including all of her colleagues who have been working overtime, received the same marks.

It then all made sense: average reviews meant the hospital did not have to pay out any merit-based bonuses. Claire left her job shortly after.

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Congressman Joe Courtney, one of the politicians behind HR 1195, continues to fight for legislative change because of men like Eugene Sausse. In 2019, Courtney received a text from his staff. Sausse, a staunch Republican and conservative, had driven straight from Louisiana to show up unexpectedly at the congressman's Capitol Hill office. He had come all that way to discuss what happened to his sister.

Lynne Sausse Truxillo worked as a nurse at Baton Rouge General Mid City Hospital when Jessie Guillory, a behavioral health patient, attacked her

coworker. When Truxillo intervened, Guillory grabbed her neck and struck her head on the desk. She died five days later from complications from her injuries.

“Sausse was determined not to let this experience just slide,” Courtney recalled. “He really wanted something to change.”

Stories like Lynne’s were not new to the congressman. They’d come to him at home over the dinner table as his wife, a pediatric nurse practitioner, recounted her day. He sensed early on that violence against healthcare workers was a serious issue, but he could not rely on anecdotes to propose legislation. He needed data, which he did not have, since there were no central entities that kept track of incidences.

When he finally received national data in 2016, his concerns were confirmed. The rates of violence against healthcare workers were 12 times higher than rates for the overall workforce, while 70% of nonfatal workplace assaults in 2016 occurred in the healthcare and social assistance sectors. More alarmingly, these numbers were gross underestimates given that healthcare workers only reported their [injury about 7 to 42% of the time](#).

National guidelines for hospitals do exist, but employers aren’t required to implement workplace violence prevention programs.

“We are never going to get real change without really putting something into law and establishing an enforceable standard,” Courtney said. “That’s what the bill seeks to do.”

HR 1195 passed in the House last April and is waiting to go to vote in the Senate, but groups like American Hospital Association are actively opposing it. In a letter sent to Courtney on March 23, 2021, vice president Thomas P Nickels cites “prohibitive cost” to “private entities” as a cause for objection.

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After the waiting-room attack in September, administrators at my hospital called multiple mandatory meetings about safety. Most of these meetings targeted staff behavior: was the assailant jostled awake too roughly? Did we personally hand him his discharge papers?

Two days after the shooter threat, we had another meeting, and one of my supervisors once again focused on staff behavior. “He was provoked,” he said multiple times. We had to do better because “society had failed him”.

Though I admired his intentions, I felt he wasn’t seeing the whole picture. After much hesitation, I forced myself to interject. “These things happen even if we do everything perfectly,” I finally blurted out.

The following month, another incident proved my point when a patient’s family member punched a staff member out of the blue. Witnesses agreed the assault was unprovoked.

After that, changes did come, albeit slowly. Over the next several weeks, physical reinforcements were made to the most vulnerable areas of our ER, staff re-trained, security added, a task force formed, and stones removed from the gardens.

With these improvements in place, we have not had another major event. Still, violence, burnout, and staff shortages continue to feed into each other, and sometimes one can observe the whole cycle play out in the microcosm of a single interaction.

On Christmas Eve, people swarmed the ER to receive their clean bill of health. It meant we saw double the number of patients with fewer than usual staff. At 7.05pm, I spotted one of our veteran nurses looking frantically for a Covid swab, which was becoming increasingly scarce. When she found one, she approached a large middle-aged man who had been pacing the hallways.

But before she could perform the test, he stomped his feet and began yelling.

“You know how long I’ve been waiting!” he dug into her. “This is ridiculous!”

The nurse told him calmly: “My shift ended. I was staying late to help you, but I’m gonna go home now.”

The patient’s tone immediately softened. “I’m sorry! Please, don’t go. Please do my swab!”

But her mind was made up. She was going home, and I wouldn't have blamed her if she never came back.

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## 2022.02.24 - Opinion

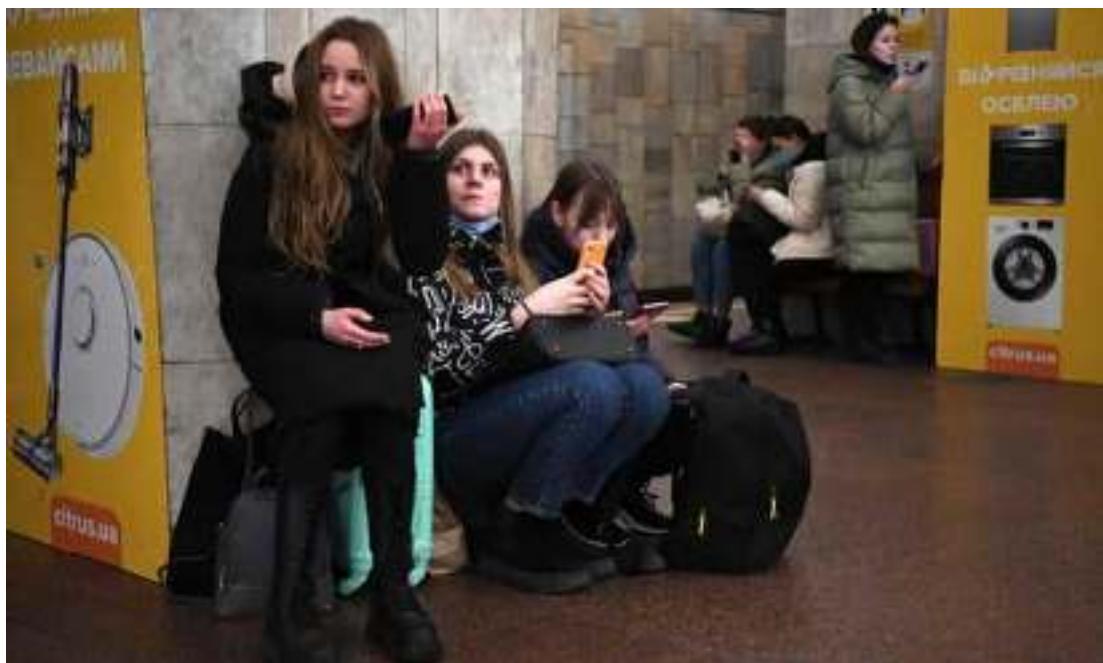
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## OpinionUkraine

# I'm in Kyiv and awake at the darkest hour – as Putin's bombs rain down

[Nataliya Gumenyuk](#)

I could not accept the idea of a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, but here I am as the airstrikes begin and Russia invades us



Civilians sheltering in a metro station in Kyiv, Ukraine, 24 February 2022.  
Photograph: Daniel Leal/AFP/Getty Images

Thu 24 Feb 2022 04.07 EST

A famous Russian independent journalist called me for a quote after [Russia launched airstrikes](#) all over Ukraine. We have never met but she started begging for forgiveness for what her country is doing and may do to mine. Both of us are experienced reporters and used to covering hard stories and conflicts. We talked, and we cried.

So it begins: 5am. Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odessa, and all along the 2,000km-long Russian-Ukrainian border.

I am in touch with friends and colleagues all over the country who are awake and hearing the explosions. A possible attack on 24 February was mentioned by the government before. A few hours before, in the middle of the night, my husband – also a journalist, but not a war correspondent – decided to drive to the office of a friend who is on duty to pick up bulletproof vests “before it starts”.

What, where? I have reported on the war before, so I am used to the sound of shelling. I know that a loud bang, a missile, a military explosion can be heard from far away.

While trying to identify places and directions, it looked as if Russia was hitting military targets and military airports, which Ukraine’s president later confirmed. He also said Ukrainian air defence was working. Prior to this morning’s full attack, I heard from the military about a particular object to be targeted in Kramatorsk and near Kharkiv if things happen. This knowledge calmed me down. It led me to believe the army knew what to expect.

I was one of those who until the very last moment could not accept the notion of a full-scale invasion with airstrikes on our major towns. [Putin’s speech](#) was sickening, but still there was a logical, if fictional, justification for a limited Russian operation. The full-scale attack on Ukraine destroys even that.

I am talking to people, doing interviews, but in between I am packing and drawing water into buckets – just in case. I said to my husband, who has never been to war, do not go out on the balcony. He jokes: finally he will be allowed to smoke inside.

I run a media organisation, I am not supposed to do breaking news. But now I have to. It’s my choice but feels like a duty. I received messages from friends abroad, from as far away as Chile, asking should I really keep reporting. Just a day before I cancelled a prestigious fellowship in Vienna to

go to the eastern frontline instead. I covered the conflict there for eight years. For me, there is only one place to be.

I read messages and receive news that other towns are under assault, and slowly more clarity emerges. Some of the news about Russian marines in Odessa turned out to be untrue. The Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, who a few hours earlier recorded an [emotional speech](#) to Russian citizens urging them to stop the war, issued a new statement. He made a reference to a famous anti-military song from the second world war: “Do Russians Want War?”, and added, “The answer is on you”.

In the new one-minute statement he urged us to stay at home, don’t rush, but be strong.

At 6.30am, in between everything, I send a message to the people with whom we should have gathered for an event today – human rights defenders, some MPs and officials. It’s a one-word message: “cancelled”. Each of them is awake and we give and offer support. I feel very emotional.

We hear messages of possible air attacks. Yet the rest of the city remains calm. We hear the sound of police, but not military sirens.

The parochial continues. Journalists write that the subway still works, while many decide to drive to the western part of the country. The Ukrainian railways inform us that trains going west are running.

I told my Russian journalist friend about our mood. For years I have been reluctant to compare any dictator to Hitler, or any war to the second world war. The comparison, to me, seemed exaggerated, even vulgar.

But what other analogy is there? With no reason, in an act of pure madness, an old-fashioned air assault has been inflicted on a neighbouring country.

I said that to my Russian colleague, and tried very hard not to show how my voice was trembling. She asked for forgiveness again.

There is a famous phrase, “4am Kyiv is bombed”. Every Ukrainian and Russian kid knows it. That’s how the announcement of the German bombardment of Kyiv in 1941 sounded.

And here we are: 24 February, 5am Kyiv is bombed by Russia.

I am happy to hang up my call. I do not want my fellow journalist to hear me crying. And then my sister calls. I knew she would, it's me the family and my mother turn to when there is trouble or they need to know what is going on.

For two-and-a-half hours from the start of the invasion, they were sleeping. I didn't dare call them. I really didn't want to. I wanted to prolong the peace for them, if only for a few hours.

- Nataliya Gumenyuk is a Ukrainian journalist specialising in foreign affairs and conflict reporting and author of *Lost Island: Tales from the Occupied Crimea*
- Join a panel of journalists, hosted by Michael Safi, for a livestreamed event on the Russia-Ukraine crisis. On Thursday 3 March, 8pm GMT | 9pm CET | 12pm PST | 3pm EST. Book tickets [here](#)

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## OpinionCouriers/delivery industry

# I have one question for delivery drivers – do you need to use my toilet?

[Adrian Chiles](#)



It can be hard for couriers to find a place to spend a penny – but it is harder still to offer your own loo without it sounding strange



When nature knocks ... (Posed by a model.) Photograph: Filippo Bacci/Getty Images

Thu 24 Feb 2022 02.00 EST

I saw a young woman recently lugging empty crates into the back of her supermarket delivery van. It was parked some distance from the entrance of the block where I live. I asked her what the job was like. She said she had not been doing it long and it wasn't too bad apart from all the lifting, with which she was struggling.

I've always thought the job must be a lot easier outside towns and cities, where parking tends to be tricky. "That's true," she said. "But the biggest problem I have, whatever route I'm on, is finding somewhere to go to the toilet. By the time I've found a toilet to use, I've got behind on my drops and I get into trouble."

Trying to be helpful, I asked if she had thought about [using a Shewee](#), which I had heard come in useful for some women at festivals and whatnot. She seemed quite interested and asked me exactly how they worked. I explained that the operational details of such devices were obviously outside my lived experience. She laughed and went on her way.

I rarely get supermarket deliveries, but, like most of us, have taken items from countless delivery people. Invariably, they seem stressed out, behind schedule and, I now realise, are quite possibly dying for a wee. How sad, when every delivery they make is to a property with at least one toilet.

Yesterday, something came for me mid-afternoon. I opened the door to allow a young chap to hand it over. As he turned to go, I said: “Excuse me, would you, erm, like to use my, er …” I hesitated, suddenly aware how absurd this was going to sound. He looked wary. “Toilet?” I blurted out. Now he looked alarmed. “No, you’re OK,” he said, hurrying away. I shut the door, feeling idiotic. I still think I’m on to something here, but I’m not sure how to take the idea any further without frightening the life out of any more delivery workers.

Adrian Chiles is a broadcaster, writer and Guardian columnist

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## Martin Rowson on Russian donors to the Tory party — cartoon

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## OpinionSyria

# The west stood back and watched in Syria – it must not do the same in Ukraine

[Hamish de Bretton-Gordon](#)

It's time for the US and its allies to show their steel in the face of Putin's aggression. We have learned that nothing else will work



‘Bashar al-Assad has continued to bomb hospitals and schools in a macabre, medieval-style scorched-earth policy.’ The aftermath of regime bombing in Termanin, north of Idlib, Syria, 22 February. Photograph: Moawia Atrash/Zuma Press Wire/REX/Shutterstock

Thu 24 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

The Syria crisis continues unnoticed. It holds key lessons for the west about Putin yet it has gone virtually unnoticed by the rest of the world. [War crimes](#)

and crimes against humanity continue in the Russian-sponsored dictatorship, even as [some misguided leaders](#) want to usher Bashar al-Assad, the architect of these crimes, back into acceptable society.

We can rest assured that the president of [Ukraine](#), Volodymyr Zelenskiy, unlike Assad, is not welcoming Putin with open arms. But in responding to the Ukraine emergency, there are lessons the west can and should learn from the situation in Syria.

Since the UN removed Syria's [declared chemical weapons](#) stockpile in 2014, Assad has continued to bomb hospitals and schools, and burn villages to the ground in a macabre, medieval-style scorched-earth policy. Mercifully, we have not seen chemical weapons used since April 2019, but Syria today is a Russian state in all but name, and Assad a puppet dictator with strings very clearly tugged from Moscow. Idlib, a province in northwest Syria, is the only region still free of the tyranny, but with millions of malnourished souls trapped there, and Assad [throwing in incendiary devices](#) to smoke them out as you would vermin, it still resembles hell on earth. Even the UN has turned its back on Idlib, [giving aid to Assad and his wife](#) to distribute as they see fit.

Syria now represents a major Russian and Iranian presence on the edge of Europe; and if Ukraine also falls, the balance of power will very much shift eastwards. With too many European countries [reliant on Russian gas](#), the current global instability began in Damascus. An emboldened Russia buoyed up by high oil prices seems much more willing to face off with Nato than it did a few years ago, when its antiquated military was no match for western tanks. While the rest of us have cut our militaries to the bone, relying on electronics and space to fight the next war, Russia has modernised its armoured might, now on show around Ukraine – there is a unique quality in mass and heavy armour, which no cyberwarrior is going to vaporise.

Syria shows what happens when you turn a blind eye and are too heavily influenced by peaceniks. Those of us involved in interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan over the past 30 years have our issues with overstepping the mark in those places, but we look at [Syria](#) and know we should have done

better. That knowledge should inform our response to Putin's aggression now.

It is clear when discussing Syria with Syrians from Idlib and regime-held areas that everybody has suffered. At least those in Idlib are getting support through Turkey, and there are some innovative projects being funded by European countries. Many hospitals and clinics in Idlib now have solar power to run their generators and surgical theatres, as there is no fuel and the power network was destroyed years ago. There is an electric car, also powered by solar energy, distributing medicines and Covid vaccines – when they are occasionally available – around Idlib. In a remarkable twist that would only happen in war, some of these Syrian medics who have developed a viable medical system under the most trying and demanding circumstances are now offering to help in Afghanistan.

The Syrian people have shown resilience and innovation beyond compare, even as they have been let down again and again. First, the west did not intervene when the regime started attacking its own people. Then, in response to chemical weapon use, illegal under every rule of war, the US declared a red line on their use – but failed to act when that line was crossed. And finally, we stood by as Russia and Iran muscled their way across Syria to create a forward operation base on our doorstep.

Our leaders will do well to remember this and be strong and resilient to protect Ukraine. I cannot think that a few sanctions on a few banks and billionaires is going to perturb Putin. He only understands strength and power – it's time to show our steel.

- Hamish de Bretton-Gordon is a chemical weapons expert, fellow of Magdalene College, Cambridge and an adviser to the Union of Syrian Medical Charities
  - Join a panel of journalists, hosted by Michael Safi, for a livestreamed event on the Russia-Ukraine crisis. On Thursday 3 March, 8pm GMT | 9pm CET | 12pm PST | 3pm EST. Book tickets [here](#)
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## QAnon

# Belief in QAnon has strengthened in US since Trump was voted out, study finds

Surveys by the Public Religion Research Institute reveal QAnon believers increased to 17% in September from 14% in March



Supporters of Donald Trump wearing QAnon t-shirts wait in line before a campaign rally. Photograph: Sean Rayford/Getty Images

*[David Smith](#) in Washington*

*[@smithinamerica](#)*

Thu 24 Feb 2022 00.01 EST

The QAnon conspiracy myth movement continues to thrive in the US and has even strengthened more than a year after [Donald Trump](#) left the White House, according to the largest ever study of its followers.

Some 22% of Americans believe that a “storm” is coming, 18% think violence might be necessary to save the country and 16% hold that the government, media and financial worlds are controlled by Satan-worshipping pedophiles, according to four surveys carried out last year by the [Public Religion Research Institute \(PRRI\)](#) think tank.

Each of these baseless and bizarre views is a core tenet of QAnon, [an antisemitic internet conspiracy theory](#) which held that Trump was waging a secret battle against a cabal of pedophiles and its “deep state” collaborators – a “storm” that would sweep them out of power.

Yet despite his election defeat by Joe Biden, major social media platforms banning QAnon activity and the [disappearance of its leader, “Q”](#), the movement has not gone away. If anything, it has strengthened.

“The share of [QAnon](#) believers has increased slightly through 2021,” the report by the PRRI states. “In March, 14% of Americans were QAnon believers, compared to 16% in July, 17% in September, and 17% in October.

“The share of QAnon doubters has remained relatively steady (46% in March, 49% in July, 48% in September, and 49% in October), while the share of QAnon rejecters has decreased slightly from 40% in March to 35% in July, 35% in September, and 34% in October.”

These findings are based on 19,399 respondents from four surveys designed and conducted by the PRRI during 2021, using random samples of adults in all 50 states.

[Natalie Jackson](#), research lead, said: “People who are susceptible to believing in these conspiracy theories are found in every demographic. It’s not just restricted to Republicans or the uneducated or those who are in a specific age group. It’s distributed throughout.

“Of course, there are some groups that are more prevalent than others, like there are many more [Republicans](#) than Democrats, but we do find that people in every demographic find these wild conspiracies believable.”

These are people who believe that their culture is under attack, their way of life is under attack ... Trump was supposed to be their leader.

*Natalie Jackson*

Among the discernible patterns, about one in five QAnon believers identify as white evangelical Protestants, and QAnon believers are significantly less likely than all Americans to have college degrees.

Media consumption is the strongest independent predictor of being a QAnon believer. Americans who most trust rightwing news outlets such as the [One America News Network](#) and Newsmax are nearly five times more likely than those who most trust mainstream news to be QAnon believers. Those who most trust Fox News are about twice as likely as those who trust mainstream news to be QAnon believers.

They generally have positive views of the Republican party and negative views of Democrats, with 68% agreeing in the October survey that “the Democratic Party has been taken over by socialists”.

Some 26% of QAnon believers have a favorable view of Biden while 69% have unfavorable views of him. About 63% have a favorable opinion of Trump but 31% have an unfavorable view of the former president who once claimed that [QAnon followers “love our country”](#) and “like me very much”.

Seven in 10 QAnon believers agree with [the false statement that the 2020 election was stolen from Trump](#), including just under half who completely agree. These individuals are also most likely to blame leftwing groups such as antifa for the US Capitol insurrection on 6 January 2021 ([there is no organized antifa organization](#)).

Jackson said: “These are people who believe that their culture is under attack, their way of life is under attack, so a lot of them do align with the Trump philosophies. According to those theories, Trump was supposed to be their leader.

“One of the things that’s somewhat impressive is even with Trump out of power, and the fact that January 6 was not ‘the storm’ that they thought it

might be, these beliefs have persisted.”

Around eight in 10 QAnon believers agree with the statement that America is in danger of losing its culture and identity. More than seven in 10 say the values of Islam are at odds with American values and way of life, or that the American way of life needs to be protected from foreign influence.

And 32% of QAnon believers agree with the statement that “the idea of America where most people are not white bothers me”.

In late 2021, about one in 10 Americans (9%) agreed it might be necessary to commit an act of violence to save the country. QAnon believers (17%) and QAnon doubters (11%) were more likely than QAnon rejecters (4%) to share this view.

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## Donald Trump

# Key inquiry into Trump's finances in jeopardy as two prosecutors resign

Carey Dunne and Mark Pomerantz of the Manhattan district attorney's office quit amid signs that the move on Trump is stalling



Donald Trump at the White House on 30 April 2020. Photograph: REX/Shutterstock

*[Ed Pilkington](#) in New York*

*[@edpilkington](#)*

Wed 23 Feb 2022 17.14 EST

One of the most aggressive criminal investigations against [Donald Trump](#) appears to be running into the sand after the two leading prosecutors in the Manhattan district attorney's office investigating the former president's finances resigned.

The inquiry by Manhattan prosecutors into the operations of Trump and the Trump Organization has been among the most dangerous of the [many legal perils](#) facing him. The investigation, which began in August 2018 under the former district attorney Cyrus Vance and continued under incumbent Alvin Bragg, has dug ever deeper into alleged discrepancies in the value of the family's assets in an effort to show a pattern of fraudulent behavior.

[According to the New York Times](#), the two top prosecutors on the case, Carey Dunne and Mark Pomerantz, quit the proceedings amid signs that the move on Trump is stalling as it reaches a make-or-break moment.

The Manhattan district attorney's office confirmed to the Guardian that Dunne and Pomerantz had resigned. They said in a statement that they were "grateful for their service".

The statement also insisted that the investigation into Trump finances was "ongoing".

The newspaper reports that a grand jury convened under the Manhattan investigation as the first step towards indicting the former president has gone silent for the past month, with no witnesses called before it.

Anonymous sources told the Times that Bragg, who took over the investigation when he began as DA in January, had indicated that he was uncertain about taking the case to the next level.

Whatever Bragg decides to do in the coming days and weeks, it is clear that his office has been under mounting pressure recently as the inquiry reached a critical stage. Prosecutors were aware that the clock is running down as the present grand jury's term comes to an end in April.

It was always going to be a tough call whether or not to pursue Trump all the way to court. As a criminal proceeding, the standard of proof is high – not only would Trump have to be found guilty "beyond a reasonable doubt" but prosecutors would have to show that he willfully committed the crime – hard to do in cases of alleged financial fraud.

Should the criminal investigation of Trump and his family business collapse, that still leaves the civil investigation that is being conducted by the [New York](#) state attorney general, Letitia James. For several months the two cases have been run in tandem, with the prosecutorial teams working closely together.

In January James [opened a window](#) on what the two teams of prosecutors had come up with when she alleged that Trump and his family business had “falsely and fraudulently” valued multiple assets. They included golf clubs, hotels and real estate holdings which James alleged were either inflated in value to attract loans or undervalued to reduce the company’s tax burden.

Trump and his lawyers have consistently denied any wrongdoing, and decried the parallel probes against him as a politically motivated witch-hunt. Both Bragg and James are Democrats, while Trump arguably remains effective leader of the Republican party.

The news that the criminal investigation might be running into difficulties is the first piece of potentially good news for Trump in several weeks relating to the many legal threats he is facing. In recent days he has been battered by a succession of dire developments on multiple fronts.

Last week his longtime accounting firm [broke off relations](#) with the Trump Organization saying that a decade of financial statements it had approved were no longer reliable. Days later a New York judge [ruled](#) that Trump and two of his children – Donald Jr and Ivanka – had to testify under subpoena in the James investigation.

With regard to on-going investigations into his role in the insurrection at the US Capitol on January 6, which are also gathering pace, the US supreme court delivered Trump a blow last month. [It allowed](#) White House documents which Trump had been trying to block to be turned over to the House committee investigating the events of that day.

In addition to the James investigation, Trump faces several other potentially serious legal actions. He is being sued for defamation by the journalist E Jean Carroll who has alleged that he sexually attacked her in the 1990s; a

federal judge this week sounded dismissive of attempts by Trump's legal team to counter-sue Carroll.

The former president is also the subject of a grand jury in Georgia which is looking into whether he criminally violated election laws when he urged the state's chief elections administrator to "find" him 11,780 – one more than would have secured him victory.

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## Russia

# Russia-backed hackers behind powerful new malware, UK and US say

Report comes as Ukraine faces cyber-attack and allies brace for state-sponsored hacks

- [Russia-Ukraine invasion latest news: follow live updates](#)



Ukrainian people and supporters protest over the Russian threat of invasion outside the Russian embassy in London. Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian

*[Kari Paul](#) and [Dan Milmo](#)*

Thu 24 Feb 2022 09.55 EST

A cyber report published by intelligence agencies in the UK and US on Wednesday has attributed insidious new malware to a notorious Russia-

backed hacking group.

The findings come as Russia launches an invasion of [Ukraine](#).

The joint research was published by the National Cyber Security Centre in the UK and US agencies including the National Security Agency. It warned that a Russian state-backed hacker group known as Sandworm had developed a new type of malware called Cyclops Blink, which targets firewall devices made by the manufacturer Watchguard to protect computers against hacks.

The sophisticated virus can withstand typical remedies including reboots, the report said. The findings come as the UK and US, allies to Ukraine, are on high alert for Russian state-sponsored hacks. The agencies added that their statement was a “routine advisory” not directly linked to the situation in Ukraine.

However, the US cybersecurity firm Mandiant said the announcement was a reminder of the damage that could be inflicted by Sandworm, which has been blamed for the [devastating NotPetya attack](#) on Ukraine in 2017. John Hultquist, a vice-president at Mandiant Threat Intelligence, said Sandworm remained a “capable and clever” adversary.

“In light of the crisis in Ukraine we are very concerned about this actor, who has surpassed all others we track in terms of the aggressive cyber-attacks and information operations they have conducted,” he said. “No other Russian actor has been so brazen and successful in disrupting critical infrastructure in Ukraine and elsewhere.”

Ukraine has suffered [a string of cyber-attacks](#) that Kyiv has blamed on Russia. Moscow, which is caught up in a mounting confrontation with the west over Ukraine, has denied any involvement.

[Wednesday](#) saw a massive distributed denial of service (DDoS) attack that targeted websites of Ukraine’s government and banks.

“At about 4pm, another mass DDoS attack on our state began. We have relevant data from a number of banks,” said Mykhailo Fedorov, minister of digital transformation, adding that the parliament website was also hit.

Ukrainian authorities said this week they had seen online warnings that hackers were preparing to launch major attacks on government agencies, banks and the defense sector.

Wednesday’s hack was consistent with the country’s tactics to distract and disrupt adversaries while “providing a level of plausible deniability”, said Rick Holland, chief information security officer at the cybersecurity firm [Digital Shadows](#).

“Russia didn’t just decide to invade Ukraine this week,” he said. “Military planners have prepared for this campaign years in advance. Disinformation, false flags, DDoS attacks, and destructive wiper malware are a part of Russian military doctrine; the battle plans have been drawn up and are now being executed.”

The White House said on Wednesday that it was in touch with Ukrainian authorities about their cybersecurity needs, in the wake of the fresh cyber-attack, which the US government has not yet attributed.

“We are in conversations with Ukraine regarding their cyber-related needs including as recently as today and we’re going to move with urgency to assess the nature and extent of this, what steps need to be taken, and therefore a response,” the White House press secretary, Jen Psaki, said.

*Reuters contributed reporting*

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## Seascape: the state of our oceansDolphins

# **Dolphins hit by Deepwater Horizon spill at risk from new drilling and river plan**

Up to 45% of Barataria Bay's dolphins died after 2010. Now they face the threat of new drilling and a Mississippi River scheme



A dolphin in Barataria Bay after the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010. The population has been badly affected by lung disease since the disaster.  
Photograph: Charlie Neibergall/AP

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*Kurt F de Swaaf*

Thu 24 Feb 2022 02.45 EST

Nearly 80% of dolphins exposed to oil in the Deepwater Horizon disaster remain badly affected nearly 12 years later, according to new research, even as the Biden administration continues to approve leases for oil and gas drilling in the Gulf of Mexico.

Scientists looked at the long-term impact of the oil spill on bottlenose dolphins living in Barataria Bay, near New Orleans.

The lagoon off the Louisiana coast was heavily polluted by oil, which killed scores of dolphins directly or within months, and their population is now slightly over half of what it was.



Pelicans nesting in Barataria Bay after the 2010 disaster, which halved the dolphin population. Photograph: Gerald Herbert/AP

The surviving dolphins did not escape ill effects, however, according to the [peer-reviewed study in Conservation Biology](#). Lung disease has been the most common issue, according to Lori Schwacke, an epidemiologist of the National Marine Mammal Foundation who was the study's lead author.

Other deterioration in the dolphins' health has led Schwacke to believe the dolphins may be suffering from an illness similar to chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), a progressive lung condition. Age-related effects could also play a role.

Recent surveys suggest Barataria Bay's bottlenose dolphin population has diminished by up to 45% since the disaster, to approximately 2,000. The reproductive success of the remaining females was significantly reduced.

Those dolphins born after the spill do not show signs of health impairment, however. "The hope is that, over time, the young animals will take over the population," said Schwacke. Recovery to baseline numbers will probably take about 35 years, she estimated, providing there are no severe threats in the near future.



A dead dolphin washed ashore five years after the oil spill. Photograph: Cain Burdeau/AP

Last November, however, the US government leased huge parts of the Gulf of Mexico's seabed for oil and gas drilling. Although the deals were recently annulled in court, there could be an appeal against the decision, making the possibility of another oil spill a strong possibility.

Moreover, a plan to divert large amounts of water and sediment from the Mississippi River into Barataria Bay poses an even greater risk. The aim of the [Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority](#), which is behind the work, is to restore coastal ecosystems such as intertidal marshes and to enhance flood protection, with the project set to start next year.

But the influx of freshwater will lower the lagoon's salinity to concentrations of less than 5 parts in a thousand. This is expected to kill dolphins, said Schwacke. Low salinity triggers severe physiological reactions, causing their skin to develop lesions and become inflamed before killing them.

The federal National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has predicted that about a [third of the population will be lost each year](#) as a result of the project.

Schwacke said the dolphins were unlikely to move to avoid the impact of the Mississippi project. “These animals have high site fidelity,” she said, adding that if the sediment diversion scheme proceeds, the dolphin population would almost certainly be wiped out.

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