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Names in the newsMariah Carey

All Mariah Carey wants for Christmas is for you to try her snack menu

[Rebecca Nicholson](#)



Maria Carey: ‘Father Christmas will have handed her full control of his sleigh.’ Photograph: McDonald’s

Sat 13 Nov 2021 12.00 EST

What started with the undeniable festive charm of All I Want For Christmas has morphed into Mariah Carey becoming a central part of the festive season. At this rate, in a couple of years, Father Christmas will have handed her full control of his sleigh; it is so fabulously, utterly Mariah of her to make Christmas all about her on a semi-global scale. This year’s celebrations include teaming up with a fast-food chain in the US to promote a sort of advent calendar of free snacks. “All I want for Christmas is ...” she says, [camping it up in the ad](#), “for you to try the Mariah menu.” And goodwill to all men!

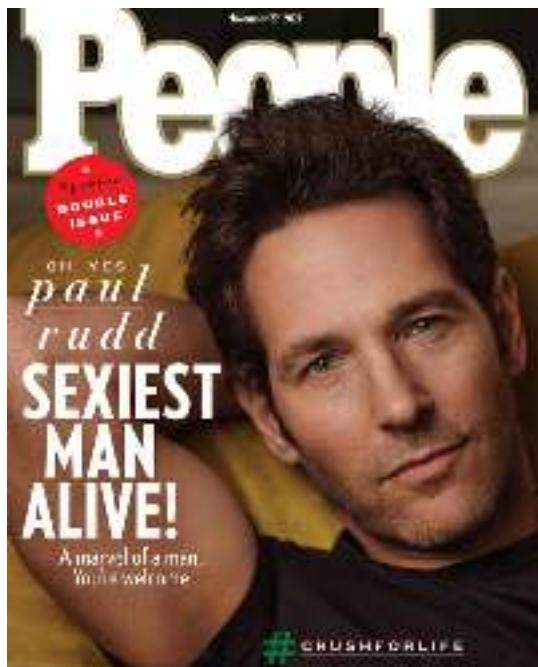
Meanwhile, in other celebrity-corporate news, an international coffee chain has stoked rumours it has teamed up with Taylor Swift, after several tweets that quoted her lyrics and pledged allegiance to the new version of her old album *Red*. Over on Instagram, Jennifer Aniston took a break from starring in my favourite TV hot mess [The Morning Show](#) to post a clip of herself putting collagen powder in her coffee, only to have her followers point out that her nails had changed colour between pouring it and drinking it: an “influencer fail”, they said.

Whenever I see a *really* famous person, I always wonder why they’re doing tie-ins or campaigns or promotions like this (though maybe Aniston just loves collagen coffee). Surely they don’t need the money or exposure? I think about Bill Murray’s character in *Lost in Translation*, sheepishly going to Japan to make whisky adverts. I don’t remember megastar celebrities ever doing ads with such gusto or frequency, apart from the odd pop star/Pepsi tie-in and George Clooney’s enthusiasm for coffee pods.

But social media has shifted perceptions here, as everywhere. It seems less about money than it is about status, though the money is not inconsiderable. In 2020, Kim Kardashian, who has promoted appetite suppressant lollipops and electric toothbrushes, among other products, said [she could make more from one socials post](#) than from an entire season of her reality show. “I

don't follow a lot of people and I have unfollowed people who have promoted too much," she also said, in 2015, though that world that might as well be decades ago. In 2018, an [Atlantic](#) reported on influencers faking sponsored content to give them more prestige. Far from putting followers off, ads and tie-ins are mutually, gruesomely beneficial, a marker of what looks like "success".

Paul Rudd shows why funny is sexy



Hot stuff: Paul Rudd. Photograph: People Magazine

The US celebrity mag *People* has released a Sexiest Man Alive! cover since 1985, beginning with then-youthful Mel Gibson, who was 29 when he was given the accolade, and remains its youngest recipient. [This year's sexiest man alive](#) is 52-year-old Paul Rudd, Marvel star, *Clueless* star, *Friends* star and all-round funny guy who seems to have been the same age for 30 years. "I'm getting business cards made," he told *People*. "But all of my friends will destroy me and I expect them to." (Incidentally, what happens to the status of the previous incumbent once a newcomer takes the crown? Are they demoted to second-sexiest man alive and so on?)

As someone who grew up in that British 90s lad mag era, with the Phwoar! Top 100 Hottest Babes types everywhere, these covers are a quaint

tradition, sort of sweetly sexless, despite Rudd flashing a provocative bicep. All the sexiest men since Gibson have been over 30 and many are funny and self-deprecating; the grunting beefcakes or preening vain boys do not appear to be welcome. There is no Sexiest Woman cover (there was one, Kate Upton, in 2014, but it didn't stick). Instead, famous women appear on the cover of the Beautiful Issue, usually looking windswept and outdoorsy or holding children. The story is an old one: men are sexy when they're older and funny; women are beautiful when they cradle babies. As objectification goes, these are gentle whispers of admiration and they barely dare to break into lust.

Stanley Tucci brings a magic touch to cocktails



Stanley Tucci: negroni maestro. Photograph: Stanley Tucci/Instagram

In the US, cocktails should come with a warning. The nation's free-pouring approach to mixing drinks has surprised this particular lightweight on more than one occasion and a memorable evening involving old fashionedds basically put me off cocktails for life. In the UK, measured carefully though they may be, cocktails are experiencing an explosion in popularity. [Wetherspoons has reported a huge increase in cocktail sales](#) during the past 15 weeks, up 45% on the same period last year. That might be because we were doing lockdown hokey-cokey at the time, but the chain also reported

that sales of ales were down, which indicates a changing demographic: younger drinkers are going out, while older drinkers are still staying away.

That cocktails are now huge in Britain should not be news to anyone who has seen a night out in recent times; while the fruitiest drink I grew up with was a cider and black (or a lager and lime, for variety), today picture-perfect drinks that pack a punch dominate. Maybe that's younger people, or maybe it's Instagram, or maybe, just maybe, there's a more obvious reason: Stanley Tucci, whose [early-lockdown negroni lesson](#) made cocktails great again.

Rebecca Nicholson is an Observer columnist

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OpinionXi Jinping

Xi Jinping has rewritten China's history, but even he can't predict its global future

[Rana Mitter](#)



Xi Jinping on a TV screen under the slogan ‘The people's yearning for a better life is the goal we strive for’ at the Museum of the Communist party of China in Beijing. Photograph: Ng Han Guan/AP

Sun 14 Nov 2021 02.00 EST

Last week, Xi Jinping gave himself full Marx. The Chinese Communist party's [sixth plenum](#), a gathering of top political cadres, passed [a resolution](#) on “Certain Questions in the Party’s History”, in which Xi’s system of thought was defined as “Marxism for the 21st century”. Not only that, but that it also served as “the essence of the Chinese culture and China’s spirit”.

These are not terms that sound natural in English, but their significance is immense, because only two previous resolutions of this sort have ever been passed – in 1945 and 1981. The resolutions on party history are meant to provide a definitive statement on the CCP’s record in governing China. The 1945 resolution sealed Mao Zedong’s status as the definitive party leader, ahead of his victory in the civil war against Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalists four years later. The 1981 resolution was more intriguing, because it was a very rare admission of fault by the party itself; its language was tortuous but it consisted of a grudging apology to the nation for the horrors of the [Cultural Revolution](#).

Forty years on and the [new resolution](#) shows no sign of contrition, instead stating the party’s “transformation” of China. It praised Xi, Mao and Deng Xiaoping for leading it to achieve “the tremendous transformation from standing up and growing prosperous to becoming strong”. This is a turning point in the history of the CCP. The resolution elevates Xi to a position held only by Mao and Deng before him, as a moving force who did not just carry on the Chinese communist revolution, but recreated it. If Mao is the founder of the People’s Republic of China and Deng the reformer who made it wealthy, the “new era” of Xi is one in which China becomes a prosperous society at home and a global one in influence.

“Party history” in China is a very specific term and it does not only mean a description of the CCP’s past. That past is fascinating to historians because of the factional battles and violent confrontation that marked the party’s passage from a tiny group in 1921 to its status as a machine that rules a quarter of humanity. “History” should be read as Xi has flagged it, as a Marxist sense of the determinism, or inevitability, of a particular outcome: a socialist society driven by Xi Jinping Thought. Of course, it helps to bring about such inevitability if alternative possibilities are closed off. One ideological deviation that Xi has condemned frequently is “historical nihilism” – criticism of the officially approved version of the party’s history, which removes almost all attacks on events such as the famine that killed millions in the [Great Leap Forward](#) of 1958-62 and greatly underplays the traumas caused by the Cultural Revolution.

Mao's thinking provided political rocket fuel for radicals around the world, whether Parisian students in 1968 or Peruvian peasants in the Shining Path terror movement of the 1980s

The 1981 party resolution opened the way for a limited, but real, ability to criticise that terrible era in public. Now that space has shrunk. This year, the cyber-administration of China reported that it had removed more than [2m online posts](#) relating to unacceptable views of party history that “distort” it by “slanderizing” its leaders and their actions since 1949. However, even if Xi shares Mao’s distaste for dissent, his political thinking is very different. Mao’s provided political rocket fuel for radicals around the world, whether Parisian students in 1968 or Peruvian peasants in the Shining Path terror movement of the 1980s. Xi Jinping Thought does not provide that kind of briquette for the revolutionary fire. It does not remotely encourage individual uprising against the forces of oppression, but instead praises massive state power to develop the ultimate goal of “common prosperity”. The “new era” seeks Chinese influence globally in all areas that matter, from security, not just in east Asia but more recently in the [Indian Ocean](#) and the [Arctic](#), to norms on trade and technology and even cultural production.

It matters that it is the party, not just Xi, which is protected in the battle against “historical nihilism”. Xi’s personality cult, while real, does not make him the equivalent of Vladimir Putin, who has built a political system around himself. The Russian leader benefits from the ambiguous placement he has within his own country’s history, both a product of the old system (as a former KGB agent) and the president of a post-Soviet state. In [China](#), the party still rules supreme and Xi’s status derives from his continuity in a sequence that includes Mao and Deng. However powerful he is, his legitimacy derives from his status as party secretary-general, as the heir to the century of historical development, one reason why he is so keen to make sure that the party’s reputation is untarnished.

Yet tradition is not everything. Last week’s events are the start of a year leading up the party congress, widely expected to be held in October next year, when Xi will probably seek and gain a third term in power. Both Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao were forced to step down after two five-year terms

each, preventing the kind of personalised rule for life that Mao had enjoyed. Xi, in contrast, has made it clear that he intends to go for a third term and perhaps beyond. His keynote speech at the party congress in 2017 argued that Chinese-style socialism was no longer just a strategy for survival in one country, but for a new sense of a global China, which he intends to develop over the long term.

Xi's personality cult, while very real, does not make him the equivalent of Vladimir Putin, who has built a political system around himself

Meanwhile, the shape of Xi's China at home is becoming ever clearer. The limited liberalism of the Jiang and Hu eras, where some dissent was allowed online and universities could debate democracy and constitutional change, even if discreetly, has largely disappeared. China's fledgling civil society, tackling issues from climate change to Aids treatment, has been absorbed and neutralised by the state. So far, however, the ability to provide growing living standards along with a genuine pride felt in China's rising global status seems to have kept the middle class broadly satisfied.

But there are problems to come. A confrontation with the US is still unlikely, but it would devastate China's economy as well as lives globally. Climate change and water shortages still bedevil China's urbanisation, a reality that may lie behind the sudden, late agreement at Cop26 between Washington and Beijing to cooperate on these issues. The demographic fallout from the one-child policy means that China will have a society older and more in need of healthcare from the 2030s. Xi's position looks unassailable now, but even all-powerful leaders cannot countermand the drying of the deserts or the decision of families in tiny flats not to have babies.

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[OpinionCop26](#)

The Observer view on the Cop26 agreement

Observer editorial



Greenpeace demonstrators raise a banner at Cop26, but the geopolitical context always made it unlikely sufficient progress would be made.
Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

Sat 13 Nov 2021 18.35 EST

On Glasgow Green, there lies a stone that commemorates the spot where the engineer James Watt in 1765 conceived the idea for a separate condenser for the steam engine. It is Watt's invention, which revolutionised the efficiency of the steam engine, that means Glasgow can lay claim to be the place from which the Industrial Revolution sprang.

Just over a quarter of a millennium later, delegates from all over the world meeting in the same city have agreed [the text of a critical international](#)

agreement to try to bind countries into the action required to slow the catastrophic global heating that the Industrial Revolution set in train.

It does not go anywhere near far enough. In recent years, scientists have warned that the goal in the 2015 Paris climate agreement to limit global temperature rises to “well below” 2C above pre-industrial levels is not sufficiently ambitious.

The implications of the world heating beyond 1.5C are much worse than previously thought. Even 1.5C would still result in significantly more extreme weather events – and some irreversible changes such as sea level rises, the melting of Arctic ice and the warming and acidification of the oceans – but those impacts will be more manageable.

The challenges going into Cop26 in Glasgow were immense. Global temperatures have already risen by about 1.1C, and global emissions of CO₂ continue to rise. In order to limit heating to 1.5C, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has said that global greenhouse gas emissions must peak in the next four years, and coal- and gas-fired plants must close within the next decade.

This requires a huge shift in global commitments: before Glasgow, the non-binding commitments countries have signed up to put the world on course to warm up by 2.7C, according to the UN – a level of overheating that would result in tens of millions of people dying as a result of drought, and large swaths of the planet becoming completely uninhabitable.

The geopolitical context always made it unlikely sufficient progress would be made at Glasgow to inspire confidence that a limit of 1.5C of warming will be achieved. Xi Jinping, president of China – the world’s largest emitter – did not attend in person.

Wealthier countries have failed to honour commitments made 12 years ago that developing countries would receive \$100bn a year to help them adapt, and the UK’s cuts to international aid have eroded its moral standing as host of the conference.

Countries' competing objectives – the desire of some states to keep drilling for oil even as others' continuing existence is dependent on imminently halting the extraction of fossil fuels – were always going to make for a difficult set of negotiations, but the pandemic has sharpened the divide between richer and poorer nations, as some countries have vaccinated virtually all their citizens while others have barely started.

It is widely acknowledged that the UK went into the conference underprepared, as the government's diplomatic efforts have been primarily focused on [Brexit](#) in recent years, rather than on laying the ground for the negotiations of the past two weeks.

At the 11th hour, the already-weak resolution on the phasing-out of coal and fossil fuel subsidies was watered down

The best that can be said about [Cop26](#) is that it has kept the possibility of limiting global heating to 1.5C alive, if only by a thread. The worst outcome of this conference would have been if countries had agreed to next reopen their commitments to reduce emissions only in five years' time, as was agreed in Paris in 2015. This would have been nothing short of a disaster.

It would have firmly put the world on the path to catastrophic and irreversible overheating – involving the deaths of tens of millions of people and the total obliteration of some countries as a result of rising sea levels. It would have thrown away humanity's last chance of avoiding this fate.

Instead, countries have agreed to come back to revisit their commitments in a year's time, and every year after that. Something radical will need to shift in the next year or two in order to achieve the commitments that are urgently needed to limit warming to 1.5C.

Take the UK's net zero strategy, for example, which falls far short of what is needed in order for it to achieve its stated goal of net zero emissions by 2050. It has been estimated we need to be investing about 1% of GDP to meet this; but the government has committed just a fraction of that, and the strategy is further undermined by the government reneging on its own

policy commitments, including its recent scrapping of the green homes schemes and the delay in the phase-out of gas boilers.

The UK's strategy is far from the worst in terms of its failure to be powered by strong government commitments, which serves only to convey the scale of what is still needed from countries across the world.

However, [the US-China bilateral agreement](#), if thin in terms of commitments, is a real sign of diplomatic progress. More than 100 countries have committed to end deforestation by 2030; five of the richest countries have pledged \$1.7bn to support the conservation efforts of indigenous people; and the US and EU have signed up to an initiative to cut methane emissions.

But it is not enough. There are too many gaps, too few commitments, insufficient willpower. At the 11th hour, [the already-weak resolution on the phasing-out of coal and fossil fuel subsidies was watered down](#) even further so as to make it virtually meaningless.

Countries pleaded in the final plenary sessions that they can go no further, but go further they must. Disaster is not yet certain; but humanity's "code red" is still blaring. The cost of ignoring it is unthinkable.

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Opinion[Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe](#)

The Observer view on the UK's failure to free Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe

[Observer editorial](#)



Richard Ratcliffe on the final day of his hunger strike, outside the Foreign Office, London, on 13 November. Photograph: Sophia Evans/The Observer
Sun 14 Nov 2021 02.10 EST

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, a British citizen holding dual Iranian nationality, has been detained in Tehran for more than five-and-a-half years on bogus accusations of spying. Successive Conservative foreign secretaries, including Boris Johnson, have promised and failed to secure her freedom. The reasons are unclear. This shocking situation cannot and must not continue.

Richard Ratcliffe, Nazanin's husband, has campaigned tirelessly for her release. His courage and fortitude are admirable, as are hers. Fearful that his

wife may be illegally jailed again, he mounted a 21-day [hunger strike](#) outside the Foreign Office to dramatise her plight, before ending it yesterday.

Talks last week between Britain and Iran once more failed to make progress. Nor is there movement in the cases of two other Britons, Anoosheh Ashoori and Morad Tahbaz, also held hostage by Iran. “We’re still stuck,” Ratcliffe said. He’s right. It’s another disgrace to shame this [shameless government](#).

Such outrageous injustice cannot be tolerated any longer. Nor can the lack of urgency, application, transparency and guile that have characterised the government’s damaging, disjointed and unsuccessful approach since 2016. Explanations are required. Without further excuses, delays or obfuscation, Johnson must answer the following questions:

Why is he still refusing to settle an acknowledged £400m debt to Iran, incurred before the 1979 revolution? This unjustified failure to pay up has bedevilled talks. Britain says bank transfer restrictions arising from international sanctions prevent payment. This is disingenuous at best. It can find legal ways around rules it helped create – if it wants to. In 2016, the US settled a similar debt, paying Iran [\\$400m in cash](#) in return for the release of four American hostages.

Why has Johnson failed to honour his personal promise to pay the debt made, when he was foreign secretary, to Ratcliffe and, indirectly, to the Iranians? Johnson’s promise was a blatant attempt to compensate for his disastrous blunder in parliament, when he misrepresented Zaghami-Ratcliffe’s activities in Tehran. Was it a lie? His blunder was used by Iran to justify her jailing. “He needs to take seriously the promises he makes and keep them,” [Ratcliffe said last week](#). Even Johnson, a man without honour, must see he has a moral duty to set this right. He could – if he wants to.

Why are Johnson and Liz Truss, the latest foreign secretary, persisting with the Foreign Office’s non-confrontational, softly-softly approach? It has failed utterly. As the former foreign secretary Jeremy Hunt says, it’s not about paying a ransom, but it is about credibility. Johnson takes a tougher line with the EU than he does with [Iran](#), whose hardline leaders mock the

UK. British moves to block the lifting of international sanctions and sever bilateral relations would get Iran's attention – if Johnson wants to.

Did Johnson let US objections wreck a planned prisoner swap last summer? The swap reportedly involved British hostages as well as US and Iranian detainees. Iran says a deal, which included full payment of Britain's debt, broke down at the last minute when the US balked. Did Johnson let his post-Brexit eagerness to curry favour with Joe Biden get in the way of his duty to rescue British citizens? Why did he foolishly agree to link their fate to that of [American hostages](#)?

Did the fact that Zaghami-Ratcliffe, [Anoosheh Ashoori](#) and Morad Tahbaz are dual nationals with foreign-sounding names adversely influence the amount of attention devoted to their plight, at least in the early stages? It's an ugly thought, but there is evidence in the Ashoori case to suggest it did. After the Afghanistan debacle, it's sadly possible to believe almost anything of the flailing, ill-led Foreign Office.

Questions such as these will keep on coming the longer the hostage scandal continues. If Johnson wants to prevent it spiralling into yet another full-blown government crisis, he should stop shirking, take responsibility and bend his will to [freeing Nazanin Zaghami-Ratcliffe](#).

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[Observer comment cartoon](#)

[Cop26](#)

And the winner at Cop26 is... the fossil fuel industry – cartoon

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[NotebookUK news](#)

Turkeys are in short supply, but at least we can watch them in Christmas movies

[Bidisha](#)



The 1951 film version of *A Christmas Carol*: love is all you need.
Photograph: Everett/REX/Shutterstock

Sat 13 Nov 2021 10.00 EST

Like a generic Christmas movie where the plot is staler than a shop-bought panettone, Pandemic Christmas 2: Numb Noel rolls around in less than six weeks. As I write, Germany has recorded [50,000 new Covid cases](#), the UK has recorded 42,000 cases, planned [Christmas markets](#) in Leeds and Glasgow have been cancelled and experts in the [Netherlands](#) are recommending a lockdown.

Actually, maybe obsessively watching [Christmas](#) movies isn't a bad survival tactic for the Yule bunker. The repetition is cosily familiar and yet, unlike a pandemic, the resolution is swift and satisfying. All the actors wear green and red chunky jumpers and striped scarves with adorable wool hats, labour under the hard lighting of a cheap daytime soap opera and carry a strong whiff of many years in the soft porn industry, regardless of the wholesome narrative they're performing.

Like the current No 1 Netflix Christmas movie [Love Hard](#), they're always about a city gal who visits a charming town and has to choose between two equally attractive men. Even if food shortages mean there's no turkey on the table come the big day, as every tale from *A Christmas Carol* on reminds us, love is all you need. Except that in *A Christmas Carol* they did have a turkey.

Losing my touch



I'm sorry, Xu Weizhou. Photograph: REX/Shutterstock

It's not just the Christmas spirit that's been warped over the last two years, it's also our libidos. Formerly fruity souls have adjusted to enforced celibacy, once abstemious singletons yearn for a human touch, seemingly solid couples are splitting up after witnessing each other's revolting lockdown habits, people bought pets because they wanted something sentient to cuddle and some flatmates have been doing a lot more than bubbling together.

I've developed a series of inappropriate lockdown crushes, born from living entirely through YouTube/Netflix/Google for a fifth of a decade. I'm now like one of those feral children who was raised by wolves and hasn't learned human norms. Sliding into a celebrity's DMs with a cheesy excuse? Showing up at a crush's Zoom panel about diversity in the arts and asking a question? I did it. To assess how delusional your lockdown crush is, imagine meeting them at a dinner party. Imagine twinkling in their direction, with a frank lady-look. Would they be horrified? Would their blood run cold?

My latest target is the Chinese model-actor-singer Xu Weizhou, or Timmy Xu to the international market. The fact that I know that is risible. He's 20 years younger than me. He's so slim I could snap him like a chicken wing. I

left a comment on his last Instagram post. It's pathetic, it's disgusting. I justified my behaviour to myself in various ways until, last week, a stranger did the same thing to me. I freaked out and then forwarded their message to all my friends and friendly colleagues. Let your pandemic desires roam free, within your own head, but don't act on them and create interference for other people; reality and fantasy cannot coexist.

Malala's happy news



Malala Yousafzai and Asser: bringing cheer to the world. Photograph: Malin Fezehai/AP

For the last few years, the news has presented us with a bottomless brunch of terrible violence, abuse, injustice and inequality. Thanks to Cop26, it's all being topped off with a garnish of actual apocalypse. So it was good to find out that [Malala Yousafzai](#), Nobel laureate, peace activist, global resistance icon and ultimate good girl, has married her partner, Asser Malik, with the blessings of their families. Amid the horror of the Taliban retaking Afghanistan, this is a bit of lovely news. I don't know if love always wins out, but it definitely brightens dark times.

Bidisha is a broadcaster, critic and journalist for BBC, Channel 4 and Sky News

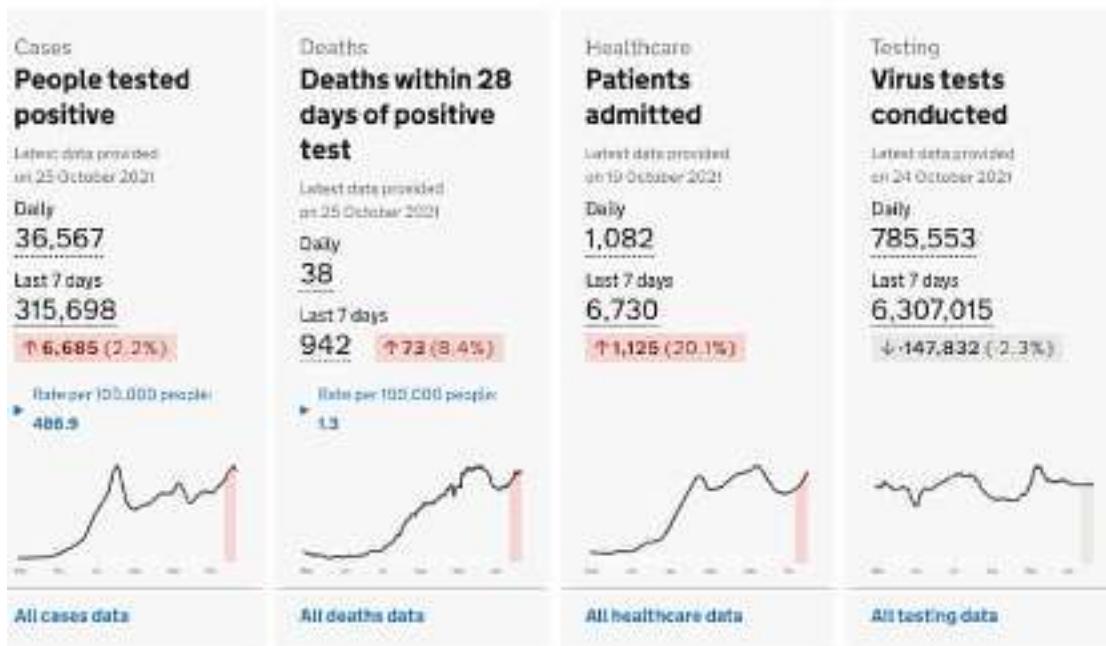
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The weekly stats uncoveredCoronavirus

On Covid, we need to be careful when we talk about numbers

[David Spiegelhalter](#) and [Anthony Masters](#)



Covid dashboard reports latest statistics. Photograph: Gov.UK

Sun 14 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

Since we have just had [Maths Week](#) in England, it seems appropriate to look at a wave of recent errors when communicating numbers.

First, the statistics may be described wrongly. The chief executive of NHS England recently [claimed](#): “We have had 14 times the number of people in hospital with Covid than we saw this time last year”, a claim repeated on Sky News and ITV. But there were [fewer Covid-19 patients](#) in England on 4 November (7,201) than a year earlier (11,037). The intended reference was to last August, when there were about 23,000 admissions within two weeks after a positive test, about 14 times higher than last year.

Second, data can be misinterpreted. The daily number of reported deaths tends to be higher on Tuesday and Wednesday, catching up for reporting delays over the weekend. Like clockwork, the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) [dashboard](#) updates on Tuesday at 4pm and newspapers duly report that Covid-19 deaths “soar”. The *Evening Standard* has done this [at least three times](#), most recently with “UK Covid deaths [soar to 262](#)” (10 November). A seven-day rolling average smooths this cycle: up to 2 November, there was a daily average of 162 new recorded deaths, while a week later, that figure rose to 166. Hardly soaring.

Incorrect claims can arise from misspeaking. The chief medical adviser of UKHSA [said on *The Andrew Marr Show*](#): “We’re still seeing deaths in mainly the unvaccinated population.” That presumably meant a higher fatality rate, since most Covid-19 deaths have been among those vaccinated since [last June](#).

Sometimes, poor presentation can propagate misuse. In weekly reports, the UKHSA counts people using health records in its database, rather than [population estimates](#), which leads to [case rates](#) appearing higher in vaccinated than unvaccinated groups. After chains of misrepresentation, finally Brazil’s president, Jair Bolsonaro, used these UK numbers to [promote the bizarre theory](#) that Covid-19 vaccines cause Aids.

[Speaking about data means more than reiterating numbers](#). Accuracy in statistical communication is fragile: saying the right number, describing the right measure, over the right time, giving necessary context and conveying limitations and uncertainty. Statistical producers need to guide readers on how their data can and cannot be used.

David Spiegelhalter is chair of the Winton Centre for Risk and Evidence Communication at Cambridge. Anthony Masters is statistical ambassador for the Royal Statistical Society

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Observer lettersCop26

Letters: don't despair. There is hope for the Earth



Climate change activists on the global day of Action for Climate Justice in Glasgow last weekend. Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

Sun 14 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

I have huge respect for Kenan Malik, whose thoughtful articles have often opened my eyes to new perspectives, and would agree that pessimism with regard to climate change can be enormously debilitating and counter-productive (“[Want to change the world? Then you'd better give up on self-defeating pessimism](#)”, Comment).

I wonder if he has come across Global Optimism, an organisation set up by Christiana Figueres and Tom Rivett-Carnac, and their podcasts *Outrage + Optimism?* And has he heard about the international Active Hope courses (based on Joanna Macy’s work) that are run far and wide? Though I hadn’t

heard the alarming words he quotes from Roger Hallam of [Extinction Rebellion](#), I can report that at every XR meeting I have attended the overriding emotional tone has been of respect, integrity, inclusiveness and most of all love... love for humanity and the world.

Last Saturday, I marched for Global Climate Justice, as did hundreds of thousands of people worldwide, and with my daughter and granddaughter experienced a sense of hope and optimism that at last the momentum for positive change is building. From this perspective, it does not feel as if “pessimism and misanthropy have come to colonise much of the left”.

Marianne Tissandier

South Brent, Devon

After reading the article “[Lightbulb moments: why stately homes have turned to illuminations](#)” (News), it seems that the message about climate change has not sunk in. Illuminated events should be decreasing, not increasing, and organisations such as English Heritage and the National Trust should be showing a lead in this area if we are to take tackling climate change seriously.

Andrew Hudson

Ulverston, Cumbria

Treat drugs like cigarettes

The illegality of drugs causes many deaths because it stops us from controlling the drugs’ strength and purity, it makes it harder for addicts to seek help, and it hands over the trade to criminals, leading to shootings on our streets (“[You’ll never have a drug-free society, expert warns UK](#)”, News). We should treat drugs as we now very successfully treat cigarettes, and should tax them to fund treatment programmes. The police and courts would have more resources to tackle other crimes.

Richard Mountford

Hildenborough, Kent

Bring back the Thame Gazette

I agree with last week's letter bemoaning the lack of "a proper local newspaper that includes obituaries, club news and civil announcements" ("[We need a local paper](#)"). Covid has increased loneliness and isolation, particularly for elderly people. At a recent meeting of local residents, many of us were surprised and saddened to hear of the deaths of people we knew. A chorus of "bring back the *Thame Gazette*" ensued.

Shirley Denny

Thame, Oxfordshire

Clapping was a cynical ploy

As chief executive of Care England, Professor Martin Green clearly comes at the relationship between health and social care from a particular angle ("[Care boss blasts ministers for treating NHS as 'favoured child'](#)"), but his comments helpfully open up a conversation about the government's publicity about the NHS.

I never clapped for the NHS on the doorstep. I thought it was insulting to stressed-out NHS workers. A national clap comes cheap, requiring the services of a limited number of government media officers. This was used to blur the distinction between valuing the services of dedicated staff and the protection of the NHS as an institution, while drawing attention away from failings of ministers in their handling of a worldwide health crisis in the UK. I would like to think that when the public inquiry gets underway next year, it will shine light on this cynical ploy – but I'm not holding my breath.

Geoff Reid

Bradford

Perhaps the solution to the complaints made by the social care boss is to take care homes back under public control, with local authorities as the provider and employer of care workers, who should be paid at least a living wage and properly valued and trained.

Privatised care homes are run as profit centres, not as a social service. Some of the profits are held in offshore tax havens. The Labour party should be raising this as an issue which increasingly affects an ageing population.

Ann Bliss

Bromley, London

Excellent evisceration

David Mitchell's brutal evisceration of Liz Truss and his championing of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe ("[It's Liz Truss's moment to do the right thing](#)", the New Review) put him right up there with Marina Hyde and John Crace – brilliant journalists who can raise a smile even as they make us weep. Thank you for helping to keep us sane in these desperate times.

Jill Salisbury-Hughes

Winton, Shropshire

Ferry unreasonable

Correspondent Laraine Thompson believes that Séamas O'Reilly should take a ferry from England to Northern Ireland with his young son, instead of flying ("[Too many flying visits](#)", Letters). I believe that, from London, the nearest port with ferries to Northern Ireland is Birkenhead. To reach Birkenhead from London would require a train journey and this would be followed by about eight hours on the ferry, an interesting experience with a young child. On arrival in Belfast, Séamas would then have to travel to Derry by some means. The return journey would take a similar length of time. Thank goodness that the junior O'Reilly has been spared this and that he has such a loving relationship with his extended family. Zoom and telephones do not replace physical closeness.

Jean Fenemore

Croston, Lancashire

Badge of opulence

I enjoyed your piece on Anne Boleyn's badge ("[This old bird? Well, actually it's the long-lost crest of Anne Boleyn](#)", News). The black area of the falcon's body is so well demarcated from the remaining gilding that it is not soot. When antique silvering paint ages it blackens, just as household silver tarnishes. Her falcon in the original badge was silver. Gold and silver are usually avoided together in heraldry for modesty. The rich emblem was

poor Anne's fleeting opulence.

Khwan Phusrisom

Shildon, County Durham

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For the recordUK news

For the record

Sun 14 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

An article quoted the Home Office saying that a delay in releasing stop-and-search statistics was due to a “record level” of data and extra time being required to resolve data quality issues. After publication, the Home Office contacted us to clarify that when it spoke of “new record level” data, it meant that data had been collected for the first time at the level of individual stop-and-search records, rather than in aggregate; it was not referring to the number of cases ([Stop-and-search figures ‘withheld to hide rise in discrimination’](#), 7 November, page 29).

It is Camilla Power who plays the role of Talitha’s mother in the drama series Showtrial, not Mika Simmons, as a TV [review](#) said. And the bereaved mother of Hannah is played by Claire Lams, not “Lam” (7 November, the New Review, page 34).

In preparing for his role in *The Power of the Dog*, Benedict Cumberbatch lived in Montana with a cowboy called Randy and his partner Jenn – not “Jane”, as we said due to a mishearing of the actor’s words (Jane Campion interview: [‘Film-making set me free ... it was as if I had found myself’](#), 7 November, the New Review, page 8).

Other recently amended articles include:

[Don’t put climate activists on trial, CPS urged](#)

[If Labour can’t beat the Tories’ polarising game, it should build bridges instead](#)

[Ballet Black: Then or Now/The Waiting Game review – dynamic anniversary celebration](#)

Will the magic of psychedelics transform psychiatry?

In Britten's footsteps, Nitin Sawhney's requiem will mark Coventry's rebirth

The EU is locked in a momentous fight with Poland. And the UK is backing the wrong side

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

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OpinionBoris Johnson

Secrets and lies: fears of a liberal ‘deep state’ are a phantom conspiracy

[Nick Cohen](#)



Boris Johnson is ‘recycling his old mates’. Paul Dacre, left, and Charles Moore. Composite: Reuters/Alamy

Sat 13 Nov 2021 14.00 EST

A paranoid fantasy began the crisis that is ripping through the Conservative party. In what from a rightwing viewpoint must be the most disastrous column in the history of the Tory press, Charles Moore, a friend and *Telegraph* colleague of Boris Johnson, used a phantom conspiracy to rally the right to Owen Paterson.

Writing on 26 October, Moore could not bring himself to mention the £110,000 Patterson’s corporate backers directed into his bank account annually. In 2009, the *Telegraph* revealed the MPs’ expenses scandal. Now its boy is in power, the tight, little world of the right’s media-political complex finds the vulgar subject of money beneath it.

Instead of explaining why the parliamentary authorities concluded that Paterson had brought “significant damage to the reputation and integrity of the House of Commons”, Moore turned on Kathryn Stone, the commissioner for standards. Without producing a shred of evidence, he asserted that Stone was letting Labour MPs off lightly, while treating Conservative MPs – “especially pro-Brexit Conservatives such as Mr Paterson and Boris Johnson himself – much more harshly”.

With that cue, Johnson, his cabinet and a section of his party knew what to say: Paterson was a victim of the elite. The real elite, that is, not the Conservative party, which just happens to have been in power these past 11 years, but the true lords of the realm: the civil servants, the broadcasters, the judges, the Electoral Commission and the activist lawyers; the dainty grandes who criticise Conservatives from a position of “pure leftwing snobbery”, in the words of Nadine Dorries, the culture secretary; the unelected “cultural Marxists”, as the attorney-general, Suella Braverman, calls them, who benefited from the 1968 generation’s long march through the institutions so completely they now have the sheer bloody nerve to act as “judge and jury”, as Moore said of Stone, not just of Paterson but of “Boris Johnson himself”.

Stone was neither judge nor jury, but Moore and Johnson were the undoubted executioners of Paterson's career. They provoked the backlash that destroyed him by pushing persecution mania to its limits.

I don't know whether their supporters or opponents were more shocked by the debacle that followed. Since 2016, paranoid politics has enjoyed continuous success. It allowed the Conservative right to paint opponents of Brexit first as agents of the EU, and then as saboteurs and fifth columnists who wanted to overthrow democracy itself.

Above all its other advantages, conspiracy theory enabled Johnson to turn cops into criminals. The Johnson administration can never permit the thought to grow that regulators are public servants following the law. It must paint them as malign enemies with secret agendas. On the paranoid account, Stone cannot be an honest enforcer of the rules. Only political malice can explain her criticisms of a rightwing politician.

The Tories have tried to taint every judicial or regulatory action that stops them doing as they please

The maligned Stone is not a one-off. The Conservatives have tried to taint every judicial or regulatory action that stops them doing as they please. Track the denunciations and you see that, despite his cheeky chappy poses, Johnson has a Nixonian determination to crush all who limit his power. To stay only with the judiciary, he promised to "root out the leftist culture of so much of the criminal justice establishment". His [anonymous briefers](#) warned that Downing Street wanted to "get the judges sorted". Assorted ministers have paid court to their master by saying judges "want to frustrate Brexit" (Kwasi Karteng) and were in an unholy alliance to "thwart the wishes of the British people" (Dominic Raab).

As a method of bringing Georgian jobbery to the 21st century, paranoid politics cannot be bettered. If every impartial institution is corrupt, if objectivity is a sham and independence is just a cover for conducting "[politics by other means](#)" (as the 2019 Conservative manifesto described judicial review of its abuses of power), then the Tory state must lever the

most rightwing candidates imaginable into public sector jobs to “redress the balance”.

Paranoia has driven [Conservatives](#), who went into politics believing state power must be limited, to endorse autocratic government. They have developed an almost Marxist belief in the impossibility of professional integrity. Because they are fanatics who can never imagine behaving impartially themselves, they believe that everyone else must be as fanatical as they are. They cannot understand how people can leave their opinions at the workplace door because they have never left them there.

As much as their indifference to the punishments Brexit is bringing to businesses, their belief in a liberal-left deep state shows how removed the Conservatives have become from the world of work. Nearly every worker in every industry knows that they cannot allow political beliefs to interfere with the services they provide. The exceptions are the arts and academia, where cancel culture undoubtedly exists, and politics and political journalism. Johnson is a dangerous prime minister because he is both a politician and pundit. He is from the tiny minority of the population where your politics are your work.

If the right was giving us new Red Wall voices with Geordie and Brummie accents, I might be more forgiving of its chicanery. But Johnsonianism in practice is just the prime minister recycling his old mates. Moore, Paul Dacre, Robbie Gibb. The same faces going round and round, year after year, decade after decade.

Until the Paterson scandal, Johnson’s power grab looked likely to succeed. Since 2005, the liberal-left in the UK has lost every election and referendum because it has underestimated the appeal of rightwing ideas. From Richard Nixon on, the US right has enjoyed enormous success as standing as the champion of the “silent majority” against a liberal elite that was soft on crime, drugs and immigrants. There appeared to be no reason why Johnson could not imitate US conservatives and convince voters he needed authoritarian controls to protect them against a rigged and biased system.

In these circumstances, the revolt of public opinion and significant sections of the Conservative party against his attempts to whitewash corruption is immensely heartening.

Donald Trump was telling the truth for once when he said of his supporters: “I could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody and I wouldn’t lose voters.” One of the few cheering pieces of news from the UK this year is that Boris Johnson cannot say the same.

Nick Cohen is an Observer columnist

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Headlines thursday 11 november 2021

- [Cop26 US-China deal on emissions welcomed by global figures and climate experts](#)
- [Live Cop26: delegates negotiate over draft text to limit global heating](#)
- ['Large loophole' World's militaries avoiding scrutiny over emissions](#)
- [Cop26 China and US pledge to work together on cutting emissions](#)

[Cop26](#)

US-China deal on emissions welcomed by global figures and climate experts



A ‘cut methane now’ on the Cop26 summit building in Glasgow. A US/China climate agreement has been broadly hailed as a step in the right direction. Photograph: Graeme Eddolls/PA

Guardian staff and agencies
Thu 11 Nov 2021 01.22 EST

An unexpected agreement between the US and [China](#) to work together on cutting emissions has been broadly welcomed by leaders and climate experts.

The world’s two biggest emitters appeared to put aside their differences at the Cop26 climate summit and on Wednesday [unveiled a joint declaration](#) that would see close cooperation on emissions cuts that scientists say are needed in the next 10 years to stay within 1.5C.

The agreement calls for “concrete and pragmatic” regulations in decarbonisation, reducing methane emissions and fighting deforestation, Chinese climate envoy Xie Zhenhua said in Glasgow.

The two countries will revive a working group that will “meet regularly to address the climate crisis and advance the multilateral process, focusing on enhancing concrete actions in this decade,” the joint declaration said.

01:06

US and China announce surprise climate agreement – video

Global leaders and climate experts broadly welcomed the agreement, with UN secretary general Antonio Guterres calling the move “an important step in the right direction”.

Genevieve Maricle, director of US climate policy action at WWF, said the world’s two largest economies “have the power to unlock vast financial flows from the public and private sectors that can speed the transition to a low carbon economy.”

A US-China bilateral agreement in 2014 gave a huge push to the creation of the historic Paris accord the following year, but that cooperation stopped with the Trump administration, which pulled America out of the pact.

“While this is not a gamechanger in the way the 2014 US-China climate deal was, in many ways it’s just as much of a step forward given the geopolitical state of the relationship,” said Thom Woodroffe, an expert in US-China climate talks. “It means the intense level of US-China dialogue on climate can now begin to translate into cooperation.”

EU climate policy chief Frans Timmermans agreed the pact gave room for hope. “It shows … that the US and China know this subject transcends other issues. And it certainly helps us here at [Cop26](#) to come to an agreement,” Timmermans told Reuters.

The Climate Council head of research, Dr Simon Bradshaw, described the focus on accelerating action this decade as “significant”.

Still, some experts noted the declaration was short on commitments that would significantly reduce heat-trapping gases.

“It’s a good sign that the world’s two biggest emitters can actually work together to face the biggest crisis of humanity but there’s not a lot of meat there after the methane stuff,” said Byford Tsang a China policy analyst for the European think tank E3G.

Bernice Lee, research director at Chatham House, said while cooperation between the US and China was positive “details remain patchy”.

“The statement is not enough to close the deal. The real test of Washington and Beijing is how hard they push for a 1.5C-aligned deal here in Glasgow.”

The Associated Press and Reuters contributed to this report

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/nov/11/us-china-deal-on-emissions-welcomed-by-global-figures-and-climate-experts>

Cop26

Cop26: End trillions in subsidies given to fossil fuel industry, says UN chief – as it happened

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Greenhouse gas emissions

World's militaries avoiding scrutiny over emissions, scientists say



F-16 fighters take off at the US Osan airbase in Pyeongtaek, South Korea
Photograph: YONHAP/EPA

[Tom Ambrose](#)

Thu 11 Nov 2021 04.29 EST

Armed forces are among the biggest polluters on the planet but are avoiding scrutiny because countries do not have to include their emissions in their targets, scientists say.

The world's militaries combined, and the industries that provide their equipment, [are estimated to create 6% of all global emissions](#), according to Scientists for Global Responsibility (SGR).

Owing to what they describe as a “large loophole” in the Paris agreement, governments are not required to provide full data on greenhouse gases being emitted by armed forces. Previously, under the Kyoto protocol, militaries were given an automatic exemption from CO₂ targets, after lobbying from the US government.

Campaigners say the current situation, whereby it is only voluntary for states to include armed forces in their carbon-cutting obligations, is undermining efforts to tackle the climate crisis.

SGR’s executive director, Dr Stuart Parkinson, said that as military spending increased, the loophole continued to grow.

“Military carbon emissions matter because they are a potentially large loophole in the Paris targets – especially for the high military spenders like the US, China, UK, Russia, India, Saudi Arabia and France,” he said.

“With military spending rapidly rising, this loophole is set to grow at a time when other emissions are falling. The seriousness with how these nations deal with this issue will affect action in other sectors and in other nations.”

The Ministry of Defence says the UK military’s total annual carbon footprint is 3 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e), but SGR estimates the true figure to be 11m tonnes.

That is roughly the amount 6m average cars would emit annually. The UK-based company with the largest carbon emissions is BAE Systems, whose emissions account for about 30% of the UK arms industry’s total output.

A recent report from SGR and the Conflict and Environment Observatory estimated the carbon footprint of EU armed forces in 2019 to total 24.8m tonnes of CO₂e, with France accounting for about a third of that.

Meanwhile, the US government says its armed forces emit 56m tonnes of CO₂e but, while there are bigger gaps in the data, SGR estimates it to be significantly higher at 205m tonnes.

The stark figures are supported by [Brown University's Costs of War project](#), which in 2019 said the US military was “the largest single source of greenhouse gas emissions in the world”.

SGR said the estimates were conservative and did not include the environmental impact of fighting wars. For example, the Iraq war was responsible for 141m tonnes of carbon releases in its first four years, according to an [Oil Change International report](#).

Let's be clear, this is the US government's most advanced and best funded climate policy. To militarise the consequences, while failing to tackle the causes of the climate crisis <https://t.co/euDYkZFLRX>

— Nick Buxton (@nickbuxton) [November 10, 2021](#)

Parkinson added: “Many nations don’t specifically report any military carbon data. Those that do often report partial figures. So figures for military aircraft could be hidden under ‘aviation’, military tech industry under ‘industry’, military bases under ‘public buildings’, etc. Indeed, it’s not just the public who are unaware, the policymakers are also unaware, and even the researchers.”

While the issue is not on the agenda at the [Cop26](#) climate summit in Glasgow, demonstrations have called for the UK to focus its spending on fighting climate change ahead of the armed forces.

Anya Nanning Ramamurthy, a campaigner for the Peace Pledge Union pacifist group, said: “I don’t think many people realise that military emissions aren’t included in the data. We have seen a massive increase in military spending in the UK, the largest in nearly 70 years, while we are in this climate crisis – they promise one thing, then go off and do another.”

This week a website was launched to monitor military emissions data. [The Military Emissions Gap](#) says it is dedicated to “tracking, analysing and closing the military emissions gap”.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/nov/11/worlds-militaries-avoiding-scrutiny-over-emissions>

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Cop26

China and the US announce plan to work together on cutting emissions

01:06

US and China announce surprise climate agreement – video

[Fiona Harvey](#)

Wed 10 Nov 2021 14.52 EST

China and the US announced a surprise plan to work together on cutting greenhouse gas emissions in the crucial next decade, in a strong boost to the Cop26 summit, as negotiators wrangled over a draft outcome.

The world's two biggest emitters had been trading insults for the first week of the conference, but on Wednesday evening unveiled a joint declaration that would see the world's two biggest economies cooperate closely on the emissions cuts scientists say are needed in the next 10 years to stay within 1.5C.

The remarkable turnaround came as a surprise to the UK hosts, and will send a strong signal to the 190-plus other countries at the talks. China and the US will work together on some key specific areas, such as cutting methane – a powerful greenhouse gas – and emissions from transport, energy and industry.

“Both sides recognise that there is a gap between the current effort and the Paris agreement goals, so we will jointly strengthen our Paris efforts and cooperation ... to accelerate a green and low carbon transition,” said Xie Zhenhua, China’s head of delegation. “Climate change is becoming an increasingly urgent challenge. We hope this joint declaration will help to achieve success at [Cop26](#).”

Speaking at a virtual business conference on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit, President Xi Jinping did not mention the deal directly but said “all of us can embark on a path of green, low-carbon sustainable development”.

“Together, we can usher in a future of green development,” he said.

John Kerry said: “The two largest economies in the world have agreed to work together on emissions in this decisive decade.

“This is a roadmap for our countries and future collaboration. China and the US have no shortage of differences. But cooperation is the only way to get this job done. This is about science, about physics.”

He told the conference: “This declaration is a step that we can build on to close the gap [between the emissions cuts set out so far and those needed]. Every step matters. We have a long journey ahead of us.”

Kerry compared the cooperation with China with the agreements by the US to reduce nuclear weapon arsenals in the cold war. “You have to look beyond differences sometimes to find a way forward.”

Just saw John Kerry sitting down with Xie Zhenhua. Fingers crossed that chief negotiators of worlds two biggest emitters 中国 and 美国 can work together and nudge the world closer to 1.5C climate target.

— jonathanwatts (@jonathanwatts) [November 4, 2021](#)

The China-US Joint Glasgow Declaration on Enhancing Climate Action in the 2020s came despite growing political tensions between the two powers, which had been reflected in the climate talks. In his parting shot at the conference, Joe Biden on Tuesday slammed China’s president, Xi Jinping, for “[not showing up](#)”. After that, Xie took a swipe at the US in an interview with the Guardian, saying: “We are not like some countries who withdrew from the Paris agreement after entering into talks.”

Antonio Guterres, the UN secretary-general, welcomed the agreement: “Tackling the climate crisis requires international cooperation and solidarity, and this is an important step in the right direction.”

The announcement followed a call by developing countries for rich nations to come forward with more financial help for vulnerable countries, saying a new draft outcome for the talks was too weak in this regard.

[The draft text, published early on Wednesday morning](#) by the UK as president of the talks, set out the probable outcome of the Cop26 talks, including a potential requirement for countries to return to the negotiating table next year to beef up their national plans on cutting greenhouse gas emissions.

The text also set out the scientific case for limiting global temperature rises to 1.5C above pre-industrial levels, and expressed “alarm” that emissions were far higher than the levels needed to stay within safe temperature thresholds.

But poor countries said the text needed more emphasis on climate finance, to help them cut carbon and cope with the impacts of climate breakdown.

Aubrey Webson, chair of the Alliance of Small Islands States, which represents 37 of the most at-risk countries, said: “The text provides a basis for moving forward but it needs to be strengthened in key areas in order to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable, particularly on finance. We won’t get the ambition on emissions we need for 1.5C if we don’t scale up the provision of finance, and this includes the long overdue recognition of a separate and additional component for loss and damage.”

He added that the language was too weak: “‘Urging’, ‘calling’, ‘encouraging’ and ‘inviting’ is not the decisive language that this moment calls for. We have limited time left in the Cop to get this right and send a clear message to our children, and the most vulnerable communities, that we hear you and we are taking this crisis seriously.”

Bruce Bilimon, minister of health for the Marshall Islands, part of the High Ambition Coalition made up of developed and developing countries, added:

“We need a comprehensive Glasgow package to build and reinforce trust between developed and developing states.”

Other developing countries told the Guardian that clearer commitments were needed to force countries to ratchet up their emissions cuts.

The UK prime minister, Boris Johnson, made a flying visit to Glasgow on Wednesday, where he warned delegates that failure to reach an effective agreement would bring an “immense” and well-deserved backlash from around the globe.

Johnson called for “a determined push to get us over the line” – and said some countries had not done enough to achieve this. Leaders not in Glasgow needed to “pick up the phone to their teams here and give them the negotiating margin, give them the space they need in which to manoeuvre and get this done”, he said.

Johnson criticised – but did not name – some countries for “conspicuously patting themselves on the back” for signing up to the Paris climate accord but doing too little at Cop.

“The world will find it absolutely incomprehensible if we fail to deliver [a good outcome]. And the backlash from people will be immense and it will be long-lasting, and frankly we will deserve their criticism and their opprobrium.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/nov/10/china-and-the-us-announce-plan-to-work-together-on-cutting-emissions>

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Chakras, crystals and conspiracy theories: how the wellness industry turned its back on Covid science



Illustration: Posed by model; Guardian Design; We Are; Nora Carol Photography; David Arky/Tetra Images; Rosemary Calvert; Somnuk Krokkum/Getty Images; Emmanuel Lattes/Alamy



Sirin Kale

Thu 11 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

Ozlem Demirboga Carr is not really into all that woo-woo stuff. “I’m definitely a full-science kind of person,” says the 41-year-old telecoms worker from Reading. She doesn’t believe in crystals, affirmations or salt lamps. But she did find herself unusually anxious during the UK’s Covid lockdown in March 2020 and, like many people, decided to practise yoga as a way to de-stress.

“I tried to be open-minded and I was open to advice on trying to improve my wellbeing and mental health,” she says. So she followed a range of social media accounts, including the “somatic therapist and biz coach” [Phoebe Greenacre](#), known for her yoga videos, and the “women’s empowerment and spiritual mentor” [Kelly Vittengl](#). The Instagram algorithm did its work. “I suddenly found myself following so many wellness accounts,” she says.

When the deployment of the Covid vaccine got under way, Carr began to see posts that troubled her, ranging from polite concern about the social consequences of mass vaccination, or the politics underpinning it, to full-blown rejection of the science. “The conversation and tone of their posts

shifted,” she says. “At first it was all about self-care and being part of a community that is caring for each other. But then they started to speak more about how there should be a choice when it came to vaccines. They were saying things like: ‘My body, my choice.’”

Carr watched as Greenacre posted an Instagram story describing vaccine passports as “medical apartheid”. Vittengl went further. In a post in July, Vittengl, who is unvaccinated, compared vaccine passports to the social polarisation [witnessed during the Holocaust](#) and spoke about the “mess” caused by the “ideology of the western medical system”. “We aren’t being shown the full picture,” Vittengl concluded, in a post that was liked by Greenacre. Greenacre subsequently invited Vittengl on to [her podcast](#), where Vittengl discussed the pernicious influence of “big pharma” and celebrated the work of the controversial doctor Zach Bush, who has been called [a “Covid denialist”](#) by researchers at McGill University in Montreal.

Such views are anything but exceptional in the wellness community. If anything, they are on the milder end of the spectrum. Anti-vaccine or vaccine-hesitant attitudes are as abundant in online wellness circles as pastel-coloured Instagram infographics and asana poses on the beach at sunset. “People are really confused by what is happening,” says [Derek Beres](#), the co-host of [Conspirituality](#), a podcast about the convergence of conspiracy theories and wellness. “Why is their yoga instructor sharing [QAnon](#) hashtags?”

In May, the Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH) found that [just 12 influencers](#) were responsible for nearly 65% of anti-vaccine content on Facebook and Twitter. “Many of these leading anti-vaxxers are alternative health entrepreneurs … They’re reaching millions of users every day,” says Callum Hood of the CCDH. “This is a serious problem. Vaccine hesitancy has become a difficult and entrenched obstacle to dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic.”



For every saintly Yoga With Adrienne there are thousands of grifters pushing untested therapies on impressionable people. Photograph: rbkomar/Getty Images

Included within the CCDH's "disinformation dozen" are Joseph Mercola, a US [wellness entrepreneur](#) called the "most influential spreader of Covid-19 misinformation online" by the New York Times; Dr Christiane Northrup, a wellness expert who helped popularise the notorious Covid pseudo-documentary Plandemic by [sharing it](#) with her 560,000 Facebook followers; and Kelly Brogan, a contributor to Gwyneth Paltrow's Goop wellness platform. Mikki Willis, the director of Plandemic, is well known in the California yoga scene, while David "Avocado" Wolfe, a conspiracy theorist and raw food advocate, is a regular figure at anti-vaccination protests across the US.

Away from the CCDH's list, other prominent figures include the yoga instructor Stephanie Birch, who has posted QAnon hashtags on her now-deleted Instagram account, and Krystal Tini, a wellness influencer with 169,000 Instagram followers, who has [consistently posted anti-vaccine](#) content, including [one post](#) that compared lockdowns to the horrors inflicted on Polish Jews in the Warsaw ghetto. Comparing vaccine deployment to historic atrocities such as slavery and the Holocaust is a routine trope in anti-vaccine wellness circles; the Los Angeles wellness and

beauty guru Shiva Rose recently compared vaccines to McCarthyism, slavery, the Cultural Revolution, the Spanish Inquisition and the Holocaust, [all in one post](#).

Beres says many of these wellness influencers are “using cult leader techniques in digital spaces”, sowing fear and hesitancy about the Covid vaccine among their followers, one Instagram post at a time.

They maintain, however, that they are misunderstood or misrepresented. When contacted by the Guardian, Greenacre distanced herself from Vittengl’s comments on her podcast. “It would be incorrect and misleading to your readers to suggest comments from a third party reflect my own,” she said. She also said that she used the term “medical apartheid” to refer to “the use of discrimination and segregation based on medical status, for example treating people negatively based on their medical status by use of Covid vaccine passports”, rather than anything relating to historical discrimination based on race.

Vittengl, meanwhile, stated that she is “not against the western medical system … However, I do feel that the industry has been heavily taken over by big pharmaceutical companies who are primarily concerned with finances over health.” She defended the work of Bush. “He is compassionately trying to help find more answers,” she said.

Carr, however, decided to unfollow both women. Now, when she wants to practise yoga, she watches the Sweaty Betty YouTube channel.

We have had more than a decade of the modern iteration of wellness. A decade of [vagina candles](#), chia bowls, coffee enemas and spirulina shots. A decade of burnt-out, anxious, unhappy women seeking to detoxify their bodies, rebalance their chakras and recentre their divine femininity, ideally while losing weight. The global wellness industry is [worth about \\$1.5tn](#) (£1.1tn) – and for every saintly [Yoga With Adriene](#) there are thousands of grifters pushing untested therapies on impressionable people.

Although the modern iteration of wellness rose out of the primordial goop of the late 00s (Paltrow, the high priest of wellness, founded her lifestyle

brand in 2008, originally as a newsletter), the origins of the movement go back to the hippy counterculture of the 70s. Then, as now, wellness presented itself as a remedy to the travails of modern life. It was structured around three tenets: robust individualism, distrust of western medicine and a commitment to self-optimisation, usually through restrictive diets and vigorous exercise regimens, designed to stave off disease and death for as long as possible. In her 2018 book [Natural Causes: Life, Death and the Illusion of Control](#), Barbara Ehrenreich wrote: “Wellness is the means to remake oneself into an ever-more perfect self-correcting machine, capable of setting goals and moving toward them with smooth determination.”



‘You think: I drink smoothies and go to yoga and work out seven days a week. Why can’t everyone else do it?’ Photograph: Piotr Marcinski/Getty Images/EyeEm

In the 70s and 80s, Ann Wigmore proselytised the ability of a raw-food diet to cure cancer, diabetes and Aids. “There is this belief that if you stay true to a certain lifestyle and only ingest a particular kind of food and drink, that guards you against disease,” says Carl Cederström, the co-author of [Desperately Seeking Self-Improvement: A Year Inside the Optimization Movement](#). “You create a strong armour around yourself by living healthily.”

By contrast, western medicine – in particular the pernicious influence of big pharma – conspires to keep the masses sick. “There’s this suspicion about science,” Cederström says. “You often hear the rhetoric that modern civilisation is poisoning our lives, poisoning our food, and we need to find ways of living *clean* again, by cutting ourselves loose from a society that is constraining us and forcing us to live an inauthentic, unnatural lifestyle.”

The polluting tributary in wellness’s fresh, clear stream has always been its unwavering insistence that health is a choice rather than something genetically predetermined or socially ordained. Few wellness practitioners say outright that people who are morbidly obese, have type 2 diabetes or have a mental illness suffer by their own hand: they instead couch their judgment in euphemisms and misdirection.

“Wellness has very strong ties to the self-help movement,” says Cederström. “And what you find at the core of these movements is the idea that you should be able to help yourself.” Rhonda Byrne, the author of the bestselling self-help book *The Secret* – which portrayed the power of positive thinking as a curative to all of life’s ills – once claimed that the victims of 9/11 were in the wrong place at the wrong time due to [their own negative thoughts](#) and outlook on the world.

“A more general theory as to why people would happily tune into the ideology of wellness, and in particular this individualistic attitude, is that it is in some ways self-flattering,” says Cederström. “We live in a culture that connects morality to health. If you have a good, middle-class life, you’re encouraged to believe that you deserve it. If you’re poor and unhealthy – well, you didn’t work hard enough.”

For nearly 50 years, the world of wellness has viewed health as something that can be shrugged on or off at will, like a cashmere sweater. Doctors are to be distrusted and individuals should take responsibility for their own “wellness journey”. Then the Covid vaccine programme began – and this anti-scientific attitude metastasised into something far more harmful. “This is a very long-running thing,” says Hood. “We’re seeing that erosion of trust in mainstream medicine flowering now. And it’s very dangerous.”

Before Catherine Gabitan, who is 31 and lives in northern California, became an “[overcoming self-sabotage](#)” coach, she worked in the service industry. Gabitan usually rose to manager roles easily, but despite the promotions she never felt that she was fulfilling her true potential, as an A-grade student with a college degree.

She smoked cigarettes, drank coffee and alcohol and ate processed foods. Despite her best efforts, she could never kick these habits. “One of my initial inspirations for becoming really healthy was to make sure I had a really clean body, so that I could be the healthiest vessel I could be in order to have the healthiest baby,” Gabitan says.

In early 2020, Gabitan bought [a \\$199 lecture series](#) from the self-sabotage coach Jason Christoff. Christoff, who also styles himself as a nutrition and exercise expert, shares misinformation about the Covid vaccine on his [public Facebook page](#) and his [Telegram](#) channel.

When contacted by the Guardian for comment, Christoff responded: “Maybe you should look into who sponsors your own newspaper, but that would get you sacked.” He subsequently [wrote a blog](#) linking the Guardian to a plot by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to reduce the global population by 10-15%. “Is the Guardian and their sponsors watching out for public health or are they colluding to decrease population and public health, in order to place the remaining population under firm tyrannical control?” Christoff wrote.

Christoff helped Gabitan to realise that, for years, she had not believed herself to be worthy of “a higher level of health”. She explains: “My subconscious beliefs regarding why I didn’t feel worthy of having a business or learning to invest, or why I drank alcohol or smoked cigarettes – all these things were related to what I felt worthy of achieving.”

Christoff’s lecture series had the invigorating quality of an ice bath after a sauna. Almost immediately, Gabitan embarked upon what she calls her “health journey”. She quit coffee, smoking, alcohol and gluten. She began exercising three times a week and eating only organic, locally produced food. She also quit the service industry, rebranding as a self-sabotage coach.

Social media is the wild west when it comes to health claims. You can say whatever you want

When the Covid vaccine programme began, Gabitan, who is unvaccinated, began sharing anti-vaccine content on her Instagram page. “Injecting poison will never make you healthy,” she posted [on 8 July](#). “We’re taught that ‘germs’ and genetics make us sick so we don’t have to take responsibility for our toxic lifestyles,” she wrote [on 23 July](#). “Could other people’s need to micromanage what we put on or in our bodies be a projection of their poor health history and inability to take responsibility for their own health?” she asked [on 16 August](#).

Gabitan sees health through a hyperindividualistic moral frame. She takes control of her own health; if other people won’t help themselves, why should she? “I don’t smoke and I don’t drink,” she says. “I spend a lot of money investing in the highest-quality foods available to me. I believe in natural immunity and supporting my immune system. I’ve taken radical responsibility for that, especially over Covid. And there are other people out there who are still drinking alcohol and smoking cigarettes who want me to protect their health, but they won’t even protect their own health.”

In this, Gabitan exhibits the logical fallacy of wellness: the idea that the human mind is a drill sergeant and the organs of our body obediently fall in line. “You may exercise diligently, eat a medically fashionable diet, and still die of a sting from an irritated bee,” Ehrenreich said in *Natural Causes*. “You may be a slim, toned paragon of wellness, and still a macrophage within your body may decide to throw in its lot with an incipient tumour.”

Gabitan does not need the vaccine, because she is a shining paragon of health. The people dying from Covid are people with disabilities, or those who are already sick, obese or old. What happens to them is nothing for Gabitan to trouble herself about unduly, as an able-bodied member of the wellness community.

“A lot of the people that are experiencing hospitalisations from Covid had a lot of other co-morbidities, right?” Gabitan says. “Or they are overweight. If our government had promoted a healthy lifestyle, healthy eating, from the

beginning ... that would have done a lot more to prevent some of these hospitalisations by actually encouraging people to become the healthiest versions of themselves. Right. So, for me, one premise is people taking responsibility for their own health.”



Some of the people pushing anti-vaccine content ‘believe themselves to be martyrs’, says Derek Beres. Photograph: Andriy Onufriyenko/Getty Images

It sounds, I respond, as if you are saying that, when people get sick, it is their fault; not bad luck, because anyone can get sick at any time. “See, I don’t think it’s just bad luck,” she says. “I think part of it is people taking responsibility for their own health, to make sure they’re not putting toxins in their body – and the other part of it is not being exposed to pollution.” Nobody close to her has died from Covid.

Gabitan also believes the vaccine to be dangerous and ineffective. “The vaccine doesn’t stop transmission,” she says. (The vaccine is thought to reduce the risk of transmitting the virus to other people, although this protection wanes with time.) She is concerned about the impact of the vaccine on her fertility – this is a common fear among the vaccine-hesitant and is particularly prevalent in wellness circles, which are mostly female – and doesn’t trust data released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the US health agency. She prefers to get information

about the vaccine from Telegram, the Children's Health Defense (a group founded by Robert F Kennedy Jr that is a major source of vaccine disinformation) and Project Veritas, a far-right conspiracy theory site.

As a result of the research she has conducted over the last year, Gabitan's distrust of medical science now extends beyond the Covid vaccine. If she had children, she would not vaccinate them against any disease. She would reject modern medicine in virtually all cases, excepting broken bones. Modern medicine is "designed to deal with symptoms, not the reason the symptoms showed up in the first place", she says.

I ask Gabitan, who is affable and willing to answer all my questions, why she agreed to speak with me, given our dramatically different perspectives on the vaccine. "To have open dialogue, even with people with different opinions, is the only way that we can heal what's going on in the world," she says. I tell her that many people would find her attitude selfish and disturbing. "I don't want to be callous," Gabitan says. "Because my goal is to help other people live the healthiest life that they can. That's my passion in the world."

I am certain that she believes it.

Gabitan's views are by no means a reflection of all wellness practitioners. Deepak Chopra, the famed yoga and meditation expert, [has urged people to get vaccinated](#). "It's mistaken and unfair to use a fringe group as the tar that stains everyone else," Chopra wrote in [a blog](#) in June. But Gabitan's attitude is an example, however extreme, of how the ideological structures of wellness may support anti-vaccine attitudes.

Before Conspirituality's Beres worked in technology, he was a yoga instructor. "Even though I've been involved in the yoga and wellness world since the 90s, I've always been sceptical of a lot of the claims," he says. "When you get into yoga, there are a lot of health claims that sound OK if you're at a nice yoga studio in a major city, but don't reflect reality."

He sees people like Gabitan as the logical end point of 50 years of telling people that virtue is to be signalled with striated abs and a rippling musculature. “When you live in a country where even a relatively modest middle-class lifestyle is way above what the rest of the world can sustain, it’s very easy to get locked into anecdote and your circle of friends,” Beres says. “You think: I drink smoothies and go to yoga and work out seven days a week and eat organic food. Why can’t everyone else do it?”

The US – the avocado stone of the global wellness community – is, and always has been, extremely individualistic. “Everything is about personal freedom and personal knowledge. What we see here is late-stage capitalism merging with hyperindividualism,” Beres says.

The US is also a country without universal healthcare. “If you don’t have insurance, it’s incredibly expensive to get treated,” says Hood of the CCDH. “People develop an interest in looking into alternatives and that’s where wellness influencers step in. You don’t have to spend thousands on doctors. You can just take this supplement or follow this regimen and you will be fine.”

Finally, it is a country where pharmaceutical companies have long behaved contemptibly. Last month, [Purdue Pharma paid \\$4.5bn](#) to settle its role in the opioid crisis, after overwhelming evidence emerged that the pharmaceutical company played down the addictive qualities of OxyContin for many years. Claims about the pernicious influence of big pharma are de rigueur in anti-vaccine circles; Plandemic’s central thesis is that big pharma is suppressing affordable cures for Covid to make money from patented medicines.

There is this belief that if you stay true to a certain lifestyle, that guards you against disease

“One thing alternate health entrepreneurs have in common with anti-vaxxers is that they talk about big pharma a lot,” says Hood. “It’s no coincidence that the organised anti-vaxx movement has its home in the US. Because there’s a greater profit motive in US healthcare, there’s a level of suspicion.” The irony, of course, is that many wellness practitioners are also

motivated by profit. “It’s a business for them, but they’re not open about it,” says Beres.

But to understand why some people may be driven to anti-vaccine attitudes is not to excuse their wider impact on community health, or the distressing implication that they regard the lives of those less fortunate than themselves as having scant value. “Some of the most strikingly nasty stuff I’ve seen with Covid misinformation has come from wellness influencers,” Hood says.

On the subject of nastiness, he refers to a [widely circulated meme](#) (shared this year by the TV presenter Anthea Turner, to outrage) featuring a fat person on a mobility scooter asking a slim person to wear a mask. “The implication is that the person in the mobility scooter is somehow morally deficient and doesn’t have the authority to ask someone to wear a mask,” says Hood. There are similar attitudes where vaccines are concerned. “There is this nasty sense from some anti-vaxxer people that the people who have fallen ill with Covid are somehow deserving of it.”

Social media companies, for their part, are reluctant to take down disinformation. “Social media is the wild west when it comes to health claims,” says Hood. “You can say whatever you want.” Research in 2020 by the CCDH [found that](#) platforms failed to act on 95% of Covid and vaccine misinformation reported to them.

Wellness influencers – including members of the CCDH’s “disinformation dozen” – remain on social media platforms with a nudge and a wink. Often, they refer users to their Telegram channels, where they really let rip. (Telegram is unmoderated.) While Northrup [has had her Instagram account](#) disabled, her Facebook page links to her [Telegram channel](#), in which she deluges 58,000 people with a flow of anti-vaccine disinformation. Likewise, Wolfe [exhorts his Facebook fans](#) to follow him on Telegram, where he unleashes.

Technology companies are slow to take down anti-vaccine content, because it is lucrative. Mercola has 1.7m engaged followers on Facebook; Wolfe an astonishing 11.9m. Outrage fuels engagement, which drives revenue, for the

influencer and the social media platform. In March, Mercola joined [the newsletter platform Substack](#) – his paid-for subscription costs \$5 a month, of which Substack takes 10% as commission. It is already the [11th-most-read](#) paid health newsletter on the platform. (While Substack's [terms of use](#) ban plagiarism, pornography and intellectual property theft, there is no prohibition on disinformation.)

Some of the people pushing anti-vaccine content do so in the sincere belief they are working for the public good. “They believe themselves to be martyrs,” Beres says. “They’re fully bought in. They think this is an apocalyptic-level battle they were made for, to be the champions.” But Beres believes others “are like: ‘Wow. I can make a bunch of money here.’”

When wellness influencers start to post anti-vaccine content online, a calcifying effect takes place. Pro-vaccine people unfollow; a few push back in the comments, but ultimately also unfollow, whereas followers who were hesitant about vaccines waver towards anti-vaccine attitudes and committed anti-vaxxers congregate, with applause. Before Gabitan began posting anti-vaccine content on her Instagram account, an average post would get 20-30 likes; now, she can easily get more than 150 likes on a post about big pharma. “The more people get this social reinforcement, the more anti-vaxx they become,” says Hood.

As a result, anti-vaccine wellness influencers get an influx of followers, many of them new to the community. “What happened after Plandemic is that QAnon infiltrated wellness circles,” says Beres. “Yoga instructors started using QAnon hashtags and watched their following grow by hundreds of thousands.” Online wellness is so closely affiliated with QAnon that the phenomenon has been called “pastel QAnon” by Marc-André Argentino, a researcher at Concordia University in Montreal. Carr is baffled by how QAnon, a rightwing movement, has infiltrated what was historically a hippy, countercultural space. “The similarities between rightwing groups and the wellness community scares me,” she says.

This dopamine pull of likes and engagement encourages influencers to skew extreme, all the while positioning themselves as victims of so-called cancel culture or online hate mobs. In an Instagram story posted after

Vittengl stated her views on vaccination, she portrayed herself as a victim. “The backlash is unbelievable,” [she wrote](#). “As an energetically sensitive person [someone who feels emotions in a heightened way] it can sometimes be too much. But … not speaking up no longer feels like a choice.” She later tells me: “I understand how this may come off as ‘victim mentality’, but it is a very real and very intense phenomenon.”

Carr finds this narrative maddening. “This community feels like they are being victimised, but they are *not* victims. They are privileged, well-off people with choices.” Carr is British-Turkish and takes umbrage with how the community co-opts the language of human rights to advocate against vaccines. “That makes me crazy,” says Carr. “To portray vaccines as against human rights … I come from a country where human rights are [constantly being diminished](#).”

In the absence of action from the social media giants, all users like Carr can do is unfollow their former gurus. “In a passive way, that’s my solution,” she says. Many more users will no doubt replace them. “If you’re an ordinary person who’s having doubts about the vaccine and you start looking for answers, you’re far more likely to come across an anti-vaxx source than you are an authoritative source like the NHS or CDC,” says Hood. “These are effective and very intentional ways of radicalising people.”

He hopes that this alignment of the wellness community with anti-vaxxers and conspiracy theorists will prompt a wider reappraisal of an industry that, for many years, has been replete with charlatans and quacks, profiting from that most fundamental of human desires – a desire for health. “I’m not saying the whole thing is rotten,” Hood says. “But there are broader questions to be asked about wellness and the alternative health industry. This is the end product of telling people they can control their health through willpower and diet. Most of the time, as a society, we don’t think that’s so harmful. But when it comes to the pandemic, it’s quite obvious that it is harmful. Probably the harms were there all the time. But the pandemic has exposed them.”

This article was amended on 11 November 2021. A previous version said CCDH research found that 95% of social media platforms failed to act on

Covid and vaccine misinformation reported to them. In fact, the figure of 95% referred to the percentage of reported misinformation that was not removed by social media companies.

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Photograph: Getty/Guardian design

[The long read](#)

Meet the ‘inactivists’, tangling up the climate crisis in culture wars

Photograph: Getty/Guardian design

by [Jack Shenker](#)

Thu 11 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

In May 2020, as the world was convulsed by the coronavirus pandemic and global infections topped 4 million, a strange video began appearing in the feeds of some Facebook users. “Climate alarm is reaching untold levels of exaggeration and hysteria,” said an unseen narrator, over a montage of environmental protests and clips of a tearful Greta Thunberg. “There is no doubt about it, climate change has become a cult,” it continued, to the kind of pounding beat you might hear on the soundtrack of a Hollywood blockbuster. “Carbon dioxide emissions have become the wages of sin.”

The video's reach was relatively small: according to [Facebook data](#), it was viewed somewhere between 15,000 and 20,000 times. But over the following weeks [more videos came](#), each one experimenting with slightly different scripts and visuals. All focused on the supposed irrationality and hypocrisy of climate campaigners, and the hardship they wanted to inflict upon society's most impoverished communities. "Those who demand action on climate change continue to fly around in private jets from one virtue-signalling climate conference to the next," stated one, against a backdrop of Leonardo DiCaprio and Prince Harry delivering speeches from lecterns. "Is this fair?" Another video took aim at the idea that countries should be transitioning towards "net zero" carbon dioxide emissions, calling it an "unnecessary and swingeing plan that hits the poor and costs the earth". In total, between May and July, the advertiser spent less than £3,000 disseminating 10 videos. Collectively, they were viewed more than half a million times.

At one stage, users hovering over the logo of that advertiser – a UK organisation called The Global Warming Policy Forum, or GWPF – were informed by Facebook that it was a "Science Site". The GWPF is not a science website: it is the campaigning arm of [a well-funded foundation](#) accused by opponents of being one of Britain's biggest sources of climate science denial.

The videos being tested by the GWPF in the spring and summer of 2020 were part of a strategic pivot away from explicit climate crisis denialism, and towards something subtler – a move being pursued by similar campaigners across the world. Welcome to a new age of what the atmospheric scientist and environmental author [Michael E Mann](#) has labelled climate "inactivism": an epic struggle to convince you not so much to doubt the reality of climate crisis, but rather to dampen your enthusiasm for any attempts at dealing with it.

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In mid-July, more than a year on from the GWPF's video advertising campaign, the British government published its long-awaited plan to [decarbonise the transport system](#), now the country's biggest source of

carbon emissions. As is increasingly common these days when it comes to big, set-piece environmental announcements, the proposals – phasing out sales of polluting vehicles and eliminating the aviation sector’s carbon footprint as part of the UK’s goal of becoming a net-zero nation by 2050 – were greeted with cautious approval from most quarters. The climate sector was broadly positive, but so too was the transport industry itself, as well as figures from across the mainstream political spectrum. When critics did speak out, it was nearly always to argue that the plan’s targets did not go far enough.

There was, however, a dissenting voice: Craig Mackinlay MP, elected representative for South Thanet – a far-flung promontory on the eastern edge of Kent, which is now home to a bitter struggle over the future of a disused local airport. “Make no mistake, this requires a radical transformation of every part of the economy and our freedoms,” he warned [in an article for Conservative Home](#). “As ever, it will be the poor who suffer most from these elite delusions.”

Mackinlay, who has described Britain’s net-zero aspirations as a “social calamity” and insisted that “sooner or later, the public will rebel against this madness”, was not alone in framing decarbonisation through the lens of cultural division and class privilege. “This policy was wrong-headed from the start, dreamed up in the kitchen diners of Notting Hill, with no understanding of real people’s daily lives,” claimed Julian Knight, a fellow Tory MP, in a [report](#) published by an all-party parliamentary group chaired by Mackinlay that supports cheaper fuel for motorists. Steve Baker, another Conservative parliamentarian and a close ally of Mackinlay, has dismissed the Committee on Climate Change, which advises the government, as “unelected and unaccountable”. Earlier this year, Baker declared that “In net zero, as with Brexit, the political class has in a very, almost smug and self-satisfied way, built a consensus which is not going to survive contact with the public.” Instead, he predicted, “there’s going to be an enormous political explosion.”

Public debate over the environment once pitted people who believed in the reality of anthropogenic climate change against those who questioned it. At least two of the current cabinet, [including Boris Johnson](#), used to count

themselves [among the sceptical camp](#). Today, with a firm majority of every demographic group in the UK in agreement with the fact that humans are warming the planet, and that this poses a serious danger, the battle lines have been redrawn.

“The great underreported story is how normalised all this has become. Those who want to see action on climate change, in many ways, have won the argument,” says James Murray, editor of the website [BusinessGreen](#) and a leading environmental commentator. “That is now the consensus view: it has the nominal support of every government and science academy on the planet, and crucially it’s where the money is.”



Conservative MP Craig Mackinlay, right, winning the seat of South Thanet in 2015, beating his former Ukip colleague Nigel Farage (left) and comedian Al Murray (centre). Photograph: Matt Dunham/AP

With outright climate science denial relegated to the fringes, opponents of urgent action on climate emergency have been forced to [switch tack](#). Alongside pro forma acknowledgments that climate breakdown is happening and vague commitments to a greener future (“Of course I want to leave this planet in a better place than I found it, we all want that,” Mackinlay [told the BBC](#) recently), the inactivists – a loose coalition of fossil-fuel interests, conservative ideologues and supportive politicians and

journalists – seek to redirect responsibility for the problem away from the fossil fuel industry and towards [individual consumers](#), as well as [developing nations](#) in the global south. When solutions to the climate crisis are proposed by inactivists, they tend to be timid and unambitious, with faith in future (as yet unrealised) “green” technologies held up as a reason to shy away from serious structural changes now.

But there is now an even more powerful weapon in the inactivist armoury. It comes in the form of an appeal to social justice: one that casts environmentalists as an aloof, out-of-touch establishment, and the inactivists as insurgents, defending the values and livelihoods of ordinary people. “The biggest single threat to the net zero transition is a culture war-style backlash that heavily politicises this agenda and spooks governments into moving more slowly,” says Murray. “At present, it’s on the periphery. But as the past few years have taught us, ideas that were on the periphery can become very influential, very quickly.”

Attempts to mobilise anti-elitist sentiments against climate activists are nothing new. Wealthy celebrities who lecture others on environmental sustainability have always been charged with inauthenticity. In the 00s, Republican attacks on Al Gore, the former US vice-president whose personal fortune tops \$300m, were one of the [main drivers of polarisation](#) among the American public on green issues. What has altered in the decade and a half since the release of Gore’s seminal 2006 film, *An Inconvenient Truth*, is our political landscape. In many parts of the world, the financial crash and years of subsequent turmoil have shredded electoral support for parties and politicians associated with the old order and propelled new forces into power, from Trump in the US to Brexiters in the UK.

Popular anger at the economic insecurities that are synonymous with 21st-century capitalism – which in the UK have included [soaring housing costs](#), the [casualisation of employment](#) and [sustained falls in wages](#) – has provided an opening for any political forces presenting themselves as radical outsiders, fighting on behalf of the voiceless masses. On the right, these grievances have been fused with a cultural resentment towards highfalutin virtue-signalling and liberal elites.

It is here that inactivists have spotted an opportunity to harness some of the antagonism towards prevailing power systems and use it to undermine support for what they see as unaffordable climate action. As decarbonisation efforts expand into the realm of our everyday lives, touching on the ways we heat our homes, for example, or the cars we own and the roads we are allowed to drive down, that task has become easier. Their efforts have been aided further by social media platforms, which have enabled the rapid spread of disinformation and helped fuel social division. The defining – and mutually reinforcing – phenomena of our age are political turbulence and technological disruption. It's into this crucible that debates over climate breakdown are now being poured.

For the environmental sector, seemingly gaining ground in the fight for hearts and minds, this evolution of the climate wars has been a dislocating experience. Not only are progressive campaigners being forced to defend themselves against charges of elitism, but they're having to do so within the confines of privately run “walled gardens” such as Facebook, where profit-seeking algorithms determine whose voices speak loudest, and those seeking to push culture-war narratives find fertile ground.

As an example of what the new battleground looks like, climate activists point to the [gilet jaunes \(yellow vests\) movement](#) in France – which began as a protest against fuel tax rises but expanded into a broader critique of economic injustice imposed by haughty technocrats – and power outages in Texas last winter that were [erroneously blamed](#) by many American rightwing pundits on the failures of wind power.

Over the course of just a few days in February, millions of internet users were subjected to [disinformation](#) about the blackouts, including a viral image of a helicopter supposedly being sent to de-ice a frozen Texas wind turbine, which was actually taken in Sweden many years earlier. The whole episode prompted MSNBC host Chris Hayes to rail against this “painful culture war idiocy”.

“The implications of all this on our ability to campaign are huge,” says Michael Khoo, a communications specialist who works with Friends of the

Earth. “We needed to master this new environment, and be able to understand and respond to what’s happening in real time.”

That is exactly what Khoo and many of his colleagues are now attempting to do. In the run-up to [Cop26](#), more than 30 leading organisations came together to develop a new set of tools capable both of monitoring the online spread of inactivist messaging, and anticipating the next Texas blackout campaign before it takes off. The ongoing project is being led by the [Institute for Strategic Dialogue](#), or ISD, a thinktank better known for its work tackling hate and extremism. So far it has yielded valuable insights into the shape of climate debates across Europe, such as the “national sovereignty” arguments being used to defend coal mining [in Poland](#), and the entwining of anti-EU sentiments with inactivist climate messaging [in Hungary](#). It has also led to a major report exploring the global spread of “[climate lockdown](#)” alarmism, in which hard-right activists and Covid denialists have found common cause in driving fear of pandemic-type lockdowns that they claim will soon be imposed by tyrannical governments at the behest of environmentalists.



The runway at Manston airport in Kent. Photograph: John Miller/Alamy

It was back in May this year that [DeSmog](#) – a journalism platform that aims to expose and eliminate the “PR pollution” around climate breakdown, and

one of the project's partners – first noticed a [newly trending Twitter hashtag](#): #CostOfNetZero. It was being pushed by Steve Baker, the Tory MP for Wycombe and the former chair of the Brexit-supporting European Research Group, as well as a newly appointed GWPF trustee. Using ISD's tools, researchers were able to map the sources of tweets containing the hashtag, and the relationships between them. "What we found at that stage was that it was basically just Baker and his allies continually retweeting it to create the impression of there being a lot of concern around this issue," said Mat Hope, a former DeSmog editor. "We were able to show that it was a manufactured controversy, not some authentic insight from somebody with their finger on the country's pulse." (Steve Baker did not respond to a request for comment.)

In the months that followed, however, disquiet over the net zero transition began ramping up in sections of the UK press – initially in outlets such as Spiked Online and GB News, but eventually creeping into the pages of major newspapers such as the Daily Telegraph and the Sun, too. In August, the Spectator magazine printed an image of banknotes tumbling into a void [on its cover](#), with the headline "The cost of net zero"; by September, right-leaning media commentators were homing in on the government's aim of gradually phasing out gas boilers as part of the decarbonisation plan, and replacing them with air- or ground-source heat pumps instead. The [far greater](#) economic costs of inaction on climate crisis were rarely mentioned in these reports, but again and again, efforts to reduce our collective carbon emissions were framed as an elitist power-grab. "People want a cleaner, greener planet," wrote Andrew Neil for the Daily Mail in October. "But they will not tolerate a green strategy that involves posh folk telling plain folk what they must do. Especially when the posh folk are doing very nicely out of greenery and the plain folk are picking up the tab."

By the autumn – as a growing cost-of-living crisis began to dominate the news agenda – the GWPF had [rebranded itself](#) as Net Zero Watch, a [new parliamentary grouping](#) called the Net Zero Scrutiny Group led by Craig Mackinlay had been formed, and Westminster insiders were reporting on [widening splits](#) within the Conservative party over the entire net zero transition. "The fact is you don't need a majority of the population behind you to create a myth-making frenzy like this; you can do it with a very

small minority and a set of media outriders,” said James Murray. Members of the Net Zero Scrutiny group reject the suggestion that they are espousing a new form of climate science denial. “What I want this group to be is a clearing house, a balanced academic facility where we get all sides of the argument,” Mackinlay has claimed [previously](#).

The idea that decarbonisation is inherently elitist is a myth, peddled largely by political figures who have shown little concern for deprived communities in any other context, and who ignore the fact that without a net zero transition it is the very poorest – globally and domestically – who will suffer most severely. But like all effective myths, it is founded on a kernel of truth: namely that under successive governments, political decision-making has felt remote and unaccountable, the rich have got richer, and life for a great many of the rest of us has grown harder. “Of course we are jumping on this, but we are jumping on it because we think it’s a real issue,” said Benny Peiser, director of the GWPF, when I questioned him about the organisation’s shift in focus. He went on: “A year ago, if someone asked their MP, ‘Why are you not raising questions about the cost of net zero?’, they would say, ‘Well I don’t get any letters from constituents about this issue, so why should I stick my head above the parapet?’ And this has changed for the first time in recent months. Now MPs do get letters about that very issue.”

The GWPF may have been working behind the scenes to encourage that change, but as Peiser implies, they are able to do so in part because people are experiencing very real anxieties. “When people like Mackinlay and Baker start talking about whether the costs and benefits of net zero are going to be distributed equitably, and you consider austerity and the impact of the pandemic, there’s something there that a lot of people might find plausible,” observed Adam Corner, an independent researcher who has helped lead studies of public attitudes on climate change. “They’re inviting people to ask themselves: can the same government that made the poorest pay for the banking crisis really be trusted to design a fair climate policy?”

The Isle of Thanet lies on the north-eastern edge of [Kent](#), where a narrow channel once severed it from the mainland. Over the centuries it has been where saints, crusaders and adventurers first set foot in Britain. More

recently, it has become better known as a place of deprivation, and as an electoral bastion for the nationalist right. In 2015, Thanet district council became the first in the country to fall under the control of Ukip, and in that same year Nigel Farage came close to winning the South Thanet parliamentary seat (he was narrowly beaten by Mackinlay, himself a former Ukip leader who later defected to the Conservatives).

Today, it is also a microcosm of the climate culture wars, thanks to a fierce tussle over the fate of Manston airport – a former RAF base that played a pivotal role in the Battle of Britain. Manston went on to cater for commercial passengers, but by the early 2010s it was losing up to £10,000 a day, and the airport finally shut its doors in 2014.

Since then, the mammoth site has been variously earmarked for housing, a manufacturing site, and even a film studio (it was “not beyond the realms of possibility” that the [next James Bond production](#) could be shot in Thanet, insisted the airport’s then owners in 2015). What some in Thanet really yearned for, though, was a functioning airport once again. “Manston is part of every local person’s DNA,” said Martin Sutton, an aviation engineer who was based at the airport for many years. “It was a community, and a massive asset to the area.”

In 2019 that dream took a step closer to reality when the site was acquired by Riveroak Strategic Partners (RSP), a group of international investors ultimately controlled by an offshore company headquartered in the British Virgin Islands. RSP announced plans to spend £300m transforming Manston into a global air freight hub, “one which delivers economic prosperity and employment across Kent and protects a strategic aviation resource for the nation”. Craig Mackinlay, along with Thanet’s other Conservative MP, Roger Gale, welcomed the development wholeheartedly.



An England flag bearing the words ‘Fight for Manston Airport, never surrender’, on display in 2015, the year after it closed. Photograph: Carl Court/Getty Images

But others in the area felt differently. With a runway approach route that lies directly over Ramsgate’s historical town centre, many residents opposed any resumption of flights – and argued that, in light of the country’s net-zero commitments, Britain should be urgently reducing its aviation emissions rather than expanding them. When RSP’s proposal was given the go-ahead by the national government last year, despite its own Planning Inspectorate recommending a rejection, the Green party [described it](#) as “a senseless act, which places the economic benefit of a small number of people ahead of the wellbeing of everybody else”. It was at that point that Jenny Dawes, a softly-spoken 74-year-old who moved to Thanet nine years ago, began [crowdfunding](#) to cover the legal costs of a judicial review that would challenge the government decision. With the support of a network of local anti-airport campaign groups, she raised more than £100,000 and – in an outcome that shocked almost everybody – succeeded. In February 2021, the Department for Transport [formally withdrew](#) its development consent order for the cargo hub and began its consideration process anew. Now, once again, Manston’s fate is uncertain.

For campaigners on both sides of the Manston debate, the degree of animosity involved has been overwhelming. “I’ve been called a toxic wart, a KGB agent, and – my personal favourite – a contentious socialite,” Dawes told me. In interviews with dozens of people in Thanet for and against the airport, I heard allegations of cars being scratched and spat at, anonymous accounts hurling abuse online, boycotts of local shops and meetings having to take place in private living rooms rather than pubs or cafes for fear of sparking open confrontation. Part of the reason is that, far from being a straightforward planning dispute, conflict over Manston has become inflected by many other dynamics such as housing, poverty, regional inequality and political disillusionment – the same dynamics that Craig Mackinlay was tapping into when he described the government’s transport decarbonisation strategy as an elite delusion.

“They are doing ok, thank you very much,” one member of the ‘Save Manston Airport Association’ Facebook page wrote recently, when describing the “vocal anti-Manston agitators” – many of whom, he suggested, had only recently arrived in the area from the capital, and still commuted there for work. “The London salary serves them well in poverty-stricken Thanet ... Obviously they are also predominantly of the metropolitan, pseudo-intellectual, leftwing, liberal type who take themselves extremely seriously ... I suppose their position as a self-appointed elite would be under threat if Thanet started to elevate itself in the world.”

This charge – that Manston’s opponents are indifferent to the economic opportunities provided by a reopened airport because they themselves are financially comfortable – is a common one, though largely unjustified: in reality, locals from all walks of life are to be found on sides of the airport divide, and the amount of work that would be created by the cargo hub is hotly contested (RSP claim it would generate 23,000 jobs within two decades, while others point out that there were only 150 people employed at the airport when it closed). Drive around Thanet, though, and it’s easy to see why the quarrel lends itself to this kind of framing. For one thing, Thanet’s stunning coastal scenery, relatively cheap property prices and quick travel links to London have attracted a wave of arrivals from other parts of the country in recent years, which has helped drive a growing arts

scene in seaside towns such as Broadstairs, Margate and Ramsgate, but also provoked resentment.

Local unemployment rates, particularly among young people, are some of the highest in the country, and the jobs that do exist are often to be found in the seasonal or gig economy. Major local employers that once provided a steady career path for school-leavers have shut up shop, including the cross-channel hoverport at Pegwell Bay that ceased operations in the 80s, the old gasworks in Ramsgate now home to a branch of Aldi and the Pfizer plant in Sandwich that scaled back in 2011. East Kent's coalfields, once famed for attracting miners who had been blacklisted for their trade union activities elsewhere, were abandoned under Thatcher; today, Thanet has the highest level of child poverty in the county, and is ranked among the most deprived 10% of all English regions.

“When people talk about ‘levelling up’, they assume that when it comes to the south-east, everybody is doing fine,” said David Stevens, a retired teacher who is now vice-chair of the Save Manston Airport Association. “But believe me, Thanet is not doing fine.”

After years of austerity – overseen by the governing party to which Mackinlay belongs – it looks to many here as if RSP are throwing Thanet a desperately needed lifeline. Last month Ramsgate football club, sponsored by the airport, held a half-term holiday camp for local children on free school meals – providing them with food, career advice and the chance to ride in a flight simulator. For supporters of the airport, a reopened Manston would not only provide future generations with some economic optimism, but also pride in a region that is too often overlooked in Whitehall and mocked in the national media; one Sunday Times columnist [described Thanet](#) as “bilious, forlorn, and desolate”, and dismissed it as a “little bit of throbbing gristle”.

“Thanet is seen as a bit of a basket-case, a laughing stock on the news,” Deb Shotton, vice-chair of the Thanet Green party, told me. “The coastal towns have always attracted some wealth, and there’s always been a great deal of impoverishment, and because of that demographic divide it’s easy to stoke division. The rubbish that Mackinlay spouts is going to get an audience.” The Guardian requested interviews with Craig Mackinlay and

RSP for this story; Mackinlay declined to answer any questions, and RSP did not respond at all.

It would be easy to frame the Manston dispute as one that pits indulgent environmentalists – blissfully unaware of Thanet’s economic plight – against ecological vandals, divorced from the reality of our climate emergency. But the vast majority of airport supporters I spoke to insisted that tackling climate breakdown was a major priority for them, and that they were convinced that technological advances such as the advent of electric planes would enable Manston to reopen without threatening the country’s net zero transition. The airport’s owners have [made repeated claims](#) about the new hub being “environmentally friendly”. At the same time, opponents of Manston are painfully aware of Thanet’s urgent need for new jobs; they just don’t believe that these should come in the form of a carbon-belching project that, according to RSP’s own projections, will be responsible for [nearly 2%](#) of Britain’s aviation emissions by 2050.

Somewhere in all this, there is a glimmer of shared ground visible, which offers hope not only to Thanet, but to the very many communities around the world that are also navigating today’s interlocking crises of climate breakdown and economic insecurity. To reach it, net zero has to be part of a political project that addresses losses that have built up over a generation – such as the dwindling of secure jobs, affordable housing and a reliable welfare safety net – and provides a convincing vision of the future. At Manston, located close to a [major offshore windfarm](#), some have suggested this could take the form of a state of the art green industrial hub built on the existing airport site. To those with power, Thanet might feel like a forgotten outcrop on the edge of things. But in reality, it is a window on to a set of arguments that are becoming part of the fabric of many places – from [coalmines in Cumbria](#) to [cities in Germany which have banned older diesel cars](#) – and which, as decarbonisation gathers pace, will increasingly concern us all.



Abandoned buildings at Snowdown colliery near Canterbury, Kent.
Photograph: Stephen French/Alamy

As Adam Corner argues, the fact that the mainstream climate debate is now an argument over the costs and fairness of climate breakdown mitigation, rather than the science, is itself a sign of progress. “This is the biggest show on earth,” he told me. “It’s changing everything. Of course you are going to have different and sometimes contradictory impulses in various places and among various communities as a result. At least we are now seeing these questions for what they are, and what they have always been really, which is political: a conversation about social choices and collective priorities, which is a conversation that on all kinds of levels we desperately need to have.”

Ten miles south of Manston’s runway stands a collection of empty redbrick buildings pockmarked by shattered windows and missing roof tiles, which are gradually being enveloped by the surrounding woodland. This was [Snowdown Colliery](#), the deepest coalmine in Kent, and at one point an employer of up to 2,000 people. Remnants of the community that once revolved around this place are still scattered on the floor – old newspapers, scraps of uniform, broken tools – but they are now disappearing under a carpet of moss, or floating in pools of muddy rainwater.

The industry that Snowdown supported proved ruinous to the environment, but the manner in which that industry was dismantled ruined countless communities, too, carving scars that continue to hurt today. The colliery was connected by railway to Faversham and the port at Dover, both of which – if global temperature increases are not arrested – could be underwater by 2050, as sea levels rise and overtop coastal defences around the edge of Kent. Many of the Thanet's most famous landmarks could be flooded, too, including Margate's Dreamland theme park and Turner Contemporary gallery, the village of Reculver's ancient towers on the region's western border, and Ramsgate's harbour to the east. Without rapid action on climate breakdown, in a few decades from now the whole of Thanet is projected to become an island once again.

The new climate wars are making that outcome more likely. But although the inactivists cheering them on may be cynical, their root causes are real and cannot simply be ignored, insulted, or reduced solely to a problem of online disinformation. Thanet's story so far – of long-term decline and uneven restoration – is familiar to great swathes of Britain, and beyond. If its next chapter is to prove more hopeful, it must be written collaboratively, and carry an entire community along with it.

This article was amended on 11 November 2021 to clarify that Pfizer scaled back its operations in Sandwich in 2011 but did not close down completely as an earlier version suggested.

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Bauhaus in Africa: the hospital in sweltering Senegal inspired – and funded – by the Albers



Innovative ... the hospital in Tambacounda can cope with 40C heat despite having no air conditioning. Photograph: Oliver Wainwright



[Oliver Wainwright](#)

[@ollywainwright](#)

Thu 11 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

When Anni Albers began weaving at the Bauhaus in the 1920s, little did she know that her geometric patterns would one day adorn the doors of a hospital in rural Senegal. Shadows play across the surface of the staggered wooden blocks set into the doors of Tambacounda's new maternity and paediatric ward, creating a woven effect echoed by the pattern of dappled sunlight streaming in through the perforated brick walls. These are small details, but they go some way to lightening the ordeal of being here, poetic touches that make the clinical environment feel like a place of care.

The art-world-philanthropy-complex works in mysterious ways. One hundred years since [Anni and her husband Josef Albers](#) met at the radical Weimar design school, the construction of a new hospital has been enabled, thousands of miles away, by the astonishing sums that their work now sells for, along with the fundraising power their name commands. Located in one of the hottest places on the planet, yet designed to function without air conditioning, the result is a building that aptly embodies the German duo's philosophy of "minimal means, maximum effect". And it happened almost by chance.

“It’s thanks to my dermatologist in Paris,” says Nicholas Fox Weber, the energetic American art historian who has run the [Albers Foundation](#) since Josef’s death in 1976. “One day he told me that he had started a small non-profit organisation to help hospitals in Senegal. I asked if I could go with him on his next trip. Six weeks later we arrived in Tambacounda with supplies: a suitcase full of blood and hundreds of toothbrushes.”



Serpentine ... the winding new hospital, which also boasts Tambacounda's first playground. Photograph: Iwan Baan

Fox Weber was appalled by what he found. In the maternity ward he was shown an “incubator” that consisted of a tray on a table, where three newborns were huddled beneath a desk lamp. Hypodermic needles were scattered on the floor, while an operating table was barely standing on three legs. Women lay crammed together at different stages of labour, or having just given birth, while others waited outside on bamboo mats on the floor.

What he saw led him to found [Le Korsa](#), a non-profit organisation funded by the Albers Foundation (which itself is mainly funded by selling Albers paintings), dedicated to improving healthcare and education in eastern Senegal. Since 2005 they have built rural clinics, [a women's refuge](#), an arts centre and the first secular school in the strictly Muslim region, the latter

two designed by Japanese-American architect [Toshiko Mori](#). There are also plans for a new museum, with the architect to be drawn from an all-African shortlist. Four years in the making, the €2m (£1.7m) hospital building is their most ambitious project so far.

Winding its way for 125 metres in a serpentine curve, the two-storey structure is a surprisingly subtle addition to the 1970s hospital complex, creating the maximum number of rooms with the thinnest possible footprint. Rather than adding another doughnut shaped building to the campus of circular wards, it weaves between them instead, hugging the former paediatric ward on one side before curving the other way to enclose a new playground courtyard shaded by a mature acacia tree.



Space and light ... one of the balconies. Photograph: Oliver Wainwright

“We tried to create a model that the hospital could use for future extensions,” says [Manuel Herz](#), the Basel-based architect behind the design. He had never designed a healthcare facility before, but he was chosen in 2017 after being the only invited architect to refuse to come up with a design without first visiting the site to properly understand the context. His previous [research into modernist architecture in Africa](#) helped to tip the balance, too. “It was crucial to come here and talk to everyone involved and find out what they really needed,” says Herz. “Our solution was to make the

building as narrow as possible to encourage cross-ventilation, while creating as much space as possible for hanging out.”

Space for hanging out might not seem like an urgent hospital requirement, but, as Herz discovered on his research trips, a hospital stay in Tambacounda is very much a family affair. The campus sees people gathered on every possible surface, with patients’ relatives making food, washing clothes or resting on bamboo mats. It has the look of a chaotic campsite, with pots and buckets lying alongside stray cats, while newborn babies shelter under mosquito nets beneath the trees.

“It’s a big problem,” says Dr Thérèse-Aida Ndiaye, director of the hospital since 2016. “Each patient comes with four or five family members, who bring their own habits. I recently found one relative having a shower here. We are a hospital, not a house.”

They come out of necessity: there simply aren’t enough staff to provide every aspect of the patients’ care, so relatives are needed to pick up the slack, running errands and buying medication from the nearby pharmacy. Many have travelled miles to get here. Tambacounda hospital sees about 40,000 patients a year from all around the region, including from across the border from Mali, the Gambia and Guinea, with families often forced to travel together, unable to leave dependents behind.



Sheltered space ... the shady interior. Photograph: Iwan Baan

Herz's design embraces the inevitable entourage. Along with space for 150 beds, tripling the previous capacity, there are plenty of social spaces, including semicircular balconies off the first-floor corridor, with curved seating overlooking the playground so parents can keep an eye on their kids. Two spiral staircases descend gracefully into the courtyards, offering an alternative processional route to the more functional steps inside. The playground was the idea of Herz's wife, Xenia, who suggested there should be laughter audible from the wards (and the couple helped to fund its construction with donations from their wedding guests). Herz says it is the first and only playground in Tambacounda – a city of almost 180,000 people.

The project's most important lesson is in what it lacks: air-conditioning. Tambacounda gets swelteringly hot, reaching more than 40C (104F) in April, giving it the nickname Tangacounda, "house of heat" in the local Wolof language. It is located in the middle of the wide, flat, tropical savanna, where the air barely moves. But by using basic climate design principles – drawn from Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew's 1956 book, [Tropical Architecture in the Humid Zone](#) – the wards can be kept cool with just ceiling fans (although air-conditioning is still required in the operating theatre).

The first trick is the double-skin vaulted roof, with a corrugated metal layer suspended above a concrete one below, creating a thermal buffer that helps to draw air up through holes in the ceiling. The walls are built from hollow concrete bricks that allow air to pass through, while being deep enough to shade the interior from direct sunlight. Rammed earth was considered, but Herz says it was safer to use a technique that local builders were familiar with, given other logistical challenges. The 50,000 bricks were made on site using a single mould, and dyed a reddish colour with iron oxide. Echoing the patterned doors, the exposed concrete ceilings were given a woven texture by sticking bamboo mats to the formwork.



‘I recently found one relative having a shower here. We are a hospital, not a house’ ... Dr Thérèse-Aida Ndiaye, director of the hospital. Photograph: Oliver Wainwright

“It’s important that everything was made locally,” says Herz. “The windows were all fabricated in a nearby metal workshop, and all the builders come from here. It means that all the money goes to the region, not to an international consortium, and they will be able to operate and fix everything themselves.” The more hi-tech foreign equipment that is imported, the more there is to go wrong – as the doctors have found, with a faulty new operating table and anaesthetics equipment that has delayed their move into the building.

The local production process also allowed further experimentation, which led to an unexpected bonus. At one point, Herz asked for a mockup facade to be built on site to test the effects of different sized holes in the bricks. Leading the construction process was [Dr Magueye Ba](#), a medical doctor-turned-builder, who has overseen a number of Le Korsa's projects.

Ba realised that a local village school was in need of a classroom, so rather than simply building a test wall that would be demolished, he made a little building for them, formed of several bays of the hospital. It stands proudly on the edge of the village, its jaunty roofline poking up from the grassy savanna, almost doubling the capacity of the school. Ba has since used the hollow bricks on another kindergarten project, their distinctive curved silhouette spawning something of a new local vernacular.

“It’s the perfect outcome,” says Herz. “I’m not in control any more – the design has taken on a life of its own.”

For more information on the work of Le Korsa, see aflk.org.

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‘There is no normal’: what it’s like to be a teenager today



Brittney, Aaloni and Autumn in Cusp Photograph: Parker Hill & Isabel Bethencourt/Courtesy of SHOWTIME

[Adrian Horton](#)
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In summer 2018, photographers Parker Hill and Isabel Bethencourt were at the tail-end of a road trip from Montana to Austin when they were diverted to a gas station in a small Texas military town. It was two in the morning, but the truck that pulled up next to them was thrumming with energy – music blasting, a group of barefoot teenage girls spilling out of the cab, charisma free-flowing and uncut.

The groups hit it off, and soon Hill and Bethencourt were careening down a dirt road toward a high school party of about 15. Cameras out, they asked the teens about their lives: what's it like to be you? What are you dealing with? What do you want to talk about?

“They had so much to say”, Hill told the Guardian. “It really felt like they had been jones-ing to talk about what it was like to be them and no one had ever asked.”

The boys talked about their jobs, the impending horizon of adulthood and the eclipsing window of carefree partying. But the girls were more forthright and circumspect about the negotiations they'd already made, the shit they'd already handled by 16. “They all felt like they had to grow up really early, and that they were more mature than they wanted to be at their age,” said Bethencourt. Few people had asked, and fewer had listened.

The photographers returned to New York, with the feeling that there was more to hear and say. So they direct messaged some of the girls on Instagram and asked if they'd be interested in welcoming a camera into their lives for a bit. The answer was typical teenage casual: text us when you're here.

The resulting debut film, *Cusp*, captures the lives of three girls from that Texas night – best friends Brittney, Autumn and Aaloni, all 15 or 16 years old — during a pivotal mid-high school summer of their lives. Filmed mostly between March and August 2019, the 83-minute documentary,

which premiered at Sundance this year and will air on Showtime after a theatrical release this month, lingers on the unvarnished treasures of a golden adolescent summer: purple twilight skies, fries in the McDonald's parking lot, a tallboy of cheap beer at a field party, friends sardined in back seats and tangled up in bed. It also observes the casual festering of open emotional wounds: remnants of sexual trauma, powerlessness so normalized it fades in to the background, shapeless futures and adults who let them down again and again.

Brittney, disaffected and impulsive, looks 12 or 20 depending on the weight of her eye makeup and avoids being alone through partying, alcohol and an older boyfriend who demands near-constant contact. Autumn, the most sardonic and wise of the three, finds her self-confidence cratered by a sudden breakup with the only boy she trusted. Aaloni, the youngest of the trio, is part older sister and part mother to her tight-knit family, rocked by the return of her father, a military man who struggles with PTSD; he never appears on camera, but his rage, often directed at the daughters he can't control, terrifies from outside the frame.

If there's a plot to the film beyond the passage of time strung between parties and debriefs and couch hangs and one communal nipple piercing, it would be the film-makers' dawning realization, and the girls' burgeoning articulation, of just how much trauma lays about, and the toxic masculinity they've weathered. Hill and Bethencourt's cameras catch an underlying power imbalance that pokes through all the house parties and car hangs. The girls were quieter around the boys, and younger. Many of the boys own and play with guns. The boys have the cars, the houses to party in, the alcohol, the drugs. They also have the leverage of physical strength, and their own terms of consent. "She was intoxicated and he was intoxicated, too. It's not rape if they're both intoxicated," one boy says at a party when the girls bring up an incident with another friend.

Autumn puts it bluntly: girls are scared to say no because "guys are powerful", and they don't listen anyway. It's 2019, but the #MeToo and Time's Up movements are distant, vague ideas to Autumn, Aaloni and Brittney, who often hold a phone in one hand and a Juul in the other, but whose social media is hyper-local (Facebook for garage sales, Snapchat for

parties and hangouts). The social movements whose discourse, if not intent, have at least become the norm in mass media are absent here.



A vortex of shame, guilt, fury and confusion churns on-screen. Photograph: Courtesy of SHOWTIME

Over the course of filming, each of the girls opened up about non-consensual sexual experiences, details of which are recounted in the second half of the film – ignored nos, gaslit “why didn’t you do anything to stop it?” defenses, wars of consent attrition they never felt they could win. Two of the girls were abused as children by friends of their parents, trauma they explain with steely, chagrined frankness.

A vortex of shame, guilt, fury and confusion churns on-screen, as the girls start to process with their words. “A lot of them explained it with an asterisk – like ‘oh, that’s my fault,’ or ‘I should have said no,’” said Hill. “They kind of explained it away.”

Brittney recalls losing her virginity, which she says she never intended to do: “I just couldn’t say no, I don’t really even know why, I was just so scared to say no.”

Brittney, in particular, evinces what Bethencourt and Hill call “survival tactics” for their specific minefield of toxic masculinity and violence. It’s wrong that her boyfriend expects her to be with him every night, she tells Aaloni and Autumn, but complying is preferable than him being mad at her. I recalled how when I was in high school in the early 2010s, it was common knowledge, a joke, to avoid a certain popular guy at a party after 10pm, or how many of us followed through with bad sex because shutting down felt less risky than speaking up. Fucked up in retrospect, practical in the moment; it just made life easier to take it on yourself, as all three girls do throughout the film.



Hill and Bethencourt’s cameras catch an underlying power imbalance that pokes through all the house parties and car hangs. Photograph: Parker Hill & Isabel Bethencourt/Courtesy of SHOWTIME

“So many of them say, ‘just pick and choose your battles,’” said Hill. “And that like, they’d rather be ok with that, and swallow that kind of thing, or let someone talk to them a certain way because it’s better than that guy being angry, or it’s better than not knowing how you’re getting home tonight.” The guys are older, bigger, often armed; the girls have a good time, get plastered, but the threats of physical violence are looming traps to dance around and blitz through.

The duality of the teenage girl experience – carefree and fragile, supreme confidence and consuming self-doubt, the joy and the threat of people you know – can be “easy to overlook”, said Bethencourt. “We really wanted people to reflect on their own teenage-hood experience and to see what is really going on today.” The phones, music and video games have changed, at least in the ten years since I graduated; the default power dynamics have not.

Cusp ends as summers do: with the return to school, which Brittney and Autumn have since graduated (Aaloni is a senior). It’s a change of scenery, not stability. “We’re all confused, because there is no normal – there’s no normal in teenage years,” Autumn says at one point in the film. She may not be able to count on many around her to listen, but she demonstrates faith in putting words to it, validating the ride.

- Cusp is out in US cinemas on 12 November and will air on Showtime on 26 November with a UK date to be announced
-

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2021/nov/10/there-is-no-normal-what-its-like-to-be-a-teenager-today>.

2021.11.11 - Coronavirus

- Live Covid: Germany sees more than 50,000 daily new cases for first time; some hospitals in Slovakia limit non-urgent care
- 'I feel really let down' Unjabbed care home staff in England on quitting their jobs
- New Zealand Jacinda Ardern's popularity plunges as Covid returns
- Education Nine in 10 university students in England have had at least one Covid jab

[Coronavirus live](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

Covid live: Germany reports record 50,000 new cases; Dutch experts recommend lockdown amid record cases

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2021/nov/11/coronavirus-news-live-europe-covid-deaths-rise-10-in-a-week-10-us-states-sue-over-vaccine-mandates>

Social care

‘I feel really let down’: unjabbed care home staff on quitting their jobs



Claire Callender, right, the manager of the Greenways care home in Warwickshire, with Katie Madden, who is having to leave her job at the home. Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian



[Robert Booth](#) Social affairs correspondent

Wed 10 Nov 2021 12.12 EST

Bedrooms are already standing empty at the Greenways care home outside the Warwickshire village of Long Itchington because there aren't enough staff.

Claire Callender, 42, the manager, has already closed 12 of her 27 beds because "there aren't people who want to do the job". And on Wednesday she said goodbye to another care worker, this time because of the new rule [making double Covid jabs a condition of deployment](#) for all care home workers in England as of Thursday.

Katie Madden, who worked night shifts at Greenways for the last 18 months, came close to tears when she told the Guardian about leaving. She worked through a Covid outbreak at the home and was ill herself with the virus for weeks. She had planned to get the vaccine, but was anxious about it making her ill again. "The decision was taken out of my hands [when the law making it mandatory was introduced] ... and I thought, 'No, I'm not ready,'" she said.

She washes residents, prepares them for bed and checks on them through the night. In the morning she gets them up and arranges breakfast. “This is a job I am going to be really upset about leaving,” she said. “I built a relationship with them all. We were all there through thick and thin when everyone was poorly ... I could have run away when there was coronavirus, but the old people were getting it and it was breaking my heart. But I went there, breaking my back to help, and it turns from that to ‘You can go now’. I feel really let down.”

For care managers, already dealing with staff shortages caused by exhaustion, pay that averages barely £9 an hour and the flow of foreign carers being choked off by Brexit, the rule is only made more difficult by the fact that NHS workers won’t have to get vaccinated until April 2022. Many care staff reluctant to have the vaccine have as a result already moved to the health service.

“The [situation] is absolutely ridiculous,” said Callender. “I have to turn a healthcare worker away if they are not vaccinated, but not visitors.”

There were goodbyes in all corners of social care on Wednesday.

Neil Russell, the chairman of PJ Care, which provides neurological care for adults, said he was losing 14 staff across three sites and potentially another dozen by 24 December unless they could persuade doctors they were medically exempt. Carers are allowed to self-certify a medical exemption until Christmas, but must leave after then if it is not confirmed.

Those leaving this week are going to new jobs including in the NHS and handling parcels at Amazon and John Lewis warehouses, he said.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/nov/10/i-feel-really-let-down-unjabbed-care-home-staff-on-quitting-their-jobs>

New Zealand

Jacinda Ardern's popularity plunges as New Zealand reckons with new era of endemic Covid



The popularity of New Zealand leader Jacinda Ardern has plummeted recently although she remains far ahead of her rivals as preferred prime minister. Photograph: Getty Images

Tess McClure in Christchurch

@tessairini

Wed 10 Nov 2021 19.01 EST

Prime minister Jacinda Ardern's popularity has plummeted in two new polls, as New Zealand struggles to contain a Delta outbreak and transitions to a new era of endemic Covid.

The Ardern-led Labour party dropped five points to 41% over the past months, according to the Talbot Mills Research poll [published by the New](#)

[Zealand Herald](#) on Thursday. While that result still places it firmly ahead of the opposition National party, it represents Labour's worst polling result in more than a year, and since before Covid-19 reached New Zealand. The result was echoed by [Curia polling](#) commissioned by lobby group the Taxpayer's Union, which showed Labour support had dropped six points to 39%, with National up four points to 26%.

While Ardern was far ahead of any of her opponents in the preferred prime minister stakes, her ranking had dropped to 47% – down from previous highs of up to 65% in the midst of the early pandemic lockdowns. Curia's polling put Ardern's personal popularity even lower, at 34% – down 13 percentage points from last month in the preferred prime minister stakes. Opposition leader Judith Collins was wallowing at 6%, and libertarian-right-wing Act party leader David Seymour, who has enjoyed a recent surge in support, was at 10.5%.

The drop in support for the prime minister comes amid recent changes in New Zealand's pandemic fortunes: after more than a year of keeping Covid out of the country and crushing small outbreaks as they arose, New Zealand is now [battling a Delta outbreak](#) and being forced to reckon with an imminent future of Covid circulating through the population.

New Zealanders have overwhelmingly [supported their government's Covid response](#) so far, with public approval often reaching past the 80% mark. But the Talbot Mills poll showed that support was crumbling: those who rated the government's handling of the pandemic as "good" had dropped from 60% in October to just 46%, and those rating it as poor rose from 16% to 26%.

"The prime minister's own high poll ratings and Labour's polling last year were based on a real sense of trust, earned by the Covid response," said political analyst and former National government staffer Ben Thomas. "The greater difficulty in stamping out Delta means that trust has really been damaged – and that shows up in the polls."

Labour is still in an extremely strong position as overall share of vote – especially when grouped with traditional coalition partners the Greens. If an

election was held tomorrow, the two parties would win a majority of seats without needing other coalition partners. But there were other signs of trouble for the government in the research. In the Curia poll, the portion of New Zealanders who felt the country was headed in the wrong direction had surpassed those who thought it was headed the right way for the first time since the Global Financial Crisis. A total 44% of respondents said [New Zealand](#) was headed in the “right direction” while 45% said “wrong direction”.

“That’s the stat that wins you or loses you elections,” Thomas said. “If people think things go well, they will probably vote for the government of the day. If they don’t? They will vote for change.”

Dr Lara Greaves, co-director of the Public Policy Institute at University of Auckland, said that a downward trend line for Ardern and Labour was to be expected – and the party could not have sustained the extreme highs it reached earlier in the pandemic. “That was a huge high point … pretty much everyone has expected that Labour would never be able to hold on to that high a lead.” Under New Zealand’s coalition based mixed-member proportional representation political system, she said, “we might never see that again”.

The recent drop, Greaves said “has been exacerbated by potential discontent in Auckland,” which has now been in lockdown for three months. And while New Zealanders may currently be punishing their government for Covid difficulties, the next election was still nearly two years away, she noted.

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Students

Nine in 10 university students in England have had at least one Covid jab, study suggests



File photo of a student at Hull University taking a swab for a lateral flow Covid-19 test. Photograph: Paul Ellis/AFP/Getty Images

[Sally Weale](#) Education correspondent

Wed 10 Nov 2021 09.42 EST

Far from being irresponsible Covid spreaders, the vast majority of students at English universities have been vaccinated at least once and would request a test if they had symptoms, according to a survey.

Students' wellbeing has suffered this autumn, however, with a third of those surveyed reporting that their mental health had deteriorated since the start of term, the report by the [Office for National Statistics](#) (ONS) says.

The survey found the average life satisfaction score among students was 6.6 out of 10, significantly lower than among 16- to 29-year-olds in general, who scored 7.0, and the overall adult population in Great Britain, at 7.1.

The ONS report says mental health has worsened as the term has progressed, with 32% of students reporting that their wellbeing has deteriorated, compared with 26% in late September.

It is better than it was last May, when half of students who took part in the survey said their mental health had deteriorated. Most students at that time were studying online owing to lockdown restrictions, while this term students have returned to campuses for more face-to-face teaching.

On vaccination, the survey – which is based on experimental data drawn from responses from almost 1,000 students in [England](#) during October and November – found that 91% of respondents had been vaccinated against Covid at least once.

The proportion of students who have been double-vaccinated was 85%, up from 78% in late September. Of the 8% who said they had not been vaccinated, almost a third (32%) said they were fairly or very likely to take a vaccine if offered.

Students also showed they were willing to test for Covid: 92% said they would request a test if they developed symptoms, and 49% said they had taken a test in the previous seven days. Meanwhile, 57% said they would stay at home for 10 days if they developed symptoms.

Last year students were often accused of spreading the virus [by holding parties](#) in breach of restrictions, and some were fined and threatened with exclusion from their university studies.

Tim Gibbs, the head of the ONS student Covid-19 insights survey, said: “It is encouraging, the majority of students report being vaccinated against Covid-19, and many would get tested if they developed symptoms. However, a third of students sadly reported their mental health and wellbeing had worsened since the start of the autumn term.”

Nick Hillman, the director of the Higher Education Policy Institute thinktank, said: “This shows that students are largely very sensible – they are getting tested and vaccinated and they are trying to progress with their studies as best they can. But they are not finding life as easy as they had hoped because student life continues to be so disrupted by Covid. Going away to university is a big transition point at the best of times; it is extra stressful in the very odd times in which we live.”

Students at 58 institutions face the possibility of further disruption to their studies because of threatened strike action by university staff who voted in favour of industrial action in two ballots over pensions and pay and working conditions. The University and College Union will meet later this week to decide on its plans.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/nov/10/nine-in-10-university-students-in-england-have-had-a-least-one-covid-jab>

2021.11.11 - Opinion

- Muddled, top-down, technocratic: why the green new deal should be scrapped
- Failing to plan for climate refugees hands a cheap victory to the far right
- Madagascar is drying out – there's no harvest, only hunger
- All we can do is remember our war dead – because we can never hope to understand what they went through

OpinionClimate crisis

Muddled, top-down, technocratic: why the green new deal should be scrapped

[Aditya Chakrabortty](#)



Illustration by Bill Bragg

Thu 11 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

Q: What binds together such disparate souls as Noam Chomsky and Keir Starmer, Yanis Varoufakis and Joe Biden, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Caroline Lucas?

A: They all want a green new deal.

Rightwingers pretend that today's left likes nothing better than to pull down statues for a laugh before disinviting speakers from student unions, but they are off by approximately 180 degrees. Only one project truly unifies the mainstream left across Europe and America today: trying to limit climate breakdown by overhauling a noxious economic model. Ask the individual parties how a hundred flowers duly bloom, but all will be branded with those same three little words.

Promising a green new deal helped [clinch the Labour leadership](#) for Starmer. It's also [how Biden keeps the Democrat base onside](#). It galvanises activists and anchors progressive conversation. Measured from the start of 2018 until this week, the phrase "Green New Deal" appeared in this newspaper and on our website almost as many times as "levelling up" and far more than "Narendra Modi". Seeing as one of those is Boris Johnson's signature policy and the other runs the world's second-most populous country, that is quite the showing.

Such dominance should spur serious interrogation, yet what the green new deal has received so far is mostly explanation or celebration. So aren't I, as a gainfully employed Guardianista, coming to join the joyous party? Sorry, but no. I like and respect many of the people working on it, and a few I count as friends – at least until they read this. I certainly agree with their top-line argument that the planet cannot afford this kamikaze capitalism. I just don't see the green new deal as the answer.

The project itself – supposedly a stark, bold, urgent idea – is a conceptual fog. Like some kind of policy peasouper, it nestles densely around arguments of ecological limits, social justice and economic transformation,

allowing only a glimpse of their outlines. That suits many on the left, as it serves to obscure all their disagreements and so keep the peace just a little longer. Rare is the bus that can keep on board both [Sadiq Khan](#) and [John McDonnell](#), and take them to totally different destinations. But at some point the warm words and the broad coalitions lose their charm and you are left just as the delegates in Glasgow are: facing the grim reality of a planet on fire.

Truth be told, the thing was born in a haze. In 2007, the New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman took a break from cheering on the Iraq war and crowing about corporate globalisation to [pen a demand for a green new deal](#). His gauntlet was picked up in London by a small group of environmentalists and economists (including Larry Elliott, of this parish), who spent the months after the collapse of Northern Rock [writing a plan](#) to tackle the “triple crunch of financial meltdown, climate change and ‘peak oil’”.

No such radicalism was on Friedman’s menu [when he wrote](#): “I am not proposing that we [Americans] radically alter our lifestyles. We are who we are – including a car culture. But if we want to continue to be who we are, enjoy the benefits and be able to pass them on to our children, we do need to fuel our future in a cleaner, greener way … The next president will have to rally us with a green patriotism. Hence my motto: ‘Green is the new red, white and blue.’”

Depending on which specs you had on, the green new deal either looked all-American and utterly painless – or it was internationalist and out for bankers’ blood. And down the years, the contradictions have only multiplied.

For AOC and today’s US left, it is about jobs (albeit “green” ones, a term far easier to deploy than to define) and infrastructure; for Lucas, Labour’s Clive Lewis and others currently [pushing a green new deal through parliament](#), it includes citizens’ assemblies and a shorter working week. It is both “[a green industrial revolution](#)” in the north of England and [debt cancellation for the global south](#); both low-carbon Keynesianism and nationalisation of the energy industry. It is, in other words, a big duffel bag

stuffed with pent-up progressive demands and jumbled up with highly dubious history and tiresome war metaphors.

Why hark back to FDR, who entered the White House nearly a century ago, if you want to be a contemporary global movement? Why lean on Keynes as your crutch, when he set out to save capitalism not to scrap it? Most of all, why talk about a “moonshot moment” (an oft-deployed metaphor by green new dealers, invoking the space race)? The next few decades will not be about inventing entirely new things but substituting for what we already have. Installing heat pumps and ripping out boilers, using renewables rather than fossil fuels, relying on battery power over the internal combustion engine: moving to a lower-carbon future is not going to be a great, dramatic transformation – it will be slow and chronic, and frankly more expensive to societies reared on cheap food, cheap energy and the idea that the rest of the bill for both those things will be picked up by someone else, perhaps yet to be born.

This isn’t just a debate over words; it is a battle between rival visions of the future. When Ed Miliband enthuses in his recent (and good) book, Go Big, about moving to a wartime economy with a vast “carbon army” retrofitting draughty homes, he is talking about a green transition that is done *to* people rather than *with* them. And it turns voters off. Earlier this year, the polling firm Survation surveyed Britons on a scheme to employ a million people to insulate houses and asked: what should they call it? At the bottom of the list came green new deal. Almost as bad was green industrial revolution. Far and away the favourite was national recovery plan. A process not a product, common sense rather than radicalism.

At some point, the post-2016 left, radicalised by Trump and Brexit, will have to surrender its notions of a radical programme executed through a vast state machinery. Zombie Johnsonism or revived Trumpism will see them off. I hope what comes next is a more focused, locally rooted and inclusive politics based around asking people what they actually need in their lives, and working out how to fit those things within an environmental framework. That can be done with universal desires such as housing and food, healthcare and education.

This is not about green growth versus degrowth, and all those old dichotomies. It is about recognising that large swaths of Britain are now effectively post-growth, and that the proceeds of whatever growth we have had has been very unfairly divided. So let us stop haring after “British-owned turbine factories” and “dominating the industries of tomorrow” and all the other boilerplate of politics. Let’s get real.

- Aditya Chakrabortty is a Guardian columnist
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[OpinionCop26](#)

Failing to plan for climate refugees hands a cheap victory to the far right

[Zoe Williams](#)



A Global Climate Strike protest in Utrecht, Netherlands, September 2021.
Photograph: Ana Fernandez/Sopa Images/Rex/Shutterstock

Thu 11 Nov 2021 03.00 EST

As scientists wrestle to predict the true impact and legacy of [Cop26](#), one speech, given at a rally organised by Global Justice Now, insisted upon a perspective not data-driven but moral. Lumumba Di-Aping, a South Sudanese diplomat and former chief negotiator for the G77, said: “The first resolution that should be agreed in Glasgow is for annex I polluters to grant the citizens of small island developing states the right to immigration.”

It was a tactful way of putting it: [annex I nations](#) are those with [special financial responsibilities](#) in tackling the climate crisis. They have these special responsibilities because their early industrialisation created so much of the carbon burden. A more pugilistic diplomat might have said “the people who created this disaster have to offer sanctuary to those displaced by it”, but then, he wouldn’t be a diplomat.

Di-Aping went on to note article 3 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.” “Small island states,” he concluded, “should not be drowned alive like Zealandia.”

This is where what Greta Thunberg calls the “[blah blah blah](#)” of international treaty-making – its high-flown and occasionally inspiring rhetoric – meets reality. It is established, year after year, that no nation can fight climate change alone. Cooperation across the globe is summoned and celebrated, and it is often explicit, whether in imperialist-paternalistic terms (“those with the broadest shoulders must bear the most weight”) or liberal postcolonial ones (“those who made this mess must clear it up”), that such cooperation is not possible unless industrialised nations accept their responsibility towards industrialising ones.

Yet there is an enduring coyness and a lot of needless sophistry around the nature of that responsibility. The impact of the climate emergency will make human life impossible. Whether through floods, bushfires, unliveable temperatures, crop failures, all of the above or something unforeseen, the

end result will be that swathes of land can no longer support human life. So the first and arguably only point of mutuality is, where are those displaced people going to live? Nations, in the end, can devise net-zero targets on their own. Cooperation may be helpful, from a trade or research perspective, in the development of new technologies, but only in the matter of climate refugees is it actually essential.

As old debates around the climate crisis and whether or not it is anthropogenic give way to consensus, new ambiguities and uncertainties are constructed around refugees: can they really be called the victims of environmental degradation? We will grapple with any other explanation – they're actually economic migrants, or they're the victims of civil strife, or they fell foul of a dictatorship, the one-bad-man theory of geopolitics – rather than trace these proximal causes back to their roots. Most political efforts, currently, are geared towards building a positive picture of a sustainable future; the alternative is despair or denial, neither of which are generative forces for change. A coherent, practical plan detailing the probable scale of displacement and figuring out a just distribution of the climate diaspora will look radical and unsettling.

One group is extremely comfortable on that territory, however: the far right. Steve Bannon sent a chill down the spine in 2015 when [he talked about](#) a “Camp of the Saints-type invasion into … Europe”. He made the reference again and again, until finally onlookers were forced to read the source: Jean Raspail’s racist novel of 1973, which [one contemporary reviewer called](#) “a major event … in much the same sense that Mein Kampf was a major event”. The title comes from a passage in the Book of Revelation about the coming apocalypse – civilisation collapses when the hordes arrive from the four corners of the Earth to “surround the camp of the saints and the beloved city” – and Raspail took up the idea; it was inevitable, he said, that “numberless disinherited people of the south would set sail one day for this opulent shore”.

Through Bannon and others, this idea has replicated, mutated and engulfed others, to become the “great replacement theory” of white supremacists, which Paul Mason describes in his recent book [How to Stop Fascism](#) as the toxic political view that “immigration constitutes a ‘genocide’ of the white

race”. Feminists help it along by depressing the birth-rate, and cultural Marxists bring the mood music, by supporting both migrants and feminists.

Other far-right movements are sucked into the vortex of this wild but coherent theory, and yet more are spawned or shaped by it: the cosmic right (embodied in [Jake Angeli](#), the QAnon figure in the animal-skin cap who stormed the Capitol in January, then went on hunger strike in prison because the [food wasn't organic](#)), or the [eco-minded white supremacists](#) who make this explicit – you can be a humanitarian or an environmentalist. Choose one.

As fanciful and irrational as many far-right arguments are, they have a rat-like cunning. They find these spaces that are untenanted by mainstream debate – there will be climate refugees and they must be accommodated – and they run riot in them. Nations who ignore Lumumba Di-Aping aren't doing anything to avert the consequences he describes: their silence merely creates an open goal for the professed enemies of a peaceful and prosperous future.

- Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist

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OpinionGlobal development

Madagascar is drying out – there's no harvest, only hunger

Anonymous



Helmine Monique Sija prepares *raketa*, a type of cactus, to eat with her family in Atoby village, in Madagascar's drought-stricken Behara district, in August. Photograph: Rijasolo/AFP/Getty

Thu 11 Nov 2021 03.00 EST

There's nothing to harvest any more, nothing that can be taken from the land, that's why people are starving in [Madagascar](#).

The rainy season was always special, an important time when everyone planted food – key crops such as cassava. But for the past three years we've had very little rain. The climate has changed in Madagascar, maybe because of the global climate crisis. We used to have distinct seasons but no more, it

has been a bit troubled. The landscape looks really dry, the trees have no more leaves. It is hard to find green areas, most have turned arid and grey.

This year was even worse because the rainy season came so late that most people could not plant as usual. This is why we see hunger, especially in children, and maybe worse is still to come. I see this hunger where I work, giving medical care to pregnant women and newborns.

You can see when they talk to us how hungry they are, that they have come without eating anything. Some cannot even wait for us to get around to seeing them, they go home to search for something to eat. Many do not come at all – if you haven't eaten, you can't walk 20km to the health centre. Some are afraid they will walk all this way but the health centre will not have anything for them to eat.

We try to help: sometimes I buy cactus fruit and give it to the women while they wait. This is only a small thing but I feel it's important. Hunger is everywhere in southern Madagascar. Those who have livestock or land will sell it to buy food but they are taken advantage of because they are so desperate. Then there are others who have nothing. They eat cactus leaves mixed with ashes, just to not be hungry, to get rid of that empty feeling.

Some people run away, hoping to find a better life somewhere else. I once met a man who had walked 200km from his home with his wife and children. But there are others who won't do that – they don't want to leave their land, that's their home.

The problem here is water. There are places where there is no water at all. People might have to walk 20km to find water from the dried-up river – you have to dig one or two metres down into the sand to find water, which is dirty.

I don't see it getting better, I'm not positive at all. We hear about plans to bring water to this part of the country but so far there is nothing. There are some organisations working here but only in a few places, so many rural areas are forgotten. More help is needed.

The author is a doctor in Madagascar who wishes to remain anonymous

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OpinionRemembrance Day

**All we can do is remember our war
dead – because we can never hope to
understand what they went through**

[Adrian Chiles](#)





Remembrance Day at the Cenotaph, London, in 2020. Photograph: Guy Bell/Rex/Shutterstock

Thu 11 Nov 2021 02.00 EST

I am always honoured to make the acquaintance of servicemen and women, be they still serving or veterans. Listening to them is fascinating, like hearing an astronaut talk about what it's like to walk on the moon, so alien is their experience to me. I learn so much, yet what I have come to know most surely is just how much is unknown.

At the heart of [Remembrance Day](#) is our Cenotaph, a word I must confess I've only just learned is derived from the Greek *κενός τάφος*, *kenos taphos*, meaning "empty tomb". Around the corner from the Cenotaph, the unknown soldier lies at rest in Westminster Abbey. But so much else is unknown, too. What was any of it, any war, any conflict, any exercise, really like? The rest of us can't know, no matter how many books we read or films we watch or even how many recollections we listen to. We can never know viscerally how it felt in any theatre of war. The more you think about it, the more the unknowns pile up. In any given conflict, do we really know what happened? Can we ever be sure what was being fought for and why? The consequences may remain uncertain – and what of those who

never knew what happened in the end? In country churchyards, I'm always troubled by the graves of anyone who died in, say, the early 1940s, for whom even the outcome of that war remained unknown.

The answers often die with those who could have given them. My friend Paul Cook, drummer with the Sex Pistols, tells me his dad, Tom, whom I enjoyed the odd pint with, never spoke about his service in the second world war. And in turn his dad, Paul's grandad, never talked about his record in the Great War. Neither was among the fallen, but the unknowns lived with them and then lived on without them.

Today is well named because, in the end, remembering is not only something we have to do, it is the only thing we can do. Making sense of it all is impossible.

- Adrian Chiles is a Guardian columnist
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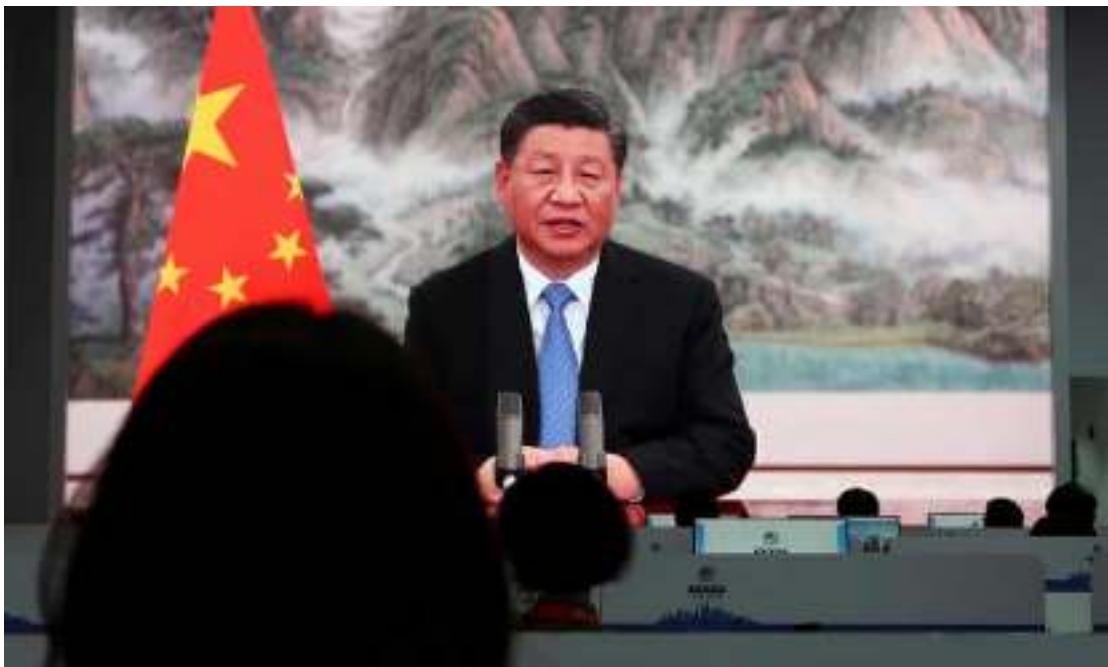
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[Asia Pacific](#)

Xi Jinping warns against return to Asia-Pacific tensions of cold war era



Xi Jinping speaking to a virtual conference at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit. Photograph: Reuters

Guardian staff and agencies
Wed 10 Nov 2021 18.02 EST

Xi Jinping has warned against a return to cold war-era tensions in the Asia-Pacific, urging greater cooperation on pandemic recovery and the climate crisis.

Amid growing tensions with the US over [Taiwan](#), the Chinese president said all countries in the region must work together on joint challenges.

“Attempts to draw ideological lines or form small circles on geopolitical grounds are bound to fail,” he told a virtual business conference on the

sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit.

“The Asia-Pacific region cannot and should not relapse into the confrontation and division of the cold war era.”

Xi’s remarks were an apparent reference to US efforts with allies and partners in the region, including the Quad grouping with India, Japan and Australia and the new Aukus alliance, to blunt what Washington sees as China’s growing coercive economic and military influence.

China’s military said on Tuesday it conducted a combat readiness patrol in the direction of the Taiwan Strait, after its defense ministry condemned a visit by a US congressional delegation to Taiwan, the democratically governed island claimed by Beijing.

US secretary of state Antony Blinken said on Wednesday that the US would ensure Taiwan can defend itself to avoid anyone “trying to disrupt the status quo by force”.

Combative US diplomatic exchanges with China early in the Biden administration unnerved allies, and US officials believe direct engagement with Xi is the best way to prevent the relationship between the world’s two biggest economies from spiralling toward conflict.

A date has not been announced for the Xi-Biden meeting, but a person briefed on the matter said it was expected to be as soon as Monday next week.

The Chinese leader also called for a joint effort to close the “immunisation gap”, making Covid-19 vaccines more accessible to developing nations.

“We should translate consensus that vaccines are a global public good into concrete actions to ensure their fair and equitable distribution,” he told the New Zealand-hosted summit.

Xi said the region should ensure that developing countries can access and afford Covid-19 vaccines.

China on Wednesday said it had reached [an understanding with the US](#) at a summit in Glasgow on the climate emergency, a key area on which the Biden administration sees the potential for cooperation.

Xi did not mention the deal with the US directly but said “all of us can embark on a path of green, low-carbon sustainable development”.

“Together, we can usher in a future of green development,” he said.

“China will stay committed to promoting win-win cooperation and contribute to the economic development of the Asia-Pacific region.”

With Reuters and Agence France-Presse

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/10/chinas-xi-warns-against-return-to-confrontation-and-division-of-cold-war-era>

Winter Olympics

Beijing Winter Olympics committee denies blocking foreign media



The speed skating venue for the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, which are due to start in February. Photograph: Roman Pilipey/EPA

[Helen Davidson in Taipei](#)

[@heldavidson](#)

Wed 10 Nov 2021 23.50 EST

Beijing's [Winter Olympics](#) organising committee has rejected accusations that journalists have been blocked in their attempts to cover preparations for the Games.

Earlier this month the Foreign Correspondents Club of China (FCCC) [accused the Chinese authorities of “continuously stymying”](#) attempts by foreign media to cover the [Winter Olympics](#) due to begin near the Chinese capital in February.

In a scathing statement, the FCCC alleged a pattern of authorities denying or ignoring requests for access, and following, harassing and abusing journalists. It contained several accounts of specific instances from foreign journalists, including the verbal abuse and freezing-out of a journalist who mentioned human rights boycotts in a report.

“Our members’ repeated inquiries towards the Beijing Winter Olympics organising committee [Bocog] on how international media can report on the Games have been met with conflicting answers or neglected completely,” the FCCC said.

“FCCC members report spending weeks trying to obtain contact details for Bocog media facilitators, only to receive dismissive or inaccurate information from them.”

In response the Bocog said [China](#) “has never recognised the organisation”.

“What this organisation said is inconsistent with the facts and cannot represent the true voice of foreign journalists in China,” it told the Guardian in a lengthy statement.

The Bocog said it “guaranteed the freedom of reporting” by international media on the Games, in accordance with “relevant Chinese policies” and on the proviso journalists abided by “relevant Chinese laws, regulations and anti-epidemic policies”.

However the statement also made several pledges which appeared to answer calls made by the FCCC, including for a dedicated media liaison desk during the Games, and for foreign media to be invited to domestic press events. It said depending on the epidemic situation there would be three press conferences for foreign media organised with the speed skating stadium, Olympic village, and sports centre.

“As the competition unfolds, we will also increase the registration quota of foreign media in the test competition,” it said.

The statement said BOCOG had “always welcomed” media attention and reports from foreign journalists on the Games preparations, had always

provided good services, and denied there was “so-called ‘inadequate information disclosure’”. As part of its defence it noted the delivery of 28 issues of an Olympics newsletter to 183 media outlets.

It did not refer to calls by the FCCC to approve long-stalled visas of foreign journalists, after dozens were expelled in 2020.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2021/nov/11/beijing-winter-olympics-committee-denies-blocking-foreign-media>

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[Japan](#)

Japanese train driver sues after wages docked 28p over one-minute delay



Japan's vast rail network rarely experiences significant delays, with the exception of disruption caused by earthquakes and typhoons. Photograph: Alamy

[Justin McCurry](#) in Tokyo and agencies

Thu 11 Nov 2021 03.55 EST

A train driver in [Japan](#) is suing his employer after it docked ¥43 (28p) from his wages over a one-minute delay that he claims was not his fault.

West [Japan](#) Railway Company (JR West) said it withheld the tiny sum by applying its strict “no work, no pay” principle over the incident, which occurred in June last year.

The driver, who has not been named by Japanese media, is seeking the ¥43 plus ¥13 overtime, as well as ¥2.2m damages for the mental anguish caused by his employer's decision, according to the Yomiuri Shimbun newspaper.

The case is a reminder of the Japanese railway network's enviable record on punctuality, with even very brief delays prompting repeated apologies to passengers.

The dispute arose after the driver, who had been scheduled to move an empty train to a depot at Okayama station in western Japan, realised he was waiting at the wrong platform.

His mistake held up the driver transfer at the correct platform by one minute and caused a further one-minute delay to the train's arrival at the depot, the newspaper said.

JR West said it was entitled to dock the driver's pay as he had not been working during the mix-up.

The plaintiff, however, told Okayama district court that the delay was caused by "human error" and that he should not have been considered absent from work, adding that there was no disruption to train timetables.

The firm initially withheld ¥85 for the two-minute delay but reduced the penalty to correspond with a one-minute delay after the driver complained to the local labour standards office.

The driver refused to accept the lower fine, however, and took his damages claim to court in March.

A JR West spokesperson told Agence France-Presse the dispute had arisen due to disagreements over how to interpret the cause of the delay, adding that the company had applied its no work, no pay rule in docking the driver's wages.

Online reaction appeared to side with the out-of-pocket driver. "So you can reduce someone's salary by one minute, but you can't pay overtime in one-

minute increments as well?” one commenter said, according to the [Sora News 24](#) website.

Another wrote: “I would go crazy if I was in charge of the payroll, having to deduct minutes from people’s salaries for every mistake they make.”

Japan’s vast rail network rarely experiences significant delays, with the exception of disruption caused by earthquakes and typhoons. Commuters and students using trains that are five or more minutes behind schedule are offered certificates to prove to bosses and teachers that they were not at fault for being late.

In 2017 the operator of a private railway firm that serves the Tokyo suburbs issued an apology for the “[severe inconvenience](#)” it had caused after one of its trains departed 20 seconds ahead of schedule.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/11/japanese-train-driver-sues-wages-docked-one-minute-delay>.

Hong Kong

Hong Kong opens modern art museum as security law casts pall



A security guard walks in front of *Bloodline – Big Family No 17* by Zhang Xiaogang at M+. Photograph: Tyrone Siu/Reuters

Reuters

Thu 11 Nov 2021 04.34 EST

A senior [Hong Kong](#) cultural official said freedom of expression was not above a China-imposed national security law, on the eve of the opening of a contemporary art museum intended to put the city on the global cultural map.

The multibillion-dollar M+, featuring contemporary artwork from leading Chinese, Asian and western artists, is Hong Kong's attempt to match museums such as Tate Modern in London, New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) and the Centre Pompidou in Paris.

But the imposition of a sweeping national security law by [China](#) last year on what used to be its freest city is casting a pall over the opening, as curators and artists struggle to find a balance between artistic expression and political censorship.

Earlier this year, pro-Beijing politicians and media outlets criticised certain works in the M+ for breaching the security law and inciting “hatred” against China, including a photograph by the Chinese dissident artist Ai Weiwei, giving the middle finger in Beijing’s Tiananmen Square.



Whitewash by Ai Weiwei. The Chinese dissident artist said the museum was clearly under censorship. Photograph: Tyrone Siu/Reuters

“The opening of M+ does not mean that artistic expression is above the law. It is not,” Henry Tang, the head of the West Kowloon Cultural District, a new cultural hub that includes the M+, told reporters.

Tang stressed all exhibits must comply with the security law and that certain works in the collection, including Ai’s contested photograph, would not be displayed.

“I have no doubt that MoMA New York probably have artworks in their archives that would not be displayed today because it would not be

politically acceptable in today's environment," Tang said.

The M+ museum's collection includes paintings, ceramics, videos and installations from artists including China's Zhang Xiaogang and Britain's Antony Gormley. A piece by Wang Xingwei, of a man in Beijing pedalling a bicycle cart laden with two dead penguins, has echoes of the Tiananmen killings in 1989.

One of Ai's installations, Whitewash, is also on display, featuring ancient Chinese earthenware jars.

Despite this, Ai remained critical.

"The museum is clearly under censorship," Ai said from Cambridge in the UK, where he is now based.

"When you have a museum which cannot or is incapable of defending its own integrity about freedom of speech, then that raises a question. And certainly the museum cannot perform well in terms of contemporary culture," he said.

Kacey Wong, a Hong Kong artist who moved to Taiwan to escape an intense political crackdown that has jailed democracy campaigners and crushed civil society, says he was forced to leave to keep his artistic "critical blade sharp".



Paddling Home by the Hong Kong artist Kacey Wong. Photograph: Tyrone Siu/Reuters

Two of his works are displayed in the M+, including Paddling Home, an art installation of a boat with a “micro home” built into it. A white naval officer’s uniform he once wore now hangs next to it, serving as a metaphor for his exile, he said.

“A museum can be, of course, a celebratory platform for the arts,” Wong said. “But it can also be a tool for authorities to bury art for ever.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/11/hong-kong-opens-modern-art-museum-security-law-casts-pall>

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- [Brexit UK ‘tough guy’ act on Northern Ireland will end in disaster, says Irish minister](#)
- [Priti Patel No 10 faces legal challenge over PM’s waiver of bullying findings](#)
- [Cop26 Coal phaseout remains in draft but some language softened](#)
- [Live Cop26: new draft tentatively welcomed as negotiations enter final day](#)
- ['We need more urgency' Cop26 targets too weak to stop disaster, say Paris trio](#)
- [Science Weekly Cop26 final day – any progress on saving the planet?](#)

Northern Ireland

UK ‘tough guy’ act on Northern Ireland will end in disaster, says Irish minister



A hijacked and burnt-out bus is removed from the loyalist Rathcoole estate in Newtonabbey, Northern Ireland. Photograph: Charles McQuillan/Getty

[Rachel Hall](#)

[@rachelahall](#)

Fri 12 Nov 2021 04.09 EST

Ireland’s minister for European affairs has said that a “tough guy approach” when it comes to [Northern Ireland](#) will lead to disaster, adding that threats to suspend the Northern Ireland protocol represented the first time the UK government has been out of step with the international consensus on preserving peace and stability in Northern Ireland in 25 years.

Speaking to BBC Radio 4, Thomas Byrne said there was “a serious danger of complete instability in Northern Ireland” if the UK government continues its “tough guy approach” through threats to trigger article 16, which would suspend post-Brexit trade arrangements.

He said: “We have a situation where we have the US putting pressure on the British government, the EU united in one voice with concern about Northern Ireland, Ireland concerned about Northern Ireland. We’ve never had a situation in the last 25 years where the British government is out of the loop on that.

“We want very close relations with the British government and good cooperation, we want to be singing off the same hymn sheet.”

He urged the UK government to be “constructive” in talks today with the EU about the Northern Ireland protocol, which keeps Northern Ireland inside the EU’s single market for goods, resulting in some checks for products crossing the Irish Sea from Great Britain, to put an end to escalating tensions in the Northern Ireland after two buses were set alight in protest in the past week.

Byrne’s comments came as the UK’s chief negotiator to the EU, David Frost, will meet the European Commission’s vice-president, Maroš Šefčovič, on Friday for the latest round of talks after the alterations proposed by the EU in October to remove checks on 80% of goods between Northern Ireland and the UK mainland fell short of UK government requests.

The UK government wants the EU to remove the role of judges in the European court of justice (ECJ) as the arbitrators of disputes. There is growing speculation that the UK could use a get-out clause from the deal in the coming weeks if this is not achieved.

Frost told the House of Lords on Wednesday that triggering article 16 – which would suspend elements of the arrangements designed to maintain free-flowing borderless trade on the island of Ireland – would be the UK’s only option if the dispute was not resolved.

He said there was “a real opportunity to turn away from confrontation, to move beyond our current difficulties and put in place a new, and better, equilibrium” in the talks. But he added it was “not inevitable” that article 16 would be triggered.

He said: “In my view, this talks process has not reached its end. Although we have been talking nearly four weeks now, there remain possibilities that the talks have not yet seriously examined, including many approaches suggested by the UK.

“There is more to do and I will certainly not give up on this process unless and until it is abundantly clear that nothing more can be done. We are certainly not there yet. If, however, we do in due course reach that point, the article 16 safeguards will be our only option.”

The Irish government has held talks with Joe Biden’s administration about the protocol. On Thursday, the Irish foreign minister, Simon Coveney, said contact with the US government was designed to “encourage progress” in negotiations.

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Boris Johnson

No 10 faces legal challenge to PM's support for Priti Patel on bullying claims



Boris Johnson, centre, decided Priti Patel, right, had not breached the ministerial code. Photograph: Jessica Taylor/UK PARLIAMENT/AFP/Getty Images

[Heather Stewart](#) Political editor

Fri 12 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

The government faces a legal challenge to Boris Johnson's decision to back Priti Patel over bullying allegations, throwing a fresh spotlight on the prime minister's approach to ethics in public life.

Alex Allan, Johnson's independent adviser on the ministerial code, resigned last year [after the prime minister chose not to act on a critical report about Patel](#).

After a Cabinet Office investigation, citing instances in which she had shouted and sworn at staff, Allan found Patel had displayed “behaviour that can be described as bullying” and that she had “not consistently met the high standards expected of her”.

His report suggested she had breached the ministerial code, even if unintentionally.

Johnson decided she had not breached the code, however, and subsequently urged his colleagues to “form a square around the Prittster”.

The FDA union, which represents senior civil servants, has brought a judicial review of his decision, probing the legal status of the ministerial code, which will be heard at the Royal Courts of Justice next Wednesday and Thursday.

Dave Penman, the FDA’s general secretary, said: “Civil servants should expect to work with ministers without fear of being bullied or harassed.

“The prime minister’s decision, which he said reflected the home secretary’s assertion that her actions were unintentional, also potentially allows ministers to avoid the consequences of their behaviour in future by pleading that it should be the intent of their actions which is important, not the consequences.

“The result is that civil servants’ confidence in challenging unacceptable behaviour from ministers has been fatally damaged.”

He added that 90% of civil servants in a recent survey carried out by the union said they had no confidence in the ministerial code as a way of dealing with bullying or harassment by ministers.

Johnson took the unusual step earlier this week of insisting the UK is “not remotely a corrupt country”, amid a slew of sleaze claims after his botched bid to protect disgraced former MP Owen Paterson from a 30-day suspension for paid lobbying.

Decisions on whether backbench MPs have breached their code of conduct are taken by the cross-party committee for standards, after an investigation by the independent watchdog, Kathryn Stone, and must then be rubber-stamped by the House of Commons.

But the prime minister is the ultimate arbiter of whether the ministerial code has been broken – and Johnson chose to override Allan’s findings in Patel’s case.

The home secretary subsequently reached a six-figure settlement with the former permanent secretary of her department, Sir Philip Rutnam, after claims that he was forced out of his job for intervening in her alleged bullying.

Whitehall sources said that Rutnam received a £340,000 settlement with a further £30,000 in costs. He had threatened to take the home secretary to an employment tribunal hearing.

Resigning in February last year, Rutnam claimed he had been the victim of a “vicious and orchestrated campaign against him”, which Patel had organised. Patel has consistently denied that claim and rejected allegations of bullying.

A report from the independent Committee on Standards in Public Life, [published last week](#), urged the government to strengthen the powers of the independent adviser on ministers’ interests – currently Lord Geidt, who was appointed to succeed Allan.

The committee said he should be able to launch his own investigations; his reports should be published promptly; and the government should publish the range of sanctions that could be applied to ministers who breach the rules in future.

“Meaningful independence is the benchmark for any effective form of standards regulation and current arrangements for the adviser still fall below this bar,” the committee said.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/nov/12/no-10-faces-legal-challenge-to-pms-support-for-priti-patel-on-bullying-claims>

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[**Cop26**](#)

Second Cop26 draft text: Coal phaseout remains in but some language softened



Cop26 president Alok Sharma speaks at the UN climate change conference in Glasgow. Photograph: Dylan Martinez/Reuters

[Fiona Harvey](#), [Damian Carrington](#), [Adam Morton](#) and agencies

Fri 12 Nov 2021 02.57 EST

Countries are being called on to accelerate the phaseout of coal power at the [Cop26](#) summit, and to return to the negotiating table next year with improvements to their national plans on cutting greenhouse gases.

The second draft of the key outcome from the Cop26 summit, now nearing its final hours in [Glasgow](#) after a fortnight of intense talks, showed a slight softening of language in some instances but retained the core demands for a return.

The three architects of the landmark 2015 Paris climate agreement have [told the Guardian](#) that a return to the negotiating table next year to revise countries' national emissions-cutting targets – known as nationally determined contributions (NDCs) – must be the key outcome of the talks if the world is to limit global heating to 1.5C.

There was a slight change in the language in the text with regards to NDC revisions – the previous text, published on Thursday morning, “urged” parties to make revisions, while the current draft “requests” them to do so. However, the latter mirrors the language used in the Paris agreement, so the change was not regarded as a significant weakening.

The latest draft proposal from the Cop26 chair, released soon after 7am on Friday in Glasgow, calls on countries to accelerate “the phaseout of unabated coal power and of inefficient subsidies for fossil fuels.”

A previous version on Wednesday had called on countries to “accelerate the phasing out of coal and subsidies for fossil fuel.”

The addition of “inefficient” could help countries that want to retain some fuel subsidies for the poor, while removing subsidies for major fossil fuel interests. This change to the language could also provide cover for countries that want to retain subsidies, however.

The issue of fossil fuel subsidies has long vexed climate experts, with calls to reduce the subsidies over two decades going largely unheeded. However, to have any language on phasing out fossil fuels and subsidies to them in the cover decision of a Cop is new and if the provision is retained in the final outcome it will mark an increased determination by many countries to face down fossil fuel producers at the talks.

A requirement for countries to revise NDCs reflects the expression of alarm by many parties, including the most vulnerable developing countries, over the chasm between carbon targets and the deep cuts necessary to limit temperature rises to 1.5C above pre-industrial levels.

Current national plans – known as nationally determined contributions (NDCs) – would lead to 2.4C of heating, according to an influential analysis this week by Climate Action Tracker.

Countries are currently expected to return with better pledges in 2025, under the Paris agreement, but many are now demanding the deadline should be brought forward. This is seen as the most closely fought area of disagreement as the UK hosts struggle to broker a deal.

The question of when and how to revise NDCs is crucial because although the Glasgow talks will continue at least to the end of Friday, and probably well into this weekend, there is now no possibility that governments will toughen their NDCs at this summit. But a clause in the draft text that will form the main outcome of the talks would allow for a return next year to update and strengthen the targets.

Developing countries are concerned that there is not enough reassurance for them for them on climate finance, a core issue for countries struggling to cope with the impacts of extreme weather.

Helen Mountford of the World Resources Institute said that the draft showed some progress in this area. “Some elements look like they could be stronger, particularly adaptation, finance and loss and damage, that was really very much needed,” she said. These issues are the funding for clean development, adapting to climate impacts and paying for unavoidable damage. “It is now giving specific dates, requesting countries to double adaptation finance by the end of 2025.”

But she added: “On the \$100 billion [promised] from 2020 annually, there’s still no reference to making up the shortfall since we know countries failed to meet that goal in 2020 and 2021. So that’s definitely a gap.” The \$100bn was promised back in 2009, to be delivered in 2020 and the failure has damaged trust between rich donor nations and poorer recipient nations.

Experts said on Friday morning that negotiators would now be in close consultation with senior officials in their country capitals, as aspects of the text would need to be decided at the highest levels of government for many countries. The text is regarded as strong by many developing countries, but

they expect it to come under fierce attack today from fossil fuel producing countries in particular.

Finance ministers are expected to meet at 11am, with a stock take by all parties expected at midday. The UK's Cop president Alok Sharma is engaged in last-minute shuttle diplomacy among parties.

Bob Ward, of the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change said: "This text appears to deal with many of the major issues that need to be resolved, but some important aspects still need to be finalised and may take some time to conclude. The text "requests", rather than commits, countries to deliver updated and more ambitious pledges by the end of next year, recognising that the planned emissions cuts collectively are still not consistent with holding warming to no more than 1.5 Celsius degrees."

But he added: "The call for countries to phase-out unabated coal power and inefficient fossil fuel subsidies is very important and historic. Unabated coal power releases carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, and all subsidies for fossil fuels are inefficient."

Since the Paris agreement was signed, binding countries to limit temperature rises "well below" 2C above pre-industrial levels while "pursuing efforts" to a 1.5C limit, new science has shown that breaching the 1.5C threshold would lead to disastrous impacts, some irreversible, including the inundation of many low-lying areas. Heating has now reached 1.1C, and extreme weather is already taking hold around the world.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has said emissions must be cut by 45% by 2030 compared with 2030 levels to stay within 1.5C.

The new draft outcome text will be discussed ahead of the 6pm UK time deadline for the talks to finish. However, previous Cop summits have a history of going well into Saturday and sometimes Sunday.

More updates soon ...

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Cop26

Cop26: deadline for agreeing crucial climate deal passes but negotiations set to continue – as it happened

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/live/2021/nov/12/cop26-live-reaction-to-latest-draft-as-negotiations-enter-final-day-un-climate-negotiations>

[**Cop26**](#)

Cop26 targets too weak to stop disaster, say Paris agreement architects



A Nepalese climate change protest in Kathmandu, Nepal this week. It will be too late to increase ambitions in 2025, Christina Figueres argues.
Photograph: Narendra Shrestha/EPA

[*Fiona Harvey in Glasgow*](#)

Thu 11 Nov 2021 15.56 EST

World leaders will have to return to the negotiating table next year with improved plans to cut greenhouse gases because the proposed targets agreed at the [Cop26](#) summit are too weak to prevent disastrous levels of global heating, the three architects of the Paris agreement have warned.

Christiana Figueres, the former UN climate chief who oversaw the 2015 Paris summit, and Laurence Tubiana, the French diplomat who crafted the agreement, have told the Guardian the deadline is essential if the world is to

avoid exceeding its 1.5C temperature limit. Laurent Fabius, the former French foreign minister who also oversaw Paris, added: “In the present circumstances [targets] must be enhanced next year.”

The last-ditch intervention by such senior figures, with the Glasgow talks reaching their final hours, reveals the heightened alarm among many experts over the chasm between carbon targets and the deep cuts necessary to limit temperature rises to 1.5C above pre-industrial levels.

Current national plans – known as nationally determined contributions (NDCs) – would lead to 2.4C of heating, according to an influential analysis this week by Climate Action Tracker.

Countries are currently expected to return with better pledges in 2025, but many are now demanding the deadline should be brought forward. This is seen as the most closely fought area of disagreement as the UK hosts struggle to broker a deal.

“If that [five years] is the first time that countries are called to increase their ambitions, honestly that’s going to be too late,” said Figueres, founding partner of the Global Optimism thinktank.

“This is critically important. We need much more urgency, as this is the critical decade. We need to come back next year. We can’t wait five years for new NDCs.”

Figueres and Tubiana said forcing countries to return with improved targets next year was allowed under the legal provisions of the Paris agreement. The European Union and the UN secretary-general, António Guterres, have also intervened to support the proposal. Guterres told the conference last week: “Let’s have no illusions: if commitments fall short by the end of this Cop, countries must revisit their national climate plans and policies. Not every five years. Every year.”

Tubiana, now chief of the European Climate Foundation, said: “It’s really important that we come back next year, and in 2023. That must be central to any outcome in Glasgow. This is necessary to fulfil the Paris agreement.”

Since the Paris agreement was signed, binding countries to limit temperature rises “well below” 2C above pre-industrial levels while “pursuing efforts” to a 1.5C limit, new science has shown that breaching the 1.5C threshold would lead to disastrous impacts, some irreversible, including the inundation of many low-lying areas. Heating has now reached 1.1C, and extreme weather is already taking hold around the world.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has said emissions must be cut by 45% by 2030 to stay within 1.5C.

Figueres said the strengthened science means the five-yearly revisions – often called a “ratchet” – set out in the Paris agreement should be hastened. “The Paris agreement was deliberately written to continue to improve its provisions according to the best available science,” she added.

Tubiana also stressed that the spirit of the Paris agreement was based on climate science. “We must base decisions on the science,” said Tubiana. “That’s why we have the ratchet mechanism in the Paris agreement. We must agree to come back next year, as this gap [between NDCs and scientific advice] is a really big problem.”

Many other senior participants, observers and countries in the talks have also told the Guardian they back the call by Figueres and Tubiana.

Mary Robinson, chair of the Elders Group of senior statespeople, and previously a UN climate envoy, UN commissioner for human rights and president of Ireland, said: “They have to come back next year, that is needed to fulfil the terms of the Paris agreement. We need much more urgency, we need pressure. How can we say we are aligned with 1.5C if we don’t agree to come back?”

The question of when and how to revise NDCs is crucial because although the Glasgow talks will continue at least to the end of Friday, and probably well into this weekend, there is now no possibility that governments will toughen their NDCs at this summit. But a [clause in the draft text](#) that will form the main outcome of the talks would allow for a return next year to update and strengthen the targets.

The US also wants countries to have to come forward with stronger plans on a more frequent basis, but balks at the idea that all parties should have to revise their whole NDCs annually, as they can be complex documents involving multiple commitments across many government departments.

Xie Zhenhua, China's head of delegation, said: "Whether the NDCs should be updated annually depends on what content is in it. Stable and long-term NDCS are more helpful for countries to carry out action to achieve targets."

Xie also indicated that a "global stocktake" – a mechanism under the Paris agreement for countries to assess their NDCs in 2023 – might be a moment for revisions.

There may be room for compromise with the world's two biggest emitters, who signed a surprise cooperative pact on Wednesday committing them to work together on emissions cuts in the next decade, in a major boost for the Cop26 summit.

A new draft outcome text is set to be drawn up by delegates in the early hours of Friday morning, and discussed ahead of the 6pm deadline for the talks to finish. However, previous Cop conferences have tended to go on well into Saturday and sometimes Sunday.

Other sticking points yet to be resolved in the draft text include climate finance for poor countries to help them cut carbon and cope with the impacts of extreme weather, and ways to help them with "loss and damage" – the ravages of extreme weather so severe that they cannot be prepared for or adapted to.

There are also question marks over how countries should monitor and report on their emissions, and controversial provisions for countries to use carbon trading or offsetting to help meet their emissions-cutting targets.

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Science Weekly

Cop26

Cop26: the final day – have we made any progress on saving the planet?

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2021.11.12 - Spotlight

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Interview

Let's Eat Grandma: 'How can I view death purely in a negative way when someone I love is dead?'

[Laura Snapes](#)



Friends reunited ... Jenny Hollingworth and Rosa Walton of Let's Eat Grandma. Photograph: Linda Nylind/The Guardian



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Let's Eat Grandma arrive in a cafe after their Guardian photoshoot, looking exactly like a pair of pop stars. Jazzed up in opulent jewel tones and immaculate eyeliner, they are both tall – about 5ft 9in – but the resemblance ends there. Rosa Walton has the plump red curls of a 40s movie star, while Jenny Hollingworth channels something of the young Kate Bush.

They find it funny, being back in band mode after three years away, says Hollingworth, “because we view ourselves as just ...”

“... us,” says Walton.

It feels right that the pair, both 22, spend much of the next two hours talking to each other. It’s easy to bask in their fervent, thoughtful, funny company. In robust Norfolk accents, they offer each other backup and emotional reassurance, cackle at absurdities, and tenderly analyse their personality traits from the perspective of an 18-year friendship (one that started over mutually appreciated snail drawings).

Their tight bond drew fans in from their debut album, 2016's lurid, sludgy, swaggering [I, Gemini](#). Some critics couldn't believe that two Norwich college girls had made this fantastically inventive music without a bloke pulling the strings. In 2018, the duo challenged that assumption with the single Hot Pink, an industrial, bubblegum piledriver of defiance "all about the misconceptions of masculinity and femininity", says Walton. It led off their second album, [I'm All Ears](#), which embodied the rushing emotions of their brilliant, impressionistic lyricism with euphoric synthpop. Nominated for an Ivor Novello award for best album, it made clear that they were massive generational talents. "We were viewed less like a novelty band," says Hollingworth, pleased.

Let's Eat Grandma: Hall of Mirrors – video

Due next April, their third album, Two Ribbons, is their best yet, balancing fierce adrenaline with a new sense of space. It frequently plays out as a conversation between the pair from a time when their friendship had faltered. The cracks started to show in early 2018 when they found they could no longer finish each other's sentences. In March 2019, Hollingworth's boyfriend, the musician Billy Clayton, died of a rare form of bone cancer aged 22. Faced by these awful, random cosmic realignments of what had once seemed certain, somehow they still had faith that the band would survive. It took on a spiritual purpose. "Not in the sense of religion," says Hollingworth, "but we were at a point where life felt very stripped of meaning. We were looking for a reason to live our life."

Before that, though, they tried to fight change. They were rehearsing for the I'm All Ears tour when they realised their relationship felt off. They assiduously tried to fix it, says Hollingworth, "because that's what we're like: Let's have 50 discussions about it!"

"We were talking but we weren't really saying anything," says Walton.

Unsurprisingly, it didn't work. "It wasn't as simple as: 'Oh, you hurt me by saying this,'" says Hollingworth. "It was like: we are fundamentally misunderstanding each other in some way."

We've always done so much together, it's almost like we didn't have the confidence to do things individually

Jenny Hollingworth

The confusion coincided with Walton moving from Norwich to London. She craved independence and a new chapter – “somewhere busy with loads of exciting things going on and opportunities”. How did the reality compare with her expectations? “Oh, it didn’t!” she laughs. She quickly burned herself out. “And then ended up spending a lot of evenings in by myself, and feeling quite isolated and lonely.”

Hollingworth jumps in, kind and enthusiastic. “Because you’re actually a very sensitive person underneath all the spontaneity and excitement, sometimes you forget that side of yourself and then it’s crying out for help.”

Walton agrees. “Mostly I’d describe myself as an extrovert but then sometimes I go too hard with that.” It’s where they balance each other out, she says. “Jenny is much more measured and less risk-taking.”

Walton tried to write through this strange period. The pugnacious, clattering Levitation describes experiencing a breakdown on a bathroom floor yet still managing to find hope in the promise of connection: “Shooting stars in your direction as I’m losing grip on my reflection.” It’s a surreal, vivid marvel about feeling “out of it and disoriented”, says Walton. “But at the same time, you feel up in the clouds and quite elevated. I quite often get it when I’m anxious: things look bright and there’s a lot of creativity.”

Back in Norwich, Hollingworth understood why her friend had moved – though she stayed with her weekly as she travelled for therapy sessions in the capital – but couldn’t help feeling left behind, especially as her life shrank. She had met local musician Clayton in 2017, the pair bonding over their love of avant-garde pop production crew [PC Music](#). At first, she admits, she found him annoying. “I got on with him better than you!” Walton hoots, her glorious laugh sounding like someone inhaling bubblegum.

Hollingworth says she can be standoffish sometimes (though she is nothing but gregarious in person). “I was very drawn to him in a way where I didn’t realise that I liked him,” she says. They describe Clayton as “a massive sweetheart”: vibrant, witty – always taking the piss out of Walton’s not inconsiderable height, because he was “proper tall” – and very sensitive. He loved music and his idol [Charli XCX](#) had taken him under her wing. “But things were very complicated,” says Hollingworth.

Clayton had been diagnosed with Ewing’s sarcoma. He was doing all right when he and Hollingworth accepted that they were, unavoidably, an item. She once said Hot Pink was partly about not feeling respected in past romantic experiences, but says Clayton – her first boyfriend – treated her as an equal. “We were always learning from each other. He was very focused. I was a lot more scattered before but he knew what his goal was creatively.” His drive emboldened her. “Maybe I didn’t have that much confidence in myself when we were doing I’m All Ears.”

But in autumn 2018, as Let’s Eat Grandma’s profile rose, Clayton’s condition worsened. “And it wasn’t back from that, really,” Hollingworth says. She sounds surprised that she’s getting choked up, although her composure when narrating this horrendous period of time is frankly astonishing. I offer to move on but she doesn’t want to stop talking: “I’m just trying to get it right, that’s the hard thing.”



Let's Eat Grandma. Photograph: Linda Nylind/The Guardian

The duo ploughed ahead with touring. Hollingworth felt a responsibility to the band and their crew “to keep going and not make a fuss”, even though she felt totally out of it. And Clayton needed space. “It was hard for him to be vulnerable with me because he didn’t want to be defined by his illness,” she says. “And that’s not how I saw him.” He eventually let his guard down, but told her to finish the tour. “He wanted me to have a good time with the band. It was hard because he really wanted to be doing music himself.”

To survive on the road, she had to compartmentalise. “It was hard because you really wanted to talk to me about things,” she says to Walton, “but I couldn’t access that.”

“It’s such a massive contrast to being on tour where everyone’s very excited all the time,” Walton replies. “That must have been even more alienating for you.”

Hollingworth still agonises over whether she made the right decisions back then. “I always tried to ask him what he wanted and then that’s what I did.”

“And that’s the best thing,” says Walton.

“But I lost sight of myself because I was doing all these different things that I felt like I needed to do – that I *wanted* to do,” Hollingworth says emphatically, “because I wanted to be there for Billy, to be with him, because I loved him.”

In spring 2019, the band were preparing to tour the US. Hollingworth had been staying in Cambridge so she could visit Clayton, who was receiving treatment at Addenbrooke’s hospital. She eventually left to give him his dignity. He died two days later. Even after that, she worried she was letting people down by cancelling the band’s imminent shows, although they still played the US Coachella festival to honour Clayton, who had dreamed of performing there. “I don’t regret that because I felt so numb, I don’t know what else I would have even been doing anyway,” says Hollingworth.

It took her a year to be able to write again. The tough, desolate Watching You Go is an obliterating distillation of the rage and futility she felt after Clayton’s death. “A lot of the emotions I found quite frightening; I didn’t know how they could get any more intense without me feeling like I was actually going to die,” she says. She was stricken by anger, which in turn provoked “a deep sense of shame because I felt like this is not a normal reaction. It’s not socially acceptable to be really angry and particularly when you can’t explain exactly where it’s coming from.”

She passed those fraught months in nature, discovering a sense of acceptance in the natural cycles of growth and death, accompanied by the music of 60s folkie [Tim Hardin](#) and Suede (a favourite of Clayton’s mum, Becky, “a legend” with whom she’s very close). Although Clayton was cremated and not buried, Hollingworth found solace spending time in graveyards. She knows some people found the way she processed her grief unhealthy. “How can I view death purely in a negative way when someone who I really love is dead?” she counters, with heart-piercing clarity.

Clayton dying so young made Hollingworth reconsider what she wanted from life. She realised she was “overwhelmingly passionate” about music, and found empowerment in writing Two Ribbons – reclaiming her voice, and music, after the stress of the previous tours. Still, she says, it “was an agonising process”. The head of their label insisted she didn’t need to push

herself so hard with her writing. “I was like, I’m not suffering because of the songs!” she laughs. “I am *anyway*, and I’m just trying to get that represented well.”

It’s nice not to be afraid to express difficult emotions, and that not be seen as shameful or bad

Rosa Walton

The band wrote separately for the first time (although they contribute to each other’s lyrics), and the words on the new album are phenomenal. “It was quite a moving experience to be able to express ourselves to each other,” says Hollingworth. Some songs are about distinctive personal experiences: Hollingworth’s about grief; Walton’s about a breakup with her long-term boyfriend and the discovery of her bisexuality, one that made her feel as though “everything was coming to life”, she says. “I’d had these internal experiences of how I imagined it being with a woman,” she says, getting giggly, “even through watching films, or … getting any content on the internet that’s out there!”

“Not necessarily video content!” Hollingworth clarifies, with comic primness, and their laughter echoes off the cafe walls.

But they also write to each other. “It’s OK to say what you wanna say / And that we’ve grown in different ways,” Walton sings on Happy New Year. “Have we lost sight of the same light?” Hollingworth wonders on Insect Loop, a song that teems with anger, sadness, guilt and tenderness. “It’s nice not to be afraid to express difficult emotions about a person, and that not be seen as a shameful or a bad thing to do,” says Walton.

The problem that had emerged in their friendship, they realised, came down to assuming that they each knew how the other felt. “Which is how we used to be,” says Walton, describing their childhood bond as “telepathic”.

“Creatively and as individuals, we’ve always done so much together, it’s almost like we didn’t have the confidence to do things individually,” says Hollingworth. She remembers how as kids, and even on their debut album, they portrayed themselves as twins, hiding behind matching waterfalls of

curly brown hair. “Bants!” she laughs (back then they also revelled in telling the press entertaining fibs). “It felt necessary because we needed to be a united front.”

“Protecting each other,” Walton agrees.

“People always talked about how similar we were, but we’re actually *so* different, and I don’t think we really realised that,” Hollingworth continues.



‘We needed to be a united front’ ... Let’s Eat Grandma performing in 2016.
Photograph: Andrew Benge/Redferns

They’ve come to recognise their differences: although Walton is more spontaneous and extrovert, she values precision, right down to creating colour-coded spreadsheets to organise her parts in the recording studio. Hollingworth may be cautious as a person, but she has more faith in following her mood creatively.

She wonders whether she would ever have joined a band without Walton. “Particularly when I was younger and lacking in confidence, you would be like: ‘We’re going to do *this*.’ You pull me out of my comfort zone.”

“That’s a nice thing to say!” Walton grins.

The pair live close to one another again now – Hollingworth in Norwich, Walton in nearby Diss – and they understand that their friendship has changed for good. For Walton, who struggles with change in any relationship, the album is about accepting these shifts. Hollingworth wants to emphasise that Two Ribbons doesn't offer any answers. "It's question after question," she says.

That open-endedness underscores her newfound confidence. She's less concerned about the pressure of expectation this time around, "because I feel much more connected with my purpose now, and also more confident in my ability to advocate for what I need". You can hear it in the closing lines of the album, from the softly strummed title track, which refuse any sense of resolution:

I wanna find the answer but I can only be your best friend
And hope that that's enough
But I know that's not enough

Although she wrote the song about Walton and Clayton, that part was about the sheer fact that no amount of love could prevent her boyfriend's death. "The end result of that song is someone dying or a relationship washing away," says Hollingworth. "It's in some ways hopeful, but also in some ways completely devastating. I never wanted it to sound like sticking a plaster on it."

Two Ribbons is released on Transgressive on 8 April 2022.

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You be the judge: should my girlfriend stop reusing teabags?



Illustration: Joren Joshua/The Guardian

Interviews by [Georgina Lawton](#)

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Fri 12 Nov 2021 03.00 EST

The prosecution: Simon

I would like my girlfriend to stop reusing teabags, and not to leave her half-drunk mugs of tea all over our flat

Emma reuses teabags all the time. She picks them out of old mugs of milky water or leaves them on the kitchen counter for later. I think it's weird and gross. All that old milk will have been absorbed into the teabag.

She's always making new cups of tea because she forgets how many she has on the go. Our flat is full of half-drunk mugs that she's lost track of. She doesn't know how long they've been sitting there.

I will open the curtain in the morning and there will be three mugs, all full, all with the teabag still in, sitting on the window ledge. I will go to the bathroom and knock over a cup of tea that's behind the door, and then there'll be a mug on the side of the bath, too. Recently when I was putting the clothes in the dryer, I found a teabag which had exploded in the washing. I've even found a teabag in the drain of the shower – what the hell is that about?

Emma asks for a cup of tea every 20 minutes, even though she will have a full cup beside her.

She says reusing old teabags is an eco-friendly decision but that's nonsense: the environment-friendly part is completely cancelled out by the fact that she throws away so much tea on a daily basis – because she forgets to finish her drinks.

We work from home together now and I only really need one or two cups a day, but Emma asks for one every 20 minutes, even though she will have a full cup beside her. She says, "Oh, I forgot to drink it", and tries to defend it by saying she will reuse the bag, but she doesn't reuse as much as she wastes.

Emma needs to stop kidding herself that she is saving tea by picking out the teabags from old cups – that's just making an excuse for her absent-

mindedness. And anyway, teabags are designed for single use, otherwise the flavour goes right out of them – everybody knows that.

The defence: Emma

It's fine to use teabags more than once and, as for leaving cups lying around: I'm the one who does the most cleaning

I come from a long line of teabag reusers. In my family home, by the kettle, there's a ramekin, a mug with an old teabag and a tea-stained spoon. It's ingrained. I grew up on a farm where we reuse food. My grandparents say “waste not want not”.

I don't think teabags are single-use – you can drink from the same one up to three times. People brew tea for up to five minutes, so I make lots of mini brews with the same bag. I've found that an oily scum sticks to the side of the mug after one go – you brew that out with subsequent usage. Simon says this is unhygienic. I tell him he needs to think about the planet and stop having a meltdown over tea.

Simon says I'm using my family history to justify a bad habit, but reusing the old bags helps save the environment.

Earlier in the pandemic my dad died and I went home to the farm. Simon came to support me, my mum, my brother and grandparents. We all drank a lot of tea – dealing with grief. One day Simon had a blow-out at me and my brother, who also reuses teabags and leaves each one on the side of the kitchen counter. Simon said we were absent-minded, don't put stuff away, and should try meditation. He was sniffing the fresh produce and checking the [use-by] dates. I told him he needs to try reusing more stuff as in our shared flat he wastes a lot.

Simon says I'm using my family history to justify a bad habit, but it's how I was raised. I drink more tea in the relationship. I won't apologise for reusing the bags; it's helping to save the environment.

Sometimes I leave old mugs around the house, but so what? I'm the tidy one in the relationship. I do all the hoovering, mopping and dusting. Simon leaves crumbs over the table – he creates dirt, while I just reuse things and sometimes forget where I leave cups. I don't think he can take the moral high ground: his bad habits aren't comparable to my hereditary teabag habit.

The jury of *Guardian* readers

Should Emma throw her teabags away after each use?

I imagine teabags can be multi-use for one person – though sharing teabags risks spreading diseases. There are many other uses for teabags – for example in gardening – that are maybe less contentious.

Corinne, 52

The biggest crime here is the weak tea. A teabag should make one decent cuppa. Putting that aside, Emma should reuse the teabags but be consistent: milk and water are resources too, and she doesn't seem too bothered about wasting those.

Adam, 48

Simon, Simon, Simon. There are much more important things than mugs lying around the house and triple-dunked teabags. It's a well-known fact that if you want to comment on your partner's housekeeping, your contribution to it must be unimpeachable. Do more tidying, Simon, then you can have an opinion. Maybe.

Charlotte, 43

I have no issue with using a teabag for multiple brews, but the prospect of semi-drunk mugs lurking around the home is a mouldy surprise waiting to happen. Treat each brew with the respect it deserves and drink up!

Dan, 28

Emma's statement sounds less judgmental. This conflict isn't really about teabags or the Earth: what is the real tension you're trying to negotiate? You both waste and make mess because you're imperfect – don't be so hard on

each other. Try coming from a softer place and talk emotions, not morals.
Anne Marie, 31

You be the judge

So now you can be the judge, click on the poll below to tell us: should Emma stop reusing teabags? We'll share the results on next week's You be the judge.

The poll will close on Thursday 18th November, 9AM GMT

Last week's result

Last week, we asked if Naila was being [too picky](#) with her baby's name, something that annoys her husband, Ameen.

93% of you said no – Naila is innocent

7% of you said yes – Naila is guilty

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The Merkel yearsGermany

Blazers out, nail varnish in: as Merkel steps down, so does star doppelganger



Ursula Wanecki: ‘There’s a gasp when people first see me – the shock effect is what’s most important.’ Photograph: Avalon



[Kate Connolly](#) in Berlin

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Ursula Wanecki has a dream, which is to finally meet [Angela Merkel](#) and swap tips with her about how to make Silesian plum cake. “I know for a fact she likes to make it, with a crumble topping. I imagine us sitting in her garden, having a coffee and eating the cake – with a crunchy crumble – away from the public eye.”

She has been told “by people in the know”, she says, that her idea is not so far-fetched. Merkel knows about Wanecki, who has been impersonating her for almost as long as she has been chancellor, and has even sent her a signed book, which Wanecki takes to be tacit approval of her unconventional role.

Her public presence as Germany’s leading Merkel double in everything from satirical TV shows and supermarket openings to private weddings and birthday parties has kept her busy over the past 16 years, even as she calls it her “hobby” and has retained her day job as an assistant tax consultant. When Merkel, 67, retires from her role next month, 65-year-old Wanecki plans to do the same.

“What I’m looking forward to most is being able to wear nail varnish and big earrings again, something Merkel never does,” she jokes. “But I think that ditching the blazers will not mean people don’t continue to shout ‘Hallo Angie’ at me for some time to come. She will not disappear from the public consciousness for some time.”

Her second life started almost by accident, with absolutely no effort on her part, Wanecki said in a recent online interview from her modest three-room flat in Attendorn, west Germany.

“When he was very young my grandson saw Angela Merkel on the TV news and told his mum: ‘That’s granny.’ Then I wore an apricot-coloured suit at a wedding, something similar to what she had worn – the colour suits us both – and later dressed as her for a laugh to go to carnival. And it went down so well that it took off from there.”

She is indeed more or less Merkel’s spitting image, mimicking her down to her slightly stooped posture, even her cautious gait and sometimes childlike glee.

In a compelling [series of sketches](#) made for a popular TV show, in which she copies Merkel undertaking everyday tasks ranging from drawing money from a bank machine to throwing a stick for a dog, she has Merkel’s cautionary approach down to a T as she hesitates before stepping on to an escalator.



Who's who? Angela Merkel and her doppelganger Ursula Wanecki.
Composite: AP/Avalon

“But I swear I never learned the mimicry. It is truly how I am. I hardly need to make any effort, I just put on a bit of makeup and an oversized blazer and when I walk out the door I am simply Angela Merkel,” she said.

Despite being taller “by a head” and having a shoe size of 40, compared with Merkel’s 38, as well as “longer, slimmer legs”, she says most people fail to notice the difference, “especially if they’ve never seen Merkel in the flesh”.

Wanecki was born in Poland and despite having lived in Germany for years, has a strong Polish accent. “Therefore I am the necessarily quiet chancellor,” she said. “I arrive somewhere in a limousine, walk up the red carpet, hold my hands in her trademark rhomboid position. There’s a gasp when people first see me – the shock effect is what’s most important. But as soon as I open my mouth, the secret is out. Sometimes I’ve joked that I’ve spent too long speaking to Vladimir Putin and his accent’s rubbed off. That almost always draws a laugh.”

She has an agent who deals with impersonation requests, who has seen demand grow steadily over the years, reaching its peak in the recent, last

months of Merkel's fourth term. In October Wanecki took part in a feature film, though she is not allowed to go into detail. She has also starred in numerous films and tableaux by the British photographer and film-maker [Alison Jackson](#), who specialises in faux scenarios using celebrity lookalikes, after the artist issued an [appeal](#) in the German media for a Merkel doppelganger.



Wanecki says most people fail to notice the difference, 'especially if they've never seen Merkel in the flesh'. Photograph: Avalon

Wanecki made the [cover of Le Monde](#) in Jackson's 2013 depiction of the revival of the Franco-German alliance, eating croissants and bretzels with François Hollande. She even made headlines once, a few years ago, after appearing in an [advert](#) for a new magazine for gay women, in which Merkel appeared to be in an intimate setting with another woman in what the magazine's editor said was an attempt to win a reluctant Merkel over to [support same-sex marriage](#).

"I come from a strict Catholic family and I had had absolutely nothing to do with homosexuality," Wanecki said. "But after I was approached by the magazine I started to do my homework and realised what an important topic it was." But she was unprepared for the reaction that followed. "The furore

around it throughout the world was extraordinary. I think it might even have helped Merkel change her mind about gay marriage.”

Merkel did not in fact vote in favour of legalising same-sex marriage in 2017, but she made no attempt to block it and subsequently said she supported the parliamentary approval it received.

Wanecki has also turned down plenty of offers, in particular, she said, if they appeared disrespectful towards a woman she described warmly as “clever, thorough and an excellent crisis manager”. These included a Russian TV advert for an underwear company, “and various other lurid invitations”.

Among the personal highlights was a trip to Greece at the height of the euro crisis to star in an ad in which she had to dip her hand into a barrel of olives and declare: “This is Greek gold with which Greece will manage to clear its debts.”

The low points came during the migrant crisis of 2015, when she was showered with offensive remarks while on assignments after welcoming refugees fleeing conflicts in Syria and elsewhere.

“That was the first time I felt scared about being mistaken for her,” she said. “And to be frank, the fear has never left me. I always take care, even in my home town, when I’m walking down the street to see who else is nearby. If someone comes up behind me unawares, I’m easily alarmed. In Berlin when I’m standing at the top of a flight of stairs with my suitcase, I always wait until it is clear before hugging the railing and walking down, in case someone tries to shove into me. There are a lot of crazy people out there who maybe want the chance to make the headlines.”

Soon Wanecki plans to hang up the blazers. She fancies a cruise and to explore more of her native Poland. “It was important for me in all the years to not lose the essence of Ursula Wanecki, the real me,” she said. “I hope that the same goes for Angela Merkel.”

Classic recipe for Pflaumenkuchen mit Streusel (plum cake with crumble)

Ingredients

For the cake:

- 680-700g ripe empress plums (Zwetschgen/Pflaumen), stoned and quartered
- 125g plain flour
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 150g granulated sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp grated lemon zest
- 115g unsalted butter (not chilled)
- 2 eggs

For the Streusel (crumble)

- 125g plain flour
- 100g sugar
- $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp cinnamon
- 115g unsalted butter (chilled)

Preheat oven to 180C. Lightly grease a 22-23cm springform pan

In a bowl, combine the flour and baking powder with a mixer. Add the sugar, vanilla extract, lemon zest, butter and eggs, and beat on a low speed. Once combined, increase speed to medium-high and beat until smooth and creamy.

Spread the batter mix into the springform. Place the plums on the dough and press in gently with finger tips.

For the streusel: In a bowl combine sugar, flour, butter, cinnamon by hand using finger tips, until the mixture resembles coarse bread crumbs.

Spread the streusel by hand evenly over the plums.

Bake for 50 minutes or until the top is lightly golden. Bake for a little longer for a crunchier crumble. Let the cake rest for 10 minutes before releasing the outer ring of the springform. Serve warm with hot vanilla sauce or whipped cream.

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Interview

Placebo: ‘It’s not the end of the world. It’s just the end of the human species’

Sasha Geffen



Placebo ... Stefan Olsdal (left) and Brian Molko: ‘It’s a rallying cry saying: Just give the world back to the animals.’

Fri 12 Nov 2021 04.00 EST

On the screen of my phone, Brian Molko is trying to dodge the camera's gaze. I'm in Colorado, video calling him in London, watching him chain smoke from across the Atlantic. He sometimes casts glances at the lens, mostly doing his best to forget it's there.

Over the past 25 years, Molko's band Placebo have often grappled with the question of image; with being seen, photographed and surveilled. Alongside co-writer and multi-instrumentalist Stefan Olsdal, Molko has carved out a dark and daring aesthetic universe, wrangling topics deemed taboo within alternative rock and culture. There are Placebo songs about abuse, co-dependency, violence and addiction; many seem to ring out from past the end of the world. In 1999, a few years after David Bowie took notice of the band and invited them to open for him – they later duetted on a version of the Placebo song *Without You I'm Nothing* – REM's Michael Stipe dedicated *It's the End of the World As We Know It* to Placebo at a festival in Belgium.

Inside the gloom, though, a sense of thrill flickers. With their distinctive palette, defined by downtuned guitars, electrified overtones and Molko's metallic, androgynous voice, Placebo extol the pleasure that can come from kink, unbridled infatuation and queer sex. Back in 1996, when Placebo released their self-titled debut album, Molko and Olsdal wore dresses and makeup onstage and in photoshoots; Molko's bratty, girlish affect broadcasted a way of moving through the world that flouted binaries. He cultivated a gendered and sexual expansiveness decades before the term “non-binary” slipped into mainstream vernacular.

“We did what we could within the framework that existed,” Molko says. “And we rebelled against the framework that existed. It's much, much more complex now. But if just by being ourselves in the 90s, we made people feel less alone – if we managed to, in any way whatsoever, increase the potential and capacity for freedom just by 1% – then we've achieved something.”



Placebo in 1997. Photograph: Pat Pope/REX/Shutterstock

Placebo didn't just play music about being queer to a broad audience – they frequently hit the Top 5 of both the UK single and album charts – but made music that insisted that queerness had its delights alongside its dangers. Songs such as *Nancy Boy*, with its [deliriously Cronenbergian music video](#), traced the fluid morphology of bodies. In one shot, Molko and Olsdal's heads dissolve into each other: symbolic of how a creative partnership, or music in general, has the power to liquefy the self.

"We had a great opportunity to let parts of us show that we hadn't up to that point in our lives," Olsdal tells me from Stockholm a few days after I speak with Molko. "We got the confidence to show the world who we were."

Molko echoes him. "We were just kids who just wanted to make music. But we couldn't do it without going onstage in a dress, without talking about our sexuality. It was very, very important for us to not be ashamed," he says. "And inadvertently, hopefully, we perhaps created something within people who listened to us where they felt that the necessity for shame was decreased."

Placebo's upcoming eighth studio album, *Never Let Me Go*, began germinating during a world tour for the 20th anniversary of that 1996 debut.

Newly a duo after parting ways with drummer Steve Forrest, both Molko and Olsdal felt trepidation; reiterating songs they had written in their 20s became stifling.

“It felt like an extremely commercial exercise for me,” Molko says. “I have a very unique point of view as the writer. I’m just looking for mistakes. Having to go back and play songs which felt quite sophomoric for me at first made me want to do something that really, really broke with all of my safety nets.”

Placebo was a way to claim space in the world; the band’s 90s output was life-giving at the time, but by 2016 felt lodged in a bygone era. “We’ve never really felt that we fit in. Having searched for so long, we got tired of searching. So we built our own world instead,” Olsdal says. “That’s what we’ve inhabited. That’s what we know and what we need to find strength, to go up on stage and to perform these songs night after night. But when you build your own world, sometimes you can get trapped by it.”

In the midst of the tour, to shake the band loose, Molko decided to invert Placebo’s typical songwriting process. “What would we normally do? Let’s not do that,” he says. “If you decide to do everything in a way that you don’t actually know how to do, you’ll fall into a series of accidents which can stimulate you or disgust you. That surprise is what I live for.”

The thing about running away is that you’ll always take yourself with you

Brian Molko

Rather than jam with a drummer to feel out the songs from the ground up, Placebo started with what usually comes last: the album cover. “Brian came in with a photograph,” Olsdal says. “And he kept throwing me song titles and potential album titles, and we worked from there.” The cover, recently [revealed on Instagram](#), shows a rocky beach bejewelled with colourful sea glass: bits of human trash worn smooth by the ocean. The image seems to speak to the track Try Better Next Time, an upbeat and sweetly melodic rumination on climate disaster. Molko’s lyrics paint a world of extreme

inequality, water shortages, militarised security and human beings growing fins to return to the encroaching sea.

“It’s not going to be the end of the world. It’s just going to be the end of the human species,” Molko says. “We call it the end of the world in our incessant hubris and narcissism. Try Better Next Time is kind of a rallying cry saying: ‘Just give it up, give it back to the animals.’ They were here first.”



‘I think my reaction to most things is just disappointment.’ Photograph: Mads Perch

While writing the album, Molko returned to the sci-fi films he had loved as a child – psychedelic ruminations on technology and power from the 1970s, such as Fantastic Planet and Silent Running. “I’m very interested in creating, with each song, an alternative universe where the laws of physics don’t necessarily apply,” he says. “Each song really does exist in its little parallel universe. If we’re not tied down to the laws of physics that are generally accepted in the universe we see, then certainly emotion will follow. Certainly anything is possible in another reality. It allows me to speak freely about what bothers me. I try to exaggerate things to increase dramatic effect, to highlight how ridiculous our reality is.”

The characters in each song further Placebo's overarching paranoia and suspicion about the world as it stands ("I think my reaction to most things is just disappointment," Molko tells me). The driving post-punk track Surrounded By Spies, written using the cut-up technique popularised by William S Burroughs, envisions a society in which every eye and camera is trained on the narrator – a commentary on CCTV surveillance and social media alike.

"What are the consequences of the bargain that we've struck in order to have all of this communication?" Molko asks. "The system is designed to take your privacy away, contribute to the loss of your freedom, and objectify you to the point that you engage in it proactively." On the beautifully melancholic Went Missing, he dips into his darkened *sprechstimme* to imagine someone who can go missing for a living – someone who survives through invisibility, a reversal of the tradeoff made by those who survive by revealing themselves constantly. There are songs of tremendous grief and desperation, such as Happy Birthday in the Sky; songs that feel haunted by past selves such as Twin Demons; songs that render the profound alienation of being seen but not known.

"A lot of the writing I did was me trying to write myself out of feeling trapped in this world," Olsdal says. "And, however scary things are, trying to engage with it somehow. As social beings, we get anxious when we're left on our own. We miss the herd on a basic human level. It's this dichotomy of trying to be an individual, but also having to be a part of others."



Molko playing live in 2018. Photograph: NurPhoto/Getty Images

Never Let Me Go might frame the end of humanity, but it also sounds out how we hold each other through the ruin. “I think we’ve come across this theme of ‘love in the time of cholera’,” says Olsdal. Beautiful James is about loving someone outside of heteronormative scripts, about how human affection so often spills over the channels that power digs for it. “I want to live in a world where a song like Beautiful James raises no eyebrows,” Molko tells me. That hope offers a slight opening out of the apocalypse on which so much culture now fixates.

I ask Molko if there’s any chance we make it. He doesn’t really think so. “If the tech billionaires get their way, we’re just going to colonise other planets and repeat our mistakes there,” he says. “The thing about running away is that you’ll always take yourself with you.” So I ask what music can do.

“For me, it’s about not existing in the problem and trying to live in the solution. I wanted to express something visceral, something very human. I just hope that other people will understand it and that it will move them,” he says. “I hope that I’ve been somewhat courageous with this record so that it might inspire courage in others. It might help them stand up for what they believe in. That’s all. That’s what music did for me.”

Never Let Me Go is released on 25 March 2022 on So Recordings. The singles Beautiful James and Surrounded By Spies are out now

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2021/nov/12/placebo-its-not-the-end-of-the-world-its-just-the-end-of-the-human-species>

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Covid live: Netherlands to return to partial lockdown from Saturday – as it happened

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2021/nov/12/covid-news-live-austria-to-restrict-unvaccinated-in-north-province-the-netherlands-consider-new-partial-lockdown>

Austria

Austria to put millions of unvaccinated people in Covid lockdown



People queue to receive jabs from a Covid vaccination bus in Vienna, Austria. Those who are not fully vaccinated face a lockdown in the regions of Upper Austria and Salzburg. Photograph: Xinhua/Rex/Shutterstock

[Kate Connolly](#), [Samantha Lock](#) and agencies

Fri 12 Nov 2021 08.13 EST

Austria is to introduce a lockdown for unvaccinated people in two of Europe's worst-hit coronavirus regions from Monday and could extend it across the country, the chancellor, Alexander Schallenberg, has said.

Millions of people not fully vaccinated against Covid in the regions of Upper Austria and Salzburg will be allowed to leave their homes only for reasons considered essential to life, such as going to work, grocery

shopping or visiting the doctor, Schallenberg said – measures believed to be unprecedented in [Europe](#).

The restrictions are in line with recommendations from medical experts and will be monitored through random checks that the health minister, Wolfgang Mückstein, compared to traffic controls.

Separately, the German government said it planned to tighten restrictions against unvaccinated people, as infections in both countries soared to record highs and intensive care units faced increasing strain.

Schallenberg said regional leaders meeting on Sunday would approve the plans, which could then be applied across the country, and that spot checks would be used to enforce the lockdown.

“Unvaccinated people will only be allowed to leave their flats to go to work, for food shopping or when they need to stretch their legs,” he said.

[Austria Covid deaths](#)

He added that the measures relied on people using their common sense, because blanket controls were not possible. “We don’t live in a police state and are not able – and nor do we want – to control every street corner,” he said.

According to virologists, the aggressive spread of Covid is owing to the Delta variant, coupled with a vaccination rate that remains too low. About 65% of Austria’s population are fully vaccinated against coronavirus, national [statistics show](#), while 67% are vaccinated in Germany. Experts say a vaccination rate of at least 75% is needed to control the pandemic. In Upper Austria, just under 60% of the population are vaccinated.

Both countries have a system of digital coronavirus passports, with most people carrying the proof in QR scans on mobile phones.

At an earlier press conference, Mückstein announced a vaccine mandate for all health workers, though he did not specify when it would come into force.

Mückstein, a member of the Greens, said the lockdown would depend on “everyone pulling their weight … we all have a job to reduce our contacts”. He compared it to speed restrictions in the vicinity of schools. “If you have a 30 km/h [18.6 mph] speed limit you can’t control every vehicle but it’s a sensible rule and you depend on people abiding by that rule,” he said. The police union in Austria has already voiced its concerns about implementing the restrictions, fearing a public backlash.

The World Health Organization said Europe was [once again “at the centre” of the pandemic](#), with Covid cases at or surpassing record levels, because of uneven vaccine coverage and a relaxation of preventive measures. It said 500,000 more deaths were forecast in the region by February.

Coronavirus deaths rose by 10% across the continent over the past week, making it the only world region where both Covid-19 cases and deaths are steadily increasing, according to [a WHO report](#).

Germany’s outgoing health minister, Jens Spahn, said on Friday the country faced a “bitter December” if immediate measures were not taken, as he announced a return to free testing from Saturday and plans to introduce a rule that would mean only people who had proof of vaccination or recovery from Covid could attend cultural or sporting events. They will also have to produce a negative test.

Germany recorded record infections for three days in a row this week. On Friday it reported almost 49,000 cases, with numbers doubling every week.

The government’s disease control agency, RKI, called for the cancellation of major events, just as the carnival season gets under way and [Christmas markets are about to open](#). RKI’s head, Lothar Wieler, said the fourth wave was “rolling on full power”, describing the situation as “five minutes past 12”.

In an effort to boost a flagging vaccine campaign, including encouraging top-up jabs, Spahn said doctors would receive €28 (£24) instead of €20 a jab, and a further bonus for jabs given at the weekend.

In the Netherlands, the government was expected to announce new lockdown measures on Friday after a record number of daily infections – 16,364 – were registered. According to media reports there are plans for a three-week set of restrictions, including a 7pm closing time for restaurants, pubs and non-essential shops and a restriction on the size of private gatherings in households to just four additional people.

Austria has the lowest vaccination rate of any western European country apart from Liechtenstein, according to data from the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. The chancellor said on Thursday that the rate was “shamefully low”.

Many Austrians are sceptical about vaccinations, a view encouraged by the far-right Freedom party, the third biggest in parliament. Schallenberg said on Thursday: “I don’t see why two-thirds should lose their freedom because one-third is dithering. For me it is clear that there should be no lockdown for the vaccinated out of solidarity for the unvaccinated.”

The number of new coronavirus infections in Austria has risen again to a record high, with 11,975 cases recorded within 24 hours, according to authorities. The seven-day incidence per 100,000 inhabitants climbed to 751, three times the figure in Germany.

Eastern European states have some of the continent’s lowest vaccination rates, are recording some of the world’s highest daily death rates per capita.

With reporting from Reuters and Associated Press

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Coronavirus

As Covid recedes in US a new worry emerges: wildlife passing on the virus



One-third of Iowa deer sampled over nine months had active infections, according to a preprint study. Photograph: Rory Merry/ZUMA Wire/REX/Shutterstock

[Melody Schreiber](#)

Thu 11 Nov 2021 05.00 EST

As America's pandemic – for now – seems to be moving into a new phase with national rates in decline from the September peak and vaccines rolling out to children, a new worry has appeared on the horizon: wildlife passing on the virus.

A new study shows that deer can catch the coronavirus from people and give it to other deer in overwhelming numbers, the first evidence of animals transmitting the virus in the wild. Similar spillover and transmission could

be occurring in certain animal populations around the world, with troubling implications for eradicating the virus and potentially even for the emergence of new variants.

One-third of Iowa deer sampled over nine months had active infections, with a peak of 80% testing positive between November and January, according to a preprint [study](#) that has not yet been peer-reviewed or published.

It builds on [previous findings](#) that one-third of deer in other US states were exposed to the virus and developed antibodies, but it differs in showing high rates of active infections, which last for a much narrower window of time.

The virus very likely spilled over from humans to deer through several different interactions, and then it probably spread to other deer, according to the analysis.

Nearly everything about their study shocked the scientists. They knew deer could be infected with the coronavirus. But they were stunned by the numbers – four out of five deer tested positive at the highest peak – as well as high viral loads that were “truly gobsmacking”, Suresh Kuchipudi, clinical professor of virology at Penn State and coauthor of the study, told the *Guardian*. They were also surprised by the fairly clear links in the genetic analysis connecting human transmission to the animals and then the rapid transmission to other deer.

“If there is spillover into free-living deer, it will rip through like wildfire,” said Vivek Kapur, professor of microbiology at Penn State and coauthor of the study. This analysis was limited to Iowa, but the researchers believe widespread infection is just as likely among deer in other states.

Deer, which are abundant in North America and a popular target for hunters, are highly susceptible to SARS-CoV-2, and they may contract it by grazing on discarded food, drinking contaminated wastewater, or nosing through undergrowth where a person has spit or relieved themselves.

“If they come in contact with the virus from any means of source, they are going to be infected,” Kuchipudi said. “It is highly likely that the animal will pick up the infection even though face-to-face interaction never happened.”

These results have implications for other wildlife as well. It is possible certain other animals are also contracting and spreading the coronavirus around the world, which would make it difficult to eradicate the virus and to prevent mutations that could lead to new variants.

Around the world, SARS-CoV-2 has been [reported](#) in cats, dogs, ferrets, minks, lions, tigers, pumas and gorillas. Hyenas at the Denver zoo [recently tested positive](#), the first confirmed cases in those animals.

In August 2020, an outbreak at a mink farm in Utah led investigators to sample wild mink nearby – and they [found](#) antibodies and active infections in some of the wild animals.

In November 2020, Denmark killed 17 million mink after the virus jumped from people to farmed mink and back to people again – the only documented case of animals passing the coronavirus back to people. The virus mutated, but [none](#) of the changes were dangerous.

Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, coronaviruses were [well known](#) for infecting animals, and vaccinations against common coronaviruses were standard for pets in the US.

Another coronavirus, which now causes mild cold symptoms, may have driven the 1889 pandemic that claimed 1 million lives – and it probably spilled over from cattle. Notably, cattle have also [passed](#) coronaviruses to deer, prompting concerns that SARS-CoV-2 could similarly move between deer, cattle and people to possibly catastrophic effect.

A virus that can circulate among animals as well as people is much harder to eradicate.

“It’s much harder to get rid of a virus if it has a reservoir,” Stanley Perlman, professor of microbiology and immunology at the University of Iowa, said.

As people build immunity to viruses, fatalities begin to drop, but the viruses don't go anywhere – the flu virus behind the 1918 pandemic still circulates today.

"It's always gonna be with us. What form it's in, I don't know – hopefully, it'll be an attenuated, weakened form," Perlman said.

This cross-species contagion can result in mutations – and it's hard to know whether these variations will be milder or more severe. "So far, there's just been no evidence" of spillback into humans from animals, Perlman said.

But "the more any virus circulates and moves around, the more opportunity it has to mutate," Ellen Carlin, assistant research professor at Georgetown University's Center for Global Health Science and Security, told the Guardian.

"Just because a virus mutates, that doesn't mean it's a problematic mutation for human or animal health. But it could be, so we need to watch for that," Carlin said. "Anything is possible at this point."

The emerging evidence on animal reservoirs increasingly points to the need for several long-term efforts to stem the virus's spread, Carlin said. Vaccines for humans, for instance, can only go so far in preventing cases when a virus is circulating among animals.

"We need to do a better job detecting these viruses in animals before they reach people, and we need to be doing a better job preventing spillover before it happens. And that requires addressing really tough challenges, like land use change and deforestation and climate change and urbanization," Carlin said. It also requires investing in health care and monitoring systems, experts say.

The study in deer is "a really hard reminder that we need to do a much better job funding wildlife research, not just for SARS-CoV-2 but for other infectious diseases," Carlin said. "We have scientists who are more than capable of going out there and figuring out what's going on with SARS-CoV-2, but there's no real system in place to do that on a national level."

More research would also reveal whether or how animals spread the virus across species, including to people.

If research like this hadn't been conducted, Kuchipudi said, the outbreaks among Iowa deer would have gone undetected. "There was a silent epidemic, if you will, happening in the deer," he said. "We would have never known unless we tested the samples."

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Coronavirus

Morgues fill up in Romania and Bulgaria amid low Covid vaccine uptake



A funeral house employee nails closed the cover of a coffin containing a Covid victim at a hospital morgue in Bucharest, Romania. Photograph: Vadim Ghirdă/AP

*[Jon Henley](#) Europe correspondent
[@jonhenley](#)*

Thu 11 Nov 2021 06.23 EST

Romania and [Bulgaria](#) are recording the EU's highest daily death rates from Covid-19, after superstition, misinformation and entrenched mistrust in governments and institutions combined to leave them the least vaccinated countries in the bloc.

“A village is vanishing every day in [Romania](#),” Catalin Cirstoiu, the head of the Bucharest university emergency hospital, where the morgue is filled to overflowing with coronavirus victims, lamented this week. “What about in a week or a month? A larger village? Or a city? Where do we stop?”

Cristiou told Associated Press the system was near breaking point, “all caused by one thing: the population’s inability to comprehend they need to get vaccinated”.

While new infections have recently started to edge down, Bulgaria this week reported its highest ever total of daily fatalities. Its seven-day rolling average of deaths per million inhabitants reached 22.8, compared with an EU average of 3.1.

In Romania the average daily death rate hit 23.7 per million last week and has since dipped to 21, [according to figures from OurWorldInData](#) – still more than 30 times higher than in Portugal, France or Spain.

Despite ample vaccine supplies, the two countries have fully vaccinated the lowest proportion of their populations in the EU: 34.5% of Romania’s inhabitants have received two jabs, and 23.04% of Bulgaria’s. That compares with an average of 65.2% across the EU, with countries such as France, Finland, Italy, Ireland, Belgium, Denmark and Spain all nearing or exceeding 70% and Malta and Portugal surpassing 80%.

Low vaccine take-up has exposed a deep east-west faultline defined by poverty, underdevelopment and low levels of health education – and compounded, in many ex-communist eastern EU states, by very low confidence in government.

[Chart](#)

Surveys have consistently shown that populations in central and eastern [Europe](#), much of which emerged from communist rule barely 30 years ago, place significantly less trust in national governments and institutions than in the west.

That has led to official campaigns promoting vaccination being widely disregarded, while efforts to deploy alternative, more trusted messengers such as family doctors or even priests have so far failed to substantially increase uptake.

In some cases, church leaders and politicians have even fuelled the suspicion caused by popular mistrust of government and online misinformation. A bishop in the Romanian Orthodox church is under criminal investigation for spreading Covid disinformation, while [Diana Șoșoacă](#), a member of the country's upper house, has repeatedly called the pandemic "the lie of the century".

Romania deaths per day

Political uncertainty has made matters worse. Romania's government collapsed last month, and in Bulgaria the prospect of parliamentary and presidential elections on 14 November has left politicians reluctant to alienate voters by imposing stricter measures.

In both countries, the overwhelming majority of deaths are among unvaccinated people. In Bulgaria, Ivan Poromanski, the head of Pirogov hospital in Sofia, told local television that nine out of 10 patients in its intensive care unit died, and the number of deaths among the vaccinated was "minuscule".

Romanian authorities introduced tighter preventive measures a fortnight ago, including a 10pm curfew and making vaccination certificates obligatory for activities such as going to the gym, the cinema or a shopping centre.

More than 90% of fatalities are unvaccinated, according to the health ministry, and roughly 85% are over the age of 60, with mistrust, misinformation and isolation keeping elderly people, in particular, away from vaccines.

Bulgaria deaths

However, Maria Sajin, the head of a university hospital morgue, said some of the dead were as young as 20 or 25. “They don’t understand they need to vaccinate, that there’s no medicine,” she said. “Nobody understands that vaccines save lives.”

Valeriu Gheorghita, Romania’s vaccination campaign coordinator, told Reuters there was “a mentality of ‘at my age I will live as long as I am meant to’. It’s very difficult to convince people to get vaccinated – it’s a matter of how they perceive life and risk of disease.”

Gheorghita said that unlike in other EU countries where many elderly people were in retirement institutions, in Romania they were more likely to be at home, alone and harder to reach. “And there is the issue of trust – they are just extremely hesitant.”

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2021.11.12 - Opinion

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Opinion[Airline emissions](#)

How can Britain cut emissions when the Tory party fetishises travel?

[Andy Beckett](#)



Fri 12 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

Travel is often a form of privilege. It needs time and money, and sometimes a confidence that you are welcome somewhere else. During a pandemic and a climate crisis, with travel clearly playing a central role in both, to regularly move across large distances requires an ever stronger sense of entitlement.

Yet the great benefits of travel – social, cultural, economic, psychological – have not gone away. And nor has the power of the travel lobby. When [flights to the US](#) resumed for Britons this week, after a long Covid hiatus, much of the media coverage read like an airline press release. There were

only occasional hints that today's transatlantic jets do not fit well with the goals of [Cop26](#).

Weighing up the costs and benefits of travel would be difficult for any British government. This is a sometimes claustrophobic country with a limited climate and a range of alluringly different places a short flight away. For half a century, foreign holidays have been a hugely valued mass pleasure: Britons [fly more than people](#) in many comparable European countries. And for centuries trade, immigration, emigration, colonisation and the afterlife of empire have made Britain a travel-driven society. Going constantly back and forth from these small islands is what many Britons have always done.

With his fondness for [private jets](#) and dislike of delivering bad news, Boris Johnson does not feel like a prime minister suited to bringing our travel habit under control. In fact he is still hoping it won't need to be. In [the foreword](#) to his government's latest plan for reducing carbon emissions, he wrote: "In 2050, we will still be driving cars, flying planes ... but our cars will be electric [and] our planes will be zero emission, allowing us to fly guilt-free."

From its enthusiasm [for roadbuilding](#) to its refusal to raise [fuel duty](#), from its [tax cut](#) for domestic air passengers to its reluctance to close our borders during the pandemic, Johnson leads a government that seems to fetishise mobility. "Global Britain", the "[tilt to the Indo-Pacific](#)" in defence policy and the Aukus alliance with the US and Australia all suggest a country frantically seeking more connections with distant places – while neglecting or actively undermining its connections with its European neighbours. Brexit is not a climate-friendly strategy.

For all their patriotic rhetoric, today's Tories – such as Sir Geoffrey Cox, with his winter preference for the Caribbean over his Devon constituency – often act as if they can't wait to get out of Britain. Such restlessness has always been a feature of Conservatism. Landowners moving between the country and the city; imperialists sailing away to seize and govern; business

executives accumulating air miles; wealthy southerners with second homes abroad; working-class retirees to warmer countries. The party has energetically represented them all.

At the same time, the Conservatives have talked a lot about the importance of rootedness, of home-town loyalties, and of protecting Britain against foreign incomers and influences. The party has regularly attacked its opponents as rootless – “[citizens of nowhere](#)” – with the aid of newspapers owned by globetrotting press lords.

The hypocrisy of it all can be maddening, not least because the left has always contained many people strongly attached to their communities, through activism or socioeconomic circumstances. Many Labour supporters, concentrated in the same urban constituencies for decades, aren’t “citizens of nowhere”, but the exact opposite.

Yet it’s important to remember that Conservatism’s double standards can be what makes it appealing to people. As with other freedoms the Tories claim to champion, the party doesn’t really believe freedom of movement should be available to all, as the [government’s approach](#) to asylum seekers and migrants makes ever more obvious. Consciously or not, even some non-Tories agree with the government on this. If you believe that this country is too crowded, wanting to get away from it regularly while also wanting the state to stop outsiders getting in can seem a necessary contradiction.

Conservative voters appear particularly resistant to cutting back on travel. According to the pollsters [Ipsos Mori](#), they are [significantly less likely](#) than Labour supporters to favour a tax on frequent flyers. But there is a chance that this could change. An [estimated 15%](#) of the population take 70% of the UK’s flights. Even if all these frequent flyers are Tories – which they are not – that is a much smaller proportion of the population than the party’s total vote.

So it follows that many Conservatives aren’t big travellers. Among less wealthy Tories and more environmentally conscious ones, there may be many people who feel – or who will come to feel, as the climate crisis worsens – that protecting the restless lifestyles of the richest Britons should

be less of a government priority.

It remains hard, though, to envisage a party that so reveres consumer choice seriously restricting flying, let alone driving. Not having to think about the wider consequences of our consumer decisions is one of the seductive prospects that modern Conservatism has always offered.

It's a bit easier to imagine a Labour government, led by Keir Starmer or some other stern figure, telling us that unlimited travel is no longer justifiable – at least until technology makes zero-emission journeys possible. But even with the Tories having a terrible autumn, such a government, like zero-emission jets, still seems a long way off. If we want to be less toxic travellers, for the foreseeable future it's up to us.

- Andy Beckett is a Guardian columnist
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[Opinion](#)[Boris Johnson](#)

Be it pandemic or Paterson, Johnson is showing he's still in thrall to the Brexiteers

[Gaby Hinsliff](#)





Plans to introduce Covid passports were dropped for England in the summer, but Wales and Scotland have since introduced them. Photograph: Matthew Horwood/Getty Images

Fri 12 Nov 2021 02.00 EST

Boris Johnson's tie was carefully tucked inside his shirt, all the better not to spread infection. He bumped elbows with nurses, rather than shook hands. But when the [prime minister posed](#) for the cameras at Hexham hospital this week, he didn't bother with a mask.

He had been wearing one when he turned up, [local papers reported](#) – just as every other visitor to the hospital must. But he shed it to do some press interviews and then emerged barefaced for his photocall. Was it just forgetfulness, or a deliberate nod to the strange minority of diehards who still enjoy watching him throw Covid caution to the wind?

As ever with Johnson, it's hard to tell cock-up from calculation. But no other living British leader would, one suspects, have failed to cover their face in a building full of sick and sometimes immune-compromised people.

Hospitalisations from Covid have, thankfully, been falling recently, as booster jabs for elderly people help to tackle waning immunity, although daily figures released on Thursday recorded a [surprise uptick](#) in cases. But we are not out of the woods yet. There are even hopes of reaching some kind of “endemic equilibrium” this winter, where some people will still get infected but the vaccine is enough to hold rates in check. However, the NHS is still struggling with the long tail of the pandemic, including surging demand from people who missed out on medical care at the height of the crisis and who are now presenting as emergencies.

Hospitals are so full that ambulances wait for hours outside A&E to unload their patients, while 999 operators run out of crews to send. The family of 82-year-old [Margaret Root](#) described this week how she waited almost six hours for an ambulance after having a stroke, and then another three hours just to get inside the hospital; by then it was too late to give her drugs that could have helped reverse the damage.

Nine in 10 health service leaders, in a survey released this week by the NHS Confederation, said their situations were “unsustainable” – and that’s before the weather gets truly wintry, bringing with it falls on icy pavements, and pneumonia cases.

Downing Street still insists there is no need to bring in tougher restrictions such as proposed Covid passports, which would force people to show proof of vaccination or negative Covid status to get into nightclubs. Ministers hastily retreated from that idea this summer after rumblings of outrage from all the usual rightwing suspects. But what’s intriguing is that Wales – which in October had the [highest rates of infection](#) of all four nations – and Scotland went ahead; and this week the Welsh scheme was extended to cover cinemas, theatres and concert halls.

For a good year now, Labour-controlled Wales has been following a more cautious path than England. The jury is still out on what difference that has made; the [circuit-breaker lockdown](#) it imposed last October, at a time when Johnson was reportedly declaring that he would rather let the “[bodies pile high](#)” than impose it, didn’t stop Wales needing another lockdown later that winter. Nor did a more cautious Welsh approach to lifting restrictions this

summer prevent hospitals struggling, or stop case numbers shooting up again once schools reopened.

But all this has to be weighed against the great unknowable, which is how much worse things might have been had Wales *not* been so cautious. The one thing we know for sure is that, far from revolting against the restrictions – as some pundits never tire of predicting – if anything, Welsh voters seem reassured by them. YouGov [polling this September](#) found 67% thought their administration had handled Covid well, against only 39% thinking the same of the UK government. Wales's soaring Covid numbers may have pushed it into [hard choices](#) that England has so far avoided, but a wise government would be watching carefully to see how these decisions play out.

The Welsh scheme still allows the unvaccinated to secure [a Covid pass](#) by producing a negative lateral flow test result. But it makes socialising less spontaneous for the wilfully unjabbed – so as well as keeping infections down, it may yet help nudge vaccination rates up. In France, where a [similar scheme](#) covers everything from cafes and cinemas to shopping centres and long-distance trains, President Macron admitted the idea was “to push a maximum of you to go and get vaccinated”. The sky does not appear to have fallen in on French cafe culture, and 76% of a once vaccine-hesitant country is now jabbed.

This is what grownup government looks like: different in each country, because each outbreak is different, but always responsive to the demands of the virus. What stops it happening in England is what arguably stops grownup governing from happening on all sorts of issues, to the growing alarm of some Tories watching their [poll lead](#) narrow. It’s Johnson’s longing to please the people who put him where he is now.

Dancing with the one that brung ya, as Ronald Reagan used to call it, means pandering to an ideology that has been calling the shots inside the parliamentary and grassroots party since the Brexit referendum, its leading figures self-styled as the Spartans but increasingly (for a new generation of Conservatives) known by less printable names.

Owen Paterson was a loyal Spartan, so Downing Street marched his reluctant colleagues up the hill to save him from being suspended over lobbying allegations, only to turn and flee when that proved workable. The self-harming [trade war](#) we are threatening to start with the EU is chiefly for the benefit of the Spartans, who were told that a hard Brexit would have serious consequences for Northern Ireland but wouldn't listen.

Spartans tend not to like facts that contradict their ideological worldview. In his book Spike, the former Sage science group adviser Jeremy Farrar recalls a Zoom meeting last autumn with Tory MPs from the lockdown-sceptic Covid Recovery Group, in which he tried to persuade them of the case for restrictions. Farrar reeled off the numbers on rising infections, hospitalisations and deaths, proof of an epidemic exploding. In return, he writes: "They asked questions like, 'What should I say to my constituents who don't see much Covid?'" There is, to put it mildly, a theme emerging.

In the wake of the Paterson debacle – which not only trashed parliament's reputation but started a war on Conservatives with lucrative outside interests – some Tory MPs are asking hard questions about who has the prime minister's ear. The mask, in more than one sense, is slipping, and in future they may well push back harder when asked to do things that don't sound right. Well, it's progress of a kind, I suppose. What a shame that, for the sake of the rest of the country, it has come several years too late.

- Gaby Hinsliff is a Guardian columnist
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[Opinion](#)[Trade policy](#)

A Brexit trade war with the EU could backfire on Boris Johnson

[Polly Toynbee](#)



Boris Johnson and David Frost at 10 Downing Street in December 2020.
Photograph: Leon Neal/AFP/Getty Images

Thu 11 Nov 2021 11.07 EST

When in trouble, Boris Johnson flees to his comfort zone. Just as [Brexit](#) havoc made him, so Brexit mayhem may yet save him. Johnson may hope to turn up the heat under that cauldron to provoke retaliatory action from the EU, which he could then blame on Brussels and President Macron. But this will be nothing more than a seductive distraction from his battalion of troubles.

This week, Johnson may have felt intimations of political mortality as his loyal press turned on him over charges of government corruption: it was not just the Daily Mail and Sun, but even the Express. Today the Spectator's editor excoriates Johnson's "court of chaos". Johnson sent Tory MPs out to shame themselves by voting for [sleaze in parliament](#) and [sewage in the rivers](#). Now, they may not obey him so readily. He has already betrayed those on his party's right and left with his machinations, leading his MPs through 43 dizzying U-turns. His popularity is at a record net -27 low, and his party's lead has been lost. So where does he turn?

Johnson has no happy place in any area of policy. The NHS is boiling over, with a hard winter and flu season yet to come. The social care crisis is blocking NHS beds (though didn't Johnson say his tax levy would fix it?). He won no kudos for his leadership of the G7 or Cop26. The cost-of-living crunch bears down on households, while those who have lost universal credit suffer outright hardship. As the PM gazes at his dumb obedient round the cabinet table, each one fronts a department in trouble.

But Johnson will always have Brexit. After a month of fruitless talks, Lord Frost yesterday told the House of Lords that suspending the Northern Ireland part of the Brexit deal will be the "only option" if negotiations fail. Frost says the threshold to trigger article 16, suspending the agreement, has already been reached – a claim that is tantamount to a declaration of trade war. Speaking to EU ambassadors after those tortuous talks, the European commission vice-president Maroš Šefčovič warned of "[serious](#)

consequences”. Ursula von der Leyen emerged yesterday from the White House with presidential support for retaliation if the UK upends the Northern Ireland protocol.

Frost likes to provoke. What effrontery to admonish the EU to “stay calm” and “turn away from confrontation” while accusing the bloc of protecting “their own interests” ahead of “supporting the peace process and the people of Northern Ireland”. Peace in Northern Ireland rates low in Johnson’s thinking, but if he did stoke real trouble the blame would land squarely with him.

A trade war takes time to unfurl. The triggering of article 16 would be followed by a one-month cooling-off delay and then talks and more talks. It takes a whole year before a trade deal can be rescinded. That may feel like a pleasingly long time for belligerent war-play from a PM who never thinks beyond one day. Johnson hasn’t many weapons, so he has already thrown out a self-harming threat to withdraw from joint EU Horizon research programmes, taking out the UK’s £15bn, to the horror of UK scientists, who fear being cut off from the mainstream.

Why would the French, with an upcoming election, politely stick to Britain’s trade-war timetable? They could quite legally slow traffic at our ports with increasingly thorough lorry checks, causing queues halfway up the country. Maybe Johnson wants such retaliation to stir up outrage against France and the EU, in order to reassemble his old alliance of leavers for a second Agincourt of plucky little Englanders against the massed EU ranks.

But this might become yet another policy landmine, rather than useful distraction. What if supply chains are snarled up, and people start to connect wage stagnation and price rises to the 4% loss of GDP that the OBR has blamed on Brexit? What if most people are just sick to death of a never-ending Brexit, which they thought had already been “done”?

Current polling gives an insight here. NatCen’s What the UK Thinks asks, “How well or badly do you think the government are doing at negotiating/handling Britain’s exit from the EU?” To that, 57% say badly; 31% well. “Do you think Brexit is having a generally good or bad impact on the economy as a whole?” Here it’s 44% saying bad, 25% good. “In

hindsight do you think Britain was right or wrong to vote to leave the EU?” This time it’s 39% right, 48% wrong. Of course, this could all swivel in a patriotic anti-French hullabaloo, but the numbers suggest a growing understanding of Brexit untruths.

If Johnson ignites this turmoil, Keir Starmer’s “make Brexit work” promise could begin to get traction. Against a backdrop of Brexit mayhem, letting the grown-ups sit down to smooth out trade obstacles might seem an attractive prospect. For as long as the UK doesn’t fall below EU food and safety standards, we could let trade flow. The “sovereign” option to set our own rules would remain, but who wants them lowered anyway? We could strike a deal to let our musicians and performers sell their wares on the continent.

This would all require tiptoeing gently; any suggestions of rejoining the single market would have Labour remoaners accused of a backdoor Brexit in name only. But over time, UK businesses looking across the Irish sea will be able to see Northern Ireland flourishing by staying in. Indeed, the industry body Manufacturing NI tells me of a 61% increase in sales to the Republic and order books brimming with sales diverted from the British mainland. Johnson’s trade war increasingly looks like a Labour opportunity.

Wiser voices warn the PM to step back. If article 16 is triggered, expert observers, such as Anand Menon of The UK in a Changing [Europe](#), think a limited deal can still be struck on some trade obstacles. But it’s legally impossible to reverse the UK’s signature to the agreement that the European court of justice will be the arbitrator of trade disputes. On this, Johnson has backed himself into a corner: will he make a humiliating compromise, or fight on for the political fun of it, whatever the damage, and whatever the risks to peace in Northern Ireland? Loudmouthed Frost goes back into talks tomorrow.

This article was amended on 11 November 2021. The UK hosted the G7 summit this year, not the G20 one as stated in an earlier version. The latter took place in Italy.

- Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist

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The rules on MPs' standards are hopeless. Here's how to clean up parliament

[Gina Miller](#)





Boris Johnson, 3 November. ‘A PM who lacks integrity while possessing a large parliamentary majority will always be tempted to test our democratic machinery to its limits.’ Photograph: Jessica Taylor/UK Parliament/AFP/Getty

Thu 11 Nov 2021 10.40 EST

A year ago Boris Johnson warned of an “invisible mugger” threatening our country’s way of life and institutions. He was talking of Covid-19 – but, as [I wrote at the time](#) in the Guardian, the real mugger destabilising the nation is more likely to be the prime minister himself.

What we’ve seen in parliament over the last week is more symptom than cause. It’s clear that a prime minister who lacks integrity or conviction while possessing a large parliamentary majority will always be tempted to test our fragile, outdated democratic machinery of government to its limits. With innumerable business and media chums, and underscored by self-interest and a lust for power that began at the age of 10, Johnson cannot resist ravaging our mother of all parliaments and our somewhat limited democratic checks and balances.

However, despite my expectations, I confess to being astonished at the depth, speed and wholesale nature of the mugging, which makes me think

there is even worse to come. Not only are the Conservatives willing to change the rules whenever they are caught out by them, but shameless grandstanding, justification of U-turns and reworking the facts all appear to be the new normal of our politics. I am reminded daily of the observations of Anthony Trollope, who, writing of a dysfunctional London in the 1870s, said: “A certain class of dishonesty ... has become at the same time so rampant and so splendid that there seems to be reason for fearing that men and women will be taught to feel that dishonesty, if it can become splendid, will cease to be abominable.”

Is that where we are now?

Johnson and co have been trashing our democratic institutions and norms through divisive messaging and the introduction of ideologically driven legislative reforms: the elections bill; the higher education (freedom of speech) bill; the police, crime and sentencing courts bill; the judicial review and courts bill; the nationality and borders bill; and the envisaged human rights bill. Together they are set to diminish our rights and voices in the courts, in the media, on the streets and at the ballot box.

Johnson appears to believe that if he can't get his own way, he can either ignore or change the rules with total impunity. The arrogance he displayed in relation to the Owen Paterson [lobbying scandal](#) was breathtaking. One can only surmise he is now [refusing to back Geoffrey Cox](#) in order to deflect from his own questionable behaviour and save his own skin.

These antics just confirm people's worst fears about politicians and further diminish already dire levels of trust, recklessly damaging people's belief in our institutions of parliament and in democracy. These may not be perfect, but we have a representative democracy, and it better serves the people to defend, improve and strengthen it.

Of course, it is naive to believe that people in public office will naturally behave with honour, or that principles and codes are enough. During the spring no fewer than [11 ministers](#) were reportedly found to have broken the ministerial code and should by rights have resigned; but the kind of honour, principles and integrity that saw MPs resign (with varying levels of pressure) in the past now appear to be extinct.

And, however outraged we are about the dubious behaviour of politicians such as Cox – who appears not to have broken the rules, as he says the chief whip approved him going to the Caribbean while the Commons sat – many of them get away with it because the rules are so weak.

It was only a matter of time before someone exploited our unwritten constitution. After the parliamentary expenses scandal was exposed in 2009, there was a general agreement among the main political parties that our politics needed to be fixed. There was a real attempt to empower voters by allowing the [recall of MPs](#) but, absurdly, it was ultimately up to MPs themselves to decide how long erring members could be suspended; and, worse, in terms of members of the cabinet, it is the prime minister who has the final say on whether behaviour is unacceptable.

In May, Johnson claimed people didn't care if a Tory donor was asked to pay for a nanny for the prime minister's baby son; but the reality is, we do care. The committee on standards in public life found that three-quarters of respondents surveyed agreed that ethical standards in government are important for making democracy work – and for preventing people using power for their own ends.

We have to stop politicians marking their own homework, and bring in legal frameworks that deter bad behaviour. We need a legally binding agreement between MPs and those who elect them, to ensure that all understand what is expected. Working hours, disciplinary policy, harassment, discrimination, expenses, misconduct, conflicts of interest and outside jobs should all be covered. I believe this reform would change the culture, calibre and cost of politics overnight.

After three decades as a transparency campaigner, it makes me angry knowing the utter waste of time, effort, and money that those in positions of power spend defending the indefensible and peddling morally and intellectually bankrupt arguments. It's time to fortify our machinery of government and public office so the good are rewarded, the bad are sanctioned, and safety nets are put in place to control the actions of any unscrupulous person who ends up holding the reins of power.

MPs can then get on with what they're paid to do: to take on their legislative responsibilities and look after those who elected them.

Gina Miller is a [transparency campaigner](#)

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Greek pilot should face premeditated murder trial over British wife's death, prosecutor says



The public prosecutor's report alleged Babis Anagnostopoulos, escorted by police, had a 'premeditated plan' when he killed Caroline Crouch.
Photograph: Nikolas Kokovlis/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

[Helena Smith](#) in Athens

Thu 11 Nov 2021 16.08 EST

The Greek pilot who allegedly [confessed](#) to strangling his British wife in May as she slept in their Athens home beside the couple's baby should be tried for premeditated murder, according to charges made public on Thursday.

The public prosecutor handling the case also recommended that Babis Anagnostopoulos be charged with lying to police after claiming for 37 days

that the death of his wife, Caroline Crouch, was the result of a botched burglary.

In a 24-page report, excerpts of which were published by the Greek press, the prosecutor, Giorgos Noulis, said the UK-trained pilot had a “premeditated plan” when he killed the 20-year-old.

Anagnostopoulos reportedly told police after eight hours of questioning that he had committed the crime in a fit of rage, denying it was premeditated. The pilot, imprisoned pending trial in the capital’s high-security Korydallos prison, claimed he was thrown into a “blurred state” after his young wife threatened to divorce him. But Noulis described him as being in a “calm state of mind”.

“He had no inhibition to go through with the act despite the fact that she was the mother of his child,” he was quoted as saying in the report. “The victim was just 20 years old, while he was 13 years older and should have been her protector.”

The prosecutor also recommended that he be tried for the crime of animal abuse after allegedly confessing to choking the family’s seven-month-old puppy by hanging it from its own leash as part of the attempt to make the crime look like a burglary.

The killing of Crouch in May – one of 12 [femicides](#) to be reported so far this year – shocked Greece. Police launched a countrywide search for the “ruthless gang of foreign thieves” that the pilot blamed for the tragedy. Anagnostopoulos said he had been tied up and blindfolded when his wife was killed.

In a rare step, authorities offered a €300,000 [bounty](#) for information that might lead to the murderers.

Anagnostopoulos was brought in for a final round of questioning – and arrested – after police analysis of Crouch’s smartwatch, combined with data downloaded from his own mobile phone, conflicted with his version of events.

Citing a coroner's inquest, the prosecutor described Crouch's death as "agonising", saying the process of asphyxiation lasted five minutes and induced a state of "physical and psychic stress" in her during her last moments. The young woman had been asleep for two and a half hours, he said, and was "unsuspecting".

The daughter of a retired oil and gas executive, Crouch was raised on the small island of Alonissos in the Sporades.

She met Anagnostopoulos in her mid-teens before marrying him in Portugal at the age of 18.

Thanassis Haramanis, the family's lawyer, told the Guardian that he expected the trial to take place next year in what would be lightning speed for a judicial system that is notoriously slow. "We believe it will be listed some time between May and September," he said. "We are optimistic."

In a separate development on Thursday, an Athens court awarded custody of the couple's child to Caroline's mother, Susan, revoking any parental rights the pilot may have had as her father, and granting limited visitation rights to his parents.

The headline of this article was amended on 12 November 2021 to clarify the prosecutor's recommendation.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/11/greek-pilot-should-face-premeditated-for-killing-british-wife-prosecutor-says>

Britney Spears

Hearing could restore Britney Spears's independence after nearly 14 years



A mural in Costa Mesa, California, supporting Britney Spears amid her conservatorship. Photograph: AFF-USA/Rex/Shutterstock

[Sam Levin in Los Angeles](#)

[@SamTLevin](#)

Fri 12 Nov 2021 04.00 EST

Britney Spears's conservatorship case will be back in court on Friday for a highly anticipated hearing that could restore the singer's independence for the first time in nearly 14 years.

Los Angeles judge Brenda Penny is expected to rule on requests to end the controversial legal arrangement that has allowed a network of people to control the pop star's finances, career and personal life since 2008.

Spears has repeatedly called for the conservatorship to be terminated. Her father, Jamie Spears, has also recently said he supports ending it, as have other parties who oversee the arrangement.

The hearing comes one month after the judge suspended Spears's father from the conservatorship in a major victory for the singer, who has been fighting for years to be freed from his control, alleging that he was abusive. If the judge approves full termination, it would mark an extraordinary end to an unusual arrangement that has sparked fan protests across the globe.

Fans from across the US and beyond showed up to the courthouse on Friday, leaving messages of support for Spears on a pink Christmas tree advocates of the pop star brought to the rally.

“I want her to know that Mexico supports her and people from around the world support her. She deserves to be free,” said Pamela Flores, 21, who came from Veracruz, Mexico for the court hearing.

Pamela Flores, 21, came from Veracruz, Mexico to rally for Britney: “I want her to know that Mexico supports her and people from around the world support her. She deserves to be free ... and to get back all the money they stole from her.” pic.twitter.com/CsqJ8cQw5i

— Sam Levin (@SamTLevin) [November 12, 2021](#)

Davis Luong, 34, and Frankie Adams, 35, came from San Diego. The two met in 2013 at a Pride event and were both wearing Spears merchandise. The friends stayed connected through online fan groups.

“Britney represents growth and strength and standing up for yourself and being who you are,” Luong said. “Today is a day of liberty, a day of freedom, a day to rejoice.”

A year ago, “we felt like the conservatorship was never going to end,” added Adams. “She is going to make legal history today, not just for herself but for everybody under a conservatorship.”

Davis Luong, 34, and Frankie Adams, 35, came from San Diego to rally for Britney. The two became friends in 2013 when they met at Pride and were both wearing Britney merchandise. They reconnected on a Britney fan page.

“She is going to make legal history today” - Frankie
pic.twitter.com/4XRIMcGWtA

— Sam Levin (@SamTLevin) [November 12, 2021](#)

Fans and longtime supporters have organized plans for a “Freedom Party” on Friday evening if the judge ends the conservatorship.

“It’s emotional, because I feel like Britney’s prayers are finally going to be answered,” said Junior Olivas, a fan and advocate who was one of the first to demonstrate at a #FreeBritney rally three years ago.



Britney Spears supporters outside a court hearing in March. Photograph: Chris Pizzello/AP

The conservatorship has faced major upheaval since June when Spears, 39, publicly spoke about it for the first time, saying she was [forced to work](#)

against her will and that her father and others controlled intimate details of her life, including her birth control, her social life and her romantic relationships.

Her testimony followed a New York Times documentary that raised questions about why the arrangement was established in the first place and why the courts considered her incapable of making basic decisions even as she continued her highly successful music career. A second documentary in September alleged that her father had hired a security team that monitored her private communications and secretly recorded her in her bedroom.

Conservatorship is a form of court-appointed guardianship that is typically established for elderly and infirm people who can no longer make decisions for themselves. But critics have argued that the process is frequently exploited, and that those involved in Spears's arrangement have taken advantage of her, reaping millions from her estate.

Spears was placed into a conservatorship while she was suffering vicious paparazzi abuse and facing apparent mental health struggles, and for years she has been forced to pay an army of lawyers and professionals on all sides of the case.

The case took a dramatic turn in July when Spears was allowed to hire an attorney of her own choosing for the first time. Her new lawyer, Mathew Rosengart, has since fought to dissolve the arrangement and vowed to investigate her father's role in it. Rosengart recently requested all documents related to the alleged surveillance of Britney Spears.

Jamie Spears long defended the arrangement and argued for its continuation, but after Rosengart began investigating him and pushing for termination, he said he would support shutting it down. Jodi Montgomery, a licensed conservator responsible for Spears's healthcare, has also signaled support for termination. Spears has said she wants the conservatorship ended without having to face further evaluations.

Before the hearing, fans expressed optimism that their demands for termination would finally be met.

“It feels really surreal, because we went so long with so little progress,” said Megan Radford, a longtime #FreeBritney organizer. “Once Mathew Rosengart came in in July, it just changed direction really fast … I knew this day would come.”

Olivas, who has been a regular presence at the courthouse for the last several years, said he hoped this was the last day he had to rally for Spears’s freedom.

“Britney’s happiness is the ultimate goal here,” he said. “Whether it’s retiring and having a family, continuing to work, traveling the world, going back to Las Vegas – it doesn’t matter as long as she’s eternally happy and she’s able to make her own decisions.”

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Diabetes

Blood pressure drugs could prevent type 2 diabetes, study finds



Researchers found blood pressure drugs may directly reduce someone's risk of type 2 diabetes. Photograph: Peter Byrne/PA

[Andrew Gregory](#) *Health editor*

Thu 11 Nov 2021 18.31 EST

Blood pressure drugs could prevent millions of people worldwide from developing type 2 diabetes, a large study suggests.

Lowering high blood pressure is an effective way to slash the risk of the disease in the future, according to the research published in the Lancet.

Doctors already prescribe cheap blood pressure drugs to reduce the chances of a life-threatening heart attack or stroke. However, until now, the question

of whether these drugs could also help fend off the threat of type 2 diabetes had been unanswered.

Now researchers have found the protective effects of the drugs are much wider than previously thought. The study shows they may directly reduce someone's risk of type 2 diabetes, a condition that an [estimated 13.6 million people in the UK](#) are at high risk of developing.

In the largest study of its kind, researchers at the universities of Oxford and Bristol followed more than 145,000 people from 19 global randomised clinical trials for an average of about five years.

They found that a 5 mmHg reduction in systolic blood pressure – easy to achieve via blood pressure drugs or lifestyle changes – reduced the risk of type 2 diabetes by 11%.

Researchers also investigated the effects of five major types of blood pressure drugs from 22 clinical trials compared with a placebo. They found angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitors and angiotensin II receptor blockers (ARBs) had the strongest protective effect, both reducing someone's relative risk of developing diabetes by 16%.

Other types of blood pressure-lowering drugs were not protective. Calcium channel blockers had no effect on type 2 diabetes risk, while beta blockers and thiazide diuretics actually increased the risk despite their known beneficial effects in preventing heart attacks and strokes.

Currently, health experts say being a healthy weight and adopting a healthy lifestyle is the best way to reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes. Researchers say existing drugs – particularly ACE inhibitors and ARBs – should now be considered for some patients who are at higher risk of the disease.

Prof Kazem Rahimi, lead researcher of the study at the University of Oxford and a consultant cardiologist, said: "Our research provides clear evidence that giving ACE inhibitors or ARBs, which are widely available and affordable worldwide, to patients at high risk could curb the growing burden of type 2 diabetes."

The research was funded by the British Heart Foundation (BHF), the National Institute for [Health](#) Research (NIHR) Oxford Biomedical Research Centre and the Oxford Martin School.

Prof Sir Nilesh Samani, the BHF medical director, said: “Diabetes and high blood pressure are two important and growing problems which increase a person’s chance of developing an array of other serious health complications, including heart attacks and strokes. This research shows that the two are inter-connected and that lowering blood pressure could be a powerful way to reduce the risk of developing diabetes.”

“It also shows that different commonly used drugs for lowering blood pressure have very different effects on risk of diabetes. Doctors should therefore consider the patient’s risk of developing diabetes when they are choosing an anti-hypertensive drug to lower their blood pressure.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/nov/11/blood-pressure-drugs-could-prevent-type-2-diabetes-study-finds>

Alibaba

Alibaba enjoys record sales for Singles Day shopping extravaganza in China



People walk along a main shopping area in Shanghai, China, during Alibaba's Singles Day shopping festival. Photograph: Aly Song/Reuters

AFP

Fri 12 Nov 2021 03.13 EST

The Chinese e-commerce titan Alibaba enjoyed record sales during its Singles Day shopping extravaganza, giving a much-needed boost to the firm after a torrid year in which it became the symbol of a government crackdown that hammered the [country's tech sector](#).

The firm said 540.3bn yuan (£63bn) was spent as China's army of consumers went on a splurge despite a more low-key sales campaign after pressure from the government to tone down the aggressive promotions and rampant consumerism.

Combined sales with its industry rival JD.com came in at 889bn yuan, which was also a record and up about a fifth from last year.

Alibaba and JD.com reported strong sales of items such as electric appliances, electronics, pet supplies, and cosmetics and other personal-care goods.

JD.com shares rose more than 4% in Hong Kong on Friday, although Alibaba was down more than 1%.

Singles Day – so-called for the 11.11 date – began more than a decade ago and for years was a one-day, 24-hour event on 11 November.

However, industry players expanded it recently into an extended promotion from 1-11 November, with many retailers and platforms offering discounts and pre-sales even earlier.

The shopping festival now dwarfs the US Black Friday spree and has become a barometer of consumer sentiment in the world's second-largest economy.

Concerned that big tech was becoming too powerful and abusing its market dominance, the government has this year dramatically tightened regulation.

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The campaign has rattled investors, slicing billions of dollars off the market capitalisation of Alibaba – whose share has plunged about 30% this year – as well as JD, Tencent and other major players.

In e-commerce, the government has taken specific aim at alleged abuse of user data and monopolistic business practices by platforms, such as banning merchants from selling their products on rival sites.

However, the steadily rising consumer sales are also likely to be quietly welcomed by the government, which is moving to create a more modern

consumer-driven economy, lessening the traditional reliance on manufacturing, exports and government investment.

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Tiananmen Square protests 1989

Danish sculptor seeks legal protection to pick up Tiananmen statue from Hong Kong



Jens Galschiot's Pillar of Shame statue – commemorating the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre – at the University of Hong Kong, which has requested its removal. Photograph: Charlène Flores/SOPA Images/Rex/Shutterstock

Reuters in Hong Kong
Thu 11 Nov 2021 23.53 EST

The Danish sculptor of a statue that commemorates pro-democracy protesters killed during China's Tiananmen Square crackdown has asked [Hong Kong](#) authorities for immunity from a national security law so he can take it back to Denmark.

Jens Galschiot loaned the eight-metre high, two-tonne copper sculpture called Pillar of Shame to a local civil society group, the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements in [China](#), in perpetuity.

The statue, depicting dozens of torn and twisted bodies, has been on display at the University of Hong Kong for more than two decades. After the alliance disbanded in September with some members accused of national security offences, the university requested the group remove the statue from its premises.

“I can understand from the press that the introduction of the new security legislation in Hong Kong means that there is a legal basis for arresting foreign nationals who engage in activities that criticise China,” Galschiot wrote in an open letter on Friday.

The statue’s removal “will lead to activities and media coverage that could be perceived as criticism of China. Therefore, I will have to get a guarantee that my employees and I will not be prosecuted.”

Galschiot, who values the statue at around \$1.4m, said he was willing to take it back to Denmark, but that his presence in Hong Kong was necessary for the complex operation to go well.

Cooperation from the university and city authorities for technical assistance, roadblocks and permits was also needed, he said.

In 2020, Beijing imposed a sweeping national security law in Hong Kong to punish what it sees as subversion, secession, terrorism and collusion with foreign forces.



Jens Galschiøt in Denmark. Photograph: Liselotte Sabroe/Ritzau Scanpix/AFP/Getty Images

The university, the government's Security Bureau and the immigration department did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The university gave the alliance a deadline for the statue's removal, which expired a month ago. It said at the time it was seeking legal advice on what to do with it.

Democratic activists and some western governments say the security law is a tool to silence dissent and put Hong Kong firmly on an authoritarian path. Chinese and city authorities maintain Hong Kong is still governed by the rule of law and individual rights and freedoms remain intact.

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Headlines saturday 13 november 2021

- [Live Cop 26: third draft text retains many key elements after talks overrun](#)
- [Report Latest version of text will now be scrutinised](#)
- [Protest Hundreds of global civil society representatives walk out](#)
- [Gleneagles Cop26 guards slept in 40-person ‘dorm’ at despite Covid fears](#)

Cop26

Cop26 president declares ‘fragile win’ for climate despite watered-down coal pledges – live updates

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/live/2021/nov/13/cop26-live-third-draft-text-expected-as-climate-talks-go-into-overtime>

Cop26

Third draft of Cop26 text retains key goal of limiting global heating to 1.5C



The Cop26 president Alok Sharma, right, and UNFCCC executive secretary, Patricia Espinosa, centre, talking at the climate conference.
Photograph: Ben Stansall/AFP/Getty Images

[Fiona Harvey](#)

Sat 13 Nov 2021 04.57 EST

A third draft of the outcome of the [Cop26](#) climate summit retained key resolutions to pursue greenhouse gas emissions cuts in line with holding global temperature rises to 1.5C.

Nations will be asked to return next year to strengthen their targets on emissions cuts, which are so far inadequate, and to accelerate the phase-out of coal power and fossil fuel subsidies. The text was not substantially weakened overnight, but there is a long process still to go through on

Saturday, and perhaps Sunday, in which some countries are likely to attack some of the key provisions.

The text of [what the UK hosts said should be the final draft](#) of the outcome of the Cop26 climate summit was released in Glasgow at about 9am on Saturday.

Delegates will pore over the decision until noon, when they will be asked for their reactions in a “stocktake”, after which the presidency will seek to move quickly to a final session at which the decisions can be adopted.

The final stages of the process will last at least until Saturday afternoon, and could stretch on much longer.

Bob Ward, policy and communications director at the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment at the London School of Economics and Political Science, said: “This text is still pretty good and one I hope that all countries can embrace. It continues to request countries to deliver more ambitious pledges next year.

“Countries will leave [Glasgow](#) painfully aware that collectively current pledges for emissions cuts by 2030 are not ambitious enough. They are not aligned with the goal of the Paris agreement of holding the rise in warming to well below 2C degrees, and to pursue efforts to limit it to 1.5C. The draft text also still calls on all countries to accelerate efforts towards the phase-out of unabated coal power and inefficient fossil fuel subsidies.

“Importantly, the UK presidency has now published draft text that outlines a good process for agreeing a significant increase in investment in developing countries to help them make their economies zero-carbon and climate-resilient. It is time for countries to stop arguing over the text and to start taking the action that has been promised, particularly to increase the flows of financial support to developing countries.”

The mood of the talks has been generally characterised as constructive, though some nations have sought to water down agreements on seeking to phase out fossil fuels and limit global heating to 1.5C above pre industrial levels. Developing countries also want further assurances on climate

finance, needed to help them cope with the impacts of extreme weather, and loss and damage, which refers to climate-related catastrophes.

The cover decision is the key outcome of the talks, outlining how countries will seek to fulfil the aims of the 2015 Paris agreement and limit greenhouse gas emissions. It was one of a raft of documents released on related issues such as adaptation to the impacts of climate breakdown, finance and some of the technical aspects of the Paris agreement, such as carbon trading.

Current national plans – known as nationally determined contributions (NDCs) – would lead to 2.4C of heating, according to an analysis this week by Climate Action Tracker.

Countries are expected to return with better pledges in 2025, under the Paris agreement, but many are now demanding the deadline should be brought forward. This is seen as the most closely fought area of disagreement as the UK hosts struggle to broker a deal.

Since the Paris agreement was signed, binding countries to limit temperature rises “well below” 2C above pre-industrial levels while “pursuing efforts” to a 1.5C limit, new science has shown that breaching the 1.5C threshold would lead to disastrous impacts, some irreversible, including the inundation of many low-lying areas. Heating has now reached 1.1C, and extreme weather is already taking hold around the world.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has said emissions must be cut by 45% by 2030 compared with 2010 levels to stay within 1.5C.

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[Cop26](#)

Hundreds of global civil society representatives walk out of Cop26 in protest

00:43

Hundreds of campaigners stage walkout on final day of Cop26 – video

[Libby Brooks](#)

Fri 12 Nov 2021 08.58 EST

Carrying blood-red ribbons to represent the crucial red lines already crossed by Cop26 negotiations, hundreds of representatives of global civil society walked out of the convention centre in [Glasgow](#) on the final morning of the summit in protest.

The audience at the People's Plenary in the conference blue zone heard speakers condemn the legitimacy and ambition of the 12-day summit before walking out to join protesters gathered on the streets beyond the security fencing.

“Cop26 is a performance,” the Indigenous activist Ta’Kaiya Blaney of the Tla A’miin Nation told the meeting before the walkout. “It is an illusion constructed to save the capitalist economy rooted in resource extraction and colonialism. I didn’t come here to fix the agenda – I came here to disrupt it.”

Tracy Bach of the advocacy steering group Ringo, shot down claims that this summit was “the most inclusive Cop ever”, telling the audience: “Most of the observers sitting here right now have not had access to the negotiation space.”

Singing and whooping, representatives of farmers, Indigenous people, youth, women, academics, trade unions and environmental NGOs processed slowly through the conference centre to be greeted by chants from the throng of activists outside the gates.

Chanting “climate justice now” and “power to the people”, the snaking line of activists still carrying the red ribbons exited the secured area where activists holding fluttering Extinction Rebellion flags were listening to speakers.

John Deman from Devon was in the waiting crowd with his one-year-old son asleep in a back carrier, wearing yellow ear defenders.

“We’ve been coming to different climate negotiations since before the little one was born, so we’re getting used to the results every time being downsized and not as strong as we need. This summit is becoming a joke again, and there’s a real need for them to listen to people like these,” he said, indicating those who had just walked out of the conference.

Moving to the call “we are unstoppable”, activists further up the mixing crowd replied “another world is possible”.

01:15

Success or failure?: Cop26 protesters give their verdict on the climate summit – video

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/nov/12/global-civil-society-representatives-walkout-cop26-protest>

Cop26

Cop26 guards slept in 40-person ‘dorm’ at Gleneagles despite Covid fears



The five-star Gleneagles hotel in Perthshire, Scotland. Photograph: Andrew Milligan/PA

[Jillian Ambrose](#)

Fri 12 Nov 2021 12.40 EST

Government delegations staying at the five-star [Gleneagles](#) hotel for Cop26 were guarded by security personnel who slept on camping cots in a 40-person dormitory set up in a lounge at the venue, raising concerns about Covid safety at the climate summit.

The team of men were recruited and housed by a security company under a Foreign Office contract just days before the world leaders summit opened at the Glasgow climate talks. Three individuals have now come forward to

raise their concerns about the cramped and unsanitary conditions in which they were housed at the luxury hotel.

One worker claimed: “We were treated like animals. We would have to take our food back to the same room – extremely stuffy from the warmth and the body odour – we’d have to eat in that same room. The showers were filthy. No cleaners were hired because we weren’t important enough for that.”

Delegates entering the [Cop26](#) conference were asked to provide daily proof of a negative Covid-19 test. It is understood that security staff were instructed to follow similar rules, but the staff recruited to patrol Gleneagles claim this was not enforced by their team leaders who they say did not require daily proof of a negative test.

“We weren’t tested for even one of those days as we shared beds with the day shift and slept right next to each other,” the worker claimed to the Guardian. “[The delegates] weren’t safe from Covid-19 because we weren’t tested once.”

Members of the security team have also claimed that personnel were not properly vetted, because not all identities were checked on arrival when they started the job.

Workers say they were asked on the job application form to provide details of their identity, immigration status and show their Security Industry Authority (SIA) licences. However, sources within the team claim that when they turned up for work not everyone was asked for ID or required to show their SIA cards.

Gleneagles hosted more than 30 international delegations including South Korea, Switzerland, Norway and Spain.

The company that employed the men was Optima Group. It was contracted by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to provide security at Gleneagles and a number of other Cop26 sites throughout the duration of the conference.

The firm, which also provided security at the recent G7 summit in Cornwall, accepted its crew were housed in a 40-bed dormitory, but rejected the allegations about security and Covid checks. In a statement, Optima said:

“Optima takes very seriously any claims in relation to its behaviour or performance. Having undertaken an initial investigation, we have found no evidence to support the claims made. At no point prior to being contacted by the Guardian were we aware of any unresolved issues connected with this task. All obligations under our contract regarding the Gleneagles Hotel security task have been met in full, including Covid testing and ID checks.”

The firm said all officers involved held valid and current SIA licences as required by law and that these had to be displayed during shifts and were checked daily. It said criminal records checks were made, and each officer was further vetted under a Foreign Office system, and that individuals were monitored throughout the duration of Cop26. Passes were supplied to officers as soon as they were received, and in the meantime interim arrangements were put in place.

Staff were instructed to bring Covid tests to complete daily and Optima received no reports of non-compliance. Additional tests were supplied if requested. If staff did not complete tests, they would have been in breach of contracts.

One worker, speaking on condition of anonymity, claimed the security team was “extremely poorly vetted, or not vetted at all” and that the contractor “couldn’t know that the people that turned up to work were the same people who filled out the application”.

“We didn’t know who those people were. No one checked,” claimed one worker, on condition of anonymity.

The makeshift dormitory, with staff sleeping on folding cot beds and in sleeping bags, was set up in a lounge area of a conference and sporting facility on the Gleneagles estate.

Gleneagles was contracted by the Foreign Office to provide secure parking and a lounge space where staff could eat and relax between shifts. However, on 12 October, during a pre-event site inspection, organisers for Optima are understood to have proposed using the lounge also as sleeping accommodation.

A Gleneagles spokesperson said: “During the event, the organisers were self-sufficient and responsible for outsourcing their own amenities and services. The Gleneagles team had no access nor operational oversight of the contracted space.”

Members of the security team raised concerns over the accommodation conditions soon after arrival and were offered an extra £25 a day on top of the £200 a day rate in compensation, according to an email sent last week by a member of security staff and seen by the Guardian.

However, the duration of the security contracts – initially advertised to run from 28 October to 4 November – was later reduced by two days at short notice, ending on 2 November.

A Cop26 spokesperson said: “The safety and security of delegates, local residents, and staff is at the core of our operational planning for Cop26.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/nov/12/cop26-guards-slept-in-40-person-dorm-at-gleneagles-despite-covid-fears>

2021.11.13 - Spotlight

- Olivia Colman ‘Portraying a murderer? It was less pressure than playing the Queen’
- ‘No sharks but I’ve seen porpoises’ The rebirth of the River Thames
- ‘How has this happened? Where is the escape hatch?’ Jon Ronson and Adam Curtis on the culture wars
- Blind date ‘He mentioned he is trained to butcher animals – right after I told him I was a vegetarian’



Olivia Colman: ‘Only stick with honest friends.’ Photograph: Amelia Troubridge/The Guardian. Dress: [Roland Mouret](#)

Olivia Colman: ‘Portraying a murderer? It was less pressure than playing the Queen’

Olivia Colman: ‘Only stick with honest friends.’ Photograph: Amelia Troubridge/The Guardian. Dress: [Roland Mouret](#)

by [Sophie Heawood](#)

Sat 13 Nov 2021 03.00 EST

[Olivia Colman](#)’s husband has written his first TV drama, a true crime series starring his wife, and I have so many questions about this that she says she can bring him downstairs to join in if I like. Ah, the possibilities when interviewing someone over Zoom. “Eddy!” she shouts up the stairs, while I peer into their comfy sitting room, somewhere deep in the English

countryside (period fireplace, bookshelves). “I’m slagging you off!” she shouts with glee at him, followed by a distant grunt.

We carry on alone, accompanied only by one of their dogs, the excitable Alfred, Lord Waggyson, and a child who briefly pops into the room to a big grin from mum. Colman, blessed with the friendliest, giggliest face on British telly, familiar from so many hit shows, somehow feels as if she belongs in *my* home, as if we are already friends. This, as we will find out, is something of a problem now she’s an international megastar.

Her fame comes not just from winning an Oscar for her role as the greedy, naughty Queen Anne in [The Favourite](#) (her viral [acceptance speech](#) began with: “Oh, it’s genuinely quite stressful. This is hilarious. Got an Oscar”) and went on to: “I used to work as a cleaner and I loved that job. I did spend quite a lot of my time imagining this. Oh, please wrap up? Right. OK”). It’s also from [playing our actual Queen](#) in two series of [The Crown](#); the wicked artist godmother in both series of [Fleabag](#); and Sophie in [Peep Show](#). She has also, more recently, had [a further Oscar nomination](#) for best supporting actress in [The Father](#) with [Anthony Hopkins](#). This year she has Landscapers (the one written by her husband), as well as [The Lost Daughter](#), directed by [Maggie Gyllenhaal](#) and based on [Elena Ferrante](#)’s novel, and a slew of other films ranging from period biopic [The Electrical Life of Louis Wain](#) to animated sci-fi comedy [Ron’s Gone Wrong](#). When I ask her why she’s doing quite so much, she says something about “having to pay the mortgage”.



Winning an Oscar for *The Favourite*, 2019. Photograph: Aaron Poole/AMPAS/EPA

How big can that mortgage be? Surely at that level of success, you can sit back and say no to everything but the five million quid gig, and pay off all your bills for ever?

“Well *that* would be good!” she hoots. “Have you ever been an agent? Maybe we could ...” she asks, wide-eyed. “God, yeah, imagine. A five million quid job!” Of course, she also takes all these roles “because I really love what I do. I would love to do slightly *less* in a year, but that would involve being paid different amounts. I’m not saying ... you know, things are going really well. But if I stopped work, we wouldn’t last long.”

Colman, her husband Ed Sinclair and their three children recently decamped from their south London terrace home to live more rurally, in a place where she can walk their dogs without having to talk to anyone. She doesn’t reveal where, but I know she remains fond of Norfolk, where she grew up. She is a hermit, “so I’m happy here. I like being able to be outside and no one can see me. I wear a woolly hat and I’m *loving* the mask thing.” She also takes a scarf to put over her face when others approach, clearly wary of people like me who think her friendly demeanour means she’s up for a new pal.

She was out walking her dogs the other day and “there was a group of people coming, and I panicked and put my thing up. And this woman went,” Colman puts on a comically booming voice, “‘I do recognise you, Olivia!’ Well, don’t say anything then – I’m clearly trying to hide! What is *wrong* with everyone?”

Maggie Gyllenhaal is very well-read. She’d be talking about Dante ... and I’m more Jilly Cooper

Americans are better at this, she says. “They’re ever so slightly classier than Brits about their actor people. They’re really nice. Sometimes in the UK, someone will literally hold a phone to my face; that has never happened to me in America. Over there, they’ll say, ‘Excuse me, may I take a photograph?’ And you say, ‘Oh well, thank you for asking so nicely!’ But here most people don’t ask and I think that’s unspeakably rude and threatening.”

She would never do it, she adds, then pauses to think whether this is true. “I’d do it to a squirrel,” she concedes.

Still, at least she doesn’t have to do all the dog walks now, as Pockets, their Cypriot rescue dog, has taken to going alone – possibly in pursuit of nonconsensual squirrels. “Now she knows the area, people in the village bring her back to us. We’ve had to look at the fencing because she climbs trees and just fucks off!”

Colman was born in Norwich and christened Sarah, but cheerily threatens to leave Zoom after I try calling her that: her stage name has become her real name. She was privately educated at Gresham’s School in Norfolk and later briefly attended a teacher training course. She soon dropped out but was able to use her student ID to get into Cambridge Footlights, where she met not only the [earliest incarnation of Mitchell and Webb](#), with whom she would go on to co-star in Peep Show, but also her future husband Sinclair. He went on to attend Bristol Old Vic theatre school and she later copied him and applied – the irony being that her career would become the bigger one, though huge fame waited until now, her late 40s, which is, she says, so

much better than if she had been 20. “I wouldn’t have coped at all. I got it late, when I already had my family. I don’t know how people cope with it young, and people who want to be famous, I don’t know what to say to them.”

That crowning Oscars moment arrived the year before the pandemic took over, when red carpets were still full. It appeared to be the shock of her life.

“It was bonkers,” she says. “You’re being swept along by people and you’re going: this can’t be happening. I think you go into self-preservation, emergency mode, because it’s too much to cope with. I only really remember it because I’ve seen it,” she says, explaining she had to watch it afterwards on YouTube like anyone else.

Her husband told her it was the best night of his life, watching that happen to the person he loved. They had travelled out to LA as a family and borrowed a friend’s house outside the city, where the kids could watch the ceremony with their babysitter, away from the madness. “And she filmed them. That was a really beautiful thing that she did. Our youngest was far too young so didn’t have a clue what was going on, but the others were just going: *wow!* I remember seeing it through their eyes,” she says, looking rather wistful at the thought.

Sinclair is no longer only the proud bystander in her life, now that *Landscapers* is to be screened on Sky (and HBO) in December. Having worked as an actor and writer before, he always longed to create something for his wife to star in.



With Eddie Marsan in *Tyrannosaur*, 2011. Photograph: UK Film Council/Kobal/Shutterstock

[Tyrannosaur](#), [Paddy Considine](#)'s incredibly powerful film in which she played a domestic abuse victim, really moved him, Colman explains, "but wasn't seen by many people – which rather broke our hearts". He wanted to write something with a similar degree of pathos, and after reading a 2014 [article in Guardian Weekend magazine](#), about a couple imprisoned for the murder of the wife's parents, an idea started to form.

Susan and Christopher Edwards were sentenced to life in prison 16 years after the 1998 murders, having buried the bodies in the Nottinghamshire garden and gone to France. They lived a delusional, naive life based around Hollywood stars, buying movie memorabilia with the dead couple's savings and pensions, while fraudulently claiming they were still alive. (The husband wrote a letter to [Gérard Depardieu](#) and was delighted when he wrote back, beginning a long correspondence. He found out only at their trial that his wife had been writing the letters all along.) Sinclair and Colman both felt the couple had been misunderstood, with Susan a victim of abuse all her childhood.

I have seen the series and, although it makes for great telly and is beautifully presented, I sometimes struggled with how much of Colman's

natural charm comes through. She plays Susan as a quiet delight. I ask if this was intentional: of course it was.

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“Ed had written her sympathetically: that is how he felt about her. And I did feel her husband was her knight in shining armour who had taken her away from this horrible situation. The fact that she was abused as a child, didn’t seem to have had any clout – I think that would be different now. But even five or six years ago, it was sort of classed as: that was when you’re a child, but you murdered when you were an adult, so it doesn’t count. And he felt: why is no one taking that into consideration, because what an enormous thing to have to deal with? He doesn’t have any doubts that they did it. You *have* to do time for that. But there are women who have killed their husbands because they face a lifetime of violence and eventually you snap. It doesn’t mean you’re a bad person. It doesn’t mean you went out to kill people.”

Colman hasn’t met the couple, but Sinclair has been in correspondence with them. “And he told them: this isn’t a turn-around-justice piece, you know, but I am interested in your story and and would you be willing to let me? And they were so eloquent and well-read and gentle in their musings, and in their writings, and they still talk about each other in such a loving way.”



With David Thewlis in Landscapers, 2021. Photograph: Stefania Rosini/Sky/PA

Did the newcomer have trouble getting the project made? “I have always read his writing and I have always known it was brilliant. And he lacked the courage to show people for a long time. What I love is that he then showed this and everyone went: oh my God, it’s amazing, and I was like, mwahaha, I told you ... You know, he’s my biggest fan,” she adds, and there is such youth in her giggles after she says this, “and I’m his biggest fan, so he just wanted to make sure that ... I don’t know, he just wanted to write something for me, which was lovely.”

I wonder if this is why she is so widely loved by the public. It is rare to get to the middle of our lives and retain such immediate access to our sweetness. We block things off, we know too much, whereas Colman sometimes seems to know too little, though I wonder how much she is just messing around and making light of things. “I’m sorry, I don’t know what I’m talking about,” she will often say, after answering a question with perfect sense. But she also doesn’t waste time apologising. For example, she once appeared on The Graham Norton Show to promote a film and couldn’t remember her character’s name or much else about it. The audience were in stitches; she seemed delighted.



‘Imagine a five million quid job!’ Photograph: Amelia Troubridge/The Guardian. Dress: [Eudon Choi](#). Coat: [Mother of Pearl](#). Sandals: [Manolo Blahnik](#)

I bring this up, tell her I would have apologised, called myself an idiot. She says she does get like that, too: “But I refuse to apologise for something I don’t know.” She wonders if this might be because she once had a maths teacher who explained something difficult to the class, asked if they understood, and Colman admitted she did not. “I didn’t have that sort of brain, for maths. But then a few other people said they didn’t get it either and the teacher said, ‘Oh OK, then that’s not your fault, that’s mine.’ From then on, I refused to pretend I knew.”

In *The Lost Daughter*, Colman plays a celebrated academic, a translator of Dante, who comes unstuck as a mother. “And Maggie [Gyllenhaal, its director] is very well-read. I mean, I might have read lots of books, but I don’t retain the information,” Colman says, typically self-deprecating. “So she had to talk to me in a different way.” Gyllenhaal would be talking about the meaning of Dante, she adds, “and I’m more [Jilly Cooper](#)”.

It is an utterly spellbinding film, and has been garlanded with praise at film festivals, pre-general release. I’m not surprised – it is largely set in a sultry

Greek beach village, yet reveals, partly through younger flashbacks in which Colman's character is played by [Jessie Buckley](#), what happens when you start having bad days as the mother of small children, and when the bad days become most of the days. I have never seen maternal ambivalence shown on the screen like that before. Colman nods, very much in agreement.

“There’s a sort of deal among people that we don’t talk about these things. And Elena Ferrante broke the deal, said it out loud. And Maggie thought: I’m feeling this. What if a whole cinema of people are feeling this? It’s amazing how many people have said thank you for putting it on screen and saying it out loud.”



In new film The Lost Daughter. Photograph: Yannis Drakoulidis/Netflix © 2021

Ferrante said Gyllenhaal, whose interest had also been piqued by reading something the author wrote in the Guardian, could have the rights to the book only if she directed it herself, “or the deal was off. She made Maggie do it, not chicken out. I was so pleased, because she was amazing. And I watched with a load of my mum mates who had that, same as you, sort of, ‘Oof, I know that feeling.’ When you just want to be on your own.”

There is an intriguing, quasi-sexual vibe between Colman's character and [Dakota Johnson](#)'s; strangers, both mothers, though at different stages, who become acquainted on a beach holiday. The way the camera watches their encounters is loaded with ambiguity. "I mean, Dakota *is* breathtaking to look at," Colman agrees. "So you do stare at her. Maggie would whisper to me, on set: 'You can't take your eyes off her. She's so beautiful.'"

I wonder how familiar that maternal ambivalence was to Colman personally. "Dakota laughed at me when we did interviews together. She said, 'You *never* felt like that!' And no," Colman is hurriedly muttering now, "I didn't really. But I don't know anyone who didn't have a little bit of postnatal depression. First baby, I found it absolutely shocking. And my mum had said, 'Oh, having a baby is like shelling peas!' In a bid to become a granny, I think. I was like, what?!"

This is like when a couple of my friends told me giving birth would be just like bad period pains, I say.



Photograph: Amelia Troubridge/The Guardian. Styling: Melanie Wilkinson, assisted by Peter Bevan. Hair: Earl Simms at Caren using Sam McKnight. Makeup: Polly Osmond at Premier Hair and Make-up using Charlotte Tilbury. Nails: Robbie Tomkins. Shirt: Issey Miyake, from [selfridges.com](#)

“Oh fuck off! Dump those mates straight away! How dare they? Only stick with honest friends. And I – the birth was quite traumatic and that sent me into a ... I didn’t know what to do with myself. And I just felt like I wasn’t very good at being a mummy. And that lasted a while and,” she says rather more quietly, “I never want to have that feeling again.”

She says it’s so innocuous, the way they call it the baby blues. “Mine lasted a bit longer. And I am a very happy person, but there are moments when your hormones are all over the shop. But then I fell in love with him, and I wasn’t scared of having more, because I thought: I can do this now. Nothing is as shocking the second time around ... If I had my way I’d be on number six by now, and I would really rather they all just stayed within a metre radius of me. Ed is a little more level.”

That close childhood bond is in marked contrast to the upbringing of her character in *Landscapers*. How does she handle the responsibility of depicting a real, living person? Colman says it was more stressful playing the Queen in *The Crown*. She “emoted” too much for the part, would cry at anything emotional, so had to wear a secret earpiece with the shipping forecast playing in it while she delivered her lines. All of that [Tyne and Dogger](#) kept her feelings on an even keel.

“Playing the Queen was the most pressurised thing I’ve ever done. Because everyone goes: that’s not right.”



As the Queen in The Crown, 2019. Photograph: Liam Daniel/AP

Did she get that sort of backlash?

“I don’t tend to read anything because I’m not very thick-skinned – so I don’t know. But we had amazing voice and hair and makeup departments – you’ve done half your job before you even step out of your van.”

Turns out it wasn’t the actual Queen she found the hardest act to follow – it was [Claire Foy](#), who had played the same character at a younger age in the earlier series. “I kept thinking, how would Claire Foy do this?

“*Oh shaddap,*” she suddenly adds – the dog is barking. “I’m gonna put him in the kitchen,” she says, dispatching Alfred. It sounds bad in there. I ask if he’s committing a murder, but no: “Our lovely nanny has come back from the shop and he’s just letting everyone know.” I’m glad she admits to having a nanny and isn’t pretending she can manage without one. Colman’s insistently down-to-earth shtick is part of her appeal; it buys into the great British underdog-made-good tradition. But she is responding to her enormous fame in a perfectly reasonable way: with bafflement, excitement and wariness. Most of us would do the same, I think.

But then, just as I make the mistake of thinking we're buddies, she punctures the illusion. It's what I'm drinking: earl grey, when she's having a mug of Tetley's. "Oh, you've ruined it. *Earl grey!* Urgh. It's nasty, like drinking water you've washed your hands in. "Oh Sophie," she sighs, "and I thought we could be friends."

Landscapers is on Sky Atlantic and Now on 7 December. The Lost Daughter will be in select cinemas from 17 December and on Netflix on 31 December.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2021/nov/13/olivia-colman-portraying-murderer-playing-queen>

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Rivers

‘No sharks but I’ve seen porpoises’: the rebirth of the River Thames



A survey by the Zoological Society of London shows that the Thames is full of life – and home to three species of shark. Photograph: Linda Nylind/The Guardian



[Patrick Barkham](#)
[@patrick_barkham](#)

Sat 13 Nov 2021 03.00 EST

The Thames shark hunt begins on a swirling golden brown river, where high above Battersea power station soars a speck that may be another awesome predator: a peregrine falcon.

“I haven’t seen a shark but I’ve seen porpoises up the Thames and there were a couple of whales last year,” says Alfie Gardner, captain of one of the Thames Clipper Uber Boats that whisk commuters and tourists up and downriver. “We see a lot of seals. Near enough every day.”

The 95 miles of the tidal Thames that snakes through Europe’s biggest city is full of life, [according to a new survey](#) by the [Zoological Society of London](#) (ZSL). Harbour and grey seals pop up for a reason: the Thames is [home to more than 115 species of fish](#), and is a nursery for smelt, seabass and sharks – starry smooth-hound, tope and spurdog.

Other remarkable sightings include a juvenile short-snouted seahorse at Greenwich and a juvenile minke whale, which was stranded near Teddington this spring.

An informal shark safari via [the scheduled riverboat service](#) from the London Eye to North Greenwich starts with a promising display of common gulls, which perch on construction barges facing into the wind so their feathers won't ruffle.

The Thames does not look alluring and its brown waters are coloured by sediment animated by the tides. Who can tell what lies beneath?

The party of visitors to the Tate Modern's beach could probably say, if only we could understand them: this biodiversity hotspot contains two swans, four greylag geese and a gaggle of feral pigeons and gulls.



Patrick Barkham on the lookout for sharks. Photograph: Linda Nylind/The Guardian

As the riverboat cruises past the Tower of [London](#), a cormorant hangs its wings out to dry like an enormous gothic bat. This fish-eating bird is another sign that there is food in the river.

Beside the Old Thameside Inn there rolls a log: here is the Thames reborn as a Canadian mountain stream. Unfortunately, the rebirth of the Thames has met with several false dawns, and this may be another.

Before 1800, 3,000 Atlantic salmon caught on the river would be taken to Billingsgate market each year. Then the Industrial Revolution poured everything from cyanide to sewage into the river, and Victorian engineer Joseph Bazalgette's sewage system only shifted the pollution downstream to Beckton.

In 1957, a survey conducted by the Natural History Museum made an incredible discovery: there were no fish left in the Thames. [As the Guardian reported in 1959](#): “The tidal reaches of the Thames constitute a badly managed open sewer.”



The brown waters of the Thames are coloured by sediment animated by the tides. Photograph: Linda Nylind/The Guardian

Sewage discharged at Beckton began to be treated in 1964, industrial pollution was controlled, and heavy industry retreated from the riverside. In 1974, the first salmon was caught on the Thames – in a power station intake 16 miles below Tower Bridge – since 1833. But a 32-year effort to restore salmon by restocking the Thames with young fish ended in failure in 2011.

This week, ZSL’s survey found that the number of fish species in the tidal Thames has actually declined since the early 1990s.

“It was a surprising decline,” says Alison Debney, ZSL’s conservation programme lead for wetland ecosystem recovery. ‘I’ve been spending the last 10 years telling everybody we’ve got all these fish and isn’t that great?’

Scientists need to unpick the reasons for this decline, says Debney, which could be pollution combined with the climate crisis.

There are positive increases in dissolved oxygen concentrations and less damagingly high phosphorus levels in the Thames but harmful nitrate concentrations continue to increase, and microplastics flow down the river at a rate of up to 94,000 pieces a second.

Fish could be struggling with dramatic temperature changes: on average, summer temperatures in the upper tidal Thames have risen by 0.19C a year this century. According to Debney, this rise could be assisted by that old foe: treated sewage, which warms the river.

Raw sewage also [continues to be discharged into the Thames](#). More than 95% of these overflows should be captured by [the Thames Tideway tunnel](#), a £3.9bn super-sewer due for completion in 2025.

There’s no sign of a shark but river regulars say seals are more visible than ever. They like the Salt Quay pub in Rotherhithe – or at least the sand in front of it – and the shallows of Wandsworth. “As the river gets narrower, the seals seem to get bigger,” says Gardner.

They are keeping their heads down on this particular river cruise. Finally, a creamy shape materialises in the water beside Deptford Creek. A seal? No, it’s an old football.

The Guardian’s informal Thames safari species list

Common gull: 550

Herring gull: 22

Mute swan: 13

Greylag geese: 4

Cormorant: 1

Black-headed gull: 1

Jackdaw: 2

Floating pieces of wood: 5

Plastic bottles: 1

Tennis balls: 1

Footballs: 1

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Illustration: Klawe Rzeczy/The Guardian

Jon Ronson and Adam Curtis on the culture wars: ‘How has this happened? Where is the escape hatch?’

Illustration: Klawe Rzeczy/The Guardian

by [Fiona Sturges](#)

Sat 13 Nov 2021 04.10 EST

Jon Ronson and Adam Curtis became friends in the late 1990s, having bonded over their shared interests in power, society and the stories we tell about ourselves. Curtis, 66, is a Bafta-winning documentary film-maker whose credits include [The Power of Nightmares: The Rise of the Politics of Fear](#) and [HyperNormalisation](#). His most recent six-part series, [Can’t Get You Out of My Head](#), draws on the history of psychology and politics to show how we got to where we are today. Ronson, 54, is a US-based Welsh

writer and journalist whose books include 2015's [So You've Been Publicly Shamed](#), about social media brutality and the history of public shaming. In recent years, Ronson has turned to podcasting, investigating the porn industry in [The Butterfly Effect](#) and its follow-up [The Last Days of August](#).

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.

His forthcoming BBC podcast, [Things Fell Apart](#), is about the roots of the culture wars and the ways the present is echoed in the past. Over eight episodes, he talks to individuals caught up in ideological conflicts, conspiracy theories and moral panics. These include Alice Moore, the wife of a fundamentalist minister and unexpected culture war instigator who campaigned to remove textbooks containing liberal material from schools, and Kelly Michaels, a daycare worker and victim of the "satanic panic" who was wrongfully imprisoned in 1988 by a New Jersey court for child abuse (the verdict was overturned in 1993).

We are on: Curtis is talking from his office in London while Ronson is at home in New York. By way of preparation before their chat, Curtis has binged on Ronson's new series. No sooner are cameras switched on than the reminiscences begin.

Jon Ronson Do you remember that time we went to an auction of [[the late Romanian dictator Nicolae](#)] Ceaușescu's belongings?

Adam Curtis Yes, now that was exciting.

JR It was. We went on a minibreak to Romania together.

AC I bought Ceaușescu's cap, and a pair of socks.

JR I also got a pair of socks. There was some very heavy bidding from a mysterious gentleman who got all the ornaments. The prices were getting pretty high so I stuck with the socks. I don't even know where they are now. I bet you know where your stuff is.

AC I do, actually.

JR We have had many conversations over the years and generally I find I'm asking you questions because I'm trying to get ideas. I always think of you as a fantastic source of insights into the future. In the early days of social media, you were the very first person to say to me: "Don't think of this as a utopia. There are some problems here." There are two or three people in my life where, when they talk, I really want to listen to what they have to say, and you are one of those.

AC That is completely not true. What actually happens is that I bollock on about theories which you completely ignore and then you go off on your stories. Anyway, I'm trying to remember when we actually met.

JR I think the first time I met you was when I made the [1997] documentary Tottenham Ayatollah and you came to the screening.

AC And your wife Elaine invited me to meet you in a cafe off Tottenham Court Road. She said: "Can you come and talk to him? Then you could take some of the pressure off me by talking about his film."

JR She probably said: "I can't take it any more. He won't stop agonising."

AC But when we met you didn't agonise at all. I think what we recognised in each other – and it's been the professional bond between us – is that we're both interested in what happens outside those normal areas that most political journalists examine that involve politics and power. We want to look at things like psychology and how a conspiracy theory plays out and how feelings work through society.

JR I'm really surprised at how frequently the things that we tell stories about overlap. But the way we go about it is so different. I think your brain works better thinking about theories and my brain works better thinking about stories.

The most radical thing you can do is something extraordinary like walking naked around the world, and not tell anyone that you've done it

Adam Curtis

AC I think you and I are creatures of our time. I got interested in this idea that power now works not through traditional forms but through the idea of individualism; it says you should be allowed to do what you want to do, but we will serve you to get that. You and I both know what it's like to be an obsessive individualist, but we've become intrigued by how that plays out in a society in which you've got lots of people wanting to be individuals. I've always had this theory that self-expression is the conformity of our age. The most radical thing you can do is something extraordinary like walking naked around the world, and not tell anyone that you've done it. You can't post anything online. When you say that to people, they can't conceive of it.

JR I really like that idea.

AC The other thing that we both do when we're interviewing people is not follow a list of questions. You go into a situation where you have questions in your head but suddenly they'll say something which is either funny or unexpected and you just learn to go with it. It's like suddenly a little piglet swerves off from the herd, and you go with it up and over the hill.

JR One positive thing that has been said about what I do is that there's a sincerity to it. I never go into something with an idea of how it will turn out.

AC We're talking about sincerity? Don't go there, Jon! You'll be writing poems next.

JR [Laughs] Well it's really to do with trying to figure out what I think from my research without being told what to think by other people. I think people appreciate the fact that I've worked hard to come to the thoughts I've come to.

AC Yes, I agree with that.



'I never go into something with an idea of how it will turn out' ... Jon Ronson. Photograph: Alberto Paredes/Alamy

JR I guess what we have in common is we're not ideologues. We don't go into a situation with a set of agendas. We're more willing to be a twig in the river of the story and just go where it takes us. By doing that we're forced to keep an open mind. I don't even have a list of questions in my head when I'm interviewing somebody. I'm literally a tightrope walker with no safety net, and I have, on many occasions, plummeted to my death like in [Squid Game](#).

AC I think that open-mindedness is clear in your podcast. And it's absolutely the right time to examine the roots of what we're calling the culture wars, which is such a difficult and sensitive area. So much journalism, when it goes back into the past to see why something happened, always interviews the people who are defined as the actors, the people who consciously set out to [create conflict]. What I'm increasingly intrigued by is the people who were acted upon by that thing or idea. Because the way ideas or concepts play out in society are never the way that the people who started them think. What you've done in these programmes is follow individuals who are acted upon by these forces, because it shows you the real dimensions of what these things called [culture wars](#) are.

JR Well, I realised that I would watch people become overconsumed by these cultural conflicts, to the extent that it was impacting their mental health and tearing families apart. But every show that's about the culture ends up a part of the culture wars, and I didn't want to do that. So I thought the way to do it was by focusing on a moment and a human story and tell that story in as unexpected a way as possible. In the end we found eight stories about the complexity of human life and they all happen to be origin stories. These are the pebbles being thrown in the pond and creating these ripples.

AC Yes, these people have got caught up in the great tides of history that have come sweeping over them. It feels real. If you follow people who are acted upon, you start to understand, in a much more sympathetic way, why people do things that you might not like or approve of. You see how someone is led to something, with no idea of the consequences. In the first two episodes, you talk about how the evangelical movement up until the early 1970s had been completely detached from any involvement in the moral, political or social questions of American society. And what you trace is how two people got sucked into a particular issue, which then acted like a fuse to reawaken the evangelical movement.



Illustration: Klawe Rzeczy/The Guardian

JR For decades the Christian right were silent: they consumed their own media, they went to their own churches and they listened to their own radio shows, and they were totally unengaged with what was happening. But then a few things happened that finally galvanised them into becoming soldiers in a culture war, and one was a new diversity of thought in school textbooks. In the series I talk to Alice Moore, who is in her 80s now and was one of the earliest cultural warriors for the evangelical right. She was a church minister's wife in West Virginia who discovered there was going to be a new sex education lesson taught in schools, and she wasn't having that. So she got on to the school board, and then the new curriculum arrived in 1974 that was full of all these multicultural voices, and things got so heated over just one semester that school buses were shot at – in fact, shots were fired from both sides – and a school was bombed. And I discovered while talking to Alice that one of the reasons for the intensity of the anger was a misinterpretation of a poem [that appeared in one of the new school textbooks].

AC By Roger McGough!

JR Yes. It was a poem [1967's At Lunchtime: A Story of Love] that featured a spontaneous orgy that takes place on a bus, because the passengers thought the world was about to end at lunchtime in a nuclear war. So Alice was reading out this poem to me and I was thinking: "I don't think this is in favour of spontaneous orgies on buses. I think this poet is agreeing with you, to an extent." So then I went off to talk to Roger about it.

AC And then you went back to Alice, and she was quite grumpy about it, which was funny. But I think this is a beautiful example of what we were talking about. As I was listening to that episode I was thinking: "Hang on, this isn't quite as bad as she thinks it is." And then, Jon's brain is thinking the same thing, but without judgment.

JR I like to steer clear of conflict as much as I can.

AC Which is good and also rare. Most people would pursue her with their agenda. Right now, everyone is judged as either being good or bad. It's

good versus evil – that's where journalism has got to now. But yours doesn't do that.

JR I'm interested in everybody as a human being and I'm quite startled by the myriad examples of the media being a part of the culture wars. It seems to happen everywhere, this mistelling of a story so it fits into a particular ideology a little more clearly. It happens on all sides. I get very disheartened when CNN lies to me or is biased or omits certain aspects of the truth to tell a certain version of the story. During the Trump years I really felt that with CNN. I felt like I was in QAnon and my Q was [Anderson Cooper](#).

AC I would read the New York Times all about the close friendship between Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump. And I know enough Russian journalists who I trust to know that it's just complete rubbish. So hysteria happened on both sides. I mean if you go back over reports even from my own organisation, the BBC, about how Trump was actually an agent of Putin, it's extraordinary. It's a conspiracy theory. That's as much of a panic as anything else you get on the right.



Illustration: Klaw Rzeczy/The Guardian

JR I also think a lot of journalists are, like: "Oh my God. All this time I've just been a liberal but look at these things that are happening: Trump's

election, George Floyd.” So they think it’s not enough to be a liberal journalist, they have to be an activist journalist. And I think it’s completely understandable and, in some cases, it’s a great thing. But then in other cases, it’s really troublesome because journalism now has pre-existing ideologies.

AC And then journalism lifts off from Planet Real and goes off into the realms of histrionic personality disorder. I actually think histrionic personality disorder describes most of the progressive classes in western societies, in that they’ve given up on their progressivism and retreated into a histrionic attitude to the world.

JR I do think these stories tell us an awful lot about the way we live our lives today. In the satanic panic episode, which is about moral panics in the 1980s, you think it’s going to be about the parallels today with QAnon. But it becomes clear that there are also parallels with the panics on the left today, and that we all have these cognitive biases. I tell this story in which daycare workers are being accused of satanic activity, which clearly never happened, and where people actually went to jail. Suddenly it wasn’t just the Christian right worried about satanic cults at the end of your street, but mainstream America. When the flame is burning hot, we can all act in irrational, brutal or inhuman ways, and you see it across the spectrum.

AC The series did make me think: how has this happened? Not just the culture wars but their ferocity. And where is the escape hatch? Because I think all sides now feel that there’s something not quite right. If you examine the years since Trump and Brexit, there has been this enormous hysteria in newspapers and on television about it. But actually the politicians have done nothing to change society. It’s almost been like a frozen world. So, I think the real answer to why this is happening is because politics has failed. It’s become this dead area, this desert surrounded by thinktanks, and someone’s got to get in there and regenerate it. The new politics is waiting to come. And I think it will happen.

Jon Ronson’s Things Fell Apart continues Tuesday, 9am [Radio 4 and BBC Sounds](#). It will be available in the US and Canada exclusively on BBC Podcasts Premium on Apple Podcasts. Adam Curtis’s [Can’t Get You Out of My Head](#) is on BBC iPlayer.

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Blind date: ‘He mentioned he is trained to butcher animals – right after I told him I was a vegetarian’



Zardi and Nadia: ‘He’s a chef and I like to bake, so we talked a lot about food.’ Photograph: Christian Sinibaldi/The Guardian

Sat 13 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

Zardi on Nadia



What were you hoping for?

A laugh and a fun time, and that the conversation would flow nicely.

First impressions?

Attractive, smart, easy to talk to.

What did you talk about?

Food, for a long, long time. We also talked about travelling, musical instruments and the things we did during lockdown.

Any awkward moments?

I drew a blank when asked what my best dishes were to cook. I also confused a gooseberry with something else.

Good table manners?

She did send a fork flying at one point, but apart from that very good.

Best thing about Nadia?

She was very easy to talk to and opened up about life which was nice .

Q&A

Want to be in Blind date?

Show

Blind date is Saturday's dating column: every week, two strangers are paired up for dinner and drinks, and then spill the beans to us, answering a set of questions. This runs, with a photograph we take of each dater before the date, in Saturday magazine (in the UK) and online at theguardian.com every Saturday. It's been running since 2009 – you can [read all about how we put it together here](#).

What questions will I be asked?

We ask about age, location, occupation, hobbies, interests and the type of person you are looking to meet. If you do not think these questions cover everything you would like to know, tell us what's on your mind.

Can I choose who I match with?

No, it's a blind date! But we do ask you a bit about your interests, preferences, etc – the more you tell us, the better the match is likely to be.

Can I pick the photograph?

No, but don't worry: we'll choose the nicest ones.

What personal details will appear?

Your first name, job and age.

How should I answer?

Honestly but respectfully. Be mindful of how it will read to your date, and that Blind date reaches a large audience, in print and online.

Will I see the other person's answers?

No. We may edit yours and theirs for a range of reasons, including length, and we may ask you for more details.

Will you find me The One?

We'll try! Marriage! Babies!

Can I do it in my home town?

Only if it's in the UK. Many of our applicants live in London, but we would love to hear from people living elsewhere.

How to apply

Email blind.date@theguardian.com

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

Would you introduce her to your friends?

Yes, I think they would get along. Nadia and I share similar interests and so do my friends.

Describe Nadia in three words

Interesting, affectionate, kind-hearted.

What do you think she made of you?

I think she thought I was rather nervous, and spent too much time talking about living in China.

Did you go on somewhere?

We talked about going to a karaoke bar and singing Adele songs all night long, but in the end we just headed to the tube station.

If it weren't for physical distancing, would you have kissed?

I don't think so.

If you could change one thing about the evening, what would it be?

That we had gone to the karaoke and sung Adele all night long.

Marks out of 10

8.5.

Would you meet again?

We exchanged numbers, so who knows.



Zardi and Nadia on their date

Nadia on Zardi



What were you hoping for?

Someone tall, dark and handsome to sweep me off my feet.

First impressions?

Not what I was expecting – a bit shy.

What did you talk about?

Travelling, living abroad, where we'd like to go next. He is a chef and I like to bake, so we also talked about food.

Any awkward moments?

When he told me his go-to karaoke song was Adele (I'm more into classic rock and metal). Also he mentioned that he is trained to butcher animals right after I told him I was a vegetarian.

Good table manners?

Yes, though I was a bit of a germ freak about sharing tapas.

Best thing about Zardi?

He's friendly and laughed at my jokes.

Would you introduce him to your friends?

Not as a love interest.

Describe Zardi in three words

Shy, polite, friendly.

What do you think he made of you?

I don't think we had any chemistry but hopefully he thought I was fun.

Did you go on somewhere?

No, it was long enough.

If it weren't for physical distancing, would you have kissed?

No, he wasn't my type.

If you could change one thing about the evening, what would it be?

A restaurant a bit easier to get to.

Marks out of 10?

I had fun, and the restaurant had a great vibe, but as a date 5/10.

Would you meet again?

Not likely.

Zardi and Nadia ate at [the Tapas Room, Brixton](#), London SW9. Fancy a blind date? Email blind.date@theguardian.com

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Covid live news: UK records 157 deaths; Germany mobilises 12,000 soldiers to fight coronavirus – report

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Coronavirus

Boris Johnson urges people to get Covid boosters as he warns of ‘storm clouds’



People queue outside a Covid-19 Vaccination Centre in Maidenhead for their booster jabs. Photograph: Maureen McLean/Rex/Shutterstock

[Nicola Davis](#) Science correspondent

[@NicolaKSDavis](#)

Fri 12 Nov 2021 11.52 EST

Elderly and vulnerable people must get their booster jabs if a rise in Covid cases in the UK is to be prevented, the prime minister has said, as he warned of “storm clouds” forming over [parts of Europe](#).

Germany, Austria, Slovakia and Croatia are among countries that have recently seen a surge in Covid cases, [with the former recording](#) its highest coronavirus case numbers since the start of the pandemic.

Speaking in a broadcast clip, Boris Johnson said the situation was of concern. “I’m seeing the storm clouds gathering over parts of the European continent. And I’ve got to be absolutely frank with people: we’ve been here before. We remember what happens when the wave starts rolling in,” he said.

The World Health Organization’s Europe head, Hans Kluge, has said a lack of uptake of [Covid vaccines is behind the increase](#).

While Johnson noted that cases in the UK had been “drifting down for a while”, he said it was unclear if the trend was set to continue. “I’m looking at what’s happening overseas, and I’m simply saying to the British people ... this is the moment to get your booster,” he said.

After coronavirus restrictions were lifted in England over the summer, infection levels rose: by October the UK was experiencing one of the highest case rates [in Europe](#). While figures still remain high, daily case data and the [latest figures](#) for infection levels from the Office for National Statistics suggest there has been a fall, with the latter revealing an estimated one in 60 people in the community in England had Covid in the week ending 6 November – about 925,400 people.

That is a decline since late October, when [one in 50 people in England were thought to have a Covid infection](#). A drop has also been recorded in Wales, although in Scotland the rate of people testing positive has remained level and the trend is unclear in Northern Ireland.

While the decline in England was seen in all age groups and in most regions of the country, it appears the trend is strongest among older children.

However, the question remains whether infection levels will rise again now schools have returned from recent half-terms, or whether – [as some have argued](#) – growing levels of immunity in children could mean a peak has been reached.

“With a marked decrease in infections among secondary school children in England, the half-term break may have played a part, though infections

were decreasing prior to this time,” said Sarah Crofts, the head of analytical outputs for the Covid-19 infection survey. “Over the next few weeks we will see if this decline continues.”

The situation is far from clearcut. The ONS survey records existing and new infections, whether symptomatic or not. However, people can test positive for some time, meaning changes in the ONS data lag behind the daily reported cases – which are based on those who have come forward for testing – by about two weeks. The latter suggests cases may be showing signs of rebounding, at least to some degree.

While daily reported cases in the UK showed a decline during the second half of October and early November, they had risen for four consecutive days, reaching 42,408 on Thursday. On Friday 40,375 new Covid cases were reported in the UK.

Prof Rowland Kao, an epidemiologist at the University of Edinburgh, said the recent rise in cases tied in well with a return to schools, but the situation remained in the balance. “Whether or not the [rise] represents a sustained increase, is of course difficult to tell. Vaccinations and boosters continue to be rolled out and with ever-increasing levels of natural immunity as well, it could still go either way,” he said.

Prof John Edmunds, an epidemiologist at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, who sits on Sage, said half-term was always going to have a big effect, adding that cases were now at roughly the same level, or a little lower, in most regions and nations of the UK than two weeks or so ago – before the half-terms. However, there are exceptions, such as Scotland where cases still appear to be climbing.

Edmunds said such a pattern would be expected if the epidemic was left to peak naturally, as has largely been the case. “It should be stressed, though, that a natural peak will be much more drawn out than a lockdown-induced peak, so I would expect to see high rates of infection, hospitalisations and deaths for many weeks – or even months – yet,” he said.

Dr Vishal Sharma, the British Medical Association's consultants committee chair, said the NHS was already overwhelmed. "There's no doubt that patients are not receiving the standard of care they should be from a fully functioning health service and if more isn't done to protect the NHS, we risk taking an already fragile recovery backwards," he said.

"The government says it will only act when the NHS is at risk of being overwhelmed. Our members – doctors working on the frontline – are clear that this is not just a risk, but it is happening right now"

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/12/covid-cases-in-england-may-remain-high-for-months-says-expert>

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Italy

Italian ski resorts get ready to open after two seasons lost to Covid



Bardonecchia in February this year after the Italian government abruptly delayed opening Italy's ski slopes. Photograph: Marco Alpozzi/AP

[Angela Giuffrida](#)

Fri 12 Nov 2021 06.05 EST

Enrico Rossi was among the protesters in Bardonecchia when the Italian government decided in February to [maintain a Covid shutdown](#) on ski resorts just hours before the slopes were due to reopen.

Rossi described the loss of the ski season as a tragedy for the small town and others in the Susa Valley, Piedmont, especially after the 2020 season had also been cut short.

But as the resort prepares to reopen in early December, he is cautiously optimistic. “Three times during last year’s season we were ready to start – we prepared the slopes, hired staff – only for it all to get cancelled,” said Rossi, who is vice-president of Bardonecchia’s tourism consortium. “It was very disappointing. But the prospects for this year are looking good. Bookings are coming in, mainly from [Italy](#), and the pandemic situation is different; let’s hope nothing changes.”

Some Italian ski slopes have already opened, albeit with the requirement to present the Covid-19 health pass when using ski lifts, reduced capacity in cabins and social-distancing measures at ticket offices. Face masks must be worn on ski lifts and in “common areas” as part of the protocols agreed by the Italian ski industry.

[Italy cases](#)

“Customers aren’t complaining – the desire to ski is much greater than the annoyance of having to abide by the rules,” said Herbert Tovagliari, the president and CEO of Cervinia Spa, a travel and tourism company in the Aosta valley.

Tovagliari said Cervinia, a popular resort close to the Swiss border, has had a high number of weekend visitors since reopening on 16 October, while hotels are seeing strong demand for the coming months. “We’re seeing decisively high numbers for the start of the season, which gives us hope,” he added.

The ski season is a huge financial resource for Italy and many villages across the mountainous northern and central regions [depend on it for survival](#). The economic cost to the sector and affiliated businesses of the shutdown last year was estimated by Coldiretti, the farmers’ association, at €10bn (£8.6bn).

“In a standard year we would make €28m. In 2020 we made €2.5m, and that was only from tourism during the summer period,” said Tovagliari.

Rubbing salt into the wound, snowfall across Italy’s ski resorts last year was bountiful. “The snow was brilliant. We had a beautiful winter, but few

people could enjoy it,” said Rossi.

Cervinia, at an altitude of 2,050 metres, is so far operating on a mix of natural and artificial snow, while resorts in Bardonecchia are stocking up on the artificial variety just in case.

Ski resorts in Piedmont’s Lanzo valley, which sit at an altitude of between 1,300 metres and 1,900 metres, are yet to see any snow. Livio Barello, president of the consortium of tourism operators in the area, hopes that will change as resorts across the valley prepare to open in early December, especially as there has been a boom in bookings over the Christmas period.

“We’ll needs years to recuperate the economic losses from the last couple of seasons, but the signs are very positive,” said Barello.

Barello works at Rifugio Lunella, a mountain hut in Viù, a town of about 1,000 inhabitants. Businesses benefited from a Piedmont region-wide holiday voucher scheme that offered visitors three nights for the price of one, an initiative that brought in a significant number of people in the summer and has supported some of the bookings this winter. “Everything revolves around tourism, it’s the soul of the economy,” said Barello.

When the ski season was cancelled last year, Gianni Poncet, the mayor of Sestriere, feared the village of just over 900 inhabitants in the Susa valley would turn into a ghost town. The resort has 217 miles (350km) of slopes, and before the pandemic the population would swell to 20,000 a day during the ski period.

Today, Poncet is feeling much more upbeat. “The atmosphere is much better this year, thank God,” he said. “We’re working hard to make sure everything goes well and have a plan to reopen safely. The Covid rules are still there, but these must be respected so that the season can properly start.”

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[OpinionCop26](#)

It's a fairytale that world governments will fix our climate crisis. It's up to us

[Bill McKibben](#)



‘The planet is out of its comfort zone; we had best be even further out of ours.’ Photograph: Jane Barlow/PA

Fri 12 Nov 2021 23.00 EST

It was inspiring to watch activists – especially young people and those from the global south – as this Glasgow Cop limped towards its mushy end. They were on top of every twist in the text, and they won significant concessions from the big polluting countries. At the time of writing, it looks as if the [phasing out of coal](#) and subsidies for fossil fuels will be mentioned in a Cop document for the first time, and that there will be more money for nations of the global south to “adapt” to the climate crisis. The activists’ anger echoed through the halls, and was heard in whatever parts of the world were

listening. To the extent that this Cop worked at all, it's a tribute to their perseverance and creativity.

But was this a sea change in the way we deal with the global climate crisis? No –Glasgow moves us down the track a little and boxes in national governments a little more, but it has changed not nearly enough. After 26 iterations, the truth about these Cops is pretty clear: the results are largely determined before they even begin. Yes, there's an endless succession of concerts, marches, seminars, negotiating sessions, speeches, ultimatums, declarations, photo-ops; and yes, everyone works hard to build a sense of drama (the media especially). But history would suggest that the parties rarely go beyond what they'd intended to do before they arrived.

This is not, I think, a cynical take; rather, it's always seemed to me that the best way to understand the process of the annual Cops – especially the big ones like Copenhagen or Paris or Glasgow – is to view them as scoreboards rather than contests. They reflect how much of an effect civil society has managed to have over the nations engaged in the negotiations, and the strength of civil society relative to the power of the fossil fuel industry and its friends in the financial community.

Copenhagen failed because there was too little movement building in the years preceding it, allowing a leader like Barack Obama to go home empty-handed and pay no political price. The global climate movement remedied that deficiency before Paris: many governments had no choice but to reach some kind of credible deal and hence a workable framework emerged, albeit without the actual pledges to make it capable of the task. Glasgow was supposed to be the place where countries lived up to the resolutions they'd proudly announced in France, and the decidedly mixed results reflect, at least in part, the difficulties activists have faced over the last few years.

September 2019 may have been the high point to date in climate organising. [Millions upon millions of mostly young people](#) took to the streets around the world as the school strike movement opened hearts and minds on every continent. Vanessa Nakate, Xiye Bastida, Greta Thunberg, Luisa Neuberger, Alexandria Villaseñor, Jerome Foster and an almost endless list of very young climate leaders captured imaginations like no one before. Together

they formed a wave that seemed as if it would continue cresting. But then came Covid-19 – and it turned out that while it's possible to do good organising on Zoom, it's not easy. In any event, the world faced a different crisis for a while, one that understandably took up the most energy. The pandemic illustrated certain useful principles for the climate fight (pay attention to science, flatten curves early). On balance, though, it focused attention elsewhere.

Even before Covid, the landscape for activists had begun to shrink. The rise of illiberal governments around the world – Trump's America, but also Xi's China (more restrictive even than its predecessors were on civil society), Bolsonaro's Brazil, Erdogan's Turkey, Putin's Russia. Much of the world is largely off limits to activism, especially the global kind exemplified by the climate movement. (The leader of the youth climate movement in India, for instance, spent several weeks behind bars; now she's awaiting trial, and the police [wouldn't permit](#) her travel to Glasgow.)

Most of the world's biggest countries are now beyond the reach of protest, and to a large degree unresponsive even to international pressure. China issued a joint statement with the US [vaguely pledging future action](#), but it also [made clear](#) that it didn't look forward to the annual revisions of its climate targets that activists – and scientists – have demanded. And no one really has an idea how to counter this, any more than they know how to counter the fact that American polling finds Republican voters [even more resistant](#) to the reality of climate change than they were a few years ago. Since there's a very good chance that Republicans will control Congress by the time of next year's Cop in Egypt, it's hard to see what leverage there will be to move the process forward.

But still. As vaccines spread, activism is spreading again too: the marches in Glasgow were as spirited as any I have ever seen, and Thunberg – with her superb gift for saying and doing the right thing at the right time – helped everyone understand the meaning of Glasgow with her “blah, blah, blah” framing. Yes, the other side is also better at its game: greenwashing has become steadily more complex, and taking apart claims like “net zero by 2050” has become a full-time occupation. But since these are lies, they will look steadily more shabby, exposed by each flood and hurricane.

My guess is that movements will adapt to the blockages in the Cop process, and powerfully. I think there's going to be ever more attention on the financial industry, in part because it's crucial to the fossil fuel machine, in part because it's located in places like New York and London, where protest of all kinds can still be carried out. And as Covid recedes, that rejuvenated activism will combine with the continuing horror of the climate crisis to produce more pressure for change. It had better – Glasgow's finish makes clear that when activists aren't able to push as hard as we need, inertia and vested interest remain powerful forces. The idea that the world's governments will simply do what needs to be done is just a fairytale.

In that sense, the Cop tells us not just what we've done in the past few years, but what we have to do in the ones ahead. The planet is out of its comfort zone; we had best be even further out of ours.

- Bill McKibben is the Schumann distinguished scholar at Middlebury College, Vermont, and leader of the climate campaign group [350.org](https://www.350.org)
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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/nov/12/its-a-fairytale-that-world-governments-will-fix-our-climate-crisis-its-up-to-us>

[Opinion](#)[Politics](#)

Labour will stop the UK being used as a haven for illicit money. Here's how

[Pat McFadden](#)



Bank of England and financial district in London. ‘The size of the UK’s financial services industry gives us both a special responsibility and an opportunity.’ Photograph: Thomas Krych/Sopa Images/Rex/Shutterstock

Sat 13 Nov 2021 02.00 EST

In the wake of the [Owen Paterson affair](#), Boris Johnson hopes you will conclude that all politicians are the same, that they are all self-serving knaves and that all the fuss over lobbying is just another short-term political storm. That way, no scandal matters. That way, anything goes. That way, his own lifelong disregard for the norms of responsibility has no consequences. That way, shame doesn’t exist.

The [U-turn performed by ministers](#) over Paterson does not come from the heart. There is no real contrition here. Rather it was an entirely tactical response to what should have been a foreseeable public backlash against what the government was doing – ripping up the parliamentary standards process to save an MP found guilty of multiple breaches of the lobbying rules to push the interests of the companies paying him, one of which [was awarded £600m of government contracts](#) with no competitive tendering process whatsoever.

While Tory MPs who followed the prime minister's instructions on this issue are left wondering why they ever trusted Johnson, there is a bigger question in play. That is how to ensure public standards in the UK remain high, that the country does not become a convenient home for more illicit finance or follow the dangerous path of tearing down every institution in sight because it attracts the ire of the faction in charge.

It is now more than a month since the Guardian's publication of the [Pandora papers](#) – an enormous cache of documents revealing the secretive purchases of UK assets, widespread use of shell companies to cover tracks and the sources of wealth of some of those named who have given millions of pounds to the Conservative party.

After the publication of those papers, Labour is calling for four things.

First, the bringing forward of the [registration of overseas entities bill](#). This legislation is aimed at showing the true nature of ownership of property and other assets in the UK. It has been promised by the government for almost four years and would enjoy cross-party support, but still it will not bring it forward.

Labour is today calling for the government to stop this prevarication, and to commit to bringing forward this legislation by 10 December 2021 – the fourth anniversary of the [UK anti-corruption strategy](#), which in 2017 committed to bringing a draft bill in that session of parliament for the establishment of a public register of beneficial ownership of overseas legal entities.

Second, [reform of Companies House](#) must be brought forward. The use of shell companies lies at the heart of the secrecy outlined in the Pandora papers. There is no good reason for ownership to be hidden behind layer after layer of shell companies whose only purpose is to obscure the facts from public view. Companies House must be empowered to become a vigilant guardian of propriety, not be left as a passive library of data.

Third, the government must act on the recommendations made in the [intelligence and security committee's Russia report](#) of last year. This report described London as a “laundromat” for illicit finance, and called for action to deal with shortcomings in the [unexplained wealth order](#) regime and for a register of members of the Lords or Commons who serve on the boards of overseas companies. The response of the government to these recommendations has been to hope they go away.

And fourth, we must ensure that the [elections bill](#) currently going through parliament requires political donations to be open and transparent, and to come from money generated in a legitimate fashion.

To reinforce all this, Labour has also announced the formation of an illicit finance taskforce with the aim of making the UK the most difficult place possible to launder the proceeds of looting and kleptocracy.

This is necessary because the use of the UK as a place to store or wash illicit money is not just an issue of financial regulation or tax revenue – it is a national security issue and should be recognised as such.

If the prime minister doesn't urgently bring forward the four measures Labour has set out today, he may as well be giving yet another green light to tax avoidance.

The size of the UK's financial services industry gives us both a special responsibility and an opportunity. The responsibility is to show that we are determined the UK will not be a welcome financial home to kleptocrats. And the opportunity is to set standards that will set an example elsewhere in the world.

Underlying all of these is something bigger – a rejection of the dismal idea that politics is simply a gravy train for the self-interested.

This recent lobbying scandal was certainly not the first involving money and politics, and it is unlikely to be the last. But what makes it stand out is the response of the government of the day, which was not to try to stop such things happening, but to rip up the system that declared they were wrong. The country deserves better than that.

- Pat McFadden MP is shadow economic secretary to the Treasury
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Opinion**Boris Johnson**

Boris Johnson's betrayal of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe shows us who he really is

[Jonathan Freedland](#)





Richard Ratcliffe outside the Foreign Office in London on the 19th day of his hunger strike. Photograph: Guy Bell/Rex/Shutterstock

Fri 12 Nov 2021 10.59 EST

Boris Johnson should look Richard Ratcliffe in the eye. If he did, he would catch a reflection of himself that might prove painful but illuminating. For contained in his handling, and fateful mishandling, of the case of Richard's wife, [Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe](#), is almost every aspect of the Johnson modus operandi. It is a parable of the prime minister's approach to politics – and to other human beings.

Ratcliffe is in the last stages of a [hunger strike](#) that has seen him camped outside the Foreign Office for 20 days and nights, weak, dizzy and shivering from cold. His wife has been detained in Iran since April 2016, and he wants her back home. There are other UK nationals held in Iran, including Anoosheh Ashoori and Morad Tahbaz, but it's Zaghari-Ratcliffe's case that implicates Johnson specifically – and says so much about him.

Start with his most infamous involvement, four years ago this month, when as foreign secretary Johnson told a Commons committee that Zaghari-Ratcliffe was "[simply teaching people journalism](#)", apparently oblivious to her insistence that she had been in Iran on holiday. Three days later,

Zaghari-Ratcliffe was hauled before an unscheduled court hearing in Iran, where Johnson's words were cited as proof that she had engaged in "propaganda against the regime".

In that act alone, you can see the essence of Johnsonism: carelessness, in both senses of the word. Most obvious is the slapdash failure to master his brief, to pay attention to detail. But most egregious is the lack of human care, the cavalier disregard for the impact his actions would have on others. That casualness, that lack of empathy, was a warning to his fellow Tory MPs, one they chose to ignore when they made Johnson their leader less than two years later.

Had they paid attention, they could have anticipated that this would be a man who would turn up at the UN or his own climate conference with nothing more than a few warmed-up jokes and vague exhortations, rather than a willingness to put in the hard, detailed work such diplomacy demands if it is to make a breakthrough. Nor would they have been surprised that he would respond to calls for a Covid lockdown by shouting to his advisers that they should "let the bodies pile high in their thousands". Careless and without care: the clues were already there.

But the Commons gaffe was not the worst of it. Ratcliffe believes that it was the move that followed a few days later, as Johnson sought to put out the fire he had started, that cost his wife most dearly. Johnson briefed friendly papers that Britain would repay the £400m it owed Iran for an unfulfilled 1970s arms deal, a move he clearly tied to Zaghari-Ratcliffe's release. According to Ratcliffe, setting that price for Nazanin and not meeting it is "why she is still held to this day".

Again, that one act contains multitudes. Johnson let people believe he was going to pay off the debt to Iran because he needed to get out of a hole, and that's how he always is – telling people what they want to hear, issuing promises he won't keep. In 2018, he assured Unionists that there would be no border down the Irish Sea; a year later he'd made a deal that would put a border down the Irish Sea. He promised "frictionless trade" after Brexit, only eventually to have a colleague admit that there would, after all, be the friction of border checks. Whether it's £350m on the side of a bus, 40 new

hospitals or a continued [0.7%](#) on aid, a nice number thrown out by Boris Johnson should always prompt a swift counting of spoons. Richard Ratcliffe is one of many to have learned that lesson the hard way.

So little in Johnson's method has changed. Ratcliffe recalls how, straight after the then foreign secretary had made his calamitous remarks four years ago, he "didn't apologise, but sent his mates out on the airwaves to defend him and to muddy the waters". That could be a description of last week, when the prime minister dispatched cabinet underlings to [embarrass themselves](#) over the Owen Paterson affair. And note how, rather than devising a diplomatic channel or strategy that might reach Tehran and actually get Zaghami-Ratcliffe out, Johnson's priority was squaring the Daily Telegraph. That remains the default even now, whether it's the Northern Ireland protocol, the pandemic or the gravest issues of geopolitics: what matters most is keeping the base on side.

All of this would be clear to Johnson if he had wandered out of Downing Street and come face to face with Richard Ratcliffe. But naturally he didn't do that, even as a simple gesture of compassion. He wouldn't do it, because that would have meant confronting something awkward and taking responsibility for it. That's not Johnson's style, as we saw again this week when he [ducked the emergency Commons debate](#) on the Tories' rising sleaze scandal, sending out one of his human sponges to absorb the mess instead.

He lacks the empathy to look properly chastened by the plight of Zaghami-Ratcliffe. Indeed, he seems unable to feel any shame at all. Any man who has to be [told three times](#) to wear a mask in a hospital obviously lacks that capacity. Even so, Johnson is clearly too frightened to face Ratcliffe, a man frail and exhausted with hunger. Perhaps he knows that in the story of that man and his imprisoned wife all his weaknesses are laid bare – and he can't bear to look.

- Jonathan Freedland is a Guardian columnist
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Digested week
Politics

Digested week: £3m to call yourself a lord looks good value for the mega-rich

[John Crace](#)



The House of Lords: worth tens of millions? Photograph: Kirsty Wigglesworth/AFP/Getty Images

Fri 12 Nov 2021 08.12 EST

Monday

If I were to stumble on a £3m windfall, I wouldn't be making a donation to the Tory party. I'd get each of the kids somewhere to live, buy a couple of Jennifer Lee pots along with first editions of Brighton Rock and The Great Gatsby, treat myself to a couple of opera away weekends somewhere in mainland Europe, and put the rest aside for a rainy day. But for the mega-rich, [donating to the Conservative party](#) – or [philanthropy](#), as George Eustice, the environment secretary, put it – seems quite a cheap way of sharp-elbowing your way into positions of power. The Sunday Times reported that a £3m donation and a token stint as party treasurer was enough to guarantee a seat in the House of Lords. Which actually seems extraordinarily good value at the price. If you've got more than £100m in the bank – and the Conservatives know plenty who have – then you'd barely notice £3m sliding out of your account. And for that you get to call yourself Lord and pick up all sorts of other perks that come with the title. It's time the Tories showed the upper house some proper respect and moved the entry bar into the tens of millions.

Tuesday

Most of us like to think we have a fairly functional inbuilt bullshit detector. That we can tell when people are talking rubbish. But a [new study](#) by Canadian and Israeli academics, published on the [PsyArXiv](#) website, suggests we may be more gullible than we thought. Much of our willingness to attribute meaning to something that sounds as if it is nonsense depends on who we think said it. Bill Gates and Michelle Obama we take seriously. Kim Kardashian and Richard Nixon not so much. Take the idea that “we live not, in reality, on the summit of a solid earth but at the bottom of an ocean of air”. If you were told that this came from a Hallmark inspirational greetings card, you'd probably have been inclined to dismiss it immediately. But if you were told it was actually said by the philosopher

and mathematician Thales of Miletus, one of the Seven Sages of Greece, you'd have given it the benefit of the doubt. You might even have found it meaningful, despite it not making much sense. It turns out that “pseudo-profound bullshit” studies – the willingness to attribute truthfulness to nonsense – are a fast-growing area in psychology: PsyArXiv has at least six other papers devoted to the subject published this year. What no one seems to have yet been able to determine is whether those who are regular bullshitters are better able to detect it in others. Nor does it seem clear whether bullshitters are always aware they are talking bullshit: it is genuinely possible that Donald Trump and Boris Johnson believe most of what they say. It also seems likely that your receptivity to bullshit rather depends on how desperate you are to believe it. When I was in the mental hospital this summer, some of the therapists used new age language that my normal cynical self would have rejected. But when I was on my knees I didn't question it. Maybe I'm just shallow.



Boris: ‘What are the rules about masks again?’ Photograph: Peter Summers/AP

Wednesday

Our youngest is 26 today. Happy birthday, Robbie. I couldn't be more proud of the person he has become, as he's far more caring and sorted than I

was at his age and is the type of young man I would have liked to have been. But his birthday does make me feel ancient. It's not just that the years seem to be slipping by faster and faster – though I can still vividly remember bringing him home from hospital after he was born, wondering if I was going to be a good enough dad to him and his sister: it's also that me having adult children feels absurd. A category error. I don't feel ready to be this old. Then, maybe I should take lessons in the ageing process from my 97-year-old mother. When I visited her in the care home last weekend she informed me that she didn't think she was going to make old bones. This from a woman who survived being machine-gunned by a Messerschmitt – she tells me she can still hear the sound of the bullets hitting the road beside her – as she was running for shelter during an air raid on Portsmouth where she was serving as a Wren in the war. And who only last year managed to contract the mildest form of Covid, when many others of her age were not so lucky. She was more upset at being placed in self-isolation, with the carers bringing her food in full PPE, than she was by her symptoms of a slight fever and cough. Even so, she didn't look as if she entirely believed me when I told her she already had made old bones. I just have to hope I have her genes rather than my father's. He died of heart failure when he was 77.

Thursday

Parliament is on a two-day recess and no one I've asked has any idea why. After all, it was only about a month ago that the Commons was on recess for a week, so it can't be because MPs need some more time off. The only logical explanation is that some MPs have fallen behind on their [second jobs](#) and need a few days to catch up. Much of the investigation into MPs' outside earnings has focused on the jaw-dropping £1m that [Geoffrey Cox](#) has raked in over the course of the last year, but two other Tories have also caught my eye. The first is Chris "Failing" Grayling, who makes an extra £100k a year as a strategic adviser to Hutchison Ports. This has to be a joke. What sea-faring operation would hire a former transport minister who awarded a £13m contract to a ferry company that was planning to operate out of a port that was not designed to take any ferries? Even if it had any, which it didn't. The other MP to come to my attention is Ben Bradley, who the register of interests says works 30 hours a week as leader of

Nottinghamshire county council and 30 hours a week as a member of the executive board of East Midlands Councils. That's five 12-hour days working outside parliament. Presumably he saves weekends for his constituency work. The register also says he earns £600 a year from East Midlands Councils, so it's safe to assume he's not in it for the money. And that he's never heard of the national living wage. The cabinet had been due to spend one of their two days off on a special management away day at Chequers – I've always wanted to go on one of these – but had second thoughts after no one wanted to be shot in the back by Boris during the afternoon paintballing session. Instead, they were holding a cabinet meeting in London where they were to discuss levelling up. Perhaps they could get some input from Cox via Zoom from Mauritius.



AOC: ‘Are you sure you can’t run a car off this stuff?’ Photograph: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez/Reuters

Friday

Cop26 is due to end today but Boris Johnson’s press conference earlier in the week, when he [returned to Glasgow](#) for a couple of hours, was remarkable for his declaration that the UK was “[not remotely a corrupt country](#)”. Hardly the most reassuring of statements as he urged world leaders to make one last effort to reach a meaningful climate agreement,

since it had all the conviction of someone trying to persuade his wife he wasn't having an affair. Practice doesn't make perfect in Boris's case, because since then the media's focus has been on all the ways Britain is a corrupt country. Paid lobbying, trying to undermine the standards commissioner, cash for honours, signing the Northern Ireland protocol in bad faith and the prime minister's financing of the redecoration of his Downing Street flat and accepting a free holiday from someone he had put in the Lords naturally all took centre stage, but the UK's refusal to pay back £400m to Iran – Richard Ratcliffe is now on the 20th day of his hunger strike as part of his heroic struggle to get his wife, Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, released from Iran (don't forget it was Boris Johnson's failure to read his brief that was partially responsible for her remaining in prison) – could be added to the charge sheet. The debt dates back to the 1970s when the UK refused to deliver the remaining tanks it had promised and for which it had already been paid when Iran became a theocracy. Clearly the ethical thing to have done would have been just to return the unspent money. After all, that's what would have been expected of any legitimate commercial business. Instead the UK has been fighting and losing court cases not to pay the £400m. When Ratcliffe brought up the subject in a recent meeting with the Foreign Office, he said the junior minister James Cleverly just clammed up. The Iranians report that our excuse is sanctions prevent us repaying the dosh, even though the central bank of Iran is not a sanctioned body. If the problem is that we just don't have the cash, then maybe the government could just flog off another 150 peerages. That should cover it.

Digested week, digested: Where's Geoffrey?

- *A Farewell to Calm* by John Crace (Guardian Faber, £9.99). To support the Guardian and Observer, order your copy at guardianbookshop.com. Delivery charges may apply.

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2021.11.13 - Around the world

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- Glen de Vries Tech mogul who travelled to space with William Shatner killed in plane crash
- Hong Kong Authorities deny visa to Economist journalist in latest media blow
- Duchess of Sussex Meghan chose to write letter to father to protect Prince Harry, texts reveal
- Sound the alarm Bees ‘scream’ when murder hornets attack, study finds

Military

Team of 10 UK soldiers sent to Poland to assist on Belarus border



Migrants in a camp on the Belarusian-Polish border in the Grodno region. British soldiers are being sent to help provide engineering support.
Photograph: Ramil Nasibulin/Belta/AFP/Getty Images

[Dan Sabbagh](#) in London and [Julian Borger](#) in Washington

Fri 12 Nov 2021 12.27 EST

Britain has sent a team of about 10 soldiers to Poland to help Warsaw strengthen its border with [Belarus](#), where groups of migrants have been stranded attempting to cross into the EU.

The troops arrived on Thursday and are expected to spend a few days in the country, including visiting the border at the request of the Polish government to work out if they can repair or toughen the fencing.

The [Ministry of Defence](#) said the mission was focused only on “engineering support to address the ongoing situation at the Belarus border”, and insiders said there was no additional plan for British troops to police the border.

Whitehall sources said was appropriate to consider helping [Poland](#) given that “it is Belarus that is pushing migrants towards the border”. Any final decision to help will have to be signed off by the defence secretary, Ben Wallace.

Hundreds of people are stranded in camp on the Belarus-Poland border in near-freezing temperatures, having been allowed to fly from Iraq, Turkey, and elsewhere in the Middle East in a growing humanitarian crisis.

[Poland](#) has established a state of emergency in the border region enforced by 20,000 border police is refusing to allow them in. But while Warsaw has asked for British help, it has refused help from the EU’s Frontex border management agency.

It is not clear why Poland feels it needs British engineering assistance, but the two countries have become close as each is engaged in disputes with the EU.

At the end of October, Boris Johnson spoke to the Polish prime minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, about his concerns over the influence of the European court of justice over the Northern Ireland protocol.

Poland is embroiled in a separate row with the EU over the primacy of the ECJ after its constitutional court ruled that Polish law supersedes EU law where there is a conflict between the two.

Britain had been planning to announce the mission next week in conjunction with Warsaw, but news of the deployment leaked. It was then confirmed on Twitter by the Polish defence minister, Mariusz Błaszczyk, who said the aim was “to cooperate in strengthening the [border] fence”.

The MoD said: “The UK and Poland have a long history of friendship and are [Nato](#) allies. A small team of UK armed forces personnel have deployed following an agreement with the Polish government to explore how we can

provide engineering support to address the ongoing situation at the Belarus border.”

Human rights groups criticised the move, arguing that the UK should concentrate on alleviating the humanitarian crisis. Steve Valdez-Symonds, Amnesty International UK’s refugee and migrant rights director, said: “Sending British soldiers to erect more border fences rather than address the needs of people dying at those borders shows a shocking disregard for both human life and the right of people to seek asylum.”

Poland has accused [Russia](#) of behind the migrant crisis by encouraging Belarus to send people to the border. This week Morawiecki said the actions of Belarus, which is subject to EU sanctions after the dispute re-election of its leader Alexander Lukashenko, “has its mastermind in Moscow”.

There have been other tensions in the east, with the US sharing intelligence with European allies about Russia’s military buildup along the Ukrainian border. Despite the military deployment, the US believes that Vladimir Putin has not as yet made a decision to invade. However, that assessment – that Putin is using the buildup of troops primarily to put pressure on the government in Kyiv – is not unanimously shared, and some US agencies are more concerned than others about the imminence of another Russian incursion, according to sources familiar with the discussions.

“There are some parts of the administration who are less concerned and see it as more of the same, Moscow destabilising Ukraine by moving troops around, and others who are very worried, who see it as something different from before,” said a European official.

The Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelensky, has been [warning for months](#) about the presence of up to 100,000 Russian troops in the border region. Moscow withdrew some troops after exercises in April but then sent more soldiers back after the summer for more war games in September.

This time it left the additional forces in place. This month Ukraine’s defence ministry estimated the Russian force at 90,000, and commercial satellite imagery shows that Russian tank and artillery units have moved close to the border over the past month.

The issue was high on the agenda of a meeting between US undersecretary of state Victoria Nuland and the political director of the UK Foreign Office, Tim Barrow, in Washington this week.

The CIA chief, William Burns, [flew to Moscow](#), last week to warn Russian security officials against any further escalation, and officials said Moscow had been marginally more cooperative since that visit.

Ukraine's foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba visited Washington this week to brief the Biden administration on the situation, and signed a new bilateral charter on strategic partnership with US secretary of state, Tony Blinken, on Wednesday.

Blinken said the charter “affirms the United States’ unwavering commitment to Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity”. He said: “We’re concerned by reports of unusual Russian military activity near Ukraine. We’re monitoring the region very closely, as we always do, we’ll continue to consult closely as well with allies and partners on this issue.”

Kuleba told ABC News: “We are extremely worried, but listen – when you live next to Russia for seven years in an armed conflict, you kind of learn to be worried. You get used to it.”

At a [summit between Zelensky and Joe Biden](#) in September, the US promised to step up cyber and intelligence support to Kyiv.

Russia covertly sent troops and military hardware across the border in 2014 in support of Russian separatists, and annexed the Crimean peninsula.

The Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov rejected fears of a second invasion. “Such headlines do nothing more than pointlessly and groundlessly fuel tensions. Russia does not pose a threat to anyone,” Peskov said. “We have repeatedly said that the movement of our armed forces on our territory should not be a cause for concern.”

The Russian military accused the US of provocative manoeuvres in the Black Sea, pointing to overflights by Nato reconnaissance aircraft and patrols by US warships. “We regard the aggressive US military activity in

the Black Sea region as a threat to regional security and strategic stability,” the military said in a statement.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/nov/12/british-troops-sent-to-poland-to-assist-with-belarus-border-situation>

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New Jersey

Tech mogul who joined William Shatner in space on Blue Origin dies in air crash



Glen de Vries, who traveled to space with William Shatner aboard Blue Origin's New Shepard rocket, was killed in a plane crash Thursday. Photograph: Patrick T Fallon/AFP/Getty Images

Guardian staff and agencies

Fri 12 Nov 2021 16.07 EST

A wealthy tech mogul who traveled to space with [William Shatner](#) last month was killed along with another person when a small plane crashed in northern New Jersey, according to state police.

Glen de Vries, 49, of New York City, and Thomas Fischer, 54, of Hopatcong, [New Jersey](#), were aboard a single-engine Cessna 172 that went down Thursday in a wooded area of Hampton Township.

De Vries founded Medidata Solutions, a tech company, and was a trustee at Carnegie Mellon University. He traveled on 13 October aboard Blue Origin's New Shepard spacecraft, spending more than 10 minutes in space after launching along with Shatner and others.



Blue Origin's New Shepard space passengers from left, Glen de Vries, Audrey Powers, William Shatner, and Chris Boshuizen. Photograph: AP

In a statement, Blue Origin said: “We are devastated to hear of the sudden passing of Glen de Vries. He brought so much life and energy to the entire Blue Origin team and to his fellow crew mates. His passion for aviation, his charitable work, and his dedication to his craft will long be revered and admired.”

Fischer owned Fischer Aviation, a family-run flight school, and was its head instructor, according to public reports.

The National Transportation Safety Board is investigating the crash.

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Hong Kong

Hong Kong denies visa to Economist journalist in latest media blow



The Foreign Correspondents' Club of Hong Kong last year reported 'highly unusual' delays in visa approval for multiple media outlets. Photograph: Anthony Wallace/AFP/Getty Images

Guardian staff with agencies

Sat 13 Nov 2021 02.16 EST

Hong Kong has refused to renew the visa of an Australian correspondent from the Economist, the newspaper's chief editor said, amid a crackdown on free speech and dissent in the city.

Sue-lin Wong is one of several foreign journalists working in Hong Kong to be forced out in recent years.

Press freedoms in the once-outspoken city have been reined in as China remoulds Hong Kong, following huge democracy protests in 2019 and Beijing's imposition of a strict national security law last year.

Wong, who is not currently in Hong Kong, was refused permission to return to work in the city, the paper's editor, Zanny Minton Beddoes, said in a statement.

"We regret their decision, which was given without explanation," she said.

"We urge the government of Hong Kong to maintain access for the foreign press, which is vital to the territory's standing as an international city," she added.

The Hong Kong government and immigration department did not immediately respond to requests from Reuters for comment.

Since Beijing imposed a national security law on Hong Kong last year, democracy activists, newspaper editors and journalists have been arrested. Critics of the legislation say it is being used to crush dissent in the city – claims the Hong Kong and Beijing authorities reject.

Fears over freedom of the press in the former British colony are increasing, months after the city's most vocal pro-democracy newspaper, [Apple Daily](#), [was forced to shut](#) after its tycoon owner, [Jimmy Lai](#), and other staff were arrested under the national security law.

In 2018, the visa of the Financial Times' Asia editor, Victor Mallet, was not renewed by Hong Kong after he moderated a speech by a pro-independence activist at an event hosted by the Foreign Correspondents' Club in the city. The move alarmed some diplomats and business groups in Hong Kong.

The Foreign Correspondents' Club of Hong Kong last year reported "highly unusual" delays in visa approval for multiple media outlets.

On the authoritarian Chinese mainland, where the press is heavily controlled and censored, foreign journalists must apply for specific visas

and face routine harassment. Reporters only need a regular business visa to work in Hong Kong, however.

As of April, 628 foreign employees working for overseas media held work visas in Hong Kong, according to the Chinese foreign ministry.

Hong Kong is guaranteed freedom of speech and the press under article 27 of the Basic Law, the mini-constitution agreed by China when it took back control of Hong Kong in 1997.

Hong Kong's leader, Carrie Lam, has denied the security legislation would curtail media freedom, saying that "freedom of expression, freedom of protest, freedom of journalism, will stay".

Reuters and Agence France-Presse contributed to this report.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/13/hong-kong-denies-visa-to-economist-journalist-in-latest-media-blow>

Meghan, the Duchess of Sussex

Meghan chose to write letter to father to protect Prince Harry, texts reveal



Harry and Meghan. The Duchess of Sussex believed a letter was better than an email or text as it ‘does not open the door for a conversation’. Photograph: Caitlin Ochs/Reuters

Caroline Davies

Fri 12 Nov 2021 13.11 EST

The Duchess of Sussex chose to write a letter to her estranged father, Thomas Markle, to protect [Prince Harry](#) from “constant berating” from the royal family to do something to stop him talking to the media, texts have revealed.

Meghan also believed a letter was better than an email or text as it “does not open the door for a conversation”.

Texts between Meghan and her then communications chief, Jason Knauf, were released by the court of appeal after being submitted by Knauf in evidence during [an appeal by Associated Newspapers Ltd](#) (ANL) against a high court ruling that publication of extracts from the letter by the Mail on Sunday and Mail Online were unlawful.

In one, dated 22 August 2018, Meghan sent Knauf a draft of the letter she proposed to send to her father. “My thinking behind this is unlike a text or email it can’t be forwarded or cut and pasted to only share one small portion. It also does not open the door for a conversation.”

She added: “The catalyst for my doing this is seeing how much pain this is causing H. Even after a week with his dad and endlessly explaining the situation, his family seem to forget the context – and revert to, ‘can’t she just go and see him and make this stop?’ They fundamentally don’t understand, so at least by writing H will be able to say to his family … ‘she wrote him a letter and he’s still doing it’.

“By taking this form of action I protect my husband from this constant berating and, while unlikely, perhaps it will give my father a moment to pause.”

Meghan said she had drafted everything “with the understanding that it could be leaked” so was “meticulous” in word choice, including using the word “Daddy”, which, if it was leaked, would “pull at the heartstrings”.

Knauf texted back: “The draft letter is very strong – enough emotion to be authentic, but all in resigned sadness rather than anger.” He suggested there were a “few tweaks” to the order of events that “could be a bit stronger – I think it’s slightly even worse than you remember”.

He added: “The only thing I think is essential to address in some way is the ‘heart attack’. That is his best opening for criticism and sympathy.

“The truth is you tried desperately to find out about the medical treatment he said he was receiving and he stopped communicating with you. You begged him to accept help to drive him to the hospital, etc, and instead of

speaking to you to arrange this he stopped answering his phone and only spoke to [the celebrity news website] TMZ.”

He asked if she was OK after writing it. She replied: “Honestly Jason I feel fantastic. Cathartic and real and honest and factual.”

ANL has argued the case should go to trial, claiming the duchess forfeited any automatic right to privacy over the letter, alleging she collaborated in sharing details of her life with the authors of the Sussexes’ biography, *Finding Freedom*, which she denies.

Emails released by the court of appeal include details of Knauf’s planned meeting with the authors. On 10 December 2018, Knauf advised the duchess not to ask her friends to engage with the authors directly so they can say “hand on heart they had no access”. He added: “Of course if you still think you would like to have one or two people speak to them on your behalf we will arrange it.”

Knauf later emailed to say he spent “close to two hours” with the authors. “I took them through everything.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/nov/12/meghan-wrote-thomas-markle-letter-to-protect-prince-harry>.

Bees

Sound the alarm: bees ‘scream’ when murder hornets attack, study finds



The bees produce the sound by vibrating their wings or thorax, elevating their abdomens and exposing a gland to release a pheromone. Photograph: Marcio José Sánchez/AP

[Maya Yang](#)

Fri 12 Nov 2021 14.38 EST

A study has revealed a new defense mechanism used by bees when attacked by giant “murder” hornets: screaming.

When left unchecked, the giant Asian hornets can destroy a honeybee hive in hours, feeding on larvae and decapitating bees in what scientists call a “slaughter phase”. The hornets then feed severed body parts to their young.

The [study](#), published in the Royal Society Open Science journal this week, revealed that bees release a “rallying call for collective defence” against the hornets. The previously undiscovered signal, now known as an “anti-predator pipe, shares acoustic traits with alarm shrieks, fear screams and panic calls of primates, birds and meerkats,” according to the study.

Bees produce the sound by vibrating their wings or thorax, elevating their abdomens and exposing a gland to release a pheromone.

“It’s alarming to hear,” Heather Mattila, a co-author of the study, [told](#) Gizmodo. “It’s characterized by rapid bursts of high-pitched sounds that change unpredictably in frequency – they’re quite harsh and noisy.”

According to the study, signal rates increase seven- to eight-fold during a hornet attack. In addition to anti-predator pipes, bees resort to “fecal spotting” – a defense mechanism in which they collect animal feces and apply it to the entrance of their hives to deter the hornets.

Other measures include “balling”, where bees will form into a cluster and smother the hornet by vibrating their wing muscles. The vibration-fueled heat, which can reach up to [46C](#), coupled with the carbon dioxide produced by the bees, can kill a hornet in 30 minutes.

In recent months, giant hornets have increasingly [emerged](#) in the Pacific north-west region of the US. In September, the third giant hornet nest to be discovered in the country this year was found in Washington state. The hornets are an invasive species with nests that are very difficult to locate, as they tend to be in forested areas.

In addition to causing devastating harm to bee colonies, the giant hornet can harm humans, at times causing fatalities. One entomologist has described the feeling of being stung by a murder hornet as like “having hot tacks pushed into my flesh”. The hornets can also eject venom.

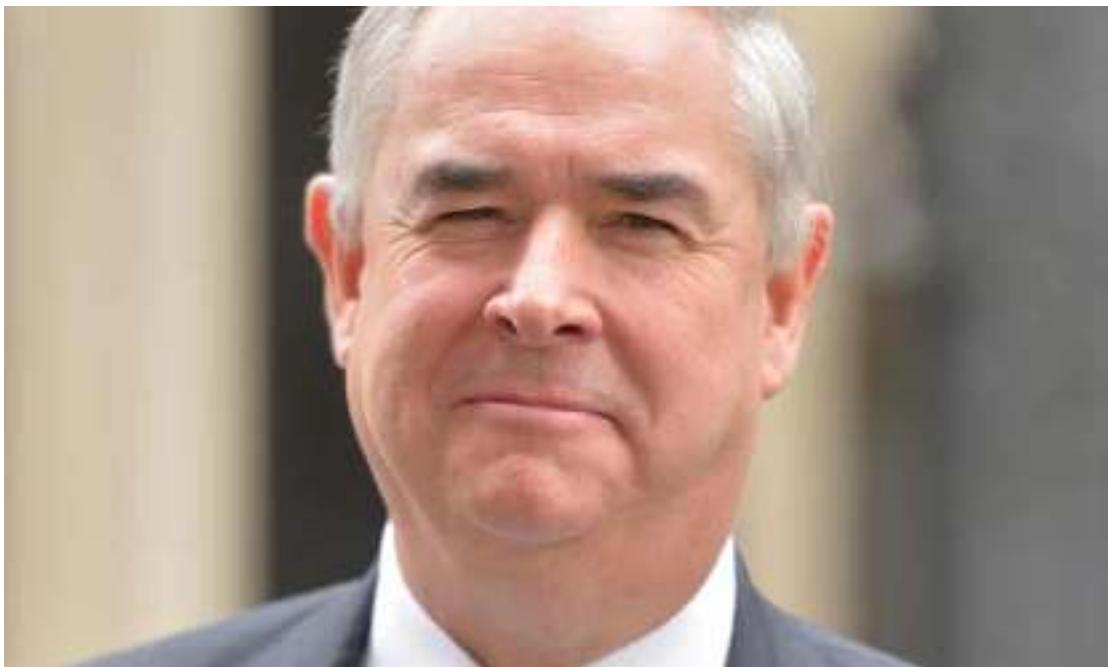
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Headlines tuesday 9 november 2021

- [Politics Raab defends Geoffrey Cox for working from Caribbean in lockdown](#)
- [Live Raab: it's up to voters to decide whether Geoffrey Cox's £1m outside earnings appropriate](#)
- [Lobbying At least a quarter of Tory MPs have second jobs, earning over £4m a year](#)
- [Standards PM trying to 'take down' watchdog – Starmer](#)

Dominic Raab

Raab defends Geoffrey Cox for working from Caribbean in lockdown



Raab said Geoffrey Cox (above) was legitimately working in the BVI as long as the job was properly declared. Photograph: Nick Ansell/PA

[Matthew Weaver](#)

Tue 9 Nov 2021 04.15 EST

The UK justice secretary, Dominic Raab, has defended the MP and former attorney general [Geoffrey Cox](#) for working for a month in the British Virgin Islands (BVI) during lockdown.

Earlier this year, Cox earned more than £150,000 in his second job as a lawyer advising the Caribbean tax haven in relation to [corruption charges brought by the Foreign Office](#).

Raab, who was foreign secretary at the time, said Cox was legitimately working as long as the job was properly declared.

Speaking to Times Radio, he said: “I’m not going to get dragged into what individual MPs do, but having the former attorney general – and he was hired by the government of the BVI – to advise them on how to correct and deal and address these allegations, is a legitimate thing to do as long as it’s properly declared.”

He added: “I was foreign secretary that commissioned a commission of inquiry [into the BVI] given the allegations of misgovernance and very serious ones, including criminal wrongdoing.”

Raab said it was important for parliamentarians, such as Cox, to have expert insights into the UK overseas territories such as the BVI.

He said: “It’s quite important that parliament, which is responsible residually for some areas of our relationship with the overseas territories, has got some knowledge of what’s going on in those territories … Actually being in touch and working with our overseas territory is quite important piece of the responsibilities in the UK and indeed our parliament.

The [Daily Mail reported that Cox](#) spent up to a month in the BVI working for the international law firm Withers. At the time, when he was working 4,000 miles away from his Devon constituency, Cox voted in the Commons by proxy.

The Mail quoted a senior Whitehall source claiming Cox had been “pocketing hundreds of thousands of pounds to help stop the exposure of corruption in a Caribbean paradise”.

Cox’s register of interests entry shows he is being paid £400,000 a year by Withers.

Asked by BBC Radio 4’s Today programme whether Cox was serving the needs of his Torridge and West Devon constituency by working the equivalent of 35 hours a week on his legal work, Raab said: “It’s for the

voters in any individual constituency to look at the record of their MP and decide whether they've got the right priorities.”

Raab also insisted that Boris Johnson followed hospital rules despite being [pictured on Monday without a mask](#) at a hospital in Hexham, Northumberland.

The prime minister was criticised for using the visit as an excuse to miss a Commons debate about standards following the government’s botched attempt to save Owen Paterson from suspension after he had been found guilty of paid advocacy.

Raab told Times Radio said: “He [Johnson] followed the clinical rules that were applied in the settings in the hospital and it absolutely right that he was up there, as part of our strategy to not just deal with Covid but get the NHS backlog down.”

He added: “In any clinical setting, you follow the rules that are applied there. I wasn’t there but my understanding is that that’s exactly what happened.”

Raab also repeated the government’s position that it was mistake to try to save Paterson by trying to overhaul the standards system.

He said: “I do think it’s been a mistake to conflate the individual case of an MP with the wider legitimate question which was debated by all members and all sides of the House of Commons yesterday about the due process and the question of an appeal.

“I think that was a mistake that we regret, but it is right to make sure we get a process which is both robust and sustainable.”

[Politics live with Andrew Sparrow](#)

[Politics](#)

No 10 implicitly criticises Geoffrey Cox; MPs to get new vote on Owen Paterson report – as it happened

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/live/2021/nov/09/geoffrey-cox-tory-mps-second-jobs-dominic-raab-boris-johnson-uk-politics-live-latest-updates>

Lobbying

At least a quarter of Tory MPs have second jobs, earning over £4m a year



Clockwise from top left: John Redwood, Laurence Robertson, Liam Fox and Chris Grayling. A ban on MPs having second jobs would lead to marked drop in their incomes. Composite: Getty/Rex/PA/Alamy

[Rowena Mason](#) Deputy political editor

Tue 9 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

More than a quarter of Tory MPs have second jobs with firms whose activities range from gambling to private healthcare, making more than £4m in extra earnings in a year, Guardian analysis has found.

The [register of MPs' interests](#) shows that more than 90 out of 360 Tories have extra jobs on top of their work in parliament, compared with three from Labour. They are overwhelmingly older and 86% are men. The highest earners were all former cabinet ministers.

The row over sleaze, including “egregious lobbying” by the veteran backbencher [Owen Paterson](#) on behalf of companies that paid him over £100,000 a year, has focused attention on moonlighting by MPs.

On Monday Steve Barclay, the Cabinet Office minister, rejected the idea of banning second jobs, saying it could stop some MPs getting experience of the outside world. They must understand, however, that “in performing their parliamentary duties they are expected to act in the public interest”, he said.

The highest earner is Andrew Mitchell, the MP for Sutton Coldfield, who made £182,600 for 34.5 days’ work in a variety of financial advisory roles, with firms including Investec and EY.

Geoffrey Cox, the former attorney general, is making around £1m a year as a barrister, while Chris Grayling, the former transport secretary, is earning £100,000 a year from Hutchison Ports Europe, the register shows.

John Redwood, a former Welsh secretary, is earning more than £230,000 working for an investment advisory company, Charles Stanley, and a private equity firm, while Alun Cairns, a former Welsh secretary, acts as adviser to a Wales-based global diagnostics company, BBI, with all his consultancy roles bringing in a total of £60,000.

Liam Fox, a former trade secretary, has a £10,000 contract with WorldPR, a Panama-based PR company for advice on business and international politics, while Julian Smith, the former chief whip, is making about £144,000 a year from advisory roles with marine, renewables and hydrogen firms.

Although ministers are not supposed to have second jobs, some have managed to hold on to them in currently unpaid capacities. [Jacob Rees-Mogg](#), the leader of the House of Commons, remains an unpaid partner in Somerset Capital Management LLP, an investment management firm. Alister Jack, the Scottish secretary, is also still an unpaid director of Atlantic Solway Holdings, an investment company in the sport fishing sector.

Two Tories have jobs linked to the gambling industry: Laurence Robertson, Tory MP for Tewkesbury, gets £24,000 a year to be a parliamentary adviser to the Betting and Gaming Council, while Philip Davies, the MP for Shipley, is paid £16,660 by GVC Holdings, owner of Coral and Ladbrokes, plus £12,000 a year by the National Pawnbroking Association.

The Guardian reported on Sunday that [more than 30 MPs](#) have jobs that could be considered direct political consultancy, which [could face a clampdown](#).

However, dozens more have lucrative board seats and advisory council jobs that are likely to involve giving political advice. Some are also earning money through personal service companies, an arrangement that can help lower their tax bills.

Paterson, the MP for North Shropshire, resigned following a furore over his lobbying rule-breaking and attempts by the prime minister to halt his 30-day suspension, which ended in a U-turn. MPs are banned from direct lobbying, but there are various loopholes, including being able to provide political advice to firms without carrying out advocacy themselves.

In contrast to the high number of Tories with second jobs, few opposition party MPs moonlight. Among Labour MPs, Rosena Allin-Khan earns extra income as a doctor, [Margaret Hodge](#) has a £20,000-a-year role at Royal Holloway University and Khalid Mahmood has a £25,000 advisory job at the Policy Exchange thinktank.

The analysis includes those with company directorships even if they are not directly salaried, but not those with unpaid roles at charities or thinktanks. It also did not count those who receive ad hoc payments for journalism, speaking at events, training, lectures or surveys – even though this is substantial additional income often earned as a result of an MP's parliamentary position.

It comes as research from Savanta ComRes found that almost half of UK adults oppose MPs being allowed to have a second job alongside their role in parliament, with just one in five supporting it.

Labour proposed banning second jobs for MPs at the last election, although Starmer has stopped slightly short of endorsing that position. But Richard Burgon, formerly the shadow justice secretary, is tabling a new private member's bill to parliament that would ban all second jobs, with limited exceptions for professional MPs such as nurses and doctors to carry on their work.

Burgon said MPs should not be “lining their pockets by moonlighting in other roles – and it is especially outrageous that this was happening during a public health crisis”.

“The job of being an MP is not only a great privilege, but it is also well paid, and it should be the full focus of anyone lucky enough to be elected as an MP. If people want to seek lucrative roles elsewhere, then no one is stopping them, but they should step down as MPs to do so,” he said. “My bill will put an end to this racket by banning MPs from having second jobs, except in limited exceptions, for example, where nurses need to work to maintain professional registrations or so a doctor can carry on serving our NHS.”

This article was amended on 9 November 2021. Geoffrey Cox is making around £1m a year as a barrister, not £1.6m as an earlier version said. This has been corrected, and as a result the overall figure given in the text for extra earnings in a year has also been revised to a total of “more than £4m”, rather than “about £5m” as previously stated. The headline has also been updated to reflect this change.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/nov/09/at-least-a-quarter-of-tory-mps-have-second-jobs-earning-5m-a-year>

Boris Johnson

Boris Johnson trying to ‘take down’ standards watchdog, Keir Starmer says



Boris Johnson was absent from parliament on Monday as he visited a hospital in Northumberland. Photograph: Peter Summers/AP

[Rowena Mason](#), [Aubrey Allegretti](#) and [Peter Walker](#)

Mon 8 Nov 2021 15.10 EST

Keir Starmer has accused [Boris Johnson](#) of trying to “take down” the standards watchdog for his personal interests as Downing Street made a new bid to stop the regulator investigating the controversy around his flat refurbishment.

The [Labour](#) leader said Johnson was leading the Conservative party “through the sewers and the stench lingers,” highlighting a pattern of behaviour where the government “goes after” those charged with enforcing the rules.

Days after Johnson was forced by a public and party backlash to abandon attempts to overhaul the standards watchdog, No 10 argued on Monday that the prime minister did not need to declare how much he was loaned by a Tory donor to make over his Downing Street flat.

The commissioner, Kathryn Stone, is set to rule within weeks on a potential investigation into whether Johnson properly declared the funding as an MP. She will decide after the Electoral Commission finishes its inquiry the Conservatives' role in helping to fund the £50,000-plus refurb.

But on Monday Johnson's spokesman said the matter was declared in the list of ministerial interests and said there was no need for the prime minister to have registered it on the list of MPs' interests as well – putting it outside the remit of the commissioner.

Asked if the prime minister believed Stone should be able to investigate the flat refurbishment, the spokesman said: "Obviously it's a matter for her on that. The interest, as you know, has been transparently declared by the prime minister following advice from Lord [Christopher] Geidt, the independent adviser.

"And the Commons rulebook is very clear that such ministerial code declarations do not need to be double-declared. And the flat was clearly a ministerial matter, as the PM only occupies it by virtue of his office."

A Downing Street source dismissed Starmer's accusation that the prime minister had tried to "take down" Stone, claiming it was "not true".

Labour has repeatedly called on Stone to investigate whether Johnson should have declared a loan from a Tory donor, David Brownlow, to fund his flat redecoration. The cost has never been formally confirmed, although party accounts showed it covered a £52,802 "bridging loan", which was later paid by Lord Brownlow and subsequently repaid by Johnson.

An inquiry by Geidt, the prime minister's independent adviser on ministerial interests, found Johnson had acted "unwisely" by not taking enough interest in the funding of the renovations, but not broken any rules.

“It is not for the prime minister or cabinet ministers to decide what the independent anti-corruption commissioner investigates,” said Angela Rayner, Labour’s deputy leader. Stone has previously investigated Johnson three times, including an inquiry into [the funding of his holiday in Mustique by a Tory donor](#) and the late registration of financial interests.

Johnson was absent from parliament as MPs debated the Westminster sleaze scandal on Monday, where several Tory MPs were among those criticising the government for its efforts last week to [overturn a 30-day suspension for Owen Paterson](#), a Conservative backbencher who broke the lobbying ban.

In the process, the government also tried to announce reform of the wider standards system for MPs, proposing that John Whittingdale, a cabinet minister and former boss of Johnson’s wife, Carrie, should be put in charge of the shake-up. But the move was abandoned after a backlash among the public, media and MPs.

Starmer said: “It wasn’t a tactical mistake, an innocent misjudgment swiftly corrected by a U-turn. It was the prime minister’s way of doing business. A pattern of behaviour.

“When the prime minister’s adviser on the ministerial code found against the home secretary, the prime minister kept the home secretary and forced out the adviser. When the Electoral Commission investigated the Conservative party, the prime minister threatened to shut it down. And when the commissioner for standards looked into the prime minister’s donations, the prime minister tried to take her down.”

With the prime minister taking the train back from a hospital visit in Northumberland, it was left to Stephen Barclay, the Cabinet Office minister, to express “regret” in the House of Commons for the government’s misjudged attempts to change the rules.

Johnson refused to apologise for the furore over standards in an interview earlier in the day. But several Tory backbenchers were unimpressed with his refusal to attend. Mark Harper, a former chief whip, said: “Politics is a team game. It’s essential to work with your colleagues to deliver anything. But if the team captain is to expect loyalty from the backbenchers and for ministers

to listen to the direction of the team captain, they deserve that decisions are well thought through and soundly based.

“As on this occasion ... if the team captain gets it wrong, then I think he should come and apologise to the public and to this house. That’s the right thing to do in terms of demonstrating leadership.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/nov/08/boris-johnson-trying-to-take-down-standards-watchdog-keir-starmer-says>

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Stéphane Bourgoin. Photograph: Eric Fougere/Corbis/Getty Images

[The long read](#)

What lies beneath: the secrets of France's top serial killer expert

Stéphane Bourgoin. Photograph: Eric Fougere/Corbis/Getty Images

by [Scott Sayare](#)

Tue 9 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

One night in the early 1990s, at a dinner party at his home in Paris, Stéphane Bourgoin, an author and bookseller then of no particular renown, began to hold forth on the matter of serial killing. The topic was, at the time, quite novel. As a cultural trope, the string of mysterious homicides had of course been a fixture around the world since at least the time of Jack the Ripper, and the French more specifically had been acquainted with the idea since as early as the 15th century, when the nobleman Gilles de Rais was found to have kidnapped, tortured and ritualistically murdered nearly

150 young children. But these people had not been understood as “serial killers”. That phrase, and the notion that such criminals were a breed apart, impelled by a special, sexualised depravity, really entered into the popular imagination only in the 1970s, and then mostly in the US, where the FBI had established a unit of so-called “profilers” to catch them. The serial killer was not yet a cultural vogue in France, much less the cliche it was already becoming elsewhere. Bourgoin’s guests were barely familiar with the concept at all. They listened, as millions of other French-speakers would listen in the decades to come, horrified, nauseated and rapt.

Bourgoin told his invitees of the FBI programme, of the traits of the typical killer, and of some of the more awful American specimens. “We were utterly captivated,” Carol Kehringer, who was among Bourgoin’s guests that night, recalled recently. Kehringer was then in her 20s, starting out as a television producer. “I started asking him all sorts of questions,” she said, “and the more he spoke, the more I thought to myself: ‘We’ve got to do a film!’”

Bourgoin was a friend of Kehringer’s parents, and Kehringer had known him since she was a child. She was fond of him, but also found him to be “a bit out of sync”, she said, “always in his own little world”. Bourgoin ran Au Troisième Oeil – “The Third Eye” – a tiny secondhand bookshop specialising in mysteries and crime. He fit the part. His frame was slight and boyish, but he had grown rather doughy by his late 30s, with a pot belly and a pallid complexion that suggested, along with his spectacles, a sedentary life in the half-light of the margins. Before the bookshop, he had been an assistant on the sets of a few minor pornographic movies. He spoke in a small, satiny voice; there was something vaguely spectral about him. Yet he tended to grow quite animated – blue eyes shimmering, his speech breathy and fervent, a mischievous smile spreading over his lips – when discussing his pet interests. These skewed sharply toward the bizarre and, increasingly, the gruesome.

Bourgoin was a lover of cinema, and the walls of his apartment were lined with an immense collection of VHS cassettes. Among these was a hand-labelled series of recorded newscasts, showing all manner of accidents and natural disasters. He kept a trove of photographs of cadavers in various

states of mutilation, which he liked to show around, and also delighted in telling the story of his mother's first husband, a German who had been decapitated by the Nazis. "He was a charming young man," a friend from that period told me, "who had an extreme attraction to the macabre."

Yet Kehringer also knew him to be what she called a "walking library", with an encyclopaedic knowledge of his preferred subjects, and that evening, for every question she asked about serial killers, Bourgoin offered an extensive response. Before leaving the dinner, she asked him to write up a pitch for a documentary, and soon enough they were at work together on a film. In the fall of 1991, Bourgoin, Kehringer and a small production team flew to the US for the shoot.

They began in Quantico, Virginia, with the FBI's serial crime unit. The head of the unit was a renowned psychological profiler named John Douglas. Douglas was a consultant on the Hollywood adaptation of *The Silence of the Lambs* – the story's protagonist, Clarice Starling, is a profiling trainee – and the film had been released earlier in the year to great acclaim. The chance to speak to a minor French film crew did not seem to fill Douglas with awe. "The impression I got was that we were more or less wasting his time," Olivier Raffet, the cameraman, told me.

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While Raffet set up his equipment in Douglas's office, however, Bourgoin began chatting with the profiler about a case from decades earlier. Douglas said something to the effect of, "The suspect was arrested in October of '48, in such-and-such city," Raffet recalled. "And Stéphane said: 'Yes, but I believe it was November, not October, and it wasn't that city but the little town next door called so-and-so.' And the guy was completely blown away. And he said: 'Yes, I believe you're right.' And from that moment on, his attitude toward us changed completely." The FBI shoot went exceptionally well. Thirty years later, it remains an all-time favourite for Kehringer.

The crew traveled to Florida, where arrangements had been made to interview two convicted killers, Gerard Schaefer and Ottis Toole. Kehringer was wary of the risk of sensationalism, and did not want the men to simply

narrate their crimes. “We wanted to know if, over time, these killers had come to understand the harm they’d done,” Kehringer said. “If they’d questioned themselves.” She and Bourgoin composed the questions together, but she was too spooked to attend the interviews herself, and the next day Bourgoin and Raffet drove to the prison without her.

Schaefer, a former sheriff’s deputy with a distressing smirk, was believed to have killed at least 34 women. Toole had once claimed participation in more than 100 murders, some cannibalistic. In subsequent years, Bourgoin would often describe the paralysing horror he’d experienced in the presence of these men. By Kehringer’s recollection, however, he emerged from the prison euphoric. “He was extremely excited, literally jubilant,” she told me. She reviewed the tapes, and very quickly realised he had not conducted the interviews according to plan.

Bourgoin had Toole describe his murders in detail. “Whoever cut the person’s throat would fuck the person, and then let an animal fuck them, too,” Toole explained. “And they would have a big feast – they would cook the person and cook the animal.” For the meeting with Schaefer, Bourgoin brought along several copies of *Killer Fiction*, a book of semi-autobiographical murder tales the killer had written, for him to sign. Afterward, he and Schaefer posed together for a photograph, each with his arm around the other’s shoulder, beaming.

Kehringer was appalled, and angry. But Bourgoin apologised, and assured her that he would keep to the prearranged questions with the third and final killer. The crew flew to California, to meet Edmund Kemper.

Kemper, who stood nearly seven feet tall, had killed his paternal grandparents as a young man and later murdered eight women, including his mother. He once remarked that, when he saw an attractive woman, “One side of me says, ‘Wow, what an attractive chick. I’d like to talk to her, date her. The other side says, ‘I wonder how her head would look on a stick.’” (Bret Easton Ellis quoted the line in his novel *American Psycho*.) Yet Kemper was thought to have grown exceptionally introspective and regretful. He could provide the analysis Kehringer wanted.

After the interview, Kehringer reviewed the tape. Bourgoin had asked Kemper about various violent incidents from his childhood, about the details of his killings, about the particulars of his monstrous fantasy life. “What were those fantasies?” Bourgoin inquired. “What were they?” Kemper replied, almost taken aback. “Possessing the severed heads of women.”

The documentary went forward, but Kehringer stopped speaking to Bourgoin. “I saw Stéphane change,” she told me. His interest in serial murder was evidently more compulsive than mere curiosity. “When he had the killers in front of him, it was as if he was sitting across from his idols.” Bourgoin, she concluded, was in fact a fan.

Serial killers seem to exert a special pull on the modern imagination. The sex and gore have much to do with it, of course, as does the prospect that the normal-looking lives of normal-looking people might conceal a monstrousness beyond comprehension. The serial killer plays upon our nervous instinct that, beneath the surface of everyday life, society is rapidly unravelling.

By the late 1960s, amid a vast and mysterious explosion in violence, this unravelling seemed to have accelerated beyond the point of control. Between 1960 and 1980, annual killings in the US climbed from about 9,000 to more than 23,000. For a time, many believed that serial killers might be to blame, stalking the new interstate highways, preying upon a new class of independent, unprotected young women. By the 1980s, with the encouragement of the FBI, the American news media had begun to speak of an “epidemic” of serial murder, one that claimed thousands of lives each year. After pushing this theory for several years, however, the bureau quietly withdrew its claims: serial killers are now thought to account for less than 1% of homicides. (The actual causes of the late-century rise in killing remain a matter of debate.) But the figure of the serial killer – “natural born celebrities”, as the scholar David Schmid has put it – had by then established itself as a conduit for the anxieties of the era. A culture – articles, books, films, innumerable television reports – had sprung up around it.



Stéphane Bourgoin at his home in the west of France, April 2020.
Photograph: Eric Hadj/Paris Match/Getty Images

Bourgoin's documentary translated this culture into French, importing it for an audience with similar preoccupations about modernity and a longstanding mix of fascination, revulsion and envy – not unlike what most people feel toward serial killers – toward the US. It was among the first major French reports on serial murder, and Bourgoin parlayed it into a new career. He worked with remarkable speed. Within about a year of the film's initial TV broadcast in 1992, he had published books on the American murderers Albert DeSalvo (the "Boston Strangler") and Jeffrey Dahmer, a monograph on Jack the Ripper, and *Serial Killers*, an encyclopaedic treatment that established him as the uncontested French authority on the phenomenon. (The title was in English, and it is a lasting reminder of the provenance of the concept that the French are, even now, just as likely to refer to "serial killers" by their English-language name as by the French translation, *tueurs en série*.) In *Le Monde*, a reviewer remarked that Bourgoin had approached his subject – "these new 'stars' of crime" – with "the precision of the entomologist", which may have been a generous way of saying that *Serial Killers* was a dense anthology of names, dates and grisly details, with no narration or analysis to speak of, the work of a hoarder of murder trivia. And yet it was a hit. Since 1993, through numerous editions, the book is said to have sold over a million copies.

Bourgoin was prolific, if, after a time, repetitive. He wrote *The Black Book of Serial Killers*, *100 Years of Serial Killers* and *The Serial Killers are Among Us*. In *Who Killed the Black Dahlia?* he claimed to have solved one of the most infamous American murders of the 20th century. (It was his second full-length book on the case.) By 2015 – the year of the second edition of *999 Years of Serial Killers* and at least four other titles – he had met with no fewer than 77 serial killers, he said, and had furnished the FBI with thousands of hours of film from those interviews. By way of thanks, the bureau had trained him as an independent investigator, he said, and he had obtained confessions from murderers around the world. “I have a certain gift for getting them to talk,” he once told *Libération*. In France, he was invited to lecture for magistrates, the judicial police and the Gendarmerie Nationale.

He had become a celebrity in his own right, “the world’s top serial killer expert”, in the estimation of one French TV host. He was a fixture of the evening talk shows, and on the radio; after murders, attacks and other violent crimes, the newspapers invited him to expound the culprit’s motivations. He made dozens of TV specials. Bourgoin never developed a comprehensive theory of the serial killer, but an enigma that remains unsolved is an enigma that keeps its fascination, and no one seemed to hold his equivocations against him. His talks and conferences sold out across France; at book signings, fans queued for hours.

Bourgoin was an unusually glamourless sort of star, and seemed to go most places wearing the same ironic murder-themed T-shirts favoured by his fans. One typical model featured the face of Dahmer, a cannibal who murdered at least 17 people, along with the slogan “So many people, so many recipes.” Bourgoin signed his books “With my bloodiest regards.”

His monomania for serial killing did not meet everyone’s definition of good taste, and from the start of his career, Bourgoin was often asked to explain his fixation. Typically, he would tell the story of his wife. When the documentary maker Frédéric Tonolli first met Bourgoin in the late 1990s, he told him rather bluntly that he thought he was a morbid voyeur. “Yes, but Frédo,” Bourgoin said, Tonolli recalled recently, “my wife was murdered. That’s why I started: I had to know why.” Tonolli was stunned. “It was still

“morbid,” he told me. “But there was love in it, and that’s something else.” He went on to direct one of Bourgoin’s early films.

Around the turn of the century, Bourgoin began speaking publicly of his wife’s death, and it quickly became the tragedy by which he was known. While living in the US in the 1970s, he would explain, he had married a woman named Eileen. In the summer of 1976, he returned to their Los Angeles apartment to find she had been raped, her throat slit, her body dismembered. Two years later, the police informed him that Eileen’s killer had been apprehended, and that the man had confessed to numerous other murders. Until then, Bourgoin had never encountered the term “serial killer”. No one was able to convincingly explain to him how a human being could be capable of such horrors. He combed libraries in the US and in France, but found nothing, and realised that if he was to make sense of the evil that had claimed his wife, he would need to do it on his own.

In 1991, when he was 15 years old, a man I will call Charles read an article in his mother’s Paris Match magazine about Jeffrey Dahmer. Dahmer, a mixer in a chocolate factory, had been arrested a few weeks earlier. In his apartment, police had found seven human skulls, four severed heads, three torsos dissolving in a vat of acid, and another torso in the freezer. Charles was captivated. The following year, in a supermarket, he came upon Bourgoin’s book on the case. “Like everyone who’s interested in the serial killer milieu,” Charles told me, “we all started with Bourgoin.”

Charles followed Bourgoin closely, and with admiration. In his 20s, on a whim, he wrote to the author to ask his opinion of a book on the killer Ted Bundy. Bourgoin responded with his phone number, and an offer to talk whenever Charles liked. “I was over the moon,” he recalled. “But I never called him. I didn’t want to act like just some fan.”

Bourgoin was generally known for being friendly and accessible, but he treated some of his admirers with a disdain that is not unusual in the realm of offbeat fandoms. He seemed to wish to make clear that their obsession with serial murder, unlike his own, was inauthentic, overblown, illicit – that he was, in essence, the real fan. In an updated edition of *Serial Killers*, he lamented the world’s “infatuation” with serial killers. “I’ve lost count of the

crazies – in their overwhelming majority, young women – who call or write to me,” Bourgoin wrote, “with appalling requests.” On Facebook, where he maintained a following of many tens of thousands, he was known for sparring with anyone who appeared to question his expertise.

Charles, who works for the French military and has asked to remain anonymous, does not think of himself as a serial murder aficionado, or at least not an obsessive. “Sometimes, on the online groups, I see things that are shocking,” he told me. “When you say, ‘My favourite serial killer is,’ for instance, ‘[Richard Ramirez](#)’” – the “[Night Stalker](#)” – “ – how can you say you have a ‘favourite’ serial killer?” His own interest is in the psychology of serial killing, he said. In 30 years of study he confessed that he has made no sense of it at all, but he continues to pore over the finer points of various killings in search of some sort of epiphany.

About 10 years ago, absorbed in these details, Charles began to notice what he thought were discrepancies in some of Bourgoin’s pronouncements. His work tended to cover the same crimes over and over again, but the specifics, especially as they related to his own interactions with the killers, had a tendency to drift. Sometimes, Bourgoin said he had interviewed Edmund Kemper only briefly; elsewhere, he claimed to have spent hundreds of hours with him. Bourgoin spoke of meeting 77 killers, but Charles could find video recordings only of the interviews with Kemper, Schaefer, Toole and four or five others. The language of some of Bourgoin’s books struck him as markedly similar to the works of various more obscure English-language writers. But plenty of media figures self-aggrandise, he reasoned, and some play a bit loose with the facts, and plagiarism is not, to many French people, an especially troubling offence. Charles was disappointed, but kept his observations to himself.

In 2019, however, he was browsing one of the various murder-related Facebook groups to which he belonged, and came upon a post about Bourgoin. It was a link to a recent television interview, in which Bourgoin recounted the usual episodes: his “300 hours” with Kemper, the murder of Eileen. He wore his Dahmer T-shirt. To Charles’s surprise, sceptical comments began appearing beneath the post, and the page’s administrator

soon created a new, smaller group to discuss the doubts that had been raised.

Everyone came with their particular misgivings. One member, a middle-aged bookshop employee named Anne-Sophie Bec, was troubled by Bourgoin's online behaviour. In one Facebook post, Bourgoin claimed to have once lived next door to Stephen King, the American author; in another, he claimed to have been given Gerard Schaefer's mortal remains – Schaefer was murdered by a fellow prisoner in 1995 – and offered to give away bits of the body to any interested fans. "There were things where you'd say to yourself, 'Wait, is he joking?'" Bec said. "But he didn't seem like he was joking." Another member of the group, a thirtysomething Belgian named Sven Coquelin, had questions about the story of Eileen. "He says that, in order to spare her family, and out of respect, he doesn't want to give her last name," Coquelin, who works in logistics at a company that manufactures heat-resistant concrete for crematoria, told me. "And at the same time, he recounts these *horrible* details."

There was some jockeying over who would lead this new group of doubters. At one point, Charles insulted the administrator and was ejected from the group. Bec, Coquelin and five others chose to follow him out, and together they formed a new group, which, in winking reference to Bourgoin's old bookshop, they called "4ème Oeil Corporation".

The members of 4ème Oeil did not know one another personally, and were spread around the globe – some in France and Belgium, Bec near Montreal, another member in South America – but they began to coordinate a joint investigation of Bourgoin. Initially, their ambitions were modest. "The thing is," Charles told me, "when we really got going and started to look around, every time we went looking for something, we'd find something." They began to feel betrayed. "The more we dug, the more new problems we found," said Coquelin, "and the more new lies."

The 4ème Oeil group began with the story of Eileen. Over the years, they found, Bourgoin had variously described her as a companion, a fiancee, or his wife, but was more consistent in his description of her murder. It had occurred in Los Angeles, in 1976; the culprit, who had also killed a dozen

other women, was apprehended in California in 1978. In 2019, Bourgoin told an interviewer that the killer was still awaiting execution.

The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation maintains a public list of the hundreds of prisoners on death row, as does the Los Angeles Times; none of these inmates had murdered a woman under the circumstances Bourgoin described. The group tried a different approach. In a TV appearance, Bourgoin had once shown an old photograph of himself and Eileen, an attractive young blonde woman with an upturned nose and distinctively square front teeth. The group began looking for any victims of known California serial killers who resembled her. Once again, they found no one.

They widened the scope of their investigation, and enlisted the help of some of America's most notorious killers. Charles wrote to about 30 murderers Bourgoin claimed to have met, asking if they had any recollection of the Frenchman. Those who said they did came exclusively from the small handful of killers whose meetings had been recorded on film. No one else who replied remembered Bourgoin at all. (Dennis Rader, the BTK killer – for “bind-torture-kill” – sent his “no” response on paper that seemed to have been perfumed. “I wrote back just to be polite,” Charles said.)

Bourgoin claimed to have interviewed David Berkowitz, the “Son of Sam”, who had said at his trial that his killings had been mandated by the demon inhabiting a neighbour’s dog. Bourgoin said that he’d confronted Berkowitz about the story of the dog, and that Berkowitz admitted to him that he’d made it up so as to appear insane. Berkowitz, who has been imprisoned since 1977, said through an intermediary that he did not recall Bourgoin. Nor was there any trace of the interview Bourgoin claimed to have had with the cult leader Charles Manson. In an interview with Le Parisien in 2017, after Manson’s death, Bourgoin said he had met him “in the early 80s” in prison, where Manson “climbed up and sat on the back of a chair, in order to dominate me physically”. The administrator of Manson’s official website, a disciple known as Gray Wolf, told 4ème Oeil he could find no evidence of such an encounter.

The Berkowitz and Manson anecdotes, the group realised, both strongly resembled experiences recounted by John Douglas – the FBI profiler

Bourgoin had interviewed 30 years earlier – in his 1995 memoir *Mindhunter*. (The book was all but unknown in France until being adapted as a [Netflix series](#); both anecdotes appeared in it.) Charles wrote to Douglas, who, to the great thrill of 4ème Oeil, responded. “Stephane Bourgogne [sic] is delusional and an imposter,” Douglas wrote. “It looks like Bourgoin became an ‘expert’ by reading books … mine in particulars [sic].”



A still from the Netflix adaptation of John Douglas's memoir *Mindhunter*.
Photograph: Netflix

The group began rewatching Bourgoin’s old TV appearances, listening to his interviews, rereading his books. The investigation took months, and nearly all their free time. “I’d get home from work, take a shower, and go straight online,” Charles said. “My wife was pissed.” Coquelin’s partner nearly left him in exasperation; another group member’s did. But they seemed unable to stop. During one conversation with Coquelin, I said I presumed that 4ème Oeil’s investigation had been propelled, at least in part, by a love of the search. “Not especially,” he said. “We really did it out of disgust.”

They found borrowings and misrepresentations everywhere. Bourgoin’s early monograph on Dahmer appeared to be heavily plagiarised, as did a

1998 book on Kemper. Who Killed the Black Dahlia?, in which Bourgoin claimed to identify the murderer, was essentially a rehashing of an American book from 1994. (The FBI still lists the case as unsolved.)

In 1999, Bourgoin had travelled to South Africa to film a documentary on Micki Pistorius, a profiler of some renown. During the shoot, Pistorius gave Bourgoin a copy of the manuscript of her soon-to-be-published autobiography, *Catch Me a Killer*. After Bourgoin returned to France, he and Pistorius spoke occasionally by phone, and at the conclusion of one call, just before hanging up, Bourgoin said, “By the way, I wrote a book about you.” “I was shocked,” Pistorius told me by email. At the time, Bourgoin insisted that the book was based solely on his experiences with her in South Africa, and Pistorius, whose French was too rudimentary to read the book herself, took him at his word. In reality, *4ème Oeil* discovered, significant portions were lifted wholesale from *Catch Me a Killer*.

The group alerted Pistorius to claims Bourgoin had been making. In one radio interview, Bourgoin had told the story of discovering, alongside Pistorius, a serial killer’s “private cemetery”, full of exposed corpses. “The police helicopters arrived,” he recounted, “but they landed too close to the bodies. And the draft from the rotor blades sent bits of decomposing body and maggots flying everywhere. And I, her, and another cop were covered in it.” In another interview, Bourgoin claimed to have obtained the confession of the killer Stewart Wilken, whose case Pistorius had worked on. “I chose a room that was quite small, claustrophobic, without windows,” he said. “I asked the investigators for photos of their young children, and I covered the walls with the photos, which he looked at constantly. And I could feel that he was beginning to crack.” Wilken eventually confessed to the murders of numerous children.

Bourgoin’s claims were preposterous, Pistorius said. The helicopter incident was real, but she had experienced it alone; Wilken’s confession had been obtained – under conditions much like those Bourgoin described, but a full two years before Bourgoin had visited South Africa – by a South African detective. “Under no circumstances whatsoever would the South African Police Service require the ‘help’ of an author who has no training in

investigation and has never been a member of a police force to interrogate a suspect,” Pistorius wrote to me.

Bourgoin’s inventions seemed to have grown more extravagant over the years. “What he would do in general was to add himself to a story after the fact,” Bec said. It was perhaps predictable that it should be his own fans who first noticed this tendency. “Without his work, we never would have got interested in serial killers in the first place,” Coquelin said. “It’s ironic. In a way it’s thanks to his own work that we ended up catching him. When we learned the real stories, we realised the stories he’d been telling were made up.”

In the autumn of 2019, 4ème Oeil began contacting French media outlets and presenters. “They didn’t take us seriously,” Charles recalled. “Because after all, this was *Stéphane Bourgoin*.” After a few months of unsuccessful efforts, 4ème Oeil decided to publish their findings on their own, in a series of long, detailed and notably angry video compilations, under the title Serial Mytho. (“Mytho” is short, in French, for “mythomaniac”.) No one in the group had any video-making experience to speak of; they posted them [to YouTube](#) without fanfare. “We’re not going to kid ourselves, the videos were pretty awful,” Charles said. “We don’t even know how people found them.”

Within the community of francophone crime aficionados, the videos took off. “A lot of people were pissed off,” Charles recalled. Bourgoin fans sent insults, and occasional threats of legal action. Some seemed to be under the impression that their hero had merely plagiarised a passage here and there, which seemed forgivable; some reproached the debunkers for going after a man whose own wife had been murdered. Other viewers, more willing to accept the content of the videos, treated 4ème Oeil as folk heroes. And others still, more conspiracy-minded, concluded that Bourgoin was not merely a fabulist but a serial killer. Etienne Jallieu, a pseudonym Bourgoin sometimes used, was a near-anagram of the words “*J’ai tué Eileen*”: “I killed Eileen.” (“Complete garbage,” Coquelin said. “He didn’t kill Eileen, given that Eileen didn’t exist.”)

After a period of near-silence, in February 2020 Bourgoin announced on Facebook that, in order to devote himself “to the most important project of my life”, he would be closing his page. (He offered no details about this project.) “Furthermore,” he wrote, he had for several weeks been the victim of a “campaign of cyber-harassment and hatred” that put him in mind of the Vichy period, “when informers sent anonymous letters to denounce their neighbours to Pétain’s regime”. He did not address the claims in the videos specifically, but he did make an extensive show of his credentials, in the form of a series of rhetorical questions. “Have all these accusers and informers met even one single serial killer?” he asked. Had they organised “international conferences”, or been invited to appear on “several hundred” television shows? Had they sold out theatres in 26 cities on their 2019 speaking tour? “Of course not,” he said.

The media began to take notice. Tony Le Pennec, a journalist for the online outlet *Arrêt sur Images*, asked Bourgoin about his interview with Charles Manson. Bourgoin said he’d spoken with Manson for only 10 or 15 minutes, and that he “couldn’t help it” if his experience – with Manson perched on the back of a chair – resembled that of Douglas, the profiler. Le Pennec then asked about the confession Bourgoin claimed to have obtained from Stewart Wilken in South Africa. Bourgoin said he and a detective had both questioned Wilken, but that it had been the detective, and not himself, who thought to cover the walls of the interrogation room with photographs of children. Le Pennec asked why Bourgoin had previously claimed otherwise. “All of a sudden,” Le Pennec wrote, in April 2020, “Bourgoin remembered that he had urgent work to finish.” Bourgoin stopped giving interviews, and succeeded, briefly, in having 4ème Oeil’s videos removed from YouTube, for alleged copyright violations. But the media covered the allegations nonetheless: *Le Progrès*, *Le Dauphiné Libéré*, *France Inter*, *Le Monde*.



Bourgoin claimed to have interviewed Charles Manson, but no evidence of it can be found. Photograph: Ullstein Bild/Getty Images

Around this time, the journalist Emilie Lanez, of Paris Match, contacted Bourgoin to ask for an interview about the controversy. She had published several books, and noted to Bourgoin that they shared a publisher. “It was a bit presumptuous,” Lanez told me. “I would love to have sold as many books as him!” Bourgoin agreed to speak, and for about a week, Lanez called him every morning. They would talk for several hours, and then she would spend the afternoon making calls to confirm what Bourgoin had just told her. Bourgoin was “very sweet”, Lanez said, and when she would confront him each new day with the lies he seemed to have told the day before, he was unfailingly apologetic. “Bourgoin would say to me, ‘Yes, I’ve done a lot of exaggerating in my life – I just wanted to be loved,’” she recalled. “And then he’d get right back on the horse and make up a new story.”

Over time, though, Lanez felt she was coming closer to the truth. Bourgoin admitted that he’d “borrowed” the helicopter incident from Pistorius – “I amplify things when I’m in front of an audience,” he said – and that he had never been trained by the FBI. When they came to Eileen, Bourgoin sobbed for a long time.

Eileen was an embellishment of a somewhat less sympathetic story, he admitted. While living in the US in the 1970s as a young bachelor, Bourgoin had been a regular visitor to Daytona Beach, a resort town on the Florida coast. On one visit, he met a bartender and aspiring cosmetologist named Susan Bickrest, who, Bourgoin seemed to imply, made a bit of extra money as a prostitute. He'd been with her a handful of times by December 1975, when he returned to Daytona Beach, after an absence, to learn that she had been murdered. A serial killer was suspected.

"I started to do some reading, I did some research, it became a passion," he told Lanez. A few years later, in 1979, he was authorised to interview his first killer, Richard Chase, a paranoid schizophrenic who drank the blood of some of his victims. Bourgoin told Lanez: "It feels good to tell the truth."

Bourgoin seemed to have hoped that the Paris Match story would somehow exonerate him. He had teased it to his fans, telling them to expect it to counter the "malicious and slanderous" claims against him. When the story appeared, he responded angrily. On Instagram, he almost immediately posted a screed about its many "untruths," and said he had "never met" Lanez. (They spoke by phone.) Still, he acknowledged having embellished and lied, and confirmed that "Eileen" had in fact been Susan Bickrest. "I most sincerely want to apologise for the disappointment that I may have caused my readers," he wrote.

After their initial excitement, however, 4ème Oeil came to believe that Bourgoin's confession was itself composed mostly of lies. Among other things, it seemed extremely unlikely that Bourgoin had ever met Richard Chase. It was not the first time he had made the claim, but previously he said he was introduced to Chase by the California detective who investigated Eileen's murder, in Los Angeles. "Now that there's no more story about his murdered wife, why would anyone have helped him to interview a serial killer in '79?" Bec said.

Both Carol Kehringer and Olivier Raffet, who worked on the 1992 documentary, said they were under the strong impression at the time that, prior to the three interviews they filmed, Bourgoin had never met a serial killer in his life. "We really had no idea how it was going to be," Raffet

said. Ahead of the shoot, Raffet had gone to see *The Silence of the Lambs*, and came away imagining that, as in the film, the killers they were interviewing would be held behind security glass. But there was no glass, or wall, or bars, and the men came to the interviews without restraints of any kind. “We were flabbergasted,” Raffet said.

Nor, 4ème Oeil concluded, had “Eileen” been Susan Bickrest. Bickrest was indeed a real person, and the victim of a serial killer. But her murderer, Gerald Stano, was not apprehended until 1980, and did not confess to Bickrest’s death until two years later. Nor did Bickrest particularly resemble the woman in Bourgoin’s photograph of “Eileen”. (4ème Oeil believes that woman to be an adult film actress, whom Bourgoin might have known from his brief time in pornography. They and I have contacted her – she now appears to work as a real estate agent – but she has never responded.) Bourgoin seemed to have chosen Stano “simply because Stano isn’t well known in Europe,” Coquelin told me, and Bickrest because she was one of his least-known victims.

“‘Eileen’ is just completely made up, from start to finish,” Coquelin said. Bourgoin’s tragic origin story seemed not to be the dramatisation of some actual experience, however banal, but pure imagining: a boyish fantasy of American horror.

Fantasy was Bourgoin’s first great love. Early on, he found genre cinema, and devoted himself to the category the French call *fantastique*, encompassing science fiction, horror and all things uncanny. Alain Schlockoff, who founded the fanzine L’Écran Fantastique in 1969, was close with Bourgoin in the early years of that decade. Bourgoin, who was not yet 20 years old, wrote frequently for the magazine. “He was friendly, he was agreeable to be with, he was intelligent,” Schlockoff told me. “I realised almost immediately that he was a fabulist.”

At the time, Bourgoin was living with his parents, in a grand apartment in view of the Arc de Triomphe. Schlockoff was a frequent visitor, and enjoyed speaking with Bourgoin’s mother, a sweet, self-effacing woman who doted on her only child. Bourgoin’s more distant father, a decorated military engineer and veteran of the French Resistance, had made a fortune

after the war; there were live-in servants. The young Bourgoin spent his days at the cinema, and amused himself by cheating his way in with old tickets he'd spent hours reconditioning with a razor blade and glue, a friend from that time told me.

Every year, Schlockoff organized a major festival of the *fantastique*, and Bourgoin often worked as one of his assistants. In 1975, ahead of the festival, Schlockoff was in London, meeting with a director. The man said he would send over a copy of the film Schlockoff had asked for; Schlockoff was confused, as he had not requested a film. "He went into his office and showed me a letter, on my festival's letterhead," Schlockoff recalled, "signed 'Stéphane Bourgoin.'" He returned to Paris to discover that, behind his back, Bourgoin had been organising a competing festival, to be held concurrently with his own, and had used his name and letterhead for credibility. He cut ties with Bourgoin immediately. (Bourgoin's festival took place, but flopped.)

Soon after, Bourgoin made a long trip to the US, where he hoped to make connections in the film industry, and to see as many movies as he could. "He had a fascination with the United States," another former friend told me. "For him, 'the movies' meant 'American movies' and not much else." The first friend happened to visit Bourgoin at home a day or two after his return to France. "He was totally exhilarated, stars in his eyes," the man said. Bourgoin said he'd met innumerable directors, producers and actors; he'd brought back two suitcases full of comic books and souvenirs. "He made absolutely no mention of any sort of fiancee he might have had," the friend said, "and even less a fiancee who'd been sliced up into pieces by a serial killer."

During his time in the milieu of the *fantastique*, Bourgoin had befriended a fellow fan named François Guérif. Guérif owned a small Paris bookshop, Au 3ème Oeil, and by the 1980s had become a prominent editor, known for publishing translations of major British and American crime writers. Guérif hired Bourgoin to run the bookshop, and introduced him to his authors. These included the Americans Robert Bloch, whose novel Psycho (adapted for the screen by Alfred Hitchcock) was inspired by the case of the serial

killer Ed Gein, and James Ellroy, whose work had similarly drawn upon the theme of serial murder.

It was around this time that Bourgoin seems to have developed his own fascination with serial killing. Initially, his friends found it amusing, or at least inoffensive. But it soon grew tiresome, especially after the release of his 1992 documentary. He spoke of nothing else. The first friend told me he suspected Bourgoin had invented the story of Eileen not so much as a ploy for sympathy or notoriety, but merely so that people wouldn't be put off by his obsessiveness.

At a certain point, however, Bourgoin seemed to have lost his bearings, to have lost hold of what was true and what was not. "What's crazy," the friend said, "what makes me think he really went off the deep end, is that he could claim this sort of thing one-on-one with people who knew him, without anyone else around. That he could tell me the story of his murdered fiancee!"

Bourgoin's friends withdrew from him, and began to await, with a fair amount of dread, his unmasking. But his star continued to rise. "What astounded me was not so much that he told tall tales, because I knew he was that way, but rather that everyone swallowed them whole," the other friend said. "It was the unseriousness, not to say the sheer idiocy, of the media."

The indulgence of the publishers, the newspapers, the television stations and even the police might have been more forgivable if Bourgoin's work had been more insightful, offered more than morbid titillation, the first friend said. "But there was never, ever, ever the slightest beginning of a hint of a shadow of analysis, of reflection," he said. "And today, people are saying, 'He's an impostor! He tricked us!' Well, folks, you yourselves should be mortified. And you should be thinking, 'We really were idiots!' Because he wasn't actually any good at all."

Quietly, Bourgoin was dropped by his publishers and producers. His new graphic novel, about the French serial killer Michel Fourniret, was taken off the shelves. Plans for a television series based upon his life were cancelled. Still, in the past year Bourgoin has been invited to a handful of small

literary festivals, and maintains a core group of fans – he has about 10,000 followers on Instagram – who appear not to have heard the accusations against him, or not to believe them, or not to care. In November, an expanded version of *The Ogre of Santa Cruz*, his book about Kemper, will be released. It appears to have been self-published. The listed publishing house, Editions Nicaise, has never released another book; its registered address is a Paris coworking and mailbox space.

I wrote to Bourgoin last year, asking if he'd be willing to speak. I didn't expect that he would, and indeed he never responded. After a time, though, I decided to try him on an old number I'd been given, mostly as a pro forma exercise, to be able to say that I'd attempted but failed to interview him. To my surprise, he answered. His voice was kindly and disarming, and, after informing me apologetically that he was no longer speaking with journalists, he immediately proceeded to tell me about his case.

"I went too far," he said. "It's my fault, after all! I recognise that." He had not met 77 serial killers, he acknowledged, but rather about 30, and some of them only briefly. Still, 30 struck him as a reasonably impressive total, all things considered. "My accomplishments might have been enough on their own, without my additions," he reflected. He had had himself psychoanalysed; the trouble was, of course, with his parents. He had also begun a census of all known French serial killers, and was in the midst of expanding his book on Kemper. "I love to write!" he told me.

Bourgoin agreed to speak again, sometime in the next few weeks. I called and emailed several times to arrange a date, but he never responded. The reversal was frustrating, but I also found it reasonable of him to be silent, and no doubt wise. And yet, after a time, Bourgoin sent me an email. In English, he wrote that he was in the hospital "for lots of exams and 2 operations (nothing to do with Covid)", and would be unavailable to speak for several weeks. He made a point of noting that he would not be disclosing his hospitalisation publicly, but also specified that, with the assistance of his "friends & associates", his social media accounts would continue to publish as usual. He attached a selfie taken standing in front of what appeared to be a hospital bed. The photograph had a realistically hasty look to it; Bourgoin's pale face, which bore an uncharacteristically solemn

expression, filled only the bottom right-hand corner. Yet someone had taken the time to alter the filename to read “HOPITAL SB.jpg”; according to the timestamp, the photograph had in fact been taken a month-and-a-half prior. Just two days before his email to me, on Instagram, Bourgoin had posted a photograph of what appeared to be his computer, inside what appeared to be his home, with a caption that read, “One more week of intense work and I’ll have finished writing a new version of my book on Ed Kemper.”

Though it has not traditionally been regarded as a condition unto itself, pathological lying has long been an object of psychiatric inquiry. In the literature, it is known as *pseudologia fantastica*. One commonly cited definition, from the early 20th century, describes it as “falsification entirely disproportionate to any discernible end in view”. Helene Deutsch, an early psychoanalyst, described pathological lies as “daydreams communicated as reality”. The pathological liar, or “pseudologue”, is not a con artist, in the sense that, whatever the consequences of his lies may be, his intent is not malice. The lying is an end in itself. Scholars disagree as to whether or not the pseudologue can be said to be responsible for his fantastical claims. Crucially, however, he is not delusional. When confronted with his inventions, the pathological liar is able to perceive, if not necessarily admit, their falsity. He knows he is lying, though most of the time he seems able to put this knowledge completely out of mind.

Serial killers have been known to be among the most prolific pseudologues, and all serial killers lie about their crimes. Bourgoin was once asked, in a television report, about this propensity for deception. Elsewhere in the segment, he implied that he was in the midst of helping to solve a series of murders, and claimed that he had extracted “confessions” from Schaefer, Toole and Kemper when he interviewed them. He was presented as a “profiler”. Bourgoin was seated behind a large desk in a sombre room, and looked up earnestly at his interviewer, whom he addressed in a regretful tone. “Very often, serial killers are extremely manipulative,” he said. “Most of the time, whatever remorse they claim to have isn’t sincere. It’s part of their habit of lies. These are confirmed liars, since their earliest childhood.” I have watched this moment, and rewound and watched it again, a number of times. Often I think I detect a glimmer of recognition in Bourgoin’s eyes,

but it is instantaneously suppressed, or shunted aside, giving way to a blank and slightly quizzical stare. More than anything, he appears to be astonished.

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Grayson Perry

Interview

Grayson Perry on art, cats – and the meaning of life: ‘If you don’t have self doubt, you’re not trying hard enough’

[Emine Saner](#)



Grayson Perry with his bike Patience in his East Sussex studio. Photograph: Eamonn McCabe/The Guardian



[@eminesaner](#)

Tue 9 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

Grayson Perry hasn't, he reports apologetically, dressed up specifically for our Zoom call, but for an event he will be attending afterwards. "I wanted to look like a lady who lunched," says Perry, who is wearing mauve silk, bright red lipstick, giant specs and Thatcherite hair. Since winning the Turner prize in 2003, Perry – with his alter ego Claire – has become one of the UK's most recognisable and admired artists. He is known primarily for his ceramics, but his other work includes tapestries and [a house in Essex](#). He is also a curator, writer and broadcaster – and his Channel 4 show [Grayson's Art Club](#), presented with his wife, the writer and psychotherapist [Philippa Perry](#), was a lockdown highlight. Currently on tour with [A Show for Normal People](#), Perry takes a break to answer Guardian readers' questions on art, life and cats.

How do you classify “normal” people? (Amy, London)

I'm interested in those things that hover in our unconsciousnesses – class, gender, identity – until we have to think about them for whatever reason. So normal is whatever's normal for you, until it's not. Everybody's got their own version that's constructed by their background and history.

If you think life is meaningless, as it says in the show's description, you must be depressed, don't you think? (Deirdre, London)

No, I think life is meaningless, fine, so it's our job to make meaning. I find it quite comforting that I have some sort of agency over the meaning I can put on to life.

Were you from an artistic family? (Andrea, Aberdeen)

No. I think I grew up in an “acultural” household – no books, no paintings, never went to an art gallery. I say that, but of course we had the TV. A lot of middle-class people still struggle to understand that television is a major cultural force. When people say “cultural” what they really mean is, “did you grow up in a middle-class cultural house?”

I can't afford a studio, work full-time and have limited time to make art. How did you get through the difficult period of needing to make a living but still being able to make work? (Will, Todmorden)

I did what a lot of other people were doing – I made art on the kitchen table. I had scrappy jobs all through my 20s, like making sandwiches, being a security guard, life modelling. I went to evening classes, which gave me a place where I could make things, with all the facilities. In the early 80s, it was really cheap. Then I married someone with more money than me. Not many men take that route. My wife supported me through my 30s. I didn't really make a living from my art until I was about 38.



Grayson and Philippa Perry at the Grayson's Art Club exhibition.
Photograph: Andrew P Brooks/Channel 4

Since winning the Turner prize, you have become a national treasure owing to your likability, emotional intelligence and natural ability on television. This may have diluted your ability to make controversial art, viewed objectively on its own merits. Do you feel your best work may be behind you? (Pete, Edinburgh)

I think my best work has been since I won the Turner prize, so I say “bollocks” to that. And “controversial” is only one tiny measure. The people who think being controversial is important are those that cling on to their punk haircut into their 60s. I became a member of the establishment a long time ago now and maybe those people who like to think of themselves as controversial might find out that they are also now members of the establishment.

If you could be an artist during any century, when would it be? (Jill, Letchworth Garden City)

I'm a big fan of the [Northern Renaissance](#) so I would have liked to have been in the Low Countries some time in the 1400s – Van Eyck, Bruegel and Hieronymus Bosch, and all those people painting. You didn't have to worry about what your subject matter was going to be, because you did

Christianity, so it was all about technique and getting on with it. You didn't have to think, "what's my art *about*?"

Where would you say the value of art comes from? Marx argued that value comes from labour. How does that relate to art, especially your art and forms like ceramics and tapestry? (Ella, Birmingham)

When I walk into one of my exhibitions, I certainly think, "Wow, there's a lot of man hours." Consciously or otherwise, I subscribe partly to Marx's statement, though I wouldn't call myself a Marxist. It's fascinating, the idea of value in the art world, because at a certain point, it goes stratospheric and it's ridiculous. It's pure market economics, and value is what somebody will pay for it.



Grayson Perry at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition in London, 2018.
Photograph: Suki Dhanda/The Observer

For you, where does value come from? (Emine Saner)

It makes my life meaningful. I love a project that gives my life a bit of motivation, and it uses up your time in a really good way.

Can you explain why a pickled shark and an unmade bed are more than a pickled shark and an unmade bed? (Martin, Oxford)

Well, it's the old Duchampian thing, isn't it? [From the 1910s onwards,

Marcel Duchamp famously put his “[readymades](#)”, including a urinal, into galleries.] Art is people who point at things. I’m not fetishistically attached to the idea of handicrafts as part of the art process – Christopher Wren didn’t build St Paul’s Cathedral – if you end up with an amazing thing at the end of it. But I do question the waning power of the art gallery to add significance to anything you drag into it.

I feel the art world is still very Eurocentric. Have you been interested or influenced by the art from a non-European cultural tradition? (Jolyon, Japan)

I would say the art world is going through quite a phase of being non-Eurocentric. The Tate, for at least a decade, has been looking out to places which aren’t represented in its collections. Because the art world is always looking for challenge – it was one of the first areas of culture I think that really looked beyond the Eurocentric canon. I rarely look for inspiration in contemporary art, but I do look backwards and I’m an equal opportunities thief. The main influence on my ceramics at the moment is probably Islamic, Persian – there’s something about the nature of their particular refinement that I find very inspiring.

I once saw you walking across Homebase car park in Walthamstow in full frock mode. Was what I witnessed art? (David, Walthamstow)

It [was] very close to my old studio, but I can’t ever remember going to that Homebase in a frock. It might not have been me. Dressing up is dressing up. It might bleed into my art sometimes, but I’m very strict about my definitions about various aspects of my practice. If I dress up, it’s just dressing up for my own pleasure.

I love a blank canvas, a fresh start. What about you? (Alan, Scottish Borders)

I’m not a great fan of the blank canvas. I think my best work usually comes towards the end of a batch of work, when I’ve got in the zone. Work makes ideas, work comes out of work. I’m in that phase at the moment where I’m getting back into my studio practice, and I always find the first couple of pieces are a bit muddled. So I don’t like that blank canvas feeling – I like to be on the go.

Artists often experience periods of doubt and low confidence. Has this ever happened to you, and how do you overcome it? (Simon, York)

I think I'm addicted to periods of doubt and low confidence. I think you should worry if you don't have them because then you're not trying hard enough. If you're sure that everything you're going to do is going to be good, then what's the point? I used to think of it as just crippling self-doubt. Now I kind of see it as a sign that I'm teetering on the edge of something new. Or troubling.

Are all motives governed by self-interest? (Chris, Newcastle)

I think there is probably a bit of truth in that. The phrase that is around a lot is "virtue signalling", but we've evolved to virtue signal because we want to be seen as a good member of the group. If your group approves of altruistic acts, then you do altruistic acts in order to get status.

How do you find Englishness in this new age of Brexit? (Hywel, Camarthen)

It's troubled because a fair proportion of the population of England don't like to describe themselves as English, because it has bad associations for them, and there's an opposing group who define themselves more happily as English than British. There are people who want to fit in with the mainstream, or what is seen as the "good thing". And people who don't, and whether they know it or not, they want to stand out, and will latch on to any cause that makes them stand out. Brexit was partly about that. I think anti-vaxxing is partly about that. I think they see a status in not being sucked into the mainstream.



‘As a transvestite, I’m heavily invested in gender stereotypes’ ... Perry.
Photograph: Richard Ansett

What do you think about gender stereotypes and how they relate to art and culture? (Misaki, Japan)

As a transvestite, I’m heavily invested in gender stereotypes, because otherwise I wouldn’t have a barrier to cross. It would just be dressing. Gender is one of the deepest conditionings in our culture. When people say, “we’re going to change what it is to be a woman, a man,” I say, “great”. But it’s going to take a long time because these things are heavily ingrained in our culture. And for men to change their behaviour – they’re the ones that need to change on the whole – it’s going to take a long time, because it’s a sort of a collective enterprise that’s done mainly unconsciously.

You went to an English art school at a particular time – how come you didn’t end up in a band? (Mark, Leeds)

Like most of my generation, I wanted to be in a rock band. I wanted to be David Bowie. That is a yearning which I confront full on in my show. At the Albert Hall, I will have a band. Brace yourselves for this sensational debut! I would have been a fabulous rock star. Whether my voice would have been that good, I don’t know, but I would have been very good at it.

How do you think art should be taught in schools? (Jane, Chichester)

Often. It gets sidelined but it should be made available to those that want it. For the kids who are like me, the art room is a refuge. It wasn't just that I enjoyed working there, it was a place where I worked out what was going on in my head, even though I didn't know I was doing it. One of the instrumental functions of art is to work out what's going on in our unconscious, collectively or personally. One of the essential things of having a healthy society is to have a strong cultural sector. What is life for if you don't have culture in all of its glorious variety?

How much is your art steered by a vision of what you're aiming to create and how much is down to spontaneity? (S, Oxford)

52.5%. My visions are usually a vague, blurry golden mist at the back of my mind, a certain tone or atmosphere that I want to conjure up. During the process of making, that gradually comes into focus, with all of the inevitable disappointment. The creative process is one of controlled disappointment, because the nature of inspiration is that it's vague. I get towards finishing a piece and it's not exactly what I hoped it would be, but it's good. Then what happens is, as time goes on, you look back on that piece and forget how you hoped it would be and see it for what it is. I don't think there are many artists who have an exact idea of what they want to make, and then make it. That would be a bit depressing.

I admire what a wonderful “completer” you are. Where do you get the drive and discipline to keep pushing through to the finish line? (Annabel, East Sheen)

Probably some kind of ancient work ethic that I have, that as I get older and tireder is more challenging. I used to be fanatically driven, but I think I'm mellowing a bit, or at least I'm distracted. I'm thinking, I'm 61, I've got X number of productive years left in me, what do I want to be doing? Do I just want to be kind of churning stuff out that I think other people expect me to do?

Do you abandon work? (ES)

Usually nearer the beginning than the end. I used to make things, then hate them and smash them. Now I can see the tragedy unfolding early on and nip it in the bud.

Eat the rich or sell them art? (Suzanne, Liverpool)

Definitely sell them art. Though a few of them could be barbecued.

Isn't it obscene to spend hundreds of millions on a piece of art? (ES)

Probably. But it's better than spending it on weapons.

How old is your cat? And how did you get her? (Emily, Kingston)

He's a boy, though he has had his knackers off. We got him from Battersea. They reckon he was about 18 months old, so he'd be about five? Six? I don't know. He was found as a stray in Hackney, so he's a hipster cat.

Grayson Perry performs A Show for Normal People at the Royal Albert Hall, London, on 22 November. Tickets are available from [Fane](#).

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Nakagin Capsule Tower in Ginza, Tokyo, Japan. The building designed by late Japanese architect Kisho Kurokawa is scheduled for demolition in 2022. Photograph: AFLO/REX/Shutterstock

Decaying but beloved, Tokyo's Capsule Tower faces uncertain future

Nakagin Capsule Tower in Ginza, Tokyo, Japan. The building designed by late Japanese architect Kisho Kurokawa is scheduled for demolition in 2022. Photograph: AFLO/REX/Shutterstock

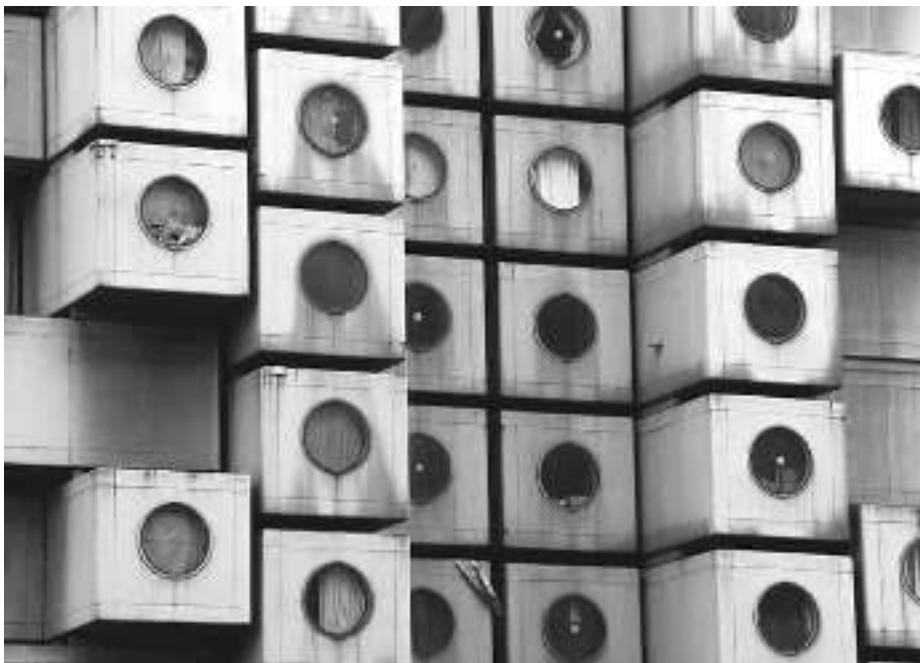
by [Justin McCurry](#) in Tokyo

Mon 8 Nov 2021 21.11 EST

It is an architectural curiosity that attracts admirers from around the world, an asymmetric stack of identical concrete boxes in a neighbourhood dominated by the gleaming glass edifices of corporate [Japan](#).

But after occupying a corner of Tokyo's Ginza district for almost half a century, the Nakagin Capsule Tower faces an uncertain future.

When it was built in 1972, Nakagin was the capital's only example of the metabolism architectural movement, which fused ideas about megastructures with those of organic biological growth, and a physical expression of Japan's postwar economic and cultural revival.



Stacks of asymmetric concrete cubes make up the Nakagin Capsule Tower exterior in Tokyo, Japan. Photograph: Dreamstime

Its designer, the celebrated architect Kisho Kurokawa, envisioned its 140 self-contained prefabricated capsules as pieds-à-terre for professionals who wanted to avoid long weekday commutes to their suburban homes.

With an area of 10 square metres, each capsule came with a unit bathroom, a Sony Trinitron TV, a reel-to-reel cassette/radio, a rotary dial phone and a large circular window through which generations of residents have viewed Tokyo's ever-changing cityscape. In keeping with its metabolism roots, Kurokawa, who died in 2007, had intended for the capsules to be removed and replaced every 25 years.

But almost half a century on, time has caught up with the structure, now shrouded in netting to keep dislodged rust and concrete from falling on to passersby.

The few remaining residents are now having to accept that their homes and office spaces will soon disappear, amid reports that the building could be demolished next spring.



An interior view of a capsule which has been restored by the Nakagin Capsule Tower Building A606 Project. Photograph: Franck Robichon/EPA



A security personnel on patrol at an area near the Nakagin Capsule Tower (background) in Tokyo, Japan. Photograph: Franck Robichon/EPA

Preserving Nakagin in its current form has proved impossible, says Tatsuyuki Maeda, representative of the Nakagin Capsule Tower Building Preservation and Regeneration Project, as he shows the Guardian around one of the 15 rooms he has bought over the past 12 years.

“We want the capsules to survive, although in a different form, to keep the metabolism idea alive,” says Maeda, 54, who started leasing some of his rooms and conducting guided tours a decade ago to raise money to preserve the 13-storey building. “This isn’t just a place where people live and work. It inspires people to be creative and innovative.”

About 40 people have moved out since March, when the management company and capsule owners decided to sell the plot, leaving just 20 tenants – a small but eclectic band that includes an architect, a DJ, a film producer and Maeda, who works in advertising. “There are a few people who have said they never want to leave, but they’ll have to get used to the idea,” he says.



Tatsuyuki Maeda, a Nakagin Capsule Tower resident. Photograph: Justin McCurry/The Guardian

Plans to remove and replace the capsules were torn up due to the high cost, logistical challenges and concern about the large quantities of asbestos inside the building. Time has not been kind to the structure, which has not had hot running water for more than a decade and, critically, does not meet Japan's strict earthquake-resistance regulations.

Nakagin's future appeared to have been secured when an overseas investor showed an interest in buying the entire building. But negotiations ended when the [coronavirus](#) pandemic prevented investors from travelling to Japan to view the property, according to Maeda, who lives nearby with his family but spends occasional nights at Nakagin.



A general view of the Nakagin Capsule Tower in Ginza, Tokyo, Japan.
Photograph: AFLO/REX/Shutterstock



Tourists look at a real-size copy of one of the capsules of Tokyo's Nakagin Tower, during an exhibition in San Sebastian, Spain. Photograph: Juan Herrero/EPA

The capsules' survival hinges on Maeda's project to disassemble them, remove the asbestos and donate them to museums, art galleries and other

institutions in Japan and overseas – a proposal that is at least in keeping with Kurokawa's architectural philosophy.

The preservation group has received inquiries from museums in the US, Britain, Germany, France and Poland hoping to play their part in protecting the legacy of Japan's short-lived experiment with metabolism.

“Europeans understand the need to preserve buildings like this, whereas Japan is still guided by a pull-down-and-rebuild mentality,” says Maeda, who resolved to buy a Nakagin capsule while gazing at the building from his old workplace.



The Nakagin Capsule Tower is both a residential and office tower in Ginza, Tokyo. Photograph: Nicolas Datiche/SIPA/REX/Shutterstock

Before the pandemic, people from all over the world flocked to this corner of Ginza to photograph its most famous architectural landmark. Foreign visitors regularly outnumbered Japanese admirers on guided tours, and fashion houses have used its retro backdrop for photoshoots. Celebrity visitors include Hugh Jackman – Nakagin's exterior appeared in the 2013 film *The Wolverine* – Francis Ford Coppola and Keanu Reeves.

“I’ve always thought the capsules would look perfect on a small island, in the middle of a forest or even on the seabed,” says Maeda, who adds that he will spend a few nights at Nakagin until the capsules’ fate is decided.

“In Japan you can live in an apartment for years without even seeing your neighbours. But here everyone is friendly and ready to help each other out. We are a real community.”

This article was amended on 12 November 2021 to add further detail to the caption of the second photo.

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‘Dignified, strong, beautiful’: the year’s best portrait photography – in pictures

‘One can only imagine what women endured’ ... Merna Beasley, Kurtijar Woman. Photograph: National Portrait Gallery London/© David Prichard

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2021.11.09 - Coronavirus

- [Live Covid: up to 100,000 NHS England staff unvaccinated; thousands protest over New Zealand's vaccine mandates](#)
- [Hexham Johnson maskless in hospital as cases among MPs rise](#)
- [China City offers cash for clues as Covid outbreak declared a 'people's war'](#)

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Covid live: Russia says workplace shutdown helped turn tide on cases; UK reports 262 deaths and 33,117 cases

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Boris Johnson

Boris Johnson seen maskless in hospital as cases among MPs rise



Boris Johnson with Marion Dickson, the executive director of nursing and other specialisms for Northumbria Healthcare, during a visit to Hexham general hospital in Northumberland on Monday. Photograph: Peter Summers/AP

[Aubrey Allegretti](#) Political correspondent

[@breeallegretti](#)

Mon 8 Nov 2021 16.18 EST

Boris Johnson appeared maskless during a visit to a hospital on Monday despite fears that Covid is spreading around parliament, with 114 people catching the virus on the Palace of Westminster estate in the past month.

The prime minister was seen walking along a corridor in Hexham hospital in Northumberland and posing for pictures alongside medical staff who

donned light blue face coverings. Johnson was seen elbow-bumping and wearing a mask at some other points.

No 10 said Johnson followed the guidelines set by the local NHS trust. A source said Johnson had just left a meeting where he was speaking, was not in a clinical area, and put a mask on shortly afterwards.

Safety measures have been gradually reintroduced to the House of Commons, and more Tory MPs have begun wearing face coverings in the chamber, though some frontbenchers – including the Commons leader, Jacob Rees-Mogg, and the chief whip, Mark Spencer – remained maskless during a debate on Monday.

George Freeman said he had a “bad attack” of coronavirus last week and faced difficulty breathing, so had been confined to bed on doctors’ orders. About five Labour MPs were said to be isolating with the virus, with the figure rumoured to be slightly higher on the Conservative side.

The prime minister was accused by opposition MPs of running scared from an emergency debate in parliament about his [botched attempt](#) last week to save a Tory colleague, Owen Paterson, from suspension for breaking lobbying rules.

[uk corona cases](#)

Johnson took a train back to London from Northumberland, leaving him unable to attend the debate. A Tory aide “noted with disdain” that last week he flew by private jet back from the Cop26 climate change conference in Glasgow to make a [dinner reservation at the Garrick Club](#) with a close ally of Paterson’s.

Some politicians have been concerned by the spread of Covid in parliament for months. An internal memo seen by the Guardian from authorities sent to staff on Monday said the Covid risk for those working in Westminster “had increased, and swift action was necessary as a result”.

It confirmed there were 114 cases “with links to the estate” found between 4 October and 5 November. Further restrictions for parliamentary workers could be introduced following a meeting of the Commons commission later this week.

Jenny Jones, a Green peer, said the Lords had been better at maintaining Covid measures than the Commons. However, she said, she had complained that ministers’ aides still came into the chamber maskless. Jones told the Guardian the government remained “arrogant and careless” on the issue.

Mike Clancy, general secretary of the Prospect union, which represents professionals including parliamentary staffers, said: “The number of cases directly linked to the estate is worrying but we’ve been warning for some time that poor enforcement or observation of the rules, particularly amongst MPs, would result in a spike in infections. We will be checking the numbers carefully in the coming days and it may be that we need to recommend stronger measures than we have currently. In the meantime everyone should be wearing a mask and practising social distancing to protect themselves and parliament staff. MPs should be leading by example on this.”

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[China](#)

Chinese city offers cash for clues as Covid outbreak declared a ‘people’s war’



China is committed to a Covid Zero strategy, and is deploying an escalating array of measures in its attempts to eliminate the virus. Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock

*Helen Davidson in Taipei and agencies
@heldavidson*

Tue 9 Nov 2021 00.11 EST

Residents of a Chinese city bordering Russia have been offered major cash rewards for tips on the continuing Delta outbreak, with local officials declaring a “people’s war” on the virus.

Authorities announced the 100,000 yuan (\$15,640) rewards for residents in Heihe, in the north-eastern Heilongjiang Province, as its total tally of cases

in this outbreak reached 240.

“It is hoped that the general public could actively cooperate with the tracing of the virus and provide clues to the probe,” the declaration said.

According to state media, officials have urged people in the border city to immediately report any instances of illegal hunting, animal smuggling, or people crossing the border to fish. It also warned of severe penalties for people who intentionally conceal relevant information.

China’s health commission reported another 62 locally transmitted symptomatic cases on Monday, and 43 on Tuesday, adding to the more than 940 cases recorded in at least 20 provinces nationally since October, in the country’s worst outbreak since Wuhan in early 2020.

The government is [committed to a Covid Zero strategy](#), and is deploying an escalating array of measures in its attempts to eliminate the virus from the community again.

Henan province authorities have said they will “catch and kill” the virus within a week, with provincial party secretary Lou Yangsheng [vowing to expand lockdowns](#) and contact tracing as necessary.

Authorities in Chengdu have expanded tracing measures and orders, reportedly identifying some people if their mobile phones transmitted through the same cell tower in a 14 day period.

The measure, dubbed “spacial-temporal overlap”, classifies someone as a close contact if the phone signal was within 800 square metres of a case for more than 10 minutes, or if both parties spent at least 30 hours in the identified area over the two week period.

The method saw authorities order about 82,000 people who had visited a massive shopping complex to get tested and then self-isolate. Video footage purported to show some people climbing over fences to escape the mandatory testing requirement.

Earlier this month authorities [locked down Shanghai Disneyland](#) and tested all guests inside after a previous visitor was diagnosed with the illness.

With the outbreak continuing, health officials have called for an acceleration of booster shots and vaccinations to children.

Wang Qinghua, chief immunologist of the Chinese Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said it was previously thought children were largely unaffected by Covid-19, but the situation had changed as the virus mutated.

“We have seen increased infections in children, with the rates of severe illness and mortality surpassing influenza in some countries ... and the hospitalisation rate for children is now more than 10 times higher than earlier this year,” he said, according to state media.

According to the Global Times, health authorities have set a target of vaccinating all eligible children aged 3 to 11 before the end of the year. More than 3.5m doses have been delivered to the age group so far, according to government data. Vaccinations are voluntary in China.

This article was amended on 9 November 2021 to correct the spelling of Heihe in the text and subheading.

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2021.11.09 - Opinion

- Tory sleaze proves that British politics needs cleaning up. Labour must do it
- I'm a comedian and banter is my job - this is the truth about racist jokes
- I am not a complete idiot – but try telling that to my mum
- No 10 is marching through cultural institutions – and making a battleground of the arts

[Opinion](#)[House of Commons](#)

Tory sleaze proves that British politics needs cleaning up. Labour must do it

[Polly Toynbee](#)



Keir Starmer speaking during prime minister's questions at the House of Commons, 20 October. Photograph: Jessica Taylor/AFP/Getty Images

Tue 9 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

Cleaning up politics is a stunningly simple task, glaringly obvious to anyone – except those [250 Tory MPs](#) who voted last week to protect their own. What we need to do is take all the money out of Westminster and let parliamentarians live on their salaries as other public servants do. Just [over a third of MPs](#) took home £4.9m between them in outside earnings in the 12 months since March 2020.

Ah, we'd lose high-quality people by banning extra work, they say – yet how much would those paid “consultant” MPs be missed? Running the NHS, schools, Whitehall or councils, the public sector is packed with people of far higher calibre than the current crop of ministers. They work without fame but, like the better MPs, to improve society.

The recent scandal only passed as a “[Westminster storm in a teacup](#)” – the words of environment secretary George Eustice – because under Boris Johnson barely a week goes by without some new dishonesty: his government has made [43 U-turns](#) since it came to power in December 2019, and most were disreputable. Keir Starmer, accusing the prime minister of “leading his troops through the sewer”, reaffirmed Labour’s commitment to bar MPs from directorships and consultancies; along with restrictions to stop ministers departing to companies through that corrupt revolving door. Lobbying pays good returns: compare Randox’s [£8,000-a-month outlay](#) to Owen Paterson, with government contracts worth almost £500m. (The company insists Paterson “played no role in securing any Randox contract”.)

Labour is perfectly placed to run a clean-up-politics campaign, led by a former director of public prosecutions and a frontbench unlikely to be caught pilfering. Back-to-basics campaigns risk exposing a wrongdoer in the ranks, but what matters is how parties respond. Labour has called for [Claudia Webbe](#), the Leicester East MP, to resign – having already withdrawn the whip – after her conviction of harassment against a woman.

But Paterson was protected by his leader, with Nadhim Zahawi sent on to the airwaves to defend him, admitting he [hadn't even read](#) the excoriating standards committee report.

Out of wrongheaded tribalism, Labour has refused to give [an independent candidate a free run](#) in Paterson's North Shropshire seat: there's little chance the party's candidate would win, so why not sidestep inevitable humiliation and help give the Tories a fright? Johnson's [polling has slid](#) to its lowest level, his every policy indicator flashing red. But Labour fails to streak ahead. It's time to accept that any general election victory will have to come with near-certain coalition with other progressive parties.

A first step in facing that reality would be to draw up a clean-politics charter with other parties and civil society organisations. Of course the Tories would refuse to join, but how would it look if all Labour, Liberal Democrat, Green, SNP and Plaid candidates wore a clean-up politics white badge, but not the Tories?

An agreed charter could commit to expunging money, honours and bribery from Westminster. Tricky cases, such as [Dr Rosena Allin-Khan](#) MP working shifts in A&E, or Nadine Dorries' [phenomenal book sales](#) are not beyond the wit of drafters to work round.

Next, they should abolish political donations beyond the small sums that come from party members. If this means increasing public subsidy to political parties, it would be a worthwhile investment for taxpayers, ensuring that the few can't buy influence: property developers [have given the Tories £60m](#) in the past decade. MP Margaret Hodge's forthcoming report for King's College London's Policy Institute traces how laundered and dirty donations mean "corrupt money corrupts politics".

A charter should pledge a wide-ranging royal commission to give Britain a written constitution, now that Johnson has broken what was left of the honour and tradition supposedly glueing those unwritten conventions together. Starmer's leadership campaign commitment to a democratic second chamber is more urgent than ever, with openDemocracy and the Sunday Times revealing the going rate for peerages: 15 of the last 16 Conservative party treasurers [donated at least £3m](#) and got the ermine.

Transparency was meant to let in sunlight, the best disinfectant, but only 41% of freedom of information requests by the public are granted in full, part of a downward trend. Yet transparency isn't enough: the National Audit Office has no power to act on its stream of shocking reports on government malfunction. It needs teeth. The current elections bill is also a travesty, giving government effective control over the independent Electoral Commission, allowing it to impose penalties on what it determines to be third-party election campaigning – say from the TUC or Black Lives Matter. Meanwhile, one backbencher told the Financial Times that some Tory MPs were informed “they would lose funding for their constituency” if they failed to vote for Paterson – flagrant corruption.

A pact on a clean-politics charter isn't the electoral alliance many of us favour, and the terms of any constitutional commission would have to be agreed by a post-election coalition. But if Johnson wants a culture war to distract from his corruption, economic failures and weakening public services, bring it on. A renamed statue or a “woke” National Trust initiative is a weak weapon compared with combating the culture of Tory snouts in the trough.

Cleaning up politics is neither left- nor rightwing, when Tory wrongdoing will keep bursting into the headlines as long as Johnson stays in No 10. The standards committee chair, Chris Bryant, goes as far as to say to me that the threatened removal of independent checks and balances means “we might as well have Viktor Orbán running Britain”. The Tory barrister and politician, Quintin Hogg, famously once warned of an “elective dictatorship” and that's Johnson's way – stuffing every post with yes people. Labour needs to go at this hammer and tongs, not with lawyerly caution but sounding the klaxon on the corruption of democracy.

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OpinionRace

I'm a comedian and banter is my job - this is the truth about racist jokes

[Shazia Mirza](#)



‘If I went on stage in 2021 and referred to someone by using the P-word or the N-word, the audience would turn on me. They just wouldn’t stand for it.’ Photograph: Dan Chung/The Guardian

Tue 9 Nov 2021 04.00 EST

“I like your handbag!” I say.

“It was only a pound, from the pound shop,” she says.

“No! I thought everything in the pound shop was £10.99. You’ve been undercharged luv, you need to go back and pay the rest!”

This is an exchange I had with an audience member while I was on stage last week. Me and the woman didn't know each other, we had a bit of a laugh, nobody was abused or attacked.

It's called banter. I know what it is because I'm a comedian: banter is my job, I do it every night.

When I was a child, my mum and I were getting on a packed train at Birmingham New Street when a white woman came on board, pushed my mum off the train and said, "Get out the way you Paki bastard!" It's been 30 years since that incident and I still feel sad and terrified every time I remember it. I remember the aggression and hatred with which it was said, and the horror not only of the word, but that nobody said anything to defend my mum.

That is not banter.

When the Yorkshire cricketer Gary Ballance came out and admitted to using the P-word against his teammate Azeem Rafiq, as part of the continuing row highlighting casual racism in sport and a national debate about racism in the workplace, the panel investigating said the use of the word was considered a "[friendly verbal attack ... in the spirit of friendly banter](#)".

But I'm not convinced that's true, even for comedians like me who can joke about anything they want. If I went on stage in 2021 and referred to someone by using the P-word or the N-word, the audience would turn on me. They would either walk out, tell me to get off, or if they were really polite, write a letter of complaint. They just wouldn't stand for it.

I say this, because even when I've made jokes about myself and my family, like "My mother wears the burqa – mainly because she doesn't want to be seen with my dad", many audiences find it uncomfortable to laugh. There is hesitation, a delay; it's like they need me to give them permission to laugh nervously.

White comedians say to me, "Only you can make that joke". That's right. But even so, people are cautious. They don't want to be seen to be laughing at someone based on their colour or religion. It's the same in the green

rooms at comedy gigs. As comedians, we often banter with each other, make jokes and laugh at one another – but I have never heard anyone making a joke at another comedian’s expense based on their race or religion, and I am certain that if they did, they would be called out on it.

It’s not always been this way, of course. In the 1970s, Bernard Manning and Jim Davidson were both racist and funny. It was acceptable then for them to use the P-word in their comedy, just like that woman on the train had, and audiences comfortably laughed along with it.

Since then, however, there has been the [Race](#) Relations Act, which outlawed discrimination, and high-profile campaigns like the anti-apartheid movement, Show Racism the Red Card and Black Lives Matter. The world has changed. It has evolved.

Racism is not banter. It’s racism.

I am Pakistani. There are some who would say that calling me a “Paki” is an abbreviation of Pakistani. It is not. It is a racial slur that has been built on hatred, aggression and violence. It is associated with a time in history when my parents first came to this country and were abused and attacked because of the colour of their skin and where they came from. A better abbreviation might be “Stani” – that has no harmful connotations. I am from Birmingham and don’t find being called Brummie offensive either – because that truly is an abbreviation of Birmingham.

There are things I say in private that I would never say in public, like how I must stop shoplifting from charity shops, and stealing sweets from the pick ‘n’ mix. My friends say things to me in private as well, things about my moustache and my poor life decisions and bad haircuts. But even in private, they would never say the P-word to me – there can be no banter with a word that has such darkness attached to it, a word that is only ever used to demean and punch down.

Duwayne Brooks, the friend of Stephen Lawrence who was with him on the night of his murder, said that he heard one of Lawrence’s assailants saying racial slurs before attacking him. If you think the N- and P-words are just

“friendly banter”, you should ask Doreen Lawrence and the parents of others whose lives have been lost in racist attacks if they think the same.

There really is nothing like British banter. We are the best at it. Along with queueing and tutting, it is a national pastime, like moaning about the weather. So what is banter? It’s the exchange of remarks in a good-humoured, teasing way. Banter might take aim at the clothes people are wearing, their hairstyle, their facial hair, their shoes. Racism should never come into it.

I would be very happy to create a list for every football and cricket ground just to make that clear.

- Shazia Mirza is a comedian. Her latest show, *Coconut*, is on tour from 16 November
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OpinionFamily

I am not a complete idiot – but try telling that to my mum

[Zoe Williams](#)



‘And this, dear, is what we call a sink.’ Photograph: Gary John Norman/Getty Images/Image Source

Tue 9 Nov 2021 02.00 EST

I had a big meal to cook a couple of days ago but my oven was broken, so I was doing it all at my mother’s. Her place is full of ovens. Even her wee microwave has a conventional function more reliable than any range cooker. She also has a regular oven, and a spare oven that she uses as a cupboard. It’s not because she’s rich, it’s just because she’s old. These things accumulate. She also has more rolls of Sellotape than I could count.

What I noticed, over eight hours, was that if I were as impractical, as naive and as irretrievably stupid as her helpful advice suggests she thinks I am, I would definitely be dead by now. “You know with your oven,” she began, “if it’s not igniting, but you leave the gas on, that could result in an explosion.” Well, yes. “Would you like the number of a gas engineer?” No, no, I’d just like to release gas into my kitchen and see what happens. “That knife you’re using …” Mmmm? “It’s extremely sharp. Try to make sure your fingers aren’t directly underneath it.” But I’m 48 years old, and I still have all my fingers! How would I have got here, not knowing to keep them away from knives? “Has that chicken been refrigerated? Because there’s quite a serious disease you can get, it’s called salmonella.” Huh, who knew? “Did I ever tell you about rice poisoning?” So many times. “Trays coming directly out of the oven can be quite hot.” OK. “Are you keeping an eye on your cholesterol?” Well, this is dinner for 13. It’s not all for me. But thanks.

I got hit by a car when I was a kid, and after that I was allowed to go and see my friend across the road, but I couldn’t cross back over until my mum came out to get me. One time, she forgot. After about 20 minutes, a stranger offered to cross me over, but I wasn’t technically allowed to talk to strangers, either, and we were both caught in this conundrum which neither my child ingenuity nor his adult wisdom could crack, until my mum finally remembered where I was. To look on the bright side, at least I am now trusted to cross a road.

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No 10 is marching through cultural institutions – and making a battleground of the arts

[Charlotte Higgins](#)





Illustration by Ben Jennings

Mon 8 Nov 2021 08.06 EST

When the chair of the National Maritime Museum, Charles Dunstone, wrote to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to extend [Dr Aminul Hoque](#)'s trusteeship into a second four-year term, it was just a formality. The letter, written in the summer of 2020, said Hoque was a valued board member. It did not say that he was the sole non-white trustee. It did not mention his academic position, or his BBC history documentary, or his MBE. There was absolutely no need to say any of that. No one had ever heard of a trusteeship not being extended: it was automatic.

An official at the department, however, telephoned Dunstone to say that Hoque's term [would not be renewed](#). There was no requirement for the culture secretary, Oliver Dowden, to justify the decision, they said – however, they pointed out, Hoque had ["liked" tweets hostile to the government](#). That autumn, Dunstone urged Dowden by phone to change his mind. He would not be able to defend the minister's decision to the museum and fellow trustees.

In January, though, Dunstone heard again from the DCMS: Hoque's trusteeship would definitely not be renewed. Dunstone, honourably,

resigned. For a giddy moment the other trustees, so I was told, considered going en masse – their “I’m Spartacus!” moment – until they realised that doing so would offer the government the chance to stuff the board with its chosen people. Bear in mind that Dunstone, the billionaire founder of TalkTalk, and [his colleagues](#) – among them a retired first sea lord and the then head of Lloyd’s Register – were as far from “woke warriors” as can be imagined.

For his part, “I was shocked, disappointed and baffled,” Hoque told me. “People should draw their own conclusions as to whether my previous academic research and writing contributed to the government’s actions.” (A DCMS spokesperson told me: “There is no automatic presumption of reappointment, and ministers may decide to make a reappointment or launch a campaign to attract fresh talent.”)

I’ve had my own little trawl through Hoque’s tweets. There’s a lot of enthusiasm for the England football team. There’s also a bit about British history, which, he suggested, “needs to be rewritten to include the stories of its ethnic minorities and acknowledge their important contribution to the development of the British national story. [#decolonize #inclusive #multiplestories](#).” Pretty mild stuff – but the sort of thing that’s a red flag to this [“culture wars”-obsessed government](#).

Appointing political allies to influential public positions is nothing new. Under Thatcher, the Conservative Marmaduke Hussey became BBC chair; under New Labour it was Gavyn Davies, who had once worked for Harold Wilson and James Callaghan. “What is different now,” [said Peter Riddell recently](#), “is the breadth of the campaign and the close engagement of 10 Downing Street.” Until September Riddell was commissioner for public appointments, in charge of ensuring the system’s fairness.

The government, in short, is going in hard to shape English public bodies in its image. This project is being pushed forward shamelessly – as in the case of Ofcom, where the process to appoint a chair is [being rerun](#) so that the favoured, but initially rejected, former Mail editor Paul Dacre can have another crack. In the arena of the arts, what is seen as a left-of-centre consensus born of the Blair and Brown years has been targeted for fixing. The arts have become a battleground where ideas of national image,

heritage and history are fought over. At the heart of No 10, there's an intense dislike of the politics of identity, and a loathing of the suggestion that the British imperial project was harmful. That's partly born of the assumption that anything that even hints at a lack of patriotism is a turn-off to the voters of the "red wall".

A look at the board of the National Portrait Gallery in London gives a sense of how this might be going: the museum in charge of presenting England's image back to itself, and currently in the throes of a major redisplay, has on its board Chris Grayling; Jacob Rees-Mogg (the leader of the House of Commons is an automatic appointment); and Inaya Folarin Iman, the culture and social affairs editor of the rightwing GB News. The chair is David Ross, who "facilitated" Boris and Carrie Johnson's infamous [Mustique holiday](#).

Behind this campaign of realignment is [Munira Mirza](#), Boris Johnson's culture adviser when he was mayor of London, now head of No 10's policy unit, and her husband, Tory fixer Dougie Smith. The trawling of tweets is not just about risk-assessing inflammatory or offensive things buried deep in a person's feed, but fishing for disloyalty. One person who recently sat as an independent member of an interview panel told me that their attention was drawn to one candidate's tweet that was unfavourable about Brexit. "I'll pretend I didn't hear that," they told me they replied.

The government, it is pretty clear, doesn't have a great deal of time for rules, or established practice, or the unspoken liberal norms that have traditionally funnelled behaviour into commonly accepted channels. Kicking out Hoque wasn't the done thing, but since it was possible, it did it. You're not supposed to leak the names of favoured candidates before a public appointments process begins, but [it did with Dacre for Ofcom](#). The process itself is designed to be transparent and rigorous: it involves an interview panel containing at least one independent member and chaired by a civil servant. The panel will name who it considers the best candidate, alongside one or two others deemed "appointable". Riddell has voiced concerns about ministers ignoring recommendations and selecting candidates deemed "unappointable"; there has already been [an attempt](#) to do this, he said recently. Johnson has form; when he was mayor, he tried to

insist that the former Evening Standard editor Veronica Wadley became chair of the Arts Council London, despite the interview panel having rejected her. (Blocked at the time by Labour culture secretary Ben Bradshaw, she later [got the job](#) under the then Tory culture secretary, Jeremy Hunt.)

How much does all this matter? Boards of trustees are innately conservative: that institutional stolidity might act as some protection from the radicalism of the right as much as it frustrates those on the left who wish for change. The direct influence of No 10 on arts institutions does not extend deep into the arts (and not much beyond England's borders): aside from national museums, [Arts Council England](#) and a handful of others, English arts organisations are in charge of appointing their own board members. However – and unarguably once the BBC is brought into the equation – those that do fall under direct government influence happen to be especially influential ones.

The most important job of trustees is to select directors of organisations, and as Tory influence deepens on boards this may begin to have its impact on the way institutions are run and what the public sees. In the meantime, don't expect museum high-ups to utter the Tory trigger-word "decolonise" any time soon; an institutional caution around certain areas – the empire, slavery – may put them into conflict with their own audiences and even their workforces, many of whose younger members are increasingly impatient with structural inequalities.

More generally, the climate created by a government obsessed by "culture wars" is profoundly damaging. When staff members from a rather dull institution such as Historic England – in charge of listing buildings and monuments – [receive threats](#) from the far right, there's something amiss with the body politic. The Tories should be very careful what they wish for.

- Charlotte Higgins is the Guardian's chief culture writer
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[SpaceX](#)

SpaceX capsule splashes down after astronauts' six months onboard ISS

0

SpaceX capsule streaks across the sky before splashing down in the Gulf of Mexico – video

Reuters

Tue 9 Nov 2021 01.27 EST

Four astronauts strapped inside a [SpaceX](#) Crew Dragon capsule have splashed down safely in the Gulf of Mexico off the Florida coast, ending a six-month Nasa mission onboard the International Space Station and a daylong flight home.

The Dragon vehicle, dubbed Endeavour, parachuted into the sea as planned just after 10:30pm EST on Monday, after a fiery re-entry descent through Earth's atmosphere broadcast live by a [Nasa](#) webcast.

Live thermal video imaging captured a glimpse of the capsule streaking like a meteor through the night sky over the Gulf minutes before splashdown.



The SpaceX Crew Dragon Endeavour spacecraft as it lands in the Gulf of Mexico
Photograph: Aubrey Gemignani/EPA

Applause was heard from the flight control centre as the four main parachutes inflated above the capsule as it drifted down toward the Gulf surface, slowing its speed to about 15 mph (24 kph) before dropping gently into the calm sea.

“Endeavour, on behalf of [SpaceX](#), welcome home to planet Earth,” a voice from the SpaceX flight control centre in suburban Los Angeles was heard telling the crew as a safe splashdown was confirmed.

Within an hour, all four astronauts were out of the capsule, exchanging fist bumps with the team on the recovery ship. “It’s great to be back,” one of the astronauts radioed in reply.

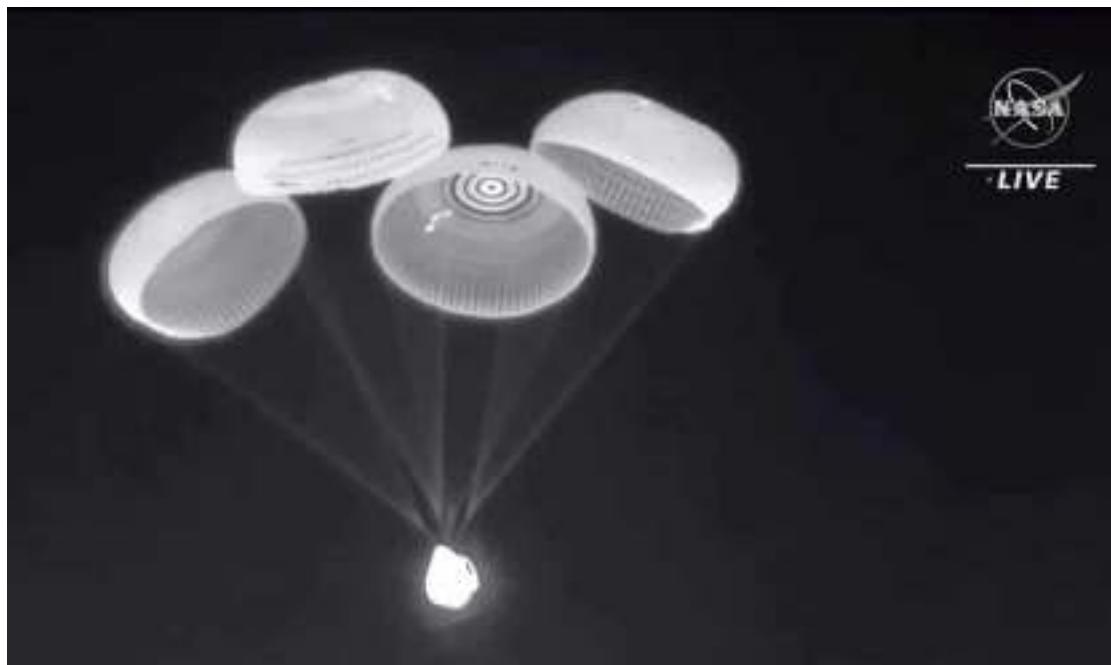
[@MargaretOrr](#) Caught the Space X re-entry from our rooftop; How cool! pic.twitter.com/LT99bfDfRs

— Allen Poole (@Poole_HeBad) [November 9, 2021](#)

Operating autonomously, the spacecraft began its eight-hour return voyage earlier in the day with a 90-minute fly-around of the space station as the crew snapped a series of survey photographs of the orbiting outpost, circling the globe 250 miles (400 km) high.

The Crew Dragon then proceeded through a series of manoeuvres over the course of the day to bring it closer to Earth and line up the capsule for its final night-time descent.

Propelled by one last ignition of its forward rocket thrusters for a “de-orbit burn,” the capsule re-entered the atmosphere at about 17,000 mph (27,359 kph) for a freefall toward the ocean below, during which crew communications were lost for several minutes.



Parachutes are deployed from the SpaceX Dragon capsule Photograph: AP

Intense friction generated as the capsule plunges through the atmosphere sends temperatures surrounding the outside the vehicle soaring to 3,500 degrees fahrenheit (1,927 degrees Celsius). The re-entry friction also slows the capsule’s descent before parachutes are deployed.

The astronauts’ flight suits are designed to keep them cool if the cabin warms up, while a heat shield protects the capsule from incinerating on re-

entry.

The crew, which spent 199 days in space during this mission, was made up of two Nasa astronauts – mission commander Shane Kimbrough, 54, and pilot Megan McArthur, 50 – along with Japanese astronaut Akihiko Hoshide, 52, and fellow mission specialist Thomas Pesquet, 43, a French engineer from the European Space Agency.

They were lofted to orbit atop a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket that lifted off on 23 April from the Kennedy Space Centre in Florida.

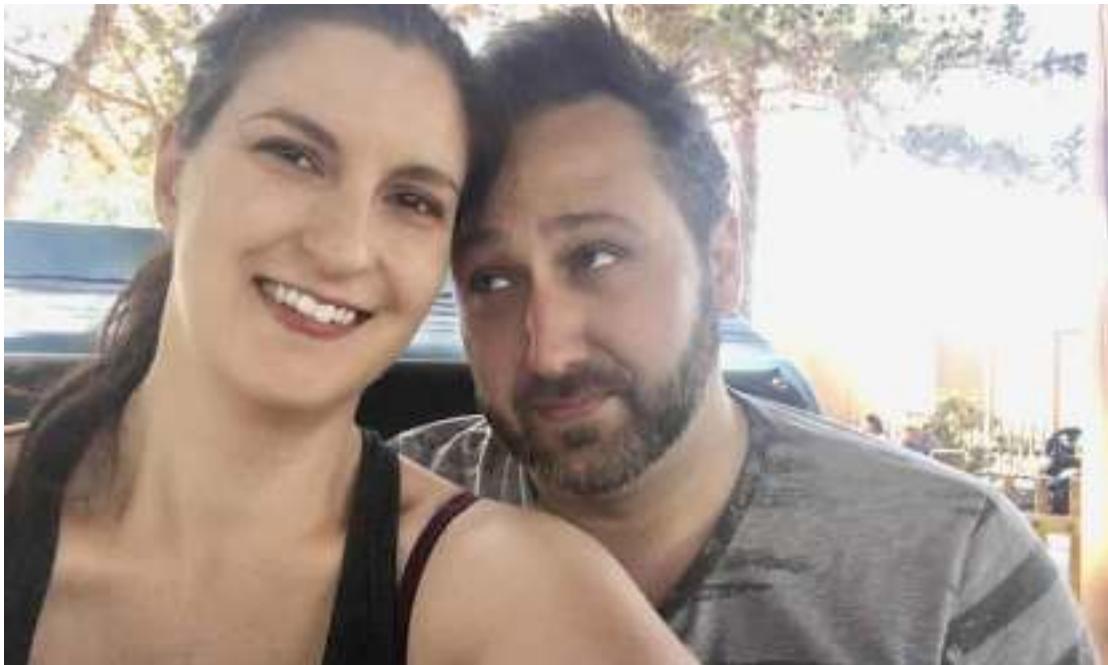
It was the third crew launched into orbit under Nasa's fledgling public-private partnership with SpaceX, the rocket company formed in 2002 by billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk, who also co-founded electric carmaker Tesla Inc.

One irregularity confronting the returning crew was a plumbing leak aboard the capsule that put the spacecraft's toilet out of order, requiring the astronauts to use spacesuit undergarments if nature called during the flight home, according to Nasa.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2021/nov/09/spacex-astronauts-splash-down-after-six-month-mission-aboard-the-iss>

California

California women gave birth to each other's babies after IVF mix-up



Daphna Cardinale, pictured with her husband, Alexander, said all four parents had made an effort to ‘forge a larger family’ since the error was discovered. Photograph: AP

Associated Press in Los Angeles

Tue 9 Nov 2021 04.22 EST

Two [California](#) couples gave birth to each other’s babies after a mix-up at a fertility clinic and spent months raising children that were not theirs before swapping the infants, according to a lawsuit filed in Los Angeles.

Daphna Cardinale said she and her husband, Alexander, had immediate suspicions that the girl she gave birth to in late 2019 was not theirs due to the child’s darker complexion.

They suppressed their doubts because they fell in love with the baby and trusted the in vitro fertilisation process and their doctors, she said. Learning months later that she had been pregnant with another couple's baby, and that another woman had been carrying her child, caused enduring trauma, she said.

"I was overwhelmed by feelings of fear, betrayal, anger and heartbreak," she said during a news conference with her husband announcing the lawsuit. "I was robbed of the ability to carry my own child. I never had the opportunity to grow and bond with her during pregnancy, to feel her kick."

The Cardinales' complaint accuses the Los Angeles-based California Center for Reproductive [Health](#) (CCRH) and its owner, Dr Eliran Mor, of medical malpractice, breach of contract, negligence and fraud. It demands a jury trial and seeks unspecified damages.

Yvonne Telles, the office administrator for the centre, declined to comment on Monday. Mor could not be reached for comment.

The two other parents involved in the alleged mix-up wish to remain anonymous and plan a similar lawsuit in the coming days, according to the attorney Adam Wolf, who represents all four parents.

The lawsuit claims CCRH mistakenly implanted the other couple's embryo into Daphna and transferred the Cardinales' embryo – made from Daphna's egg and Alexander's sperm – into the other woman.

The babies, both girls, were born a week apart in September 2019. Both couples unwittingly raised the wrong child for nearly three months before DNA tests confirmed that the embryos were swapped, according to the filing.

"The Cardinales, including their young daughter, fell in love with this child, and were terrified she would be taken away from them," the complaint says. "All the while, Alexander and Daphna did not know the whereabouts of their own embryo, and thus were terrified that another woman had been pregnant with their child – and their child was out in the world somewhere without them."

The babies were swapped back in January 2020.

Mix-ups like this are exceedingly rare, but not unprecedented. In 2019, a couple from Glendale, California, sued a separate fertility clinic, claiming their embryo was mistakenly implanted in a [New York woman, who gave birth to their son](#) as well as a second boy belonging to another couple.

Wolf, whose firm specialises in fertility cases, called for greater oversight for IVF clinics. “This case highlights an industry in desperate need of federal regulation,” he said.

Breaking the news to their older daughter, now seven, that doctors made a mistake and that the baby was not actually her sister “was the hardest thing in my life,” Daphna said. “My heart breaks for her, perhaps the most,” she said.

Since the mix-up came to light and the babies returned to their biological families, all four parents have since made an effort to stay in each others’ lives and “forge a larger family,” Daphna said.

“They were just as much in love with our biological daughter as we were with theirs,” Alexander said.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/nov/09/california-women-gave-birth-to-each-others-babies-after-ivf-mix-up>

Myanmar

Myanmar military build-up ‘mirrors’ movements before Rohingya atrocities, says UK



A child seen at a camp for people displaced during conflict between military and an ethnic rebel group in Myanmar's eastern Shan state. Millions are in desperate need of aid, a senior UN figure has said. Photograph: MNWM/AFP/Getty Images

Staff and agencies

Tue 9 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

Britain’s deputy UN ambassador has voiced concerns a military build-up in Myanmar’s north-west bears similarities to the [Rohingya genocide of 2017](#).

James Kariuki told reporters before heading into a closed-doors meeting with the UN security council on Monday: “We are concerned that this rather

mirrors the activity we saw four years ago ahead of the atrocities that were committed in Rakhine against the Rohingya [Muslim minority]”

The remarks came as UN aid chief Martin Griffiths said the humanitarian situation in [Myanmar](#) was deteriorating, with more than 3 million people in need of life-saving aid, adding that “without an end to violence and a peaceful resolution of Myanmar’s crisis, this number will only rise”.

The security council meeting coincides with the first anniversary of the re-election of Aung San Suu Kyi’s government, which was then ousted by the military in a 1 February coup.

Myanmar is [facing charges of genocide](#) at the international court of justice over a 2017 military crackdown on the Rohingya that forced more than 730,000 people to flee into neighbouring Bangladesh. Myanmar denies genocide and says its armed forces were legitimately targeting militants who attacked police posts.

About 223,000 Burmese remain internally displaced, including 165,000 in the country’s southeast – adding to those already displaced in Rakhine, Chin, Shan and Kachin states prior to the takeover, the UN emergency relief coordinator [said](#).

Griffiths also said in a statement that the situation in the northwest of the [Myanmar](#) had become “extremely concerning” in recent weeks as fighting escalated between the Myanmar military and the Chinland Defence Force in Chin state and the Myanmar military and the People’s Defence Forces in Magway and Sagaing regions.

“More than 37,000 people, including women and children, have been newly displaced, and more than 160 homes have been burned, including churches and the offices of a humanitarian organisation,” Griffiths said.

The UN chief said attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, including humanitarian workers and facilities are banned under international humanitarian law and “must stop immediately”.

Griffiths called on the Myanmar armed forces to “facilitate safe, rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access” and the international community to “fund the response”.

“I’m hoping we will speak together today and with one voice and a statement on Myanmar,” Ireland’s UN ambassador Geraldine Byrne Nason told reporters ahead of the council meeting.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/09/millions-in-myanmar-need-live-saving-help-un-aid-chief-warns>

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[**Business live**](#)

[**Business**](#)

UK facing income squeeze and rising destitution; ‘Bitcoin’ consultation launched; Tesla shares slide – as it happened

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[Apple](#)

Apple's first computer, a collector's dream, could fetch \$500,000 at auction



An Apple-1 at the Computer History Museum in Mountain View, California. Photograph: Tony Avelar/EPA

[Dani Anguiano in Los Angeles](#)

[@dani_anguiano](#)

Mon 8 Nov 2021 16.57 EST

One of the few remaining Apple-1 computers, the company's first product, will go on sale this week at an auction that is expected to fetch as much as \$600,000.

The 45-year-old computer is one of just 200 that Steve Wozniak and Steve Jobs tested and designed along with Patty Jobs and Daniel Kottke in the Jobs' Los Altos home. It is considered a "holy grail" for vintage tech collectors.

“That really makes it exciting for a lot of people,” Corey Cohen, an Apple-1 expert, told the [Los Angeles Times](#).

John Moran Auctioneers will [auction the computer](#) off on Tuesday with bids starting at \$200,000. The southern-California-based auction house estimates it will sell for between \$400,000 and \$600,000. Apple-1 experts told the LA Times they estimate it will fetch around \$500,000. In [2014](#), a New York auction house sold an Apple-1 unit for \$905,000.

The model was one of 50 sold to the ByteShop in Mountain View, [California](#). Paul Terrell, the shop’s owner, was unhappy when he first received the computers as he expected the units would be ready to be plugged in and used by the buyer. But Jobs was able to convince him he could make a profit by selling the computer with keyboards, monitors and power supplies from the shop, according to John Moran.

A Chafee College electronics professor first purchased the computer but in 1977 sold it to a student in order to upgrade to an Apple II. The student had held on to it ever since.



Steve Jobs stands beneath a photograph of him and Steve Wozniak, during a 2010 event. Photograph: Kimberly White/Reuters/Corbis

The model has undergone an “extensive authentication, restoration, and evaluation process”, according to the auction house. It is one of about 60 Apple-1 units still in existence, according to the Times, and one of just 20 still functioning.

The model is one of six encased in Koa wood, which has since become rarer and more expensive. It comes with a Panasonic video monitor, a copy of the Apple-1 basic manual and operations guide, an original programming manual, and two Apple-1 software cassette tapes as well as three original video, power and cassette interface cables.

John Moran has already received phoned-in bids, a representative told the [East Bay Times](#), and the auction was featured in Times Square.

“When you see certain items, you just know that they’re going to be showstoppers,” Nathan Martinez, advertising and marketing director at John Moran, told the newspaper. “The Apple-1 is one of those.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2021/nov/08/apple-1-computer-auction>

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[Cop26](#)

Cop26 legitimacy questioned as groups excluded from crucial talks



Members of indigenous groups from Brazil stand on the stage in George Square during the Cop26 summit in Glasgow. Photograph: Jane Barlow/PA

[Nina Lakhani](#) in Glasgow

Mon 8 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

The legitimacy of the [Cop26 climate summit](#) has been called into question by civil society participants who say restrictions on access to negotiations are unprecedented and unjust.

As the Glasgow summit [enters its second week](#), observers representing hundreds of environmental, academic, climate justice, indigenous and women's rights organisations warn that excluding them from negotiating

areas and speaking to negotiators could have dire consequences for millions of people.

Observers act as informal watchdogs of the summit – the eyes and ears of the public during negotiations to ensure proceedings are transparent and reflect the concerns of communities and groups most likely to be affected by decisions.

But their ability to observe, interact and intervene in negotiations on carbon markets, loss and damage and climate financing has been obstructed during the first week, the Guardian has been told.

“Civil society voices are critical to the outcome of Cop, but we’ve not been able to do our jobs. If participation and inclusion are the measure of legitimacy, then we’re on very shaky grounds,” said Tasneem Essop, the executive director of Climate Action Network (CAN), which represents more than 1,500 organisations in over 130 countries.

CAN is one of two environmental “constituencies” – loose networks of NGOs including youth groups, trade unions, indigenous peoples, business, agriculture, and gender – recognised by the UNFCCC.

Gina Cortes, a member of the [Women and Gender Constituency](#), representing women’s groups, said they also had to “call out the deep inequities and deep injustices of this Cop”.

“There are thousands of activists who should be here but who are missing and there is a shocking degree of closing space for civil society and frontline voices … it is offensive, unjust and unacceptable,” said Cortes.

In the run-up to [Cop26](#), the UK government had boasted that Glasgow would be the most inclusive summit on record.

In reality, [about two-thirds of civil society organisations](#) who usually send delegates to Cop have not travelled to Glasgow due to “vaccine apartheid”,

changing travel rules, extortionate travel costs and Britain's hostile immigration system.

Observers say the situation was most critical during the two-day leaders' summit at the start of last week, when they were limited to one or two tickets per constituency despite six negotiating rooms operating simultaneously. In addition, work stations, offices and restaurants were also cordoned off, preventing observers from having face-to-face contact with negotiators.

05:33

Indigenous activists on tackling the climate crisis: 'We have done more than any government' – video

"The level of restrictions was unprecedented," said Sebastian Duyck, from the Centre for International Environmental Law. "It's alarming, because the relationships we build at the start of Cop are crucial to the work we do after ... the limited participation absolutely undermines the credibility of Cop."

Access has improved since the ticketing system was lifted, with one observer per constituency now technically allowed in each meeting room – if there's enough space according to social distancing rules. But their ability to participate meaningfully remains limited.

Observers are particularly concerned about negotiations over carbon trading protocols, as governments and corporations look for ways to achieve net zero commitments using offsets.

"There's a real risk that decisions made in these rooms will impact human rights in the most dramatic fashion, like we saw happen under the carbon trading mechanism under Kyoto. If we get a bad rule, it's almost impossible to fix afterwards. The scale of carbon markets means there's a greater threat to communities," said Duyck.

This is a huge worry for indigenous communities, who comprise 6% of the global population but protect 80% of the planet's biodiversity. "Without our voices this risks the creation of rules that will continue to violate human,

territorial and spiritual rights of Indigenous Peoples,” said Eriel Deranger, an observer for Indigenous Climate Action.

The UK government points to the unprecedeted challenges posed by the pandemic, and says access has been boosted by the new online platform that has so far been used by 12,000 people.

But for some, trying to follow what’s going on virtually, technical glitches have made access a “logistical nightmare”, said Hellen Kaneni, regional Africa coordinator for the international nonprofit Corporate Accountability. “Cop has never been credible but this year it’s much worse, access has been limited in so many ways, it’s horrible.”

Aderonke Ige from Corporate Accountability and Public Participation Africa, who made it to Glasgow from Nigeria for her first Cop despite the Covid restrictions, said she felt “disappointed and unfulfilled” after failing to get online and being denied access to the meeting rooms and offices of the African group negotiators.

A spokesperson said: “The UK is committed to hosting an inclusive Cop. Ensuring that the voices of those most affected by climate change are heard is a priority for the Cop26 presidency, and if we are to deliver for our planet, we need all countries and civil society to continue demonstrating their ideas and ambition in Glasgow.”

The success of this Cop will be judged over years to come. But according to Nathan Thanki from Demand Climate Justice (the second environmental constituency), the summit’s legitimacy had been seriously undermined by restrictions in access and the way rich countries had used Cop26 to make headline-grabbing announcements outside the UNFCCC’s pledge and review framework.

“It’s impossible to monitor these announcements, which means there’s no accountability to civil society or other countries. That’s the sorry situation at this summit.”

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Cop26

Cop26: Obama criticises China and Russia for ‘dangerous absence of urgency’ – day eight as it happened

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/live/2021/nov/08/cop26-obama-to-speak-survey-shows-few-will-change-lifestyle-for-climate-day-eight-live>

[Cop26](#)

Cop26: what's still to be resolved in the week ahead



Negotiators have five days left to cut deals needed to cap global warming at 1.5 C. Photograph: The Observer

[Fiona Harvey](#) in Glasgow

Mon 8 Nov 2021 02.00 EST

Countries that have failed to come up with national plans on cutting greenhouse gas emissions in line with [limiting temperature rises to 1.5C](#) must be forced back to the negotiating table every year from now on, poor countries have said ahead of crunch talks at the [Cop26 climate summit](#).

Current pledges are inadequate, and would lead to heating of 2.7C, according to UN calculations. But [under the Paris agreement](#), countries are only required to ratchet up their pledges – [known as nationally determined](#)

contributions (NDCs) – every five years, with the next deadline falling in 2025. Developing countries say this is much too late.

Lia Nicholson, lead negotiator for the Alliance of Small Island States, told the Guardian: “Major emitters have to step up their climate action now, not in 2025, backed by concrete steps like ending fossil fuel subsidies in the next few years. Scaled up, accessible climate finance needs to happen now for more ambitious climate action in developing countries, through grants and not debt. It’s time to get to work and live up to our grand pledges.”

However, the UK’s environment secretary, George Eustice, suggested in an interview with Times Radio on Sunday that a commitment on bringing countries back to the table with fresh pledges would not be included in the final decision from [Cop26](#).

Christiana Figueres, the [former UN climate chief who oversaw the Paris agreement](#), told the Guardian that countries returning every year was possible under the Paris agreement, and a plan to do so should be agreed in Glasgow.

“The most vulnerable countries have called for an annual reporting on increased ambition for all governments, especially the major emitting countries. This could be done as a new regular component of the yearly Cops, and is allowed under the Paris agreement,” she said. “[This] should be part of the agreed outcome of Cop26.”

The Climate Vulnerable Forum, made up of 55 developing countries most affected by the consequences of the climate crisis, has also called for a “Glasgow Emergency Pact” from the summit, which would include a requirement from all countries for annual reporting on emission reductions, on a voluntary basis.

“The climate emergency requires an annual review, and not just every five years,” said Saleemul Huq, director of the International Centre for Climate Change and Development in Bangladesh.

Ed Miliband, Labour's shadow business secretary, and a veteran of the 2009 Copenhagen Cop, added: "If George Eustice represents the position of the government, it is deeply worrying and cannot be allowed to stand. All the evidence suggests we will leave Glasgow with a chasm between where we are and where we need to be to halve global emissions this decade and keep 1.5C alive. If the world decides not to revisit commitments on halving emissions until 2025, it will deliver a devastating blow to the prospects of keeping 1.5C alive."

02:37

'We're in this together': why I'm protesting at Cop26 – video

Some others have estimated that heating could be reduced to 1.9C or 1.8C, given other pledges made outside the Paris agreement, but these are controversial as they rely on many untested assumptions about countries fulfilling voluntary, and sometimes vague, promises. Only pledges made through the UN can be counted on, developing countries insist.

The discussion over when countries should return to the table – known as the acceleration, or ratchet, issue – is one of the key sticking points to a potential deal that the UK presidency is trying to put together in the second week of the Glasgow talks.

The [first week was dominated by announcements](#) of deals on preserving forests, galvanising climate finance from the private sector, and phasing out coal. The second week will focus on some of the hardest elements of the talks, including issues around the ratchet and:

- Regulations on how countries measure and report on their emissions.
- Whether, and how, carbon trading can play a role in how countries meet their commitments, under article 6 of the Paris agreement.
- How countries can be helped to adapt to the impacts of the climate crisis, and how they can receive financial help for any impacts too great to be adapted to – known as loss and damage.

However, cracks are already appearing in the goodwill and constructive approach that appeared to characterise the first week of the talks.

Greenpeace accused Saudi Arabia of leading efforts to ensure that a commitment on accelerating the review of NDCs was off the table. Jennifer Morgan, executive director, said this was familiar behaviour from the oil producer: “Saudi Arabia is at the chess board, manipulating the pieces in an effort to stop an outcome that keeps 1.5C within reach. Other governments now need to isolate the Saudi delegation if they want this Cop to succeed for everyone, not just fossil fuel interests.”

Mohamed Adow, director of the Power Shift Africa thinktank, warned that developing countries would not accept a poor outcome. He criticised rich countries for failing to deliver [\\$100bn to poor countries in climate finance](#), a target that was originally set for 2020 and now looks likely to be met only in 2023.

He warned: “The mood among developing countries is sour. Real progress needs to be made on adaptation funding and the setting up of a loss and damage mechanism to address those growing needs. Unless we get that developing countries will wonder why they bothered coming.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/nov/08/cop26-whats-still-to-be-resolved-in-the-week-ahead>

Fossil fuel divestment

More than 130 MPs call for parliament pension fund to divest from fossil fuels



(From left) Caroline Lucas, Nadia Whittome, Zarah Sultana, Clive Lewis and Claire Hanna, who are among the MPs calling on their pension fund to divest from fossil fuel firms.

Damien Gayle
[@damiengayle](#)

Mon 8 Nov 2021 02.00 EST

More than 130 MPs, including over half of the parliamentary [Labour](#) party, have signed a cross-party letter to their pension fund calling on it to divest from fossil fuel companies to “ensure that our pensions are not funding climate disaster”.

The letter, to be delivered on Monday to trustees of the Parliamentary Contributory Pension Fund (PCPF), applauds [recent reductions](#) in

investments in fossil fuels, but adds: “We believe you must go a step further, divesting from the fossil fuel industry in its entirety, as quickly as possible.

“Without this, our pensions are contributing to temperatures rising [above 1.5°C](#). If this limit is exceeded, then by the time younger members are old enough to draw our pensions, a full-blown climate catastrophe will have struck, with ice caps melted, food systems collapsed and deadly extreme weather becoming the norm.”

A total of 132 MPs have signed, including 107 of the 199 members of the parliamentary Labour party, with nine members of the shadow cabinet signing. Thirteen SNP MPs, five Liberal Democrats and two Conservatives also signed, among others.

The letter, drafted to coincide with the UK’s hosting of the [Cop26 climate summit](#), reiterates a UN warning that current investment in planned fossil fuel extraction “vastly exceeds” the limit needed to keep global heating below the 1.5C rise mandated by the Paris agreement.

“It is recognised that as elected representatives, we have a responsibility to show leadership on the climate emergency and ensure that our pensions are not funding climate disaster,” it says. “Let us get our house in order by aligning our pension investments with a green and prosperous zero-carbon future that helps to contain global heating to below 1.5°C.

“The world’s eyes are on us. It is time that we show true leadership and divest parliament from the fossil fuel industry.”

The letter has been coordinated by the Labour MP for Coventry South, Zarah Sultana as part of the long-running Divest Parliament campaign, which claims the backing of more than 360 current and former MPs.

Another signatory, David Warburton, the Tory MP for Somerton and Frome, said Cop26 had put the UK “at the centre of international diplomacy and coalition-building in a pivotal moment for climate action”.

The branch of the GMB union that represents MPs' staff this week said it supported Divest Parliament and announced that it would be launching a similar campaign centred on staff pensions. "We recognise that MPs and the Westminster community have a unique opportunity to show leadership on climate action and responsible investment through addressing the practices of their own pension fund," it said [in a tweet](#).

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- [The big idea Should we leave the classroom behind?](#)
- ['When I lose it, I lose it in a dangerous way' Arsène Wenger on sweat, suffering and selfishness](#)
- [Dartmoor train line is back after 50 years Here's what to do and see along the route](#)

The age of extinction

Gardens of Eden: the church forests of Ethiopia – a photo essay

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/nov/08/gardens-of-eden-the-church-forests-of-ethiopia-aoe>

The big ideaBooks

The big idea: Should we leave the classroom behind?



Plugging into the digital era. Illustration: Elia Barbieri/The Guardian

[Laura Spinney](#)

Mon 8 Nov 2021 03.00 EST

My 21-year-old goddaughter, a second-year undergraduate, mentioned in passing that she watches video lectures offline at twice the normal speed. Struck by this, I asked some other students I know. Many now routinely accelerate their lectures when learning offline – often by 1.5 times, sometimes by more. Speed learning is not for everyone, but there are whole [Reddit threads](#) where students discuss how odd it will be to return to the lecture theatre. One contributor wrote: “Normal speed now sounds like drunk speed.”

Education was adapting to the digital world long before Covid but, as with so many other human activities, the pandemic has given learning a huge shove towards the virtual. Overnight, schools and universities closed and teachers and students had to find ways to do what they do exclusively via the internet. Naturally there were problems, but as Professor Diana Laurillard of University College London's Knowledge Lab explains, they essentially pulled off an extraordinary – and global – experiment. "It can't return to the way it was," she says. "The cat is out of the bag."

Academics who think about education recognise that not all the enforced changes have been good. Covid highlighted how critical the social aspect of learning is, and that something extra happens when students and their teacher share a physical space. The experiment also played out differently in schools and universities, in part because the benefits of "co-present" learning may vary by age. The tension now is between those who see the pandemic as an opportunity to overhaul education and those who are impatient to return to "normal".

Covid showed how critical the social aspect of learning is – how students and teachers benefit from sharing a physical space

"This is a time for schools and systems to reimagine education without schooling or classrooms," says Professor Yong Zhao of the School of Education at the University of Kansas. Dr Jim Watterston of the Melbourne Graduate School of Education in Australia thinks the traditional classroom is alive and well, on the other hand, but that "education needs to be more adventurous and captivating" – and, above all, more flexible.

Earlier this year, Zhao and Watterston co-authored a [paper](#) in which they identified three major changes that should happen in education post-lockdown. The first concerns the content, which should emphasise such things as creativity, critical thinking and entrepreneurship, rather than collecting and storing information. "For humans to thrive in the age of smart machines, it is essential that they do not compete with machines," they wrote. "Instead, they need to be more human."

The second is that students should have more control over their learning, with the teacher's role shifting from instructor to curator of learning resources, counsellor and motivator. This is where so-called "active learning" comes in, with a growing body of research suggesting that comprehension and memory are better when students learn in a hands-on way – through discussion and interactive technologies, for example. It's also where the concept of "[productive failure](#)" applies. Professor Manu Kapur of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zürich argues that students learn better from their own or others' failed attempts to solve a problem, before or even instead of being told how to solve it.

Zhao and Watterston's third proposal is that the *where* of learning should change – "from the classroom to the world". With lockdown all learning went online, but it tended to stick to pre-existing timetables, and it was this temporal rigidity that caused distress and disengagement in some students, they claim.

With digital tools it is no longer necessary for students to learn at the same time as each other. What's needed, they say, is a mix of online and face-to-face learning – so-called [blended learning](#) or the [flipped classroom](#), where students read or watch lectures in their own time, beyond the school walls, and solve problems in the presence of their teacher and peers.

That decoupling of learning time and school time means that the former can expand – something that is going to be particularly important for the recovery from Covid, says Laurillard. It comes as no surprise to her that students speed up their lectures, or that lecturers have begun dividing up their presentations into five- and 10-minute video segments, or that all this was happening even before the pandemic. "There's a lot of redundancy in a 50-minute lecture," she says.

But can you really acquire knowledge properly at speed? Woody Allen once joked about a speed reading course where he learned to read down the middle of the page and completed War and Peace in 20 minutes. "It's about Russia," was his summary. At the University of Waterloo in Canada, cognitive psychologist Professor Evan Risko has been testing people's comprehension after speed-watching video lectures. Though it depends on the nature of the material, the student's prior knowledge and the lecturer's

delivery style, his [research](#) indicates that an acceleration of up to 1.7 times has little negative impact and, of course, saves time.

These are, you might say, first world preoccupations. What of those who don't have the luxury of digital tools? The digital divide is not a new problem, Laurillard says, but nor should it put a brake on change, "because the digital world moves faster in providing access than the physical one". She points to the [United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4](#), which is to provide quality education for all by 2030. The only way this will happen, she says, is if teachers in disadvantaged areas receive tools and materials digitally – perhaps via [massive open online courses](#) – and then pass them on to their students in the traditional way.

If even the digital divide won't hold back the coming revolution, it seems unlikely that the classroom will ever look the same again. As Laurillard puts it: "It took a global pandemic to drive home what we've been saying for 30 years."

Further reading

[**Make It Stick: The Science of Successful Learning**](#) by Peter Brown, Henry Roediger and Mark McDaniel (Harvard, £24.95)

[**Building the Intentional University**](#) edited by Stephen M Kosslyn and Ben Nelson (MIT, £22.20)

[**How We Learn**](#) by Stanislas Dehaene (Penguin, £9.99)

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‘When I lose it, I lose it in a dangerous way’: Arsène Wenger on sweat, suffering and selfishness



Arsène Wenger: ‘When I’m in adversity I can concentrate on what is important and what is less important.’ Photograph: Ed Alcock/The Observer



[Chris Godfrey](#)

Mon 8 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

Arsène Wenger knows that his love for the beautiful game is actually an all-consuming addiction. For the 34 years he spent managing football teams – 22 of them at his beloved Arsenal – he was possessed by the need to win. Little else mattered. At times this devotion produced magnificent results. At others, self-destruction.

“Competition is something that eats slowly at your life and it makes of you a little monster,” he says, video calling from his office at Fifa’s Zurich headquarters, where he has worked since 2019. “That’s what I became, yes. I spent my whole life in top-level competition and it makes you slowly somebody who is psychologically obsessed and one-dimensional, someone who kicks out everything on the road that is not winning the next game.”

In a new documentary about his life and career, Arsène Wenger: Invincible, the 72-year-old declares: “The meaning of my life was football. Sometimes I’m afraid of that.”

His father, Alphonse, would never tell his son: ‘Well done!’, only: ‘You can do better’

“There are other important things in life – art, for example – that I didn’t explore at all,” he tells me, when I ask what’s so scary about this single-mindedness. “Maybe only geniuses can be successful in many multi-territorial things. I was not a genius; I had to dedicate my whole energy to one thing.”

But there’s no denying that it worked. When Wenger came to [Arsenal](#) in 1996, the impact was almost immediate. He won the Premier League title and FA Cup in his second season, becoming the first foreign manager to win the double, then did the same again a few years later. His crowning achievement was in 2003/04, however, when Arsenal became known as the Invincibles after winning the Premier League title without losing a single game. Even his greatest rival, Sir Alex Ferguson, had to give Wenger his due, commenting: “The achievement stands aside, it stands above everything else.” Arsenal still hold the record for the longest unbeaten run in league history, at 49 matches.



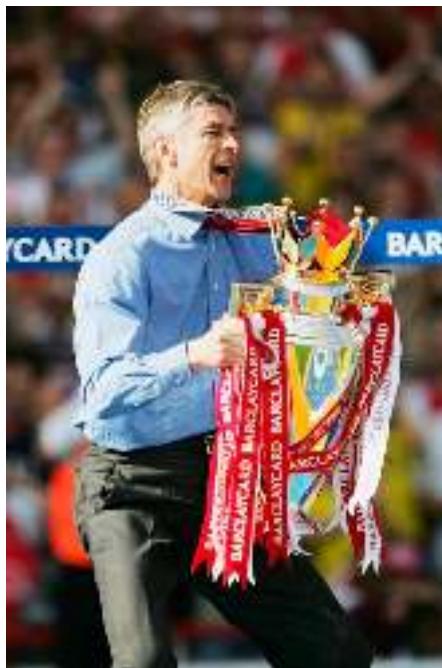
Arsène Wenger holds an impromptu press conference on the steps outside Highbury in 1996. Photograph: Colorsport/Shutterstock

Two years before the Invincible season, Wenger had [announced](#) that he thought his team could do it – and been mocked for saying so. “If you don’t

set high targets,” he says now, “you don’t push people to go as far as they could be.”

But there were obstacles off the pitch as well as on. Wenger was one of the first foreign managers in the league, and his arrival contributed to English football’s transformation from an inward-looking monoculture to the global game it is today. The press was sceptical – “Arsène who?” asked one infamous Evening Standard headline. Winning games turned that scepticism into hostility, “a mass of negativity because he was a foreign manager and he was doing things that are different,” Arsenal legend Ian Wright claims in the documentary. It climaxed with false reports of Wenger’s dismissal and rumours that a newspaper was set to print a highly compromising story about his private life. Wenger held an impromptu [press conference](#) on the steps outside Highbury, Arsenal’s stadium at the time, and said he was ready to [refute the lies](#). No such story was ever published.

“I had enough maturity to deal with it,” says Wenger. “I think I have one quality, maybe, when I’m in adversity: I can concentrate on what is important and what is less important. At that stage, I felt surprised, but I felt: ‘Let’s do what I think I can do, which is to manage a football team.’ So I was not destabilised.”



Arsenal manager Arsène Wenger lifts the Premiership trophy at Highbury in 2004. Photograph: Clive Mason/Getty Images Sport

There was a marked culture shift as players started drifting in from the continent, and individual performances were bolstered by revolutionary concepts such as a healthy diet and not following Ray Parlour's lead by sinking 10 pints the night before a match. Wenger transformed Arsenal's style of play from one of safety first to a more expressive, improvisational attacking game – which at its peak was christened "Wengerball". And he brought calmness to the dressing room. Wright says Wenger was the first manager he had who didn't indiscriminately "blast you down" at half-time.

"I felt always that the most important thing is that you get a good diagnosis of what's going on," Wenger says. "The hairdryer method [screaming at your players] is more to get your frustrations out – and it's not very efficient. If you do that every week, people adapt to the behaviour of their manager. I thought it's more important to be kind, master the situation and give an indication of what you should do."

"I thought: 'What is the most efficient, not what is the most spectacular?' I have a very passionate character; when I lose it, I lose it in a dangerous way. So I learned to control myself. Because you can make mistakes when you are out of control that you cannot repair."

It bred a fierce loyalty in his players; former Arsenal midfielder Emmanuel Petit says he would have climbed Everest without oxygen for him. Others have spoken about how Wenger was a father figure to them. "I believe that players have to know that you love them," Wenger says. "The players must feel at the start that you can be demanding, but as well they must believe that, deeply, you want to help them."

He led by example and prepared for games as if he himself was playing. He wouldn't go out for 48 hours before a match ("Life in central London? I can watch that on television"), and knew only the triangle made by the training centre, stadium and his home in north London, where he lived with his wife, Annie Brosterhous, a former basketball player (from whom he separated in 2015) and daughter Léa.

His devotion to the game – not to mention his bespectacled, scholarly appearance and academic background – earned him the nickname Le Professeur. But, for all his reserve, Wenger was never the most gracious in defeat. He thinks this profound hatred of losing may have started in the village where he was raised – Duttlenheim, near the German border in Alsace, north-eastern France – at the local Catholic church.

“I was not the most patient child,” he says, remembering how he would be forced to kneel in front of the whole congregation after talking during services. Mass, being in Latin, was of little interest. “People went to my father’s pub and told him that I’d been kneeling in front of everybody again. That’s maybe where my hate for losing comes from: being humiliated.”

Wenger was born in 1949, the youngest of three children. His earliest memories – aside from ignominy – are of the football pitch and the village bistro his parents owned. It was used as a clubhouse for the local team; they’d get changed there then make their way to the match. Watching the men interact in the bar and studying their behaviour was “a great psychological experience for a boy” and kindled his lifelong fascination with the human psyche.



Arsène Wenger waves goodbye to the crowd following his final home match as Arsenal manager in 2018. Photograph: Tom Jenkins/The Guardian

Wenger has always been very demanding of himself, for which he credits his father, Alphonse, who would never tell him: “Well done!”, only: “You can do better”.

“It was the style of education at the time,” says Wenger. “Today, when you educate your children, you give them more of the drive for quality of life. The generation after the war was more ‘work hard, don’t question that’.”

“In a village,” he continues, “especially in a farmers’ village, you have a long-term view. You work hard, wait and maybe you will be rewarded. That’s what the farmer’s life is about. It gives you patience and investment in long-term work.”

Did any of his life’s achievements spur a “Well done!” from his father? “Never.” Not even the Invincibles? “No, it was not that kind of life. You don’t reinvent yourself at that age. He was of course very happy that things went well for me. But that was not his biggest quality, to say: ‘Well done!’ And maybe he was right, because one of the important things in life is to always try to be better.”

Wenger started playing football for the village team at 12; he would take his mass book and pray before and during the games, as it was the only way he felt they could win. Though a career in football was an unconventional path, his parents were happy he pursued his passion. “I was very independent, very young,” he says. “At 19 years of age, I had never gone out of my village. After that I never came back to my village, and had a very international life.”

His professional playing career was short-lived and fairly unremarkable, taking in a handful of French clubs, including Strasbourg. By his early 30s he had secured a management diploma, had graduated from Strasbourg University with a degree in economics and begun coaching the Strasbourg youth team. Managerial stints at Nancy and Monaco followed, before a brief spell in Japan at Nagoya Grampus Eight.

It was a chance meeting that led him to Arsenal. He went to watch a match at Highbury and at half-time shared a cigarette with Barbara Dein, wife of

David, the club's vice-chairman. She introduced the two men, they struck up an immediate rapport, and Wenger was appointed manager in 1996.



Arsène Wenger playing for RC Strasbourg in 1978. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

If the first half of Wenger's reign as Arsenal manager was characterised by success, the second was more problematic. When Arsenal moved from Highbury ("my soul") to the Emirates stadium ("my suffering") in 2006, it left the club with a lot of debt and fewer resources to invest in the team. Arsenal endured a barren spell of nine years without a trophy. "Wenger Out" protests became depressingly frequent.

Did the constant calls for his sacking ever wear him down? "No, I am quite focused on what I have to do," he says. "I always said to the players: 'The judgment of people depends on your performances, so that means it's something that you can change.' In this kind of job the assessment of other people is always overboard; it's too high or too low. You are a genius or you are Mr Nobody, and the truth is always in between."

In March 2018 he was finally told it was over. He left in May as the club's [most successful ever manager](#), with three Premier League titles and seven FA Cups.

Wenger wonders now if he should have left sooner: identifying with one club so fully for such a long time was, he feels, a mistake. “I didn’t even consider ...” – he pauses – “I had so many offers to go elsewhere, you know, and at the end of the day it turned against me.” But he never fell out of love with Arsenal. “I will support the club until the end of my life, because I think I contributed a lot to what the club is today,” he says. “I suffered a lot. I sweat a lot for every stone that is in the stadium and I sacrificed the best years of my life to do that. So I won’t renege on that. I will support this club for ever.”

He is now Fifa’s chief of global football development, where he is known for his controversial support for a [biennial World Cup](#). He has not returned to Arsenal since leaving three years ago. Many fans (myself included) feel that is a great shame. Is there a chance he will return this year? “This season? I don’t know. Because I travel a lot, you know, and I have a very, very busy schedule. But at some stage, why not?” He could come and sit with us in the North Bank? “Yes, that’s the best place! That’s my favourite one.”

02:07

Arsène Wenger: Invincible: documentary highlights manager's achievements – video

But he has other priorities. Such was Wenger’s relentless focus on Arsenal, he was unable to take care of the people around him as much as he should have, including Léa, who is now in her 20s. He is now trying to repair the damage. “That’s why I told you the competition eats you slowly, because you’re less available to other people. Every passion is selfish.”

Does he still carry the guilt of that selfishness? “Yes,” he says. “Less now because you put things a little bit more into perspective. I think it was Mark Twain who said: ‘There are two important days in your life: the day you were born, and the day you know why.’ And I knew, always, why. For me, it was obvious that I was [meant to be] in football, in the competition. But of course, people around me maybe suffered from that.”

If he had to do it all again, would he strike a different balance? “No,” he says. “I believe that when you have a dream in your life, you have to commit totally, completely. There are prices to pay ... but there is no other way.”

Wenger described leaving Arsenal as like witnessing his own funeral, such was the intensity with which his life’s work was eulogised. But his enduring feeling is joy, not mourning.

“Yes, I’m happy and content,” he says. “I have some days when I’m less happy and some days when I’m more happy ... But if happiness is to lead the life you want to lead, then yes, I am happy.”

- *Arsène Wenger: Invincible* is in cinemas from 11 November and on Blu-ray, DVD and Digital on 22 November
-

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Dartmoor train line is back after 50 years – here's what to do and see along the route



Belstone Common looking west towards Yes Tor on the northern edge of Dartmoor. Photograph: Robert Harding/Alamy

[Chris Moss](#)

Mon 8 Nov 2021 02.00 EST

Many are the legends of lost walkers tricked by swirling mists, pixies or ghosts on the northern edge of Dartmoor, one of Devon's more isolated corners. In the 18th century, when stage coaches rattled over rough tracks, it was a harsh and dangerous place to travel. There is still a sense of remoteness - this is where the Atlantic winds arrive unhindered, and it is at once bleak and bracing, dramatic and drear. But if you haven't got wheels, it has been harder to reach in recent times than it was for generations past.

That is set to change on 20 November, when the [Dartmoor Line](#) will reopen almost 50 years after it was axed. Now local shoppers and workers, as well as walkers and climbers, cyclists and campers, will be able to travel from anywhere in the UK, via Exeter, and reach the top of Dartmoor easily and without driving. The £40.5 million line, the first to be reinstated as part of the Department for Transport's "Restoring your Railway" initiative, is a significant national moment as well as great news for the tourism-reliant south-west.



The new line to Okehampton station (pictured), described by one campaigner as an "oasis in a rail desert". Photograph: Antony Christie

Stations at Ivybridge and Totnes have opened up the east and south moor. The new line to Okehampton – described by one campaigner as an “oasis in a rail desert” – could be a boon for the north moor as well as parts of Cornwall. It will also take some traffic off the often jammed A30.

The line is a significant national moment as well as great news for the tourism-reliant south-west

Locals campaigned for the reopening for more than two decades, working alongside councillors, railway experts and Great Western Railway, even running three special “protest” trains from Okehampton to Paddington, Stratford-upon-Avon and Weymouth to force the government’s hand.

When it opened in [October 1871](#), the 15.5-mile line from Exeter was the initial stage in a series of two major railway extensions that continued west to Launceston in Cornwall and, in 1890, down to Tavistock and Plymouth via the Tamar valley. Though not scheduled to close as part of the initial [Beeching cuts of the 1960s](#), the last regular train ran back in 1972. A Sunday service operated in the summer months from the late 1990s but the line was largely for transporting – ironically enough – railway ballast from Meldon Quarry.

West Devonians are still calling for a restoration of the complete route down to Plymouth, their case strengthened in 2014 when [a storm destroyed](#) the GWR tracks at Dawlish. For now, though, we’ll have to make do with the new line, which will make the journey from Exeter to Okehampton in 40 minutes with a single stop at the tiny bishopric of Crediton along the way. Trains will run every two hours (hourly from 2022).



The Museum of Dartmoor Life in Okehampton. Photograph: Greg Balfour Evans/Alamy

Often overlooked, Okehampton is a likable enough market town that's home to the [Museum of Dartmoor Life](#), retelling the region's history from the Mesolithic to post-industrial times, and an excellent YHA hostel that occupies an old railway goods shed. Over the winter, its Victorian station will be refurbished, the cafe restored, and there are plans for a [Dartmoor national park](#) visitor centre next year.

With the town centre just 20 minutes' walk from the northern border of Dartmoor national park, [Okehampton](#) is pitching itself as the “gateway to the moor” and is likely to be a popular base for those setting off on walks. Just west of the town is [Meldon Viaduct](#), a popular place to start ascents of [High Willhays and Yes Tor](#), the highest points on Dartmoor.

A major upside is that Dartmoor is the only area in England that currently explicitly permits wild camping

Twelve miles southeast lies [Chagford](#), a lively former stannary (tin-mining) town inside the national park. Arts and crafts studios, vegan cafes and jazz nights make it a sort of Totnes of the top of the moor, and there are plenty

of cottages and inns offering B&B. It's a fair, but pleasant, walk and the [178 bus](#) runs once daily (except Sundays) between Okehampton and Chagford. There are lovely woods and riverside footpaths around the town.

Each region of Dartmoor has its own character. The north and northwestern moors generally feel more open and exposed, and while there is plenty of good walking, the uplands can be Baskerville-level boggy. The presence of the MoD and its firing ranges can be a pain if war games coincide with your planned visit – but they're not that common and usually military activity is restricted to one of three areas (firing and other military exercises are flagged up in advance [online](#)).

A major upside is that Dartmoor is the only area in England that currently explicitly permits wild camping. For domestic tourists keen to reduce their carbon footprint, a train ticket and a tent are all they need to escape to the wilds of the far north.

The best options for walks and rides from the new line



Wild camping on Dartmoor, the only area in England that explicitly permits it
Photograph: John Ryan/Alamy

Circular walk from Okehampton

From Okehampton follow the road to the Battle Camp – just inside the moor – to do a popular circular five- or six-mile walk around West Mill Tor, Rowtor, Scarey Tor and Tors End, returning via the quaint [Tors Inn at Belstone](#).

Granite Way

The mainly traffic-free 11-mile [Granite Way cycle route](#) runs between the station and Lydford. You can rent bikes and e-bikes at [Granite Way Cycles on Klondyke Road](#).

Two summits

The 10-mile climb from either Okehampton or [Meldon Viaduct](#) up to the two highest points on Dartmoor – [High Willhays](#) and [Yes Tor](#) – is easy enough so long as it's not lashing down. The name of High Willhays, recorded as “High Willies” and “High Willows” in some old documents, might be derived from Welsh “gwylfa” for “watching place” – suggesting it might have been a lookout for beacon fires. Its summit is not of the dramatic, pointed kind but at 621 metres above sea level, it is often wind-lashed and wet.

Okehampton to Buckfastleigh



The steam-operated South Devon Railway at Buckfastleigh station.
Photograph: Ben Birchall/PA

It's a serious-sounding 26 miles between these two small towns, but the terrain is varied and rarely tough going, and there are excellent places to camp en route, including beside the [Grimsound](#) stone hut circles or in the woodlands and gorse patches on the eastern slope of Hameldown. This last is a majestic humpback hill with fine views in all directions. [Buckfastleigh](#) is served by the touristy [South Devon Railway](#), which links up with Totnes for mainline trains.

Cross Dartmoor

The 37-mile [West Devon Way](#) between Okehampton and Plymouth is a good option for those who come by bus or train: each of the eight stages starts and stops at a bus stop.

Two Moors Way

Passing smack-bang between Okehampton and Crediton, the [Two Moors Way](#) involves a 10-mile "walk in" or a taxi. The 102-mile coast-to-coast footpath, from Lynton in north Devon to Wembury near Plymouth, spans Exmoor and Dartmoor; ultra runners can complete the journey in a single day. Sustrans' 99-mile [Coast to Coast route](#), between Ilfracombe and Plymouth, is the equivalent for cyclists.

Loop the loop

The 95-mile [Dartmoor Way](#), which passes through Okehampton, loops round the park on lanes and minor roads, ideal for cycling and e-bikes. It can be used for day trips or for a full five-to-seven day holiday. A parallel 108-mile route is used by walkers.

Note on navigating

Large areas of Dartmoor are featureless, mists are common and sudden, and there are morasses all over. The double-sided Ordnance Survey OL28 map covers almost the entirety of the national park at 1: 25,000 scale, ideal for walkers

BMC XT40, a single 1:40,000 scale map showing the whole of Dartmoor, is suitable for general planning or easy, short walks on well-used paths.

Tickets from Exeter to Okehampton cost £8 return, for information and tickets visit Dartmoorline.com

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Coronavirus

UK government could restrict travel for people who refuse Covid boosters



A mobile NHS vaccination unit in Datchet, Berkshire, on Saturday.
Photograph: Maureen McLean/Rex/Shutterstock

[Ian Sample](#) Science editor

[@iansample](#)

Sun 7 Nov 2021 19.03 EST

More than 10 million people in the UK have had Covid vaccine top-up shots, figures show, as government sources confirmed they are looking at plans for travel restrictions on people who do not take up the booster offer.

NHS figures for Sunday showed that 10,062,704 people in the UK had received a booster jab, or third shots for those with weakened immune systems, with the number in [England](#) reaching 8.5 million.

The milestone follows a record day for boosters on Saturday when more than 371,000 people in England had the jabs. About 30% of over-80s and more than 60% of people aged 50 and over have yet to receive the extra doses, however.

The health secretary, Sajid Javid, urged people to take up the [offer of booster shots](#) when they became eligible, describing the push as a “national mission” that would help the country “avoid a return to restrictions and enjoy Christmas”.

In a move that may further drive booster uptake, No 10 sources confirmed that ministers were considering a change in the rules on travel so that eligible people who had turned down a third dose would face quarantine and testing if they went abroad. The change was said not to be imminent.

This month official guidance was updated to say government was “reviewing the implications and requirements of boosters for international travel certification” and “looking at whether and how booster vaccinations could be included in the NHS Covid pass for travel”.

Currently, all over-50s, health and social care workers, and people who are clinically vulnerable are able to receive boosters six months after their second dose. On Monday, the booking system will change to allow people to arrange their appointment a month before they have the shot.

John Roberts, a member of the Covid-19 Actuaries Response Group, said while the number of people becoming eligible for booster shots was still growing faster than boosters were being delivered, the situation had improved in the past week.

“The really positive thing is the change that allows people to book their booster [up to a month early](#). That will make a really big difference to things over the next few weeks,” he said. “I’ve been worried that we wouldn’t get all priority groups done before Christmas mixing takes place but I think this will make a big difference.

“The important thing for me is the number who are being jabbed is growing. The weekly rate is up to 1.8 million now, and I think we’ll see quite a step forward over the next two to three weeks as people take advantage of being able to book in advance. The only caution is we seem to be struggling to get some of the over-80s boosted and I think maybe these people are less mobile, and may rely on their GP contacting them and to go to a centre very close to them.”

Vaccines are highly effective at preventing hospitalisations and deaths but protection wanes over time, particularly in elderly people and at-risk groups. The booster programme aims to top up people’s immunity before an expected rise in cases in winter.

Evidence from [Public Health England](#) shows that protection against hospitalisation falls from 95% to 75% in the five months after the second shot of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine, and from 99% to 95% for the Pfizer/BioNTech shot. Even small falls can have a major impact on hospitals, with a change from 95% to 90% protection against hospitalisation doubling the number of admissions in those vaccinated.

It comes as the NHS is to receive £250m over the next year to help digitise scans, checks and test results so they can be shared more easily across computer systems in hospitals, labs and GP surgeries. The Department of [Health](#) said on Monday the funds would drive up efficiency, allow staff to do perform more diagnostic tests and scans, and so better tackle the healthcare backlog.

The new technology was recommended last year in an [independent review](#) of NHS diagnostics by Prof Mike Richards. It will allow imaging specialists to view scans or X-rays remotely, without needing to be in an imaging lab, while further tools aim to help GPs order the most suitable scans based on their patients’ symptoms and medical history.

The announcement follows the £2.3bn pledged for the NHS over the next three years in the latest Spending Review, which aims to improve diagnostic services with at least 100 community diagnostic centres across England.

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Coronavirus

England's hospitals already at peak winter bed occupancy, NHS bosses warn



The NHS faces a surge in admissions every winter. Photograph: Rob Pinney/Getty Images

Ian Sample Science editor

[@iansample](#)

Sun 7 Nov 2021 07.25 EST

Hospitals in England are already at peak winter levels for bed occupancy, according to NHS bosses, who fear the health service will come under severe pressure in the months ahead.

The chief executive of NHS Providers, which represents England's 240 NHS trusts, said the situation was unprecedented and "very worrying" as exhausted hospital staff prepare for [higher levels of Covid](#) and other

respiratory infections such as influenza while dealing with a backlog of care for patients.

“What’s very, very striking in talking to our trust chief executives is how worried some of the very long-term leaders, who’ve been around a long time, are at this point. What they are saying to us is they’ve never been so worried,” Chris Hopson told Times Radio on Sunday.

“The accident and emergency pathway is very, very busy. So at a point when our staff are really exhausted, it is very worrying. The bit that’s particularly worrying is … if you look at acute hospitals, where effectively you look at bed occupancy, which is a very good measure of how busy a hospital is, we’re seeing bed occupancy levels, it’s sort of 94, 95, 96% at this point, before we’re into peak winter. We’ve not seen that before. That’s unprecedented. So, there’s a real sense that the [NHS](#) is going to be under real pressure.”

The NHS faces a surge in admissions every winter as the colder weather drives up respiratory infections, exacerbates heart problems and in severe conditions causes a steep rise in accidents. But pressure on the health service tends to rise through December and reach a peak early the following year.

While coronavirus cases are [falling](#) in the UK, it is unclear whether the epidemic has peaked for the year or whether infections will surge again now that schools have returned after half-term and people start to mix more indoors. Covid rates may have peaked in secondary school children but have been rising in older, more vulnerable age groups, driving an increase in deaths through October.

Beyond concerns about bed capacity, Hopson said he was “very worried” about the move to make Covid jabs [compulsory for NHS staff](#) from April. He said there was an obvious risk of infected staff passing the virus on to colleagues, patients and visitors and recognised the logic behind mandatory Covid shots, but said there were risks with the approach.

“The bit that’s absolutely vital, and we have seen this in social care, is that if we get this wrong then what will happen is we risk a significant loss of a significant number of staff, just at the point when we cannot afford to lose those staff,” he said.

Matt Hancock, however, has called on ministers to bring in legislation requiring all NHS workers to receive a coronavirus vaccination before winter.

Writing in the Daily Telegraph on Monday, the former health secretary said: “Having looked at all the evidence, I am convinced we must require vaccination for everyone who works not just in social care, but the NHS – and get it in place as fast as possible.”

Speaking on BBC One’s Andrew Marr Show, the UK [Health](#) Security Agency’s Dr Susan Hopkins said that while new cases peaked on 18 October, infections could remain at a “very, very high level”, meaning there would be more deaths that could have been prevented with vaccination.

“The people who are dying are the same people who have died all the way through,” she said. “It is particularly the older age groups, so the over-70s in particular, but also those who are clinically vulnerable, extremely vulnerable, and have underlying medical conditions.

“As we’ve mentioned, the immune effects wane and what we see is, especially in the older or the vulnerable groups, those are the people whose immunity will wane the most. So, if you’re a healthy 30-year-old, then two doses will protect you for a longer period. That’s why those people need to come forward for their third dose as soon as possible.”

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Airline industry

BA and Virgin Atlantic put aside rivalry for return of leisure flights to US



BA flight BA001 and Virgin flight VS3 will take off from Heathrow on parallel runways for New York's JFK airport at 8.30am on Monday.
Photograph: Bloomberg/Getty Images

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[@GwynTopham](#)*

Sun 7 Nov 2021 19.01 EST

The UK's long-haul airlines will put the worst of the pandemic – as well as old rivalries – behind them on Monday morning, when British Airways and [Virgin Atlantic](#) take off simultaneously at Heathrow for the first transatlantic flights carrying leisure travellers to the US since Covid-19 closed borders in March 2020.

The bosses of Virgin and BA said it was a “pivotal moment” for the battered industry, with both airlines having registered enormous losses and shed thousands of staff during 20 months of restricted travel.

BA flight BA001 – a number previously reserved for Concorde – and Virgin flight VS3 will take off from London Heathrow on parallel runways for New York’s JFK airport at 8.30am, more than 600 days since the [US travel ban was introduced](#).

The transatlantic corridor has in recent years accounted for the majority of Virgin and BA profits, and the airlines said the reopening of the US borders to foreign travellers, [announced in late September](#) by the Biden administration, would be a significant boost for the industry. Before the pandemic, 22 million people a year travelled between the two countries, along with 900,000 tonnes of cargo.

Vaccinated US visitors have been able to travel to Britain since the summer, when the UK lifted quarantine restrictions, boosting passenger numbers, but the airlines are now increasing schedules and there are full planes this week for the first time.

With both airlines deeply damaged by the pandemic – BA’s owner, IAG, is expecting losses of [€7.3bn over 2020 and 2021](#), and Virgin has been on [the brink of collapse](#) – the pair will put on a rare show of unity after decades of bitter rivalry.

The transport secretary, Grant Shapps, said it was a “historic event” and “marks a significant moment for the aviation sector”.

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Sean Doyle, BA’s chief executive, said it was a moment to celebrate: “We’re setting aside rivalry and for the first time ever, [British Airways](#) and Virgin Atlantic aircraft will be seen taking off together to mark the vital importance of the transatlantic corridor.

“Transatlantic connectivity is vital for the UK’s economic recovery, which is why we’ve been calling for the safe reopening of the UK-US travel corridor for such a long time. We must now look forward with optimism, get trade and tourism back on track, and allow friends and families to connect once again.”

Shai Weiss, Virgin Atlantic’s chief executive, said: “Today is a time for celebration, not rivalry. The US has been our heartland for more than 37 years and we are simply not Virgin without the Atlantic.”

Both will fly A350 planes after retiring their least fuel-efficient jumbos, the Boeing 747s, as the pandemic hit, and Virgin will have a significantly smaller fleet. Weiss said the airline’s battle for survival was “still with us, and cost discipline remains. But with the opening of the US market, we’re at 60% of our capacity, and we feel more confident than in a long time about the prospects.”

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2021.11.08 - Opinion

- I have lived under corrupt regimes – the cynicism stalking Britain is all too familiar
- Dark things are happening on Europe's borders. Are they a sign of worse to come?
- The billion-dollar race to defy ageing is the last thing the planet needs
- I've had a wake-up call on Covid vaccines for children – mine will be first in line

OpinionUK news

I have lived under corrupt regimes – the cynicism stalking Britain is all too familiar

[Nesrine Malik](#)



The sun sets behind the Houses of Parliament in London. Photograph: Tolga Akmen/AFP/Getty Images

Mon 8 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

‘That happens in Russia, it shouldn’t happen in Britain.’ [These were the words](#) of Chris Bryant, chair of the standards committee, on the events of last week, when Conservative MPs voted to reject the recommended suspension of Owen Paterson, while the government [tried to change the system](#) that had found him guilty. The sense of abhorrence is welcome, but the insinuation that it was an un-British occurrence, the kind of thing that is only supposed to happen in dark and dastardly faraway places, is

disappointing. It is a common rhetorical tic in this country: the deep-seated urge to make sense of the state of British politics by invoking foreign lands, instead of looking at our political class directly in the face.

What happened in Westminster was neither exceptional nor inherently foreign. It is simply what happens in all countries where the political system has, in one way or another, been captured by a small elite of political and business interests.

This capturing doesn't always announce itself through overt power grabs – both democratic and undemocratic means can be used. It can happen via military coup, the hoarding of natural resources by a ruling family, or through a born-to-rule elite riding a wave of nationalist populism into power. I have lived in countries where all three of these models have thrived and they all have the same thing in common: the concentration of influence in so few hands that the public become an afterthought to the job of doing politics. All that is required for a corruption-friendly ecosystem to prosper is for those in power to have such a strong mandate that they can start assailing political norms without fear of punishment.

There is an Arabic expression that warns against the perils of an abundance of wealth: “Loose money teaches theft.” Britain has the dubious honour of being the home of the loose money of the global rich, facilitating its movement through secret [offshore companies](#), setting up entirely legal means to profit from these opaque transactions. Taking liberties in office tends to work the same way. Loose power teaches corruption, which in turn happens through technically above-board means. That loose power broadly requires three further conditions to trigger misconduct – a craven or cowed press, a lack of what is seen as a viable political alternative and a large section of the public made quiescent, either through apathy or tribalism. Sound familiar? Welcome to the global community of those living under corrupt governance. The good news is that you are not alone. The bad news is that, once corruption starts to set in, it becomes very hard to reverse. It becomes (this will also sound familiar to you), “priced in” to people’s expectations of the political class, even institutionalised.

People in those other countries – the ones you more easily associate with corruption than your own – will explain the subtle evolution: what was

before a furtive cash bribe that you needed to pay for a government stamp becomes an official fee that you are handed a nice crisp receipt for. What was before an outrageous grab of power from a democratically elected government becomes a legal process blessed by an election, perhaps one even overseen by international observers. The unprincipled will not be shunned but enriched and honoured. The press will contradict what you have seen with your own eyes. Conspiracy theories will begin to flourish because everyone is in the business of making up narratives, so the truth becomes a matter of spinning and selling the most convincing lie. Ministers might even, after attempting to rig a regulatory system in their favour, tell you that their government is trying to “restore a degree of integrity and probity in public life”. It will begin to exhaust your sense of outrage and warp your sense of right and wrong.

Eventually what will begin to settle is a sense that you as an individual have no control, no matter how many freedoms – voting, protesting – you feel you can exercise. Those rights will feel like levers that aren’t connected to anything. And so you give up. The main political emotion I grew up with in the Middle East and north Africa was not that of suffering oppression, but of jaundice – a sort of cultivated cynicism that protected us against the despair of life under regimes that stole from us and then remade the rules in their favour.

I have felt this creeping up on me in the UK. It is an impulse that I recognise in the continuing support for the Conservatives, or the tepid resistance to them despite their proven malpractice, their endless scandals, their failure to deliver on what were once considered basic criteria for governments: that the state does everything it can to protect its citizens’ lives in a pandemic, and that most people’s material circumstances get better with time. Once the state withdraws from that role of honest broker and facilitator, the result is a fatalism: we must carry on and make do with what we have.

How we think about politics in the UK is confused by exceptionalism at the best of times, and so we compare ourselves with “failed states” overseas to show that, sure, things are bad, but we are not there yet. It’s a false comfort. Corruption bores through the system and settles within it so that we don’t

quite see it for what it is. So favouritism and fast-tracking when handing out [Covid-related contracts](#) is rebranded as a necessity in times of emergency. So huge donations to the Conservative party, [revealed in investigations at the weekend](#), correlate with seats in the House of Lords (with no serious consequences likely because, [as the CPS said](#) back in 2007, “direct evidence” of an “agreement” would be needed for any prosecution). Corruption in Britain lives in plain sight; it even follows the rules. We may not be Russia, but we don’t need to be for us to be in trouble. “Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way,” Tolstoy wrote. The same applies elsewhere – every corrupt political system is corrupt in its own way. The end result, the collective unhappiness, is the same though.

- Nesrine Malik is a Guardian columnist
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OpinionMigration

Dark things are happening on Europe's borders. Are they a sign of worse to come?

[Daniel Trilling](#)



'In Poland, the government has passed an emergency law allowing authorities to turn back refugees who cross into the country "illegally".' Border guards are seen guarding Afghan refugees at the Polish and Belarusian border, August 2021. Photograph: Attila Husejnow/SOPA Images/Rex/Shutterstock

Mon 8 Nov 2021 03.00 EST

It is bad enough when states break their own rules and mistreat people – but it's when they start to change the rules that we really need to worry. Three recent stories, from three different corners of Europe, suggest that governments are crossing a new threshold of violence in terms of how they

police their borders. These developments are harmful in their own right, but they also set a disturbing precedent for how countries in rich parts of the world might deal with future displacements of people – not just from war and persecution, but [from the climate crisis](#) as well.

In the UK, the Home Office has quietly tried to amend its draconian nationality and borders bill, currently at committee stage, by introducing a provision that gives Border Force staff [immunity from prosecution](#) if they fail to save lives at sea. Priti Patel, the home secretary, claims this is an essentially benevolent measure: if boats in the Channel are turned around, it will eventually stop people attempting the dangerous trip in the first place. In fact, it undermines a key principle of international maritime law that makes it a duty to rescue people in distress.

In Poland, the government has just passed [an emergency law](#) allowing authorities to turn back refugees who cross into the country “illegally”. It is the latest development in a diplomatic standoff with Belarus, which has cynically been [encouraging people](#) from Iraq, Iran and parts of Africa to cross into the EU, in response to sanctions imposed on it earlier this year. Poland’s hardline response leaves many people trapped in the no man’s land between the two countries. Aid agencies warn of a looming humanitarian crisis as winter sets in; [at least eight people](#) have died this year so far, mostly [from hypothermia](#).

10:38

Freezing to death: the migrants left to die on the Poland-Belarus border – video

In south-eastern Europe, an international team of investigative journalists have revealed that Croatia and Greece are [using a “shadow army”](#), balaclava-clad plainclothes units linked to those countries’ regular security forces, to force people back from their borders. In Croatia, these units have been filmed beating people with clubs at the border with Bosnia. In Greece, they are accused of intercepting boats in the Aegean and setting the passengers adrift on life-rafts in Turkish waters. (Croatia has promised to investigate reports of abuse, while Greece denies the practice.) Just as shocking as the claims themselves is the fact that the revelations have

largely been met with a shrug of indifference by EU officials, whose funding helps prop up border defences in both countries. Twelve member states are even demanding that the EU [adjusts its rules](#) so that it can finance “[further preventive measures](#)”, including walls and fences, at its external borders.

Together, these stories suggest that the “push-back” – the forcing away of migrating people from a country’s territory, even if it places them in harm’s way or overrides their right to asylum – is becoming an entrenched practice. Once something that would take place largely in the shadows, it is being done increasingly openly, with some governments trying to find ways to make the practice legal. The UK’s proposal has been strongly criticised by the UN refugee agency, UNHCR, [whose representative said](#) it would “unavoidably” put lives at risk.

This is not only a problem for today: it is a dress rehearsal for how our governments are likely to deal with the effects of the climate crisis in years to come. Predictions about climate-related migration are notoriously vague, and prone to hyperbole, but [a new report by the World Bank](#) projects that 216 million people could be displaced within their own countries by water shortages, crop failure and rising sea levels by 2050. Some people may well end up moving further if they face poor economic prospects or conflict and instability at home. In April, the US vice-president, Kamala Harris, said that drought and “extensive storm damage because of extreme climate” were partly behind increased migration from Central America.

Unfortunately, many of our politicians are primed to see displacement first and foremost as a civilisational threat. That was the logic of Boris Johnson’s comments ahead of the launch of Cop26 in Glasgow, when he claimed – [incorrectly](#) – that “uncontrolled immigration” was responsible for the fall of the Roman empire, and that a similar fate awaits the world today. In this telling, an environmental disaster that affects us all is transformed into a question of how the wealthy and powerful can preserve their privileges.

Richer parts of the world have already begun to militarise their borders, a process that has accelerated in response to the refugee movements of the past decade. In this, they are backed up by a burgeoning [border security](#).

industry. A recent report [by the Transnational Institute](#) warns of what it calls “the border-industrial complex”, a growing multibillion dollar industry that ranges from security infrastructure to biometrics and artificial intelligence. The global market in fences, walls and surveillance alone is projected to be worth \$65-\$68bn by 2025.

This, however, is a false kind of security. Restrictive and violent border control just makes the societies that wield it more authoritarian – and it doesn’t stop people moving entirely, either. What it does is force people to make more dangerous journeys, becoming even greater targets for xenophobic backlash. Countries or regions that are seen as desperate to keep people out become targets for unscrupulous neighbours who want to use the issue to exert political pressure. The ultimate result, as we are continuing to see at Europe’s borders, is a callous disregard for life.

What’s required, instead – beyond action to reduce emissions – is a plan to help people adapt to changing living circumstances and reduce global inequality, along with migration policies that recognise the reality of people’s situations. Last year, the UN human rights committee ruled that governments [should not return people to countries](#) where their safety would be directly threatened by the climate emergency. As it stands, however, there is no proper legal framework for protecting people displaced for environmental reasons. A [major new US study](#) commissioned by the Biden administration recommends new laws to protect climate migrants, but it is strikingly light on detail.

The next few years are likely to mark a turning point in the way our governments respond to displacement. Either they work together to build a system that protects people’s lives and dignity, and that can adapt to the changing realities of the 21st century, or their borders will continue to harden, at considerable human cost. If we want to avoid the latter, then now is the time to challenge the violent logic of the push-back, before it becomes written into our laws.

- Daniel Trilling is the author of *Lights in the Distance: Exile and Refuge at the Borders of Europe* and *Bloody Nasty People: the Rise of Britain’s Far Right*

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[Opinion](#)[Ageing](#)

If the super-rich want to live for ever our planet is truly doomed

[John Harris](#)



Illustration by R Fresson.

Sun 7 Nov 2021 07.00 EST

Welcome to the era of [immortalists](#): scientists, dreamers and – crucially – billionaires, who want us to think of age as a curable disease, and our final end as something that could be indefinitely postponed. According to [one estimate](#), the revenues of the global anti-ageing industry will increase from about \$200bn today to \$420bn by 2030. One sure sign of its rosy prospects is the involvement of high-profile people in the US who have made vast fortunes from the internet. If many of them can avoid taxes, why not death?

“Death is sort of an [afront to American life](#),” wrote Zadie Smith in 2003. “It’s so anti-aspirational.” In tech circles, this kind of distaste for mortality often blurs into the culture of “[biohacking](#)” (fasting, closely tracking your vital signs, gobbling supplements and “smart drugs”) which is one manifestation of transhumanism: to quote the definition in the Oxford English Dictionary, “a belief that the human race can evolve beyond its current limitations, especially by the use of science and technology”.

The [sums invested](#) in anti-ageing research by such tech players as the Google founders, Larry Page and Sergey Brin, and the Trump-supporting venture capitalist, Peter Thiel, show what happens when such ideas meet big money. The same goes, somewhat predictably, for the activities of the Amazon founder and aspiring astronaut, Jeff Bezos, who has [previously funded](#) an anti-ageing setup called Unity Biotechnology, and, via his personal investment vehicle Bezos Expeditions, is now reportedly a donor to a newly founded California venture called [Altos Labs](#). The latter company is apparently going to set up “institutes” in the US, the UK and Japan, and is recruiting scientists with the offer of big salaries. One insider says its initial aim is to “understand rejuvenation”; its focus is the kind of “[biological reprogramming technology](#)” focused on the manipulation of cells.

Plenty of other companies – they have such names as BioViva, Youthereum Genetics, the Longevity Fund and AgeX Therapeutics – are also trying to somehow arrest ageing. Piercing through the research and journalism that

surrounds what they are doing, you occasionally get the vague feeling that some of the people involved may eventually come across some or other revelation about age-related diseases, but there is usually a sense of fuzzy, hubristic ideas, and money that would be better spent elsewhere. Anti-ageing research now has a long history, but as far as I can tell, no company working in the field has yet managed to push any therapy to the stage of conclusive clinical trials. In 2012, the Japanese scientist, Shinya Yamanaka, won a Nobel prize for his discovery that bathing single cells in four proteins could rejuvenate them, but using the [technique on mice](#) resulted in some developing cancerous tumours.

Besides, even if anti-ageing techniques eventually proved successful, what would be the social and cultural consequences of literally pathologising old age? If we lived much longer, would we also be expected to work indefinitely? How would the planet cope with a hugely increased population, and who would be first in the queue? I think I know some of the answers to the last two questions. They resonate with the negotiations currently going on in Glasgow, and the lifestyles of some of the people gathered there. As my colleague George Monbiot [recently pointed out](#), keeping the average rise in global temperatures to 1.5C demands that each of us is responsible for no more than two tonnes of CO₂ a year, whereas the richest 1% of the world's population are on track to produce an average of [more than 70 tonnes](#) a head. Imagine such people jetting around until they were 140, or 200, or even existing forever.

There is something about all this that feels analogous to the [space travel](#) efforts of Bezos and Elon Musk, and what those projects seem to say about a relative lack of attention to some urgent issues playing out on the planet that the two men apparently want to escape. In the same way, sizeable investments in attempts to eventually cheat death risk neglecting aspects of ageing that we all face right now. Some of these are about specific illnesses and conditions often linked to getting older. (Bezos, in fairness, has also contributed to dedicated work on [cancer](#) and [dementia](#), though I dare say even more help would be welcome.) But there are equally urgent questions centred on people's everyday lives – and potential answers that could certainly do with more help from self-styled philanthropists.

Notwithstanding the effects of the pandemic, the age-frontier of the planet's population is already increasing fast. The World Health Organization says that by 2030, 1.4 billion – or one in six – people in the world will be [aged 60 or over](#), and the number of people aged 80 or older is expected to triple between 2020 and 2050, to 426 million. The UK reflects these trends. But as evidenced by this country's ongoing contortions about social care, we tend to live in a collective state of denial. Consider also the kind of sad facts for which there are so far no biohacks. Half of all people in the UK aged 75 or over live alone – and, according to the charity Age UK, half a million people over the age of 60 usually [spend each day in solitude](#).

Thinking about eternal youth may be a diverting intellectual exercise. But as a matter of scientific fact, we know that strong and stable relationships and immersion in communities result in people living longer and healthier lives, and the loneliness that too often grips people's later years has the [reverse effect](#). The idea of [co-housing](#), whereby people – often of all ages – are resident in communities built on mutual help and everyday socialising, embodies exactly that realisation. So, at their best, do the kind of modern retirement villages where people live in their own spaces, and have access not just to company, but an array of services and life-enhancing leisure options.

But how do we recreate those innovations for millions of people? And if we did, what would it mean for our health and care systems, leisure services and transport networks? As against the cliche of retirement to the country or coast, would it be good for older people to live nearer the [centre of cities](#) and, if so, how would that work? Most importantly, if there currently is a chronic mismatch between our housing stocks and what an ageing population needs, what do we intend to do about it?

Leaving aside huge questions about their [personal and corporate tax arrangements](#), imagine if the most trailblazing, publicity-attracting projects of 21st-century billionaires involved not leaving the planet or living indefinitely, but the kind of earthbound things that could transform lives in the here and now. Just as the Scottish-American businessman Andrew Carnegie used the money he made in the steel industry to fund the building of 2,500 [libraries around the world](#), they could plough their money into co-

housing projects, retirement communities, adult education centres and more. Such things wouldn't be quite as head-turning as the unlikely promise of a world populated by deathless super-humans, but they would be a lot more useful.

Four years ago, scientists at Harvard University published the latest findings of a [study of the lives](#) of 268 alumni; it had started in 1938, and was eventually expanded to include people in inner-city Boston. What it said about longevity was striking: not just that "close relationships, more than money or fame, are what keep people happy", but that those ties "are better predictors of long and happy lives than social class, IQ, or even genes". Here is what the immortalism of famous capitalists rather neglects: that the most immediate route to living better and longer lies not in hacking our cells, but helping people to be more human.

- John Harris is a Guardian columnist
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OpinionCoronavirus

I've had a wake-up call on Covid vaccines for children – mine will be first in line

[Emma Brockes](#)





‘Suddenly, a pathway to getting the kids out of masks opened up.’
Photograph: Francine Orr/Los Angeles Times/RexShutterstock

Sun 7 Nov 2021 09.00 EST

Along with a lot of other people, over the summer I had responded to news about Covid vaccine trials in young children mainly by sitting on the fence. When the time came, I thought, I’d probably get my two six-year-olds vaccinated, but possibly not in the first wave. It seemed unnecessary to run for the door, given the low impact of the disease on young children and the high number of teens and adults ([nearly 80%](#) in our zip code) in New York who have had at least one dose of vaccine. A big surprise, therefore, has been not only how keen I am to get my kids vaxxed, after Tuesday’s announcement that 28 million five- to 11-year-olds in the US are now eligible, but how emotional this moment feels.

It has been a feature of Covid that every projected end-point has been pushed back beyond the horizon. To remember March 2020 is to invite bitter laughter at the naivety of those early days of lockdown, when we thought this thing might be over by summer, or by autumn, or by the first Christmas – definitely by the time the vaccine programme rolled out, in early 2021. And it did get much better. Viewed from the US, people in the

UK look deranged, sending their unvaccinated kids to school unmasked, behaving as if Covid is over while the numbers surge. But even here in [New York](#), where precautions are still stringent – the kids are under mask mandates at school and no one I know is having indoor playdates or birthday parties – it is, of course, a vast improvement on where we were last year. If this is the new normal, we had, I thought, done a good job of adjusting.

With this in mind, it seemed that vaccinating one's kids when the trial period was so “shallow” (these are the things one has found oneself saying, with great authority, in the last weeks and months) wasn't a priority. At the end of October, the New York Times [reported](#) an Axios-Ipsos poll showing that 42% of parents in the US said they were unlikely to get their under-12s vaccinated. Another survey, by the Kaiser Family Foundation, found that two-thirds of all parents were either reluctant or firmly opposed to vaccinating their kids. People mumbled about myocarditis, a heart condition [most often triggered](#) in very small numbers of boys and young men in the wake of receiving the vaccine. This seemed eminently reasonable in October – as has been the case throughout Covid, time concertinas in weird ways so that even the most recent history can feel like ancient times. Wait and see; why wouldn't we?

That was the week before last. I hadn't been paying close attention to the data; these conversations were all driven by emotion. Looking now, however, this position seems ludicrous. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 172 children between the ages of five and 11 [have died from Covid-19](#) in the US, and more than 8,300 have been hospitalised. The CDC figures indicate that of the 877 recorded cases of myocarditis in under 30-year-olds after the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine, none resulted in death. All these risks are vanishingly small, and the risk to kids from catching Covid – this is before you get to the public health implications and the risks posed to vulnerable adults from unvaccinated kids – would still seem to be higher.

On Tuesday, a week after the Federal Drug Agency approved the vaccine for five to 12-year-olds, at a third of the adult dose, the CDC officially recommended it. Within a day, we received two emails, one from our

doctor's office, another from my children's school, offering the Covid vaccine for all who wanted it, in the school auditorium next Tuesday. Suddenly, a pathway to getting the kids out of masks opened up. (Although if large numbers of parents hold out on vaccinating their kids, it's unclear exactly how this will happen; as with every other aspect of Covid, the greatest opportunity provided by this latest development is the one to loathe other people.)

In the 1980s, we lined up outside the nurse's office in school to receive our BCG (tuberculosis) jabs, and it's a smart move to deliver Covid vaccines in school. By the middle of last week, friends were jumping on even earlier appointments in midtown clinics and before long, photos started to come in of their eight-year-olds getting jabbed. All dissembling evaporated. We look with hope and relief to this Tuesday. It doesn't proof us against every Covid-related eventuality, but after all the mindless dithering and unscientific speculation, the feeling is one of pure joy. Another step closer.

- Emma Brockes is a Guardian columnist
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2021.11.08 - Around the world

- Iraq Drone attack by militants on Iraqi PM ‘marks escalation’ in power struggle
- China Xi Jinping to lay out vision for future – and past – at key meeting
- New Zealand Christchurch shooter claims guilty plea obtained under duress, expected to appeal
- ‘We saw everyone drop’ Bee swarm stops play in New Zealand cricket match
- Biden administration Democrats ‘thank God’ for infrastructure win after state election warnings

[Iraq](#)

Drone attack by militants on Iraqi PM ‘marks escalation’ in power struggle

01:01

Iraqi prime minister survives armed drone assassination attempt – video

[Martin Chulov](#) Middle East correspondent

Sun 7 Nov 2021 14.14 EST

Senior figures in Iraq believe a brazen drone attack on the home of Iraq's prime minister, Mustafa al-Kadhimi, marks an unprecedented escalation between the country's leaders and Iran-backed militant groups attempting to overturn last month's election.

The overnight attack is seen by Iraqi officials as an assassination attempt, and the first of its kind against a prime minister since the US-led invasion to remove Saddam Hussein nearly 19 years ago.

Kadhimi was slightly injured when a drone exploded near the front door of his residence in Baghdad's fortified green zone. Seven of his guards sustained more significant injuries, although none were life-threatening.

Regional intelligence figures say the attack was likely launched by Iran-linked groups which lost two-thirds of their parliamentary seats in the national election and had on Friday tried to storm the green zone before being beaten back by security forces.

[Baghdad's Green zone](#)

Whether the attack was ordered by Iran remains unclear. The political dominance in Baghdad between nationalist interests and blocs aligned to Iran is again being hotly contested in an increasingly unpredictable environment.

“We say the militias did this,” said one Iraqi official. “We say the Iranians maybe knew. We are not more sure than that.”

The absence of the Iranian general Qassem Suleimani, who exerted a powerful influence over Iran-linked militias until he was assassinated in a drone strike ordered by Donald Trump in January 2020, has however clouded even Iraqi officials’ understanding of whether acts by proxies in Iraq are ordered by figures in Iran.

“We assess that this would not have happened if Qassem Suleimani was still alive,” the official said. “There is no longer the same hold over the militia groups as there was under him. This means the link to the seat of power in Tehran is not as [strong] as it was.”

Iran-linked groups have, however, shown increasing vehemence after the election, which shredded their political muscle and bolstered the Iraqi cleric Muqtadr al-Sadr, who will play a prominent role in the months of horse-trading ahead to determine the makeup of a government and who gets to lead it.

Friday’s attempted incursion into the green zone led to the death of one protester and the wounding of several dozen members of the security force. In response, Qais al-Khazali, the leader of one of the militant groups, Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq, warned: “The blood of martyrs is to hold you accountable. The protesters only had one demand against fraud in elections. Responding [with live fire] means you are the first responsible for this fraud. [...] Avenging the blood of the martyrs is our responsibility and we will do this by putting you on trial.”

The march on the fortified zone marked the second time this year that militia groups had attempted to make inroads into the seat of power. In June, leaders of the groups ordered their members to seize one of the main checkpoints leading across the Tigris. That move led to protracted negotiations with leaders of the groups and had weakened Kadhimî’s authority – so much so that he had seriously considered not standing for a second term.

However, a subsequent trip to Washington, where he successfully negotiated the withdrawal of remaining US forces from Iraq, was well received in Iran. “The Iranians want him to stand again,” a second Iraqi official said. “But that doesn’t mean that they wouldn’t have wanted this as well. It’s always complicated with them.”

One significant complication is the relatively weak hand of Suleimani’s replacement as leader of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard’s Quds Force, Ismail Ghani, who has had a rough induction to the role pioneered by his predecessor.

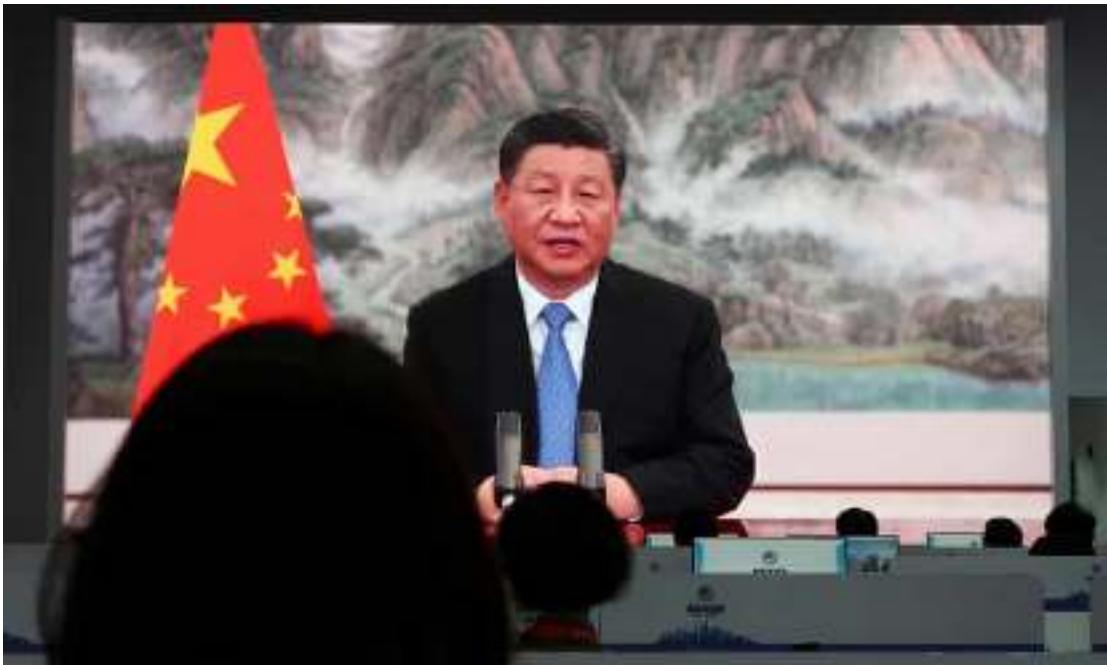
“They don’t listen to him as much as they listened to Qassem,” the first official said. “In fact sometimes they don’t listen to him at all. Nowadays there are many different lines back to Iran. That authority we had gotten used to has broken down.”

While Kadhimy has not announced whether he will stand for a second term, he is widely expected to do so by allies and adversaries alike. International observers have broadly dismissed claims of irregularities in the election, which attracted a poor turnout but delivered an emphatic boost for Sadr, whose support will be key if Kadhimy is to be returned.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/07/drone-attack-on-iraqi-pms-home-marks-escalation-in-power-struggle>

[China](#)

Summit of political elite opens in China as Xi eyes extraordinary third term



Xi Jinping will preside over the meeting of the ruling Chinese Communist party's central committee, known as the sixth plenum. Photograph: Reuters

[Vincent Ni](#) and [Helen Davidson](#)

Mon 8 Nov 2021 10.08 EST

A meeting of hundreds of members of China's political elite, which is expected to pave the way for [Xi Jinping](#) to consolidate power with an extraordinary third term as president, has opened in Beijing.

The four-day, closed-door meeting of the ruling Chinese Communist party (CCP) central committee, known as the sixth plenum, is expected to produce a resolution on the history of the party, which analysts say will shape domestic politics and society for decades to come.

The sixth plenum is one of the last significant meetings in China's five-year political cycle, and sets the stage for next year's party congress, where Xi is expected to seek a third term as leader of the CCP after having previously abolished term limits in 2018.

The agenda of the meeting is top secret, with a communique of discussions and resolutions to be released after it has finished. At the 2016 plenum, the CCP bestowed the [title of “core” leader](#) on Xi, putting him on par with Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping but also emphasising the importance of collective leadership.

Xi opened the plenum on Monday with a work report on behalf of the political bureau of the party's central committee and "explanations on a draft resolution on the major achievements and historical experience" of the party in its 100-year history, the state news agency Xinhua reported.

The historical resolution will be only the third since the founding of the party, following in the footsteps of Mao, who set out the aims of the party in 1945 with himself as the only true leader, and Deng, whose 1981 resolution condemned the failures of Mao's rule while salvaging the party.

"The 1945 resolution affirmed Mao's leadership in the CCP, and the 1981 resolution was about turning a new page from the decade-long destructive chaos of [Cultural Revolution](#) Mao created," said Dali Yang, a China expert at the University of Chicago. "This year's resolution will be somewhere in between – the party's past and Xi's future."



Students displaying the flag of the Chinese Communist party to mark its 100th anniversary during an opening ceremony of the new semester in Wuhan. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

Anthony Saich, a professor at Harvard University and the author of the book [From Rebel to Ruler: One Hundred Years of the Chinese Communist Party](#), agreed. “For the CCP, history is the future,” he said. “The objective of this plenum is to tie them together to show that Xi is an inevitable product of the history of the party, which is leading China into a new chapter.”

The resolution will determine how Chinese history is taught and depicted, and dictate the context in which Xi’s authority and his policies are viewed as successes. The document comes in the centenary of the CCP’s founding and a critical time for Xi’s future leadership. Analysts say Xi hopes to cement his place in history as an epoch-making Chinese leader alongside Mao and Deng.

As China’s relationship with the west continues to deteriorate, many in western capitals question what type of power China is going to become in the future. In July, Xi said his party had achieved its first centenary goal of building a moderately prosperous society for all and eradicated extreme

poverty. He also said “reunification” with Taiwan was a “historic mission and an unshakable commitment” of the party he leads.

Saich said that although this particular plenum was not about policy, it would, however, signify China’s newfound role on the international stage, and the party’s identity in helping the Chinese people achieve their “China dream”.

“Internationally, we will continue to see China playing an assertive role; domestically, we’ll see anti-corruption, addressing inequality and tackling environmental degradation [still] as the party’s priorities,” he said.

Critics of Xi say that since his tenure as China’s president and the CCP’s general secretary, as leader, he launched sweeping anti-corruption drives, purged many political enemies, oversaw crackdowns on minority groups, introduced his own political theory – “[Xi Jinping thought](#)” – to school students, and initiated an increasingly expansionist foreign policy.

In the run-up to this week’s meeting, Xinhua has been in propaganda overdrive, highlighting Xi’s pivotal role in many aspects of China’s achievement. “Xi Jinping often visits farms, farmers’ houses … and even inspects pigsties and toilets to obtain first-hand information of people’s livelihood,” read one tweet. “President Xi attaches great importance to cultivation of morality and ethics throughout society …” wrote another.

Reiterating the principle established by Mao Zedong that "the Party commands the gun," Xi Jinping has demanded the military be combat-ready. He also boarded China's first domestically built aircraft carrier. What else did Xi do in this regard? Read: <https://t.co/cr8e45TvE8> pic.twitter.com/6JuqQFZTw7

— China Xinhua News (@XHNews) [November 6, 2021](#)

But John Delury, a historian at Yonsei University in Seoul and the co-author of [Wealth and Power: China’s Long March to the Twenty-first Century](#), cautioned against putting too much emphasis on Xi in interpreting this week’s events.

“I fear we over-read Xi Jinping across the board and fall victim of the Chinese propaganda agencies,” Delury said. “If we use the 1981 resolution as the baseline, it was a collective effort to draw a line between the party under Deng and Mao’s Cultural Revolution. Since then, the story of the CCP-led China is one largely filled with economic growth and Beijing’s expanding role in international affairs, so the history is easier to resolve, as it were.

“Of course, since 1981 there was the 1989 Tiananmen massacre and in 2012, a massive corruption scandal involving the then Chongqing party chief, Bo Xilai, but my guess is that they are going to avoid them as much as possible, or fold them into a more triumphant narrative.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/08/xi-jinping-to-lay-out-vision-for-chinas-future-and-past-at-key-meeting>.

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New Zealand

Christchurch mosque shooter claims guilty plea obtained under duress, expected to appeal



The Christchurch mosque shooter says he only pleaded guilty under duress, according to a new memo, and is expected to appeal his conviction.
Photograph: Kai Schwörer/Getty Images

Tess McClure in Christchurch

@tessairini

Sun 7 Nov 2021 22.39 EST

The Christchurch mosque terrorist has filed complaints alleging that his treatment in [New Zealand](#) custody – including the refusal to refer to him by name – constituted a violation of his human rights, and that his guilty pleas were obtained under duress.

Brenton Tarrant, an Australian white supremacist who murdered 51 people in [an attack on two Christchurch mosques](#) in March 2019, said via a memorandum from his lawyer Dr Tony Ellis that his guilty pleas were obtained under duress due to mistreatment in custody. He was [sentenced to life imprisonment](#) without the possibility of parole in August 2020. Ellis told local media outlets that he expected the gunman, Tarrant, to file an appeal against his convictions.

In the wake of the attacks, prime minister Jacinda Ardern [vowed she would never say the attacker's name](#), and many other government bodies followed her lead. “He sought many things from his act of terror but one was notoriety, that is why you will never hear me mention his name,” Ardern said of the gunman at the time. “He is a terrorist. He is a criminal. He is an extremist. But he will, when I speak, be nameless. ... He may have sought notoriety but we, in New Zealand, will give nothing – not even his name.”

Imam Gamal Fouda, the imam of one of the mosques at the centre of the attacks, said the terrorist was “grandstanding” and attempting to further traumatisise the families of those who he killed.

“I believe this unnamed terrorist wishes to become famous and [is] grandstanding, especially with the coroner’s inquiry due in early December this year,” he said. “This situation is causing further trauma to the whānau (families), and the terrorist should not be given the opportunity to re-traumatisise all of us as New Zealanders.”

“I fully support what the New Zealand courts have done, and I request that all media whether in New Zealand or overseas do not provide the terrorist with any voice. I believe they should continue to disregard his name.”

“I don’t know how he can appeal it because he already admitted to what he’s done,” said Rashid Omar, whose son Tariq Omar was killed in the attacks, and who is co-chair of the 15th March Whānau Trust. “If it’s going to go ahead, it’s going to recreate all the trauma that we had. And I think that’s what he enjoys, what he wants us to feel – to go back to day one again, after two and a half years.”

The coroner's office would not release the memo on Monday, saying in a written statement that "Chief Coroner Judge Marshall makes no comment in this matter," and said the memo could be requested from Tarrant's lawyer. Ellis declined to comment to the Guardian on the memo or to provide its full text, and said Tarrant had released it to only two local media outlets.

According to RNZ, one of the media outlets given the memo, Tarrant says he pleaded guilty to the charges because of the inhumane and degrading treatment he experienced while awaiting trial. He has been held in near 24-hour solitary confinement, and has highly limited access to news. Ellis also alleged his client had had correspondence withheld, including letters from the coroner and copies of the royal commission of inquiry.

"He sent me about 15 pages of narrative of how he had been treated since he'd been in prison," Ellis told RNZ.

"He said because of how he was treated while he was awaiting trial and afterwards, [that affected] his will to carry on and he decided that the simplest way out was to plead guilty."

"By this, he means he was subject to inhuman or degrading treatment whilst on remand, which prevented a fair trial."

According to the outlets provided with the memo, Ellis writes that the chief coroner's refusal to use Tarrant's name – instead referring to him repeatedly as "the individual," was a serious breach of human rights and an attempt render the offender a "non-person", failed to provide him equal protection and equal treatment before the law and was "deeply offensive and unlawful".

In both the royal commission's full report into the attack and the coroner's 47-page scope of inquiry, the terrorist is never referred to by name, only as "the individual".

"What we've been doing, calling him 'an individual' is very, very polite," Omar said. "To me [he] is nothing. He's not even a human being. So I still

call him ‘it’ – he doesn’t deserve any name at all.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/08/christchurch-mosque-shooter-claims-guilty-plea-obtained-under-duress-expected-to-appeal>

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Cricket

‘We saw everyone drop’: bee swarm stops play in New Zealand cricket match



Players hit the ground as a swarm of bees fly overhead during the Plunket Shield match between Wellington and Canterbury at Basin Reserve.
Photograph: Hagen Hopkins/Getty Images

[Guardian sport](#)

Sun 7 Nov 2021 19.14 EST

It’s usually rain that stops play in [New Zealand](#), but on Sunday it was the unfamiliar sight of a swarm of bees that brought a halt to the cricket being played at Wellington’s Basin Reserve.

Players and umpires dropped like flies as they took cover from the descending bees on the relative safety of the oval’s turf on the opening day of the Plunket Shield match between Wellington and Canterbury.

The invasion caused a brief intermission in the 22nd over but play resumed shortly afterwards and the day ended with Wellington on 102-8 in reply to Canterbury's 156, trailing by 54 runs.

BEE-careful! □ A swarm of bees popped in at the Cello [@BasinReserve](#) for a closer look at today's [#PlunketShield](#) action between [@cricketwgtninc](#) & [@CanterburyCrick!](#) [#CricketNation](#) [#Cricket](#)

□ expertly captured by [@PhotosportNZ](#) pic.twitter.com/IBwRwIEXx2

— BLACKCAPS (@BLACKCAPS) [November 7, 2021](#)

It is not the first time a swarm of bees has interrupted a cricket match.

International cricket has also been stung in the past – in 2017 [South African beekeepers came to the rescue](#) during a one-day international against Sri Lanka in Johannesburg, while another match between the same two sides was [interrupted at the 2019 Cricket World Cup](#).

But it is believed to be the first time a top-level domestic match has been affected by the insects in New Zealand.

“It was definitely a first [for me],” Wellington coach Glenn Pocknall said. “I was on the other side of the ground with [batting coach] Doug Watson and we saw everyone drop and we weren’t really sure what was going on.

“After 30 or 40 seconds between us we figured out there were some bees out there floating around. It’s nothing I’ve ever seen at the Basin, which is bizarre.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2021/nov/08/we-saw-everyone-drop-bee-swarm-stops-play-in-new-zealand-cricket-match>

Biden administration

Democrats ‘thank God’ for infrastructure win after state election warnings

0

Biden hails ‘monumental step forward’ as Democrats pass infrastructure bill – video

[Martin Pengelly](#) in New York

[@MartinPengelly](#)

Sun 7 Nov 2021 10.59 EST

Voters in Virginia and New Jersey this week sounded a serious warning to Democrats, key players in the [Biden administration](#) and Congress said on Sunday: the party needs to get things done or it faces disaster in midterm elections next year.

The energy secretary, Jennifer Granholm, said “we thank God” something was done on Friday night: a \$1tn infrastructure deal [sent](#) to Joe Biden’s desk by the House.

Three days after [Democrats](#) lost a race for governor in one state Biden won comfortably and barely held the other, House centrists and progressives managed to come together, with some Republican support.

Biden [hailed](#) a “monumental step forward” and a “blue-collar blueprint to rebuild America”. He also said “the one message that came across” in Virginia and New Jersey was: “Get something done.”

Ron Klain, the White House chief of staff, echoed his boss, telling NBC’s Meet the Press the American people “wanted to see more action in

Washington. They wanted to see things move more quickly, and three days later, Congress responded.”

But Democrats punted again on the second half of the president’s domestic agenda, the 10-year, \$1.75tn Build Back Better package to boost health and social care and to seek to mitigate the impact of the climate crisis.

I wish the House would have moved earlier

Mark Warner

Granholm told CNN’s State of the Union: “I think that the Democrats in the House got the message very loud and clear. Pass the bill and pass the second part too, because these contain things that everyday people care about.

“The governor of Michigan, Gretchen Whitmer, ran on the phrase ‘Fix the damn roads’. And that’s what this bill does. It fixes the damn roads. It fixes the bridges. It gets broadband to real people. It fixes your homes so that they’re not leaking energy.”

Granholm also said the infrastructure bill did *not* help with childcare and other “costs of living for real people”. That, she said, is the job of Build Back Better, which now awaits analysis by the Congressional Budget Office, a measure demanded by centrists.

The New Jersey centrist Josh Gottheimer told CNN he and his allies wanted to make sure the bill was “fiscally responsible and paid for”. He said he was confident it would pass but dodged when asked repeatedly if his group would vote no if CBO analysis differed from White House and congressional estimates.

In New Jersey, the Democratic governor, Phil Murphy, won by an unexpectedly narrow margin. Taking a page from Donald Trump’s playbook, the Republican Jack Ciattarelli has refused to concede.

In Virginia, Terry McAuliffe, a former governor, suffered a devastating defeat by Glenn Youngkin, a businessman who kept Trump at arm's length

while campaigning on culture war issues including the place of race in education.

Asked if Youngkin could have been beaten had major legislation been passed in Washington before election day, Mark Warner, a Democratic senator from Virginia, told CNN: “I wish the House would have moved earlier.”

Warner also said voters needed to be told what was in the Biden bills, rather than what they cost. The bills’ cost is regularly condemned by Republicans – and by Joe Manchin, the West Virginia Democrat who remains a key obstacle in the Senate.

Joe Biden won a very narrow election by winning swing voters and they’re not where the progressive caucus is

Larry Hogan

The White House adviser Cedric Richmond told Fox News Sunday that Manchin was “a lot more conservative and everybody sees that but he’s been a willing partner to come to the table with constructive dialogue. And we’re confident in where we will go with our Build Back Better framework. We’re optimistic we’re going to get it done. And the truth is we need to get it done.”

Richmond also rejected Republican claims that increased spending will add to inflation. Granholm said the administration saw current inflation as “transitory”.

Larry Hogan, the governor of Maryland and a Republican moderate with presidential ambitions, told CNN Biden had “nearly snatched defeat from the jaws of victory”.

The infrastructure bill “should have been an overwhelming win back in August”, Hogan said. “And I think [Biden] should not have let it get sidetracked by the progressives in the House. I think that was bad for Joe Biden. I think that was reflected in the election results because I think they misread the mandate.

“You know, Joe Biden won a very narrow election by winning swing voters and they’re not where the progressive caucus is, I can assure you, and the vast majority of Americans are not for the second bill.”

Progressives contend otherwise. In tweets on Saturday, the Washington state congresswoman Pramila Jayapal highlighted news from the Cop26 climate summit in Glasgow and said: “This is EXACTLY why we need the Build Back Better Act. We will deliver climate action – for our communities, future generations, and our planet.”

She also retweeted the Rev William Barber, the leader of the [Poor People’s Campaign](#). He [said](#): “My prayer is that Congress will keep its word and vote to pass Build Back Better, because if not, that political betrayal will be a political crime and integrity breach.”

Such a failure, Barber said, “would abandon over 140 million poor and low-wealth people who make up 43% of the nation and 30% of the voting population”.

That, he said, “could split the Democratic party in ways that may be irreparable”.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/nov/07/democrats-biden-infrastructure-bill-virginia-new-jersey-spending-progressives>

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