

# The Guardian

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## 2021.10.10 - Opinion

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## **Kylie Minogue's going home, but we'll never get her out of our heads**

[Rebecca Nicholson](#)



‘What if she is the canary in the coalmine?’ Photograph: David M Bennett/Dave Bennett/Getty Images for Gerard Basset Foundation

Sat 9 Oct 2021 13.00 EDT

Kylie Minogue has revealed that after 30 years of living in the UK, she is [moving back to Australia](#), the country of her birth. “I’ve had friends call me, my friend at my local restaurant was like, ‘Kylie, what do you mean? You can’t go’,” she told Zoe Ball on Radio 2, saying that she couldn’t believe the public reaction to her decision.

If you listened hard enough, past midnight, you may have heard wailing and weeping on the breeze, as fans on dancefloors across the land shuffled sadly to Can’t Get You Out of My Head and asked why. Why, Kylie, why? Why are you leaving us?

How could Kylie possibly leave all this behind? A couple of weeks ago, I stopped at every petrol station on a drive from London to Bristol, to find them roped off or closed as the fuel tank ran low; when it was nudging the red, and one motorway station turned out to be open, drivers across the forecourt actually cheered when they knew they were about to pay motorway petrol prices, which felt doomier than any clips of torrential rain flooding city streets.

I’m not sure how anyone could tear themselves away from this prime minister’s seeming inability to acknowledge a state of affairs where food banks are [feeling the effects of food shortages](#), in a country where the [need for food banks](#) has increased by 128% in the last five years. Now hard-up families are losing the extra cash that might have just meant that, with clever budgeting, they didn’t have to choose between being warm or being fed.

I wondered how Kylie could have decided to leave the UK when I saw so many newspaper front pages, on the same day with the word “war” splashed across them and they were not even reporting the same news story. Gas or flu? Take your pick, but it looks like both are going to be as ubiquitous as glitter at a [Kylie Minogue](#) concert this winter.

Still, there was always that lovely summer that we got to spend safely outside, with our loved ones, in the blazing sunshine, warming us up for a winter in which few may be able to afford to turn the heating on without wondering if it would be more economical to just wear two jumpers instead.

Minogue says that she has been talking about moving back to Australia for a while and that she has been spending more time with her family there. It's obviously a personal choice, but what if Minogue is the canary in the coalmine? Will the last Kylie to leave Britain please turn out the lights?

## **Matthew Macfadyen: could weasel Tom win a Bafta?**



Sarah Snook and Matthew Macfadyen in *Succession*. Photograph: HBO/Kobal/Shutterstock

The next TV Bafta ceremony will take place in May 2022 and a handful of tweaks to the rules were announced last week. One that should inject a bit of international glamour is the fact that British actors appearing in non-British shows will be eligible for the performance categories. I don't want to get ahead of myself, as the third season is not yet with us, but this does put any actors not in in a show called *Succession* at a slight disadvantage. It is not hard to imagine that it will be dominated by the Roy family and its

associates, from Matthew Macfadyen's weaselly Tom Wambsgans to Brian Cox's formidable patriarch, Logan Roy.

It also opens up a path for all the film stars slumming it on the small screen, such as Kate Winslet in *Mare of Easttown*, to get the nod, thus giving the red carpet a Hollywood boost, as when the film Baftas broadened their criteria. Whether this puts smaller, British-made shows at a disadvantage remains to be seen, but boundaries and borders are not what they once were in television. After all, the series everyone is currently talking about is a satirical South Korean horror/thriller called *Squid Game*.

## **Freya Cox: vegans are fun – the proof is in the pudding**



Freya Cox: let them eat cake. Photograph: Mark Bourdillon/Love Productions

Freya Cox, the amiable 19-year-old *Great British Bake Off* contestant from Scarborough, is vegan, although as the show is about baking across the spectrum, and baking challenges often involve the use of dairy products, she has, on occasion, used dairy products in the technical challenges, in order for it to be a fair competition. “Sorry if this is disappointing to hear but once the

show has finished I have plans to veganise the recipes for you all,” [she wrote](#) on Instagram, which seems fair enough.

No matter what she did, Cox was never going to win. It was as easy to see coming as one of Prue Leith’s necklaces. The comedian Sara Pascoe once [talked about getting hate mail](#) from vegan activists after she made a vegan bread and butter pudding on the celebrity version, because she appeared alongside people who used actual butter.

Even before this series began, Cox was [criticised](#) by trolls for riding horses while being vegan. There remains a popular gotcha mentality towards vegans, from people just waiting for them to slip up. (How do you know that somebody has heard that joke about how you can tell if somebody is a vegan? Don’t worry, they’ll tell you.)

Cox is showing that you can bake without dairy ingredients, if you wish to do so. If her goal is to get people to see the possibilities, then she is showing that it is flexibility, not dogma, that will achieve it.

Rebecca Nicholson is an Observer columnist

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## OpinionBenefits

# The Observer view on benefit cuts

[Observer editorial](#)



Children playing football in the street in Manchester. Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

Sun 10 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

The government enacted the biggest ever overnight [benefit cut](#) last week. In one fell swoop, low-paid parents and unpaid carers of disabled people have lost more than £1,000 a year from their annual budgets, at a time when energy and food costs are [steadily climbing](#) and many are still feeling the impact of the pandemic. The result of these political choices is that more children will grow up without the fundamentals no child should ever be without: a warm and secure home; going to bed without feeling hungry at night. Not even [Marcus Rashford](#), the footballer who speaks with such moral clarity about child poverty and who has forced the government to U-turn from enacting policies that cause harm to children, could extract a concession from the government this time.

It has justified this unconscionable policy on two grounds. First, the chancellor, Rishi Sunak, has argued this is not a benefit cut, but simply a removal of a temporary and pandemic-related uplift to low-income families with children. Second, Boris Johnson claimed in his speech to the Conservative conference last week that by dramatically reducing low-skill immigration in the wake of Brexit, he was setting the country on a path to productivity and wage growth that we are led to believe will more than compensate for his decision to slash financial support to parents and carers.

Both are rhetorical sleights of hand. The £20 a week boost in universal credit introduced at the start of the pandemic must be set in the context of a decade of cuts to financial support for low-income parents that cost some families thousands of pounds a year. These were delivered while Conservative chancellors initiated income tax cuts to the tune of billions a year that disproportionately benefited more affluent families. Even taking into account the pandemic uplift, low-paid parents are much worse off than they were in 2010.

It has long been an accepted principle of the welfare state that it should support parents with some of the costs of bringing up children: from free schooling, to help with childcare costs, to financial support via child benefit and targeted tax credits. This is to ensure that it is not just the wealthier half of the population who can afford to have children without exposing them to significant hardship. Raising children is expensive, particularly in a country with the highest rents in Europe, and the minimum wage would need to be set at an unfeasibly high level to eliminate the need for financial transfers to low-paid parents altogether. Our fertility rate has already declined to a level that is creating an ageing population, where there will be a decreasing number of working-age taxpayers to shoulder the increasing costs of ensuring that the UK is a decent country to grow old in. Some people in their 20s and 30s say they are already putting off having children because they feel they cannot afford them.

By eroding financial support for low-paid parents so significantly since 2010, the Conservatives have fundamentally undermined the social contract through which society subsidises the costs of having children. This consigns many to growing up in hardship: as Marcus Rashford has rightly highlighted, almost one in three children are living in poverty and the

universal credit cut will increase those numbers even further. It also makes it harder for young families to have children when they want them: because of the impossibility of making becoming a parent work financially when they are juggling a minimum-wage job without guaranteed hours, paying out an unsustainable proportion of their income on rent and unable to meet the costs of the childcare needed to retain a job after having children. This is bad for them and bad for society.

The government has claimed that wages will rise as a result of Brexit and falling immigration. But it would take an implausibly huge and immediate rise in real wages to counteract the universal credit cut. Moreover, the government's economic workings are visibly incoherent. There is no correlation between productivity and wages on the one hand and low-skill immigration on the other, and little evidence that cutting low-skill immigration will force improvements in productivity and sustainable wage increases across the economy. Wages may go up in some limited parts of the economy – for example, for HGV drivers – but unless there are across-the-board improvements in productivity, shortages will simply push up inflation and erode real wages for everyone else. The only way to improve productivity as part of a strategy to boost living standards is through long-term economic reform, such as investment in skills. But beyond the government's loose rhetoric of "levelling up", no such strategy exists.

This encapsulates Johnson's populist approach to governing. The formula is well-worn: construct an unfair scapegoat for economic grievances, in this case, a mix of Britain's membership of the EU, the immigrants our health and care systems rely upon to function and parents who do not work hard enough to support their children. Tell voters that there are simple workarounds to complex economic conundrums that have confounded policymakers for decades. Pledge to turn things around with simple sentiments such as putting British workers first by cutting immigration and encouraging parents to get better-paid jobs that don't exist by cutting the tax credits that hold them back from doing so.

None of this will work as claimed. Johnson cannot evade political accountability for this for ever. But the tragedy is that in the interim, millions of children will bear the burden of his dishonest brand of populism, a burden that will affect them for the rest of their lives.

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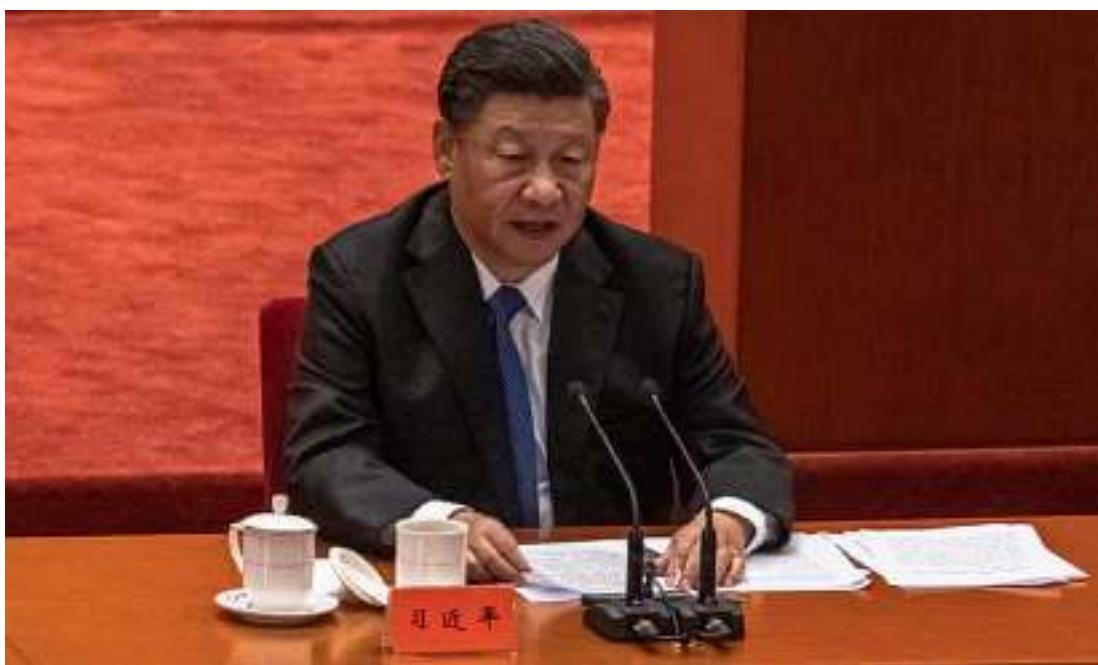
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## OpinionTaiwan

# The Observer view on Xi Jinping's increasing threats to Taiwan

[Observer editorial](#)



China's president Xi Jinping declares that reunification with Taiwan 'will be fulfilled' in Beijing on 9 October. Photograph: Roman Pilipey/EPA

Sun 10 Oct 2021 01.30 EDT

Chinese president Xi Jinping's [menacing declaration](#) that reunification with Taiwan is a "historical task [that] must be fulfilled and definitely will be fulfilled" came at the end of a fraught week. Provocative sorties by Chinese combat aircraft inside the island's air defence zone are at record levels. Defiant statements by Taiwan's leaders "[to do whatever it takes](#)" to repel invasion have acquired a new intensity. The US and regional countries are uneasy. Is war coming?

Most analysts think not, not yet at least. Unlike previous verbal broadsides, Xi's speech in the Great Hall of the People avoided an overt threat of force to defeat those he calls "independence separatists". The People's Liberation Army navy is building amphibious assaults ships and landing craft needed for an invasion. Chiu Kuo-cheng, Taiwan's defence minister, predicts Beijing will be ready to attack [by 2025](#).

For now, Xi seems to be biding his time, conscious of the consequences of armed conflict, including possible confrontation with the US, whose longstanding policy of "strategic ambiguity" grows less and less ambiguous. Washington does not recognise Taiwan as an independent state yet increased arms sales, diplomatic contacts and the presence of US special forces and marines, [revealed last week](#), reflect a deepening commitment.

This is raising questions in Congress and among allies over whether US policy on China, and specifically Taiwan, under Joe Biden is drifting alarmingly. In many respects, for example, trade sanctions, Biden has maintained Donald Trump's tough approach. He has spoken of "extreme competition" between the two countries, expressed "rock solid" backing for Taiwan and rallied the UK and Nato countries in support. Yet as Richard Haass, president of the US Council on Foreign Relations, [points out](#), contradiction and confusion bedevil US thinking. "Deterring China will require sustained increases in military spending and a greater willingness to use force... Many Republicans but few Democrats back the former; few in either party seem ready to sign up for the latter," he wrote recently.

Xi's advisers are undoubtedly aware of this ambivalence. They know Biden wants and needs China's help in tackling issues he cannot handle alone: the climate crisis, global health, nuclear proliferation and regional challenges such as Afghanistan and Korea. They also know he faces a momentous domestic agenda that is in peril of coming unstuck ahead of midterm elections.

These considerations help explain the seemingly disdainful attitude adopted by Chinese officials when they met Jake Sullivan, Biden's national security adviser, in Zurich last week. Taiwan topped the agenda. Both sides subsequently reiterated their commitment to a peaceful solution. But Biden's renewed request for direct talks with Xi again met with a cool response.

There may or may not be a [Zoom chat](#) before year's end. This standoffishness is worrying. It suggests Xi may overestimate the strength of his position. It points to possibly fatal future miscalculations. China's de facto president-for-life has accumulated a level of dictatorial power unmatched by any leader since Mao and no one should doubt his determination to subjugate Taiwan and secure his legacy by completing the unification of communist China 100 years after its birth.

But therein lies the danger. After decades of growth and expanding influence, Xi's China is running out of gas, literally. [Its economy is slowing](#) amid chronic energy shortages. State debt is spiralling, productivity is falling and the workforce is ageing. Food insecurity is growing in an environmentally damaged land that is the world's largest food importer. Meanwhile, China grows short of friends, thanks to Xi's aggressive policies and "wolf warrior" diplomacy.

A China fearful its dreams of power and glory may be dashed. A divided America that doesn't know its own mind. A defiant [Taiwan](#) symbolising the global ideological struggle between democracy and authoritarianism. These are the ingredients of disaster. Recognising and addressing them now could prevent future catastrophe.

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

## Like all cults, Borisology is detached from reality and destined to end badly

[Andrew Rawnsley](#)



‘The prime minister’s speech was a breathless and jumbled hurtle through slogans, wordplay, boasts, metaphors and jokes, jokes and more jokes.’  
Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

Sun 10 Oct 2021 03.00 EDT

The Conservative & Unionist party is no more. It has ceased to be. It has expired and gone to meet its maker. It’s kicked the bucket, shuffled off its mortal coil, run down the curtain and joined the choir invisible. This is an ex-party.

It has been replaced by the Boriservative & Johnsonist party. This is the conclusion I draw after observing the worshippers at the Borisfest in Manchester. It was all about him. Even when he wasn’t visible, he was omnipresent. He was there in the devoted eyes of the activists prepared to queue from six in the morning to secure a seat for the triumph of the Boris that concluded proceedings. He was there in the twitchy eyes of ministers who referred to him as “the boss” or “the king” even when they weren’t on camera. The tone was set on the opening day by Oliver Dowden, not so much the party chairman as the prime minister’s representative on Earth. “We are all just bit players,” [said Mr Dowden](#), telling everyone else that they were irrelevant, before referring to the principal player as “our prize stallion, our rampaging rhino”. Animal worship has been a feature of religions since primitive times. In Mr Dowden’s imagining, the divinity that is Boris is a composite super-beast with (I’m guessing a bit here) the horn, hide and bulk of a rhino and the mane, legs and possibly another appendage of a stallion.

The Boris cult involves human sacrifice. We were witnesses to the humiliating abasement of his cabinet colleagues, the mere mortals who supposedly run important departments. I’ve been present at Tory conferences since the mid-1980s. The leader has always been top of the bill, but there were opportunities for the supporting acts to share the spotlight. Margaret Thatcher had a god-like status with her party when she was at her zenith. Even then, senior figures in her government were allowed to deliver substantial speeches from the main stage so that they had a chance to make their mark and the party could assess who might be its rising stars. No one knows better than Mr Johnson that the conference platform can be exploited

to further leadership ambitions. There is room for only one tall poppy in his government. So the cabinet were ruthlessly levelled down.

The main stage, a large arena custom-built for the great entertainer, was exclusively reserved for the leader's performance. Those of the cabinet who were allowed to speak – many of them weren't even given that courtesy – were permitted only a truncated time in a small auditorium with awful acoustics. The chancellor of the exchequer got just 19 minutes and the foreign secretary less than 12 minutes. Rishi Sunak had to battle against Tannoy announcements and noise from the adjoining exhibition hall. Can you imagine Conservative chancellors of the past – Ken Clarke, say, or Nigel Lawson – putting up with such demeaning treatment? Put up with it Mr Sunak and the rest of them had to, because nothing was going to be allowed to distract from the only act that counted. The prime minister's speech was a breathless and jumbled hurtle through slogans, wordplay, boasts, metaphors and jokes, jokes and more jokes. Some of them were very good, but never before have I heard a leader's speech in which virtually every other sentence was a punchline in search of a guffaw.

One of Mr Johnson's tricks is to winkingly hint to his audience that he knows that his act is preposterous

One of Mr Johnson's tricks is to winkingly hint to his audience that he knows that his act is preposterous. He is such a cynic that he mocked his own conference slogan even though it expressed what is supposed to be his big idea. After a passage about rewilding, he shouted: "Build Back Beaver". Trade with the US was rendered: "Build Back Burger". Those looking for a philosophical thread or a coherent argument were left disappointed. As were those who might have expected to hear how the prime minister intends to address the many problems pressing in on Britain. You would not know that there are queues for petrol, bare supermarket shelves, surging energy prices, welfare cuts and looming tax rises from his breezy boosterism. It is in the nature of cults that they are detached from reality. I asked one senior Tory whether he was any the wiser about what Johnsonism amounted to. He sighed: "Surely we have got to the point where we realise there isn't such a thing as Johnsonism. It is whatever works for him on the day."

The Conservative party used to have a set of values and a body of convictions. These evolved in response to changing times and electoral needs, but they always had some cohesion. The Boris cult is not like that at all. It revolves around a capricious character with few deep beliefs and no fixed ideological abode. When he adopts positions, it is not in the service of any higher purpose than following his instincts, quenching his appetites and promoting his interests as he perceives them from one day to the next. The only goal to which he is consistently committed is keeping himself popular and in power.

There are consequences from putting a party in such thrall to one mercurial personality. The American Republicans discovered that when their party fell into the hands of Donald Trump, who proceeded to trash many of their previously cherished principles. Something similar, if not yet quite so dramatic, is happening to the Conservatives. They used to be the party of business and farmers. If they were anything, they were that. Not any more. Mr Johnson flippantly shrugs at the travails of farmers and attacks business because he thinks that is to his advantage at this particular time.

The shortages of essential workers and goods that are disrupting daily life might just have something to do with the severity of the rupture with the EU. But that can't be acknowledged for it would be to concede that the prophet of Brexit is fallible. So business must be ferociously blamed for unfilled jobs, paralysed supply chains and the threat of a Christmas without turkeys.

Many Conservative MPs I spoke to in Manchester expressed their bemusement that, as one of them put it, "we lurch from crisis to crisis while serenely maintaining a poll lead". For adherents of the Boris cult that is not a paradox. It is a confirmation of their belief. Such is his sorcery, he can levitate over any calamity.

Except he can't. Not forever. Something we know about cults is that they tend to end badly. We cannot say with certainty when this one will collapse under the weight of its contradictions, but we can collect clues about why it will do so eventually. Some were to be found in Manchester.

They used to be the party of business and farmers. If they were anything, they were that. Not anymore

While the adulation of the activists who cheered his speech looked genuine, many of the MPs present were faking it. They still think of themselves as representatives of the Conservative party, not devotees of the Johnson Church of Borisology. The typical Tory MP came into politics believing in low taxes, restrained public spending, free markets, a stable society and a modest state. They are disoriented, when they are not horrified, to find that they are members of a government that is presiding over chaos, raising taxes, bashing business and encouraging wage inflation while having no serious plan for mitigating the disruption, nurturing economic growth or improving productivity.

Talking about the tax hikes being imposed on both employers and employees, one former Tory cabinet minister observed to me: “Business is unhappy with them. Backbenchers are unhappy with them. Party donors are unhappy with them.” They are grimacing and bearing it at the moment, because the Tories are ahead [in the polls](#) and many continue to think that Mr Johnson has a special connection with the electorate that no one else can match. The conviction that he is a winner is the foundational belief of the cult. He was the frontman of a Brexit campaign that succeeded when it was expected to fail. He then secured the best parliamentary majority for the Tories in more than 30 years. His continuing defiance of political gravity encourages faith that he will win again next time. One Conservative MP told me confidently: “Boris is going to have at least eight years as prime minister.”

No one can know that for sure. Public patience will wear thin and then snap. In furtive corners of the conference, Tory MPs could be found debating whether the bubble will burst before or after the next election. The public will turn against him one day, as they do on all leaders, and then his MPs will do the same. For the cult worships only an extremely flawed parcel of mortal flesh who is much better at cracking jokes than he is at cracking governing.

Andrew Rawsley is Chief Political Commentator of the Observer

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## What's our message to outer space? We are not so brilliant here on Earth

[Rowan Moore](#)



Leyla Aliyeva at a music festival in Baku, Azerbaijan. Photograph: ITAR-TASS News Agency/Alamy

Sat 9 Oct 2021 12.00 EDT

You might think of poets as poor – starving in their garrets, receiving tiny sums for their occasional slim volumes of verse and all that. Not so Leyla Aliyeva, one of whose [works was printed in school books](#) in her home country of Azerbaijan. As revealed in the [Pandora Papers](#), she and her siblings were shareholders of 44 companies registered in the British Virgin Islands between 2006 and 2018, which owned tens of millions of pounds worth of luxury property, much of it in London.

It would be churlish to think that either her literary success or her wealth are anything to do with the fact that her father is Ilham Aliyev, the country's president, or that her grandfather (the subject of the poem in the school books) was president too. Her mould-breaking achievements are surely attributable to the unique beauty and brilliance of such lines as "I wish the winds would spread the cry of my heart/ To the whole universe".

In any case, creativity runs in the family. In 2010 her mother, Mehriban Aliyeva, received the Unesco Mozart Medal, a prize for contributions to music also given to such giants as Elisabeth Schwarzkopf and Mstislav Rostropovich. This could have been awkward for the-then director-general of Unesco, the Bulgarian Irina Bokova, who was married to a beneficiary of handsome [consultancy fees](#) from an Azerbaijani company.

## Calling Mars



People visit the UK pavilion at the Dubai Expo 2020, on 3 October.  
Photograph: Kamran Jebreili/AP

In other poetry news, the Covid-delayed Dubai Expo 2020 has just opened. The [UK Pavilion](#), by the designer Es Devlin, offers passersby a large circular facade on which LED lights display verses created from words submitted by visitors and generated by artificial intelligence.

The idea is to create a [message](#) that we might want to deliver to other advanced civilisations in outer space, in response to the late Stephen Hawking's call for such a thing. Examples so far include such enigmatic gems as "now I'm in a garden by chance, and the light is all but positivity" and "papa's shirt, and the grasshopper coming this way – but this is a weird day for thinking". Between these lines and Leyla Aliyeva's cries blowing through the universe, you'd hope that any passing alien might consider this planet too baffling to bother invading.

## The body politic



An exact replica of Michelangelo's statue of David on display at Italy's pavilion at Dubai Expo 2020. Photograph: Massimo Sestini/Italy Pavilion for Expo 2020 Dub/AFP/Getty Images

Expos, once known as “world fairs”, are like the Olympics – only without the excitement – vast and expensive international jamborees constructed around vague platitudes about global friendship and understanding. I haven't made it to the [Dubai](#) iteration, so maybe I'm missing something, but it seems to conform to the usual ratio of 99% futility to 1% inspiration, as a row about the Italian pavilion suggests.

This features a 6-metre replica of Michelangelo's *David*, which is something to do with the theme of “Beauty Connects People”. The famously naked statue is hemmed in by the pavilion's interior architecture so that the ordinary visitor, circulating through an upper gallery, [can only easily see its head and shoulders](#) – you have to be a select visitor or attend a function on the lower floor to get a good view of its genitals.

The pavilion's organisers have been obliged to deny accusations that this is an act of self-censorship, in order not to offend their hosts in the predominantly Muslim United Arab Emirates. Let's believe them, as why would Emirati VIPs be thought less sensitive to body parts than the general

public? But what was gained by giving themselves this problem in the first place?

Rowan Moore is the Observer's architecture critic

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## Boris Johnson's prize porkies – cartoon

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[Opinion](#)[The Queen](#)

## **It's Festival 22 time! Welcome to an orgy of pride, pageantry and, er, levelling up**

[Catherine Bennett](#)





A women waits to watch the Thames flotilla staged for the Queen's diamond jubilee in 2012. Photograph: Ki Price/REUTERS

Sun 10 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

Usefully, as it turns out, there is already a word for a national glut of festivals and pageants – pageantitis. First innocently observed in 1907, then again in the 1950s, another wave of festivities is currently being commissioned – to the satisfaction of its self-appointed star, [Boris Johnson](#) – for 2022.

Last week, with a hint of the impending auto-idolatry, the prime minister took early ownership of one of these celebrations, the Birmingham Commonwealth Games, which [the Queen had just launched](#) with a baton relay. They marked, he announced, “a year of pride and celebration for this country”.

Pride in what? Shelves? There’s so much to choose from, isn’t there, and nothing perhaps more apposite to probable 2022 conditions than the centenary of TS Eliot’s *The Waste Land*. But the main pretext, maybe only partly tarnished by the ongoing efforts of Prince Andrew to elude legal action by an allegedly trafficked victim of sexual abuse, is the Queen’s platinum jubilee, marking her heroic and unrivalled 70 years on the throne.

With Andrew presumably concealed, the ritual will otherwise look familiar: parades, coaches, thanksgivings, balcony appearances, street parties, beacons, fireworks, a concert and a [three-part pageant](#), “Ceremonial, Celebration, Finale”, that will “celebrate the service of Her Majesty’s reign”, ie, all her majesty’s previous pageants.

As is equally traditional, the pageantry will be principally entrusted, via some process not well understood outside the pageant community, to a favoured brotherhood, including in this case the [pageant master](#) who brought us the Thames celebration in 2012. Also involved in that unforgettable regatta was the now platinum co-chair, Sir Michael Lockett, a former organiser of Tory conferences who helped with David Cameron’s leadership campaign. Although the appointment of his co-chair, the former publishing executive Nicholas Coleridge, now introduced as “chairman of the Prince of Wales’s campaign for wool” was not immediately comprehensible, his appearance at the Tory conference will have fulfilled party hopes that these £15m celebrations have a parallel function – to keep it in power.

Assuring delegates that the pageant would be bigger than Queen Victoria’s, in 1897, Coleridge confirmed that its ambition also exceeds hers, being a kind of national antidepressant, to “try to cheer up the country” after the pandemic. The wool expert also wants us to feel “re-energised, highly patriotic and very much one nation”. If he was unable to confirm that “Build Back Better” would feature on the Queen’s hat, with a thoughtful Johnson kindly replacing her majesty where much standing is involved, Coleridge reassured Conservatives that the mood-enhancing entertainment would never lose sight of its [other purpose](#): “The levelling-up agenda will be fully respected.”

Levelling up will also, according to Birmingham mayor [Andy Street](#), be a specifically Tory message from the Commonwealth Games: “To show that the prime minister’s key agenda does not just apply to white working-class areas up north.”

In Windsor, another jubilee pageant, “[A Gallop Through History](#)”, planned by some other men, will take a shape – “from Elizabeth to the present day” – perhaps more redolent of the kind described by Richmal Crompton. William is cast as a swain.

“‘You know, dear,’ said his mother, ‘it’s a dear old festival and quite an honour to take part in it, and a smock is quite a nice manly garment.’

‘Yes, Mother,’ said William.”

The producer, director and army major general Simon Brooks-Ward promises broadcast entertainment that, even without slogans, can’t but help Johnson exploit the 2022 festivities just as, when mayor, he appropriated the London Olympics (in whose organisation he similarly played no part) and Danny Boyle’s acclaimed ceremony. “Lighthearted, respectful and, above all, joyful,” is the Windsor pageant motto.

It will have a “fun element”, the BBC reports, “to act as a counterpoint to the pandemic the nation has been experiencing”. This seems quite a claim, even for horse therapy. Though at least, being largely equine, that fun element cannot be spoiled by fuel shortages. Unless, by then, we’ve also run out of hay.

Festival 22, formerly the Festival of Brexit, the other major component in this orgy of celebration, could be, as befits a legacy from Theresa May, a less promising platform. There are no uniforms, no flypasts, no certainty, even, of flags. While Tony Blair’s Dome and millennium festivities were contemporaneously recognised as vacuous, unwanted and extravagant, Festival 22 faces the additional complication of terrible timing amid economic decline and, possibly as some sort of [warning](#), Johnson’s elevation of Nadine Dorries. The plan, if still unaffected by the woke-hating star of *I’m a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!*, is for 10 diverse creative projects whose providing groups are presumably grappling already with their essential function: to bury Brexit and promote the Conservatives.

The pageant master, or “Chief Creative Officer”, is Martin Green; his visionary triplet, “Open, Original, Optimistic”. Bad luck, *The Waste Land*. Any triumphs will duly become Johnson’s gifts to a grateful nation. Less effective opiates can be ignored or blamed on wokeism, lefties, doomsters – the usual suspects. No pressure then, but with the jubilee and sports both of the trusted *panem et circenses* variety, as Johnson certainly conceives of them, it’s left to Festival 22 teams to create public engagement that at least frustrates political appropriation.

Though it's not too late for amateurs to plan, with some simple floats and costumes, their own levelling-up pageant, a story featuring everything from, for instance, David Cameron wheedling around a Saudi campfire to a social-distancing demonstration by Matt Hancock, Stanley and Boris Johnson as ([vital educational input](#)) Gepetto and Pinocchio and Nadine Dorries and her [payrolled daughters](#) as the three graces.

The parade might end, more conventionally, with some inspirational Shakespeare – “This precious stone set in the silver sea” – during which, connecting past with present, a tanker load of untreated sewage is ceremonially released into a popular bathing spot. The key words in any decent Johnson pageant being shit, shambolic and, above all, shameful.

Catherine Bennett is an Observer columnist

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## OpinionBrexit

# Brexit is all around us, yet politicians run scared of even uttering the ‘B word’

[Anand Menon](#)



Illustration: Dominic McKenzie/The Observer

Sun 10 Oct 2021 02.30 EDT

We seek it here, we seek it there. Yet Brexit is nowhere to be seen. Neither Labour in Brighton nor the [Conservatives](#) in Manchester wanted to utter the “B word”. Superficially at least, one might be led to believe that the prime minister has been as good as his word and “got Brexit done”.

And yet Brexit is everywhere. Discussed, sotto voce (and out of earshot of ministers) as a possible cause of fuel and food shortages. Muttered about as a drag on future growth. Hinted at as the reason why the UK can now do things differently and create what we are promised will be a [“high-wage economy”](#). Brexit is done, but Brexit is not over.

This relative silence stems from several sources. First, boredom. Personally, I don't understand how anyone can fail to be endlessly fascinated by the huge social experiment that is [Brexit](#). But I am starting to realise I may not be wholly representative of the population. Five years of bitter debate and paralysing polarisation followed by 18 months of pandemic have left the public desperate to move on. There's a reason why "get Brexit done" proved such a popular slogan.

Second, expectations. Whatever role Brexit might play in driving the shortages, its impact is relatively subtle and its interplay with other factors is complex. This, in other words, is a long way from the "cliff edge" of which many Remain campaigners warned us. The economic impact of Brexit was always likely to be more of a slow puncture than a dramatic blowout and its effects more slow burn than much anti-Brexit rhetoric implied. It is genuinely extremely difficult to tease out any Brexit drivers of our current economic malaise from the impact of lockdowns.

Third, there is polarisation and perception. As political scientist [Sara Hobolt](#) and her collaborators Thomas J Leeper and James Tilley have argued, one of the features of the "affective polarisation" that has characterised post-Brexit debates has been what they term "evaluative bias in perceptions of the world". Simply put, Brexit identities shape our perceptions of what is going on. And indeed, their research suggests that Brexit identity has a greater effect than party identity in this respect. Little surprise, then, that Leavers do not really blame Brexit for the shortages.

Which takes us to the politics. You hardly need a doctorate in political science to realise the Conservatives are not about to point to Brexit as a cause of our economic travails. Given that Boris Johnson's success in the 2019 election was largely down to his ability to put together a Leave-backing electoral coalition, he can bank on his voters' reluctance to see Brexit as a reason for any economic problems they may face.

For obvious reasons, little attention is paid to the question of how long or how disruptive this 'transition' might be

Insofar as ministers mention Brexit at all, they have happened on the tactic of portraying it as the key to unlock a [new, high-wage UK economy](#). Yet, and for obvious reasons, little attention is paid to the question of how long or how disruptive this “[transition](#)” (as the business secretary, Kwasi Kwarteng, termed it) might be.

As for Labour, the party has been reluctant to mention Brexit at all for much of the period since the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) came into effect. There were passing references at the party conference. Keir Starmer spoke of “[making Brexit work](#)”. Rachel Reeves, the shadow chancellor, drew links between cost of living crisis and the “Tories’ Brexit mess”. Yet there is precious little evidence of the kind of sustained and repeated attacks that would be necessary to entrench a link between the TCA and shortages on the shelves and at the pumps firmly in the public mind.

None of which is to say that this situation will endure. As economies recover from the shutdowns, they may well do so at different speeds and this might reveal something that looks like a Brexit effect. Thus HGV driver shortages are more severe in the UK than in other European states, partly as a result of Brexit. Broader labour shortages, notably in agriculture and social care, are also clearly linked to the decision to leave the EU. Should the UK’s economic performance diverge from that of its neighbours, it might become harder for the government to argue that the problems are global.

Which brings us to Northern Ireland. Stephen Bush of the *New Statesman* has argued that one reason the Brexit minister, David Frost, is so anxious to [renegotiate the infamous protocol](#) is the fact that the province seems to have been less severely affected by shortages than the rest of the UK. The Petrol Retailers Association has pointed out that there are [no issues with the supply chain](#) in Northern Ireland, attributing this to its different relationship with the EU’s single market.

Absent the renegotiation of the protocol that Frost has demanded and the EU has flatly refused, such differences might come to undermine the government’s claims that Brexit has not negatively affected the UK economy.

In addition, the full impacts of Brexit have yet to be felt. For one thing, the government has still not put in place the gamut of measures necessitated by the TCA to check imports from the EU into the UK, which will affect such trade.

Second, lockdown prevented most business travel. Consequently, service providers in particular haven't experienced how the Brexit deal will transform visa requirements and other assorted paperwork in the sector.

Much will hinge on how the British economy fares in the months to come. In the event of inflationary pressures, or of continued shortages, and particularly if Labour is willing to hammer home a message linking these outcomes to the Brexit deal, the issue could come back to haunt the Conservatives. Indeed, there is already some, albeit limited, evidence that public perceptions of the Brexit process are shifting. A YouGov [survey](#) of 29 September revealed that 53% of people thought that Brexit was going badly.

And that's without mentioning the possibility of a crisis. The French are talking about [retaliation](#) against the UK for what they see as its failure to honour commitments on everything from fisheries to the Northern Ireland protocol.

And a UK decision to suspend part or all of that protocol would raise the spectre of a tit-for-tat trade spat. How that could affect the economy and public perceptions of the government is simply too soon to tell.

However, the bottom line is that, for all the absence of Brexit from conference season, there is little reason to believe the “B” word has been banished from our politics for good. Brexit may be done, but it has far from done with us.

Anand Menon is director of [UK in a Changing Europe](#) and professor of European politics and foreign affairs at King's College London

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## Observer lettersInequality

# Lettters: the deception that is ‘levelling up’



The City of London: ordinary people had to pay for the financial crash.  
Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

Sun 10 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

Isn’t it time to call out the complete deception that is being peddled as “levelling up”? (“[You can’t level up by raising taxes on the poor, Tories tell PM](#)”, News). We know that Boris Johnson is ace at spewing out slogans and phrases that can sound good. Most are devoid of serious content and serve only as a distraction from what is really needed to give everyone who works, has worked, will work or would like to work a really fair chance in life.

“Levelling up” was invented only to persuade rich people who keep the Tory party afloat of the idea that fairness and social justice won’t cost them anything. They were never seriously asked to pay for the disaster that befell

the world economy in 2008, even though their wealth was hugely bolstered by the abuses that brought that collapse about in the first place. It was whole populations of ordinary people who had to pay through years of austerity when services were cut to the bone and needs were ignored, so that after 11 years of Tory rule we are now on the brink.

**Roger Pask**

Barnham, West Sussex

## Restore our rivers

Robin McKie's very good piece on the need for a rivers act to restore and protect our waterways for people and for wildlife ("Heatwaves, sewage, pesticides... why our rivers urgently need a 'new deal' to avert crisis", News) would have benefited from a reference to George Monbiot's excellent investigative journalism on the subject of the River Wye earlier this year. His film Rivercide is a shock to the system and should be a wake-up call for government.

The fact that it took local community scientists to expose the failings of an underfunded Environment Agency in performing its statutory duties is a dreadful indictment of those in power. To the four suggested measures to be included in any future act should be added industrial farms and the inevitable effect of run-off of animal dung, rendering rivers lifeless.

**Stephen Leahy**

Leeds

## Older women are abused too

Your article on the harassment of women and girls "up to middle age" ignores the legions of older women who encounter hostility or being patronised by these same men ("You can't opt in and out of taking violence against women seriously", Comment). Older women are subject to rape. Rape is a violent act that has nothing to do with sexual attraction.

**Val Mainwood**

Wivenhoe, Essex

## The adventures of Mrs Trellis

Amelia Tait has discovered the hobby of scambaiting (“[Who scams the scammers? Meet the scambaiters](#)”, Observer Magazine). This is not new. Almost 20 years ago, a colleague began documenting their adventures as a scambuster in the guise of the well-known prolific correspondent, Mrs Trellis of north Wales. Some of her more memorable adventures are documented online at [mrstrellis.co.uk](#).

**Ruth Charles**

Swavesey, Cambridge

## The real cost of fossil fuels

Although I am one of those Bulb customers who has recently received notice of an energy price increase, I was genuinely shocked at the prices some people are being asked to pay (“[Energy firm under fire for 80% monthly bill rise](#)”, News). When, although in credit, I received notification of a monthly rise from £90 to £124.91, I thought that was bad enough, but it would seem that I may be one of the luckier ones. Certainly the solar panels I had installed in 2005 have paid their way, as have later investments in improved insulation.

**Steve Edwards**

Wivelsfield Green, Haywards Heath, West Sussex

## Time to reopen surgeries

Much of the anger directed at GPs is caused by rigid application of Covid rules while other sectors are relaxing (“[Doctors, receptionists and practice teams quit after wave of hostility over GP appointments](#)”, News). Patients can see empty surgeries yet are prevented from going in (even masked) to make appointments and are told to go home and phone. It can take up to half an hour to get an answer. Patients are then quizzed by a non-medically trained person and if they are lucky get a phone appointment. This is limited to the specific problem and the GP cannot see anything else that could be significant. All this could be addressed by opening surgeries again.

**Jane Ghosh**

Bristol

## A little respect

Re “[The minimum wage is meaningless if we don't treat workers with respect](#)” (Business leader): I had almost given up waiting for someone to write about this appalling situation. Around 60% of the population earn £24,000 or less a year and the cost of bare essentials is rising constantly, which adds to the precarious lives of so many. Politicians note with enthusiasm that the economic health of this country depends on people spending, yet appear oblivious to the obvious – that the vast majority of citizens don't have funds to spend on anything but the essentials unless they borrow or get credit.

Elsewhere in the world, leaders are living lives of unimaginable luxury while the majority live in poverty and you may wonder why there are no uprisings to put an end to this abomination. I would imagine that the travails of feeding your children day to day take up so much time and energy that there is little opportunity to fight the system. I have a horrible suspicion that the UK is heading in the same direction.

**Anna Farlow**  
London NW2

## Accept us as women

Do you have to deny Darwin's theory of natural selection, as Nick Cohen claimed, in order to say trans women are women (“[Shouldn't progressives be in favour of people wanting to speak their mind?](#)”, Comment)? I do not deny biological sex: it resulted in my existence. And I have a need to express myself as a woman. I felt misery and despair when I tried to suppress it, and increasingly now, reading hostility and denial in leftwing media. Just as platypuses are mammals that lay eggs, so trans women are women who confuse people who like clear, “logical” categories. Accept us as women and we flourish and contribute. We are ordinary people, not a threatening, dangerous minority group.

**Abigail Maxwell**  
Irthlingborough, Northamptonshire

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

## For the record



Author Hiromi Kawakami Photograph: Publishers handout

Sun 10 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

We misattributed a letter about gene editing to Christopher Price, CEO of the Rare Breeds Survival Trust, when it was in fact written by Patrick Cosgrove (Your letters, 3 October, page 48). Mr Price's letter can be read online [here](#)

The Japanese writer Hiromi Kawakami is a woman, not a man, as suggested by our reference to *Strange Weather in Tokyo* as "his 2013 book" ([20 classic books by writers of colour](#), 3 October, the New Review, page 8).

A review of Lady Hale's memoir *Spider Woman* said she sat with "10 male judges" for the supreme court prorogation hearing; in fact, she sat with eight male and two female judges ([A tangled web she weaves](#), 3 October, the New Review, page 38).

A caption misspelled the surname of Michaela Coel, the actor, writer, producer and director, as “Cole” ([Yes, the younger hires are diverse. But why does TV still lack black people in top roles?](#), 3 October, page 46).

Day’s Cottage, the Gloucestershire-based cider producer, is marking Apple Day on 17 October, not 23 October, as we incorrectly said; and some of the activities that we suggested were planned related to their 2019 event ([Pomme tiddly pomme](#), 3 October, Magazine, page 33). Day’s Cottage has also asked us to make clear that its family-run farm is suitable only for a small number of visitors, particularly in view of Covid considerations.

Other recently amended articles include:

[Did RAF’s intelligence base play a role in US drone strike on Iranian general?](#)

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

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OpinionSadiq Khan

## **Sadiq Khan's 24/7 security challenges our notions of non-racist London**

Nick Cohen



Sadiq Khan. Photograph: Tolga Akmen/AFP/Getty Images

Sat 9 Oct 2021 14.00 EDT

Today, as every day, police protection will be at its highest around the Queen and the prime minister and around a politician who in normal circumstances would barely need guarding. Fifteen armed officers, trained in counter-terrorism and emergency medicine, will be on alert solely because a brown-skinned Muslim, caught up in a global wave of hatred, is the mayor of London.

The level of threat Sadiq Khan must live with challenges the self-congratulatory claim that "[Britain is the least racist country in the world](#)" and many other complacent clichés.

British society tells immigrants and their children that all will be well as long as they assimilate. No family could have tried harder than the Khans. Sadiq's father, Amanullah, and mother, Sehrun, emigrated from Pakistan in 1968, the year of Enoch Powell's "rivers of blood" speech. When his son became a Labour MP in 2005, that time of racial intimidation and violence was meant to have passed into an unmarked grave.

I am not damning with faint praise when I say that if Khan were a white politician, there would be nothing exceptional about him. Since the voters made him London's mayor in 2016, he has not shown a trace of sectarianism or religious intolerance. He [has described Pride marches](#) as a highlight of his year. When Jeremy Corbyn was in charge of Labour, Khan [spoke out against anti-Jewish hatred](#) with more political courage than many of his colleagues could muster. As if to prove the point, the first threats he received did not come from neo-Nazis but from Muslim radicals who [condemned his support](#) for same-sex marriage.

Khan is a modern social democrat. He might be the progressive mayor of any large European or North American city or a leader of or minister in any centre-left government. Yet how many of his contemporaries have experienced the following?

Khan is a modern social democrat. He might be the progressive mayor of any large European or North American city

The police took a bomb threat in February so seriously Khan was conducting online meetings while dogs sniffed for explosives in the mayoral office, his staff told me. Last year, police put 24-hour surveillance on his family home because of credible threats against him and his wife. Without publicity, the authorities also sectioned a Nazi sympathiser from Surrey, who threatened to “do something” to Khan, which would mean “we will see him in the news”. So great is the hate staff in City Hall’s public liaison unit are offered counselling to help them cope with the volume of racist, Islamophobic, violent and abusive messages they see, and pass on to detectives.

A second myth follows the assertion that the assimilated have nothing to fear in the world’s least racist country. Whenever far-right terrorists spoil the national image by murdering Jo Cox or threatening to murder Khan, conventional conservatives [jump up](#) to say we cannot call them “terrorists”. They are “mentally ill” loners, in the Lee Harvey Oswald mould, who do not represent darker forces in wider society.

You could forgive Khan for replying that he has enough “loners” after him to fill a stadium. As Brenton Tarrant prepared to massacre 51 people in Christchurch mosques, he found the time to [urge his supporters](#) to show their commitment to a “white rebirth” by removing the “Pakistani Muslim invader [who] now sits as representative for the people of London”. “Why would a terrorist in New Zealand know about me?” Khan asked. His answer comes from the great reactionary year of 2016 that pushed conservatism rightwards. As he was preparing for the May election in London, Boris Johnson and his Vote Leave team were swinging the Brexit referendum with the lie – and there is no other word for it – that Muslim Turkey with its population of 76m “[is joining the EU](#)”. At the same moment, US commentators were dismissing the presidential run of Donald Trump and did not see that he would win in November on an anti-Muslim ticket.

Khan experienced the new rightwing politics in the campaign of the Conservative contender, Zac Goldsmith, a member of the upper class, who showed how the mainstream could exploit the lunatic fringe. The

Conservatives [sought to widen](#) communal divisions between London's Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs. Khan was a Muslim, they maintained, and if not quite a terrorist then a "[Labour lackey who speaks alongside extremists](#)". I remember thinking at the time that the dog whistles were so loud, you couldn't hear yourself speak.

Conservative newspapers know their readership and understand that putting Khan's name in a headline guarantees angry clicks

During the 20th century, anti-Jewish hatred was Janus-faced. On the one hand, it exploited resentment from below by pretending that a Jewish elite controlled the capitalist banks and media, along with (and don't ask how) the Soviet Communist party. On the other, it exploited resentment from above about immigrants with an alien religion undercutting wages and stealing jobs. Today's far right plays both sides when it says the global elite is replacing white people by flooding the west with immigrants. Khan lives with danger because he has become the first prominent Muslim politician it can claim is a member of the elite.

Trump may be deranged but he is hardly a loner. He was president of the US and may be again. He [endorsed Katie Hopkins](#), who [pretends](#) that Khan has allowed no-go areas in London where sharia law rules. You can see the same cry [echoed on Twitter](#) to this day.

Conservative newspapers know their readership and understand that putting Khan's name in a headline guarantees angry clicks. No attack on Khan is too trivial to dismiss. They will generate traffic by seizing on [criticism of him](#) from figures as obscure as Piers Morgan's son.

Khan said he had kept quiet about the dangers he faced because he did not want to deter people from minorities from going into politics. Then he realised that black footballers did not duck the issue of racism for fear they would put the young off sport. They wanted to fight it and so should he. Silence "normalised extremism", he told me, and he had had enough of keeping quiet.

The mayor of our capital city needs 24/7 protection because of his faith. If you appreciate the consequences of the threat he faces, you must conclude the world's "least racist country" is not anti-racist enough.

Nick Cohen is an Observer columnist

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## **Headlines saturday 9 october 2021**

- University of Cambridge Colleges accused of exploiting ‘gig economy’ tutors
- Taiwan Xi Jinping vows ‘reunification’ with China will be fulfilled
- Violence against women 888 safety app ‘wins Patel’s support’
- Met police Whitehall troubleshooter Louise Casey hired to wipe out force’s misogyny
- Tories Peers to defy PM with aim to make misogyny a hate crime

[University of Cambridge](#)

## Cambridge colleges accused of exploiting ‘gig economy’ tutors



Pembroke College claims the average pay for supervision is “well above the living wage”. Photograph: Graham Turner Photograph: Graham Turner/The Guardian

*[Rachel Hall](#)*

*[@rachela\\_hall](#)*

Sat 9 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

Colleges at the [University of Cambridge](#) have been accused of using overworked and underpaid gig economy workers to provide the institution’s famous one-on-one tutoring system.

[Research](#) by members of the University and College Union found nearly half of undergraduate tutorials, or “supervisions” as they are known, are delivered by precariously employed staff who lack proper contracts. One-

third of supervisors are postgraduate students or freelancers, including those who have recently completed their PhDs.

Supervisors who spoke to the Guardian said they gained work through personal contacts and loose email agreements, with no guarantee of how many students they would receive. They said the £36 an hour rate failed to cover the considerable time required to prepare for supervisions, including covering entire reading lists, and mark papers, with the result that some said their pay worked out at closer to £5 an hour.

A freedom of information (FoI) request by the UCU branch to Pembroke College showed the university had been challenged by HMRC over its failure to put supervisors on the payroll. Pembroke College defended the practice as “analogous to the college’s use of external maintenance contractors, for example plumbers and decorators”. HMRC subsequently reversed its decision, noting it was “borderline”.

Lorena Gazzotti, a postdoctoral researcher who is coordinating the campaign for Cambridge UCU, said colleges were operating a gig economy “like Deliveroo”, despite advertising supervisions to students as a core feature of Cambridge’s teaching model.

“These are hyper-casualised jobs which could become real jobs for people if colleges were willing to invest the time and resources,” she said. “If most people working on your unique selling point are treated as individual contractors you have a problem because this is the main mission of your institution.”

Gazzotti is planning to include demands for secure contracts, guaranteed hours and fair pay, potentially resembling the graduate teaching assistantships offered at universities including Sheffield and Birmingham, in the UK-wide wave of strike action that is planned for later in the academic year.

A spokesperson for the University of Cambridge said: “A majority of supervisors are self-employed, choose which colleges they prefer to work with, the hours they work and often work with multiple colleges.

“The colleges are separate legal and financial employers, so cannot be covered by a single agreement. Supervisor training is provided for free and the average pay for supervision, including preparation, is well above the living wage.”

Postgraduate supervisors said that although they enjoyed teaching the supervisions and considered them valuable experience, they struggled with the high workload, low pay and contract insecurity.

One supervisor said he relied on the work to top up his £12,000 stipend, but had all his hours cut suddenly. “PhD students are forced to live in Cambridge on very low wages, and as a necessity to make ends meet we take on teaching,” he said. “But I had no protection when I was told I would not be given any more [work].”

Another supervisor said the need to gain teaching experience by delivering undergraduate supervisions had become a “vicious cycle” in the early stages of academic careers, since spending time teaching makes it hard to find time for research. “I wonder whether it’s worth staying in academia to get treated institutionally so badly,” he said.

Mary Newbould, who has worked as a supervisor since finishing her PhD in 2007, said that despite being employed for an average of 25 hours of supervision a week during term time, which corresponded to a 75-hour working week including preparation, she typically earned about £10,000 a year, and had accrued no pension.

“I’d like to see something formalised and recognised, where you don’t feel like you’re filling a gap. It’s come out of a gentlemanly pursuit where they would give a tutorial for an hour a week over a glass of sherry, and the colleges haven’t realised it has evolved out of that to be something people are trying to make a wage out of,” she said.

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[The Observer](#)[Taiwan](#)

# Xi Jinping vows to fulfil Taiwan ‘reunification’ with China by peaceful means

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Xi Jinping insists China will achieve 'reunification' with Taiwan – video

*[Vincent Ni](#) and agencies*

Sat 9 Oct 2021 06.31 EDT

China's president, Xi Jinping, has vowed to realise “reunification” with Taiwan by peaceful means, after a [week of heightened tensions](#) in the Taiwan strait.

Taiwan responded shortly after by calling on Beijing to abandon its “coercion”, reiterating that only Taiwan's people could decide their future.

Beijing regards democratically run Taiwan as its breakaway province. In the past, it has repeatedly [pledged to take it, by force if necessary](#). However, Taiwan's leader, Tsai Ing-wen has said the island of 24 million people is already a sovereign nation with no need to declare independence, and has no wish for conflict.

Tensions across the Taiwan strait have been running high in recent weeks. In the first four days of October, for example, China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) sent nearly 150 planes into Taiwan's air defence identification (ADIZ) zone. Leading figures and state-run media in [China](#) have labelled such actions as a demonstration of strength, but many western governments condemned the latest shows of force as acts of intimidation and aggression.

Washington has said it is “deeply concerned” about China’s actions that undermine peace across the Taiwan strait. “We are going to stand up and speak out, both privately and publicly when we see the kinds of activities that are fundamentally destabilising,” said Jake Sullivan, the US national security adviser, this week.

Meanwhile, according to the Wall Street Journal on Thursday, about two dozen US special forces soldiers and an unspecified number of marines have been training Taiwanese forces, in the latest indication of the extent of US involvement in the tensions in the area. The report said that trainers were first sent to Taiwan by the Trump administration, but their presence had not been reported until now.

It is against this backdrop that Xi’s speech on Saturday has been closely scrutinised. Speaking at Beijing’s Great Hall of the People, Xi said the Chinese people had a “glorious tradition” of opposing separatism.

“Taiwan’s independence separatism is the biggest obstacle to achieving the reunification of the motherland, and the most serious hidden danger to national rejuvenation,” he said the day before the anniversary of the revolution that overthrew China’s last imperial dynasty in 1911. Taiwan marks 10 October, when the revolution began, as its national day.

Xi said “reunification through a peaceful manner is the most in line with the overall interest of the Chinese nation, including Taiwan compatriots”, but added that China would protect its sovereignty and unity.

“No one should underestimate the Chinese people’s staunch determination, firm will, and strong ability to defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity,” Xi said. “The historical task of the complete reunification of the motherland must be fulfilled, and will definitely be fulfilled.”

He added: “The Taiwan question is purely an internal matter for China, one which brooks no external interference.”

Analysts say that Xi’s speech struck a slightly softer tone than in July, his last major speech that mentioned Taiwan, in which he vowed to “smash” any attempts at formal independence.

“It’s actually relatively moderate – even mundane – in the section talking about Taiwan,” said George Yin, of Harvard University’s Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies. “Although the current situation looks tense, Xi does not ultimately want to see it out of control across the Taiwan strait, especially after this week’s meeting between Jake Sullivan and Xi’s top foreign policy adviser Yang Jiechi.”

00:42

Taiwan must be on alert against 'over-the-top' China, says premier – video

He added: “All sides – China, Taiwan and the US – understand that unnecessary accident is not in anyone’s interest, after all.”

In response, Taiwan’s presidential office said Taiwan was a sovereign independent country, not part of the People’s Republic of China, and had clearly rejected China’s offer of “one country, two systems” to rule the island. “The nation’s future rests in the hands of Taiwan’s people,” it said.

In a separate statement, Taiwan’s Mainland Affairs Council called on Beijing to “abandon its provocative steps of intrusion, harassment and destruction” and return to talks.

[China’s airforce mounted four straight days of incursions into Taiwan’s air defence zone](#) from 1 October, involving close to 150 aircraft.

Speaking shortly before Xi, Taiwan’s premier, Su Tseng-chang, noted that China had been “flexing its muscles” and causing regional tensions.

“This is why countries that believe in freedom, democracy and human rights, and based on shared values, are all working together and have repeatedly warned that China should not invade Taiwan,” Su said.

*With Reuters and the Associated Press*

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## Violence against women and girls

# New 888 service to protect women ‘wins Priti Patel’s support’



Women walk by floral tributes to Sarah Everard in Clapham, south London.  
Photograph: Yui Mok/PA

*[Nadeem Badshah](#)*

Fri 8 Oct 2021 19.44 EDT

A proposal by BT for a new service to help protect women travelling alone has reportedly secured the support of the home secretary, Priti Patel.

Users would download a mobile phone app and enter their home address and other frequent destinations, said the Daily Mail.

Before a journey, a person would call or text 888 or use the app to enter an estimated journey time, which would then be tracked by the phone’s GPS

system with the app sending a message to check whether the user had got home.

A failure to respond would trigger calls to emergency contacts and subsequently to the police.

The paper said the BT chief executive, Philip Jansen, had written to Patel saying the helpline would cost around £50m and could be launched by Christmas.

A Home Office spokesperson said: “We have received the letter and will respond in due course.

“As set out in our strategy earlier this year, we need a whole-of-society approach to tackling violence against women and girls, and welcome joint working between the private sector and government.”

Patel told the Mail: “This new phone line is exactly the kind of innovative scheme which would be good to get going as soon as we can. I’m now looking at it with my team and liaising with BT.”

Jansen told the paper that he came up with the idea after the coverage of the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard in south London by Wayne Couzens.

[Couzens, a former Metropolitan police officer, was given a whole-life sentence last week.](#)

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[Metropolitan police](#)

## Met appoints Whitehall troubleshooter Louise Casey to wipe out misogyny



Louise Casey has previously tackled issues such as antisocial behaviour, troubled families, integration and victims' rights. Photograph: Antonio Olmos/The Observer

[Vikram Dodd](#)

Fri 8 Oct 2021 13.27 EDT

The former Whitehall troubleshooter Louise Casey has been brought in by the [Metropolitan police](#) to root out misogyny and lax standards, as it battles to dig itself out of a crisis caused by its mishandling of the Wayne Couzens scandal.

Lady Casey has been appointed by the Met commissioner, Dame Cressida Dick, to lead the review which came after harrowing details of the rape,

kidnap and murder of Sarah Everard by Couzens while a police officer were made public.

Dick has accepted the case has dealt a hammer blow to public trust after it was revealed Couzens used his police warrant card to stop Everard, his training and powers to trick her into a car, his handcuffs to restrain her, and then his police belt to strangle her.

The Met then stoked extra anger on itself by suggesting people, especially women, nervous that an officer stopping them was a threat, could flag down a bus.

The review will examine issues including vetting, recruitment, leadership, and training in Britain's biggest force, which has left ministers concerned as it lurches from regular crisis to crisis.

Couzens, who was an armed officer in parliament and diplomatic protection command, was last Thursday sentenced to a rare whole-life sentence because his crimes and abuse of power were deemed so serious.

The Met also announced a “root and branch” review of the parliament and diplomatic protection command, focusing on recruitment, vetting, culture, professional standards and supervision.

Dick announced the review on Monday, only for the home secretary, Priti Patel, the next day to announce the government was launching its own inquiry. The Met’s handling of the fallout from the Couzens case has tested the patience of the two people responsible for appointing the commissioner, namely the home secretary and London’s mayor, Sadiq Khan.

The Met is trying to demonstrate it can reform to try to regain public confidence. It also announced a review to ensure investigations into claims of sexual and domestic abuse allegations against Metropolitan police service officers and staff.

The force also said it still had officers and staff in its ranks who faced claims of sexual misconduct and domestic abuse allegations over the last decade, and will now examine some of those cases.

Casey has been called in by Labour and Conservative governments to tackle issues such as antisocial behaviour, troubled families, integration and victims' rights.

She is brusquer than the normal Whitehall insider and in 2013 Casey told the Guardian in an interview: "The Daily Mail don't like me 'cos I'm female and fat and lefty. Other people on the left think I sleep with the devil."

The London mayor, Sadiq Khan, welcomed the news that Casey would lead the review and said: "Public trust in our police has been severely damaged and requires urgent rebuilding."

Dick said of her appointment: "We recognise the grave levels of public concern following the kidnap, rape and murder of Sarah Everard and other deeply troubling incidents and allegations. I have said that we know a precious bond has been broken."

Casey said: "Trust is given to the police by our, the public's, consent. So any acts that undermine that trust must be examined and fundamentally changed.

"This will no doubt be a difficult task but we owe it to the victims and families this has affected and the countless decent police officers this has brought into disrepute."

Everard, 33, was seized by Couzens as she walked home in south London in March 2021.

The review by Casey is expected to take six months and the Met said it would be made public.

The government is still to announce the terms of reference for its inquiry and who will lead it.

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## [Crime](#)

# Tory peers to defy Boris Johnson with push to make misogyny a hate crime



Messages and floral tributes to Sarah Everard on Clapham Common in March. Photograph: Daniel Leal-Olivas/AFP/Getty Images

*[Alexandra Topping](#)*

Fri 8 Oct 2021 10.55 EDT

Conservative peers and MPs will defy Boris Johnson's stance that misogyny should not be a hate crime and push ahead with attempts to change the law, the Guardian understands.

The former victims' commissioner and Conservative peer Helen Newlove is leading the charge, tabling an amendment to the police, crime, sentencing and courts bill, [currently at committee stage](#) in the House of Lords.

Lady Newlove said she was “disappointed and dismayed” at Boris Johnson’s comments this week stating that he did not support making misogyny a hate crime.

“I was dismayed with it. Because at the end of the day, we need to fully understand how women feel,” she said.

“If the rhetoric is we’re going to have an inquiry for [Sarah Everard](#), for the prime minister to dismiss [making misogyny a hate crime] is not really to have understood what happened to her. I’m disappointed and hopefully the government will start to listen.”

Johnson came under fire this week for appearing to harden his stance against making misogyny a hate crime, despite backing an “experimental” move to require police forces to collect [data on crimes apparently motivated by hostility towards women](#), in the wake of Everard’s murder in March.

The National Police Chiefs’ Council (NPCC) said, six months on, it was waiting for guidance from the Home Office about how the recording should be done.



Lady Newlove said she was ‘disappointed and dismayed’ at Boris Johnson’s comments. Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

Asked whether he thought misogyny should be made a hate crime this week, Johnson said: “I think, to be perfectly frank, if you simply widen the scope of what you ask the police to do you’ll just increase the problem.”

The justice secretary, Dominic Raab, also rejected calls for it to become a hate crime and appeared confused about its meaning [in an interview with the BBC](#), suggesting it could apply to abuse against either women or men.

The first step of collecting data was seen as a potentially significant step towards changing the law, and changing culture within the police to compel officers to take violence against women seriously.

Eleven police forces already record crimes motivated by hatred of someone’s sex or gender, with indications that data improves outcomes in addressing the abuse and harassment of women and girls.

Campaigners are calling for sex or gender to be included as a hate crime category alongside religion, sexual orientation, disability and transgender identity, which would give judges the ability to increase the punishment of an offence if it was motivated by a hostility towards women.

The Law Commission is expected to publish a wide-ranging review of hate crime this autumn. It has previously proposed that [misogyny should be considered a hate crime](#).

Newlove said she was confident of cross-party support for her amendment, which is championed in the Commons by the Labour MP Stella Creasy and is likely to be supported by Conservative MPs including Bob Neill, the chair of the justice select committee.

“We are probing the government to listen, and hopefully they will take it onboard and they will accept it,” said Newlove. “This is not just one woman on a mission, we’ve got men also on the amendment who will stand up and say it’s much needed. I won’t give up and I’ll keep probing because it’s very important that we recognise this as a building block to make people feel safe.”

Creasy said misogyny drove crimes against women, adding: “We don’t need to create new crimes to recognise that, if we give the courts the power to take that into account in sentencing and ensure the police record it, but we do need political leadership that understands it and acts to address it.”

A Home Office spokesperson said it would not pre-empt the conclusions of the Law Commission review, but confirmed police forces were being asked to record any crime where the victim perceived it was motivated by hostility to their sex. The government was “in consultation” with the NPCC and forces on how to take this forward.

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## 2021.10.09 - Spotlight

- [Exclusive Read an extract from Silverview, John le Carré's final novel](#)
- [Dying as an Irishman Fintan O'Toole on le Carré's final twist](#)
- ['Riveting' Stephen King, Paula Hawkins and others on their favourite le Carré](#)

Sat 9 Oct 2021 09:45 BST

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John Le Carré: 'I filched from the manners and lifestyle of my peers and betters.' Photograph: Nadav Kander/The Guardian

## Fintan O'Toole on John le Carré's final twist: dying as an Irishman

John Le Carré: 'I filched from the manners and lifestyle of my peers and betters.' Photograph: Nadav Kander/The Guardian

by [Fintan O'Toole](#)

Sat 9 Oct 2021 04.45 EDT

I'm looking at one of the last photographs of [John le Carré](#). It was taken by his son Nick in October 2020. There is a mostly empty bottle of good beaujolais in front of him and a glimpse through the window behind of the Cornish landscape that he inhabited with such delight. His beloved wife and most important collaborator, Jane, is seated next to him, laughing heartily.

The man in the picture seems at home in the world, comfortable with who – and where – he is. Written over the last years of his life and completed by

Nick, his final novel [Silverview](#) is now about to be published posthumously. The book is shot through with an elegiac kind of Englishness: beach huts in an out of season seaside town, greasy spoon cafes, net curtains.

But this photograph disrupts any notion of a life reaching a serene conclusion, of the grand old man of English letters going gently into the night. For le Carré – in real life David Cornwell – is wrapped in a flag. It is the green, white and orange tricolour of the country to which, in his late 80s, he chose to belong, the Republic of Ireland. He is, as Nick put it to me, “going out swinging”.

Le Carré is arguably the greatest English novelist of his generation. He is, moreover, one of England’s most important public moralists. He tested, perhaps to destruction, his country’s values, its sense of purpose in the world. He is, in the best sense, a national writer as well as an international one. Why is he so boldly declaring his allegiance to another nation?

What hovers over this happy picture is a notion that is never far away in his novels: betrayal. It is itself a tiny le Carré drama of unstable loyalties, of uncertain belongings, even, as English nationalists might see it, of treachery. But the question it poses is also the one that becomes, in his stories, so knotty: who and what is being betrayed? The answer that le Carré himself increasingly implied is that, long before he was unfaithful to England, England was unfaithful to itself, betraying him and the things that, when he served his country as a spy, he thought it stood for.

We might think of this photograph as the personal equivalent of le Carré’s literary valediction to his most famous character, the spymaster [George Smiley](#). Smiley was always in one specific sense anti-English. Short, fat, cerebral, unsexy, morally torn, he is a knowing antithesis of – and, in the world’s imagination, competitor with – the glamorisation of a reckless, amoral Britain in [Ian Fleming](#)’s James Bond.

But in le Carré’s farewell to him, [A Legacy of Spies](#), published in 2017, after the Brexit referendum, Smiley’s next to last words are a direct response to [Theresa May’s dismissal of unpatriotic infidels](#) as “citizens of nowhere”. He muses on the purposes of all his cold war operations: “‘So was it all for *England*, then?’ he resumed. ‘There was a time, of course there was. But

*whose* England? *Which* England? England all alone, a citizen of nowhere? I'm a European ... If I had a mission – if I was ever aware of one beyond our business with the enemy, it was to Europe.””



Le Carré with Irish flag and wife Jane, on his 89th birthday last year.  
Photograph: Nick Cornwell

Le Carré’s decision to die as an Irish citizen of the EU was his riposte to May’s reactionary definition of belonging: if you want to make me a citizen of nowhere, I will become a citizen of another somewhere. He could do this because his maternal grandmother, Olive Wolfe, was from County Cork. In a sense, the great storyteller was, at the end, spinning a new story about himself. As his son Nick put it in Philippe Sands’ excellent Radio 4 documentary [A Writer and His Country](#), “When the archivist who was helping him to research his roots in Skibbereen said, ‘Welcome home’, it was vastly moving for him, a huge emotional shift, an awareness of history and self which had genuinely eluded him his whole life.”

But this last twist in the thriller of his life was not just about picking a homeland. It was also, in a sense, about picking a parent. His Irishness belonged to him through his mother. His Englishness came from his father, who wanted his son David to be a paragon of British respectability. As Nick told me, in making himself Irish at last, he was “choosing finally to step

away from the caricature British gent identity that his father wanted for him”.

Peter Guillam, the Breton-born spy who features in many of the Smiley novels, speaks of “the Anglicisation wished on me by my father”. His creator was that most tautological of beings: an Anglicised Englishman. David Cornwell’s father wanted him not merely to be English, but to perform a very particular version of the national type. He would have thought the answer to Smiley’s question – *Whose England?* – completely obvious: the toffs’.

Ronnie’s entire life was spent walking on the thinnest ice. He saw no paradox between being on the Wanted list for fraud and sporting a grey topper in the Owners’ enclosure at Ascot

#### *John le Carré on his father*

His own formation as a fabulist owed everything to Ronnie Cornwell: “[conman, fantasist, occasional jailbird, and my father](#)”. Just as, in le Carré’s most personal novel, the traitor Pym’s experience of being the son of a fraudster makes him A Perfect Spy. Rick, the lightly fictionalised version of Ronnie in that novel, has a great line in grandiloquent self-justification: “The burden is that any money passing through Rick’s hands is subject to a redefinition of the laws of property, since whatever he does with it will improve mankind, whose chief representative he is.” It is not hard to see why le Carré would become a great hater of all forms of self-serving sententiousness, of all those in power who can so smoothly identify the interests of humanity with their own.

Easy, too, to see where his feeling for the instability of identities and loyalties might have come from. On the one hand, le Carré’s father was clearly amoral to the point of being a psychopath: he swindled, not just strangers but his own mother and mother-in-law. On the other, his fictional alter ego Rickin A Perfect Spy, has grand plans for the family’s future at the highest reaches of the British establishment: “Son. It’s time for you to set those fine feet of yours on the hard road of becoming Lord Chief Justice and a credit to your old man.”

The life of the conman is an affair of many selves. As le Carré recalled, “Ronnie’s entire life was spent walking on the thinnest, slipperiest layer of ice you can imagine. He saw no paradox between being on the Wanted list for fraud and sporting a grey topper in the Owners’ enclosure at Ascot.” The son, too, skated on the thin ice of self-invention. He recalled “the dissembling as we grew up, and the need to cobble together an identity for myself, and how in order to do this I filched from the manners and lifestyle of my peers and betters”.

He could, after all, pass quite successfully as the kind of Establishment Englishman Ronnie wanted him to be. It is fascinating to listen to his voice in the earliest interviews in Sands’ radio documentary. In the later recordings, his accent is toned down, though still unmistakably that of the English public school elite.

He was briefly a schoolmaster at Eton. One of his pupils, [Ferdinand Mount](#), [noted](#) his manner of dealing with upper-class yobs in his classroom: “He delivers merciless and exact parodies of their arrogant, languid voices.” But in those archive recordings from 1966, he himself sounds as if he were auditioning for a part in [The Crown](#). It is as though the mimicry at which he excelled throughout his life is being used to constitute his public, terribly English ruling class persona.

One can hear in that voice the ease with which he must have blended in as one of the boys in MI5 and MI6, the suavity with which he could pass himself off as an up-and-coming British diplomat in Bonn. He could surely have ended up, if not quite as the Lord Chief Justice of Ronnie’s ambitions, then at least as Ambassador Sir David Cornwell. It might even have made for a perfect little English melodrama: the intensely respectable mandarin who has to pay off his old man to keep schtum about the family’s disreputable past.

To understand how he became [John le Carré](#) instead, we have to think about two great betrayals, one highly political, the other deeply intimate. In the immediate postwar years, he was stationed in Graz in Austria. One of his main tasks was interrogating people who had crossed into the country and who were being held in camps. The purpose of the interrogations was to hunt out Nazis for exclusion and possible prosecution. Except that this

purpose was suddenly reversed: to hunt out Nazis to be recruited as agents and allies against the communists.

## Quick Guide

### Saturday magazine

#### Show



This article comes from Saturday, [the new print magazine from the Guardian](#) which combines the best features, culture, lifestyle and travel writing in one beautiful package. Available now in the UK and ROI.

Photograph: GNM

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He had, as he recalled for Sands, “really believed that I had found a cause that I could serve” in the creation of a democratic European order after the horrors of tyranny, war and Holocaust. He had, he once wrote, “visited the concentration camps of Dachau and Bergen-Belsen while the stench still lingered in the huts”. Now, as a 20-year-old second lieutenant in the army that had helped to defeat fascism, he was expected to bring unrepentant

Nazis back into the fold. It was “bewildering – I had been brought up to hate Nazism ... All of a sudden to find that we had turned on a sixpence and the great new enemy was to be the Soviet Union was very perplexing.”

This abrupt shifting of the moral ground opens up the murky terrain of le Carré’s great cold war novels in which noble ends and dirty means become hopelessly intertwined. At the end of Smiley’s People, published a good 10 years before [the fall of the Berlin Wall](#), the hero has finally succeeded in turning his nemesis, Karla. “George,” his junior colleague Guillam says, “you won.” The last line of the novel is Smiley’s rueful, downbeat, “Did I? Yes. Yes, well I suppose I did.” Smiley, like his creator, is not at all sure what victory means any more.

How better to reject the kind of Englishness his father wanted for him than to embrace the culture of England’s recently defeated enemy, Germany?

If, in the political cynicism that took hold at the beginning of the cold war, le Carré’s great cause left him behind, he was already marked by another cold leave-taking. When he was only five, his mother Olive slipped away from their home, and from him and his older brother Tony, in the middle of the night.

As far as he was concerned, she simply disappeared for 16 years. It is hard to blame her – Ronnie had been in and out of prison, he cheated on her prolifically, he had started to hit her and his life of deception must have been hard on the nerves. Le Carré later recalled that, when he met his mother again, she gave him a well-thumbed copy of [Richard Krafft-Ebing](#)’s Psychopathia Sexualis in the hope that it would help him to understand his parents’ relationship. That can hardly have been reassuring.

For a child of five, though, there can only have been a feeling of utter abandonment, leaving an empty space that could never be filled. But le Carré’s sense of being European is at least one part of his attempt to do so. He managed to flee England when he was 16, by going to the [University of Bern](#) to study German. It is both striking and poignant that, in his introduction to The Pigeon Tunnel, he says that he was not merely trying “to

get out of England by the fastest available route” but also to “embrace the German muse as a substitute mother”.

In Bern, he called himself “a refugee from England”, a phrase that in 1948, when there were still millions of desperate and displaced people all over Europe, must have had a provocative perversity that only an adolescent could get away with. But it is probably truer to say that he was in search of a motherland in both senses – a place to belong to and an attachment that would compensate for the absence of his actual mother.

How better to reject the kind of Englishness his father wanted for him than to embrace the culture of England’s recently defeated enemy? The paradox that so much of the work of one of the most English of novelists is set in Germany surely delighted him, apart from everything else, for its pure contrariness. (Even Smiley is, as we discover in *A Legacy of Spies*, happily living out his days in Freiburg.) Le Carré refused to accept British honours or [literary prizes](#), but he was thrilled to receive Germany’s official decoration, the [Goethe Medal, in 2011](#). It seems a fair guess that, if he could have chosen any European citizenship, it would have been not Irish, but German.

Yet Ireland did have the advantage of being a literal motherland. It seems telling that le Carré could in fact have claimed Irish citizenship from his paternal grandmother, who seems to have come to England to work as a servant. In an essay on his father, he refers in passing to “her Irish brogue”, so he was obviously well aware of this heritage. That he chose instead to trace his roots through his mother’s family is poignant. It was, at the end of his life, a search for the missing maternal connection.

There is, moreover, a real case for seeing le Carré as a very peculiar kind of Anglo-Irish writer. There is a very long tradition of Irish authors enjoying the doubleness of being – in relation to England – both outsiders and insiders. It is one of the advantages of displacement. Le Carré acquired it by becoming, psychologically and politically, a kind of displaced person, an insider with an outsider’s perspective. Instead of the old Irish trick of infiltrating England, he did it the other way around, exfiltrating himself from Englishness into a richly productive fluidity of identity.

But, of course, he never actually left. In his house in London, he kept the single thing he had that belonged to his mother, the fine suitcase from Harrods she had taken with her when she abandoned him. It was lined with a pink silk interior that was, for him, infused with a “heavy sexuality” as if it might contain “some kind of childish erotic paradise from which I had been shut out once Olive had packed her bag and left”. It is perhaps the best image of his contrary and contradictory relationship with his country: a token of painful departure that yet stays in place, a suitcase that is being carried nowhere, a lost dream that still lingers.

We Don’t Know Ourselves: A Personal History of Ireland Since 1958, by Fintan O’Toole, is published by Head of Zeus at £25. To support the Guardian and Observer, order your copy at [guardianbookshop.com](https://guardianbookshop.com). Delivery charges may apply.

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Composite: Guardian Design Team

## 'The twists and turns are riveting': Stephen King, Paula Hawkins and others on their favourite le Carré

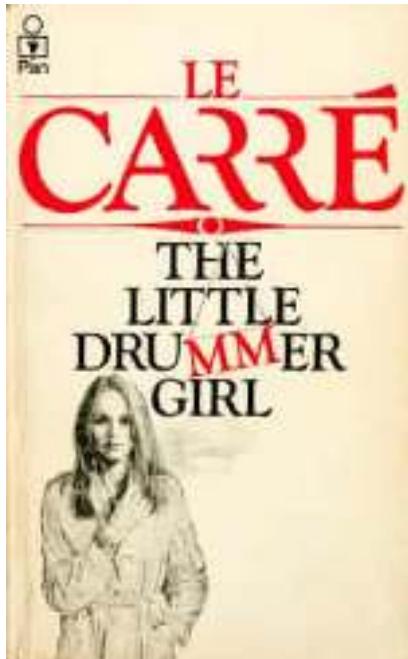
Composite: Guardian Design Team

by [Stephen King](#), [Paula Hawkins](#), [Frederick Forsyth](#), [Aya de León](#), [John Banville](#), [William Boyd](#), [Charlotte Philby](#) and [John Grisham](#)

Sat 9 Oct 2021 04.45 EDT

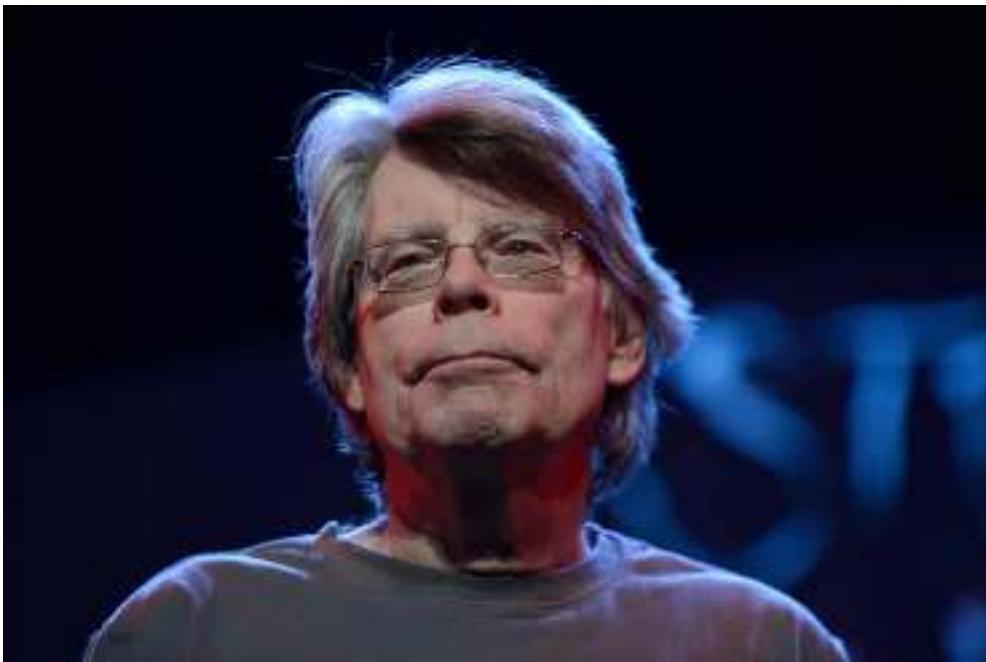
### Stephen King

**The Little Drummer Girl, 1983**



My favourite le Carré – the one that brought me to all the others – was (and is) *The Little Drummer Girl*. This, it seems to me, is where le Carré's interest in tradecraft became secondary to his interest in his characters. At the centre of the novel is an aspiring actress named Charlie. She is the first of le Carré's anything but ordinary "ordinary people" who are sucked into the unforgiving machinery of spies and their masters, those great, grey bureaucracies that le Carré first distrusted and then came to loathe. I fell in love with Charlie, who is taught to understand that the Israelis are just and good, then must believe just as passionately – as actors must – that the Israelis are monsters. Le Carré gives us both sides, with a few points (perhaps) going to the Palestinians ... but le Carré never shies from the hideous tactics the terrorists espousing the Palestinian cause employed. Charlie comes to dominate both the book and our thoughts as characters in novels rarely do. And she opened the way, it seems to me, for a way of thinking that led to le Carré's later books, like *The Night Manager* and [The Constant Gardener](#).

Stephen King's [If It Bleeds](#) is out now.

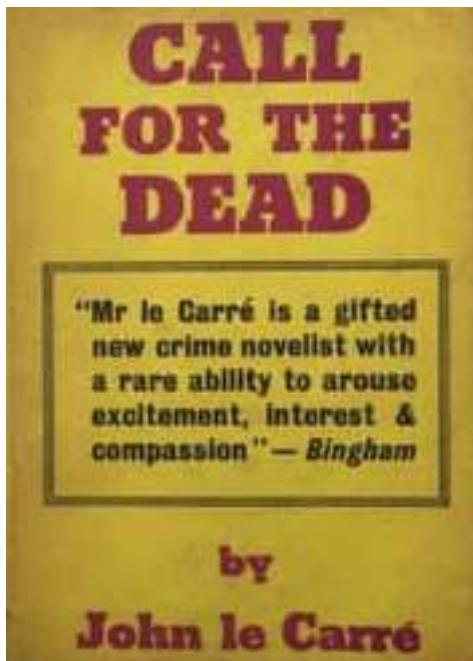


Stephen King: 'I fell in love with Charlie.' Photograph: Ulf Andersen/Getty Images

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## Paula Hawkins

**Call for the Dead, 1961**



Neither the most popular nor the best known of the Smiley books, Call for the Dead is frequently denigrated (along with A Murder of Quality) as more mystery than spy novel. As a writer of crime fiction and a lover of origins stories, it is precisely my cup of tea.

In fact, there is a strong flavour of espionage in this taut, carefully paced and politically astute tale of a civil servant's suicide. We are given a foretaste of the dark machinations of Circus folk and a glimpse of shabby 1960s Chelsea, but it is the introduction to le Carré's "breathtakingly ordinary" hero that makes the book so memorable. George Smiley is a "bulldog in a sou'wester", a man "who could reduce any colour to grey". Canny, dogged, disappointed and deeply unattractive, Smiley is a compromised pragmatist, a believable antidote to the tedious machismo and casual cruelty of fiction's more glamorous spies.

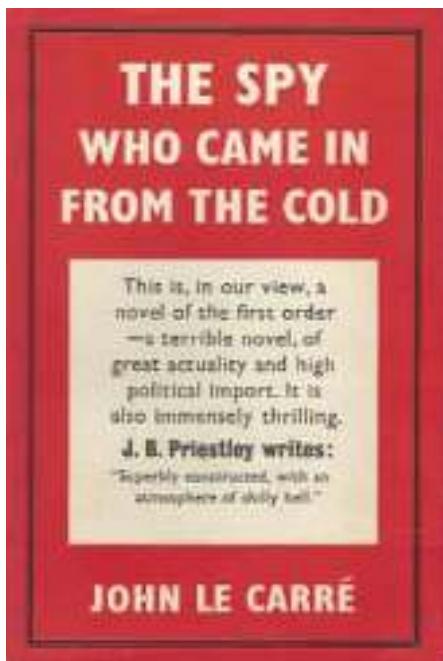


Paula Hawkins: 'This is precisely my cup of tea.' Photograph: Ibl/Shutterstock

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## Frederick Forsyth

**The Spy Who Came in from the Cold, 1963**



Although he wrote many fine novels telling great stories, my thoughts always stray back to le Carré's breakthrough, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*. It was not his first but his third, the first two having made no mark until they were relaunched later. But *The Spy* broke the mould. Prior to that, espionage was about people like W Somerset Maugham's Ashenden and other gentlemen. Then came Alec Leamas, crumpled, rumpled, malodorous, immoral. A deceiver in a world of deceivers. And the brilliant plot – using a foolish, gullible patsy to destroy an East German enemy by subterfuge. It briefly introduced the subtle, devious George Smiley, who will later be revealed as the infinitely devious controller. The twists and turns of the East German court case are riveting and the double – or is it triple? – sting in the tale masterly. It established le Carré for all time as the master spy-novelist.

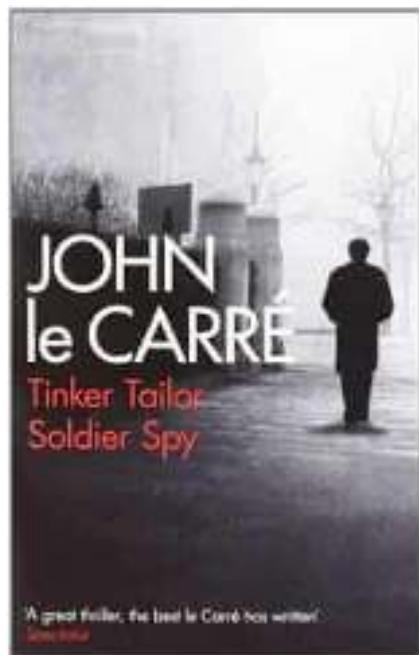


Frederick Forsyth: ‘The sting in the tale is masterly.’ Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

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## Aya de León

**Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy, 1974**



I first encountered my mother's copy of *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* in the house as a teenager, but I didn't read the book until I was an adult. Le Carré's generation of espionage writers perfected the classic third-person point of view that I and many other spy authors use to this day. *Tinker Tailor* weaves a tense and grim cold war tale of betrayal among men. It features few female characters, and most romantic storylines have a grimness of their own. Both TV and film adaptations open and close with the gripping, labyrinthine plot.

But I'm also fascinated by the novel's beginning and ending at a boys' prep school. One of the spies is sent there to lie low and recover after nearly being killed. These sections are largely told from the perspective of an isolated new student whom the wounded teacher deploys as his assistant and spy. This connection between two loners has the most transformative arc of all the novel's relationships. Although tangential to the plot, le Carré uses it as a frame, contrasting the easy loyalty of youth with the jaded mistrust of adult men. Those sections read almost like a middle-grade novel, with a brighter tone and sensibility. Le Carré infuses warmth into this harsh cold war tale but, instead of romance, he uses the optimism of intergenerational found family.

*Aya de León is the author of *A Spy in the Struggle* and the forthcoming novel *Queen of Urban Prophecy*.*

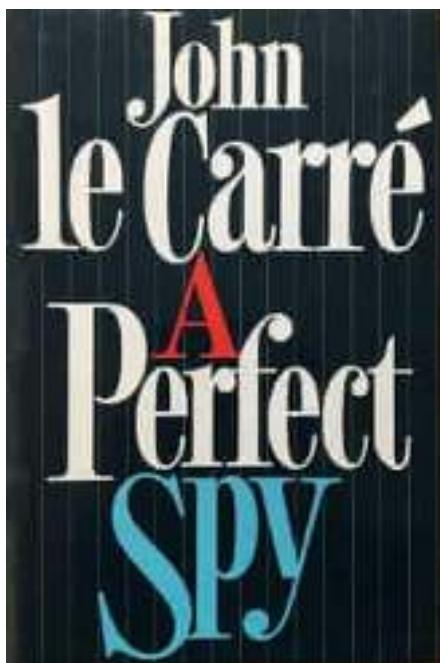


Aya de León: 'He perfected the classic third-person point of view.'  
Photograph: Anna de León

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## John Banville

**A Perfect Spy, 1986**



It is a pity that the word “spy” is in the title, for this is not a spy yarn, in that the trappings of le Carré’s spycraft are of little moment in the book’s intricate unfolding. It is the most closely biographical of le Carré’s fictions, concentrating as it does on the protagonist Magnus Pym’s relations with his conman father. To the very end of his life David Cornwell, AKA [John le Carré](#), was obsessed with his own father, Ronnie, who could have conned for Britain in the Olympics – he would have pawned his gold medal afterwards. There is little doubt that David despised, feared and loved the rascally Ronnie, and that awful melange of emotional responses is what informs *A Perfect Spy* and makes of it a work of art. The story is trite – Magnus is a double agent on the run, pursued by his old friend, the significantly named Jack Brotherhood – but the richness and diversity that le Carré finds in it are the mark of an artist working at full power.

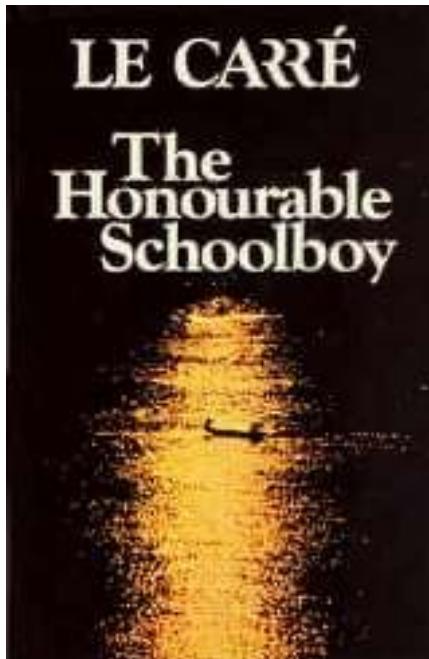


John Banville: ‘It’s a work of art.’ Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

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## William Boyd

**The Honourable Schoolboy, 1977**



The Honourable Schoolboy is, by some measure, le Carré's longest novel, close to 700 pages in the edition I have, and is a sequel to Tinker Tailor and the second novel in the so-called Karla trilogy, featuring at its centre the mythic figure of George Smiley. Consequently, if you only had to read one le Carré novel to gain some sense of the author and his unique achievements, then Schoolboy is perhaps the perfect candidate. Set largely in Hong Kong and south-east Asia during the 1970s, it tells the story of an operation Smiley develops to exfiltrate, then interrogate a Soviet agent from China, where he has been spying on the Chinese.

Smiley's key component in this endeavour is one Jerry Westerby – the eponymous schoolboy – who is sent to Hong Kong to initiate the highly complex espionage plot of bluff and double bluff, feint and counter-feint that Smiley has devised. But Westerby becomes a traitor and compromises the plan because he falls in love. As in many le Carré novels, it's the human heart that gets in the way of being a successful spy.

Quick Guide

**Saturday magazine**

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Photograph: GNM

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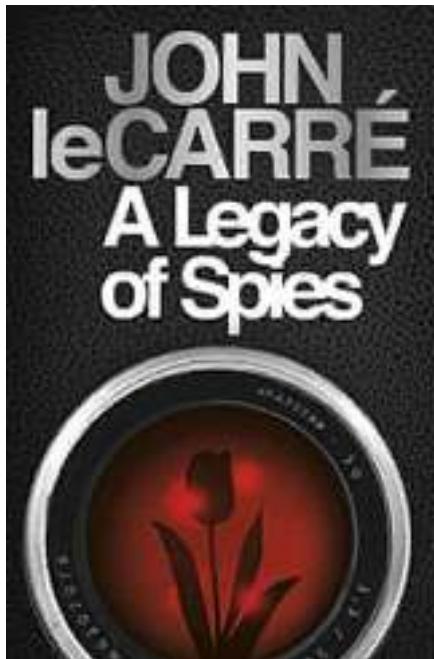
Thank you for your feedback.

Le Carré realised that artful complexity, creative bafflement and surprising revelation are at the core of the serious espionage novel, and these aspects are nowhere better exemplified than in Schoolboy. It's not a perfect novel – as ever, le Carré has his own idiosyncratic writerly flaws mixed in with his overall mastery of the detail and the considerable moving parts of the plot – but Schoolboy does show him at the height of his powers. It's a very ambitious, dense and confident novel, and the fact that it's never been filmed is a telling, backhanded tribute to its scale and heft.

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## Charlotte Philby

A Legacy of Spies, 2017



There is something almost ceremonial about starting a new le Carré: the expectation, not knowing where we'll be taken but trusting that wherever it is will be both terrible and magnificent; the reassurance that the story will be entirely original, and yet the author's voice comfortingly familiar.

Having started a new job with a long commute and no risk ever of getting a seat, and fretting as my own first quasi-spy novel was out on submission, in 2018 I downloaded [A Legacy of Spies](#) as an audiobook read by Tom Hollander. Both a prequel and a sequel to *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (how deliciously le Carré), the story is timeless and at the same time a perfect reflection of the recent period in which it was written. Capturing his cast in exquisite detail, with every passing face perfectly drawn, the story soothed as much as it riled me, demonstrating his essence and skill as a writer. I remember thinking that, frankly, it didn't matter whether my own book was ever published, as long as we had storytellers like him in the world. And how lucky that we did.



Charlotte Philby: 'The story soothed as much as it riled me.' Photograph: Roo Lewis

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## John Grisham

The Little Drummer Girl, 1983



In 1985 I began writing my first novel. I had never written before and had no idea what I was doing. About the same time I read [The Little Drummer Girl](#), and when I was finished I immediately read it again, something I had never done before and haven't done since. I was smitten with Charlie, the heroine, and I was enthralled by the supporting cast. I began to see that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict had two sides. The story's plots and subplots were crafted by a genius. The suspense was so smart, so clever.

I almost stopped writing, but with time convinced myself that I didn't have to be as good as John le Carré to co-exist in the vast world of international publishing. I vowed, though, to at least try. And I'm still trying.

*John Grisham's new novel *The Judge's List* is out on 26 October.*

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## 2021.10.09 - Coronavirus

- [Covid live Brazil passes 600,000 deaths; Covid dramatically worsened global mental health – study](#)
- [England Trial participants to get Pfizer jabs to end travel ‘limbo’](#)
- [From 007 to Brighton Pier Relaxed Covid restrictions fuel UK leisure boom](#)
- [TikTok Anti-vaccine videos being viewed by children as young as nine](#)

[\*\*Coronavirus live\*\*](#)

[\*\*Coronavirus\*\*](#)

# **Coronavirus live news: US has given over 400m jabs; Protesters in Rome try to break into PM's office – as it happened**

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## Vaccines and immunisation

# Covid trial participants in England to get Pfizer jabs to end travel ‘limbo’



More than 15,000 people took part in phase 3 Novavax trial across UK, but the company has not yet submitted data to regulators to get its jab approved.  
Photograph: Alastair Grant/AP

*[Andrew Gregory](#)* Health editor

Fri 8 Oct 2021 11.29 EDT

Thousands of Britons who took part in Covid-19 vaccine trials are to be offered approved vaccines so they can travel abroad, the government has announced.

Trial participants have described feeling trapped and in limbo because they were unable to get a licensed Covid-19 vaccine, [hindering their ability to leave the UK](#) for business or pleasure.

But after taking advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) said those in [England](#) who took part in the UK-based Novavax trial should be offered two doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech jab, with eight weeks between the doses.

The health administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are expected to follow suit for vaccine trial participants in their regions.

More than 15,000 people took part in the phase 3 Novavax trial at various hospital sites across the UK, but the company has not yet submitted data to regulators to get the jab approved.

The UK already recognises those in Covid vaccine clinical trials as being fully vaccinated for the purpose of certification, both domestically and internationally. However, most other countries do not recognise clinical trial volunteers and require visitors to have been fully vaccinated with a vaccine that has been approved for deployment by the relevant medicines regulator.

Sajid Javid, the health secretary, appealed to global health leaders last month at the G20 meeting for clinical trial pioneers to have their vaccine status recognised globally. But with them refusing to shift their position, it has meant thousands of people continue to be unable to easily travel abroad.

The offer of two doses of Pfizer from next week means people will be able to travel more freely and have two doses of an approved Covid-19 vaccine on their health records, as well as via the NHS app. People will be able to get their extra vaccines following a discussion with an investigator from the Novavax clinical trials team.

The offer of two further vaccines will also be rolled out to participants in other relevant vaccine trials this month, the DHSC said.

No evidence exists to date on administering four doses of different vaccines, although experts do not expect significant issues. However, there is evidence that mixing three doses of different vaccines is safe, as set out in the [Cov-Boost vaccine trial](#).

Prof Jonathan Van-Tam, England's deputy chief medical officer, said: "Covid-19 vaccine trials have been absolutely integral to our response to the virus, and as a result we now have our renowned vaccination programme, which continues to save lives. I urge as many people as possible to continue contributing to these trials.

"The measures we have taken will allow UK Covid-19 vaccine trial participants to travel freely overseas once they have had the additional vaccinations. We should be very clear that the results from these trials benefit the whole world, and it has to be said that if more countries around the world had reciprocated by allowing UK volunteers to enjoy fully vaccinated status for overseas travel, these measures would not have been necessary."

Prof Paul Heath, the principal investigator of the Novavax clinical trial across 35 sites, said: "For too long the participants have been disadvantaged in terms of international travel because this vaccine is not yet approved for deployment, but trial participants now have the flexibility to receive booster doses, or additional doses for travel purposes, if they wish to."

Dale Moody, a Novavax trial volunteer, said he welcomed the move. "I am both relieved and elated about the decision to let Novavax volunteers have an approved vaccine for travel or as a booster," he said. "It is a load off my mind.

"I was concerned that we had been cast aside. I had my second dose of Novavax in November last year and was worried about not getting a booster vaccine."

Moody, 69, of Market Drayton in Shropshire, added: "I have family in Australia and was concerned that the uncertainties about the approval timescale of Novavax would prohibit visiting my family out there."

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## Travel & leisure

# From 007 to Brighton Pier ... relaxed Covid restrictions fuel UK leisure boom



Brighton Palace Pier said the August bank holiday week was the first time in the pier's history that gross sales topped £1m in a week. Photograph: Peter Cziborra/Reuters

[Mark Sweeney](#)

[@marksweney](#)

Fri 8 Oct 2021 08.39 EDT

The pent-up public demand to seek out entertainment as Covid restrictions lifted has fuelled a boom in leisure pursuits, with cinemas and bowling alleys hitting pre-pandemic highs, while [Brighton](#) Pier has recorded the best week in its history.

The [James Bond juggernaut](#) continues to lead the post-pandemic cinema recovery with Odeon, the UK's biggest chain with more than 112 sites,

selling more than 1m tickets in the first week since No Time to Die's premiere.

The chain said the film, which became the [most successful movie at the British box office since the pandemic began](#) after just three days, has now notched up the highest attendance since Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker in 2019.



A pedestrian passes a James Bond 007 logo above the entrance to Burlington Arcade in London. Photograph: Tolga Akmen/AFP/Getty Images

A significant sign of encouragement for the movie industry is that about half of those who have watched Daniel Craig's last outing as 007 are visiting a cinema for the first time since the pandemic began.

Odeon said that so far Bond fans had eaten about six tonnes of pick 'n' mix and drunk enough soft drinks to fill the tank of the super spy's Aston Martin DB5 nearly 3,000 times.

Shares in the owner of Brighton Pier surged more than 16% on Friday after the company issued a "significant" upgrade to full-year profits and revenues thanks to a summertime boom in business fuelled by people holidaying in the UK and families looking to splash out with savings built up during lockdown.

“It is good to be able to report a new record,” said Anne Ackord, chief executive of the Brighton Pier Group. “The final bank holiday week of this summer was the first time in the pier’s history that it achieved gross sales in excess of £1m over a single week.”

The group, which also owns some mini-golf sites and Lightwater Valley theme park in North Yorkshire, said revenues were up 44% on pre-Covid 2019 levels for the 13 weeks to 26 September.

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Hollywood Bowl, the UK’s biggest tenpin bowling operator, said revenues were up 29% on 2019 levels in the period since reopening on 17 May and 30 September.

The leisure group, which owns 61 bowling sites and three mini-golf venues, said huge pent-up demand in the school holidays for “great value family entertainment” resulted in record revenues of £20m in August, up 50% compared with the same month pre-Covid. Hollywood Bowl’s annual revenues to the end of September hit £75m, well ahead of the company’s previous forecast of £51m.

“Those consumers who were fortunate enough to keep their jobs and avoid either unemployment or the furlough scheme have both savings and a desire to get out and about and spend their money,” said Russ Mould, the investment director at investment firm AJ Bell.

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## TikTok

# Revealed: anti-vaccine TikTok videos being viewed by children as young as nine



TikTok accounts with hundreds of thousands of followers that discourage vaccination and peddle Covid myths have been uncovered by NewsGuard.  
Photograph: Robin Utrecht/Rex/Shutterstock

[Jamie Grierson](#), [Dan Milmo](#) and [Hibaq Farah](#)

Fri 8 Oct 2021 14.15 EDT

Lies and conspiracy theories about Covid-19, which have amassed millions of views and are accessible to young children, have been available on the social media platform [TikTok](#) for months.

TikTok accounts with hundreds of thousands of followers that discourage vaccination and peddle myths about Covid survival rates were uncovered by NewsGuard, an organisation that monitors online misinformation.

NewsGuard said it published its findings in June and sent them to the UK government and World Health Organization (WHO), but the content remained on the platform.

The revelation comes amid renewed concern about the impact that social media is having on young people, after it was reported that Instagram, which is owned by Facebook, had internal research showing its [app was harming teenagers](#).

As part of its investigation, NewsGuard said children as young as nine had been able to access the content, despite TikTok only permitting full access to the app for those aged 13 and over. Three participants in the organisation's research who were under 13 were able to create accounts on the app by entering fake dates of birth.

TikTok told the Guardian it worked diligently to take action on content and accounts that spread misinformation.

Some of the accounts seen by the Guardian had posted individual videos containing Covid misinformation that had attracted up to 9.2m views. The misinformation included false comments about side-effects of specific brands of Covid vaccine and misleading comparisons between Covid survival rates and vaccine efficacy rates.

Alex Cadier, the UK managing director for NewsGuard, said: “TikTok’s failure to stop the spread of dangerous health misinformation on their app is unsustainable bordering on dangerous. Despite claims of taking action against misinformation, the app still allows anti-vaccine content and health hoaxes to spread relatively unimpeded.

“This is made worse by the fact that the more anti-vaccine content kids interact with, the more anti-vaccine content they’ll be shown. If self-regulation isn’t working for social media platforms, then regulation, like the online safety bill, has to be the way forward to keep young people safe online.”

Published in May, the [draft online safety bill](#) imposes a “duty of care” on social media companies, and some other platforms that allow users to share

and post material, to remove “harmful content”. This can include content that is legal but still judged to be harmful, such as abuse that does not reach the threshold of criminality, and posts that encourage self-harm and misinformation.

Cadier added: “The difficulty in really knowing the scale of this problem is that TikTok hold all the information and get to mark their own homework.

“They say they’ve taken down 30,000 videos containing Covid-19 misinformation in the first quarter of 2021, which is a good step, but how many are left? Of the ones they deleted, how many views did each get? Who shared them? Where did they spread? Where did they come from? How many users mostly see misinformation when they see Covid-19 related content?”

On Friday, [the Financial Times](#) reported an investigation by the digital rights charity 5Rights had alleged that dozens of tech companies, including TikTok, Snapchat, Twitter and Instagram, were breaching the UK’s new [children’s code](#), which protects children’s privacy online.

The research was submitted to the Information Commissioner’s Office as part of a complaint written by Beeban Kidron, the charity’s chair and the member of the House of Lords who originally proposed the code.

Violations of the code alleged by 5Rights include design tricks and nudges that encourage children to share their locations or receive personalised advertising, data-driven features that serve harmful material including on eating disorders, self-harm and suicide, and insufficient assurance of a child’s age, before allowing inappropriate actions such as video-chatting strangers.

TikTok uses a small notification at the bottom of the screen that says “learn more about Covid-19 vaccines” and links directly to the NHS coronavirus vaccines [page](#).

One-quarter of TikTok’s 130 million monthly active users in the US were aged 10 to 19 as of March 2021 and nearly half of the total number of users

were under 30, the data company Statista reported. In the UK, according to Statista, people under 25 represent 24% of all users.

TikTok has begun to eclipse other well-established social media platforms in popularity, having overtaken YouTube in average viewing time for Android users in the US and UK, according to the app analytics firm App Annie. TikTok was the world's most downloaded app in 2020, App Annie reported.

TikTok is owned by ByteDance, an internet conglomerate based in China.

A TikTok spokesperson said: “Our community guidelines make clear that we do not allow medical misinformation, including misinformation relating to Covid-19 vaccines. We work diligently to take action on content and accounts that spread misinformation while also promoting authoritative content about Covid-19 and directly supporting the vaccine effort in the UK.”

The debate over younger people and their interaction with social media platforms has been reignited over the past month following the revelations that Instagram knew via internal research that its app was harming the mental health of some teenage girls.

Facebook has described the revelations, published in the Wall Street Journal after a document leak [by the whistleblower Frances Haugen](#), as a “mischaracterisation” of its work. The documents include a [survey result](#) that estimated that 30% of teenage girls felt Instagram made dissatisfaction with their body worse.

The research about vaccination misinformation on TikTok comes after parents and teaching unions raised concerns that the jab rollout to children in England was “haphazard” and “incredibly slow”. Only 9% of 12- to 15-year-olds had been vaccinated by last Sunday, while new data released on Friday showed one in 14 had Covid last week.

All [children in the UK aged 12 to 15](#) are eligible for a Covid jab following a decision made by the UK’s chief medical officers. Healthy 12- to 15-year-olds are being offered one Covid jab at the moment, but those vulnerable to

the virus, or living with someone who is, will be offered two doses eight weeks apart.

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## 2021.10.09 - Opinion

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## When others stay silent about the ills of British capitalism, liars like Johnson rush in

[William Davies](#)

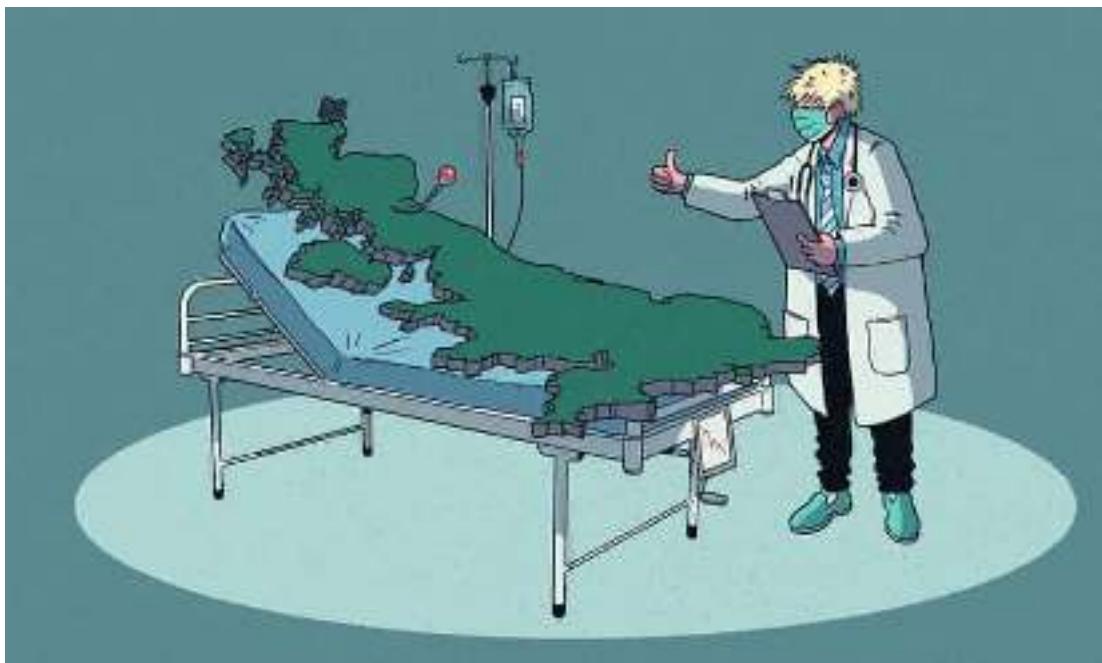


Illustration: R Fresson

Sat 9 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

Boris Johnson's latest wheeze is classical political economy. Faced with the chaos of petrol shortages, empty supermarket shelves and surging gas prices, Johnson offered an audacious response this week: this was all part of the plan. [Britain, he explained, was merely transitioning](#) out of a broken economic "model", based around low pay and high immigration, and into a new one, based around high productivity and high-wage job creation.

His conference speech was immediately [criticised by the right](#), on the basis that by celebrating tighter labour markets it appeared to be actively inviting inflation. But on the basic gut level, to which Johnson only ever speaks, he appears to have got away with it. Britain's most exasperating economic policy riddle of recent decades – its [sluggish productivity growth](#) – was simply going to be magicked away, he announced.

Regardless of whether we agree with the Adam Smith Institute that his speech was “economically illiterate”, Johnson’s newfound interest in economic “models” tells us something about how this weird new Conservative party is operating. It is equally significant that Keir Starmer – in contrast to his two predecessors – shied well away from discussing the state of British capitalism. The terms of political debate appear to have flipped.

To some extent, Johnson was ploughing a familiar conservative furrow. The insistence that apparent economic failure is, on the contrary, merely a symptom of the medicine beginning to work has strong echoes of Margaret Thatcher’s turbulent first few years in office. In 1981, Thatcher was famously criticised by 364 far more distinguished economists than those of the Adam Smith Institute in a [letter to the Times](#) condemning her attempts to tackle inflation through punitively high interest rates.

Thatcher posed as the strict nurse, painfully weaning the patient off its addiction to inflation. Johnson, by contrast, is suggesting Britain now needs to kick its dependence on foreign labour. No matter what apparent damage the Conservative party does to business or GDP, there is something about its status in British public life that grants its leaders the right to speak about the essence and direction of capitalism, in defiance of all economic logic and indicators.

Thatcher, of course, was deadly serious and a living embodiment of the work ethic that she was advocating. Johnson is neither of those things. Thatcher nearly paid a hefty political price for her intransigence, whereas it’s hard to imagine Johnson risking his position for a mere ideology. For Johnson, it’s safe to say, this is more bluster that “works” to the extent that it allows him to spin a good yarn. Theories of capitalism now join ancient

Greek myth and rugby metaphors – all simply ways that Johnson chooses to navigate an interview.

Starmer evidently views Johnson's recklessness as an opportunity to position Labour as the party of business. "Good business and good government are partners," [he told Labour conference](#) a week earlier. While his speech was understandably hostile to Conservative economic policies, which he blamed for low wages, it contained nothing as drastic as changing the entire *model* of the British economy. In the tradition of New Labour, it largely fixated on extolling the benefits of what (good) business can do.

It is a strange juncture to have reached, when the character of British capitalism is now being questioned for wholly opportunistic purposes by a showman such as Johnson. But this is what happens when more honest politicians duck difficult questions about the workings of capitalism, or get punished for asking them by the media – which is precisely what has transpired over the past 30 years.

Among political economy scholars, interest in "varieties of capitalism" blossomed during the 1990s, at the same time that liberal democracies were abandoning the question of "capitalism or socialism?" in favour of a question about *which kind* of capitalism. Before winning power, New Labour was tempted by Germanic visions of "stakeholder capitalism" [proposed by Will Hutton](#), but Gordon Brown came to the conclusion that Britain's flexible labour market was too valuable an asset, especially given stubbornly high unemployment on the continent at the time.

The economist David Soskice, whose 2001 book *Varieties of Capitalism* (edited with Peter Hall) is still the handbook for this mode of analysis, supposedly convinced Brown that he was far better off streamlining Britain's existing, flexible "model" than seeking to impose a set of constraints upon the labour market in search of a new one. Before long, the entire question of economic "models" fell by the wayside. Brown, meanwhile, rolled out a system of tax credits, that brushed the social consequences of a low-wage economy under the carpet.

It wasn't until 2011, with capitalism in crisis and the bookish Ed Miliband leading the Labour party, that such questions were resuscitated. In place of

New Labour's usual bland paeans to "business", Miliband sought to draw a line between the economy's "[predators](#)" and "[producers](#)" – a truthful recognition that British capitalism had become a playground for asset-strippers, speculators and monopolists. It was shot down in the press as evidence of "Red Ed's" dangerous Marxism.

From 2015-19, Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell upped the ante, developing a left populism that accused the super-rich of "rigging" the economy. In their eagerness to side with the majority of workers, they went into the 2019 general election promising to [target just 150 "billionaires"](#): not so much a failed economic "model" as a tiny parasitical clique.

By retreating back to the New [Labour](#) tactic of praising "business" and promising "economic prosperity" in general, Starmer has abandoned any such critique. The manifold differences between, say, a private equity fund extracting profits from a care home by squeezing wages and a family-owned exporter of machine tools, become obscured all over again. In his bid to look economically serious, Starmer has had to avoid making serious economic distinctions. In a public culture that rewards mendacity, a liar such as Johnson ends up with more licence to raise such topics, so long as and he doesn't do so with any serious intent and Labour remains silent about them.

Economic reality cannot, of course, be wished away altogether with bluster and humour. But among the dysfunctions of Westminster is the fact that economic outcomes may eventually be determined by two policy areas that are no longer up for democratic debate: Brexit and monetary policy. Johnson can bluff about productivity and immigration all he likes, but neither he nor Starmer will stand up in public and highlight manifest connections between Britain's chosen Brexit deal and logistical chaos.

And he can troll the Confederation of British Industry all he likes by celebrating wage increases, but if inflation runs above 2% for long enough, the independent Bank of England is duty bound to respond by raising interest rates. The effect this may have on an already-inflated housing market may pose him far greater political problems than wage inflation, but that's how Britain's economic model works. If he really wants to change it by design, and not merely revel in the current chaos, he's got his work cut out.

- William Davies is a sociologist and political economist. His latest book is This is Not Normal: The Collapse of Liberal Britain
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Letter from a curious parent  
Literacy

## **Dear Nadhim Zahawi, the Tories vowed to ‘eradicate illiteracy’ years ago. What went wrong?**

[Michael Rosen](#)





Nadhim Zahawi delivers a speech at the Conservative party conference in Manchester. Photograph: Neil Hall/EPA

Sat 9 Oct 2021 03.30 EDT

Welcome to your new job as education secretary. In your Conservative party conference [speech](#) you drew our attention to when you were at school. As this was your focus, I took a look at your [wikipedia page](#) to see where you got your education. It says two out of your three secondary schools were private ones. No one is responsible for the education their parents chose for them, but as you made a point of thanking your teachers, there will be some of us who might wish that all school students could get the same facilities as those offered [within the private sector](#). I've come up with a phrase for bringing this about: "levelling up". Please feel free to use it.

One big theme in your speech was "illiteracy". To tell the truth, I thought your government had cracked this. In 2011, I was at the House of Commons for that year's launch of the Summer Reading Challenge. We were lucky to have a speech from the then schools minister, Nick Gibb. He went straight to his favourite subject: phonics – or to be more precise, systematic synthetic phonics (SSP). He said that SSP would "eradicate illiteracy".

He then went ahead and transformed nursery, reception, years 1 and 2 and remedial English lessons, working to his principle of “first, fast and only”. In other words, SSP became the sole diet for early years children when learning to decode. To confirm that all was going well with this – and to monitor how well teachers were teaching it – the government devised the phonics screening check, a test that asks children to say out loud words on a list, some of which are invented words with no meaning.

Though most officials are careful to describe this as “decoding” and not reading, I’ve noticed that [Gibb himself](#) has at times described this act of saying words out loud as reading, talking of “the tried-and-tested phonics method of teaching young children to read”.

Now, 10 years after Gibb’s words on this matter, you are saying that you’re going to tackle illiteracy. You’ll deal with children who are not “reading”!

A quick glance at who was in charge of this programme for the last 10 years right up until recently, reveals that it was Nick Gibb, the continuous hand on the tiller of eradicating illiteracy.

At some point, I think you’ll have to clear up for us exactly what your government has done, eradicated illiteracy, or not?

Going all the way back to 2005, your former prime minister David Cameron made a big deal out of this: “The biggest problem facing education today is the fact that one in five 11-year-olds leaves primary school unable to read properly,” he said. The phrase he used later, in 2011, and which others have used since, is that your party would demand that schools would put in place [“the method that’s proven to work”](#).

Seeming to echo this, you said in your speech: “We will relentlessly focus on what works.” This has an earthy, robust feel about it, suggesting you have years of research to back you up. My first problem with this is that if you’re setting about tackling illiteracy now, following 10 years of Nick Gibb’s methods, is it really what’s “proven to work”?

Second, people who study reading tests all across the English-speaking world – such as the distinguished linguist Prof [Stephen Krashen](#) – tell me

that so far they have found evidence that first, fast and only phonics systems merely improve children’s ability to say out loud words on a list – which I hope we are agreed is not the same as “reading”.

My third problem comes if we refer to another test that your government is very keen on: the key stage 2 English reading test (for 11-year-olds). Here children are asked to show they can retrieve information from a passage of writing; that they can “infer” why something has happened in the passage; and that they can reproduce the order or chronology of the passage. (As an aside, I’ll say that my view is that reading involves many more processes than retrieval, inference and chronology, but let’s agree that the test is a measure of a certain amount of “comprehension”.)

You’ll know by now that children score much higher on the year 1 tests than the year 6 tests. These are of course very different ways of measuring what children can do, testing different things, so why should they match up? No reason why they should – except that all who trumpeted the introduction of first, fast and only systematic, synthetic phonics claimed it would eradicate illiteracy. In other words, every child would be able to “read” and not simply “decode”. There would be no illiteracy.

I would be the last person to suggest that all those who do not reach the expected level at the age of 10 or 11 are “illiterate”. That’s why I’m curious as to why you used the word. Are you really talking about students who have been in school in England since 2011? There are of course some children who came late into the system but everyone else has been taught according to the Nick Gibb principles. Many parents will be wondering what’s gone wrong with the system that your government said 10 years ago is “proven to work”.

**Yours, Michael Rosen**

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[Opinion](#)[Maria Ressa](#)

## In Rodrigo Duterte's war on press freedom, Maria Ressa stands up for the truth

[Rachel Obordo](#)





‘In the face of multiple threats, criminal charges and two arrests, Maria Ressa has continued to speak out.’ Maria Ressa is escorted by police after posting bail. Photograph: Eloisa Lopez/Reuters

Sat 9 Oct 2021 05.00 EDT

For the first time, a Filipino person, Maria Ressa, has been [awarded](#) the Nobel peace prize – “a win for Filipinos, for journalists, and for the global fight to uphold press freedom,” as her colleague [Lian Buan](#) puts it.

Ressa, the co-founder and chief executive of the news site Rappler, shares the prize with the Russian journalist Dmitry Muratov in recognition of their individual activism and relentless fights for press freedom. She is a symbol of courage in light of the human rights situation in the Philippines. Since the president, Rodrigo Duterte, took office in 2016, even residents with no link to drugs have been touched by the thousands of extrajudicial killings that have taken place. According to [Human Rights Watch](#), during the Covid lockdown between April and July 2020, the country saw the number of killings increase by more than 50%.

Ressa and Rappler have fought for the reality of Duerte’s “war on drugs” and its consequences to be kept in the spotlight. She has also come to symbolise the fight and struggles many Filipinos experience on a daily basis.

Nearly every Filipino can tell you a story of how someone has been attacked, killed or kidnapped in front of them, often in a case of mistaken identity. No one's family, including mine, has been left untouched by the abuse of power and corruption that has been inflicted on the public.

Official government figures state that since 2016, at least 6,117 suspected drug dealers were killed during police and security forces operations. However, the UN [cites](#) that in June 2020, government figures already recorded more than 8,600 deaths.

Drugs are not uncommon in impoverished urban areas of the Philippines, but the number of lives affected by Duterte's bloody war is innumerable. Children of victims are left behind and often find themselves fighting to survive in an already difficult environment, living in cramped conditions and often struggling to access clean water and sanitation. Many, especially those from large families all under one roof, suffer from malnutrition. As Human Rights Watch said in a [recent report](#), the death of a family member who earned money leaves the children of victims facing extreme economic hardship. Many of them have suffered psychological distress, sometimes leading them to drop out of school and take on paid work from a young age. Others have been bullied by their peers and even left to live on the streets. And with many looking for justice and accountability, Ressa has been ruthless in her fight for the truth.

In the face of multiple threats, criminal charges and two arrests, Ressa has continued to speak out against Duterte and safeguard freedom of expression. She joins Filipino environmental activists, liberal politicians and LGBT groups and individuals who have been threatened and attacked for challenging the administration's discrimination and promotion of disinformation. According to the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility, by the end of 2020, 19 journalists had been killed under Duterte's administration, while there were [at least 171 cases](#) where journalists were threatened or attacked between June 2016 and April 2020. State agents are often the alleged perpetrators of these actions, while journalists frequently face harassment and threats of libel or being barred from coverage. The Philippines continues to be a dangerous place for those working in the press.

In 2017, Rappler was accused of violating the Philippine constitution and declared by Duterte in his state of the union address as “fully owned by Americans”. He even went on to say: “Not only is Rappler’s news fake, it being Filipino is also fake.” The criticism was later found to have no basis but marked the start of a retaliation against Ressa, her colleagues and her mission for truth. She and a former Rappler researcher, Reynaldo Santos Jr, are currently out on bail after being convicted of cyber libel in June 2020 and facing up to six years in prison. They have filed an appeal and await its outcome.

Despite these continuous attacks, Ressa has stood her ground in what can only be described as a heroic act of defiance and courageousness. Journalism and democracy in the Philippines may be nearing a cliff edge, but Ressa winning the [Nobel peace prize](#) is a shining light in a long, dark tunnel.

Just a glance at social media confirms this. The former presidential spokesperson [Edwin Lacierda](#) said: “You [sic] do our country proud in the midst of impunity and the narrowing of the democratic space,” while the human rights lawyer Leni Robredo has affirmed her “[tireless efforts ... for truth and accountability](#)”. To me, as a Filipino journalist, Ressa is an inspiration. For others across the world and especially in the Philippines, her work makes it possible to continue fighting the good fight – or “hold the line” as Ressa calls it.

In a [live conversation with Rappler](#), Ressa said: “When you don’t have facts, you don’t have truth, you don’t have trust. Trust is what holds us together to be able to solve the complex problems our world is facing today.” The award is vindication of the work she and her colleagues at Rappler have done, not only for the Philippines but for press freedom and democracy globally. She goes on to say she hopes the win will be “energy for all of us to continue the battle for facts”. Let us join her and not be silenced.

- Rachel Obordo is a community journalist for the Guardian

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## Opinion**Newcastle United**

# The Saudi takeover of Newcastle United is a symptom of England's political failures

[David Goldblatt](#)



‘Why should Newcastle United’s fans lead the fight for human rights?’ Fans gather outside St James’ Park on Thursday. Photograph: Tom Wilkinson/PA

Fri 8 Oct 2021 11.00 EDT

Football, no longer merely the national game, is England’s political theatre. The way in which the [spasm of fan protest](#) stopped the European Super League in its tracks in April, and which the prime minister [erroneously claimed](#) as his own victory, spoke to both a residual – if often dormant – public sense of justice and communitarianism, and the shamelessness of our snake-skinned political conversation. The [open conflict](#) between the England men’s team, the Conservative government and a section of the England

fanbase over taking the knee at Euro 2020 was a battle over who gets to define the terms of our debate over structural racism. Now, the long anticipated [sale of Newcastle United](#) to Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund points to England's practically and morally diminished place in the world, and the roads that have taken us there.

The crown prince of Saudi Arabia is not the first politician to take an interest in Newcastle United. In the early 1990s, Tony Blair, then leader of the opposition, was busy burnishing his local credentials by declaring his fidelity to the team, decrying Andy Cole's transfer to Manchester United in the Sun, and [playing keepy-uppy](#) with Kevin Keegan. Like Blair, Newcastle United were the coming thing. After four decades without a trophy, but now under the new ownership of Sir John Hall, both a Thatcherite property developer and an advocate for regional government and regeneration in the north-east, Keegan's Newcastle were challenging for the Premiership title and playing fabulous football to raging full houses. In 1996 [Alan Shearer arrived](#), on a then record transfer fee, and declared to a delirious crowd that he was still "the son of a sheet-metal worker". One could have been forgiven for thinking that, after the hammer blows of 17 years of Thatcherism, there was hope for an English working class and regional revival.

As we know, things did not turn out quite as planned. [Keegan and his team imploded](#). New Labour took power but delivered neither meaningful devolution nor a model of regeneration that could sustainably revive the city. Hall's investments in the club turned out [to have been loans](#), some paid back at wincingly high interest rates. The Hall and Shepherd families (Freddy Shepherd succeeded Hall as chairman in 1997), showing extraordinary contempt for the club's fans, presided over decline and then sold up to Mike Ashley, banking a couple of hundred million.

Whatever the Ashley regime's failings, and there were many, the wider structural transformations of English football made any real revival of the club almost impossible. Unable to secure a regular place in European competition, or to establish themselves as a global brand, Newcastle were losing ground every season to the teams of London, Manchester and Liverpool. More significantly, Ashley actually tried to run the club like a business, and sells it on as a profit-making, if forlorn institution. But in the absence of collective wage controls, and with the arrival of other owners

who had neither need nor interest in balanced books – like Roman Abramovich at Chelsea and the UAE at Manchester City – it was a strategy doomed to mediocrity, at best.

Little wonder, then, that most of Newcastle is delighted that they now have their own oligarchs to play with. Having been failed, as a city and a club, by the tepid reforms of New Labour’s regeneration programme, the rentier economics of local property developers and the low-wage, sweatshop capitalism of 21st-century retail billionaires, why wouldn’t you opt for foreign oligarchs and their fossil fuel investment funds? It’s precisely what a significant slice of the country’s elites have been doing for years.

There is an entire industry, overwhelmingly in London and the south-east, that has grown grotesquely wealthy on servicing the political and economic needs of the Gulf’s ruling families, and oligarchs and dynasties everywhere. From the banks that [launder stolen money](#), to the accountants that then hide it; from the lawyers who resolve tricky domestic affairs to the PR firms mopping up the damage afterwards, and the estate agents that arrange to store your wealth in London’s [empty residential skyscrapers](#). Our governments and arms industry have been hardly any better, barely able to censure the Saudi state for its human rights abuses, the [murder of Jamal Khashoggi](#) or its war in Yemen for fear of losing enormous arms sales and construction contracts. And yet now Newcastle United’s fans are meant to lead the fight for human rights?

There is another footballing world in which these kinds of odious compromises and contradictions could be lessened. The distribution of money within the [Premier League](#) and football more widely could have been more egalitarian. Systems of regulation and control could have put a break on the arms race of spending and the concentration of capital and footballing success. It would have been a world in which Newcastle’s phenomenally loyal support would have been an economic advantage rather than an irrelevance.

A properly regulated football would have drawn the line at Abramovich as an owner, let alone permit [exiled prime ministers](#) from around the world and the sovereign funds of authoritarian states to buy clubs. In fact, Newcastle

United, and every other team, could have been passed into [German-style social ownership](#).

However, at every turn, as with our wider economy and society, we have allowed the private to trump the public. We nurture and tolerate eye-watering levels of inequality, poverty and downward social mobility, and have long since made our peace with the power of capital, whatever its origins and actions. How many times do we have to learn the lesson that, if you continually deny people hope that this can change for the better, they will gravitate to those offering something different, however pernicious their real intentions, however false their prospectus?

- David Goldblatt is the author of *The Ball is Round: A Global History of Football and The Game of Our Lives*
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## [Texas](#)

# **Texas' restrictive abortion law temporarily reinstated one day after being blocked**



A federal appeals court allowed Texas to temporarily resume banning most abortions. Photograph: Evelyn Hockstein/Reuters

*Associated Press*

Fri 8 Oct 2021 22.26 EDT

A federal appeals court on Friday night allowed [Texas](#) to temporarily resume banning most abortions, just one day after clinics across the state began rushing to serve patients again for the first time since early September.

Abortion providers in Texas [had been bracing](#) for the 5th US court of appeals to act quickly, even as they booked new appointments and reopened their doors during a brief reprieve from the law known as Senate Bill 8,

which bans abortions once cardiac activity is detected, usually around six weeks.

On Wednesday, the US district judge Robert Pitman, an appointee of Barack Obama, issued an order [suspending the Texas law](#), which he called an “offensive deprivation” of the constitutional right to an abortion. It came in response to a lawsuit filed by the Biden administration, which warned that other GOP-controlled states could rush to adopt similar measures.

“From the moment SB8 went into effect, women have been unlawfully prevented from exercising control over their lives in ways that are protected by the constitution,” wrote Pitman.

But the New Orleans-based appeals court quickly granted Texas’s request to set aside Pitman’s order for now while the case is reviewed. It ordered the justice department to respond by Tuesday.

Texas had roughly two dozen abortion clinics before the law took effect on 1 September, and not all Texas abortion providers resumed services while it was on hold. Many physicians had feared a swift reversal from the appeals court that risked putting them back in legal jeopardy.

The new law threatens Texas abortion providers – and anyone else who aids in an abortion – with lawsuits from private citizens, who are entitled to collect at least \$10,000 in damages if successful. That novel approach is the reason courts had not blocked the law prior to Pitman’s ruling: it leaves enforcement to private citizens, not prosecutors, which critics say amounts to a bounty.

Pitman’s order amounted to the first legal blow to SB8. In the weeks since the restrictions took effect, Texas abortion providers said the impact had been “exactly what we feared”.

Planned Parenthood says the number of patients from Texas at its clinics in the state decreased by nearly 80% in the two weeks after the law took effect.

Some providers have said Texas clinics are now in danger of closing while neighboring states struggle to keep up with a surge of patients who must

drive hundreds of miles for an abortion. Others, they say, are being forced to carry pregnancies to term.

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## [Hong Kong](#)

# Hong Kong University orders removal of Tiananmen Square massacre statue



The University of Hong Kong has ordered the Pillar of Shame statue, which commemorates the Tiananmen Square massacre, be removed from the campus. Photograph: Katherine Cheng/SOPA Images/REX/Shutterstock

*Agence France-Presse*

Fri 8 Oct 2021 21.12 EDT

The University of [Hong Kong](#) has ordered the removal of a statue commemorating protesters killed in China's 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown.

The 8-metre-high (26ft) copper statue was the centrepiece of Hong Kong's candlelit vigils on 4 June to commemorate those killed when Chinese troops backed by tanks opened fire on unarmed pro-democracy campaigners in Beijing.

The statue, called the Pillar of Shame, shows 50 anguished faces and tortured bodies piled on one another, and has been on display at Hong Kong's oldest university for more than two decades.

The decision was blasted by the statue's Danish sculptor Jens Galschiøt, who said its removal illustrated the ongoing purge of dissent in the once outspoken and semi-autonomous business hub.

In a legal letter to the now-disbanded Hong Kong Alliance (HKA) – the organiser of the city's huge annual Tiananmen vigil – the university demanded the group “immediately ... make arrangements for the sculpture to be removed from the university's premises” by 5pm on 13 October.

“If you fail to remove the sculpture ... it will be deemed abandoned,” the letter said.

It added that the university will deal with the statue in a manner it sees fit without further notice.

Richard Tsoi, a former member of HKA's standing committee, said the university's request was “unreasonable” and he has asked its chancellor to keep the statue.

“As a space with free speech and academic freedom, the University of Hong Kong has the social responsibility and mission to preserve the Pillar of Shame,” Tsoi said.

Galschiøt said he was “shocked if there were plans to desecrate the only memorial to such a consequential and important event in Chinese history”.

“I wish that the Pillar stays in Hong Kong, at the same place as it stands today. That would be historically correct. The pillar is an important artwork that has a historic link to Hong Kong and should stay on Chinese land,” he said.

The university said its request was “based on the latest risk assessment and legal advice”.

Groups and venues linked to the commemoration of the 4 June massacre have become the latest target of a sweeping national security law that China imposed on the city last year to quash dissent after huge and often violent democracy protests.

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[Democrats](#)

## Progressive Democrats draw strength from muscle-flexing in Congress



Pramila Jayapal, chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, talks to reporters amid negotiations to pass both an infrastructure bill and a reconciliation bill focuses on social and environmental goals. Photograph: Drew Angerer/Getty Images

*[Joan E Greve in Washington](#)*

[@joanegreve](#)

Sat 9 Oct 2021 04.45 EDT

When House Democrats were [forced to delay](#) their planned vote on the bipartisan infrastructure bill earlier this month, the reaction from progressives was surprising, considering it is a key part of Joe Biden's domestic agenda.

Rather than lamenting the delay of the vote, progressive groups praised the Democratic lawmakers who had demanded the scheduling change.

The Congressional Progressive Caucus – a group of leftwing [Democrats](#) in Congress – had argued that the infrastructure bill could not pass on its own because if it did, Democrats would lose vital momentum for passing the much larger reconciliation package, which includes huge investments in climate initiatives, affordable childcare access and healthcare and other social programs.

“We applaud House Democrats who are boldly holding the line for better care for our families, our planet, and our futures, not the bottom line for big corporations,” the progressive group MoveOn said.

After years of complaints that leftwing Democrats in Congress have consistently failed to wield their power effectively, the CPC is now receiving plaudits from supporters for their strategy in the infrastructure negotiations.

The progressives' success has emboldened their allies and raised questions over how they may use that power in the next stage of negotiations as Biden seeks to pass an agenda that many have compared to the 1930s New Deal or the 1960s Great Society.

For progressives outside the Capitol, the CPC's success was a validation of their years-long efforts to push for more robust climate and healthcare policies.

“I think often movements run into crises of powerlessness when we spend so much energy [on] an election or having a certain candidate come through in

order to just fall on all of those promises,” said John Paul Mejia, a spokesperson for the climate group Sunrise Movement.

“Thankfully with progressives, what we have seen is that by building accountability and power with folks inside and outside of the halls of power, we’ve actually been able to do some pretty wild things that are in line with what our movement seeks to do in ensuring the vision of the Green New Deal.”

Some progressives have said the fight felt overdue, as the CPC has long weathered criticism that its members raise objections to bills only to back down at the last minute.

“Progressives were seen as caving in the ninth inning of a game, and there was a years-long need for credibility if the progressive bloc wanted to be seen as an actual bloc in future fights,” said Adam Green, a co-founder of the Progressive Change Campaign Committee. “And this was that moment because the stars aligned.”

Green added that the victory could encourage progressives to pursue hardline tactics again, saying, “Now that that’s done once, [CPC chair] Pramila Jayapal and the progressive caucus will have more credibility and therefore be able to impact negotiations more in all future fights.”

Progressives’ strategy could have a significant impact on the final version of the reconciliation package, which lawmakers continue to negotiate over.

The legislation was previously expected to cost about \$3.5tn, a figure progressives already considered to be a major compromise from their ideal price tag of \$10tn. But now, more centrist Democrats, including Senators Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema, are pushing for a smaller bill. Manchin has suggested going [as low as \\$1.5tn](#) for the legislation.

Mejia strongly urged progressives to once again stand their ground in the next stage of negotiations, warning that a smaller bill would fail to address the serious issues facing the country.



Joe Biden visits the Capitol to meet with the Democratic caucus. Progressives are aligned with the president's agenda while a tiny sliver of congressional Democrats are obstructing it. Photograph: Nathan Posner/Rex/Shutterstock

“We need investment at the \$3.5tn level in order to truly begin addressing the crises that have plagued us over the past many years,” Mejia said.

“When we face our next hurricane or when we face floods in our homes, we won’t care about how nice Joe Biden was to Joe Manchin or Kyrsten Sinema. We’ll care about whether he made the \$3.5tn investment or not to keep our communities and families safe.”

As they push for a larger reconciliation package, progressives are also seeking to shift the narrative about the lawmakers who are advocating for a less comprehensive bill, such as Manchin and the Democratic congressman Josh Gottheimer.

Progressives argue that it is incorrect to describe those politicians as “moderate”.

The progressive congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez said in a tweet last week, “Moderates make up a sizeable chunk of the party. The 4% of members threatening the full agenda of a moderate president are not

moderates. How would you describe these demands: fossil fuel subsidies, protect the rich from taxes, keep prescription drug prices high? Conservative!”

Moderates make up a sizeable chunk of the party. The 4% of members threatening the full agenda of a moderate president are not moderates.

How would you describe these demands: Fossil fuel subsidies, protect the rich from taxes, keep prescription drug prices high?

Conservative! <https://t.co/b3FKnXvTTa>

— Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (@AOC) [October 3, 2021](#)

Indeed, some of the most vulnerable members of the House Democratic caucus have echoed their progressive colleagues in emphasizing the need to pass both the infrastructure bill and the reconciliation package.

Six of those “frontline Democrats” penned a [Newsweek op-ed](#) on Monday, in which they wrote, “[W]e are the serious, dedicated lawmakers who earned the Democratic majority. We fight every day to deliver for our voters. And we’re committed to getting both the infrastructure bill and the Build Back Better Act across the finish line.”

Matt Bennett, executive vice-president for public affairs of the centrist thinktank Third Way, warned that it will be moderate Democrats who suffer the consequences in next year’s midterm elections if the party fails to pass the reconciliation package.

“We believe that, in order for them to win, they’re going to need every tool at their disposal, and they’re going to need to be running from a position of strength,” Bennett said. “And if the president’s agenda were somehow to fall apart in intra-party bickering, that would be a position of extreme weakness.”

And while Democrats like Gottheimer have emphasized the urgent need to pass the “[historic](#)” infrastructure bill, Bennett argued that bill alone would

not be enough to get vulnerable moderates re-elected next year.

“There’s a lot of good stuff in the infrastructure bill,” Bennett said. “But it’s just not enough. We have to do more to show voters that we are listening to them and making their lives better in some fundamental ways.”

The stakes could not be higher for Democrats, and progressives like Mejia are watching closely as the negotiations unfold. He condemned lawmakers such as Manchin and Sinema for their “relentless will to fight for their corporate donors instead of their own constituents”, and he said their actions only underscored the need to elect more progressives to Congress, potentially by supporting primary challenges to more centrist Democrats.

“At the level of crisis that we are facing right now, we need no further obstructionists in power keeping us from getting to the solutions our communities desperately need,” Mejia said.

“And if a congressperson or a leader in any shape, way or form can’t deliver on the will of the people in a democratic process, then they need to be replaced with someone who will.”

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Nobel peace prize

## Dmitry Muratov: the Nobel winner shining light on Russia journalist murders



Dmitry Muratov is mobbed by supporters outside the Novaya Gazeta office in Moscow on 8 October after winning the Nobel peace prize. Photograph: Dimitar Dilkoff/AFP/Getty Images



*Pjotr Sauer in Moscow and [Jennifer Rankin](#)*

Fri 8 Oct 2021 12.33 EDT

When Dmitry Muratov saw a Norwegian number flash up on his phone, he assumed it was a nuisance call. Finding out he was [joint laureate of this year's Nobel peace prize](#) was a complete shock. “I am laughing. I didn’t expect this. It’s crazy here,” [he told](#) the Russian news site Podyom.

Muratov, the long-serving editor of one of Russia’s most fearless news outlets, Novaya Gazeta, promised to “leverage this prize for Russian journalists which [Russian authorities] are now trying to repress”.

Since Novaya Gazeta was established by Muratov and colleagues in 1993, it has investigated corruption inside and outside Russia, as well as the long wars in Chechnya. Six of the paper’s reporters and contributors have been murdered for their work. Muratov said the prize belonged to them: “It’s for Igor Domnikov, it’s for [Yuri Shchekochikhin](#), it’s for [Anna Stepanovna Politkovskaya](#), it’s for Nastya Baburova, it’s for [Natalia Estemirova](#), for [Stas Markelov](#),” he told Russian media. “It is that of those who died defending the right of people to freedom of speech.”



A woman places flowers before a portrait of the murdered Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya in 2009. Photograph: Pavel Golovkin/AP

Muratov was born in the south-west Russian city of Saratov in 1961, becoming a journalist in the era of glasnost when the Soviet leader [Mikhail Gorbachev](#) allowed unprecedented openness to the media. The young Muratov began his career at the communist youth paper Komsomolskaya Pravda in 1987; he left in 1993 with dozens of colleagues to start Novaya Gazeta after disagreeing with the editorial policies of the populist daily.

Gorbachev, another Russian Nobel laureate, donated some of his peace prize award to help the new paper buy computers and pay staff. On Friday, Gorbachev described Muratov's award as "very good news ... it raises the importance of the press in the modern world to great heights".

By 1995 Muratov was editor in chief, establishing Novaya as the leading voice of the Russian liberal class. He stood down in 2017, but returned in 2019, after being voted in by staff.



A man lights a candle in front of a portrait of the journalist Natalia Estemirova in St Petersburg in 2009. Photograph: Yelena Ignatieva/EPA

“Muratov is a living legend,” Pavel Kanygin, a veteran journalist at Novaya Gazeta, said. “He is very demanding but fair. He always wants us to go the extra mile, he is so passionate about his work.”

As Russia’s crackdown on independent media intensified under Vladimir Putin, the paper and its staff were repeatedly targeted. In 2018 a funeral wreath and severed sheep’s head were sent to the paper’s offices with a note addressed to a staff member who reported on the secretive Wagner mercenary group. Earlier this year, Novaya Gazeta said its offices in Moscow had been targeted with a “chemical attack”.

Despite the pressure, Novaya Gazeta has continued its investigations, revealing in the Panama papers in 2016 the offshore wealth of Russian officials close to Putin, and exposing Chechnya’s persecution of LGBT people.

Novaya Gazeta is one of the last independent outlets in Russia not [labelled as a “foreign agent”](#), and staff hope Muratov’s award will shield it against future attacks.

“The last few months have been very difficult for Russian journalism,” Kanygin said. “We had a feeling we are all approaching a tragic ending. We were running out of hope. I hope this prize will help to protect us against attacks from the authorities.”

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/08/my-nobel-peace-prize-belongs-to-russias-murdered-journalists-says-dmitry-muratov>

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[Nobel peace prize](#)

## **Journalists Maria Ressa and Dmitry Muratov win Nobel peace prize**



Dmitry Muratov (left), editor-in-chief of Russia's main opposition newspaper Novaya Gazeta, and Maria Ressa, journalist and CEO of the Rappler news website Photograph: AP

*[Jon Henley](#), Pjotr Sauer in Moscow and [Rebecca Ratcliffe](#), South-east Asia correspondent*

Fri 8 Oct 2021 08.47 EDT

Campaigning journalists from the Philippines and Russia have won the 2021 [Nobel peace prize](#) as the Norwegian committee recognised the vital importance of an independent media to democracy and warned it was increasingly under assault.

Maria Ressa, the chief executive and cofounder of Rappler, and Dmitry Muratov, the editor-in-chief of Novaya Gazeta, were named as this year's

laureates by Berit Reiss-Andersen, the chair of the Norwegian Nobel committee.

“Free, independent and fact-based journalism serves to protect against abuse of power, lies and war propaganda,” Reiss-Andersen said, praising the two journalists’ “courageous fight for freedom of expression, a precondition for democracy and lasting peace”.

A free press was essential to promoting “fraternity between nations, disarmament and a better world order”, she said, adding that the committee considered Ressa and Muratov to be “representatives of all journalists who stand up for this ideal in a world in which democracy and freedom of the press face increasingly adverse conditions”.

Hours after the announcement, Russia’s justice ministry designated the owner the Bellingcat investigative news organisation, along with nine journalists including one for the BBC’s Russian service, as “foreign agents”, meaning they must file detailed financial reports and face other tight operating restrictions.

The press freedom NGO Reporters Without Borders (RSF), which says 24 journalists have been killed since the beginning of the year and 350 others imprisoned, called the award “a call for mobilisation to defend journalism” that had sparked a sense of both “joy and urgency”.

Ressa, 58, a former CNN bureau chief in the Philippines, and [Rappler, the news site she founded](#) in 2012, have faced multiple criminal charges and investigations after publishing stories critical of President Rodrigo Duterte and his bloody drugs war.

02:01

Nobel peace prize winner Maria Ressa: 'A world without facts means a world without truth' – video

In emotional comments aired on [Rappler's Facebook page](#), she said: “This is a recognition of how hard it is to be a journalist today. How hard it is to keep doing what we do ... It’s a recognition of the difficulties, but also hopefully

of how we're going to win the battle for truth. The battle for facts. We hold the line.”

[In a subsequent interview](#), Ressa, who is on bail pending an appeal against a conviction in a cyber libel case for which she faces up to six years in prison, said the award was for Rappler, and showed the Nobel peace prize committee had recognised that “a world without facts means a world without truth and without trust”.

When facts have become debatable, she said, and when “the world’s largest distributor of news prioritises the spread of lies laced with anger and hate – then journalism becomes activism … It’s about the facts, right?” She told Norwegian TV the reward gave her and Rappler “tremendous energy to continue the fight”.

Amal Clooney, a member of Ressa’s legal team, said: “I am so proud of my client and friend. She has sacrificed her own freedom for the rights of journalists all over the world. I hope the Philippine authorities will now stop persecuting her and other journalists, and that this prize helps to protect the press around the world.”

Muratov, 59, who was one of the founders of the independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta in 1993 and has been its editor-in-chief since 1995, told the Telegram news service Podyom: “We will continue to represent Russian journalism, which is now being suppressed. That’s all.”

He was later quoted by the Russian news agency Tass as saying the award “is for Novaya Gazeta, and also for those who died defending the right of people to freedom of speech. Now that they are no longer with us, [the Nobel committee] probably decided I should tell it to everyone.”

He then proceeded to list journalists murdered in Russia for their work: “It’s for Igor Domnikov, it’s for Yuri Shchekochikhin, it’s for Anna Stepanovna Politkovskaya, it’s for Nastya Baburova, it’s for Natasha Estemirova, for Stas Markelov. This is for them.”

Christophe Deloire, RSF’s secretary general, said there was “joy because this is an extraordinary tribute to journalism, an excellent tribute to two

incredible figures, Maria and Dmitry”. But there was also a feeling of urgency, he said, because “journalism is in danger, journalism is weakened, journalism is threatened … all over the world”.

According to the RSF’s latest world rankings, the situation for press freedom is “difficult or very serious” in 73% of the 180 countries it evaluates, and “good or satisfactory” in only 27%. Attempts to stifle independent media – from physical violence through state censorship to targeted financial pressure – are multiplying around the world, the group says.

The Nobel committee said Rappler had focused “critical attention on the Duterte regime’s controversial, murderous anti-drug campaign” which had caused so many deaths that “it resembles a war waged against the country’s own population”.

Ressa and Rappler had also “documented how social media is being used to spread fake news, harass opponents and manipulate public discourse”, the committee said. It said of Muratov’s Novaya Gazeta that the newspaper was “the most independent newspaper in Russia today, with a fundamentally critical attitude towards power”.

02:23

Moment Maria Ressa learns of Nobel peace prize win during Zoom call – video

The paper’s “fact-based journalism and professional integrity have made it an important source of information on censurable aspects of Russian society rarely mentioned by other media”, the committee said. Despite harassment, threats, violence and murder, Muratov had refused to abandon the newspaper’s independent policy.

“He has consistently defended the right of journalists to write anything they want about whatever they want, as long as they comply with the professional and ethical standards of journalism,” Reiss-Andersen said.

Pavel Kanygin, a veteran reporter at Novaya Gazeta, said: “This is great encouragement for us all; the last few months have been very difficult for Russian journalism. I hope this will help to protect us against attacks from

the authorities. This is an award that is important not just for us, but the whole Russian independent journalist community.”

The Kremlin spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, congratulated Muratov on winning the prize, hailing him as a “talented and brave” person.

The prestigious award is accompanied by a gold medal and 10m Swedish kronor (£840,000). The prize money comes from a bequest left by the prize’s creator, the Swedish inventor Alfred Nobel, who died in 1895.

This year’s nominees included the environmental activist Greta Thunberg, the Belarusian human rights activist and politician Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and the jailed Russian opposition figure Alexei Navalny.

Organisations nominated included Black Lives Matter, the World Health Organization, the Covax vaccine sharing body, and the press freedom groups RSF and the Committee to Protect Journalists.

Previous laureates include the Pakistani campaigner for female education Malala Yousafzai, anti-apartheid leader Nelson Mandela, US president Barack Obama, the Dalai Lama, Catholic missionary Mother Teresa, civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Chinese writer and activist Liu Xiaobo, and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.

Gorbachev, who helped fund the launch of Novaya Gazeta with the proceeds of his prize, said the decision was “good news” for the world’s press.

“This is good, very good news,” he said in a statement. “This award raises the importance of the press in the modern world to great heights.”

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[Maria Ressa](#)

## **‘War reporting was easier’: Maria Ressa’s journey to Nobel prize winner**



Maria Ressa in 2019. She is currently free on bail as she appeals a six-year prison sentence handed down last year for a libel conviction. Photograph: Aaron Favila/AP

*[Rebecca Ratcliffe](#) south-east Asia correspondent and [Jon Henley](#)*

Fri 8 Oct 2021 12.28 EDT

Maria Ressa, the Philippine journalist and 2021 [Nobel peace prize](#) laureate, spent two decades working as an investigative reporter, foreign correspondent and CNN bureau chief before heading the news division of her country’s biggest TV news channel.

But none of it prepared her for the torrent of threats, hatred and abuse she has faced from supporters of President Rodrigo Duterte since she co-founded the investigative news site Rappler with three fellow female

journalists in 2012, developing it into one of the Philippine's most popular news outlets.

"There were so many hate messages ... Ninety hate messages an hour, 90 rape threats per minute," Ressa, 58, recalled five years after the site launched. "When I was younger, I was a war correspondent. That was easier than this." On social media she has been targeted through hashtag campaigns such as #ArrestMariaRessa.

Currently free on bail as she appeals a six-year prison sentence handed down last year for a libel conviction, Ressa expressed "shock and disbelief" on Friday after learning [she had shared the prize](#) with the Russian investigative journalist Dmitry Muratov.

02:23

Moment Maria Ressa learns of Nobel peace prize win during Zoom call – video

Ressa said the award showed the committee had recognised that "a world without facts means a world without truth and without trust. When facts become debatable, she said, journalism becomes activism".

Rappler, an online news platform with an ethos similar to a tech startup, operating with a small team of 12 young reporters and developers, was the first of its kind in the [Philippines](#). It is now the fourth-biggest news website in the country, with more than 100 journalists.

It was among the first outlets in the world to illustrate the dark side of social media, and how it can be manipulated by populist leaders to win power. Its journalists have also shone a light on corruption under Duterte and documented the president's brutal anti-drugs campaign, which has led, according to data cited by the international criminal court, to tens of thousands of killings.

Ressa has, in turn, been repeatedly targeted – in the courts, and online. The president has lashed out at her in speeches, accusing Rappler of peddling "fake news" and being a tool of the CIA, since it began investigating mass killings during a crackdown on drugs that has resulted in so many deaths

that the Nobel committee compared it to “a war waged against the country’s own population”..

In total, Ressa, Rappler and other staff have faced at least 11 government investigations and court cases, including libel prosecutions, two criminal cases alleging illegal foreign ownership in her companies, and investigations into her old tax returns. Throughout the pandemic, Ressa has repeatedly attended court hearings.

Duterte has said these cases are not politically motivated. Yet they have been widely condemned by human rights groups. The United Nations high commissioner for human rights said that there appeared to be “a pattern of intimidation” of media in the Philippines. The US Senate has described the cyber-libel allegations against Ressa as “unjustified judicial proceedings”.

The site, which has said it “remains 100% Filipino-owned” and its foreign investors have no say in its operations, is also in a legal dispute with the Philippine government to have its licence – revoked in 2018 for alleged violations of laws on foreign ownership – reinstated.

Since Rappler was launched, Ressa, who is also a US citizen, has had to post bail 10 times to stay out of jail in response to a string of lawsuits accusing her of everything from defamation to tax evasion, fuelling international concern about media harassment in a country once seen as a standard-bearer for press freedom in Asia.

“We’re going through a dark time, a difficult time,” she said on Friday. “We realise that what we do today is going to determine what our tomorrow is going to be.” To keep doing what it does, “Rappler lives with the possibility of a shutdown on a daily basis – we’re on quicksand … What we have to do as journalists is just hold the line.”

Journalists in the Philippines, which ranks 138th out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders’ (RSF) world press freedom index, have widely celebrated Ressa’s award.

“Reporters routinely face online harassment, local newsrooms face pressure to self-censor, and regional journalists remain the most vulnerable to violence, including detention and killings,” said the the Foreign Correspondents Association of the Philippines. “Her win is a victory for press freedom advocates across the Philippines.”

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

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# **Tory conference: five arrested after Iain Duncan Smith allegedly assaulted – as it happened**

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[Brexit](#)

## UK promises ‘robust’ reaction if EU starts trade war over Northern Ireland



David Frost: ‘We cannot wait for ever.’ Photograph: Paul Ellis/AFP/Getty

*Lisa O’Carroll* Brexit correspondent

[@lisaocarroll](#)

Mon 4 Oct 2021 13.33 EDT

The UK will react in a “robust” manner if the EU launches a retaliatory trade war in the event of Brexit talks on [Northern Ireland](#) breaking down, the government has warned.

The Brexit minister, [David Frost](#), said he expected the EU to issue its formal response to the UK’s demand for renegotiation of the Northern Ireland protocol within the next 10 days, as he outlined fresh detail on the timeline for talks.

It means a November crunch time for the Democratic Unionist party, which on Monday repeated its threat to quit Northern Ireland's power-sharing administration and force fresh Stormont elections if substantial progress on ditching the protocol is not made.

Lord Frost said he would then engage with the EU in an “intensive” manner for a “short period” before deciding whether to trigger article 16, the mechanism to suspend parts of the protocol and enter a formal dispute.

“On the talks question, we must do it as quick as possible … The team is ready to go to Brussels,” he said. “We need a short and intensive negotiation, and when I say short, I mean weeks, three weeks.”

“I personally believe there comes a decision point probably around early November when we know an agreement can be reached or it cannot and certain consequences flow from that,” Frost added.

Speaking at a Centre for [Brexit](#) Policy event at the Conservative party conference, Frost also warned that if no agreement could be reached, the UK would be “robust” if the EU retaliated by imposing tariffs or other barriers to trade flow between Great Britain and the EU.

“We don’t think retaliation makes any of those things any easier,” he said, but if they did launch trade wars, which could include enforcement action in other parts of the Brexit deal, “proportionality is important”.

Earlier on Monday, the leader of the DUP gave Boris Johnson until the end of October to solve the Northern Ireland protocol row, just hours after the UK issued a veiled threat to the EU that it would pull the plug on the Brexit arrangements.

At a private meeting with the prime minister in Manchester and later at a public event, Sir Jeffrey Donaldson warned that the party needed him to “take action within weeks” or he would force an election in Northern Ireland.

Donaldson, however, said he was “greatly encouraged” by what Johnson had told him on Monday morning and hoped that significant progress could be

made within the next three weeks.

The DUP leader was speaking shortly after [Frost said Britain “cannot wait for ever”](#) for the EU to respond to its demands to rewrite the Brexit arrangement.

In a speech to the conference, Frost said he had been waiting since July for a formal request for substantial changes to the protocol, which the UK has largely suspended over objections to checks on a range of goods, including sausages.

“We cannot wait for ever. Without an agreed solution soon, we will need to act, using the article 16 safeguard mechanism, to address the impact the protocol is having on Northern Ireland,” he said.

Setting the scene for an imminent triggering of [article 16](#), he said he was not confident that the EU would meet his demands.

“From what I hear, I worry that we will not get one [a response] which enables the significant change we need,” Frost said. .

The government is also coming under renewed pressure from the European Research Group of MPs to ditch the protocol completely.

The chair of the influential group of backbench Tory MPs, Mark Francois, said its members knew the protocol was flawed when they voted for the withdrawal agreement in January 2020, but went into it with their “eyes wide open”. He said the group viewed the protocol as unfinished business at the time and had faith in Frost and Johnson’s ability to renegotiate the arrangements.

David Trimble, one of the architects of the 1998 Northern Ireland peace accord, said there was little point in waiting for the EU to renegotiate the protocol. “They will never change their position. We need to repudiate the entire arrangement.”

The EU’s ambassador to the UK, João Vale de Almeida, said there was nothing strange or unexpected in Frost’s speech, promising a response to the

UK's demands within the coming weeks.

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## Supply chain crisis

# Rishi Sunak: supply chain crisis could lead to higher productivity



Sunak argued that higher pay need not necessarily lead to a spiral of rising inflation. Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

*[Peter Walker](#) Political correspondent*

*[@peterwalker99](#)*

Mon 4 Oct 2021 05.13 EDT

The ongoing supply chain crisis should provide an impetus for companies to improve productivity thus ensuring higher wages are not cancelled out by rising inflation, [Rishi Sunak](#) has argued.

In another development in the government's emerging insistence that queues at petrol stations and empty shelves in shops could be an indicator of longer-term benefits to the UK, the chancellor built on arguments made by Boris Johnson.

Interviewed on Sunday, the [prime minister said](#) that labour shortages, which have brought petrol shortages and the prospect of 120,000 pigs being slaughtered and burned, were part of a necessary transition to a higher-wage, higher-skilled economy.

In his own interviews on Monday ahead of his speech to the Tory party conference in Manchester, Sunak insisted the supply crisis was a global issue, which ministers could do only so much to mitigate.

“We can’t wave a magic wand,” he told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme. “There’s nothing I can do about the decision by a country in Asia to shut down a port because of a coronavirus outbreak. But be assured we are doing everything that is in our control to try and mitigate some of these challenges.”

Sunak’s comments came as the first military tanker drivers took to the roads to try to ease the petrol shortages. About 200 army personnel, half of them drivers, are being used mainly in London and the southeast of England, where the worst of the shortages remain.

The chancellor argued that higher pay need not necessarily lead to a spiral of rising inflation: “In an ideal world, if higher pay is being driven largely by higher productivity, then that is a net positive for the economy.

“It will depend on the particular sector, and we will see what happens. We don’t live in a command and control economy; the exact way that costs and prices manifest themselves is going to be different in each sector of the economy.

“But we want a high-productivity economy, to lead to higher wages, and we’re doing things to enable that.”

This might take time, Sunak said, acknowledging that for now the UK was more of a shortage economy, with wages for people such as HGV drivers being increased purely to plug labour gaps.

“But if that catalyses people to think about their supply chains and their business differently, to then invest in technology or equipment that can help

drive up productivity, because now wage levels are higher ... that can be a good thing," he said. "This doesn't happen overnight; it's a process."

Sunak said he believed people would not end up being poorer in real terms, saying he was not convinced that inflation would reach 4% by the end of the year.

"It could, but we haven't seen that happen yet," he said. "It is still the belief of the Bank of England and most other central banks that what we're seeing at the moment will be transitory and will pass through the system over the course of next year."

Asked if people would simply demand more pay rises in response to rising prices, Sunak added: "We're getting into economic theory here, about people's inflation expectations.

In an earlier interview, Sunak dismissed the argument of the Tory MP Chris Loder, who told a conference fringe meeting that he hoped the HGV driver shortage would lead to supermarket supply chains being dismantled.

"I don't think anyone would say there's an upside to people struggling with supply chain challenges and not being able to get what they want at the time they want it. No one wants to see that." he told Sky News.

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## Coronavirus

# Shapps criticised for remarks on wearing masks in enclosed spaces



Grant Shapps said there was ‘a feeling of safety coming back, because people will know they’re jabbed, and everyone else is jabbed’, Photograph: CLY/Rex/Shutterstock

*[Peter Walker](#) and [Ian Sample](#)*

Mon 4 Oct 2021 03.33 EDT

Vaccinations have made people more confident to sit in enclosed spaces without masks, [Grant Shapps](#) has said, prompting scientists to warn that such messages risked complacency, and that mask use was vital in limiting the spread of Covid.

Speaking at a packed fringe event about the rail industry at the Conservative party conference, where many people in the room did not have a face

covering, the transport secretary noted the return of [confidence of people to travel.](#)

“It is the case that coming out of the pandemic, everyone needs to make that first journey – you felt, actually, that wasn’t so bad,” Shapps said. “You look at us in this room. Three months ago it would have been unimaginable for us to be sat in this room, in reasonably close proximity, [without] face coverings.”

Saying that anyone still unvaccinated without a medical reason was “mad”, Shapps said the extent of vaccination meant there was “a feeling of safety coming back, because people will know they’re jabbed, and everyone else is jabbed”.

Asked at the event in Manchester whether it was a good thing that so many people without masks were in the room, Shapps said: “I don’t think I said I was pleased. I was simply making the comparison that three months ago this would have been impossible, if we hadn’t come to the end of the programme of vaccination. And it is undoubtedly a good thing that society is able to open up.”

However, some scientists said it was important that the messaging on masks was not undermined. Dr Deepti Gurdasani, an epidemiologist at Queen Mary, University of London, said it was clearly established that people who were vaccinated could get infected and transmit Covid, and should wear masks in crowded places.

She said: “Infection rates in England currently are very high, so the risk of ‘superspreading’ in indoor crowded places is also very high. And government officials not wearing masks in such environments undermines their own public messaging that advises others to do so, and further erodes public trust, which is critical in the midst of what is a crisis, where we’re having an NHS that’s already struggling and 1,000 deaths per week and it’s not even winter yet.”

Trish Greenhalgh, a GP and professor of primary care health at the University of Oxford, said while Covid vaccines had been a “game-changer” for the pandemic, vaccinated people should still wear masks at indoor events.

“People who are fully vaccinated can still transmit the virus and still catch it,” she said. “The more people in the room, the more chance that someone is exhaling the virus even when they’re vaccinated, but especially if they aren’t.”

She urged people to take a “belt and braces” approach, adding: “The combination of masks and vaccines gives vastly more protection than either one alone.”

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Interview

## **Jason Donovan on Kylie, coolness and cocaine: ‘I’m a survivor and I’ve made mistakes’**

[Emine Saner](#)



‘How do you process people going nuts for you?’ Jason Donovan in London. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian



[@eminesaner](#)

Mon 4 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

Despite insisting that he likes to look to the future, Jason Donovan is confronted with the past much of the time. He has just started a UK tour – one that has been postponed twice because of the pandemic – singing the songs that turned him into a huge star in the UK in the late 80s and early 90s, after his role in [the Australian soap opera Neighbours](#) (which people also always want to talk about).

“My catalogue of recent music is probably thin, so I tend to rely on my heritage a bit more,” he says. “This is a sort of moment of reflection.” But does he feel he is always being dragged back? Does it fill him with wistfulness? Does he think about time passing? “I do when I can’t sleep,” he says with a laugh. But the answer is no: “It’s just great to be able to sing those songs, still have a voice, still have an audience. I’m grateful. Those songs are going to live beyond me.”

It comes on the back of his summer run in the Andrew Lloyd Webber musical [Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat](#). In 1991, Donovan

played the lead role; 30 years later, he returned as Pharaoh, a part for an older man. There had been talks about him reprising Joseph. “I entertained the idea. I can see the kids of 1991 growing up and bringing their kids to the show, and that’s a good ticket, that’s an interesting thing. The question I’ve got to look at is: can I revisit that moment with the same passion and integrity? How do I look in a loincloth?” He laughs. It was the right decision not to take it, he says. “This was a perfect marriage of keeping my currency right there and having a moment that articulated the past, but could get me off the hook a bit.”



Donovan and Kylie Minogue as Scott and Charlene in Neighbours. Almost 20 million Britons watched their wedding episode in 1988. Photograph: Fremantle Media/Rex

Was it poignant, seeing a young man in his former role? Donovan is determinedly avoiding my pit of nostalgic melancholy. “It changed my life,” he says, brightly. “It took me from being this soap star turned pop star turned ‘What are we going to do now?’ star. Along came Andrew Lloyd Webber, who said: ‘I’ve got an idea,’ and suddenly it’s eight shows a week at the London Palladium and people are going to take you a bit more seriously.”

He sometimes performs at 80s festivals with artists such as the Human League and Peter Hook: ‘All quite heavyweight. I slot in for 20 minutes,

sing Too Many Broken Hearts and Especially for You and a couple of other tracks, and then I sing [Any Dream Will Do](#) [the big number from Joseph]. The crowd go fucking nuts and it's sort of cool. Do you know what I mean?"

What does success mean? What does a good life look like? These are questions many of us will have reflected on in the past 18 months as priorities have shifted and goals have been re-evaluated. These are also questions many fading celebrities will have grappled with – and Donovan has been there. There was a time in the 90s when he was well aware it was not "sort of cool" to be singing Joseph songs; he wasn't sure what he was supposed to do now that his teenaged fans (me included) had grown up and got into Nirvana.

His reaction was to [spiral into drug addiction](#). But now? At 53, his career rolling along, with a long marriage, three children (his daughter, Jemma, [is now in Neighbours](#)), a house in Notting Hill and a sense of humour, getting through the years must bring its own perspective about what constitutes success.

If I am feeling overly nostalgic, it is because teenaged me would never have dreamed that I would one day be sitting in a cafe with Donovan. (He is warm and down to earth; the cafe is near his house and the staff greet him like a friend.) In the era of streaming and niches, it is hard to emphasise just how huge Neighbours was – or the number of huge careers it launched. The episode in 1988 in which Donovan's character, Scott, married Charlene (played by Kylie Minogue) was watched by 20 million people in the UK. Just about everyone in my generation will be able to say where they were when they watched it, because the answer will be: at home, after school.

Donovan and Minogue were a couple at the time. Is it weird having people scrutinise their relationship – and Donovan's first love – more than 30 years on? "Well, I've become used to it. That's sort of a brand." He has been with his wife, Angela Malloch, for more than 20 years, he says. How does she feel about it? "I think, initially, she would get a little frustrated with stuff, but she's such a strong woman and our relationship is so solid that it transcends that moment that, with respect, mostly journalists are obsessed with."

The kid in me had to crash the car to be able to realise what I want and what I don't want

Of course, it is not just journalists – it is fans, too. Donovan, affably combative, smiles and softens. “And fans, I agree, as part of that nostalgia. It’s something I’m not obsessed with, but I understand it is what people want to hear about.” (He says Minogue is “awesome”; they message each other occasionally.) The [video of the pair reuniting at Minogue’s 2018 concert in Hyde Park, central London](#), to sing their hit Especially for You has been watched nearly 6.5m times.

The first time I watched it, I surprised myself by bursting into tears – it was the idea of first love, enduring friendship, lost years; the teleportation back to one’s youth that a brilliant pop song can provide. Donovan’s relative dishevelment and vulnerability (he had arrived at the gig by bike – he cycles everywhere – and the idea was sprung on him) compared with Minogue’s dazzling superstardom only added to the emotional impact. “It is one of those moments that means a lot to many people,” he says.

Donovan and Minogue first appeared together on screen as children, [in the Australian show Skyways](#). His father, Terence Donovan, is an actor, as was his mother. When his parents broke up, his father got custody; he grew up on film sets “because we didn’t have a babysitter”. It was unusual then for a father to be given custody. Did Donovan feel different to his friends? “Yeah, I did, actually. I do remember things like lunch boxes, normally given to you by your mum with this array of food in it, and my dad … the bread wasn’t always fresh. But I had love.”



Performing at the Royal Variety show in London, 1989. Photograph: Eugene Adebari/Rex Features

His father remarried and Donovan became close to his stepmother. “We’re still very close; we spoke today. My grandmother was a big part of my life, so I never felt like I missed out on anything. I’m sure, psychologically, those things have an effect on people’s lives, but … I guess the net result is with my own family – how important it is to make sure that those moments aren’t repeated.”

Donovan would pester his father to set up auditions. He did a few shows other than *Skyways* before his debut in [Neighbours](#) as the mulleted Scott Robinson a few months before he turned 17. What was it like to deal with sudden fame so young? “I don’t think anything prepares you for that. At the heart of it, I didn’t join Neighbours to become famous. I joined it because I loved getting up in front of people – a little shy, but I felt confident with the right script to be able to express myself.”

He had already seen fame up close – people would stare at his father in the street. “I understood it is a currency – it’ll go up and down, make the most out of the moment – but the moment kept on going and it grew. How do you process, at the age of 19, people going nuts for you, people outside your

house for two or three years? I don't know. It can be very claustrophobic and overwhelming, and it can be wonderful; it can be all sorts of things."

He had always loved music, but becoming a pop star seemed accidental. "I saw what Kylie was doing [Minogue's first album was a huge hit]; that gets you motivated pretty quick." She had been produced by Stock Aitken Waterman. "I suppose they looked at her and said: 'Who's next?' and I went: 'I think I could do something here.'" Especially for You became Donovan's first No 1 (he would have three more in the UK, as well as 10 Top 10s) and his debut album was the highest selling of 1989 in the UK.



Donovan as Joseph and Linzi Hateley as the Narrator in 1991's *Joseph And The Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. Photograph: Tristram Kenton/The Guardian

The music he was into was more David Bowie, Pink Floyd and Australian rock bands. How did he feel about the commercial hits he was singing? "I still loved pop music," he says. "I never forget being in clubs, hearing Rick Astley's Never Gonna Give You Up, going: 'Wow.' But at the same time I was a big New Order fan, I loved the Cure. I was a little bit confused, but I knew the Stock Aitken Waterman route was the right way to go, to complement what I was doing on Neighbours."

Once *Especially for You* became a hit and cemented Donovan as a teen icon, “there was no turning back”. Sometimes he catches old episodes of *Top of the Pops*. “I pinch myself and go: ‘That happened to me.’ It’s about timing. I could have been fussy and gone: ‘I need to be a bit more indie,’ and the moment would have gone.”

He did try to become edgier for his third album, but it didn’t sell particularly well. Even then, his past had a stranglehold – his new label shoehorned Donovan’s old hits into the album, resulting in an odd mix. It came out in 1993, two years after he had taken the title role in *Joseph*. That had been a huge success, but it wasn’t exactly the height of credibility. “I looked at myself at the Palladium in a coat of many colours and a loincloth, going: ‘What am I doing?’ In hindsight, what I thought at the time wasn’t cool was so fucking cool. But it takes a generation.”

He wanted to be Kurt Cobain – “but grunge was a rebellion against people like me” – or Michael Hutchence, the INXS singer (and the man for whom Minogue had left him). “I looked at someone like Michael and said: ‘I wish I was you.’ In hindsight, that all doesn’t matter, but the kid in me had to crash the car to be able to realise what I want and what I don’t want.”

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In the 90s, there couldn’t have been anything cooler than being invited to Kate Moss’s 21st birthday party at the Viper Room in Los Angeles, which was part-owned by her boyfriend at the time, Johnny Depp. Donovan was carried out on a stretcher after having a seizure, brought on by too much cocaine. In his 2007 autobiography, he recounted the humiliation with painful self-awareness: “I’d tried to party with the big boys, tried to be so very rock and roll, but all I had done was make a complete fucking idiot of myself. Who was I trying to fool? There was nothing rock and roll about me.” Was that his lowest moment on drugs? He laughs. “Well, it’s one of many moments that weren’t great.”

A couple of years earlier, Donovan had sued the music magazine *the Face* for libel. He won £200,000 damages, which he waived, but it was disastrous for his image. The magazine had printed a story implying Donovan was lying about his sexuality; posters of him had appeared around London, presumably posted by activists who were trying to out closeted celebrities.

By suing for libel, not only was Donovan attacking a fashionable magazine, but he was also inviting accusations of looking homophobic. At the clubs and bars he went to in London, he had become a pariah.

In his book, he called suing the Face the biggest mistake of his life, but now he says: “I’ll stand by the decision. But no one won.” It was about what was morally right, he says. “It was about the suggestion I was lying.” There were also political considerations – Donovan did not agree with the campaign to out people. “You can’t out someone because you think you have a right to tell their story. It’s not right. That would not happen today.” Does he regret that, to some, it looked like homophobia? “I was brought up by a dad who was an actor and a stepmother who was a model, in a very open world,” he says. “The issue was not about sexuality.”



Outside the high court in London after winning his 1992 libel case against the Face magazine. Photograph: Neil Munns/PA

Feeling stressed and bruised, a cocaine habit took hold. By 1994, he had been dropped by his record label and, with no work to anchor him, his partying took over. He moved back to Australia for a while. After collapsing in a cafe after a two- or three-day bender (he can’t remember), the media started to report on his state. Those around him tried to help. “The problem

was I wasn't worried about what they were thinking. It's a very selfish existence. It's an illness.”

It was meeting his wife – a stage manager on the UK tour of The Rocky Horror Picture Show, his first foray back to work – that marked the turnaround, followed by the birth of their first two children. She said they could live together as a family only if Donovan came off drugs. It wasn't a hard decision – Donovan adored being a father – and he also had a sensible streak. Even at his lowest, he “always kept one foot in the door of responsibility” (he continued to exercise regularly and, although he spent a fortune on drugs – “I don't know how much” – he was financially savvy in other areas).

For the last few years, Donovan has worked steadily in theatre, presented a radio show, released albums (largely of covers) and embraced his role as an entertainer and object of public affection. “I'm a survivor and I've made mistakes. No life is perfect. When you're young, you're fearless, and then you realise how fragile we actually are. It's not about necessarily having chart success or the most successful this or that. I take comfort in the fact that every career has its ups and downs and, as you get older, you think: how many bedrooms in a house do you actually need? I don't need to show anything off.”

When did he make peace with his – dare I say it? – uncoolness? “When you have kids, your life changes, because it's not about you, it's about them. It mattered about working and keeping moving forward.” Even if you are too old to mind about such things, and even when others constantly want to drag you back to the past, what could be cooler than that?

[Jason Donovan is touring the UK and Ireland until 2 March](#)

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2021/oct/04/jason-donovan-on-kylie-coolness-and-cocaine-im-a-survivor-and-ive-made-mistakes>

[Apple](#)

## Apple iPhone 13 review: cheaper, longer lasting and better camera



One of the best phones of last year gets improved cameras, longer battery life, more storage and a price cut for 2021. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

*[Samuel Gibbs](#) Consumer technology editor*

Mon 4 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

The [iPhone](#) 13 is a minor upgrade to last year's brilliant iPhone 12, with an improved camera, larger storage longer battery life and a small price cut.

Apple's latest regular-sized smartphone costs £779 (\$799 or A\$1,349), which is £20 cheaper than its predecessor, and sits between the smaller £679 iPhone 13 mini and the £949 iPhone 13 Pro.

The phone has the same general design as its predecessor. Its flat aluminium sides and hardened glass front and back feel just as robust as last year. It is 12g heavier and ever so slightly thicker, but unless you compare them side by side that is not noticeable.



The Face ID notch at the top of the screen is 20% smaller but only displays the same battery, signal and time either side as its predecessor, making it a purely aesthetic change. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

The screen is crisp, vibrant and a little brighter than last year's model. It has a refresh rate of 60Hz, which was standard for iPhones but makes it less smooth when scrolling than most Android rivals and this year's iPhone 13 Pro models with their 120Hz displays.

The iPhone 13 has Apple's latest A15 Bionic processor, which is slightly faster all-round than last year's A14 in the iPhone 12, and double the starting storage with 128GB, which will probably be enough for most people. It is one of the fastest phones you can buy.

## Specifications

- **Screen:** 6.1in Super Retina XDR (OLED) (460ppi)

- **Processor:** Apple A15 Bionic
- **RAM:** 4GB
- **Storage:** 128, 256 or 512GB
- **Operating system:** [iOS](#) 15
- **Camera:** dual 12MP rear cameras with OIS, 12MP front-facing camera
- **Connectivity:** 5G, wifi 6, NFC, Bluetooth 5, Lightning, ultra wideband and location
- **Water resistance:** IP68 (6 metres for 30 mins)
- **Dimensions:** 146.7mm x 71.5mm x 7.7mm
- **Weight:** 174g

## Longer battery life



The iPhone 13 takes 111 minutes to fully charge, hitting 50% in 25 minutes using the included Lightning cable and a 45W USB-C power adaptor. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

Battery life is excellent. The phone lasts about 46 hours between charges with the screen used for about five hours in that time including 90 minutes browsing on 5G, which is longer than most similarly sized rivals and [last year's model](#). That means the phone can just about make it from the morning of day one until the morning of day three if you're careful, but more likely it'll need charging every other night.

## Sustainability



The iPhone 13 contains more recycled material than previous devices and competitors. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

Apple does not provide an expected lifespan for the iPhone 13's battery but it can be [replaced for £69](#). Batteries in similar devices typically maintain at least 80% of their original capacity after 500 full charge cycles. The smartphone is generally repairable, with an out-of-warranty service [costing £426.44](#), which includes the screen. The previous iPhone 12 was awarded [six out of 10 for repairability](#) by the specialist site iFixit.

The iPhone 13 uses 98% recycled rare earth metals, 99% recycled tungsten and 35% recycled plastic in various components, plus 100% recycled tin in the solder of its main board and battery management unit. The company breaks down the [phone's environmental impact](#) in its report.

Apple also offers trade-in and free recycling schemes, including for non-Apple products.

## iOS 15



The iPhone 13 runs the same version of iOS 15 as other Apple smartphones including the iPhone 13 Pro (right). Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

The iPhone 13 ships [with iOS 15](#), which runs on all of Apple's smartphones from 2015's [iPhone 6S](#).

That [includes various newly added features](#) such as the faster, local voice interpretation for Siri, improved notifications and “focus modes” for removing distractions, plus an improved Safari browser design and FaceTime video calling with non-Apple users.

Apple provides software updates for its smartphones for longer than any other manufacturer. You can expect at least five years of software and security updates but potentially as long as seven years, so you can use the phone safely for longer.

## Camera



The camera app is one of the easiest to use with new features such as photographic styles accessed via a swipe. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

There are two improved 12-megapixel cameras on the back, one main and one ultrawide angle; there is no optical zoom.

Both cameras are bigger and let in more light than those on last year's models, which is most noticeable on the main camera. Photos in good light are detailed, crisp and well balanced even in high contrast scenes. Low light performance is greatly improved, so you need the dedicated night mode far less often while producing sharper and better balanced images. The ultrawide is a little sharper and has better low light performance too, making it more usable indoors.

The new "photographic styles" feature for still shots is great, letting you choose the balance between contrast, vibrancy and tone. Previously Apple typically favoured a warmer look compared with rivals from Google and Samsung, which you can now change beyond simply applying filters.

The iPhone is still leagues ahead on video quality. New for this year is "[cinematic mode](#)", which simulates "[rack focus](#)" where film-makers draw your attention to a person or object by switching focus to them when they

look towards the camera and blurring the foreground and background. It's a lot of fun to play with, but I can't see myself shooting a film with it.

The 12MP selfie camera is the same as on previous iPhones and is starting to show its age. It shoots good, crisp and detailed images in bright light, but struggles a little in dimmer settings such as inside a pub often resulting in softer, blurrier images.

## Observations



The camera lump protrudes a few millimetres further from the back of the phone than the previous model. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

- Call quality was excellent.
- iPhone 12 cases do not fit the iPhone 13 because the side buttons are in a slightly different position.

## Price

The iPhone 13 costs [£779 \(\\$799/A\\$1,349\)](#) with 128GB of storage, £879 (\$899/A\$1,519) for 256GB or £1,079 (\$1,099/A\$1,869) for 512GB.

For comparison, the iPhone 13 mini costs £679, the iPhone 13 Pro costs £949, the Samsung Galaxy S21+ costs £949, the OnePlus 9 costs £629 and the Galaxy Z Flip 3 costs £949.

## Verdict

The iPhone 13 keeps everything that was great about the iPhone 12, cuts £20 off the price, doubles the starting storage and adds two meaningful upgrades: longer battery life and a better camera.

That makes it one of the best phones you can buy, particularly when you take into account that you can safely use it longer than any other smartphone with in excess of five years of software support provided by Apple, plus reasonable and accessible battery replacement options.

It is not perfect – it lacks a telephoto camera and the screen is slower than rivals. It is not worth the upgrade for anyone with a recent smartphone. But for those looking to replace a three or four-year-old phone, the iPhone 13 should be very near the top of your hitlist.

**Pros:** better cameras, water resistant, Face ID, longer battery life, great performance, great screen with smaller notch, durable and easy to hold, 5G, long software support.

**Cons:** no USB-C, need your own charger, no telephoto camera, screen slower than competition and 13 Pro.



The new larger camera modules are now placed diagonally opposed.  
Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

## Other reviews

- [OnePlus 9 review: a good, well-priced top-spec smartphone](#)
- [Galaxy S21+ review: the big-screen Samsung phone for slightly less](#)
- [Galaxy Z Flip 3 review: Samsung's cheaper, better hi-tech flip phone](#)
- [Xiaomi Mi 11 review: cheaper, top-spec phone undercuts competition](#)

## Mental health

# The wonder stuff: what I learned about happiness from a month of ‘awe walks’



‘I was utterly mesmerised’ ... Bempton cliffs. Photograph: Daniel Lavelle

[Daniel Lavelle](#)

Mon 4 Oct 2021 05.00 EDT

I am in the middle of a cloud, halfway up a steep pike, and on a mission to get some awe. I am here thanks to a new study, which found that by paying close attention to our surroundings as we walk, we can get our happy chemicals pumping and enhance overall wellbeing. That sounded pretty good, so I find myself in the middle of nowhere on an oddly misty, humid day.

Dacher Keltner, a professor of psychology at the University of California, Berkeley, thinks I am in the right place. “It’s hard to think of a single thing that you can do for your mind and body that’s better than a little dose of

awe,” he says. It was Keltner and a team of researchers who published a paper that found that awe can reduce stress, help inflammation, increase creativity and sociability and make you happy. “To me, that all says we urgently need to find awe.”

Experiencing awe, Keltner says, has a host of beneficial outcomes. It helps deactivate the default mode network, the part of your brain that ticks along when you are distracted from the world around you. Keltner says this network is effectively your ego. “It’s telling you to work harder. Awe quiets that,” he says. He adds that awe stimulates the vagus nerve, which calms the body and increases openness. “There’s suggestive evidence that awe activates oxytocin release, which makes you feel more cooperative and connected. Some kinds of awe deactivate the amygdala, which is a threat-related region of the brain.”

The idea behind an awe walk, then, is that combining the known benefits of exercise with a top-up of awe will make you even happier. I don’t doubt the study’s findings, but I can imagine this research hitting social media and morphing into self-help pseudoscience that is leapt on by Insta-narcissists. I can just imagine the posts: “Look at the majesty of these nitrous oxide canisters! #Awe #Awewalk #Awesome!” But I shove this thought to the side and bravely promise to take a walk every day for a month to put the theory to the test.

Luckily, there are plenty of opportunities for awe where I live, on the doorstep of the Pennines. The only problem is that you have to drag yourself up steep pikes along boggy moorland to get to any of it. On my first attempt, my enthusiasm works against me and I bite off far more than I can chew.

For some inexplicable reason, I have decided to tackle Alphin, the tallest baby mountain in Saddleworth. (It is actually a hill.) The day is hot, but thick with the kind of grey mist depicted in schlocky fantasy novels. It is so eerie I half expect to be confronted by an aged sage warning me, through riddles, that I will meet a dragon on the hillside. (That would really be the time to hit the share button: #awewalk #Dragonawe #AWWWWWESOOOOOME.)

Disappointingly, there is no sign of an old man, or anyone – I am alone, damp, tired and fed up. It doesn't help that, for the past few months, I have moved only as much as a sloth that has let itself go. I have barely started before my lungs and legs feel as if they are cooking in acid.

Three hours later, I finally reach the summit – of sorts. Summits are on mountains; you need oxygen, a massive wallet and no sense to reach most of them. I am just an idiot on top of a hill.



'I did it! Get in!' The view from the top of Alpin pike. Photograph: Danny Lavelle

I have to admit, though: I am made up to reach it. "I did it! Get in!" I boom. I look around, embarrassed. But I am alone. And how often can you truly say that? So I take advantage and let out all my bottled-up frustrations, bugbears and gripes, like a sweary jukebox stuck on shuffle. I even throw a few Manchester United chants in for good measure. It feels great!

On the way down, I get lost and end up at Indian's Head, so named because the jagged rocks looking over Chew valley and the reservoir are supposed to resemble a feathered headdress. However, the vista from Indian's Head is also awe-inspiring. Trippy purple heather caresses weathered boulders, while wisps of cloud float through the valley. I feel the awe. I am one with

nature and nature is one with me: #aweonthehill #AWELOUDS. It is true, however, that coming down almost kills my awe – I end up shuffling down the hill on my backside – but still.

As it turns out, there was no need for this, since I hadn't followed Keltner's advice properly. His experiment had asked 60 participants to go on 15-minute ordinary strolls, which could be in their local area, and take photographs of what they saw. Apparently, with the right outlook, reverential wonder can be found anywhere. "Wherever you are, you can find a little pocket of awe – and it may have to be other people," Keltner says. What about if you live in a big city? "Well-resourced people find parks; it's harder for poorer people. I think the awe instructions help you to find it. You can think about a tree; you can plant a local garden. So, there is a lot of opportunity in less obvious places."

There are loads of trees to think about where I live, so for the rest of August I take short walks to new places or locations I haven't visited since I was a kid. I start on the Delph Donkey, a mile-long bridle path that runs behind my house. The Donkey used to be a railway track and got its name from the donkey-drawn carriages that rumbled along in Victorian times.



The path to mindfulness? The Delph Donkey. Photograph: Danny Lavelle

On the Donkey, I follow the advice in Keltner's guide, which is similar to the kind of instructions seen in mindfulness meditation apps. Conscious deep breathing, paying attention to your surroundings, limiting distractions and so on. To my surprise, the little things that I encounter every day begin to delight me: the way the leaves swirl and tumble with chaotic elegance in the breeze; the nimble hops performed by dainty robins; the wind whistling ... no, sorry, I can't lie to you. They are just walks. I stretch my legs; get fresh air. They are fine.

Awe walks seem to offer what much of our era of wellbeing fads do: focusing our minds on being present. And, if I am honest, this pining for presence strikes me as the angst of people with cosy, comfortable lives. Back when I was on the dole, with intermittent calls for crisis loans and visits to pawn shops, I had no choice but to be present.

But, determined to persevere, I decide an evening walk might offer some scope for awe. So, I venture into the woods in front of my house. As soon as I walk under the thick canopy, I am startled by a cauldron of bats. Then several high-pitched squeals pierce the darkness. They sound like screeching brakes crossed with a strangled weasel, and my fear ratchets up.

I think about using my phone's torch to shine my way out of this worsening nightmare. But then I remember that I haven't brought my phone with me. You are not allowed phones on an awe walk. You must be present and focused on what is happening. "At least I'll die undistracted," I think.

In short, I can't say that awe walking worked for me. But that is not to say my time was wasted, or that I don't believe in its power. A month earlier, I visited Bempton cliffs, home to "Seabird City", where half a million birds – gannets, skylarks, meadow pipits and adorable puffins – gather between March and October to raise their families on the North Sea coast. I was utterly mesmerised. You would have to have a swinging brick in place of a heart not to be.

But even on my less-awe inspiring walks, it is hard not to find something interesting in visiting places you haven't been to before, and that bring you closer to your environment. Keltner points this out, telling me: "I got stuck

in my patterns during Covid, and those instructions reminded me: just take a different road, just go down a slightly different path and open your mind.”

These different paths don’t have to lead to natural wonders. Your awe might be found at a cafe, pub, shop or street that you have passed for years but never visited; or in other people. “I was just on our campus here at Berkeley. Students are coming back for the first time in 18 months. I was cheering, because I was like: ‘Human social life is awesome!’ It’s amazing to see people hug and laugh and all this stuff,” says Keltner.



Local awe ... Roman ruins at Castleshaw. Photograph: Danny Lavelle

As for me, my parents have lived in the area for 30 years, yet I wasn’t aware that there was a Roman ruin a few miles away in Castleshaw. Nor did I know that, behind my house, there is an old well with a dark past: a young servant girl was found dead at the bottom of it more than 100 years ago. The inquest found it was suicide, but theories persist that she was murdered.

Even without the wonder, finding fascinating spots in your local area is pretty great. And the beauty of it is that you can give it a go anywhere, for free. Like, right now. Well, why are you still reading this? Go and get some awe. #Awegetter #awesomeawewalk #awetastic.

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/oct/04/the-wonder-stuff-what-i-learned-about-happiness-from-a-month-of-awe-walks>

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## Honest playlistMusic

# ‘I don’t play music when I have sex – maybe I should’: Michelle Visage’s honest playlist



Michelle Visage ... going to the Go-Gos again. Photograph: Suki Dhanda/The Guardian



[Elle Hunt](#)

Mon 4 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

## The first album I ever bought

At my 10th birthday party, I got not one but three copies of Andy Gibb's album Shadow Dancing. He was so hot! So sexy! But since I had three copies, I didn't need to buy it. The first one that I used my own money to buy was Kenny Rogers's The Gambler. It was No 1 on the radio, and I wanted that record.

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## My karaoke go-to

Anything by Pat Benatar: Love Is a Battlefield, We Belong – *not* Hit Me With Your Best Shot, because that's too overdone. She's one of my favourite female vocalists of all time. It's something that you can really *sing*.

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## The song I inexplicably know every lyric to

Skid Marks on My Heart by the Go-Go's. The Go-Go's changed my life. I saw them 11 times when I was young. I'm seeing them again in December. They really were the first all-girl band.

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## The last song I streamed

Jolene by Dolly Parton. It makes me happy every time I hear Dolly's voice, and the guitar at the start – I'll keep it on loop sometimes. [Miley's cover](#) is amazing.

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## The best song to have sex to

Pony by Ginuwine. It's predictable: it's the Magic Mike song. But I don't play music when I have sex. I've been married for 25 years, we're lucky if we do it. Maybe I should put it on.

Quick Guide

Saturday magazine

Show



This article comes from Saturday, [the new print magazine from the Guardian](#) which combines the best features, culture, lifestyle and travel writing in one beautiful package. Available now in the UK and ROI.

Photograph: GNM

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

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## **The song I put on at a party**

There's one song that gets everybody on the dancefloor at family parties: Celebration by Kool & The Gang. Every wedding, every party, every anything – you put on "Celebrate good times, come on!", everyone's on their feet.

---

## **The song I want played at my funeral**

I haven't thought about that, thank God! Elaine Stritch's version of I'm Still Here, from Stephen Sondheim's Follies, because I'm going to haunt my family and everybody in my life – I'm never going to leave them alone. I'm going to badger them for ever.

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## **The song I can't help singing along to**

Journey – Don't Stop Believin'. But I'm a singer, so any song that comes on I'm gonna sing.

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## **The song I pretend to hate that I secretly like**

Jersey Girl by Bruce Springsteen. I hate Bruce Springsteen because he has no voice. Every person in New Jersey is going to hate me. When I was growing up there, Bruce Springsteen was shoved down my throat and I was

like: “This guy cannot sing, I don’t get it.” But when Jersey Girl comes on, I secretly love that.

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## The song I tell people is my favourite song

I do not have a favourite song. There’s no way I could pick. That’s like when people ask me if I have a favourite musical – it’s like gay Sophie’s Choice.

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2021/oct/04/i-dont-play-music-when-i-have-sex-maybe-i-should-michelle-visages-honest-playlist>

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## 2021.10.04 - Coronavirus

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- [Live Covid: new rules for travel in England; New Zealand to phase out elimination strategy](#)
- [US Signs of encouragement as nation sees drop in Covid cases and hospitalizations](#)
- [Covid Girl, 15, dies of virus on day she was due to get vaccine](#)

## Europe holidays

# England's travel traffic-light system replaced and testing requirements to change



The beach at Izmir, Turkey, a country newly removed from the red list, making holidays more affordable. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

[Nazia Parveen](#)

[@NParveenG](#)

Mon 4 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

An overhaul of England's Covid-19 rules governing international travel will come into force from Monday 4 October, replacing the traffic-light system.

A single red list of countries will remain, with the previous green and amber countries becoming the "rest of the world" or "non-red list". There will also

be changes to the testing requirements when returning from a non-red-list country, if fully vaccinated.

From 4am on 4 October, there will no longer be a requirement for fully vaccinated travellers to take a test in the three days before their return from a non-red-list country.

Also, from the end of October, they will no longer be required to take a PCR test on day two of their arrival in England or Scotland – instead they will need to take a lateral flow test. If the lateral flow test is positive, they will need to isolate and take a confirmatory PCR test at no additional cost.

For those who are unvaccinated or not fully vaccinated, there are currently no changes to the testing or quarantine requirements. This means if they arrive in the UK from any non-red-list country, they will still need to take a pre-departure test, a PCR test on day two and day eight, and quarantine at home for 10 days. If they are arriving in England, they still have the option to use the test-to-release scheme on day five.

Requirements for arrivals in the UK from red-list countries remain the same: a pre-departure test and the pre-booking of a mandatory 11-night quarantine hotel package, which will include two PCR tests, taken on day two and day eight, whatever your vaccination status.

All travellers, regardless of their vaccination status and the country they are travelling from, will also still need to complete a passenger locator form any time in the 48 hours before they arrive in the UK.

The aim of the changes, according to the transport secretary, Grant Shapps, is to simplify rules and decrease the burden on people travelling. The new regime is expected to be fully in place in time for people returning from October half-term holidays in England.

The new rules announced apply to England. The devolved administrations are in charge of their own travel rules, but they have typically been mirroring Westminster's approach.

Aside from removing the need to take tests, the change in rules means the overall cost of travel will be cheaper. Test providers have typically charged £60 for PCR tests and £30 for lateral flow tests.

The removal of popular destinations such as Turkey from the red list will also make holidays more affordable. Having to quarantine in a hotel after returning to the UK comes at a cost of £2,285 for a single person and £1,430 for additional people over the age of 11.

Over the weekend rumours began to circulate that prime minister Boris Johnson would open up more countries for hotel quarantine-free travel later this week. The Sunday Telegraph reported that the UK's red list of destinations would be slashed to nine from 54.

Fully vaccinated arrivals from countries including Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico and South Africa would no longer have to quarantine in a government-designated hotel for 10 days when they get to England from later in October, the newspaper said.

More changes to travel rules are expected to be announced on Thursday.

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[Coronavirus live](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

## Covid live: Kremlin pleads for people to get jab – as it happened

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## Coronavirus

# Signs of encouragement as US sees drop in Covid cases and hospitalizations



San Francisco's famous cable cars returned to service in September after many months on pause because of Covid. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

*Eric Berger*

Mon 4 Oct 2021 05.00 EDT

The United States has seen a dramatic drop in the number of Covid-19 cases and hospitalizations in recent weeks, a trend that epidemiologists see as an encouraging sign that the Delta wave of the virus has peaked nationally.

The seven-day average of daily new cases in America dropped from about 151,000 on 14 September to about 106,000 on 29 September, a 29% decrease, according to [data](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The number of people admitted to the hospital with Covid-19, who at the peak of the Delta surge filled some intensive care units to capacity, has followed a similar downward [trajectory](#) in recent weeks.

Still, while those experts said they do not expect another surge as big as previous ones during the pandemic, they emphasized the virus remains a significant threat due to the large number of people who have not been vaccinated and the risk of a new variant, possibly even emerging from the unvaccinated population.

“Will the next surges be as big as this current one? It’s not likely, but it’s possible,” said Michael Osterholm, director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota. “When you have 70 million people left who have not been [vaccinated](#), many of whom have not yet been infected, that’s a lot of human wood for this coronavirus human forest fire to burn.”

America’s vaccination rate has slowed at a rate below many of its industrialized peers where the vaccine is widely available. Reasons vary, but are a mix of rightwing and religious opposition and skepticism, fears over safety, and concerns from communities of color wary of previous racist treatment by American healthcare institutions.

The downward trend can be attributed to increased immunity in the US population because of vaccination or natural infection and because of behavior change, such as people again wearing masks and avoiding travel or the large gatherings that they participated in before the recent surge, said Jennifer Nuzzo, an epidemiologist at Johns Hopkins University.

“We saw that as we relaxed everything at the end of June and July, then we saw another surge, partially attributable to Delta but also behaviors changed, and people went back to living in pre-Covid ways,” said Nuzzo.

Still, while there has been relief across much of the country, seven states have seen at least a 14% increase in Covid-19 cases over the last two weeks, according to [data](#) compiled by the New York Times.

That includes Maine and North Dakota, which have seen 29% and 25% increases during that period. The hardest hit appears to be Alaska, which has experienced a 75% increase in cases. Two of its hospitals have had to start rationing care, the Associated Press [reported](#).

Bill Hanage, an epidemiologist at the Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health, said this year was following a similar trend to last fall, when Covid-19 surged through the south and then through more sparsely populated parts of the country.

“The difference this year is that spread is going to be impeded – or not – by vaccination,” said Hanage.

Ali H Mokdad, professor of health metrics sciences at the University of Washington, projects that the number of cases will eventually start to go up again in winter because of the unvaccinated, seasonality – with the weather getting colder and people gathering indoors rather than outdoors – and waning immunity among those who are vaccinated.

The size of that increase could be determined by whether more people get vaccinated – though that rate has largely plateaued – and by how people behave during Thanksgiving and Christmas.

“If Americans wear masks, we will not see a surge this winter,” said Mokdad. “So basically if we all take the vaccine and wear a mask, we could have a very close to normal winter.”

There is also an ongoing worry about a variant emerging that can evade the vaccines, Mokdad said.

Still, he and the other epidemiologists do not expect that we will again see a surge like August, when more than 100,000 people were [hospitalized](#) across the country.

“Mortality could start going up, but it will never reach the level that we had seen during the summer surge or during the last winter surge because the vaccines have been effective in preventing hospitalizations and deaths,” said Mokdad.

Despite that promising assessment, the virus experts were not ready to make predictions as to when life will return to normal.

“It’s not really fully answerable by science. It’s also about people’s comfort,” said Nuzzo, the Johns Hopkins epidemiologist. “One of the challenges for me in sorting through all this data is I actually don’t know what the off ramps are” from Covid precautions. “We haven’t defined that as a country.”

Osterholm, the University of Minnesota epidemiologist, thinks that “people are feeling like this is the end, [but] we’re vaccinating very few people for the first dose,” he said. “There will be more to come.”

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## Coronavirus

# Girl, 15, dies of Covid on day she was due to get vaccine



Jorja Halliday: her mother said she was a ‘loving girl’ and a talented kickboxer and aspiring musician. Photograph: PA

*[Alexandra Topping](#) and agency*

Sat 2 Oct 2021 18.15 EDT

A 15-year-old girl who tested positive for Covid-19 has died on the day she was due to have her vaccine, her family said.

Jorja Halliday, from Portsmouth, died at the Queen Alexandra hospital on Tuesday, having tested positive for the virus four days earlier.

Her mother, Tracey Halliday, 40, said that the GCSE student at the Portsmouth Academy was a “loving girl” with lots of friends, a talented kickboxer and an aspiring musician.

Halliday said: “She was very active, she liked to go out and spend time with her friends and loved spending time with her brothers and sisters.

“Growing up, she turned into a beautiful young lady, always wanting to help others, always there for everybody. It’s heart-wrenching because your kids are always meant to outlive you, and that’s the one thing I can’t get over.”

Halliday said that Jorja’s siblings were devastated.

She said that Jorja, who did not have any underlying health conditions, had developed flu-like symptoms before she took the PCR test that gave a positive result, leading to her isolating at their home.

Jorja was struggling to eat on Sunday and by Monday she could not eat at all because of her throat hurting.

A doctor prescribed antibiotics, but Jorja’s condition worsened and she was seen by a doctor who said her heart rate was double what it should be and she was taken to hospital.

Halliday said: “They realised how serious it was and I was still allowed to touch her, hold her hand, hug her and everything else. They did allow me that. I’m at the point where I can’t comprehend that it’s happened.

“I was with her the whole time. They tried to put her on a ventilator to give her body a chance to recover. Her heart rate didn’t stabilise. Her heart couldn’t take the strain. They worked as well as I think they could medically, but were unable to save her.”

Preliminary results from the hospital’s medical examiner indicated Jorja had Covid myocarditis, heart inflammation caused by the virus. Halliday explained that Jorja had been booked to have a jab on Tuesday, but had tested positive the Saturday before. She had been planning to get the jab once the isolation period was over, but died on the day she had been scheduled to have the vaccine.

Halliday said: “She had the best of care, I know that they did everything they could to save her.”

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## 2021.10.04 - Opinion

- Is it really so radical to say the police aren't fit for purpose?
- The responsibility is on police to restore trust in their ability to protect women
- At my first live concert in 18 months, songs about divorce have never felt so joyful
- The universal credit cut is the end point of years of 'welfare' cruelty

## OpinionPolice

# Is it really so radical to say the police aren't fit for purpose?

Nesrine Malik



A message among the floral tributes to Sarah Everard on Clapham Common, London, in March. Photograph: Leon Neal/Getty Images

Mon 4 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

More people are beginning to see it. Not clearly, but something is coming into view. When a policeman, known to colleagues as "[the rapist](#)", murders a woman after luring her with his police credentials, when another has an [exploitative relationship](#) undercover, when two officers take and [share pictures](#) of dead women, something begins to confront us, no matter how much we would like to look away.

It's clearly more than "one bad apple", it's clearly not just the usual level of violence against women that we've come to accept as background noise, it

clearly happens often enough for it to raise questions about the police force itself. These questions aren't about police failure – failure suggests the system is trying to prevent these incidents but not succeeding.

Instead, we should be asking what it is about policing that seems to encourage these violations? Whether the police, perhaps, are not merely a reflection of society's ills but built to uphold them? What if these people are not just harming us occasionally, but not serving their primary function of protecting us at all?

Once we start asking these questions, we begin to see not who the police serve, but who they harm. The answer is, a lot of people. We can conduct a quick experiment to test where you land on either side of this divide. If you see a policeman, police car or group of police officers, do you feel safer or slightly on edge?

If your reaction is the former, then you are fortunate. If it is the latter, you join the thousands of black, brown, Asian and minority-ethnic people, working-class people, and women, who have been assaulted, framed, given overly long sentences and criminalised for petty offences. Policing has not lost its way, but is functioning exactly in the way it was designed to do – to wield disproportionate, coercive power to maintain a social order that protects the powerful and victimises the weak.

Since its beginning, the primary purpose of Anglo-European policing was to exert control and quell uprisings by those demanding rights – be they sovereign, racial or economic – and protect those with land, property and wealth. The world may have changed since the days of British “bobbies” suppressing Irish republicanism, and escaped-slave-hunting militias in the US, but the mentality and structure of those institutions endures.

We see it in the excessive policing of protests from [Occupy Wall Street](#) to [Black Lives Matter marches](#). We see it in how [antisocial behaviour orders](#) were used to criminalise begging and prostitution. We see it in the [militarisation](#) of police forces, with hi-tech weapons and intelligence tactics used against civilians.

That is not to deny there are many police officers who are on the right side. But once these historical strands are bound together, they cannot be pulled apart by the resignation of the Metropolitan police commissioner, Cressida Dick, or harsh sentences for perpetrators. Even when we recognise the extent of the problem, we still fall short. When we say the police are plagued by “[structural racism](#)” or “structural misogyny”, we inadvertently obscure, rather than reveal, the real scale of the problem. The problem is not structural, it is fundamental, foundational even.

In her book, *Becoming Abolitionists*, the lawyer and activist Derecka Purnell explains how the biggest supporters of police abolition are the police’s first victims, those in the neighbourhoods that need protection the most. “When people come across police abolition for the first time,” she writes, “they tend to dismiss abolitionists for not caring about neighbourhood safety or the victims of violence. They tend to forget that often, we are those victims, those survivors of violence.”

Abolition sounds like a radical and impossible proposition. But if you have recently started thinking that things cannot continue the way they are, then you are contemplating not reform but some form of abolition. A drastic change that rethinks policing, so as to make it less open to abuses of power but also more effective, starts to seem less radical and more unavoidable.

But the next step is the hardest. What does a world with no, or a different, form of security look like? We do not allow ourselves to think there is any alternative to how we are policed because for too long this has simply been the way it is. We are paralysed by a lack of vision of what a fair and accountable system would look like. And so we are left frustrated by the knowledge that our angry demands for inquiries or resignations will not solve the problem, and lack the language to ask for more. The closest we have come is the demand to “[defund the police](#)” after the death of George Floyd – a call not to invest in more policing, but instead to give resources to community and public health schemes to address the social ills that can lead to crime.

Change did not happen after [Stephen Lawrence](#), and it will not happen after [Sarah Everard](#). We are resigned to the fact that innocent people get hurt. We

are more willing to contemplate a world in which women simply must get better at judging which police officers are safe and which are a threat, than consider the possibility that policing needs replacing with something altogether different. No small reform will save the next woman. We must allow ourselves to be confronted by that fact. The truly impossible future is that things continue as they are.

- Nesrine Malik is a Guardian columnist
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## OpinionPolice

# The responsibility is on police to restore trust in their ability to protect women

Nicole Jacobs



Met police commissioner Cressida Dick speaks after the sentencing of Wayne Couzens. Photograph: Vuk Valcic/SOPA Images/Rex/Shutterstock

Sun 3 Oct 2021 10.53 EDT

Being a police officer comes with a badge of trust. That trust was ruthlessly abused and betrayed by [Wayne Couzens](#), leaving us all reeling with horror, rage and sadness. Despite some protestations, this is not about one bad apple, but instead about institutional misogyny within our police forces and a wider failure to tackle violence and domestic abuse against women and girls.

As the [domestic abuse commissioner](#), I hear from survivors every day who feel let down by the police and criminal justice system. Even before recent

events there was a persistent lack of confidence among women who have experienced domestic abuse and sexual assault to come forward, to report, and to support prosecutions to bring offenders to justice.

Hundreds of reports of domestic abuse are made against serving police officers every year but the number who face criminal action or misconduct hearings is far, far too small. In total, the Bureau of Investigative Journalism uncovered nearly [700 reports of domestic abuse](#) by police officers across the UK in the three years to 2018 – averaging more than four a week. Fewer than one in 10 reports resulted in a dismissal or warning. Only 3.9% in England and Wales resulted in a conviction – that's compared to 6.2% among the general public, which is itself deeply problematic. Figures from the Femicide Census show that at least [15 serving or former police officers](#) have killed women in the UK since 2009.

Senior officers say this type of conduct has absolutely no place within policing. It is abundantly clear that we need to see a zero-tolerance approach to domestic abuse within police ranks, and that no perpetrator should be a serving police officer. Clearly, there are far more good officers than bad but it's plain that many abusers aren't being dealt with properly, and we have heard reports of officers closing ranks and ignoring victims' needs.

That problem can only be overcome by having a system in place that protects victim confidentiality and where investigations are handled externally. Unless there is a very good reason, when an allegation is made against an officer, it should immediately be sent to a neighbouring force to investigate – independent enough to do a proper investigation and near enough to facilitate local support services for the complainant.

More broadly there is no doubt the police must rebuild trust with women and girls who don't feel safe on the streets or in their homes. But how can the police do this? Asking people to challenge lone plain-clothed police officers is not the answer. The onus should never be on the public to keep themselves safe from those in positions of power. Instead, what we need is action. The police need to take responsibility for building trust with the public and demonstrate clearly that these crimes are a top priority.

The police have ample recommendations to work from. A [recent report](#) by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services couldn't have been clearer about the [epidemic of violence against women and girls](#). It called for it to be treated as seriously as terrorism. The report, written by Zoe Billingham, outlined the need for urgent improvements in policing, but also for far-reaching fundamental and radical change.

The police, crime, sentencing and courts bill going through the Lords, provides the perfect opportunity to do this. It contains a proposed new serious violence prevention duty, which requires a range of public bodies such as the police, health authorities and probation services to work together to prevent and tackle serious violence.

This could provide a concrete chance to implement an early intervention, public health focused approach to tackling serious violent crime, rather than relying on traditional criminal justice solutions, which only come into play after an offence has been committed. But, as the bill currently stands, the definition of serious violence in the prevention duty does not explicitly include domestic abuse, domestic homicide or sexual violence.

Instead local areas are left to decide whether to include these crimes in their new serious violence prevention strategies, resulting in a postcode lottery for women and girls. If the government does accept Gabby Bertin's [amendment](#) to explicitly include domestic abuse, domestic homicide and sexual violence, it will be sending out a clear message to the public and the police that violence against women and girls is not acceptable and won't be tolerated.

Trust in the police has been badly damaged. Now we need to see swift action. The safety of women and girls depends on it.

- Nicole Jacobs is the domestic abuse commissioner for England and Wales

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[OpinionPop and rock](#)

## **At my first live concert in 18 months, songs about divorce have never felt so joyful**

[Rick Burin](#)



Martha Wainwright at the Union Chapel in London. Photograph: Lorne Thomson/Redferns

Mon 4 Oct 2021 04.00 EDT

We are all returning from the restrictions of the pandemic at different speeds. To seeing friends, to seeing art, to the office, to obligations. We may put those priorities in different orders, but it is a constant weighing: is this venture into crowds worth the risk? Is *this*? In my life, live music looms large. Now it is worth it again.

On a recent Monday evening, a mere 557 days since [I had last been to a concert](#), I returned to gigs. Finally I was back where I am most content: in this case, London’s Union Chapel, waiting for the voice of Canadian singer-songwriter Martha Wainwright to shatter the tedium of a Covid-era evening.

This Islington venue is a jewel: architecturally, artistically. Photos from gigs here exhibit a blissful continuity, each visiting cultural titan dwarfed by that gargantuan stained-glass window. As the Royal Albert Hall’s senior press manager, I would be trashing my career if I called this my favourite venue, but let’s just say that it’s my favourite venue I’m not contractually obliged to promote.

It certainly offers a singular gig-going experience. Pay your extra £25 a year to be a member, and advance entry means you can nab a cushion, buy a hot chocolate from the kiosk and go and sit on the front row of the wooden pews.

When I arrive with a friend, we find that this wholesome ritual has, of course, been exploded by Covid. Entry is grimly rigorous, the kiosk is closed, and only an idiot would think you could still borrow a communal cushion during a pandemic. Anyway, they asked me to put it back, and I apologised.

Since the bar upstairs was shut, we simply sat in place, talking through masks, until the support act came on. They were called Bernice and seemed to be interested in all the genres at once: to the uninitiated, it sounded like each band member was playing a different song. But halfway through the set – on a new track, *Are You Breathing?* – everything came together, and by the time they closed we had been won over completely.

Having waited 18 months to experience live music again, it seemed fitting that fate and [Martha Wainwright](#) should dictate that the ones breaking the silence be a Canadian indie-jazz-R&B-pop band we’d never heard of before. That’s one erratic virtue of the gig experience: the roulette of the supporting act.

There was a moment in the lull between sets when an audience member exploded into coughs, and the little voice in my head muttered: “Oh shit.”

But next my ear was caught by the techs tuning a double-bass over the sound of piped-in funk. And I just felt privileged to be there. That feeling endured. The background music stopped. The lights dimmed. The hubbub cut suddenly to silence. And there was that single, shared moment of realisation, before the tumult commenced. As Wainwright strode to centre stage, the wave reached its crest. “You’re gonna make me cry, and we haven’t even started,” she said.

Wainwright exemplifies live music’s central appeal: its narcotic escapism and capacity for emotional release. The scion of two legendary folk families, renowned for her starkly confessional songs, she truly comes alive on stage, her vocal gymnastics and tortured physicality a frequent vehicle for fury and pain. But while she will spin Leonard Cohen’s [Chelsea Hotel # 2](#) into a work of violent retribution, the main order of the night is simple. It is joy. Though the new album she is touring, [Love Will Be Reborn](#), is about her divorce, we are all so happy – Martha included.

In an interview the next day, I ask her about the atmosphere. “You could feel how much people were yearning,” she says. “What I’ve missed most is the emotional arc of a show. I was nervous, and rushed the first couple of songs, but after a few I started feeling at ease – and then the happiness kicked in. It was an unusually joyous night. This city’s been through a lot, and there was this celebratory feeling – that we are not out of the woods yet, but a better time is starting.”

For me, it is mostly about the music – but not entirely. There is something unexpectedly affecting here, too: the artificiality of the stage smoke; that white light and haze. We have lived too much in the real world of late, or perhaps not in it at all. And, while I have always gone to gigs for the connection to the artist, now the crowd matters so much. When Wainwright sings Falaise de Malaise at the piano, in French, and the final notes disappear, someone off to our right coos: “That’s *beautiful*.”

Many of us will have had confused feelings about returning to things that were, 18 or so months ago, unquestioned parts of life. My first gig back was not the same as before. Not quite. We sat there, out of practice in a crowd, exhausted from pandemic life, our cheers slightly muffled by masks. But

then the sound, the stagecraft, this artist's articulation of our half-realised thoughts returned to sweep us up again. We were lost in the music, and we could forget everything else.

- Rick Burin is a writer and senior press manager at the Royal Albert Hall
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[\*\*Opinion\*\*](#)[\*\*Universal credit\*\*](#)

## The universal credit cut is the end point of years of ‘welfare’ cruelty

[John Harris](#)



Illustration: Matt Kenyon/The Guardian

Sun 3 Oct 2021 09.00 EDT

Here it comes. This Wednesday, the Department for Work and Pensions will finally [end the £20-a-week “uplift”](#) to universal credit introduced in March 2020. The cut will hit different households at different times, but it will formally arrive on the same day that Boris Johnson gives his big Conservative party conference speech in Manchester, which is sure to be full of boosterish talk about “levelling up”, the new global Britain – and, if recent [announcements](#) are anything to go by, the supposed prospect of a country that cannot currently feed itself becoming a major player in space exploration. On Earth, by contrast, millions of people’s sudden loss of [£86.67 a month](#) will inevitably trigger increases in debt, evictions and quiet, grinding want.

The surrounding picture only makes the cut look more cruel. Last week, the government’s furlough scheme came to an [end](#), triggering fears of new redundancies and even more people being loaded into a benefits system that makes basic subsistence all but impossible. We all know about rising energy prices and [food inflation](#). What the cut in universal credit will mean for lives already upturned by the pandemic hardly needs explaining; among other issues, in the midst of a [crisis of childhood mental health](#), a change predicted to increase child poverty by [nearly 300,000](#) children looks both reckless and nasty.

Yet the government machine speeds on. Last weekend, the transport minister, Grant Shapps, [said](#) the cut was happening “as we move back to people going back to work and more normal times”. The labour shortage is part of the mood music here, as if an abundance of opportunity awaits anyone who fears the breadline, when in reality the sectors short of workers – haulage, food-processing, hospitality – are often built around shifts and hours that rule most people out. And in any case, when [40%](#) of people on universal credit are already in employment, “back to work” is an idiotic mantra indeed.

In his interview with Andrew Marr today Johnson insisted that the uplift was one of a package of Covid measures that are “no longer appropriate”. But

behind the public intransigence, anxiety about the consequences of the cut is now swirling around Whitehall. The Department for Work and Pensions is said to [be in talks with the Treasury](#) about reducing universal credit's so-called taper rate (at which benefits are cut for every additional pound earned from work, meaning that making up the lost £20 necessitates earning at least another £54) from 63p to 60p, which would hardly compensate for the imminent loss. Last Thursday, the government, belatedly responding to months of warnings about the cut's effects, announced a new [household support fund](#), which will apparently be administered by local councils. It is apparently aimed at "those most in need as we enter the final stages of recovery", and offers help with such necessities as "food, clothing, and utilities", but its inadequacies are obvious.

The annual impact of the cut will be around £6bn, but the fund totals £500m. It replaces a basic entitlement with a rationed, discretionary system, suddenly loaded on to local authorities starved of staff and resources. Note also that one of the most ingrained features of life on the social edge is the necessity of endlessly fighting your way through great tangles of form-filling and phone calls, and the chief effect of this move will be to increase it.

And so to the politics of all this. Particularly during the first lockdown, hopes briefly rose of a kinder, less punitive kind of welfare state, and the "uplift" seemed to indicate that even at the top of the government, some understanding of the impossibility of life for millions of people had sunk in. Now we see the most awful kind of rewinding. The pandemic has evidently not shifted the basics of benefits policy, and we are where we ever were: people who need help endlessly being kicked around, while politicians crow about the character-building wonders of work, and present an inhuman, endlessly "conditional" system as being simply what the public wants.

But I wonder. The idea of the benefits system as a grudging last resort for people who have to be stopped from milking it ("welfare", as opposed to the postwar idea of social security) is getting old now. To some extent, it has its roots in the New Labour years, with Tony Blair's push on what he called "[welfare to work](#)", and the kind of messages put out by his successor (it is good to see Gordon Brown [saying](#) that the cut is "the most morally indefensible thing I've seen in politics", but worth remembering such

[headlines](#) as “Gordon Brown to crack down on benefit cheats in Queen’s speech”). The stage was thus set for David Cameron and George Osborne’s cynical distinctions between workers and mere claimants, and the way that the then Work and Pensions secretary, Iain Duncan Smith, introduced universal credit amid a drive to [cut benefits spending](#), and an array of brutal changes: the hugely increased [stopping](#) of people’s benefits, the arbitrary and stupid benefit cap, disgraced [work capability assessments](#), the [bedroom tax](#). The system was by now inherently punitive: give or take the softening of some rules as the pandemic took hold, this is where we have been ever since.

But as the cruelties were ratcheted up – not least for disabled people – there was an inevitable pushback. An array of social media [voices](#) and [bloggers](#) have done amazing work shining light on seemingly endless iniquities and outrages. The number of food banks began to hugely increase around a decade ago: they may be open to allegations that they have normalised hunger, but they also give poverty a visibility and urgency – and, via things as mundane as public food-collection points, a nagging presence in everyday life. The concept – and awful reality – of “[holiday hunger](#)” started to get attention around 2014. Last year, the work done by the [footballer Marcus Rashford](#) on the same issue marked a big shift; now, his loud opposition to the universal credit cut only underlines the fact that, thanks largely to non-politicians, questions about poverty and benefits can no longer be pushed to the margins.

In a political mainstream too often dominated by ideas about “welfare”, there are reasons for guarded hope. How Keir Starmer’s talk about a “[contribution society](#)” (in which life chances will apparently be decided on the basis of “hard work and how you contribute”) will manifest itself in policy is something that needs to be vigilantly watched – but his party is [committed to replacing universal credit](#) with “a better system”, changing the “perverse” taper system, and scrapping both the two-child limit on child benefits and the benefit cap.

In Brighton last week, the Greater Manchester mayor, Andy Burnham, wandered around the conference fringe making the case for a [universal basic income](#). A repentant Stephen Crabb, Duncan Smith’s short-lived Tory

successor at the DWP, [says](#) that the idea that “if you can only just make welfare that bit tougher … you’ll get better engagement with the labour market” has no basis in the evidence; Cameron’s former speechwriter [says](#) that the cut to universal credit “will be felt in countless domestic catastrophes and indignities”. Maybe, just maybe, the kind of thinking that has ruined so many lives is slowly falling apart, but there is a characteristic cruelty in one inescapable fact – that it is going to take even more suffering and pain to quicken its demise.

- John Harris is a Guardian columnist
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## 2021.10.04 - Around the world

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## [China](#)

# US condemns China for ‘provocative’ aircraft sorties into Taiwan defence zone



The US urged China to ‘cease its military, diplomatic, and economic pressure and coercion against Taiwan’. Photograph: Jin Danhua/AP

*Helen Davidson in Taipei, and Agence France-Presse*

[@heldavidson](#)

Sun 3 Oct 2021 23.33 EDT

The United States has condemned China for “provocative” and “destabilising” military activity after Beijing sent nearly 100 fighter jets and bombers into Taiwan’s air defence zone over three consecutive days.

“The United States is very concerned by the People’s Republic of China’s provocative military activity near Taiwan, which is destabilising, risks miscalculations, and undermines regional peace and stability,” US state department spokesman Ned Price said in a statement.

“We urge Beijing to cease its military, diplomatic, and economic pressure and coercion against Taiwan.”

Beijing marked its National Day [on Friday](#) with its biggest aerial show of force against Taiwan to date, buzzing the self-ruled democratic island with 38 warplanes, including nuclear-capable H-6 bombers.

That was followed by a new record incursion on Saturday by 39 planes, and at least 16 more on Sunday, said Taiwan, which accused Beijing of “bullying” and “damaging regional peace”.

“It’s evident that the world, the international community, rejects such behaviours by China more and more,” Taiwan’s premier, Su Tseng-chang, told reporters on Saturday.

Foreign minister, Joseph Wu, [who has repeatedly said Taiwan would appreciate international intelligence and security assistance](#) – but has not specifically requested military involvement – said the incursions were “threatening”.

Democratic Taiwan’s 23 million people live under the threat of invasion by China, which views the island as its territory and has vowed to one day seize it, by force if necessary.

Beijing has ramped up pressure on Taipei since the 2016 election of president Tsai Ing-wen, who has said she views the island as “already independent” and not part of a “one China”.

Under president Xi Jinping, Chinese warplanes are crossing into Taiwan’s air defence identification zone (ADIZ) with increasing frequency.

In the past two years Beijing has begun sending large sorties into Taiwan’s ADIZ on a near-daily basis, often to signal dissatisfaction at key moments – and to keep Taipei’s ageing fighter fleet regularly stressed.

Various analyses of flight data have also shown increasing use of the nuclear-capable H-6 bombers in the Taiwan-targeting flights.

With the recent activity in the Taiwanese ADIZ, I plotted out the last ~3 months' worth of incursions, with data grouped by week. This shows a pattern leading up to the last few days. Data sourced from [@MoNDefense](#). [pic.twitter.com/n0sACNf7YZ](https://pic.twitter.com/n0sACNf7YZ)

— Amelia (@ameliairheart) [October 2, 2021](#)

Xi has described Taiwan becoming part of the mainland as “inevitable”. The Global Times, a hawkish state-backed tabloid which publishes in English, on Sunday described the weekend sorties as a demonstration of “the strong ability of the PLA to form a wartime air attack”.

“The increase in the number of aircraft showed the PLA Air Force’s operational capabilities,” it said in an editorial.

“The PLA is forming a siege of Taiwan with a show of strength as it did in Beijing in 1949. There is no doubt about the future of the situation across the Taiwan Straits. The initiative of when and how to solve the Taiwan question is firmly in the hands of the Chinese mainland.”

US military officials have begun to talk openly about fears that China could consider the previously unthinkable and invade. While there is broad consensus that China will make a move on Taiwan, [the timing and nature of such action is strongly debated](#) among analysts and government figures.

Protection of Taiwan has become a rare bipartisan issue in Washington and a growing number of western nations [such as Britain](#) have begun joining the United States in “freedom of navigation” exercises to push back on China’s claims to the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait.

Price reiterated that the United States would “continue to assist Taiwan in maintaining a sufficient self-defence capability”.

“The US commitment to Taiwan is rock solid and contributes to the maintenance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and within the region,” he said.

Last month senior government ministers at the annual US and Australian ministerial consultation (Ausmin) stated mutual intent to “strengthen ties with Taiwan”, which they described as a “leading democracy and a critical partner for both countries”.

It came just days after the announcement of a new trilateral security deal between Australia, the UK, and the US (Aukus), aimed at countering China’s aggression, which prompted questions in London over the UK’s potential involvement in war. Prime minister Boris Johnson did not rule out UK action should China invade or attack Taiwan.

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## [Afghanistan](#)

# Civilians killed in deadliest Kabul attack since US withdrawal



Taliban stand guard near the scene of the blast in Kabul. Photograph: EPA

*Associated Press in Kabul*

Sun 3 Oct 2021 12.46 EDT

At least five civilians have been killed in a bomb blast at the entrance to a Kabul mosque on Sunday, a [Taliban](#) official said, the deadliest attack in the Afghan capital since US forces left at the end of August.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility, but suspicion fell on [Islamic State](#) extremists, who have stepped up attacks on the Taliban in recent weeks, particularly in the IS stronghold in eastern Afghanistan.

It is believed that a roadside bomb went off at the gate of the sprawling Eidgah mosque in Kabul when a memorial service was being held for the

mother of the Taliban's chief spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid. Five people were killed, said Qari Saeed Khosti, a spokesman for the interior ministry

Three suspects were arrested, said Bilal Karimi, another Taliban spokesman. Taliban fighters were not harmed in the attack, he said.

An Italian-funded emergency hospital in Kabul tweeted that it had received four people wounded in the blast.

The area around the mosque was cordoned off by the Taliban, who maintained a heavy security presence. Later in the afternoon the site was cleaned. Afterwards the only signs of the blast was slight damage to the ornamental arch by the entrance gate.

The explosion underlined the growing challenges facing the Taliban just weeks after they took control of [Afghanistan](#) in a blitz campaign, culminating in their takeover of Kabul on 15 August.

During their 20-year insurgency, the Taliban frequently carried out bombing and shooting attacks, but they are now faced with trying to contain rival militants who are using the same methods. The growing security challenges come at a time of economic meltdown, as the Taliban struggle to run the country without the massive foreign aid given to the US-backed government that they toppled.

IS militants have stepped up attacks against the Taliban since their mid-August takeover, signalling a widening conflict between them. IS maintains a strong presence in the eastern province of Nangarhar, where it has claimed responsibility for several killings in the provincial capital of Jalalabad.

In late August an IS suicide bomber targeted American evacuation efforts at Kabul's international airport. The blast killed 169 Afghans and 13 US service members, and was one of the deadliest attacks in the country in years.

Attacks in Kabul have so far been rare, but in recent weeks IS has shown signs it is expanding its footprint beyond the east and closer toward the capital. On Friday Taliban fighters raided an IS hideout just north of Kabul

in Parwan province. The raid came after an IS roadside bomb wounded four Taliban fighters in the area.

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[The Observer Afghanistan](#)

## Inside the CIA's secret Kabul base, burned out and abandoned in haste



The burnt-out remains of cars, minibuses and armoured vehicles at the CIA secret base. Photograph: Emma Graham-Harrison/The Observer



[Emma Graham-Harrison](#) in Kabul

Sun 3 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

The cars, minibuses and armoured vehicles that the CIA used to run its shadow war in [Afghanistan](#) had been lined up and incinerated beyond identification before the Americans left. Below their ashy grey remains, pools of molten metal had solidified into permanent shiny puddles as the blaze cooled.

The faux Afghan village where they trained paramilitary forces linked to some of the worst human rights abuses of the war had been brought down on itself. Only a high concrete wall still loomed over the crumpled piles of mud and beams, once used to practise for the widely hated night raids on civilian homes.

The vast ammunition dump had been blown up. Many ways to kill and maim human beings, from guns to grenades, mortars to heavy artillery, laid out in three long rows of double-height shipping containers, were reduced to shards of twisted metal. The blast from the huge detonation, which came soon after the bloody bomb at Kabul airport, shook and terrified the capital city.

All formed part of the [CIA](#) compound that for 20 years was the dark, secret heart of America's "war on terror", a place where some of the worst abuses to sour the mission in Afghanistan would fester.

The sprawling hillside compound, spread over two square miles north-east of the airport, became infamous early on in the conflict for torture and murder at its "Salt Pit" prison, codenamed Cobalt by the CIA. The men held there called it the "dark prison", because there was no light in their cells, the only occasional illumination coming from the headlamps of their guards.



Taliban special forces show journalists around the abandoned compound.  
Photograph: Emma Graham-Harrison/The Observer

It was here that [Gul Rahman](#) died of hypothermia in 2002 after he was chained to a wall half-naked and left overnight in freezing temperatures. His death prompted the first formal CIA guidelines on interrogation under a new regime of torture, eviscerated in a 2014 report that found that the abuse did not provide useful intelligence.

The base has for two decades been a closely guarded secret, visible only in satellite photos, navigated by the testimony of survivors. Now the Taliban's special forces have moved in and recently, briefly, opened up the secret compound to journalists.

“We want to show how they wasted all these things that could have been used to build our country,” said Mullah Hassanain, a commander in the Taliban’s elite 313 unit, who led the tour of destroyed and burnt-out compounds, “burn pits” and incinerated cars, buses and armoured military vehicles.

Taliban special forces include suicide attackers who recently marched through Kabul to celebrate seizing the capital. Vehicles now emblazoned with their official “suicide squadron” logo escorted journalists around the former CIA base.

It was a grimly ironic juxtaposition of the most cruel and ruthless units on both sides of this war, a reminder of the suffering inflicted on civilians by all combatants in the name of higher goals, over several decades.

“They are martyrdom seekers who were responsible for the attacks on important locations of invaders and the regime. They now have control of important locations,” said a Taliban official, when asked why suicide squads were escorting journalists, and if they would continue to operate. “It is a very big battalion. It is responsible for the security of important locations. They will be expanded and further organised. Whenever there is a need, they will respond. They are always ready for sacrifices for our country and the defence of our people.”

They planned to use the CIA base for their own military training, Hassanain said, so this brief glimpse of the compound is likely to be both the first and last time the media is allowed in.



The sprawling hillside base near Kabul airport became infamous for its Salt Pit prison. Photograph: Emma Graham-Harrison/The Observer

The men guarding it had already changed into the tiger-stripe camouflage of the old Afghan National Directorate of Security, the spy agency once in charge of hunting them down.

The paramilitary units that operated here, based in barracks just near the site of the former Salt Pit jail, included some that were among the most feared in the country, mired in allegations of abuse that included extrajudicial killings of children and other civilians. The barracks had been abandoned so fast that the men who lived there left food half-finished, and barracks floors were littered with possessions spilled out of emptied lockers, cleared in an apparent frenzy.

Mostly they had taken or destroyed anything with names, or ranks, but there were 01 patches, and one book that was filled with handwritten notes from weeks of training.

Nearby, the site of the Salt Pit jail had apparently been razed a few months earlier. [A New York Times](#) satellite investigation found that, since spring, a cluster of buildings inside this part of the CIA compound had been levelled.

Taliban officials said they did not have any details about the Salt Pit, or what had happened to the former jail. Rahman's family are [still searching for his body](#), which has never been returned to them.

Other torture techniques recorded at the site included "rectal feeding", shackling prisoners to bars overhead, and depriving inmates of toilet "privileges", leaving them naked or wearing adult diapers.

Construction equipment was abandoned on the site, with concrete slabs half poured. Next door, a building that had once been fortified with high-tech doors and equipment had apparently been firebombed, its interior as totally destroyed and reduced to ash as the cars outside.

Destroying sensitive equipment at the base would have been complex, and there was evidence of several burn pits where everything from medical kits and a manual on leadership was put to the flames, along with larger pieces of equipment.

The Taliban officials were jumpy about letting journalists into areas that had not been officially cleared. They had found several booby trap bombs in the rubble of the camp, Hassanain said, and were worried that there might be more.

For days, helicopters ferried hundreds of people from the base to inside the airport, where men from the 01 force – aware they were likely to be prominent targets for reprisals – helped secure the perimeter in return for evacuation in the final hours, [under a deal struck with the US](#).

Untouched nearby was a recreation hall with snooker, ping-pong, darts and table football gathering dust. A box in the corner held brain teaser puzzles. It was unclear what the Taliban, once so austere that they even banned chess, would do with the trappings of western military downtime.

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## Aung San Suu Kyi

# Aung San Suu Kyi asks to reduce court time due to ‘strained’ health



The ousted Myanmar leader, who has been held in detention since the military coup on 1 February, missed a court session last month due to dizziness caused by motion sickness, Photograph: Peter de Jong/AP

*[Rebecca Ratcliffe](#) in Bangkok*

Mon 4 Oct 2021 05.28 EDT

Aung San Suu Kyi has requested her court sessions be held every two weeks rather than every week on health grounds, according to her lawyer, as hearings for a series of [legal charges](#) filed against her by Myanmar’s junta continue.

The 76-year-old, who faces charges ranging from corruption to the illegal possession of walkie-talkies, requested the change, saying “she had to spend all weekdays at court so her health conditions seemed strained”, her lawyer

Khin Maung Zaw said in a statement. The judge said he would make a decision next week.

The ousted Myanmar leader, who has been held in detention since the military coup on 1 February, [missed a court session last month](#) due to dizziness caused by motion sickness, though her legal team said at the time that it was not serious.

Khin Maung Zaw told Reuters that Aung San Suu Kyi's health was not concerning and she was not suffering from disease or any specific sickness, but was dealing with tiredness from court appearances. "She is tired. At her age, it is not convenient to sit for hearings every day of the whole week ... It is not a concerning situation. She is just tired."

As her court hearings continue, there are growing warnings about the humanitarian situation across the country. The February coup, which is fiercely opposed by the public, has caused health services to collapse, paralysed banks, and left millions of children out of school. Alongside a peaceful civil disobedience campaign, conflict between the military and opponents of the coup has also intensified, spreading to areas that were previously stable.



The February coup has caused health services to collapse, paralysed banks, and left millions of children out of school. Photograph: EPA

Across [Myanmar](#), 206,000 people have been forced to flee their homes, including 76,000 children, according to Save the Children. Many are sheltering in the jungle in torrential rains without adequate food, the charity has warned.

In Kayah state in south-east Myanmar, one of the worst-affected areas, about 22,000 people fled their homes last month alone, according to the UN. Almost 80,000 people are currently displaced in the state.

“Families are living on next to nothing, sharing just one meal a day between six or seven people. Children are already going hungry, and very soon they will start to succumb to disease and malnutrition,” Save the Children said in a statement.

01:08

Protests sweep Myanmar to oppose coup and support Aung San Suu Kyi – video

The UN estimates that 3 million people across the country are in need of humanitarian assistance, up from 1 million prior to the coup. Access for aid agencies, however, is extremely limited. According to Save the Children, displaced people are instead relying on donations from local communities.

Last week, António Guterres, the secretary general of the UN, [warned of](#) “an increasing number of reports that humanitarian partners are being targeted or threatened by security forces and that bureaucratic impediments are put in their way”.

“It is crucial that the United Nations country team and humanitarian partners have safe and unimpeded access to the populations in need of life-saving humanitarian assistance,” Guterres said in a report sent to UN general assembly, which warned of a “real risk of a large-scale armed conflict”.

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- [Gas Nord Stream 2 approval may cool prices in Europe, says Russia](#)
- [Live Russia pushes for Nord Stream 2 certification amid energy crisis](#)
- [Energy industry Winter blackout risk in Great Britain rises after cable fire](#)

## Energy bills

# UK energy bills could rise 30% in 2022, warn analysts



The UK regulator's energy price cap could rise from £1,277 to £1,660, says the energy research firm Cornwall Insight. Photograph: Lee Smith/Reuters

*[Mark Sweney](#)*

*[@marksweney](#)*

Thu 7 Oct 2021 04.29 EDT

Energy bills could rise by as much as 30% next year if gas and electricity prices continue to soar and more suppliers go bust, according to a new report.

The research firm Cornwall Insight is forecasting that the energy price cap, set at a record £1,277 a year from 1 October, is going to have to be significantly boosted in spring 2022 as the energy crisis continues.

The firm expects the energy price cap to be put up by about 30%, to about £1,660, by the industry regulator. [Ofgem](#) has said that if gas prices rise, or stay at such elevated levels, it will have to push the price cap up when it is reviewed on 1 April.

“With wholesale gas and electricity prices continuing to reach new records, successive supplier exits during September and a new level for the default tariff cap, the Great British energy market remains on the edge for fresh volatility and further consolidation,” said Craig Lowrey, a senior consultant at Cornwall Insight.

Nine suppliers have collapsed in recent weeks after finding themselves unable to maintain price promises in the face of soaring wholesale gas prices. It is [predicted that more could follow](#).

In a separate warning, the founder of the green energy supplier Ecotricity said it “doesn’t make sense” to have a retail price cap but not a wholesale one, and accused the government of “killing energy companies right now”.

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Dale Vince told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme: “It’s illogical to hold prices at one end of the supply chain and not the other end, and the natural consequence is companies going out of business.

“The government currently have closed their eyes and ears to this and said they don’t care, they’re not going to help energy companies but that kind of misses the point because they’re killing energy companies right now.”

Vince said nationalisation of the sector should be considered.

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## Gas

# Nord Stream 2 approval may cool gas prices in Europe, says Russia



Workers in Russia construct the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, which is awaiting clearance from the German regulator. Photograph: Anton Vaganov/Reuters

*Reuters*

Thu 7 Oct 2021 03.57 EDT

Russia's deputy prime minister has said certification of the Nord Stream 2 undersea gas pipeline, which is awaiting clearance from Germany's regulator, could cool soaring European gas prices.

Prices have risen sharply in response to a recovery in demand, particularly from Asia, with storage levels low.

The price of Dutch wholesale gas for November, a European benchmark, has jumped almost eightfold since the start of the year and reached an all-time high of more than €150 (£125) a megawatt hour (MWh) in the early hours of Wednesday. It then fell to €114 by 3pm GMT.

“I think there are two factors, which could somewhat cool off the current situation. First of all, of course, this is, definitely, completion of certification and the fastest clearance for gas supplies via the completed Nord Stream 2,” Alexander Novak told a meeting of government officials and heads of energy companies.

Nord Stream 2, which runs on the bed of the Baltic Sea from Russia to Germany, is expecting certification from Germany, which could take a few months. The pipeline has faced resistance from the US, which says the project will increase Europe’s reliance on Russian energy.

Novak said an increase in gas sales on Gazprom’s electronic sales platform could also calm prices. The Russian gas group set up the ESP in 2018 for gas sales to Europe to supplement existing long and midterm contracts. It has suspended gas sales for delivery in 2022 since late August.

President Vladimir Putin, who chaired the meeting, has agreed with the proposed increase, adding that Russia should meet its domestic gas needs first.

Novak said some speculative trade could also be behind the soaring gas prices, which he said did not reflect the fundamentals of supply and demand.

Igor Sechin, the head of Russia’s state oil firm, Rosneft, asked Putin at the meeting for the right to export natural gas from Russia. State television did not air Putin’s reaction to the request.

### Nord Stream map

Putin told the meeting that Europe was wrong to reduce the share of long-term deals in natural gas trade in favour of the spot market, where prices have surged. “We talked to the European Commission’s previous lineup, and

all its activity was aimed at phasing out of so-called long-term contracts,” he said.

“It was aimed at transition to spot gas trade. And as it turned out, it has become obvious today, that this practice is a mistake.”

Gazprom has resisted moving to spot trade in Europe, preferring long-term deals that sometimes last about 25 years.

Putin also reiterated that Russia has been a reliable energy supplier to Europe, which may receive record-high Russian gas exports this year as Moscow is increasing gas supplies, including via Ukraine, in response to the energy crunch and stands ready to stabilise the market.

He said Russian gas transit via Ukraine was set to exceed volumes agreed under Gazprom’s contract with Kyiv.

Earlier on Wednesday, Putin’s spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, said Russia had no role in causing Europe’s surging gas prices, following accusations from the International [Energy](#) Agency and some in the European parliament that Russia had not done enough to increase supplies.

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“There are a couple of reasons [behind the gas crisis] – the way the economy is recovering, how demand for the energy resources is growing, as well as gas storages are not filled in,” Peskov told reporters.

Putin also cited economic recovery and cold weather in Europe, which led to a reduction in gas storage, as further reasons.

Peskov said Moscow was ready to discuss new long-term contracts for gas sales to European consumers and that Gazprom was meeting all its obligations.

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**Business live**

**Business**

# Petrol retailers say recovery from fuel crisis is too slow; inflation warnings rise – as it happened

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## [Energy industry](#)

# Winter blackout risk in Great Britain rises after cable fire



The National Grid site in Sellindge, Kent. A dozen fire engines attended a blaze at the site in September. Photograph: Gareth Fuller/PA

*[Rob Davies](#)*

*[@ByRobDavies](#)*

Thu 7 Oct 2021 04.00 EDT

The risk of winter blackouts has increased after a [fire affecting a key subsea cable](#) further eroded Great Britain's backup electricity supply cushion, already diminished by the shutdown of gas plants and nuclear reactors.

The National Grid's electricity system operator, ESO, said the "de-rated margin" – the amount of excess capacity that could be called upon if needed – was expected to be 6.6% or 3.9 gigawatts (GW).

That would be higher than the margins seen in 2015-16 and the following year. But the ESO said a worst-case scenario, such as multiple power plant outages, low wind speeds, and a bitterly cold winter, could cause the margin plunge to just 4.2%, or 2.5GW.

That would be well below the 5.1% it forecast in 2015, before a notoriously difficult winter when National Grid was forced to ask businesses to [reduce their electricity usage](#) to keep the lights on.

With margins likely to be tighter than the Grid would like, it expects to issue a similar number of electricity market notices to last year, when it sent six of the official pleas to energy suppliers to increase the amount of electricity they make available.

The ESO took the unusual step this year of issuing an early version of its Winter Outlook, its annual assessment of Great Britain's electricity safety net.

It said at the time that the margin could fall to 5.3%, owing to the retirements of the Dungeness B and Hunterston B nuclear power stations and shutdowns at the Baglan Bay, Severn Power and Sutton Bridge gas power stations.

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But its worst-case scenario has worsened since September, when a large fire affected the IFA high-voltage power cables importing electricity from [France](#). Half of the 2GW cable is expected to be unavailable until March.

Despite the downgrade, National Grid said there was no risk of blackouts as a result of the tighter margin.

Fintan Slye, the executive director of ESO, said: “The Winter Outlook confirms that we expect to have sufficient capacity and the tools needed to meet demand this winter. Margins are well within the reliability standard and therefore we are confident that there will be enough capacity available to keep Britain’s lights on.”

However, speaking at an event hosted by the Financial Times on Wednesday, the National Grid chief executive, John Pettigrew, said the gap between supply and demand could be smaller than in recent years.

Tighter margins can lead to higher bills as the Grid faces the excess cost of paying energy suppliers more for extra supplies to top up the backup margin.

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## The indecent exposure epidemic: ‘How are they not taking this seriously after Sarah Everard?’



Illustration: Calum Heath/The Guardian



Sirin Kale

Thu 7 Oct 2021 05.00 EDT

Cathkin Braes country park, in south Glasgow, is beautiful. You can see the city and, behind it, the mountains. Clara (not her real name), a 35-year-old community worker from Glasgow, went there in March to enjoy the view from her campervan. As she relaxed, she looked over and saw a car parked beside her, with the passenger window rolled down. A man was staring at her, and masturbating. He clearly relished her visible fright. “That is what was turning him on,” Clara said. “His head was nearly out of the passenger window, staring at me.”

Because she was in a campervan, it wasn’t easy to get away quickly: Clara had to get out to fold away some seats. “I decided to jump out,” she says, “and when I looked at him, he was wiping ejaculation off his dashboard and looking at me.” She took a photograph of his car numberplate and drove away. But the man realised what she had done and gave chase. For 15 minutes, he tailed her through the streets of Glasgow. Frightened for her life, Clara drove to a police station, but the man turned off before she arrived.

The same day, Clara reported the incident to [Police](#) Scotland. The officer asked Clara if she saw the man’s penis, and when she said no, but that she

was certain he was masturbating, the officer said there was nothing they could do. “I told him: ‘My concern is that he grows in confidence with this behaviour and he starts approaching women. Can you not at least do a door knock? I have his registration.’” The police officer refused. “I thought: ‘What the fuck? How are they not taking this seriously? Especially after Sarah Everard.’”

Recent weeks have seen renewed focus on the crime of indecent exposure, after the sentencing of the Metropolitan police officer Wayne Couzens for Everard’s kidnap, rape and murder. Couzens, it has been subsequently reported, had a history of indecent exposure. In 2015, a woman reported him for indecent exposure [to Kent police](#); the force is now under investigation for its response to the allegation. Couzens has also [been accused of twice exposing](#) himself to staff at a McDonald’s drive-thru, again in Kent, just days before he attacked Everard. Staff provided police with Couzens’s car registration number, but it appears that no action was taken.

Flashing, or to use its proper name, indecent exposure, is a crime punishable by a maximum [two-year jail sentence](#). And yet so often it is dismissed as a matter of scant consequence; an unpleasant but inconsequential offence, committed by the mac-wearing pervert of popular myth. Canvassing women for this article, I was struck by how few *hadn’t* been flashed. Women had been flashed when they were children outside school, on public transport, from parked cars, in Topshop as 13-year olds, in the stairwells of multistorey car parks, and cycle lanes, and busy motorways. And parks, so many parks, usually by inveterate offenders who were known to police, who took no action.

Guardian analysis of Office for National Statistics (ONS) and Ministry of Justice data for England and Wales [revealed that](#) 10,775 indecent exposure cases were logged by police in 2020, but just 594 suspects were taken to court. The true figures are likely to be much higher. “The vast majority of women, if you talk to them, will remember an experience of being flashed,” says Dr Fiona Vera-Gray of Durham University, an expert on sexual violence and street harassment. “But most never report being flashed because they’re never sure if they will be blamed, or if people will think it’s their fault.”

I said to the police: You know where this is going. Stop him before it goes too far

### *Taali Kwaten*

When women do tell the police, they are can be met with apathy, condescension, or even outright scorn. “Honestly,” says Taali Kwaten, 25, who works in events and as an LGBTQA+ community organiser, “the police’s response was more upsetting than the actual flashing. They belittled it. They kept making jokes, and trying to be funny about it.” Kwaten, who is gender-fluid femme (meaning that they identify as both genders, but present as feminine) and uses both they and she pronouns, was walking in Arnos Park, north London, in April this year when they saw a man masturbating in some bushes.

“I started to panic,” Kwaten remembers, “because there were mums and kids walking towards us. I thought: ‘This could traumatised them.’” Kwaten filmed the man. In the footage, they repeatedly ask him to leave the park. When he refuses, they call the police. “I was really emotional and shaking and crying. But I felt like he was going to do it again, and I had an obligation to call.” Nearly an hour later, the police arrived, and told Kwaten they would visit that evening, to take a statement. Kwaten stayed up late waiting, but no one came.

The next day, Kwaten phoned again, but the police said they had been unable to find the flasher. Concerned for the safety of women and children in the park, Kwaten uploaded the video [to Instagram](#). “I’m very fearful he will do the same thing again,” they wrote. The response was overwhelming. Twenty-five women told Kwaten they had been harassed or flashed by the same man. He had been banned from a pub for throwing a chair at a woman who refused to give him her number. He had followed women home. Some had reported him to the police, only for no action to be taken. Some residents had even set up a WhatsApp group about him a year previously.

When police finally came to take Kwaten’s statement, two days later, they said there was nothing they could do. “My mum said: ‘If you put two police officers in the park and patrol it for a week, you will find him. He will continue to do this again. He is dangerous. Something needs to be done.’”

This was just weeks after Everard was murdered, and Kwaten mentioned the case. “I said: ‘You know where this is going. Stop this before it goes too far.’” The police told Kwaten that they had bigger things to deal with.

After the police left, Kwaten’s parents went to Arnos Park themselves, to see if they could find the flasher. They spotted him within 10 minutes, called the police, and he was arrested. He was later convicted of indecent exposure and put on an electronic tag.



Flowers laid on Clapham Common for Sarah Everard, whose killer reportedly twice indecently exposed himself in the days before her murder.  
Photograph: Daniel Leal-Olivas/AFP/Getty Images

Police routinely dismiss reports of flashing as time-wasting from hysterical women. When they do so, says the criminologist and academic Prof Jane Monckton-Smith, of the University of Gloucestershire, women “end up feeling like they’re the ones in the wrong. The police have better things to do than deal with their petty complaint. And so women begin to internalise that, and think: ‘I mustn’t bother anyone about this.’”

But the impact of being flashed can be lifelong, and profound. “It still upsets me all these years later,” says Dr Heidi Colthup, a lecturer from Wye, Kent. She was flashed and assaulted in 1986, when she was 17. “I just remember

being terrified,” she says. Colthup’s assailant was convicted in juvenile court, but she is certain that police only took it seriously because her father was a police officer; the first time she tried to report the incident, without her parents present, she was sent away.

Colthup, who is close to tears during the course of our conversation, explains why flashing is so distressing. “You aren’t doing anything,” she says. “Just minding your business. And suddenly this man, completely unbidden, inserts himself into your life. It’s that total removal of control. We all like to think we are in charge of our own destinies and can do what we want. But flashing shows how flimsy that freedom and choice really is. Somebody – a man – can take that away from you.”

Victims of flashing carry around maps in their head, overlaid with the traumas of past encounters. Kwaten used to walk through Arnos Park every day. Now, they walk through congested streets, instead of enjoying the open spaces of the park. “Women have to limit their space and freedom because of the actions of some men,” says Vera-Gray. “They have to be hyper-vigilant in public. Because there are men out there who will seek to do them harm.”

And the fact is that flashers do cause women harm. “Flashing is an act of sexual aggression,” says Monckton-Smith. “It’s a red-flag behaviour. If someone has flashing in their past, I’d expect there to be problems in their future. It might not lead directly to rape, but it may lead to things like domestic abuse, coercive control, stalking and sexual violence.”

If police aren’t identifying dangerous patterns in offenders, they aren’t doing their job

*Jane Monckton-Smith*

She urges police to consider the psychology of the person flashing. “If we’ve got someone who’s fantasising about offending,” says Monckton-Smith, “they are going to have to take steps to get where they are going. Every time they take an extra step, that is an escalation in risk. Say someone has exposed themselves in an isolated place. They may do that until they feel comfortable with it, and then move on to the next step.”

Karen, a 69-year-old retired teacher from Woburn Sands, has sometimes wondered what could have become of her on the night she was flashed cycling home from work in 1999. A man was masturbating outside his car, in the road. “I stopped and looked back to try and get the car number,” she says. The man got back in his car and drove after her. It was a quiet country lane. As he approached, a woman walked down the road towards them. The man leaned out of the car window, apologised, and drove away. Karen reported his registration plate to the police. “They later told me that the very next day he raped someone,” she says. She questions whether her flasher intended to rape her, too. “If the other woman hadn’t been with me, might it have been different?”

Couzens murdered Everard just four days after he allegedly exposed himself at a McDonald’s. One 2014 [evidence review](#) found that 5 to 10% of flashers escalated their behaviour to more serious sexual offences. Harvey Weinstein is known to have masturbated in [front of multiple women](#), without their consent. Were police to adopt a “broken windows” approach when it comes to indecent exposure, taking each incident seriously and prosecuting it to the fullest extent of the law, more serious crimes could be averted. “Indecent exposure is one of the least serious sexual offences,” says Monckton-Smith. “So in the hierarchy of offences, to the police, it can seem minimal. But one of the police’s key functions is the prevention of crime. If they aren’t identifying dangerous patterns in offenders, they aren’t doing their job.”

And existing law is not fit to protect women from the growing menace of cyberflashing. Defined as the practice of sending women and girls unsolicited “dick pics”, cyberflashing is not currently a criminal offence. In June, almost 90% of British schoolgirls surveyed told [Ofsted inspectors](#) that they had been sent unsolicited sexual photos. “What we know about cyberflashing is that it parallels indecent exposure for women in the sense of the threat they feel,” says Prof Clare McGlynn QC of Durham University, an expert in cyberflashing. Because men can use Bluetooth to send images to their victims’ phones, rather than, for example, emailing them, women who are cyberflashed in public may have no idea who is responsible. “Because you don’t always know who sent the image,” McGlynn says, “it’s difficult to risk-assess the situation. The fear of the unknown can be worse.”

If the events of the past few months have confirmed anything for Britain's women and girls, it is that the streets are not safe. Police do not take our safety seriously, and sometimes wish to hurt us themselves. Which means that, for the foreseeable future, women will be consigned to live a half-life in public spaces: always watching for the men who would seek to do them harm, and the men who would excuse their behaviour.

When Clara goes out in her campervan on solo holidays, she doesn't get out after dark, even if the sky is clear and the stars are beautiful. "That's one of the saddest things," she says. "So much of my life, I spend trying to be invisible. Because I don't want unwanted male attention."

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

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## Housing

# How UK housing segregates residents

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‘I consider myself to be an older soul, hence I have nearly 200 houseplants’  
... Tom Daley. Photograph: Bartek Szmigulski

## **Tom Daley on love, grief and health: ‘It was hammered into me that I needed to lose weight’**

‘I consider myself to be an older soul, hence I have nearly 200 houseplants’  
... Tom Daley. Photograph: Bartek Szmigulski

by [Emine Saner](#)

Thu 7 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

Tom Daley, Britain’s most decorated diver, grew up in the spotlight. He was 14 when he [made a splash at his first Olympics](#), in 2008, and at 15 [he became a world champion](#). This year in Tokyo, at his fourth Games, [he finally won a longed-for gold](#), with his synchronised diving partner, [Matty Lee](#). In 2013, [Daley came out](#) – a rarity among professional sportspeople – and he has become a campaigner for LGBTQ+ rights. Now 27, he is married

to the screenwriter Dustin Lance Black, with whom he has a three-year-old son.

In a new autobiography, he describes struggles with injury, debilitating anxiety and coping with the death of his father, his biggest champion. Here, one of Britain's best-loved athletes gamely answers questions from our writer and *Guardian* readers on all of the above, as well as his other great passion: knitting.

**Which do you think has had a greater role in your success – hard work, luck or talent? (Sam, UK)**

I think it's work, talent and luck, if I was to put them in order. It's a lot about hard work, having the right mindset and being able to nurture what nature has given you.

**What was your mindset when it came to each of your four Olympics? (Margaret, Canada)**

In 2008, I didn't have many expectations; I just wanted to give it my best shot. In 2012, it was about the experience and the home crowd. There was a performance goal, but I also knew that I had more Olympics in me. Going into 2016, it felt like my best chance – I was in the best possible shape. I put unbearable pressure on myself [[Daley won bronze](#) with Dan Goodfellow in the synchronised 10-metre, but didn't make the final in the individual event]. When I went to 2020, my perspective shifted and the most important thing for me was my family – knowing they love me and support me, regardless of how I do.



Going for gold ... Daley and Matty Lee during the men's synchronised 10-metre final. Photograph: Jean Catuffe/Getty Images

**How do you stay motivated for so many years? What techniques do you use to get into the zone on competition day? (Meena, US)**

I try to do 10 minutes' meditation every day, whether that be breathing work, guided meditation or knitting or crochet. The elusive Olympic gold medal was what was keeping me going, but there's always something to motivate me. It's difficult some days, like it is for everyone, but I want to set a good example to [my son] Robbie of working hard, that you don't just get given things and that your best is OK.

My dad said: "If you go into a competition with 18 people in it and you come last, as long as you do your best, you're 18th-best in the whole country. How cool is that?" I want to be able to pass that on to Robbie – it's not about which medal you win, it's about the attitude you have.

**What does a bad day look like for you? How do you stay optimistic? (Kerish, the Philippines)**

I need a lot of sleep and I like to eat, so if there's no food in the house then I will definitely be slightly cranky. Working out, or just going for a walk, turns my mood around. Knitting can also help, or doing something with Robbie.

On a bad training day, I used to spiral, but my coach told me to be like Peter Pan and fly out of it. One bad day is a day in a week, in a month, in a year, in a whole career of things that have also gone really well. I try to acknowledge it and then move on. In a competition, each dive is an independent event. You just have to be in the moment.

**Have you ever dived from a board higher than 10 metres? (Adam, UK)**

Absolutely not. Going up to those 27-metre boards is terrifying. I went up there in Barcelona after the 2013 world championships and it was so high. I was like: how does somebody even jump off this? But it's extremely exciting to watch.

I had to figure out my sexuality very much in the public eye. For me, coming out lifted a weight off my shoulders

**You had BBC Sports Personality of the Year sewn up until the US Open. As a former teenage sports star, what is your message for Emma Raducanu as she begins her life in the spotlight? (Allan, UK)**

Stay true to who you are and keep working hard. Don't get distracted by anything and keep striving towards your goals.

**What are your views on the sexualisation of athletes in sport, having been pushed as a poster boy and not wearing very much? (Milly, UK)**

You have these body issues as an athlete. Lots of people would look at athletes and be like: "What are you talking about? You're an athlete, you're in shape, you have nothing to worry about." But especially as a diver, you're up on the diving board and you're so naked, so visible, so it's quite hard to be content with your body, because you always want to be better.

**You wrote about this in your book. Is it fair to say you developed an eating disorder? Would you call it that? (Emine Saner)**

I used to make myself throw up, in 2012. I weigh myself every day. I've had a very strange relationship with food and my body image. I guess it is a mild form of that. Men always seem to not have eating disorders, and it's hard to talk about it. But I would consider myself to be someone that has very much struggled with body image, and eating, and feeling guilty and shameful of the things that I eat.

**You also wrote that some of the magazine shoots you did when you were young perhaps wouldn't be appropriate now. (ES)**

I don't know if there would be shoots of maybe 14-, 15-, 16-year-old boys in their trunks, with water thrown all over them, now. I know there definitely wouldn't be girls doing that. It's hard to say what's right and what's wrong. Looking back, it made me feel more mature; I never felt taken advantage of in any way. I don't think the body image issues come from anything to do with the media. My body image [issues] came from within my sport – it was hammered into me that I was overweight and needed to lose weight in order to perform.



Source of inspiration ... the Australian diver Matthew Mitcham, a friend of

Daley, was the first openly gay person to win an Olympic gold medal.

Photograph: Jane Dempster/AAP

**You have talked about the importance to young people of having LGBTQ+ sporting role models. What effect did it have on you when the Australian diver Matthew Mitcham came out in 2008, before winning gold in Beijing? (Kathryn, UK)**

He's been a massive source of inspiration – he was the first openly gay man to win an Olympic gold medal. He lives in London and we hang out quite often. Being able to have role models is so important; seeing someone like

you do well does help motivate you and make you think: “I can do that, too.”

**What was life like before and after coming out? (Ian, Singapore)**

I had to figure out my sexuality very much in the public eye. For me, coming out lifted a weight off my shoulders. It eats you up inside when you’re trying to be someone you’re not, or not even trying to be someone you’re not, but not necessarily being honest. It was terrifying, but at the same time it was like: now I no longer have to hide. It was very much wanting to take control of the situation.

**You and Lance are vocal about LGBT rights in the UK, the US and the Commonwealth. If you could bring one issue before any politician of your choice, what would it be? (Dorothea, Germany)**

In terms of sport, I think no country should be able to host any kind of international event unless they have equal rights for LGBT people, for women, for people of colour. There should be a standard, where anyone that wants to go there is going to be safe, supported and not feel threatened for their life. The 2022 football World Cup is in Qatar – for women and queer people, that can be a dangerous place. After I came out, I didn’t go to Russia [which has homophobic laws] to compete, because I was worried, and then [for the next competition there] I was like: “You know what? I want to go, to be visible.” That, I think, is more powerful than not going at all. As an athlete, I’m in a safer position, but for people just living their lives in many countries, it’s a scary place to be.



‘Lance is very much the big kid in the house’ ... Daley with Black and their son, Robbie. Photograph: @tomdaley/Instagram

**How did you meet Lance? (Stefanos, Germany)**

At dinner in Los Angeles, in March 2013. Our mutual friend brought some friends, of which Lance was one. In that first week, we said we loved each other and we named our children. And here we are, four years married and with a three-year-old son.

**Do you sometimes feel the 20-year age gap between you? (Evgeniya, Russia)**

Never. If anything, Lance is very much the big kid in the house. I consider myself to be an older soul, hence I have nearly 200 houseplants, and I knit, and I like to be able to have conversations with people who have experienced a similar amount as I have. That’s where Lance and I connected a lot – he had lost his brother, I’d lost my dad, and then he lost his mum. We’d also experienced the highs of a career [Black won an Oscar in 2009 for his screenplay for Milk] and having that comedown afterwards. That was something we really were able to connect on.

**Do you have any plans for new additions to the family? (Cindy, Myanmar)**

It's not quite as easy as a bottle of wine and a good time. A lot of thought has to go into it, but absolutely, I'd love more kids.

**How difficult was it for you to remain focused on diving during your dad's illness and death? [Daley's father, Robert, died in 2011 from a brain tumour.] (Cliff, Mexico)**

I didn't allow myself to believe that it was going on, and diving was my outlet to escape from it all. Even after my dad died, I was very much "diving, diving, diving". It wasn't until I met Lance and he said: "You need to deal with this, you can't just carry on and pretend that nothing's happened." Now I'm able to share memories, do some of the things we used to do together, rather than be like: "I can't do this, it makes me too sad." It was extremely tough at the time, all very public, and I felt like I had to be strong for my family. Everybody grieves differently, but I definitely had a delayed grief moment.

**I was so moved to read in your book that your dad's ashes are buried by the diving board at the London Aquatic Centre. (ES)**

It was one of those things that only I knew during London 2012. That's why I put my water bottle there; I still put my bottle there whenever I train. He got the best seat in the house – no parents are allowed poolside during diving competitions, let alone the Olympics. It was very special to me that I won my first Olympic medal in that pool.



'I definitely had a delayed grief moment' ... Tom Daley in Plymouth, his home town, with his father, Robert, in 2008. Photograph: Darren Jack/Shutterstock

**The diving facilities at my local pool closed and a new leisure centre was built without one. There is no chance that my children will take up diving. What can be done to make diving accessible to the next generation of Olympians? (Richard, UK)**

There are more 10-metre diving facilities than ever before in the UK, but lots of smaller facilities are being closed. I started the [Tom Daley Diving Academy](#), which is now across pools without diving boards, teaching people the basics off the side. You can get a feel for diving and then if someone is good and is talent-scouted, they can move to diving pools. I'd like to see more leisure centres that have, not even 10-metre facilities, but if you can have 1-metre, 3-metre and 5-metre boards, that is great for beginners.

**How did you keep up training during lockdown? (Sarah, UK)**

I was doing somersaults on to sofa cushions. I had a spin bike, a treadmill; I would occasionally go for runs, do Zoom workouts. I ordered things to be delivered, like weights, but they took for ever because everybody wanted them. It allowed me to focus on things I never would usually, like time to stretch and all those things that really help.

**How often do you and Matty Lee speak? And have either of you decided on 2024? (Curtis, US)**

Matty is actually living in my house [in London] while I'm in Calgary [where Black is making a TV show]. He was meant to be out by the time I get back, but I'm going to be living with him for a month. We speak all the time. An individual gold would have been amazing, but there's almost something more special about the synchro, because you get to share that moment with someone.

No decisions have been made about 2024. If I'd won a gold medal in 2016, I planned to retire, because I didn't think, as an older athlete, I was ever going to be as good. I'm still very much on an upward trajectory.

**What got you into knitting? (Matilda, UK)**

My coach always wanted me to sit down, rest, recover. Because I'm one of those people always up doing something, Lance said some people on [TV sets], while they're waiting between takes, will knit. I was terrible at it, got a bit of info from YouTube and a couple of divers on the international scene helped me, and then all of a sudden I was obsessed with it. Every new project was a new technique to learn. It's what I do whenever I have a moment. I used to be a massive nail biter and now I don't bite my nails, because that fidgeting is gone.



Man of many talents ... Daley with one of his knits at a Tokyo 2020 diving event. Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty Images

**If you had to give an athlete one of your knits, what would it be? (Lauriane, France)**

Maybe I'll knit Usain Bolt a full running leotard – green, gold and black. It might be a bit heavy, though.

**Will you be competing in next year's Commonwealth Games in Birmingham? (Roseanne, UK)**

I want to take a longer break and I think, by the time I get back to training, I will have missed the qualification event. Unless our director says: "We know you can do it, so you're qualified already," but, otherwise, probably not.

**Which other Olympic sports would you most and least like to compete in? (Susan, UK)**

Something I'd already have some ability in would be gymnastics, but I'd love to do luge or skeleton, or bobsleigh. Least appealing? Swimming. Watching it is fine, but the training – swimming up and down, looking at a black line on the bottom of the pool – is not appealing to me.

**Do you plan to turn your knitting hobby into a business? (Netasha, Malaysia)**

I'd love to work out a way of getting more people into knitting, just for the mindfulness element – and to be able to make your own clothes would be better than all the fast fashion.

**Where do you see yourself in five years? (Alexandra, Canada)**

I'd love to have a successful knitwear business and be established as a TV host. And maybe with more children.

*In the UK, the eating disorder charity [Beat](#) can be contacted on 0808 801 0677. In the US, the [National Eating Disorders Association](#) is on 800-931-2237. In Australia, the [Butterfly Foundation](#) is on 1800 33 4673. Other international helplines can be found at [Eating Disorder Hope](#)*

*Coming Up for Air by Tom Daley is published on 14 October (HQ, £20) in hardback, ebook and audiobook. To support the Guardian and the Observer,*

*order your copy at [guardianbookshop.com](https://guardianbookshop.com). Delivery charges may apply*

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## Europe's best walking cities: Six wonders of the wandering world



‘Towns spread out over steep hills can make for arduous ambling’ – but Lisbon rewards the explorer. Photograph: Panther Media GmbH/Alamy

[\*Chris Moss\*](#)

Thu 7 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

The art of flâneur-ing might be French and its most famous practitioners Parisians, but other European cultures have walking traditions, from the Italian *passeggiata* and Spanish *paseo* – social promenades to take the air as dusk falls – to German wanderlust: hiking with desire. Nothing opens up a city like a long ramble on foot. It's the only way to make a place your own and unearth discoveries not listed in guidebooks or apps.

## Berlin: Crossroads of modern history



The Berlin Wall. Photograph: robertharding/Alamy

For all that it is mainstream, even fashionable, and was a favourite with no-frills flying weekenders before the pandemic, Berlin remains a strange, sometimes alienating city. This is especially the case when you go walking around its historic heart, where the Berlin Wall stood from 1961 to 1989. While unified Germany has thrown many millions at the city and tried to fill this former site of espionage, tension and trauma with newbuilds and showy upgrades, such as Norman Foster's glass dome for the Reichstag, swathes of the area remain open to the sky. This accentuates a feeling of emptiness in what is a relatively unpopulous capital city – 3.6 million, around a third of London – and also allows the mental space to conjure Berlin's many ghosts.

Vague, unplanned walks around the former East and West will still evince differences – the tank-friendly width of Karl-Marx-Allee, the glitzy shops along the Kurfürstendamm – but if you want to chart a route, I'd recommend a wander taking in the following: the Hansa Quarter (Hansaviertel), a showcase estate where renowned architects (including Alvar Aalto, Walter Gropius, Arne Jacobsen and Oscar Niemeyer) designed modernist residential buildings at a site destroyed in the second world war; the Tiergarten inner-city park; Alexanderplatz, which still exudes something of the old East; and Prenzlauer Berg, where there are nice coffee shops and lunch spots. Berlin is big, but you can always hop on an S-bahn train for the return journey. If you fancy a hike outside the central districts, wander down to former Tempelhof airport, where the narratives of Nazi Germany, the Berlin airlift and modern migration crisscross like contrails.

## Trieste: Joycean jaunts and good coffee



Castello di Miramare. Photograph: Matej Kastelic/Alamy

While he was imagining the Dublin perambulations of Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus that would provide the two plotlines of Ulysses, James Joyce was doing his real walking around the city of Trieste. The august, oft-overlooked port on the Adriatic is a perfect place for the activity, partly

because it has much-loved cafes – some beautiful, all convivial – that serve as pit-stops, but also because it has such a splendid seafront.

One of the grander cafes, the [Caffè degli Specchi](#) stands on the main square, the Piazza Unità d'Italia. This is a natural place to start a zigzagging walk, taking in the [Joyce museum](#), the art collection and sumptuous interiors at the [Museo Revoltella](#), the graceful Borgo Teresiano, named after the 18th-century Habsburg ruler Maria Theresa, and the [Caffè San Marco](#), a spacious bookshop-cafe with an interior in the Vienna secession style (and upwards of 50 types of cups of coffee available – as Trieste has long been at the centre of the bean-importing trade). From the centre, it's a short, steep walk up to Villa Opicina for a view over the Gulf of Trieste. If you have energy for more walking, continue along the wooded gravel path of the Strada Napoleonica towards Prosecco. It's 5km if you go the whole way; you'll see the Castello di Miramare, the summerhouse of Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian and his wife, Charlotte, at the foot of the cliff. You can come back along a different footpath.

## **Marseille: Moorish markets and maritime connections**



Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilisations and Fort Saint-Jean in the Vieux-Port of Marseille. Photograph: Hilke Maunder/Alamy

The ancient French city has it all: the sea-facing Vieux-Port, the narrow, winding streets of the Le Panier neighbourhood, the sweeping view from the Basilique Notre-Dame de la Garde, and the Rue de la République quarter, with its Haussmannien girth and grand mid-19th-century buildings. Just three blocks in from the port is marché Noailles, where you can sample fresh produce and sniff the spices at the daily marché des capucins, and have mint tea or a kebab, flatbread and couscous. Follow the front round to the [Mucem](#) (Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilisations) – but make sure to check out some of the city's smaller museums, too.

In his essay Hashish in Marseilles, philosopher and urbanist Walter Benjamin recounted an evening strolling around cafes after consuming the drug: “I now suddenly understood how to be a painter – had it not happened to Rembrandt and many others? – ugliness could appear as the true reservoir of beauty, better than any treasure cask, a jagged mountain with all the inner gold of beauty gleaming from the wrinkles, glances, features.” Visitors today are unlikely to find Marseille particularly ugly, but it is a somewhat disorderly city and run-down districts rub up against more well-heeled ones. If hashish isn’t your thing, then artisanal *pastis* – all the rage right now – will do just as well to blur the edges.

## Lisbon: Fish for lunch, fado for dinner



A view across Lisbon. Photograph: Panther Media GmbH/Alamy

Towns spread out over steep hills can make for arduous ambling, especially if dressed in your best city gear and the sun is up. The streets that climb up and down Alfama, Bairro Alto and Chiado benefit from their narrowness – you can usually find shade. Lisbon is one of those cities where the least attention-seeking restaurants serve some of the best food, and it pays to stray away from the honeypots and find where locals are having lunch. Fish is usually excellent, and for comfort food it's hard to top dishes such as *bacalhau à brás* (salt cod with egg and potatoes), grilled sardines or *cataplana* (white fish and seafood stew).

On your wanderings, you'll come upon lovely bars and cafes, some of which fill with the melancholy strains of live fado after dark. The late, great fado singer Carlos do Carmo, on his landmark 1997 album, *Um Homen na Cidade* (A Man in the City), intones on the title track, “I grab the dawn, as if it were a child ... I go down the street of the moon.” The Portuguese capital is at its best at the top and bottom of the day, before the streets steam with people and sunshine. Lisbon has suffered the woes of overtourism in recent years. Do Carmo’s album namechecks many city landmarks and if your Portuguese is up to it, you might try out a situationist experiment and use

fado lyrics as your map and guide – it's sure to take you away from the hubbub.

## Copenhagen: Shades of meaning in a surprisingly bookish city



Black Diamond, part of the Royal Danish Library. Photograph: mauritius images GmbH/Alamy

A local academic told me that Søren Kierkegaard always enjoyed walking on the shady side of the street. Even if it's an apocryphal anecdote, it chimes with the moodier, morose side of the famous Danish theologian and proto-existential philosopher. For all that, he did once write, "Above all, do not lose your desire to walk. Every day, I walk myself into a state of wellbeing and walk away from every illness. I have walked myself into my best thoughts, and I know of no thought so burdensome that one cannot walk away from it." His home city, famous as being among the most cycle-friendly in the world, is also kind to those who take off on two feet.

Start a bookish walk at the [Assistens Cemetery](#). It's not the least bit gloomy; locals come here to relax, have picnics and enjoy the lush foliage. Kierkegaard and Copenhagen's other – even more famous – writer, Hans Christian Andersen, are buried here. Beyond the walls is the Nørrebro

district, full of designer clothing stores and galleries, murals and craft beer outlets – the kind of superficial, fun things Kierkegaard would have hated. From here, drift thoughtfully towards the harbour area, passing through the delightful green space of the [Royal Library Garden](#) en route and popping into the [Royal Library](#), AKA Black Diamond library, due its dramatic form, which has a great collection of manuscripts on show. For a bite to eat or a drink, choose between the [Paludan Bogcafé](#) and the opulent [Library Bar](#) at the Plaza hotel – known for its Chesterfield chairs, jazz gigs and excellent cocktails.

## Seville: Holy walks, divine gardens, sacred cults



Real Alcázar. Photograph: Juanma Aparicio/Alamy

The historic core of Seville is quite compact, but if you take in Triana, across the Guadalquivir, and the Isla de la Cartuja, which hosted the 1992 Expo, you have a sprawl to take on. As with all of Andalucía's tourist-friendly spots, Seville gets its fair share of moochers and souvenir-browsers. It's all too easy to join the throng of lost souls. One way to impose a degree of design on your outing is to undertake part of the route for which the city is famous: the Holy Week procession. The *cofrades* (religious fraternities), in their disarming pointed hats, gravitate to the centre from parishes all over the city, but are all funnelled into the last few streets, from Calle Campana,

down Calle Sierpes, across Plaza de San Francisco, along the Avenida de la Constitución, concluding at the cathedral. Next door is the [Real Alcázar](#), a complex of palaces, fortifications, patios, reflective pools and beautiful gardens and olive groves laid out on a neat grid. A complicated melding of mudéjar and other European architectural styles, the site was developed in the 11th century, when Seville was under the rule of the Arab Muslim Abbādid dynasty; it was added to and modified many times on its way to becoming a Christian royal residence.

Cross the river to enter Triana for contrast: once *extra muros*, this insular district has links with Seville's glory days as a port, as well as its ceramics industry, matadors, flamenco artists and Roma people. Local cults honour the Virgen de la Esperanza (Virgin of Hope), whose image is kept in the Sailors' Chapel, and the Cristo de Expiración (Christ of the Last Breath) – whose statue in the namesake church on Calle Castilla is said to be the likeness of a stabbed Roma man, the sculptor Francisco Ruiz Gijón, found in the streets here in the 1680s. Triana is loveliest from dusk, when you can get a *fino* or a cold beer on the riverside of Calle Betis before heading into the bowels of the barrio to find tapas and flamenco.

The headline to this article was amended on 7 October 2021. An earlier version referred to “seven wonders” when six was intended.

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## 2021.10.07 - Coronavirus

- Live Coronavirus: 1.1m in UK estimated to have long Covid; Finland to pause Moderna jab for men under 30
- Sarah Gilbert Virus ‘still rampant’ worldwide, warns creator of Oxford vaccine
- Alaska Hospitals make wrenching decisions as they begin to ration care
- England Covid travel red list to be cut to a dozen countries

[Coronavirus live](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

## Covid live: England's travel 'red list' cut to seven countries; Italy relaxes coronavirus restrictions

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## Coronavirus

# Covid ‘still running rampant’ worldwide, warns creator of Oxford vaccine



Covid jabs being administered in Katlehong, South Africa. Only 1.9% of people in low-income countries had received at least one vaccine dose by early September. Photograph: Themba Hadebe/AP

*[Andrew Gregory](#)* Health editor

Wed 6 Oct 2021 14.00 EDT

Coronavirus is “still running rampant” worldwide and the failure to ensure poorer countries can access vaccines risks more deaths and the emergence of potentially dangerous new variants, the creator of the Oxford jab has warned.

Pleading for immediate action to enable wider distribution of jabs across the world, Prof Dame Sarah Gilbert said the “ever-evolving” virus “continues to

circulate unchecked”, and, as a result, every country in the world now faces the threat of “further Sars-CoV-2 variants” this winter.

“No one is safe until we are all safe,” said Gilbert. Even countries with high levels of vaccine coverage, such as Britain, could still face “an alarming future”, she added.

“The virus has already adapted to increase transmission between humans, with the Alpha variant and then the Delta variant becoming dominant in many countries.

“As the world grapples with the spread of the Delta variant, it is more crucial than ever that we do not forget the lives that could be saved by administering first and second doses to the most vulnerable populations worldwide and the opportunity that the global distribution of vaccine provides to protect all of us by reducing the selection of further Sars-CoV-2 variants.”

She added: “In the longer run, strategies for managing the risk of an ever-evolving Sars-CoV-2, including through the use of definitive medical countermeasures such as vaccination, will have to be adapted to the needs and experience of each country. For now, however, with the disease still running rampant, the priority must be to vaccinate as many people as possible and as quickly as possible.”

Greater efforts are now urgently required to make vaccines available “for the whole world”, the Oxford University professor of vaccinology said in a letter co-written with Dr Richard Hatchett, the chief executive of the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations.

Their letter, published in *Science Translational Medicine*, said that by early September this year, 41.5% of the world’s population had received at least one dose of a Covid-19 vaccine, yet only 1.9% of people in low-income countries had.

Gilbert and Hatchett warned that offering booster jabs and vaccinating children – as is happening in the UK and other wealthy countries – would

place “additional pressure on global vaccine supplies”.

They wrote: “In many high-income countries, more than 50% of the population have received two doses of vaccine. In high-income countries, the next questions are whether, or when, booster doses should be administered and whether to extend vaccination to children in the pursuit of herd immunity.

“Such extensions of the use of Covid-19 vaccines by high income countries will place additional pressure on global vaccine supplies and potentially further increase disparities between high-income countries and the rest of the world in terms of vaccine access.”

Ensuring underdeveloped countries can deliver Covid-19 vaccines has become one of “the most urgent challenges in the next phase of the Covid-19 pandemic”, they said.

“The proliferation of authorised Covid-19 vaccines and projected rapid growth in their aggregate supply has the potential to create an embarrassment of riches,” they added.

While supply to poorer countries is slowly picking up, the new challenge is ensuring they are able to distribute the jabs to millions safely and effectively once they arrive, they said.

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## Coronavirus

# Alaska hospitals make wrenching decisions as they begin to ration care



Angie Cleary, a registered nurse, cares for a Covid patient in Tok, Alaska.  
Photograph: Rick Bowmer/AP

*[Melody Schreiber](#)*

Thu 7 Oct 2021 05.00 EDT

Rural areas across the United States are in crisis as Covid-19 overwhelms some hospitals, but the situation is especially dire in Alaska, which has the highest US rate of Covid cases and recently turned to emergency measures to allow the [rationing of healthcare](#) at 20 medical centers across the state.

Alaska's health system, stretched by enormous distances and limited resources, was precarious before the pandemic hit, and now remote communities are worried they will have nowhere to send their sickest patients.

One in 84 people in Alaska was [diagnosed](#) with Covid-19 in the last week of September alone. On Monday, the state [reported](#) 2,290 cases and one death over the course of three days. Less than two-thirds of eligible Alaskans are fully vaccinated, and the entire state is on high alert for significant spread of the coronavirus.

The surge comes as Alaskan leaders and communities are sharply divided on issues like masks and vaccinations, and health workers are burned out and bullied.

On Kodiak Island in southern Alaska, doctors are spending entire shifts searching for beds in other states so patients can receive the care they need. Providence Kodiak Island Medical Center is implementing crisis of care standards, and the nearest major hospitals in Anchorage have been [filled to overflowing for weeks](#).

“We have medevaced people all the way to Seattle, and some of our providers have reported that it has taken them literally 12, 18, 24 hours of phone calls to find a place that will accept one of our patients,” said Carol Austerman, chief executive officer of Kodiak Community Health Center.

This spike has been “devastating”, she told the Guardian, and it’s not easing yet. Her worst fear would be “to lose a patient because we can’t find a place to send them”.

In Anchorage, Alaska’s largest city, one doctor had to [choose](#) between several patients vying for the same open bed in the intensive care unit, including the resident of a rural community who would have flown in for emergency surgery. After careful deliberation, the medical team decided one of the other patients would be more likely to survive – and the rural resident died.

Rural Americans are twice as likely to die from Covid-19 than urban residents, according to a [study](#) released on Friday, and the pandemic is worsened in places with [inadequate water and sanitation](#).

Alaska relies on a tenuous network of small community clinics, mid-level regional centers, and larger hospitals in major cities. But when those

hospitals fill up, the entire network [begins to fold](#). Rural residents are worried not just about a lack of care for Covid but also about surgeries, cancer treatments, accidents and other health emergencies.

On Friday, the Republican senator Lisa Murkowski [spoke](#) on the Senate floor about a loved one who recently sought emergency care at a hospital in Fairbanks. There were no ICU beds available in Fairbanks or anywhere else in the state, she said, and if he needed that level of care, he would be flown thousands of miles away to Seattle or Portland.

“When your hospitals are full, you just can’t put them in an ambulance and take them to another town,” Murkowski said. And the person was seeking care unrelated to Covid. “That’s the squeeze,” she said. “That’s the pressure that it puts on the rest of your system.”

Alaska is geographically bigger than California, Montana and Texas combined. Facing vast distances, Alaskans travel on average about 150 miles each way to get medical care. And unlike most other states, Alaska is much more limited in its ability to transfer patients to other hospitals. Seattle and Portland, for example, are facing their own surges.

Remote villages also have to deal with the vagaries of weather and long-distance travel. “We have really struggled, off and on throughout the pandemic, with being able to get people out,” Austerman said. Kodiak is only accessible by ferry or plane, and Covid-positive patients travel by medevac. A weather delay “throws a whole ’nother stick in the fire,” she said. The transfers happen only when they find a bed in a bigger facility in the first place – a dimming prospect.

Early in the pandemic, Alaska reacted swiftly, closing down remote regions and taking precautions, especially in villages where the legacy of the devastating 1918 flu pandemic still lingers. Alaska was initially a [leader](#) in distributing vaccines, despite its vast and remote geography. Yet that progress faltered in the face of growing political opposition.

Governor Mike Dunleavy, a Republican, has resisted measures like mandating masks or encouraging vaccination, saying those are measures best left up to local jurisdictions. Local meetings have grown hostile, with

one Anchorage resident recently [comparing](#) mask mandates to the Holocaust – a comparison endorsed by the city's mayor, Dave Bronson, who [walked back](#) his comments only after an outcry.

Murkowski called meetings like these “horrible, horrible altercations” and the comparison to the Holocaust “shocking”.

“It is neighbor against neighbor,” she said of the divisions in Alaska.

Health workers, once exalted as heroes, are now being [spit upon](#) and mocked at public meetings, and one health center was recently vandalized. It's getting harder to know exactly how many Covid patients in Alaska hospitals are vaccinated, because some grow angry or violent when health workers ask their status, Dr Anne Zink, Alaska's chief medical officer, told the Guardian in September.

Now, Alaska is reaching the point health workers have dreaded and worked hard to avoid: a disintegrating health system. “We've always known that healthcare capacity would be and continues to be one of the greatest limitations in Alaska's response to Covid,” Zink said. Alaska has “incredibly limited resources and an unprecedented number of people who are needing particularly ICU-level care in our state.”

It's not just a lack of beds and resources. “Staffing in Alaska is just horrific,” Austerman said. “We are so low on medical staff right now. No one is applying.” Some nurses have taken high-paying travel contracts to work in other cities, she said, leaving remote areas with a critical shortage of staff.

Austerman hopes the triage announcement will relieve some of the pressure on hospitals, as the state brings in about 500 health workers to deal with the crush of patients.

But that's a short-term solution for hospitals, Austerman said, and it won't help remote health centers like hers. “The clinics are not included in that announcement,” she said. “We're not getting any of those people.”

Health officials and workers are still holding out hope that more Alaskans, in both rural and urban areas, will understand the crisis facing the entire state

and choose to get vaccinated in order to relieve pressure on the crumbling system.

“Vaccinations are hopefully going to make a huge difference,” Austerman said. In Kodiak, about 60% of those eligible have gotten shots, which is similar to rates in the rest of Alaska. “That 40% that’s left is really devastating everybody else.”

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## Health policy

# England's Covid travel red list to be cut to a dozen countries



Passengers returning from destinations including Brazil, Mexico and South Africa will no longer have to isolate in a hotel for 11 nights after the move.  
Photograph: Steve Parsons/PA

*[Aubrey Allegretti](#) and [Jessica Elgot](#)*

Wed 6 Oct 2021 12.32 EDT

Ministers will slash England's travel red list to about a dozen countries, but plans for replacing the requirement for a negative PCR test with a lateral flow one to avoid isolation hang in the balance.

Destinations including Brazil, Mexico and South Africa are expected to be moved off the red list on Thursday, meaning passengers returning from them will not have to isolate in a hotel for 11 nights at a cost of more than £2,000.

The move means restrictions at the border will be at their loosest since the third lockdown began nine months ago.

The Foreign Office has also announced it will drastically overhaul its travel advice. Currently, it still issues advice to people not to travel to some non-red list countries for all but essential reasons based on Covid grounds.

This is separate to the health rules which are led by the Department for Transport, but significant because the discrepancy meant that travellers going to non-red list countries were not covered by normal travel insurance and so had to pay substantially more. The FCDO is no longer advising against non-essential travel to 32 countries and territories – including Algeria, Ghana and Malaysia – and will only reimpose it solely for Covid reasons “in exceptional circumstances such as if the local healthcare system is overwhelmed”.

Given the current Covid vaccines have held up against the Delta variant, which is dominant in the UK and increasingly usurping other variants overseas, government insiders are increasingly confident the move to slash the red list is safe.

However, ministers also hoped to be able to announce that PCR tests – which travellers have to test negative with to avoid isolation from non-red list countries if they are fully vaccinated – were being replaced with significantly cheaper lateral flow ones.

A source with knowledge of the discussions said the idea was still “up in the air” and “not settled yet”, sparking fears the change could be delayed until after the October half-term, when many people would be looking to take advantage of relaxed travel rules.

The final decision will be made in a meeting on Thursday morning and is expected to be announced that afternoon. Given health restrictions are a devolved matter, it will be up to the administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to decide whether to follow suit.

Brazil and South Africa have faced the toughest restrictions longer than almost any country, as they were both put on the red list in January owing to

fears that the Gamma and Beta variants that were discovered in the two countries respectively were more resistant to vaccines. Pockets of Beta cases sprang up in the UK, but Delta was then imported from India and began to outstrip most other variants owing to its high transmissibility.

There are 54 countries on the red list, which include all of those in mainland South America and southern and eastern Africa. The London-based World Travel and Tourism Council, which represents industry firms, said the sector's recovery would continue to be "sluggish" owing to policies such as the red list.

The government has been criticised by Tory MPs – including the former prime minister Theresa May – for not unlocking international travel as fast as many other countries. Over the summer, she said it was "incomprehensible" that the UK – being "one of the most heavily vaccinated countries in the world" – was the "most reluctant to give its citizens the freedoms those vaccinations should support".

Gradual changes have been made to the rules, including most recently the axing of the three-tier traffic light system that graded countries red, amber or green. There is now only a red list, and all other countries that do not feature on it are treated the same. However, there are still different rules for those who are fully inoculated and those who are not, partly in an attempt, government sources have said, to encourage everyone to get both jabs.

The transport secretary, Grant Shapps, said this week: "We are accelerating towards a future where travel continues to reopen safely and remains open for good, and today's rule changes are good news for families, businesses and the travel sector.

"Our priority remains to protect public health but, with more than eight in 10 people now fully vaccinated, we are able to take these steps to lower the cost of testing and help the sector to continue in its recovery."

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## 2021.10.07 - Opinion

- Boris Johnson's 'high wage' agenda is taking the wind out of Labour's sails
- England needs to ditch its 'vaccine just' strategy for 'vaccine plus' instead
- What Succession gets right about the rich
- Shapeshifting Tories have mastered playing to the crowd, while Labour fights itself

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

## Boris Johnson's 'high wage' agenda is taking the wind out of Labour's sails

[Larry Elliott](#)



‘Boris Johnson has as good as admitted that Labour has been right in its critique of Britain’s economic failings all along.’ Photograph: Mark Thomas/REX/Shutterstock

Thu 7 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

There’s nothing original about saying Britain needs a new economic model. Nor that poverty wages should be a thing of the past. Or even that business needs to stop relying on cheap imported labour and invest more in skills training instead.

The idea that Britain needs root-and-branch reform to make it a high-productivity economy has been around for decades. It is voiced every time there’s a scandal involving gang masters or the squalid conditions in which migrant workers have been forced to live.

What’s unusual is that the call for change is coming from [Boris Johnson’s government](#), which has spent the past few days telling UK companies that the days when they could ease labour shortages by whistling up low-wage workers from the EU are over. The prime minister said in his [conference speech](#) that it was time to tackle the “long-term structural weaknesses” of the UK economy, which takes some nerve given that the Conservatives have been in charge of this “broken model” for 11 years.

Traditionally, [Labour](#) would have much happier suggesting that Britain has lessons to learn from Germany’s economic model, but Johnson thinks the people who provided him with his 80-seat majority in 2019 are turned off by free-market economics and will support a party that offers higher wages, better railways and more money for the NHS.

Johnson went out of his way to praise the private sector and the dynamism of capital, but that seemed like an attempt to mollify business after the savaging they have been getting in Manchester all week. It would once have been unthinkable for a Conservative cabinet minister to go on the radio and [accuse business](#) – as Dominic Raab did – of having an “addiction” to cheap imported labour.

This is not ground on which the Conservative party would traditionally choose to fight, not least because the seeds of Britain's low-wage, service-sector dominated model were sown by Margaret Thatcher when she decimated manufacturing, smashed the trade unions and strongly supported the creation of Europe's single market.

Predictably, the thinktanks that keep the flame of Thatcherism alive hated Johnson's speech. The Adam Smith Institute called it "[economically illiterate](#)", describing it as "an agenda for levelling down to a centrally planned, high tax, low productivity economy".

But Johnson's Tories appear to have no qualms about picking fights with the businesses that bankroll the party. What's more, they do so using the sort of political language normally only used by the left.

It goes without saying that all this represents a gamble. In the circumstances, the government's poll ratings are [holding up well](#), but there's no guarantee that they will continue to do so if inflation surges and shortages intensify. Parties that preside over falling living standards don't tend to prosper.

There were times in his speech when Johnson appeared to be inhabiting a parallel universe where motorists did not have to queue for petrol, energy bills were not rocketing and supermarkets were not suffering from shortages. These were dismissed as stresses and strains, the sort of things that happen when the economy is coming out of lockdown.

Yet Johnson clearly thinks this is a gamble worth taking. His aim is to cement the reshaping of British politics that has been under way since the Brexit vote in 2016. The prime minister thinks he has hit on a winning formula with an interventionist, left-of-centre approach to the economy and a tough right-of-centre approach to law and order, immigration and culture wars. In the absence of a coherent alternative from Labour, he could well be proved right.

In theory, this should be happy times for the opposition. Johnson has as good as admitted that Labour has been right in its critique of Britain's economic failings all along. He has gone out of his way to antagonise business at the start of what looks like being a long, hard winter.

But the upbeat mood of the Tories in Manchester was noticeable by its absence when Labour met in Brighton last week. And one reason is that the [Conservatives](#) are united behind a plan for post-Brexit Britain they believe in, while Labour would rather not talk about Brexit at all.

This is not a good place to be – and something the relatively small number of Labour Brexiters feared would happen. They argued – as Johnson is now doing – that leaving the EU presented an opportunity to restructure the economy and warned that if a party of the left did not make a positive case for change, then the vacuum would be filled by the right.

Put simply, Labour has a choice. One option is to stick with its current approach – stay outside the EU, but negotiate a better Brexit deal – and hope that the government is hobbled by economic chaos over the coming months, which is entirely possible but not guaranteed.

Another is to argue that Brexit was a mistake and therefore the party will campaign at the next election to rejoin the EU. This appeals to many party members but after the [wipeout of 2019](#), Keir Starmer and his team have no appetite for a strategy they think would result in a similar result next time.

Finally, Labour could say that it, too, wants to seize the opportunity afforded by Brexit and would make a better fist of renewal than the government. For that, though, two things are needed: a plan of its own, and some of Johnson's optimism.

- Larry Elliott is a Guardian columnist
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[Opinion](#)[Coronavirus](#)

# Why is England doing worse against Covid than its European neighbours?

[Christina Pagel](#) and [Martin McKee](#)



‘A common perception is that other countries are in the same boat as us. Yet England has one of the highest burdens of Covid in Europe.’ Photograph: Amer Ghazzal/Rex/Shutterstock

Thu 7 Oct 2021 05.00 EDT

Only two months after being forced at the last minute to “cancel Christmas” in 2020, Boris Johnson committed to a “[cautious and prudent](#)” roadmap out of lockdown that recognised the evolving epidemiology of the virus. But memories are short. On 19 July, all social distancing and face-covering requirements, as well as limits on the number of people at indoor or outdoor events, were lifted in England. As the summer progressed, international travel restrictions were eased and fully vaccinated people and children were

no longer [required to isolate](#) if they had been in contact with someone who contracted Covid-19.

Some people in England, and many more elsewhere, watched with astonishment. Israel, a world leader in vaccinations, was already seeing the beginning of a rapid increase in cases driven by the new Delta variant. England had a rising number of cases; 54% of the population was fully vaccinated by 19 July. CNN, capturing a widespread view, called England's approach an "[experiment](#)" (a leader in the [Irish Times](#) prefaced that word with "reckless"). Fortunately the [large increase](#) in cases that some feared would arrive after 19 July didn't materialise. According to the [Sage modelling subgroup](#), this was largely due to a slow return to pre-pandemic behaviour, school holidays and continued home-working.

Yet cases have remained high and mostly flat well into the autumn. Since 1 June, there have been almost 3m confirmed cases of Covid-19 in England. Rather than prompting concern, this seems to have instead resulted in a perception that England has transitioned to "living with the virus". Each week in England there are still more than 500 deaths and between 150,000 and 200,000 confirmed cases of Covid-19, too many of which will result in long Covid. Yet these numbers are rarely discussed. Presumably they are considered a necessary price to pay for the majority to get back to living a normal life (of course, many of those who are clinically vulnerable, and their family members, do not feel able to enjoy this return to normality).

A common perception is that England has navigated its way out of the pandemic more successfully than most through vaccination, or that, at the very least, other countries are in the same boat as us. Yet England has one of the highest burdens of Covid in Europe, measured by the weekly number of [new cases per million people](#), exceeded only by the three Baltic states, Serbia and Romania. England's case rates are eight to 10 times higher than some of the best performing countries, such as Spain and Portugal.

Measured by death rates, the situation is not quite as bad. Some countries with weaker health systems and low vaccination coverage among their elderly citizens, such as Bulgaria and Romania, have particularly high death rates. But even so, England is still doing much worse in terms of Covid deaths than our western European and Nordic neighbours. With more than

7,500 reported deaths since 1 June, England's current death rate (22 deaths per million people in the last two weeks) is more than twice as high as Germany's (10 deaths per million people) and almost six times as high as Finland's (four deaths per million people).

England is not unique in struggling with the Delta variant, which now accounts for almost all cases across Europe. So why are our closest neighbours achieving much better health outcomes given that they, too, have their children back at school, their students back at university, and their business and leisure facilities open? The reason comes down to strategy. While Germany, France, Spain and others have pursued a “vaccine plus” strategy, England has opted for a “vaccine just” strategy.

Both strategies require vaccinating as many people as possible. Earlier this year, much was made of our rapid start to the vaccination programme. Yet England is now falling behind on this. It had fully vaccinated 67% of its entire population by the beginning of October, far lower than countries such as Portugal (85%), Spain (79%), Denmark (75%) and Ireland (74%). Crucially, much of the [rest of Europe](#) began vaccinating teens early in the summer, ensuring a high proportion would be protected when schools reopened.

Now to the “plus” bit. While each country is doing its own version there are some common elements. Face coverings and vaccine passports remain widespread across western Europe. Anyone who has visited France over the summer will have seen the routine use of the [TousAntiCovid](#) app in bars and restaurants. Masks are required in indoor public spaces and public transport in France, Germany, Portugal, Italy, Spain and elsewhere. Yet in England these measures will only be implemented if the government moves to its “[Plan B](#)”. Some countries maintained some restrictions for longer on highest risk settings such as [nightclubs](#) or [large events](#). Many countries have also made major investments in [ventilation](#) and filtration, while some have made [CO<sub>2</sub>](#) monitors compulsory in certain settings, such as hospitality venues. While England recently decided to [fit schools with CO<sub>2</sub> monitors](#), until recently it relied on simply advising people to open windows where possible. Schools across Europe have a range of protections in place to reduce cases in children, including masks, bubbles and distancing. In

England these measures have been scrapped, although some schools and councils are now [reintroducing them](#) in the face of high case rates in school children.

England, not for the first time, is the odd one out in Europe. The Sage modelling subgroup Spi-M warned of the potential for new surges this autumn and considered that “a relatively light set of measures could be sufficient to curb sustained growth” – advice the government has, once again, ignored. If it looked to its European neighbours, England might realise that they are already doing just this. They are demonstrating that there is a way to be open while keeping cases low. It’s “vaccine plus”. It works. And we should be doing it.

This article was amended on 8 October 2021 to clarify that some countries maintained restrictions in the highest-risk settings for longer as part of a “vaccine plus” strategy.

- Christina Pagel is director of UCL’s Clinical Operational Research Unit, which applies advanced analytical methods to problems in healthcare. Martin McKee is professor of European public health at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine

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**Opinion**  
[The super-rich](#)

## What Succession gets right about the rich

[Rachel Connolly](#)



‘In our risk-averse production climate, every good cultural artefact is replicated and warped in the process, usually losing whatever it was that made it good in the first place.’ Photograph: Graeme Hunter

Thu 7 Oct 2021 04.00 EDT

How should a rich person be? In Succession, the HBO drama about the trials and tribulations of the ultra-wealthy Roy family and their crumbling media dynasty, the answer is, mostly, unhappy. In the first two seasons, as patriarch Logan Roy was faced with the problem of choosing one of his disappointing children as a successor we saw a gallery of paranoid elders and neurotic, despondent heirs rattling around their gilded cage, pecking at each other. (The [third season](#) will air in the coming weeks.) The characters seemed terrible but real, the tone was an unusual combination of funny and

unsettling but clearly articulated – conversations about politics were topical but cynical. It felt weird, honest and fresh. It was excellent TV.

But, in our risk-averse production climate, every good cultural artefact is replicated and warped in the process, usually losing whatever it was that made it good in the first place. And so there has been a trend of similar shows, all playing off the premise of a group of hyperwealthy people, awkwardly bound together – by family connections, staying at the same hotel, or attending the same school – in an unhappy tangle of resentment and neurosis. The cast of characters includes recognisable stock types (the “white feminist” girl-boss, the entitled older man, the rich socialist). The characters talk about the sort of political and cultural topics for which we all know what the “right” position to hold is. The tone is humorous.

Where [Succession](#) represented the best of this, The White Lotus and the Gossip Girl remake (copying not one, but two, premises) are the worst of it. In these, the format has been reduced to an empty and pandering moralistic tale about bad rich people. The characters feel like educational devices. Gossip Girl is full of guilty young heirs calling each other out on their relative levels of privilege, or for fat shaming, or not attending lectures on deforestation; the unsettling humour of Succession has collapsed into a guilty earnestness. Meanwhile jokes in The White Lotus come with a kind of manically obvious “rich people are stupid and they do stupid things” exaggerated-wink-at-the-audience – a quality I’ve come to think of as “honk honk”. Succession is an original TV programme; its successors, however, are something between a parable and an Instagram infographic about a recent news event.



‘Gossip Girl is full of guilty young heirs calling each other out.’ Photograph: Jose Perez/Bauer-Griffin/GC Images

Of course there have always been shows (and films, novels and plays) about the exploits of rich people, often conniving and wicked ones. But one of the dreariest, and least politically productive, developments in recent years is the expected performance of hollow social justice rhetoric of everyone from billionaires to princes. These shows respond to that climate, unwittingly highlighting just how wearisome and futile it is. Why can’t we explore glamour and badness without trite sermons on privilege and climate breakdown?

The White Lotus [has been praised](#) for its “uneasy discussions about race, consent and privilege” but are they uneasy viewing? Who for? With these topics there seems to be an idea among liberals that, while a small number of us know the right way of thinking on these things, most others are totally ignorant. This is arrogant but also clearly false. Who doesn’t know that colonialism is bad? Or what the progressive line on white men is? Perhaps the same person who missed all of the discourse around “Karens”? The intended audience for this ilk of shows has been having these conversations for the past decade, and maybe even contributed to some of the talking points in the form of viral tweets. It’s not that these conversations are radical, at this stage, but rather that they are insular.

The problem is that The White Lotus and Gossip Girl feel as if they are trying to absolve me of something; that I am supposed to watch them and smugly think: "Haha, look at those awful people in the fancy hotel with their bad politics." In an [interview](#), the creator of The White Lotus, Mike White, said the character he most identifies with is the put-upon hotel manager Armond. "I sometimes feel like I'm in the service industry, even though I'm not," he said. "Dancing for the man – I find myself doing that a lot."

Everybody wants to feel like this; it's very flattering. Who would identify as "the man"? But cruelty, vapidness and some culpability for the state of the world does not start at the absolute top wealth bracket, and is not the preserve of a certain identity category. The White Lotus has been described as "[biting social satire](#)" (Gossip Girl is too obvious for that), but I think it's the opposite. It indulges the dominant political sentiment of our time (on the left, the centre and the right): a strange acceptance that, while things are very bad, none of it has anything to do with any of us. I don't buy it, and honk-honk laughing at the super-rich doesn't make me feel any better about it.

The pandering trope of wealthy, oblivious white people is absent in Succession. Instead virtually every character is utterly cognisant of the progressive line on everything, and perfectly happy to use this knowledge to their advantage. (See Siobhan Roy using her status as a "feminist" to persuade a woman not to testify in a sexual assault case which could ruin her father's company.) There is a brutal honesty to this very recognisable cynicism which is not solely the preserve of the elite.

But, despite its excellence, there is a more subtle pandering element in Succession. The miserable, powerless billionaire heirs, imprisoned by their wealth and status, play into a popular idea: that almost everyone, from millionaire property tycoons to supermodels, is having a terrible time under capitalism. Everyone, other than perhaps Jeff Bezos, is simply doing their best to "survive". Maybe that's true but it seems like wishful thinking. I think this is why Logan is the most compelling character of the show. With his hardness, his sense of purpose and his ruthlessness, he possesses a strange dignity. He is wildly selfish, a liar, devious, manipulative and obsessed with the accumulation of wealth and status for its own sake. He hates his children (who could love them?) but he doesn't make a performance of hating his own life. There is an honesty to that.

- Rachel Connolly is a London-based journalist from Belfast
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[Opinion](#)[Boris Johnson](#)

## **Shapeshifting Tories have mastered playing to the crowd, while Labour fights itself**

[Owen Jones](#)





‘It’s been a dizzying ride: from the high Thatcherism of unabashed beggar-thy-neighbour individualism, to Boris Johnson’s strategic investment blended with a culture war waged from the ministerial bully pulpit.’

Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Thu 7 Oct 2021 03.00 EDT

To be a Tory is to be a shapeshifter. The [Conservatives](#) are one of the world’s most successful electoral forces because they are always attempting to strike a balance between the spirit of each age and the interests of the elites they exist to champion.

For the true blue grassroots, this can be discombobulating, aggravating even. At the Tory party conference, some activists muttered to me about the “socialism” of [Boris Johnson](#). Such complaints have a historical pedigree: when the Conservatives resigned themselves to Clement Attlee’s postwar consensus of nationalisation, high taxes and strong trade unions, Margaret Thatcher denounced her party’s acquiescence. She even accused her predecessor, Ted Heath, of having “proposed and almost implemented the most radical form of socialism ever contemplated by an elected British government”.

It's certainly been a dizzying ride ever since: from the high Thatcherism of unabashed beggar-thy-neighbour individualism, to David Cameron's austerity, pinkwashed with equal marriage, to Boris Johnson's strategic investment blended with a culture war waged from the ministerial bully pulpit. Some Thatcherite complaints about Johnsonian statism simply refer to desperate decisions most western governments were forced to implement because of an unprecedented public health emergency, like the state stepping in to pay the wages of private sector workers – but few bother to pretend free market economics and a pandemic mix. Yet it doesn't end there. For years, the Tories – and New Labour for that matter – slashed corporation tax with the mantra that asking big business to contribute less will actually increase tax revenues. That they have repudiated this dogma by [increasing corporation tax](#) is a major win for the left's arguments, or at least it would be if today's Labour party was interested in fighting Tory dogma (spoiler: it is not).

The latest incarnation of the Tories understand that the electorate never warmed to free market nostrums, that at best sufficient numbers could only be convinced they were necessary evils. Their so-called “red wall” voters – predominantly older white homeowners – want assets to rise, have a disdain for progressive social norms, dislike immigration, but have no love for slash-and-burn economics either. This is the sweet spot Johnsonian Tories seek to nurture. So while the nurses who carried Britain through its worst emergency since the war may suffer a real terms pay cut – 82% of [healthcare workers](#) opted for Labour in 2019, hence their livelihoods can be sidelined – funds for [struggling towns are earmarked](#) for Tory constituencies, not least in former Labour fortresses.

Owen Jones meets delegates at the Conservative party conference.

While Thatcher sneered at class as a “Communist concept”, today's Tories cosplay as a blue collar, working-class base: but it is undermined by the facts. [Labour led](#) among the working age population in its 2019 electoral rout, particularly among low-paid workers. No wonder, then, the Tories feel so relaxed about slashing the universal credit uplift, emptying the pockets of the low paid and poor households of £20 a week. The same persistent Tory dogma underpins this vulgar act of class war: Tory delegates told me, almost as if they were reading from a script, that people are poor because they

couldn't manage their own finances properly, or they splash it on cigarettes, booze and gambling. The idea that poverty is the consequence of individual failings – [a claim](#) that collides with the reality of record numbers of poor working households – remains hardwired into the Tory soul.

Yet Labour often retreats into a comfort zone of bashing the “same old Tories” when it finds itself lacking anything to say. [Johnson's speech](#) to conference yesterday was classic public school japes over substance. His optimistic sunny uplands of Britain schtick jars with a reality of rising prices, emptying supermarket shelves and queues outside petrol stations. But that very sentence spells out the Johnsonian trap: he relishes dismissing opponents as miserablist doomsayers, underlining the need for Labour to spell out its own hopeful, confident vision of what society could be. Just as the Tories dazzlingly reframed what should have been a crisis of Tory ideology – the 2008 financial crisis – as a crisis of public spending, today’s scenes of petrol station forecourt chaos are dishonestly spun as proof the medicine is working, a painful readjustment to a high-wage economy. Aided and abetted by a largely pliant media, any incarnation of Labour would struggle to dismantle this unapologetic dishonesty, but the opposition does not even have the semblance of a story to offer as an alternative.

As Johnson tossed culture war red meat to his audience of followers – mercilessly pillorying drug users, despite both he and various members of his cabinet [having admitted](#) to previously smoking or [snorting](#) illicit substances – the Tory vision is clear: bash the “woke”, kick out migrants, promise high wages and funds from the public purse if your community votes the right way.

His team knows this is sufficient to build a formidable electoral coalition. They are untroubled by [Keir Starmer](#), who Johnson casually dismissed as a “chameleon” presiding over a party at war, highlighting the hole the opposition leader has dug for himself by abandoning his leadership pledges and using his conference to ignite an internal ruckus. As it happens, there is no more classic chameleon than the Conservative party itself, but at least they shift on the basis of picking up traces of public mood and adapting it to their partisan advantage.

Alas, Labour's leaders are more interested in settling internal factional scores than disassembling Tory deceit and projecting an optimistic, coherent vision in its place. This remains a party championing the well-to-do over, say, the underpaid supermarket worker, care worker, or nurse: yet they have the cockiness of a government lacking an opposition. That Labour has chosen to give them this entirely needless confidence is a voluntary decision of political self-destruction.

- Owen Jones is a Guardian columnist
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## [Hong Kong](#)

# Hong Kong plans megacourt to deal with protest arrests backlog



Police patrol the streets during anti-government protests in November 2019.

Photograph: Willie Siau/SOPA Images/Rex/Shutterstock

*[Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei*

*[@heldavidson](#)*

Thu 7 Oct 2021 05.27 EDT

Hong Kong will build a new megacourt to address a shortage of space as it works through a backlog of the thousands arrested during the 2019 mass protests, and the more than 150 arrested under the national security law.

The city's leader, Carrie Lam, announced the initiative on Wednesday in a policy address, which also included plans for a new metropolis on the border with mainland China and [further tightening of national security laws](#).

Lam said the megacourt would be established in an existing government building “to handle cases involving a large number of defendants” until a planned new district court is commissioned in late 2027. She said work on the court, as well as supporting facilities, would begin early next year.

“I have asked relevant departments to fully assist the judiciary in tackling the problem of courtroom shortage,” she said.

During [demonstrations in 2019](#) when millions took to Hong Kong’s streets, police arrested more than 10,200 individuals. There was a 70% increase in the number of 16- to 20-year-olds arrested compared with the previous year, according to police statistics.

By April this year, when government figures were published, about one-quarter of the 10,200 had begun or completed judicial proceedings. Among those being processed, 720 people had been charged with rioting offences, while others were accused of unlawful assembly, desecration of the flag, weapon possession, stopping vehicles on an expressway, or assaulting a police officer, the South China Morning Post [reported](#) at the time.

There have also been single cases with large numbers of defendants. In March [a bail hearing for 47 defendants](#) – the bulk of those [arrested over the staging of unofficial primaries](#) for the pro-democracy camp – was criticised as [lacking judicial fairness](#).

The first day of the hearing ran until 3am the following morning, ending with at least four defendants taken away by ambulance amid claims of a lack of food, rest, or opportunity to change clothes between sessions. The individuals and various legal teams struggled to fit in the courtroom.

That case has since been delayed multiple times, with most defendants – including former politicians and activists – remaining in jail on remand.

There have been growing concerns about the independence of Hong Kong’s once-vaunted court system, as it seeks to navigate increasing government pressure and the 2020 introduction of the national security law that included a separate police department, and provisions for the chief executive to

handpick judges for sensitive cases. Trials can also be transferred to the mainland in special instances, but this power has not yet been used.

In her speech, Lam defended the judicial system, saying a fair trial and due process were “essential elements of the rule of law”, and that the judiciary played a “pivotal role”.

The lengthy policy address also flagged plans for a new city in the northern and rural areas near the border with mainland [China](#). Lam said the metropolis could house up to 2.5 million people eventually, and serve as an international IT hub.

She also outlined plans to continue tightening security in Hong Kong, including implementing national security legislation in addition to the already active Beijing-imposed law, bringing in a “fake news” law, increasing national security education in schools, introducing programmes to help young people “develop positive thinking and law-abiding awareness”, and expanding mandatory oath-taking for public servants.

On Thursday, Lam also said Hong Kong needed to consider banning insults, with a law covering the police, officials and potentially the general public, the broadcaster RTHK reported.

“In Singapore, they’ve recently enacted a piece of legislation to protect security guards in the private sector, so they won’t be insulted or injured,” Lam told the legislature. “So, give us some time to consider the scope of the legislation.”

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## Deaths in custody

# Indigenous man dies during ‘violent struggle’ with Queensland police



Queensland police are treating the death of a 27-year-old Aboriginal man during a struggle with officers on a street in Wilsonton as a death in custody.  
Photograph: Joel Garrett/AAP

*Australian Associated Press*  
Thu 7 Oct 2021 05.31 EDT

An Indigenous [Queensland](#) man has died during a “violent struggle” with police that also left two officers with minor injuries.

Two other men were on the run after fleeing the scene of the incident in Toowoomba, west of Brisbane, after midday on Thursday.

Officers went to a street near the heart of the regional city after a member of the public reported seeing a group of people behaving suspiciously in a

vehicle.

By the time officers arrived, they had determined the Subaru was stolen, the assistant commissioner, Mike Condon, told reporters.

“Upon arrival police attempted to detain the occupants of the vehicle,” he said.

Two men got away. The third man died at the scene.

“During an altercation with police, a 27-year-old male person became unconscious, whereby police immediately provided first aid,” Condon said later on Thursday.

Paramedics arrived quickly and continued to work on the man but he could not be revived.

The incident was being treated as a death in custody and was being investigated by the police service’s ethical standards command, with oversight by the state coroner and the Crime and Corruption Commission.

“The mere fact that it involved an altercation will necessitate we investigate the use of force used by our officers,” Condon said.

He would not comment on how the man became unconscious but did say there were witnesses. “I would suggest that the fact there was a violent struggle would suggest that they were fleeing from the scene as they were in a stolen vehicle.”

The assistant commissioner said the dead man’s family had been notified and police liaison officers were working with the community “to ensure there are no concerns that may cause any unrest”.

One of the police officers involved suffered breathing difficulties and the other officer had minor, unspecified injuries. Both were taken to St Vincent’s hospital in a satisfactory condition.

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They were yet to be interviewed but Condon said that was likely to happen within 24 hours.

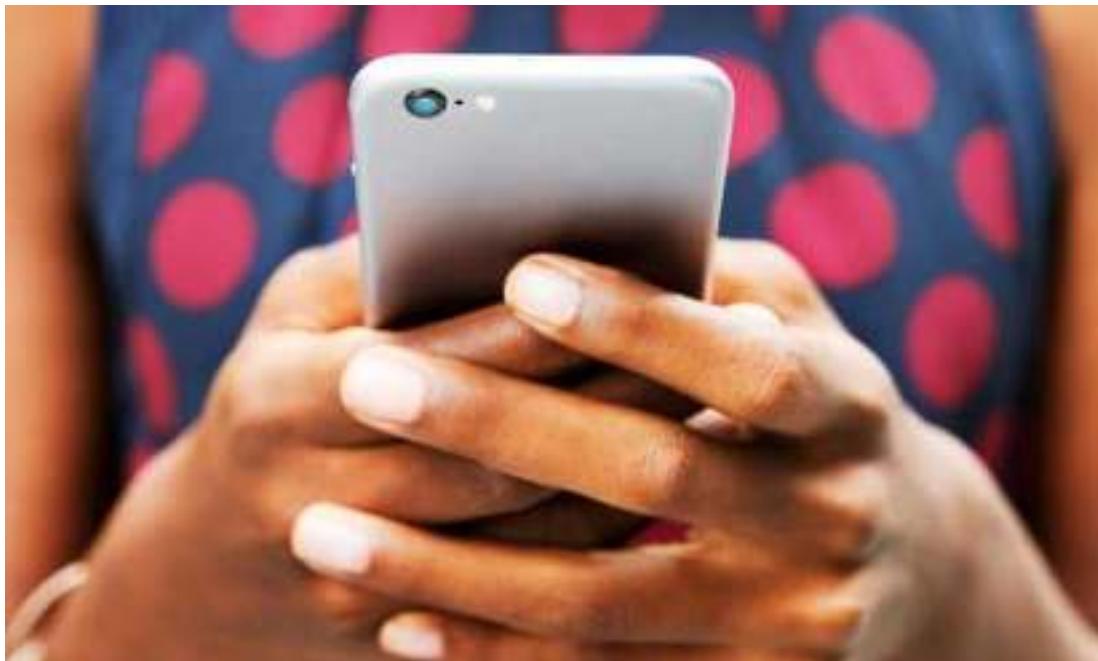
“The normal process is that they will stand down for a couple of days to regather themselves, but it really depends on the individual. But we are here to support them,” he said.

Condon said little was known about the dead man other than that he was 27 and a First Nations person born in the Western Downs town of Mitchell.

#### Quick Guide

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Photograph: Tim Roberts/Stone RF

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“We always try to expedite these matters to ensure the community have complete confidence in the investigation. We don’t have all the answers at the moment.

“Until those investigations are complete, I would hope that common sense applies within the community, and we work together to ensure that once the outcome is known that people will understand completely what’s occurred.”

The incident happened on Stone Street in Wilsonton. Police want to hear from anyone with mobile phone or dashcam footage.

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## [Texas](#)

# **US judge temporarily blocks Texas's near-total abortion ban in blow to contentious law**



A woman marches in protest of Texas' SB8, a controversial bill that bans abortions at about six weeks of pregnancy. Photograph: Reginald Mathalone/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

*Guardian staff and agencies*

Wed 6 Oct 2021 21.32 EDT

A US federal judge has temporarily blocked the near-total ban on abortion in [Texas](#), dealing the first legal blow against the contentious law and throwing its future into uncertainty.

The law, known as Senate Bill 8, [banned most abortions](#) in the nation's second-most populous state and, until now, had withstood a wave of early challenges.

Wednesday's ruling, which stems from a challenge brought by the Biden administration, will prevent the state from enforcing the Republican-backed law while litigation over its legality continues. But even with the law on hold, abortion services in Texas may not instantly resume because doctors still fear that they could be sued without a more permanent legal decision.

"Tonight's ruling is an important step forward toward restoring the constitutional rights of women across the state of Texas," White House press secretary Jen Psaki said in a statement late on Wednesday. "The fight has only just begun, both in Texas and in many states across this country where women's rights are currently under attack."

Texas officials are likely to seek a swift reversal from the fifth US circuit court of appeals, which previously allowed the restrictions to take effect.



People participate in the Houston Women's March against the Texas abortion ban on 2 October. Photograph: Melissa Phillip/AP

The law, signed by Republican governor Greg Abbott in May, prohibits abortions once cardiac activity is detected, which is usually around six weeks, before someone can even know they are pregnant. To enforce the law, Texas deputized private citizens to file lawsuits against violators, and has entitled them to at least \$10,000 in damages if successful.

The lawsuit was brought by the Biden administration, which has said the restrictions were enacted in defiance of the US constitution. The [Biden administration argued](#) that Texas has waged an attack on the constitutional right to abortion.

“A state may not ban abortions at six weeks. Texas knew this, but it wanted a six-week ban anyway, so the state resorted to an unprecedented scheme of vigilante justice that was designed to scare abortion providers and others who might help women exercise their constitutional rights,” said Brian Netter, justice department attorney, to the federal court on Friday.

In a 113-page opinion, judge Robert Pitman took Texas to task over the law, saying Republicans lawmakers had “contrived an unprecedented and transparent statutory scheme” to deny patients their constitutional right to an abortion.

“From the moment SB8 went into effect, women have been unlawfully prevented from exercising control over their lives in ways that are protected by the constitution,” wrote Pitman, who was appointed to the bench by Barack Obama.



A women's march and abortion rights rally at the State Capitol in Austin, Texas, in October. Photograph: Sergio Flores/AFP/Getty Images

“That other courts may find a way to avoid this conclusion is theirs to decide; this court will not sanction one more day of this offensive deprivation of such an important right.”

Abortion providers say their fears have become reality in the short time the law has been in effect. Planned Parenthood says the number of patients from Texas at its clinics in the state decreased by nearly 80% in the two weeks after the law took effect.

Some providers have said that Texas clinics are now in danger of closing while neighboring states struggle to keep up with a surge of patients who must drive hundreds of miles. Others, they say, are being forced to carry pregnancies to term.

Other states, mostly in the South, have passed similar laws that ban abortion within the early weeks of pregnancy, all of which judges have blocked. But Texas’ version has so far outmaneuvered the courts because it leaves enforcement to private citizens to file suits, not prosecutors, which critics say amounts to a bounty.

At least one [Texas abortion provider](#) has admitted to violating the law and been sued but not by abortion opponents. Former attorneys in Illinois and Arkansas say they sued a San Antonio doctor in hopes of getting a judge who would invalidate the law.



Abortion rights supporters participate in the nationwide Women's March held on 2 October. Photograph: Go Nakamura/Reuters

The Texas law is just one that has set up the biggest test of abortion rights in the US in decades, and it is part of a broader push by Republicans nationwide to impose new restrictions on abortion.

On Monday, the US supreme court begins a new term, which in December will include arguments in Mississippi's bid to overturn 1973's landmark Roe v Wade decision guaranteeing the right to an abortion.

Last month, the court did not rule on the constitutionality of the Texas law in allowing it to remain in place. But abortion providers took that 5-4 vote as an ominous sign about where the court might be heading on abortion after its conservative majority was fortified with three appointees from Donald Trump.

Ahead of the new supreme court term, Planned Parenthood on Friday released a report saying that if Roe v Wade were overturned, 26 states are primed to ban abortion. This year alone, nearly 600 abortion restrictions have been introduced in statehouses nationwide, with more than 90 becoming law, according to Planned Parenthood.

In a statement following Wednesday's order, the [organization tweeted](#): "It's been 36 days since Texas deprived its citizens of their constitutional right to abortion. The relief granted by the court today is overdue. We will continue fighting this ban in court, until we are certain that Texans' ability to access abortion is protected."

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## [Pakistan](#)

# Pakistan earthquake: at least 20 dead after powerful 5.7 magnitude tremor



A boy walks out of his damaged family house, following an earthquake, in Harnai, Balochistan, Pakistan. Photograph: Naseer Ahmed/Reuters

*Guardian staff and agencies*

Wed 6 Oct 2021 21.14 EDT

A 5.7 magnitude earthquake hit southern [Pakistan](#) in the early hours of Thursday, killing at least 20 people and injuring more than 200, government officials said.

The quake struck Balochistan at 3am local time and at a depth of around 20km (12 miles), [the US Geological Survey said](#).

Many of the victims died when roofs and walls collapsed, Suhail Anwar Hashmi, a senior provincial government official, told Agence France-Presse.

A woman and six children were among 20 dead, he said.

“We are receiving information that 20 people have been killed due to the earthquake. Rescue efforts are under way,” provincial interior minister Mir Zia ullah Langau added.

### [Pakistan map](#)

Naseer Nasar, the head of Balochistan’s provincial disaster management authority, said that between 15 and 20 people had died, but that the toll may increase.



Residents watch a Pakistani army helicopter preparing to land with a rescue team following an earthquake in the remote mountainous district of Harnai.  
Photograph: Banaras Khan/AFP/Getty Images

The worst-affected area was the remote mountainous city of Harnai, in Balochistan, where a lack of paved roads, electricity and mobile phone coverage has hampered the rescue effort.

The earthquake was also felt in Balochistan’s provincial capital, Quetta, which is about 100km west of the epicentre.

Pakistan straddles the boundary where the Indian and Eurasian tectonic plates meet, making the country susceptible to earthquakes.

In October 2015, a 7.5-magnitude quake in Pakistan and Afghanistan killed almost 400 people across rugged terrain that impeded relief efforts.

The country was also hit by a 7.6-magnitude quake on October 8, 2005, that [killed almost 80,000 people](#) and left about 3.5 million homeless, mainly in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir.

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## The Pegasus projectSurveillance

# Manager of fund that owns Israeli spyware firm not yet given access to sensitive info



A logo on the wall of branch of the Israeli NSO Group company, near the southern Israeli town of Sapir. Photograph: Sebastian Scheiner/AP

*[Stephanie Kirchgaessner](#) in Washington*

*[@skirchy](#)*

Thu 7 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

The US consulting firm that now manages the fund that owns a majority stake in NSO Group, the Israeli spyware maker, has not yet been granted clearance by the Israeli government to receive any sensitive information about the company.

The clearance is required before any sensitive information can be shared because NSO is regulated by the Israeli defence ministry, and details about the company's government clients and internal investigations are classified.

Berkeley Research Group (BRG) was [selected to take over management](#) of the fund by a group of public investors in late July after an internal dispute between the founding partners of Novalpina Capital, the London-based private equity company that previously managed the fund and [controlled NSO's board](#).

A spokesperson for the Israeli embassy in London declined to comment. BRG did not respond to several requests for comment.

The change in management of the fund followed months of [internal strife](#) at Novalpina. It also came after the publication of [the Pegasus project](#), an investigation into NSO by a consortium of 17 news outlets that included the Guardian, Washington Post and the French nonprofit Forbidden Stories.

The investigation revealed how human rights activists, journalists and lawyers around the world have been targeted by authoritarian governments using NSO's hacking software, which is known as Pegasus. Traces of Pegasus have also recently been discovered on the mobile phones of [five current French cabinet members](#), according to a report by the investigative website Mediapart.

NSO has said its hacking software is only meant to be used by government clients to conduct legitimate investigations into serious crime. The company has denied that its spyware has ever been used to target French officials, and has also said it conducts thorough investigations of allegations of misuse when it receives "credible information".

Once [installed on a phone](#), Pegasus can harvest more or less any information or extract any file. SMS messages, address books, call history, calendars, emails and internet browsing histories can all be exfiltrated. It can also turn a mobile phone into a remote listening device.

The Guardian has also learned that Gunter Schmid, a senior adviser to Novalpina who had continued to serve as chair of NSO's governance, risk

and compliance committee (GRCC), recently submitted his resignation.

According to a recent disclosure by NSO about its internal governance practices, the GRCC oversees NSO's adherence to its human rights policies and leads investigations into complaints of abuse.

Following Schmid's departure, the GRCC now appears to include at least three members: Asher Levy, the executive chairman of NSO, Shalev Hulio, the NSO co-founder and chief executive, and Shmuel Sunray, NSO's general counsel.

NSO did not respond to queries about Schmid's resignation or questions about BRG's status with the Israeli government. Schmid was not immediately available for comment.

According to its website, BRG is a global consulting firm that helps organisations manage disputes and investigations, deal with corporate finance issues and improve performance. The firm says on its website that it is "continuously looking for opportunities to make a positive contribution in our local and global communities".

BRG's executive chairman is David Teece, a prominent economist and professor in global business at the Haas school of business at the University of California, Berkeley.

A press officer at the university did not respond to a Guardian request for an interview with Teece. But the professor has previously expressed views on the role of corporations in helping to support democratic values.

In October 2020, [in an opinion piece](#) that was published by the New York Times and focused on corporations' social responsibility in the wake of "disturbing" developments in China, Teece called on companies "whose prosperity depends on liberal democratic institutions" to "reassess their strategic decisions to determine if they are, in any way, undermining those institutions".

He wrote: "[I]t's about thinking ahead with a stewardship perspective and a deep care for democracy, open societies, justice and the rule of law. Other

issues, except possibly those related to the environment, pale in significance.”

BRG declined to respond to question about its corporate social responsibility policies.

Two people familiar with the matter said the decision by investors to transfer management of the fund that owns NSO from Novalpina to BRG was heavily influenced by Tobias Read, the treasurer of the state of Oregon who recently launched a [campaign to become governor](#).

The Oregon state employee pension fund was one of the largest investors in Novalpina Capital, after committing about \$233m to the private equity firm in 2017, before its acquisition of NSO.

Rachel Wray, the Oregon treasury spokesperson, told the Associated Press in August that Read – who as the state’s chief investment officer has oversight of its multibillion-dollar pension fund – was “concerned” about reporting around NSO and was “involved” at the time in discussions around Oregon’s investment.

In response to questions about whether Read had any concerns about BRG not yet receiving clearance by Israel, Wray said in a statement to the Guardian: “Treasury is one of many limited partners in this fund; as a limited partner, we do not control the investment decisions made by external managers at private equity funds.”

She then directed enquiries to be referred to a spokesperson for BRG. The spokesperson did not respond to requests for comment.

It is understood that BRG has recently met managers of other portfolio companies owned by the fund that was previously controlled by Novalpina.

While BRG has not yet been to Israel to visit NSO’s headquarters, or accessed classified information, it is understood that the consulting company has met Omri Lavie, an NSO co-founder who is based in the US.

In a message exchange with the Guardian, in response to a question about whether he expected BRG to be involved in NSO in the same manner as

Novalpina had been, Lavie wrote: “I guess you’ll have to wait and see like everybody else.”

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## Boris Johnson

# Boris Johnson says shortages are result of ‘giant waking up’ of economy

01:02

127 tanker drivers have applied to work in UK, says Johnson – video

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

Tue 5 Oct 2021 04.28 EDT

Boris Johnson has insisted there is no crisis in supply chains but admitted just 127 visas for tanker drivers had been granted.

Asked by BBC Radio 4’s Today programme if he believed there was a crisis, the prime minister said “no” and said difficulties were linked to the revival of the economy, calling it “a giant waking up”.

Johnson said the government had asked the road haulage industry to provide the names of foreign drivers who would want to come to the UK, and only 127 had been produced so far.

“What that shows is the global shortage,” he said.

The prime minister said a difficult winter of the [petrol crisis](#), shortages on supermarket shelves and soaring energy bills were symptoms of the economic path the country was on that would tackle a long-term lack of productivity, low wages and under-investment in energy and infrastructure.

“This government is doing the difficult, long-term things. We got Brexit done, which was a very difficult thing to do, and we are now going to address the big underlying issues that face the UK,” he said.

Part of the problem was that businesses had been able to “mainline low-wage, low-cost immigration for a very long time,” Johnson said. ““I think actually this country’s natural ability to sort out its logistics and supply chains is very strong. But what we won’t do is pull the lever marked ‘uncontrolled immigration’.”

The prime minister doubled down on his insistence that disruption would be temporary but said it was part of the transition to offering more people better pay and conditions, saying drivers often had to “urinate in bushes” because the workforce was not valued by the industry.

“What you can’t do is go back to the old, failed model where you mainline low-wage, low-skilled labour – very often very hard-working, brave, wonderful people – who come in, working in conditions that frankly are pretty tough, and we shouldn’t be going back to that,” he told BBC Breakfast.

In broadcast interviews, Johnson defended the [cut in universal credit](#), linking it to his drive to increase pay. “What we won’t do is take more money in tax to subsidise low pay through the welfare system,” he told LBC.

Johnson also criticised workers who had not returned to their offices, saying there were Downing Street staff still working from home.

He said young people who wanted to learn “can’t just do it on Zoom” and said they would be “gossiped about and lose out” if they worked from home. He said the cabinet secretary, Simon Case, had written to No 10 staff telling them to “get back to their desks”.

On Tuesday, the Conservative party conference will hear speeches by the justice secretary, Dominic Raab, and the home secretary, Priti Patel, who will announce [tougher rules on community service and tagging criminals](#).

Johnson said he did not believe making misogyny a hate crime would be the right response to the murder of Sarah Everard. He said people’s main anger was about how existing laws were so poorly enforced.

“To be perfectly honest, if you widen the scope of what you ask the police to do, you will just increase the problem,” he said. “What you need to do is get the police to focus on the very real crimes, the very real feeling of injustice and betrayal that many people feel.”

Johnson said recruiting more female officers would help change the culture in police forces, after multiple stories about misogyny among officers that emerged in the wake of the sentencing of Everard’s murderer, Wayne Couzens, who was a serving police officer.

“In the Met now you are now running at 40%. That is a good thing. I want to see those officers progress up the ranks and attain senior positions and change the culture,” he said.

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

[\*\*Politics\*\*](#)

# **Johnson says government cannot ‘magic up’ solutions to help farming industry – as it happened**

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## Environmental activism

# Climate activists crossed the line with roadblocks, says minister



Insulate Britain activists blocking a motorway junction near Heathrow last week. Photograph: Peter Cziborra/Reuters

*Damien Gayle*

*@damiengayle*

Tue 5 Oct 2021 11.26 EDT

Climate change protesters “crossed the line” between their right to protest and their responsibility towards the rest of the public when they caused huge tailbacks by blocking three key London roads on Monday, the policing minister, [Kit Malthouse](#), has said.

New measures will be announced to [crack down on protesters](#) who target road networks and critical national infrastructure, which “is of a different

scale of damage than you would otherwise find with a normal protest”, the junior minister said.

On Monday, 54 members of Insulate Britain staged blockades at Hanger Lane, Wandsworth Bridge and the Blackwall tunnel at the height of rush-hour. On LBC radio on Tuesday morning, Boris Johnson called the group “irresponsible crusties”.

Malthouse, speaking on Sky News, said: “While we obviously all value the right to protest, there is a difference between causing disruption and causing damage. We believe that these protesters and some of the others that we’ve seen in the last couple of years have crossed the line between exercising their right but also their responsibility towards the rest of us, and something needs to be done.

“So today we’re going to be announcing a raft of new measures alongside those that are already in the police, crime, sentencing and courts bill that’s going through the House of Lords at the moment that we think will help deal with this problem, specifically recognising the disruption of infrastructure and disruption of the strategic road network is of a different scale of damage than you would otherwise find with a normal protest.”

In recent weeks, the home secretary, Priti Patel, has applied for court injunctions to stop Insulate Britain campaigners from bringing motorways to a standstill. The current fines for blocking a highway are up to £1,000.

However, breaching such an injunction is not in itself an arrestable offence.

At the high court on Tuesday, a return hearing for two emergency injunctions, banning Insulate Britain from blocking the M25 and around Dover, was adjourned for a week so they could be heard together with a third injunction.

But the judge refused an application by David Elvin QC, acting for National Highways, to allow serving of injunctions on a list published online and emailed to Insulate Britain. “This is an order which potentially leads to contempt proceedings,” Mr Justice Lavender said, adding that documents could be served to individuals by post.

Outside, a dozen or so members of Insulate Britain held banners and spoke to journalists. Some said they had been targeted with threats as a result of their activism. “I’m getting death threats and my name and address published on Twitter,” said Liam Lawton, 36, from London.

Tim Speers, also 36 and from London, said: “My name and address is on this injunction. I had someone personally message me the other day saying he’s going to find me and beat me up. It’s dangerous, their releasing this information.”

When asked on Sky why high court injunctions were not enough to bring an end to the protests, Malthouse said the “consequences step” had to follow a number of other legal steps, giving protesters a “legal loophole”.

“In the meantime, while the police can arrest these protesters and charge them for obstructing the highway, the charge at the moment isn’t severe enough that they can be detained in custody pending an appearance in court. That means that these people in particular are then free to go repeat offend, as we’ve seen.

“Eventually, given that they are as far as I can see in breach of that injunction, they will appear in front of a judge and face the wrath of that judge, but in the meantime we need to think about this particular legal loophole to give police more power to deal with this very severe disruption.”

At the Conservative party conference in Manchester, Patel was greeted with applause as she vowed to “close down the legal loopholes” exploited by “the so-called eco warriors trampling over our way of life and draining police resources”.

“Their actions over recent weeks have amounted to some of the most self-defeating environmental protests that this country has ever seen,” she said, in an apparent reference to Insulate Britain.

Penalties for blocking motorways will be increased, a new offence of interfering with key national infrastructure will be created, and courts will be given new powers to stop a “small minority of offenders” from travelling to protests, Patel said.

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**Sajid Javid**

## **Sajid Javid: patients on waiting lists need not go private as ‘NHS can manage’**



Sajid Javid has pledged to use his position as the first ethnic minority health secretary to tackle racial disparities in health. Photograph: Phil Noble/Reuters

**Heather Stewart and Rowena Mason**

Tue 5 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

Sajid Javid has urged patients stuck on [lengthy waiting lists](#) not to go private, insisting “the NHS can manage it,” as he pledged to use his position as the first minority ethnic health secretary to tackle racial disparities in health.

Speaking to the Guardian as he marks [100 days in the post](#), the health secretary declined to say when the NHS would be able to clear the post-

pandemic backlog.

But asked if he would encourage patients to resort to using [private healthcare](#) to expedite their treatment, Javid said: “No. That’s always a choice for people that can afford it, and that’s up to them. But it’s not certainly something I would be recommending to anyone.”

He added: “I don’t want a situation where too many more people just stop [using the health service] … because I want them to use the [NHS](#). The NHS can manage it.”

Jon Ashworth, the shadow health secretary, said last week that long waiting lists were in danger of leading to [privatisation of the NHS](#), as patients desert it in favour of private providers.

The Institute for Public Policy Research thinktank recently suggested that eliminating the backlog in cancer care alone could take more than a decade.

The government recently announced a [1.25 percentage point increase in national insurance contributions](#), with most of the revenue initially going to the NHS, and switching to social care in later years.

As well as dealing with the legacy of the coronavirus crisis, Javid said he wanted to tackle the inequalities that mean healthy life expectancy is 20 years higher in Richmond-upon-Thames than Blackpool, where he gave a recent speech.

“With Covid, we’ve all seen that it’s had a different effect on people depending on perhaps where they live, what their income was, what their race was in some cases. Lots of people have said Covid is a great leveller but it is nothing of the sort – it is anything but that.”

He gave the example of the pulse oximeters that were used to assess patients’ oxygen levels and determine whether they should receive treatment in hospital. “They were giving the wrong readings, generally, for anyone that had dark skin – because they were designed for caucasians,” he said.

“As a result, you were less likely to end up on oxygen if you were black or brown, because the reading was just wrong.”

Asked if that could partly explain higher death rates among minority ethnic people, he said: “I think it’s a reason,” though suggested that BAME people were also more likely to be in frontline jobs such as transport or health workers.

Javid, who is the son of a Pakistani bus driver, said his background gave him a new perspective. “As the first health secretary from an ethnic minority background I think I feel able to say things about racial disparities that others couldn’t say,” he said.

He said tackling these inequalities would mean a cross-government effort and that he was examining effective ways of tackling tobacco and alcohol use, and obesity. “I want to find out the best ways to do it,” he said.

He praised the sugar tax levied on sweetened drinks in 2018, saying it had encouraged manufacturers to reformulate their products – though said he was not considering specific new tax proposals. But asked whether he would consider tax as a way of tackling health disparities, he said, “Instinctively I don’t like it.”

Javid raised the question of whether companies target advertising for unhealthy products such as junk food at less affluent areas, where health outcomes tend to be poorer.

“Just picking Blackpool as an example, I wonder whether companies – tobacco companies, certain food companies – whether they target certain areas more themselves. I mean anecdotally, when I was in Blackpool, in the driving rain, going around, it just seems there’s a lot more adverts on stuff like alcohol everywhere than I notice in Bromsgrove, for example.”

Javid said that the health and social care bill currently before parliament includes limits on junk food advertising to children, but dropped a hint that he would like to go further. “I’m almost one step ahead of that,” he said.

But Javid’s claim to be ready to tackle health disparities came as the [Health](#) Foundation thinktank and the Association of Directors of Public Health (ADPH) pointed out in a new analysis that the public health grant had been

cut by 24% in real terms per capita since 2015-16 – equivalent to £43 a head in Blackpool, for example.

Jim McManus, interim director of the ADPH, said: “Investing in local public health is critical to levelling up, preparing for the future threats and building a more prevention-focused health and care system.”

Javid praised the healthcare workers who have been on the frontline during the pandemic. He said: “When it comes to GPs, they’ve done a brilliant job and continue to work incredibly hard, and if we want them to meet more people, which I do, offer more face to face appointments, then I have got to work with them in partnership and see what we can do.

“I’ve asked both GP leaders and also my department to think about what more we can do.”

Javid suggested he was considering a new “covenant” for healthcare workers, along the lines of those the government has signed with the police and members of the military, setting out the government’s responsibilities to support them.

“I am just thinking about what more we can do in law to support health and social care workers,” he said.

Asked whether there could be more serious penalties for those who attack health workers, Javid said: “You could. One thing I did for police and emergency workers was to increase the penalties. I will think about what I can do.”

This article was amended on 6 October 2021 to correct a reference to the rise in national insurance contributions, which is 1.25 percent, not 1 percent as an earlier version said.

## 2021.10.05 - Spotlight

- ‘I didn’t really watch any tennis’ How Martin Parr captured the Grand Slam’s real champions
- The long read Arguments, anticipation, carefully encouraged scandals: the making of the Booker prize
- Intimate data Can a person who tracks their steps, sleep and food ever truly be free?
- ‘I saw something in Bruce Springsteen that nobody else saw’ The world according to Stevie Van Zandt

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Interview

## **‘I didn’t really watch any tennis’: how Martin Parr captured the Grand Slam’s real champions**

[Xan Brooks](#)



Melbourne meltdown ... a spectator cools down at the 2018 Australian Open, as featured in Parr's book Match Point. Photograph: Martin Parr/Magnum Photos



[@XanBrooks](#)

Tue 5 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

It's the morning after the night before at the US Open and the sports sections contain images of triumph and defeat. Ecstatic Emma Raducanu lying prostrate on the tennis court. Bereft Novak Djokovic sobbing into his towel. The photographer [Martin Parr](#) would have liked to have watched the finals, but he's been unwell and incapacitated, stuck on one floor of his house with the TV on the other. He briefly considered watching on his laptop but it just seemed too much bother. "I like tennis tournaments," he says, a little sheepishly. "That doesn't necessarily mean that I like tennis per se."

In this, one suspects, he is not alone. Parr's new book Match Point offers a vivid globe-hopping tour of the four grand slam tournaments, bounding from Melbourne to Paris to London to New York and mingling with the spectators as they ogle their iPhones or sunbathe on the grass or guzzle iced coffee at the refreshment stand (the book was commissioned by the Italian coffee firm Lavazza). Most people, he points out, visit Wimbledon in the same spirit that they would attend Ascot or the Chelsea flower show: it's a social event, an

excuse to dress up. They might spend the entire day in the grounds at SW19 and go home without seeing a single ball being served.

Parr suggests we meet at the office of his foundation in Bristol. He's not in good health and can't travel far. At the age of 69, the photographer has spent the bulk of his life on the move, bustling from one social gathering to the next, shooting on the run, jaywalking into human traffic. But these are difficult times: for the world and for him. Lockdown was a drag in that it kept everybody indoors. But then in May he was diagnosed with cancer and is now having chemotherapy. He nods at his walking frame and barks a short laugh. "Hopefully, I can get rid of this thing in a few months or so," he says. "But it might be that I'll need it for the rest of my life."



'Roland Garros is probably the least interesting' ... the French Open in 2016. Photograph: Martin Parr/Magnum Photos

We sit on the couch and turn the pages of Match Point. It feels like peering into a bygone age. Parr took these pictures back in 2017 and 2018, when punters could pack into Flushing Meadows and Roland Garros like sardines, and it seemed that pretty much everyone was sipping from the same plastic straw. He tells me that each of the venues has its own distinct character. "Wimbledon is the most interesting because of the queue and the fact that people camp all night. Melbourne's good as well. Lots of social activity.

Always very hot. People carry little fans to cool down.” He snorts when we get to Paris: “I can’t say that Roland Garros is the least interesting, but it probably is. Too much tennis for my liking. They take it very seriously there.”

I didn’t really watch any tennis at all. It takes too long. You get involved in a match and suddenly three hours have passed

Let the official photographers crouch at the sidelines and shoot the superstar athletes. Parr was there with a different brief. His book contains one double-page spread of Rafael Nadal signing autographs. Elsewhere, though, the top players appear in virtual form, pixelated on giant TV screens or plastered on hoardings beside the coffee stall. It’s an approach that turns the likes of Andy Murray or Roger Federer into the equivalent of wallpaper or background muzak. The punters stroll by with their attention directed elsewhere. That’s what interests Parr: he couldn’t give a stuff for the stars. “I didn’t really watch any tennis at all. It takes too long. You get involved in a match and suddenly three hours have passed.”

In his time, Parr’s racked up more than 80 photobooks and over 100 exhibitions. But his most famous work remains [1986’s The Last Resort](#), with its retina-frying vignettes of working-class New Brighton, the seaside resort on Merseyside. Parr ran amok on the shingle, at the arcade, inside the chippy and whipped up a hyperreal vision of Thatcher-era Britain at play that was so bracing, so tangy that you could almost smell the vinegar and filled nappies. It was a breakthrough collection that established his reputation and set the trajectory of his career. “Basically, my one big project is what the rich western world is up to in its leisure time,” he says. “That’s my project – but I’m a part of it, too, I’m not exempt.”

Parr’s photography is driven by a fiery ambivalence about the UK. He loves it and he hates it, sometimes within the same frame. “I mean, I’m your classic remoaner, pissed off that we voted leave. That’s the aspect of Britain that annoys me. But then there are also many other aspects that I love, like Radio 4 and the village fete.” He barks a laugh. “Which is probably full of Brexiters.”



More like Chelsea flower show ... Wimbledon in 2014. Photograph: Martin Parr/Magnum Photos

While Parr's area of interest remains constant, he's had to find new locations to haunt and fresh targets to hunt. He's naturally drawn to big public spaces: crowded beaches, high streets, shopping centres. It's just that these days there are fewer people about, while those who still go out appear to have grown camera-shy. "It's becoming more and more difficult to photograph on the street," he explains. "People are more suspicious. A lot of them think it's illegal and I have to keep telling them that it's not."

So having your photo taken used to be a nice novelty, whereas it's now seen as a violation? "Well, you can't make a sweeping statement like that," he says, bristling. "That's always what you journalists do. But certainly over the years, it has become more difficult. When I think back to the early 80s, when I was photographing kids on the beach at New Brighton, no one batted an eyelid. If I did that now, I'd be pounced on. People are more wary. The general drift is towards suspicion. That's why I like photographing events these days. [Tennis](#) tournaments, art fairs, fashion shows. If people are engrossed in what they're doing, they have less time to respond."

When *The Last Resort* was first published, he was accused of exploiting his subjects, of holding a fairground mirror up to everyday British life. But he

feels that such criticism is not only pious, it's also built on false assumptions. Truth is subjective. [Photography](#) has to entertain. Anyone who claims otherwise is simply kidding themselves. "But there's still this old-fashioned humanism that persists in some quarters. This idea that, 'Oh, I photograph war in order to end war.' But you never will. It's impossible. All we are doing is creating entertainment. Hopefully, it will have a serious message, too, but it's not obligatory. Unless you make an entertaining picture, no one's going to pay attention." He picks up Match Point. "Is this entertainment? I suppose it is on one level. I'm not sure what you'd learn about tennis from this book."



'Suddenly I'm a disabled photographer' ... Parr has been battling illness.  
Photograph: Guy Corbishley/Alamy

I worry he's downplaying his achievements, but he insists he's not. Parr believes in the power of the still image. He says it's the index of our lives, the art-form of our time. "Every day you go out hoping that you might get one of those magic pictures, those iconic pictures. You rarely do. But that's what keeps you going." How many times does he think that he has? "Over my lifetime?" He grimaces. "Maybe 60 or 70. And that's not bad going. It really isn't."

The past 18 months have, he admits, been especially hard. He thrives on crowds and colour: the hustle and bustle of bodies inside a shared space. But the high streets are struggling and the department stores keep closing and he worries that the ripple effect of Covid could change the country for good. So he finds himself at a crossroads. He doesn't especially want to shoot ghost towns, but there hasn't been much else going on. He had several plans for the summer, but he got ill. "At this point, I just want to continue," he says. "I hope to get back to some proper photography next year. Hopefully sooner. I was in St Ives over the bank holiday and I had a mobility scooter, so that was fun."

St Ives that weekend, he remembers, was just like old times. Heaven on earth. Completely rammed. Parr wove through the crowds on his scooter, snapping pictures on his phone. He says: "Suddenly I'm a disabled photographer. And that doesn't do any harm. It's probably less threatening. It makes a nice change from being an old white middle-class man."

Match Point: Tennis by Martin Parr is published by Phaidon on 7 October, price £39.95.

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Photograph: PM Images/Getty Images

[The long read](#)

## Inside the Booker Prize: arguments, agonies and carefully encouraged scandals

Photograph: PM Images/Getty Images

by [Charlotte Higgins](#)

Tue 5 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

Just after 7.20pm on 20 October 1981, the 100 or so guests for the Booker prize ceremony sat down under the oak panelling of the Stationers' Hall in the City of London. Dinner was mousse of avocado and spiced mushrooms, goujons of sole, breast of pheasant Souvaroff, black cherry pancake and hazelnut bombe. The menu's vaguely fashionable ingredients (avocado!) announced the year's prize as at least tentatively modern. (Back in 1975, there had been *la tortue verte en tasse* (green turtle soup), a dish from

another age altogether.) Among the guests were prominent figures, then and now, of London's cultural scene: [Joan Bakewell](#), Alan Yentob, Claire Tomalin. The seating plan had been kept flexible in case Italo Calvino declared himself available at the last moment.

It was the year BBC began regular live TV coverage of the Booker prize, which was as fundamental to its fame, through the great era of terrestrial television, as the carefully encouraged scandals that regularly detonated around it. The year before, [Anthony Burgess](#) had demanded to know the result in advance, saying he would refuse to attend if William Golding had won – which he had. The prize's administrator, Martyn Goff, leaked the story, and Burgess's literary flounce made for gleeful headlines. Over Goff's 34 years in charge, many more semi-accurate snippets from the judging room were let slip. "I was somewhat dismayed to find that purposive, often very misleading, leaking was going on," Hilary Mantel, a judge in 1990, told me. It was by such steps that the Booker became not just a book prize, but a heady tangle of arguments, controversy and speculation: a cultural institution.

The 1981 TV broadcast included an interview with a bookie from Ladbrokes. Muriel Spark's novel Loitering With Intent was the favourite, at 7-4. DM Thomas's The White Hotel was, at 3-1, expected by many to come through. Also [in the running](#) were Molly Keane, Ian McEwan, Ann Schlee, Doris Lessing and Salman Rushdie. Bookies' odds, a regular feature of the prize, strike some as undignified when transported from the racecourse to the field of serious literature. But the Booker was always intended, according to an early memo, to provoke "tension and anticipation", and enough of it, it was hoped, "to cause people to wait outside the building where the final session is in progress, because they can't bear to wait a minute longer than necessary to get the news".

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At 7.37pm, the winner's name was announced. The cameras swivelled towards the 34-year-old [Salman Rushdie](#) (8-1), until recently an ad man at Ogilvy and Mather, who picked up a cheque for £10,000 and instant fame.

The prize was becoming part of a bolder, bigger and more competitive spirit in publishing, and British culture more generally. Penguin's canny new boss, Peter Mayer, had snapped up the paperback rights to most of the 1980 shortlist, and rushed them out with a Booker slash on the cover – making buying, reading and having an opinion about “Booker books” affordable and attractive. In 1982, an enterprising new bookshop chain called Waterstones was founded, and two years later, the Turner prize was established as the Booker for art. In the thrusting Thatcher years, competitions – as well as competition – were all the rage.

From Rushdie's victory onwards, life has changed dramatically for most of the authors who have won the prize. (In the early days this was “an Oscar-type thing”, as an internal memo referred to it: a vaguely art-deco, female figure holding aloft a shallow dish, more than half a metre tall.) “It made it possible for me to live by my work, which I have done ever since,” Rushdie told me. When Ben Okri heard his name announced a decade later, at a banquet at Guildhall in London, “I got up, walked slowly, in a dreamlike way, past all these tables and made my way across,” he told me. “You could divide my literary life in that walk.”

The prize today is worth £50,000 and a guaranteed surge in sales. It remains transformative for its winner. Hilary Mantel's Wolf Hall was already a bestseller when it won in 2009; even so, she told me, “You feel your status change overnight”. Bernardine Evaristo, who won jointly with Margaret Atwood in 2019, is, two years on, still busy with press interviews. When we spoke in the summer, it was, possibly, Portuguese publication day, though she'd lost track. Before the Booker she had never been able to make a living purely from her fiction. Then came the prize, and, at 60, with her eighth novel, “everything that I could have wished for my career happened to me overnight”: stage rights and film rights sold; 50 translations on the way; a BBC Imagine documentary. The first Black woman to win, she found herself in demand to speak out politically. “Suddenly I was given a certain kind of gravitas, and respect and authority,” she said. Evaristo has become, one publisher told me, “the interviewee, the interviewer, the chair of this, the face of that”.



Margaret Atwood, left, and Bernardine Evaristo, joint winners of the 2019 Booker prize. Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

There was no banquet for Douglas Stuart, who won last November's prize for his debut, [Shuggie Bain](#). Instead, he and his partner, on Zoom at home in pandemic-hit New York, ordered pizza and unearthed an "ancient" bottle of champagne. He spent much of the next two months on the same grey sofa at home, giving Zoom interview after Zoom interview. His editor in London, Ravi Mirchandani, told me that when Picador acquired the book they would have been pleased if it had sold 25,000 copies; now it has sold 800,000 in the UK alone, never mind US sales and its endless foreign editions. "Marathi, Georgian and Mongolian translations," said Mirchandani, "are quite something for a book about a working-class childhood in 1980s Glasgow."

In an era in which the novel's cultural status is wavering as other forms of entertainment loom ever larger, in which media coverage for literature is waning, in which writers' earnings have plummeted (£10,500 a year was [the median in 2018](#), down 42% from 2005), the Booker has grown more, rather than less, important as an energising force in the publishing industry, one that presents a mass readership with books that the market alone would rarely bring to prominence. Winning the prize, the Booker's director Gaby Wood told me, has become a kind of "coronation".

A literary prize needs judges. In ancient Athens, where the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides competed for an ivy wreath, citizens chosen by lot did the job. For France's Prix Goncourt – the award that a young publisher, Tom Maschler, wanted to emulate when he dreamed up the Booker in 1968 – the 10 judges are literary grandes who, once elected, serve continuously until retirement at 80. They deliberate on the first Tuesday of each month while luching at the Paris restaurant, Drouant, that has been their HQ since 1925. Each uses cutlery engraved with his, or more rarely her, name.

For the Booker, a fresh set of judges is chosen every year, which makes predicting the outcome reliably difficult. The person who picks them – with the approval, officially, of the prize's trustees – is Wood, the director. A former literary editor of the Telegraph, Wood, 50, cuts a poised, intellectual figure: a contrast to Goff and her immediate predecessor [Ion Trewin](#), both products of a more swashbuckling age of literary London. Bilingual, owing to her Mexican mother, Wood grew up in a “seminar-like atmosphere”, she told me – her father, Michael Wood, is a Princeton English professor who was, coincidentally, chair of the Booker jury in 2015, the year she was appointed.

Wood's position makes her one of the most quietly powerful people in the global publishing industry, a power discreetly exerted from her flat in Archway in north London, since, for now, the prize lacks an office. (Until earlier this year, when Wood's freelance role was made into a full-time job, it also lacked any employees, though an external PR consultant, *éminence grise* Dotti Irving, has worked continuously with the prize since 1993.)

The prize's founders identified the appropriate [mix of judges](#) as a “chair”, a “reviewer”, a “publisher”, a “novelist” and an “outsider”. (The last might mean, a memo from 1970 outlined, an “intelligent actress … like Sheila Hancock or Fenella Fielding”.) In the years since then, publishers, except retired ones, have been banished, and ideas about diversity have radically transformed. The prize waited nearly 20 years for its first Black or Asian judge (newsreader Trevor McDonald, in 1987); since 2015, about a third of judges have been people of colour. Until Wood put a stop to it, the advisory committee lunched in the ultra-traditional, male-only members club the Garrick. “When I got the job,” she told me, “a couple of them said: ‘Oh,

don't worry, Gaby, we can book the table for you.' And I said: 'That's not the *point*.'"'



Salman Rushdie, who won the Booker in 1981 for his second novel *Midnight's Children*. Photograph: Reg Innell/Toronto Star/Getty

Wood likes to think of the judging panel, she said, as a jury of "creative peers". The judges for 2021, chaired by the Harvard historian Maya Jasanoff, fall into the categories of "a novelist, a highly literate actress, an academic, a journalist and a retired parson", in the words of said parson, the former archbishop of Canterbury and poet, [Rowan Williams](#). One fixed point among the judges is a critic, often someone Wood has worked with in her former life as a literary journalist. This year, that's Horatia Harrod, an editor at the Financial Times; in 2016, it was the writer and academic Jon Day, whose invitation, he said, was vague and slightly mysterious, "a bit like being approached in an Oxford pub for MI5". Wood told me she picked Day "because he can explain Will Self to Telegraph readers" – a way of saying she wanted someone who knew about modernism but wasn't absolutely abstruse in their leanings.

The Booker treads a narrow line between literary credibility and popular appeal. If winners are seen as too obscure, there is a risk the public blows cool and the book-trade becomes testy. (James Kelman's 1994 winner, [How](#)

Late It Was, How Late, was the subject of a sarcastic letter to the prize from the head of books at WH Smith, who noted it had, after its win, quadrupled its sales – from eight to 30 copies a week.) If the prize veers too mainstream, though, that is also a problem, since the Booker is supposed to be decided on loftier criteria than mere commercial appeal. In 2011, when Wood herself was a judge, there was a row when one of her colleagues declared he favoured books that “zip along”. The ensuing kerfuffle contributed to the foundation of not one but two competitor prizes seeking to claw back a literary purity seen to be crumbling away from the Booker. Prizes breed prizes, as the literary scholar James English has noted: either to emulate a successful model (the Goncourt was set up in the wake of the Nobel, the Booker to rival the Goncourt, the Turner to imitate the Booker), or to establish a *salon des refusés*. The Women’s prize was set up in response to an all-male Booker shortlist in 1991, just as France’s Prix Femina was set up in 1904 to counter the misogyny of the Goncourt.

Wood likes “to mix and match judges, and treats it like a weird fivesome dating thing”, said the novelist and books editor of Prospect magazine Sameer Rahim, a judge in 2020. Often, Wood thinks in intriguing or unlikely pairs of judges – critical theorist Jacqueline Rose alongside crime novelist Val McDermid (2018); or classics professor Emily Wilson with thriller writer Lee Child (2020). “For me there’s something about the first woman to have published an English translation of the *Odyssey* and the author of *Jack Reacher* in conversation about contemporary English fiction,” Wood said. “Can you be both extremely exacting and extremely democratic? Might those two people embody that idea?”

Playing with potential judge combinations is a year-round game. “Just this morning,” Wood told me this spring, as she was working on a possible lineup for the 2022 prize, “I was doing my fantasy football team, moving names around in Notes on my phone. I do that every other day. *These* people go on to the team and *these* go on to the subs’ bench.”

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Submitting books for the prize is an annual agony for publishers. At first glance, the rules seem simple enough. Each imprint (which might be an independent publisher, or a sub-brand of a conglomerate), gets to submit one book: a work of “long-form fiction”, originally written in English. Self-

published works are not eligible, nor are short-story collections. The word “novel” was removed from the rules in 2019, having proved contentious as long ago as 1971, when judges Saul Bellow and John Fowles disagreed with their colleagues that the winner, VS Naipaul’s *In a Free State*, could properly be so described.

But there are mind-bending complications. On top of that one book – which might represent 100% of an imprint’s annual fiction list if it’s a small indie like Galley Beggar Press, or as little as 10% for a big publisher, like Jonathan Cape – any novel by a previously shortlisted author may be submitted. In addition, imprints that have had books longlisted in the past five years can submit additional titles, on a sliding scale of up to four extra. On top of that, each imprint can nominate another five works to be “called in”, if desired, by the judges. Finally, judges are also entitled to “call in” any other eligible book they please. No one I spoke to, except the Booker prize’s freelance company secretary Eve Smith, could remember all of these rules offhand.

No change to the criteria has been more controversial than the decision, in 2014, to [expand eligibility](#) to include all authors writing in English, rather than, as previously, only those from the UK, Ireland, the Commonwealth and Zimbabwe. The change meant, crucially, that Americans could now be entered, and would, many feared, come to dominate the prize. (This year, there is only one UK author on the shortlist, the British-Somali writer Nadifa Mohamed, and half are American.) The change was furiously opposed by many in the British publishing industry – not least since the big US prizes, such as the Pulitzer and National Book Award, are reserved for American writers. Even US critics [complained](#), saying that the new rules robbed them of a chance to discover books from beyond their borders. As recently as three years ago, 30 publishers [signed a joint letter](#) demanding a reversal. Prior to 2014, the Booker had flirted with running its own US prize, cashing in on its significant name recognition among transatlantic readers; a viability report from the management consultancy firm McKinsey was even commissioned. The idea was eventually ruled out owing to cost, complexity and faint intimations of hubris. It was [Ed Victor](#), the late literary agent, who suggested that the prize could simply expand the criteria of the original prize.

From the perspective of the prize's organisers, the old Commonwealth criteria had come to seem arbitrary, a hangover from the early years, when, from 1969 to 2002, it was bankrolled and partly run by the Booker company, a business with roots firmly in the British empire. It is now a UK-based food wholesaler, but until the country's independence, it was based in Guyana, largely producing rum. After Booker plc, by then under new ownership, dropped its sponsorship, the prize was set up as a charitable foundation promoting literature and reading, and the Man Group, a hedge fund, supported the prize for 17 years. Since 2019 it has been funded by a very modern kind of philanthropist: [Michael Moritz](#), a wiry, well-read, publicity-shy, cycling-mad, Cardiff-born former journalist who wrote the first biography of Steve Jobs, made billions as a Silicon Valley investor, and is keen to see the Booker prize become more digitally active.

“The old rules were imperialist rules,” said Nick Barley, director of the Edinburgh international book festival and a Booker prize foundation trustee. “The idea was that we would celebrate things published in the former empire. In the long term, changing the rules was inevitable.” Barley was also the chair of the [Booker international](#) prize judges in 2017, which rewards fiction in translation: the two awards now interlock, covering all English and foreign-language novels published in the UK.

Amid the forest of rules, there are various possible tactics available for editors hoping to increase their chances of a win. One is to formally submit a debut or work by a less famous writer, thus ensuring that it gets read, while keeping back a bigger name for the call-in list, betting that the judges will feel obliged to consider it. “It’s unbelievably high-risk, because, perversely, they very often don’t call in the famous name,” said Dan Franklin, who retired as head of Jonathan Cape in 2019. On Hilary Mantel’s shelves, only three or four books remain from her judging year of 1990. Among them is David Malouf’s *The Great World*, which she called in. It did not make the shortlist: “It was so late and we were so weary,” she told me. Even now, “Every time I look at it, I think: ‘Could I have fought harder?’” She wishes Chatto & Windus had submitted it; it would have had a better chance.



Marlon James, author of *A Brief History of Seven Killings*, with Arifa Akbar, after winning in 2015. Photograph: WPA Pool/Getty Images

Another tactic is to increase the number of books one can submit – by founding a new imprint of your publishing house. “One might ask why, for instance, Bloomsbury started its imprint Bloomsbury Circus,” speculated critic and writer Stuart Kelly, a 2013 judge. “It wasn’t as if there was apparently a very different aesthetic between the two publishers, but they just doubled the number of possibilities.” Some publishers scrutinise the CVs of the judges and submit according to their supposed tastes. “You are trying to think: ‘Is Kingsley Amis going, as it were, to vote for *Trainspotting*?’ Probably not,” said Franklin. This approach can misfire: there was an upsurge of thrillers submitted when Lee Child was a judge; none were longlisted.

The crucial thing, Franklin said, was for editors to make it a rule to never, ever tell authors whether or not they had been submitted – not if you wanted to avoid terrible rows with agents, or furious, depressed authors. Various editors told me of agents attempting to stipulate in contracts that an author’s book must be submitted, though none would admit to this ever having happened to them personally. Franklin, when faced with a deadlock on what to submit, told me that in the end “we sometimes used to toss a coin”.

Juliet Mabey, of independent publisher Oneworld, had two winners in consecutive years, [Marlon James](#) in 2015 and Paul Beatty in 2016, both of which she'd picked up for tiny, five-figure advances. She might, then, be considered something of an expert on the art of submission. (She told me she knew Shuggie Bain would win last year's prize as soon as she saw the longlist.) But in the end, she said, there was no science to it. "You just pick up the donkey's tail – and pin it."

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No one, at any point in their life, will read novels as intensely as a Booker judge. After sets of books arrive from publishers at the offices of Dotti Irving's PR firm, they are numbered and sent off to the judges in the order they arrived, ready to be discussed, 20 or 30 at a time, at sessions that run every month from January until the longlist meeting in July.

This year, the judges read 158 books – close to one a day after the post-Christmas trickle became a steady stream. The number has escalated over the years: in 1969, the judges considered about 60 novels, in 1981, Rushdie's winning year, 70-odd; in 1994, it was 130. For other prizes, including the Baillie Gifford prize for nonfiction and the National Book Award in the US (which can attract as many as 400 submissions), there is an initial triage system, through which judges will share out early-stage reading between them. This is not the case for the Booker. The deal is that every judge reads every book, and the pay is, accordingly, high by the standards of British book prizes.

"I have had days when I have read two novels cover to cover and started a third," this year's chair, Maya Jasanoff, told me. Film critic and novelist Anthony Quinn, a judge in 2006, picked up an endurance tip from novelist Sebastian Faulks – you read leaning on the kitchen counter, on which you have placed a knife pointing bumwards. If you drop off, the knife will stab you awake and you continue reading. One of his fellow judges that year, novelist Candia McWilliam, recounted in her memoir that she went blind with blepharospasm, a condition in which the sufferer cannot open their eyes, immediately after finishing the Booker reading. Correlation, of course, is not the same as causation; either way, her condition had to be carefully covered up at the prize dinner. "The hilarousness of a blind judge for a

literary prize already buffeted by vulgar attention might have done an indignity to the prize or its sponsors,” she wrote.

Booker judges are apt to develop intense relationships with each other, on a scale from adoration to deep mutual loathing. Jasanoff told me this summer that whenever she saw her colleagues’ faces popping up in the Zoom room, she would think to herself: “Here are these other people who have this very strange life – I’m among my people.” On the other hand, the biographer Victoria Glendinning, chair of a deadlocked jury in 1992, once found herself telling [a fellow judge](#) he was “a condescending bastard”. In her prize-night speech, she described the judges’ relationship as close “in the circumstantial way” of people “thrown together by a railway accident”. For Philip Larkin, chair in 1977, the analogy was also one of some freak disaster. “It was remote yet intense, like people sharing a raft after a shipwreck”.

Wood sits in on every meeting (just as its director, Fiammetta Rocco, will do for the international prize), taking notes and only occasionally speaking. This year, for example, she has told the judges that they needn’t be quite so polite to each other – their almost extreme good behaviour due, she suspects, to Rowan Williams’s archiepiscopal presence. One former judge recalled a colleague dismissing an Ian Rankin detective novel, saying it wasn’t the kind of book that could win the Booker. Wood intervened. “At those moments I say: ‘No. You have to say why,’” Wood told me. “‘You have to judge it on the level of the sentence, on the level of characterisation, the same as everything else. Not on what ‘kind of book’ it is.’”



Hilary Mantel with a copy of her 2009 Booker-winning novel *Wolf Hall*.  
Photograph: Luke Macgregor/Reuters/Corbis

Some past judges quietly confessed that they had adopted a system of “reading into” books, abandoning them after 50 pages if they were not showing promise. For many, though, it is a matter of pride to complete the task fully: “You have to do it,” said critic Stuart Kelly, “with both duty and courtesy.” Day wrote mini-reviews for every book submitted, on a computer file that grew to tens of thousands of words long. Rebecca West, a judge in 1969 and 1970, was more succinct – and brutal. Her notes record she thought that Michael Frayn was “curiously dull”, Melvyn Bragg “grossly overwritten” and that Mordecai Richler’s “genito-urinary systems [kept] on coming between the reader and the page”. Even a book she liked, Anthony Powell’s *The Military Philosophers*, was “not earth-shaking”, as there was “such a high percentage of twaddling on”. In 1971, Malcolm Muggeridge resigned from the panel, finding “most of the entries mere pornography in the worst sense of the word”. Rowan Williams has not had objections of this kind. Still, “There are moments,” he told me, “when you never want to read anything but PG Wodehouse again”.

Jasanoff’s system for whittling down 158 books into a longlist of 13 – and every panel will devise its own – was that judges were to arrive at meetings armed with three favourites and two other “maybes” from the month’s haul.

After a bout of what Wood calls “literary group therapy”, they placed the books in green, amber or red categories. Greens went through to the longlist meeting, ambers were to be returned to, reds were out. By July’s longlist meeting there were about 30 books, which were then whittled down to 13. The result was an eclectic selection that ranged from Nobel laureate Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Klara and the Sun* to Karen Jennings’ [An Island](#), which was printed with an initial run of just 500 books. “We definitely don’t agree on everything,” Jasanoff told me just after the meeting. “Each of us has at least one book that we would not have seen on the longlist … We felt that there was real value in including books that had strong advocates and strong detractors: they made us have serious discussions about what we thought it was that fiction was trying to do.”

To arrive at the shortlist, at the key meeting in September, Jasanoff asked each judge to separate the longlist into books they passionately wanted to see shortlisted, and those they did not want to see shortlisted, with each leaving some books floating in the middle. Each judge’s preferences were submitted privately to Wood in advance. (None knew the others’ choices, so there were no advance backroom deals or horse-trading.) Out of that process, three titles floated to the top, and two were fairly easy to rule out. The other three slots were debated.

In the end, after a three-hour meeting, each judge found that the shortlist they’d drawn up contained three books they’d argued for. Ishiguro, and another big British name, Rachel Cusk, were out. One judge saw a book they’d assumed would go through, one that had been well supported at longlist level, fall away; they hadn’t quite had their rhetoric marshalled to save it on the day. “It was pretty harrowing,” Wood told me. “There will always be one judge that feels like an outlier in these meetings. One of them was still mourning a book not longlisted.”

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Deciding the winner is, more often than not, painful. No detailed guidance is laid out in the Booker’s rules. Sameer Rahim, when judging in 2020, believed strongly in applying “some kind of objective criteria”, otherwise it’s “just an elevated book club”. Others trust their instincts. “What you really want to capture is this feeling of ‘I must push this book on to my friends’,” said Jon Day. It can be a slightly melancholic process, all the

same. “You realise how many perfectly fine novels are published,” he said. “Totally fine, creditable novels. At times I just got a bit depressed by the relentless OK-ness of much contemporary fiction.”

Given that there are multiple possible interpretations of what is “good” or “best” in literature, considerations that are not strictly aesthetic might come into play, at least for some judges. “I personally thought that it’s actually OK, if multiple books are good, to think we might want to longlist more by young people and more by people of colour,” said classics professor Emily Wilson. The prize is not immune from politics in other ways, either. While Wilson and her colleagues were in the process of reading in 2020, the Booker foundation found itself in a perilous position after Emma Nicholson, an honorary vice-president of the prize, was challenged for what one writer described as “very public and very powerful homophobia”, and for “attacking members of the trans community” (accusations she strongly rejected). At the time, “It made me think we really need to come up with a shortlist of all trans and non-binary authors”, Wilson told me. Mostly kidding, she nevertheless mooted the notion with fellow judges. (In the end, the position of honorary vice-president itself was quietly removed by the Booker trustees.)

The Booker has an uneven number of judges: it is designed to produce a single winner. That’s not what happened in 2019, when it was split between Bernardine Evaristo and Margaret Atwood. Evaristo was initially ahead by three votes to two – often there is a three-to-two split in the last meeting, Wood told me – but the judges were encouraged by their chair, the former Hay festival director Peter Florence, to rebel against the regulations – “a very solipsistic thing to do,” said the novelist Sarah Hall, who has been both shortlisted and longlisted for the prize, and judged it in 2017, the year George Saunders won. Judging the Booker is by definition “heartbreaking”, Hall told me. Your favourite may not win; you will lose beloved novels along the way. “I love Lincoln in the Bardo and think it’s a brilliant winner. That’s not to say I wasn’t heartbroken by the last remaining book it was pitted against. Which is also a brilliant book. You have to think: ‘I will be disappointed.’ Disappointed at longlist level, disappointed at shortlist level. And also proud, hopefully. There is a cognitive dissonance to the whole process.”



Douglas Stuart via video call reacting to winning the 2020 Booker prize for his novel Shuggie Bain. Photograph: David Parry/PA

Especially divisive books – perhaps because they are formally experimental, perhaps because they contain material that some judges find difficult – are unlikely to progress to the end, particularly if that year’s panel is inclined to take one or two judges’ extreme disfavour as a dealbreaker. Adam Mars-Jones’s *Box Hill*, for example, about a submissive, possibly abusive, gay relationship, which opens with a leisurely description of an alfresco blowjob, was considered by one or two of the 2020 judges unsuitable for recommending to friends and family. (One judge wryly described their eventual winner, *Shuggie Bain*, as, by contrast, “gay, but not too gay”.) Particular authors have repeatedly fallen aside at the last moment: Beryl Bainbridge became the eternal “Booker bridesmaid”, as the sexist label had it, being shortlisted five times, and winning only a one-off posthumous award invented for her benefit in 2011. Muriel Spark was shortlisted twice. Ali Smith has been shortlisted four times. All are authors of deceptively modest books that do not insist upon their own greatness.

Before the shortlisting and the final meeting, the judges read the remaining books again. Wood calls it “a stress test”. “It’s a crazy process, but it’s also one way of telling what’s going to last. They are looking for a book that basically rewards rereading. By the winner meeting, they’ve read them at

least three times.” This repetition is why “comedy and crime never win”, said 2013 judge Stuart Kelly. “Tell me any joke that’s funny on the third reading. With crime, on the second reading you might be drawn into, say, the social background of the book. But on the third?” There are books, Day told me, “that can collapse on the second reading”. On the third, said Nick Barley, they might “curdle”.

The winning book is often a work that can be appreciated from different viewpoints by different judges. The 2018 winner, for example, Anna Burns’s [Milkman](#), could be approached as a historical novel about the Troubles; a political novel; a feminist novel; one that pushed at the edges of the novel’s form. “All six books were present in the room, like companions,” said Wood of the final meeting that year. “They were honoured by intense redescription, as if none of the judges could bear to leave them behind. And then the discussion became richer over one in particular, and went on and on until it became obvious that that was the book that would have to win. It wasn’t really like judging at all – it was more like Milkman levitated, because of what those five people saw in it.”

Out in the world beyond the judging room, six publishers had put in provisional print orders, each book’s cover rebranded with a “winner of the Booker prize” logo, and any details, such as flaps on a paperback, that might slow down a rush printing, designed out. On that evening, 16 October 2018, five of the six orders were never confirmed; and for five authors the work began of recovering from the disappointment and getting back to work. Sarah Hall – who turned 30 the year she was shortlisted, in 2004 – remembers that for her, the only woman on the list, the whole experience had “felt unknown and pretty overwhelming”. It took her longer to complete her next novel than she’d anticipated. There were now expectations of her work, in a way there hadn’t been before. “I steered away into sci-fi, stepping around the question of ‘What is she going to do next?’” she told me.

Winning “makes a lot of people more anxious writers”, said Mantel. “For me it’s been nothing but positive, but I think that was because I’d been around a long time, and nothing much was going to knock me off course. I didn’t have to come up with some super-miraculous idea and sort of beat myself.” Victory is also incredibly time-consuming and distracting. Douglas

Stuart told me of his relief at having his second novel already finished by the time of his Booker nomination. Evaristo laughed when I asked her if she'd written any fiction in the past two years. (She is, however, publishing *Manifesto*, a work of nonfiction, this autumn.)

This year's winner will be announced on 3 November, after the 2021 judges' first in-person meeting. "This will sound ridiculous, but I'm often very moved by the final stages of judging," said Wood. "All these incredible readers are sitting together, along with the fictional worlds they've inhabited, and as an observer I feel the room is almost thick with the breath of the books."

One of those judges, [Chigozie Obioma](#), who has the unusual qualification of having been Booker shortlisted for his first and second novels, confessed himself "a little bit demoralised" when we spoke this summer. "The experience makes me think 'Never, ever, in your wildest imagination, even imagine that your book will be in the running for any prize,'" said Obioma. "Don't do that to yourself. You can never grasp the sheer scale of what is being produced. Right now I have three or four winners, in my mind. It's luck," he said. "It's just luck."

Join the Guardian for an evening with the Booker prize winner 2021. Details [here](#)

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## Health & wellbeing

# Intimate data: can a person who tracks their steps, sleep and food ever truly be free?



A step too far? Our every waking, and sleeping, moment can now be monitored. Composite: Getty

*[Simon Usborne](#)*

Tue 5 Oct 2021 05.00 EDT

First we counted our steps, then our heartbeats, blood pressure and respiratory rates. We monitored our sleep, workouts, periods and fertility windows. But there is plenty left to measure as we are sold the promise of self-optimisation by the vast and sometimes controversial frontier of health tracking – an increasingly medicalised market that has flourished since pedometers went digital and watches got smart.

The latest health metric available to consumers comes from a medical device originally designed for people with diabetes; it allows users to track their blood sugar levels. But, as always, the big questions are: will it make us healthier, and is it wise to sacrifice [ever more intimate data?](#)

There is no doubt the device itself is revolutionary. In 2017, the NHS began to prescribe the FreeStyle Libre to monitor blood-glucose levels for people with diabetes. Rather than prick a finger and squeeze a drop of blood on to a testing strip, a patient could stick a coin-sized sensor with a tiny probe to their upper arm. The painless probe barely pierces the arm, measuring glucose constantly via liquids just under the skin and giving a readout with the swipe of an electronic reader.

The system promised way more data and control for people with diabetes, who try to avoid dangerous peaks and troughs in blood-sugar levels. Soon they could pair their phones with the sensor, keeping a record in an app without ever having to draw blood. It was a life-changing marriage of medical and consumer technologies.

Laura Douglas isn't diabetic, but a few years ago she began experimenting with one of the sensors, which is made by the US health corporation Abbott Laboratories. In the simplest terms, spikes in sugar levels can induce hunger. You eat a biscuit and your levels go up, then crash: you want another biscuit.

"I found it almost rewired my brain," says Douglas, a 29-year-old engineer and health researcher based in London. "If I saw a spike, I'd know what had caused it and avoid that food because I had the memory of the spike, rather than weighing myself every day and thinking: 'It's going OK overall.'"



Sugar rush ... diabetics now test their glucose levels with sensors.  
Photograph: BSIP/Universal Images Group/Getty Images

In 2018, Douglas founded MyLevels. The startup, which is in the testing phase, pairs FreeStyle Libre sensors with its own app to understand the effects of foods on an individual's glucose response, using artificial intelligence to recommend a personalised diet. "A lot of diets will tell you not to eat when your sugar levels crash," says Douglas, who is from Edinburgh and has a master's degree in machine learning. "We say: 'Don't spike too much in the first place.'"

MyLevels has sent sensors to about 300 trial customers; it plans to launch fully in a few months (a 14-day programme costs £139). Customers are invited to eat test foods, such as a bar of Dairy Milk, to get a range of individual baseline responses, and log what they eat. Foods are then scored as part of a new recommended diet that aims to avoid sugar spikes.

Douglas is not alone. "The use of continuous glucose monitors in healthy individuals is an exploding area," says Sarah Berry, a senior lecturer in nutritional sciences at King's College London and an expert in postprandial metabolism, or the way we respond to food.

Berry is an adviser to Zoe, a health science company founded in 2018 that monitors glucose levels as well as body fat and gut health. Meanwhile, Supersapiens – an app from the US – uses glucose monitors to optimise diets and training for top athletes. There were rumours that Apple was going to add glucose monitoring to its [latest smartwatch](#), which goes on sale later this autumn. It didn't, but new devices that use technology called spectrometry are in the pipeline. These can “scan” for blood glucose levels in your wrist without a probe.

Scientists are pushing the limits of technology and consumer demand, cramming shrinking circuitry into wearables, including smart patches that will work as one-stop diagnostic and tracking centres. “We've probably reached the point where we're mostly satisfied with the size and functionality of our phones,” says Sara Ghoreishizadeh, an electronics engineer at University College London, where she is developing a smart mouth guard. The device will track acid levels and hormones in saliva to determine metrics including dental health and sleep quality. “Now it's time to develop stronger technology to allow us to track our health.”

I watched the announcement of the new [Apple](#) Watch last month with interest. A few weeks earlier, my Garmin smartwatch gave up the ghost. Before that, I wore a Fitbit to count steps, track my pulse and sleep, and record runs and bike rides. My instinct was to get a replacement. I decided to wait to see how much the new Apple device would cost. Still keen at least to track the time while I waited, I dug an old Casio out of a desk drawer.

For several weeks, I have worn nothing more on my wrist than the time. And, spoiler alert, it has been fine; a relief, even. I no longer feel the need to track every mile I ride or step I take. My activity levels haven't changed – and I don't need a device to tell me I have slept badly. But I have a problem, because my health tracking data has become about more than my own curiosity and good intentions.

A few years ago, in a fit of grownupness inspired by new fatherhood – and my dad's early death 20 years ago – I took out life insurance. Like many policies, it links premiums to lifestyles rather than crude metrics such as age and life expectancy. My Garmin account, to which my watch transmitted my step counts and activities, is linked to my policy.

I win points daily by walking far enough or burning calories during activities, as estimated by the rises in my heart rate measured by a smartwatch. My annual points total affects my insurance status and premiums. The more active I am, the less likely I am to die young – and the less I pay.

While my lifestyle hasn't changed since my Garmin died, my insurer thinks I have become idle and therefore at greater risk of life-shortening conditions. It hasn't contacted me, but if I go on like this, without collecting points, I could face higher premiums.

Such quandaries will only become more common and complex, says Btihaj Ajana, a reader in media and digital culture at King's College London and a specialist in self-tracking. She traces our tracking instincts in the digital age to the “quantified self” movement. It took shape in 2007 as a way for individuals to use technology to optimise themselves like machines. “What started as a positive phenomenon then got hijacked,” Ajana says.

Constant advances in tracking have given tech companies new ways to keep selling their latest devices, while happily collecting the data we generate and sign away without reading the terms and conditions. “You don't own that data,” Ajana says. Apple promises to encrypt and guard the multiplying streams of health data it collects for us. But much of the concern about privacy in this growing market is what we consent to share with third-party apps and services that have their own privacy policies. “We are so blasé about privacy,” Ajana says.

It is easy to imagine the value of health data not only to insurers, but also advertisers and employers. Around 2014, a number of big businesses [started giving Fitbits](#) to staff, collecting information on their sleep, activity and location. The rise of corporate tracking, which is presented as an employee perk (free watch! Better health!), may be hastened by Covid. LifeSignals, a California startup that has developed a chest patch to measure signals including breathing, temperature and even posture, noted a spike in demand last year from [big businesses](#) that wanted to screen staff for Covid symptoms.

“Some employers ask employees to compete with each other to be more healthy,” Ajana adds. “It can all seem benign and nice – but what if that data also gets used to decide who gets the next promotion or whose health insurance policy needs adjusting?” Opting out of such programmes can feel like a career risk of its own.

Meanwhile, the range of data that is being gathered and assessed grows. NatureQuant, a startup in Oregon, is developing an app to track and rate the time we spend outside – not how many steps, but where we step, based on the well-established health benefits of fresh air and green space.

The company gathers data, including satellite imagery, street-view photography, road densities and measures of air pollution, to score any location (so far only in the US). GPS location tracking then pairs user and place. Going for a walk, for example, would earn you a “nature dose” in minutes, towards a 120-minute weekly goal, and a “nature score” based on how green and pleasant it was.



Sleep easy? Our every breath is monitored. Photograph: 10'000 Hours/Getty Images

NatureQuant is open about wider interest in its data. “We’re in conversations with big insurance providers to provide NatureDose as a tool to improve

population health,” says Jared Hanley, the company’s CEO. Employers are also keen, as are property developers who might use nature scores to identify and promote new sites.

Privacy policies vary between health apps, many of which tap into the sensors and hardware developed by device manufacturers. Earlier this year, the New York Times analysed the policies of 250 iPhone apps, including 20 health and fitness apps. Thirteen of these apps shared data with an average of three third-party trackers, many of which passed data to advertisers.

The apps included Flo, a period and fertility tracking app used by more than 100 million women. In January, Flo agreed to a settlement with the US Federal Trade Commission after it had been exposed for sharing health data – including users’ period timings and declared intention to conceive within the app – with advertising tech companies including Facebook. Flo had not given users an opt-out for such sharing, something it has now agreed to do as part of the settlement. Flo did not admit to any wrongdoing, and denied sharing users’ names, addresses or birthdays, saying in a statement: “We are committed to ensuring that the privacy of our users’ personal health data is absolutely paramount.”

Douglas says MyLevels does not sell or share any personal data, relying instead on subscriptions. Yet she has been courted by investors “pushing for different business models … You can imagine advertising targeting you when your glucose levels are crashing,” she says.

For advocates of health tracking, the risk of sacrificing data is worth taking. “There is no digital health revolution without breaching some of our privacy,” says Bertalan Meskó, a “geek physician” who, as the director of the Medical Futurist Institute, studies the way technology can change healthcare.

Meskó envisages a not-too-distant era in which “digital tattoos” send health data streams to our smartphones. An app would alert us to worrying symptoms and arrange appointments with digital doctors, which would prescribe personalised medicines based on our data and genomic sequences. Medicines will be 3D-printed in precise formulations. “And you’ve probably

just saved yourself from hospitalisation or even a major medical incident,” he says.

Meskó struggles to understand heightened fears of health data sharing. “We use tech every day that has for years been a threat to our privacy, yet here is tech that could promise a better life and now you have concerns?”

Even if tracking might eventually help spot symptoms early, the extent to which it nudges us into better behaviour is moot. While some studies have shown step-counting, for example, can boost motivation and activity, others have questioned its overall effect on the population, particularly after the novelty wears off.

There is also concern about the precision and side-effects of health tracking. In 2018, Apple added an electrocardiogram (ECG) sensor to its Watch. Until then, such monitors were used in hospitals to detect abnormal heart rhythms. Now, anyone can be alerted to potential problems, but the US Preventive Services Task Force, an independent panel of experts in disease prevention, has recommended against ECG use in healthy people.

Doctors have expressed concerns, for example, about the accuracy of such tracking, and risks associated with further screening prompted by an alert – as well as the potential for health tracking to induce anxiety or obsessive behaviour. “GPs are under immense workload pressure and it’s important they aren’t overloaded with patients submitting readings from smartwatches and fitness trackers if they have not been asked to do so,” says Dr Michael Mulholland, the vice-chair of the Royal College of GPs.

Berry, the nutritionist, says glucose responses to food can guide someone towards healthier eating as part of a bigger picture. “But the worrying thing is, if you became obsessed with it, you could reduce your glycemic variability [blood-sugar spikes] while eating bacon and eggs every day and your fat response would be all over the place.”

Douglas, who says glucose tracking has helped her stabilise her own weight, is aware of the risks of potentially obsessive behaviour in vulnerable customers. MyLevels does not recommend weight loss as a goal to customers whose body-mass index is below 18.5, which is categorised as

underweight, she says, but adds: “I honestly think it will do more good for people, as it has for myself.”

I, meanwhile, will continue to wait for the new Apple Watch, with all its promise as a virtual nurse, and then decide if I really need it. How will I balance the convenience and potential benefits to my health and insurance premiums of a smartwatch against the instincts of a burgeoning industry of data gluttons in big tech and advertising? Do I really need digital confirmation of a bad night’s sleep or a lazy day? While I ponder these questions, the only thing I can share is the time.

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## Pop and rock

Interview

# ‘I saw something in Bruce Springsteen that nobody else saw’: the world according to Stevie Van Zandt

Michael Hann



‘I find the world extraordinarily boring.’ ... Stevie Van Zandt. Photograph: Evan Agostini/Invision/AP



[@michaelahann](#)

Tue 5 Oct 2021 04.00 EDT

It is the middle of the 1980s, and Stevie Van Zandt, having departed the E Street Band and left Bruce Springsteen's side, is pursuing a solo career. He has also parlayed decades of experience playing in bar bands into a new and unusual role: international activist and campaigner against injustice. And so he finds himself, in company with Jackson Browne, in Nicaragua, against which the US is waging a proxy war.

He arranges a meeting with [Rosario Murillo](#), the wife of Nicaragua's president, Daniel Ortega, as he notes in his memoir, [Unrequited Infatuations](#). "After a few drinks, I moved off the small talk and suddenly asked her if she loved her husband. She was taken a bit aback but said, Yes, señor, very much. 'Well,' I said, 'you should spend as much time with him as possible, because he's a dead man walking. It's just a matter of time and time is running out' ... She was a very smart woman married to a revolutionary. But she was expecting a pleasant conversation about the arts, and the reality of what I was saying hit her hard."

There are other encounters, too. He headed off to South Africa and persuaded the disputatious black nationalist groups to lay down arms while

he explained to them how to end apartheid and recorded the single [Sun City](#) by [Artists United Against Apartheid](#). It's a little surprising he didn't end the cold war, too. The greatest miracle, though, is that none of the people he was going round lecturing told him to piss off.

"I'm sure they were thinking that," Van Zandt says now, via Zoom. "In Nicaragua, I got her attention. I probably wasn't telling her anything she didn't already know or sense. But I know what Ronald Reagan was thinking. He couldn't wait to invade Nicaragua. And her husband had a target on his forehead. So when I explained to her what was about to happen and how she could avoid it, she took that quite seriously and listened to my advice."

And South Africa? "In the case of South Africa, they thought I was a little bit crazy and eccentric because of the way I looked – lots of earrings and bracelets – which was the only way I got away with anything. The tough part is when you're in Soweto and there's no electricity, telling people they're going to win the war on TV. That was a bit of a stretch. So they probably thought I was such a lunatic I wasn't worth killing."



Michael Imperioli, Van Zandt (centre) and James Gandolfini in The Sopranos. Photograph: Barry Wetcher/Hbo/Kobal/Shutterstock

Van Zandt has an extraordinary life. Just to have been the right-hand man – consigliere, as he puts it – to Springsteen from 1975 to 1984, and then again since 1999, would be enough to assure his status. Add to that his starring roles in [The Sopranos](#) and [Lilyhammer](#). Then factor in the forming of, and writing, arranging and producing of [Southside Johnny and the Asbury Jukes](#), and his own solo career with Little Steven and the Disciples of Soul. And don't forget his ongoing cheerleading for rock'n'roll as a broadcaster for nearly 20 years, and his work campaigning for musical education. It's tiring just reading about it.

It's all down to tedium, he says. "I find the world extraordinarily boring. I don't know how we got this boring, honestly. Everywhere you look it's just boring. Why? The architecture's boring. Everything. Why aren't we being creative? We have all this wonderful creativity in the human species; why aren't we using it? At the same time I am compelled by bullies and injustice and obvious gaps. And I'm thinking, 'Why does nobody do a radio format that has this, this and this in? I'm going to have to do it myself.' The South Africa thing I was just embarrassed by the policy. How could we be supporting slavery in the 1980s?"

I've interviewed Van Zandt before, and liked him. I enjoyed talking to him this time, too. He has the true zeal of an enthusiast, an overwhelming passion for the music of the mid-1960s – "the renaissance", he calls it, the absolute zenith of human cultural endeavour – and he laughs easily. He talks easily, too, about life as the perpetual sideman, always in the shadows, never the spotlight.

In the beginning, he says, it was because he reckoned he had something Springsteen was missing. "I saw something in him that, frankly, nobody else saw. He was very quiet for many years. And very shy. But I just felt he had something. It wasn't out of being philanthropic: if I make him the biggest star in the world, I'm going to be riding on that train. It was good for me. I didn't have quite the ambition to be the front guy and take it all the way. I could have been signed as a solo act immediately, the same time we signed the Jukes for sure. But I didn't have the ambition to do it, and Bruce was always very single-minded." There's also a more modest reason for sticking with Springsteen: "I do feel very strongly that every successful person should have one person from the old neighbourhood hanging around."

Unrequited Infatuations, however, achieves the rare feat of making its author less likable: in trying to make himself more than Springsteen's consigliere, he manages to make himself less. There are attitudes that seem frankly eyebrow-raising (the way to end misogyny is to ensure all men can buy sex). There's a strong strain of "Needless to say, I had the last laugh" about it. When things go wrong, it is because Van Zandt was ignored; when they go right, it is because he was heeded. Quite plainly, he has no shortage of ideas but perhaps, I suggest to him, some of them were rejected for being terrible ideas.



Van Zandt (left), Bruce Springsteen and Patti Scialfa perform with the E Street Band at Madison Square Garden in New York in 2016. Photograph: Robert Altman/Invision/AP

Take, for example, his proposal to the US TV networks that he host a New Year's special from the Playboy Mansion, with Playboy Bunnies dressed as go-go dancers, and a handpicked bill of his favourite bands. Honestly, I have no trouble understanding why that was rejected. It's an awful idea.

"That was a long time ago," he says, dismissively.

Not that long ago: second half of the last decade. Come on, Playboy Bunnies on a New Year's Eve show?

“It’s before woke world. That’s your opinion. And I have my opinion. My opinion is instead of showing a repeat of some boring network show, maybe a few people would like to see Playboy bunnies doing go-go dancing in the Playboy Mansion with five or six fantastic bands playing. Call me crazy, but that would have been more of an attention-getter for the audience than some terrible network TV show. So I disagree with you, obviously.”

At which point, a voice comes on the line. My hour is up. So I don’t get to ask if it’s up to women to end misogyny by letting men pay for sex. Instead I say how much I hope the E Street Band will be back on the road next summer, how much I’m looking forward to the shows. Van Zandt’s face softens into a smile again.

No matter that I didn’t like his book, he’s still Stevie Van Zandt. He’s still the man stage-left at the Springsteen show, which is many magnitudes more than most musicians will ever achieve. I might doubt quite how central Sun City was to the collapse of apartheid, but he still got out and made the record happen. He’s still Miami Steve, Little Steven. He’s still Silvio. How many of us can look down our CV and say we came anywhere near close to what he’s managed?

And there’s more humility in the conversational Van Zandt than in the written one. At one point he starts explaining why it is worth people’s while taking his advice. They should do so, he says, “mostly because I’ve fucked up every possible way you could fuck up in this business. Usually when I give advice it’s because I didn’t take it. So I’m really somebody you should listen to.” He laughs, the most successful failure in rock history.

- [Unrequited Infatuations](#) is published by White Rabbit on 28 September.

## 2021.10.05 - Coronavirus

- [Live Coronavirus: California deploys National Guard; Pfizer jab ‘highly effective’ against hospitalisations](#)
- [Coronavirus Pfizer jab ‘90% effective against hospitalisation for at least 6 months’](#)
- [Australia Anti-vaxxers try to disrupt vaccine rollout with fake bookings](#)
- [Russia Record Covid deaths reported as official toll reaches 210,000](#)

[Coronavirus live](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

# **Coronavirus live: UK reports 33,869 new cases as more than 100,000 English schoolchildren are off with Covid – as it happened**

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## Coronavirus

# Pfizer Covid jab ‘90% effective against hospitalisation for at least 6 months’



The Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine remained highly effective at preventing hospitalisations, but protection against new infections fell from 88% to 47% over the six-month duration of a US study. Photograph: Dado Ruvic/Reuters

*[Andrew Gregory](#)*

Mon 4 Oct 2021 19.01 EDT

Two doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech Covid vaccine are “highly effective” at preventing hospitalisations for at least six months, a large-scale study shows, but protection against infection nearly halves over the same period.

Effectiveness against all Covid infections fell from 88% within a month of having two doses to 47% after six months, according to the research. However, effectiveness against hospitalisations remained high at 90% overall – and crucially across all variants, including delta.

The findings, published in the Lancet, are consistent with preliminary reports from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Israel's ministry of health that suggested protection against the virus fades within six months.

The results underscore the vital importance of improving Covid vaccination rates globally, researchers said.

In the UK, the NHS is already offering booster jabs to people who had their second vaccine at least six months ago, are living in residential care homes for older adults, are over 50, or are frontline health and social care workers.

It is also inviting 16- to 49-year-olds with underlying health conditions that put them at higher risk of severe symptoms and adults who have household contact with immunosuppressed individuals to go for their third inoculation.

"Our study confirms that vaccines are a critical tool for controlling the pandemic and remain highly effective in preventing severe disease and hospitalisation, including from the Delta and other variants of concern," said the study's lead author, Dr Sara Tartof, of the Kaiser Permanente Southern California Department of Research and Evaluation.

Researchers analysed the health records of three million people between December 2020 and August 2021. During the study period, 5.4% of people were infected with SARS-CoV-2. Among those who were infected, 6.6% were hospitalised. The average time since being fully vaccinated was between three and four months.

Dr Luis Jodar, senior vice-president and chief medical officer of Pfizer vaccines, said: "Our variant-specific analysis clearly shows that the BNT162b2 vaccine is effective against all current variants of concern, including Delta. Covid-19 infections in people who have received two vaccine doses are most likely due to waning and not caused by Delta or other variants escaping vaccine protection."

Prof Penny Ward, visiting professor in pharmaceutical medicine at King's College London, who was not involved in the study, said: "This publication

describes real-world evidence from the US on the effectiveness of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine assessed using data from a large healthcare database from the Kaiser Permanente organisation.

“In general, if the objective of vaccination is to prevent illness and prevent continued spread of infection, the information suggests need for boosters six months after completion of the first vaccine course, particularly among the most vulnerable, in whom infection may lead to more severe illness and death. This approach has already been adopted in the UK, where the booster campaign is now under way.”

Meanwhile, amid reports that winter could see a rise in infections, nursing leaders are warning that nurses are experiencing more sickness, including for anxiety and depression, which could affect patient care.

The Royal College of Nursing analysed figures for staff sickness from before the pandemic and earlier this year and found thousands of days lost to staff absence on already overstretched wards.

The NHS in England recorded 73,209 more sick days among nurses and health visitors in May 2021 compared with May 2019 – a rise of 18%. Staff are now more at risk of mental health problems, chest and respiratory problems and migraines than before the pandemic, the analysis showed.

Since May 2019, the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) days lost for mental health reasons has increased by 31.4%, from 102,491 in 2019 to 134,669 in 2021.

The RCN council’s chair, Carol Popplestone, said: “There will be immense pressure on health and care services this winter, and services can’t afford to lose safety-critical professionals to avoidable illnesses on top of tens of thousands of nursing vacancies.”

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**Victoria**

## **Anti-vaxxers trying to disrupt Australian rollout by making fake vaccine bookings**



GPs have reported people not showing up to bookings in the hope that vaccines doses will be thrown out. Photograph: Chaiwat Subprasom/SOPA Images/REX/Shutterstock

**Caitlin Cassidy**

Mon 4 Oct 2021 12.30 EDT

People opposed to Covid vaccinations are making fake bookings at clinics in a bid to disrupt the rollout, GPs are warning, with concerns they could be taking the slots of vulnerable patients.

Anti-vaxxers would “go to any lengths” to try to derail the rollout, Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) president Dr Karen Price said.

“Unfortunately, some GPs have reported people not showing up to bookings in the hope that the doses will be thrown out,” she said.

General practitioners have administered more than 15m vaccines since the rollout began – more than half the national total.

Melbourne general practitioner Dr Mukesh Haikerwal said about 15% of vaccination appointments at his practice were no-shows. While not all are anti-vaxxers, there are ways of recognising those who might be.

“In our system we can often spot it, because we see rows of names and they won’t put their Medicare card details in so we can’t verify their health data,” Haikerwal, a former federal president of the AMA, said.

“We would call to confirm their visit … and they’d fill you with expletives, so we stopped bothering.”

To avoid vaccine doses going to waste, Haikerwal said the clinic had become “much more careful” about not drawing up for the last hour to reserve doses.

“We only have a certain number of bookings, and it means people have to wait longer.

“The people who most need to get a vaccine, the people we want to protect should be able to easily, it should be easy for them,” he said.

Price said she encouraged “all practices to … do everything possible to avoid doses going to waste … don’t let the anti-vaxxers get you down.”

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Last month, a Melbourne vaccination clinic which had been administering vaccines to vulnerable Victorians was [forced to close for four days](#) after staff were abused and spat on by protesters amid ongoing rallies in the CBD.

A social media channel linked to the Melbourne protests with more than 13,000 members has since been sharing advice on how to avoid Victoria's [extended vaccination mandate](#).

In July, a Geelong Advertiser article that revealed [hundreds of Victorians weren't turning up to booked vaccination appointments](#) was distributed as a [call-to-action by anti-vaxxers](#), who shared the story across Facebook groups.

But emergency physician Dr Stephen Parnis said only a small minority of the vaccine-hesitant population "hardcore refused" the jab and would be unlikely to be convinced otherwise.

"They don't think with reason, it's emotion based," he said.

"The more we can target the hesitant group, the better outcomes will be," he said.

Vaccine hesitancy across Australia has continued to steadily fall and is now sitting at 15%, the [latest Melbourne Institute data](#) shows.

Those "unwilling" to be vaccinated dropped from 9.4% in mid-September to 8.2% by the end of that month, while those "unsure" dropped from 7.3% to 6.8%.

Hesitancy among over 44-year-olds has remained stable, while vaccine uptake continues to increase fastest among 18-to-44-year-olds.

Parnis said it was "comforting" to see the vaccination rate in [Victoria](#) reach 80% first doses for over 16-year-olds.

"If you've had your first dose, you're highly likely to have your second. We're all pushing hard to see if we can get the rate above 90%," he said.

According to Victoria's current roadmap, at 80% of double-dose targets, unvaccinated people with no reasonable excuse will be excluded from the majority of public life including pubs, clubs and restaurants.

Under the current NSW roadmap, unvaccinated people will remain restricted until 1 December, when 90% of adults are expected to be fully vaccinated. Proof of vaccination status to access public and private sector services won't be needed in the ACT once the territory opens up due to high levels of vaccination.

Parnis said opening public life to the unvaccinated would depend on extremely high vaccination rates among the eligible community.

"The issue we have is the vaccine isn't perfect, it doesn't eliminate the risk of getting infected, and it doesn't eliminate risk of transmitting," he said.

"You couldn't entertain it until you have penetration rates above 90%. But the availability of the vaccine through GPs, pharmacies and state-run hubs should put the lack of access argument to bed."

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## Russia

# Russia reports record Covid deaths as official toll reaches 210,000



Healthcare professionals wearing special protective gear at Kommunarka hospital in Moscow. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

*Pjotr Sauer in Moscow*

Mon 4 Oct 2021 07.23 EDT

Russia has reported a record number of Covid deaths for four of the past six days, as the country experiences a devastating fourth wave caused by the Delta variant and a low vaccination rate of under 30% of the adult population.

On Monday, 883 deaths and 25,781 new coronavirus cases were reported, taking the official death toll to 210,000. Calculations based on publicly available mortality data suggest that the “excess death” toll between the start of the pandemic and July this year is nearly 600,000.

The pandemic has reached Russia's [leadership](#). Last month, Vladimir Putin was forced to go into self-isolation after "several dozen people" in the president's inner circle tested positive.

"The recent developments are very concerning," said Vasiliy Vlasov, an epidemiologist at Moscow's Higher School of Economics. "Even though many people have already been sick and the country should have developed some immunity, deaths are on the rise again. "This was expected as there have been practically no restrictions and a very sluggish vaccination rate," Vlasov added.

### [Russia: number of coronavirus deaths per day](#)

Russia, which was the first country to create a coronavirus vaccine, has struggled to vaccinate its population. Only 29% of the adult population have received two shots of one of the three Russian vaccines being used. Vaccines made abroad are not being distributed.

Officials have [said the vast majority of people in hospital are unvaccinated](#), and Putin has repeatedly urged Russians to get the jab. However, [independent polls show](#) that many Russians are sceptical of the Russian-made vaccines. Critics have principally blamed the low uptake on a botched vaccine rollout and mixed messages the authorities have been sending about the outbreak.

In addition, coronavirus antibody tests are popular in Russia and some observers suggest this contributes to the low vaccination numbers. Western health experts say the antibody tests are unreliable either for diagnosing Covid or assessing immunity to it. The antibodies that these tests look for can only serve as evidence of a past infection. Scientists say it's still unclear what level of antibodies indicates that a person has protection from the virus and for how long.

"It's been a very busy few weeks. Hospitalisations are rising quickly again," said a surgeon at Moscow's Clinical Hospital Number 50 who has been treating Covid-19 patients from the start of the pandemic and did not want to give his full name.

## Russia: number of new coronavirus cases per day

The deputy prime minister, Tatiana Golikova, who manages the national Covid-19 response, said last week that a difficult period was ahead. “We have a rise in morbidity and I want to ask you to be careful,” Golikova said.

Despite the stark figures for deaths and infections, authorities have been reluctant to introduce nationwide restrictions that could hurt the economy. Restaurants, bars and nightclubs remain open, though some regions have announced they will reimpose rules requiring people to show vaccination certificates to get into some venues.

Moscow briefly tried during the summer to require proof of vaccination or a negative PCR test for indoor customers at restaurants and bars, but abandoned the programme after business owners complained of reduced revenues.

The Kremlin last week pressed regions to take steps to slow the spread of coronavirus but rejected reports that lockdowns were being considered.

*Associated Press contributed to this report*

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## 2021.10.05 - Opinion

- The BBC needs to get much better at defending itself
- The Conservative conference shows a party in denial while all around is crisis
- On Teesside, we have seen how ‘levelling up’ works in practice
- Thank God I have kids. How else would I have found out how grating I am?

## [OpinionBBC](#)

# The BBC needs to get much better at defending itself

[David Hare](#)



Hugh Laurie as Peter Laurence in David Hare's *Roadkill*. Photograph: AP

Tue 5 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

Given that the [BBC](#) has to endure a daily barrage of envy from less popular competitors, you would think by now it would have become more expert at defending itself.

Private Eye reported that during the summer more than 2,000 articles had been devoted to the means by which Martin Bashir got an interview with Diana, Princess of Wales in 1995. Was the public interested? Not very. When a former Conservative political candidate, Tim Davie, was made director general of the BBC in 2020, much of Fleet Street couldn't trouble itself to say a single word. But when [Jess Brammar was mooted](#) as executive

editor of news, after supposedly making some disparaging remarks about Brexit on social media, outrage fired up the presses for weeks. If you support public broadcasting and care about its survival, the BBC's failure to articulately challenge the obvious hypocrisy of its critics was far more ominous than the one-sided ravings of the critics themselves.

The original purpose of the BBC was to inform, educate and entertain. It was only in the 1990s, under John Birt, that two of those roles were made subservient to the third. Up till then, the BBC had gloried in its properly diverse function of democratising art, music, film and drama, while giving equal emphasis to philosophy, sport, religion, gardening and history – in short, to the culture of the whole country. No other broadcaster could do this, and, to this day, none comes close. That's the case for its existence. Lutalo Muhammad and Antonia Quirke are meant to have the same status as Huw Edwards.

So when Birt chose to pitch the BBC as the greatest news-gathering organisation in the world, he caused nothing but problems. First, he narrowed the far larger role the BBC was there to play. Second, he encouraged people to start asking why we needed the BBC at all. If its principal purpose was to gather news, there were a whole host of commercial outlets that could do the job just as well. But third, he pushed the culture of non-news departments further towards an alien management style, which the producer Tony Garnett [memorably described](#) as “totalitarian micromanagement”. It still prevails.

If you doubt that news is thought to be the primary business, you will find it architecturally expressed if you visit Broadcasting House. Every other department is flattened against the walls of an overblown newsroom that draws all energy to the centre. And yet if you look at the real scandals that have done the BBC lasting harm – its atrocious mismanagement of the revelation that its [ex-employee Jimmy Savile](#) was a rapist, or its unlawful [broadcast of a police raid](#) on Cliff Richard – they have always been down to the mistakes of news.

Earlier this year, Richard Sharp, a banker from Goldman Sachs and donor of £400,000 to the Conservative party and [£35,000 to the controversial Quilliam Foundation](#), was appointed chair of the BBC. In his oral evidence

to the government, Sharp said that he believed there had been a [remain-bias on Question Time](#) (though he defended the BBC's overall Brexit coverage as balanced) and implored the corporation to be “its own toughest critic on impartiality”. Perhaps to that end, he used my TV series about Tories in Westminster, [Roadkill](#), to exemplify leftwing bias. To do this, he deployed what older readers will remember as the Mary Whitehouse line of argument. Sharp said that he himself had been [able to enjoy Roadkill](#), because he was sufficiently well informed to know that my portrait of a charismatic politician in hock to commercial interests was not accurate. (Whitehouse similarly claimed that she herself was far too high-minded to be corrupted by pornography.) However, Sharp was concerned that some people out there, young people in particular, might mistake a drama for the truth.

My first reaction was to think that since my protagonist, Peter Laurence, had been played by Hugh Laurie with 10 times the charm, humour and intelligence of any member of the present cabinet, Sharp should have been discreetly grateful. But my second thought was, “Oh my God, here’s yet another bigwig who doesn’t know the difference between fact and fiction.” All plays are, by their very nature, biased, because they come from an individual’s imagination. Macbeth does not need to be banned because people may mistake it for an attack on Scottish monarchy. Nor does Hamlet’s contemplation of suicide need a warning at the end to anyone who may have been affected to call the Samaritans.

My own experience of the public is that they know far better than the chair of the BBC what a play *is*. But the newsification of absolutely everything has left all the corporation’s other departments drowning in the News’s extremely choppy wake. The BBC has had a horrible pandemic, with its News at Ten too often reduced to the cheerless reiteration of government press releases. It has become more like a state broadcaster than a public service, with serious investigations abandoned and all mention of the prime minister’s history of lying censored. But the rot is also spreading to once healthy organs. Threats from the government, and alleged interference from [one member of the BBC board itself](#), have succeeded in muting the BBC in its own defence. In the face of terror about the renewal of the licence, current drama on the BBC is markedly uncontentious – just the affirmation of well known truths.

Like all supposedly well-intentioned organisations, the BBC takes special pleasure in betraying its friends, especially the most loyal. We expect it. At this point, too cowed to attack its critics, it prefers instead to round on its supporters. But we are right to fear that unless the BBC's leaders start to argue with conviction for far wider purposes than being a British CNN, they will play into their enemies' hands.

This article was amended on 5 October 2021. Tim Davie is a former Conservative political candidate, not a “former Conservative politician” as an earlier version said.

- David Hare is a playwright and screenwriter
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[Opinion](#)[Business](#)

## The Conservative conference shows a party in denial while all around is crisis

[Polly Toynbee](#)



Rishi Sunak delivers his speech at the Conservative party conference on Monday. Photograph: James Veysey/REX/Shutterstock

Mon 4 Oct 2021 13.10 EDT

The Tory party conference seems to be floating along in a sea of delusion. Outside their cocooned security zone, in the real world of petrol shortages and soaring energy prices, a cost of living crisis is “flashing red for the Conservatives”, according to [the pollster Public First](#), “especially among the working-class voters they’ve come to rely on”. There are signs the party’s [“red wall” support is starting to crumble](#), though no one knows if or when there will be a tipping point, as inflation pushes up costs beyond household means this winter.

In denial, ministers witlessly blamed petrol queues on public “panic” – an insult to those desperate to get to work, school or hospital. Next, ministers claimed this had nothing to do with [Brexit](#) – even though there are no queues or empty shelves across the Channel.

Oh yes, this *is* all about Brexit, Boris Johnson suddenly swerved on Sunday: this great disruption was all in the plan, he [told the BBC’s Andrew Marr](#). Brexit heralds “the end of the broken model of the UK economy that relied on low wages and low skill and chronic low productivity”, that used to “reach for the lever of uncontrolled immigration to get people in at low wages”. Expect a “period of adjustment”, says the prime minister. He hopes Brexit, his greatest hit and his forever campaign, can sail him through winter price shocks.

Under Johnson, Britain is living through a real-time great economic experiment, the uncharted waters of a Brexit without plans: with more than a million job vacancies, will the invisible hand of pure market forces send pay shooting high enough to pull people into unappealing work in far-off places? That free market religion had the fantastical Brexit minister Lord Frost claiming, “The British Renaissance has begun!” Meanwhile, outside the hall, protesting farmers warned that 120,000 pigs risk incineration for lack of abattoir workers (a potential scandal that [Johnson appeared oblivious to](#) when questioned by Marr).

Across the country, restaurants, pubs and cafes are closing down from a lack of chefs and other staff. Dare the prime minister sit back, arms folded, waiting for free markets to fix everything, even as frail old people are left neglected for lack of those missing 100,000 care workers? Or will he blink first and either issue more visas or up their pay? Usually he swerves at the 11th hour in response to public opinion.

“Delivery” is the conference’s rather unfortunate theme. Meanwhile in the real world, awaiting deliveries, supermarket shelves lack 20% of their orders, Ian Wright, head of the Food and Drink Federation, tells me there will be food, just not choices: “Remote and disadvantaged places are getting least – like Lowestoft or Minehead. That’s now normal.” He expects food inflation to hit 9% by the end of the year. So how patient will the public stay?

Upending Britain’s rotten low-pay, low-productivity model is a great goal – and the only half-respectable case there ever was for Brexit, though it was rarely made by rightwing free-traders at the time. Now (unless Johnson keeps backsliding on visas) we may see if immigration really did cause low pay: will employers be forced to train and cherish newly well-paid British workers? As Brexit does its damage, Johnson even pretends pay is already rising, despite the Office for National Statistics [figures showing a real-terms fall](#).

The UK is growing fastest in the G7, Johnson claimed on Marr’s programme, repeated by chancellor Rishi Sunak : they failed to say this temporary bounce still left Britain [doing worst in the G7](#) since the pandemic. No one in Manchester watching the manic boosterism of every minister would ever guess what’s happening in the world outside.

Economists’ models habitually collide with real people’s behaviour and attitudes: so far, Britain’s million vacancies, many caused by the lack of European workers, are not pushing up wages or conditions, says the Resolution Foundation’s Kathleen Henehan. Zero-hours jobs are increasing, not declining, and most of these vacancies are low-paid, with very few in middle or higher grades. “There’s no sign yet of improving conditions or pay,” she says, fearing that young people will be “shoved into low-grade

jobs, bad for their long-term future, with no ladder upwards”, with few jobs for older workers.

Unpicked broccoli and raspberries rotted in the fields this year, with Christmas turkeys set to be imported for the first time. A National Farmers’ Union petition calls for British food self-sufficiency, which has fallen from 78% in the mid-1980s to 60% now. After looking over the abyss of our fragile supply chains, the chances are that voters will back British farmers over free-market orthodoxy: if so, expect more Johnson U-turns on farming visas.

If pay really was the prime minister’s great mission, he could raise low wages today: lift the minimum wage from £8.91 to Labour’s promised £10 right now. Unfreeze public pay, raise care workers’ wages, ban zero-hours jobs, reverse the universal credit cut: it’s in his immediate gift. He could steal Labour’s employment policies with fair pay agreements that fix minimum rates across every sector. (His hero Winston Churchill introduced these wages councils, which were later abolished by Margaret Thatcher.) Johnson could end the fire-and-rehire epidemic now sweeping through workplaces.

Days before that brutal £20 universal credit cut, due on Wednesday, the Trussell Trust has warned that yet more destitute families are pouring into its food banks, with heart-rending stories of everyday indignities. With trepidation, the trust awaits even more after this cut. But alas, only four – *four* – Conservative delegates bothered to show up for its conference breakfast meeting. Meanwhile the chancellor, in his round of interviews this morning, all but confirmed he is instead hoarding funds for a tax bribe ahead of the next election.

If this “period of adjustment” turns out to be permanent, if the cost-of-living crisis bites deep into household budgets, and if wages don’t rise faster than prices, Johnson may come to regret admitting that Brexit is the cause and claiming that all this “transition” is a price worth paying. YouGov already finds just 18% of those surveyed think Brexit has worked well, with 53% saying it’s worked badly.

Until now, Brexit has been a no-go “remoaner” danger zone for Labour, but by daring to promise to “make Brexit work” at last week’s conference, Keir Starmer began to challenge this worst of all Brexit deals. Johnson has now set himself up to be judged by whether his government genuinely raises pay. But neither his Brexit nor his policies look likely to make that happen.

- Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist
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## On Teesside, we have seen how ‘levelling up’ works in practice

[Ben Houchen](#)



‘Setting up freeports in places such as Teesside has been a great first step.’ The LPG tanker Bayamo leaving the River Tees and passing the EDF Teesside Wind Farm. Photograph: Tom Collins/PA

Tue 5 Oct 2021 03.00 EDT

After I spent a day showing the secretary of state for levelling up some of the transformative projects in my area, a reporter asked Michael Gove what his new job was about. His answer was simple: “If you want to see what levelling up looks like, come to Teesside.” Having been scorned, patronised, belittled or simply ignored for years by the Whitehall establishment, it’s fantastic to finally be recognised as a shining example of what the government’s most important policy ought to look like on the ground.

“Levelling up” is a phrase on everyone’s lips at the moment, and it has been uttered often during the [Conservative party conference](#) this week. Indeed, in his [speech in Manchester](#) yesterday Gove defined it further and spoke of “making opportunity more equal”. The idea is especially important for the prime minister, who knows that the “red wall” voters who backed him at the last general election are now hoping he will deliver opportunities that once seemed impossible for their communities. Being acknowledged is important; but just as with Brexit, voters want not platitudes but real delivery.

The aspirations of people in Tees Valley, where I am the elected mayor, are much like those of people in any other part of the country. They need good-quality, well-paid jobs to support their families; they want to see opportunities to transform their communities seized, rather than watching those chances pass them by. People want to see that their children and grandchildren can build a future with hope.

However, this doesn’t mean that in every place the same challenges need to be tackled the same way. That’s why regional mayors are essential to delivering on the promise of levelling up.

It will definitely take time for the fruits of mayoral devolution to be realised. In the meantime, the government needs to continue to take direct positive action. [Setting up freeports](#) in places such as Teesside has been a great first step. Making the right infrastructure investments is important too, and the government can already press ahead with projects that include the new Tees crossing, which will alleviate congestion on the existing road over the River Tees. This is not just needed to improve journey times; it is essential to ensure we get the full job-creation benefits of freeports.

However, with drive, focus and passion elected mayors can achieve a huge amount even in a relatively short time. In my four years, I’ve found being a successful mayor is all about working, listening to and communicating with local people and government, and keeping a steady focus on tackling the biggest challenges.

Mayors need to reject petty point-scoring and party-political grandstanding in favour of prioritising the things that will deliver a real, visible difference

for local people. I've fought to secure better transport links by land, sky, and sea, including through bringing [Teesside airport](#) into public ownership and saving it from closure; making sure we're a centre of business, not on the margins.

[I spearheaded the compulsory purchase](#) of the former SSI steelworks site from a group of Thai bankers who were trying to hold local communities to ransom, and now the site has been [reborn as Teesworks](#), the country's biggest industrial zone. In conjunction with the Teesside freeport, this has allowed us to bring in thousands of high-quality wind-turbine manufacturing jobs, as well as net zero plans that are putting Teesside at the heart of a green industrial revolution.

I've also successfully made the case to government that we can and should host the government's new economic campus. With Treasury North and Trade North now setting up in Darlington, alongside the Office for National Statistics and Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, talented local people have a real opportunity to build a great career at the same time as contributing to their communities.

There's a lot more to do, but it shows that mayors can deliver. Some people might be cynical about local authorities' ability to rise above the parochial to deliver big strategic projects. Others might question how genuinely local regional mayors can be, and draw comparisons to the gulf between Nicola Sturgeon's overcentralised authority and communities at a more local scale. However, done right, mayors can strike the balance between having the scale of powers and responsibilities needed to address big problems while being local enough to be in touch, on top of their region's big issues, and meaningfully accountable. Turnout in the mayoral elections here on Teesside increased by more than 50% once people started to see the difference their mayor could make.

Central state planning cannot be the answer to our country's most entrenched problems. Key decisions should not be left to Whitehall officials who have no idea where towns such as Loftus or Billingham even are; people are much better off with the power to transform their own communities. That's why the mayoral model doesn't just need to be expanded across the country – it needs to become deeper and more flexible.

Whitehall must stop trying to micromanage. Instead, in a way never seen before, government needs to give mayors freedom to adapt to opportunities and commit funds where necessary to enable different places to tackle their specific problems.

That's the kind of devolution that will deliver true levelling. Now the government needs to hold its nerve to follow through on this agenda, putting faith in local people, so the whole country can benefit.

- Ben Houchen is the Conservative mayor of Tees Valley
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## Thank God I have kids. How else would I have found out how grating I am?

[Zoe Williams](#)



I just have to avoid talking about comics and any cultural spin-off.  
Photograph: SDI Productions/Getty Images/iStockphoto (Posed by models.)

Tue 5 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

The correct way to pronounce Marvel, as in Captain Marvel, is with all the emphasis front-loaded on to the first syllable, like the verb. I have been pronouncing it all this time like the poet Marvell, and this hasn't interrupted my life in any way; I've never, for instance, gone to the cinema and ended up in the wrong film, or embarked on a debate about the feminist subtext of Captain Marvel and landed, mystified, in a conversation about country house poetry. Yet it is still a tremendous problem, since it makes me the most irritating person alive. Thank God, some years ago, I took the precaution of producing young, since I would never otherwise have found out how incredibly grating I am.

Other ways in which I am maddening, just in the comic universe space: being unable to distinguish between Marvel and DC; failing to say "Catwoman" fast enough, so that it sounds like I'm listing two separate entities.

Well, this is easy – I just have to avoid talking about comics, and any cultural spin-off. Except, not so fast: there are other subjects on which I am also incredibly annoying, and that, for brevity, is all of them. Politics, food, friendship, the time I went on a snowmobile. I irked the living hell out of my son the other day, just by revealing that I was at Reading festival in 1992, when Nirvana were headlining, just because it should have been him. I wasn't really listening, I said, trying to be emollient, but apparently that made it worse. I was also there the year before, when a much more obscure Kurt Cobain was on the bill, and I do not plan to admit this for at least another 10 years.

I can see the biological imperative here: the outside world is fraught with risk, and who would plunge into it, if the alternative – a house, with a loving parent in it, who doesn't say Catwoman fast enough – weren't worse? Nevertheless, I now have a mumbled mantra that I might get as a tattoo: I don't think I'm actually that bad.

# Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist

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## 2021.10.05 - Around the world

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## Animals farmedMeat industry

# EU ‘failing to stop meat industry exploiting agency workers’



A Romanian woman arrives at Frankfurt last year for seasonal farm work. Germany began to tighten rules on subcontracting in meat plants last year. Photograph: Thomas Frey/dpa

Animals farmed is supported by



## [About this content](#)

[Jennifer Rankin](#) in Brussels

Tue 5 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

The EU is facing calls to ban outsourcing in the meat industry, after a Guardian investigation revealed how agency workers were exploited by companies that took no responsibility for pay and conditions.

Katrin Langensiepen, vice-chair of the European parliament's employment and social affairs committee, said the EU should ban subcontracting across all economic sectors to ensure workers receive the same pay and conditions for the same work.

“If you have an employee working for you, you have to pay for him or her. Full stop,” said Langensiepen, a German Green elected to the parliament in 2019.

## Q&A

### **What is a 'precarious worker'?**

Show

Although there is no universally accepted definition of "precarious work", the term is used to describe workers who have temporary employment that does not offer the security and protection of employed work.

For example, it may involve [zero-hours](#) contracts or unpredictable/variable work or hours, non-standard or atypical employment contracts, designation of bogus "self-employed" status, below-average pay, an elevated threat of losing work at short notice, along with minimum or no holiday, parental and sick pay.

Individuals in precarious work may be at a high risk of in-work poverty and economic vulnerability. They may be excluded from social rights such as pensions, decent housing and healthcare.

In 2016, it was [estimated](#) that more than 7 million Britons were in precarious employment. An [EU report](#) recognises precariousness as a problematic practice.

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Asked whether the EU should ban subcontracting, she said: "We need EU-level social standards. We, as Greens, are crystal clear: we need minimum wage, [minimum income](#)."

The [Guardian investigation revealed](#) how meat companies may avoid legal liability for pay, working time, accidents and injuries by hiring workers through a variety of intermediaries, including subcontractors, agents and agencies.

Tomáš Zdechovský, a centre-right Czech MEP and another vice-chair of the employment committee, said he would not go as far as banning subcontracting, but said companies must guarantee all workers were subject to the same rules.

"While we must give companies the option to use subcontracted workers to answer specific needs arising in specific times, such as during the pandemic, the EU must also guarantee that subcontractors follow the same set of rules

applicable to the rest of workers in the companies that use their services,” he said.

The problems in the meat industry were also evident in other labour-intensive industries, such as construction and food delivery, said Claes-Mikael Ståhl, deputy secretary general of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC). “There is a long chain of subcontracting, which ... are structures for enabling low-wage competition to take in migrants at low cost and in precarious conditions,” he said of such industries.

Ines Wagner, a professor at the Norwegian Institute for Social Research, said she had found “the same conditions and grievances” aired by meat-industry workers during her research in 2015. “That’s quite disconcerting,” Wagner said.

Since then, some countries have tightened up the rules. After an outbreak of coronavirus in large meat-processing plants in Germany, the government there [banned subcontracting](#) in the industry with fines of €30,000 (£25,000) for rule-breaking companies. However, the ban on subcontracting contained [loopholes](#), such as exemptions for small firms and during the summer barbecue season for the first three years the law is in force.

The EU has also created the European Labour Authority, which is charged with upholding EU law on working standards and the movement of labour. Jean-Claude Juncker, who proposed it as the the-then [European Commission](#) president, said in 2017: “In a union of equals, there can be no second-class workers. Workers should earn the same pay for the same work in the same place.”

The ELA began work in 2019, but will not be fully operational until 2024.

In 2018, the EU agreed to overhaul the rules on “posted workers” – EU nationals sent by their employer to work in another member state. Posted workers pay national insurance contributions to their home country, rather than to the country where they work. This allows posted workers from central and eastern Europe countries to offer cheaper services in western Europe, where labour costs are higher.

Posted workers number only about 2 million people – under 1% of the labour force, compared with 17 million “mobile workers”, or EU nationals who use their right to live or work in other member states.

The changes were a victory for the French president, Emmanuel Macron, who was elected on a promise of a “Europe that protects” and wants to reduce differences in pay and conditions. Under the new rules, posted workers can only work for lower salaries for one year, after which they must be paid the same as the domestic workforce.

But Ståhl, the trade unionist, sees problems with EU rules on posted workers. He recalls a case in his native Sweden, where one Polish company won 59 contracts to refurbish houses over 11 years while continually claiming they were hiring “temporary” posted workers. “That’s just one example of how companies use the internal market to compete on low wages,” he said.

## [Map](#)

In emailed comments to the Guardian, the EU commissioner for jobs and social rights, Nicolas Schmit, said: “I find reports of poor working conditions, non-transparent terms or inhumane treatment of workers completely intolerable.

“Some countries have already taken action and clamped down on poor working conditions in slaughterhouses, but more progress is needed. I urge all member states to redouble their efforts to ensure that EU labour laws are properly enforced by all companies and in all sectors, as well as to follow up with inspections as needed.”

Trade unions fear that national governments are struggling to uphold and enforce labour standards, after wide-ranging cuts since the financial crisis.

Research by the ETUC found that workplace safety inspections in the EU had [fallen by a fifth since 2010](#), while there had also been a loss of 1,000 safety inspectors – 7% of the total. The cuts were deepest in Portugal and Malta, which each saw a 55% reduction in inspections. Even the bloc’s biggest economy, Germany, saw a 25% fall in inspections during this period.

The ETUC has yet to be convinced by the fledgling European Labour Authority, [accusing it of failing to take action over dozens of cases of labour exploitation](#) last year, including unpaid and underpaid wages of EU and non-EU migrant workers.

Attitudes to labour market regulation were undergoing a generational change, Ståhl said. “For almost 20 years the EU has been used as a structure to enable wage competition and that [view] has just shifted.” Recent legal changes showed the predominant view now was “that the EU should be used as an instrument to prevent wage competition,” he said. “That’s an important shift but, of course, we are not there yet.”

Wagner said current labour market structures were reinforced by social factors – workers in relatively poorer eastern European and non-EU countries seeking higher wages, as well as employment contracts that create dependency, such as travel to the destination country, accommodation and transport to the workplace often being paid for workers in farming and food processing.

“As long as this dependent relationship is within reasonable acceptable grounds for the workers, then it might continue,” she said. Workers will only get out of exploitative jobs, “when there is no [more] work, or there is no salary paid at all”.

*Sign up for the [Animals farmed monthly update](#) to get a roundup of the best farming and food stories across the world and keep up with our investigations. You can send us your stories and thoughts at [animalsfarmed@theguardian.com](mailto:animalsfarmed@theguardian.com)*

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## Global development

# One in five 15- to 24-year-olds globally ‘often feel depressed’, finds Unicef



Teenagers watch a live broadcast of church service from home after religious gatherings were suspended during the pandemic, in Accra, Ghana, in March 2020. Photograph: Francis Kokoroko/Reuters

Global development is supported by



[About this content](#)

[Sarah Johnson](#)

Tue 5 Oct 2021 02.30 EDT

Almost one in five 15- to 24-year-olds around the world say they often feel depressed, according to a new UN report.

The children's agency, Unicef, and Gallup conducted interviews in 21 countries during the first six months of the year.

Almost all children across the globe have been affected by lockdowns, school closures and disruption to routines. Coupled with concern for family income and health, many young people feel afraid, angry, and uncertain about the future, said the [report](#) released on Tuesday.

Almost a third of children in Cameroon said they often felt depressed or had little interest in doing things, while one in five children in the UK, and one in 10 children in Ethiopia and Japan felt this way.

The findings do not reflect levels of diagnosed depression but show how children and young people have been feeling during the Covid-19 pandemic. A lack of data gathering and routine monitoring meant the picture of young

people's mental health status and needs in most countries was extremely limited, said the report.

The report highlighted how more than one in seven 10- to 19-year-olds (13%) are estimated to live with a diagnosed mental health disorder – 89 million boys and 77 million girls.

"It has been a long, long 18 months for all of us – especially children. With nationwide lockdowns and pandemic-related movement restrictions, children have spent indelible years of their lives away from family, friends, classrooms, play – key elements of childhood," said Henrietta Fore, Unicef's executive director.

"The impact is significant, and it is just the tip of the iceberg. Even before the pandemic, far too many children were burdened under the weight of unaddressed mental health issues," she said.

As the pandemic heads into its third year and amid concern about its impact on the mental health of children and young people, the report also revealed that one child dies every 11 minutes from suicide.

Each year an estimated 45,800 adolescents die from suicide, which is the fifth most prevalent cause of death for children aged 10 to 19. For 15- to 19-year-olds, it is the fourth most common cause of death, after road injury, tuberculosis and interpersonal violence. For girls in this age group, it is the third most common cause of death, and the fourth for boys, said the report.

"It's really bad," said Ann Willhoite, a mental health and psychosocial support specialist at Unicef. "If you look at the statistics compared to other issues, it's shocking and concerning this is not being shouted about more."

Diagnosed mental health problems, including anxiety, autism, bipolar disorder, ADHD, depression, eating disorders, and schizophrenia, can significantly harm children and young people's health, education and future, said the report.

Untreated mental health problems also have an impact on world economies. A new analysis by the London School of Economics, included in the report,

showed that the economic price of such neglect is £387.2bn (about £285bn) a year.

Despite demand for support, government expenditure on mental health globally accounts for 2.1% of the total amount spent on health in general. In some of the world's poorest countries, governments spend less than \$1 a person treating mental health conditions.

The number of psychiatrists who specialise in treating children and adolescents is fewer than 0.1 per 100,000 in all but high-income countries, where the figure is 5.5 per 100,000.

Investment in promoting and protecting – different to treating and caring for children facing serious challenges – mental health is extremely low, said the report.

Lack of investment means people working in a number of areas, including primary healthcare, education and social services, are not able to address mental health issues.

“Mental health is a part of physical health – we cannot afford to continue to view it as otherwise,” said Fore. “For far too long, in rich and poor countries alike, we have seen too little understanding and too little investment in a critical element of maximising every child’s potential. This needs to change.”

*In the UK and Ireland, Samaritans can be contacted on 116 123 or by emailing [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org) or [jo@samaritans.ie](mailto:jo@samaritans.ie). In the US, the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) is 1-800-273-8255. In Australia, the crisis support service [Lifeline](#) is 13 11 14. Other international helplines can be found at [befrienders.org](#).*

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## Russian tycoon's link to alleged corruption in leaked files raises questions for Tory ministers



Fedotov is the majority owner of Aquind, a UK company that is seeking ministerial approval for an undersea power interconnector between Portsmouth and Normandy in France. Illustration: Guardian Design

[Harry Davies](#), [Rowena Mason](#) and [Jillian Ambrose](#) in London, and [Andrew Roth](#) in Moscow

Mon 4 Oct 2021 07.00 EDT

A Russian-born oil tycoon whose firm has made huge donations to the Conservative party secretly co-owned a company once accused of participating in a massive corruption scheme, according to leaked files seen by the Guardian.

Viktor Fedotov, 74, a reclusive executive with a mansion in Hampshire, made at least \$98m (£72m) from an offshore financial structure that appears to have funnelled profits from the accused Russian company via multiple tax havens.

Documents in the [Pandora papers](#) suggest Fedotov and two other men made fortunes from the company in the mid-2000s, around the time it was alleged to have been siphoning funds from the Russian state pipeline monopoly Transneft. He appears to have used some of the money to buy a \$34m private jet.

## Quick Guide

### **What are the Pandora papers?**

Show

The Pandora papers are the largest trove of leaked data exposing tax haven secrecy in history. They provide a rare window into the hidden world of offshore finance, casting light on the financial secrets of some of the world's richest people. The files were leaked to the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), which shared access with the Guardian, BBC and other media outlets around the world. In total, the trove consists of 11.9m files leaked from a total of 14 offshore service providers, totalling 2.94 terabytes of information. That makes it larger in volume than both the Panama papers (2016) and Paradise papers (2017), two previous offshore leaks.

### **Where did the Pandora documents come from?**

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The accusations of fraud – which are strongly denied – against the Russian contractor Fedotov co-owned were contained in a confidential Transneft report. After the report was leaked, the resulting allegations were questioned by senior Russian officials including the then prime minister, Vladimir Putin, who said the matters had been investigated and no criminal offences had been committed.

Lawyers for Fedotov strongly denied all accusations of fraud. [In a statement](#), they said he was too unwell to comment on the “false allegations” but denies any allegation of wrongdoing.



Viktor Fedotov pictured in 2012. Photograph: Ekaterina Chesnokova/Sputnik

However, a *Guardian* and BBC *Panorama* investigation revealing Fedotov's secret ownership of the Russian company, and files that suggest he generated a fortune from the structure that owned it, could prove explosive for Boris Johnson's government.

Fedotov is now the majority owner of Aquind, an entirely separate UK company that is seeking ministerial approval for an undersea power interconnector between Portsmouth and Normandy in France. The £1.2bn proposal is regarded by officials as a "nationally significant infrastructure project". A decision on whether to allow it to proceed is due within weeks.

Aquind's project has already been mired in controversy, amid local opposition and complaints over the company's donations to and links with the Conservative party. Alexander Temerko, who is a friend of the prime minister, Boris Johnson, and a co-owner of Aquind, has together with the company donated £1.1m to the Tories.

Three Conservative ministers have already had to recuse themselves from the decision-making process over the Aquind undersea cable because of

their links to the company. There is no suggestion Temerko had any knowledge of the possible origins of Fedotov's wealth.

Aquind's lawyers said the allegations against the Russian company co-owned by Fedotov came from a wholly unreliable report. [In a lengthy statement](#), Aquind said the accusations were completely false.



Alexander Temerko with Boris Johnson. Photograph: Zoe Norfolk

Ministers will now have to consider whether there are questions to answer over the sourcing of Fedotov's investment in Aquind, and whether any money the Tory party received from the firm may be linked in any way to alleged fraud.

## **Allegations of embezzlement**

The company co-owned by Fedotov that was accused of involvement in corruption is Vniist, which was a contractor on Transneft's massive Eastern Siberia-Pacific Ocean (Espo) pipeline project.

Allegations of fraud in connection to the pipeline project date back to 2008, when the state pipeline monopoly's newly appointed president, Nikolay

Tokarev, went public with concerns about financial irregularities involving the prior management of Transneft.

Two years later, the Russian opposition activist Alexei Navalny, then a 34-year-old lawyer, went further and revealed what he alleged was a huge embezzlement scheme perpetrated by Transneft's previous management and multiple contractors on the pipeline project. Navalny estimated the fraud cost the Russian taxpayer \$4bn.



Alexei Navalny pictured in Moscow in 2010. Photograph: Alexander Zemlianichenko/AP

“They stole,” Navalny wrote on his blog at the time. “They overstated prices. They connived with contractors to cheat.”

To support his claims, Navalny published a confidential 2008 report that an internal working group at Transneft, which was by that time led by Tokarev, had compiled at the request of Russia’s audit chamber – a body responsible for monitoring federal budgets.

The leaked report alleged that “a scheme was artificially created” to benefit contractors on the pipeline project who “did not perform” any work yet received “unreasonably high payments” from the state-owned company. The findings appeared to echo Tokarev’s earlier public admission of concerns.

Among the multiple contractors identified in the internal report was Vniist. The report did not identify who ultimately controlled Vniist but alleged, on the basis of two case studies, the company had siphoned as much as 3.8bn roubles – at the time around \$140m (£80m) – from Transneft.

Specifically, the report alleged Transneft had “no objective need to conclude a contract with Vniist” and the involvement of the company in the Espo project was “unjustified and economically unprofitable”.



Oil storage tanks operated by Transneft, the oil pipeline monopoly, stand at the Yuzhny Balyk plant in Sentyabrsky, Russia, 2014. Photograph: Bloomberg/Getty Images

At the time, Navalny’s leak of the report made headlines around the world and thrust him further into the spotlight as an outspoken anti-corruption campaigner. The report was referred to the Russian interior ministry and prosecutor general and the growing controversy elicited responses from senior Russian figures.

The head of Russia’s audit chamber, Sergei Stepashin, reportedly said in November 2010 that while Transneft did misuse some funds, Navalny’s calculation about the scale of the alleged fraud was incorrect. “There was no \$4bn embezzlement,” he said. Two months later, Tokarev accused Navalny

of “propaganda” and also said the blogger’s calculation about the scale of the alleged fraud was based on a flawed extrapolation.

When no charges materialised in the Transneft case, Navalny accused authorities of covering up an alleged fraud. That accusation was rejected by Putin, who in September 2011 said: “If there had been anything criminal there, I assure you people would have been behind bars long ago.”

Aquind’s lawyers said the response from the Russian authorities and other evidence they had uncovered demonstrated the Transneft report was a “wholly unreliable” document. They said Transneft had a commercial motive for making allegations against Vniist, a company it later brought a number of largely unsuccessful legal actions against over a series of contractual disputes.

In the decade since he leaked the Transneft report, Navalny has been a thorn in the side of the Putin regime, which he accuses of poisoning him. He was [imprisoned this year](#) in Russia in relation to a case of alleged embezzlement that he said was politically motivated.

Vladimir Ashurkov, the director of Navalny’s Anti-Corruption Foundation, who worked in 2010 with the activist to investigate the Transneft case, said they were largely unable to determine who benefited from the alleged corruption – which did not result in any criminal charges. “It wasn’t easy,” he said. “The majority of it we couldn’t attribute to anyone in particular.” No criminal prosecutions ever resulted.

For 10 years, the identity of the ultimate owners who controlled Vniist has remained a mystery. It is a question now seemingly answered by the Pandora papers.

## **Secret offshore stakes**

Leaked documents suggest Vniist was secretly owned by three Russian businessmen. One was Viktor Fedotov. The other two were executives of Transneft – including the state company’s then president, Semyon Vainshtok.



Vladimir Putin and the Transneft oil company president, Semyon Vainshtok, pictured in 2007. Photograph: Sputnik/Alamy

Lawyers for Vainshtok acknowledged he had a “beneficial interest as an indirect shareholder in Vniist”. However, they said he was not a director of Vniist and denied any involvement in awarding the Espo pipeline contracts. They said the allegations of fraud in the Transneft report were “unfounded” and made for “political purposes”.

“The allegations against Mr Vainshtok were made more than 10 years ago and are entirely without foundation,” his spokesperson [said in a statement](#). “When the allegations were made, they were fully investigated and confirmed as untrue by all the relevant authorities ... which found no wrongdoing and no grounds for further investigation.”

Vainshtok’s lawyers also did not expressly dispute his and Fedotov’s secret offshore stakes in Vniist, which are revealed in the Pandora papers.

Files show that in June 2003, two months before Transneft signed its first contract with Vniist for the Espo project, Fedotov, Vainshtok and the other Transneft executive each established New Zealand trusts, naming themselves and their family members as beneficiaries.

Within two years, the three trusts – settled on the same day with the help of the same London accountancy firm – came to control a labyrinthine offshore structure that stretched from the British Virgin Islands (BVI) to Russia via shell companies in Malta, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.

According to a document prepared by an adviser to the trusts, the purpose of the structure was clear. The men “had common business interests in a range of Russian companies, including in particular a valuable interest in Vniist”.

Documents suggest that through layers of shell companies the trusts held a 75% stake in Vniist and majority stakes in four other Russian companies.

Two leading QCs who reviewed the documents told the Guardian the complex structure appears to have been designed to deliberately conceal any connection between the Russian companies and their ultimate owners.

The files suggest that within three years of the creation of the offshore structure, Fedotov, Vainshtok and the other Transneft executive became extraordinarily rich with a combined total of at least \$220m flowing into their New Zealand trusts.

Money appears to have moved up through the structure to the trusts in the form of dividend payments. In one August 2005 document held by the trusts’ administrators, a handwritten note suggests Vniist intended to pay dividends to each of the trusts. The value of each dividend payment is not clear, nor is the precise route payments took before arriving into trust bank accounts.

But accounting records suggest a flurry of large bank transfers to each of the trusts were made at the time Vniist was engaged by Transneft as a contractor for work on the Espo pipeline.

For Fedotov, who served as Vniist’s chairman until 2006, the trust generated a lucrative windfall for him and his family. Financial records suggest that his London-based accountants calculated the trust received \$98m between 2003 and 2005.

The funds appear to have been quickly put to use. In early 2005, the trust's BVI company agreed a \$40m line of credit with an exclusive Swiss bank. Weeks earlier, it purchased a \$34m Bombardier private jet, a top-of-the-range aircraft designed for long-distance flights.

## Aquind ownership revealed

In May 2007, the secret trust structure was restructured, boosting Fedotov's stake in the underlying companies. Shortly after, Fedotov agreed to transfer his new 65% stake in the Russian companies to a series of newly incorporated companies in Cyprus. Vainshtok left Transneft in September 2007.

But by May 2008, Fedotov and Vainshtok were working together again, this time in the UK, where the pair of Russian energy executives briefly became directors of a struggling oil and gas engineering firm based in a seaside town on the Suffolk coast.

That company, SLP Engineering, was part of a group of companies that later became known as Offshore Group Newcastle (OGN). Vainshtok's lawyers said he was only "briefly" a director of SLP Engineering, and had no involvement in OGN.

Two years later, in 2010, OGN created Aquind, the company now vying for ministerial approval for its undersea electricity cable.

For a decade, the ownership of OGN and Aquind, which had been transferred offshore, was shrouded in secrecy. Fedotov lawfully kept his identity as owner of Aquind hidden after Companies House granted him an exemption to rules requiring a company's ultimate owners to be identified. Fedotov's lawyers said the exemption was made to protect his "personal security".

Earlier this year, Aquind disclosed in corporate documents that Fedotov was the majority owner of the company. Lawyers for Aquind stressed that Fedotov did not personally donate to the Conservative party, was not involved in the management of the company and had "no influence" over its donations.

Fedotov's lawyers said he "has never had any interest in British politics and has operated in an open and transparent manner throughout the course of his career".

However, the Pandora papers revelations are likely to give rise to questions for the Conservative government.

MPs have raised concerns that Aquind's electricity connector is a critical piece of UK infrastructure with potential national security implications, not least as the company has also been seeking to run a telecommunications line alongside its power cable.

Now they are likely to ask other pressing questions. Was the fortune earned by Fedotov from Vniist in any way connected to funds supporting Aquind's bid for a government-approved undersea cable? And did any of that money make its way into Tory party coffers?

## Links with Conservative party

The quasi-judicial decision over whether to approve Fedotov's contentious undersea electricity interconnector is being taken by the business secretary, [Kwasi Kwarteng](#). Aquind argues its project will help reduce the impact of volatile gas and coal prices, which are the reasons behind growing electricity bills this autumn and winter. A decision is due within 17 days.

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Letters released under freedom of information laws suggest the business secretary favoured the project when he was a junior minister in the same department, and agreed to lobby French officials to support it on their side of the Channel.

In one piece of correspondence from October 2019, Kwarteng wrote to Aquind saying the government had written to the European Commission to "reiterate our support for a number of projects including, of course, the Aquind project".

Following the release of the letters, Stephen Morgan, the Labour MP for Portsmouth South, raised concerns in the House of Commons about the Tory party's links to Aquind. In addition to Aquind's political donations and links to ministers, the company has ties to two Conservative peers: James Wharton and Martin Callanan. There is no suggestion of wrongdoing by either Tory peer.

Wharton was employed by Aquind as an adviser at the same time as he was running Johnson's bid to take over as Conservative prime minister in 2019. Callanan, a former Aquind director, is now a business minister.

A spokesperson for the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy said the decision over the Aquind's cable would be made "solely" by Kwarteng. They added: "No decision has yet been taken."

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[Pandora papers](#)[UK news](#)

## Pandora papers: what has been revealed so far?



Illustration: Guardian Design

*Guardian investigations team*

Wed 6 Oct 2021 07.19 EDT

### What are the Pandora papers?

The Pandora papers are a leaked cache of 11.9m files from companies that specialise in creating offshore companies and trusts. They are the latest major data leak to expose an alternative financial world where the super-rich can hide their assets and pay little or no tax, following on from the [Panama papers](#) in 2016 and the [Paradise papers](#) in 2017.

### What do they show?

The files reveal how wealthy individuals can shield their income and their assets from taxation and scrutiny by hiding them in offshore jurisdictions, more commonly known as “tax havens”.

Not everyone named in the [Pandora papers](#) is accused of wrongdoing. But using companies or trusts incorporated in tax havens such as the British Virgin Islands, Panama or Switzerland, the rich can ensure their assets remain hidden, and sometimes that enables tax avoidance.

## The revelations so far

- **Abdullah al-Hussein, the King of Jordan**, has [amassed a \\$100m global property empire](#) hidden through offshore companies. His lawyers say there is nothing improper about him holding his property portfolio offshore, but the revelation will be hugely sensitive in Jordan, where activists have previously been arrested simply for asking how much land the king owns.
- The Queen’s crown estate has launched an internal review after the files [revealed it paid £67m](#) to the family of **Ilham Aliyev**, the president of Azerbaijan, in order to acquire part of their London property portfolio. The Aliyev clan has presided over Azerbaijan, one of the most corrupt countries in the world, for two decades. Aliyev and his family did not respond to invitations to comment.
- Former British prime minister **Tony Blair and his wife, Cherie**, appear to have [saved around £300,000 in stamp duty](#) after acquiring a property owned by an offshore company. There is no suggestion of wrongdoing on the part of either the Blairs or the sellers, though the arrangement illustrates how routine the use of tax-avoiding offshore companies has become for high-value property transactions.
- Conservative party donor **Mohamed Amersi**, who funded Boris Johnson’s leadership campaign, is [revealed to have advised on the structure of a deal](#) that was later found to be a £162m bribe for the daughter of Uzbekistan’s president. Amersi’s lawyers said any suggestion he “knowingly” facilitated corrupt payments was false and

that the underlying arrangements for the deal had already been put in place before his involvement.

- A Russian-born oil tycoon, **Viktor Fedotov**, whose firm has made huge donations to the Conservative party, secretly co-owned a company once accused of participating in a massive corruption scheme, the files show. Fedotov said he was too unwell to comment but denies wrongdoing.
- The papers reveal the extraordinary hidden wealth of Russian president **Vladimir Putin**'s inner circle. His childhood friend and an alleged former lover are among those revealed to have amassed extraordinary wealth, hidden through offshore companies.
- A law firm founded by **Nicos Anastasiades**, the president of Cyprus, and which still bears his name, was reported to financial regulators by an offshore services provider that believed it had given them false names to hide the assets of a controversial Russian oligarch. The president insists he has had nothing to do with the firm for years, while the firm strongly denies any misconduct.
- The Czech prime minister, **Andrej Babiš**, who is up for re-election this week, is revealed to have acquired a chateau in the south of France by routing money through a series of offshore companies. He denies any wrongdoing.
- The Ukrainian president, **Volodymyr Zelenskiy**, is revealed to have transferred his shares in an offshore company to a friend just weeks before his election. When approached for comment his spokesperson said: “Won’t be an answer.”
- **Moonis Elahi**, the Pakistani minister for water resources, pulled out of making investments through offshore tax havens after being warned that his country’s tax authority would be informed, the files suggest. A spokesperson denied wrongdoing and said all declarations required by law were made.
- The president of Kenya, **Uhuru Kenyatta**, and his family are named as having amassed \$30m of offshore assets, including London property.

Kenyatta has previously called for all politicians to make their assets public. He did not respond to requests for comment.

- The wealth of **Lubov Chernukhin**, who has donated £2.1m to the Tories since 2012, appears to [flow in part from the corporate structures of her husband](#), Vladimir, a former Russian state banker and a finance minister under Vladimir Putin. The files also reveal the extent to which the couple rely on a vast offshore network of companies to fund their lifestyle. Their lawyers deny Lubov Chernukhin's donations had been funded improperly or influenced by anyone else.
- Heads of government, oligarchs, business tycoons, ruling families and a Middle Eastern monarch are [among the anonymous owners](#) of **at least £4bn in UK property**, the papers reveal. Many of the properties are in the most exclusive London postcodes: Mayfair, Knightsbridge, Kensington and Belgravia.
- The profits from **Unaoil**, a Monaco-based company behind what was previously dubbed "[the world's biggest bribe scandal](#)", moved through a series of offshore companies before being invested in £200m of UK property, the documents suggest.
- Conservative party co-chair **Ben Elliot** jointly owned a secret offshore film financing company that indirectly [benefited from more than £120,000 of UK tax credits](#).
- **Douglas Latchford**, a prolific trader of looted Cambodian cultural heritage, used offshore trusts and companies to [transfer ownership of sacred Khmer antiquities](#) and avoid UK inheritance tax on the proceeds of selling them.
- **Farrer and Co**, lawyers to the Queen, acted for Abubakar Bagudu, who has since been accused by the US Department of Justice of playing an "instrumental role" in a notorious corruption scheme through which [billions of dollars were looted from Nigeria](#).
- **Jonathan Aitken**, the former Conservative minister once jailed for perjury, [received £166,000 to write a hagiography of Kazakh dictator](#)

[Nursultan Nazarbayev](#), according to documents.

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## Major Tory donor advised on Uzbekistan deal later found to be \$220m bribe



Mohammed Amersi and Gulnara Karimova. The oldest daughter of authoritarian ruler Islam Karimov is in prison in Uzbekistan on corruption

charges. Illustration: Guardian Design/Martin Godwin; Yves Forestier/Getty Images; Reuters

*[Harry Davies in Stockholm](#)*

*[@harryfoxdavies](#)*

Mon 4 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

A major Conservative party donor who funded Boris Johnson's campaign to become prime minister advised on the structure of a deal that was later found to be a \$220m (£162m) bribe for the daughter of the then president of Uzbekistan.

Documents show how Mohamed Amersi advised a Swedish multinational telecoms company on a complex transaction that it later accepted was a "corrupt payment" to the powerful first daughter of Uzbekistan's authoritarian ruler, Islam Karimov.

Responding to the allegations, Amersi's lawyers said any suggestion he "knowingly" facilitated corrupt payments was false and that the underlying arrangements for the deal had been put in place two years before. They added that Amersi had relied on the fact that others had done due diligence on the arrangement, that he had "no reason" to believe it might be a bribe, and that he had only worked on the project for six weeks.

A joint investigation by the *Guardian* and *BBC Panorama*, however, raises wider questions about the work Amersi did for the telecoms firm, Telia, over a six-year period as it sought to secure lucrative business across the central Asia region.

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Was this helpful?

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An international dealmaker in the telecoms industry, Amersi was paid about \$65m for his work over that period – funds which, the [Pandora papers](#) suggest, contributed to a significant fortune, spent in part on luxury properties in the UK.

The Guardian and BBC have reviewed thousands of pages of internal emails, court papers, invoices, corporate files and internal reports, and spoken to multiple well-placed sources familiar with the role Amersi played for Telia in central Asia.

They include a whistleblower – Michaela Ahlberg, Telia's former chief compliance and ethics officer – who has decided to come forward with her

concerns about the Tory donor's wider work for the company in central Asia.

In an interview, she claimed that – separate to Amersi's advisory role in the 2010 Uzbekistan deal – Telia had uncovered multiple “big red flags” about how he had operated while working as a consultant in the region between 2007 and 2013. Those were detailed in a confidential report by an international law firm that was commissioned in 2013 by Telia's board to review the company's entry into multiple central Asian markets.

Excerpts from the report, which states that its findings should not be treated as final, alleged that some of the payments Telia made to Amersi “may have been utilised” in Kazakhstan to “improperly acquire” regulatory benefits. The company terminated its relationship with Amersi later that year.

Through his lawyers, Amersi said he had met with “senior political figures” in Kazakhstan, but that the meetings were “official occasions” accompanied by Telia executives. Amersi's lawyers added that he fully complied with Telia's expenses policy at all times.

They strongly rejected any suggestion of misconduct, saying any allegations that their client had made “improper or illegal payments”, or was a conduit to help Telia “improperly” acquire regulatory benefits, were false. They said Amersi had never faced any allegations of misconduct or criminality despite exhaustive investigations into Telia's activities by law enforcement bodies in four countries.

However, new disclosures about Amersi's past business activities may alarm the Conservative party, which has received more than £750,000 from the Kenyan-born businessman and his partner since 2018. Johnson's party is [hosting its annual conference](#) in Manchester this week.



Mohamed Amersi with Boris Johnson

The revelations will also reignite controversy surrounding Amersi, who alleged in July that the Conservative party was operating an “[access capitalism](#)” scheme for major Tory donors like himself. “You get access, you get invitations, you get privileged relationships, if you are part of the setup,” he said.

His comments described the approach of the party’s co-chair Ben Elliot, a friend of the prime minister who co-owns a company providing concierge services for the super-rich. After he became leader, Johnson made Elliot his fundraiser-in-chief. Elliot then raised a record £37m for the party’s 2019 general election campaign.

Amersi, 61, gave the Conservatives a £100,000 cash injection ahead of that campaign, after previously donating to the leadership campaigns of Johnson, Michael Gove and Jeremy Hunt. As a member of the party’s “[Leader’s Group](#)” of donors, he has secured frequent access to ministers.

The telecoms tycoon is seeking to influence the Conservative party’s foreign strategy with a new group he hopes will handle its relations in the Middle East. Amersi’s lawyers said all his donations were derived from work done

for legitimate clients and any suggestion that they were the product of improper funds was false.

Beyond Westminster, Amersi has secured a place in elite British circles as a deep-pocketed philanthropist. He has cultivated close ties with Oxford University and has advisory roles with Prince Charles's charitable organisations.

Amersi has funded charitable causes through a Bahamas-based foundation and campaigned against corruption, which he has called a "heinous crime".

In 2017, he spoke at an Oxford University event where he was praised for his "commitment to combating corruption" – a subject he said was "close to my heart". He welcomed journalists exposing corruption, but said "governments and enforcement agencies are powerless to be able to do something".

Amersi even brought up Telia's deals in Uzbekistan, which he said had been the focus of a cross-border corruption investigation. What he did not mention, however, was his own involvement in the structuring of a deal that was later found to be a bribe to the daughter of the country's late dictator.



The Stockholm head office of the Swedish telecoms giant Telia. Photograph: Jessica Gow/Alamy

## The president's daughter

It was almost Christmas in 2009 when Mohamed Amersi received an email from a senior Telia executive asking him to join a conference call about “an urgent job on Uzbekistan”. By then, Amersi had been working for Telia on its central Asian strategy for more than two years.

Emails suggest that over the following week Amersi assisted Telia executives as they engaged in hurried negotiations with a person now alleged to have been an associate of Gulnara Karimova.

Lawyers for Amersi said he had no reason to suspect that the Uzbek intermediary was linked to the daughter of Uzbekistan’s then ruler. They said the work he did on the project – structuring the agreement and validating the valuation – was limited in time and scope. They said the transaction related to terms put in place two years earlier, before he had any involvement, and he relied on the fact that due diligence had been done by Telia and its advisers.

Karimova was once a glamorous businesswoman, diplomat and pop singer who performed a duet with Gérard Depardieu. She is now in prison in Uzbekistan on corruption charges. Swiss and US prosecutors have separately accused her of soliciting hundreds of millions of dollars in bribes.

An initial report commissioned by Telia on the Uzbek scandal, conducted by a Swedish law firm, found that the telecoms giant had failed to conduct proper due diligence on who was behind its “local partner” in Uzbekistan. However, the law firm failed to establish that bribes had been paid.

As part of a record \$965m settlement Telia reached with the US Department of Justice (DoJ) in 2017, the company accepted that it had made “corrupt payments” in Uzbekistan. The telecoms firm admitted to paying a “foreign official” – subsequently identified as Karimova – a series of bribes worth more than \$331m.

According to US prosecutors, Telia executives decided that in order to operate in the country and obtain the relevant telecom licences, they had to

regularly pay Karimova significant bribes. Those took the shape of corrupt business deals and payments between 2007 and 2010.

Telia's initial deal with Karimova was struck in the summer of 2007. Although since accepted by Telia as corrupt, the deal was no ordinary bung.

In a complex financial arrangement, Karimova would receive an initial £30m bribe from a Telia subsidiary. Meanwhile, a Gibraltar-based shell company she controlled through a proxy would acquire a 26% ownership stake in the Uzbek mobile phone network that Telia would operate, Ucell.

In return, she would help facilitate Telia's entry into her father's country. But for Karimova, the 2007 deal was only the first bite of the apple. It also included an unusual condition: after 31 December 2009, the Gibraltar-based shell company would be allowed to sell its shares in Ucell back to Telia, generating a major windfall.



Gulnara Karimova at a press conference in Tashkent in 2013. Photograph: Yves Forestier/Getty Images

With the end of 2009 approaching, Karimova's representative, Bekhzod Akhmedov, moved quickly to complete this part of the deal with Telia. An influential player in Uzbek telecoms, Akhmedov would later be indicted in

the US for his alleged role in the bribery scheme. The status of that case is unclear. Akhmedov has denied any wrongdoing.

Amersi's involvement in the deal came over a six-week period beginning in late 2009. Emails show that Amersi personally drafted a key message to Akhmedov that formally introduced how Telia proposed to structure the next stage of the deal. Later, one Telia executive described the text of this letter as "proposed by Mohamed". When informed that Akhmedov was broadly happy with Telia's offer, Amersi replied: "This is great!"

Eventually, the new deal was agreed; a memo shared with Amersi in January 2010 described its terms. Telia would pay Karimova's shell company \$220m for 20% of its shares in Ucell. In return, the Gibraltar-based shell company would help Telia's mobile network receive and renew telecoms licences needed to operate in the country. The memo described the shell company as having "good political connections in Uzbekistan".

The director of the shell company was Karimova's 26-year-old personal assistant, who had no prior experience in the telecoms industry.

A lawyer for Karimova said she "contested" a DoJ indictment alleging that Telia had made corrupt payments to her, saying the charges "lack any probative value". Akhmedov said he "categorically denies soliciting or facilitating any corrupt bribe payments from Telia or any other telecom firm". He said the \$220m payment was not a bribe for Karimova.

Amersi's lawyer said he had "no knowledge" of Karimova's involvement in the shell company at the time and there was no expectation or reason for him to conduct his own due diligence on the deal.

Weeks after the 2010 deal was sealed, Amersi appears to have transferred a \$500,000 success fee to one of his Swiss bank accounts. An invoice submitted in March of that year by one of his offshore companies shows that Amersi asked for the \$500,000 to be paid into a bank account in Zurich. The invoice specified the payment was for "Project Uzbekistan/Takilant" – a reference to the name of the Gibraltar company controlled by Karimova.

Amersi's British Virgin Islands-based company, which received the funds, is one of 16 companies controlled by him that appear in the Pandora papers. The files show that between 2012 and 2016, two of these companies acquired a string of properties in the UK, including a mansion in the Cotswolds that sold last year for £8.4m. Another entity was formed to hold his £14m townhouse in Mayfair.

## ‘Mr XY’

In the spring of 2013, Telia found itself at the centre of a major corruption scandal in [Sweden](#) after journalists uncovered evidence of the secret deal with Karimova.

When Ahlberg joined Telia a few months later, the company was still reeling from the fallout from the scandal. She was part of a new management team tasked with cleaning up the company and investigating how it had secured licences to operate in countries including Kazakhstan and Nepal.

The following year, Telia disclosed to its shareholders that a review by the international law firm Norton Rose Fulbright (NRF) into its deals in these countries found the company had engaged in unethical and possibly criminal activities.

Excerpts of the report seen by the Guardian state the findings “should be subject to further testing”. It nonetheless raises a series of questions about the role played by an unnamed external consultant who advised on transactions in central Asia and Nepal, who is referred to in the report as “Mr XY”.

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According to the NRF report, Mr XY was paid about \$65m over the course of his six years as an adviser to Telia – some of which the report alleged may have been paid to third parties in Kazakhstan to “improperly acquire regulatory benefits and/or secure the go-ahead of transactions”.

Services provided by Mr XY, the report said, “appear to have included arranging introductions and contact with politically exposed persons” in countries where Telia hoped to do business.

As well as a monthly retainer, the NRF report said Mr XY was paid “lump sums” of \$500,000 or £1m as “success fees” and claimed as much as \$200,000 in monthly expenses for “lavish corporate entertainment”, including for politically exposed persons, according to the report.

One of the remedial steps the report raised was the termination of Telia’s contracts with Mr XY. According to multiple sources, Mr XY was Amersi. A letter seen by the Guardian shows that the contracts were formally terminated by Telia in September 2013.

In a statement, Telia declined to comment on Amersi’s work for the company. It said that since 2013 Telia had “committed itself to transparency and openness” and exited all central Asian countries where the company had operated. The company added that it had “accepted responsibility” for violations of anti-corruption laws.

Amersi’s lawyers told the Guardian that after details of the NRF report emerged in 2014, he had no reason to believe its allegations referred to him, as the company had hired numerous advisers and no allegations of misconduct had ever been put to him by Telia or anyone else.

They said that while Amersi would on occasion “meet with” senior political figures along with Telia executives, he only “dealt with” with private citizens who were not officials, and had ordinary banking facilities.

Amersi’s lawyers confirmed that he had received approximately \$65m in “fees”, which they said were “commensurate” with industry standards. They said Amersi’s termination by Telia was a “mutual, friendly departure”.

They added that despite an unsuccessful attempt by Swedish prosecutors to bring charges against three former Telia executives in 2018, and investigations in three other countries, no criminal or other legal action had been brought against Amersi.

One of the sources who confirmed that Mr XY was Amersi is Ahlberg, Telia's former chief compliance officer. She urged institutions in the UK receiving money from Amersi to scrutinise his past business activities. "With the position of power this man has today, it is important that people around him, that trust and listen to him, understand the whole context of his career and wealth."

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## **Headlines friday 8 october 2021**

- [Coronavirus Grant Shapps wants to scrap costly PCR tests for travellers by half-term](#)
- [Live Covid: England aims to replace PCR tests with lateral flow tests for international travel](#)
- ['Red list' England's last restrictions confound South Americans](#)

## Travel & leisure

# Grant Shapps wants to scrap costly PCR tests for travellers by half-term



Grant Shapps says the government has confidence in downgrading the level of tests for foreign travel because of the coronavirus vaccination programme. Photograph: Aurore Shirley/Alamy

[Mark Sweeney](#)

[@marksweney](#)

Fri 8 Oct 2021 05.12 EDT

The transport secretary, [Grant Shapps](#), has said he wants to scrap costly PCR tests for international travellers returning to England in time for the October half-term holiday, in a boost to airlines and the broader industry.

The tests, which cost about £75 each on average, would be replaced by cheaper lateral flow tests. The move to make travel easier follows the

government announcement on Thursday that the number of countries on the “red list”, which have the toughest restrictions, is to be cut to only seven.

Addressing plans for a shift in policy on testing, Shapps said: “We want to get this done for half-term for people.

“When it comes to the safety aspect, we are still requiring a test,” Shapps told Sky News. “But we are going to move that down from being a PCR one, an expensive one that you have to send away to a lab, to a lateral flow test, so that will help and enable us to monitor things. We anticipate having it ready for the half-term. What a difference it will make for people.”

Despite [soaring numbers of positive coronavirus cases](#), Shapps said the government had confidence in downgrading the level of tests for foreign travel because of the vaccination programme.

“And, reassuringly, if you come back from where you do a lateral flow and you get a positive result, then you’ll be able to get a free NHS PCR test in the normal way and you’ll be back in the normal system. The big difference now is we are vaccinated,” he said. “That makes the change here. It will be much easier and much less expensive.”

The move to simplify testing comes after the government gave the travel industry a boost by announcing that the number of countries on the red list, with the toughest restrictions including 10 days of quarantine, [would be cut from 54 to seven](#).

It means there is likely to be a surge in bookings from UK holidaymakers for popular winter destinations such as Mexico, South Africa and Brazil.

After the red list was cut back, [British Airways](#) immediately announced a ramping up of flights to popular destinations this winter, offering up to £300 off some holiday packages.

“It finally feels like we are seeing light at the end of a very long tunnel,” said Sean Doyle, the chief executive and chairman of BA.

Shares in BA’s owner, IAG, had risen 1.6% by on Friday afternoon, making it one of the top risers on the [FTSE](#) 100.

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Shapps said he had been speaking to his counterpart in the US, a critical business and leisure air route still not open for travellers, but could not give firm advice on reopening beyond guidance of early next month.

“I’ve been speaking to my opposite number – I spoke to the American ambassador a couple of days ago – they’re still working through the technicalities of all that,” he said.

Doyle said a firm date for reopening of US borders would “reignite transatlantic businesses and reunite families who have been separated for the best part of two years”.

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[Coronavirus live](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

# Coronavirus live: Russian Covid deaths in August hit at least 49,389 – as it happened

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## [Global development](#)

# England's last Covid 'red list' restrictions confound South Americans



Arrivals from Peru in England still have to undergo an 11-night hotel quarantine. Photograph: Karel Navarro/Peruvian Ministry of Health/AFP/Getty Images

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*Joe Parkin Daniels* in Bogotá

[@joeparkdan](https://twitter.com/joeparkdan)

Thu 7 Oct 2021 18.35 EDT

England's decision to maintain strict Covid travel rules for seven South American and Caribbean countries has prompted further fury and confusion in the nations which remain on the "red list".

Ministers announced on Thursday that [restrictions would be lifted for 47 countries – including Brazil, South Africa and Thailand](#) – allowing travellers to enter England without being subject to draconian and expensive quarantine restrictions.

But arrivals from Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Panama, the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Venezuela will still be required to undergo an 11-night hotel quarantine at a cost of over £2,000, or to remain in a third-party country for the same time before entering England.

For many in a region where social distancing and mask use remains commonplace and uncontroversial, it is a step that defies logic. [Colombia](#),

for example, currently has an average daily Covid caseload of 1,428, compared with England's 27,851, even though the two countries have a similar population. When Zac Goldsmith, minister for the pacific and the environment, visited Colombia on Wednesday, he posed unmasked for a [photograph](#) with local officials.

Alcaldes y representantes de Barranquilla, Bogotá, La Estrella, Valle de Aburrá, Pereira, Topagá, Yopal y Manizales intercambiaron con Lord [@ZacGoldsmith](#) sus planes a futuro para continuar reduciendo emisiones y brindando soluciones basadas en la naturaleza en sus ciudades.  [pic.twitter.com/IYj79kC78t](https://pic.twitter.com/IYj79kC78t)

— Embajada Británica en Colombia (@UKinColombia) [October 7, 2021](#)

A petition to remove the country from the red list has currently received more than 3,500 signatures.

“It’s devastating that Colombia is still on the red list,” said Martin Higgins, 35, a university teacher living in Bogotá, who cancelled plans last year to travel with his family last year due to Covid restrictions. “My son was born in 2019 and hasn’t met his grandfather yet so it has affected us deeply; hotel quarantine just isn’t an option with a two-year-old and the cost of it is extortionate.”

Many others expressed anger at the new rules. “There is no justifiable explanation,” said Thomas Markall, who lives in Bogotá and was incensed by news that he would remain stuck in Colombia for the foreseeable future. “The current government doesn’t seem to even be able to interpret current data and implement an informed, reasonable policy. Either that or they are too lazy to look at the facts.”

I can't even explain how enraged I am feeling over Colombia staying on the red list. No explanation given.

My head is spinning

— Luisa María  (@Luisammn) [October 7, 2021](#)

Those in England hoping to visit relatives in Colombia were also furious that their hopes for travel had once again been dashed.

“Last April my grandmother died and with the restrictions in place, I was unable to go back to Medellín to attend her funeral and to accompany my father who lived with her,” wrote Laura Gomez, a Colombian living in London, in an open letter to the British government. “The last time I saw my family was in January 2019 and the agony of not knowing when I will be able to see them again is painful.”

Britain’s ambassador to Colombia, Colin Martin-Reynolds, said in a statement on Thursday that the decision to keep the country on the red list is due to a “significant presence of the variants of interest Mu (and to a lesser extent, Lamda).”

People in other affected countries expressed similar frustration, with Peruvians, Ecuadorians and Panamanians questioning why they remained on the red list even though their countries boast higher vaccination rates than other states which have been removed.

“Re. Peru remaining on the red list: it makes zero sense, scientific or otherwise,” [tweeted](#) one person.

“Ecuador is one of the seven countries remaining in the UK’s red list, despite having a successful vaccination program,” [tweeted](#) another. “If decisions are made on a medical basis why have countries like Brazil and South Africa come off? This feels like politics rather than science.”

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## 2021.10.08 - Spotlight

- 'Total loss of confidence' Franco-British relations plumb new depths
- 'If there is a God, this is what he put us on Earth to do' The unlikely return of Tears for Fears
- You be the judge Can I ask my tenant to stop working out on the front porch?
- Quick on the draw Jeymes Samuel on remaking the western

## [Foreign policy](#)

# ‘Total loss of confidence’: Franco-British relations plumb new depths



Boris Johnson and Emmanuel Macron with backs turned on each other as Macron talks to Joe Biden at a Nato summit in Brussels in June. Photograph: Reuters

*[Jon Henley](#) Europe correspondent*

*[@jonhenley](#)*

Fri 8 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

The British embassy in Paris held a splendid James Bond soiree this week, guests in black tie and evening dress sipping Bollinger and Martinis shaken, not stirred, playing blackjack and admiring the gleaming Aston Martin DB5 in the courtyard.

As projections of British soft power go, it was as potent as any could wish for. Except, as one experienced observer said: “There don’t seem to be many

French policy people about.” Another wondered: “Were they not invited – or didn’t they come?”

The embassy, of course, does not discuss guest lists. But it is a sign of just how bad Anglo-French relations have become – and according to ex-ambassadors and analysts alike, they have rarely been worse – that the question was posed.

“They’re as bad as I can remember,” said Peter Ricketts, Britain’s ambassador to [France](#) from 2012 to 2016. “My sense is the French have just totally lost confidence in the UK as an ally, and in the British government as something to depend on.”

For Sylvie Bermann, France’s ambassador to Britain from 2014 to 2017, Franco-British relations “have never been this tense, this inimical. In Paris there is a real absence of trust – a feeling that Britain no longer honours the agreements it signs”.

Tensions that built up over five years of ill-tempered [Brexit](#) negotiations have been exacerbated by a series of increasingly heated cross-Channel disagreements, some related to the fallout from the UK’s departure from the EU, but others not.

Britain’s decision to impose [tighter Covid travel restrictions on France](#) than on other EU countries this summer, for example, was deeply resented in Paris, where it was seen as unjustified discrimination and assumed to be politically motivated.

Tempers have flared, too, over the longstanding problem of [migrant crossings](#) in small craft from France to the UK, with the home secretary Priti Patel’s plan to turn back boats and withhold cash for French coastal patrols dismissed by her Paris counterpart, Gérard Darmanin, as “[blackmail](#)” and “posturing”.



Sylvie Bermann, then French ambassador to Britain, pictured in 2016 with Boris Johnson, then foreign secretary. Photograph: Daniel Leal-Olivas/AFP/Getty Images

The Indo-Pacific security partnership, [Aukus](#), announced last month by the US, Australia and UK, cost France a multibillion-euro submarine deal with Australia and drew cold fury in Paris – although Britain is seen as very much a junior partner.

The UK was the deal’s “fifth wheel”, said the French foreign minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian, noting that France had not recalled its ambassador to London – as it did its envoys to Washington and Canberra – because it was by now so used to Britain’s “constant opportunism”.

Boris Johnson, though he later professed Britain’s “ineradicable” affection for France, mocked French anger in franglais, saying Paris should [“prenez un grip and donnez-moi un break”](#). That prompted Emmanuel Macron to [respond to a](#) call to “re-establish cooperation” with a cool: “The president awaits his proposals.”

But the most profound reason for the rift remains Brexit and its fallout, with the French infuriated by what they see as London’s refusal to implement – and desire to relitigate – key parts of the agreement, and the British viewing

Paris as hellbent on punishing the UK for having had the temerity to leave the EU.

Fed up with the UK “not applying its agreements” and “badmouthing” France and the EU, Clément Beaune, France’s Europe minister, [warned this week](#) of retaliatory steps, including hitting Britain and Jersey’s energy supply, for Britain’s failure to provide sufficient fishing licences to French fishers.

Paris is equally [galled by David Frost](#)’s determination to rewrite the Northern Ireland protocol, which Britain negotiated and signed up to in order to avoid a land border on the island of Ireland but which imposes border controls in the Irish Sea.



Tempers have flared, too, over the issue of migrant crossings in small craft from France to the UK, with home secretary Priti Patel threatening to turn boats back and withhold cash for French coastal patrols. Photograph: Home Office

Analysts, diplomats and French media commentators see little hope of any short-term improvement in cross-Channel relations as long as two leaders with such radically different agendas – and their own overriding political imperatives – remain in No 10 and the Elysée.

“Johnson’s strategy is based on justifying Britain’s divorce from the EU and stressing its supposed benefits – while the profoundly pro-European Macron slams the ‘lie’ on which Brexit was built and of which Johnson was the key architect,” said [Le Monde](#).

“In that sense, each one is the incarnation of what the other most rejects,” said Elvire Fabry, a senior research fellow at the Jacques Delors Institute in Paris. “That locks the two countries in the familiar Brexit narrative, unable to look to the future and see where cooperation could and should be possible.”

Compounding those strategic differences is the domestic political advantage to be had by bashing one’s neighbour. From the French perspective, attacking France allows Johnson (whom Paris views as profoundly unserious) to distract, for example, from Britain’s recent supply chain crisis – which, as a consequence of Brexit, Paris is only too happy to highlight.

In the British view, the fact that Macron – long seen in London as the “bad cop” of the Brexit negotiations, the EU leader who always took the hardest line – faces a difficult presidential re-election campaign next year means he too has everything to win by playing to a domestic audience.

“As the UK can’t admit the difficulties it faces are the logical consequences of Brexit and of the minimal free trade agreement it demanded,” said [Gérard Araud](#), a former French ambassador to Washington, “it will make the EU a scapegoat, and particularly France.” In the near term, “we are doomed to a disastrous relationship”.

Blaming the French “has always worked very well politically in the UK”, agreed Bermann. “You only have to look at the front pages of the tabloids.” But while it was “normal to experience ups and downs in the relationship”, she said, the current level of acrimony appeared almost unprecedented.

Ricketts, who as chair of Britain’s Joint Intelligence Committee under Tony Blair experienced at first hand the more than usually bitter Franco-British quarrel over the US-led invasion of Iraq, said that was “a very sharp, but short-lived difference”.

It was followed, he said, by “real high points” in cross-Channel relations, such as the 2010 Lancaster House agreements on bilateral defence cooperation. “This feels more profound – it’s a lot more than a spat,” he said. “It will take time and serious effort to repair.”

Fabry, too, said she thinks had “gone beyond annoyance. I try not to bash Brexit, but there seems such a clear domino effect: hard Brexit, end of free movement, supply chain problems. As long as that persists, France makes an obvious target. I’m not very optimistic”.

Georgina Wright, the head of the [Europe](#) programme at the Institut Montaigne, said past bilateral defence cooperation, notably in the Balkans, Sahel and Middle East, had been close but “the lack of trust is also slowly being felt in the defence circles”.

Both sides would have to move, she said. “The view in London is that France is still trying to punish the UK for Brexit, and the bilateral relationship is stuck because of French threats. In Paris the view is that Britain can’t be trusted. I can’t see things changing in France before the next presidential election – and in the UK, it could take longer.”

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Interview

## **‘If there is a God, this is what he put us on Earth to do’: the unlikely return of Tears for Fears**

[Laura Barton](#)



Let it all out ... Tears for Fears, AKA Curt Smith and Roland Orzabal.  
Photograph: Frank W Ockenfels III



Fri 8 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

Some years ago, Curt Smith, the singer and songwriter best known as one half of Tears for Fears, found himself in Vancouver. He was filming one of several guest spots he made on the US TV detective series [Psych](#), and after work that day he joined the rest of the cast at a local karaoke bar.

There, before the stage, Smith was struck by the idea to get up and sing one of his band's most famous hits, 1985's UK platinum-selling Everybody Wants to Rule the World. How hilarious it would be, he thought, when people clocked that he was the actual singer of the song. "And no one paid a blind bit of attention," he says now. "No one! They didn't realise it was me."

Meanwhile, back in England, Smith's bandmate Roland Orzabal had received an invitation to audition for the reality TV show [Popstar to Operastar](#). Orzabal, who had sung opera in the past, felt the stars were aligning. "I'm thinking: 'This was meant for me.'" he says. He took the audition seriously, practised diligently, sought out an opera coach near his home in the West Country. "I went in there and I fucking nailed it," he

recalls of his performance of Giordani's *Caro Mio Ben* in a suite at the Savoy hotel that winter. "And they didn't ask me. Midge Ure got it."

The life of the "semi-retired" musician is a strange one, Smith reflects. "You still write music, but you do other things. I was very much the stay-at-home dad, because my wife [the marketing executive Frances Pennington] has a career and is very busy." With little in his Los Angeles home to suggest a successful career in music – no gold discs on the walls, or awards on the mantelpiece – Smith realised that, while he might not need such reminders to know who he was, his identity was mysterious to his children. One day at preschool, his eldest daughter was asked what her parents did. "Her answer was: 'Mama goes to the office and Papa goes to the gym.'"

With the demands of family, acting, opera and gym workouts, not to mention management disputes and periods of acrimony between the pair, somehow 17 years have passed since Tears for Fears last recorded an album together. Today, though, they sit in the small, starkly lit boardroom of a Marylebone hotel, two radiant 60-year-olds eager to talk about their new material. *The Tipping Point* is a stunning record, taking in fine-fledged folk guitar and aggressive synthesisers, and encompassing loss, resentment, the Mistral wind of southern France, the healing that has taken place between them; plus the patriarchy, the pandemic and the Black Lives Matter protests.



Suffer the children ... Orzabal and Smith being interviewed at MTV Studios, New York, in 1983. Photograph: Gary Gershoff/Getty Images

Tears for Fears were teenagers when they met in Bath, bonding over a love of Blue Öyster Cult, and recording as the mod-leaning Graduate before forming a synth-led band with a name inspired by the work of the primal therapist Arthur Janov. They released their first single, Suffer the Children, in 1981. Early on they were sometimes mocked for their willingness to speak about such wide-ranging subject matter as emotional issues, mental health and gender imbalance. “When we came out with Woman in Chains, I think a lot of our peers who were hanging out at the Groucho Club were like: ‘What the fuck?’” says Orzabal.

“We came from an era where young men should be seen and not heard,” Smith says. “It was a lot of: ‘Who are you to be talking about these subjects? You’re too young to understand these things!’ And in all honesty we didn’t know enough, but we weren’t shy to voice our opinions. That was the difference between us and a lot of people of that era.”

“I think when you’re making that transition from childhood into adulthood and you’re leaving a lot of things behind, the world is a scary place,” Orzabal continues. “We’d previously been in a very lightweight mod band together, and then both of us had embraced Janov’s primal theory, and we discovered what we do best: stick out some messages, hidden, cleverly, in a whole bunch of electronica. And then we were off, because we had something to say.”

I can’t put my heart into it unless we have something fresh to say, do or play

*Curt Smith*

Three albums – The Hurting, Songs from the Big Chair, and The Seeds of Love – sold a reported 30m copies. Then, in 1991, the pair fell out, breaking up the band to pursue solo careers. In 2004, a thaw led to a new album, Everybody Loves a Happy Ending, but sales were not as hoped. “It went straight on the Radio 2 A list,” Orzabal remembers. “And we did American

TV. But when we looked at the record sales, the record that was selling was the greatest hits.”

Still, the band toured widely, sidestepping 80s-revival shows (“We’ve turned it down every time,” says Smith, “because we don’t consider ourselves from a decade”), and releasing covers of contemporary songs by the likes of Hot Chip, Animal Collective and Arcade Fire, but there seemed little appetite for new material. Their then-manager encouraged the status quo, says Orzabal. “‘Do you really need to put out another record? You’re always going to be a heritage act, you’ve got these classic songs, don’t worry about it, let’s continue to tour.’”

“Night after night,” Smith continues. “After a bunch of years we’re like: ‘It’s getting a bit boring now.’ I can’t put my heart into it that much more unless we have something fresh to say, do or play.”

Meanwhile, something interesting was happening: Mad World had already been covered by Gary Jules and Michael Andrew on the cult 2001 film [Donnie Darko](#), and now younger artists such as Lorde, the 1975, Kanye West and the Weeknd were citing Tears for Fears as an influence. The band’s live show shifted accordingly, ramping up the tempo and the contemporary covers. “Word spread among the promoters – ‘These guys are good, you want them on the show’ – so we got more and more invites,” says Orzabal.

There followed a co-headline tour with Hall and Oates, a Royal Albert Hall show and a Radio 2 special. “That was the tipping point, because [until then] people liked our music, but they didn’t know whether we could play, or whether we were just two guys and a synthesiser,” says Orzabal. When they sold out the O2, Smith recalls with a smile, “it was: ‘Hang on – what’s going on? We’re back in fashion!’”

But the upturn in the band’s career coincided with difficulties for Orzabal. In the summer of 2017, his wife Caroline – his partner since they were teenagers – died. He talks about her with a kind of tender openness that seems quite at odds with a newspaper interview. In 2007, he says, Caroline hit menopause. “And then the wheels came off, and she went from being extremely feisty and spirited and up, and so charismatic, to hitting depression. And menopause was probably a smokescreen.”

Caroline was prescribed medication, the kind you are not meant to drink while taking. She continued to do so anyway, entering a cycle of increased mental anguish and suicidal ideation. Orzabal laments the treatment of depression with pills. “There should be real strict controls on what people are dealing with.”

Plus, he says, his wife was adept at hiding the truth of her condition. “Caroline was a little bit lax and naughty when she would see doctors. She wouldn’t be 100% honest, she would talk about menopause: she would talk about empty nest syndrome – that became the next one, and it wasn’t that at all. It was a number of things. And it was her liver, cirrhosis, and that was a long time coming.”

I went round to Curt’s place with an acoustic guitar and we went straight back to being 18-year-old kids

*Roland Orzabal*

Caroline never stopped drinking. “Which is partly my fault because I’m a drinker, too. If I’d known that was the reason ...” He trails off. “But I didn’t. I don’t know how commonly known it is that alcohol is far more dangerous for a woman than it is for a man, and the problem was Caroline used to match me. But again, that’s my own ignorance and stupidity at what was going on, because at that point in time there should have been no alcohol anywhere, that’s a fact.”

She developed alcohol-related dementia. “So it was five years of hell where I became her carer,” says Orzabal. “I had a care company as well to take the weight off me, and there we were in our big country house in the West Country with an increasingly shrinking circle of friends and it was pretty harrowing.” He lets out a long breath, and the three of us sit, wet-eyed around the boardroom table.

It was while Caroline was ill that Orzabal began to write several of the songs that appear on *The Tipping Point*. “I needed some respite from the constant illness, the constant dysfunction, and as per usual, as I’ve always done all my life, they went into lyrics and songs,” he says.



Songs from the big chair ... the reconvened Curt and Roland. Photograph: Frank W Ockenfels III

The song Please Be Happy was “inspired by watching someone you love sitting in a chair all day, not doing anything, not moving, and when she does, she goes up the stairs with a glass of wine, and [the glass] crashes on the stairs”. The title track recalls sitting in Caroline’s hospital room, “looking at someone and waiting for the point when they are more dead than alive”.

The year that followed Caroline’s death, Orzabal suffered his own health issues, spent time in rehab and postponed the band’s world tour. “I was going through hell,” he says. Smith, fearing he might exacerbate his bandmate’s problems, kept his distance.

“I knew Roland wasn’t in a healthy place, and I felt it was important that he got well more than anything else,” he says. Over the years, the pair had grown accustomed to periods of intense creative connection, followed by “butting heads”, and extended time apart. They describe the shape of their relationship as “this helix thing”.

But in the depths of it all, Orzabal had a revelation: “I thought that was it, because Caroline had gone, [longtime Tears for Fears collaborator] Alan Griffiths was gone, and immediately my mind went to Curt. That’s when I

thought: ‘This guy’s really important.’ It was obvious – it’s really obvious to a lot of people – but then all of a sudden you think: ‘Oh no, this partnership is right, we’ve done great things.’ And the story’s not over – thank God!”

Orzabal’s new love, now wife, the writer and photographer [Emily Rath](#), encouraged a reconciliation. “She is an amazing influence – teaching me how to be kind and polite, and not hostile all the time.” he says. In early 2020, he messaged Smith and the pair had lunch in Los Angeles. “It was like: what’s our problem? We don’t really have one. So I went round to Curt’s place with an acoustic guitar and we went straight back to being 18-year-old kids. Curt came up with this riff, No Small Thing, and we were off. So that was the key that unlocked the album.”

Seventeen years after their last record – an album primarily about their reunion – Orzabal feels The Tipping Point is a different beast, a coming home to the band’s true way of writing. “When you start doing that again the energies, the supportive waters, start carrying you, and it’s like: ‘Wow, this is amazing.’ But the songs we have now connect the personal and the political; songs which can be interpreted on an individual basis and interpreted on a collective basis. That’s what – if there is a God – that’s what God put us on the Earth to do.”

In late September, Smith and Orzabal walked on to the stage at the [Ivor Novello awards in London](#) to a standing ovation. There to receive the Outstanding Song Collection award, Smith hung back while Orzabal took the microphone, joked about Bath Spa Waitrose, thanked their wives, their new management and new label. “Lastly,” he said, looking out over the audience, “I’d like to thank two people without whom we just wouldn’t be here.” He paused, and glanced toward Smith: “Us.”

- *Tears for Fears’ single The Tipping Point is out now. The album follows in February 2022.*

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## You be the judge: ‘Can I ask my tenant to stop working out on the front porch?’



‘He thinks I’m jealous of his confidence but, really, I just don’t want to draw unwanted attention to our flat.’ Illustration: Joren Joshua/The Guardian

*Interviews by [Georgina Lawton](#)*

*@georginalawton*

Fri 8 Oct 2021 03.00 EDT

## The prosecution: Felix

*My lodger works out on our front porch, but it's on a well-lit road and draws a lot of attention*

It started during the second lockdown, last autumn, when Fabio moved in to my four-bedroom flat. I've known him since we were 11, so when the lease ran out at his place, we agreed that he would move in with me.

Fabio loves working out on the front porch of our house. His workouts last about an hour and consist of strength exercises with a kettlebell: swings, squats, lifts, presses. We live on a main road where there's lots of traffic, people shopping and quite a few drug addicts around at night, so I think it looks rather strange.

He has always been into fitness, whereas I only took up running for the first time recently. I'm quite self-conscious and care what people think, but Fabio is the opposite. He tells me he usually gets smiles or funny looks when he's exercising. He thinks I'm jealous of his confidence but, really, I just don't want to draw unwanted attention to our flat.

When the gyms were closed, but the days were longer, Fabio would work out in our private garden at 5pm each day. But when winter came and it got dark earlier, he insisted on exercising on the front step, where there's street lighting. I think he could have stayed in the garden and just done his exercising earlier in the day.

Our neighbours come home and see this guy thrusting away right outside their dining-room window

The flat below mine is on the same level as the porch, so our neighbours come home and see this guy thrusting away right outside their dining-room window. They are nice, but I can't help feeling secondhand embarrassment whenever I watch Fabio.

After spending the first lockdown living alone, I was very happy to have him around as he is chilled and level-headed. But sharing the flat with him has also taught me that we are more different than I thought – he is definitely much more of an exhibitionist than I am.

We're both still working from home and sometimes Fabio works out in the garden when he hasn't had time to go to the gym. But I am dreading the darker nights, when he'll move back to the front step. Can I ask him to stop exercising there?

## The defence: Fabio

*I love swinging my kettlebells out there after dark: it's a way to break up our time together*

Felix would never allow me to work out inside his house. It's an old Victorian building and my workouts are quite vigorous – I'm swinging a 24kg kettlebell around in a high-intensity workout, so I could easily punch a hole through the wall.

The natural answer is to exercise on the nice bit of concrete outside the house while I'm still working from home. Yes, it's by the street, but who is bothered?

Lockdowns have changed our relationship with going outside. We've been so restricted that exercising outside makes sense

These lockdowns have changed our relationship with going outside. We've been so restricted that exercising outside our homes makes sense. I don't think there's anything wrong with it.

Perhaps I love the attention. When I moved in, I thought the world would be opening up and I'd be spending less time with Felix, but each evening it was just us.

We became like an old married couple, arguing about what to watch on the telly. Exercise was a way to break up our life together.

I missed dating and flirting – a cheeky bit of eye contact at the gym. I relished the occasional glance from a stranger in the street as it made my life a bit more interesting. I also got to keep fit – kettlebells are great for your legs and butt.

I started off exercising in the back garden last summer, but by autumn it was darker much earlier so I couldn't continue. There's great light on the front step, so I will continue to exercise there on days I'm working from home or can't be bothered to go to the gym. It saves commuting time and I've got used to it.

## Quick Guide

### **Saturday magazine**

Show



This article comes from Saturday, [the new print magazine from the Guardian](#) which combines the best features, culture, lifestyle and travel writing in one beautiful package. Available now in the UK and ROI.

Photograph: GNM

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

I know Felix disapproves. Sometimes I'd be doing a workout and he'd come back from a run and we'd chat outside the flat – he seemed fine with it then. But I've known him for 20 years and he hides his emotions very well. He hates confrontation.

Now gyms are open, but I'm working from home until next year. There are days I won't fancy going to the gym in winter, and so I'll be back out at the front, swinging and squatting. What's the problem?

## **The jury of Guardian readers**

### **Should Fabio stop working out on the porch?**

Felix, you seem blind to your good fortune. Living on a main road, you need security, and fit Fabio in your porch gives you that. A guard dog demands food and exercise, while Fabio can look after himself. He even pays rent!

**Michael, 68**

I am sympathetic to Felix's secondhand embarrassment, but Fabio's solution is environment-friendly and cost-effective. Lockdown has shown that there are many ways to maintain personal fitness outside of the gym.

**Nicola, 28**

How about we shed a little light on the problem – or, better still, on the back garden – and leave Fabio and his oversized kettlebell out there?

**Tony, 66**

Classically British behaviour – let's hide our bodies for fear of embarrassment! But doesn't a Fabio on the porch make life more interesting for local residents? If it's not hurting anyone, why the heck not?

**Katy, 28**

Living with students this year, I've learned that you have to accept other people's habits – so I agree with Fabio. Felix could ask him to stop nicely, but if Fabio says no, then Felix must respect that.

**Genevieve, 20**

# You be the judge

So now you can be the judge, click on the poll below to tell us: should Felix stop exercising on the front porch?

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

**The poll closes on Thursday 14 October at 9am BST**

## Last week's result

We asked if Curtis [should tidy his room](#), as it bothers his mother, and landlady, Grace.

**56%** of you said no – Curtis is not guilty

**44%** of you said yes – Curtis is guilty

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Interview

## Quick on the draw: Jeymes Samuel on remaking the western

[Ellen E Jones](#)



Regina King, Idris Elba and Lakeith Stanfield in *The Harder They Fall*.  
Photograph: David Lee/Netflix



Fri 8 Oct 2021 03.00 EDT

If you want to know who's hot in Hollywood, have a look at the lineup for righteous and rowdy new western *The Harder They Fall*. It is produced by Jay-Z and features a magnificent seven: [Idris Elba](#), Jonathan Majors, Regina King, Lakeith Stanfield, Zazie Beetz, Delroy Lindo and RJ Cyler. Among such talent, it is the film's writer-director, Jeymes Samuel, who has the lowest profile. But the 42-year-old Londoner isn't a low-profile kind of guy. Even via video call, Samuel makes an entrance. He frequently refers to himself in the third person ("That Jeymes is one interesting fellow!"), and launches into detailed critiques of classic movies at the slightest provocation; his thoughts on *Breakfast at Tiffany's* ("Holly Golightly is actually a really horrible character"), for instance, culminate in an a cappella rendition of *Moon River*. And that's all within the first five minutes.

It is a personality to match the size of the vast vistas of the New Mexico desert where *The Harder They Fall* was shot, with a reported \$90m (£65m) budget. The plot is a simple cowboy tale of revenge – Nat Love (Majors) hears that the man who killed his parents (Elba) has broken out of jail, then reassembles his old posse to seek justice – but it plays out in widescreen wonder: a standoff with a steam train, gangs galloping across the open prairie and plenty of daring shootouts in dusty frontier towns.



The Harder They Fall director Jeymes Samuel on set with Idris Elba.  
Photograph: David Lee/Netflix

While Samuel may be new to film-making on such a scale, he is not new to the game. He has been making music since the turn of the millennium, producing and collaborating with an eclectic range of artists, including Damon Albarn, Mos Def and Charlotte Gainsbourg. In 2013, he worked with Jay-Z and Baz Luhrmann on the music for *The Great Gatsby* and released his own album, *They Die By Dawn*, under his musical moniker the Bullitts (movie buffs will note the nod to the 1968 car-chase classic starring Steve McQueen).

That album, which featured guest spots from Lucy Liu and Rosario Dawson, was his stepping stone into film-making – accompanied as it was by a 51-minute western of the same name, starring Dawson alongside Erykah Badu and Michael K Williams. Samuel became particularly close friends with Williams, who died suddenly last month. “It’s strange, man, speaking about him in past tense,” Samuel says. “As far as me being a film-maker that people wanted to work with, that started with Michael K Williams. This man had no proof that I can shoot anything and he was like: ‘I’m in!’”

As well as writing, directing and co-producing, Samuel has put together the soundtrack for *The Harder They Fall* which, as suggested by the title’s

reference to the influential 1972 Jamaican crime film, combines reggae beats with Ennio Morricone-esque melodies. So is Samuel a musician-turned-film-maker? Or a film-maker who makes music? Neither, he says: “They come from the exact same place. When I’m writing and these words are coming out, so are melodies and song and score.”

This intermingling began on north-west London’s Mozart estate, where he grew up, the second youngest of five children, born to a Nigerian mother and an African-Brazilian father. It was a creative family. His older brother is Henry Olusegun Adeola Samuel, better known as the Grammy-winning singer-songwriter Seal. It is their cinephile mother, however, whom Jeymes credits with setting him on his path: “She said her relationship to the western world came from cinema. It was like taking the plane every time she watched a movie.”

### [Watch a trailer for The Harder They Fall.](#)

After Samuel was expelled from his first secondary school, he spent a formative few months at home in front of the TV. “Charles Laughton, John Mills, Jack Hawkins, Alastair Sim, Alec Guinness, David Lean: I’d know all about these actors and directors from my mum.” There were always musical instruments around the house, too, and by age 13, he’d got hold of a Bolex 16mm camera. “From there I was always shooting, always making music, and they would influence each other.”

Despite now spending much of his time in the US and making movies in the most archetypal of American genres, Samuel insists he remains British through and through. “Literally, you can walk on Portobello Road any time and you’ll see me with a bunch of my dudes – ‘dudes’ meaning guys and girls.” He’s so British, he says, he has Jacob’s Cream Crackers Fed-Exed to his sets. “I can eat a whole pack dry, as long as there’s a drink near me.” Not bourbon or sarsaparilla, mind: “I wash that shit down with Ribena!”

Look how much swag is missing when you delete Black people! Look what happened when they put Lando in The Empire Strikes Back!

*Jeymes Samuel*

It was Hollywood westerns that really caught his imagination as a young film obsessive, and it was what the genre lacked that inspired most. “It’s almost like [130-minute-long] *Tombstone* was too short a movie. I wanted more! So I’d go and get more information about these characters and then I’d wanna know, where are the Black people? And where are the women?!” The young Samuel began reading up on the real historical people who’d eventually become characters in his films: the outlaw gang leader Rufus Buck, gun-toting mail carrier Stagecoach Mary, the aforementioned cowboy hero Nat Love. He soon discovered that the mostly white classic western was not based on historical fact, but a choice made by mostly white filmmakers; [the Smithsonian Institution estimates](#) that around one-in-four cowboys of the old west were of African descent.

In part, *The Harder They Fall* is an attempt to put that right. “Just on a shallow level, look how much swag is missing when you delete Black people from the narrative,” Samuel says. “Look what happened when they put Lando Calrissian in [The] *Empire Strikes Back!*” – here, an impression of Princess Leia and Chewbacca swooning at the smooth-talking smuggler – “Billy Dee Williams was amazing.”



Zazie Beetz and Jonathan Majors in *The Harder They Fall*. Photograph: David Lee/Netflix

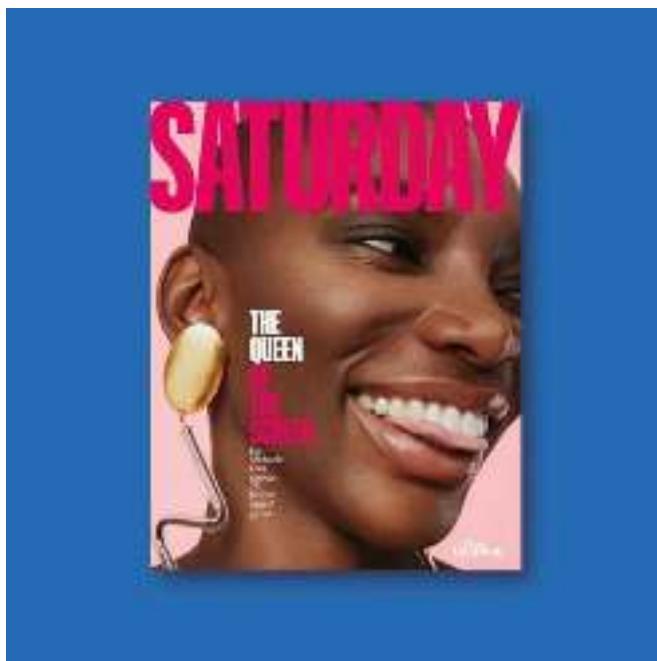
To that end, Samuel has cast his films with the swaggiest stars this side of the Mississippi. How does he bring all these big names together? It's simple: "To me, great artists always want to make great art." He doesn't need to pitch, he says, he just talks about his own projects – and in Samuel's presence, it is easy to understand how such enthusiasm could be infectious. "When I do something, I do it because I think it's wicked, and *The Harder They Fall* is a wicked movie!"

As for the initial introductions, Samuel makes those for himself, the old west way: "I throw literally The. Best. Parties. On. The. Planet." These gatherings, known as The Saloon, are legendary in Hollywood, he says. "I met Al Pacino in Soho House and he said to me: 'You must be Jeymes Samuel. When are you throwing another one?'... Leonardo DiCaprio will be there, next to Jay-Z and the girl that served me a sandwich in Starbucks, and everyone is jamming."

Quick Guide

## Saturday magazine

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writing in one beautiful package. Available now in the UK and ROI.

Photograph: GNM

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To answer Pacino's question, though, The Saloon doors are set to swing open again next month after a two-year hiatus, as the official afterparty for The Harder They Fall's LA premiere. It will be a momentous occasion, and one that very nearly didn't happen: Samuel's galvanising spirit was put to the ultimate test in March 2020, when Elba contracted Covid and Netflix shut down production. "We were one day before shooting was due to start ... And a lot of people thought we were shut down for good. I was receiving all these emails from people saying: 'I'm so, so sorry!'"

Whoever sent those messages obviously didn't know Samuel very well. When the production did eventually get back up and running – one of the first to do so during the pandemic – Samuel had to direct wearing a mask and goggles, at a distance of six feet. Instead of admitting defeat, he turned his inexperience to his advantage. "It was like learning to drive in a Bugatti; Mini Cooper, Bugatti – who cares? Just tell me where I've got to sit and brrrrrrrm! I'm making this movie! I come from Kilburn Lane! Nothing is gonna stop The Harder They Fall from being made!"

*The Harder They Fall* is released in select cinemas and on Netflix on 3 November.

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## 2021.10.08 - Coronavirus

- [England Ministers criticised for ‘haphazard’ jab rollout for teenagers](#)
- [Parents 'I fear my daughter will get Covid'](#)
- [Teenage vaccines How the UK scheme works](#)
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## Young people

# Ministers criticised for ‘haphazard’ Covid jab rollout for teenagers in England



Nadhim Zahawi, previously the vaccines minister, said on Thursday he had not yet seen the vaccination data. Photograph: Peter Byrne/PA

*[Sally Weale](#) and [Nicola Davis](#)*

Fri 8 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

Ministers have been accused of losing a grip on the Covid vaccination programme for teenagers with headteachers and parents describing a “haphazard” and “incredibly slow” rollout that is causing disruption in schools in [England](#).

They raised the alarm as [Nadhim Zahawi](#), the education secretary, admitted he had no idea how many 12- to 15-year-olds had had their jabs, with early

figures suggesting the government has little hope of hitting its target of vaccinating them all by half-term.

New data has shown that fewer than one in 10 (9%) in the age group had been vaccinated by last Sunday, but this includes those who are either clinically vulnerable or living with people who are vulnerable and who were prioritised for vaccination earlier in the summer.

The government set half-term as a target for what ministers hoped would be a speedy rollout in schools, but with just over two weeks to go until the autumn break, anxious parents have told the Guardian they are seeing Covid infections rise in their children's school but have still not been given a vaccination date.

Others said vaccinations were not being done until after half-term in November, while there are also reports of sessions being cancelled at the last minute and "poorly prepared" vaccination teams overwhelmed by demand having to leave sites after vaccinating just a fraction of pupils with consent.



Felix Dima, 13, from Newcastle receives the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine at the Excelsior Academy in Newcastle upon Tyne. Photograph: Ian Forsyth/Getty Images

According to [the latest UK Health Security Agency \(UKHSA\) data](#), published on Thursday, almost 260,000 12- to 15-year-olds – out of a total of just under 3 million – had received the jab by 3 October. Of those, 94,000 have been vaccinated since the rollout began in schools on 20 September.

NHS England, however, claimed its up-to-date figures suggested more vaccinations had taken place. “In just two weeks hundreds of schools have already held vaccination clinics, with more than 160,000 children getting protected,” a spokesperson said. “As the rollout continues over the next few weeks, local providers will continue to contact schools and work with parents to agree consent so that they can organise a visit.”

Asked on Times Radio about the rates of vaccination in schools in England, Zahawi, who was previously the vaccines minister, said on Thursday he had not yet seen the vaccination data but was due to have a meeting with his former team.

He said: “It’s worth just reminding your listeners, there’s a lag because obviously you’ve got to get consent letters out, they’ve got to come back and then the school, with the school-age immunisation clinicians, decide as to when they’ve got enough students [and] parents have consented, that they can actually vaccinate.”

Labour criticised the government over the situation. Shadow education secretary Kate Green said: “Over 200,000 children were out of school due to Covid last week and the [Conservatives](#) are asleep at the wheel. Nadhim Zahawi cannot even say how many kids have had the jab.”

Dr Deepti Gurdasani, a clinical epidemiologist at Queen Mary University of London, said she was very concerned by the UKHSA figures. “Not only did the government miss the opportunity to vaccinate adolescents over the summer, even when the offer was made, it seems that most adolescents haven’t been able to access vaccination.”

Prof Christina Pagel, director of UCL’s Clinical Operational Research Unit blamed poor organisation. “In the week to 3 October, we vaccinated 70,000 children (2.4%) in England. In the three days from 1-3 October, we gave

470,000 booster doses. This is an organisational issue, not a supply issue. Scotland has already vaccinated 30% of its 12- to 15-year olds compared to our 9%.

“Cases in teenagers are extremely high. We have had months to plan a vaccine rollout to children and it is very disappointing to see it move so slowly.”

Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said his members were becoming increasingly concerned about the rollout. “We have picked up reports of issues where the School Age Immunisation Service (Sais) has underestimated the challenge of vaccinating so many students at once, and has therefore had to provide vaccinations to certain year groups and arrange to return at a later date.

“We have also heard of vaccinations being cancelled because demand for the vaccine has outstripped supply, and of issues arising where either a website has crashed on which parents give consent, or the school has been asked to manage the administrative process without sufficient time to make these arrangements.”

Mark Woolhouse, professor of infectious disease epidemiology at the University of Edinburgh and a member of Spi-M (the Scientific Pandemic Influenza Group on Modelling), speaking in a personal capacity, said it was likely a substantial fraction of under-16s had already been infected with coronavirus.

“I think it’s fair to say that natural infection of under-16s is outpacing vaccination,” he said. “The good news is that the wave of infections in school-age children in Scotland is well past its peak now [according to the] ONS positivity survey data and, as you’d expect, Covid-related absences are falling too. Since Scotland’s schools went back [a few weeks] before England it’s possible that England will follow suit in the next week or two.”

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## Coronavirus

**‘I’d like to get my daughter vaccinated soon – I fear she will be next to get Covid’**



Medical staff in England preparing to receive secondary school pupils for Covid-19 vaccinations this September. Photograph: Ian Forsyth/Getty Images



Sally Weale Education correspondent

Fri 8 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

“In my daughter’s school there are no signs of vaccines so far. No consent forms received either,” said Arancha Bueno, who lives in Kent and has two children.

She is not alone. Many parents who contacted the Guardian in response to a call-out about the Covid vaccine programme for 12- 15-year-olds were still waiting to hear when their child might be vaccinated, their schools left often in the dark too.

Bueno said: “The school sent a message earlier this week asking parents to stop asking the school for information on when the vaccination programme will commence as they hadn’t received any information on it yet.

“I would like my daughter to be vaccinated as soon as possible as the number of cases in the community are still very high. My son had Covid a few weeks ago after an outbreak in his class. So I’m in fear she will be next.”

An ITU nurse in Suffolk was similarly worried. “My daughter was due to have her vaccine at school last week. Thanks to the fuel crisis, explained

away as ‘unforeseen circumstances’, that didn’t happen, and the vaccinations have been cancelled until further notice.

“Over a third of my daughter’s classmates have now tested positive via lateral flow tests and are now isolating. I worked in ITU over the height of the second wave, and having seen the very worst of the pandemic I wouldn’t wish it on my worst enemies.”

In South Yorkshire there were also delays. “The school vaccination team are expected in our secondary school mid November. This is horrifying given the current rate of spread in our schools,” said one reader who responded to the call-out. “I’ve been in touch with our MP to ask why drop-in clinics are not available for 12-15s as they are in Scotland. It’s a desperate situation. No one seems to have an answer as to why England is adopting this incredibly slow roll-out.”

In Leicester, a mother with two children, in separate secondary schools, said each child had had postponed vaccination dates with no explanation. “No information has been provided to parents as to why that is, nor have we been told when vaccination will take place. The lack of information is troubling.”

In the east Midlands another mother said: “My 14-year-old was due to have the vaccine on 8 October at school, and I’d given my consent a couple of weeks ago via the online portal.

“Today, 6 October, we received notice that the vaccine won’t be given on Friday. The reason cited was, ‘the uptake of the vaccine for children has been extremely popular and the [NHS](#) trust are having to reschedule the dates in order to fit everyone in’. No future date has been given to the school.”

In Wiltshire there was disappointment too. One mother said: “My son is 12 and was supposed to get the vaccination today along with the flu vaccination. The Covid vaccination was cancelled with 24 hours’ notice although the flu vaccination went ahead. We don’t know why the vaccination was cancelled or when it will happen.

“We want our son to be fully vaccinated, as his cousins are in Germany, but it’s not clear if he will be before half term. If we had been given the choice I

would have booked him in and he would have had a vaccination already.”

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## [Coronavirus](#)

# Covid jabs for 12- to 15-year-olds: how the scheme in England works



A 15-year-old receives a Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine at a Newcastle upon Tyne school, September 2021. Photograph: Ian Forsyth/Getty Images

*[Nicola Davis](#) Science correspondent*

*[@NicolaKSDavis](#)*

Fri 8 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

As concerns grow about the slow [deployment of Covid jabs to older children in England](#) we take a look at who is eligible and where the vaccinations can be given.

## Which children are now eligible for vaccination?

All children in the UK [aged 12 to 15 are now eligible for a Covid jab](#). The decision was made by the UK's chief medical officers after consideration of

a range of evidence, including the impact on education.

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation [previously said](#) that while the health benefits of vaccinating this entire age group were greater than the risks, they were not enough on their own to support the move; they then advised that the jabs only be given to children either at risk from Covid or living with someone at risk.

Healthy 12- to 15-year-olds are being offered one Covid jab at the moment, but those vulnerable to Covid, or living with someone who is, [will be offered two doses](#) eight weeks apart.

Both the [Moderna and Pfizer/BioNTech vaccines](#) have been approved for use in the UK for children aged 12 to 17. But [the NHS website suggests](#) that at present under 18s are only offered the Pfizer/BioNTech jab.

### **Where will children be vaccinated?**

[According to the NHS](#) and the UK Health Security Agency, Covid jabs will be delivered to most [children in schools, during the premises' open hours](#), by local school age immunisation services (SAIS) – the same programme that coordinates other school-based jabs such as those against meningitis and HPV.

Letters about when this will happen will be sent by the school. [According to NHS England](#) 12- to 15-year-olds who have underlying health conditions can also be flagged for vaccination by their GP and invited to book a jab.

Children who are home schooled, or who do not attend for another reason, will also have the chance to receive a Covid jab. “Parents and guardians will be contacted about when and where the vaccine will be offered,” [the NHS said](#).

### **Can you get your child vaccinated at a walk-in centre or elsewhere?**

All those aged over 18 can get vaccinated at a walk-in centre, however not all centres offer shots to those under the age of 18. An [NHS website](#) allows users to find their nearest walk-in vaccination centre and see whether it offers vaccinations to those aged 16 and over, or adults only.

The website states: “If you’re under 16 and eligible for the Covid-19 vaccine you cannot use these walk-in sites to get vaccinated. Please wait to be contacted by the NHS.”

## **What are the rules on consent?**

As with other vaccinations at schools, parents or guardians will be asked for consent for their child. However if this is not given and the child wants to be vaccinated [the guidelines say the vaccination teams](#) will decide whether the child is able to make an informed decision. If the child is “Gillick competent” – able to make the decision – providers will try to discuss the matter with parents or guardians, but they cannot stand in the way if such a child wants to have the jab.

## **If a child has had Covid this term is there any benefit to their having a vaccination?**

A natural infection is likely to create some immunity and [this response may be broader than would be elicited by vaccination alone](#) – although few studies have looked at just how high this level of natural protection is in children, and there may be variation between individuals. Prof Chris Whitty, chief medical officer for England, [speaking at](#) an inquiry into [Covid-19 and children's vaccination](#) by the Education Committee, said the levels of protection could be on a par with those arising from vaccination.

“I would anticipate that vaccines and natural immunity in the sense of if you got infected, let us assume, will be broadly similar. I would secondly assume that it will take longer probably to wane in children than in older adults, just because we know that in older adults things tend to wane. That is an assumption. Both of those may be untrue,” he said.

But experts say that even if a child has some natural protection this is likely to be boosted by vaccination, giving better protection, [as seen in adults](#).

“The jab will boost and prolong their protective immunity. Latest data also shows that adults who are double jabbed after having had a natural infection have better levels of protection,” said Prof Lawrence Young, of Warwick University.

Prof Danny Altmann, of Imperial College London, agreed. “From an immunology standpoint the clear answer would be an overwhelming ‘yes’ to the notion of getting vaccinated even if recently infected.”

That chimes with information from the British Society for Immunology and UK Coronavirus Immunology Consortium which states: “It’s likely that for most people vaccination against Covid-19 will induce more effective and longer lasting immunity than that induced by natural infection with the virus. Even if you’ve had Covid-19 you’re recommended to get the vaccine because it will boost whatever immunity you have from natural infection.”

According to the guidelines people should not attend a vaccine appointment within four weeks of having a positive Covid-19 test, or if self-isolating or waiting for a Covid-19 test.

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[Welsh government](#)

## **Wales draws up emergency Covid plan to stop NHS being overwhelmed**



The Welsh first minister, Mark Drakeford, says: ‘We are facing a challenging winter ahead – coronavirus hasn’t gone away and flu is forecast to return this winter.’ Photograph: Ben Birchall/PA

[Steven Morris](#)

[@stevenmorris20](#)

Thu 7 Oct 2021 17.00 EDT

The [Welsh government](#) has drawn up a “Covid urgent” plan designed to deal with any new coronavirus crisis that threatens to overwhelm the NHS this autumn and winter.

If the plan has to be brought in, it could mean that the Covid alert level for [Wales](#), currently at zero, might be increased and restrictions reimposed.

However, the Labour-led government stressed it believed it was more likely that the country would be able to operate under a planning scenario it is calling “Covid stable”, in which Wales remains at alert level 0 through the autumn and winter, with all businesses staying open.

On Friday, the first minister, [Mark Drakeford](#), is publishing an updated coronavirus control plan for the next few months.

Drakeford said on Thursday evening that Wales would remain at alert level 0 for the next three weeks, meaning all businesses are open. But he added: “We are facing a challenging winter ahead – coronavirus hasn’t gone away and flu is forecast to return this winter.” He urged everyone to be vaccinated for Covid – and all those who were eligible to also get a flu jab.

The latest version of the coronavirus control plan sets out two planning scenarios for the pandemic. In the first, Covid stable, Wales remains at alert level 0 through the autumn and winter, with all businesses able to open.

A Welsh government spokesperson said: “This is thought to be the most likely scenario for the future, as we become used to living with coronavirus and we gradually move out of the pandemic to a position where the virus becomes a seasonal illness.

“Under this scenario, if case rates fall, measures could be relaxed further in response, and if they rise, some existing measures could be strengthened to protect people’s health.”

The second planning scenario, Covid urgent, is designed to deal with any sudden changes to the situation, caused by the emergence of a new, fast-spreading variant or if vaccine immunity levels fall, causing a rise in pandemic pressures, which risk overwhelming the [NHS](#).

The spokesperson said in such a scenario, the alert level system and restrictions would be used “proportionately”, but as a last resort.

Drakeford has made it clear he is determined to act cautiously this autumn and winter. [People must still wear face masks in busy public places](#) and the Labour-led government wants people to work from home whenever

possible. A Covid pass to get into nightclubs and sporting events [comes into force on Monday](#).

The Welsh government also announced on Thursday evening it would change [its restrictions on international travel to keep them in line with England's](#).

But the health minister, Eluned Morgan, said her government has urged the UK to take a “more precautionary approach”, adding: “We are concerned about the cumulative impact of the risk being carried in relation to opening up travel particularly from higher risk countries.”

Meanwhile, Andrew RT Davies, the leader of the Welsh Conservatives in the Senedd, said he was taking a “complete break” on doctor’s orders to focus on his recovery, having caught flu and Covid-19, which he said had taken a toll on his mental health.

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## 2021.10.08 - Opinion

- The Home Office is failing refugees. I've seen it from the inside
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## The Home Office is failing refugees. I've seen it from the inside

Anonymous



‘The ‘People’s Priorities’ apparently did not include addressing the conditions at Napier Barracks.’ Photograph: Andrew Aitchison/In Pictures/Getty Images

Fri 8 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

“Do you want to see it?” Before I could say, “That isn’t needed,” the man lifted his shirt, showing me an ugly scar from what he claimed was an AK-47 bullet wound. As with many asylum claimants interviewed by decision-makers at the [Home Office](#), it was evident that something had hurt him, but it wasn’t possible to determine what had done the damage. The man sat, shaking, and told me that he was terrified to ever go back and risk facing the men who he alleged had attacked him and killed his family members. It would be necessary to assess the rest of his story to make a decision.

Evaluating the applications of asylum seekers means sifting each day through human suffering. The Home Office does this to determine whether claimants can stay in the UK or will be forced to return to their country of origin and potentially be thrown into unimaginable hardship. During my recent time as a decision-maker, my colleagues and I were subjected to unreasonable management pressures that made it increasingly difficult for staff to consistently uphold their duty of care to claimants or make correct decisions in asylum cases. This led to an exhausted and demoralised workforce – one likely to make mistakes.

While interviewing claimants, we heard about every kind of atrocity imaginable. At the decision stage, we had the task of picking through mountains of complex and arcane case law and guidance. Home Office asylum decision-makers are at the same level within the civil service as Department for Work and Pensions officers with the job of sanctioning universal credit claimants. They require no formal legal education beyond training received on the job. In our first few weeks, our trainers told us matter-of-factly, we would be expected to produce more refusals than grants: one of the criteria on which managers would judge our success.

Compounding these challenges were internal targets incentivising staff to produce ever higher volumes of decisions, leading to decision-makers sacrificing quality and failing to protect vulnerable clients. Our regular target was between four and five “events” a week; an event could be an interview, or an approval or refusal letter. Management pushed us to exceed those targets. One such example was a message telling staff – who were working overtime to get through the enormous backlog of cases – that they would be expected to produce at least a whole decision letter by the end of the day.

In the case of refusals, decisions often ran upwards of 5,000 words. Asking people to put together what amounts to a detailed legal argument combined with a biography, often involving contextualising and referencing dozens of sources, while paying attention to the client’s other needs in a single working day is asking for trouble.

Often colleagues simply discarded tricky cases: if a decision-maker was overloaded already, they would put their surplus case files back into the case hold (known as the “pile”). This sometimes occurred when colleagues were

not confident in the quality of their interviews, where the “material facts” – the key details of the claimant’s account – had not been correctly questioned. Another officer would eventually be assigned, but in the meantime the claimant would be left in limbo. Safeguarding forms, intended to ensure that risks to clients and their dependents – such as suicidal thinking or other mental or physical health problems – are identified and addressed, were sometimes left without being updated.

The lack of accountability meant that decision letters could be sent to claimants containing severe mistakes, including clear factual errors. I saw letters with obviously pasted-in case law specific to entirely different countries than the claimant’s. I read incorrect references or just plain wrong arguments justifying refusals, such as citations of outdated policy documents. I can only imagine the anger and confusion felt by claimants and families, finding out that a decision that determined their future, and had been signed “on behalf of the home secretary” could contain such inaccuracies. These failures go some way towards explaining the Home Office’s [abysmal record](#) at defending its own decisions: its success rate is barely 40%.

Covid brought further stresses. When managers introduced online asylum interviews, colleagues complained they could not hear claimants clearly; this remained unresolved for weeks. The piles of folders, each representing a claimant, needed to be scanned and digitised to enable homeworking. Hundreds of case files were mislabelled or couldn’t be opened; correcting clerical mistakes could take days. The breaks in work on cases, both before and during Covid, combined with claims being passed between decision-makers with incomplete casework, created the conditions for safeguarding failures.

The current indifference to suffering demonstrated by the Home Office is, I believe, a direct symptom of both monstrously negligent failures of ministerial leadership and a lack of concern from society at large. Our office intranet was plastered with departmental propaganda featuring our minister, Priti Patel, grinning next to Home Office employees, supposedly enacting the “[People’s Priorities](#)” – priorities that apparently did not include access to adequate housing, or addressing the internment camp conditions at the

Napier and Penally barracks, or responding adequately to the rash of suicides among asylum seekers.

The Home Office says: “We absolutely reject the suggestion that we are failing to protect vulnerable asylum seekers. All asylum cases are assessed on a case by case basis – high standards are incredibly important and all new decision makers have 100% of their decisions checked until they are deemed fully effective – and we continue to randomly sample a percentage of all decisions to ensure standards are maintained.” It also says that all asylum decision-makers receive safeguarding training, and that safeguarding concerns are assessed appropriately.

But from what I’ve seen, the asylum system needs profound reform, ensuring a consistent and fair service where the safety of asylum seekers is seen as a paramount moral obligation. This requires considerable extra investment.

A good start would be more decision-making staff, improved training, a different system of targets and, above all, a thoroughly enforced system of accountability. Tragically, I see no chance of these real priorities being followed through by the current government, which is more interested in pandering to anti-refugee hostility than providing people with the service they need.

- The author worked as a decision-maker for the Home Office
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[OpinionLabour](#)

## People want bold economic change – the tragedy is, Labour hasn't realised this

[Rachel Shabi](#)



Labour leader Keir Starmer delivers the closing speech of the 2021 Labour party conference. Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock

Fri 8 Oct 2021 04.00 EDT

Boris Johnson's speech to the Conservative party conference on Wednesday was full of hot air and tediously empty phrases. And yet, amid all the bluster, there was something else in the mix: change.

It was entirely [unsubstantiated and undeliverable](#). It came from the leader of a party that not only caused the country's past and present hardships, but is also bereft of actual policies to tackle them. But still, the sense of change burst out of Johnson's dramatic statement: "We're going to deal with the biggest underlying issues of our economy and society, the problems that no

government has had the guts to tackle before, and I mean the long-term structural weakness in the UK economy.”

What the prime minister tapped into is the public appetite – yes, even among Conservative voters – for big, systemic change of the sort that only leftists usually talk about. That much is clear from [new polling by Opinium](#) for the grassroots group New Economy Organisers Network (I occasionally do media-training work for them). It shows the public skews far more to the left than the Labour leadership imagines, judging by Keir Starmer’s positioning at his own party conference last week. There is 57% [support for a four-day week](#), 70% support for rent caps, 69% for a universal basic income, 63% favour increasing sick pay, 68% back a wealth tax, and a majority want the government to finance the transition to low-carbon heating and upgrade insulation in homes.

Demand for bold action shouldn’t surprise us. Throughout the pandemic, we’ve seen the terrible cost of a crumbling welfare state and a workforce that cannot afford to be sick. Many of our society’s most important workers are still paid the least, while dealing with the worst working conditions. Alongside the effects of Covid-19, we’re seeing the terrible consequences of not tackling the climate emergency in more frequent floods, wildfires and hurricanes across the world. Meanwhile, an economic system that tolerates insecure jobs, spiralling living costs and plunging wages is intolerable for everyone forced to work within it. The moment requires big, bold policies.

What’s more surprising is that the Conservative leader seems to get this – albeit emptily, rhetorically – while the self-styled moderates leading Labour do not. The party’s current reluctance to champion progressive policy comes despite Labour gaining electoral ground in 2017 on a patently left platform and in the face of a report on the 2019 defeat put together from a broad spectrum of views, which stated that [leftwing policies were not the problem](#). At some point you have to wonder if it isn’t concern for electoral popularity so much as blinkered ideology that is driving Labour’s centrist-throwback approach.

Even more bewildering is that Labour is stuck in a 1990s mode of tinkering around the edges of a market that knows best, just as progressive parties from the US to Germany to Norway are [shifting leftwards](#) – economically at

least – and winning. After all, if a long-time moderate such as Joe Biden can commit to [radical spending plans](#), surely Starmer can follow suit? In discussion with Labour's former shadow chancellor [John McDonnell](#) last week, the leftwing former presidential candidate Bernie Sanders explained why the US president had opted to work with the socialist movement within the Democrat party: “He was prepared to think big, not small, and he understood the only way we bring people into the political process is by talking about the pain that they are now experiencing. We cannot continue to ignore that.” We are witnessing a global left realignment, tapping into a [public clamour for economic overhaul](#): there is a great opportunity for big and important change, but Labour is missing it.

Political commentators often remark that people like ideas from the left, but won't vote for them once [shown the price tag](#). This snarky theory pushes the fallacy that costed, popular policies are inevitably unaffordable. Strangely, it's never reeled out over support for entirely unbudgeted proposals, such as more immigration controls – even when the actual, crippling cost of ending freedom of movement is staring right at us in the form of a fuel crisis, staffing shortages and empty supermarket shelves. But this tendency to dismiss viable, progressive economic redistribution as unworkable simply perpetuates the sense that real change will never come, while leaving the way clear for a chauvinist right to scapegoat migrants instead.

Such fatalism over progressive economics is a terrible fuel to pump into our political system. It destroys faith in democracy and promotes nativists and authoritarians. And if [Labour](#) does not harness the public demand for bold economic change, the populist right will. Boris Johnson already has.

- Rachel Shabi is a journalist, broadcaster and author
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[SportblogNewcastle United](#)

## Newcastle are not selling their soul to the Saudis. There is no soul left

[Martin Farrer](#)



A Newcastle fan walks past the gates of St James' Park after news of the Saudi takeover of the club. Photograph: Lee Smith/Action Images/Reuters

Fri 8 Oct 2021 05.00 EDT

About 15 years ago, a young girl wrote my mother a beautiful poem for Christmas, talking about how she hoped the new year would bring an end to famine, war, and generally make the world a better place. Coming from one Tyneside family to another, the message ended with the plaintive line “Hope for Newcastle”.

Fans have been hoping ever since. But although they have packed out St James’ Park every other week, all they’ve been given is hopelessness. Although that young girl didn’t intend it, the line in that poem has become a cruel joke, mocking quietly from the kitchen cupboard door where it hangs to this day.

News that the long-delayed, controversial Saudi takeover of the club has gone ahead could change all that. Or maybe not.

I’m old enough to remember the last time a takeover of the club from reviled owners offered a sense of hope. Back in 1992, Sir John Hall, property magnate and all-round Mr North-East, wrested control from the patrician custodians who had presided over decades of decline. As things went from strength to strength on the pitch thanks to Kevin Keegan’s wildly entertaining side, the region was gripped by a giddy sense of possibility. Hope was everywhere, fans wore their shirts with pride, and when in 1996 we broke the world transfer record to sign Alan Shearer, silverware seemed only a matter of time.



Alan Shearer signs for Newcastle in 1996. Photograph: Shutterstock

It wasn't to be, of course. Hope duly turned to despair, and the pain of unfinished business has lingered on Tyneside ever since. There seem to be plenty of people who think the fans whinge about not challenging for the league and how we think we should be rubbing shoulders with whoever the big six or big four are at any given moment.

That might be what the odd phone-in fan might have you believe, but it isn't what the vast majority of Newcastle fans think. Most have been scarred by a lifetime of underachievement and just want the team to be competitive, watch a decent game of football that they can get excited about, and, yes, maybe even win a trophy.

The dearth in this department is truly impressive. It's a well-known and oft-trotted-out line that we haven't won a domestic trophy since 1955 (the FA Cup, for the record). Less well known is that 35 different clubs have won a trophy in the intervening decades. Two of them, Oxford United and Luton Town, have had time to disappear from the Football League and come back without us catching them up.

Our record in cup games at Wembley in that time is also a study in hopelessness: played five, lost five, goals against 11, goals for two. Throw in

the 1996 Charity Shield and the 2005 FA Cup semi-final in Cardiff and there's another eight goals in the debit column and one on the plus side.

I have not got a handy attendances-to-silverware ratio up my sleeve, but I'd be prepared to guess that there can't be many other clubs in Europe, if any at all, that regularly have 50,000 fans at home games and yet boast such a hopeless record.



Mike Ashley's 14-year ownership of Newcastle United has been controversial, to say the least. Photograph: Martin Rickett/PA

I know from the 90s experience that a takeover does not come with any guarantees and the same thing could happen this time. The initial spin seems to be suggesting there will not be a massive Chelsea- or Manchester City-style spending spree and that improvement will be more organic with an emphasis on youth development.

Along with the prospect of serious money, the Saudis obviously come with serious baggage and there is no denying it is going to be an uncomfortable fit. It could end in tears but with the idea of a more competitive team – as well as much-needed multimillion-pound investment in the entire region – the fans are overwhelmingly in favour of the takeover.

We have had enough and positive reaction to the deal should be judged against the background of years of failure. Why shouldn't we dare to dream, perhaps even one day having a highlights reel in colour instead of, you know, just black and white? Without fantasy, football becomes meaningless. Under Mike Ashley's 14-year ownership, the club have become zombified, content to merely exist somewhere near the bottom of the table – or the Championship – without any ambition to progress. If reports are to be believed, even shelling out the wages to bring in the Leicester squad player Hamza Choudhury during the previous transfer window was too much. Some might say we are selling our soul to the Saudis but there's no soul left to sell.

If the laughable Choudhury failure is one of the last acts – or rather non-acts – of the Ashley regime, it seems a suitable moment of bathos on which to end 14 years of disappointment. Maybe make that 66. Hope for Newcastle.

*Martin Farrer grew up in Tynemouth and has supported Newcastle for more than 40 years.*

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## Pandora papers

# Invest in investigative journalism. It pays dividends

Katharine Viner



Decades of Guardian investigations have produced stories that changed the world Illustration: Guardian Design

Thu 7 Oct 2021 07.00 EDT

Power is becoming more powerful.

Democracy is at risk in many parts of the world. Autocracy is back in vogue. Unprecedented wealth is accumulating in ever fewer hands. Trillions have gone missing offshore. Even in mature democracies, the restraint on power is often alarmingly feeble.

And so it is vital for anyone who has the means, to do what they can to keep the powerful honest, and the honest powerful. Our investigative journalists, brave, patient, sensitive and tough, have repeatedly done this over the years. Think of Windrush, Snowden, Cambridge Analytica, the Panama and Pandora papers and Pegasus. Think of the Guardian's work on the gig economy, sexual harassment, Covid-19 and spy cops. Think of World Cup slaves, the Polluters, the Xinjiang camps, and the Counted.

This is the lifeblood of the Guardian. It shows where society is going wrong, and gives us a chance to put things right. It scrutinises power and identifies those who are serving the people, and those who are serving themselves. It holds those in authority to higher standards. It keeps tabs on the use - and abuse - of technology, which must exist in service of people and not the other way round. It highlights the unfairness and inequality of the world, and demands redress.

Guardian investigative journalism has been used in court cases and congressional hearings, parliamentary inquiries, police prosecutions. And yes - it has brought down cabinet ministers and captains of industry when they have been shown to have fallen short of the standards of office.

This week, we are asking for as many people as possible [to support the Guardian](#) so we can intensify what we do in our investigations. Whether you [make a contribution](#) or [take out a subscription](#), you can be assured of investing in an experienced, independent, relentless newsroom. It's an investment that pays dividends in the form of corruption exposed,

oppression revealed, incompetence rumbled. In short, we highlight things that are wrong so society can start putting them right. For a modest sum, you can have a big impact.

We've already channelled formidable resources into the Guardian's investigative team because we wanted to build on its reputation for long, difficult, legally fraught investigations such as the Edward Snowden revelations and the phone hacking scandal.

In recent years, we have followed this award-winning journalism with a succession of momentous pieces of work that brought about major change. Global collaborative investigations into offshore wealth (the Panama, Paradise and, this week, the Pandora papers) have exposed greed in high places and helped recover hundreds of millions for taxpayers. The Windrush project restored the right to settled status for a generation of maligned immigrants. The Cambridge Analytica files galvanised a global data privacy movement and put Mark Zuckerberg before a joint US Senate committee. Our gig economy exposés have brought about greater protection for workers.

Our investigative techniques have become more sophisticated, as we rely on technical experts to help us sift through huge volumes of leaked documents, and set up encrypted environments for us to communicate with each other - not so much cloak and dagger as code and database.

There can be great jeopardy in this work, publishing things that powerful people do not want published. Our reporters are robust but even they find it stressful when letters threatening to sue land on our doorstep. The people we write about have far deeper pockets than we do. London is a litigant's dream. The playing field, never level, now slopes even more steeply against campaigners and investigative journalists.

But we know how important it is to invest time, money, courage and energy in our investigative work. Again and again, it results in journalism that matters, journalism that is accessible to every reader regardless of where they live or what they can afford to pay. We persevere because we know that investigative journalism is an essential part of our democracy, a vital catalyst for progress in our troubled world.

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## **Secret group of US military trainers has been in Taiwan for at least a year**



Taiwan soldiers walk behind an armoured personnel carrier during an annual military drill in Taichung, central Taiwan, in 2017. Photograph: Sam Yeh/AFP/Getty Images

*[Julian Borger](#) in Washington and [Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei*

Thu 7 Oct 2021 14.07 EDT

The US has been secretly maintaining a small contingent of military trainers in [Taiwan](#) for at least a year, according to a new report, the latest sign of the rising stakes in US-China rivalry.

About two dozen US special forces soldiers and an unspecified number of marines are now training Taiwanese forces, the [Wall Street Journal](#) reported

on Thursday. The trainers were first sent to Taiwan by the Trump administration but their presence had not been reported until now.

The report came as President Tsai Ing-wen said on Friday that Taiwan will “do whatever it takes to defend its freedom and democratic way of life”.

“Taiwan does not seek military confrontation,” she told a security forum in Taipei. “It hopes for a peaceful, stable, predictable and mutually beneficial coexistence with its neighbours. But Taiwan will also do whatever it takes to defend its freedom and democratic way of life.”

US troops have not been permanently based on the island since 1979, when Washington established diplomatic relations with the People’s Republic of [China](#).

A Pentagon spokesman, John Supple, would not comment directly on the report, but noted that “our support for and defense relationship with Taiwan remains aligned against the current threat” from China.

“It is an important step but it’s intended primarily not to be provocative but actually improve the defence capability of Taiwan’s forces,” said Jacob Stokes, a fellow of the Indo-Pacific security programme of the Center for a New American Security.

“There’s always this balance between symbolism and substance, and I think by doing it quietly it’s meant to be more substance.”

The presence of US Marines Raiders in Taiwan has been [previously reported](#), and was later [confirmed by the Taiwan Navy Command](#) as a “routine Taiwan-US military exchange and cooperation training”, [according to US defence media and local outlets](#). US officials said the November 2020 reports were “inaccurate” but did not elaborate.

China’s foreign ministry issued a statement urging the US to stop military aid to Taiwan.

“China will take all necessary steps to protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity,” the statement said.

Hawkish state media outlet, the Global Times said on Friday that China's state council "strongly opposed any form of military collusion between Taiwan and the United States".

"We urge the US to abide Three Communiqués on the Taiwan issue and stop any provocations. The DPP authorities work with external forces to seek "independence" and reject reunification. This has led the people of Taiwan to disaster, and their attempts are bound to fail."

The report of a US military presence in Taiwan comes after [a series of escalatory signals](#) in the Indo-Pacific. China flew nearly 150 military planes, including bombers and fighter jets, into Taiwan's air defence zone, over the first four days of October.

[Speaking to the BBC](#) a day after meeting top Chinese diplomat Yang Jiechi, US national security advisor Jake Sullivan said that the US was deeply concerned about rising tensions in the region.

"We are going to stand up and speak out, both privately and publicly when we see the kinds of activities that are fundamentally destabilising," Sullivan told the BBC.

Asked if the US was prepared to take military action to defend Taiwan, Sullivan said: "Let me just say this, we are going to take action now to try to prevent that day from ever coming to pass."

Sullivan also said it would be an "enormous mistake" to draw conclusions about the US commitment to its allies based on its recent withdrawal from Afghanistan.

On Thursday, the CIA confirmed it would be creating a new "mission centre" to prioritise intelligence gathering on China.

Announcing the reorganisation, the agency's director, William Burns, called the Chinese government "the most important geopolitical threat we face in the 21st century".

"Throughout our history, CIA has stepped up to meet whatever challenges come our way," Burns said. "And now facing our toughest geopolitical test

in a new era of great power rivalry, CIA will be at the forefront of this effort.”

Separate mission centres created by the Trump administration on Iran and North Korea are to be dissolved into broader regional sections.

The state department has taken similar steps, establishing an enlarged specialised office, known informally as [the China House](#), as part of the Biden administration’s broader pivot to Asia.

According to the Wall Street Journal report, the trainers in Taiwan rotate in and out, so it does not represent a permanent presence. There have been reports of [US military](#) advisers there over the years but Julian Ku, a law professor at Hofstra University, said the significant factor in Thursday’s report is the apparent confirmation by US officials.

“It’s an open secret they’ve been doing training exercises here and there, but this is a big deal to publicly acknowledge them,” Ku said.

“I don’t know what the benefit of that is. The Chinese government knows what’s going on. We’re not telling them – we’re just telling the Chinese public, which will then create pressure on the government to do something.”

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[Tony Abbott](#)

## **Tony Abbott raises fears China ‘could lash out disastrously’ as Taiwan tensions grow**



Tony Abbott, giving a speech in Taipei, says he does not believe the US and Australia could stand by and watch Taiwan be ‘swallowed up’ by China.  
Photograph: Reuters

[Daniel Hurst](#) in Canberra and [Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei

Fri 8 Oct 2021 07.53 EDT

The former Australian prime minister [Tony Abbott](#) has raised fears Beijing “could lash out disastrously very soon” amid growing tensions over the future of Taiwan – and argued the US and Australia could not stand idly by.

Delivering two high profile addresses to a regional forum in Taipei on Friday, Abbott dismissed claims that Australian officials were beating the “drums of war”, while calling on Beijing to “scale back the aggression”.

In a speech to dignitaries at a closing dinner event, Abbott laid out his predictions of China's plans for [Taiwan](#), suggesting an escalation into war could see the world divided into two camps – “democracies versus dictators”.

Conceding he was “no military planner”, Abbott said should China's military not be able to provoke conflict through increasingly aggressive grey zone activities, he expected Beijing would blockade Taiwan.

“This would be the key moment for Taiwan’s friends,” he said. “Would they be prepared to run a Chinese blockade and would China be prepared to intercept ships and planes bound for Taiwan? My instinct is that China would be reluctant to do so but would instead challenge the US and its allies to keep Taiwan supplied indefinitely.” This could lead to global division, Abbott said.

He urged international governments to maintain their presence in the region and suggested he thought conflict was more imminent than many analysts believe.

“Ready or not China is coming for Taiwan’s freedom and the best way to avoid the war that no one wants is to be ready for it,” he said.

At an earlier press conference, Abbott said he would return to Australia with a message for the government about the importance of doing “everything we reasonably can to support Taiwan” as it was “under major challenge from its giant neighbour”.

Abbott also described Taiwan as a “wonderful country” before correcting himself to say a “wonderful place”. The phrasing is sensitive because Australia – like most nations – doesn’t have formal diplomatic relations with Taiwan. He said: “It’s very easy to fall into these little traps, isn’t it?”

Abbott is [visiting Taiwan as a private citizen](#), but the conservative former prime minister was [granted an audience with Taiwan’s president](#), Tsai Ing-wen, on Thursday.

Abbott used an earlier address to the Yushan Forum on Friday to accuse China of displaying “growing belligerence to Taiwan” – including through a recent increase in incursions by military aircraft into Taiwan’s air defence zone.

“Sensing that its relative power might have peaked, with its population ageing, its economy slowing, and its finances creaking, it’s quite possible that Beijing could lash out disastrously very soon,” said Abbott, who was prime minister from 2013 to 2015.

“Our challenge is to try to ensure that the unthinkable remains unlikely; and that the possible doesn’t become the probable.”

Abbott said he did not believe the US “could stand by” and watch Taiwan be “swallowed up” by China. “I don’t think Australia should be indifferent to the fate of a fellow democracy of almost 25 million people,” he added.

An honour, but more so a duty to visit Taiwan and meet with [@iingwen](#) this week. Taiwan’s friends are so important right now.

You can read my full address to the Yushan Forum here:  
<https://t.co/PFFIyrrg3W> [pic.twitter.com/K7IsMHmYHJ](http://pic.twitter.com/K7IsMHmYHJ)

— Tony Abbott (@HonTonyAbbott) [October 8, 2021](#)

Abbott - the prime minister who signed Australia’s free trade agreement with China in 2014 – said “much has changed” since then.

The secretary of Australia’s Department of Home Affairs, Michael Pezzullo, attracted criticism in April when he said that free nations “again hear the beating drums” of war and were bracing for “the curse of war”.

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In Friday's speech, Abbott said: "So if the 'drums of war' can be heard in our region, as an official of ours has noted, it's not Australia that's beating them. The only drums we beat are for justice and freedom – freedom for all people, in China and in Taiwan, to make their own decisions about their lives and their futures."

Abbott said China had taken "a wrong turn". Its actions were responsible, he said, for the reinvigorated Quad grouping of the US, Japan, India and Australia. "The more aggressive it becomes, the more opponents it will find."

Abbott said he had hesitated to attend the same conference two years ago "lest that provoke China" but he cited a range of developments since then, including the clampdown on dissent in Hong Kong and "weaponising" trade against Australia.

In an apparent reference to the Chinese president, Xi Jinping, Abbott said Beijing had "cancelled popular personalities in favour of a cult of the red emperor".

Abbott called on governments – including Australia's – to welcome Taiwan into the trade deal now known as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).

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Photograph: Tim Roberts/Stone RF

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Abbott, who was appointed last year as an adviser to the UK Board of Trade, suggested China's own bid to join the CPTPP should be blocked while it was "engaged in a trade war with Australia, and in predatory trade all-round".

The former prime minister said China could "hardly succeed while it mistreats its own people and threatens its neighbours". He ended his speech by urging the audience to "stay free".

At the press conference, Abbott acknowledged he had recently [visited India as an Australian government trade envoy](#), but said he was “here as citizen Abbott”.

He argued Australia should “intensify” naval patrols in the South China Sea, the East China Sea and the Taiwan Strait: “The best way to ensure that the conflict none of us want and would be a catastrophe for everyone [is avoided] is to let Beijing know that Taiwan has friends.”

Abbott also told reporters it was up to China to “make amends” with Australia after Beijing had taken “grievous offence at our perfectly innocent call for an impartial investigation into the Wuhan virus”.

The Australian government did not use the term Wuhan virus – a term favoured by [some members of the former Trump administration](#).

“We have no intrinsic dispute with China, but there are a lot of things where China is treating us extremely unfairly with great aggression, and it’s really up to the Chinese to stop that,” Abbott said.

A spokesman for Abbott said his trip was “privately funded” and the Australian government was not given an advance copy of his speech. “No advice was given or sought regarding the speech or the trip,” Abbott’s spokesperson said.

A spokesperson for Australia’s foreign affairs minister, Marise Payne, reiterated that Abbott travelled “in a private capacity”.

Payne said earlier that the government was committed to its one-China policy – but that did not prevent Australia from strengthening ties with Taiwan, which she described as a “leading democracy” and a “critical partner”.

“We have been concerned by tensions across the Taiwan Strait sharpening in recent months,” Payne told the ABC on Thursday. “It is clear that conflict is in no one’s interests here and we are concerned by increased air incursions by China into Taiwan’s air defence zone in the past week.”

# Comment has been sought from the Chinese embassy in Canberra.

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[China](#)

## **China orders coalmines to raise production to address power crunch**



Seventy-two mines in Inner Mongolia have been ordered to increase coal production by almost 100m tonnes. Photograph: Mark Schiefelbein/AP

*Reuters*

Fri 8 Oct 2021 03.36 EDT

Chinese officials have ordered more than 70 mines in Inner Mongolia to increase coal production by almost 100m tonnes, with the country battling its worst power crunch and coal shortages in years.

The move is the latest attempt by Chinese authorities to boost coal supply amid record high prices and shortages of electricity that have led to power rationing across the country, crippling industrial output.

The proposed increase would make up almost 3% of China's total thermal coal consumption. In an urgent notice dated 7 October, the Inner Mongolia regional energy department asked the cities of Wuhai, Ordos and Hulunbuir, as well as Xilingol League, to notify 72 mines that they may operate at stipulated higher capacities immediately, provided they ensure safe production.

An official with the region's energy bureau confirmed the notice but declined to say how long the production boost would be allowed to last.

The notice came after a meeting on the same day during which the regional authorities mapped out measures for winter energy supplies in response to mandates from China's state council, or cabinet, the state-run Inner Mongolia Daily reported.

"The (government's) coal taskforce shall urge miners to raise output with no compromise, while the power task team shall have the generating firms guarantee meeting the winter electricity and heating demand," the newspaper said.

A Beijing-based trader, who estimated the production boost may take up to two to three months to materialise, said: "This demonstrates the government is serious about raising local coal production to ease the shortage."

The 72 mines listed by the Inner Mongolia energy bureau, most of which are open pits, had previously authorised annual capacity of 178.45m tonnes. The notice proposed they increase their production capacity by 98.35m tonnes combined, according to Reuters calculations.

"It will help alleviate the coal shortage but cannot eliminate the issue," said Lara Dong, a senior director with IHS Markit. "The government will still need to apply power rationing to ensure the balancing of the coal and power markets over the winter," she said.

Inner Mongolia is China's second biggest coal-producing region, churning out just over 1bn tonnes in 2020 and accounting for more than a quarter of the national total, official data shows.

However, that output was down 8% in 2020 and was falling every month from April through July this year, partly because of an anti-corruption investigation initiated last year by Beijing targeting the coal sector, which led to lower production as miners were banned from producing above approved capacity.

The neighbouring Shanxi province, China's biggest coal region, had to close 27 coalmines this week because of flooding.

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Coal inventories at major Chinese ports were at 52.34m tonnes in late September before a week-long national holiday that started on 1 October, down 18% from the same period last year, data compiled by the China [Coal](#) Transportation and Distribution Association showed.

Meanwhile, coal consumption is climbing as north-eastern China has kicked off the winter heating season, with major power plants having stockpiles for about 10 days of use, down from more than 20 days last year.

To ensure power and heating supply to residential users, China has reopened dozens of other mines and approved several new ones.

The government has also called for “appropriately” raising coal imports to levels on a par with last year, analysts said, after imports fell almost 10% in the first eight months.

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## The Pacific projectSolomon Islands

# **'It was a nice break from everything': two men rescued after 29 days lost at sea**



The men set off from Solomon Islands in the beginning of September to make a 200km journey and appeared nearly a month later in neighbouring Papua New Guinea. Photograph: Alamy Stock Photo

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Fri 8 Oct 2021 00.33 EDT

Two men from Solomon Islands who spent 29 days lost at sea after their GPS tracker stopped working have been rescued off the coast of [Papua New Guinea](#) – 400 kilometres away from where their journey began.

Livae Nanjikana and Junior Qoloni set out from Mono Island, in Western province, [Solomon Islands](#), on the morning of the 3 September in a small, single 60 horsepower motorboat.

The pair planned to travel 200km south to the town of Noro on New Georgia Island, using the west coast of Vella Lavella Island and Gizo Island to their left as a guide.

“We have done the trip before and it should have been OK,” Nanjikana said.

But even for experienced seamen, such as Nanjikana, the Solomon Sea, separating Solomon Islands from its neighbour, Papua New Guinea, is notoriously rough and unpredictable.

## Map

Just a few hours into their journey, they encountered heavy rain and strong winds, which made it hard to see the coastline they were supposed to be following.

“When the bad weather came, it was bad, but it was worse and became scary when the GPS died,” he said. “We couldn’t see where we were going and so we just decided to stop the engine and wait, to save fuel.”

Surviving on oranges they’d packed for the trip, coconuts they collected from the sea and rainwater they trapped using a piece of canvas, they floated about 400km northwest for 29 days, eventually spotting a fisher off the coast of New Britain, Papua New Guinea.

“We didn’t know where we were but did not expect to be in another country,” Nanjikana said.

The men were so weak that when they arrived in the town of Pomio on 2 October they had to be carried off the boat and to a nearby house.

They have since been assessed at a local health clinic and are now staying with Pomio local, Joe Kolealo, who [told the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation](#): “Now they live happily with us.”

Nanjikana said he has taken some positives away from the experience, such as a forced break from the chaos of a global pandemic.

“I had no idea what was going on while I was out there. I didn’t hear about Covid or anything else,” he said. “I look forward to going back home but I guess it was a nice break from everything.”

Mary Walenenea, the chief desk officer for the Solomon Islands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, based in Papua New Guinea, said they are in contact with Nanjikana to ensure the necessary arrangements are made so that both men can return home.

Just north of Mono Island, where the two men departed from, is Papua New Guinea's Bougainville Island.

In July, a boat carrying Bougainville's minister for health Charry Napto, his wife, their son and four others [disappeared in rough seas](#). Only one person, a local teacher, was found.

Just weeks earlier, another boat disappeared off the coast of Bougainville with 13 passengers on board, ending up 50km north of its destination 36 hours later. Bougainville's police chief, Francis Tokura, has since said the government is considering restricting boat travel during rough weather.

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