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Names in the newsRidley Scott

Sorry, Ridley Scott, we just don't think it's safe to go back into the cinema

[Rebecca Nicholson](#)



Ridley Scott – director of ‘proper’ films. Photograph: David Fisher/REX/Shutterstock

Sat 27 Nov 2021 10.00 EST

Ridley Scott is responsible for many of the best *proper* films in the history of cinema and by proper I mean the massive, blockbuster, event-type ones, the ones you’d make an effort to go to the cinema to see, the ones that practically smell like popcorn. *Thelma & Louise?* [Ridley Scott](#). The *Alien* movies, *Blade Runner*, *Gladiator* and I would make a case here for *GI Jane*, all directed by him. It must help with the hit rate that his work ethic is astonishing: he’s had two films out in the UK in six weeks.

His latest, *House of Gucci*, out now, [has divided critics](#) so sharply that seeing it has become a matter of urgency: is it “boring”, “audacious”, “so bad it’s bad” or “stylish”? Is anything better than Lady Gaga in the trailer, saying: “Father, son and house of Gucci”, a line that gets stuck in my head like the chorus of a catchy pop song? The big question is whether it will do better than Scott’s [The Last Duel](#), which was released in cinemas last month and effectively bombed.

If times were different, you could wonder why *The Last Duel* did not do very well, with that cast (Matt Damon, Ben Affleck, Jodie Comer), and that story, and Scott behind it. It was perfectly placed to be a Proper Cinema Film, yet its box-office takings were miserable. Scott talked about it with Marc Maron on the WTF podcast last week, suggesting that the [reason it had tanked was young people](#) and phones. “What we’ve got today [are] the audiences who were brought up on these fucking cellphones. The millennial [sic] do not ever want to be taught anything unless you’re told it on a cellphone,” he said.

It’s hard to argue with the first part, though older millennials are the last generation who remember life without the internet, never mind cellphones, and have queued up for *Gladiator*. And I have many thoughts on screen size (I can barely read a crucial-to-the-plot text on my television, much less my phone) and what is lost when beautiful films are shrunk into a tiny box.

But surely it is more than, at this time, it remains a big ask for people to go and sit in the cinema to watch a film for two hours or more. I have heard stories of sold-out music gigs that were only half full because ticket holders either wouldn't or couldn't attend. Pantomime ticket sales are down a third on pre-pandemic times. People are only half ready to get out there again and understandably so. Everything right now is uncertain and shaky and the blockbuster movie may have to wait a bit longer for its comeback.

Dua Lipa: forget gender, we are all now music-fluid



Dua Lipa: the last of her kind. Photograph: David M Benett/Dave Benett/Getty Images for Frieze

For the rest of time, a statement that, at this rate, is looking less hyperbolic than it should, Dua Lipa will be the last woman to have received a Brit award for British female solo artist, while J Hus will be the last man to have been crowned British male solo artist.

The Brits have followed the [Berlin film festival](#) by [scrapping gendered categories](#) and will instead introduce more genre awards, opening up new slots for acts in four categories: alternative/rock, hip-hop/grime/rap, dance and pop/R&B.

The decision to do away with male and female categories has been the most chat-worthy, obviously, provoking a small ripple of a backlash that could have been predicted in photographic detail, though I will admit that [Brian May going off on a tangent](#) about Queen and diversity was a curveball. The worry seems to be that either men or women will be disadvantaged by this move, but this ignores the fact that music and pop trends are cyclical – women are dominating pop right now and men will perhaps come to dominate at another point. I doubt that judging work on its comparative merits rather than the sex of who made it will make much difference to that.

More curious is the genre decision, which seems to have been necessary to bulk out the ceremony, but arrives in an age where genre has all but collapsed and it is increasingly difficult to categorise artists. In 2021, where would Little Simz sit? Arlo Parks? Adele? Ed Sheeran? All borrow bits and pieces from everywhere.

I'll have to check what [Brian May](#) thinks.

Richard Madeley: gut response to I'm a Celebrity



Richard Madeley: completely bushed. Photograph: Kieron McCarron/ITV/REX/Shutterstock

I have an ambivalent relationship with *I'm a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here*, currently trundling towards the end of a busy first week.

I love Ant and Dec's humour, the general camaraderie and watching people triumph over tough situations, but I hate seeing snakes wrap themselves around famous people's heads and having to wonder if the snakes are OK or pitying rats just trying to go about their business only to have Ian Beale's face looming large next to them. The [RSPCA yet again](#) asked the series to stop using live animals in bushtucker trials this year; yet again, the producers claimed that "rigorous protocols" were in place.

It is not a show for the squeamish and may be tougher than we thought. Richard Madeley slid headfirst into a pit of rotten fruit and veg and had fish guts and offal dumped on him on a freezing cold night in Wales. The presenter, whose Partridge-isms set him up as the main attraction, was taken to hospital "as a precaution" when he fell ill and ended up [leaving the series](#) after just four days.

Does it make it more watchable, or less, to wonder if the celebrities are actually going to make it through?

Rebecca Nicholson is an Observer columnist

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OpinionStephen Sondheim

Sondheim reshaped musical theatre, placing it at the very heart of American culture

David Benedict



Stephen Sondheim, who has died aged 91. Photograph: Yousuf Karsh/CAMERA PRESS

Sun 28 Nov 2021 02.03 EST

If you've ever used the phrases "everything's coming up roses" or "the ladies who lunch", you have Stephen Sondheim to thank. He coined them in his lyrics for *Gypsy* (1959) and *Company* (1970), two of his most celebrated musicals. But for all the felicitousness of his work as a lyricist, he saw himself as a composer. In truth, not only was he both, the combination catapulted him into a league of his own.

Within moments of news breaking of his sudden death in the early hours of Friday after a Thanksgiving dinner with old friends, shocked tributes began flooding social media. This wasn't only theatreland in mourning. Sondheim's remarkable influence across popular culture was startlingly current for an artist still working at 91.

Before the pandemic, his work was everywhere. In 2019 alone, Adam Driver sang Being Alive, his anthem of hope from *Company*, in the film [*Marriage Story*](#); Daniel Craig hummed a few bars of his *Follies* torch song Losing My Mind in [*Knives Out*](#); his biggest, Grammy-winning hit Send in the Clowns appeared to ironic effect sung by the ringleader of Joaquin Phoenix's attackers in [*Joker*](#); Ryan Murphy's Netflix series *The Politician* used numbers from *Assassins* and Jennifer Aniston and Billy Crudup duetted his bittersweet love song Not While I'm Around from *Sweeney Todd* on AppleTV's *The Morning Show*.

His primacy within wider culture came from the widest possible acknowledgement that not only had Sondheim created a succession of groundbreaking hits, but that in the mostly reactionary world of the American musical, he was a revolutionary. It started with his Broadway debut, when he was hired aged 25 as lyricist by director/choreographer Jerome Robbins, composer Leonard Bernstein and bookwriter (Broadway's term for librettist) Arthur Laurents for a show about New York gangland violence. It was originally called *Gang Way* but, mercifully, they changed the title to *West Side Story*.

Until its 1957 opening, no other Broadway musical had ended with a pile-up of dead bodies. Its success gave him a licence to continue in his chosen vein: creative rule-breaking. Although he was later unhappy with his work on it – he particularly inveighed against his decision to give ill-educated, Puerto Rican Maria (in *I Feel Pretty*) the line: "It's alarming how charming I feel" – Broadway success and the 11-Oscar-winning movie that followed put him on the map and money in the bank. The original soundtrack album sat at No 1 in the charts for a record-breaking 54 weeks and was the biggest-selling album of the entire 1960s. From the word go, people were singing his songs.

Or, rather, his lyrics. Sondheim didn't become a Broadway composer until 1962 with the uproarious Roman farce *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. With its riotously funny book by Sondheim's friend Burt Shevelove and Larry M*A*S*H Gelbart, it ran for a hugely profitable three years, played in London starring Frankie Howerd. It formed the (unacknowledged) inspiration for Howerd's hit TV series *Up Pompeii!*

But Sondheim's score was overlooked and he spent the rest of the decade being notably aggrieved, grumbling to friends and toiling with little discernible success until the opening of *Company*, which changed everything, not least because it ushered in his landmark partnership with the [legendary producer/director and lifelong friend Hal Prince](#). Over the next 11 years, they created what is now routinely regarded as the most daring succession of iconoclastic shows – musical or otherwise – in American theatre history.

No one else would have had the gall to write the daringly plotless *Company*, the serial-killer-thriller musical *Sweeney Todd* (later filmed by Tim Burton) or, most audacious of all, *Pacific Overtures*, his musical about the opening up of Japan by the west. The last of those contained Someone in a Tree, which he often described as his favourite of his songs. Small wonder since it weaves several perspective into a richly complex song about doubt, about what people simultaneously see and don't see.

His gorgeously scored 1981 show, *Merrily We Roll Along*, was radically structured (it was told backwards) and dealt with artistic hope wrecked by blind ambition. A thunderous flop, it managed only 14 performances and Sondheim retreated. He'd have been forgiven for returning three years later with something crowd-pleasing but Sondheim forever believed in safety last.

For the second half of his career, he became more, not less, experimental. *Sunday in the Park With George*, *Into the Woods* and *Passion*, all created with writer/director James Lapine, persistently reinvented musical theatre's structural, thematic and dramatic possibilities. He believed his theatrical voice was most present in his distinctive, vividly dramatic use of harmony. But it was also present in his fascination with ambivalence, his music and lyrics in perfect balance to express conflicts coursing through character.

Detractors claimed his clear-eyed vision was cynical, which he vehemently denied. He was actually a fascinating contradiction: a romantic moderated by realism.

Like British playwright Caryl Churchill, whose work he admired, each of his shows sounds and feels completely different while still bearing his hallmark. He loathed the idea of repeating himself. He was forever searching for and creating new forms with which to express ideas. It's that which made widespread commercial success for much of his work elusive. Yet it also made him the most influential theatre artist of the second half of the 20th century. His expanding of theatrical possibilities paved the way for game-changers such as Michael Bennett's *A Chorus Line* and [Lin-Manuel Miranda's Hamilton](#). Only in September he announced the new musical, *Square One*, which he was writing with dramatist David Ives. It will now never be finished. Absurd though it sounds for a man of his age, it makes his death yet more untimely.

I asked him a few years ago if he feared death. "I think about it a lot now," he mused. "I have to keep telling myself how close it is. You don't feel that unless you're ill. And, for the most part, I've been very lucky with my health. So I'm used to feeling like there's plenty of tomorrows." He looked at me and said, decisively: "I don't mind the idea of death at all. I don't want to suffer. I don't want to know that I'm dying."

Mercifully for him, he got his wish.

David Benedict is the official biographer of Stephen Sondheim

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OpinionCoronavirus

The Observer view on the Omicron variant

[Observer editorial](#)



Preliminary evidence suggests there is an increased risk of reinfection with the Covid-19 Omicron variant. Photograph: Thomas Faull/Alamy Live News/Alamy Live News.

Sun 28 Nov 2021 01.30 EST

Scientists have always warned that the biggest risk to the UK at this stage of the pandemic is the emergence of a more infectious, virulent and vaccine-resistant variant of the virus. It remains to be seen whether Omicron, the new variant of concern identified by the World [Health](#) Organization last week is that.

But the structure of Omicron – the number of concerning mutations in its spike protein – and the preliminary evidence that there is an increased [risk of reinfection](#) with this variant have rightly prompted a global response to try

and contain its spread as much as possible. It will be weeks before we understand how just much a risk Omicron presents. If it is much more infectious than the Delta variant of Covid, its global spread is to some degree inevitable, though it will of course be slowed by vaccines and travel restrictions. It is a relief that the government acted far more promptly to impose travel restrictions on South Africa and other affected countries than it did in the case of Delta and India, where a delay of weeks undoubtedly contributed to the speed at which Delta became the dominant variant here in the UK. But it is concerning that the government has not been testing all arrivals from South Africa in recent days in the same way as, for example, the [Dutch government](#) has.

The emergence of Omicron should serve as a reminder of some key lessons in this pandemic. The first is the importance of genomic sequencing, which tracks the genetic structure of the virus. Omicron was spotted early thanks to South Africa's huge investment in sequencing, which has allowed swift action to be taken. This could be valuable in terms of developing updated vaccines if needed. But this action takes the form of punishing travel bans, so there is a case for [South Africa](#) receiving global compensation in order not to disincentivise countries with similar sequencing capabilities from being transparent about their findings.

Second, as highlighted yet again by former prime minister Gordon Brown in the *Guardian* last week, Omicron is a reminder that no one is safe until everyone is safe. By the end of the year, enough vaccines will have been manufactured to have vaccinated the whole world against Covid. Yet too many countries are facing this winter with low vaccination rates as a result of wealthier nations hoarding unused supplies. Only 3% of people in low-income countries are fully vaccinated, compared with more than 60% in high-income countries. This gap is not only ethically wrong – it increases the likelihood of a vaccine-resistant strain developing. High-income countries need to develop far more efficient and timely systems for delivering unused vaccinations to developing countries well in advance of their expiry date.

Third, the importance of the precautionary principle has been proved over and again in this pandemic. With a virus that spreads so rapidly, less restriction action sooner can prevent the need for more restrictive action for

longer later. Britain's vaccination programme has been a success and means that unless we see another more vaccine-resistant variant, whether that is Omicron or another, we should be able to avoid the sorts of invasive lockdowns that were required in the first and second waves.

The government was right yesterday to introduce stricter requirements around travel, self-isolation for those who have been in contact with Omicron and compulsory mask wearing in shops. As we have argued throughout the pandemic, it needs to [boost sick pay](#) in order to ensure people with symptoms can afford to take the time off work to self-isolate if they test positive. Clive Dix, the former chair of the vaccine taskforce, has sounded the alarm about the government's lack of preparedness for a vaccine-resistant variant, as we report today.

Hopefully, Omicron will prove to be less of a risk than some fear. But if so, we should treat it as a lucky escape. It is a warning that this pandemic is far from over and that the UK and other rich nations should be doing more to combat the spread of the virus in other parts of the world.

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OpinionRefugees

The Observer view on UK policy on asylum seekers

[Observer editorial](#)



Immigration enforcement officers and members of the RNLI assist a group of people thought to be migrants from a lifeboat in Dungeness, Kent, on 23 September. Photograph: Gareth Fuller/PA

Sun 28 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

Sometimes, a tragic image or story appears set to shift the course of history for the better. The haunting photograph of three-year-old Alan Kurdi, washed up on a beach in Turkey, shocked Europe in September 2015. He was a toddler from Syria who perished alongside his mother and brother while trying to make the dangerous Mediterranean crossing. For a few weeks at least, it seemed as though public horror at how he died might propel the EU to take a more humanitarian approach on asylum. But in recent years, it has become more, not less, hardline, striking unsavoury deals

with authoritarian regimes such as Turkey and failed states such as Libya to keep refugees out, regardless of the human rights abuses that are taking place in their [detention centres](#).

The tragedy has spread to our own shores, as growing numbers of desperate people try to cross the English Channel, the busiest shipping route in the world, in little more than inflatable dinghies. Twenty-seven people [drowned last Thursday](#), including a pregnant woman and three children. Their stories, like that of [Maryam Nuri Mohamed Amin](#), a 24-year-old Kurdish woman fleeing Iraq to join her fiance in the UK, are just starting to emerge. But there is little hope that they will engender a change in the political response.

What is happening in the Channel is a humanitarian crisis, as people mostly from Iran, Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan – the vast majority of whom will qualify for refuge – try to reach the UK. What it is not, however, is any sort of crisis for the UK asylum system, with the number of people seeking asylum in the UK [significantly lower](#) than at the peak in the early 2000s and [far lower](#) than in Germany or France. Neither is it at all a new phenomenon: people have always fled conflict and torture worldwide, sometimes driven by desperation to take appalling levels of risk, as [Tim Adams reports from France today](#).

What is new is the increasing willingness of political leaders around the world, particularly in the UK, but also in countries such as Australia, to ignore their obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention. What is first and foremost driving the British response is not reducing loss of life in the Channel, but reducing the numbers of people claiming asylum after arriving in the UK.

The best way to reduce the number of deaths as people fleeing conflict try to cross the Channel – or, indeed, the Mediterranean – is to open up safe passage to [Europe](#), thus reducing demand for the people smuggling operations of criminal gangs. It may be hard for those with a European-centric view to believe, but the majority of refugees do not aspire to come to Europe – they want to stay close to their home in the hope they can one day return. Almost nine in 10 of the world's refugees live in the lower-income countries that neighbour their home country. Allowing safe passage and a

more generous system through which people can apply for resettlement would help erode the business model of the people smugglers.

But this conflicts with the government's apparent desire to keep the numbers of people who are granted asylum in the UK unfeasibly low. Just over 13,000 refugees were granted protection in the last year: that is equivalent to just 20 people per parliamentary constituency. The UK could easily offer protection to more. But, as the *Observer* explained last week, because this does not fit with the political image they want to cultivate, Boris Johnson and Priti Patel are instead shifting the emphasis to deterring people from making the crossing by making the UK even more hostile to asylum seekers and by restructuring our asylum system in a way that breaks both the spirit and the letter of the 1951 convention.

The UK is already a very hostile place for people seeking refuge: they are not allowed to work, are often housed in dreadful conditions and are forced to subsist on less than £5.50 a day. The government has sought to make it even harder by opening up a two-tier system whereby the 1951 convention rights of asylum seekers arriving in the UK through means other than official resettlement programmes – an entirely legal action – would be further eroded. This runs entirely counter to one of the convention's key principles, which is that people with a legitimate claim for asylum should have them heard fairly regardless of how they arrived in a country. The government's other “deterrence” proposals currently being considered by parliament include other measures that break international refugee and maritime law, including the dangerous forcible return of boats to France and processing asylum seekers offshore.

The fight that Johnson picked with French president Emmanuel Macron perfectly encapsulates the dire state of the government's response. France was wrong to exclude the UK from a key meeting on the Channel crisis. Yet by provoking Macron into this, by publishing an incendiary letter on social media that made a set of unreasonable demands on France, Johnson showed his true colours. He is a man who prioritises getting bombastic headlines in the sympathetic press over trying to work with our neighbours to avert further human tragedy.

Wealthy nations have an ethical obligation to people fleeing conflict and disaster that they are not collectively fulfilling. It is also in their self-interest: to simply bunker down, shut off borders and look the other way would be to dangerously undermine global security. Britain was one of the founding signatories of the 1951 refugee convention, which codified the international solidarity and cooperation without which a humanitarian approach to refugees is simply not possible. To our national shame, it is today one of the countries leading the charge to rip it up.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/nov/28/observer-view-on-uk-policy-asylum-seekers>

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[NotebookTheatre](#)

Is a crush on Shaun Evans enough to sustain me through a theatrical turkey?

[Rachel Cooke](#)



Shaun Evans in *Manor* at the National Theatre. Photograph: Manuel Harlan

Sat 27 Nov 2021 12.00 EST

Unless you're loaded, booking theatre tickets is like Russian roulette. When to hit the website? Leave it until after the reviews and, if they're good, you'll struggle to get a seat. But jump too soon and you may come to regret it, your spirits falling faster than a safety curtain as the demolition jobs roll in.

Last week, the National Theatre's production of Moira Buffini's new play *Manor* received some [truly atrocious notices](#), the critic at the *Times* deigning to award it no stars at all, which spelled bad news for me. I booked my tickets ages ago, a decision based on the fact that Buffini has written good things in the past, that one of its stars, Nancy Carroll, is amazing, and that the other is Shaun Evans, on whom I seem to have developed a crush following his appearance in the BBC's preposterous [submarine drama, *Vigil*](#). Oh, woe. My seats for this turkey cost more than an easyJet flight to Rome.

Should I go anyway, in the hope it'll be so bad it's good? Or should I beg the theatre (more gambling) for a voucher for some as yet unknown future production? Right now, the second strategy seems to me to be as risky as the first. Where have all the good plays gone? Last week, we were trapped at one so cringe-inducing – for minutes at a time an actor was required to impersonate Maggie Smith – my companion bolted in the interval, making at speed for the nearest martini or three (this may have helped when we met up later and I performed the second act in its entirety at our restaurant table).

When I interviewed Eileen Atkins in September, she told me she'd reached the point in her life – she is 87 – when she never wants to see another production of *The Deep Blue Sea*. I've now reached the point in mine where all I want to see is *The Deep Blue Sea*. I miss you, [Terence Rattigan](#).

New lease of life

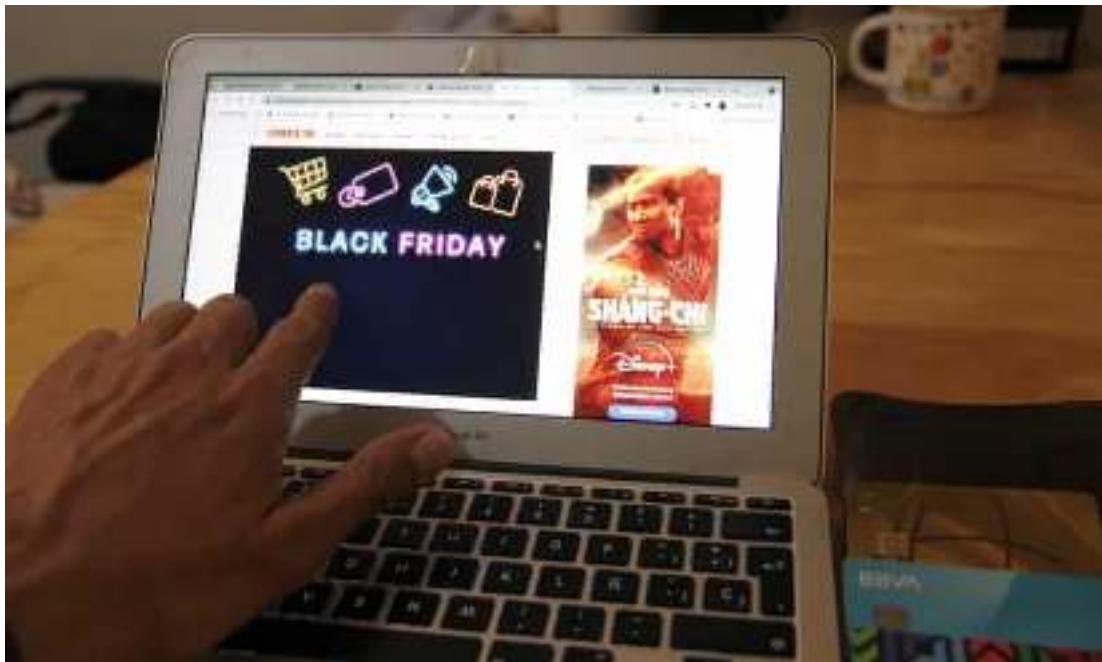


Pulling pints as a second career act. Photograph: Ian Rolfe/Alamy

In middle age, it's important to remember that lives can have second, even third, acts. Away in the Lake District, I stayed at the Hare & Hounds in Bowland Bridge, a formerly closed pub that (I can hardly believe I'm writing this) was recently leased to my old friends, Andrew and Simon. Not so long ago, these two were in London, doing their whizzy media jobs. Now they're in Windermere, where Simon grew up, pulling pints.

At supper, I looked up from my corn on the cob and for a few moments watched them smoothly criss-crossing the packed room in their long, brown aprons. What a sight. I mean, it was inspirational. I'm not sure I knew it was possible to look both so knackered and so happy and yet still to be upright.

All over the map



Black Friday – style over substance. Photograph: Luis Barron/Eyepix Group/REX/Shutterstock

On [Black Friday](#) (ugh), I did not purchase a flatscreen television, a sofa or a Fitbit; I did not even treat myself, as I see the Rev Richard Coles did, to a new potato masher. No, I bought a kimono with a 1903 ordnance survey map of Sheffield on it, an item for which I've longed since the day I first clapped eyes on it online, and wasted an hour trying to work out if the street where I grew up would cover my chest or my backside.

The only question now is whether I'll be able to resist wearing this lovely thing outside the house as well as in it. Someone perhaps needs to warn the neighbours. I can already hear my friend the fashion director urging me to “style it up with jeans and sneakers”.

Rachel Cooke is an Observer columnist

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Opinion**Boris Johnson**

And still television companies beat a path to wife-beater Stanley Johnson's front door. Why?

Catherine Bennett





Christina Talacko (left), president of the Australian Coalition for Conservation, talks with Stanley Johnson at the launch of the Centre-Right Climate Action Declaration in Glasgow. Photograph: Jeff J Mitchell/Getty Images

Sun 28 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

Potential guides to Marco Polo, the 13th-century explorer, must be thin on the ground. Are there, in fact, any out there who've never been described as "handsy"? And, for preference, never broken their partner's nose? An attractive on-screen personality being, like the ability to comply with [Covid regulations](#) and to not [insult the public](#), an advantage, but by no means essential.

Asking only because a week after three women identified him as a specialist in unwanted touching, the – to give him his full title – father of the prime minister, was announced as the presenter for a forthcoming documentary series about Marco Polo's route through China. By way of qualifications: Stanley Johnson once, it's understood, went quite near there as a student.

Johnson will, admittedly, have some back-up: another Johnson from that inexhaustible supply. Max Johnson, 36, turns out to be a son, a Hong Kong businessman and the half-brother of the prime minister. The value of this

novice presenter (Johnson senior having appeared on *I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!* and countless TV sofas) seems to reside, supposing his genes don't speak for themselves, in his business know-how. Max reportedly hopes, though presumably not actually on screen, "to promote tech and investment from China". He further aspires, according to a [Tatler interview](#) last year, to be an actor and seeks a publisher for his 80,000-word memoir.

It may hearten any Uyghurs who get to hear of a project likely to take the Johnsons through lands where their people are being killed and persecuted that the presenting choice of two China advocates has been noted. Johnson's promotion of China despite its human rights abuses has previously aroused suspicion, while mini-Stanley appears, if anything, more ardent on Sino-UK bonding, with *Tatler* recording that he's "disappointed in the west's pivot away from China". The Johnsons' producer, Dale Templar, told the *Times*: "This is not a political piece. I want to show China as a fantastic country."

It remains a mystery, however, why Ms Templar should wish also to show Johnson as a fantastic person. Well before the MP Caroline Nokes [described how he smacked](#) her "hard" on the bottom, the *New Statesman* journalist Ailbhe Rea said she'd also experienced unwanted touching, while his supporter Isabel Oakeshott confirmed, perhaps carelessly, Johnson's reputation as "handsy", he was known to have put his first wife, the late artist Charlotte Wahl, in hospital.

That her nose was broken by Johnson was not denied, when the incident was revealed in Tom Bower's 2020 biography of the prime minister. Rather, friends explained, it was a regrettable "one-off" that occurred when his physically weaker victim "flailed" at him. Johnson was subsequently spared, as a one-off nose-breaker, anything approaching the condemnation that has recently been heaped upon, for instance, celebrities who [composed offensive tweets](#) as teenagers, or authors who used disappointing language or who have aired, as with Margaret Atwood and JK Rowling, contested opinions. Publication of Johnson's books continued undisturbed, unlike Woody Allen's latest, by staff walk-outs. Television producers have been unflinchingly loyal. Post-Bower, he was invited, for instance, to expatiate on subjects from the climate crisis (BBC's *Newsnight*) to [TB in alpacas](#) (BBC's *Today* programme) and to perform on *Countdown* (Channel 4).

Regarding domestic violence and its long-term impact on children who witness it, we await, alas, his expert input. “Stanley’s violence has forever haunted Boris,” is among the conclusions in Bower’s book.

Shortly after it was published, the Conservative Environmental Network announced the arrival of Johnson as its “[international ambassador](#)”, which he remains. Plausible groping accusations seem likely, along with Johnson’s disrespect for their authors, likewise to be classed as environmentally sustainable. Perhaps because initial newspaper serialisation did not reflect the extent of the violence detailed in Bower’s book, the nose-breaking, explained away, was insufficient to pause Johnson’s career. But his ex-wife had described mistreatment that began early in their marriage. “He resented that I cared about my friends,” she said, echoing many fellow survivors’ accounts, “and that’s when he first hit me”. Later, she said, doctors and her parents were made aware and spoke to Johnson about his abuse, which was known to their children. “He had hit me. He hit me many times, over many years.” She told Bower she wanted “the truth told”.

Well, now it is on record and Johnson the broadcaster, with the new accounts of inappropriate touching to add to Wahl’s extended character reference, remains sublimely uncancelled, even despite growing evidence that hiring a Johnson or 10 offers programme makers no significant protection against Nadine Dorries.

The latest promotion of Johnson could hardly be better timed to shed light on the normalisation of domestic violence

Last week, the Office for National Statistics marked the UN’s Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women with figures showing record levels of domestic violence: calls to the UK domestic abuse helpline rose during the pandemic by more than a fifth. The latest promotion of Johnson could hardly have been better timed to shed light on the normalisation of domestic violence. How serious can it be, after all, if a man so credibly accused can still be introduced, with neither talent nor repentance to account for the dispensation, as a broadcasting asset?

On the contrary, with his history of [flouting pandemic regulations](#), his [efforts for China](#), his frequent-flyer environmentalism and jibes about the public's intelligence, to say nothing of the interminable "my son the prime minister" partisanship, Johnson might be considered, even without his mistreatment of women, among the more disposable talents to have afflicted broadcasting. Though it would be unfair to blame this shameless exhibitionist, alone, for his contribution to trivialising domestic violence. For Nadine Dorries he remains "a gentleman", [more trustworthy than the woman MP](#) whose bottom he hit. Johnson could not have [outlasted Johnny Depp](#) without the help of patrons, media and otherwise, who are aware of the brutality his ex-wife finally made known and happy to advertise their indifference.

Catherine Bennett is an Observer columnist

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For the recordUK news

For the record

Sun 28 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

An interview with Rebecca Frecknall said she was “the first woman to direct a major production of *Cabaret*”. In fact, Gillian Lynne directed and choreographed the 1986 London revival (“[Willkommen, bienvenue ... new life at the Kit Kat Club](#)”, 21 November, New Review, page 20). And we misspelled “Willkommen” in that headline with a single “l”.

Eagle-eyed readers noticed that Lord and Lady Mountbatten had their jackets buttoned the opposite way to normal in a photograph taken in 1958. The image had been flipped by the agency (“[Anger over ‘grotesque abuse’ of £600,000 case to keep Mountbatten papers secret](#)”, 7 November, page 31).

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

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Observer letters**Boris Johnson**

Letters: Boris Johnson was never a real Conservative



‘It was fairly obvious that he was a man of no real firm political beliefs or ideology.’ Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Sun 28 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

What sprang out at me from Andrew Rawnsley’s accounts of all the various factions of the Tory party crying out their frustrations was that Boris Johnson is not what they thought he was (“[Boris Johnson has united every Tory faction – in anger at him](#)”, Comment). The centre doesn’t think he’s liberal enough, the ERG and its Thatcherite fellow travellers don’t think he’s sufficiently devoted to the memory of the Iron Lady and the red wall MPs suspect that he’s not serious about levelling up.

What astonishes me is that this realisation that Johnson is a political chameleon is only now beginning to dawn on them. To anyone with even vague acquaintance of his pre-prime ministerial career, it was fairly obvious

that he was a man of no real firm political beliefs or ideology, other than a burning desire to become “king of the world”. It was also pretty clear that he would say and do anything he felt necessary to anyone in order to achieve that goal.

Lord Heseltine said that Johnson was the sort of man who waits to see which way the crowd is running and then jumps in front of them and shouts: “Follow me!” If he could see it, why couldn’t the rest of them?

Gareth Pratt

Machen, Caerphilly

Andrew Rawnsley quotes a veteran Thatcherite as saying: “There’s a lot of us worrying: is this a Conservative government?” It’s time to get our terminology sorted. There hasn’t been a Conservative government since 1979. The founding ideology of Edmund Burke that the then Tory party should keep the best of what there was while moving cautiously forward was the governing style, right up to its apogee under Churchill, Eden and Macmillan, but was dumped by Margaret Thatcher, who told an aide that she didn’t like the terms conservative or consensus and decried the one-party grandes as “false squires”.

The Thatcherite style has always been to fracture, divide and rule, and the result after four decades has been the worst inequality since the Edwardian era and a divided, fractious people. “Pork barrel” Boris is merely the logical endgame to all this. [Blue anarchists](#), as Rawnsley himself described them.

David Redshaw

Gravesend, Kent

Set the vaccinated free

Your experts discussing whether we should have vaccine passports don’t mention their apparent acceptance in, for example, France and Italy, nor the feelings of those of us who are fully vaccinated and wish to involve ourselves in activities again (“[Should vaccine passports be used within UK? Scientists urge caution](#)”, News).

I would prefer to use public transport, go to the cinema, visit a museum or art gallery, browse an independent bookshop, knowing that the unmasked

person next to me is also vaccinated or is now clear of infection. If unvaccinated people wish to sit at home that is their choice, but please don't expect me to do the same.

Janice Gupta Gwilliam

Norton, Malton, North Yorkshire

Linking the north

No one in the north expects us to be able to ever again compete economically with London ("[Punishing London will be a train wreck for regions, too](#)", Business). We don't want to kill off London, but neither do we want a trickle-up economy from the capital.

We want the opportunity for the businesses to be able to have the connectivity across the north to allow us to collaborate and increase output. With the funding coming from Westminster this is choked, as we saw last week. The north also isn't asking for London businesses to relocate to the north to save on rates or overheads. That model is unsustainable and smacks of the belief that we are all part of a great commuter belt.

Businesses born in the north are working internationally and its cities aren't just "striving to achieve" culturally; there is a vibrant scene outside London. The UK is one of the worst cases of a country that focuses all of its resources, political and financial, on one bloated city.

Jonathan Ashworth,

small business owner

Dunham Massey, Greater Manchester

Eradicating racism in cricket

Regarding racism in cricket, the good manners required to behave appropriately need nurturing at home and in school ("[If tackling racism is just a box-ticking exercise, we lose the moral imperative to change our ways](#)", Comment). Bullying, the basis for the cruel and harmful behaviour of racism, sexism and the rest, has to be dealt with among the youngest to stop the hateful behaviour between adults in all team games.

The number of state schools offering cricket is in decline, allowing the cricket community to develop without such scrutiny. “Banter”, unchecked and unchallenged, soon moves from bad manners to insulting and harmful assaults on religious beliefs and cultural norms. Start developing with young girls and boys the consideration needed in the game, then we may once again be proud of our cricketers, rather than ashamed.

Lyn Overall
Sheffield

A team effort

Torsten Bell’s article on “hold-up power” demonstrates the risks involved in demarcation in the workplace and placing too much reliance on individuals, such as excellent managers and highly skilled chefs (“[Having the power to put a spanner in the works pays very well](#)”, Comment).

In the 90s, many employers in the motor industry broke down demarcation, instigated team working and flattened hierarchies. This meant that workers became multiskilled and that the learning resided in the team rather than the individual. Better training and consultation were intended to provide greater job satisfaction and retention. Perhaps wise employers should look at workplace culture and employee development so that they are not dependent on recruitment specialists.

Yvonne Williams
Ryde, Isle of Wight

I’ll miss apostrophes

I was worried to read David Mitchell say that my surname is to be abolished and rather than known as “O’Sullivan” I will henceforth be “Osullivan” or just “Sullivan” after the abolition of the apostrophe (“[A chilling catastrophe punctuated my week](#)”, New Review) .

It was bad enough when my records at the dentist or library were misfiled under “S”. With the arrival of websites, names with apostrophes were not recognised and had to be written with no apostrophe and a lower-case second letter. Where will this all end?

Joseph O'Sullivan
East Wittering, West Sussex

The kids are kk

The [Q&A with Sarah Ogilvie](#) (New Review) was one of the best pieces I've read in ages. Both of my sons are Gen Zers. I recognised some phenomena but learned an enormous amount as well, especially the ways of expressing "OK", which was truly enlightening. The article should be required reading for their parents' generation.

Alison Carter
Lindfield, West Sussex

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/commentisfree/2021/nov/28/boris-johnson-was-never-a-real-conservative>

Opinion[Boris Johnson](#)

Why do we Britons still genuflect before age-old class caricatures?

[Nick Cohen](#)



John Cleese, Ronnie Barker and Ronnie Corbett in The Class Sketch in Frost on Sunday, 1970 Photograph: ITV/Rex Features

Sat 27 Nov 2021 14.00 EST

In a time of British decline, acting is one of the few world-beating skills we have left. From high to low, we are masters at raiding the dressing-up box and putting on a show. Pieces on why [British actors succeed](#) in Hollywood have become a staple of the entertainment press for good reason.

The prosaic answers credit their training in character acting and their relative cheapness. The best look at our love of pretence. We have a monarchy that pretends it is happy and glorious while we pretend to believe it; a House of Lords that pretends to be noble while its seats are on open sale; and adversarial political and legal systems, whose participants pretend to oppose one another, while they privately agree. The British sense of humour tends towards the absurdist and the ironic, styles that reject realism. Above all, as the theatre director Richard Eyre [observed](#), the British make exemplary actors because “role-playing [is] second nature to a nation obsessed with class distinction and inured to the necessity of pretending to be what you aren’t”.

Now an actor leads a nation of actors. [Boris Johnson](#) has been putting on a show since 1984, when Neil Sherlock, the only man to defeat him in a close election, taught him that he must master the arts of pretence. Sherlock was a state school boy, running to be president of the Oxford Union. Johnson was an Etonian and a Tory, who thought he had a right to the job.

Sherlock, who went on to become a special adviser to Nick Clegg, remembers how Johnson’s then girlfriend, the fashionable [Allegra Mostyn-Owen](#), invited Sherlock to her rooms and begged him not to stand in the way of “my Boris”. Sherlock asked what made Johnson think he was fit to run the Oxford Union, or anything else for that matter.

Well, Mostyn-Owen replied, he was in charge of Pop when he was at Eton. As he was a lad from Woking, it took Sherlock a while to discover she did not mean Johnson sold lemonade in the school canteen but that he ran a

[society called Pop](#) for prefects. Unmoved by her pleas, Sherlock fought a fierce campaign that targeted Johnson's snobbery and entitlement, and won.

Defeat changed Johnson. At the next union election, he no longer relied on the old-school network but posed as a friend to the middle classes. His rightwing politics vanished, as he played the part of a centrist. His new persona secured him victory. Ever since then he has played whatever role would persuade editors to hire him or voters to elect him. The result is an empty vessel. There is nothing there.

One appealing response to the belated discovery by the Conservative party that its leader is a hollow man with no ideas beyond his own advancement is to burst out laughing and ask, what kept you? "Scratch an actor," [Laurence Olivier said](#), "and underneath you will find another actor." If you put your life or your country in the hands of people who make it up, you will find that there is only more makeup beneath the makeup, however hard you scrub.

The second is to blame him on a make-believe British culture. If the British do not pretend, our voices betray us. They reveal birthplaces, class backgrounds, sex and race. This is a small country with an extraordinarily large number of dialects: between 30 and 40, depending on who you ask. If you speak with a broad accent, the middle and upper classes dismiss you as stupid. English is also a second language for about a billion people. But migrants find it is not enough to know English. Unless they speak in an English dialect that marks them as middle class, they too will be dismissed. As Johnson was bivoting last week, the Social Mobility Foundation was campaigning against "[class polish](#)".

The need to pretend has revived Victorian elocution classes. The UK has hundreds of 'accent reduction' voice coaches

When working-class people enter professional occupations, they find their polished counterparts earn £6,000 more a year. Polish projects self-confidence. Polished voices become "the self-presentational markers of a privileged class background" and are enough to keep pay for their owners high and for their colleagues low.

Social mobility allows the possibility of reinvention, which can be liberating. But for many the requirement to mimic middle-class manners feels like an assault. Alex Baratta, a linguist at Manchester University, and his colleagues, reported on [working-class teachers](#), who were told by their superiors that they would never advance in the profession unless they dropped their glottal stops. The knowledge that their careers depended on hiding their roots and identities humiliated them.

The need to pretend has led to the revival of Victorian elocution classes. The UK has hundreds of “accent softening” or “accent reduction” voice coaches who train people to modify their dialects as if they were actors preparing for a role. (Tellingly, many accent softeners trained at drama schools.)

“Are you a native speaker who wants to sound more polished?” [asks one](#) with a nod to the Social Mobility Foundation. We can “help non-native speakers of English as well as native regional speakers, who feel that their accent is holding them back in either their personal or professional life”, [explains another](#). I don’t know whether their existence is a cause for shame. I interviewed an accent softener called [Rachel Preece](#) for this piece and she argued that you could no more succeed if your listeners could not understand what you say than if your readers could not understand what you write. But I can tell the difference between the actors at the top and the bottom of British society.

Our elite acts out caricatures from deep within the national consciousness: the gentleman amateur, who knows more than the “so-called experts”, the aristocratic swell, who is the ordinary people’s friend, the John Bullish voice of common sense, who cuts through the nonsense. Ever since university, acting has given Johnson and his contemporaries a status they do not deserve.

By contrast, the immigrant paying £50 an hour for accent softening or the Liverpudlian trying to disguise scouse vowels are forcing themselves to learn new roles so they can get the rewards they were always entitled to on their merits.

Nick Cohen is an Observer columnist

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/nov/27/why-do-we-britons-still-genflect-before-age-old-class-caricatures>

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[Coronavirus](#)

B.1.1.529 Covid variant ‘most worrying we’ve seen’, says top UK medical adviser



Susan Hopkins said South Africa’s epidemiology picture had more than doubled in a shorter period than two weeks. Photograph: Tayfun Salcı/Zuma Press Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

[Haroon Siddique](#)

Fri 26 Nov 2021 05.01 EST

The chief medical adviser to the UK Health and Security Agency has warned that [a newly identified Covid-19 variant in southern Africa](#) is the “most worrying we’ve seen”, with transmission levels not recorded since the beginning of the pandemic.

Dr Susan Hopkins said the R value, or effective reproduction number, of [the B.1.1.529 variant](#) in Gauteng in South Africa, where it was first found, was

now 2. For an R of anything above 1, an epidemic will grow exponentially.

She voiced her concerns as other countries, including Japan and Germany, joined England and Scotland in banning flights from six countries in the region, while Israel said it had identified its first case with the variant.

Hopkins told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: "What we're seeing in South Africa is that they were at a very, very low point, with a very low amount of cases being detected a day, and in a shorter period than two weeks they have more than doubled their epidemiology picture.

01:42

Sajid Javid on latest Covid variant: 'Our scientists are deeply concerned' – video

"They are saying that their transmission rates, the R value that they have in Gauteng around where this was first found, is now 2, which is really quite high and we've not seen levels of transmission like that since right back at the beginning of the pandemic, because of all of the mitigations and steps we've taken. So that would cause a major problem if you had that high transmission with this type of virus in a population where it may evade the immune responses that are already there."

She stressed that no cases had been identified in the UK yet and that one of the 30 mutations of the B.1.1.529 variant was very similar to one of the alpha mutations, meaning it could be detected easily with a large amount of existing PCR tests, but had not shown up yet.

Hopkins said some of the mutations were likely to change the immune response, as had already been seen in South Africa, whose population, although not highly vaccinated, has high immunity from previous rounds of infection, but that only time would tell the extent. "We would like more details in laboratory studies and epidemiological studies. I know the South Africans have already started to give us that information, but it will take weeks rather than days to find the full information," she said.

The transport secretary, Grant Shapps, said the government was taking a “safety-first approach” to the new variant but it did not necessitate reintroducing enforcement of the use of face masks in public transport and shops.

He told Sky News: “We want the economy to be able to flourish, we want people to be able to go about their business, see their friends and family. So we’re trying to operate as permissive an atmosphere as possible but, of course, we’re keeping a very close eye on this all the time. So far, in all the numbers, we haven’t seen any reason to do anything else.”

South Africa, Namibia, Lesotho, Botswana, Eswatini and Zimbabwe were placed on England’s [travel red list](#) on Thursday and flights are banned from Friday.

South Africa’s foreign ministry said the decision to ban flights from South Africa “seems to have been rushed”

The World Health Organization (WHO) appeared to concur. “At this point, implementing travel measures is being cautioned against,” the WHO spokesperson Christian Lindmeier told a UN briefing in Geneva on Friday. “The WHO recommends that countries continue to apply a risk-based and scientific approach when implementing travel measures.”

Israel, which like England and Scotland announced a ban on Thursday, said it had identified the new variant in a traveller returning from Malawi. The prime minister, Naftali Bennett, said on Friday: “We are close to an emergency situation … we must act strongly and quickly.”

France suspended all flights from southern Africa for 48 hours.

Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission, tweeted on Friday that it would also propose stopping travel from the southern Africa region.

The [@EU_Commission](#) will propose, in close coordination with Member States, to activate the emergency brake to stop air travel from the southern African region due to the variant of concern B.1.1.529.

— Ursula von der Leyen (@vonderleyen) [November 26, 2021](#)

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/26/b11529-covid-variant-most-worrying-weve-seen-says-top-uk-medical-adviser>

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Covid live: world scrambles to combat Omicron variant; New York declares ‘disaster emergency’

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Coronavirus

WHO to assess new highly mutated Covid-19 variant as countries ramp up health checks



Countries around the world are responding to news of a new coronavirus variant carrying an unusually large number of mutations. Photograph: Michele Spatari/AFP/Getty Images

[Samantha Lock and agencies](#)

Thu 25 Nov 2021 23.46 EST

The [World Health Organization](#) will meet on Friday to assess a new variant detected in South Africa that is feared to be the worst Covid-19 variant yet identified.

The meeting will determine if the B.1.1.529 variant should be designated a variant of “interest” or of “concern”. The variant, which was identified on

Tuesday, initially attracted attention because it carries an “extremely high number” of mutations.

Some world leaders have hastily responded by [issuing new precautions](#) and travel restrictions, while markets around the world saw falls sparked by the uncertainty.

Indian health officials on Friday put states on alert, asking them to carry out “rigorous screening and testing” of travellers who had arrived from [South Africa](#), Botswana and Hong Kong, and to trace and test their contacts.

Health secretary Rajesh Bhushan urged all states to ensure that samples from Covid-positive travellers were swiftly sent to genome sequencing labs for testing.

Singapore, a major transit hub, said on Friday it would restrict arrivals from South [Africa](#) and countries nearby. All non-Singaporean or non-permanent residents with recent travel history to Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe will be denied entry or transit through Singapore, its health ministry said.

Italy announced a similar entry ban on Friday. “Our scientists are studying the new B.1.1.529 variant. In the meantime, we will adopt the greatest possible caution,” health minister Roberto Speranza said.

Japan, too, will clamp down on border controls for visitors from South Africa and five other African countries, the Jiji news service reported.

New Zealand is also closely monitoring global advice on the new variant, the ministry of health said. The deputy prime minister, Grant Robertson, said the new variant was “a real wake-up call for all of us, that this pandemic is still going” and reiterated the need to continue with caution.

Dr Maria Van Kerkhove, WHO’s technical lead on Covid-19, said in a [press briefing](#) on Thursday: “We don’t know very much about this [variant] yet. What we do know is that this variant has a large number of mutations. And the concern is that when you have so many mutations, it can have an impact on how the virus behaves.”

The infectious disease epidemiologist said that researchers would meet to “understand where these mutations are and what this potentially may mean” in terms of whether it is more transmissible or has potential to evade immunity.

A high number of mutations does not necessarily make a variant more transmissible. In August, similar concerns emerged about a variant in South Africa, known as C.1.2, but it was never listed as a variant of interest or concern. In Japan, some experts believe the country’s pronounced fall in cases was down to mutations that drove it towards “natural extinction”.

At the meeting the WHO may decide whether or not to give the [B.1.1.529 variant](#) a name from the Greek alphabet. If it does, it is likely to be named Nu, the next available letter.

England announced it was [temporarily banning flights](#) from South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Lesotho and Eswatini from midnight on Friday, and that returning travellers from those destinations would have to quarantine. Israel has followed suit, saying it will ban its citizens from travelling to southern Africa.

UK civil service sources said the variant, which is feared to be more transmissible and has the potential to evade immunity, posed “a potentially significant threat to the vaccine programme which we have to protect at all costs”.

Britain’s health secretary, Sajid Javid, confirmed the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) was investigating, saying “more data is needed but we’re taking precautions now” in a [tweet](#) late on Thursday.

UKHSA chief executive Jenny Harries said: “This is the most significant variant we have encountered to date and urgent research is under way to learn more about its transmissibility, severity and vaccine-susceptibility.”

Scotland confirmed late on Thursday that all arrivals from South Africa, Namibia, Lesotho, Botswana, Eswatini and Zimbabwe will be required to self-isolate and take two PCR tests from midday on Friday, while anyone

arriving after 4am on Saturday will need to stay at a managed quarantine hotel.

Australia's health minister, Greg Hunt, said it was investigating and would swiftly close its borders to travellers from the African nation if the WHO were to classify it as a major new variant. "If the medical advice is that we need to change, we won't hesitate," he told reporters on Friday morning.

South Africa's Foreign Ministry said Britain's decision to ban flights from the nation "seems to have been rushed" voicing concerns over the potential damage to tourism and business in both countries.

Foreign minister Naledi Pandor said South Africa would engage with British authorities to try to get them to reconsider their decision.

Markets took a hit on Friday, with world stocks heading for a 0.7% fall – their largest weekly drop in nearly two months, Reuters reported.

South Africa's rand fell 1%, Japan's Nikkei was down 2.4% and Australian shares fell 0.6% in early trade, as did US crude futures. S&P 500 futures fell 0.4%, while the Australian and New Zealand dollars dropped to three-month lows.

"The trigger was news of this Covid variant ...and the uncertainty as to what this means," said Ray Attrill, head of FX strategy at National Australia Bank in Sydney. "You shoot first and ask questions later when this sort of news erupts."

On Thursday, South Africa's health minister Dr Joe Phaahla said the new variant could be driving a recent "exponential rise" in cases in Gauteng, a north-eastern province home to the city of Johannesburg.

B.1.1.529 is thought to contain a total of 32 unusual mutations to the spike protein, the part of the virus that most vaccines use to prime the immune system against Covid.

Penny Moore, a virologist at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, whose lab is assessing the variant, said: "We're flying at warp

speed.” She said there were anecdotal reports of reinfections but that it was too early to draw any conclusions.

Professor Tului de Oliveira, director of South Africa’s centre for epidemic response and innovation, [said](#) the news was “really worrisome at the mutational level” and described the variant as being “of great concern”.

Variants of concern, such as Delta, show increased transmissibility, virulence or change in clinical disease, and a decreased effectiveness of public health and social measures. Variants of interest are those shown to cause community transmission in multiple clusters, and which have been detected in multiple countries, but have not yet necessarily proven to be more virulent or transmissible.

An infectious diseases specialist at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban, Dr Richard Lessells, [said](#) the number of mutations “might affect how well the virus is neutralised” and may give the virus enhanced transmissibility.

South Africa has confirmed about 100 cases as B.1.1.529 but the variant has also been found in Botswana and Hong Kong, with the Hong Kong case a traveller from South Africa.

The significance of the variant so far remains unknown, with the coming days and weeks key to determining its severity.

“It will take a few weeks for us to understand what impact this variant has,” Kerkhove of the WHO said, adding the variant is “under monitoring” and “something to watch”.

Ewan Birney, the deputy director general of the European Molecular Biology Laboratory and a member of Spi-M, which advises the UK government, said it posed a risk of worsening the pandemic.

He urged countries not to repeat the mistake of failing to act quickly. “What we’ve learned from the other situations like this – some have turned out OK and some haven’t – is that whilst we’re [investigating] you have to be reasonably paranoid,” he said.

The 32 mutations in the spike protein is about double the number associated with the Delta variant. Mutations of this kind can affect the virus's ability to infect cells and spread, but also make it harder for immune cells to attack the pathogen.

However, Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention chief John Nkengasong urged for caution. "There are so many variants out there but some of them are of no consequence on the trajectory of the epidemic," he told a news conference on Thursday.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/26/who-to-assess-new-highly-mutated-covid-19-variant-as-countries-ramp-up-health-checks>

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Coronavirus

What do we know about the new ‘worst ever’ Covid variant?



Up to 700 people arrive in the UK each day from South Africa via operators including BA and Virgin. Photograph: Mark Thomas/Alamy

[Andrew Gregory](#), [Tom Ambrose](#) and [Haroon Siddique](#)

Fri 26 Nov 2021 08.56 EST

What is the new Covid variant and why is it a concern?

Scientists have detected a new Covid-19 variant called B.1.1.529 and are working to understand its potential implications. About 100 confirmed cases have been identified in [South Africa](#), Hong Kong, Israel and Botswana.

B.1.1.529 has a very unusual constellation of mutations, which are worrying because they could help it evade the body’s immune response and make it

more transmissible, scientists have said. Any new variant that is able to evade vaccines or spread faster than the now-dominant Delta variant may pose a significant threat as the world emerges from the pandemic.

Dr Susan Hopkins, the chief medical adviser to the UK Health Security Agency, said the R value, or effective reproduction number, of the B.1.1.529 variant in the South African province of Gauteng, where it was first found, [was now 2](#) – a level of transmission not recorded since the beginning of the pandemic, before restrictions began to be imposed. For an R of anything above 1, [an epidemic will grow exponentially](#).

01:42

Sajid Javid on latest Covid variant: 'Our scientists are deeply concerned' – video

Where has the new variant been found?

Early signs from diagnostic laboratories suggest the variant has rapidly increased in Gauteng and may already be present in South Africa's other eight provinces.

In a regular daily update on confirmed cases nationally, the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) reported 2,465 new Covid-19 infections, slightly less than double the previous day's infections. The NICD did not attribute the latest resurgence to the new variant, although some leading local scientists suspect it is the cause.

South Africa has confirmed about 100 specimens as B.1.1.529 but the variant has also been found in Botswana and Hong Kong. As many as 90% of new cases in Gauteng could be B.1.1.529, scientists believe.

Hong Kong recorded two infections in people who served a period of quarantine at the Regal airport hotel. A traveller from South Africa was found to have infected the person in the room next to him. The hope will be that the quarantine period will have stopped it spreading further. Israel said it had detected its first case of the variant, in a person who had returned from Malawi.

How does B.1.1.529 compare with other variants?

Senior scientists on Thursday evening described B.1.1.529 as the worst variant they had seen since the start of the pandemic. It has 32 mutations in the spike protein, the part of the virus that most vaccines use to prime the immune system against Covid. That is about double the number associated with the Delta variant. Mutations in the spike protein can affect the virus's ability to infect cells and spread, but also make it harder for immune cells to attack the pathogen.

The Delta variant was first detected in India in late 2020 but has spread around the world, causing an increase in case rates and deaths. Other coronavirus variants include Alpha (which originated in Kent in the UK), Beta (formerly known as the South African variant) and Gamma (originally found in Brazil). It has been suggested, after a drop in cases in Japan, that variants can "mutate themselves out of existence".

What new travel restrictions are being imposed?

South Africa will be placed under England's "[red list](#)" travel restrictions from midday on Friday – affecting between 500 and 700 people who typically travel to the UK from South Africa each day through airlines including British Airways and Virgin.

The ban will also cover flights from Namibia, Lesotho, Botswana, Eswatini and Zimbabwe. Scotland confirmed all arrivals from the countries must self-isolate and take two PCR tests from midday on Friday, while anyone arriving after 4am on Saturday will need to stay at a managed quarantine hotel.

Recent arrivals from southern Africa will also be tracked down and offered tests in an effort to avoid the introduction of the variant.

Israel also announced it would ban its citizens from travelling to southern Africa – covering the same six countries as well as Mozambique – and bar the entry of foreign travellers from the region.

Germany, Japan, France, Bahrain and the Czech Republic are among other countries that have suspended flights. The European Commission plans to stop flights from the region.

England's travel red list had remained empty since the final seven countries were removed on 1 November. South Africa had been removed on 11 October, meaning vaccinated travellers were able to visit once again without having to quarantine in a hotel on their return.

What does the new variant mean for the UK and for Christmas?

It is too early to tell. Scientists in the UK are working around the clock to understand more about the variant. Because it has recently emerged, scientists do not yet have evidence of its transmissibility or ability to evade vaccines. With a month to go until Christmas, there will be concerns that the variant, if it is allowed to spread, could trigger the need for further restrictions. The health secretary, Sajid Javid, said there were "very live discussions" about adding further countries to the red list.

It could be a few weeks before scientists have complete information about the variant and how serious a threat it may pose to the world.

Is there anything I can do to protect myself?

Yes. The advice remains to get vaccinated if you have not already done so. Britons aged 40 and above who received their second jab at least six months ago are eligible to have their booster now.

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2021.11.26 - Spotlight

- 'Wake up' Why markets are warning central banks to get a grip on inflation
- Analysis How world's major economies are dealing with spectre of inflation
- You be the judge Should my husband spend more time with our baby?
- Music stars on pop's strange 2021 'You can't cancel me, I've got bills to pay!'

Inflation

‘Wake up’: markets warn central banks to get a grip on inflation



A 46% rise in the price of petrol has contributed to inflation in the US jumping to 6.2% in October. Photograph: Justin Lane/EPA



Martin Farrer

Fri 26 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

Financial markets fear the world's leading central banks are risking "economic disaster" by misjudging the threat of rising inflation and not turning off the stimulus taps that have flooded the global economy with money.

From the Federal Reserve to the [European Central Bank](#), policymakers are grappling with a surge in prices not seen for decades while trying to keep wobbly economies on course to recovery from the ravages of the coronavirus pandemic.

While central banks stick largely to the mantra that inflation is "transitory" and price pressures on everything from [timber to turkeys](#) will ease in the coming months, economists, business leaders and investors are ringing alarm bells.

They fear that without swift action, such as a rise in interest rates, runaway inflation – which has not been seen in developed economies since the early 1980s – will become so embedded by next year that a policy switch will be too late to have any effect. At the very least, they see this as critical moment

to end the [massive money-printing schemes](#) that were ramped up to counter a pandemic recession.

Julian Jessop, an independent economist who has worked at the UK Treasury and City firms, said most central banks were “well behind the curve” and that rising costs throughout the supply chain, such as in shipping, would continue to put upward pressure on prices well into next year.

“Central banks need to respond to changing economic conditions,” he said. “The recession that justified the additional quantitative easing and keeping interest rates at emergency lows is over.”

Given that interest rates were at record lows, modest increases “would not be an economic disaster, but should help to prevent one”, Jessop added.

“Interest rates and borrowing costs are still likely to remain near historical lows – especially real rates, after allowing for inflation. In reality, central banks would simply be taking the foot off the accelerator, rather than slamming on the brakes.”

Poland, where inflation hit 6.8% in October, its highest for 20 years, has decided to go on the attack immediately. The Polish prime minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, said on Thursday that the government would cut tax on fuels and energy from December, and would offer bonuses to the hardest hit households.

Describing the move as an “anti-inflation shield”, he said it would cost the government about 10bn zlotys (£1.8bn) and that additional funds would come from spending cuts.

Morawiecki blamed inflation, which hit 6.8% in October, its highest since 2001, on greater energy costs, saying they stem from Russia’s gas policy, the European Union’s climate policy and CO2 emission certificate prices, as well as on bonuses that were paid out to help businesses survive the Covid-19 pandemic.

Prices have risen on foods, fuels and energy. “We are offering a large reduction of tax, in order to cushion the effects of the inflation,” Morawiecki

said, adding that inflation may still rise in the winter months of December to March.

Inflation has been stalking the global economy for months but has burst into the open in recent weeks. The 6.2% jump in US inflation in the year to October stunned markets and highlighted huge increases in the cost of some consumer basics, such as a 46% rise in petrol prices and 11% for meat, fish and eggs. In the UK, inflation is running hot at 4.2%, pumped up by record natural gas prices.

With pandemic-induced supply constraints set to continue for months and a wave of pent-up Covid consumer cash chasing a limited flow of goods, claims by the chair of the [Federal Reserve](#), Jerome Powell, that inflation is transitory look increasingly hollow.

Chris Watling, the chief executive and founder of the advisory firm Longview [Economics](#), agrees that central banks risk being caught out.

After the financial crisis of 2008, they pursued loose monetary policy and tight fiscal policy in the form of quantitative easing and spending cuts. Now they have “loose monetary and loose fiscal”, with too much money chasing too few goods.

“They will wake up one day in catch-up phase,” he said. “Perhaps late next year, or 2023, and then they’ll end up tightening quite quickly when prices are rising. And if you tighten into that situation, a bubble, it will burst. So it’s a real challenge for them.”

Mohamed El-Erian, global economist at insurance group Allianz, said that if the Fed were to leave it too late to increase rates, the US – and perhaps the world – could be pushed into recession. “Such a tightening would potentially coincide with three other contractionary forces in the US: a tightening of market financial conditions, the absence of any additional fiscal stimulus, and the erosion of household savings.”

It is a precarious tightrope for policymakers. Inflation can swiftly undermine business and consumer confidence, but going too hard could jeopardise

recovery and could also seriously spook booming property markets in countries such as the US, UK and Australia.

El-Erian said policymakers should also consider broader changes to boost productivity, and improvements to the oversight of financial stability risk, particularly in the non-bank sector.

Some central banks are already preparing to jump off the tightrope, most notably the Bank of England, which came [close to raising interest rates](#) earlier this month. The ominous US inflation number means policymakers seem certain to take the plunge and increase rates by 0.25 percentage points to 0.35% when they meet again in the first week of December.

Rising prices have exposed central bankers' "[King Canute" theory of inflation](#), the former governor of the [Bank](#) Mervyn King said this week in a strong attack on how policymakers around the world have reacted to the Covid-19 crisis.

New Zealand does not often grab markets' attention, but this week the country's Reserve Bank announced the [second rate rise in as many months](#) in an effort to cool inflation that hit 4.9% last month. Across the Tasman Sea, the Reserve Bank of Australia reiterated its belief that rates would not go up from their record low of 0.1% until 2023 at the earliest, but the markets are betting on them being 1% this time next year. Lenders are voting with their feet though, with the largest bank, the Commonwealth, on Friday hiking fixed rates for the third time in six weeks.

South Korea's central bank followed New Zealand's example, announcing a rise to 1% – its second increase of the year – amid concern over higher living costs. The country's inflation rate reached 3.2% in October, a near-10-year high.

Alex Joiner, the chief economist at IFM Investors in Melbourne, said central banks were trying to wait it out and "hope against hope" that pressures from the pandemic would continue to ease, with supply issues resolving themselves.

“They are trying to temper market expectations but the problem is that markets are not believing them,” he said. “Market pricing is aggressive, with investors showing that they think rates will go up.”

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The cautiously optimistic Fed view prevails for now, and both Joiner and Watling point to signs of easing in supply chains. The benchmark for world shipping costs, known as the Baltic index, has been falling, and China is beginning to overcome the power shortages that hurt its giant manufacturing sector in September.

However, there is also the possibility that everyone has underestimated the extent of structural changes in the global economy that started in recent years and have been accelerated by Covid. These could mean there is never a return to the Goldilocks era when inflation and growth were both “just right”.

John Studzinski, the managing director and vice-chair of Pimco, the world’s biggest bond trader, told a recent Bloomberg forum that higher inflation could persist for three to five years. Supply chains need to be re-established as the world emerges from the pandemic crisis, he said, and with some deglobalisation of trade, inflation “could be very volatile”.

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Global economy

How world's major economies are dealing with spectre of inflation



The European Central Bank president, Christine Lagarde, in Brussels.
Photograph: François Lenoir/Reuters

[Dominic Rushe](#), [Phillip Inman](#), [Jennifer Rankin](#), [Kim Willsher](#), [Peter Hannam](#), [Justin McCurry](#) and [Martin Farrer](#)

Fri 26 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

The world's major central banks are scratching their heads over how to deal with the rising cost of living. Raising interest rates now could deal a blow to the post-pandemic recovery. Wait too long, and inflation may spiral out of control.

United States

If there is one word that keeps the Federal Reserve's chair, Jerome Powell, awake at night, it is "transitory".

By many measures the [US economy](#) has roared back from the pandemic recession. Unemployment fell to 4.6% in October, down from the dizzying high of 14.8% at the peak of the pandemic. The jobs market is so hot that record numbers of people are quitting to find new posts and wages are rising. Stock markets keep hitting record highs. People are spending again.

And yet the spectre of inflation hangs over it all. Rising energy costs, increased consumption and supply shortages have sent US inflation surging to an annual rate of 6.2%, a level not seen for more than 30 years. Powell and the Biden administration have repeatedly said these rises are transitory and will recede as the pandemic's impact on the economy wanes. Prices, however, have continued to rise.

Fear, stoked by political expediency on the part of Republicans and, no doubt, by the astronomic inflation in media coverage of inflation, has US consumers worried. US consumer confidence plunged to a [10-year low](#) in November.

The Fed's main tool for damping inflation is raising interest rates. It is a blunt instrument and one Powell has been wary of using. The dilemma is clear: raising rates too quickly could stall a confusing recovery and prove counterproductive if, indeed, the price rises are transitory. But failing to dampen inflation could in the worst scenario lead to runaway price hikes, more rate rises and recession.

United Kingdom

The Bank of England is expected to become the first major central bank to raise interest rates [when officials meet next month](#).

Many City analysts believe that the jump in inflation to 4.2% in October – the highest level for a decade – will force policymakers to increase the base rate from 0.1% to 0.25% ahead of another rise in February to 0.5%.

As one of the more open economies in the world, with more than one-third of its GDP dependent on trade, Britain has suffered more than most from the supply chain crunch and energy price increases.

Meanwhile, Brexit has reduced access to skilled workers who might have once filled a [record level of vacancies](#).

Now policymakers fear workers, emboldened by a lack of people to fill vacancies, will demand higher wages to compensate for higher living costs. This could trigger a damaging wage/price spiral lasting several years.

Critics of the central bank ask what higher borrowing costs will do to calm energy prices determined by global markets. There is also little evidence that labour shortages can be resolved by making access to credit more expensive, they say.

Instead, a rise in interest rates could further erode the living standards of those who depend on credit to survive.

[Inflation by country](#)

European Union

As traders bet on an interest rate hike from the Bank of England and US Federal Reserve, the [European Central Bank](#) (ECB) has been sending a clear message: don't count on the same move from Frankfurt.

Inflation in the eurozone is now 4.1%, a 13-year high, although price rises vary widely across the zone.

The ECB sets interest rates for all 19 members of the euro currency union. Its head, Christine Lagarde, warned on Friday that pressing the button too early could damage recovery from the pandemic.

"At a time when purchasing power is already being squeezed by higher energy and fuel bills," she said, "an undue tightening would represent an unwarranted headwind for the recovery."

Oliver Rakau, the chief German economist at Oxford [Economics](#), agrees with the ECB that eurozone inflation is transitory. His team forecasts inflation will slow to 2% in 2022, after averaging 2.4% in the current year.

He recommends easing off on the [quantitative easing](#) plan (the asset purchasing programme) and its pandemic sibling before hiking the cost of borrowing money.

“Suddenly talking about interest rate hikes before you’ve even normalised your QE purchases, I don’t think makes a lot of sense,” he said.

[Shortages table by country](#)

France

While French interest rates are set by the ECB in Strasbourg, the speed of inflation is unique to each eurozone country, and governments have some discretion over how they manage rising prices.

October’s [annual inflation rate was 2.6%](#), the highest since 2008, pushed up by a 20% surge in energy prices.

The prime minister, Jean Castex, responded by announcing an “inflation compensation” payment of €100 (£84), which will be given to everyone earning less than €2,000 a month net, an estimated 38 million people.

Ministers have also intervened on energy prices. Gas tariffs are frozen until next April and electricity will be capped at a 4% increase.

The Bank of France’s most recent prediction is that inflation is “temporary in nature but could last for a few more quarters”. Its governor, François Villeroy de Galhau, said he saw no reason for the ECB to increase its interest rates next year.

Australia

The Reserve Bank of Australia, the country’s central bank, seems to be relying on “Australian exceptionalism” to avoid lifting its official cash rate

from the record low 0.1% before 2024.

As Gareth Aird, the head of Australian economics at the country's largest bank, the Commonwealth, said in a recent briefing note, "the RBA has sounded as dovish as is credibly possible on the inflation outlook at every given chance".

As elsewhere, inflation is on the march. Australia's [core consumer prices in the September](#) quarter jumped 0.7 percentage points to 2.1%. It was the first time in six years the inflation measure had risen into the 2%-3% range targeted since the 1990s.

The central bank, wary of past criticism, has stressed it wants to see wages go up, ideally faster than inflation. That's why it is "prepared to be patient" with rising prices before it will even "consider an increase in interest rates next year", the RBA governor, Philip Lowe, said this week.

Japan

Japan is a notable exception to the inflation surge. As the pioneer of ultra-easy monetary policy – the interest rate has been at minus 0.1% since 2016 – the world's third-biggest economy is struggling to end decades of deflation and stagnation and looks unlikely to reach its inflation target of 2% any time soon.

Although government data showed a slight year-on-year increase in core consumer prices for October, driven mainly by higher fuel prices, economists warned that rises in underlying inflation were likely to be modest.

"Looking through artificial distortions and one-off hits, we still expect underlying inflation to accelerate to peak just shy of +1.0% early next year before falling back," said Tom Learmouth, a Japan economist at Capital Economics.

In a recent Reuters poll, economists said they expected 13 of 25 central banks to raise interest rates at least once before the end of next year. The Bank of Japan was not among them. "The BoJ is living in a totally different

world as an outlier from the global trend,” Masamichi Adachi, the chief economist at UBS Securities, said recently.

Japan’s emergence as the sole Keynesian in the room was underlined when the country’s [new prime minister](#), Fumio Kishida, unveiled a record stimulus package worth about ¥56tn (\$490bn) on 19 November. The spending package includes cash handouts for people aged 18 and under and investment in pandemic readiness.

China

Some inflation drivers and global supply chain problems can be traced directly to [China](#). It is the world’s biggest exporter and accounts for almost 30% of the world’s manufacturing: disruptions in China in the form of power, labour and shipping shortages have had knock-on effects around the world.

The country’s annual inflation rate rose to 1.5% in October, up from 0.7% in September, the highest for 13 months. This was driven by food and fuel costs. More alarmingly, factory gate prices soared 13.5%, the fastest rate for 26 years, mainly because of energy costs.

But the People’s Bank of China has more pressing problems to deal with – including a [wobbling property sector](#). The main interest rate has been 3.85% since early 2020 and is highly unlikely to go up given the harmful impact that could have on the housing market.

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You be the judge: should my husband spend more time with our baby?



Illustration: Joren Joshua/The Guardian

Interviews by [Georgina Lawton](#)

@georginalawton

Fri 26 Nov 2021 03.00 EST

The prosecution: Jenny

Since our baby was born, Tom has not changed his routine, and is out most nights playing sport

Tom and I have a nine-month-old baby called Isaac. Since Isaac was born, my life has changed drastically, but Tom's has not. Most nights after work he either plays football or golf, or goes to a restaurant with his friends. If I get to see him every other night, it's a good week. Recently Isaac vomited everywhere and I called Tom for help. He said: "I've got four holes left at golf. I'll be back in an hour." I had cleaned it all up by the time he got back.

Tom teaches sports and prioritises it as part of his wellbeing. It is the one thing he doesn't want to give up – but he's quite self-centred for someone who's meant to be a team player. I met him three years ago on Tinder and he moved in within three months. Then we got married and had a baby.

I'm now back at work, as I don't get much maternity leave. After the office I want to spend as much time with Isaac as possible: talking to him, reading him stories, preparing dinner, and making silly voices while I cook. Tom does take Isaac swimming, but sometimes when he's in charge of the baby he just puts him in front of the TV, whereas I'm more interactive.

Most nights after work Tom either plays football or golf

The pandemic was tough as we don't have any family around to help with childcare. Lockdown rules were quite relaxed where we live, so Tom kept to his routine while I stayed at home. I'd be in our apartment with Isaac while Tom was gone from 7am to 8pm, at work and playing sports. I also suffer from postpartum anxiety and ADHD.

My life was really active before we had the baby. It was like being at university – parties and drinking all the time. Now my friends have changed: I have more of a mums' network, because I need people who get what I'm going through.

But I am a whole person and I miss being able to get my nails done and going to dinner when I want. I'm not saying Tom should give up all his hobbies, but if he would just be at home a bit more it would help. I tell him: it's not babysitting, it's parenting – Isaac is your baby too. I want Tom to work and play hard, then come home and enjoy spending time with our family.

The defence: Tom

I need my exercise for the endorphins. It's natural for Jenny to do more as she is breastfeeding

I'll admit that Jenny only gets one or two nights a month to get her nails or hair done, whereas I get a few nights of leisure time every week. I'm a sports teacher, and I've always been active. I need to play football and tennis and go swimming once a week, and to the gym twice a week and play golf at the weekends. It seems like a lot but if I give up even one of my sports, I could become lazy. Once that happens, it impacts your work, relationship and family. Exercise releases endorphins that keep me going day to day.

Jenny definitely takes the lead in parenting. We have a live-in nanny, who has taken the pressure off us both, but Jenny is hands-on and does a tremendous job. Isaac is nine months old and is exclusively breastfed, so it's natural for Jenny to do more. I take Isaac swimming a lot, which I love. Jenny plays with Isaac more in the evenings, whereas I will play with him for a bit after work and then I'll get tired.

Sign up to our Inside Saturday newsletter for an exclusive behind the scenes look at the making of the magazine's biggest features, as well as a curated list of our weekly highlights.

In our apartment Isaac has his little toys in a soft area, and when I mind him sometimes I put him there with the TV on in the background, which Jenny doesn't like. But I'll turn the volume down low, or just let Isaac watch two or three episodes of Bluey, as each one is only seven minutes long.

We do have different parenting styles. Jenny wants to be close to Isaac all the time, whereas I am less hands-on because I want him to explore, learn

things for himself and be independent. The time that Jenny phoned me about Isaac being sick, I was already out and it was quite a normal thing – babies vomit a lot. If it had been more serious, I would've dropped everything. Other times when he has been sick, we have handled it together.

Jenny is a hands-on Mum and does a tremendous job

When Jenny and I first met, we had time to go on date nights and travel. Getting married and having a baby has changed that. I think Jenny could try and relax a bit with Isaac, and both of us could make more time for each other. I will try and do my sports early in the morning or late in the evening when Isaac is sleeping so it doesn't impact the time I spend with them, but I can't give up my exercise routine.

The jury of Guardian readers

Should Tom spend more time with his wife and baby son?

Tom needs to make compromises as he's taking his family for granted. They could join a gym with crèche facilities to work out together. Tom could also swap his golf for hiking with Jenny and Isaac. Equally Jenny needs to learn to stop micromanaging Tom's parenting.

Emma, 31

Tom's reasons for being absent aren't convincing. He wants to cling on to his younger self and to their former carefree life. Jenny wants Tom to enjoy these years with Isaac because he'll only get these once. I find for the prosecution.

Stewart, 55

Jenny works and suffers with anxiety and ADHD. Tom is a selfish husband and parent. He has made no adjustments to help with the care and wellbeing of his wife and child. He should be ashamed.

Christine, 64

Tom lives his best life in an unequal partnership, but to say "partnership" is to give him too much credit. Choosing golf over "the baby is sick and I need

you” is contempt defined. I side with Jenny.

Patrick, 36

Parenting is an equal commitment and Jenny is taking on more of this responsibility. Jenny and Tom should sit down and plan their week, ensuring that both feel their needs are being met. Both seem very caring parents; the balance just needs readdressing.

Mandy, 48

You be the judge

So now you can be the judge, click on the poll below to tell us: should Tom help out at home more? We'll share the results on next week's You be the judge.

Last week's result

Last week, we asked if Emma should stop reusing teabags, because it creates mess for her boyfriend, Simon.

44% of you said no – Emma is innocent

56% of you said yes – Emma is guilty

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‘You can’t cancel me, I’ve got bills to pay!’: music stars on pop’s strange 2021



(From left) Eris Drew; Laura Mvula; Sigrid; BackRoad Gee; Snail Mail; Serge Pizzorno. Illustration: Guardian Design



As told to [Alexis Petridis](#)

Fri 26 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

January

How did you feel coming into 2021, after the unprecedented bleakness of 2020?

Lindsey Jordan, AKA Snail Mail I finally finished a record – it had been three years. It's funny, as a teenage star, that I came back as an adult. We haven't played a show in two years, and that time means a lot to me, because I'm pretty young. I feel like I'm swimming upstream against imposter issues; I forget what it feels like to play a show.

Sigrid Definitely. I was doing Reading festival this summer and I was thinking: "Do I know how to artist?" And also the same feeling of being scared of getting too excited about something.

Eris Drew For me, it was pretty bleak. I was working on an album and I was still in the middle of engineering it. But I hadn't seen friends, I'd been distant from family, for a long time. I felt pretty bad, and it wasn't just about lockdown. It was also the sense that there were actually some opportunities

really lost during 2020: we had this tremendous explosive social movement in the States, and then you feel the sense of people moving on and it felt bad.

Laura Mvula I still feel like I'm adjusting to the new landscape. Everything is constantly changing; plans that appear to be concrete can vanish. I've had so many gigs cancelled.

Serge Pizzorno, Kasabian We had 17 shows booked in October, so I had a real focus. But it's wild doing them, because we're in a bubble: we're playing to 2,000, 3,000 people, but after the gig, we go straight to the hotel, where we're not allowed to see anyone except room service. You're not allowed to see your kids or your wife, even, because you don't want to catch Covid on tour. You get the connection of everyone at the shows going absolutely wild, all this energy thrown at you, then you're just sat in a bubble afterwards, five of you. It's a mad thing.

February

Britain leaves the EU and with it comes a lot of red tape for touring artists. Has touring become harder? Does this government care enough about music?

Mvula It hasn't felt like touring or the arts is a priority for our government, especially with all the cuts to organisations, school supplies, arts funding, which I rely heavily upon. It's scary: how do I continue to grow my touring business with these restrictions?

Pizzorno I went to see a band in Leicester, Beak. They were talking about playing a show in Brussels and being held at the border for 14 hours. If you've got a gig in Paris and a gig in Rome, you're not going to be able to make it; it's going to take two or three days. You'll get to a point financially where you won't be able to do it, and that's the worst, not being able to play live. It needs sorting out, quick.



Enter the metaverse ... Ariana Grande. Photograph: Epic Games

March

Kings of Leon become the first band to hop on the NFT craze. Later in the year, **Ariana Grande** embraced the metaverse with her avatar performance on Fortnite. Are these innovations feasible ways to make money, or are they baffling and distracting?

BackRoad Gee I don't really understand it, man. I get a little bit of it. I would really like to do some more research on the metaverse.

Drew I don't either. Part of me is like "good for you for figuring out a way to make some money", but it seems like something that's going to be so inaccessible to your average artist.

Sigrid If you were to change everything to be digital, there's a lot of people in the chain of creating shows who would get lost. It's really important to protect the live industry and you can't replace that, not properly.

April

Artists including Paul McCartney and Kate Bush [call for a change in streaming rules](#), **to improve royalty rates.** Are musicians still struggling to make ends meet? What needs to change?

Pizzorno Major labels are making more money than they ever have. The streaming royalty rates need to change now, it's completely unfair. Why's the person that made the music getting paid last and paid the least?

Jordan It's annoying to see yourself have a successful career but see exactly where the money is missing. It's like: wait, someone doing this exact thing in the 90s would have been a millionaire.

Mvula I can hear my mum saying: "Don't tell people your business now", but let's be real. My girl Lindsey is right: if we were in the 90s now, I'd be balling! A good starting point would be the parliamentary vote on 3 December to introduce equitable renumeration for artists. If this is passed, it would mean income for all musicians who perform on a track, including session musicians, and it would apply from the first stream. So let's get this moving.

BackRoad Gee For me it's kind of different, because I'm still independent, so streaming actually works if you're pulling in some good numbers. Obviously, I understand why it would be frustrating for some people when you're signed, because that's one part of the money that you're not going to be collecting.

May

Tion Wayne and Russ Millions [score the first UK drill No 1](#) with the remix of Body. Has drill finally broken through?

BackRoad Gee Yes and no. It's only really Russ and Tion that's done it on that level. But they have broken the doors open for someone to come up and do that as well. So, right now, I feel if there is any chance of it happening, they played a big part in that. We appreciate them for that, 100%.

June

Winston Marshall leaves Mumford & Sons after championing a far-right writer and being called out for it online. Is “cancel culture” something you all worry about?

Mvula As a young, Black female artist I've always lived in fear of being cancelled, because I don't want to get stereotyped as the “angry mad Black woman”. That's a real thing in this industry. I noticed people over time saying things like: “Oh, you're really well media-trained” and I realised what they meant by that was I was good at filtering quite a lot of what I say; I would find ways to say it that wouldn't cause offence, or would be somehow less impactful. I guess because I'm getting older, I've experienced true liberation through saying what I really mean, even if it risks being unaccepted. I come from a very outspoken tradition – in my family, within church – so it's hard to dilute that because I don't want to be inauthentic.

I've experienced true liberation through saying what I really mean, even if it risks being unaccepted

Laura Mvula

Drew This is a really complex issue. The idea that people need to be a little bit more considered before they spew their mouth, I like that. I like people being held accountable for their racism, their sexism, their ignorance. But I do think cancel culture chills speech sometimes; I don't want to pretend that it's all rose-tinted glasses. Personally, I'm kind of more worried when I speak out against the dance music industry. I'm pretty critical of a lot of dance music today, although I love the scene; I'm like a hard-loving mother!

BackRoad Gee I'm really in my own world, man. I'm not really fazed by what anyone can say to me. You can't cancel me, man; I've got bills to pay! You know what I'm saying? I just speak my mind and I make sure that it's not a disrespectful thing.

Jordan The thing that freaks me out is when people use [cancel culture] as a weapon against each other. It trivialises it so that, the more it happens, the more people make fun of it, it takes away from the good that it can do: protecting each other from people who are dangerous, and shitheads and

fascists. It can be an extremely important tool. The issue I think, is more people making it not matter.



Olivia Rodrigo.

Olivia Rodrigo is accused of plagiarism by Courtney Love and Pom Pom Squad and later settles with Paramore over a similarity between her song Good 4 U and their Misery Business. Is it harder than ever to come up with a truly original melody?

Sigrid I'm in pop [writing] sessions all the time and I've kind of been known for being the one calling out whenever we do copy. I feel like it happens often, when everyone's like: "Oh shit, no no no, this is like ..."

Mvula I mostly plagiarise myself. "Oh! I already wrote that song!"

Pizzorno I think a lot of these cases seem like stretches, like lawyers going: "We might be able to do something with this" and I think it's unfair. Sometimes you can hear that people have sat in the studio listening to music and thinking: "We need to make a song like this – similar rhythm, similar tempo." That's cool, surely? It's a vibe; you can't own a vibe, can you?

Drew Even though I love dance music, I actually studied early rock'n'roll and they're all taking each other's riffs, messing with them a little bit,

speeding them up or whatever. Musicians have always reacted to each other, and that's kind of part of it. Oftentimes what we hear about are kind of extreme cases and, as a sampling artist, I don't want to be an extreme case – I would never take someone else's song and just put a bass line on it. I just try to be really creative and put things in different contexts; I write a ton of original music that I put in these collages. It's interesting, though, how someone would feel whose work I've taken a small sample from. That's not up to me. I just try to be conscientious.

October



Environmentally sound ... Coldplay. Photograph: James Marcus Haney

[**Coldplay unveil their plans for environmentally sound touring. How are you tackling this issue yourself?**](#)

Jordan I don't know how I'm tackling it other than, you know, trying to drink out of reusable water bottles.

Pizzorno I suppose next year, we'll probably play fewer shows, travel less. I was thinking if you played in a full moon and just used huge mirrors so that you didn't have to use lights ... but that might have been the mushrooms talking.

Drew I've talked about doing a CO2 offset at the end of the year, because, goddamn, I've used a lot of jet fuel and I'm very much a Mother Earth kind of goddess DJ, and it just seems profoundly inconsistent to me. As an artist, I do think I have responsibility. The only way the world's going to get better is if every single person feels they have responsibility.

Sigrid In Norway, we have a festival called Øya and with a lot of other Norwegian artists we signed this green rider [pledge]. We're cutting plastic backstage, doing more organic and vegetarian food, if there's transport we ask for it be environmentally friendly, try to do all the good stuff. I try to show up at climate events; I did play for some people in Norway cleaning beaches, which was really nice. I also just try to encourage people to use their right to vote.

November

Ten people are killed at Travis Scott's Astroworld festival. How much is crowd safety the responsibility of the artist and did the incident make you think any differently about performing live?

02:41

How the Travis Scott Astroworld festival tragedy unfolded – video report

Sigrid When that news came through, it was just horrendous. Of course I feel a responsibility when I walk onstage. When people buy a ticket to my show, I want them to know they're in a safe space, you shouldn't be worried about something happening. When we play big shows, we always take our own security and part of their job is to make sure that crowd safety is paramount. They've got a line on me onstage so that if anything goes down we can always cut the gig.

Drew It's a tremendous amount of delegated responsibility any time you're playing a show, even if it's a small club show. But I can't be in front making sure trans people like me are getting treated well; that all the people that have various vulnerabilities coming to my events are safe. I don't think that any artist is going to be completely responsible for anything that happens at their event, that's not realistic, but for years now I have tried to make the

spaces I play generally safer; we have a written safety protocol for our own parties. I have thought about my shows differently after Astroworld – every time I’m onstage now, I think: “Am I actually assessing this situation properly?” I’ve played several big events, thousands of people in front of me, and I’m like: “How would I necessarily know if this was getting rough for people at the front, because it looks really way too intense already?” The lights are dizzying, the whole experience is meant to be disorienting, so it’s hard to make that judgment.

Jordan I honestly don’t know enough about the situation at Astroworld, but I have thought, for my fan base specifically, there’s a lot of young gay girls and they’re usually mixed in with some frenetic scary old dudes that are like “I want to drink your blood” on Twitter. I’m the one bringing them all together in a room. I definitely don’t feel personally all that safe – ever! I think anywhere there’s fanaticism, usually there’s people doing unhinged stuff. I don’t know how you protect yourself and others.



FreeBritney supporters. Photograph: Patrick T Fallon/AFP/Getty Images

Britney Spears's conservatorship finally ends. How have you felt following what has arguably been the biggest pop music story of the year?

Sigrid First of all, it's about time. I'm happy to see her as a free woman. If there's one thing I hope the media has learned from it, it's how to treat people with respect.

Jordan A lot of kids in the entertainment industry have parents that steal from them and that control what they're doing. A kid can never really consent if they're going to become a really big star or not; you ask any kid if they want to be on the Disney Channel, they're going to say: "Yeah, of course!" The adults in charge, that's always been an issue, it doesn't seem like anything particularly new. It's just that we all know and love Britney so I guess this is a more personal example of what we all know to be going on.

Mvula I think the scary thing for me is the mental health issue: that it can not be known that they're really fucking struggling, especially when they're so adept at being the show-woman, being so skilled at playing a role. Then it takes the worst to happen for people to go: "Oh, somebody should help them." It's made me think a lot about how we can monitor one another more closely.

Pizzorno I think there's definitely more awareness than there was, but it still does feel more like: "When's the next album out?" and: "Oh, you'll be OK." There's awareness for sure, but there's plenty of room for it to get better, you know?

Finally, what's your favourite album or albums of the year and what are your hopes for 2022?

Pizzorno I'm going to chose Nine by Sault and the Tyler, the Creator album, Call Me If You Get Lost. And Amyl and the Sniffers, if I can sneak one more in there, please. And for next year, I want to make music for massive gatherings. I want to see everyone back in fields having a great time. That's it.

Jordan I'm going to say To Hell With It by PinkPantheress. And hopes ... I've got to get my fucking vocal cords operated on, I have to spend a month in silence, so I'm excited to see if my stoic self picks up more information. I'm excited to become extremely wise! And hopefully, I can just get back out on the road.

Sigrid My favourite record was Flyte, This Is Really Going to Hurt – melodies, production, everything really. It's quite retro but fresh at the same time, quite Beatle-esque. And next year, I'm hoping to let myself get carried away again, feel hopeful and positive about the future, have that "let's fucking go!" mentality.

Drew I want to mention two EPs, because in dance music it's the EP that often shows an innovative new talent. One is a UK artist, Ehua, the EP's called Aquamarine. If you love breaks and club music, this person has made something truly mystical that can slice you open and heal you at the same time. Also, Bored Lord, from LA, made an incredible EP, The Last Illusion. And Matthew Herbert's album is a true return to form. And next year I would like to see more people being able to engage in the subjective experience of loving music together. It's a beautiful experience when it's right, and it hurts me to know people have been shut off from it for so long.

Mvula The soundtrack for The Harder They Fall, a Black western on Netflix. Fatoumata Diawara's on it, Lauryn Hill, Jay Z, Kid Cudi, the Roots play a lot of the rhythm section, quite a few African artists – I'm like: "How did I not know about this person?" – are on it and I'm chuffed to be on it, too. Theo Croker's BLK2life/A Future Past: he really is pushing the boundaries, it's really beautiful, fragile playing, and he was singing on this record, I've never heard his voice before and it's beautiful. And hopes? I just need to work! Can I work my album please? Can I do a show or two? And I want to travel. I feel like I'm going a bit crazy with my need to travel.

BackRoad Gee There's my own album, Reporting Live (From the Back of the Roads) and I've been listening a lot of Wizkid's Made in Lagos, it's been on replay. And, boy, 2022: we'll come in greatness, do a lot of work. We're here, foot on the neck, you know?

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2021/nov/26/you-cant-cancel-me-i've-got-bills-to-pay-music-stars-on-pops-strange-2021>

2021.11.26 - Coronavirus

- [Booster jabs EU moves to place booster vaccines at heart of travel rules](#)
- [Australia Border to remain open to South Africa despite new variant](#)
- [Health Late diagnosis of breast cancer rises as NHS struggles in Covid crisis](#)

[European Union](#)

EU moves to place Covid booster jabs at heart of travel rules



Officers check a passenger arriving at Frankfurt airport in Germany.
Photograph: Boris Roessler/AP

[Jennifer Rankin](#) in Brussels

Thu 25 Nov 2021 08.47 EST

People hoping to travel to the [European Union](#) next year will have to get a booster jab once their original Covid vaccines are more than nine months old, under new proposals from Brussels.

On Thursday, the [European Commission](#) proposed a nine-month limit for vaccine validity that would apply for travel within and to the EU.

If the plans are approved by EU ministers, from 10 January 2022 non-EU travellers will be required to show proof of an EU-approved booster jab once their original vaccine status is more than nine months old. Similarly,

travellers between the member states would have to meet the same requirement to avoid Covid tests, quarantine and other restrictions.

The Commission hopes to avoid a confusing mixture of rules across the 27 member states, as governments scramble to tighten restrictions on everyday life following a surge in coronavirus infections.

The plans were unveiled on Thursday as the European Medicines Agency approved the use of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for children aged five to 11, opening the way for governments to extend vaccination campaigns.

The EU regulator recommended two injections three weeks apart in the upper arm for primary-school children, at one-third of the adult dose.

The latest EU proposals prioritise vaccinated people, as Brussels moves to classify travellers according to individual health and vaccine status, rather than their country of departure.

From 1 March 2022, EU member states would only permit entry to vaccinated, recovered or essential travellers, such as lorry drivers. The current system, under which countries are added and removed from a safe list, will be dropped, a change officials think offers more certainty.

The recommendation to make booster jabs necessary after nine months for non-EU non-essential travellers is part scientific advice, part practical policy. Immunity wanes after six months, but EU officials added an extra three to allow governments to get booster-shot programmes up and running.

03:36

What is driving Europe's surge in Covid cases? – video explainer

The EU executive also wants to allow entry for travellers with non-EU approved vaccines that are recognised by the World Health Organization, such as China's Sinopharm and Sinovac and [the AstraZeneca vaccine made by the Serum Institute of India](#). The EU has only approved four vaccines: Pfizer-BioNTech, AstraZeneca (produced in Europe), Janssen (Johnson & Johnson) and Moderna.

Most EU member states only permit entry to people with EU-approved vaccines.

Under the new proposals, travellers to the EU with a WHO-approved vaccine that is not EU approved, could enter the EU, but would have to produce a negative Covid-test.

Tests and vaccination are not required for children under six, whereas those aged six to 17 are required to have a negative Covid test to enter the EU. Within the EU children under 12 are exempt from the travel rules.

Travel within the EU has been eased by the EU's digital Covid certificate, which enables travellers to prove they have been fully vaccinated, recently tested negative or are fully recovered from the virus.

The EU "passport" is now linked to equivalent systems in 43 countries, including Switzerland, the UK, Turkey and New Zealand. This means those countries' Covid certificates are accepted in the EU and vice versa. At least 20 EU member states use the digital certificate to control entry to bars, restaurants, cinemas and other venues.

EU officials fear that if member states opt for different rules on travel, people will lose confidence in the EU digital Covid pass. Didier Reynders, the EU commissioner for justice, said EU residents in possession of the EU Covid certificate should not face additional restrictions when travelling inside the union.

The EU has vaccinated nearly two-thirds of the population and around three-quarters of adults, not enough to avoid a surge in cases driven by the more contagious Delta variant and relaxation of restrictions.

On Thursday, the outgoing German chancellor, Angela Merkel, said "every day counts" in introducing social distancing measures, warning her country faced "exponential growth" in cases. A host of measures have been introduced by German regions to curb the spread of the virus, but [Merkel is urging them to go further](#).

Earlier this week, the EU's disease control agency, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, changed its guidance to recommend booster shots for all adults, with priority given to the over-40s.

The EU commissioner for health, Stella Kyriakides, said: “We have vaccinated over 65% of the total EU population, but this is not enough. There are still too many people who are not protected. For everyone to travel and live as safely as possible, we need to reach significantly higher vaccination rates, urgently.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/25/eu-moves-to-place-covid-booster-jabs-at-heart-of-travel-rules>

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[Australia news](#)

Australia's border to remain open to South Africa despite emergence of new Covid variant



Only a quarter of South Africa's population is vaccinated as concerns grow about a new Covid variant detected. Photograph: Denis Farrell/AP

[Michael McGowan](#)

[@mmcgowan](#)

Thu 25 Nov 2021 21.30 EST

Australia has no plans to restrict flights from [South Africa](#), despite the emergence of a new variant of Covid-19 which has prompted the UK to shut its borders to the country.

As the World Health Organisation called an urgent meeting to discuss the new variant detected in South Africa, Australia's health minister, Greg Hunt,

said on Friday that officials were assessing the threat posed by the strain and would not yet introduce restrictions on arrivals from southern Africa.

While Australia would “be able to act quickly if there’s advice”, Hunt told media the country’s chief medical officer, Paul Kelly, had advised him there was “no basis for change” in border arrangements.

The UK on Friday announced it would ban flights from southern parts of Africa amid concern about the emerging B.1.1.529 variant, but Hunt said international health authorities were still gathering information about it.

“The world is learning and looking [at] the strain,” he said. He had been briefed by both Kelly and the secretary of the department of health, Brendan Murphy, on Friday morning.

“At this stage they are gathering information [but] we’re flexible and if the medical advice is we need to change then we won’t hesitate,” Hunt said.

He said a repatriation flight from South Africa had arrived in Australia last week and the returnees had been in quarantine at Howard Springs in the Northern Territory. He was not aware of any cases of the new strain being detected in Australia.

It comes as Dr Maria Van Kerkhove, the WHO’s technical lead on Covid-19, said in a question-and-answer livestream on Friday that information about the strain was still emerging.

“What we do know is that this variant has a large number of mutations. And the concern is that when you have so many mutations, it can have an impact on how the virus behaves,” she said.

The emergence of a new strain is by no means a first. [Another variant, C.1.2, was also detected in South Africa earlier this year](#), but has not proven as infectious as the more common Delta strain.

However, the B.1.1.529 variant has raised concerns in the international community due to the “extremely high number” of mutations, which [some](#)

researchers fear could help the virus evade immunity.

Whether or not the strain is classified a variant of concern by the WHO, its emergence has drawn renewed attention to efforts to help increase global vaccination rates.

South Africa's vaccination rate is only about 24% while in neighbouring Botswana, where the strain has also been detected, only one in five people have been vaccinated.

Prof Catherine Bennett, an epidemiologist from the University of Deakin, said the rest of the world needed to do more to increase global vaccination rates.

"Australia has now contributed 9m doses to partners in the region, some to the [Covax program](#), some to funding, but it isn't enough," she said.

While Australia was "rightly" focused on our region, she said, low rates of vaccination across the globe remained a substantial problem.

"Vaccination rates like in Botswana really does leave you vulnerable," Bennett said.

"It doesn't have to be a super-infectious strain of the virus, it just has to get into places with those low vaccination rates. We don't know what will happen with this, it might fizzle out and the vaccine might work just as well. But if any of those things isn't quite right, you are putting yourself in a position where the virus might just make a bit of a leap in its evolutionary development."

On Friday Hunt defended international efforts for developing countries, saying there had been "extraordinarily high" rates of vaccination in some of those countries.

"Our spare vaccines are being provided but beyond that we're also working directly through the Covax program," he said.

“South Africa is doing everything it can to encourage vaccination within its population and to continue to expand its distribution network, but there are different challenges in different countries.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/nov/26/australias-border-to-remain-open-to-south-africa-despite-emergence-of-new-covid-variant>

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[Cancer](#)

Late diagnosis of breast cancer rises as NHS struggles in Covid crisis



Macmillan says various types of cancer have seen falls in diagnosis during the Covid crisis. Photograph: David Davies/PA

[Denis Campbell](#) Health policy editor

Thu 25 Nov 2021 19.01 EST

Soaring numbers of women are being diagnosed with advanced breast cancer, undermining their chances of survival, because of Covid's disruption of [NHS](#) care, a charity has warned.

The number of women being diagnosed with the disease at stage 4 is as much as 48% higher in some months than expected, with the pandemic to blame, says Macmillan [Cancer](#) Support.

At the same time, fewer women are being confirmed as having breast cancer at stage 1, when their chances of responding well to treatment and living

longer are much higher.

For example, in April 128 women were diagnosed at stage 4 – 28 (42%) more than were expected, based on pre-pandemic trends, Macmillan said. But in the same month 942 were diagnosed at stage 1, which was 164 (15%) fewer than expected.

Macmillan estimates that there is now a backlog of 47,300 people across the UK who have not yet been diagnosed with some form of cancer, as a direct result of Covid. They include people who could not access care in the usual way because many NHS services were scaled back, and also those who were too scared to seek help or did not want to add to the pressure the health service was already under. None have had a confirmed diagnosis of cancer, though some may be undergoing tests or screening.

Top five cancer groups

“The full impact of the pandemic on later diagnosis will not be understood for some time. But these figures reinforce our worst fears that delays and disruption caused by the pandemic are leading to more and more people being diagnosed later,” said Steven McIntosh, an executive director at Macmillan.

“Anyone diagnosed at a later stage is facing the agony of fewer options and worse prognosis. On top of this, they are entering into a system that does not have capacity to guarantee them timely treatment and care, which is of the upmost importance,” he added.

The charity wants ministers to lay out detailed plans to relieve the “alarming pressures on cancer services” when they publish their “[elective recovery plan](#)” next week. It will detail how NHS England will tackle the record 5.8m-strong queue of patients awaiting care.

A Macmillan analysis found types of cancer that saw the biggest falls in diagnosis in England between March 2020 and July this year included prostate cancer (down 23.1%), multiple myeloma (13.8%), melanoma (13.2%) and breast cancer (11.6%).

Missing cancer patients bar chart

Daisy Cooper, the Liberal Democrats' deputy leader and health spokesperson, said that people "will be alarmed by these figures that show record numbers of people are waiting too long for cancer treatment, leaving them at risk of more intensive treatment and a lower chance of survival.

"It is particularly worrying that prostate cancer, leukaemia and breast cancer are seeing the most missed diagnoses."

A Department of Health and Social Care spokesperson said: "Cancer diagnosis and treatment is an absolute priority and nearly half a million people were checked for cancer in August and September this year – some of the highest numbers ever.

"We remain committed to delivering our long-term plan for tackling cancer and have backed the NHS with record investment, including £2bn this year and £8bn over the next three years to deliver an extra 9m checks, scans and operations for patients.

"Most cancer services are back to or above pre-pandemic levels and the latest NHS figures show a reduction in the number of patients waiting for a diagnostic scan for the first time this year, meaning more people are now getting the checks they need."

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/nov/26/late-diagnosis-of-breast-cancer-rises-as-nhs-struggles-in-covid-crisis>

2021.11.26 - Opinion

- Roman Britain is still throwing up secrets – and confounding our expectations
- The sudden scrutiny of Boris Johnson has one explanation: he's served his purpose
- The warning signs are there for genocide in Ethiopia – the world must act to prevent it
- Twenty-seven dead in the icy Channel. This must be the spur for change

[Opinion](#)[Roman Britain](#)

Roman Britain is still throwing up secrets – and confounding our expectations

[Charlotte Higgins](#)





A Roman mosaic depicting one of the most famous battles of the Trojan War which has been uncovered in a farmer's field in Rutland. Photograph: ULAS/PA

Fri 26 Nov 2021 02.00 EST

Walking the local landscape was a feature of many lives during the lockdowns in Britain last year. Not everyone discovered a ravishing Roman mosaic while rambling across the family farm, but Jim Irvine did. He contacted archaeologists at Leicestershire county council. That led to an excavation with the University of Leicester and the discovery of a [third- to fourth-century villa](#). At its heart is a great mosaic, 11m by 7m.

What is so special about this mosaic is its subject. It is [unique in Britain](#) (though who knows what lies unseen beneath other fields?) in that it shows, in three cartoon-strip-like panels, scenes from the Trojan war. Specifically, it narrates episodes from the climax of Homer's Iliad. Scene one, the topmost strip, has the Trojan prince Hector and the Greek champion Achilles in battle. Scene two, Achilles drags the naked corpse of Hector behind his chariot. Scene three, King Priam, Hector's father – elaborately enrobed and wearing the jaunty red "Phrygian cap" with which Roman iconography often identifies Trojans – watches as an attendant prepares a ransom for Hector's

body, the corpse placed on one side of a scales while the other is heaped with golden objects.

That's where it gets interesting, since no such weighing occurs in the Iliad (though Achilles alludes to the notion while he's taunting his dying enemy). But the fifth-century BC playwright Aeschylus did dramatise such a detail in his now lost play, Phrygians. So this mosaic shows an Aeschylean riff on a famous Homeric scene – in an artistic style that some might call crude, but I claim as characterful.

Roman rule came to an end in Britain when the emperor Honorius cut the province loose to look to its own defences, in around 410. There is evidence that some of Britain's towns had declined by then. But there seems to have been a successful rural economy in parts of Britain in the fourth century, centred around large villas. It's from such buildings that some of Britain's most spectacular mosaics come. Mosaics showing Orpheus singing to animals and trees can be seen in the [Corinium Museum](#) in Cirencester. A great chariot race depicted in tesserae can now be seen in the [Hull and East Riding Museum](#). The mosaic from Rutland adds to this picture of rural wealth late in Britain's Roman period.

It also becomes one of a handful of pieces of evidence that points, potentially, to a sophisticated literary culture in Roman Britain – at least as enjoyed by the wealthy. The popular picture of the Romans in Britain is as miserable Mediterranean soldiers, shivering beside their spears while guarding a hostile, rainy island. But by the time the Rutland mosaic was made, southern Britain had been under Roman rule for about 300 years. How "Roman" in terms of culture this really made it is debatable, but there is evidence of Virgilian poems being read near Hadrian's wall, the Aeneid being studied in Hampshire, and now this mosaic. Perhaps most intriguingly, it looks to my eyes to bear a strong relationship to another mosaic, [now in the Somerset Museum](#).

That mosaic was discovered in a villa near the village of Low Ham, at the other end of the Fosse Way, the Roman road that connected the east Midlands to the West Country. It has a similar, late-Roman pictorial style and a similar literary subject: it is a narration of the love story between Dido

and Aeneas from Rome's great national epic, The Aeneid. It's thought that the artist of the Low Ham mosaic may have been working from an illustrated manuscript of the text, perhaps one belonging to the villa's owner. The same hypothesis could be applied to the Rutland mosaic. It's tempting to imagine they could even have been made by the same workshop.

The Rutland mosaic is damaged. At some point fires were lit on it, blackening the decoration, [according to John Thomas](#), deputy director of University of Leicester Archaeological Services. Later still the building collapsed into rubble. Two human bodies were buried within the ruins. Much research is still to be done to try to trace this poignant tale of a building beyond its days of pomp; until then, all is uncertainty and the imagination floods into the gaps. But the Rutland mosaic is a thrilling discovery. Roman Britain, far from dead and distant and static, is still throwing up its secrets, and still confounding expectations.

- Charlotte Higgins is the Guardian's chief culture writer and the author of Under Another Sky: Journeys in Roman Britain

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Opinion**Boris Johnson**

The sudden scrutiny of Boris Johnson has one explanation: he's served his purpose

Owen Jones





Boris Johnson at 10 Downing Street, London, November 2021. Photograph: WIktor Szymanowicz/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

Fri 26 Nov 2021 03.00 EST

Boris Johnson's meandering [recent speech](#), in which he lost his place and blathered about Peppa Pig, was consistent with what we have come to expect of the prime minister. So the fact it was monstered by media commentators is bemusing. Johnson has long given up on topics [halfway through](#), asked [underwhelmed audiences](#) to applaud him and babbled about [painting model buses](#). Yet his latest shambolic presentation has been treated as a signal that his premiership is disintegrating. It suggests that media outlets have decided to apply a new filter because, as far as Johnson's public persona is concerned, nothing has changed.

Johnson is often described as a Teflon politician, but this non-stick coating must be applied by someone. Three years ago, a Tory MP batted away my suggestion that Johnson would become prime minister. His colleagues, you see, would never allow it. The parliamentary Conservative party regarded him as completely unsuitable to be national leader, because he was selfish, incompetent and morally abject. As such, the MP told me, his colleagues would not permit him to make the final two on the shortlist for members to adjudicate.

Months later, this same politician recorded a video endorsing Johnson's leadership bid, bursting with fulsome praise to the point of sycophancy. Tory MPs had rallied around someone they knew was a charlatan because they believed he had unique properties to defeat the twin menaces of Farageism and Corbynism. Michael Gove notoriously [overturned the Johnson leadership bandwagon](#) in 2016, declaring his Brexit brother-in-arms unfit to govern, while Dominic Cummings openly confessed to helping Johnson to become prime minister [despite knowing he was unsuitable](#), purely because he was a convenient blunt instrument to deliver Brexit and [smash the Corbyn project](#).

Johnson's true nature was hardly hidden from media outlets either. An interview with Eddie Mair eight years ago was a [striking outlier](#); the broadcaster savaged Johnson over being [sacked twice for lying](#) and [conspiring to beat a journalist up](#) – concluding “You’re a nasty piece of work, aren’t you?” By contrast, most of the British media conspired to present Johnson as a rib-tickling performer, allowing him to spin political liabilities into charming virtues. Yet even with this protective shield, Johnson has never been popular, never coming close to the [approval ratings](#) enjoyed by all four of his prime ministerial predecessors in their first few months. Johnson’s unique capacity to “cut through” to the British public is a myth.

But how the narrative changes: Johnson has gone from the genius defier of political gravity, to a shambolic punchline, and now to a joke. One Tory MP even declared recently that [“a bowl of soup could have beaten Jeremy Corbyn”](#). Yet this retelling of history contrasts starkly with the public image that the press has concocted around Johnson up until now. When the Telegraph declared the 2019 election result a [“personal triumph for Boris Johnson”](#), he was widely regarded as a vindicated political titan.

That Johnson’s government is defined by corruption should hardly surprise the media. His ex-lover, Jennifer Arcuri, has spent years alleging that as Tory leader he used public office to [further her business interests](#). That Johnson shamelessly breaks solemn promises is entirely consistent with his entire character: as his former colleague Peter Oborne [writes](#): “I have never encountered a senior British politician who lies and fabricates so regularly, so shamelessly and so systematically as Boris Johnson.”

Indeed, Johnson's flaws are anything but subtle. Our media outlets knew all this, but were possessed by the same terror of the alternative as Tory MPs. That included many who fear the left more than the right, privately believing Johnson – who provoked a [surge in hate crimes](#) after comparing Muslim women to letterboxes and bank robbers a year before becoming prime minister – was a lesser danger than his opponent. Some persuaded themselves that Johnson was himself a liberal alternative to the Stalinist authoritarianism of Corbyn. He had a “political philosophy ... that he will not restrict our liberties unless there is an overwhelming reason to do so,” [suggested ITV’s Robert Peston](#). As prime minister, Johnson has appointed pantomime authoritarian Priti Patel as home secretary and cracked down on the right to protest.

Johnson’s team must surely be bewildered by the sudden emergence of media scrutiny. During the early days of the pandemic, when British hospitals were being overwhelmed with dying patients because of the government’s mishandling of Covid-19, this was not presented as an existential crisis for Johnson. Yet the Peppa Pig speech is given as reason to question his political future. The nation’s media outlets have gone off script. When Nadine Dorries, the new culture secretary, [reprimanded](#) the BBC’s Laura Kuenssberg and proclaimed the left has [hijacked social media](#) (even though Twitter’s [own research](#) shows its algorithm benefits rightwing news sources), she underscored the extent to which the Tories can usually count on media compliance.

So what explains this sudden shift in the way that Johnson’s premiership is being discussed, both among Tory MPs (some of whom have allegedly issued [letters of no confidence](#)) and media outlets? The answer is unremarkable: Johnson has served his purpose. Most Tories do not believe a Keir Starmer premiership is likely and will brutally dispose of Johnson if that calculation changes. Besides, thanks to Starmer’s efforts to recast his party as the [establishment’s B-team](#), a Labour government does not present the same terror as one led by his predecessor.

The significant danger for Labour is that a shift in Johnson’s popularity among despairing Tory voters won’t be due to any enthusiasm they hold for the opposition: the decline in Tory support has been driven by its voters [shifting to the “don’t know” column](#) rather than to Labour. Starmer’s team

needs to present a compelling alternative that motivates the electorate to vote for it, rather than relying on disillusionment with a man who, in any case, may be thrown overboard. For Johnson, meanwhile, this must be a sobering moment. It seemed as though he could get away with anything. And indeed he could – until, suddenly, he couldn't.

- Owen Jones is a Guardian columnist
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OpinionGlobal development

The warning signs are there for genocide in Ethiopia – the world must act to prevent it

Helen Clark, Michael Lapsley and David Alton



‘Five warning signs for mass, ethnically targeted violence are flashing red.’ Supporters of Ethiopian prime minister Abiy Ahmed at a rally in Addis Ababa this month. Photograph: AP

Fri 26 Nov 2021 03.00 EST

Genocide happens when warning signs are not heeded. The world looks away, refusing to believe that mass ethnic killing is possible. We hope that the worst will be avoided. But to prevent genocide, we must sound the alarm before we arrive at certainty.

Rarely before has the danger of genocide been so clearly signalled in advance than in [Ethiopia](#).

No [side to this conflict](#) is angelic. [All sides](#) in Ethiopia's conflict have committed violations. But only one side has committed violations on a scale and nature that could credibly qualify as genocide – and that, we regret to say, is the coalition of the Ethiopian government, under the prime minister, Abiy Ahmed; the Amhara regional government; and the state of Eritrea.

Twice in the past year, the world has stood by while this coalition has perpetrated international crimes against civilians of Tigrayan identity – including murder, [rape](#), torture and [starvation](#).

We may now be facing a third atrocity, even larger and bloodier than what has gone before: a possible mass killing of interned civilians in Addis Ababa and elsewhere.

Five warning signs for mass, ethnically targeted violence are flashing red.

In recent weeks the government has interned more than 30,000 ethnic Tigrayan civilians in Addis Ababa

First, figures in the Ethiopian government and their allies have promoted hate speech against Tigrayan people as an ethnic group. They have stoked violence in language that identifies all Tigrayans as enemies. This [hate speech](#) is escalating – Tigrayans have been referred to as “cancer”, “weeds”, “rats” and “terrorists”.

Second, the government has mobilised the instruments for mass atrocity, in the form of militias and vigilante groups, organised on an ethnic basis and with an ethnic agenda. It has armed them and granted them impunity.

Third, the government is eliminating any middle ground. It has [silenced](#) independent and critical voices. It has prevented media access to Tigray, closed down or censored independent national journalists, and intimidated foreign reporters and their local counterparts. Individuals who try to protect Tigrayans are also attacked. People who try to remain out of politics are condemned as “fence-sitters”.

Fourth, the government has begun large-scale [detention of Tigrayan civilians](#) in areas it controls. One year ago it interned at least 15,000 ethnic Tigrayan

members of the armed forces, whom, we understand, it continues to keep in detention camps. It has interned Tigrayan civilians in western Tigray. In recent weeks it has interned more than 30,000 ethnic Tigrayan civilians in Addis Ababa and unknown numbers elsewhere.

Fifth, the international community is divided, confused and indecisive. The government has protectors at the UN security council. The African Union listened deferentially to the government's denials and obfuscations. The main European powers have dithered. The US has toned down its condemnations, perhaps for fear of being diplomatically isolated. It also has conflicting priorities, including trying to facilitate humanitarian assistance and initiate negotiations for a ceasefire and political settlement – an agenda that can preclude calling out one party to the conflict for atrocity crimes or genocide.

In the 1990s, after mass atrocities in former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, there was renewed interest in the obligation to prevent genocide enshrined in the 1948 genocide convention. There have now been more than two decades of policy and institutional reforms on atrocities prevention and response. There has been a litany of mea culpas, of enjoinders to greater political will, and calls for “never again”.

Crucial reports were written in the decades after Rwanda and the wars of Yugoslavia’s dissolution that shaped the debate and policy over the use of coercive measures in pursuit of peace, humanitarian action and the prevention of atrocities. At the [United Nations](#), the African Union, international expert commissions, and under the leadership of powerful countries – reams of paper were dedicated to analysing the past and pledging to heed warning signs and prevent genocide.

Those reports all stressed that genocide is preventable – if the political will is there to act on warnings.

Today in Ethiopia, these warnings could not be more clear. The time to act is now – to call out what is happening and for the UN security council to use every measure at its disposal to give meaning to the cry of “never again” and prevent catastrophe.

- Helen Clark is a former head of the UN Development Programme and former prime minister of New Zealand. Fr Michael Lapsley is president of Healing of Memories Global Network and founder of the Institute for Healing of Memories. David Alton is an independent crossbench life peer and campaigner on genocide
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Opinion[Immigration and asylum](#)

Twenty-seven dead in the icy Channel. This must be the spur for change

[Gaby Hinsliff](#)



A group of migrants on an inflatable dinghy leave Wimereux in France to cross the English Channel, 24 November 2021. Photograph: Gonzalo Fuentes/Reuters

Thu 25 Nov 2021 11.00 EST

It was the kind of boat, a French politician said, that you blow up [like a paddling pool](#).

Not much more than a toy, of the kind many families will have bought this summer for their children to play in on the beach. But this winter, flimsy inflatables may be all that stand between other people's children and a watery grave. Smugglers charge a small fortune for places in boats so dangerously overloaded that some begin to sink while still in sight of land, while others drift in darkness through one of the busiest shipping lanes in the world. Refugee charities had long warned of a tragedy waiting to happen, and so it has proved. At least 27 human beings, including a pregnant woman and three children, lost their lives in the freezing November sea this week, in the worst such incident since human traffickers began using this route three years ago.

Yet within hours, other boats were setting forth, a reminder of just how fiercely desire burns. After all, those on board have nothing much left to lose. They may have already sold everything they had, or left loved ones behind; many will have endured life-threatening journeys to reach the French coast, only to end up shivering in makeshift roadside camps, repeatedly moved on by police who confiscate their tents and sleeping bags to leave them at the mercy of the elements. Some young men are carrying the hopes of families left behind, who have sacrificed everything to get one child to the west. They're not going to stop when the end is so tantalisingly in sight; not after all they have been through, let alone all they may have fled. (Research [suggests](#) two-thirds of those crossing the Channel are ultimately judged to have been genuine refugees, escaping conflict and persecution.) As charities must be tired of saying, nobody would do this if they had a better option. Now our job is to provide them with one.

This tragedy forces everyone in British politics once again to confront an issue that most find visibly uncomfortable. The government plainly doesn't know what to do about the flow of people across the Channel, and the opposition often struggles with what to say about it; Labour members lean towards a much more open and generous offer to refugees, but their party's most likely path to Downing Street lies through an electorate that instinctively doesn't. It is, however, time for a few home truths.

If nothing else, this must spell an end to Home Office talk of forcibly "[pushing back](#)" boats as they enter British waters, which had prompted widespread concerns about the risk of capsizing them. The only way in which this week's tragedy could have been more awful is if British border officials had physically been responsible for tipping people into the sea themselves.

It should also shock Britain and France into working more closely together, although the [omens are not good](#); within hours Boris Johnson was accusing the French of supposedly failing to do enough to stop small boats crossing, while French politicians retorted that it was the supposed ease of finding jobs in Britain's black market that incentivised people to keep trying. President Macron is however pushing for an emergency meeting of European ministers, recognising that half of Europe is wrestling with similar dilemmas. The next step is recognising that enforcement alone isn't enough.

Britain used to mock Donald Trump's plan to build a wall, not just for its inhumanity but because it sounded so dumb and crude. Anyone can make it physically harder to cross a border but you can't build a wall against hopes and dreams, or contain the universal desire for a better life behind a fence. But if Priti Patel could work out how to build a wall on the water she would doubtless do it tomorrow, and demands for more beach patrols and more enforcement are effectively the nearest equivalent. A strategy built solely on keeping people out does nothing to tackle either the push factors driving people to leave – conflict, political repression, and perhaps increasingly in future climate crisis-fuelled natural disasters – or the pull factors drawing them here, with many migrants insisting they don't want to stay in [France](#) and claim asylum there because they have relatives in Britain or speak English. And that leaves a difficult conversation to be had with the electorate.

British politicians are long past the point of having the courage to challenge assumptions on this most electorally toxic of issues. But if they were honest they would admit that the “crisis” we have supposedly experienced pales by comparison with what Greece or Italy, whose shores form Europe’s most southerly border, have seen in recent years. Although asylum claims are at [their highest annual level since 2004](#), that’s likely to reflect a fall during the pandemic when travel was restricted and a surge after it. Far from being an irresistible magnet, in the year to this March, Britain received the [fourth highest number of asylum claims](#) compared with EU countries and only the 17th highest when measured by head of population. Yet much of Britain still behaves – and votes – as if it was overwhelmed with people who are in fact mostly going somewhere else. Five years ago, leave campaigners [exploited](#) these exaggerated fears to help secure a Brexit that, if anything, has made illegal movement harder to control, [ending a longstanding right](#) to return asylum seekers arriving from another EU country and poisoning relations between Britain and France just as goodwill was needed. The gall of Brexiteers now in government is breathtaking, but saying so doesn’t help stop people drowning at sea.

For that we need safe, legal routes out for asylum seekers, agreed in concert with other countries to ensure that accidents of geography don’t leave some struggling to absorb an unfair share. That solidarity is even more critical now that Russia, always alert for opportunities to destabilise and divide Europe, is [suspected](#) of weaponising tensions by funnelling people through Belarus into Poland and perhaps its neighbours beyond. Tackling such complex, intractable issues requires a political maturity currently lacking, and a willingness to recognise tragedy as the spur to change.

Migrants are all too often painted as a threat to Britain, but events such as this should remind us that the real danger is to those crossing the Channel. In death we can see them for who they are; victims both of the regimes they are escaping and of traffickers exploiting their desperation, but sometimes also of knee jerk hostility in the countries that they long to reach. In the immediate haunting aftermath of tragedy, that hostility may sometimes be replaced, if only briefly, by pangs of conscience and by compassion. Blink now, and we will miss the moment.

Gaby Hinsliff is a Guardian columnist

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Solomon Islands

Solomon Islands PM blames violent anti-government protests on foreign interference



Solomon Islands prime minister Manasseh Sogavare has blamed violent protests in Honiara on foreign interference. Photograph: Charley Piringi/AFP/Getty Images

Guardian staff and agencies

Fri 26 Nov 2021 01.24 EST

Solomon Islands prime minister Manasseh Sogavare has blamed foreign interference over his government's decision to switch alliances from Taiwan to Beijing for anti-government protests, arson and looting that have ravaged the capital Honiara for the past three days.

However, critics have blamed the unrest on complaints of a lack of government services and accountability, corruption and foreign workers

taking local jobs. In 2019, Sogavare also angered many, particularly leaders of Solomon Islands' most populous province, Malaita, when he [cut the country's diplomatic ties with Taiwan](#).

Australian police began taking control of hotspots in Honiara on Friday, witnesses said, after local police were outnumbered. Tear gas was deployed in Chinatown where looting and the burning of buildings continued on Friday morning, a resident told Reuters.

Solomon Island resident Transform Aqorau said more than a hundred people were looting shops, before Australian federal police officers arrived.

“The scenes here are really chaotic. It is like a war zone,” Aqorau told Reuters by telephone on Friday morning. “There is no public transport and it is a struggle with the heat and the smoke. Buildings are still burning.” He said later Australian police were “taking control of Chinatown”.

A Guardian reporter said the area was “completely in ashes now”, while businesses in the Ranadi industrial area in the city’s east including a timber yard, a bank and a hardware store had also been targeted.

The Australian broadcaster ABC meanwhile reported that rioters had targeted Sogavare’s own compound, setting a building on fire. Local police moved in to quell the attack, reportedly firing warning shots.

Parts of Honiara CBD blocked off. [pic.twitter.com/5DpskQFotK](#)

— Charley Piringi (@cpiringi7) [November 26, 2021](#)

A curfew, initially imposed on Wednesday, was also extended overnight, police said.

Australia had said Thursday it would [deploy more than 100 police and defence force personnel](#) to support “riot control” and security at critical infrastructure.

Many of the protesters come from the most populous province, Malaita, and feel overlooked by the government in Guadalcanal province and oppose its 2019 decision to end diplomatic ties with Taiwan.

Malaita premier Daniel Suidani said in a statement this week that Sogavare had “elevated the interest of foreigners above those of Solomon Islanders” and should resign.

Sogavare said on Friday he stood by his government’s decision to embrace Beijing, which he described as the “only issue” in the violence, which was “unfortunately influenced and encouraged by other powers”.

External pressures were a “very big … influence. I don’t want to name names. We’ll leave it there,” Sogavare said. “I’m not going to bow down to anyone. We are intact, the government’s intact and we’re going to defend democracy,” he added.



Protesters have set buildings in Honiara on fire and looted businesses.
Photograph: Charley Piringi/AFP/Getty Images

Australian foreign minister Marise Payne did not agree that other countries had stirred up the unrest. “We have not indicated that at all,” Payne said. “We’ve been very clear. Our view is we don’t want to see violence. We would very much hope for a return to stability,” she added.

Local journalist Gina Kekeea said the foreign policy switch to Beijing with little public consultation was one of a mix of issues that led to the protests. There were also complaints that foreign companies were not providing local jobs.

“Chinese businesses and [other] Asian businesses … seem to have most of the work, especially when it comes to extracting resources, which people feel strongly about,” Kekeea told the ABC.

Protesters had been replaced by looters and scavengers on Friday in Honiara’s hard-hit Chinatown, Kekeea said. “It’s been two days, two whole days of looting and protesting and rioting and Honiara is just a small city,” Kekeea said. “So I think that there’s nothing much left for them to loot and spoil now.”

Australian prime minister Scott Morrison on Thursday committed troops, police and diplomats to help local police restore order and protect critical infrastructure. Australia would not assist in the protection of the national parliament and the executive buildings, in a sign that Australia was not taking political sides.

Some observers argue Australia intervened quickly to avoid Chinese security forces moving in to restore order. But Morrison said Sogavare had asked for help because he trusted Australia.

“The Solomon Islands reached out to us first … as family because they trust us and we’ve worked hard for that trust in the Pacific,” Morrison said. “That is our region and we’re standing up to secure our region with our partners, our friends, our family and allies.”

Sogavare requested assistance from Australia under a bilateral security treaty that has existed since 2017, when Australian peacekeepers last left Solomon Islands.



A building next to the parliament building in Honiara was set on fire on Wednesday. Photograph: Courtesy of Charley Piringi/AFP/Getty Images

Australia led an international police and military force called the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands that restored peace in the country after bloody ethnic violence from 2003 until 2017.

China, meanwhile, expressed serious concern about recent attacks on some Chinese citizens and institutions, without providing details.

“We believe that under the leadership of Prime Minister Sogavare, the Solomon Islands government can restore social order and stability as soon as possible,” Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said on Thursday.

He said that economic and other cooperation since the establishment of diplomatic relations has benefited both sides. “Any attempts to undermine the normal development of China-Solomon relations are futile,” he said.

The Australian force would also be equipped to “provide a medical response,” Australian defence minister Peter Dutton said. “It’s certainly a dangerous situation on the ground. We’ve seen the rioting that’s taken place,

the arson and the general disorder that's there at the moment as well," he added. "So there's a lot of work for the police to do on the ground."

Sogavare declared a lockdown on Wednesday after about 1,000 people gathered in protest in Honiara, demanding his resignation.

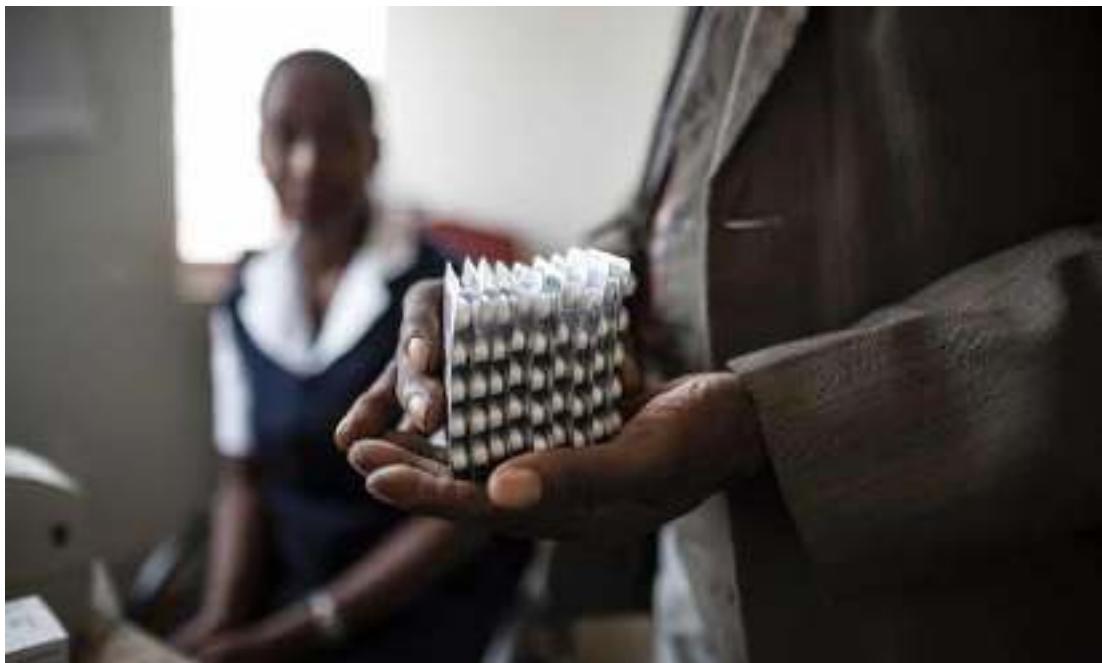
The protesters breached the national parliament building and burned the thatched roof of a nearby building, the government said. They also set fire to a police station and other buildings.

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Global development

Warning on tackling HIV as WHO finds rise in resistance to antiretroviral drugs



A patient with his supply of antiretroviral drugs at a hospital in Malawi. The number of people globally receiving antiretrovirals has risen to 27.5 million.
Photograph: Marco Longari/AFP/Getty

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[About this content](#)

[Kaamil Ahmed](#)

Thu 25 Nov 2021 10.17 EST

HIV drug resistance is on the rise, [according to a new report](#), which found that the number of people with the virus being treated with antiretrovirals had risen to 27.5 million – an annual increase of 2 million.

Four out of five countries with high rates had seen success in suppressing the virus with antiretroviral treatments, according to the World Health Organization's HIV drug-resistance report.

But the study found an increase in countries reaching a 10% threshold of resistance to a class of drugs which, the WHO said, underlined the need for a move to an alternative treatment, which it has recommended since 2019. Resistance exceeding the 10% threshold was reported in 21 of 30 countries surveyed.

Switching from non-nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors was important for children, the report said, with nearly half of infants newly diagnosed carrying drug-resistant HIV, according to surveys in 10 sub-Saharan African countries.

The WHO said robust monitoring of drug resistance was key for governments with high numbers of HIV patients to ensure that suppression of the virus did not wane. It said 64% of those countries had plans to monitor and tackle drug resistance.

Meg Doherty, director of WHO's global HIV, hepatitis and STI programmes, said the report held countries accountable for monitoring drug resistance and ensuring effective treatment for patients.

"In the future, we will expand our surveillance to new ARVs [antiretrovirals], and those that are delivered as long-acting agents for prevention and treatment, so that we can maintain our ARVs for the lifetime of people living with HIV," said Doherty.

According to the report, countries achieving high levels of viral suppression increased from 33% in 2017 to 80% by the end of 2020, which the WHO said prevented transmission and deaths from HIV and slowed the emergence of drug resistance.

WHO's director general, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, urged countries to use antimicrobials therapy responsibly to ensure effectiveness.

"Antimicrobials – including antibiotics, antivirals, antifungals and antiparasitics – are the backbone of modern medicine. But the overuse and misuse of antimicrobials are undermining the effectiveness of these essential medicines," said Tedros. "We can all play a part in preserving antimicrobials and preventing drug resistance."

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/nov/25/warning-hiv-who-finds-rise-resistance-antiretroviral-drugs>

[Google](#)

Google to pay £183m in back taxes to Irish government



Parent company Alphabet has been accused of avoiding tax through its ‘double Irish, Dutch sandwich’ tax strategy that allows it to move revenues made in Europe. Photograph: Artur Widak/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

[Rupert Neate](#) Wealth correspondent

[@RupertNeate](#)

Thu 25 Nov 2021 12.54 EST

Google’s Irish subsidiary has agreed to pay €218m (£183m) in back taxes to the Irish government, [according to company filings](#).

The US tech company, which had been accused of avoiding hundreds of millions in tax across [Europe](#) through loopholes known as the “double Irish, Dutch sandwich”, said it had “agreed to the resolution of certain tax matters relating to prior years”.

Google [Ireland](#) said it would pay corporation tax of €622m for 2020, including the €218m backdated settlement and interest charges. The previous year Google Ireland paid taxes of €263m.

In line with a 2015 law, the company, which is part of the parent company Alphabet, [promised last year that it would ditch the loopholes strategy](#), which allowed it to effectively shuffle revenues made across Europe offshore to places like Bermuda, where the tax rate was zero. [A Bloomberg investigation](#) showed the scheme allowed Google to cut its overseas tax rate to just 2.4%.

Google did not explain the reason for the back tax payment in its accounts and did not respond to request for comment. In the filing it said only: “Subsequent to year-end, the company agreed to the resolution of certain tax matters relating to prior years. This tax liability and associated interest are recognised in the current financial year.”

Paul Monaghan, the chief executive of the Fair Tax Foundation, said: “There really is a disgraceful lack of transparency around Alphabet’s tax conduct, especially at the level of the Irish subsidiaries. Stakeholders have a right to know what this Irish corporation tax settlement relates to.

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“Investors in particular should be concerned given Alphabet’s US filings show that it has billions more in dispute with tax authorities around the globe in circumstances where, by its own definition, it has less than 50% chance of winning.”

Ireland, which has provided low-tax European headquarters for many of the world’s largest multinationals, initially declined to sign up to an [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development agreement](#) for a global minimum corporate tax rate of 15% by 2023, but [dropped its resistance to the plan](#) after a change to the text.

The agreement, which has been joined by most of 140 countries taking part in negotiations, is designed to end decades of countries undercutting their

neighbours by offering companies lower taxes.

The accounts show Google Ireland Limited made a pre-tax profit of €2.85bn in 2020, up from €1.94bn in 2019. Turnover rose by €2.7bn to €48.4bn.

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

Interpol's president: alleged torturer rises as symbol of UAE soft power



Ahmed Nasser al-Raisi, who has been elected president of Interpol.
Photograph: Emirates News Agency/Handout/EPA

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HUMANITY UNITED

[About this content](#)

[Ruth Michaelson](#)

Thu 25 Nov 2021 13.40 EST

Maj Gen Ahmed Nasser al-Raisi's ascent through the ranks of the interior ministry in Abu Dhabi is associated with the United Arab Emirates' transformation into a hi-tech surveillance state.

His personal achievements include a diploma in police management from the University of Cambridge, a doctorate in policing, security and community safety from London Metropolitan University and a medal of honour from Italy.

Now, in a big soft-power win for the UAE and its attempt to legitimise its policing methods internationally, he has been [elected the president of the global policing organisation Interpol](#) – to the dismay of human rights defenders.

Often photographed smiling, Raisi is the longstanding inspector general for the interior ministry, responsible for the supervision of detention centres and policing. Multiple former detainees [accuse him](#) of using this position to green-light abuses, including torture.

“Raisi’s rise to the Interpol presidency legitimises the role and conduct of security forces in the UAE,” said [Matthew Hedges](#), a British academic and expert on the Emirates who was detained there for seven months on espionage charges. Hedges, who was eventually pardoned, says Raisi was responsible for his arrest and also oversaw the torture he says he suffered in detention.

“This translates to a green light for states to continue acting in a way that abuses accountability and human rights, legitimises the dilution of rule of law and emboldens authoritative and abusive systems of detention,” Hedges said. “This is really a warning to the international community that cross-border abuses can and will occur.”

The Gulf state has previously said Hedges was not subjected to any physical or psychological mistreatment during his detention. On Thursday its interior ministry heralded Raisi’s win as “recognition of the vital role of the UAE all over the world”.

“The UAE,” it said, “is now at the helm of this international organisation working in the fields of security and policing and will do its best to make the world a safer place.”

In an unusually public campaign for the role, Raisi boasted of technological transformations that overhauled policing and surveillance in the UAE. These included the introduction of iris and [facial scanning](#) technology, and the creation of the interior ministry’s first “general directorate of happiness”.

His domestic policing changes underpin Abu Dhabi and Dubai’s status as two of the [world’s most surveilled cities](#). One system, called Falcon Eye, deploys thousands of cameras to monitor not just traffic violations but also “behavioural issues like public hygiene and incidents like people gathering in areas where they are not allowed to”, [according to a report](#) by the state news agency WAM.

The rise in surveillance has been accompanied by a crackdown on domestic criticism and dissent. Human Rights Watch [has said](#): “The government’s pervasive domestic surveillance has led to extensive self-censorship by UAE

residents and UAE-based institutions; and stonewalling, censorship, and possible surveillance of the news media by the government.”

Abdullah Alaoudh, from the Washington DC organisation Democracy for the Arab World Now, said the UAE had been applying a two-pronged approach epitomised by Raisi’s Interpol win: “Cracking down hard on every voice of dissent, while investing in public relations like lobbying, soft power, sports and entertainment.”

Christopher M Davidson, the author of a book on statecraft in the Middle East, described Raisi as an example of “high-performing technocratic members of UAE political society” who had found success under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

“The key to the regime of Mohammed bin Zayed has been to get things done, to stamp out corruption. Despite all criticisms levelled at the UAE and Abu Dhabi today, it is a far less corrupt place than it was 15 years ago. These were the people entrusted to clean up ministries,” said Davidson.

Stamping out corruption has, at times, included arresting the wealthy and critics. Khadem al-Qubaisi, a former adviser to the royal family and a businessman who said he was “scapegoated” by the Abu Dhabi authorities for embezzling millions, is detained in Al Wathba prison. The prison, overseen by Raisi, also holds the human rights defender Ahmed Mansoor.

Riyaadh Ebrahim, who spent more than a year in the prison, said he witnessed torture there. “There is wrongful imprisonment, no application of the rule of law. People are being persecuted for crimes they did not commit,” Ebrahim said. He said he was “totally appalled” by Raisi’s victory in the Interpol election race.

Davidson said the UAE was using its wealth and resources to buy reputational shortcuts on the international stage.

“Policing in the UAE still has its problems, but this is a way of saying to the world that [they] are credible and respectable,” he said. “Obtaining the presidency of Interpol symbolises moving in the right direction.”

Jalel Harchaoui from the Geneva-based organisation the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime said Raisi's election highlighted the struggle between liberal and illiberal nations within international institutions such as Interpol, and was a victory for anti-democratic countries.

"On the surface, Abu Dhabi – thanks to excellent soft-power outreach – markets itself as a modern state, which happens to be a dependable friend to all the major western democracies," he said. "In reality however, the Emiratis, whose governance style has been partly inspired by China's strict form of authoritarianism, always campaign against liberalism and its key principles."

A spokesperson for the UAE embassy in London did not respond to a request for comment.

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Russia

Dozens killed in Siberia after coalmine explosion – reports



Rescuers at Listvyazhnaya coalmine on Thursday. Photograph: Kemerovo region government press/AFP/Getty Images

Associated Press

Thu 25 Nov 2021 08.32 EST

A devastating explosion in a Siberian coalmine on Thursday left 52 miners and rescuers dead about 250 meters (820ft) underground, Russian officials have said.

Hours after a methane gas explosion and fire filled the mine with toxic fumes, rescuers found 14 bodies but then were forced to halt the search for 38 others because of a buildup of methane and carbon monoxide gas from the fire. A total of 239 people were rescued.

The state Tass and RIA-Novosti news agencies cited emergency officials as saying that there was no chance of finding any more survivors in the Listvyazhnaya mine, in the Kemerovo region of south-western Siberia.

The Interfax news agency cited a representative of the regional administration who also put the death toll at 52, saying they died of carbon monoxide poisoning.

It was the deadliest mine accident in Russia since 2010, when two methane explosions and a fire killed 91 people at the Raspadskaya mine, also in the Kemerovo region.

A total of 285 people were in the Listvyazhnaya mine early on Thursday when the blast sent smoke that quickly filled the mine through the ventilation system. Rescuers led to the surface 239 miners, 49 of whom were injured, and found 11 bodies.

Later in the day, six rescuers also died while searching for others trapped in a remote section of the mine, the news reports said. Regional officials declared three days of mourning.

Russia's deputy prosecutor general, Dmitry Demeshin, told reporters that the fire most probably resulted from a methane explosion caused by a spark.

The miners who survived described their shock after reaching the surface. "Impact. Air. Dust. And then we smelled gas and just started walking out, as many as we could," one of the rescued miners, Sergey Golubin, said in televised remarks. "We didn't even realise what happened at first and took some gas in."

Another miner, Rustam Chebelkov, recalled the dramatic moment when he was rescued along with his comrades as chaos engulfed the mine. "I was crawling and then I felt them grabbing me," he said.

"I reached my arms out to them, they couldn't see me, the visibility was bad. They grabbed me and pulled me out, if not for them, we'd be dead."

Explosions of methane released from coal beds during mining are rare but they cause the most fatalities in the coal mining industry.

The Interfax news agency reported that miners have oxygen supplies normally lasting for six hours that could only be stretched for a few more hours.

Russia's Investigative Committee has launched a criminal probe into the fire over violations of safety regulations that led to deaths. It said the mine director and two senior managers were detained.

The Russian president, Vladimir Putin, extended his condolences to the families of the dead and ordered the government to offer all necessary assistance to those injured.

Thursday's fire was not the first deadly accident at the Listvyazhnaya mine. In 2004, a methane explosion left 13 miners dead. In 2007, a methane explosion at the Ulyanovskaya mine in the Kemerovo region killed 110 miners in the deadliest mine accident since Soviet times.

In 2016, 36 miners were killed in a series of methane explosions in a coalmine in Russia's far north. In the wake of the incident, authorities analysed the safety of the country's 58 coalmines and declared 20 of them, or 34%, potentially unsafe.

The Listvyazhnaya mine was not among them at the time, according to media reports.

Russia's state technology and ecology watchdog, Rostekhnadzor, inspected the mine in April and registered 139 violations, including breaching fire safety regulations.

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Headlines monday 22 november 2021

- [Social care UK minister refuses to rule out people having to sell homes to fund care](#)
- [Live UK politics: Labour urges Tory MPs to reject PM's 'care con' ahead of Commons vote](#)
- [Q&A The England social care cap: how will it work and is it fair?](#)
- [Conservatives MPs warn Boris Johnson not to take support for granted over social care cap](#)

[Social care](#)

UK minister refuses to rule out people having to sell homes to fund care



There is alarm that the £86,000 cap on lifetime care costs could leave thousands of England's poorest pensioners paying the same as wealthier people. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

[Jamie Grierson](#) and [Peter Walker](#)

Mon 22 Nov 2021 04.38 EST

A government minister has been unable to guarantee that some people will not have to sell their homes to fund their own social care amid a [backbench rebellion](#) over plans to scale back a cap on costs.

The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) [caused alarm](#) on Thursday when it revealed it would calculate the £86,000 cap on lifetime care costs in a way that could leave tens of thousands of England's poorest pensioners paying the same as wealthier people.

With MPs due to vote on the proposal on Monday evening, some expressed hope that the government would make a last-minute concession in the face of increasingly rebellious backbenchers who fear a backlash from constituents.

Pressed on whether some people would have to sell their homes to pay for care, despite Boris Johnson's pledge that his policy meant they would not, the business minister Paul Scully told Sky News: "There will be fewer people selling their houses and hopefully none."

He continued: "I can't tell you what individuals are going to do. What I'm saying is the social care solution is all about getting a cap above which you do not need to pay – that gives people certainty."

Asked again whether some people receiving care may have to sell up under the proposals, he said: "It will depend on different circumstances.

"If you hit the cap you will not have to pay any more money for your personal care – I think that is a fair, balanced approach for taxpayers and people who are having to pay for what is a really expensive, at the moment, form of care through social care."

In a subsequent interview with BBC Radio 4's Today programme, Scully said that under the new plans people would not need to sell homes in their lifetime, but did not disagree that some would be unable to pass them on to children.

He said: "If you're solely looking at what happens to someone's home, there are deferred payment agreements, and if the spouse continues to live in the home, the value of the house won't be included in someone's asset calculations, so nobody will be forced out of their homes."

[Sir Andrew Dilnot, the economist](#) whose report on social care a decade ago established the principle of capping costs, told Today that the government's tweak to the system would save it about £900m a year by the time it was fully operational, near the end of this decade.

“That needs to be compared to the much more than £10bn a year that the health and social care levy was going to raise,” he said.

“If this amendment is passed, then the less well-off person will not hit the cap at the same time as the better-off person, and will go on spending out of their own income and wealth until they spend exactly the same as the amount the better-off person has spent, £86,000, and then they hit the cap. That doesn’t seem very progressive.”

Chart

The shadow health secretary, Jonathan Ashworth, said the new plan was “a care con” rather than a care plan.

He said: “Because if you live in a £1m house, perhaps in the home counties, 90% of your assets will be protected if you need social care, but if you live in a £80,000 terraced house in Hartlepool or Mansfield or Wigan, for example, you lose nearly everything. That is not fair. That is not levelling up. That’s daylight robbery.”

Christian Wakeford, the Bury South Tory MP, previously expressed anger that the plans appeared to have been changed since MPs voted in September to support the £12bn a year health and social care levy that will pay for the policy.

“If we’re changing the goalposts again, halfway through the match, it doesn’t sit comfortably with me or many colleagues,” he said, warning the government: “It shouldn’t be taken for granted that we’re just going to walk through the same lobby.”

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

[**Politics**](#)

Government narrowly wins vote on social care cap with majority of 26 – as it happened

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/live/2021/nov/22/uk-politics-live-labour-tory-mps-boris-johnson-care-cap-commons-vote-latest-updates>

Social care

The England social care cap: how will it work and is it fair?



The proportion of income paid for care costs will still be unfair for those on lower incomes, experts say. Photograph: Rosemary Roberts/Alamy

[Heather Stewart](#)

Mon 22 Nov 2021 05.06 EST

What is the social care cap?

The cap is a lifetime limit of £86,000 on how much individuals will have to pay towards their care costs. First proposed more than a decade ago by the economist Sir Andrew Dilnot in a government-commissioned review, it is designed to allow individuals hit by hefty care costs to pass on more of their assets to their children, instead of seeing them wiped out. In September Boris Johnson [announced](#) the cap would be implemented from 2023, funded

by a new £12bn-a-year “health and social care levy” that comes into force next April.

What has been announced ?

While MPs at Westminster were focused on the scandal over MPs’ second jobs, the government published new details of how the social care cap will operate. People with assets of less than £100,000 will receive means-tested support to help them pay for their care, under the new system.

But Department of [Health](#) and Social Care (DHSC) guidance has revealed that only the amount these households contribute themselves – not the total cost of their care – will count towards the £86,000 cap. In other words, many will still end up paying a total of £86,000, the same contribution those with much larger assets will have to make.

That approach was rejected by the Dilnot review as “unfair for those on low incomes” because the net effect would be that this group “contribute more slowly, rather than contributing less overall” than much wealthier individuals.

What do experts make of the changes?

Sally Warren, director of policy at the King’s Fund, said the cap as described “no longer protects those with lower assets from catastrophic costs” when they need care.

Torsten Bell, of the Resolution Foundation thinktank, tweeted: “Here’s a simple way to think about the problem the government has created: if you own a £1m house in the home counties, over 90% of your assets are protected. If you’ve got a terraced house in Hartlepool (worth £70k) you can lose almost everything.”

Will MPs be given a vote on the cap?

Yes, the vote will be held on Monday evening. A cap on care costs was originally legislated for by MPs in the 2014 Care Act under David

Cameron's coalition government but never implemented. That legislation will now have to be amended to make it operate in the way the government is suggesting. This could give Conservative MPs concerned about the impact on lower-income households the opportunity to express their concerns and possibly rebel against the government.

And is £86,000 the maximum anyone will pay for their care?

No. The DHSC guidance also makes clear that, as expected and as Dilnot recommended, "daily living costs" will be excluded. These will be set at a nationwide flat rate of £200 a week. The guidance says: "People will remain responsible for their daily living costs throughout their care journey, including after they reach the cap."

The headline of this article was amended on 18 November 2021. The original incorrectly suggested the social care cap would cover the whole of the UK. The policy covers only England.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/nov/17/the-uk-social-care-cap-how-will-it-work-and-is-it-fair>

Social care

Tory MPs warn Boris Johnson not to take support for granted over social care cap



Boris Johnson is accused of ‘putting the cart before the horse’ after MPs were asked to vote on the proposals before more details were published.
Photograph: Nathan Stirk/Getty Images

[Heather Stewart](#) and [Rajeev Syal](#)

Sun 21 Nov 2021 15.57 EST

Boris Johnson has been warned not to take the support of his MPs for granted, as he faces a backbench rebellion over controversial plans to scale back the social care cap after a tumultuous fortnight at Westminster.

The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) [caused alarm](#) on Thursday when it revealed it would calculate the £86,000 cap on lifetime

care costs in a way that could leave tens of thousands of England's poorest pensioners paying the same as wealthier people.

With MPs due to vote on the proposal on Monday evening, some expressed hope that the government would make a last-minute concession in the face of increasingly angry backbenchers who fear backlash from constituents.

Christian Wakeford, the Bury South MP, expressed anger that the plans appeared to have been changed since MPs voted in September to support the £12bn a year health and social care levy that will pay for the policy.

"If we're changing the goalposts again, halfway through the match, it doesn't sit comfortably with me or many colleagues," he said, warning the government: "It shouldn't be taken for granted that we're just going to walk through the same lobby."

Several backbenchers told the *Guardian* they were considering voting against the government's proposed method to calculate the social care cap. One former minister said they were "very concerned" about the details of how the cap would operate, and it had been "clear from the start that when you looked at the detail it didn't meet the rhetoric". Johnson has repeatedly said he will "fix" social care.

Another former minister said with the rebellion apparently gathering pace they hoped the government would be prepared to make a last-minute concession. Some MPs are considering backing other amendments, including one from Jeremy Hunt calling for the NHS to carry out better workforce planning.

Robert Buckland, the former justice secretary, became the most senior Tory to say publicly that he was minded not to support the changes to the social care cap on Sunday, telling LBC: "I think the government should look again at this."

He said asking MPs to vote on the proposals before publishing more details in the promised social care white paper meant the government was in danger of "putting the cart before the horse".

Many Conservative MPs remain angry about their treatment at the hands of No 10 over the Owen Paterson affair, when they were dragooned into Johnson's botched attempt to protect the disgraced former MP.

The government announced on Thursday that the means-tested support families receive with their care would not be counted towards the £85,000 total, meaning those with relatively modest assets could still see themselves paying that amount in full.

Torsten Bell, director of the Resolution Foundation thinktank, said the government risked "turning very good news about long overdue social care reform into a huge political headache".

He said: "This seemingly techie change has very real implications, leaving people with fewer assets with far less protection than previously planned. Changing the cap on care costs into something benefiting only households with significant assets, who live disproportionately in the south, isn't obviously the way you'd choose to put levelling up back on track after last week's train traumas."

Many red wall Conservative MPs had already [reacted with anger last week to the government's integrated rail plan](#), which is significantly less ambitious than repeated promises from the prime minister had led them to expect.

Sajid Javid defended the social care plans on Sunday, saying that while they were less generous than proposals originally set out by the economist Sir Andrew Dilnot, who first devised the cap, they would still do "what we said we would do, which is protect people from the costs of catastrophic costs of care by capping it at £86,000".

The health secretary pointed out that one in seven people had care costs that were higher than £86,000, and said a new more generous means test meant that "everyone, no matter where they are in the country, will be better off under the new proposals that we've set out, versus the current system".

But Dilnot, who originally proposed the cap a decade ago, has said he is disappointed in the government's approach. "The people who are most harshly affected by this change are people with assets of exactly £106,000.

But everybody with assets of less than £186,000 would do less well under what the government is proposing than the proposals that we made,” he told MPs last week.

Liz Kendall, the shadow care secretary, urged Conservative MPs to support Labour in rejecting the change in Monday’s vote. “You can’t sell this to constituents: they’re going to be hit in their pockets, to protect millionaires’ mansions,” she said.

Daisy Cooper, the Lib Dems’ health and social care spokesperson, said: “These social care plans are two broken promises in one. Boris Johnson promised in his manifesto not to raise national insurance tax and that no one would have to sell their home to pay for care.

“Now struggling families face being hammered by unfair tax rises, while still facing losing their homes to fund care costs.”

Asked whether the government would break its manifesto promise that “nobody needing care should be forced to sell their home to pay for it,” Javid said people would be able to “plan for the future” if they knew their total costs would not be more than £86,000.

He added that no one would have to sell their home during their lifetime, because of deferred payment agreements. These have already been in place for several years in many parts of the country, and allow patients to accrue a debt for their care that can be met out of their estate after their death.

Whitehall sources blamed the chancellor, [Rishi Sunak](#), for both the less generous social care policy, and the scaled-back rail plans, with the Treasury flexing its muscles across government.

Nevertheless, the Treasury insists it has not been involved in drawing up the detail of how the care costs cap would work, and that it is up to DHSC to decide how to work within its budget.

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Interview

Brooke Shields on child stardom, sexualisation and nailing comedy: ‘It’s not in my nature to be a victim’

[Emine Saner](#)



Brooke Shields: ‘I feel more empowered now than I ever did.’ Photograph: Guy Aroch



[@eminesaner](#)

Mon 22 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

How, I wonder, is Brooke Shields so sorted? She has survived a childhood with an alcoholic mother, some disturbing early films, a nation’s creepy obsession with her, a divorce and severe postnatal depression. She even came through the 90s’ overplucked-eyebrow trend unharmed. And here she is, radiant through my laptop screen, in her beautiful New York townhouse kitchen, with a dog at her feet, husband milling about in the background, one teenage daughter upstairs, another successfully packed off to college, and her sense of humour very much intact. She has, she says with a smile, when I point out how together she seems, “been going to therapy for 35 years”.

Shields is in a Christmas romcom, for Netflix, which is the gift you didn’t know you wanted. “There’s dogs, castles, knitters, pubs!” she says, laughing. I don’t need convincing. The plot of *A Castle for Christmas* may be as predictable as gift-wrapped socks, but sometimes you just need preposterous cosy escapism. Shields is great as bestselling American author Sophie Brown, who, suffering with writer’s block, escapes to Scotland to trace her roots and ends up acquiring a stately home. And, despite the film’s many

conventions, a middle-aged romcom still feels quite radical. There are lots of women in their 50s like Sophie, she says, “who are taking their life in their own hands. They’ve raised kids, they’re moving on to this next phase and there’s a lot of power that comes with that.”

Shields has seen it in her friends, and in herself. “There’s a level of confidence, a level of ‘I don’t give a shit’. My friends are moms who are starting new careers, who are empty nesters, and who are saying: ‘I’m this age but there’s so much more for me to do. And I’m capable of it, and I’m independent.’ We love the men in our lives, but we’re not reliant on them. We’re not defined by this, this or this – and that includes motherhood. And I think that’s very appealing.”



With Cary Elwes in *A Castle for Christmas*. Photograph: Mark Mainz/Netflix

Shields recently launched [her own company, Beginning Is Now](#), an online platform for women, which came out of this newfound confidence. “I feel stronger, I feel sexier, I feel less burdened by: ‘Oh, what do they think of me?’ I’m not encumbered in the same way that I spent a great deal of my youth in. I still care about people, but I don’t put myself in this position to feel ‘less than’. And all of a sudden, I was like: ‘Why am I not represented?’

Why am I told: ‘You’re over because you’re not in your 20s’? I’m 56 and I feel more empowered now than I ever did.”

Shields has been famous almost all her life. She appeared in a soap advert when she was 11 months old, and famously as a prostituted child in the film *Pretty Baby* at age 11. As a teenager in the 80s, she was everywhere. There were the blatant cash-generators – there was a Brooke Shields doll and she put her name to a range of hairdryers – and also highly sexualised adverts for Calvin Klein, and the film *Blue Lagoon*, in which, not yet 16, she spent most of the time naked. Then Shields escaped it all and took up a place at Princeton University, which she says now perhaps wasn’t the best timing in terms of her career, but probably saved her sanity.

Hollywood is littered with the broken careers, and lives, of child stars. “I don’t know why I didn’t,” she says when I ask why she never hurtled down that path. “I talk about it a lot in therapy, but I think because I was so ...” She pauses. “I had to keep my mother alive. The focal point for me was keeping her alive, because it was the two of us alone in the world, in my opinion.”

Shields’s mother, Teri, was a working-class girl from New Jersey who, through her wit, beauty and force of personality, had turned herself into a Manhattan socialite. She had become pregnant with Brooke after a brief relationship with a man from a wealthy New York family; they divorced when Shields was five months old. Shields then spent a strange childhood shuttling between her father’s affluent Long Island life and her mother’s penniless bohemia.



Teri and Brooke Shields in 1978. Photograph: Robert R McElroy/Getty Images

Shields was then – as now – beautiful, and Teri recognised this, shepherding her daughter’s career. “She had this baby that looked this way, and that’s how we survived,” says Shields. “My looking a certain way paid the bills.” Did that feel like a big responsibility? “I just loved the approval. And I loved working and I loved being on a set. We had fun, we travelled everywhere. So it wasn’t as if I felt the responsibility as much as: ‘Oh my God, we get to get a car. Oh, we bought a house. We bought another house.’ Like, if I do this, we get this. That’s the way it went for decades.” There was never a plan, she says, and she stresses Teri wasn’t pushy. “As long as I was happy, we kept doing it. I never did something I didn’t want to do.”

But some of the things Teri consented to on her daughter’s behalf – or even set up herself – seem so damaging. When Shields was 10, Teri commissioned a photographer, Gary Gross, to take nude photographs of her for the Playboy publication Sugar’n’Spice (later, [Tate Modern removed an artwork based on the photograph](#), made by the artist Richard Prince, from an exhibition). When Shields, then 11, appeared in Louis Malle’s film *Pretty Baby*, playing a child who grows up in a brothel and is then auctioned off to the highest bidder, she was filmed naked. Teri got a storm of criticism for allowing her daughter to be in the film – and for *Blue Lagoon* a few years

later, in which Shields and her co-star Chris Atkins are marooned on an island as children, go through puberty and develop a sexual relationship. Shields had a body double for the sex scenes, but the whole thing is uncomfortable (off-screen, Shield wrote in her memoir, she and Atkins were being encouraged to fall in love for real; she was 14, he was 18). There is a misogynistic inevitability to the extent to which her mother was blamed, rather than the men who actually made these films, but still, you have to wonder what Teri was thinking. Would Shields have let her daughters do a film like *Pretty Baby*? “In 1977, probably,” she says. “Now, I don’t know if I would. It was a different era.”

Does she look at the film with different eyes now? Shields, who wrote a thesis on Malle’s work at college, is proud of the film (through her mother, she grew up with an appreciation for European arthouse films). She talks for a while about its “cinematic portrayal”, but acknowledges: “I just don’t know if you could make that movie today. I guess you’d have to have an actress who was older, playing younger.” She adds: “I’m not quite sure what the rules are now”, as if it’s an HR issue, rather than a societal one. “But I also wasn’t personally scathed by it.”



With Chris Atkins in *The Blue Lagoon*. Photograph: Columbia Pictures/Allstar

Did she not feel it was damaging even being exposed to those themes? “Not when you grow up in New York. I mean, it just takes five minutes to see – on the old 42nd Street – what prostitution was. And also I was very sequestered from all of it in my real life. I was a virgin till I was 22, so it was all pretend in my mind. I was an actress. I didn’t suffer privately about it.” But more widely, does she look back – at the films, the photos, the ads – and think how damaging it is, as a culture, to sexualise young girls like that? “I think it’s been done since the dawn of time, and I think it’s going to keep going on,” she says. She seems a little detached and academic about it, saying: “There’s something incredibly seductive about youth … I think it just has different forms and it’s how you survive it, and whether you choose to be victimised by it. It’s not in my nature to be a victim.”

If Teri was controlling, an upshot was that it was protective. Shields never “had a #MeToo moment”, she points out. Her mother would even come with her to nights out at Studio 54. “I could just dance and have a really good time, and she would make sure I got home,” says Shields. “I had school the next day. She protected me, like, nobody got near me.” For all their unusual situation, Teri tried to maintain a degree of normality for her daughter – they stayed in New York, rather than moving to Hollywood, and Shields attended normal schools – which probably explains why she seems grounded today. Teri, says Shields, “had her issues, but I felt loved by her”.

She thinks her mother’s alcoholism – in her memoir she writes painfully about Teri’s erratic behaviour – probably steered her away from drink or drugs, inadvertently rather than consciously. “I think that it seemed like a waste of time. Being not present, to me, seemed like a waste; she missed out on a lot.” Shields writes in her book that her career would have gone differently – or at least there would have been a solid plan – had she had a proper agent, rather than her mother’s scattergun, moneymaking approach (at one point Meryl Streep’s agent wanted to take Shields on, so long as she left Teri and committed to being an actor, rather than a celebrity; Teri refused to let her do it). “I think my talent would have been more forward than my fame,” she says now. Then again, she adds brightly, “the fame trajectory” – the one that relied on the products, and magazine covers, and gossip about dating Michael Jackson – perhaps explains her longevity. “So on the one hand, I think it would have gone differently, but I’m not sure I would still be here, or relevant or working.”



Shields with a Brooke Shields doll, in 1982. Photograph: Bettmann/Bettmann Archive

It must be so strange to have never really known anonymity. Did she feel able to become her own person? “I don’t think I became my own person until I got pregnant with my first kid,” says Shields. That was in 2003. “I finally now am my own person. It’s taken this many years, because if you grow up being accountable to a persona, accountable to the public, there’s so many different things that we are encapsulated in. And then I had my first kid, and no one could tell me really how to do it. Like, I’m responsible for that person. I’m doing this with this kid, and you just hope you don’t fuck them up.” She laughs.

It is also about getting older, she says. “For the past almost 20 years, I’ve been coming more into my own. I don’t spend time with people I don’t want to spend time with any more. I don’t spend time doing things I don’t want to do. I don’t make movies that don’t make me happy.” How much of it was breaking away from her mother? “I was like a summer away from being Grey Gardens with my mom,” says Shields of the 1975 documentary about a reclusive mother and daughter, both named Edie, who lived together. She says her first husband, [the tennis player Andre Agassi](#), who she got together with in 1993, “really helped me sort of individuate from my mother and take ownership of my career in a proactive way. I think that that started me

understanding that I could take control of my career, that I could focus on things that I wanted to do. So the individuation process from my mom was a lot later than most.”

Her marriage to Agassi broke up in 1999. In 2001, Shields married the screenwriter and producer Chris Henchy, with whom she has had two daughters. In her career, she found a home in comedy; her starring role in the sitcom *Suddenly Susan* brought her two Golden Globe nominations. Her ability to send herself up is obvious on her social media accounts, and *A Castle for Christmas* would probably have been awful without Shields’s comic charm. Comedy, she says, “is where I am the happiest”.



Teri and Brooke at Studio 54 in 1978. Photograph: Ron Galella/Ron Galella Collection/Getty Images

Was it a reaction against the teen sex-symbol image? She insists not, more that she’s part of a long tradition. “The visual of a pretty girl falling on her face somehow is really appealing. That’s been in comedy for a long time; Lucille Ball was a beauty queen. My image went through so many different machinations. I mean, it was like, I was the Lolita, then I was the most famous virgin. Whatever anybody wanted to label me as, they did. Now I’m the depression person, because I spoke about postpartum depression.”

Shields wrote a book, *Down Came the Rain*, about her experience of depression following the birth of her first daughter, at a time when few women, [particularly movie stars, spoke about it](#). “I just set out to be honest, because I was suffering and I saw other people suffer, and nobody was talking about it, and that angered me,” says Shields. “I was like: why should I be made to feel like I’m not a good mom when no one told me about this? So I decided to be accountable and talk about it, because the shame surrounding it is really unfortunate. And it did help, which I’m told quite frequently. I wish that there had been something that I could have read. I wanted to give people forgiveness from it, I needed to be let off my own hook.”

In a career that has spanned more than 55 years, Shields – grounded, sensible and with a willingness to see the ridiculous in things – takes the long view. She realises that to try to keep her teen success going would have been a huge pressure as well as impossible, and that careers, if you’re lucky enough to have a long one, go up and down. “Nobody really can maintain it, but I learned that at a young age,” she says. “I’m not chasing it.”

A Castle for Christmas is on Netflix from 26 November

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2021/nov/22/brooke-shields-on-child-stardom-sexualisation-and-nailing-comedy-its-not-in-my-nature-to-be-a-victim>

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An Audience With Adele review – a master comedian at work



Surpassing all expectations ... An Audience With Adele. Photograph: ITV



Rachel Aroesti

Sun 21 Nov 2021 18.35 EST

An Audience With ..., the long-running ITV format that matches a star with a celebrity-heavy crowd, has lain dormant for a decade, ever since Barry Manilow serenaded guests including Gino D'Acampo, Stacey Solomon and Bruno Tonioli back in 2011. Only a great cultural event could be worthy of the show's resurrection – and obviously, a new [Adele](#) album qualifies. Apparently, the musician is one of the programme's most ardent fans, and her presence has certainly elevated the guest-list since the last iteration: the congregation here includes Emma Watson, Gareth Southgate, Samuel L Jackson, Bryan Cranston, Dua Lipa, Dawn French and many more.

What becomes very clear very quickly is that this is the ideal vehicle for Adele. The musician is known as the mega-voice behind a raft of glacial, tear-jerking torch songs. She's also known as a chronically no-nonsense, compulsively self-deprecating Londoner with a great sense of humour. This programme requires both. It needs a blockbuster musician, but also a consummate entertainer: a raconteur, an MC, a comedian, a natural host. Tonight Adele proves she can fulfil all those roles with her eyes closed – she is ridiculously quick-witted and radiates relatability (see: her revelation that beneath her glitzy black dress her tights are becoming “baggy in the

crotch’’). What could have been contrived and navel-gazing feels, in Adele’s hands, authentic, down-to-earth and heartwarming. She is a master at deflecting praise and allergic to self-seriousness. In other words, she’s very good at being British.

Nowadays, however, the Londoner is an LA resident, and this broadcast lags a week behind a similar US TV special. *Adele One Night Only* was half outdoor Hollywood gig, half deep and meaningful with Oprah, during which the musician opened up about her divorce, the main inspiration behind her new album, *30*. It won’t come as a shock to hear that there is no public therapy session at the London Palladium, and the questions asked by the rather bashful famous faces are light-hearted (when has she had an awkward encounter with one of her idols, wonders Stormzy). We get insight into who she is from the way she navigates proceedings, not the granular details of her private life.



A blockbuster performer ... *An Audience With Adele*. Photograph: ITV

In the US version, the showstopper moment came from a man surprising his girlfriend with a proposal. This time, it is Adele herself who is surprised (maybe), when Emma Thompson – whose frantic dancing deserves a TV special all of its own – asks her to name an influential figure in her early life. The musician’s answer is her old English teacher, Ms McDonald, who

happens to be in the crowd. The pair have an extremely moving reunion on stage, which also tees up the comic highlight of the night: Adele's teariness necessitates a makeup touch-up, setting off a chain of events that ends with her pal Alan Carr being forced to perform *Make You Feel My Love* for everybody, very badly. "Now that's a true friend," says Adele when she returns, not missing a beat.

Adele's own singing is incredible, especially on her current single, the record-breaking *Easy on Me* (even if she restarts it in order to perform it perfectly: "I'm shitting myself," she explains). The one-note nature of Adele's music – something she references here, encouraging the crowd to dance to *Send My Love (To Your New Lover)* because most of the other songs are "sad and miserable" – might have made such a programme drag were it not for the transportative power of her voice. Her ability to perform with her face (the production involves a full-band and backing singers but is otherwise distinctly no-frills) also helps: many of these songs are much more engaging in person than on record.

Still, after such uproarious inter-song banter, to end the show abruptly after performing an as-yet practically unknown track – *Love Is A Game*, from 30 – is anticlimactic. Yet there's little doubt Adele surpassed whatever expectations anyone might have had of her hosting skills: it's hard to imagine anybody doing this better. Hopefully, this multi-million-selling pop superstar will be back to present in another ITV teatime slot very soon.

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Rights and freedomWorkers' rights

The road to reform: have things improved for Qatar's World Cup migrant workers?



Qatar claims reforms have benefited more than a million workers but many migrants say they are threatened if they try to use their right to change jobs.
Photograph: Pete Patisson

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[Pete Pattisson in Doha](#)

Mon 22 Nov 2021 03.00 EST

When Qatar won the bid to host the [World Cup](#) in 2010, the triumphant Gulf state unveiled plans to host the most spectacular of all World Cup tournaments and began an ambitious building plan of state-of-the-art stadiums, luxury hotels and a sparkling new metro.

Yet, over the next decade, the brutal conditions in which hundreds of thousands of migrant workers toiled in searing heat to build Qatar's World Cup vision has been exposed, with investigations into the [forced labour](#), [debt bondage](#) and [worker death toll](#) causing [international outrage](#).

In an attempt to quell the mounting criticism, [Qatar](#) announced sweeping labour reforms in 2019. This included ending *kafala*, the system that made it illegal for migrant workers to change jobs or leave the country without their employer's permission, effectively trapping workers who were being exploited and abused. Other reforms included the first minimum wage for migrant workers in the region and harsher penalties for companies that did not comply with the new labour laws.

When they [came into force in September 2020](#), the reforms were met with wide acclaim. Fifa called them groundbreaking. The UN said they marked a new era. An international trade union referred to them as a gamechanger. Even human rights groups, long critical of Qatar's record on labour rights, gave them a cautious welcome.

Yet more than 40 migrant workers who talked to the Guardian in Qatar in September and October this year say that for them, nothing much has changed.

Despite the International Labour Organisation (ILO) claiming that more than 200,000 workers have changed employers since the new laws were rolled out, the Guardian met only one worker – a young man from Kenya – who had managed to leave his job.

His experience spoke strongly of the potential empowerment the new laws could bring to worker's lives. When he first arrived in Qatar, he was earning 625 rials (£127) a month as a construction worker. Now he is working for a logistics company with a salary almost three times higher. "I'm able to send much more money home. Now I can't complain," he says.

Yet everyone else the Guardian spoke to who wanted to change jobs says it is difficult or impossible to do so.

They allege their companies are simply ignoring the new laws. Some say their bosses threaten to impose fines or hold back wages if they try to change jobs, and that they are living so close to destitution this could be catastrophic.

Other workers say employers refuse to sign resignation letters or issue "no objection certificates", seemingly unaware that neither are required under the reformed labour code.

"They threaten us, saying they will deduct the cost of our room and bedding from our salary and refuse to pay end-of-service benefits if we try to leave," one Indian security guard says. "We are still under their control."

A Kenyan security guard says: “I found another job but when I went to my company, they refused to release me. I waited three months and they refused again.” He says he could go to a labour court to fight his case but would have to pay for transport that he cannot afford and take time off work that his company will not allow.



A security guard at a five-star hotel near Doha shelters from the blistering sun. Photograph: Pete Patisson

Migrant-rights.org, an advocacy group for migrant workers across the Gulf, describe the end of *kafala* as a “mirage”, saying that employers could easily prevent unhappy workers from leaving.

When asked if the reforms had made a difference, another worker from Nepal gives a simple verdict: “*Kafala* is alive.”

The new minimum wage of 1,000 rials a month, plus food and board, appears to be more rigorously enforced. Most low-wage workers interviewed said they receive the legal minimum, a significant increase on their previous salaries, except some security guards who routinely work 12-hour shifts, but do not receive the mandated overtime payments.

Yet the new minimum wage set by the Qatari government, one of the richest countries in the world, is still equivalent to just £1 an hour.

Such low wages mean that workers often remain in Qatar for years, unable to afford to return home to their families. One Nepali worker who talked to the Guardian has not seen his wife and child in five years. “When I call my son he doesn’t come to me,” he says. “He won’t [even] talk to me on the phone.”

The Qatari authorities and the ILO acknowledge that the reforms are a work in progress. “[The Qatari government] are faced with implementation challenges and with some level of resistance, which is not surprising given their magnitude,” says Max Tuñón, head of the ILO project in Qatar.

A spokesperson for the government says that with the new laws in place, the emphasis had shifted to implementation and enforcement: “Achieving systemic change is a long-term process and shifting the behaviour of every company will take.” Strict penalties have been imposed on companies that try to evade the law, they add.

Qatar’s Supreme Committee, the body in charge of delivering the World Cup, said the tournament is a powerful catalyst for delivering a sustainable human and social legacy ahead of, during, and beyond the 2022 Fifa World Cup.

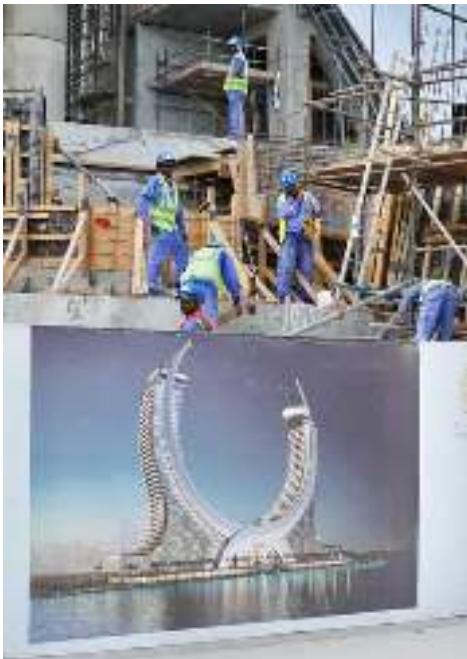
It said in a statement: “Our commitment to workers welfare has resulted in significant improvements in accommodation standards, health and safety regulations, grievance mechanisms, healthcare provision, and reimbursements of illegal recruitment fees to workers.”

Human rights groups are warning that Qatar is running out of time to ensure the new reforms actually make life better for migrant workers before the start of the World Cup in November next year.

“[Qatar’s] significant reform to the *kafala* sponsorship system didn’t happen until late in 2020, 10 years after the country put itself in the global spotlight,” says James Lynch, a director at human rights group FairSquare.

“The reforms have been beset by teething difficulties and pushback from the business community, and so there are real questions about whether it is

going to deliver on its transformative potential in the lead-up to and beyond the World Cup.”



Workers from India constructing the Katara Towers, a luxury hotel and office complex in Lusail, north of Doha. Photograph: Pete Patisson

Most of the eight World Cup stadiums and related infrastructure had been completed by the end of 2020, before the reforms fully came into effect.

“There is an urgent need for an injection of political will to ensure this and other reforms have a meaningful impact for workers, and embed these changes for the long term,” Lynch says.

Qatar, Fifa and the ILO have said repeatedly that the World Cup will leave a lasting legacy of better workers’ rights in Qatar and across the region. So far, anecdotal evidence suggests that legacy is far from secure.

In the road construction works near central Doha last month, the Guardian met four workers who had recently arrived from India employed by AlJaber Engineering. AlJaber, one of Qatar’s top construction firms, built the Al Thumama Stadium. Along with all other World Cup contractors, AlJaber must adhere to strict worker welfare standards which, among other things, do not allow workers to pay recruitment fees.

But the four workers claim they each paid almost £1,000 in recruitment fees to secure their jobs. Their claims suggest that AlJaber could be failing to apply the World Cup worker welfare standards to its new contracts. AlJaber Engineering did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

Human rights campaigners are already questioning what pressure there will be on the Qatari government to ensure the new laws are actually implemented on the ground after the World Cup ends next year.

In a recent interview, [Malcolm Bidali, a Kenyan blogger and migrant worker who was detained](#), held in solitary confinement, and then charged with spreading “false news” for writing about the plight of migrant workers online, is asking the same question. “If I was unjustly detained and unjustly fined – while all eyes are on Qatar – what happens when no one’s looking?” he asks.

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World Cup

The legacy question: will World Cup change Qatar or is it more the other way round?

[Sean Ingle](#)





Workers outside the Ras Abu Aboud Stadium, one of the venues for the Qatar World Cup. Photograph: Hamad I Mohammed/Reuters

Mon 22 Nov 2021 03.00 EST

Imagine the scene in Qatar, a year from now. Across the Corniche, the palm-fringed boulevard which runs along Doha's seafront, thousands of football fans of different nationalities and religions are smiling, swaying, having fun. And that sound you hear? Not bottles being smashed, but stereotypes. Against expectations, [the first Arab World Cup](#) – and the first Muslim World Cup – is not only building bridges between East and West but changing perceptions of the country itself.

The other hero in this rose-tinted story? The power of sport itself. Over the weekend Gianni Infantino, the Fifa president, praised Qatar for taking “real steps” [since winning the right to host the World Cup](#), “particularly in relation to human rights and workers’ welfare”. It followed a promise by Hassan Al-Thawadi, the secretary general of the Qatar 2022 supreme committee, that the tournament would “set new benchmarks for social, human, economic and environmental development … and will forever be remembered as innovative, sustainable and transformative”.

But will the [World Cup](#) really change Qatar – or merely alter perceptions of the country? As usual, it pays to be sceptical.

Qatar, of course, insists it has made fundamental changes – in particular the abolition of the kafala system in 2020, which stopped migrants from changing jobs or leaving the country without their employer's permission. “The abolition of kafala, the liberalisation of the job market and implementation of a national minimum wage would have happened in time,” says one insider. “But has the World Cup been a catalyst? Unquestionably.”

But there are caveats and asterisks. Last week Amnesty International said that the new laws were not yet being implemented by all employers, leaving migrant workers still facing “widespread exploitation”. That sentiment is echoed by Nicholas McGeehan, of the human rights organisation FairSquare, who warns there is “genuine concern that as soon as the spotlight is taken away after 2022, these reforms will be rolled back.”

McGeehan also points to the lack of investigation into the deaths of at least 6,500 migrant workers from south-east Asia in Qatar since 2010 as another reason to be sceptical about claims the country has fundamentally changed. “The families still have no answers as to how these workers died, because no one took the time to do the investigations,” he says. “They've also ruled out their access to compensation. I think that's inexcusable. And I would hope the players who participate in the World Cup agree.”

What about freedom of speech? Qatar is certainly more open than most countries in the Middle East, with Reporters Without Borders noting that “the outspoken Qatari TV broadcaster Al Jazeera has transformed the media landscape in the rest of the Arab world”. But Qatar is ranked 128 out of 179 countries in the Press Freedom Index. In 2010 when it won the right to host the World Cup its position was 121st. “Qatar was already leading the way on media freedoms in the region,” McGeehan says. “It is a stretch to say it has become more liberal over the past decade.”

A similarly complex story emerges when it comes to LGBT rights. Homosexuality is illegal in Qatar, but the authorities insist that gay fans are welcome at the World Cup – providing they act conservatively. That promise

appears to be genuine. When Paul Amann, the founder of the Liverpool LGBT group Kops Out, visited Qatar for the Club World Cup in 2019, he was pleasantly surprised. “It’s not a country I would choose to live in,” he says. “But I wouldn’t mind revisiting it again. My husband and I went to the Corniche, museum and souk at night, and we felt entirely safe.”



Gianni Infantino at the presentation ceremony of the Fifa Club World Cup in Doha earlier this year. Photograph: David Ramos - FIFA/Getty Images

Again, though, there are significant caveats. As McGeehan points out, LGBT people living in Qatar face a very different experience. “The laws remain deeply discriminatory,” he says. “And if you’re gay, you are excluded from society. That takes an appalling toll on LGBT people in Qatar. It ruins their lives. Football is not going to change that. That change will come from within Qatari society.”

Have there been actual changes since the country won the right to host the World Cup? Sure. Infrastructure-wise, it has been transformed. And when the academic Joel Rookwood visited Qatar for the Club World Cup in 2019, he noticed there were far more women fans compared to when he conducted research at the Asian Cup in 2011. Back then he saw just six women across 14 games. “It wasn’t just that there were far more women in 2019,” he says.

“It was that they went unnoticed. They were accepted. I think that’s a really big shift.”

Even so, it is hard to make a case that Qatar has become significantly more liberal and open since 2010. Yet, for many football fans, that probably does not matter.

A few years ago when Rookwood interviewed supporters who travel to World Cups about the 2022 tournament, for instance, he found the “overwhelming majority... made little reference to [Qatar’s human rights violations](#), discussed continuously by media sources and non-governmental organisation”. As one fan put it to him: “You don’t really think of the workers. I know it sounds bad, but ... once you’re there it’s party time.”

Such attitudes do not surprise McGeehan. When asked about the tournament’s potential legacy McGeehan is blunt. “Hosting the World Cup has largely benefited Qatar’s reputation. It is now identifiable on the world stage. And while that has come at a cost on one or two issues, for every fan who is concerned about migrant workers and LGBT issues, there’s probably another 40 or 50 people who are uncritically consuming PR content that presents Qatar as a luxurious destination with five-star hotels and camel rides.”

Remind me, how do you say sportswashing in Arabic?

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‘People expect cheap food, drink and accommodation – that horse has bolted’: a hotelier on life without EU workers



‘Hospitality works on such tight margins’ ... Veryan Palmer at the Headland hotel in Newquay, Cornwall. Photograph: Jenna Foxton/The Guardian



[Sam Wollaston](#)

[@samwollaston](#)

Mon 22 Nov 2021 04.00 EST

The Headland hotel in Cornwall has been in Veryan Palmer's family all her life. Her parents bought the imposing Victorian pile overlooking Fistral Beach, Newquay, 43 years ago. Now Palmer, 37, is director. They have always had staff from Europe. "My parents would talk about when European countries joined the EU they would suddenly get an influx of staff from a new country," she says. "They remember the summer that Poland joined and the sudden influx of Polish housekeeping staff who are just phenomenal."

In 2019, about half the staff were non-British. Palmer attributes the identity and the success of the hotel – one of just two in the county with five stars – to them. "There is no chance we would be where we are now without the skills of people coming from other countries."

It used not to be hard to recruit. "Cornwall is a lovely place to come and work; we're pretty hot on the work-life balance, and the life part is pretty fun, with beaches and surfing. So it's always been attractive for hospitality team members from across Europe."

Workers came from all over: Spain, Italy, France, Poland, Romania, Estonia, sometimes whole families. Some came for just a summer, to practise their English; others came over and settled. They brought experience with them, says Palmer. “They have a greater understanding of what our European guests want, and a skill level you don’t always see in UK hospitality workers. In [Europe](#), a lot of young people have part-time jobs from around the age of 16, so when they come over at 18 or 20 they have already got quite a bit of work experience. They understand that if work starts at nine, you turn up at five to nine. We end up doing quite a lot of life-skills training for people who have been brought up in the UK.”

Hospitality has been hit hard recently. Palmer says it’s difficult to distinguish what is [Brexit](#) and what is the pandemic: “It’s just all come together in one mighty swirl of a disaster zone.”

[**Your food and drink is going to cost a huge amount more and a lot of places won’t survive**](#)

What’s certain is that many workers went home during the pandemic and didn’t come back, either because they weren’t allowed to or didn’t want to. If they don’t already have settled status in the UK, applicants from both EU and non-EU countries have to be paid a salary of at least £25,600 under the new skilled worker visa scheme. More than 90,000 [workers left the country’s hospitality sector](#) during the past year. London, where [up to 75% of hospitality workers were from the EU pre-Covid](#), has been hardest hit. Job vacancies across the industry are at the highest levels on record.

She thinks her business will survive, by looking hard at costs, but that some hotels won’t and that it’s going to be incredibly tough for the industry. “Hospitality works on such tight margins. With the rising cost of food, most of us have [used the drop in VAT](#) to suck that up, instead of putting up our prices.”

But that VAT reduction for hospitality is tapering off: it’s up from 5% to 12.5% and in April will return to its pre-pandemic 20%. On top of that, hospitality wages are up 23%, Palmer says. “Someone’s got to pay for that. [Your food and drink is going to cost a huge amount more](#) and a lot of places

won't survive. The expectation of cheap food, drink and accommodation – that horse has bolted.”

Palmer says that the percentage of British staff at the Headland has risen to about 80%, and that in Cornwall some businesses have been able to put wages up because they've had such a busy year. But that's had a detrimental knock-on effect on other sectors – such as care, for example. “If you can get maybe two, three, four pounds an hour more in hospitality, where you're not doing night shifts, what are you going to do?”

For now, Palmer has 11 international placement students at the Headland hotel. They are attached to UK universities, so have student visas and are permitted to work. But still she could do with another 30 or 40 staff, especially as Cornwall is such a hot destination. “We've got a crazy October and, in theory, this November will be the best November we've ever had. However, we have had to shut off 20 out of 91 bedrooms to make sure all our staff can have two days off a week.”

On Brexit, Palmer says a lot of promises were made by both sides, “when actually no one truly knew what the outcome would be. It was a bonkers thing to go to a referendum on, there was never going to be accurate and truthful information.”

So which way did she vote? She laughs – she's not telling. “Whichever way I say, people would tear me apart.”

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[Australian politics](#)

Australia to let in vaccinated visa holders but tourists have to wait



As fully vaccinated arrivals from Singapore began being welcomed back into Australia, the government has announced exemption-free travel for a range of vaccinated visa holders from 1 December. Photograph: James D. Morgan/Getty Images for Tourism Australia

Sarah Martin Chief political correspondent

@msmarto

Sun 21 Nov 2021 23.15 EST

International students and skilled workers will be allowed exemption-free travel to Australia from next week, in what the prime minister, [Scott Morrison](#), has hailed a “major milestone” for the country returning to normal.

From 1 December, travel exemptions will no longer be required for fully vaccinated eligible visa holders – including students, skilled workers, and those on humanitarian, working holiday and family visas – for the first time since borders closed in early 2020.

A travel bubble operating for Singapore will also extend to Japan and South Korea, allowing quarantine-free travel for these citizens, including tourists, subject to a negative Covid test before departure.

Government figures show that there are about 235,000 eligible visa holders who would be free to travel to Australia under the eased restrictions, including 162,000 international students.

The move comes amid [sustained calls from employment groups](#) and the university sector to restart Australia's temporary migration program, which many sectors have become reliant upon to meet skills shortages.

Morrison said the announcement would allow Australia to take full advantage of the economic recovery as states emerged from the pandemic, with workers “desperately needed” across the country.

“It is another win for Australians who have got vaccinated, it’s another win for Australians who want to see Australia to return to some form of the normality that we once knew pre this pandemic,” he said.

“The return of skilled workers and students to Australia is a major milestone in our pathway back. It’s a major milestone about what Australians have been able to achieve and enable us to do.”

Morrison hailed the country’s “extraordinary” vaccination rate, with an 85% full vaccination rate for those older than 16, and 91.5% having had one dose.

While Monday’s announcement will ease travel restrictions for a large number of visa classes, the government has not yet announced when an estimated one million tourists wanting to travel to Australia will be allowed the same access.

“We will now monitor how we move to this next stage,” Morrison said.

“I think Australians are very keen to see us take this step-by-step approach. They’ve been through a lot and have sacrificed a lot to ensure that we can open safely so we can stay safely open, and that’s what we’ll continue to do.”

The home affairs minister, Karen Andrews, said she expected about 200,000 visa holders to arrive in coming months who would be subject to the quarantine arrangements of the states, but said the government was “actively looking to bring as many people into Australia as soon as we possibly can”.

The prime minister said the latest easing of restrictions was an example of “getting government out of people’s lives”, amid a furious debate about the merits of “freedom” protests across the country.

Morrison has come under fire for appearing to sympathise with those rallying over the past week, with Labor accusing him of “pandering to extremists” by saying he understood their concerns.

When challenged on his stance after he previously endorsed state-imposed lockdowns and resisted calls from the NSW premier Dominic Perrottet to ease restrictions earlier, Morrison said that the federal government had needed to “make decisions that had to reach into people’s lives”.

“You’ve got to deal with the situation as you find it, and the situation when you have a pandemic raging through when people’s lives are at risk, well you have to take decisions to protect those lives,” Morrison said.

“As the circumstances change, then it’s time for us to move back, which is what the national plan was designed to do.

“So I just don’t buy this binary proposition that somehow you’re either for or against this at all points in the cycle. Times change over that (cycle), circumstances change, and governments that are interested in balanced, practicable, sensible decisions, will make them, in the moment, with the circumstances they have to face.”

He said there were extremes at both sides of the debate, but the vast majority of Australians were “just looking for people to just make sensible

decisions”.

Morrison also brushed off government divisions over vaccine mandates after a Senate vote on Monday morning resulted in five government senators crossing the floor to support Pauline Hanson’s vaccine discrimination bill.

“In the Liberal party and the National party, we don’t run it as an autocracy, we don’t kick people out of our party if they happen, from time to time, to disagree on an issue on which they feel strongly,” he said.

“I respect the fact that individual members from time to time will express a view and they’ll vote accordingly and that is what has happened today.

“We’re big parties, we can deal with any differences of views that occur from time to time.”

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Travel

Australia international border restrictions: what's changed for travel and who can arrive quarantine-free



Skilled workers and international students can arrive in Australia from 1 December without quarantine if they are fully vaccinated and test negative to Covid within three days of flying. Photograph: James D Morgan/Getty Images

[Caitlin Cassidy](#)

Sun 21 Nov 2021 23.15 EST

Australia's international border will be further eased from next week under substantial changes announced by the federal government on Monday.

From 1 December, Australia's travel bubble will be expanded and skilled workers, eligible visa holders and international students will be able to arrive quarantine-free, subject to some conditions. Here's what you need to know.

What's changing for international travel?

From 1 December, there will be a significant relaxation of the nation's international travel rules allowing [fully vaccinated eligible visa holders](#) to come to Australia without needing to apply for a travel exemption.

Foreigners including working holiday-makers, temporary and provisional [visa holders](#) will be able to enter Australia from next week under the changes, subject to limited conditions.

The minister for home affairs, Karen Andrews, said travellers would need to be fully vaccinated with a Therapeutic Goods Administration-approved vaccine, provide proof of their vaccination status and present a negative PCR test within three days prior to departure in order to enter Australia.

Travellers must comply with the quarantine requirements in the state or territory of their arrival.

Who will be able to come to Australia?

Overseas students and skilled workers will be able to fly to Australia from 1 December provided they're fully vaccinated and test negative to the virus within three days prior to flying. The prime minister, Scott Morrison, said it would be a "major milestone" for the nation's economic recovery.

Some 200,000 students and eligible visa holders were expected to travel to Australia between now and January, subject to the quarantine arrangements in their state of arrival when the changes come into effect.

Australia will also reopen its borders to refugees and humanitarians under the relaxed restrictions.

Morrison said it would be the government's "highest priority" to secure flights for Afghan visa holders in the first stages. The federal government allocated an initial [3,000 humanitarian visas](#) when Afghanistan fell to the Taliban in August.

“I always saw that number as a floor, not a ceiling,” he said.

“It was a topical conversation I had with quite a few leaders when I was overseas, particularly in the UK and in Canada. We are all working together on what is a very challenging issue.”

Are there any changes to the travel bubble?

Japanese and Korean citizens will join Singapore and New Zealand as international “safe travel zones” from 1 December provided they are fully vaccinated and receive a negative Covid test within three days of departure.

The travel bubble has been operating since 1 November, when one-way quarantine-free travel resumed from New Zealand to Australia. On Sunday, it was expanded to allow fully vaccinated Singaporean citizens to arrive.

Under the arrangements, tourists from Japan and Korea will be able to travel from their home countries quarantine-free without needing to seek a travel exemption, provided they hold a valid visa.

“They will need to depart from their home country, they will also need to be fully vaccinated and provide proof of their vaccination status,” Andrews said.

“They will need to hold an eligible visa and ... have a negative PCR test within three days ... of their departure.”

What about other tourists?

Morrison said Australia’s high vaccination rates allowed him to make the “important first step” in relaxing Australia’s border rules, as was laid out in the national plan. More than 80% of eligible Australians were now fully vaccinated.

“Japan and Korea and Singapore are all very important tourist markets for Australia ... I make those decisions in the national interest above all others,” he said.

“As circumstances change, that is the time to ask [governments] to move back, which is what the national plan was designed to do.”

It will be a “step by step” approach to welcoming tourists from other nations, including Europe, which had again become the epicentre of the virus.

Morrison said that between now and the end of the year the government would “look carefully” at extending free travel.

Fully vaccinated Australians, permanent residents and their immediate family members have been able to return home since 1 November.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2021/nov/22/australia-international-border-restrictions-whats-changed-for-travel-and-who-can-arrive-quarantine-free>

Coronavirus

England's Covid test and trace spending over £1m a day on consultants



A woman at an NHS test-and-trace centre in Hillingdon, west London. The service has average daily contractor rates of £1,100. Photograph: Adrian Dennis/AFP/Getty Images

[Andrew Gregory](#) Health editor

Sun 21 Nov 2021 10.30 EST

England's flagship test-and-trace service is still spending more than £1m a day on private consultants, official figures reveal weeks after MPs lambasted it as an "[“eye-watering” waste of taxpayers’ money](#)" that is failing to cut Covid infection levels.

Dr Jenny Harries, the chief executive of the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), who is responsible for NHS test and trace, told MPs in July there was a "very detailed ramp-down plan" to cut the number of consultants.

But latest figures show that at the end of October it employed 1,230 consultants. Test and trace has average daily contractor rates of £1,100, potentially equating to £1,353,000 a day. The ratio of consultants to civil servants in NHS test and trace in September was 1:1, separate data shows, despite a target set a year ago to reduce the ratio to 60%.

At the same time, new contracts worth millions of pounds are still being awarded to private consultancy firms, the *Guardian* has found, despite repeated pledges to curb their use.

The test-and-trace system, which has a £37bn two-year budget that is equivalent to almost a fifth of the annual NHS [England](#) budget, is designed to identify Covid cases and limit their spread. UK daily reported Covid cases exceeded 50,000 last month and remain at about 40,000 a day.

In November 2020, test and trace promised to cut the number of consultants it employed. At that time, they accounted for 51% of staff, a figure deemed acceptable by some because the system was in its infancy. A year on, the proportion has fallen but official figures show consultants still made up more than a third (34%) of the workforce in September.

The data was published by the UKHSA and the Department of [Health](#) and Social Care (DHSC) in response to questions from the *Guardian* and a series of parliamentary written questions from the shadow health secretary, Jonathan Ashworth.

“There is no justification for continuing with these highly paid expensive consultants,” Ashworth said. “Ministers should ensure every penny piece of taxpayers’ money is spent wisely on patient care – not blown on expensive management consultants.”

Separate research by the *Guardian* reveals that in the last month the government has quietly published details of at least seven new NHS test-and-trace deals with private contractors, together worth more than £17m. One runs until at least September 2023.

The revelations come after a report by MPs concluded that test and trace had “not achieved its main objective” to enable people to return to a more normal way of life. The public accounts committee said the system’s “continued over-reliance on consultants is likely to cost taxpayers hundreds of millions of pounds”. Meg Hillier, the chair of the committee, said she was concerned the organisation was treating taxpayers like an ATM machine.

Some of the private consultants have been paid rates of more than £6,000 a day.

In June, a report by the National Audit Office (NAO) found that to scale up quickly, test and trace initially “relied heavily on consultancy support at its central office”, adding: “NHST&T told us that this is because many of the skills required were not available from the civil service within the timeframe, and some of the skills and capacities required are on a short-term basis to support the ‘build’ of the organisation.”.

Deloitte won the highest committed contract values (£298m), according to the NAO, followed by IBM (£46m), Accenture (£30m), the Boston Consulting Group (£30m), and PA Consulting Services (£30m).

“Consultants are much more expensive than civil servants or temporary staff from other public services,” the NAO said. “While access to consultancies has provided NHST&T with the skills and capacity needed to build up the test-and-trace capacities quickly, it may not, as NHST&T recognised itself, be the best use of public money to rely on consultancies to deliver the services on an ongoing basis.”

Between November 2020 and February 2021, consultants employed by the programme accounted for 51% of staff, falling slightly to 45% in April 2021. The total number of consultants employed in April (2,239) was higher than in December 2020 (2,164). UKHSA said that at the end of October this year, management consultants made up 11% of the UKHSA workforce. It also said there were a number of different consultants filling expert roles including clinical consultants.

Giving evidence to MPs in July, Harries said it was not her “ambition” to rely on consultants and that “we have a very detailed ramp-down plan”.

In the same evidence session, Shona Dunn, second permanent secretary at the DHSC, was asked by MPs to reassure them she was going to “wean the organisation off expensive consultants and get better value”.

“This is a really sharp area of focus,” she said. “The committee can be absolutely assured that we will not take our eye off this ball.”

A UKHSA spokesperson said: “Prioritising people’s health, saving lives and helping to stop the spread of Covid-19 continues to be our focus. We are working to reduce the number of consultants in a constructive and planned way without having a detrimental effect on our health protection services which we need to change over the course of the pandemic.

“A number of roles require highly sought after specialisms in competitive market places and we have employed consultants to help deliver these vital services. We have significantly reduced consultant workforce in many areas while responding to the unprecedented demands created by Covid-19. We are seeking to build a strong team of expert and generalist civil servants and always recruit to the civil service wherever we can.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/21/england-covid-test-and-trace-spending-over-1m-a-day-on-consultants>

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OpinionLobbying

This is not a cross-party matter: second jobs are a very Conservative scandal

[Nesrine Malik](#)



‘Sajid Javid said: “It’s good to have experience that is not all about politics.”’ The follow-up question is, of course: good for who?’ Photograph: Tayfun Salcı/Zuma Press Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

Mon 22 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

Over the past few weeks, the news has been dominated by headlines about MPs who abuse the parliamentary rules that allow them to have second jobs. This is a misleading, generalised account of a specific and exceptional problem. The scandal is the direct result of Conservative ideology, one that has a fundamentally contemptuous opinion of public service and a tradition of leveraging political contacts to feather nests.

According to [research](#) into the register of members’ interests, 148 MPs spent some time on a second job in the period from January 2020 to August 2021.

Out of this number 114 were Conservatives, whose activities make up 87% of the income from those second jobs. Most of that income is from roles in the private sector; accountancy, investment banking, energy, pharmaceuticals and independent legal work. Such is the time dedicated to these roles, and the pay netted from them, that it could be argued that being a Tory MP is itself the second job; or in some instances, the third or fourth.

This is not just an unfortunately timed snapshot that happens to have caught out the party with almost six times more MPs in second jobs than the [Labour](#) opposition. Nor is it a party temporarily out of control under the chaotic stewardship of its prime minister, Boris Johnson, a man whose popularity and familiarity among the British public is a result of his own various second jobs in the media as opposed to any serious political performance in office.

To its credit, the Labour party took efforts to tackle the issue back in 2019. An entire pledge to ban second jobs was [made](#) in the party's manifesto, and its then leader, Jeremy Corybn, expressly blocked any shadow cabinet members from second jobs, with limited exemptions to maintain professional registrations such as nursing. It is baffling that something identified and stigmatised, and for which a technical solution has already been proposed, should ever become a question about what to do about the risks of a "[part-time parliament](#)".

This seems like a pretty straightforward question about values, more than it is about parliamentary rules or how we can motivate MPs not to take second jobs. It's unsurprising in a party that lauds aspiration that its MPs would be concerned about the "[change in lifestyle](#)" – presumably one that includes private school fees – if their income were to fall.

Values are also drawn from our backgrounds. The complaints from some about how difficult life is on a mere £81,932 a year plus benefits sound out of touch to you and me, but very much in touch with their peers and family networks. Forty-one per cent of Conservative MPs went to independent schools, as opposed to 14% of Labour MPs (and 7% of the population as a whole). The newer intake of MPs, younger and from more working-class areas, are underrepresented in the second-jobs market, which is [dominated](#)

by older men, and where the highest earners were all former cabinet ministers.

For many Conservative MPs, extraparliamentary activities are simply factored in when choosing to go into politics, as these cushion the income they lose by not working in the private sector. Second jobs are also an insurance policy. By keeping one foot in the door, MPs are able to build or maintain connections, in the hope that they will embrace them when their tour in politics is done. When asked about his £150,000-a-year second job with JP Morgan, Sajid Javid said: “It’s good to have experience that is not all about politics.” The follow-up question to that statement is, of course: good for who?

Not making these connections – between the type of people who become Conservative MPs, their political beliefs and their desire for and need of private incomes – situates the problem in a general political system of naughty MPs. One in which MPs will either inevitably stick their hands in the honeypot or drop out of politics altogether. And so we look for “realistic” solutions to these “complicated” situations, including suggestions that we pay MPs more so they aren’t forced to look elsewhere for income to meet their lifestyle needs. We end up solving for the sin, rather than condemning it. We resign ourselves to the flawed nature of a political class that is in fact a conservative class.

The second-jobs blight is the natural outcome of a conservative philosophy towards political office – a place from which to wield power for the benefit of yourself and your connections, rather than to serve. The solution, however, is simple: restate what being an MP is all about – serving your constituents – and ban anything that gets in the way of this.

- Nesrine Malik is a Guardian columnist
- This article was amended on 23 November 2021 to make clear, for avoidance of doubt, that a reference to opposition MPs with second jobs meant MPs of the official (Labour) opposition. A link to research by nationalworld.com was also added, to show the source of MP job numbers mentioned in the piece.

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OpinionRefugees

Choose Love cutting back Calais funding shows the limits of celebrity philanthropy

[Daniel Trilling](#)



Actors Andrew Scott, Phoebe Waller-Bridge and Ben Aldridge volunteer at a Choose Love shop in London, December 2019. Photograph: David M Benett/Dave Benett/Getty Images

Mon 22 Nov 2021 03.00 EST

Pick a humanitarian emergency in any part of the world, and the needs will seem remarkably consistent. Once people have escaped immediate danger, they need food, shelter, clothing and medical assistance – the things, in other words, that sustain us physically. The most pressing questions are about how to source the items and services required, and how to distribute them effectively.

What determines whether an emergency is resolved quickly or allowed to persist, however, is politics. And if you want to see what happens when political solutions fail, then the scrubland of the northern French coast, just across the Channel from England, is an instructive place to look.

The recent decision by Choose Love – a celebrity-backed charity set up in the aftermath of the 2015 European refugee crisis – to withdraw most of its funding for aid projects based in northern France, does not indicate that the needs there have changed in nature. There are an estimated 2,000 migrants camped out in and around Calais, looking for a way to reach the UK – fewer than when the crisis was at its peak in 2015 and 2016, but more than at other times in the past. Many of these people are destitute; as winter approaches, local aid organisations, which provide everything from clean water and cooking equipment to phone charging, have launched an urgent appeal to make up the shortfall in funding.

Yet if the situation on the ground has not changed significantly, the context in which aid is distributed has been transformed. Political leaders have never wanted migrants to travel to Calais. For at least two decades now the French authorities, with British encouragement, have tried to make living conditions as difficult as possible, by demolishing camps and evicting squats. But the outpouring of public sympathy in 2015 – when hundreds of thousands of people across Europe demonstrated in support of refugees, and many others joined volunteer efforts to provide material help – forced them to temporarily back off.

Choose Love was founded, initially under the name Help Refugees, amid that wave of sympathy, by a trio of media-savvy campaigners. It won the backing of celebrities including Coldplay's Chris Martin, and actors Olivia Colman and Phoebe Waller-Bridge, and raises money partly by selling fashionable branded goods online and in a London boutique on Carnaby Street. Today, the charity has expanded to work with refugees in 22 countries and has raised £35m.

Now, politicians talk once again of migrants in Calais as an inconvenience that must be eliminated – by repelling people rather than establishing routes to safety. In one recent statement, the UK Home Office implied that aid

volunteers in northern France were part of the problem, telling the Guardian [on 3 November](#): “It is dangerous to encourage these Channel crossings, which are illegal, unnecessary and facilitated by violent criminal gangs profiting from misery.” This is in keeping with the [more hostile attitude](#) of European governments in recent years to humanitarians whose actions they find inconvenient: this month, Seán Binder and Sarah Mardini, two volunteers who saved lives in the Aegean Sea, [went on trial in Greece](#) accused of human trafficking, money laundering, fraud and espionage.



Refugees queue for food distributed by local NGOs in Calais, France.
Photograph: Rafael Yaghobzadeh/Getty Images

In a statement posted on its Instagram page, Choose Love said that it had been forced to make “some difficult decisions” in a strategic review, and that factors including the pandemic had prompted the decision to largely pull out of Calais. (Funding will still be provided to two charities working with unaccompanied minors in northern [France](#).) But its decision tells us something broader about the limits of this type of humanitarian activism, which seeks to mobilise the might of branding and celebrity endorsements. It can be a powerful way to raise money and distribute resources in targeted ways – but what happens when the attention moves elsewhere, leaving a political problem unsolved?

The promise of this type of action is that it offers us the opportunity to address the world's problems with minimal disruption to our own privileged lifestyles, or to the system that enables them. As the late theorist Mark Fisher wrote [in his book Capitalist Realism](#), it's a form of social protest, but one that offers the "fantasy ... that western consumerism, far from being intrinsically implicated in systemic global inequalities, could itself solve them. All we have to do is buy the right products."

Fisher's point is not that celebrity-driven activism is inherently fake or insincere, as opposed to other more "authentic" forms. Rather, it epitomises a culture in which we are encouraged to think of ourselves as consumers instead of political subjects. During the triumphant era of global capitalism, before the crash of 2008, this model of action aimed high. Live 8, a string of benefit concerts in 2005 that marked the 20th anniversary of the original Live Aid, demanded nothing less than the abolition of global poverty. Bono's Product Red, a fundraising partnership with corporate brands launched the following year, went a step further. "Philanthropy is like hippy music, holding hands," the U2 frontman said. "Red is more like punk rock, hip-hop, this should feel like hard commerce."

The picture today is more fragmented. A new class of global billionaires have little need for even the illusion of popular consent, using their vast wealth to pursue individual passions from space travel to disease eradication. Campaigns that capture popular imagination, meanwhile, are now more likely to centre on crises closer to home. Think of the fundraising drives that have dominated the British public's attention in recent years: we have been asked not only to help keep refugees alive on our doorstep, but to raise money for the NHS and to stop children from starving during the school holidays – tasks that our government, one of the world's wealthiest, should be able to carry out itself. It's more obvious than ever that charity is a response to a faltering system, not a sign of its success.

Choose Love was the product of a moment when thousands of ordinary people intervened in a situation they found unjust. Its priorities might have shifted but that situation persists. Calais is not the site of a natural disaster, but a place where governments have deliberately created scarcity for political ends. It goes right to the heart of a debate about how states police

migration, which itself is a proxy for the wider issues of war, global inequality and – increasingly – [the climate crisis](#). In that context, the simple but urgent act of providing aid to others takes on a potentially greater significance, because it is a challenge to the established way of doing things. We should keep giving that help in Calais – but we should also be asking why it is necessary in the first place.

- Daniel Trilling is the author of *Lights in the Distance: Exile and Refuge at the Borders of Europe* and *Bloody Nasty People: the Rise of Britain's Far Right*
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Ben Jennings on Priti Patel's efforts on small boats in the Channel — cartoon

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Starmer must offer hope to Stoke and broken Labour heartlands

[Richard Partington](#)



Keir Starmer and the shadow chancellor, Rachel Reeves, in a warehouse in Stoke last week. Photograph: Joel Goodman/The Guardian

Sun 21 Nov 2021 10.15 EST

It is a cold night on a Stoke-on-Trent industrial estate and [Keir Starmer](#) is in town again. It's at least his seventh trip here in search of redemption after Labour's historic defeat in 2019, in a sign of how important he sees the Potteries to the party's future.

"I feel I'm getting to know Stoke quite well," he tells me. "And we'll keep on coming. I think it's very, very important. The sort of discussion we want to have tonight is not a discussion we could have in London. You've got to have it where people live, in their place, in their town, about the issues that matter to them."

Flanked by his shadow chancellor, [Rachel Reeves](#), the Labour leader has gathered a group of about 30 voters of all political stripes in a warehouse on an industrial estate in Newcastle-under-Lyme, on the outskirts of the city.

There is a mix of young and old from all walks of life, sitting clustered around workbenches in a room usually used for teaching apprentice bricklayers. Only today the lesson is about rebuilding the old "red wall" of former stronghold seats across the north and Midlands, starting with Stoke at its heart.

There is a danger that this could be yet another focus-grouped postmortem of the 2019 election. But there is growing frustration to build on as well, as Boris Johnson's [levelling-up promises](#) unravel to nothing, living costs go through the roof, and the stench of cronyism clings to the Conservatives.

In a show of hands orchestrated by Deborah Mattinson, Starmer's pollster (who [knows a thing or two about Stoke](#)), just two people think Britain's economy will be stronger in six months' time. No one thinks things will improve for Stoke.

Dawn, a secondary school teacher who has taught kids in the area for 30 years, sums up the sense of pessimism: "It's kind of 'Stoke's a dump, isn't it,

Miss? I'll have to work hard to get out, Miss?' And you want to say, no you can generate a good living here as well."

There's a big gap between the haves and the have nots, she says. Some of her students don't have their own bed. "We talked about our town centre and the idea that you know, you get into Hanley, and you think, 'This is a poverty-stricken city.'"

Stoke is a place I know well, as a regular visitor for most of my life. I grew up an hour north up the M6 in Warrington, but there were regular journeys to my grandma's in Leek, the Staffordshire town my dad is from, as well as innumerable ups (Premier League promotion), downs (too many to mention), and cold, rainy nights following him as a Stoke City supporter.

Clearly there have been better days in the city of six disparate towns, where its world-famous ceramics industry once employed half the local workforce near its peak in 1938, before decades of industrial decline set in.

But there are great strengths too, with the potteries still providing skilled jobs and tourism, albeit for far fewer people, at firms like Emma Bridgewater and Burleigh. Major companies like JCB, Michelin and Jaguar Land Rover are investing in the area, while the online gambling company Bet365 – started by the local Coates family, who also own Stoke City – employ thousands.



Labour leader Keir Starmer listens in on a table discussion at a town hall-style focus group event at Achieve Training in Stoke. Photograph: Joel Goodman/The Guardian

Still, Stoke was hit hard by Covid-19, having entered the emergency in a weaker position after a decade of austerity. Debt problems rose sharply, while those at the [Labour](#) town hall say there are few job opportunities for young people, a lack of training provision for technical careers, little support for small businesses, and soaring living costs.

It's fertile ground for Labour. "In Stoke and across the country, there is a growing cost-of-living crisis going on at the moment," Reeves tells me. "I think you'll be wondering why the government are increasing taxes, reducing universal credit and allowing prices to get out of control and doing very little to fix those problems."

Inflation is at the highest level in a decade thanks to soaring energy costs, with the average family expected to lose £1,000 next year. After a decade of Tory government, households are [forecast to have a disposable income barely any higher in 2025 than they did in 2008](#). Meanwhile [petrol prices hitting a record high](#) is disproportionately felt here, in a city where public transport is poor.

Testing out their ideas for the economy, Reeves and Starmer say they would cut VAT for household energy bills, insulate homes to keep down heating costs, and put a [focus on buying more British goods](#). It's part of a listening exercise Starmer says will inform policies for the next election. "Your fingerprints could be on something we've talked about today," he tells the audience.

The plans, although fairly vague, draw a positive response. But some worry that the costs of insulating their homes will fall on ordinary people. "I struggle to heat my home and keep the mould out. Council houses aren't warm enough," says Tracy. "But taxes are high enough already. It'll take food off our children."

There is a big focus on fairness, with the room united in annoyance at [Amazon](#) while countless shops are boarded up across the city. "We all buy from Amazon, let's be honest," says David. "But everybody says 'Why are they paying no taxes?'"

Small shops might have suffered in the city, but Stoke has seen a boom in old industrial land along the A500 converted into vast warehousing and logistics sites. Figures published this year showed the city was enjoying [among the fastest jobs recoveries in Britain](#), a point heralded by the local Conservative council leader.



Shadow chancellor Rachel Reeves and Keir Starmer at a the Labour 'town hall' event in Stoke. Photograph: Joel Goodman/The Guardian

Wages are rising fast in the logistics sector amid nationwide staff shortages. Still, Mark Gregory, visiting professor of business economics at Staffordshire University, which has its main campus in Stoke, says it's hard to imagine that low-skilled warehouse jobs might drive an economic renaissance: "It seems unlikely that wage growth will outstrip inflation. The logistics piece will help a bit of the local economy but whether that's widespread seems unlikely."

With an ageing population, a higher share of public sector jobs and universal credit claimants than elsewhere, the city is being hit hard, he says. "With the cost of living, Stoke is going to be right in the firing line."

Reeves argues that the chancellor [Rishi Sunak's budget last month](#) lacked the substance to tackle inflation hitting families hard, while the Tories cut benefits and are poised to raise national insurance taxes on workers.

"People in Stoke are paying probably the highest taxes ever paid for 70 years," she says. "And I don't think people have ever had to pay so much and get so little in return. Because so many public services are a breaking point."

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It's a powerful argument that the Tories will not only break their levelling-up pledges, but that public funds will be spent unwisely; with high levels of tax, low growth and continuing regional inequality the only visible outcomes.

The problem for Labour, so far, is that the opposition has looked like it wouldn't do much better.

However, in what was the ground zero of Labour's 2019 defeat, Starmer is aiming to start building a message he hopes may change the narrative. "We've changed very much," he says. "We're very determined and focused on places like this, and the Conservative party in my view is going backwards."

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2021.11.22 - Around the world

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Chile

Far-right populist, ex-protest leader set for runoff vote in Chile's presidential election



José Antonio Kast based his campaign on issues relating to migration, public security and conservative social values. Photograph: Marcelo Hernández/Getty Images

[John Bartlett](#) in Santiago

Sun 21 Nov 2021 18.59 EST

The far-right populist José Antonio Kast is on course for a convincing victory over former protest leader Gabriel Boric in the first round of Chile's presidential election.

With more than 90% of the votes counted, Kast led Boric by 28% to 25.6%. The two will meet in a runoff next month. Chileans also voted for a new congress in the general election.

Polling showed far-right Republican party candidate Kast had pushed into an unlikely lead over the last month, and he has ultimately been able to draw support from across the right to take victory in this first round.

Kast is a devout Catholic and father of nine who opposes marriage equality, abortion and political correctness. He has run a campaign focusing on migration, public security and conservative social values.

The Broad Front's Boric, by contrast, is a 35-year-old former student leader who espouses social liberties and a green post-pandemic recovery.

The result suggests that Kast's hardline stance on several big issues resonated more with voters than Boric's plans to expand and improve Chile's social welfare system.



The presidential candidate for the Broad Front, Gabriel Boric, at his campaign's closing ceremony on 18 November Photograph: Lucas Aguayo/Zuma Press Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

Elsewhere in a divided field, Franco Parisi, a businessman who has conducted his entire campaign from the US without once setting foot in Chile, surprised analysts by taking nearly 14% of the vote.

Two other presidential hopefuls, centrist Yasna Provoste and former minister Sebastián Sichel, underperformed notably – each drawing about 12% of the vote.

The vote marks a sharp departure from the progressive trajectory Chile has followed since era-defining anti-inequality protests exploded in October 2019.

Millions took to the streets in demonstrations to decry a host of inequalities and injustices, leading to the country opting to rewrite its dictatorship-era constitution in a plebiscite last October.

When the referendum was held nearly 80% of Chileans voted to draft a new constitution, and in a subsequent vote this year independent and leftist candidates swept into the assembly that is currently writing the new document.

But abstention is often high in Chile. Since voting became voluntary in 2013, the first round of a presidential election has never had a turnout of more than half of registered voters.

On this occasion, more than 15 million Chileans were registered to vote both in the country and abroad. Turnout data will be available shortly.

The runoff between Boric and Kast will be held on 19 December, and Chileans face an anxious wait to see how the other candidates' first round votes will be divided between the two leading candidates and their starkly contrasting national projects.

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Peng Shuai

Peng Shuai: IOC accused of ‘publicity stunt’ over video call

02:42

Peng Shuai: China faces global backlash over disappearance of tennis star – video report

[Emma Kemp](#) and [Daniel Hurst](#)

Mon 22 Nov 2021 06.07 EST

The International Olympic Committee has been accused of engaging in a “publicity stunt” over the wellbeing of the Chinese tennis player [Peng Shuai](#), amid growing momentum behind a diplomatic boycott of the Beijing Winter Olympics.

The IOC, under increasing pressure to intervene in Peng’s case after the former doubles world No 1 accused a former senior Chinese government official of sexually assaulting her, held a video call with Peng on Sunday and subsequently [announced she was “safe and well”](#).

Peng, whose whereabouts have been a matter of international concern for almost three weeks, appeared at a dinner with friends on Saturday and [a children’s tennis tournament in Beijing](#) on Sunday, photos and videos published by Chinese state media journalists and by the tournament’s organisers show.

But the assurances have done little to quell the concerns of human rights groups and the Women’s [Tennis](#) Association (WTA).

“It was good to see Peng Shuai in recent videos, but they don’t alleviate or address the WTA’s concern about her wellbeing and ability to communicate without censorship or coercion,” a WTA spokesperson said.

“This video does not change our call for a full, fair and transparent investigation, without censorship, into her allegation of sexual assault, which is the issue that gave rise to our initial concern.”

After the 30-minute call, attended by the IOC president, Thomas Bach, its [China](#) representative Li Lingwei and its athletes’ commission chair, Emma Terho, the IOC said Peng was “safe and well” but would “like her privacy to be respected at this time”.

“That is why she prefers to spend her time with friends and family right now,” it said. “Nevertheless, she will continue to be involved in tennis, the sport she loves so much.”

Nikki Dryden, a human rights lawyer and former Olympic swimmer for Canada, labelled the IOC’s handling of Peng’s case as a “media exercise” designed to allay growing threats of diplomatic boycotts as China prepares to host the Winter Games in February.

The IOC has avoided involvement in the country’s human rights record, which includes the treatment of the Uyghur Muslim minority and its political crackdown in Hong Kong.

“I’m so relieved she’s alive, but the execution of this proof-of-life video is really troubling from a safeguarding perspective,” Dryden said.

“It seems very political to me that Bach would have this call with the athletes’ commission chair – who is probably somewhat appropriate – and then the IOC member from China. That’s not a safeguarding call by any means. Tennis should have been able to have that call, it should have been a safeguarding officer having that call – not a publicity stunt.

Elaine Pearson, the Australia director of Human Rights Watch, criticised the IOC for taking part in the video. “Frankly, it is shameful to see the IOC participating in this Chinese government’s charade that everything is fine and normal for Peng Shuai. Clearly it is not, otherwise why would the Chinese government be censoring Peng Shuai from the internet in China and not letting her speak freely to media or the public.”

The human rights activist Craig Foster, a former Australian international footballer, said where the WTA had demonstrated strength and firm resolve by threatening to pull tournaments out of China, the IOC had “placed political and commercial considerations ahead of transparency, accountability and justice”.

He said: “The IOC’s staged conversation with Peng Shuai could not be more tone deaf in terms of women’s rights and protections and in dealing with a survivor of sexual assault.

“The concept that a conversation with Thomas Bach followed by a ‘catch-up over dinner’ is a satisfactory resolution of a very serious matter or an appropriate response to allegations of sexual abuse by an athlete which include censorship and likely coercion by an IOC member state, is emblematic of the failed concept of Olympism.”

In its long history since the late 19th century, the IOC has [repeatedly come under fire](#) for what critics say its failure to address human rights issues in Olympic host countries. In recent years, for example, it was criticised for allowing the Sochi winter games to take place despite Russia’s deteriorating human rights record, in particular its hostility [towards the LGBTQ+ population](#).

On 2 November, Peng posted on Chinese social media that the former vice-premier Zhang Gaoli had coerced her into sex and they later had an on-off consensual relationship. The post was quickly deleted and the topic has been blocked from discussion on China’s heavily censored internet.

Neither Zhang nor the Chinese government have commented on Peng’s allegations.

France’s foreign minister called on Sunday for Chinese authorities to let Peng speak publicly.

“I’m expecting only one thing: that she speaks,” Jean-Yves Le Drian told LCI television, adding there could be unspecified diplomatic consequences

if China did not clear up the situation. His office did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the IOC's statement.

The US and Britain have also called for China to provide proof of Peng's whereabouts.

Current and former tennis players, including [Naomi Osaka](#), [Serena Williams](#) and [Billie Jean King](#), joined the calls [seeking to confirm she was safe](#), using the social media hashtag #WhereIsPengShuai?

The men's singles world No 1 Novak Djokovic said it would be strange to hold tournaments in China unless the "horrific" situation was resolved.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2021/nov/22/peng-shuai-wta-says-chinese-tennis-stars-call-with-ioc-chief-is-not-enough>

Global development

Pregnant women at risk in Malawi as drug shortage prevents caesareans



Eleven of Malawi's 28 district hospitals have run out of standard anaesthetics, forcing doctors to use second-line drugs and shut operating theatres. Photograph: Tetra Images/Alamy

Global development is supported by



[About this content](#)

[Charles Pensulo](#) in Lilongwe

Mon 22 Nov 2021 02.00 EST

Almost half of Malawi's district hospitals have closed their operating theatres due to a dire shortage of anaesthetics.

Maternity care has been affected by a lack of drugs, said doctors. Surgery, including caesareans, has been cancelled and patients needing emergency care have been moved hundreds of miles around the country.

The Anaesthesia Association of Malawi called the situation "an emergency" and said 11 of the country's 28 districts had run out of drugs.

The association demanded answers from the Ministry of [Health](#) and a meeting with the Central Medical Stores Trust (CMST), which buys and supplies drugs to all public hospitals.

Joel Moyo, president of the association, said the safety of pregnant women faced with complications during their labour was a big concern.

"One of the drugs that is not available is thiopentone, which we use in surgery, especially for women who are convulsing during delivery and also

those who have high blood pressure,” said Moyo.

“This [drug] has not been in the country for a year. We asked [the CMST officials] why it has not been available and it was attributed to logistical issues,” he said, adding that they had been improvising by using second-line drugs, although that was not recommended.

“We thought, ‘maybe next month things will change’, but this has been going on for a year now. But when members said that they don’t have suxamethonium, that’s when we raised a red flag. That drug is supposed to be in a [operating] theatre all the time.

“Without it, then the theatres have to be closed. You can lack some drugs, but when we don’t have this, then there is no theatre.”

Moyo said he had received worrying reports that some pregnant women who required emergency surgery were at risk as district hospitals had to refer them to central hospitals where the necessary drugs might be available.

Malawi’s health system faces immense challenges, from lack of equipment to a severe shortage of qualified staff. Poor working conditions, including low salaries, have led to health workers seeking better-paid jobs outside the country or with non-governmental organisations. People, including pregnant women, have to travel long distances to reach their nearest clinic or hospital.

Patrick Chithumba, 72, in Mulanje, southern Malawi, has been waiting several years for treatment for a painful bladder condition. When he was finally given a date for surgery earlier this month, his siblings and six children pooled their savings to pay for his transport to the hospital 140 miles (225km) away.

But when he arrived, he found the surgery had been cancelled due to a lack of anaesthetics.

“I am much traumatised with this,” Chithumba said. “Apart from the money that we’ve spent, I am in pain and my children have to take me to the local community clinic to be checked, but the help is not enough.”

New private clinics have sprung up across Malawi, profiting from the shortages by catering to those who can afford their prices.

Dr Victor Mithi, president of Malawi's [Society of Medical Doctors](#), said the lack of anaesthetics was the "tip of the iceberg".

"It is very concerning because you can't do an operation without these drugs and the fact that we don't have them speaks a lot as to how our healthcare system is organised and governed. Some of the procedures are a matter of life and death," he said.

"For instance, if you have a pregnant woman who you need to operate on and you don't have these drugs, you can either lose the woman or lose the baby, and the decisions are made in haste. This is why we're worried and we hope the government will be able to chip in and help us as fast as possible."

"These are not the only drugs not available in hospitals," Mithi added. Medical centres had been running out of supplies in many areas, he said.

"People don't really speak about this," he said. "Sometimes patients accuse us of not properly attending to them. But this is because we're not supplied with the proper working materials."

Herbert Chandilanga, a CMST spokesperson, said suppliers were struggling to secure stock from India and China amid "a logistics scramble worldwide".

Malawi's minister of health, Khumbize Chiponda, said the government planned to improve funding of the Central Medical Stores, which she said owed medical suppliers more than 19bn Malawian kwacha (£17.2m).

She said the CMST had out-of-date drugs worth more than 2bn kwacha that "may have been procured by the previous administration".

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US news

US added to list of ‘backsliding’ democracies for first time



Anti-Trump protesters gather in New York to call for his impeachment, in December 2019. Photograph: Stephanie Keith/Getty

Agence France-Presse in Stockholm

Mon 22 Nov 2021 04.48 EST

The US has been added to an annual list of “backsliding” democracies for the first time, the International IDEA thinktank has said, pointing to a “visible deterioration” it said began in 2019.

Globally, more than one in four people live in a backsliding democracy, a proportion that rises to more than two in three with the addition of authoritarian or “hybrid” regimes, according to the Stockholm-based International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.

“This year we coded the United States as backsliding for the first time, but our data suggest that the backsliding episode began at least in 2019,” it said in its report.

Alexander Hudson, a co-author of the report, said: “The United States is a high-performing democracy, and even improved its performance in indicators of impartial administration (corruption and predictable enforcement) in 2020. However, the declines in civil liberties and checks on government indicate that there are serious problems with the fundamentals of democracy.”

The report says: “A historic turning point came in 2020-21 when former president Donald Trump questioned the legitimacy of the 2020 election results in the United States.”

In addition, Hudson pointed to a “decline in the quality of freedom of association and assembly during the summer of protests in 2020” after the police killing of George Floyd.

International IDEA bases its assessments on 50 years of democratic indicators in about 160 countries, assigning them to three categories: democracies (including those that are “backsliding”), “hybrid” governments and authoritarian regimes.

The organisation’s secretary general, Kevin Casas-Zamora, said: “The visible deterioration of democracy in the United States, as seen in the increasing tendency to contest credible election results, the efforts to suppress participation (in elections), and the runaway polarisation ... is one of the most concerning developments.”

He warned of a knock-on effect, noting: “The violent contestation of the 2020 election without any evidence of fraud has been replicated, in different ways, in places as diverse as Myanmar, Peru and Israel.”

The number of backsliding democracies has doubled in the past decade, accounting for a quarter of the world’s population. In addition to

“established democracies” such as the US, the list includes EU member states Hungary, Poland and Slovenia.

Two countries that were on the list last year – Ukraine and North Macedonia – were removed this year after their situations improved. Two others, Mali and Serbia, left the list because they were no longer considered democracies.

While Myanmar moved from a democracy to an authoritarian regime, Afghanistan and Mali entered this category from their previous label of hybrid governments.

For the fifth consecutive year, in 2020, countries veering towards authoritarianism outnumbered those experiencing democratisation. International IDEA expects this trend to continue for 2021.

For 2021, according to the group’s provisional assessment, the world counts 98 democracies – the lowest number in many years – as well as 20 hybrid governments including Russia, Morocco and Turkey, and 47 authoritarian regimes including China, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia and Iran.

Adding backsliding democracies to the hybrid and authoritarian states, “we are talking about 70% of the population in the world”, Casas-Zamora said. “That tells you that there is something fundamentally serious happening with the quality of democracy.”

The report says the trend towards democratic erosion has “become more acute and worrying” since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.

“Some countries, particularly Hungary, India, the Philippines and the USA, have (imposed) measures that amount to democratic violations – that is, measures that were disproportionate, illegal, indefinite or unconnected to the nature of the emergency,” it says.

Casas-Zamora said: “The pandemic has certainly accelerated and magnified some of the negative trends, particularly in places where democracy and the rule of law were ailing before the pandemic.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/nov/22/us-list-backsliding-democracies-civil-liberties-international>

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Aukus

UK invites south-east Asian nations to G7 summit amid Aukus tensions



The foreign secretary, Liz Truss, said she wanted 'like-minded countries to work together from a position of strength'. Photograph: Tom Nicholson/Reuters

[Patrick Wintour](#) Diplomatic editor

Sun 21 Nov 2021 19.01 EST

The UK has invited south-east Asian nations to attend a [G7](#) foreign ministers meeting in Liverpool next month, in a move that risks highlighting concerns that the new alliance between Britain, the US and Australia will fuel a regional nuclear arms race.

States from the Association of South-East Asian Nations are divided on the new Aukus partnership but some, notably [Indonesia](#) and Malaysia, have sharply criticised it, and many in the 10-member bloc are reluctant to take sides in the unfolding superpower rivalry between the US and China.

The invitation to Merseyside on 10 December for three days came a week after the terror attack outside Liverpool Women's hospital. The choice of Liverpool as the venue for the event, the second G7 foreign ministers' meeting during the UK's chairing of the G7, came before the incident. The Foreign Office said Liverpool had been chosen due to its history as a port city with a global outlook. As many as 21 foreign ministers could attend, as Australia, South Korea, India and South Africa have also been invited.

The foreign secretary, Liz Truss, said: "I want us to build a worldwide network of liberty that advances freedom, democracy and enterprise and encourages like-minded countries to work together from a position of strength."

She added: "I was deeply saddened by the awful attack in Liverpool this month, but the resolve of the people of this great city will never waver in the face of such atrocities."

The only country in the Asean not invited is [Myanmar](#), which has been asked to instead present a representative who is not part of the ruling junta to attend by video, the policy adopted by Asean at its own summit last month, and at a China-Asean summit due on Monday.

China is likely to view this expansion of the G7, which represents the world's most advanced economic powers, as an attempt to get the region to endorse Aukus, and a more hard-edged military approach to [China](#).

In September, Australia infuriated the French by cancelling a longstanding submarine contract with Paris and announcing it was forming a partnership with the US and the UK to build nuclear-powered submarines, and to work together on technologies such as artificial intelligence and quantum computing.

Speaking at the weekend, the Indonesian defence minister, Prabowo Subianto, said of Aukus: "Our position is that of course south-east Asia should remain nuclear-free, and the fear is that this will spark an arms race, this will spark more countries seeking nuclear submarines, and we know now that the technology is there. I think many other countries can very soon have nuclear submarines – I would say Japan and India and many other

countries, so that is the concern.” He added that he understood, however, that countries might seek to defend themselves when faced by what they consider an existential threat.

The Malaysian defence minister, Hishammuddin Hussein, said: “The stakes are too high and the cost is not worth the risk, as no one wants or can afford a full-scale confrontation in these waters. We must set aside our egos, our pride and our anger in moving forward. Combative statements, whether from inside or outside the region, are not helpful and could only serve as a spark to a potential tragedy.”

Hussein also spoke out against Aukus, saying: “My concern with the developments of Aukus – and sometimes it is rhetoric, sometimes it might be increased tensions, it might be reduced dialogue with regards to the two superpowers in our region – is it should not lead to unforeseen, unintended and accidental incidents in the South China Sea. If the South China Sea is full of military movement, [it increases] the chances of unintended accidents happening, which has happened in the past – and we all have to realise the first world war started by accident. Now, that is a real problem [that] requires courage, it requires a lot of patience, it requires diplomacy.”

He also warned against the new alliance leading to a break up of the Asean bloc. “We do not want these 10 nations to be broken up for any reason, especially not because of the geopolitical reasoning of superpowers in our region.”

Stephen Lovegrove, the UK’s national security adviser, said the planned Australian nuclear-propelled submarines “will carry probably very similar weaponry to the submarines that Australia was, in any case, going to buy from the French”, and added that “the Australian government is completely committed to making sure that the highest possible standards of stewardship and operation are maintained”.

On Friday, Kurt Campbell, the US Indo-Pacific adviser at the national security council acknowledged the resentment the Aukus partnership had caused, and claimed that it might not be an exclusive organisation, but open to other European nations to join in the future. He gave no details.

The Chinese embassy in Washington disputed Campbell's characterisation. "Aukus is a closed and exclusive clique informed by the cold war zero-sum mentality with strong military security undertones," Liu Pengyu, an embassy spokesperson, said.

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Headlines tuesday 23 november 2021

- [Social care cap Boris Johnson's plans face fresh hurdle in Lords](#)
- [Live Ministers will eventually U-turn over social care costs, Jeremy Hunt predicts](#)
- [Social care cap Ministers defy Tory rebellion to push through amendment](#)
- [Politics How did your MP vote on social care funding?](#)

[Social care](#)

Social care plan ‘still in peril’, say MPs as peers vow to amend bill



Ros Altmann, the government’s former pensions adviser, described the change to discount council contributions from the pensions cap as ‘half-baked’. Photograph: Antonio Olmos/The Observer

Jessica Elgot Chief political correspondent

@jessicaelgot

Tue 23 Nov 2021 12.49 EST

MPs have said the government is “still in peril” over its plans for social care funding, with several expecting a government climbdown as peers warned they would force the issue back to the Commons.

The government suffered [a significant rebellion on Monday night](#) but carried the change to the social care cap with a slimmed-down majority. The

number of abstentions from discontented MPs is likely to worry whips if peers in the House of Lords return an amended bill to the Commons.

On Tuesday the chair of the Treasury select committee, Mel Stride, rebuked ministers for delaying an impact assessment into the change and sending only a short letter half an hour before the vote.

If the government does not change course, which No 10 denied it would do, [Boris Johnson](#) faces a showdown with peers in the new year over the changes, with several high-profile Conservatives saying they will seek to amend the bill.

In the Commons on Monday night, the government narrowly won the vote to change a key aspect of its social care plan that means council contributions to care fees would not go towards [the new £86,000 cap](#).

Eighteen Tory MPs voted against the government and 68 were absent. Labour sources told the Guardian that just 13 were paired – meaning they were given official permission to be absent – suggesting dozens of MPs intentionally abstained.

A number of abstaining MPs told the Guardian there was widespread discontent at the lack of information over the change to funding, which would hit poorer households in areas with lower house prices, and said dozens more could rebel if the government does not provide more information on how to mitigate the impact.

“We didn’t need to rush this through,” a former minister said. “A lot of colleagues are saying now: we’ll look at the full picture and then have a go at amending it again when it comes back from the Lords.

“Many of us withheld support because frankly we are sick of being marched up the hill and left behind when the government changes its mind. So we are waiting for that rather than being made to look foolish. The government may well compromise.”

Jeremy Hunt, the chair of the Commons health select committee, abstained in the vote and predicted a government U-turn. “I was conflicted, I actually

ended up abstaining because it is a big disappointment that they changed the way the cap is calculated,” he told the BBC. He said he expected the government to look again at the plans.

The change means homeowners in the poorest areas of England face losing a three times greater share of their housing wealth to pay for social care than people in the most affluent areas, according to [Guardian analysis](#).

Johnson sought to reassure ministers at cabinet on Tuesday that “no one will be forced to sell a home they or their spouse is living in as it will not be counted as an asset”.

Later on Tuesday Stride said he was alarmed the government was further delaying its impact assessment on the change. In a letter to Stride on Monday night, the health secretary, Sajid Javid, said he could not provide regional or individual assessments on the impact of the change, as the funding at a local authority level has not yet been agreed.

“The letter, which was sent half an hour before parliament was set to vote on the changes last night, does not provide the full assessment requested,” Stride said. “I have real concerns about the way these changes have been introduced.”

Several influential Conservative peers including Andrew Lansley, another former Tory health secretary, and Ros Altmann, the government’s former pensions adviser, have said they will attempt to amend the bill and send it back to the Commons – though this is not expected until March next year.

Labour’s leader in the Lords, Angela Smith, said there could be a buildup of public anger by that time. “In this case, you had something that’s pretty much sneaked out, and then voted on very quickly. And I suspect you’re seeing now those discussions and debates particularly [among] those Conservative MPs who voted for it. Are people thinking – hang on, what does this mean for me?”

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Politics live with Andrew Sparrow

Politics

Dorries denies threatening to cut BBC funding because of Nick Robinson's interview with PM – as it happened

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Social care

Ministers defy Tory rebellion to push through social care cap amendment



Mark Harper was among the Tory rebels urging ministers to withdraw the amendment. Photograph: UK Parliament/Jessica Taylor/PA

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

Mon 22 Nov 2021 17.15 EST

Ministers have pushed through an amendment to England's social care plans, which is set to disproportionately hit poorer pensioners, despite a sizeable rebellion from backbenchers.

The change means that council contributions to care fees would not go towards [the cap](#), which means poorer people who get means-tested help would end up paying the same as richer people if they needed care for a significant amount of time.

It would save the government £900m a year by 2027, but would leave many poorer homeowners exposed to “catastrophic costs” including the need to [sell their homes](#) to fund care, analysts have said. The vote passed by 272 to 246, a majority of 26. There were 19 rebels for the Conservatives and 70 abstentions, of which only 13 were paired according to Labour.

Rebels included a number of Tories in northern seats likely to be hit hard by the changes, including 2019 intake MPs Christian Wakeford in Bury South, Holly Munby-Croft in Scunthorpe and Mark Jenkinson in Worthington.

Angela Rayner, Labour’s deputy leader, said Tory MPs had “voted to break their promise that nobody would have to sell their homes to pay for their social care costs and voted to hammer poorer pensioners to protect millionaires in mansions”.

She tweeted: “It’s an inheritance tax on the north and a con, not a social care plan.”

Speaking in the Commons, the health minister, Edward Argar, defended the change, which goes against what was originally proposed by the architect of the cap, Sir Andrew Dilnot. “We’ve always intended that the cap applies to what people personally contribute, rather than on the combination of their personal contribution and that of the state,” he said.

Argar said, to roars of disapproval from the Labour benches, that “no one will lose from these reforms compared to the system we have now, and the overwhelming majority will win”.

Among the rebels was the former Conservative chief whip Mark Harper, who had urged ministers to withdraw the amendment. “It potentially disadvantages the less well-off and those of working age with lifelong conditions,” he said. “DHSC [Department of Health and Social Care] ministers haven’t properly worked with the sector or MPs to explain their thinking or decisions.”

The chair of the Treasury select committee said he had “real concerns” about the way the change had been made and said no geographical assessments had been made.

As anger mounted in Westminster, Downing Street and the business minister Paul Scully repeatedly refused to guarantee that no one will need to sell their home in order to pay for care.

“The social care solution is all about getting a cap above which you do not need to pay – that gives people certainty,” Scully told Sky News.

“If you hit the cap, you will not have to pay any more money for your personal care. I think that is a fair, balanced approach for taxpayers and people who are having to pay for what is a really expensive, at the moment, form of care through social care.”

Amid mounting tensions with backbenchers, cabinet ministers spent the afternoon ringing round MPs to stress that the details of the full social care package would mitigate the effects of the change and that a full impact assessment would be published.

In the Commons, Damian Green said that the government should publish an impact assessment. The former cabinet minister, who said he abstained on the vote, later said it was unclear whether the alteration to the cap for care costs is fair. He told BBC’s Newsnight: “The party wants to see a proper fair solution to social care that is fair around the country and in all areas of the country.

“And to put it as politely as I can, it’s not yet clear that this solution achieves that.”

Jeremy Hunt, chair of the Commons health and social care select committee, told colleagues it was better to vote through the plans in the hope that governments would in future make them fairer for people with fewer assets. Hunt said it was a “slightly more stingy cap” than had been hoped for, but that it was “a step in the right direction”.

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House of Commons

How did your MP vote on social care funding?

[Seán Clarke](#)

Mon 22 Nov 2021 18.55 EST

New clause 49

Not to consider council payments in the calculations of care caps, meaning poorer people could pay more

Against

246



For

272

Conservative

Labour

Scottish National Party

Liberal Democrat

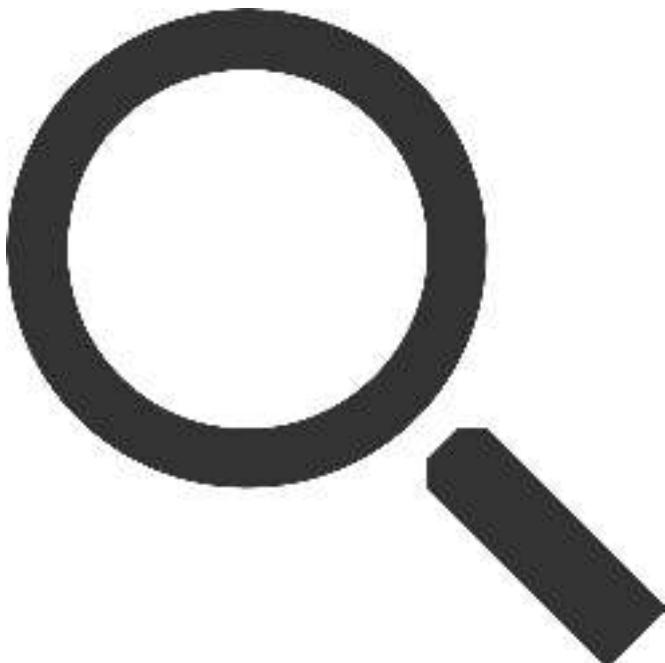
Democratic Unionist Party

Plaid Cymru

Green

SDLP

Alliance



Tap header to sort

Party

Name

Constituency

Vote

Key vote rebel

Con

Caroline Johnson

Sleaford and North Hykeham

For

No

Lab

Diane Abbott

Hackney North and Stoke Newington

Against

No

Con

Nigel Adams

Selby and Ainsty

For

No

Con

Bim Afolami

Hitchin and Harpenden

For

No

Con

Adam Afriyie

Windsor

For

No

Ind

Imran Ahmad Khan

Wakefield

--

—

Con

Nickie Aiken

Cities of London and Westminster

For

No

Con

Peter Aldous

Waveney

Against

Yes

Lab

Rushanara Ali

Bethnal Green and Bow

Against

No

Lab

Tahir Ali

Birmingham, Hall Green

Against

No

Con

Lucy Allan

Telford

--

—

Lab

Rosena Allin-Khan

Tooting

Against

No

Lab

Mike Amesbury

Weaver Vale

Against

No

Lab

Fleur Anderson

Putney
Against
No
Con

Lee Anderson
Ashfield
For
No
Con

Stuart Anderson
Wolverhampton South West

--

—
Con
Stuart Andrew

Pudsey
For
No
Con

Caroline Ansell
Eastbourne

For
No
Lab

Tonia Antoniazzi
Gower
Against

No
Con

Edward Argar
Charnwood
For
No
Lab

Jonathan Ashworth

Leicester South

Against

No

Con

Sarah Atherton

Wrexham

For

No

Con

Victoria Atkins

Louth and Horncastle

For

No

Con

Gareth Bacon

Orpington

For

No

Con

Richard Bacon

South Norfolk

For

No

Con

Kemi Badenoch

Saffron Walden

For

No

Con

Shaun Bailey

West Bromwich West

For

No

Con

Siobhan Baillie

Stroud

--

—
Con

Duncan Baker

North Norfolk

For

No

Con

Steve Baker

Wycombe

For

No

Con

Harriett Baldwin

West Worcestershire

For

No

Con

Steve Barclay

North East Cambridgeshire

For

No

SNP

Hannah Bardell

Livingston

Against

No

Lab

Paula Barker

Liverpool, Wavertree

Against

No

Con

John Baron

Basildon and Billericay

Against

Yes

Con

Simon Baynes

Clwyd South

--

—

Lab

Margaret Beckett

Derby South

--

—

SF

Órfhlaith Begley

West Tyrone

--

—

Lab

Apsana Begum

Poplar and Limehouse

Against

No

Con

Aaron Bell

Newcastle-under-Lyme

For

No

Lab

Hilary Benn

Leeds Central

Against

No

Con

Scott Benton

Blackpool South
For
No
Con
Sir Paul Beresford
Mole Valley
For
No
Con
Jake Berry
Rossendale and Darwen

--

—

Lab
Clive Betts
Sheffield South East

--

—

Con
Saqib Bhatti
Meriden
For
No
SNP
Mhairi Black
Paisley and Renfrewshire South

--

—

SNP
Ian Blackford
Ross, Skye and Lochaber
Against
No
Con
Bob Blackman

Harrow East

For

No

SNP

Kirsty Blackman

Aberdeen North

Against

No

Lab

Olivia Blake

Sheffield, Hallam

--

—

Lab

Paul Blomfield

Sheffield Central

Against

No

Con

Crispin Blunt

Reigate

For

No

Con

Peter Bone

Wellingborough

--

—

SNP

Steven Bonnar

Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill

Against

No

Con

Sir Peter Bottomley

Worthing West

--

—
Con

Andrew Bowie

West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine

For

No

Con

Ben Bradley

Mansfield

For

No

Con

Karen Bradley

Staffordshire Moorlands

--

—
Lab

Ben Bradshaw

Exeter

Against

No

Con

Sir Graham Brady

Altrincham and Sale West

For

No

SF

Mickey Brady

Newry and Armagh

--

—
Con

Suella Braverman

Fareham

For

No

Lab

Kevin Brennan

Cardiff West

Against

No

Con

Jack Brereton

Stoke-on-Trent South

For

No

Con

Andrew Bridgen

North West Leicestershire

--

—

Con

Steve Brine

Winchester

--

—

Con

Paul Bristow

Peterborough

For

No

Con

Sara Britcliffe

Hyndburn

--

—

SNP

Deidre Brock

Edinburgh North and Leith

Against

No

SNP

Alan Brown

Kilmarnock and Loudoun

Against

No

Lab

Lyn Brown

West Ham

Against

No

Lab

Nicholas Brown

Newcastle upon Tyne East

Against

No

Con

Anthony Browne

South Cambridgeshire

For

No

Con

Fiona Bruce

Congleton

For

No

Lab

Chris Bryant

Rhondda

Against

No

Con

Felicity Buchan

Kensington
For
No
Lab
Karen Buck
Westminster North
Against
No
Con
Robert Buckland
South Swindon

--

—

Con
Alex Burghart
Brentwood and Ongar
For
No
Lab
Richard Burgon
Leeds East
Against
No
Con
Conor Burns
Bournemouth West
For
No
Lab
Dawn Butler
Brent Central
Against
No
Con
Rob Butler

Aylesbury

For

No

Lab

Ian Byrne

Liverpool, West Derby

Against

No

Lab

Liam Byrne

Birmingham, Hodge Hill

Against

No

Lab

Ruth Cadbury

Brentford and Isleworth

Against

No

Con

Alun Cairns

Vale of Glamorgan

For

No

SNP

Amy Callaghan

East Dunbartonshire

--

—

SNP

Lisa Cameron

East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow

--

—

Lab

Sir Alan Campbell

Tynemouth
Against
No
DUP
Gregory Campbell
East Londonderry
Against
No
Lab
Dan Carden
Liverpool, Walton

--

—

LD
Alistair Carmichael
Orkney and Shetland

--

—

Con
Andy Carter
Warrington South

--

—

Con
James Cartlidge
South Suffolk
For
No
Con
Sir William Cash
Stone
For
No
Con
Miriam Cates

Penistone and Stocksbridge

For

No

Con

Maria Caulfield

Lewes

For

No

Con

Alex Chalk

Cheltenham

For

No

LD

Wendy Chamberlain

North East Fife

Against

No

Lab

Sarah Champion

Rotherham

Against

No

SNP

Douglas Chapman

Dunfermline and West Fife

--

—

Lab

Bambos Charalambous

Enfield, Southgate

Against

No

SNP

Joanna Cherry

Edinburgh South West

Against

No

Con

Rehman Chishti

Gillingham and Rainham

For

No

Con

Sir Christopher Chope

Christchurch

--

—

Con

Jo Churchill

Bury St Edmunds

For

No

Lab

Feryal Clark

Enfield North

--

—

Con

Greg Clark

Tunbridge Wells

For

No

Con

Simon Clarke

Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland

For

No

Con

Theo Clarke

Stafford
For
No
Con
Brendan Clarke-Smith
Bassetlaw
For
No
Con
Chris Clarkson
Heywood and Middleton
For
No
Con
James Cleverly
Braintree
For
No
Con
Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown
The Cotswolds
For
No
Con
Thérèse Coffey
Suffolk Coastal
For
No
Con
Elliot Colburn
Carshalton and Wallington
For
No
Con
Damian Collins

Folkestone and Hythe

For

No

LD

Daisy Cooper

St Albans

Against

No

Lab

Rosie Cooper

West Lancashire

--

—

Lab

Yvette Cooper

Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford

Against

No

Ind

Jeremy Corbyn

Islington North

Against

—

Con

Alberto Costa

South Leicestershire

For

No

Con

Robert Courts

Witney

For

No

Con

Claire Coutinho

East Surrey
For
No
SNP
Ronnie Cowan
Inverclyde

--

—
Con
Sir Geoffrey Cox
Torridge and West Devon
For
No
Lab
Neil Coyle
Bermondsey and Old Southwark
Against
No
Con
Stephen Crabb
Preseli Pembrokeshire

--

—
SNP
Angela Crawley
Lanark and Hamilton East

--

—
Lab
Stella Creasy
Walthamstow
Against
No
Con
Virginia Crosbie

Ynys Môn

For

No

Con

Tracey Crouch

Chatham and Aylesford

For

No

Lab

Jon Cruddas

Dagenham and Rainham

Against

No

Lab

John Cryer

Leyton and Wanstead

Against

No

Lab

Judith Cummins

Bradford South

Against

No

Lab

Alex Cunningham

Stockton North

--

—

Lab

Janet Daby

Lewisham East

Against

No

Con

James Daly

Bury North
For
No
LD
Ed Davey
Kingston and Surbiton
Against
No
Lab
Wayne David
Caerphilly
Against
No
Con
David T C Davies
Monmouth
For
No
Con
Gareth Davies
Grantham and Stamford
For
No
Lab
Geraint Davies
Swansea West
Against
No
Con
James Davies
Vale of Clwyd
For
No
Con
Mims Davies

Mid Sussex
For
No
Con
Philip Davies
Shipley
Against
Yes
Lab
Alex Davies-Jones
Pontypridd
Against
No
Con
David Davis
Haltemprice and Howden

--

—

Con
Dehenna Davison
Bishop Auckland
For
No
SNP
Martyn Day
Linlithgow and East Falkirk
Against
No
Lab
Marsha De Cordova
Battersea
Against
No
Lab
Thangam Debbonaire

Bristol West
Against
No
Lab
Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi
Slough
Against
No
Con
Caroline Dinenage
Gosport
For
No
Con
Miss Sarah Dines
Derbyshire Dales
For
No
Con
Jonathan Djanogly
Huntingdon
For
No
Con
Leo Docherty
Aldershot
For
No
SNP
Martin Docherty-Hughes
West Dunbartonshire
Against
No
Lab
Anneliese Dodds

Oxford East
Against
No
DUP
Sir Jeffrey M Donaldson
Lagan Valley

--

—
Con
Michelle Donelan
Chippenham
For
No
SNP
Dave Doogan
Angus
Against
No
SNP
Allan Dorans
Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock

--

—
Con
Nadine Dorries
Mid Bedfordshire
For
No
Con
Steve Double
St Austell and Newquay
For*
No
Lab
Stephen Doughty

Cardiff South and Penarth

--

Lab

Peter Dowd

Bootle

Against

No

Con

Oliver Dowden

Hertsmere

For

No

Con

Jackie Doyle-Price

Thurrock

For

No

Con

Richard Drax

South Dorset

--

Lab

Jack Dromey

Birmingham, Erdington

Against

No

Con

Flick Drummond

Meon Valley

For

No

Con

James Duddridge

Rochford and Southend East

For

No

Lab

Rosie Duffield

Canterbury

Against

No

Con

David Duguid

Banff and Buchan

For

No

Con

Sir Iain Duncan Smith

Chingford and Woodford Green

--

—

Con

Philip Dunne

Ludlow

For

No

Lab

Dame Angela Eagle

Wallasey

Against

No

Lab

Maria Eagle

Garston and Halewood

Against

No

SDLP

Colum Eastwood

Foyle
Against
No
Con
Mark Eastwood
Dewsbury
For
No
Ind
Jonathan Edwards
Carmarthen East and Dinefwr
Against

—
Con
Ruth Edwards
Rushcliffe
For
No
Lab
Clive Efford
Eltham
Against
No
Lab
Julie Elliott
Sunderland Central

--
—
Con
Michael Ellis
Northampton North
For
No
Con
Tobias Ellwood

Bournemouth East

--

Lab

Chris Elmore

Ogmore

Against

No

Con

Natalie Elphicke

Dover

For

No

Lab

Florence Eshalomi

Vauxhall

Against

No

Lab

Bill Esterson

Sefton Central

Against

No

Con

George Eustice

Camborne and Redruth

For

No

Lab

Chris Evans

Islwyn

Against

No

Con

Luke Evans

Bosworth
For
No
Con
Nigel Evans
Ribble Valley

--

—
Con
Sir David Evennett
Bexleyheath and Crayford
For
No
Con
Ben Everitt
Milton Keynes North
For
No
Con
Michael Fabricant
Lichfield
For
No
Con
Laura Farris
Newbury
For
No
LD
Tim Farron
Westmorland and Lonsdale
Against
No
APNI
Stephen Farry

North Down
Against
No
Con
Simon Fell
Barrow and Furness

--

—
SNP
Marion Fellows
Motherwell and Wishaw
Against
No
Ind
Margaret Ferrier
Rutherglen and Hamilton West
Against

—
SF
John Finucane
Belfast North

--

—
Lab
Colleen Fletcher
Coventry North East
Against*
No
Con
Katherine Fletcher
South Ribble
For
No
Con
Mark Fletcher

Bolsover
For
No
Con
Nick Fletcher
Don Valley
For
No
SNP
Stephen Flynn
Aberdeen South
Against
No
Con
Vicky Ford
Chelmsford
For
No
Con
Kevin Foster
Torbay
For
No
Lab
Yvonne Fovargue
Makerfield
Against
No
Con
Liam Fox
North Somerset
For
No
Lab
Vicky Foxcroft

Lewisham, Deptford

Against

No

Lab

Mary Kelly Foy

City of Durham

Against

No

Con

Mark Francois

Rayleigh and Wickford

--

—

Con

Lucy Frazer

South East Cambridgeshire

For

No

Con

George Freeman

Mid Norfolk

For

No

Con

Mike Freer

Finchley and Golders Green

--

—

Con

Richard Fuller

North East Bedfordshire

For

No

Lab

Gill Furniss

Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough

--

—
Con

Marcus Fysh

Yeovil

--

—
Con

Sir Roger Gale

North Thanet

For

No

Lab

Barry Gardiner

Brent North

Against

No

Con

Mark Garnier

Wyre Forest

For

No

Con

Nusrat Ghani

Wealden

--

—
Con

Nick Gibb

Bognor Regis and Littlehampton

For

No

SNP

Patricia Gibson

North Ayrshire and Arran
Against

No

Con

Peter Gibson

Darlington

--

—
Con

Jo Gideon

Stoke-on-Trent Central

--

—
SF

Michelle Gildernew

Fermanagh and South Tyrone

--

—
Lab

Preet Kaur Gill

Birmingham, Edgbaston

Against

No

DUP

Paul Girvan

South Antrim

--

—
Con

John Glen

Salisbury

--

—
Lab

Mary Glindon

North Tyneside

--

—
Con

Robert Goodwill
Scarborough and Whitby

For

No

Con

Michael Gove
Surrey Heath

For

No

SNP

Patrick Grady
Glasgow North

Against

No

Con

Richard Graham
Gloucester

For

No

Con

Helen Grant
Maidstone and The Weald

--

—
SNP

Peter Grant

Glenrothes

Against

No

Con

James Gray

North Wiltshire

For

No

Con

Chris Grayling

Epsom and Ewell

For

No

Con

Chris Green

Bolton West

Against

Yes

Con

Damian Green

Ashford

--

—

Lab

Kate Green

Stretford and Urmston

Against

No

LD

Sarah Green

Chesham and Amersham

Against

No

Lab

Lilian Greenwood

Nottingham South

Against

No

Lab

Margaret Greenwood

Wirral West
Against
No
Con
Andrew Griffith
Arundel and South Downs
For
No
Lab
Nia Griffith
Llanelli
Against
No
Con
Kate Griffiths
Burton
For
No
Con
James Grundy
Leigh
For
No
Con
Jonathan Gullis
Stoke-on-Trent North
For
No
Lab
Andrew Gwynne
Denton and Reddish
Against
No
Lab
Louise Haigh

Sheffield, Heeley
Against
No
Con
Robert Halfon
Harlow
For
No
Con
Luke Hall
Thornbury and Yate
For
No
Lab
Fabian Hamilton
Leeds North East
Against
No
Con
Stephen Hammond
Wimbledon

--

—
Con
Matt Hancock
West Suffolk
For
No
Con
Greg Hands
Chelsea and Fulham
For
No
SDLP
Claire Hanna

Belfast South
Against
No
Oth
Neale Hanvey
Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath

--

—
Lab
Emma Hardy
Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle
Against
No
Lab
Harriet Harman
Camberwell and Peckham

--

—
Con
Mark Harper
Forest of Dean
Against
Yes
Lab
Carolyn Harris
Swansea East
Against
No
Con
Rebecca Harris
Castle Point
For
No
Con
Trudy Harrison

Copeland

--

—
Con

Sally-Ann Hart

Hastings and Rye

For

No

Con

Simon Hart

Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire

For

No

Lab

Helen Hayes

Dulwich and West Norwood

Against

No

Con

Sir John Hayes

South Holland and The Deepings

--

—
SF

Chris Hazzard

South Down

--

—
Con

Sir Oliver Heald

North East Hertfordshire

For

No

Lab

John Healey

Wentworth and Dearne

Against

No

Con

James Heappey

Wells

--

—

Con

Chris Heaton-Harris

Daventry

--

—

Con

Gordon Henderson

Sittingbourne and Sheppey

For

No

Lab

Sir Mark Hendrick

Preston

Against

No

SNP

Drew Hendry

Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey

--

—

Con

Darren Henry

Broxtowe

--

—

Con

Antony Higginbotham

Burnley

--

—
Lab

Dame Meg Hillier
Hackney South and Shoreditch

Against

No

Con

Damian Hinds

East Hampshire

For

No

Con

Simon Hoare

North Dorset

For

No

LD

Wera Hobhouse

Bath

Against

No

Lab

Dame Margaret Hodge

Barking

Against

No

Lab

Sharon Hodgson

Washington and Sunderland West

Against

No

Con

Richard Holden

North West Durham

For

No

Lab

Kate Hollern

Blackburn

Against

No

Con

Kevin Hollinrake

Thirsk and Malton

Against

Yes

Con

Philip Hollobone

Kettering

Against

Yes

Con

Adam Holloway

Gravesham

--

—

Con

Paul Holmes

Eastleigh

For

No

Lab

Rachel Hopkins

Luton South

Against

No

SNP

Stewart Hosie

Dundee East
Against
No
Lab
Sir George Howarth
Knowsley
Against
No
Con
John Howell
Henley
For
No
Con
Paul Howell
Sedgefield
For
No
Oth
Sir Lindsay Hoyle
Chorley

--

—
Con
Nigel Huddleston
Mid Worcestershire
For
No
Con
Neil Hudson
Penrith and The Border

--

—
Con
Eddie Hughes

Walsall North

For

No

Con

Jane Hunt

Loughborough

For

No

Con

Jeremy Hunt

South West Surrey

--

—

Con

Tom Hunt

Ipswich

For

No

Lab

Rupa Huq

Ealing Central and Acton

Against

No

Lab

Imran Hussain

Bradford East

Against

No

Con

Alister Jack

Dumfries and Galloway

For

No

LD

Christine Jardine

Edinburgh West

--

Lab

Dan Jarvis

Barnsley Central

Against

No

Con

Sajid Javid

Bromsgrove

For

No

Con

Ranil Jayawardena

North East Hampshire

For

No

Con

Sir Bernard Jenkin

Harwich and North Essex

For

No

Con

Mark Jenkinson

Workington

Against

Yes

Con

Andrea Jenkyns

Morley and Outwood

For

No

Con

Robert Jenrick

Newark
For
No
Con
Boris Johnson
Uxbridge and South Ruislip
For
No
Lab
Debbie Abrahams
Oldham East and Saddleworth
Against
No
Lab
Dame Diana Johnson
Kingston upon Hull North
Against
No
Con
Gareth Johnson
Dartford
For
No
Lab
Kim Johnson
Liverpool, Riverside
Against
No
Con
David Johnston
Wantage
For
No
Con
Andrew Jones

Harrogate and Knaresborough

For

No

Lab

Darren Jones

Bristol North West

Against

No

Con

David Jones

Clwyd West

--

—

Con

Fay Jones

Brecon and Radnorshire

For

No

Lab

Gerald Jones

Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney

Against

No

Lab

Kevan Jones

North Durham

Against

No

Con

Marcus Jones

Nuneaton

For

No

Lab

Ruth Jones

Newport West

Against

No

Lab

Sarah Jones

Croydon Central

Against

No

Con

Simon Jupp

East Devon

For

No

Lab

Mike Kane

Wythenshawe and Sale East

Against

No

Con

Daniel Kawczynski

Shrewsbury and Atcham

For

No

Con

Alicia Kearns

Rutland and Melton

For

No

Con

Gillian Keegan

Chichester

For

No

Lab

Barbara Keeley

Worsley and Eccles South
Against

No

Lab

Liz Kendall
Leicester West

Against

No

Lab

Afzal Khan
Manchester, Gorton

Against

No

Lab

Stephen Kinnock
Aberavon

Against

No

Con

Sir Greg Knight
East Yorkshire

For

No

Con

Julian Knight
Solihull

For

No

Con

Danny Kruger
Devizes

For

No

Con

Kwasi Kwarteng

Spelthorne
For
No
Lab
Peter Kyle
Hove
Against
No
Con
Dame Eleanor Laing
Epping Forest

--

—

PC
Ben Lake
Ceredigion
Against
No
Lab
David Lammy
Tottenham
Against
No
Con
John Lamont

Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk

For
No
Con
Robert Largan
High Peak

--

—

Con
Pauline Latham

Mid Derbyshire

For

No

Lab

Ian Lavery

Wansbeck

Against

No

SNP

Chris Law

Dundee West

Against

No

Lab

Kim Leadbeater

Batley and Spen

Against

No

Con

Andrea Leadsom

South Northamptonshire

For

No

Con

Sir Edward Leigh

Gainsborough

For

No

Con

Ian Levy

Blyth Valley

For

No

Lab

Emma Lewell-Buck

South Shields

Against

No

Con

Andrew Lewer

Northampton South

Against

Yes

Con

Brandon Lewis

Great Yarmouth

For

No

Lab

Clive Lewis

Norwich South

Against

No

Con

Julian Lewis

New Forest East

Against

Yes

Con

Ian Liddell-Grainger

Bridgwater and West Somerset

For

No

SNP

David Linden

Glasgow East

Against

No

Lab

Tony Lloyd

Rochdale
Against
No
DUP
Carla Lockhart
Upper Bann

--

—
Con
Chris Loder
West Dorset
For
No
Con
Mark Logan
Bolton North East

For
No
Lab
Rebecca Long Bailey
Salford and Eccles

Against
No
Con
Marco Longhi
Dudley North
For
No
Con
Julia Lopez
Hornchurch and Upminster
For
No
Con
Jack Lopresti

Filton and Bradley Stoke

--

—
Con

Jonathan Lord

Woking

For

No

Con

Tim Loughton

East Worthing and Shoreham

--

—

Grn

Caroline Lucas

Brighton, Pavilion

Against

No

Lab

Holly Lynch

Halifax

Against

No

Oth

Kenny MacAskill

East Lothian

--

—

Lab

Steve McCabe

Birmingham, Selly Oak

--

—

Lab

Kerry McCarthy

Bristol East

Against

No

Con

Jason McCartney

Colne Valley

Against

Yes

Con

Karl McCartney

Lincoln

For

No

Lab

Siobhain McDonagh

Mitcham and Morden

Against

No

Lab

Andy McDonald

Middlesbrough

Against

No

SNP

Stewart Malcolm McDonald

Glasgow South

--

—

SNP

Stuart C McDonald

Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East

Against

No

Lab

John McDonnell

Hayes and Harlington

Against

No

Lab

Pat McFadden

Wolverhampton South East

Against

No

Lab

Conor McGinn

St Helens North

Against

No

Lab

Alison McGovern

Wirral South

Against

No

Con

Craig Mackinlay

South Thanet

For

No

Lab

Catherine McKinnell

Newcastle upon Tyne North

Against

No

Con

Cherilyn Mackrory

Truro and Falmouth

For

No

SNP

Anne McLaughlin

Glasgow North East

--

—
Con

Rachel Maclean

Redditch

For

No

Lab

Jim McMahon

Oldham West and Royton

Against

No

Lab

Anna McMorrin

Cardiff North

Against

No

SNP

John McNally

Falkirk

Against

No

SNP

Angus Brendan MacNeil

Na h-Eileanan an Iar

--

—
Con

Stephen McPartland

Stevenage

--

—
Con

Esther McVey

Tatton
Against
Yes
Lab
Justin Madders
Ellesmere Port and Neston
Against
No
Lab
Khalid Mahmood
Birmingham, Perry Barr
Against
No
Lab
Shabana Mahmood
Birmingham, Ladywood
Against
No
Con
Alan Mak
Havant
For
No
Lab
Seema Malhotra
Feltham and Heston
Against
No
Con
Kit Malthouse
North West Hampshire
For
No
Con
Anthony Mangnall

Totnes
For
No
Con
Scott Mann
North Cornwall
For
No
Con
Julie Marson
Hertford and Stortford
For
No
Lab
Rachael Maskell
York Central
Against
No
SF
Paul Maskey
Belfast West

--

—
Lab
Christian Matheson
City of Chester

--

—
Con
Theresa May
Maidenhead

--

—
Con
Jerome Mayhew

Broadland

For

No

Con

Paul Maynard

Blackpool North and Cleveleys

For

No

Lab

Ian Mearns

Gateshead

Against

No

Con

Mark Menzies

Fylde

For

No

Con

Johnny Mercer

Plymouth, Moor View

--

—

Con

Huw Merriman

Bexhill and Battle

For

No

Con

Stephen Metcalfe

South Basildon and East Thurrock

For

No

Lab

Edward Miliband

Doncaster North

Against

No

Con

Robin Millar

Aberconwy

For

No

Con

Maria Miller

Basingstoke

For

No

Con

Amanda Milling

Cannock Chase

--

—

Con

Nigel Mills

Amber Valley

For

No

Lab

Navendu Mishra

Stockport

--

—

Con

Andrew Mitchell

Sutton Coldfield

--

—

Con

Gagan Mohindra

South West Hertfordshire

For

No

SF

Francie Molloy

Mid Ulster

--

—

SNP

Carol Monaghan

Glasgow North West

Against

No

Con

Damien Moore

Southport

Against

Yes

Con

Robbie Moore

Keighley

For

No

LD

Layla Moran

Oxford West and Abingdon

Against

No

Con

Penny Mordaunt

Portsmouth North

For

No

Lab

Jessica Morden

Newport East

--

—
Lab

Stephen Morgan
Portsmouth South

Against

No

Con

Anne Marie Morris
Newton Abbot

--

—
Con

David Morris
Morecambe and Lunesdale

--

—
Lab

Grahame Morris
Easington

Against

No

Con

James Morris
Halesowen and Rowley Regis

For

No

Con

Joy Morrissey

Beaconsfield

For

No

Con

Jill Mortimer

Hartlepool
For
No
Con
Wendy Morton
Aldridge-Brownhills

--

—
Con
Kieran Mullan
Crewe and Nantwich
For
No
Con
Holly Mumby-Croft

Scunthorpe

Against

Yes

Con

David Mundell
Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale

For

No

Lab

Ian Murray
Edinburgh South
Against

No

Lab

James Murray
Ealing North

--

—
Con
Sheryll Murray

South East Cornwall

--

—
Con

Andrew Murrison
South West Wiltshire

For

No

Lab

Lisa Nandy
Wigan

--

—
Con

Sir Robert Neill
Bromley and Chislehurst

--

—
SNP

Gavin Newlands
Paisley and Renfrewshire North
Against

No

Lab

Charlotte Nichols
Warrington North

--

—
Con

Lia Nici
Great Grimsby
For

No

SNP

John Nicolson

Ochil and South Perthshire

--

—
Con

Caroline Nokes

Romsey and Southampton North

For

No

Con

Jesse Norman

Hereford and South Herefordshire

--

—

Lab

Alex Norris

Nottingham North

Against

No

Con

Neil O'Brien

Harborough

For

No

Con

Matthew Offord

Hendon

--

—

SNP

Brendan O'Hara

Argyll and Bute

Against

No

LD

Sarah Olney

Richmond Park

Against

No

Lab

Chi Onwurah

Newcastle upon Tyne Central

Against

No

Con

Guy Opperman

Hexham

For

No

Lab

Abena Oppong-Asare

Erith and Thamesmead

Against

No

Lab

Kate Osamor

Edmonton

Against

No

Lab

Kate Osborne

Jarrow

Against

No

SNP

Kirsten Oswald

East Renfrewshire

Against

No

Lab

Taiwo Owatemi

Coventry North West

Against

No

Lab

Sarah Owen

Luton North

Against

No

DUP

Ian Paisley

North Antrim

Against

No

Con

Neil Parish

Tiverton and Honiton

--

—

Con

Priti Patel

Witham

For

No

Con

Mark Pawsey

Rugby

For

No

Lab

Stephanie Peacock

Barnsley East

Against

No

Con

Sir Mike Penning

Hemel Hempstead
Against
Yes
Lab
Matthew Pennycook
Greenwich and Woolwich
Against
No
Con
John Penrose
Weston-super-Mare
For
No
Con
Andrew Percy
Brigg and Goole
Against
Yes
Lab
Toby Perkins
Chesterfield

--

—
Lab
Jess Phillips
Birmingham, Yardley
Against
No
Lab
Bridget Phillipson
Houghton and Sunderland South
Against
No
Con
Chris Philp

Croydon South
For
No
Con
Christopher Pincher
Tamworth
For
No
Lab
Luke Pollard
Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport
Against
No
Con
Dan Poulter
Central Suffolk and North Ipswich
Against
Yes
Con
Rebecca Pow
Taunton Deane
For
No
Lab
Lucy Powell
Manchester Central
Against
No
Con
Victoria Prentis
Banbury
For
No
Con
Mark Pritchard

The Wrekin

--

—
Con

Tom Pursglove

Corby

For

No

SNP

Anum Qaisar

Airdrie and Shotts

Against

No

Con

Jeremy Quin

Horsham

--

—
Con

Will Quince

Colchester

For

No

Lab

Yasmin Qureshi

Bolton South East

Against

No

Con

Dominic Raab

Esher and Walton

For

No

Con

Tom Randall

Gedling
For
No
Lab
Angela Rayner
Ashton-under-Lyne
Against
No
Con
John Redwood
Wokingham
For
No
Lab
Steve Reed
Croydon North

--

—

Lab
Christina Rees
Neath

--

—

Con
Jacob Rees-Mogg
North East Somerset
For
No
Lab
Ellie Reeves
Lewisham West and Penge
Against
No
Lab
Rachel Reeves

Leeds West

Against

No

Lab

Jonathan Reynolds

Stalybridge and Hyde

Against

No

Lab

Bell Ribeiro-Addy

Streatham

Against

No

Con

Nicola Richards

West Bromwich East

For

No

Con

Angela Richardson

Guildford

For

No

Lab

Marie Rimmer

St Helens South and Whiston

Against

No

Ind

Rob Roberts

Delyn

Against

—

Con

Laurence Robertson

Tewkesbury
For
No
DUP
Gavin Robinson
Belfast East

--

—
Con
Mary Robinson
Cheadle
For
No
Lab
Matt Rodda
Reading East
Against
No
Con
Andrew Rosindell
Romford

--

—
Con
Douglas Ross
Moray

--

—
Con
Lee Rowley
North East Derbyshire
For
No
Con
Dean Russell

Watford
For
No
Lab
Lloyd Russell-Moyle
Brighton, Kemptown
Against
No
Con
David Rutley
Macclesfield
For
No
Con
Gary Sambrook
Birmingham, Northfield
For
No
PC
Liz Saville Roberts
Dwyfor Meirionnydd
Against
No
Con
Selaine Saxby
North Devon
--
—
Con
Paul Scully
Sutton and Cheam
For
No
Con
Bob Seely

Isle of Wight
For
No
Con
Andrew Selous
South West Bedfordshire
For
No
Lab
Naz Shah
Bradford West
Against
No
DUP
Jim Shannon
Strangford
Against
No
Con
Grant Shapps
Welwyn Hatfield

--

—
Con
Alok Sharma
Reading West
For
No
Lab
Virendra Sharma
Ealing, Southall
Against
No
Lab
Barry Sheerman

Huddersfield

--

Con

Alec Shelbrooke
Elmet and Rothwell

--

SNP

Tommy Sheppard
Edinburgh East
Against
No
Lab
Tulip Siddiq
Hampstead and Kilburn
Against
No

Con

David Simmonds
Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner

For

No

Con

Chris Skidmore
Kingswood

For

No

Lab

Andy Slaughter
Hammersmith
Against
No
SNP
Alyn Smith

Stirling

--

—
Lab

Cat Smith

Lancaster and Fleetwood

Against

No

Con

Chloe Smith

Norwich North

For

No

Con

Greg Smith

Buckingham

For

No

Con

Henry Smith

Crawley

For

No

Lab

Jeff Smith

Manchester, Withington

Against

No

Con

Julian Smith

Skipton and Ripon

For

No

Lab

Nick Smith

Blaenau Gwent
Against
No
Con
Royston Smith
Southampton, Itchen
For
No
Lab
Karin Smyth
Bristol South
Against
No
Lab
Alex Sobel
Leeds North West
Against
No
Con
Amanda Solloway
Derby North
For
No
Lab
John Spellar
Warley
Against
No
Con
Ben Spencer
Runnymede and Weybridge
For
No
Con
Mark Spencer

Sherwood
For
No
Con
Alexander Stafford
Rother Valley
For
No
Lab
Keir Starmer
Holborn and St Pancras
Against
No
SNP
Chris Stephens
Glasgow South West
Against
No
Con
Andrew Stephenson
Pendle
For
No
Lab
Jo Stevens
Cardiff Central
Against
No
Con
Jane Stevenson
Wolverhampton North East
--
—
Con
John Stevenson

Carlisle

--

Con

Bob Stewart

Beckenham

For

No

Con

Iain Stewart

Milton Keynes South

For

No

LD

Jamie Stone

Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross

Against

No

Con

Sir Gary Streeter

South West Devon

For

No

Lab

Wes Streeting

Ilford North

Against

No

Con

Mel Stride

Central Devon

For

No

Lab

Graham Stringer

Blackley and Broughton
Against

No

Con

Graham Stuart

Beverley and Holderness

For

No

Con

Julian Sturdy

York Outer

--

—

Lab

Zarah Sultana

Coventry South

Against

No

Con

Rishi Sunak

Richmond (Yorks)

For

No

Con

James Sunderland

Bracknell

For

No

Con

Sir Desmond Swayne

New Forest West

For

No

Con

Sir Robert Symes

Poole
For
No
Lab
Mark Tami
Alyn and Deeside
Against
No
Lab
Sam Tarry
Ilford South
Against
No
SNP
Alison Thewliss
Glasgow Central
Against
No
Con
Derek Thomas
St Ives
For
No
Lab
Gareth Thomas
Harrow West
Against
No
Lab
Nick Thomas-Symonds
Torfaen
Against
No
SNP
Owen Thompson

Midlothian
Against
No
SNP

Richard Thomson
Gordon
Against
No
Lab

Emily Thornberry
Islington South and Finsbury
Against
No

Con
Maggie Throup
Erewash

For
No
Lab

Stephen Timms
East Ham
Against
No

Con
Edward Timpson
Eddisbury

For
No
Con
Kelly Tolhurst
Rochester and Strood
For
No
Con
Justin Tomlinson

North Swindon
For
No
Con
Michael Tomlinson
Mid Dorset and North Poole
For
No
Con
Craig Tracey
North Warwickshire
For
No
Con
Anne-Marie Trevelyan
Berwick-upon-Tweed
For
No
Lab
Jon Trickett
Hemsworth

--

—
Con
Laura Trott
Sevenoaks
For
No
Con
Elizabeth Truss
South West Norfolk
For
No
Con
Tom Tugendhat

Tonbridge and Malling

--

Lab

Karl Turner

Kingston upon Hull East

Against

No

Lab

Derek Twigg

Halton

Against

No

Lab

Liz Twist

Blaydon

Against*

No

Con

Shailesh Vara

North West Cambridgeshire

For

No

Lab

Valerie Vaz

Walsall South

Against

No

Con

Martin Vickers

Cleethorpes

For

No

Con

Matt Vickers

Stockton South
For
No
Con
Theresa Villiers
Chipping Barnet
For
No
Con
Christian Wakeford
Bury South
Against
Yes
Con
Sir Charles Walker
Broxbourne
For
No
Con
Robin Walker
Worcester
For
No
Con
Ben Wallace
Wyre and Preston North
For
No
Con
Jamie Wallis
Bridgend
For
No
Con
David Warburton

Somerton and Frome

For

No

Con

Matt Warman

Boston and Skegness

For

No

Con

Giles Watling

Clacton

--

—

Con

Suzanne Webb

Stourbridge

For

No

Ind

Claudia Webbe

Leicester East

Against

—

Lab

Catherine West

Hornsey and Wood Green

Against

No

Lab

Matt Western

Warwick and Leamington

Against

No

Con

Helen Whately

Faversham and Mid Kent

For

No

Con

Heather Wheeler

South Derbyshire

For

No

Lab

Alan Whitehead

Southampton, Test

Against

No

SNP

Philippa Whitford

Central Ayrshire

Against

No

Lab

Mick Whitley

Birkenhead

Against

No

Con

Craig Whittaker

Calder Valley

For*

No

Con

John Whittingdale

Maldon

For

No

Lab

Nadia Whittome

Nottingham East
Against
No
Con
Bill Wiggin

North Herefordshire
For
No
Con

James Wild
North West Norfolk

For
No
Con
Craig Williams
Montgomeryshire
For
No
PC
Hywel Williams
Afon

--

—
Con
Gavin Williamson
South Staffordshire
For
No
LD
Munira Wilson
Twickenham
Against
No
DUP
Sammy Wilson

East Antrim

--

—
Lab

Beth Winter

Cynon Valley

--

—
Lab

Dame Rosie Winterton

Doncaster Central

--

—
SNP

Pete Wishart

Perth and North Perthshire

--

—
Con

Mike Wood

Dudley South

For

No

Con

William Wragg

Hazel Grove

Against

Yes

Con

Jeremy Wright

Kenilworth and Southam

For

No

Lab

Mohammad Yasin

Bedford
Against
No
Con

Jacob Young
Redcar

For

No

Con

Nadhim Zahawi
Stratford-on-Avon

For

No

Lab

Daniel Zeichner

Cambridge

Against

No

* Teller for the division. Not counted in the totals of those voting for or against the motion

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2021.11.23 - Spotlight

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Illustration: Paul Ryding/The Guardian

[Lost to the virus](#)

Samantha Willis was a beloved young pregnant mother. Did bad vaccine advice cost her her life?

Illustration: Paul Ryding/The Guardian

by [Sirin Kale](#)

Tue 23 Nov 2021 03.00 EST

It was typical of Samantha Willis that she bought the food for her baby shower herself. No fuss; she didn't want other people to be put out. She even bought a cheese board, despite the fact that, because she was pregnant, she couldn't eat half of it.

On 1 August, the care worker and mother of three from Derry was eight months pregnant with her third daughter. The weather was beautiful, so

Samantha stood out in the sun, ironing clothes and getting everything organised for the baby.

Then the texts started to come through, first to Samantha and then to her husband, Josh, a 36-year-old civil servant: they had Covid. They had taken a test the day before, after coming into contact with someone who was positive. Samantha rang around her family and friends, cancelling the baby shower.

Both Samantha and Josh were homebirds – the sort of people who loved nothing better than watching Netflix and snuggling on the sofa – so the prospect of an enforced self-isolation didn't seem so bad. “We were looking forward to a week in the house,” says Josh. “We thought we'd sit in the garden and cook and get the house organised.”

It never crossed either of their minds that Samantha would fall seriously ill with Covid. She was only 35 and in good health, with no underlying conditions. Samantha was unvaccinated – she had received advice against getting jabbed at an antenatal appointment. “They gave her a flyer telling her there wasn't enough research on the Covid vaccine in pregnant women,” says Josh. He found the flyer among her things recently. It read: “The vaccines have not yet been tested in pregnancy, so until more information is available, those who are pregnant should not routinely have this vaccine.”

Later, when the guidance changed to advocate vaccination in pregnant women, Samantha was nearer her due date. “We thought: people are off school, she's on maternity leave, it's pretty safe now,” says Josh. “We decided she would get it after her pregnancy.”

The couple were careful to limit their contact with the outside world, given Samantha was unvaccinated and pregnant. “We thought we'd be safe in the house,” says Josh, who worked from home. By the time of the positive tests, whenever they needed a change of scenery, they would pick up a Chinese takeaway and eat it in the car.

They had been careful; they had come so far. Samantha was due to give birth in less than a month. Their positive Covid tests, while a mild inconvenience,

were nothing to be unduly concerned about. “It didn’t even cross our minds that we would get sick,” says Josh.

Samantha was born in 1986, the oldest of five children. In childhood, she was “more or less a tomboy”, says her mother, Mary Davidson, 54, who lives in Derry and is a support worker for people with learning disabilities. “She went out nice and came in mucky as anything.”

Samantha left school at 16 to work as a hairdresser, then at a dry cleaner’s. She had her first two children young: Shea, her son, when she was 17, and Holly, her eldest daughter, when she was 20. She didn’t like to talk about her 20s. “It was just one of those things I wasn’t supposed to ask her about,” says Josh. “She didn’t want to dwell on things.”

The couple met in a Derry bar on Samantha’s birthday in 2012. Everything moved quickly. “She idolised that man,” says Mary. “He was the love of her life.” They married in March 2019. “When we got married, I told her: I’ll never get married again,” says Josh. The same year, Samantha began working as an at-home carer. It was exhausting but rewarding work; 11-hour shifts were commonplace. “She got attached to the service users,” says Mary. “If anyone passed away, she would cry.”

Samantha was the sort of person who would get out of bed at 2am to drive a friend home if they couldn’t find a taxi. She loved watching trashy TV, such as Keeping Up With the Kardashians, and making extravagant Halloween costumes for the kids; she loved decorating people’s Christmas trees and sliding her freezing cold feet in between Josh’s feet in bed. (He hated this.)

“I wish I had done a lot more for her,” sighs Josh. “I thought we had another 50 years or so, to watch the wee ones grow up.”



Samantha and Josh on their wedding day, with (*left to right*) Shea, Lilyanna and Holly. Photograph: Stephen Latimer/Courtesy of Josh Willis

When the Covid vaccine programme began in the UK on 8 December 2020, pregnant women were told [not to get vaccinated](#), as Samantha would discover a few months later.

In March, Stella Creasy, the Labour MP for Walthamstow, received a leaflet from Public Health England that read: “[The Covid vaccine] has not yet been assessed in pregnancy, so it has been advised that until more information is available, those who are pregnant should not have this vaccine.” She was pregnant at the time, with her second child.

Because Creasy felt uneasy about the rationale for excluding pregnant women from the vaccine programme, she raised her concerns repeatedly at the weekly video-call sessions with the then minister for vaccine deployment, Nadhim Zahawi, to which all MPs were invited. Also on these calls was Prof Anthony Harnden of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), the committee of scientists that advises the government on vaccine policy.

“They kept saying to me that a pregnant woman is at no greater risk of dying than her non-pregnant counterpart,” says Creasy. But in October 2020, the

Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) [published guidance](#) warning that “intensive care admission may be more common in pregnant women with Covid-19 than in non-pregnant women of the same age” and that pregnant women with Covid were three times more likely to have a preterm birth.

Further evidence emerged in 2021 indicating that pregnant women were particularly vulnerable to Covid, especially in their final trimester. Research from the University of Washington, published in January, found that pregnant women were [13 times more likely to die from Covid](#) than people of a similar age who were not pregnant.

Only 1.7% of 927 Covid-related trials specifically included pregnant women

This is unsurprising, says Dr Kristina Adams Waldorf, the study’s lead author, because pregnant women have long been known to be more vulnerable to respiratory viruses. (It is for this reason that pregnant women [are advised](#) to have the flu vaccine.) “The immune system in a pregnant woman changes to make sure that the body doesn’t reject the foetus as an immunologically foreign object,” Waldorf says. “When it does this, it becomes impaired in the way it fights infection – and that makes it more difficult to fight a virus like influenza or Covid-19.”

But throughout February and March, the JCVI’s scientists did not appear especially concerned about examining the case for vaccinating pregnant women. “They kept telling me: ‘This is an issue for [addressing when we vaccinate] younger age cohorts,’” says Creasy. Priority in the early stages of the vaccine programme was being given to older people, so many pregnant women remained towards the back of the queue.

The maternity campaign group [Pregnant Then Screwed](#) was also sounding the alarm. “If you look at who was on the Covid war cabinet and leading the daily briefing, it was nearly all men,” says Joeli Brearley, its founder. “Pregnant women were treated as if they were very similar to the general population, rather than being seen as a special cohort that needs special consideration. They were just not a priority.”

Brearley sees this as part of a pattern of generalised apathy towards pregnant women from policymakers. She points out that, even after the government reopened bars and nightclubs, some NHS trusts continued to impose [visiting restrictions](#) on pregnancy scans and labour. Pregnant Then Screwed is taking [legal action](#) against the government for indirect sex discrimination against women who took maternity leave and were eligible for the self-employed income support scheme, but received lower payouts due to the fact they had taken maternity leave.

By early April, the case for vaccinating pregnant women was mounting. Creasy says that she emailed Matt Hancock, the then health secretary, urging him to consider the evidence. “I was terrified,’ she says. “Because I had read the data, as had lots of pregnant women. People were asking me about it. They were looking at me, saying: what shall I do?” On [16 April](#), the JCVI announced that pregnant women would be offered the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine at the same time as the general public, based on [vaccination data](#) from more than 90,000 pregnant women in the US.



‘He was the love of her life’ ... Samantha and Josh. Photograph: Courtesy of Josh Willis

But even though pregnant women were now eligible for the vaccine, the infrastructure was not in place to support their vaccination. [Women](#) booking

vaccines using the online booking system weren't able to specify Moderna or Pfizer vaccines, as per the JCVI's guidance. "Pregnant women were telling us that they were being turned away from vaccine centres because they didn't have the right vaccines," says Brearley. On 25 April, Creasy wrote to Zahawi, explaining that the NHS booking system needed to be updated to allow pregnant women to specify their vaccines, but the system was not amended until 7 May.

Even though pregnant women were now eligible for the vaccine, the expert advice was noticeably tepid. "We believe it should be a woman's choice whether to have the vaccine or not after considering the benefits and risks ... this move will empower all the pregnant women in the UK to make the decision that is right for them," [said a spokesperson for the RCOG](#).

"It is *very* different to say: 'We have no evidence that the Covid-19 vaccination is harmful in pregnancy,' rather than: 'Our evidence strongly supports that the Covid-19 vaccine is safe and effective in pregnant women,'" says Adams Waldorf. "This hedging language has resulted in a lot of misinformation and misunderstanding. Pregnant women are being given conflicting messages. Many aren't realising that the data overwhelmingly shows that the vaccines are safe and effective."

Women presenting to vaccine centres throughout the spring and summer were given out-of-date leaflets telling them they were not allowed to get the vaccine, or else discouraged from getting vaccinated. Ellie Parrott, a 26-year-old administration manager from Hertfordshire, went to get vaccinated at a leisure centre in Harlow in July. "They turned me away and told me that I'd need to speak with my GP," she says. After speaking with her GP, she was finally vaccinated in September, nearly two months later.

Data from July found that 98% of 171 pregnant women in hospital with Covid symptoms since mid-May had been unvaccinated

Ella (not her real name), who is 38 and lives in London, gave birth in July. She says that most women in her WhatsApp group for expectant mothers were told to wait until after their babies were born to get vaccinated. When Ella told her midwives that she wished to get vaccinated, they were

lukewarm. “There would be this pause and then they would say: ‘Are you sure?’ It was really not what I wanted to hear,” she says. “I wanted them to support and validate my choice.”

Louise Williams, a 32-year-old teacher from London, was vaccinated by the time she attended an antenatal appointment at Barnet hospital in June. But she was horrified to overhear a midwife telling another pregnant woman that she wasn’t allowed to have the vaccine. “She was completely misinformed,” says Williams.

A Pregnant Then Screwed survey of 6,869 pregnant women in July found that 47% had been given conflicting advice about the Covid vaccine by a health professional.

As a result, vaccine uptake among pregnant women was slow. Research from St George’s University hospitals NHS foundation trust, conducted between March and July, found that only [10.5% of pregnant women](#) surveyed received at least one dose of the Covid vaccine before giving birth.

By June, the RCOG was so concerned about vaccine uptake in pregnant women that it dropped its earlier position. “We understand this is a very challenging time for those who are pregnant … but we want to reassure them that vaccination in pregnancy is safe and effective in preventing Covid-19,” a spokesperson said in a [press release](#). On 22 July, a [coalition of organisations](#) including Pregnant Then Screwed, the Royal College of Midwives and the RCOG wrote to Sajid Javid, the health secretary, to ask him to prevent the spread of misinformation about the risks of Covid vaccines in pregnancy and to ensure that the staff in vaccine centres were given the most up-to-date research and data.

Ultimately, however, this change in position was ineffectual. By July, ICU beds were [filling up with pregnant women](#). Data from the UK Obstetric Surveillance System (UKOSS), published that month, found that 98% of the 171 pregnant women hospitalised with Covid symptoms since mid-May [had been unvaccinated](#). One in 10 of these women [required intensive care](#). Internal NHS data revealed that women who tested positive for Covid at the time of birth were [twice as likely](#) to have a stillborn baby.

All through the summer, beleaguered NHS clinicians worked to save desperately ill pregnant women and their unborn children. “It was your worst fear,” says Creasy. “That something you wanted to prevent did happen.”

By 3 August – two days after the news of her positive test – Samantha was having trouble breathing. It took her ages to get out of bed and get dressed. “We thought: if she’s having difficulty, then the baby is having difficulty,” remembers Josh. “We weren’t thinking about her health at that point, just about the baby.”

Mary brought over a [pulse oximeter](#), which measures the saturation of oxygen carried in red blood cells. Samantha’s sats were 87%, well below the safe limit of 95%. After speaking with a GP, Josh dropped Samantha at Altnagelvin Area hospital. “I didn’t even give her a hug or a kiss,” says Josh, sounding tormented. “I thought I’d see her again in a couple of days.”

On 5 August, doctors delivered Samantha’s baby, Eviegrace, by caesarean section. Josh wasn’t allowed in the room, because of the Covid risk. He watched at home, from an iPad. It was a bittersweet experience. “She never wanted a C-section,” says Josh.

After Eviegrace was born, Samantha seemed to be improving. “She said she could breathe a wee bit easier,” says Josh. She was moved from the ICU to the general respiratory ward on 9 August. Nurses brought her Eviegrace’s teddy bear from the neonatal ward. They sent her photographs and videos of the baby girl she had never held.

On 12 August, Samantha’s oxygen levels plunged. She had to be ventilated on the ward, because doctors weren’t sure she would make it to the ICU. Josh was at St Eugene’s cathedral at the time, with their four-year-old daughter, Lilyanna. “She lit a candle and said: ‘I hope Mummy gets better soon,’” Josh says. He got a phone call in the car to say she was deteriorating and that he should come in. “I thought: I won’t be lighting candles in a hurry any more,” he says.



Eviegrace was born on 5 August. Photograph: Courtesy of Josh Willis

At the hospital, Josh held Samantha's hand. She was ventilated, lying on her front, wires snaking out of her. Josh told his wife that everyone missed her, so much. He urged her to fight and get well. He hoped that the sound of his voice would somehow reach her. After a few hours, he returned home and gave Lilyanna the news.

"I said to her: 'Mummy might die,'" says Josh, clearing his throat. "She said: 'Who will be my mummy then?' I said: 'She will always be your mummy, even if she's not here.'" Later that evening, the hospital summoned him again and told him that this was the end. Josh, Shea, Holly and Mary entered the room. A priest administered the last rites.

Samantha died just after midnight on 20 August. The nurse told Josh first, then Mary, who screamed. "I had to get out of there," she says. "I panicked. That's my regret." Josh, Shea and Holly stayed with Samantha until the morning. "It was the only time any of us had had with her for over two weeks," says Josh.

It took Josh five attempts to leave the room. "I knew that it would be a closed coffin, because of Covid," he says. "When I left, I was never seeing her again."

Samantha was initially discouraged from getting the Covid vaccine because the clinical trials that proved the vaccines were safe [did not include pregnant women](#). Even before the vaccine programme began, academics had warned of the dangers of excluding pregnant women from trials. In August 2020, Prof Marian Knight of the University of Oxford co-authored [an editorial](#) in the British Medical Journal, pointing out that only 1.7% of 927 Covid-related trials specifically included pregnant women. “We may face the paradoxical situation of recommending vaccination for a risk group in which the vaccine is untested,” Knight wrote.

“What I predicted has come to pass,” Knight says now. “What I didn’t predict, really sadly, is that I would also be counting women dying from a vaccine-preventable disease due to the high levels of uncertainty among pregnant women, and inconsistent advice.”

As the leader of the nationwide MBRRACE-UK study, Knight is probably Britain’s foremost maternal mortality researcher. Every time a woman dies within a year of giving birth in the UK, Knight investigates. “My job is hard, because I deal with tragedy,” she says. “But I always try to see the big picture. For me, the ultimate tragedy is not to learn from these deaths.”

Knight has been collecting the statistics on unvaccinated pregnant or postpartum women who have died of Covid. From February to September, 235 women were admitted to ICUs with Covid, of whom 98.7% were unvaccinated. Thirteen have died since July. Almost all [were unvaccinated](#).

“Never before have I wanted to cry so much as I have in the last few weeks,” says Knight. “Because I feel we’ve failed these women. They’re dying because they haven’t been vaccinated.” It is the single most disturbing experience of her decades-long career, she says.

Knight sees this as an issue of medical equity. “This is one of the major structural biases we have got within the system,” she says. “Pregnant women don’t get equitable care compared with non-pregnant people.”



‘She would want us to march on’ ... Samantha. Photograph: Courtesy of Josh Willis

Even when pregnant women are admitted to ICU beds, they may not be given the same access to potentially life-saving medications as non-pregnant people. Clinicians are reluctant to treat women with the full range of Covid therapies, because these drugs haven’t been tested in pregnant women. “If the doctors would talk to obstetric physicians, they’d be able to advise on which drugs you can give to pregnant women,” says Knight. “But the default is that they don’t give pregnant women anything, because they’re worried [about the side-effects].”

This issue is not specific to Covid. Women of childbearing age are routinely excluded from pharmaceutical trials, regardless of whether or not they are pregnant, breastfeeding or using contraception. The reason for this is historical and can be summed up in one word: thalidomide.

Developed in the 50s, thalidomide was used to alleviate morning sickness in pregnant women. The drug led to birth defects in thousands of children and transformed the way in which regulatory bodies approved medicines. In 1977, the US’s Food and Drug Administration (FDA) effectively banned women of childbearing age from most clinical trials.

“Thalidomide is without doubt the reason we have such an extremely cautious approach to testing drugs in pregnant women,” says Knight. A number of women reported to Pregnant Then Screwed that they had been turned away from vaccine centres for that exact reason. Brearley says: “The number of times a health professional said to a pregnant woman: ‘We don’t want another thalidomide incident ...’”

But pregnant women can and do fall ill – and should be given equal access to evidence-based medicine. “There’s a default attitude among doctors that women should stop taking medication when they are pregnant,” says Knight. “But women may have conditions that need medication in pregnancy.”

Experts disagree about whether pregnant women should be included in clinical trials. But many feel that excluding *all* women of childbearing age from drug testing trials is unnecessary and even a form of medical misogyny – part of a pattern of generalised contempt for bodies that are not male and able-bodied. “It’s pure sexism,” says Brearley. “Everything about it makes me furious.”

As a result of this mass exclusion, pregnant women don’t receive the best evidence-based medicine. “There are a number of factors that affect the functioning of a drug in our body,” say Dr Maria Teresa Ferretti of [The Women’s Brain Project](#), a Swiss collective of scientists that study and advocate for better consideration of sex and gender in precision medicine. “Men and women have different sex hormones and they also have different genetics. The immune function is different between men and women. There are biological reasons why the same drug may have different effects in men and women.”

Do you want to carry a baby and not be there to rear it? It’s a no-brainer. Get the injection

Mary Davidson

The situation is gradually improving. In 1993, the FDA [lifted its ban](#) on women participating in clinical trials. Women now represent [about 43%](#) of all trial participants globally, although they tend to be underrepresented in

[higher-risk](#) phase 1 trials. Knight believes that regulation is needed to ensure equity in medical testing.

“There will never be any incentive for companies to test vaccines or medications in pregnant women, because they’ve got a big market elsewhere,” she says. “Unless the regulator insists as part of the licensing requirements, pregnant women will always be an afterthought.” The Women’s Brain Project champions a global registry, in which clinicians could provide real-world information about the safety of drugs in pregnant or breastfeeding women.

After high-profile tragedies, such as the death of [Saiqa Parveen](#), a mother of five from Birmingham, ministers and public health officials are now [loudly promoting](#) the benefits of vaccination. This month, Prof Chris Whitty, England’s chief medical officer, warned at a Downing Street press conference of the [“stark” numbers of pregnant women](#) being hospitalised with Covid, describing these cases as “preventable admissions”. Some [NHS trusts](#) have begun administering the vaccine at antenatal clinics, although this is not yet a nationwide policy.

But as recently as October, pregnant women were reportedly turned away from [vaccine clinics](#). That month, NHS England figures showed that one in five Covid patients requiring ECMO treatment – the highest form of life-saving treatment on offer in the NHS – were [unvaccinated pregnant women](#). Last week, Dr Latifa Patel, a chief officer at the British Medical Association, told the i that [she felt that](#) “pregnant women have been let down by society, the NHS and the government” during the pandemic, due to confused and mixed messaging around the safety of vaccinations in pregnancy.

Pregnant women are [still not](#) deemed a vulnerable group by the government, nor were they made eligible for booster vaccines. Last month, the RCOG said [only about 15%](#) of pregnant women in the UK were fully vaccinated (although data analysis suggests the figure is [probably higher than that](#)).

On 23 August, the Willis family held a baptism and a funeral. The sun shone brilliantly as Eviegrace was carried into the church behind her mother, who arrived in a coffin covered in white flowers. Josh had insisted the baptism

and the funeral be held together; it was the only way that Samantha could be there.

Around Derry, Josh has become a tragic celebrity. “I can’t go on a walk without people looking at me,” he says. “It’s a small enough city. People think: there’s that boy whose wife died of Covid and had the baby christened at her funeral.”



Samantha’s funeral and Eviegrace’s christening were held during the same service in August. Photograph: Liam McBurney/PA

He visits Samantha’s grave every day and talks to her about the weather. He tells her how many weeks it has been since she died. He tells her that they are all doing OK. He asks her to watch over them and keep them safe. “I hope one day we will see each other again,” says Josh. “In another 50 years or so.”

Mary hopes that pregnant women will hear Samantha’s story and get vaccinated. “Do you want to carry a baby and not be there to rear it?” she says. “It’s a no-brainer. Get the injection.” Josh isn’t angry at the situation, but he wishes things had been different. “What can you do?” he says. “You would go off your head if you let it bother you.”

Because it is what Samantha would want, Josh is pushing ahead with their plans. He is in the process of buying their council house and redecorating it according to Samantha's designs. "She would want us to march on," says Josh. "But we will never forget her. I won't let Lilyanna forget her. And when Eviegrace is older, we'll tell her all about her."

Mary finds it hard to look at Lilyanna and Eviegrace. "The fact them poor kids don't have their mother, that's the hardest part," she says. "Thinking about what they will miss out on. That is what breaks my heart."

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Brooding beauty: why Carmarthenshire is Wales' best-kept secret



Picws Du is the second highest peak on the Carmarthen Fans escarpment, Brecon Beacons national park. Photograph: Craig Joiner Photography/Alamy

[*Chris Moss*](#)

Tue 23 Nov 2021 02.00 EST

Thank God no boozy poet or philandering painter was born or buried in [Llandeilo](#) in the heart of Carmarthenshire. If there were, it would probably be flooded with pilgrims. As it is, the small inland town on the mighty Tywy (or Towy) – the longest river that has its source and outlet in Wales – has a degree of quaintness, but not too much, and only a handful of gawpers admiring the pastel-painted facades. Most are, like me, on road trips, as the A40 which runs through Llandeilo is a greenery-fringed alternative to the busier [Heads of the Valleys road](#) just to the south, and there are coffees and buns and bowls of cawl (a local lamb and veg stew) to be had here.

[Wales map](#)

Carmarthenshire – or Sir Gâr – known as the Garden of Wales, is one of the 13 historic counties. Still largely agricultural, it's criss-crossed by quiet back roads and is where the M4 runs out. It's one of many places in Wales people pass through without stopping and is something of a Cinderella county.

But the shiny English SUVs dashing for the beaches of [Pembrokeshire](#) are missing out. Close to Llandeilo is the Black Mountain range at the western end of the Brecon Beacons; here the national park is taken up by the 300 square-mile [Fforest Fawr Geopark](#), which contains mountains and moorland, woods, meadows, towns and villages and some small lakes.

Beloved of locals but attracting nothing like the numbers who clamber around the likes of [Pen y Fan](#), the peaks here are a little lower and smoother; the sense is of great age and a brooding, sombre calm. I spend a glorious half-day on an eight-mile hike from the village of Llanddeusant, which takes me up past a trout hatchery and weir, then on to a steeper path along a ridge above the glacial lake of [Llyn y Fan Fach](#). The terrain is semi-rugged but not at all technical. A brisk breeze ships in weather and the temperature dips, but this is more than compensated for by the dance of clouds over pale-green slopes.



A view from near Llansteffan to Ferryside. Photograph: Neil McAllister/Alamy

The route continues via Picws Du; this peak, along with neighbouring Fan Foel, are the highest in the area, and while they rise only to 730 metres-plus (2,400 feet), they look much loftier due to their dramatic contours. There's a bronze age barrow at the top of Picws Du, from where I can see back to the [Cambrian Mountains](#) and south to Swansea and the silvery shimmer of the Bristol Channel. From here it's down to Llyn y Fan Fawr, another, slightly larger lake surrounded by peaty land, where I swing back to the starting point.

Stretches of sand dune, salt marsh and old military installations lead to a verdant parkland and pine forest

One of the reasons I like South Wales is that its open spaces abut industrial and post-industrial landscapes. The better-known and perhaps rougher-looking areas are around Merthyr and down by Port Talbot, but the Carmarthenshire coast played its own part in Wales' gritty recent history.

I ditch the car to start a coastal jaunt at Llanelli, which looks out at the gorgeous [Gower](#), but is all the things that the picturesque peninsula is not. Once known as "Tinopolis", it used to produce huge quantities of tin and tin-

plate, as well as coal. A westbound walk along the [Wales Coast Path](#) (WCP), from the bridge that crosses the tidal waters and treacherous mudflats of the River Loughor, takes in views of the Tata-owned Trostre steelworks, the twittering edges of a [Wildfowl and Wetland Trust](#) nature reserve, the former heavy industry hub of North Dock – overlooked by a Grade II-listed former hydraulic accumulator tower built around the 1900s – as well as patches of brownfield, marsh and scrub. In front of Llanelli's Furnace Theatre, in town, a monument called Industrial Symphony honours male and female workers; the title could be used equally for the mix of landscapes.



Pembrey country park. Photograph: Adam Gasson/Alamy

It's a little over 18 miles from Llanelli and Ferryside. Most of it is flat and there's plenty on the way to look at. The Gower is always there, of course, pretty and pastoral in the haze, or drizzle. Closer by, Burry Port is where [Amelia Earhart](#) and her co-pilot and mechanic touched down in 1928 after crossing the Atlantic. Stretches of sand dune, salt marsh and old military installations lead to the verdant parkland and pine forest at [Pembrey country park](#). At Kidwelly I head inland and up a little to admire the imposing walls of the [Norman castle](#).

Ferryside is one of Carmarthen's best-kept secrets. It faces on to one of the many estuaries that cut deep into the coast and over to Llansteffan and

another castle. A community-based tourism project has made it the natural place to break a long walk. In 2015, seeing no one in officialdom helping to put Ferryside on the map, 10 trustees took out a 99-year lease on a disused ex-county council building. First they opened the lovely [Pryd o Fwyd](#) (A bite to eat) cafe and, in summer, they opened a new five-room hotel, [Calon y Ferri](#). A post office, art gallery, restaurant and “Men’s Shed” share the same space. Locals still know the building, which has solar power, as The Billets in reference to an RAF air/sea rescue base that used to occupy the site. Ferryside is an unmanned stop on the main London/Cardiff-Milford Haven/Pembroke line – just in case you want to speed up your walking.



Ruin of Laugharne castle. Photograph: Wild Places Photography/Alamy

Founded by the Romans, Carmarthen has never received the kind of attention that York and Chester, or even Peterborough have enjoyed – because it’s in Wales. Chosen because of the [Tywi](#) and its raised position, the city of Moridunum had public baths and a temple. Fought over by the Normans and Welsh princes in medieval times, it was here that Henry VII’s father, Edmund Tudor (a family of Welsh origin), died from the bubonic plague in 1456 during the War of the Roses. This tussling for power is a reminder that the so-called Landsker line – the once-fortified division between Anglophone and Welsh-speaking Wales – passes close to here. I heard plenty of Welsh spoken in the lovely little market. There’s plenty of

good picnic grub and pubs here, but I had lunch out at one of my favourite places not only in Wales but in the UK: [Wrights Food Emporium](#), in Llanarthne – 8.5 miles east of the town centre – which has successfully reinvented itself post-Covid-19 as an outdoor eatery with a limited but lovely menu of pork rillettes and chicken cooked in perry.

Just nine miles away is the [National Botanic Gardens of Wales](#). As well as a [Norman Foster-designed glasshouse](#) (toasty in the cold months), it recently concluded the [Regency Restoration project](#) – a community-led £7m scheme to return the site to its position, 200 years ago, as one of the UK's finest waterparks. The five-year project, which included a large lake, waterfall, cascades, bridges and a dam set in 300 acres of wooded parkland, has just been nominated for a prestigious [ICE People's Choice](#) engineering award.

Laugharne is the one truly famous township thanks to its boozy poet, Dylan Thomas, and philandering painter, Augustus John

Carmarthenshire has intriguing horticultural and herbal connections. A bed in the Apothecary's Garden contains plants that might have been used by the “[Physicians of Myddfai](#)”. Folk legend has it that, in the 12th or 13th century, Rhiwallon and his three sons dispensed natural remedies and started a line of doctors that lasted till the 18th century. Flukily, one of the tales relates how the family received their initial commission from a mysterious lady of the lake – and the lake was Llyn y Fan Fach, which I had skirted two days earlier. Today, Prince Charles, who has a house at nearby Llwynywermod, keeps up the local tradition with his Duchy plant extracts and his homeopathic leanings.



Pendine Sands. Photograph: Joan Gravell/Alamy

[Laugharne](#), 13 miles south-west of the county town, is Carmarthenshire's one truly famous township – thanks to its boozy poet (Dylan Thomas) and, to a lesser extent, its philandering painter (Augustus John, a frequent visitor). It is possessed of a natural beauty that still stuns me – I lived there for three years – thanks to a glistening estuary, skeletal castle ruin and lovely sloping main street of Georgian houses. Visitors from all around the world come here to see the former homes and the grave of the poet. His descriptions of Laugharne as the “strangest town in Wales” and his evocations of its “heron-priested shore” are earworms for local residents, but Laugharne has survived Thomas as much as it has memorialised him; it has its own poetry, thanks to the people, the topography, the enduring remoteness. As well as the obvious pleasures of enjoying a pint in Brown's (an old pub turned boutique hotel), the so-called [Birthday Walk](#) (after a Thomas poem) up to Sir John's Hill is a joy; from the top of the headland there are views over to Worms Head on the Gower and to the white silken beach of [Cefn Sidan](#) – places I passed on my coastal hike.

The beach, a remarkable seven-miles long, is a great empty beauty, too windy and exposed for delicate folk

For many, such a prospect would be a natural conclusion to a Carmarthenshire tour, but I preferred to wind up the trip on Pendine Sands. This seaside resort – all chalets, fish and chips and windbreaks – is understated, and underrated, in the way [Tenby](#) and [Saundersfoot](#), a few miles to the west, are not. But the beach is a remarkable seven-miles long and, at high tide, gapingly wide strand. Used for numerous attempts to break the land speed record and for the Welsh TT in years gone by, it's now a great empty beauty, too windy and exposed for delicate folk. After a bracing walk back into the cooling westerly, I find a cuppa at the top of the coast path walkway set into the cliffside. If Pembrokeshire is Little England, then perhaps Carmarthenshire is Little Wales: a patchwork of all the key elements, untainted by tourism. Let the smart SUVs roll on by; this is as good as anywhere.

All the coastal sections can be undertaken without a car; trains and buses connect all points. Good buses connect Carmarthen with Llanarthne/Wrights Food Emporium. For the Black Mountain range and National Botanic Gardens of Wales, local taxis are your best bet

Chris Moss is the author of Wales Coast Path: Tenby-Swansea (Aurum Press)

This article was amended on 23 November 2021 to remove a mention of the Cambrian period in relation to the Llandeilo area.

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Interview

Outlander author Diana Gabaldon: ‘I needed Scotsmen because of the kilt factor’

[Alison Flood](#)



‘It was about 20 years ago that I saw the ending’ ...Diana Gabaldon
Photograph: Sarah Lee/The Guardian



Tue 23 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

Writing a novel shouldn’t have been high on Diana Gabaldon’s list of priorities in the late 1980s. She already had two jobs, as a university professor at Arizona State, with an expertise in scientific computation, and as a software reviewer for the computer press. And she had three children under six. But she’d known since she was eight years old that she was “supposed to be a novelist”, so she decided it was time to give it a try.

With three degrees – a bachelor’s in zoology, a master’s in marine biology, and a PhD in quantitative behavioural ecology (her thesis was on “nest site selection in pinyon jays”) – Gabaldon says she “liked science, I was good at it. But I knew that was not my vocation, that’s not my calling. So when I turned 35, I said to myself, well, you know, Mozart was dead at 36. If you want to be a novelist, maybe you’d better start.”

More than 30 years later, it is clear Gabaldon had her priorities right. The Outlander author, whose blockbuster historical fantasy series about Claire, a married woman from the 1940s who accidentally time travels back to 18th-century Scotland and falls for outlaw Jamie, has sold 50m copies around the

world. She is in London after a cruise from Basel to Amsterdam accompanied by more than 100 of her fans, here to talk about *Go Tell the Bees That I Am Gone*, the eagerly anticipated ninth novel in the series.

Fans have been waiting for it since 2014, when *Written in My Own Heart's Blood* left them hanging, but Gabaldon has been somewhat delayed by the television adaptation of her series, which kicked off that year and on which she is a consultant. *Go Tell the Bees*, in which Jamie and Claire have finally been reunited with their time-travelling daughter Brianna and her family in 1779 North Carolina, only for the American revolution to cast its shadow over their lives, also runs to more than 900 pages.

I feel sorry for George RR Martin – his show caught up with him. But they'll never catch me

“It was definitely more of a challenge to write, mostly because of the chronology, which was very complicated,” she says. In any event, seven years is less time than fans of George RR Martin have been holding on for the sixth *Game of Thrones* novel; Gabaldon has, incidentally, included a chapter in her latest doorstopper called *The Winds of Winter* – a “nod or a dig, depending on how you want to interpret it” at Martin’s writing speed.

“Poor George, I feel very sorry for him,” she says. “What happened is that his show caught up with him, and he then met with the showrunners and he told them what he was planning to do in that book, so that they could then write accordingly. Only they didn’t write accordingly, they took his stuff, and distorted it and wrote their own ending, which wasn’t at all what he had in mind but used all the elements that he told them.”



'Maybe they'd fight over her or want to kill her or whatever' ... Sam Heughan in Outlander. Photograph: Aimee Spinks/Starz/© 2017 Sony Pictures Television Inc. All Rights Reserved; Amazon Prime Video

This won't, she says, happen to her: she has one more Outlander novel to write and the popular TV series, starring Sam Heughan as Jamie Fraser and Caitriona Balfe as Claire, is only up to the sixth, which is due to air next year. "They'll never catch me," she says. "I will certainly finish the 10th book before they finish the show."

Gabaldon began writing novels in absolute secrecy: she knew her husband would have raised an eyebrow at her desire to add writing to her packed schedule, so she'd get up and work between midnight and 4am, before getting on with her day. "He would have said, wait till the kids are in school and you have more time, wait till my business is doing better and you can quit one of your jobs. It would all have made perfect sense, and he would have succeeded in stopping me because my grip on it was very tenuous to start with."

Gabaldon read everything, voraciously – she didn't have a particular genre she was drawn to. So she decided that she might as well put her academic research skills to use in writing historical fiction. "Also, if I turned out not to have an imagination, I could steal things from the historical record."

Outlander – season six preview

The only question was, with all of history laid out before her, where to start. “I was just casting around mentally for a time and place to set this novel – Roman times, the American civil war, Venice under the Borgias. And in this malleable frame of mind, I happen to see a really old Doctor Who episode.”

This serendipitous viewing, much recounted, was of Jamie McCrimmon, a kilt-wearing 18th-century Scot played by Frazer Hines. Gabaldon was an instant fan, but had never been to Scotland, so she went to her university’s library and started checking out books about its history, culture and geography.

“The only thing I knew about novels was that they should have conflict, so I was thinking, well, what kind of conflict was going on in Scotland in the 18th century? That’s an easy one to answer, it’s the Jacobite risings. That sounded cool, and it’s this doomed cause that’d have a lot of openings. So I said OK, we’ll do that,” she says. “It looked to me, at this point, not knowing the subtleties, that it was essentially the Scots, the Jacobites, versus the British army. I had to have a lot of Scotsmen because of the kilt factor, but I thought it would be good if I had an English female to play off these guys. We’d have sexual tension, that’s conflict, and maybe they’d fight over her or want to kill her or whatever.”



‘Plainly, she was a time traveller’ ... Caitriona Balfe and Sam Heughan in Outlander. Photograph: Starz! movie channel

But when she wrote her Englishwoman into a scene, she just didn’t sound as if she came from the past. “I sent her into a cottage full of Scotsmen to see what she’d do. They all turned around when she came in and stared at her, and one of them stood up slowly, and he said, ‘My name is Dougal MacKenzie, and who might you be?’ Without my stopping to think, I just typed ‘My name is Claire Elizabeth Beauchamp, and who the hell are you?’” says Gabaldon. “I fought with her for several pages, trying to beat her into shape and make her talk like an 18th-century person. She wasn’t having any of it, she just kept making smartass modern remarks. And so by the end of three pages, I said, ‘OK, I give up. I’m not gonna fight with you all the way through this book. Go ahead and be modern. I’ll figure out how to get there later.’ Plainly, she was a time traveller, so then the question was, where did she come from?”

It took Gabaldon 18 months to write *Outlander*, which runs to almost 650 pages – all of it in secret, apart from a group of online friends she made on a literary forum (she’d got a free CompuServe membership thanks to writing for *Byte* magazine). After getting into an argument with a man online over what it felt like to be pregnant, she posted a section from *Outlander* in which Jamie’s sister Jenny evocatively describes the experience; her forum friends

liked it, and one eventually introduced her to a literary agent. He took her on, and landed her a three-book contract.

Outlander was published in 1991 – pitched firmly at the romance market, something to which Gabaldon objected. “The problem with writing a book that nobody can describe is marketing, and I agreed that we could sell it as romance provided that I had tasteful covers.” (No bare-chested men.) Her proviso was that if it did well, the series would be moved to general fiction, and after “a whole lot of pushing on my part”, by the fifth in the series, The Fiery Cross, it was.

While she’s since published an article on the Gabaldon theory of time travel in the Journal of Transfigural Mathematics, Gabaldon admits that the passion between Jamie and Claire – forever thwarted as it is by pesky time travel, by the dangers of the 18th century, and by evil antagonists – is what fans love about the books. Fortunately for her readers – and viewers – she’s still not tired of writing explosive sex scenes for them, even as the couple enter their late 50s/early 60s in Go Tell the Bees. “Let’s put it this way, since my husband’s left the room,” she says. “We will have been together for 50 years in February, and it is possible to have a rewarding sex life, even if you’re not young newlyweds.”

Along with passion, Go Tell the Bees is packed with everything readers love about the Outlander series: the delicious clash between modern and historical life (there are particularly delightful moments when Jamie and his 18th-century compatriots are given copies of The Lord of the Rings and Green Eggs and Ham, or when Claire fulfils her quest to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich). The epic sweep of history, in this case the American revolution, set against the smaller tragedies of everyday life (a mother is mauled to death by a bear in a scene that had me weeping buckets). Love – for friends, romantic partners, family – abounds, as does conflict, danger and derring-do.

Gabaldon has also written a handful of mysteries starring Lord John Grey, a protagonist in the Outlander series who is forced by the times to conceal his homosexuality, and is considering whether the intriguing character of Master

Raymond is due his own novel. For now, though, there is the 10th and final novel to write – but at least she knows the end point she's heading towards.

"It was about 20 years ago that I saw the ending, and I got up in the middle of the night and wrote it down with tears rolling down my face," she says. "And no: I'm not telling you what it is."

- Go Tell the Bees That I Am Gone by Diana Gabaldon is published by Century and available [at the Guardian bookshop](#).
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Lubaina Himid

Lubaina Himid review – jolly postmodern pop art made me long for a slap in the face



The anger seems tamed ... Six Tailors, 2019. Photograph: © Lubaina Himid



[Jonathan Jones](#)

Tue 23 Nov 2021 04.00 EST

Those wags at Tate Modern! They spend 21 years telling you figurative painting is dead: 21 years of film projections, dance and guys screaming on monitors. Then they give an old-school figurative painter a retrospective and tell us this is what modern looks like now.

[Lubaina Himid](#)'s exhibition in the museum's Blavatnik Building, where time and performance-based art usually rule, is full of the kind of jolly postmodernist pop you usually see at the [Royal Academy Summer Exhibition](#). The vibe this museum projects is heavy and apocalyptic, in keeping with its daunting industrial scale. But this artist is all whimsy. She starts her retrospective with a set of paintings about DIY. Safety instructions from a manual are written out next to pictures of cogs, nails and tools. On speakers nearby, in one of several sound art pieces Himid has created with [Magda Stawarska-Beavan](#), these instructions are repeated. It's like a very, very soft version of Jasper Johns. And it turns out this whole show is about as dangerous as a painting of a hammer. It doesn't escape from art into life.

The sound work, so early on, seems intended to reassure us that Himid fits perfectly well into Tate Modern. But she's no more modern than David

Hockney – although he's very modern, in his way. The comparison is not random. When Himid started her art life in the 1980s, it appears, she was a huge Hockney fan. His influence is visible in early paintings such as [Ankledeep \(1991\)](#), with its two pairs of naked feet resting on a splashy spume of blue and white brushstrokes straight out of one of his early 1960s pictures.



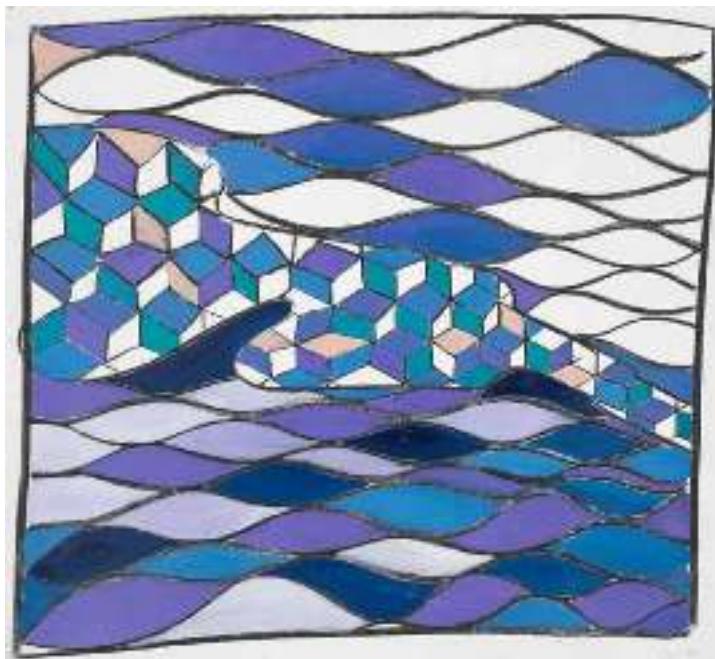
A fascination with narrative ... artwork by Lubaina Himid. Photograph: Kirstin Prisk Photography Ltd

Hockney himself appears, with the dyed blond hair he still sported in the 1980s, sitting with a man on his lap in Himid's 1984-6 installation [A Fashionable Marriage](#). When this Hogarth-inspired tableau was shown in the [2017 Turner prize \(which she won\) in Hull](#), it seemed angry and satirical. Here, amid all her paintings, it is tamed.

It turns out to be an expression of Himid's fascination with narrative painting. Her 2016 cycle Le Rodeur, taking its name from a French slaving ship, uses Hogarth's idea of a "progress", a visual story told across multiple images. Le Rodeur: The Cabin is particularly Hogarthian, set on a ship, where a musician in 18th-century costume plays fife and drum while a waiter brings on a jelly.

The crew of Le Rodeur [threw 36 shackled west Africans overboard](#) in 1819. Himid's paintings don't rage at this incident. Instead it is a dull ache in the background, a fact her characters might be evading or silently brooding about. If this was a play it would be full of pauses.

“What is a monument?” asks Himid in a painted text beside a collection of pots, based on jelly moulds, painted with historical portraits, emblems and styles. It’s a good question. Her art deals with memory yet in an oddly meandering way. Historical pain haunts it but the sedate figures and upbeat colours maintain their composure.



Shot through with lacings of blue ... Tide Change. Photograph: Lubaina Himid

After a while, you want an explosion. I wanted a video screaming at me, a performer slapping my face. This is all too easy and too polite. The gap between the political and historical themes of Himid's art and its elegance could be highly effective. Instead, meaning gets reduced to a thin thread of allegory. OK. I get that the sea in all the scenes of Le Rodeur is sinister, the calm of the characters unnatural, when you know it's about slavery. Yet you won't see that from the actual images.

There are also paintings of utopian buildings, of carpets and near-abstract patterns. Himid enjoys her colours. A sound work keeps repeating the word “blue” in different languages, in a room filled with constructivist arrangements of musical instruments, newspaper ([this one](#)) and book covers, all shot through with lacings of blue.



What is a Monument? ... Jelly Mould 2. Photograph: © Lubaina Himid

As a colourist she fizzes, but as a painter of people and places she's too damn vague. We see formally composed, stylishly clad groups meeting in bars or living rooms, but each detail is like a quote of a quote.

If Tate Modern thinks painting is now modern, it needs to give some thought to why some paintings are just decorative, while others are profound. There's nothing here to show why this particular skilled and idiosyncratic, but not especially earth-shaking painter belongs in Tate Modern when others of her generation have to be grateful for a show at the less glamorous Tate Britain. I have always wondered what this museum means by “modern”. It turns out to be whatever's fashionable, and if the wind blows towards painting then let it not be said that Tate Modern does not also blow.

- Lubaina Himid is at [Tate Modern, London](#), from 25 November to 3 July.

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Illustration: Guardian Design

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A tale of two pandemics: the true cost of Covid in the global south

Illustration: Guardian Design

by [Kwame Anthony Appiah](#)

Tue 23 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

For the past year and a half, people everywhere have been in the grip of a pandemic – but not necessarily the same one. In the affluent world, a viral respiratory disease, Covid-19, suddenly became a leading cause of death. In much of the developing world, by contrast, the main engine of destruction wasn't this new disease, but its second-order effects: measures they took, and we took, in response to the coronavirus. Richer nations and poorer nations differ in their vulnerabilities.

Whenever I talk with members of my family in Ghana, Nigeria and Namibia, I'm reminded that a global event can also be a profoundly local one. Lives and livelihoods have been affected in these places very differently from the way they have in Europe or the US. That's true in the economic and educational realm, but it's true, too, in the realm of public health. And across all these realms, the stakes are often life or death.

The three countries I mentioned have a median age between 18 and 22 years, and the severity of Covid-19 discriminates sharply by age. A big way that Covid can kill is by hampering the management of other diseases, such as HIV, malaria and [TB](#). In Africa alone, 26 million people are living with HIV and, in a typical year, several hundreds of thousands die of it, while malaria, which is especially deadly to infants and toddlers, claims almost 400,000 lives.

Those are big numbers, and yet they used to be much bigger – a major healthcare effort brought them down. Amid the pandemic, though, people stopped visiting clinics, in part because it became harder to get to them, and healthcare workers had to curtail their own movements. According to a [Global Fund survey](#) of 32 countries in Africa and Asia, prenatal care visits dropped by two-thirds between April and September 2020; consultations for children under five dropped by three-quarters.

Public-health experts predict that, as an indirect consequence of the Covid pandemic, twice as many people around the world could be at risk of dying from malaria. There could be 400,000 extra deaths [from TB](#) in the next few years, and half a million extra deaths from HIV. Across much of the world, in short, the response to the coronavirus has ushered in a shadow pandemic. The coronavirus's real death toll, then, has to be calculated not just in deaths from Covid, but also in deaths that would otherwise have been prevented, from malaria, TB, HIV, diabetes and more.

This shadow pandemic isn't simply a story about disease – it's about poverty, hunger, truncated education and stunted lives. A suggestive comparison can be made with the climate crisis. In the affluent world, some people think of climate breakdown as a matter of how long the [air](#)

[conditioning](#) stays on, but for many in the developing world, it's already a matter of floods, droughts and famine.

These disparities between the global north and south are likely to be a feature of crises to come. The tale of two pandemics, then, is a tale of two international orders. The post-pandemic challenge, in turn, is to take seriously the rhetoric of an “international community”, and integrate the two into one.

The economies of rich nations have, of course, been buffeted by the pandemic as well. But these nations have been able to spend [enormous sums](#) toward relieving the financial distress that has resulted from lockdowns and social-distancing protocols. Lower-income nations don't have those resources. Borrowing money is costly for them, and their tax base in the formal economy is a shallow, narrow plinth. Country by country and village by village, there's little to cushion the blow. Not long ago, a team of researchers studied living standards during the pandemic via household surveys across nine developing countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia. [They found](#) that the direct health impact of Covid in these relatively youthful countries was less than in richer (and, invariably, older) countries, but that economic vulnerability was decidedly greater. Households typically reported a drop in income – people lost jobs or had a harder time selling their goods. Half of the rural households in Kenya they surveyed had to skip meals or shrink them; in Sierra Leone, that number was nearly 90%.

When the pandemic came to India, meanwhile, 140 million migrant workers [found themselves](#) effectively stranded or simply shipped back to their home villages, plunging their dependents into dire circumstances. “For those who were living from hand to mouth to start with,” the eminent India-based economist Jean Drèze observed as it was happening, “lockdown is almost a death sentence.”

The number of people in extreme poverty around the world has risen [for the first time](#) since 1997, and analysts don't expect a quick toggle back once the health crisis subsides. Africa was on track to see economic growth of 3.2% in 2020; now that's estimated to have been 0.8%. When you've got a population growth rate of about 2.5%, that means less food on the table for

many, and outright malnutrition for some. In rich countries, Covid's medical consequences killed elderly people. In developing countries, Covid's economic consequences killed the poor.

Taleni Ngoshi, a softly spoken 32-year-old businesswoman in Namibia, described the situation to me precisely: "The gap between the rich and the poor here is quite huge. The line between the middle class and the poor is very thin." Her people are Ovambo, from northern Namibia, where she was born in a town without electricity, eventually got work in a nursery, and found she had a green thumb. Down in Windhoek, the nation's capital, she started a small business helping people with their gardens. Stories like hers help to explain why, a dozen years ago, the World Bank [reclassified Namibia](#): it went from being a lower-middle-income country to an upper-middle-income one.



Migrant workers outside Delhi in April attempt to return to their villages following a government-ordered lockdown. Photograph: Adnan Abidi/Reuters

With the pandemic, though, business came to a standstill: most of Ngoshi's regular clients cancelled their contracts, fearful of any visitors. When she looks around, she sees people losing their houses and cars along with their jobs. Her husband's small government salary at least puts food on her table.

So mainly she worries about the three people who work for her part-time – and the six or seven people who depend on each of them.

The story is different from place to place, and also the same. The low-income nation of Mozambique, which has been identified as the African country [most vulnerable](#) to climate change (extreme weather events cost it billions in 2019), found its economy contracting in response to the pandemic, with depressed markets for its commodities and, of course, for tourism. In the lower-middle-income nation of Kenya, where, in 2020, GDP shrank for the first time in almost 30 years, millions of families, living close to subsistence, were squeezed hard. Women there have been especially stricken, in part because they're heavily involved in retail, hospitality and tourism. (Global tourism losses have been estimated at \$8tn.)

To get a proper sense of how the pandemic roiled a country like Kenya, though, bear in mind that one of Kenya's biggest exports is cut flowers – lilies, carnations, baby's breath and roses. In fact, Kenya has, in recent years, emerged as the main exporter of rose stems to the EU, supplying almost 40% of the market. Floriculture employs perhaps 2 million Kenyans, directly and indirectly. Dozens of large flower farms can be found around Lake Naivasha, an hour's drive north-west of Nairobi, and about 1,800 metres above sea level. It's sunny there, and well supplied with water for irrigation. Despite transport requirements, the carbon footprint per stem was a fraction of that for flowers grown in heated Dutch greenhouses.

Over the past year and a half, as you might guess, those sales wilted. Social distancing meant fewer functions – wedding, funerals, celebrations of all kinds – and fewer functions meant fewer flowers. Millions of rose stems were dumped into pits as flower farms found most of their orders cancelled. Workers were furloughed or saw wages reduced. Once the pandemic settled in, those sales disappeared.

In west [Africa](#) – in Ghana and Ivory Coast, in particular – the big story wasn't about roses; it was about chocolate. Cocoa trees are picky about temperature, humidity and soil, and large swaths of these west African countries hit their sweet spot. Together, the two countries account for about two-thirds of the global cocoa supply. It's Ivory Coast's biggest export. In

Ghana, gold and oil exports are greater in monetary value, but they don't matter as much to the country, because they don't employ as many people and they don't generate as much public revenue. Economists have estimated that as much as a third of Ghana's workforce depends on cocoa, directly and indirectly.

During the pandemic, though, chocolate consumption declined. Not mine, and maybe not yours. But it turns out that a lot of chocolate is bought at retail shops and vending machines. They're gifts or impulse buys: the pre-ribboned box you pick up at the airport, the KitKat bar that pleads for release from its plexiglass prison. Then there's all the chocolate bought for gatherings at Christmas, Easter, Halloween – or, more to the point, all the chocolate *not* bought when those festivities don't take place.



A girl is given an anti-malaria injection in Ziniare, north-east of Burkina Faso's capital Ouagadougou. Photograph: Olympia de Maismont/AFP/Getty Images

Both countries had big plans for 2020. Ghana and Ivory Coast have state-run boards in charge of buying and selling the cocoa harvest, and had jointly agreed to impose a new surcharge on cocoa exports, amounting to \$400 per tonne. It was dubbed a "living income differential", and was meant to benefit the farmers. Chocolate is a \$130bn-a-year industry, but only a few

percentage points go to the millions of west African smallholders who do the cocoa cropping. And they have a tough time of it: on average, each cultivates about 3.5 hectares, while trying to support half a dozen or more family members. It's hard work. The trees are susceptible to sun scald, and those beans arrive inside pods a little smaller than rugby balls. They take months to mature – during which time they can be afflicted by various pests and pathogens, like “black pod” rot. Just in the past half decade, the swollen-shoot virus has forced the destruction of hundreds of thousands of hectares of cocoa trees.

Many cocoa farmers barely eke out a living; a 2018 Unicef report calculated that the average west African cocoa farmer made between \$0.50 and \$1.25 a day. (When my father was a member of Ghana's parliament, in the 1960s, he had a lot to say about cocoa farmers getting shafted by the government board that set their prices.) In fact, the growers now tend to be middle-aged, because their kids see how bad they have it, and find other ways of making a living. When the new “living income differential” programme was announced in 2019, growers increased their output, hoping for a sweeter deal.

Instead, they found themselves stuck with beans they didn't have the capacity to store. As Covid shrank the chocolate market, buyers in the west asked for their deliveries to be suspended. Local middlemen, known as *pisteurs*, demanded deep discounts to take the bean off the growers' hands.

Wilting flowers, mouldering cocoa – when you hear stories about how poorly served the global south has often been by the systems of international trade, it's not surprising that some people have been tempted to urge withdrawal from those systems. Among certain African and Asian scholars, there's been a revival of interest in arguments from the late great Samir Amin in favour of “*déconnexion*” – unplugging from an unjust order in which development and underdevelopment were just two sides of a coin.

Amin, an Egyptian economist who spent much of his career in Senegal, urged that development be “national and popular”, and directed toward greater autonomy, or what he termed a strategy of self-reliance. Real political independence called for economic independence, in his view.

Although he denied that his plans amounted to “autarky” – the aim of total self-sufficiency – he insisted that a nation’s “external relations” submit to the requirements of internal development: autarky-lite, then.

Alas, there is little encouragement to be found in those postcolonial African regimes, such as Guinea under Sékou Touré, that attempted something like this. In fact, the story of rising global interdependence is also one of rising equality among the nations. Over the past two decades, more than 30 countries have moved from the lower-income category to the middle-income category, to go by the official World Bank designations. Certainly, the 21st century saw enormous advances in the country of my childhood. GDP per capita in Ghana rose fivefold between 2002 and 2016. In recent years, most of the world’s fastest-growing economies were in Africa. And many of the pandemic-linked economic shocks are short-term ones: the market for flowers and chocolate – and timber and bauxite – is rebounding.

All the same, there are morals to be drawn from the vulnerability of the global south amid the pandemic. One is that self-directed programmes of national development don’t work when they simply ignore market realities or leave internal impediment unaddressed. Here, Ghana’s cocoa conundrum is an illustrative instance. In February 2020, Ghana’s president, Nana Akufo-Addo, travelled to Switzerland and announced that his country wouldn’t be dependent on the export of raw materials. Instead, it would get into the business of manufacturing chocolate and ascend the manufacturing chains, soaring high like Ghana’s animal mascot, the tawny eagle.

A couple of generations earlier, Ghana’s leaders were intent on building up a steel industry: that’s what they thought modernisation looked like. Akufo-Addo has pinned his hopes on bars of a different sort. Why shouldn’t Ghana have vast Toblerone-type factories, with temperature-controlled vats and conveyor belts and wrapping machines? True, the country lacks a dairy industry, and has a rather paltry sugar sector, but it has no shortage of cocoa beans.



A volunteer in Johannesburg directs two men towards a medical tent where they will be tested for Covid as well as HIV and TB. Photograph: Jérôme Delay/AP

Yet Ghana, like most developing nations, has been trammelled by conflicting demands and interests. A fascinating [recent paper](#) by a Soas economist and an Accra-based cocoa analyst lays this out. Because Ghana's central bank needs US dollars – foreign-exchange reserves – the state cocoa boards must sell the commodity to multinational companies. In the meantime, the country is [stifling](#) local production by imposing a 60% tax on domestic sales of chocolate and “semi-finished” cocoa products. Special tax exemptions are reserved for firms that export most of their production, hindering those that would first build skills and capacities by developing local markets. All these statutory legacies run contrary to Akufo-Addo's hopes of ascending the manufacturing chain. If Ghana's cocoa policy had a mascot, it wouldn't be the tawny eagle; it would be the [pushmi-pullyu](#).

There are other impediments. A patchwork-quilt land-ownership system makes it hard for smallholders to gain title to their farms. (In Ghana, where so much terrain is in the hands of the traditional chiefs, land reform is a huge, and hugely complicated, issue.) And west African cocoa yields have scarcely improved in the past century. There are now programmes that

promote more sophisticated and sustainable cocoa-growing methods – including “smart irrigation” – but they’ve had a late start.

These quandaries are typical of developing nations. Countries throughout Africa and Latin America have economies organised around the export of fairly raw commodities from fishing, farming or mining. Most go through minimal processing before being sold on – the “value add” is meagre. You see a lot of subsistence entrepreneurship, and a lot of vulnerability associated with informal labour and low savings rates. Meanwhile, the climate crisis makes everything worse. When you farm inefficiently, you need more land, which worsens deforestation, which worsens climate change, which worsens your farming efficiency. (West Africa’s seasonal Harmattan winds – hot, dry and dusty – have been growing more expansive over the past couple of decades.) In truth, the turbulences of climate change are akin to those of Covid in slow motion. The price is paid by those least able to afford it.

In the shadow pandemic of the global south, the most lasting consequences could relate to schooling and skills – to what economists call human capital. School closings have obviously been a big problem everywhere. Around the planet, schooling has been interrupted for 1.6 billion students. Yet classrooms in Africa have been shut longer than the global average – and this is a continent where the median age is under 20. ([In South America](#), it’s 31.) Low-income countries, World Bank researchers say, “could lose more than three full years of their investment in basic education”, exacting a commensurate loss in future labour earnings.

For many families, the problem isn’t access to the internet – it’s access to electricity. Between April and August of last year, a team from Human Rights Watch conducted interviews with people across Africa, [and found](#) plenty of children receiving no instruction at all. Even when a school had managed to put its lessons online and a parent had a smartphone, the parent might not have a sufficiently generous data plan to make use of them. A teenager in Garissa, Kenya, told the HRW team that lessons were offered on a local radio station, “but I never tuned in because we don’t have a radio”.

When classrooms close, researchers say, female students are hit especially hard: they're at an elevated risk of child marriage, early pregnancy, domestic abuse and child-labour exploitation. For all these reasons – along with the simple fact that girls are regularly asked to take on child-rearing duties and household chores – Unesco researchers fear that 11 million girls around the world may never return to school. Think of it as another way of being a Covid “long-hauler”.

That gender disparity is worrisome for a variety of reasons. It has been estimated that women’s wages go up by 11.5% for each additional year of schooling, a couple of percentage points more than for men. As the notably unsentimental economist Lawrence Summers once observed, “investment in the education of girls may well be the highest-return investment available in the developing world”. When women are more highly educated, they have fewer children but invest more in each child; their children are healthier and, in turn, better educated. Civic participation is higher among educated women, too, and, as the Nobel prize-winning academic Amartya Sen has suggested, expanding female education may help reduce gender inequality within families.

For men and women alike, all these things matter to a society’s prospects of freedom and wellbeing. When development experts say that the pandemic-linked interruptions to education [threaten to push](#) 72 million students into “learning poverty”, then the consequences aren’t simply financial. This represents an immense squandering of human potential.

‘Covid is the tide that went out and exposed our nakedness,’ a well-known Lagos-based business consultant, Sanyade Okoli, told me. “It revealed all the weaknesses in our health system, educational system, governance structures etc.” Those regional weaknesses can be seen in the spreadsheets; they can also be seen in the streets. A woman with a communications firm in Windhoek offered me a very specific view of the situation: “Ten people a day are at my doorstep asking for food or for work.”

According to World Bank economists, more than 80% of the 120 million people whom Covid ushered into extreme poverty – defined as having earnings equivalent to \$1.90 a day or less – [are from](#) middle-income

countries, a capacious category that encompasses India, Indonesia, much of west Africa and much of Latin America.

That shouldn't be a surprise. People who live in middle-income countries are peculiarly vulnerable to global contractions; they buy from you and they sell to you. They're thoroughly enmeshed in a globalised economy. That enmeshment has allowed for some marvellous advances, but lately it feels as if they're trying to climb an escalator moving down.

The solution is not to get off, or stay home. Even if all you want to do is cultivate your own garden, you're hardly independent from others when it comes to your seeds, your fertiliser, and – as we've all learned – your weather. The way to rebuild a post-Covid world is not to withdraw from internationalism, but to strengthen it.



A worker gathers roses in Eldama Ravine, Kenya. Photograph: Aldo Pavan/Getty Images

Catastrophes are fractal. They have to be understood – and addressed – in macro and in micro ways. When affluent nations in Europe and North America shut down in order to slow the pandemic, their governments offered their citizens targeted relief. (A comparable programme in Nigeria was scantily funded and – Nigerians I spoke to maintained – opaque to the

point that it largely benefited government cronies.) In the US, Paycheck Protection Program loans were made to distressed business, which would not need to be repaid if certain conditions were met. In the UK, [Bounce Back Loans](#) and the like allowed financing on easy terms. These programmes – an ad-hoc method of social insurance – were imperfect, but they helped a great deal.

Something like this approach is needed on an international scale. The affluent world, in the aggregate, gains enormously from globalisation. We cherish our chocolate and roses, not to mention the aluminium, lithium, tantalum, yttrium and neodymium on which our mobile phones depend. In many respects, it's a common enterprise – a system of cooperation – from which we all benefit. Yet, as we all know, its yields are greater for some than for others. If the trading partners of the rich nations lose faith in the system, they might be tempted to give up on it. That would be costly to them, but it would be costly to those rich nations, too.

That's why the system is sustainable only if it involves a sense of shared responsibility. When things go wrong, we who benefit from the system have a duty to do internationally what we do at home: help the vulnerable weather the storm. When public-health measures to “flatten the curve” in rich countries can push people elsewhere on the planet into penury, it's our problem, too. An integrated global system is imperilled when risk is shifted to those most vulnerable.

Our international responsibilities in the age of Covid have often been discussed in absurdly narrow ways – as if we just needed to ship more vaccines to the under-vaccinated populations. Yes, programmes such as [Covax](#), the international vaccine distributor, need to be better supplied, but all the vaccines in the world won't remedy the moral and practical perils of inequality. In richer nations, economic turbulence puts more people on the dole. In poorer ones, it puts more people in the grave. If the gains in alleviating global poverty over the past generation were heartening, they have also proved perishable. Okoli, in Nigeria, recalled that, early in the pandemic, people with means took care to feed those in need. “There was a sense,” she added mordantly, “that if we don't feed them, they'll eat us.”

The Covid pandemic is, in [the words of](#) the eminent economic historian Adam Tooze, “the first truly comprehensive crisis of the [Anthropocene era](#)”. In his view, it has put paid to the notion that globalisation will move the whole world toward greater economic and social equality – what he calls the “millennial vision”. The question is what will replace it.

To come to grips with global inequality on a post-pandemic planet, we’ll need more sensitive measures of fragility. No simple jab will resolve the vulnerabilities and inequities that arise from our global interdependence. Still, people in the public and private sectors will do well to think hard about a range of issues: ways of restructuring, forgiving or otherwise mitigating debt burdens when indebted governments have put the money to good use; ways of promulgating smarter and more sustainable agriculture (and other forms of resource exploitation); ways of encouraging better governance at regional and national levels; ways of building and maintaining supple and inclusive global institutions.

And, of course, ways of targeting assistance to do the most good. When, earlier this year, the UK decided to [cut foreign aid](#) by \$4bn, it was signalling a retreat at a time when history is calling for an advance. The most thoughtful critics of foreign aid make an important point: we want governments that are principally accountable to their people, not to foreign donors and lenders. But the right kind of assistance (including the Covid-related financing and [debt-service suspension](#) organised by World Bank Group over the past 18 months) needn’t have this distorting effect on governance. And the expansion of human capabilities is never a money hole.

As the climate crisis was telling us long before Covid blared the message, what happens in one place can have repercussions in many places. That’s why the pandemic must be understood not as an anvil-from-the-sky medical crisis, but as something far more encompassing. “Science is the exit strategy,” the head of the Wellcome Trust famously said, early in the pandemic. But, though science is necessary, it’s hardly sufficient, particularly when we’re interested not simply in exit but in re-entry. As raucous, inward-turned nationalisms continue to claim followers, we’ll need to resist the go-it-alone fantasies of autarky. Rather, a post-pandemic era calls for a richer sense of our mutual obligations.

I think of what Taleni Ngoshi, in Namibia, told me about how she was affected by those whose livelihoods depend on hers. “There are days when you wake up in bed and you think to yourself, ‘I’m tired of this,’” she said. “And one minute later you think, ‘I have to do something. If I stay in bed and wallow in misery, what will the others eat tomorrow?’”

They depend on her, just as, ultimately, she depends on them. Around these small, local circles of reciprocal caring, we need to build larger, global ones. Resilience shouldn’t be reserved for the rich. An international conjuncture that’s fairer and more secure requires that we keep track of systemic risks conceived in the broadest possible way. And trade without responsibility is itself an unaffordable risk – as tempting as a box of chocolates, as perishable as a cut flower.

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[Coronavirus](#)

Another Covid Christmas: Britons urged to delay festive plans



Shoppers at Oxford Circus in London on Saturday. Scientists say rates of Covid transmission are still very high. Photograph: Hollie Adams/Getty Images

*[Nicola Davis](#) Science correspondent
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As [Christmas](#) approached in 2020, it was not a Dickensian spirit but the spectre of Covid that haunted households up and down the UK.

With cases soaring, government-approved plans to allow three households to mix for five days in England [were scrapped](#) within weeks of being made, while [scientists urged families to connect over Zoom](#) or host drinks on the pavement rather than meeting for a hug.

“There is no point having a very merry Christmas and then burying friends and relations in January and February,” Gabriel Scally, a visiting professor of public health at the University of Bristol, said at the time.

Twelve months on, there has been little word from the UK government about how to safely celebrate Christmas 2021. But scientists say caution remains crucial.

“Rates of transmission are still very high, numbers of Covid weekly deaths continue at around 1,000, the NHS is described by those running it as ‘hitting breaking point’ and ‘unsustainable’, with Covid cases taking up hospital beds with the potential to tip the NHS into crisis. And we haven’t yet hit winter,” said Prof Susan Michie of University College London, a member of the government’s Covid-19 behavioural science team and the Independent Sage group of experts.

Michie added the current situation was unstable and could change quickly – for better or worse.

“In these circumstances, my advice would be to delay planning Christmas as long as possible,” she said.

However, for those already tackling yuletide logistics, experts say there are measures that should be taken to reduce the risks.

“These include all those we considered last year – thinking about the vulnerability of those you are visiting; maximising the chance that you are not infectious [for example] by testing, restricting contact beforehand; and making indoor spaces as safe as possible in terms of ventilation, limiting numbers and crowding, and using sanitiser and face masks,” said Michie. “The Delta variant is highly contagious, with many people now catching it despite double vaccination and cautious behaviour.”

[According to the latest data](#), more than 88% of people aged 12 years and over in the UK have received at least one Covid jab, with many now eligible for a booster. However, a substantial number remain unvaccinated.

“Get vaccinated if you have still not done so, and get boosted if you are eligible,” said John Edmunds, a professor of infectious disease epidemiology at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine who sits on the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage).

Dr Elise Paul, of the Institute of Epidemiology and [Health](#) at UCL, agreed. “Getting the vaccine as well as a booster if you are called is the most important thing you can do to protect loved ones and those who are more vulnerable than you,” she said.

But, Paul added, other measures remain important.

“I would say that although the primary benefit of the vaccine is that it greatly reduces the likelihood of severe illness and death, even those who have been fully vaccinated can still fall ill from and therefore transmit the virus,” she said. “The best advice I can give is to continue to take recommended precautions: lateral flow tests, proper ventilation, thorough and frequent hand washing or sanitising. These are especially important when family and friends who may be more vulnerable are present.”

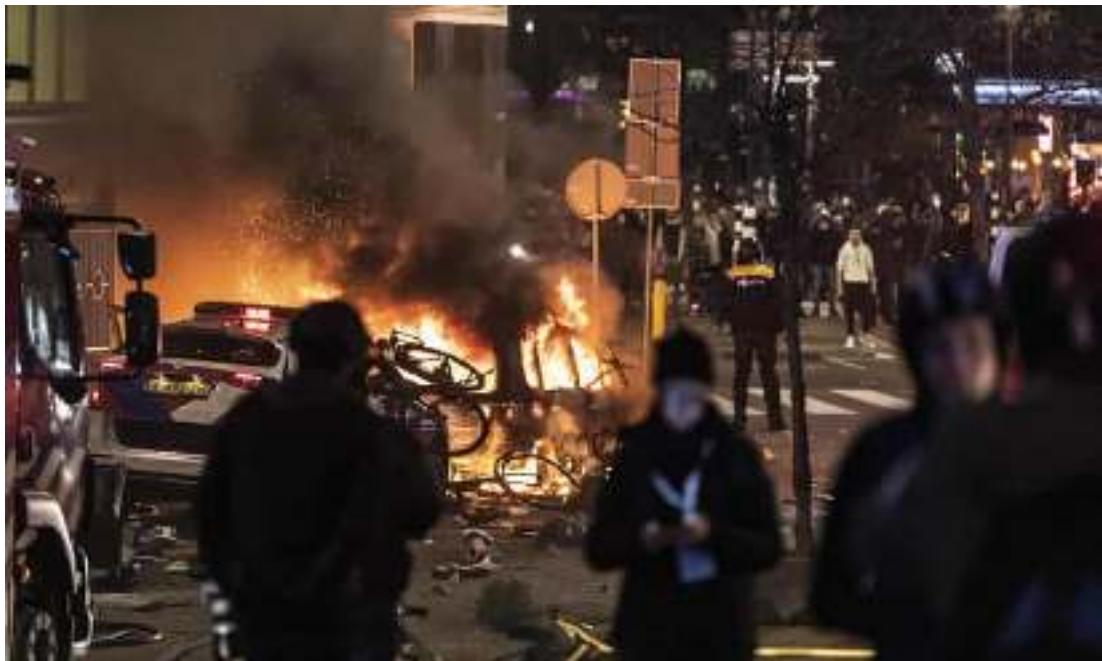
Edmunds also backed the use of testing.

“Use a lateral flow test before all risky events, such as work parties or visiting elderly relatives,” he said. “Only attend if you are negative.”

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Netherlands

Violent anti-lockdown protesters are idiots, says Dutch PM



At least 130 people have been arrested, four wounded and several police officers injured since the violence began in Rotterdam on Friday.
Photograph: Hollandse Hoogte/REX/Shutterstock

[Jennifer Rankin in Brussels](#)

Mon 22 Nov 2021 10.10 EST

The Dutch prime minister, Mark Rutte, has lambasted as “idiots” people who turned to “pure violence” during three consecutive nights of anti-lockdown protests across the [Netherlands](#).

Rutte told Dutch media that their actions had “nothing to do with demonstrating” but were “a pure explosion of violence directed against our police, against our firefighters, against ambulance drivers”.

At least 130 people have been arrested, four wounded and several police officers injured since the violence began in the port city of Rotterdam on Friday.

Rutte, who leads a caretaker government, said he would always fight for the right to demonstrate, as part of Dutch democracy and the rule of law, “but what I will never accept is that idiots use sheer violence against the people who work for you and me every day … to keep this country safe under the guise of: ‘We are dissatisfied.’”

The Netherlands tightened coronavirus restrictions last week after a surge in cases, as [rising infections across Europe](#) trigger tougher measures from governments.

[Netherlands: number of new coronavirus cases per day](#)

Rutte’s government is facing calls from opposition politicians to go further, either by banning non-vaccinated people from bars and restaurants, or closing all non-essential shops and other venues.

Last Friday in Rotterdam hundreds of rioters torched cars and threw rocks at police in what [the city's mayor called an “orgy of violence”](#). On Saturday night protesters lit fires in The Hague and other cities, including at a primary school in Roosendaal in the southern Netherlands. On Sunday demonstrators were out in force in the northern cities of Groningen and Leeuwarden, Enschede in the east and Tilburg in the south, where they threw fireworks and vandalised property.

In [Belgium](#) politicians have condemned violence in Brussels, after a peaceful demonstration against coronavirus restrictions turned violent.

Belgium’s home affairs minister, Annelies Verlinden, said: “A mature democracy respects the opinion of a minority but does not accept that a few abuse their protest vote by force. Vaccinated or not: it is important that we continue to follow the measures. Only together can we win the fight against the virus.”

Police estimated that 35,000 demonstrators gathered in the Belgian capital to march against the Covid Safe Pass, the app demonstrating vaccine and recovery status, which is essential to enter bars and restaurants. But many wanted to voice discontent more broadly with Covid restrictions, which were tightened last week as infections rose.



Officers in Brussels made at least 45 arrests, including two on suspicion of armed rebellion. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Local media reported a varied mix of people at the demonstration, including the far-right, people espousing anti-vaccine conspiracy theories and antisemitism, as well as seemingly apolitical people opposed to vaccination, including entire families.

The daily *Het Nieuwsblad* reported that healthcare workers stood shoulder to shoulder with people who had pinned Jewish stars on their clothes in protest at what they called a Nazi regime. It also reported attendance by the anti-vaccination, anti-mask, Dutch-speaking “Teachers for Freedom” group, as well as MPs for the Flemish far-right party, the Vlaams Belang.

One nursery nurse, Tina Cleybergh, told the paper she had come to the protest because the Covid pass had created division in society, “in which unvaccinated people feel labeled as criminals”.

Some protesters expressed concern their intended peaceful gathering had been infiltrated by troublemakers.

[Belgium: number of new coronavirus cases per day](#)

A police spokesperson told *De Standaard* that many of the agitators were “hooligan-like types” already known to law enforcement. The spokesperson said the crowd was diverse: “What they have in common is mistrust in the system and politics, especially in the area of coronavirus.”

Police used water cannon and teargas to disperse violent protesters, who massed close to EU headquarters, where they were throwing firecrackers, smashing cars and setting bins on fire. Officers made at least 45 arrests, including two on suspicion of armed rebellion. Three police officers and one protester were injured and taken to hospital.

The violence has reignited the debate on compulsory vaccination in Belgium, an idea that divides the seven-party ruling coalition.

On Monday, Pierre-Yves Dermagne, the Socialist deputy prime minister, who is also economy minister, said it was necessary to reopen the discussion. “We must have this debate because we know that we are going to live with this virus for months and even years. We cannot limit ourselves to short-term measures.”

Last week Belgium’s liberal prime minister, Alexander De Croo, dismissed mandatory Covid jabs as a “false good idea”, arguing it would be difficult in practice and more effective to persuade people.

The government is already facing backlash over mandatory Covid jabs for healthcare workers. On Monday about 50 people protested against the recently agreed policy outside a hospital in the eastern town of Libramont.

From 1 January all healthcare workers in Belgium are obliged to be vaccinated against coronavirus, or face redundancy if they refuse.

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Coronavirus

Germany and Netherlands face tightening Covid rules as Austria enters lockdown



People protesting against Covid pass restrictions in Brussels, Belgium.
Photograph: Thierry Monasse/Getty Images

[Jon Henley](#), Europe correspondent, [Kate Connolly](#) in Berlin and [Jennifer Rankin](#) in Brussels

Mon 22 Nov 2021 13.37 EST

Germany and the [Netherlands](#) have been told they should face still tougher Covid restrictions as the German health minister, Jens Spahn, made the startling prediction that most of his compatriots would be “vaccinated, cured or dead” by the end of winter.

With Europe again the centre of the pandemic, ushering in tighter controls mainly on the unvaccinated across the continent, on Monday [Austria](#) became

the first west European country to re-enter lockdown since vaccination began earlier this year.

Stricter rules have already sparked clashes in [Belgium](#) and the Netherlands, with the Dutch prime minister, Mark Rutte, describing the rioters as “idiots” and his Belgian counterpart, Alexander de Croo, calling the violence “absolutely unacceptable”.

“Probably by the end of winter, more or less everyone in [Germany](#) will be vaccinated, cured or dead,” Spahn said. “That sounds cynical, but it’s the reality.” The outgoing chancellor, Angela Merkel, said tighter restrictions were needed.

“We are in a highly dramatic situation. What is in place now is not sufficient,” Merkel told leaders of her centre-right CDU party. About 68% of Germans and 66% of Austrians are fully vaccinated, among the lowest in western [Europe](#).

Eastern European countries, where vaccination rates are even lower, have been experiencing some of the highest death tolls in the world, with hospitals overrun in Bulgaria and Romania.

More than 38,000 new cases were confirmed in Germany over the past 24 hours, and a sharp rise in the last few weeks has left intensive care units near capacity. The worst-hit regions have ordered new shutdowns, including Christmas markets.

In Austria, the seven-day Covid incidence rate hit a record 1,110 per 100,000 people, prompting the government to tell people to work from home if they can and to shut cafes, restaurants, bars, theatres and non-essential shops for at least 10 days.

People may leave home for a limited number of reasons, such as going to workplaces if they cannot avoid it, buying essentials or taking a walk. The country has also announced that vaccines will be mandatory from 1 February, one of very few in the world to do so.

The Czech Republic and Slovakia also banned unvaccinated people from some shops and services, including pubs, from Monday. In Germany, a Social Democrat MP, Karl Lauterbach, called for a “radical” vaccine pass strategy, adding: “A general vaccine mandate [shouldn’t be] taboo.”

Lothar Wieler, the head of Germany’s Robert Koch Institute disease control agency, described compulsory vaccination as a “measure of last resort” but did not rule it out. The outgoing government said it would leave the decision to the next administration.

The return of severe Covid restrictions brought about 40,000 protesters on to Vienna’s streets on Saturday, resulted in violent demonstrations in Brussels, and led to three nights of rioting across the Netherlands over the weekend.

In Brussels on Sunday, officers fired water cannon and teargas at a protest police said was attended by 35,000, demonstrating against a ban on the unvaccinated from venues such as restaurants and bars. Local media reported a varied mix of people at the demonstration, including the far right and people espousing anti-vaccine conspiracy theories and antisemitism, as well as seemingly apolitical people opposed to vaccination, including entire families.

The daily newspaper Het Nieuwsblad reported that healthcare workers stood shoulder to shoulder with people who had pinned Jewish stars on their clothes in protest at what they called a Nazi regime. One nursery nurse, Tina Cleybergh, told the paper she had come to the protest because the Covid pass had created division in society, “in which unvaccinated people feel labelled as criminals”.

Belgium’s home affairs minister, Annelies Verlinden, said: “A mature democracy respects the opinion of a minority, but does not accept that a few abuse their protest vote by force. Vaccinated or not, it is important we continue to follow the measures.”

The violence has reignited the debate on compulsory vaccination in Belgium, an idea that divides the seven-party ruling coalition.

Pierre-Yves Dermagne, the Socialist party deputy prime minister, said on Monday the discussion had to be reopened. “We must have this debate, because we know that we are going to live with this virus for months and even years,” he said. “We cannot limit ourselves to short-term measures.”

At least 145 people were arrested after the Dutch protests against the country’s new three-week partial lockdown, which began in Rotterdam on Friday and spread to cities including The Hague and Breda, while four demonstrators were wounded and several police officers injured.

Rutte said he would always fight for the right to demonstrate, but added that he would “never accept idiots using sheer violence against the people who work for you and me every day … to keep this country safe, under the guise of: ‘We are dissatisfied.’”

He told Dutch media that the protesters’ actions had “nothing to do with demonstrating” but were “a pure explosion of violence directed against our police, against our firefighters, against ambulance drivers”.

The caretaker government is also facing calls from opposition politicians to go further, either by banning unvaccinated people from bars and restaurants, or by closing all non-essential shops and other venues.

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2021.11.23 - Opinion

- The NHS is facing its hardest winter ever - but the Tories are still bent on destroying it
- I got help for postnatal depression that saved me. Most women in India do not
- Getting jabs to the unvaccinated has never been more critical
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OpinionNHS

The NHS is facing its hardest winter ever - but the Tories are still bent on destroying it

[Polly Toynbee](#)





‘Ambulances queue outside A&Es that can’t admit patients, with beds blocked by people waiting for social care.’ Photograph: Mark Thomas/REX/Shutterstock

Tue 23 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

A screeching U-turn to save northern homeowners’ inheritances, or plunging his bulldozer through his own “red wall” seats? Regardless of the vote on [how much people will pay](#) for the government’s social care reforms, Boris Johnson has never had a plan to rescue England’s stricken social care system itself. After this vote, not a penny extra will be put towards helping the [2,000 frail people](#) whose requests for care are refused every day. Nor is there any strategy to integrate social care with the NHS. That great opportunity has been blown away.

Indeed, the health and social care bill stumbling through the Commons this week seems curiously irrelevant to the oncoming [NHS](#) crisis. With the whole system sinking fast, the bill puts the health service through yet another re-disorganisation, while social care slides into collapse. Deckchair-shifting on the Titanic comes to mind.

Covid is not the only reason the health service is on a trolley in the corridor, even though a pandemic was [foreseeable and foreseen](#), but never prepared

for. Let's take the pulse of the NHS: waiting lists, so low in 2010, have [just hit 6m](#) and are rising fast (remember they had already [reached more than 4m](#) by the time Covid struck). Why are they so high? The answer is that for a decade, annual NHS funding increases have [been at their lowest levels ever](#), far below what's required of the population increase (especially of elderly people). The result has been "efficiency" cuts of [17,000 beds](#) and more than [100,000 unfilled vacancies](#) for doctors and nurses, whose training places fell under the axe of George Osborne's first budget. That's why ambulances queue outside A&Es that can't admit patients, with beds blocked by people waiting for social care.

Nor is there any plan to restore the 24% that has been cut from the [public health budget](#) since 2015-16, which reduces the number of people getting ill in the first place. Nor has there been any restoration of the thousands of lost Sure Start centres which cut children's hospitalisations by a [remarkable 18%](#), according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies. Such preventive measures take time to have an effect, but the emergency is now with hospitals and GP surgeries – already into what Chris Hopson, the head of NHS Providers, says is "the most difficult winter in its history". He's not crying wolf: the wolf is already in the wards and [causing deaths](#) on trolleys and in ambulances.

This bill addresses none of that. Its original purpose was a good one – to undo the vandalism done to the NHS by David Cameron's 2012 act, which blew the service into marketised fragments which were forced by law to compete rather than cooperate. The 2012 act opened up all contracts to private tenders. The irony was that, due to the plundered state of a half-starved NHS, the private sector has been less tempted by marketisation than the Tories initially hoped, only prowling around the periphery picking off tasty scraps in community and GP services.

Simon Stevens, the former chief executive of NHS England, spent much of his seven years at the head of the health service finding ways around competition law so services could work together. The current bill, which he originally designed, divides England into 42 integrated care systems (ICS), each with its own budget to rationalise and plan local services. The idea was to include local authorities and combine social care with health. But with no plan to make social care free at the point of use, and no machinery to force

the NHS and local councils to pool their budgets, there is no way the bill will marry social care and health. Councils and the NHS may cooperate in some places, but both will remain separate silos that are strapped for cash.

The original purpose of Stevens' bill has been sabotaged. The health secretary has seized power to overrule the independence of any ICS so he can upend their decisions on mergers or appointments according to political whim or cronyism. The government has sinisterly refused an amendment that would firmly establish the NHS as preferred provider – one of the original purposes of the bill's removal of competition. That means there is no protection against a reprise of Covid contracts for cronies. What's more, the government refuses to bar private providers from sitting on the boards that oversee each ICS. Appointments of all directors fall under the absolute power of the health secretary.

The government's rejection of these protections is a symptom of that perennial Tory tic, which hankers after any form of NHS privatisation they can manage to sneak through. The Conservatives dare not promote insurance systems or publicly announce their desire to privatisate the health system, but they try it on anyway. The Ayn Rand admirer Sajid Javid displays this same instinctive distrust of public service, with his warnings to GPs and his threat to sack trust managers who fail to clear impossible waiting list backlogs. He is bringing in a business supremo and even an army general to second-guess the work of NHS trust CEOs.

Everything about his behaviour, like that of so many Tories, suggests the gut ideological inability to believe the overwhelming evidence. Listen to their fringe meetings, read Tory papers or magazines and they seem simply unable to digest near-universal research that shows a state-run NHS does remarkably well. Despite its reduced funding and beds, and the fact it has fewer doctors and nurses per capita than equivalent countries, the health service nonetheless keeps producing good results for a country that has always taxed and spent less than its comparators. This bill, warped from its originally benign intent, contains unstated opportunities to bend NHS principles Torywards. Yet Johnson has still managed to aggravate his own backbenchers.

The most serious loss is the great opportunity to at long last pull together the NHS and a national social care service, enabling them to work together seamlessly with pooled local budgets and a united career and pay path. That will take some future re-disorganisation, with everyone reapplying again for their old jobs under new logos and new brass plates.

- Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist
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[Opinion](#)[Global development](#)

I got help for postnatal depression that saved me. Most women in India do not

Priyali Sur in New Delhi



A mother with her child in Uttarakhand. Nearly half of women who phoned a helpline during the pandemic had symptoms of postpartum psychosis.
Photograph: Devendra Rawat/Alamy

Global development is supported by



[About this content](#)

Tue 23 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

A month after giving birth, Divya tried to suffocate her new daughter with a pillow. “There were moments when I loved my baby; at other times I would try and suffocate her to death,” says the 26-year-old from the southern Indian state of Kerala.

She sought help from women’s organisations and the women’s police station, staffed by female officers, in her town. But Divya was told that the safest place for a child was with her mother.

Divya was suffering from postpartum psychosis – a severe mental health condition characterised by difficulty in responding emotionally to a newborn. It can lead to thoughts of harming the child.

There are no figures on the prevalence of postpartum psychosis in India, where there is also very little awareness or support for those with postnatal depression. The stigma around mental health and the shortage of professional psychological support in the country has forced many women to deal with it alone.

Postnatal depression is a global problem – an estimated [one in seven women](#) can develop some form of postpartum depression (PPD). But in India, the figure is [closer to one in five](#).

The need is “overwhelming in the entire country”, says Dr Prabha S Chandra, head of perinatal psychiatry at the National Institute of Mental [Health](#) and Neurosciences (Nimhans) in Bengaluru, one of India’s leading mental health institutions.

I tried to get counselling but there were long waiting lists ... perinatal mental health is not even on the radar

Covid-19 has exacerbated the problem. “We have been asking the government to mainstream perinatal mental health for a long time, even before the pandemic. Sadly, it hasn’t happened,” she says.

About 46% of women who phoned a Nimhans helpline during the pandemic were exhibiting symptoms of postpartum psychosis.

I can understand how Divya felt. A month after giving birth to my beautiful son in June, I thought that it wouldn’t be so bad if I ended things.

I not only thought about harming myself, but also had fleeting thoughts about hurting my newborn. What if I dropped his tiny, frail body while rocking him to sleep? Would it be so bad? I was shocked and ashamed of myself but I could not control my feelings.

My son was born at the end of India’s brutal second wave of Covid, which reportedly [killed almost 1.5 million people](#). To protect me from the virus during pregnancy, my husband and I had isolated ourselves. I had not seen my parents or sister and when we brought my baby home from the hospital, it was just me, my husband and the continuing isolation of the pandemic.

I tried to get counselling but there were long waiting lists for therapists in Delhi. One said she could schedule me for an appointment after eight months. The shortest wait was three weeks and I jumped at it.

The extreme shortage of psychiatric and psychotherapeutic support makes it next to impossible to access help urgently. The mental health workforce is severely understaffed, with an estimate in 2019 suggesting [India needs another 27,000 psychiatrists](#) for its population.

This year, India allocated just [1.2% of its GDP on healthcare](#) and the budget for [National Mental Health Programme is 400m rupees](#) (about £4m). Amid [chronic underinvestment in the health sector](#), perinatal mental health is not even on the radar.

“I don’t think that anyone in the government is thinking that our mothers are struggling and need help. It is not even understood as a big problem,” says Dr Ashlesha Bagadia, a perinatal psychiatrist and co-founder of the [Green Oak Initiative](#), a community mental health centre in Bengaluru.

“Having a mental health screening policy for perinatal women would make a huge difference,” says Bagadia. “We are so far behind that we don’t even have a mapping of perinatal mental health services available, unlike the US and the UK.”

For me, regular counselling with a trained therapist, where I could express all my feelings of exhaustion, depression and rage uninhibitedly, along with the support of my spouse, were very helpful. Going through this process helped me bond with my baby and we are both doing well now.

Sadly, things did not turn out as well for Divya. Her condition worsened with each day; with no support from her family or any institution, she reached her breaking point.

“One afternoon we were all alone. I took my baby and started drowning her in a bucket of water,” says Divya. She realised what she was doing almost immediately and pulled her out of the water, dried her and lay down with her for hours. “Then suddenly my mood changed again and I attacked her with a pillow.” This time she killed her.

Divya was arrested and sent to a mental health institution for 42 days. She is now living with her father and undergoing psychiatric treatment.

“I am not even allowed to visit her grave,” she says, through tears. “Everyone calls me a killer.”

In India, [NIMHANS perinatal psychiatric](#) national helpline is (+91) 81057 11277. [The Doula Collective Postpartum Support Initiative](#) also offers a free support group. The [Green Oak Initiative: Chiguru perinatal mental health initiative](#) can be contacted on (+91) 9972 665 268 and (+91) 8042 40411

In the UK, advice and support for postpartum psychosis can be found at [Action on Postpartum Psychosis](#). In the UK and Ireland, [Samaritans](#) can be contacted on 116 123 or email jo@samaritans.org or jo@samaritans.ie. The charity [Mind](#) is available on 0300 123 3393 and [ChildLine](#) on 0800 1111. In the US, [Mental Health America](#) is available on 800-273-8255.

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OpinionCoronavirus

Getting jabs to the unvaccinated has never been more critical

[Andrew Pollard](#) and [Brian Angus](#)



People wait for Covid-19 booster jobs at a vaccination centre in London, 16 November. Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

Tue 23 Nov 2021 02.00 EST

More than ever before, we must look behind the reported Covid-19 numbers in hospitals and communities to understand what is happening in the pandemic. We also need to better understand how the pandemic is playing out among unvaccinated people, and those who have been vaccinated.

To the public, the pandemic was and still is a silent pestilence, made visible by the images of patients fighting for their next breath and reporters at intensive care units talking about the fear of patients and the exhaustion of doctors and nurses from behind their fogged visors. This ongoing horror, which is taking place in ICUs across Britain, is now largely restricted to

unvaccinated people. Generally, Covid-19 is no longer a disease of the vaccinated; vaccines tend to limit this suffocating affliction, with a few exceptions.

If the protection that vaccines offer against severe Covid-19 began to wane, given that tens of millions of people are now vaccinated in the UK and only a fraction of the population have not received the jab, ICUs would be filled to the brim with vaccinated people. But they are not. Vaccines still seem to give almost complete protection against this form of life-threatening cases of Covid-19. The latest wave of the virus in the UK – with cases [rising rapidly in parts of Europe](#) – will directly translate into a stream of mostly unvaccinated patients entering ICU.

In the short term, boosters and social restrictions will help prevent Covid-19 from spreading among people who are unvaccinated this winter. But in the long run, the pressure of Covid-19 on ICUs won't be solved through these measures. The virus will eventually reach unvaccinated people. To prevent serious illness, these people need first and second doses of the vaccine as soon as possible.

It is therefore obvious that governments with doses to spare should be making every effort to ensure vaccines urgently reach people who are undecided and unvaccinated. Some countries are already hoping to drive uptake among this group by imposing social restrictions or introducing [vaccine mandates](#). But understanding and dealing with people's underlying objections to vaccinations would be a visionary project to secure the public's health, during the pandemic and beyond.

In countries with lower vaccination rates, the impact of the current wave on hospital ICUs will be far worse than in Britain. As a proportion of the whole population, vaccination coverage in the UK is [69%](#), but in Bulgaria it is only 24% and in Slovakia 43%. It is also important to address pockets of unvaccinated people in countries where vaccine uptake is otherwise high. In the US, for example, fewer than 50% of people have received both jabs in certain states. In other states, the rate is 70%.

In this context, it is shameful that in some low-income countries only 5% of the population have received at least one dose, almost a year since the first licensed dose was given in Britain. The director general of the World Health Organization expressed his deep concern last week that there are now [six times more booster doses](#) being administered every day than first doses. We are still not doing enough to end the pandemic for the world's unvaccinated, and governments and manufacturers urgently need to work together to get doses to those in low-income countries, keeping an eye on the long-term gains of global vaccination, despite the challenges posed by the current Covid spike in Europe.

For those of us fortunate enough to have already been vaccinated, the story now seems very different. For the most part, we are protected from very severe cases of Covid-19. But it is now clear that even the fully vaccinated can get mild infection with the virus: the effectiveness of two-dose vaccines against mild symptomatic infection now ranges from 44% to 63%, according to the UK [Health](#) Security Agency.

This lower level of protection is partly a feature of waning immunity against mild infection. It's also a result of the [Delta variant](#), which is better at infecting people than its predecessors, even when they have vaccine immunity. For most vaccinated individuals, these mild infections are little more than an unpleasant inconvenience. But for those who are very frail, immunocompromised or have underlying health conditions, these infections are enough to destabilise them and lead to hospital admissions, which is what happens every winter with other viruses, including flu.

For some, these are serious, life-threatening health problems that add to the pressure on the [NHS](#). But this situation is not the same as the one we faced last year. It's also worth remembering that while daily hospital admission data includes people with Covid-19, these numbers may also include people admitted for an unrelated illness, an accident or indeed for elective surgery who happened to have tested positive for Covid. It is difficult to know the true burden of disease in hospitals when the background rate of infection in the community continues to be high.

Booster doses drive up the antibody levels that are needed to prevent infection. According to recent figures from the UKHSA, they appear to

increase protection against Covid-19 to at least 93%. As a consequence, they will help to drive down the number of Covid-19 cases in the community, and reduce the chance that milder infection will occur among vulnerable people that result in hospital admissions. In highly vaccinated regions where the supply of doses is not limited, this is good news. But we don't yet know how long this boost to protection will last.

We need better and cleaner clinical data to understand fully which patients are being admitted to hospital, to improve our assessment of how effective vaccines are at preventing hospital and ICU admission, and to assess who would be most likely to benefit from boosters. It is also important to monitor and assess the duration of the top-up protection afforded by boosters to then inform the best long-term strategy for future control beyond this winter.

What this means for people who are vaccinated is that we have our first glimpses of what “living with the virus” might look like, though it will be some time before it is clear where or when this will all level out. There are still questions over whether we will need regular boosters, and who these should target. But the horrors of the pandemic continue unabated for the unvaccinated, who remain at risk wherever in the world they live. We have to do better at delivering first doses to these people by addressing the unequal access to vaccines across the world, and the barriers that exist to vaccine acceptance among some communities.

- Prof Sir Andrew Pollard is a paediatrician and director of the Oxford Vaccine Group, University of Oxford
- Brian Angus is professor of infectious diseases at the Nuffield Department of Medicine, University of Oxford

[Opinion](#)[Christmas](#)

When is the perfect time to start preparing for Christmas? It's right now

[Zoe Williams](#)



Articles about when Christmas starts get earlier every year. Photograph: baona/Getty Images

Tue 23 Nov 2021 02.00 EST

My kids' dad has a rule that nobody can discuss [Christmas](#) until his birthday has passed at the end of November. It has a folkloric inarguability, like "ne'er cast a clout till May is out", except it is much more strictly observed. Nobody really knows what casting a clout means, and everybody knows what discussing Christmas sounds like. I think the kids might have some residual fear from early childhood that a breach will result in the cancellation of Christmas; my daughter cleaves to it so closely that she gets the heebie-jeebies even when her friends start talking about the festive season too early, and I always wonder, should I explain how this works? That not *everyone's* dad is born on 21 November? Or would that be considered patronising, her being 12?

Christmas preparations are often dressed up as a question of what is classy, where in fact it is an issue of class with a side-order of gender. The most elegant MO is to affect not to notice it's happening at all, to wander round town going "why is everyone so drunk?", to roll your eyes at the fake holly festooning the supermarkets, to affect disgust at the choral muzak, until 18 December, when you will finally acknowledge that the arrival of the Christ child is almost upon us. To pull this off, however, you need both money and leisure in considerable quantities; you'll have done nothing to spread the cost of the event, and you have only seven short days to do a month's emotional labour, which, even if you don't have a job, is not enough. It might just work if you have a wife, but then it doesn't count.

So, to spread the many burdens manageably, you really want to start in late September, but then you'll crash into Halloween, and you'll also have eaten all the tiny Toblerones you bought as stocking fillers by 1 November. Ideally, you want to realise it's nearly Christmas shortly after WH Smith does – for they have been the hallmark of the unclassy, since the decline of Hallmark – but before Lidl takes delivery of its mini panettones, otherwise you'll definitely miss them. Round about now, in other words. So maybe my kids are right.

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Wisconsin

Waukesha Christmas parade: man charged with homicide after five killed

01:20

Social media footage shows SUV speeding through Wisconsin Christmas parade – video

[Richard Luscombe](#)

[@richlusc](#)

Mon 22 Nov 2021 21.53 EST

Authorities in [Wisconsin](#) on Monday identified a 39-year-old man as the person who plowed his vehicle into a Christmas parade on Sunday night, killing five people and injuring another 48, including two children who remained in a critical condition.

Darrell E Brooks was in custody, charged with five counts of intentional first-degree homicide, Daniel Thompson, police chief of Waukesha, a city 20 miles west of Milwaukee, said at an afternoon press conference.

He said that the suspect was involved in an unspecified domestic disturbance immediately before the parade incident, and that further charges were expected.

Thompson said that there was no evidence the bloodshed on Sunday was a terrorist attack or that the suspect knew anyone in the parade. Brooks had acted alone, the chief said.

Thompson said Brooks “drove right through the barricades” to enter the parade route and then raced towards a collision with those entertaining the holiday crowds, including a marching band, a troupe of “Dancing Grannies” and a dance team of girls aged nine to 15 performing with white pom-poms and wearing Santa hats.

Spectators and participants scattered as the red Ford SUV barrelled through at speeds estimated at up to 60mph. Videos posted to social media showed members of the crowd and first responders treating injured victims.

Thompson identified those killed as Tamara Durant and Jane Coolidge, both 52; Leanna Owens, 71; Virginia Sorenson, 79; and Wilhelm Hospel, 82.

The Milwaukee Dancing Grannies troupe said in [a Facebook post](#) that members were among those killed.

“Those who died were extremely passionate Grannies. Their eyes gleamed ... joy of being a Grannie. They were the glue ... held us together,” the post said.

“Our group was doing what they loved, performing in front of crowds in a parade putting smiles on faces of all ages, filling them with joy and happiness.”

At least 10 children remained in intensive care on Monday afternoon, health officials said. Injuries ranged from broken bones to serious head wounds.

Thompson, the police chief, said officers had been called to a domestic dispute near the parade route, but said Brooks fled before they got there. One officer fired his weapon to try to stop the driver as he sped away from the parade after he ran over the victims, but was unsuccessful. Nobody was hurt by the shots and the officer was placed on administrative leave, Thompson said on Monday.

Brooks was arrested a short time after the incident and his vehicle impounded, Thompson added. Brooks has been charged with crimes 16 times since 1999 and had two outstanding cases against him at the time of the parade disaster – including one in which he was accused of deliberately running down a woman with his vehicle.

The mayor of Waukesha, Shawn Reilly, said his town was grieving “a senseless tragedy”.

“Many of us were participants in the parade and witnessed these horrific actions. We are all trying to process what we experienced,” he said.

“For those of you who do not live in Waukesha, you need to know that Waukesha is a community that helps her neighbours. Waukesha is a community that takes pride in its identity and has a wonderful spirit. Waukesha looks after each other.”



Residents attend a candlelight vigil in remembrance of the victims a day after a car plowed through a holiday parade in Waukesha. Photograph: Reuters

In an address from the White House in Washington, Joe Biden also paid tribute to the victims.

“Five families in Waukesha are facing fresh grief of life without a loved one,” the president said. “At least 40 Americans are suffering from injuries, some of them in critical condition, and an entire community is struggling to cope with the horrific act of violence.

“The people of Waukesha were gathered to celebrate the start of a season of hope and togetherness and thanksgiving. All of us pray that that same spirit is going to embrace and lift up all the victims of this tragedy.”

Large crowds turned out for a candle-lit vigil in Waukesha on Monday evening, and Reilly said a community fund had been set up “to support the needs of the families”.

Witnesses described terrifying scenes as the SUV burst through barricades at about 4.40pm on Sunday and sped towards the performers. One said the driver appeared to be swerving from side to side, apparently targeting those marching.

Corey Montiho, a member of the Waukesha school board, told the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel the driver hit his daughter's dance team.

"There were pom-poms and shoes and spilled hot chocolate everywhere. I had to go from one crumpled body to the other to find my daughter," he said. "My wife and two daughters were almost hit. Please pray for everybody. Please pray."

Montiho said he made eye contact with the man driving the vehicle, the Washington Post reported. He described him as "calm and composed".

"I saw bodies and kids and dads not breathing," he said.

Tony Evers, the [Wisconsin](#) governor, ordered flags at half mast.

"Kathy and I are praying for Waukesha tonight and all the kids, families and community members affected by this senseless act," Evers said in a statement.

"I'm grateful for the first responders and folks who acted quickly to help."

The Associated Press contributed reporting

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/nov/22/waukesha-christmas-parade-investigators-suspect-wisconsin>

[Adele](#)

Adele's 30 becomes biggest-selling album of 2021 in US after three days



Her biggest-selling album yet? ... copies of the Adele album 30.
Photograph: Tolga Akmen/AFP/Getty Images

[Ben Beaumont-Thomas](#)

[@ben_bt](#)

Tue 23 Nov 2021 04.42 EST

Adele's 30 is already the biggest-selling album of the year in the US, just three days after it went on sale.

Using a metric that combines sales of vinyl, CDs and downloads alongside streaming, 30 has sold over 575,000 copies. Adele has overtaken the previous highest seller Taylor Swift, whose December 2020 album [Evermore](#) has sold 462,000 copies this year.

30, a [typically lovelorn album](#) that addresses the musician's 2019 split from her husband, is also performing strongly in the UK. In the midweek album chart reported yesterday, it outsold the rest of the Top 40 combined, with 167,000 chart sales (again combined sales and streaming figures). Adele looks certain to beat Abba to the biggest first week of 2021, after the Swedes sold 204,000 copies of [Voyage](#) on its release last month. The UK's biggest-selling album of the year so far is Olivia Rodrigo's Sour, with 320,000 chart sales as of the end of the third quarter in October, according to the Official Charts Company.

Adele could also achieve the rare feat of [appearing at Nos 1, 2 and 3 in the singles chart](#), where she currently sits in the midweeks. Easy on Me is set to spend its sixth week at No 1, with Oh My God at No 2 and My Little Love at No 3. Only one artist has achieved that feat before: Justin Bieber, whose singles Love Yourself, Sorry and What Do You Mean occupied the top three in 2016.

Swift is currently No 1 in the US and UK album charts with her re-recorded and expanded version of 2012 album Red, [Red \(Taylor's Version\)](#), making it her 10th chart-topper in the US and eighth in the UK. She is also top of the US singles chart with All Too Well (Taylor's Version), which at 10 minutes and 13 seconds is [the longest song](#) to ever reach No 1 there.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2021/nov/23/adele-30-becomes-biggest-selling-album-of-2021-in-us-after-three-days>

[China](#)

Chinese birthrate falls to a new low



A man and a child walk past prams at a shopping mall in Beijing. The Chinese government is under pressure to prevent a potential population decline. Photograph: Wu Hong/EPA

[Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei

[@heldavidson](#)

Tue 23 Nov 2021 04.37 EST

China's birthrate has plummeted to the lowest level seen in official annual data covering the period from 2020 back to 1978, as the government struggles to stave off a looming demographic crisis.

Figures released by the country's national bureau of statistics show there were 8.5 births per 1,000 people in 2020, the first time in decades that the figure has fallen below 10. In 1978, the figure was more than 18 per 1,000.

The statistical yearbook, released at the weekend, said the natural rate of population growth – taking in births and deaths – was also at a new low of 1.45.

The government is under pressure to prevent a potential population decline after decades of interventionist policies on childbirth and more recent pressures including high living costs.

It did not give reasons for the dramatic drop, but demographers have [previously pointed](#) to the relatively low number of women of child-bearing age and the rising cost of raising a family.

The yearbook reported a drop in per capita spending on educational, cultural and recreational costs, and health and medical services for rural and urban Chinese, and an increase in household income. Housing costs also rose.

China's population woes are largely driven by a one-child policy that was implemented in 1980 and ran – with some exemptions – until 2015, but they are part of a broader pattern around the world, [particularly in east Asia](#).

Governments and local authorities have introduced a swathe of policies seeking to reverse the trend, from [relaxing limits](#) on having children, to easing costs associated with education and child rearing, and introducing mandatory ["cooling off" periods for divorces](#).

China's yearbook revealed a fall in divorces for the first time since at least 1985, to about 4.3m, though there were also fewer marriages, 8.14m, compared with 9.27m the year before.

But it appears the government's policies have so far failed to adequately address young people's concerns about the costs associated with having children.

“What the Chinese government is doing has already been done by the Japanese government, and the former is not as rich as the latter,” said Yi Fuxian, a senior scientist in obstetrics and gynaecology at the University of

Wisconsin-Madison. “Japan can provide free healthcare and education, but China can’t.”

Yi, the author of Big Country With an Empty Nest, said there were many social and societal influences on China’s low birthrate, and interventionist policies on reproduction had also shaped public sentiment.

“Most people just want one child, as was promoted by the government, and they have become used to having just one child. They don’t want a second or third despite the policy changes,” Yi said.

“For the foreseeable future the Chinese government can’t do much, because Japan has done everything it can and must consider its society and economics to make fundamental changes. The difficulty of this is even higher than the reform and opening up in 1979. I don’t know if the Chinese government has such boldness.”

Yao Meixiong, a demographics expert and adjunct professor at Huaqiao University’s school of economics and finance, told the local outlet Jiemian that the low levels of desire to have children was a wake-up call for China’s development.

“The response to the population crisis is in a race against time, and measures to encourage childbirth must be expedited,” Yao said.

Additional reporting by Xiaoqian Zhu

This article was amended on 25 November 2021 to clarify a heading and text describing China’s birthrate as the “lowest since 1978”. That year marked the start of a body of data cited (1978-2020) – not a low in Chinese birthrates.

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Ethiopia

US, France and Germany tell nationals to leave Ethiopia as PM commits to battle



‘Let’s meet at the front’: Abiy Ahmed has issued a rallying cry to Ethiopians in the year-long battle with TPLF rebels. Photograph: Presidential Press Service/Reuters

Staff and agencies in Addis Ababa

Tue 23 Nov 2021 13.53 EST

The US, France and Germany have called on their nationals to leave Ethiopia immediately as the prime minister, Abiy Ahmed, vowed to lead his country’s troops “from the battlefield”, the latest turn in a devastating year-long war with rebel groups.

The Nobel Peace prize winner said in a statement posted to Twitter: “I will mobilise to the front to lead the defence forces. Those who want to be

among the Ethiopian children who will be hailed by history, rise up for your country.”

Tens of thousands of people have been killed in the war between Ethiopian and allied forces and fighters from the country’s northern Tigray region. A de facto blockade on Tigray has triggered a humanitarian crisis and prevented the delivery of essential medical supplies.

In response to the worsening situation France, Germany and the US state department urged their citizens on Tuesday to leave on the first available commercial flight.

The Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) rebel group have continued to press towards Addis Ababa, claiming control of the town of Shewa Robit, just 220km north-east of the capital by road.

The US and others have warned that Africa’s second-most populous country could fracture and destabilise the whole Horn of Africa.

Abiy was awarded the Nobel Peace prize in 2019 after he signed a deal to end a nearly 20-year military stalemate with Eritrea after their 1998-2000 border war.

But last November he sent troops into Ethiopia’s northernmost Tigray region to topple the TPLF, saying the move came in response to TPLF attacks on army camps.

Though he promised a swift victory, by late June the TPLF had regrouped and retaken most of Tigray including its capital, Mekelle, prompting the federal army to largely withdraw from the region.

Since then the TPLF has pushed into the neighbouring Afar and Amhara regions.

It has also formed an alliance with other insurgent groups including the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), which is active in the Oromia region surrounding Addis Ababa.

Fears of a rebel advance on the capital have prompted several countries including the US and the UK to pull out non-essential diplomatic staff.

These countries are also urging their citizens to leave Ethiopia while commercial flights are still available.

In a year's time, Abiy's government has gone from describing the conflict as a "law enforcement operation" to an "existential war".

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South Korea

Former South Korean dictator Chun Doo-hwan dies aged 90



Former South Korean president Chun Doo-hwan, who crushed pro-democracy demonstrations in 1980, has died. Photograph: AP

Reuters

Tue 23 Nov 2021 00.08 EST

Former South Korean president, Chun Doo-hwan, who presided over the infamous Gwangju massacre during his iron-fisted eight-year rule, has died aged 90.

Chun had multiple myeloma, a blood cancer which was in remission, and his health had deteriorated recently, his former press secretary Min Chung-ki told reporters. He passed away at his Seoul home early in the morning and his body will be moved to a hospital for a funeral later in the day.

A former military commander, Chun oversaw the [1980 Gwangju massacre](#) of pro-democracy demonstrators, a crime for which he was later convicted and received a commuted death sentence.

His death came about a month after another former president and his coup comrade Roh Tae-woo, who played a crucial but controversial role in the country's troubled transition to democracy, died at age 88.

Aloof and ramrod-straight, Chun defended the coup at his mid-90s trial as necessary to save the nation from a political crisis and denied sending troops into Gwangju.

"I am sure that I would take the same action, if the same situation arose," Chun told the court.

Chun was born on 6 March 1931, in Yulgok-myeon, a poor farming town in the south-eastern county of Hapcheon, during Japanese rule over Korea.

He joined the military straight out of high school, working his way up the ranks until he was appointed a commander in 1979.

Taking charge of the investigation into the assassination of President Park Chung-hee that year, Chun courted key military allies and gained control of South Korea's intelligence agencies to headline a coup in the December.

"In front of the most powerful organisations under the Park Chung-hee presidency, it surprised me how easily [Chun] gained control over them and how skilfully he took advantage of the circumstances. In an instant he seemed to have grown into a giant," Park Jun-kwang, Chun's subordinate during the coup later told journalist Cho Gab-je.

Chun's eight-year rule in the presidential Blue House was characterised by brutality and political repression. It was, however, also marked by growing economic prosperity.

Chun resigned from office amid a nationwide student-led democratic movement in 1987 demanding a direct electoral system.

In 1995, he was charged with mutiny, treason and was arrested after refusing to appear at the prosecutors' office and fleeing to his home town.

At what local media dubbed the “trial of the century”, he and coup co-conspirator and successor as president, Roh Tae-Woo, were found guilty of mutiny, treason and bribery. In their verdict, judges said Chun’s rise to power came “through illegal means which inflicted enormous damage on the people”.

Thousands of students were believed to have been killed at Gwangju, according to testimonies by survivors, former military officers and investigators.

Roh was given a lengthy jail term while Chun was sentenced to death. However, that was commuted by the Seoul high court in recognition of Chun’s role in the fast-paced economic development of the Asian “Tiger” economy and the peaceful transfer of the presidency to Roh in 1988.

Both men were pardoned and freed from jail in 1997 by then-president Kim Young-sam, in what he called an effort to promote “national unity”.

Chun made several returns to the spotlight. He caused a national furore in 2003 when he claimed total assets of 291,000 won (\$245) of cash, two dogs and some home appliances – while owing 220.5 billion won in fines. His four children and other relatives were later found to own large swaths of land in Seoul and luxurious villas in the United States.

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Headlines saturday 27 november 2021

- [Live Covid: Omicron variant spreads to Europe; UK expert says ‘reboot of pandemic’ extremely unlikely](#)
- [US Restrictions on travel from southern Africa to be introduced](#)
- [South Africa Officials accuse UK and others of ‘knee-jerk’ reaction](#)
- [At a glance Everything you need to know about the new variant](#)

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[Coronavirus](#)

Covid live: UK to bring in new measures after Omicron variant detected; Israel bans oversea visitors – as it happened

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2021/nov/27/covid-news-live-omicron-variant-spreads-to-europe-countries-rush-to-impose-travel-bans-on-southern-africa>

Biden administration

US to restrict travel from southern Africa over Omicron Covid variant fears



Joe Biden visits Nantucket downtown following lunch with family on Friday. Photograph: Tasos Katopodis/Reuters

[Victoria Bekiempis](#) and [Martin Pengelly](#) in New York

Sat 27 Nov 2021 01.58 EST

Joe Biden's chief medical adviser, Anthony Fauci, said on Friday there was "no indication" the new "[Omicron](#)" coronavirus variant discovered in southern Africa had reached the US.

Nonetheless, the [Biden administration](#) – along with the UK, Canada and Australia governments – said it would restrict travel from South Africa and seven other countries in southern Africa, starting on Monday.

In a statement from Nantucket, the island off Massachusetts on which the president was spending the Thanksgiving break, Biden said: “This morning I was briefed by my chief medical adviser, Dr Tony Fauci, and the members of our Covid response team about the Omicron variant which is spreading through [South Africa](#).

“As a precautionary measure until we have more information, I’m ordering additional air travel restrictions from [South Africa](#) and seven other countries. These new restrictions will take effect” on Monday.

The Washington Post [quoted](#) an unnamed official as saying the restrictions were being imposed “out of an abundance of caution”. They will apply to travelers from South Africa, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Lesotho, Eswatini, Mozambique and Malawi but not to US citizens or permanent residents.

Other countries moved quickly to enact travel limitations due to variant fears. Britain has [banned](#) flights from South Africa, Namibia, Lesotho, Botswana, Eswatini and Zimbabwe. European Union states [agreed](#) to introduce restrictions on travel from South Africa, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia and Zimbabwe. Singapore, Japan and Thailand also restricted travel.

Canada is banning foreign travellers to the country from seven African countries, and [Australia has announced similar measures](#).

The World Health Organization gave the variant [B.1.1.529](#) a name, Omicron, and said an advisory group had recommended it should be designated as “of concern”. The WHO also said preliminary evidence suggested the latest variant carried a “higher risk of re-infection than other variants of concern”.

Some health officials expressed concerned over whether present vaccines could protect against the Omicron variant.

The new variant has more than 30 mutations on the virus’s “spike protein”, by which the virus unlocks cells, more than twice the number of spike protein mutations carried by the highly transmissible Delta variant. That has

spurred fears antibodies from vaccination or previous infection might not be well matched, and thus become less protective.

BioNTech, which produced a Covid vaccine with Pfizer, [said it would know](#) in two weeks whether the shot works well against the Omicron variant, based on lab-based experiments.

“Pfizer and BioNTech have taken actions months ago to be able to adapt the mRNA vaccine within six weeks and ship initial batches within 100 days in the event of an escape variant,” the company said in a statement.

In [remarks](#) to reporters, Biden said: “We don’t know a lot about the variant except that it is a big concern and seems to spread rapidly, and I spent about a half-hour this morning with my Covid team led by Dr Fauci, so that was the decision we made.”

Biden said he was not considering any other orders “at the moment”.

In his statement, the president said US adults who are fully vaccinated should get a booster shot. Those not yet fully vaccinated, he said, should “get vaccinated today”.

“This includes both children and adults,” Biden said. “America is leading the world in vaccinating children aged five to 11 and has been vaccinating teens for many months now. But we need more Americans in all age groups to get this life-saving protection. If you have not gotten vaccinated or have not taken your children to get vaccinated, now is the time.”

The president also called on “other countries to match America’s speed and generosity” in donating vaccines to poorer nations and said he would “call on the nations gathering next week for the World Trade Organization ministerial meeting to meet the US challenge to waive intellectual property protections for Covid vaccines, so these vaccines can be manufactured globally”.

The Omicron variant has been found in South Africa and Botswana, as well as in a person who traveled to Hong Kong from South Africa. [Belgium was](#)

[the first European nation](#) with a confirmed case. Israel has also confirmed the presence of the variant.

Experts said the public should not panic. Sajid Javid, the British health secretary, [said](#): “More data is needed but we’re taking precautions now.”

Fauci spoke to CNN. He said the variant was “raising some concern, particularly with regard to possibly transmissibility increase, and possibly evasion of immune response”.

Fauci said Omicron appeared to be spreading at “a reasonably rapid rate” and said US scientists were in “very active communication” with their South African counterparts, seeking to learn more.

“Right now, we’re getting the material together with our South African colleagues to get a situation where you could actually directly test it,” he said. “So, right now you’re talking about sort of like a red flag that this might be an issue – but we don’t know.

“Once you test it, you’ll know for sure whether or not it does or does not evade the antibodies that we make – for example against the virus, through a vaccine. The answer is we don’t know right now, but we’re going to find out for sure.

He continued: “This is really something that’s in motion – and we just arranged, right now, a discussion between our scientists and the South African scientists … to really get the facts. We want to find out scientist-to-scientist exactly what is going on.”

Fauci said research work was necessary to “find out if in fact [the Omicron variant] does evade the vaccines that we’re doing. You’re prepared to do everything you need to do to protect the American public, but you want to make sure there’s a basis for doing that.”

US stocks tumbled significantly on Friday in the wake of news about Omicron. The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell around 905 points, marking its worst day of the year, according to NBC News. The S&P 500 fell 2.3%

and Nasdaq Composite dropped 2.2%. Airlines and aviation company stocks took significant hits.

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Coronavirus

South Africa accuses UK and others of ‘knee-jerk’ reaction to new variant



People wait to get a Covid-19 vaccination at a shopping mall in Johannesburg, South Africa. Only about 35% of adults in the country are fully vaccinated. Photograph: Denis Farrell/AP

[Nick Dall](#) in Cape Town and [Lizzy Davies](#)

Fri 26 Nov 2021 13.09 EST

South Africa has angrily condemned travel restrictions imposed by countries including Britain as “knee-jerk and draconian” as it scrambled to assess the potential for the new Covid-19 [variant](#) to unleash a deadly fourth wave.

In a heated press conference on Friday, the health minister, Joe Phaahla, said his country had acted transparently by alerting the world to the B.1.1.529 variant, which was detected by its scientists earlier this week.

But others had responded by imposing restrictions on flights to and from the southern African region that were completely unjustified, he said. The UK had announced its decision to impose a temporary ban without consulting the South African authorities, he added.

“The reaction of countries to impose travel bans are completely against the norms and standards as guided by the World Health Organization,” said Phaahla. “The same countries that are enacting this kind of knee-jerk, draconian reaction are battling their own waves.”

Scientists at South Africa’s National Institute For Communicable Diseases identified the new variant among a spike in cases in Gauteng province, which includes the cities of Johannesburg and Pretoria.

Within hours of being briefed, the South African government learned that countries including Britain were [imposing temporary travel restrictions](#). Botswana, where the earliest sample showing the variant was collected on 11 November, was also affected, along with Lesotho, Eswatini, Zimbabwe and Namibia.

Since then anger has been growing in South Africa, which was hoping for a much needed holiday season reprieve from a Covid-induced tourism slump. The country was on the UK’s red list for much of 2021, despite having lower infection numbers for much of this period, and was [only removed in October](#).

“The UK has been very short-sighted. It’s just absolutely ridiculous,” said Bryan West, sales manager of the Abelana game reserve in the north-east of the country. Only that morning, he had had two groups of guests leave early in a rush to catch flights back to Britain and Germany.

“I think the UK overreacted,” he added. “South Africa’s very safe to be in at the moment.” At Abelana, staff were all wearing masks and sticking closely to Covid protocol, he said: “We limit the number of guests on the [safari] vehicle, so there’s more space.”

Echoing his irritation, Otto de Vries, the CEO of the Association of Southern African Travel Agents, called it a “a knee-jerk reaction” that put airlines,

hotels, travel businesses and travellers in a difficult situation.

The economic impact was instantaneous. The Johannesburg stock exchange had fallen almost 2% by midday on Friday, and the rand was trading at its weakest in more than a year.

“The world should provide support to South Africa and Africa and not discriminate or isolate it,” [tweeted](#) Prof Tulio de Oliveira, the director of the centre for epidemic response and innovation.

“We have been very transparent with scientific information. We identified, made data public, and raised the alarm as the infections are just increasing. We did this to protect our country and the world in spite of potentially suffering massive discrimination.”

Phaahla’s reprimand came as President Cyril Ramaphosa prepared to discuss reimposing lockdown restrictions at a meeting of the national coronavirus command council on Sunday. The country is currently on alert level 1 – the lowest of five, indicating “a low Covid-19 spread with a high health system readiness”.

But the vaccination programme is flagging, with daily jabs at their lowest point since June 2021. And the country is about to enter its holiday period, a time when schools and businesses close for the long summer break, people travel widely and enjoy large festive gatherings.

The world should provide support to South Africa and Africa and not discriminate or isolate it

Prof Tulio de Oliveira

On Friday the government appealed to all South Africans aged 12 and over to get jabbed as soon as possible.

The country’s top scientists were “in intensive engagement with all established surveillance systems to understand the new variant and what the potential implications could be,” [a statement](#) said.

“While this work continues, South Africans must take all measures to protect themselves against coronavirus infection, beginning with vaccination against Covid-19,” it added. Only about 35% of adults in the country are fully vaccinated.

Should the new variant prove to be highly transmissible, there are fears that a fourth wave could materialise – and in a more dangerous form than had been anticipated.

However, Dr Angelique Coetzee, chair of the South African Medical Association and a practising GP based in Pretoria, said it was “premature” to make predictions of a health crisis.

“It’s all speculation at this stage. It may be it’s highly transmissible, but so far the cases we are seeing are extremely mild,” she said. “Maybe two weeks from now I will have a different opinion, but this is what we are seeing. So are we seriously worried? No. We are concerned and we watch what’s happening. But for now we’re saying, ‘OK: there’s a whole hype out there. [We’re] not sure why.’”

Coetzee said she would like to see the government embark on a push to get more people vaccinated, but added: “Unfortunately, it’s not only the responsibility of the government; it’s the responsibility of the public as well ... You can only ask people so many times to go and get vaccinated, and if you don’t listen, then there’s consequences, and then you have to take the consequences.”

South Africa’s vaccination programme was bedevilled by protracted teething problems, most notably the government’s controversial decision in February to suspend the rollout of the AstraZeneca vaccine due to concerns – now dispelled – over its efficacy.

However, the programme has since sped up, and for the past several months supply has far outstripped demand.

In [a tweet](#) directed at the department of health on Friday, Shabir Madhi, professor of vaccinology at University of the Witwatersrand, said: “SOS ...

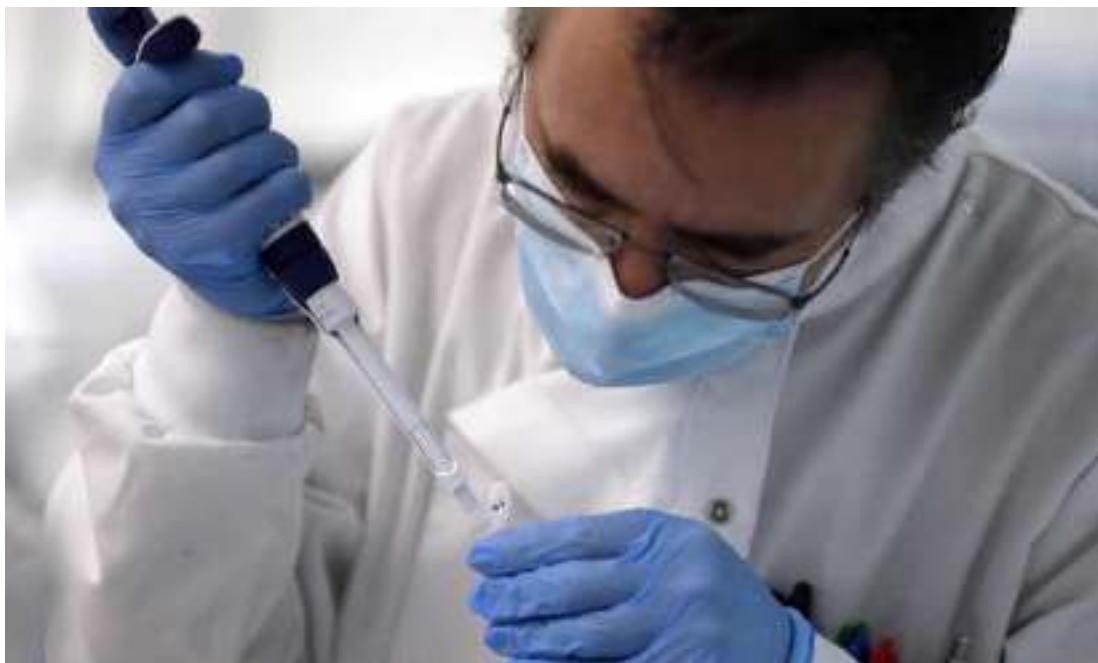
there is no time to hold back” on boosting key sections of the population such as over-65s and the immunocompromised. “And do so without creating obstacles. Much more sensible than keeping 17 million doses in the depot.”

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Coronavirus

Omicron: everything you need to know about new Covid variant



The new variant has been called Omicron. Photograph: Frank Augstein/AP

*Hannah Devlin Science correspondent
@hannahdev*

Fri 26 Nov 2021 13.52 EST

What is it called?

The variant was initially referred to as B.1.1.529, but on Friday was designated as a variant of concern (VOC) by the World [Health](#) Organization because of its “concerning” mutations and because “preliminary evidence suggests an increased risk of reinfection with this variant”. The WHO system assigns such variants a Greek letter, to provide a non-stigmatising label that does not associate new variants with the location where they were first detected. The new variant has been called Omicron.

When was the Omicron variant first detected?

The B.1.1.529 variant was identified on Tuesday and highlighted as a concern due to its high number of mutations, which could lead it to evade immunity. It was also linked to a surge in case numbers in the Gauteng province of South Africa, an urban area containing Pretoria and Johannesburg, in the past two weeks. These two factors put it quickly on the radar of international monitors, with the chief medical adviser to the UK Health and Security Agency describing the variant as the “[most worrying we've seen](#)”.

Where did it come from?

Although initially linked to Gauteng, [the variant](#) did not necessarily originate there. The earliest sample showing the variant was collected in Botswana on 11 November. Scientists say that the unusual constellation of mutations suggests it may have emerged during a chronic infection of an immunocompromised person, such as an untreated HIV/Aids patient.

Why are scientists worried about it?

The variant has more than 30 mutations on its spike protein – the key used by the virus to unlock our body’s cells – more than double the number carried [by Delta](#). Such a dramatic change has raised concerns that the antibodies from previous infections or vaccination may no longer be well matched. Purely based on knowing the list of mutations, scientists anticipate that the virus will be more likely to infect – or reinfect – people who have immunity to earlier variants.

Is it more transmissible?

This is not yet clearcut but the emerging picture is worrying. There has been a [surge of cases in South Africa](#) from 273 cases on 16 November to more than 1,200 by the start of this week. More than 80% of these were from Gauteng province and preliminary analysis suggests the variant has rapidly become the dominant strain. The R value, which indicates how fast an epidemic is growing, is estimated to be 1.47 for South Africa as a whole, but

1.93 in Gauteng. There is a chance this is a statistical blip linked to a super-spreader event but the data has triggered enough concern for precautionary measures.

Will existing vaccines work against it?

Scientists are concerned by the number of mutations and the fact some of them have already been linked to an ability to evade existing immune protection. These are theoretical predictions, though, and studies are rapidly being conducted to test how effectively antibodies neutralise the new variant. Real-world data on reinfection rates will also give a clearer indication on the extent of any change in immunity.

Scientists do not expect that the variant will be entirely unrecognisable to existing antibodies, just that current vaccines may give less protection. So a crucial objective remains to increase vaccination rates, including third doses for at-risk groups.

What about existing drugs?

Scientists expect that recently approved antiviral drugs, [such as Merck's pill](#), will work as effectively against the new variant because these drugs do not target the spike protein – they work by stopping the virus from replicating. However, there is a bigger risk that [monoclonal antibodies](#), such as Regeneron's treatment, could fail or partially fail because they target parts of the virus that will have mutated.

Will the variant cause more severe Covid?

There is no information yet on whether the variant leads to a change in Covid symptoms or severity – this is something South African scientists will be closely monitoring. Since there is a lag between infections and more serious illness, it will take several weeks before any clear data is available. At this stage, scientists say there is no strong reason to suspect that the latest variant will be either worse or milder.

Can the vaccines be tweaked and how long could that take?

Yes, teams behind vaccines are already working on updating vaccines with the new spike protein to prepare for an eventuality where a new version might be needed.

A lot of the preparation work for such an update took place when the Beta and Delta variants emerged – although in those cases existing vaccines have held up well. This means research teams were already poised to create new versions of vaccines and have discussed with regulators what additional trials would be required. However, it could still take four to six months before updated vaccines, if required, are widely available.

How likely is it to spread around the world?

So far, the majority of confirmed cases have been in South Africa, with a handful in Botswana and Hong Kong. A further case was detected on Thursday evening [in Israel](#) – an individual who had returned from Malawi – and two other cases are suspected in the country. On Friday, [Belgium confirmed](#) it had detected a case in someone who had travelled to Egypt and Turkey.

Nevertheless, given that there is community transmission in southern Africa, if there is a transmissibility advantage the new variant is likely to have already spread undetected to other countries.

Previous experience shows [travel bans](#) tend to buy time, but, short of taking a [zero-Covid](#) approach with hard lockdowns, these measures are unlikely to stop the spread of a new variant entirely.

2021.11.27 - Spotlight

- 'People are talking about us instead of hiding us away' The stars with Down's syndrome lighting up our screens
- The first Covid-19 books Pandemic novels have arrived, but are we ready for them?
- 'It was a call to arms' Jodi Picoult and Karin Slaughter on writing Covid-19 into novels
- Fishmongers' Hall attack Author Preti Taneja on realising she had taught the attacker: 'We were all unsafe'

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[Down's syndrome](#)

The stars with Down's syndrome lighting up our screens: 'People are talking about us instead of hiding us away'



From left: model Madeline Stuart, presenter George Webster, actors Kassie Mundhenk and Tommy Jessop, model Ellie Goldstein and actor Zack

Gottsgagen. Photograph: David Kelly/Fabio De Paola/Chris Buck/Sophia Spring/Jeffery Salter/The Guardian

Hayley Maitland

Sat 27 Nov 2021 03.00 EST

In the middle of last winter's lockdown, while still adjusting to the news of their newborn son's Down's syndrome diagnosis, Matt and Charlotte Court spotted a casting ad from BBC Drama. It called for a baby to star in a [Call the Midwife](#) episode depicting the surprising yet joyful arrival of a child with Down's syndrome in 60s London, when institutionalisation remained horribly common. The resulting shoot would prove a deeply cathartic experience for the young family. "Before that point, I had shut off certain doors for baby Nate in my mind through a lack of knowledge," Matt remembers. "To then have that opportunity opened my eyes. If he can act one day, which is bloody difficult, then he's got a fighting chance. He was reborn for us on that TV programme."

It's a fitting metaphor for the larger shift in Down's syndrome visibility over the past few years. While *Call the Midwife* has featured a number of disability-focused plotlines in its nearly decade-long run – actor Daniel Laurie, who has Down's syndrome, is a series regular – the history of the condition's representation on screen is one largely defined by absence.

I don't like the word 'disability'. To me, Kassie is differently able, and she was as capable as any other member of the cast or crew

Kate Winslet, actor

A watershed moment came in 2019 with the premiere of [The Peanut Butter Falcon](#), starring newcomer Zack Gottsgagen, who has Down's syndrome, opposite Shia LaBeouf and Dakota Johnson. After meeting film-maker friends Michael Schwartz and Tyler Nilson at Zeno Mountain Farm, a theatre camp for disabled and non-disabled adults in Vermont, Gottsgagen asked them to write a feature-length drama in which he could star, given the total absence of leads with Down's syndrome in Hollywood. It proved a herculean (and financially draining) task to get the resulting movie into

cinemas, with several streaming services claiming that Gottsagen was not a “marketable” face. “Mike and Tyler put their lives on the line,” Gottsagen’s mother, Shelley, shares affectionately from her Florida home. “They were both homeless in the process [of making the film].”

The Peanut Butter Falcon’s legacy can be felt in the growing numbers of characters with Down’s syndrome appearing on screen. Dakota Johnson is looking to create a TV show for Gottsagen through her production company TeaTime, while Netflix has partnered with the BBC on a five-year programme to get more talent with disabilities in front of and behind the camera. Then there’s Brad Ingelsby’s Emmy-sweeping [Mare of Easttown](#) for HBO, which cast teenager Kassie Mundhenk as Moira Ross, the daughter of detective Mare’s best friend.

“Children with Down’s syndrome were always part of my life growing up,” Ingelsby reflects over the phone from Los Angeles. “If you’re creating a ‘portrait’ of a community, it just makes sense to have someone with Down’s syndrome as part of the ecosystem.”

Kate Winslet, who starred as Mare, goes one step further. “We were proud that our storyline included a young person who may not typically be cast because of their different abilities,” she tells me. “I don’t like the word ‘disability’ – I never have. To me, Kassie is differently able, and she was as capable as any other member of the cast or crew in coping with being part of an intense team on a buzzing set. She took it in her stride like any other professional would.”



Model Ellie Goldstein and Line of Duty actor Tommy Jessop. Ellie wears jumper by Self Portrait, from mytheresa.com. Skirt, mollygoddard.com. Hair clips from a selection by missoma.com and alighieri.com. Tommy wears polo shirt by Gucci, from matchesfashion.com. Trousers by Isabel Benenato, from selfridges.com. Ellie styled by Melanie Wilkinson. Tommy styled by Helen Seamons. Styling assistant: Peter Bevan. Makeup: Neusa Neves at Terri Manduca using SUQQU makeup and skincare by Dermalogica UK. Hair: Sven Bayerbach at Carol Hayes Management using Kiehl's since 1851. Photograph: Sophia Spring/The Guardian

Writers are asking leads with Down's syndrome to tackle difficult plotlines – including ones focused on their marginalisation – rather than shying away from awkward topics. Take the last season of Line of Duty, which saw Tommy Jessop's character Terry Boyle mistreated by police over the course of a brutal investigation. Far from struggling to handle the material, according to the show's creator, Jed Mercurio, Jessop "empowered us all to give him greater responsibilities". Co-star Vicky McClure adds that he remained "a true professional" throughout even their most "challenging scenes". Jessop's mother, Jane, who has always championed her son's talents and founded Winchester's Blue Apple theatre for those with disabilities, seconds the hard-to-watch plot's necessity: "It highlighted things that needed highlighting." She says that actors with Down's syndrome "don't have to accept everything" if a part is triggering for any reason.

It is a revolution that Los Angeles-based agent Gail Williamson has worked for decades to precipitate as head of KMR Talent Agency's dedicated diversity division – a rarity in Hollywood. As the mother of a son with Down's syndrome, Williamson witnessed the dramatic impact representation can have after the historic casting in the 90s sitcom *Life Goes On* of actor Chris Burke, who has Down's syndrome. In the late 80s, she remembers going to dinner “with my son on my hip, and just silencing the restaurant”. With the introduction of Burke's character, Corky, on one of America's most-watched TV channels, waiters began speaking to her little boy directly.

Among Williamson's most high-profile clients are *Glee*'s Lauren Potter and *American Horror Story*'s Jamie Brewer. (Tellingly, both series are [Ryan Murphy](#) projects; Williamson credits the producer's interactions with her young son during a bit part on *Nip/Tuck* with opening Murphy's eyes to the possibility of hiring talent with Down's syndrome.) The numbers alone speak volumes. When Williamson joined KMR in 2013, she had about 25 clients with disabilities who made approximately \$50,000 (£37,000) in a year. Today, she looks after more than 700 individuals, with KMR's disabled clients collectively bringing in \$3m in 2019.

Finding a talented actor with Down's syndrome isn't difficult. So please do it

Lindsey Ferrentino, playwright

The world of theatre is a different story. While organisations such as Blue Apple theatre and Zeno Mountain Farm have been staging elaborate productions starring performers with disabilities for years, the mainstream industry has been slower to embrace the Down's syndrome community. Jamie Brewer became the first actor with Down's syndrome to play a lead in a [Broadway](#) or off-Broadway production in 2018, when she starred in *Amy and the Orphans*, which depicts three siblings reunited at their father's wake. Playwright Lindsey Ferrentino's telling note to directors when she submitted the work? “Finding a talented actor with Down's syndrome isn't difficult. So please do it.” Netflix is adapting the work into a film, with Ferrentino set to direct.

“There’s less of a safety net for performers in theatre due to a lack of funding, and you need those mechanisms in place,” says Ben Weatherill, an alumnus of the Royal Court Young Writers Programme, who in 2018 wrote the [acclaimed romcom *Jellyfish*](#). Its staging – starring Sarah Gordy – at the Bush theatre and the National Theatre proved a learning experience (and another first for an actor with Down’s syndrome), with Weatherill making each performance as accessible as possible: commissioning sign language interpreters; producing simplified guides to the material; and maintaining quiet spaces for anyone who felt overwhelmed. “Most of the people who came through the National’s doors for *Jellyfish* had never been there before,” Weatherill enthuses. “It’s the clearest argument for representation I’ve ever seen.”

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Meanwhile, choreographer Daniel Vais has taken a build-it-and-they-will-come approach since founding his inclusive performing arts studio, Culture Device, in London in 2010: he staged *The Rite* – an interpretation of Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring* – at the Royal Opera House, and toured the world with [Drag Syndrome](#), with troupes of dancers and drag kings and queens with Down’s syndrome. “Everyone assumes that what we’re doing is like an after-school club,” he says, “These are artists. My choreography is surreal and abstract, and I realised that talent with Down’s syndrome could simply perform it better than anyone else.”

His next project, Radical Beauty, is a series of high-fashion photographs of individuals with Down’s syndrome taken around the world, which will be released as a coffee-table book and major touring exhibition in 2022. His simple words of counsel when his artists face marginalisation? “Listen, this is avant garde – and the world is a bit slow.” It seems it may be catching up at last.

New faces: meet the game changers

Zack Gottsagen, actor

‘You can do anything you have in your mind, and I always have something in

mine'



Zack Gottsagen. Photo assistant: John Karp. Stylist: Anthony Bermudez. Groomer: Paola Orlando. Photograph: Jeffery Salter/The Guardian

At the 2020 Academy Awards, Zack Gottsagen became the first actor with Down's syndrome to present an Oscar, [eliciting a roaring standing ovation](#) the moment he appeared on stage in a crystal-studded bow tie and tuxedo. "I met all the famous people around," he says, his face lighting up at the memory. "Adam Driver, Jamie Foxx, Brad Pitt." It's a lesser-known talent who inspired his career, though. "I got into acting because of Corky," he says, referring to a character from the 90s American sitcom, *Life Goes On*, played by Chris Burke, who has Down's syndrome. "I saw him as a five-year-old, and I still remember it. He made me realise that I could do it."

He quickly committed to training at school and at home. (His parents would give him three VHS copies of *Grease* every year for his birthday, knowing he would wear them out within a few months while practising his Danny Zuko impression in their living room in Florida.) Yet, as an adult, Gottsagen felt disheartened about the lack of Hollywood parts for actors with Down's syndrome, so he challenged his friends at Zeno Mountain Farm, an acting camp in Vermont, to write and direct a movie in which he could star – despite their total lack of experience, Hollywood connections, or financing.

Through Gottsagen's sheer force of will (not to mention cooperation from Shia LaBeouf and Dakota Johnson), *The Peanut Butter Falcon* finally hit cinemas in 2019, and became one of the highest-grossing indie films of the year.

“You can do anything you have in your mind, and I always have something in mine,” says Gottsagen, who plays a young man who escapes from a care home to follow his dream of wrestling. Not only did the 36-year-old improvise many of his lines, he also did every one of his own stunts, from plunging off a 21ft dock into a river, to being wrenched backwards off his feet after shooting a gun. Up next? A turn as a drag queen in the comedy *God Save the Queens*, starring *Drag Race*'s Michelle Visage.

Madeline Stuart, model

‘The fashion show runway is my happy place, where I truly feel alive’



Madeline Stuart. Stylist: Annabel Falco. Stylist's assistant: Jarrah. Hair and makeup: Ginelle Dale. Photograph: David Kelly/The Guardian

Few fashion careers begin quite as auspiciously as Madeline Stuart's did. After making her first appearance at New York fashion week in 2015, the Australian model found herself one of the most tweeted-about people in the world that day. “I felt amazing,” enthuses Stuart, who studied with a coach

from Juilliard before her debut. “Preparing was a little stressful, and there was a moment when I needed a quiet space to try to relax, but now I don’t need to prepare. The runway is my happy place, where I truly feel alive.”

Her journey to the catwalk began a few years earlier, when the now 25-year-old lost a lot of weight for health reasons. (For certain people with Down’s syndrome, a slower metabolism can contribute to heart problems, which Stuart has struggled with since childhood.) When her mother uploaded a self-styled before-and-after photo on Facebook in celebration of her progress, it quickly racked up 7m views, earning her a devoted following and requests to model for global brands in the process. “Social media has shown us that people want to hear people’s stories,” she says now. “It is not enough just to be pretty; you need to be authentic and caring for people to embrace you.”

Today, Stuart has walked for more than 100 designers, everywhere from Paris to Dubai, occasionally pausing to high five the “frow”. But she has had to fight to be treated, and compensated, as any other model would be. “About 15% of the world’s population has some sort of disability,” she says. “I don’t think we should just talk about people with Down’s syndrome. All of those people deserve to be included and represented.”

George Webster, presenter

‘It’s really important for children to see me on the TV – I never had anybody like me on the telly growing up’



George Webster. Photograph: Fabio De Paola/The Guardian

Perched in front of a vast CD collection at home in Leeds, George Webster is every bit as cheerful and animated as his CBeebies persona. “I loved CBeebies when I was really young,” the 21-year-old explains, beaming. “My inspiration, my hero, was Mr Tumble, because if I spoke, I used Makaton [a language programme incorporating speech, signs and symbols], and he helped me to learn it.”

These days Webster is, as he gleefully puts it, “really, really, really busy”. After making his debut in the channel’s rainbow-coloured, polka-dotted house as a guest presenter in September, he quickly got promoted to a regular slot after lighting up social media. The [five-minute clip](#), which sees Webster making a fruit smoothie and hosting a kitchen disco, has racked up nearly 100,000 views, with everyone from Strictly Come Dancing champion Oti Mabuse to Doctor Who’s Jodie Whittaker messaging him their congratulations.

“I had to do a screen test, and then a month later I got a phone call saying I had the job,” he says. “I was squealing with excitement. My first day on set I worked with Dodge the dog, who is hilarious. I’m loving making connections with a young audience, and hearing from parents of children

with Down's syndrome. It's really important for children to see me on the TV, and for me to be a positive role model. I never had anybody like me on the telly growing up. More people with Down's syndrome and other learning disabilities need to be given spaces on programmes to help everyone understand what Down's syndrome really is. Everyone in the world is talented in their own way, and nobody deserves to be judged."

Fittingly, a TV special with Mr Tumble is in the works. And when George is off CBeebies duty? You can find him "going t' pub" with friends; whipping up his speciality, a tuna pasta bake; or watching a favourite film from his extensive library.

Kassie Mundhenk, actor

'My favourite TV series will always be Mare of Easttown'



Kassie Mundhenk. Kassie wears jacket, shopmarled.com. Top, Zara. Skirt by Wild Fable, from target.com. Earrings, lelesadoughi.com. Necklace, Banana Republic. Styling: Emma Pritchard. Hair & Makeup: Dana Arcidy using Amika and Alima Pure. Photograph: Chris Buck/The Guardian

Like more than 3 million other people around the world, Kassie Mundhenk sat enthralled by the finale of *Mare of Easttown* when it dropped this summer – attracting such record-breaking viewing figures that HBO Max

proceeded to crash just as Kate Winslet's Detective Sheehan apprehended the series' murder culprit.

"I'm still kind of upset," the 19-year-old says of the twist ending. "How could it be him? How could he do it?" She has more reason to be invested than most: the Pennsylvania teenager beat more than 50 girls for the part of Moira Ross, the daughter of Sheehan's best friend, Lori (Julianne Nicholson), in the Emmy-winning hit.

The Philadelphia set proved an excellent training ground for Mundhenk, who settled on becoming an actor as a little girl, with Winslet popping into her trailer to check in during filming. She's currently in the middle of rewatching *Mare of Easttown* and analysing everyone's performances. "I like the acting from Detective Zabel in episode five," she says, a note of the Hollywood critic in her voice.

While Mundhenk, like many of the cast, never learned the killer's identity on set, she had bigger concerns than trying to decipher red herrings. Moira's experience of bullying is central to her storyline, and Mundhenk felt determined to represent that element of the Down's syndrome experience properly on camera. "I was embarrassed," she admits of a scene in which Moira is tormented in the school cafeteria, but pushed through with filming regardless, "because it happens".

Her next goal? A Disney contract – although, she stresses: "My favourite TV series will always be *Mare of Easttown*." In fact, she's as keen for another season as the rest of the world, frequently checking in with showrunner Brad Ingelsby about any progress on fresh material. "He doesn't have anything yet!" she says exasperatedly, with a little of Moira's winning sassiness, before a determined look comes over her face. "Well, I'll help him."

Ellie Goldstein, model

'Do I like being the centre of attention? Oh my God, yes!'



Ellie wears dress, stellamccartney.com. Hair clip, alighieri.com. Styling: Melanie Wilkinson. Styling assistant: Peter Bevan. Makeup: Neusa Neves at Terri Manduca using SUQQU makeup and skincare by Dermalogica UK. Hair: Sven Bayerbach at Carol Hayes Management using Kiehl's since 1851. Photograph: Sophia Spring/The Guardian

“Who’s ready to let the dogs out?” Ellie Goldstein quips to the photography team assembled for her *Guardian* shoot, before breaking into an infectious cackle. The 19-year-old may have started modelling only three years ago after signing with Zebedee Management, but she’s in her element in front of the camera – instinctively striking poses and making asides that have the crew in fits of laughter. (Her thoughts on her makeup? “Cake it on.”) Although she’s in hot demand with major fashion brands these days, she’s perhaps best known for her viral Gucci campaign, where she became the first model with Down’s syndrome to star in an advertorial for a luxury fashion house.

“It was faaabulous,” she says in her Essex twang after the shoot wraps up, explaining that she decided to go into modelling after spending hours poring over a coffee-table book about the lives of old Hollywood stars. “I felt proud and excited about the Gucci campaign. To make the world more inclusive, you need more people with disabilities – and more people like me – as models.”

At the moment, she's busy working on a "top-secret" project with Adidas, and has just released her first Victoria's Secret campaign, while her ultimate dream is to be on the cover of Vogue.

And though she loves being the centre of attention – "Oh my God, yes!" – she finds her newfound status as a role model a bit odd, particularly when it comes to interacting with her thousands of Instagram followers.

"To be honest, it's really weird. I didn't expect that. To everyone, I would just say, 'Be yourself. Never give up. You can do it. And I hope your dreams come true, whoever you are.'" As for her favourite social media comment from a fan thus far? She pauses, turning serious for a moment, before breaking into a grin. "Your eyebrows are on 'fleek'."

Tommy Jessop, actor

'This series of Line of Duty was a bit like being on a James Bond set'



Tommy wears jumper, paulsmith.com. Styling: Helen Seamons. Stylist's assistant: Peter Bevan. Makeup: Neusa Neves at Terri Manduca using SUQQU makeup and skincare by Dermalogica UK. Hair: Sven Bayerbach at Carol Hayes Management using Kiehl's since 1851. Photograph: Sophia Spring/The Guardian

“Never judge a book by its cover,” Tommy Jessop counsels while sitting for his Guardian portrait in an east London studio. In the 16 years since he helped his mother, Jane, launch Winchester’s Blue Apple theatre company for people with learning disabilities, Jessop has collected a garland of firsts within the Down’s syndrome community, including becoming a voting member of Bafta and playing Hamlet in a major touring production. “It’s one of the highlights of my career,” he says of the latter. “I learned how to sword fight, and how to ‘punch’ someone. Brilliant.”

The 36-year-old is best known for his nail-biting performance as Terry Boyle in Line of Duty, most recently in series six, broadcast this spring. “It was a bit like being on a James Bond set,” he says, his deliberate enunciation betraying his years of Shakespeare training. “I enjoyed doing the infamous interrogation scenes. I do like to make an audience laugh and cry, shout and swear.”

His verdict on the episode in which his character is nearly drowned in a lake? “Like being in a freezer in the Arctic.” He’s keeping details about a rumoured next season under his hat (“hashtag no spoilers”) but admits his favourite moments from the shoot included trading football stats with Vicky McClure – he’s a devoted Newcastle United fan.

Now, Jessop’s talent has caught the attention of Hollywood, with Steven Spielberg casting him in his forthcoming second world war series, Masters of the Air, for AppleTV+. “I’m optimistic about the future, because people are talking about us now rather than hiding us away,” Jessop adds. “We’re people first, with different skills and interests. Don’t let the label get in the way.”

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Inside story: the first pandemic novels have arrived, but are we ready for them?



Windows on to interior worlds ... Ruth Medjber's night-time portraits were taken across Ireland during lockdown. Photograph: Ruth Medjber/Ruthless Imagery

Lara Feigel

Sat 27 Nov 2021 04.00 EST

At the start of the second world war, authors asked themselves if they were going to write about their unprecedented times, or if they should be doing something more useful – joining the fire service, becoming an air raid warden. The phoney war, with its uncertainty and dread, proved hard to write about, but the blitz brought new experiences and a new language that demanded to be recorded or imaginatively transformed. Elizabeth Bowen began to write short stories, somewhere between hallucination and documentary, that she described as “the only diary I have kept”. Set in windowless houses populated by feather boa-wearing ghosts, these are stories that take place in evenings “parched, freshening and a little acrid with ruins”.

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When lockdown hit last March, some writers offered their services as delivery drivers or volunteered at Covid test centres. Others attempted to make progress with preexisting projects, blanking out the new world careering into being in front of them. But nothing written in the past 18 months can be entirely free of Covid, with its stark blend of stasis and fear. And now, as we see the work made by writers who confronted it head on, questions emerge. Do we really want to read about the pandemic while it is still unfolding? Do we risk losing sight of the long view in getting too caught up with the contemporary?

First came Ali Smith’s Summer, the final instalment in a quartet produced at speed expressly in order to incorporate current events. Smith was responding to the pandemic in real time, so her novel provides an opportunity to measure its impact on one of our most inventive and intellectually fierce writers.



Ali Smith's novel *Summer* responds to the pandemic in real time.
Photograph: Antonio Olmos/The Observer

In Smith's vision, the pandemic only increases the fragmentation that characterises her almost alarmingly profuse narratives. *Summer* includes speculations from Einstein alongside sections about the incarceration of "enemy aliens" on the Isle of Man in the second world war and ruminations on the pandemic recognisable from everyday life. As detainee immigrants are released, lest they collectively die in prison, Smith asks if it will be an opportunity for a new kind of world. The elderly Iris reflects that the comparisons to the war made by the media are inappropriate, because "the pandemic is making walls and borders and passports as meaningless as nature knows they are".

Smith folded the beginning of the pandemic into wider concerns; this autumn sees the publication of a first wave of books written wholly in response to Covid-19. [Burntcoat](#), which Sarah Hall began on the first day of the first spring lockdown, is about two lovers facing frightening new forms of intimacy in a plague-ravaged world. Sarah Moss's [The Fell](#), written during the bleak hopelessness of the winter lockdown, features a self-isolating woman maddened by confinement. And [Life Without Children](#), a collection of stories written by Roddy Doyle from one Dublin lockdown to the next, explores with curious glee the new bearings of our world and its

linguistic quirks (in Dublin shops, people ask for “one and a half social distances of plywood”).

Howard’s *56 Days* begins with two lovers moving in together and asks, is the perfect murder what lockdown allows?

The fearfulness of lockdown has also made it rich territory for crime writers. As an established writer of intense psychological thrillers, Catherine Ryan Howard knew that crime thrives in situations where secrecy, fear and suspicion are already rife. Her novel *56 Days* begins with two lovers moving in together under the pressure of lockdown, and asks whether the perfect murder is precisely what lockdown allows. In Graham Greene’s wartime novel *The Ministry of Fear*, he has a character ask why any one murder matters amid so much death. A murder plot can seem driven by generic requirements, but Ryan Howard’s book focuses attention on the place of individual death and fragility in our lives.

As Smith’s character Iris observes, wartime comparisons have been frequent over the past two years. For many, Covid brought a strange new blitz spirit. In the hospitals, there has been something like a wartime atmosphere of disaster, but for so many of us, lockdown was a period of waiting. The challenge for writers is to create narrative out of people staying at home. The reward is that this was a time rich with revelations. Bowen described the mood of her wartime stories as “lucid abnormality”. She thought we were revealed to each other with a new starkness, becoming “heady and disembodied”.



Hanya Yanagihara's forthcoming novel imagines a totalitarian world riven by plagues. Photograph: Natalie Keyssar

I put the question of revelation to Hall, who, with a kind of terrible appropriateness, talks to me from her Covid sickbed. She thinks the virus has acted as a “clarifying force”. This is partly a case of exposing the cracks in society (government corruption, state services, inequality). But in Burntcoat there is exhilaration in the way the isolation of lockdown strips the lovers to their core, leaving them as vulnerable bodies, exposed to each other. Illness propels the discoveries here; sex becomes more intimate as the lovers get closer to death.

It's telling that in Burntcoat, Hall made the virus more deadly and the lockdown more extreme than ours. Her response to the plotlessness of lockdown is a kind of febrile, extreme imaginative act – an enactment of our fears, filtered through the perceptions of a sculptor, Edith. Edith's creativity (she makes vast public sculptures) is as extreme as the virus, which becomes itself a devilish fellow creative being: “It was – it is – perfect. Perfectly composed, star-like.” When I tell Hall that I admired this take on the virus, she reports her conversation with a virologist about the other viruses lurking around us, “ready to jump”. “Those viruses are there, getting ready to go … Covid isn't going to be the one that really takes us down.” The novelist can warn against possible futures.

The revelations in Moss and Doyle's books, which explore lockdown rather than illness, are more subtle. It has been said that everyone became more themselves during lockdown, and it has often seemed to me that, without the enforced normality of social interaction, people have become more extreme in their obsessions or anxieties. Moss and Doyle portray characters going gently mad under the pressure of social withdrawal. When I put this to the writers, Moss disagrees; she thinks we become most ourselves in company rather than isolation. For Doyle, however, affably chatty in his Dublin attic study, there was a kind of stripping to the core of Irish middle-aged men in particular that enabled them to lose some of the facade they'd acquired at their usually brutal schools.

Most of the protagonists in Doyle's stories are late middle-aged men. There are men who use the lockdown to walk away from their lives, or to fall in love with the wives they haven't noticed for years. Doyle has responded to the challenges of lockdown by making narrative splinter into the fragmented form of the short story collection.

Moss's approach can be seen as the most difficult. If, as Smith suggests, Covid has shown how fragmented our world is, the danger of lockdown can be that there is too much coherence, rather than too little. Moss focuses in on the home of two people – Kate, a cash-strapped single mother, and her teenage son Matt – who are 10 days into self-isolating. Isolation itself becomes subject matter.



Rooney's latest novel, *Beautiful World, Where Are You* glances at lockdown. Photograph: Linda Brownlee/The Guardian

Recently, we've seen the will towards isolation and a related exhaustion with narrative and storytelling in books by Sally Rooney and Rachel Cusk. Rooney's latest novel, [Beautiful World, Where Are You](#), is set mainly before lockdown, but describes a writer, Alice, retreating to a remote seaside house, torn between protecting herself from exposure to others and being drawn compulsively back to the world. The book ends with a parenthetic glance at lockdown and Alice's sense that for her "the difference between lockdown and normal life is (depressingly?) minimal".

Rooney's brusque deftness makes the single word contained in the brackets here loom large. Alice at this point is plagued by chronic ill health and has writer's block; the narration dwindle to brisk epistolary summaries, and there's a sense of Rooney using lockdown to find a flatter form of storytelling. Alice grapples with the heavily plotted novels she's written previously and no longer finds them truthful; Rooney (whose neatly plotted [Normal People](#) was adapted into one of the [TV hits of lockdown](#)) seems to have been energised by similar doubts. Cusk's [Outline](#) trilogy, which portrayed a woman increasingly isolating herself within her world, was an experiment in finding a form for the novel that didn't rely on overall narrative structure. In some ways she's the obvious writer to take on

lockdown, and it's there in the background of her latest novel, [Second Place](#), where the narrator observes that her life has changed less than the lives of many others ("we had already simplified our existence"). Yet this novel is propelled by the narrative gusto Cusk previously eschewed.

Moss refuses the pleasures of isolation, perhaps because she herself seems to have feared the confinement of lockdown from the start. "Some people were more frightened of confinement than contagion," she says, speaking from Copenhagen. Her novel is an elegy for all we have lost in lockdown, though she's also hopeful about our capacity to survive it. She tells me that the book began with a question: who will catch us when we fall? The danger is that lockdown erodes community. Driven online, where binary thinking is the norm, we may cease to recognise each other's humanity.

It is telling that both Moss and Doyle abandoned novels they were halfway through when the pandemic began, because they couldn't think their way into an alternative form of the present. Reading these lockdown novels and stories, I've asked myself how many more can be published without the scenarios getting too repetitive, and what it would mean *not* to bring the pandemic into fiction. Are readers prepared to suspend disbelief and imagine an alternative version of the past few years? Or will writers avoid the literary challenges of the pandemic by turning to history or to the future?

Some writers were already thinking about the past; [Tessa Hadley](#)'s forthcoming novel is set in the 1960s, while [Jonathan Franzen](#) has embarked on a trilogy of books set in the 1970s. Lauren Groff has said that she wrote [Matrix](#), her tale of 12th-century nuns, to escape Trump's America; she may have been relieved when the pandemic hit that she was saved from that as well. But there is something very reminiscent of lockdown about her community of sisters, and narrative excitement here comes precisely from the attempt to keep the world at bay: the nuns create an alternative world by constructing a vast and unwieldy labyrinth.



Gary Shteyngart ... his latest novel, *Our Country Friends*, portrays a group of friends waiting out the pandemic. Photograph: Test - Ramin Talaie/The Guardian

One way to avoid writing about lockdown too narrowly is to imagine more extreme scenarios, as Hall has. Pandemics are the natural territory of science fiction, and of the climate change novel. Sci-fi writers have been thinking about what a pandemic might entail for years. Covid-19 has revealed how fully our lives are connected to the lives of other species, and Laura Jean McKay conducts a bravura investigation of the relations between humans and animals in her Arthur C Clarke award-winning novel, [The Animals in That Country](#). The book imagines a world hit by “zooflu”, which leaves humans and animals able to understand each other’s language. Oana Aristide’s [Under the Blue](#) revealingly brings together an imagined pandemic with advances in AI – there’s a new artificial mind being developed to predict threats to human life and help us deal with crises of this kind. These books were both poised to come out when Covid hit, then delayed by lockdown. Books such as these have turned out to be prophetic because the resources of literary fiction – its artfulness, inventiveness and structural play – are themselves prophetic, dramatising the forces at work in our world with more vitality than textbooks or documentaries can.

The pandemic, in its actual and its more luridly imagined forms, will continue to find its way into fiction, even as the actuality of Covid becomes something more everyday (a new normal in which few retain a sense of smell and daily life is structured around lateral flow tests). [Hanya Yanagihara](#)'s forthcoming novel To Paradise has a strand extending to 2093, imagining a totalitarian world riven by plagues that can be seen as a dark extension of our times. Sequoia Nagamatsu's How High We Go in the Dark spans hundreds of years as humanity attempts to rebuild itself in the aftermath of a plague. And [Gary Shteyngart](#)'s Our Country Friends, set closer to home in the 2020 lockdown, is a portrayal of a group of friends waiting out the pandemic, [Boccaccio-style](#), in a rural retreat. These three novels, all out in January, show how different sorts of high-concept literary device are being enabled, and also made necessary, by the pressures of our current times. There will be more pandemic novels to come, novels asking what happened to us as a society in lockdown, novels exploring what Covid has revealed about whether our societies and the stories we tell about them hold together or not; lucid abnormality flashed through Covid's searchlights.

*Lara Feigel is the author of *The Group* (John Murray).*

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Books

‘It was a call to arms’: Jodi Picoult and Karin Slaughter on writing Covid-19 into novels



‘I wasn’t writing it for publication, I was writing it to sort out everything I’d learned so far’ ... Jodi Picoult. Photograph: Sarah Lee/The Guardian

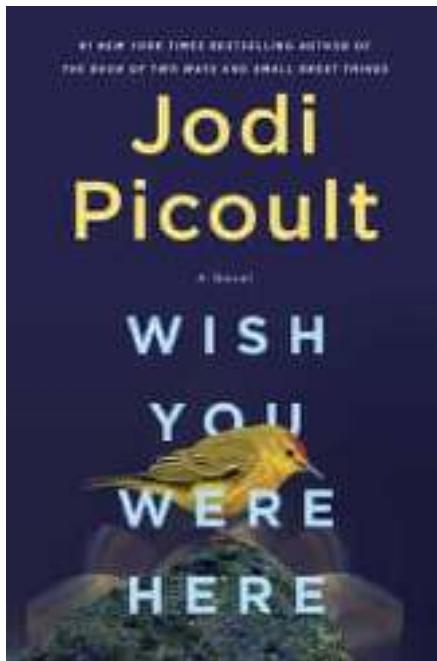
Jodi Picoult and [Karin Slaughter](#), as told to [Alison Flood](#)

Sat 27 Nov 2021 04.00 EST

Jodi Picoult on writing Wish You Were Here

I was very conscious of the fact that by the end of 2020, we had already forgotten what happened months earlier, we had forgotten the moments when we’d been told don’t wear a mask, when we washed our broccoli with soap and water. All of the things that that seemed so shocking and scary in

March were so far away by November, December. And that was when I started to play around with the story.



Photograph: Ballantine/AP

I was thinking about how we as writers are going to tell the story of Covid, because it's up to us to make sense of the nonsensical. People turn to artists for that all the time. I couldn't wrap my head around this, I just kept trying and trying and trying. And finally, it was when I heard about this guy stranded in Machu Picchu that I was like, "Oh, wait a second. I know how I could do this."

I wasn't writing it thinking of publication, I was writing it thinking of sorting out everything I'd learned so far. I was in a very strict lockdown, because I have asthma, and I didn't leave my house for 15 months except to go on hikes outside in the woods. That was a really scary time, because I knew if I got it, I was going to be on a ventilator, my lungs wouldn't be able to handle it.

'I don't think of it as a novel about Covid, I think of it as a novel about surviving'

I started to write, and it came very, very quickly. The research that I did was at my fingertips – even the people I interviewed who survived ventilation, it was one social media ask and I had more than 100 people within an hour saying “please tell my story, because I can’t believe people don’t think this is real”. There’s this urge for people who have gotten through Covid, to make other people see what’s right in front of their faces, that they’re not seeing. It was the same with the doctors I spoke with. I thought it’d be really difficult to find doctors who had the time to speak to me, but they were all so intent on making sure their side of the story got told. So it was this real call to arms for me.



‘At times I thought why did you do this? Because everything kept changing’
... Karin Slaughter. Photograph: Alison Cohen Rosa

I don’t think of it as a novel about Covid, I think of it as a novel about surviving, which is a little different. Yes, you’ll see the medical profession and you’ll see deaths in it. But to me, this is a novel about how we came through to the other side.

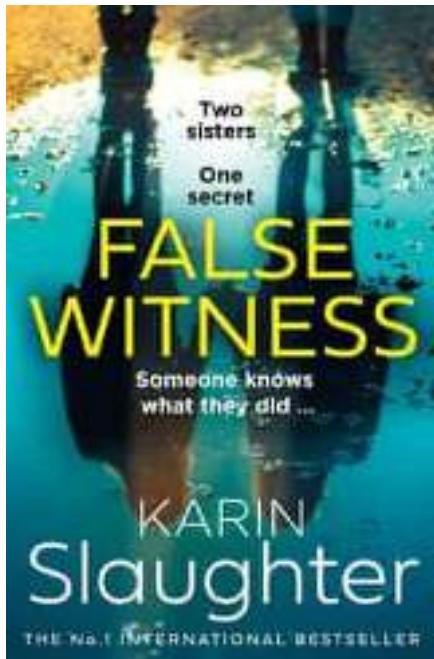
Jodi Picoult’s Wish You Were Here is published by Hodder & Stoughton. To support the Guardian and Observer, order your copy at guardianbookshop.com. Delivery charges may apply.

Karin Slaughter on writing False Witness

When I was in college I read Pale Horse, Pale Rider by Katherine Anne Porter – it was the first time I'd read about the 1918 flu pandemic in a way that humanised it. And so I thought, I want to write something that captures what we're going through right now. [Fiction](#) tells the best history. You can read all the history books you want, but you won't know the taste and the feel and the fog and London at that time from history books the way you will from fiction. I wanted to capture things like, in Atlanta, all our distilleries stopped making alcohol and started making hand sanitiser, and so everybody smelled like tequila or rum.

At times I thought, why did you do this? Because everything kept changing, and I'm writing the book as these things are happening – I'm writing the chapter that has to go in the courtroom, and I don't know if it's going to be on Zoom, and how am I going to get tension from a Zoom? Then when the vaccines came out, I was like, I've got to go back and incorporate the vaccines. I had to just find a cut-off point.

Most crime fiction talks about a lot of social issues, and this is a book about childhood trauma affecting you into adulthood. My character Leigh puts her child in a private school so that she isn't virtually schooling and losing a complete year of her academics – well, most children didn't have that. That chasm between fortunate and unfortunate people, it just widened during the pandemic, and for women it was particularly hard.



Photograph: HarperCollins

These kids today – in 20 years, who knows what kind of trauma they’re going to manifest and how they’re going to experience that? We know scientifically that children who had traumatic childhoods are more likely to abuse drugs, to have diabetes, to have heart disease, they have lower life expectancy. So what is this one year-plus going to mean for children in the future? And not just children who are disadvantaged, but for children who were really lucky to get that extra year of education that most of their peers will not have? That’s the kind of stuff that I like to write about. And I think a pandemic just put a brighter light on it.

Karin Slaughter’s False Witness is published by HarperCollins. To support the Guardian and Observer, order your copy at [guardianbookshop.com](https://www.guardianbookshop.com). Delivery charges may apply.

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Interview

Author Preti Taneja on realising she had taught the Fishmongers' Hall attacker: 'We were all unsafe'

[Helen Pidd](#)



Preti Taneja: ‘No one at any level wanted to take final responsibility for what happened.’ Photograph: Suki Dhanda/The Guardian



Sat 27 Nov 2021 04.45 EST

It wasn’t until the morning after the [terror attack at Fishmongers’ Hall, London, in 2019](#), that Preti Taneja realised she knew the perpetrator. Her partner read out his name from a news report over breakfast: Usman Khan. The 28-year-old had taken the creative writing course she led in HMP Whitemoor, a high-security category A prison, two years earlier. The report said he had been shot dead by police, after stabbing five people, two fatally.

Khan had been an enthusiastic student, keen to show off his literary knowledge as well as his writing. When he was released in December 2018, he was encouraged to continue working with the prison education programme [Learning Together](#), which brings students into prisons to learn alongside people who are incarcerated.

“It was considered *a protective factor*,” writes Taneja in *Aftermath*, a new book that attempts to make sense of her personal proximity to the atrocity. “The only thing he had apart from the gym.”

Taneja had been teaching with Learning Together since 2017, attracted by the chance to mix her background in human rights advocacy with her dual career as an academic and fiction writer. Creative writing, she says in the book, “was considered a sign of hope” for Khan, who had been convicted of terrorism offences. He was encouraged to keep writing when he was banned from training as an HGV driver in the outside world. He had been working on a play about a knife attack, his inquest heard, but MI5, “considered it simply rehabilitative”. He was a model student, the poster boy for the programme.

On 29 November 2019, a fortnight before the last general election, Khan was at Fishmongers’ Hall for an event to celebrate five years of Learning Together. He sat quietly through the morning with his coat on. During the lunch break he went to the toilets and put on a fake bomb vest he had made from Xbox cables, empty plastic bottles and a slimming belt, then taped two kitchen knives to his wrists. MI5 knew he was going to London that day, his inquest later heard. As Taneja puts it: “They said they wanted to test his mindset.”

Taneja wasn’t at the event. She had been invited, but stayed at home in Cambridge. She was a research fellow at the university and was preparing for a literary festival. She feels both relieved and guilty to have missed the horror, and has been left wondering how to make sense of her peripheral connection to the atrocity. She tells me she has now come to call it “disenfranchised grief … for those who had known the perpetrator, it was something unspeakable”. She is now, she notes in *Aftermath*, writing “in the wreck”.

We meet at Newcastle University just before the second anniversary of the attack. Taneja is nervous, dressed in black with an A4 pad on her lap. Even now, discussing the attacks is hard. She doesn’t want to talk about what Khan was like; she is very conscious of the privacy of the victims’ families. She weighs her words carefully, unafraid to leave long gaps while she finds the right ones. She does the same in her prose, leaving white space in the middle of sentences, requiring the reader to fill in the blanks, to ponder the unsaid, the unsayable.



Floral tributes are left for Jack Merritt and Saskia Jones, who were killed in the attack. Photograph: Peter Summers/Getty Images

Taneja grew up in Hertfordshire but moved to the north-east in March 2020 to become a professor of world literature and creative writing; she wrote *Aftermath* in the isolation of successive lockdowns. She found the “huge pandemic silencing” of Covid helpful to form her thoughts. “Into that silence, there was an opportunity to think very carefully about some of these huge feelings of grief and culpability, of historic mourning, of political rage and social injustice that I suppose were raised from the seabed almost by this event.”

She didn’t just know Khan, but also one of his victims: 25-year-old [Jack Merritt](#), Learning Together’s programme coordinator. “Kind, funny, compassionate, driven, a mentor to many, an excellent trainer of trainers”, is how she describes him in the book. Khan also murdered 23-year-old [Saskia Jones](#), a volunteer at the event, who worked in a rape crisis centre and hoped one day to be a detective specialising in victim support. He injured several others before being tackled by some of the course participants – one, famously, with a [narwhal tusk](#) grabbed from the hall’s wall – and was then shot by police 20 times on London Bridge.

Aftermath is Taneja's second book. Her first, [We That Are Young](#), a retelling of King Lear in contemporary India, won the Desmond Elliott prize in 2018. Exploring the links between empire and what she sees as the “fascism” in the modern Indian state, it was praised in the Guardian as “that rarest of beasts, a page-turner that’s also unabashedly political”. It took her “a very long time” to find a publisher, a fact she partly attributes to her refusal to write “a beautiful immigrant Bildungsroman”, the sort of debut she thinks many minority writers are pushed into producing. “It wasn’t the kind of book I suppose one would expect from a debut writer from my background,” she says. Galley Beggar, the independent press, gave her a £1,000 advance. “People are shocked when they hear what I got, but it was the best grand I’ve ever earned.”

Aftermath blends journalism, memoir, poetry and literary criticism in an attempt to process an event she will never truly understand. It is split into three parts – radical doubt, radicalising thought, and radical hope – and mixes first-, second- and third-person narrative to tell an often painful story.

It is a confronting, sometimes angry read about racism in society and the criminal justice system, taking in everything from the Kashmir conflict to the [Prevent counter-terrorism strategy](#) (which, she writes, “makes civil society into border police”), [joint enterprise](#) murders and being a person of colour “passing” in majority white Britain. It should shame many readers, particularly those in the worlds of journalism, education, publishing, prisons and police.

For a long time, Taneja couldn’t talk about what happened. First, she writes, her Cambridge college advised her to stay silent, less to protect her than itself – “call it fear of tarnishing a world-leading reputation, offending donors, the Daily Mail”. She was given media training by the university, where she was presented with a list of possible questions journalists might ask. Several revolved around the possibility that they might suggest her first book, which she had given to students in prison, could possibly have radicalised Khan. “There was a serious suggestion that it could be interpreted that way by elements of the media,” Taneja says.

She went along with it at the time. “Shock of that magnitude almost makes you cling to things you think you know, even harder. So if you think that

someone is there to keep you safe, you'll go with that.”

She taught Khan for only 20 hours over one term but wonders what could have been done to stop him. “I think I had a perspective on what was going on, that if anyone had asked ... I would have been able to say, at the time: how can you release this person? How can you think that they’re going to be fine? Going from category A, right into the world? Who is taking charge of this process? It was a technicality that he was released on.”

She feels the inquest process “revealed how unsafe we as course leaders and students actually were while ... we did this work inside; and in fact it revealed we were all unsafe on the outside, too, all the way up to MI5 – which is what the coroner’s report finally concluded. Prevent, police, the Home Office: nothing kept this from happening ... And no one at any level wanted to take final responsibility for what happened.” She says that “the realisations and responses of the inquest process deeply added to my grief and shock”.

No one has ever really taken responsibility for Khan’s early release. He was let out automatically on licence after serving half of his 16-year term without going in front of the parole board, despite intelligence held by the Prison Service warning that Khan was going to “go back to his old ways”.

He had been convicted aged just 19 of being part of a terror cell that was plotting an attack on the London Stock Exchange and planning a jihadi training camp. As Taneja details in Aftermath, he was not a model prisoner, though she had no idea of this when she was his teacher. In 2013, he was found in prison stockpiling chemicals for a bomb. A loose razor blade was discovered taped to the underside of his locker in 2017, as well as the address of a prison governor. He took part in the government’s Healthy Identity Intervention deradicalisation scheme, while influencing inmates to kill and harm others. There were suspicions he was playing the system and showing “false compliance”. Taneja didn’t know this when she welcomed him into her classroom.

Did she see the real Khan, or was the face he presented to her and others an elaborate fiction? Though never excusing his bloodshed, she sees him as a victim of a racist society that has never atoned for the sins of colonialism; a

society in which young Black adults are, she writes, “twice as likely to receive a caution, 8.4 times more likely to receive a conviction, 1.5 times more likely to be sent to prison, and given prison sentences that are 80% longer than those given to white young adults who commit similar offences”.



Taneja, photographed earlier this month. Photograph: Suki Dhanda/The Guardian

How was he allowed to disappear from school in Stoke-on-Trent at 14 without anyone asking questions, she writes. How did he go to prison and come out more high risk than when he went in? The Britain he was released into was “more bitter, more scared, more split, more racist since his incarceration”, she writes.

Though the attack provides the narrative structure for *Aftermath*, it is just as much a furious reflection on her 44 years as a British-born woman of Indian origin. It reappraises a childhood growing up in a white community with “angel-haired friends”, being cast as “poor girl” in successive nativities. It recalls a work experience stint on a national newspaper shortly after 9/11 where, the only Asian in the newsroom, she was dispatched to Brick Lane, in the East End of London, to coax Bangladeshi men into appraising the attacks. She did it and felt “sick with my own duplicity”.

In Aftermath's afterword, Taneja writes a long list of what she thinks the book is about: personal identity, risk, safety, generational trauma, racial grief and more. But ultimately, she says when we meet, it's a book about trust. How to step out of the house each morning and trust in a society you can't control. "The fluid, shining faith not in a God or in the edicts of any organised religion or institution but in the necessary fiction we rest our contingent lives on, which in English we call *trust*," she writes.

This event felt so extreme and complex that I couldn't find anywhere in literature that knew how to process it

Even before the attack, Taneja says she had never felt safe. "I don't think as a woman of colour I'd be alone in saying that. There was always a sense of vigilance around me, like in my peripheral vision, an acknowledgment of my own physical size, my body, what it can do."

No one with a connection to the Fishmongers' Hall attack, whether they were staffing the cloakroom that day, or worked in the jobcentre and tried to help Khan find employment, will be the same again, Taneja says. "All these people will always have this question in their minds about who they can trust."

She adds: "For me, the trust was broken to the extent that I lost my faith in language, the things I read, the places I would go for comfort – the poets who usually provide such comfort in times like this. This event felt so extreme and so difficult and complex and unusual, that I couldn't find anywhere in literature that knew anything about how to manage and process it. So, for me, it's about the difficulties of that moment, but also about how, as a writer, to make any kind of future out of it. And I'm determined to do that, and make it a better one than the one that caused it."

This isn't about "prison expansion or more surveillance – though the question of the most damaged violent people is one I've had to reckon with – it's how do we work towards making a safer world without those things, which aren't working to keep us safe anyway".

She is extremely nervous about how the book will be received, and the potential for it to be misinterpreted. Why write it? “Sometimes stories choose us,” she says. “And, there was no other way through this time than to try to work out in my own mind how I sat inside the story, and where I could say something about what I saw and what I know about this event, and the structural harms and systemic failures that contributed to it.”

This book is a lament. It is a labour of love

She wrote a few pages of notes in the immediate aftermath to record the way she was feeling. A month later, in January 2020, she received an email from an editor in the US at a small publisher, [Transit Books](#), who was starting an essay series called [Undelivered Lectures](#): would she consider contributing? There was no rush to publish. She wanted the bereaved relatives to have their say first, and for the inquests to be held. The journalistic aspects of Aftermath, which tell the story of attacks she did not witness, are all [taken from the inquest transcripts](#). Any proceeds will be given to charity. “There’s no money being made here,” she says. “This book is a lament. It is a labour of love.”

It feels a very contemporary book, drawing links between media coverage of the death of a schoolgirl who drowned in a river after another child encouraged her into the water, and so-called [Isis brides](#). She writes that there is “a deep, mythologically driven Islamophobia, embraced through class harms: digital platforms, voter ID cards and immigration rules that will spare no one, from 12-year-old [Shukri Abdi](#) standing on a river bank, to [Shamima Begum](#), groomed into Isis then consigned to statelessness, and the men who buy into an alternative promise of power, the violent ideology, extreme drug, who will use this *as their rationale*”.

She berates the British education system for failing school pupils in colonial history, teaching instead “that Black and brown youth have no history but are lucky to be born in England. That a Muslim boy or a girl is a body of terror. That a Black man must be waiting to attack: must be subject on the street. That a brown girl mute is the best she can be. That a Black girl drowning is a tragic *accident*.”

She calls out the media for giving white, privileged terrorists an easier ride. She reminds her readers of [Harry Vaughan](#), a teenage satanist who was arrested in 2019 after posting offensive material online under numerous aliases, boasting about school shootings, sharing explosives manuals and neo-Nazi propaganda. Journalists tended to describe him not simply as a terrorist, but “as *neo-Nazi terrorist, far-right terrorist* as if the *terrorist* is not normally those things”. This, she reminds us, happened “in a country where the fastest-growing terrorist threat is from the far right”.

Reports of Vaughan’s crimes – 14 terror offences plus possession of indecent images of children – are always mentioned alongside his straight As, his autism and a reference to his father’s job, a clerk in the House of Lords. The judge gave him a two-year suspended sentence.

There are moments of macabre humour, particularly in the postcolonial glossary she provides for readers. Sample entry: “*Funny tinge* – As in, it is *not just about being black or a funny tinge ... you know, different ... B, err, from the BME community.*” It is a reference to former [Labour MP Angela Smith](#), who used this phrase on live TV when talking about the intersection between class and race.

The book now finished, she is focused on solutions to the problems she set out. She wants to use her writing to push for a better society than the one that let Khan drop out of school at 14. She wants all schoolchildren to read books by British people of colour, rather than just having one [Toni Morrison](#) text on the curriculum. “It is wonderful to have access to literature and poetics and a knowledge base about America. But it isn’t the same. It’s like the difference between hip-hop and grime. We need our own stories. We need our own ways of talking about what happened to our ancestors and why we’re here. All of us, my white students, my brown students, Black students,” she says.

“There are amazing British voices coming up. And they’re so necessary – but what is needed is that the widest systems of power open the gates to hear them, really listen to them.”

Taneja hasn’t been back inside a prison since 28 November 2019, the day before the Fishmongers’ Hall attack. She hasn’t ruled out a return, incensed

at how [prisoners were treated during Covid](#), with even [children confined to their cells for 23 hours of a day](#).

When it comes to that fateful day, two years ago, she will never stop wondering if anybody could have done more. “How can you not? It’s just part of grieving and the reality of being mortal.”

‘I remember it as ice, splintering’: an exclusive extract from Aftermath



A police officer on London Bridge, two days after the attack. Photograph: Peter Summers/Getty Images

In the days of the [immediate aftermath](#), I could not sleep. All I wanted was to go back to the day before. If nothing else, to tell Jack *do not go to London tomorrow*. And further back – who knows how far?

Thursday, 28 November, 2019: A full, busy day. You and Jack are working together inside the prison. Jack is hosting a workshop on the life and teachings of [Malcolm X](#), led by visiting UCLA professor Bryonn Bain. Your writing students join in with a larger group. You remember it as a day of laughter, shared stories: electric with effort. There is a reunion of sorts. For

you with men you haven't seen for a year, two years: you are glad to meet again. Their children have grown older, they say.

In the late afternoon, your small group of writers from university and prison leaves the larger space for their final seminar of 2019. You end the day on a bittersweet note: finalising the drafts of pieces they have been working on through the semester. You leave full of plans for the next meeting, which will take place in January 2020, after the winter break. It is hard to leave. Yes, when we share stories with those who must stay, prison is hard to leave.

Friday, 29 November, 2019: You do not go to the gathering at Fishmongers' Hall, though you have been invited. You stay at home and prepare notes to chair an admired writer at a literary festival event, taking place in two days' time. In this life, your other, public, literary life, fictions of self are heavily curated. In some ways this splitting is an act of protection for those who spend more time alone creating others' speech. But perhaps it asks something specific also of writers with immigrant histories, who – though skilled in navigating and code switching in mainstream life – might have so much further to travel, when focus on our work puts us in the public gaze. Perhaps it can feel like a performance of the oldest pattern repeating, as a *trigger*, as it is called

Saturday, 30 November: The bright day. You are at home. *Objective correlative:* Hot coffee and fresh pastries. Breakfast with a friend; your partner in the other room, winter sun coming in through the skylight, the door is open, the coloured glass reflects and refracts, and you see him scrolling, reading something on his phone. He says, *Learning Together*. He says the perpetrator's name

A sensation – like floating – while feeling the hardness of the chair you are sitting on digging into your back. Your phone is next to you: you text *Please let me know you and the team are physically OK when you can*. You remember stepping outside to the sharp incongruity of a world gone white for the first time that year. Trying to de-ice your car: it was parked in the looping street near your house, it would not start.

It is a perfect blue-sky Cambridge day. A frozen day.

When the call came, I remember it as ice, splintering. The shards held in place by the space in between as *cold dark matter*, as if the world has become all the absurd facts of an exploded shed by the artist Cornelia Parker, as if even now, metaphor will not be stopped. Even while I write, I am enraged by language, can only turn once again to lament

Who will gather and hold these fragments? Who will, O who will?

[. . .]

When I think of that time, I think of a fingerprint, lines tracing around each other outwards from the small, intimate core. At heart the family, lovers, the friends and colleagues, spiral outwards, back inwards as you try to catch yourself in freefall

There is a hierarchy to grief. It is profound and right to observe it, especially when deaths happen publicly and violently, when such people as Jack and Saskia, who were just beginning their work and lived with the brightest hope, are killed. Especially then. The beloved young belong to the ones who hold them closest. First and foremost to the intimacy of deep feeling, scent of childhood, growing up, sun holiday. Sound of their footfall, their phrases, the taste of their jokes, trick senses of smell and sight.

Those who are left now must transmute their loss into objects suddenly so precious: necklaces, sunglasses, which yield to the way they laughed: light on water, a certain song. These dear fragments synecdoches of the left-behind. Then they become words, spoken, relayed, written down. A collage of a life. When they open their mourning to the world, it is by kind invitation.

But if grief is a spiral so is guilt. Now for some they bond as double helix in the cells

Survivor's guilt is felt by those who were invited but did not go to the event, or were not in the same room as where the attack took place; or did not fight the attacker; or were standing near but could not help those hurt; or even those close enough to look into the attacker's eyes, and speak to him, and

say *stop*. Because *we* did not die, we can suffer that sense that we have less legitimacy to grieve it seems without end

Some write and apologise for not responding to the invitation to Fishmongers' Hall, as if they now feel they should have been there, if only to have put their own lives at risk alongside those whose were. Perhaps wanting to have been closer to the feeling that it could have – or should have – been them. Through all of the long months that come, for many that feeling sustains. There should be many words for these kinds of sorrow, these kindred feelings, for us as kin.

[. . .]

Those of us carrying the other cannot find comfort or rest. We cannot speak of the disappeared, the dead, who is horror, who has inflicted terror and horror. There is only this: the parabolic descent. *Dive into the wreck* of what was still a life, and what ruins of life it left. The possibility of a whole life after that

- An excerpt from *Aftermath*, published in the UK/Europe by [And Other Stories](#) in April 2022 and available to pre-order now. It is published by [Transit](#) in North America.
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2021.11.27 - Coronavirus

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- ['Extraordinary' The Sicilian town where the Covid vaccination rate hit 104%](#)
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Coronavirus

Omicron variant spreads to Europe as UK announces countermeasures

01:42

Sajid Javid on latest Covid variant: 'Our scientists are deeply concerned' – video

[Rowena Mason](#), [Hannah Devlin](#), [Nicola Davis](#) and [Daniel Boffey](#)

Fri 26 Nov 2021 14.13 EST

As an [alarming new Covid variant](#) spread to Europe on Friday, scientists warned that it would inevitably reach Britain, while ministers faced calls to urgently speed up the vaccination programme.

Thousands of travellers were [left stranded or with their plans in disarray](#) after flight bans were introduced targeting countries across southern Africa, where the variant was discovered. Hotel quarantine and enhanced testing would be brought in across the UK, the health secretary, Sajid Javid, said.

B.1.1.529, or [Omicron](#), was designated as a variant of concern by the World Health Organization (WHO) on Friday night due to its “concerning” mutations and because “preliminary evidence suggests an increased risk of reinfection with this variant”.

It is feared to have an R or reproduction value of 2 with the potential to evade vaccines. Javid said it “may pose substantial risk to public health”.

Belgium reported a case in a traveller who had been in Egypt and Turkey rather than southern Africa, suggesting community transmission, while cases were also detected in Israel and Hong Kong. Experts predict it is only a matter of time before it reaches Britain.

No 10 is still debating further steps to prevent or delay its arrival. But Labour called on ministers to bring forward booster jabs by a month for over-50s to create a five-month gap and demanded an update on when under-40s can expect approval for their third vaccinations.

Discussions are live within government over what would trigger a move to “plan B” including mandatory mask wearing, working from home, Covid passports and other measures. Javid said on Friday there was no change yet, but added: “If we need to go further, we will.”

If we need to do something more muscular at a later stage, can we still take people with us?

Chris Whitty

Prof Chris Whitty, England’s chief medical officer, said it was his “greatest worry” that people may not abide by a return to restrictions after almost two years of the pandemic. “If we need to do something more muscular at some point, whether it’s for the current new variant or at some later stage, can we still take people with us?”

However, he said he believed the public would overall be responsive “provided you are clear with people what the logic is, provided they feel that we’re being entirely straight with them as to all the data”.

With scientists still unsure whether Omicron poses a greater danger than other variants, further developments include:

- Thousands of UK nationals face paying thousands of pounds for mandatory hotel quarantine on their return from South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, Eswatini, Zimbabwe and Namibia after Sunday. Non-UK and non-Irish nationals from those countries will be banned, while people arriving in England before 4am on Sunday will have to take PCR tests and quarantine at home.
- The EU agreed there was a need to suspend flights from countries in southern Africa following restrictions announced by countries

including the UK, Japan, Germany, Italy and Spain. The US and Canada also brought in travel curbs on Friday night.

- South Africa said it was “[unjustified](#)” for other countries to impose travel bans and Boris Johnson held a call with the country’s president, Cyril Ramaphosa, to discuss the restrictions.
- The FTSE 100 had its worst day since June 2020, closing down 3.6%, with £72bn wiped off the index. The British Airways owner, IAG, ended the day nearly 15% lower, while Rolls-Royce slumped more than 11%.

As the UK recorded 50,091 daily Covid cases and 160 more coronavirus-related deaths on Friday – the highest level in a month – scientists said it was highly likely the variant would come to the UK, risking a surge in cases.

Prof Sharon Peacock of the University of Cambridge, the director of the Covid-19 Genomics UK Consortium, said: “Once a new variant emerges and it is fitter than previous variants it can be difficult to stop it going into a country unless you have very stringent lockdown rules.”

Dr Jeffrey Barrett, the director of the Covid-19 Genomics Initiative at the Wellcome Sanger Institute, agreed it was “probably right that it’s a case of buying time because of past experience”. But he added that, because Omicron has been identified at a far earlier stage than the now-dominant [Delta variant](#), “there might be some hope for some amount of containment or that time-buying phase to be longer”.

Prof Christina Pagel, the director of University College London’s clinical operational research unit and a member of the Independent Sage group of experts, said delaying the import of Omicron to the UK would be beneficial.

“If we can keep it out until after the Christmas break then we’ve bypassed a massive mixing opportunity,” she said. “I think we do need to do something to get transmission down now and ramp up our testing and contact-tracing abilities. When Delta arrived in the UK, we were in lockdown. So it spread but it was harder for it to spread.

“Now, if [Omicron] comes here and it spreads through a few people then there’s nothing to stop it carrying on … So that’s why if we start putting in things like mask wearing and working from home – now you’re in a situation where it’s not going to stop it, but it’ll slow it down. We’re boosting about 2.5 million people a week, so delaying even a few weeks really does help.”

The Belgian health minister urged people not to panic. Frank Vandenbroucke, speaking at a press conference to announce new Covid restrictions including the closure of nightclubs, said: “I want to repeat that it is a suspect variant. We do not know if it is very dangerous. So: absolute precaution, but no panic pending further scientific analysis.”

On Friday night, the European centre for disease prevention and control, an EU health agency, published an assessment that “the probability of further introduction and community spread” in the EU was high and the impact could be “very high”.

Dr Andrea Ammon, director of the ECDC, said: “We must be proactive and implement measures as a precaution to buy time until we gain more knowledge.” The assessment warned that the Omicron variant was “the most divergent variant that has been detected in significant numbers during the pandemic so far, which raises concerns that it may be associated with increased transmissibility, significant reduction in vaccine effectiveness and increased risk for reinfections”.

Labour said ministers needed to act quickly to “get a grip” of the issues before Omicron had a chance to take hold. The party said No 10 should bring forward eligibility for boosters to five months after the previous dose to “ensure continuous protection and mitigate against waning immunity”.

It also demanded “immediate clarity” on when those under 40 will be eligible for boosters and any rollout of the Covid vaccine to children under the age of 12, as well as a robust plan to ensure all hospitals have an adequate supply of antiviral drugs to treat patients.

The shadow health secretary, Jonathan Ashworth, is currently isolating with Covid and high levels of the virus appear to be circulating in Westminster, with MPs saying a number of colleagues are absent. Ashworth's deputy Alex Norris, a shadow health minister, said: "This new variant is a wake-up call. The pandemic is not over. We need to urgently bolster our defences to keep the virus at bay. We must not lose the gains we have made through vaccine rollout. Ministers must grip this fast."

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Coronavirus

The Sicilian town where the Covid vaccination rate hit 104%



Residents of Palazzo Adriano after receiving their second dose of Covid-19 vaccine. Photograph: Salvatore Spata

[Lorenzo Tondo](#) in Palazzo Adriano

[@lorenzo_tondo](#)

Sat 27 Nov 2021 03.00 EST

While European governments weigh up new mandates and measures to boost the uptake of Covid jabs there is on the slopes of Sicily's Monte delle Rose a village with a vaccination rate that defies mathematics: 104%.

The figure is in part a statistical quirk – vaccine rates are calculated by Italian health authorities on a town or village's official population and can in theory rise above 100% if enough non-residents are jabbed there – but Palazzo Adriano, where the Oscar-winning movie [Cinema Paradiso](#) was

filmed, is by any standards a well-vaccinated community. A good portion of the population has already taken or booked a third dose and since vaccines were first available it utilised its close-knit relations to protect its people.

“It seems like an impossible statistic,” said the mayor, Nicolò Granà, proudly. “But, in fact, at Palazzo Adriano, those inhabitants who live in our town, even though they are not official residents and other people who live in neighbouring villages have also been vaccinated.”



Nicola Longo, 64, and Francesco Cuttonaro, 73, are preparing for their third dose of the vaccine. Photograph: Lorenzo Tondo/The Guardian

With a population of 2,100, Palazzo Adriano is one of more than 5,500 Italian villages with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants. Most have been severely affected by young people leaving to look for work in other countries or large cities and have an average age of over 60. If Covid were to spread among these populations, these villages would risk being wiped off the map.

“Last March, we feared the worst,” says Salvatore Spata, 54, the village’s councillor for culture. “A nun and a priest, who came from another town and who did not know they were positive, infected some residents, causing an outbreak that affected about 16 inhabitants. Fortunately, in those days, the vaccination campaign had started.”



Nicolò Granà, the mayor of Palazzo Adriano. Photograph: Lorenzo Tondo/The Guardian

He described the vaccination effort as “an extraordinary word of mouth campaign” making the most of Palazzo Adriano’s human networks. “At least one representative of each family in the village passes through this square, every day. We took advantage of those intense relationships between relatives and friends to spread the vaccination campaign. All we had to do is inform every person we met, reminding them to get vaccinated, and, the next day, their relatives showed up in the lab for the jab.”

“There was almost an air of celebration at the vaccination hubs,” said Granà. “It was like being at a popular town festival. People understood that, with vaccines, they were creating a shield that would protect their community, safeguarding the very survival of the village.”

Where there were concerns over the vaccine, the village set up a WhatsApp group of hundreds of residents to discuss them. “In this group, we responded to fake news and reassured people about vaccine safety,” Granà said. “I am convinced that, if we had spread the wrong information about the dangers of jabs, today we would be here to tell you another story – that of dozens of deaths from Covid that would have risked halving the inhabitants of this village.”

And, while, across Italy, [protests against Covid passes](#) continue to rage, incited by far-right movements, at Palazzo Adriano, Nicola Longo, 64, and Francesco Cuttonaro, 73, are preparing for their third doses.



Palazzo Adriano is best known internationally for being one of the filming locations of Cinema Paradiso. The town has dedicated a museum to it.
Photograph: Lorenzo Tondo/The Guardian

“We all know each other here,” says Longo. “And it was easy to convince people. By vaccinating ourselves we safeguard others, and, here at Palazzo Adriano, safeguarding others means safeguarding your children, your friends’ children and your relatives.”

There are many small villages in [Italy](#) that have reached vaccination rates close to 100%. In Brinzio in the northern region of Lombardy, nearly 97% of its 789 inhabitants are vaccinated. In Premana, in the province of Lecco, 100% of its 2,000 inhabitants are jabbed.

In Palazzo Adriano’s main square, where fresh water flows directly from a mountain spring into an old water fountain, older people walk, play cards, sip an espresso, while young people chat at the bar. “Some will say that, in other European countries, people have resumed doing what they did before,” said Granà. “But, I think, going back to doing what you did before, knowing

that the person by your side, your friends, the people who are with you at the bar, are vaccinated, makes you feel more protected and therefore more free.”

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Coronavirus

What should the UK do now? Experts on responses to the new Covid variant



Shoppers in Kingston upon Thames. Travel measures might buy time but they could not prevent the arrival of B.1.1.529 in the UK, said one expert.
Photograph: Amer Ghazzal/REX/Shutterstock

[Nicola Davis](#) Science correspondent

[@NicolaKSDavis](#)

Fri 26 Nov 2021 11.33 EST

Despite the UK's much-vaunted vaccination programme, and scientists' ever-growing understanding of Covid-19, Britain and the rest of the world face the challenge of a new, potentially more transmissible variant just a month before Christmas.

While Sajid Javid, the health secretary, announced [the red-listing of six southern African countries](#) and said "we must act with caution", he ruled out

immediate new Covid measures including triggering [winter plan B](#) – which would involve working from home, mask-wearing and Covid passports.

So what should the UK do in the short term and what is the chance of fresh restrictions? Prof Mark Woolhouse of the University of Edinburgh said travel measures might buy time but, as they could not prevent the arrival of B.1.1.529 in the UK, the key was what was done with the time bought.

“The priority must be to establish whether B.1.1.529 really does pose a significant threat to public health. If it does then we have a suite of tools available to lessen its impact,” he said.

Ravi Gupta, professor of clinical microbiology at the University of Cambridge, is among experts backing an increase in precautions now, saying this would also limit flu and the spread of the dominant delta variant of Covid as people started gathering in groups in the winter.

Prof Rowland Kao, an epidemiologist at the University of Edinburgh, said that while more information was needed about the new variant, “we can’t afford to wait”. Local lockdowns in areas where the variant was found could be necessary to reduce its spread, he said.

“The greatest concern at the moment is that, because [B.1.1.529 is] so different, vaccines will be less effective at preventing infection. And without direct evidence that it is less deadly, it would mean any introduction into the UK would require measures, at the very least at a fairly large local level,” he said.

Stopping the variant entering the UK could be a means to avoid such measures “and that means we should be prepared to extend the red list rapidly and generously if needs be”, he said.

Prof Azra Ghani, an epidemiologist at Imperial College London, said the appropriate response was hard to gauge but alongside red-listing countries, genomic surveillance – decoding the genome of virus samples – was key.

“We have very good genomic surveillance in place but the recent relaxation of testing post-travel, [for example] no longer requiring PCR tests after return, may limit the speed with which the new variant entering the country is detected,” she said.

But Prof Adam Finn of the University of Bristol, a member of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), said until there was more clarity on distribution and transmission of the new variant, there was “not much else to do at this point”. Evidence was needed on whether it did indeed escape immune responses, he said, but tweaking the vaccine would take time.

Experts have previously [suggested the process could take six months](#). “Vaccines can be modified relatively rapidly but they then additionally need to be produced at scale, delivered and administered,” said Ghani. In other words, it is unlikely the UK will be able to rely on new jabs to tackle the variant in the short term at least.

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[Opinion](#)[Coronavirus](#)

A new Covid variant is no surprise when rich countries are hoarding vaccines

[Gordon Brown](#)





‘While South Africa has achieved 27% vaccination rates, its rural areas are often in single figures.’ A woman receives a Covid jab in Katlehong, South Africa, October 2021. Photograph: Themba Hadebe/AP

Fri 26 Nov 2021 11.00 EST

Despite the repeated warnings of health leaders, our failure to put vaccines into the arms of people in the developing world is now coming back to haunt us. We were forewarned – and yet here we are.

In the absence of mass vaccination, Covid is not only spreading uninhibited among unprotected people but is mutating, with new variants emerging out of the poorest countries and now threatening to unleash themselves on even fully vaccinated people in the richest countries of the world.

On Thursday, the UK’s Department of Health, which has placed a travel ban on southern Africa, warned that the B.1.1.529 “Omicron” variant was the most “complex” and “worrying” seen so far. And yet with 9.1bn vaccines already manufactured and 12bn expected by the year’s end – enough to vaccinate the whole world – this was the “arms race” that we could have won. No country should be facing yet another winter with the uncertainty of a new wave of Covid hanging over us.

On Monday, the World Health Assembly, the decision-making body of the World Health Organization, will meet in a special session. They will hear that vaccination rates in the six countries now subject to UK travel bans are still dangerously below the [40% target](#) that was set for December. In Zimbabwe, only 25% have had a first vaccine and just 19% of the population are fully vaccinated. In Lesotho and Eswatini, which have had the Johnson & Johnson single-shot vaccines, just 27% and 22% respectively have been vaccinated. In Namibia the figure is even lower: 14% vaccinated with only 12% fully vaccinated.

While South Africa has achieved 27% vaccination rates, its rural areas are often in single figures, and the whole of the continent is justifiably angry because their own efforts to vaccinate have been impeded for months by the neo-colonialism of the European Union. Even as the gap between the vaccines haves of Europe and the vaccine have-nots of Africa mushroomed, [the EU insisted on commandeering](#) millions of South African-produced Johnson & Johnson one-shot vaccines and sending them out of Africa into Europe.

In June, Boris Johnson promised he and the G7 countries would use their surplus vaccines to immunise the whole world. In September, at a summit chaired by President Biden, a December target of 40% vaccination was set for the 92 poorest countries. Two and a half months on, there is little chance of this target being met in at least 82 of them. By Thursday the US, which to its credit has been responsible for half the vaccines donated, had still delivered only 25% of the vaccines that it promised.

The arithmetic of failure in the rest of the world is even more embarrassing. According to Airfinity, the European Union has delivered only 19%, the UK just 11% and Canada just 5%.

China and New Zealand have delivered over half of what was promised, but their pledges amounted to just 100m and 1.6m respectively. Australia has given just 18% of what it offered and Switzerland just 12%.

The result is that even now only 3% of people in low-income countries are fully vaccinated, while the figure exceeds 60% in both high-income countries and upper-middle-income countries. Every day, for every vaccine

delivered as first vaccines in the poorest countries, six times as many doses are being administered as third and booster vaccines in the richest parts of the world. This vaccine inequality is the main reason why the WHO is predicting 200 million more cases on top of the 260 million so far. And after 5 million deaths to Covid, another 5 million are thought to be possible in the next year and more.

What's most galling is that this policy failure is not because we are short of vaccines or manufacturing contracts to secure them. The problem is not now in production (2 billion doses of vaccine are being manufactured every month), but in the unfairness of distribution. The stranglehold exercised by the G20 richest countries is such that they have monopolised 89% of vaccines, and even now, 71% of future deliveries are scheduled for them. As a result, the global vaccine distribution agency, Covax, has been able to secure only two-thirds of the 2bn vaccines promised to poorer countries.

The good news is that our medical genius has ensured that the new Omicron variant has been identified quickly; is being sequenced at speed; and, if it proves not only more transmissible but immune to current vaccines, a new vaccine could potentially soon emerge. But given the contrast between the success of our scientists and the failure of our global leaders, only a herculean effort starting this week can allay fears that new mutations among unvaccinated people in the least-protected places will take Covid into a third year – with even fifth, sixth and seventh waves.

We can act quickly. As of today, 500m unused vaccines are available across the G7. By December, the figure will rise to 600m, and by February, it will be 850m vaccines, which can be sent to the countries in greatest need. At the last count, the US has 162m vaccine doses it could immediately deliver to the rest of the world, a figure that grows to 250m next month; Europe currently has even more: 250m, which by February could exceed 350m. The UK has 33m vaccines – expected to rise to 46m over the next three months.

The alternative is too awful to contemplate; vaccines are being destroyed while lives are being lost through lack of them. According to the data research agency Covax, around 100m of western countries' vaccines will pass their use-by dates in December and could easily go to waste. Of course, there will be issues of absorption in Africa, but the bigger problem is that

too many of the vaccines gifted to the poorest countries are within 12 weeks of their “use-by-dates”. These short lead times between donation and expiry show why a strengthened G20 and a month-to-month delivery timetable is now urgent; and why the expeditious transferring of delivery dates, from rich to poor countries – as has happened with Switzerland’s recent transfer to Covax – is the best way of speeding up the transfer of unused vaccines to where they are needed most.

Nothing so dramatically illustrates the urgent need for what might be called a pandemic non-proliferation treaty . A new and binding international agreement that the World Health Assembly will consider next week must improve our surveillance and early warning systems, ensure the early transfer of medical supplies to countries in need, and finally agree sufficient funding of a worldwide effort to deliver what is clearly the most important global public good of all: cross-border control of infectious disease. Only when we reject vaccine nationalism and medical protectionism will we stop outbreaks becoming pandemics.

- Gordon Brown is the WHO ambassador for global health financing, and was UK prime minister from 2007 to 2010
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OpinionDiscrimination at work

Yorkshire cricket is in disgrace but the fight to tackle workplace racism is nationwide

[Charlene Brown](#)



The former Yorkshire player Azeem Rafiq gives evidence to MPs.
Photograph: Parliament TV

Sat 27 Nov 2021 03.00 EST

As a lawyer and managing director of a company that specialises in culture, law, and diversity and inclusion, I investigate allegations of harassment, bullying and discrimination often. The nature of my work means that I'm no stranger to the discourse surrounding racism and how it manifests in the workplace.

“Banter”, as we’ve seen played out in the [Yorkshire cricket scandal](#), is routinely badged as fun and a laugh, but the boundaries between banter,

bullying, microaggressions and racism are thin.

Racism is not banter. While some believe that no intent to be racist equates to an absence of racism, this is not the case. Not meaning to crash into someone's car doesn't erase the crash, or the resulting damage. Intent is a tricky issue to overcome. Unconscious bias is just that – unconscious – and, without the right tools or environment to deconstruct learned behaviour, change is quashed by shame and defensiveness. This kind of toxic culture prevents the growth of employees, who may never have had the opportunity to understand what unconscious bias *is*, and the harm it can do.

It's important to note, however, that, while some people's actions can be understood by their lack of knowledge and understanding, there are groups of people who are intentionally racist and use the veil of misunderstanding, or "banter", to excuse their behaviour. People can be tentative and often fearful of addressing behaviour – not wanting to put a foot wrong, cause more distress or be branded racist – but this inaction is unhelpful.

I have seen first-hand how opening up a compassionate, constructive dialogue can heal and improve workspaces. This is only a starting point, though, and must always be scaffolded by expert strategies, investigations, better internal procedures, change management and much more. It's not as easy as having a heartfelt conversation and moving on.

What has happened at Yorkshire County Cricket Club appears to be, so far, an example of what not to do when tackling allegations of racism in the workplace. The club seems to have had a root-and-branch issue for some time that was left woefully unaddressed, allowing negative behaviours to develop. The remarks allegedly [made by Michael Vaughan](#) to a group of Asian players at Yorkshire in 2009 strike me as being learned behaviour, reflective of an attitude and culture woven into the fabric of the club before the start of his tenure. He denies making these remarks, but if he did so, his failure to acknowledge their root causes will not allow him to reflect and will undoubtedly cause more harm.

After watching the interview with Joe Root, who [denied witnessing](#) any instances of racism, I found it interesting how he placed the focus on "the

way forward". There was little pause and reflection about the magnitude of Azeem Rafiq's testimony. Rushing into action without deep reflection of impact, why and how this happened, and who Yorkshire intends to be as a club, will not change its behaviours and structures.

In contrast, I have personally had the pleasure of supporting employers who are committed to action and change, who have recognised their flaws and identified where improvements must be made. Part of the work I do is about creating safe spaces to examine what and where things are going wrong, and how issues such as racism take hold in structures, policies and behaviours. Only through this honest reflection and assessment can we help companies and organisations make the necessary changes.

Many business structures were created without inclusion, anti-racism and equality in mind. They were chosen for operational, or financial, purposes, and employers are not prioritising deconstructing them, or don't know how to do so safely. Without structures that support recognising and addressing racist behaviours in the workplace, training and discussions about racism will only go so far.

Hard policy lines need to be drawn that are reflective but, most importantly, best suited to supporting an anti-racist work culture, supported by accountability and sanction measures. In its most simple form, this means allowing anonymous and identifiable complaints of racism to be made and assessed objectively. Support should be provided to the complainants, followed by an investigation, then a decision as to what the most appropriate action might be. It may be disciplinary action whereby someone is fired, it could be mediation to bring the parties involved together to resolve and find a way forward, or it could also be a coaching conversation.

There is no one fixed solution. This is all subject to context and employers need definitive clarity. What is defined as racism, microaggression, bullying and harassment? Where is the line? Ultimately, a consistent approach that is reflected upon routinely is essential, because, in my experience, every person has a different understanding, a different viewpoint and a different resolution need.

The issues surrounding racism are becoming increasingly more complex and these exposés will continue until real action is taken. It's time to stop reactive statements and box-ticking. The longer this continues, the greater the risk for employers and their employees.

- Charlene Brown is a lawyer, diversity and inclusion expert and MD of Howlett Brown
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Britain, the Stupidest MP contest is back. But who will get your vote?

[Marina Hyde](#)



“There seems to be a call from a tiny, but very vocal, minority that every male character or good role model must have a female replacement,’ explained Nick Fletcher MP.’ Jodie Whittaker as the Doctor. Photograph: James Pardon/PA

Fri 26 Nov 2021 09.28 EST

When I first started on this newspaper’s Diary column (still this millennium, but only just), we had a rolling competition called Stupidest MP, which aimed to celebrate Westminster’s non-finest minds. So many memories – too many to choose from, in some ways. But Archie Hamilton, then Tory member for Epsom and Ewell and a former 1922 committee chairman, was a perennial candidate. The Diary had previously contacted Sir Archie asking if he would sit an intelligence test, to which he had tentatively – and indeed bizarrely – agreed, as long as others did it with him. Alas, what we might politely term a “peer group” could not be found for some years.

But everything changed when news emerged of a “talking” chimpanzee named Panbanisha that resided at the Great Ape Trust in Iowa. A call to Hamilton’s office was immediately placed. When he came to the phone, Sir Archie was asked whether he had seen the stories about this creature. He had? Very good. In which case: would he be willing to participate in an intelligence test against the chimp? Very regrettably, Sir Archie declined the opportunity, forcing the Diary to make a subsequent call to Conservative Central Office. “We can’t say to him ‘You must do it,’” fretted a press officer there. “If it’s something he feels he couldn’t do well, we can’t make him.” Understood. Had she any other suggestions? “What about someone from our education team? There’s Theresa May ... ”

When Archie announced his retirement as an MP – he’s in the House of Lords now, obviously – we again called his office to arrange a fitting tribute. Would he finally do the animal kingdom the honour of taking the test, only this time against a mynah bird? “Are you serious?” wondered his agent. Yes. We have the bird on standby. There was a ruminative pause. “Look, I don’t think it’s Archie’s cup of tea. We’re Conservatives, you see. We have certain proprieties.”

I suppose the point of this lengthy preamble is to set up the question: has anyone got a mynah bird to hand? Alternatively, has anyone got a chimp, talking or otherwise? For while Archie has taken his brains to the Lords, his spirit lives on in the Commons. In fact, there would have been two very strong candidates for Stupidest MP this week, from opposite sides of the house.

We'll begin with an eye-catching Westminster speech on the subject of international men's day, which has long served as an occasion to draw out the cream of parliamentary intelligentsia. Announcing himself as one of their number was the Don Valley MP, Nick Fletcher, who delivered a neuron-killing address about a crisis in masculinity. "Everywhere ... there seems to be a call from a tiny, but very vocal, minority that every male character or good role model must have a female replacement," [explained Nick](#). "One only needs to consider the discussions around who will next play James Bond." Not really – it'll be a man, but go on. "In recent years we have seen Doctor Who, the Ghostbusters, Luke Skywalker and the Equalizer all replaced by women, and men are left with the Krays and Tommy Shelby." Think he'll find they're mostly on TikTok and not bothered about this either way. But it's the extrapolation that's the really special bit: "Is there any wonder we are seeing so many young men committing crime?" Nick would later refer to this as "a rather nuanced point", to which the only possible rejoinder is: no. Incorrect.

Anyway, on to Labour's Jon Trickett, who detected in Boris Johnson's gibberingly shambolic [Peppa Pig meltdown](#) on Monday not simply a strategy, but a complex and brilliant strategy. "Peppa Pig," [explained Jon](#), "was a media distraction to disguise the handover of your NHS to private health." Oh dear. Please, not the "dead cat". I don't know if you can technically kill a dead cat, but if this phrase were to be robbed of the ability to appear in British political discourse ever again, it would be of great benefit.

Alas, among a certain breed of political watchers, the mention of dead cats has become almost reflexive. Everything is a dead cat for something else, and there must always be an unseen play at work. The dead cat is a close ally of other conspiracist assumptions that bolster those simply unable to accept that the political upheavals of the last few years were not largely the

work of the Russians, or Cambridge Analytica, or any other hidden master villains manipulating the poor, stupid voters. These things might have made a small amount of difference. But the alternative, and in my view accurate, reading is that the UK basically cocked everything up/liberated itself on its own. With some low-level assistance, yes, but all the elements were already there. And yet in many political tribes this is regarded as unthinkably simplistic, probably out of a self-regarding inability to confront the fact.

In the vast, vast majority of cases, dead cats are just a story people like to tell themselves – perhaps to sound cleverer, but more probably just to feel better. As a long-term Jeremy Corbyn supporter, you can quite see why Trickett needs to think some kind of fiendish mastery was underpinning Johnson's Peppa meltdown: the alternative is facing up to the bald reality that people actually preferred THIS GUY to his guy. Which, let's face it, is quite telling enough.

All in all, then, an impressive week for Stupidest MP, an eminently revivable contest for which we might have to start coming up with some prizes. The chance to be rebooted with a female mynah bird? Or the opportunity to go head to head in an intelligence test with a dead cat?

- Marina Hyde is a Guardian columnist
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OpinionThe Beatles

The Beatles were like aliens from the future in 1969 - and they are still as radical today

[Jonathan Freedland](#)





Illustration: Matt Kenyon

Fri 26 Nov 2021 11.48 EST

They Shall Not Grow Old was the title Peter Jackson gave to the first documentary he made, and he could have named his latest exactly the same way. Instead it is called Get Back, and while the earlier film restored archive footage of the young British men who fought the first world war, this new one – nearly eight hours long and making its [debut](#) in three parts this weekend – does the same for the young British men who conquered the world by more peaceful means; four of them to be precise, known for ever as the Beatles.

Obsessives across the globe have had their anoraks zipped up in readiness for a while, eager to study the differences between the ninth and 13th take of Don't Let Me Down, but the resonance of these films is not confined to muso aficionados alone. On the contrary, they have something to say to anyone interested in Britain and how it's changed – and in the universal themes of friendship, creativity, regret, loss and time.

The brightest light shed on Britain comes in the film's climax: the [famous rooftop concert](#) on a cold January lunchtime in 1969. Part of the crew who had been filming the band over the preceding month, as they worked up

material for what would become the Let it Be album, went into the streets below to [interview Londoners](#) who were hearing what was the first live Beatles performance for nearly three years.

For a 2021 audience, it's a revelation. The buildings of Savile Row are not all that different, but in every other respect, the past truly is another country. The vox pops show a London that is largely white, English-born and marked by a class divide that is wide and clear. There are men in suits, ties and bowler hats – disapproving of the disruption to business in the area – and cheeky-chappie cabbies giving an approving thumbs up. There are young women sharing their delight in a cockney accent that has all but vanished, and plummy ladies who lunch. What's missing is the group that would dominate now: everyone in between. Statistically, Britain today is [majority middle class](#); no one would have suggested such a thing then.

It's a jolt to realise this is the same country: we seem to have so little in common. In fact, one of the few points of connection between this place and that one – besides the Queen – is the Beatles. They listened to them then; we listen to them now. There's a cheery optimism to the London of 1969, and the Beatles were surely part of that too. Yes, the postwar years had been humbling; the economic and political story was one of decline. But it was possible to cling to a mild form of British exceptionalism, at least in terms of popular culture. Because when it came to pop music, Britain really did lead the world.

And yet, when you watch the Beatles in these films, it's not the Britain of 1969 that you're thinking about. That's chiefly because the four somehow stand outside it, or rather ahead of it. They look so current, so fresh – John wearing trainers, George in baseball boots – they seem like visitors from the future, emissaries from 2021 who have somehow landed in the world of Bedford vans, Charles Hawtrey and the Daily Sketch.

15:13

The Beatles, Get Back and London: on the trail of a timeless story – video

The modernity finds other expressions too. The form is contemporary: all that fly-on-the-wall footage, watching the dynamics of a group close up,

suggests that to the long list of innovations credited to the Beatles, perhaps we should add an early form of reality TV. But the content of the conversations brims with modernity too.

There's an arrogant temptation to assume that it's the current generation of men, in particular, that has acquired emotional intelligence, that the men of 50 years ago were strangers to empathy or self-awareness. But then you eavesdrop on John Lennon and Paul McCartney reflecting on how they have driven George Harrison to walk out. We've already seen it for ourselves in the film, the way the older two treat Harrison as a kid brother, failing to enthuse over songs he has tentatively brought to the group. "It's a festering wound," says Lennon, "and yesterday we allowed it to go even deeper. And we didn't give him any bandages."

They say explicitly that, since the death of their manager, Brian Epstein, they're missing a father figure. McCartney has stepped into the leadership vacuum but he knows that none of them likes it, including him: "I'm scared of me being the boss," he says. On the well-worn topic of Yoko Ono's constant presence, glued to Lennon as the band plays, McCartney is understanding rather than irritated. "They just want to be near each other," he says, adding that it needn't be "an obstacle, as long as we're not trying to surmount it".

Indeed, Get Back serves in part as a study in male friendship. What you see on screen between John and Paul, especially when they play, is a chemistry that crackles as fiercely as any sexual or romantic attraction. The connection between the two is so intimate, the shared glances full of such understanding, that when they play Two of Us, you realise that the love that song celebrates is theirs – even if they didn't know it.

Which brings us to the music. There can be few truer expositions of the creative process than these films. Yes, it can be long and tedious and repetitive, going over the same ground again and again. Yes, it's as much about hard work as innate talent – and the Beatles' work ethic, returning to the studio to make a new record a matter of weeks after they had finished the "White Album", is striking. But we also witness the miracle of the act of

creation. Before your very eyes, McCartney's random strums turn into Get Back: it's like watching a chick hatch from a shell.

All of this has great poignance, because we know what they don't: that the concert on the roof will be their last performance together and that, a little over a decade later, John Lennon will be dead. Part of you is filled with regret: you want to urge the four of them to find a way to keep going, if only for a little longer; you pine for all the songs that went unwritten and unsung.

And the larger part of you marvels at what these four people in their 20s did in little over six years: creating music that is truly timeless, in the sense not only that it will live on, but that much of it seems to exist outside time altogether. The finest Beatles melodies sound as if they are part of nature, as if they always existed and were only waiting to be picked up.

This is why Jackson could once again have found his title in that same poem of war. Because even without his masterful digital effects, the Beatles will always be those four young men bursting with improbable talent. Age shall not weary them.

Jonathan Freedland is a Guardian columnist

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Solomon Islands unrest: three bodies found in burnt-out building



A police vehicle outside the burnt-out building in Honiara where three bodies have been found. Photograph: Charley Piringi/AFP/Getty Images

Charley Piringi and agencies

Fri 26 Nov 2021 23.49 EST

The bodies of three people have been discovered in a burnt-out building in the [Solomon Islands](#) capital of Honiara, the first reported deaths after days of rioting.

The charred bodies were discovered in a store in the Chinatown district of Honiara, police said on Saturday.

A security guard, Edie Soa, said the bodies had been found in the OK Mart in Honiara's Chinatown on Friday night.

“Three of them were in the same room with a cash box and money on the floor,” he said.

Many buildings in the Chinatown district have been torched and Soa said the bodies were very badly burnt.

“We couldn’t tell if they are Chinese people or locals.”

Police said forensic teams had launched an investigation and were still on the scene but that the cause of the deaths was unclear.



People walk through the Chinatown district of Honiara after days of violence. Photograph: Charley Piringi/AFP/Getty Images

The streets of the capital remained relatively quiet on Saturday morning as locals begin to assess the damage left by days of rioting. More than 100 people have been arrested.

A curfew had been imposed on the restive capital overnight after a third day of violence that saw the prime minister’s home come under attack and swathes of the city reduced to smouldering ruins.

Australian peacekeepers, [who arrived in the country late on Thursday](#), also joined police on the streets to restore order and protect critical infrastructure.

The explosion of violence is partly a result of frustrations with prime minister Manasseh Sogavare's government and chronic unemployment – made worse by the pandemic.

Experts say the crisis has also been fuelled by long-standing animosity between residents of the most populous island Malaita and the central government based on the island of Guadalcanal.

The archipelago nation of around 700,000 people has for decades endured ethnic and political tensions.

Malaita residents have long complained that their island is neglected by the central government, and divisions intensified when Sogavare recognised Beijing in 2019.

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[The ObserverSouth Korea](#)

Widow of former South Korean dictator Chun Doo-hwan offers ‘deep apology’ for brutal rule



Lee Soon-ja, the wife of the late former South Korean President Chun Doo-hwan, watches the coffin containing the body of her husband in Seoul.
Photograph: AP

Associated Press

Sat 27 Nov 2021 02.24 EST

The widow of South Korea’s last military dictator has issued a brief apology over the “pains and scars” caused by her husband’s brutal rule as dozens of relatives and former aides gathered at a Seoul hospital to pay their final respects to Chun Doo-hwan.

Chun, who took power in a 1979 coup and violently crushed pro-democracy protests a year later before being jailed for treason in the 1990s, [died at his](#)

Seoul home Tuesday at the age of 90.

On the final day of a five-day funeral procession, Chun's family held a funeral service at Seoul's Severance hospital before taking his remains to a memorial park for cremation. Chun's widow, Lee Soon-ja, said during the service at the hospital that her husband had wished to be cremated and that his ashes be spread in border areas near North Korea.

"As we wrap up the funeral procession today, I would like to offer a deep apology on behalf of our family toward the people who suffered pains and scars during my husband's time in office," said Lee on Saturday, without specifying Chun's misdeeds.

Chun never apologised for his atrocities, which included overseeing a massacre of hundreds of pro-democracy protesters in the southern city of Gwangju in 1980, one of the darkest moments in the country's modern history that came as he attempted to solidify his rule after the coup.

Cho Jin-tae, a senior official at a foundation representing Gwangju victims, said Lee's vague expression of remorse rang hollow and called for Chun's family to back her words with action, including cooperating with truth-finding efforts into Chun's major wrongdoings.

"I don't think anyone will be consoled by Lee Soon-ja's comments today," Cho told The Associated Press by phone.

Chun was an army major general when he seized power in December 1979 with his military cronies, including Roh Tae-woo, who later succeeded Chun as president after winning the country's first democratic election in decades. The two died nearly an exact month apart, with Roh's death coming on 26 October.

While Roh was given a state funeral, there has been much less sympathy for Chun, who had been nicknamed the "butcher of Gwangju". Although Roh never directly apologised over the crackdown, his son repeatedly visited a Gwangju cemetery to pay respects to the victims and apologised on behalf of his father, who was bed-ridden in the 10 years before his death.

Chun's coup extended military-backed rule of the country after the assassination of his mentor and former army general, Park Chung-Hee, who had held power since 1961. During their back-to-back dictatorships, South Koreans suffered huge human rights abuses although the national economy grew dramatically from the ruins of the 1950-53 Korean war.

Aside from the bloody crackdown in Gwangju, Chun's government also imprisoned tens of thousands of other dissidents during the 1980s, including future president and 2000 Nobel Peace Prize winner Kim Dae-jung. Kim, then a prominent opposition leader, was initially sentenced to death by a military tribunal on accusations of fomenting the Gwangju uprising. After the United States intervened, Kim's sentence was reduced and he was eventually freed.

Desperate to gain international legitimacy, Chun's government successfully pushed a bid to host the 1988 Olympics, a process that was accompanied by massive house clearings and roundups of vagrants and homeless people as officials tried to beautify the country for foreign visitors.

Trying to develop relations with the democratic West and reduce the number of mouths to feed at home, Chun's government also facilitated the international adoptions of Korean children, mostly to white families in America and Europe, creating what is now the world's largest diaspora of adoptees. More than 60,000 children were sent abroad during Chun's presidency, most of them newborns procured from stigmatised unwed mothers who were often pressured to relinquish their babies.

Public anger over his dictatorship eventually fuelled massive nationwide protests in 1987, forcing Chun to accept a constitutional revision to introduce direct presidential elections, which were considered as the start of South Korea's transition to democracy.

Roh, the governing party candidate, won a hotly contested December 1987 election, largely due to a splitting of the vote between liberal opposition candidates Kim Dae-jung and his chief rival, Kim Young-sam.

After Roh left office in 1993, Kim Young-sam became president and had both Chun and Roh stand trial as part of a reform drive. The two ex-

presidents were convicted of mutiny and treason over the coup and the Gwangju crackdown, as well as corruption. Chun was sentenced to death and Roh to 22 1/2 years in prison.

The supreme court later reduced those sentences to life imprisonment for Chun and 17 years for Roh. After spending about two years in prison, Roh and Chun were released in late 1997 under a special pardon requested by then president-elect Kim Dae-jung, who sought national reconciliation.

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[Peru](#)

Archaeologists unearth mummy estimated to be at least 800 years old in Peru



The discovery of mummies in Peru, such as the 1,700-year-old Lady of Cao, pictured, has forced the re-writing of history books. Photograph: Wiese Foundation HANDOUT/EPA

Reuters

Fri 26 Nov 2021 23.16 EST

A team of experts has found a mummy estimated to be at least 800 years old on Peru's central coast, one of the archaeologists who participated in the excavation said.

The mummified remains were of a person from the culture that developed between the coast and mountains of the South American country. The

mummy, whose gender was not identified, was discovered in the Lima region, said archaeologist Pieter Van Dalen Luna on Friday.

“The main characteristic of the mummy is that the whole body was tied up by ropes and with the hands covering the face, which would be part of the local funeral pattern,” said Van Dalen Luna, from the state university of San Marcos.

The remains are of a person who lived in the high Andean region of the country, he said. “Radiocarbon dating will give a more precise chronology.”

The mummy was found inside an underground structure found on the outskirts of the city of Lima. In the tomb were also offerings including ceramics, vegetable remains and stone tools, he said.

Peru – home to tourist destination Machu Picchu – is home to hundreds of archaeological sites from cultures that developed before and after the Inca empire, which dominated part of South America 500 years ago, from southern Ecuador and Colombia to central Chile.

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[Republicans](#)

Why Republicans are embracing Kyle Rittenhouse as their mascot



Kyle Rittenhouse at the Kenosha county courthouse in Wisconsin.
Photograph: Sean Krajacic/The Kenosha News/ZUMA Press
Wire/REX/Shutterstock



[David Smith](#) in Washington

[@smithinamerica](#)

Sat 27 Nov 2021 02.00 EST

Wearing suits and ties, the two men give the camera smiles and thumbs up. One is Donald Trump, former president of the United States. The other is [Kyle Rittenhouse](#), who killed two people at an anti-racism protest. And behind them is a framed photo of Trump meeting the North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un.

[The mesmerizing tableau](#) emerged from the ex-president's Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida earlier this week. It was, in effect, the coronation of Rittenhouse as a future star of the rightwing media, Republican party and "Make America great again" (Maga) movement in their crusade against liberalism.

"Kyle Rittenhouse has become the poster child for a general feeling among some in this country that White America is under siege," Eddie Glaude, chairman of the department of African American studies at Princeton University, [wrote in the Washington Post](#). "Rittenhouse defended himself, this argument goes, and White America must do the same."

Rittenhouse was 17 last year when he travelled 20 miles from his home in Antioch, Illinois, to Kenosha, Wisconsin, where racial justice protests had been held since the shooting of a Black man, [Jacob Blake](#), by a white police officer.

Rittenhouse joined others who said they wanted to protect private property. Armed with an AR-style semiautomatic rifle, he shot and killed two people and wounded a third. In court he argued that he fired in self-defense after he was attacked and in fear for his life.

When a jury acquitted Rittenhouse on all charges earlier this month, progressive activists urged fresh debate on gun safety and vigilantism. But Republican members of Congress wasted no time in lionising Rittenhouse as a [victim turned hero](#).

Madison Cawthorn of North Carolina, Matt Gaetz of Florida and Paul Gosar of Arizona floated the idea of offering Rittenhouse an internship in their offices on Capitol Hill. Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia trumped them by [sponsoring a House bill](#) to award Rittenhouse a congressional gold medal for protecting the community of Kenosha.

Not to be outdone, Ron DeSantis, the governor of Florida tipped as a potential presidential candidate in 2024, declared: “Kyle Rittenhouse did what we should want citizens to do in such a situation: step forward to defend the community against mob violence.”

This is where the energy in the party is

Dan Cassino, political scientist

And in light of Rittenhouse’s [meeting with Trump at Mar-a-Lago](#), it would come as no surprise if the now 18-year-old is given a speaking slot at next year’s [Conservative Political Action Conference \(CPAC\)](#) or a future Republican National Convention (RNC).

[Kurt Bardella](#), an adviser to the Democratic National Committee, said: “It’s very clear that they’re trying to make him their mascot. Any time that your mascot is someone who thought that it was an acceptable form of protest to

show up at a political event with an AR-15, that is glorifying violence. And that's a very dangerous thing to prop up and promote.”

In the week of Rittenhouse’s acquittal, all but two House Republicans refused to censure Gosar for posting an animated video that depicted him killing Democratic congresswoman [Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez](#) and attacking Biden.

Bardella, a former Republican congressional aide and spokesperson for rightwing Breitbart News, added: “It is a pattern. These aren’t isolated incidents. One is following the other and it’s not an accident and it’s not a coincidence. It’s a deliberate strategy.”

The sanctification of Rittenhouse, who was photographed in a bar before his trial with apparent members of the far-right Proud Boys, fits a tried and trusted playbook. Mark and Patricia McCloskey, a white couple in St Louis who pointed guns at Black Lives Matter protesters marching past their house, [addressed last year’s RNC](#) a day before Rittenhouse opened fire in Kenosha.

Mark McCloskey is now running for the US Senate in Missouri and welcomed Rittenhouse’s acquittal [by stating](#): “Liberals want to defund the police and prevent you from defending yourself, your family, your home, and your businesses. I will never stand for that. I stood for Kyle Rittenhouse and his right to self-defense.”

[Nicholas Sandmann](#), a high school student from Kentucky who sued media outlets for their depiction of his interaction – wearing a Maga cap – with a Native American activist on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington also came to personify grievances on the right.

And the pro-Trump mob that stormed the US Capitol on 6 January in an attempt to block certification of Joe Biden’s election has received similar treatment. Taylor Greene [visited accused insurrectionists](#) in what she called the “patriot wing” of a Washington prison, condemning its conditions as she tweeted: “I have never seen human suffering like I witnessed last night.”

Trump himself has praised Ashli Babbitt, a Capitol rioter fatally shot by police, as “a truly incredible person” and [recorded a video](#) to mark what would have been her 36th birthday in what many regard as an effort to turn her into a martyr.

Each cause célèbre is typically magnified by conservative media. On Monday more than 5m viewers watched Rittenhouse interviewed by Tucker Carlson, the Fox News opinion host’s biggest audience since the night of the 6 January attack.

[Carlson told viewers](#): “During the course of our long conversation, Kyle Rittenhouse struck us as bright, decent, sincere, dutiful and hardworking … exactly the kind of person you would want many more of in your country. He’s not especially political. He never wanted to be the symbol of anything.” He also described Rittenhouse as a “sweet kid”.

In the interview, Rittenhouse claimed that he had been “extremely defamed” during the case, fuelling speculation that he will take legal action against the media and politicians. Sandmann urged him to do so, [writing in the Daily Mail](#): “The parallels between me and Kyle Rittenhouse are impossible not to draw … The attacks on Kyle came from the national news media, just as they came for me.”

The challenge for Republicans who are running in competitive seats is, is that who you want?

Larry Jacobs, director, Center for the Study of Politics and Governance

Other Fox News presenters have revelled in an opportunity to “own the libs”. Laura Ingraham [tweeted](#): “The Left is going wild. Enjoy,” ahead of a show captioned: “Kyle and the liberal mind.” Sean Hannity interviewed Trump, who after meeting Rittenhouse made the provocative claim: “He should not have had to suffer through a trial. He should never have been put through that.”

Such comments imply resistance to a leftwing tyranny that assails individual rights, such as the right to bear arms. [Dan Cassino](#), a political scientist at Fairleigh Dickinson University and author of Fox News and American

Politics: How One Channel Shapes American Politics and Society, said: “This is where the energy in the party is.

“If you ask people on the right or look at rightwing media, they’ll tell you all the people Kyle Rittenhouse shot were criminals, they were terrible, they were going to kill everybody and these people are heroes for standing up, especially for using their second amendment rights.

“That’s a big part of this narrative, that having guns allows you to stand up to disorder and is a necessary thing to do in order to protect your community. It’s not Kyle Rittenhouse himself: he was protecting his community, and that’s what the second amendment is about as far as they’re concerned.”

But the normalisation of violence represented by Trump’s remarks at rallies, Gosar’s tweet and [Rittenhouse’s valorisation](#) is likely to be politically polarising, firing up the Maga base but turning off certain constituencies in elections.

[Larry Jacobs](#), director of the Center for the Study of Politics and Governance at the University of Minnesota, said: “The challenge for Republicans who are running in competitive seats is, is that who you want? He’s a guy who is not cheered by a lot of people, including suburban and better educated women. The idea of people running around with automatic weapons in street? That doesn’t really excite them.

“I expect the Trumpians to grab on to him, bring him out, have him smile and wave and say a few things. But I think the candidates may be more selective.”

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Brexit

French fishers block three ports and Channel tunnel access road



French fishers block the Normandy Trader boat at the entrance to the port of Saint-Malo. Photograph: Stéphane Mahé/Reuters

*[Lisa O'Carroll](#) and agencies
[@lisaocarroll](#)*

Fri 26 Nov 2021 09.47 EST

French fishing crews have mounted “symbolic” protests at the Channel tunnel and three ports in northern [France](#) in a day of action against the British government over the ongoing dispute about access of French boats in the Channel.

The fishers lit red flares as they started their protest on Friday at the port of Saint-Malo before moving on to Calais and the Channel tunnel in the afternoon.

Half a dozen fishing vessels blocked access to Calais port, the main gateway to [Europe](#) from the UK, in a 90-minute protest, with similar protests mounted in the port of Ouistreham and access roads to the Channel tunnel.

“We want our licences back,” read an English-language banner brandished on one of the boats, the Marmouset II.

Friday’s blockades did not bring traffic to a halt but were designed as “a warning shot” against the British, said Olivier Lepretre, the president of the regional fishing committee in Calais.

He added that it was “a symbolic action” but if the dispute over what they say is the UK’s failure to issue the French their full complement of fishing licences continues, they will escalate their actions and “show more teeth”.

He said: “The British have access to the European market, while we do not have access to British waters. This is not normal, the British government must respect the agreement.”



Cars and trucks are stopped as French fishers block the entrance of the Channel tunnel. Photograph: Michel Spingle/AP

The protests were mounted as a demonstration of what the fishers said was the contemptuous and humiliating approach of the UK since [Brexit](#).

Gérard Romiti, the president of the national maritime fisheries committee, told reporters that all they wanted was the honouring of the trade and cooperation deal sealed on Christmas Eve last year.

He described the demonstration as legitimate and said it aimed to prevent “British bad faith” from prevailing in the fishing dispute and in other matters.

“We want the agreement signed on 24 December 2020 to be respected,” Romiti said. “We don’t want handouts, we just want our licences back. The UK must abide by the post-Brexit deal. Too many fishermen are still in the dark.

“We have been waiting with bated breath for 11 months. The patience of professionals has limits. We hope this warning shot will be heard,” he said, refusing to rule out further actions in the future.

Romiti said the dispute should be seen in the wider context of the UK’s strained relationship with the EU and France on a range of issues including Northern Ireland and the people-trafficking crisis in the Channel.

“If the question of the licences may seem minor at the European level to some, it’s part of a much bigger picture,” he said. “The long-term relationship with the UK depend on the resolution of this issue.”

The [dispute](#) broke out after Britain left the EU, with Paris claiming London is not respecting the post-Brexit arrangements agreed on Christmas Eve.

The EU has said it wants the dispute resolved by 10 December.

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Headlines thursday 25 november 2021

- [Channel drownings UK and France trade accusations after tragedy at sea](#)
- [Live Dozens of people drown after refugee boat capsizes in Channel](#)
- ['Shared responsibility' France warns UK not to use Channel tragedy for 'political purposes'](#)
- [Refugees Tragedy brings home our hostility to the world's desperate](#)

Immigration and asylum

Channel drownings: UK and France trade accusations after tragedy at sea

01:48

Boris Johnson 'appalled and deeply saddened' after 31 people die in Channel – video

[Virginia Harrison](#), [Rajeev Syal](#), [Angelique Chrisafis](#), [Diane Taylor](#) and agencies

Thu 25 Nov 2021 00.10 EST

British and French leaders have traded accusations after at least 27 people died trying to cross the Channel in the deadliest incident since the current migration crisis began.

In a phone call with Boris Johnson on Wednesday night, French president [Emmanuel Macron](#) stressed “the shared responsibility” of France and the UK, and told Johnson he expected full cooperation and that the situation would not be used “for political purposes”, the Élysée said.

Thirty-four people were believed to be [on the boat when it sank](#) on Wednesday, leading to what the International Organisation for Migration said was the biggest single loss of life in the Channel since it began collecting data in 2014. Two survivors are in intensive care.

The British prime minister renewed calls for [France](#) to agree to joint police patrols along the Channel coast, and said Wednesday’s incident highlighted how efforts by French authorities to patrol their beaches “haven’t been enough”.

“We’ve had difficulties persuading some of our partners, particularly the French, to do things in a way that we think the situation deserves,” he said

on Wednesday. “I understand the difficulties that all countries face, but what we want now is to do more together – and that’s the offer we are making.”

The French have previously resisted UK offers to send police and Border Force agents to mount joint patrols amid concerns about the implications for national sovereignty.

Macron also called for an emergency meeting of European government ministers and an immediate funding boost for the EU’s border agency, Frontex. France’s government is holding an emergency meeting on Thursday morning to discuss next steps.

“France will not let the Channel become a cemetery,” Macron said.

The French interior minister, Gérald Darmanin, called for coordination with the UK, saying “the response must also come from Great Britain”.

01:34

Macron calls for greater cooperation from UK over refugee Channel crossings – video

The House of Commons is set to hold a debate on “the numbers of migrants arriving in the United Kingdom illegally by boat” just before midday on Thursday, according to a recently released parliamentary schedule.

Speaking on Newsnight, immigration compliance minister Tom Pursglove confirmed Johnson had renewed a previous offer for UK police and Border Force officers to take part in joint patrols with the French, and said the last incident showed the two countries needed to deepen their cooperation.

“The prime minister and President Macron have had exactly that discussion this evening. That is something that I am very keen to see happen,” he said. “It is the case that in the past we have offered to host and to help with joint patrols. I think that could be invaluable in helping to address this issue. I really do hope that the French will reconsider that offer.”



A man wheels a gurney into a warehouse in the Port of Calais, France, where it is believed the bodies of migrants are being transported after recovery from a boat which capsized off the French coast. Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

A spokesperson for Johnson said the two leaders had agreed to the urgency of stepping up joint efforts to prevent the deadly crossings. They also highlighted the importance of working closely with Belgium and the Netherlands, as well as other countries across the continent.

The mayor of Calais, Natacha Bouchart, said it was the British who were to blame and called on Johnson to “face up to his responsibilities”. “The British government is to blame. I believe that [Boris Johnson](#) has, for the past year-and-a-half, cynically chosen to blame France,” she said, according to French media reports.

The Channel is one of the world’s busiest shipping lanes and currents are strong. Human traffickers typically overload the dinghies, leaving them barely afloat and at the mercy of waves as they try to reach British shores.

Both countries cooperate to stem migration across the Channel but also accuse each other of not doing enough – and the issue is often used by politicians on both sides pushing an anti-migration agenda.

Darmanin told a news conference in Calais those who died in Wednesday's tragedy included five women and a girl. He said the boat that sank had been "very frail", and compared it to "a pool you blow up in your garden".

He said 34 people were believed to have been on before it sank and it was not clear what country the victims originally came from.

Four suspected traffickers have been arrested, two of whom later appeared in court, he said.

Refugee charities called on the government to save lives by opening safe routes for asylum seekers to apply to come to the UK without taking to the sea.

Enver Solomon, the chief executive of the Refugee Council, said: "How many tragedies like this must we see before the government fundamentally changes its approach by committing to an ambitious expansion of safe routes for those men, women and children in desperate need of protection?

"Every day, people are forced to flee their homes through no fault of their own. Now is the time to end the cruel and ineffective tactic of seeking to punish or push away those who try and find safety in our country."

An emergency search was sparked at about 2pm on Wednesday when a fishing boat sounded the alarm after spotting several people at sea off the coast of France.

The latest deaths follow others reported but unverified in the Channel in recent weeks, amid a record number of people attempting the crossing. On 11 November, a total of 1,185 people arrived in England by boat, the most in a single day.

More than 25,700 people have made the dangerous journey to the UK in small boats this year – three times the total for the whole of 2020, according to official figures.

It was widely expected that the number of crossings would reduce in the winter. Instead, bigger boats have been used to bring people to the UK in greater numbers.

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[France](#)

Channel crossing tragedy: Priti Patel offers joint patrols with France – as it happened

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Migration

France warns UK not to use Channel tragedy for ‘political purposes’



People are helped ashore from a RNLI lifeboat at a beach in Dungeness after being rescued while crossing the Channel. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

[Damien Gayle](#)

[@damiengayle](#)

Thu 25 Nov 2021 04.04 EST

Emmanuel Macron has warned Boris Johnson not to use the deaths of dozens of people in the [Channel boat tragedy](#) “for political purposes”, the Élysée said.

In a conversation with the prime minister on Wednesday night, the French president stressed “the shared responsibility” of [France](#) and the UK, according to French reports. France’s government is holding an emergency meeting on Thursday morning to discuss next steps.

The British home secretary, Priti Patel, will speak to her French equivalent on Thursday morning about the next steps the two countries can take to halt the small boat crossings, a Home Office minister has confirmed.

The immigration minister, Kevin Foster, told BBC Breakfast it was “a dynamic situation”.

He added: “The French authorities are investigating and obviously we’re keen to let them get on with their work and we’ve obviously offered any support we can give.”

Macron’s comments came as British and French officials traded blame over the deaths of at least 27 people making the perilous Channel crossing in an inflatable boat.

Following a meeting of the Cobra emergency committee, Johnson said it was clear that French operations to stop the migrant boats leaving “haven’t been enough” despite £54m of UK support.

He said people traffickers were “literally getting away with murder” and that he hoped the French would now find a renewed offer of joint patrols by British and French authorities “acceptable”.

But on Thursday, the French interior minister, Gérald Darmanin, said Britain, Belgium and Germany needed to do more to help France tackle the migration issue and human trafficking.

Darmanin told the French radio station RTL people were “often attracted” by Britain’s labour market. “It’s an international problem … We tell our Belgian, German and British friends they should help us fight traffickers that work at an international level,” he said, adding: “There is bad immigration management (in Britain).”

Darmanin said since the start of the year, French police and rescuers had saved 7,800 people in French waters in the Channel. He also revealed a fifth suspect had been arrested in connection with the boat disaster. He said the suspect’s car was registered in Germany and that he had bought inflatable Zodiac boats in Germany.

Jean-Marc Puissesseau, the chairman of the ports of Calais and Boulogne, said he had expected the kind of tragedy seen on Wednesday “would happen one day”. He told BBC Breakfast he was “personally very, very, very sad” about the deaths. But, he added: “Between us I can tell you, we thought it would happen one day because these people are taking such an enormous risk to get to your country.

“When they leave their country it’s because they are suffering there and they have only one idea and wish – to get to your country. And they are ready to risk their lives, as they did yesterday.”

On Thursday morning, more people were brought ashore on the Kent coast after crossing the Channel. A group of people wearing lifejackets and wrapped in blankets were seen huddled onboard an RNLI lifeboat before disembarking in Dover, according to the PA Media news agency.

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Refugees

Dinghy deaths tragedy brings home our hostility to the world's desperate



A damaged inflatable dinghy and a sleeping bag abandoned by migrants on the beach near Wimereux, France. On Wednesday over 30 people were killed when their dinghy capsized off the French coast. Photograph: Gonzalo Fuentes/Reuters

[Diane Taylor](#) and [Angelique Chrisafis](#) in Paris

Wed 24 Nov 2021 17.22 EST

The sheer terror of crossing the busy, dark and freezing cold Channel between France and the UK in a flimsy, unseaworthy boat was best described by 12-year-old Mohammad, who made the journey with his mother and eight-year-old sister in June after fleeing Afghanistan before the Taliban takeover. “It was like a horror movie,” he said. And that was summer – not the depths of November.

Mohammad and his sister survived the 21-mile journey made through the night. They are among thousands of children thought to have crossed the Channel in small boats this year.

Some came with parents who could hug them close and whisper that everything would be OK. Others, teenagers, came alone. At least one child was on board the packed inflatable dinghy that capsized off the French coast killing more than 30 people on Wednesday in dangerous winter weather conditions. A young girl's body was recovered, French officials said.

It is unclear where the passengers had been on the French coast before boarding the boat. Dunkirk has more refugee families than Calais, many from Iranian, Iraqi and Kurdish backgrounds.

A few weeks ago the UK home secretary, Priti Patel, told a parliamentary committee that [70% of those crossing in small boats](#) are economic migrants. But they are people who have fled war zones, a recent [Refugee Council report indicated](#).

The growing number of people attempting very dangerous small boat crossings in makeshift vessels and inflatable dinghies – drifting out into one of the busiest, most dangerous shipping lanes in the world – shows how refugees fighting for their lives face a hostile environment that extends beyond the UK and across Europe. And how they have a shrinking number of options available to them.

[Graphic](#)

Only a small minority go to northern France trying to cross to the UK. Those who do find it is becoming increasingly inhospitable with evictions of refugee camps every morning by the French police.

People with the misfortune to be the poorest cannot afford to pay the smugglers, and try their luck with blow-up kayaks, which are even more dangerous than dinghies. The French sports shop Decathlon last week announced it would [no longer sell sports canoes](#) in stores on the northern French coast because they were being used for crossings.

Those who can pay for the crossing are often then frogmarched to the shore, sometimes with guns held to their heads, even in atrocious weather. Those who are too scared to get into the boats are forced inside anyway.

Until 2018, lorries were the preferred route for refugees to reach the UK. But the French and the British governments have proudly showcased how they have sealed off this option, with walls, high wire fences, security patrols and cameras changing the landscape to shut off access to the Channel tunnel. This has driven people to the much more dangerous option of small boats. Nobody who has choices would step into such a boat, local charity workers say.

Wednesday's tragic deaths mark a new milestone when it comes to fatalities: the highest death toll since the small boats crisis began. But it was all too predictable. In 2020, a family of five Iraqi Kurds perished crossing the Channel to England, with the body of a 15-month-old baby, Artin, washing up in Norway months later.

How did it come to this? After the notorious [Sangatte](#) Red Cross centre, which once housed up to 2,000 migrants, was closed in 2002, migrants trying to get to the UK have slept rough in illegal squats, slums and outdoor camps, which have been bulldozed by police before cropping up elsewhere. Some in small groups report being woken in dawn raids to have their tents confiscated and be moved on by police. They are desperate to reach greater perceived safety.

In the past 20 years, it was dangerous for refugees sleeping rough on freezing Calais wasteland with no access to proper sanitation – described by one Afghan man as “not fit for animals” – as they attempted to stowaway or hide under lorries travelling through the Channel tunnel.

One 25-year-old Nigerian man died from smoke inhalation in his tent after he lit a fire to try to keep warm. In 2014, at least 15 migrants in and around the French port of Calais died – one man was killed after attempting to jump from a motorway bridge on to a moving lorry, and two more died in nearby Dunkirk when the truck they were hiding in caught fire. In 2015, an Eritrean man was knocked down and killed by a freight train as he attempted to find a way to reach the UK.

But from 2018, the danger factor increased dramatically as desperate people turned to the sea route.

Amid an increasingly hostile political debate in the UK around immigration and asylum, the small boat crossings – and how to police and prevent them – have become an element of the current post-Brexit political friction between the UK and France.

Last week the French interior minister, Gérald Darmanin, accused the UK of using France as a “punching bag” for domestic political squabbles over immigration. In France, Boris Johnson’s current UK government is seen, as the French foreign minister recently said on French radio, as taking a “populist” turn. But in Paris, there has been a real fear for months that the small boat crisis could lead to large fatalities at sea, unacceptable to the French electorate.

When in September Patel suggested that small boats carrying migrants could be turned around and sent back to France, French officials dismissed it out of hand as against maritime law and impossibly dangerous. It was clear then that in the corridors of French power, deaths in the Channel would be a tragedy that could not be tolerated.

One interior ministry official said this autumn that France wanted to avoid “making the Channel a new theatre of human tragedy like other seas have seen; that is very important to us”. In France, images of the hundreds of deaths in the Mediterranean have made front pages.

This month, French rescue services have pulled many small boat passengers from the sea. On 12 November, 71 migrants were saved between Dunkirk and Boulogne-sur-Mer. A day earlier, three people were declared missing after trying to cross from the Calais coast by kayak.

The French interior ministry works closely with the UK and insists it is managing to prevent the departure of small boats, with more than 600 police and gendarmes on the north coast every day.

62.5% of departures were stopped in 2021, up from about 50% last year, France says.

But the clamour for safe and legal routes for those whose lives are at risk is getting louder, and the UK response is [ever angrier and more politicised](#).

At the heart of the policy of closing off all routes to safety for people fleeing persecution – apart from the option of small boats – is the fear from both the British government and the Labour opposition that they must not be seen as a “soft touch” in their treatment of those who are most vulnerable. But votes cannot be more important than lives, campaigners say.

While the numbers crossing the Channel in small boats have more than tripled so far this year compared with last year’s total – an increase from 8,469 for the whole of 2020 compared with 25,700 so far this year – overall annual numbers claiming asylum are down 4% from the previous 12 months to June 2020. Rhetoric about new arrivals being economic migrants is inevitably fuelling backlash from far right groups.

But as one Iranian asylum seeker who recently arrived in the UK told the Guardian: “British people live here in their houses with their families and with their cars and their clothes in the cupboard. In Iran I had all those things. If my life had been safe in Iran would I leave my country and come to the UK? The answer is no.”

Twelve-year-old Mohammad and his family are safe for now, but dozens of others have lost their lives in the sea between two of the richest countries in the world, failing to deal with a crisis that has been years in the making.

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2021.11.25 - Spotlight

- The Beatles: Get Back review Eight hours of TV so aimless it threatens your sanity
- The seven types of rest I spent a week trying them all. Could they help end my exhaustion?
- David Shrigley I see genius where other people see rubbish
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The Beatles: Get Back review – eight hours of TV so aimless it threatens your sanity



To use the language of 1969, what a drag ... The Beatles: Get Back.
Photograph: Linda McCartney/2020 Apple Corps Ltd/PA



Alexis Petridis

Thu 25 Nov 2021 03.01 EST

The Beatles' 1970 album *Let It Be* and its depressing accompanying documentary were always bugbears among the former Fabs. John Lennon dismissed the music as "badly recorded shit"; Paul McCartney was so horrified by the album that he masterminded a new version in 2003, shorn of the additions by Phil Spector, whom Lennon employed as a producer without telling McCartney. None of the Beatles turned up to the documentary's premiere; Ringo Starr objected that it was "very narrow" and had "no joy".

Peter Jackson's *Get Back* is a documentary series designed to address Starr's concerns. It shows a broader, ostensibly happier, picture of the band's doomed 1969 project to write a new album, rehearse the songs and perform them live in the space of two weeks. Whether the *Get Back* sessions hastened the Beatles' demise remains moot, but a preponderance of footage featuring songs sung in funny voices, mugging to camera and in-jokes can't stop the initial sessions at Twickenham Studios from looking like misery.

Harrison is alternately surly and prickly, as you might be if you brought in a song as good as [All Things Must Pass](#) and got a lukewarm reception.

Lennon is visibly, joylessly stoned out of his gourd. Valiantly attempting to jolly things along, McCartney keeps slipping into passive-aggressive wheedling. Matters aren't helped by the original documentary's director, Michael Lindsay-Hogg, who insists that the band should perform in an amphitheatre in Tripoli – "Torchlit! In front of 2,000 Arabs!" – and is heroically undaunted by various Beatles telling him where to stick his idea.

He is still at it when Harrison storms out and can't be persuaded back, a move that McCartney genuinely seems to think signals the end of the band. As Macca sits disconsolately in Twickenham, eyes brimming, Lindsay-Hogg seizes the moment: "I think we should have a good location ..." The Beatles have apparently split up, but the dream of Tripoli and its torchlit Arabs lives on.



Stoned out of his gourd ... John Lennon in *The Beatles: Get Back*.
Photograph: Apple Corps Ltd.

Things improve when the band decamp to a studio in Apple's headquarters – at least for the Beatles. For the viewer, it is another matter. Jackson is not a director noted for the brevity of his approach – his version of King Kong is twice the length of the original; his Hobbit films turned a 310-page novel into eight hours of cinema – and so it proves here. The three episodes of *Get Back* last the best part of eight hours. There are doubtless Beatle maniacs

who think that is impossibly stingy – there is a bootleg set of recordings from the Get Back sessions that fills 89 CDs – but, for anyone else, its sheer length can feel like a schlep.

There are fantastic moments. Lennon and McCartney's eyes locking as they harmonise on Two of Us; the producer Glyn Johns' gentle, futile attempts to dissuade Lennon of the apparently unimpeachable genius of Allen Klein, a crook whose involvement hastened the Beatles' demise and ended in litigation; Lennon's delighted cry of "Yoko!" as McCartney's adopted six-year-old daughter, Heather, starts screaming into a microphone; and especially McCartney, casting around for a new song, idly strumming his bass and singing nonsense words, gradually settling into a rhythm and melody that turns into Get Back.

Indeed, it is hard not to boggle at the Beatles' productivity. Ostensibly short of material at the outset, after a month they have grubbed up not only the entire Let It Be album, but also more than half of Abbey Road and a selection of songs that ended up on their early solo albums: Jealous Guy, Back Seat of My Car, Gimme Some Truth.

But the moments of inspiration and interest are marooned amid acres of desultory chit-chat ("aimless rambling", as Lennon rightly puts it) and repetition. There is a point, about five hours in, when the prospect of hearing another ramshackle version of Don't Let Me Down becomes an active threat to the viewer's sanity. That is doubtless what recording an album is like, but for an onlooker it is – to use the language of 1969 – a real drag. Much opprobrium has been cast at Yoko Ono for her constant presence at Beatles' recording sessions, but, after this, you marvel at her fortitude for sitting through them.

With Lindsay-Hogg's 2,000 torchlit Arabs a memory, it ends with the famous concert on the roof of Apple's HQ, which Jackson makes the most of by showing it in split screen, shared with footage of the street below and police arguing with the building's receptionist. It is 40 minutes of untrammelled joy, but it is an inordinately long and winding road to get there. You wonder how many viewers will last the distance and if any, other than the aforementioned maniacs, will take it more than once.

The Beatles: Get Back is on Disney+ on 25, 26 and 27 November

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The seven types of rest: I spent a week trying them all. Could they help end my exhaustion?



Unwind yourself ... Emma Beddington at home as she tries different types of rest. Photograph: Richard Saker/The Guardian

[Emma Beddington](#)

Thu 25 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

“Are you the most tired you can ever remember being?” asks a friend. Well, yes. I have it easy – my caring responsibilities are limited and my work is physically undemanding and very low stakes – but I am wrecked. The brain fog, tearful confusion and deep lethargy I feel seems near universal. A [viral tweet](#) from February asked: “Just to confirm … everyone feels tired ALL the time no matter how much sleep they get or caffeine they consume?” The 71,000-plus retweets seemed to confirm it’s the case.

But when we say we are exhausted, or Google “Why am I tired all the time?” (searches were reportedly at an all-time high between [July and September](#) this year), what do we mean? Yes, pandemic living is, objectively, exhausting. Existing on high alert is physically and mentally depleting; our sleep has suffered and many of us have lost a sense of basic safety, affecting our capacity to relax. But the circumstances and stresses we face are individual, which means the remedy is probably also individual.

The need for a more granular, analytical approach to fatigue is partly what prompted Dr Saundra Dalton-Smith, a physician and the author of [Sacred Rest: Recover Your Life, Renew Your Energy, Restore Your Sanity](#), to start researching and writing. “I wanted people to take a more diagnostic approach to their fatigue. When someone comes in and they say they’re hurt, I can’t treat that without having more details: what hurts, where does it hurt, when does it hurt?”

Sacred Rest dates from before the pandemic, when Dalton-Smith’s practice was already full of tired patients. “People would come in saying: ‘I’m tired all the time’, ‘I don’t have energy’ … lots of non-specific complaints. Nothing where you could give them a pill; things that needed lifestyle changes.” Simultaneously, Dalton-Smith was struggling to combine intense career pressure with parenting two toddlers. “I was experiencing some burnout-type symptoms,” she says. The book starts with an extremely relatable account of her lying on the floor, her kids snacking in front of the TV. “I never knew how hauntingly healing cold wooden planks could be,” she writes.

Her fatigue prescription is to incorporate seven types of rest into your life: physical, mental, emotional, social, sensory, creative and spiritual. I am dubious. *Sacred Rest* has a classic off-putting self-help book cover (a jetty shrouded in mist), talks about the “bread of self-disclosure and the wine of community”, and focuses heavily on God (there’s a clue in the title). Then there is the fact that any attempt to take a break over the past 18 overloaded months has left me feeling miserable and unmoored. I confess this when I speak to Dalton-Smith over Zoom.

“I don’t like resting,” I tell her. “I get listless and sad and feel a failure.” She is not surprised. “For some people, rest is almost uncomfortable. It’s almost as if their psyche fights back against it because of the new sensation.” She would never, she says, recommend a three-day silent retreat to a completely frazzled patient. “For someone who is actively burned out, that’s almost traumatic.”

The book is not, in fact, about that kind of complete withdrawal; it is about incorporating enough moments of rest to stay functional. That may be a depressing indictment of end-stage capitalism: Dalton-Smith is thoughtfully critical of society’s inability to take a preventive approach to its “burnout culture”, commoditising sleep (“It’s a billion-dollar industry, we have speciality pillows, weighted blankets, all of this stuff”) rather than focusing on the root problem. It is, however, refreshingly realistic. I gave the seven types of rest a whirl over a week, to see whether I would feel less tired – whatever that actually means – afterwards.

Physical

As a lazy, desk-based homeworker, I am rarely physically tired. I do, however, get stiff and achy, sit for far too long and pretzel my body into terrible shapes. Dalton-Smith advises incorporating “body fluidity” into my day with hourly small movements. It’s easy and rewarding to set a phone reminder to roll my neck, clench and unclench my hands, or stand up and rock on my heels. Even better is the advice to “choose to be still on purpose for five minutes while lying down.” I do this on the sofa, under a blanket; the hardest part is getting up after five minutes.

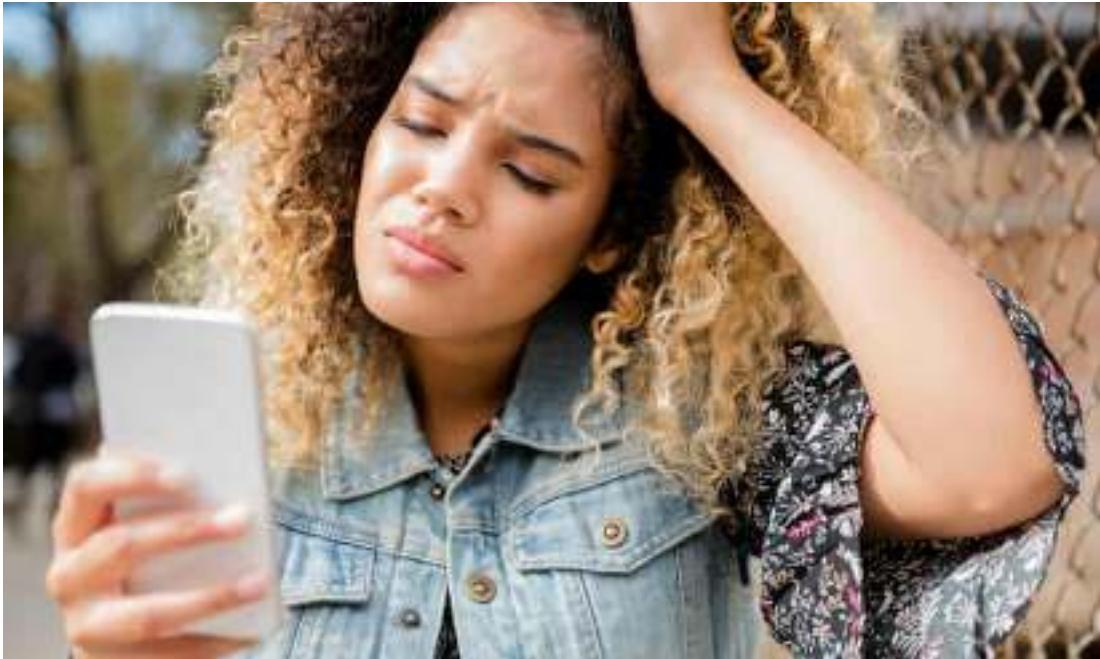


Set a phone reminder for some body fluidity. Photograph: Manusapon Kasosod/Getty Images/Posed by model

[I am a poor sleeper](#), so Dalton-Smith's "bedroom routine" advice (the usual: dim lights, comfy clothes and no bedtime screens) is mainly stuff I do already. I follow her recommendation to add some stretches before bed; I sleep well the first night but after that I am back to my usual tossing and turning.

Mental

Mental fatigue – that befuddled, nervy, brain-fog feeling; forgetting what I was doing, and missing important things because my concentration is shot – is my constant companion. "Brain like damp Weetabix," a friend calls it, which feels about right.



Try to block out email and social media to retain your focus. Photograph: JGI/Jamie Grill/Getty/Tetra images RF/Posed by model

It is chastening how easy it is to improve my focus with a basic technique: time spent blocking out “low-yield activities”, such as email and social media, and periods of concentration. It dovetails well with the hourly movement breaks from physical rest, too. I am quickly conscious of how instinctively reactive I am to the most recent – not the most urgent, or the most important – demand; how the chime of a WhatsApp message chips 10 minutes off my concentration, leaving me fogger. I feel idiotic not to have realised this before. Usually when I try something for an article, however beneficial, I abandon it instantly once I finish, but the 25-minute focus, five-minute distraction timers on my phone have become a permanent fixture.

Emotional

Dalton-Smith has an online “[rest quiz](#)” to work out your rest deficits; by far my worst score is for emotional rest. It also turns out to be the area I find hardest to address. One suggestion is to identify people who “drain” you; as an introvert, I fear that’s everyone. Another tip is to “risk vulnerability”, against which I have an almost physical reaction: my mask is there for a reason! The third is to “cease comparison”, but comparing myself

unfavourably to others is my main hobby. None of these are exactly quick fixes. I probably need therapy, but failing that, I ask Dalton-Smith for help.

She suggests writing down what I am feeling, if confiding in others feels too exposed. I sit in a cafe and write down everything I can think of that makes me feel angry, scared, ashamed and sad. It takes a while and I really hate it: it feels as if I have forced all my worst thoughts to the surface without any plan for what to do with them. Maybe it doesn't have to feel good to do me good, and maybe if I sustain it for a while, I'll feel the benefit? I am reserving judgment.

Social

I assumed “social rest” would mean opting out of socialising for a while, but Dalton-Smith’s social rest means spending time with people with whom you can be your unvarnished self.



Try to spend time with people with whom you can be your unvarnished self.
Photograph: kali9/Getty Images/Posed by models

Thankfully I am seeing my hairdresser this week (as [a wig wearer](#), this is a very rare treat). We have known each other for 25 years and he sees me at my most vulnerable: bald and scared of what he's about to do with his

scissors. He is also wonderful company. Punctuated by the totally misused phrase “long story short, Em”, he treats me to a two-hour monologue on a variety of feuds, scandals and gossip so entertaining I leave feeling more energised than if I had had a transfusion of something unethical in a Swiss clinic.

After that, I have a leisurely lunch with my best friend, the woman who knows my worst qualities and nastiest thoughts. We eat like pigs, lapse frequently into silence, and discuss both really important stuff and the rising tide of water in the bottom of our fridges. It’s deeply restorative. She’s my emotional rest too, I realise.

Sensory

I know exactly what sensory input exhausts me: sound. Almost any noise – the battery bleep from a neighbour’s fire alarm, a distant engine, the bathroom fan – can obliterate my focus (while writing that sentence, I told the dog off for licking himself too loudly). My husband has been a brilliant WFH pandemic colleague, but the man is loud: a volcanic sneezing, expansive yawning, loudspeaker telephoning one-man band. It has been challenging.



Try to appreciate moment of silence when they happen. Photograph: fizkes/Getty Images/iStockphoto/Posed by model

This is no surprise to Dalton-Smith. Analysing data from her quiz during the pandemic, she saw “a huge uptick in the number of people who were experiencing sensory rest deficits”. People confined to the house with small children in particular, she says, were exposed to constant noise and even some adults “irritated each other to death. That non-stop hum of somebody talking in the background causes you to get agitated. That’s what sensory overload does to us.”

I am pretty much on top of my noise sensitivity: this article comes courtesy of a “peaceful piano” playlist that masks my least favourite noises without commanding my attention. But this week, I also try to ensure I appreciate the moments of silence when they happen, and to be conscious that when I feel depleted and stressed, noise is often the reason.

Creative

I haven’t had a decent idea for at least two years, so I think it’s fair to say I am creatively burnt out. I instantly love Dalton-Smith’s advice to “build sabbaticals into your life”. That’s not a month-long writer’s retreat; it can be as little as 30 minutes, doing something you choose, away from the grind.



Interacting with art can be transporting and inspiring. Photograph: Tetra Images/Getty Images/Tetra images RF/posed by model

I decide on lunch at my favourite cafe, then a gallery trip. After checking my email on the bus – a mistake – my lunch becomes a working one, as I do an urgent job. But after that the fun starts. I wander slowly around a ceramics exhibition, which is both transporting and inspiring. Afterwards, I drink a hot chocolate as the late autumn light fades, looking at people and shop windows and even having a conversation with a man about his dog. I feel like a different person for a while, as if there is more space in my head. I still have no good ideas, but looking beyond my usual environment and doing something I have chosen feels wonderful.

Spiritual

Dalton-Smith is clear that you don't need to share her – or any – faith to incorporate “spiritual” rest into your life. “At the core of spiritual rest is that feeling that we all have of needing to be really seen, of feeling that we belong, that we’re accepted, that our life has meaning.” That might come through voluntary work, or other activities.

I have no faith, and finding what gives me those feelings seems a longer-term undertaking. Instead, I turn to the only spiritual thing I know well: a

Quaker silent meeting. I was educated by the Quakers, a faith group whose conception of God is simultaneously so expansive and so minimalist (they believe there is “that of God in everyone”), it’s hard to feel uncomfortable about it. Silent meeting – an hour of silence, interrupted occasionally by anyone who feels moved to speak – is the only kind of meditation I can manage. I turn up, get a warm, no-fuss welcome, sit down, and enjoy the silence. Sometimes I examine my thoughts; sometimes I look at people’s jumpers. I can see the blue sky out of a window; mainly I look at that. It’s the deepest peace I feel all week.

Do I feel more rested? I am not miraculously restored and razor-sharp, but that’s not a realistic goal, or even the aim of the book. It is another week of poor sleep, but I feel as if I have a bit more in the tank than usual, which is pleasant. I find it useful, too, to analyse what sort of tired I am, and to have a toolkit to address at least some kinds of fatigue.

Of course, there is an unavoidable flaw in this experiment: I am resting for work purposes. That gives me sort of “permission” to rest, while still, actually, working. Could I embrace rest purely for myself? I should: this is basic maintenance, not self-indulgence. We can’t function forever fuelled by adrenalin and caffeine, fogged brains scrabbling to function, nerves frayed like a cheap phone cable. Sure, we can sleep when we’re dead, but a little rest before that would be nice.

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Interview

David Shrigley: ‘I see genius where other people see rubbish’

[Tim Jonze](#)



‘It’s ended up looking like op-art’ ... Shrigley at his Mayfair Tennis Ball Exchange at the Stephen Friedman Gallery, London. Photograph: Linda Nylind/The Guardian



[@timjonze](#)

Thu 25 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

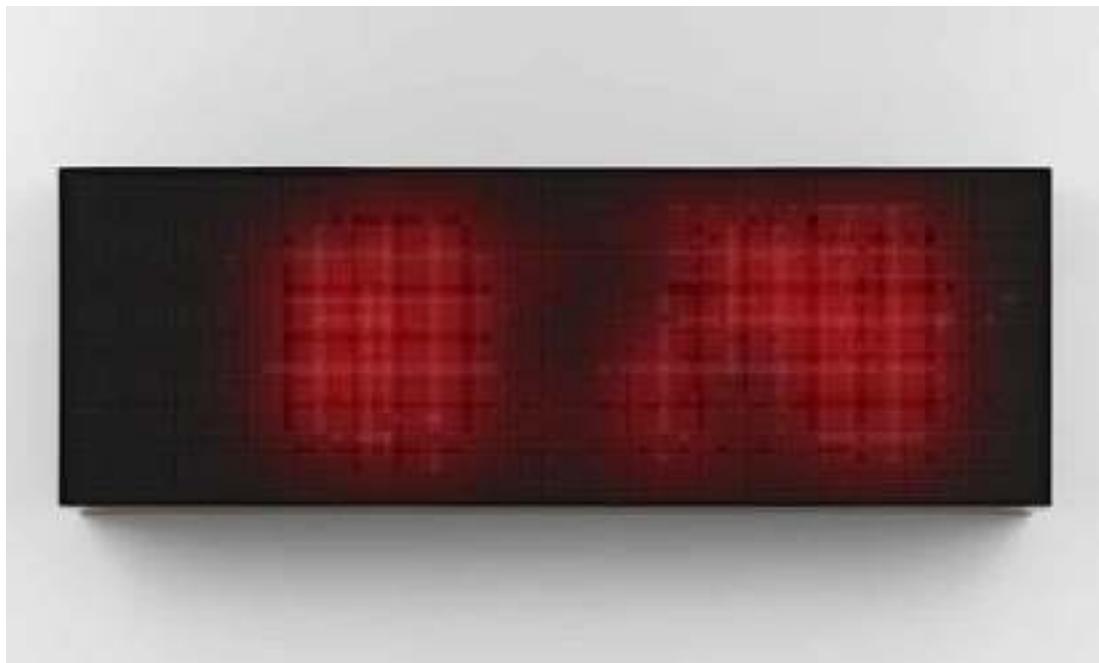
The first thing I notice about [David Shrigley](#) is his balls. Twelve thousand, one hundred and sixty six of them, to be precise, lined up neatly over almost every available inch of the gallery walls. Walking around this room of dazzling yellow is a surprisingly psychedelic experience – the bright lights and recurring patterns play havoc with your brain.

“It’s ended up looking like a piece of op-art,” says Shrigley, who talks almost as if he had no hand in it. “I wasn’t anticipating that.”

The work won’t stay like this. The idea is that for the next few weeks people can wander in off the street and trade these fresh tennis balls for worn-out ones of their own. It reminds me a little of [Roelof Louw’s 1967 sculpture Soul City \(Pyramid of Oranges\)](#), only instead of the work gradually dwindling as visitors interact with it, this will evolve into a grubbier form: a slow, ugly decay. Shrigley says that ideas around trade, currency and even his dog Inca’s (lack of) ball retrieving skills served as inspiration for the work – but really I think he just likes the idea of people doing something weird in the middle of Mayfair. Not knowing exactly what’s going to happen is, he admits, one of the main thrills.

The work arose from a question many of us have asked ourselves over lockdown: “Why, exactly, am I doing this?” Shrigley took the time to reevaluate his career and realised there were things he didn’t want to do any more. “I just didn’t want to do another presentation of works on paper,” he says, of the strange, amusing and unsettling [drawings that made his name](#). “I was a bit jaded about making the same exhibition over and over again.”

And so Shrigley started creating more conceptual works. In the gallery space across the road from the tennis balls exhibition is a digital wall clock he made, in which the bright red LED digits are blurred, making it almost impossible to read. Shrigley is 53 now, but a few years ago he was in a taxi when he noticed the car’s clock was out of focus. It turned out he needed glasses.



‘I don’t know exactly what to do with it’ ... Shrigley’s Clock. Photograph: Mark Blower/David Shrigley. Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London

“I don’t quite know why I’ve made this,” he says. “It was quite expensive and I don’t know exactly what to do with it.” He gazes at it as if it’s some work by another artist he doesn’t fully understand and tells me how it’s a complete departure from his usual style. I’m not so sure. Feeling your

eyesight fail as a clock ticks down another minute closer to death doesn't feel entirely un-Shrigley like to me.

We retire to some sofas. Shrigley speaks quietly, in a soothing monotone that rarely pauses, and you have to listen attentively to tell what he's actually passionate about and what is just tangential rambling (the inner workings of my Dictaphone, for example). He's adamant that [he still loves drawing](#): "It's my life's project, somehow," he says. "The inquiry continues and it will never end until I'm gone." But he will occasionally say things that suggest he finds the process, if not frustrating, then certainly a little baffling.

When I was six, I was the best at art in my class. By the time I graduated from art school, I was close to the worst

"I will make 100 works on paper with the intention that no more than half are any good," he says. "And there are probably four where you're like: 'This is basically *fantastic!* This is me demonstrating my area of expertise and all the other 96 are just attempts to do this.' And do they sell? Do they fuck. You look through the inventory going: 'Nobody bought that? Nobody bought *that*? Well, what did they buy?' And it's a picture of a cat or something."

He laughs. "I've realised my tastes are very peculiar relative to the rest of the world. I see genius and other people see rubbish. I see rubbish and they see genius." These days he lets the gallery choose which works to exhibit.

For Shrigley the drawings that he likes best are the ones that surprise or confuse him. "Where I think 'It's kind of funny, but I don't know what it means ... so I'll just put it out there and figure it out.'"

It's the same reason he enjoys his more interactive work – [inviting people to draw a giant urinating sculpture](#) as part of his Turner prize show, opening pop-up tattoo parlours so people can have his doodles inked on to them, or inventing a bunch of strangely shaped instruments – such as a one-stringed electric guitar – and getting musicians to play them. One of his musical heroes, [Sonic Youth's Lee Ranaldo](#), recruited a bunch of avant garde

musicians and terrorised a New York restaurant with Shrigley's instruments. What did it sound like?

"A noisy racket," he says.



I was a bit jaded about making the same exhibition over and over again' ... a detail of Shrigley's exhibition. Photograph: Linda Nylind/The Guardian

Shrigley was born in Macclesfield but grew up in Oadby near Leicester. His main interaction with art as a kid was through record sleeves (the Fall's Live at the Witch Trials was a favourite, long before he heard it). But it was a trip to Tate Britain with his dad in 1982 that really sparked his interest: [Jean Tinguely](#)'s kinetic constructions led him to [Dada](#) – the absurdist art movement that sprung up in Zurich during the first world war – which he still believes is the most important moment in art history. "Thinking of art as being in opposition to *everything*," he says.

Unsurprisingly, this obsession led him to being a "smart-arse" student by the time he'd arrived at Glasgow School of [Art](#). His tutors didn't always share the same outsider viewpoint. Was he disappointed with a 2:2 after his final show?

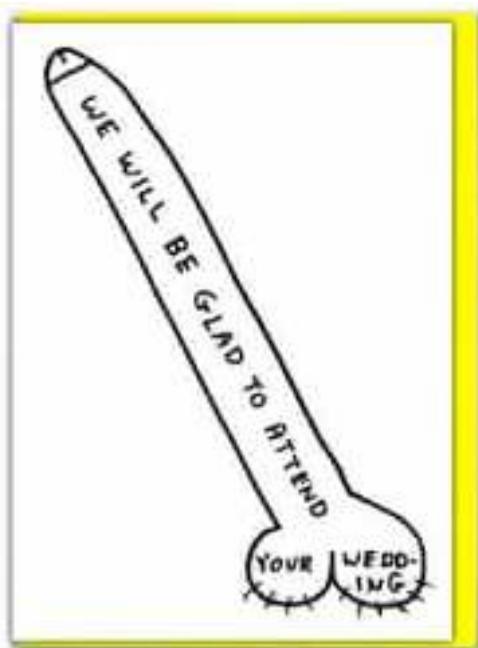
"I was mortified, yeah," he says, deadpan. "I felt like I deserved a 2:1."

He says the art school put a lot of emphasis on traditional craft, which reminds me that [the Guardian once said](#) Shrigley “would win few prizes for drawing, and even fewer for his handwriting” – does he agree with that?

“Well it depends what the competition would be,” he says, laughing. “Put it this way: when I was six, I was the best at art in my class. By the time I graduated from art school, I was close to the worst. It’s just not really important, I suppose. I make the drawings that I make through a desire to present ideas in as economic a fashion as I can.”

He went through this same journey of understanding with [René Magritte](#): he considered the Belgian surrealist a master painter at 14, but by the time he got to art school and learned to draw himself he realised he wasn’t actually all that. “And then by the time I graduated I understood that none of that mattered too much anyway,” he says. “For me, it was all about [Ceci n'est pas une pipe](#). That’s such an important statement, an illustration of the slippage between language and image.”

You can certainly see the link between that work and what Shrigley does. “Whereas I have no interest at all in someone like Salvador Dalí,” he says. “Well, not as an artist. If he was presenting Bake Off then I’d definitely watch that.”



He's a card ... David Shrigley's wedding acceptance card. Photograph: David Shrigley

Shrigley left art school feeling as if he had no saleable skills. But then he got a job at an agency – “they said ‘we like the way you think’” – and struck gold with his simple yet inimitable combinations of drawings and text featuring freaky figures and twisted thoughts. “I play in my play pen. I am very happy,” reads the text next to a caged stick man. “I don’t know why I did it,” is the caption to a man aiming a catapult at a hairy beast’s bum. His work, which used to feature weekly in the Guardian’s Weekend magazine, has ended up on tea-towels, salt and pepper pots (labelled “cocaine” and “heroin”) and greetings cards (“We will be glad to attend your wedding,” says one message, running down the full length of a cock and balls).

I wonder if the recent political turmoil has had an effect on his drawings, and he says that inevitably it has. He’s noticed they have a lot more swearing in them. “But then again, less bloodshed.”

People read their own messages into them regardless. “You think you’re making a work about the climate crisis and then it becomes about the pandemic, because that’s what everyone’s thinking about. Or everything you make becomes about Brexit.”

He tells me about a work he’s making at the moment which is harder to misread: “I’ve acquired 5,000 copies of Dan Brown’s The Da Vinci Code, and I’m pulping them all,” he says, with a hint of mischief. “Then I’m making paper with it and, on that paper, I’m reprinting an edition of Nineteen Eighty-Four by George Orwell.” He laughs. “I can do it because nobody wants to buy The Da Vinci Code any more – they just want to deposit it. So that for me is a project about: ‘Wake up! We are sleepwalking into a totalitarian regime!’”

Suddenly, his enthusiasm dims: “Making that artwork feels like a very impotent gesture somehow,” he decides. Which brings us to another lockdown decision he made: selling his house in Brighton and setting up Sidmouth School of Art, a mental health and wellbeing charity in Devon. At the moment the four people behind the project are applying for charitable status and have spoken to a local GP practice about the idea of referring

people to them. The thought of being prescribed an art session with Shrigley paints an image as surreal as some of his own works. But the artist reasons: “If I can make an art project that is helping people with mental health problems then is that more helpful than making a funny drawing about the mental health crisis?”

He’s not without experience: back in Glasgow, where he lived for 27 years before moving to Brighton in 2015, he participated in community education for five years. He found working with elderly people, mentally disabled people and prisoners rewarding – although other jobs were more challenging. “Personality wise, I’m not so good at dealing with hostile Glaswegian teenagers. With weapons. Who don’t want to do the papier-mache,” he says, before putting on a fantastic Scottish accent: “Ah dinnae wantae paint a picture ye prick!”

I suspect Shrigley himself will be a beneficiary of the charity too. He says he’s spent his career feeling “not like a fraud, but … a bit selfish, like I’m just pleasing myself and enjoying my life far too much.” Recently he’s been reading about people who have overcome chronic pain through their artistic endeavours. “This one woman was really suffering with an arthritic condition, she was basically incapacitated. Then she joined a choir and the pain went. The doctors don’t know how it works, they just told her to keep doing it.”

Once more he sounds utterly astounded by this endlessly confusing, utterly unknowable thing he’s devoted his life to. “It was just so exciting to find out that art is … actually *good* for people.”

- [David Shrigley: Mayfair Tennis Ball Exchange is at Stephen Friedman Gallery, London, until 8 January.](#)
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Illustration: Guardian Design

[The long read](#)

Is society coming apart?

Illustration: Guardian Design

by [Jill Lepore](#)

Thu 25 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

In March 2020, Boris Johnson, pale and exhausted, self-isolating in his flat on Downing Street, released a video of himself – that he had taken himself – reassuring Britons that they would get through the pandemic, together. “One thing I think the coronavirus crisis has already proved is that there really is such a thing as society,” the prime minister [announced](#), confirming the existence of society while talking to his phone, alone in a room.

All this was very odd. Johnson seemed at once frantic and weak (not long afterwards, he was [admitted to hospital](#) and put in the intensive care unit). Had he, in his feverishness, undergone a political conversion? Because, by

announcing the existence of society, Johnson appeared to renounce, publicly, something Margaret Thatcher had said in an interview in 1987, in remarks that are often taken as a definition of modern conservatism. “Too many children and people have been given to understand ‘I have a problem, it is the government’s job to cope with it!’” Thatcher said. “They are casting their problems on society, and who is society? There is no such thing!” She, however, had not contracted Covid-19.

Of course, there is such a thing as society. The question now is how the pandemic has changed it. Speculating about what might happen next requires first deciphering these statements, and where they came from. Johnson was refuting not only Thatcher, but also Ronald Reagan. Thatcher’s exclamation about the non-existence of society and the non-ability of government to solve anyone’s problems echoed a declaration made by Reagan in his 1981 inaugural address: “Government is not the solution to our problem. Government is the problem.” Thatcher and Reagan often conflated the two – to diminish both – but society and government mean different things. Society usually means the private ties of mutual obligation and fellowship that bind together people who have different backgrounds and unequal education, resources and wealth. Government is the public administration of the affairs of people constituted into a body politic as citizens and equals. Society invokes community, government polity.

According to the Reagan-Thatcher worldview, there is no such thing as society. There are only families, who look after one another, and individuals, who participate in markets. The idea that government is the solution to people’s problems rests on a mistaken belief in the existence of society. This mistaken belief leads to attempts to solve problems such as ill health with government programmes such as government-funded healthcare, as if these were problems of society, rather than problems of individuals. Government programmes like these will also interfere with the only place where real solutions are to be found, which is the free market.

Not many worldviews build worlds but, long before the pandemic, this one did. It not only contributed to the dismantling of social supports in the US and the UK, but also undergirds the architecture and ethos of the internet, which is ungoverned, deregulated, privatised and market-driven – a remote

and barren wasteland where humans are reduced to “users”, individuals, alone, just so many backlit avatars of IRL bone-marrow selves.

Then came Covid. Remoteness replaced intimacy, masks hid faces, screens stood in for rooms. States enforced “social distancing”: stickers on sidewalks, chairs left empty. Much carried on as before, only more intensely. Corporations monetised “social networking”: predictive algorithms, “friends”, “followers”. The pandemic forced vast numbers of people not only to retreat from the actual world, but also to live their lives in the anti-government, antisocial world of the virtual, the ersatz, the flat, [lonely](#), [locked inside](#) and [burned out](#).

To be sure, campaigns to halt the spread of the virus have demonstrated, again and again, the strength of ties of mutual obligation, through sacrifices made for sick and vulnerable people and, not least, through the surging number of mutual aid groups, each another expression of love and nurture and care and fellow feeling, each another proof of the existence of society. All the same, angry unmasked Americans are [punching flight attendants](#) on planes and schoolteachers in classrooms, when asked to wear masks, and there is a general sense that social norms are under a wartime level of stress, absent a wartime solidarity. Picture the second world war, where, instead of queueing in the ration line, people are clobbering one another. Even among the peaceable, alongside grief, exhaustion and dread, loneliness and alienation remain as the lasting miseries of the pandemic. Whether the fateful social distance will ever close will depend on the ravages of the virus, on an aching longing for one another, and on something more, too: on political decisions about public goods.

This year, while the world begins to remake itself, and as each of us, like so many hermit crabs crawling along the blinding sand, try to get our bearings, it may be that the future of society can be found in its past. Even before the pandemic, intellectuals and policymakers on both the left and the right had been raising alarms about the future of society, launching initiatives designed to pin, stitch and darn the world’s tattered “social fabric”. In 2018, the American conservative columnist David Brooks founded Weave: The Social Fabric Project, [advocating](#) “a life for community rather than a life for

self”. Last year, Onward, a conservative thinktank in the UK, founded [Repairing Our Social Fabric](#), a programme aimed at offering “a comprehensive understanding of the state of community in Britain”. Nor have these calls come only from conservatives. [More in Common](#), a nonpartisan, multinational research organisation, undertakes projects designed, for instance, to “strengthen the parts of Germany’s social fabric that remain intact”.

Racial justice has lately been framed as a social fabric problem, too. “A functioning society rests on a web of mutuality, a willingness among all involved to share enough with one another to accomplish what no one person can do alone,” Heather McGhee writes in her 2021 book, *The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together*. “In a sense, that’s what government is. I can’t create my own electric grid, school system, internet, or healthcare system – and the most efficient way to ensure that those things are created and available to all on a fair and open basis is to fund and provide them publicly.” The problem, McGhee writes, is that for much of history, both in the US and in many other parts of the world, those goods have been “for whites only”. What with polarisation, tribalisation and atomisation, “the social fabric of the country has been torn,” said Eddie Glaude, chair of the African American studies programme at Princeton University, near the end of the Trump presidency. “We have to imagine a different way of being together with each other.”

Sometimes people argue that the pandemic has made all these problems worse; sometimes they argue that the pandemic has cast such a glaring light on these problems that now, finally, they can be fixed. Either way, thinktanks are dedicating funds to the purpose: the Russell Sage Foundation announced a research initiative on Covid-19’s effects on the social fabric. And that’s interesting, because Russell Sage is a New York-based thinktank founded in 1907 by the widow of a railroad magnate who was concerned that the social fabric had been ripped apart by industrialism, which happens to be where the idea of a social fabric came from.

The English expression “the social fabric” was coined in the 1790s, the age of the machine loom, when observers worried that the growth of factories and cities, and the movement from farms and towns, was leaving people isolated and alone. Over the next century, all sorts of thinkers, from the

Romantics, De Tocqueville and Marx to Hegel and the utopian socialists, agreed that something called “society” was coming apart. They disagreed about solutions but, broadly, for much of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, liberals placed their faith in liberal democracy. In the US, faith in society was a hallmark of progressive and New Deal-era liberalism, especially during the Great Depression. “The faith of a liberal is a profound belief not only in the capacities of individual men and women,” Franklin D Roosevelt said in 1935, “but also in the effectiveness of people helping each other.”



Tables and chairs are taped to ensure social distancing at a Starbucks coffee shop in Hong Kong, 30 March 2020. Photograph: Vincent Yu/AP

But by then, in much of the industrial world, in an age of bone-breaking economic inequality, the suffering masses had grown so impoverished, lonely and alienated that they bent before authoritarians. Fears of economic collapse, civilisational decay and social disintegration go back to antiquity. People are forever warning that the sky is falling. But in the 1930s and 40s, the sky fell. After the second world war, the anguished investigation into the rise of totalitarianism shattered liberals’ faith in society, and “gave rise to a theory of mass society that rooted totalitarianism in modernity itself”, as the intellectual historian Dorothy Ross has recently argued. As Ross writes: “The threat to liberal democracy of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union

brought these fears into focus: the atomized individuals of mass society were ready supporters of totalitarian movements and the false solidarity they promised.”

The mid-century reckoning this wrought often concerned itself with where to draw the line between “society” and “government”, or between the social and the political. To that end, the political philosopher Hannah Arendt sorted revolutions into those that attempt “to change the fabric of society” and those that try “to change the structure of the political realm”. She admired the second and feared the first, arguing that revolutions can never solve the “social question” – poverty – and should not try, because “the whole record of past revolutions demonstrates beyond doubt that every attempt to solve the social question with political means leads into terror”. Overwhelmed by the desperation of the poor, she argued, revolutions that attempt to change the fabric of society will lead to the evisceration of order, the destruction of property, and the mass execution of intellectuals. She didn’t say that governments that address the problem of poverty are doomed. Only revolutions.

But conservative thinkers blamed the fraying fabric of society – and the masses’ vulnerability to totalitarianism – not on the dislocations and inequality wrought by industrial capitalism, but on the growing power of the state. In a 1953 book called *The Quest for Community*, the American sociologist Robert Nisbet lamented the modern state’s “successive penetrations of man’s economic, religious, kinship and local allegiances”. He believed that it was not capitalism but secularism and statism (especially, in the US, the New Deal) that had loosened social bonds, leading to “personal alienation and cultural disintegration”. He contrasted the pathology of modern life with “earlier times” (when “family, church, local community drew and held the allegiances of individuals in earlier times”). In earlier times, people knew where they stood, and they took care of one another, and didn’t look to the government to help them out when things got difficult.

Nisbet, the man who quested for community, was something of a misanthrope. At home, he liked to watch *Gunsmoke* on the family’s black-and-white television, play croquet with his kids and potter in his rose garden. He went to church only at his wife’s insistence. He did not enjoy society. “I

very much like *individuals*,” he’d say, adapting a quote from Linus Van Pelt in a 1959 issue of the Charles Schulz comic strip Peanuts. “It’s *people* I can’t stand!” There is no such thing as society, Thatcher would say later. There are only individuals. Thatcherism, in the end, came from Charlie Brown.

Conservatives had long placed their faith not in society, but in the free market. But the gap between liberalism and conservatism closed in the 1950s, when liberal intellectuals, terrified at the prospect of a collapse of liberal democracies into totalitarianism, lost faith in the idea of society and abandoned their commitment to social democracy. Ross argues that these liberals no longer believed their role was to protect society by arguing for assembly, mutual concern, cooperative action and equal inclusion. Instead, they strove to protect the individual, and the individual’s ability to make choices, as if the act of choosing, and the market-driven rhetoric of choice, could inoculate the masses against becoming a mass. In the 1960s, liberals would seem to have renewed their commitment to the idea of society – by way of the civil rights movement and Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society – but this, for Ross, was a mere blip, a slight detour, in liberals’ decades-long abandonment of the social. “The political resurgence of social liberalism during the 1960s did not last,” Ross writes, “for it provoked a political and intellectual resurgence of conservatism and the fragmentation of liberal politics and social thought.”

Other scholars see more continuity, an unbroken tradition of liberal and social democracy on the left, from early 20th-century progressivism down to the 21st-century version. But no one disputes that the political revolutions of the 1960s provoked a counter-revolutionary conservative insurgency, animated, in part, by a furious opposition to civil rights. To McGhee’s point, a great many white people appear to have stopped believing in the existence of society just at the point when Black people won enough political power to declare that society could no longer be “whites only”.

In the 60s, Nisbet’s work found a new audience, not among liberals but within an emerging, communitarian New Left. The social, on the left, took on a new cast: liberals gave up on social democracy; the New Left decided to fight for “social justice”. The Quest for Community had gone out of print soon after it was published, but was reprinted in the 60s because it had

become fanatically popular among the New Left. For the 1962 edition, Nisbet changed the title to *Community and Power*. It sounds leftier, but it's the same book, a manifesto about the loneliness and alienation of modern life. Here's Nisbet, in a preface written for that edition, decades before quarantines and stay-at-home campaigns and the loneliness epidemic and social distancing and lockdowns:

"By alienation I mean the state of mind that can find a social order remote, incomprehensible, or fraudulent; beyond real hope or desire, inviting apathy, boredom, or even hostility. The individual not only does not feel a part of the social order; he has lost interest in being a part of it. For a constantly enlarging number of persons, including, significantly, young persons of high school and college age (consider the impressive popularity among them of JD Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*), this state of alienation has become profoundly influential in both behavior and thought. Not all the manufactured symbols of togetherness, the ever-ready programs of human relations, patio festivals in suburbia, and our quadrennial crusades for presidential candidates hide the fact that for millions of persons such institutions as state, political party, business, church, labor union, and even family have become remote and increasingly difficult to give any part of one's self to."

New Leftists who read Nisbet weren't joining conservatism; they were trying to marry liberalism to socialism, and to other traditions, too, including Catholic social thought, and the writings of the American philosopher John Dewey. Their manifesto – the Port Huron Statement, issued in 1962 by the Students for a Democratic Society – bemoaned "loneliness, estrangement, isolation", and celebrated "human interdependence" and "human brotherhood" as "the most appropriate form of social relations" (the word "social" appears 38 times in the document). It pledged that "a new left must include liberals and socialists, the former for their relevance, the latter for their sense of thoroughgoing reforms in the system".

In the middle decades of the 20th century, people on all sides seemed to agree about the problem: the vulnerability of rootless, ignorant mass society to political persuasion and propaganda. But they had different ideas about both its causes and the solution. Nisbet and his conservative kin, blaming the state, placed their faith in a laissez-faire free market and a return to

institutions more powerful in “earlier times”: the family, the church. Black civil rights activists called on the communal traditions of the Black church and the Nation of Islam. The New Left, which began as a movement of students, placed its faith in the university and, ultimately, in cultural rather than social or political change. And white liberals invoked a vague notion of choice – the rational political choices of voters, the informed purchasing choices of consumers. Even abortion would be framed as a “right to choose”. But everyone seemed to agree that no matter what they tried, social bonds kept weakening.

An MIT political scientist named Ithiel de Sola Pool coined the expression “social network” in 1957, founding a field that he called “small world” studies. Two years later, he founded the Simulmatics Corporation. Its name was a portmanteau, and its purpose was to automate the computer simulation of human behaviour in order to make predictions that it could sell to corporations and governments; it was, in short, the first artificial intelligence-driven data services company. In the 1960s, De Sola Pool made a series of predictions about what would worry people in our day, about society. “In the 21st century, the sort of critic who now attacks conformity in society may be complaining of an atomized society,” he predicted in 1968. “Modern technology, he’ll assert, has destroyed our common cultural base and has left us living in a little world of his own.”

De Sola Pool, a technological utopian, believed that emerging technologies of communication – he was at the vanguard of what would become the internet – would instead, by bringing people closer together, make the world smaller. De Sola Pool started out as a liberal but ended as a neoconservative and, technologically, libertarian. Networking computer networks, he predicted in *Technologies Without Boundaries: On Telecommunications in a Global Age*, a book published posthumously in 1990, would produce “communities without boundaries”. This was the fantasy of the founders of the internet.



Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg testifies before the House financial services committee in Washington DC, 29 October 2019. Photograph: Mandel Ngan/AFP/Getty Images

The world wide web is the 21st century's machine loom. "I think we have created tools that are ripping apart the social fabric," said the venture capitalist and former Facebook executive Chamath Palihapitiya in 2017. Critics lately argue that the social network is destroying the social fabric, but the people who built the social network thought it would repair the social fabric. Facebook's actual mission statement – part of its terms of service – is "to give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together". Technological utopians have always believed that if the machinery of industrialism had torn apart the social fabric, another machine could repair it. Technologies of transportation and communication always seemed especially promising: bringing people closer together, faster. The telegraph, the telephone, the radio, television, cable television, the internet, the so-called world wide web, its wispy threads gathering us all together.

This vision owes a great deal to De Sola Pool, who argued that the internet was a "technology of freedom". It owes something, too, to Nisbet, and the attraction his ideas held for the strange bedfellows responsible for establishing the lawlessness of the internet: communitarian New Leftists and anti-government conservatives. In the 1970s, Nisbet taught at Columbia. In

New York, he spent a lot of time with conservative intellectuals, including William F Buckley. Then, at the age of 64, he moved to the American Enterprise Institute, a leading conservative thinktank. Nisbet disliked what conservatism had become in the age of Reagan. “I dislike intensely the hold on him the people of Moral Majority far right have,” he fumed. “Lord, how I detest these religious-political fanatics.” But in the 1990s, and even after Nisbet’s death in 1996, his work became even more influential than it had been before.

“Another Nisbet revival is on right now,” the liberal columnist EJ Dionne wrote in 1996, “this one fueled by political conservatives searching for a coherent philosophy to support their efforts to tear down the modern welfare state and replace it with more localized and voluntary efforts to lift up the poor.” But the Nisbet revival was fuelled not only by conservatives but also by New Democrats, including Bill Clinton himself, and it found its most powerful expression in the anti-government vision of the internet advanced by the coalition of leftists and conservatives, led by the self-described “conservative futurist” Newt Gingrich, architect of the 1996 Telecommunications Act, which set up an internet free of all government interference and oversight.

“Governments of the Industrial World, you weary giants of flesh and steel, I come from Cyberspace, the new home of Mind,” the libertarian John Perry Barlow wrote in his [Declaration of Independence of Cyberspace](#) in 1996. “I declare the global social space we are building to be naturally independent of the tyrannies you seek to impose on us.” Barlow’s rhetoric was anti-government (“Cyberspace does not lie within your borders”) but pro-society (“We are forming our own Social Contract”). He predicted that the internet would be all society and no government. He was half right. With notable exceptions – above all, China – it is ungoverned.

In 2000, Wired magazine predicted that the internet would heal all of America’s divisions, and the world’s. “We are, as a nation, better educated, more tolerant, and more connected because of – not in spite of – the convergence of the Internet and public life. Partisanship, religion, geography, race, gender, and other traditional political divisions are giving way to a new standard – wiredness – as an organizing principle for political and social attitudes.” Few predictions have been more wrong. Turning the

world wide web into a social network, with the rise of “social media” in the first decades of the 21st century, only further corroded social ties. It produced a seemingly unending series of lamentations, and yet another Nisbet revival.

In 2013, George Packer published *The Unwinding: An Inner History of the New America*, his chronicle of America’s crisis of loneliness and alienation and isolation, which won the National Book Award. “No one can say when the unwinding began – when the coil that held Americans together in its secure and sometimes stifling grip first gave way,” Packer wrote. “Like any great change, the unwinding began at countless times, in countless ways – and at some moment the country, always the same country, crossed a line of history and became irretrievably different.” For Packer, the unwinding began “countless times” – a faint echo of Nisbet’s equally vague “earlier times” – but readers understood *The Unwinding* as a lament about the abandonment of the New Deal, first by the New Left, then by the New Right, and then by the New Democrats. Packer believed that the weakening power of the state diminished community: less government, less society. Nisbet believed the opposite, that the rising power of the state diminished community: more government, less society.

In 2020, just as the pandemic was beginning, Ross Douthat, a conservative columnist for the New York Times who wrote the introduction to a new edition of *The Quest for Community*, published *The Decadent Society*. Its arguments rest on a Nisbet essay about how golden ages end when the balance between individual and community is lost, in favour of rampant individualism and what Douthat calls decadence. In another 2020 book, *A Time to Build*, Yuval Levin, the founding editor of the conservative magazine *National Affairs*, quoted at length from Nisbet’s work. Nisbet wrote of a “twilight age”, marked by the “decline and erosion of institutions” and a strong “sense of estrangement from community”. This is the sort of thing Levin means when he writes that “we are living in an era marked by vacuum of allegiance”.



A man scrolls through his smartphone in Bangkok, Thailand. Photograph: Songyuth Unkong/Getty Images/EyeEm

“We Americans are living through a social crisis,” he writes, describing a crisis of “loneliness and isolation, mistrust and suspicion, alienation and polarization”. We have lost faith in institutions: “From big business, banks, and the professions to the branches of the federal government, the news media, organized labor, the medical system, public schools, and the academy, confidence in our institutions has been falling and falling.” For Levin, this decline, which can be measured by public opinion polls, began in the 1970s. For Douthat, who is less interested in loneliness than in cultural decay, the fall began in 1969, when men landed on the moon, and can be followed, among other places, in American cinema, with its endless remakes of old movies. (How many more Star Wars and superhero movies can be left to make?) This comes straight out of Nisbet, and Douthat acknowledges that debt. “The creative burst can last just so long,” Nisbet wrote, “and then everything becomes routine, imitation, convention, and preoccupation, with form over substance.”

You can’t really take an indictment written in 1953 and republish it in 2020 as a diagnosis of something that started around 1970. Nisbet’s quest for community, written during the presidency of Harry S Truman, identified New Deal liberalism as the problem, because Nisbet was still living in the

New Deal. Levin and Douthat want to blame liberalism, but the decades they identify as marking the decline of society are the very decades marked by the rise of conservatism of the Thatcher and Reagan variety. Those decades are also marked by the increasing illiberalism of the New Left which stands as profound danger to knowledge-driven social institutions, especially education and journalism. If the social fabric really is rent, there is, as ever, plenty of blame to go around.

Arguments made in the shadow of Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin do, eventually, become obsolete. Now might be a good time to return your copy of Nisbet's *Quest for Community* to the public library for reshelfing. In many parts of the world, totalitarianism remains a danger, not from the state but from corporations that control data, knowledge and information. There is no escape. They know everything about you. You can hardly engage in a transaction – political, financial, cultural or social – without them. It's less that the social fabric has grown frayed, its edges unravelling, than that the so-called social fabric is now manufactured, for profit, by monopolistic businesses, a cheap, throwaway fake.

Before the pandemic, there was a real world, and this fake one, real friendships and “friends”, political communities and “followers”, genuine political expression and “likes”. The risk, when interactions with other human beings are narrowed to these remote, glancing and often combative exchanges – simulations – is that, once the lockdowns are over, people will bring the culture of the virtual into the real, creating even angrier, more impatient, more superficial, more transactional, more commercial and less democratic societies.

Forging stronger bonds in a post-pandemic world, if one ever comes, will require acts of moral imagination that are not part of any political ideology or corporate mission statement, but are, instead, functions of the human condition: tenderness, compassion, longing, generosity, allegiance and affection. These, too, are the only real answers to loneliness, alienation, dislocation and disintegration. But the fullest expression of these functions across distances as easily spanned by viruses and flood waters as by broadband cables and TikTok videos, requires both society and government. What's needed is nothing less than a new social contract for public goods,

environmental protection, sustainable agriculture, public health, community centres, public education, grants for small businesses, public funding for the arts. It won't be a new New Deal. The dangers are graver because decades of a world, both real and virtual, shaped by Reaganism and Thatcherism, has left the waters rising, all around us, and the forests on fire. Governments rest on a social contract, an agreement to live together. That contract needs renewing. But the problem, in the end, isn't with society, or the social fabric. It's with governments that have abandoned their obligations of care.

Liberalism didn't kill society. And conservatism didn't kill society. Because society isn't dead. But it is pallid and fretful, like a shut-in staring all day long at nothing but a screen, mistaking a mirror for a window. Inside, online, there is no society, only the simulation of it. But, outside, on the grass and the pavement, in the woods and on the streets, in playgrounds and schoolyards and ballparks, in council flats and shops and pubs and agricultural fairs and libraries and union halls, society hums along, if not with the deafening thrum of a steam-driven machine, then with the hand-oiled, creaking clatter of an antwacky wooden loom.

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2021.11.25 - Coronavirus

- Live Covid: Germany death toll passes 100,000; vaccines giving people ‘false sense of security’, WHO says
- Vaccination UK public urged to get Covid booster by 11 December if eligible to avoid waning immunity
- Variants Scientists warn of new Covid variant with high number of mutations
- ‘Bawled my eyes out’ Tears and cheers of New Zealanders free to head home

[Coronavirus live](#)

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Covid live: England and Israel ban flights from southern Africa

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Coronavirus

UK public urged to get Covid booster by 11 December if eligible to avoid waning immunity



About 16 million people have had a booster vaccine or a third dose across the UK. Photograph: Maureen McLean/Rex/Shutterstock

[Andrew Gregory](#) and [Hannah Devlin](#)

Thu 25 Nov 2021 01.01 EST

Ministers are urging millions of Britons to get their Covid booster jab by 11 December to ensure they have “very high protection against Covid by Christmas Day” as new evidence shows the risk of infection increases with the time since the second dose.

The fresh warning comes after cases broke records in parts of Europe on Wednesday, with the continent once again the centre of a pandemic that has prompted new restrictions.

About 16 million people have had a booster vaccine or a third dose across the UK. Everyone aged 40 and over and the clinically extremely vulnerable are eligible to get a booster six months after their second jab. “If you’re yet to get your first, second or booster dose, please do come forward for the jab as soon as possible,” said Maggie Throup, the vaccines minister.

A Department of [Health](#) and Social Care spokesperson added: “People who have had their booster vaccine by 11 December will have very high protection against Covid by Christmas Day. Following a rise in cases and a return of lockdown restrictions in Europe, those eligible for a booster have been urged to take up the offer as soon as possible to protect themselves and their families, and help to reduce the pressure on the NHS.”

Research has previously shown that two weeks after a booster people have a very high level of protection from getting a symptomatic case of Covid.

It comes as new research today shows immunity against infection falls significantly in the six months after two doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine. Experts say the major study highlights the importance of boosters.

The findings, based on a study of 80,000 people in Israel, showed that the chances of a breakthrough infection was roughly double by four months after the second dose of Pfizer/BioNTech and had increased more than tenfold by six months.

Previous work has shown that vaccines are highly effective at preventing hospitalisations for at least six months but that protection against infection falls more steeply, meaning that booster programmes are required to prevent the spread of infection.

Ariel Israel of Leumit Health Services, who led the research, said: “The message is that boosters are needed after about five months.”

The study, published in the [British Medical Journal](#), is based on the electronic health records of just over 80,000 people who had a PCR test between mid-May and September at least three weeks after their second vaccination. None of the people in the sample had evidence of previous Covid-19 infection.

The study found that the rate of positive results was found to rise in line with the time since people had had their second dose. Across all age groups, 1.3% of people tested positive 21-89 days after a second dose, but this increased to 2.4% after 90-119 days; 4.6% after 120-149 days; 10.3% after 150-179 days; and 15.5% after 180 days or more.

The authors said it appears clear that immunity wanes after the first three months of being double-vaccinated but returns to a high level after a booster dose.

They said: “Large-scale Covid-19 vaccination campaigns can achieve control over the spread of the virus, but even in countries with high vaccination rates, breakthrough infections can occur. The risk of [Covid] infection in adults who received two vaccine injections increased with time elapsed since vaccination compared with the reference [individuals vaccinated in the last 90 days].”

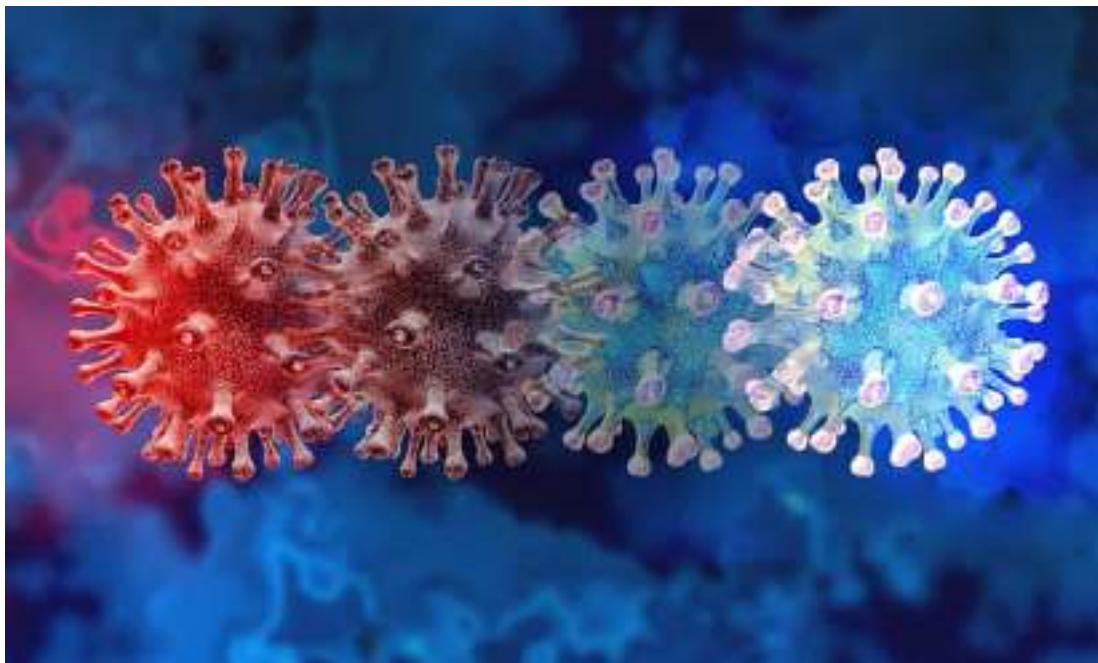
They said it was too early to say whether immunity also wanes after a third booster dose.

AstraZeneca has said antibody protection from its vaccine also wanes, although its chief executive, [Pascal Soriot, said on Tuesday](#) that the jab is thought to offer long-term T-cell immunity for older people, which could be better than other vaccines.

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Coronavirus

Scientists warn of new Covid variant with high number of mutations



Dr Tom Peacock of Imperial College London said the variant ‘could be of real concern’ but may just be an ‘odd cluster’. Photograph: Brain Light/Alamy

[Ian Sample](#) Science editor

@iansample

Wed 24 Nov 2021 13.30 EST

Scientists have said a new Covid variant that carries an “extremely high number” of mutations may drive further waves of disease by evading the body’s defences.

Only 10 cases in three countries have been confirmed by genomic sequencing, but the variant has sparked serious concern among some

researchers because a number of the mutations may help the virus evade immunity.

The B.1.1.529 variant has 32 mutations in the spike protein, the part of the virus that most vaccines use to prime the immune system against Covid. Mutations in the spike protein can affect the virus's ability to infect cells and spread, but also make it harder for immune cells to attack the pathogen.

The variant was first spotted in Botswana, where three cases have now been sequenced. Six more have been confirmed in [South Africa](#), and one in Hong Kong in a traveller returning from South Africa.

Dr Tom Peacock, a virologist at Imperial College London, posted details of the new variant on a [genome-sharing website](#), noting that the “incredibly high amount of spike mutations suggest this could be of real concern”.

In a [series of tweets](#), Peacock said it “very, very much should be monitored due to that horrific spike profile”, but added that it may turn out to be an “odd cluster” that is not very transmissible. “I hope that’s the case,” he wrote.

Dr Meera Chand, the Covid-19 incident director at the UK [Health](#) Security Agency, said that in partnership with scientific bodies around the globe, the agency was constantly monitoring the status of Sars-CoV-2 variants as they emerge and develop worldwide.

“As it is in the nature of viruses to mutate often and at random, it is not unusual for small numbers of cases to arise featuring new sets of mutations. Any variants showing evidence of spread are rapidly assessed,” she said.

The first cases of the variant were collected in Botswana on 11 November, and the earliest in South Africa was recorded three days later. The case found in [Hong Kong](#) was a 36-year-old man who had a negative PCR test before flying from Hong Kong to South Africa, where he stayed from 22 October to 11 November. He tested negative on his return to Hong Kong, but tested positive on 13 November while in quarantine.

England [no longer has a red list](#) to impose restrictions on travellers arriving from abroad. People who are not fully vaccinated must test negative before flying and arrange two PCR tests on arrival. Those who are fully vaccinated need to have a Covid test within two days of landing.

Scientists will be watching the new variant for any sign that it is gaining momentum and spreading more widely. Some virologists in South [Africa](#) are already concerned, particularly given the recent rise in cases in Gauteng, an urban area containing Pretoria and Johannesburg, where B.1.1.529 cases have been detected.

Ravi Gupta, a professor of clinical microbiology at Cambridge University, said [work in his lab](#) found that two of the mutations on B.1.1.529 increased infectivity and reduced antibody recognition. “It does certainly look a significant concern based on the mutations present,” he said. “However, a key property of the virus that is unknown is its infectiousness, as that is what appears to have primarily driven the Delta variant. Immune escape is only part of the picture of what may happen.”

Prof Francois Balloux, the director of the UCL Genetics Institute, said the large number of mutations in the variant apparently accumulated in a “single burst”, suggesting it may have evolved during a chronic infection in a person with a weakened immune system, possibly an untreated HIV/Aids patient.

“I would definitely expect it to be poorly recognised by neutralising antibodies relative to Alpha or Delta,” he said. “It is difficult to predict how transmissible it may be at this stage. For the time being it should be closely monitored and analysed, but there is no reason to get overly concerned unless it starts going up in frequency in the near future.”

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New Zealand

‘Bawled my eyes out’: tears and cheers of New Zealanders free to head home



New Zealanders will be able to travel home from Australia without needing to quarantine for Covid starting on 17 January. Photograph: James D Morgan/Getty Images

Eva Corlett in Wellington

@evacorlett

Wed 24 Nov 2021 23.04 EST

New Zealanders stranded overseas and desperate to return home have shed tears of relief they will soon be able to skip the country’s managed isolation system. But for many the news is bittersweet as they still face another summer separated from loved ones, amid anger that a decision did not come sooner.

The country will reopen its borders to vaccinated visitors in the opening months of 2022, for the first time since the prime minister, Jacinda Ardern, announced their snap closure in the first month of the Covid-19 pandemic. The country's borders have been closed to unrestricted travel for more than a year and a half.

The border will initially open to New Zealand citizens and visa holders coming from Australia, then from the rest of the world, and finally to all other vaccinated visitors from the end of April. They will still have to self-isolate at home for a week, but will no longer have to pass through the country's expensive and space-limited managed isolation facilities.

NZ border shut March 2020.

Travel inwards restricted to 190,000 via 14 days of hotel quarantine since then. Usually about 11 million per year enter.

Today the government released a plan to open.

The enormity of all the missed things for so many.<https://t.co/nQLNMxgpLU pic.twitter.com/vbYAC5ayEa>

— Tanya Selak (@GongGasGirl) [November 24, 2021](#)

“As soon as I read the date of 13 Feb 2022 for no more [managed isolation] for Kiwis from ‘higher risk’ locations I began to bawl my eyes out,” Lara Iriarte said. Iriarte left New Zealand for what was supposed to be a short trip in February 2020, but became stuck in Panama City as the pandemic developed and New Zealand’s borders closed. She said she is still in Central America and has not seen her only son since January last year.

Sherryl Clark, who is in Victoria, Australia said: “To hear that we will not have to do the seven days in [managed isolation] is such brilliant news.

“We have been trying to move back to New Zealand for over 12 months, and it feels like our life has been on interminable hold. Not just with New Zealand restrictions on entry, but lockdowns in Victoria, which have meant

selling our house and getting organised has been also held up for month after month.”

Clark said she attempted to secure a spot in the managed isolation lottery six times, and eventually won a spot when the government changed the isolation requirements to seven days from 14 November.

“Even so, the delays have meant realistically we had to choose a February date, so I have missed two funerals of loved ones, my sister’s 70th and of course my first Christmas with my family for more than 15 years,” Clark said.

Lisa Stella said her husband, who works in Hong Kong, has been trying to get home since June and has made seven attempts at securing a spot in the managed isolation and quarantine (MIQ) system. “Nine minutes after hearing the news, my husband who works abroad had a ticket from Hong Kong to New Zealand.”

While we welcome steps in the right direction, we still can’t work out why fully-vaxxed, double-tested Kiwis crossing the border need to isolate yet Aucklanders traveling for summer don’t. Got a good answer, [@jacindaardern](#) and [@chrishipkins](#)?

— Grounded Kiwis (@GroundedKiwis) [November 24, 2021](#)

But for many New Zealanders, the government’s strict border controls and challenging managed isolation system have permanently damaged its reputation.

“For me [the announcement] is absolutely useless and I find the ongoing restrictions completely over the top. New Zealand will be 90% vaccinated, so is Australia. It’s time to move on and stop destroying the economy and keeping families apart, and denying New Zealand citizens their rights to return and leave their country,” Vanessa Freeman said.

Freeman, a New Zealand citizen based in Melbourne, is desperate to get home and see family over summer. “We can’t go home over the holidays,

when working people could conceivably have the time of work to do the seven days in isolation and still actually see their loved ones.

“My son is very close to his cousins in New Zealand, my mum is elderly and not well, and I am pretty done in emotionally after the last two years. I want to spend Christmas with my loved ones, to recover and recharge.”

Freeman said she had initially supported the government’s pandemic response and voted for Labour in the 2020 election, but said: “[Now] they have lost me, and my family.”

For others the idea of New Zealand as “home” has been called into question. Ian Fenn, who is based in Austria, said he was shocked New Zealand could “so easily lock out its own citizens” and said of the border announcement: “I think it is well overdue but my trust in my home country and New Zealanders has forever been changed, for the worse.”

Sharelle Govignon-Sweet said: “I didn’t even jump for joy. The damage has been done, with regards to my feelings toward ‘home’ and what that means to me now.

“Simply put, our nation locked us out and the populace stayed quiet on that, which alludes to there being a tacit agreement between the two. Teamed with a lack of empathy or compassion for what those of us locked out went through, I have forever been changed by all this.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/25/bawled-my-eyes-out-tears-and-cheers-of-new-zealanders-free-to-head-home>

2021.11.25 - Opinion

- Alone, afraid and facing exile: one boy's ordeal indict Britain's asylum system
- The horrific Channel deaths show the UK needs a more humane asylum system
- PC Andrew Harper's killing was appalling, but changing the law won't protect key workers
- Ironing has a rival for my affections – the matchless, marvellous joy of log-stacking

OpinionImmigration and asylum

Alone, afraid and facing exile: one boy's ordeal indicts Britain's asylum system

[Aditya Chakrabortty](#)



This illustration is an interpretation of a painting in Folkestone's local history museum. By Eva Bee

Thu 25 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

On the final Saturday night in August, the last RAF plane left [Afghanistan](#). On board were any remaining British diplomats and soldiers, escaping a country in murderous chaos. Outside the base, Taliban militia were roaming Kabul's streets, while the previous evening a suicide bomber had got to the airport gates and set off an explosives belt, killing at least 183 people.

As the UK's largest evacuation mission since the second world war ended, [Boris Johnson](#) praised his officials and troops: "They have expended all the patience and care and thought they possess to help people in fear for their lives."

Nearly two months later and 4,000 miles away, a fragile young man in the Kent town of Folkestone remained in fear for his life.

Bashir Khan Ahmadzai fled Afghanistan after his father, a police officer, was seized from the family home by Taliban troops who promised they would be back to take his son. He arrived here as a child, crammed into the back of a lorry with other scared and sick boys and men, and applied for asylum. Now the same British government that just weeks before had worked round the clock to rescue people from the clutches of the Taliban was continuing its long-running campaign to deport him.

No "patience and care and thought" was wasted on the 25-year-old's case. He had done nothing wrong, the [Home Office](#) accepted; he just did not qualify to be a refugee. It was a Friday in mid-October. He was due in court on Monday.

I wrote about Ahmadzai here [three years ago](#), and have kept an eye out for him ever since. A lot of people do that, all of us worrying about what will happen to this skinny foal with big brown eyes. Even hard-headed, gavel-bashing judges describe him as "vulnerable", while court documents list "complex speech, language and communication difficulties".

What would have happened had he lost, I asked people in Folkestone last week. His mate Hadi recounted how in the months leading up to the hearing Ahmadzai had stopped coming out, had not been sleeping, and had lost more and more weight. Support worker Bridget Chapman remembered sitting in on a psychiatric assessment conducted this summer for the court case. At one point the doctor asked if Ahmadzai had ever had any thoughts of hurting or killing himself. He replied: “I think about it every day”.

“His depression is now severe,” concluded the medical report. “I would suspect that the risk of his trying to end his life would increase significantly if he were returned to Afghanistan.”

All this summer, as I wondered what would become of him, I had another question: what did his treatment say about the rest of us? These were the weeks when Westminster mourned the noble intentions with which it had 20 years earlier marched into Afghanistan; when newspaper pundits extolled the humanitarian work done after 9/11. Yet when Ahmadzai and I first met, in 2018, he had just been released from a detention centre where he’d been taken without warning and locked in a tiny cell. The small window was too high for him to see out of, but he could hear shouting and planes roaring overhead. He said the staff had taunted him: “We are going to deport you.”



The Landing of the Belgian Refugees, 1914 by Fredo Franzon. Photograph: Courtesy of Folkestone Museum & Town Council

Admittedly, Afghanistan then was not in the state it is now. Back then, the Home Office judged it only “the second-least peaceful country in the world”. The Taliban were already taking towns and villages. Hadi remembered how at his school one day the Qur'an lessons had been suddenly swapped for instruction in how to clean and shoot rifles. Then they were taken into the basement and shown suicide vests. You trigger them with your chins, the boys were told. That way their heads would be so badly destroyed that no one could identify them. That is the society Hadi and Ahmadzai escaped.

Those immigration officers were ultimately working for us, as part of a Whitehall department acting on our behalf, funded by our taxes and implementing policies endorsed at the ballot box. Ahmadzai's solicitor, Jamie Bell, calculates that the government has spent in the region of £20,000 on the case to deport him. Over the past six years, Bell has represented about 100 Afghans seeking asylum in the UK and 75% of cases, he believes, have involved some form of injustice from the Home Office. Injustices committed in our names.

It was not always so barbaric. Just off the paved market in Folkestone is the local museum, and inside hangs a giant oil painting. The Landing of the Belgian Refugees marks how in the autumn of 1914 Folkestone welcomed Belgians fleeing the German army. Painted by one of those refugees, it shows children and their families on small boats in the Channel. Those clambering on to the docks look thin, anxious and worn out, but there to greet them is the mayor of Folkestone, his deputy, a magistrate, vicars and doctors: all the great and good of the town, who understood that it could easily be them seeking safety and sustenance. Showing me this picture, Chapman told me how on one day alone 16,000 refugees crossed the water. She paused. “What's changed?”

Any number of answers suggest themselves. Those people are white; these are brown. Belgium is only a couple of hundred miles from Folkestone;

Afghanistan is a few thousand. But the question is an excellent one, because it highlights the most important element of all: political will.

Last Friday, I asked the Guardian's librarians to count how many articles the Sun, Daily Mail and Daily Telegraph and their Sunday equivalents had run on the asylum system in just the past month. The total was 114, or more than one per paper each and every morning: a daily drumbeat of headlines and opinion on stories from the poppy bomber to [Priti Patel](#). Then I asked: how many of those pieces had featured any comment at all from an asylum seeker or a refugee? The answer was five.

Five out of 114. Imagine reading 20 different articles on the social care crisis and only on the 21st hearing from someone actually in the care system. Then imagine if all those articles ever said was what spongers those sick and elderly people were, how they were just playing the system. They don't need care, government ministers and newspapers columnists would say. They just want room service.

It would never happen, of course. Those people are judged too important for such a monstering. But it is done every day to asylum seekers. They are erased from the record, stripped of their humanity and rendered as grotesque stereotypes for others to lie about.

Newspapers claim that "record numbers" are coming here, when asylum claims are actually down from last year. The MP for Dover, Natalie Elphicke, claims refugees are "breaking and entering" Britain, when it is a right enshrined in law to seek asylum (this is the same MP who thinks her husband, Charlie Elphicke, is serving an "[excessive](#)" sentence for sexual assault). And the home secretary, Priti Patel, says people only come here from war zones and failed states for the hotel rooms, even while she sticks them in abandoned army barracks that government inspectors judge as "[impoverished, run-down and ... filthy](#)".

The great, galling irony is that this is being done by a home secretary who claims her parents would have qualified for asylum when they left Uganda, and publicly supported by Nadim Zahawi, an Iraqi refugee who spent his childhood on benefits, and is now education secretary. Yet they visit on others treatment that would have broken them. And by their refusal to

manage the flow of asylum applicants, they ultimately force people to risk their lives in the search of safety. Those people who sank in the Channel yesterday died because of our asylum regime.

As Ahmadzai was preparing for court that Friday afternoon, he got a phone call from his solicitor. The Home Office had dropped the case. With apologies for “late submissions”, it had considered “the recent events in Afghanistan” and the official guidance that had been changed just days before – and was granting him asylum.

In the weeks since, Ahmadzai has started to sleep again. He has also begun to dream. He wants to get a moped and ride for Deliveroo or Uber Eats. Oh, and he’s desperate to go to the gym and bulk up. As I left, he mustered up a few words of English and clutched one of his biceps. “Chicken legs,” he said. Despite all he’d been through, he was still just a young man. Your son, your brother, your neighbour.

- Aditya Chakrabortty is a Guardian columnist
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OpinionImmigration and asylum

The horrific Channel deaths show the UK needs a more humane asylum system

[Enver Solomon](#)



People who crossed the Channel in a small boat are helped ashore by RNLI and Border Force staff at Dungeness in Kent on 24 November. Photograph: Henry Nicholls/Reuters

Thu 25 Nov 2021 04.29 EST

There are moments when the heartbreaking tragedy of those much less fortunate than us should act as a wake-up call to make the world a better place. Yesterday afternoon was one of those.

At least 27 men, women and children who, through no fault of their own, were seeking safety in the UK, perished in the cold, unforgiving seas of the Channel – the busiest shipping lane in the world. They had packed

themselves into a flimsy unseaworthy dinghy on the French cost on the final leg of what they hoped would be a journey to a new life where they could do what we all take for granted – work, make friends, have fun and be safe from any harm.

We don't yet know their names, their ages, what relation they were to one another or where they were from. But we do know they will have paid vast sums of money to people smugglers who cruelly control a trade in human cargo that exploits the suffering of those who have fled persecution, oppression and terror in other parts of the globe.

It is difficult for any of us to imagine what the people arriving across the Channel have been through. I recently met two teenage brothers who had made their way overland from Afghanistan fleeing the Taliban, who at the time were advancing across the country. They too had arrived in a small boat on the beach in Dover.

As I sat with them at the Kent Intake Unit, where Refugee Council staff look after them before they are taken into the care of local authorities, they looked vacant, totally disoriented and fearful of what would happen to them next. In broken English, they told me they wanted England to be their new home. Clearly very traumatised, they said they were terrified they could be sent back to Afghanistan.

Rather than showing compassion, humanity and understanding to people like the two teenage Afghans, the government has chosen to talk and act tough, adopting an uncompromising stance. Expensive kit has been bought to try to block the boats. Millions have been spent on increasing border controls – much of it handed to the French to deliver.

The government says those arriving in small boats are nearly all economic migrants – a claim repeated on Tuesday in the Commons by the home secretary. The reality is different. An analysis by the Refugee Council published last week shows that almost all arrivals in the 18 months to June this year were from 10 countries, including Iran, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Sudan, Eritrea and Afghanistan, where persecution is not uncommon. [More than six out of 10 people](#) from these countries seeking asylum in the UK are granted

refugee status or protection. For the top five countries it is higher, at seven out of 10.

Anybody who comes here overland has been immediately labelled an “illegal immigrant”. The [new nationality and borders bill](#) is designed to create an even more hostile environment, including provisions to offshore people while their asylum claims are processed, and a new status of temporary refugee protection. The plan is also to return people to another country if there is evidence they have passed through a so-called “safe country”.

01:48

Boris Johnson 'appalled and deeply saddened' after 31 people die in Channel – video

The rationale is that the more hostile and the tougher the policy, the less likely men, women and children are to risk their lives at the hands of people traffickers. It's a far too simplistic assumption that relies primarily on deterrence, control and enforcement. It will fail because the problem is complex and nuanced. A more sophisticated, intelligent and humane response is required.

The government needs to accept that if there were more safe and regular routes in place for people – such as a wide-ranging resettlement programme, humanitarian visas and reformed family reunion rules – fewer people would feel the need to make such dangerous journeys in the first place. Both Labour and Conservative governments have curtailed safe routes in recent decades through more draconian asylum and immigration laws, forcing people to take dangerous journeys instead. An ambitious expansion of safe routes is urgently needed.

Many people seeking asylum will have no option other than making a journey by land. In the seven decades since the UK helped establish the [UN convention on refugees in 1951](#), many thousands have fled their home countries – including those escaping ethnic cleansing in the Balkans, torture in Zimbabwe and war in Syria – taking dangerous routes to reach our country. They have been granted a fair hearing on UK soil when they arrive. This principle, upheld by prime ministers since Winston Churchill, should

continue today. And to avoid the risky journeys people could be allowed to apply for a humanitarian visa to enable them to travel safely to our shores to claim asylum.

People seeking asylum have the right to choose to come to Britain, often because they have family or community connections or speak some English. Far more – three times more in the case of Germany and twice as many in the case of France – seek asylum elsewhere in [Europe](#). As a signatory to the convention, the UK should allow those who choose to make an asylum application here to do so.

The movement of people in search of safety is not just a policy challenge for our government but one that Europe and other western nations are facing. Like the climate crisis, it requires a multilateral response – working collaboratively with other countries. This includes working together to address the factors that force people to seek safety. Mechanisms that will stabilise and enrich those parts of the world that people are fleeing are critical. “Global Britain” could seek to play a leading role in addressing this global challenge.

The horrific deaths in the Channel require the government to stop and think again. Less empty rhetoric, more intelligent realism, less nationalist posturing, more global leadership – and most importantly, less punitive control. At the end of the day, more compassion is what we really need.

Enver Solomon is chief executive of the Refugee Council

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[Opinion](#)[UK criminal justice](#)

PC Andrew Harper's killing was appalling, but changing the law won't protect key workers

[Zoe Williams](#)





Some 10,000 attacks on police officers, nurses, and other frontline staff take place every year. Photograph: Hollie Adams/Getty Images

Thu 25 Nov 2021 03.00 EST

[Harper's law](#) is named after PC Andrew Harper, killed in pursuit of three quad bike thieves in 2019. It introduces mandatory life sentences for anyone whose crimes result in the death of an emergency service worker, and is expected to take effect at the start of 2022, after a successful campaign by Harper's widow, Lissie. The pair were newlyweds when the police officer was killed.

Some crimes and their subsequent prosecution demand systemic change; others feel simply unresolved by the legal outcome, and it's hard in the moment to distinguish between the two. Harper's killers, Henry Long, then aged 18, and Jessie Cole and Albert Bowers, both 17, were all cleared of murder and convicted of manslaughter. Their sentences weren't insignificant – Long's was 16 years; Cole and Bowers were both sentenced to 13 – but their conduct was unrepentant, chilling. It emerged after the trial that the jurors had [been given extra security amid fears of potential intimidation by supporters of the defendants](#). It was understandable to perceive, as Lissie Harper did, that rather than facing justice, Long, Cole and Bowers had

slipped through its technicalities and niceties, that their punishment was insignificant compared with the harm they had caused.

It's essentially to redress that balance – the loss of such an upstanding, public-spirited and altruistic character as Andrew Harper, distortedly mirrored in the leniency toward three antisocial, callous criminals – that Lissie Harper pursued this law change. Appeal judges had already rejected calls to increase the sentences.

There is a principle at the core that is unarguable: people who put themselves at risk to protect others deserve a more ardent protective social shield than an ordinary citizen. It's a principle that is echoed in rhetoric around ex-service personnel, prison officers, nurses and, more recently in the wake of Covid, bus and delivery drivers. In order for all of us to live peaceably, some must put themselves in danger, and gratitude for this demands a responsive reciprocity. The law is a social tool for mitigating those dangers. This, Harper's law indicates, is more important than more abstract questions, such as whether it is possible or desirable for a judicial system to sort citizens into a hierarchy of good ones versus bad ones, and build different laws around each.

It is highly questionable, however, whether giving a mandatory life sentence to anyone whose actions cause a death in service does actually protect those public servants. By definition, this new law will predominantly affect criminals whose actions accidentally resulted in death, since murder carries a mandatory life sentence anyway. Putting aside the ethical question of whether wrongdoing is better or worse when you didn't mean it, there is the practical question of whether it's possible to be deterred in advance from an act that you didn't intend. So unless we believe that very long sentences will warn people off committing crime altogether (and we know from the three-strikes sentencing process in California that extremely harsh sentencing has only a marginal deterrent effect, offset from a social perspective by massive increases in the prison population), the protective force of Harper's law is questionable.

This isn't to minimise the threats the emergency services face. Some 10,000 attacks on police officers, nurses, and other frontline staff take place every year. Ambulance drivers describe, in astonishment, the violence they face

from people as they undertake the immediate business of saving lives. Prison officers give alarming accounts of surging violence, exacerbated by overcrowding and understaffing. The common factor across all of these tales of violence is that frontline workers are meeting with unprecedented rage and frustration, both in predictable contexts (policing, prisons) and unpredictable ones (A&E).

Public servants often account for this in ways that sound nebulous and unfixable: has the pandemic triggered a large-scale mental health crisis? Are public services so underfunded that previously routine situations have become sites of tremendous pressure and potential violence? These factors, hard but not impossible to quantify, are still a problem even if public discourse does not acknowledge them. Against this backdrop, many emergency service workers will feel about Harper's law roughly as nurses felt about being clapped every Thursday: it's nice to know you care, general public, but this display does very little to improve the lived reality of the challenges you say you care about.

The underlying political agenda is grimly recognisable – a display of harshness to give the impression of competence and grip; a constructed enemy, to sort the nation into categories of those who are on the side of good versus those on the side of evil. It is tactically not unlike New Labour's "tough on crime" shtick – sacrificing insignificant people (who in the case of antisocial behaviour orders, as likely as not couldn't even vote) was easy meat for bellicose media.

Harper's law has a much less widespread application. Fewer than one police officer a year is killed while attempting to prevent, stop or solve a criminal act. But it's nonetheless unsettling. It's a law that ties the hands of judges and disregards their expertise; but more than that, it is a law designed to meet the real problem of a newly febrile public sphere. It washes away the intricacies of policy, the complexities of evidence and pluralism, with a set of false dichotomies: are you in favour of our brave service personnel or do you prefer lowlives and defence barristers? Are you for good or for evil?

- Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist

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Ironing has a rival for my affections – the matchless, marvellous joy of log- stacking

[Adrian Chiles](#)





Well-stacked ... Adrian's log pile. Photograph: Adrian Chiles

Thu 25 Nov 2021 02.00 EST

Those of us with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder crave absorption more than most. It would help if I were blessed with more practical skills. Basic competences in carpentry, knitting or even Lego would be so useful to me in my search for peace. As I am sorely lacking in these departments, when I do find a task to lose myself in, it is a source of great joy. Pootishly, I have written before about a [lockdown love I developed for ironing](#), my ardour for which is undimmed, but now it has a rival for my affection: log-stacking.

A great load was discharged from the side of the log man's van. I looked at the waist-high pile and sighed. Almost all previous experience in my life of tidying or imposing order merely constituted moving piles of stuff from one place to another. Pointless.

Listlessly, without hope, I went about the task at hand. The first row I assembled didn't look too shabby; the second row, even if I say so myself, fitted together rather nicely. With some judicious log selection and some slight rearranging, row three also came to look the part. Faster and faster I worked, as a spatial awareness I had never before tapped into slowly

emerged, blinking into the light after more than 50 years dormant. I had never known absorption like it. My stack is my work of art. I have lovingly photographed it and it is now my screensaver.

Later, glowing with peace, I went for a walk and chanced upon a dry-stone waller of my acquaintance at work. I have often admired his work. He reminded me that I had once said I would like to spend a day with him. I gushed about my log-stacking achievements and saw the fear in his eyes as it dawned on him that I would, after all, be asking to spend a day with him soon. What is log-stacking if not entry-level dry-stone walling? What a joy it will be. No wonder this bloke always looks so happy.

Adrian Chiles is a Guardian columnist

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/nov/25/ironing-has-a-rival-for-my-affections-the-matchless-marvellous-joy-of-log-stacking>.

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Ahmaud Arbery

‘A long fight’: relief across the US as men convicted of murdering Ahmaud Arbery

01:42

Ahmaud Arbery's mother and civil rights leaders react after guilty verdict for his killers – video

[Richard Luscombe](#)

[@richlusc](#)

Wed 24 Nov 2021 16.37 EST

Relief, emotion and a sense of hope came flooding out in Brunswick, on social media, from the White House and across the US as the nation came to terms with the [Ahmaud Arbery](#) verdicts and their place in history.

Outside the [Georgia](#) courthouse, a joyous, flag-waving crowd repeatedly chanted: “Ahmaud Arbery! Say his name!” as the Arbery family, surrounded by their attorneys, emerged to address them.

“It’s been a long fight, it’s been a hard fight,” said Arbery’s mother, Wanda Cooper-Jones.

“To tell you the truth I never saw this day. Back in 2020 I never thought this day would come ... Thank you to those who marched, the ones who prayed, thank you.”

Cooper-Jones said her son “will now rest in peace”.

Arbery’s father, Marcus Arbery, thanked his son’s mother, and the activists and lawyers who helped draw attention to his son’s case.

“God put us all together to make this happen,” he said. “We conquered that lynch mob. We got that lynch mob … Today is a good day.”

Ben Crump, the civil rights attorney representing the Arbery family, said although the outcome of the case was welcome, Ahmaud Arbery’s parents were still grieving their son.

“Even though this is not a celebration, it’s a reflection. The spirit of Ahmaud defeated the lynch mob,” he told the courthouse crowd.

In a statement released immediately after the verdicts were read, Crump also assessed the power of the moment. “After nearly two years of pain, suffering, and wondering if Ahmaud’s killers would be held to account, the Arbery family finally has some justice,” he said.

“The violent stalking and lynching of Ahmaud Arbery was documented on video for the world to witness. But yet, because of the deep cracks, flaws and biases in our systems, we were left to wonder if we would ever see justice.

“Today certainly indicates progress, but we are nowhere close to the finish line. Keep marching. Keep fighting for what is right. And never stop running for Ahmaud.”

From the Oval Office, Joe Biden reflected on Arbery’s killing as a “devastating reminder of how far we have to go in the fight for racial justice in this country” but saw the trial’s outcome as a beacon of hope.

“We must recommit ourselves to building a future of unity and shared strength, where no one fears violence because of the color of their skin,” the president said in a statement.

“My administration will continue to do the hard work to ensure that equal justice under law is not just a phrase emblazoned in stone above the supreme court, but a reality for all Americans.”

Outside court, civil rights leader the Rev Al Sharpton told the cheering crowd: “Brunswick, Georgia, will go down in history as the place where criminal justice took a different turn. Decades from now they’ll be talking

about a boy called Ahmaud Arbery who taught this nation what justice looks like.”

Bernice King, daughter of the civil rights icon Dr Martin Luther King Jr, welcomed the verdict on Twitter but noted: “#AhmaudArbery should be here.”

#AhmaudArbery should be here.

The McMichaels and Bryan are indeed guilty of taking his life for no other reason than for him being Black.

I’m praying for and thinking of Ahmaud’s family, including his mother, Wanda Cooper-Jones, who in this moment, is still missing her son.
pic.twitter.com/JNKCzfSXP8

— Be A King (@BerniceKing) [November 24, 2021](#)

“The McMichaels and Bryan are indeed guilty of taking his life for no other reason than for him being Black. I’m praying for and thinking of Ahmaud’s family, including his mother, Wanda Cooper-Jones, who in this moment, is still missing her son,” she wrote.

The Rev Raphael Warnock, a Democratic US senator for Georgia and a Baptist pastor, echoed her words. “This verdict upholds a sense of accountability, but not true justice,” he said [in a tweet](#).

“True justice looks like a Black man not having to worry about being harmed – or killed – while on a jog, while sleeping in his bed, while living what should be a very long life. Ahmaud should be with us today.”

By contrast, politicians and commentators on the right were noticeably silent in the immediate aftermath of the trial’s conclusion.

There was no early statement from Donald Trump, the former president who was last Friday [quick to celebrate](#) the acquittal of 18-year-old [Kyle Rittenhouse](#) for killing two men and injuring another at a racial justice

protest last year in Wisconsin, nor from any of the Republican Congress members who are vying with each to accept Rittenhouse as an intern.

In his remarks to the Brunswick crowd, Sharpton cited the case of [Trayvon Martin](#), a 17-year-old unarmed Black youth shot dead by the white neighborhood watch captain George Zimmerman in Florida in 2012. Zimmerman was [acquitted](#) a year later after presenting a self-defense argument similar to the McMichaels, in a verdict that sparked widespread outrage.

“Let it be clear that almost 10 years after Trayvon, God used Wanda and Marcus’s son to prove that if we kept marching and kept fighting, we would make you hear us,” he said.

Sybrina Fulton, Trayvon’s mother, celebrated the Arbery verdicts [on Twitter](#) with a “Guilty!! Justice4AhmaudArbery” graphic.

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Ahmaud Arbery

How the murder of Ahmaud Arbery further exposes America's broken and racist legal system



Annie Polite, 87, leads a protest march outside the Glynn county courthouse during the trial of three men accused of murdering Ahmaud Arbery.
Photograph: Stephen B Morton/AP

Maya Yang

Wed 24 Nov 2021 16.50 EST

For many observers, the high-profile case of the three white men convicted of murdering [Ahmaud Arbery](#), a 25-year-old Black man who was out jogging, revealed the racist ways the American legal system has been designed to treat Black people differently.

Arbery was killed in February 2020 in the coastal town of Satilla Shores, [Georgia](#). None of the men involved were charged until eyewitness footage

was made public months later, shortly before the murder of [George Floyd](#) in Minneapolis, prompting widespread protests.

Three white men, Gregory McMichael, 67, his 35-year-old son, Travis McMichael, and their neighbor William “Roddie” Bryan, 52, pursued Arbery, claiming they suspected his involvement in a series of burglaries in the neighborhood. The McMichaels, both carrying firearms, attempted to corner Arbery in a roadway using their truck before the younger McMichael fired three times with a shotgun.

03:18

Key moments from the Ahmaud Arbery murder trial – video report

The men were charged with murder, aggravated assault and criminal attempt to commit false imprisonment, counts to which they all pleaded not guilty.

A court has now found all three guilty of murder.

Here are some of the ways the trial touched on race and racism in the US, echoing America’s segregated past as well as modern-day prejudice.

Black people face danger for doing ordinary things

Arbery’s killing highlighted the dangers Black Americans can face doing entirely ordinary things that white people may perceive as a threat. They range from [birdwatching](#) to showing a [house for sale](#) to [swimming](#).

Arbery, a former high school football standout, loved to run. On 23 February last year, he was jogging through his neighborhood in Brunswick, Georgia, when he was tracked by the McMichaels and Bryan and gunned down.

Relying on a civil war-era law that deputized citizens to police the movements of Black bodies and carry out citizen’s arrests of suspected criminals – a measure the state has [since overhauled](#) – the white men argued that they were acting in self-defense. They said they believed they were legally justified in pursuing Arbery because they thought he matched the description of a burglary suspect.

Arbery's death has reaffirmed a concern among many Black runners that they will be racially profiled or attacked while exercising. The multitude of racist experiences of "running while Black" has prompted runners to take precautionary measures such as wearing bright colors to appear non-threatening and running during daylight hours.

Yet Arbery's white T-shirt, his habit of waving at some neighbors as he passed, and his decision to go jogging in the middle of the day did not protect him.

A reluctance to prosecute

In the weeks and months after Arbery's killing, Glynn county law enforcement officials either ignored the case or failed to thoroughly investigate his death. In one instance, a district attorney refused to allow police officers to make arrests.

Jackie Johnson, the Glynn county district attorney, barred police officers who responded to the shooting from arresting the McMichaels, saying that Greg McMichael had worked as an investigator in her office for 20 years before retiring in 2019.

"The police at the scene went to her, saying they were ready to arrest both of them," Allen Booker, the Glynn county district 5 commissioner, told the Atlanta Journal Constitution. "She shut them down to protect her friend McMichael."

Johnson recused herself from the case four days after Arbery's killing.

George Barnhill, the Waycross district attorney, took over. Less than 24 hours after seeing the video and evidence compiled by the police, Barnhill decided not to charge the McMichaels, citing insufficient evidence, according to the Glynn county commissioner Peter Murphy.

On 2 April, Barnhill emailed law enforcement authorities, saying: "Arbery's mental health records and prior convictions help explain his apparent aggressive nature and his possible thought pattern to attack an armed man."

Less than a week later, Barnhill recused himself because his son had worked on a case involving Arbery while working in Johnson's office. The connection was only [discovered](#) when Lee Merritt, an attorney representing Arbery's mother, found the link between Barnhill's son and her own on Facebook and raised it with his office.

Tom Durden, the district attorney in nearby Hinesville, then took the case on 13 April, making little progress for more than three weeks until the graphic video of Arbery's killing emerged on 5 May. The video prompted swift outcry and Durden notified the Georgia bureau of investigation.

The McMichaels were arrested two days later and on 11 May, the Cobb county district attorney and the case's fourth prosecutor, Joyette M Holmes, took over the case. Holmes is one of only seven black district attorneys in Georgia.

In September, Johnson was indicted on charges of misconduct for allegedly using her position to protect the McMichaels.

[According](#) to evidence introduced in pre-trial hearings, Greg McMichael called Johnson soon after the shooting and left her a voicemail, saying: "Jackie, this is Greg. Could you call me as soon as you possibly can? My son and I have been involved in a shooting and I need some advice right now."

An almost all-white jury

In November, a [nearly all-white jury](#) was selected after defense attorneys eliminated almost all Black jurors from the pool.

Throughout a jury selection period that lasted 11 days, lawyers were given a pool of 48 potential jurors, 12 of whom were Black. However, defense lawyers struck all but one of them from the final jury, leaving 11 white members and one Black member.

The defense attorney Kevin Gough previously [said](#) in an interview with the Atlanta Journal-Constitution that the case's jury selection pool lacked

“Bubbas or Joe six-packs”, referring to white men over 40 without a college degree.

Prosecutors urged Judge Timothy Walmsley to reverse the striking of eight Black potential jurors, whom they argue had been deliberately targeted over race. Despite Walmsley’s acknowledgment of the “intentional discrimination”, he said he was limited by supreme court precedent and said that the defense presented justifiable reasons unrelated to race.

Attacking civil rights leaders

Gough also tried unsuccessfully to remove prominent civil rights leaders and Black pastors, including Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton, from the courtroom, arguing that their presence was intimidating and could influence the jury.

Gough told the judge “We don’t want any more Black pastors in here” and later compared his clients’ treatment to a “public lynching” in language that seemed designed to provoke racial tensions.

During a prayer vigil held outside the Glynn county courthouse this month by Sharpton, Ben Crump, an attorney representing the Arbery family, stressed the acute need for racial justice for Black communities.

“What happens here in Brunswick, Georgia, in the trial in the killers of Ahmaud Arbery, is going to be a proclamation not only to Georgia, not only to America, but to the world, how far we have come to get equal justice in America for marginalized Black people,” he said.

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The Pacific projectSolomon Islands

Australia sends troops and police to Solomon Islands as unrest grows



Violent protests have broken out in the Solomon Islands' capital, Honiara, for a second day, with witnesses saying Chinese-owned businesses were being targeted. Photograph: Georgina Kekea

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Thu 25 Nov 2021 09.31 EST

Australia is deploying more than 100 police and defence force personnel to [Solomon Islands](#), where anti-government protesters took to the streets in the capital, Honiara, for a second day running in defiance of a lockdown order.

The Australian government said the deployment would support “riot control” and security at critical infrastructure, a day after [demonstrators attempted to storm parliament and topple the prime minister](#), Manasseh Sogavare.

Canberra said the move was in response to a request from Sogavare under an existing security agreement between the two countries, and should not be seen as taking a position in Solomon Islands’ internal affairs.

Sogavare said his government was still in control. “Today I stand before you to inform you all that our country is safe – your government is in place and continues to lead our nation,” Sogavare said on Thursday, adding that those responsible would “face the full brunt of the law”.

Most of the protesters in Honiara are reportedly from the neighbouring island of Malaita. People on the island have long complained of neglect by central government and strongly opposed the decision to switch the country's diplomatic allegiances from Taiwan to China in 2019.

The protesters defied a 36-hour lockdown imposed in the wake of Wednesday's unrest and took to the streets again on Thursday. By late evening, thousands of people were out on the streets, as fires burned and plumes of thick black smoke billowed high above the city, Agence France-Presse reported. Banks, schools, police stations, offices and Chinese-owned businesses were among the buildings reportedly torched and, in some cases, looted.

“There’s mobs moving around, it’s very tense,” one man told AFP.

The Australian prime minister, Scott Morrison, announced his government was deploying 73 federal police officers and 43 Australian defence force (ADF) personnel to Solomon Islands, which lies about 1,000 miles north-east of Australia.

Resurgence of unrest in the Solomons fuelled, in part, by lingering animosity towards Chinese businesses and the 2019 decision to switch diplomatic allegiances from Taiwan to China.

Solomons capital under curfew after protesters target parliament -
@AFPh^{https://t.co/DzSYoluqSI}

— Jerome Taylor (@JeromeTaylor) November 25, 2021

Morrison said it was a time to support “our Pacific family”.

“We have received reports of more buildings burning on the main road in the centre of Honiara, including a large commercial building and a bank branch, and increasing numbers of people on the streets,” Morrison told reporters in Canberra.

The first 23 police officers left Canberra on a Royal Australian Air Force plane on Thursday afternoon. Morrison said the police officers would

“support riot control” while additional police and the ADF personnel would “support security at critical infrastructure”.

But Morrison said Australian personnel would stay away from the parliament and the executive buildings of the government, as guarding those facilities was a task for the Solomon Islands police force.

“Our purpose here is to provide stability and security to enable the normal constitutional processes within the Solomon Islands to be able to deal with various issues that have arisen and that be done in a climate of peace, stability and security,” Morrison said. “It is not the Australian government’s intention in any way to intervene in the internal affairs of the Solomon Islands – that is for them to resolve. I’ve made that very clear.”

The Australian foreign minister, Marise Payne, said the Australian diplomatic mission in Honiara remained operational and all staff and their family members were safe. “They are supporting the government in the provision of information about events as they unfold,” she said.

Witnesses posted images on social media of smoke rising from the capital and said Chinese-owned businesses were being targeted. In Beijing, the foreign ministry spokesperson, Zhao Lijian, expressed “grave concern” and called on the Solomon Islands government “to take all necessary measures to protect the safety of Chinese citizens and organisations”.

Solomon Islands, an archipelago nation of around 700,000 people, has struggled repeatedly with ethnic tensions and political violence since gaining independence from Britain in 1978.

Australia led an international police and military force called the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands that restored peace in the country after bloody ethnic violence from 2003 until 2017.

Sogavare angered many in 2019, particularly leaders of Malaita, Solomon Islands’ most populous province, when he cut diplomatic ties with Taiwan, switching diplomatic allegiance to China instead.

Several hundred demonstrators torched buildings, including a police station, and looted stores on Wednesday after marching on parliament to demand Sogavare's resignation.

Sogavare ordered an immediate curfew across Honiara, set to run until 7am on Friday, describing the unrest as a "sad and unfortunate event aimed at bringing a democratically elected government down".

No peace yet in Honiara. Sad time. All spoken to wants PM to step down inorder for peace to return. More looting and burning. Am standing from afar pic.twitter.com/w2zDbcy35d

— Georgina Kekeia (@ginakekeia) [November 25, 2021](#)

The opposition leader, Matthew Wale, called on Sogavare to step down, saying the unrest would not be quelled by a police-enforced lockdown.

"Regrettably, frustrations and pent-up anger of the people against the prime minister are spilling uncontrollably over on to the streets, where opportunists have taken advantage of the already serious and deteriorating situation," he said in a statement.

"The 36-hour lockdown is yet another reactionary response that is not the solution to the current situation."

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/25/honiaras-chinatown-targeted-as-violent-protests-break-out-for-second-day-in-solomon-islands>

South Korea

South Korea trials robots in preschools to prepare children for high-tech future



The Alpha Mini robots are part of a pilot teaching programme in 300 childcare centres in the South Korean capital. Photograph: Anthony Wallace/AFP/Getty Images

Agence France-Presse

Thu 25 Nov 2021 00.10 EST

Seoul has started trialling pint-sized robots as teaching aids in kindergartens – a pilot project the city government said would help prepare the next generation for a hi-tech future.

The “Alpha Mini” is just 24.5 centimetres tall and can dance, lead sing-a-longs, recite stories and even teach kung fu moves as children mimic its push-ups and one-legged balances.

“The robots help with the kids’ creativity,” teacher Byun Seo-yeon told Agence France-Presse during a visit to the bright and busy Maru nursery in Seoul.



The Alpha Mini robot Photograph: Anthony Wallace/AFP/Getty Images

The robot’s eyes wink and blink – and its pupils become heart-shaped during conversation. With a camera on its helmet, it takes photos that are instantly sent to a tablet for viewing.

“In the future, knowing how to manage AI and related tools will be very important,” Han Dong-seog, from the Seoul government’s childcare division, told Agence France-Presse.

The robots are being trialled in 300 Seoul nurseries and childcare centres, with the government recommending the programme for children aged three to five.



The robots are being trialled in schools that typically educate children aged three to six Photograph: Anthony Wallace/AFP/Getty Images

“We believe having this experience in nursery schools will have a lasting effect throughout their youth and as adults,” Han said.

The Alpha Mini has been adopted as part of a daily schedule for the class of four- to five-year-old students at Maru, with its ability to “fart” on command being a highlight during playtime.

“When I tell it to sing, it sings well. I tell it to dance and we dance together,” said five-year-old Lee Ga-yoon.



The city government said the robot trial is designed to help prepare the next generation for a hi-tech future Photograph: Anthony Wallace/AFP/Getty Images

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/25/south-korea-trials-robots-in-preschools-to-prepare-children-for-high-tech-future>

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