

The Guardian

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Joe Exotic: Netflix's Tiger King sequel is surely flogging a dead horse

[Rebecca Nicholson](#)



Joe Exotic: still in jail but never out of the headlines Photograph: Netflix US/AFP/Getty Images

Sat 30 Oct 2021 12.00 EDT

There is usually something a little off about a true-crime sequel. It either seems to be an admission of failure, a recognition that the original series could not come to a satisfactory conclusion – and I have been suckered into enough lengthy podcasts that promise a big reveal only to end with a shrug of the shoulders and a “so who knows, it could have been anyone” – or it stands as an admission that the makers have agreed to wring more out of the story because the story was a hit, even if the material might not be there to back it up.

Joe Exotic’s story is far from dry, but it is being squeezed for every last drop. After being convicted of his role in plotting to kill Carole Baskin, Exotic, who is still in jail but never out of the headlines, will once again return to wider public consciousness in November, as Netflix prepares to release *Tiger King 2*. The official trailer for this true-crime saga arrived last week and it appears that the film-makers took one look at the original and thought perhaps they had not done enough with the murder for hire, black-market animal trading, drugs, politics and polyamory.

The *Tiger King* industry is a fertile one already. There were two Joe Exotic dramas in the works, potentially now down to one, after reports that the Nicolas Cage project was shelved. There was that excruciating “reunion” episode, too bad for me to watch to the end, the format of which seemed to be a tacit acknowledgement that this was more reality TV than documentary. Louis Theroux revisited the site of Exotic’s GW Zoo for the BBC this year, reasserting his position in a story that he had come across when he met Exotic 10 years ago, as a part of a film about America’s love of dangerous pets.

The contrast between Theroux’s understated approach and the throw-everything-at-it *Tiger King*-style was stark. [Netflix](#) got in touch with Theroux to warn him off, telling him that many participants were under exclusive contracts, another indication, maybe, that this story is purely for entertainment now.

The trailer for *Tiger King 2* makes that more plain. It is blockbuster bombastic. To a soundtrack of *Maybe This Time* by Liza Minnelli, one of the most intensely dramatic songs ever and the centrepiece of a musical about the ascent of the Nazis, we see the familiar characters once again, talking about how much life has changed for them since the original series. What stands out most is how much money they have made.

The Beatles: Liverpool gets by with a little help from Rishi



A statue of the Beatles on Pier Head. Photograph: Bloomberg/Getty Images

Rishi Sunak's budget announcement that £2m would be allocated to a waterfront Beatles attraction in Liverpool seemed to take its residents by surprise, who wondered whether the city needed another monument to their most famous musical sons. There are bus tours and walking tours. I have played drums to a video of Ringo at [The Beatles](#) Story at the Royal Albert Dock. I have posed next to a statue of John Lennon near the site of the Cavern Club. It's like giving Stratford-upon-Avon cash for a statue of little-known playwright William Shakespeare.

The *Liverpool Echo* [dug deeper](#), reporting that the money is going towards a “cutting-edge” tourist attraction that would entice people to the city and,

while it will be “Beatles led”, it will celebrate Liverpool’s musical heritage as a whole. How unlike this government to aim for relevance and still come across as confusing and incompetent.

It is, at least, timely. The Beatles never go away, but there are periods of renewed interest and this is one of them. Paul McCartney’s almost-autobiography *The Lyrics* has been dropping crumbs, such as the claim that he, not John Lennon, wrote the opening to A Day in the Life. Peter Jackson’s three-part documentary *Get Back* polishes up hours of unseen footage from the *Let it Be* era. I may have spent much of the late 90s claiming to hate the Beatles, like any good indie kid did, but one of the benefits of getting older is that I can embrace my love for them and honestly I can’t wait.

Julianna Margulies: it's called acting for good reason



Julianna Margulies: ‘we’re all making assumptions as to who I am.’
Photograph: Axelle/Bauer-Griffin/FilmMagic

Though I do not believe in guilty pleasures, I am starting to make an exception for Apple TV’s *The Morning Show*. After a strong first season, it has chucked its ultra-A-list stars into a tumble dryer and cannot seem to find

the stop button. It has become an extravagant, extraordinary mess. Yet even as characters choose a new personality at random each week, I cannot stop watching it.

The Good Wife's Julianna Margulies, usually an indication of the best television, [has joined the cast](#) as news anchor Laura Peterson, who is a lesbian. Predictably, Margulies, who is married to a man, was asked to respond to the argument that the part should be played by an LGBTQ+ actor. "I can understand that," Margulies said on the US show *CBS Mornings*. "My response would also be, we're all making assumptions as to who I am and what my past is and what all of our pasts are." As this debate continues to rumble on, surely Margulies makes a valid point: exactly how much should actors be required to reveal about their own lives in order to pretend to be someone else? I want to use my imagination when I watch television, not limit it.

Rebecca Nicholson is an Observer columnist

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OpinionCop26

The Observer view on the Cop26 climate talks

[Observer editorial](#)



A protest to raise awareness of bottom trawling, said to be one of most environmentally harmful forms of fishing, in front of Cop26 venue the Scottish Event Campus in Glasgow, on 30 October. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

Sun 31 Oct 2021 01.04 EDT

More than three decades have passed since former prime minister Margaret Thatcher, in an address to the Royal Society, cautioned that humanity had “unwittingly begun a massive experiment with the system of this planet itself”. Her warning, in 1988, about the dangers of climate change was followed by other speeches in which she outlined how rising greenhouse gas emissions could trigger dangerous warming of the atmosphere.

It was a prescient admonition, made all the more remarkable for what occurred in its wake. While scientists – with increasing certainty – found more evidence to support the idea that surging fossil fuel emissions were heating the atmosphere, world leaders refused to take any meaningful action. The burning of oil and gas was allowed to continue and atmospheric greenhouse gas levels soared as a result, a process that has continued for the past three decades. During these years, humanity, despite knowing that global warming poses an existential threat to civilisation, has done virtually nothing about it. Indeed, it has frequently chosen paths of action that have only worsened our prospects of restricting climatic chaos.

Consider the figures. The world emitted an estimated 784bn tonnes of carbon dioxide from the dawn of the Industrial Revolution until 1990, when Mrs Thatcher was in the midst of her climate warning phase. Then, for the next 30 years, a further 831bn tonnes were belched into the atmosphere. Thus, over the past three decades, when, for the first time, we actually had a notion of the climatic peril we faced, we chose to emit more carbon dioxide than in all the previous centuries combined. Storms have worsened, heatwaves have increased in number and intensity, floods have increased and droughts have spread, while humanity has, effectively, done nearly everything it could to make the crisis worse.

Code red warning for humanity

It is against this deeply dispiriting background that the two-week [Cop26](#) climate talks began today in Glasgow. More than 120 world leaders are set to gather at the summit, which will also be attended by thousands of lobbyists, activists, journalists, businessmen and politicians. What is agreed will have a profound impact on the lives of billions of people.

Under the Paris climate agreement that was reached in 2015, nations [committed themselves](#) to holding global temperatures rises to well below 2C from pre-industrial levels while pursuing efforts to keep that increase to nearer 1.5C. Countries then agreed to set up non-binding targets, in the form of proposed fossil fuel cuts, which would keep temperature rises to those limits. In Glasgow, delegates will analyse pledges made to date and calculate how they will affect global warming. The answers they get will be

straightforward: these emission promises are desperately inadequate. According to last week's [UN analysis](#), the world is still on course to warm by 2.7C by the end of the century. This is a code red warning for humanity, as the UN secretary-general, António Guterres, has put it.

We should be clear about how a 2.7C warming would affect the world. Droughts and heatwaves would increase in frequency, intensity and duration; the great ice sheets of Greenland and west Antarctica would destabilise and crumble; ocean acidification would worsen; and sea levels would rise by around a centimetre every three years, leading to widespread inundation of low-lying nations. Tens of millions of people would be unable to feed themselves, coastal cities would have to be abandoned and large parts of our planet would become uninhabitable. Humanity clearly has much to gain from a successful Cop26 outcome. As [David Attenborough](#) has put it, the Glasgow summit is "our last chance to make the necessary step change" to protect the planet.

Achieving that goal will be extraordinarily difficult, however. Almost 200 nations will pursue widely differing agendas. Arab states want to continue drilling for oil for as long as possible. In contrast, Pacific island states, which could soon be wiped out by swiftly rising sea levels, seek a rapid halt to the extraction of all fossil fuels. Developing nations, like the rest of the world, are being asked to replace their old, polluting energy sources with green technologies. However, they say that funding for this should be heavily subsidised by wealthy nations. After all, the latter acquired their riches by creating the industries that have led us to this crisis, they point out. For their part, developed nations insist they will only cough up when poorer countries give strict commitments to cut emissions.

UK failure to prepare

Over this morass of competing claims, Britain, as hosts of the summit, will have a critically important role to play in "[keeping 1.5 alive](#)", as ministers have framed the summit's purpose. Our delegation, led by Boris Johnson and Alok Sharma, will have to sort out the key issues and bring order to proceedings. It will require enormous diplomatic skill, a task made all the harder because of past government actions including Britain's recent,

egregious decision to cut its foreign aid budget, a grievous misjudgment that has soured relations with developing nations which see the move as a sign of our indifference to their fate. Chancellor Rishi Sunak [announced that the cutback would be reversed in 2024](#) in last week's budget, but most delegates fear the original reduction has caused irreparable harm.

Then there is the issue of Brexit, which has absorbed the attention of UK diplomats for the past four years, a time when they should have begun to focus on Cop26. This distraction contrasts with France's preparations for the Paris climate summit in 2015. For a year before that meeting, the French diplomatic service was focused entirely on efforts to ensure its success. Their UK counterparts have been allowed no such freedom or time, further weakening the host nation's ability to influence events.

The UK will require enormous diplomatic skill, a task made harder by the government's decision to cut foreign aid

On top of these problems, Covid will have an impact on proceedings. Developing nations are angry that rich countries, including the UK, have [monopolised access to vaccines](#) while they have been left unprotected from the pandemic. Many delegates will arrive in Glasgow already aggrieved at the treatment meted out to their home countries and will be very wary of rich nations pitching climate plans to them.

Further headaches include the [difficulties of President Joe Biden](#) in passing his \$500bn clean energy package through Congress; the intransigence of China in considering whether or not to bring forward its 2030 deadline for peaking net zero emissions; and the decision by Saudi Arabia to increase oil production over the next few years.

Perilous position

This is a lengthy list of problems and they raise a simple question: exactly what are the prospects of the world achieving a 1.5C limit on global warming in the wake of the Glasgow summit? The answer, say most UK delegates, is simple: our hopes are hanging by a thread. Indeed, very few expect sufficient emission-cut pledges are likely to be made in Glasgow and

that the best hope is for Cop26 to agree to hold yearly audits of emission pledges as opposed to every five years, as now. With that kind of regularity, a sense of urgency could be imposed on climate negotiations and should be considered a prime goal for delegates. If that is achieved, there is a chance, a slim one, that we can contain global warming to 1.5C.

If this goal is missed, global carbon capture schemes will need to be established or the world will have to accept that a rise of 2C in average temperatures is unavoidable, though this latter scenario was once described by the distinguished US climate scientist James Hansen as “a prescription for long-term disaster”. Thus, long-term disaster would be the best the world could then hope for, while a 2.7C to 3C warming – the future to which we are currently heading if no new emission pledges are agreed – would simply be a prescription for short-term disaster.

Given these alternatives, it is clear just how perilous a position we find ourselves in, a situation that raises the issue of how we ended up mired in this meteorological mayhem. We should be clear. We are in this state because we ignored the warnings of scientists and we did so because we allowed corporations and businesses to dictate an agenda in which short-term interests took precedence over the planet’s long-term health. This is the legacy of climate change deniers whose influence was seized on by the rightwing press and used to spread the message that we could continue on our grim polluting ways. It is a point summed up by Britain’s Nobel prize winning [climate scientist Peter Stott](#). “The task ahead is not impossible but it is now much harder than if humanity had acted sooner,” he says. “For that, the climate change deniers bear a heavy responsibility.”

We may yet emerge from Cop26 with our hopes of containing global temperatures to a 1.5C rise, but we should also keep in mind the needless danger we placed ourselves in by ignoring for so long what science was telling us.

Observer comment cartoon

Halloween

Tory Halloween tricks but no treat – cartoon

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[Notebook](#)[University of Sussex](#)

Kathleen Stock's departure shows universities can't cope with argument

[Rachel Cooke](#)



Kathleen Stock has resigned from her chair at Sussex University.
Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

Sat 30 Oct 2021 10.01 EDT

How profoundly depressing to hear that the philosopher [Kathleen Stock has effectively been hounded from her chair at Sussex University](#) by the mob. However brilliant her career in the future – and there is no doubting that it will be – it’s hard to see her departure as anything other than a victory for the bullies and anti-intellectuals. (Stock’s only “crime” is that she refuses to deny the material reality of biological sex.) But as the child of an academic, I have experienced something else too, a painful sense of nostalgia for a time when argument wasn’t just tolerated in our universities, but actively embraced.

I keep thinking of those long ago Saturday mornings when my father used to drag me to his office at Sheffield University, a staging post on our regular journey into town to buy some books at W Hartley Seed and aniseed balls at the Castle Market.

In the university corridors, which smelled of Mansion Polish and festering grudges, we often passed various of my father’s colleagues. Smiles and polite hellos would be exchanged, hands would be shaken. No sooner would we have turned the corner, however, than my father would begin his tirade. “That man’s a disgrace!” he would say, or: “His last paper: lazy and inaccurate like you would not believe.”

I’m quite sure not only that the fellow in question, padding along in his bad shoes, was thinking exactly the same about my dad, but that both parties found their sometimes insurmountable disagreements intensely invigorating, a force that was every bit as galvanising as anything they might be about to discover in their laboratories.

Culture vulture



Kristen Stewart as Princess Diana in *Spencer*, directed by Pablo Larrain
Photograph: Pictorial Press Ltd/Alamy

Not quite believing the government's insistent claim there will be no further lockdowns this winter, I continue manically and relentlessly to fill my diary. Plays must be seen and concerts heard; restaurants have to be booked and drinks with friends arranged. I'm out every night and it's exhausting. Rushing into an exhibition of work by Ben Nicholson at Pallant House in Chichester the day before it closed, I suddenly felt almost dizzy with tiredness. Why don't you take a break? I thought, gazing at his lovely circles and squares, his wondrously dextrous lines. Stay in for couple of evenings and watch TV.

But I know that I won't. Thanks to the pandemic, my gratitude for the outward life is so great, it feels close to numinous at times. I'm like some weird cultural nun, a vestal figure who can squeeze pleasure from just about anything, even Pablo Larrain's frankly batty new film about Princess Diana ([Spencer](#), [starring Kristen Stewart](#), which opens on Friday; do look out for her custard-yellow tricorn hat).

The show at Pallant House included items from the beloved collection of old mugs and jugs Nicholson liked to keep in his studio – and yes, I was duly enraptured. Never before has some slightly chipped bit of Sunderland

lustreware looked so beautiful, a tarnished pewter tankard seemed so absurdly alluring.

Sage advice



Room service: a maid cleans a hotel room. Photograph: DragonImages/Getty Images/iStockphoto

In Sussex, I stayed in a house by the sea, where my small niece, E, had prepared for my arrival by drawing up a document rather like those some hotels like to hang on the door handles of bedrooms.

What time, it asked, did I want to be woken up? Was I interested in having my bed turned down? Several boxes had to be ticked immediately, but for everything else, including room service, I was invited to call housekeeping. Below this, she'd written her mobile number and, in brackets, the advice, rather starkly offered, that I should "THINK REALISTICALLY". Words for life, I'd say.

Rachel Cooke is an Observer columnist

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Opinion[David Beckham](#)

David Beckham, weren't you once the new face of masculinity? Now you're the face of Qatar

[Catherine Bennett](#)





David Beckham with Qatari businessman Nasser al-Khelaifi at Khalifa International Stadium, Doha, Qatar, on 18 Dec 2019. Photograph: Kieran McManus/BPI/REX/Shutterstock

Sun 31 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

Being among the 60% or so of women (as opposed to 38% of men) who never watch a match, I found myself regrettfully immune, during lockdown, to the comforting football analogies of England's deputy chief medical officer, Professor Jonathan Van-Tam.

It was reported that many people enjoyed, for instance, his comparison of vaccine development to “getting to the end of the play-off final, it’s gone to penalties, the first player goes up and scores a goal. You haven’t won the cup yet, but what it does is, it tells you that the goalkeeper can be beaten.”

In fact, acclaim for these similes perhaps explains why, with Covid briefings suspended, so many speakers believe that Van-Tam-style football talk renders any message, however grim or remote, more relatable. Asked about the government’s lethal failures, Jeremy Hunt compared its pandemic record to a “football game”, with “two very different halves”. One bereaved woman responded: “My mother didn’t lose her life in a game.”

Possibly more successfully, the latest man to be invited to run London's Barbican arts centre, Will Gompertz, last week tried, on a *Times* interviewer, this variation: "Could the Barbican become somewhere like Old Trafford?" Whatever this meant – presumably not the centre's imminent sale to the Glazer brothers – it must have endeared him to Nadine Dorries, who declared her own passion in her first speech as culture secretary: "Football is central to our national life."

If so, given the current state of the UK's national life, perhaps it's appropriate that the game should, even with some hugely admirable young players, become increasingly enmeshed with the world's ugliest jurisdictions. Following the willingness of Newcastle United, founded in 1892, to be acquired in 2021 by Saudi Arabia's Mohammed bin Salman, understood to have approved the assassination of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, we find David Beckham, former England captain, darling of the 2012 Olympics and recently British football's ambassador, signing as the face of Qatar's 2022 World Cup.

Admittedly, relative to Newcastle's deal, Beckham's with Qatar does not, though gag-inducing, actively reek of blood. Even with its record on exploiting foreign workers, prohibiting homosexuality and reducing women to impotent chattels (an arrangement its UK associates have often found unremarkable), Qatar is yet to be implicated in either dismembering offshore dissidents or in starving foreign civilians. Then again, Newcastle United had not built a career, prior to its unholy collaboration, on behaving nicely.

For the Unicef goodwill ambassador David Beckham, good works are, as demonstrated on the "philanthropy" section of his website, as critical to his brand as his sporting greatness, his photogenic family and the lingering metrosexual image that still sells, among luxury items, the Beckham "eyewear" collection ("inspired by his hometown, London").

He poses, for instance, next to his daughter, Harper Seven, with pictures of some high-achieving young women – Malala, Emma Raducanu, Amanda Gorman – to mark the Day of the Girl. "These girls make me so excited about the future ahead," he expands on Instagram, "and the inspiration my daughter Harper Seven has because of their determination." Would the ex-

footballer, without this prominent conscience, even be a pre-tournament cleansing agent worth £150m to [Qatar](#)?

As for the entrepreneur, he presumably feels his goodwill is ample enough to merit, along with the public honours that [went missing in 2013](#), public tolerance for this massive bung from a country whose male guardianship rules guarantee that no girl can aspire, unlike Harper Seven, to independence. In Qatar, Harper would shortly need a male guardian's permission to study, work, take an Uber, marry, divorce, book a hotel room, leave the country and, if she had them, make decisions about her children.

If Beckham senior were not around, she would have to apply to her grandfather or brothers. Nor would Mrs Beckham be likely to thrive. In Qatar, Mrs Beckham could not attend an event serving alcohol and she could be subordinate to Brooklyn.

A recent, impressive report by Human Rights Watch, entitled [Everything I Have to Do Is Tied to a Man](#), would show any Qatar apologist that they sanitise a system whereby, violating Qatar's own constitution, women are treated like children and left, in the absence of independent women's rights organisations, with little hope of either changing things or leaving. Around the time Beckham celebrated the #DayoftheGirl, the hashtag #WhereIsNoof began circulating on social media. It circulates still. Friends and supporters are fearful for 23-year-old [Noof al-Maadeed](#), a successful escapee, aged 21, from her father's house who returned to Qatar and has not been heard of for two weeks.

Who could now be better placed to check on al-Maadeed and intervene for women than the face of Qatar's forthcoming World Cup? Or better advised to do so? If Beckham's reputation is, as widely argued, in jeopardy, then so is that of [Unicef](#) so long as, inexplicably, it keeps him on. His Unicef mission for "a world in which all children have the opportunity to reach their full potential" currently co-exists with his paid PR for a country in which half the children are destined be controlled, in the absence of reform, by the other.

But Unicef aside, widespread indifference to Newcastle's deal could indicate inaction. Even the giant checklist of Saudi horrors for which Crystal Palace

fans were, hilariously, reported did not specify (in common with much professional comment) the subjugation of women. Guided by Newcastle, Beckham may have concluded that the character of the national game, even with its rumoured interest in building female participation, still leaves women's rights unlikely to cause significant trouble. Yes, his Qatari benefactors might look bad from that perspective, but how does that affect the market for Beckham eyewear? If there is a football analogy for this, it would be a great pleasure not to hear it.

Catherine Bennett is an Observer columnist

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OpinionPoland

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

Will Hutton





Thousands of people take part in a pro-EU demonstration in Krakow, Poland on 10 October. Photograph: Beata Zawrzel/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

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It should be a moment when the values of the European Enlightenment, embodied triumphantly in the astonishing capacity to deliver anti-Covid vaccines within 12 months, should be riding high. “To dare to know”, the great maxim of Emmanuel Kant that delivers such brilliant science, is of a piece with principles of tolerating difference and good government founded on the separation of powers between the executive, legislative and judiciary. These underpin the rule of law and are foundational preconditions for EU membership embodied in its treaties. The British government, for its part, requires applicants for citizenship to know that the rule of law, and what stands behind it, is a supreme British value. Yet everywhere these Enlightenment principles are being challenged.

So while the justice secretary, Dominic Raab, ponders a freedom-curbing override of British judicial independence by equipping ministers with the power to change judges' verdicts if they consider them “incorrect”, the EU finds itself facing a real crisis over the rule of law. The Polish government is actually doing what Raab, at least for the moment, is only contemplating.

In a case brought by its prime minister, earlier this month Poland's supreme court ruled that legal challenges, based on EU law incorporated in EU treaties, would be constitutionally inadmissible. These include challenges to the government disciplining judges for "incorrect" rulings and limiting their independence, so allowing policies that indulge anti-gay declarations, deny climate change or limit press freedom. Unsurprisingly, a court packed by the prime minister's placemen and women found for him: EU law was "[not compatible](#)" with Poland's constitution.

The Polish government, run by the extreme social conservative Law and Justice party, must be unconstrained from doing what it wants, so that if a third of Poland's towns have issued proclamations declaring themselves "LGBT ideology-free zones", nothing can be done. In vain might the EU president, Ursula von der Leyen, declare that such zones are "humanity-free", [that they have no place](#) in a "union of equality". She is powerless to equip Polish citizens with the legal rights that citizens have in other EU member states to challenge their government.

Poland may have signed EU treaties enshrining principles dedicated to the separation of powers and the rule of law, but if they are declared constitutionally invalid, Polish citizens become second-class members of the EU. British citizens will be similarly disempowered if Raab and [Boris Johnson](#) decide to create mechanisms to discipline judges for "incorrect" rulings, but there is no EU to attempt our rescue.

On Poland, the EU, after years of prevarication and weak threats, is at last acting. The judgment, said Von der Leyen, "calls into question the foundations of the EU. It is a direct challenge to the unity of the European legal order", a view backed by the European parliament and outspokenly by the French, Dutch and Belgian governments. Last Wednesday, the European court of justice (ECJ) [imposed a daily fine of €1m](#) (£845,000) on the Polish supreme court for not disbanding its disciplinary chamber. Given that the same supreme court has ruled that the chamber is legal, no compromise is in sight. Nor should it be. This is a battle the EU has to win.

It is [withholding €36bn of post-pandemic funding](#), Poland's share of the EU recovery fund. Prime minister Mateusz Morawiecki is unyielding. There is no question of Poland leaving the EU, he says. He knows Polish support for

the EU is sky high (viewed, as it is, as a source of prosperity and bulwark against Russia), but he threatens to paralyse the EU's operations. Poland will leave the EU's green new deal. It will keep its coal mines and coal-burning plants open. It will veto routine EU legislation. It will challenge the way Germany appoints its judges. If agreements such as the EU arrest warrant become inoperable, so be it. The ECJ must be bested.

In all this, Morawiecki has one supporter in Europe – Boris Johnson, who on Friday took time to brief him by phone on how, echoing Poland's experience, Britain wanted to cease any jurisdiction of the ECJ in Northern Ireland. Poland's fight was Britain's fight against the Northern Ireland protocol. Britain is making common cause with Poland – for national constitutional autonomy against the imperial ambitions of Brussels. Perhaps, hopes Johnson, the fear of "Polexit" may make the EU give way, abandon its "bureaucratic" defence of its legal order and open the way for a famous victory in Northern Ireland.

Perhaps, hopes Johnson, fear of 'Polexit' may make the EU give way and open the way for a victory on Northern Ireland

Johnson misjudges both EU unanimity and its passion for Enlightenment values. The fact that his new ally deplores "LGBT ideology", denies climate change, wants to abolish abortion, rails against press freedom, holds racist views on immigration and is sympathetic to anti-vaxxers should give him pause. More practically, he should know Morawiecki is fighting for his political life. His base in hyper-conservative Catholic south-eastern Poland is shrinking as the liberal cities grow. There are growing pro-EU protests on the streets. The evident disaster of Brexit has virtually eliminated the anti-EU cause, so any threat to leave it would be economic and political suicide.

Johnson is backing a losing horse. The ultra-rightwing project of curtailing Enlightenment liberties to enact hyper-conservative legislation and override treaty obligations may seem attractive to a vocal base. But it's being challenged – there as here.

The EU will hold its ground. In Britain, it was telling that the Office for Budget Responsibility last week declared that Brexit would cost the country

twice as much permanent lost output and prosperity as Covid, heralding a new era of a virtually growthless economy, so hard is Brexit is hitting our trade. But much more importantly, Britain is a quintessentially Enlightenment country; on this, the citizen application test is right.

We should be standing unflinchingly with the best in Europe, not conniving in the trashing of our core values and beliefs. This is not where the majority of British are. Hyper-conservatism is not a vote winner and if that is what Brexit's authors intend it to become, ultimately it will be reversed.

Will Hutton is an Observer columnist

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Observer lettersAssisted dying

Letters: give us the right to ask for help to die



Protesters outside the Houses of Parliament call for reform of laws on assisted dying. Photograph: Dominic Lipinski/PA

Sun 31 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

Kenan Malik's considered piece misses the most important point in favour of decriminalising assisted dying, namely that of individual freedom ("[Claiming a monopoly on truth and dying is no way to win the assisted dying debate](#)", Comment).

Human rights in the field of health have allowed recourse in law to individual patients held or treated against their will, but there is no right, as yet, to assisted dying. I agree, as Malik writes, that "society" should view the vulnerable as "people to whom we have obligations, not as inconveniences weighing us down", but there is a curious slippage in that sentence, too, as though the elderly were not part of our society.

True respect for the vulnerable would involve hearing and respecting their wishes. Death is frightening, partly because we are not certain that we will be properly cared for as we die. Many hoard pills, secretly try to find suicide advice and wonder who to ask for help – not because they are suicidal, but because it makes sense to plan. To have a legal right to ask for assistance to die, and to be confident that dying would be as well taken care of as childbirth, would alleviate much unnecessary suffering.

Sigrid Rausing

London W8

Assisted dying is legal in many countries, but not in the UK, even though doctors keep many patients alive into their 90s and beyond. Among these elderly people, it is likely that many will feel prolonged unhappiness, perhaps with no close family surviving and disagreeable accommodation, prompting a wish to die. People who are fit and active can find it difficult to appreciate such situations but they certainly exist, making assisted dying a humane response to a request from somebody in advanced old age, including when there is no clinical disease.

Elsa Woodward

High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire

Holidays and hotspots

Simon Tisdall's article on Dominic Raab's time off in Crete and the fall of Kabul raises some sharp questions about cabinet ministers' holidays ("Raab's negligence over Kabul is now clear. If he had any honour, he'd quit", Foreign Affairs Commentary).

If they are facing a major crisis, there is nothing that says they can only go on holiday during a parliamentary recess. If they foresee trouble coming down the track, they can always opt for a holiday in the UK, where an emergency return to the office is easier. Unless a minister is a lone parent (with the back-up arrangements that go with that), his or her family will probably be used to the constant negotiations that go with high-level, demanding jobs.

So how do the likes of the foreign secretary justify reckless actions (or non-actions) to protect their holidays? Surely it cannot be because they have such

a low opinion of their own importance and the work they do? Or do they think that they should be given a lot of leeway because they believe that they could be earning more in the private sector? Either way, it represents a profound lack of judgment, which is the most important attribute that we pay them for.

Geoff Reid
Bradford

Truth and the Tudors

English Heritage is reported to be unhappy about Hilary Mantel’s “Tudor bias” (“[Hilary Mantel tells a great tale – but our ruined abbeys tell another, says English Heritage expert](#)”, News). Surely no reader mistakes a fictional reimagining of history for the gospel truth. After all, the victors write the histories. For a counterbalance to this interpretation of the Pilgrimage of Grace, and with greater emphasis on the lesser players in the drama, I suggest readers could try *The Man on a Donkey* by Hilda FM Prescott, first published in 1952, a book on whose cover Hilary Mantel is quoted as saying: “A classic of historical fiction...[it] captures all the poignant strangeness of the era.” Balance restored.

Barbara Lockwood
Huddersfield

Splendid insulation

The government may be “keen to avoid detaining members [of Insulate Britain] who could be presented as ‘climate prisoners’ when Cop26 opens” (“[Why aren’t we in prison, ask Insulate Britain protesters](#)”, News).

But despite many agreeing with Insulate Britain’s aims, the unpopularity of its methods continues to provide the government with a convenient diversion, distracting from the truth that it has done and is doing very little to insulate Britain’s buildings. A situation that, given its determination to replace gas boilers with heat pumps, must change.

David Murray
Wallington, Surrey

Return to Salem?

Along with the theories of the “patriarchy’s revenge” in the witch hunts of the 16th and 17th centuries (“[Why the witch-hunt victims have come back to haunt us](#)”, Focus), it’s worth mentioning Karen Armstrong’s theory about the way new science and rationality were starting to intrude on religion and causing conundrums.

With the first stirrings of the Reformation came the need among devout people to explain the Bible stories and add shape, form, personality and location to its cast of characters. Thus the alleged sightings of actual devils and their familiars and the need to find explanations for deaths, crop failures etc. This was impossible since proper religion involves myth, legend and symbolism to get its points across. At this point, as Armstrong observes, you get bad science and bad religion. It may be that this impossible task also accounted for the burst of melancholia that characterised this period.

Unfortunately, we’re seeing a return of it in the spread of literalist, fundamentalist religious mania in heartland America and elsewhere. Could Salem make a comeback in the 21st century?

David Redshaw
Gravesend, Kent

Get a grip

In your article (“[“The darker skies and the colder weather provide perfect conditions for Covid-19 to thrive”](#)”, News), you say there is a sense that the government may be losing its grip on Covid. Could someone please point to the nanosecond when the government might actually be said to have had any kind of grip on the pandemic?

Dave Pollard
Leicester

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[For the record](#)UK news

For the record

Sun 31 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

We published an article last week with the headline [Only 8% of schools have received air monitors that were promised by government](#) (24 October, page 4). It said this finding had been “revealed” by a Twitter poll conducted by a headteacher. Twitter polls are informal and, if choosing to report them on a significant issue, we should be clear that respondents are self-selecting users of the platform who may or may not be statistically representative. In this case we failed to make that clear. The poll question, which was not given in the article, was, “Anybody seen a CO2 monitor yet? Asking for a school?”, and it cannot be said whether all those answering were in a position to confirm school arrangements. The online version of the article, which was amended shortly after publication to include reference in its headline to the Twitter poll, has been withdrawn from our website.

Professor Brian Josephson, speaking about the academic community ([Premonitions that turn out to be true can feel profound. But is there science to explain them?](#), 24 October, Magazine, page 59), was quoted as saying: “You’re supposed to believe certain things and you run into problems you disagree with.” His actual quote was: “You’re supposed to believe certain things and you run into problems if you disagree.”

Other recently amended articles include:

[Frances Haugen: ‘I never wanted to be a whistleblower. But lives were in danger’](#)

[‘Darker skies and colder weather provide perfect conditions... for Covid-19 to thrive’](#)

[Painting is back in the frame ... and the rising stars are mostly women](#)

*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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[Opinion](#)[Facebook](#)

You can't escape your past by changing your name, as Mark Zuckerberg will discover

[Kenan Malik](#)





Mark Zuckerberg announced Facebook's new name last week. Photograph: David Talukdar/REX/Shutterstock

Sun 31 Oct 2021 03.00 EDT

It's easy to mock the Corporation Formerly Known As Facebook. Mark Zuckerberg's announcement that Facebook would henceforth be Meta, and his attempt to swerve the intensifying assault on his company's sordid activities with a nifty bit of rebranding, is worthy of all the ridicule that's been heaped on it.

And yet, when the laughter has faded, we might also reflect on the fact that the Zuckerberg manoeuvre is a feature not of a particular company but of our age. Rebranding has become the norm, not just in business but in politics and social activism too. And, as with Facebook (or Meta), we live in a world in which form is often seen as more important than content and the symbolic is elevated over the material.

In 1995, the political philosopher Nancy Fraser warned that too often "cultural recognition displaces socio-economic redistribution as the remedy for injustice and the goal of political struggle". Twenty-six years on and struggles for equality and social justice have become even more centred

around the cultural and the symbolic, whether tussles over identities or controversies over statues, rather than on wages, housing or material deprivation.

The symbolic, of course, matters. It is important that the social presence of different groups is recognised, that people can find dignity in their lives and don't feel disrespected or shunned. But today, both politicians and activists often worry more about cultural domination – think of the constant spew of controversies over “cultural appropriation” or offensive speech – than exploitation; the struggles for the material changes necessary to improve our lives have too often become subsumed by demands for symbolic gestures. Not only has politics become Zucked, but the stress on the cultural and the symbolic distorts our understanding of both the present and the past.

A few days before the renaming of Facebook, London's Imperial College [published a report](#) from its history group on the renaming of its buildings. The group had been [commissioned](#) “to examine the history of the College through its links to the British Empire, and to report on the current understanding and reception of the College's legacy and heritage in the context of its present-day mission”.

The report's most important, and controversial, recommendation is to rename the Huxley Building, named in honour of the Victorian naturalist Thomas Henry Huxley, and to remove his bust from public view.

In what way would removing Huxley's bust and renaming the hall improve the lives of minority students at Imperial College?

Huxley was a naturalist, whose fierce defence of the theory of evolution earned him the moniker of “Darwin's bulldog”, and was a leading liberal of his age. His 1865 essay Emancipation – Black and White, which the history group cites as reason for his removal, was written as a polemic against slavery and for women's education. It also took for granted, as most works by Victorian liberals did, the racial superiority of white people and the inferiority of black people.

Huxley, like most historical figures, was a complex personality, with traits and beliefs to admire and to deplore. He played a major role in developing and popularising evolutionary theory, in promoting education, in opposing polygenism (the idea that different races were different species) and in challenging hardline racism while accepting the idea of a racial hierarchy of inferiority and superiority. To view him primarily as a racist, and to suggest that his racism is significant for creating a more equal and diverse society today, is to warp both the past and the present. After all, in what way would removing Huxley's bust and renaming the hall improve the lives of minority students at Imperial College?

The Huxley renaming kerfuffle is a minor issue in a London college. It reflects, though, a wider confusion in the way in which we think about historical figures and contemporary bigotry. It's the latest in a series of controversies about the renaming of buildings that celebrate figures such as Scottish Enlightenment [philosopher David Hume](#), 19th-century prime minister [William Gladstone](#) or the taking down of statues commemorating people such as Bristol slaver [Edward Colston](#) or [Winston Churchill](#). It's an international phenomenon. New York City council voted recently to remove a statue of [Thomas Jefferson](#) from City Hall.

It used to be the cliche that, in novelist LP Hartley's words, "the past is a foreign country. They do things differently there." Now, though, we seem loth to view the past as a different country and want to imagine, and judge it, almost as if it were the same as the present. Huxley's social views, the report tells us, "fall far short of Imperial's modern values". Is that surprising?

Colston was a merchant and slaver, whose life and wealth were built on the oppression of others

The demand that we should rethink our history, take more seriously the shameful aspects often ignored, and reimagine our public spaces and that which they celebrate, is a response to traditional accounts that have often downplayed the [historical record](#) of racism and bigotry. It is, as Helen Carr and Suzannah Lipscomb put it in their introduction to [What Is History, Now?](#), a new collection of essays rethinking our relationship to the past, "about refusing to accept a censored version of history that glorifies certain

people and erases others” and “encouraging us” to pay attention to those who have been marginalised or ignored.

Acknowledging this does not mean, however, replacing it with an equally cartoonish view of history or, guided by contemporary needs, ignoring its complexities. Huxley is a major figure who helped progress both scientific and social views. Colston was a merchant and slaver, whose life and wealth were built on the oppression of others. Damning both equally as racists who do not deserve commemoration is to abandon historical evaluation for a crude mode of moral judgment.

It is difficult to know what the renaming of Huxley Hall would add to our understanding of the man, of his age or of racism. It is equally difficult to know how it would take away anything of the actual racism that black people face today. What we end up with is a Zuckerberg version of history in which symbolic gestures come to replace material change and in which rebranding becomes an all-purpose tool to avoid serious discussion.

History is akin to a continuous conversation with the past, a conversation that inevitably changes over time as values and beliefs change, and that inevitably reflects contemporary preoccupations, but cannot simply reflect contemporary preoccupations. Otherwise, it becomes an exercise in rebranding, not in enriching our understanding of the past or in helping ameliorate the present.

Kenan Malik is an Observer columnist

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[**Opinion**](#)[**Tactical voting**](#)

If opposition parties abroad can put aside their differences, why can't Davey, Starmer and co?

[Nick Cohen](#)





‘Will the other parties accept that a radical realignment is needed after the Conservatives fifth election victory in 2023 or 2024?’: the BBC’s exit poll on 12 December 2019. Photograph: Tolga Akmen/AFP via Getty Images

Sat 30 Oct 2021 14.00 EDT

The uniting of the opposition in 2023 was a moment of optimism built out of despair. Labour, the Lib Dems, Greens and Welsh Nationalists resolved to do whatever it took to drive Boris Johnson from power. Under the slogan “just get rid of them”, they overcame an electoral system that had delivered a majority of 80 to the [Conservatives](#) on 43% of the vote in 2019 and could do so again.

In Turkey, Hungary and Israel, opposition parties had shown that protecting democracy from strongman leaders was more important than ideological divisions. The UK centre-left did not want its country to become a one-party state either and decided to put just one opposition candidate against the Tories in each seat.

Such thoughts are fantasies today. Suggest opposition parties work together to stop a stagnant and autocratic Conservative regime stretching from 2010 to 2028 and beyond and harrumphing commentators wag their fingers.

To claim there is an anti-Conservative majority because 57% of the electorate did not vote Tory is tendentious, they say. One could as easily say there was a 68% anti-Labour majority at the 2019 election because only 32% voted for Jeremy Corbyn. [Evidence](#) going back to the 1980s shows many who vote Liberal would, if forced to choose, prefer the Conservatives to Labour. Progressive alliances are unsporting and un-British, they continue. Voters would smell a stitch-up. In any case, what would a coalition of opposition parties do about Scottish nationalists? The SNP has every interest in keeping Johnson in power because he drives Scottish voters into its arms. It does not want a better UK, but for Scotland to leave the UK.

I accept that these arguments were true in 2019, but the liberal-left thinktank Best for Britain is making a persuasive case to opposition leaders that they are not true now.

It used the most accurate available [polling methods](#) to test how an electoral pact would work in every English constituency. It found that, if their preferred party did not stand, 41% of Lib Dem voters would back Labour, with 19% saying they would vote Tory. Similarly, Labour supporters were almost twice as likely to vote for the Lib Dems (40%) than the Conservatives (25%). About one-third of Labour and Liberal Democrat voters would transfer to the Green party, which supported the conclusion that a unity candidate could beat the Conservative in many marginal seats.

The findings should only surprise those who haven't been paying attention. Polling earlier this year found [two-thirds of voters](#) believed parties that broadly agree with each other should co-operate in elections. (Who knew?) Meanwhile, [60% of voters](#) do not know who came second in their constituency. They needed politicians to show leadership by offering them a unity candidate rather than assume they can work out how to vote tactically themselves.

As for the notion that the British would reject a pact as unsporting, Nigel Farage [stood down candidates](#) in Tory-held seats in 2019 and will doubtless do the same in 2023 or 2024 if he revives his movement. The centre-right plays the electoral system by operating as a united bloc, to the demonstrable advantage of the Tory party. I can find no reason why the centre-left

shouldn't follow suit, unless it subconsciously wants to lose, which, judging by its behaviour, is a possibility you should never dismiss.

Alliances are springing up everywhere as reactions to democratic emergencies. Ünal Çeviköz, a former Turkish ambassador to London and a leader of the Republican People's party, summed up the spirit of opposition solidarity when he told me the true dividing line in modern politics was not between left and right but democrats and autocrats. Six opposition parties are co-operating to oppose Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as the manic Turkish leader wrecks the economy, neuters the judiciary and keeps thousands of political prisoners in jail. The struggle to stop Benjamin Netanyahu has produced a coalition government in Israel that upends everything you thought you knew about the Middle East. The Islamist Arab List co-operates with the Jewish ultranationalist Yamina ("Rightwards") party. Fear of Netanyahu's return keeps them and disparate parties of right and left together. In Hungary, the united opposition against Viktor Orbán's corrupt control of the state and media runs from the Greens and the socialists through to the formerly neo-Nazi Jobbik party, which is now a Hungarian version of Ukip. Your enemy's enemy is your friend when the future of the democratic system is in the balance.

A united centre-left slate here would not have to struggle to cover a gaping ideological divide. If it cannot include the SNP, so be it. The biases of first past the post benefit Scottish as well as Brexit nationalists and co-operation between Labour and the Lib Dems could stop a repeat of the SNP winning 48 out of 59 Scottish seats in 2019 with just 45% of the vote.

Caroline Lucas, of the Green party, favours an anti-Tory front. We are "out of time" on global warming, she says, and do not "have the luxury" of indulging tribalism for another election cycle. The Lib Dem, Layla Moran, says opposition parties must work together against a "nativist government [that] is attacking our rights, trashing our reputation abroad and has cost thousands of lives by mismanaging this pandemic".

Most other Labour and Liberal Democrat leaders remain cautious. Naomi Smith, Best for Britain's CEO, is trying to help them help themselves. She has identified 25 seats where the Lib Dems or Greens could win if Labour gave them a free run and accepted proportional representation as part of the

deal. In return, the Lib Dems and Greens would stand down in 150 seats, which strikes me as a decent offer.

In all likelihood, the narcissism of small differences and the conservatism of the British centre-left will prevent co-operation. But before politicians and their supporters reject it, they should ask the old question: if not now, when? Will they change their minds and accept that a radical realignment is needed after the Conservatives fifth election victory in 2023 or 2024 or sixth in 2028 or 2029? For how much longer will they be able to say that they oppose the Tories without doing what needs to be done to eject them from power?

Nick Cohen is an Observer columnist

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/oct/30/if-opposition-parties-abroad-can-put-aside-differences-why-cant-ed-davey-keir-starmer>

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Owen Paterson

MP Owen Paterson faces suspension for breaking lobbying rules



Owen Paterson could lose his seat if enough constituents trigger a by-election. Photograph: Rob Stothard/Getty Images

Aubrey Allegretti Political correspondent
[@breeallegretti](https://twitter.com/breeallegretti)

Tue 26 Oct 2021 06.23 EDT

The Tory MP Owen Paterson faces a 30-day suspension from the [House of Commons](#) for an “egregious” breach of lobbying rules, raising the possibility he could lose his seat if enough constituents trigger a by-election.

The former cabinet minister was found to have breached paid advocacy rules, [two years after the Guardian published](#) documents revealing how the former environment secretary helped lobby for two firms he was paid to advise – Randox and Lynn’s Country Foods.

Paterson claimed the investigation by Kathryn Stone, the parliamentary standards commissioner, did “not comply with natural justice” and had played a “major role” in the death of his wife, Rose, who took her own life in June 2020.

Stone’s investigation, which was launched in October 2019, found Paterson had worked as a consultant to Randox, a clinical diagnostics company, since August 2015, and Lynn’s Country Foods, a processor and distributor of meat products, since December 2016.

She said he made three approaches to the Food Standards Agency relating to Randox and the testing of antibiotics in milk; seven approaches to the same agency relating to Lynn’s Country Foods; and four approaches to ministers at the Department for International Development relating to Randox and blood testing technology.

Following her investigation, the standards committee – which contains MPs from different political parties, including several [Conservatives](#) – launched its own investigation, and the results of both were published on Tuesday.

The committee revealed Paterson had failed to declare his interest and used his parliamentary office on at least 16 occasions for business meetings with his clients between October 2016 and February 2020, and sent two letters relating to his business interests on taxpayer-funded Commons-headed notepaper.

Paterson was also found to have committed “an egregious case of paid advocacy”, “repeatedly used his privileged position to benefit two companies for whom he was a paid consultant”, and brought the Commons into disrepute. It said: “No previous case of paid advocacy has seen so many breaches or such a clear pattern of behaviour in failing to separate private and public interests.”

The committee recommended Paterson be suspended from the Commons for 30 sitting days.

Under a law introduced in the wake of the MPs’ expenses scandal, any MP suspended for more than 10 days can face a trigger ballot where their

constituents decide whether to force a by-election by supporting a recall petition. Ten per cent of the electors in Paterson's seat would need to support the petition for a by-election to be called.

Paterson, a former Northern Ireland secretary and prominent Brexit campaigner, claimed the investigation was biased and "offends against the basic standard of procedural fairness that no one should be found guilty until they have had a chance to be heard and to present their evidence including their witnesses".

He said Stone did not speak to him to get his side of the story until after she had "made up her mind" and did not seek oral evidence from 17 witnesses who wanted to testify in his support. "I am not guilty and a fair process would exonerate me," he added.

Last summer Paterson's wife of 40 years killed herself. "We will never know definitively what drove her to suicide, but the manner in which this investigation was conducted undoubtedly played a major role," he said in a statement responding to the commissioner and committee's ruling.

"Rose would ask me despairingly every weekend about the progress of the inquiry, convinced that the investigation would go to any lengths to somehow find me in the wrong. The longer the investigation went on and the more the questions went further and further from the original accusations, the more her anxiety increased.

"She felt beleaguered as I was bound by confidentiality and could not discuss this inquiry with anyone else. She became convinced that the investigation would destroy my reputation and force me to resign my North Shropshire seat that I have now served for 24 years."

However, the standards committee said there was no evidence Stone had shown any evidence of bias and called it "completely unacceptable" for Paterson to have made "unsubstantiated, serious, and personal allegations" against the work of his scrutineers.

Questions were raised about Paterson's business dealings in April 2019, when [the Guardian revealed](#) he was being paid nearly £100,000 by Randox

to act as a consultant, while helping lobby the government to seek contracts for the same multinational firm.

- In the UK and Ireland, Samaritans can be contacted on 116 123 or email jo@samaritans.org or jo@samaritans.ie. In the US, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is [1-800-273-8255](tel:1-800-273-8255). In Australia, the crisis support service Lifeline is 13 11 14. Other international helplines can be found at www.befrienders.org.
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Autumn budget 2021

Rishi Sunak to scrap public sector pay freeze in autumn budget



Sunak before the spring budget on 3 March 2021. In his autumn announcement, he is set to confirm that a yearlong freeze on public-sector pay will be lifted. Photograph: Paul Marriott/Rex/Shutterstock

[Jessica Elgot](#) and [Rowena Mason](#)

Mon 25 Oct 2021 17.30 EDT

Rishi Sunak will end the public sector pay freeze for millions of workers and increase the national minimum wage in the budget on Wednesday, though economists warned the measures would not compensate for inflation rises and cuts to universal credit.

The chancellor is set to confirm that the yearlong “pause” on public sector pay, which affected 2.6 million teachers, police and civil servants during the pandemic, will be lifted as the economy recovers from the pandemic.

On Monday he also confirmed that the UK's national living wage will rise from £8.91 to £9.50 an hour for workers aged 23 and over from April, a 6.6% increase, meaning a pay rise for millions of low-paid workers after ministers accepted the Low Pay Commission's recommendation.

The announcements mean about 7.5 million people could see their pay rise – about 5.7 million working in the public sector and 2 million on minimum wage, though there is some crossover. Just under half of public-sector workers were affected by last year's freeze, with exemptions for NHS workers and those earning less than £24,000.

Sunak [imposed the controversial public sector pay freeze](#) in November 2020 and it came into force in April. At the time, he said, it was unfair for millions of workers to get a rise while many of their private sector counterparts were [being furloughed](#) or losing their jobs.

But with wages in many sectors rising, and the prime minister using his [party conference speech](#) to highlight the prospects for a “high-wage economy”, that argument no longer applies.

“The economic impact and uncertainty of the virus meant we had to take the difficult decision to pause public sector pay,” Sunak said, announcing the end of the freeze. “Along with our Plan for Jobs, this action helped us protect livelihoods at the height of the pandemic. And now, with the economy firmly back on track, it’s right that nurses, teachers and all the other public-sector workers who played their part during the pandemic see their wages rise.”

The Treasury briefed that the minimum wage increase represents a hike of about £1,000 a year for a full-time worker. But calculations by Labour found that those affected by the £1,000-a-year [cut in universal credit](#), the rise in national insurance and the freeze in the income tax personal allowance will still be £807 worse off from April.

They are also likely to feel the pinch from a rise in gas and electricity prices when the energy price cap is reviewed in the same month.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) thinktank agreed that the minimum wage increase would not offset cuts to benefits. Tom Waters, senior research economist, said: “While this boosts earnings for full-time minimum wage workers by over £1,000 a year, those on universal credit will see their disposable income go up by just £250 because their taxes rise and benefit receipt falls as their earnings increase.

“Minimum wage workers are most heavily concentrated around the middle of the household income distribution – not the bottom – often because they live with a higher-earning partner. That means that the minimum wage is a very imperfect tool to offset cuts to benefits, which are much more targeted at the poorest households.

“Rising inflation will also blunt the real-terms value of this minimum wage hike – and of course while prices are rising now, the increase in the minimum wage won’t kick in until April.”

The two government announcements are seen by the Treasury and No 10 as putting the focus back on higher wages over government support. Sunak is also likely to confirm that the government is targeting a rise in the national living wage to more than £10 by the time of the next election, a pledge that would match Labour’s.

Bridget Phillipson, Labour’s shadow chief secretary to the Treasury, said the offer was “underwhelming” and would work out at £1,000 a year less than Labour’s plans for a minimum wage of at least £10 an hour for people working full time. “Much of it will be swallowed up by the government’s tax rises, universal credit cuts and failure to get a grip on energy bills,” she said.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/oct/25/rishi-sunak-to-scrap-public-sector-pay-freeze-amid-cost-of-living-crisis>

Politics live with Andrew Sparrow

Politics

UK politics: Owen Paterson rejects report saying he broke lobbying rules – as it happened

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/live/2021/oct/26/uk-politics-live-public-sector-pay-rises-inflation>

[Climate crisis](#)

Climate crisis: economists ‘grossly undervalue young lives’, warns Stern



Prof Nicholas Stern warned that many economic assessments of the climate crisis “grossly undervalue the lives of young people and future generations”.
Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Damian Carrington Environment editor
@dpcarrington

Mon 25 Oct 2021 19.01 EDT

Many economic assessments of the climate crisis “grossly undervalue the lives of young people and future generations”, Prof Nicholas Stern warned on Tuesday, before the [Cop26 climate summit](#) in Glasgow.

Economists have failed to take account of the “immense risks and potential loss of life” that could occur as a result of the climate crisis, he said, as well

as badly underestimating the speed at which the costs of clean technologies, such as solar and wind energy, have fallen.

Stern said the economics profession had also misunderstood the basics of “discounting”, the way in which economic models value future assets and lives compared with their value today. “It means economists have grossly undervalued the lives of young people and future generations who are most at threat from the devastating impacts of climate change,” he said. “Discounting has been applied in such a way that it is effectively discrimination by date of birth.”



Nicholas Stern. Photograph: David Levenson/Getty Images

Youth protests around the world, sparked by the school strike of Greta Thunberg, have been a key factor in increasing demands for action in recent years, along with rising extreme weather events. Recent research shows people born today will suffer many times more extreme heatwaves and other climate disasters over their lifetimes than their grandparents.

However, Stern said: “The move to net zero [emissions] can be the great driver of a new form of growth – the growth story of the 21st century. This growth will be more resource-efficient, more productive, and healthier, and will offer greater protection to our biodiversity.”

Renewable energy costs have fallen dramatically and electric cars are moving to scale, he said, while 75% of global emissions are now covered by national commitments to net zero emissions by the middle part of century, though “some of those commitments are more credible than others”.

Stern’s remarks are based on a [paper to be published in the Economic Journal of the Royal Economic Society](#) and made to mark the 15th anniversary of the landmark Stern review on the economics of the climate crisis in 2006. It concluded that the costs of inaction on climate were far greater than the costs of action and that the climate crisis was the biggest market failure in history.

Since the publication of the report, carbon emissions have risen by 20% and Stern was scathing about much of the economic analysis that has informed policymakers. “Cavalier treatment of risk, and the missing of the very rapid technical progress, means the models have been profoundly misleading,” he said. The theory of discounting had not been related to its ethical foundations, he added, or allowed for the risk that global heating will make future generations poorer.

Political action has been slow since 2006, Stern said, because of the persistence of the “damaging” idea that climate action cuts economic growth and also because of the global financial crisis, which diverted attention and cut middle-class incomes, making politics more “fractious”.

“The economic question now is: how do we manage the radical transformation we have to make in the world economy in the next 20 or 30 years?” he said. “How do we promote the 2% or 3% extra investment we’ll need – which is a very valuable investment, not a cost.”

A whole range of policies are needed, Stern said, including carbon pricing, regulation, product standards, investment in research and reform of capital markets. A critical factor is the provision of large-scale, low-cost finance to fund the low-carbon transition, especially in developing countries.

Stern was directly involved in the negotiation of a promised \$100bn a year in climate finance from rich nations in Copenhagen in 2009. But this has yet to be delivered and it is a vital goal of Cop26. On Monday, developed

countries [released a delivery plan](#) to mobilise the funding, projecting the goal would be surpassed in 2023 onward, after being nearly attained in 2022. Nick Mabey at the E3G thinktank said it was “just about credible”.

The Stern review was criticised by some when published as exaggerating the risks of the climate crisis. “The idea that I was alarmist is just laughable in retrospect. We underestimated the dangers. The costs of inaction were very worrying 15 years ago – they are immensely worrying now.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/oct/26/climate-crisis-economists-grossly-undervalue-young-lives-warns-stern>

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Climate crisis

Climate crisis ‘needs same urgency seen at start of Covid pandemic’



The near-deserted A102 Blackwall Tunnel approach road in London during the first national Covid lockdown last year. Photograph: Glyn Kirk/AFP/Getty

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

Tue 26 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

Ministers must tackle the climate crisis with the same urgency seen at the start of the Covid pandemic, according to in-depth research that also found widespread support for nationalisation and scepticism over the role of the private sector.

The Net Zero Diaries, a project run by the consultancy Britain Thinks to examine evolving attitudes to the pursuit of a net-zero emissions target,

found support for strong-arm tactics from the government even among those who said they had low engagement with environmental issues.

“When the government wanted to be proactive with getting Covid deaths down … they took a proactive and committed [approach]. Who paid for it? The government,” one participant in the research observed.

Boris Johnson and the [business secretary, Kwasi Kwarteng](#), are said to have been motivated by the pandemic to take a more radical approach towards net zero. A source close to the prime minister said both had reflected on the damage catastrophic events could wreak on the economy and used those arguments to make the case for greater safeguards against climate events.

The focus group project involved 40 people keeping diaries of news events and their everyday climate encounters, and hearing from a range of experts across the political spectrum. The research was commissioned by the energy company Ovo, Citizens Advice, WWF and Lancaster University, and diarists were recruited to reflect differing views on climate, from engaged activists to low-engagement regular consumers.

It found some sympathy with the aims of direct action groups [such as Insulate Britain](#), but a widespread belief that civil disobedience would not work as a tactic.

Ahead of Cop26 next week, the project also found there was cynicism over [what the summit in Glasgow will deliver](#) and concern about the amount of emissions it would produce. Several respondents suggested there was an irony in gathering leaders from different corners of the world when many major conferences were successfully held online during the pandemic.

Diarists regularly came back to the idea of coordinated national action and saw nationalisation as the simplest way to achieve this. Labour in particular has faced controversy over Keir Starmer’s reluctance to back a previous pledge to [nationalise energy companies](#).

“I like the idea of that personally, even though I know there were lots of problems with the nationalised companies we had in the old days,” one

participant said.

Participants were asked to examine the most recent manifestos of the four main UK political parties, with the majority choosing the Scottish National party as being the most appealing, citing its focus on national companies and timeframes that seemed achievable.

The Green party's was the second most popular, with Labour and the Conservatives joint bottom amid criticism of "platitudes" such as commitments to [tree-planting](#) and a distrust of nuclear energy.

The participants said they did not trust the private sector to drive a shift to net zero – a key plank of the government's strategy, designed to incentivise companies to reorient their research and development towards cheaper green solutions.

Despite hearing from speakers who argued that private-sector innovation was crucial and that change could be driven by the free market, the participants said they roundly disagreed and argued companies would always maximise profits. Instead, participants said, regulation should be much tougher, and sanctions should be applied to companies unwilling to comply.

Yet there was a strong reluctance towards individuals bearing the brunt of the costs, defaulting towards a belief that big industry should be the first call for higher taxation.

There was also concern that the less well-off – or those in precarious jobs – will need support. "Unless there is a good retraining to send these people into green jobs, then they are heading for permanent unemployment, probably, as the Yorkshire coal miners did in the 80s. A generation of people not working, the poverty," one participant said.

Most said they were reluctant to change their diet and underlined the high costs of changing their cars or energy supply. "We are naturally meat-eaters and changing that is not practical," one said. "I keep wanting to trade in our

diesel Kia Sportage for an e-vehicle, but the costs are astonishingly high and it would be £40,000+ to change,” said another. “Who can afford that?”

One diarist said they wanted to see the government install solar panels and energy-efficient boilers free of charge “if they are serious about becoming more energy-efficient”.

The participants were sceptical of campaigns that sought to highlight the [“racist” aspects of the climate crisis](#) and the effects on the developing world, as well as arguments about intergenerational fairness, and said their views were more shaped by current inequalities, citing the need to protect poorer citizens from fuel poverty and retrain people in green industries.

Participants will continue to keep their diaries for another two months and report back after the Cop26 summit.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/oct/26/climate-crisis-needs-same-urgency-start-covid-pandemic-uk>

2021.10.26 - Spotlight

- 'For 18 months, I thought I was a leper' Frankie Dettori on his cocaine ban, bulimia and banter with the Queen
- 'Got to be accessible' The Derbyshire MP set on holding surgeries
- Music Syd: 'I've always made it a point to just be gay. There's a girl in the video with me, what else do I need to say?'
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Frankie Dettori

Interview

‘For 18 months, I thought I was a leper’: Frankie Dettori on his cocaine ban, bulimia and banter with the Queen

[Simon Hattenstone](#)



‘It’s given me everything, but I’m the lucky one’ ... Dettori at home with his miniature donkeys. Photograph: Tom Jenkins/The Guardian



Tue 26 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

All life can be found at Dettori towers. The outside looks forbiddingly formal – a huge new-build mansion, propped up by grandiose pillars, near the Suffolk racing town of Newmarket. Inside, it's a different story. Frankie Dettori's wife, Catherine, is chopping up chicken for the cats, dogs, kids and Dettori. Chilli, the alsatian, is mooching around, chewed-up Frisbee in his mouth, begging for a game of catch. Blue, a friend's 16-week-old working cocker spaniel, is tearing chunks out of Ricky, a Romanian rescue dog three times her size, while the dachshunds Lettie and Possum try to keep up.

In the fields outside, horses and miniature donkeys are grazing happily. Catherine's mother pops over for a natter. Blue's owner is chatting with Catherine, while Catherine is telling me how quiet it is now that three of the five kids have left home, their pet pig has gone to pig heaven and their emus have departed for distant shores.

But there is no sign of Dettori. It turns out that the jockey is still on his way back from London. He decided to visit their older son, Leo. "He turned up first thing in the morning, despite the fact that Leo was having a lie-in because he'd just done a late shift," Catherine says. "If Frankie's awake, he thinks everyone should be awake."

The great thing about Catherine is you don't really need Dettori here. She tells you everything about him and more, while stuffing you with coffee and doughnuts.

Dettori, who grew up in Milan, has been Britain's most prominent jockey since [Lester Piggott](#) retired in 1995. In 2007, then 36, he told me he had four years left in racing. He had just won the Derby after 20 years of trying. He had been champion jockey (winner of the most races over a season) three times and had made history at 25 by becoming the first (and still only) jockey to achieve the Magnificent Seven – winning all seven races on the card at Ascot in 1996. Dettori was the Robin Hood of racing, the people's champion who broke the bookies by pulling off the near-impossible. He had won pretty much everything of note in the flat-race calendar, survived a plane crash that killed the pilot, established himself in television on A Question of Sport and become a wealthy man. He was happy with his lot and preparing to quit while he was ahead.



Pleased as punch ... Dettori rides Stradivarius to victory in the Gold Cup at Ascot in 2018. Photograph: Tom Jenkins/The Guardian

Only it didn't work out like that. He is now 50, still at the peak of his powers, and has enjoyed some of his greatest triumphs in recent years. All

this, when it looked as if his career would end in ignominy after [his 2012 ban for taking cocaine](#).

Dettori has written a memoir, Leap of Faith, a reference to his flying dismount. I ask Catherine if she has read it. She gives me a look. “Erm, no. Is it good?” Why would she read it, she asks. “I know the story. Anything I don’t know, he’s telling lies or has forgotten.” So, Frankie in a nutshell, she says – easily bored, impatient, crotchety. It’s obvious that she adores him. “On his gravestone, they’re going to put: ‘I’m not waiting.’ This all started when we went skiing. We’d get to the top of the slopes and the kids were snowboarding and he’d say: ‘I’m not waiting.’ He gets *so* bored.”

Then there is his daily life – the diet of chicken and water to keep his weight down (he is 5ft 4in, or 1.63m, and weighs about 8st 7lb, or 54kg), the injuries, the risks, the misery when not winning. So, it’s easy being married to a jockey? “Yes! They don’t want you to cook anything.” She laughs. As it happens, Dettori is the one who likes cooking.

By mid-afternoon, he is back home. It’s hard not to do a double-take when you see him in the flesh. He is *so* tiny. It’s not his height; it’s the Action Man build – conker-sized bottom and a chest like a 9V battery. He marches us to his “office”, the gym where he sweats off all the weight. Dettori changes into his favourite colours – the ones he wore when winning so many races recently on Enable, the filly known as the Queen of Racing. By the window is a photo of his father with Pope John Paul II.

I was once told, if you’re a sportsman, you die twice: once when you retire and once when you really die

Gianfranco Dettori, a successful jockey in Italy, sent Frankie to England at 15 with 1m lire (the equivalent of a few hundred pounds) and nothing else, to toughen him up. No matter what he did, nothing impressed his father. They would fall out and not talk for years. Now, they get on well. Dettori says he wouldn’t have made it without his father’s tough love. “I was a softie, a weak person. I didn’t want confrontation, I didn’t really have ambition. I was happy to stay in the middle of the pack.”

He was so tiny, so young – and a ripe subject for ridicule. “I arrived as a stable lad and I was getting peanuts. I didn’t speak any English. There weren’t many people from abroad coming in those days, so I was a bit bullied.”

Racing was, and remains, insular. Even now, there are hardly any jockeys of colour. Why does he thinks that is? He shakes his head. “I have no idea. But look, 20 years ago, you hardly saw a woman ride. Now, you have a lot. So, it’s changing, and that’s good.”

When Dettori started racing, he was shy, but then he started winning. “You get addicted to it. You get more confident and then you’re chasing your next winner. Then your character changes.” He became an extrovert and his loudness became a shield and a brand. “I saw a gap in the market when I was young. I thought: everyone is so serious and boring. I’m Italian, Latin, got a bit of a character. So, I used the platform to sell myself. When I go to races, I’m like an actor going on stage. I have painted myself with this thing that I’m happy and flamboyant – and have to carry on even if some days I don’t feel like talking to anybody.” Most of the time, he says, he loves being fun-time Frankie.



Jumping for joy ... with the Olympic torch at Ascot in 2012. Photograph: Locog via Getty Images

The young Dettori went straight from bashful to bumptious. “I was Jack-the-lad aged 19, champion apprentice. I was full of myself and giving Lester plenty of shit. I was in the weighing room with him, saying: ‘I’m going to put you in a museum and stuff you.’ Everyone else was petrified of him, but it meant nothing to me. I’d come from Italy, I’d never met the guy, and I used to take the piss out of him all the time.” Piggott got his revenge one day in a race at Goodwood. “From behind, he grabs my bollocks and squeezes as hard as he can. I’m like: ‘Ow! You fucker!’ ‘That’ll teach you to be cocky, you little shit,’ he said. Then we got on well till he retired.”

He tells this anecdote in *Leap of Faith*. I tell him I liked the book. “Did you?” He looks pleased. “I haven’t read it. Is it good?” The book is ghosted by Boris Starling. “It’s not boring, is it?” he asks, anxiously. For Dettori, nothing is worse than boring. I tell him about what Catherine said about his gravestone. He laughs. “She says I’ve got the concentration span of a flea. ‘I’m not waiting!'” He giggles. “That’s it. OK, What else d’you want to know?”

He loves his Piggott stories. “We were queueing for an ice-cream in Germany and this guy comes up to him and says: ‘Can I have your autograph?’ He turns around and looks at me and goes: ‘I want £20,’ and the guy gave him 20 quid and he pocketed it. I went: ‘You have some cheek, you have!’ But that was him.” Was it greed? “No, he got a kick out of it. He did it all his life.”

Piggott, who went to prison for tax evasion in 1987, was the Queen’s favourite jockey. Dettori has often ridden her horses and has a good relationship with her. There is a wonderful photograph of her with her arms stretched and him laughing his head off. It looks as if she is telling a filthy joke. But he still can’t compete with Piggott. “I won my fourth King George on Doyen, so I see the Queen and I bow and I say: ‘That was my fourth King George, Ma’am.’ And she says: ‘Lester won seven.'”

Time to move. He heads for the stables, singing, and I try to keep up. In 2012, Dettori was banned for six months for drug use. He had hit a low, after other jockeys had been promoted ahead of him at Godolphin Racing, the world-famous stables owned by Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum, the ruler of Dubai. Before that, he had always been their No 1. It

took him three years to come back after the ban, he says. “For 18 months, I thought I was a leper. I just couldn’t get a ride.”

Did it change him? “God, yes. I was massively depressed and I became bulimic.” Had he been bulimic before? “At times, yes, but not as bad as then. It’s common for a jockey, obviously, but I was looking at food as a comfort. I felt I was being finished without my own control and that’s a very scary thing when you’re a sportsman. I was thinking: if this goes on, I might have to finish by the end of the season.” He pauses. “I was once told, if you’re a sportsman, you die twice: once when you retire and once when you really die.”

The bookies make so much money out of racing and we still race for the same prize money as we did in the 80s

But he did come back – and how. He left Godolphin, went freelance, reunited with the trainer extraordinaire John Gosden and won his second Derby, on Golden Horn, in 2015. “It’s the best thrill I’ve had in horse racing. It meant everything. It was my comeback, my kids were old enough to understand, I never thought I’d have a horse like that again. Everyone likes a comeback story, don’t they?” He grins.

Golden Horn’s racing career lasted just 367 days, but he won seven of his nine races. “When I got Golden Horn, I thought God paid me back 10 times more after getting done for the drugs and losing my job.” After Golden Horn went to stud, Dettori was given another wonder horse, again trained by Gosden. Enable won 15 of her 19 races (including three King George VIIs and two Arcs) before retiring last year.

What has been his favourite horse? “Enable,” he answers, instantly. “For two days, I cried when she left.” Does Catherine ever get jealous of his relationship with horses? “Not now. I think she enjoys me when I love a horse. She’s an animal lover. Thing is, you get so attached to them you just can’t help it.” Fujiyama Crest, the final horse he raced on the day he won the Magnificent Seven, lived with them for 15 years after being retired.

Was he shocked when footage emerged earlier this year of the jockey Rob James laughing while [joke-riding a dead horse](#)? He winces. “I was. It was horrible. What was going through his mind?”

In the pandemic, his oldest daughter took up racing and loved it. How would he feel if she decided to race professionally? Again, he winces. “Thank God, she’s at university, studying medicine.” Why thank God? “Safer,” he says. “Not just because of the injuries, but emotionally. I would hate to see one of my children as a jockey struggle to make any money. It is a tough life. It’s given *me* everything, but I am the lucky one.” The exception? “Yes, correct. What are the chances of one of my kids doing what I did? I was scared they wanted to do the same.”



Holding court ... sharing a joke with the Queen after winning the Gold Cup at Ascot in 2018. Photograph: Tom Jenkins/The Guardian

Racing is a punishing career, with a terrible record of depression among jockeys. Last year, a 36-year-old former jockey, [James Banks](#), killed himself after losing his home and going bankrupt, while the 2009 Grand National winner [Liam Treadwell](#), 34, died after taking a combination of strong drugs. (The coroner could not be certain Treadwell had intended to take his own life.) “My daughter’s friend’s boyfriend killed himself,” Dettori says. “He was a stable lad.” He partly blames the poverty in racing on the bookmakers.

“The bookmakers are fleecing my sport. It is ridiculous. They are a billion-pound industry; they make so much money out of racing and we still race for the same prize money as we did in the 80s. If the money doesn’t trickle down, by the time it gets to the bottom there’s fuck all there. That’s why the stable lads go around on bicycles and haven’t got any money.”

Dettori is having his photo taken. “Crack on,” he says to the Guardian’s photographer, Tom Jenkins. “I’ve got to get to the sales at Newmarket.” We head off towards the miniature donkeys.

“Frankie, leg over, please,” Jenkins says.

“I’ll try,” he says. “I don’t want to put too much weight on.” Dettori needn’t worry. The donkey flicks his head and throws him. He looks at Catherine and he is laughing – just about. “It’s your idea! I know it’s your idea!”

And he’s off. “I’m not waiting. I’m going to put my civilian clothes back on.” The birds are singing on a gorgeous autumn day. “When it’s like this, it’s the best place in the world,” he says. “I’ll tell you what, though, the winters are bleak.”

Back in the house, I ask how he has changed over the years. He looks at Catherine. “Grumpy!” he says.

“I think you are more grumpy,” she agrees.

He offers me a glass of water as if it’s the finest Dom Pérignon. You always look so happy, though. “When he’s at work, he generally is happy,” Catherine says.

And what is he like when he is grumpy, I ask.

“Shouty,” he shouts.

“He shouts and then, luckily, he just goes to his room,” Catherine says.



Champing at the bit ... embracing Enable after winning the Darley Yorkshire Oaks in 2019. Photograph: Simon Cooper/PA

“I have three-days limit of staying at home, then I have to move. I just go,” he says. “You want to see my sulk room?” he says, enthusiastically.

He takes me to the darkened mausoleum to which he retires every evening. There is a huge TV, an even bigger trophy cabinet crammed with cups, and two giant sofas. “*Da-dahhh!*” he says, proudly. “This is my own room. No children, no women and no animals.” Nobody is allowed in? “Well, only my mates!”

When I comment on the number of trophies, he laughs and says every drawer in the house is full of trophies. I open a few drawers. They are all rammed with trophies. It’s like a hoarder’s house – only this hoarder just collects trophies. I ask him which is his favourite. He shows me a tiny cup. “This was my first ever win. The Donkey Handicap.”

We are back at the kitchen table and he is marvelling at how lucky he has been. Last year, Dettori equalled Piggott’s record of seven King George VI wins. Has he had the opportunity – “To tell the Queen? No.” Does he think he could replace Piggott as her favourite jockey? Not a chance, he says. He tells me of a visit to Windsor Castle. “After the dinner, you go for drinks in

the massive hall with all the paintings.” He says the Queen headed straight for him. “She grabs my arm and says: ‘Go get me Lester!’” He knows his place, he says.

He talks about what the Queen has done for his sport. “She just loves talking about racing. She’ll have her Racing Post on the desk and she watches all the races when she has runners, 100%.” She could have been a commentator? “Yes, she could have taken over from Peter O’Sullivan.” He giggles. “Listen, we are very lucky. She is head of state, loved by the world and has never put a foot wrong. To have her in my sport, to be so knowledgable about it, is incredible.” He pauses and sips his precious water. “Everybody in racing’s got the same fear now. What will happen when the Queen’s not there any more?” She is irreplaceable as an ambassador? “Absolutely.” He notes that she has barely ever missed Royal Ascot or the Derby. “So, where are you going to find a person like that?”

As for him, he has no plans to retire. I remind him that Piggott continued until he was 59. “In my case, I’ll either get out with an injury or because nobody will put me up. Not because I want to stop. They’ll say: ‘Fuck it, let’s get rid of the old bastard.’ Hahahaha!”

In the UK, the eating disorder charity [Beat](#) can be contacted on 0808 801 0677. In the US, the [National Eating Disorders Association](#) is on 800-931-2237. In Australia, the [Butterfly Foundation](#) is on 1800 33 4673. Other international helplines can be found at [Eating Disorder Hope](#)

In the UK and Ireland, Samaritans can be contacted on 116 123 or by emailing jo@samaritans.org or jo@samaritans.ie. In the US, the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) is 1-800-273-8255. In Australia, the crisis support service [Lifeline](#) is 13 11 14. Other international helplines can be found at [befrienders.org](#)

Leap of Faith by Frankie Dettori (HarperCollins, £20) is out on 28 October. To support the Guardian and the Observer, order your copy at [guardianbookshop.com](#). Delivery charges may apply

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UK news

‘Got to be accessible’: the Derbyshire MP set on holding surgeries



Robert Largan begins his commuter surgery outside Hadfield station on Monday morning. Photograph: Joel Goodman



Helen Pidd *North of England editor*

Tue 26 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

At least once a week, Robert Largan, Conservative MP for High Peak in Derbyshire, holds a surgery. It might be outside a supermarket or a train station in his enormous 200-sq-mile patch, but each runs the same. First come, first served, ask him whatever you like.

As he stood in the darkness outside Hadfield station at 7am on Monday, there was one key difference: for the first time since his election in 2019, he had a security guard.

It was his one reluctant concession to safety, 10 days after the murder of fellow MP Sir David Amess. Largan had ignored advice to book all appointments two weeks in advance to allow police vetting, or to pivot to Zoom. “A big, important part of the job for me is that anyone can wander down and reach out to me,” he said.



Robert Langan notes that female colleagues and MPs of colour received far worse abuse than he does. Photograph: Joel Goodman

A self-confessed “compulsive campaigner”, Langan also holds surgeries in the pub. “Lager with Langan”, he originally wanted to call them, but was talked into “Your local with Langan” instead. With a majority of just 590, the 34-year-old former accountant needs to see and be seen if he is to retain this bellwether seat.

But does accessibility equal vulnerability? Langan insisted he did not feel scared. “I’m just trying to be mindful and sensible about it,” he said. “If you spend any time worrying about it, I think you’d lose your mind.”

The day after Amess was killed, Langan [made a point of tweeting](#) that he was going ahead with his surgery in New Mills, a former cotton-spinning centre that now smells faintly of Parma Violets [as the home of Swizzells](#) sweets.

It was a humbling morning. “People were bringing me cups of tea, saying: ‘I don’t have an issue to raise, I just wanted to say I’m so sorry,’” he said. A retired police officer offered his services as a free bodyguard and a local karate instructor invited him to learn self-defence.

Monday's meet-and-greet was in Hadfield, famed as the filming location of [The League of Gentlemen](#). Few local people had time or inclination to talk to their MP, scuttling past the sandwich board billing him as "High Peak's independent-minded champion".



Robert Largan talks to a constituent during his surgery outside the station.
Photograph: Joel Goodman

One constituent had got out of bed early to catch him for a chat about traffic issues. She offered her condolences for Amess' murder. "I hope they're looking after you," she said, concerned, before asking him to do her a favour: "Will you wear a mask for me in parliament?"

Most people are nice, Largan said. If people lie about him, he fights back. Much of Sunday was spent on Twitter demanding retractions for false claims that he had voted to allow water companies to pump sewage into rivers, when he was in fact one of the 22 Tory rebels to vote against the government.

Female colleagues and MPs of colour get it far worse, he said: "There is very little Diane Abbott and I agree on, but some of the abuse she gets is really awful." Women suffer "very creepy stuff", he added, such as the

colleague who keeps getting sent clothes in her size to her house by an unknown admirer.

He has called the police five times because of serious threats to his safety since becoming an MP. He constantly (and inconsequentially) reports online abuse too, like the person who said he should be “put in a full nelson and thrown in a river” for his mythical sewage vote. Largan blames much of the abuse on what he calls “classic Corbynista types, who split their time between abusing me and Keir Starmer”.

Ultimately, Largan thinks he can cope with the abuse. “You’ve got to be accessible and approachable and if we had a situation where people can’t chat to us, it feels like we are losing something important.”

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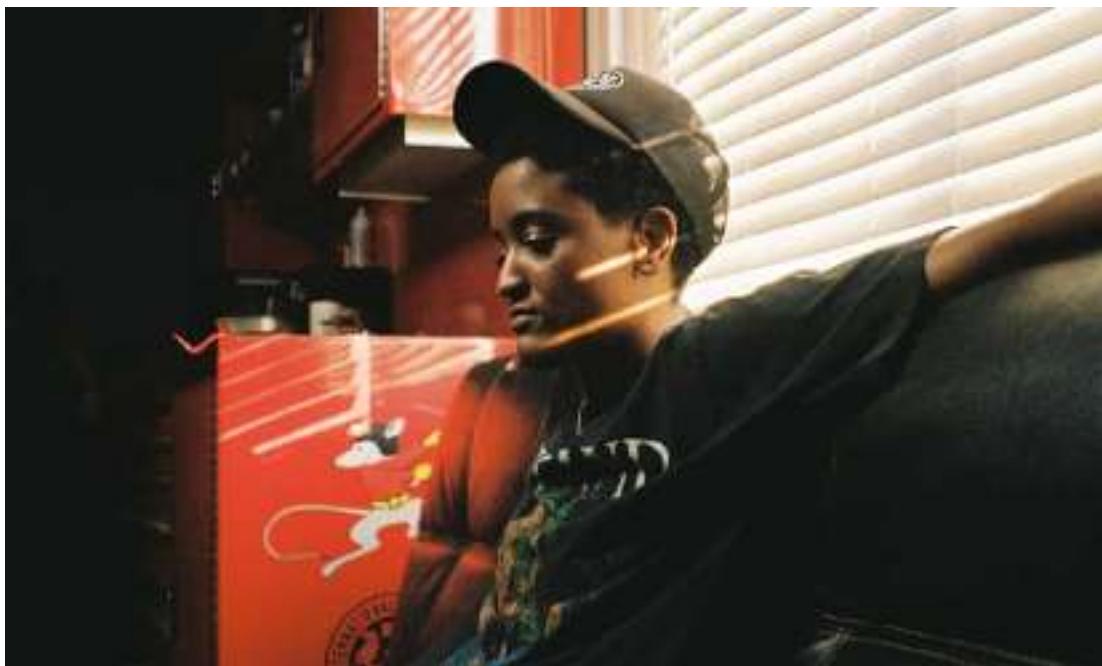
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Interview

Syd: ‘I’ve always made it a point to just be gay. There’s a girl in the video with me, what else do I need to say?’

[Lauren O'Neill](#)



Syd: ‘I think I’ve got my wings now.’ Photograph: Swurve

Tue 26 Oct 2021 03.00 EDT

Interviewing Syd starts the way most interviews do these days: I apologise for inevitable Zoom issues, and Syd, relaxed in loose pyjamas and a cap in her neat apartment, graciously waves this off. Then a wildcard element enters the chat: the singer-songwriter is accosted by a furry bundle on her couch. Said bundle is Rocky, a tiny, “anxious” yorkshire terrier. “He absolutely loves me. He doesn’t like many people,” she says, and this is clearly a point of genuine pride.

Born Sydney Loren Bennett, the 29-year-old made her name as part of the hip-hop collective [Odd Future](#). Subsequently she fronted the neo-funk outfit the Internet, and now she is recording as a solo artist in her own right. Rocky is new to her life, as is his owner, Syd’s girlfriend. While making her upcoming second album, Broken Hearts Club, Syd was processing the bitter end of a two-year-long relationship and the minor matter of a global pandemic. As lockdowns swept the world, the relationship began to crumble; her ex revealed that she no longer wanted to be in a relationship with a woman. Syd, for the first time in her life, was heartbroken. “I thought it was going to last for ever,” she says. “We had talked about it lasting for ever. We talked about getting married and having kids and all of that.”

On top of the breakup, Syd had to contend with the fact that she could no longer bear to listen to the music she had been making before it happened. “I was writing an album full of love songs!” she laughs. “One of the working titles was literally In Love.” It took a while to deal with the fallout, creatively and emotionally: “I definitely had to sit by myself for six months and just get over it. And also, I was like: ‘Let me use this as fuel, to make a great album. Something compelling.’”

And that is exactly what she has done. Syd rethought the record, and created the glistening, vulnerable Broken Hearts Club, which chronicles a love story from its happy beginnings until the end. She gave her album that title because, when her relationship was over, she felt as if she had joined a club “of stronger people. People who had a plan, and someone else just threw a wrench in it.”

Breakups can be lonely, but Syd has enlisted a starry cast of vocalists – such as Kehlani, Mamii, Smino and Lucky Daye – to join her on the album. “Honestly, what made me want to collaborate more was really Mac Miller’s death,” Syd says. Miller, a much-loved rapper who died of an accidental overdose in 2018, had been a longtime friend and musical co-conspirator of the Internet. “He was just a chronic collaborator. And at the end of the day, that’s the community that we all talk about. He made everybody feel so special. I wanted to be more like him.”

Syd was just 16 when she joined Odd Future, performing under the name Syd tha Kyd alongside fellow members and Matt Martians. (Their careers took off so fast that Syd had to ask her father for a \$200 CD mixer for Christmas so they could play live.) For the past decade, she has also been lead vocalist for the Internet, her band, which includes Martians as well. So Syd is used to finding inspiration in the people around her. While she produced parts of Broken Hearts Club herself, she also frequently wrote to beats submitted by others, including the producers Brandon Shoop and Troy Taylor, who has worked with such luminaries as Whitney Houston and [Aretha Franklin](#). (“He’s like this legendary producer who made songs that I grew up on,” Syd says.)

While Broken Hearts Club is populated by Syd’s signature slick synths, as well as the same soft but sure sexuality that made her 2017 debut, [Fin](#), so arresting, what feels new is the emotional truth. Goodbye My Love is one of the few songs she wrote in the thick of her breakup, but it wasn’t recorded until much later because singing it, she says, made her “sob”. Spanish-style strings animate Right Track, a Christina Milian and Destiny’s Child-esque pop crossover moment, while chunky Prince-style guitar riffs pop up on Fast Car and Could You Break a Heart. Out Loud, which features Kehlani, is especially important to her, she says: “It is a really personal song, based on a conversation I had with my ex, when I realised that she hadn’t told everybody about me.”

It is a deeply personal topic, especially for a musician who has never particularly wanted to place her queerness at “the forefront of the press”, as Syd puts it. “I’ve always made it a point to just be gay,” she says. “It was just like: ‘Look, there’s a girl in the video with me. What else do I need to

say?”” In the four years since Syd released Fin, however, the R&B landscape has bloomed as a space for LGBTQ+ artists, with gay acts such as Frank Ocean and Lil Nas X flourishing. Syd understands that Out Loud is the song that “the people around me really want me to push”, but she feels wary.

“On one level I’m like: ‘Dang, I’m glad that you guys want to support this equality thing,’” she says. “‘But are you trying to make money off of it?’ That’s where it gets confusing and tough on the morals. I definitely love the fact that I can be a role model. I love the responsibility of providing representation. But I think I’ve always tried to do that in the most natural way possible. I’m trying to find the right way to really let [Out Loud] shine, without corporate agendas being involved.”

Soon, this will be less of a worry. Although Syd is grateful to her label, Columbia – “They gave me money when I had no money. They gave me time, and opportunity, to make three, four albums with my friends, and two albums on my own,” she says – Broken Hearts Club is her last record with the label. “I think I’ve got my wings now, so I’m gonna try it out on my own after this.” She bursts into laughter. “Maybe I’ll push my gay agenda once I’m independent!”

For now, however, Syd’s focus is on all the new things in her life: new album, new relationship (“much better” than her last), and of course a new companion in Rocky. He has joined her again as we say goodbye, curling up on her lap after being taken outside. Rocky’s living the good life, I say, and Syd agrees: “A nice lap to sit in and somewhere to pee! What more could you ask for?”

Broken Hearts Club by Syd is due out later this year.

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Tibetans in New York commemorate the 1959 uprising against China.
Photograph: Pacific Press/LightRocket/Getty

[The long read](#)

‘We are so divided now’: how China controls thought and speech beyond its borders

Tibetans in New York commemorate the 1959 uprising against China.
Photograph: Pacific Press/LightRocket/Getty

by [Lauren Hilgers](#)

Tue 26 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

It was a pleasant, breezy day in late September 2020 when the FBI showed up outside the home of a man named Baimadajie Angwang. Angwang, who lived in Long Island with his wife and two-year-old daughter, was a community liaison officer with the New York police department, where his role was to build relations with the neighbourhood in the 111th precinct in

Queens. He had arrived in the US in 2005, a 17-year-old asylum-seeker from a Tibetan enclave in [China](#). He joined the marines in 2009 and served one tour in Afghanistan. And then, in 2019, he showed up at the Tibetan Community Center in Queens.

He wanted to be part of the community, Angwang told people. He was there to help Tibetan immigrant youth. He was also, according to the charges against him, in regular contact with two members of the Chinese consulate. “Let them know,” he had told a consular official in November 2018, “that you have recruited someone in the police department.”

Certainly, if he was a spy, as charged, he wasn’t a very good one. According to the [documents](#) that outline the charges against him, he contacted consular officials on his personal mobile phone, placing calls while FBI officials were listening in. In the recordings released to the court, Angwang flatters and brags. “I’m thinking, the whole world is promoting diversity,” he tells a man referred to as PRC OFFICIAL-2, suggesting they approach minority groups in the Tibetan community to recruit informants. Angwang tries to convince the official to get him a visa to go back and visit China. Other informants will want them, he says. They will think the PRC doesn’t appreciate them. Especially, he says, the “100%-type” – the real believers. “It is hard to find people like us,” he complains. “So enthusiastic.”

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Enthusiasm aside, Angwang seemed to have little real intelligence to offer. The charges filed shortly before he was taken into custody testify to his relatively lowly status. He is facing allegations of wire fraud, making false statements and of acting as an unregistered foreign agent: a section of the US criminal code widely known as “espionage light”. Of the many questions raised by Angwang’s case, perhaps the most striking is why the Chinese consulate would have bothered talking to him at all.

In the past nine years under Xi Jinping’s leadership, the Chinese Communist party (CCP) has thrown itself into what Freedom House, a US-based human rights NGO, calls “transnational repression”. Every arm of the PRC government has been called upon to join in the work of influencing

opinions, stifling speech and controlling dissent within and beyond its borders. In a tally of direct physical attacks originating from China since 2014, a [recent Freedom House report](#) uncovered 214 incidents in 36 different countries, from abductions in Thailand to physical assaults in Canada – far more than any other country in the study.

More numerous than these blatant attacks are the incidences of harassment and intimidation. Exiles and activists all over the world have reported threatening phone calls and cyber-attacks; Chinese students studying in the [UK](#) and [Australia](#) have reported being threatened and harassed if they criticise the PRC; in California, a man was apprehended driving a car made to look like a Chinese police vehicle through an immigrant neighbourhood; police officers in the PRC frequently make calls to exiles using their relative's phones (“You must bear in mind that all your family and relatives are with us,” a Chinese officer [told one Uyghur exile](#) from China’s Xinjiang province). “China conducts the most sophisticated, global, and comprehensive campaign of transnational repression in the world,” reads the Freedom House report. Of the groups targeted for repression, Tibetans in exile have long been the object of special attention.

Globally, there are about 150,000 Tibetans living outside China’s borders. It’s a small group with an outsized international voice, partly thanks to their charismatic leader, the Dalai Lama. The People’s Republic of China took control of Tibet in 1950, and the Dalai Lama escaped to Dharamshala, India, in 1959, where he set up the Tibetan government in exile. Ever since, the Tibetan diaspora has been growing and the PRC has viewed the Tibetan people – with their allegiance to a leader outside the Communist party system and an independence movement with [global support](#) – as a dangerous enemy.

One of the biggest Tibetan diaspora communities outside Dharamshala is in and around New York City, where an estimated 15,000 Tibetans live. In Jackson Heights, Queens, Tibetan restaurants and groceries line the streets around the Roosevelt Avenue subway station. There is a community centre, opened in 2019, a temple and a school for Tibetan language and culture. Along a stretch of 74th Street that is hung with strings of lights, Tibetan and Nepali restaurants share sidewalk space, prayer flags flutter, and a discount shop is named Namaste.

Angwang's arrest seemed to confirm what the Tibetan community had long suspected: that the Communist party of China is watching them. Tibetans in New York applying for visas to visit China are directed to a separate entrance to the PRC consulate in the city, where an official – usually of Tibetan descent – meets them for an extensive interview. They are asked to write a biography, listing all their friends and family in Tibet, along with their jobs, addresses and contact information. Many worry that their applications could harm loved ones in China. They fear their daily activities are documented and tallied. Some applicants have been shown photos of themselves attending a protest, or a teaching led by the [Dalai Lama](#). In one case, a visa applicant in San Francisco found that the interviewer knew the name and breed of their dog.

"We go between overestimating and underestimating the threat (of surveillance)," said Tenzin Dorjee, a PhD student in political science at Columbia and one of the most recognisable faces in New York's Tibetan community. Dorjee goes by the name Tendor – many Tibetan boys are given one of the Dalai Lama's names (he has seven), so nicknames are common. Tendor was the child of Tibetan exiles in India and moved to the US as a teenager. He spent four years as the director of Students for a Free Tibet, where PRC surveillance was considered a given.

Tendor has watched as paranoia has grown in his community. Tibetans, he believes, are brave, but in the last decade the PRC has managed to exploit their vulnerabilities: their ties to family and friends still in China, and their hopes of obtaining visas to visit Tibet. The PRC has sowed divisions and left Tibetans in exile frightened and suspicious of each other. "You can basically have no spies in the community," Tendor told me, "as long as you create the perception that there are spies in the community."

Not long after Angwang's arrest, I met Tendor at a restaurant in Jackson Heights. It was a cold November night and when I arrived, he was sitting outside with two friends, beers on the table in front of them, hats on their heads. Tendor wears rectangular glasses and has a narrow face. A man named Lobsang Tara sat next to him, a mask hanging from one ear, and across the table, the current head of Students for a Free Tibet, Dorjee Tseten, was leaning forward over his empty plate, hands in his pockets. The

community was in uproar. Tara was wondering if Angwang really was Tibetan at all. He had met Angwang at a restaurant one night a few months before the arrest. Angwang didn't look Tibetan, Tara said – he was too pale. He didn't act Tibetan. ("We're more ... disordered," Tara told me.)

Across Queens, Tibetan groups were rushing to distance themselves from the alleged spy. "The way he spoke!" Tara said. "Not one clean word of Tibetan came out of his mouth!"

A few weeks earlier, the Tibetan Community Association of New York and New Jersey had held a press conference to explain why Angwang had been attending their meetings. "We knew he was a pro-communist type of guy," one board member of the association told me. "But we never suspected he could be a spy." When the New York Post contacted the former head of the board – a man named Sonam Gyephel – he protested that they had shared nothing important with Angwang. "We didn't give any information to him," said Gyephel. "We gave him nothing. Nothing."

Tendor had crossed paths with Angwang once, at the 2019 Losar, or Tibetan New Year, celebration held at the Tibetan Community Center in Queens. That night the guest of honour had been Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the new congresswoman representing Queens, and she had been photographed with Angwang, playing with his baby daughter, the two of them wrapped in a single ceremonial white scarf. Now people wanted to know how the community leaders had allowed an alleged spy to sit next to a congresswoman. ("She was bored and went to go play with the baby," Tendor said. "Sometimes these community events can drag on.") People had read the FBI affidavit and seen the references to their celebrations, the minority groups in their midst, and the places where they spent time. It was chilling to see their community dissected and discussed like a puzzle to be solved. "They knew us," Tendor told me.



Baimadajie Angwang. Photograph: Inty/Twitter

Despite all the stories circulating about encounters with Angwang – short conversations in broken Tibetan, brief meetings in restaurants and at local events – few people in the community knew much about him. The handful of Tibetans who knew Angwang well had met him some time ago. No one I spoke with wanted their names associated with the alleged spy, but they painted a picture of a stocky, muscular young man who was full of bravado. He flashed money clips and bragged about his parents’ success in China. He was also struggling to adapt to his new home.

According to court documents, Angwang was born in the lowlands, below the Tibetan plateau and outside the Tibetan Autonomous Region, in an area of China’s Sichuan province known as Zitsa Degu in Tibetan, or Jiuzhaigou in Mandarin. It’s a place of natural beauty where Chinese tourists come to spend their holidays hiking to waterfalls. It was also part of the Tibetan region where, in 1956, the first uprisings were staged against communist rule. Today, however, the economy in the area is controlled by ethnic Han Chinese and the demographics have changed. “His town is already 80% Chinese,” one of Angwang’s early acquaintances told me. And because the Tibetan population is small, crackdowns are rare. “It’s culturally part of China,” the friend said. “They feel confident about it and go easy on it.”

Ethnic Tibetans from this area speak a local dialect, and their complexion is different from that of Tibetans living on the plateau. So, people would later argue, it was not so strange that Angwang would not speak standard Tibetan, and unsurprising that he looked a little different. Angwang went to high school in Chengdu, the capital city of Sichuan province. “He said his teachers and classmates would taunt and exclude him,” one of his acquaintances told me. “They’d say things like ‘Tibetans are dirty’.” Angwang would get so angry that he would take off his clothes and dare them to smell him. In his 2005 asylum application, Angwang said he had been imprisoned unlawfully in Sichuan. He said he had been targeted because of his ethnicity, and that he had been tortured while in jail.

Angwang approached the Tibetan Community Association of New York and New Jersey sometime in November 2018. He had called Gyephel’s cell phone (which was the number listed on the association’s website) and offered a refrain that he would repeat until his arrest: he worked for the NYPD, he was concerned about the state of Tibetan youth in the city, and he was there to help. He didn’t speak much Tibetan, but the board didn’t ask. Here was a Tibetan man in a uniform – a story of success and acceptance in the US.

“We don’t want to get stuck in our own small community,” a former board member told me, trying to explain why they welcomed Angwang in. “We want to be part of the larger city. We want to get connected with everybody.”

According to the Freedom House report, the PRC’s influence campaigns abroad target ethnic minorities and dissidents on a global scale unmatched by any other nation. Their activities, it reports, are best understood as functions of the United Front Working Department (UFWD), a nebulous part of China’s bureaucracy that oversees all activities aimed at influencing groups not directly controlled by the CPC, inside China and out. These can be civil society organisations, media groups, academics, dissidents or Uyghurs from [China’s Xinjiang region](#). They can also be Tibetans. The official on the other end of the phone with Angwang in the FBI recordings was a member of the China Association for Preservation and Development of Tibetan Culture – a group overseen by the United Front.

Under President Xi, the United Front Working Department has been in the ascendant. In September 2014, borrowing a term from Mao, Xi called united front work a “magic weapon”, and launched an effort to reform and increase its power. United Front Work, Xi has said, will help to unite the Chinese people under a single worldview and in a common cause.

The United Front aims to influence Chinese citizens and foreigners, its methods including intelligence gathering, silencing dissent, and cultural exchange. The agencies involved in united front work include the propaganda department and the ministry of education. “Xi Jinping has emphasised that ‘the United Front is about working on people,’” [wrote Alex Joske](#) of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute in a 2020 report titled The Party Speaks for You. “Co-opting and manipulating elites, influential individuals and organisations is a way to shape discourse and decision-making.” Teng Biao, a human rights lawyer and scholar living in New Jersey, puts it another way: “They don’t want to hear any criticism and they don’t want to see independent civil societies which are out of control,” he told me. “They are sending the message that they are everywhere. Nowhere is out of reach.”



A Tibetan restaurant in the Jackson Heights neighbourhood of Queens, New York. Photograph: Richard Levine/Alamy

Because of the scope of United Front work, it can be difficult to track. There are explicit examples of harassment and abduction. Operation Fox Hunt – an effort to track down and repatriate a list of “most wanted” Chinese dissidents and exiles living abroad – has involved the intimidation and stalking of multiple targets in the US. Internationally, the PRC claims to have located and repatriated 8,000 international “fugitives” accused of financial crimes. (The same year that Angwang was arrested, the FBI apprehended seven people in New Jersey for [harassing and stalking](#) a Chinese exile living in the suburbs.) There are also subtler United Front operations. The China Association for the Preservation and Development of Tibetan Culture – of which Angwang’s consulate contact was a member – once sponsored a Tibet exhibit at a Queens library focusing on the PRC’s positive role in the region. It was shut down [after protests](#) from the Tibetan community. In 2014, an official from the association [was banned](#) from the UN Council on Human Rights after intimidating and photographing a woman named Ti-Anna Wang, who was there to testify about the abduction and imprisonment of her father, a pro-democracy activist.

The difficulty of measuring or combating the United Front is maybe most evident in the formation of Chinese Students and Scholars Associations at universities across the world. For the most part the CSSA provides uncomplicated support to Chinese students living abroad, such as listservs that help new arrivals find roommates, sell furniture or join study groups. Most Chinese migrants or students will connect with the consulate in a way that is harmless, says Yaqiu Wang, a researcher with Human Rights Watch. In many cases, however, the CSSA is connected and directed by the local Chinese consulate. Students may meet United Front officers while applying for visas, attending consular dinners (the consulates, she noted, always offer the best Chinese food), or joining organisations that help new arrivals build a community. According to Wang, some students have then been asked to keep tabs on their friends and classmates.

“You grow up in China, you understand that not criticising the government, not standing up to the government is good for you,” Wang said. “There is this relationship going on … you understand that it is good for you if you are close to the consulate.”

For years, Tibetans in India and the US felt buffered from the influence of the Communist party of China. Tendor's parents escaped Tibet soon after the Dalai Lama fled China in 1959, and settled in the Kullu valley a few hours' drive from Dharamshala. They both worked in one of a string of boarding schools established by the Dalai Lama's sister. Tendor was born in 1980 and grew up steeped in Tibetan history and prayer. In the school's central courtyard, students would put on plays about the Tibetan revolt of 1959 – one in a string of uprisings and crackdowns that saw an estimated 6,000 monasteries destroyed and tens of thousands of Tibetans killed over the course of 15 years. At school in India, Tendor spoke in Tibetan and worked on his English. Twice a day, in the morning and the evening, all the students attended prayer sessions. ("We all found this part of the day to be a drag," Tendor joked.) Hardly anyone spoke Mandarin. Tibet seemed close, but China far away.

Inside Tibet, surveillance was increasing. After an attempt at rapprochement in the early 80s, when the Tibetan Autonomous Region was opened to tourism, demonstrations against Chinese rule were violently suppressed by the military, and martial law was declared in the region in 1989. It was around that time that new arrivals at Tendor's boarding school in India told him what it had been like in their home villages: "Every crack in the wall is an ear."

Over the years, China's Tibet policy has combined investment and increased opportunity with military crackdowns and surveillance that has included cameras inside monasteries and 21,000 CPC cadres dispatched into Tibetan villages. A shrinking number of schools in Tibet allow instruction in Tibetan. The region experienced unrest before the Olympics in 2008. Starting in 2011, a series of self-immolations shocked some of the easternmost towns and villages.

When Tendor was a boy, surveillance was defined by informants, by people listening through the walls. Now, he said, it's eyes – people reading your text messages, looking at your computers, and monitoring daily life in Tibet through CCTV cameras. Technology has made it easier to take surveillance beyond the PRC's borders. In 2001, a leaked document outlined Beijing's concern over the international Free Tibet movement. "It is difficult to reverse the present situation where the enemy's fortune on the international

arena is running high and ours low,” it read. By 2009, years before Xi’s rise to power, a group of Canadian researchers reported that China’s large-scale cyber espionage operation, [Ghostnet](#), had focused its attacks on Dharamshala.

In the past two decades, Tendor told me, these incursions have started to erode the security felt by Tibetans living outside China. “The PRC became much better at connecting people to their friends and family still in Tibet,” he told me. “So if you show up at a protest in New York, your family member might call you from China and say: please stop.”

This year marks the 70th anniversary of CCP control of Tibet. As part of China’s celebration, portraits of Xi have been hung throughout monasteries and homes (portraits of the Dalai Lama have long been banned). Tibetans have stopped arriving in Nepal. Even in India, Tibetans have been arrested in advance of the arrival of PRC government officials. In September, authorities in Sichuan [arrested](#) more than 100 Tibetans for possessing pictures of the Dalai Lama, for “discussing social issues”, and for sharing messages and information with the community outside China.

If convicted, Angwang would not be the first spy to be caught reporting on the activities of a Tibetan exile community. In 2017, the Swedish government [arrested a spy](#) who had spent years tracking the movements of Tibetans all over Europe. The man, [Dorjee Gyantsan](#), had long been a part of a tiny population of about 140 Tibetans in Stockholm. Gyantsan had probably connected with a Chinese agent on an international ferry from Sweden to Finland. He collected information on Tibetan immigrants in Sweden, Poland and Denmark, providing information on their living situations, their families and their travel plans to a Chinese embassy official in Warsaw. He was convicted of “illegal intelligence activity” in 2018 and was deported back to China last year.

After arriving in New York City from Sichuan, Angwang, according to his friends at the time, had struggled. He was young and conflicted about his identity. He would approach groups of Tibetans on the street and, when they found he could not speak Tibetan, only Mandarin, they would politely

excuse themselves. He could not access the community. Not long after being granted asylum in 2009, Angwang joined the marines and left the city.

When he returned to Queens in 2014, Angwang had been honourably discharged from the marines. In 2015, he met his future spouse. In 2016, they married and Angwang began working at the NYPD. In 2017, his daughter was born. And in 2018, Angwang started attending the community association board meetings. He was outspoken and liked to project an air of authority. It did not take long before other members of the board started to find him off-putting. In one incident, Angwang approached a member of the board and asked him why he was wearing a jacket with “Free Tibet” written on the back. “You’re an up-and-coming type of guy,” Angwang had said. “Why would you wear a jacket like that?”

Later, Angwang showed up in uniform at the new community centre. “He said he was just swinging by,” the same board member recalled. Angwang motioned to the police cruiser outside and said he wanted to show his partner the new centre. He gestured to the set of flags hanging at the entrance. “Why do you keep the Tibetan flag up outside with the American flag?” Angwang asked. “If I were you, I wouldn’t put up the Tibetan flag.” He said that there were some big businessmen who were interested in giving money to the centre. “If you put up that Tibetan flag,” Angwang warned. “You might not get that kind of donation.”

The board member listened quietly. He did not nod, but he didn’t argue. “It was kind of a friendly suggestion,” he told me. “But the seed of suspicion was sown.” Tibetans are proud of their flag, which is illegal in Tibet. “This gentleman is saying he’s a Tibetan,” the man recounted, “and he’s asking us to put down the flag.”

Angwang declined to participate in this article, but his lawyer, John Carman, told me that these incidents had been misunderstood. Angwang was worried not about the Tibetan flag, but the fact that it was hanging without a US flag above it. He worried that a photograph of himself in uniform with a flag, or a Free Tibet logo, would suggest the support of the entire NYPD. He wanted to avoid politics, not find himself involved in the tensions between the US and China.



A monk addresses his congregation in Jackson Heights, Queens.
Photograph: Ira Berger/Alamy

No matter the reason for his comments, board members had lost trust in Angwang. He had made too many members uncomfortable. Finally, on the same day that Angwang was photographed with Ocasio-Cortez at the Losar celebration, he attended a lunar new year gala at the Chinese consulate. For the Tibetan Association of New York and New Jersey, this was the last straw. They stopped taking his calls. If the consulate was hoping for revelatory new intelligence or even a long-term informant, Angwang was not their man. But even bad spies can be useful.

No one knows exactly when or why Angwang started communicating with PRC officials at the Chinese consulate. In legal documents, Carman argues that anyone with access to the entirety of the FBI tapes would understand: all Angwang was doing was trying to get a visa so he could return to China and visit his parents. He was not a sinister agent, but a man who wanted to take his daughter home to meet her grandparents. (A spokesperson for the Chinese consulate in New York said [in a statement](#) after Angwang's arrest that consulate staff "have been conducting normal exchanges with various sectors of society in its consular district ... Their work is above board and beyond reproach.")

According to Lobsang Tara, Angwang's reasons for informing are irrelevant. Everyone in the Tibetan community wants to go home. Visas, he told me, are "the achilles heel of the Tibetan people". Not everyone, however, is in regular phone contact with consular officials. Tara grew up in Tibet, in a small village of 60 people. After an uprising in 1987, when Tara was 13, his father sent him to India on a journey over the Himalayas that meant two weeks of walking, river-crossings and cold nights sleeping rough.

In 1998, Tara trekked back over the mountains and sneaked into Tibet. His grandmother had been heartbroken when she heard he had left for India, but when he returned she spent the first afternoon convinced that he was an impostor sent to inform on the family. Once she was reassured, it was a happy reunion, but Tara worried he would attract attention, and so he returned to India. He hasn't seen his family since.

Tara came to the US in 2002 and has worked selling shoes and driving cars, and as an interpreter for Tibetan officials travelling to the US. He went to film school and made documentaries about Tibetans. He worked with Tendor at Students for a Free Tibet. And then, he told me, the idea of getting a visa – and a chance to visit his home – lodged in his heart. He tamped down his activism. When he first arrived at the Chinese consulate in New York City for an interview, however, he was led to the back door of the consulate and taken into an interview room. The interviewer asked questions about his family, his activism and his acquaintances. They asked for phone numbers and addresses. Tara was careful with his answers, but his visa was denied. He has so far changed his name six times to try to make it through the application process. "I belong to the Li family now," he told me.

Following Angwang's exile from the Tibetan Community Association of New York and New Jersey, he started approaching other community groups. One was the Tibetan Service Center in Queens, which focuses on preserving cultural heritage. At first, the director of the centre, Tsering Diki, saw Angwang as a kindred spirit. "A lot of people are working on the political side," Diki told me. "Every day they want to talk about a free Tibet. Then there is another group of people like me who want to dedicate themselves to preserving the culture and making the community outside Tibet stronger."

When Diki met Angwang, she thought he had similar goals. Not long after they met, he called her and told her about an event that was part of Asia Pacific Heritage Month in May 2019. He complained that Chinese performers were planning to represent Tibet. “He told me that the Chinese were always there misrepresenting the Tibetan Culture,” she said. So Diki volunteered a dance group from the Tibetan Service Center, and the event, she felt, was a huge success. “He was right, there was a Chinese group there performing a very fake Tibetan dance,” she told me. Diki’s group had the chance to present something more authentic. “So I felt, oh my God, we kind of saved our culture!”

Diki’s good relationship with Angwang would not last. In late 2019, Angwang started asking Diki why she featured the Tibetan flag and a portrait of the Dalai Lama at the centre. At first, Diki changed the subject whenever he brought it up. When he kept asking, she felt she couldn’t keep ignoring it. Diki stopped answering his calls.

Diki, who was born in Tibet and arrived in the US as a college student, has herself faced growing suspicion from other Tibetans in Jackson Heights. In recent years, she has led an annual group trip for Tibetan exiles back to Tibet. It took her many years, she told me, to obtain tourist visas for her group. She had tried Chinese travel agencies, but none of them could help her. “They would be excited to help you. Then they would find out you were Tibetan Americans and ditch you right there,” she told me. Diki begged a friend who organised tour groups in Lhasa to help her, and was granted her first set of visas in 2014. The itinerary she developed was strictly cultural. “We had a tour guide and there were five or six United Front officers sleeping in our hotel until the day they dropped us off at the airport,” she said.

Diki was thrilled to be showing Tibet to children who had been born in India or the US. But suspicions in New York’s Tibetan community had grown. “People start questioning: why did that person get [the visa]?” Tendor told me. Earlier this year, in a social media post, a Tibetan youth organisation accused Diki of being a spy and working with the Chinese consulate. She wrote a letter denying their accusations and threatened to take them to court. Now that Angwang has been accused of spying and tension are even higher, Diki is considering cancelling her summer trips for good.

“Sometimes I think: ‘Is there a lot of Chinese spy work involved?’” Diki told me. “We are so divided now, and that’s exactly what they want.”

Tendor sighs. Being Tibetan in exile is political – it’s inescapable. Shortly before the pandemic, Tendor was scheduled to speak at an event at Columbia university discussing PRC surveillance, but it was shut down after students from the PRC threatened to protest.

Angwang was no mastermind. He had cracked no codes and unveiled no revolutionary plots. But in Queens, it didn’t matter. His arrest reminded people that the PRC is watching. Today, Angwang is out on bail and awaiting trial. Whether or not he is guilty, the question of spying on communities is creating difficulties in US-China relations.

Tara has started a business selling Tibetan-style beef jerky and barley. With fewer Tibetans making it over the border, Tendor feels responsible for making sure that his daughter will speak Tibetan. It is difficult, however, to find books and videos to show her. (There is one, at least, with a yak that pops up in the Tibetan alphabet.)

China is changing rapidly. But change, Tendor pointed out, isn’t always for the better. “I do not know how to fix it,” Tara told me. “You live life with this fear under everything you do. I have American friends who can talk freely, and even as they are talking freely, I have this fear underneath.”

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Hong Kong

‘We are Hong Kong’: can the Olympics sidestep the politicisation of sport in China?



People watch the live broadcast of Hong Kong's Lee Wai Sze competing in the women's sprint cycling finals at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games
Photograph: China News Service/Getty Images



[Naaman Zhou](#)

[@naamanzhou](#)

Tue 26 Oct 2021 00.30 EDT

In July, more than 5,000 people gathered along the sides of the APM shopping centre in [Hong Kong](#) on a Monday night. They waved flags and screamed “Hong Kong” at the TV. In a new, shiny mall in the industrial district of Kwun Tong, an enormous screen had been hoisted up into the centre of the main concourse, so people could watch the Olympics.

Videos from the time showed people crowded against the railings, stacked up across multiple stories, as they watched fencer Edgar Cheung Ka Long win Hong Kong’s first gold medal in 25 years. Across the territory, throughout the Olympics, shopping centres became a kind of town square, kept open late into the evening.

The Tokyo Olympics were Hong Kong’s most successful ever. The city won six medals, more than in all previous Olympics combined. Thousands watched Siobhan Haughey win Hong Kong’s first-ever medals in swimming: silver in the women’s 200m freestyle and 100m freestyle; both Asian records. When the athletes returned, a humbly sized contingent of 46, they were paraded through the city in an open-top bus.

The Olympics – and sport more broadly – have become a fresh rallying point for the Hong Kong identity, a source of politicisation, and a site for old arguments. This weekend, [Hong Kong marathon runners were ordered to cover up “political” slogans](#) and tattoos before being allowed to compete. It was the first major group sporting event since the [introduction of the national security law](#). Now attention turns to the Beijing Winter Games in February. Athletes are still in the process of qualifying for the winter events, but two Alpine skiers from Hong Kong have already qualified, meaning the region will be sending a team to Beijing.



Siobhan Haughey of Hong Kong smiles after the women's 200-meter freestyle final in Tokyo. Photograph: Matthias Schräder/AP

We are ‘Hong Kong’

Hong Kong competes separately from China at the Olympics, and has done so since 1954, when it was a British colony. As the world focuses more on the geopolitical definitions of Hong Kong and Taiwan, amid China’s increasing control over the former, and [claims of sovereignty](#) over the latter, the Olympics has stood out as one of the few global events where all three are kept separate and compete directly against each other.

Cheung's gold medal at the Tokyo Games was the first for Hong Kong since the handover in 1997. In Hong Kong, as they broadcast Cheung's medal ceremony on the big screen at the APM mall, a 40-year-old man allegedly started booing the Chinese national anthem, and waving an old British colonial flag. He went home, and a few days later, was arrested, under a law introduced last year that criminalises insulting the Chinese flag or national anthem. Gordon Mathews, a professor of anthropology at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, told the South China Morning Post that he felt some people in the crowd used the Olympics to test what they could do under the national security law "that would not get them to jail".

Other controversies surfaced during the Tokyo Games. Badminton player Angus Ng Ka-long, a great medal hope, kicked off a political firestorm simply for wearing a plain black shirt. Ng, ranked 9th in the world, was "condemned" by Nicholas Muk Ka-chun, a history teacher who is a member of the pro-Beijing DAB party, after he played his first match in a black shirt and shorts, without the Hong Kong flag. Black is a colour still heavily associated with pro-democracy protesters, and Muk wrote on Facebook: "If [you] don't want to represent Hong Kong China, please choose to withdraw from the competition".



Hong Kong's Angus Ng Ka Long in the men's singles badminton group stage match in Tokyo Photograph: Alexander Nemenov/AFP/Getty Images

Ng, a normally reserved and media-shy athlete, immediately clarified that it was not a political statement. He had recently left his sponsor, he said, so had used his own shirt, and had chosen it only because it was comfortable. For the second match, he and the Hong Kong badminton association scrambled to find him a replacement, even requesting assistance from the home affairs department. The next match, he played in green and white, with the symbol of Hong Kong, the five-sided Bauhinia flower, over his chest. He was knocked out, in an upset, by the world number 59, Kevin Cordon. In his post-match interview, he said he felt “tense and under pressure”.

The fact that Ng, a devotedly non-political athlete, was caught in the middle of this debate is the latest example of sport’s increasing politicisation and partisanship on an island that also divides its shops into [yellow \(pro-protesters\)](#) and [blue \(pro-police\)](#). Even after Ng said the shirt was not political, another politician, executive councillor Ronny Tong, commented that [he should still always avoid wearing black](#). “[We] have had bad experiences so we are afraid,” he said. “It’s better not to wear black, otherwise people may have a heart attack while watching the television.”

Fears athletes may be silenced

As [arrests continue in Hong Kong](#) under the national security law and China [escalates its military drills near Taiwan](#), the same political questions raised this year look to intensify in the lead up to the 2022 Winter Games in Beijing.

Human Rights Watch has warned that China could cancel the Olympic visas of “[athletes whose opinions it doesn’t like](#)”. The European Elite Athletes Association has also called for the IOC to ensure that athletes have “[the right to express their concerns](#)”. In July, the IOC assured media that Hong Kong and Taiwan [would be able to compete in Beijing](#) regardless of any political tension.



Flag bearers Hsing-Chun Kuo and Yen-Hsun Lu of Team Chinese Taipei during the Opening Ceremony of the Tokyo Games Photograph: Patrick Smith/Getty Images

Hong Kong's chief executive Carrie Lam, like many politicians, has used the region's recent Olympic success to claim that it is united rather than divided. She said that Haughey "[brought glory to the city](#)", and that Cheung "[has made all of us proud](#)".

Lam has announced more funding for sport, and has been clear that she does not see sporting success as making Hong Kong's identity more independent, or distanced from China. Lam has been staunchly [against any calls for boycotts of the 2022 Winter Olympics](#). "Thomas Bach, the IOC chairman, has repeatedly said that 'sports is sports'," [she has said](#). "One should not try to politicise sports."

- *Naaman Zhou was a Judith Neilsen Asia Reporting fellow for 2020*

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Coronavirus

Firm that gave 43,000 false Covid results still processing PCR tests



Downing Street has dismissed claims that negative results wrongly given out by Immensa's Wolverhampton lab are behind a rise in cases in the south-west. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

[Rowena Mason](#) Deputy political editor

Tue 26 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

The company at the heart of a [fiasco](#) that saw up to 43,000 people wrongly given negative Covid results is still processing PCR tests for travel and one of its senior members of staff has been seconded to work within the UK Health Security Agency, the Guardian has learned.

Immensa, whose privately run Wolverhampton laboratory was suspended by the government over the scandal this month, is continuing to process results for international travellers who buy tests through its sister company, Dante Labs.

The government also confirmed that an “employee from Immensa/Dante Labs is supporting NHS Test and Trace [part of the UKHSA] in a technical role”, though it denied any conflict of interest.

A UKHSA spokesperson said the staff member had “no involvement whatsoever in any PCR testing commercial matters” and added: “The secondee completed a conflict of interest form when appointed and they were judged suitable for the role.”

Downing Street has dismissed claims that the estimated 43,000 false Covid test results from the Wolverhampton lab were to blame for a sharp rise in cases in south-west England, saying the region might be catching up with the rest of the country.

South-west England, which was served by the Wolverhampton lab, now has the highest case rate of any region, with 760 cases per 100,000 people, according to Public Health England. The south-east had the second highest rate, at 526 cases per 100,000.

When the false tests scandal emerged on 15 October, NHS Test and Trace suspended operations at the lab. Labour’s Jonathan Ashworth has previously raised questions about “how this private firm – which didn’t exist pre-May 2020 – was awarded a lucrative £120m contract to run the lab”.

A Whitehall source insisted that Immensa had assured the UKHSA that the Wolverhampton lab was no longer being used for PCR travel results and that any tests posted to that location would be sent to another of the company’s labs for processing.

The source said the investigation to date suggests travel tests are not affected by the same problems as they were processed using different equipment, giving the first hint that a technical failure might have been to blame for the testing scandal.

Asked whether Immensa was processing PCR travel test results, a company spokesperson said: “All PCR testing, including private testing for travel, has been suspended at the Wolverhampton lab. All samples received in

Wolverhampton are being rerouted to other labs. We have been cooperating fully with the UKHSA on this matter and will continue to do so.”

On Monday Downing Street said the slew of false test results had not caused a surge in the south-west. “In terms of the causes behind the increase in the south-west, we have seen there was this lab error; I don’t believe that accounts for the increases we have seen,” Boris Johnson’s official spokesperson said. “We know the south-west was an area that did not previously have as high rates as other parts of the country, which may be a factor as well.”

Dr Kit Yates, a senior lecturer in the department of mathematical sciences at the University of Bath, said it was “inconceivable that telling 43,000 people they were negative when in fact they were positive, making them believe they could safely go into schools and workplaces where they may have infected others, did not have an impact on the prevalence of Covid in the south-west … In part we may be seeing the impact of people who were given the false negatives being asked to retest and finally appearing in the figures.

“However, the vast majority of people given the false negatives will no longer be testing positive, so this is unlikely to be a big driver of the case rates. These figures will be independent of the testing scandal, indicating that the fast rises we are seeing are genuine and not a result of retesting.”

He also said it was “very odd to see No 10 trying to cover for this private company’s mistakes instead of demanding an urgent investigation and being upfront with the general public about what has happened”.

In response to the high rates of Covid, directors of public health in the south-west have advised schools to take measures such as cancelling assemblies, wearing masks in corridors and returning to bubbles.

The Pacific projectPapua New Guinea

Mass burial to relieve overflowing Papua New Guinea morgue as Covid cases surge



A nurse prepares beds for new patients at a makeshift Covid-19 hospital in Port Moresby. Photograph: Andrew Kutan/AFP/Getty Images

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[Leanne Jorari](#) in Port Moresby and agencies

Mon 25 Oct 2021 23.57 EDT

Papua New Guinea authorities have approved a mass burial to take pressure off Port Moresby's hospital morgue where bodies are stacked on top of each other [as Covid-19 cases surge](#).

The burial of more than 200 bodies comes as health teams around the country report being attacked as they took part in vaccination programs.

National Pandemic Response Controller David Manning has authorised the burial of 200 bodies out of more than 300 at the morgue which was built to cater for only 60, The National newspaper reports.

National Capital District Governor Powes Parkop said refrigerated containers had been installed to store more bodies and a mass burial was planned for this week.

The PNG capital is bracing for a possible lockdown this week to try to reduce coronavirus cases and deaths in a city where 99% of Covid cases admitted to the general hospital are unvaccinated.

National health board deputy chair Mathias Sapuri said a two-week lockdown across PNG was the only way to control the Covid-19 surge.

“The virus stops moving when people stop moving,” he said.

Governor Parkop earlier this month said he would oppose any further lockdowns in Port Moresby because of the costs of previous ones but the latest surge in cases appears to have changed his mind.

“If the doctors tell me that we have to lock down because they cannot cope any more, then I will follow their advice,” he told *The National*.

Other regions in PNG have already imposed lockdowns and curfews in a bid to curb the spread of coronavirus.

PNG has officially confirmed 26,731 coronavirus cases and 329 deaths but it is believed many more cases and deaths are going unreported in the nation of nine million where vaccination hesitancy is reported to be high.

Vaccine hesitancy has been a major issue and cause for concern in PNG, where less than 1% of the population has been fully vaccinated.

Last week, in the second largest city, Lae, community health workers were harassed and threatened at the centre of town during a mobile awareness and vaccination drive in the city centre.

The incident on 18 October was caught on camera, showing bystanders throwing rocks and shouting at health workers.

“The situation was so tense. The public started throwing stones and running towards the vaccination team with sticks, iron rods, and stones,” said Emmanuel Saem Jr who witnessed the scene.

“The crowd shouted at the health care workers, saying: ‘*Karim 666 chip goh!*’ (Take the 666 chip away) or ‘*Karim microchip goh!*’ (Take the microchip away).”

No injuries were reported from the incident and police were called in to disperse the tense crowd, but witnesses say that people who wanted the vaccine were intimidated by some of the mob.

After the incident, the mobile vaccination awareness drive was abandoned. Vaccinations are now only offered at the country's second largest referral hospital, Angau General Hospital, and at smaller suburban clinics.

The Morobe Provincial Health Authority did not respond to request for comment, however health workers in the province stated that people don't seem to take the virus seriously.

"People are not observing the new normal. People are just too complacent or just don't believe Covid-19 is real," said Dr Alex Peawi, head of Angau Hospital's Emergency Hospital.

On Friday, a health team reportedly administering childhood vaccinations for polio in Lae were attacked by someone who believed they were giving out Covid-19 vaccinations, according to the Post Courier.

Health experts in Morobe fear that the number of Covid-19 cases will continue to rise because of the province's proximity to the Eastern Highlands Province, currently a Covid hotspot.

Eastern Highlands, Western Highlands and Enga are experiencing a surge in the number of Delta variant cases. Hospitals in all three provinces are experiencing a shortage of supplies and manpower and are scaling down services to deal with the outbreak.

AAP contributed to this report

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[Pfizer](#)

FDA advisers recommend approval of Pfizer's Covid vaccine for kids aged 5-11



Jair Flores, 12, closes their eyes while receiving a first dose of the Pfizer Covid-19 vaccine approved for children over 12. Photograph: Patrick T Fallon/AFP/Getty Images

[Melody Schreiber](#)

Tue 26 Oct 2021 17.15 EDT

Independent advisers for the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) on Tuesday recommended the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid vaccine for children aged five to 11 – the first vaccine available for younger children in the US.

Of 18 members, 17 voted yes and one abstained.

Vaccines for children have been seen as crucial for protecting kids from the virus as well as slowing its spread, in addition to reducing the social and educational effects of school closing and attendance – and related economic concerns, such as caregivers’ ability to work.

The advisers weighed the vaccine’s effectiveness, the social and physical effects of the pandemic, and the potential risk of rare side-effects like myocarditis, a type of heart inflammation.

Data from Pfizer-BioNTech indicate the vaccine is [90.7% effective](#) at preventing symptomatic illness among this age group.

The benefits of vaccination “clearly outweigh” the risks of myocarditis and pericarditis, FDA scientists concluded in an [analysis](#), an assessment the independent advisers agreed with.

Making these decisions can be difficult and nerve-racking, but they are not made “when you know everything”, said Paul Offit, director of the Vaccine Education Center at Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia. “The question is when do you know enough.” In this case, he said, the benefits outweigh the risks, especially since myocarditis tends to be less common in pre-adolescent children.

“Our kids are going to be dealing with this virus for many years to come,” said Jay Portnoy, professor of pediatrics at the University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Medicine. “Getting the vaccine is just the first step that they’re going to take towards being able to protect themselves.”

Peter Marks, director of the FDA’s Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research (CBER), highlighted the harms of the pandemic.

“Far from being spared from this harm of Covid-19, in the five-to-11 year-old age range, there have been over 1.9m infections, over 8,300 hospitalizations (about a third of which have required intensive care unit stays), and over 2,500 cases of multisystem inflammatory disorder from Covid-19,” Marks said.

Nearly 100 children in this age group have died, making it the eighth leading cause of death in the past year for this group. Children between five and 11 have one of the highest case rates of any age group, accounting for about one in 10 of all Covid cases in the country. They are also the most frequently affected by MIS-C, an inflammatory disorder that affects organs.

Children are “at least as likely” to be infected as adults, said Fiona Havers, medical officer at the CDC. But at the same time, cases among kids are more likely to go unnoticed, according to seroprevalence data indicating that about 43% of children have already been infected.

“There are many other adverse outcomes on children from the pandemic, including worsening emotional and mental health, decreased physical activity and loss of caregivers,” Havers said. “Lost in-person learning is another potential adverse outcome of Covid-19.”

The effects of the pandemic are unequal among children. Black, Hispanic and Native American children have a greater risk for developing MIS-C or dying from Covid-19.

Several advisers repeatedly pointed to the importance of vaccinating children in order to reduce cases throughout the country. While it is not yet clear how well the vaccine keeps children from transmitting the virus, data among vaccinated adults shows this is likely, and reducing the number of overall Covid cases through vaccination would help reduce spread.

“Children likely play an important role in transmission, and vaccinating children can help reach herd immunity,” said William Gruber, head of vaccination development at Pfizer.

The Pfizer-BioNTech trial included 1,518 children who received the vaccine beginning in June, as well as an additional 1,591 children who were vaccinated beginning in August, when the FDA asked the company to expand the trial in order to pick up on safety concerns.

Mild side-effects like fever and chills were less common among the kids than in older age groups. There were no reports of myocarditis among the approximately 3,100 children receiving the vaccine.

But serious rare side-effects like myocarditis may be “the principal concern people have regarding use of these mRNA vaccines and in children,” said H Cody Meissner, professor of pediatrics at Tufts University School of Medicine.

Myocarditis cases after vaccination tend to happen within a week, generally among adolescent males, and boys between the ages of 16 and 17 have the highest rate, at 0.007%, said Matthew Oster, a medical officer for the CDC. “Testosterone and hormones play a big role in this, which is part of why you may see a really high peak in adolescence and young adulthood, especially among males,” Oster said.

The FDA, in its scientific analysis, said the risks of Covid outweighed the risks of myocarditis. In one scenario that Hong Yang at the FDA called “purposefully conservative,” Covid cases could drop until more children are hospitalized from the vaccine than from the illness.

“If you just look at our track record in terms of predicting the epidemics, we’ve not done particularly well,” Pfizer’s Gruber said. “Given that the winter season is coming, the Delta [variant] is still up there, you still have a large number of susceptible children – there’s every reason to believe that the rate will not be at the nadir.”

Arnold Monto, acting chair of the committee, warned against “assuming that we are on the descending slope of the curve. Thinking that this is going to be the end of the wave permanently is maybe a little overly optimistic.”

While [cases](#) in the US have dropped since their recent height in September, coming cold weather and holidays may bring another spike.

The vaccine for this age group was formulated slightly differently, in order to extend its shelf life in a refrigerator from one month to 10 weeks, which should help the roll-out to pediatricians’ offices and elsewhere. The proposed dose for children is 10 micrograms, or one-third the adult dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. The child-size doses look different from adult doses in order to prevent mix-ups, with caps and labels colored orange instead of purple.

Children 12 and up currently receive a higher dose than those 11 and younger. But antibody titers were similar across all age groups in this trial, potentially indicating that a lower dose could be sufficient for older children, Pfizer's Gruber said.

On 2-3 November, advisers for the CDC will meet to discuss their recommendations as well. The FDA and the CDC will take the advisers' recommendations into account when making the decision whether to authorize the vaccine.

While a little less than half of US children may already have some immunity after surviving Covid, it is not clear how well infection-acquired immunity will last, especially in the face of emerging variants. Reinfections are becoming more common across age groups, Havers said.

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2021.10.26 - Opinion

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- Simply throwing money at the NHS won't solve all its problems
- The world was woefully unprepared for a pandemic. Let's be ready for the next one
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Sunak's sneaky budget can't hide the cost of living crisis about to hit voters

[Polly Toynbee](#)



‘Sunak wants us to believe he can “level up” with fiscal rectitude, while cutting the deficit and carbon emissions too’: the chancellor at the Conservative party conference, 4 October 2021. Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

Tue 26 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

What a tightrope the chancellor will walk on Wednesday, with contradictory messages to satisfy opposing audiences. His party, who will choose its next leader, wants austerity so he keeps a photo of Margaret Thatcher’s chancellor, Nigel Lawson, by his desk. That matches Rishi Sunak’s conference admonition that “stacking up bills for future generations to pay is not just economically irresponsible. It’s immoral.”

Yet a blizzard of public-pleasing spending promises sows deliberate confusion: is he putting a tourniquet on spending or splashing the cash? He wants us to believe both impossibles: he can “level up” with fiscal rectitude, while cutting the deficit and carbon emissions too.

This is nonsense. Screws will tighten on public services. There should be no surprises that the trail of spending pledges is deceptive when even the head of the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), Paul Johnson, tells me that though there will be extra capital spent, “We can’t work out how much is re-announced” as the chancellor obfuscates the time over which the money is spread.

Demographics help the deception too. Some local councils will implode under a funding formula relying on out-of-date population data, which means it ignores those that have seen a 60% increase in residents over 80. Demographics reduce education spending too: rising student numbers mean councils need an extra 10% just to stand still in funding per capita, says the IFS. What about skills? Money for the promised “high skills and high wage” economy covers only a third of what has been cut from skills since 2010. There is no space here to list each doubtful pledge.

We can wail and gnash our teeth at public decrepitude amid private excess. But what if too many voters don’t know or don’t care? Those who do know and care can’t understand Boris Johnson’s continued popularity, aghast at the

ever-widening chasm between his words and deeds, between rhetoric and reality. Labour shadow ministers [solemnly reveal the facts](#) of Tory failure, hoping hard evidence vanquishes preposterous fantasy, but as yet to no effect.

A new organisation chaired by Labour MP Stephen Kinnock, Renaissance, recently published a report for which researchers spoke to 60 former Labour voters in England and Wales – all of whom switched in 2019. Johnson delivered on Brexit, on protecting jobs during the pandemic and on vaccinations, they say. Complain about corrupt pork-barrelling? Why wouldn't people choose a party that provides funds for their locality? Tax cuts before the next election may be money stolen from services or benefits, but they're not unpopular. They like Johnson's upbeat positivism, his wafty visions for the future.

Public perceptions depend on what services they use: if bins are collected, few notice social care collapsing for elderly people, let alone for children at risk. Even Labour councils are conflicted about whether to shout about their own deteriorating services for fear of taking the blame. At any one time, too few families confront the childcare crisis – and they forget about it later. The poor are many and multiplying, but are too few to outvote the comfortable. Even high Covid death tolls cause little more than a shrug.

Overall spending will rise, but almost all of it will [go to the NHS](#), because everyone needs that. But few ever come in contact with collapsing courts, prisons, disability services or dismal units for excluded pupils. Paul Johnson expresses surprise that we have “already passed” what he thought would be tipping points in some services. He expected more outcry over the £20 reduction in universal credit: “But once it happened everything went quiet.”

Labour is left bleating on the sidelines, miserablist Cassandras whose warnings go unheeded. Which way to turn? Instructions from Renaissance and many pollsters say it must regain trust for fiscal prudence. But that suggests not promising higher spending, despite Keynes being proven right yet again over the past decade, when cutting instead of investing made the UK one of the slowest to revive from the 2008 crash. But Keynes himself called it his “paradox of thrift”, so when 70 distinguished economists call for

[£70bn more borrowing](#) to accelerate growth, it goes against gut instinct. Sunak, observing George Osborne's success in advocating belt-tightening, learned how Conservative "common sense" can win the economic argument.

Promise "good jobs", "value for money" and "security", along with "make and buy British", says Renaissance's research. All good advice, but hardly marking out a separate piece of turf from the government, while the prime minister spreads himself rhetorically across the entire electoral playing field with his abundance of verbiage pledging everything to everyone.

In the end, we have to believe truth will out or abandon all political hope. Sooner, not later, there will be nowhere for this government to hide. This spending plan defines it in ways no words can disguise – and it is wholly inadequate for everyday decent living standards and reliable services, let alone for the mighty promises it comes wrapped in.

The cost of living crisis is about to reach into the pockets of most voters. Sunak, in an article for the Sun on Sunday readers, promises, "I know that families here at home are feeling the pinch of higher prices and are worried about the months ahead. But I want you to know we will continue to do whatever it takes, we will continue to have your backs – just like we did in the pandemic." What can he mean?

Inflation is expected to [increase to 5%](#) while wages lag, a real cut. Energy bills [could rise 30%](#), petrol prices [hit a record high](#) on Sunday, [rents are up by 8.5%](#), family debts soar, while the Food and Drink Federation tells me food prices will be up 9% by December. The Institute for Public Policy Research says [a typical family loses £500](#) a year in the national insurance levy and an expected 5% rise in council tax.

None of that will feel like the chancellor having the average voter's back. He may steal Labour's pledge to cut VAT on energy bills. He will raise the minimum wage. He promises to lift the freeze on public pay – but will that restore, let alone allow those who've lost out to catch up, such as experienced teachers in England who in real terms are [paid 8% less than in 2010](#)? Watch where any pay increase comes from: departments must raid their own budgets, on top of finding magical 5% "efficiency savings". No flag-waving disguises how Britain fared so badly in the pandemic, in deaths

and in the economy. Combine that with [Brexit's creeping losses](#) and there is no hiding place for the prime minister or chancellor.

Waiting for the worst is Labour's unappealing role for now, but hammering away at the facts, day after day, is the only course to take, earning trust eventually by the sheer force of the evidence as it unfurls for all to see. Pollsters say it can take just one trigger to collapse support for a government that is already sliding in popularity. This "optimism" budget with its airy promises is setting voters up for bitter disappointments. With so many trip-wires, who knows which one will break the Boris Johnson spell. You really can't fool all the people all the time, not when they can count the diminishing buying power of every pound in their pockets.

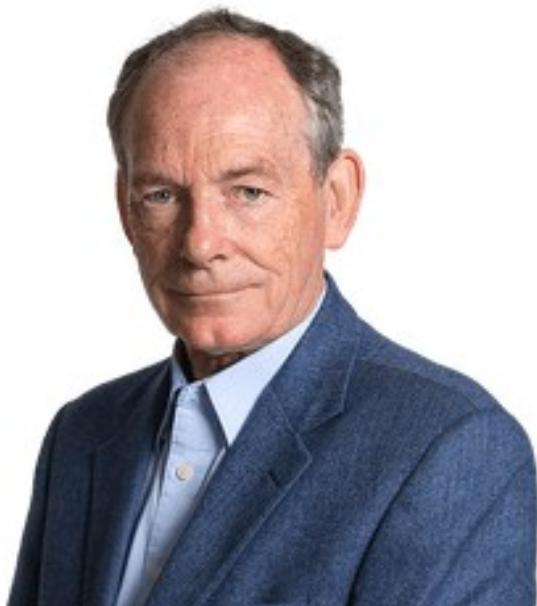
- Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist
-

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OpinionNHS

Simply throwing money at the NHS won't solve all its problems

[Simon Jenkins](#)



‘The Nightingale hospitals, created last year in a blaze of political publicity, were largely unused.’ Ambulances outside the Nightingale at the Excel Centre, London, April 2020. Photograph: Matthew Childs/Reuters

Tue 26 Oct 2021 05.00 EDT

Watch the news each day and you might regard Britain’s NHS as a black, swirling pit into which ever vaster sums of money constantly vanish. All it does is answer back with screams of hospitals near collapse, [queueing ambulances outside hospitals](#), year-long waiting lists, postponed tests and staffing crises. The chancellor, Rishi Sunak, obsessed with daily headlines, [hurls billions of pounds at it](#), to no obvious effect.

Those who know the NHS all say the same. The NHS relies on the public thinking it wonderful, and as a result all it needs to do is demand money from the government. In 2007, the businessman [Gerry Robinson](#) made a celebrated documentary about trying to run an NHS hospital. At the end of a working day, the camera caught him getting into his car and collapsing into tears of frustration. The reason was not money. It was the opposition of the entire senior staff to any measure that might improve their performance or render their work more efficient.

A classic issue is whether GPs, whose surgery productivity has been improved through the use of telephone consultations during the pandemic, should be forced back to [in-person appointments](#), as the NHS is insisting under political pressure from the government. Elsewhere, the health service has long neglected specialist testing centres, plentiful in the private sector, for taking work from its hospitals. The result is tests delayed for years, and Sunak now rushing to build new centres.

The NHS’s age-old rivalry with local government has blinded it to local elderly care as critical to its performance. Yet, in the early stages of the pandemic, it simply [cleared elderly hospital patients](#) into care homes, where thousands died and thousands more had to return to hospital. The pain – and cost – must have been enormous. As for the [seven Nightingale hospitals](#) created to treat Covid victims last year in a blaze of political publicity, they were largely unused.

In all big public service organisations, value for money becomes impossible to measure. The [NHS](#) has long sought comfort in hiring cohorts of management consultants. Hundreds of millions have gone to firms such as McKinsey and Deloitte: vast sums of money spent with the supposed aim of saving other sums of money elsewhere. I know of no estimate that says a penny was worth it, yet no account is ever given.

Challenging a public service to behave efficiently does not mean challenging its ideological status. Public healthcare is good. But in many countries across Europe, it is integrated with local government and in most cases is administered locally and without the chaos surrounding the NHS. [Such processes also deliver outcomes](#) that are often superior to those of Britain's hyper-centralised system.

The last thing the NHS needs is another “reorganisation”, [as Sajid Javid promises](#). But it must reassure the public that it cares for efficiency if support is not to wear thin. “Protect the NHS” is Boris Johnson’s war cry. But protect it from whom?

- Simon Jenkins is a Guardian columnist
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Opinion[**Global development**](#)

The world was woefully unprepared for a pandemic. Let's be ready for the next one

[Elhadj As Sy](#)



A health professional holds a Covid patient's hand in a Peru hospital. More than 200,000 people have died of Covid in Peru, which is preparing for a third wave of the disease. Photograph: Ernesto Benavides/AFP/Getty

Global development is supported by



[About this content](#)

Tue 26 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

Two years ago, three months before coronavirus erupted, the Global Preparedness Monitoring Board (GPMB) [issued a warning to the international community](#) that a pandemic was only a matter of time, and that the world was not prepared. Tragically, we were proved right.

After 20 months of Covid-19, with nearly five million directly attributed deaths and economic devastation, we say again that the world is not prepared. It has neither the capacity to end the current pandemic in the near future, nor to prevent the next one.

We should not be surprised by the catastrophic failures of this pandemic. They are rooted in a long history of inequality and inaction. We should feel deep shame over the multiple tragedies that have shattered our lives. We should grieve and be angry. Because millions of deaths – many preventable – is neither normal nor acceptable.

Covid has exposed a broken world of haves and have-nots where access to vaccines, treatments and PPE depends on your ability to pay. Most glaringly, it is the imbalance of vaccines that strikes at our moral fibre and confirms

that this pandemic is no longer a problem shared. Rates of [vaccine distribution almost perfectly track income distribution](#).

The lack of global equity is due in part to the fundamental misunderstanding of global solidarity as being founded on generosity, not justice. It is also caused by longstanding systemic inequities in the global health emergency and broader international system.

Financing health emergency preparedness and response is based largely on ad hoc, bilateral and multilateral development assistance. Low- and middle-income countries are often under-represented and opportunities to engage communities and civil society are meagre, further marginalising vulnerable groups.

Covid erupted into a polarised world characterised by heightened nationalism, distrust and inequality. It has only accelerated those trends. The inadequacies start at the top. The UN general assembly, UN security council, World [Health](#) Assembly, G7 and G20 leaders among others, have little to show for their efforts other than declarations of intent.

Worse, while the key to containing the pandemic and preparing for the next is collective action, current processes to reform the health emergency ecosystem are splintered and could exacerbate the existing fragmentation.

At the heart of this ecosystem, we need an empowered WHO, strengthened with resources and authority

For all the pandemic's challenges, it has also offered an opportunity. It has given us occasion to celebrate the life-saving and inspiring role that science can play in mitigating dangerous diseases. We have seen the kindness, comfort and solidarity that people can offer one another. We have also reached a consensus that the global health emergency system needs fundamental reform.

Preparedness starts with communities and countries. Every country has the responsibility for the protection of its own population. Every country must follow through on the commitments it has made to its people. Every country

can – and must – do more. But global preparedness is greater than the sum of national preparedness. It needs concerted, collective and coordinated action. At its heart must lie a new global social contract which prioritises equity, accountability, solidarity, reciprocity and inclusivity.

This is why the [GPMB, in its new report](#), is calling for stronger political leadership and accountability to change the way the international community prepares for future health emergencies. We are calling on countries – including those from the global south – to work together with civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders, to take urgent steps to strengthen the ecosystem of pandemic preparedness and response; to negotiate an international agreement in WHO; to create a new financing instrument at the World Bank; and to develop end-to-end mechanisms to advance public goods for health emergencies and share data. And at the heart of this ecosystem, we need an empowered WHO, strengthened with resources and authority.

We also stress the importance of independent monitoring, which plays an essential role in keeping our leaders, governments and institutions accountable. Together, these actions will help to create a coherent plan for global preparedness and monitoring. As we move forward with these solutions, we must be mindful of the lessons of the past, and design for equity and interdependence.

The window of opportunity for change is fast disappearing. As life in some parts of the globe returns to a new normal, and the world's attention is distracted elsewhere, the urgency fades.

We know what we need to do. There have been hundreds of recommendations to reform the system. We just cannot seem to do it. But do it we must. We have learned the hard way that disease knows no borders. None of us is safe until all of us are safe. We must move from words to action.

- Elhadj As Sy is co-chair of the Global Preparedness Monitoring Board, an independent body working to chart a roadmap for a safer world,

whose annual report can be [accessed here](#)

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[Opinion](#)[Environment](#)

What does a stream of raw sewage symbolise? Broken Brexit promises, for one

[Zoe Williams](#)





A member of Surfers Against Sewage on Brighton Beach – the environmental charity highlights the sewage discharge into coastal and inland waters by UK water companies. Photograph: Ciaran McCrickard/PA

Tue 26 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

I remember the good ol' days, when we weren't always lurching from one crisis to another and we had time to wonder why the EU's clean-beach legislation hadn't done more for its popularity. Maybe people just didn't care about sewage, one way or the other?

That was possibly the working assumption of Conservative MPs, who are now experiencing mounting unease – lobby-speak for freaking the hell out – over the environment bill that is ping-ponging through parliament. It's a rangy piece of legislation, of which the faeces element is only a small part. A Lords amendment sought to put a duty on water companies not to dump raw sewage into the waterways – and 265 Tories voted against it. The website Evolve Politics published [the list in full](#) and thus crashed itself, so urgent was public interest in the names. Querulous Tories are taking to Twitter crying fake news, puzzled by the strength of public feeling.

I think I can help, here, with a little explainer. Sewage has become a powerful symbol of a number of things at once. First, all those [Brexit](#)

promises – that nothing would change, except to improve; that our environmental protections without the EU would be, if anything, better. The boot is on the other foot in this rift that won't heal – it used to be remainers making detailed, boring, practical arguments, while Brexiters sang their full-throated freedom shanties. Now, it's leavers trying to make the case for complexity – “We think you'll find this is actually about heavy rainfall and Victorian sewerage” – while remainers are making the simple, emotional case: “Things used to be better and now they're shit.”

Second, running up to [Cop26](#), there is a building sense that the environment will bear the brunt as we witness the consequences of electing a joke government that doesn't keep promises.

Third, the downsides of privatisation are often palpable but opaque, hard to prove and speculative. Not in this case. Water companies pump out raw sewage because they can't afford the infrastructure improvements it would take not to do so; they have also paid out [£57bn in dividends over the past 30 years](#). If there is one thing worse than an issue that distills several cases at once, it's one of which the metaphorical potential is so rich that it would be vulgar to mine it.

Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist

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2021.10.26 - Around the world

- [Sudan US condemns military takeover as protests rage overnight](#)
- [Analysis Seeds of Sudan coup sown after fall of Omar al-Bashir](#)
- [Halyna Hutchins Vigil held amid anger at Hollywood ‘cutting corners’ on film sets](#)
- [Rust shooting Alec Baldwin was pointing gun at camera when it went off, director says](#)

[Sudan](#)

Sudan coup: US condemns military takeover as protests rage into second day



Sudanese women join protests in Khartoum against Monday's military coup.
Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

[Peter Beaumont](#), a Guardian reporter, and agencies

Tue 26 Oct 2021 01.38 EDT

The United States has “strongly” condemned the leaders of Sudan’s military coup as the United Nations planned an emergency meeting on the crisis and protests entered a second day.

After clashes between pro-democracy protesters and security forces left at least seven people dead on Monday, demonstrators took to the streets of the capital Khartoum again on Tuesday morning chanting “Returning to the past is not an option”.

The protesters found support from US secretary of state Antony Blinken, who called for the immediate return to civilian rule and the release of the detained prime minister.

“The United States strongly condemns the actions of the Sudanese military forces,” he said in a statement late on Monday, as he expressed grave concern about reports that security forces used live ammunition against protesters.

“We firmly reject the dissolution of the civilian-led transitional government and its associated institutions and call for their immediate restoration,” said Blinken, whose government has suspended \$700m in aid to Sudan.

Tension had been mounting in Sudan since what the civilian government described as [a failed coup attempt on 21 September](#), and disagreements within the country’s “sovereign council” in which power was shared between civilians leaders and the military.

Sudan’s armed forces moved to end the impasse on Sunday by detaining the civilian leaders, including prime minister Abdalla Hamdok, who have been heading the country’s transition to full civilian rule following the April 2019 overthrow of long-time autocratic leader [Omar al-Bashir](#).

The military also declared a state of emergency, and large parts of the internet and mobile phone network were cut off in the immediate aftermath of the coup.

Gen Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, who had been head of the “sovereign council”, justified the seizure of power and the dissolution of the country’s transitional government by saying infighting between the military and civilian parties had threatened the country’s stability. The military was meant to have passed leadership of the joint sovereign council to a civilian figure in the coming months.

Pro-democracy protesters immediately took to the streets in protest after Burhan’s speech, blocking streets and setting fire to tyres in the capital Khartoum and its twin city of Omdurman.

They chanted “The people are stronger, stronger” and “Retreat is not an option!” as they clashed with security forces, who used teargas and live rounds to try to disperse the crowds.

The information ministry said soldiers “fired live bullets on protesters rejecting the military coup outside the army headquarters”.

Video shared on social media, however, showed people running from the sound of gunfire, and one man being treated for what looked like a gunshot wound.

Among the crowds converging on central Khartoum was Ahmed Osman, who said he was a relative of one of the ministers detained.

“I’ve been on the street since 2am when I learned about the disappearance of the minister. We don’t know to where they took him. He’s always been target of the Islamists,” said the young man, who had wrapped himself in the Sudanese flag. “It’s our country, isn’t it? We have to reject what’s going on.”

At least seven people have been killed, according to a health ministry statement late on Monday.

UN secretary-general António Guterres said in a statement the detention of the civilian leaders was “unlawful” and condemned “the ongoing military coup d’etat”.

The UN demanded the Sudanese prime minister’s “immediate release” and diplomats in New York said on Monday night that the security council was expected to meet to discuss the crisis on Tuesday.

The European Union, African Union and Arab League also expressed concern.

Jonas Horner from the International Crisis Group think tank called it an “existential moment for both sides … This kind of intervention… really puts autocracy back on the menu”.

Hamdok had previously described splits in the transitional government as the “worst and most dangerous crisis” facing the transition.

Bashir, who ruled Sudan with an iron fist for three decades, is in jail in Khartoum following a corruption conviction. He is wanted by the International Criminal Court to face charges of genocide over the civil war in Darfur.

But UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet warned Sudan risked returning to oppression.

“It would be disastrous if Sudan goes backwards after finally bringing an end to decades of repressive dictatorship,” Bachelet said.

Agence France-Presse contributed to this report.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/26/sudan-coup-us-condemns-military-takeover-as-protests-rage-overnight>

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Sudan

Seeds of Sudan coup sown after fall of Omar al-Bashir



A protester draped in Sudan's flag flashes the victory sign next to burning tyres during a demonstration in Khartoum. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

[Peter Beaumont](#)

Mon 25 Oct 2021 10.42 EDT

In 2019, in the immediate aftermath of the fall of Sudan's authoritarian leader Omar al-Bashir – who had himself seized power in a military-backed coup in 1989 – the potential for fissures in the country's nascent political settlement were already obvious.

As representatives of the country's rebel movements sent delegations to the huge and sprawling public protests in Khartoum and students discussed the possibilities of democracy at coffee stalls set up on the pavement outside universities, the military – which had removed their backing from Bashir – was keeping a watchful eye with its soldiers manning checkpoints.

The consequence of eight months of mounting [street protests](#) sparked by increases in the cost living, including the ending of a subsidy for wheat, was that Sudan's revolution was resolved in a messy compromise.

The democratic transition, the military and civilian actors eventually agreed, would be overseen by a transitional body, a sovereign council incorporating generals and civilian politicians who would oversee the process.

The reality was that many of Sudan's most pressing competitions for power – between political parties, between army, militias and local rebel groups, and between those who favoured a more Islamist vision for the state – were papered over.

What would transpire in the intervening period was a long-running competition between various Sudanese actors which came to a head in recent weeks and months, including a previous [attempted coup only a month ago](#), as rival interests both pro-military and pro-democracy took to the streets.

On the side of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), represented by the leading general Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, who has now moved [to arrest civilian figures in the cabinet including the prime minister](#), Abdalla Hamdok, there has been mounting dissatisfaction over the perceived weakening of the military in the transition process.

02:32

Protesters march in Khartoum after Sudan's military launches coup – video

For civilian political leaders, the previous failed coup attempt in September – blamed on members of the military and former Bashir loyalists – had underlined the danger from the military with Hamdok saying the incident confirmed the “need to reform the security and military apparatus.”.

Since that attempted coup both pro-democracy and pro-military factions have been at loggerheads with pro-military groups and their allies launching a sit-in last week [calling for a return to military rule](#).

Complicating the issue is how various parties have used the political tensions to preserve or expand their power bases. Proposals to integrate the notorious paramilitary Rapid Support Forces – whom rights groups have accused of atrocities in Darfur – into the army were resisted by the veteran militia leader General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, or “Hemedti”, earlier this year.

For his part Hamdok said earlier this year that unresolved splits among political factions at the helm of Sudan’s transition could result in chaos and civil war.

Among those warning of the possibility of widening violence in the mounting crisis is Theodore Murphy, the director of the [Africa](#) programme at the European Council on Foreign Relations, who suggested the military acted for fear it was being weakened and that its move was backed by outside countries.

“Credible reports indicate that Egypt and the United Arab Emirates are supporting SAF’s general direction,” he said.

“Demonstrations have begun and clashes are to be expected between supporters of the civilian component and some protesters animated by a mixture of support to the SAF and some of the armed movements.

“It is exceedingly clear that the civilian-aligned protest movement remains significant in number and that it is convinced that despite SAF’s assurances what is transpiring is effectively a coup.”

Echoing the view that the army may have misjudged Sudanese public opinion, Sanya Suri, the [Economist Intelligence Unit](#)’s Africa analyst, said: “While the latest developments highlight a major setback for the country and the fragility of peace, there is little the military can hope to gain by renegeing on the power sharing deal.

“International support and financial aid are crucial to help sustain Sudan’s economic recovery especially in the wake of the pandemic.

“International partners will be quick to withdraw support in the event that the military takes over. We expect further unrest in the coming weeks as pro-democracy/pro-civilian rule supporters take to the streets and the military attempts to quash the revolt.”

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[Alec Baldwin](#)

Halyna Hutchins mourned amid anger at Hollywood ‘cutting corners’ on sets



A candlelight vigil is held for Halyna Hutchins at IATSE Local 80 in Burbank, California, on Sunday. Photograph: Myung J Chun/Los Angeles Times/Rex/Shutterstock

[Soo Youn](#) in Los Angeles

Mon 25 Oct 2021 17.38 EDT

A public vigil for the slain cinematographer Halyna Hutchins in Los Angeles on Sunday evening served both as an unofficial memorial event and an outlet for anger over working conditions in Hollywood that many lower-paid crew believe were linked to the 42-year old [mother's death](#).

Several hundred colleagues gathered outside the local union office for the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) which represents workers on film and TV sets, who had been [poised to go on strike](#) to protest about pay, long hours and dangers on sets just days before

Hutchins was [fatally shot](#) by [Alec Baldwin](#) on the New Mexico set of the desert western film Rust last week.

The mood at the vigil was somber yet charged with subdued rage, referenced by IATSE's international vice-president, Michael Miller, as he addressed the crowd.

"We're here to mourn. But I'm afraid we are also gathered with some frustration and a little bit of anger. Anger that too often the rush to complete productions and the cutting of corners puts safety on the back burner and puts crew members at risk," he said.

Miller spoke next to a projected image of [Hutchins](#) and flanked by standing wreaths of white flowers. A black cloth-covered table, piled high with bouquets and framed photos of Hutchins, became a makeshift altar, illuminated by an array of candles on the ground.

Rust's director, Joel Souza, [was injured](#) in the shooting last Thursday and the incident is being investigated by the Santa Fe sheriff's department in New Mexico.

Baldwin was rehearsing a scene that involved him pointing a gun "towards the camera lens" when it accidentally went off, [Souza noted](#) in a statement to the sheriff's office.

Most of those who attended the vigil belong to one of the Hollywood trade unions. Nearly every attendee was masked against the spread of Covid-19, although the event was outdoors, in a crowd that is used to strict set protocols as they work through the ongoing pandemic.

Most held a lit candle and many had pinned a white ribbon to their jackets. Some wore their union jackets. One person held up a sign that said "Vote No".

This referred to an upcoming vote to ratify a tentative agreement reached by the union and Hollywood producers earlier this month when members were [on the verge](#) of a strike that would have halted TV and movie-making, with

workers protesting against low pay, grueling days without breaks and safety hazards.

A mentor to Hutchins from the American Film Institute (AFI), Stephen Lighthill, who is also president of the American Society of Cinematographers, implored those gathered “to start a conversation about functional guns on sets. There is no place for weapons that can kill on a motion picture.”

Most firearms that appear in Hollywood movies or TV shows are real, but have been modified to shoot blanks.

The Rust crew had protested about long hours and low pay on the set, and half a dozen had walked off the set just hours before Hutchins was killed, according to reports on Friday that were corroborated by affidavits released by the Santa Fe sheriff’s department on Sunday night.

Serge Svetnoy, who worked as the gaffer, or head electrician on the set, wrote in a public Facebook post on Sunday, that he had been standing “shoulder-to-shoulder” with Hutchins when she was shot.

“I was holding her in my arms while she was dying. Her blood was on my hands,” he wrote.

“I want to tell my opinion on why this has happened. It’s the fault of negligence and unprofessionalism,” Svetnoy said.

In tying the tragedy on set last week to an industry tendency towards production cost-cutting, Svetnoy’s post added: “It is true that the professionals can cost a little more and sometimes can be a little bit more demanding, but it is worth it. No saved penny is worth the LIFE of the person!”

Ezra Riley, a friend of Hutchins who called her “just amazing” and “a loving person” said on Sunday he was offered a job on Rust but turned it down because of what he deemed “super low pay”.

A request made to Rust Movie Productions to respond on numerous points did not receive an immediate reply.

Tom Kang, a friend of Hutchins from AFI, said he last spoke with her about one month ago, when she called to ask a technical question about the camera she would use on Rust. He said that there had been some industry criticism directed at Hutchins since her death for not walking off set and this upset him as she would have regarded the crew members as family.

“You spend months. You spent so much time prepping. It’s unpaid. You spend so much of your heart and soul into the images that you’re crafting. You work with the director. And sacrificing time with her son to do this,” he said. “She’s not the type to quit.”

Another friend of Hutchins and fellow cinematographer Antonio Cisneros said she was probably “trying to be the negotiator”. But her death underscored what he saw as worsening conditions in the industry as a result of digital streaming services forcing productions to be made more cheaply and on tighter schedules. He said he would vote against the settlement with producers, and favors a strike.

Kang also decried the conditions often tolerated.

“You default to the same thing that everyone has been always doing in the subculture of this business: long hours are acceptable. They just assume that people are going to do it, because they have been. And so you have all this stuff contributing – from the top, the systemic issues, down to the very detailed things that directly happened, they all contributed,” he said.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2021/oct/25/halyna-hutchins-vigil-anger-film-set-safety>.

[Alec Baldwin](#)

Alec Baldwin was pointing gun at camera when it went off, director says



Joel Souza, the director of *Rust*, in an undated photo. Photograph: Phillip Caruso/Reuters

[Luke Harding](#)

Mon 25 Oct 2021 21.50 EDT

Alec Baldwin was practising a scene that involved him pointing a gun “towards the camera lens” when it accidentally went off, [killing his director of photography](#), according to a written statement by the film’s director.

The director, Joel Souza, said he heard what “sounded like a whip and then a loud pop”. He said he saw the cinematographer Halyna Hutchins clutch her midriff and stumble backwards. Souza noticed that he himself was bleeding from the right shoulder.

The cameras were not rolling at the time. Baldwin was sitting on a wooden church pew on the set and trying out a scene in which he would “cross-draw” a revolver from its holster. Hutchins and Souza were checking the camera angle.

Moments before the accident, Baldwin was assured he was handling a “cold gun”, Souza told investigators. The film’s armourer, Hannah Gutierrez-Reed, checked prop weapons, and the assistant director, Dave Halls, rechecked them and handed them to the actors, Souza said. It was Halls who gave Baldwin the gun, police said.

Affidavits released on Sunday night paint a picture of a dysfunctional and feuding set, where five crew members walked out last Thursday just hours before the fatal shooting at Bonanza Creek Ranch in New Mexico. They were unhappy with pay and conditions.

Halls was the subject of an internal complaint on a previous movie, it emerged over the weekend. Maggie Goll, a prop maker and licensed pyrotechnician, [said she had raised concerns](#) about Hall’s conduct on set with the executive producers of Hulu’s Into the Dark TV series in 2019. He has yet to comment.

“This situation is not about Dave Halls … It’s in no way one person’s fault,” Goll said, adding that there were larger issues about the wellbeing of crew that had to be addressed. “It’s a bigger conversation about safety on set and what we are trying to achieve with that culture,” she added.

Further concerns were raised about Halls on Monday, after a producer who communicated with [the Associated Press](#) said Halls had been fired from a previous job after a gun went off on a previous film set and wounded a member of the crew. The producer, who asked not to be identified by name, wrote that Halls “was removed from the set immediately”.

A police investigation continued on Monday, and new court documents showed that authorities seized three black revolvers, ammunition boxes, a fanny pack with ammunition, several spent casings, two leather gun belts

with holsters, articles of clothing and swabs of what was believed to be blood.

Authorities did not say what type of ammunition they had removed from the set or whether it included live or dummy bullets or blank cartridges.

Investigators hope a forensic analysis of ballistic evidence will shed light on those questions, Juan Rios, a spokesman for the Santa Fe sheriff's department, said on Monday.

"This is a complicated case," he said.

In an Instagram post on Monday, Baldwin's wife, Hilaria, wrote: "My heart is with Halyna. Her husband. Her son. Their family and loved ones. And my Alec.

"It's said, 'There are no words' because it's impossible to express the shock and heartache of such a tragic accident. Heartbreak. Loss. Support."

One of the central mysteries about the killing remains what kind of projectile was fired from the gun and how it got there. The [Hollywood website TMZ](#), citing unnamed sources, said crew members were using the weapon for recreational shooting during breaks. It also alleged that live ammunition and blanks were being stored in the same area.

The Santa Fe sheriff's county office has yet to comment on the reports. As part of its investigation it has seized all relevant evidence including the gun, camera memory cards and bone fragments, as well as taking statements from cast and crew.

In an affidavit, the camera operator Reid Russell suggested Baldwin was not to blame for the incident. He described the actor as very careful and said on a previous occasion Baldwin had made sure a child actor was not near him when a gun was being discharged.

Russell said the crew walkout left him with extra work to do, with only one camera available to shoot. It had to be moved because the light had shifted and there was a shadow, he said. He added that he stepped outside for five minutes and did not know if the gun was checked before it reached Baldwin.

Russell told investigators that after the gun went off he “remembered Joel having blood on his person”. He added: “Ms Hutchins [was] speaking and saying she couldn’t feel her legs.”

Hutchins was pronounced dead after being flown by helicopter to the University of New Mexico hospital. Souza was treated at Christus St Vincent regional medical centre, where he was brought by ambulance.

A detective, Joel Cano, interviewed Souza on Friday afternoon. Souza told him “there should never be live rounds whatsoever, near or around the scene”, Cano wrote in an affidavit, [according to the New York Times](#). Souza also said “everyone was getting along” and there were “no altercations”, the statement added.

The film’s chief electrician, Serge Svetnoy, blamed producers for Hutchins’ death in an emotional Facebook post on Sunday. Svetnoy said he had worked with Hutchins on multiple films and faulted “negligence and unprofessionalism” among those handling weapons on the set. He said producers hired an inexperienced armourer.

A vigil for Hutchins was held on Sunday in southern California. Mourners exchanged tearful hugs and speakers called for improved safety standards.

Baldwin, who is known for his roles in 30 Rock and The Hunt for Red October, and his impression of Donald Trump on Saturday Night Live, has described the killing as a “tragic accident”. On Friday he said there were “no words” to express his shock and sadness.

Agencies contributed reporting

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Rishi Sunak defends halving domestic flight taxes in Cop26 run-up

00:57

Rishi Sunak: domestic flights tax cut will not impede net zero target – video

Aubrey Allegretti Political correspondent

[@breeallegretti](#)

Thu 28 Oct 2021 05.08 EDT

Rishi Sunak has defended cutting domestic flight taxes in the run-up to next week's Cop26 summit, after being accused of going "headlong in the wrong direction" about tackling climate emergency at a pivotal point for Britain.

Labour said it was an "astonishing" announcement from the chancellor in Wednesday's budget, given the UK government will urge many world leaders, set to arrive in Scotland within days, to speed up decarbonisation plans in their own countries.

Sunak halved the tax on domestic flights, which are already far cheaper and [more polluting than train](#) journeys. Air passenger duty was increased by £4 on "ultra-long" flights of more than 5,550 miles, from £87 to £91. Overall, the changes were a tax giveaway of £30m a year.

After criticism from environmental groups, the chancellor batted away claims it could lead to 400,000 more domestic flights every year. "What we're doing on air-passenger duty is going back to a system we used to have, which means we don't essentially double-tax people for flying inside the UK – so in that sense it's a pro-union policy," Sunak told BBC Radio 4's Today programme.

He said the new ultra long-haul band was fair because it meant "the further you're flying, the more emissions, then you will pay a higher rate".

Sunak was asked why he did not simply increase the levy for longer haul flights and leave domestic air-passenger duty at its current level, instead of cutting it significantly.

“We could have done, but we wanted to deliver on a previous commitment to reform air-passenger duty to return to the system that we used to have so people flying within the UK are not taxed twice, which we never thought was right,” the chancellor said.

“It supports the union, it supports regional airports, which are big employers. But also aviation in general only accounts for about 7-8% of our overall carbon emissions and, of that, I think domestic aviation is less than 5% – so it is a tiny proportion.”

Asked if the UK should be showing moral leadership on the issue, given it will be pressing other countries to drastically increase their commitments to tackling climate change by trying to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees, Sunak said: “We’re a country that has decarbonised faster than basically any other advanced nation over the past 10, 20, 30 years, so I think our track record on this is pretty good, actually.

“In my small responsibility on the finance side, last week the UK was named the world’s best place for green finance anywhere in the world ... I feel pretty confident about our leadership on this issue.”

However, the shadow chancellor, Rachel Reeves, who stood in for Keir Starmer in the Commons on Wednesday after he had tested positive for Covid, said: “We wouldn’t have gone ahead with that cut.

“I find it astonishing that the week before [Cop26](#), when we are supposed to be showing global leadership, we have cut air-passenger duty on domestic flights. We should be encouraging people to use our train network for those journeys, not cutting APD on domestic flights.”

She added: “If you’re a banker on a short-haul flight sipping champagne, you would have been cheering at the budget yesterday. If you’re on a modest

income and you're worried about the rising cost of living, frankly there was very little to cheer.”

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Autumn budget 2021

UK's annual tax bill 'to rise by £3,000 a household by 2027'



The hit to real wages would be caused by rising inflation, said the Resolution Foundation. Photograph: Getty Images/Tetra images RF

[Jasper Jolly](#) and [Phillip Inman](#)

Thu 28 Oct 2021 05.46 EDT

Boris Johnson's government has set a course for a "high-tax, big-state economy" with a [budget](#) that will raise the UK's tax bill by £3,000 a household by 2027, according to analysis by an independent thinktank.

The Resolution Foundation said that despite a spending spree, real wages would fall again next year. The UK is "still in the midst of its weakest decade for pay growth since the 1930s", it said.

Sunak portrayed the budget as preparing the "high-wage" economy for the "post-Covid" era, as stronger economic forecasts [gave him room to increase](#)

spending on government departments by £150bn.

However, the Resolution Foundation said real wages would grow by only 2.4% between May 2008 (as the financial crisis hit) and May 2024, compared with 36% real wage growth between May 1992 and May 2008.

The hit to real wages would be caused by rising inflation leading to a “flat recovery for household living standards”, amid surging energy prices and persistent supply chain problems, the thinktank said in its analysis.

The analysis found the combined impact of the budget policies would increase incomes of the poorest fifth of households by 2.8% by 2025, while incomes for people on middle incomes will fall by 2%, and the highest-earning fifth will fall by 3.1%.

Rachel Reeves, the shadow chancellor, said Sunak’s lack of action on the cost of living showed he was describing a “parallel universe”.

Sunak told Conservative MPs on Wednesday evening that in future he planned to use “every marginal pound” to lower taxes, with the Conservative party’s eyes turning towards a general election in 2023 or 2024.

The thinktank’s analysis showed that tax paid by businesses and households as a share of the economy will be at its highest level since 1950 by 2026-27 – £3,000 a household higher than at the start of Boris Johnson’s premiership.

Torsten Bell, the Resolution Foundation’s chief executive, said: “The chancellor has set out plans for a new high-tax, big-state economy.

“Higher taxes aren’t a surprise given the UK is combining fiscal conservatism with an ageing society and a slow-growing economy. But it is the end of low-tax conservatism, with the tax take rising by £3,000 per household by the middle of this decade.”

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He said the figures did show a boost for the lower paid over the life of the parliament if the temporary Covid-related £20-a-week uplift in universal credit was not taken into account but 3.2 million of the 4.4 million families that felt the benefit of pandemic-related welfare increases would be worse off.

The major beneficiary of the spending increases has been the National Health Service, which will have taken up £84bn of the £111bn annual increase in spending controlled by Whitehall by 2024-25.

The spending announced by Sunak will only go partway towards reversing the austerity cuts implemented by the former chancellor George Osborne. The Resolution Foundation found that a third of those cuts will have been reversed by 2025, with work and pensions and transport budgets still down by 40% and 32%.

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Budget

Rishi Sunak's budget 'hammers' working people while giving banks a tax cut, says Labour – as it happened

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Autumn budget 2021

Budget calculator 2021: what does it mean for me?

Wed 27 Oct 2021 13.27 EDT

Against a backdrop of supply chain issues, labour shortages and rising inflation, [Rishi Sunak has delivered an optimistic budget](#), looking ahead to a post-pandemic economy.

With the economy [forecast to grow by 6.5% this year](#) and unemployment expected to peak at lower levels than previously feared, the government has found itself with more room for manoeuvre when it comes to spending.

During his statement Sunak committed to supporting households with [lower alcohol and fuel duties](#) despite imposing higher taxes on workers and cutting benefits elsewhere. He said: “Today’s budget delivers a stronger economy for the British people: stronger growth, with the UK economy recovering faster than our major competitors. Stronger public finances, with our national debt finally under control. Stronger employment, with fewer people out of work and more people in work.”

The [optimistic outlook](#), fuelled by a faster economic recovery from the pandemic earlier this year, did come with a note of caution as Sunak acknowledged the threat of rising inflation.

But how will your personal finances be impacted by the budget? Enter your details in the calculator at the top of the page, created by accountants Blick Rothenberg, to find out.

If you’re having trouble viewing the budget calculator in our mobile apps, please try opening the link in your mobile browser instead.

Alcohol duties remain frozen this year, but are subject to simplification in

future years. Child benefit rates have not been changed in the Autumn budget announcement but are subject to review in November 2021.

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Interview

Joseph Marcell: ‘I tried to get Will Smith to do Shakespeare instead of Independence Day’

[Ryan Gilbey](#)



‘If I walk into a room and I’m not recognised as Geoffrey, I get really cross’
... Marcell. Photograph: Alicia Canter/The Guardian

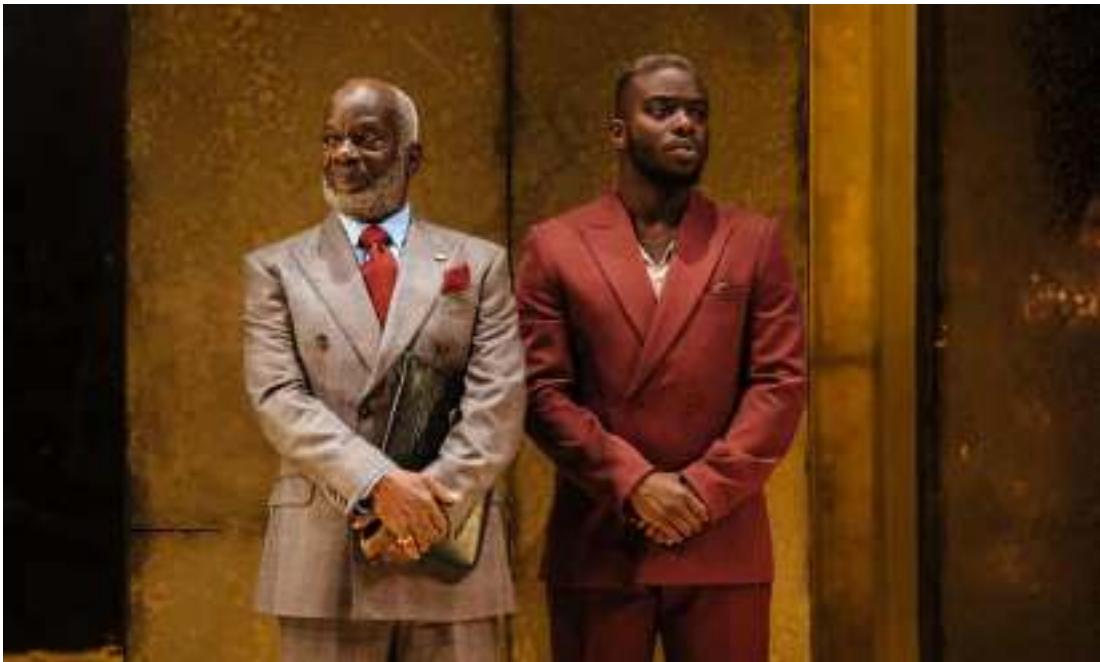
Thu 28 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

Joseph Marcell’s life has been dominated by a lot of Shakespeare and by one smash-hit sitcom. So when we meet, I bring the lyrics to The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air’s theme song, which [some joker online](#) has translated into blank verse. “In west Philadelphia born and raised / On the playground was where I spent most of my days” has become “From western Philadelphia I hail, / where in my youth I’d play upon the green” and so on. Sitting opposite me in the bar of London’s Young Vic, the 73-year-old actor laughs sweetly, stroking his frosted beard as he reads the print-out. “Oh heavens!” he says. “May I keep it? I’ll have to show Will.”

That’s [Will Smith](#), of course, who played an ebullient goofball living with his affluent Californian relatives, while Marcell was Geoffrey, the family’s withering English butler. When I mention one of his driest rejoinders – “Run Geoffrey! Fetch Geoffrey! Perhaps you’d like me to catch a Frisbee in my teeth?” – he summons the character right there in the empty bar, baring his fangs as he savours that final word, then laughing at the memory.

Fresh Prince ran for six years from 1990. “There was not one day when I went to work and wished I was somewhere else,” says Marcell. At its height, the show attracted US audiences of nearly 20 million. Even now, strangers in the street will call out Smith’s greeting to Geoffrey: “Yo, G!” How constant is the attention? “Put it this way: if I walk into a room and I’m not recognised, I get really cross!”

But it is the Danish prince, rather than the Fresh one, that has occasioned our meeting today: Marcell is currently delivering a tender, funny Polonius at the Young Vic opposite [Cush Jumbo](#) as Hamlet and [Adrian Dunbar](#) (Line of Duty’s Ted Hastings) as Claudius. “Polonius is an honest man,” Marcell says. “I try to show that bond of family in him. He really does care about his children, and he protects Ophelia in the best way he can.”



‘An honest man’ ... Marcell as Polonius, with Jonathan Ajayi as Laertes, in Hamlet. Photograph: Helen Murray

To see a Black woman as the prince is revelatory, he says. “The beauty of what Cush is doing is that you forget she’s female because of her skill in delineating the character,. Personally, I celebrate the fact that I’ve lived long enough to see this happen. It’s time. One of the most difficult things, especially with the King plays, was that you were always being reminded by people that this was *English* history, that kind of nonsense. It’s nice to see that’s changed. What’s that Sun Tzu quote? ‘If you wait by the river long enough, the bodies of your enemies will float by.’”

In 2013 at the Globe, where he is also on the board, Marcell became one of only seven performers of colour to have played King Lear in Britain since 1930, but he never had the chance to give the world his Hamlet despite several stints at the RSC. Were there many other parts he wasn’t invited to play? “Oh, absolutely. It was servants, et cetera, I was given. I tried not to have any pretensions. I thought of the RSC as a resource I ought to use. I’m not being Pollyanna-ish but I had a much larger vision for what I wanted to do with my life than what they had to offer.”

Other actors have spoken of similar treatment they encountered at the company: Ben Kingsley once recalled being told that he would “be very

good at playing servants". Marcell is diplomatic, even circumspect, when discussing his own experiences. "I'm dodging your question because I don't know how to put it, and a lot of it is guesswork," he says. "But I think we were not considered good enough to speak the verse. That had a lot to do with it. You were told certain things might not be possible. The phrase used in my case was, 'Of course, in a *fair* world ...'"

What can you do with a comment like that? "Tell 'em to fuck off!" he says, dropping the diplomacy. "I'm lucky enough that I don't need the RSC. I can go to Oregon, Washington DC, California. They'll let me play what I want." Indeed, it was only after leaving the company that he became one of the first Black Othellos on the London stage, in a 1984 production at the Lyric Hammersmith with Siân Thomas as Desdemona. His friend Patrick Stewart told him at the time: "You know, I've never seen Othello played by a Black person before."



'Yo G!' ... with Will Smith for season one of *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*.
Photograph: NBC/NBCUniversal/Getty Images

What did he bring to the Moor? "It was the first time the world had seen a self-possessed Othello," says Marcell. "He was not a victim, and the idea of the 'noble savage' was not part of my construction of the character. I presented him as a man who was good at what he did. It's just he was a little

insecure. You didn't feel sorry for my Othello – you felt sorry he had this tradition which made him perhaps a little gullible.”

Discrimination had been part of Marcell's life ever since he moved from St Lucia to London with his family in the mid-1950s, though initially the big shock was climate-related. “When we got to our road in Bermondsey, there were no leaves on the trees,” he says. “It was terrifying.” Then his father explained to him and his siblings that there were certain areas they should avoid. “That's when it became really scary. He'd say, ‘If you go into a place and the white people start saying things, just leave. Don't stop. Don't talk. Just go.’ Gradually, your instincts take over.”

He was working as an electrical engineer when he had his lightbulb moment and decided to become an actor. It happened after he and his friends strolled past a West End marquee advertising a show by the American Negro [Theatre](#). “Someone said, ‘Let's go in.’ So we paid half a crown and sat up in the gods. I don't remember what it was about, but seeing Black actors on stage was extraordinary. It made me think, ‘That's what I want to do.’”

Marcell joined the RSC at the start of the 1970s during Trevor Nunn's renowned Romans season, and returned again a decade later. His career has encompassed TV roles in everything from the groundbreaking Black British drama series Empire Road to EastEnders and [Desmond's](#). On stage in Bath, he played the fearsome Zimbabwean dictator in Breakfast with Mugabe, while in Leicester he was Willy Loman in Death of a Salesman. His most fateful stage work, though, was on the RSC's American tour in the late 1980s, when Patrick Stewart directed him as Angelo in Measure for Measure and as the bin-dwelling Nagg in Beckett's Endgame. It was here that Marcell was spotted by producers casting a new NBC sitcom: in a bin one moment, in Bel-Air the next.



Trailblazer ... as King Lear in the Globe's production in 2014. Photograph: Darrin Zammit Lupi/Reuters

What were his first impressions of the show's star? "I thought Will was a total bloody lunatic," he splutters. During Marcell's audition, Smith began improvising wildly. "I turned and said, 'Is that how he's going to do it?'" This is recounted in his crispest Geoffrey voice. "Everyone fell about. Including Will, who said, 'Yeah man, that's how I'm gonna do it.'" Years later, Smith told him: "We knew you were OK, but that was the moment we knew you were exactly right."

Most of the surviving cast members meet up every few years, which is convenient for Marcell, who divides his time between the UK and his other home in California. He is just back from there, in fact, where he has been shooting a new series for [Ryan Murphy](#), the pop-culture titan with whom he worked on *Ratched*, the *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* prequel made by Netflix.

Marcell talks affectionately about his old sitcom colleagues, especially Smith. "What I loved about him – and still do – is that if Will says it's so, then it's so. He's an honourable man." Could he be persuaded to do Shakespeare? "Maybe. I did want him to play Mark Antony but he was busy with *Independence Day*." Does he have an Othello in him? "I think he does,

yes. But he needs somebody who can handle him on stage.” He is all but tapping his nose now. “I have plans,” he says. Leave it to G.

- Hamlet is at the [Young Vic, London](#), until 13 November, and [livestreaming](#) from 28 to 30 October.
-

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Tax havens

How Britain is responsible for a third of the world's lost taxes – video

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Peter Bradshaw's film of the week
Movies

Last Night in Soho review – Edgar Wright's entertaining Valhalla of toxic 60s glitz



Wide-eyed ... Thomasin McKenzie in *Last Night in Soho*. Photograph: Landmark Media/Alamy



Peter Bradshaw

@PeterBradshaw1

Thu 28 Oct 2021 04.00 EDT

A trip to the dark heart of London's unswinging 60s is what's on offer in this entertaining, if uneven, film from screenwriter Krysty Wilson-Cairns and director Edgar Wright, serving up a gorgeous soundtrack and some marvellous re-creations of sleazy Soho and the West End. There's a tremendous image of the marquee for the 1965 Thunderball premiere in Coventry Street, and a show-stopping crane shot of Soho Square, apparently filmed from where the 20th Century Fox sign is now no longer to be found atop that company's former premises.

Last Night in Soho is a doppelganger horror-thriller about a wide-eyed fashion student called Eloise (Thomasin McKenzie) who has brought her mum's old Dansette record player and Cilla Black and Petula Clark LPs up to London from Cornwall on the train. Eloise has a fetish for the lost innocent glamour of the 60s but, moping all alone in her manky bedsit, finds herself stricken with nightly neon phantasms. Like a ghost from the future, Eloise dreams her way through a portal in time back into 60s London clubland, where she witnesses Sandie (Anya Taylor-Joy), a blonde singer – exactly the kind of retro showbiz princess Eloise moonily idolises – who is

being forced by her slick-haired manager Jack (Matt Smith) into having sex for money with creepy old men. Gradually, Eloise feels her identity merging with Sandie's. Is she having a breakdown, or is this nightmare really happening?

Wright's re-creation of that bygone half of the film is hypnotic: interestingly, Eloise's bedsit is not in Soho, but just to the north in Fitzrovia; maybe for the [Peeping Tom](#) vibes, this being where [Michael Powell](#)'s classic 1960 London shocker was set. Eloise has a grumpy old landlady played with gusto by the late Diana Rigg, and there are other instances of 60s ancestor-worship casting, including ruined 60s cherub [Terence Stamp](#) as a mysterious old guy who hangs about by the pub.

There are no cliched celeb cameos – no Francis Bacon in the Colony Room or Jimi Hendrix at the Bag O'Nails – and I like the way Wright does not romanticise or glamorise Soho: he shows us that this is a place of misogynistic nastiness. There is a grippingly squalid sequence in which Sandie is humiliatingly forced to participate as a chorus girl, performing Puppet on a String in a cringe-making saucy revue that is basically a prostitution shop-window for leering male punters in the audience, who are expecting Jack to set up a personal introduction. It's a clever echo of the Christine Keeler revue scenes in [Michael Caton-Jones's Scandal from 1989](#).



A place of misogynistic nastiness ... Anya Taylor-Joy and Matt Smith in *Last Night in Soho*. Photograph: Lifestyle pictures/Alamy

But the contemporary half of the film is for me less interesting, particularly in the overextended third act. It is almost as if the movie has used up all its horrified rapture on those vivid 1960s hallucinations, and it sometimes isn't as scary as it could be. McKenzie does a lot of pop-eyed staring and sitting bolt upright in bed as she wakes up from another actually-happening bad dream, and there is a slightly laborious stretch where she is somehow able to research 60s Soho crime from microfiche newspaper records in her college library. In these book-lined stacks she suffers one of many ghost incursions. Taylor-Joy's Sandie is opaque, but in the right way: the sacrificial fetish in a vortex of fear.

None of this stops the Soho of the film from being re-created with great exuberance, a Valhalla of toxic glitz, whose world Wright directs with great style.

Last Night in Soho is released on 29 October in cinemas.

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[Men](#)

‘I’m scared I’ve left it too late to have kids’: the men haunted by their biological clocks



Illustration: Steven Gregor



Sirin Kale

Thu 28 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

It was when Connor woke up in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom that he started thinking about it. The 38-year-old civil servant from London got back into bed and couldn't sleep: he was spiralling. "I thought: 'Shit, I might not be able to have children. It actually might not happen,'" he says.

"It started with me thinking about how I'm looking to buy a house, and everything is happening too late in my life," Connor says. "Then I started worrying about how long it would take me to save again to get married, after I buy the house. I was doing the maths on that – when will I be able to afford to be married, own a house and start having kids? Probably in my 40s. Then I started freaking out about what the quality of my sperm will be like by then. What if something's wrong with the child? And then I thought, oh no, what if me and my girlfriend don't work out? I'll be in an even worse scenario in a few years."

That sounds exhausting, I say. Connor laughs, but it's clear he is seriously worried. "I've always maintained the perspective that if you say that children are the meaning of life, you're putting your problems on someone

else,” He says. “But that night I kept thinking my life would be so empty and I would be so unsatisfied if it didn’t work out.”

We typically associate the so-called biological clock with women, but, thanks to a [wider commodification](#) of men’s health anxieties – the booming [hair transplant industry](#), apps such as [Hims](#) that offer drugs for erectile dysfunction and premature ejaculation – the male biological clock is becoming ever more relevant. A number of sperm-freezing tech startups backed by venture capitalists have responded to the growing anxiety. In the US, the companies Legacy and Dadi offer at-home sperm collection kits that users can return for [analysis and storage](#), while YoSperm provides at-home testing to analyse sperm quality and motility.

It’s not surprising that men are anxious: over the last few years there have been a spate of stories about the decline in sperm count, often linked to trends like [cycling](#) or [skinny jeans](#) – with reports that the average sperm counts of western men have more than halved over the [past 40 years](#). While these figures [have been contested](#), they have doubtless contributed to fears around male fertility.

Three years ago, Connor visited his GP to discuss sperm freezing. “She said I didn’t need to think about it at the time,” he says, “but if I was in the same situation at 45, then I would. As it stands, I think it’s something I’ll seriously look at if I’m still childless at 40.” He would do so for health reasons. “Obviously it’s not clearcut,” says Connor, “but the idea is that sperm from a younger person tends to be healthier.”

The desire to become a father can creep up on men slowly, and then all at once. Connor first heard his biological clock ticking when his girlfriend, Rosanna, told him she was pregnant two years ago. Although the pregnancy hadn’t been planned, he was overjoyed.

Rosanna miscarried before her 12-week scan. “It gutted me in a way that I hadn’t expected,” Connor says. “I really grieved. The experience totally crystallised for me how much I wanted kids.” Since the miscarriage, Connor hasn’t been able to stop worrying that children may never happen for him. He and Rosanna have agreed it is best to wait until they are more financially settled, and she is emotionally ready, before trying again. But the waiting

game poses its own risks. “I’m scared I’ll leave it too late and not be able to have them at all, or that something won’t be right with the child, and I’ll blame myself for it,” he explains.

Connor’s fears aren’t entirely baseless. Children born to men aged 45 and above have a higher risk of premature birth, seizures, low birth weight and being admitted to neonatal intensive care. There is also data linking an increased risk of autism with babies born to older fathers, although the evidence is not conclusive. Male fertility also decreases with age: although men don’t experience a menopause in the same way as women, [researchers pinpoint the 35-40 age bracket](#) as the point at which sperm counts typically deteriorate.

Once sperm count starts to drop, “it’s a steady decline”, says Dr Laura Dodge, an assistant professor of reproductive biology at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston. In 2017, she led a world-first study into the male biological clock. “It’s the one area in health where men have been neglected!” Dodge jokes. “That’s why I started looking into it. As a woman of childbearing age, you often hear that infertility is the woman’s problem. But I was curious – how much are men contributing towards the issue?”

Dodge and her colleagues studied the records of 19,000 couples who had undergone [IVF](#). They found that 75% of couples where the man was aged under 35 would have a live birth after six rounds of IVF. This figure dropped to 60% when the man was 45 or older. This may be due to declining testosterone levels, as well as DNA damage that happens to all of us as we age. Dodge advises men who know they want to be fathers not to get complacent. “It’s something to be aware of, in the same way that women are aware their fertility declines with time,” Dodge says.



Illustration: Steven Gregor

According to the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, [the optimal age](#) for female childbearing is 20 to 35. Having babies after the age of 35 increases the risk of miscarriage, birth defects and other birth-related complications for women. The same doesn't exactly apply for men. Although sperm quality declines with age, men can and do father children well into old age – just ask Mick Jagger, Warren Beatty or Rupert Murdoch.

But just because men are biologically capable of having children later in life, it doesn't mean they are immune from the wider social pressures around parenthood and ageing. Many men hit their late 30s and 40s and struggle with the realisation that they may never become fathers, whether due to financial or work constraints, fertility issues related to them or their partner, or because they never found the right person to settle down with.

“Not a day goes by when I don’t think about the fact that I’ve never married and had children,” says Adam, a 51-year-old teacher from the Midlands. His last relationship ended eight years ago and panic has begun to set in. Sometimes he wakes in the night and can’t breathe. “I think: ‘This isn’t just a worry: it’s real. It’s finished. The chances are, this isn’t going to happen,’ ” he says. “And friends won’t look you in the eye and tell you otherwise.”

Adam works in a female-heavy environment, where women often have babies. “It’s horrible to admit this, but you dread it when people bring their babies into work,” he says. “You skulk out of the way and busy yourself elsewhere.” Adam’s colleagues often mistakenly assume that his childlessness was a choice. He doesn’t correct them. “You cover it up,” he says. “You pretend you’re not bothered, like it was all part of the plan … but it’s always there, and it haunts me, if I’m being honest.”

Worse is when people make flippant remarks about how “lucky” men are for theoretically being able to father children into old age. “People make comments like: ‘Look at Charlie Chaplin,’” says Adam (Chaplin fathered a child at the age of 73). “I think, what on earth does that mean? Someone famous was medically able to have children at a certain age, and that means I’m OK to have children? I want to have children in a meaningful way … And to just dismiss it by saying: ‘Well, you can biologically have children, so it’s OK,’ is upsetting.”

Whereas for earlier generations of men, becoming a parent was perhaps not something much thought about or considered, recent years have seen a broader cultural shift towards a more active, hands-on model of fatherhood. “Men are more likely to want to have kids than in the past,” says Dr Kevin Shafer, a professor of sociology at Brigham Young University in Utah, and an expert in parenting and fatherhood. “They’re seeing more emotional value in having kids, and identifying more strongly with the paternal role.”

This desire to have children is driven by shifting social dynamics. “Until recently, the paternal role was more about breadwinning and being a disciplinarian than being emotionally involved or engaged in care-giving … men are becoming more engaged with those roles, and so their identification with becoming a father increases,” says Shafer.

But with this move towards conscious fatherhood comes doubt. “I’ve got a bit of an internal conflict,” says Jonathan Kirk, 38, who works in healthcare and lives in Manchester. He has been with his partner for 13 years, and they’re both ambivalent about having kids. “Time is running out a little bit and I’m not really sure,” he says. “And I don’t want to have kids unless I’m 100% sure I want them.” Kirk isn’t sure he’d want to be an older parent, although he worries that this is a decision he may one day come to regret. “I

know that the older you are, the harder it is to raise kids and work full time,” he says. “You’re more likely to have health problems, and it’s harder to deal with the sleepless nights. Can you do that so much later in life? Along with wanting to have a long and happy retirement?”

Even if you are willing to have children in your 40s or 50s, there is no guarantee it will happen, particularly if you are a gay man trying to save up for a surrogate – US commercial surrogacy starts at around \$100,000 (£76,000). Duncan Roy is a 61-year-old property consultant from Whitstable, Kent. Many of his younger gay friends are ferociously saving up to pay for surrogates. “It’s one of the biggest anxieties for young gay men in my community,” he says. “How am I going to earn enough money for a surrogate? Will I ever be able to afford it?” He knows men who have maxed out credit cards paying for surrogates.

Roy himself wishes he’d considered having children when he was younger. “I feel sad that fatherhood wasn’t encouraged for me in the same way it is for heterosexual men,” Roy says. But it’s too late for him now. “I don’t want to be one of those guys who are bringing up a baby at 60,” he says.

The men I speak with are involved in a constant, exhausting daily mental arithmetic. They look at their existing relationships, and try to assess whether they’ll go the distance. They worry about their financial commitments, and if they’ll ever be able to afford to have children. They fret more with each passing birthday, with each friend or family member announcing a new baby. They are always calculating. But these sums are usually done in silence – it’s hard to speak openly about the male biological clock in a society where women are perceived to have a tougher time of things.

Adam wishes this silence would change. “I would like to see greater awareness that men aren’t just sperm donors,” he says. “We do think really seriously about kids, and when we’re talking about the desire to have children, those feelings are really strong for me.”

Some names have been changed

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2021/oct/28/scared-late-kids-men-biological-clocks-ageing-procreation-anxieties>

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Covid live: Singapore experiencing ‘unusual surge’ of cases; UK records 39,842 new infections and 165 deaths

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Hong Kong

Hong Kong doubles down on Covid restrictions to fall into line with mainland China



Hong Kong risks losing its appeal for international companies if it maintains strict anti-Covid restrictions on travellers, business people say. Photograph: Jérôme Favre/EPA



Helen Davidson in Taipei

@heldavidson

Wed 27 Oct 2021 21.12 EDT

It used to be an international business centre, the bustling, vibrant commercial gateway to [China](#) and the rest of Asia.

But after weeks of lobbying by Hong Kong's global business community for the government to ease border restrictions and harsh mandatory quarantine to bring it into line with other trading hubs, the authorities have instead responded with even tougher measures.

At her regular press conference on Tuesday, Hong Kong's chief executive, Carrie Lam, announced most exemptions from the city's mandatory and self-funded quarantine periods of up to 21 days will soon be cancelled. The government followed it up on Wednesday by announcing that Covid patients would have to spend [a further two weeks in hospital](#) after they had recovered.

Hong Kong has reported just one local case since mid-August and, eager to have China reopen its borders to the city, Lam has made it clear she has

prioritised Beijing's demand for zero Covid over restarting international travel and "living with the virus".

The changes push Hong Kong further into a life dictated by China's strategy as the rest of the world is opening up, which according to business and expatriate groups is driving people out of the city. It adds to already record levels of population loss as Hongkongerss fled the national security crackdown.

Hong Kong has reported a relatively low 213 deaths and 12,300 cases in the pandemic, largely due to its early border closures. It has since developed a labyrinthine set of [entry requirements](#) depending on a traveller's point of origin, vaccination status, visa status, and quarantine hotel bookings.

The city mostly bans non-residents, and requires entrants to undergo up to 21 days of quarantine. Until Lam's announcement on Tuesday there were exemptions or shorter quarantine stints for some residents, workers, diplomats and business figures – [controversially including Nicole Kidman](#) to film a movie.

The rules have changed repeatedly, at times suddenly banning entrants from entire countries, leaving Hongkongers stranded overseas. Mandatory self-funded quarantine has been criticised by leading health professionals as unnecessarily long and potentially harmful. Coupled with the wholesale changes to Hong Kong's political freedoms and daily life, those who had moved to Asia's world city for work are starting to reassess.

"It's the fact that it's changing all the time," said James Arnold, an Australian finance worker, shortly before leaving Hong Kong after five years living in the city with his family.



Carrie Lam announces the opening of the border with China on Tuesday.
Photograph: Jérôme Favre/EPA

“People I speak to say that they’re not travelling again until they know. So then the pressure builds up, and now the conversation is: I haven’t seen my mum for two years.

“With Hong Kong particularly being so opaque, it’s very difficult, and that opaqueness is not determined by them, it’s determined by Beijing.”

One American expat living in Hong Kong said he was considering leaving after a decade in Hong Kong.

“Other economies are opening up, including most recently Thailand. However if I leave I have to do three weeks in a quarantine hotel. The other reason is ageing parents, and they are not able to come visit me due to the restrictions.”

The number of non-mainland foreign companies is falling, with US companies dropping for a third straight year. Business representatives including the US Chamber of Commerce have voiced frustration at being unable to attract staff or make long-term decisions, and many are now pushing to restructure or relocate to Singapore, or to cities in mainland China such as Shanghai.

Last weekend the Asia Securities Industry and Financial Markets Association warned the government that its approach risked Hong Kong's status as a global financial centre.

Faced with the uncertainty of the border closures on top of the worsening [security and political environment](#), foreign chambers of commerce have warned that many existing companies are leaving, downsizing or moving staff to other Asian cities.

A survey by the US Chamber of Commerce earlier this year found more than 40% of its members were considering leaving Hong Kong, but its president, Tara Joseph, said the government was not responding to their concerns. "We're at the point where it just feels like we're talking to a wall," Joseph [told Bloomberg](#). "So we've stopped writing letters at this point."

'People don't need to be in Hong Kong for access to China'

Talks are under way between Hong Kong and Beijing counterparts about opening travel between the two regions, with China insisting Hong Kong's approach be closely aligned to its own.

China has responded to outbreaks with an elimination strategy of lockdowns, mass testing and travel restrictions, and has made it clear it expects Hong Kong to maintain a similar standard of pandemic control.

And so Hong Kong appears ready to sacrifice its status as an international hub, impose long quarantine on returning residents, and extra quarantine for discharged patients – a move [described by one health expert](#) as wasteful but by another as likely to help the negotiations with China.

Lam has said that international businesses were in Hong Kong because of access to China, and so would not want global travel to resume without their crucial mainland access.

But Arnold, citing Beijing's increasing control over the city, said Lam was missing a key point: "There's a point we get to with Hong Kong, particularly

with changes to national security laws, where people don't need to be in Hong Kong for access to China.

"If they're comfortable working in China they will go [to be based in China]."

The departing international expats and companies join [the separate and massive exodus of Hongkongers](#) fleeing the Beijing-led crackdown on democracy. A phone survey this month by the Chinese University of Hong Kong found 42% of respondents indicated they would emigrate given the chance.

The specific impact of pandemic measures on respondents were unclear, but Dr Victor Zheng Wan-tai, associate director of CUHK's Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, which ran the poll, said the exodus was driven by politics but pandemic-related push/pull factors for people likely offset each other.

"Although you can consider the greater seriousness of Covid-19 in western countries might hinder intentions to leave, the welcoming and [increasingly] relaxed measures in the UK, Canada, and Australia in fact also encourage them to do so," he told the Guardian.

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[Japan](#)

Face mask row in Japan over cost of 80m left in storage unused



The government secured 260m face masks – nicknamed ‘Abenomasks’ after the then prime minister, Shinzō Abe – early last year. Photograph: Eugene Hoshiko/AP

[Justin McCurry](#) in Tokyo

Thu 28 Oct 2021 04.42 EDT

Wearing masks may be [near-ubiquitous in Japan](#), but the government has come under fire after it was revealed that more than 80m face coverings it procured at the start of the [coronavirus](#) pandemic are still in storage, at a huge cost to taxpayers.

The government secured 260m washable cloth masks early last year to distribute to every household in Japan after public anxiety over the virus emptied stores of [medical versions](#).

The government planned to send 120m coverings – nicknamed “Abenomasks” after the then-prime minister, Shinzō Abe – to households and an additional 140m to nursing and childcare facilities.

However, the Nikkei business newspaper reported this week that 82m masks intended for care homes had not been sent as of March this year. Instead, the items – worth ¥11.5bn (£74m) – remain in storage.

The Abenomasks – a play on the then leader’s economic policy, “Abenomics” – quickly invited ridicule on social media. Many people said they were too small, while others complained that they had been sent defective or dirty masks. Some said they had received theirs late or not at all. There were questions, too, over the decision to send just two masks to each household.

Reports said tens of millions of the face coverings had yet to be distributed by the time the nationwide mask shortage had been resolved in July last year.

Aside from the cost of making the masks, storing them is thought to have cost ¥600m between August 2020 and March this year, the Nikkei said, citing information from sources connected to the country’s audit board.

After confirming the accuracy of the Nikkei story, the deputy chief cabinet secretary, Yoshihiko Isozaki, said the government had switched to sending the masks to care facilities on a request-only basis, which had led to the surplus.

Isozaki denied that the government had wasted taxpayers’ money by overestimating demand in the first few months of the pandemic, insisting that the masks had been an “effective way to prevent infections amid the supply shortage last year”.

“Based on the situation at the time, I think it was appropriate,” he said, according to the Kyodo news agency, adding that officials would try to find a way to put the leftover masks to good use.

“Abenomask” was trending on Japanese Twitter following the Nikkei report, with opposition politicians accusing the government of wasting public money.

“We called for the plan to be changed many times, but prime minister Abe saw it as necessary,” wrote Renho, a senior member of the Constitutional Democratic party of [Japan](#). “Now no one, including Abe, is wearing the Abenomask.”

While Abe’s cloth masks were unpopular, the widespread wearing of shop-bought masks has been credited as one factor in the recent [dramatic decline in Covid-19 cases](#) in Japan.

[Graphic](#)

The latest daily report showed just 321 new infections, compared with more than 25,000 in late August.

The recent drop prompted the government on Monday to lift [emergency restrictions on bars and restaurants](#), which for several months had been asked to close early and refrain from serving alcohol.

After a slow start, Japan’s vaccine rollout has quickly gathered speed. More than 70% of the country’s 125 million population has now received two Covid-19 jabs, according to government figures.

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[Art](#)

‘It’s a closure’: the artist making an endless, erasing Covid-19 memorial



Rafael Lozano-Hemmer: ‘For me, art has always been a good vehicle for mourning, but also a vehicle to express continuity.’ Photograph: Photo by Jonathan Dorado



[David Smith](#) in Washington

[@smithinamerica](#)

Thu 28 Oct 2021 02.28 EDT

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer caught the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic. The media artist became infected in March last year during a visit to New York, then unwittingly took the deadly virus back home to Canada.

“As far as I know, I am Patient Zero,” he says by phone from Toronto. “I may have been the one that caused Canada to catch it because I was very early.”

Lozano-Hemmer has an asthma condition “so it did get hairy for about five weeks”, he says, but he was able to avoid hospital with the help of steroids. However, two of his friends, in Mexico and Spain, died from the virus. “It’s been quite a time of loss and a time of mourning.”

The 53-year-old has turned mourning into art with a work that opens at the Brooklyn Museum in New York on Friday. [A Crack in the Hourglass](#) is an ephemeral, ever-evolving Covid-19 memorial that confronts the question of how to commemorate a tragedy that has killed 5 million people with no end in sight.

This is how it works. Members of the public anywhere in the world can submit photos of loved ones lost to Covid-19 at acrackinthehourglass.net along with a personalised dedication. They can then watch via live stream or at the gallery as a modified robotic plotter deposits grains of hourglass sand on to a black stage to recreate the person's image.

Once the portrait is finished, it is slowly erased by gravity. The entire process – which takes about 20 to 40 minutes, depending on the complexity of the picture – is archived on the website, then the same sand is recycled into the next portrait, forming an endless collection of online memorials.



Photograph: Photo by Jonathan Dorado

“It gets laboriously and slowly drawn, one grain of sand at a time, and the slowness is part of it,” explains Mexico City-born Lozano-Hemmer. “It’s kind of like a mandala, trying to create this sense of memory and evoke, crucially, a closure because the piece disappears after it’s been finished for a few seconds.

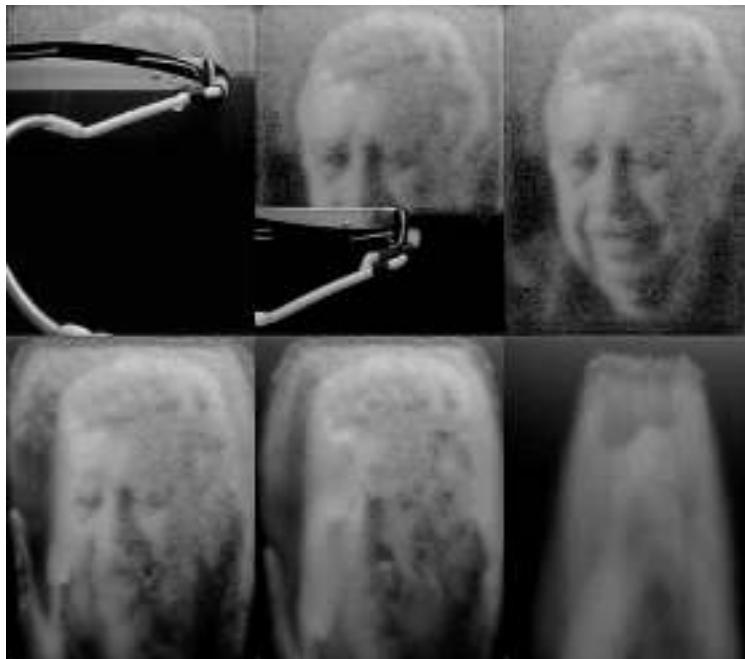
“We document it and make a web page for each and every participant but gravity pulls all of the sand. It gets recovered and then we reuse it for the future portraits. Importantly, some people said, ‘Oh, don’t you think it’s kind of violent the way that the image disappears?’ Well, that’s exactly what a

funeral is. It's a closure. It's this chance to see this image one last time and then help you understand that it's over."

He goes on: "For me, art has always been a good vehicle for mourning, but also a vehicle to express continuity. I like the idea that with this very same small amount of sand we've actually drawn hundreds and hopefully eventually thousands of unique likenesses. There's something about using that same sand that makes it express the sense of continuity and marvelling at how unique each person was."

A Crack in the Hourglass was commissioned by the [Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo](#) in Mexico City and has been running in a remote fashion since last November. The installation in New York, an early pandemic hotspot, will be its first live presentation. Visitors who make a submission while at the museum will be put to the front of the queue so will hopefully get to witness the image of their loved one take shape.

Lozano-Hemmer describes the work – a provocative contrast to soaring 19th- and 20th-century memorials of bronze, granite and marble that adorn many cities – as an “anti-monument”. Its hymn to absence perhaps brings to mind the 9/11 Memorial’s cascading waterfalls in the footprints of the twin towers in New York, or another recent coronavirus tribute by Suzanne Brennan Firstenberg: [700,000 white flags](#) temporarily planted on the national mall in Washington to commemorate the American dead.



Photograph: Courtesy of Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo. Photo: Courtesy of the artist

Lozano-Hemmer cites a further example: Esther Shalev-Gerz and Jochen Gerz's [monument against fascism](#), a 12-metre-tall lead column in Hamburg, Germany, which, between 1986 and 1993, gradually descended into the ground until it disappeared from view. "You go to visit today, you don't see anything. You just see a little plaque reminding you what happened here. You can stand on top of the monolith, which is now just a footprint under your foot. I love that. How else do you represent something as awful?"

He continues: "I find that to remember somebody is not necessarily to cast their name in a monolith and just place it in public space. Sometimes an ephemeral intervention, something that disappears, helps you remember better. Sometimes these systems that allow us to create a unique interruption in the way that we experience time somehow help us affix or relate emotionally to a loss."

Lozano-Hemmer's work also arrives at a moment when [statues of Confederates](#) who fought to preserve slavery are being removed and monuments to problematic figures such as Christopher Columbus and Thomas Jefferson are under interrogation.

He comments: “Whenever we see a memorial or monument, we keep remembering that these are very specific stories being told. Right now in the United States there’s such a conflictive and understandably revisionist history of who gets to be in those monuments because we’re understanding that they come at the expense of exclusions and historical injustice.

“The anti-monument approach is something more fragile, something more relational, something that depends on your participation to exist. That’s the kind of work that I’ve been specialising in for the past 20 years.”

But will the lessons of the pandemic itself endure? Lozano-Hemmer regards the global trauma as a rebuke to narrow nationalism. “Hopefully our sense of solidarity or empathy or sense of how things are interconnected will serve us into the future,” he says. “But maybe that’s a little bit naive. I do hope that we’ve learned something out of all this shit.”

Among the organisers of the installation is curator [Drew Sawyer](#). He says by phone from New York: “Monuments are usually geared towards the idea of nationalism and here it’s a global project that allows access for people to participate no matter where they’re located.

“At the end of the day, Rafael is deeply a humanist – he believes in humanity – and I think the project attempts to create a space that allows a sense of shared humanity even though, of course, we know that the pandemic has affected different countries, different communities unequally.”

- Rafael Lozano-Hemmer: A Crack in the Hourglass is on display at the Brooklyn Museum in New York from 29 October to 26 June
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2021.10.28 - Opinion

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- Covid measures give us choice. They are not restrictions on British life
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OpinionBudget

Rishi Sunak may have called off austerity, but the Tories will never reverse it

[Aditya Chakrabortty](#)





‘So bad is the picture that the head of the IFS, Paul Johnson, exclaimed in some very non-IFS language: ‘Actually awful.’’ Rishi Sunak holds the budget box in Downing Street, 27 October. Photograph: Peter Nicholls/Reuters

Thu 28 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

Two very different budgets were unveiled yesterday afternoon. They concerned the same country and the same economy, and were delivered by the same chancellor. They were the same coin, but each face was implacably opposed to the other.

You might call the first “heads we win” – and boy, was it a triumph. Chancellor [Rishi Sunak](#) stood up in the Commons and laid out boast after joke after strapline. His was a budget for “the age of optimism”, he declared, creating an economy of “higher wages, higher skills … vibrant communities and safer streets”. He listed spending pledges and ran off an itinerary of northern towns about to get building projects. To a house used to grim economic news and tax hikes, it felt like golden sun peeping out from behind black clouds.

Detailing at inordinate length a tiny measure to encourage ships to fly the red ensign – the UK merchant vessel flag – Sunak glanced at the Labour

MPs opposite. See, [he said](#), “red flags are still flying somewhere in this country … even if they are all at sea”. It was a very George Osborne trick, retrofitting a policy to a joke at the opposition’s expense, and how his side loved him for it.

The other budget, the budget of “tails you lose”, got no such mention but it was there all right, buried deep inside the documents released after the chancellor had sat down. Read down the tables published by the Office for Budget Responsibility – the body whose economic forecasts set the limits for any chancellor’s plans – and the picture is much grimmer. Take away surging inflation and record high taxes, and household incomes barely rise at all over the next half decade. Living standards are set to stagnate. So bad is the picture that the head of the Institute for Fiscal Studies, Paul Johnson, exclaimed in some very [non-IFS language](#): “actually awful”.

In that contrast lies the harsh truth of politics in this very punishing winter. A government, with both the majority and confidence to tell whatever story it likes to the media and voters, looks out on a country where motorists punch each other for petrol, major supermarkets put out pictures of veg to fill their empty shelves, and everything from your fuel bill to your grocery bill just keeps on rising, and declares it a triumph.

Boris Johnson believes his own boosterism, the chancellor gets high on his own spending pledges – and anyone who doesn’t share the jubilation was never invited to the party anyway. In the nineties and noughties, budgets would be assessed on their “feelgood factor”. This financial package is the very opposite: it looks great but is feel-bad.

The Treasury is now a government department that looks and behaves like Virgin Rail, complete with friendly fonts and carefully curated social media profile. We had the Seven Days of Sunak leading up to yesterday afternoon, with umpteen press releases announcing carefully uncosted policies. And the surprise and [welcome promises](#) of spending for schools and councils, and even a half U-turn on universal credit, all read as if No 11 had got a very sharp talking-to from the boss next door.

The feel-bad factor is the realisation that none of this matches up to what teachers and town halls and organisations who work to alleviate poverty

actually asked for. Sunak brags of spending as much on school pupils as in 2010 – which is not much of a boast, seeing as it is nearly 2022 and pupil numbers have risen sharply. Preliminary estimates indicate that school funding is still £1,000 less per pupil than it was in 2010.

Though £6bn was taken away from some of Britain's poorest people, in reduced universal credit, only half of that was given back yesterday. Sunak may have shown a little more flexibility than had been expected, but those on universal credit who are unemployed will get nothing from his largesse.

The basic message of today – the most significant in British policymaking this parliament, setting out the shape of the state and budgets for Whitehall departments for years to come – is that the Tories have now called off their decade-long austerity programme, but they will never reverse it. Beyond the NHS, huge swaths of the public realm are now permanently shrunken.

You see it even in the ways groups now lobby the Treasury. The Local Government Association welcomes the fact that councils have just been granted £5bn, even while gently observing they need nearly twice that to stand still. Yet our town halls have been stripped of their budgets and their services by former chancellor Osborne's austerity – and they have given up asking for that money to be restored.

Moreover, Labour has let Johnson off the hook for the way his predecessors smashed up public services. Through diffidence and sheer lack of political skill, Keir Starmer has allowed Johnson to pose as an anti-austerity prime minister, to swear loyalty to net zero carbon, and to fake seriousness about reducing the regional inequality his party did so much to create.

Sunak cut the ribbon on Cop26 by freezing petrol taxes yet again, announcing ever more road-building and halving passenger duty on short-haul flights. Is that what he thinks will help the planet? At a time when Joe Biden and progressive leaders across the west herald a new green politics and a commitment to reforming capitalism, this government is still doing so much damage.

This mob of Brexiteers knows the magic of small numbers. That's why their bus read £350m a week rather than £18bn a year. And that's how they go

about levelling up, a project that would take decades and hundreds of billions by any administration serious about it. This lot hope to get there by throwing around some spare change – look, Mum, £20m for Sunderland – and posing for photos in hard hats and hi-vis jackets.

But the electorate works with small numbers too. That's how we manage our bills and measure how much we have at the end of the month. And when we finally work out that we're not getting better, that's when there'll be hell to pay. Now is not the moment, not with a country still blinking its way out of the worst of the pandemic and a media keener on reporting what Johnson says rather than auditing what he does. But voters can turn into hecklers very easily – witness the Brexit referendum. And when it finally happens, it will look ugly and feel much, much worse.

- Aditya Chakrabortty is a Guardian columnist
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OpinionCoronavirus

Covid measures give us choice. They are not restrictions on British life

[Stephen Reicher](#)



‘Masks certainly don’t constitute lockdown.’ Photograph: Niklas Halle’n/AFP/Getty Images

Thu 28 Oct 2021 03.00 EDT

Calls for the government to introduce extra measures to contain Covid have grown louder. At the last count these came from the NHS Federation, the British Medical Association, Macmillan Cancer, the behaviours and modelling subcommittees of the emergency science group Sage, the president of the Royal College of Emergency Medicine, the president of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, regional public health directors and metropolitan mayors. Yet [the government has responded](#) by saying it sees no need for restrictions, and that it is opposed to lockdown in all forms.

What is telling here is not only the decision not to act, but the way in which the government's framing of the issues serves to justify that decision. Covid *measures* are characterised as Covid *restrictions* or even a *lockdown*. Those calling for action can thereby be characterised as fanatics who want to remove our liberty while the government presents itself as defender of our freedoms, preserving "normality".

This has been an effective strategy. After all, who wants lockdown? So if you are labelled a lockdown supporter, you have probably lost the argument. And the reason why this finger-pointing strategy has gained traction is because – probably more as a result of thoughtlessness than collusion – it is echoed by most of the media. Almost daily I am asked by journalists whether people will accept new Covid restrictions.

So in response to all those queries: if I had to list the most important new measures necessary to supplement vaccines and bring infections down, this is what they would be: to ensure adequate ventilation of all indoor public spaces, which can mitigate the effect of even mass indoor gatherings on infection spread; and to limit the number of contacts people have through measures based on protection rather than restriction – because if you double contacts, you double the number of people we are each likely to infect or be infected by. As the Immensa lab scandal showed, it's very harmful when large numbers of infected people continue to circulate in the community.

Regarding ventilation, I would institute a system whereby all public spaces were required to indicate their "clean air" status, just as kitchens in restaurants are required to indicate their hygiene status. I would also improve the messaging so that people know how important it is and how to know when they are safe. This wouldn't amount to a restriction. It's a protection. It doesn't limit choice. On the contrary, in increasing the number of spaces that are safe, it gives us more choice.

In order to limit social contacts, I would give people the choice to work from home where possible. Studies of mixing show that we had on average 11 or 12 contacts a day pre-pandemic. In the spring of this year, that went as low as three. It then crept up to four in the summer, and now stands at about five. But this isn't because of people socialising more. It's largely down to people mixing at work, whether they want to or not. Obviously, working from home

isn't possible for everyone. But give people the option. Once again, this is not a matter of restriction but of protection; and it increases, rather than limits, choice.

Finally, in order to increase self-isolation – without which all the money spent testing and tracing is largely squandered – I would do the obvious thing. It's the thing that has been called for since the start of the pandemic, and which government has consistently ignored. I would provide comprehensive support for people to stay at home: adequate financial support, support with hotel accommodation for those in crowded, multi-generational households, practical support (if one has caring responsibilities for instance, or needs the dog walked), and emotional support.

The former health secretary Matt Hancock notoriously rejected such measures on the grounds that people might “game the system”; such disdain for the public has come at a huge cost. Self-evidently, here too we don't need a restriction. These provisions would give people the choice to do what is demanded of them to stay at home.

I am certainly not suggesting that these are the only measures needed. A requirement to wear masks in crowded places would involve a mild amount of restriction: though if everyone does wear masks this would provide more choice overall, especially to vulnerable people who may not feel safe to leave home. However, masks certainly don't constitute lockdown, and three-quarters of the public support the wearing of them.

What I would also suggest is that it's unhelpful for the discussion of a “plan B” to focus on such measures as mask-wearing and to characterise the plan as being about restriction – or, worse, about lockdown.

What we need right now, to supplement the vaccine rollout, is a set of protections and support measures to reduce the harm inflicted by Covid and relieve pressure on the NHS. In order to make that clear, politicians and journalists need to reframe the way they talk about the pandemic. Stop asking: will the public stick to the restrictions? Instead ask: will the government protect and support the public to keep one another other safe?

The real irony is that, by conflating protection with lockdown and refusing to implement the protections necessary to bring infections down, keep people safe and relieve the pressure on the NHS, this increases the likelihood, as Sage noted [this month](#), that more draconian measures will be needed in the future.

In the end (and as we saw last year), the true lockdown party would be the “do nothing” party.

- Stephen Reicher is a member of the Sage subcommittee advising on behavioural science

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/oct/28/covid-measures-choice-restrictions-science-freedom-infections-safe>

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Grow concrete? Now we know the climate deniers' nonsense can be debunked

[Zoe Williams](#)





Illustration by R Fresson

Wed 27 Oct 2021 11.32 EDT

Radio wonks are calling it the interview that made its own headlines: TalkRadio's Mike Graham went [head-to-head](#) with Cameron Ford, a young carpenter and environmental activist. In 57 seconds, each more delicious than the last, Graham sets out to unmask Ford as just another blowhard hypocrite and instead checkmates himself so thoroughly that the only logical endpoint to his argument is to claim that [you can grow concrete](#).

Ford's is a masterclass in a new debating style: you don't have to chase every stick your opponent throws for you. Silence can be a bear trap. But the exchange distilled something more profound: an imperturbable confidence and maturity not just in the carpenter but in the environmental cause itself.

Climate change denial is an agile creed. Fifteen years ago, deniers – yet to rebrand themselves “sceptics” – would simply show up on current affairs shows armed with a big rhetorical question, like “What's in a greenhouse gas? You don't know, do you? Well, do you?”

The Green party's Caroline Lucas used to deal with that quite well, but for most people arguing the case, the burden of having to start there, explaining

gases to a man who didn't care about gas – indeed, had absolutely no interest in science or its conclusions – was just head-scrambling. TV debates took on the quality of parables, simultaneously creating content and metaphor: an expert would describe why the world had no time to waste, and then a huge amount of time would be wasted, as some member of the Lawson family (not Nigella!) pooh-poohed their qualifications and asked them why, if their findings were correct, it had recently snowed in Northumberland.

Over time, broadcasting norms changed: if 95% of the world's scientists were in accord, if even politicians had reached a consensus that carbon emissions were dangerous (as they did in 2008), it was no longer responsible to air the views of those who simply refuted it all. So the focus changed, away from “Is climate change happening?” towards “How fast is it, how serious, and is it anthropogenic?”

Sceptics became “lukewarmers” – they accepted that the climate was changing but were unpersuaded on the seriousness of the implications. Climate researchers would turn themselves inside out: can we say this wildfire or that flood is the result of climate change, and with what degree of certainty?

That discursive period didn't survive contact with reality; as freak weather events became commonplace in exactly the way climatologists had predicted, the general appetite waned for asking science to prove its case over and again. The alignments shifted, and that chorus – which had once set out to disprove the entire concept of ecological crisis – set its face against zealots, activists, “woke-armies” and hypocrites. Why does this [Insulate Britain](#) activist live in an uninsulated flat? Why does that one drive a diesel van? Why does Greta Thunberg eat salad out of a plastic container, if she loves the environment so much? Isn't every world leader travelling to Cop26 next week using a plane?

These arguments are inexhaustible: there is no such thing as a life of total environmental purity. You would either have to secede from the world altogether and live in a tree, or be so affluent – with your Tesla and your “[passive house](#)” – that the question would then arise, “If you're so green, how come you haven't given away all your money?” The long game, very

similar to that used against the left, is not so much to land a point as to taint everyone with the same unlovely qualities – hypocrisy, self-interest, shortsightedness – that prove progress is impossible.

There was a time when this line of attack resonated: when we knew that renewable energy was urgently required, but hadn't yet seen it succeed; when there was a general consensus that there was a climate emergency, but governments hadn't yet pledged to act. Or when we had this sense that everything would have to change – from the way we ate to the way we travelled, to where we went and what we bought – but there was no roadmap, no sense of scale.

Environmental activism and campaigning had this critical insecurity at its centre. What if we just weren't up to it, as a species? What if collective action were beyond our wit? From the moment [Al Gore](#) stepped on a plane to tell the world to stop flying, the climate change movement had allowed an open goal, and lukewarmers could just keep popping balls in.

That context has now changed. The galloping success of renewable technologies has fostered an entirely different sense of what's possible. Global youth climate strikes have disrupted all the cliches about what people will accept and how ready they are for change. Political will has shifted – two-thirds of the world's GDP is now in countries that have declared a net zero target.

Yes, it would have been better if we'd got here 30 years ago. Yes, there are still real question marks over whether international collaboration will hold, whether it will be ambitious enough – and there's justifiable, well-founded terror about the warming effects that are already baked in. But there is a new solidity to environmentalism that makes it impervious to the nonsense charge that its activists have to be perfect before they can be heard. It will be interesting to see where the Mike Grahams of the world head next; but only mildly.

- Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist
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The age of extinctionCop26

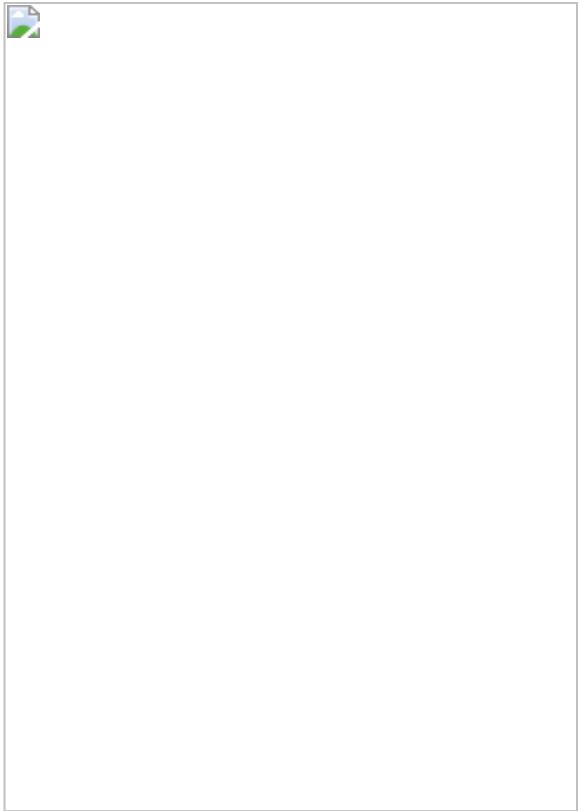
Net zero is not enough – we need to build a nature-positive future

[Frans Timmermans](#) , [Achim Steiner](#) and [Sandrine Dixson-Declève](#)



A recovery plan that puts nature at the centre could lift a billion people out of poverty, create nearly 400 million jobs and deliver \$10tn in economic value. Photograph: Amitava Chandra/Climate Visuals Countdown

The age of extinction is supported by



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Thu 28 Oct 2021 01.01 EDT

Nearly two years after the first reported case of Covid-19, the world is still facing the repercussions. At the same time, the extent of our planetary emergency – of climate crisis, biodiversity loss and inequality – has become evident. As we rebuild our societies and economies, we are faced with a unique opportunity to build a nature-positive future that we must not let slip away. It is time for all of us to chart a planetary response to our planetary crisis – a response that puts nature at the centre.

Our shared global experience with Covid-19 has underlined the interconnectedness of our different systems. The science is clear: climate, biodiversity and human health are fully interdependent. Yet, within discussions around post-Covid recovery, nature is not yet recognised enough as an essential piece in the puzzle of a resilient future for all.

A just, green and nature-positive recovery is a crucial first step towards emergence. It holds incredible potential – from the [creation of 395 million jobs globally to delivering \\$10.1tn \(£7.4tn\) in economic value](#) by 2030 – if anchored in long-term systemic transformation of our societies and economies. This is not to say that the path towards transformation is an easy one. However, inaction would be the worst option of all – we would not just miss out on \$10tn in potential economic value but [lose an additional \\$10tn](#) or more globally over the next 30 years.

The [Planetary Emergency Plan](#), published by the Club of Rome and the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, identifies key actions that support a paradigm shift from limiting the harm we do to the world through our day-to-day activities to a world where we enhance and restore the health of ecosystems. The plan calls on governments and sectors to adopt commitments to protect our global commons and develop national and sectoral roadmaps for regenerative land use and green, inclusive, circular societies.

In shifting towards regenerative models and reforming our food systems, for instance, we simultaneously tackle global health issues such as air pollution and malnutrition, regenerate our land, forests and waterways, enhance our ability to store carbon to reach net zero and reduce the risk of zoonotic diseases. Within the EU alone, health co-benefits are estimated to cover 84% of the costs of reducing greenhouse gas emissions (within a 1.5C scenario).

The science is clear: climate, biodiversity and human health are fully interdependent

Global awareness of the critical role of nature is slowly building and we are seeing signs of significant progress. These past weeks, through the [Nature for Life Hub](#), we have seen how different sectors are leading the way on key

transformations – from [Equator prizewinners](#) redefining prosperity by creating new models of governance and rewiring economic norms by pricing carbon, to farmers pivoting to regenerative practices and biodiversity conservation. The Global Fund for Coral Reefs seeks to [invest \\$500m in coral reef conservation and restoration](#) over the next 10 years. An increasing number of global political leaders have committed to delivering a nature-positive world by 2030 through the [Leaders' Pledge for Nature](#).

While the momentum is heartening, it is important that we go beyond pledges and promises. In practice, investments on the ground still fall far short. According to [new data](#) from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), member countries and key partner economies have so far allocated \$336bn to environmentally positive measures within their Covid-19 recovery packages. But this amounts to only 17% of the total sums so far allocated to Covid-19 economic recovery – decision-makers should carefully consider if this is really enough to build back better.

To successfully emerge into a sustainable future that lies within planetary boundaries, but also lifts a billion people out of poverty, the transition needs to be global – we all need to walk the path towards a nature-positive future together, in the same direction and with comparable speed. With the adoption of its [biodiversity strategy](#) under the [European Green Deal framework](#), the EU strives to lead efforts to get nature on the political agenda and mobilise resources for biodiversity not just in the EU, but in partner countries. Recently, the EU has committed to [doubling its external funding for biodiversity](#), particularly for the most vulnerable countries.

During the next eight months, global leaders will meet during three global Conferences of Parties (COPs) (the [Convention on Biological Diversity](#), the [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change](#) and the [United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification](#)) and the [Stockholm+50](#) conference. These events offer a chance for a global emergency response to our planetary crisis. Among others, finding agreement on the objective of protecting 30% of land and 30% of sea by 2030 will be crucial, and this should be one of the main aims for next year's COP15 in Kunming, China.

We must *all* be part of the solution – to emerge from this emergency together. We simply cannot wait. It is time to act for a nature-positive future – today.

- Frans Timmermans is executive vice-president for the European Green Deal, Achim Steiner is administrator of the United Nations Development Programme and Sandrine Dixson-Declève is co-president of the Club of Rome
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- China Hypersonic missile test 'close to Sputnik moment', says US general
- 'They are protecting the club not girls' More abuse claims hit North American soccer
- Rust shooting Film's assistant director admits gun was not thoroughly checked
- Weatherwatch Late monsoon rains bring floods and landslides in Nepal and India

[Taiwan](#)

Taiwan president says China threat growing ‘every day’ as Biden criticises Beijing



Taiwanese military helicopters rehearsing for the island's national day celebrations near Taipei, amid growing military threats from China.
Photograph: Daniel Ceng Shou-Yi/Zuma Press/Rex

[Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei, and agencies

[@heldavidson](#)

Thu 28 Oct 2021 07.55 EDT

Taiwan is on the “front lines” in the fight for democracy as the threat from China grows “every day”, its president Tsai Ing-wen has said, as US president Joe Biden criticised China’s “coercive” actions in the [Taiwan](#) Strait.

The democratically elected Tsai told CNN she remained open to dialogue with China's leader Xi Jinping, but amid increased risk of military action she had "faith" that the US would come to the island's defence.

She also confirmed the [presence of US military trainers on the island](#), the first time she has personally done so. But she said it was "not as many as people thought", adding: "We have a wide range of cooperation with the US aiming at increasing our defence capability."

In an interview recorded on Tuesday, Tsai repeated calls for other democracies in the region, [including Japan](#), Australia and South Korea, to help support Taiwan.

"When authoritarian regimes demonstrate expansionist tendencies, democratic countries should come together to stand against them. [Taiwan is on the front lines](#)."

Q&A

Why is China increasing its military pressure on Taiwan?

Show

Beijing claims Taiwan as a province of China. Unification is a key goal of the Chinese leader, Xi Jinping, who has not ruled out taking Taiwan by force. Beijing regards Taiwan's democratically elected government as separatists but the island's president, Tsai Ing-wen, has said Taiwan is already a sovereign country with no need to declare independence.

Taiwan holds democratic elections, has a free media, its own military and currency. It has enjoyed de facto independence since the end of the civil war in 1949, when the losing Kuomintang faction fled to the island. The Chinese Communist party has never ruled Taiwan.

Few countries recognise Taiwan's government, many having transferred their formal ties to Beijing from the 1970s onwards. Beijing's "one-China principle" formally declares its claim over Taiwan, and various other nations have their own "One China" policies, which lay out the level of recognition their governments afford Beijing's policy.

Bonnie Glaser, the director of the Asia programme at the German Marshall Fund, said flights into Taiwan's air defence identification zone were increasingly used for training, but also “to signal to the United States and Taiwan not to cross Chinese red lines. And to stress Taiwan’s air force, to force them to scramble, to stress the aircraft, the pilots, force them to do more maintenance and test the responses of Taiwan’s air defence system.”

Helen Davidson and Chi Hui Lin in Taipei

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

Tsai said the Chinese Communist party needed to decide what sort of relationship it wanted with the world.

“Does Xi want to have a peaceful relationship with everybody in the region or in the world, or does he want to be in a dominant position so that everybody listens to him, listens to China?” she said.

China is becoming increasingly isolated on the world stage as Xi stands by the goal of annexing Taiwan. Beijing considers Taiwan to be a province of China, and has not ruled out using force to “reunify”.

Tsai’s comments provoked ire from Beijing. “We firmly oppose any form of official exchanges and military contacts between the United States and Taiwan, oppose US interference in China’s internal affairs, and attempts to provoke and stir up trouble,” said foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin. “The one China principle is the political foundation of China-US relations,” Wang added. “The US should not underestimate the strong determination of the Chinese people to defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity.”

Tsai first came to power in 2016, and was reelected in 2020. Beijing considers her stance - that Taiwan is a sovereign nation with no need to declare independence - to be separatist, and has refused to engage with her government.

Asked why cross-straits dialogue had deteriorated, Tsai said the situation and China's plan for the region had "changed a lot".

China's military activity in the region and acts of intimidation towards Taiwan have grown in recent years, and increased dramatically in the last few months. In the first four days of October China's air force sent 149 warplanes into Taiwan's air defence identification zone.

PLA drills and exercises have also increased in the region as China modernises and expands its military, and in response western nations and allies have increased their military presence and participation in joint exercises.

Taiwan's military can not match China's but Tsai has pledged to increase military spending and focus on an asymmetric defence system to make it more difficult for China to attack or consider attacking.

Last week, Biden set off alarm bells in Beijing by saying the US had a firm commitment to help Taiwan defend itself in the event of a Chinese attack. The White House later downplayed the president's comments, which came during a CNN town hall, and said he did not mean to imply any changes in the US "one-China policy", which recognises Beijing but allows informal relations and defence ties with Taipei.

On Tuesday Tsai told CNN people had different interpretations of Biden's comments but she had faith the US would defend Taiwan if China made a move.

On Wednesday Biden told leaders at the east Asia Summit – an annual meeting of 18 Asia-Pacific nations which was also attended by Chinese premier Li Keqiang – of his concern at China's actions in the Taiwan Strait, saying they undermined peace and stability in the region.

"The president also reiterated the US commitment to the international rules-based order and expressed concern over threats to that order," the White House said in a statement. "He made clear that the United States will

continue to stand with allies and partners in support of democracy, human rights, rule of law, and freedom of the seas.”

His comments came after China said Taiwan had no right to join the United Nations, in response to a US call for the democratic island to have greater involvement in the world body.

In a statement marking 50 years since the UN general assembly voted to seat Beijing and boot out Taipei, the US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, said on Tuesday he regretted that Taiwan had been increasingly excluded on the world stage.

“Taiwan’s meaningful participation in the UN system is not a political issue, but a pragmatic one. That is why we encourage all UN member states to join us in supporting Taiwan’s robust, meaningful participation throughout the UN system and in the international community,” he said.

In response to Blinken’s statement, China emphasised its position that Taiwan’s government had no place on the global diplomatic stage. “Taiwan has no right to join the United Nations,” Ma Xiaoguang, a spokesperson for the Taiwan Affairs Office in Beijing, said. “The United Nations is an international governmental organisation composed of sovereign states ... Taiwan is a part of China.”

With Agence France-Presse and Associated Press

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US military

China's hypersonic missile test 'close to Sputnik moment', says US general



Military vehicles carrying the DF-17 hypersonic ballistic missile at a parade in Beijing in October 2019.

Photograph: Xinhua News Agency Handout/EPA

Associated Press

Thu 28 Oct 2021 01.14 EDT

China recently conducted a “very concerning” test of a hypersonic weapon system as part of its aggressive advance in space and military technologies, America’s top military officer has confirmed.

Gen Mark Milley, chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, was the first Pentagon official to confirm the nature of a test this year by the Chinese military that was [reported](#) as a nuclear-capable hypersonic weapon that was launched into space and orbited the Earth before re-entering the atmosphere and gliding toward its target in China.

Milley said he could not discuss details because aspects involved classified intelligence. He said the United States was also working on hypersonic weapons, whose key features include flight trajectory, speed and manoeuvrability that make them capable of evading early warning systems that are part of US missile defenses.

The US has not conducted a hypersonic weapon test of the sort Milley said China had achieved.

“What we saw was a very significant event of a test of a hypersonic weapon system, and it is very concerning,” Milley told Bloomberg Television.

“I think I saw in some of the newspapers, they used the term Sputnik moment,” he added. “I don’t know if it’s quite a Sputnik moment, but I think it’s very close to that. So it’s a very significant technological event that occurred, or test that occurred, by the Chinese. And it has all of our attention.”

The launch of a Sputnik satellite by the Soviet Union in 1957 stunned the world and fed US fears that it was falling behind technologically in an accelerating arms race in the early stages of the nuclear age.

China has disputed western news reports about its test, saying it was working on technology for a re-usable space vehicle for peaceful purposes.

Asked about Milley’s remarks, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said he was conveying concern about China’s military modernization.

“They continue to pursue capabilities that increase tensions in the region,” she said. “And we continue to have concerns about that. And I think that was reflected in his comments.”

Pentagon press secretary, John Kirby, declined to comment on the test or on Milley’s remarks beyond saying that China’s work on advanced hypersonic weaponry is among a “suite of issues” that cause the Biden administration to be concerned by “the trajectory of where things are going in the Indo-Pacific”.

Asked about progress on US hypersonic weapon technologies, Kirby said it “is real, it’s tangible, and we are absolutely working toward being able to develop that capability”. He declined to provide specifics.

Some US defence experts say the worry about China’s work on a hypersonic weapon that could deliver a nuclear weapon from space are overblown.

James Acton of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace wrote in an essay last week that the United States has long been vulnerable to a Chinese nuclear attack.

“While the prospect of a nuclear attack against the United States is terrifying, this is no Sputnik moment – partly because it’s not entirely clear what was tested, but mostly because the threat of a Chinese nuclear attack on the United States isn’t remotely new,” Acton wrote.

In addition to its advances in hypersonic weapons, China has been expanding its network of underground silos that could be used to launch intercontinental-range nuclear missiles, and it has rebuffed U.S. calls to join nuclear arms control talks. The US also has raised concerns about what it calls Chinese efforts to intimidate Taiwan, the self-ruled island that China claims as part of its territory, and to claim disputed islands and other land features in the South China Sea.

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Sexual abuse in sportSoccer

‘They are protecting the club not girls’: More abuse claims hit North American soccer



Hubert Busby Jr is currently the head coach of the Jamaica women’s team.
Photograph: Brad Smith/ISI Photos/Getty Images

[Matthew Hall](#)

[@matthew_hall](#)

Thu 28 Oct 2021 04.00 EDT

The head coach of the Jamaica women’s national team has been accused by a former player of attempting to solicit sex from her during a recruiting process when he was in charge of the [Vancouver Whitecaps](#) women’s team.

The latest allegations against a prominent figure in North American women’s soccer come at a time [when players around the world](#) have spoken out about a culture of abuse and inappropriate behavior in the sport.

The detailed claims against Hubert Busby Jr date to his time as head coach of the Vancouver Whitecaps women's team in 2010 and 2011 and include alleged sexual advances toward a player he was attempting to recruit. Busby denies the allegations. The Whitecaps also operate a men's team in Major League Soccer and are considered a soccer powerhouse in Canada.

The allegations center on the recruitment of Malloree Enoch. She told the Guardian she initially contacted Busby in September 2010 seeking an administrative job with the Whitecaps women's team. Enoch says Busby suggested she could play for the Whitecaps rather than work in team management.

That invitation triggered a series of incidents during a recruitment process that, according to Enoch, saw the coach give her Adidas sports equipment as gifts, fly her across the country on multiple occasions to attend events with him, take her to restaurants for meals in one-on-one situations, and ask her to stay with him alone in his hotel room while working in his role as the Whitecaps' coach.

According to Enoch, Busby first invited her to spend the night in a hotel room after a dinner in her hometown of Tampa, Florida, in November 2010 which she thought would be attended by several Whitecaps staff. Only Busby was present.

"When he said to stay the night I was like, er, probably not," Enoch said. "The way he spun it was, 'You have been drinking. I don't think you should drive home.' ... It felt like it was a proposition."

The following month, Enoch was flown to Los Angeles believing she would take part in a trial game for the Whitecaps. Enoch recalls that Busby said the game would secure her place on the squad and she would meet her future teammates.

"He picked me up [at the airport] and brought me to the hotel and there was also supposed to be another coach, but no one else showed up," Enoch says. "He took me in the elevator up to my room and he was following me like he was going to show me the room. When we opened the door all his stuff was

in there. He said the club messed up and they would figure it out when we got back [from a restaurant]. When we got back he went straight to the elevator to go up and I stopped in the lobby. He said that he had called the club and there was nothing they could do about it.”

Not only was there no room for Enoch, there were no teammates, and no game. Jennifer Stoltenberg, who was also recruited by Busby to play with the Whitecaps that season, had been invited to play in the proposed trial game but was told four days before the match that it had been canceled. Asked if it was normal for a coach to invite a player to share a room during a recruiting process, Stoltenberg said: “No.”

Enoch ended up sharing the room with Busby for three nights. She says he made no sexual advances towards her during this time.

“It put me in a weird situation,” says Enoch. “I didn’t have the financials to get myself out of the situation. My parents would have wanted me to call them but there was no way I could call them to tell them I had got myself into this situation and put them under that stress. I spent most of the time waiting in the hotel room. He did his own thing during the day and he drove me around and took me to get something to eat.”

Enoch says Busby continued to take an interest in her. In January 2011, Enoch says Busby arranged for her to fly to a coaches’ convention in Baltimore. Enoch says Busby told her that she would sign for Whitecaps at the convention.

At least two other Whitecaps players attended the convention but Enoch was never introduced to them. On this occasion, Enoch says, Busby booked a room she did not have to share. However, the contract signing never took place and she returned home to Tampa.

On a weekend in February 2011, in a room at the Gaylord Palms Resort and Convention Center in Orlando, Enoch’s recruitment process took a twist. In an email written to Vancouver Whitecaps executive Dan Lenarduzzi on 10 August 2011, Enoch detailed some of the incidents alleged to have taken place that weekend.

Enoch told Lenarduzzi that Busby asked her to pick him up from the airport in Tampa and drive him to watch a tournament in Orlando. She had hoped to play for her college team the following day in another tournament but was unable to participate because she had not traveled with the team.

Enoch wrote to Lenarduzzi: “Yet Hubert insisted on going to the tournament to watch my team play. I had to sit on the sidelines because I was not able to travel with the team since I ‘had’ to pick Hubert up at the airport and drive him. This was very unfair to put me in a position like that, and I was rather embarrassed to not be able to dress for the tournament.”

Enoch also alleged to the Guardian that further improper conduct occurred that weekend.

“He insisted that I go to the game he was going to scout in Orlando,” Enoch says. “Time passes and then [Busby says] ‘You must stay because it is so late and the drive is unsafe. I couldn’t afford a room and he wasn’t going to pay for it.’”

Asked if Busby made it clear that the only option was for her to stay in his room, Enoch replied: “Yes.”

“It was messed up the first time I stayed in his room in Los Angeles but I had my own bed and he had his own bed and as awkward as it was it obviously could have been worse,” she says.

“The second one in Baltimore, we did it right. I didn’t expect any [sexual] advances in Orlando even though the one-on-one time was awkward. I didn’t feel like *that* was going to happen.”

In notes taken by Enoch in 2011, which have been seen by the Guardian, the player wrote: “He insisted I stay because now it was late and when I agreed it was far too late to drive back. When we got back to the hotel he again didn’t have a room reserved for me. I had to stay in his room. This particular night there were two beds and I laid in my own bed and he made his way to my bed and at some point was standing over the top of me.”

She told the Guardian that the situation developed from there. “He was on all fours fully on the bed. He was definitely aroused. He tried to kiss and touch me. The light was not on but I don’t think he had his shirt on. I had to negotiate to get him off the bed. I told him I wasn’t interested.”

She added: “I think there was a lot of emotion. I was definitely scared. I had this dream to be a soccer player and I was trying to pursue something I had wanted to do since I was five and now I was put in a really shitty position. He was using this power because he had something that I wanted.

“I was very uncomfortable. I was resistant to it and he tried to pursue it and pursue it and then he got pissed off and went over to his own bed and went to sleep.”

Enoch says she didn’t tell the club of the alleged misconduct at the time because: “I was embarrassed and didn’t want to compromise being able to play. Of course the right thing to say is no. I know to say no but at the same time I know that with his power he can take away any opportunity I could have whether it was for a job or to play. It would be the end game if I pissed him off or didn’t do something.

“What made me feel safe was that he had the backing of such a renowned club and I was protected.”

However, what Enoch would soon learn was that the club’s record of appropriately dealing with abuse by coaches was poor. After abuse allegations from players in 2009, coach Bob Birarda left the Whitecaps by “mutual agreement” but was back coaching teenage girls in the Vancouver area within months. Birada was last year arrested in Vancouver charged with six counts of sexual exploitation, two counts of sexual assault, and one count of child luring over a 20-year period between 1988 and 2008. The charges against Birada are understood to involve at least three former soccer players. He is currently out on bail [and has yet to enter a plea.](#)

Enoch eventually signed for the Whitecaps. While a teammate recalled Busby appearing to give more attention to Enoch than other players during the 2011 season, Enoch says the coach paid little attention to her when she arrived in Vancouver. “The day he dropped me off at the [team] house he

ignored me,” Enoch says. “He was someone who just picked me up at the airport and dropped me off.”

At the end of the 2011 season, Whitecaps players sent an email to club officials detailing a list of complaints concerning inappropriate behavior by Busby and his coaching staff. The email to Whitecaps management reported the Enoch incident in Los Angeles and the allegations also included coaching staff partying until 3am during a road trip and asking players to participate, and Busby becoming involved in a heated confrontation with a member of the public at a team hotel. Players also had other issues with how the team was managed that year, such as the club not providing adequate health insurance cover for international players. The club responded by sending a postseason survey to the players.

In August 2011, Enoch sent her own email to Whitecaps management saying that it was “important that the club is notified of the incidents that took place with Hubert Busby and I. I know that in the past there has been history with inappropriate coach/player relationships. I want the club to be aware that it is happening once again and something needs to be done this time. My biggest concern is, this will be swept under the carpet.”

The Whitecaps responded to the written complaints by Enoch and the team by hiring an ombudsman to interview the players. Following the interviews, Lenarduzzi sent all players on the women’s team an email on 6 October 2011, which stated that following “an analysis of the 2011 season and the women’s program as a whole... it was in the club’s best interest to make a change in coaching staff for our women’s team program.” In the email, Lenarduzzi also told the players that “it is not appropriate to comment publicly on this matter – this includes social media. Thank you in advance for your professionalism and cooperation.”

Kelsey Hood, the Whitecaps team captain in 2011, was among the players who wrote to club management detailing their experiences over the season. Hood recalls being “disappointed but not surprised” by how the Whitecaps dealt with their complaints.

“For them to part ways like that wasn’t good enough,” she says. “They are protecting the name and the club instead of protecting the girls and the players.

“I found out [Busby] got a head coaching job at another club while the people who stood up for Mal [Enoch] were pushed aside. I learned afterward that there were situations like this at the Whitecaps that had happened before. They parted ways with that coach [Birarda] but he ended up coaching girls. That blows my mind. In my career and in my experience there has been a lot of inappropriate behavior that has been found out and there have been no consequences for it.”

When the Guardian spoke to Busby this month, he denied all of Enoch’s allegations. He also denies his contract was not renewed for any inappropriate behavior. “It was more about where they wanted the program to head to at that particular time and where I thought the program was at as well,” Busby says. “I was offered a contract renewal and we obviously couldn’t come to terms. When I went to discuss the contract renewal we decided to go in another direction.” Asked by the Guardian if he was told his contract would not be renewed by the Whitecaps because of allegations by players received by the club, Busby replied: “No.”

Busby was subsequently hired by Western New York Flash before a six-year stint with the Seattle Sounders women’s team where he was both coach and general manager. He joined the Jamaica women’s national team staff for the 2019 Women’s World Cup. He was appointed head coach of Jamaica’s women’s team in 2020.

Today, Enoch has a message for all women facing misuse of power - not just in sport but in everyday life.

“From my experience in coaching young girls, they have dreams and aspirations to be professional soccer players, just as I did.” Enoch says. “When they express their desire to play beyond college, I think to myself that they should probably have a back-up plan. One reason is because if they actually get the opportunity that millions of other little girls want, I can’t guarantee to them that it is going to be a fantastic experience if history continues to repeat itself.

“It’s OK to say no. When you are younger you don’t have the wherewithal to understand or know that there will be other opportunities. But you can wait for the next chance.”

- *The Vancouver Whitecaps did not respond to multiple requests for comment for this story.*
-

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2021/oct/28/abuse-allegations-vancouver-whitecaps-womens-team-hubert-busby-jr-soccer>

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US crime

Rust shooting: film's assistant director admits gun was not thoroughly checked



Santa Fe's county sheriff, Adan Mendoza, speaks during a press conference to update members of the media on the shooting accident on the set of the movie Rust on Wednesday in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Photograph: Sam Wasson/Getty Images

Gloria Oladipo in New York

@gaoladipo

Wed 27 Oct 2021 18.55 EDT

Officials confirmed on Wednesday that live bullets, including the round it is believed killed cinematographer Halyna Hutchins and injured director Joel Souza, were found on the set of the movie Rust last week after actor Alec Baldwin [fired a gun](#) during a rehearsal.

It also emerged that the .45-caliber Colt – which [has been described](#) by law enforcement as a “legit” antique gun, not a prop gun – was not thoroughly

checked before being given to Baldwin, who fired the lead bullet, according to officials and a new court filing.

The new details emerged during a news conference by Santa Fe's county sheriff, Adan Mendoza and district attorney Mary Carmack-Altwies, and in an affidavit filed by the sheriff's department.

According to that affidavit, the film's assistant director Dave Halls admitted to investigators that he "should have checked all" the rounds in the gun before handing it to Baldwin but had not done so.

No decisions have been made yet about any criminal charges.

"We believe that we have, in our possession, the firearm that was fired by Mr Baldwin. This is the firearm we believe discharged the bullet," said Mendoza at Wednesday's press conference.

02:23

Single bullet likely caused death after Alec Baldwin fired gun on set, police say – video

Film-makers showed "complacency" about safety on set, the sheriff said initial inquiries had led the authorities to believe. He added that his investigators believe they have also recovered "the spent shell casing from the bullet that was fired from the gun".

The single, apparently live round that injured Souza and probably also killed [Hutchins](#) was found in Souza's shoulder after he was treated for his injuries at a local medical center, Mendoza said when giving updates on the investigation relating to [last week's tragedy](#) on the set in New Mexico.

Mendoza also said that officials recovered about 600 items of evidence, including three firearms and approximately 500 rounds of ammunition from the set of the desert western that was being filmed.

Two of the guns were non-functional. The third one, handed to Baldwin on the assumption it was safe, was a .45 Colt-style real antique gun.

Possible additional live rounds, including the bullet the authorities believe killed Hutchins, will be submitted to the FBI crime lab in Quantico, Virginia, confirmed the sheriff.

He refused to speculate, when questioned by reporters, about what happened to result in a single bullet evidently killing one and then injuring another person.

Mendoza said more interviews still needed to be conducted, including a possible additional interview with [Baldwin](#), whom the sheriff described as “cooperative”.

The actor was also a producer on the movie, where filming was shut down and has not resumed since Hutchins’s death.

Mendoza also confirmed that his office was investigating reports of informal incidents of target practice having taken place on or near the set before the incident, and rumors of crew members drinking the night before.

“I think the industry has had a record recently of being safe. I think there was some complacency on this set. And I think there are some safety issues that need to be addressed by the industry and possibly by the state of New Mexico,” Mendoza said.

He held the short press conference with the Santa Fe district attorney, Mary Carmack-Altwies.

“All options are on the table … No one has been ruled out at this point,” Carmack-Altwies said, referring to potential criminal charges.

Last Thursday, a gun that Baldwin was holding mistakenly discharged ammunition while he was rehearsing a scene for the movie, noted Rust’s director [in a statement to the sheriff’s office](#).

Baldwin was “cross drawing” the revolver from its holster while Halyna Hutchins, the film’s director of photography, and Souza were standing by, checking camera angles.

When the gun discharged, Hutchins, who was shot in the torso, was airlifted to the University of New Mexico hospital, where she was pronounced dead. Souza was wounded in the collarbone area, taken by ambulance to a medical center, and later released after treatment.

Baldwin, who had been pointing the gun at the camera, was told by crew that the gun was “a cold gun”, meaning the gun contained no ammunition and was safe to use.

“It’s a suspected live round that was fired but it did fire from the weapon and it did cause injury. That would lead us to believe it was a live round,” he said, referring to the round as a lead bullet.

Carmack-Altwies said it could take many weeks for any decisions to be made on whether any actions related to the tragedy warranted criminal charges.

The gun was also handled by Halls, and armorer Hannah Gutierrez-Reed before Baldwin fired it.

Gutierrez-Reed, who was in charge of weapons on the set, told investigators that she had checked guns there but found no “hot rounds” – apparently meaning live ammunition – before the shooting, according to a new affidavit filed by the sheriff’s department on Wednesday.

A public vigil for Hutchins was held on Sunday in Los Angeles outside the union of which she was a member, serving as an unofficial memorial for the 42-year-old mother and film-maker as well as an outlet for frustration and anger over low pay and poor working conditions in Hollywood that many crew members believe were linked to Hutchins’ death.

Just hours before the fatal shooting, several crew members had walked out, unhappy about pay and working conditions as well as safety fears, court papers said.

Halls had been the subject of internal complaint on a previous film set. Maggie Goll, a prop maker and licensed pyrotechnician, said she had raised concerns about Hall’s conduct on set with the executive producers of Hulu’s

Into the Dark TV series in 2019, where some crew were scared about their safety. He has yet to comment.

“This situation is not about Dave Halls … It’s in no way one person’s fault,” Goll said, noting that there were larger problems about the wellbeing of crew that had to be addressed. “It’s a bigger conversation about safety on set and what we are trying to achieve with that culture,” she added.

Further concerns were raised about Halls on Monday, after a producer who communicated with the Associated Press said Halls had been fired from a previous job after a gun went off on a film set and wounded a member of the crew.

In Los Angeles, city councilman Paul Koretz introduced a new resolution on Wednesday to support state legislation that would prohibit live guns and ammunition from production sets.

“The idea that even one misfire has caused danger is outrageous. The clear solution is banishing live guns and ammunition from the sets of television and motion picture productions to eliminate all possibility of human error in the handling of weapons so that flawless oversight and restrictions guarantee that these kinds of accidents never happen again,” Koretz said.

Maya Yang and agencies contributed reporting

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World weatherwatchEnvironment

Late monsoon rains bring floods and landslides in Nepal and India



A flooded highway near Rampur in India's Uttar Pradesh state Photograph:
AFP/Getty Images

Matt Andrews (Metdesk)

Thu 28 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

Late monsoon rains have caused significant damage in parts of Nepal, as well as the Indian states of Uttarakhand and Kerala.

Landslides swept away homes, bridges and roads after heavy rain and flash floods. Uttarakhand saw some of the heaviest rainfall, with more than 300mm recorded in 24 hours. Almost 200 people are known to have died and dozens are unaccounted for. The Indian monsoon typically runs until September but was delayed this year.

Meanwhile, a deep area of low pressure named by Météo-France as Storm Aurore brought strong winds and heavy rainfall to parts of Europe last week. Four people were killed in Poland, and power outages and transport disruption were reported in France, Germany and the Netherlands. There were 250,000 homes left without electricity in France, and the Deutsche Bahn cancelled all long-distance trains in Germany's populous North Rhine-Westphalia state.

After relentless and exceptional drought conditions across the US Pacific coast, the past few days have seen some relief for parts of California and the Pacific north-west in the form of heavy rainfall and snowfall thanks to a category 5 atmospheric river. Atmospheric rivers are long, narrow regions of air that transport large quantities of water vapour through the atmosphere. Despite the wet conditions, a recent report by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration drought taskforce foresees drought conditions continuing well into 2022.

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Headlines

- Climate crisis Cop26 will be whitest and most privileged ever, warn campaigners
- Afghanistan Cop26 delegate applications rejected days before event
- Climate crisis 1.5C is ‘real science’, not just talking point, experts warn world leaders
- Australia UK’s top climate adviser launches scathing attack on eve of Cop26

[Cop26](#)

Cop26 will be whitest and most privileged ever, warn campaigners



Many campaigners and observers have given up travelling to Glasgow due to visa problems, Covid rules and ‘scarce and expensive’ accommodation.
Composite: Guardian/AFP/Getty

[Matthew Taylor](#)

Sat 30 Oct 2021 05.00 EDT

The global climate summit [in Glasgow](#) will be the whitest and most privileged ever, according to campaigners, who warn that thousands of people from frontline communities in the global south have been excluded.

World leaders and delegates are expected to be joined by celebrities, corporate chief executives and royals at the critical two-week event.

But the [Cop26 Coalition](#) – which represents indigenous movements, vulnerable communities, trade unionists and youth strikers around the world

— says that up to two-thirds of those it was helping to travel to Glasgow have given up, overwhelmed by a combination of visa and accreditation problems, lack of access to Covid vaccines and changing travel rules — as well as “scarce and expensive” accommodation.

Rachael Osgood, director of immigration at [Cop26](#) Coalition, said: “This event, because of multiple combining factors, most of which fall under the responsibility of government, is set to be the most elite and exclusionary Cop ever held.”

She said that, while it was difficult to put a precise figure on the numbers of observers, campaigners and civil society groups from the global south who had been prevented from coming, the impact on the negotiations would be significant.

“What we know for certain is that thousands of people from the global south are being excluded, and they represent tens of millions of voices from those right on the frontline of this crisis which are not going to be heard ... We are looking at global north countries making decisions with minimal accountability to those least responsible and most affected, and that goes against everything Cop should stand for.”

Campaigners say activists and observers have been prevented from coming by:

- an underlying “hostile attitude” from the UK Home Office towards those travelling from countries in the global south, particularly Africa, which has led to many visas being refused;
- a failure to honour a pledge to offer Covid vaccines to all delegates, leaving many to search for vaccines in countries with little or no access;
- constantly changing Covid restrictions for those entering the UK, with travel banned from countries on the UK’s red list, which, [until this month](#), included many of the countries worst hit by the climate crisis. This has left many to seek costly and complicated routes to Glasgow via third countries;

- an [accommodation crisis in the city](#) that has made finding a safe place to stay difficult and expensive. Campaigners have set up a “homestay network” to try to link people up with spare rooms, but say they have thousands on their waiting list

Asad Rehman, of the Cop26 Coalition, said: “Cop26 is going to be overwhelmingly white and rich this year. The UN climate talks are always exclusionary, but this year the logistics of this summit have been extraordinarily badly managed. On every level, those who are most affected by this crisis have been systemically silenced and excluded.

“It has become increasingly clear that the UK government has prioritised the Cop being a global platform to promote its and other rich countries’ interests, whilst delivering an inclusive and legitimate Cop is a distant afterthought.”

Lidy Napil, of the Asian People’s Movement on Debt and Development, who is based in the Philippines, said these hurdles had made it impossible for her team to attend. “The challenges and complications related to vaccines, visas and quarantine requirements that the UK failed to adequately address are the main reasons why we will not be at Cop26,” she said.

She said that while Cop processes had always been “dominated by wealthy countries and corporate interests”, the lack of representation from the global south would exacerbate those trends.

“Given far less southern participation, especially of movements, Cop26 will fail to bring us closer to climate justice,” she said.

Dorothy Guerrero, of campaign group Global Justice Now, also warned that an absence of people from the global south would have dire consequences. “This will only benefit rich nations that will decide on key issues and benefit their transnational corporations with limited protests from developing countries and NGO observers.”

A spokesperson for Cop26 said the UK government was “working tirelessly” with the Scottish government and the UN to “ensure an inclusive,

accessible and safe summit ... with a comprehensive set of Covid mitigation measures”.

They added that they had secured about a third of hotel rooms in [Glasgow](#), Edinburgh and the surrounding areas, making them available at a fair price, and were offering to fund the required quarantine hotel stays for registered delegates arriving from red-list countries and to vaccinate accredited delegates.

But campaigners say the situation on the ground for those wanting to travel from the global south is dire. Osgood said that in some of the countries facing the worst impacts of climate breakdown, almost no one – including official delegates and observers – had been able to secure travel routes or visas.

“Haiti is a prime example,” said Osgood. “To get a visa, you need to have your fingerprints and face scanned, but there is no facility for this in the country, so anyone wanting to go has to travel to the Dominican Republic to complete their application. But this is expensive and limited, so no observers or civil society groups will make it to Cop, which is a travesty.”

Osgood, who runs the coalition’s visa and legal advice service, said she had raised this and many other issues with the UK [Home Office](#), but it took them three months to even identify a Cop liaison officer to discuss cases with.

The Home Office said it had been working with delegates from around the world on their visa applications “to ensure Cop26 is inclusive and accessible”.

A spokesperson said: “We aim to process all visa applications within 15 working days – but those which are more complicated, or when individuals do not provide the required information, may take longer.”

But Osgood said: “The road to this Cop for many people is broken and strewn with structural obstacles, it is an unequal and unjust system and that will have a huge impact on the climate justice outcomes.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/oct/30/cop26-will-be-whitest-and-most-privileged-ever-warn-campaigners>

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[Cop26](#)

Afghans have Cop26 delegate applications rejected days before event



The six have previously worked for either UN programmes, the previous pre-Taliban government in Afghanistan or environmental bodies in their country. Photograph: Scott Heppell/AP

[Diane Taylor](#)

Sat 30 Oct 2021 05.00 EDT

Six environmental experts from [Afghanistan](#) who were due to attend Cop26 as their country's delegates to the global conference have had their applications rejected just days before the event begins.

The six – five men and one woman who cannot be named because it could jeopardise their safety – were looking forward to travelling to the event to help make the concerns of [Afghans about the climate emergency](#) heard at the summit.

All have fled the Taliban and are in hiding in neighbouring countries from where it would be easy to travel to the UK.

No reason has been given for the six applications being rejected. Initially they thought either the Home Office or the [Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office](#) (FCDO) had vetoed their trip to the UK.

However, FCDO sources told the Guardian the decision had not been made by any UK government department. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) secretariat would not be registering delegates from Afghanistan to [Cop26](#) pending further guidance from the Bureau of the Cop, the sources said.

The six, who have previously worked for either UN programmes, the previous pre-Taliban government in Afghanistan or national environmental bodies in their country, say they are very upset with UNFCCC's decision to bar them from attending this crucial conference.

"We are very disappointed with this decision. We have met all the requirements for the visa but the UNFCCC secretariat rejected our nominations without any proper reasons – maybe due to the ongoing political situation in Afghanistan," said one of the delegates.

Another said: "By taking this action the UNFCCC secretariat stifled the voice of millions of Afghan victims of climate change impact. Climate change does not respect borders. They should have not mixed the environment with politics. We were hoping to attend Cop26 to raise the voice of millions of Afghan victims of the adverse impacts of climate change."

While Afghanistan is [responsible for only 0.03% of global emissions](#), the country is severely affected by the climate crisis.

An initial letter to the delegates from UNFCCC secretariat asked for the UK's assistance to speed up the process of visa applications for the six delegates and to issue them with visas to facilitate their participation at Cop26.

However, a subsequent letter stated: “We are glad to inform you that you have been nominated to attend UNFCCC session Cop26 on behalf of Afghanistan. However your status at the moment is ‘rejected’.”

The UNFCCC has not responded to repeated requests by the Guardian to explain the U-turn on the six delegates attending the conference.

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[Cop26](#)

Climate experts warn world leaders 1.5C is ‘real science’, not just talking point



The Greenland ice sheet, the melting of which would raise sea level rises, could be tipped into a state of irreversible decline beyond 1.5C. Photograph: Mario Tama/Getty Images

[Fiona Harvey](#) Environment correspondent

Sat 30 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

The [1.5C temperature limit](#) to be discussed by [world leaders at critical meetings this weekend](#) is a vital physical threshold for the planet’s climate, and not an arbitrary political construct that can be haggled over, leading climate scientists have warned.

World leaders are meeting in Rome and Glasgow over the next four days to thrash out a common approach aimed at holding global temperature rises to

1.5C above pre-industrial levels, the lower of two limits set out in the 2015 Paris climate agreement.

But some countries are unwilling to peg their emissions plans to the tougher goal, as it would require more urgent efforts. They prefer to consider long-term goals such as net zero by 2050.

Johan Rockström, the director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research and one of the world's foremost climate scientists, warned that the 1.5C target was not like other political negotiations, which can be haggled over or compromised on.

"A rise of 1.5C is not an arbitrary number, it is not a political number. It is a planetary boundary," he told the Guardian in an interview. "Every fraction of a degree more is dangerous."

Allowing temperatures to rise by more than 1.5C would vastly increase the risk of irreversible changes to the climate, he said. For instance, it would raise the risk of the Arctic losing its summer ice, with dire knock-on effects on the rest of the climate as the loss of reflective ice increases the amount of heat the water absorbs, in a feedback loop that could rapidly raise temperatures further.

The Greenland ice sheet, the melting of which would raise sea level rises, could also be tipped into a state of irreversible decline beyond 1.5C.

A rise of more than 1.5C would also threaten changes to the Gulf Stream, which could also become irreversible. It could result in catastrophe for biodiversity hotspots, damage agriculture across swathes of the globe, and could inundate small islands and low-lying coastal areas.

02:33

2050: what happens if we ignore the climate crisis – video explainer

"This is real science – it is a real number. Now we can say that with a high degree of confidence," he said, as 1.5C indicated a physical limit to the

warming the planet can safely absorb.

Rockström added: “[Staying within] 1.5C is achievable. It is absolutely what we should be going for.”

The leaders of the G20 group of the world’s biggest economies – developed and developing – are meeting on Saturday in Rome. They will fly to Glasgow for Monday morning, where they will be joined by more than 100 leaders from the rest of the world for the [UN Cop26 climate summit](#).

The UK, as host of [Cop26](#), has set the aim of “keeping 1.5C alive”, but some countries – including China, Saudi Arabia and Russia – have been reluctant to agree to focus on the 1.5C limit, preferring to point out that the Paris agreement states the world must hold temperatures “well below” 2C while “pursuing efforts” to stay within 1.5C.

However, scientific research since the Paris agreement was signed has added to a compelling body of global science showing that if temperatures are allowed to rise by more than 1.5C, the consequences will be severely damaging and many are likely to be irreversible.

Other leading climate scientists echoed Rockström’s warnings. Mark Maslin, a professor of Earth systems science at University College London, said: “The report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published in 2018 made the science very clear: there are significant climate impacts all round the world even if we limit warming to 1.5C.

“The report also showed there were significant increases to impacts and damages if we overshoot this target … These results were fully supported by the very latest 2021 IPCC science report [published in August]. This is the science and these agreed climate targets set by the Paris agreement are non-negotiable and have been agreed already by all 197 countries of the UN.”

Joeri Rogelj, the director of research at the Grantham institute, Imperial College London, said: “Science tells us that climate change risks increase rapidly between 1.5C and 2C of warming. Looking at the last years, during which we experienced some of the impacts of a 1.2C warmer world [such as

heatwaves, flooding and extreme weather] – one would be hard pressed to call this safe.”

05:18

Why the world is getting hotter and how you can help – video explainer

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Cop26

UK's top climate adviser launches scathing attack on Australia on eve of Cop26



The UK's Climate Change Committee chair Lord Deben has questioned if Australia has 'got a proper program' to meet its net zero commitment.
Photograph: Scott Heppell/AP

[Tory Shepherd](#)

Sat 30 Oct 2021 03.34 EDT

The UK government's climate change adviser has launched a scathing attack on Australia's net zero commitment on the eve of critical talks in Glasgow.

Lord Deben, the Climate Change Committee chair, [told the BBC](#) on Saturday there was "no indication" that the Australian prime minister, Scott Morrison, had a plan to deliver on the commitment to net zero that was "squeezed out of him".

“It’s very sad that a great country like Australia should change our climate,” he said.

“Because that’s what happens. If you allow people to keep on doing this, it’s our climate as well as theirs that’s changed.”

Morrison is in Rome for the G20 summit, and on his way to Glasgow for Cop26, after [initially appearing reluctant](#) to make the trip.

He says the federal government has a plan to meet the net zero target, but has announced [no new policies, no real details](#), and is relying on future technology “breakthroughs” to meet the target.

Experts say the claim carbon offsets could reduce emissions by up to 20% relies on a “[gross manipulation](#)” of data.

Morrison’s “projection” of a 30-35% emissions reduction by 2030 is [not a new target](#) – Morrison is sticking with the current target to reduce emissions by up to 28% on 2005 levels.



Lord Deben says he would ‘love to see Australia rejoin the pack’ and most leaders are beginning to recognise how serious the threat of climate change is. Photograph: Troika/Alamy

Lord Deben, who was a minister in Margaret Thatcher's conservative government and environment minister under her successor John Major, said most world leaders were beginning to recognise how serious the threat of climate change is.

“(But) not all leaders are like that. I’m afraid that if you look at [Scott Morrison](#) from Australia, we’ve squeezed out of him a commitment to net zero in 2050 but there’s no indication at the moment that he’s got a proper program for that,” he said.

“But in general the world has changed.”

Lord Deben said he would “love to see Australia rejoin the pack”, and that climate change was an existential threat.

“If we don’t do it then we really do risk the destruction of everything we’ve ever known,” he said.

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It’s not the first time Lord Deben has singled Australia out for criticism. In September he said Australia was “[recalcitrant](#)”. He also warned Australia would be “left behind”, and should really understand what [needs to be done](#).

Back in 2015 he said the then prime minister Tony Abbott’s 2030 target – which remains under Morrison – was “[pathetic](#)”.

“Global warming won’t wait for Mr Abbott and his government. Mr Abbott’s hubris is staggering,” he said.

From Rome, Morrison said Australia’s policy was a “significant commitment” and compared it to the hunt for a Covid vaccine.

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Photograph: Tim Robberts/Stone RF

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“(I’m) looking forward to updating other leaders on our plans and programs, particularly on our keenness to work with other countries on those technology breakthroughs that frankly, when you’re talking about hitting net zero emissions, it’s the same sort of challenge the world faced when you’re looking for a vaccine, a vaccine to end the pandemic,” he said.

Asked if he thought Glasgow might “end up a bit of a damp squib” because China and others were not turning up, he said: “Australia’s taking steps forward. We’re taking strong steps forward.”

Morrison also said he would meet with Australia’s former finance minister Mathias Cormann. In his new job as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development secretary general, Cormann has called for a price on carbon [despite sinking a carbon price plan when he was in government.](#)

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[Ai Weiwei](#)

Interview

Ai Weiwei: ‘It is so positive to be poor as a child. You understand how vulnerable our humanity can be’

[David Shariatmadari](#)



Ai Weiwei at his home in Portugal: ‘Once you don’t have a place to go, you can go anywhere’. Photograph: The Guardian



Sat 30 Oct 2021 05.30 EDT

Ai Weiwei is hard to pin down. For the first few minutes of our Zoom call, him bleary-eyed at his computer, I think he’s talking to me from his new base in Portugal. My mistake – it’s Vienna, where he’s planning a show for next March. A year and a half ago, Ai was giving [interviews about his new life in Britain](#); before that it was Germany, the country that offered him safe harbour when he finally left China in 2015, after years of hounding by the authorities and a spell in detention. So where does he actually live?

“Yeah, the question always comes up,” he says sheepishly. He moved to Cambridge so his son, Ai Lao, could improve his English. His son is still there, but in the meantime, “I found a piece of land near Lisbon, so I’m kind of settled there, but that’s only for the past year”.

A star of the Chinese art scene from the mid-90s on, Ai became a household name in the west after he helped conceive the “bird’s nest” stadium in Beijing for the 2008 Olympic Games, before [rejecting](#) its use as “culture for the purpose of propaganda” and refusing to attend the opening ceremony. His many projects since have continued to needle the Chinese state, up to

and including [Coronation](#), his 2020 documentary about the coronavirus outbreak in Wuhan.

You'd expect an artist as globally famous as him to do a lot of international travel, of course. But there's something more to his un-rootedness. He explains, a little gnomically: "Once you don't have a place to go, you can go anywhere."

You mean, once you've left your homeland, you can make a home wherever you like? The word doesn't sit well with him. "I'm still a Chinese citizen, a passport holder. But I don't feel that it is my homeland. I speak Chinese and I'm a typical Chinese – but I never had a home there. The year I was born, my father was exiled. So my story started with no home, just being pushed away to a very remote area as some kind of enemy of the state."



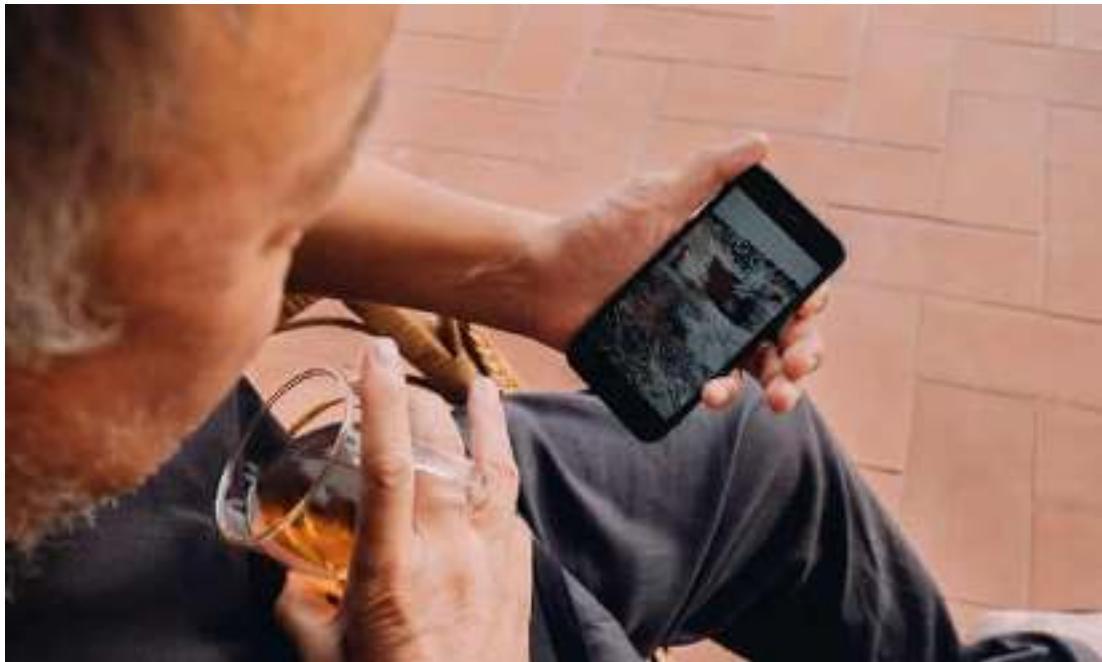
Ai Weiwei with his father, Ai Qing, at Tiananmen Square, Beijing, 1959.
Photograph: Courtesy of Ai Weiwei

It's true that Ai's trajectory is impossible to understand without knowing about his late father, Ai Qing. Regarded as one of China's greatest poets, Ai Qing was a leftwing hero, having been imprisoned in 1932 for his links to communism. Later, he was a friend and an intellectual sparring partner of the Communist party leader [Mao Zedong](#), before dramatically falling from

grace in a purge of so-called “rightist” intellectuals. This story is told in painstaking but often beautiful detail in Ai’s new autobiography, 1000 Years of Joys and Sorrows. It’s more like a dual biography, with Ai Qing’s story taking up the first 150 pages, a useful corrective for westerners who know little about him.

What jumps out from those passages is the sheer cruelty of Mao’s system of ideological enforcement, and the abject conditions Ai experienced as a child. The bleakest period was when Ai Qing and his two sons lived in a dugout in “Little Siberia”, part of China’s far north-west. Their “bed” was a raised dirt platform covered with wheat stalks, with a square hole in the roof to let in light. The paraffin lamp they used inside made their nostrils black with soot. Rats were a constant problem, as were lice. Ai Qing’s job for much of this time was cleaning out communal toilets, which consisted of holes over a cesspit. In winter, this involved “breaking up the frozen faeces into manageable pieces and shifting them out of the latrine one by one”. Eventually, his father was rehabilitated, and the family moved to Beijing.

When I ask Ai about this period he picks up his phone and turns it to face the camera. His homescreen is a black-and-white photograph of the dugout, a reminder of how difficult life can be – or at least that’s what I assume. “Well, it was a hard time, but you have a lot of joy, too.” How so? “You feel safe. You’re under there, you’re at a different level from other people. They’re all above you, but you feel safe.” He goes further: “I think it is so positive, to be poor, and to have an empty life as a child. I think you establish an understanding of how vulnerable our humanity can be.”



Ai Weiwei's homescreen, showing the dugout where his family lived.
Photograph: The Guardian

Ai is given to bold statements like this that don't necessarily stack up. The experience of grinding poverty may be useful to look back on, but perhaps only when cushioned by wealth. I'm not sure he always thinks through the implications of what he says, but I'm not sure he cares all that much either. Perhaps this is the legacy of his childhood: when you've already been rejected in the most extreme way, there's little to fear from people's opinions of you. But it also seems to have engendered a kind of nihilism.

I ask what motivates him. "Good question," he answers. "You know, without your interview, I wouldn't know what to do today. I have so many shows, but I never initiated a show and never contacted a curator in my lifetime." If it wasn't for people getting in touch, he says, "I might be wandering on the beach, trying to find some beautiful shells."

It's an extraordinary comment for someone as prolific as Ai. Each year he produces several major solo exhibitions (in 2016 he had [17](#), from California to New York to Turin to Athens). His work takes in photography, sculpture, film and social experiments such as Fairytale, in which he arranged for 1,001 Chinese travellers to visit the German town of Kassel. At other points he has strayed into something resembling journalism, attempting to

document the names of children killed in the Sichuan earthquake when the authorities failed to record them. He is assisted by a small army of helpers: he says their number varies, but “if we do large projects it would be hundreds, sometimes thousands”.

As a child, he says, he had no dreams for his future, because such things ran counter to communist ideology. Ambition was a dirty word: “If the doors and windows are shut, you don’t have a view.” But even after he escaped to New York in his early 20s, he drifted, enrolling at Parsons School of Design but flunking his final exams by simply writing his name at the top and nothing else. He rented an apartment on the Lower East Side, worked night shifts at a print shop, and lived the life of a flâneur. At St Mark’s Church one evening, he listened to [Allen Ginsberg](#) recite a poem about China; it contained a line about “revolutionary poets [sent] to shovel shit in Xinjiang”. Ai approached him, explained the connection, and the two became friends. He remembers him as “a wonderful man, very kind, but with the heart of a rebel”.



Allen Ginsberg and Ai Weiwei in New York, 1988. Photograph: Krause, Johansen/Courtesy of Ai Weiwei

His wanderings also took him to the Strand Bookstore on Broadway, where one day he picked up *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol*, a book of the artist’s

deadpan observations on fame, love and work. It obsessed him. He singles out Warhol as one of the key influences on his life, alongside the conceptual artist Marcel Duchamp, his father and, more surprisingly, the philosopher Wittgenstein.

“I was so fascinated by this individual who seemed so empty, but at the same time was a true reflection of our American culture,” he says of Warhol. He is disappointed that they never met, though he attended a couple of gallery openings in the great man’s presence. “Warhol understood irony so well, but also tells the truth. Very harsh truth in his writing. He was 50 years ahead of his time. He understood free expression, media and communication, he was taking selfies all the time, recording people all the time.” Does he feel they have a lot in common as artists? “We are both sincere and insincere at the same time. And we love life, but without goals, without purpose.”

I point out that Ginsberg and Warhol – and Wittgenstein for that matter – were gay. “Gay people in society have a complicated state of mind … they are generally more sensitive and smarter,” Ai says. This is another one of those disarmingly bald statements that someone more anxious about how their words are received would avoid. I find myself trying to reshape it for him: is it that they have a more complicated relationship with society? “They are complicated, and that complication gives them insecurity, because they’re different. And that insecurity makes them, you know, more sensitive – they are artists, poets, musicians.” I find this an amusingly pat description of the gay condition, but I’ll take it.

Back to Warhol: what would he have made of the internet? Would he have enjoyed memes and social media? Ai thinks no, he probably wouldn’t – what he liked about selfies and live streams (as you could credibly call some of his eight-hour movies) was that he was the only one doing it. Ai, on the other hand, is famous for his love of Twitter, seeing it as a tool for free expression and connection. And while you imagine Warhol would have revelled in our current state of advanced capitalism, for Ai there is no bigger threat to humanity.

“I used to think the danger was from authoritarianism. But now, I really sense that corporate capitalism is a bigger danger to the whole human

environment. It's going to totally destroy human society by encouraging the desire just to have more, just to get profit." Does that mean he's come full circle to communism? "I don't think so. I hate the communist viewpoint. I think that only belongs to the past." So what is his solution? "We have to go back to humanism." What does that mean, though? "Respect for individuals' lives, property and development," he says, throwing me slightly by mentioning property, which suggests at least some sympathy with capitalism. Humanism centres "individuals rights to be themselves and speak out about what they're thinking".

If other aspects of his political thinking are confused, there's no mistaking Ai's commitment to free speech. Donald Trump may indeed pose a danger to democracy, he says, but the "much bigger danger" are social media platforms that "manipulate our thinking" by banning him. The freedom to say it as he sees it is perhaps the only real guiding principle of Ai's eclectic career, and provides another link back to his father, who wrote Mao a long letter about the need to preserve artists' ability to speak the truth, whatever the circumstances.

Ai tells me he has "no plan, no goal, no purpose of my life". But that's not quite right. His plan is to be himself, unfiltered. It's a quest that explains his restlessness and dizzying productivity, which, even during the pandemic, gave rise to more shows, more public art, 10,000 printed face masks, the Wuhan film and, of course, the book. I ask him what he thinks the job of an artist is. "The job of an artist is to have no job," he laughs. What matters is to "stay alert" and "speak out with truth". Ai Qing would no doubt agree.

1000 Years of Joys and Sorrows by Ai Weiwei, translated by Allan H Barr, is published on 2 November by The Bodley Head.

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Cop26

Cop26: the time for prevarication is over

Katharine Viner



Part of the Tehachapi Pass windfarm in California, one of the first large-scale windfarm areas developed in the US. Composite: Guardian/Global Warming Images

Sat 30 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

Summits do not always live up to the name. They can get bogged down in detail and disagreement, never really reaching altitude.

That is often the case with the annual UN climate summits known simply as the Cop, which have earned a reputation since the first was held 26 years ago for being bewildering marathons that overrun and underdeliver.

This year, perhaps more than any other year, the world needs the summit that starts tomorrow in Scotland to hit the heights. We've had make-or-break moments before, of course, when the climate movement has teetered on the brink of collapse at a Cop only to be rescued by a deal (or fudge) in injury time.

But Glasgow 2021 feels even more do-or-die, because the climate emergency is more finely balanced than ever before between hope and despair, and the effects are already all around us.

One path, the path of short-sighted national self-interest, leads us deeper into the crisis that Guardian reporters are covering with ever greater frequency around the world: the heatwaves of Russia, eastern Europe and the west of North America this year; the floods in China, Germany, India, England, Greece, Thailand. The drought in eastern and southern Africa, threatening hunger, even famine, in places such as Madagascar. The wildfires in Australia, the United States, Canada, Europe, recurring with greater intensity, greater destruction.

Increasingly, at certain times and in certain places, the Earth is literally becoming unlivable. And this is a world warmer by just 1.2C over pre-industrial levels. A world two or even three degrees warmer in which our descendants will swelter in a few decades' time if we carry on regardless is a terrifying prospect.

But the word “crisis” has a second, less well-known meaning, from the original Greek – a turning point, an opportunity. What is perhaps different about this Cop, this moment, is that the opportunity is greater than ever.

There has never been as much innovation, investment and interest in green technology. The revolution in renewables, which have soared from a niche interest 30 years ago to a cheap, global alternative energy source that provides more than one quarter of the world’s electricity, is one of humanity’s most remarkable achievements.

[Heat pumps](#) and [hydrogen](#) are becoming household words, if not quite yet household appliances. Batteries, [zero-carbon ships](#) and [aeroplanes](#), [meat-free food](#) and electric vehicles and other emissions-cutting technologies are all still in their infancy, full of potential. Science, so vital in our dogfight with Covid, is once again playing its part.

Now we need the politicians to play their part too. The fate of billions rests in their hands. Business and consumers are showing willing – but people take their cue from the government, from policy, from binding commitments.

So the [Cop26](#) climate summit, which starts in Glasgow tomorrow must be the moment when the hope generated by the Paris deal in 2015 becomes real.

The conference needs to find agreement on deep cuts to emissions. It needs to provide serious funding for developing nations to help them cope with the impacts of extreme weather which are already being felt. It needs to commit to ending the razing of forests.

And most importantly, it needs to set targets for short-term progress and agree on a road map for action for the next decade. Every minute decisions are delayed, greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise – and the task ahead becomes more difficult, and urgent.

Taken together, ambitious measures in these areas could keep alive the goal of limiting global heating to 1.5C. It will be hard. The UN climate

convention operates by the consensus of all nations, and geopolitical shifts have fractured international cooperation in many areas in recent years.

But we all live under the same sky. We must hold on to the fact that if the necessary systemic changes take place – from energy to transport to food – we could build a cleaner, healthier world.

As [Nicolas Stern, the British economist and author of the seminal 2006 government study into the costs of climate change, says](#), a [just transition to a low-carbon economy](#) is the only viable future for humanity.

The time for prevarication is over.

History will not forgive this generation for the inevitable legacy that will come from inaction.

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[Paul McCartney](#)

Ken Dodd, Stockhausen and Psycho: unlocking Paul McCartney's musical genius



Here, there and everywhere ... McCartney in 1980. Photograph: Linda McCartney

[Paul Muldoon](#)

Sat 30 Oct 2021 04.00 EDT

Towards the end of 2016 I had a phone call from an unfamiliar number. The voice, though, was immediately familiar. The newly elected Donald Trump introduced himself quite matter-of-factly. He lost no time in getting to the point: would I be willing to come to Washington to serve as his “Poetry Supremo”?

That Sir [Paul McCartney](#) turns out to be such a brilliant mimic shouldn’t have come as a surprise. Like almost all great writers, he’d apprenticed himself to the masters of the trade: Dickens, Shakespeare, Robert Louis Stevenson, Lewis Carroll. All apprenticeships are characterised by caricature and impersonation.

The context in which McCartney was exposed to both King Lear and Edward Lear is vital to an understanding of his achievement. Born in 1942, he was among the very first UK citizens to benefit directly from the [1944 Education Act](#), which allowed many more possibilities for the historically underprivileged. Paul’s parents had both come from immigrant families of Irish extraction and had at once an intrinsically complex relationship to the UK and a sense of belonging to Liverpool’s vast Irish community. More significantly, though, they identified with the newly confident, comparatively optimistic postwar generation.

As McCartney attests, his parents always wanted “greatness” for him and his brother Mike, so the boys were encouraged to go to the best available schools. His father, a cotton salesman, was “very good with words”, and the fact that his mother was a nurse ensured that Paul was “the only boy in school who could spell ‘phlegm’”.

The single greatest influence on young McCartney turned out to be his English teacher, Alan Durband, who had attended Downing College, Cambridge, and been a student of [FR Leavis](#), the doyen of close reading. McCartney’s capacity for textual analysis, of his own work as much as others’, may then be traced directly to Durband’s influence.

McCartney describes songwriting with Lennon as like ‘looking in a mirror’

To have had such a secure grounding in the world of English literature accounts for only part of McCartney’s success. That he is equally steeped in the popular song tradition – not only Little Richard and Chuck Berry, but the songwriters of the [Brill Building](#) and [Tin Pan Alley](#) – has given him a remarkably wide musical vocabulary. Among his earliest heroes were Fred Astaire, [Hoagy Carmichael](#), George and Ira Gershwin and Cole Porter. Though he would later be in conversation with such avant garde composers as Karlheinz Stockhausen and John Cage, McCartney’s immediate influences were the Everly Brothers and, preeminently, Buddy Holly. “Elvis wasn’t a writer or a lead guitarist; he was just a singer. [Duane Eddy](#) was a guitar player but not a singer. So Buddy had it all.” Buddy Holly wrote his own songs, sang them and played guitar.

In his own songwriting buddy, John Lennon, what McCartney recognised from the outset was John’s equally prodigious ventriloquistic capacities. However groundbreaking their work would turn out to be, the Beatles were constantly in dialogue with their contemporaries, whether the artists associated with Motown, the Beach Boys, or Bob Dylan, or the singers and songwriters of a slightly earlier era. Even now, McCartney will psych himself into a song by channelling Little Richard or Fred Astaire. He may even occasionally channel John Lennon. He acknowledges that the interplay of Lennon and McCartney was “nothing short of miraculous”, describing how they “wrote with two guitars”. “The joy of that was that I was left-handed and he was right-handed, so I was looking in a mirror and he was looking in a mirror.”

The other gift McCartney recognised in Lennon was his willingness not only to improvise but to improve. Together, they were always “on the lookout for the kind of subject that hadn’t really been the stuff of popular song”. They shared the eternal schoolkid’s engagement with nonsense and nursery rhyme, as well as a Byronic lingering over the slightly outrageous rhyme, whether “Edison/medicine” or “Valerie/gallery”. They were blessed to find in George Martin a producer who could keep pace with them – sometimes, indeed, setting the pace. Martin’s suggestions for string arrangements and

his openness to the inventiveness of [Robert Moog](#) and his newfangled synthesiser allowed the Beatles to be chronically inventive themselves.



Striking a chord ... Paul McCartney and John Lennon write I Saw Her Standing There, Liverpool, 1962. Photograph: Mike McCartney

A persistent component in the Beatles' soundscape that is often overlooked is the impact of radio. McCartney describes Sgt. Pepper as "a big radio programme". Like the rest of the Beatles, he grew up on a diet of madcap radio comedy such as the Goon Show, which ran from 1951 until 1960 and starred Peter Sellers, Spike Milligan and Harry Secombe. Other radio stars included the Liverpudlian zany Ken Dodd, often considered the last great music hall comedian. The influence of radio underscored McCartney's fascination with "what's missing in a piece", as well as the power of a few well-chosen words to set a scene. The impact of radio drama, including Dylan Thomas's 1954 masterpiece Under Milk Wood, cannot be overstated. Then there's the role of stage drama, whether Sean O'Casey's Juno and the Paycock or Eugene O'Neill's Long Day's Journey Into Night. McCartney may usefully be thought of as a writer of mini-plays. He has the capacity to render a fully rounded character from what might otherwise be merely a thumbnail sketch.

Two other longstanding areas of interest fall under the rubric of the visual arts. The first is painting. McCartney is both literally a painter, having completed hundreds of works in oil, and figuratively a presenter of images. The second is cinema. He is a presenter of the moving image, insisting along the way that “my camera is looking around and sweeping life for clues”.

To think of a song as a shooting script is an angle of entry into the planetary atmosphere of Eleanor Rigby, one of McCartney’s best-known songs, released in 1966. Part of the impact of Eleanor Rigby is its filmic structure, where the two main characters are introduced in the first and second verses and are then brought together in the third. It’s a version of the technique that Alfred Hitchcock used for the shower scene in his 1960 film, Psycho, in which he establishes the image of bloody water flowing down a drain, cuts away from it and then returns to a shot of the same drain with clear water swirling into the vortex. The shower scene in Psycho is also relevant because the frenzied playing of the double string quartet orchestrated by George Martin is reminiscent of Bernard Herrmann’s “stabbing” film score. Part of the impact of Eleanor Rigby is this all-but-invisible subtext of isolation and death.

The death of his own mother when he was 14 – something he’s “never gotten over” – is what hurt McCartney into song. From I Lost My Little Girl to such pieces as Despite Repeated Warnings, McCartney has taken as his subject matter an astonishing array of topics – everything from his relationships with Jane Asher, [Linda Eastman](#) and [Nancy Shevell](#), through climate change and racial injustice, to the family dog and car. As he says, “what made the Beatles such a great band was that no two tracks are the same” and throughout his long career with Wings and as a solo artist, he has had an unfailing “aversion to being bored”. For 60 years he has embodied the restlessness we associate with the artist of the first rank. Beyond that, McCartney is remarkable in that he is one of the very few who is not only influenced by his time but whose work has substantially defined that time. He is living proof of his fellow lyricist William Wordsworth’s brilliant dictum that “every great and original writer, in proportion as he is great and original, must himself create the taste by which he is to be relished”.

① Hey Jude don't make it bad
BREAK
② Hey Jude don't be afraid.
... (middle) — and anytime you feel it happen
③ Hey Jude don't let me down.
-- better, better, better BREAK
-- (middle) let it out & let it in...
④ Hey Jude don't make it bad
better, better, better BREAK
Ending fading

McCartney's handwritten lyrics for Hey Jude. Photograph: Julien's Auctions/PA

I was introduced to Paul McCartney in early 2015. There followed 24 separate meetings over a five-year period, most taking place in New York, and each involving two or three hours of intensive conversation. The process was a little reminiscent of the two- or three-hour writing sessions that were a feature of the Lennon-McCartney partnership, though the tea was green rather than Brooke Bond or PG Tips. For snacks there were bagels with hummus, cheese and pickles, occasionally Marmite. Our times together were universally upbeat, sometimes uproariously so. We were born nine years apart, and part of the reason we got on so well was our shared culture and range of reference. Our birthdays are also separated by just two calendar days, and we were both named Paul for the same reason: the fact that the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul falls on 29 June.

However good he may be at putting people at ease, and however comfortable in his own skin, there's no getting around the fact that Paul McCartney will always be a 20th-century icon, and I did have to allow myself an occasional starstruck moment. It was a particular delight to have him quite often pick up a guitar to demonstrate a chord sequence and play a few bars of one of his songs. Despite all this to-ing and fro-ing, we did

somehow manage to discuss the lyrics of six to eight songs each time we met.

The depth and durability that are the hallmarks of McCartney's lyrics derive from the combination of two seemingly irreconcilable forces that I characterise as the "physics" and the "chemistry" of the song. The physics has to do with the song's engineering. One estimate has the Beatles playing nearly 300 times in Germany between 1960 and 1962. That sheer exposure to the business of how songs are constructed lies at the root of the word "poet", a version of the Greek term for a "maker". It's no accident that one Scottish term for a poet or bard is makar.

The chemistry component is reflected in another term for a poet: "troubadour". The word "troubadour" is related to the French word trouver, "to find". McCartney often uses some version of the phrase "I came across the chords" to describe how a song begins its mysterious life. It's the magical combination of two elements – whether musical notes or the components of a simile – that causes a chemical reaction.



Lennon, Ringo Starr, McCartney, George Harrison arrive at JFK Airport, New York, in 1964. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

McCartney often refers to a version of inspiration before which he is all but inert. The element of ventriloquism is one which he continues to valorise, as when he says that “with the Little Richard thing you just have to give yourself over to it”. He remembers his father being “into crossword puzzles” and acknowledges that he has “inherited a love of words and crossword puzzles”. The word he uses of his attitude to the puzzle of a song – the answer to the question only it has raised – is “fascination”. It brings to mind WB Yeats’s insistence that “The fascination of what’s difficult / Has dried the sap out of my veins”. Like Yeats, McCartney is committed to the idea of the mask, or persona, reminding us that “starting with myself, the characters who appear in my songs are imagined” and it’s “all about making it up”.

McCartney also has at least a partial regard for what the French philosopher Roland Barthes described as the “death of the author”, the idea by which the act of reading necessarily involves a degree of writing, or even rewriting, the text. In his case, the song becomes what it might most truly be only when it is heard and heralded. The single quality that makes McCartney great, though, is his well-attested humility. He would be on exactly the same page as the perennially wise novelist and short story writer [Donald Barthelme](#), who, in an essay titled Not-Knowing, categorised the writer as “one who, embarking on a task, does not know what to do”. The emotional range and intellectual robustness of his lyrics are testimony to McCartney’s profound selflessness – the implicit acknowledgment that he represents no more or less than what Barthelme calls “the work’s way of getting itself written”.

*This is an edited extract from Paul Muldoon’s introduction to *The Lyrics: 1956 to the Present* by Paul McCartney, published by Allen Lane on 2 November. Paul McCartney and Paul Muldoon will be talking about *The Lyrics* with Samira Ahmed on 5 November. The live stream is available on demand from 5 to 12 November; tickets £10. See southbankcentre.co.uk*

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Blind date: ‘I should have stopped drinking before I said I was Charlotte Brontë in a previous life’



Fred and Laurine: ‘She looked like she’d come straight from the set of The French Dispatch.’ Photograph: Christian Sinibaldi/The Guardian

Sat 30 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

Fred on Laurine



What were you hoping for?

A genuine human connection, be it romantic or platonic.

First impressions?

She looked like she'd come straight from the set of [The French Dispatch](#).

What did you talk about?

Childhood memories; the best film adaptation of Emma (Clueless); her belief that she's the reincarnation of Charlotte Brontë; how she once laid a rose on Keats's grave and shed a tear (sorry, Laurine, it was just too good).

Any awkward moments?

We kept having to repeat ourselves as there was a flock of 30 bankers across the room, whose cacophony vastly exceeded the socially acceptable decibel level. We asked to be reseated.

Good table manners?

She tackled her curry, rice and naan with grace.

Best thing about Laurine?

Her unwavering optimism.

Would you introduce her to your friends?

Yes, especially the thespians and my friend who agrees that Clueless was indeed the best adaptation of Emma.

Describe Laurine in three words

Kind, introspective and hilarious.

What do you think she made of you?

Hopefully an adequate drinking and conversation companion.

Did you go on somewhere?

To the end of the street, whence she headed east and I west.

If it weren't for physical distancing, would you have kissed?

It didn't seem like the evening was heading in that direction.

If you could change one thing about the evening, what would it be?

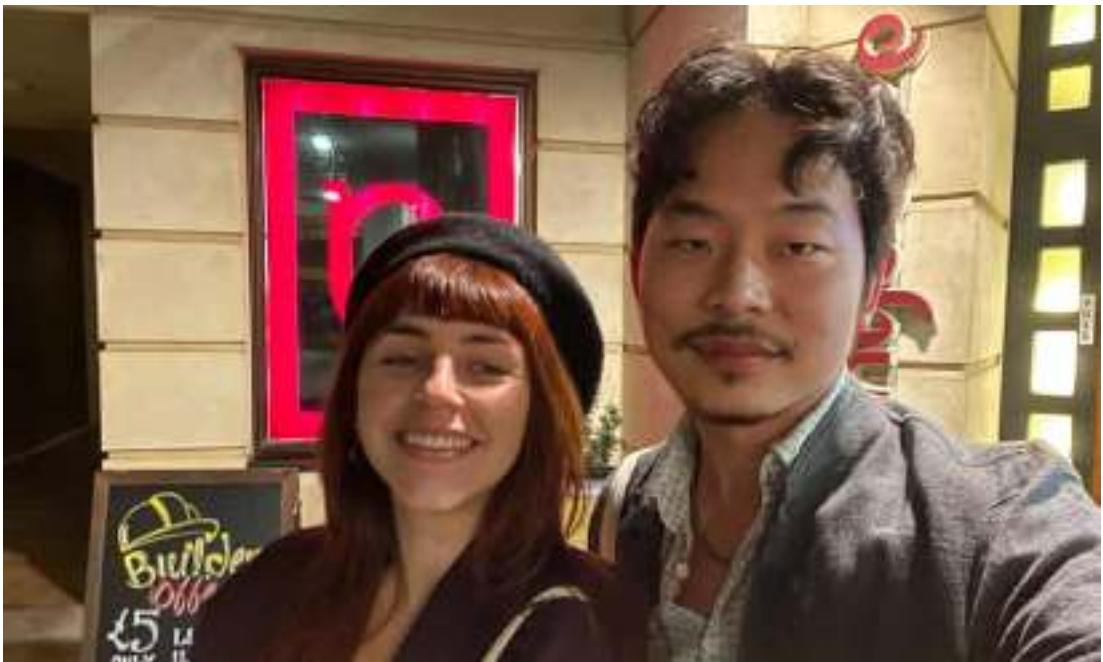
That the banker bros be recalled to the office, leaving behind their bottles of Prosecco in our care.

Marks out of 10?

8.

Would you meet again?

Who wouldn't? She's a delight.



Fred and Laurine's selfie. Photograph: Courtesy Laurie & Fred

Laurine on Fred



What were you hoping for?

That the other person wouldn't be rude, boring or a Covid-denier.

First impressions?

He started talking at me the second I sat down. Happily, he began asking me questions soon afterwards.

What did you talk about?

Arts, our hobbies, views on literature, life and dating. We both have many opinions about the most casual things.

Any awkward moments?

There were two or three lulls, but we had to catch our breath; we talked lots.

Good table manners?

Nothing to complain about.

Best thing about Fred?

He spent the evening discussing arts, opera and feminist literature, only to admit, four drinks in, that his favourite movie is [The Devil Wears Prada](#).

Would you introduce him to your friends?

Yeah, I think they could get along.

Describe Fred in three words

Funny, interesting and open-minded.

What do you think he made of you?

He may think I'm not right in the head. I should've stopped before I said I was Charlotte Brontë in a previous life. In fact, I should've stopped after two drinks.

Did you go on somewhere?

No, we went our separate ways.

If it weren't for physical distancing, would you have kissed?

Nah, don't think either of us wanted to.

If you could change one thing about the evening, what would it be?

The group at the table next to us.

Marks out of 10?

9. Not 10 as I had to ask for his number.

Would you meet again?

I don't think there was a romantic spark, but I would definitely meet again, and perhaps become friends.

Fred and Laurine ate at [Bangalore Express](#), London EC3. Fancy a blind date? Email blind.date@theguardian.com

Q&A

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Blind date is Saturday's dating column: every week, two strangers are paired up for dinner and drinks, and then spill the beans to us, answering a set of questions. This runs, with a photograph we take of each dater before the date, in Saturday magazine (in the UK) and online at [theguardian.com](#) every Saturday. It's been running since 2009 – you can [read all about how we put it together here](#).

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‘People are starting to wane’: China’s zero-Covid policy takes toll



Medical workers arrive at a residential community where people are under Covid lockdown in Hohhot, Inner Mongolia. Photograph: China News Service/Getty Images

[Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei and [Vincent Ni](#), China affairs correspondent

Sat 30 Oct 2021 05.00 EDT

On Friday, the Beijing Daily published an intricate graphic identifying two people sick with Covid-19 and everyone they had infected, detailing the spread of the latest Delta outbreak in the country. The map came amid growing frustration, some panic, and rare protests over the ramifications of China's effort to remain a "zero Covid" country.

Since the first coronavirus cases were reported nearly two years ago, China has run [a zero-tolerance Covid policy](#). Its success in preventing the virus from spreading across the vast country serves as a stark contrast to the situations in many western countries. Since last year, fewer than 100,000 cases have been officially recorded, among a population of about 1.4 billion. At least 4,634 have died.

By comparison, the US has reported nearly 46m cases and more than 740,000 deaths. The UK has reported nearly 9m cases and more than 140,000 deaths.

But the policy is intense. For [just a handful of cases](#), measures have included strict border closures, [localised lockdowns](#), travel restrictions, and the mass testing of tens of millions of people. Homebound flights booked by Chinese citizens who live abroad are often cancelled at the last minute.

On Thursday, a high-speed train from Shanghai was ordered to halt midway before arriving in Beijing, after an attendant was identified as a close contact of a Covid-positive patient. All the other 211 passengers onboard were immediately quarantined in designated places.

But as the world begins to slowly open up, having decided to live with the virus mitigated by vaccinations, China is one of the few still clinging to a strategy of elimination. Analysts and health experts are starting to ask how long it can last, and the latest outbreak – which began early this month – is again testing the limits.

As of Friday the latest Delta outbreak had infected more than 300 people across 12 provinces, including the capital, Beijing, in little more than a

week. The outbreak is centred on the province of Inner Mongolia but was linked to travellers.

In response authorities again launched mass testing, halted transportation and enacted local lockdowns.



Tourists stranded due to Covid in Ejin Banner, Inner Mongolia, leave on a charter train on Thursday. Photograph: VCG/Getty Images

“Such scenes have become a norm in recent months,” said Yanzhong Huang, a China public health policy expert at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York. “It’ll get more and more difficult over time. But costs are getting higher, and returns are diminishing quickly.”

On Chinese social media, while the majority of commenters support the government’s approach, frustration is also being voiced in Beijing, where one resident said fear had returned to their daily life, while another described people “panicking” as the situation there gets more tense.

“There is banning of dining and lockdowns everywhere. It is too difficult to even just eat normally,” said another resident.

There is also frustration in Ejina Banner in Inner Mongolia, where trapped tourists have posted on social media in recent days.

On Saturday, one tour leader said his guests had been stranded for six days and some elderly participants were running out of medicine. One alleged some guests were showing symptoms but there was no medical institution nearby. “It seems Ejina Banner doesn’t care about people’s life or death,” they said.

“People are starting to wane,” said Prof Chunhuei Chi, the director of Oregon State University’s centre for global health. “As with anywhere in the world we can see dragged into this pandemic for nearly two years, and everywhere we observe pandemic fatigue. That would surely also be affecting Chinese people.”

The current crisis is the second major outbreak of the highly transmissible Delta variant this year; both spread to multiple cities. The first [reportedly](#) sparked rare social unrest in Yangzhou this summer, over a government failure to deliver food to residents who had been locked down for three weeks.



People queue up for Covid testing in Yinchuan, in north-west China’s Ningxia Hui autonomous region. Photograph: Xinhua/Rex/Shutterstock

At the time, some high-profile Chinese [public health experts began to suggest](#) that China should consider moving towards a policy of coexisting

with the virus. Their comments received some support from citizens and scientific colleagues, but were drowned out by government censure.

Chi said China's government was sticking to the strategy because it had little other choice, politically. Citing energy shortages and the housing industry crisis, he said ensuring there was no major outbreak of Covid was "possibly their last stronghold of credibility and legitimacy" domestically.

But there is another motivation, stemming from the international blame directed at China for the pandemic itself, Chi said.

"From the beginning China has persistently wanted to show the world both its capability and credibility in terms of controlling this pandemic. They want to demonstrate how successful China has been in containing the outbreak and its ability to mobilise all available resources.

"They want to be seen as not the cause but as the saviour."

There is still support for the government's efforts.

"Personal freedom, personal work, privacy, dignity, and mental health can all be sacrificed," said one social media user, urging others to look at the bigger picture.

Beijing has admitted the pandemic is the biggest challenge to the forthcoming [Winter Olympics](#) in February and Winter Paralympics in March. Recently released guidelines showed entrants will quarantine before entering the "closed loop" of the competition world, completely separated from the rest of China to avoid cross-infection.

Chi said China may be able to use accumulated wealth to sustain the country and itself through another year – crucially, past the date Xi Jinping will probably be seeking a third presidential term – but it is a different story for the people.

"The people are already suffering, particularly the sizeable proportion who are in low to middle income," he said. "They can't sustain it. The limit to their mobility and economic activity will worsen their livelihood."

Both big Delta outbreaks were sourced to domestic tourism – the only remaining market for the industry with no sign of international visitors returning soon, even with Olympic events around the corner.

Huang said that, to some extent, Beijing was also in a dilemma. “We’ve already seen flareups in the countries that adopt a ‘coexistence with Covid’ approach, such as Singapore. If this happens to China too, then people will turn to the government and ask: ‘Why did you not manage to protect us?’

“This is the last thing China wants to see, especially in the run-up to the Winter Olympics early next year.”

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- It's been a turbulent year for race in Britain. So what next?
- The battle to get here was ugly, but the impact of Joe Biden's climate plan will be huge
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Our climate demands we change the world right now. The good news? We can

[Rebecca Solnit](#)



‘The longer we wait, the harder it becomes, the more doors slam shut, the more devastation overtakes us, the more it becomes too late for some places, species, systems.’ Photograph: Evelyn Hockstein/Reuters

Sat 30 Oct 2021 05.00 EDT

Nothing and everything and not nearly enough has changed in the six years since the Paris climate summit and agreement. The four players in our climate future – climate chaos, climate activism, climate solutions and climate finance – are still on a playing field filled with floods, flames and false solutions. Two of them are racing away from catastrophe, one is rushing toward it, and the fourth is undecided.

Runaway climate change itself has gotten far worse: we're seeing chaos and destruction, ice melt and early signs of systemic collapse of ocean currents, ice sheets and much else. Both the climate movement and the practical solutions have gotten far stronger, more ambitious, more capable, more diverse. Climate finance has run in both directions: far too much money is still pumped into the fossil fuel industry, but there have been significant successes getting governments, development banks, and private investors to cut financing and reframe the industry as fundamentally criminal.

Today, 2015 seems an age ago, before the climate monsters Donald Trump, Boris Johnson and Jair Bolsonaro became heads of government, before the Sunrise Movement and Extinction Rebellion and Greta Thunberg's public protests, before so many floods, so many fires, so many broken heat records. We stopped talking about climate chaos as the future and acknowledged it as the present.

And yet so little has happened since then, in that the Paris treaty is a commitment to "holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5C above pre-industrial levels" and "making finance flows consistent with a pathway towards low greenhouse gas emissions and climate-resilient development". Nations are not meeting their commitments, though they are making new ones, and the Glasgow summit may be and must be an occasion to set stronger goals and commitments to really mean them this time. We are still on a superhighway past 2C.

There have been a lot of specific victories of late. In September, China committed to stop building coal-power plants abroad. That month, the US, EU and eight other nations launched a [methane-reduction treaty](#) that will probably gain new signatories before or at the Glasgow summit. A lot of fossil fuel projects have been cancelled, and the industry is in turmoil, with coal corporations going bankrupt, huge oil companies losing share value and standing, and fossil fuel generally regarded as an industry in decline.

In May the usually stodgy International Energy Agency called for "a complete transformation of how we produce, transport and consume energy" to keep temperature rise to 1.5C or less (six years ago the Paris agreement was originally aiming at two degrees; it was protests from the Climate

Vulnerable Forum nations that shifted the goalposts). Its just-released [World Energy Outlook 2021](#) report furthers those goals, calling for a plan in which “no new oil and gas fields are approved for development, and no new coal mines or mine extensions are required” thanks to “a massive transition in the way we produce and consume energy”. The optimistic version would be that that transition needs to grow in speed and scale; the pessimistic one is that it needs to begin in earnest.

Six years ago, I met Steve Kretzmann, a fossil fuel policy expert and the founder of Oil Change International, inside the Cop21 press area in Paris. When I reached him the other day he reiterated the urgent necessity of stopping fossil fuel extraction and use: “We have got to turn the dial down on fossil fuels and we’re not doing it yet. While we’re watching impacts and awareness accelerate, we’re not denting fossil fuel’s share of total energy. We have to accept that winning on climate means phasing out the fossil fuel industry.” Renewables, he points out, have grown, but the addition of a new energy source is not automatically the subtraction of an old one. That subtraction is crucial.

Varshini Prakash, executive director and co-founder of the Sunrise Movement, launched in earnest in 2018, now with 400 hubs across the US, agreed that we need to escalate: “For decades people have been ignoring the climate crisis and we watched our communities suffer as a result. Just two or three years ago, the climate crisis and climate justice was thought of as a political loser, no one wanted to touch it with a 100ft pole. That isn’t true any more and it’s because we agitated and we organized and we bird-dogged these politicians every place they were … We’ve come a long way, but let’s be clear – the climate crisis doesn’t grade on the curve and neither can we. We’ve got to go much faster, much further if we want to prevent catastrophic harm.”

I also talked to the 350.org co-founder and executive director May Boeve, who offered a more sanguine view, telling me that “activists maintaining hope always is so important, because making sense of our success and impact is so difficult measured against these summits. The COP is the scoreboard and not the game; it’s the moment when there’s collective attention turned toward climate and it’s a way to take stock.” And then she speculated about the unknowns of what will happen in Glasgow – who will

disrupt the status quo, who will take risks that will push others to expand their commitments. And of the dangers, now that the battle over whether climate change is real is over, of “phony commitments that don’t stop fossil fuel from being burned”.

Glasgow has to be a turning point, a point at which nations shift into high gear (a metaphor that still works with electric vehicles). The call is to change the world, and the job is entirely possible. But the longer we wait, the harder it becomes, the more doors slam shut, the more devastation overtakes us, the more it becomes too late for some places, species, systems. Looking back at 2015, it’s dismaying to see that we’re still so close to the starting line of the race.

- Rebecca Solnit is a Guardian US columnist. Her most recent books are Recollections of My Nonexistence and Orwell’s Roses
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Opinion**Black History Month**

It's been a turbulent year for race in Britain. So what next?

[David Harewood](#) and others



Illustration: Guardian Design/EPA/Bryn Lennon, Harpo Productions/Joe Pugliese, Jeff Overs/PA, Andy Rain/EPA, Alex Pantling/Getty, Todd Wawrychuk/Shutterstock

Sat 30 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT



David Harewood: ‘Too many people wish we would just shut up’

It's hard not to see the past year as a missed opportunity. I've been banging on about racism for 30 years, but the voices for change are getting louder and more articulate. Yet though we've seen a range of books on our experiences, our hopes and our frustrations, it still feels like a huge section of the British public aren't listening. This is a country that cherishes its history and its traditions, but unfortunately this means there's a resistance to change. We need to start embracing difference.

There are voices on the right that are aggressively seeking to stamp out any discussion of white complicity in the disadvantage of black people. They don't want slavery taught in schools; they think it was such a long time ago that it doesn't matter. But that's because they don't understand that slavery and colonialism are the roots of what we go through today. The legacy of slavery is racism.

People in Britain have unfortunately grown tired of the subject. They either don't understand why we keep talking about it, or wish we would just shut up. But these are our careers, our livelihoods; and when we talk about “white privilege”, all we're saying is that white people don't face the racial

disadvantages that we do. Those of us who have been successful have a choice: we can either throw the ladder down for other people to climb up; or deny that colour has an impact and say, “If you just work hard you can achieve anything,” when plainly that’s not the case.

In the US, where I spend a lot of time working, I can turn on my television any night and see a range of black actors in leading roles. Look at what Netflix has done with [Bridgerton](#). I’m still not seeing that on British TV. Even today, I’ve never played a leading character on British television.

Now there’s a whole new generation coming through that’s finding its path blocked by an older demographic that almost seems threatened. This new influx of talent should be welcomed, not just on to Britain’s stages and screens but into its boardrooms too. It’s not going to be easy and there will be pushback, but we have to find ways of bringing new energy into the decision-making process.

[Black Lives Matter](#) has forced white people to take notice of our story, and tackling racial discrimination is something that people are finally acknowledging. But I don’t think most white people really understand their role. While it’s great to see so many people accept that things need to fundamentally change, things are just moving too slowly. Until more white champions join the fight, I think the positive conversations we’ve had this year are unlikely to lead to root-and-branch change. It’s about time white people did some of the heavy lifting.

David Harewood is an actor



Helen Grant: ‘There is progress in sport, not just on the pitch but in the boardroom’

It would be easy to say that nothing has changed, and that we’ve failed to move on. It is true that bigotry and racism are still with us; and campaigners for diversity and equality clearly cannot take their foot off the pedal. But that is not the whole picture: there is also progress.

In March, the Rugby Football Union [chose Tom Ilube](#) as its new chairman, making him the first black chair of a major sports governing body in England. Like me, Tom was born to an English mother and a Nigerian father in 1960s Britain, when such an appointment was not in anyone’s contemplation. In British sport, the pathway is there, not just on the pitch but in the boardroom too.

And in our national game, the race conversation now has national attention, with moves toward an [independent regulator for English football](#), which would work to tackle these issues. I am a proud member of the group championing this cause. Yes, there is much to do, but these are examples of hope for the coming generations.

Helen Grant is the Conservative MP for Maidstone and the Weald



Nicola Rollock: ‘There has been a sophisticated sanitising of racism’

On the one hand, the [murder of George Floyd](#) stimulated an “awakening” for those white people who seem to have been asleep prior to 25 May 2020, and had managed to ignore the experiences of Black and Brown people around them. On the other, we have also borne witness to a sophisticated sanitising of racism – particularly anti-Black racism – as if to admit to suffering racism is to embody fecklessness and a lack of ambition.

There are those who speak of having “hope” in the light of the stream of advertisements and TV shows now featuring not just Black and Brown people but those with disabilities and differing sexual identities. And there is now greater attention paid to the ethnic mix of discussion panels and, in some cases, of boards and interview shortlists. But do I, as a Black woman working in the field of racial justice for more than 20 years, have hope?

I will have hope when I am no longer invited to be a signatory to letters about people of colour who have been overlooked for roles despite their qualifications, and when I stop receiving emails from those teetering on the edge of mental breakdown because of their experiences at the hands of their employer. My measurement for hope is simple: the outcomes, experiences

and decision-making powers of racially minoritised groups must improve. Anything else is simply tinkering at the edges.

Nicola Rollock is professor of social policy and race at King's College London



A protest in Manchester against the police, crime, sentencing and courts bill, featuring a George Floyd mural, March 2021. Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images



Lester Holloway: ‘A “common cause” is emerging between oppressed communities’

October tends to be bookended by looking forward to the celebration of black achievement and reflecting back on the month. As for the other 11 months of the year, it has once again been utterly depressing: black-owned business have been twice as likely to close in the pandemic; unemployment for black and minority-ethnic citizens is rising three times as fast as for white workers; and black African men are four times more likely to die of Covid-19. To add insult to injury, the widely discredited Sewell report, commissioned by the government, sought to deny institutional racism.

At times like this I look for hope. Not much of that can be found in Westminster, but it feels like there is a revival of a narrative of “common cause” between all oppressed communities. Today there is more of an appreciation that tackling the causes of structural racism actually improves the lives of the white working class too. The gravitational pull of Joe Biden’s US has breathed new life into demands for racial, environmental and social justice. Amid the rubble of last year, the black, green and red shoots of recovery are visible once more.

Lester Holloway is editor of The Voice



Kehinde Andrews: ‘Progress has crashed on the rocks of the culture war’

The wave of anti-racist feeling that surged after last year’s Black Lives Matter protests has crashed on the rocks of the culture war: in 2021 we seem to have gone backwards.

It is a shame that, rather than marking any kind of progress, the most diverse cabinet in British history has merely reminded us that, even in its darkest days, the British empire was facilitated by Black and Brown middle managers. Home secretary Priti Patel is presiding over the most draconian of immigration policies that includes deportation flights and threats to push back small boats that could lead to people drowning in the Channel. Not to mention that the police, crime, sentencing and courts bill will essentially outlaw the very protests that last year were meant to mark a watershed. We are at a dangerous moment where another Tory MP suggests that teaching white privilege should be considered a counter-terrorism violation. The lesson for any Black History Month is that the fires of resistance rage the hardest when the stakes are highest. But last summer reignited a flame that will not be extinguished.

Kehinde Andrews is professor of Black studies at Birmingham City University



Wilfred Emmanuel-Jones: ‘Individuals in power must decide to stop the injustice’

I am a Windrush Generation child brought up in poverty in Small Heath, Birmingham. I suffered then, and now, most of the indignities that people of colour experience. My success is not just down to my drive and ambition, but also to senior white executives who saw past my colour and gave me a break. Change only happens when individuals in a position of power decide to stop the injustice rather than turn a blind eye.

But not enough high-level executives are sticking their heads above the parapet and stating that black inclusion is on their list of priorities. I want Black awareness to be a year-round thing, not just something for [Black History Month](#).

I am sick of being rolled out and given a platform for just four weeks, when for the rest of the year it seems as if I don’t exist.

Next year, and subsequent years, I would like to see companies report what progress has been made in their organisations. We need to start seeing hard evidence of real change.

Wilfred Emmanuel-Jones is a businessman, farmer and former Conservative party candidate



Chi Onwurah: ‘I worry that racism will be entrenched by algorithms’

In parliament’s Black History Month debate last year, I spoke about racism and the hope of its eradication. A year on, I am not nearly so optimistic. Racial justice appears once more to be a niche interest.

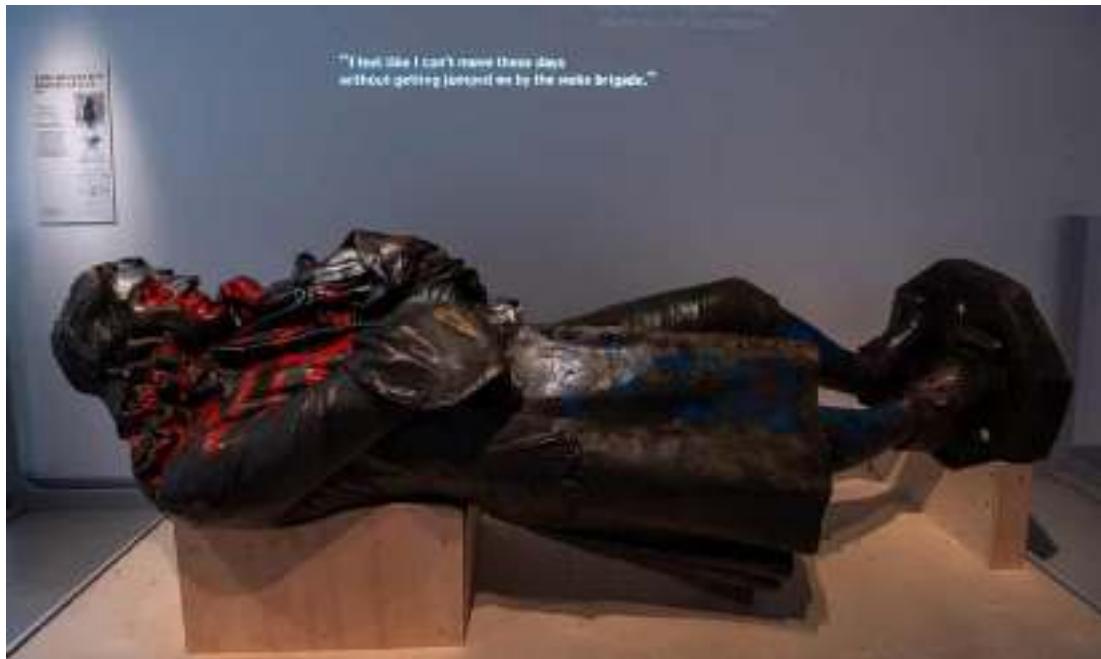
Where is the leadership? We have a home secretary who wouldn’t condemn football fans who booed black England players taking the knee. What kind of message was that to send to the country, and to us? It was nice to see so many people from different communities supporting those players, but it is hard not to feel that right now we are a divided country.

As someone who spent 20 years as an engineer, I have a particular worry going forward that racism, instead of being addressed, will be further enhanced, entrenched and automated – by algorithms. It may seem left-field, but algorithms are everywhere, determining who gets a visa, a top-grade A-level, priority healthcare, or a knock on the door from the police. The Sewell report said algorithmic bias would be solved by a “fairness” equation. But

they are only as good as their design and the data they're trained on. Few software engineers are women, from ethnic minorities or working class.

Racism is not an equation, it is a lived reality, and it cannot be coded out. On top of everything else, that is a worry and a battle for the future.

Chi Onwurah is the Labour MP for Newcastle upon Tyne Central



The toppled Edward Colston statue on public display in the M Shed museum, Bristol, June 2021. Photograph: Polly Thomas/Getty Images



Athena Kugblenu: ‘Black people are taking the initiative, rather than waiting for structural change’

This is a country in which people take to the streets to chant for change when a white woman is murdered, while the murder of two black women, in equally revolting circumstances, can go relatively unnoticed. A country in which only 8% of Black pensioner families drew any income from a personal pension. The median accumulation of wealth through homeownership by a Black family over the past decade in Great Britain is zero. Even the housing bubble discriminates.

Campaigns to decolonise the curriculum have been dismissed in England, as have efforts to address the high mortality rates for Black women in childbirth. So I don’t think, overall, anti-Black racism is in any kind of recession. Perhaps because of the visibility of famous Black people, it’s better disguised.

There are positives. We have Black Pound Day. I have a library full of books for my preschool children where they can see themselves represented in ways I was never able to see myself. While major publishers have diversity initiatives, the blossoming self-publishing industry is to thank for that.

Increasingly, Black people are taking the initiative, rather than waiting for the structural change we’ve been waiting centuries for. This is where I find the most optimism.

Athena Kugblenu is a comedian and writer



Nicholas Daley: ‘Can we promote black creatives all year round?’

We have a long, complex and deep-rooted history in this country, so the question of why has it taken so long to have these conversations is an important one. White people have a role to play: we need allies, not enemies.

There have been some big jumps for black people in the fashion industry: black people are in creative director roles and other positions of genuine authority. But I want people to ask more questions. Who are the decision-makers? Who are the gatekeepers? Who has the economic power? And how can we produce art and culture that reflects the complexities of the black experience?

Can we promote black designers and black creatives all year round, beyond Black History Month? Can we teach our children about their history, their heritage and how it relates to their experiences today? Black history is British history. And black culture is as diverse as it is rich. Having people who can understand that, and celebrate it, is a necessary step towards a more level playing field.

Nicholas Daley is a menswear designer



Jason Okundaye: ‘The country is militarising its war on woke’

The outburst of superficial solidarity that framed much of the response to the Black Lives Matter movement inevitably built an unstable coalition around what it meant. Brands, institutions and publications that launched PR campaigns or attempted allyship found themselves unwittingly drawn into a culture war – where supporting Black Lives Matter was pilloried as endorsing such things as Marxism, Palestinian liberation and police abolition. It is no surprise that this year’s Black History Month has seen far fewer campaigns and appeals – it’s no longer commercially viable or worth the reputational risk in a country that is militarising its “war on woke” and obsessing over the teaching of critical race theory. It does sting a little that brands can’t even fling us a BHM discount code for some “self-care”.

Jason Okundaye is a culture writer



Bell Ribeiro-Addy: ‘The government is driving a wedge between working-class communities’

Rather than looking forwards and trying to tackle the injustices raised by the Black Lives Matter movement, we’ve seen the government insisting there’s no such thing as institutional racism – driving a wedge between working-class communities.

Of course working-class children aren’t being held back by schools teaching them about racism; they’re being held back by the Tories starving deprived schools of funding. The culture wars are a distraction tactic, designed to point the finger away from the real problems in our society, like the shocking concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the super-rich.

But there are causes for optimism. Under Mark Drakeford’s leadership, Wales has this month become the first UK nation to commit to making teaching black history in schools mandatory. Ahead of Cop26, I’m also proud to have established a parliamentary group on African reparations, which will open up a debate about how Britain can make amends for its history of slavery and colonialism as well as their ongoing legacies. Advances like these give me hope.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy is the Labour MP for Streatham

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The battle to get here was ugly, but the impact of Joe Biden's climate plan will be huge

[Jonathan Freedland](#)





Italy's prime minister, Mario Draghi, greets the US president, Joe Biden, at the G20 leaders' summit in Rome. Photograph: Guglielmo Mangiapane/Reuters

Fri 29 Oct 2021 12.33 EDT

Move aside, Donald Trump: there's a new American for the world's progressives to hate. What's more, he's not even a Republican, but rather a member of Joe Biden's Democratic party. He's [Joe Manchin](#), who represents West Virginia in the US Senate – the body that's split 50-50, and which Democrats only control if every single senator stays onside. It's thanks to him – aided and abetted by the Arizona Democrat senator Kyrsten Sinema – that Biden cannot take his place at the Cop26 summit in Glasgow proudly pointing to a raft of measures, signed and sealed, by which the US government will tackle the climate crisis.

Biden had a whole plan worked out, and most Democrats backed him. But Manchin refused to say yes. He insisted that Biden drop perhaps the [most powerful element](#) of his climate programme: rewards for energy companies that shift to renewable sources, and fines for those that stick with fossil fuels. Manchin killed that off, perhaps because he represents a state that still has some coal mining, perhaps because he has big [personal investments in coal](#), perhaps because he has received [fat donations](#) from the fossil fuel

industry. Or maybe just because West Virginia voted by an almost [40-point margin](#) for Trump last year and so, to keep winning, Manchin has to look more like a Republican than a Democrat.

Either way, the effect is the same. Manchin has held up the passage of what Biden had envisaged as a transformative spending bill, a mega-package not limited to the climate emergency. To win Manchin over, the president has dropped all kinds of measures he had promised to deliver during his 2020 campaign and which the US desperately needs, many of them – from cheaper medicine for elderly people to paid family leave – hugely popular with US voters. Biden did all that so that he could get the overall price tag down from \$3.5tn (£2.5tn) to \$1.75tn, making it more palatable to Manchin – who believes in reining in, rather than unleashing, the might of government.

What's left is [\\$555bn](#) for incentives and tax breaks aimed at reducing US carbon emissions, spread out over 10 years – far less than the US [spends every year](#) on defence.

Even that amount is not fully agreed. Though the White House hailed a [breakthrough](#) yesterday, Manchin and Sinema have not signed on the dotted line nor even committed to doing so. Which is why Biden left for Glasgow empty handed.

This matters not only because the US is, after China, the [world's biggest emitter](#) of CO₂, but because of the leadership role the US needs to play. It's hard for Biden to bang the table and demand greater, speedier action from the likes of China and India when the US itself is still hesitating, even during this all too rare interlude – likely to end at next year's midterms – when Biden's party controls the White House and both houses of Congress. Authoritarian states fond of arguing that democracy is unfit for purpose in the 21st century will be cheered. Those young voters who rallied to Biden for the sake of the climate will wonder if it was worth it.

And yet, there is another way to look at all this. It begins with a recognition that the alternative to Manchin as the senator from West Virginia is not some impeccable liberal: if he or someone very much like him wasn't there, the

seat would be filled by a Republican and there would be no Biden plan, big or small. (The same is not true of Sinema: Arizona, which voted for Biden in 2020, would not punish her for behaving like a Democrat.) Not that this package is so small. If it passes, it will represent the [biggest US spend](#) to tackle global heating in history.

During the negotiations that led to this admittedly provisional agreement, Biden gave way on that string of popular, necessary domestic pledges, including free community college and expanded healthcare provision – but he held firm on the climate. It now stands as the [largest single component](#) of the entire bill, and that represents a huge victory by the environmental movement. It has persuaded one of the two main US parties to recognise that the climate is the dominant issue of the age.

Besides, \$555bn is not to be sneezed at. I [spoke](#) on Thursday with Ben Rhodes, former adviser to Barack Obama. In 2009, Obama [set aside](#) a mere \$90bn for climate-related action. But even that sum worked wonders. Despite Trump’s “ranting and raving”, and despite his withdrawal from the Paris accords, Rhodes notes that the US actually met its Paris targets in the Trump period.

That’s because Obama’s move had signalled where the economy was going, setting in train a shift that Trump could not reverse: “Companies were adjusting, the markets were adjusting, money was moving.” Now, a decade later, “people are not building new coal plants in the United States; they’re building windfarms and solar panels.”

Biden is sending a much bigger signal now. Combined with various executive actions he can take as president – moves he can make without the blessing of the senate or Manchin or anyone else – the legislation should help US greenhouse emissions fall to [half](#) their 2005 levels by 2030.

That can serve as a useful corrective to the view that the US, and democracy itself, has become dysfunctional and ineffective in the face of an existential threat. Yes, a dictatorship such as China can move more quickly: there is no senator from West Shanxi for Xi Jinping to worry about. But it is Europe and, if Biden’s deal holds, the US that is setting the pace. That, Rhodes adds,

is partly down to the pressure to act on the climate that comes with an open civil society and a free press.

As for the motivation of a new generation, one that in 2020 got behind Biden with climate their most animating issue, what happens next is partly in the hands of all those who campaigned so hard to reach this moment. They can either lament all that was left out of the bill, railing against Manchin and Sinema, or they can celebrate what remained in.

It's a partial victory, of course. Insufficient, inevitably. But the world's most powerful country is about to take a big step forward. Its governing party decided that this was the one issue on which it could not compromise. At a time when so much is going in the wrong direction, we can allow ourselves a small cheer when something goes the other way.

This article was amended on 30 October 2021. An earlier version misidentified the Italian president, Sergio Mattarella, in the main image caption; the image has been changed.

- Jonathan Freedland is a Guardian columnist
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[Opinion](#)[Horror films](#)

Dread is the modern condition – no wonder the Halloween franchise still resonates

[Anna Bogutskaya](#)



Jamie Lee Curtis, left, as Laurie Strode in *Halloween Kills*: ‘Strode has been carrying the burden of fear with her for 40 years.’ Photograph: Ryan Green/AP

Sat 30 Oct 2021 04.00 EDT

During the past 18 months we've collectively experienced more anxiety than we could ever have imagined, which ironically makes it fitting that our [appetite for horror](#) has increased. Anxious times demand anxious films.

Indie film-makers responded to the lockdowns by making horror films that reflected our mood: Ben Wheatley made the psychedelic earth-horror, [Into the Earth](#), seeped in pandemic paranoia, and Rob Savage tapped into the

horror of Zoom calls with Host. Big franchise releases such as The Conjuring: The Devil Made Me Do It, Spiral: From the Book of Saw and A Quiet Place Part II were pushed back to be released in cinemas, and did relatively well at the box office. But none have broken records like [Halloween Kills](#), the 12th instalment in the long-running franchise, which was released both in cinemas and online. The film dominated the box office in its first weekend in US cinemas, taking in [more than \\$50m](#). Streaming service Netflix also joined in, uploading six of the Halloween films in time for the new release.

Is there something in the franchise that speaks to the moment we find ourselves in? There are only two constants in a true Halloween film: Laurie Strode and Michael Myers (apart from the questionable Rob Zombie reboots and the third instalment, Halloween III: Season of the Witch). Well, that and the synthy goodness of John Carpenter's [original score](#).

The chief antagonist, Myers – in the 1978 film and in the reboots – is billed as The Shape. Nick Castle, who played him in John Carpenter and Debra Hill's original, was directed to simply walk from A to B. No backstory. No emotion. No humanity. Myers has been subjected to endless attempts to bring him to an end, and yet he keeps on living, keeps on coming back to the same town, the same house.

And so does Strode, played since the original by Jamie Lee Curtis. While Myers remains an ageless shape hidden beneath the white William Shatner mask (in a fun touch, the mask ages), Strode has been carrying the burden of fear with her for 40 years. She is the [beating heart of the films](#). While Myers might be the empty void of evil, she is a complete human being, flawed, bruised and clinging on to life. When I [interviewed Curtis](#), she talked about the vulnerability of her unexpected heroine: "We have wanted to take care of her all these years."

The palpable dread in Curtis's performance has transformed over the years into something more empathic, something that we can connect with more intensely now that we too have been afraid so intensely of the world around us and of unstoppable forces. Strode knows that no matter where she is, the

possibility of Myers appearing is never gone. Fear is a certainty that Strode has to live with – as do we.

Being scared has become the default for a lot of us, and it can feel right to latch on to supernatural stories when the natural world feels so out of control. Myers is the shapeless, faceless bogeyman on to whom we project our own personal anxieties. We can experience fear, and then most importantly the release of it, when we watch these films. The Halloween franchise always taunts us with the death of the bogeyman, but he's never really defeated. And Strode still has to face him. *That's* why we keep coming back to these films, because she reminds us that we need to keep facing our own fears head on.

- Anna Bogutskaya is a film and TV critic, writer and broadcaster
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US politics

Biden's agenda remains unrealized as Democrats fail to close deal again



Joe Biden in Rome on 29 October. Photograph: Antonio Masiello/Getty Images

Lauren Gambino in Washington
[@laurenegambino](#)

Fri 29 Oct 2021 13.53 EDT

Joe Biden's nearly \$3tn domestic agenda remains unrealized after an 11-hour push to rally [Democrats](#) around a pared-down package that he framed as historic, failed to close the deal in time for his meeting with world leaders in Rome at the G20 summit.

But after a dramatic Thursday of bold promises and dashed hopes, the House speaker, [Nancy Pelosi](#), was forced to postpone a vote on a \$1tn infrastructure bill for a second time in a month, as progressives demanded

more assurances that a compromise \$1.75tn social policy plan would also pass.

It was a setback – though perhaps only a temporary one – for Democratic leaders, who had hoped to hand the president a legislative victory that he could tout during his six-day trip to Europe for a pair of international economic and climate summits.

The delay underscored the depth of mistrust among Democrats – between the House and Senate, progressives and centrists, leadership and members – after a lengthy negotiating process yielded a plan that was about half the size of Biden’s initial vision.

Biden’s proposal includes substantial investments in childcare, education and health care as well as major initiatives to address climate change that, if enacted, would be the largest action ever taken by the US Congress. Revenue would come from tax hikes on corporations and the wealthy.

But in concessions to centrists like the West Virginia senator Joe Manchin and Arizona senator Kyrsten Sinema, paid family leave, free college tuition and efforts to lower prescription drug prices were stripped from the latest iteration of the plan. Progressives were left disappointed by the cuts but their desire to pass the legislation ultimately held little leverage to force major changes.

In a speech before departing for Europe, Biden acknowledged the bill fell short of his legislative ambitions, but reflected the limits of what was politically possible given Democrats’ narrow governing majorities and unified Republican opposition.

“No one got everything they wanted, including me,” he said. “But that’s what compromise is.”

As lawmakers and activists digested the newly released details of the plan, there seems to be a growing consensus among progressives that, while insufficient, the plan makes critical investments in many of their top priorities, especially in the field of tackling the climate crisis.

“The newly announced Build Back Better Act can be a turning point in America’s fight against the climate crisis – but only if we pass it,” leaders of the climate advocacy group Evergreen Action wrote in a memo on Friday.

Julian Zelizer, a historian at Princeton University, said unified control of the White House and Congress can, perhaps paradoxically, make governing harder. Because these moments are rare and often fleeting, there is a rush by the president and his party to pursue an ambitious, legacy-defining agenda, he said.

“But the challenges of legislating don’t go away,” Zelizer said. “And in some ways, the tensions within the party are exacerbated by the stakes being so high.”

Some have argued that scaling back key programs could make it harder for Americans to feel the impact of the new benefits, despite the substantial size of the legislation. That could make it difficult for Biden, whose approval ratings have slid in recent weeks, to sell the plan he told House Democrats would determine the fate of his presidency and their political futures.

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US director of national intelligence releases declassified Covid report – as it happened

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G20

Biden admits to Macron the US was ‘clumsy’ in Aukus submarine deal

01:42

Biden tells France the US was 'clumsy' in its handling of Aukus deal – video

Patrick Wintour in Rome *Angelique Chrisafis* in Paris and *Julian Borger* in Washington

Fri 29 Oct 2021 13.06 EDT

Joe Biden has moved to repair his damaged personal and political relationship with Emmanuel Macron by acknowledging that [the announcement of a security and technology pact](#) that blindsided France was a “clumsy” episode handled with a lack of grace.

The US president and his French counterpart met at France’s Vatican embassy in Rome on Friday, ahead of the G20 leaders’ summit this weekend, for their first in-person discussion since an astonished Macron was left feeling betrayed and humiliated by September’s security deal.

As a result of the “Aukus” pact between the US, Australia and the UK, Australia tore up a troubled \$66bn (£48bn) contract signed with France to build six diesel-powered submarines in favour of a deal with the US for eight nuclear-powered submarines. It was the first time the US had offered to share its nuclear technology with a third party other than the UK.

Sitting next to Macron before a bilateral meeting, Biden also implied that he thought Australia had already informed France that it was cancelling its submarine contract.

“The answer is – I think what happened was to use an English phrase ... clumsy, it was not done with a lot of grace,” Biden said.

“I was under the impression that France had been informed long before, that the [French] deal was not going through,” he said, which suggests either his staff failed to inform him, or Australia misled the White House about what it had told the French.

There is no suggestion from the White House that Macron himself knew the contract had been cancelled, a point that the French have shown in published exchanges with the Australians days before the contract was cancelled.

The two leaders met for nearly an hour and a half at the Villa Bonaparte, the French embassy to the Vatican. A senior US official said that for more than half that time, Macron and Biden were alone.

“It was a very meaty, substantive but I would say broad-ranging and strategic conversation,” a senior US official said, adding that the leaders spent a “fair amount of time talking about the challenge posed by the rise of China.”

“I don’t worry at all about instability or drift in the US-France relationship,” the official added, saying relations had been given a “jolt of energy” in the past month. “We had some hard conversations in September and October, I think the conversations heading into November will be exciting and engaging. There’s not any sense that there’s some kind of fundamental rift in the relationship.”

The two leaders issued an unusually long joint statement after the meeting, highlighting areas of agreement. Biden pledged to step up US support for French-led counter-terrorist operations in the Sahel. The two leaders welcomed the establishment of a bilateral clean energy partnership by the end of the year, they affirmed their faith in Nato and its nuclear deterrent capability, and “robust” collaboration in the Indo-Pacific.

Biden called France an “extremely, extremely valued partner … and a power in itself” with the “same values” as the US.

Macron told reporters that the meeting had been helpful, with a “strong” US commitment about European defense, but he said what happened next was important.

“Trust is like love: Declarations are good, but proof is better,” he said.

The secretive handling of the submarine deal, and the effective elbowing out of France from the Indo-Pacific, was in part driven by a US belief that France did not support a real confrontation with China.

But the handling of the episode led to soul-searching in Washington, and an acceptance it needed to do more than make gestures of reconciliation to Macron.

France regards the new agreement as necessary diplomatic and security recompense, and a successful effort to retrieve something positive from the debris of the cancelled Australian contract, which shook French trust in the Biden administration, symbolised by the temporary recall of the French ambassadors to Washington and Canberra.

Macron, in common with past French presidents, has long championed a stronger, separate European defence identity that he says can be complementary and not duplicatory of Nato. But he has faced resistance from Germany, and some Nordic EU states that fear EU defence will mean losing the protection of the US within Nato.

An implicit Biden endorsement of the Macron project may help ease some of the objections inside the EU, as well as play well for a US domestic audience keen to reduce the global US military footprint. Macron will develop the theme of a more autonomous European defence project as part of the six month French presidency starting in January.

Biden sees the shift as part of an effort to focus US military resources on competing with the growing military strength of China in the Indo-Pacific.

Before the meeting an Elysée source said it “will be an occasion to show that after the Aukus affair, we have been able to jointly negotiate significant elements of cooperation on key communal issues”.

The Elysée said the meeting set a clear framework for the future French-US relationship and “set a very high level of ambition for relations between the EU and the US, with a strong emphasis on security and defence”.

The Elysée said a key topic would be “our common security” namely European defence and transatlantic defence ties. Macron’s office stressed that there was “no contradiction between European defence and the Atlantic alliance”.

The Macron-Biden reconciliation, prepared in intensive talks over the last month, will help to heal some but not all of France’s wounds, but still leaves untreated soured relations between France and Australia, including the issue of compensation to France for cancellation of the contract.

France’s relations with Britain are deteriorating separately across a range of largely Brexit- rather than security-related issues.

The Aukus agreement is also facing growing questions in Australia, with some politicians asking why Canberra has abandoned the certainty of purchasing French diesel-powered engines to become involved in buying nuclear-powered submarines that will be subject to an 18-month scoping study followed by a delay of decades.

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North Korea

‘Momentum for peace’: Pope Francis urged to visit North Korea by Moon Jae-in



South Korea's president Moon Jae-in met Pope Francis at the Vatican to discuss peace efforts. Photograph: Vatican Media Handout/EPA

Agence France-Presse
Fri 29 Oct 2021 21.15 EDT

The South Korean president, Moon Jae-in, has made a fresh attempt to have Pope Francis visit North Korea, at a meeting at the Vatican where the two leaders discussed peace efforts, Yonhap news agency said.

Moon gave Francis one of 136 crosses created with barbed wire from a fence in the demilitarised zone, the division across the peninsula for the past 68 years.

He said on Friday that if the pope were to visit [North Korea](#) “when an opportunity arises,” such a trip would provide “momentum for peace”, presidential spokesperson Park Kyung-mee told the South Korean news agency.

Francis replied he was willing to go if he received a letter of invitation from Pyongyang, it added.

The [Vatican](#) said the pontiff discussed the “promotion of dialogue and reconciliation between Koreans” with Moon, who is in Italy for the G20 summit.

During Moon’s first meeting with the pope in 2018, he delivered a verbal invitation from North Korean leader Kim Jong-un for Francis to visit the North – something which no pope has done before.

Francis also travelled to South Korea in 2014, and held a mass in Seoul dedicated to reunification.

There are 5.9 million Catholics in South Korea, according to the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Korea, accounting for one in nine of the population.

In the North, religious freedom is enshrined in the constitution but all religious activity is completely banned outside of state-sanctioned institutions.

In the early 20th century, Pyongyang was a regional missionary hub with scores of churches and a thriving Christian community earning it the title of “Jerusalem of the East”.

But Kim Il-sung, the North’s late founding leader and the present ruler’s grandfather, viewed Christianity as a threat and eradicated it through executions and labour camps.

The North’s regime since then has allowed Catholic organisations to run aid projects in the impoverished country, but direct relations with the Vatican are non-existent.

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Coronavirus

Sajid Javid ‘leaning towards’ mandatory Covid jab for NHS staff

00:47

Compulsory Covid jab for NHS staff could ramp up vaccine uptake, says Javid – video

[Sarah Marsh](#)

[@sloumarsh](#)

Mon 25 Oct 2021 04.15 EDT

NHS staff have been warned they could face a mandatory requirement to be vaccinated against Covid, with the health secretary saying he is “leaning towards” making the jabs compulsory for staff in [England](#).

Sajid Javid said he had not made a final decision, but the move would put NHS staff in England broadly in line with the requirement [for care home workers](#).

It comes as the chancellor is expected to announce [£5.9bn for NHS England](#) as part of financial measures this week to clear the backlog of those waiting for tests and scans, which has been worsened by the pandemic, and also to buy equipment and improve IT.

Critics have said that as well as resources, the government must address the fact that there are not enough staff to support services.

“There are around 100,000 that are not [vaccinated in the NHS] at this point but what we saw with the care sector is that when we announced the policy ... then we saw many more people come forward and do the right thing and get vaccinated, that’s what I hope, if we can do the same thing with the [NHS](#), we will see,” Javid told Sky News.

“I’m leaning towards doing it [mandatory vaccinations],” he added. This was echoed during a later interview with the BBC Radio 4’s Today programme, where he said it was the “direction of travel”.

“If they haven’t got vaccinated by now then there is an issue about patient safety and that’s something the government will take very seriously,” Javid said, declining to say when the move would come into force. But he added: “I don’t want to put a timeframe on it but it wouldn’t be months and months.”

He also said he would wear a mask in the House of Commons chamber on Wednesday for the chancellor’s [autumn budget](#) because it would be crowded. But he stopped short of urging Conservative MPs to follow suit, as he told Today: “The guidelines are clear: it’s for people to make a personal decision on how they see the risk of them and those around them, and this is obviously a workplace setting, so it’s going to be a decision for them, but I can speak for myself.”

NHS leaders had a “mixed” view on mandatory vaccines for NHS workers, said Dr Layla McCay, the director of policy at the NHS Confederation.

She told Times Radio: We’ve spoken to our members about this, and it’s a bit of a mixed picture because most of them agree that in some ways, mandating the vaccine could be quite helpful to make sure that more people get the vaccine.

“But on the other hand, if some people decide they don’t want the vaccine that could lead to staff recruitment and retention problems and we’re going into this incredibly challenging winter.

“If we start to lose staff during this time that could be incredibly challenging, so it’s a real balance.”

Health workers should get vaccinated as a “matter of professional pride”, a member of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) has said.

Jeremy Brown, a professor of respiratory medicine at University College London hospitals, who sits on the JCVI, told Sky News: “If you’re frontline NHS staff dealing with patients and meeting the general public you should be vaccinated – it’s a professional thing, it’s a safety thing.

“We know that quite a few infections [that] have occurred in the hospital have potentially come from staff rather than patients. And if you’re not vaccinated, I feel, you shouldn’t be dealing with patients or the general public – whether it should be compulsory it is always a tricky thing but I do think professionally each person should be vaccinated.”

He said he would not answer a question about whether staff should lose their jobs if they were not vaccinated, but added: “I think they should change their role, perhaps, not lose their job.

“I’m sure there are exceptions where there is a reasonable reason why somebody hasn’t been vaccinated or doesn’t need to change their role, but in general if you’re dealing with a patient on a regular basis, you should be vaccinated as a matter of professional pride and role.”

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Politics live with Andrew Sparrow

Politics

Facebook is ‘unquestionably making hate worse’, says whistleblower Frances Haugen – as it happened

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Coronavirus

Rising number of anti-vaxxers ‘willing to take direct action against schools’



A protester holds a placard opposing Covid vaccines for children during a march calling for medical freedom in London. Photograph: Martin Pope/Sopa/Rex/Shutterstock

[Sally Weale](#) and [Sarah Marsh](#)

Mon 25 Oct 2021 13.22 EDT

“Substantial numbers” of people influenced by conspiracy theories are now willing to take direct action against schools administering vaccines, experts on online misinformation have warned, as Labour called for exclusion orders to block activists.

Amid findings that close to 80% of schools had been targeted by anti-vaxxers, [Keir Starmer](#) said it was “sickening” that those against vaccinations were demonstrating where children are educated.

The home secretary, [Priti Patel](#), called such protests “completely unacceptable”, adding that children, teachers or parents should not be “intimidated and harassed outside their schools”.

Her comments in the [Daily Telegraph](#) were echoed by the education secretary, Nadhim Zahawi, who said the “disgraceful actions of a small minority ... must be brought to an end”.

A warning was also issued by the Center for Countering Digital Hate that exclusion zones in themselves would not be enough to counter what it described as a “novel extremism threat”.

“What measures are the government taking to look into the networks encouraging people, and the individuals encouraging people to take this sort of action?” said founding CEO Imran Ahmed. “Most people will have swallowed some kind of misinformation, many people will have swallowed a bit of conspiracy theory ... very, very few people then go on to actually take real live action.”

“We now have substantial numbers of people who are willing to take direct action against schools to disrupt their activities because they believe them to be trying to harm children by administering a vaccine.”

Exclusion zones were needed, he said, but also warned of the broader problem, which was being driven by the dynamics of social media organising groups where more extreme comments were being amplified and rewarded.

The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) revealed this month that most of the schools surveyed by the union (79%) had been targeted by anti-vaxxers. This had mainly been through emails threatening legal action, but the ASCL said in some cases staff had been threatened with physical harm and that some protesters had gained access to school sites.

Starmer said: “It is sickening that anti-vax protesters are spreading dangerous misinformation to children in protests outside schools. The uptake of vaccines among children is far too low and the government’s rollout is

painfully slow. Everything must be done to get those eligible jabbed as quickly as possible in this public health emergency.

“Labour believes the law around public spaces protection orders [PSPOs] urgently needs to be updated so that local authorities can rapidly create exclusion zones for anti-vax protests outside schools.”

PSPOs can be used to disperse people from a public area and have previously been used to move on protesters outside abortion clinics or to allow police to confiscate alcohol in certain spaces.

But gaining permission to impose one takes significant consultation, and Labour is calling for an expedited process in cases of preventing harassment and intimidation of children outside schools if agreed by the school, the leader of the local council and the local police chief constable.

The party said the PSPO could be in place within five days and for up to six months.

Geoff Barton, the general secretary of the ASCL, said: “We would welcome any action which helps to keep anti-vaccination campaigners away from schools and which allows pupils and staff to go about their business without this intrusion.

“Schools are operating under great pressure because of the disruption which continues to be caused by the coronavirus pandemic. The last thing they need is the additional problem of protesters outside their gates.”

He added that jabs were key to keeping pupils in the classroom, and said: “If protesters think otherwise, there are plenty of outlets for them to express their views without resorting to targeting schools.”

The ASCL previously said that of the 526 responses from schools eligible for the Covid vaccination programme for 12-15-year-olds, 13% had reported seeing protesters immediately outside their school and 20% had reported protesters in the local area.

Eighteen schools said protesters had gained access to and protested inside the premises, while 20 said they had received communications threatening

physical harm to staff.

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Vaccines and immunisation

Ministers to ramp up Covid vaccine rollout as hospitalisations rise



Doctor Abhi Mantgani administers a Covid-19 vaccine booster to Shirley Davies at Birkenhead Medical Building in Birkenhead, Merseyside. NHS England said more than 5m people had had a third jab since the vaccination programme began administering them last month. Photograph: Martin Rickett/PA

[Andrew Gregory](#) Health editor

Sun 24 Oct 2021 19.01 EDT

Two million people who are eligible for a Covid booster vaccine in England will receive their invitation this week as ministers seek to intensify the rollout.

The government has launched a media blitz encouraging people to get a booster jab, amid mounting concern over the speed of the vaccination rollout as Covid hospitalisations rise.

NHS England said on Sunday that more than 5 million people had had a third jab since the vaccination programme began administering them last month.

About 7.5 million people have already been invited by text, email and letter, encouraging them to book through the national booking service. Two million more will receive invitations this week.

Figures suggest a slight increase in uptake in recent days. Saturday was the best day on record, with 325,140 jabs administered. In total, over the last three days, 828,729 boosters were administered, NHS England said.

Amanda Pritchard, the chief executive of NHS England, [tweeted](#) on Sunday: “Yesterday was the biggest day yet for Covid booster jabs: more than 325,000 people getting vital protection. In the past three days over 800,000 people have had their booster jab.”

The NHS is sticking to guidance that boosters should be delivered at least six months after the second dose, with evidence suggesting this is the best time to increase immunity to Covid.

About 10 million people in England are now eligible for a booster, including health and care workers, those with underlying health conditions, and people aged 50 and over.

Prof Stephen Powis, NHS England’s medical director, said: “Winter is coming and infection rates are rising and so it’s now really important that everyone receiving their invite for a booster vaccine from the NHS this week books in at one of the convenient vaccinations sites around the country offering this crucial, additional protection.”

Boris Johnson, who has resisted pleas from health leaders for tighter restrictions despite the rising number of cases, said vaccines would get the country through the winter and out of the pandemic.

But Prof Adam Finn, of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), said on Sunday the vaccination programme would not

be enough to bring coronavirus numbers under control.

While vaccines are very effective at stopping people from getting seriously ill, they are not so effective at stopping infections altogether or halting the spread of the virus.

“They do have an effect on that, but they’re not by themselves going to be enough at the present time to keep the spread of the virus under control,” Finn told Sky News’s Trevor Phillips on Sunday.

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Trainspotting: behind the scenes by Danny Boyle, Ewan McGregor, Irvine Welsh and more

Ewan McGregor as Renton

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‘We are more than just The Scream’: inside Oslo’s mega Munch museum



It is hoped the 13-storey Munch building will attract young visitors.
Photograph: Einar Aslaksen

[Oliver Wainwright](#)

Mon 25 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

How fitting that a building dedicated to the life and work of [Edvard Munch](#) may make you want to scream.

The £235m [mega museum](#) of the tormented Norwegian artist stands as an ominous grey tower on the Oslo waterfront, lurching out at the top like a military lookout post, keeping watch over the fjord. It is a location scout's dream for the ultimate villain's headquarters, an almost comically menacing structure, bent over the pristine white iceberg of the city's beloved [opera house](#) with a thuggish hunch. It may seem like an apt container for the tortured soul of Munch, whose shadow looms large over the city – but the anxiety-inducing effect wasn't wholly intentional.

"We wanted to create a welcoming vertical symbol," says [Juan Herreros](#), the Spanish architect behind the 13-storey complex. "It may be against the local tendency for modesty, but we thought the city needed a statement in a prominent location for this astonishing artist. It creates a new vantage point where people can discover a different view of the landscape."



Architect Juan Herreros: 'I am of the generation that has consumed too many horizontal museums.' Photograph: Jan Khür

More than a decade in the making, and subject to intense political wrangling over its cost, form and location, the museum finally opened on Friday, one

of the largest in the world dedicated to a single artist. It is a mighty mall of Munch, a towering stack of 11 galleries connected by zigzagging escalators, crowned with a rooftop restaurant and bar.

“Forget everything you know about museums,” says its director, Stein Olav Henrichsen. “This is totally different.”

The word museum has been dropped for a start. In an attempt to attract new audiences, who may be put off by the m-word, this is just MUNCH. Its punchy all-caps logo is slanted back 20 degrees to match the tilt of the tower, emblazoned across the facade in glowing, full storey-high letters. A promotional video sets the youth-oriented tone, featuring teens skateboarding towards the building, texting each other with scream emojis, on their way to hang out, not just look at paintings. Henrichsen promises that a brimming programme of events and performances will “make this house lively from 10am to 10pm every day”.

They won’t be short of visitors, thanks to global Munch-mania. But the impending crowds seem to have dictated the design: the whole place feels like it has been designed to process the hordes as efficiently as possible. A functional foyer, with shop and cafe, leads through big glass doors to the ranks of escalators and lifts, where visitors are funnelled up between the landings and into the galleries. It is a relentlessly airport-like world of grey floors, grey walls and grey ceilings, with glass balustrades, steel trim and aluminium mesh cladding completing the cold, clinical palette. Seats are placed at the end of these long landings, with monitors adding to the departure lounge vibe, but it is not a place you would care to linger, or wander aimlessly. It feels like a vertical conveyor-belt of art.

“I am of the generation that has consumed too many horizontal museums,” says Herreros, “where there are more people walking around, not knowing where they are going, than actually looking at the paintings.” In contrast to these free-flowing, public space-filled museums, he says, which are often more about spectacular architecture than content, “we wanted to make a paradise for curators, where the art is the protagonist.”



A vertical conveyor-belt of art: the escalators of the Munch building.
Photograph: Einar Aslaksen

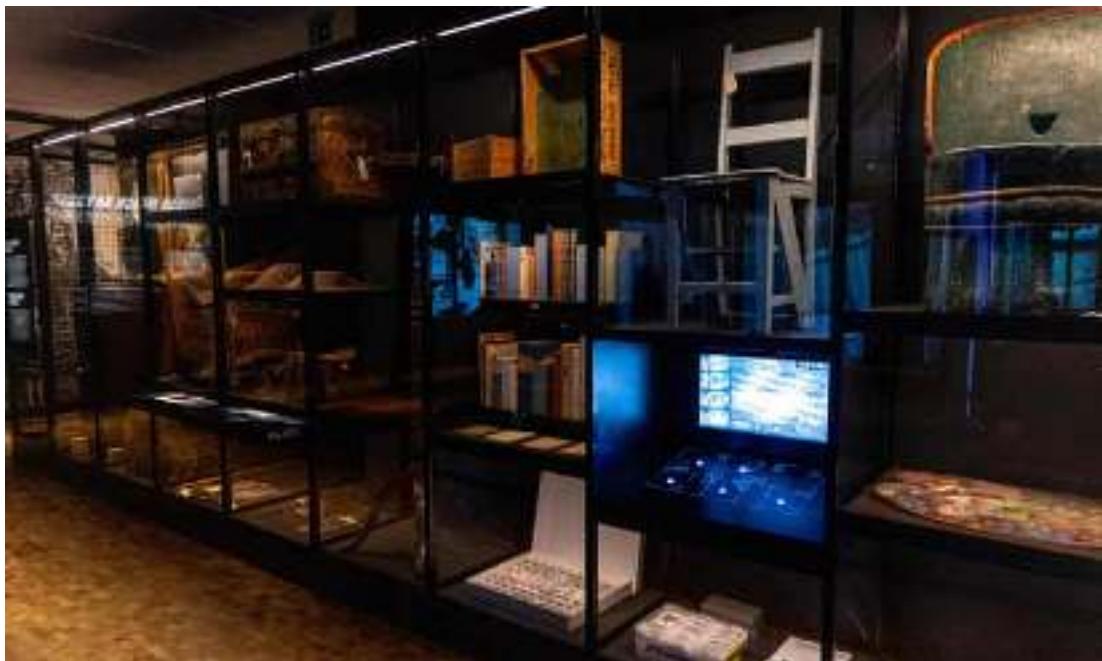
He has succeeded in the sense that the galleries themselves are all neutral, rectangular, black-box spaces, designed with a range of different heights, with no architectural whimsy getting in the way. “We are not like Zaha,” he says, referring to the late Zaha Hadid who [designed galleries with impractical angled walls](#), “killing curators every day”.

The star of the show is indeed not the building but Munch, whose 26,700 works now enjoy four times the amount of space than at the previous 1960s museum in Tøyen, 2km to the north-east. Five thematic exhibitions introduce the many facets of the artist, from a gallery of his monumental canvases (so big they had to be craned through a hole in the side of the building), to a floor that focuses on his woodcuts, complete with a textured table where you can rub your own Munch relief. Another room shows his early experiments with selfies, made after acquiring a Kodak Brownie camera in 1902, including an arresting photo of himself power-posing in a loin cloth on the beach, paintbrush in hand.

Another escalator ride brings you to a temporary exhibition that pairs the work of Tracey Emin with Munch across two floors ([partly shown at the Royal Academy last year](#)). They make for surprisingly good bedfellows,

indulging each other's bed-bound misery with their anguished, smeary canvases. Emin's filthy bed looks exactly the kind of place Munch would have been at home in, the detritus of used tissues and tampons echoing his habit of leaving his paintings outside in the forest to get covered in muck and bird droppings.

Further windows into his domestic life are provided on a floor that recreates ghostly black scenes from his home and studio, displaying his paintbrushes, palettes and even the breathing equipment he used to alleviate his lifelong lung problems. You may need similar aids if you're planning to see the entire museum in a day. It's a feat of endurance, but it creates a rich picture of the artist. As Henrichsen puts it: "We are more than just *The Scream*."



Everyday objects from the the artist's life sit alongside his work.
Photograph: Beate Oma Dahle/NTB/AFP/Getty Images

It is the fate of that twisted, gaping face – now a global staple of Halloween costumes and emoji keyboards – that they have mainly to thank for their new home. One of *The Scream* paintings was [stolen \(and later recovered\) from the Tøyen museum in 2004](#), sparking debate around the need for a more fortified facility. Along with the increased security and climate-controlled galleries, a theatrical trick has been employed to heighten the drama of Munch's best-known work. The museum has three different

versions of The Scream – painting, crayon and lithograph – hung in a dimly lit shrine on the seventh floor, but only one is ever visible. The other two remain hidden behind black doors, each taking its turn to be revealed for an hour at a time. The earliest and most famous version of the painting may belong to the National Museum ([reopening in a new home across town next year](#)), “But now we are giving them some competition,” says Henrichsen. They’re certainly upping the gift-shop stakes. You can buy the tormented, quivering face on everything from tote bags and pens to glasses cases, paintboxes and even a diamond-encrusted ring – yours for £17,800.



The limited-edition Scream ring, priced £17,800. Photograph: Langaard.no

The Munch marathon ends with an open-air roof terrace, flanked by a penthouse bar and restaurant (sadly not called Munchies), where the building leans out to take in the view of the Bjørvika waterfront. The area has been transformed over the last two decades from a container port to the cultural heart of the city, with the opera house, [an astonishing new library](#) and now MUNCH, all flanked by [the brash “barcode” development](#) of high-rise offices and hotels behind – with which the museum’s tower was partly designed to compete.

For a space intended to provide panoramic vistas, the roof terrace does a good job of blocking the view, with its layers of chunky steelwork and

angled glazing creating the feeling of being hemmed in, trapped in a zone of consumption. Munch was never free from his torments, and neither shall the visitor be. “Without anxiety and illness,” he wrote, “I am a ship without a rudder. I want to keep those sufferings.” Little did he know how his trauma would endure – and end up being wrought in a 60 metre-high anxious monolith of aluminium and glass.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2021/oct/25/we-are-more-than-just-the-scream-inside-oslos-mega-munch-museum>

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Honest playlistMusic

‘One of the few things that makes me angry is Abba’: Alex Horne’s honest playlist



Alex Horne: ‘I was into metal as a teenager.’ Photograph: Channel 4/Simon Webb



[Rich Pellew](#)

Mon 25 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

The first single I ever bought

The Loco-Motion by [Kylie Minogue](#). My brother and I were both big Kylie fans and I still stand by it: she's one of the true greats. Also I can relate to her, because I don't think she can really sing.

The song that is my karaoke go-to

I had to pick a song at [comedian] Ed Gamble's wedding to sing first to encourage others, so I picked Disco 2000 by Pulp.

The song I stream the most

The theme tune to Detectorists by Johnny Flynn. Don't ask me why.

The best song to play at a party

Turn Down for What by DJ Snake and Lil Jon. I'm Little Alex, so I like Lil Jon. Plus the music video is funny, and best played on a big screen.

The song I wish I had written

Pretty much any song by [Flight of the Conchords](#), but I'll pick Business Time – we could never be as cool.

The song I can't help singing

Witch Doctor, but not the original 1958 version written and performed by Ross Bagdasarian under his stage name David Seville. I prefer the 2007 version sung by Alvin and the Chipmunks. It has always stuck in my head and pops out during inappropriate occasions, such as funerals.

The song I say I hate that I secretly like

I was into metal as a teenager. Then I went on a gap year and a girl I had a crush on really liked More Than Words by Extreme. I knew I was supposed to hate it, but I liked it. But they're just not cool, are they?

The song I can no longer listen to

One of the few things that makes me angry is any music by [Abba](#). I'll go with Mamma Mia, but it could be any song. Abba are so overplayed. My bandmates tell me they are the best pop group ever, and that makes me even more annoyed. Even the word "Abba" is annoying.

The best song to have sex to

Nothing with words; that's too distracting. I'll go for the 1812 Overture by Tchaikovsky. My wife and I bang it on all the time. The trick is to time it alongside the bit with the fireworks where the cannons go off.

The song I want played in my funeral

[The Horne Section](#) have actually recorded a song to be played at my funeral, with [Jessie Ware](#). Can I have that? If not, then I want the theme to EastEnders as the curtains are drawn.

Taskmaster is on Thursday, 9pm, Channel 4; the Horne Section are touring to December.

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Jesica Monica Bura poses with her bridesmaids in her parents' house in the village of Cămărzana. Photograph: Michal Novotný

[The Guardian picture essay](#)

Romanian wedding traditions – a photo essay

Jesica Monica Bura poses with her bridesmaids in her parents' house in the village of Cămărzana. Photograph: Michal Novotný

by Michal Novotný

Mon 25 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

In a remote region in the north of [Romania](#), there is a remarkable mixture of tradition and wealth. Residents of the Oaș region have been labouring for years in the west so that back home they can build magnificent houses and drive expensive cars. Dressed in the latest Paris fashions as well as old folk costumes, they organise opulent weddings worth tens of thousands of

pounds, where guests dance among dry ice and eat select delicacies, with everything recorded by a team of photographers.



- A wedding procession in the village of Bătarci

For 11 months of the year they work in western [Europe](#), but in mid-August they return to their native villages in the hills of northern Romania, near the border with Hungary and Ukraine. “All year they work hard, save their money, they don’t take vacations, but at home they want to show off,” says Claudiu Bud. He has worked in Spain and England but has returned home to run the Enigma bar in Negrești-Oaș, the region’s capital, population 12,000. “People here have always been hard-working and able to make money,” he says, surrounded by bottles of expensive single-malt whiskies.



- Guests eat dinner during the wedding party of Jesica Monica Bura and Grigore Pop-Hotcas in the village wedding hall in Cămărzana. About 1,000 guests attended the party

Weddings in Oaș are attended by hundreds, sometimes even 1,000 people, and it is important that no expense is spared. Stretch limos are fully booked shuttling between villages; cosmeticians and hairdressers in beauty salons work until exhaustion; and one suspects that cooks sleep by their stoves and ovens, flower shops make endless bouquets, and musicians play every night until dawn. Everything must be the best so that guests leave satisfied. And I was one of them.

Wedding madness

Maria Cont slices off a chunk of yellow butter that has softened nicely in the noontime sun, and carefully massages it into Andreea Avram's hair. Preparations for her wedding to Florian Mois are beginning, accompanied by the wild cadences of Romanian folk songs. It will take four hours to braid her traditional hairdo. Tomorrow Avram will be sitting on a podium at the head of a long table, and the eyes of 400 guests will be fixed upon her.

Weddings in the Romanian region of Oaș are a serious affair, and usually take place twice. “This year we’ll have a traditional wedding in folk costumes, but next year we’ll put on a modern wedding, which will be attended by many more people,” says Avram.



- Maria Cont helps to dress Denisa Avram in the traditional wedding dress

Maria Cont enjoys special status in the village of Racsa. “I learned how to prepare brides from my mother and grandmother, and nobody else knows how to do it,” she says as she braids locks of hair into something resembling elephant ears. She also owns accessories such as dozens of strings with multi-coloured beads, a fake bun, and decorated ribbons that will be sewn to the hairdo later. “How will she sleep so that she doesn’t damage this little work of art?” I wonder, and Avram’s mother laughs: “She’ll have to think of something, it’s her first wedding.”

The Conts’ house perches on a hill overlooking the village, and beyond the trees there is an amazing view of what seems to be the entirety of Oaș, to the hills marking the Ukrainian border.



- A bride and a groom with their guests and musicians leave a Romanian Orthodox church after a traditional wedding ceremony in the village of Tur





- Women dressed in traditional costumes watch a wedding ceremony in a Romanian Orthodox church in the village of Tur. At the end of August and start of September, the region is gripped by wedding madness, and whenever you drive through its villages, in short order you will run into a wedding

Where did the locals' wealth come from? "Even back in communist times they would travel to the south of the country in the summer for seasonal farm work or to paint high-voltage towers. They felled deep forests that had to make way for fields when communist dictator Ceaușescu wanted to make Romania the breadbasket of Europe. As soon as communism fell, they went west to work," says Bud in his Enigma bar.



- A fiddler plays a traditional song during the wedding of Marian and Madalina Bosinceanu in the village of Vama

In the beginning they may not have known any foreign languages, but they didn't mind labouring from dawn to dusk, doing work at which others turned up their noses. They slept in abandoned houses or crowded together in miniature flats in the worst neighbourhoods, and they saved. Some became successful and started their own companies. When they had saved enough money, they began building houses back home in their villages, which are more like palaces, but ones in which nobody lives for most of the year. They are being constantly rebuilt and improved. There's a saying in Oaș: "If my neighbour builds a three-storey house, mine has to have four."



- Mihai Big kisses his mother, Marie, before his wedding in the village of Racsa





- Women dressed in traditional costumes watch dancing guests during the wedding of Mihai Big and Denisa Avram in the village of Racsa

In summer you can encounter Porsches, Maseratis or Mercedes on country roads in Oaș in numbers that dwarf even those in rich neighbourhoods of Munich or London. Often I see a young man or woman behind the wheel, with a new driving licence, if they even have one. "That's the latest trend, they've started competing in who will buy their kids the most powerful and expensive car," says Bud, shaking his head.

A complicated hairdo is slowly growing on Avram's head. Her bridesmaids, who are dressed in folk costumes, have come to support her. One of them, 15-year-old Denisa Lup, watches what lies in store for her one day. Her parents have been working in England for the past 20 years, and because they were too busy working to take care of her, she lived with her grandfather until the age of 10. During this year's summer holidays she has already attended 15 weddings, and next year she is invited to at least 20.



- Andreea Avram, dressed in a traditional bride's costume that can weigh up to 20kg, in front of her family's house in the village of Racsa





- Andreea Avram in her traditional bridal costume in front of her family's house in the village of Racsa.

Remus Tiplea is a renowned money changer in Oaș, and in the summer, thanks to workers returning home from abroad and their conspicuous spending, he reaps a windfall. In 2009 he began taking photos and he has already published several books on traditions and rituals in Oaș.

“Today’s wedding in the village of Camarzana will be fairly large, for about a thousand people,” he says in an attempt to prepare me for the spectacle. But such an event is much more than one photographer could handle, and so we set off in a convoy of cars – the small team, headed by Tiplea, includes two videographers and another photographer. Two or three hundred people are invited to the average wedding in Oaș, more than 1,500 to large ones.



- Grigore Pop-Hotcas and Jesica Monica Bura wait for their wedding guests in the Jesica's parents house in the village of Camarzana

In Camarzana, everything is being readied in the yard of the groom's parents' house for the arrival of the wedding guests. Two bands have been invited – traditional Gypsies with guitars and violins, and a female singer with a small band. Rows of champagne glasses are arranged on the table, and the champagne is being kept cold in a refrigerated van parked on the street. The glasses are hand-painted with the names of the wedding guests, and the glasses for the bride and groom have a relatively faithful rendering of them locked in an embrace.



- Jesica Monica Bura poses for a portrait in front of her parents' house in the village of Camarzana. Right; Jesica Monica Bura visiting a beauty salon before the wedding.

They've barely started bringing out platters of delicacies, and we're already on our way to the bride's house. I look back wistfully at the meatballs, mini-

schnitzels, roulades and salamis, but we're not going far: the bride and groom, Jesica Monica Bura and Grigore Hop-Hotcas grew up almost within sight of each other.



- Jesica Monica Bura and Grigore Pop-Hotcas arrive to their wedding party in the village wedding hall in Camarzana

The bride's family can't allow itself to be put to shame either, and here too the tables are groaning under various delicacies – but there's one thing that's different about the tables at the groom's house. "Notice that there's no alcohol here," says Claudia Simon, a videographer. "The bride's family belongs to the Pentecostal movement, while the groom's family is Orthodox." But religious differences pose no problem here – the wedding will be in the Orthodox church that towers over the village.



- Jesica Monica Bura poses for a portrait in front of her parents' house

Simon is from Zalau, about 100 miles away. “During a year I shoot roughly 30 weddings, but here in Oaș I do at most two – I don’t think I could survive more. Elsewhere in Romania people are happy to have the wedding edited down to a short film, but in Oaș we make roughly five-hour movies for them.”

Everything must be recorded meticulously. A small flowered background has been set up in the garden, where the bride is having her picture taken with everyone. When there aren’t any more people to take pictures with, Tiplea, his team and I finally attack the platters of delicacies, but after the first few bites we’re called into the house. Standing in the corner of the living room is another wedding dress, and the bride with her bridesmaids, wearing housecoats made expressly for the wedding, are already frolicking in the bedroom with balloons. The scene has been carefully staged for the sole benefit of the photographers and videographers.

Dressed in her over-the-top wedding dress, the bride returns to the garden to once again have pictures taken with everyone. Simon estimates this dress cost about €5,000. The wedding guests hand over envelopes with gifts. “The

average wedding costs approximately €50,000, but every guest has to bring a gift from their family,” Tiplea says later. The amount depends on how well you know the bride and groom. “The amount collected is always more than the wedding costs.”

We join the procession to the groom’s house where a brief civil ceremony follows. There’s more dancing in a circle in the courtyard, and soon we’re off in a small procession to the church.



- Fiddlers play during the wedding procession of Jesica Monica Bura and Grigore Pop-Hotcas

After the ceremony, when it’s almost dark, we drive to the wedding hall at the edge of Camarzana. The hall is so large that you can barely see from one end to the next. The newlyweds are already dancing and the singer is putting his all into a romantic song. “This is going to be a long night,” says Tiplea. At his last wedding he didn’t finish taking pictures until 6am.



- Jesica Monica Bura and Grigore Pop-Hotcas pose for a wedding photo

Over the course of seven days I attended six weddings in Oaș. I'm exhausted and can't imagine attending 20 during a few weeks, and then returning rested to Paris or London to labour all year on construction sites.



- Villagers wait to see Jesica Monica Bura and Grigore Pop-Hotcas after their wedding

“You can expect to wait at least an hour at the border,” says Tiplea, who has come to say goodbye. “Everyone is leaving and we’ll have some peace and quiet again. Seventy per cent of the locals work abroad. Most of the year you don’t even have anyone to talk to here.”

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Coronavirus

Beijing and Wuhan marathons postponed as China battles Delta outbreak



A health worker takes a swab sample from a man during a Covid test at a nucleic acid collection station in Beijing. Photograph: Noel Celis/AFP/Getty

Helen Davidson in Taipei

@heldavidson

Mon 25 Oct 2021 03.13 EDT

A Covid outbreak in northern [China](#) is expected to get worse, authorities have warned, after cases were detected in 11 provinces and two marathons were postponed.

Authorities recorded more than two dozen new community cases of coronavirus on Sunday, including four in the capital, Beijing, seven in Inner

Mongolia, six in Gansu, six in Ningxia, and one each in Hebei, Hunan and Shaanxi.

As the rest of the world opens up and resumes travel, China is maintaining a zero-Covid strategy, particularly in the lead-up to the [Winter Olympic Games](#).

It has responded to other Delta outbreaks with localised lockdowns, mass testing and transport shutdowns. Authorities respond swiftly with strict measures to any outbreaks and local officials can face punishment for any inadequate responses.

On Sunday organisers of the Beijing marathon, scheduled for 31 October, announced its postponement, citing the safety of runners, staff and residents. It followed the postponement of the Wuhan marathon, which was scheduled for Sunday.

About 30,000 people were expected to participate in the 40th Beijing marathon, which has run since 1981. Approximately 26,000 had been expected to compete in Wuhan.

More than 130 cases have been linked to the outbreak of the Delta variant since 17 October, a spokesperson for the national health commission, Mi Feng, said on Sunday.

Most were linked to domestic tour groups, health officials said, but non-tourism cases were rising. Mi urged affected areas to adopt “emergency” measures, warning there was an increasing risk that the outbreak might spread owing to “seasonal factors”.

Tour operators have been banned from organising cross-region travel into affected areas, while Beijing has prohibited the entry of people with a travel history to affected areas.

Bus and taxi services have been suspended in some provinces, while an Inner Mongolia county, Ejina, has asked all residents to remain indoors, Bloomberg reported. State media said thousands of tourists were stranded in Ejina, including elderly members of tour groups.

About 75% of the population has received two doses of China's domestically produced vaccines, and authorities have begun administering booster shots to people who were vaccinated at least six months ago.

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Coronavirus

Worst of US pandemic likely behind us but we can't drop our guard, experts say



A man wearing a protective face mask in Manhattan. Although new cases and deaths have declined across much of the US, there have still been surges in some states, such as Alaska. Photograph: Shannon Stapleton/Reuters

Eric Berger

Mon 25 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

The number of new Covid cases and deaths in the United States has been in a steady decline since early September, prompting many infectious disease experts to conclude that the worst impacts of the pandemic in America are probably in the past.

But in the same breath, those experts also caution that it's not yet safe to abandon safeguards against the virus. That's because parts of the US

population and much of the world remain unvaccinated, which could allow for outbreaks and dangerous new variants of the virus to emerge.

“My most optimistic assessment is that if we keep vaccinating, sometime during late fall, into the winter, the pandemic phase of Covid will be substantially reduced over much of the United States,” said William Schaffner, an infectious diseases expert at Vanderbilt University School of Medicine.

He added: “We could move from pandemic to endemic, and endemic means that the virus remains in the community, akin to influenza, smolders along, keeps being transmitted, but the rate of disease that occurs is profoundly diminished, and the impact on individuals and health systems is very much controlled.”

In early September, the seven-day average of daily new cases in the United States was 166,000, according to [data](#) compiled by the New York Times. On 20 October that figure was 76,000, representing a 54% decrease. The seven-day average of new deaths has also declined by 26% over the last month, according to New York Times data.

“We have highly effective vaccines – which, yes, the new [Delta variant] impacts, and we may need to get boosters to protect people who are vulnerable and high-risk – but we have made big strides compared to this time last year, going into colder weather, at least in the northern hemisphere,” said Nahid Bhadelia, director of Boston University’s Center for Emerging Infectious Diseases Policy and Research.

Bhadelia also credits some of the “defanging” of the virus to the emergence of new antiviral drugs that reduce some of the worst effects of Covid for infected patients.

Still, while new cases and deaths have declined across much of the US, there have still been surges in some states. For example, Alaska, which trails the US average in its vaccination rate, has seen a significant increase in the number of hospitalizations and deaths over the last month, a [trend](#) that

forced hospitals to postpone non-emergency surgeries and import staff from other states.

In states with lower vaccination rates, “it’s unclear what the baseline immunity from infections is,” and “that’s going to determine whether or not there are surges and how big those surges are,” Bhadelia said, though she did not expect something on the scale of previous waves.

There are also parts of the world, such as Africa, where only a small percentage of the population has been [vaccinated](#) against Covid, largely because of a lack of access to the doses, according to health officials and African [leaders](#).

That could allow new variants of the virus to emerge.

A new variant “could reduce the effectiveness of our current vaccines, which would mean that we would need to re-engineer the vaccines and give everybody boosters again,” Bhadelia explained.

The other factor that complicates when people can stop worrying about the virus is the lack of a clear nationwide goal in terms of the number of cases, other than zero, said Justin Lessler, an epidemiology professor at the University of North Carolina. There have been 23 cases per 100,000 in the United States over the last week, according to the New York Times.

For Lessler, the goal is one case per 100,000 people, because then the risk of hospitalizations due to the virus is relatively negligible and the chances of meeting someone who is infected will be extremely low, he said. Then, Lessler said, he would be willing to eat indoors at a restaurant.

“I think that’s a reasonable number to have in your head as a goal, and I wish we had more of a national conversation about what the goal should be,” Lessler said. “It gives people a sense of what to expect.”

Bhadelia also hopes that the country retains limits on large indoor gatherings in communities with low vaccination rates and high transmission of the virus.

“We have done this every single time – starting with Memorial Day last year – where we just [open](#) up too fast, and I think this time, maybe we should be a bit more cautious,” said Bhadelia, who recommended retaining requirements for masks and proof of vaccination or a negative Covid test to attend events.

When asked whether people should attend large indoor gatherings, such as basketball games, Schaffner, the infectious diseases expert at Vanderbilt University, said he would not declare an event is safe “because it implies complete safety”.

Instead, he suggests people at higher risk from Covid, such as seniors and those with underlying conditions like lung disease, conduct a “personal risk assessment: Would I rather stay home and watch it on TV?

“Or am I ready to go, and if I go, will I wear a mask? They will be reducing their risk [with a mask], but if you go to a congregant event, where there are lots of people indoors – particularly if they are excited and cheering – there will be some risk,” Schaffner said.

Also, not everyone in epidemiology is convinced that the US has turned a corner in this pandemic. Shaman described himself as “very neutral” on the subject, in part because of uncertainty over when immunity from vaccines or infections wanes.

That is “going to be very important to understanding how frequently we are going to see new outbreaks of Covid in our communities,” Shaman said. “I’m cautious and waiting for the evidence. If you wanted me to make a prediction for where we will be this winter, I can’t even begin to tell you.”

The infectious disease experts, of course, hope more people in America will continue to get vaccinated. They also hope some safety measures become fixtures of society even after the pandemic. That includes an emphasis on handwashing – even though scientists determined that the virus rarely spreads through touch – and people no longer coming into the office when sick because they see it as a badge of honor.

“We all are a little flippant about when we are sick. People go to their jobs and are, like, ‘It’s just a cough. It’s just a stuffy nose.’ And I would hope that people at least start wearing masks when they are sick. That has become the behavior in a lot of the world, and I think it would be nice if that was something we do” in the United States, said Lessler.

Still, the experts also acknowledge that some people no longer want to hear that they need to be cautious.

“People are exhausted by this,” Shaman said. “The complacency in society is totally understandable, and there are only so many times you can tell people: ‘The virus doesn’t care.’”

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West of England metro mayor urges mask-wearing after rise in Covid cases



Dan Norris has asked the public to give the NHS the best possible present this Christmas by wearing a mask, getting vaccinated and washing their hands. Photograph: Matthew Horwood/Getty Images

PA Media

Sun 24 Oct 2021 17.54 EDT

The West of England's metro mayor is urging people to start wearing masks again in public places after a sharp rise in Covid cases across the south-west.

[Dan Norris](#) is sending a poster urging people to wear masks to thousands of public-facing businesses. He will also take out pro-mask adverts in local papers and has written to Sajid Javid, the health secretary, asking for extra funding for the west of England.

The south-west of England has seen a huge rise in cases, with some of the blame being laid on errors at a lab in Wolverhampton which told many people who had the virus that they were Covid-free.

“Through no fault of the NHS, local civic leadership, local businesses, or local people, infections continued to spread unchecked within our region,” he said. “Now we face a hugely difficult situation.”

Norris warned that the NHS is facing a looming crisis which could bring it “to its knees”.

“There is a looming crisis,” he said. “The last thing I want to see is more death and heartbreak, with patients queueing on trolleys as our precious NHS is brought to its knees.”

Instead, he asked the public to give the NHS the best possible present this Christmas by wearing a mask, getting vaccinated and washing their hands.

It comes as cases have soared in south-west England, with Bath and North East Somerset seeing 1,079.7 cases per 100,000 people, according to the latest government data up to 19 October.

This compares with the England-wide average of 482 per 100,000.

Meanwhile, south Gloucestershire has 931.5 cases per 100,000 and Bristol has 763.7 per 100,000.

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2021.10.25 - Opinion

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It's Boris Johnson's path or Rishi Sunak's way: the Tories can't have both

[John Harris](#)



‘Words tumble out of Boris Johnson’s mouth: even his own chancellor, it seems, does not take them wholly seriously.’ Photograph: Jonathan Brady/PA

Mon 25 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

Look at the two main political parties in England and Wales, and consider which one seems to have most changed.

Labour? It has been collectively fretting for decades about the appeal of Conservatism to the working class, while solidifying into [a party dominated](#) by the educated bourgeoisie. In terms of basic beliefs, it remains the party of the big centralised state. Leaving aside the brief spells of Margaret Beckett and Harriet Harman as acting leader, all 19 of the [party's chiefs](#) have been white men, and its current frontbench does not quite reflect the diversity its leaders extol.

Meanwhile, the Tories have long seemed restless, and self-transforming. Their five most recent prime ministers have included two women. The next leadership election could well be a contest between Sajid Javid, Priti Patel, Kwasi Kwarteng and Rishi Sunak. Now that the party has achieved breakthrough successes in a huge number of former Labour strongholds, its senior figures suddenly speak the language of interventionism, infrastructure and “levelling up”. The narrative the [government is now selling](#) portrays the country’s current problems as mere turbulence, en route to a fairer future that will benefit the people and places that Conservative politics has too often ignored.

On Wednesday, Sunak will present his combined budget and spending review: a big occasion that will mark the decisive beginning of what the government wants us to see as post-pandemic politics. Notwithstanding the [apparent divisions](#) between the prime minister and chancellor about the spending involved, the government’s pursuit of net zero carbon emissions by 2050 will loom large. So will the Tories’ emphasis on somehow bringing opportunity and wealth to places where they are in short supply. The weekend saw pre-budget announcements that included [a revival](#) of the kind of early-years provision that Sunak’s party has spent 10 years taking away,

new [transport finance](#) for England's city regions, and [increased funding](#) for skills education.

But the chill of austerity is also in the air. In his [speech at Tory conference](#), Sunak insisted that "recovery comes with a cost". For the spending review, the Treasury has [asked Whitehall departments](#) to identify "at least 5% of savings and efficiencies" from their budgets, and any additional money going to many government departments looks set to amount to mere crumbs. Councils continue to face impossible financial pressures, and there is no sign of any meaningful help from Whitehall. We know that the so-called tax burden is set to rise to its highest-ever peacetime level. Any excitement about the Treasury's supposed enthusiasm for "levelling up" also ignores the most significant pre-budget announcement by far: the [brutal ending](#) of the £20-a-week "uplift" to universal credit, which was [pushed through by the chancellor](#) – and takes much-needed money out of both people's pockets and local economies.

Moreover, the government's strategic goal seems to have been set. On the most basic fiscal matters, Sunak and Boris Johnson have reportedly [come to an agreement](#). As the Financial Times columnist Robert Shrimpsley [wrote last week](#), in a sentence that could have described any number of Tory budgets going back decades: "The ambition, shared by both prime minister and chancellor, is to rein in spending and borrowing now so that they can cut income tax before the election." Whatever the pyrotechnics, the party's outward revolutions have seemingly been carried out in the service of a fundamental continuity: everything must change in order for everything to remain the same.

Of course, Sunak will not present his announcements in those terms. Before the relevant experts start going through the small print, there will doubtless be headlines saluting his largesse, and suggesting that the great post-Brexit shift in Conservatism is proceeding as planned. Missing from such hype will be not only the fine details of what he announces, but the kind of action that is demanded at a time of profound economic uncertainty and a mounting cost-of-living crisis – not to mention the continuing pandemic. Witness last week's [open letter](#) from left-leaning thinktanks and economists, proposing a

fiscal stimulus of up to £90bn split between capital investment and day-to-day spending, and focused on “a green and care-led recovery”.

Another interesting point of comparison is the prime minister’s rhetoric. Last June, for example, as he announced a pretty trifling £5bn increase in infrastructure spending, [Johnson insisted](#) the government would “not be responding to this crisis with what people called austerity”, and that he and his colleagues would not try “to cheese-pare our way out of trouble, because the world has moved on since 2008”. They would, he claimed, “build back greener and build a more beautiful Britain”. He went on: “I am conscious as I say all this that it sounds like a prodigious amount of government intervention. It sounds like a New Deal – and all I can say is that if so, then that is how it is meant to sound and to be, because that is what the times demand.”

Words tumble out of his mouth: even his own chancellor, it seems, does not take them wholly seriously. As Johnson sounds off, Sunak’s calculation seems to be that someone has to be a Conservative grownup, guarding the nostrums of balanced budgets, and quietly readying his party for an eventual return to a smaller state. This will not get in the way of increases in the minimum wage, a modicum of devolution, some transport projects, and small pots of money to restore what the government calls “local pride”. But if Sunak gets his way, the ground rules of Conservative politics will be the same as ever: the Tories will style themselves as the financially responsible champions of homeowners and hard workers; the Labour party they will warn against will be portrayed as fiscally incontinent and too kind for its own good.

This positioning has helped the Tories win elections before; maybe it will again. But there are [tensions within the cabinet](#) about the gap between some ministers’ interventionist ambitions and Sunak’s preferred direction of travel, and they may yet spill out into other parts of the Conservative party. If I were one of the new MPs representing a so-called red wall constituency, I think the chancellor’s emphasis on the old Toryism of fiscal tightening and eventual tax cuts would bring on a growing sense of worry. Among the party’s leaders in local government, wearied by the necessity of [competitively bidding](#) for paltry “levelling up” funding, anxiety may yet teeter into rising anger.

The UK's deep inequalities and imbalances have made it vulnerable to both economic shocks and political turnabouts, as proved by the crash of 2008 and what eventually followed it: most notably, the vote for Brexit, and the way the restlessness and resentment behind it led to Johnson's seismic victory in 2019. Sunak and his ilk may think the eternal Tory talent for maintaining the status quo while presenting a picture of novelty might serve them well – but I would not count on it.

Soon enough, they may yet pick up cries from the cheap seats which will sound eerily similar to the ones last heard when our exit from the EU was held up by parliamentary deadlock, and the government's current high-ups presented themselves as the solution: "We voted for change. Where is it?"

John Harris is a Guardian columnist

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OpinionRace

My Black friends fear calling the police. That's why I'm taking on racism in the force

[Abimbola Johnson](#)



'Disparities in stop and search are still unexplained and unjustified'.
Photograph: keith van-Loen/Alamy

Mon 25 Oct 2021 03.00 EDT

After my appointment to oversee police plans for race equality in England and Wales was announced, a friend messaged me, warning that I may find myself "hard-blocked at every turn, worn down by frustration or have no real power – if not all three". Another called me to check I had a good support network in place, and that I had an exit strategy for if and/or when I became exhausted by the role.

It's a cynicism that I shared and remain acutely sensitive to, despite my grand-sounding title of chair of the independent scrutiny and oversight board on the police's action plan on inclusion and race. Since May last year, I've seen numerous institutions and corporations releasing statements about anti-racism, we've had black squares on social media, but there's been very little movement towards structural change. I've also seen a decrease in the quality of conversation and action around racism: a war on "wokeism" raging in politics and the media, and a reluctance to even accept the idea of systemic inequality.

A year ago, I wrote [a Guardian article](#) about the concerns many of my Black friends had around calling the police. The article drew on my decade-long experience as a barrister and quoted Home Office statistics, the Lammy review into race and the criminal justice system, and reliable reports of cases. Though the article was largely well received, a Black Conservative MP tweeted (now deleted) that my article was "disingenuous" and fuelled division. There were defensive replies on Twitter asserting that, despite my professional experience, I simply didn't understand how policing works.

That's how discussions around racism often pan out: calls are made for evidence to prove a problem that has been proven time and again; when that doesn't work, the person raising the issue of racial disparity is attacked. Rarely is the response to concentrate on tackling racism itself.

The evidence shows that racism in policing is real. Earlier this year, the home affairs committee released its update report on progress by the police on the 70 recommendations made in the seminal [Macpherson report](#) which 22 years ago famously concluded that the Metropolitan police was institutionally racist. [This year's update](#) found that confidence in the police among Black people has fallen in recent years. Twelve years after the last Macpherson update, in 2009, little has changed in terms of recruitment and retention for Black, Asian and minority-ethnic people.

There is clear [racial disparity](#) in the number of officers being dismissed from police forces and in the number of minority-ethnic officers and staff being subjected to internal disciplinary processes. Disparities in stop and search are still unexplained and unjustified, and [recommendations made](#) by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary since 2017 to improve the way stop

and search is used are still not being followed by all forces. Several senior policing figures accept that overall progress has not been fast enough, and that issues raised by Macpherson have proven intractable.

When I first heard of this scrutiny position it looked to me like it could be more of the same: being asked to fix a problem that affects Black people but isn't caused by us. I was also concerned that, were I to take it, it might simply be an opportunity for the police to tick a box and use my identity, and the fact I've previously spoken out about racism, as a convenient cover if ever they were criticised about their record.

But then a friend posted the role in a predominantly Black WhatsApp group, urging us to share it with our networks or to consider applying for it ourselves. When I looked again at the advert I saw this was an initiative generated from within policing – a collaborative effort between national police chiefs and officers; and the role was to monitor progress rather than create a plan from scratch. It had the hallmarks of what I was looking for, a push for institutional change. So I applied.

Since being appointed, I've begun recruiting a diverse six-member board, all of whom will be paid. We will have a clear purpose and boundaries, and will work transparently. We will also have input from organisations with an interest in scrutinising the police; independent advisory groups; police and crime panels; local community groups and civilians. Finally, we have unfettered access to data, and the commitment of each of the 43 police forces in England and Wales to deliver on an action plan. The meetings I've had so far with the National [Police](#) Chiefs' Council and senior members of the College of Policing have been positive.

My board's role will be to hold the police accountable. Ultimately, time will tell whether the plan will be successful: its focus is on long-term change. But I have seen evidence of real commitment to the idea of it, and I'm determined to ensure that Black people are properly at the centre of the way it is implemented.

I've spoken out on police failings before and, though I'm committed to being successful in this role, if I see them being repeated I'll have no

hesitation in speaking out again.

Abimbola Johnson is chair of the independent scrutiny and oversight board on the police's action plan on inclusion and race. Recruitment for the independent scrutiny and oversight board launches this week

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[OpinionCop26](#)

Transforming care must be central to any bold vision of a greener future

[Emily Kenway](#)



‘A majority of people identify solar panel installers as green workers, but far fewer consider care workers to be in the same camp.’ St Leonards Rest Home on Hayling Island, Hampshire. Composite: The Guardian

Mon 25 Oct 2021 05.00 EDT

It is no coincidence that both care and our climate are in crisis. Addressing each requires us to recognise that we are vulnerable and interdependent, as a species and individually. This will only become more apparent, because – as the world gets hotter and consequently more dangerous – we are going to need to care for each other more than ever before. As initiatives including Naomi Klein’s [The Leap](#) and the [Feminist Green New Deal](#) have explained, we need a care-centred approach to meet the demands of a future that looks very different to our past.

First, we must broaden our understanding of what constitutes a “green job”. Research by the Feminist Green New Deal [has found](#) that a majority of people identify solar panel installers as green workers, but far fewer consider care workers to be in the same camp. This shows us something important about our mindset. So far, we have thought in terms of *greening* highly polluting industries – turning from fossil fuels to renewables – rather than identifying what is simply *green*, ie what is low-carbon by nature. This is the difference between tweaking our current system and stepping into a new approach that makes different kinds of work central to our economy. From this perspective, care work becomes a core component of our future, as [those calling](#) for its inclusion in a green new deal have advocated.

Centring care in industrial visions is a bold and expansive new way of thinking about our future, but we must be wary of making a category error. Care isn’t solely a sector or a job; it’s also what political scientist Prof Joan Tronto has termed a “[species activity](#)”.

Most care for the sick, impaired or elderly in the world today is performed unpaid and informally, by family and friends. When we think in terms of care as an economic sector, we risk overlooking what this means from a climate perspective. The carbon intensity of care, as a species activity, is contingent on the general structures and patterns of our lives. It is a bigger question, then, than a green jobs strategy can house. For example, many caregivers make frequent petrol-guzzling journeys to support their elderly parents. This raises obvious questions about transport, but we also need to consider housing.

The [Older Women’s Co-Housing](#) project in north London provides a pioneering model, based on wider co-housing movements in northern Europe. Its hybrid approach of private, accessible dwellings with shared community spaces enables older women to care for themselves and each other more effectively than if they lived as isolated individuals. This reduces the need for journeys by family members living separately.

Alternatively, I’ve learnt through my interviews with caregivers that many would value modular homes to enable elderly parents or impaired adult children to live with them without loss of privacy and personal space. Either of these housing alternatives would reduce caregivers’ [well-documented](#)

strain by limiting the financial and energetic impact of caring, while also reducing carbon footprints.

Consider, also, that [14% of the UK](#) workforce juggle caring responsibilities (not including standard parenting) with paid work. Academics have found that the resultant “time squeeze” (otherwise known as sheer exhaustion) can [affect the carbon intensity](#) of lifestyle choices, such as opting for ready meals or food deliveries, driving instead of taking lengthier or less predictable public transport, and using more time-saving electrical devices. This can’t be solved without introducing new employment rights for caregivers, including the right to [work flexibly](#) and sufficient paid carer’s leave.

Care – the arduous, bodily practice, which it is sometimes forgotten to be – is also a minefield of disposability and devices. The use of medical equipment in the home has increased and many products considered vital for both hygiene and dignity are non-reusable. The adult incontinence product market is just one example. In 2020, its global market value reached [\\$15.4 bn \(£11.2bn\)](#) and is projected to hit \$24.2bn by 2026. This is because incontinence, uncomfortable as this fact may be, is a common side effect of ageing and specific health issues, such as dementia, Parkinson’s and cancer treatment. Work currently under way to make the NHS [net zero](#) could be transferred to caring, including attempts to reduce waste.

If care is considered not just as a sector but also a practice of life, terrifying intersections between it and the global climate crisis appear that also need serious attention. When we think about climate-provoked migration, we rarely ask who gets to migrate. It’s not the unpaid caregivers. Anil Patil is the founder and executive director of [Carers Worldwide](#), a charity that supports carers in Nepal, India and Bangladesh. “We have to raise awareness of the specific risks of climate change to carers,” he told me. In each of these south Asian countries, Carers Worldwide and its partners are seeing climate change directly harming carers’ ability to meet basic needs.

Wells drying up or domestic water supplies being diverted to parched farmland mean that lengthy journeys to collect water are created – journeys

that just aren't feasible for those supporting someone with high dependencies.

Many carers are unable to leave the person whom they support unattended for more than a few minutes at most, depending on the specific illness or impairment. Yet in Nepal, when [increasingly frequent landslides](#) occur, accessing relief trucks often requires a two- to three-hour walk. "In most disaster and mitigation plans, carers are forgotten," Patil explains. "They can't access relief, and if there are no organisations advocating for them, they have no voice." This isn't unique to the global south: care worker [Theresa Santos died](#) in 2017 in a northern California wildfire when she stayed with her immobile client rather than save herself. We must be wary of assuming all people are equally mobile when considering the dangers of the climate crisis.

Santos stands out because she acted selflessly. After all, she was paid to be there; others may have abandoned their client to save themselves. But for unpaid caregivers supporting a loved one, they will feel little option but to remain in danger. And it's those people – mostly women – whom we must centre in climate and care narratives. They and those for whom they care are the ultimate example of those two inescapable facts about our species: we are both vulnerable and interdependent. The challenge for our future lies in whether we have the courage to recognise these facts and create a vision that puts them at its heart.

- Emily Kenway is a writer and author of *The Truth About Modern Slavery*

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A just transitionRail industry

Clean rail travel is vital to the UK's future: now we need a government that can deliver it

[Aneurin Redman-White](#)



‘With the Great Western electrification project stunted, the specialist workforce became surplus to requirement.’ Network Rail Electrification Training Centre, Swindon, 2016. Photograph: CALYX/REX/Shutterstock

Sun 24 Oct 2021 07.00 EDT

Working on the railway, we see our industry as part of the solution to the climate emergency, as it provides one of the most efficient, low-carbon forms of transport. Right now in the UK, you can reduce the CO₂ output from a journey [by roughly 70%](#) by switching from car to train. On an electric train, you can save 90%. That’s pretty good, especially with road haulage struggling – and petrol prices spiking.

I started my railway career as a teenager volunteering on the Mid-Hants steam railway and I've been a full-time railway employee for five years. I now work in a consultancy where we design everything from re-signalling schemes down to the connections in a control box. It's a long way from my childhood playing trains on the kitchen table. Each major project needs dozens of engineers, project managers and trackside workers, most of them skilled specialists, and each project takes years of planning and the application of sustained political will.

But for years now we've seen railway upgrades [stalled and cut back](#), as Westminster shortchanges passengers and does away with the jobs needed for a just transition to a low-carbon industry. This transition needs a long-term national strategy, and Network Rail does make strategic plans over five-year blocks called control periods. Unfortunately, though, recent UK governments have preferred to announce grand transformations followed by drastic cutbacks and U-turns.

For example, the [Transpennine route upgrade](#) between Manchester, Huddersfield, Leeds and York – announced in 2012 – was going to be a total route modernisation with better services running on new track, new signalling, and in particular electrification. But [it was paused](#) during 2015, and it's *still* not been announced whether electrification will reach the section that actually crosses the Pennines.

Despite its power to cut transport emissions, electrification has officially been cancelled on several other projects: the Midland Main Line [between Kettering and Sheffield](#), the Windermere branch in Cumbria, and most infamously the Great Western route. The Great Western Electrification Project – GWEP to those in the know – was to have been Britain's first significant electrification project since 1994. [It was described](#) as “the biggest overhaul of the Great Western route since Brunel started work on the line more than 175 years ago” by the government in 2018 – and more recently as [“the project from hell”](#) by Network Rail chair, Peter Hendy.

The ambition was to electrify from Paddington to Swansea, Bristol and Oxford, taking polluting diesel trains off a swathe of the network. But the UK lacked the experience and the supply chain needed for such a huge

project, and as a result it was poorly specified and planned. Costs rose until in 2017, the then transport secretary, Chris Grayling – having used the project to justify repeated fare increases – announced that electrification was “[no longer needed](#)” for most routes. Electrification [stopped at Cardiff](#), and passengers and communities were saddled with the inefficient stopgap of bi-mode trains that run for long stretches on dirty diesel power.

With GWEP stunted, and its companion projects largely cancelled, boom turned to bust. The newly developed skills and specialist workforce were surplus to requirement, including 150 of my industry colleagues at Swindon, who faced redundancy. Thankfully, the workers and organisers of the [Transport](#) Salaried Staffs’ Association (TSSA) and its sister unions averted mass layoffs as employers agreed to redeploy staff and offered voluntary redundancies. But even so, the skilled Great Western team was broken up and these jobs, central to the just transition to low CO₂, abruptly ended.

Planning one grandiose project every decade or two, training a workforce from scratch each time and then abandoning them halfway through is no way to invest in infrastructure. The Railway Industry Association’s (RIA) Electrification Cost Challenge, partly a response to the chaos of GWEP, contrasts this feast-or-famine approach with the successful rolling programmes of electrification [in Germany](#) and Scotland. These retain experience, skills and low-carbon jobs without the risk or spiralling costs that plagued GWEP.

Long-term infrastructure strategy doesn’t excite many people. Apparently not everyone gets excited about trains, either. But steady investment and planning ahead are vital if we’re to see through the projects that will make a difference to the climate emergency. We all deserve that certainty – not least the people who are, quite literally, doing the groundwork.

- Aneurin Redman-White is a railway employee and Transport Salaried Staffs’ Association (TSSA) rep
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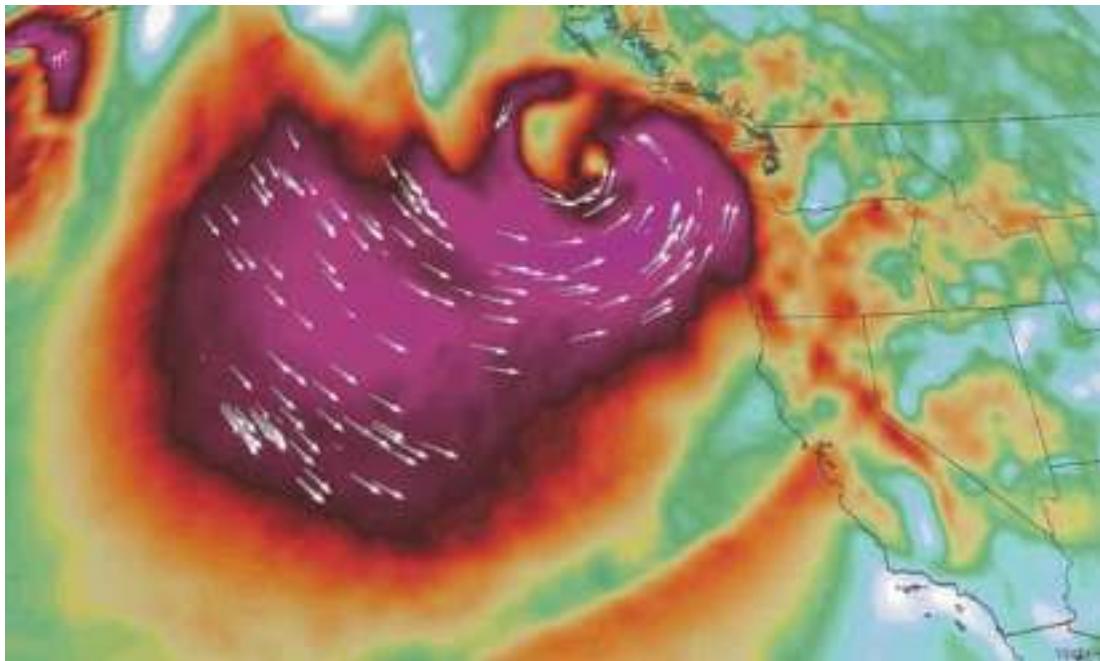
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[California](#)

Powerful storm hits California amid warnings of ‘potentially historic rain’



Storm roars ashore in California, flooding highways, toppling trees and causing mud flows in areas burned bare by recent fires. Photograph: NOAA/ZUMA Press Wire Service/REX/Shutterstock

[Gabrielle Canon](#)

[@GabrielleCanon](#)

Sun 24 Oct 2021 17.28 EDT

A powerful storm has roared ashore in [California](#), flooding cities, toppling trees and causing mud flows in areas burned bare by recent fires.

With an armful of belongings, Pablo Paredes (left) leaves his Santa Rosa home after flood waters crept in. Pablo and his family have lived in the apartment building for two years and said he and his wife have never experienced flooding at their home before. [@sfchronicle](#) pic.twitter.com/w04B1xz6AC

— Brontë WittPenn (@BronteWittPenn) [October 24, 2021](#)

After months of drought, the darkened clouds collecting over the state this weekend were a welcome sight to some. But rather than the much-needed drizzle residents and officials hoped could end a disastrous fire season and dampen dried landscapes, the state got a deluge. Some areas are forecast to see more than 10in (25cm) of rain and thousands across the state have lost power.

“A powerful west coast storm is likely to produce areas of heavy rain with life-threatening flash flooding, especially on burn scars, high winds, and significant waves along the coast,” the National Weather Service [reported](#) Sunday, adding that “some areas that normally do not experience flash flooding will flood”.

Drenching rain and strong winds accompanied the arrival of an “atmospheric river” – a long and wide plume of moisture pulled in from the Pacific Ocean that was predicted to move south over the next few days. The weather service’s Sacramento office warned of “potentially historic rain” and by Sunday afternoon, the storm had already delivered. Several areas – including San Francisco, Santa Rosa, and Sonoma – reported dangerous flooding.

Alarm bells sounded alerting locals of the rising waters through San Anselmo, a town in Marin, on Sunday afternoon as officers rushed to clear the downtown area and businesses were forced to close. Nearby, the Corte Madera creek – barely trickling just a week prior – gushed like a river. By 4pm, authorities warned it would likely top its banks.

Here’s the creek in San Anselmo right now. Wild because just over a week ago it was essentially bone dry. [pic.twitter.com/X1djJ2CbUc](#)

— Liz Kreutz (@ABCLiz) [October 24, 2021](#)

To the south, San Francisco sent text alerts to residents warning of flooded streets and downed trees and power lines. The entire downtown area of San Rafael was closed down to all “non-essential traffic,” [as streets were](#)

submerged. Traffic on the highway 101, a main artery through the north Bay Area, slowed to a standstill and an overturned big-rig truck stopped traffic on the Richmond bridge. A car in Sonoma County, near the Russian River, was seen silently sinking, after its driver was helped to safety.

Sacramento's City Hall, which is being used as a storm center and shelter, neared capacity and fire districts in Solano county reported a shortage of sandbags needed to stop the surging waters from entering homes and businesses. As the storm raged on, more than 130,000 people lost power in the Bay Area.

Debris flows also caused the closure of Highway 70, which snakes through the mountainsides in Plumas County, as an enormous pile of mud, rocks, and trees blocked passage in both directions.

And the storm is far from over.



Heavy rains blanketing Northern California created slide and flood hazards in land scorched during last summer's wildfires. (AP Photo/Noah Berger)
Photograph: Noah Berger/AP

Forecasters predict the record-breaking rainfall and strong winds will continue into Tuesday, wreaking havoc across the northern part of the state, especially in areas close to where fires burned over the last two years. The

cities and towns near the Caldor Fire, which burned across more than 221,800 acres in the Sierra Nevada range before it was stopped near South Lake Tahoe, [could see torrential rains through Sunday evening](#), according to the climate scientist Daniel Swain.

“If you are near a burn scar, it may be too late to evacuate,” the National Weather Service [wrote](#) on Twitter Sunday morning. “Do not attempt to cross a debris flow. Take shelter in the highest floor of your home.”

Landslide on Hwy 70 near Tobin, Ca has the highway shutdown and will likely be for a long duration. [#CAwx #wxTwitter](#)
[#AtmosphericRiver](#) pic.twitter.com/MlBVa19Dyl

— WXChasing (Brandon Clement) (@bclemms) [October 24, 2021](#)

Evacuation orders were issued in several areas – from parts of San Mateo county that burned in 2020 to Santa Barbara county where the Alisal Fire [that still hadn't been fully contained](#) by Sunday morning – and the California Office of Emergency Services also [deployed crews to assist in burn scars](#) through the Sierra Nevada range.

“This is a reminder to have your go-bag ready and heed any warnings from officials,” the agency tweeted, noting that state emergency resources were being sent to help counties navigate the storm. “Like during a wildfire, if told to evacuate, don’t wait!”

More than [7 million Californians live](#) in an area at risk of flooding, according to the state’s Department of Water Resources, which has been rolling out programs in an attempt to prepare residents still reeling from the effects of drought and fire.

The storm is also producing hurricane-force winds that are tearing across the Bay Area, toppling trees. Gusts higher than 50mph have heightened the risks as roads were blocked and homes had to be evacuated.

“Peak gusts have been around 70mph on higher peaks with 40 to 50mph gusts filtering into lower areas,” the weather service said. “Expect the winds to linger within the main rain band but cut back before the rain begins to let

off.” Santa Cruz county officials said the wind could reach up to 90mph at the peaks.

There are concerns that California’s unhoused residents, most of whom reside outside on the streets and sidewalks, will be in danger from heavy rains. More than [161,500 people typically experience homelessness](#) in the state on any given day, according to official counts from 2020, and organizations have already begun calling for help for those whose tents were overcome by the storm. There were also reports that 4 people had to be rescued as they camped near the roaring Russian River. San Francisco opened an [additional shelter for those seeking refuge](#), and deployed drivers to transport people through the rain.

Four homeless individuals successfully rescued from their camp on an island in the middle of the Russian River in Cloverdale this morning.
pic.twitter.com/PHhhYrZny

— Christopher Chung (@cchungphoto) [October 25, 2021](#)

The rain did bring some relief, however, especially in areas desperate for water amid a historic drought and in still smoldering fire footprints.

Lake Mendocino – which the governor [used as a backdrop](#) in April to illustrate the drought emergency – gained hundreds of acre-feet of water, according to the Press Democrat. Lake Oroville gained 3ft of elevation in under 11 hours.

But it still remains to be seen if the wet weather will make a dent in the drought that’s plaguing California and the western United States. California’s climate is hotter and drier now and that means the rain and snow that does fall is likely to evaporate or absorb into the soil.

I've checked upper [#RussianRiver](#) flows every day for months & seen them running way below 100 cubic feet per second. Seeing flows now in the 1000s in the upper river & Dry Creek, and way above 4,000 in the lower river, sure wishing there were some way to capture and save it all.

— MaryCallahan (@MaryCallahanB) [October 24, 2021](#)

“[Northern] California going, in one week, from the worst drought in recorded history to likely record breaking October rainfall - is a good reminder that climate change isn’t just about warmer temperatures, but a destabilized climate system,” Aviva Rossi, an ecologist and professor at University of San Francisco [said](#) on Twitter.

California’s 2021 water year, which ended 30 September, was the second driest on record and last year’s was the fifth driest on record. Some of the state’s most important reservoirs are at record low levels.

Close to 94% of California is still experiencing severe drought, as categorized by the US Drought Monitor, and scientists with the National Weather Service’s climate prediction center have said that much of [the western region is so dry](#) that it would require “sustained above-normal precipitation for several weeks for meaningful improvements”. This torrential rain event is also unlikely to have an affect on thirsty south-west.

Climate change, which intensified drought conditions with higher heat that baked moisture out of the land and atmosphere, has also set the stage for greater extremes like the storm currently pummeling the west coast.

“A lot of times when we talk about whether it was a wet year or dry year you average the whole season,” John Fasullo, a scientist at the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR) told the Guardian. “But with climate change, you have greater amounts of rainfall being delivered in shorter bursts.” That is much more damaging, especially after fires, he said, adding that climate change has produced a “multiplying effect”.

The Associated Press contributed reporting

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/oct/24/california-storm-atmospheric-river>

France

French election polls: who is leading the race to be the next president of France?

[Seán Clarke](#) and [Angelique Chrisafis](#)

Mon 25 Oct 2021 05.31 EDT

France will vote to elect a new president in April, and the jostling for position among potential candidates is well under way. The current president, [Emmanuel Macron](#), has yet to declare his candidacy but is expected to run again. His second-round opponent from 2017, the far-right populist Marine Le Pen, has already launched her campaign. Alongside them on the ballot will be Anne Hidalgo, the Socialist candidate, Yannick Jadot, representing the Green movement, and a candidate from the centre-right, to be chosen by Les Républicains, on 4 December. The far-right TV pundit Éric Zemmour, who has no political party, could declare an outsider bid.

How the process works

How the process to choose a candidate works

Would-be candidates have until 4 March to present the 500 signatures of elected officials supporting their run, which the law requires. Some of the politicians hoping to be candidates will by then have withdrawn from the field, but in 2017 11 candidates were on the official ballot.

A first round is to be held on 10 April, and in the likely event that no candidate receives a majority of the votes, a second round runoff will be held two weeks later, featuring the two leading candidates from the first round.

Polls have shown that the most likely candidates to enter the run-off are Macron and Le Pen, the leader of the far-right Rassemblement National

(National Rally) party.

Who might stand, and how do the polls rate their chances?



1.

Emmanuel Macron

La République en Marche

Latest 7-day average (first-round preferences):

-

Source: [NSPPolls](#)

France's current president shook up the country's political scene in 2017 when he ran without the backing of a major party and won. His hastily assembled, centrist République en Marche party went on to win that year's parliamentary elections too. Macron, a former economy minister under the Socialist president François Hollande, is seen by voters as having leaned towards the centre-right in office.



2.

Marine Le Pen

Rassemblement National (National rally)

Latest 7-day average (first-round preferences):

-

Source: [NSPPolls](#)

Le Pen has led a public relations drive to try to sanitise the image of the anti-immigration far-right National Front, which she took over from her father in 2011 and renamed the National Rally in 2018. The party's score in June's regional elections was lower than predicted after many of its traditional voters abstained. Le Pen, in her third bid to be president, is campaigning on the party's traditional line of curbing immigration and 'keeping France for the French'.



3.

Xavier Bertrand

Independent

Latest 7-day average (first-round preferences):

-

Source: [NSPPolls](#)

Xavier Bertrand, a former minister under Nicolas Sarkozy, was recently re-elected head of the Hauts-de-France region in northern France. He left the party, Les Républicains in 2017 and had intended to campaign as an outsider who could unite voters on the right, from low-income workers to the bourgeoisie. He recently returned to the fold to take part in the internal party vote on December 4 to choose a candidate.



4.

Valérie Pécresse

Independent

Latest 7-day average (first-round preferences):

-

Source: [NSPPolls](#)

Pécresse was budget minister under Nicolas Sarkozy and is currently the president of the Ile-de-France region, which includes the French capital and surrounding area. She argues that it is time for the right to have a female candidate and describes herself as 'two-thirds Angela Merkel and one-third Margaret Thatcher', which she says means being tough and economy-focused while building consensus. She is standing in the Les Républicains internal race to choose a candidate on 4 December.



5.

Michel Barnier

Les Républicains (Republicans)

Latest 7-day average (first-round preferences):

-

Source: [NSPPolls](#)

Barnier was the EU's lead negotiator on Brexit, and is consequently well-known in Britain, but less so in France. He has returned from Brussels to stand in the race to choose a candidate for Les Républicains. He argues that he has always been loyal to the party and can unite voters on the right. He has presented a hardline on authority, justice and immigration, arguing for a moratorium on immigration and a reassertion of French 'sovereignty' in relation to the European court of human rights.



6.

Eric Zemmour

Independent

Latest 7-day average (first-round preferences):

-

Source: [NSPPolls](#)

Zemmour is a far-right TV pundit who has previously been convicted for inciting racial hatred and who promotes controversial views such as the 'great replacement' theory that Muslim immigrants will 'replace' the populations of European countries. He has no political party and has not yet declared if he will launch an outsider bid.



7.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon

La France Insoumise (Unbowed France)

Latest 7-day average (first-round preferences):

-

Source: [NSPPolls](#)

Mélenchon is a former Socialist who has stood for various leftwing groupings since leaving the party. He stood in the previous two presidential elections, winning more than 10% of the vote each time, and more than the Socialist candidate in 2017.



8.

Yannick Jadot

Ecologistes (Greens)

Latest 7-day average (first-round preferences):

-

Source: [NSPPolls](#)

Jadot is the Green candidate. In the presidential election in 2017, he stood down in favour of the Socialist Benoît Hamon.



9.

Anne Hidalgo

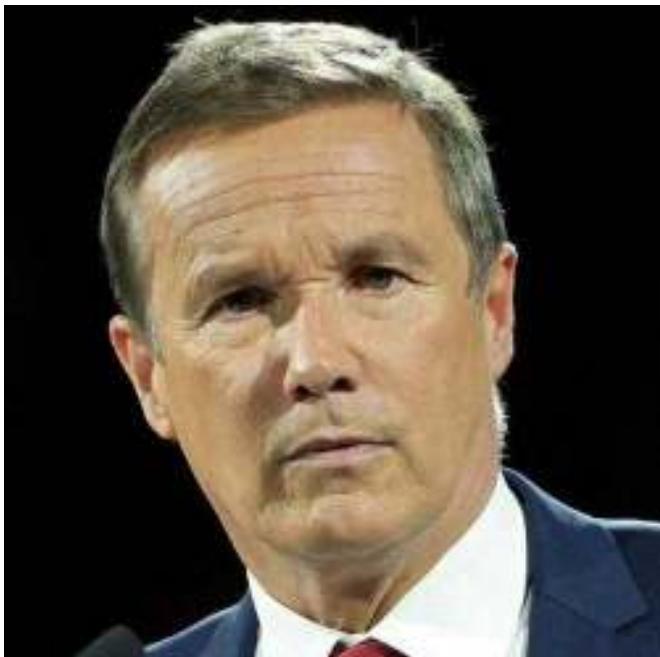
Socialists

Latest 7-day average (first-round preferences):

-

Source: [NSPPolls](#)

Hidalgo is the first female mayor of Paris and is in her second term. She is best known for her campaign to reduce the number of cars in the French capital. As presidential candidate for the Socialist party, she has highlighted her working-class, immigrant roots, promising to improve salaries, notably for teachers.



10.

Nicolas Dupont-Aignan

Debout La France (Arise France)

Latest 7-day average (first-round preferences):

-

Source: [NSPPolls](#)

Dupont-Aignan, the leader of the nationalist Debout La France, is a friend and fan of Nigel Farage and supports a French exit from the EU.

Also in contention

The slate also includes numerous other possible runners, most of whom usually fail to poll more than 3% in surveys. They include former Socialist Arnaud Montebourg, Fabien Roussel of the Communist party, Jean Lasalle of the Resistons! (Resist!) party and Nathalie Arthaud of Lutte Ouvrière (Workers' Struggle).

What about the run-off?

France's polling organisations also ask respondents how they would vote in a hypothetical second round. For obvious reasons they concentrate on what currently seems the most likely scenario, a re-run of 2017's Macron-Le Pen vote.

1. Emmanuel Macron v Marine Le Pen

Source: [NSPPolls](#)

This is the core scenario, and therefore the one most commonly polled. Macron's lead over Le Pen is greater in second-round polling than in responses on first-round choices. In 2017 he inherited over 70% of the other first-round candidate's votes.

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Michael Jordan

Michael Jordan's Nike Air Ship trainers sell for \$1.5m to smash auction record



The \$1.5m paid for the game-worn trainers easily beat the previous record, held by a pair of Nike Air Jordans which sold for \$615,000 in August 2020. Photograph: Timothy A Clary/AFP/Getty

Karen Dacre

Mon 25 Oct 2021 12.51 EDT

Old trainers have apparently become the new Picassos after a pair of basketball shoes worn by [Michael Jordan](#) sold for nearly \$1.5m (£1.1m).

The white and red leather high-tops featuring Nike's iconic swoosh set a new record price at auction, confirming secondhand sneakers as rivals to fine art.

The [NBA](#) superstar wore the shoes in the fifth game of his rookie season with the Chicago Bulls, the same year he and Nike began a long-running

collaboration on a range of shoes and clothes. The trainers sold for \$1,472,000 at a luxury sale in Las Vegas.

#AuctionUpdate The most valuable sneakers ever offered at auction—Michael Jordan's regular season game-worn Nike Air Ships from 1984—have just sold at \$1,472,000 in our luxury sale in Las Vegas.
#SothebysxMGM pic.twitter.com/OlxvZ1ETML

— Sotheby's (@Sothebys) [October 24, 2021](#)

It is the highest sum ever paid for game-worn footwear from any sport and beats a record set last year when another pair of shoes worn by Jordan sold for \$615,000 at an auction by Christie's.

Sotheby's, the London-based auction house behind the record-breaking sale, confirmed that Jordan's autographed size 13s were in good condition “with signs of court wear and tear”. The shoes were a gift from the player to Tommie Tim III Lewis, who was a ballboy for the Denver Nuggets during the 1984-85 season. The signed trainers were bought by Nick Fiorella, a well-known collector.

In April, Kanye West's first pair of Yeezys – a pair of black leather high-tops worn by the rapper to the Grammys in 2008 – sold for \$1.8m at a private auction, becoming the most expensive pair of trainers ever sold.



The black high-top Yeezys that sold for \$1.8m. Photograph: Sotheby's/AFP/Getty

Trainers have long ignited hysteria from fans who respond to savvy marketing campaigns and internet hype by queueing up outside stores for new releases and investing large sums in limited-edition styles. But the growing presence of “sneakerheads” who collect limited-edition styles show trainer trading has become big business.

The development of resale and sneaker specialist sites that allow collectors to trade their “player exclusives” and limited-edition kicks has fuelled this global sneaker resale market – valued at \$6bn in 2019 and forecast to be worth \$30bn by 2030.

StockX, described as “a marketplace for current culture”, is among those leading the charge. The Michigan-based company, recently valued at \$3.8bn, offers its customer base the opportunity to buy and sell sneakers along with other collectibles.

On StockX, coveted items such as a pair of Dior Jordan 1 sneakers sell for up to \$10,000. For UK-based Depop – a secondhand online marketplace – trainers are also the most lucrative category.

Off-the-shelf trainers are more in demand than ever, too. While sneakers were once considered a dirty word in fashion circles, sports-inspired footwear is now a leading luxury category.

Trainers have transcended the gym and are regularly spotted on catwalks and red carpets. While sports labels once dominated the sneaker market, fashion houses such as Balenciaga and Louis Vuitton now offer their own styles. Balenciaga's Triple S sneaker became the biggest-selling luxury sneaker on the market in 2017.

Recent highlights have come from Lanvin, which unveiled a Batman-inspired sneaker in its spring/summer 2022 collection, and Miu Miu, which revealed a collaboration with New Balance.

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Lava streams continue to pour from La Palma volcano – in pictures

Lava from the Cumbre Vieja volcano flows, as seen from Tajuya on the Canary Island of La Palma, Spain. Photograph: Susana Vera/Reuters

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2021/oct/25/lava-la-palma-cumbre-vieja-volcano-canary-island-in-pictures>

[Saudi Arabia](#)

Saudi crown prince a ‘psychopath’, says exiled intelligence officer



Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has been accused by Saad Aljabri in a 60 Minutes interview of boasting he could kill the kingdom's one-time ruler, King Abdullah. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

*[Stephanie Kirchgaessner](#) in Washington
@skirchy*

Mon 25 Oct 2021 04.38 EDT

A former senior Saudi intelligence officer has claimed that Crown Prince [Mohammed bin Salman](#) is a “psychopath with no empathy” who once boasted that he could kill the kingdom’s ruler at the time, King Abdullah, and replace him with his own father.

In an interview on US television, Saad Aljabri, who fled Saudi Arabia in May 2017 and is living in exile in Canada, also said he had been warned by an associate in 2018, after the [murder of the journalist Jamal Khashoggi](#) in

the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, that a Saudi hit team was [heading to Canada to kill him.](#)

Aljabri told 60 Minutes on CBS he was warned “don’t be in a proximity of any Saudi mission in [Canada](#). Don’t go to the consulate. Don’t go to the embassy.” When he asked why, he said he was told “they dismembered the guy, they kill him. You are on the top of the list.”

00:43

Saudi crown prince a ‘psychopath’, says exiled intelligence officer Saad Aljabri – video

Some details of the alleged murder plot, which were detailed in litigation in the US and Canada, have already been reported. But the 60 Minutes interview represents the first time Aljabri has publicly spoken about his break with Prince Mohammed.

He also spoke of the plight of his two youngest children, [Sarah and Omar](#), who were arrested and are in prison in Saudi Arabia in what is widely seen as an attempt to force their father back to the country.

“I have to speak out. I am appealing to the American people and to the American administration to help me to release those children and to restore their life,” he said.

The Saudi government did not address Aljabri’s allegations but said in a statement that “Saad Aljabri is a discredited former government official with a long history of fabricating and creating distractions to hide the financial crimes he committed”.

Aljabri was a close adviser to Mohammed bin Nayef, a former crown prince and interior minister [who is being held in Saudi Arabia](#) and has been seen as a potential political rival to Prince Mohammed. “I expect to be killed one day because this guy will not rest off until he see me dead,” Aljabri said.

Aljabri has strong support in the US, where former intelligence officials have credited their Saudi counterpart for helping to save American and

Saudi lives following the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the US.

On 60 Minutes, the former acting CIA director Mike Morell said Aljabri was “honourable”. Intelligence relayed to the US by Aljabri – Morell said – had led to the interception of bombs that had been planted by al-Qaida in 2010 in two desktop printers that were being flown as cargo on two planes.

Morell said there were also other examples of Aljabri saving the lives of Americans, but that they were still classified.

Saudi Arabia has previously denied there was an attempt on Aljabri’s life in Canada. The kingdom has also denied that the murder of Khashoggi, a Washington Post columnist, was ordered by Prince Mohammed. But a declassified US intelligence assessment – [released earlier this year](#) – concluded the murder was approved by the crown prince.



Saad Aljabri. Photograph: Aljabri family/AFP/Getty Images

According to Aljabri’s account of alleged plans to assassinate him in Canada, a six-person team landed at Ottawa airport in mid-October 2018, lied to Canadian border officials about knowing one another, and carried suspicious equipment for DNA analysis. The team was deported by Canada after being intercepted by the authorities at the airport. The Canadian government has said: “We are aware of incidents in which foreign actors

have attempted to threaten those living in Canada. It is completely unacceptable.”

The serious allegations about Prince Mohammed come as Saudi Arabia is seeking to improve its image around the world, including through the [recent takeover](#) of Newcastle United by the Public Investment Fund, the Saudi-controlled sovereign wealth fund where Prince Mohammed serves as chairman.

In the interview, Aljabri portrayed Prince Mohammed as reckless and untrustworthy.

He is, Aljabri said, “a psychopath with no empathy, [who] doesn’t feel emotion, never learned from his experience.”

The former intelligence chief also claimed Prince Mohammed “feared” the information Aljabri knew about him, including a 2014 recorded discussion between Prince Mohammed and the then crown prince, Bin Nayef, in which Prince Mohammed allegedly said he could kill the sitting king, Abdullah, to clear the throne for his own father, Salman.

“He told him, ‘I want to assassinate King Abdullah. I get a poison ring from Russia. It’s enough for me just to shake hand with him and he will be done’ ... We took it seriously,” Aljabri said.

He added that he knew of two copies of the recording, and that he knew where they were located.

Saudi Arabia has in turn accused Aljabri of embezzlement and claimed he stole hundreds of millions of dollars from the kingdom’s coffers. The allegations were denied by Aljabri and downplayed by Morell.

“I don’t know if Dr Saad was corrupt in any way. I wouldn’t be surprised if he wasn’t because he’s such an honorable man. But I also wouldn’t be surprised if he was. Because everybody to some extent had their hand in the kitty. And King Abdullah allowed it, permitted it,” Morell said.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/25/saudi-crown-prince-a-psychopath-says-exiled-intelligence-officer>

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- [Cop26 Biden heads to crucial climate talks as wary allies wonder if US will deliver](#)
- [‘Existential challenge’ G20 draft climate communique commits to 1.5C goal](#)
- [Climate crimes Exxon CEO accused of lying about climate science to congressional panel](#)

[**Pope Francis**](#)

Pope Francis urges leaders to take ‘radical’ climate action at Cop26

01:53

Pope Francis urges radical response to climate crisis at Cop26 – video

[Harriet Sherwood](#)

[@harrietsherwood](#)

Fri 29 Oct 2021 08.09 EDT

Pope Francis has urged world leaders to take “radical decisions” at next week’s global environmental summit in a special message recorded for BBC Radio 4’s Thought for the Day.

Leaders attending the [Cop26 conference in Glasgow](#) must offer “concrete hope to future generations”, the pontiff said.

Francis is not attending the summit, despite earlier suggestions that he would fly in for a brief appearance to reinforce the significance of the event. His message was recorded in Italian and lasted almost five minutes. It was broadcast on Friday morning with a voiceover in English.

He said: “Climate change and the Covid-19 pandemic have exposed our deep vulnerability and raised numerous doubts and concerns about our economic systems and the way we organise our societies.

“We have lost our sense of security, and are experiencing a sense of powerlessness and loss of control over our lives. We find ourselves increasingly frail and even fearful.”

A succession of crises relating to healthcare, the environment, food supplies and the economy were “profoundly interconnected”, he said. “They also

forecast a perfect storm that could rupture the bonds holding our society together.”

Every crisis called for “vision, the ability to formulate plans and put them rapidly into action, to rethink the future of the world, our common home, and to reassess our common purpose. These crises present us with the need to take decisions, radical decisions that are not always easy. At the same time, moments of difficulty like these also present opportunities, opportunities that we must not waste.

“We can confront these crises by retreating into isolationism, protectionism and exploitation. Or we can see in them a real chance for change, a genuine moment of conversion, and not simply in a spiritual sense.”

This could only be pursued through “a renewed sense of shared responsibility for our world, and an effective solidarity based on justice, a sense of our common destiny and a recognition of the unity of our human family in God’s plan for the world”.

05:18

Why the world is getting hotter and how you can help – video explainer

Political decision-makers meeting at [Cop26](#) “are urgently summoned to provide effective responses to the present ecological crisis and in this way to offer concrete hope to future generations. And it is worth repeating that each of us – whoever and wherever we may be – can play our own part in changing our collective response to the unprecedented threat of climate change and the degradation of our common home.”

Later on Friday, the pope received Joe Biden at the Vatican. The pair were due to discuss the climate emergency, an issue that Francis has put at the heart of his papacy since 2013.

01:39

Biden gives Pope Francis sentimental coin and calls him 'warrior for peace' – video

On Saturday, leaders from the world's leading economies will meet in Rome for the G20 summit to discuss the Covid pandemic, climate change, the global energy crisis and other major challenges.

A [draft G20 communique](#) says leaders will pledge to take urgent steps to reach the goal of limiting global warming to 1.5C.

The US president, a devout Catholic who carries a rosary and attends mass most Sundays, last met the pope in 2016 during a papal visit to the US. After Biden's election victory almost a year ago, Francis was one of the first world leaders to congratulate the president-elect.

In 2015, Francis published an encyclical on the environment that was an ambitious call to the world population to take urgent action to avert a climate catastrophe. Laudato Si' criticised consumerism and the lack of effective action from world leaders.

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[Cop26](#)

Biden heads to crucial climate talks as wary allies wonder if US will deliver



Joe Biden in Chicago earlier this month. The president's ambitious climate agenda has so far been whittled down by a recalcitrant Congress.
Photograph: Evelyn Hockstein/Reuters

[Oliver Milman](#)

[@olliemilman](#)

Fri 29 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

With no major climate legislation firmly in hand and international allies still smarting after four bruising years of Donald Trump, [Joe Biden](#) faces a major challenge to reassert American credibility as he heads to crucial UN climate talks in Scotland.

The US president, who has vowed to tackle a climate crisis he has described as an “existential threat” to civilization, will be welcomed to the [Cop26](#) talks with a sense of relief following the decisions of his predecessor, who pulled his country out of the landmark Paris climate agreement and derided climate science as “bullshit”.

But Biden, who departed to Europe on Thursday and arrived in Rome on Friday morning for a G20 summit, will head to Glasgow with his domestic climate agenda whittled away by a recalcitrant Congress and a barrage of criticism from climate activists who claim Biden’s actions have yet to match his words.

This disconnect has perturbed delegates keen to see a reliable American partner emerge from the Trump era, [amid increasingly dire warnings](#) from scientists that “irreversible” heatwaves, floods, crop failures and other effects are being locked in by governments’ [sluggish response](#) to global heating.

“The US is still the world’s largest economy, other nations pay attention to it, and we’ve never had a president more committed to climate action,” said Alice Hill, who was a climate adviser to Barack Obama. “But there is skepticism being expressed by other countries. They saw our dramatic flip from Obama to Trump and the worry is we will flip again. A lack of consistency is the issue.”

Laurence Tubiana, a French diplomat who was a key architect of the Paris agreement, said that Biden had put climate “at the top of his agenda” and

that US diplomacy has helped eke some progress from countries such as Saudi Arabia, South Africa and India.

But she added the US had a “historical climate credibility problem” and that other leaders fret about its domestic political dysfunction and long-term commitment.

“We do worry, because it has happened before and could happen again,” she said. “The US is the world’s largest historical emitter and never passed a significant climate bill. [Biden] has still got a long way to go to make up for Trump’s lost years.”

In a show of soft American power, Biden is bringing a dozen of his cabinet members to Glasgow, where delegates from nearly 200 countries will wrangle over an agreement aimed at avoiding a disastrous 1.5C of global heating, a key objective of the Paris deal. But perhaps the most consequential figure to the American effort, rivaling the president himself, is remaining at home – the West Virginia senator [Joe Manchin](#).

Manchin, a centrist Democrat, looms large at the talks having derailed the centerpiece of a landmark reconciliation bill that would slash US emissions. The White House still hopes the bill, which would be the first major climate legislation ever passed in the US, will help convince other leaders to also increase their efforts in Glasgow to head off [climate breakdown](#).

Cop26 delegates have become acutely aware of how Biden needs the vote of Manchin, [who has close ties to the fossil fuel industry](#), to pass his agenda and help determine the future livability of places far from the West Virginia senator’s home state.

“Bangladeshis probably know more about American politics than the average American does, people know about Joe Manchin,” said Saleemul Haq, director of the International Centre for Climate Change and Development, based in Bangladesh, which faces looming devastation from flooding. “Joe Manchin is in the pocket of the fossil-fuel industry and is trying to cut everything the coal lobby doesn’t want.

“Biden’s agenda is stuck in Congress with his own senators and he hasn’t delivered anything near what the US should deliver. It’s just words. His actions are woefully inadequate.”



A airboat hovers over the Everglades national park in Florida. Activists say Biden has not done enough on the climate crisis. Photograph: Chandan Khanna/AFP/Getty Images

Biden has admitted that “the prestige of the United States is on the line” over the reconciliation bill, [according](#) to Democrats who met with the president, but publicly he has remained upbeat. When John Kerry, Biden’s climate envoy, [said](#) that the failure to secure the legislation would be like “President Trump pulling out of the Paris agreement, again”, Biden gently rebuked him, saying that Kerry had indulged in “hyperbole”.

“In every single day of this administration we’ve been driving forward a whole of government approach that sets us up to go into this climate conference with an incredible deal of momentum,” said an administration official.

The White House has pointed to the rejoining of the Paris accords, the resurrection of several environmental rules axed by Trump and what it is calling the “largest effort to combat climate change in American history”

with the reconciliation bill, which is still set to funnel hundreds of billions of dollars in support for solar and wind energy and electric vehicles.

Progressives argue, however, that the Biden administration has done little to curb the fossil fuel industry, most notably in allowing two controversial oil projects, the Dakota Access pipeline and the Line 3 pipeline, to proceed. Just a week after the end of Cop26, the administration will auction off 80m acres of the Gulf of Mexico for oil and gas drilling, an area larger than the UK.

“The president is doing so much, but he is simply not doing everything he can to deliver climate justice and save lives – and we need him to now,” said Cori Bush, a progressive Democratic congresswoman who has visited the site of the Line 3 construction in Minnesota.

Protests have erupted in front of the White House over this record, with several young climate activists currently staging a hunger strike to demand Biden does more.

“President Biden started very strongly by rejoining the Paris agreement but it’s been a frustrating past few months, things have slowed down,” said Jade Begay, a climate activist who is part of a White House advisory council. “Joe Manchin is holding hostage our survival on planet Earth for his own political career and people are really questioning if Biden will stick to his promises.”

05:18

Why the world is getting hotter and how you can help – video explainer

The US has also declined to set an end date for the coal sector, unlike countries such as the UK and Germany. This position runs contrary to a key objective of the British government as Cop26 hosts, with Alok Sharma, the conference’s president, pledging the talks will help “consign coal to history”.

Asked by the Guardian about the US’s stance on coal, Sharma said progress on the issue has been slow until now but “we want to see what is going to be possible” at the Glasgow summit. “I welcome the fact we now have an administration in the US that is very focused on taking climate action and supporting the international effort,” he said.

Sharma added: “It is ultimately on world leaders to deliver. It is world leaders who signed up to the Paris agreement and … if I can put it like this, it is on them to collectively deliver at Cop.”

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G20

‘Existential challenge’: G20 draft climate communique commits to 1.5C goal – report



The summit of the Group of 20 (G20) leading economies is about to kick off in Italy's capital amid tight security measures and with a packed agenda
Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock

Reuters

Thu 28 Oct 2021 21.13 EDT

A draft [G20](#) communique says that world leaders who are gathering for talks in Rome will pledge to take urgent steps to reach the goal of limiting global warming to 1.5C.

The communique, which was seen by Reuters and is subject to negotiation and changes, indicates the world's 20 richest countries are on track to commit this weekend to tackling the existential threat of climate change,

paving the way for more detailed action at the UN [Cop26](#) climate change summit next week.

They will then head to Glasgow, Scotland for the crucial United Nations gathering of almost 200 countries.

The landmark 2015 Paris agreement committed signatories to keeping global warming to “well below” 2 degrees above pre-industrial levels, and preferably to 1.5 degrees.

Since then, as extreme weather episodes have intensified and carbon levels in the atmosphere have grown, climate scientists have increasingly emphasised the importance of a 1.5 degree cap to limit the risk of environmental catastrophe.

“Responding to the call of the scientific community, noting the alarming reports of the IPCC [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change] and mindful of our leadership role, we commit to tackle the existential challenge of climate change,” the draft, which might still be changed, said.

“We recognize that the impacts of climate change at 1.5 degrees are much lower than at 2 degrees and that immediate action must be taken to keep 1.5 degrees within reach,” the G20 said.

“We acknowledge the key relevance of achieving global net zero greenhouse gas emissions or carbon neutrality by 2050,” the statement said, referring to a recommendation by UN climate experts who say the mid-century deadline is crucial to meet the 1.5 degree warming limit.

However, the 2050 date appears in the draft in brackets, indicating it is still subject to negotiation.

Some of the world’s biggest polluters say they cannot reach the 2050 target date, with China, by far the largest carbon emitter, aiming for 2060.

The G20 bloc, which includes Brazil, China, India, Germany and the United States, accounts for more than 80% of the world’s gross domestic product,

60% of its population and an estimated 80% of global greenhouse gas emissions.

US president Joe Biden will attend the meeting in person, but China's President Xi Jinping will participate and give a speech via video link. A handful of other key leaders from wealthy nations, including Russian President Vladimir Putin and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida will not attend in person.

Host Italy had hoped the summit would see all leaders meet face-to-face.

The G20 reaffirmed a commitment to “phase out and rationalise” fossil fuel subsidies by 2025 and to curb coal power, considered a principal culprit of global warming.

The leaders said they will “do their utmost” to avoid building new unabated coal plants, adding the phrase “taking national circumstances into account,” which is commonly used to avoid firm commitments.

The leaders said they would end public finance for overseas coal plants by the end of this year and aim for a “largely decarbonised” power system in the 2030s, according to the draft.

They also pledged to cut their collective emissions of methane, a greenhouse gas which is much more potent but less long-lasting than carbon dioxide, “substantially” by 2030. This deadline is also in brackets.

The willingness of developed countries to help finance the ecological transition of poorer ones, known as “climate financing”, is likely to be crucial to the success of the G20 and the Glasgow summit.

“We stress the importance of fulfilling the joint commitment of developed countries to mobilise \$100 billion annually from public and private sources through to 2025 to address the needs of developing countries, in the context of meaningful mitigation actions and transparency on implementation,” the draft said.

Why the world is getting hotter and how you can help – video explainer

Richer countries agreed in 2009 to establish a \$100bn a year fund to help transfer technologies and minimise climate risks in the developing world, but progress has been slow.

Alok Sharma, president of the Cop26 conference, said this week he hoped the fund would be made available in 2023, three years later than planned, and many developing nations are reluctant to commit to accelerating their emissions reductions until rich ones meet their pledges.

A Chinese environment official said on Wednesday this was “the biggest obstacle” to progress in the climate talks.

The G20 draft calls in brackets for “additional climate financing”, suggesting there is plenty of negotiating still to be done on this issue.

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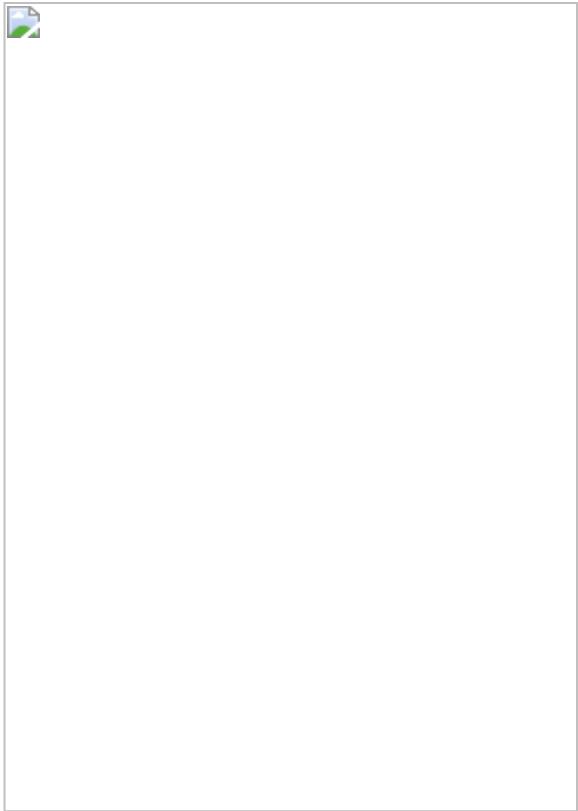
[Climate crimes](#)[Environment](#)

Exxon CEO accused of lying about climate science to congressional panel



Darren Woods, chairman and CEO of Exxon Mobil Corporation, denied any inconsistency between what the company told the public and what Exxon scientists had privately warned. Photograph: Brendan McDermid/Reuters

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Thu 28 Oct 2021 17.05 EDT

The chief executive of [ExxonMobil](#), Darren Woods, was accused of lying to Congress on Thursday after he denied that the company covered up its own research about oil's contribution to the climate crisis.

For the first time, Woods and the heads of three other major petroleum companies were [questioned under oath](#) at a congressional hearing into the [industry's long campaign](#) to discredit and deny the evidence that burning

fossil fuels drove global heating. When pressed to make specific pledges or to stop lobbying against climate initiatives, all four executives declined.

The chair of the House oversight committee, Representative Carolyn Maloney, pressed Woods about statements by his predecessor, Exxon CEO Lee Raymond, who in the 1990s said the scientific evidence for climate change was “inconclusive” and that “the case for global warming is far from air tight”. In 2002, Exxon ran advertisements in the New York Times [calling climate science “unsettled”](#).

Malone put it to Woods that Exxon’s own scientists had repeatedly warned the company about the threat from burning fossil fuels as far back as the 1970s.

“There is a clear conflict between what Exxon CEO told the public and what Exxon scientists were warning privately for years,” she said.

Woods denied that Raymond or Exxon misled anyone.

“I do not agree that there was an inconsistency,” he said.

Maloney said the response reminded her of “another hearing that we had with the tobacco industry”.

“They said they did not believe that nicotine was addictive. Well, it came out that they lied. Tobacco nicotine was very addictive. And now I’m hearing from you that the science that was reported publicly, where your executives were denying climate change, we know that your scientists internally were saying that it’s a reality,” she said.

“So I was hoping that you would not be like the tobacco industry was and lie about this.”

The heads of the American operations of the other oil companies – Shell, [Chevron](#) and BP – also denied they misrepresented climate science or deceived the public.

They each said that they recognised global heating was a reality and a major challenge. But the executives did not accept that their companies had failed to take it seriously or that they were undermining attempts to cut greenhouse gases by funding trade groups pouring millions of dollars into lobbying Congress against tighter environmental laws.

“We accept the scientific consensus,” said Michael Wirth, the CEO of Chevron. “Climate change is real. Any suggestion that Chevron is engaged in disinformation and to mislead the public on these complex issues is simply wrong.”

But Maloney accused the oil companies of continuing the cover-up, including by hiding documents. She said she would take the unusual step of issuing subpoenas to force the firms to reveal what they knew.

“We need to get to the bottom of the oil industry’s disinformation campaign and with these subpoenas we will,” she said.

The oil and gas industry, which spent about \$100m on political lobbying last year, was strongly backed by a number of Republicans on the committee who sought to distract by denouncing Joe Biden’s energy policies.



Carolyn Maloney, chair of the House oversight committee, speaks at a hearing on the role of fossil fuel companies in climate change. Photograph:

Jacquelyn Martin/AP

Republicans called their own witness, Neal Crabtree, who said he lost his job as a welder within three hours of Biden being sworn in as president because the Keystone pipeline was cancelled. Crabtree was used to portray Biden as colluding with China and Russia against America's oil industry.

The highest-ranking Republican on the committee, Representative James Comer, questioned the legitimacy of the investigation. He said the committee would be better off spending its time investigating the White House's handling of inflation, illegal immigration and the US military withdrawal from Afghanistan.

In a hearing meant to focus on climate misinformation, several Republican members openly questioned the urgency of the climate crisis. Representative Clay Higgins called the hearing "a threat from within" because the American way of life was built on oil.

Another Republican member said Maloney owed the oil executives an apology for intruding on their right to free speech by pressing them to make a commitment that their firms will "no longer spend any money, either directly or indirectly, to oppose efforts to reduce emissions and address climate change".

None of the executives would make a direct commitment.

Maloney showed the hearing [a video secretly recorded](#) by Greenpeace earlier this year of an Exxon lobbyist describing the oil giant's backing for a carbon tax as a public relations ploy intended to stall more serious measures to combat the climate crisis.

"How did Exxon respond?" asked Maloney. "Did they come clean about this shocking conduct? No. Mr Woods called Mr McCoy's comments inaccurate and then they fired him. And they are obviously lying like the tobacco executives were."

While the oil executives largely maintained a united front, Representative Ro Khanna, a leading critic of the petroleum industry on the committee,

drew out testimony that showed the European companies, Shell and BP, were working to cut production while the US firms, Exxon and Chevron, intended to increase drilling in the coming years.

Wirth said that that Chevron would raise oil production while cutting carbon emissions.

The hearing also questioned the leaders of two powerful lobby groups accused of acting as front organisations for big oil, the American Petroleum Institute and the US Chamber of Commerce.

Khanna noted that API was heavily funded by oil company money as it resisted the expansion of infrastructure for electric vehicles and opposed a methane fee backed by Biden, including flooding Facebook with advertisements in recent months.

Khanna challenged each of the oil executives in turn to resign from API over its position on electric vehicles or to tell it to stop its opposition to a methane fee. All of them declined to do so.

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Interview

Billy Bragg: ‘Boris was trolling me the whole time. We’ve got a wind-up merchant as PM’

[Jude Rogers](#)



Billy Bragg: ‘I wore glasses live for the first time last night: I need to see the setlist!’ Photograph: Jill Furmanovsky

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Fri 29 Oct 2021 05.00 EDT

In an Exeter pub on a wet Monday morning, [Billy Bragg](#) is talking about a day at the Glastonbury festival in 2000. The BBC had signed up an unusual guest for its coverage – Boris Johnson. In the footage (still online), Johnson – then a year from becoming an MP – forgets to get off the train, gets a comedy henna tattoo in Sanskrit, and growls the Clash’s Bankrobber to Bragg in the car: “It’s your philosophy, isn’t it?” he says. “Leftwing approval of theft from capitalists?”

“He was trolling me the whole time,” Bragg remembers. “That’s what his MO still is. A wind-up merchant who became prime minister! How the fuck did that happen?” He shrugs. “Modern politics needs things he doesn’t have: accountability and empathy.”

For nearly four decades, Bragg has mixed human emotion and social commentary in song. His 13th studio album, *The Million Things That Never Happened*, is his first in eight years, a woozy, melancholic affair, full of Mellotrons, Moogs and resonant Dobro guitars. “It’s another album about where I am now, as my albums always are,” Bragg says. “*Workers’ Playtime* was a break-up album, *William Bloke* was about becoming a dad, this is about the sense of loss people are going to feel once the pandemic is over.”

The kids that pull the statues down … they challenge me to see / The gap between the man I am and the man I want to be

Billy Bragg, Mid-century Modern

Now 63 (and “Grandpa Bill” to grandchildren from a previous relationship of his partner, Juliet Wills), he’s looking surprisingly hipsterish today, his white hair in a newly styled quiff, trendy owlish glasses sitting on his nose. “I wore glasses live for the first time last night,” he says. “I need to see the setlist!” He talks about how the new album’s title track lists things people have missed in the last 18 months (“a father present at a birth / a

grandmother hears a first word”). Lonesome Ocean, I Will Be Your Shield and Good Days, Bad Days also tackle loneliness, depression and “this great weight that I feel”.

Bragg’s past 18 months have been tough. “My partner was diagnosed with breast cancer in the first lockdown, so that’s sort of brought things home to us.” He adds that she had successful surgery. “So we’re working our way back from that at the moment.” Two years away from playing music live also made Bragg think about where he fitted into culture as a musician, “although I don’t know if this is a pandemic thing or because I’m in my 60s”, he laughs.

His interest in younger people’s views of politics runs through our conversation today. This includes his interest in musicians like [Sam Fender](#) (“I love the way he writes about the pressures he’s under”), Michael Kiwanuka (“[Kiwanuka](#) is such a great record – a very political record”). He also presented an NME award with Taylor Swift in February 2020, with whom he “really got on. We had a quick chat about owning your music, and she’s really inspiring for all artists, but especially for women trying to navigate what’s still a very male, racist, sexist industry. It’s not as bad as it was in the 80s, but it’s still a ‘show us a bit more flesh’ kind of industry, and that needs to be countered.”

His album is contemporary, too. Freedom Doesn’t Come for Free is a country-flecked satire on a libertarian utopia, while Mid-century Modern celebrates “the kids that pull the statues down … they challenge me to see / The gap between the man I am and the man I want to be”. Ten Mysterious Photos That Can’t Be Explained also dissects the joys and perils of the internet. “It’s like heroin for autodidacts,” he raves, “the conspiracy hacks, the cybercondriacs”.



Billy Bragg in about 1980. ‘I’m trying to write for other people of my generation who came through politics back then.’ Photograph: David Corio/Getty Images

The internet is a good thing, though, he says. “What would lockdown have been like without the internet? Jesus!” He also hates how social media users are blamed for the temperature of public discourse. “They also need to find the person who’s anonymously writing those Daily Mail headlines that say ‘Crush the saboteurs’, those sending out signals to the general public that set the tone of the debate. We need to dial it all down, all of us, on all sides.”

Of course, Bragg has been in a few social media spats himself. In 2018, his comments about the Jewish community needing to do work to “build trust” with the Labour party were [rightly criticised](#). He apologised for his “very insensitive response” in the Guardian in 2019 and reasserts that today: “Of course.”

More recently, he said he has faced criticism from “gender-critical campaigners” after he started discussing the human rights of transgender people online. Is he aware of his status as a cisgender man speaking from a position of privilege? “I am very much so, yeah. It’s quite common for me to get called misogynistic simply because I support trans rights, but this is

without any reference to all the other issues on which I support the rights of women – on abortion, against male violence.”

He continues. “I’m saying, where can the two sides exist in a positive way that allows women to feel that they are not threatened and the trans community to feel that they are respected? And that’s something I haven’t yet sussed out.”

“I’m used to people listening to what I have to say,” goes a lyric in Mid-Century Modern, before offering a possible solution to his problems: “So I find it hard to think that it might help if I just stepped away.” Does he ever consider doing this himself? “Maybe it would help,” he says. “But not to go away, not give up or surrender, just step back and listen sometimes. I’m also trying to write those lines for other people of my generation who came through politics back then [in the 1980s] and are perhaps fixed in their ways more.”

Today, however, he is very happy to talk. We discuss the Daily Mail slamming him for making money from the sale of his “four-bedroom Victorian seaside mansion” near Chesil Beach, Dorset, in 2019 (he didn’t sell, he says, and still lives there). “I always thought they were in favour of self-made people – I’m a good example of a small businessman! You think they’d be supportive … [it’s] clearly about my politics. But if I lived in a cave, they’d still complain about me. ‘That cave-dweller, who does he think he is, he never has a good time, look at him.’ They’re just trying to intimidate me to shut me up.”



Johnny Marr (left) and Billy Bragg at Manchester Apollo on the Red Wedge tour, 1986. Photograph: Steve Rapport/Getty Images

He is also unsurprisingly vocal about the Labour party. He was disappointed by Jeremy Corbyn's 2019 election campaign: "You can't step away from the fact that Corbyn and his people weren't very good at organising." He likes Andy Burnham, mayor of Greater Manchester: "He's been going on about proportional representation for years. [Starmer's] lot got it knocked back by their more reactionary mates in the unions. Surely the way forward is by bringing together the progressive forces in British politics together, especially as Labour will never get back Scotland."

The Labour party is always good at having arguments with itself, I say. "Well, yeah, it always has been thus," he replies, "although I'd like to point out that Brexit is a result of the Tories arguing with themselves."

Nevertheless, Bragg doesn't think musicians can bring about substantial change. "It's not going to end racism or elect people – it doesn't have agency like that – but it can give you a different perspective on the world, and that's important." He found out about gay rights at [Rock Against Racism](#) gigs in the late 1970s, he says, and has fond memories of playing with bands like the Smiths with Red Wedge – although he's still sad about "[what happened](#)" to [Morrissey](#). "He was a representative of the marginalised and he was able

to connect with those people. I don't know what happened there." He can still listen to their music, though, because Johnny Marr remains "the nicest man in rock'n'roll – and I heard from a friend that those [Rick Astley \[and Blossoms Smiths tribute\].gigs](#) were good."

Who might do a similar tribute to Bragg? "Bill Bailey has done something already [on his 2000 Bewilderness tour], but I'd have to pick someone daft, a bit out there, to match this." A minute later, a lightbulb goes off in his head. "I've got it. [Sinita!](#)"

She'll have to wait a while, though, as he is not going anywhere yet, he says – apart from the guitar shop he is heading for after the pub, where he is getting an instrument fixed for his tour. Why does he think his career has lasted so long? His answer is surprisingly melancholic. "I think what first attracted people to my music was the politics and the vulnerability together. I've always been conscious of that because that's who I am: I am that vulnerable person. I had to reinvent myself, and becoming 'Billy Bragg' allowed me to talk, to go out among crowds, to wake up in the morning feeling I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing. That's always been how music works for me. So I'm still doing it."

- A Million Things That Never Happened is out now on Cooking Vinyl. Billy Bragg tours the UK and Ireland [until 27 November](#)
-

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Cop26: Meet nine fashion designers making real change



Slow-fashion by Bora Studio Nepal. Photograph: Bora Studio Nepal

[Tamsin Blanchard](#)

Fri 29 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

Is it actually possible to reduce the fashion industry's impact on the environment? Nine pioneering designers from five continents are showing that it is. Masterminding a series of solutions to some of the challenges facing their own communities, they demonstrate what we can learn from local indigenous knowledge and how to work within the limits of our natural resources.

In the lead up to [Cop26](#), the designers were asked to respond to the climate change talks' themes of adaptation, resilience and nature for a series of online workshops created by Fashion Open Studio (the initiative set up by Fashion Revolution) in partnership with the British Council. If you happen to be in Glasgow between November 4 to 11, you can take part in workshop events around the city, or to watch previous events and find out about upcoming workshops online, check out fashionopenstudio.com/events. In the meantime, here are the nine names to know:

BORA STUDIO, NEPAL



Bora Studio reuses jute sacking to make new garments. Photograph: Bora Studio Nepal

Bora Studio is a slow-fashion, environmentally responsible clothing brand founded by Meena Gurung in Nepal. The word "Bora" derives from

Nepalese language meaning a jute sack, which Gurung repurposes to make the collections. From a farmer sowing seeds in his fields to harvesting the crops and selling the produce, jute sacks are used multiple times and are 100% biodegradable. All Nepali households have a jute sack lying around somewhere in their houses. “I wanted my clothing to be a medium to inspire people, to adapt sustainability and be nature-friendly,” says Gurung.



Garments from Bora Studio's collection. Photograph: Bora Studio Nepal

For the past three years, Gurung has been working with local indigenous communities all around Nepal through participatory natural dyeing training programmes, creating awareness on benefits of natural dyeing and sustainable choices that we can make as individuals. Recently, Bora Studio worked with an indigenous community from Koshi Tappu, Sunsari, Eastern Nepal, known as “Sardar” who are living in and around Koshi Tappu wetland area. The local community is facing a massive problem due to an invasive species water hyacinth which is taking over their lands and posing a huge risk for the river ecosystems. They have given women training on how to harness water hyacinth as a material which can be used for weaving matts, bags and curtains. It can also be repurposed as a natural fertiliser for their farm fields as it's very rich in nitrogen which help to yield more produce.

SINDISO KHUMALO, SOUTH AFRICA



Each piece by Cape Town-based Sindiso Kumalo tells a story. Photograph: Sindiso Khumalo South Africa

Sindiso Khumalo is a textile designer based in Cape Town, South Africa. Khumalo studied architecture at the University of Cape Town and worked for Sir David Adjaye in London before completing her MA at Central Saint Martins in Textile Futures.

Inspired by her mother, who was a political activist against the apartheid regime, Khumalo has been motivated to bring values of social justice into her eponymous brand which she launched in 2014. Her interests lie in the representations of black women from the turn of the 20th century up to the 1980s, looking at the portraiture of that time. Each garment tells a story about Africa, women and female empowerment.

With textiles and craft at the heart her collections, she works closely with NGOs and has a small workshops in South Africa and Burkina Faso, producing unique handwoven and hand-embroidered textiles for her collections. She employs women from a Cape Town-based NGO called Ignite Dignity which works towards rehabilitating those who have previously been trafficked and found themselves working in exploitative conditions. The brand also works with a workshop in Burkina Faso producing handwoven cloth from hemp, recycled and organic cotton and

upcycled waste materials. From orders of 40 metres six years ago, they have grown to 1,000 metres this year.

GARCIA BELLO, ARGENTINA



Zero-waste patterns are built into the designs by Garcia Bello. Photograph: Garcia Bello Argentina

Garcia Bello was conceived in Tierra del Fuego province, in the south of Argentina, by Juliana Garcia Bello, a graduate in Clothing Designer from FADU. A brand focused on upcycling and reconstruction methods, it uses disused materials, donated hand-me-downs and old or discarded clothes combined with raw, biodegradable cotton to make its locally produced collections. Two types of zero-waste patterns are built into the pattern design, enabling them to use existing secondhand clothes as raw material and make the most of these rolls of cloth.

The brand works in what they describe as “a humane and unhurried time frame” and with a small stock. Each piece is genderless and its size adapts to different body builds. This allows them to create comfortable, timeless, durable items, with a low-impact on the environment – garments for everyday wear designed to be worn for a long time. Bello describes her

method as “human-scale production”. She likes to show and share her working methods to invite others to follow the upcycling techniques.

RAHEMUR RAHMAN, BANGLADESH



Natural dyes and heritage woodblock techniques mark out the work of Rahemur Rahman. Photograph: Aranya x Rahemur Rahman Bangladesh

Rahemur Rahman's fashion brand is redefining what it means for fashion to be “made in Bangladesh”. Using design, print and weave to reinterpret and re-tell stories of South Asian identities, London-born Bangladeshi Rahman blends history and tradition with fantasy, playing with patterns and texture to create distinctive pieces “for the people who dream in colour”. The designer has a unique way of designing which he’s been perfecting since graduating from Central Saint Martins in 2014. Only working with textiles made of natural fibres that are naturally dyed using a heritage wooden block technique from Bangladesh called Wax and Resist dye, he focuses on the “death of the garment”, whereby every design decision is considered by how it will disintegrate and decompose on the earth once it is disposed of. All these natural elements will take 10 to 20 years to fully decompose and become earth again for a new lease of life. Each garment produced by the brand also has a tiny seed hidden inside which will allow for a tree to grow wherever this product has its “death”.



Rahemur Rahman aims to decolonise craftsmanship from the subcontinent.
Photograph: Aranya x Rahemur Rahman Bangladesh

Rahman hopes to engage with the community he grew up in through social engagement projects. Working with the World Fair Trade Organisation and World Crafts Council member, Aranya Crafts, in Bangladesh, Rahman creates sustainable and ethically produced textiles cultivating the traditional technique of natural dye, bringing textiles from the subcontinent to an international audience.

Taking inspiration from textiles in museums in the UK from pre-colonial West Bengal, the brand is focused on working to decolonise craftsmanship from the subcontinent through fashion and textiles, collaborating with young people from marginalised backgrounds for galleries and exhibitions across the UK to tackle the engagement gap of these communities in these prestigious art institutions.

TOTON, INDONESIA



Jakarta-based brand Toton is committed to working with local artisans and factories. Photograph: Toton Jakarta Indonesia

Jakarta-based brand Toton was founded in 2012 by Parsons New School graduate Toton Januar and partner Haryo Balitar. Drawing on Indonesia's rich culture, nature, and heritage, it is committed to working with local artisans and factories to preserve the heritage techniques that have been passed down by the generations before them and lessen the environmental damage caused by big factories and irresponsible use and waste of chemicals.



Toton works with repurposed and recycled denim. Photograph: Toton
Jakarta Indonesia

In 2017, the brand started to work with repurposed and recycled denim to create a collection made entirely from materials found in their home and studio. It jump-started not only working with denim from post-consumer off-cut waste, but pre-consumer denim waste from small to medium factories around Jakarta, too. The limited nature of waste material pushes the brand to be more creative in researching sustainable techniques for both aesthetics and production. Since then, Toton has worked exclusively with waste materials for its denim pieces in every collection, with an average use of denim waste around 150 m³ to 200 m³ per month. “It is still such a small number but we hope to increase them in a very organic way,” says Januar. “We want to produce pieces that last, not just another product that soon would be destined for landfill again.”

VIMBAI NATASHA NAOMI, ZIMBABWE



Reviving unwanted textiles is the aim of Vimbai Natasha Naomi.
Photograph: Vimbai Natasha Naomi Zimbabwe

Vimbai Natasha Naomi is a Zimbabwean brand founded by Vimbai Mupfurutsa. The brand uses upcycling, innovation and experimentation with careful use and reuse of locally sourced discarded fabrics, samples and pre-loved clothes. “I carefully consider fabric consumption, recycling and waste management, with regard to their contribution towards people, economies and the environment,” says Mupfurutsa, who uses rejected fabric samples that have been rescued from a local cotton mill that recently shut down. By reviving unwanted textiles, she wants to encourage the fashion ecosystem from mills to consumers to adopt sustainable methods such as focusing on quality over quantity, valuing people over profit when manufacturing, and encouraging upcycling by purchasing secondhand clothing. Working with women who come from disadvantaged communities and backgrounds, she teaches them how to repurpose fabric – specifically how to create new textiles so that they may be equipped to continue sustainable practices and teach others in their communities to reduce waste, as well as pollution.



Vimbai Natasha Naomi teaches women from disadvantaged communities to repurpose fabric. Photograph: Vimbai Natasha Naomi Zimbabwe

“Pollution is one of the biggest contributors to this titanic climate change we are experiencing today,” she says, “and unfortunately the lives that are most affected are not responsible for it. In developed countries, consumerism is paramount, where individuals buy excess that is then later discarded in ways that do not favour the environment. This way of life continually fuels unethical fast fashion practices such as labour exploitation, unfair trade and the mishandling of the earth’s natural resources.” Mupfurutsa anticipates consumption increasing in Zimbabwe too, and sees herself as a role model to inspire a slower, less wasteful pace and discourage the practice of incinerating samples and excess stock. “As a designer who was born and raised in a developing country, mobilising resources for my community will have long-term positive impacts towards social sustainability.”

IRO IRO, INDIA



Iro Iro aims to revive a dying craft tradition. Photograph: IroIro India

When Bhaavya Goenka launched her label IRO IRO, she started with a question: why did something as organic and natural as clothing and fashion have to be so polluting and harmful for the environment? Her solution was a business that uses hand-woven fabrics which are upcycled from discarded textiles, woven with love and care by weavers from a village near Jaipur, India. Every finished IRO IRO product represents the revival of a dying craft tradition and each one sold supports a family of weavers, enabling them to pursue a profession they are passionate about.

Specialising in the reuse and upcycling of industrial textile waste through indigenous craft practices of India has helped Goenka to help spread a new circular system of production; as such, Iro Iro collaborates with other businesses to upcycle their waste into textiles for fashion and interiors, generating work for 20 artisans based in a village near Jaipur. “Our constant motivation is to reimagine the system of making fashion and not just limit our innovation to the product,” says Goenka. “From a system that shares its losses and not its profits we aim to make fashion that shares prosperity throughout its value chain.” Buy the kit to sew your own Iro Iro jacket [here](#)

BHUKRAM, THAILAND



Thai fashion brand Bhukram uses community participatory processes to make their garments. Photograph: Bhukram Thailand

Bhukram is a Thai fashion brand founded by Pilan Thaisuang which uses clothes as a medium to tell stories about the Phu Phan community's way of life and its natural environment. The embroidery art reflects the relationships between community members themselves, community members and outsiders, and humans and nature. The brand uses a community participatory process to work with members of the Ban Nang Toeng Village, Phu Phan District, Sakon Nakhon Province in Thailand.

For each collection, the design team oversees the overall design aspects including silhouettes, fabrics, and subjects to be depicted through embroidery, after which they coordinate with a diverse pool of artisans, especially the embroiderers who are the main storytellers and share their stories to raise awareness of environmental protection and the preservation of the traditional way of life. Bhukram's subdued colours are taken from nature, reflecting the nature of Phu Phan, the traditional way of life and traditional knowledge.

"The current mainstream processes of industrialised fast fashion are killing traditional agriculture, craftsmanship, and biological, social, and cultural diversity," says Thaisuang. "Bhukram enables small-scale zero-mile

production, regional fibre systems, creation of local and sustainable jobs for communities.” With co-design and participatory practices, many important decisions are made locally by the artisans directly involved, so “much of the decision-making, know-how and cultural and economic value remains in the hands, minds and pockets of the local community.”

HUNER, TURKEY



Istanbul-based accessories brand, Huner, repurposes sail cloth. Photograph: Huner Turkey

Huner is an Istanbul-based accessories brand which repurposes used sails to create durable bags and accessories. Although the base material of sail cloth is made out of carbon fibre and plastic coating, by turning this material into bags that can be used many more times than its original form (sails are used only a handful of times before they lose performance and have to be replaced) they commit to finding a long-lasting use for a very specific material waste stream.

“Our main goal is to produce, without having anything virgin produced for us,” says Hüner Aldemir, who founded her limited-batch brand in 2017 having grown up making things from scrap fabrics at her aunt’s house. She received her BFA in Fashion Design from Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, NY

and then apprenticed with designer Peter Som in New York. She then worked at various e-commerce platforms in Istanbul, where she felt uneasy about the levels of mass consumption and production. “We believe the best way forward for reducing our impact on the earth is through reducing our consumption first, but also our production of things. That’s why Huner is firmly positioned as an upcycling brand, says Aldemir. “There is so much material in the world already just waiting to be purposed into useful things, it seems irresponsible to add to the production of virgin goods. There are alternative ways of producing our goods and we can alter our ways of thinking and doing in order to change this course we’re on.”

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[Sarah Moss](#)

Interview

Sarah Moss: ‘The rhetoric during lockdown was terrifying’

[Emma Brockes](#)



‘When did we become a species whose default state is shut up indoors?’ ...
Sarah Moss. Photograph: George Voronov/The Guardian



[@emmabrockes](#)

Fri 29 Oct 2021 05.00 EDT

Last December, in the depths of lockdown, Sarah Moss picked up a copy of [Winter Papers](#), an annual anthology of new Irish writing. The 46-year-old and her family had recently moved from Coventry to Dublin, and although Irish lockdown was less restrictive than the Britain version, Moss was feeling, she says, “completely frozen”. For nine months, the pandemic had been impossible to absorb, not only personally, but as a writer – until it showed up in Winter Papers. “It was only a glimpse of it in essays and stories,” Moss says, but for the first time she thought: “This is a thing we can write about. And it was such a relief.”

The permission given in that moment triggered an extraordinary burst of activity. Moss’s eighth novel, [The Fell](#), was written in a frenzied few months and centres on the story of two neighbours in a remote village in the Peak District. At the beginning of the novel, Kate, a single mother of a teenage son, and her elderly neighbour, Alice, are both struggling with lockdown, not just the logistics but the guilt of complaining when they are supposed to be grateful simply for being alive. It’s perfect material for Moss, who in previous novels has examined the interplay between human systems and the natural world – specifically, how seemingly small domestic manoeuvres can

throw one up against the vast planes of history, in ways tragic and absurd. In The Fell, Alice wonders if “maybe she’ll die without ever touching another human”, but also whether it’s OK to put frivolous items such as Hula Hoops on the list when Kate offers to do her shopping for her. Kate, meanwhile, asks, “When did we become a species whose default state is shut up indoors?” and, in an action that triggers the drama of the novel, sneaks out of the house for a rule-breaking walk. The Fell is a funny, savage novel about the very recent past, and seems to do the impossible: hold a story that is still unfolding immobile enough to integrate into fiction.

The tone of The Fell, as in so much of Moss’s work, is a pervasive creepiness that builds as the story develops. Her characters, in various states of claustrophobia, are saturated with helplessness and shame, but the existential questions raised by their difficulties are firmly rooted in politics. In Ghost Wall (2018), the power dynamics within an abusive family drill down into larger systems of oppression; in Summerwater (2020), the individual dread of families on a rainy holiday in Scotland reflects the deeper threat of environmental damage. The Fell asks the primary question of lockdown: what, exactly, is “essential”? “The idea of what is and isn’t essential is so political,” she says, and uses the example of children’s shoe shops, which were initially considered “non-essential” and prohibited from opening.

The question of blame-shifting is at the heart of this dynamic, and Moss is very canny at nailing the rightwing impetus behind government’s urging people to be grateful merely to have breath in their bodies. In the novel, Alice, going to bed one night, sheepishly berates herself for feeling lonely and scared. “‘There’s a reason they don’t write protest anthems about well-off retired people feeling a bit sad,’ she thinks, and tries to rally herself with the thought that “a person can doubtless live like this indefinitely, the background murmur of dread only a little louder week by week, month by month”. The fact is, she concludes, that ‘people don’t die of dread’”.

If you have to go around being grateful to be alive, then you can’t demand equal pay, or policing, or anything else

As Moss is at pains to point out, people do, actually, die of dread; it just takes a bit longer than other ways and is almost impossible to isolate as a cause. “But that was so much of the rhetoric during lockdown. When anybody said, ‘How are you doing?’ you had to say: ‘Oh, well, I’m so grateful that I’m not in intensive care.’ And you’d think, OK, but of course, always; but really?” It misunderstands what human beings are. “It’s also terrifyingly apolitical. If you have to go around being grateful to be alive, then you’re not allowed to demand equal pay, or safety on the streets, or just policing, or anything else. Because you should just be so glad you’re not dead.”

One of the aspects of lockdown that made Moss most furious was its sunken class biases and assumptions. Before leaving England, she would take her bike out into rural Warwickshire, “past some of the most deprived parts of Coventry. I’d volunteered in the local food bank and I knew what conditions in some of the council and ex-council blocks were like: people living with damp and mould that hospitalised babies, people who needed food parcels when they had no access to cookers or fridges, children who would come in to the food bank and ask how many of the biscuits on the plate they could eat because they were hungry. And then I was cycling along the lanes past enormous old houses that had their own tennis courts, with signs in the windows saying ‘Stay home, save lives’ and the smugness of it was enraging.”

The Fell is not by any means anti-lockdown; it just fills in a lot of pieces missing from a conversation that has to date been so scripted from the top. Much of the impetus for the story comes simply from recognising how humans need to be outside. Moss was raised in Manchester, where her dad was a computer scientist and her mum worked in arts and healthcare. When she was growing up, the family were frequent visitors to the Peak District and spent all their holidays out of doors. Moss’s landscapes aren’t soothing in the traditional sense; people in her novels are for ever on the brink of being snuffed out by bad weather. But something happens outside, psychologically, that the novelist finds particularly trenchant in this screen-addled era when, for long periods of time, many of us seem to function more as hard drives than people.

Moss is a “compulsive runner”, she says, “and it’s not about fitness or weight or sport or any of that. It’s just about being out in a body, feet on the stones and rain in the hair.” In terms of her fiction, she says, “I think the reason I’m interested in ‘bad’ weather is because that is when you’re most aware of your own embodiment in the world; when your skin is being rained on and your hair is being blown around. You really know you’re alive when you’re most physically present to the world and the elements.”

I’m interested in ‘bad’ weather because that is when you’re most aware of your own embodiment in the world

The flip side of this is her cerebral and more sedentary life as a teacher and academic. She graduated from Oxford in 1997, and stayed on to do a PhD on the influence of travel writing on Wordsworth, Coleridge and Mary Shelley. (“So landscape, travel and mostly Arctic and Antarctic travel writing, in the end.”) Occasionally, she wonders if becoming an academic was the right choice. It allowed her to travel; when her children were still very young, she took up a post in Reykjavik and the family moved to Iceland for a few years. It also enabled her writing career, something she’d aspired to “from very young, five or six. But I didn’t know anyone who did it and I couldn’t see how anyone would get from writing a thing in a notebook to publishing a book. A life in academia bought her time, structure and comfort. But “in some ways I wish I’d thought of an alternative career early on, because the world is wide and there are many interesting things I might’ve done.”

This desire to explore has perhaps been channelled into her fiction. Moss’s first novel, *Cold Earth* (2009), followed the fate of six archaeologists trapped in Greenland for an apocalyptic winter, a setup that “breathed authenticity,” [wrote Jane Smiley](#) in the *Guardian*. The book led to four further novels, three of which – [*Bodies of Light*](#), [*Signs for Lost Children*](#), and [*The Tidal Zone*](#) – were shortlisted for the Wellcome prize.

Ghost Wall is the story of a teenage girl who goes on a historical re-enactment weekend with her family. It focuses on her relationship with her dad, an angry, violent man obsessed with the iron age”. In spite of his brutishness, he’s not a character without sympathy, which, says Moss, “wasn’t even a literary move; it’s just how I think about people. A literary

defence would be that it's boring to write a monster, and actually people are more complicated than that. But also I just don't believe in monsters.

Moss is very good on the English, particularly their behaviour during lockdown. In the new novel, the business of spying on one's neighbours and the fear of being reported to the authorities is used to great effect. The dynamic is slightly different in Ireland, she says, where "there is a very long history of not telling on people" – so that while neighbours breaking the rules of lockdown might be observed, they would in all likelihood not be turned in. "Irish friends said that a lot of people were compliant because they would be ashamed in front of the neighbours if they weren't. I mean, it's Foucault in the background here: it wasn't that you'd tell the police on your neighbours, but you would think less of them." Which of course turns out to be the greater policeman.

Unusually, Moss is not writing at the moment. She has learned to be fine with that, or at least, after years of being anxious and controlling about her output, to weather the discomfort between books with more grace. Now, she says, "I'm more inclined to trust the process and see what happens." She takes issue with a popular tenet of creative writing teaching – that you should write every day and keep writing. "Something I say to students is hold back for as long as you can, because if you're writing the wrong thing – putting words on a screen is not an act of virtue. Leave it until you've got something that you want to say."

The Fell by Sarah Moss (Pan Macmillan, £14.99). To support The Guardian and Observer, order your copy at [guardianbookshop.com](https://www.guardianbookshop.com). Delivery charges may apply.

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[Experience](#)[Life and style](#)

Experience: I own England's most haunted cottage



Tim Chilton: 'It felt almost as if Lowes Cottage had a personality and was testing me in some way.' Photograph: Stephen Burke/The Guardian

Tim Chilton

Fri 29 Oct 2021 05.00 EDT

In 1999, I was in my mid-40s and had just escaped from my stressful and joyless career as a management consultant. I needed a project. I loved small period buildings and decided to throw my energy into restoring one; I started combing through auction catalogues in search of a place.

Having failed to win a number of London houses that didn't much inspire me anyway, I cast the net wider. My father would often give me advice over the phone. He persuaded me to focus on Derbyshire, a county my family has a strong connection to, and helped me identify what my ideal house would

be like: stone-built, a south-facing garden, with at least two bedrooms and a workshop.

One night, we'd just finished a long conversation about this elusive dream home when Dad – a healthy 75-year-old – had a heart attack. He died instantly.

I didn't look at any more auction catalogues until after the funeral. When I did, I spotted Lowes Cottage straight away. Located in the Derbyshire Dales village of Upper Mayfield, it was built late in the 18th century by a stonemason who needed a home with a workshop. It seemed exactly like the place my father had described.

I drove out to view it the day before the auction. The cottage was approached over the ominously titled Hanging Bridge and Gallowtree Lane – the house itself was named after a nearby iron age burial mound. Perhaps I should have felt a sense of foreboding, especially when the agent wouldn't let me use my video camera inside the house. But the cottage had everything I'd been looking for, with the added attraction of bewitching Peak District views. I was delighted by it.

The following day, I turned up at the auction to find a camera crew present and a tangible buzz in the room. The hammer came down after I'd bid £6,000 over the guide price. I'd barely had time to process the fact that I'd won before I was ushered into an anteroom full of reporters. A microphone was thrust towards me and someone asked: "How does it feel to have bought England's most haunted cottage?"

I had no idea of the house's reputation – there was no hint of it in the description – but I was quickly brought up to speed. A couple, Andrew and Josie Smith, who had bought Lowes Cottage in 1994, had filed a [lawsuit against the previous owners](#) for not telling them the property was haunted.

The Smiths claimed they had been driven out by a number of manifestations, including something they described as "a creeping presence", like a mist that appeared and thickened into fog. They spoke of sudden pockets of cold, damp patches on the wall and objects inexplicably moving. Their claims were backed up by a vicar, who investigated the cottage and said he found a

pungent odour that moved around and a wall that seemed to weep when he placed his hand on it.

It was reported to be the first case relying on the existence of supernatural forces since the middle ages, but the judge gave the Smiths' claims short shrift. During my first night in Lowes Cottage, I started to have some sympathy for my predecessors. My collie, Syon, was uneasy entering the house and found it hard to settle. Lights switched on and off, there were sudden changes in temperature and my TV would turn itself on.

There were further incidents. I was visited by reporters who experienced problems with tape recorders or cameras. I remembered the agent who had forbidden filming when I first visited, and when mysterious patches of glistening moisture started forming on walls, I recalled the vicar's description of a "weeping wall".

It felt almost as if Lowes Cottage had a personality and was testing me in some way. The place seemed capable of changing moods, though I never had any sense of a malignant entity. I later got to meet the Smiths and found them to be solid and authentic people.

After a while, Syon seemed to make peace with the house, and the perplexing incidents stopped. I spent a happy four years at the cottage before renting it out. Only one of the tenants has reported anything unusual.

In the months after the auction, some people told me the house would be "a blessing" to me, and they were right. In spite of its notoriety, I'm very grateful to Lowes Cottage. Seemingly prophesied by my father, it acted as a pivot between an unhappy time in my life and my more fulfilling existence restoring period properties.

As told to Chris Broughton

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Coronavirus

Gordon Brown urges rich countries to airlift surplus Covid vaccines to world's poorest



Gordon Brown said 100m Covid vaccines in the UK and other western countries would pass their expiry dates by Christmas. Photograph: Simon Dawson/Reuters

[Miranda Bryant](#)

Fri 29 Oct 2021 03.52 EDT

Gordon Brown has called on the British government and other G20 countries to urgently arrange a military airlift of [surplus Covid vaccines](#) to poorer countries before they expire, saying it is their “moral responsibility” to do so.

The former prime minister has organised a letter from more than 160 former world leaders and global figures calling for richer countries to send 240m

vaccines stored in the US, Europe and Canada to countries struggling to vaccinate their populations.

The letter is addressed to the Italian prime minister, Mario Draghi, who is hosting this weekend's [G20 summit in Rome](#), and calls for urgent action.

Brown, who is the [World Health Organization](#) ambassador for global health financing, said about 100m of the vaccines held in the UK and other western countries would pass their expiry dates by Christmas and risk not being used at all.

"If you don't get them out quickly, you're going to lose them altogether," he told BBC Radio 4's Today programme. "And I think what people hate most of all is waste. If you can save lives through getting these vaccines out, it's a moral responsibility to do so, as well as being in our self-interest to prevent further outbreaks of new variants."

Brown said 2% of low-income countries had been vaccinated and 5% of Africa, where only 10% of health workers had been vaccinated.

He added: "We've got about 240m vaccines that are stored in America, Europe, United Kingdom and Canada that are not being used, that are not needed, because we've accounted for vaccines for boosters and vaccines for young people and we've got to get them out to the people who need them to save lives."

More than 5 million people have died from coronavirus since the start of the pandemic. Brown warned that an additional 5 million people would die from the virus if vaccines were not distributed.

He said it was not the fault of Covax, the global vaccine distribution initiative, but that it was down to [G20](#) leaders, who have control of what happens to unused vaccines that he claimed were usually over-ordered.

He said the UK's Covax donation of 100m vaccines was being distributed too slowly and that the government lacked urgency.

“There’s an urgency about saving lives and there’s also an urgency about preventing these vaccines passing their use-by date, and I don’t think the British government has yet realised the urgency of the problem and the need in the poorest countries,” he said.

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Coronavirus

Jabs do not reduce risk of passing Covid within household, study suggests



The results suggest even those who are fully vaccinated have a sizeable risk of becoming infected. Photograph: Martin Rickett/PA

Nicola Davis Science correspondent
[@NicolaKSDavis](#)

Thu 28 Oct 2021 12.00 EDT

People who are fully vaccinated against Covid yet catch the virus are just as infectious to others in their household as infected unvaccinated people, research suggests.

Households are [a key setting for the transmission of Covid infections](#) (pdf), with frequent prolonged daily contact with an infected person linked to an increased risk of catching the virus.

However, questions have remained – including the true proportion of household contacts who become infected from an initial case, the duration of their infection, and the impact of vaccination on the risk of transmitting the virus and the chance of catching it.

Now a study has revealed that while vaccination against Covid is crucial to preventing severe disease and death, even fully jabbed individuals catch the virus – and pass it on.

Writing in the Lancet, researchers from a number of institutions including Imperial College London and the UK Health Security Agency (HSA) report how they analysed data from 204 household contacts of 138 people infected with the Delta variant.

Of these contacts, who were recruited within five days of their household member showing symptoms and were tested daily for 14 days, 53 went on to become infected, 31 of whom were fully vaccinated and 15 were unvaccinated.

The results suggest even those who are fully vaccinated have a sizeable risk of becoming infected, with analysis revealing a fully vaccinated contact has a 25% chance of catching the virus from an infected household member while an unvaccinated contact has a 38% chance of becoming infected.

However, the figures do not shed light on the severity of illness, while the team cautions these figures fall within a range of possible values, meaning the exact size of the difference is unclear.

The analysis further suggests that whether an infected individual is themselves fully vaccinated or unvaccinated makes little or no difference to how infectious they are to their household contacts.

The team add that the peak level of virus in infected individuals was the same regardless of whether they were jabbed or not, although these levels dropped off more quickly in the vaccinated people, suggesting they cleared the infection sooner.

“This likely explains why [fully vaccinated] breakthrough cases are as infectious to their contacts as [unvaccinated] cases” said Prof Ajit Lalvani, chair of infectious diseases at Imperial College London and an author of the study.

The team also looked more closely at those who were fully vaccinated.

“What we found, surprisingly, was that already by three months after receipt of the second vaccine dose, the risk of acquiring infection was higher compared to being more recently vaccinated,” said Lalvani.

“This suggests that vaccine-induced protection is already waning by about three months post-secondary,” he added.

Lalvani stressed that vaccination, including boosters, was important, noting that unvaccinated people cannot rely on the immunity of those who are fully jabbed for protection.

Should fully vaccinated individuals become infected, he added, they remain protected against severe disease and death, and tend to have only a mild infection.

However, when asked if the data suggested booster doses should be offered sooner than six months after a second jab, Lalvani said the emphasis should be on encouraging those already eligible to take the extra dose.

Prof Rowland Kao, an epidemiologist at the University of Edinburgh, who was not involved in the work, said the estimates of high rates of transmission among household contacts underscored the need to vaccinate teenagers and give boosters to vulnerable people.

“The vaccinations of younger persons to slow down transmission in the community, and the boosters to directly protect against severe infection and hospitalisation,” he said.

Kao suggested the findings also added weight to calls for the introduction of further measures in the UK to tackle the spread of Covid, adding the move could also mitigate the risks posed by other respiratory infections including flu.

“The result that vaccinated individuals who become infected appear to pose a similar infection risk to others also emphasises the need for continued or improved non-pharmaceutical interventions to further slow down transmission rates and ease hospital burdens over the winter,” he said.

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Coronavirus

Looking for the peak: the cautious optimism over stalling UK Covid cases



About 1 in 56 people in the UK have Covid with symptoms, according to data from the last five days. Photograph: Dan Kitwood/Getty Images

Nicola Davis Science correspondent
[@NicolaKSDavis](#)

Thu 28 Oct 2021 09.00 EDT

The Covid pandemic has been a story of twists and turns, with the situation often developing quickly.

For much of October, confirmed cases in the UK have risen daily – largely driven by increases in England and Wales.

The situation has provoked consternation, with voices ranging from the [head of the NHS confederation](#) to the [British Medical Association](#) and a [number of leading scientists](#) urging the government to implement its “plan B” – a

series of “light touch” measures such as advice to work from home if possible, mandatory use of face coverings in some settings and the introduction of vaccine passports.

But, at least on the surface, it seems that the rise in cases may have stalled, while modellers who contribute to the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage) have suggested cases may decline in the coming weeks even without extra measures.

[Speaking on BBC Radio 4's Today programme](#) on Wednesday, Prof John Edmunds, an epidemiologist at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, said work by three groups of researchers who have modelled potential scenarios pointed in a similar direction.

“If you take the consensus, we all feel that we might see cases either levelling off or falling in the next few weeks,” said Edmunds, who sits on Sage.

One reason for that is [the expected decline of cases in children](#) – the group where infection levels are highest. “The epidemic in the last few months has been really driven by huge numbers of cases in children … and that will eventually lead to high levels of immunity,” Edmunds said.

But while the models offer cause for optimism, there is also a need for caution. Reported new Covid cases in the UK reached a recent daily high of 52,009 on 21 October before falling for four consecutive days. But in the past two days they have risen again, reaching 43,941 on Wednesday.

And that may just be the tip of the iceberg. According to the latest Zoe Covid study figures – based on PCR and lateral flow test data from up to five days ago – there are 92,953 new daily symptomatic cases of Covid in the UK on average, with about 1 in 56 people in the UK having the virus with symptoms.

As Prof Neil Ferguson of Imperial College London notes, while the models point in a similar direction, there is uncertainty about when a peak would be seen.

Another consideration is that many schools in England are closed for the half-term holiday. Half-terms have previously led to a fall in infections among children, although that would not be expected to be seen immediately. But experts say the break can also lead to a drop in testing.

Speaking to the Guardian this week, Edmunds said it was too early to say whether cases had reached a peak.

“After half-term we will have to evaluate where we are; do cases start to go up again or not?” he said.

That situation may not be the same across all regions. London, for example, has had some of the lowest Covid case rates in the country during the autumn despite relatively low rates of vaccination, possibly because the capital was hit hard by previous waves, meaning a high proportion of the population has some level of protection. Meanwhile, parts of the south-west have seen large increases in case rates over the same period.

That means cases could pick up again after half-term in some areas, but not others.

It will take another couple of weeks before it becomes clear whether cases in the UK are really declining.

If a peak in cases has been reached, it would suggest that Covid hospitalisations will soon peak too. However, with concerns that this winter could bring higher than normal levels of flu and other respiratory infections, and the NHS already loaded with an enormous backlog of routine treatments, the question remains as to whether a levelling or even a decline in Covid cases – and hospitalisations – will be enough to prevent “unsustainable pressure” on the NHS.

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Even in our history month, black people are the repeated victims of cancel culture

[Afua Hirsch](#)





Illustration: Eleanor Shakespeare/The Guardian

Fri 29 Oct 2021 01.00 EDT

A few days ago, approximately one hour before I was due to give a keynote speech to a large public sector organisation, I received some last-minute instructions. Please refrain from using controversial or politicised language, the network of black staff who had invited me in asked. They were genuinely scared that I would get them into trouble and draw “unwanted negative attention to the detriment of our members”. The offending phrases they feared I might use included “white privilege”, “critical race theory” and – the absolute killer – “Black Lives Matter”.

Welcome to [Black History Month](#), a time when black people who work in predominantly white spaces invite people such as me into their organisations, to say things to their white bosses that they themselves dare not speak. And theirs is a legitimate fear. Up and down the country, these lone black employees tread a delicate, precarious line. On the one hand, they want to capitalise on the opportunity offered by October to create conversations that would otherwise be unthinkable at work, school or in government.

On the other hand, theirs is an organisation that is run by white people (it always is), which then engages me as a speaker on questions of authenticity, scholarship and the lived experience of blackness in Britain – and then tells me what to say. Every October, I find that the content of my talks – the erasure of black history, the demand that black people assimilate into whiteness, the fragility of people unused to hearing a black perspective, tone policing – are being performed in real time by the organisers and audience of those talks.

As the level of consciousness about how racism can be inflicted upon black people grows – and I think in the past year it has – I find myself noticing more and more that we have internalised a system of racism in our anticipation of how white people will respond to our blackness. I began rejecting that internalised self-censorship in earnest in 2018, when [my book Brit\(ish\)](#) was published – stories from my life and an analysis of our society that I had never before had the confidence to share.

That experience of sharing has only made me increasingly unapologetic about rejecting it further. So has the chorus of other writers, creatives and leaders taking up space in their delivery of the same message. This week, for example, a black art curator I follow on Instagram posted that, in all instances where she is the only black person at the table, she must be paid more than her counterparts.

“I consider this to be a tax for the violence of isolation, and the additional educational labour that I have to do,” she explained. I could almost hear the sound of thousands of black hands immediately tapping this note into their own memos. I know I was. If the violence of isolation sounds like an exaggeration, you need only examine the case studies of high-profile figures who have found themselves unprotected from such violence, despite the resources they have that might otherwise shield them.

Celebrities such as Lewis Hamilton, for example, who has used his platform to demand justice for George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. In response to Hamilton wearing a T-shirt demanding justice for Taylor, the governing body of Formula One issued new guidance banning drivers from wearing T-shirts when taking the podium after races. Or the England football team, which found itself lacking the support of not just its own fans but [its own](#)

[government](#) for taking the knee. This amounted to nothing less than a threat to the legacy of the team, for the crime of asserting the humanity of black people.

Or take the writer Reni Eddo-Lodge, who claimed her book Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race was accused of [supporting segregation](#). Or Marcus Ryder, who founded the Centre for Media Diversity and found himself barred from a senior position at the BBC, seemingly as a direct result of his work on race and injustice.

When we attempt to constructively engage with government, we are penalised further. This month I was targeted in the rightwing press for having the audacity to accept an invitation to speak with the Home Office. Since this government department has by its own admission failed monumentally in its treatment of black British people, I thought speaking about anti-racism might be helpful. Apparently it was in fact “a hostile tirade”. Earlier this year I had a speaking engagement with another government department cancelled at short notice as retribution for having a piece in the New York Times about racism in Britain, which it felt painted Britain in a bad light.

There is a name for this, of course – “cancel culture”. Cancel culture is the Windrush campaigners who paid for accreditation to the Conservative party conference, being humiliated when they tried to assert their right to attend. It’s the National Trust facing cancellation of its government funding if it dares to investigate how the history of colonial exploitation manifests in its properties.

Cancel culture is the obliteration of the memory of enslaved Africans in this country. Those whose watery graves off the coast of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, some of the most significant sites in the 400 years of transatlantic slave trading, have never been acknowledged. It’s the deafening silence where government dialogue around the creation of a [Museum of Empire](#) – a place where this history could be studied in all its cruel complexity – should be.

I wish black history were so mainstream throughout the year that Black History Month became redundant. While we need it – and sadly we still do –

it's an opportunity not just to relate these stories of oppression, but also to centre our joy. One of the best things that happened to me this October was a party held by a friend, entitled "Joy Is My Birthright". It should be so obvious. But as black people who move in white spaces, it can feel like a radical concept. Our narrative – controlled for so long by white oppressors, or white saviours, or the draining task of communicating to both groups that that's what they were – was never reflective of who *we* are.

When I look back at many of my earlier interventions against racism, it's so obvious to me that I was still someone who was seeking to convince, impress or gain approval from people who didn't get it. The greatest progress for me – on a personal level – has been that I no longer care. "Truth," the great ancient Egyptian proverb says, "is light as a feather. But lies require many layers to hold them down." Lightness and joy are our birthright. That's a Black History Month message I can get behind.

Afua Hirsch is a Guardian columnist

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OpinionGlobal development

We know who caused the climate crisis – but they don't want to pay for it

[Vanessa Nakate](#)



Ugandan climate activist Vanessa Nakate at the Youth4Climate summit in Milan in September. Photograph: Miguel Medina/AFP/Getty

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[About this content](#)

Fri 29 Oct 2021 02.00 EDT

While walking with a friend through central Kampala last month, we saw a police truck go by, a body in the back.

It's a sight that has become more common in Uganda. The life of that person, and many others, was taken by a heavy downpour in my home city. Uganda has been battered by floods in recent years, as well as droughts and [plagues of locusts](#). So much has been damaged and lost here as a result of the climate crisis.

A week later I was at the Youth4Climate summit in Milan, where [Greta Thunberg spoke about the “blah blah blah”](#) rhetoric from world leaders who have promised so much but delivered so little. One pledge that sticks out for me, made in 2009, is that [rich countries would send \\$100bn](#) (£73bn) of climate finance each year to the most affected countries by 2020. This was meant to be just the start – a first recognition of the catastrophe inflicted on the most affected countries by the [biggest historical emitters](#). This money was promised so countries such as mine could develop clean energy, to mitigate emissions for everyone.

But since 2009, the impacts of the climate crisis have accelerated. Africa has endured a long list of climate-related disasters – drought, flooding, landslides, famine, destruction and death – rocking all parts of our continent. Aside from the innumerable personal tragedies, the crisis is causing [billions of dollars of economic damage](#). There is no mitigation that can undo this damage, and further harms will continue as a result of world emissions.

Protecting against future impacts is no longer enough. Climate-vulnerable countries need funds to deal with the loss and damage we are suffering now

There is no money to pay for this devastation. These areas are no longer insurable – the risk is too high. But money to repair and deal with the consequences of extreme weather has to come from somewhere.

“Loss and damage” is the term used in UN climate negotiations to refer to compensation for the most affected countries for what has been inflicted on them. For years the richest nations have blocked any progress on loss and damage at UN summits, but now it is unavoidable.

I believe in the “polluter pays” principle. A [recent analysis](#) identified the countries historically responsible for the climate crisis. We know who did this – but they don’t want to pay the bill. Rich countries providing finance only for the mitigation of our emissions and protections against future impacts is no longer enough. Climate-vulnerable countries need funds to deal with the loss and damage we are suffering now.

Fossil fuel companies should also pay for the loss and damage they have caused. They have made billions of dollars in profits selling products they knew could drive humanity to existential crisis. For decades they have [run lobbying campaigns](#) to question science they knew was true, and to prevent the climate action that would have saved many lives.

A finance package for developing countries will be a central focus of [Cop26](#) in Glasgow. But one thing is certain: we need leaders to go beyond the gesture of guaranteeing the \$100bn they promised 12 years ago. They need

to wake up to the scale of this crisis; a separate fund for loss and damage should be an enduring legacy of Cop26.

We have seen similar compensation pots before. Since the 1970s, the international community has required oil companies to contribute to a [fund to compensate communities](#) affected by big oil spills.

The polluters who decided to sacrifice our lives for their own profits, whether corporations or governments, should pay. Such a fund would allow us to rebuild our lives after a downpour hits and we cannot get out of the way. Such a fund would allow the most affected countries to trust in international climate diplomacy again and be a major step towards climate justice for all.

Vanessa Nakate, 24, is a climate activist and author of [A Bigger Picture: My fight to bring a new African voice to the climate crisis](#) (One Boat)

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/oct/29/we-know-who-caused-the-climate-crisis-but-they-dont-want-to-pay-for-it>

OpinionCoronavirus

How does Covid end? The world is watching the UK to find out

[Laura Spinney](#)



‘Letting the virus rip, even in a highly vaccinated population, carries risks.’

Photograph: NurPhoto/Getty Images

Fri 29 Oct 2021 04.00 EDT

As Cop26 gets under way in Glasgow this weekend, one collective action problem is taking centre stage against the backdrop of another. Covid-19 has been described as a dress rehearsal for our ability to solve the bigger problem of the climate crisis, so it seems important to point out that the pandemic isn’t over. Instead, joined-up thinking has become more important than ever for solving the problem of Covid-19.

The endgame has been obvious for a while: rather than getting rid of Covid-19 entirely, countries will get used to it. The technical word for a disease that we’re obliged to host indefinitely is “endemic”. It means that the disease-

causing agent – the Sars-CoV-2 virus in this case – is always circulating in the population, causing periodic but more-or-less predictable disease outbreaks. No country has entered the calmer waters of endemicity yet; we’re all still on the white-knuckle ride of the pandemic phase.

In the pandemic phase, outbreaks are unpredictable and bad. There are simply too many people who remain susceptible to the virus, either because they’re unvaccinated or because they haven’t yet encountered the now-dominant Delta variant, which transmits even among the fully vaccinated. The virus will find most of them eventually – even if it does not cause them all to become seriously ill.

Only when such pools of susceptibility have dried up can we say the pandemic is over, the infectious disease modeller Adam Kucharski of the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine told me. From then on, the disease’s spread will be sustained by gentler forces such as the gradual waning of immunity in the human population, and the emergence of relatively mild new variants. But nobody knows yet when that will happen, because there’s uncertainty about how long a person remains immune to Sars-CoV-2 following natural infection or vaccination, and about the virus’s capacity to generate variants that aren’t mild.

One thing is clear: the transition to endemicity will happen at different times in different countries and regions. It’s not unreasonable to think that the UK, with its high case numbers and vaccination rates, might be among those closest to the tipping point – which is why other countries are watching it closely.

Delta, which is around three times as transmissible as the original Wuhan variant of Sars-CoV-2, has yet to reach many countries, but since May it has been dominant in the UK, where it has spread like wildfire since “freedom day” on 19 July. That’s why [some scientists think](#) the UK is entering its final pandemic wave, from which it will exit into the endemic phase next spring.

Others think the pandemic has several more waves left in it, even in the UK. The waves may be smaller than in the past, especially since vaccines have broken the link between infection and hospitalisation to a large degree. But Britons may still be facing another year or more during which vulnerable

people die in large numbers, others report the debilitating effects of long Covid, and health systems creak and potentially crack under the strain.

Every country will eventually reach endemicity, but the UK is heading there very fast – and there will inevitably be a human toll to pay. Letting the virus rip, even in a highly vaccinated population, carries other risks too. “The high case numbers in the UK at the moment can only increase the risk of emergence of variants of concern,” the modeller Robin Thompson of the University of Warwick told me.

We have yet to see a Covid variant that causes severe disease even in the fully vaccinated. Touch wood, we won’t. Virologist Didier Trono of the Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne in Switzerland is cautiously optimistic that SARS-CoV-2 is nearing the limits of its capacity to adapt. Though new variants continue to emerge – [such as AY.4.2](#), which recently started spreading in the UK – these have only been slightly more transmissible than Delta, at most, and the disease is not dramatically more severe now than it was in early 2020. But as immunity grows in the population, so does the selective pressure for the virus to mutate and escape that immunity. Vaccinologists are [working hard](#) to prepare for this risk.

It’s a race to the finish, in other words, but a race that might not be won by the fastest. At this point, vaccines are protecting us individually, not collectively. But the form that the endemic disease will take will be shaped collectively. The future of Covid-19 could be as mild as a common cold, but it could be worse. The response to this future disease may need to be more onerous than the response to flu, which involves only an annual vaccination campaign. “I don’t think we can rule out a situation where Covid, though endemic, puts overwhelming pressure on health systems in some years,” Kucharski told me.

That’s why the pandemic is still very much a collective action problem, and why the coming wave – whether or not it’s the exit wave – should be met with masks, other light social distancing measures where and when required, and a high uptake of booster shots among those who are eligible. The strategy has to remain as nimble as the virus, which also means ensuring that there is no trade-off between booster campaigns in wealthy countries and the rollout of initial vaccine doses in poorer ones. Sars-CoV-2 may have been

cornered, but it hasn't been tamed; it still has plenty of bite in it. And, as Cop26 reminds us, it's just the dry run.

- Laura Spinney is a science journalist and the author of *Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of 1918 and How it Changed the World*

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The bikelash paradox: how cycle lanes enrage some but win votes

Janette Sadik-Khan and Seth Solomonow



‘Superblocks’ were introduced by the mayor of Barcelona to calm traffic and create community space. Photograph: Josep Lago/AFP/Getty Images

Fri 29 Oct 2021 05.00 EDT

Every politician knows the word “bikelash”. From Milan to London, from Sydney to Vancouver, reallocating public space from motor vehicles for people to walk and cycle will inevitably send some residents into paroxysms of anger.

But a persistent theme is that voters have time and again reelected the mayors responsible for ambitious road reclamations, often with overwhelming majorities. Although many presume these policies are toxic, projects that make cities more liveable have been shown to be good urban policy and good politics.

Milan's mayor, Giuseppe Sala, earlier this month won reelection after reclaiming 22,000 sq meters of vehicle lanes to create 38 neighbourhood plazas over three years and 22 miles (35km) of cycling and walking space on main travel corridors [during the pandemic](#). This citywide reordering of streets put half of Milan's 1.35 million residents within walking distance of new public space. The measures were strongly opposed by some residents concerned about the loss of parking and driving space, but Milanese voters ultimately rewarded Sala with [56% of the vote](#).

"It's easy to argue about parking," said Sala. "But it's difficult to dispute a new city space filled with people and with signs of life commerce and a sustainable purpose where there was nothing before. It's critical to act to meet the climate and sustainability moment with something meaningful that people can see, feel and use."

Next month, the mayors of two cities in North America – Mike Duggan in Detroit and Valérie Plante in Montreal – will test whether voters reward their pedestrian and bike-friendly policies.

London's mayor, Sadiq Khan, won reelection in May after [creating or completing 160 miles \(260km\) of new bike routes](#). Faced with an opponent who vocally opposed improvements for cycling and walking, the Labour mayor won 55% of the vote in the runoff.

Voters in Paris last year returned the socialist mayor Anne Hidalgo to a second term after a radical remaking of the city's landscape before and during the pandemic. Hidalgo has spurred a cycling golden age, building hundreds of kilometres of bike lanes, turning the crosstown Rue de Rivoli into a churning bike- and bus-priority corridor, and pedestrianised a highway along the right bank of the Seine. Intense opposition and driver protests did not translate into votes: Hidalgo won by a margin of 18 percentage points in the second round of voting.

The Barcelona mayor, Ada Colau, in 2019 [was reelected](#) by the city's council after expanding citywide biking corridors and creating innovative "[superblocks](#)" – pedestrian-priority neighbourhood streets that are furnished with chairs, tables and playground equipment to calm traffic and create community space. She and her government have gone on to more than

double the bike network and reallocate 30,000 sq metres of road space from cars.

And in Oslo, the city council reelected mayor Marianne Borgen in 2019 after introducing policies that removed [most of the city's downtown parking spaces](#) to ease pollution. [Clover Moore in Sydney](#) has already won three reelections despite strong blowback to her pro-cycling agenda; she is now running to win a fifth term in December. Tel Aviv's electorate reelected [Ron Huldai](#) partly owing to his bike-lane and pedestrian space actions.

Voters consistently remind us that it is they and not the pundits, tweeters or headline-writers who decide elections. Though road reclamations reliably serve as public-relation challenges for cities, experience shows that residents adapt quickly to road changes and predictions of traffic nightmares and business failures do not come to pass.

The authors of this article experienced this directly as New York City's transportation commissioner and department spokesperson under mayor Mike Bloomberg, who won a third term in 2009 just months after pedestrianising Broadway at Times Square and after building 200 miles (322km) of bike lanes in two years.

The improvements to street space won over residents. In the final [New York Times poll](#) of the Bloomberg era in 2013, 72% of New Yorkers supported the creation of plazas across the city, 73% supported the city's new bikeshare system and 64% supported the bike lanes. If these margins were votes, bikes and pedestrian space would be elected mayor in a landslide.

Experience often overtakes fears after projects have time to become part of daily life in cities. Studies of [New York](#), [London](#), [Toronto](#), [San Francisco](#) and [other American cities](#) determined that pedestrian and cycling infrastructure increased retail sales by making streets and the stores along them better for shoppers on foot, bike and public transport.

In Detroit, Duggan will be hoping to see similar support after he oversaw the largest one-year buildout of protected bike paths in the US and created a network of plazas and downtown pedestrian space. Plante's path to reelection in Montreal on 7 November is being challenged by Denis

Coderre, who has criticised her bike- and pedestrian-friendly policies. Critics have portrayed Plante as out of touch with ordinary residents, but even her opponent is careful to promise that he would not reverse her signature protected bike lane on St Denis Street.

Bikelash can be exhaustingly repetitive, to the point where even media writers are tired of the ritual of discussing bike lanes solely in terms of controversy.

Reflecting on a decade of bike controversies across Canada, Toronto's the Globe and Mail this month asked: "Is the war against bike lanes finally over?"

Perhaps not quite yet, but the editorial took the view that bike lanes had "grown from political flashpoints – and ideological signifiers – to standard-issue civic infrastructure".

It added: "The arguments over bike lanes are settled. They're becoming what they should have long been: an ordinary way of getting around our cities."

They are also an increasingly ordinary way for mayors to win elections.

- Janette Sadik-Khan is a former commissioner of the New York Department of Transportation and a principal with Bloomberg Associates. Seth Solomonow is an adviser and strategist with Bloomberg Associates, specialising in public space and sustainable transport infrastructure. The authors provided pro bono advice to Sala and Duggan on their public space plans.

2021.10.29 - Around the world

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Netherlands

‘A lot of work to do’: Dutch government formation talks drag on for record 226 days



Government coalition talks in the Netherlands have stretched on for a record 226 days. Photograph: Remko de Wal/EPA

Reuters

Fri 29 Oct 2021 00.43 EDT

Government formation talks in the Netherlands have become the longest on record, 226 days after the [17 March elections](#) delivered a fractured political landscape that made parties more reluctant than ever to compromise.

Dutch government coalitions often take months to form, but this year’s post-election talks have been especially drawn out. For months, parties failed to even move beyond the question of who would be allowed at the negotiation table.

Meanwhile, pressing matters such as climate change, health care and the strained housing market have been left untouched.

“It’s remarkable,” said political historian and cabinet formation expert Carla van Baalen. “We have never seen a situation in which no real talks were held for months following the elections.”

Talks came to a standstill shortly after the elections as parties tried to mend relations after a [failed no-confidence vote](#) in prime minister Mark Rutte.

As efforts to bring other parties to the table failed, the four parties that have governed the [Netherlands](#) since 2017 finally agreed to try to extend their coalition last month, but no real progress has been reported since.

The lack of fully functioning government does not seem to have hurt the Dutch economy. It has rebounded strongly from a Covid-19 slump and boasts one of the strongest growth rates in [Europe](#).

But pressing longer-term problems are being neglected as long as the coalition remains in caretaker status.

“Only urgent problems, such as immediate measures to fight Covid-19, are addressed”, Van Baalen said.

The March elections were won by the conservative VVD party led by Rutte, who has been prime minister since 2010. But with only 22% of the vote, Rutte needs the support of at least three junior partners to secure a majority in parliament.

Party leaders were expected to grasp the nettle during a three-day retreat that started last Wednesday, but as they convened Rutte made it clear that a compromise was still not in sight.

“We’ll have more talks next week, and probably in the week after too”, Rutte said. “There is still a lot of work to do.”

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Meta

Mocking Meta: Facebook's virtual reality name change prompts backlash

02:17

Facebook gives a glimpse of metaverse, its planned virtual reality world – video

[Samantha Lock](#)

Thu 28 Oct 2021 23.29 EDT

The announcement by Facebook CEO [Mark Zuckerberg](#) that the social media giant will [change the name of its holding company to Meta](#) in a virtual-reality rebrand has prompted dismay and bemusement.

On Thursday, Zuckerberg said Meta would encompass [Facebook](#) as well as apps such as Instagram, WhatsApp and the virtual reality brand Oculus.

“Announcing [Meta](#) — the Facebook company’s new name,” the tech giant said in a tweet. “Meta is helping to build the metaverse, a place where we’ll play and connect in 3D. Welcome to the next chapter of social connection.”

The metaverse is the next evolution of social connection. It’s a collective project that will be created by people all over the world, and open to everyone. You’ll be able to socialize, learn, collaborate and play in ways that go beyond what’s possible today.
pic.twitter.com/655yFRm8yZ

— Meta (@Meta) [October 28, 2021](#)

The rebrand comes as the company faces a series of public relations crises.

A trove of recently leaked documents now known as the [Facebook Papers](#) exposed the inner workings of the company, with allegations from

whistleblower Frances Haugen that Facebook has put profits ahead of ridding its platform of hate speech and misinformation.

Satirical late night news programme the Daily Show tweaked Zuckerberg's Meta presentation video by superimposing the tech billionaire onto footage of the January 6 Capitol riots and the 2017 Charlottesville white nationalist march. Both events were organised on Facebook.

"Imagine you've put on your glasses or headset and you're instantly in your home space and it has an incredibly inspiring view of whatever you find most beautiful," Zuckerberg says as footage of Capital rioters and a group of tiki torch-bearing white supremacists plays in the background.

Nobody asked for this new Facebook feature
pic.twitter.com/18pHZUX3Ej

— The Daily Show (@TheDailyShow) [October 28, 2021](#)

Politicians across all party lines also joined the conversation about the controversial rebrand.

New York progressive congresswoman [Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez](#) didn't hold back in her disapproval, calling the company "a cancer to democracy" and "a global surveillance and propaganda machine for boosting authoritarian regimes and destroying civil society."

Meta as in "we are a cancer to democracy metastasizing into a global surveillance and propaganda machine for boosting authoritarian regimes and destroying civil society... for profit!"
<https://t.co/jzOcCFaWkJ>

— Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (@AOC) [October 28, 2021](#)

US Senators Richard Blumenthal and Ed Markey didn't mince their words either.

Blumenthal, a former Attorney General of Connecticut, alleged the name change was nothing more than an effort to “confuse” and “distract” but ultimately “won’t erase years of devious practices & disregard for privacy, kids’ wellbeing, spreading hate, & genocide.”

Markey refused to acknowledge the name change. “Facebook wants us to start calling it Meta, but we’re just going to keep calling it what it is, a threat to privacy, democracy, and children,” he said.

Away from the motives for the rebrand, some took issue with the name Meta itself.

“Meta is such a low effort, first draft name that multiple consulting companies definitely got paid millions of dollars to come up with,” comedian and producer Mike Drucker said.

“And it was on that day that ‘that’s so meta’ went from being an interesting observation to a devastating insult,” author and science vlogger Hank Green wrote.

stop trying to make meta happen pic.twitter.com/L3ZSckEA10

— Adam Lance Garcia (@AdamLanceGarcia) [October 28, 2021](#)

Other companies joined the rebranding bandwagon. Fast food outlet Wendy’s tweeted: “Changing name to Meat.”

Changing name to Meat

— Meat (@Wendys) [October 28, 2021](#)

Twitter also jumped on board with the official Twitter account joking they had “big news” followed by the clarification – “lol jk still twitter”. The social media platform’s CEO, Jack Dorsey, offered a definition to help anyone confused by the change. “Meta: referring to itself or to the conventions of its genre; self-referential,” he wrote.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2021/oct/29/mocking-meta-facebooks-virtual-reality-name-change-prompts-backlash>

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Meta

Facebook announces name change to Meta in rebranding effort

01:06

Meta: Mark Zuckerberg announces Facebook's new name – video

Kari Paul in San Francisco

Thu 28 Oct 2021 16.06 EDT

Facebook CEO [Mark Zuckerberg](#) announced the social media giant will change the name of its holding company to Meta, in a rebrand that comes as the company faces a series of public relations crises.

Zuckerberg revealed the new name at Facebook's annual AR/VR conference on Thursday, where he outlined the company's virtual-reality vision for the future.

The CEO sketched his plans to build the “metaverse” – a digital world built over our own, comprising virtual reality headsets and augmented reality. “We believe the metaverse will be the successor of the mobile internet,” Zuckerberg said. “We'll be able to feel present – like we're right there with people no matter how far apart we actually are.”

02:17

Facebook gives a glimpse of metaverse, its planned virtual reality world – video

Sporting a blue infinity symbol as a logo, the new holding company Meta will encompass Facebook, its largest subsidiary, as well as apps such as Instagram, WhatsApp and the virtual reality brand Oculus.

In recent earnings reports, the company announced its virtual reality segment had grown so substantially it would now report its revenue separately, dividing its products into two categories.

Those categories include a “family of apps” including Facebook, Instagram, Messenger and WhatsApp, and the “reality labs” products including AR and VR as well as any related hardware.

Zuckerberg on Thursday said he expects the metaverse to reach a billion people within the next decade. He described futuristic plans to create a digital world, in which users will feel they are with one another and have a “sense of presence” despite being far apart.



Facebook's vision for Metaverse gaming. Photograph: Meta

The platform would allow users to customize their avatars and digital spaces, decorating a digital office with pictures, videos and even books. The presentation imagined users inviting friends over virtually, two people attending a concert together despite being across the world from one another, and colleagues making work presentations remotely.

“When I send my parents a video with my kids, they’re going to feel like they’re right in the moment with us not peering through a little window,” he said.

Yet he admitted the company has a long way to go. “The best way to understand the metaverse is to experience it yourself,” Zuckerberg added, though “it doesn’t fully exist yet”.



Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg delivers the keynote address during a virtual event on 28 October. Photograph: Eric Risberg/AP

Still, Zuckerberg said, Facebook rolled out two of its metaverse projects in beta last year: Horizon World, which allows users to invite friends over into their digital world, and [Horizon Workrooms](#), which does the same in professional settings. He also said Facebook plans to further explore NFTs and crypto to help facilitate media that can be represented digitally, and is working on gaming applications.

Zuckerberg said the company would continue to offer services and hardwire to developers at low cost or for free, in an attempt to attract a critical mass of people to the platform. The company has also dedicated \$150m to developers to create new apps, games and immersive programs in the metaverse.

“We want to serve as many people as possible, which means working to make our services cost less not more,” he said.

Facebook’s rebranding effort is not [unprecedented](#) in the tech space – Google in 2015 restructured into a new holding company, placing subsidiaries including its namesake search engine, YouTube and its self-driving car firm Waymo under a new umbrella firm called Alphabet.

But Facebook's announcement comes amid deep regulatory and PR challenges. Those include a series of recent reports based on [documents leaked](#) by the whistleblower [Frances Haugen](#) that exposed toxic business practices and internal knowledge of its longterm negative public health impact.

The revelations from the “Facebook papers” are just the latest struggle for the embattled company, which has in recent years been [served with a lawsuit](#) from the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), was the subject of numerous congressional hearings, and in 2019 was fined \$5bn by the Federal Trade Commission in 2019 for “deceiving” users.

Critics of the platform contended on Thursday that the metaverse project is a distraction from the company’s PR crisis, and that the company risks making the same mistakes as it has in the past.

“The fact that Zuckerberg has set his sights firmly on the so-called ‘metaverse’ while societies all over the world are scrambling to alleviate the myriad harms caused by his platforms just goes to show how out of touch Facebook is with real people,” said Imran Ahmed, CEO of the Center for Countering Digital Hate.

In her recent testimony, Haugen said she was “shocked” to hear how much the company was investing in the metaverse while its safety efforts failed. The company has dedicated \$10bn in 2021 to the metaverse while its safety division received \$5bn in funding.

“To echo Frances Haugen’s words, just imagine what Facebook could achieve if it devoted even a fraction of its metaverse investment on proper content moderation to enforce even the most basic standards of truth, decency and progress,” Ahmed said.

Others warned Facebook’s metaverse launch could mean a new space in which the company has a monopoly, amid ongoing antitrust concerns.

Zuckerberg on Thursday tried to get ahead of such privacy and security concerns. Nick Clegg, the company’s vice-president of global affairs,

acknowledged that the company has faced criticism for not envisioning the long-term impacts of its problems.

“We have years until the metaverse as we envision it is fully realized. This is the beginning of the journey,” Clegg said.

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Evergrande averts default with interest payment – reports



A failure to pay by the Friday deadline would have triggered cross-defaults on all of Evergrande's \$19bn worth of bonds. Photograph: Alex Plavevski/EPA

Guardian staff and agencies

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The Chinese property developer Evergrande has reportedly made an interest payment for an offshore bond before a grace period expired on Friday, narrowly averting a catastrophic default for the [second time in a week](#).

Evergrande, once China's top-selling developer, is reeling under more than \$300bn in liabilities, fuelling worries about the impact of its fate on the world's second-largest economy as well as on global markets. It staved off a default last week by securing \$83.5m for the last-minute payment of interest

on a bond, and needed to make \$47.5m in coupon payments to bondholders by Friday.

On Friday, Reuters, [Bloomberg](#), and the New York Times said sources with direct knowledge of the matter had confirmed the payment. Evergrande did not respond to Reuters' request for comment.

A failure to pay by the Friday deadline would have triggered cross-defaults on all of the company's \$19bn worth of bonds in international capital markets, in what would have been the world's second-largest emerging market corporate debt default.

Reuters was not able to determine the source of the funds used to make the interest payments. Bloomberg News reported earlier this week that Chinese authorities had urged Evergrande's founder, Hui Ka Yan, to pay the developer's debts out of his personal wealth.

Shares of Evergrande gave up early gains to fall about 0.8% by late morning on Friday, versus a 0.3% decline in the Hang Seng Index. The Hang Seng Mainland Properties Index fell about 0.9%, while an index of developers' mainland A-shares dropped 3.6%.



Evergrande's unfinished Taicang theme park. Photograph: Aly Song/Reuters

Prices of the developer's bonds jumped higher on Friday, with its 11.5% January 2023 bond surging more than 9%, and its 12% January 2024 bond up nearly 8% on the day, data from Duration Finance showed.

That still left them trading at discounts of more than 75% from their face value, with the 2023 bond yielding nearly 190%.

One bondholder said he maintained a negative outlook for the developer despite it making the coupon payment.

"I only think they are buying time at this point," the bondholder said.

Evergrande missed coupon payments totalling nearly \$280m on its dollar bonds on 23 and 29 September and 11 October, beginning 30-day grace periods for each.

It still has nearly \$338m in other offshore coupon payments coming due in November and December.

The New York Times earlier [reported that the developer made an interest payment](#), citing a person speaking on condition of anonymity.

"Evergrande has tried its best to solve liquidity problems, but it's a little bit difficult to gather enough capital to pay all the debt," said Cliff Zhao, chief strategist at [China](#) Construction Bank International in Hong Kong.

"I think there [will] be some negotiations between Evergrande and its lenders, so some sort of haircut is still possible. The market still needs some time to digest and to price this in."

Evergrande's woes have snowballed for months and its dwindling resources set against its vast liabilities have wiped out 80% of its value, leading some analysts to consider default at some point inevitable.

Even as Evergrande secures funds to make payments, other Chinese developers whose fortunes have been hit by market concerns over Evergrande's debt crisis have slid into formal default.

Fantasia Holdings Group Co Ltd, Sinic Holdings (Group) Co Ltd, China Properties Group Ltd and Modern Land (China) Co Ltd have all defaulted on dollar debt obligations this month.

Other developers with significant dollar debt have proposed extending offshore bond maturities or undertaking debt restructuring in a meeting with regulators, sources have said.

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