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Names in the news[Sophie Ellis-Bextor](#)

Sophie Ellis-Bextor: never stop dancing, it's the best tonic for these pandemic times

[Rebecca Nicholson](#)





Doing it for the kids: Sophie Ellis-Bextor's danceathon was in aid of Children in Need. Photograph: BBC/PA

Sat 20 Nov 2021 10.00 EST

When I was growing up, charity efforts always seemed to involve slop of some kind. People got dunked with gunge or they sat in baths full of baked beans. And then it shifted. You could no longer expect to be slipped a tenner for getting mucky and looking a bit daft. Serious feats of endurance are now required for the dedicated fundraiser: mammoth bike rides up and down the country, hoisting yourself up the sorts of mountains that tax professional climbers. Now it is the era of my favourite new charitable endeavour, the 24-hour danceathon.

Last week, Sophie Ellis-Bextor [raised more than £1m](#) (and counting) for Children in Need after dancing on air for 24 hours. Hold your Murder on the Dancefloor jokes: "I don't like the idea of the headline writing itself," she quipped at the outset. It proved to be a common-sense-defying act of physical fortitude, many costume changes and sleep deprivation – and it was beautiful. Dermot O'Leary had done it for Comic Relief in 2015; he popped along to offer some advice as she shuffled her way through various BBC shows. She danced to the travel news, which was basically performance art, and she danced behind Tony Blackburn and Gemma Collins as the GC

murdered Cliff Richard's Summer Holiday, which actually was performance art.

There is something so specific about dancing as a mood-enhancer. Whatever you think of the rule-breaking and the recklessness, it was no surprise that lockdown raves sprang up when we were supposed to be at home. For the people who went to them, it can't just have been about socialising – it was moving to music and feeling it.

I went to a party last weekend, legal now, but still quite bracing, even with those considerate on-the-day lateral flows. There was dancing all night and even when the party was about to be over, the music stayed loud, a few stragglers still determined to get through as many Janet Jackson classics as they possibly could before the lights came up. I love dancing, though I've always been shy about it, to my great regret; now, after everything, I don't feel so shy about it any more.

Ellis-Bextor did the nation a favour with her [lockdown Kitchen Discos](#), which made me want to invest in a karaoke machine and flashing lights, and now she has upped the benevolence once again. It was so much better than a baked bean bath, so beautifully good-natured and free, and half-mad, and just right for right now. That million quid figure deserves to keep rising.

Tina Turner's lookalike is a tribute too far



Tina Turner or is it? Photograph: Stefano Rellandini/Reuters

In Germany, Tina Turner is [suing representatives](#) of a Tina Turner impersonator named Dorothea “Coco” Fletcher, who performs in a tribute show called Simply the Best.

Turner’s lawyers are arguing that Fletcher looks too much like her and that may be misleading. On *Good Morning Britain* last week, Fletcher appeared to discuss the case and the idea of “image appropriation”, leading to presenter Ben Shepherd noting that “you sound very like her, [you’re] performing very like her”, which is surely good news for an impersonator who makes a living from trying to make audiences agree with that. And she does very much look like Turner, especially when decked out in the full gear, performing her songs.

Maybe it’s the level of tribute act that I’ve witnessed – and there are whole festivals dedicated to reliving Britpop via impressions of its least vital bands – but I would argue that one problem they don’t have is performers looking too much like who they’re supposed to be. Most make those seaside waxwork museums look like photographic reproductions of celebrities, though if this case succeeds, perhaps they’ll be the ones who are laughing.

Oprah Winfrey: never mind the lyrics, she put her heart into it



Oprah Winfrey: not note perfect, but who cares? Photograph: Caitlin Ochs/Reuters

I had a lot of sympathy for Oprah Winfrey, who went mildly viral last week after [trying to sing along](#) to Adele's Hello while watching Tottenham's finest belt it out live. While standing next to Lizzo, who knew every word and even added a "let's go!", Winfrey managed "hello from the other side", but faltered during practically every other part of the song.

In his book [*Musicophilia*](#), the late, great neurologist Oliver Sacks explored the relationship between human beings and music, which takes up more of our brains than language, and observed that, even after a severe brain injury or illness, music is often the last thing to be lost. It explains why I know all the words to 2 Unlimited's No Limit, while I can't remember what I had for tea last night, but at some point, surely, our brains get filled up with songs, like an old iPod that cannot fit any more on it.

So I feel for Winfrey. There should be a word for that moment of starting to sing along to something with utter commitment, passing the point of no return, followed by the realisation that you don't know it well at all.

I've come in at the wrong point on Talking Heads' This Must Be the Place almost every time I've listened to it; I only ever do the "oh-oh-ohhhh" bit of Lady Gaga and Bradley Cooper's Shallow, because it's impossible to get right anyway, and therefore open to all. Winfrey may not have known every word to Hello. Nevertheless, she persisted. She sang *something* anyway and that is why Oprah Winfrey is where she is today.

Rebecca Nicholson is an Observer columnist

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The Observer view on Priti Patel's fake migrant crisis

[Observer editorial](#)



Home secretary Priti Patel visits Heathrow airport in August to see refugees from Afghanistan arrive on an evacuation flight. Photograph: WPA/Getty Images

Sun 21 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

Home secretaries from both main parties have scapegoated asylum seekers in attempts to endear themselves to voters in recent decades. But none with the fervour of Priti Patel, who in her two-year tenure at the Home Office has announced a series of initiatives to put people off seeking asylum in the UK. [Wave machines in the Channel](#), flying asylum seekers to inhospitable islands thousands of miles away [to be processed](#), criminalising those who rescue people drowning at sea: all are recent measures proposed by the home

secretary regardless of their compatibility with international law and Britain's moral obligations.

Patel gives the impression that there is an escalating crisis in terms of the numbers of people arriving in the UK and trying to illegitimately claim refuge. This is not true. There is absolutely a crisis for asylum seekers trying to reach British shores by making the treacherous Channel crossing in small boats and dinghies. The British government should be doing all it can to clamp down on the people traffickers making a fortune by charging desperate people to attempt the crossing. But the number of people coming to the UK to claim asylum fell by [4% last year](#) and stands at less than half what it was in the [early 2000s](#). Britain receives a fraction of the asylum applications of Germany and France and fewer per resident than the EU average. Low-income countries host [nine out of 10 displaced people](#) worldwide.

What has happened is that the flow of people has been made more visible by the pandemic; the number reaching the UK by air has dropped steeply, which has pushed people to attempt the Channel crossing. Patel has wrongly claimed that 70% of those arriving on small boats are “not genuine asylum seekers”, but data shows that [two-thirds have been granted refugee status](#). No system will be immune to people without a legitimate claim attempting to seek asylum, but the best approach is to process applicants quickly and fairly and return those for whom there is genuinely no risk to their home countries.

Instead, Patel has sought to over-egg the idea that Britain faces an unsustainable crisis of people arriving to try to claim asylum in bad faith and that the best way of reducing Channel crossings, or any attempt to reach the UK to claim asylum, is to make Britain as inhospitable as possible for those fleeing their homes, often in fear for their lives. This is surely why the Home Office refuses to release its research on why people travel to the UK to claim asylum, as we report.

Thanks to 30 years of anti-asylum measures taken by successive governments, Britain is already an overwhelmingly hostile place for asylum seekers. Those fleeing persecution and torture are forced to subsist on less

than £5.50 a day – [less than in France](#) – and are not allowed to work while their claims are being processed, unlike in many other countries, which makes them vulnerable to exploitation by criminals. They are often housed in damp, dirty and vermin-infested [conditions](#) or disused army barracks. Many are trapped in this limbo for years thanks to long delays in the system. Unaccompanied and traumatised children are put up in hotels in Kent with virtually no adult care or supervision; some fall prey to county lines [grooming, gangs and traffickers](#).

Asylum seekers still try to reach the UK in modest numbers, some because they have family here, others because they already speak English. Making the material conditions once they get here even worse is unlikely to put off people fleeing conflict who are desperate to reach somewhere where they can build a new life.

That has not stopped Patel putting new measures to parliament in the [nationality and borders bill](#). They include the forcible return of [boats to France](#), removing the [£38 a week](#) for those who arrive by any other route other than a government settlement scheme, housing asylum seekers in large reception centres, scrapping the appeals system, despite the Home Office's dire track record on decision-making and offshoring the processing of asylum seekers in the same way that Australia has done, to international condemnation. Many of these measures break international maritime law and the 1951 refugee convention and would be subject to legal challenge. Patel just last week claimed to be negotiating with Albania regarding the offshoring and processing of asylum seekers who are Britain's responsibility; Albanian government officials have dismissed this as "[fake news](#)".

It is not only Britain, of course. We live in a world where rich nations increasingly shun their obligations for political reasons, even as climate change will boost irregular migrations and levels of abject poverty are worsened through cuts to international aid. Rather than take a co-operative approach, the EU has left poorer countries on Europe's borders to deal with far larger flows of people than the UK has ever seen. It has struck deals with unsavoury despots in Turkey and failed states such as Libya to keep people away from Europe's shores in contravention of their human rights. The product of this approach is evident in the tragedy unfolding on Poland's

border with Belarus, where desperate Syrians are freezing to death as a result of being used as pawns in the dispute between Belarus and the EU.

The world urgently needs renewed moral leadership on asylum and refuge of the sort that led to the creation of the 1951 convention. But we cannot expect it from [Priti Patel](#), who is more interested in using asylum seekers as pawns in the government's culture war and is thus leading the UK in the charge to the bottom.

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OpinionFrance

The Observer view on the far-right's power beyond the French presidential elections

[Observer editorial](#)



French far-right politician Eric Zemmour speaking in London on Friday.
Photograph: Kirsty Wigglesworth/AP

Sun 21 Nov 2021 01.30 EST

Eric Zemmour is unlikely to be the next president of France. In the first place, he is not yet officially a candidate. Second, his repellent brand of racist, far-right codswallop already has a well-established mouthpiece: [Marine Le Pen](#), leader of the National Rally (formerly the National Front).

That said, [Zemmour](#) is doing well in opinion polls and is significantly influencing the election agenda. Known as a TV pundit and polemicist, his latest bestseller, *France Has Not Had Its Final Word*, is a pseudo-intellectual

requiem for “the death of France as we know it”, by which he means white, Catholic France. In short, Zemmour claims Muslims are out to capture the state.

Such drivel might be dismissed out of hand but for the fact that, according to one recent survey at least, 61% of French people believe it is certain or probable that the white, Christian populations of Europe face extinction because of Muslim immigration from Africa. A civil war is coming, Zemmour warns; France could become an Islamic republic. A lot of voters appear to have [taken fright](#).

The French people, their customs, their history, their state, their civility, their civilisation’ are at existential risk, Zemmour claims

This pernicious argument is rooted in the “great replacement theory” peddled by French far-right “thinkers” and adopted by likeminded bigots in Donald Trump’s America and elsewhere. “The French people, their customs, their history, their state, their civility, their civilisation” are at existential risk, Zemmour claims. In the past, Protestants or Jews were the whipping boys. Now it’s Muslims.

Zemmour, like Le Pen, blames “elites”, typified by President [Emmanuel Macron](#) and the EU, for France’s problems. He would suspend Schengen free movement rules (which would please Priti Patel). He wants France to defy the European court of justice. Britain and France are historical foes, he says, but the UK should not be punished for Brexit. All disturbingly Johnsonian.

If he stands in April’s election, Zemmour is [predicted](#) to attract 14.9% of the first-round vote, against 19.6% for Le Pen. This prospective split suggests she, not he, would face the president, currently on 26%, in a second round. That’s what happened in 2017, when Macron triumphed by a margin of 2-1. He would be expected to do so again.

More intriguing, and alarming for Macron, is the possibility that either Xavier Bertrand, Valérie Pécresse or [Michel Barnier](#), if chosen to lead the centre-right Les Républicains, could overtake Le Pen and make the run-off,

as François Fillon very nearly did in 2017. That scenario poses a bigger danger for Macron. Zemmour's rampage of hate would merely have ensured defeat at the ballot box for his ugly ideas.

Thus it seems clear the real threat posed by Zemmour is not electoral. It's ideological and cultural. It's a threat to the social fabric of France and, by extension, of other European countries where febrile questions of identity, security and perceived national decline have fuelled the rise of xenophobic populist politicians. Divisive Zemmour feeds off fear of change, fear of difference, fear of each other.

Britain, where Brexit brought such sentiments to the surface, surely understands. Zemmour controversially [visited London](#) last week to spread his insidious bile. Yet fundamental differences persist. The inquest into shocking racism in English cricket, for example, is extremely painful. But it has revealed a country determined, however imperfectly and clumsily, to root out such poison and find better, inclusive ways. Can France honestly say the same?

What the Zemmour phenomenon dramatises in both countries, and across Europe, is the continuing failure of the political and intellectual left to develop credible alternative platforms to repulse the right's lies and distortions. Support for France's Socialists, in power under François Hollande only four years ago, has collapsed to 4.8%. In Britain, on all precedents, Labour should be winning hands down, but it's not. The struggle against the political weaponisation of fear and hate is far from won.

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Observer comment cartoon

Boris Johnson

Boris Johnson, a liar and a clown – cartoon

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NotebookUK news

Lloyd George defined ‘profiteer’ more than a century ago. It may be time to revisit it

[Tim Adams](#)





Nurses changing their PPE on a Covid ward at the Royal Alexandra Hospital in Paisley. Photograph: Jane Barlow/PA

Sat 20 Nov 2021 12.00 EST

The last time that the UK parliament tried to define the word “profiteering” was in 1919, as the country emerged from war and unscrupulous traders made fortunes by criminally inflating prices on everything from shoes to building materials. David Lloyd George’s government was moved to attempt to outlaw those practices that fed on national scarcity and that signalled corruption to the wider world. For the purposes of that debate, his trade minister, Auckland Geddes, argued that “‘to profiteer’ is to make unreasonably large profit by the sale to one’s fellow-citizens of an article which is of common use by or for the majority of the population”.

There was universal agreement about the immorality of the trade, but plenty of scepticism about the chances of the legislation, not least from Colonel Josiah Wedgwood, great-great-grandson of the potter. “So long as human nature remains what it is every man is going to get as big a profit as he can,” Wedgwood argued. “From my knowledge of human nature that is likely to continue in spite of any Act of Parliament...”

The bill passed, but Wedgwood's prediction was sound. The word "profiteering" has only persistently recurred in Hansard twice: in 1939, at the outbreak of the Second World War, and in the last 18 months when it emerged, for example, that during the pandemic, Somerset Capital, the investment firm established by Jacob Rees-Mogg, was alerting its clients to the prospect of "once in a generation" opportunities to make "super normal returns" by buying stock in crippled companies.

So far, the scandal of PPE procurement in the first weeks of the Covid crisis has mostly focused on government law-breaking. But reading further revelations last week about some of the 47 firms that were fast-tracked into the ministerial "VIP channel" to supply gowns and masks to the NHS frontline, with profits in one case soaring 4,700%, surely Lloyd George's profiteering bill is overdue another look.

Off the beaten track

Forty years ago, the literary magazine *Granta* made its name with the new "travel writing", a catch-all term to describe intrepid, in-depth reporting in far-off places, from the likes of Bruce Chatwin and Jan Morris and Redmond O'Hanlon. The current edition of the magazine is also devoted to travel, but contributors now invariably have to overcome potential derailment before they even get out of the door: do the tales they tell justify their carbon footprint or, as the issue is succinctly titled, "Should we have stayed at home?"

Venus ascendant



Venus Williams at a premiere screening for King Richard in Los Angeles.
Photograph: Ringo Chiu/Reuters

There has never been a sports coach to rival Richard Williams, with his prenatal plans to produce two of the greatest female tennis players of all time. Will Smith captures all the drive and insanity of that mission in the new biopic [King Richard](#).

Watching it, I was reminded of interviewing Venus, just as she became world number one, and just how infectious her father's myth-making was. Inevitably, I asked her how it all began and she patiently told me how, when she was three and a half years old, her daddy took her down to the nearest exclusive club in Los Angeles and organised a game for her against the pro.

“How did you do?” I wondered.

Well, she said, she was shy at first. “But soon I was serving aces... I was used to beating guys by then, so I beat this guy, too...”

“Really?” I said, wide-eyed. “You beat him? When you were three and a half?”

She paused a beat, stared at me, laughing hugely at my credulity. “Nah. Of course not!”

Tim Adams in an Observer columnist

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/nov/20/lloyd-george-defined-profiteer-more-than-a-century-ago-time-to-revisit-it>

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What fresh hell must Philip's will contain to make the royal family look any worse?

[Catherine Bennett](#)





Prince Harry and Meghan Markle speak at the 2021 Global Citizen Live concert at Central Park in New York. Photograph: Caitlin Ochs/Reuters

Sat 20 Nov 2021 14.00 EST

A legal challenge has been launched against an earlier court ruling, reached in secret, that the contents of Prince Philip's will should be concealed for 90 years. News to which the reflexive reaction, along with distaste for an uncontested intervention that protected royal privilege even in death, is inevitably, what's in the will? Is it as promising as Lord Mountbatten's diaries, whose [censored passages](#), not necessarily involving his riding-boot fetish, are being demanded by a biographer?

Philip's bequests must surely be more than slightly awkward if they have to be hidden until long after the Queen is beyond embarrassment and, maybe no less pertinently, *The Crown's* showrunners are likewise departed. The judge responsible, Sir Andrew McFarlane, must, if he wasn't acting purely out of servility, have concluded that transparency would be riskier to royal wellbeing than the public appetite for disclosure he has, with a flair worthy of a 19th-century serial novelist, preferred to stimulate.

If the will's security comes at this price, the contents must, you imagine, be dramatic or at least mischievous. The eulogies dwelt on Philip's [pranks](#). Are

we talking bequests to unappetising political groups, brotherhoods – republicans? Or does some retiring beauty stand to inherit, say, a curious Land Rover ornament of Philip's own design which, if its existence is revealed, is certain to be claimed by another favourite?

Though there's no reason why Philip should not, inspired by long [literary tradition](#), have been more ambitious. Along with unexpected bequests or strange conditions, there could be damning or reproachful comments, clauses designed for posthumous revenge. Has the prince seized this opportunity to advance the [name he surrendered](#) or to remind Charles, with obscure penalties, that he always thought he was mad to prefer Camilla to Diana?



Princesses Eugenie (left) and Beatrice of York at a service marking the Queen's 90th birthday in 2016. Photograph: Justin Tallis/AFP/Getty Images

It is “clear”, McFarlane said in his ruling, that a will of a member of the royal family should not be subject to plebeian regulation. Secrecy serves, he says, “to protect the dignity and standing of the public role of the sovereign and other close members of her family”.

Does he ever read the papers? Actually, perhaps not: McFarlane's case for excluding reporters from the will hearing was that media interest could only

be “commercial”, with the public interest better represented, even unknowingly, by the attorney general. So it may fall to friends or colleagues to break it to McFarlane that the dignity and standing of the royal family is not fully as it was when the precedent for royal will cover-ups was set, in 1910.

Thanks to laxer censors than himself, McFarlane was probably aware that, following the abdication of the Nazi-sympathising Edward VIII, the royal family entered, largely thanks to the current Queen, one of its occasional phases of respectability, even taking into account unedifying contributions from the Queen’s mother, sister and children, also Princess Michael of Kent. Today, the Windsor reputation just about entitles the family’s sympathisers to argue, thankfully vainly, that it’s possible for the Netflix series *The Crown* to make it look worse.

Increasingly, however, as the Queen retreats from public duties, it’s obvious that she, in terms of dignity-and-standing enhancement, has been an anomaly. Whatever the horrors in Philip’s last will and testament, they could hardly surpass the threat now posed to this dynasty by his descendants and their near associates. Will it, when unsealed, contain anything stupider than the ongoing public feud between the Cambridges and the Sussexes, all four of them self-styled authorities on mental health? What bequest could match, in terms of moral damage, Andrew’s connections with the late sex offender [Jeffrey Epstein](#) and with Ghislaine Maxwell?

If updates on Virginia Giuffre’s lawsuit against Andrew seemed scarcer last week, it’s only because public interest (as measured, conventionally, in media rather than judicial coverage) moved to Andrew’s [financial relationship](#) with the Tory party donor and former Guernsey resident David Rowland. Rowland, a close enough friend to have sat in the front row at the wedding of a York daughter, Eugenie, reportedly paid off a loan to Andrew, by his own bank, of £1.5m. As ill luck would have it, Andrew’s older daughter, Beatrice, was also in the news, having at some point accepted a job as “head of partnerships” in a tech company whose founder is now accused of the sexual harassment and assault of a young woman.

Still, Charles could in turn be confident that if he waited a few hours the Sussexes would provide diversionary cover

Beatrice seems to have resisted the suggestion that, like David Cameron, another prominent ornament to this company, she hurry up and quit.

Possibly and correctly, she calculated that, left for a day or two, her difficulties would probably be overtaken by another royal scandal, like the [mess involving Prince Charles](#), his donors and an ex-valet. Perhaps through his excessive kindness, the heir appears to have become popular with [people who help](#) paying foreigners wanting British honours, citizenship, royal pals. Michael Fawcett has just stepped down as head of the Prince's Foundation, a charitable operation run from [Dumfries House](#), one of the great environmentalist's larger additions to a scattered house collection.

Still, Charles could in turn be confident that if he waited a few hours the Sussexes would provide diversionary cover, such as the revelation that they had indeed assisted the authors of [Finding Freedom](#) with that dismal hagiography. As if that weren't enough, the duchess was soon helping bury, with her regrettable chatshow appearance, news that the Charity Commission is to [investigate](#) how donations meant for the Prince's Foundation somehow ended up at a different charity.

Given these multiplying misfortunes, perhaps it's understandable that any royal spouse able to put on a hat and look sad is now [hailed](#), as three such achievers were last week, as the monarchy's brightest hope. In fact, has the judge really done the right thing? In the post-Elizabethan age, a sensational royal will might soon look like a sweet reminder of better times.

Catherine Bennett is an Observer columnist

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OpinionSex work

Selling sex is highly dangerous. Treating it like a regular job only makes it worse

[Sonia Sodha](#)



Sex work is inherently dangerous and open to exploitation. Photograph: Motortion/Getty Images/iStockphoto

Sun 21 Nov 2021 02.00 EST

Last Monday, James Martin was sentenced to four and a half years in jail for killing Stella Frew. They had argued in his van, then he accelerated away with her hanging off its side, eventually running Frew over, causing her catastrophic injuries. Martin sped away with her handbag in the van, which he later dumped.

The cause of their altercation? Martin refused to pay her for the sex act she had just performed on him. Like many women who sell sex, Frew struggled with drug and alcohol addiction and was under their influence when she approached Martin. Her daughter described her for the court as the “[kindest, most warm-hearted woman](#)” who had been abused and hurt by men her whole life. The judge commented that Martin had shown barely any empathy for his victim.

And so it has always been. Prostitution is laced with mortal peril: women who sell sex are 18 times more likely to be murdered than women who don’t, according to [one study](#). Yet these women have throughout history been cast as [second-class citizens](#), not worthy of the same concern as other victims.

How best to prevent violence against those selling sex, the vast majority of whom are women, is a question that has long divided feminists. For some, it is about decriminalising the selling *and* buying of sex, which in England and Wales would mean dropping [criminal offences](#) such as kerb crawling, soliciting and running a brothel. There will always be prostitution, so the argument goes, so best to keep it out in the open. Others agree that the selling of sex should be decriminalised in all circumstances and think women should be provided with ample support to get out of prostitution, but argue that the buying of sex, an almost exclusively male activity, should always be a crime.

The full decriminalisation argument is driven by a belief that it is possible to sufficiently strengthen the agency of those who sell sex to transform it into

“sex work”, like any other job. You can see what makes it an appealing frame, powered by an archetype that has evolved from the *Pretty Woman* male saviour narrative, to the sex-positive woman sticking two fingers up at a socially conservative society by making bags of money doing something she loves. Sex work is a choice that should be respected and we should destigmatise it by decriminalising the men who buy it and regulate it to make it safer. Women railing against this are depicted as prudes constrained by their own squeamishness about sex.

There are two reality checks that bring these theoretical arguments crashing down to earth. The first is that for every woman or man selling sex who regards it as a positive choice, and there are some, there are many more who have been trafficked or exploited and are effectively enslaved to criminal networks, working for a pittance, or for drugs to forget the trauma of being forced into selling yourself to be penetrated again and again, or for nothing at all.

In one investigation into sex trafficking, Leicestershire police reported that 86% of the women in brothels they visited were Romanian; in Northumbria, it was 75%. Numerous studies have shown just how dangerous prostitution is: a majority of women selling sex have experienced severe and repeated violence, with more than two-thirds suffering from PTSD at levels comparable to war veterans. Women who are actually or effectively being forced into selling sex have little voice in policy debates, although there are prominent survivor networks that argue for abolition.

How is a woman selling sex supposed to maintain safe boundaries or withdraw consent when a man is hurting her?

Second, as the feminist campaigner Julie Bindel exposed in her 2017 book *The Pimping of Prostitution*, decriminalisation and regulation has not been the success its advocates claim. Bindel visited and interviewed women working in legal brothels in the Netherlands, Germany, Nevada, New Zealand and Australia and found exploitation to be rife, with legalisation acting to empower brothel owners. In one Las Vegas brothel, women weren’t allowed out unaccompanied or without their manager’s permission. In a German brothel, women had to service six men a day at the minimum rate

just to make back the room rent. In a New Zealand brothel, women said men could simply complain to the manager and get their money back, leaving them with nothing.

Decriminalisation increases the overall extent of prostitution in a country without decreasing its harms or delivering any of the promised benefits of regulation. In New Zealand, Bindel revealed there were only 11 brothel health and safety inspections over a 12-year period. And decriminalisation makes it even harder for the police to combat trafficking; Spanish police [describe](#) how difficult it is to investigate when they enter a brothel and clearly frightened and distressed young women tell them they are working there by choice.

Decriminalisation can't make prostitution safe because it is inherently dangerous and exploitative. How is a woman selling sex supposed to maintain safe boundaries or withdraw consent when a man physically capable of killing her is hurting her?

The men who buy sex all too often escape scrutiny. The [Invisible Men](#) project documents the nauseating way men talk online about their experience of women selling sex, very little of it printable. [Research](#) finds that men who buy sex are also more likely to abuse their partners, have a stronger preference for impersonal sex and to commit rape and other sex offences.

Correlation may not equal causation, but it's not hard to imagine how using women for a price, even if it hurts them, further hardens already toxic attitudes towards women. These men have a vested interest in the sanitisation of their sex-buying. Perhaps the most extraordinary example is the former MP Keith Vaz, who chaired a home affairs select committee inquiry that came down against criminalising those who buy sex, and who a few months later was [exposed](#) as having offered to buy cocaine for two men selling sex.

There should be zero stigma, only help and support for those caught up in prostitution. But we legitimise the men who engage in the harmful practice of buying sex to our detriment. In the UK, it is estimated about one in 10 men have [paid for sex](#); in [Spain](#), where it is decriminalised, it is much

higher. To accept that prostitution is always going to happen, and therefore the best we can do is regulate it, not only means tolerating the abuse of women: it is to be complicit in its expansion.

Sonia Sodha is an Observer columnist

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[For the record](#)UK news

For the record

Sun 21 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

The environmentalist we spoke to about water pollution at Swalecliffe, Kent, is Andy Taylor, not “Andy Turner” or even “Hunter” ([Swimming in sewage](#), 14 November, the New Review, page 8).

An article said Barclays bank had to report annually to regulators on its handling of whistleblowers after the then chief executive, Jes Staley, tried to unmask one in 2016. That reporting requirement ended last year (“[The task was to restore Barclays's reputation, but will Staley's scandals undo his work?](#)”, 7 November, page 63).

In France, people in at-risk groups, including over-65s, who have not had a booster jab will no longer be entitled to a Covid health pass from 15 December, not 1 December ([Why is Europe returning to the dark days of Covid?](#), 14 November, page 40). The pass is needed to enter bars, restaurants, leisure venues and some shopping malls, but not shops in general.

We described Molly Scott Cato as an MEP, but the Green party’s economics spokesperson finished in that role in 2020 when the UK left the EU ([Treasury green savings bond offers ‘paltry’ incentive for helping planet](#), 14 November, page 62).

In our early edition last week, the late BBC newsreader Richard Baker was misidentified as Kenneth Kendall in a picture caption ([Anchors away: why the golden age of TV news presenters has had its day](#), 14 November, page 44).

Mao Zedong spoke of letting “one hundred flowers bloom”, not one thousand, as an article suggested ([From Nicaragua to China, reckless autocrats betray the promises of revolution](#), 14 November, page 35).

Other recently amended articles include:

[On trial for saving lives: the young refugee activist facing a Greek court](#)

[Found: the club where Geoffrey Cox's cash gets thumbs-up](#)

[Bucket lists: are they really such a good idea?](#)

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[Observer letters](#)[House of Commons](#)

Letters: an MP's job is to represent their constituents



MPs in the House of Commons. Photograph: UK Parliament/Roger Harris/PA

Sun 21 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

While the common focus on MPs' second jobs is the vast amounts of money paid, there is the other consideration of the time spent away from their primary duties ("[The only people MPs should be hustling for are their constituents](#)", Andrew Rawnsley, Comment). During my working life, my employers had the old-fashioned idea that, in order to be paid, I had to turn up and do work to their benefit. If MPs are working up to 30 hours a month at a second job, how much does that eat into their working week? Is an MP's job so undemanding that they can fit in the extra hours? If they contend that the work is in addition to their parliamentary commitments, do they contravene the working time directive? Do you want to be represented by an MP who is exhausted?

Rawnsley states that the public do not mind MPs working as doctors, the argument being that they are kept abreast of NHS matters from the inside. If working in a casualty department allows sufficient time to wander around inquiring into the state of services generally, I suggest all the talk of NHS crisis is exaggerated. In the time it takes to earn a day's pay in a hospital, they could visit several health service premises in their constituency and use their expertise to ask challenging questions.

The only way to prevent all this is to pay them a proper salary, elect by proportional representation to eliminate ultra-safe seats and ban all second jobs.

Nick Crook

Hanham, Bristol

Talking about my generation

Catherine Bennett's article superbly demonstrated the absurdity of labelling generations in a broad-brush way and then treating them accordingly ("[If Adam Boulton has to slip quietly away at 62, how long before they come for you too?](#)", Comment). However, that did not stop me wondering to what named age tranche I belong. Google informs me that, having been born during the war, I am one of the "silent generation". It is true that, as the grim reaper takes his toll, more of us are inevitably falling silent. However, I recently entered my 80th year and I find that it's really weird being the same age as old people. But your publication of this letter proves that we are not all silent just yet awhile.

Dick Spall

Cavendish, Suffolk

A convenient truth

I was delighted to see our local repurposed loo occupy prime position in your article ("[Skip to the loo? Easier said than done as Britain loses hundreds of public toilets](#)", News). The Theatre of Small Convenience has a high profile in Malvern where we welcome many visitors every year. It takes its place in a theatre-loving community; for those who worry about being caught short, there is a real public convenience immediately opposite.

Suzi Macintyre
Hereford

Just another freeport freeloading

I fear that the new freeport initiative (“[Low taxes and levelling up: the great freeport experiment comes to Teesside](#)”, Business) will be yet another familiar round of subsidies, low rates and rents offers for industry plus cheap power to turn the wheels. Teesside and Hartlepool, where I was born and brought up, need real, guaranteed jobs that are unionised and protected from the excesses of zero-hours contracts. Otherwise, it’s a freeport freeloader that expires when the subsidies run out.

Jonathan Hauxwell
Crosshills, North Yorkshire

A flare for communication

I understand that David Mitchell is put out by the migration to Digital Voice (“[It's good to talk, unless you're a BT customer](#)”, the New Review). Not least, he has probably had to upgrade his telephonic instrument from the candlestick device he may be accustomed to using to something more in keeping with the 21st century. However, I must point out that he speaks from the viewpoint and mindset of what many of us non-metropolitans identify as “a resident of that London”.

Here in rural south-west Scotland, we can only dream of effective broadband. Unlike Mr Mitchell, we will benefit from Digital Voice when this is rolled out (possibly in four years’ time). By default, instead of the 2Mbps we currently “enjoy”, as a team of trained snails inch their way along the copper phone line, it will deliver modern broadband speeds.

He has a point about the loss of a back-up voice channel. Since we have no reliable mobile network signal, the removal of the copper cable may have a more significant downside in these parts, but I am looking at buying in a stock of emergency flares to cover this eventuality. Has Mitchell considered this option?

Jo Lynch

Stoneykirk, Dumfries and Galloway

Sewage: the big picture

I agree entirely with Tim Adams's "[Swimming in sewage](#)" article (the New Review). However, Southern Water is not the only culprit; the system under which it has to operate is absurd.

The legal framework is flawed. The water company is not allowed to refuse connection to a development passed with planning permission, while the council is strongly discouraged to refuse planning permission on the grounds of lack of sewerage capacity.

Licensed capacity is based entirely on dry weather conditions. Capacity problems and discharges regularly occur due to wet weather. Water company contracts permit virtually unlimited storm discharges during wet weather.

For a decade, water companies have been self-regulating with virtually no oversight of daily activities by the Environment Agency.

The whole system is clearly unfit for purpose and can only be rectified by overhaul at government level.

Roy Seabrook

Nutbourne, Chichester, West Sussex

Ever-boozy Brits

"[Tipsy at 30,000ft? It's the British way](#)" (Focus): it was ever thus. Killing time in 1984 at a busy Washington airport. Sitting in an all but deserted bar a couple of hours before the flight home. A customer came in and commented on how quiet it was. "Not for long," replied the barmaid wearily. "The Brits are due in soon."

Rod Evans

Charlbury, Oxfordshire

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Sajid Javid

Sajid Javid under pressure over share options in US health tech firm



Sajid Javid worked for C3.ai until he returned to the cabinet in June, advising it on ‘the global economy, geo-politics and market opportunities’. Photograph: REX/Shutterstock

[Heather Stewart](#) Political editor

Fri 19 Nov 2021 04.00 EST

The health secretary, [Sajid Javid](#), is facing questions over share options he continues to hold in the hi-tech US company he worked for until rejoining the cabinet in June – and which operates in the healthcare sector.

Javid was paid the equivalent of £150,000 a year by C3.ai, a California firm specialising in artificial intelligence (AI), from October last year until he was given the job of health secretary.

As part of his remuneration package, he was also given “an option for 666.7 shares per month”.

According to the health secretary’s current entry in the register of MPs’ interests, he continues to hold these options, which he reports have a market value of approximately £45,000.

The deputy Labour leader, Angela Rayner, has written to the prime minister’s ethics adviser, Lord Geidt, to ask him whether this represents a conflict of interest.

“In September, the secretary of state’s department announced that the use of AI would shorten waiting lists in our NHS,” she wrote, suggesting the idea the Department of Health could spend taxpayers’ money on AI “could clearly be perceived as beneficial to an AI company”.

The ministerial code states that “ministers must scrupulously avoid any danger of an actual or perceived conflict of interest between their ministerial position and their private financial interest”.

Employee share options usually allow the recipient to buy a set number of shares at a predetermined price, sometimes on a particular future date.

Their value fluctuates with the company’s share price, so they are used to give staff an interest in the company’s value appreciating. Details of when Javid’s options can be cashed in have not been published.

C3.ai is a California-based tech firm which floated on the New York Stock Exchange in December 2020. Among nine industry sectors listed on its website, it includes “healthcare” and “government”.

It has a UK subsidiary, and is now recruiting sales and marketing staff in the UK. Javid advised the firm on “the global economy, geo-politics and market opportunities”.

The NHS was already increasing spending on AI before Javid arrived in post, but he recently [highlighted its potential role in tackling health injustices](#).

“Technology, particularly AI, can be an incredible force for good. It can save valuable clinician time and help provide faster, more accurate diagnosis, so patients can access the care they need as quickly as possible,” he said. “It can also help us better understand racial differences so we can train our workforce to look for different symptoms or complicating factors, diagnose faster, and tailor treatments.”

Javid held the post at C3.ai alongside another advisory role, with US bank JP Morgan from August 2020 to June 2021, for which he was also paid the equivalent of £150,000 a year. He took up that role six months after resigning as chancellor. Javid previously worked for JP Morgan before entering parliament. Both of these jobs were cleared with the independent Advisory Committee on Business Appointments, which vets jobs for former ministers.

A spokesperson for the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) said: “The secretary of state has acted in line with the ministerial code and has properly declared these share options in the usual way.”

Aides suggested he had begun the process of divesting himself of the options when he became health secretary, but that the process was difficult because the market for share options is not very liquid.

Javid unexpectedly became health secretary in June, when Matt Hancock resigned after being caught on camera in a clinch with Gina Coladangelo, a longtime friend who had been brought on to the DHSC’s payroll.

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[India](#)

Indian PM Narendra Modi to repeal farm laws after year of protests

01:46

Modi repeals controversial laws in surprise victory for Indian farmers – video report

[Hannah Ellis-Petersen](#) in Delhi

Fri 19 Nov 2021 12.29 EST

Narendra Modi has announced he will repeal three contentious farm laws that prompted [a year of protests](#) and unrest in India, in one of the most significant concessions made by his government.

In a huge victory for India's farmers, who had fought hard for the repeal of what they called the “black laws”, the prime minister announced in an address on Friday morning that “we have taken the laws back”.

“We have decided to repeal all three farm laws. We will start the constitutional process to repeal all the three laws in the parliament session that starts at the end of this month,” said Modi, in a surprise announcement.

While Modi remained adamant in his speech that the laws were necessary reforms, he acknowledged that they were unfeasible given the fierce opposition from farmers. “I appeal to all the farmers who are part of the protest ... to now return to your home, to your loved ones, to your farms, and family. Let's make a fresh start and move forward,” he added.

Modi had passed the three farm laws in 2020 in an attempt to overhaul India's archaic agriculture sector by rolling back farm subsidies and price regulation on crops. The agriculture sector still employs about 60% of India's workforce, but is riddled with issues of poverty, debt and inefficiency.

However, they quickly became a major source of contention among India's millions of farmers, who accused the government of passing the laws without consultation. They said the reforms put their livelihoods and farms at risk and gave private corporations control over the pricing of their crops, which could crush smallholder farmers.

After the government refused to repeal the laws last year, hundreds of thousands of farmers marched to Delhi's borders, met on the way with barricades, teargas and water cannon, and set up protest camps along the main highways into the capital.

Tens of thousands of farmers have remained at the several camps around Delhi borders ever since, maintaining one of the most sustained challenges to the Modi government, even through the harsh winters, baking summers and the brutal second wave of Covid-19. They found support in huge swathes of India, as well as internationally, with figures including Rihanna and Greta Thunberg speaking out in support of their actions, much to the chagrin of the government. The protests turned violent in February when the farmers stormed into the centre of Delhi and briefly took over the historic Red Fort in the old city centre.

The government had made concerted efforts to crush the farmer protest movement over the past year. Farmers and supportive activists were arrested and police made several threats to clear the protest camps around Delhi, before briefly resorting to barricading in the farmers with concrete barriers and spikes. Those leading the protests were regularly cast as terrorists and anti-nationals conspiring against India.

After several rounds of negotiations failed, the government agreed to suspend the laws earlier this year, but the farmers, who have the backing of powerful unions, said they would not budge until the laws were repealed entirely.

On Friday, farmer leader Rakesh Tikait said the farmers would still not disband their protest camps and rallies until the act of repealing the laws had been carried out in parliament. He also emphasised that more than 700 farmers had died over the past year during the protests against the farm laws.

“At last, all of our hard work paid off ... I salute the farmer brothers who were martyred in this battle,” said Tikait.

Previously the Modi government had said it would not bow down to pressure from the farmers over the farm laws. Modi, a strongman prime minister, has until now been unyielding to all mass protests and challenges to his government.

However, it is thought that Modi’s decision to rollback the laws and make a rare public apology is tied to upcoming crucial state elections in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, where farmers make up a crucial proportion of the “vote bank” and farmers’ unions hold significant power and influence. The farm laws had caused a lot of anger in the north Indian states that are the heartland of Modi’s ruling Bharatiya Janata party (BJP).

Ashutosh Varshney, director of the Centre for Contemporary South Asia at Brown University, said it was the Uttar Pradesh elections “pure and simple” that had motivated the decision.

“If the BJP loses Uttar Pradesh in March, it will open up politics in a way that can have huge implications in 2024 [the general election].”

Varshney said the rollback made Modi look “potentially vulnerable, not yet decidedly weak”, adding: “This is his first reversal when faced with a movement. “It will encourage other movements but Modi will back down only if the protest threatens the BJP electorally. Otherwise Modi can ride it out.”

An opposition MP, Palaniappan Chidambaram, said in a tweet: “PM’s announcement on the withdrawal of the three farm laws is not inspired by a change of policy or a change of heart. It is impelled by fear of elections!”

In his speech, Modi said he was repealing the laws because he lamented that the government had been “unable to convince farmers”.

“Whatever I did was for farmers,” the prime minister said. “What I am doing is for the country.”

Amarinder Singh, former chief minister of Punjab state, which is home to many of the protesting farmers, tweeted: “Thankful to PM [Narendra Modi](#) ... for acceding to the demands of every Punjabi.”

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[Coronavirus](#)

Covid live: Dutch police open fire at protest; German government not ruling out full lockdown — as it happened

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Coronavirus

Booster jabs to be added to England's Covid pass for travel



Some countries, including Croatia and Austria, have introduced a time limit for the validity of the coronavirus jab. Photograph: Steve Parsons/PA

[Jamie Grierson](#)

[@JamieGrierson](#)

Fri 19 Nov 2021 04.53 EST

Travellers from England who have had a booster or third dose of vaccine will be able to demonstrate their vaccine status through the [NHS](#) Covid pass, which will allow them to travel to countries requiring proof for entry, ministers have announced.

Israel, Croatia and Austria are among countries that have already introduced a time limit for the Covid-19 vaccine to be valid for quarantine-free travel.

However, it will not be necessary to show evidence of a booster for travel into England at this time, the Department of [Health](#) and Social Care said.

Evidence suggests immunity provided by two doses of any of the approved Covid vaccines has waned six months after the second jab.

Booster and third doses will not be added to the domestic Covid pass as it is not a current requirement for individuals to receive booster doses to qualify as fully vaccinated.

More than 13m booster and third jabs have been administered in the UK, providing those eligible with maximum protection as winter approaches.

The health and social care secretary, Sajid Javid, said: “We want to make it as easy as possible for people to show their vaccine status if they are travelling abroad.

“This update to the NHS Covid pass will mean people can have their complete medical picture at their fingertips if they are going on holiday or seeing loved ones overseas.

“Getting a top-up jab is our best defence against this virus and I urge all those who are eligible to come forward and get boosted.”

The NHS Covid pass enables people to demonstrate their Covid-19 status when travelling abroad or when visiting organisations who have opted to use the domestic certification process.

Booster and third doses will show up automatically in the digital Covid pass and will be visible from midday on Friday for users in England but will not immediately be available via the Covid pass letter service, which will be updated in due course.

The booster vaccine will appear on the Covid pass in Wales from 29 November.

However, evidence of a booster vaccine is not needed to enter venues in Wales that require a Covid pass for entry. Evidence of two vaccinations or a

negative lateral flow test in the last 48 hours remain the requirement.

The announcement does not cover Scotland and Northern Ireland.

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Coronavirus

UK ministers were unprepared for impact of Covid, says watchdog



Covid-19 signs in Slough, Berkshire, last summer. The NAO report says the government did not learn lessons of simulation exercises – and Brexit both helped and hindered planning. Photograph: Maureen McLean/Rex/Shutterstock

PA Media

Fri 19 Nov 2021 03.46 EST

Ministers were not “fully prepared” for the “wide-ranging impacts” that Covid-19 had on society, the economy and essential public services in the UK, and lacked detailed plans on shielding, job support schemes and school disruption, a report has found.

Some lessons from “previous simulation exercises” that would have helped with Covid-19 preparations were “not fully implemented”, according to the National Audit Office (NAO).

The report, which looked at the government's preparedness for the Covid-19 pandemic, also found that time and energy spent preparing for Brexit both helped and hindered planning for future crises.

The watchdog said preparations for leaving the EU enhanced some departments' "crisis capabilities", but also took up significant resources, meaning the government had to pause or postpone some planning work for a potential flu pandemic.

"Some work areas of the Pandemic Flu Readiness Board and the Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Programme Board, including scheduling a pandemic influenza exercise in 2019-20, were paused or postponed to free up resources for EU exit work," the report says.

The NAO found that the emergency planning unit of the Cabinet Office allocated 56 of its 94 full-time equivalent staff to prepare for potential disruptions from a no-deal exit, "limiting its ability" to plan for other crises.

"This raises a challenge for the government as to whether it has the capacity to deal with multiple emergencies or shocks," the report says.

The watchdog found that, overall, the pandemic "exposed a vulnerability to whole-system emergencies". Although the government had plans for a pandemic, many of these were "not adequate" for the challenge at hand, it said, and there was "limited oversight and assurance" of the plans in place.

The report said that Exercise Winter Willow, a large-scale pandemic simulation exercise carried out in 2007, warned that business continuity plans needed to be "better coordinated" between organisations – and this was "not evident" in most of the plans reviewed by the NAO.

It also said that after Exercise Cygnus, another pandemic simulation held in 2016, the government noted that "consideration should be given to the ability of staff to work from home, particularly when staff needed access to secure computer systems".

However, when Covid-19 hit, "many departmental business continuity plans did not include arrangements for extensive home working", the watchdog

said.

According to the report, the government had prioritised preparations for “two specific viral risks” – an influenza pandemic, and an emergency high-consequence infectious disease.

The latter typically has a high death rate among those who contract it, or has the ability to spread rapidly, with limited treatment options – like Ebola and the Middle East respiratory syndrome (Mers).

The NAO said this meant the government did not develop a plan specific to a disease with characteristics such as Covid-19 – which has an overall lower death rate than Ebola or MERS, and widespread asymptomatic community transmission.

It said that, according to the Cabinet Office, scientists considered such a disease “less likely” to occur.

The report said the government was able to use some mitigations it had in place when Covid-19 hit – for example, the personal protective equipment (PPE) stockpile. However, it was “not fully prepared” for the “wide-ranging impacts” that the disease had, the watchdog said.

This was despite the fact that the government’s 2019 National Security Risk Assessment recognised that a flu-like pandemic could have “extensive non-health impacts, including on communications, education, energy supplies, finance, food supplies and transport services”.

The report also said that, prior to the pandemic, the government “did not explicitly agree what level of risk it was willing to accept for an event like Covid-19”.

The NAO said it was told by the Cabinet Office that, as the crisis began, the government’s “risk appetite changed” and it “lowered the threshold for the health and societal impacts of the pandemic that it deemed acceptable”.

It concluded that Covid-19 had highlighted the need to strengthen the government’s risk management process and “national resilience” to prepare for any similar events in future.

The watchdog said the government had already started to consider addressing many of the issues raised – for example, through its National Resilience Strategy.

It went on to make a number of specific recommendations for the Cabinet Office on risk management and preparedness.

These include establishing who is in charge of whole-system risks, helping departments to take stock of how funding is prioritised and managed, working with departments to ensure plans are “comprehensive, holistic and integrated”, strengthening oversight of emergency planning, and ensuring lessons from simulation exercises are put to use.

The NAO also said the Cabinet Office and Treasury should help departments to “reduce variation in capacity, capability and maturity of risk management, emergency planning and business continuity”.

Gareth Davies, the head of the NAO, said: “This pandemic has exposed the UK’s vulnerability to whole-system emergencies, where the emergency is so broad that it engages all levels of government and society. Although government had plans for a flu pandemic, it was not prepared for a pandemic like Covid-19 and did not learn important lessons from the simulation exercises it carried out.

Fleur Anderson, Labour’s shadow cabinet Office Minister, said the report showed that “Conservative ministers failed to prepare and they failed the public. A Labour government will learn the lessons to create a more resilient Britain and ensure that never again is our country left unprepared and dithering when crisis hits,” she said.

A government spokesperson said: “We have always said there are lessons to be learned from the pandemic and have committed to a full public inquiry in spring.

“We prepare for a range of scenarios and while there were extensive arrangements in place, this is an unprecedented pandemic that has challenged health systems around the world.”

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Wanted: 100,000 pioneers for a green jobs Klondike in the Arctic



Liliana Celedon from Mexico, at the curling arena in Skellefteå, a former gold mining city and the gateway to Swedish Lapland. Photograph: Julian Lass/The Guardian

[Richard Orange](#) in Skellefteå, Sweden

Fri 19 Nov 2021 02.00 EST

One by one, the 20 engineers and technicians step up to receive their equipment before the briefing. They have come to the far north of [Sweden](#) from as far away as Mexico, the US, Saudi Arabia, China, Germany and Russia.

“Welcome!” bellows Håkan Pålsson, their instructor. “We’re here to show you how to do curling, and then you’re going to go out on the ice and show us.”

This is the fourth curling session for new arrivals organised by staff at Northvolt, a company whose car battery gigafactory is rising at breathtaking speed on the outskirts of Skellefteå, this old gold-mining city just 200km south of the Arctic Circle.

The company, the city and the local Västerbotten county are doing everything they can to help arrivals get comfortable. This summer there was a foraging and wild cooking event for German engineers considering the move north. Locals are instructed to be friendly: “You are going to see more new faces in Skellefteå than ever before,” runs an encouraging post on the city website. “Their experience of Skellefteå will, to a large extent, depend on how good we are at welcoming them.”

Most impressive of all is the 20-storey [Sara Cultural Centre](#), which opened last month. One of the tallest [wooden buildings](#) in the world, it has two theatres, a gallery, a library and a luxury hotel.

The reason for all this effort is simple.

If Northvolt is going to succeed in its plans to build Europe’s biggest battery factory, it and its host city need to convince thousands of people to move to the edge of the Arctic Circle, to a region where snow cover is constant from November to April and where the winter sun shines for no more than four hours a day.

The gigafactory is just the most advanced in a succession of green industrial megaprojects springing up all over Sweden’s far north, lured by cheap,

renewable energy, vast tracts of undeveloped land and [funding from the European Green Deal](#). Development locals compare it to Dubai or the Klondike gold rush.

About 160km north in the city of Boden, [H2 Green Steel](#) starts work next year on the world's first industrial-scale, fossil-free steel plant. Next door to that, Spain's Fertiberia plans to spend €1bn on a giant electrolysis plant for green ammonia, which will be used to produce fertilisers. A further 200km north in the Arctic mining town of Gällivare, the mining company LKAB will next year embark on a £35bn, 20-year [project](#) to switch to fossil-free sponge iron, using hydrogen technology [successfully trialled](#) this year at the [Hybrit](#) steel plant in Luleå.

Reverse migration

What these projects are all desperately short of, more than money, renewable electricity, space or permits, is people.

“The weakest link in the chain is the workforce,” says Lotta Finstorp, the governor of the local Norrbotten county and recent arrival from Stockholm. “If we can’t get people to move up here, we won’t be able to succeed with all these very necessary investments for the world.”

Sweden’s government estimates that the new projects and their suppliers will create at least 20,000 jobs, with 20,000 extra public sector workers needed, and 10,000 to work in shops, cafes and the like.



Lotta Finstorp, the governor of Norrbotten county. Photograph: Julian Lass/The Guardian

In total, Sweden's two most northerly counties could gain [100,000 people](#) in 15 years, boosting their population by a fifth, according to Peter Larsson, the man the Swedish national government has appointed to coordinate this transition. It's a remarkable ambition given that not so long ago, unemployed people were being paid to move south for work. Larsson thinks the key to achieving reverse migration is to convince people "that this is the best place on earth to live".

For Liliana Celedon, a 28-year-old engineer from Mexico, it's an easy sell. Skellefteå is about as exotic as it gets for someone from a sprawling, car-based city on the US border. "I've been hiking, swimming in the ocean, and just spontaneously being with nature," she says.

Outside the Skellefteå Arena, where the curling is happening, the first, slushy snow of the year has just started to fall, and she's looking forward to downhill and cross-country skiing in the city centre. For Benjamin Lindén, from southern Sweden, curling is fun but culture a necessity. Unusually for someone in construction, he started his career as a theatre director, and the day before the curling, he was checking out some improvisational stage shows at the Sara Cultural Centre.

“It’s an absolutely important part of my life to have [theatre] available,” he says. “I actually called the theatre before I came up here, because I wanted to know what they had. Now with the Cultural Centre I really think it will be a lot better.”



Benjamin Lindén and Liliana Celedon being introduced to curling in Skellefteå
Photograph: Julian Lass/The Guardian

Finstorp suspects it will be harder to appeal to southern Swedes, like Lindén, among whom northerners have a reputation for being obsessed with hunting, snowmobiles and snuff tobacco, and for being literally less than monosyllabic, dispensing even with the word “yes” in favour of a sharp intake of breath.

Alistair Coley, a 25-year-old cell process engineer from Sunderland in the UK, has found making friends here surprisingly easy. “Everyone you meet does at least say ‘hello’,” he says. He arrived in February with his fiancee, Claudia, and their two cockapoos, Primrose and Albert. “They’re interested in what you’re doing, so I think it’s not necessarily the Swedish stereotype that you get in the north. They want you to be here.”

They were in contact with a local couple before they left the UK, and have since been invited to regular meals and hikes. “We met them, weirdly

enough, through the dogs' Instagram accounts," Coley says.

Since then, they've gone inland and seen the northern lights, encountered wild reindeer out with their dogs, hung out on a dog beach on the Baltic Sea and experienced the Swedish midsummer celebration, replete with the traditional flower wreaths.



Alistair Coley outside his home in the far north of Sweden. Photograph: Julian Lass/The Guardian

Regional authorities are also trying to tempt locals to move home. Skellefteå, which serves as the gateway to Swedish Lapland, sends Christmas cards to everyone who has moved south over the past 10 years and hosts ice hockey and other events for migrants in Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö. .

Swedish not essential

The next step is to target the roughly 400,000 unemployed people living in less dynamic parts of Sweden. The employment minister, Eva Nordmark, has pledged to do "whatever it takes" to get people to move north, [even tightening welfare rules](#) to force relocation.

In its offices across the country, Sweden's employment service is selling the chance to take part in a “historic” green transformation. It has also launched a scheme called [Relocate](#) to target long-term unemployed people in Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö, part-funded by the EU Social Fund.

Northvolt is looking in particular for immigrants to Sweden who have good English and a technical background, says Katarina Borstedt, the person responsible for finding the more than 3,000 people needed for the battery factory. “You don’t have to learn Swedish before you can work at Northvolt,” she says.

The vast battery factory site is already humming with construction workers in hi-vis jackets and safety helmets, as the company races to produce its first cells by the end of this year. Once complete it will be able to make batteries for 1m cars a year. Most of those already at work at the plant have, for now, flown in on short contracts .

“They come from all over the world, and are people attracted by these kinds of mega and giga projects,” says Fredrik Hedlund, who is managing the build. “If you look at the inside of the factory, that’s really international expertise.”

Hedlund is a southerner who moved north, having sold his house in Lund, the previous week. His 16-year-old daughter started at the local technical high school in August.

“Northvolt is an all-in project. This is not something you fly in and fly out of,” he says. “If you’re invested in something, and really want to make sure it works, you go there.”



Frederik Hedlund at the Northvolt construction site Photograph: Julian Lass/The Guardian

The vast grey boxes that have risen in this 200-hectare plot are just the start, he says, pointing to the forest edge close to a kilometre and a half away that will mark the full extent of the finished plant.

The gigafactory, like H2 Green Steel to the north, will primarily supply the car industry 2,000km to the south. “The majority [of production] is going to go to the German automotive industry,” Hedlund says.

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Making a difference

For many employees, the chance to be at the absolute forefront of the shift to a more sustainable future is reason enough to move. Coley, who was hired directly from Europe’s first car battery plant in Sunderland, shakes his head with admiration when he talks of Northvolt’s ambitions. Production will be powered entirely by green hydroelectric power for example, and a battery recycling plant on site is planned.

“Other companies think they should get a pat on the back just for just providing batteries for electric cars, but there’s so much more than that,” he says. “Northvolt’s really trying to act sustainably from the energy perspective, and that’s important to me. It wasn’t about joining any battery business to make money, it was about coming here to make a difference.”

There’s a similar “pioneer spirit” in nearby Boden, says the local mayor, Claes Nordmark, now work is about to begin on the new steel plant.



The Hybrit pilot plant in Luleå Sweden, which successfully trialled hydrogen technology in 2021. Photograph: Julian Lass/The Guardian

When the Swedish military closed its Boden base in 1998, it lost 10% of its population in two years. In Skellefteå, the story was similar after a big copper smelter reduced its headcount from 3,000 to 800.

Unemployment in Sweden’s two most northern counties fell only after unemployed people were paid to move south.

At its lowest point, Skellefteå had 1,500 empty apartments, with some sold for a nominal price of one Swedish crown. Those one-crown flats are now selling for upwards of a million, while Skellefteå and Boden are racing to build thousands of new homes.



Sara Cultural Centre in Skellefteå. Photograph: Julian Lass/The Guardian

The decades of decline may have paved the way for today's successes. Boden and Skellefteå bought huge tracts of land and linked them to the mainline power grid, hoping to copy nextdoor Luleå, where [Facebook opened its European datacentre](#) in 2013.

In what now looks a stroke of luck, both failed to win their hoped-for datacentres, leaving them with perfect, readymade sites for the new generation of green industrial megaprojects.

Those tough years also explain why there is little opposition to the coming wave of labour migration. After years when young people, and particularly young women, have moved south, giving the north the oldest population in Sweden, everyone welcomes an influx of 20- to 40-year-olds, wherever they come from.

"Something good, something different is happening," says Pålsson, the 66-year-old curling instructor, after watching the new arrivals to Skellefteå tottering unsteadily on the ice.

"Now we will have people from many countries coming to the city. That's just good for us. We welcome them, and it's very important to show what we can offer."

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Peng Shuai

The disappearance of Peng Shuai: what happened to the Chinese tennis star?



Peng Shuai posted sexual assault allegations against a powerful former government official
Photograph: Greg Baker/AFP/Getty Images

[Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei

[@heldavidson](#)

Fri 19 Nov 2021 00.20 EST

Who is Peng Shuai?

Peng Shuai, 35, is one of China's most recognisable sporting stars. The former tennis doubles World No 1, she also reached No 14 in the singles rankings, and won two women's doubles grand slams at Wimbledon in 2013 and the 2014 French Open. She also competed in multiple Olympics.

Peng is now the subject of international speculation and concern after she posted sexual assault allegations against a powerful former government official earlier this month, and [hasn't been seen since](#).

What happened?

On 2 November Peng posted a lengthy statement to Weibo, China's Twitter-like social media platform, in which she [accused the country's former vice-premier, Zhang Gaoli, of sexually assaulting her](#).

Peng said she and Zhang, now 75, had for several years had an on-off extramarital "relationship". Peng said Zhang had stopped contacting her after he rose in the ranks of the Communist party, but about three years ago invited her to play tennis with him and his wife and then sexually assaulted her in his house.

In her Weibo post, Peng said she couldn't produce any evidence of her accusation but was determined to voice them. "Like an egg hitting a rock, or a moth to the flame, courting self-destruction, I'll tell the truth about you," she wrote.

The accusation is the most significant of China's #MeToo movement, which has [struggled to gain traction](#) in the face of strict censorship, an opaque justice system, and social and political hostility. No public accusation has been levelled against a senior official of the Chinese Communist party before, let alone one as high-ranking as Zhang.

How did China react?

The post was deleted by China's strict censors in less than 30 minutes, but nonetheless went viral. As people sought to discuss and share the news, censors clamped down, blocking keywords like "tennis", disabling comments on Peng's account, and removing numerous references to her from China's internet.

There has been no official response. Neither China's government nor Zhang, who sat on the CCP's highest ruling body, the seven-member Politburo Standing Committee, have responded to media queries or made any public

statements. The spokesperson for China's ministry of foreign affairs, which deals with foreign press, has said it is not a diplomatic issue and he has no knowledge of the incident.

How has the tennis world reacted?

The Women's Tennis Association (WTA), through its chief executive Steve Simon, has demanded a full investigation into Peng's allegations. Simon said he had received "assurances" from the Chinese Tennis Association (CTA) that Peng was "safe and not under any physical threat" but no one from the WTA was able to contact her to confirm.

Across several statements and interviews, Simon made it clear that the WTA expected action on Peng's claims, and they were willing to jeopardise the lucrative access to the Chinese market to ensure it. Simon said allegations that one of their players had been sexually assaulted was an area where there could be no compromise.

"We're definitely willing to pull our business and deal with all the complications that come with it," Simon told CNN. "Because this is certainly, this is bigger than the business. Women need to be respected and not censored."

[Tennis stars have also joined the campaign](#), often posting under the hashtag #whereisPengShuai. [Serena Williams](#), Naomi Osaka, Kim Clijsters, Martina Navratilova, and Stanislas Wawrinka were among those calling for answers. Spanish footballer Gerard Piqué, founder and president of the investment group which co-runs the Davis Cup, also posted to his 20.1 million followers.

There are now calls [for the International Olympic Committee to step in](#). Beijing is hosting the Winter Games in February and was already subject to calls for a boycott. The IOC declined to comment, instead cryptically saying: "Experience shows that quiet diplomacy offers the best opportunity to find a solution for questions of such nature."

Where is she?

Just as demands for answers were escalating China's state-run English-language broadcaster, CGTN, said [Peng had emailed Simon to say “everything is fine”](#). As evidence the broadcaster tweeted a screenshot of a block of text which it said was the email.

“The news in that [WTA press] release, including the allegation of sexual assault, is not true. I’m not missing, nor I am unsafe. I’ve just been resting at home and everything is fine. Thank you again for caring about me.”

Simon and the WTA dismissed the suggestion the email came from Peng, and said it only increased his concern.

“I have a hard time believing that Peng Shuai actually wrote the email we received or believes what is being attributed to her.”

There were other elements which also prompted skepticism. The [language of the letter was similar](#) to previous forced confessions by detainees in China, the screenshot included a visible cursor in the text, and it was not published anywhere inside China, or in Chinese.

On Friday Hu Xijin, editor of the fiery state-media tabloid Global Times, said he didn’t believe Shuai had been subject to any “retaliation”. However in a sign of the sensitivity inside China, the usually free-speaking Hu didn’t specify the allegation, referring instead to “the things people talk about”.

As a person who is familiar with Chinese system, I don’t believe Peng Shuai has received retaliation and repression speculated by foreign media for the thing people talked about.

— Hu Xijin 胡锡进 (@HuXijin_GT) [November 18, 2021](#)

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Rio Tinto's past casts a shadow over Serbia's hopes of a lithium revolution



Illustration: Pep Boatella/The Guardian

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[Daniel Boffey](#) in the Jadar valley, Serbia

Thu 18 Nov 2021 23.00 EST

A battery sign, flashing dangerously low, appears superimposed over a view of the globe as seen from space. “Green technologies, electric cars, clean air – all of these depend on one of the most significant lithium deposits in the world, which is located right here in Jadar, Serbia,” a gravel-voiced narrator

announces. “We completely understand your concerns about the environment. [Rio Tinto](#) is carrying out detailed analyses, so as to make all of us sure that we develop the Jadar project in line with the highest environmental, security and health standards.”

Beamed into the country’s living rooms on the public service channel RTS, the slick television ad, shown just after the evening news, finishes with images of reassuring scientists and a comforted young couple walking into the sunset: “Rio Tinto: Together we have the chance to save the planet.”

The pivot to ecological saviour and bastion of transparency is perhaps an unlikely one for Rio Tinto, the world’s second-largest metals and mining corporation.

Throughout its almost 150-year history, the Anglo-Australian multinational, which posted profits after tax of \$10.4bn (£7.3bn) in 2020, has faced accusations of corruption, environmental degradation and human rights abuses.

It is currently fighting a civil lawsuit by the US Securities and Exchange Commission that accuses the company of fraud at its Mozambique coal business. That follows a £27.4m fine in 2017 from the UK’s financial watchdog for breaching disclosure and transparency rules.



Rio Tinto's office in the village of Gornje Nedeljice, Serbia.

The chief executive of Rio Tinto's iron ore operation, Simon Trott, conceded earlier this year that the company was "not proud of its history" at its Marandoo mine in Western Australia where hundreds of ancient artefacts were thrown into a rubbish dump. Last year, the then chief executive resigned after the company deliberately blew up an ancient cave, one of Australia's most significant archaeological research sites, where there had been evidence of 46,000 years of continual occupation. This summer the company finally agreed, after decades of appeals, to fund an "environmental and human rights impact assessment" of its former copper and goldmine in Panguna, in Papua New Guinea, where it is claimed that 1bn tonnes of mine waste was dumped into the Kawerong-Jaba river delta and continues to wreak catastrophic damage.

It is a troubling history. One critic has said Rio Tinto could be seen as "a poster child for corporate malfeasance". But for Rio Tinto executives the future is also a cause for concern despite current bumper profits. The share price has been struggling. The price of iron ore is under pressure from massive Chinese production. Scandals in Australia have put its future expansion in jeopardy and the company's management of a major copper mine in Mongolia has come under heavy criticism.

It is in that context that the world's dash for decarbonisation and the European Union's drive for self-sufficiency in raw materials to achieve its climate targets have caught the company's eye.



Jadar River in western Serbia. The proposed site for the Europe's biggest lithium mine is on the bank of the Korenita River, a tributary of the Jadar.

In July, Rio Tinto announced that it would invest \$2.4bn in a project in the Jadar valley, in western Serbia, overlooked by the Cer and Gučeva mountains, building what it says will be Europe's biggest lithium mine, and one of the world's largest on a greenfield site.

The company estimates that over the expected 40-year life of the mine, it will produce 2.3m tonnes of battery-grade lithium carbonate, a mineral critical for large-scale batteries for electric vehicles and storing renewable energy, and 160,000 tonnes of boric acid annually, necessary for the renewable energy equipment such as solar panels and wind turbines.

Rio Tinto boasts the mine will make it one of the top 10 lithium producers in the world, and could produce enough for more than 1m electric cars a year, of which annual sales are expected to jump from 1.2m vehicles in 2017 to at least 23m in 2030, according to the International Energy Agency.

The EU, with which [Serbia](#) has an association agreement facilitating trade and regional funding, imports all its battery-grade lithium from outside Europe. Talks about supplying leading German car manufacturers have

begun. Four 40ft shipping containers carrying the infrastructure for a lithium processing plant have set sail for Serbia from Australia.

The project is gathering momentum. But anxious and angry campaigners, including the thousands of protesters who have taken to the streets of the Serbian cities of Loznica and Belgrade over recent months, say they are witnessing an unfolding disaster in the country's "breadbasket", responsible for around a fifth of total agricultural production, raising questions about the strange bedfellows being made in the maelstrom of the green revolution, and whether lessons have been learned about consumption and production that has made the transition to a decarbonised world so urgent.

Shortcomings in Serbian democracy further raise concerns over whether the voices of those on the frontline are being heard.

It is 17 years since lithium, a silvery-white alkali metal, was discovered by chance by Rio Tinto geologists in one of two boreholes in a cornfield in Jadar valley.

The team had been looking for borates, used in fertiliser and building materials, but found something unexpected: borates and lithium in one mineral, a combination that would later be given the name jadarite, after the valley.



Marijana Petkovic, a teacher, at her home in Gornje Nedeljice village.

Marijana Petkovic, 47, a teacher, lives with her husband, Nebojša, 49, and two daughters in Gornje Nedeljice, one of the nine villages that will be most affected by the planned mine. She remembers the day the Rio Tinto men arrived.

“They were taking samples and were around all the time. We got to know them, they would be invited in for coffee, lunch, for saints’ days and local events – they were Serbian,” she said. “They were talking about a small mine then, 20 hectares, and that we would never even know it was here.”

Over the following years, donations started to be made by Rio Tinto to local causes. Gornje Nedeljice’s school received funds for classroom renovations. The football team’s clubhouse got a new roof and farmers were offered vouchers for expensive agricultural equipment. There was even cash for the Christmas bazaar among the 107 donations dished out since 2003, of a total value of \$608,807 (£451,034).

“After a year or two, the mine was suddenly going to be 80 hectares,” said Petkovic. “Then in September last year, we received letters telling us that our land had been rezoned from being agricultural to building land. I remember a friend invited me to her house where a group of us women were asked by a lady from Rio Tinto about what we wanted from the mine, what opportunities might interest us ... We were idiots. We weren’t paying attention.”

Rio Tinto said it did not recognise the figures cited by Petkovic but conceded that plans had evolved. According to the spatial plan published by the Serbian government in March, the zone at risk of subsidence will be spread across 850 hectares, the size of more than 1,000 football pitches.



A meeting of a group fighting the planned mine. Despite the promise of jobs, local people are worried about the destruction of their community and way of life.

The core mine will be on a site of just over 200 hectares on a bank of the Korenita River, a tributary of the Jadar, with further hundreds of hectares set aside for landfills of waste and new transport infrastructure. Excavation will take place underneath the two riverbeds where lithium has been identified at depths of 100 to 650 metres.

In 2014, flooding of the Korenita led to a dam overflowing into a closed coalmine, spilling toxic material over farmland. Rio Tinto says it plans to convert the liquid waste from the mine into dry “cakes” to make it safer to store. It is making contingency plans for a “once in 10,000 years flood event”, just in case.

The mine will involve the relocation of 81 households, voluntary or otherwise, and the purchase of fields of 293 landowners. A brochure circulated among those affected stated that expropriation of homes and land would be a “last resort”.

The company has already bought up about 80% of the land and property, for what are said to be “unheard of” sums, according to Petkovik, amounting to

hundreds of thousands of euros in some cases, based on payouts of €470 (£397) per sq metre of a property. Rio Tinto is offering 5% bonuses to those who complete within four months of an offer.

About 30 homes have been bought in Petkovic's village. Knowing their properties are destined to be destroyed, the owners rip out windows, doors and even roofs, leaving desolate scenes for those who have resisted Rio Tinto's money or are yet to be offered anything. "Our neighbours did it so we had to," said Živana Šakic, 67, who recently sold up.



Houses in Gornje Nedeljice village that have been sold to Rio Tinto.



About 30 houses have been bought in the village by the mining company. Knowing that their homes will be destroyed, the former owners have removed windows, doors and even roofs.

Close to the proposed works, lies the Paulje necropolis dated 1500-1000BC, the biggest central Balkans cemetery from the bronze age.

Rio Tinto has paid a local museum for an archaeological dig and hundreds of artefacts including pottery, jewellery, tools made of painted stone and bronze, aceramic spool and a three-legged altar have been uncovered so far.

Zlatko Kokanovic, 45, a vet who farms about 32 hectares with his brother, in which a five bronze age graves are located, said he had rejected attempts by Rio Tinto to lease the land for excavation. “They will never buy me off – they can only steal it from me,” the father of five said.



Zlatko Kokanovic, a vet, on some of the 32 hectares he owns with his brother. He has refused to lease the land to Rio Tinto for excavation.

“The Jadar project will not have any impact on this important site in any of its phases,” Rio Tinto said.

There are also two Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas internationally recognised as important for the conservation of bird populations. “But so far no risks have been identified for the existing fauna in these zones ... No activities have been or will be carried out during the period of active nesting of birds,” added the company spokesperson.

Obtaining lithium will nevertheless entail a heavy environmental toll, generating 57m tonnes of waste over the mine’s life of rock material and industrial detritus.

The average water demand is estimated to be 6-18 litres a second, or about 1.3 litres of water for every kilo of product. As for carbon emissions, the company says on its website that it “anticipates” using renewable energy.

“Such mines are mostly opened in deserts precisely because of the detrimental effect on the environment and biodiversity,” said Prof Dragana Đorđević, head of environmental chemistry and engineering at the University of Belgrade. “The basins of the Drina and Sava rivers, from

which about 2.5 million people are supplied with water, are endangered.” Rio Tinto deny this.

Rio Tinto has commissioned 12 environmental studies, none of which the company would make available when asked by the Guardian. The company also declined requests for an interview.

But one study funded by the company, summarised in a slide presentation obtained by this newspaper, offers an insight. Dr Imre Krizmanic, from the biology faculty at the University of Belgrade, found that attempts to mitigate the damage to more than 145 protected species , from wolves, beavers and bats to salamanders, pond turtles, dragonflies, fish, flora and fauna, would have a highly limited impact.

The presentation concluded that “due to the expected irreversible changes in certain ecosystems, as well as risks of significant endangerment of the living world of the rivers Jadar, Drina and downstream watercourses, the optimal and basic measure to prevent the negative consequences of the state of biodiversity in this area is the abandonment of planned exploitation and processing of the mineral jadarite”.

While the Jadar project does not yet have the permits necessary for construction, Rio Tinto is confident that the Serbian ministry of environment will give the green light when it submits its environmental impact assessment (EIA) later this year.

A Rio Tinto spokesperson said of the core site, “almost all species at this location can be found in western Serbia or beyond. In other words, there are no species that cannot continue their life beyond this territory, meaning that impact on biodiversity will be minimal.”

Serbia’s president, Aleksandar Vučić, told a TV chatshow in January: “We do not have sea or natural resources that will bring us millions. We have jadarite, and I’m dying with laughter when I hear that people are protesting over it. They are protesting down there, in western Serbia, over Rio Tinto and they say it will be a disaster. No, it will not. No disaster will happen there.”

Vučić has suggested he could open up the issue to a referendum but Miroslav Mijatović, from NGO, the Podrinje Anti-Corruption Team (Pakt), worries that the government is revising the rules over such votes. “Both the previous government and this current government are clientelistic towards the company and adapt the laws to their needs,” he said.

As for the potential electoral threat posed by the unpopular mine, minutes of a meeting between the European Commission and Rio Tinto executives, released under freedom of information laws, note in bold that EU officials had been informed that “site development [will] start – from [the second quarter] of 2022 – after the elections in Serbia (March 2022)”.

Rio Tinto says it will create 2,000 jobs during the mine’s construction and 1,000 long-term positions, making a 1% direct and 4% indirect contribution to GDP. But people fighting the plan find it difficult to see beyond the imminent destruction of a longstanding community and way of life.

Dragan Karajcic, 51, leader of the parish council, who has corn and soya fields close to what will be the landfill site, said Rio Tinto’s record had been that of leaving “deserts behind”. “Even if they were planning a chocolate factory in the name of Rio Tinto I wouldn’t give up my land”, he said.

Beekeeper Vladan Jakovljevic, 60, from Stupinica, 2km from the mining zone, whose 400 hives produced three tonnes of acacia honey last year, said the area where his bees feed would be left “desolate.”



Vladan Jakovljevic, a beekeeper from Stupinica village, is worried that the mine will leave his bees in a waste land with nothing to feed on.

Ratko Ristic, a forestry professor has lobbied with others from the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts against the Jadar mine, claiming “the possible benefits for the state of Serbia is between €7m to €30m a year, the possible income from advanced agricultural activity in the same area would be more than €80m a year without pollution or relocation”.

A petition against the mine has more than 130,000 signatures, 2% of the Serbian population. The company has already had to pay small sums in damages due to leakage in fields where it has carried out research.

Pakt has filed a criminal report with the basic public prosecutor’s office in Loznica against Rio Tinto, incorporated in Serbia as Rio Sava Exploration, claiming it has acted contrary to its research permits by illegally dumping rubble, and that lorries have driven over weak bridges.

Rio Tinto said it had not been contacted over the claims, and “the competent authorities have confirmed that the activities of Rio Sava Exploration are in line with applicable legislation”.

The company’s assurances, however, that its operations will be in compliance with Serbian and European regulations, offer little succour to

locals.



A view from a windowless house in the village of Gornje Nedeljice sold to Rio Tinto. The village is one of nine that will be most affected by the planned mine.

While Serbia is obliged to align its water and waste management and industrial emissions regulations with the EU, as part of its route to joining, the European Commission conceded in a letter to lawyers for the Mars Sa Drine (March on Drina) anti-mine campaign that while Serbia “has achieved some progress regarding the alignment with the European legislation … implementation is still at an early stage”.

Lucas Bednarsk, author of *Lithium: The Global Race for Battery Dominance and the New Energy Revolution*, said a moral argument could be made that Europe should bear the ecological costs of the lithium excavation it needs. It is currently imported from Australia, Latin America and China.

But Meadbh Bolger, from Friends of the Earth Europe, says that batteries for electric vehicles and renewables are predicted to drive up demand for lithium by almost 6,000% by 2050 – and asked why such consumption was not being questioned.

“There is still no talk about reducing demand,” says Bolger. “We have asked the question and the commission said they were not at the stage that they could address constraint. The reason we got to where we are in the first place is by exploiting the resources, too much extraction, to meet the needs of the luxury rich and European industry … We are just doing it again.”

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A great walk to a great pub: the Tiger Inn, East Sussex



The view west from the South Downs Way towards Cuckmere Haven.
Photograph: Peter Flude/the Guardian

Mike Unwin

Fri 19 Nov 2021 02.00 EST

Start The Tiger Inn, East Dean, near Eastbourne

Distance 7½ miles

Time 3½ hours

Total ascent 370 metres

Difficulty Easy to moderate

Google map of the route

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Autumn bluster is in the air as I set off from the car park, with rain clouds roiling overhead and rooks exploding from the treetops like shrapnel. Down on the village green, the cosy Tiger Inn looks tempting, but I am saving its rewards for later. Until then, up on the open downs, with a stiff south-westerly straight off the sea, I may be in for a battering.

The picturesque village of East Dean lies just off the A259, between Seaford and Eastbourne, and makes a perfect gateway to the [Seven Sisters country park](#). If you don't know the name, you'll recognise the landscape from book covers and film backdrops, its rolling green hills and towering chalk cliffs suggesting some nostalgic notion of pastoral England.

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To the geologist, these cliffs reveal where the broad chalk band of the South Downs, laid down 80 million years ago, reaches the English Channel, only to be cheese-wired away by the relentless waves. The Sisters are peaks

between ancient river valleys: Haven Brow, rising 77 metres above Cuckmere Haven at the western end, is the highest of the seven. For the naturalist, the surrounding grassland means special flora and fauna; for historians, it means Saxon churches, smugglers' tales and iron age earthworks.



The Tiger Inn sits on the village green at East Dean. Photograph: Peter Flude/the Guardian

This place is too well known to be anyone's "best-kept secret", but it never disappoints. The landscape is on such a grand scale that it easily absorbs the day trippers who beetle over its muscular contours. Each day brings new skies, each season new attractions, and there are enough trails that I can find a new route each time, with its own take on those stunning cliffs.

Today, I head south from East Dean village green, following a no-through road (Went Way) to a gate, then crossing a damp field to a small wood. The track climbs through the trees, tunnelling towards an oval of light that promises a view beyond. I emerge to find the celebrated panorama laid out before me. Below and to the east is the dip of Birling Gap, with its hotel, cafe and beach, from where the cliff line rises again to the prominent Belle Tout lighthouse and on towards Beachy Head. Ahead lies the sea, all scudding cloud shadows and spotlight sunbeams.



Walkers (and weary dog) taking the cliff path from Cuckmere. Photograph: Peter Flude/the Guardian

No rain so far. I press on over sheep-cropped sward and past wind-stunted hawthorns to a red-roofed barn, from where the track descends gently towards the cliffs. At a cluster of low scrub, where the path continues to Birling Gap, I head right, along the cliff top. I have now joined the 100-mile South Downs Way which would, had I the time and energy, take me all the way to Winchester.

The cliff path is a switchback ride, the roar of the waves turning abruptly on and off as its undulations take me in and out of the wind. In summer, chalkhill blues and other butterflies dance over the flower-studded grass. Today, jackdaws ride the up-draughts and the odd wheatear flutters ahead, the last of many southbound migrants for which these cliffs mark a final departure point. I gaze seawards in hope of spotting a passing peregrine but keep well back from the edge: it's a long way down.



A small woodland path beyond East Dean village. Photograph: Peter Flude/the Guardian

A third of the way along, I reach a flint-studded monument commemorating the 1926 purchase of the Crowlink Valley (for “the use and enjoyment of the nation”). From here, a shorter circuit leads back inland to East Dean, but I press on to complete the Sisters. After another 45 minutes of ups and downs, I’ve crested Haven Brow and am looking west across the floodplain and meander loops of the Cuckmere Valley. Above the river mouth, the famous Coastguard Cottages – also regulars on those film sets and book covers – cling precariously to the cliffs.

The landscape is on such a grand scale that it easily absorbs the day trippers who beetle over its muscular contours

A National Trust signpost on Haven Brow offers a choice of routes. Leaving the cliffs, I turn right along a gentler path inland. Down on the valley floor, I meet a paved track that leads north to the country park visitor centre (in an 18th-century barn, with tearoom and toilets). From here I could complete a longer return to East Dean through deep, dark Friston Forest, north of the

A259. But I can't get enough of those cliffs, so cut across on to a raised bank and follow the Cuckmere back towards the sea.

This little loop around Cuckmere Haven is bird country. In a month or so, wigeon and other wintering wildfowl will be flocking to graze the salt marsh. Today there are little egrets working the riverbank and redshanks probing the tidal pools. Past visits have brought me kingfishers and, on one red-letter day, a wandering osprey.



Friston church. Photograph: Peter Flude/the Guardian

Reaching the beach, I tramp left across the shingle towards the foot of Haven Brow, its massive chalk buttress rearing defiantly above the waves. From here, a steep zigzag path cut into the hillside returns me to that NT signpost, where a kestrel now hangs motionless in the breeze. I set off east again, retracing my steps along the clifftop, with the low sun behind me now illuminating the panorama ahead. Reaching the last dip before the monument, I pass through a sheep gate into Crowlink Valley and cut back inland, for the last hour, which is a gentle one.

My route follows a farm track north across fields to the hamlet of Crowlink – its houses hidden by the downs until you find yourself among them – then continues up a road to Friston Church, a building of Saxon origins opposite a

picture-perfect pond that was listed in the Domesday Book. Across the churchyard, a gate opens on to Hobb's Eares field and the final descent to East Dean. Rabbits scuttle for the hedges as I lengthen my stride, the Tiger Inn in sight.



Photograph: Peter Flude/the Guardian

The pub

This picturesque pub sits among the flint-walled cottages that surround East Dean's village green. There is said to have been a hostelry here since the 12th century: the "tiger" bit is thought to refer to the three leopards crest of the de Dene family. The present structure dates from the 16th century, as evident in its oak beams. Local ales on tap include Harvey's Sussex Best bitter (£5.50 a pint) and Longman Long Blonde (£4.40), while pub fare includes "catch of the day" from Newhaven, and a vegan "not-tiger burger" (£13.50). Book ahead in summer, when it's busy with thirsty hikers and drinkers spill out on to the green. In winter, the low ceilings and blazing fire suggest the smugglers' retreat that, according to legend, this once was.

The rooms

The [pub has five en suite rooms upstairs](#) (from £100 B&B). It also has nine self-catering cottages around a walled garden behind the pub, sleeping between two and six (from £405 for a long weekend). For a unique alternative, on the cliff top a mile from the inn and a short walk from Birling Gap is the [Belle Tout lighthouse](#) (from £175 B&B). It has six rooms and an extraordinary lounge with 360-degree vistas over the South Downs and the Channel.

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Austria

‘No way around it’: Austrians queue for jabs as unvaccinated told to stay home



The Austrian government has taken the unprecedented step of imposing a stay-at-home order for those with no proof of immunisation. Photograph: LPD / Dietrich/LPD/Dietrich



[Philip Oltermann](#) in Linz

[@philipoltermann](#)

Fri 19 Nov 2021 05.30 EST

On a street of shops in the Austrian city of Linz, a stone's throw from the winding Danube river, two police officers in navy-blue uniforms and peaked white caps stop random passersby to check their vaccine passports.

Elderly shoppers rummage around in their handbags and comply with a smile, but a fortysomething woman with a nose piercing is less forthcoming: she says she left her immunisation certificate on the kitchen table as she had to dash across town to see a dentist.

When the woman fails to provide proof of her medical appointment, the officers ask her to head home, though they decline to take down details. “This is a state of complete madness,” she says as she continues on her original northward journey.

Since Monday, about 2 million unvaccinated people in Austria are facing severe restrictions on their free movement after the conservative-led government took the unprecedented step of trying to suppress a powerful

fourth wave of Covid-19 [with a stay-at-home order](#) for those with no proof of immunisation.

Under the “lockdown for the unvaccinated”, those who have declined to take the jab and are found to have left their home for non-essential reasons can face fines of €500, rising to €1,450 if they fail to comply with checks.

The measure has attracted worldwide attention, as countries across the globe are wondering if they can battle a seasonal resurgence of the virus through vaccines alone.

In Germany, which has a comparable vaccine uptake (68%) to Austria (66%) and where the head of the disease control agency warned this week that the real number of new daily cases could be up to three times the 50,000 that showed up in tests, some politicians [have suggested following the example set by its southern neighbour](#).

Others fear the lockdown of the unvaccinated could set a dangerous precedent, enforcing a segregation on medical grounds in an already polarised society. In Austria, the step has been criticised not just by the far-right Freedom party (FPÖ) but also the liberal NEOS. The former Olympic skier Felix Gottwald, a national sporting icon, has said the law reminds him of his country’s darkest National Socialist past.

Further still, medical experts fear it may also prove ineffective in fighting the pandemic, as authorities struggle to police the rules the government has imposed.



Since the start of the week, police in Upper Austria have carried out about 5,000 spot checks a day. Photograph: LPD / Dietrich

In Linz, Austria's third-biggest city, this week's partial lockdown, as well as proof-of-immunity requirements in restaurants and bars introduced a week earlier, are already having one visible effect: on Wednesday morning, a rapidly growing queue had formed at the walk-in vaccine centre inside a shopping centre on Landstraße.

Thomas Draxler, a bus driver in his 50s queuing for his first jab of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, said he was not a militant anti-vaxxer but had held out until now "because I haven't had any run-ins with the virus". But regular testing requirements for the unvaccinated had worn him down. "Now there's no way around it".

From a legal point of view, driving up vaccination rates is only a desired side-effect of the partial lockdown. To survive challenges in court, the new measure also has to prove that it is suited to protect the healthcare system from a surge of Covid-19 patients.

Lining up for his booster shot to the back of the queue, Maximilian Scherlacher justified the measure to restrict the movement of unvaccinated people in similar fashion. "I do think it's fair," said the 39-year-old, who is

married to a hospital worker. “What would have been unfair is if we did not try to protect medical personnel working in emergency care and ill people who can’t get hospital beds because they occupied by unvaccinated Covid patients”.

Upper Austria, of which Linz is the capital, experienced relative mild earlier waves of the virus but is now one of the Alpine republic’s Covid hotspots. At 60.8%, it also has the [lowest vaccination rate](#) of its nine states.

[Austria: number of new coronavirus cases per day](#)

“A year ago, we laughed at Donald Trump for suggesting you could treat corona by injecting disinfectant,” Scherlacher said. “Now we see it’s not that different over here.”

For Austria’s stay-at-home order for the unvaccinated to be compatible with the country’s constitution, it must be justifiable from a medical point of view. Since vaccinations reduce the risk of catching and therefore passing on the virus, even if [less effectively so over time](#), some scientists say this is the case.

It also needs to work, [argued](#) Karl Stöger, a professor of constitutional law at Vienna university. “If the partial lockdown ends up being an intelligence test for those looking for loopholes how to evade fines, then that’s not good enough”, Stöger said. “A measure that doesn’t work must not come into action”.

Since the start of the week, police in Upper Austria have carried out about 5,000 spot checks a day in the streets – none of them in people’s private homes – and detected 63 breaches of the new regulations. But even law enforcement officers concede working out whether a person walking around town is engaged in essential or inessential activity is at times impossible.

The list of exemptions is long: unvaccinated people are still allowed to go to work, visit their partners, go for recreational walks and go shopping for food or other essential supplies. Asked whether the roasted chestnuts sold at the ubiquitous stalls on Landstraße counted as sustenance or leisure, a police spokesperson said: “That’s a good question.”

Even the right to freedom of assembly is excluded from the lockdown rule: on Tuesday, police allowed a 600-strong anti-vaxxer protest outside the Wels-Grieskirchen clinic to go ahead.

“Of course we can’t carry out comprehensive controls”, said another Linz police spokesperson, David Furtner. “We are reminding people that rules apply even when the police isn’t present.”

On Friday, the national government conceded that minimising the movements of the unvaccinated alone would not suffice to flatten the curve. From Monday, every citizen in Austria will go into their third general lockdown of the pandemic for at least ten days. From February 2022, the government plans to make vaccinations mandatory across the country.

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[Coronavirus](#)

Defying expectations: how New South Wales kept Covid cases low after reopening



Patrons dine-in at a bar by the harbour as Covid-19 regulations ease in Sydney. Photograph: Jaimi Joy/Reuters

[Samantha Lock and Caitlin Cassidy in Sydney](#)

Thu 18 Nov 2021 22.32 EST

In the weeks before Australia's most populous state of New South Wales emerged from a 106-day lockdown in October, a surge of Covid cases seemed certain to coincide with the easing of restrictions. Experts predicted infections would rise and hospitals braced for a spate of new admissions.

But instead, the opposite happened. Daily Covid cases have dropped and – more than a month after exiting lockdown – the numbers continue to fall.

On 11 October, thousands of Sydneysiders flocked back to newly reopened cafes, bars and gyms. A total of 446 new cases were reported across the state and 769 people were being treated for Covid in hospital.

Modelling predicted daily cases in the state of 8 million people would swell to 1,900 each day in the weeks following restrictions easing, as schools and offices reopened, with a second, larger peak around Christmas. Australia's leading medical research centre, the Burnet Institute, forecast hospitalisations would reach between 2,286 and 4,016 in Sydney by the end of September.

Instead, new daily Covid cases in NSW fell from a peak of 1,603 on 10 September, and now hover at about 200 to 250 new cases a day. The past week saw a seven-day average of 226 new infections each day. Hospitalisations have also dropped by more than two-thirds.

Australia's second most populous state of Victoria has similarly seen a steady decline with new daily Covid cases dropping from a peak of 2,293 on 13 October to fewer than 1,000 over the past week.



International travellers arrives at Sydney airport in the wake of coronavirus disease border restrictions easing. Photograph: Jaimi Joy/Reuters

It is unexpected but welcome news as other parts of the world eye their own rising Covid case numbers with trepidation, reinstate lockdowns and race to roll out booster programmes.

Fourth and fifth waves of the virus are [sweeping across Europe](#). This month alone, Germany, Greece, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Russia and many countries in the eastern bloc have seen infection rates surge to record highs as hospitals face increasing strain.

Health experts say there are lessons that can be learned from the success of NSW in keeping case numbers low while reopening its economy. The combination of an impressive and rapid vaccine uptake, together with mask mandates, contact tracing and isolation requirements as well as vaccination entry permits, has largely been credited for containing the outbreak and keeping case numbers low.

On the first day of Sydney's lockdown, fewer than 9% of adults in NSW had received both jabs, according to government health [data](#). By the time lockdown ended several months later, this figure had risen to 73.5%, with 90.3% of the eligible population receiving their first dose.

Dore said the turnaround in vaccine rates was “in one word: phenomenal”. NSW now boasts one of the highest vaccination rates in the world with 91.4% of adults double-dosed as of 18 November. The speed at which the state ramped up the rollout is counter to countries like the US and the UK, which began to stall as they approached the 50% mark.

Still, experts believed even high levels of vaccination would not be enough to contain Covid.

“Models underestimated the impact of the vaccination on transmission, and the rate of the vaccine take-up in those first few months, particularly targeted vaccination spreading to broader geographical areas,” Dore said.

Timing was also crucial. A short interval period between Pfizer doses allowed NSW Health to vaccinate huge swaths of the population quickly and “optimised the impact in preventing infection”, Dore said. So when lockdowns lifted, immunity levels were high. Unlike other parts of the world, NSW maintained key public health measures even after restrictions eased.

The University of NSW epidemiologist Dr Abrar Chughtai said health authorities continued to mandate masks in public places while maintaining contact tracing and isolation requirements in order to curb the spread.

The Doherty Institute’s final report, released this month, credited continuing public health measures such as testing, tracing, isolating and quarantine as “critical interventions” in achieving low case numbers.

Prof Alexandra Martiniuk from the University of Sydney school of public health also cited the importance of the state government’s “gradual reopening”, with vaccination requirements for entry in most indoor venues and social distancing measures.

She said NSW had also maintained “excellent” testing rates, with low test positivity compared with other countries that have similar vaccination levels. About 0.3% of tests were coming back positive in NSW, while tests had continued to exceed 50,000 a day.

Martiniuk explained the reopening of NSW was done gradually compared with countries such as England, which reopened much sooner and with more restrictions taken away all at once.

The public health expert acknowledged that while lockdowns can work, the “number one” avenue other countries should take in order to curb the spread was to increase vaccination rates.

“Those who were vaccinated more than six months ago should get boosters,” she said, adding that although other countries vaccinated more quickly than NSW, their booster roll out had been slower.

“NSW vaccinated late but quick,” she said. “We reopened in a phased approach whereas other countries reopened all at once.”

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Hong Kong

Cathay Pacific sacks three pilots for catching Covid on layover



Three Cathay Pacific pilots have been sacked for breaching Covid safety rules. Photograph: Lam Yik/Reuters

Reuters

Thu 18 Nov 2021 19.12 EST

Cathay Pacific Airways has sacked three cargo pilots for becoming infected with Covid-19 during a layover in Frankfurt, citing an unspecified “serious breach” of crew rules while overseas.

“The individuals concerned are no longer employed by Cathay Pacific,” the company said in a statement issued on Thursday.

The pilots were suspected of leaving their hotel rooms in Germany, according to the [South China Morning Post](#).

The discovery of the infections led to more than 150 other Cathay employees, including pilots and flight attendants, as well as many household members and community contacts, being sent to a government quarantine facility for three weeks.

“As a result of these findings, we have requested the government to review the decision to place certain groups into government quarantine,” Cathay said.

Hong Kong has recorded barely any local coronavirus cases in recent months but authorities have tightened up quarantine rules.

The territory is following Beijing’s lead in retaining strict travel curbs, in contrast to a global trend of opening up and living with the coronavirus. The city government hopes the tighter rules would convince China, its main source of economic growth, to gradually open its border with Hong Kong.

After the pilot cases were reported last week, Cathay said it would step up compliance checks at overseas ports to ensure health and safety protocols were being strictly followed during layovers.

All of Cathay’s crew have received Covid-19 vaccines and the airline said it would require a booster dose as well.

Hong Kong’s strict rules, which include up to three weeks of hotel quarantine for arrivals, have led to a plunge in travel demand.

Cathay said this week it operated in October at only 10% of the pre-pandemic passenger capacity and posted a 97.2% decline in passenger numbers from 2019.

However, cargo demand has been far more robust and the airline achieved close to operating cash break-even for the period from July to October.

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Vaccines and immunisation

Rollout of third Covid jabs in England condemned as ‘shambolic’



A health worker prepares to administer a Covid vaccine in Eton Wick on Wednesday. Photograph: Maureen McLean/Rex/Shutterstock

Peter Walker Political correspondent
[@peterwalker99](https://twitter.com/peterwalker99)

Thu 18 Nov 2021 07.15 EST

A “shambolic” rollout of third Covid vaccinations has left an unknown number of immunocompromised people still without proper protection going into winter, and in other cases even given the wrong type of injection, a leading charity has said.

Blood [Cancer](#) UK said poor planning and confusing messaging meant “many thousands” of people with weakened immune systems might have missed out, leaving them at greater risk of serious consequences if they catch Covid.

In a lengthy statement, [the charity said](#) NHS England had repeatedly failed to acknowledge the problem, while Sajid Javid, the health secretary, incorrectly [said](#) more than six weeks ago that the “vast, vast majority” of eligible people had already been invited for a third jab.

People were still coming forward to say they were struggling to get a third dose, said Gemma Peters, the chief executive of Blood Cancer UK. “The rollout of the third doses has been shambolic, causing yet more anxiety for immunocompromised people.”

Third doses are separate to the wider programme of booster jabs, now being extended to [adults aged 40 and above](#). Third injections [are aimed at](#) increasing the protection for people whose immune systems have been affected by conditions including blood cancer, with Covid vaccines likely to be less effective for them.

According to Blood Cancer UK, part of the confusion has been between booster and third doses. While the former are given six months after the second dose, third injections can be given after only eight weeks.

And while the dose for people given the Pfizer vaccine is the same for both types, with the Moderna vaccine, while booster jabs are a half dose, immunocompromised people are meant to be given a full dose for their third jab. The Oxford/AstraZeneca jab is not usually used for boosters or third vaccinations.

Blood Cancer UK said it had received numerous reports of health professionals not understanding the distinction and telling people with blood cancer they would have to wait six months. There were also reports about some immunocompromised people only being given a half dose of Moderna.

The charity said that soon after the rollout began, it received calls and emails from people saying some GPs and hospitals knew nothing about the third doses, while others knew but either did not think they had to invite people or did not know how to.

Even after the [NHS](#) wrote directly to eligible people, there remained sufficient confusion among doctors that the charity started to advise people to simply turn up to vaccination centres with a letter saying they had blood cancer.

While in recent weeks matters seemed to have notably improved, the charity said, it was concerned there were “likely to be many thousands of people who have already been told the wrong information, do not feel able to challenge their healthcare professional, or are unaware of the third dose programme, and so still have not had a third dose”.

With immunocompromised people expected to be offered a fourth dose soon, the charity said there was still “a serious problem of lack of accountability” within both NHS [England](#) and the health department, with a lack of clarity as to which was ultimately responsible for third jabs.

Peters said: “Ultimately, the chaotic rollout is a result of the government and the NHS leadership failing to learn from the mistakes they have made in supporting people with health conditions at the start of the pandemic. Now, it is only by learning the lessons from this failure that they can hope to avoid repeating this failure.”

Officials say the third jab programme is complicated by factors such as people’s suitability for the vaccination varying amid courses of chemotherapy.

An NHS spokesperson said: “Progress has been made in the roll out of third jabs, with around seven in 10 people who are immunosuppressed having had a third vaccination.

“The decision on when to get a third jab for this group is made between patients and their clinicians, and can be accessed through their hospital consultant or GP, and additionally, those with a letter from their doctor can attend their local walk-in vaccination centre.”

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In one day, the government has broken two key promises to its new voters

[Polly Toynbee](#)



Boris Johnson at a Network Rail hub in Selby, November 2021. Photograph: Ian Forsyth/Getty Images

Fri 19 Nov 2021 04.00 EST

Another day, another assault by this government on the very voters who gave it such a stonking majority. The [change in social care subsidies](#) in England, sneaked out under the shield of their own sleaze scandal, is a finely targeted strike on older, less affluent homeowners living in northern English seats. These are the very people Boris Johnson now likes to claim as his own. His [manifesto promise](#), repeated time and again, was that people would [not lose their homes](#) through the unlucky “bolt from the blue” of needing care in old age. Well, now they will.

With a new manipulation of the figures that create an £86,000 cap on care costs, the Treasury claws back some of its high cost – but all of it taken from those with less valuable assets. On the same day, another missile lands on his target voters: the [northern rail promises](#) hit the buffers – forget Bradford, forget Leeds. How reckless that in such a short time two key “red wall” promises Johnson made in 2019 have become serious electoral liabilities.

All the attention has been on who should pay for social care, and how much. But that should be a sideshow, as it doesn’t touch the real catastrophe: lack of care, low standards and blocked NHS beds. Instead, Johnson only made a manifesto pledge on “catastrophic” costs to homeowners, because how much people leave in inheritances is a powerfully emotive electoral issue: inheritance tax is the most unpopular, by far. That’s why it raises too little, after decades of wildly escalating property values.

The real crisis is the 1.5 million people denied enough care, people who would have received it in 2010, [according to Age Concern](#). Frail people being left at home alone without support, as care is increasingly rationed, is the real “catastrophe”. So is the low quality of care: with 15-minute home visits, and the inadequacies in service provision found in Care Quality Commission inspections. The King’s Fund says many of these services never improve. Difficulty in recruiting staff may make improvement even harder.

Wasn't this all "fixed" with the [f12bn national insurance rise](#) – the increase the Conservatives called the health and social care levy? Despite that unfair NI burden on working-age people, only £5.4bn is destined for social care over the next three years, and £3.7bn of that is [needed by councils](#), to cover the cost of the £86,000 care cap and extend the means test. After that's taken into account, local authorities have only a 1.8% annual increase in spending power to cover each year's rapidly accelerating number of the elderly and disabled people needing care, according to Simon Bottery, the King's Fund's social care analyst.

Meanwhile, as the NHS crisis grows, Amanda Pritchard, the head of NHS England, [joined the chorus of pleas](#) this week from within the NHS for more social care provision. The lack of NHS beds, many occupied by people waiting for social care, causes blockages in A&E, and the pile-up of ambulances we have seen outside hospitals. How many NHS beds are blocked? Conveniently, last year the government [paused counting and publishing](#) those figures.

Remember that "[oven-ready plan](#)"? There is no social care plan, only a homeowners' inheritance plan. There is no plan to reorganise the shambolic patchwork of care providers; so many understaffed, while others are in debt to [private equity firms](#). With 100,000 vacancies in the sector, and the number growing, the Tories have no care workforce plan. We need a national care service, with pay and career paths integrated with the NHS.

Here's the political problem. Social care consumes [more than 40%](#) of English local authority spending, yet only 2% of their voters use it at any one time. Everyone hopes not to need it, few understand its fiendish complexity, but everyone with any assets now knows they risk paying out £86,000, plus [£200 a week in living costs](#). That threat concerns many more voters than may ever pay it, which is why all the money has gone on saving inheritances, not on care. But what political ineptitude from Johnson to upset the very people he was supposed to soothe.

Emotions about inheritance are not amenable to reason. The best plan was in Labour's 2010 manifesto, and was designed to pool risk for everyone: the proposal was that everyone with assets would put in a relatively low lump sum upon retirement (about £20,000 in cash, or a lien on a property), and

then everyone would receive decent free care if and when they needed it. The Tories killed it off as a “[death tax](#)”. But they have never put forward a plan for paying for social care – and there isn’t one now.

- Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist
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OpinionBBC

The BBC is finding out the hard way you can't do 'balance' with this government

[Andy Beckett](#)



Illustration: Thomas Pullin

Fri 19 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

These long years of Conservative rule have been bewildering for many liberal and leftwing Britons. Your party being out of power often is. But this time, as well as all-too-familiar feelings of frustration and impotence, many non-Tories have a new sense of betrayal. They are realising they can't rely on the [BBC](#) to stand up to the government.

During the previous era of Tory dominance, under Margaret Thatcher, the corporation clashed with her administration sufficiently often for the official history of the BBC then to be titled [Pinkoes and Traitors](#). Challenging

governments is what many Britons who love the BBC – and some who do not – believe the corporation always does. Officially, the BBC agrees. Its editorial guidelines state: “We must always scrutinise arguments, question consensus and hold power to account.”

Yet since the Tories returned to office in 2010, it has become increasingly clear that the BBC is not properly fulfilling these roles. From its inadequate coverage of the [huge death toll](#) caused by David Cameron’s austerity policies to its less than even-handed treatment of [Jeremy Corbyn’s Labour leadership](#); from its blunders during the 2019 election – such as allowing Boris Johnson to avoid an [interrogation by Andrew Neil](#) – to its presentation of Johnson’s often extreme administration as just another Tory government, the corporation has failed to give its huge audience the full picture.

Instead, it has often played down the Conservatives’ excesses and disasters. There was a typical example on the 5 live breakfast show last week. One of the co-presenters, Rachel Burden, was reviewing newspaper coverage of the latest Tory sleaze scandal. “They talk about one in four Conservative MPs [having] additional jobs,” she said. “But of course there are MPs from right across the political spectrum who have second jobs ... ” The fact that the vast majority of MPs with second jobs are Tories was almost completely obscured.

Burden is a good broadcaster and not a partisan one. But such moments reveal that, contrary to its reputation, the BBC is less interested in depicting the realities of power in Britain than in achieving what it regards as political balance.

Last year, the then editorial director of BBC News, Kamal Ahmed, told its senior political editors that they should be neither “too soft on the government” nor “too condemnatory”, and should instead seek the “delicate middle ground”. Similar instructions have been issued by BBC executives throughout its history.

Yet the Johnson government is different from Britain’s other governments since the corporation was founded. It is divisive by design. It ignores our democratic norms. And it sees media organisations as it sees most interest groups: as either enemies to be defeated or obedient allies.

To try to find a “middle ground” with such a bullying regime seems an unrealistic, even naive, strategy for such a worldly organisation as the BBC. So far its coverage of the government – however helpful it has been to Johnson – has not earned it any favours. The government has made threatening noises about freezing or abolishing the BBC’s licence fee. It has appointed Nadine Dorries, a fierce critic of the corporation, as culture secretary. And for over a year, despite endless controversy, its preferred choice as the new head of the broadcasting regulator Ofcom, which oversees the BBC, has been the [former editor of the Daily Mail, Paul Dacre](#): perhaps the most famous BBC-hater in the country.

Meanwhile, the corporation’s credibility with non-Tories has steadily drained away. In leftwing circles, it’s commonplace to hear people say that they’ve stopped using the BBC for news. For some lefties, the mainstream media has never and will never be good enough, and the internet provides ever more alternatives. But other non-Tory viewers and listeners that the BBC has alienated – such as remainers enraged by its coverage of Brexit – include allies it may regret having lost, if and when the Conservatives get really rough.

It’s possible to argue that the BBC has no choice but to cover the Johnson government so respectfully. Ofcom requires that all British broadcasters practise “due impartiality”. But that phrase is open to a degree of interpretation, as the regulator’s own website points out. The word “due”, it says, “means … appropriate to the subject” of each programme. In other words, the impartiality of a broadcaster’s entire output does not have to be absolute.

For much of Thatcher’s premiership, the BBC had enough confidence to produce programmes that made her party and the state very uncomfortable. The director-general from 1982 to 1987, Alasdair Milne, so riled her government by his independence that it eventually [forced him to resign](#).

It’s hard to imagine such a confrontation happening now. Thanks to tight licence fee settlements imposed by the Tories since 2010, the BBC is preoccupied by cost-cutting rather than pushing political boundaries. It also has a very different director-general. Tim Davie is a former Conservative activist and local council candidate.

The corporation's tentative approach to Johnson's premiership is also part of its broader failure to cover rightwing populism robustly. The BBC often skated over the authoritarian aspects of Donald Trump's presidency, mesmerised by the spectacle and keen not to be seen as liberal or elitist. When I complained once to a BBC executive about this, he rolled his eyes: "Do we have to say he's a fascist every time?" Subsequent events suggest it might have been better journalism.

Like Britain, the BBC is always changing, but changing slowly. Eventually, perhaps when the current Tory ascendancy is obviously crumbling, the corporation will become tougher again on the ruling party – assuming it first survives whatever it has in store for it. Yet the BBC's dealings with the Tories since 2010 ought to teach liberals and leftists, once and for all, that the corporation's independent-minded phases are the exception, not the rule. If you want a broadcaster that will always "hold power to account", look somewhere else.

- Andy Beckett is a Guardian columnist
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OpinionBoris Johnson

If Boris Johnson were a stock, canny investors would be looking to unload

[William Davies](#)



Boris Johnson at the Lord Mayor's banquet at the Guildhall in central London, 15 November 2021. Photograph: Aaron Chown/PA

Fri 19 Nov 2021 03.00 EST

One of John Maynard Keynes's most famous claims is that financial markets are driven by “animal spirits”. But Keynes’s reasoning is less well known. The danger of financial markets, he argued, is that traders aren’t focused just on the price and quality of goods themselves, but also on the behaviour of the other traders.

Unlike markets for consumer goods or commodities, financial markets circulate things of no intrinsic value: pieces of paper that are expected to rise or fall in price, but largely because everybody else expects them to. Under such circumstances, herd behaviour and emotions become decisive. The

result is volatility – not just when things go wrong, but as a normal feature of such markets. Bubbles are inevitable, and bubbles inevitably burst.

In societies as dominated by finance as ours, this logic permeates well beyond the markets for bonds and equities. Housing is perhaps the most prominent and divisive case of “animal spirits” invading an area outside the sphere of finance itself. But as the Belgian social theorist Michel Feher has argued, many aspects of our social and personal lives are now treated like financial assets. As individuals we actively nurture our reputations, online and off, in the hope of winning investment, if not necessarily in a monetary sense then in the form of attention and positive ratings. These are all forms of “credit” (literally “belief”) of one sort or another.

The volatility of “animal spirits” was perfectly demonstrated by the 2017 Fyre festival (told in a [2019 Netflix documentary](#)), one of the great morality tales of our age. An entrepreneur convinced “influencers” to generate online buzz surrounding an island music festival he was planning, but neglected to organise basic facilities or headline acts. Once the first guests actually arrived on the island, the vibe took a turn for the worse when a single disgusting photograph of a cheese sandwich in a polystyrene box went viral.

As the consequences of Tory sleaze finally eat into [Boris Johnson’s polling lead](#), such examples may offer clues into something that has long been hard to fathom: how does the Johnson era end? It’s possible that if Johnson’s stock becomes marked a “sell”, rather than a “buy”, things could collapse rapidly. Might the [Andrea Leadsom amendment](#), tabled to defend Owen Paterson, turn out to be the “cheese sandwich” of the Boris festival? The fallout has certainly been spectacular.

Johnson’s political stock resembles a financial asset in a number of ways. First, he is of no intrinsic value. That he has no aptitude for or interest in governing was known before the pandemic, but took on a fatal dimension in March 2020, at the cost of many [thousands of lives](#). He lacks any consistent political vision or ideology, and runs scared of difficult decisions, beyond following whichever advice he received last. We know that he is also hedonistic and lazy, hence the [constant holidays](#). Given all of this, his [compulsive lying](#) is not even his worst trait as a leader.

All of which raises the obvious question of how he found himself in such a job in the first place. This is the second way in which Johnson resembles a financial asset: his value is founded on the fact that his supporters are all watching one another as much as him. Like a dotcom company circa 1999, he is someone to get behind, so long as everyone else is behind him – but especially the media. Johnson was originally an artefact of the papers for which he worked, from the Times via the Spectator to the Telegraph. Have I Got News For You made him a household face and name beyond the reaches of the conservative press (a fact that the former's presenters have never acknowledged). He is in many ways a PR trick.

Of course, media profile is far from worthless in today's political climate, but its value ultimately comes down to the capacity to coordinate and control public attention. In [his blog explaining](#) the 2016 referendum outcome, Dominic Cummings recognised the unique role of Johnson, but specifically as a means of steering the media:

“Without Boris, Farage would have been a much more prominent face on TV during the crucial final weeks, probably the most prominent face. (We had to use Boris as leverage with the BBC to keep Farage off and even then they nearly screwed us as ITV did.) It is extremely plausible that this would have lost us over 600,000 vital middle-class votes.”

Being recognisable and entertaining, Johnson provides a focal point; and because everyone knows this, it is then possible to rally people around him, rather as people might meet near a famous landmark. Indeed, his whole political career (whether in Westminster, London or the country at large) has depended almost entirely on his outsized levels of public recognition and willingness to exploit it.

But financial assets also suffer a major deficiency: an absence of investor loyalty. No doubt Johnson has close friends scattered around the higher reaches of the media and the Conservative party, but it is hard to identify any “Johnsonites”, given how little he stands for beyond himself. As a celebrity, he is better suited to attracting fans than allies. The recent tightening of the polls and negative headlines surrounding corruption may not represent a bursting of the Boris bubble, but they do clarify how little Johnson has to fall back on, should the press turn truly hostile. Cummings presumably

flatters himself that, like some hedge-fund wizard, he started shorting the stock at just the right moment.

It's always a mistake to underestimate Johnson's tenacity and hunger for power, but a political opportunist can scarcely expect anything more than opportunistic support. It's likely that once one set of "investors" pulls out (such as the Murdoch press), many others will flee. The fallout could be embarrassing, though not for Johnson himself, who will return to a life of parties, holidays and cracking risque jokes for money.

Instead, the shame that he's incapable of feeling will be shared among all those who collectively agreed to put him in power. Once it's finished, what the Johnson era will have illuminated is the complete vacuum of moral purpose or judgment at the heart of the Conservative party, establishment newspapers and individuals (including Cummings) who used him as their vehicle.

Some refused to invest at the outset. The [resignation of Johnson's own brother Jo](#) from the cabinet in September 2019 was as clear a red flag as one could imagine. Many others will make excuses for their support and rewrite the past. But the depressing fact remains that, for the time being, columnists, MPs, editors and voters are mainly on board because everyone else is. As Chuck Prince, then CEO of Citibank, famously said in July 2007, three weeks before the start of the credit crunch: "As long as the music plays, you've got to get up and dance. We're still dancing".

- William Davies is a sociologist and political economist. His latest book is This is Not Normal: The Collapse of Liberal Britain
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[Opinion](#)[Coronavirus](#)

Visit Britain, my friends said – just don't bring the plague back here

[Emma Brockes](#)



‘The one anomaly in the downward spiral of tourists are visitors from America.’ Photograph: Mark Thomas/REX/Shutterstock

Fri 19 Nov 2021 02.00 EST

Two weeks ago, before travelling from America to Britain, I shared my plans with a couple of friends. Both made faces at mention of Britain. One expressed amazement that I would consider travelling to a country widely perceived to have given up on trying to stop Covid; the other made a remark about community safety. “I’m triple vaxxed,” I said, taken aback by her vehemence, but this didn’t wash. “Just don’t bring it back here,” she said, darkly.

It is impossible to live abroad for any length of time – with the exception, perhaps, of moving to Gibraltar – and retain a sense of Britain as the centre of the universe, as a place so important it deserves the endless allowances it asks be made for it. Still, while I’m not under any illusions about my country’s shortcomings, it was strange to hear it referred to in the manner of the kid in class the others mock for spreading germs. Boris Johnson is ludicrous wherever you live, and no one in Britain seems able to settle on a mask policy. And yet the idea that, with international travel finally opening up again, it is unwise to the point of recklessness to visit the place triggered a tiny ping of defensiveness I had no idea was still in my system. We might suck in all sorts of ways – but nobody’s perfect.

As it turns out, data from Visit Britain, the national tourist board, broadly supports the knee jerk negativity of my friends. In line with other European countries, visitor numbers in Britain plunged during the worst months of the pandemic – from more than 40 million people a year in 2019 to just over 11 million in 2020. The difference with its European neighbours, however, is that while France and Germany seem to be bouncing back as destinations – year on year, French visitor numbers are up 34%, and warmer countries such as Spain and Greece are almost back to pre-pandemic levels of tourism – Britain has, incredibly, attracted even fewer visitors. By the end of 2021, it is predicted that only 7.7 million people will have visited the country this year, a drop of over 80% on pre-pandemic 2019. On the website CNN Travel last

week, a term first used for Britain by the New York Times last year, was dug up and reused: [Plague Island](#).

Seemingly, it's not just Covid numbers putting off visitors, although the convoluted requirements for getting in and out of the country – the fact that, unlike those vaxxed in Britain, visitors vaccinated abroad may be required to self-isolate for 10 days if “pinged” by NHS Test and Trace – have given travelling to Britain a frisson of Russian roulette. Complicated rules around unvaccinated kids entering the country are only changing on 22 November, much later than in most European countries, and images of maskless people on packed tube trains, and a maskless prime minister everywhere he goes, have done a lot of damage to Britain’s image.

There are other things, too. No one decides where to go on holiday on the basis of domestic policies like Brexit, but scare stories about supply chain issues and fuel shortages have probably depressed visitor numbers, too. Even without the pandemic, travel into Britain from Europe is harder these days, requiring a passport where formerly an ID card would do. There is a sense, viewed from a distance, that Britain is an ailing state, limping from one crisis to another, and definitely not somewhere you’d want to get stuck.

Oddly, given my friends’ horror at my plan to visit Britain, the one anomaly in the downward spiral of tourists is visitors from America. According to Visit Britain, since the [US reopened its borders](#) to British people on 8 November, reciprocal travel from the US has spiked; flight reservations from America to Britain have jumped back up to over 60% of pre-pandemic levels. Letting Britons into the US, finally, has sent a signal to Americans that the place is slightly less plaguey than it was. There is also, perhaps, a persistent image of Christmas in Britain as desirable. This seems particularly perverse, given how cold, dark, drunken and never-ending the festive season is in Britain, although for visitors, the gloominess and threat of quarantine does suggest one unexploited marketing angle: Britain as the perfect destination for those [nostalgic for the early pandemic](#).

- Emma Brockes is a Guardian columnist
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Canada

Canada floods: 18,000 people still stranded in ‘terrible, terrible disaster’

01:40

18,000 people stranded after floods and landslides in British Columbia – video

[Leyland Cecco in Toronto](#)

Thu 18 Nov 2021 21.12 EST

Emergency crews in western [Canada](#) were still trying to reach some 18,000 people stranded by landslides and struggling to find food among bare grocery store shelves after devastating flooding.

John Horgan, the premier of British Columbia province, declared an emergency on Wednesday. In an emotional address on Thursday, the province’s public safety minister, Mike Farnworth, said: “This has been a terrible terrible disaster but I know this: As British Columbians, as Canadians, we stick together. I want to come out of this. I’m going to build a stronger better province and a stronger and better country.”

Appearing to fight back tears, he said: “Canadians are supporting our province that we are one big family and absolutely that to me is something that we all instinctively know it is absolutely just a remarkable feature and facet of our communities, our people, our province and our country.”

One person is confirmed dead in [a landslide that swept vehicles off a road near the village of Pemberton](#), but with many others missing – and with searchers still combing through the debris – that number is almost certain to rise.

Meanwhile, communities in already-inundated areas braced for more rain next week

“I am not concerned about today’s rain. What I’m concerned about is next week, and what’s coming,” said Henry Braun, mayor of the city of Abbotsford where officials kept close watch over a pumping station. If the pumps failed, Braun warned, the results would be “catastrophic” for a community already grappling with thousands of drowned farm animals and a bill that could reach \$1bn to rebuild the city.

As the the military [joined the effort to rescue thousands left stranded](#) by the floods, residents say the recent days have exposed the vulnerability of small communities to natural disasters worsened by the climate crisis.

When Krystal Babcock got word that a wildfire was approaching her community of Merritt earlier this summer, she and her family prepared to leave as dark clouds of smoke blacked out the sky. The town was spared but when turbid flood waters rushed through it months later, Babcock knew she couldn’t leave.

[Canada flood map](#)

Her mother needed care and her father was without a vehicle. “I just sat there speechless. I didn’t know what to do. I didn’t know what to think. You’re told to grab what you can and get out. Some people didn’t even have time to grab anything.”

As officials issued a mandatory evacuation order, she stayed behind.

She and a handful of others are the few that remain in the mountain town submerged in muddy water earlier this week. The family has taken to using their motorhome as a restroom and are washing everything “pioneer-style” in basins after the town’s water treatment plant shut down. They have enough food and friends have passed them water and supplies at a police checkpoint near the town limits.



Evacuated residents of Merritt, BC, line up at a reception centre in Kelowna.
Photograph: Jeff McIntosh/AP

“We’re just trying to help each other out and survive,” she said. “But right now, we’re literally cut off from everything.”

But as she cares for her parents, Babcock has grown frustrated that more care wasn’t taken in helping people evacuate, especially those with greater needs who have difficulty moving.

With most roads closed, the majority of Merritt’s 7,000 residents travelled to nearby Kamloops, where they were told by emergency services that shelter and warm food was waiting. Soon, stories began trickling back of long lines to find shelter.

Melanie Racher arrived in Kamloops with her husband, family dog, diabetic mother and elderly father to find hundreds of people waiting ahead of them to be temporarily housed – and quickly hundreds lined up behind her. Despite promises from emergency services she would get a call, none came.

“We ended up sleeping in our car. And there was elderly people outside in the snow, sleeping, having to wait overnight”, she said. “And they never got phone calls back either.”

Frustrated, the family drove an hour and a half east to Vernon, where they rented a hotel room.

“We ended up depleting my dad’s savings account for the room. We’re very fortunate to have the money – but we can’t do this for months or weeks. We don’t know how long that’s going to happen,” she said.

With major highways washed out across the south-western areas of the province, travelers have remained trapped for days.

Allie Dexel was driving home over the weekend when she and her partner narrowly missed multiple slides that choked off traffic and destroyed sections of the highway.

“We spent a cold night in the car with no water left next to the mountain which had copious amounts of water coming down off of it onto the road,” she said. “We were worried there would be another landslide where we were, but we had nowhere else to go.”



Flood waters cover a neighborhood a day after severe rain prompted the evacuation of Merritt, BC, which has a population of 7,000. Photograph: Artur Gajda/Reuters

The couple eventually joined 300 other stranded travelers at Camp Hope, where they have been since Monday. Dexel has a spotty internet signal from a diesel generator, but no mobile reception. She sleeps on a mattress on the floor but considers herself lucky.

Food was recently brought in by helicopter, neighbors with chickens have provided eggs and the Chawathil and Skawahlook First Nation sent over canned salmon and a bag of rice. Members of the Lytton First Nation, who are also at Camp Hope [after being displaced by fires months ago](#), have also welcomed the newcomers.

“Initially I was so focussed on surviving and coping with being caught up in a natural disaster that I was only really aware of our immediate situation,” she said. “Every time I see a new image, I feel like I have to stare at it for minute to really believe it. It’s impossible not to reflect on climate change and worry about our future with the flooding and slides after the wildfires we had in the summer.”

As Babcock surveys her community, now covered by muddy debris and a fresh dusting of snow, she also worries how vulnerable her family will be in the future and how long they can stay.

Merritt is used to fires in the summer and floods in the spring as snow melts from the surrounding hills, but the speed and ferocity with which the water overtook the community – and a [fire season that stripped the surrounding hills of critical vegetation to help slow the water](#) – has left Babcock in shock.

“The water has never done anything like this. I would have never thought that that water could come that fast … There was no time before the town was turned into a river,” she said.

“This has been a really big eye opener for us. We were thinking of moving before, but this has pushed us even more. We all know the town is in a floodplain. But the fact that it can happen this fast from rain is just unbelievable.”

This article was amended on 19 November 2021. The state of emergency in British Columbia was declared on Wednesday, not on Thursday as an earlier version said. And the quotes from the province's public safety minister Mike Farnworth made during an address on Thursday were wrongly attributed to premier John Horgan.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/18/residents-brace-for-torrential-rains-in-already-flooded-western-canada>

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Rights and freedomWorkers' rights

‘We have fallen into a trap’: Qatar’s World Cup dream is a nightmare for hotel staff



A security guard (not interviewed for this story) at a five star hotel near Doha seeks shelter from the heat. Photograph: Pete Patisson

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[Pete Patisson in Doha](#)

Thu 18 Nov 2021 07.00 EST

When Fifa executives step on to the asphalt in Doha next November for the start of the 2022 [World Cup](#) finals, their next stop is likely to be the check-in at one of Qatar's glittering array of opulent hotels, built to provide the most luxurious possible backdrop to the biggest sporting event on earth.

Now, with a year to go before the first match, fans who want to emulate the lifestyle of the sporting elite can head [to Fifa's hospitality website](#) to plan their stay in the host nation. There they can scroll through a catalogue of exclusive, Fifa-endorsed accommodation, from boutique hotels to five-star resorts.

Yet behind the scenes of some of those hotels, while guests lounge around the pool or sip cocktails at the bar, migrant hotel workers claim they are struggling to survive on wages of £1 an hour.

The Guardian stayed at or visited seven of the hotels listed on Fifa's hospitality website and in interviews and conversations with more than 40 workers – employed directly and through sub-contractors – uncovered a

number of allegations of serious labour rights violations and low wages. The hotels have not been named to protect the identity of the workers who spoke to the Guardian.

Many workers alleged they worked extremely long hours, with some saying they had not had a day off for months. While they spent their days surrounded by the most luxurious of settings, some workers said they were housed in overcrowded rooms in stifling labour camps. A few workers claimed their passports had been confiscated. Many said their employer would not let them change jobs.

While rooms in the hotels listed on Fifa's hospitality site are charged at up to £820 a night when bought as part of a package, almost every worker the Guardian spoke to employed in housekeeping, security, valet service, cleaning or gardening said they earned less than £1.25 an hour. Many were working for less than £1 an hour.

Workers made multiple allegations of breaches of Qatar's labour law, which suggest shortcomings in Qatar's [labour reforms](#). These promised an end to abusive working conditions and the [kafala](#) sponsorship system that meant workers could not change jobs or leave the country without their employer's consent.

The workers' allegations also imply that Fifa has failed to effectively carry out basic checks on the hotels investigated by the Guardian that it had signed up to its catalogue, in breach of its own [human rights policy](#), which requires it to prevent labour abuses linked to its operations.

While most workers the Guardian spoke to received salaries in line with the new minimum wage, which came into force in March 2021, that wage still equates to only £1 an hour plus a small allowance for food and board.

The Guardian has also seen payslips from one worker employed directly by a hotel in Fifa's catalogue, which show that when the minimum wage was introduced his basic wage of 750 rials (£150) rose to 1,000 rials (£200) a month, but allowances for food or transport, for example, were cut by the same amount, meaning his salary stayed the same.

“Sometimes I ask myself why I came here,” he said. “The World Cup is a big thing and everyone enjoys it, but the way they treat us ... we are all tired of it.”

As darkness fell on one of the properties in Fifa’s brochure, guests retired indoors, leaving David*, a migrant worker from Africa, labouring near the swimming pool.

A night in a standard room in the hotel costs more than David earns in a month. He is desperate to change jobs but despite recent government legislation allowing this, he says said he is trapped. “My friends have tried to change jobs but our company refuses to let them go,” he said. “We have to accept it. Our boss does whatever he wants.”

My friends have tried to change jobs but our company refuses to let them go ... Our boss does whatever he wants

David, hotel worker

The hotel boasts sumptuous suites and a marble-lined lobby, but his own lodgings are starkly different: a small room shared with five others in a run-down compound on the edge of Doha.

Ranjit, a security guard, stood on duty nearby, as he had done for the previous 11 hours. Ranjit’s salary works out at about 80p an hour. Yet for five months he kept nothing; everything went towards paying off the illegal £1,300 fee he was forced to hand a recruitment agent back home to secure the job. “It’s a scam,” he said. “Here they suck your blood.”

Some workers across the seven hotels said they were happy with their jobs and the staff accommodation provided by their hotels. Yet the majority said they felt trapped between the demands of their employers and the need to earn money for their families back in their own countries.

At one hotel, a worker alleged that the management would only give bonuses to staff who handed over their passports. It is illegal for employers to keep workers’ passports in [Qatar](#).

“We have fallen into a trap and can’t get out,” said another worker at the hotel.

With 1.2 million fans expected during the World Cup, the hospitality sector can look forward to a lucrative tournament.

A few hotels demonstrated good practice by recruiting their staff directly through online adverts, rather than through labour agents who often extract extortionate and illegal fees from recruits, but even in these properties the Guardian spoke to staff who were paid very low wages.



A glittering array of new buildings have been built to accommodate the World Cup tournament. Photograph: Pete Patisson

The worst allegations of abuse were by workers employed through sub-contractors, in particular hotel security guards and gardeners.

At another hotel on Fifa’s website a Kenyan security guard was about to begin his 12-hour shift, which he said stretched beyond 15 hours when he added travel time to and from his labour camp.

If he works all month without a break he earns 2,000 rials (£400); far less than he was promised when he signed up for the job in Kenya. If he took a day off, his employer would cut his wages by 50 rials (£10). Not that he

often had that option. “During the summer we had to work for three months without a day off,” he said.

His passport has been confiscated by his company. “Maybe they think if you have your passport you can run away to another company,” he said. “We have no other option, so we take what is on the table.”

The Guardian’s findings have shone a spotlight directly on world football’s governing body, which has been [criticised by Amnesty International](#) for taking a “hands-off” approach to workers’ rights in the host nation. A spokesperson for Fifa said it “takes any claim concerning the rights of workers contributing to the hosting of Fifa events very seriously”.

The spokesperson said a dedicated team was implementing an audit and compliance system for companies involved in the delivery of the World Cup, including hotels, to ensure workers’ rights were respected. “While there is a need for continued improvement, we have already seen important progress by many hotels in Qatar in recent months,” the spokesperson added.

Isobel Archer, a specialist in labour rights in the Gulf at the Business & Human Rights Resource Centre (BHRRC), a charity headquartered in London, said hotels must recognise their responsibilities to all workers, including those employed through sub-contractors.

“If hotel brands put even half the effort into scrutinising their suppliers’ labour practices as they do the height of their reception desks or the density of guest room pillows, we’d see transformational change for hotel workers,” she said.

A report by the BHRRC this year also found evidence of widespread exploitation of hotel workers in Qatar which, it said, should be a “red flag” for football teams, fans and corporate sponsors.

A Qatari official said the government “takes any violation of its labour laws very seriously, including those in the hospitality sector”. The official said Qatar had a zero-tolerance approach towards violating companies, issuing harsh penalties that included fines and prison sentences.

“Awareness-raising initiatives have been launched to provide workers with information on how to raise complaints against their employer, and new mechanisms have been introduced to facilitate better access to justice,” the official added.

**Names have been changed or omitted to protect workers' identities.*

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/nov/18/we-have-fallen-into-a-trap-for-hotel-staff-qatar-world-cup-dream-is-a-nightmare>

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Nutrition

Man's severe migraines 'completely eliminated' on plant-based diet



The diet included lots of dark-green leafy vegetables, fruits, beans, oatmeal, and a daily green smoothie. Photograph: Elenathewise/Getty/iStockphoto

[Andrew Gregory](#) Health editor

Thu 18 Nov 2021 18.30 EST

Health experts are calling for more research into diet and migraines after doctors revealed a patient who had suffered severe and debilitating headaches for more than a decade completely eliminated them after adopting a plant-based diet.

He had tried prescribed medication, yoga and meditation, and cut out potential trigger foods in an effort to reduce the severity and frequency of his severe headaches – but nothing worked. The migraines made it almost impossible to perform his job, he said.

But within a month of starting a plant-based diet that included lots of dark-green leafy vegetables, his migraines disappeared. The man has not had a migraine in more than seven years, and cannot remember the last time he had a headache. The case was reported in the journal [BMJ Case Reports](#).

Doctors in the US who treated the photographer suggested it might be worth adopting a plant-based diet to ease the symptoms of chronic migraine.

But other independent experts cautioned that because the report was a single case it was impossible to generalise the finding and should not be taken as a solution for all people with migraines.

More than a billion people worldwide experience migraines. While drugs can help prevent and treat them, a growing body of evidence suggests diet may also offer an effective alternative without any of the side effects associated with some of the drugs, the report's authors said.

Writing in BMJ Case Reports, the 60-year-old patient, whose identity was not disclosed, said: "Before I changed my diet, I was suffering six to eight debilitating migraines a month, each lasting up to 72 hours. Most days, I was either having a migraine or recovering from one."

After 12 years of migraines, nothing had made a difference. "I was desperate," he said.

Six months before his referral to a lifestyle medicine clinic in New York, the man's migraines had become chronic, occurring on between 18 and 24 days of every month.

"However, within one month of beginning a nutrient-dense plant-based diet that included primarily lots of dark-green leafy vegetables, fruits, beans, oatmeal, and a daily green smoothie, I was able to get off both medications.

"Now the migraine medications have expired, and I have not had a migraine in seven years. I can't even remember the last time I had a headache. I am no longer a prisoner in my own body. I have my life back."

The report's authors advised the man to adopt the Low Inflammatory Foods Everyday (Life) diet, a nutrient-dense, whole food, plant-based diet.

It includes eating at least five ounces (142g) by weight of raw or cooked dark green leafy vegetables every day, drinking one 32-ounce (946ml) daily green smoothie, and limiting intake of whole grains, starchy vegetables, oils, and animal protein, particularly dairy and red meat.

Within two months, the frequency of his migraine attacks had fallen to just one day a month. The length and severity of the attacks had also lessened. After three months his migraines stopped completely. They haven't returned in over seven years.

Prof Gunter Kuhnle, a professor of nutrition and food science at the University of Reading, who was not involved in the case, said: "This is a case report and therefore it is impossible to generalise the finding. Migraine is a debilitating condition and it is important to find ways to treat and manage it. Diet can play an important role in the management of many diseases, and some foods are known to trigger migraine."

"Bioactive compounds found in dark-green leafy vegetables and other foods might have an important role in the management of many diseases, but in order to make definitive statements and recommendations, considerably more research is needed."

Dr Duane Mellor, a registered dietitian and senior teaching fellow at Aston University's medical school, said the report was "interesting" but "cannot be taken as a solution for all people with migraines".

"The diet that was used was one which is largely in line with many countries' dietary recommendations and included eating more vegetables – especially dark-green leafy vegetables."

"The problem with this type of report is that there is no control or comparison intervention, it could be an effect of the diet which was started, but also it could be a response to something they were no longer eating or even just the behavioural effect of a change in diet which may have led to the reduction in migraines."

A separate analysis published in the journal BMJ Global Health on Thursday shows the global rise in the red and processed meat trade over the past 30

years is linked to a sharp increase in diet-related ill-health.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2021/nov/18/mans-severe-migraines-completely-eliminated-on-plant-based-diet>

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Lithuania

China condemns opening of Taiwan office in Lithuania as ‘egregious act’



Taiwan opened the representation office in Lithuania's capital Vilnius Thursday, in a move angering Beijing. Photograph: AP

Agencies

Thu 18 Nov 2021 21.38 EST

Taiwan has opened a de facto embassy in [Lithuania](#) in a diplomatic breakthrough for the island, brushing aside Beijing's strong opposition to the move which again expressed its anger and warned of consequences.

Taipei announced on Thursday it had formally opened an office in Lithuania using the name [Taiwan](#), a significant diplomatic departure that defied a pressure campaign by Beijing.

Lithuania revealed in July it had agreed to let self-ruled Taiwan open a representative office using its name, the island's first new diplomatic outpost

in [Europe](#) in 18 years.

That move prompted a fierce rebuke by China, [which withdrew its ambassador](#) to Lithuania and demanded Vilnius do the same, which it eventually did.

Other Taiwan offices in Europe and the United States use the name of the city Taipei, avoiding a reference to the island itself, which [China](#) claims as its own territory.

China has stepped up efforts to get other countries to limit their interactions with Taiwan, or cut them off. Only 15 countries have formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan.

China condemned the opening as an “extremely egregious act,” saying any move seeking Taiwanese independence was “doomed to fail”.

“We demand that the Lithuanian side immediately correct its wrong decision,” the Chinese foreign ministry said in a statement.

Beijing has also been angered by Lithuania’s decision to open its own representative office in Taiwan, though no firm date has been set for that yet. Taiwan’s foreign ministry said the opening of the office would “chart a new and promising course” for ties between it and Lithuania.

There was huge potential for cooperation in industries including semiconductors, lasers and fintech, it said. “Taiwan will cherish and promote this new friendship based on our shared values.”

China’s foreign ministry said the move was a “crude inference” in the country’s internal affairs.

“The Lithuanian side is responsible for all consequences arising therefrom,” it said.

Taiwan’s foreign ministry said the Lithuania office would be headed by Eric Huang, currently Taipei’s chief of mission in neighbouring Latvia.

“We are very happy that we have the opportunity to be a facilitator and promoter for the relations between Taiwan and Lithuania,” Huang said.

On the significance of using the name Taiwan, he said it was “of course very meaningful”.

“We will not emphasise too much about the geopolitical context. As the representative office of my country, what I am focused on is to promote a substantive relationship.”

The opening of the Vilnius office is the latest sign that some Baltic and central European countries are seeking closer relations with Taiwan, even if that angers China.

Last month a delegation of Taiwanese officials visited Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Lithuania, sparking anger from Beijing.

The dispute with Lithuania over Taiwan has also sucked in the United States, which has offered its support to Vilnius to withstand Chinese pressure.

Many other countries maintain de facto embassies in Taipei, including several of Lithuania’s fellow EU member states, Britain, Australia and the United States.

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Belarus

British soldiers to give more support to Poland amid Belarus border crisis



A view of a deserted migrants' camp on the Belarusian-Polish border.
Photograph: Leonid Shcheglov/BELTA/AFP/Getty Images

[Dan Sabbagh](#) Defence and security editor

Thu 18 Nov 2021 17.00 EST

A hundred British military engineers are to provide practical support to help Poland tighten up its eastern border with [Belarus](#), where thousands of migrants had been attempting to cross in often freezing temperatures.

The plan was confirmed by the defence secretary, [Ben Wallace](#), on a visit to Warsaw, in which he said Belarus was making a “conscious attempt” to destabilise Poland and all of Europe by encouraging migrants to the border.

“The best way to respond is to work together hand in hand, not only within Nato, but simply as good friends and partners,” Wallace said, and accused

Belarus's president, Alexander Lukashenko, of a "disgusting attempt to use people as a weapon".

A small team of British soldiers completed a study visit on Thursday and are working up detailed plans to strengthen the border fence, which has been repeatedly breached by migrants from the Middle East, desperate to reach the EU. Once the plans are finalised, work is expected to start later this month, [Poland](#) said.

The minister was speaking at a press conference with his counterpart Mariusz Błaszczyk, who said "the support of British soldiers" would help ensure that "no one who tries to cross the border illegally will be able to do it".

Belarus appeared to be trying to ease political tensions by [removing its hastily constructed migrant camps](#) at the border, although that could prompt people previously located there to disperse without shelter. Thirteen people have already died during the crisis, mostly from exposure, including a [one-year-old Syrian boy](#) whose family had made it across to Poland.

Aid agencies [have criticised the UK](#) for focusing on border security rather than providing humanitarian assistance, in an agreement that also cements ties between two countries who have been involved in their own disputes with the EU.

Poland has also refused to accept help from Frontex, the EU's own border agency, preferring to declare a state of emergency and reach a wider military agreement aimed at better securing itself against its eastern neighbours.

Warsaw said it was intending to buy British-made missiles and jointly develop air defence system intended to counter Russia. The deal is likely to be worth around £3bn to manufacturers based in the UK, including missile maker MBDA.

It is the second arms deal that the UK has discussed in a week. On Tuesday it was confirmed that the [UK would provide £1.7bn in loans to Ukraine](#) so Kyiv can boost its naval capability in the Black Sea by buying two

minesweepers from British supplier Babcock, and jointly build a frigate and eight other missile-bearing ships.

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HS2

DfT says rail benefits to come 10 years early amid fury over cuts to HS2



The revised plan is expected to confirm that the eastern leg of HS2 will be scrapped between the east Midlands and Leeds. Photograph: Tolga Akmen/AFP/Getty Images

[Gwyn Topham](#) Transport correspondent

[@GwynTopham](#)

Thu 18 Nov 2021 11.30 EST

No 10 has said its downgraded rail plan will bring faster connections a decade earlier, amid fury in northern England and the Midlands over the scrapping of both the eastern leg of the high-speed HS2 and a promised new fast line from [Manchester to Leeds](#).

The long-delayed integrated rail plan (IRP), being published later on Thursday, is expected to confirm the axing of key schemes to save billions

of pounds, after repeated pledges from Boris Johnson and others to “level up” by building new high-speed lines between northern cities.

Instead, under the £96bn rail plan [HS2](#) will stop in the east Midlands, at an existing station rather than a new planned hub, while the main TransPennine route at the heart of what was due to be Northern Powerhouse Rail will consist mainly of upgrades to existing track rather than a new line between Manchester and Leeds.

Department for [Transport](#) (DfT) sources said the plan would transform passenger journeys between the Midlands and the north, but leaked details have already been widely described as a “betrayal” of the regions.

Johnson reaffirmed his commitment to building HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail in 2020, but the eastern leg has been in doubt since then with a review of the exact route.

The DfT said the IRP plans would still deliver more capacity and quicker journeys “in a way that presented value for money for the taxpayer” and would mean “passengers and consumers benefit from tangible changes more quickly”.

Promised upgrades include full electrification of the Midland mainline – a scheme scrapped halfway through by the government in 2017 – and of the existing TransPennine line, as well as more investment in the east coast.

Another £360m will be spent to roll out more contactless, integrated ticketing of the kind seen in London and the south-east across commuter transport networks.

00:56

Boris Johnson denies 'betrayal' of northern England as HS2 plan scaled back – video

Johnson said the rail plan would be “the biggest transport investment programme in a century, delivering meaningful transport connections for more passengers across the country, more quickly – with both high-speed

journeys and better local services, it will ensure no town or city is left behind”.

But Labour said it would be “crumbs” compared with what was promised. Jim McMahon, shadow transport secretary, said: “It’s laughable and insulting to expect people to be satisfied with watered down schemes and crumbs from the table, after putting their faith in a prime minister who has gone back on his word at the first opportunity.”

The Treasury has been seeking to rein in spending on infrastructure amid wider concern about the costs of HS2. The [Oakervee review](#) said in 2018 that HS2 should be built in full but warned the final bill for the whole network could reach £106bn.

The HS2 line from London and Birmingham is under construction, while the line on from Crewe to Manchester should still be built under the new plan.

The line from Birmingham and Leeds is expected to be ended at East Midlands Parkway rather than a planned new hub at Toton, between Nottingham and Derby.

Lilian Greenwood, the MP for Nottingham South and a former chair of the transport select committee, said she was “furious but not surprised” at the move. She said: “For a decade authorities have been working how to maximise the benefits for the entire region from our hub station at Toton and those plans are being thrown into the bin.”

The rail engineer and writer Gareth Dennis agreed, and said the plan, by not building new lines and concentrating on engineering upgrades, risked decades of disruption to services. He said HS2 would have segregated high-speed trains and allowed more capacity to be released to local services and freight, adding: “This is going to make railways worse in the north and Midlands than they are now.”

Mick Whelan, the general secretary of the train drivers’ union, Aslef, said it was “levelling down”, adding: “This is not the green, efficient, modern railway of the future we were promised.”

Bradford, one of the worst-connected cities in England, had hoped to be at the centre on the new line planned by northern leaders. Naz Shah, the Labour MP for Bradford West, said the move would be “pulling the whole damn rug from under our feet”.

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Rail transport

Boris Johnson's rail plan: what's in it and what was promised



The construction of the HS2 line from Birmingham to Leeds will no longer go ahead. Photograph: Leon Neal/Getty Images

*[Gwyn Topham](#) Transport correspondent
[@GwynTopham](#)*

Thu 18 Nov 2021 07.58 EST

Ministers say the £96bn integrated rail plan [published on Thursday](#) will deliver improvements quicker than original plans for the HS2 eastern leg and Northern Powerhouse Rail.

In a foreword to the plan, the prime minister, [Boris Johnson](#), said it been “clear that the plans – first drawn up 11 years ago – had to change”, while Covid had “altered some of the assumptions on which these schemes were designed”.

But critics in the north and Midlands say it is a “rail betrayal” and a watered down version of what was promised.

These are the key changes:

HS2

The plan: The high-speed line heading north-west will be built but the eastern leg from Birmingham to Sheffield and Leeds has been scrapped beyond the east Midlands. A brand new hub station at Toton, outside Nottingham, will also not be built for [HS2](#), but will be partially developed for local services. HS2 trains will continue on existing lines into Nottingham and Derby.

What was promised: Originally, a full Y-shaped network linking London, Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds. Preliminary work on the eastern leg was paused after the Oakervee review.

Northern Powerhouse Rail

The plan: Upgrades to the existing TransPennine line – much of which was separately promised to be delivered as part of a programme of improvements by Network Rail under Chris Grayling. It will bring full electrification and some new track. A new section of high-speed track will link Warrington and Marsden to enable faster east-west connections.

Bradford-Leeds links are to be electrified and improved. Leeds is to get a new urban transit system.

What was promised: A high-speed line linking Manchester and Leeds, at the heart of plans drawn up by northern leaders and transport authorities for improved east-west connections across the region. Northern planners said the line should go through under-served Bradford.

Electrification and upgrades

The plan: The Midlands mainline, linking London and Sheffield, will be electrified in full and more work will be done to improve speed and capacity on the east coast line.

What was promised: The Midlands mainline electrification was in progress but stopped in 2017. East coast upgrade work is in long-term progress and not yet clear if it is new money and additional projects.

Integrated and contactless ticketing

The plan: Funding of £360m to introduce London-style contactless ticketing and integrated fares, linking some bus and tram networks.

What was promised: Reform of ticketing to improve journeys and connections has been long sought by regional transport authorities and agreed in principle, but not delivered, by ministers.

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‘Always neglected’: Bradford braced for bad news in rail plan



Bradford is Britain’s seventh biggest city but according to a national data analysis of rail journeys it is the worst connected major city in the UK.
Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

[*Mark Brown*](#) North of England correspondent

Thu 18 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

“We’re out of it … again,” said retired yoga teacher Jane Ayers, as she walked out of the railway station concourse on an unseasonably mild Wednesday morning. “As per usual. [Bradford](#) is always neglected.”

Ayers, 82, was talking about [Northern Powerhouse Rail \(NPR\)](#), the plan to transform trans-Pennine services between Liverpool and Leeds, which many fear will now not happen.

The government will announce its much anticipated integrated rail plan on Thursday. [Reports have suggested](#) it has dropped its commitment to the eastern leg of HS2 to Leeds and may not fully go ahead with NPR, which would go through Bradford.

The government has insisted it will be the biggest ever public investment in the rail network, costing £96bn, and will transform journeys across the Midlands and the north. “If we are to see levelling up in action now, we must rapidly transform the services that matter to people most,” the prime minister has said. But local politicians are braced for bad news.



Jane Ayers: ‘It was never going to happen.’ Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

“It was never going to happen,” Ayers said. “It is all just a game this shower of a government play all of the time.

“I’m not a dyed in the wool Bradfordian. I’ve only been here 55 years ... I am just sorry for Bradford.”

Bradford is Britain’s seventh biggest city but according to [a national data analysis of rail journeys](#) it is the worst connected major city in the UK.

The problem is a lack of direct routes and slow trains. Incredibly, campaigners say, it was quicker to travel to places from Bradford on steam trains than it is today. Leeds takes about 20 minutes. That’s two minutes longer, [campaigners say, than it took in 1910](#). The Edwardians could get on a train from Bradford to Wakefield and it would take 30 minutes. Today it’s 48 minutes.

Slow trains and bad connections were mentioned time and again by travellers at Bradford’s dated Interchange station.

Student Amani Alhajri, 22, gets the train from [Leeds](#) to Bradford. “I’m getting used to it,” she said. “It quite often gets cancelled and it is busy most of the time. I have missed lectures because the train has been cancelled, which is awful.”



Haleema Usamot: ‘If you want to go anywhere you have to take the train to Leeds.’ Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

Haleema Usamot, a 17-year-old student, goes the other way and said it was “always packed. The past two weeks have been really bad. It’s been late all the time because of train works at Leeds.”

She said the problem was connections. “There’s not many places you can get the train to. If you want to go anywhere you have to take the train to Leeds.”

Chris Oakley said it was a problem having two stations in the city. He was travelling from his home in Skipton to his office in Manchester and it involved a train to Forster Square, a walk, and then the hour journey to Manchester. It takes two hours.

“The trains are slow but to be honest as long as they are frequent and the trains are decent then I don’t mind. I can do work on the train. All this stuff about speeding things up by 10 minutes is over-rated. It’s frequency and comfort which is more important.”

Tracy Shaw, a civil servant who lives in Bradford, said her frustration was short trains. “I got the train to Manchester and there were only two carriages and there were people heading to the football. So it’s 10.30 in the morning and you’ve got people drinking around you.”



Chris Oakley: ‘All this stuff about speeding things up by 10 minutes is over-rated.’ Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

Paul Shearon, a retired IT manager who lives in Brighouse, said: “It is a city of half a million and it’s got the same service as Halifax. It probably is the worst connected city and I would like to see it brought up to the status of a city this size.”

If he wanted to go to Scotland he would always go from Huddersfield. “That’s not even a city. Huddersfield, Leeds and Wakefield are all miles better than here.”



Melissa is unhappy about how early in the evening the trains stop running.
Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

Melissa, from Todmorden, who declined to give her surname, uses local train services regularly. “They are a bit crap. There is all this talk about [HS2](#) but they haven’t invested in local networks. What has always irritated me tremendously is that the trains stop really early in the evening. If I want to go to Manchester or Bradford it is really hard to get back on public transport later in the evening.”

Taxi driver Mohammed Khan said NPR should happen but wouldn’t. Most people drove rather than relying on trains. “The roads are congested all the time. Any accident on the M62 and it has an effect on everything and everyone. There is too much traffic.”

Campaigners argue that NPR would boost the Bradford district economy by £30bn over 10 years, create 27,000 jobs and cut 44,000 daily car journeys between the city and Leeds.

Not everyone was gloomy about Bradford’s rail issues. Josie and Steve Brown from Gildersome are retired and have mobility issues and don’t mind how slow the trains are. “I suppose if you’re chasing your arse to work, it

matters,” said Steve. “It doesn’t matter to us whether we get to Chester at 12 or 2pm.”

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Illustration: Klawe Rzeczy/The Guardian

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Ten ways to confront the climate crisis without losing hope

Illustration: Klawe Rzeczy/The Guardian

by [Rebecca Solnit](#)

Thu 18 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

The world as we knew it is coming to an end, and it's up to us how it ends and what comes after. It's the end of the age of fossil fuel, but if the fossil-fuel corporations have their way the ending will be delayed as long as possible, with as much carbon burned as possible. If the rest of us prevail, we will radically reduce our use of those fuels by 2030, and almost entirely by 2050. We will meet climate change with real change, and defeat the fossil-fuel industry in the next nine years.

If we succeed, those who come after will look back on the age of fossil fuel as an age of corruption and poison. The grandchildren of those who are young now will hear horror stories about how people once burned great mountains of poisonous stuff dug up from deep underground that made children sick and birds die and the air filthy and the planet heat up.

We must remake the world, and we can remake it better. The Covid-19 pandemic is proof that if we take a crisis seriously, we can change how we live, almost overnight, dramatically, globally, digging up great piles of money from nowhere, like the \$3tn the US initially threw at the pandemic.

The climate summit that just concluded in Glasgow didn't get us there, though many good and even remarkable [things happened](#). Those people who in many cases hardly deserve the term "leader" were pulled forward by what activists and real leaders from climate-vulnerable countries demanded; they were held back by the vested interests and their own attachment to the status quo and the profit to be made from continued destruction. As the ever-acute David Roberts put it: "Whether and how fast [India phases out coal](#) has nothing at all to do with what its diplomat says in Glasgow and everything to do with domestic Indian politics, which have their own logic and are only faintly affected by international politics."

Six months ago, the usually cautious International Energy Agency called for a stop to investment in new fossil-fuel projects, declaring: "The world has a viable pathway to building a global energy sector with net-zero emissions in 2050, but it is narrow and requires an unprecedented transformation of how energy is produced, transported and used globally." Pressure from activists pushed and prodded the IEA to this point, and 20 nations [committed at Cop26](#) to stop subsidies for overseas fossil fuel projects.

The emotional toll of the climate crisis has become an urgent crisis of its own. It's best met, I believe, by both being well grounded in the facts, and working towards achieving a decent future – and by acknowledging there are grounds for fear, anxiety and depression in both the looming possibilities and in institutional inaction. What follows is a set of tools I've found useful both for the inward business of attending to my state of mind, and for the outward work of trying to do something about the climate crisis – which are not necessarily separate jobs.

1. Feed your feelings on facts

Beware of feelings that aren't based on facts. I run across a lot of emotional responses to inaccurate analysis of the situation. Sometimes these are responses to nothing more than a vague apprehension that we're doomed.

One of the curious things about the climate crisis is that the uninformed are often more grim and fatalistic than the experts in the field – the scientists, organisers and policymakers who are deep in the data and the politics. Too many people like to spread their despair, saying: "It's too late" and "There's nothing we can do". These are excuses for doing nothing, and erase those doing something. That's not what the experts say.

We still have time to choose the best rather than the worst scenarios, though the longer we wait the harder it gets, and the more dramatic the measures are required. We know what to do, and that knowledge is getting more refined and precise, but also more creative, all the time. The only obstacles are political and imaginative.

2. Pay attention to what's already happening

Another oft-heard complaint is "nobody is doing anything about this". But this is said by people who are not looking at what so many others are doing so passionately and often effectively. The climate movement has grown in power, sophistication and inclusiveness, and has won many battles. I have been around long enough to remember when the movement against what was then called "global warming" was small and mild-mannered, preaching the gospel of Priuses and compact fluorescent lightbulbs, and mostly being ignored.

One of the victories of climate activism – and consequences of dire climate events – is that a lot more people are concerned about climate than they were even a few years ago, from ordinary citizens to powerful politicians. The climate movement – which is really thousands of movements with thousands of campaigns around the world – has had enormous impact.

In the US, where I live, a lot is happening at the local, state and federal levels. Local measures can seem insignificant, but often they scale up. For example, a few years ago the Californian city of Berkeley decided to ban the installation of gas appliances in new buildings. Berkeley is one small city, so it would be easy to dismiss the impact – but now more than 50 California municipalities [have followed](#) suit, and all-electric could become standard far beyond the state. In the UK, the group Insulate Britain has [staged blockades](#) while demanding that the government improve building insulation standards, which is something I never imagined people would protest about. But insulation is a survival and justice issue in this coming winter of rising fuel costs and scarcity, as well as a climate issue.

There are organisations, initiatives and legislation on various scales, and there is a scale that is right for everyone. Sometimes it's getting your college to divest, or your city to change building regulations, or your state to adopt an aggressive clean-energy plan (as Oregon did this summer) or ban fracking (as New York State did a few years ago) or protect an old-growth forest.

If some past victories are hard to see, it's because there's nothing left behind to see: the coal-fired plant that was never built, the pipeline that was stopped, the drilling that was banned, the trees that weren't chopped down. As my friend Daniel Jubelirer of the [Sunrise Project](#) advises, if you find the sheer volume of data and issues overwhelming, join up, learn as you go and perhaps pick an area to master.



A climate protest organised by the Indigenous Environmental Network, the Sunrise Movement and other groups in Washington DC, October 2021.
Photograph: Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images

3. Look beyond the individual and find good people

When I ask people what they're doing about the climate crisis, they often cite virtuous lifestyle choices, such as being vegan or not flying. Those are good things to do. They are also relatively insignificant. The world must change, but it won't happen because one person does or does not consume something – and I would prefer we not imagine ourselves primarily as consumers.

As citizens of the Earth, we have a responsibility to participate. As citizens massed together, we have the power to affect change, and it is only on that scale that enough change can happen. Individual choices can slowly scale up, or sometimes be catalysts, but we've run out of time for the slow. It is not the things we refrain from doing, but those things we do passionately, and together, that will count the most. And personal change is not separate from collective change: in a municipality powered by clean energy, for instance, everyone is a clean-energy consumer.

If you live on a diet of mainstream news – which focuses on celebrities and elected politicians, and reserves the term “powerful” for high-profile and wealthy individuals – you will be told in a thousand ways that you have no role in the fate of the Earth, beyond your consumer choices.

Movements, campaigns, organisations, alliances and networks are how ordinary people become powerful – so powerful that you can see they inspire terror in elites, governments and corporations alike, who devote themselves to trying to stifle and undermine them. But these places are also where you meet dreamers, idealists, altruists – people who believe in living by principle. You meet people who are hopeful, or even more than hopeful: great movements often begin with people fighting for things that seem all but impossible at the outset, whether an end to slavery, votes for women or rights for LGTBQ+ people.

Values and emotions are contagious, and that applies whether you’re hanging out with the Zapatistas or the Kardashians. I have often met people who think the time I have spent around progressive movements was pure dutifulness or dues-paying, when in fact it was a reward in itself – because to find idealism amid indifference and cynicism is that good.

4. The future is not yet written

People who proclaim with authority what is or is not going to happen just bolster their own sense of self and sabotage your belief in what is possible. There was, according to conventional wisdom, never going to be marriage equality in Ireland or Spain, or a US president [honouring](#) trans visibility day, or Canada ceding 20% of its land mass to indigenous self-governance [as Nunavut](#), or an end to Britain running on coal, or Costa Rica coming close to 100% clean energy. The historical record tells us that the unexpected happens regularly – and by unexpected, I mean unexpected to people who thought they knew what was going to happen.

In 2015, Christiana Figueres led 192 nations to a successful global climate treaty in Paris. But when she was first asked to take on the job, she blurted out that it was impossible. She took it on anyway, and the night before the treaty was announced, people around me were still saying it was impossible,

and preparing for failure. Then it succeeded – not in finishing the job, but in moving it forward.

The future is not yet written. We are writing it now.



A wind turbine near Wolfsburg, Germany. Photograph: Felipe Trueba/EPA

5. Indirect consequences matter

In September, Harvard University announced it would [divest from fossil fuel](#). It took organisers 10 years to make that happen. For more than nine years you could have looked at the campaign as unsuccessful, even though it was part of a global movement that got trillions of dollars out of fossil-fuel investments, recast the fossil-fuel industry as criminal and raised ethical questions for all investors to consider. This month, Bloomberg News [reported](#) that the “cost of capital” for fossil fuel and renewable energy projects used to be comparable, but thanks largely to shareholder and divestment activists, the cost for fossil projects is now about 20%, while that for renewables is between 3% and 5%. This affects what gets funded and what is profitable.

The campaign against the Keystone XL oil pipeline was, for many years, a jumble of wins and losses and stalls and setbacks – and then finally the

pipeline was completely halted when Joe Biden came into office. This was not a gift from Biden; it was a debt being paid to the climate activists who had made it an important goal. Patience counts, and change is not linear. It radiates outward like ripples from a stone thrown into a pond. It matters in ways no one anticipates. Indirect consequences can be some of the most important ones.

The Keystone XL campaign was long and hard, and the heroes who fought it did a lot of things besides stop one pipeline. They made the Alberta tar sands – one of the filthiest fossil fuel operations on Earth – far better recognised as an environmental atrocity and a global climate bomb that had to be defused. The organisers built beautiful coalitions between farmers, Native landholders, local communities and an international movement. They taught us why pipelines are a pressure point, and inspired people to fight and win many other pipeline battles.

The Keystone XL campaign may have helped inspire the Lakota leaders at Standing Rock who stood up against the [Dakota Access pipeline](#) in 2016. That struggle didn't stop the pipeline but it may yet. It's not over. And it did so much else. A friend from Standing Rock told me it gave hope to the Native youth there and elsewhere, and a sense of their own agency and value that mattered. It led to many remarkable things, including a huge intertribal gathering and the healing of old wounds – notably when hundreds of former US soldiers got down on their knees to apologise for what the US army did to Native Americans.

And it inspired one young woman, who had driven there from New York with her friends, to decide to run for office. You wouldn't have heard of her then, but you have now: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. As a congresswoman, she did so much to amplify the need for a Green New Deal. The deal hasn't passed Congress, but it did change the sense of what is possible, and it undid the old false divide between jobs and the environment. It seems to have shaped the Biden administration's emphasis on green jobs as part of an energy transition, and as such it's out there in the world now in the form of the [Build Back Better](#) legislation plan.

If you follow the ripples from Standing Rock, to a young woman's decision to run for Congress, and the Sunrise Movement's espousal of a new

framework on climate action, you can see indirect change – which demonstrates that our actions often matter, even when we don't achieve our primary goal immediately. And even if we do, the impact may be far more complex than we had anticipated.



Activists and Indigenous community members protest against the Enbridge Line 3 pipeline from Alberta, Canada in Solvay, Minnesota, US, June 2021.
Photograph: Kerem Yucel/AFP/Getty Images

6. Imagination is a superpower

There is a sad failure of imagination at the root of this crisis. An inability to perceive both the terrible and the wonderful. An inability to imagine how all these things are connected, how what we burn in our powerplants and car engines pumps out carbon dioxide that goes up into the sky. Some cannot see that the world, which has been so stable for 10,000 years, is now destabilised, and full of new perils and dangerous feedback loops. Others cannot imagine that we can actually do what is necessary – which is nothing less than building a new and better world. This is one of the remarkable things about this crisis: though the early climate movement emphasised austerity, a lot of what we need to give up is poison, destruction, injustice and devastation. The world could be far richer by many measures if we do

what this catastrophe demands of us. If we don't, catastrophes such as the violent flooding that recently cut off Canada's largest port and stranded the city of Vancouver are reminders that the cost of addressing the crisis is dwarfed by the cost of not doing so.

7. Check the facts (and watch out for liars)

Thinking about the future requires imagination, but also precision. Waves of climate lies have washed over the public for decades. The age of climate denial is largely over, succeeded by more [subtle distortions](#) of the facts, and by false solutions from those who seek to benefit from stasis.

Oil companies are spending a lot on advertising that features outright lies and the hyping of minor projects or false solutions. These lies seek to prevent what must happen, which is that carbon must stay in the ground, and that everything from food production to transportation must change.

There is a lot of fuss about carbon capture technologies – and a very nice old joke that the best carbon capture technology of all is called a tree. The nonexistent technology of large-scale, human-made carbon capture is often brought up to suggest that we can keep producing those emissions. We cannot. [Geoengineering](#) is another distraction beloved by technocrats, apparently because they can imagine big, centralised technological innovation, but not the impact of countless small, localised changes.

In 2017, Mark Jacobson of Stanford University's [Solutions Project](#) concluded that almost every nation on Earth already has the natural resources it needs to transition to renewable energy. "We have the solutions" read a banner at the huge 2014 New York City climate march, and they have only grown more effective since then.



A rally in support of the Global Climate Strike in Quezon City, Philippines, 2019. Photograph: Rolex dela Peña/EPA

8. History can guide us

The American left, someone once told a friend of mine, is bad at celebrating its victories. (The same may well go for the left in other countries, too.) We have victories. Some of them are very large, and are why your life is the shape it is. The victories are reminders that we are not powerless, and our work is not futile. The future is not yet written, but by reading the past, we see patterns that can help us shape that future.

To remember that things were different, and how they were changed, is to be equipped to make change – and to be hopeful, because hope lies in the possibility of things being different. Despair and depression often come from the sense that nothing will change, or that we have no capacity to make that change.

Sometimes it helps to understand that this very moment is astonishing. Early in this century, we had no adequate alternative to fossil fuel. Wind and solar were relatively expensive and inefficient, and battery technology was still in its infancy. The most unnoticed revolution of our era is an energy revolution:

solar and wind costs have plummeted as new, more efficient designs have been invented, and they are now widely considered to be more than adequate to power our future.

The scale of change in the past 50 years is evidence of the power of movements. The nation I was born into 60 years ago had tiny lesbian and gay rights movements, nothing resembling a feminist movement, a Black-led civil rights movement whose victories mostly lay ahead, and a small conservation movement that had not yet morphed into an environmental movement – and few recognised the systemic interdependences at the heart of environmentalism. A lot of assumptions were yet to be dismantled; a lot of alternatives yet to be born.

9. Remember the predecessors

We are the first generations to face a catastrophe of the reach, scale and duration of climate change. But we are far from the first to live under some kind of threat, or to fear what is to come. I often think of those who were valiant and principled in the death camps of Nazi Germany. I think of my Latin American neighbours, some of whom braved terrifying migrations, walking across the desert for days to escape death squads, dictatorships and climate catastrophe. I think of the Indigenous people of the Americas, who already lived through the end of their worlds when their lands were stolen, their populations decimated and colonial domination disrupted their lives and cultures in every possible way. What it took to persevere under those conditions is almost unimaginable, and also all around us.

Indigenous leadership has mattered tremendously for the climate movement, in specific campaigns and as ongoing testimony that there are other ways to think about time, nature, value, wealth and human roles. A [report](#) that came out this summer demonstrated how powerful and crucial Native leadership has been for the climate movement: “Indigenous resistance has stopped or delayed greenhouse gas pollution equivalent to at least one-quarter of annual US and Canadian emissions.”



An old growth forest in Vancouver Island, Canada. Photograph: Cole Burston/AFP/Getty Images

10. Don't neglect beauty

Climate chaos makes us fear that we will lose what is beautiful in this world. I want to say that in 50 years, and 100 years, the moon will rise, and be beautiful, and shine its silvery light across the sea, even if the coastline isn't where it used to be. In 50 years, the light on the mountains, and the way every raindrop on a blade of grass refracts light will still be beautiful. Flowers will bloom and they will be beautiful; children will be born, and they, too, will be beautiful.

Only when it is over will we truly see the ugliness of this era of fossil fuels and rampant economic inequality. Part of what we are fighting for is beauty, and this means giving your attention to beauty in the present. If you forget what you're fighting for, you can become miserable, bitter and lost.

For a long time we have told horror stories about ice and coral reefs and violent weather events to try to wake people up to the fact that the climate is changing. I have a different fear now – that this chaos will come to seem

inevitable, and even normal, as war does to someone who has lived their life in wartime.

I believe we now need to tell stories about how beautiful, how rich, how harmonious the Earth we inherited was, how beautiful its patterns were, and in some times and places still are, and how much we can do to restore this and to protect what survives. To take that beauty as a sacred trust, and celebrate the memory of it. Otherwise we might forget why we are fighting.

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‘I’m fully booked, but can’t take on jobs’: a builder on life without EU workers



Sebastian Przetakowski: ‘Everyone is struggling to find workers.’
Photograph: Christian Sinibaldi/The Guardian



[Sam Wollaston](#)

[@samwollaston](#)

Thu 18 Nov 2021 04.00 EST

Sebastian Przetakowski came to the UK when he was 24. He wanted a holiday, and to make a bit of money to buy a car. His uncle was working in construction here and got Sebastian a job as a labourer. The plan was to spend two or three months working in the UK, then return to Poland. That was in 2004, and he's still here – settled, a UK citizen, married, with two kids.

He gradually climbed the ladder, eventually starting his own construction business in London, doing loft conversions, extensions and garden offices. His daughters, six and four, are at school here; they supported England in the [recent World Cup qualifier with Poland](#). “We had a small war at home,” he laughs.

The business grew, from 12 people to about 50. There were a few guys from the Czech Republic and Romania, but most came from Poland. It made communication easier but also, Sebastian says, Poles are good workers. “We have a very high work ethic and always try to work to the highest possible standards. Maybe because we have struggled. Poland has had difficulties

since the war, people were always trying to do their best, I think that's the reason.”

Around the time of the EU referendum, Przetakowski felt less at home in Britain. “You could feel the tension. There were places, some pubs, clubs, restaurants, where you could feel you were not welcome. And Nigel Farage on the TV.” His brother, the carpenter in the business, left. “He said he didn’t want to live here any more.” A few other friends and employees – plasterers, plumbers, decorators – went back. “The Polish economy at the time was doing quite well, there was a big demand for construction.”

Przetakowski was settled here, with his family and his business, so he stayed. But the exodus meant it was harder to find workers, both skilled and unskilled. And then Covid swung in like a big wrecking ball, sending more EU workers flying home. The most recent [Federation of Master Builders State of Trade survey](#), published in August, found that 53% of builders are finding it hard to hire carpenters, while 47% are struggling to find bricklayers. Add to that material price rises (reported by 98% of respondents) and you’re looking at a sector under a lot of strain.

Przetakowski has had to reduce his own workforce. “And raise the wages of the people who stayed in order to reward them in some way and stop them from leaving.” There has been plenty of work coming in during the pandemic, “from people with money for projects like extensions and loft conversions. I’m fully booked up to next year, and can’t take on any jobs because I can’t get the people. Everyone is struggling to find workers.”

Before [Brexit](#), Przetakowski could just call and get a cousin over for a few months. “Now it’s going to be difficult because of the new immigration system, it will require a lot of bureaucracy and paperwork. We’re going to need a solution from the government. The construction industry urgently needs temporary workers from the EU; this is a must.”

Young people are not getting into construction any more, it’s not fashionable

At the Tory party conference, Boris Johnson said [Brexit would be good for British workers](#), as their wages would rise. Przetakowski has nothing against hiring Brits; he recently had some British bricklayers working for him. “They were reliable, worked on weekends and bank holidays.” But it’s not as if there’s a surplus of British workers at the moment either.

The problem is not just about the double hit of Brexit and Covid, says Przetakowski. “Young people are not getting into construction any more, it’s not fashionable. The decline needs to be reversed.” That means more apprenticeship schemes, for a start. “Also we have to get young people, including young women, to start thinking about working in construction and that it can help the environment as well. We can build flats with solar panels, with access to electric car charging – maybe this will make the industry more fashionable.”

He says that tension, the feeling of being unwelcome, has mostly gone. But so have so many much-needed workers, and they are still going. A Polish family at his children’s school is heading back to Poland next year. “It’s not like it’s behind us,” he says.

His carpenter brother, meanwhile, after initially returning to Poland, went to work in Germany. “It’s closer to Poland, he can drive there and back to see his family every two weeks. And it’s in the EU.” The money might be a bit less, but when you compare travel and living costs, he’s better off. “He’s much happier there than he was here.”

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Documentary

‘Annoying snobs was part of the fun’: Paul McCartney and more on the Beatles’ rooftop farewell

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The Beatles, Get Back and London: on the trail of a timeless story – video



[John Harris](#)

[@johnharris1969](#)

Thu 18 Nov 2021 05.45 EST

It’s lunchtime on a cold Thursday in January 1969. After weeks of sometimes difficult rehearsals and recordings, the Beatles and their new songs finally – and spectacularly – collide with the outside world. The occasion is now fixed in their iconography. On 30 January on the roof of 3 Savile Row, the London HQ of their company Apple, the four – joined by the US keyboard player [Billy Preston](#) – performed five songs: Get Back (three times), Don’t Let Me Down (twice), I’ve Got a Feeling (ditto), Dig a Pony and One After 909. They played with a tightness and confidence that

belied the last-minute nature of events, while a sense of urgency and drama was provided by two police officers, determined to shut everything down.

This magical performance forms the finale of *Get Back*, Peter Jackson's new three-part documentary series about the Beatles. Neither the band nor the people watching on the rooftop and down below are aware that this will be their last ever live performance. But for the viewer, that knowledge makes everything more compelling.



'I think it's a bit of an imposition to absolutely disrupt all the business in this area' ... the gig on the roof of Apple Corps. Photograph: Ethan A Russell/Apple Corps Ltd

What happened that day highlights one of *Get Back*'s themes, something that is often overlooked: the group's fascinating relationship with their audience and the wider public. Down below, on streets dominated by the elegant facade of the Royal Academy, a swelling crowd gathered, and their opinions were sampled by camera crews who asked the most simple of vox pop questions: "Do you know what music you're listening to?"; "Do you like the music you're listening to?"; "Do you normally like listening to the Beatles?"

Among other things, the resulting footage – used in the original 1970 documentary [Let It Be](#), and now recut by Jackson – proves that the Beatles could still tease out the prejudices of age and class. This is shown by the responses of a gaggle of businessmen who gather in the doorway of 2 Savile Row. “This type of music is all right in its place – it’s quite enjoyable,” says one man whose slicked-back hair, horn-rimmed glasses and double-breasted overcoat give him the air of a character from a late-60s sitcom. “But I think it’s a bit of an imposition to absolutely disrupt all the business in this area.” A man next to him is asked if he ever enjoys the Beatles’ music. “In the right surroundings,” he shoots back. “But definitely not now.”

When I ask [Paul McCartney](#) about these scenes, he mentions a sequence from the first Beatles film, 1964’s [A Hard Day’s Night](#). The four are portrayed confronting a bowler-hatted commuter who objects to sharing space with them in a train compartment. He responds to [Ringo Starr](#) blaring music from a radio with a line that, back then, was common currency: “I fought the war for your sort.”

“There’s always the guy in the bowler hat who hates what you’re doing,” says McCartney. “He’s never going to like it, and he thinks you’re offending his sensibilities. But you’ve got to remember, as we always did, there’s the people who work for that guy. There’s the young secretaries, the young guys in the office, or the tradesmen or the cleaners. Those are the people who like us. Also, a lot of the bosses too. We always knew that there’s the establishment, then there’s the working people. And we were the working people. Working people tended to get us, and understand what we were doing. And occasionally, you would get the kind of snob who would get angry. In a way, that was part of the fun.”



‘Working people tended to get us’ … the Let It Be vox pops with people in the streets below the gig, which Jackson has recut for Get Back. Composite: Apple Films Ltd

By and large, the array of people with positive opinions of the rooftop performance outnumbered the detractors, proving that the Beatles had an almost universal appeal – from female twentysomethings to a passing cab driver (“Is it their new record? Oh, great! I’m all in favour of it”) and the trilby-hatted man who offers the opinion that the Beatles are “real good people”. The band’s reach, it seemed, was formidable – and, to some extent, this had happened by design.

As McCartney has pointed out in the past, the early run of singles – Love Me Do, Please Please Me, From Me to You, She Loves You – had deliberately used personal pronouns, to maximise their popular resonance. Later, such McCartney songs as Eleanor Rigby, Penny Lane and She’s Leaving Home brilliantly mixed the everyday with the poetic. In John Lennon’s case, even his most surreal imagery often originated in the ordinary: “newspaper taxis”, “4,000 holes in Blackburn, Lancashire”, I Am the Walrus’s “stupid bloody Tuesday” and “choking smokers”. The brief detour into avant garde film-making they titled Magical Mystery Tour, let us not forget, centred on a coach trip around Devon and Cornwall. Whatever

they did, they never really lost the quality we now know as being “relatable”.

Their work in early 1969, moreover, was partly based on a very relatable idea. When they began work at Twickenham Film Studios, they were aiming to go back to their roots and reconnect with their audience. The starting point for the rehearsals and recording sessions that would produce the album and film titled Let It Be was a plan to globally televise their first performance in front of a crowd since 1966.



Relatable stars ... John Lennon, Ringo Starr and George Harrison in A Hard Day's Night. Photograph: Photo 12/Alamy

This necessitated long conversations about who their audience now were, and how they might be gathered together. The movie's director, Michael Lindsay-Hogg, said they ought to somehow play to “the whole world”. Among the ideas they considered was a show at a Roman amphitheatre in Libya, staged in front of some kind of microcosm of humanity. (Not unreasonably, Starr worried that “every time we do something it's got to be really awesome”.)

Could they stage an event that somehow represented their global appeal? In the summer of 1967, they had pulled off something like that, playing All

You Need Is Love to a worldwide TV audience of at least 400 million, thanks to the new technology of satellite broadcasting. In September 1968, Lindsay-Hogg had directed the [promotional video for Hey Jude](#) which featured a multiracial cast of about 300 extras (“We wanted a mix, which would be like the world of England at the time,” he later said).

This time, though, [George Harrison](#)’s antipathy to returning to the stage, which led to his temporary walkout, meant that any ambitious plans soon proved to be non-starters. Blasting out their music into central London without warning on a cold January day was a last-minute compromise ... but in attracting a crowd of all ages, it just about made the same point.

And so to a slightly smaller aspect of the 50-year Let It Be/Get Back saga. As well as new CD and vinyl editions of Let It Be, Jackson’s series is accompanied by a Get Back book which, like the films, tells a much more nuanced and complicated story than the received idea of the sessions as a time of unending strife. It features superb images by [Linda McCartney](#) and Let It Be’s on-set photographer [Ethan Russell](#), and transcripts taken from 120 hours of Beatles conversations – which, it still amazes me to say, I was given the task of editing. After that job was complete, Apple then got in touch with me and my colleague [John Domokos](#) with an idea: given the centrality of vox pops to some of the 1969 footage, and also our Guardian video series [Anywhere But Westminster](#), could we make a short film about the Beatles, their 21st-century audience, and London?

We spent time in and around Savile Row and the West End, collaring the public, pointing at the rooftops, and asking much the same questions that had been posed in 1969. This time, no one was dismissive or snobby, and 99% of our interviewees responded to the idea of anyone trying to stop the Beatles’ last live performance with incredulous laughter. We met a hip-hop aficionado who talked about learning of the Beatles through other artists sampling their music, and a man whose 24-year-old daughter had just completed a cover of Eight Days a Week and put it online. “The youngsters are still into them,” he marvelled. From one passerby, we got a matter-of-fact summary of what we were trying to get at: “Nobody dislikes the Beatles. Everybody at some point has a memory to one of their songs. So they’re part of our collective culture.”

The best example of this were the Thayer family from Somerset, whom we later met outside [Abbey Road](#) studios, restaging the famous cover of the album of the same name. Dad Tom led his kids – Lois, Evie and Jude (named after the song) – across the zebra crossing, while mum Esther took the photo. High fives ensued. And there, once again, was the Beatles' magic: a very ordinary part of the British streetscape, once again filled with wonder by history's most truly universal pop group.

New versions of Let It Be and the Get Back book are out now. Peter Jackson's Get Back begins on 25 November on Disney+

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The technical rehearsal of a new production of Wagner's The Valkyrie, directed by Richard Jones for the English National Opera at the Coliseum, London

'About as big as it gets': behind the scenes of Wagner's The Valkyrie at English National Opera

The technical rehearsal of a new production of Wagner's The Valkyrie, directed by Richard Jones for the English National Opera at the Coliseum, London

by [Imogen Tilden](#), photographs by [David Levene](#)

Thu 18 Nov 2021 04.03 EST

This is about as big as it gets, says English National Opera's music director Martyn Brabbins. Wagner's Ring Cycle – the Mount Everest of opera, around 16 hours of music in total, and the ultimate challenge for any company. [Director Richard Jones is staging all four operas in new English](#)

translations over the next few years. The cycle begins on 19 November at the London Coliseum with the second in the tetralogy, The Valkyrie – which is about five hours long. Brabbins will be conducting almost 100 musicians, so many that the boxes closest to the stage will accommodate four harps, timpani and percussion; cast and crew number many more. The Ring is a miraculous piece of work, says Jones. “I’ve always enjoyed thinking about it. I adore it. I’m addicted to it.”



The story

The Valkyrie (*Die Walküre*) is often staged as a standalone work. Its third act opens with Ride of the Valkyries, one of opera’s best-known moments, depicting the eight Valkyries – warrior sisters of Brünnhilde, our heroine and daughter of Wotan, ruler of the gods – bearing heroes slain in battle to Valhalla. But there are several hours more, involving incest, murder, passion, betrayal, battles, loyalty and love.

Nicky Spence (*below, front*), like most of the cast, is making his role debut. “I’m singing Siegmund. I’m a misanthrope who never seems to be able to get things right and seems to piss off everyone else along the way, until he meets Sieglinde – who he doesn’t know is his twin sister. They are both

dealing with huge abandonment issues. They don't really know where they've come from, where they fit in. Really, they need to put their emotional baggage issues in the hold. This is all unfurled in act one, gloriously. Siegmund has got some of the most lyrical, beautiful music Wagner ever wrote. I feel so lucky.”



At this tech rehearsal, the cast are in costume – which is contemporary dress – but not wigs or makeup. Most wear Covid masks when they’re not singing, as does everyone around the building. “It’s so nice not to be put in a crazy costume, says Spence. “My wig is good, though … a kind of 90s Keanu Reeves sexy Bear Grylls survivor look.”



Matthew Rose sings Wotan, one-eyed king of the gods. Tell us the story? “A brother and sister meet and fall in love not knowing who they are. Then, in act two, Siegmund has to be killed because incest is wrong. I tell Brünnhilde he has to die in battle, but she goes against that because she believes in the love he and Sieglinde have. So Wotan has to turn up and kill him. Act three is basically Brünnhilde being told off, but I’m distraught to have to punish her. She has to lie on a rock with fire around her until a hero can rescue her. It’s actually a pretty simple story for five and a half hours.”



- Matthew Rose (Wotan) and Rachel Nicholls (Brünnhilde)

“It was 25 years ago that I first heard this piece and I knew even then it was something I would love to do,” says Rose. “The music affects me so much. I was due to sing the role in January for a concert performance that was, of course, cancelled, but Covid at least means I’ve had 18 months to work on it and really think about it and absorb it. I must have 53 recordings of *Die Walküre*. I’m a bit of a geek like that. It’s nice to go back to the score and, having heard where the trees have sprouted up in the performance history, just to clear all that out and do it afresh.”



The production

- Director Richard Jones with stage manager Rosie Davis (left) and Matthew Rose (Wotan)

“It is a such a privilege to work with Richard,” says Rose. “Every word, every nuance, everything has such meaning.” “Richard makes it all about the characters. He’s got such a sexy mind,” says Spence. “We’ve had reams and reams of notes. Because the set is not flashy it’s all about the interaction between the characters. Where have they come from, where are they going, and the relationships between them.”

The cast is all British, and most are making their role debuts. “That meant they brought a freshness and curiosity to the rehearsal room, and a need to be really nourished as to what I think the scenes are about,” says Jones. “But once you get on stage, they’re bombarded with technical stuff and I’m saying things like ‘Put your foot there. Stand like this.’”



- Technical rehearsals in progress at the Coliseum

The day of the tech rehearsal, Jones and his team are grappling with bad news from Westminster council, which has just vetoed all the fire effects on stage. “The first line of the play is: ‘This fire isn’t mine so I’ll stay here,’ and the last line is: ‘I will surround you with my magic fire,’ says Jones.

“It’s really serious. I don’t know what we are going to do … there’s councils of war going on as we speak.”

How much sleep are you getting? “This week? Not much! You do say: ‘I will never have a sleepless night over a show.’ I’ve vowed that so many times… but yes, the Westminster council thing is a blow. Your mind does race.”



The props

- Claire Esnault (left) and Mikaela Hale, freelance prop makers, in the props department with the dummy corpse Marty

In the props room, things are relatively calm, if bloody. The team are prepping the dummies that represent the fallen warriors that lie across the stage as act three opens. “Compared with a show like [Satyagraha \[Phelim McDermott's spectacular staging of Philip Glass\]](#)’s opera has just finished a run] it’s quite prop-light actually,” says senior prop technician Katie Howard.



- Crew instructions for exactly how to lay each dummy in position on stage

Everything is made in house by the ENO props team. The dummies are all fully articulated so that when they are up in the flies they hang and swing like real corpses. Some have been given names. I'm introduced to Marty (*above*), so named because the team think he looks like Back to the Future's [Marty McFly](#). Boris lies on a nearby shelf, union jack flag defiantly in hand. He's part of a different production – [HMS Pinafore](#). "He used to scare us every time we walked into the room." It's a firm no to my suggestion of sneaking him on stage as an additional fallen warrior. "They'd have an apoplectic fit."





There's red grape juice for the wine, but the tinned fruit? It turns out that in part of the action, Hunding and his men have to rip open and eat what looks like a tin of dog food. "We prep it with a hollow bottom and put mandarins in instead," says Katie.

The spears are very delicate and risk losing their tips if they fall over. The team have to make sure the fake one is given to the right person to be thrown on to the ground as the "real" ones would smash into pieces.



Act three features 25 minutes of black snow falling from the skies. The plastic has been treated to be non-flammable and is being recycled for re-use in each show. The props crew laboriously sweep it up and return it to bin liners.





- Emma Bell (Sieglinde) tries to get plastic black snow out of her hair, left. The props team (right) arrange 10 dummy corpses on stage. Each position has been carefully planned out by the set designer

“It gets everywhere ... stuck on bodies (real and fake), in hair, on clothes. I’ve swept this floor five times already. ”



Rachel Nicholls as Brünnhilde

Brünnhilde is brave and strong, but she is a teenager who doesn't know very much about human love, says the soprano Rachel Nicholls. "She takes it upon herself to disobey her father's orders at enormous cost to herself. And yet I think she's more emotionally intelligent than him. She makes her case for herself very well and gets her punishment commuted into something she can cope with. Although she's going to be abandoned on the rock, Wotan is going to surround her by a ring of fire so only a hero brave enough to fight through can wake her." (Spoiler alert: that comes in the third opera, Siegfried.)



- Matthew Rose (Wotan) and Rachel Nicholls (Brünnhilde) and part of Nicholls's costume

“The way we’re representing this in this production is I’m flown on wires about six or seven feet above the stage, just suspended by Wotan’s big cuddly red coat, which he’s been kind enough to wrap me in before he’s put

me to sleep. I'm supposed to be in a state of suspended animation until the next opera and so it's poor Matthew (Wotan) who has to be responsible for clipping my harness to the wires. We've practised it a lot. The aerial stuff is super exciting."



Brünnhilde's horse, Grane, is brought to life by dancer Lauren Bridle, pictured here backstage being helped into the headdress.



The music

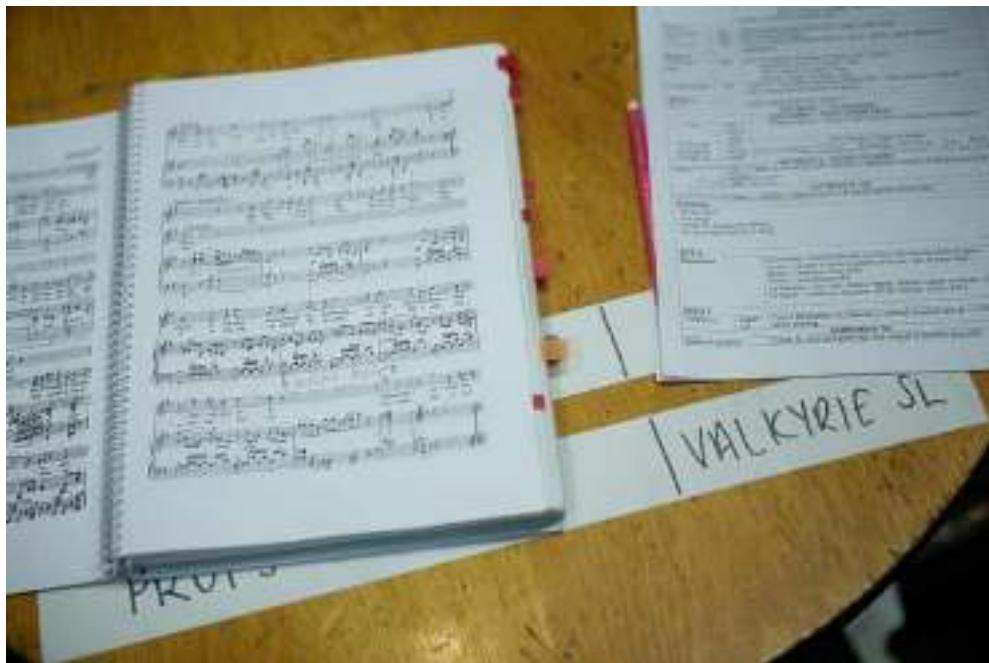
“The thing to remember about the Ring operas is that most of the musical interest is in the pit,” says conductor Martyn Brabbins. “The singers sing great words and great melodies, but most of the drama and emotion and characterisation comes from the orchestra. It’s this amazing web of seamless creativity. Everything is characterised brilliantly, from darkness to light, anger to happiness, love and beauty, to all kinds of dramatic interactions between the characters, and the vast majority of it is done by the orchestra. Which is great for me!



- Pianist Richard Peirson plays a piano reduction of Wagner’s complex score for the tech rehearsals.

“It’s a huge span of music that you really have to pace. A conductor’s job when he or she has a really great orchestra, like I do here, is to set things in motion then off it goes, then you reset, and off it goes again. You need to know when to inject the energy, the pace and the colour. It’s nearly four

hours of music and you've got to get it just on track all the time otherwise it derails. If you get one bit wrong the next won't connect."



"We've got an amazing wealth of talent within such a relatively small talent pool here in Britain. It's wonderful to have an all-British cast, all, apart from Rachel (Brünnhilde) and Brindley Sherratt (Sieglinde's husband, Hunding) making role debuts. Vocally, it's massive for so many of them. But it's been a complete joy."

Backstage, sweeping up black snow, is Bradley Cauchi, one of the running props crew. "I'm not used to opera – I worked for many years in the West End on shows including Les Mis. It's very different here, a lot quicker, the shows change constantly and you move from one thing to another. I got a bit blasé about hearing people sing really well, but here, standing in the wings, listening, it's like WOW! It's so good. The music is awesome!"



‘Bold, radical and always relevant’

”When this was first scheduled, says the bass Brindley Sherratt, “I wasn’t able to be in it because I was committed elsewhere. In the darkest days of the second lockdown I had Covid quite badly, so did my wife and my daughter, and my work for the rest of the year had all just disappeared. Then my agent called and said: ‘They’re now putting on Walküre in the autumn and this time you’re able to be in it.’ It was a light at the end of the tunnel. Just fantastic, and so bold to announce that you’re doing the entire Ring Cycle when everybody else was just like, ‘We’re all going down the pan.’”



- Brindley Sherratt (Hunding), Nicky Spence (Siegmund, middle) and Matthew Rose (Wotan)

“Wagner was a theatrical radical. I think he is the most influential modern artist. More than Beckett, more than Pirandello,” says Jones. “The Ring is like great Greek drama. Since it was first performed in 1876, there has never been a period when it wasn’t germane to the contemporary world.”

“I’ve done a Ring Cycle before, and if you’re involved with something so huge and so technically difficult there’s always a real sense of collegiality, but what’s so special about this particular project is that we’re all – director, conductor, cast, crew – from within these shores. We’re all knackered but we’re all clubbing together. Come and see us. It’s going to be epic!” Sherratt adds.



- Emma Bell (Sieglinde) and Grane backstage; Wotan and Brunnhilde say goodbye
-

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2021.11.18 - Coronavirus

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Covid live: Florida bans businesses from requiring jabs while Greece imposes new curbs on unvaccinated

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Coronavirus

US leaders urge Covid boosters for all ahead of expected FDA authorization



Shyrel Ritter, a certified nursing assistant, receives her Covid booster shot in Riverdale, New York. Photograph: Seth Wenig/AP

[Melody Schreiber](#)

Wed 17 Nov 2021 09.33 EST

As Covid-19 cases in the US begin to rise once more and health agencies consider booster shots for all adults, some states and cities are taking matters into their own hands and urging additional shots, advice that goes beyond current federal guidelines.

Leaders in Colorado, California, New Mexico, Arkansas, West Virginia, and New York City recommend that residents older than 18 seek an additional shot six months after their initial immunization.

These states and cities have little in common, except their health systems have been stretched to a breaking point before during the pandemic – and one-third or more of their population is still unvaccinated.

Cases are rising sharply in New Mexico, Arkansas, New York City and Colorado, but they are falling in California and West Virginia.

Even so, the officials, fearing a winter wave hitting the US, are opening up additional shots for all adults in their jurisdictions before scientists and regulators with the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Food and Drug Administration have weighed in – though the FDA could make a move [as soon as Thursday](#).

Boosters are already available for those who say they qualify, with no documentation required – and [nearly 90%](#) of vaccinated American adults fall under the CDC's existing recommendations.

But opponents say officially endorsing booster shots for a wider swath of the population, before regulators have examined the data, could undermine trust in the scientific process – already an issue for those who believed the vaccines were authorized too quickly.

“We’ve subverted the process,” said Paul Offit, director of the Vaccine Education Center at Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia and a member of the FDA’s independent advisory committee.

Federal agencies serve as a firewall between Americans and the pharmaceutical industry, for instance, “to make sure that the American public is protected and only gets the vaccines, in this case, that are well-studied and go through a rigorous process before we give them to millions and tens of millions and hundreds of millions of people,” he said.

Joe Biden announced a plan in August to offer boosters on 20 September, sparking a debate over interference in the regulatory process. Two senior vaccine experts at the FDA, Marion Gruber and Phil Krause, resigned and penned a [commentary](#) on the lack of evidence around the necessity of boosting.

On 21 October the CDC's director, Rochelle Walensky, [announced](#) expanded eligibility for anyone over the age of 65, as well as those over the age of 18 who have underlying medical conditions, including asthma and depression, who live in care facilities, and who work or live in high-risk settings, like hospitals or schools. This guidance applies to those who received mRNA vaccines more than six months ago.

Anyone over 18 is also eligible for Johnson & Johnson boosters two months after the first dose, effectively making the vaccine a two-dose series.

Pfizer-BioNTech [asked](#) the FDA on 9 November to consider expanding their booster to all adults, which the agency may do without convening its panel of independent advisers, as it has done for previous vaccine decisions.

But Walensky has emphasized the vaccines' effectiveness at preventing severe disease and death, instead of all infections, as boosters for younger people may do.

“We will not boost our way out of this pandemic,” Walensky [said](#) in September. When asked on 10 November about Colorado’s widening eligibility, Walensky [said](#) states should focus instead on vaccinating those who haven’t received any shots yet, including kids, as well as giving boosters to the vulnerable according to CDC guidelines.

Reaching those who aren’t yet vaccinated is challenging, though, and leaders are still looking for ways to change minds.

“Boy, if I had a good answer to that, we wouldn’t still be in the middle of a pandemic,” said Clay Marsh, a critical care physician and leader of West Virginia’s Covid response. It’s been especially difficult given misinformation and disinformation campaigns targeting the vaccines. “I just think people are confused,” he said. “There’s distrust with the vaccines. The fact that these ended up being a line in the sand is just so sad.”

The virus’s reproduction rate and the state’s test positivity rate are both increasing once more in West Virginia, leading officials like Marsh to try anything that might reduce transmission in the state. West Virginia has the

third-oldest population, and many residents are chronically ill and live in rural areas, putting them at [higher risk of worse outcomes](#) from Covid.

“We know that younger people are certainly a reservoir of exchange and transmission of the virus,” he said. “We feel like the risk/benefit [analysis] is in favor of boosting for that population as well.”

“Our two priorities are to save lives and try to maintain our hospital capacity,” Marsh said.

The benefits for boosting older adults are clear: boosters were highly effective at reducing hospitalization and death for those over the age of 50, [several studies have found](#).

But the benefits of boosting for younger, healthier adults at this point are less clear; a recent [study](#) from Israeli data couldn’t calculate the benefits for adults between the ages of 18 and 39 because so few were included in the trial. A Pfizer [study](#) found that protection against infection waned to about 53% after four months, but protection against hospitalization and death stayed strong for the first six months.

Recommending boosters to all adults in order to cut down on transmission may be asking too much from the vaccines, Offit said.

“The goal now is, we’re not just trying to prevent serious illness, we’re trying to prevent any illness – even mild illness, even asymptomatic infection,” he said – and no vaccine accomplishes that. “It’s not a reasonable goal,” he said.

The risk of a very rare side effect, like myocarditis, is worth it as long as there is a clear benefit, Offit said. “The risk is rare, very rare, but it’s real. So then the question becomes, is a third dose clearly a benefit to that age group?”

“Because right now, all the epidemiological data is that they are protected against serious illness, which is the goal of the vaccine,” Offit said.

As more evidence accumulates, it’s possible an additional shot will become a standard part of Covid vaccination.

"I was disappointed when the FDA and CDC committees did not recommend universal third immunizations," said Peter Hotez, dean for the National School of Tropical Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine. "I didn't understand that at all, but hopefully now it looks like that might be corrected."

However, that doesn't mean boosters will continue every six months. "It's important for people to understand that just because we're going to recommend a third immunization does not necessarily mean we're going to have to boost in perpetuity," said Hotez. "It's not one and done and two and done – it could be three and done."

In West Virginia, the next challenge is getting vaccinated people to get the boosters. "We're not seeing the uptake that we had hoped that we would see," he said. "Many people on the receiving end apparently still don't feel good enough to take the boosters."

In response to a lackluster booster rollout, he is urging every West Virginian to look at the FDA and CDC criteria and "identify the area that puts them in that position to be eligible".

"We believe that every West Virginian will qualify under that approach," Marsh said.

Additional reporting by Jessica Glenza.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/17/us-leaders-urge-covid-boosters-ahead-of-expected-fda-authorization>

Coronavirus

‘Zero-Covid is not going to happen’: experts predict a steep rise in US cases this winter



Activists, many of who brought ashes of relatives who died from Covid, gather outside the US Capitol to call for action to prevent future pandemics.
Photograph: Bonnie Cash/UPI/REX/Shutterstock

[Jessica Glenza](#)

[@JessicaGlenza](#)

Thu 18 Nov 2021 02.00 EST

A steep rise in Covid-19 cases in Europe should serve as a warning that the US could also see significant increases in coronavirus cases this winter, particularly in the nation’s colder regions, scientists say.

However, there is more cause for optimism as America enters its second pandemic winter, even in the face of likely rises in cases.

Evidence shows vaccine-conferred protection against hospitalization and death remains high several months after inoculation, vaccines for children older than five can reduce Covid transmission, and new antiviral medications hold the promise of making Covid-19 a treatable disease.

“I do expect to see cases increasing – we’ve started to see this in the last week or so,” said Dr David Dowdy, an associate professor of epidemiology at Johns Hopkins University. “I don’t think what we’re seeing in Europe means we’re in for a huge surge of serious illness and death as we [saw] here in the US,” last winter.

In the last three weeks, new cases have increased in several cold weather states across New England and the midwest. However, vaccines remain roughly 85% effective at preventing hospitalization and death.

“Even if cases go up this winter, we’re very unlikely to see the overcrowded [intensive care units] and morgues of a year ago,” said Dowdy.

Vaccine-conferred immunity against infection may allow cases to rise, he said, but far fewer people will need hospitalization. The vast majority of people who were hospitalized or died from Covid-19 this summer, [more than 90% in one CDC study](#), were not fully vaccinated.

“People can still get Covid, there can still be breakthrough infections, but the great news is if you have been vaccinated you are very much less likely to be hospitalized or have severe infection,” said Rupali Limaye, an associate scientist at Johns Hopkins University and an expert in vaccine communication.

Nevertheless, vaccine distribution is highly uneven across the US. Just 58.6% of the nation is vaccinated, lower than vaccination rates in some European nations now struggling with an increase in Covid-19 cases, such as in [Germany](#) and [France](#).

“I’ve been predicting a pretty bad winter wave again, and it looks like it’s starting to happen,” said Dr Peter Hotez, dean of the National School of Tropical Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine and co-director of the Texas Children’s hospital’s center for vaccine development.

“There’s just too many unvaccinated and too many partially vaccinated [people]” to stop the “aggressive” Delta variant, Hotez said.

What’s more, even if the impacts of Covid-19 are damped this winter, there still could be a devastating loss of life. A prediction from among the most respected long-term Covid-19 forecasters in the country found an additional 100,000 people may die between November 2021 and March 2022.

“We see increasing evidence in the northern hemisphere that the expected winter surge has started to unfold,” said Dr Christopher JL Murray, lead modeler at the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the University of Washington, as he introduced a new forecast. “Reductions in cases and new infections and hospitalizations have stopped in the US and started to turn around.”

[IHME’s projection](#), which Murray described as “optimistic”, forecast 863,000 cumulative deaths from the pandemic by March 2022. Already, more than 765,000 people in the US have died from Covid-19.

IHME’s worst-case scenario predicts hundreds of thousands more deaths, for more than 1m pandemic deaths by March 2022.

“Many countries in western Europe are even farther ahead of us in the sense that the numbers are going up quite quickly in the places like the Netherlands and Denmark, but also in Germany now and a number of other countries,” said Murray. Nearly two-thirds of the 1.9m new infections globally are on the European continent, the [World Health Organization](#) said.

Further, there are few calls and little appetite to reinstate social restrictions. The promise of vaccines that could reduce transmission of Covid-19 prompted local governments around the country to [drop social distancing](#) and mask restrictions.

That trend has held even as an emerging body of evidence showed the vaccine’s ability to prevent infection with Covid-19 waned over time, and the focus of vaccine efficacy shifted to the steady protection conferred against hospitalization and death.

The risk of a “fifth wave” and waning immunity has now prompted a call for “booster” shots, or third vaccine doses, for everyone who received mRNA vaccines, those developed by Pfizer or Moderna.

The Food and Drug Administration has already authorized booster doses for people older than 65 or who work in high-risk settings. Everyone older than 18 who received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine is eligible for a second dose, as evidence shows its effectiveness against serious disease may wane over time.

Booster doses are effective at increasing antibody levels, but are not the most effective way to curb transmission of Covid-19. The best way to curb transmission, experts have said repeatedly, is to get new people vaccinated. Experts now widely believe Covid-19 will be endemic and circulate for decades to come, though the severity of infection may wane over many years.

The Covid-19 pandemic may never be “over”, as many conceived early in the pandemic, Dowdy said. “The point is – when can we get this to a point where it’s tolerable to us as a society? And I think we may be closer to that point than we imagine.

“Zero-Covid is not going to happen.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/18/zero-covid-experts-predict-rise-us-cases-winter>

Coronavirus

Covid Delta variant offshoot ‘less likely’ to cause symptoms



The study found that an offshoot of the Delta variant, known as AY.4.2, appears to be less likely to cause symptoms than the dominant Delta variant.
Photograph: Dan Kitwood/Getty Images

[Nicola Davis](#)

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Wed 17 Nov 2021 19.01 EST

An offshoot of the Covid Delta variant that is on the rise in England appears to be less likely to cause symptoms than the dominant form, researchers have revealed – although experts say the finding requires further scrutiny.

Scientists on the React-1 study analysed more than 100,000 swabs taken across England with the majority taken between 19 October and 5 November.

The results suggest that over that period, the infection rate for England was 1.57% – a figure that includes both symptomatic and asymptomatic infections – with prevalence highest among children aged 13-17, at over 5%. The team added that while rates were lower in older adults, levels had doubled in those aged 65 and over compared with the previous round of the study carried out in September.

While overall the infection rate in the latest study period was higher than in the September round of the study, the findings suggest there was a peak around 20-21 October, with the rate subsequently declining: results released earlier this month suggested the infection rate in the first half of the most recent study period was [1.72%](#).

The decline, the team add, reflects a fall in prevalence of infections among both children and adults below the age of 55 during overall study period.

The drop chimes with trends seen in data from other sources [including the Office for National Statistics](#), although some have suggested it may be partly down to the impact of half-term.

Prof Christl Donnelly of Imperial College London and a co-author of the study added a similar dip was seen around the same time last year.

Among other findings, the study revealed there has been an increase in infections among double vaccinated individuals in recent months, while an offshoot of the Delta variant, known as [AY.4.2 and which is on the rise in England](#), appears to be less likely to cause symptoms than the dominant Delta variant, AY.4.

It has previously been suggested that AY.4.2 may be around 10-15% more transmissible than the original Delta variant.

But others said the new finding requires further scrutiny.

Dr Simon Clarke, associate professor in cellular microbiology at the University of Reading, said: “What the data doesn’t tell you is who those infections [of AY.4.2] are in. So if they’re in younger people, or if they’re in

a community that has a higher than average vaccine uptake, then that might account for things,” he said.

Donnelly said a reduction in coughing may reduce spread, but suggested it is also possible a reduced tendency to cause symptoms may boost spread of the virus. “It is absolutely the case that if people are waiting for symptoms to do a test and to therefore identify that they are infected and therefore should cut back their contacts, being asymptomatic may facilitate transmission,” she said.

Clarke said: “It’s an interesting suggestion, but it’s not what’s been seen with the other [variants].”

Using linked health records, the team were also able to probe the impact of vaccination, revealing a single jab appeared to be 56.2% effective against infection, whether symptomatic or not, in children aged 12 to 17, two weeks after vaccination, and 67.5% effective against symptomatic infection.

Prof Paul Elliott, director of the React study, added the research also shed light on the impact of boosters.

“We found that within 14 days of having had a third dose, the risk of infection was reduced by two-thirds,” he said.

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2021.11.18 - Opinion

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- [What happens when you cross Christmas with the Hunger Games? Let's find out](#)
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When inflation bites, support for the Tories will further erode

[Larry Elliott](#)

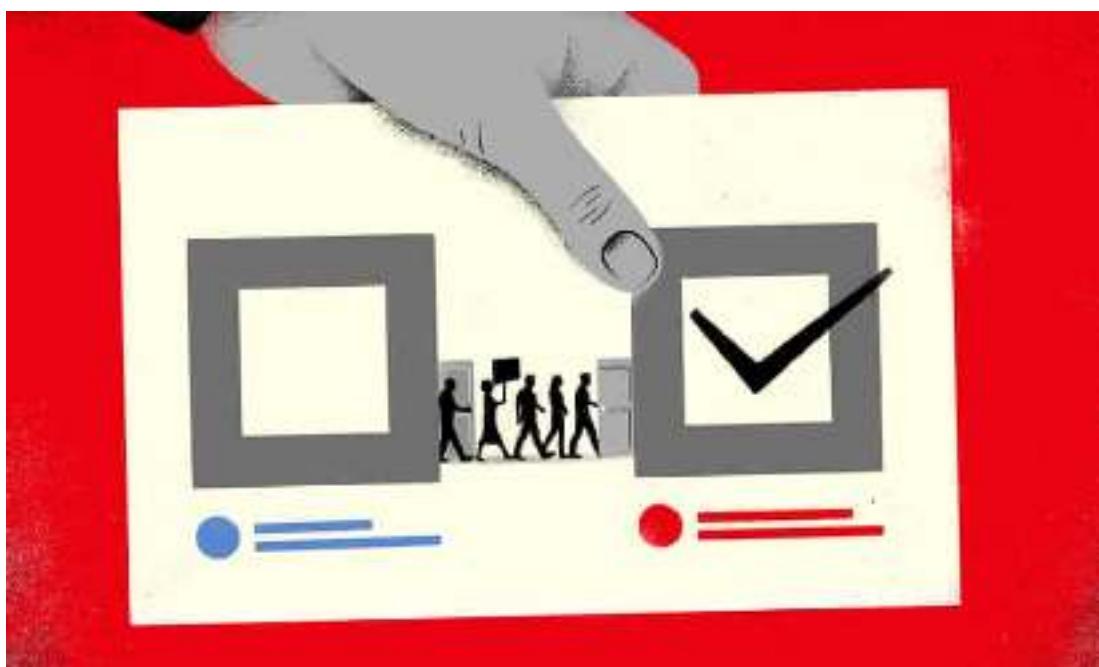


Illustration: Sébastien Thibault

Thu 18 Nov 2021 02.58 EST

Inflation has hit its [highest level](#) in a decade. For most people, prices are rising faster than wages. Energy bills are soaring. The Bank of England is poised to [raise interest rates](#) next month. Personal taxes are going up in the spring. A tough winter looms.

It's not hard to see why Boris Johnson has hit the panic button with his plan to [ban MPs](#) from holding consultancy jobs. On its own, the government could perhaps ride out a sleaze scandal on the grounds that voters think (wrongly) that politicians are all as bad as each other. But sleaze plus a struggling economy is a potentially toxic mixture, especially since a long period of one-party rule makes voters susceptible to that most powerful of political messages: time for a change.

Objectively, things could hardly look more promising for [Labour](#). A government that will spend the next year trying to explain away falling living standards and record NHS waiting lists should present the easiest of targets. Yet the opposition doesn't give the impression that it expects to win the next election – instead, it displays a lack of self-confidence that is both irrational and potentially self-fulfilling.

Sure, there are reasons not to get carried away. Labour is [neck and neck](#) in the polls with the Conservatives, but was streets ahead in the 1990s when Tony Blair was leader of the opposition. Unlike then, focus groups say they don't really know what Labour stands for under Keir Starmer. If the prime minister was able to survive the mishandling of the pandemic, then why should he not be able to survive a mid-term sleaze scandal?

All that is obviously true. But enough of such pessimism. There is a more optimistic case to be made. For a start, the public mood is shifting after a period in which voters cut the [Conservatives](#) an excessive amount of slack. Britain had one of the world's worst per capita death rates from Covid-19 but – in large part due to the emergency economic support package put in place by the Treasury – Johnson avoided being blamed.

After spending hundreds of billions of pounds preventing mass unemployment, chancellor Rishi Sunak is now providing less help. The furlough has already come to an end, as has the stamp duty holiday for homebuyers and the £20 a week uplift to universal credit. Some limited support for the working poor was announced in last month's budget but, in general, measures brought in during the early months of the crisis in 2020 have either already gone or are being phased out.

The economy is still making up the ground lost during the lockdowns but during the course of the next few months will once again be recognisable as the low-growth, low-productivity, low-unemployment model that existed pre-pandemic. Yet there's one key difference: this time Britain will face an annual inflation rate of 5% or more.

It is, of course, possible that workers will meekly accept a cut in their standard of living, and there are those who say that culture-war issues matter more in shaping voting patterns these days. But traditionally, governments become less popular when real (inflation-adjusted) incomes are falling, and there's no reason to imagine this pattern has changed.

Sunak's response to the latest cost-of-living figures was to boast [about the £4bn](#) he's spending to mitigate the impact of rising prices on households. This too is telling because it demonstrates how the Conservatives have filched ideas from the left for their economic strategy.

Ed Balls, when shadow chancellor in 2011, said austerity would be a disaster – and now Johnson agrees with him. The trade unions played a crucial role in developing the furlough scheme, which effectively nationalised a large chunk of the workforce. Surviving the pandemic and meeting manifesto commitments to level up have forced the Tories to become a party of big government, and the pressures to spend more look certain to grow.

The crisis of confidence on the left is not new and it is not confined to Britain: since the collapse of the Berlin Wall social democratic parties have been struggling to redefine themselves. But it should not be that hard: for a start, the right has been going through its own existential crisis since the financial crash. The heyday of unfettered free markets came to an end with the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008.

The view that globalisation or capitalism are unstoppable forces has to be resisted, because that is clearly not the case. In areas such as tackling climate change or cracking down on tax avoidance by multinational corporations, a more interventionist approach is now widely accepted – and the ideas for reform are coming from the left, not the right.

That said, Labour still has to convince voters that it has answers to the issues that concern them: paying the bills, job security and decent public services among them. Starmer and his shadow Treasury team are rightly making this a priority.

Finally, the left needs to remember its own history. Labour's big victories have come not when it tells people how bad things are, but when it shows how much better they could be. The spike in inflation will give the party a chance to be heard: it must show it has a vision for the future that people can believe in.

- Larry Elliott is the Guardian's economics editor
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OpinionChristmas

What happens when you cross Christmas with the Hunger Games? Let's find out

[Joel Golby](#)



‘Christmas may not be Proper Christmas. Not this year.’ Photograph: Maureen McLean/REX/Shutterstock

Thu 18 Nov 2021 03.00 EST

Well, we've done it: we've successfully navigated the goth autumnal chicane of Halloween and Bonfire Night, and now, crackling distantly in the air, can you hear it – a jingling of the bells? [Christmas](#) looms, and though in traditional years even mentioning the C-word at this point in November might instigate a round of groans (and, in shop workers, an electric jolt of Mariah Carey-shaped PTSD), there has been a notable loosening of the law: Christmas trees have already gone up, lights adorn the exteriors of houses,

mince pies have been consumed. Is this normal? No. Has anything about the past 20 months been normal? Also no. These two things are connected.

I do not know if you recall last Christmas, or if it's just been balled up into the brown plasticine wad that is remembering the last almost two years your life, but it was, historically, one of the most underwhelming Christmases on modern record. Boris Johnson announced an inter-tier travel ban in England about 100 hours before Christmas Day itself, leading to a mass of people rushing to train stations to desperately travel to the home counties before the ominous midnight gong forbade them from doing so.

This had the necessary effect of ruining a lot of people's Christmases, as well as putting the whole country back in hyper-vigilance mode, so the Christmas holidays became a hastily rearranged grey few days of Zoom calls, lonely roasts, and waving to nans through double-glazed windows. You might have had a fine enough time – I did! I just sat in a really centrally heated house and chained a near-infinite supply of bottled lager – but it wasn't a real Christmas, was it? It was a Christmas we will look back on one day, shellshocked, and tell children who don't remember it how amazing it was that we had to live through that. "We got a Mrs Brown's Boys special, sure, but it wasn't even recorded in front of a studio audience. So frankly what was the point?"

Well, sorry to say this, but I've visited the caves and read the ominous runes and also "remembered last year", and all signs point to us having something more of the same. Christmas ... Christmas may not be Proper Christmas. Not this year.

First, shortages, which we're not allowed to blame on Brexit in case it hurts the feelings of Brexit voters, so let's blame coronavirus and deeply worrying global supply chain issues instead (these are reasons, too: it's just that, on top of those reasons, Brexit *really doesn't help*). The headlines started a month or so ago – [Christmas turkey shortage likely, farmers warn](#); [Get booster jabs and wear masks to save Christmas, urges Javid](#); [UK faces Christmas champagne shortage due to HGV driver crisis, poor harvests and high demand](#); [Why Christmas could be stuck in a shipping container](#); [The foods you can freeze NOW to get ready for Christmas](#) – but they continue: as The Times reported last week, [Christmas comes early to high streets amid](#)

[fear of shortages](#). And in recent days, the grimly inevitable: [Boris says he CAN'T rule out Xmas lockdown](#).

Then there's the whisper network of people who have mates who have mates who know things, the nurses and the drivers and the civil servants, all of whom also solemnly warn of further Covid restrictions. Add to this the gaps on supermarket shelves and [the cardboard asparagus](#), and it's enough to start triggering the flashbacks. It haunts me in dreams. Me, wearing two enormous gap-year backpacks, trying to navigate [St Pancras station](#) before the police arrest me for being "too in the spirit of Yule".

So what is there to do about Christmas? Realistically, the answer is, "get over it". It is only Christmas, and we are still technically in a pandemic. I know Christmas is special – believe me, there's nothing I like to do more than watch Shrek and all the Shrek sequels while slowly absorbing Baileys as if on an IV drip; also seeing family is alright, I guess, as well – but last year the onus on seeing loved ones after a long hard year of not doing that felt more vital, disproportionately special. If Christmas isn't very good this year because there aren't enough turkeys and it's suddenly illegal to leave our postcode: OK, not the end of the word. It's unideal but we've done it before.

However, I would argue that the sheer act of entertaining the idea that Christmas will be crap this year is, in itself, a failure of government. Does anyone left in this country really fully trust Boris Johnson to deliver an unruined Christmas? If they do, do they remember the last time he tried it? It is not healthy to live in this primed state of "anticipating government failure", but it is becoming increasingly normal after almost 20 consecutive months of it. The petrol queue crisis of a short lifetime ago was the perfect event to drip-feed us the idea of shortages, of patience, of spending most of a Saturday and a little bit of a Sunday trying to buy an item that is normally abundantly available. It was ultimately all to prepare our fight-or-flight skills for a December trip to M&S.

So, it is deeply unlikely Christmas will be normal and that's more or less OK – the real fear is that we soon remember this rubbish Christmas as a rare high before a 2022-long low. Ho ho ho!

- Joel Golby is a writer for the Guardian and Vice, and the author of Brilliant, Brilliant, Brilliant Brilliant
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OpinionCricket

Azeem Rafiq's testimony should shine a light on racism in every workplace

[Shaista Aziz](#)

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Azeem Rafiq tells cricket racism hearing of ‘inhuman’ treatment at Yorkshire – video report

Wed 17 Nov 2021 11.18 EST

I spent some of the past summer at the Lord’s and Oval cricket grounds watching my beloved England and Pakistan play. When both teams play each other, I’m never going to be on the losing side. As is the case for many working-class British Asians, cricket has been part of my life since childhood, and a personal barometer for racism, classism, Islamophobia, identity and belonging. Remember [Norman Tebbit’s infamous “cricket test”?](#)

In July, while waiting for a friend at Lord’s, known as “the home of cricket”, a security guard looked me up and down while walking towards me: “You’re standing at the wrong gate. You’re here to work? You need to go through another entrance.” He tried to shoo me away.

Up until this point, this man and I had not exchanged a word. However, he assumed that a brown, hijab-wearing woman could only be at Lord’s to work in hospitality.

I told the security guard he need not worry, I was at the right gate. He looked stunned.

Cricket is riddled with class, race and gendered inequalities at every level. That incident was yet another reminder that the establishment and “polite” English society demands that people of colour, people like me, know our place. I have spent my entire life as an anti-racist campaigner, refusing to

know my place, because my place is everywhere. If anyone has a problem with that, then it's just that – their problem, not mine. It has taken years of me internalising painful experiences of racism, Islamophobia and misogyny. Coping with workplace cultures of silencing, denial and the minimising of racism, and the many harms it has caused to me and my career, has led me to this point.

A recent study shows that English cricket is increasingly dominated by privilege. [Two in five](#) of England's Test cricketers last year were privately educated, six times more than the national average.

This is such a stark contrast with football, where [87% of the England team](#) are state educated. Even though Asians have a minimal presence in professional football, the Three Lions football team is far more representative in terms of class and race than is cricket.

According to the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) there are approximately a million South Asian cricket fans across the country. The ECB has created a [South Asian action plan](#) – an 11-point strategy presented on its website under an image of two beaming young brown women of colour, one of whom is wearing a hijab.

Like many people of colour, I watched the former Yorkshire cricketer [Azeem Rafiq](#) give evidence to the parliamentary inquiry into racism in cricket with my stomach churning and my chest feeling tight. Supremely dignified and courageous, Rafiq's testimony was triggering for so many who have been subjected to racism and Islamophobia in our places of work. Yet, unlike many of my white friends, I wasn't shocked by his devastating testimony.

His story of dealing with institutional racism isn't exceptional. What marks him out is the fact he is *finally* being listened to and believed: by MPs, the cricketing authorities and the media. When I was growing up, the P-word was used frequently against me, my family members and my friends; it was often followed up by violence.

Over the past two decades, aided by the “war on terror”, the P-slur has been replaced with open and mainstream anti-Muslim hate. This is likely to be

part of Rafiq's experiences. It needs to be recognised that Islamophobia is a form of racism.

Rafiq told parliament that he wouldn't want his son involved in the sport. It makes me mourn for the massive potential waste of talent, the future England stars who could be lost to the game; but Rafiq is right to say what he has said. Until English cricket tackles institutional racism and Islamophobia at all levels, the rest of us must do everything in our power to protect those at risk of racism from the mental anguish Rafiq is still enduring. He has gone on record to say the bullying led to him contemplating taking his own life. For anyone, let alone a practising Muslim, to disclose this publicly, is horrifying.

Rafiq's account is a bodyblow for the [ECB](#) and its attempts to diversify the sport; it should also be a watershed moment for English cricket and wider society, including every workplace.

Shaista Aziz is a journalist, writer, comedian, and Labour councillor for Oxford city council

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[**Opinion**](#)[**Politics**](#)

Boris Johnson's anti-sleaze plan is purely for show. He knows it will not pass

[Martin Kettle](#)





Boris Johnson speaks during Prime Minister's Questions in the House of Commons, 17 November. Photograph: House of Commons/PA

Wed 17 Nov 2021 12.42 EST

Under Theresa May and [Boris Johnson](#), the Conservative party has become increasingly ungovernable. The process shows no sign of stopping. It will continue in the next parliament, especially if Johnson wins with a smaller majority.

Let me be clear. This isn't me speaking: it is the view of a number of current and former Conservative MPs, with different standpoints, whom I have been talking to in recent days and weeks.

The events of the last two weeks are a demonstration of this process at work. In the pre-Brexit past, the Tory party's internal cohesion was led from Downing Street, enforced by the whips and backed up by the backbench 1922 Committee and its officers, who were essentially a parliamentary arm of government. Discipline was one of the party's most intimidating parliamentary assets.

Today almost the reverse is true. Tory discipline still exists, sometimes very formidably and effectively. But it exists in little groups of like-minded MPs,

not across the party as a whole. Brexit highlighted that reality. But the reality continued after Britain finally left the EU in January 2020. Revolts among MPs are an almost weekly occurrence. Johnson's proposal to clamp down on MPs' outside earnings and jobs has provided a [powerful example](#).

That clampdown was promoted this week as though it would wrongfoot Labour and perhaps even recapture a bit of what remains of the moral high ground after the Owen Paterson debacle. But that is not how it was actually seen by Tory MPs, or probably even Johnson himself, and it is highly unlikely it will get anywhere soon. The proposal was performative. The reforms will not happen because even if he believed in the policy, Johnson could not rely on his party to deliver it.

Many things make the modern Conservative party unusually difficult to manage. Its large parliamentary majority means a lot of thwarted ambition on the backbenches. But there are also a lot of backbench groupuscules – all divided by various forms of ideology, habit, culture and self-interest – a development enhanced by the successes at the 2019 election in the old industrial north and by Johnson's own unpredictability.

One of those groups, based around the so-called Spartans who brought down May, triggered the ill-judged attempt to get Paterson off the hook for breaking lobbying rules. This wasn't really a government matter at all, in the old sense. But it was one in the new, groupuscule sense. It was a disaster. But despite the prime minister's U-turn over Paterson, the groups still hold the power.

One of the key facts to grasp about the past fortnight is that second jobs are much more common among Conservative backbenchers than opposition ones. Partly this is because that is the Tory party's tradition; partly because they are the governing party. Either way, Johnson's clampdown would have hit his own party worse than any other. Tory MPs would have felt it in their wallets. It would have been especially threatening to backbenchers with long careers in safe seats, and to those who no longer expect to become ministers.

This is why, under the current ungovernability, it is never going to happen. Johnson's proposal is based on a [2018 report](#) by the independent committee on standards in public life. It would ban paid work as a parliamentary

adviser or consultant and would insist that outside work be confined “within reasonable limits”. In short, it would threaten the way a significant proportion of Tories now organise their lives, which is partly why it has been gathering dust so far.

There is a minefield of mischief in the report’s recommendations. Can an MP who sits on a board be defined as a parliamentary adviser? If not, that could be a loophole. And what are “reasonable limits”? It makes a lot of difference if they are defined by the income obtained or, as the government hopes, by the extracurricular hours spent.

Crucially, who decides the meaning of “reasonable”? The answer cannot realistically be the prime minister. The committee says it should be the parliamentary commissioner for standards, Kathryn Stone, yet she is anathema to many [Conservatives](#), including Johnson. Tory MPs hate these plans, and they tend to get what they want. The clear inference is that No 10 does not expect serious reform – which presupposes a cross-party approach and agreement, both unlikely – to see the light of day.

But for many Tory MPs, the damage has already been done. For them, it is simply another sign that Johnson is a bad leader who does not bother to consult them, is not good at delivering, and whose credibility is on the slide.

This tension, and the governmental ineffectiveness that umbilically goes with it, is not confined to the sleaze and standards rows. It is part of a whole range of major policy choices that now face Johnson and his party. These range from net zero carbon emissions, through a series of key public spending decisions, to this week’s much-trailed announcement about [high-speed rail](#). On all of these, the gulf between the promises made and the evolving reality is enormous.

Post-lockdown Covid policy is a powerful example too, with England (as distinct from the parts of the UK where Johnson’s writ does not run on health issues) essentially junking restrictions and regulations, while [allowing Covid cases to rise](#) and pressure on the health service to increase. The policy makes little sense and was not even supported by a majority of the public. It is in force because the issue is a hostage to the travel and entertainment

industry interests, and ultimately to libertarian groupings on the Tory backbenches.

The prime minister's personal popularity has papered over many of the divides, failures and contradictions in the way he governs. In a striking [chapter about 2019 voters](#) in the newly published Nuffield study, it is made clear that Johnson's attractiveness was the most influential factor behind former Labour voters switching to the Conservatives – far greater than either Brexit or dislike of Jeremy Corbyn.

The question today is how far that is still true. Johnson's ratings have fallen sharply. Yet his position remains secure. Tory MPs don't like his methods or his ideas but they like his popularity. When he eventually ceases to be party leader, however, it is highly likely that the strange and unstable coalition over which he presides will become even less manageable than it is today. In those circumstances, the voters may look at the parties very differently too.

Martin Kettle is a Guardian columnist

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Aids and HIV

New HIV jabs taken two months apart hailed as huge step forward



About 100,000 people have HIV in Britain. Photograph: 4421010037/Getty Images/iStockphoto

[Andrew Gregory](#) Health editor

Wed 17 Nov 2021 19.01 EST

Thousands of people living with HIV in Britain are to be freed from the burden of taking daily pills, after health chiefs gave the green light for a revolutionary treatment by injection every two months.

Draft guidance from the [National Institute for Health and Care Excellence](#) (Nice) recommends offering the antiretroviral drugs cabotegravir and rilpivirine in England and Wales after trials proved they work as effectively as daily tablets.

The Scottish Medicines Consortium has also approved the injections for adults living with HIV in Scotland.

Although HIV, which attacks the immune system, is still incurable, researchers found that patients who had the new treatment could reach a point where the virus particles in their blood (the viral load) were so low those particles could not be detected or transmitted between people.

“We still have a long way to go in educating around HIV, but today’s announcement demonstrates how far we’ve come since the 1980s epidemic,” said Garry Brough of Positively UK. “It is a huge step forward. Having to take tablets every day can be physically, emotionally and socially burdensome for some people. This decision reflects the rightful need for people living with HIV to have the freedom to manage their HIV in a way that works best for them, helping them to live their life to the full.”

Debbie Laycock, head of policy at Terrence Higgins Trust, described the breakthrough as “incredible news”.

The treatment is the first long-acting, injectable treatment for adults with HIV. It is also the first recommendation Nice has made about the use of HIV treatments since they came under its remit two years ago.

Cabotegravir with rilpivirine is now being recommended as an option for adults with HIV infection when antiretroviral medicines they are already taking have kept the virus at a low level, and where there is no evidence to suspect viral resistance and no previous failure of other anti-HIV medicines.

About 100,000 people have HIV in Britain. It is estimated that initially at least 13,000 people will be eligible for the new jab in England alone.

At present treatment for HIV involves life-long antiretroviral regimens taken as tablets every day. Clinical trial results show cabotegravir with rilpivirine is as effective as oral drugs at keeping the viral load low. The antiretrovirals are administered as two separate injections every two months.

Chloe Orkin, professor of HIV medicine at Queen Mary University of London, said: “This is a paradigm-shifting moment in the UK where, for the first time, it is possible to release people with HIV from the burden of daily oral therapy and offer them instead just six treatments per year.”

Deborah Gold, chief executive of the National AIDS Trust, said: “Long-acting injectables have been proven to be a safe and effective method of delivering HIV treatment, so we are delighted that Nice has approved the use of cabotegravir with rilpivirine for adults living with HIV.

“It won’t be right for everyone but, for some, monthly injections are highly preferable to daily pills. Innovations that can make it easier for people to stick to their treatment plans both improve the wellbeing of people living with HIV and bring us one step closer to the goal of ending transmissions by 2030.”

A treatment only required six times a year will make taking medicine easier for some people, and is more discreet for those who feel unable to be open about their HIV status. Experts say removing the need to take pills every single day may also lessen the emotional toll of living with HIV, and improve the numbers of people who adhere to their treatment regime.

Meindert Boysen, deputy chief executive and director of the Centre for Health Technology Evaluation at Nice, said: “Despite scientific advances HIV is still incurable, but the virus can be controlled by modern treatment. However, for some people, having to take daily multi-tablet regimens can be difficult because of drug-related side effects, toxicity and other psychosocial issues such as stigma or changes in lifestyle. The committee heard that stigma remains an issue for people living with HIV and can have a negative impact on people’s health and relationships.

“We’re pleased therefore to be able to recommend cabotegravir with rilpivirine as a valuable treatment option for people who already have good levels of adherence to daily tablets, but who might prefer an injectable regimen with less frequent dosing.”

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Global development

‘Horrific’: 10 people suffocate in overcrowded migrant boat off Libya



When Doctors Without Borders vessel, Geo Barents, reached the wooden boat, 30 nautical miles off the Libyan coast, survivors spoke of people crammed on the lower decks. Photograph: Candida Lobes/MSF

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[Lorenzo Tondo in Palermo](#)

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Thu 18 Nov 2021 02.00 EST

Ten people were found dead in the lower deck of a severely overcrowded wooden boat off the coast of [Libya](#), Doctors Without Borders (MSF) has reported.

According to survivors, those who died on Tuesday suffocated after 13 hours on the cramped lower deck, where there had been a strong smell of fuel.

In a difficult operation, less than 30 nautical miles from Libyan shores, the MSF team onboard the charity's chartered search and rescue vessel Geo Barents reached the boat carrying more than 100 asylum seekers attempting to reach [Europe](#). Survivors told rescuers that there were people crammed on the lower deck who were unresponsive.

After 99 people, all showing signs of acute stress and trauma, were brought on board the Geo Barents, the rescue team found 10 dead bodies at the bottom of the boat.

“It took us almost two hours to retrieve them and to bring them on board, so they can have a dignified burial once arrived onshore,” said Fulvia Conte, MSF deputy search and rescue team leader on the Geo Barents. “It was horrific and infuriating at the same time. This is another tragedy at sea that could have been avoided.”

Abdoulaye, one of the last survivors to leave the boat, barely had the time to understand what had happened to his fellow travellers before the MSF rescuers took his arm and helped him into the rescue lifeboat.

“Let me see their bodies,” he told the team. “These are my brothers. We come from the same place, we went through Libya together. I need to tell their families they are dead. Please let me see them.”

Some had to identify the body of a younger brother or friend who had died in front of them a few hours earlier.

The volunteer-run Mediterranean rescue hotline Alarm Phone accused the European authorities of ignoring the distress call: “We had raised the alarm, several hours before, but no one answered. We are fed up with the announcements of these deaths that could be avoided.”

Caroline Willemen, MSF project coordinator on the Geo Barents, said: “We are once more witnessing Europe’s unwillingness to provide the much needed dedicated and proactive search and rescue capacity in the central Mediterranean.”



After survivors were brought onboard the MSF vessel it took two hours for the rescue team to retrieve the 10 bodies from the lower deck. Photograph: Candida Lobes/MSF

In less than 24 hours, Geo Barents performed three rescues in the Maltese and Libyan search and rescue zones, bringing 186 people safely on board, including the survivors from the boat where 10 died. Those rescued were from Guinea, Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Somalia and Syria, and included several children, the youngest only 10 months old.

With the attention of the European authorities focused on the humanitarian crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border, Geo Barents, with nearly 200 asylum seekers and 10 dead bodies, must urgently find a place of safety to disembark.

An estimated 1,225 people have died or gone missing while attempting to cross the central Mediterranean so far this year. Since 2014, 22,825 people have gone missing or died on this route.

"It has become the deadliest migration route, and it is shameful," Willemen said.

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Music

R Kelly associate jailed for intimidating singer's accuser with arson attack



R Kelly at a 2019 hearing. Photograph: Antonio Perez/AP

[Ben Beaumont-Thomas](#)

[@ben_bt](#)

Thu 18 Nov 2021 04.46 EST

Michael Williams, an associate of disgraced R&B star [R Kelly](#), has been sentenced to eight years in prison after intimidating an accuser in Kelly's trial for sexual abuse.

Williams, a relative of a former publicist for Kelly, had pleaded guilty to arson. In June 2020, he drove 200 miles to where one of Kelly's accusers, known pseudonymously as Jane, was living, and set a car leased by Jane's father on fire.

“The vehicle, leased by the victim’s father, was heavily damaged,” prosecutors said during the trial in April this year. “Fire investigators also detected an accelerant along the outside perimeter of the residence. Williams had previously made internet searches about the detonation properties of fertiliser and diesel fuel, witness intimidation and witness tampering, and countries that do not have extradition agreements with the United States.”

Jane’s father had also received a threatening text message, saying: “It might be wise for you to protect your daughter from heartache she’s gonna endure through this and after.”

Jane was not at the sentencing, but said in a statement: “My mental state deteriorated tremendously due to fear, invasion of privacy and trauma among many other things. Because of your actions, I live in fear and have had to relocate my entire life.”

Other associates of Kelly have been accused of witness intimidation. Donnell Russell, a former manager of Kelly, is accused of threatening to leak sexually explicit photos of one woman. Russell has pleaded not guilty and awaits trial. Richard Arline Jr pleaded guilty earlier this year to pressuring a woman not to testify against Kelly, offering hush money.

In September, Kelly was found guilty of nine counts against him, including sex trafficking, sexual exploitation of a child, racketeering and kidnapping. The court heard testimony from numerous women who said Kelly coerced them into sex and controlled their lives with physical and emotional abuse. He will be sentenced in May and faces decades in prison.

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Pesticides

Bee-harming pesticides exported from EU despite ban on outdoor use



Research on neonicotinoid insecticides is said to show evidence of lethal and sublethal effects on bees. Photograph: Bloomberg/Getty Images

[Mattha Busby](#)

Thu 18 Nov 2021 01.02 EST

Thousands of tonnes of pesticides that seriously harm bees are being exported from the EU despite a ban on their outdoor use within the bloc.

Data obtained by Unearthed, the investigative arm of Greenpeace, and Swiss NGO Public Eye shows that 3,900 tonnes of banned neonicotinoid pesticides were destined to leave the EU and UK for low- and middle-income nations with weaker environmental regulations in the three months after the ban came into force.

The insecticides, which contain the active ingredients thiamethoxam, imidacloprid or clothianidin, were mostly destined for Brazil (which was due to receive almost half of the exports), Russia, Ukraine, Argentina, Iran, South Africa, Indonesia, Ghana, Mali and Singapore.

The EU ban came into force on 1 September 2020. Neonicotinoid pesticides have been described by the International Union for Conservation of Nature as “a worldwide threat to biodiversity, ecosystems and ecosystem services”, but some EU countries continue to use them under emergency authorisations.

Eight EU countries are likely to have exported banned neonicotinoid pesticides since the ban – Belgium, France, Germany, Spain, Greece, Austria, Denmark and Hungary – plus the UK.

The World Health Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organization welcomed the ban and said it was evidence of a growing consensus on the need to severely restrict the pesticides’ use owing to the “large-scale adverse effects on bees and other beneficial insects”.

Claire Nasike, of Greenpeace Africa, said: “This is the highest form of double standards, exhibited by these EU countries. They are prioritising profits at the expense of the people and the planet. It is time for low- and middle-income countries to pass laws that protect their people and environment from these toxic chemical imports.”

A [European Commission](#) health and food safety official said: “Neonicotinoids are particularly toxic for bees and contribute significantly to the decline in pollinator populations. We would not find it acceptable that the production of food for import into the EU leads to or poses a threat of serious adverse effects on pollinator populations.”

Most of the exports were notified by subsidiaries of Syngenta, the Swiss-headquartered, Chinese-owned pesticide multinational, and its German counterpart Bayer.

A Bayer spokesperson said neonicotinoids were an important tool for farmers as they helped to control pests and safeguard harvests. “The mere

fact that a plant protection product is not authorised or banned in the EU says nothing about its safety,” they said.

A Syngenta spokesperson said: “We fully stand by the safety and effectiveness of thiamethoxam. The many emergency authorisations granted by various EU countries show that farmers need this technology to protect their crops.”

Neonics were set to be used in England this year under an emergency authorisation, despite a government pledge to keep the restrictions post-Brexit to protect “pollinator populations at risk … unless the evidence base changes”. But the plan was ditched after cold weather killed off virus-transmitting aphids.

A report from the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services said: “Recent research focusing on neonicotinoid insecticides shows evidence of lethal and sublethal effects on bees.”

A European Commission source said countries could decide whether they wanted to import certain pesticides. “A ban of exports from the EU may, however, not automatically lead third countries to stop using such pesticides if they may import them from elsewhere,” they said.

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Business live

Business

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- [‘Object!’ The moment Tory MP blocks condemnation of Owen Paterson](#)
- [Sleaze PM fails to stifle scandal as ratification of Paterson report blocked](#)
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UK news

'Object': The moment Tory MP blocks condemnation of Owen Paterson – video

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Kwasi Kwarteng

PM fails to stifle sleaze scandal as ratification of Paterson report blocked

01:14

'Object': The moment Tory MP blocks condemnation of Owen Paterson – video

[Aubrey Allegretti](#) and [Rowena Mason](#)

Mon 15 Nov 2021 17.57 EST

Boris Johnson's attempt to draw a line under the sleaze scandal engulfing the Conservative party fell apart after a Tory MP blocked parliament endorsing a report that found a former colleague committed an egregious breach of lobbying rules.

The backbencher Christopher Chope was named by multiple sources as the person who objected to ratifying the findings about Owen Paterson's behaviour which followed a two-year investigation by the Commons standards watchdog.

The government had tried to shunt the vote to the end of the day but put forward a motion that only one MP needed to object to in order for it to fail. In a deeply embarrassing move for the prime minister, one Tory cried out "object" late on Monday night – prolonging the resolution of the issue that has prompted some MPs to warn tensions are "frighteningly high" within the Conservative party.

Chris Bryant, a Labour MP and chair of the standards committee, said he had been assured the motion would be retabled on Tuesday with a one-hour debate to try again to endorse the Paterson report. Chope was contacted for comment.

Fury from Tories exploded at the issue being prolonged, with a minister telling the Guardian: “He has been for many year a Jurassic embarrassment – tonight he crossed a line. The man should retire and the executive are livid. If he comes into the team room tomorrow, colleagues would want to say two words to him and the second word would be ‘off’.”

A former minister said: “The fact we can’t deselect these people is baffling”, while a frontbencher called Chope “a selfish twat”. Backbenchers complained it would “make a bad situation even worse”, and expressed severe disappointment it was “handing Labour a freebie”.

Meanwhile, the shadow Commons leader, Thangam Debbonaire, said the “farce was of the Tories’ own making and serves Johnson right for trying to sneak a U-turn out at night rather than do the decent thing and come to the house to apologise”.

It came hours after [Kwasi Kwarteng](#) apologised to parliament’s standards commissioner for casting doubt on her future in the role earlier this month.

The business secretary wrote to Kathryn Stone saying he regretted his choice of words and recognised that ministers must adhere to high standards that treat others with consideration and respect.

“I did not mean to express doubt about your ability to discharge your role and I apologise for any upset or distress my choice of words may have caused,” he said.

Kwarteng made the comments in a broadcast interview as he was sent out to defend the government’s bid to overhaul the standards regime and spare Paterson a six-week Commons suspension.

He told Sky News: ‘I think it’s difficult to see what the future of the commissioner is, given the fact that we’re reviewing the process, and we’re overturning and trying to reform this whole process, but it’s up to the commissioner to decide her position.’

Just hours later, the government U-turned on its efforts to undermine the system that regulates the actions of MPs, as Johnson agreed to let the

parliamentary standards committee come up with its own proposals for reform.

Tory MPs had already been whipped to vote in favour of reforming the system in a way that would let Paterson off the hook, but the government has since agreed to reverse that parliamentary decision.

After the motion narrowly passed on 3 November, ministers privately vented their fury and a public backlash forced the prime minister to U-turn.

Johnson promised to retract the motion that set up a new committee that would have been chaired by a Tory MP and reviewed the existing processes for investigating sleaze claims.

The humiliating climbdown led to Paterson resigning as MP for North Shropshire, and sparked a close examination of other lawmakers' second jobs and outside interests.

In the nearly two weeks since, many in Johnson's party have vented their frustration at yet another "unforced error" by Downing Street that has potentially cost them a lead in the polls and seen their faith in Johnson diminish further.

One former cabinet minister said there was still widespread unhappiness in the parliamentary party, with particular ire about the way the chief whip had been "hung out to dry" when the decision had ultimately been Johnson's.

He said the preference of many Conservative MPs would have been to plea for leniency for Paterson, who has always denied wrongdoing, rather than letting him off altogether, but those MPs suggested that course had been ignored.

[The Observer](#)[Boris Johnson](#)

Ten days that turned Boris Johnson from election winner to political liability



Boris Johnson on a visit to Hexham general hospital in Northumberland on the day MPs in the Commons held an emergency debate on sleaze.
Photograph: Peter Summers/AFP/Getty Images

[Toby Helm](#) and [Michael Savage](#)

Sun 14 Nov 2021 02.00 EST

Two weeks ago it was difficult to find a single Labour MP who genuinely thought their party was in with a chance of winning the next election. The mood was one of quiet resignation at the prospect of a fifth consecutive defeat. The media had also largely written off [Keir Starmer](#).

A fortnight of Tory sleaze stories later, with [Boris Johnson](#) having been at the centre of many of them, it all looks very different.

“Everything we said, prior to the [Owen Paterson](#) fiasco, appeared to be dying in a giant void,” says the shadow cabinet member Charlie Falconer.

“Now the goal for [Labour](#) is standing open and unguarded. Suddenly it seems like everybody in the media is after stories about how terrible this government is.”

A golden rule of spin doctors, often attributed to Alastair Campbell (though he denies being the originator), is that if one particularly bad story is still plastered over the front pages nine days after it first broke, then the person at the centre of the storm will be in terminal trouble.

Saturday was the 10th day since the Paterson fiasco, in which Johnson tried to save his friend’s career, despite the latter’s “egregious” breaches of Commons rules.

And the sleaze stories were still coming from left and right, thick and fast.

The [Guardian front page headline](#) was “PM’s holiday villa linked to Goldsmith tax evasion case”, while the Daily Mail had a poll that was such bad news for the Conservatives that the paper splashed it across the front. “After a week of sleaze Labour race ahead of Tories by SIX points”, the Mail said. Embarrassingly for Johnson, this was all on the concluding weekend of the Cop26 climate summit – at which he had hoped to pose as a global saviour.



Jennifer Arcuri. Photograph: Leon Neal/Getty Images

Today, on it goes, with the Observer's extraordinary revelations about Jennifer Arcuri's diary of her affair with Johnson when he was London mayor. His ex-lover's apparently contemporaneous notes show he overruled advice from his own officials in order to further her business interests, and their relationship.

A poll for this newspaper by Opinium today also gives Labour a lead – for the first time since January – and shows Johnson's personal ratings plumbing new depths.

Now it is the mood inside the Tory party that is depressed, and very sour.

Much of the 2019 intake – including those who won former Labour seats in the north and Midlands because voters liked Johnson's upbeat political celebrity brand much more than that of Jeremy Corbyn – are furious at being ordered to vote to save Paterson for no reason, only then to be blamed for doing so by their constituents.

Frustration at the government's antics extends right across the Conservative parliamentary party. A Tory MP who won his seat in 2010 said: "Our intake is also pretty pissed off with him because he recently promoted the 2019 intake to jobs ahead of us because they were from the 'red wall' seats, when

we had been waiting for years. And now this. We are not a happy united team.”

Asked on Saturday how bad it was for the prime minister – and if Johnson might be on the way out – a former cabinet minister put it this way: “It is bad. It is certainly the worst crisis he has faced. But it is not unrecoverable.”

What Johnson needed to do, he said, was put time into rebuilding personal relations with his MPs, something he was not very good at.

Inevitably, with the Tories imploding, there is early talk of rivals manoeuvring for Johnson’s job.

Last week Rishi Sunak [distanced himself deliberately](#) from the Paterson mess, saying the party had to do better, though Sunak’s own backing among the Tory grassroots has dropped off since his big-state, high-tax budget.



Liz Truss. Photograph: Ben Stansall/AFP/Getty Images

From the right, supporters of the foreign secretary, [Liz Truss](#), are said to be out in the field, canvassing away. “They are not very subtle,” says one senior Tory, who had seen some lobbying first-hand.

Other names seen as potentially interested and possibly in the frame if things get even worse for Johnson are [Jeremy Hunt](#) and the ex-chief whip Mark Harper.

Labour meanwhile is finding its voice, with its deputy leader, [Angela Rayner](#), and chair of the standards committee, Chris Bryant, leading the anti-sleaze charge. If Starmer can win the trust of the electorate his MPs know things could really begin to look up. “Keir now needs to take the ball and run with it,” said one frontbencher.

For Johnson there is no end to the trouble in sight. The Arcuri revelations are explosive. The parliamentary standards commissioner, Kathryn Stone, is still considering an inquiry into the [refurbishment of the Downing Street flat](#). And on Wednesday, Johnson will appear before the Commons liaison committee to answer questions from senior MPs on sleaze and trust in politics, in what promises to be a highly uncomfortable session in front of TV cameras.

Soon the prime minister will have to act to limit second jobs for MPs, which are feeding a daily production line for sleaze stories. But doing so will bring more political problems for the man who himself earned £1.6m as a backbencher from outside work. “He can’t win with his MPs,” said a former minister. “Whatever he does to limit second jobs he will anger huge numbers of us [who have them].”

In the space of less than a fortnight, Johnson has gone from being viewed as winner both at Westminster and in the country, to being seen as something of a political liability by his own MPs.

Another former minister described him as “a publicity phenomenon, which is how he got the 80-seat majority”. Now that people had begun to see through the act, he suggested, that could be that.

“He’s squandering that,” the former minister added. “He looks dodgy. It’s like having a drift in the ceiling and you think, oh, I can live with that for a bit. And the whole fucking ceiling comes down and you think, I wish I’d dealt with that.

“Voters don’t seem to care, then suddenly, it all catches up with you. The troubles with the economy are going to mount up. Levelling up is a slogan and not a policy. Global Britain is a slogan and not a policy. He just looks shallow.”

Another influential Tory was equally doom laden. “Boris has forgotten what being a Conservative means. It started with ‘parking tanks on Labour lawns’, as a bit of a PR exercise – which was clever, strategic stuff. But it’s gone to his head, he’s bought into his own PR, and he’s now a leader that’s lost his way and forgotten the sound Conservative principles that got him elected as the party’s leader in the first place.

“That, combined with his seeming inability to put a strong team of advisers around him, or to empower ministers to go out and deliver for him as they all want to, and you’ve got a toxic mix of havoc and shambles in No 10 that will drive this country into the ground if MPs don’t start doing something about it.”

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Interview

Jeremy Clarkson on his farming show: ‘It’s like Attenborough doing jetskiing’

[Rich Pelley](#)



‘If I died now, I’d be furious – I’m not nearly finished’ ... Clarkson on his farm. Photograph: Ellis O’Brien / Amazon Prime



Tue 16 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

Over early morning coffee at his Oxfordshire farmhouse, [Jeremy Clarkson](#) is talking about his new nemesis, badgers, and the fact that they constantly urinate, usually on his grass. “If they’ve got TB and a cow eats that bit of grass, then you, the taxpayer, pay for that cow to be killed. A quarter of the world’s badgers live in the UK, causing chaos. But if you say, ‘I’m going to shoot a badger’, you can expect to find your house on fire within 10 minutes. Carrie Johnson is a badger enthusiast, so the government aren’t likely to do anything while she’s running around.”

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Your understanding of why badgers, and the leanings of Boris Johnson’s wife, have got Clarkson’s Levi’s in a twist may depend on how far along his career you’ve travelled. Since leaving the BBC’s Top Gear in 2015, he has co-hosted four series of The Grand Tour (basically Top Gear with 300 times the budget) on [Amazon Prime Video](#). In his most recent Amazon venture – Clarkson’s Farm – he attempts to cultivate the 1,000 acres of land he’s owned since 2008 but didn’t give an agricultural hoot about until the actual farmer who worked them retired in 2019. “I didn’t have a clue what was

growing in my fields,” he says, gesturing all around. “Now I know what’s in them all.”

Clarkson’s Farm has delighted Clarksonphiles by showing TV’s leading boor/buffoon utterly out of his comfort zone and sinking fast. “I had the most awful accident last week,” he says at one point. “I hit a telegraph pole with a very expensive piece of borrowed equipment. So I’m in deep shit.” But there has, inevitably, been criticism from Clarksonphobes, whose existence he acknowledges with the words: “A lot of people don’t like cars, or me, and certainly don’t like the combination of the two.”



‘I kind of know about cars’ ... Clarkson with James May on Top Gear.
Photograph: BBC

Clarkson doesn’t grant many interviews. “You inevitably say something stupid. Then they say, ‘He’s stupid.’ So it’s easier not to bother.” But there is a reason why I’m sitting in front of this mud-splattered figure: he’s got a book out, a collection of his newspaper columns on farming. “I look like a farmer,” he says. “I’ve even bought a check shirt and a pair of steel-toed boots, which are incredibly heavy. I don’t know how farmers walk about.”

Clarkson’s Farm split the Guardian’s TV writers. “Unlike his motoring shows,” wrote [Stuart Heritage](#), “where his stock reaction to any problem was

to blast out of it in an orgy of explosive cluelessness, the Clarkson we meet here is actively willing to learn. Better yet, he isn't the in-your-face alpha of this show, because everyone else knows so much more than him." However, in her one-star review, Lucy Mangan called the show, which she renamed Jeremy Buys a Tractor, "[wearisome, meretricious rubbish](#)".

Clarkson is 61 now. When I ask him how he hopes to die, he pops a piece of Nicorette in his mouth and says: "I used to think I'd put out my last cigarette age 107 and just die. But I stopped smoking four years ago. When my dad died at 61, I thought, 'That's a pretty good innings.' Now I'm 61, if I died, I'd be furious. I'm nowhere near finished. So, yes, I think about dying every day. There's your headline. In 40 years, I shall be dead and nobody shall remember me." Although some channel will probably still be showing Top Gear repeats, I suggest. "No blue plaque," he agrees with a laugh, "but I'll be on Dave."

I've got my first medical for two and half years next week – the full anus – and I'm terrified

Clarkson found himself in hospital with pneumonia in 2017 and, last Christmas, feared he would "die alone in a plastic tent" after contracting Covid. How's his health now? "I've got my first medical for two and half years next week – the full anus – and I'm terrified. They begin with a prostate exam and it gets more undignified as the day goes on. Then a doctor summons you into this dimly lit surgery to look at your results. You sit there thinking, 'Have I got cancer?' That's all I care about. I don't listen to the rest – drink less, lose weight. You'd have thought with all the exercise, I'd look like a whippet."

With The Grand Tour now appearing only as specials (but still carrying on a lot longer than the Guardian would hope, he says) and his agricultural adventure now filming its second series, is the farm Clarkson's retirement plan? "No. I'm not farmer stock. You spend 30 years blowing everything up" – this included his own farmhouse in a 2016 episode of The Grand Tour – "then make this rather gentle programme with some lovely people from a village. It's so far removed, like David Attenborough doing a programme on jet-skiing, or Nicholas Witchell saying, 'I'm going to be a cage fighter.' But

I'm still the same person. I kind of know about cars, so I can be bombastic. I don't know anything about farming, so you're watching me learn. I was nursing a semi yesterday because I was driving past one of the fields in a tractor."



'I've even bought a check shirt' ... Clarkson and his digger. Photograph: Ellis O'Brien / Amazon Prime

A semi? "Priapic," he says. "Tumescent." Oh, I see. "And then I noticed a strip that hasn't been seeded. So I busted Kaleb for making his first mistake in two years." That's Kaleb Cooper, Clarkson's 22-year-old farming assistant. "I haven't seen him all morning. He's in a sulk."

One of the most enjoyable things about Clarkson's Farm is that absolutely everyone treats him with a genuine, complete and utter lack of awe. "Why would they do otherwise?" he says. "I'm just one of those rich fuckers who moved to the Cotswolds." Local opinion is certainly divided, though. The taxi driver who takes me to his house is a fan, referring to him as "Lord Clarkson". But a person I talk to in the pub, who has met him once, describes him as "clearly a massive knob".

Clarkson doesn't seem too concerned and mentions that he has set up a Google alert on himself. "If I get up in the morning and there's no alert," he

says, “I’m thrilled. But the red trousers brigade object to everything. One turned around last night at the parish council meeting and said, ‘It’s not your job to be rude.’ I said, ‘It kind of is.’”



Flying the flag ... with his assistant Kaleb Cooper at the British Farming Awards. Photograph: Amazon Prime Video Clarkson's Farm/PA

There is also something quite refreshing about seeing Clarkson doing an actual hard day’s graft. “I definitely sleep better after a day on the farm,” he says. “There’s no cameras here today, though. I’ve had to write a column and I’m seeing you. But as soon as you’re gone, weather permitting, I’m back on the tractor.”

The week after we speak, Clarkson scores a win at the British Farming Awards, in the Flying the Flag for British Agriculture category. He dedicates it to Cooper, saying he couldn’t have done it without him. This echoes recent remarks made by the sheep farmer and author James Rebanks, who said Clarkson had done “more for farmers in one series than Countryfile achieved in 30 years”.

If Clarkson really has become the new voice of British farming, no one is more surprised than him. “If somebody said to me two years previously, ‘The president of the National Farmers Union wants to take you out for

lunch', I'd have thought, 'What is going to happen in my life to cause that?'"

Does he think an OBE could be on the cards? "You're very sweet. But I'm more annoyed I've never won a Bafta. I've done some bloody good shows over the years: a good one on Brunel and some military documentaries. You'd think the Bafta committee might think, 'We should at least nominate him. Drag him to London to disappoint him.' But as soon as the newspapers say, 'Jeremy Clarkson, friend of David Cameron', that's it: 'He's not having a Bafta.'"

He goes on: "I can't imagine in a million years that the honours committee are going to go, 'Right, everyone, he's just the man.' Come on. Go through the cuttings. You'll quickly discover I'm not."

- Diddly Squat: A Year on the Farm is published by Penguin (£16.99). To support the Guardian and Observer, order your copy at guardianbookshop.com. Delivery charges may apply.
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Illustration: Klawe Rzeczy/The Guardian

[The long read](#)

Votes for children! Why we should lower the voting age to six

Illustration: Klawe Rzeczy/The Guardian

by [David Runciman](#)

Tue 16 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

There is no good reason to exclude children from the right to vote. Indeed, I believe there is a strong case for lowering the voting age to six, effectively extending the franchise to any child in full-time education. When I have made this case, as I have done in recent years in a variety of different forums, I am always struck by the reaction I get. It is incredulity. What possible reason could there be to do something so seemingly reckless and foolhardy? Most audiences recognise that our democracy is growing fractious, frustrated and frustrating. Our political divisions are wide and our

institutions seem ill-equipped to handle them. But nothing surely could justify allowing children to join in. Wouldn't it simply make everything worse?

It would not. In fact, it might make things better. But to understand why, we first need to understand the nature of the problems our democracy faces, and in particular, the generational divide that has become an increasingly important factor in politics over recent decades.

We have never been more divided. And yet we have never had more in common. Britain, like other western democracies, is split down the middle on most of the big political questions. Brexiteers square up against remainers. The north opposes the south. It's the city v the countryside. Graduates confront non-graduates. But at the same time, we increasingly share a single frame of reference. We watch the same TV shows, circle round the same topics of conversation and obsess over the same celebrities. When Oprah interviewed Harry and Meghan, responses to what they said were conditioned by [political tribalism](#). Tell me how you voted in the Brexit referendum and I'd have a good idea of whether you were team Meghan or team Kate. Still, we all tuned in together. And when it was broadcast, we were all under lockdown together.

The contours of this new landscape – politically divided, socially connected – are most stark when it comes to intergenerational conflict. If the franchise at the 2019 UK general election had been limited to the under-30s, Jeremy Corbyn [would have won](#) the biggest landslide in Labour's history. If it had been limited to the over-60s, the Tories would have won almost every seat in the land. The old and the young have become two separate political nations. But they are not, as Disraeli once said of the rich and the poor, "two nations between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy, who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets". Young and old interact at almost every level of their lives. Family life is built on that interaction. Far from inhabiting separate planets, the different generations often inhabit the same homes.

Of course, families can be places of deep antagonism, too, especially when young and old are forced together under one roof. No society has ever been free of intergenerational conflict. What makes our society different is that the generations diverge so profoundly over politics while coming together over so much else. When I was a child in the 1970s, pop music was primarily for the young. Older generations were more likely to listen to classical music, or big bands, or show tunes. Kids swore, but not in front of their parents. Their parents swore, but not in front of the children. Young people wore jeans, but their grandparents didn't. They still wore jackets and ties, or skirts and dresses. When the weather got warmer, the young would strip off, but that was a privilege of youth. The old had to sweat it out. Go to any high street now on a hot summer's day and count the men in shorts, regardless of age. The sixtysomethings will often be dressed like the children.

What, then, explains the widening political divide that lies behind our growing social conformity? The answer is a combination of demography and geography. Ours are now rapidly ageing societies in which older voters have come to outnumber the young. This is the case across Europe, in the US and increasingly in Asia, too. The traditional dynamic of intergenerational conflict was that even if the older generations had the wealth and the power, the young had the numbers. In all democratic societies, from ancient Athens to 1970s Britain, there were many more voters under 40 than over 60. That is no longer the case. Our growing social conformity is not simply because the old are aping the habits of the young. It is because in any society where the middle-aged and elderly are the dominant economic and political blocs, their interests predominate. Pop music used to be for the young because that's where the market was. Now it is people like me who are being catered for (I'm 54). It's my 12-year-old son who is finding himself listening to the music of my youth, not the other way round.



Preschoolers vote in Lausanne, Switzerland, during a practice run at the country's direct democratic system. Photograph: Fabrice Coffrini/AFP/Getty Images

The reason that the outcome of the 2019 general election [looked more like](#) the map of an elderly political nation than a youthful one is simple weight of numbers. The over-65s, who at the dawn of modern mass democracy 100 years ago made up barely 5% of the electorate, are now [closer to 20%](#). What's more, older voters tend to turn out in [far higher numbers](#) than the young. The conventional lament of progressive politicians was that if only people in their 20s voted with the same dedication as people in their 70s, they could tip the balance. It was assumed that elections kept going against younger voters' interests because they failed to show up at the polls. Now it's as plausible to argue that they fail to show up because elections keep going against their interests. Why bother if the system is stacked against you?

This effect has been exacerbated by geographical movement, which congregates significant numbers of younger voters in cities and university towns, where they relocate for work and education. The concerted expansion of higher education from the 1980s onwards has led to a large-scale migration of those in their late teens and early 20s from their home towns, often never to return. The places they go to – Brighton or Bristol,

Canterbury or Cambridge – have become far more likely to return Labour MPs, because there the young can tip the balance. But as their votes pile up in densely populated metropolitan areas, the places they leave behind have started returning Conservative MPs in ever-greater numbers. The “red wall” seats that [turned blue](#) in 2019 have been left behind in this sense at least: the average age of their constituents is far higher than it was before so many students departed.

There is now a set of vicious circles at work. Once politicians representing older voters start winning elections time and again, the young are discouraged from voting, which only makes the political imbalance worse. If young people pursue social mobility by moving to places where other young people are, they increase the likelihood that older voters will dominate electoral outcomes everywhere else. The result will be governments and policies that work against the sorts of social mobility that younger voters tend to favour. This has been [the pattern](#) in Britain for the best part of a generation. Pensions will get protected while student debt goes unaddressed. The interests of mortgage payers will be prioritised over the interests of renters. A country in which more than 70% of the under-30s voted to remain in the EU will still choose to leave. Once the old outnumber the young, the political divisions between them will grow. Even if everyone is watching [Bridgerton](#).

When the pandemic arrived, it briefly seemed likeas if these generational divisions might be somewhat healed. We all faced a common enemy. The lockdown rules applied to everyone, and the experience of being stuck at home generated a whole new set of common reference points. Griping about Zoom – for work, for family calls, for anything – became a habit for young and old alike. Being cooped up, getting used to wearing masks, trying to understand the new rules – these were all things we endured in common, with the same dates in our calendars and the same sense of disappointment as they came and went without clear resolution. Our social connectedness has never been more vividly on display than when we went into enforced isolation from each other.

But this sense of connection simply hid a more familiar pattern. In a society where demography and geography are widening the political divisions

between the generations, the pandemic has done nothing to bridge them. It has made them worse. The worst consequences of the virus are very unevenly distributed. The chances of dying from Covid-19 are vastly greater for the over-70s than the under-30s. That of course is why the old have been prioritised throughout: for protection, for treatment, for vaccination. Neither politicians nor the public have had much choice about this: the profile of the disease meant there was no other option.

In this, the effects of Covid-19 are part of a longstanding trend. As the population ages, healthcare becomes more and more of a political priority. Older people have a greater need for it, and the working population is required to pay for it. Because older people determine the results of elections, politicians do everything in their power to maintain this equation. The totemic status of the NHS throughout its existence conceals a profound shift in its primary purpose. When it was founded in 1948, its priority was infant health, in a society in which infant mortality was high, childhood diseases were still rife and children made up a far higher proportion of the overall population. Now the NHS is required to focus on elderly people, and their interests come first. Covid has not skewed our political priorities when it comes to health. It has simply revealed them.



Schoolchildren rally in Glasgow in 2019 as part of a nationwide student climate march. Photograph: Jeff J Mitchell/Getty Images

The pandemic has highlighted generational imbalances without doing anything to resolve them. Politicians talk about rewarding the young for the sacrifices they have made, but our political system does little to incentivise politicians to turn those words into actions. The young can plausibly claim that democracy presently discriminates against them in more ways than one. Not only are their votes regularly outweighed, but their representatives are rarely from their own generation. The average age of members of the House of Commons has barely changed in a century: it moves up and down from parliament to parliament, but never far away from 50. It is currently 51, roughly where it was after the first world war. It is true that there are more MPs in their 20s in the parliament elected in 2019 than ever before. But it is only 21, and still vastly outnumbered by the 300 MPs in their 50s and 60s, and fewer even than the number of MPs over 70.

Yet there is another source of democratic discrimination that is rarely, if ever, discussed. The reason the over-60s outnumber the under-40s at the polls is not because they represent a higher portion of the overall population. They don't. The median age in the UK [is 40.4](#), which means there are almost as many people under 40 as there are older than that. The over-60s, though far more numerous than they used to be even a generation ago, are still only a minority of the total. But democracy does not work like that. There is no cutoff at the top end, so that the over-60s includes the increasing number of people in their 70s, 80s and above. But we do exclude anyone under the age of 18 (or 16 in Scotland) from full democratic citizenship, including the right to vote. We do this because that is the way it has always been.

When it comes to democracy, children don't count. Why not?

The arguments against allowing children to vote always start with the basic question of competence. But what that means is that we are applying standards to children that we have given up applying to anyone else. It is true, of course, that many children would struggle to understand complex political questions, especially younger children. It is hard to envisage a group of six-year-olds getting to grips with fiscal policy. But many adults also struggle with complex political questions, and all of us have big gaps in our political understanding. (I say this as someone who studies politics for a living, and not because I have studied the ignorance of others, but because I

am reminded daily of my own.) The fact is that we don't apply a test of competence before granting the right to vote to anyone other than children. So why start with them?

Setting imaginary tests before allowing enfranchisement is an essentially 19th-century idea. The basis of the principle of universal suffrage that replaced it is that we no longer believe voting is a right that belongs to individuals on the grounds of their competence to exercise it. Instead, it is a right that belongs to each of us because we are members of a democratic political community, and will have to live with the consequences of the decisions that are made by politicians on our behalf. If we suffer the consequences of those decisions, we should have a right to express a view about who gets to decide. That applies to children just as much as adults.

Perhaps, instead, the argument against letting children vote is less a principled one than a pragmatic one. Surely more adults are likely to understand what is at stake in an election than a group of schoolchildren. But that depends a great deal on how we conceive of the groups in question. It is striking how often sceptical audiences jump to the conclusion that lowering the voting age to six would mean giving six-year-olds a decisive say in the running of the country. That is absurd: the lower age group would be a small minority of children overall, just as children would still be a minority of the overall electorate. Older voters in any instance can always outvote the young. But if we take children in education as a whole, there is a good chance that some groups will be better informed than many adults. They have the time and the resources to learn what is at stake if they want to. No one can be obliged to take an interest in politics, but that is as true of adults as of children. The difference is that children in school are better placed to make up the gaps in their knowledge.

The question of competence – and the difficulty of using it as an argument against extending the vote to children – is especially acute in ageing societies such as our own. As the population ages, so the number of voters suffering from dementia and other forms of cognitive decline rises. But we don't take the vote away from old people, and we don't apply tests of competence to individuals in their 80s and 90s. Again, it is very striking how often I find that when pressed on this point, audiences will say that rather than giving votes to children it would be better – safer? – to disenfranchise

elderly people. The 19th-century assumption that we ought to discriminate on grounds of competence has not gone away.

Yet it would not be better – certainly not safer – to disenfranchise elderly people. As soon as anyone suggests a programme of mass disenfranchisement, we should always ask how it would be done. By doctors? By going into care homes and asking the residents to take a test? By simply arriving at some arbitrary cut-off point, say the age of 80? How would the many actively engaged and extremely well-informed voters in their 80s take to being told that they have lost the right to vote because others of their age have been deemed unfit to exercise it?

There is a lot to be said for the principle of universal suffrage, not least that it sticks to the basic democratic idea of one person, one vote. It does not play around with quotas and competencies and tests. Taking the vote away from elderly people would violate that principle. Giving the vote to children upholds and extends it.

There are plenty of other arguments that are made against allowing children to vote. One of the commonest is that they would simply do what their parents say. In the early years of the 20th century it was often said that it would be pointless to give women the vote because they would just do what their husbands say. This was not true, of course. Women were as capable of making their own choices as men, and they often voted differently from their husbands. Would children be any less independent? We might think that they would be more susceptible to parental pressure than adults are to spousal pressure, but in truth we have no idea because we have never tried to find out. Do children follow their parents' views on other matters than politics? Sometimes, but not always. Do children ever decide to embrace the opposite of what their parents think? Not always, but often enough.

It seems just as likely that children would be influenced in other ways. Perhaps by their grandparents, especially since many school-age children of working parents spend as much time with grandparents as with parents. Perhaps by their teachers, or by their friends, or by their favourite YouTube stars, or by footballers, or by superheroes. So, you might say, I am admitting that children would be susceptible to all sorts of external pressures. Of

course – but so are adults. There is overwhelming social science evidence that all voters, old and young, educated and uneducated, make their political choices on the basis of loyalties, identities and forms of peer pressure that often have little or nothing to do with politics, and certainly are far removed from the political issues that are the focus of high-level debate. We are all politically tribal in one way or another. Do we know whether six-year-olds might turn out to be more conservative than their parents? We don't, but there is only one way to find out. Let them vote.

But shouldn't children be protected for as long as possible from having to deal with the harsh realities of the adult world? Shouldn't we preserve them from grownup responsibilities? These are also familiar arguments, and ones that were made against giving votes to women: why burden anyone with unnecessary responsibilities when the hard work of taking difficult decisions can be left to others? Simone de Beauvoir had a clear response to this line of thought in *The Second Sex*: it's always the people with power who say they want to protect others from exercising it. Men say it. Women don't. Colonisers say it. The colonised don't. Adults say it. [Children](#) don't. People without a say don't want to be protected from the burden of having a say. They want to experience it. And once experienced, they don't want to give it up.

Are children a special case? It is often assumed that getting children involved in politics would corrupt them because politics is such a nasty business. But I believe the opposite is the case. Bringing politics into schools wouldn't make schools worse. It would make politics better, precisely because we take the protection of children seriously. Consider this thought experiment. Think of an adult political debate: BBC Question Time, for example, with all its grandstanding and rabble-rousing and [howling partisanship](#). Then think of a similar debate, discussing similar issues, taking place in front of an audience of primary-aged schoolchildren, with their teachers watching on. Would the conversation be worse-tempered? Or would it be conducted better? Would it perhaps even be better informed?

What's left of the argument against letting children vote is more straightforwardly partisan. Given the competing, age-based electoral maps that divide the UK into the Corbyn/remain nation of the young and the

Johnson/Brexit nation of the old, extending the franchise in this way can look like blatant gerrymandering – a desperate way to reverse Labour’s seemingly grim electoral prospects. Lowering the voting age to 16, which has happened in Scotland, sometimes appears to be a piece of naked political engineering. Because younger voters tend to be left-leaning on a range of issues, increasing their number could be expected to tip the balance in favour of particular causes. Wouldn’t lowering the voting age to six be more of the same? No. First, because we don’t know how children would vote: they don’t tend to get polled, so no one has really asked them. Second, because large-scale enfranchisements rarely have the anticipated effect.



‘The arguments against allowing children to vote always start with the basic question of competence.’ Photograph: BraunS/Getty Images

Lowering the voting age by two years would be a piecemeal reform that could be seen as gerrymandering. The great advantage of lowering the voting age by 12 years is that it would be far less predictable. It would be comparable to the other great enfranchisements, including working men in the 19th century and women in the 20th. These changes created opportunities for all political parties and required a far more inclusive and imaginative conception of the electorate. In both cases – contrary to expectations – the Conservative party discovered how to broaden its appeal.

I am not saying that would happen in this case. I am simply saying we don't know.

Why, then, have an arbitrary age threshold at all? Why not make voting a human right – or even a birthright – and give the vote to everyone from the first day of their lives to the last? Though some political theorists have argued for this, it falls down on practical grounds, because babies and small children would need someone to exercise that vote for them. Once voting becomes a system of proxies and surrogates, it loses the simplicity and clarity of one person, one vote. I do believe in a very basic competence threshold, which is the ability to express a preference in the first place. Being in full-time education seems a reasonable way of establishing that – if you can go to school, you can put a cross against a box or press a button on a voting machine. That means you can vote.

The right to vote goes along with having a share in the fate of a democratic community and having to live with the consequences of the decisions that are made by those in power. Children will have to live with those consequences longer than anyone. If it is argued that they nonetheless do not share in the life of the community in the same way as adults, because they do not earn, or pay tax, or perform public service, we must remember that we stopped making those prerequisites of enfranchisement a long time ago. Adults can vote regardless of the taxes they do or do not pay, of the public services they do or do not perform, of whether they are net contributors to or net beneficiaries of the public purse. They can vote because we all have things in common that transcend our individual contributions. We have preferences and opinions and hopes and fears. Voting is one way – not the only way, and by no means always the most effective, but still one of the most important – to be heard. Children deserve the same.

There is clear evidence that children feel more strongly about some questions than older voters. Education ranks highly as a priority for young and old, but environmental concerns are a far greater priority for the young. This may be because younger people – with a life ahead of them – have longer time horizons. Or it may be something else: fashion, peer pressure, groupthink. It doesn't matter. Preferences are preferences, interests are interests, and the fact that they emanate from children does not invalidate

them. All preferences should count. It would be better for everyone if they did.

Giving children the vote would not, contrary to many people's expectations, be transformative. Mass enfranchisements rarely are. The same kinds of people still end up getting elected, because the incentives for becoming a politician do not change. As the old saying goes, if voting really changed anything, they would abolish it. But voting still matters. I am not arguing for six-year-olds to be in parliament, which would be revolutionary (and, frankly, a little mad). I simply believe that everyone should be able to take part in the electoral process, and to have an opportunity for politicians to ask them what they think and to take account of what they say in constructing their political programmes. Put that way, it is a far less radical idea than it sounds.

Some things would change. Climate politics would probably rise more rapidly up the political agenda. Time horizons for some political decisions might alter. Politicians would have a wider range of views to consider. I do not believe that anyone involved in this newly expanded democracy would become a better person as a result. Politics would still be a cutthroat business. Children would no more be improved by taking part in elections than adults are. This is not about giving children a civics lesson – electoral democracy has never been about that. Giving children the vote would not let children control the future – the adults would still be in charge. But it could invigorate our democracy, improve it, vary it, leave it a little less ossified, a little less predictable, a little less stale.

It might also help bridge the generational divide. In some ways, children do inhabit a different planet from the rest of us. We don't watch the same TV programmes as [they do](#), unless we have no choice. The lives of six-year-olds are deeply mysterious to most adults. That is a large part of why democratic politics should at least be open to their perspective. But at the same time, children don't live apart from older generations. They don't migrate to places where they can pursue the lives they want to lead. They are forced to coexist with the grownups. However much they might prefer it otherwise, they have to listen, if only because the grownups still get to call the shots. Children talk to their parents and grandparents, their teachers and guardians.

The adults don't always listen in return, though it would be far better if they did. But the conversations are real, which is the precondition of democratic politics.

The political theorist John Wall, in his forthcoming book [Give Children the Vote](#), writes of the enfranchisement of the roughly one-quarter of the population to whom it is routinely denied: "It is vital to making contemporary societies more democratic. It is the only way to pressure political leaders to respond to the lived experiences of all instead of just some of the people. It is the only way to make the franchise fully just and effective ... It is not the answer to everything. But it must be part of the solution. Things need realigning and this is arguably our best hope for doing so. No politics is ever perfect. But if societies want to be truly democratic, they need to overcome their engrained biases and embrace the whole human community."

The pandemic has given an opportunity to rethink assumptions that we take for granted. Political choices that would have seemed impossible two years ago have become routine. Why, then, does universal suffrage remain out of bounds?

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Social media

‘The unknown is scary’: why young women on social media are developing Tourette’s-like tics



‘I’ve been called an attention seeker’ ... Meg Jones, 17, began experiencing tics this year. Photograph: Francesca Jones/The Guardian



Sirin Kale

Tue 16 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

Michelle Wacek was a TikTok fan years ago, back when the video-sharing app was called Musical.ly. “I went on it for a laugh,” she says. “And then I got sucked into the vortex.” She took part in lip-syncing challenges, and followed the influencer [Evie Meg](#), who raises awareness about Tourette syndrome among her 14 million followers.

In April 2020, Wacek was messing around in the kitchen when her husband accidentally clipped her in the face. The then 25-year-old chef had a panic attack. “It triggered a PTSD response from a previous abusive relationship I was in,” she says.

Over the next few weeks, Wacek noticed that she was having tics. “They were just little noises,” she says. “Nothing to write home about.” She would scrunch up her nose, or huff. The tics escalated from sounds into words and phrases. Then the motor tics kicked in. “I started punching walls and throwing myself at things,” she says. By July, Wacek was having seizures. She had to stop work. “Being a chef with seizures is not safe at all,” she says.

Her GP referred her to a neurologist, who diagnosed her with functional neurological syndrome (FND). People with FND have a neurological condition that cannot be medically explained, but can be extremely debilitating. “In a general neurological clinic, around 30% of the conditions we see are not fully explainable,” says Dr Jeremy Stern, a neurologist with the charity Tourettes Action. In Wacek’s case, FND manifested in verbal and motor tics, not dissimilar from how Tourette syndrome appears to lay people, although the two conditions are distinct.

Wacek has up to 20 seizures a day and currently has to use a wheelchair. Like Meg, she is now a TikTok influencer, using her platform to raise [awareness of FND](#). “Knowing that I am going through the same crap as other people out there makes me feel better,” Wacek says. “Without all these platforms, I would be quite isolated.”

This month, Wacek’s Facebook groups and online communities lit up. The source: [a Wall Street Journal report about the rise in young women](#) developing sudden-onset tics that doctors thought could be linked to TikTok. The article prompted a swift backlash from many in the Tourette’s and FND community. “I read the article and thought it was a load of crap,” says Wacek. “TikTok is not giving people Tourette’s.” The fact that she followed Meg before developing tics herself, says Wacek, is a “coincidence”.

But there is a rise in young women presenting with unexplained tics that come on suddenly, far later in life than the usual presentation for Tourette syndrome. Some of these young people are social media users, some are not. What on earth is going on?

The neurological journal *Brain* isn’t typically the locus of international controversy. But times are changing. “Journals are more open-access than ever before,” says [Dr Seonaid Anderson](#), a research psychologist and neurodiversity consultant who specialises in Tourette syndrome. “People with neurodiverse conditions can access what is being written about them far more freely. Webinars often feature patients in the audience.”

In August, *Brain* [published a paper with the incendiary headline](#): “Stop that! It’s not Tourette’s but a new type of mass sociogenic illness”. In it, clinicians from Hannover Medical School in Germany speculated that a mass

sociogenic illness (MSI) that resembled Tourette's but was not Tourette's, was spreading among German teenagers. A sociogenic illness, explains researcher Dr Kirsten Müller-Vahl, "is when people who are in close contact develop similar symptoms, but without any underlying cause".

A mass MSI outbreak was seen in the UK [at a Lancashire school in 2015](#), where 40 pupils received medical treatment for dizziness thought to be brought on by anxiety after a handful of children fainted during an Armistice Day service in a warm assembly hall. MSI is currently in the news as a possible cause for the [mysterious Havana syndrome](#), which is affecting diplomats at US bases across the world. But experts did not believe MSI could be spread via social media – until the Hannover team's research.

MSI ripples outwards from a "patient zero", infecting the people around that person in waves of anxiety-induced illness. "People now use social media so intensively that it more or less replaces our normal context," says Müller-Vahl. "You can be in close contact with someone via social media, it can be very emotional, and you can identify with that influencer. We believe that spread can happen solely via social media." In this case, Müller-Vahl identifies this patient zero as a German YouTuber, Jan Zimmerman, who has Tourette syndrome and [runs a channel](#) with 2.2 million subscribers.

In 2019, Müller-Vahl says, teenagers began to present at her clinic with functional Tourette's-like symptoms, a subset of FND. Typically, Tourette's [starts during childhood](#), with six the average age of onset. But the mean onset age of Müller-Vahl's patients was 19. Their symptoms also escalated more quickly than typical Tourette's. In all, since 2019 Müller-Vahl has seen nearly 50 young people; all of them confirmed that they watched Zimmerman's channel. She believes FND was spread via social media contagion, in much the same way that a fainting fit ripples through a packed school hall.

Müller-Vahl is not accusing young people of faking illness. "I know no expert who feels this is malingering," she says. But the title of her paper – Stop That! – was interpreted that way. "People criticised our title because it was a bit provocative," says Müller-Vahl, sounding exasperated. "But we are not saying to the patients: 'Stop that.' It's addressed to medical doctors. Stop diagnosing this as Tourette's, when it's FND."



Michelle Wacek developed functional neurological syndrome in 2020.
Photograph: Jim Wileman/The Guardian

Be that as it may, says Anderson, “It’s easy for the public to think people are saying that you should stop your tics. We want people to get away from that view, which is linked to the dark days of previous years.”

The phenomenon Müller-Vahl’s team observed – young people with sudden-onset tics, thought to be FND and possibly linked to social media exposure – has been observed by clinicians globally. With the exception of Müller-Vahl’s own study, most of those with the symptoms are female. “We’ve seen groups of teenage girls from the same school who develop almost identical tics,” says Dr Tammy Hedderly, a paediatric neurologist at Guy’s and St Thomas’ NHS trust. Stern has likewise heard of outbreaks in UK schools.

“They shout ‘Baked beans!’ or hit their parents on the head,” says Hedderly. “When a 15-year-old girl walks into my clinic shouting ‘Baked beans!’, my first question is: ‘Have you been watching this influencer? Because I know all the names of the influencers. So it’s important to recognise that social media does play a role and the scale of the problem is wide, across the UK.’”

In the US, Dr Caroline Olvera, a [neurologist](#), has also seen an increasing number of young people, mostly girls, presenting with sudden-onset tics.

She wrote a research paper based on her study of more than 3,000 videos of TikTok Tourette's influencers, observing: "Despite our study cohort spanning different countries, 67.9% of the cohort mentioned their TikTok tics were from other content creators, and the majority had the same vocal tic."

Olvera's research has not gone down well in some quarters. "I'm frustrated," she says. "I've tried to stop reading a lot of what is written out there." She's received "lots" of angry emails. "My colleagues have had a positive response to my research," she says, "but I don't know if it's been perceived appropriately by the public. The last thing I would want is for my patients to walk away from this thinking that their disorder is fake or not worthwhile."

Much of the controversy arises from the misapprehension that doctors are accusing young people of faking Tourette's for attention, or arguing that [TikTok](#) is giving people Tourette's. Neither claim is true. "What the media has boiled it down to," says Olvera, "is that if it's not Tourette syndrome, it's fake. But just because it's not Tourette syndrome doesn't mean it's fake. This is a real condition. Even though it's not typical Tourette's, it's very disruptive and stressful."

Meg Jones, 17, began experiencing tics in February this year. "I was really stressed out," she says. Her puppy was sick, and Meg was behind at school. "I had teachers phoning me non-stop, asking me where my work was," she says. "At one point I broke down." The tics started with neck jerks and escalated within weeks. Meg would hit her friends and head-butt things. By May, she was having seizures.

Meg was recently diagnosed provisionally with Tourette's – over the phone. "The call was less than five minutes long," she says. "The neurologist didn't say much. He just said, 'I believe you have Tourette's.'" (A diagnosis of Tourette syndrome requires a person to have had verbal and motor tics for at least one year.) She is on the child and adolescent mental health services (Camhs) waiting list. "If I was to look at my life and think of all the things I can't do at this point, and how uncertain the future is," says Meg, "I would become extremely depressed."

After she developed tics, Meg started to follow TikTok influencers with Tourette's. She is a fan of [@UncleTics](#), a New Zealand influencer with 3.2 million followers. "Finding people who are going through the same thing helps a lot," she says. "But I also noticed that watching other people tic made me tic." She picked up specific vocal tics from these TikTok accounts, such as blurting out the word "lesbian".

It is widely accepted by experts that tics are "suggestible", meaning that people with tics often trigger new tics in each other. "We know that when people with Tourette's get together in support groups," says Anderson, "they may pick up each other's tics, although it's usually for only a few hours." It is not that TikTok is giving people tics; rather, it may be triggering tics in people who are searching social media for information about their condition. "Social media can't create tics," Anderson argues. "What it might do is trigger someone who is already susceptible."

"The safety and wellbeing of our community is our priority," a TikTok spokesperson says. "We're consulting with industry experts to better understand this specific experience. We're proud that people living with Tourette syndrome have found a home on TikTok where they can fight stigma, find community and express themselves authentically."

Meg, meanwhile, isn't consciously imitating the influencers she sees on TikTok. "I've had people at my school tell me that I'm an attention seeker," she says. "But if they were put in my shoes, they'd know that's not true ... Imagine straining your neck for hours a day and not being able to move. As much as I find myself hilarious and laugh about it with my friends, I would 1,000% choose not to have this over having the attention, any day."

Suggestibility can trigger tics even in the classroom. Chloe (not her real name), 14, received a diagnosis of Tourette syndrome in July. "The tics started 18 months ago," says her mother, Jill (also not her real name). "But she'd been suppressing them, until everything came out in September last year. The stress of the pandemic made it too difficult to hold them in." Chloe had to take time off school this year. "During the time she was off," says Jill, "another girl in her class developed tics." Now both girls are in the same classroom, which poses a problem. "They set each other off," Jill explains.

It should not be surprising that the stress of the pandemic is causing young people to present with tics, which are often exacerbated by stress and anxiety. It should also not be surprising that social media use may worsen tics in people with an underlying predisposition, in the same way that social media is known to correlate with other negative mental health outcomes. Stern advises patients to limit social media exposure for this reason.

What is surprising, and dispiriting, is the extent to which stigma persists around little-known conditions such as FND, and the lack of support available to people with tics. “Regardless of why these tics are happening,” says Jess Thom of the [blog Tourette’s Hero](#), “whether they are functional (FND) or Tourette’s, the symptoms are real and not the fault of these young people who are in need of support that doesn’t really exist.”

NHS mental health services are at breaking point due to a post-pandemic backlog. “I’ve heard of families waiting between two and four years to be seen by Camhs,” says Anderson. Chloe is on a two-year waiting list to see a neurologist. Wacek is waiting to see a neurotherapist; in desperation, she called 111 recently, only to speak to a brusque and unsympathetic doctor. “He said I was doing it to myself,” she recalls. “Which made me feel worse, which made me have more seizures.”

In Wales, there is currently no paediatric neurologist who specialises in Tourette syndrome. “It’s shocking,” says Helen Reeves, 42, from Pembrokeshire. Her 13-year-old daughter developed sudden-onset tics in August. “You go to the paediatrician with symptoms and they ask me what I think it might be.” Reeves is campaigning for better provision: [a petition](#) she started has more than 7,000 signatures. It is a similar story in much of the UK. “There are hardly any pathways through to consultants,” says Paul Stevenson, 58, of Berwick-upon-Tweed. His son developed sudden-onset tics last year. “All these people are going through this traumatic period, and doctors are not fully understanding what is going on.”

In the absence of specialist support, young people can only hope their tics become more manageable with time. A couple of weekends ago, Meg went away with friends to Cardiff. It was the first ordinary thing she has managed since her tics came on. “That was a major thing,” she says. “To be a normal independent teenager.” Next year, her friends will apply to university. She

wants to apply too, but is worried. “What if I had a seizure and no one knew what was going on?” says Meg. “The unknown is scary. But I don’t want to be afraid of my life.”

This article was amended on 16 November 2021 to attribute the following quote to Seonaid Anderson, instead of Tammy Hedderly: “I’ve heard of families waiting between two and four years to be seen by Camhs.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2021/nov/16/the-unknown-is-scary-why-young-women-on-social-media-are-developing-tourettes-like-tics>

Women's rights and gender equality

‘If I can get a plane into the sky, I can do anything’: female Afghan pilot refuses to be grounded



‘It was a huge accomplishment for Afghanistan’: Mohadese Mirzaee was a pilot on her country’s first all-female flight. Photograph: Handout

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[Stefanie Glinski](#) in Kabul

Tue 16 Nov 2021 03.00 EST

Sitting alone in her small flat in Bulgaria, Mohadese Mirzaee contemplates the future. Three months ago, she left behind her family, and her dream job, in [Afghanistan](#). At 23, Mirzaee was the country's first female commercial airline pilot.

"Today, I don't know where to go, but I'm not giving up. I've started applying for pilot jobs anywhere because I know I need to get back to flying," she says by phone from the capital, Sofia.

When news broke that the [Taliban had seized](#) Kabul, Mirzaee was already at the airport in her uniform, preparing for her evening flight to Istanbul. She had left home early that morning, waving goodbye to her mother and two sisters.

The flight never took off. As thousands of Afghans stormed the city's international airport, desperate to leave the country, Mirzaee was diverted to a flight to the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv – this time as a passenger.

“It was dark when we took off, that’s all I remember,” she says. “It was a rollercoaster of emotions because everything happened so quickly. I couldn’t believe Kabul had fallen. When I left my house in the morning and said goodbye to my family, I couldn’t have imagined that by evening time, I’d be permanently leaving home.

“I saw my country crumbling,” she recalls.

Just months earlier, Mirzaee had made [headlines as one of the pilots](#) of a Kam Air Boeing 737 – the country’s first flight with an all-female crew.

The Taliban want to silence women. If I give up on my passion, they have achieved their goal

Mohadese Mirzaee, pilot

“It was a huge accomplishment for Afghanistan and for the male-dominated aviation industry in general,” says Mirzaee. She believed then that change within the country’s conservative society was possible, and that she and the airline would be part of it.

But when the Taliban established an [all-male government](#) that saw hundreds of women removed from their jobs, Mirzaee says she was robbed of her hopes for the future.

“Afghan women have done amazingly over the past decades. We’ve used any opportunities given to us. We fought for our rights and scored big achievements. I was hopeful that a window had opened. I was approached by many young women who also dreamed of becoming a pilot,” Mirzaee says.



‘I’m hoping another airline will give me a chance to continue my career,’ says Mohadese Mirzaee. ‘I will fight for my passion.’ Photograph: Handout

“With the [Taliban](#) takeover, it all disappeared. They are the same barbaric group they have been in the past and they want to silence women. If I give up on my passion, they have achieved their goal.”

Mirzaee attended Kabul’s Afghan-Turk Maarif school but finished her final year in Port Colborne in Canada, where she first considered a career in aviation.

She stayed in Canada for another year after her studies, working as a cashier and barista to scrape the money together for flying lessons.

“My flight instructor told me, ‘you have control, so fly the plane’ before taking off on my first ever flight. I was nervous, but I also felt free. I figured, if I can get a plane into the sky, I can do anything,” she says.

Back in Afghanistan, Mirzaee talked to airlines to see if she could continue her training, but they all initially said no. “I kept annoying them,” she laughs.

“Kam Air, one of Afghanistan’s carriers, decided to give me a chance – and I took it very seriously.”

She became Afghanistan's first female commercial airline pilot in September last year, flying to Turkey, Saudi Arabia and India.

Mirzaee was able to travel to Bulgaria on a pre-existing visa. It has just expired and she has been advised to claim asylum.

Her mother and sisters were also evacuated from Afghanistan, flying to Albania on the same day an [explosions ripped through the crowds](#) outside Kabul airport, killing almost 200 people and injuring hundreds more.

Most of her friends are now scattered across the globe.

“When I was studying, my mum always told me to come back to Afghanistan and work for my country. I shared her conviction. But today, even though I’d like to go back, I can’t. There is no space for women like me in Afghanistan any more. I lost my job, my home, my crew – everything.”

But she says: “I’m hoping another airline will give me a chance to continue my career. A lot has been taken from me, but I will fight for my passion. That is what makes me, me.”

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Coronavirus

No 10 plans booster jab requirement for people to obtain Covid pass



As sign in Buckinghamshire on Monday as Boris Johnson said the concept of what constitutes 'full vaccination' will need to be adjusted. Photograph: Maureen McLean/Rex/Shutterstock

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

Mon 15 Nov 2021 13.03 EST

Ministers are set to require three vaccinations from those eligible for booster jabs in order to qualify as being fully vaccinated in areas where people must prove their status, such as travel or avoiding mandatory isolation.

Downing Street sources said the intention was to end up in a place where three jabs, rather than two, was the requirement to obtain a Covid pass showing full vaccination – though currently only over-40s are eligible for the booster.

If the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) continues to recommend boosters for all adults six months after their second jab, then the requirement could be in place in England by the early spring.

News of the plan came as England's chief medical officer, [Chris Whitty](#), also warned there was "major concern" about vaccination rates among pregnant women – saying 98% of severely ill pregnant women in hospital had not been vaccinated.

Speaking at a press conference on Monday, [Boris Johnson](#) said the concept of what constitutes "full vaccination" will need to be adjusted – and said that getting a third jab would become part of that.

"It's very clear that getting three jabs – getting your booster – will become an important fact and it will make life easier for you in all sorts of ways, and we will have to adjust our concept of what constitutes a full vaccination to take account of that," he said. "And I think that is increasingly obvious."

"The booster massively increases your protection – it takes it right back up to over 90%. As we can see from what's happening, the two jabs sadly do start to wane, so we've got to be responsible and we've got to reflect that fact in the way we measure what constitutes full vaccination."

A Downing Street source said it was inevitable that requirements for the digital Covid pass would need to change for travel as more countries began requiring a third dose. Currently booster doses are not displayed on the Covid pass on the NHS app, which has caused some concern over the use of the pass for travel.

In a number of European countries, third doses are set to be a requirement to prove vaccination status. In France, starting in mid-December, over-65s must have had the booster jab in order to access spaces such as restaurants and galleries or travel long distances. Other countries, including Austria, Switzerland and Croatia, have expiry dates on fully vaccination status – in effect enforcing booster jabs.

Johnson said the government was "making plans to add the booster to the NHS Covid travel pass." He added: "If you're thinking about that, then this

is yet another reason to get it done.”

At the press conference, Whitty said there were “storm clouds” gathering over parts of Europe.

He said the UK could soon feel the effects of the new wave in central and western Europe. “We don’t yet know the extent to which this new wave will sweep up on our shores but history shows that we cannot afford to be complacent,” he said.

“Those countries with lower vaccination rates have tended to see bigger surges in infection and in turn been forced to respond with harsher measures while those countries with higher vaccination rates have so far fared better.”

Whitty said the other major target for the vaccine roll-out was pregnant women who were more hesitant to have the vaccine. “I would just like to give you some fairly stark facts about this because this is a major concern,” he said.

Whitty said that between 1 February and the end of September, 1,714 pregnant women were admitted to hospital with Covid, 98% of whom had not been vaccinated. And of 235 women admitted to intensive care units, over 98% had not been vaccinated.

“These are preventable admissions to ICU and there have been deaths,” he said. “All the medical opinion is really clear that the benefits of vaccination far outweigh the risks in every area.

“This is a universal view among doctors and among the midwife advisory groups and among the scientific advisory groups. So can I please encourage all women who are pregnant or wishing to become pregnant to get their vaccination.”

On Monday, the government’s vaccines watchdog said Covid booster vaccines would be extended to those aged between 40 and 49 in the UK, as well as giving approval for teenagers aged 16 and 17 to receive second jabs.

A study by the UK [Health](#) Security Agency found that boosters gave more than 90% protection in people over 50. The research showed that two weeks after receiving a booster dose, protection against symptomatic infection was 93.1% in those who had initially received Oxford/AstraZeneca and 94.0% for Pfizer/BioNTech.

Prof Wei Shen Lim, the chair of the JCVI, said it was possible boosters might be extended further down the age range.

“It may well be that adults who are under 40 years might require a booster dose or a third dose at some point. We don’t know whether that is definitely the case yet.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/15/no-10-plans-booster-jab-requirement-for-people-to-obtain-covid-pass>

Coronavirus

UK Covid booster jabs policy: what has changed?



Vaccination of 12- to 15-year-olds is ongoing, with some yet to receive a first dose of vaccine. Photograph: Ian Forsyth/Getty Images

[Linda Geddes](#) Science correspondent

Mon 15 Nov 2021 10.01 EST

What has been announced?

Until now, Covid booster jabs were only being offered to adults aged 50 and older, and those in at-risk groups. This is now being [extended](#) to include all adults aged 40 to 49, and Boris Johnson has said the [concept of what constitutes “full vaccination” will need to be adjusted](#). This third jab will be given six months or more after the second dose.

The Scottish government said 40- to 49-year-olds would be invited to receive a booster once everyone in the earlier priority groups had been offered one, but that they would be able to book an appointment through the NHS portal “shortly”. They were also considering how best to implement the advice for 16- to 17-year-olds. The Welsh government also said it would provide information shortly on how they planned to roll vaccines out to these groups and Northern Ireland is expected to follow suit. The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) is also advising that a second dose of Covid-19 vaccine should be offered to all 16- and 17-year-olds, 12 weeks or more after receiving their first vaccine dose. Previously, only those in at risk groups were eligible for a second dose; other teenagers had to wait until they turned 18.

Why now?

Primarily, to help maintain high levels of protection against hospitalisation, severe illness or dying from Covid-19 this winter, and reduce pressure on the NHS in the coming months. Recent [data](#) from the UK and elsewhere have indicated a slight fall in the levels of protection against severe Covid-19 among adults who received their initial two doses some time ago.

For 16- to-17-year-olds, the decision to advise on a second dose was based on a review of the latest evidence of the benefits of the vaccine programme, compared with the risks of any side-effects, the JCVI said. Not only does a second dose increase the level of protection and extend the duration of that protection, it may also reduce the risk of onward transmission to vulnerable close contacts, such as grandparents.

How much additional protection will a booster provide?

[Newly published data](#) from the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) suggested that Britons aged 50 years and older who received a third booster dose of either the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine increased their level of protection against symptomatic Covid-19 infection to 93.1% for those who had previously received two doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine and to 94.0% for those who previously had the Pfizer jab.

Twenty weeks or more after receiving their first two doses, the level of protection among those who did not get a booster was 87.4% for those who had had the AstraZeneca vaccine, and 84.4% for those received the Pfizer jab.

“This is the first real evidence of the effectiveness of the booster in the UK setting,” said Paul Hunter, a professor in medicine at the University of East Anglia. “This is perhaps even more impressive when considering that a significant proportion of people who have not yet had their booster will have had an infection and so had some additional protection now. This report also gives reassurance that whether someone had AstraZeneca or Pfizer as their first course, the booster provides similar excellent protection.”

Because of the natural lag between acquiring infection and experiencing complications, it is too early to say what the impact of boosters on hospitalisations will be.

When will I be able to book an appointment?

According to NHS England, the National Booking System will open for those aged 40-49 from 22 November, allowing those who had their second dose at least 152 days (five months) earlier to book a third jab – although the appointment itself won't take place until at least 182 days (six months) after their second dose.

For those aged 16-17, the booking service for second jabs will be available from 22 November, with appointments available no earlier than the recommended 12 weeks after their first.

Will it be the same vaccine as I received the first time around?

Not necessarily. The JCVI is advising that booster jabs for adults aged 40 years and over should be either Pfizer or Moderna – irrespective of the vaccines given for the first and second doses.

For 16- and 17-year-olds, the second dose will be the Pfizer vaccine – the only vaccine currently licensed for this age group in the UK.

How long will it take for the additional protection to kick in?

In the UKHSA study, the level of protection five to six days after the booster dose was similar to that seen in individuals who had received two initial doses but no booster. It is unclear precisely when the additional protection from the third jab would kick in, but the higher levels of protection observed in this study were recorded 14 days post-jab. It's possible that protection will be higher still as time progresses, although how long this additional protection will last is unknown. It is also unclear whether further booster doses will be required in the future, and if so, when.

Will younger teenagers and adults be offered second jabs or boosters as well?

According to the JCVI, there is currently no robust evidence of a decline in protection against hospitalisation and deaths among under-40s who have received both vaccine doses. However, since these individuals are at lower risk of severe disease and received their first two doses later than older adults, it may simply take longer for any decline in protection to be detected.

Vaccination of 12- to-15-year-olds is ongoing, with some yet to receive a first dose. However, many scientists believe they should be offered a second vaccine dose in due course. The JCVI said it would continue to closely review all available data to develop further advice.

What if I've recently been infected with Covid-19?

The NHS advises adults to wait four weeks after having a positive Covid-19 test before booking a booster.

For 16- and 17-year-olds, the second vaccine dose should be given 12 weeks or more after the first dose, or 12 weeks after a positive Covid-19 test result, whichever is later.

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Austria

Austrian police carry out routine checks as unvaccinated enter lockdown



Police officers stand guard as people gather in Vienna to protest against Covid restrictions. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty

[Philip Oltermann](#) in Berlin

[@philipoltermann](#)

Mon 15 Nov 2021 10.37 EST

Police in Austria have begun carrying out routine checks on commuters to ensure compliance with a nationwide "[lockdown for the unvaccinated](#)", as the Alpine country tries to get on top of one of the most rapidly rising infection rates in Europe.

The restrictions, which came into effect on Monday morning, will affect almost 2 million Austrian citizens aged 12 and older who have so far not been fully vaccinated against Covid-19. Of those, the 356,000 people who

have been vaccinated only once can be released from lockdown if they show a negative PCR test.

Those who are found to be in breach of the rules face fines between €500 and €3,600.

“It can happen any time and anywhere,” the interior minister, Karl Nehammer of the Austrian People’s party, said of the police checks. “Every citizen has to expect to be checked.”

However, a long list of exceptions has led critics to warn that the partial lockdown will be difficult to enforce: unvaccinated people will still be able to go to work with a negative test result, do essential shopping and outdoor physical exercise, meet their partner or other select individuals, and “satisfy their basic religious needs”.

Schoolchildren, who are tested regularly, are also exempt from the lockdown.

63% of all Austrian citizens are fully vaccinated against Covid-19

The measures, details of which were announced on Sunday by the chancellor, Alexander Schallenberg, are provisionally designed to last for 10 days, though the government said it would discuss potential further restrictions on Wednesday, such as a nighttime curfew that would also apply to those who have been vaccinated.

“My aim is very clear: to get the unvaccinated to get vaccinated, not to lock up the unvaccinated,” Schallenberg told ORF radio station.

The week before the new restrictions came into place, almost 130,000 people in Austria chose to be vaccinated for the first time, the highest weekly number recorded since the second week of July.

The far-right Freedom party has said it will seek legal action against the lockdown measures and announced plans to organise a protest in Vienna on Saturday.

The leader of the Freedom party, Herbert Kickl, announced via Facebook on Monday afternoon that he would not be able to participate in the protest since he had tested positive for Covid-19 and would have to quarantine for 14 days.

[In Austria, 74% of adults aged 18 and over are fully vaccinated against Covid-19](#)

Over the past week, Austria has recorded almost 840 new cases per 100,000 people, the highest infection rate in western [Europe](#) and the highest recorded in the country since the start of the pandemic. On Monday, Austria reported 11,889 new cases and 40 new deaths.

At 63%, the country's vaccination rate is also the lowest in western Europe, though only a few percentage points lower than the 67% of the population fully vaccinated in Britain.

The UK, which has so far declined to reintroduce any curbs on social movement, has been recording a similar number of weekly Covid deaths relative to its population.

In Germany, the parties of the likely next government have also signalled they would be prepared to reintroduce some restrictions on social gatherings and checks of vaccine status or test results on public transport in an attempt to curb rising infection rates.

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2021.11.16 - Opinion

- Levelling up? If anything, things are getting worse for the lowest paid in the UK
- Has the nation finally had enough of Tory scandals?
- The Cop26 message? We are trusting big business, not states, to fix the climate crisis
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Levelling up? If anything, things are getting worse for the lowest paid in the UK

[Polly Toynbee](#)





“‘Change jobs’ say economists … They need only venture into the real world to understand why few low-paid families dare take the risk.’ Photograph: Nathan Stirk/Getty Images

Tue 16 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

This should be the moment: it’s the best chance in years for a shot at the “high wage, high skill economy” that [Boris Johnson promised](#). The ratio of job vacancies to unemployed people is at its highest since the 1960s, meaning employers are in theory competing for workers rather than the other way around. If not now, when?

Wherever you go, spot the “staff wanted” signs in shops, care agencies, minicab offices, cafes, hairdressers, on the back of buses and vans. At last, is the boot on the worker’s foot – a deserved reward for pandemic heroism?

There’s scant sign of it. The Bank of England says actual pay has [risen about 3%](#), while the City expects Wednesday’s Office for National Statistics inflation rate to hit 4%. Highly skilled workers may manage to keep up, their wages following the cost of living, but the low-paid won’t.

The Office for Budget Responsibility projects an imminent decline in household income

On Monday, the “real living wage” – a voluntary scheme – [rose to £9.90 an hour](#) outside London, which equates to £1,930 more a year than the government’s so-called national living wage (NLW). The Living Wage Commission sets this rate, unlike the government’s, to reflect the rising price of rent, food and fuel. The good news is that a third more companies became accredited living wage employers during the pandemic, committed to paying this rate. Now almost 9,000 employers, including half of the FTSE 100, have signed up, covering 300,000 staff. By setting the pace, Gavin Kelly, chair of the Living Wage Commission, says their rate pushes governments to keep raising the official rate. Even so, almost 5m jobs, or one in six nationally, pay below the real living wage. If Johnson seriously meant his “levelling up” to make the country less unequal, he would start here: in the south-east of England 12.8% are low paid; that figure rises in the north, with the highest, at 21.3%, in Northern Ireland.

Yet what the budget gave, it took back: while the NLW rose, 55p in each extra pound is lost as a result of changes to universal credit. Since the end of the £20 a week “uplift”, the [Resolution Foundation finds that](#) despite the minimum wage rise, the lowest-paid fifth of households will lose £280 a year. But in the wretched world of low pay, the hourly rate is deceptive. For those on zero-hours contracts, what matters most is the number of hours worked: a week with too few can plunge families into debt. The government’s long-delayed employment bill needs to make guaranteed contracted hours a right. Will that bill include the power to stop the “self-employment” sham that denies security, or sick and holiday pay? A regulator needs to enforce rights. Will it ban monstrous forms of control, such as [algorithmic systems](#) that make employees work like robots, harming their mental health?

Any serious project of levelling up would adopt Labour’s plan for fair pay agreements in each sector, starting with social care. Winston Churchill [created wage councils](#), which fixed payment thresholds in each sweatshop occupation, but John Major abolished them to let the market rip. Decades after Margaret Thatcher eviscerated the unions, it’s time to oblige employers to let them recruit in every workplace. There’s no levelling up without rebalancing the power between employer and employee.

That means between gender too, as two-thirds of the low-paid are women. This Thursday is Equal Pay Day, the dismal point in the year when, metaphorically, women stop earning: this year they [earned almost 12% less than men](#). Deep sexism in social attitudes traps women in a downward pay spiral for all the bad old reasons: they work in low-pay sectors – caring, cleaning, catering, checkouts – in traditional women’s roles, traditionally underpaid because women do them. Worse, the Fawcett Society points to [research indicating](#) that when women move into a sector, pay falls.

“Change jobs to let the labour market work its magic!”, say economists with their dud models. They need only venture into the real world to understand why few low-paid families dare take the risk – the typical level of savings among the [poorest fifth of households](#), before the pandemic, was £473. A mother dashing to work, then home to collect children, has no time to job hunt. Is that job nearby, do its hours fit childcare times, how can she go for an interview? It could mean queueing at agencies to collect and then bring back forms with photos and certificates; a delayed start-date and the wait for the first payday mean she risks pennilessness in the meantime. What if the job doesn’t work out?

The high-skilled may leverage themselves to keep up with inflation, but not the insecure low-paid. “Upskill and aspire!” urge Tory politicians. But five out of six people on low pay are still low paid a decade later, [finds the Institute for Employment Studies](#), with women least likely to progress through training or promotion.

Sadly, this doesn’t look set to be a golden era where the underpaid call the shots. The Office for Budget Responsibility projects an imminent decline in household income, with inflation outpacing earnings, which are [1% lower than this time a year ago](#). By 2024 the Resolution Foundation predicts only a pitiful 0.5% increase in real incomes, which would make this parliament the very worst on record for wage growth. That’s after virtual stagnation since the 2008 crash. Ipsos Mori reports [exceptional pessimism](#) about the rising cost of living. Voters won’t judge levelling up by a handful of reopened northern railway lines: it’ll still be the economy, stupid.

- Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist

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Has the nation finally had enough of Tory scandals?

[Zoe Williams](#)



New low? Owen Paterson was forced to resign as an MP after he was found to have broken lobbying rules.

Photograph: Peter Nicholls/Reuters

Tue 16 Nov 2021 02.00 EST

In the great scandal pile-up of the current government, it can be hard to prioritise. What is more important, Jacob Rees-Mogg's [undeclared £6m low-interest loan](#) to himself or Boris Johnson putting himself forward as the footstool, or the throttle – or the toadstool, or whatever the hell his libidinous analogising was trying to get at – to [Jennifer Arcuri's career](#)? Which is more inappropriate – [Chris Grayling's £100k gig](#) with Hutchison Ports or [Andrew Mitchell's six consultancy jobs](#) with investment banks and accountancy firms? In the avalanche of dirt, it can be hard to tell which way is up.

Yet a new reality is beginning to emerge. We have hit the tipping point, where all the things that previously didn't matter suddenly do: from 2019 until now were the “priced in” years; so Johnson invited Arcuri to his house, left her there to take selfies while he ran out to buy cheese, may or may not have engaged in sexual activities on his family sofa ... isn't that exactly what we expected of this oft-divorced, unknown-number-of-children politician? And doesn't it naturally follow that standards of probity and transparency will be pretty lax in his party overall, that rich people gonna rich, and Tories gonna crony?

It has not been hard to find impropriety in Conservative ministers' and MPs' behaviour: infidelity during office hours, gargantuan contracts going to spouses and friends, that very distinctive whiff of people looking out for number one. It has been extremely hard, by contrast, to get anyone to react. Opposition lines about “one rule for them, another for us” have fallen flat. [Conservatives](#) have defended one another's impunity with great gusto and been met hitherto with a collective: “Meh.”

Arguably, the [Owen Paterson](#) affair was a new low, his colleagues not only ignoring the rules but trying to overturn them. But was there anything new about that low, or have they been bumping along the sea bed for ages? It may be that we all just hit the hard limit of what we could swallow. Now

every new detail hits the nation's gag reflex. This could end in an elegant intra-Tory coup where they replace the leader and start again; or it could be much messier and altogether better. But it doesn't have the feel of a tipping point that will easily tip back.

- Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist
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[OpinionCop26](#)

The Cop26 message? We are trusting big business, not states, to fix the climate crisis

[Adam Tooze](#)



‘So, how does John Kerry propose to close the gap? As far as he is concerned, the solution is private business Photograph: Alberto Pezzali/AP

Tue 16 Nov 2021 03.00 EST

Cop26 delivered no big climate deal. Nor, in truth, was there any reason to expect one. The drastic measures that might – at a stroke – open a path to climate stability are not viable in political or diplomatic terms. Like climate breakdown itself, this is a fact to be reckoned with, a fact not just about “politicians”, but about the polities of which we are all, like it or not, a part. The step from the scientific recognition of a climate emergency to societal agreement on radical action is still too great. All that the negotiators at Cop26 could manage was makeshift.

When it comes to climate finance, the gap between what is needed and what is on the table is dizzying. The talk at the conference was all about the annual \$100bn (£75bn) that rich countries had promised to poorer nations [back in 2009](#). The rich countries have now apologised for falling short. The new resolution is to make up the difference by 2022 and then negotiate a new framework. It is symbolically important and of some practical help. But, as everyone knows, it falls laughably short of what is necessary. John Kerry, America's chief negotiator, said so himself in a [speech to the CBI](#). It isn't billions we need, it is trillions. Somewhere between [\\$2.6tn and \\$4.6tn](#) every year in funding for low-income countries to mitigate and adapt to the crisis. Those are figures, Kerry went on to say, no government in the world is going to match. Not America. Not China.

We should take the hint. There isn't going to be a [big green Marshall plan](#). Nor are Europe or Japan going to come up with trillions in government money either. The solution, if there is to be one, is not going to come from rich governments shouldering the global burden on national balance sheets.

So, how does Kerry propose to close the gap? As far as he is concerned, the solution is private business. Hence the excitement about the \$130tn that Mark Carney [claims to have rallied](#) in the Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero, a coalition of banks, asset managers, pension and insurance funds.

Lending by that group will not be concessional. The trillions, Kerry insisted to his Glasgow audience, will earn a proper rate of return. But how then will they flow to low-income countries? After all, if there was a decent chance of making profit by wiring west Africa for solar power, the trillions would already be at work. For that, Larry Fink of BlackRock, the world's largest fund manager, has a ready answer. He can direct trillions towards the energy transition in low-income countries, if the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are there to [“derisk” the lending](#), by absorbing the first loss on projects in Africa, Latin America and Asia. Even more money will flow if there is a carbon price that gives clean energy a competitive advantage.

It is a neat solution, the same neat neoliberal solution that has been proffered repeatedly since the 1990s. The same solution that has not been delivered.

Talk of carbon pricing evokes the bitter memory of [shock therapy](#) in eastern Europe and the developing world. BlackRock's [backstop idea](#) is the logic of the 2008 bank bailouts expanded to the global level – socialise the risks, privatise the profits.

At this point those promising trillions in private funding to fight the climate crisis reveal themselves to be the true utopians, just utopians of a neoliberal variety. Carbon pricing – a fee placed on emissions – may be the economists' favourite. The one place where it may work, ironically, is in Europe, where energy is already heavily taxed and the most sophisticated welfare states in the world can cushion the impact. China is experimenting with the largest carbon market yet. But as a global proposition, a single minimum carbon price is a non-starter, first and foremost in the US, whose economists [invented the idea](#).

Nor is Congress or any European parliament about to vote in favour of hundreds of billions of dollars to backstop BlackRock. Western states carried out bailouts in 2008 and again in 2020. But those were desperate efforts, *faute de mieux*, to save the status quo at home. And that was toxic enough. Stretched to a global scale, it has zero political appeal.

However, the risk is not that [Cop26](#) opens the door to some gigantic neoliberal climate stitch-up, but instead that we remain locked in our current impasse, careening towards catastrophe.

Faced with that prospect, both the US and the EU seem less preoccupied with grand schemes of carbon pricing and blended finance, than with pushing a case-by-case approach. Four separate initiatives show the direction of travel.

The [deal on aluminium and steel](#) announced by the EU and the US ends one of Trump's more absurd trade wars and turns it into a process for agreeing on accounting rules for carbon. What seems to be envisioned is a hi-tech, clean-steel trade zone, with [tariffs imposed](#) on high-carbon imports from China, Russia and Ukraine. It isn't a global carbon price, but a sectoral [rich-country buyers' club](#).

On coal, though the final declaration [was disappointing](#), the US is working with India to promote the rollout of renewables. This involves a three-way [partnership](#) with the UAE to provide technical assistance and finance to speed up the [move away from coal](#). India is not the only emerging market with a coal problem.

One of the best pieces of news out of Cop26 was the multinational [\\$8.5bn package](#) to support the winding down of coal burning by Eskom, South Africa's bankrupt and dysfunctional power utility.

To accelerate the pace of industrial change, history tells us that the key is to incentivise first movers – leading firms that adopt new technologies and thus send the message to their competitors: innovate or be left behind. In unleashing a race to the top, the announcement of the [First Movers Coalition](#) in November, backed by the US and the World Economic Forum and involving firms like shipping giant Maersk and Cemex and Holcim, two of the world's leading cement makers, is potentially a significant step.

Finally, there is the deal to cut emissions of methane, the long-neglected but deadly greenhouse gas, [by 30% by 2030](#). That will involve a technological push across the oil and gas industry worldwide.

Advocates of the Green New Deal have long urged big government-led industrial policy. The approach of Kerry and his team seems to follow a more low-key, pragmatic script. As Danny Cullenward and David Victor write in their book, Making Climate Policy Work, rather than attempting a contentious grand bargain, the key is to find coalitions of the willing and drive change sector by sector, raising ambition through [repeated rounds of bargaining](#).

Like the Paris agreement of 2015, which first demonstrated this pragmatic approach in action, the Kerry initiatives face two big questions. Will a series of ad hoc measures add up to an adequate overall solution? Furthermore, not every deal can be win-win. How will the tough trade-offs be fought out? Whose interests will be served? The reply by the pragmatists is that no general answer can be given in advance. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. It is not much of an answer. But, as Cop26 attests, it may be the only realistic one.

If that is the case, then the response of the climate movement should be to keep up the pressure. In political terms, pragmatic ad hocery may be realistic, but there is no negotiating with the dwindling carbon budget. Given how deeply entrenched the status quo is, the temptation to conservative wishful thinking is everywhere. Someone has to pound the message home. The biggest risk is not to change.

- Adam Tooze is a professor of history at Columbia University
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OpinionNHS

As a paramedic, I can tell you why people are dying in the backs of ambulances, Mr Javid

Anonymous



Ambulances outside the Royal London hospital in Whitechapel, London, November 2021. Photograph: Mark Thomas/Rex/Shutterstock

Mon 15 Nov 2021 12.10 EST

Dear Sajid Javid, I am a paramedic working on the frontline for an NHS ambulance service in England. I have worked as a paramedic on the frontline throughout the Covid pandemic. It first occurred to me to write to you following your [October speech](#) in which you spoke of “doing what it takes to ensure that the pressure on the NHS does not become unsustainable, and we don’t allow the NHS to become overwhelmed”.

Today, with new revelations of the plight of [people who die in the back of ambulances](#) and the up to 160,000 more a year who come to harm because they are stuck outside hospitals unable to be admitted to A&E, we all see the extent to which the NHS is struggling in the face of extraordinary pressure.

Let me share with you my perspective from the frontline. The [NHS](#) is running on empty. The staff are physically and mentally exhausted. And yet we are constantly asked for more.

I recently worked 54 hours in four days. I had five hours of unplanned overruns at the end of my shifts. My 30-minute break, which I am entitled to in a 12-hour shift, was eight or nine hours into the shift every time. That is nine hours of work without a break. That is due to the sheer amount of calls we are receiving as an ambulance service.

This is not a sustainable way of working. I finished my shifts physically and mentally drained, and considering resigning from my job. I love my job. I love working as a paramedic, but in recent times, I am starting to consider the physical strain that it is putting on my body, and the stress and tension I am carrying around with me even on my days off. My time away from work is not downtime any more, because I cannot relax from the strain of the job. We are being worked into the ground. This will lead to more resignations and more strain on an already stretched service.

The patients that we are seeing are hugely suffering. I see it myself on a daily basis at work: people are waiting 12 hours or more for an ambulance. This may be an elderly person who has fallen and is still on the floor. The repercussions of this for the patient are enormous. They will develop pressure sores that may never heal. They will become severely dehydrated and their kidneys may begin to shut down, which will lead to multi-organ failure.

Another example I have seen several times are patients who ring 999 late at night because they are struggling with suicidal thoughts and need help and support to prevent them from acting on those thoughts. We are not arriving at their house until eight hours later, at 6am, by which time we may be too late.

I have been driving to a patient who had been waiting 16 hours for an ambulance. Unfortunately, we didn't even get to their house because we got diverted to a more serious call. That patient waited even longer for an ambulance.

Imagine if that had been your mother, one of your brothers or your son who had waited 16 hours for an ambulance. It is unacceptable.

These patients are receiving a dangerous and unsatisfactory level of service from the NHS. This has a harmful effect on the overworked staff, too. It is very disheartening and wearying for the staff to see these situations on a daily basis, despite their hard work.

Please do not tell us that you wish to prevent the pressure on NHS becoming unsustainable. It already is.

Mr Javid, there is no quick and easy solution to this issue, but it should be recognised for what it is. Your blindness and complete aversion to acknowledging that the NHS is already overwhelmed does nothing to help the patients who are waiting 16 hours for an ambulance.

Regards,

An NHS paramedic

- The writer is an anonymous NHS England paramedic

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[Joe Biden](#)

‘America is moving again’: Joe Biden signs hard-fought \$1tn infrastructure deal into law



US president Joe Biden signs the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act at the White House in Washington. Photograph: Jonathan Ernst/Reuters

Associated Press

Mon 15 Nov 2021 22.31 EST

President [Joe Biden](#) has signed his hard-fought \$1tn infrastructure deal into law before a bipartisan, celebratory crowd on the White House lawn, declaring that the new infusion of cash for roads, bridges, ports and more is going to make life “change for the better”.

The president hopes to use the infrastructure law to build back his popularity, which has taken a hit amid rising inflation and the inability to fully shake the public health and economic risks from Covid-19.

“My message to the American people is this: America is moving again and your life is going to change for the better,” he said.

However, the prospects are tougher for further bipartisanship ahead of the 2022 midterm elections as Biden pivots back to more difficult negotiations over his broader \$1.85tn social spending package.

With Monday’s bipartisan deal, the president had to choose between his promise of fostering national unity and a commitment to transformative change. The final measure whittled down much of his initial vision for infrastructure. Yet the administration hopes to sell the new law as a success that bridged partisan divides and will elevate the country with better drinking water, high-speed internet and a shift away from fossil fuels.

“Folks, too often in Washington the reason we didn’t get things done is because we insisted on getting everything we want. Everything,” Biden said. “With this law, we focused on getting things done. I ran for president because the only way to move our country forward in my view was through compromise and consensus.”

Biden will get outside Washington to sell the plan more broadly in coming days.

He intends go to New Hampshire on Tuesday to visit a bridge on the state’s “red list” for repair, and he will go to Detroit on Wednesday for a stop at General Motors’ electric vehicle assembly plant, while other officials also fan out across the country.

“We see this as is an opportunity because we know that the president’s agenda is quite popular,” said Jen Psaki, the White House press secretary. The outreach to voters can move “beyond the legislative process to talk about how this is going to help them. And we’re hoping that’s going to have an impact.”

Biden held off on signing the hard-fought infrastructure deal after it passed on 5 November until legislators were back from a congressional recess and could join in a bipartisan event.

The gathering on Monday on the White House lawn was upbeat, with a brass band and rousing speeches, a contrast to the drama and tensions when the fate of the package was in doubt for several months. The speakers lauded the measure for creating jobs, combating inflation and responding to the needs of voters.

Senator Rob Portman, an Ohio Republican who helped negotiate the package, celebrated Biden's willingness to jettison much of his initial proposal to help bring GOP lawmakers on board. Portman even credited former president Donald Trump for raising awareness about infrastructure, even though the loser of the 2020 election voiced intense opposition to the ultimate agreement.

"This bipartisan support for this bill comes because it makes sense for our constituents, but the approach from the centre out should be the norm, not the exception," Portman said.

In order to achieve a bipartisan deal, the president had to cut back his initial ambition to spend \$2.3tn on infrastructure. The bill that became law on Monday in reality includes about \$550bn in new spending over 10 years, since some of the expenditures in the package were already planned.

Senate GOP leader Mitch McConnell supported the agreement, saying the country "desperately needs" the new infrastructure money, but he skipped Monday's signing ceremony, telling WHAS radio in Louisville, Kentucky, that he had "other things" to do.

Historians, economists and engineers welcomed Biden's efforts. But they stressed that \$1tn was not nearly enough to overcome the government's failure for decades to maintain and upgrade the country's infrastructure.

"We've got to be sober here about what our infrastructure gap is in terms of a level of investment ... that this is not going to solve our infrastructure problems," said David Van Slyke, dean of the Maxwell school of citizenship and public affairs at Syracuse University.

"Yes, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act is a big deal," said Peter Norton, a history professor in the University of Virginia's engineering

department. “But the bill is not transformational, because most of it is more of the same.”

Norton compared the limited action on the climate crisis to the start of the second world war, when Roosevelt and Congress reoriented the entire US economy after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Within two months, there was a ban on auto production. Dealerships had no new cars to sell for four years as factories focused on weapons and war materiel. To conserve fuel consumption, a national speed limit of 35mph was introduced.

“The emergency we face today warrants a comparable emergency response,” Norton said.

Biden tried unsuccessfully to tie the infrastructure package to passage of a broader package of \$1.85tn in proposed spending on families, health care and a shift to renewable energy that could help address the climate crisis. That measure has yet to gain sufficient support from the narrow Democratic majorities in the Senate and House.

Biden continues to work to appease Democratic skeptics of the broader package, while also holding on to the most liberal branches of his party. Pelosi said in remarks at the bill signing that the separate package will pass “hopefully this week”.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/nov/16/america-is-moving-again-joe-biden-signs-hard-fought-ltn-infrastructure-deal-into-law>

Birds

House sparrow population in Europe drops by 247m



The house sparrow has been the hardest hit species, losing half its population in Europe since 1980. Photograph: Keith J Smith./Alamy

[Patrick Barkham](#)

[@patrick_barkham](#)

Tue 16 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

There are 247 million fewer house sparrows in [Europe](#) than there were in 1980, and other once ubiquitous bird species have suffered huge declines, according to a new study.

One of every six birds – a net loss of 600 million breeding birds in total – have disappeared over less than four decades. Among the common species that are vanishing from the skies are yellow wagtails (97m fewer), starlings (75m fewer) and skylarks (68m fewer).

[The study](#) by scientists from the RSPB, BirdLife International and the [Czech Society for Ornithology](#) analysed data for 378 of 445 bird species native to countries in the EU and UK, finding that the overall abundance of breeding birds declined by between 17% and 19% between 1980 and 2017.

The total and proportional declines in bird numbers are particularly high among species associated with farmland.

The house sparrow has been hardest hit, losing half its population, while its close relative, the tree sparrow, has seen a fall of 30 million birds. Both species have declined because of changing farming practices, but house sparrows have also vanished from many cities for reasons that have not yet been established but are likely to include shortages of food, diseases such as avian malaria, and [air pollution](#).



Long-distance migrants, such as the yellow wagtail, have declined proportionally more than other groups. Photograph: Andy Hay/RSPB/PA

While agricultural intensification causing habitat loss and chemical farming triggering [big declines in insects](#) that feed many birds is a cause of many population falls, long-distance migrants, such as [willow warbler](#) and yellow wagtail, have declined proportionally more than other groups. Shorebirds such as lapwings and dotterels have also slumped.

“Our study is a wake-up call to the very real threat of extinctions and of a Silent Spring,” said Fiona Burns, lead author of the study and a senior conservation scientist for the [RSPB](#).

Burns said [next year's meeting](#) of the UN convention on biological diversity was crucial to creating a strong framework for preventing extinctions and recovering the lost abundance of many species.

She added: “We need transformative action across society to tackle the nature and climate crises together. That means increasing the scale and ambition of nature-friendly farming, species protection, sustainable forestry and fisheries, and rapidly expanding the protected area network.”

While 900 million birds vanished in total, 203 of the 378 species studied increased in number. Sixty-six per cent of the 340 million additional birds were from just eight booming species: blackcap, chiffchaff, blackbird, wren, goldfinch, robin, woodpigeon and blue tit.

Numbers of 11 species of birds of prey have more than doubled since 1980, including peregrine falcon, marsh harrier, buzzard, white-tailed eagle and golden eagle, although such species are relatively rare and so their populations are still mostly small.



Eleven birds of prey species have more than doubled since 1980, including the buzzard. Photograph: Edo Schmidt/Alamy

Scientists say these raptors have benefited from increased protection and reductions in harmful pesticides and persecution, as well as specific species restoration projects. The EU's Birds Directive and Habitats Directive have also provided legal protection to priority species and habitats that have been found to benefit bird species.

While rates of decline in many species have slowed in the last decade, the declines are not just a hangover from the damaging practices of previous decades, and the study supports previous research that reveals substantial recent losses in biodiversity.

The scale of losses and types of bird disappearing are comparable with declines in North America, where 3bn birds were found to have disappeared since 1970.

Anna Staneva, interim head of conservation at BirdLife Europe, said: "This report loudly and clearly shows that nature is sounding the alarm. While protecting birds that are already rare or endangered has resulted in some successful recoveries, this doesn't seem to be enough to sustain the populations of abundant species."

"Common birds are becoming less and less common, largely because the spaces they depend on are being wiped out by humans. Nature has been eradicated from our farmland, sea and cities. Governments across all of Europe must establish legally binding targets for nature restoration. Otherwise the consequences will be severe, including for our own species."

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/nov/16/house-sparrow-population-in-europe-drops-by-247m>

[Space](#)

US accuses Russia of ‘dangerous’ behavior after anti-satellite weapons test

01:14

Debris from Russian anti-satellite test 'threatens interests of all nations', says US – video

[Adam Gabbatt and agencies](#)

[@adamgabbatt](#)

Mon 15 Nov 2021 15.31 EST

The US has accused [Russia](#) of “dangerous and irresponsible behavior” after it conducted an anti-satellite weapons test that threatened the lives of the seven astronauts on board the International Space Station (ISS).

Russia fired a missile at one of its own satellites over the weekend, generating more than 1,500 pieces of trackable orbital debris and hundreds of pieces of smaller debris, which the US said “now threaten the interests of all nations”.

Astronauts aboard the ISS were forced to float into special “lifeboat” pods following the release of the debris. The pods can detach from the ISS and fly crews back to Earth.

“Needless to say, I’m outraged. This is unconscionable,” [Nasa](#) administrator Bill Nelson said. “It’s unbelievable that the Russian government would do this test and threaten not only international astronauts, but their own cosmonauts that are on board the station as well as the three people on China’s space station.”

Nelson said the astronauts now faced a four times greater risk than normal with the ISS passing near or through the debris cloud every 90 minutes.

His assessment was based on the risk from debris big enough to track. But hundreds of thousands of smaller pieces were going undetected – “any one of which can do enormous damage if it hits in the right place”.

Antony Blinken, the US secretary of state, also condemned Russia’s action and said satellites throughout Earth’s orbit were also now in jeopardy.

The test clearly demonstrated that despite Russian claims that it opposed the weaponisation of outer space, it was “willing to imperil the exploration and use of outer space by all nations through its reckless and irresponsible behavior”, Blinken said in a statement.

The UK defence minister Ben Wallace said: “This destructive anti-satellite missile test by Russia shows a complete disregard for the security, safety and sustainability of space.”

Anti-satellite weapons tests are rare and are criticized by the space community, due to the risk they create for crews in low Earth orbit. Last year US space command accused Russia of having “made space a warfighting domain” after it fired a missile at a satellite as part of a weapons test.

The Russian military and ministry of defense did not immediately comment.

Earlier on Monday, amid reports that Russia had conducted an anti-weapons test, Nasa’s Russian counterpart, Roscosmos, tweeted that the ISS crew had been forced to move into spacecraft owing to an “object” orbiting the Earth.

The @Space_Station crew is routinely performing operations according to the flight program.

The orbit of the object, which forced the crew today to move into spacecraft according to standard procedures, has moved away from the ISS orbit.

The station is in the green zone. pic.twitter.com/MVHVACSpmT

— POCKOCMOC (@roscosmos) [November 15, 2021](#)

“Friends, everything is regular with us! We continue to work according to the program,” Anton Shkaplerov, the current commander of the outpost, [tweeted](#).

The Nasa astronauts Raja Chari, Tom Marshburn, Kayla Barron, and the European Space Agency astronaut Matthias Maurer floated into their SpaceX Crew Dragon spacecraft for safety, according to a report by [Spaceflight Now](#).

At the same time, the Russian cosmonauts Shkaplerov and Pyotr Dubrov and the Nasa astronaut Mark Vande Hei boarded a Soyuz spacecraft on the Russian segment, Spaceflight Now said.

Experts say anti-satellite weapons that shatter their targets pose a space hazard by creating a cloud of fragments that can collide with other objects, which can set off a chain reaction of projectiles through Earth orbit.

The US performed the first anti-satellite weapon test [in 1959](#), when satellites themselves were new and rare. The US fired an “air-launched ballistic missile” from a B-47 bomber at the Explorer VI satellite, but missed.

Russia conducted three anti-satellite missile tests in 2020, according to [Space.com](#). Following the launch of an anti-satellite missile by Russia last December, Gen James Dickinson, the US space command commander, criticized the country for “persistent testing” of “space-based and ground-based weapons intended to target and destroy satellites”.

“Russia publicly claims it is working to prevent the transformation of outer space into a battlefield, yet at the same time Moscow continues to weaponize space by developing and fielding on-orbit and ground-based capabilities that seek to exploit US reliance on space-based systems,” [Dickinson said](#).

He added: “We stand ready and committed to deter aggression and defend our nation and our allies from hostile acts in space.”

The US military is increasingly dependent on satellites to determine what it does on the ground, guiding munitions with space-based lasers and satellites

as well as using such assets to monitor for missile launches and track its forces.

The anti-satellite weapons tests have also raised questions about the long-term sustainability of operations in space that are essential to a huge range of commercial activities, including banking and GPS services.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2021/nov/15/us-investigating-debris-event-space-reports-russia-anti-satellite-weapon-test>

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[Space](#)

‘A wild west out there’: Russian satellite debris worsens space junk problem



A Soyuz rocket blasts off into space carrying 38 satellites from 18 countries. Russia’s destruction of one of its satellites has increased space junk by an estimated 10%. Photograph: Roscosmos Press Office/Tass

[Virginia Harrison](#)

Tue 16 Nov 2021 00.57 EST

When [Russia](#) fired a missile at one of its own satellites on the weekend, the explosion generated many thousands of pieces of shrapnel that are now zooming around in space at breathtaking speeds.

It added to a sizeable volume of debris already in space, intensifying concerns over the risk that rubbish poses to the International [Space](#) Station (ISS) and satellites. The danger lies in a possible collision between objects that are hurtling around at 17,000 mph (27,400km/h).

Jonathan McDowell, an astrophysicist at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, said there were about 4,000 active satellites and since [the Russia test](#), as many as 19,000 pieces of space debris in low Earth orbit. This is the region of space stretching from about 120 miles to 1,200 miles (200km to 2,000km) above Earth.

He said the test would have generated other pieces of shrapnel, too small to show up on radar, that could number in the hundreds of thousands. All up, the explosion probably increased the number of debris objects by around 10%.

“It’s not a huge increase, but it’s worrying. We have a problem with space junk. So don’t deliberately create more,” he said.

The concern is that flying debris may collide with the ISS or a satellite, with the latter helping with a range of things from internet relay to weather services, imaging, studying climate change and spying. At the speed the debris travels, McDowell said it would “pulverise instantly a satellite and completely destroy it”.

In the worst-case scenario, there could be so many collisions that low Earth orbit becomes too cluttered with debris for satellites to operate. McDowell said while this is a “danger”, it’s not something that would happen immediately.

“It’s like most environmental problems, it’s not like the oceans are wonderfully clear and then one day they are full of plastic. Things get slowly worse and worse.”

The astrophysicist said the number of near-misses in space is rising, and the number of collisions – while still rare – is also rising. In March, a piece of Russian debris hit a Chinese satellite, generating a spray of fresh junk. Tracking debris can help avoid mishaps but ultimately, some of it will need to be removed.

Some progress has been made on this in recent years. McDowell said many involved in space are operating in a “cleaner” way and there are processes

that naturally reduce some of the debris. But all of that is wiped out in a day with a collision like the Russia test.

“At some point we’re going to have to have space garbage trucks that go up and take some of this stuff,” he said. “That’s going to be expensive. The technology is just about there now, the money is not. But I think it has to come.”

Adding to his concerns is a steep ramp-up in commercial activity in space which McDowell said had begun to dominate government activity in recent years. Many thousands of new satellites have been launched and up to 100,000 could be added in the next few years.

“There’s a real concern that we’re getting a real environmental problem in outer space. Commercial activity isn’t being regulated adequately ... it’s happening faster than regulation,” he said.

“It’s largely US and Europeans but even China now is starting to have a true commercial space sector. It’s a bit of a wild west out there.”

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2021/nov/16/a-wild-west-out-there-russian-satellite-debris-worsens-space-junk-problem>

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- [Kyle Rittenhouse Unrest in Portland as Kenosha shooting verdict divides US](#)
- [Court verdict Teenager who shot dead two is found not guilty](#)
- [The acquittal Five key takeaways](#)
- [Kenosha As Rittenhouse walks free, a city picks up the pieces](#)

[The Observer](#)[Kyle Rittenhouse](#)

Unrest in Portland as Kyle Rittenhouse verdict divides US

02:36

Protests erupt across US over Kyle Rittenhouse verdict – video

[Gloria Oladipo](#)

[@gaoladipo](#)

Sat 20 Nov 2021 01.10 EST

About 200 protesters in Portland, Oregon, broke windows and threw objects at police on Friday night as reaction poured in after a jury cleared [Kyle Rittenhouse](#) over the shooting deaths of two people at an anti-racism protest in Kenosha, Wisconsin, last year.

Sheriffs in the city [declared a riot](#) downtown after “violent, destructive behavior by a significant part of the crowd”, with reports [some talked about burning down the Justice Center](#).

Police used loudspeakers to ask the crowd to disperse or face the use of force, including “pepper spray and impact weapons”. By 11pm the crowd had broken up and largely dispersed.

[In Kenosha](#), shouting matches flared on the courthouse steps between supporters of opposing sides, embodying the wildly different lenses through which a divided America viewed the case.

Protest marches were also held in Chicago and New York.



Riot police stand in a garage on Portland during a confrontation with protesters on Friday night. Photograph: Grace Morgan/Reuters

With reaction pouring in from both sides of the political divide, the Rittenhouse case has split the nation, with many pointing out the discrepancy between the law enforcement's treatment of the armed white militia supporter and anti-racism protesters.

Rittenhouse has become a cause célèbre for many conservatives, who have raised money for his legal team. He had traveled to Kenosha from Illinois amid disturbances in the city [after a white police officer shot Jacob Blake](#), who is Black, in the back.

After the announcement that Rittenhouse had been acquitted on all charges, politicians and public figures shared their views on the verdict via social media.

“The verdict in the [#KyleRittenhouse](#) case is a travesty and fails to deliver justice on behalf of those who lost their lives as they peacefully assembled to protest against police brutality and violence,” tweeted the NAACP.

Bernice King, a minister and daughter of Martin Luther King Jr, said on Twitter: “Justice is not just about verdicts. It is a continuum. We can

galvanize around changing our culture, including challenging the difference in how a Black male teen would have been engaged in Kenosha.”

I know so many are weary and tired.

But justice is not just about verdicts.

It is a continuum.

We can galvanize around changing our culture, including challenging the difference in how a Black male teen would have been engaged in Kenosha.

— Be A King (@BerniceKing) [November 19, 2021](#)

Joe Biden, addressing reporters on Friday, said that he “stands by” the jury’s decision.

“I stand by what the jury has concluded. The jury system works,” said Biden before answering questions related to his health [following a colonoscopy he had earlier in the day.](#)

In a later statement the US president appealed for calm and said: “While the verdict in Kenosha will leave many Americans feeling angry and concerned, myself included, we must acknowledge that the jury has spoken. I ran on a promise to bring Americans together, because I believe that what unites us is far greater than what divides us.”

Biden on [#RittenhouseVerdict](#) “I stand by what the jury has concluded.” - [@POTUS](#)

See full comments:

[pic.twitter.com/ridkknlCah](#)

— Chernéy Amhara (@CherneyAmharaTV) [November 19, 2021](#)

The Missouri representative Cori Bush [commented on the verdict via Twitter](#), saying she was “hurt”, “angry”, and “heartbroken”.

“It’s white supremacy in action. This system isn’t built to hold white supremacists accountable. It’s why Black and brown folks are brutalized and put in cages while white supremacist murderers walk free,” tweeted Bush.

Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez strongly condemned the Rittenhouse acquittal, writing on Twitter: “What we are witnessing is a system functioning as designed and protecting those it was designed for.

“My heart still breaks for the communities and families whose grief now compounds, and the countless others who will be denied and deprived in similar scenes across the country,” she wrote.

The governor of Illinois, JB Pritzker, also weighed in, saying: “Carrying a loaded gun into a community 20 miles from your home and shooting unarmed citizens is fundamentally wrong.

“Twenty-six-year-old Anthony Huber and 36-year-old Joseph Rosenbaum, a father, had their whole lives ahead of them. They deserve to be alive today. They deserve justice,” Pritzker [wrote in a statement](#). “We must do better than this.”

Many conservative politicians have celebrated the acquittal of Rittenhouse, who many on the right sought to portray as someone who stood up to rioters.

“Rittenhouse -- NOT GUILTY!” tweeted the Texas governor, Greg Abbott, shortly after the verdict was announced.

The Wisconsin senator Ron Johnson tweeted: “I believe justice has been served in the [Kyle Rittenhouse](#) trial. I hope everyone can accept the verdict, remain peaceful, and let the community of Kenosha heal and rebuild.”

Representative Madison Cawthorn of North Carolina also commented on the verdict, [tweeting out](#), “NOT GUILTY” and [offering Rittenhouse a congressional internship](#).

“You have a right to defend yourself. Be armed, be dangerous, and be moral,” said Cawthorn on Instagram following the decision.

Donald Trump, meanwhile, “congratulated” Rittenhouse on the verdict. The former president put out [a brief statement](#) that read: “If that’s not self-defense, nothing is!”

Rittenhouse killed Joseph Rosenbaum, 36, and Anthony Huber, 26, and wounded Gaige Grosskreutz, 27, when he shot them with an assault rifle as he roamed the streets of Kenosha with other self-described militia during protests in August 2020.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/nov/19/kyle-rittenhouse-verdict-reaction-conservatives>

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Kyle Rittenhouse

Kyle Rittenhouse found not guilty after fatally shooting two in Kenosha unrest

01:18

Kenosha shooting: jury finds Kyle Rittenhouse not guilty – video

[Maya Yang](#) and [Joanna Walters](#)

Fri 19 Nov 2021 15.36 EST

A jury on Friday found [Kyle Rittenhouse](#) not guilty on charges related to his shooting dead two people at an anti-racism protest and injuring a third in Kenosha, Wisconsin, last year, after a tumultuous trial that gripped America.

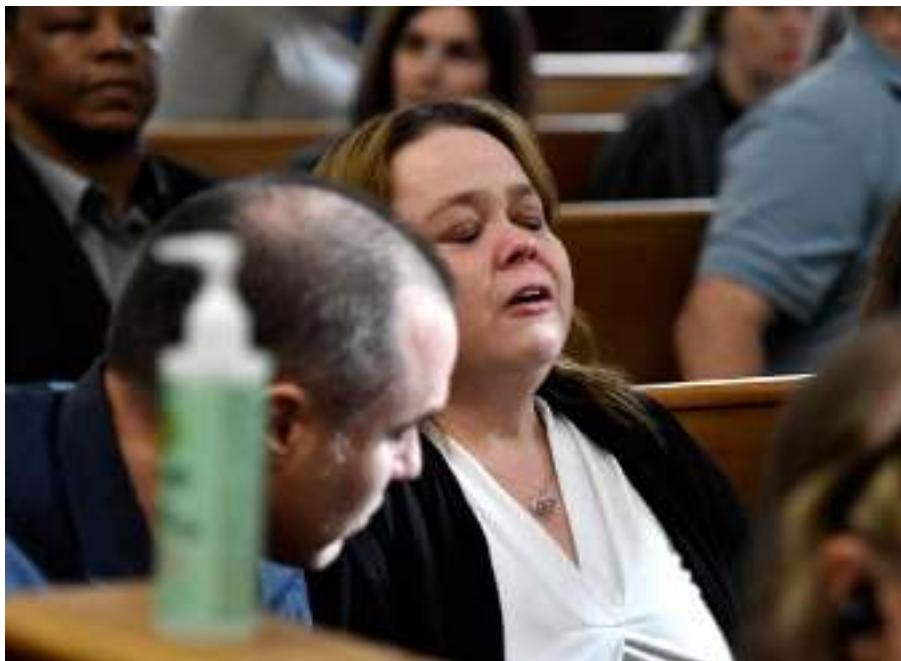
Rittenhouse killed Joseph Rosenbaum, 36, and Anthony Huber, 26, and wounded Gaige Grosskreutz, 27, when he shot them with an assault rifle as he roamed the streets of Kenosha with other armed men acting as a self-described militia during protests in August 2020, [after a white police officer](#) shot a Black man, [Jacob Blake](#), in the back.

The trial was seen as a test case for the US, as it appeared to illustrate [contrasting attitudes](#) of law enforcement when confronted with white men or teens who claimed to be acting as vigilante-style informal security personnel, armed with assault rifles, and Black members of the public or those protesting in support of the Black Lives Matter movement.

The jury in Kenosha returned to the courtroom early on Friday afternoon on the fourth day of its deliberations, after indicating that they had reached a unanimous verdict.

The verdicts of not guilty were read for each charge Rittenhouse faced, including for crimes normally classed as murder in most courts but in [Wisconsin](#) were charged as intentional homicide, reckless homicide and attempted intentional homicide.

Rittenhouse, now 18, shook as he waited for the verdicts to be read and, after he had been acquitted on all counts, he rushed from the room then later returned and was calmed and offered water by his lawyers as he sobbed and gulped for air.



Kyle Rittenhouse's mother, Wendy Rittenhouse, reacts with relief as her son is found not guilty on Friday. Photograph: Getty Images

He was 17 when he came to Kenosha from his home in Illinois in August 2020, and began patrolling the streets, staying out after curfew, with the apparent approval of some of the police officers on duty at the time, who handed out water to the groups of armed civilian men milling about.

They claimed to be protecting property and acting as informal medics and unofficial security after some businesses had been destroyed when demonstrations against the police shooting spilled over on the fringes into violence after dark.

A turning point in the trial came when Grosskreutz testified for the prosecution but admitted that he pointed a gun at Rittenhouse before the 17-year-old fired his rifle, hitting him in the arm. Others testified that Rittenhouse was pursued by the men he shot dead and the teenager, who

testified in his own defence, told the jury he was in fear of his life when he fired his gun.

Rittenhouse is white, as were the men he shot. But the case focused attention on questions of racial justice, unequal policing, and firearms rights, often sitting at the heart of America's increasingly bitter partisan divide.

Claiming self-defense, Rittenhouse had pleaded not guilty to the homicide and attempted homicide charges and also to two charges of recklessly endangering safety, for firing his weapon near others. He was also charged with the illegal possession of a dangerous weapon by a minor, but the judge dropped that count against him during the trial.

Outside the courthouse on Friday afternoon, supporters of Jacob Blake and Black Lives Matter faced off with supporters of Rittenhouse and angry words were exchanged after the 18-year-old was acquitted.

Justin Blake, Jacob Blake's uncle, has said the past year has been "a living hell" for his family. His nephew was paralysed from the waist down when a white police officer, Rosten Sheskey, shot him in the back seven times as he attempted to apprehend him next to his car.



Justin Blake, Jacob Blake's uncle, leaves the Kenosha county courthouse after the jury returned a not guilty verdict for Kyle Rittenhouse. Photograph:

Tannen Maury/EPA

Adelana Akindes, a 26-year-old activist who grew up in Kenosha and is suing the city over law enforcement's treatment of her while she was protesting, has decried "[two sets of laws](#)" in America – "one that applies to those who protest police brutality and racism, and another for those who support the police".

Racial justice advocates had said any verdict will not resolve long-simmering racial tensions in the city that boiled over last August, but that Kenosha needed to find a way forward.

Ahead of the verdict, the state's governor, Tony Evers, announced that 500 National Guard members stood ready in case of trouble. But hours after the jury came back, there were no signs of any major protests or unrest in Kenosha.

Demonstrators were seen taking to the streets in New York. Video circulating on social media showed large crowds peacefully gathered in [Brooklyn](#) and on the [Manhattan Bridge](#) to protest the acquittal.

Meanwhile, politicians and public figures shared their views on the verdict.

Joe Biden said: "I stand by what the jury has concluded." The US president told reporters: "The jury system works. We have to abide by it."

In a later statement Biden appealed for calm and said he had spoken to local authorities in Wisconsin to offer any help needed to ensure public safety. "While the verdict in Kenosha will leave many Americans feeling angry and concerned, myself included, we must acknowledge that the jury has spoken."

Biden added: "I know that we're not going to heal our country's wounds overnight, but I remain steadfast in my commitment to do everything in my power to ensure that every American is treated equally, with fairness and dignity, under the law."



People protest against the Kyle Rittenhouse verdict in New York.
Photograph: David Dee Delgado/Reuters

Civil rights campaigners were outraged.

“The verdict in the #KyleRittenhouse case is a travesty and fails to deliver justice on behalf of those who lost their lives as they peacefully assembled to protest against police brutality and violence,” tweeted the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) civil rights group.

Bernice King, a church minister and daughter of the murdered civil rights icon Martin Luther King Jr, said on Twitter: “Justice is not just about verdicts. It is a continuum. We can galvanize around changing our culture, including challenging the difference in how a Black male teen would have been engaged in Kenosha.”

Rittenhouse quickly became a cause célèbre for some conservatives, who raised money for him and portrayed him as a patriot.

“Rittenhouse – NOT GUILTY!” tweeted the rightwing Texas governor, Greg Abbott.

Ron Johnson, a Republican senator from Wisconsin, tweeted: “I believe justice has been served in the Kyle Rittenhouse trial.”

And the judge in the case, Bruce Schroeder, also became a source of controversy with a bombastic style, outrageous comments during the trial and attitudes some observers said betrayed sympathy with the defense.

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Wisconsin

Kyle Rittenhouse acquittal: five key takeaways from the courtroom drama

01:18

Kenosha shooting: jury finds Kyle Rittenhouse not guilty – video

[Maya Yang](#)

Fri 19 Nov 2021 13.22 EST

The acquittal of [Kyle Rittenhouse](#) – who killed two men and injured another during anti-racism protests in Kenosha, Wisconsin – came after a contentious and controversial trial that gripped America.

For many people Rittenhouse's treatment was seen as revealing the favorable treatment that a white and armed militia supporter received from law enforcement when compared with police attitudes to anti-racism protesters.

Here are five key moments that happened as the courtroom drama played out.

The prosecution: ‘The only person who killed anyone’

In his dramatic opening statement on 2 November, Kenosha county assistant district attorney Thomas Binger portrayed Rittenhouse as an antagonist who chose to exacerbate tensions. Binger argued that not only did Rittenhouse deliberately contribute to the chaos on the night of unrest last August, but that he was also the sole individual who killed others.



Thomas Binger, assistant district attorney, presents opening statements to the jury on 2 November. Photograph: Sean Krajacic/AP

“The evidence will show that hundreds of people were out on the street experiencing chaos and violence, and the only person who killed anyone was the defendant, Kyle Rittenhouse,” Binger told the court.

Defense attorney Mark Richards pushed back against the claim, arguing: “The government can refer to [Rittenhouse] all they wish as an active shooter ... The only person he had shot was Joseph Rosenbaum, who had made threats to kill.”

Prosecution setback: state’s witnesses bolstering self-defense claim

Throughout the trial, several of the state’s witnesses appeared to have bolstered Rittenhouse’s self-defense argument, including Gaige Grosskreutz, the 27-year-old man he injured. Grosskreutz testified that he carried a loaded gun that night and acknowledged that it was aimed at Rittenhouse when Rittenhouse shot him.

During cross-examination, defense attorney Corey Chirafisi asked Grosskreutz, “It wasn’t until you pointed your gun at him, advanced on him

... that he fired, right?"



Gaige Grosskreutz cries as he describes the moments where he was shot by Kyle Rittenhouse. Photograph: Sean Krajacic/AP

"Correct," Grosskreutz answered. He has, however, affirmed that he did not intend to point his pistol at Rittenhouse, [saying](#), "That's not why I was out there. It's not who I am." Grosskreutz, who trained as a paramedic, testified that he volunteered as a medic at the protest.

Another witness, videographer Richie McGinniss, described the 36-year-old Joseph Rosenbaum, whom Rittenhouse fatally shot, as chasing after Rittenhouse and lunging for his gun. When Binger pressed McGinniss to concede he did not know what Rosenbaum's intent was, McGinniss had a pointed – and damaging – answer.

"Well," McGinniss replied, "He said, 'Fuck you,' and then he reached for the weapon."

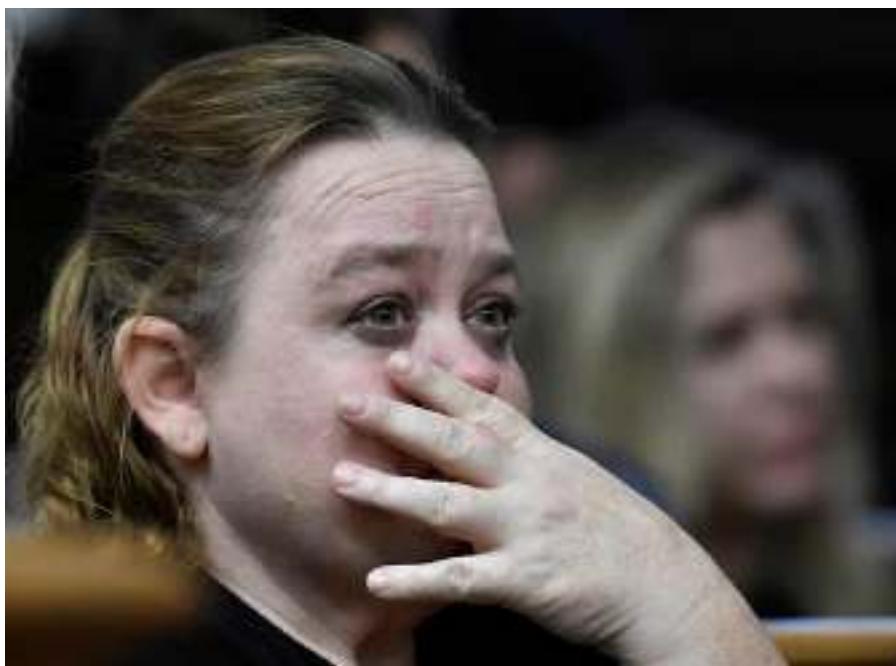
Prosecutors also asked Kariann Swart, Rosenbaum's fiancee, whether he had taken medication earlier on the day he was shot. By asking that question, Judge Bruce Schroeder ruled, prosecutors opened the door for the defense to ask Swart what the medication was for. Swart revealed that it was for bipolar

disorder and depression during cross-examination, in turn potentially adding credibility to the idea that Rosenbaum was an unstable aggressor.

Rittenhouse cries on the stand

After Rittenhouse took the stand, the trial took an emotional turn when the 18-year old broke down [crying](#) uncontrollably as he described being “ambushed” by Rosenbaum, whom he said ran at him threatening to kill him.

“I didn’t do anything wrong. I defended myself,” Rittenhouse told the court. “Once I take that step back, I look over my shoulder and Mr Rosenbaum was now running from my right side. I was cornered in front of me … and there were people right there,” he said before he began crying.



Wendy Rittenhouse, Kyle Rittenhouse’s mother, gets emotional as her son breaks down on the stand. Photograph: Reuters

Wendy Rittenhouse, his mother, sobbed loudly as she watched on.

Schroeder ordered a 10-minute break for Rittenhouse to compose himself. The defendant remained largely composed throughout the rest of the day,

though his voice did break at times during the tough cross-examination by the prosecution.

More prosecution missteps

During Rittenhouse's cross-examination, Schroeder asked the jury to leave the courtroom twice before sharply admonishing the prosecution for its line of questioning.

The startling turn came when Binger asked Rittenhouse about whether it was appropriate to use deadly force to protect property. He also questioned Rittenhouse's silence after his arrest, as was his right.

Schroeder erupted at Binger, accusing him of pursuing improper line of questioning and trying to introduce testimony that the judge earlier said he was inclined to prohibit.



Bruce Schroeder rebukes the prosecutor after a defense motion for a mistrial.
Photograph: Mark Hertzberg/AP

"When you say you were acting in good faith, I don't believe you," Schroeder said to Binger. At one point, he yelled, "Don't get brazen with me!"

The defense asked for a mistrial with prejudice, meaning that if one is granted, Rittenhouse cannot be retried in the shootings. Schroeder said he would consider the matter but let the rest of the trial unfold.

A judge's ringtone: 'God Bless the USA'

During last Wednesday's cross-examination, Schroeder's phone suddenly rang to the [ringtone](#) of God Bless the USA. Released in 1984 by Lee Greenwood, the song is popular in conservative circles and often played as Trump's entrance theme during his rallies.



Bruce Schroeder makes a personal call during Kyle Rittenhouse's trial.
Photograph: Mark Hertzberg/AP

Schroeder's ringtone prompted many criticisms online, with many [arguing](#) that it further reveals his potential bias in the case.

Schroeder was previously accused of establishing a double standard by the prosecution when he [ruled](#) prior to the trial that prosecutors could not refer to the men shot by Rittenhouse as "victims" whereas defense attorneys may call them "arsonists" or "looters".

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As Kyle Rittenhouse walks free, Kenosha is left to pick up the pieces



Outside the Kenosha courthouse where Kyle Rittenhouse was acquitted of murder, division and inequality remain. Photograph: Evelyn Hockstein/Reuters

[Mario Koran in Kenosha, Wisconsin](#)

Sat 20 Nov 2021 01.39 EST

Kyle Rittenhouse is now a free man after fatally shooting two men and wounding a third during anti-racism protests last year, but his trial has left behind a divided America – and done little to ease tensions in the city of Kenosha, Wisconsin, where the killings took place.

Rittenhouse, 18, who faced charges of homicide, was [acquitted in full on the grounds of self-defense](#). But the jury's decision did not calm the people outside the Kenosha county courthouse in the hours after news of the verdict rippled across the city, and the rest of the United States.

The shouting matches that flared on the courthouse steps between supporters of opposing sides embodied the wildly different lenses through which a divided America viewed the case.

On one side many saw the different treatment a white and armed militia supporter received from law enforcement when compared with anti-racism protesters. Meanwhile, conservatives hailed Rittenhouse a hero defending a city on fire, and raised money for his legal defence.

Those different world views played out across the US as Democratic and Republican politicians weighed in with statements that either condemned or supported the jury's decision.



A woman reacts in anger to the Kyle Rittenhouse verdict outside the courthouse in Kenosha. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

But on the streets of Kenosha the reaction was more immediate and visceral.

Drivers voiced their views from the open windows of passing vehicles. “Everyone go home!” shouted one man from his car. A Black woman raised her fist in solidarity with those protesting racial injustice, while a white man said nothing, but blasted “Celebrate!” from the window of his truck. Meanwhile, a small group of men atop the stairs chanted “Let’s go Brandon” – a coded jab at Joe Biden.

But aside from the jeers and heated debate, reactions in Kenosha remained largely peaceful, standing in stark contrast to the smoke-filled chaos that erupted on the nights of protest in August 2020 that left Joseph Rosenbaum and Anthony Huber dead and maimed Gaige Grosskreutz.

But what the jury determined to be a justifiable case of self-defense was viewed by many outside the courthouse as the latest example of a system biased toward white defendants and a legal system uncaring to Black deaths and injuries, after the violence had been sparked by the police shooting of a local Black man.

“When these types of things typically happen, we expect the worst but hope for the best. And today we saw the worst,” said Johnathon McClellan, the president of the Minnesota Justice Coalition.

McClellan, who came from neighbouring Minnesota for the case, pointed to judge Bruce Schroeder, Wisconsin’s longest-serving circuit judge, whose controversial statements and rulings have drawn scrutiny, and at times, rebukes from those watching the case.

McClellan and the Minnesota Justice Coalition are calling on the Wisconsin’s attorney general to recharge Rittenhouse with possession of a dangerous weapon by a person under 18, a misdemeanour charge that seemed a likely conviction for prosecutors until Schroeder dismissed the charge on Monday.

“I think that we need to have more legal professionals speak up and speak out because this isn’t what our system is supposed to be, irrespective of the process,” said McClellan.

Alana Carmickle, a 17-year-old from Kenosha, said she came to the courthouse straight from school after she heard the verdict because she wanted to represent the voices of teenagers who, she said, are not being heard.

“I’m not surprised, but I’m deeply, deeply upset by the verdict,” Carmickle, who is Black, said. “It’s very heartbreaking. It makes me question everything, including my own safety.”

“Had Kyle been a Black boy or man, the verdict would be completely different. Everybody knows it … The whole country is watching our city fall apart. It’s now known for letting a killer go free.”

Brook Love, a 63-year-old from Milwaukee, said the outcome was typical of the racial injustice she’s seen throughout her life as a Black woman.

“What happened today is not right,” she said. “Any reasonable person can see that. People call this a judicial system. I call it a non-system, because

most systems work. This non-system is not working. It's a miscarriage of justice.

"If a person of colour would have shot those people, they'd be under the jail. There's a double standard. How dare anyone call this a judicial system?"



A man holds up a sign in support of Kyle Rittenhouse outside the Kenosha courthouse. Photograph: Mark Hertzberg/ZUMA Press Wire/REX/Shutterstock

But Kevin Mathewson, a former Kenosha alderman who in August 2020 put out a call on Facebook for civilians to take up arms and protect the city, had a very different view on the verdict – and the events that led to shooting.

"I'm just so relieved. I am filled with joy," said Mathewson, who had been criticised for putting out a call to action that brought armed civilians like Rittenhouse to Kenosha.

Mathewson, who is white, like Rittenhouse's victims, said the case had nothing to do with race, but instead a "fundamental right to defend oneself against somebody who wanted to kill you, or at the very minimum, do you great bodily harm".

He described Kenosha as a lawless, dangerous place during the nights of protests in August 2020 and said the government showed through inaction it could not protect the city's citizens. Fires burned, streetlights were torn out and police officers were attacked with bricks.

"We were on our own. So I went on Facebook and I said, 'we need help. Arm yourselves, protect your neighbourhoods, your homes, your businesses. We need to do this because the government isn't.' That's what I put out. And I stand by that," Mathewson said.

In order for the city to move forward, everyone needs to accept the verdict and go back to living their "normal, everyday lives" – just like he had to do when Donald Trump lost the 2020 election, he said.

But a return to normal living, said Dayvin Hallmon, who served on the Kenosha county board for 10 years, is a continuation of the status quo that set the stage for the events of August 2020. Kenosha, in fact, is a city that has long suffered from the effects of a Black community feeling vulnerable and sidelined.

"The important thing is not the verdict here," Hallmon said. "Focusing only on the verdict is scapegoating the real problem, which is the fact the opportunities for the young Black and brown residents of Kenosha are dismal as shit."

Hallmon said for years he pushed his colleagues on the county board to rewrite use-of-force policies for law enforcement officers and pass resolutions to denounce violence. If Kenosha leaders were serious about moving forward from the past year, they'd be focusing on rooting out racism within the police department and listening to the city's young people, who "feel like Kenosha is not for them and doesn't want them".

"If we focus only on the verdict here, this will all happen again," he said.

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- Lin-Manuel Miranda 'Doing Hamilton every night saved me. It kept my head from getting off the swivel'
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- Mo Gilligan 'My greatest achievement? Getting a house. I didn't think that was possible'

Life and style

Are the 2020s really like living back in the 1970s? I wish ...



Polly Toynbee: 'Flowing floral dresses are back.' Photograph: Jay Brooks/The Guardian. Dress: [Me+Em](#). Boots: [Dune London](#). Necklace, Polly's own



Polly Toynbee

Sat 20 Nov 2021 04.45 EST

Queueing for petrol, I turn on the radio and there are [Abba](#), singing their latest hit. Shortages on shop shelves are headline news, with warnings of a panic-buying Christmas. And national debt is sky high. But this isn't the 1970s; it's 2021. People who weren't born then have been calling this a return to that decade. There are similarities, of course: this retro-thought was sparked by the recent petrol queues, people as frantic to fill up to get to work as I remember back then. Elsewhere, flowing floral midi dresses are back, just like the ones I wore; Aldi is selling rattan hanging egg chairs; and, as well as Abba, the charts have been [topped by Elton John](#). But is this really a 1970s reprise?



Toynbee in the early 70s. Photograph: courtesy of Polly Toynbee

No, nothing like it; not history repeated, not even as farce – just a stylist's pastiche, as bold as the wallpaper I'm posing in front of here. Folk memory preserves only the 1974 three-day week; the miners' strike blackouts, with no street lights and candle shortages; the embargo that quadrupled the price of oil. True, I did queue at the coal merchant's to fire up an ancient stove for lack of any other heat or light. But the decade shouldn't be defined by this, or by 1978-79's "winter of discontent" strikes, a brief but pungent time of rubbish uncollected and (a very few) bodies unburied by council gravediggers.

Most 70s imagery is a deliberately manufactured caricature, with its garish wallpaper and avocado suites, an ignored time zone between the swinging 60s and glitzy greed-is-good, big bang, big hair 80s. It's an image that obscures the radical social changes and great progressive leaps forward that took place then. True, we all construct our own pick'n'mix memorabilia and there's a risk anyone my age will pine for the decade when they were in their 20s. But that's not why I reject any comparison to Boris Johnson's Brexit-stricken regressive and corrupt era.

Radical feminists locked me in at an angry meeting, demanding the Guardian back abortion of all male foetuses

So why does history record the 70s as nothing but a time of strife, shortages, hyper-inflation and decline? Well, it's because history is written by the victor. And that victor was Margaret Thatcher, whose 1979 election conquest sought to uproot, marketise and diminish the role of the postwar state. Her political tribe used all their media power to expunge inconvenient 70s memories that didn't fit her narrative, as surely as Stalin purged Trotsky from the photographic record. It was a goodbye to John Maynard Keynes's generous social democratic state and hello to [Friedrich Hayek's desire to let the market rip](#); Thatcher kept his book *The Road to Serfdom* in her handbag to waggle at her cabinet.

In 1970, I was travelling the country researching my book [A Working Life](#). I took jobs at Unilever's soap factory in Port Sunlight, Merseyside; in a cake factory; as a hospital ward orderly; and I joined the Women's Royal Army Corps for a while. Working as a switch-cable operator in one of the 11 Lucas car parts factories in Birmingham (all now closed), I watched a strike by our foremen and charge hands, who were trying to restore their differentials – the extra pay they received above those they supervised. By the second day, 19,000 car workers were laid off, so just-in-time supply chains were fragile even then. However, unions were simply striving not to fall behind a rate of inflation that later [soared to nearly 30%](#); the reality I saw was unrecognisable from the “grasping workers” vilified in the anti-union Tory press (Rupert Murdoch had bought the Sun the year before). Union membership [peaked at 13m by 1979](#). Now less than half as many belong. Strong, 70s-style unions would never have let this current zero hours gig economy destroy rights that had been hard-earned back then.



A petrol queue in Kirby, Merseyside in January 1979 ... Photograph: Daily Mail/Shutterstock



... and one in Ashford, Kent last month. Photograph: Gareth Fuller/PA

Here's another crucial contrast. Look at the relative ease with which Edward Heath's Conservative government took the country into Europe in 1973, a move confirmed in Labour's referendum two years later on a 67% to 33%

vote. Yet now we're out, a country adrift and wrenched apart by an acrimonious Brexit.

For all the turmoil, Britain's democratic institutions never buckled. Now they come under greater threat from the prime minister himself, who assails the powers of regulators, judges, scrutiny committees and all the checks and balances of our unwritten constitution. He sends in his culture warriors to spearhead "a war on woke". But for my friends and me, "woke" began in 1970 with [Germaine Greer](#)'s [The Female Eunuch](#), an electric shock of awakening. [Spare Rib](#) and Gay News heralded liberation for millions more. Each new iteration of activism rolls those freedoms forwards, as [#MeToo](#) energises a new generation to break silence on sexual harassment by bosses. Back then, I'm afraid, we wearily fended off beware-the-stationery-cupboard lecherous gropings, regarding them as part of women's working life.



'Yes, I had an egg chair': in style then and now. Photograph: Everett Collection Inc/Alamy

I joined the Guardian's women's page in 1977 when the great and funny writer [Jill Tweedie](#) broke every mould, challenging every assumption, including those of SCUM, the Society for Cutting Up Men, pretty much a one-woman crusade by [Valerie Solanas](#). Jill never dodged the dilemma of

“liberation” from men we loved and lived with: she had lost two children stolen abroad by an abusive husband. Her influence sometimes shocked her: a woman called her in the Guardian office one day from a public phone box, saying: “Right, I’ve left my husband. I’m in a caravan with my children, what do I do now?” Feminism was always plagued by rifts: Jill and I were locked in at an angry meeting by radical feminists threatening not to release us until the Guardian backed abortion of all male foetuses. Now, I tear my hair out over the latest feminist arguments over trans issues.



At a demo in 1970. Photograph: courtesy of Polly Toynbee

How far have we come? Never far enough. Of demands drawn up at the [first National Women’s Liberation Conference in 1970](#), there is still no equal pay or opportunity, no abortion on demand, or free 24-hour nurseries. Despite some state aid, Britain still has some of [the most expensive childcare in the developed world](#), costing parents more than their rent or mortgage, often for poorly trained staff paid a pittance.

The first women’s refuge opened in 1971 – [but 80 women a year are still murdered](#) by a partner or ex-partner in England and Wales. When I worked in a Wimpy bar half a century ago, no single women were allowed in after midnight: those who were unaccompanied were presumed to be prostitutes. It could be hard to get served in a pub. Some things slide backwards: as I

buy presents for my newest granddaughter, I find the pinkification of “girls” toys has got worse since my daughters were small: there were no pink space hoppers. Children are more shut in now, parents too afraid to let them roam, more anxious about threats of every kind, from strangers to impure food. There were always a thousand ways to make mothers miserable: in 1975, only 57% of women worked, with rightwing papers running a drumbeat of spurious research on the damage done to children to make working mothers guilty, often wheeling out [John Bowlby’s “attachment theory”](#). Now [women’s employment stands at 78%](#), but with the absolute necessity of two incomes to keep an insanely expensive roof over the family, full-time work and lack of childcare feels less like liberation for many.



‘This reminds me of Laura Ashley in her heyday.’ Photograph: Jay Brooks/The Guardian. Jacket: [East](#). Dress: [Marks & Spencer](#)

Newly married in 1970, aged 23 with a full-time job, when I bought a washing machine I needed my husband’s signature on the hire purchase agreement. The rampant misogyny and racism of “jokes” in 70s TV comedy has made some of those programmes unrepeatable. The “political-correctness-gone-mad” brigade should be made to watch the revolting Benny Hill chasing bikini-clad young girls, or the sitcom Mind Your Language, with its riot of immigrant jokes in a night school class, to

appreciate how Labour's Equal Opportunities Commission and Race Relations Board in 1976 began the long, slow culture change. For all the [Enoch Powellite](#) anti-immigrant racism, it was a decade that saw more people emigrate than immigrate. As feminists, we thought Barbara Castle's 1970 Equal Pay Act and the Sex Discrimination Act would fix everything, but here we are, still fighting old battles. [Three-quarters of mothers](#) say they face discrimination at work for being pregnant, with shocking cases of sackings and demotions from the [Pregnant Then Screwed campaign](#). Some glass ceilings shattered through that decade: the Old Bailey got its first woman judge in 1972 and now there are equal numbers, but still [only 28% of university professors are women](#).



Rubbish piled high in Leicester Square, London in February 1979 ...
Photograph: Mike Sullivan/Evening News/Shutterstock



... and in Brighton, East Sussex last month. Photograph: Jon Santa Cruz/Shutterstock

By the 70s, the worst brutalities of childbirth were ending: [Sheila Kitzinger](#) had rebelled against enforced pubic hair shaving and giving birth with legs strapped up in stirrups. I had my first two children in the 70s, and I worked as a ward orderly in a maternity ward in a run-down hospital, and it's striking that women had kinder care and attention then. A full week in hospital was a blessing for many, and health visitors were closer at hand for everyone. My daughters were turfed out within hours of their children being born and, compared with 2015, [there are a third fewer health visitors](#), leaving them to struggle with impossible caseloads.

A great landmark of the decade was [Harold Wilson's Open University](#). With its first students starting in 1971, it offered second chances, especially to women, and is now Britain's biggest university by far. Women's new freedom and opportunity helped triple divorce rates in the 70s: better child benefits made escape easier. But the penalty for single parenthood is higher now, [with 49% of children in lone-parent families living below the poverty line, according to the Child Poverty Action Group](#). We have more things now, but many more children are left outside the consumer society.

Look at the hard economic facts: in the 70s, Britain reached its most equal point ever in pay and wealth

Now, civilisation is on a climate knife-edge, but then world-ending fear focused on nuclear war. Alarm at extinct species and environmental pollution was rife, but concern could be gently laughed at in the Surbiton of 70s sitcom [The Good Life](#). I was keenly aware, because my father, a millenarian by nature, founded an ill-fated [agricultural commune in Monmouthshire in the 70s](#), designed to be self-sustaining. He used to wag a finger at me and my city ways, warning I'd come crawling to their door begging for cabbages when my unsustainable lifestyle caught up with me. The venture collapsed in 1979.

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For a family on the left, with a relaxed attitude to sex, I don't think there was any greater gap between my parents and me than between me and my children and they and my grandchildren. I went on an anti-Vietnam war demo with my father, and pro-EU membership and climate protests with my grandchildren. But I see how each generation has a greater sensitivity on race, gender and privilege, which I find encouraging. Here's the greatest generational difference: we boomers had it all in the 70s – free university, plentiful good jobs with pensions, cheap homes to buy, but none of those are there for millennials.

Don't be tricked by false parallels between the 70s and now. Look at the hard economic facts: in the 70s, Britain reached its most equal point ever in pay and wealth. In a century-long trajectory, super-taxes and inheritance taxes had gradually eroded the mega-incomes of the rich to pay for a growing welfare state with pensions, benefits and the NHS. That's how my generation was taught O-level social history: as a story of unstoppable progress from reforming factory acts, working and voting rights to a social security safety net. To understand the 70s, remember that the unions'

struggle was about holding on to that progress against a tidal wave of inflation.

In 1979, that battle was lost and everything went into reverse. The slump of 1980-81 caused by [an extreme austerity budget](#) tipped millions, especially the young, into unemployment, which rose above 11%. Later, deregulating the City blew the lid off top earnings, so the income and wealth gap widened astronomically. The victors' history tells a story of militant strikers making outrageous demands, designed to justify Thatcher's crushing of the unions and the deep inequality that has endured ever since as a result.



'Are these lurids really back in vogue?' Photograph: Jay Brooks/The Guardian. Styling: Melanie Wilkinson. Hair and makeup: Sarah Cherry. Prop styling: [Propped Up](#). Dress: [Boden](#). Polo neck: [Marks & Spencer](#). Boots: [Dune London](#)

As I write, the number of people falling into poverty is [growing rapidly](#), after universal credit cuts. Last month's budget cemented the fact that pay – stagnant for the past decade – will continue to be so through the next.

I can see why some look back now, imagining the 2020s – full of political, economic and environmental doom – as a reprise of those times. Look how many of that era's icons retain their cultural clout. I've just read [John le](#)

Carré's posthumous bestseller *Silerview*, and I urge his 1974 classic *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* on my older grandchildren as the best evocation of a cold war that framed our thinking and fears. Debbie Harry, still magnificent when she goes to Glastonbury, Led Zeppelin's Robert Plant back in the charts, ditto Nile Rodgers of Chic – 70s icons have been revived or never went away. Back then, the UK could win Eurovision song contests, too, but a repeat of that feat seems unlikely now that everyone hates us.

Style? The flowery dress I'm wearing for this photoshoot reminds me of Laura Ashley in her heyday, though her clothes strove to be more authentic Victorian country print copies, with mutton chop shoulders, and I even had one with a bustle. Yes, I had an egg chair, but – as Aldi shoppers will find – they're more for posing than comfort. And I did have one room with wallpaper that looked like fried eggs. Are these lurids really back in vogue? Not with me.

But do reject the rightwing trashing of the 70s as a time of “decline” and “failure”, the Austin Allegro of decades. Thatcherites needed to invent that history to disguise their social vandalism and promote the myth of her glittering capitalist renaissance. Take it from me, and from all the social statistics: the 70s were a good time to be alive.

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If the hats fit: after success as a songwriter and performer, Lin-Manuel Miranda has now turned to directing. Photograph: Camila Falquez/Netflix Inc 2021

Lin-Manuel Miranda: ‘Doing Hamilton every night saved me. It kept my head from getting off the swivel’

If the hats fit: after success as a songwriter and performer, Lin-Manuel Miranda has now turned to directing. Photograph: Camila Falquez/Netflix Inc 2021

by [Emma Brockes](#)

Sat 20 Nov 2021 03.00 EST

About halfway through *Tick, Tick ... Boom!*, the new movie directed by [Lin-Manuel Miranda](#), the patrons of a diner in 90s New York all turn to the camera and sing. The movie, Miranda’s directorial debut, is based on the autobiographical stage show of the same name by Jonathan Larson (creator

of [Rent](#)) and tells the story of Larson's late 20s as a struggling writer and waiter. [Andrew Garfield](#) is extraordinary in the lead, but it's the people around him who make this particular scene; as the number unfolds, it becomes apparent that every extra in the diner is a legend of musical theatre, from [Bernadette Peters](#), to Brian Stokes Mitchell (a veteran Tony award winner), to [Roger Bart](#) (original cast, *Tick, Tick ... Boom!*), to Jim Nicola (former artistic director of the New York Theatre Workshop) to a blink-and-you'll-miss-it shot of [Joel Grey](#), chasing the waiter for the bill. "I don't know that I'm the guy you hire to make your next Marvel movie," Miranda says, speaking via video from his office in uptown New York, "but I am the guy you hire to make this musical about a guy who wrote musicals." It is simultaneously funny, moving and monstrously self-indulgent – or, as Miranda puts it, "about as musical theatre nerdy as it can get."

Imagining Miranda as the steward of an alternate Marvel universe – Comic-Con, but for musical theatre geeks – restores him to what, prior to the opening of *Hamilton* in 2015, was his quieter role in the cultural landscape: as the champion of a much-loved, much-mocked art form that rarely troubled mainstream popular culture. *Hamilton* changed all that. The show not only won 11 Tonys, a Pulitzer, and more than [\\$850m in box office receipts](#), it conferred on Miranda a singular status, variously crediting the 41-year-old with reanimating history, diversifying Broadway, and provoking children all over the world to memorise large chunks of lyrics about America's revolutionary politics, some of them concerned with the restructuring of the national debt. ("Hey yo, I'm just like my country / I'm young, scrappy and hungry / And I'm not throwing away my shot" – still being hammered out at a million barmitzvahs). The most surprising thing about all this, perhaps, is that Miranda, appearing today in his customary flat cap and goatee, has the boundless enthusiasm and apparent absence of cynicism of the aspiring artist still untouched by success.

If you had to find the antithesis to *Hamilton*, *Tick, Tick ... Boom!* – a piece of musical theatre of outlandish obscurity – would be a good place to start. The show, written in 1990 as Larson turned 30, his fifth year as a waiter at the [Moondance diner](#), was never produced beyond [an off-Broadway read-through in 2001](#). It is small in scale, telling the story of Larson's failure to find a backer for one of his earlier musicals, as well as his difficult relationship with his girlfriend and their life in the grungy downtown

neighbourhood that would later provide him with the foundations for Rent. That show, which opened off-Broadway in tragic circumstances in 1996, was the project Larson began writing after *Tick, Tick ... Boom!* failed to get off the ground. When it reached Broadway later that year, its impact was similar in scale to *Hamilton*'s, 20 years later. [Rent ran for 12 years and made more than \\$270m at the box office.](#)

The trailer for *Tick, Tick ... Boom!* starring Andrew Garfield.

Tick, Tick ... Boom! is not the story of how Larson wrote *Rent*, or rather, not directly. If its premise sounds unpromising – I'm a big fan of musicals, and even I hesitated – to Miranda, it seemed the perfect project for his directorial debut, a way to celebrate Larson and create a broader portrait of the artist as a young man; in particular, how years of sunken cost and effort can predate an artist's big hit. Miranda saw *Rent* as a teenager, when it first opened in New York, an experience so profound that he sees Larson's biography as inextricably linked to his own. "That's the guy who got me writing musicals," he says. "Rent was when I changed from liking musicals and being in the school play, to thinking I could actually one day write one. It was truly the first contemporary musical I had ever seen – this story that took place in the Village, about artists trying to survive, deciding whether to stick with what they're doing, living and dying. And it just felt like, 'Oh, anyone's allowed to write a musical?'"

Inspired by Larson's example, the musical Miranda ended up writing was [In the Heights](#), the show that launched his career on Broadway at the age of 28, which he says has "a lot of shared DNA with *Rent*". Unlike his hero, Miranda did not have an extended period of failure when it seemed foolish to go on writing, but other than that, the parallels between the two men are strong. Both lived in New York neighbourhoods concerned with "fighting gentrification": 1980s SoHo in Larson's case, Washington Heights in Miranda's. Both believed that "popular music and theatre music can be friends" – Larson tipped towards rock, while Miranda incorporates the Latin, pop and hip-hop of his upbringing. Both were straight men in a genre latterly dominated by gay ones, and both were mentored, a generation apart, by Stephen Sondheim, who appears in *Tick, Tick ... Boom!*, played with canny accuracy by Bradley Whitford. (After watching an early cut of the film,

Sondheim told a nervous Miranda, “you treated me gently and royally, for which I am grateful”).

Larson’s score riffs on Sondheim’s [Sunday in the Park With George](#), another musical about the creative process, and if the music is less ersatz than Rent’s, one suspects it is in part thanks to this influence. The main reason for the movie’s success however, is Garfield, who is sensational as Larson, by turns maniacal, crushed, furiously hopeful and heading, as most in the audience will know, towards an early death at the age of 35, from an aortic aneurysm he had the night before Rent opened off-Broadway.



Miranda and Garfield on the set of *Tick, Tick ... Boom!* Photograph: Macall Polay/Netflix

Miranda had seen Garfield on stage four years earlier in the [National Theatre’s epic production of Angels in America](#), Tony Kushner’s show set during the Aids crisis in the US in the 1980s. “He carried the hardest part of a six-hour play,” Miranda says, and it occurred to him that night that, if he ever got *Tick, Tick ... Boom!* off the ground, this was the man to play his hero. “I remember cocking my head to one side and thinking, ‘Can I see Jonathan Larson there? Maybe with a perm?’” There is a physical resemblance – “I think they share a gangliness, which is helpful” – but it’s

the power of the performance that makes the men seem in tune. “I think that Andrew can do anything.”

It’s a feature of Miranda’s post-Hamilton career, of course, that for a few years he, too, has been able to do anything, and the fact that, apart from reheating [In the Heights for the screen](#), he has largely pivoted away from Broadway towards Disney, taking on acting roles ([Mary Poppins Returns](#)) and collaborating on big Disney soundtracks ([Moana](#), the forthcoming [The Little Mermaid](#)), has invited some sniffy commentary along the lines of: Sondheim would never have done that. It’s a tension addressed in the movie – the conflict between art and commerce; what constitutes selling out – that Miranda finds largely amusing. He has, he says, always accepted work on the basis of what any individual project might teach him, and said yes to Poppins, for example, for the chance to work with director [Rob Marshall](#).

But in any case, he invites those judging to put themselves in the place of the struggling young writer, braced for years of disappointment so that if success finally comes, he has perhaps earned the right to say yes to everything. In 2001, while Miranda was still at college, he saw that off-Broadway production of *Tick, Tick ... Boom!* and it felt, he says, “like watching a message in a bottle. It was like, ‘Hey? You’re graduating with a degree in theatre? Good fucking luck!’” He bursts out laughing. “And guess what? Those people you’re sitting with, who are so talented and are also theatre majors, they’re going to grow up and get a real job and you’re going to be the only motherfucker banging your head against a wall. Are you ready for that?”



With Emily Mortimer, Julie Walters and Emily Blunt in *Mary Poppins Returns*, 2018. Photograph: Walt Disney Pictures/Allstar

Lin-Manuel Miranda's temperament is famously chill. He's not a tantrum-thrower, or a diva. He is, by reputation, a nice guy, approachable, self-deprecating and uxorious (his wife, [Vanessa Nadal](#), was at school with him), who wrote the bulk of *Hamilton* while wandering around his neighbourhood or riding the subway to Brooklyn. This equanimity, which in the first flush of success contributed to Miranda's popularity, inevitably later became a target for satire. *Hamilton* was so loved, so lauded and for a while so universally present across every medium, that Miranda's affable dorkiness – his Joe Biden-levels of folksiness – started to show up as snarky TikTok memes (many riffed on Miranda's omnipresence, pasting him, Where's Wally?-style, into every conceivable background, or mocking what students of his acting divined to be his single doleful, facial expression). The show itself, meanwhile, was criticised for being insufficiently tough on the founding fathers' involvement with slavery, and the movie version of *In the Heights* [was slammed](#) by some commentators for casting light-skinned over Black and Afro-Latinos. Miranda humbly [accepted all charges](#) and promised to learn from them. But the bloom had come off the rose.

The truth is that with the exception of a petulance he admits comes over him when a producer or collaborator sends him notes on his work – “my back

can go up” – he is pretty even-tempered. Does he have a particularly stark example of this petulance? He does. “We were working on In the Heights and they brought in a mentor composer, Andrew Lippa, who is great. At one point he goes, ‘Are all of your songs in 4/4?’ And I go, ‘Yeah.’ And he goes, ‘Yeah, that’s a problem.’ And I went, ‘Excuse me?’ He said, ‘You need some rhythmic variety, because I felt it.’ I left that meeting cursing him out.” An hour later, Miranda says, “I was sitting under a tree going, ‘Oh god!’ And I immediately made a decision to put all of Nina’s songs in 3/4 – to make her literally, rhythmically out of step with the rest of them. It was a great note, to which I reacted with remarkable hostility.”

Miranda has no formal music training. He learned piano as a child and cobbled together enough musical expertise while at college to enable composition (his arranger, [Alex Lacamoire](#), carries a lot of the weight for the Hamilton score). Miranda’s family, immigrants to the US from Puerto Rico, had a theatrical streak – you only have to look at the video of his wedding, during which he [leads his family through a choreographed rendition of To Life](#), from Fiddler on the Roof, to see what a showman his father, Luis, is. (Vanessa expected her new husband to pull some theatrical number, but had no idea how far it would go. “It’s when she sees her brother – who’s in *real estate* – get up and start line dancing with us, that she really starts bawling,” Miranda says).



Starring in Hamilton, New York, 2015. Photograph: Joan Marcus/AP

Luis Miranda spent his working life [as a political consultant](#), and is characterised by his son as a “bit of a frustrated artist”, who thought music and writing were best left as hobbies. “He had an uncle in Puerto Rico who was a beloved theatre actor, but my dad’s just too practical to make a go of that.” Miranda smiles. “Lo and behold, he has this son who has no such practicality. I always think of my grandmother, who under her breath, every time I was drawing something or making something, would say, ‘That boy and his inventions.’”

His parents weren’t discouraging, exactly. But both Luis, and Miranda’s mother, Luz, a psychologist, wanted him to apply to law school after college as insurance. This is where, Miranda says, the Panamanian singer Rubén Blades “messed up the curve for everyone. Because Rubén Blades, who is one of the great Latin songwriters and an incredibly accomplished actor, also went to Harvard Law School. So my dad would be like, ‘Rubén Blades! Rubén Blades!’ And I’m like: ‘I’m not as smart as Rubén Blades, it’s not going to happen.’”

One early show was delayed because ‘my dad’s bus of 40 people was late. I was mortified’

The pressure was real and Miranda, a conscientious son, had to summon real courage to resist it. At the same time, he says, his parents never missed a show. During his first year at college, Wesleyan University in Connecticut, where he was emphatically not studying law, he was cast in a student production of Jesus Christ Superstar. Miranda blanches at the memory. “They had to hold the curtain,” he says, “because my dad’s bus of 40 people from New York was late. And they were like, ‘We’re holding for the Miranda bus!’ while I’m mortified, in the wings.” Miranda assumes the wide-eyed, stricken face of a teenager wishing the floor would open up to eat him. “But they were always supportive in terms of showing up, even when they were scared for me.”

Miranda started writing In the Heights when he was 19 and still in his first year. It would, he says, probably have gone nowhere – if things had been

slightly different, Miranda might, like Larson, have had 10 or more years in the wilderness before a hit – had he not met Thomas Kail, a director several years ahead of him at college. The pair only met, through theatrical circles, after both had graduated, but something in the quality of the collaboration pushed Miranda forward. “When I met Tommy Kail, I met someone who was much smarter than me, who I enjoyed collaborating with, and made deadlines for me. And also someone who was not focused on where the end product would go. I don’t think Tommy and I said the word ‘Broadway’ for the first three years of our collaboration. We’d be like: what else do we need to do? We need to make the best show we can, and not worry about where it’s going.”

From a technical point of view, there are probably better songwriters in the world than Miranda. His real skill, beyond his originality, lies in an ability to communicate huge volumes of feeling via small, often superficially dry transitional moments in a song. In one small example from Hamilton, it remains mysterious how, exactly, Miranda manages to invest the phrase “the Hamiltons move uptown”, from a [song](#) about the loss of Hamilton’s son, with more emotion than is managed in many entire two-hour musicals. Whenever you return to the show, it hits you afresh; the pure impact of the score, the imaginative feat not only of putting himself in the shoes of the 200-year-old architects of modern America, but of the father grieving for his child. Miranda had no template for that. It remains, as a piece of writing, a staggering achievement.



The film of *In the Heights*, released earlier this year. It was the stage version that launched Miranda's career. Photograph: Macall Polay

He has been helped, Miranda says, by Vanessa, whom he calls his “home field advantage”. Although the two were at the same high school in New York, they only met and started dating after college, when Vanessa was a scientist at Johnson & Johnson. She later enrolled at MIT to study chemical engineering, before eventually becoming a lawyer – she now works in cosmetics law – and more than a decade after their wedding, Miranda remains in awe of her real-world skills. She does not, he says, “really care about musicals. She likes good ones, but she doesn’t like any old musical. They have to be good. I will watch anything; I think the worst musical is better than a good movie.” Hamilton would not, he says, zip along with the pace and energy it does, were it not for Vanessa. “Because if it took too long she’d be like …” he drums his fingers on the desk.

The couple have two young sons, Sebastian, six, and Francisco, three, and in the early years of their marriage, Vanessa was the breadwinner. The frustration of this arrangement is one addressed in *Tick, Tick ... Boom!* – the habit of content creators to disappear into their own heads around deadlines, and to use everything around them as grist. Whereas Larson’s girlfriend Susan understandably rails at him for never being fully mentally present, Vanessa is unusual, Miranda says. “When we started dating, I felt no

self-consciousness about writing in front of her – and what I look like writing is crazy.” He makes a wild face. “It’s me putting on the character until I’m telling the truth; that looks like a person talking and singing and screaming to themselves. And she was totally not fazed by that.”

There’s one scene in the movie when Larson, mid-hug, starts absent-mindedly doing air-piano on Susan’s shoulder, writing a song in what is supposed to be a tender moment. She goes bananas. It was a direction that came from Miranda, which he calls “a bit of a dirty laundry thing for writers – the mic’s always hot if you live with us. Sondheim said it better than anyone – there’s a part of you always mapping out a sky. For any writer, in any form, there’s a part of you that’s living, and a part of you that has a tape recorder on: remember this for later.” Even that, he says, doesn’t faze Vanessa. Miranda tries to be present for his children, which entails making sure “I can carve out writing time”. But when Vanessa saw the scene with the air piano, she told him she would never blow up as Susan did. “She said, ‘If you had an idea for a song, I’d say I’m glad you got something useful out of this fight we had’; it wouldn’t be, ‘Fuck you for writing while we’re fighting’; it would be, ‘Well, something’s come out of this’.” She sounds like a saint.



Miranda with his wife Vanessa Nadal – ‘my home field advantage’.
Photograph: Broadway World/REX/Shutterstock

Another strand of *Tick, Tick ... Boom!* is how hard it is for writers to spend years on a single project without seeing the thing to fruition. Miranda felt that keenly with *In the Heights*, he says – “the feeling of I’m-going-to-explode if this giant thing that only exists in my brain doesn’t get out of my brain on to a stage”. But it was the slow-going early stages of *Hamilton* that really got to him. After reading [Ron Chernow’s biography](#), Miranda had decided to adapt it as a musical and was, in the first instance, partnered with a playwright. It was hell, he says, “the feeling of being already too pregnant with the work” to have to wait for the busy playwright to be free. “I had done all the research and it was starting to distil and I had that impulse that I just need to get writing – I can’t worry about lining up with this playwright and figuring out how to fix this. I’ve just gotta go.”

In the end, he ditched the co-writer and wrote *Hamilton* singlehandedly, which in a different writer, might indicate problems with collaboration. This isn’t the case with Miranda, who is so far from the stereotype of the gruff, ornery genius that it can be tempting – unfairly, I think – to read his real talent as marketing. One of Miranda’s advantages is an ability to admit to not knowing things, and to reach out and ask for help. For *Tick, Tick ... Boom!*, Miranda says he picked up the phone and called on every passing friend and acquaintance better qualified at directing than him, who had ever casually offered advice. “Edgar Wright, Ava DuVernay, anyone who I’d met on my travels. I called Tommy [Kail] and Jon [Chu] a lot. I called Rob [Marshall] when I was planning and storyboarding, because Rob is the best storyboarder.”

Miranda is so endlessly, boundlessly sunny about everything, you start to wonder if there’s anything he hates. In the new movie, Larson takes a crack at the parlous state of Broadway as exemplified by *Cats*, but Miranda won’t knock Andrew Lloyd Webber. (He recently saw *Phantom of the Opera*, now that Broadway has reopened. “It was great!” he says. “There were all these alums in the audience, and I talked to a gaggle of Christines who said they’ve never seen the show looking so clean or the choreography this sharp. There’s never been a better time to see theatre, because everyone had to start from scratch.”)



‘Being in a Broadway show is like being a chef; they don’t care about how much people liked it last night, it’s about tonight.’ Photograph: Camila Falquez © Netflix

OK, but there must be something – anything – he really despises? He thinks, hard. “I have dislikes within the genre. Like, I’m not good at meta musicals. I don’t love a musical that makes fun of the fact that it’s a musical. That’s my personal taste; I’m like, don’t apologise! You like musicals, too, otherwise you wouldn’t be writing one. I don’t like things that apologise for what they are. So when a musical’s like, ‘We’re singing a song, isn’t that crazy?!’ I’m like, ‘No; I came to see a musical, it’s not crazy that you’re singing a song. Sing the fucking song’.”

This is a very satisfying rant, but it is, of course, delivered with pitch perfect good humour. On the subject of Disney, Miranda says it’s “super scary” writing music that will, if it succeeds, be built in to children’s memories, where it will stay for ever. “With Moana, I was the last guy hired, and I was also working on Hamilton at the same time,” and these things are scarier than usual, he says, “because you know you’re going on a playlist with [The Little Mermaid’s] [Part of Your World](#), and [Frozen’s] [Let it Go](#). That’s tricky company to be in.” How did he calm himself? “You know what I did, actually? I was working Tick, Tick ... preproduction and Mermaid at the same time, and at the same time that Heights was shooting. And the way that

I psyched myself out was to tell myself: I'm back in college; these are all just courses I'm taking.”

What?!

“Yes. I’m doing an internship with Alan Menken [who wrote songs for The Little Mermaid, and worked with Miranda on Tick, Tick … pre-production]; I’m doing my Columbia history project [with Hamilton]. If I think of it as classes, and projects, they feed each other rather than, ‘Oh god, I have so much work to do.’ I think of it as cross-curriculum; I’m getting a very well-rounded education.” During the heights of the craziness around Hamilton, he was saved by an almost polar opposite mental trick, which was intense, singular focus on the show. “Doing it every night became my meditation. For two and a half hours, I only have one job. That saved me, because I couldn’t go and party, I couldn’t go to half the things I was invited to; I was like: no, I have two shows on Saturday, which kept my head from getting off the swivel. Being in a Broadway show is like being a cook in a restaurant; they don’t care about how much people liked it last night, it’s about tonight.”

Is he relieved no longer to be the hot young thing? Miranda looks taken aback. “In terms of no longer being the hot young thing – to use your words, and I really appreciate that – I think it is very surreal to be on the other side of Hamilton, and realise that for some people my name is synonymous with musical theatre.” It seems absurd to him that the opinion of the kid from Washington Heights has so much sway, “but I try to take whatever that is in the most responsible way”. This means promoting those with less exposure than he has, as Sondheim once helped him along. In that spirit, he says, “I went to [Douglas Lyons’ comedy] [Chicken and Biscuits](#) yesterday, it was great, and I laughed my ass off and you should go see it.” He also raves about Ruben Santiago-Hudson’s [Lackawanna Blues](#) and makes a short speech about how safe, with masks and vaccine mandates, it is to visit Broadway and “get together in the dark to see a show”. Miranda looks briefly surprised. Then he smiles, and starts laughing at the sheer improbability of it all. “I’ve become an elder statesman.”

Tick, Tick … Boom! is available on [Netflix](#) now.

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Gender pay gap

Flexible working: ‘A system set up for women to fail’



Anna Whitehouse, vlogger, broadcaster and founder of Flex Appeal, a campaign for the adoption of flexible working across all UK jobs, makes her point at a demo outside parliament. Photograph: Mark Kerrison/Alamy



Joanna Partridge

Sat 20 Nov 2021 02.00 EST

Employees want it, employers know they have to offer it; flexible working has transformed almost every office during the pandemic and it's here to stay.

It is a change that has been demanded for decades by groups including women, those with caring responsibilities and disabled people. But economists and employment experts are warning it could lead to more inequality at the office, particularly for working mothers.

The latest to voice concerns was the [Bank of England](#) policymaker Catherine Mann, who [warned of a “she-cession”](#), and said women who accept their employer's offer of working mostly from home risk damaging their careers, as they aren't returning to the office after Covid to the same extent as men.

Mann told an event for women in finance hosted by the newspaper Financial News that technology and virtual working methods couldn't replace spontaneous office conversations that are also vital for career progression.

“There is the potential for two tracks,” she said. “There’s the people who are on the virtual track and people who are on the physical track. And I do worry that we will see those two tracks develop, and we will pretty much know who’s going to be on which track, unfortunately.”

Traditionally, more women than men – particularly those with children or caring responsibilities – have requested flexible working. Women were found to have taken on more responsibility for household chores during the pandemic, and surveys suggest they also bore the brunt of home schooling.

The switch to working from home has, more than 18 months on from the start of the first lockdown, changed a traditional office-based culture for good, even prompting the government to consult on making home working the “default” option.

For some, however, the more flexible approach has resulted in setbacks.

Jennifer*, a mother-of-two from Kent, recently returned to her role as a user experience researcher after her second maternity leave. During the pandemic her employer decided to close its London offices, and now rents space in a co-working building.

The 38-year-old has opted to work three long days each week and is continuing to work from home, but she worries about missing out.

“What I have seen is the people who can go, will, and are, doing the networking and having the coffees and the informal chat, and meeting the new CEO. I am very conscious it doesn’t feel like something I can easily do, as I need to go and pick up the kids,” Jennifer said.

Her experience differs vastly from her husband’s, who was one of a rare group of remote workers pre-Covid. His company has now shifted to permanent remote working for all employees, which she believes has put him on an “equal footing” with the rest of the workforce.

“He’s not a second-class citizen. I also don’t get the feeling he’s looked down on for being a parent,” she said.

Anna Whitehouse, a broadcaster and the founder of Flex Appeal, a campaign for the adoption of flexible working across all UK jobs, believes women are disadvantaged because they usually take responsibility for looking after children.

“I got so frustrated with Catherine Mann’s comments, that it’s a female issue, for us to fix,” she said.

“We’re obviously going to be taking up more flexible working because of the way the system is, the burden of childcare is still firmly strapped to female shoulders. But that’s not to say that there are these hapless dads who don’t want to step up to the challenge.”

Whitehouse, who runs the popular [Mother Pukka](#) blog, is calling for families to discuss how they divide up household chores and childcare, and for more men to push for flexible working.

“We are in a system set up for women to fail, to an extent, and I think we need companies to help us bridge that gender pay gap.”

Indeed, some campaigners advocate increased uptake of flexible working by men as one way of improving pay disparity, especially given data from the Office for National Statistics which suggests that the [gender pay gap widened during the pandemic](#).

[Last Thursday marked Equal Pay Day](#) – the date when women effectively begin working for free each year, because on average they are paid less than men – as calculated annually by the Fawcett Society.

“Flexible working is here to stay,” said Andrew Bazeley, the policy and public affairs manager at the society. “There are a number of people who will prioritise it in job applications, so in a tight labour market employers will realise they have to offer it, especially if they don’t want to widen the gender pay gap.”

The challenge for managers is that many have not been trained on how to supervise remote workers, according to Ann Francke, the chief executive of the Chartered Management Institute (CMI).

Nearly a third (29%) of managers said they felt promotion opportunities would decrease for remote workers, according to a recent CMI poll of 1,200 UK bosses, although 58% said they thought remote working would make no difference to staff prospects.

The majority of organisations have not yet done anything to ensure that a home office is not an obstacle. According to the survey, 30% of managers admitted their organisation had not taken steps to ensure employees were not passed over, while 38% did not know. Only a third of (33%) companies had put procedures in place to ensure staff working remotely home workers had an equal shot at future promotions.

“Even though both men and women wish to work flexibly, of course more women than men will request it, and the implication is they are the ones who will suffer,” said Francke.

“It is extremely important that organisations are not complacent. They need training on judging people and promotions by productivity not presenteeism.”

** Not her real name*

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The Q&AMo Gilligan

Interview

Mo Gilligan: ‘My greatest achievement? Getting a house. I didn’t think that was possible’

Rosanna Greenstreet



Mo Gilligan: ‘I wake up in the middle of the night and write jokes.’
Photograph: Suki Dhanda/The Guardian

Sat 20 Nov 2021 04.30 EST

Born in London, Mo Gilligan, 33, began his career uploading comedy clips to social media, and was given his own Channel 4 series, [The Lateish Show](#), in 2019. His Netflix special, Momentum, has been released in 190 countries, and he [won the 2020 Bafta](#) for best entertainment performance. He produced and fronted the Channel 4 documentary Mo Gilligan: Black, British and Funny. Currently touring his show [There’s Mo to Life](#), he stars in the latest Purplebricks advertising campaign. He lives in London.

What is your earliest memory?

I'll never forget my first day at nursery. My mum dropped me off and I was like, "Wow, this is fun." I was playing on the swing and the slide, and turned around and she was gone. I remember losing it.

What is your most treasured possession?

My passport.

Describe yourself in three words

Laid-back, charismatic and funny.

What would your superpower be?

To stop time and sort out my punctuality.

What makes you unhappy?

Rainy days.

What do you most dislike about your appearance?

The bags under my eyes.

What is your most unappealing habit?

I slurp drinks when they are very hot.

What scares you about getting older?

Not being able to keep up with trends.

What is your guiltiest pleasure?

I love trainers. Wherever I go in the world, I will look for trainer shops and probably buy four or five pairs.

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Which book are you ashamed not to have read?

My own: I haven't got my copy yet.

What is the worst thing anyone's said to you?

About four years ago, someone asked for a picture when I was on the phone.

I said, “Give me two seconds.” And they said, “Oh right, it’s not like you’re famous.” What? I’m just taking a call.

Would you choose fame or anonymity?

Fame – I got a PS5 for free!

To whom would you most like to say sorry, and why?

Some of my old teachers for disrupting lessons. I was the class clown.

What does love feel like?

I always relate love to happiness.

What is the worst job you’ve ever done?

Handing out leaflets for a dry cleaner’s, because no one wanted them and, if people did take them, they just threw them on the floor.

What has been your biggest disappointment?

Not investing in bitcoin.

If you could edit your past, what would you change?

I don’t think I would change anything because it might not have got me here.

If not yourself, who would you most like to be?

Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson.

What would you like to leave your children?

A house.

What do you consider your greatest achievement?

Getting a house. I didn’t think that was a possibility for me. I’ve been able to do amazing things – Netflix, tours, winning a Bafta – but having something you own is hard, so that’s really up there.

What keeps you awake at night?

Material. I wake up in the middle of the night and write jokes.

What is the most important lesson life has taught you?

To enjoy it.

Tell us a joke

My life. It's literally built on jokes.

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Coronavirus

UK Covid infections dip but worries remain of ‘significant strain’ on NHS



The UK government has been buoyed up by news of the significant impact of a third vaccine dose on immunity. Photograph: Amer Ghazzal/Rex/Shutterstock

[Ian Sample](#) and [Heather Stewart](#)

Fri 19 Nov 2021 13.25 EST

Covid infections have fallen across much of the UK, according to official figures, but remain high enough to put the health service under “significant strain” in the months ahead, scientists warn.

The Office for National Statistics estimates one in 65 people in England had Covid in the week ending 13 November, down marginally from one in 60 the week before. A small decline was also seen in Wales, with rates in Scotland and Northern Ireland broadly level.

The new figures, which are for community infections and exclude people in hospitals, care homes and other settings, come as a surge in cases on the continent sent [Austria back into lockdown](#) and led [Germany's health minister](#) to warn that a further lockdown there could not be ruled out.

Cases have risen sharply since the summer in many European countries in a [wave of infections](#) that began in eastern nations and moved steadily west. But while the worst affected countries are bringing in major restrictions to contain the surge, UK ministers are holding off with plan B measures that would bring in vaccine passports, expand mask wearing and encourage more people to work from home.

Ministers hope immunity is higher in England than in some other countries because of the decision to open up earlier. “Covid has had more time to wash around in the UK,” said a government source.

It is understood Downing Street has been advised of two potential scenarios. Either the colder weather could bring a sharp increase in cases and hospital admissions, as on the continent – and “we have suddenly got a big problem” as a government source put it – or higher immunity levels could let Covid continue to circulate among unvaccinated populations including children, but without leading to a surge in hospital admissions and deaths. It will not be clear for some weeks which trajectory the UK is on.

The government was buoyed up by news of the significant impact of a [third vaccine dose on immunity](#) – and it is understood ministers expect the independent Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) eventually to recommend expanding boosters to all adults.

Meanwhile, government sources point to very high vaccination rates among the oldest people as evidence the vaccine programme is going well.

Prof John Edmunds, a member of the Sage committee of advisers, told BBC Radio 4’s the World at One programme that waning immunity could lead to an increase in cases among UK adults. “There’s a risk because of waning immunity in older individuals – and that’s all adults, not just the elderly – that cases could really take off,” he said. “It’s really important that we boost

immunity in older individuals and then we might be able to avoid any significant fourth wave.

“We’re going to have high levels of infection for many months, so I think the [NHS](#) will unfortunately be under significant strain. It may not get to breaking point, where we were close to before, but significant strain for a very long period of time is certainly on the cards,” he said.

Sage advised ministers last month that a package of light measures, including more mask wearing and encouragement to work from home, could prevent the need for more drastic action later if cases took off in the winter.

While vaccine passports are under consideration, they may not have a rapid impact on case numbers. Mark Woolhouse, professor of infectious disease epidemiology at the University of Edinburgh, said that if the aim was to bring cases down fast, other measures could be more effective. “Vaccine passports are not a very efficient way to do that,” he said. “Requiring negative test results at venues is probably a better bet. That takes the infectious people out of the equation.”

Vaccine passports could encourage people to get jabbed, Woolhouse said, but it was unclear what level of restrictions would need to be placed on unvaccinated people to have a substantial effect on uptake. “It’s not a quick or efficient solution and we know there is significant transmission going on in the vaccinated population,” he said.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/19/uk-covid-infections-dip-but-worries-remain-of-significant-strain-on-nhs>

Hong Kong

Hong Kong authorises Sinovac Covid vaccine for children aged 3 to 17



A community vaccination centre offering the Sinovac vaccine in Hong Kong. About 67% of the population are vaccinated with two shots from either Sinovac or BioNTech. Photograph: Jérôme Favre/EPA

Reuters

Sat 20 Nov 2021 04.44 EST

Hong Kong has approved lowering the age limit for the Covid-19 vaccine from China's Sinovac Biotech to three, down from 18 years of age.

Hong Kong's secretary for food and health, Sophia Chan, said in a statement published on Saturday: "Adolescents aged 12 to 17 will be accorded priority to receive the CoronaVac vaccine, with a view to extending to children of a younger age group at a later stage."

She considered the benefits of approving the extension of the age eligibility to cover those aged three to 17 outweighed the risks, the statement said.

A Hong Kong government advisory panel on Covid vaccines had earlier recommended that the minister approve the new age limit, it said.

The extension of the age eligibility comes after Hong Kong's vaccination campaign, which started in February, has lagged behind many other developed economies. About 67% of the population have received two shots of either Sinovac or Germany's BioNTech vaccine.

The city's government said in separate statement on Friday that it had purchased 1m extra doses of BioNTech vaccine for third dose Covid vaccinations.

Hong Kong has followed Beijing's lead in retaining strict travel restrictions to curb new outbreaks, in contrast to a global trend of opening up and living with the coronavirus.

International business lobby groups have said Hong Kong could lose talent, investment and competitive ground to rival finance hubs such as Singapore unless it relaxes its restrictions on travel.

Despite barely any recent local cases and an environment virtually free of Covid, Hong Kong has imposed mandatory hotel quarantine of up to 21 days for arrivals from most countries at the travellers' cost.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/20/hong-kong-authorises-sinovac-covid-vaccine-for-children-aged-3-to-17>

[Australian politics](#)

Australia Covid protests: threats against ‘traitorous’ politicians as thousands rally in capital cities



Crowds in Melbourne protest against mandatory vaccinations and lockdown measures on Saturday. Photograph: James Ross/AAP

[Stephanie Convery](#)

[@gingerandhoney](#)

Sat 20 Nov 2021 02.14 EST

Thousands of people have marched in “freedom” rallies in [Melbourne](#), Sydney, Brisbane, Perth and Adelaide, with the largest crowds in the Victorian capital as protests against the state government’s pandemic legislation ramped up again.

Protesters marched from Victoria’s state parliament, down Bourke Street and up to Flagstaff Gardens, carrying Australian flags and placards bearing anti-

vaccination, anti-lockdown and anti-government slogans, while chanting “kill the bill”, “sack Dan Andrews” and “Aussie, Aussie, oi, oi, oi”.

The rally drew a significant increase in numbers following weeks of protests against the Victorian premier’s Public Health and Wellbeing (Pandemic Management) Bill 2021, which previously came to a head last weekend, when thousands of people marched through central Melbourne in a demonstration that included a prop gallows, protesters posing with nooses, and chants of “hang Dan Andrews”.



United Australia party leader Craig Kelly in Sydney. Photograph: Steven Saphore/AAP

The bill as introduced by the Victorian government would allow the premier to make an indefinite declaration of a pandemic and state of emergency, give the health minister power to make broad public health orders, and grant authorised officers the power to detain people under quarantine.

The Victorian premier, Daniel Andrews, [has been racing to pass the pandemic legislation before the state of emergency is due to lapse](#) on 15 December.

If the bill fails to pass, the Victorian government may not have the legal framework to enforce and create Covid-19 orders to manage the pandemic.

The bill has been criticised by the Law Institute of Victoria, the Victorian Bar Association, and the Human Rights Law Centre, who say it lacks oversight and transparency.

Speakers at the Melbourne rally included the rightwing fringe pundit Morgan C Jonas and Harrison McLean, [who was charged earlier this year with incitement](#) for allegedly encouraging people to breach the chief health officer's directions with regards to Melbourne protests on 18 September, in the middle of the city's sixth lockdown.

Speakers claimed credit for the pandemic legislation bill being delayed in parliament this week and called on the crowd to “go to any length necessary to rid our parliament of those traitorous politicians”.

At least one protester was detained before being led away by police.

A counter-demonstration organised by the Campaign Against Racism and Fascism, a coalition of progressive activists and leftwing organisations, which met at the Eight Hour Day Monument in Carlton, attracted a crowd of about 300 to 500 people.

Speakers claimed credit for the pandemic legislation bill being delayed in parliament.

While it seemed initially like a confrontation was imminent, the anti-fascist demonstrators took a route through Carlton rather than making their way into the CBD.

Nahui Jimenez, an organiser from the campaign, said on Saturday that the purpose of the rally was to draw attention to the conspiracy theorists and far-right elements that were a feature of the “freedom” rallies.

“Hostility to vaccines and other important health measures has become a gateway to the far-right globally,” Jimenez said. “We will not allow fascist groups to propagate their bigotry and occupy our streets without resistance.”

The Victorian parliament was the site of ugly scenes this week as protesters occupied the front steps to demonstrate against the proposed pandemic laws.

A crowd staged a mock execution of the premier using wooden gallows on Monday evening, while another demonstrator attended an earlier protest with three nooses in an apparent reference to crossbenchers who have supported the bill. It was also reported figures associated with the neo-Nazi movement had joined the protests.

In Sydney on Saturday, several thousand protesters also marched through the CBD.

The sound of bagpipes echoed through York Street as a man dressed in white screamed “destroy the new world order” and others chanted “walk with us”.

A Sydney demonstrator carried a “kill the bill” sign, despite there being no such bill in NSW, while others waved Australian flags.



Protesters take part in the ‘Worldwide Rally for Freedom’ protest against mandatory vaccinations and lockdown measures in Sydney. Photograph: Steven Saphore/AAP

United Australia party leader and federal MP Craig Kelly addressed the crowd at Martin Place after attending a Melbourne protest last weekend.

“We will hold every politician and every bureaucrat responsible for forcing injections upon the Australia population,” he said, drawing chants of “sack

them all”.

The party’s founder and former senator, Clive Palmer, was at the sister rally in Brisbane’s Botanical Gardens.

He criticised a number of politicians, including the prime minister, Scott Morrison, who he said “abandoned Australia”.

When the Brisbane crowd was asked by a protester giving a speech what they thought of the Queensland premier, Annastacia Palaszczuk, someone yelled: “Hang the bitch.”

It came after Queensland MP Brittany Lauga contacted police after she and other members of state parliament received an email with “threats of terrorism, extremism and violence”.



Clive Palmer at the sister rally in Brisbane’s Botanical Gardens. Photograph: Darren England/AAP

“I understand local doctors have been sent death threats and other threatening letters,” she wrote on Twitter.

“I unequivocally condemn these threats of violence, terrorism and extremism. This is not peaceful protest.”

On Friday, key Victorian crossbench MP Andy Meddick revealed his daughter Kielan had allegedly been attacked on a Fitzroy street the previous evening and had suffered a head injury after being confronted by an unknown man over the spray painting of an anti-vax poster.

The incident drew condemnation from Morrison and the Victorian premier.

Experts say protesters in Melbourne have capitalised on criticisms of the bill to maintain the momentum of anti-government protests, which began as anti-lockdown protests last year, morphed into anti-vaccine mandate protests in July, and were fuelled by outraged construction workers in September after the two-week shutdown of the state's construction industry.

Australian Associated Press contributed to this report

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2021.11.20 - Opinion

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- The dishonesty of Boris Johnson has finally infected the entire government
- Give the Parthenon marbles back to Greece – tech advances mean there are no more excuses
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OpinionMental health

My treatment in an NHS psychiatric ward was crucial. But why was I there so long?

[Jen McPherson](#)



Staff with a service user at an NHS secure mental health unit in Lancashire, 2016. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

Sat 20 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

Three years, seven months, and 19 days. This is the length of time I spent incarcerated inside the psychiatric system. I look back on my years living on inpatient wards with a mixture of grief and sorrow. And I still wonder: is institutionalised care really the only option for the most critical cases?

When I was 27, I had a psychotic episode. Psychosis is merciless. It preyed upon everything I knew about myself and left behind a dark void of a

person. I was sectioned under the Mental [Health Act](#) and detained against my will in hospital.

I arrived on the ward depressed and delusional. A psychiatrist quickly diagnosed me with bipolar disorder and prescribed medication. My mood lifted; the doctors tinkered with cocktails of drugs until the delusions subsided. Being here was a holiday for my mind, a place of safety, a place to get better.

But life on a psychiatric ward is regimented and controlled. I took my medication at the same time every day, ate at the same time and slept at the same time. I lost my autonomy: staff dictated when I went outside and for how long. They counted the cutlery after every meal before I was allowed to leave the dining room to check I had not taken anything I could harm myself with; any sharp objects I owned – razors, tweezers, even glass makeup bottles – were taken from me and kept in the security cupboard. I was searched whenever I came back from going outside.

I know this was done to protect me, other patients and staff – but it was suffocating. At 18, I had trekked across Nepal on my own – now all my freedom and autonomy had been taken away.

In the year to March 2021, there were 53,239 new [detentions under the Mental Health Act](#) – an increase of 4.5% on the previous year. Mental health professionals will say to you that they always seek to keep people out of hospitals if they can: long hospital stays can lead to dependency and institutionalisation, rather than the autonomy and freedom people need to make long-term recovery.

Currently, [8 million people](#) are shut out of NHS mental health care because they don't qualify as ill enough, and a further 1.6 million who do are sitting on waiting lists. With this in mind, it is easy to see how mental ill health can spiral out of control. This crisis in care means that the idea of supporting people like me in our communities, where we can access professional help alongside a network of family and friends, is becoming more and more distant.

I met patients who had languished on psychiatric inpatient wards for years – some even decades. It is no life. I got used to the alarms going off all through the day and night as staff rushed to the bedroom of whichever patient was the latest to have self-harmed. If a patient couldn't be managed, they were taken to seclusion, a completely bare room. The aim of putting them there was to calm them down. I could hear their cries and shouting and it still haunts me.

One time, a fellow patient stopped taking her medication and relapsed. She wrote expletives on the walls in felt-tip pen, wrecked the ward garden and smashed her bedroom window with a snooker ball. Another day, a patient came into my room and swallowed the batteries out of my television remote control and had to be rushed to A&E. I learned after that never to leave my door open again.

I owe my life to the staff on the ward – their inexhaustible energy and supply of compassion and patience gave me back my dignity and self-worth. I learned the importance of taking care of myself. “Self-care” has been hijacked by advertisers as millennial, middle-class platitude, but it is so much more than an expensive bubble bath. It is making sure I take my medication on time. It is ensuring I am not under too much stress academically or professionally. It is cultivating my friendships and support network. Most importantly, self-care is a mentality; it is forgiving myself and prioritising time and kindness for myself.

I also started an Open University course while an inpatient. It gave me purpose, drive and motivation. I was no longer just a patient or a diagnosis; I was a student with aspirations and goals.

Still, I do question whether I really needed to be in hospital for as long as I was beyond my initial crisis period. I became, as Sylvia Plath wrote, imprisoned by the bell jar, “stewing in my own sour air”. The jar – my mental state and the rules of the institution – smothered me over the years as I fought to get better. The psychiatric ward taught me many things, but mainly it taught me how important freedom is. We must have a national conversation about whether the best way of treating patients with severe and enduring mental illness is to leave them on psychiatric wards.

As I recovered from my illness, every step towards being free was a small victory. I gradually began to care about my appearance, having stopped bothering when I first fell ill. When I was discharged, I would go for long walks in the park, read and write in cafes, and go out for drinks with friends. Regaining my freedom was like going from sepia to colour. I still think back to my time in the psychiatric ward and wonder how my fellow patients are doing. Are they out now, living their lives, or are they still confined to the labyrinth of hospital life? I pause, and then I move on. Now I have to write my own story.

- Jen McPherson is a student and freelance journalist
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[Opinion](#)[Conservatives](#)

The dishonesty of Boris Johnson has finally infected the entire government

[Jonathan Freedland](#)



‘The government tells us it is pursuing net zero, even as it nudges Britons away from trains and into cars and planes.’ Photograph: Nathan Stirk/Getty Images

Fri 19 Nov 2021 11.32 EST

The personal dishonesty of the prime minister is serial and well documented. It’s the thread that has run through his career. It saw him fired from his first job, at the Times, for making up quotes, then saw him [fired from the Tory frontbench](#) for lying to his party leader – to say nothing of the [anti-EU fabrications](#) that made Boris Johnson’s name as Brussels correspondent of the Daily Telegraph.

But dishonesty is no longer merely the character flaw of one man. It has become the imprint of his party and this government.

Admittedly, the Conservatives’ collective dishonesty is less florid than Johnson’s individual variety. If you were being kind, you would call it intellectual dishonesty or, kinder still, magical thinking. Sometimes it takes the form of arguing two contradictory things at once; often it comes down to saying one thing and doing the exact opposite.

So we have a Tory government publicly committed to reducing carbon emissions, one that just last week wrapped up Cop26 in Glasgow, where it urged the world to pursue net zero. But this week that same government [broke its promise](#) to extend HS2 to Leeds and abandoned the pledged high-speed rail link between Leeds and Manchester. Passengers and freight that would have moved on clean, swift trains will instead be burning up petrol on the roads.

Indeed, buried deep in the government’s announcement was a telltale line. On page 23 of [the new plan](#) is the observation that the original scheme would have crossed various motorways 13 times: disruption to road users that, the document cheerfully notes, has now been avoided. Proof, says Richard Bowker, former head of the Strategic Rail Authority, that for this government the car is “still king”.

That came less than a month after Rishi Sunak gave a boost to [domestic air travel](#) – surely one of the very easiest things for a nation of Britain's size to cut down on. In other words, the government tells us it is pursuing net zero, even as it nudges Britons away from trains and into cars and planes.

Of course, it was grimly predictable that it would be [northern England that got shafted](#) by Thursday's announcement. The Conservatives' breaching of the “red wall” in 2019 has let them pose as the party of working people, but their actions tell a different story.

You had to examine the small print, but look at the government's social care reforms, details of which were [announced this week](#). Those who have little will [lose 75% of their assets](#) to pay for care if they need it. Those with £500,000 in the bank will keep more than 75% of theirs. The Tories talk a good game to voters in Bishop Auckland or Blyth Valley, but it's still Bucks and Berks they're looking after.

The mother and father of these dishonesties remains Brexit, still the organising principle of this government and the adhesive that binds Johnson to his party. That project always rested on magical thinking – the belief that Britain could boost its economy by making trade with its nearest neighbours harder and more expensive – and it requires more and more such thinking to maintain the illusion. So you have a chancellor who simultaneously wants to shower red-wall seats with cash, cut taxes and reduce borrowing, all of it only possible with mighty economic growth – which is unachievable, thanks to an exit from the EU projected to drain [2.25% from our output](#) by the end of 2022.

Brexit entails all kinds of such deceptions, the contradictions never admitted let alone confronted. David Frost was in Brussels today, for the latest round of apparently [never-ending talks](#) with the EU over Northern Ireland's post-Brexit arrangements. For all the technical details, the problem has always been both simple and obvious. Once the UK had resolved to leave the single market and the customs union, there had to be a border somewhere. It could be on the island of Ireland; the government promised it would not do that. Or it could be down the Irish Sea; the government promised it would not do that either. It has tried to wish away that fundamental conundrum, hoping it

might disappear in a puff of magician's smoke. That was delusional, but it was also dishonest – to the people of Northern Ireland above all.

Wherever you look, this government is spinning similar fictions. It could be “global Britain” – evoking the long history of a free-trading nation at the very moment Britain slams the door on the largest free-trade bloc the world has ever known – or “levelling up”: slogans are the one commodity that's never in short supply. But the government either does nothing to make those pledges real, or actively works against their fulfilment.

All of this is personified by Johnson himself, who has turned [breaking his word](#) into a vocation. But now it has become a collective trait. The government has adopted Johnson's notorious attitude to cake – wanting to have it and to eat it – and made cakeism its defining creed. The Tories want both to look good on climate and withhold cash from the transport system. They want both to spend big and keep taxes low. They want both to leave the EU and keep Northern Ireland exactly as it was. They want both to hold the red wall and keep giving preferential treatment to their own blue-wall faithful.

If this were only magical thinking designed to deceive themselves, it would be bad enough. But the Tories are doing to the country what Johnson has done his whole life: making promises that cannot be kept and telling stories that are not true.

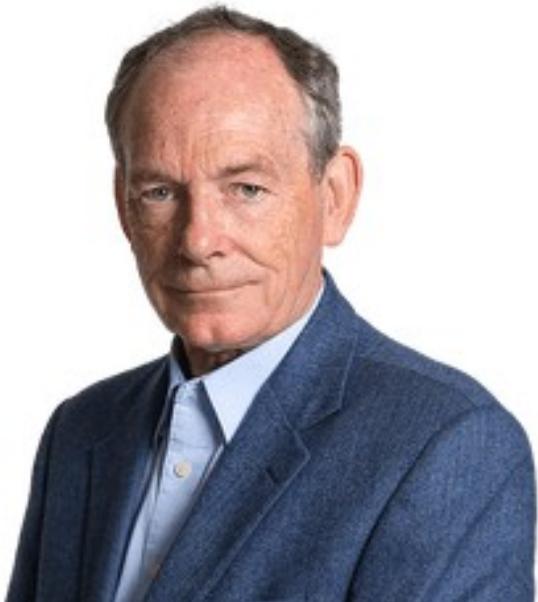
- Jonathan Freedland is a Guardian columnist
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[Opinion](#)[Parthenon marbles](#)

Give the Parthenon marbles back to Greece – tech advances mean there are no more excuses

[Simon Jenkins](#)





‘The British Museum argues that its amassing of global artefacts over two centuries of British empire has delighted and educated tourists to London.’ Sculptures removed from the Parthenon at the British Museum. Photograph: Matt Dunham/AP

Sat 20 Nov 2021 03.00 EST

One day a British government will [return the Parthenon marbles](#) to Athens. The only question is: who will obtain Greece’s undying credit and thanks?

The obvious candidate was surely Boris Johnson. In 1986, the classics scholar invited the Greek culture minister Melina Mercouri [to speak at Oxford University](#), pledging to help her restore the Parthenon’s glory. Yet this week it became yet another of Johnson’s Don Giovanni promises – words meant only at the time. Visiting London earlier this week, the Greek prime minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, [challenged him](#) to “think out of the box in terms of global Britannia” and stage a “fantastic coup for public diplomacy”. Johnson pretended the issue was for the British Museum to decide, and nothing to do with him.

Anyone who has seen the other half of the Parthenon frieze, now on display in Athens’ magnificent Acropolis Museum, will agree that this greatest of European treasures should not be cut up and divided between Athens and

London. It belongs where it was created, radiant in the Greek light and laid out within sight of its original temple. Half of it should not be sitting, frigid and out of context, in a bleak Bloomsbury mausoleum.

The Parthenon marbles saga has lately become enveloped in a wider debate over cultural identity and restitution. The British Museum has long argued, for a time powerfully, that its amassing of global artefacts over two centuries of British empire has delighted and educated tourists to London. The marbles were not looted but were [cut from the Acropolis](#) between 1801 and 1805 by the British ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Lord Elgin, with permission from Greece's then conquerors, the Turks. No one asked the Greeks, but otherwise it was legal.

The British Museum now protests that what it has, it holds with care. Yes, it did come close to wrecking the marbles when [cleaning them with wire brushes](#) in 1938, but at least they were safe from war and pollution. The whole world can get to London to see them, rather than traipsing to a distant Balkan capital, the museum says; we don't want to open the floodgates to every tinpot regime seeking to boost its cultural image by raiding London basements for ancestral stuff. Museum curators love worst-case scenarios.

Yet the world is moving on. Cultures are craving their homelands, settings, identities. Museums across Africa and Asia are improving. They are seeking to rediscover and interpret their ancient narratives. Surely we should respect rather than impede this desire. There may be no rules governing the restitution of museum objects, but dealings between peoples require qualities of courtesy, generosity and common sense.

To be fair, western museums are responding. Paris is [returning looted artefacts](#) to south-east Asia and Senegal. Benin bronzes [have been returned](#) to Nigeria from Cambridge, Aberdeen, Germany and France. The British Museum returned royal jewels to Ceylon in the 1930s and [regalia to Burma in 1964](#). It even returned part of the Sphinx's beard to Egypt. To circumvent rules forbidding "deaccessioning", these moves are often couched as "permanent loans".

In 1941, during the second world war, the British Foreign Office [actively considered](#) the Parthenon marbles' return as a gesture of support for Greek nationalism, as and when the war should end. The British Museum has occasionally mooted lending them to Athens for an exhibition, but does not trust the Greeks to return them. Nor is it moved by Greek offers of sumptuous objects lent in return, such as the golden Mask of Agamemnon.

This debate has been further transformed by [developments in replication](#). Computerised 3D printing and etching pioneered in Italy and at Oxford's Institute for Digital Archaeology can now recreate with microscopic accuracy ancient buildings and statues, even using the original stone. There are plans to "reprint" Palmyra's Temple of Baal, destroyed by Islamic State in 2015, and [replicate monuments](#) tragically lost in Mosul and Nimrud.

The [Parthenon marbles](#) could now be reproduced as indistinguishable from the originals, even if snooty art critics can dismiss them as fakes and "not the same thing". This then raises the question of which museum, London or Athens, should get the "originals" – and does it really matter? We can admire the second casting of a Rodin statue or the fourth state of a Rembrandt etching as much as a first. Who cares?

To this there is only one answer: that the Greeks do care. The missing Parthenon frieze in its original state is a reminder of the country's humiliation by the Turks, and by a British aristocrat. They feel these stones are theirs, just as the [Stone of Scone](#) belongs to Scotland, and Stonehenge would "belong" to every Briton, had the Emperor Claudius decided to cart it back to Rome. If Londoners want to experience the aesthetic appeal of Greek carving, they can: technology can replicate it for them, as it is now replicating famous statues across Europe. But let the stones return.

This issue, so important to the Greeks but not to the British, could be sorted out with goodwill in an instant. Precisely such a negotiation on the marbles was demanded in September by Unesco, and [rejected by Britain](#). If it requires a "perpetual loan" or an act of parliament, then get on with it. If money is required, raise it. Johnson is being feeble in fobbing off Athens' request as not being under his purview. The museum is a state institution. Instead of keeping his promise and doing the right thing by the marbles, he has performed another U-turn and funked it.

- Simon Jenkins is a Guardian columnist
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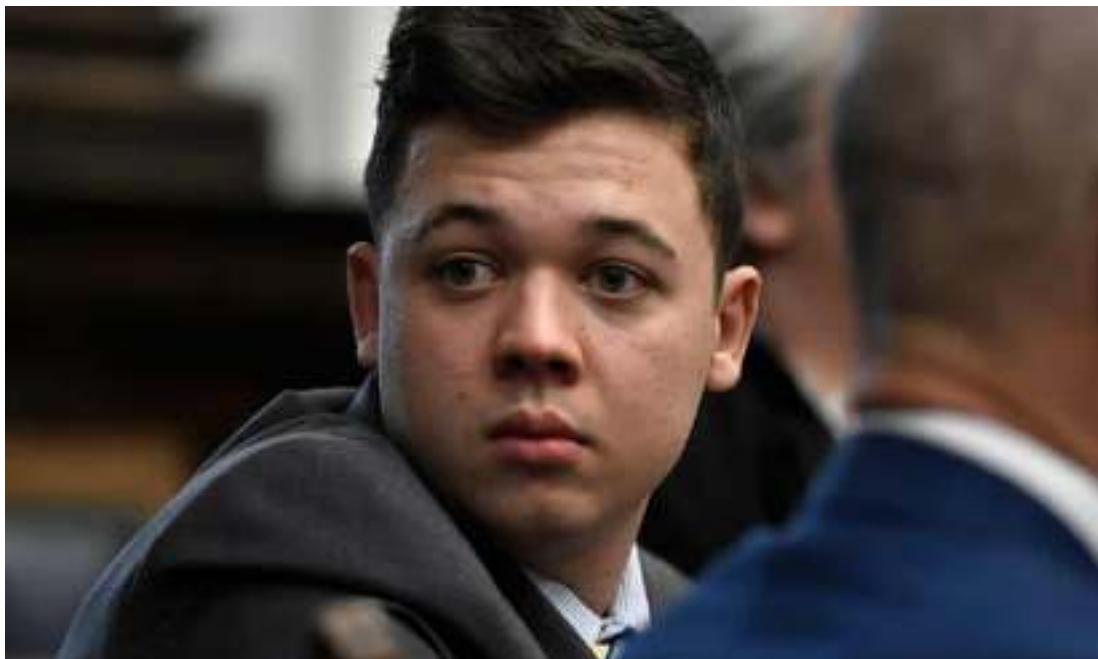
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Kyle Rittenhouse

Kyle Rittenhouse wasn't convicted because, in America, white reasoning rules

Michael Harriot



Kyle Rittenhouse, who killed two demonstrators during protests in Kenosha, Wisconsin, was acquitted of all charges on Friday. Photograph: Getty Images
Sat 20 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

Before sending a Kenosha, Wisconsin, jury to deliberate if [Kyle Rittenhouse](#) is a murderer, Judge Bruce Schroeder informed Rittenhouse's hand-picked jury that his fate rests on the "privilege" of self-defense.

We now know what the jury decided.

Neither side disagreed that the 18-year-old intended to shoot Anthony M Huber, Joseph Rosenbaum and Gaige Grosskreutz. They don't disagree that

the Smith & Wesson M&P 15 is a dangerous weapon. However, under Wisconsin's self-defense statutes, Rittenhouse was allowed to use deadly force, even if he provoked the 25 August attack, if he "reasonably believed" it was necessary to prevent his own death. Even though he traveled to the city and walked into a chaotic scene with a killing machine.

"A belief may be reasonable even though mistaken," the jury instructions read. "In determining whether the defendant's beliefs were reasonable, the standard is what a person of ordinary intelligence and prudence would have believed in the defendant's position."

Before former Kenosha alderman Kevin Mathewson summoned "patriots willing to take up arms and defend our city from the evil thugs", no one else had died during the unrest in his city. Before Rittenhouse killed two people and wounded another, no one else had been shot. So, why is it reasonable to believe Rittenhouse needed a killing machine to protect himself against the "evil thugs" who were not shooting and killing people?

The "reasonable man" test derives from the description of a nondescript English character called the "man on the Clapham omnibus" – a reasonably educated, but average, hypothetical passenger on a London bus route whose thoughts and actions are defined as "ordinary". The US supreme court case *Graham v Connor* enshrined this concept into law. The reason police are often acquitted of killing unarmed citizens is that they can argue that a "reasonable" police officer would have used deadly force, *even if the officer turned out to be wrong* and the victim was unarmed. When I first heard this principle, the first thing I thought was: "A white person came up with this."

Because all of our opinions are shaped and colored by our experiences, "reasonable" is a subjective notion. Only white people's perceptions are made into a reality that everyone else must abide by. Think about how much privilege one must have for their feelings to become an actual law that governs the actions of people everywhere.

While there is no doubt about the value of the white lives Rittenhouse snuffed out, there's also no doubt that Rittenhouse was venturing into one of the scariest, most dangerous situations those white jurors could imagine: a

Black Lives Matter protest. It is easy to see how, for Rittenhouse and jurors, the victims were part of the frightening mob of “evil thugs”.

In America, it is reasonable to believe that Black people are scary.

Understanding the innate fear of Blackness embedded in the American psyche does not require legal scholarship or a judge’s explanation. This belief shapes public perception, politics and the entire criminal justice system. And it is indeed a privilege only afforded to whiteness.

Only white people’s perceptions are made into a reality that everyone else must abide by.

Researchers have found that Americans perceive Black men as larger, stronger and more threatening than white men the same size. A 2016 paper found that Black boys are perceived as older and “less innocent” by police officers. Black girls as young as five years old are viewed as older, less innocent and more aggressive than white girls. In real life, 35% of gang members are Black, but in Hollywood, 65% of the roles described as “gangsters” are played by Black actors.

The idea of the “scary Black person” manifests itself in every segment of the US criminal justice system. It’s why police are more likely to stop Black drivers, even though – according to the largest analysis of police data in the history of the world – white drivers are more likely to be in possession of illegal contraband. It’s why unarmed Black people are killed by cops at three times the rate of whites, in spite of the fact that most on-duty police fatalities are committed by white men. After controlling for factors that include education, weapon possession and prior criminal history, the US sentencing commission found that federal judges sentence Black men to prison terms that are, on average, 20% longer than white men with similar circumstances.

It’s why 5,000 people responded to Mathewson’s Facebook call-to-arms. It’s why police officer Rusten Sheskey was not charged with a crime for shooting Jacob Blake seven times in the back and the side. Blake’s pocketknife made Sheskey fear for his life, but Rittenhouse was allowed to waltz past officers from the same police department carrying a killing

machine during chaotic protests. They did not see the gun-toting teenager as a threat. He is not Black. He was not scary.

That privileged loophole extends past the borders of Wisconsin. It is on display in the trial of the men who killed Ahmaud Arbery in Brunswick, Georgia. The impromptu lynch mob hunted Arbery down based on an [1863 law](#) that allows citizens to arrest anyone based on “reasonable and probable grounds of suspicion”, [referred to by Cornell professor Joseph Margulies](#) as a “catching-fleeing-slave law”. This explains how a court could seat only one Black juror in a county that is [26.6% Black](#).

Knowing how this belief has shaped reality for every Black person in America explains why white people are the only group who doesn’t think [“attention to the history of slavery and racism is good for society”](#). It is reasonable to assume that Black history is as scary as the people in it. It is reasonable to assume that police fear for their lives when they detain Black suspects. It is reasonable for conservatives to assume that Black voters will upset the political equilibrium if they are not systemically suppressed. And yes, it was reasonable to believe that Kyle Rittenhouse’s [white jurors](#) would grant him the privilege of self-defense.

The Rittenhouse verdict is proof that it is reasonable to believe that the fear of Black people can absolve a white person of any crime.

- *Michael Harriot is a writer and author of the upcoming book Black AF History: The Unwhitewashed Story of America.*

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Opinion[Kyle Rittenhouse](#)

Kyle Rittenhouse has walked free. Now it's open season on protesters

[Cas Mudde](#)



‘Kyle Rittenhouse has just been acquitted after literally killing two people and injuring a third at a protest.’ Photograph: Reuters

Fri 19 Nov 2021 16.53 EST

Kyle Rittenhouse – the armed white teenager who traveled from Illinois to Wisconsin to allegedly “protect” local businesses from anti-racism protesters in Kenosha, whereupon he shot and killed two people and injured another – has been [acquitted of all charges](#). I don’t think anyone who has followed the trial even casually will be surprised by this verdict. After the various antics by the elected [judge](#), which seemed to indicate where his sympathies lay, and the fact that [the prosecution](#) asked the jurors to consider charges lesser than murder, the writing was on the wall.

I do not want to discuss the legal particulars of the verdict. It is clear that the [prosecution](#) made many mistakes and got little to no leeway from the judge, unlike the defense team. Moreover, we know that “self-defense” – often better known as vigilantism – is legally protected and highly racialized in this country. Think of the acquittal of George Zimmerman of the killing of [Trayvon Martin](#) in 2013.

In essence, the Rittenhouse ruling has created a kind of ‘stand your ground’ law for the whole country

In essence, the Rittenhouse ruling has created a kind of “[stand your ground](#)” law for the whole country. White people now have the apparent right to travel around the country, heavily armed, and use violence to protect the country from whatever and whoever they believe to be threatening to it. Given the feverish paranoia and racism that has captured a sizeable minority of white people in the US these days, this is a recipe for disaster.

In the coming hours and days, many media outlets will eagerly await riots or other potentially violent reactions from the other side – from the anti-racists and progressives of all colors and races who are disturbed by this verdict – and use the existence of those riots, if they occur, to push a misguided “[both sides](#)” frame. If there is protest or rioting, don’t expect the police to be as courteous and supportive as they were towards Rittenhouse and his far-right buddies.

The most worrying effect of this verdict may be this: giving rightwing vigilantes a legal precedent to take up arms against anyone they consider a threat – which pretty much runs from anti-fascists to so-called Rinos (Republicans in Name Only) and includes almost all people of color – means it is now open hunting season on progressive protesters.

Don’t get me wrong; this ruling alone did not start this kind of lopsided law and order. It is just the latest in a centuries-old American tradition of protecting white terror and vigilantism. Civil rights demonstrations in the 1960s, particularly but not exclusively in the south, were not just denied

police protection; the demonstrators were attacked and abused by the police. That was also the case at many [Black Lives Matter demonstrations](#) last year.

A Boston Globe [investigation](#) found that “between [George] Floyd’s death on 25 May 2020 and 30 September 2021, vehicles drove into protests at least 139 times”, injuring at least 100 people. In fewer than half of the cases the driver was charged, and only four drivers have been convicted of a felony. Moreover, in response to these attacks, Republican legislators have proposed laws to protect the *drivers* from legal action in case they hit a protester. Florida, Iowa, and Oklahoma have already passed such laws.

It takes courage to publicly protest in any situation, particularly when protesting state powers. Now protesters in the US will have to fear not only police brutality but an emboldened and violent far right, fired up by the Republican party and the broader rightwing media and protected by the local legal system.

All of this comes at a crucial point in US democracy. From [Georgia](#) to [Wisconsin](#), the Republican party is attacking the electoral system, while their supporters are [terrorizing](#) poll workers and those [signing up](#) to be poll workers in the next elections. In the event that Democrats win important elections in conservative states in 2022 – think Stacey Abrams in Georgia or Beto O’Rourke in Texas – there is a big chance that these results will be contested and judged by highly partisan forces protected by state politicians.

Similarly, should President Biden or another Democrat win the 2024 presidential election, the result will again be challenged in conservative states, but this time independent poll workers could be absent or outnumbered and the few Republicans who withstood Donald Trump’s pressure in 2020 will have been replaced or have fallen in line.

At that point, Democrats, and indeed all democratic-minded citizens, will have to go into the streets to protest. They will confront an alliance of heavily armed civilians and police and national guard, who can attack protesters with effective immunity. Remember: [Kyle Rittenhouse](#) has just been acquitted after killing two people and injuring a third at a protest.

In my home country, the Netherlands, we have a saying that is used regularly in political discussions: “[Democracy is not for scared people](#).” Most of the time when it is used, we mean that democracy is not for people who are afraid of change or of critique. In the US, in the wake of today’s verdict, this saying has become both more real and more sinister.

- Cas Mudde is Stanley Wade Shelton UGAF professor of international affairs at the University of Georgia, the author of [The Far Right Today](#) (2019), and host of the podcast [Radikaal](#). He is a Guardian US columnist
- This article was amended on 20 November 2021. An earlier version incorrectly stated that Kyle Rittenhouse’s mother drove him to Kenosha.

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2021.11.20 - Around the world

- ['I thought I was a goner' Survivors detail harrowing escapes of Canada mudslides](#)
- [Theranos trial Elizabeth Holmes takes stand in her own defence](#)
- [Germany Bavaria gets tough on Covid with cancellation of Christmas markets](#)
- [Analysis 'Storm clouds' over Europe – but UK Covid rates remain high](#)

[Canada](#)

‘I thought I was a goner’: survivors detail harrowing stories of Canada mudslides



In this aerial photo, damage caused by heavy rains and mudslides earlier in the week is pictured along the Coquihalla Highway near Hope, British Columbia. Photograph: Jonathan Hayward/AP

[Leyland Cecco in Toronto](#)

Fri 19 Nov 2021 23.13 EST

Emergency crews in western [Canada](#) continued searching on Friday for victims of flash floods and mudslides which tore through the region this week, as survivors described harrowing escapes from the disaster.

British Columbia declared its third state of emergency in a year on Wednesday after a month’s worth of rain fell in two days, swamping towns

and cities, blocking major highways and leaving much of the province under water.

So far, officials have confirmed just one fatality, in a landslide near the village of Pemberton. But [gripping testimony](#) from a journalist who survived that incident suggests that figure is likely to rise.

Global BC cameraman Mike Timbrell was traveling along a mountain highway towards Vancouver on Monday as the storm raged.

After picking his way past several smaller landslides he was eventually brought to a halt behind a line of cars. Other travellers had left their vehicles and appeared to be gathered around what appeared to be the aftermath of another rockslide.

As he got back into his vehicle, Timbrell heard a “loud, terrifying roar” as a wall of snow and mud descended on the scene, toppling trees – and engulfing the motorists.

“My truck was moving all over, getting hammered by trees. I thought I was a goner,” he said. Once the slide stopped, Timbrell escaped from his car and began running.

“I turned around and looked at my truck and it was half-buried and all the cars that were on the road and all the people, they were just gone. Gone,” he said.

“I couldn’t believe it, it was almost like – in the blink of an eye – there were roads, there were cars, there was people, and then bang, everything was gone, just gone. Not a sign of a car, not a wheel, just trees and mud. It was all you could see,” he said.

Accounts from survivors have revealed that even successful rescue operations were far more dangerous than the public first realized.

Search and rescue crews in helicopters navigated rain, high winds and thick cloud cover in what was described as one of the largest mass air evacuations in the region’s history. More than 300 people stranded on Highway 7 were

rescued in the operation, during which one pilot was forced to land a Cormorant helicopter less than a meter from a broken power line pole.

“It was probably the tightest confined area I ever landed in,” Capt Jonathan Grotens told the *Globe and Mail*.



A vehicle swept off Highway 7 near Hope by a landslide is seen crushed in debris. Photograph: Jesse Winter/Reuters

On Friday, British Columbia imposed temporary restrictions on fuel and non-essential travel to ease supply chain disruptions and help the recovery effort. The orders, announced by deputy premier Mike Farnworth, limit people in some areas, including the Vancouver Island, to 30 liters (7.9 gallons) of fuel per visit until 1 December. Non-essential travel along severely affected highways will also be prohibited.

The storms forced the closure of the Trans Mountain pipeline and cut two critical east-west rail lines owned by Canadian Pacific Railway and Canadian National Railway Co that lead to Canada’s busiest port of Vancouver, impeding the supply of fuel and goods.

Farnworth said the province was also working with the federal government to import fuel via alternate routes, including by truck and barge from the US or neighboring Alberta.

As water levels recede in areas and crews work to clear debris and assess damage to highways, many of the province's small communities remained cut off from road systems or without power.

On Thursday, fire chief Jody Woodford of Tulameen, a village of fewer than 300 people, told media the community had been without phone reception for days, and only pockets had power.

“Some people made it out and actually had to swim, abandon their vehicles and swim to dry land and then walk to the fire hall.” she said.

In the province's lower mainland, as emergency crews work to stave off an [impending disaster on the regions' many farms](#), the mayor of the city of Abbotsford warned that homes may be destroyed in order to build emergency dikes, after the previous barrier was breached.

“One house is too much. And if it was my house, I'd be concerned, too. But there are not many options here,” he said. Work on the 2.5km dike is set to begin on Friday morning, with the help of dozens of soldiers.

Much of the area lies on the former site of Sumas Lake, [a vast body of water which was drained in the last century](#). Four pumps currently divert water from the basin at a rate of half a million gallons a minute, but city officials feared earlier this week they could fail, inundating the area with even more water.

Braun said the pump station is still an area of concern, as the waters of the Nooksack River continue to rise as it flows in from the United States and heavy rain is forecast for early next week. “We are not out of this by a long shot,” he said.

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[Theranos](#)

Elizabeth Holmes trial: Theranos founder takes the stand in risky move



Elizabeth Holmes arrives at the federal courthouse for jury selection in her trial on 31 August. The prosecution rested its case on Friday. Photograph: Nic Coury/AP

[Kari Paul](#)

Fri 19 Nov 2021 20.15 EST

In a surprise move, Theranos founder Elizabeth Holmes took the stand in her own defense on Friday during a fraud trial that has held [Silicon Valley](#) in its grip.

The former CEO of the blood-testing company is charged with deceiving investors and customers about a supposedly revolutionary device that could perform hundreds of tests using just a drop of blood. She faces 11 counts of fraud and up to 20 years in prison.

Holmes's testimony came just hours after prosecutors rested their case, as the trial approached the end of its 11th week. The unexpected decision to have Holmes testify so early in her defense was a bombshell development and a risky move by her legal team.

Holmes walked slowly to the stand before a rapt courtroom filled with spectators and jurors, all wearing masks. She began her testimony by recounting her early years as a student at Stanford University and her interest in disease detection, culminating in her decision to drop out of school at age 19 and found the startup later known as [Theranos](#).

She recounted her early years as a student and interest in disease detection while working with a respected chemistry professor, Channing Robertson, who would later join Theranos.

"He encouraged me to continue my research," Holmes recalled. She spoke in a husky voice that became one of her trademarks as she raised hundreds of millions of dollars and touted the revolutionary potential of Theranos's blood testing technology.

After drawing up a business plan and securing patents for the blood-testing technology she was trying to perfect, Holmes testified that she used savings earmarked for college to finance her ambitions of shaking up the health care industry.

"I started working all the time ... trying to meet people who could help me build this," Holmes said.

Holmes also discussed how the company had originally been called Real Time Cures but later changed its name. "I was doing it on my own ... I raised the money to start a lab and hire scientists," she told the court.

Taking the stand in her defense carries significant risks as prosecutors can attack on any inconsistencies in Holmes's numerous public statements. Federal prosecutors made it clear that they are eager to grill Holmes under oath as they presented their case against her. It's unlikely they will get that opportunity until Monday, at the earliest, when the trial resumes.

Over the course of the trial, being held in the San Jose, [California](#), courtroom, government attorneys have attempted to prove Holmes knowingly misled investors and patients by misrepresenting the capabilities of her company's blood-testing devices. At the close of their case, the defense moved to dismiss one count of fraud regarding a patient who was unwilling to testify.

The prosecution called more than two dozen witnesses including former employees, investors and patients who testified that Theranos's blood-testing devices did not work as advertised, returning inaccurate results. Witnesses also stated many blood tests were being carried out by external labs rather than on Theranos devices.

The legal team for Elizabeth Holmes will argue the founder did not knowingly commit fraud but rather did not understand the shortcomings of Theranos technology.

In opening arguments, her defense attorney Lance Wade painted a picture of a hardworking young female executive caught up in the Silicon Valley culture that encourages entrepreneurs to push cutting-edge ideas.

"In the end, Theranos failed, and Ms Holmes walked away with nothing," he said. "But failure is not a crime – trying your hardest and coming up short, is not a crime."

The defense is expected to argue that Holmes was influenced by her co-executive and former boyfriend, Sunny Balwani. As potential witnesses, the defense team has listed a number of domestic violence experts, suggesting they may argue Holmes was abused and not thinking clearly when she made business decisions that resulted in fraud.

"There was another side of Holmes's relationship with Balwani that the public never saw," Wade said in opening arguments, adding that "trusting [Balwani] as her primary adviser was one of her mistakes".

Balwani has strongly denied these allegations. His defense team did not respond to request for comment. He faces his own trial for fraud charges in

2022.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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Coronavirus

Bavaria gets tough on Covid with cancellation of Christmas markets



Bavaria has one of the highest Covid hospitalisation rates in Germany.
Photograph: Christof Stache/AFP/Getty Images

[Kate Connolly](#) in Berlin

Fri 19 Nov 2021 12.21 EST

Bavaria is to introduce sweeping measures to curb the spread of coronavirus, including cancelling all Christmas markets and placing limits on household mixing, its leader, Markus Söder, has announced.

Germany's largest state by land mass, with more than 13 million inhabitants, has one of the lowest vaccination rates in [Germany](#) and one of the highest hospitalisation rates. "The situation is overwhelming and just keeps escalating," Söder said.

The [cancellation of Christmas markets](#), which were due to open next week, will be a crushing blow for the public as well as vendors, for the second year in a row. The markets are a highlight of the German calendar and are of huge economic and social importance, attracting significant numbers of visitors from home and abroad.

In other measures, the number of people who can meet in a private capacity will be reduced to a maximum of five people from two households, and nightlife venues will close. The rules are due to come into place next Wednesday and to last until 15 December.

Shops will be limited to one customer per 10 sq metres of shop space while hairdressers, driving schools, music schools, sporting and cultural events will be restricted to those who can prove they are vaccinated or recovered from Covid-19 as well as produce a negative test result. Restaurants, operating on the same basis, will have to close at 10pm.

Söder said: “Above all the unvaccinated will be affected. It is a real risk to be unvaccinated.” He said the measures would be “massively controlled”.

Bavaria’s move came as neighbouring Austria announced it was to go into a nationwide lockdown from Monday and will introduce a national vaccine mandate in 2022.

Echoing the words of the Austrian chancellor, Alexander Schallenberg, Söder said: “I believe we will not be able to escape a vaccine mandate for everyone. Otherwise, we will get caught in a continuous loop.”

Earlier, Jens Spahn, the acting health minister, said he could not rule out a general lockdown across Germany, but added he was sceptical about a general vaccine mandate, “because I worry that it would tear this country apart”.

Bavaria’s decision followed a warning earlier in the day from Lothar Wieler, the head of Germany’s disease control agency, the Robert Koch Institute (RKI), who said the country was in a “state of national emergency”.

[Covid deaths in Germany](#)

The RKI reported more than 52,000 new Covid cases on Friday, after 10 days in which the level of the virus continuously reached record levels not seen during the pandemic so far with daily deaths of between 200 and 300 for days. The national proportion of people who have been fully jabbed was just under 68% on Friday, well below the 90% experts say is needed to tackle the more virulent Delta variant.

A campaign to encourage booster shots has been virtually non-existent with just 4m having been administered so far.

Meanwhile, 14% of intensive care beds are occupied with coronavirus patients and increasing numbers of hospitals are having to move patients elsewhere.

Wieler recommended the cancellation of large-scale gatherings, the closure of what he called “hotspots” such as “badly ventilated clubs and bars” and the reduction of social contacts.

“We must put on the emergency brakes right now,” he said, comparing the virus to a “tanker heading towards a harbour wall, which if we all make an effort, might perhaps only ram the wall from the side, not smash into it full on”.

Christian Drosten, the head virologist at Berlin’s Charité hospital and an expert on coronaviruses, said the virus had yet to reach the “endemic phase” in Germany as it was soon expected to do in the UK.

In an [interview in Die Zeit](#), he said: “You can see in the UK, which has round about the same vaccine level as us, and unfortunately twice as many deaths per head of population, that it is now in a ‘post-infestation’ stage, which has been ongoing since the late summer. Natural infections there are creating community protection. We’re not there yet in Germany, because there are too few people who have recovered [from the virus] and the elderly are not sufficiently vaccinated. If we let the virus spread uncontrollably it would lead to another 100,000 deaths if we don’t first close the vaccine gaps.”

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[Coronavirus](#)

‘Storm clouds’ over Europe – but UK Covid rates remain high



People pass by a restaurant window displaying Covid safety guidance in Munich, Germany. Photograph: Michaela Rehle/Reuters

*[Jon Henley](#) Europe correspondent
[@jonhenley](#)*

Fri 19 Nov 2021 07.25 EST

As Covid infection rates [surged again across Europe](#), Boris Johnson [spoke this week](#) of “storm clouds gathering” over parts of the continent and said it was unclear when or how badly the latest wave would “wash up on our shores”.

The situation in some EU member states, particularly those with low vaccination rates, is indeed dramatic. In central and eastern [Europe](#) in particular, but also Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands, case numbers are rocketing.

But missing from the prime minister's remarks, and from much of the media coverage of them, was the fact that Britain's rolling seven-day average of daily new coronavirus cases is still higher than the average of the EU27, and has been since June.

According to [figures from OurWorldInData](#), the EU's average has quadrupled in recent weeks, from just over 110 daily new cases per million people on 1 October to 446 on Thursday.

The UK began that same period with a daily infection rate of 505 per million people, nearly five times the EU27 average. After peaking at nearly 700 in late October the rate fell to 495 on 10 November, but for the past week it has been climbing sharply again.

[Covid cases graph](#)

The headlines made much of Angela Merkel describing [Germany's situation](#) as "dramatic", but at 536 per million, its infection rate is lower than Britain's 581 – which remains 30% higher than the average for the EU27.

Slovakia and Slovenia are currently the EU's hardest-hit countries, with rolling seven-day average rates of 1,643 and 1,581 per million respectively.

Not far behind are Austria – western Europe's [least vaccinated country](#), with 64% of the total population inoculated – on 1,395, Croatia on 1,275, and Belgium, the Czech Republic and the Netherlands, all with rates of more than 1,000.

Other EU members including Ireland, Hungary, Greece and the Baltic states also have infection rates higher than the UK's. But several – mainly those with high vaccination rates and relatively strict social distancing rules – do not.

They include France on 201 daily infections per million, Italy on 138 and Spain on 95, as well as Portugal, Finland and Sweden. Infection rates in [Romania and Bulgaria](#), previously the EU's worst-affected countries, are now also much lower.

[Vaccinations chart](#)

The WHO has said [repeatedly in recent weeks](#) that its 53-country European region is again at the centre of the pandemic, and no one knows whether those continental countries that have so far kept rates relatively low will continue to do so.

Britain's infection rate, meanwhile, has climbed by about 15% over the past 10 days, from a base that for the past six months has been consistently higher than the European average – something the prime minister does not often mention.

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[UK news](#)

Three remain in custody over Liverpool Women's hospital blast



Police officers near the scene of Sunday's explosion at Liverpool Women's hospital. Photograph: Phil Noble/Reuters

[Jamie Grierson](#), [Maya Wolfe-Robinson](#) [Vikram Dodd](#) and [Helen Pidd](#)

Mon 15 Nov 2021 06.07 EST

Three people remain in custody as counter-terrorism police and MI5 continued to investigate a car explosion at a hospital in Liverpool that killed one person and injured another.

A taxi exploded in flames outside the Liverpool Women's hospital at 10.59am on Remembrance Sunday. Police later confirmed that a male passenger was declared dead at the scene.

The cab driver, who has been widely named in reports as David Perry, from Kirkdale, managed to escape, and is in hospital in a stable condition.

The mayor of Liverpool, Joanne Anderson, has praised the driver, telling BBC Radio 4's Today programme: "The taxi driver, in his heroic efforts, has managed to divert what could have been an absolutely awful disaster at the hospital.

She added: "Well, we knew that the taxi driver had stood out and locked the doors, we knew that early on." However, she added it was important not to get drawn into speculation about the incident.

Oliver Dowden, the Conservative party chair, told Sky News:

"Clearly we'll have to see exactly what happened but if that is the case it is another example of true bravery and courage."

Carl Bessant was inside the hospital, where his partner had just had a baby, at the time of the blast. He told the BBC: "We were so close and she was feeding the baby when it happened. We heard a loud bang and looked out of the window. We saw the car on fire and someone jump out ... screaming, and there was someone inside the car."

The police counter terrorism unit for the north-west said three men aged 29, 26, and 21 were detained in the Kensington area of Liverpool and arrested under the Terrorism Act in connection with the incident and continued to be questioned on Monday. The security service MI5 is also assisting.



An armed police officer in Rutland Avenue, Liverpool, after the explosion.
Photograph: Peter Byrne/PA

The three arrests took place in Sutcliffe Street, where witnesses reported seeing armed officers swoop on a terraced house on Sunday afternoon.

Keith Ford, 47, a production operative, who lives in Sutcliffe Street with his partner and 13-year-old daughter, witnessed the dramatic arrests.

“I’d say about an hour and a half later, a man came out of the property that they were pointing the guns at,” Ford said. “He came to the front door, police shouted at him, saying ‘hands up in the air’ – then he walked to the pub on the end of the corner.”

Ford described the man as having dark hair, dark trousers and a blue T-shirt.

He continued: “A couple of hours later, another man came to the door, the police were shouting at him, saying ‘hands up in the air, hands up in the air.’”

He understood that the occupants of the property changed around two months ago and had not seen anyone since they moved in.

Ford was told to leave his home and spent the night at his parents' house before returning on Monday morning.

Jan Temple, 61, who lives with her two sons in Sutcliffe Street, was evacuated at 9.30pm on Sunday night. Of the people living in the property, she said: "We very rarely saw anybody coming or going."

[updated map](#)

Sections of Sutcliffe Street and Boaler Street remained cordoned off, with a heavy police presence at the scene as inquiries continued. There was a similar scene at Rutland Avenue in Sefton Park, with counter-terrorism officers sighted in the neighbourhood.

Greater Manchester police, providing updates from the north-west counter-terrorism unit, said: "A large cordon is in place on Rutland Avenue in Liverpool and a small number of addresses have been evacuated as a precaution."

Officers wearing vests marked "Negotiator" entered the cordon earlier on Sunday afternoon.

Locals said police arrived from about 1pm. Officers were guarding a terraced property as the immediate surrounding area was cordoned off.

A number of residents in Rutland Avenue were evacuated from their homes. A police operation continued past midnight with armed officers within the cordon.

Earlier, images of a vehicle on fire, and later burnt-out, outside the hospital were shared online.

A spokesperson for Merseyside police said: "So far we understand that the car involved was a taxi which pulled up at the hospital shortly before the explosion occurred."

Boris Johnson said on Twitter: "My thoughts are with all those affected by the awful incident in Liverpool today. I want to thank the emergency

services for their quick response and professionalism, and the police for their ongoing work on the investigation.”



Armed police near the scene of the blast. Photograph: Peter Byrne/PA

The chief constable of Merseyside police, Serena Kennedy, offered her reassurance over the incident. “While I understand that today’s incident may cause concern in our communities, it should be pointed out that events of this nature are very rare,” she said.

“Merseyside police will continue to liaise with community groups, community leaders, partner agencies and individuals in the coming days and weeks to make sure any concerns are addressed and ensuring that we provide the best possible service to local people.

“There will also be an increased and visible police presence on the streets of Merseyside and I would encourage people to engage with my officers and raise any concerns they may have.

Liverpool Women’s hospital said visiting access had been restricted until further notice. Patients were diverted to other hospitals where possible during most of Sunday.

In a statement, the hospital said: “Anyone with appointments at the hospital will notice an increased security and police presence on site.”

Phil Garrigan, the chief fire officer of Merseyside fire and rescue Service, said the car fire at Liverpool Women’s hospital was “fully developed” when two appliances arrived shortly after 11am.

He told reporters at the scene: “The operational crews extinguished the fire rapidly but as has been reiterated by the police chief constable, there was one fatality.

“Another individual had left the vehicle prior to the fire developing to the extent that it did.”

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[UK news](#)

Liverpool hospital taxi explosion: what we know so far



Armed police stand outside an address in Rutland Avenue in Sefton Park, after an explosion at Liverpool Women's Hospital killed one person and injured another on the morning of Sunday 14 November, 2021. Photograph: Peter Byrne/PA

[Samantha Lock](#) and [Matthew Weaver](#)

Mon 15 Nov 2021 07.45 EST

A [taxi exploded outside Liverpool Women's hospital in England](#) on Sunday morning, killing one and injuring another.

Here's what we know so far:

- In what is being treating as a terrorist incident, a taxi exploded in flames outside Liverpool Women's hospital in the city centre, shortly

before 11am on Sunday.

- A male passenger inside the vehicle was killed in the blast and declared dead at the scene. Police believe they know the identity of the dead man, but have yet to release it.
- The taxi driver managed to escape before the flames spread and has been released from hospital after being treated for injuries.
- The taxi driver had picked up a passenger from Rutland Avenue in the Sefton Park area of Liverpool, about 10 minutes from the hospital.

00:43

CCTV footage shows bomb exploding in taxi outside Liverpool Women's hospital – video

- A police search of an address in Rutland Avenue uncovered items described by police as “significant”.
- Police inquiries indicate that a homemade improvised explosive device (IED) was brought into the cab by the passenger. The explosion was believed to be due to the ignition of the IED.
- Following police raids on Sunday, three men – aged 29, 26 and 21 – were arrested at an address in Sutcliffe in the Kensington area of the city under the Terrorism Act, police said in a [statement](#) on Sunday night.
- A fourth man, aged 20, was arrested on Monday at a separate address. All four men are being interviewed by counter-terrorism detectives.
- In the hours after the blast, a heavy police presence was reported at three streets in the city – Sutcliffe and Boaler streets in Kensington, and Rutland Avenue in Sefton Park. Fire crews and police officers wearing vests marked “negotiator” were seen at Rutland avenue and cordons remain in place.

[map](#)

- The motive for the apparent attack is unknown. Police assume the IED was built by the passenger who was killed in the blast.
 - The reason why he took it to the Women's hospital is also unknown, as is the reason for its sudden explosion.
 - One possible motive is that the incident is linked to the Remembrance Day ceremony nearby. Liverpool's assistant chief constable Russ Jackson, from counter-terrorism policing north-west, said: "We are of course aware that there were Remembrance events just a short distance away from the hospital and that the ignition occurred shortly before 11am. We cannot at this time draw any connection with this. But it is a line of inquiry which we are pursuing."
 - The investigation is being led by counter-terrorism police who are being assisted by Merseyside police and MI5.
 - There is no specific threat to the area, but police patrols have been increased across Merseyside.
-

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Coronavirus

Covid booster jabs extended to people aged 40 to 49, says JCVI



A mobile NHS van administered Covid booster jabs in Datchet, Berkshire, on 6 November. Photograph: Maureen McLean/Rex/Shutterstock

Peter Walker Political correspondent
[@peterwalker99](https://twitter.com/peterwalker99)

Mon 15 Nov 2021 08.52 EST

Covid booster vaccines can be extended to those aged between 40 and 49 in the UK after being approved by the government's vaccines watchdog, which also gave approval for teenagers aged 16 and 17 to receive second jabs.

While such decisions are devolved, all devolved nations tend to accept JCVI guidance. Ministers in England, Scotland and Wales have already said they would extend boosters.

The announcements, made in a virtual briefing by Prof Wei Shen Lim, the chair of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), will be welcomed by ministers, who have been keen to extend vaccination programmes [before winter](#).

Immediately after the JCVI gave the green light for boosters for over-40s, the health secretary, Sajid Javid, said the advice had been accepted in England. “I have asked the NHS to prepare to offer those eligible a vaccine as soon as possible,” he said.

The Scottish government said separately it would also extend its booster programme and allow 16- and 17-year-olds to receive a second dose.

The move comes after a study by the UK [Health](#) Security Agency found that boosters gave more than 90% protection in people over 50. The research showed that two weeks after receiving a booster dose, protection against symptomatic infection was 93.1% in those who had initially received Oxford/AstraZeneca and 94.0% for Pfizer/BioNTech.

Lim said it was possible boosters might be extended further down the age range. “It may well be that adults who are under 40 years might require a booster dose or a third dose at some point. We don’t know whether that is definitely the case yet.

“We are looking very closely at the data all the time and should there be sufficient signal to warrant a third dose, so a booster dose for this age group, then certainly we will announce that and advise that accordingly.”

Speaking at the same briefing as Lim, England’s deputy chief medical officer, Prof Jonathan Van-Tam, warned that even with the extension of boosters, intended to tackle potentially waning immunity from earlier jabs, winter could be a difficult time with Covid.

He said: “People keep asking me about Christmas. I think for Christmas and the winter period, we can expect respiratory viruses to be around and we are particularly concerned that flu will come back and add to our problems, and it could be quite a bumpy few months ahead.”

Speaking on a visit to a vaccine centre in east London on Monday morning, Boris Johnson also warned of a potential “blizzard” of infections over the winter, urging people to get boosters if eligible.

“What we have certainly got to recognise is there is a storm of infection out there in parts of Europe, you can see those numbers ticking up very sharply in some of our continental friends,” the prime minister told reporters. “And we’ve just got to recognise that there is always a risk that a blizzard could come from the east again, as the months get colder.”

Those currently eligible for a booster, which is usually given six months after the second dose, include those aged 50 or over, or anyone younger seen as clinically very vulnerable to Covid. Others who are eligible include frontline health and care workers, or those who care for someone at high risk from Covid.

There is a separate programme of third jabs for people who have compromised immune system, for whom vaccines are often less effective.

It was also announced that people aged 16 and 17 can receive a second Covid jab 12 weeks after their first. The JCVI decided in favour of first jabs for the age group in early August. But there had been no updates since, with some parents reporting that GPs were telling teenagers they would need to wait until they were 18 for their second dose.

The JCVI is understood [to have approved second jabs](#) in outline last month but nothing had been formally announced.

Chart

Ministers see the extension of boosters as a key element in efforts to mitigate the impact of Covid over the winter, with the number of jabs now picking up after a slow start. So far, 12m boosters had been given, with 2m in the last week, the Conservative party co-chair Oliver Dowden said.

Among efforts to speed up the process, some people are [being invited for boosters](#) five months after their second jab, rather than six.

Covid infection rates have fallen during November but they are rising again, and more than 1,000 deaths connected to the virus were recorded in the week to Sunday.

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/15/uk-vaccine-advisers-set-to-approve-covid-booster-jabs-for-under-50s>

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Cop26

Ratchets, phase-downs and a fragile agreement: how Cop26 played out



The Cop26 president, Alok Sharma (left), during his concluding remarks at the UN climate change conference in Glasgow. Photograph: Paul Ellis/AFP/Getty Images



Fiona Harvey in Glasgow

Mon 15 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

As weary delegates trudged into the Scottish Event Campus on the banks of the Clyde on Saturday, few realised what a mountain they still had to climb. The [Cop26](#) climate talks were long past their official deadline of 6pm on Friday, but there were strong hopes that the big issues had been settled. A deal was tantalisingly close.

The “package” on offer was imperfect – before countries even turned up in Glasgow they were meant to have submitted plans that would cut global carbon output by nearly half by 2030, to limit global heating to 1.5C above pre-industrial levels. Although most countries submitted plans, they were not strong enough and [analysis found they would lead to a disastrous 2.4C of heating](#).

The gap between countries’ targets and the emissions cuts scientists say are needed had been known since before the start of the talks – what was crucial in [Glasgow](#) was to find a roadmap to closing it, which involved forcing some highly reluctant countries to agree a timetable of swift revisions. Finally, after two weeks of wrangling, a “ratchet” had been settled, with countries agreeing to return next year, and the year after, with amendments.

As the Cop president, [Alok Sharma](#), approached the podium, the gavel was poised by his folder, ready to push through an agreement between all of the nearly 200 countries gathered in the room. But there was a last-minute hitch.

04:17

What did Cop26 actually achieve? The hope and heartache from Glasgow – video explainer

What followed reduced Sharma almost to tears. China and India wanted to reopen a vital clause in the agreement that enjoined countries to “phase out” coal-fired power generation. No dates were given for the phaseout, and no more commitment than “accelerating efforts towards the phaseout of unabated coal power and inefficient fossil fuel subsidies”.

Abandoning coal, the dirtiest fossil fuel, is essential to staying within 1.5C, the most stringent goal under the 2015 Paris climate agreement, and a level scientists regard as a planetary boundary beyond which some of the impacts of climate breakdown will become catastrophic and irreversible. The International Energy Agency has said 40% of the world’s existing 8,500 coal-fired power plants must be closed by 2030, and no new ones built, to stay within the 1.5C limit.

Sharma had made “consigning coal to history” a personal mission through his presidency of the UK talks, and made numerous speeches on it. He had determined long before the start of the summit that he wanted a commitment on coal in the text.

It may seem uncontroversial for an agreement on the climate to refer to the need to cut out fossil fuels, as they are the source of the problem. Yet since the Kyoto protocol was signed in 1997, there has been no such reference in a Cop decision, at the behest of the major fossil fuel producers and users, who hold a great deal of sway in a process that relies on consensus. The inclusion of such a commitment in the Glasgow outcome was thus a major step.



(From left) Abdulla Shahid, president of the UN general assembly, Patricia Espinosa, executive secretary of the Framework Convention on Climate Change, Carolina Schmidt, minister of the environment for Chile, Alok Sharma, president of Cop26, and Hoesung Lee, chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, in Glasgow. Photograph: Reuters

At the last minute, China and India made it known that they objected to this wording. Sharma, who had been surviving the day on a diet of Lucozade tablets as he had no breaks for food, convened a meeting in the space behind the auditorium. The two countries – both major coal users and producers – would not accept the current wording. As the Indian delegates discussed the wording among themselves, Sharma answered them in Hindi to press the case for its retention – but to no avail. The two countries were adamant: a phaseout was unacceptable; but a phase-down, implying a longer-term future for some coal at least, was the most they would sign up to. The carefully crafted agreement was now in peril.

“My fear was we would lose the whole deal,” he told the Guardian later. “This was a fragile agreement. If you pull one thread, the whole thing could unravel. We would have lost two years of really hard work – we would have ended up with nothing to show for it, for developing countries.”

The man jokingly nicknamed “No Drama Sharma” by his team was on the verge of tears. To be forced to accept the change was bitter, and he was “deeply frustrated” according to an aide, but said it was the only way to protect the overall deal.

Sharma has seen himself from the start as the champion of the most vulnerable developing countries at these talks, the only forum in which the poorest nations can confront the biggest emitters and producers of fossil fuels with the consequences of their actions. Choking back emotion, he addressed them directly: “I apologise for the way this process has unfolded. And I am deeply sorry. I also understand the deep disappointment. But as you have also noted, I think it’s vital that we protect this package.”

Developing countries felt the disappointment just as keenly, but they understood the difficulties Sharma faced. “Although this is far from a perfect text, we have taken important steps forward in our efforts to keep 1.5C alive, and deliver the much-needed outcomes on adaptation,” said Milagros de Camps, of the Dominican Republic and the Alliance of Small Island States. “We acknowledge it was not an easy task.”

05:18

Why the world is getting hotter and how you can help – video explainer

The last-minute change of wording was galling, but did not materially change the agreement. Sharma insists that the deal as it stands shows “we are on the way to consigning coal to history”, and Nicholas Stern, the peer and climate economist, concurs: “The last-minute watering down of this statement is unfortunate but is unlikely to slow down a strong momentum past coal, a dirty fuel of an earlier era.”

John Kerry, the UN climate envoy, was also visibly annoyed, telling journalists afterwards: “Did I appreciate we had to adjust one thing tonight in a very unusual way? No. But if we hadn’t done that we wouldn’t have a deal. I’ll take phase it down and take the fight into next year.”

When countries meet next year, it will be very hard for any to [rewrite the commitment](#) now that it has been adopted. For the UK, it was a bitter pill but did not scupper the hard-fought diplomatic struggle to “keep 1.5C alive”.

Returning to the ‘ratchet’

Agreeing to return next year to revise countries’ emissions targets may not sound like much of an achievement. But climate talks sometimes seem to move at the rate of a pre-industrial glacier. The UN climate Cops have been taking place almost annually since 1992, when the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, parent treaty to the Paris agreement, was signed.

For most of that time, countries squabbled over who should have to cut greenhouse gas emissions and how. Meanwhile, carbon counts kept rising.



The US special presidential envoy for climate, John Kerry, meets India’s minister of energy, Raj Kumar Singh, in New Delhi ahead of Cop26. Photograph: Anushree Fadnavis/Reuters

The Paris agreement of 2015 marked the first time that developed and developing countries agreed to take the necessary action to limit temperature rises, to “well below” 2C above pre-industrial levels, and to “pursue efforts” to limit heating to 1.5C.

However, while the Paris treaty set the binding targets, the means to get there were contained in a non-binding annex. These national plans on

cutting emissions, called nationally determined contributions (NDCs), were drafted and presented by each country but they were much too weak to achieve the temperature goals – under the Paris NDCs, temperatures would soar by more than 3C, enough to swamp most of the world's major coastal cities.

So the accord also contained a mechanism to force countries back to the table. Informally known as the “ratchet”, this would require all signatories to return with revised NDCs every five years. That is why Cop26 was always going to be so important – it marked the first five-yearly revision (it was supposed to take place in November 2020 but was delayed by a year because of the Covid-19 pandemic).

Since the Paris agreement was signed, however, scientific warnings on climate breakdown have intensified. In October 2018, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change – the world's leading authority on climate science – produced a report showing that going beyond 1.5C would produce changes to the climate system that would rapidly become irreversible. The melting of the ice caps would accelerate, sea levels would rise to inundate small islands and coastal areas, coral reefs would bleach and extreme weather such as droughts, floods, heatwaves and fiercer storms would wreak havoc.

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.”

These warnings, [repeated in an IPCC report this summer](#), showed that the Paris timetable was too loose. To have a good chance of staying within 1.5C, the IPCC estimated, greenhouse gas emissions must fall by about 45% by 2030 compared with 2010 levels, and reach net zero by mid-century. Except for a short blip during the lockdowns, carbon emissions have been steadily rising since the Paris agreement was signed.

When the UK took over the Cop26 presidency, countries were still in the early process of preparing their NDCs. Under the Paris agreement, they had no obligation to align them with the IPCC advice on halving by 2030 – just a looser obligation to strive to meet the Paris temperature goals. Sharma and his advisers decided that the conference must have a clearer objective – to focus attention not on the “well below 2C” limit, but on the tougher but far safer 1.5C. And if the NDCs that were presented were not good enough, countries would have to return not every five years as envisaged at Paris, but every year until they were good enough.

Graphic

That is because this decade is now crucial, according to scientists. António Guterres, the UN secretary general, warned after the latest IPCC findings in August: “[This report] is a code red for humanity. The alarm bells are deafening, and the evidence is irrefutable: greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuel burning and deforestation are choking our planet and putting billions of people at immediate risk.”

Yet at Glasgow some countries tried to claim that focusing on 1.5C and forcing a review of NDCs next year was an attempt to “reopen the Paris agreement”. Sharma was forced to deny this repeatedly: “We are not seeking to reopen the Paris agreement. The Paris agreement clearly sets out the temperature goal well below 2C and pursuing efforts to 1.5C. That is why our overarching goal of keeping 1.5C within reach has been our lodestar.”

According to its architects, [the Paris agreement](#) was carefully written to be supple enough to allow for yearly returns, under provisions in article 4 of the accord. In the closing stages of the Cop26 talks, the trio behind the agreement – Laurent Fabius, the French foreign minister who presided over the talks; his chief diplomat, Laurence Tubiana; and Christiana Figueres, the former UN climate chief – [told the Guardian](#) it was “essential” for countries to meet again next year to fulfil the terms of the Paris accord.

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

Forcing countries back to the table also provides the sort of pressure that countries need to feel in order to make the commitments needed, according to Tom Burke, a veteran government adviser who is co-founder of the E3G thinktank. “You need an anvil, as well as a hammer,” he said. “The anvil is that moment of pressure – a big event, like a Cop.”

Cops have another advantage: they are the only forum in which the smallest developing countries have an equal say with the largest economies. At Cop26, more than 30,000 participants from nearly 200 countries roamed the halls, some in colourful national dress, others in sombre suits, all – this time – in masks. In these meetings, the people suffering on the frontlines of the climate crisis have an opportunity to directly confront those responsible for the emissions causing climate change. It is a powerful moral lever, notes Tina Stege, climate envoy for the tiny Marshall Islands, an archipelago with 60,000 inhabitants that leads the High Ambition Coalition at the talks. “We are a small nation, but we have moral authority – our position on the frontline gives us that,” says Stege. “We need to raise our voice, as these changes will affect the whole world in time.”

The final stages of the Cop26 talks bore this out: Tuvalu’s representative received resounding applause for noting that his island would be under water if the talks failed, and Kenya for noting that a 1.5C global temperature rise would equate to an unbearable 3C rise in parts of Africa.

For these reasons, the agreement to return next year to revise NDCs is far more important and powerful than it may at first appear. Stege said: “It is real progress, and elements of the Glasgow package are a lifeline for my country. We must not discount the crucial wins covered in this package.”



A delegate takes part in a video call at Cop26. Photograph: Andy Buchanan/AFP/Getty Images

Taking the lead

Under the UN rules, Sharma will remain Cop president for the next year. That gives a clear opportunity for the UK to show leadership on the climate crisis before next year's crucial meeting in Egypt, and to gee up countries to make further cuts in their emissions in line with a 1.5C target. "We will have a very active presidency," he pledged to the *Guardian* as he left Glasgow by train. "Everyone who knows about these talks know that this is not about one big bang solution to climate change. It's a building block."

But if the UK is to make such a mark, and help lay the crucial groundwork for a successful conclusion to next year's Cop, much of that work will need to start at home. At Cop26, the UK government led a series of initiatives – on banking, forests, coal and electric vehicles – that failed to impress some observers, who worried they were motivated by greenwash.

The forest announcement, involving a pledge to halt deforestation by 2030, was criticised as a repeat of a previous failed attempt; the 450 banks who signed up to net zero pledges turned out to be allowed to continue investing in fossil fuels; the world's biggest coal users were left out of the much-

vaunted promise to phase out coal; and major car manufactures shunned the electric vehicle pledge.

Mohamed Adow, of the thinktank Power Shift Africa, complained: “These announcements are eye candy, but the sugar rush they provide are empty calories.”

Campaigners and green experts have also been dismayed by the government’s habit of continuing to support high-carbon policies and developments, even while trumpeting its low-carbon credentials. They point to decisions such as the mooted Cumbrian coalmine; new oil and gas licences in the North Sea; cuts to air passenger duty; road-building and airport expansion; and most of all the cuts to overseas development aid, which have undermined the crucial message on climate finance to the developing world at Cop26.

Rachel Kennerley, climate campaigner at Friends of the Earth, said: “The UK government cunningly curated announcements throughout this fortnight so that it seemed rapid progress was being made. With the Cop moment over, countries should break away from the pack in their race for meaningful climate action and let history judge the laggards.”

If the UK wants to “follow through” the achievements made at Cop26, these are the policies on which ministers need to start. Otherwise, Sharma’s two years of hard work may still prove fragile and prone to unravel.

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[The Pacific project](#)[Cop26](#)

Cop26: Pacific delegates condemn ‘monumental failure’ that leaves islands in peril



A boy rides through floodwaters near high tide in a low-lying area of Tuvalu, in the South Pacific. Pacific island leaders have expressed disappointment at the Cop26 climate summit's outcome. Photograph: Mario Tama/Getty Images

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[Lagipoiva Cherelle Jackson](#)

Sun 14 Nov 2021 23.14 EST

Pacific representatives and negotiators have condemned the outcome of the [Cop26](#) meeting as “watered down” and a “monumental failure” that puts Pacific nations in severe existential danger, with one saying that Australia’s refusal to support funding for loss and damage suffered by Pacific countries was “a deep betrayal” of the region.

Some Pacific leaders expressed qualified optimism about the result of the critical climate summit, such as the Fijian prime minister, Frank Bainimarama, who tweeted: “The 1.5-degree target leaves Glasgow battered, bruised, but alive.”

But many other Pacific experts and climate negotiators were disheartened by the result.

“1.5 is barely alive,” said Aumatagi Joe Moeono-Kolio, a Pacific senior political adviser to the Fossil Fuels Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative.

“The first draft of an otherwise very unambitious text had one notable bright spot in it – the phase-out of coal. This was further watered down. For a planet in crisis, this represents a monumental failure in recognising the clear and imminent danger entire countries are now in, including my own.

“For all the hoopla and greenwashing since yesterday, the fundamental fact remains: we are still headed for a two-degree-plus world,” he said.

For Samoan negotiator Galumalemana Anne Rasmussen, who is the representative of Small Island Developing States (Sids) to the Cop bureau, the Pacific can only do so much.

“The Alliance of Small Island States and Pacific Sids really pushed hard, everyone engaged, but unfortunately it is always up to the developed and rich to determine the fate and direction of these pledges and outcomes.”

A regional oceans and climate expert from [Tonga](#), Taholo Kami, agreed: “I think we may be finding leadership at subnational and national level, private sector and even consumer and community level offer more hope at this time than the lethargic Cop process where we are forced to celebrate painful and minimal shifts with text and leave not knowing if this will result in meaningful outcomes.”

In particular, Pacific leaders were disappointed by the softened language on “phasing down” rather than “phasing out” coal, and also the lack of strong commitment for funding to pay for loss and damages suffered by Pacific nations due to the climate crisis.

“Cop26 also failed to adequately recognise our present reality – we are facing the impacts of climate change right now,” said Auimatagi, who has worked with Pacific governments under the process of the UN framework convention on climate change. “Yet despite their historical responsibility for our current plight, developed nations like the US, UK and Australia refused to support a funding facility for loss and damage which, in Australia’s case, presents a deep betrayal and abdication of its responsibilities to its Pacific neighbours.”

04:17

What did Cop26 actually achieve? The hope and heartache from Glasgow – video explainer

Hilda Heine, the former president of the [Marshall Islands](#), who has been a key figure in climate negotiations in previous years, tweeted she was “disappointed EU and US [High Ambition Coalition] members did not rally behind funding facility to support the vulnerable respond to loss and damages caused by industrialised world’s addiction to [fossil fuels] and coal”.

Despite travel restrictions, costs and risk to health, [Pacific islands sent negotiations teams to Cop26](#) in the hopes of influencing outcomes and ensuring that Pacific concerns were heard.

The minister for finance of [Tuvalu](#), one of the atoll nations considered most at risk of disappearing due to sea level rise, gave an emotive speech to the summit in which he spoke of the impact of the climate crisis on his country.

“It is not fiction, it is not projected to happen in the future – our land is fast disappearing. Tuvalu is literally sinking. We must take action now.”

But even the presence of Pacific negotiators could not influence the outcomes of the Glasgow summit, which as it stands – even if conditional and unconditional nationally determined contributions for the near-term target of 2030 were met – projected that warming might still spell the end for some Pacific atoll nations.

“Going forward, it’s time we look at not only drastically reducing our fossil fuels consumption, but begin taking serious steps ahead of Cop27 to stop fossil fuel production altogether and begin a just transition before it is too late,” Aumatagi said. “Only then can we have a real shot of keeping 1.5 alive and ensuring our islands – and our planet – survives.”

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2021.11.15 - Spotlight

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Interview

Rob Delaney on love, loss and married life: ‘No, my wife is not having an affair with her karate teacher’

[Sam Wollaston](#)



‘For Catastrophe, we just tried to think up the most monstrous scenarios we could’ ... Rob Delaney. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian



[@samwollaston](#)

Mon 15 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

Rob Delaney – comedian, actor, writer, [tweeter](#), activist – co-wrote and co-starred in the Channel 4 sitcom *Catastrophe* with [Sharon Horgan](#). Now he has a starring role in the film [Home Sweet Home Alone](#). He has also written and spoken movingly about the death of [his two-year-old son, Henry](#). Here, he answers questions from readers about all of this, as well as being an American in London – and how he keeps his hair looking so great.

When you were offered the role in *Home Sweet Home Alone*, did you hesitate and think that maybe another remake of a successful movie would be pointless? *Bernard Hautecler, Brussels, Belgium*

And similarly ...

What part of the new *Home Alone* seemed like a good idea? It’s a Christmas classic, loved by millions worldwide; why did you feel it was appropriate to star in a carbon copy? *James Burgess, Lake District*

Those are entirely legitimate questions. When I heard they were going to make a new Home Alone film, I thought: well, that's not necessary. But when I was sent the script I thought: sure, I'll read it. I love to read scripts, good or bad – they help me as a writer.

I was immediately won over – the script was gorgeous and hilarious. If anyone doubts me, I would just say watch some Saturday Night Live sketches written by these guys, Mikey Day and Streeter Seidell. That should put your concerns to rest. They are wildly clever and inventive. Yes, you have all the wonderfully violent stunts that you would hope to have in a Home Alone film – but the story is genuinely original.

‘Genuinely original’ ... watch the trailer for Home Sweet Home Alone.

It’s perfectly understandable to be terrified or angry that they are making a new Home Alone film – until you see it. I am at peace with questions like that, because I used to be like those people.

How's that lizard of yours? David, Sheffield

Very well. Jackie the bearded dragon is alive, happy. We live in a tall, skinny house and she's too many storeys up to go and show you, but Jackie is doing great.

As a fresh set of eyes, do you feel the NHS is an outdated model of care, or an under-resourced gold standard? Solomon Kamal-Uddin, Amersham

Despite the efforts of some, the latter – under-resourced gold standard – and I feel I can say that with some authority. I moved here at 37, so I had nearly four decades of the American healthcare system and then discovered the NHS, which we were just wowed by even before our son got very sick and had a very long, almost two-year, experience with the NHS.

My family's grief isn't a commodity to fill airtime or space – when used consciously it can really help people

If you have a fairly small thing like the flu, you go to the local GP, you get taken care of, you're not charged and it is dealt with. If you have a

catastrophic event like a brain tumour or a heart attack, even if you're in a private hospital, then they immediately get you in an ambulance to an NHS hospital where you will be treated with an amazing standard of care.

The trouble is – and this is stuff people experience especially when they age – if you need knee surgery that isn't urgent, you're going to be waiting a while. That's when you can feel that it is a political choice by parliament. They say: oh, that's not an emergency, even if you are in crippling pain. So it's a funding issue, a political choice that is made each morning by the people in power.

Rob, you have done us a huge service by speaking and writing about aspects of your personal life. Your writing about the loss of your beautiful son Henry has been raw and incredibly valuable to people. How do you and your family [Delaney and his wife have three other children] decide what to share and what to keep private? And how do you protect your mental health while sharing these painful parts of your life? Nancy, London

As a family, we are very concerned with things like children's hospices, and we do a lot to raise money for kids and families with life-limiting illnesses, but I don't just trot it out. My family's grief isn't a commodity to fill airtime or space – it's more precious and when used consciously can really help people.

What if someone lives in a really rural area? I live in London; I can go to a bereaved parents' group once or twice a week if I want. What if someone lives in a tiny town in the Yorkshire Dales and it's not readily available? Then it might be great, if they have lost a child or have a child who is dying, to hear my family's experience with that. It might be of genuine use to them. And I know, because of how other bereaved parents' stories have been useful to me.

Your character in Catastrophe, Rob, became very intense, almost hostile, towards the end of the series. How much of your personality did Rob contain? Makbul Patel, Bolton



‘The characters continually make the choice to stay together and work it out’ ... with Sharon Horgan in Catastrophe. Photograph: Mark Johnson/Channel 4

I like that question. You can really divide Catastrophe: the first two series we made when all my family was alive and healthy, the third series we made when Henry was in the hospital post cancer diagnosis, post massive brain surgery that crippled him, and then the fourth season was written and shot after he died.

We never, ever lost sight of the fact that it was a sitcom; for Sharon and me, our prime directive was to have the show be funny. That said, within that framework, I was in an incredible amount of pain; there was a lot of anger, there was a lot of hostility in my heart and mind during the last two seasons – and that absolutely went into the show. And I’m glad it did, because I think it made the show truer and better.

I saw the relationship between Sharon and Rob in Catastrophe as honest, loving, witty and, to some degree, aspirational. My boyfriend said it was a toxic relationship that should probably end. With whom do you agree? Christine, London

My wife and I have been together for 17 years. We have learned and we continue to learn about the work that a relationship requires and the humility required to nurture love and a close relationship. So, for me, Catastrophe is a great example of two people who, of course, have faults and foibles (and we sharpened the edges to make it funnier TV), but we tried to keep them as real people – real people who fall in or out of love. The characters continually make the choice – even when the odds are against them – to stay together and work it out; that is an expression of how real relationships are and what they look like.

So, I'm strongly in the camp of the questioner, not her boyfriend.



‘Social media is a tool that is frequently used for bad, like a machete.’
Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

I’m sorry to be the one to bring this up, but has it ever occurred to you that your wife may be having an affair with her karate sensei? Marc, Sunderland

Sometimes on Twitter I pretend my wife is clearly having an affair with her karate teacher and I am oblivious. It’s a long-running gag that I don’t know if anyone else enjoys, but for some reason it makes me laugh. In real life, my

wife doesn't take karate – and if she *is* having an affair with any kind of trainer or person more athletic than myself, she's doing a good job hiding it.

What are the books that you have loved and recommend? Mary Buck, Virginia, US

My favourite writer is [Alice Munro](#), the Canadian short story writer. I discovered her at the beginning of lockdown and she has dethroned every other favourite writer I have ever had, because of her ability to twist your guts with deceptively simple domestic stories.

Delaney's mum, Nancy, is visiting from the US and briefly joins the video call to deliver a cup of coffee. Sadly, there are no reader questions for her, but she says that Delaney is a wonderful son and always has been. As a kid, he was inquisitive, thoughtful and funny; on car journeys, he would entertain them all. One thing that could be worked on? "Like me, he could have more patience. But I don't know: I'm a fan, I think he's the best."

Rob, if you had been born British, which aspects of you would be different? Grant Evans, Mumbles

Mmm, I don't know. I really enjoy scary nature. It's difficult to find an animal in Britain that could kill you, whereas in California there's rattlesnakes and mountain lions – that was always thrilling about going on a hike. Here, there aren't too many beaches with waves that could absolutely end your life quickly; in Malibu, there are.

But the thing is, I know a lot of British people who are really adventurous and find that stuff anyway. So, I was going to say maybe I would be more averse to big, scary nature, but I know so many British people who love to do the craziest stuff. So I'm not sure what would be different about me.

I don't think this is a great answer.

You've been here a few years now. How different do you find the UK from the US, and what do you think about the direction America is heading? Anthony, Lancashire

I think the US and the UK suffer from many of the same problems. The root of it all is [income inequality](#) and the widening gap between the super-rich and the poor masses. It's easy and fun to point to the US and say: oh, what a disaster, but the fact is, if you die of poverty in the UK, you still get incinerated at a similar crematorium or buried at a graveyard that looks just like the one in the US. The real endemic problems in both societies are pretty similar.

The idea that my comedy would appeal to one populace over another makes me physically sweat

That said, [gun culture in the US](#) is a massive blot on the nation and the people who run it. And there is still a stronger social safety net here.

I lament the direction the US is headed in politically. Biden is the definition of mediocrity and [the Senate is a nightmare](#) – it's such an obstacle to necessary progress. There are things that are wonderful about America – millions of incredible, beautiful people, wonderful nature. I can't slam the US wholesale, but the US's billionaires and senators are doing a good job of ruining things for a lot of people. I should say the proof is in the pudding: I am American, but I choose to live here.

Do you feel that the way you look at life and your sense of humour is more accepted in the UK than in your own country? David Gow, Edinburgh

No, I don't. I feel comfortable making jokes here and I feel accepted as a person of humour. But the idea that my comedy would appeal to one populace over another makes me physically sweat. In Catastrophe, which was most watched in the US and the UK, we would always try to make sure that jokes would work in both places – unless we found one that would be such a home run in one place that we didn't care what the other place thought.

Are there any British quirks that you still struggle to understand? Lee Lugard-Davies, Maidstone

British people make holiday plans psychopathically early, so if we try to do something for half-term and it's a mere nine weeks before, everything will be booked. Will you relax, British people!

Do you ever find it difficult to reconcile your political views with the work you do as an entertainer? And can anti-capitalist art ever exist, undiluted and sincere within a media culture driven by profit? Jonathan Evans, Oxford

Any socialist model aspires to create significant swathes of time for people to consume and enjoy and make art, so I think entertainment is entirely compatible and necessary. The only show I wrote that made it to television was *Catastrophe* and we really endeavoured to make Rob's work [advertising for a pharmaceutical firm] look awful. I was pleased – and I think this will support an affirmative answer to the question – when a friend of my dad who works in the pharmaceutical industry asked me: how did you nail what it is like in the pharmaceutical industry? Who did you consult? I was like: oh, we just tried to think up the most cash-hungry, monstrous people and scenarios that we could.

I feel that *Catastrophe* would comfortably fit in the canon of ... you know [Robert Tressell's 1914 novel] [The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists](#)? That book would be like the Bible and *Catastrophe* would be like a starter pamphlet for idiots. In the pantheon of good anti-capitalist art, they would sell copies of *Catastrophe* outside that pantheon.

Throughout lockdown, your hair always looked fabulous in social media posts. How did you keep your mane looking so terrific while you were stuck at home? Paul Tandy, London

How kind of that person to ask that. I guess just not cutting it? And certainly not washing it with any kind of frequency. All those natural oils – and just letting it be what it wanted to be.

In this age of the hairless, metrosexual man, have you ever been tempted to wax or shave your body hair? Jackie Hughes, London

No. And I think we have equalised a bit there – where there was a big rip-all-your-hair-off thing for a while, I think people now are like: that's a lot of work, and the pendulum has swung back in the right direction. I never thought I should shave my body or anything like that. Never felt it, never did it.

When historians look back on this period, how do you think they will judge the influence of social media – something that was a force for good or for bad? *Frank, Germany*

A force for bad, on aggregate. Let's use America as an example. Somebody in West Virginia – you know, a low-income voter for Trump – and me – a comedian, previously Los Angeles and now London – there's just so much less difference than we are led to believe by the media. They sow division so that they can control us – and it works. Social media has been a successful tool in creating that division where we really police ourselves and police each other and subscribe to one camp or the other.

I should say it is a tool that is frequently used for bad, like a machete. A machete can clear a path through the jungle to get medical supplies to people who need it, or it can be used to hack somebody apart. And so people use it incorrectly. Whereas I use it beautifully.

[Home Sweet Home Alone](#) is exclusively on Disney+

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Housing market

‘I have to move my bike to get to the fridge’ – the UK boom in microflats



Rioch Fitzpatrick’s flat in north London boasts a total area of 19 sq m. Photograph: Christian Sinibaldi/The Guardian

[Julia Kollewe](#)

Mon 15 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

For Rioch Fitzpatrick, a 39-year-old dubbing mixer for television, home is a tiny studio flat smaller than a standard Premier Inn hotel bedroom. At just 19 sq metres (204 sq ft), his north [London](#) “microflat” has a shower and lavatory separated from the main room by a partition, without even a separate wash basin.

“It’s probably a bit odd, people coming in and seeing your bed in the kitchen, but I’ve just got used to it,” he says. “My neighbours live in a flat similar to mine – a couple with a two-year-old kid. That must be really tough.”

Fitzpatrick moved into the studio, on the ground floor of an old townhouse converted into 10 flats, in May 2018 because he was fed up with living in a house share, and liked the area.

The flat was refurbished but there are annoying things – I have to keep moving my bike around to get to the fridge,” he says.

“I have to sleep with earplugs because the boiler is right above my bed and the fridge is also making noises all night. And my sink is my kitchen sink – that’s where I wash up and shave and do my teeth.”

The rent is relatively affordable at £900 a month, including gas and electricity, while the rate for a standard one-bed flat in the affluent north London area of Crouch End would cost £1,200-plus. He is always on the lookout for a bigger place and would also like to get on the housing ladder, but has been put off by high property prices.



Fitzpatrick's microflat is one of 10 flats carved out of an old townhouse.
Photograph: Christian Sinibaldi/The Guardian

[Map](#)

Fitzpatrick is not alone. As many as one in 15 apartments in London fell below the national minimum standard of 37 sq m for a one-bedroom home between 2011 and 2021, according to analysis of energy performance certificate measurement data conducted for the Guardian by Dr Jon Reades, associate professor of spatial data science at University College London and Philip Hubbard, professor of urban studies at King's College London. The median size of UK properties under 37 sq m dropped to 29 sq m this year and last, down from 30 sq m in 2019.

The government has recommended a [minimum space standard of 37 sq m](#) since 2015, although it is not mandatory – local authorities have discretion to apply it or not.

[Graphic](#)

[Micro homes have been on the rise](#) since 2013, when rule changes designed to beat national housing shortages allowed developers to convert office blocks into apartments without planning permission. They were also allowed to bypass minimum space requirements, until a rule change in April this year allowed councils to apply the standards. Families have talked of the struggle to live in tiny flats, [for example at Templefields House in Harlow, where some measure just 18 sq m.](#)

The average size of new-build flats in England – already the lowest in Europe – is declining: an analysis of 10,000 estate agency listings by LABC Warranty, one of the UK's three main providers of new-build home warranties, showed that the average new home had fallen to just 67 sq m by 2018, down from 83 sq m in the 1970s. This trend is even more pronounced in London, where land prices are much higher.



Barratt's Eastman Village on the site of the former Kodak factory in Harrow.
Photograph: Linda Nylind/The Guardian

Barratt has recently become the first major housebuilder to launch pocket-sized apartments, in Harrow, north-west London, branded SMRT homes. It is selling 123 apartments off-plan at the former Kodak factory in Eastman Village, mainly one-bed flats with larger two-bed ones also available.

Designed with built-in cupboards and wardrobes, slimmer kitchen worktops and pull-out shelves, the one-bed flats measure about 37 sq m, the minimum standard. Joseph Antoniazzi, senior sales manager at Barratt London, says they are aimed at the “Instagram generation” – young people who commute into London.

If they take off, Barratt plans to roll them out across the UK. A buyer taking advantage of the government’s help-to-buy programme, which runs until March 2023, would need to earn about £40,000 a year to buy a one-bed flat.

They would suit a single person or perhaps a couple “if you really like the person”, says Neal Hudson, a housing analyst. “There will be demand for this and it’s got to be attractive to first-time buyers. There are a lot of people who’d rather have a microflat than live in a shared house.”

The flats start at £285,000, significantly cheaper than the average £321,988 price for homes sold in Harrow in the past 12 months tracked by Rightmove, and the average house price of £510,515 in Greater London, according to Halifax.

However, when compared with Barratt's standard one-bed apartments measuring 50 sq m, they cost about £1,000 more per square metre.

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Reades' and Hubbard's analysis found that micro apartments cost up to 30% more per square metre than average-sized London properties. This is partly because of the costs related to installing electricity and plumbing; every home needs a kitchen and a bathroom. On top of these inflated prices, they point out that residents often struggle with poor ventilation, noise, lack of light and privacy.

Hudson believes micro homes should be for rent, rather than for sale, as "they are very much designed for a short period of someone's life". He is concerned that "people end up being stuck in this", possibly even with a family. It would be better, he says, to "buy a home that you can live in for a long period so you can ride out any boom and bust".

In the face of the chronic housing shortage and soaring property prices, some developers specialise in building smaller homes. [Pocket Living was set up in 2005 to build flats](#) sized 37-38 sq m and sells them at a 20% discount to the average local market rate to help young, middle-earning Londoners buy their first home.

Bolu Sofoluwe, 25, who bought a one-bed Pocket Living flat in Barking, east London, for £198,400 in January and works for a bank in Canary Wharf, is happy with her property. "I forget that it's smaller than average," she says. "It's more than enough for me."



Bolu Sofoluwe at Pocket Living in Barking. Photograph: FTI Consulting

Research from the Intergenerational Foundation showed that the number of micro homes built in the UK increased almost fivefold in just five years, from 2,139 in 2013 to 9,605 in 2018. They are not just a London phenomenon but are also spread across north-west England, the south-east, and Yorkshire and Humber.

Despite the boom in small homes, housebuilding is still far below the government's target of 300,000 new homes a year by the mid-2020s. The number of new-builds declined to 148,000 last year from 178,000 in 2019, according to government figures. In the first six months of this year, construction started on 88,710 new homes.

With the pandemic taking its toll on retailers and more people working from home, Hubbard is predicting more conversions of office blocks and retail schemes into micro homes. Every year, between 1,000 and 2,000 new micro apartments come on the market in London, 3% of all new homes.

“A lot those are not going to be less than 37 sq m, they’re going to follow the national standard but they’re going to be barely above that. It might be fine as student living or as a crash pad but not for someone who wants to live in it for a number of years and make it their home.”

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[iPhone](#)

iPhone 13 Pro Max review: Apple's heavyweight super phone



If you want the biggest, longest-lasting iPhone, the 13 Pro Max is it, but it comes at some cost. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

[Samuel Gibbs](#) Consumer technology editor

Mon 15 Nov 2021 02.00 EST

Apple's latest super-sized smartphone is a beast in all directions, but is bigger really better?

The iPhone 13 Pro Max is Apple's most expensive smartphone, starting at £1,049 ([\\$1,099/A\\$1,849](#)) – at least £100 more than other models. With the same chips, software, design and camera as the regular sized 13 Pro, size is the key differentiator.

The 6.7in 120Hz OLED screen is fantastic: crisp, bright and super smooth, matching [Samsung's very best](#). As with pin-sharp retina screens before them, faster screens are like a ratchet: once you use one it is very difficult to go back.

But while it looks great, its large size and solid-feeling stainless steel sides come with a major downside: weight.



The iPhone 13 Pro Max (left) is significantly bigger with its 6.7in screen than the iPhone 13 Pro (right) with its 6.1in screen. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

Last year's [iPhone 12 Pro Max](#) was already heavy at 226g, but the 13 Pro Max is even weightier at 240g. Direct competitors weigh significantly less with [Samsung's Galaxy S21 Ultra](#) at 227g and [Google's Pixel 6 Pro](#) at 210g, while the regular [iPhone 13 Pro](#) weighs 204g. Many other phones are under 200g and the difference is quite discernible.

You can feel the 13 Pro Max's weight in the hand, in your pocket or bag, and it makes it hard to hold one-handed for any extended period without fatigue.

Specifications

- **Screen:** 6.7in Super Retina XDR with ProMotion (120Hz OLED) (458ppi)
- **Processor:** Apple A15 Bionic
- **RAM:** 6GB
- **Storage:** 128, 256, 512GB or 1TB
- **Operating system:** iOS 15.1
- **Camera:** Triple 12MP rear cameras with OIS, 12MP front-facing camera
- **Connectivity:** 5G, wifi 6, NFC, Bluetooth 5, Lightning, ultra wideband and GNSS
- **Water resistance:** IP68 (6 metres for 30 mins)
- **Dimensions:** 160.8 x 78.1 x 7.7mm
- **Weight:** 240g

Rapid performance and impressive battery life



The phone fully charges via its Lightning port in just under two hours, hitting 80% in about 55 minutes using a 45W USB-C power adaptor (not included). Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

Apple's latest A15 Bionic processor is one of the fastest you can get, which combined with the 120Hz screen makes the 13 Pro Max feel super responsive.

Battery life is class-leading. The phone lasts well over 48 hours on battery requiring me only to charge it every third day, while still using the screen for almost eight hours with various apps, photos and music, including a good four hours on 5G. That's a solid six-plus hours longer than [smaller 13 Pro](#) and should last a day for even the heaviest of users.

Sustainability



The shiny stainless steel and frosted hardened glass back, here shown in blue, feel extremely solidly built. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

Apple does not provide an expected lifespan for the iPhone 13 Pro Max's battery but it can be [replaced for £69](#). Batteries in similar devices typically maintain at least 80% of their original capacity after 500 full charge cycles. Out-of-warranty [screen repairs cost £316.44](#). The 13 Pro was awarded [five out of 10 for repairability](#) by the specialist site iFixit.

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

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

iOS 15



The Face ID camera notch at the top of the screen has been shrunk compared to previous generations but iOS only displays the same limited number of icons and the time either side of it as iPhone 12 or earlier models.

Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

The 13 Pro Max ships [with iOS 15](#), which runs on all Apple's smartphones from [2015's iPhone 6S](#) and newer, including [the 13 Pro](#). The software has a few additions for the larger screen, such as two-pane views in the calendar, the settings app and others when held in landscape orientation.

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

Camera



The camera app is simple to use with various modes available and the ability to shoot in the RAW format as well as standard Jpeg. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

Unlike [last year's 12 Pro models](#), the 13 Pro and 13 Pro Max use the same cameras: three 12-megapixel cameras on the back including a really good 3x optical zoom, a top-class main camera with excellent low light performance and a great ultrawide camera. New for this year is a dedicated macro photography mode for capturing closeups of flowers or insects. For more detail see the [13 Pro review](#).

Price

The iPhone 13 Pro Max costs [£1,049 \(\\$1,099/A\\$1,849\)](#) with 128GB of storage, £1,049 (\$1,199/A\$2,019) for 256GB, £1,249 (\$1,399/A\$2,369) for 512GB or £1,449 (\$1,599/A\$2,719) for 1TB.

For comparison, the [iPhone 13](#) costs [£779](#), the [iPhone 13 Pro](#) costs [£949](#), the [Galaxy S21 Ultra](#) costs [£1,149](#), the [OnePlus 9 Pro](#) costs [£829](#) and the [Galaxy Z Flip 3](#) costs [£949](#).

Verdict

The [iPhone](#) 13 Pro Max is a beast with Apple's biggest screen, longest battery life and highest price.

There aren't many phones that can last more than 48 hours on a charge, particularly with top-class chips, cameras, a 120Hz screen and upwards of six years of software support.

But all that size and power comes at a very heavy cost. Literally. The phone is just too heavy.

If you're an iPhone buyer looking to replace a worn-out handset, you can stomach spending over £1,000 and need it to last at least two days of use on battery, the 13 Pro Max is it. For everyone else there are better, lighter options.

Pros: great cameras, 3x optical zoom, Face ID, very long battery life, great performance, large and brilliant 120Hz screen with smaller notch, 5G, long software support.

Cons: no USB-C, need your own charger, very heavy, very expensive, huge and difficult to use one-handed, not cutting edge compared with folding-screen devices.



The stainless steel sides, here shown in blue, have a premium lustre to them, but readily pick up fingerprints. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

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Interview

Playwright James Graham: ‘Was I too easy on Dominic Cummings? I go back and forth’

[Dorian Lynskey](#)



‘I went to bed completely obsessed with them’ ... Graham, whose new play Best of Enemies tackles the debates between Gore Vidal and William F Buckley Jr. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian



Mon 15 Nov 2021 01.00 EST

Last May, the playwright James Graham found himself in the unfamiliar environs of Question Time. He hadn’t planned to become a spokesperson for theatre during the pandemic, but he happened to be promoting [the ITV version of Quiz](#), his [hit 2017 play](#), just as the sector was screaming for a bailout, and he used his platform wisely. One thing led to another. At the same time, he was researching his new play, Best of Enemies, about 11 landmark televised debates between Gore Vidal and William F Buckley Jr in August 1968.

“I heard the Question Time music and my brain emptied of every single thing I’d ever thought,” he says with a comical shudder. “I’m not naturally good at broadcast media. That’s why it’s fascinating to spend time in the heads of Vidal and Buckley. I was ashamed by the distance between what I could do and what they did. They were impossibly articulate.”

Best of Enemies, which will be staged at London’s Young Vic, is based on [a 2015 documentary of the same name](#). “I went to bed completely obsessed

with it,” says Graham. “As a political dweeb, I was embarrassed that I’d never heard about these debates.”



The moment political debate became a wrestling match ... Buckley and Vidal in 1968. Photograph: ABC/Disney/Getty

During the 1968 party conventions in America, the struggling ABC network attempted to juice its ratings by pitting Vidal, aristocratic chaos agent of the left, against Buckley, arch-conservative editor of the *National Review*, for the ensuing culture-war fireworks. It worked all too well. The documentary argues that their combative theatricality (they “*hated* each other” Graham says) began the process of reducing political disagreement to a wrestling match, yet in 2021 the idea of 10 million viewers watching two eloquent public intellectuals debate the future of a bitterly divided America seems remarkable.

There’s no exchange of ideas, no listening, no empathy – we’re in a really bad place

“I’m asking: what is a healthy conversation between two people who disagree?” Graham says. “Like everyone else, I’ve been preoccupied with how we talk to one another on our new platforms and how unhealthy and

dangerous that sometimes feels. There's no exchange of ideas, no listening, no empathy. We're in a really bad place."

Physically, at least, the two of us are in a very nice place. We're having lunch in a busy restaurant near the [Young Vic](#), where Graham is busy rewriting the script during rehearsals. The draft he sent me five days ago is already out of date and the final version will be something else again. "I take a huge block of ice into a rehearsal room and then we start chipping away at it," he says. "You just have to not care about embarrassing yourself."

It helps that he is so self-effacing. He shrugs off the bumper ratings of Quiz ("Everyone was bored and stuck at home") and frequently frets about sounding "wanky". He also just loves the process of collaboration. A boyish 39, Graham has enough contagious excitement to make anyone consider jacking in their job and joining a theatre company. "It's the best job in the world," he says. "I've really missed it."



Bumper ratings ... Matthew Macfadyen and Sian Clifford as Charles and Diana Ingram in Quiz. Photograph: ITV/Rex/Shutterstock

Vidal is played by Charles Edwards of Downton Abbey and The Crown (for which Graham wrote a standout episode about Prince Charles) and Buckley, counterintuitively, by Homeland's [David Harewood](#). So in the play's

flashback to Buckley's 1965 Cambridge Union debate with James Baldwin, both actors are black. "David's brain is extraordinary," Graham says. "He pulled me up and said, 'You can't temper the more unattractive aspects of his politics because I'm playing him. If he hates black people, I need to own that thought in my head.'"

Buckley was guilty of homophobia as well as racism. In the penultimate debate, Vidal called him a "crypto-Nazi" and Buckley notoriously turned feral, calling Vidal "you queer" and threatening to "sock you in your goddamn face". Shocking enough in 1968, it seems unforgivable now. How can a modern audience still sympathise with him? "That's a good question," Graham says. "The most generous view of Buckley is we're all capable of being the very worst version of ourselves at the very worst moment. I think audiences can feel, not sympathy, but empathy for his loss of control."

Graham is known for giving both sides of a political conflict their due. His 2012 breakthrough [This House](#) dramatised the scheming of the whips' offices during the 1974-79 Labour government with such even-handedness that the audience included a cross-bench alliance of politicians. He's that rare beast: a political playwright who doesn't tell you where to stand. "A psychologist would probably assign to where I grew up my interest in differences of opinion," he says.

This was the Nottinghamshire mining village of Annesley, where the miners' strike led to a kind of civil war. His forthcoming BBC drama Sherwood explores how a double murder years later reopened old wounds. "To this day people cross the street because of a political choice they were forced to make 40 years ago."



‘Gung-ho contempt’ ... Richard Goulding as Boris Johnson, Benedict Cumberbatch as Dominic Cummings and Oliver Maltman as Michael Gove in Brexit: The Uncivil War. Photograph: Nick Wall/Channel 4

In hits such as Quiz, [Ink](#) and 2019’s Channel 4 drama [Brexit: The Uncivil War](#), Graham harnesses the exhilaration of seeing underestimated outsiders pull off a gamechanging upset to even make you root, at least emotionally, for Rupert Murdoch’s Sun or Dominic Cummings’ Vote Leave – before he pulls the rug and exposes the grim ramifications. “Basically, everything is a sports movie when I start writing it,” he says. “It’s either Moneyball or Cool Runnings: the underdogs who change the world. I like missions, and the unintended consequences of those missions.”

Buckley and Vidal are no longer around to pass comment but Murdoch saw Ink twice, which led to mutterings that Graham had a little too much sympathy for the devil. “The very valid question was: should he have been comfortable watching it?” he says. “All I can say is that there was a deliberate intention to make people like him, or people who read his newspapers, feel like they could get a defence, but then they have to sit there and listen to the prosecution.”

Far more controversial was Benedict Cumberbatch’s rendering of Cummings in Brexit: The Uncivil War. The Guardian journalist Carole Cadwalladr

accused Graham of portraying Cummings (not then a public figure) as a Sherlockian maverick. Now, after Barnard Castle and all that, does he worry that he wasn't hard enough? "I go back and forth all the time. Sometimes I think I was *too* hard, but not very often." Cummings' gung-ho contempt for journalists, MPs and judges while he was at No 10 did make Graham think twice. "He was perpetuating this civil war in a really reckless way given that a woman got killed in that referendum. I wish I'd needled that a little more – the consequences of that contrary approach to politics."



Sympathy for the devil? ... Bertie Carvel as Rupert Murdoch in Ink.
Photograph: Tristram Kenton/The Guardian

Still, he refuses to villainise easy targets because that would mean preaching to the choir. "It's inert, dramatically and politically. I have sleepless nights about that balance and I'll probably never get it right but I go into it sincerely." For that reason, Graham is strategically cagey about discussing his own voting history. "It's a genuine desire to allow any audience member to come to the work as cleanly as possible," he says. "I hope that's a generous instinct and not a self-preservation instinct. I believe we live in a world of polarised extremes and that would be a barrier." Although, he adds, his general political orientation is hardly a mystery. "I believe in the power of government and of progress. Basic social democracy."

He picks his battles, like campaigning for greater diversity in theatre and access to the arts. “We don’t talk about class enough. I come from a working-class background in a town that is culturally deprived. How we find people in Mansfield and Kirkby-in-Ashfield a way to experience live arts, and possibly contemplate making some, has gone unanswered. It’s not just doing it because you think you should but because of all the stories you’ll miss if you don’t. I don’t know why we think of art as this sacred thing that takes place in cities with posh people.”

Graham says he was “a bit of a mess” during lockdown, which he spent alone in south London, but he was certainly productive. Alongside Best of Enemies and Sherwood, he worked on a musical about the televangelist Tammy Faye Messner with Elton John and Jake Shears, the screenplay for an Ink movie, and a livestreamed lockdown play, [Bubble](#). After seven years, he’s still attached to Paul Greengrass’s movie version of George Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty-Four. “It’s still alive as a prospect,” he says. “Where I think I failed is – I was chasing the modern world. That book is already a metaphor so you don’t need to shrink it by saying, ‘Is Big Brother Facebook?’”

His output may seem eclectic but to Graham there’s a common thread: “Great stories from our recent past that are useful vessels for exploring anxieties and tensions that we’re all dealing with today. Quiz was about truth, information and mob mentality. The theme of Ink was populism. Sherwood takes the social divides of Brexit and finds an equivalent in a town torn apart by the legacy of the miners’ strike.” He laughs. “None of my shit gets put on in Germany because it’s so unapologetically micro-British.”

Graham finishes his coffee and heads back to rehearsals, where he will continue to wrestle with the two men who, he says, “live rent-free in my head”. He’s always working towards understanding his characters better, especially the ones he doesn’t agree with. “That’s why I think the death of drama in schools is terrifying,” he says, “because drama forces you to interrogate and empathise with people you don’t like. Twitter is an outrage machine and theatre is an empathy factory.”

- Best of Enemies is at the [Young Vic, London](#), 3 December-22 January.
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Coronavirus

UK officials have compiled ‘Covid exit strategy’ from April – report



The UK's current testing regime requires anyone who has any of the three main Covid symptoms to take a free test. Photograph: Amer Ghazzal/Rex/Shutterstock

[Rowena Mason](#) Deputy political editor

Sun 14 Nov 2021 11.55 EST

Officials have been working on a “Covid exit strategy” called Operation Rampdown, under which the government could wind down testing and people would no longer be forced to isolate if they are ill from April, leaked documents reveal.

The documents, prepared by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), give ministers the option of dismantling the official government-backed testing system and tracing operations.

The requirement for people to isolate for 10 days if they contract Covid could also be scrapped and those on low pay would no longer receive £500 to isolate.

No 10 sources distanced ministers from the document on Sunday and denied the April target. “No ministers have asked for this or seen it,” one source said.

“It’s far too early to be talking about any of this stuff when don’t know where we will be in terms of case numbers or state of the pandemic.

“You can’t plan so far ahead with this disease. It’s very premature to be talking about that at this stage particularly ahead of winter.”

The existence of the document was revealed by the Mail on Sunday, which said it was prepared as part of a six-week review of the government’s test-and-trace operations conducted by UKHSA officials. The new body is headed by the former deputy chief medical officer for England, Dr Jenny Harries.

According to the report, the document said: “We will no longer be prioritising the previous objectives of breaking chains of transmission at all costs.”

A government spokesperson said: “We have published the autumn and winter plan for managing the response to coronavirus, which remains a serious risk.

“We keep our approach under review, and no decisions have been taken about next year.”

The plan would involve the winding down of the Covid testing regime, which requires people to get a free test if they have any of the three main symptoms: cough, temperature and loss of smell or taste.

Testing would instead be paid for and left to the private marketplace, despite concerns about some of the companies offering tests. The Competition and

Markets Authority are investigating a number of them over misleading claims.

The Sunday Times also reported that the data privacy watchdog was examining information about one company, CignPost, over fears that its terms and conditions could allow the sale of its customers' genetic data to third parties.

Cignpost denied it was keeping such data. It said: "Cignpost Diagnostics only uses customers' DNA for Covid-19 testing. All PCR Covid-19 tests are based on DNA analysis. We only use DNA for the purposes of conducting the PCR test in line with Public Health England guidelines. All DNA samples and data are destroyed once the Covid-19 test process is complete and data has been shared with clients and PHE."

"Our terms and conditions do not allow the use of customer DNA samples or data for any purpose other than Covid-19 testing. Any change in use of customer data would require new explicit consent. We apologise to our clients for any concern or confusion caused by today's media coverage."

It comes as the government pins its hopes for avoiding further Covid restrictions this winter on enough people getting booster jabs. Latest figures showed 38,351 new cases and a further 157 deaths on Saturday.

The virus is most prevalent among older children and teenagers. The NHS said on Sunday that more than a million 12- to 15-year-olds in England had been vaccinated, and that NHS teams would visit more than 800 schools next week to offer young people vaccinations before the onset of winter.

Prof Neil Ferguson, an epidemiologist at Imperial College London, said this weekend that he thought it unlikely there would be a catastrophic winter wave similar to last year's, which led to months of lockdown.

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Austria

Austria orders nationwide lockdown for those not fully vaccinated against Covid



The Austrian chancellor, Alexander Schallenberg (centre), gives a news conference on Sunday. Photograph: Leonhard Föger/Reuters

Agencies

Sun 14 Nov 2021 08.01 EST

Austria will place millions of people not fully vaccinated against coronavirus in lockdown as of Monday in an effort to deal with a surge in infections, the country's chancellor has said.

“We must raise the vaccination rate. It is shamefully low,” Alexander Schallenberg told a news conference on Sunday, announcing the measure after a video call with the governors of Austria’s nine provinces. Lockdowns for two of the provinces, Upper Austria and Salzburg, were announced on Friday, but Sunday’s move extends that to the whole country.

Approximately 65% of the population is fully vaccinated against Covid-19, one of the lowest rates in western [Europe](#).

Europe has again become the centre of the Covid-19 pandemic, prompting some governments to consider reimposing unpopular lockdowns.

Many Austrians are sceptical about vaccines, a view encouraged by the far-right Freedom party, the third biggest in parliament.

While the Netherlands is dealing with its surge in infections by imposing a partial lockdown that applies to all, Austria's conservative-led government has said it wants to avoid imposing further restrictions on those who are fully vaccinated.

[In Austria, 74% of adults aged 18 and over are fully vaccinated against Covid-19](#)

The Austrian health minister, Wolfgang Mückstein, said that those aged 12 and under would be exempt from the lockdown, under which the unvaccinated can only leave their homes for a limited number of reasons, such as going to work or shopping for essentials. He said the lockdown would initially last 10 days.

Many officials, including within Schallenberg's conservative Austrian People's party and the police, have expressed doubts that such a lockdown can be properly enforced since it applies to only part of the population. However, Schallenberg and the interior minister, Karl Nehammer, said that police would carry out thorough checks.

Meanwhile, Dutch police arrested 15 people in a town in the north of the Netherlands late on Saturday during clashes with demonstrators who were protesting against a new partial lockdown.

Police said hundreds of people had gathered at a square in the centre of Leeuwarden to protest against the new rules, under which bars and restaurants must close at 8pm.

On Friday, the Dutch prime minister, Mark Rutte, announced at least three weeks of lockdown measures targeting restaurants, shops and sporting

events to curb a record spike in coronavirus infections.

Reuters and AFP contributed to this report

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New Zealand

Māori tribe tells anti-Covid vaccine protesters to stop using its haka



Anti-vaccine protesters in New Zealand have been told by a Māori tribe not to use the ‘ka mate’ haka, a war dance made famous by the All Blacks.
Photograph: Hagen Hopkins/Getty Images

Tess McClure in Christchurch

@tessairini

Sun 14 Nov 2021 22.57 EST

Anti-vaccine protesters in [New Zealand](#) have been told to stop using the “ka mate” haka by the tribe who have ownership of it.

The haka, a Māori war dance made internationally famous by its performance by the All Blacks at rugby matches, is considered a cultural treasure, or taonga, in New Zealand. It was performed last week by anti-vaccination and “freedom” protesters, who [marched in their thousands to parliament](#).

Ngāti Toa, the tribe that has legal guardianship of the ka mate haka, said on Monday that it “condemns the use of the Ka Mate haka to push and promote anti-Covid-19-vaccination messages” and “request that anti-vaccination and anti-mandate protesters cease the use of Ka Mate at their protests immediately”.

The tribe’s request comes amid concerns from some that Māori sovereignty movements are [being co-opted by anti-vaxxers](#), some of whom argue that vaccination represents a form of “modern day colonisation”. Vaccination rates among Māori are concerningly low in New Zealand: Ministry of Health figures show 77% of eligible (those aged 12 and over) Māori have had at least one dose of the vaccine and 61% are fully vaccinated. In the total eligible population, 90% have had one dose and 81% both.

Even as vaccination rates gradually rise, an increasingly vocal dissenting cohort have begun to organise demonstrations against vaccine mandates and other public health restrictions. Several thousand gathered on Tuesday to protest in front of parliament, and their concerns were eclectic: among the signs and slogans were pro-Trump and QAnon flags, calls for violence against prime minister Jacinda Ardern, as well as flags of the [Māori](#) sovereignty movement. After a number of speeches, members of the crowd performed a ka mate haka.

But Ngāti Toa leaders said that the tribe had lost many tupuna (ancestors) to pandemics during the course of colonisation – and that they were embracing vaccination to protect against this one. “Many of our tupuna lost their lives in previous pandemics and our iwi [tribe] suffered greatly,” Helmut Modlik, chief executive officer of the tribal authority Te Rūnanga o Toa Rangatira, said.

“We are absolutely clear that the Covid-19 vaccine is the best protection we have available to us, and we are committed to supporting our whānau (family) to get vaccinated as soon as possible.”

“Protests are promoting the views of individuals ahead of the needs of collective whānau.”

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OpinionCop26

Cop26 took us one step closer to combating the climate crisis

[Christiana Figueres](#)



Delegates at the Cop26 climate conference in Glasgow on Saturday.
Photograph: Yves Herman/Reuters

Mon 15 Nov 2021 02.54 EST

If a bus were hurtling towards a child in the middle of the road, no one nearby would take merely one step to get that child out of the way. They would rush, at speeds previously unbeknownst to them, using every muscle in their body, to get that child to safety.

On the climate crisis, a bus is careering toward us and we have still not flexed all our muscle power to get ourselves or future generations to safety.

Emissions continue to rise. The loss and damage is devastating. Trust has been breached. The resulting [frustration, anger and incredulity at the pace of](#)

progress is warranted. As activists of all stripes remind us constantly, we need systems change, not climate change. And they are absolutely right.

At the same time we should understand our double predicament. First, we are actually in the midst of a systems change, and it is precisely the systemic nature of the change that slows the pace for now – until we hit positive tipping points. If we only had to transform one sector, or move one country off fossil fuels, we would have done so long ago. But that is not what it takes. All sectors of the global economy have to be decarbonised, even the hard-to-abate ones, and all countries must switch to clean technologies, especially those that have depended on exporting or importing fossil fuels for decades. It is a deliberate metamorphosis that is more complex and far reaching than any transformation we have ever attempted.

Second, just as the transition gathers pace moving from gradual to exponential, the window within which we need to achieve it constantly shrinks. The speed of change foreseen in Paris in 2015 has been superseded by improved scientific understanding and the shocking escalation of impacts being felt by the most vulnerable. We now know that we must halve global emissions no later than 2030. It is as though the bus suddenly accelerated as we were approaching the child.

And yet none of the above can keep us from doing what needs to be done – the consequences are simply too dire.

Cop26 had to reset the pace of transformation to be commensurate with the increasing urgency we face. And it was challenging. Diametrically opposed interests were exposed. Pressure inside the negotiating rooms was intense. Common ground was elusive. Compromise was inevitable. And still, the Cop increased the speed of action with at least three resets.

First, 1.5C is the new 2C. The final decision reflects the intention to keep 1.5C not just alive, but front and centre of our efforts. The first set of reduction commitments registered in Paris brought the forecast trajectory of a 6C rise above pre-industrial levels by the end of the century to a 3.7C path, better but catastrophic for humanity. The second set of reductions committed to in Glasgow has taken us down to a 2.4C course, better again but still dangerous. We are still far from where we need to be, but we now know that

the task is to not surpass the ceiling of 1.5C. No one in their right mind is talking about “well below 2C” any more. The science is undisputed, and this understanding will continue to force us to accelerate all efforts over time.

Second: the yearly ratchet. Thanks to a strong push by the most vulnerable countries, the third set of national efforts to reduce emissions and contribute to climate solutions is now scheduled for the end of 2022, instead of waiting another five years. This is a much-needed tightening of the multilateral system: ratcheting commitments annually to ensure we are halving emissions by 2030 is what will keep 1.5C in sight. It comes with complications – including with emissions accounting – but this accelerated pace already makes the previous five-yearly schedule look outrageously out of whack.

Third: nature is finally recognised for its solution potential. All the emissions reductions in the world will mean nothing to future generations if we do not also protect and restore nature. Nature is our greatest protector from the worst impacts of the climate crisis, and this was recognised with \$20bn in commitments of public and private [money for forest protection](#) – a first for a climate Cop. In addition, more than 100 countries pledged to reverse deforestation by 2030 at the latest. The decision text rightly emphasises the importance of protecting, conserving and restoring nature in order to achieve the Paris agreement temperature goal. So, while the energy revolution – from coal to clean – is already well under way, Cop26 marks a new push to achieve the necessary land use revolution this decade: from degeneration to regeneration if we are to keep 1.5C in sight.

There are remaining areas of deep disappointment; the “phase-out of coal” being weakened to a “[phase-down of unabated coal](#)”, for example. The intended finance facility for developing countries was reduced to a dialogue. But the most acutely felt, glaring void is the lack of support for the most vulnerable nations to cope with quickly accelerating loss of homes and livelihoods and damage to lands and infrastructure. Much work needs to be done to address this before nations reconvene in Egypt for Cop27 – as the climate crisis is hurtling towards us at terrifying speed.

The success of Cop26 lies in the eyes of the beholder. Many will say that we continue to irresponsibly spin the political wheels, and from some vantage points that is true, but no one can deny that Cop26 has hastened the speed of the wheels of change. However, the question still remains, will we ultimately end up under the bus, or will the added speed of action deliver us and our descendants to safety? The answer to that is up to all of us.

- Christiana Figueres was head of the UN climate change convention that achieved the Paris agreement in 2015, and is the author of [The Future We Choose](#).
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Lady Gaga, be warned – method acting may bag you an Oscar, but where does it end?

[Rebecca Root](#)



Adam Driver and Lady Gaga in House of Gucci. Photograph: Fabio Lovino/AP

Mon 15 Nov 2021 03.00 EST

There's an old showbiz anecdote that sums up the differences between two distinct acting techniques, which I will call simply "method" and "not method".

In 1976, on the set of the spy thriller Marathon Man, Laurence Olivier and Dustin Hoffman, the film's two stars, are apparently not getting along. Hoffman hasn't slept for 72 hours in order to bring verisimilitude to his portrayal of a man being interrogated under sleep deprivation. Seeing his

colleague turn up ragged before the cameras roll, Olivier drily remarks: “My dear boy, why don’t you just try acting?”

There was an ocean between these method and not-method actors. Olivier, steeped in the worlds of the theatre and Shakespeare and classical poise; and Hoffman, no less a craftsman, but with his training grounded in realism and the “method”, as propounded by his teachers at the Actors Studio in New York.

Lady Gaga, whose new film House of Gucci opens in the UK next week, appears to be from the Hoffman school. She [recently revealed](#) that playing Patrizia Reggiani, the Italian socialite convicted of hiring a hitman to assassinate her ex-husband, [Maurizio Gucci](#), was a process of “becoming” rather than an “imitation”. She told [Vogue](#) that she stayed in character for 18 months, speaking with an accent for nine months of that. “Off camera,” she said. “I never broke. I stayed with her.”

Jeremy Strong, too, has talked about the extreme toll that playing Kendall Roy has had on him in Succession. [He says](#) acting is “not just an imaginary experience” but “you go through something and [...] it costs you”. His co-star Brian Cox [has said](#) it is torturous to watch. “Sometimes you say: ‘Jeremy, for [expletive] sake. Stop it now.’”

The difference between these two approaches – the Hoffman and the Olivier – lies in what goes into a performance to make it believable. Olivier would work from the outside in, using external influences to simulate emotion (he once supposedly said, “I just turn upstage and pull a nose hair out” when asked how to cry on stage). Method actors work from the inside out in a relentless search for the “truth” of the character, learning everything they can about them and attempting to embody that information with every fibre. The practice of “staying in character”, during rehearsals, between takes and on and off set brings, they feel, authenticity to the performance – but it can be extreme.

Film and television history is filled with stories of actors taking the method to extremes: Sylvester Stallone ending up in intensive care for eight days after wanting to be knocked unconscious by a co-star in Rocky IV. Nicolas Cage spending five whole weeks with his face covered in bandages and

having his teeth pulled out for Birdy. Daniel Day-Lewis – one of the modern masters of the method – [catching pneumonia](#) while walking around New York without a proper coat when preparing for his role in Gangs of New York, or spending the entire filming period for [My Left Foot](#) in a wheelchair, being fed by crew members. Halle Berry not showering for eight weeks while filming Jungle Fever. And Jamie Foxx having his eyelids glued shut to play blind musician Ray Charles.



Joaquin Phoenix, left, in the western *The Sisters Brothers*: ‘The moment the cameras started rolling, he became brooding, taciturn even, disappearing into the role of Charlie Sisters.’ Photograph: Shanna Besson/Annapurna/Kobal/REX/Shutterstock

The closest I have witnessed such transformative behaviour was in working with Joaquin Phoenix on the 2018 western [The Sisters Brothers](#). In pre-production, our relationship was cordial. The moment the cameras started rolling, however, he became brooding, taciturn even, disappearing into the role of Charlie Sisters – we spoke little except for when performing scenes together (though he was a generous and accommodating scene partner, no Hollywood diva). A year later, when we were at the Toronto international film festival to promote the film, Joaquin was already in prep for his role as Arthur Fleck in *Joker*, and his weight loss and haphazard behaviour was

disturbing – sitting in a crowded room with headphones on, only answering questions in monosyllables.

Authenticity delights audiences. But where does it end? If you’re playing Macbeth, must you commit regicide? If you’re performing Romeo do you have to fall in love with the actor playing Juliet (and do you even have to fancy her)? Well, no. Yet while all acting is a form of pretence, you should have a sense of what that person could be like “in real life”. For me, and most actors I know, doing background research is an essential part of “finding a character”. We study the character’s education and social experience, their likes, dislikes and places they have lived. How they speak, and so on. What we can’t discover, we simply invent: the imagination is as powerful a muscle as biceps, glutes or abdominals for an actor.

But clearly the method works. For many who adhere to it, glory at the Oscars seems inevitable; Joaquin’s performance in Joker won him an Academy Award. Maybe that’s why it remains the most esoteric and mysterious of acting techniques: it produces such endlessly startling, award-winning results, I’m tempted to try it myself.

- Rebecca Root is an actor. Her recent work includes The Queen’s Gambit

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OpinionCop26

Empty words, no action: Cop26 has failed First Nations people

Tishiko King



‘When communities have the freedom to define their own path, our people thrive, and they heal.’ Photograph: Supplied

Sun 14 Nov 2021 21.01 EST

Cop26 is officially over, and my time in Glasgow almost at an end. I was at the forum to represent my community and to stand up for First Nations people who are leading global movements for climate justice. I was cautiously optimistic about what could be achieved.

Instead, at this supposedly historic event, I saw a conference that relied on dated colonial constructs and ignored Indigenous people. I watched the Australian pavilion used to promote gas and carbon capture and storage, sponsored by corporations such as Santos. [Outnumbered by fossil fuel](#)

lobbyists, First Nations people witnessed an aggressive big business approach to climate negotiations, hardly the turning away from and permanent closure of extractive, polluting industries that we are all calling for.

And I saw a lot of talk. Countries said they would be ambitious, but without implementation by all governments at all levels, these are just empty words when we desperately need action.

First Nations people were locked out of discussions, and as a result for me Cop26 has failed, denying us the right and ability to safeguard our futures. Doors were closed to us, both physical and metaphorical, but as the attendees disperse and return to their homes across the world, it is essential these are opened for us.

What happens next is critical. Globally, Australia arrogantly flaunts its high ranking on the lists of countries trying to soften global commitments to climate action, and recent analysis from Cop26 showed that Australia's per capita emissions from coal power nearly doubled those of China. In fact, Australia tops the class in this field.

But politics is the name of the game and, with a federal election looming and many state elections around the country to follow, it is here that we must strike. It is essential that First Nations people have a seat at the table and that we stand together to protect our country, our home. In some cases, we'll need to just build our own tables.



Tishiko King and fellow campaigners in Glasgow for Cop26. Photograph: Supplied

More than half the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in this country are younger than 25. Increasingly, young people are leading the way in many areas of social change for our communities. Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must be supported to lead the movement for climate justice and ensure our voice is heard on issues that affect us and our future.

First Nations young people see through the spin, the manipulated numbers, the glossy sponsorships, but perhaps most importantly we see the solutions. When I talk to communities they have boundless ideas for solutions to the climate crisis. Ideas that exist in the present, draw on the past and genuinely respond to the challenges communities across the country are facing. They are not just solutions for our communities but solutions that would benefit everyone.

While Cop26 failed, there is enormous power with the people. There is power in their actions, their voices, their votes

They tell us there is a need to shift away from an industrial civilisation to an ecological civilisation, in which traditional practices are embedded into

everything we do, led by First Nations people.

Where they can, communities are already acting to make these changes reality. For example, in the Northern Territory, where Australia's first Indigenous youth climate network, [Seed, is working with communities to protect country and water from dangerous gas fracking](#), communities are working to become energy self-sufficient and supply clean and cheap power with solar power and batteries. When communities have the freedom to define their own path, our people thrive, and they heal.

And when I reflect on my conversations with communities, I remember that, while Cop26 failed, there is enormous power with the people. There is power in their actions, their voices, their votes. So, while tired, I am not without hope.

I will continue to work with communities to elevate their voices and table their ideas for acting on a climate crisis which is very much already here. It's time to push doors previously closed to us open and bring others on the journey. In fact, it's time to tear those doors down all together. Because when First Nations people have a seat at the table, have a voice, have self-determination, all of our country wins.

Tishiko King is the campaigns director at [Seed Mob](#) and community organiser for [Our Islands Our Home](#)

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OpinionRemembrance Day

Remembrance Day must be about all those who fought against fascism

[Luke Turner](#)



Gurkha veterans with British and Nepalese supporters march from Parliament Square to Westminster to protest about their pension rights, 18 August 2021. Photograph: Sabrina Merolla/Zuma Press Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

Sun 14 Nov 2021 08.47 EST

For more than two years during the second world war, 158 Squadron of Bomber Command flew missions over Germany and Nazi-occupied Europe from RAF Lissett, an airfield near the east Yorkshire coast. Since the 1970s, members of the [158 Squadron Association](#) and their families have met for an annual reunion, including a Sunday morning service at Lissett's village church; I attended this September. As the [Last Post](#) cut through the muggy air, it sounded an especially poignant note – 2021 marked the first 158

Squadron event at which there were no surviving veterans present. It was a deeply moving experience, and emphasised how quickly the second world war is passing beyond living memory.

I used to buy my annual poppy from old servicemen wearing their second world war medals, collection boxes in hand, at my local railway station. It's noticeable that as these people have left us, Remembrance has become the subject of bitter argument, with annual rows about who is or isn't wearing a poppy. The Poppy Watch Twitter account, which collates some of the more tasteless examples of commemoration (pull the pin on a [hand grenade of rum](#), anyone?), gets busier every year.

Myths of plucky Britain struggling "alone" in 1940 shape our current moment, from Brexit to the government's [response to the pandemic](#), during which the implication often seemed to be that imbibing the "Blitz spirit" might be a magical medical treatment. A [recent survey found](#) that the majority of British adults regret not speaking to elderly relatives about the war before they died: what they may have found through those conversations is a picture of the war far less parochial or simple than that we are presented with today.

And now that generation is disappearing, those born well after the conflict have a newfound duty to remember the war in all its worldly and diverse detail.

The memory of the anti-Nazi war is frequently invoked by populist chancers like Nigel Farage and Boris Johnson and England's rightwing press. But to allow the second world war to be used for dubious political ends is to obscure the lives of those who, often far from the frontline, endured boredom, fear and loneliness as they quietly got on with their duty in the biggest anti-fascist struggle in history. From their testimony, still being uncovered in archive material, unpublished memoirs, [Mass Observation diaries](#) and oral history transcripts, the moral and societal upheaval of the 1939 to 1945 conflict, and its continuing impact today, can be better understood. In my own research into a book on masculinity during the war years, I've discovered how extraordinary circumstances often forced people to overcome their prejudices, whether based on gender, class, sexuality or race.

It shouldn't even be seen as a radical step to reject nationalistic readings of wartime history and recognise that this was a global war in which many nations served a common cause. Following the Dunkirk evacuation and fall of France in the spring of 1940, the establishment periodical Punch published a cartoon of two soldiers looking out over the sea. "So our poor old Empire is alone in the world," says one. "Aye, we are," the other replies, "the whole five hundred million of us." British Future's [Remember Together](#) initiative, teaching children about the contribution made by countries in the Commonwealth and former empire, ought to be rolled out across the country.

At the Lissett memorial service, the flags of Canada and Australia flew in the churchyard. Men from the Caribbean volunteered for service in the RAF, including the Trinidadian [Ulric Cross](#), who flew as a navigator on more than 80 bombing missions. Māori soldiers from New Zealand were among the bravest troops resisting the invasion of Crete in 1941, even leading their British and Greek comrades in a traditional *haka* war dance before a bayonet charge. About 110,000 Gurkhas [fought in various theatres](#), including bitter jungle fighting against the Japanese; nearly a third became casualties. Closer to home, the Polish 303 Squadron [shot down more](#) German aircraft than any other unit during the Battle of Britain. From 158 Squadron, Sri Lankan navigator Rohan Amerasekera's life was [changed by the war](#) – he ended up commanding the then Ceylon air force, but also wrote a series of spiritual and religious tracts inspired by his wartime service. Part of our current examination of the legacy of the British empire – resisted by those on the right who regularly invoke the war – ought to be to commemorate the lives of those of its subjects who fought for the country that had ruled over them from afar.

Even less frequently discussed are the LGBT+ men who bravely fought against fascism, such as [Dudley Cave](#), an ordinary soldier who suffered in Japanese PoW camps but after the war [sought reconciliation](#) with his former enemies. This led to him becoming an activist and co-founding of the Lesbian and Gay Switchboard – a crucial lifeline during the HIV/Aids crisis; he was subjected to abuse for laying a pink triangle at the Cenotaph in recognition of the contribution of LGBT+ to the war effort.

The site of RAF Lissett has since been returned to agriculture, with wind turbines named after 158 Squadron's bombers turning in the Yorkshire air. Near to what was the main runway is a [memorial](#), a silhouetted outline of the figures of an aircrew made from weathered steel. The names of the 850 men and one woman who died in active service with the squadron are etched into this simple and affecting tribute. A few dilapidated wartime buildings still stand nearby. Wandering through them, in the damp remains of the former guardhouse, I came across a swastika that had been graffitied on the wall. It was a troubling reminder that the values the wartime generation fought for are fragile and, like their memory, worth preserving.

- Luke Turner is the author of Out of the Woods
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Michael Flynn

Trump ally Michael Flynn condemned over call for ‘one religion’ in US



Michael Flynn, Donald Trump’s first national security adviser, in 2017.
Photograph: Carolyn Kaster/AP

[Martin Pengelly](#)
[@MartinPengelly](#)

Mon 15 Nov 2021 02.00 EST

Michael Flynn, Donald Trump’s first national security adviser, was widely condemned after calling for the establishment of “one religion” in the US.

Religious freedom is enshrined in the [first amendment](#) to the US constitution, which says “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof”.

Regardless, at a rally staged in San Antonio on Saturday by the Christian “nonprofit news media network” American Faith, Flynn said: “If we are going to have one nation under God, which we must, we have to have one religion. One nation under God and one religion under God.”

In response, the Minnesota Democrat Ilhan Omar, one of the first Muslim women elected to Congress, [said](#): “These people hate the US constitution.”

Mark Hertling, a retired general and media commentator, [called](#) Flynn, himself a retired general, “an embarrassment to the US army”.

“His words are disgusting,” Hertling said.

On Sunday, the veteran reporter Carl Bernstein told CNN that Flynn, as one of the “knaves and fools and dangerous authoritarian figures” with whom Trump surrounded himself in and out of office, was “saying out loud things that have never been said by an aide or close associates to the president of the United States”.

Bernstein added: “It should be no surprise to know that Michael Flynn is saying the kind of things that he is saying, but what’s most significant here is that much of the Republican party … something like 35% in exit polls said they favour Trump because Christianity is being taken away from them.

“So Michael Flynn is not that far away from huge numbers of people in this country.”

Flynn is no stranger to controversy. Fired from a senior intelligence role [by Barack Obama](#), he became a close aide to Trump before [resigning](#) as national security adviser after less than a month in the role, for lying to the FBI about contacts with Russians.

Flynn [pledged guilty to one criminal charge](#) under Robert Mueller’s investigation of Russian election interference and links between Trump and Moscow, a plea he sought to withdraw before receiving a [pardon](#) from Trump.

He has since emerged as an influential figure on the far right, [linked](#) to the QAnon conspiracy theory and [appearing](#) to advocate armed insurrection.

In San Antonio, Flynn called the [indictment](#) of another Trump ally, Steve Bannon, over the investigation of the Capitol attack, an “abuse of freedom of speech” – another first amendment freedom.

The Capitol was attacked on 6 January by Trump supporters seeking to overturn his election defeat. Flynn is himself the [subject of a subpoena](#) from the investigating House committee. On Friday, he told Fox News he had nothing to hide.

In Texas, Flynn called the House investigation “a crucifixion of our first amendment freedom to speak, freedom to peacefully assemble”.

His remarks about religion attracted support from a prominent contender in a vicious party fight for a Republican Senate nomination in Ohio.

Josh Mandel, a former Ohio state treasurer, [tweeted](#): “We stand with General Flynn.”

Mandel’s own religion has been the subject of debate and controversy. In September, the Forward published [an op-ed](#) which asked if he was “obscuring his Jewishness” in order to appeal to far-right Christian voters.

In response, Mandel [described himself](#) as a “Proud American. Proud Jew. Proud Marine. Proud Zionist. Everything Democrats hate.”

Mandel’s religion was the subject of a controversial attack ad from another Republican hopeful, Mark Pukita, who denied charges of antisemitism.

Amid criticism of his support for Flynn, Mandel [said](#) “freedom of religion [is not equal to] freedom FROM religion”. He also [said](#): “America was not founded as a secular nation.”

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Business

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Global development

Palm oil land grabs ‘trashing’ environment and displacing people



Burnt land next to a palm oil plantation in Central Kalimantan. Indonesia is the biggest producer of the crop, which is ranked at highest risk for land grabs. Photograph: Willy Kurniawan/Reuters

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[Kaamil Ahmed](#)

Mon 15 Nov 2021 02.30 EST

Businesses and governments must stop the growing rush of commodities-driven land grabbing, which is “trashing” the environment and displacing people, [says new research](#).

Palm oil and cobalt were extreme risks for land grabs according to an analysis of 170 commodities by research firm Verisk Maplecroft published last week. It also warned that, alongside cobalt, other minerals used for “clean” technology, including silicon, zinc, copper, were high risk and undermined the sector’s label.

The research showed that goods such as coconuts, garlic, tea and cocoa were also high risk for land grabbing.

In 2007, a world food price crisis led to a land rush as companies tried to secure production and costs. [A UN report in September](#) said commodity exports in the decade after grew 20%, to \$4.38tn (£3.27tn) by 2019.

Verisk Maplecroft said the demand for more land to produce goods had been accompanied by displacement of indigenous communities and damage to

natural capital – “such as clean air and water, pollinating insects, and soil quality” – crucial to battling the climate crisis.

Will Nichols, Verisk Maplecroft’s head of environmental research, said investors should scrutinise supply chains and pressure companies they work with to do more.

“There is a lot of money to be made from trashing the environment rather than saving it when you are a landowner or someone looking to invest in these kinds of industries and you’re aware that the government isn’t going to stand in your way,” said Nichols.

“The onus falls on corporations to be diligent about where they are sourcing, auditing suppliers, making sure commodities are coming from where they are told they are coming from.”

Nichols added that governments were responsible for enforcing regulations and eliminating corruption.

Campaign group Focus on the Global South published [a letter signed by 257 organisations](#) last Tuesday rejecting carbon-offsetting pledges from corporations and warning that initiatives such as tree planting will displace indigenous populations while land is still exploited for industrial agriculture.

Despite [world leaders agreeing to stop deforestation](#) at Cop26 this month, Ward Anseeuw, at the International Land Coalition, said there was a gap between government pledges and action on the ground.

Anseeuw highlighted Madagascar, where he said a new land law [voted in this year](#) by parliament actually reversed efforts to allow poorer farmers to secure land rights. He said the law would strip away land rights handed out since 2005.

“It gives government very strong central power over these lands and they can decide unilaterally what can happen. That opens up the door for a huge land grab. More than 3 million households could be affected,” he said. “It really shows the contradiction of what is being discussed, and the actions or

decisions being taken at a global level, and what is going on in the field with governments and specific companies.”



Indigenous leaders march at Cop26 in Glasgow. Land displacement often affects indigenous people who are key to protecting biodiversity.
Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

Land Matrix, which monitors land deals globally, said [in a September report](#) that an increase in land acquisitions starting in 2008 had peaked, but there was potential for a new land rush as economies try to recover from the Covid pandemic, with countries like India and Indonesia opening up their land markets.

Kirtana Chandrasekaran, a programme coordinator at Friends of the Earth, said agribusiness was driving land grabs.

“There is a huge connection. In Indonesia, for example, there are several million hectares that have been grabbed from small-scale producers. Sometimes they do produce some palm oil for their own consumption but the problem is when it becomes needed for high-scale production for export,” said Chandrasekaran.

“You see huge lands rights violations, where people are completely thrown off land and or harassed and threatened.”

She said displacement often affected indigenous people who are key to protecting biodiversity.

Chandrasekaran said the increasing production of commodities was driven not by demand but by companies’ desire to lower prices, as well as trade agreements, such as the [EU’s proposed deal to import beef from South America](#).

She said this drive for commodities was despite most of the world’s food [being produced by family farms](#), not by big corporations.

“People are still consuming things that are produced locally by small-scale producers. [Commodities](#) production can be considered food, but it’s highly processed, not accessible outside urban centres and not very nutritious,” she said.

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Uganda

Ugandan children held in prison for months after crackdown on opposition



Relatives of former presidential candidate Robert Kyagulanyi, also known as Bobi Wine, centre, were also targeted. Photograph: Abubaker Lubowa/Reuters

[Jason Burke](#) and [Samuel Okiror](#) in Kampala

Mon 15 Nov 2021 00.00 EST

Ugandan security services held children for months in prisons after successive [crackdowns against opposition activists](#) earlier this year, witnesses and victims have said.

Adults and children described systematic physical abuse, denial of basic legal rights and appalling conditions as they waited for trial on charges they claim were fabricated.

The experiences of the children, revealed to the Guardian after their release, will increase pressure on Uganda, a key western ally in east [Africa](#), over human rights failings that have grown significantly worse since the country's president, Yoweri Museveni, started to face a significant political challenge in recent years.

Since campaigning opened last year for elections, hundreds – possibly thousands – of supporters of the opposition politician, Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu, also known as Bobi Wine, have been [arrested and illegally detained for months](#) in the worst repression for decades.



Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, president of Uganda, has faced significant political challenge in recent years. Photograph: Kamran Jebreili/AP

Others, snatched off the streets by security services in a series of abductions, have disappeared into secret jails. More than 50 people were [killed during protests in November](#). Most were shot by security forces.

[Museveni claimed victory in the election](#) in January, which was marred by allegations of fraud and the harassment of opposition activists.

The children included one who was 17 at the time of his arrest and others who were much younger.

Fifteen-year-old Happy Mugisha, the adopted son of Kyagulanyi's elder brother, was arrested on 21 March by masked armed men who raided his home.

"They were looking for my dad, who had escaped. They told us to lie down at gunpoint then dragged us into their vehicle. I was blindfolded, beaten and tortured. When I refused to tell them my name, one soldier slapped me on the face and one kicked me on the chest and I fell down. They beat me. I was crying," he said.

[A complaint to the international criminal court](#) filed earlier this year by lawyers acting for victims describes hundreds of abductions. Some detainees have had their joints or genitals beaten with wires, have been burned with cigarettes or have had fingernails torn out. At least one detainee has been confirmed as having died in custody, although the true death toll is thought to be much higher. Many have been members of Wine's party, the National Unity Platform (NUP).

Ugandan military spokespeople have repeatedly denied responsibility for any abuses, and Museveni in a national address in February dismissed allegations that his forces had illegally detained civilians, saying the army was "a disciplined force" and that his party "does not kill" its opponents.



Security forces gather on election day in Kampala, Uganda on 20 August 2021. Photograph: Jérôme Delay/AP

Mugisha was held for 10 days in an overcrowded cell in at military facility in Mbuya in the capital, Kampala, where he was handcuffed, blindfolded and interrogated.

“They asked me questions I didn’t have answers for … I told them I am a child and didn’t know anything. They would pour water on me, told me to remove clothes and beat me seriously. You could hear people screaming and crying. I was in very terrible pain. They told me I would be killed,” he said.

Fifteen-year-old Elijah Walakira, another relative of Kyagulanyi, was detained in one of the first waves of repression in November 2020. The 15-year-old had been selling NUP merchandise near the party’s headquarters in Kampala when he was caught in a police raid.

“I was pushed inside the back of the patrol car. We were driven to a police station. I was thrown into the cell. I was forced to share a cell with more than 80 adults. You didn’t have anywhere to sleep or stand at some point. We would sleep in turns,” Walakira said.

After four days, Kyagulanyi came in person to the police station and obtained his nephew’s release.

Museveni, 76, has been in power for 35 years and has strong support in some rural areas, as well as among the military, security services and police. The US and UK have given billions of dollars of development and security assistance to [Uganda](#) in recent years. Both have made their deepening concerns at recent human rights abuses clear.

“It was a very bad experience … When I returned back to school, some students were sympathetic while others were making fun of me. They cooked up their stories, teased and mocked me. It caused a lot of pressure and trauma on me,” said Walakira.

Kenny Kyalimpa, a 17-year-old student on Wine’s campaign team, [was arrested in December, and held for six months](#) at Kitalya maximum security

prison outside Kampala.

He described four days of beatings with rubber batons at a military barracks and a week in solitary confinement.



Security forces officers are seen during a joint patrol in a street ahead of Uganda's election results announcement in Kampala. Photograph: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP/Getty Images

"Day and night you are in handcuffs. I was told to strip naked, sit down and widen my legs. They squeezed my testicles and penis. I pleaded with them. But they didn't want to listen," Kyalimpa said.

"They told me to say my last prayer because they were going to kill [me]. I told them: 'If you want to kill, go ahead and kill me. God is on my side. My crime was supporting the opposition.'"

Last month, Museveni moved to deflect mounting domestic anger and international concern in a new national address, saying abuses tarnish Uganda's reputation and blaming "lazy" officers.

"Evidence through torture is not reliable. Torture is unnecessary and wrong. It must not be used again if at all it was being used like I see some groups claim in the media," the veteran ruler said.

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Belarus

Polish PM urges ‘concrete steps’ by Nato to address border crisis



Polish soldiers and police near Kuznica, on the border with Belarus.
Photograph: Reuters

[Andrew Roth](#) in Moscow

Sun 14 Nov 2021 10.55 EST

The Polish prime minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, has called for Nato to take “concrete steps” to solve the migrant crisis on Europe’s border as dozens of asylum seekers reportedly broke through Poland’s border defences with [Belarus](#).

Morawiecki said that [Poland](#), Lithuania and Latvia may ask for consultations under article 4 of the Nato charter, indicating they believe their territorial integrity, political independence or security is threatened.

European countries have warned that the increasingly tense situation on the frontier may lead to a conflict with Belarus, whose president, Alexander Lukashenko, has been accused of encouraging thousands of people from the Middle East to travel to Europe's borders.

Belarus and its main backer, Russia, would probably react angrily to any new deployment of [Nato](#) troops to eastern Europe. This week Russia dispatched nuclear-capable bombers and paratroopers on training missions to Belarus as the countries tested their joint air defences.

Lukashenko, the autocratic leader of Belarus, has also vowed to retaliate against new EU sanctions that are due to be announced on Monday.

The sanctions are expected to target Belarusian officials, as well as travel agencies and airlines that have helped ferry migrants to Belarus. European officials have managed to strike deals with a number of airlines to limit flights with migrants to Belarus.

The EU and Belarusian foreign policy chiefs spoke directly about the migrant crisis for the first time on Sunday.

Josep Borrell said he had spoken to Belarus's foreign minister, Vladimir Makei, by phone about "the precarious humanitarian situation" at the Belarus-Poland border.

"The current situation is unacceptable and must stop. People should not be used as weapons," [Borrell said in a tweet](#).

In Belarus's statement about the conversation, Makei said any sanctions would be "hopeless" and "counterproductive".

On Saturday, the Syrian carrier Cham Wings Airlines said it would halt flights to Minsk "due to the difficult situation on the Belarus-Poland border and because most of the travellers on our flights to Minsk are Syrian citizens". Turkey has also blocked flights for migrants from Istanbul.

The turmoil on the border has continued, however. Polish police reported that there were 223 attempts to cross the border from Belarus on Saturday and that one group of 50 people broke through defences on Poland's border

near the village of Starzyna. They were later caught by Polish authorities and returned to the border, the state news agency PAP reported.

Locator of Starzyna on Polish-Belarusian border

The police also said the helmet of an officer serving at the border had been damaged after a stone was thrown at him.

The spokesperson for Poland's security services, Stanisław Żaryn, wrote on Twitter on Sunday about reports of trucks carrying stones and rubble from Belarusian construction companies to areas near the border.

Aid agencies have warned of a growing humanitarian crisis as thousands of asylum seekers, many from Iraq and Syria, stay at campsites on the border with temperatures plunging below freezing.

Two diplomats said on Thursday that the EU was considering imposing sanctions on Belarus's main airport in an attempt to make it more difficult for airlines to bring in migrants.

“We will give the green light to extending the legal framework of our sanctions against Belarus so that it can be applied to everyone who participates in smuggling migrants to this country,” Borrell told the French weekend newspaper Le Journal du Dimanche.

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