

# The Guardian

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## 2021.09.26 - Opinion

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## **Roald Dahl's universe might not be a golden ticket for the writer's fans**

[Rebecca Nicholson](#)



Gene Wilder and Peter Ostrum as Willy Wonka and Charlie in Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory (1971). Photograph: Allstar/WARNER BROS./Sportsphoto Ltd./Allstar

Sat 25 Sep 2021 10.00 EDT

It has been a lucrative week for the estate of Roald Dahl and an expensive one for Netflix, [which purchased the Roald Dahl Story Company](#) for a reported £500m and though neither organisation would confirm the exact sum involved, I'm sure the frobscottle corks were popped. In a statement, the streaming service said its planned adaptation of *Matilda the Musical* and its forthcoming animated *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* series had "opened its eyes to a much more ambitious venture – the creation of a unique universe across animated and live action films and TV, publishing, games, immersive experiences, live theatre, consumer products and more".

Whew. It's going to be *Frozen* all over again, isn't it? I don't have children, but I do have nephews and nieces and have learned through them that there is nothing you can't embellish with Anna and Elsa. A fork? Frozened. Trainers with sparkly laces? Frozened. There are *Frozen* potties, Hula Hoops, bed frames, tents. There are more snowflakes on children's toys than there are people angrily typing the word on Twitter. Surely it's only a matter of time before we get Miss Trunchbull-branded javelins, Mr Twit beard combs or a Grandpa Joe-themed bedspread.

Most children who grew up on a giddy, gruesome diet of Dahl will have a lingering fantasy that the chocolate factory could one day be a possibility, though the pandemic may have had a lasting impact on the desirability of wallpaper you can lick. Yes, Willy Wonka's machines maimed children, but it was worth it, by the sounds of that Whipple-Scrumptious Fudgemallow Delight. If the Dahl universe does get the full Harry Potter treatment, then beware false hope: I have made the real-life attempt at Butterbeer, so you don't have to. I'd rather face Dementors than drink it again.

Netflix has been urged to acknowledge [Dahl's well-documented antisemitism](#), for which his descendants apologised last year, with the Board of Deputies of British Jews calling for a documentary to be made about his

bigotry, so as to avoid painting him “as some sort of paragon of kindness and virtue”.

Even so, Dahl branding is already out there. Matilda has given her name to bubble bath. You could buy disappointing Wonka chocolate with popping candy in it for years. I remember a gentle boat ride at Alton Towers that took all of the nastiness out of the chocolate factory. It is a particular kind of possessive nostalgia, I think, which makes the idea of a [Roald Dahl](#) “immersive experience” instinctively off-putting, but hope lies in the prose. His books are about powerful, self-sufficient children and inept, cruel or useless adults or sometimes adults who are all three. They are about farts – and death and neglect - and they are about magic and strength and freedom. This is a heady mix to balance. Let’s hope those immersive experiences can take it.

## Competitive walking? It's a slippery slope



Take a Hike: on your marks, get set...

Photograph: Stephen Kingston/BBC/Cardiff Productions

I started watching a new show on BBC2 last week called *Take a Hike*. I enjoy the comedy of Rhod Gilbert, who narrates. I enjoy hiking, even though it's just walking, puffing out its chest and trying to make itself sound

important, and I enjoy television, so I settled in for some vicarious views and perhaps some fleece-based inspiration for the coming cold months.

There are jokes in the narration and lovely scenery, but mostly, *Take a Hike* is a competition. Of course it is. We already have [Coast](#) and [Walks with My Dog](#), and Channel 5's entire Friday night schedule for watching people amble around beautiful landscapes, so it was inevitable that this would have a competitive element. It's one of the many shows borrowing from the school of *Come Dine with Me*, pitting people against each other and then ranking their efforts out of 10. Here, the winner, with perfect BBC stinginess, gets a golden stick and a voucher for walking gear.

Does every activity have to become a competition? The rankings can't be bothered to be nasty – “lovely views but she did serve cheese at lunch?” and “I would have [had] a little bit less mud” aren't quite at the *Four in a Bed* level of cutthroat just yet – and the programme is mostly about looking at hills. Surely, I thought, walking is the last place that this format can go. And then I watched a trailer for *A Perfect Pitch*, in which avid campers compete to find the best camping spot in Britain, [coming to Channel 4 this week.](#)

## **Catch yourself on, like Derry Girls**



Derry Girls: all good things must come to an end. Photograph: TCD/Prod.DB/Alamy Stock Photo

That's it, then, for *Derry Girls*, which is officially [coming to an end](#). Lisa McGee, its creator and writer, announced that the comedy's forthcoming third series would be its last. The hilarious show is about to begin filming, after a two-year delay caused by Covid. "What a ride!" McGee wrote on Twitter, confirming the news, though she did tease that the gang may "return in some other guise some day", which is handy for those of us who wish to put their vaguely awkward confidence with the phrase "catch yourself on" to further use.

It seems an odd time for it to come to an end, having ascended to the much-coveted level of "special edition with celebrity guest on Comic Relief", but I firmly believe a three-series limit should be imposed on almost every show. British and Irish productions have a knack for brevity that their transatlantic cousins sometimes lack, partly because they aren't often given a chance to improve on so-so first seasons. It sorts the wheat from the laughs, if you will. (I'm sorry.) Three series and out is a classy move and should be enough to keep the *Derry Girls* legacy alive.

Rebecca Nicholson is an Observer columnist

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[OpinionAukus](#)

## We should not allow the Anglosphere to distort the history of liberty

[Kenan Malik](#)



President Joe Biden announces the Aukus deal with Boris Johnson and Scott Morrison      Photograph: Kent Nishimura/Los Angeles Times/REX/Shutterstock

Sun 26 Sep 2021 03.30 EDT

‘A people that idly sips its cognac on the boulevards as it lightly takes a trifling part in the comedie humaine,’ Franklin Giddings, professor of sociology at Columbia University, taunted contemptuously in 1900, ‘can only go down in the struggle for existence with men who have learned that happiness... is the satisfaction that comes only with the tingling of the blood.’ The blood that tingled was Anglo-Saxon. ‘The greatest question of the twentieth century,’ Giddings believed, was ‘whether the Anglo-Saxon or the Slav is to impress his civilisation on the world’.

A century later, it’s not Anglo-Saxon pitted against Slav, but the west against China. Nevertheless, as the fallout from the [Aukus deal](#) reveals, something of the contempt for the French still remains, on both sides of the Atlantic, as does the sense of what Giddings called ‘the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon’, though today many prefer to talk about the ‘Anglosphere’. France, Tory lord Daniel Hannan suggested, is ‘not a reliable partner’, so ‘Anglosphere allies’ have taken ‘responsibility for defending liberty’, demonstrating that ‘there are still some grown-ups patrolling the playground’.

In recent years, the Anglosphere has become a go-to concept for a certain strand of rightwing Eurosceptics, helping them redefine British identity in the post-Brexit world. For Nigel Farage, Aukus is ‘the Brexiters’ dream’ because ‘[our best friends in the world speak English](#)’.

As a word, ‘Anglosphere’ is relatively new, coined by Neal Stephenson in his 1995 science fiction novel *The Diamond Age*. As a concept, however, its roots go back to 19th-century notions of Anglo-Saxon racial greatness, cultivated by figures as diverse as American poet Ralph Waldo Emerson and English historian JR Seeley. What connects the old Anglo-Saxonism with contemporary ideas of the Anglosphere, advanced by enthusiasts such as Hannan and historian Robert Conquest, is a view of Englishness as a unique culture, the one that ‘invented freedom’.

It's a vision that, in its understanding of language, culture and history, ironically draws heavily upon German Romantic philosophy, in particular Johann Gottfried Herder's notion of the *Volksgeist*, the spirit of a people carried across history. In every language, Herder wrote, dwells "the entire world of tradition, history, principles of existence: its whole heart and soul". Hannan [similarly argues](#) that the tribes that settled in England in the fifth century brought with them "the germ of... Anglo-Saxon liberties" and ensured "a direct connection between the English language and the distinctive political system of the Anglosphere".

It's a story of how liberties have been won that does serious damage to history. The role of the English, and the British, in the development of freedom and equality has been complex and contradictory.

The English philosopher John Locke is seen, not just by Anglosphere advocates, as a founder of liberalism and of notions of tolerance. He was also a shareholder in the Royal African Company, which supplied African slaves to the English colonies. His *Two Treatises on Government* argued that "all men by nature are equal" while also making a case for the legitimacy of slavery. Locke's view that Catholics should be denied rights shaped English law for two centuries.

Continental thinkers, meanwhile, especially those within the tradition of the Radical Enlightenment, offered more expansive visions of liberty. The law, Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza insisted, unlike Locke, should not restrict beliefs but allow everyone "to think what he wishes and say what he thinks". French philosopher Denis Diderot was vociferous in his opposition to slavery and colonialism. It was through the French Revolution that the "declaration of the rights of man and the citizen" was enunciated, becoming central to struggles for liberties since.

Neither the British nor the French (nor the Americans) allowed their love of liberty to get in the way of the practice of slavery. It was not Britain, as many claim, which first ended slavery, but a slave insurrection on the island of Saint-Domingue (now Haiti) in 1791 that not only brought about emancipation but forced the French formally to abolish servitude. The British response? To invade Saint-Domingue in a (failed) attempt to restore slavery and prevent the virus of emancipation from spreading to British

colonies. Forty years later, Britain finally passed its own Slavery Abolition Act.

Those who fought for their liberties were treated with brutality by the British. A favourite way of dealing with rebels of the “Indian Mutiny” was to lash them to cannons and blow them up. Lieutenant George Cracklow wrote to his mother that he thought “no more of blowing away half a dozen mutineers before breakfast [than I do of eating the same meal](#)”.

This is not to say that British thinkers and movements have not been important in the forging of traditions of liberty. From Thomas Paine to Mary Wollstonecraft, from the suffragettes to the Red Clydesiders, many have fed into those struggles. The story, however, is far more complex than Anglosphere advocates wish to acknowledge. Only by reducing liberty to notions of the “free market”, “small government” and “common law” could the idea of the Anglosphere as the principal fount of liberty be imagined.

Even with this risibly restricted notion of liberty, the argument for a distinct Anglosphere political culture does not stack up. Take the question of free speech, fundamental to any discussion of liberty. British law is (unfortunately) more aligned to European legislation than to America’s First Amendment (which itself draws more on the spirit of Spinoza than of Locke). British welfare and health policies are similarly (thankfully) more akin to those of European nations than of America, the free market doctrines of recent decades notwithstanding. Australia’s Covid policies have hardly been rooted in the defence of liberties. Nor does New Zealand distancing itself from the Five Eyes security [policy towards China](#) speak of a common Anglosphere vision.

The irony, as Linda Colley [has observed](#), is that the “cult of superior British liberty has often been deployed to uphold and maintain the political status quo”. Radicals have often called on ancient liberties, real and imagined, to buttress new struggles for freedoms. The authorities, however, have used those same stories “to promote a version of liberty that would be fully compatible with property, hierarchy and law-abiding moderation”. From Peterloo to Orgreave, the laws and traditions celebrated by Anglosphere enthusiasts have often been used to suppress radical dissent. As we wrestle with what Britishness means today, we should be wary of distorted histories

of liberties and freedoms being deployed to curtail today's struggles for liberties and freedoms.

Kenan Malik is an Observer columnist

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## The Observer view on shortages and rationing

[Observer editorial](#)



Panic buying by motorists has added to petrol shortages caused by the lack of lorry drivers. Photograph: Vuk Valcic/SOPA Images/REX/Shutterstock

Sun 26 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

Queues at the pumps, shortages in supermarkets, energy companies going bust and [chemotherapy being cancelled](#) due to staff shortages. Welcome to Britain in 2021. Some of this disruption has clearly been caused by a pandemic exerting pressures on supply chains, workforces and healthcare systems all over the world. But Boris Johnson's political choices have only acted to make Covid's impact on the national infrastructure far worse.

The lines at petrol stations may be driven more by [panic buying](#) than real fuel shortages. But panic buying can become a self-fulfilling prophecy and it

is a sign of a more anxious national mood as Britain heads into winter. Food prices are forecast to increase by [more than 5%](#) in the coming months. And the government is persisting with plans to cut financial support for low-paid parents by more than £1,000 a year this autumn. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has estimated that the typical low-income family will be [£1,750 a year worse off](#) by next April as a result of all these changes. This is a huge amount to lose for parents already struggling to keep their children warm and well fed, the difference between just about getting by and entering into a miserable downward spiral of debt and poverty.

It is unthinkable that the government is about to let so many families already suffering from intense financial jeopardy end up in this situation. This situation is not just the product of a pandemic-related economic shock: it is the result of sustained government policy. A decade of tax credit cuts has seen many low-income families lose thousands of pounds a year even as Conservative chancellors have spent several billion a year on tax cuts that have disproportionately benefited more affluent households. The government has done too little in the face of longstanding warnings to tackle the fragility of the UK's energy supply.

One of the reasons that relatively low food prices are [so important for household budgets](#) is because of the extortionate housing costs that swallow up renters' salaries: tenants in the UK, who make up a growing proportion of households, pay the [highest rents in Europe](#). Yet the government has done nothing to reverse the whittling away of the social housing stock that is needed to create more affordable rents: last year, it was depleted by almost 30,000 through [sales and demolitions](#), far exceeding the number of [new social homes built](#).

Brexit has also made things worse. As one of the public faces of the Vote Leave campaign, Johnson promised that a bilateral trade deal with the US would be the jewel in the post-Brexit British crown. The experts who warned that it could never make up for more than a small fraction of the volume of trade lost as a result of Brexit, and that it would never come to pass, have been proved right as all hopes of a quick deal evaporated when Johnson paid his first visit to the White House last week.

All the anticipated costs and frictions of Brexit have materialised, combining with CO<sub>2</sub> shortages to jam up the food supply chain. The end of free movement has generated a lorry driver shortage that has been made worse by the inefficiencies Brexit has imposed on road haulage: European drivers have [far less flexibility](#) to work deliveries within the UK into their cross-continent routes. The government's proposed solution – a temporary relaxation [in visa rules](#) – is pitched too incrementally: will European drivers really opt for this given the added inefficiencies of UK work, the short-term nature of the relaxation, and the experience many had of being trapped in their cabs in queues on British roads due to Covid-related disruption [last Christmas?](#)

It is not just the food supply chain that Brexit is affecting: there is also a growing crisis in the care sector, with a shortage of care workers both as a result of the pandemic and of [post-Brexit immigration rules](#). This is leaving too many people with disabilities in the intolerable position of struggling to arrange not just the life-enhancing, but in some cases the life-critical care they need. And in the NHS, a lack of workforce planning and a decade of underinvestment have meant that the long-term effect of Covid will be even more detrimental. One hospital in Nottingham announced that staff shortages are forcing it to [ration chemotherapy for cancer patients](#), while a new study out last week predicted that it could take more than a decade to clear the post-pandemic [cancer treatment backlog](#).

A pandemic may have made things worse, but what is happening in energy, to food and to healthcare shows that years of neglect of Britain's housing, health and essential infrastructure, combined with the political right's almost fanatical obsession with Brexit, will come at a very high cost for families. The government may not yet be facing the political consequences, but the question for Keir Starmer as the Labour party holds its annual conference this weekend is whether he can articulate the hardships in store. Voters deserve an opposition capable of illustrating that it is a series of quite deliberate political choices that will catapult hundreds of thousands of people into [poverty](#), generate rising homelessness as a result of tenants not being able to pay their rent and lead to growing numbers having their medical treatment cancelled. It is the Conservative government that is to blame for the full extent of the cost-of-living crisis and the precarious state

of the NHS and the care sector. But Starmer's Labour party must play its role in holding Johnson to account.

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## [OpinionGermany](#)

# The Observer view on the fight to succeed Angela Merkel

[Observer editorial](#)



Angela Merkel on the election trail with Armin Laschet, the German chancellor's choice as her successor. Photograph: Friedemann Vogel/EPA

Sun 26 Sep 2021 01.30 EDT

Angela Merkel's long goodbye as Germany's chancellor finally draws to a close this weekend as votes in the federal election are tallied – at least in theory. If the latest opinion polls are to be believed, [there will be no clear winner](#). No party is expected to command an overall Bundestag majority. Coalition talks on forming a new government could take months. In the meantime, in practice, Merkel remains in charge.

The uncertainty over who will replace her is a big change from the often predictable politics of the past 16 years. But it would not do to get

overexcited. Neither Olaf Scholz, who leads the Social Democrats (SPD), the biggest centre-left party, nor Armin Laschet, Merkel's conservative choice as her Christian Democratic Union (CDU) successor, offers radically different agendas. Both men stress continuity while promoting modest, incremental change.

This is a problem. The campaign highlighted pressing issues that were ignored during the Merkel era. One is pension reform for an ageing population. Another is inadequate public investment in healthcare, utilities, housing and broadband. Recent floods in western [Germany](#) revealed a lack of structural resilience. Critics say Merkel has done far too little to address climate change.

Would a hypothetical Scholz-led ruling coalition including the Greens and the pro-business Liberals (FDP) have sufficient clout and unity of purpose to tackle such challenges? Would a similar combination of parties led by Laschet? It's possible the Greens leader, Annalena Baerbock, could yet emerge on top, but her ability to effect real change is also circumscribed by her need for allies.

The risk for German democracy amid all this horse-trading is that a resulting weak, compromise coalition may disappoint and alienate and push frustrated voters towards the extremes represented by the far-left Die Linke and the far-right AfD. Neither party is expected to do particularly well this time. But that may change if a post-Merkel government serves up more of the same.

That would be bad news for Germany but also for Europe and Britain, which both need a strong, confident partner in Berlin. Merkel, a consummate consensus-builder, helped hold the EU together during successive financial, migrant and pandemic crises. On the other hand, she famously lacked strategic vision. She far preferred cutting energy and trade deals with Russia and China to confronting the authoritarian [threat they pose](#).

Both Scholz and Laschet advocate closer integration with the EU. Both support the creation, in parallel to Nato, of a European army and defensive union. Unlike anti-American pacifists to her left, Baerbock also backs Nato, urges a tougher line towards Beijing and Moscow and wants a “values-

driven foreign policy”. She says the EU must be “self-reliant” as the US alliance grows less predictable.

Yet it’s unclear whether any of these chancellor candidates will throw their weight fully behind President Emmanuel Macron’s ideas about EU “strategic autonomy” or how far they might go towards fiscal and economic union, ideas Merkel always kept at arm’s length. In Scholz’s case, there are potential tensions, too, with Ursula von der Leyen, the German EU commission president and longtime Merkel crony.

In the absence of a strong lead from Berlin, Macron may try to expand his influence over the EU’s future direction. But a difficult re-election battle in April will distract and could even defeat him. The greater danger is paralysis within the EU, matching that in Germany, over the big geopolitical, climate, trade, energy and technology challenges it faces – and a rising risk of internal fragmentation.

All this could negatively affect Britain, which will rely on German goodwill and common sense if it is ever to forge a rational post-Brexit political and security relationship with Brussels and resolve disputes over trade, Northern Ireland and cross-Channel migrants. Merkel provided both. Her successor, whoever that is, may not do so.

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## The looming winter of discontent – cartoon

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NotebookBirds

## This haunting vision of climate change could concentrate minds at Cop26

Tim Adams



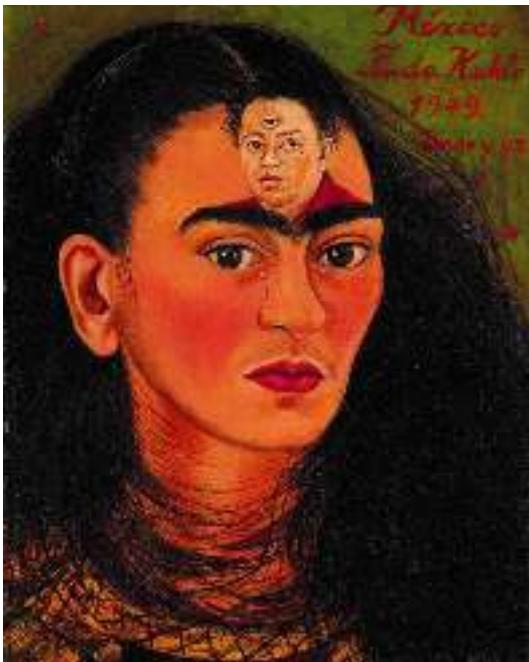
Jonathan C Slaght describes trying to find the largest living species of owl in remote Russian forests. Photograph: Amur-Ussuri Centre for Avian Biodiversity

Sat 25 Sep 2021 12.30 EDT

I've been reading Jonathan C Slaght's wonderful book [\*Owls of the Eastern Ice\*](#), his account of four seasons trying to locate and protect the largest living species of owl in the remote Russian forests of Primorye, bordering North Korea. The [Blakiston's fish owl](#) is a creature that seems entirely made of mythology. The threats to its continued existence include radioactive rivers and deforestation as well as the by-products of climate change: increasing floods, wildfires, typhoons.

Slaght's extraordinary adventures on its behalf are like scenes from the end of the world. Rather than rely on the prime minister's prep school arguments for a revolution in [how the planet is managed](#) at the forthcoming Cop26 gathering in Glasgow, organisers might be better advised to leave a copy of Slaght's book at every world leader's bedside. If they picked it up in the jet-lagged early hours they might find their dreams haunted, as mine have been, by huge, endangered owls swooping low through their subconscious, reminding them what survival might mean.

## Tracks of her tears



What am I bid? Frida Kahlo's self-portrait. Photograph: HONS/AP

Every age, perhaps, most values the art that best describes it. If the medieval world treasured all eyes uplifted to a gold-leaf hereafter and the age of empire shelled out for heroic history painting, our own times, the age of uncertain mental health, prize the authentic depiction of private anguish above all else. [Edvard's Munch](#)'s *Scream* set the bar. This autumn, one of the most tormented of Frida Kahlo's self-portraits [comes to auction](#). By some lights, her painting, in which the image of Kahlo's serially unfaithful former husband, Diego Rivera, is imprinted on the artist's forehead, while tears roll down her cheeks, might be almost unbearable to look at. The auctioneer's estimate is a record-breaking \$30m: nothing sells quite like pain.

## Philip prints



Prince Philip: any idea why my printer won't work? Photograph: Darrin Zammit Lupi/Reuters

The Duke of Edinburgh was not a man of the people in many obvious senses, but last week's [BBC family tribute](#) revealed one habit with which all of Britain's home-working citizens could surely empathise: he would spend mornings in his study shouting at his desktop printer, in the vain hope of persuading it, just once, to do his royal bidding. No doubt each unexplained beep and pause, every concertina-ed paper jam and illegible smear of the world's most expensive commodity, printer ink, represented a failure of governance. The duke might have had use for some advice a friend once gave me: never throw a knackered printer away, keep it in a cupboard with a hammer, so that when, right on deadline, the current model coughs up another comedic error code, satisfying punishment can at least be exacted on one of its immediate forebears.

## **What goes around**



The M25: stasis, not transit. Photograph: Steve Parsons/PA

Ever since its publication nearly 20 years ago, Iain Sinclair's masterpiece *London Orbital*, his wayward walking pilgrimage around the hinterland of the M25, has read like prophesy of the way we live now. It was Sinclair's contention that to understand the true life of the metropolis, you should examine not the centre but the margins – the places where stories all ended up, like litter blown against the capital's perimeter fence. The spectacle of environmental protesters supergluing their hands to the asphalt in the cause of loft insulation was made for Sinclair.

The only mystery about the protesters might have been why they chose this motorway, the slowest in Europe (average speed 24mph), to stage their glue-in. In any motorist's mind's eye, the M25, the world's biggest car-park, already means stasis rather than transit. The jams caused by the protesters were just today's reason to sit still in traffic.

Tim Adams is an Observer columnist

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## By signing up Emma Raducanu, it's game, set and match to Tiffany

Catherine Bennett



Emma Raducanu attends a party hosted by British Vogue and Tiffany.  
Photograph: David M Benett/Getty Images

Sun 26 Sep 2021 02.00 EDT

Like many men studying Emma Raducanu's victory at the US Open, one writer found himself focusing on one particular part of her body – her “athletic frame”, as the former table tennis champion Matthew Syed called it.

“I've just been looking at photographs of Emma Raducanu again, this time focusing on her upper chest,” Theo Hobson, a theologian, [wrote in the Spectator](#). He had spotted the player wore a cross. It interested him deeply. “To what extent is it legitimate to inquire into this?”

To an incredible and unlimited extent! The sparkly cross, along with earrings and a bracelet, was placed there by the jewellers Tiffany, precisely for millions of viewers to notice it, as Hobson did, in the final. This company, long established but recently consumed by the French LVMH luxury goods conglomerate, has now appointed the brilliant Raducanu its “[house ambassador](#)”, for a sum assumed to be enormous. “I wore the ring, bracelet, earrings and cross necklace throughout the tournament,” Raducanu said, when the deal was announced last week. “These pieces will always be very special to me.”

But identical pieces are also, happily, available on the Tiffany website. Should Hobson want the £2,750 “[cross pendant](#)” in 18k gold with “round brilliant diamonds”, it is still for sale online, though of course meeker price points are available. What about a heart-shaped Tiffany keyring, one that “evokes timeless elegance”, for £175?

That Raducanu should now, joining Tracee Ellis Ross and Anya Taylor-Joy, have a key role in displaying and marketing Tiffany's wares on behalf, ultimately, of LVMH's owner, Bernard Arnault, the world's third richest man, was last week celebrated as an honour hardly less dazzling than her tennis title. For that, after all, she only had to practise for thousands of hours, with parents she has described as “[very tough to please](#)”. To win the Tiffany deal, she needed to be the sort of tennis champion who could manifest, 48

hours after winning, at the Met gala; the kind of 18-year-old who is slurped over by commentators, courted by Anna Wintour, and also, only intensifying the echoes of ingenues pursued in Henry James novels, by Wintour's transatlantic rival, *Vogue*'s Edward Enniful.

Fashion magazines, such as *Grazia* and *Elle* – “Just when you thought Emma Raducanu’s year couldn’t get much better” – were willing to parrot PR drivel about the “Tiffany family”, as the company calls the celebrities, also including Beyoncé and Jay-Z, currently considered worth their hire by an old brand with its eye on younger customers. One campaign featuring denim jackets and called “[Not Your Mother’s Tiffany](#)” does appear to have had some success in depicting this arm of LVMH as edgy. Happily, most of this target audience is unlikely to remember some disparaging comments made about the then 16-year-old Greta Thunberg by Arnault. Thunberg’s approach, [Arnault complained](#) in 2019, “has a demoralising side to it for young people. She’s not proposing anyway, aside from criticism.” For his part, Arnault, then aged 70, hoped to show that the market in Veblen goods, whose appeal resides in their artificially inflated prices, could nonetheless be sustainable.

There is speculation following Raducanu’s appearance at the Met gala in an amorphous contraption by Chanel that another Veblen ambassadorship is in sight. Either way, the player’s half-Chinese, half-European heritage, along with her youth, prodigious talent and charm, could have been designed to make her the saviour of any elderly luxury brand trying to find a way back from the pandemic. Environmental concerns that Arnault would probably find demoralising have only added to the difficulties confronting the luxury industry when consumers are unable either to visit shops or to parade their chosen brands. Is a brand in private, unrecognised by even one other awed adept, even a brand?

But the miracle of Raducanu coincides with other signs that luxury buying may have emerged from the pandemic in better shape, thanks to financially unscathed patrons with yet more money and time on their hands than the humbler kind. Some brands, such as [Chanel](#), simply raised their prices. Raducanu’s jewellery deal, announced at a British *Vogue*-Tiffany fashion week party, arrived at a time when even the generally unlamented it-bag

seems to have risen, judging by [fashion week reports](#), from the dead, untouched by both sustainability and any post-pandemic chat about values.

For all that the Tiffany deal reflects and rewards Raducanu's personal achievement, its actual purpose – gilding the profits and reputation of this LVMH component – looks less obviously worth celebrating. Reputationally, outside the luxury industry and its dependent magazines, it even looks a bit one-sided. Tiffany/LVMH gets to inject her radiance and youthful but still blissfully apolitical energy into a range of bling that hasn't looked that interesting, even to mothers, since the 80s. Raducanu gets tons of money, free jewellery hire and, with this early descent to the sulphurous realms of How To Spend It, alliance with a company whose CEO, though hostile to her contemporary Thunberg's "doom-mongering", has been less keen to judge Donald Trump. Opening an LVMH factory, [Trump told Arnault](#): "I could learn something from you about branding."

As for honour: Tiffany was happy to be associated, before Raducanu came along, with Kendall Jenner, even after the Kardashian star appeared in a [sensationally misconceived](#) Pepsi advert. There are worse faults, of course, for a heritage brand than a Kardashian association, which predated LVMH's acquisition of Tiffany. Raducanu, both of whose parents work in finance, will be quite capable, along with her reportedly illustrious agent, of setting the financial security of the Tiffany deal against the possible disadvantages – to her – of this rapid transformation from unbranded newcomer into a luxury goods emissary, never not accessorised with something stupidly expensive. The latest [pair of earrings](#) cost £37,000. If it's premature to interpret this deal as endorsing the LVMH family's undeviating commitment to conspicuous consumption, it's also hard to see it as anything else.

Catherine Bennett is an Observer columnist

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[Opinion](#)[Feminism](#)

## **‘White feminists’ are under attack from other women. There can only be one winner – men**

[Sonia Sodha](#)





Guilt and shame make solidarity harder to build. Illustration: Dominic McKenzie/The Observer

Sun 26 Sep 2021 03.00 EDT

Blaming women for the ills of the world might appear an odd feminist call to action. But an idea gaining traction is that the “white feminism” dominant in the United States and the UK is not only a driving force of societal racism, but responsible for a host of other bad things, from the war on terror to the hypersexualisation of women in popular culture, to the dreadful abuses of power we see in international aid. It’s part of a growing tendency on the left to look for scapegoats at the cost of building the solidarity needed for social change.

This is not to downplay the extent of racial inequalities in the UK, the way they affect women of colour and the structural racism that lies behind them. But it’s quite a jump to move from the observation that women are no more immune to racism than men to holding the feminist movement accountable for the plight of women of colour around the world. A new book, *Against White Feminism*, by [Rafia Zakaria](#), makes precisely this case. To stack up the argument, she stereotypes feminism beyond recognition as a shallow, consumerist and exclusionary movement dominated by selfish white women

who care little about scrutinising the male violence perpetrated by white men.

Feminism is a broad movement: look for it and you'll find superficial strands. But to reduce feminism to this alone is to ignore the British tradition of radical grassroots feminism that has brought women of all colours and classes together in the fight against patriarchal male violence. In one of the best-known examples, Justice for Women and Southall Black Sisters worked together from the early 1990s to get long prison sentences overturned for women driven to kill their abusive partners following the most dreadful prolonged abuse.

In the case of [Kiranjit Ahluwalia](#), Southall Black Sisters led with Justice for Women standing alongside. “It brought women – black and white, young and old, professionals and survivors – together in a wonderful moment of unity to highlight injustice and change things for the better,” says Pragna Patel, a founding member of Southall Black Sisters. “There were differences, but it was only through solidarity with each other that we could create change. The black feminist tradition has challenged feminism’s blind spots around race and class not in the interests of separatism, but to strengthen our collective movement.” The women’s refuge movement provides similar examples.

Attacks on white feminism are the product of a broader divide in the anti-racist movement about the best route to social change. Is it by making well-intentioned people who are unwittingly complicit in replicating inequalities feel guilt and shame for their “white privilege”? Or by inviting them to feel a shared sense of injustice in a way that emphasises common belonging to a movement, without glossing over difference? Feminists such as Zakaria fall into the former camp. But guilt and shame can make solidarity harder, not easier, to build.

The mainstream anti-racist left has a bad track record of hanging out to dry women of colour challenging misogyny within their communities, for fear of upsetting cultural sensitivities. Examples abound: the *Newsnight* investigation that revealed several Muslim female councillors who have experienced pressure not to stand from Asian Labour party members, which prompted the Muslim Women’s Network to call for an inquiry into systemic

misogyny in the party that was met with overwhelming silence; the smears the MP Naz Shah has faced from local Asian men in her party; the negative response to the anti-FGM activist Nimco Ali from her local Labour party. The white privilege discourse makes this more not less likely, because it makes people more scared of being culturally insensitive.

Indeed, reading Zakaria's book, one gets the impression that white women can't win, damned for speaking only of their own experience, but scolded for getting involved in fights that aren't their own. The irony is that radical feminism has often run counter to the mainstream left on this precisely because it regards female oppression as cross-cultural. Intimate partner killings, female genital mutilation or forced marriage: it's all patriarchal violence at the hands of men, a universal female experience.

It would be obscene to suggest that a white 18-year-old leaving care could ever be considered more privileged than me

Not only this: white feminism critiques strengthen patriarchal forces by falling into the trap of the privilege Olympics. We need analysis of outcomes by class, race and sex to understand the extent of inequalities, but it should never be overextended to imply all white women are more privileged than women of colour (consider how obscene it would be to suggest that a white 18-year-old leaving care could ever be considered more privileged than me).

Yet that is exactly what lazy polemics about terrible white feminism do: they empower men to use the fact that all white women are supposedly high up in the privilege pecking order to tell middle-aged women to shut up or, even worse, accuse them of weaponising their abuse and trauma. It doesn't help women of colour, either: it implicitly posits Asian male crime against women as somehow lesser than white male crime, because Asian men are victims too.

This is part of a broader trend on the left towards fracture, where attacking people with whom you share quite a bit in common is now seen as a laudable displacement activity for the Southall Black Sisters/Justice for Women approach to real change. It is telling that Zakaria chose not to engage with a critical book review by Joan Smith, the longstanding

campaigner against domestic violence, instead launching a personal attack on her “[old and white](#)” appearance.

“Be kind” is not a platitude, it is a political slogan, for without kindness, how can we foster the solidarity that must be built, not demanded? Making well-meaning but imperfect people feel terrible about themselves may sell books, generate outrage and indulge some people’s masochistic tendencies, but the one thing it will never ever do is change the world for the better.

Sonia Sodha is an Observer columnist

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## OpinionScience

# How ancient footprints shed light on America's first teenagers

Robin McKie



Fossilised footprints from more than 21,000 years ago at the White Sands national park in New Mexico. Photograph: AP

Sun 26 Sep 2021 02.30 EDT

The White Sands of New Mexico have been a popular tourist attraction for a remarkably long time. Modern travellers come to gaze at the vistas of glistening, pure dunes of gypsum that stretch for miles in all directions.

But previous visitors had very different goals. Thousands of years ago, *Homo sapiens* came here to hunt giant sloths, mammoths and other megafauna. In doing so, they left signs of their presence whose analysis now promises to transform our understanding of the populating of our planet.

In a paper in *Science* last week, palaeontologists outlined data that suggests men, women and children strode across the White Sands more than 21,000 years ago. In providing such a date, the team added more than 6,000 years to previous estimates of humanity's earliest known appearance in America. Population geneticist Pontus Skoglund, of the Crick Institute, London, described the discovery as "absolutely groundbreaking".

For decades, it was reckoned Siberian hunter-gatherers did not leave Asia – across land now covered by the Bering Strait – to reach America until the end of the last ice age, around 15,000 years ago. Now it appears humanity had arrived much earlier.

The evidence for this reassessment of *Homo sapiens*' last great continental conquest stems not from old stone tools or bones but from ancient footprints preserved in White Sands. Humans who strode close to lakes there left damp footprints that hardened and were then covered with more sand. Thousands of these markings criss-cross the landscape.

Crucially, layers of ditch grass seeds were also buried over the millennia. By carbon dating seeds found above and below one set of footprints, the scientists were able to show they had been made between 21,000 and 23,000 years ago, long before the end of the last ice age..

Previous claims about finds that have suggested early dates for America's settlement have been generally treated with scepticism. By contrast, the footprints' research has been hailed. They provide "a very compelling case" for an early dating of humanity's American arrival, Spencer Lucas, a palaeontologist at the New Mexico Museum of Natural History and Science, told *Nature*. "That's a game-changer."

It is less clear how humans managed to reach New Mexico when the last ice age was still worsening. These were bitterly inhospitable times, though it is possible groups of hunter-gatherers passed through a corridor that separated the main ice sheets that were then covering North America. Alternatively, they may have moved southwards along America's west coast, possibly in boats, on a route that is known as the Kelp Highway.

However, there is more to this intriguing research than merely finding a new date for the populating of America, scientists stress. These footprints in the sands of time also have a lot to tell us about human behaviour in general.

It was the equivalent of parents at school gates, standing and chatting, while their children run round the playground

For a start, there is the issue of the age of the people who made those footprints. “Most that we see here were made by adolescents,” says Professor Matthew Bennett, of Bournemouth University, lead author of the *Science* paper. “These were America’s first teenagers and they were hanging out together as they do today. The only thing missing then was a smartphone.”

Ancient preserved footprints have been found in many other areas and, intriguingly, those of young people, children and teenagers often predominate. “Older adults tend to keep still and not waste energy,” says Dr Sally Reynolds, another member of the Bournemouth University team.

“Young people move about all the time and as a consequence leave a lot more footprints. It was the equivalent of parents meeting at school gates, standing and chatting, while their children run round the playground.”

It is also possible that the White Sands teenagers may have been helping adults in tracking and hunting the megafauna that roamed the region, huge creatures that would have included giant sloths and mammoths as well as dire wolves and other animals. “The teenagers would have provided the non-skilled labour for these hunting groups,” adds Bennett.

Previous studies of other sets of White Sands footprints, also carried out by Bournemouth University researchers, have provided some surprisingly vivid details about the lives of people who came to the region 20,000 years ago. These snapshots of ancient lives include footprints of a woman who clearly set off across the sands with a toddler in her arms, which she occasionally put down, causing little footprints to appear beside hers. It is a tender insight into our ancestors’ behaviour, which also indicates that humans were very confident of their safety in the open.

“Humans must have quickly established themselves in White Sands,” adds Reynolds. “We evolved in Africa, where we were not apex predators. We had been the prey of others. So it is fascinating to see that by the time we reached America, we had become dominant hunters.”

The dangers posed by *Homo sapiens* was clearly appreciated by other animals there. One set of prints clearly shows a giant sloth avoiding a group of hunters. And such data is likely to be crucial in future explorations of the links between ancient humans and the extinction of megafauna such as the mammoth.

Our ancestors are often blamed for wiping out these creatures after the end of the ice age, although other researchers suggest that climate change could also have been involved, killing off the mammoth and giant sloth. “White Sands now gives us a chance to study our relationship with megafauna and get a far better understanding of what our ancestors did to these creatures,” adds Reynolds.

- Robin McKie is science and environment editor of the Observer

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[Observer letters](#)[Liberal Democrats](#)

## Letters: Liberal Democrat win was all about nimbyism



Lib Dem leader Ed Davey after his party's win in the Chesham and Amersham by-election in June. Photograph: Steve Parsons/PA

Sun 26 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

Andrew Rawnsley states that the Lib Dems won the Chesham and Amersham by-election as the voters in the constituency considered them to be a refreshing change from the incompetence and lies of Johnson ([“Tories repelled by Johnson can help the Lib Dems knock down the blue wall”](#), Comment). The reality is that the nimbys of Buckinghamshire voted Lib Dem in the belief that they would scupper the proposed changes to the planning rules proposed by the Tories. They couldn't care less about the ethics of Johnson just so long as the value of their houses doesn't go down. Bizarrely, the next general election will be won by the party promising to build the fewest houses.

**Stuart Cadman**

Preston

Andrew Rawnsley presses the [Liberal Democrats](#) to win over soft Conservatives in the blue wall. Should they not also be trying to recruit some of the prominent liberal Tory politicians, such as Dominic Grieve, David Gauke and Justine Greening, who have been rejected by the current regime? There is a strong 19th-century precedent in the path of the Peelites, who inhabited a wilderness after the repeal of the corn laws, until 1859 when they joined forces with the Whigs and Radicals to become the Liberal party. Along with Gladstone, they formed a significant part of the Liberal government of 1868 and presumably appealed to a liberal Conservative-voting constituency.

**Roger Truelove**

Sittingbourne, Kent

## **Swim with care**

Will Coldwell's article on free swimming fails to discuss one crucial aspect – the impact on nature ("In at the Deep End: the activist plunging into the wild swimming campaign", the Observer Magazine). Rivers, streams, lakes and, to a more limited extent, reservoirs are home to many animals and plants with very specific habitat needs, and many are endangered species.

The wild swimming campaign should think about this carefully, proactively and collectively – for example, selecting sites with due regard to vulnerable species and locations (that means learning about them and signposting them within the community), establishing a code of conduct for people in and around the water and monitoring the impact of wild swimming on ecology (assessing sites before plunging in, and studying the impact; maybe working with the county wildlife trusts). Otherwise it is just going to be rave culture in the water and nature, as usual, will pay the price for human self-indulgence.

**Roy Smith**

Burntwood, Staffordshire

## **Antisocial? No, overcrowded**

I have been a community mediator for many years and have come to realise that the anger and frustration that often drives neighbours to behave in “antisocial ways” is a combination of overcrowding, poor quality social housing and streets that were never intended to be stuffed with cars, bikes and large wheelie bins (“[Noisy neighbours spark 67% rise in police complaints](#)”, News). Paper-thin walls and the fashion for laminate flooring is a toxic combination when a bit of sound-absorbing carpet would be more effective and cheaper than sending antisocial behaviour officers round to insist that harried parents try harder to keep their toddlers quiet in the middle of the night. Young adults still at home fight with neighbours for space to park their car outside a house on a street that was never intended for three- or four-car families.

Of course there is genuine antisocial behaviour, but so much of the anger and frustration that boils over when too many people and their belongings are crammed into spaces which are already full to overflowing is often more about poverty and social deprivation than about bad behaviour. Richer people in detached houses can avoid their neighbours behind high fences, install security cameras and park their cars off the road. “Levelling up” has many facets.

**Judy Bavin**

Urmston, Manchester

## Blight didn't cause famine

For an article in which the writer is clearly calling for more evidence-based nuance in regulation, it's surprising that Nick Talbot promotes the myth that the 1840s famine in Ireland was caused by potato blight (“[Science can rescue farming. Relaxing gene editing should be just the start](#)”, Comment).

No, it did not. The blight destroyed the staple food of poor people, but the famine was largely caused by land reform failures, absentee landlords and a disinterested British government that continued to export other foodstuffs out of the country, reflecting its commitment to laissez-faire economic policies.

**Conor Niall O'Luby**

Bournemouth

## Off the boil

I must take issue with Jay Rayner's comments on bechamel and cauliflower cheese ("[Bechamel is the classic recipe I can never get right](#)", Observer Food Monthly). Cauliflower, either whole or florets, should never of course be boiled, or even par-boiled. It makes it soggy. Five minutes in the top of a steamer will leave the florets cooked, crisp, full of flavour and ready for Jay's – or his wife's – bechamel sauce.

**Rose Harvie**

Dumbarton, West Dunbartonshire

## Going under cover

Your article states that as many as half the travellers are now ignoring the stipulation to wear masks on the tube ("[To mask or not to mask? Opinion split underground](#)", News). If only half managed this. On my daily commute across London, boredom is relieved by counting those following the rules: the overground and Jubilee Line manage approximately 40% compliance, while Essex exceptionalism on the Shenfield-Liverpool Street trains sees a mere 20% take-up. Compliance falls at the weekend.

**Julia Collins**

Ilford, London

## Know when to quit

What a splendid article by David Mitchell ("[The small print says that you'll never win](#)", the New Review). My partner and I, a same-sex couple, were bullied out of sheltered accommodation. We lost confidence, peace of mind and lots of money. A local group advised us to take the matter to court, and had promised financial help as well as providing legal advisers.

However, because our health was affected we decided to drop everything and just sell up and leave. Since then, many people have said that we should have pursued the case and tried to get some recompense. So it was great to read David Mitchell's article. Please let him know how much it has helped.

**Sylvia Daly and Maggie Redding**

Brighton

# That's what I call bad luck

BB King had a “childhood bout of the mumps, causing an attendant swelling of his testicles, which were also gored by a ram on a farm, while further damage was caused by a sexually transmitted disease” (“[Father to 15 children... but were any of blues star BB King's offspring his?](#)”, News). No wonder he sang Everyday I Have the Blues.

**Toby Wood**

Peterborough, Cambridgeshire

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## For the recordUK news

# For the record

Sun 26 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

Jackie Weaver is the chief officer of the Cheshire Association of Local Councils, not a councillor, as she was described in the heading of an interview ([Q and A](#), 19 September, New Review, page 17).

A feature about clifftop hotels said Marsden Grotto in South Shields was created in 1782 when Jack and Jessie Bates used dynamite to make a cave house. While they used explosives, dynamite was not invented until the 1860s. Also, the Cliff Hotel in Cardigan has 76, not 78, rooms ([Living the high life](#), 19 September, Magazine, page 42).

An article about UFOs described Devil's Den in Arkansas as a national park; it is a state park (['What I saw that night was real'](#), 12 September, Magazine, page 18).

Malapropism corner: "With the prime minister and his cabinet publicly flaunting their own guidance, it is perhaps little wonder mask wearing has dropped significantly" ([No masks and no plan: a perilous winter awaits](#), 19 September, page 40).

Other recently amended articles include:

TS Eliot wrote *The Waste Land*, not The Wasteland ("[The London that time forgot](#)", 12 September, New Review, page 41).

[To mask or not to mask? Opinion split on London underground](#)

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

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[Opinion](#)[Keir Starmer](#)

## Dump the New Labour playbook, Keir Starmer, and set out your programme for radical change

[John McDonnell](#)



Keir Starmer: 'He has abandoned the platform on which he was elected Labour leader.' Photograph: House of Commons/PA

Sat 25 Sep 2021 15.00 EDT

When Jeremy Corbyn and I [stood down](#) from the leading positions in the Labour party, we agreed [Keir Starmer](#) should not be treated the way we were by some Labour MPs, doing all they could to undermine us.

Although it was a bit tongue in cheek, I said I would become an elder statesman and until this last week that is exactly the role I have tried to play,

offering constructive, and occasionally critical, support to the new leader and his team.

It's now, though, time for some hard talk. By the time [Labour's conference](#) ends, we could be just 18 months off a general election. Boris Johnson won't want to risk going to the polls in the last year of the electoral cycle and he'll be desperate to avoid exposure in the [Covid inquiry](#), which I doubt he can put off much longer.

So it's time for all [Labour](#) members to make a realistic appraisal of where we are electorally and why. When you have been in the frontline of two election defeats, no matter how close we came in 2017, you become pretty sanguine in assessing the party's electoral prospects.

Labour support [in the polls](#) is bouncing along behind the Conservatives with a corrugated trajectory. As each Johnson failure or ministerial gaffe is exposed, the Tory lead over Labour narrows, mainly because Conservative voters move to undecided. When coverage of the incident fades, the Conservative lead is restored.

The other consistent story from the polls is the worrying scale of the slide in [Starmer's personal ratings](#). This has been in a period when, in comparison with its treatment of past Labour leaders, the mainstream media have been relatively benign and the Conservative artillery has been barely trained on the opposition leader. Of course, being the leader of the opposition in a period of national emergency is always tough. People naturally expect politicians to suspend the usual knockabout party politics and pull together in a national crisis. Nevertheless, they still want to hear someone sticking up for them and offering the hope of something better when things go wrong, as they so badly have during the pandemic: the highest death toll in Europe and among the G7 second only to Trump's US.

For too long, they haven't heard the voice of Labour sticking up for them loudly enough and apart from a few sporadic policy announcements there hasn't been much of a Labour offer of something better. The result is that people have been left without knowing what or who the party stands for.

The fear is also that the public may now have a settled opinion of Starmer and, judging from the polls, it's not one that believes he is a [prime minister in waiting](#). He has abandoned the platform on which he was elected Labour leader, sidelined much of the broad team that got him elected and has reached for the Blairite playbook and resuscitated Blair's old crew of [Peter Mandelson](#) as his consigliere, combined with an appetite for internal factional purges that makes the Kinnock era look tame.

We are witnessing something akin to the performance of a Blairite tribute band

The result is we are witnessing something akin to the performance of a Blairite tribute band with the same old stunts and strategies being rolled out on schedule but with a great deal more venom. It starts with setting up a confrontation with his own party members to demonstrate the strong leader, exercising mastery over his party. Serious political analysis within the party is replaced with meaningless statements that have been focus-grouped to absolute banality. In prospect is a [policy review](#) that subjugates a meagre policy programme to the lowest common denominator demands of the rightwing media, big business and the City.

The New Blairites have had to adapt their strategy to the massive surge in membership under Corbyn and they have done so by an old-fashioned, ruthless purge of party members and an attempt to stitch up [rule changes](#) that neutralise the power of the membership.

The party conference has been planned as the major relaunch of Starmer. It's blindingly obvious that he has to change course if Labour is to stand any chance of winning the next election but rehashing New Labour just won't work. That model crashed to defeat in 2010, with Mandelson running the campaign, in which the party slumped to 29% of the vote. The truth is no faction of Labour has found a winning formula post-bank crash – and we need to unite with some humility to find that. Starmer became leader on that basis, but is squandering goodwill internally and looking increasingly out of touch to the electorate.

The next six months could determine Johnson's fate as the economic blizzard of [rising energy prices](#), increasing inflation and a public sector pay freeze blows in hard. This is the opportunity for Labour to come out fighting and break down that defensive shield around Johnson that has protected him so far.

That's why at this Labour conference it is so foolhardy to be blundering around stoking up internal disputes over the party's rulebook, when Starmer should be setting out the argument for radical change and the programme that would bring that change about. It should be a conference to inspire our members, not attack and demoralise them.

As it is, we've wasted five days now that have completely overshadowed important policy announcements by Lucy Powell [on housing](#) and by Angela Rayner and Andy McDonald [on workers' rights](#). All the while, the government has been floundering as petrol stations run dry and energy companies collapse. Before any attempt at a New Labour rerun, it might be best to consider the words of an old German philosopher: "History repeats itself, first as tragedy, then as farce."

- John McDonnell has been the Labour MP for Hayes and Harlington since 1997. He was shadow chancellor from 2015 to 2020
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# Headlines thursday 23 september 2021

- [Sabina Nessa London teacher thought to have been killed on way to meet friend, say police](#)
- [Live UK cost of living squeeze looms as Bank of England meets](#)
- [Energy crisis Gas firms may face windfall tax as crisis hits households](#)
- [Heidi Crowter Woman with Down's syndrome loses UK abortion law case](#)

## [UK news](#)

# ‘London streets are safe for women,’ say Met after Sabina Nessa killing



Police say Sabina Nessa left her home and walked through Cator Park in south-east London on the way to a pub to meet a friend at about 8.30pm last Friday. Photograph: AP

*[Jamie Grierson](#) [Jessica Murray](#) and [Sarah Marsh](#)*

Thu 23 Sep 2021 11.49 EDT

Scotland Yard has said London’s streets are safe for women as it investigates whether a primary school teacher was killed by a stranger who is still at large.

Sabina Nessa, 28, is suspected to have been murdered as she walked through Cator Park in south-east London, on what should have been a five-minute journey to a pub from her nearby home, at about 8.30pm last Friday.

Her body was found near the OneSpace community centre in the park off Kidbrooke Park Road, Greenwich, at 5.30pm on Saturday by a member of the public.

### What we know about Sabina Nessa's murder

Speaking from the crime scene, DCS Trevor Lawry, of the Metropolitan police, said London's streets "are safe for women", although he was unable to rule out that Nessa's killer could strike again.

Her killing, which follows the high-profile murders of [Sarah Everard](#) and the sisters [Nicole Smallman and Bibaa Henry](#), has once more prompted debate over the safety of women and girls on Britain's streets.

Lawry said he was "keeping a completely open mind" on the motives of the attacker but was concerned that they were still on the loose.

Asked whether the Met was worried that the killer could attack someone else, he said: "We have lines of inquiry that we're pursuing at the moment. It's always a concern that it may happen, but that's not something that we have any intelligence on at this time."

Asked whether he believed a stranger was behind the attack, Lawry added: "That's definitely a line of inquiry that we're looking at." He went on: "The streets are safe for women, I'd like to reassure the public around that, I'd like to make sure that people are free to walk around free from fear and my officers will make sure that that can take place."



The headteacher of the primary school where Nessa worked called her a brilliant teacher. Photograph: LinkedIn

Nessa is understood to have been heading towards the Depot bar in Pegler Square, Kidbrooke Village, when she was attacked. A postmortem examination, carried out on Monday into the cause of death, was inconclusive.

A man in his 40s who was arrested on suspicion of murder has been released under further investigation.

DI Joe Garrity, who is leading the murder inquiry, said: “Sabina’s journey should have taken just over five minutes but she never made it to her destination. We know the community is rightly shocked by this murder – as are we – and we are using every resource available to us to find the individual responsible.”

Nessa was raised in Sandy, Bedfordshire, and attended the University of Bedfordshire to study for her postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE).

A few doors down from the Nessa family home in Sandy, a neighbour, Carol Ball, said the whole street was in shock following the news. “What can you say? I spoke to her dad and he’s in a daze,” the 76-year-old said. “I’ve known her since she was just a little girl. She was lovely, so well-mannered

and well brought up, all the girls were. They all did well at school and with their driving.”

She said the family had lived on the street for at least 20 years. “They would talk to everyone down the road and the girls would play out on the road when they were younger. We’re just in shock, she was only 28.”

Another neighbour, who asked to remain anonymous, said: “They were a nice quiet family, I’ve known them a long time. I was absolutely shocked when I heard the news. I put a card through the door but they’ve got to be left alone to grieve.”

Colleagues and neighbours have paid tribute to Nessa. Lisa Williams, the headteacher of Rushey Green primary school in Lewisham, called her a brilliant teacher and said the school was “devastated”.

Annie Gibbs, the vice-chair of the Kidbrooke forum community group, said people in the area were shocked and scared. “We want people to respect and honour her life and make sure that we send a loud and clear message that we are a united community and this violent act isn’t going to divide us. Violence isn’t welcome here and we will stand up against it. Although many people didn’t know Sabina, our community is one,” she said.



Floral tributes at Cator Park in Kidbrooke, south London, near to the scene where Sabina Nessa's body was found. Photograph: Ian West/PA

Campaign groups have said that for too long the burden of women's safety has been on women, adding that a woman dies at the hands of a man every three days in England.

In July, the government released a strategy to help prevent violence against women and girls and promised better support services for minority communities, as well as a public health campaign that will focus on perpetrator behaviour.

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**Business live**

**Business**

# Bank of England warns energy price surge will push inflation over 4% – as it happened

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## Energy industry

# Gas firms may face windfall tax as energy crisis hits households



More than 1.5m households now being forced to find on to a new supplier and forced to pay hundreds of pounds more for their gas and electricity per year. Photograph: Jeff Gilbert/Alamy

*[Jillian Ambrose](#), [Rowena Mason](#) and [Aubrey Allegretti](#)*

Wed 22 Sep 2021 17.32 EDT

Another 800,000 households fell victim to the energy crisis on Wednesday with the collapse of two more suppliers, as ministers admitted they were considering a windfall tax on companies profiting from record gas prices.

The failure of Avro Energy and Green means that seven energy companies have gone bust in a little over six weeks, with a total of more than 1.5m households now being shunted on to a new supplier and forced to pay hundreds of pounds more for their gas and electricity a year.

With soaring gas prices threatening the viability of all but the biggest firms, the business secretary, [Kwasi Kwarteng](#), warned the government had to prepare for “long-term high prices”, and would consider “all options” to tackle the crisis.

Boris Johnson, speaking ahead of his speech to the UN general assembly in New York, said the crisis was the “growing pains of the global economy coming back to life”.

Pressure is mounting on ministers to find ways of providing some financial support for households, which are due to be hit with a £139 increase in bills next month – some of the most expensive energy bills on record.

Combined with the £20 universal credit cut and rising inflation, Labour and some Tory MPs have warned of a potentially catastrophic cost of living crisis.

On Wednesday, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation estimated a typical low income family would be £1,750 worse off by next April.

The energy market shock has also raised concerns for the UK’s struggling consumer supply chains and heavy industries such as steel, reigniting fears of empty supermarket shelves ahead of Christmas and a return to a three-day week for factories.

The government’s options include a cash grab from gas companies, big power generators and traders to help protect the millions of households whose energy supplier is likely to fail this winter.

Gillian Cooper, the head of energy at Citizens Advice, said the latest failures would “add to people’s worries at what’s already an extremely unsettling time”.

“Supplier collapses and rocketing energy prices, combined with the looming cut to universal credit, are creating huge amounts of uncertainty for millions of people,” she said.

Jonathan Brearley, the chief executive of Ofgem, added that the recent gas market price rises were “something we don’t think we’ve seen before, at this

pace”.

“We do expect a large number of customers to be affected. We’ve already seen hundreds of thousands of customers affected. It may go well above that,” he said.

Emma Pinchbeck, the chief executive of Energy UK, added that the crisis had exposed the vulnerability of the country’s retail energy sector, meaning even “good, well-run companies will fail”.

Kwarteng [told MPs on Wednesday](#) that the government was considering the Spanish government’s plan for a €3bn (£2.58bn) windfall tax on generators and energy traders that stand to gain from the energy crisis while homes and energy suppliers struggle.

“We’re looking at all options. I think what they’re doing in Spain is recognising that it’s an entire system. We’re in discussion with [energy regulator] Ofgem officials, looking at all options,” Kwarteng told the business select committee.

Avro Energy, based in Hinckley in Leicestershire, became the largest supplier to go bust after leaving 580,000 households stranded, while Newcastle-based Green left behind more than 250,000 customers.

Green collapsed just days after [admitting it would struggle to survive the winter](#) if the government refused to provide any support to smaller energy suppliers.

Green’s chief executive, Peter McGirr, told the Guardian there would be a “tsunami of more [collapses] to come” because small suppliers do not have deep enough pockets to weather the surge in costs without passing them on to their customers.

The government is considering paying larger energy suppliers to shoulder the cost of picking up stranded customers, but has said it [is unwilling to pay to prop up failing energy companies](#).

“What I don’t want to do is to give taxpayer money to companies which have come into the market only to exit the market after a year. I don’t think

that's responsible," Kwarteng said.

In total almost 2m households have lost their supplier this year, and this number is expected to spiral in the months ahead. The number of suppliers in the market is predicted by industry insiders to shrink from 70 at the beginning of the year to about 10 by the end of winter.

Surging energy market prices have already brought steelworks and fertiliser companies to a standstill, and threatened to derail the supply chain for carbon dioxide which is critical to the UK's food, drink and meat industries.

After days of increasingly desperate warnings from retailers, abattoir owners, beer and fizzy drink makers, ministers were forced to subsidise a US chemicals giant to restart its fertiliser factory on Teesside – to ensure vital supplies of carbon dioxide begin flowing again.

That rescue deal will cost taxpayers millions of pounds, environment secretary George Eustice admitted, and is likely to force up prices for shoppers. However, that deal only lasts for three weeks, and ministers have been unable to put a total price on the cost of propping up the factory.

Regarding the deal, Johnson, who refused to say if government support could continue after the three-week period, said: "It's a once in a century pandemic and we've had to cope with it in all sorts of extraordinary ways. This is just another part of it.

CF Fertilisers supplies food-grade CO<sub>2</sub> as a byproduct of fertiliser manufacturing, with the gas vital for food and packaging firms. Eustice said: "The reason why it is justified for the government is ... if we didn't, there would be a risk to the food supply chain. It's not a risk the government is willing to take."

Richard Griffiths, the chief executive of the British Poultry Council, said the deal was a "great relief" for the industry as it was only days away from running out of CCO<sub>2</sub>, which is used in the slaughter of birds, but added the higher cost of the making the gas will "ultimately feed through to food prices".

Kwarteng said: “I’m confident that we can get other sources of CO<sub>2</sub> in that period, there was an immediate crisis and the deal that we reached solved the immediate problem.”

Surging power prices and CO<sub>2</sub> shortages have heaped pressure on supply chains already creaking under staffing shortages, leaving retailers demanding urgent action from ministers to help them plug gaps in their workforces.

The shortage of HGV drivers, which is estimated to total about 100,000, has left gaps on shelves and forced grocers to offer generous pay deals to attract hauliers.

However, pleas from the food and drink industry for a short-term visa scheme to recruit overseas workers, including HGV drivers, to ease disruption in the food supply chain, has been rebuffed by Kwarteng, who told them to hire and retrain British workers instead.

Britain’s biggest supermarket warned the sector could be hit by panic buying in the run up to Christmas unless urgent action is taken to fix the shortage of HGV drivers.

Tesco’s distribution director Andrew Woolfenden told ITV: “Our concern is that the pictures of empty shelves will get ten times worse by Christmas and then we’ll get panic-buying.”

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## Abortion

# Woman with Down's syndrome loses UK abortion law case



Heidi Crowter (centre) and Máire Lea-Wilson speaking to the media outside court in London on Thursday. Photograph: Gareth Fuller/PA

*[Alexandra Topping](#) and agencies*

Thu 23 Sep 2021 07.37 EDT

A woman with Down's syndrome who took [Sajid Javid](#) to court over the UK's abortion law has lost her case in the high court.

Heidi Crowter, who [brought the case alongside Máire Lea-Wilson](#), whose son Aidan has Down's syndrome, and a child with Down's syndrome identified only as A, had argued that allowing pregnancy terminations up to birth if the foetus has Down's syndrome is discriminatory and stigmatises disabled people.

They challenged the Department of Health and Social Care over the [Abortion](#) Act 1967, which sets a 24-week time limit for abortions unless there is “substantial risk” of the child being “seriously handicapped”. At a two-day hearing in July they argued it interfered with the right to respect for private life in article 8(1) of the European convention on human rights (ECHR), including the decision to become or not to become a parent and “rights to dignity, autonomy and personal development of all three claimants”.

But in [a ruling on Thursday \[pdf\]](#) their case was dismissed by two senior judges, who ruled that the legislation was not unlawful and aimed to strike a balance between the rights of the unborn child and of women.

Lord Justice Singh and Mrs Justice Lieven said: “The issues which have given rise to this claim are highly sensitive and sometimes controversial. They generate strong feelings, on all sides of the debate, including sincere differences of view about ethical and religious matters. This court cannot enter into those controversies; it must decide the case only in accordance with the law.”

Crowter said it was a “sad” day but vowed to keep on fighting. Speaking alongside her husband, James Carter, outside the Royal Courts of Justice, she said: “The judges might not think it discriminates against me, the government might not think it discriminates against me, but I’m telling you that I do feel discriminated against and the verdict doesn’t change how I and thousands in the Down’s syndrome community feel.”

During the hearing Jason Coppel QC, representing the claimants, told the high court Down’s syndrome was the single largest justification for “late-term abortions” under the [Abortion](#) Act.

The judges said the evidence they had heard “powerfully” showed that there were families who positively wished to have a child even if they would have severe disabilities, but not every family would react that way.

They added: “[T]he ability of families to provide a disabled child with a nurturing and supportive environment will vary significantly. The evidence is also clear that, although scientific developments have improved and

earlier identification may be feasible, there are still conditions which will only be identified late in a pregnancy, after 24 weeks.”

The judges said women other than the claimants could see their “choices [...] curtailed (and potentially made criminal)”.

The ruling stated: “There is powerful evidence before this court of families which provide a loving environment to children who are born with serious disabilities but we do not know what would happen, in a counterfactual world, in which some women have been compelled by the fear of the criminal law to give birth to children who will not be loved or wanted.”

The issue was better debated in parliament than dealt with in litigation, they said.

Lea-Wilson said: “Today’s high court judgment effectively says that my two sons are not viewed as equals in the eyes of the law. People with Down’s syndrome face discrimination in all aspects of life, with the Covid pandemic really shining a light on the dangerous and deadly consequences this can have.”

She said the ruling condoned discrimination and would cement the belief in society that the lives of people with Down’s syndrome were not as valuable. She said she did not regret bringing the case because it had “helped raise awareness around the wonderful lives people with Down’s syndrome and their families lead”, and had helped to dispel some negative stereotypes.

Crowter compared the claimants’ battle to William Wilberforce’s fight against slavery. “[W]hen the going got tough, he kept going, and I’m going to do the same, because I want to succeed in changing the law to stop babies like me ... being aborted up to birth, because it’s downright discrimination,” she said. “I’m not giving up, let’s do this.”

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## **On thin ice: how The Alpinist captured the terrifying climbs of Marc-André Leclerc**



‘The things Marc-André was climbing often fall down at the end of the day’  
... the Canadian takes the ice route up. Photograph: Jonathan Griffith



[Sam Wollaston](#)

[@samwollaston](#)

Thu 23 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

An insect-like creature is climbing a wall. The wall is made of ice – not regular, firm ice, but ice with spikes and cracks and gaps in behind. The creature has extended arms like a mantis, with sharply angled ends that hook into the ice, as well as spikes on its feet to kick in. Still, it doesn't look very secure: the ice creaks and bits break off and fall. The creature feels around for somewhere else to stick its hooks and spikes, then continues upwards – intently, methodically, almost mechanically. It is both beautiful and absolutely terrifying.

When the camera pans out, it's even more terrifying, because of the sheer size of this frozen wall. It is vast and vertiginous, the creature a tiny dot creeping upwards, a gnat in a sweeping sub-zero landscape. Except that this gnat has no wings: if it falls, it falls. Nor does it have a rope, because it's not a gnat or even an insect, but a man – a Canadian by the name of Marc-André Leclerc, climbing solo in the Rockies with crampons and a pair of ice-axes.

Leclerc is the subject of *The Alpinist*, a gripping new documentary by Peter Mortimer and Nick Rosen, whose previous films include [The Dawn Wall](#)

and [Valley Uprising](#), two giants of the climbing genre. The former captures the agonies of Tommy Caldwell and Kevin Jorgeson as they spend weeks ascending – and vertically camping on – a 3,000ft cliff in Yosemite. The latter is a riotous and occasionally tragic look at how rock-climbing and wingsuit-flying took hold in the same Californian National Park seven decades ago, confounding both the police and gravity.

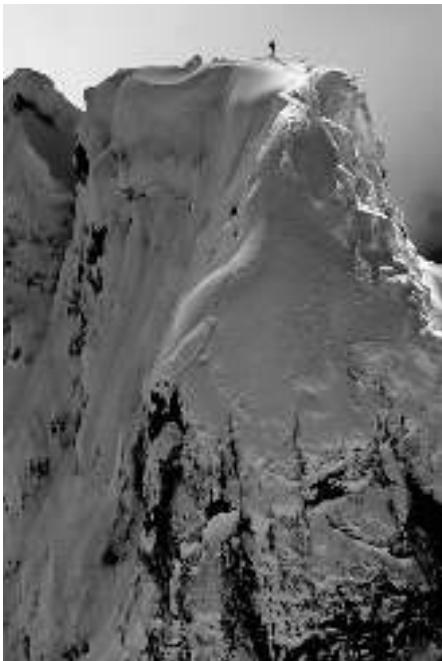


‘An infectious joyfulness’ ... Leclerc sets up camp. Photograph: The Alpinist

When Mortimer and Rosen embarked on *The Alpinist*, Leclerc was pretty much unknown outside of the climbing community in Squamish, a town in British Columbia surrounded by mountains. He sought not publicity but adventure, just went out and did these outrageous climbs, generally alone. But it was precisely this pure approach to climbing, along with his obscurity and astonishing talent, that attracted the film-makers. “It was like if we discovered Neymar playing beach soccer down in Brazil,” says Mortimer on a video call from Boulder, Colorado. The plan was to follow Leclerc and see where he took them. Which was not always easy.

Leclerc, then 23, could be a frustrating subject, sometimes forgetting to tell them he was disappearing into the Ghost River Wilderness of Alberta, or heading to Alaska to climb with his girlfriend Brette Harrington, an elite

climber herself. Sometimes he forgot on purpose: when Leclerc went off to do the first ever solo ascent of the [Emperor Face of Mount Robson](#), at 3,954m the highest peak in the Canadian Rockies, he didn't tell them because he didn't want them there. "It wouldn't be a solo for me if somebody was there," he says in the film. "It wouldn't even be remotely close to the adventure I was looking for."



'He was just having these outrageous experiences by himself in the mountains' ... Leclerc summits an icy peak. Photograph: Clark Fyans

Mortimer compares the experience to making a wildlife documentary. "It's like filming a wolf in the wild," he tells me. "Just being there, tracking it, knowing where it's going to go and getting in the best position. Definitely not distracting – once we're there, we're stagnant."

Rosen, also in Boulder, reiterates the point: they did nothing to rob Leclerc of his focus, nor did they make him do anything he wouldn't have done had the camera not been there. Then, on top of the ethical issues, there were all the extraordinary logistical ones of filming while clinging to a fragile frozen waterfall or dangling from an overhanging granite wall. "We're working with a very small group of cinematographers who are also really skilled alpine climbers, the best in the business," says Rosen. "And that world is so

small, they also happen to be friends and climbing partners of Marc-André, so he feels comfortable up there.”

Probably more so than when a camera is pointed at him on the ground. “I’m Marc-André Leclerc, I’m a climber … generally speaking,” he says, blinking and squirming with embarrassment. But his dorkiness, his wonky-toothed smile, his Butt-Head laugh all add to his appeal. He might not be the greatest of talkers, but there’s an infectious joyfulness about him. And as well as the stunning and buttock-clenching climbing sequences, some of the loveliest scenes in the film are Leclerc hula-hooping with Squamish climbing scene legend [Heyv Duty](#), from Yorkshire (does he really need subtitles?); goofing around with his girlfriend in a bivouac hanging from a cliff; and playing with the kid of the owner of a hostel in Patagonia.

Comparisons with the brilliant 2018 Oscar-winning documentary [Free Solo](#) are inevitable. [Alex Honnold](#), the climber that film made a star of for his rope-free ascent of Yosemite’s 3,000ft [El Capitan](#), is a big Leclerc fan and one of the talking heads in The Alpinist. (As Rosen says, Honnold now “side-hustles in explaining climbing to the world”.) Speaking to me from his home in Las Vegas, Honnold points out that there are more variables and therefore more risks in Leclerc’s climbing. “Ice changes hour by hour,” he says. “It’s either freezing or thawing. Rock is mostly permanent. The route I climbed on El Cap will probably remain the same for the next 50 years. The things Marc-André was climbing often fall down at the end of the day.”

But The Alpinist isn’t just Free Solo with snow and ice – Freeze Solo, if you like. The two climbers are very different characters for starters. And, as Honnold points out, climbing may be hitting the big time – it made its debut as an Olympic sport in the summer and climbing gyms are springing up everywhere – but Leclerc’s approach is a throwback to a more romantic, philosophical alpinism of the past. “It was not competitive,” Honnold says. “It was not commercialised in any way. He was just having these outrageous experiences by himself in the mountains.”



‘I met Marc when he was 19 and I was 20 and we just started climbing together’ ... Brette Harrington and Leclerc. Photograph: Brette Harrington

And then *The Alpinist* takes a devastating change of course. In March 2018, as filming neared completion, Mortimer and Rosen got news that Leclerc had gone missing while climbing with a local man named Ryan Johnson in Alaska. Harrington, who was in Australia at the time, raised the alarm after not hearing from him when expected. She immediately flew to Alaska, as did the film-makers and other friends, for an agonising wait as bad weather prevented any attempts at search and rescue. The film goes from being a joyous celebration of the outdoors and adventure to a stark reminder of the risks: the delicate cornice on which Leclerc and others tread, with whooping ecstasy on one side and a dark chasm on the other.

“I miss him more than I can express,” says Harrington, talking to me from Banff, Alberta. “We basically spent our entire adult life together. I met Marc when he was 19 and I was 20 and we just started climbing together, doing everything together. He was my best friend.”

The bodies were never found, just a piece of red rope poking out from a mass of heavy snow. After successfully summiting a new route on the [Mendenhall Towers](#), it seems they were consumed by an avalanche on the descent. Leclerc was 25, Johnson 34.

Everyone agreed the film should go ahead. After taking some time out, Mortimer and Rosen did two more interviews, with Harrington and Marc-Andre's mother Michelle Kuipers, but otherwise the structure remained the same. "We really felt we had to include the grief and the people who were most affected," says Mortimer. "We were trying to tell an honest complete story about this person – and that is part of the story."



'Our cinematographers are also skilled alpine climbers, the best in the business' ... a shot being set up. Photograph: Scott Serfas

A story not just of adventure and stunning vistas but one of loss, a point Honnold appreciates. "I've had a lot of friends die climbing but I haven't seen a lot of the aftermath. That was one of the more powerful parts of the film, seeing what effect Marc-Andre's death had – on his girlfriend, his family, his community."

It hasn't stopped Harrington from climbing. She's carrying on what they used to do together. "More than anything else," she says, "Marc loves ... loved to have fun." She does that, seems to forget and speaks about him in the present tense. "That's why I need to continue enjoying life."

Harrington has been back to mountains they climbed together, and to ones they were planning to, managing a fiendish first ascent of a route up

Patagonia's Torre Egger, which she named MA's Vision in his memory. While she never felt invincible before, she says, "I didn't realise how close death could be. Now I'm more sensitive to how fragile we are as people."

The Alpinist is released on 24 September.

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Illustration: Nathalie Lees/The Guardian

[The long read](#)

## ‘Iran was our Hogwarts’: my childhood between Tehran and Essex

Illustration: Nathalie Lees/The Guardian

by [Ariane Shahvisi](#)

Thu 23 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

When I was 12, a bespectacled boy with a shock of thick hair and his forearm in plaster gave me the first Harry Potter book. We were at that age when gifts need little occasion, and this marked the last day of our first year of secondary school. It was 1999, and the book was unknown to me. I was mildly embarrassed by its childish watercolour cover, but I dutifully packed it in my satchel when, two days later, my family flew to [Iran](#) for our six-week summer holiday. On the large, faded floor cushions of my grandparents’ apartment in Tehran’s central district, I read the book aloud,

flanked by my twin younger sisters, while the adults took their siesta and scorched air and car horns filtered through the mosquito blinds. We fell for it instantly, rooting for Harry as he was transported from life as a misfit in a gloomy suburban cupboard to the secret world of wizardry in which he found fellowship, adventure and belonging.

In the years that followed, I would read each successive book to my sisters. Even from the start, they were too old to be read to, but it was more gratifying and companionable to follow Harry's story together, and besides, we could only ever get our hands on one copy. Every now and then one of us would sigh and say, "Don't you feel sad when it hits you that Harry Potter isn't real?" We lived in Southend-on-Sea and attended the local school, an underperforming comprehensive housed in a squat brutalist building on the edge of a large council estate. Most of the pupils were poor, and many underfed, which gave rise to an unshakeable fog of hopelessness, shame and anxiety. While there were few children of colour, racism prospered alongside the many other casual cruelties. With our packed lunches and summer holidays, we were the lucky ones (as our parents often reminded us), but we nonetheless lived in hope that the prosaic, heartless world around us was just the opening scene of a story with a stronger narrative, a better set of characters, and the clean justice of magic.

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Returning from Iran, we would start the new school year back in [Essex](#) brimming with secrets, adapting our unorthodox capers into more mundane retellings. The International Statute of Wizarding Secrecy requires that wizards protect themselves and others by dressing and behaving as Muggles (those without magical ability) and giving no reason for suspicion. So it was that when Harry returned to his aunt and uncle, Petunia and Vernon Dursley, each summer, he had to bear their mistreatment and his cousin's bullying without recourse to his spells, and without the satisfaction of telling them that he was special in the other world. As any migrant or mixed person knows, *I am valued there* has no value here. Bodies migrate; worth, like home-boiled jam, doesn't travel well.

We kept our double lives studiously; so much was at stake. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps defend the Islamic regime, ensuring, among other things, that the Islamic dress code is observed in public spaces. (I was once chastised by guards for wearing a Manchester United cap instead of my scarf.) Yet to us, the Revolutionary Guards' defence of the law had nothing on the merciless policing of Essex schoolchildren, to whom difference was always deficiency. One September, a classmate suggested I was fibbing about visiting Iran, because wasn't it a desert or something, and I never returned with a tan. I was stunned into silence. Checkmate. (Derived from the Persian *shah mat*: the king is flummoxed.) How could I tell that group of freckled white children of St-George's-flag-flying parentage that I walked the streets of Tehran in hijab and manteau, and that when it's 40C outside, you drive into the mountains with a pan of dolma – vine leaves stuffed with seasoned lamb, rice and lentils – and picnic after dark, singing "*ay dolma dolma dolma/ kazanakay le kolma*" ("hey dolma dolma dolma, the pan is on my shoulder")? I demurred, said we didn't lie in the sun much.



Arianne Shahvisi's Iranian relatives dancing at a party. Photograph: Courtesy of Arianne Shahvisi

A girl in the year above asked why I went on holiday to a war zone. I could have told her the last war in Iran ended when we were infants, but we both knew she meant something else: *you are weird, your weirdness is tinged*

*with danger*. I held my tongue. Our English relatives would telephone to reproach my mother for allowing us to holiday in a place “where they chop off people’s hands”. She would roll her eyes, her pen nib tearing the notepaper beside the phone as she scribbled in quiet frustration.

More recently, one of the twins called me to say she’d met an Iranian boy in her halls of residence. On learning she was half-Iranian, he had called her a mudblood, pointing out that our British mother makes us half-Muggle. My sister and I laughed: we’d spent so long being too foreign and now we weren’t foreign enough. Not long after, I learned that my other sister had a name for white British people with a petty, conformist outlook. Not “Muggle”, which would be too friendly, too anodyne. No, they are “Dursleys”, and we’d grown up in the thick of their judgment.

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Our annual trips were marked by important rituals. Before we flew out, we would be given a few pounds to spend in the airport. My older sister would buy a copy of *Smash Hits* and a packet of Opal Fruits, while I’d save my money, adding it to my birthday and *Newroz* (Kurdish New Year) funds, which I’d spend in the bazaars, where it would go further. I’d check the exchange rate and would calculate my fortune in tomans. I had learned my Iranian numerals, and would interpret price tags on my own and enjoin my father to stop and haggle for a watch or a pair of trainers.

*Smash Hits* would be the centrepiece of our trip. At home in England, money spent on something as trivial as a magazine would be seen as wasteful. In the liminal space of the airport, such rules were lifted. My sister would leave it unread until we arrived, preferring, like me, to be fully present for the excitement of the plane journey, revelling in the continual arrival of small gifts that we’d stash, unopened, in our bags – a model plane, salted nuts, wet wipes, earphones – and the joy of whispering about other passengers or laughing at the awkward placenames the little aeroplane hovered over on the map. We found our fellow passengers rude and entitled. They complained about my younger sisters thrutching in their seats, about wailing babies, about the quality of rice in the meal. They were old, tetchy and uncomfortable, while we were pleased as punch, flying back towards our kingdom in big plush seats. As the plane entered Iranian airspace, women would mitheringly retrieve their Islamic dress from their hand

luggage. My sister and I would be passed silk scarves by our mother, and would tie them under our chins.

Iran was our Hogwarts, Heathrow Terminal 3 our platform 9¾, the great chubby jumbo jet with a griffin on its tail our gleaming Hogwart's Express. Diminished by the polite putdowns of the Dursleys of south-east Essex, in Iran we felt like minor celebrities. The first few days of the trip would be taken up with a stream of relatives visiting us at my grandparents' apartment. We'd greet them with two or three kisses on their cheeks (a custom known as *ruboosi*), receive a lavish box of delicate pastries, and would then help to serve them *sharbat* (rosewater cordial), tea, and fruit (an offering they would refuse at first, in line with the custom of *taarof*).

After a week or so, we'd settle into a routine of taking a mid-morning walk in the searing city air. My mother said the same thing every time, "mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the midday sun", which made us all feel joyous and silly as we traipsed along the empty pavements past the honking Paykans. My father would slap his palms on the hoods of the grimy cars and they'd stop so we could pick our way across. Sometimes, we'd go to an internet cafe, where our parents would wait beside humming fans while we conducted absurd conversations with our friends on MSN messenger for an expensive 15 minutes. My sisters would beg for *bastani*, and would eventually be bought ornate pots of ice-cream. I'd have a stick of corn from the grill of a street vendor, who'd dip the popping cob into a bucket of saltwater for a brief seasoning sizzle before presenting it to me. We'd pile into the bathroom on our return and use the bidet to rinse the blackness from our toes, bickering over whose feet were dirtiest, just as back home we'd fight over whose Coco Pops turned the milk darkest.

Lunch would be followed by the city-wide siesta. A thick lethargy would steal over the apartment as my grandparents and parents closed the doors of their rooms, leaving us children alone with a pile of bedding propped in the corner my grandfather's study. My grandfather was spindly and delicate and could not sleep with the air conditioning on, so the hushed rooms would be left to the ravages of the city's heat, bringing the dusty smell out of the carpets and sofas, and matting our hair to our temples as we whispered plans for an unsupervised afternoon.

This was the time for Smash Hits. Since it was hers, my older sister would rest the magazine in her lap while we arranged ourselves either side, pinching and elbowing each other in anticipation. The power went to her head. She would decide when the page was turned, or whose sweaty fingerprints were permitted to smudge the pages as we pointed in glee. She'd close it sternly if we made a fuss. Most importantly, she would decide which pages were promised to each of us. The ultimate fate of the magazine was to be cut into pieces, with the photos and lyrics sheets divided among us and our closest cousin, Parastoo, who helpfully had very different taste in music and men. By this point, the thing would be so overhandled and dog-eared, its staples long lost, that I had learned to beg my sister to remove my parts in advance. When I got my cuttings, I'd save them in the pages of a book to be glued into my school planner when the new year started.

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In Iran, our family was magically transformed. My timid older sister wore sparkly clothes that had no place in our lives back home, and danced into the small hours, shimmering across the Persian carpets of our relatives' flats, while I lurked in wonder, baffled as to where she learned to move so bewitchingly, always ready to scarper at the slightest hint that someone would expect me to do the same.



Shahvisi's family during one of their summers in Iran. Photograph: Courtesy of Arianne Shahvisi

My mother, usually quiet and reserved, would be nabbed by those wishing to practise their English, and would hold forth on all manner of unusual topics, baffling them with rare Lancashire apophthegms as she detailed the intricacies of British food or shopping habits. She grew up in a working-class family in Stockport, and our first family trip to Iran was only the second flight she'd ever taken, yet she adopted the unfamiliar customs and enthusiastic relatives without fuss, noting the parallels where others might have dwelled on the differences, and appreciating, in the absence of a milky brew and a biscuit, the incessant servings of *chai* and *gaz* (pistachio nougat). There is a family video of us children squealing in my uncle's pool, water steadily sloshing over the sides as we laughed and splashed around. Out of sight, but dominating the audio, my mother is going to great pains to describe the variations in the hardness of water between particular regions of the UK. She was overwhelmed by her popularity every summer. Her blue eyes and ruddy cheeks were cherished by our Iranian relatives, but so too was her openness and lack of pretension. She had little interest in jewellery, clothes or status, and this made her quaint and enchanting, even in the eyes of those who did. If everyone in Britain were like her, what an open, straightforward, happy place it must be.



Shahvisi's father around the time of his migration to the UK in 1976.  
Photograph: Courtesy of Arianne Shahvisi

My father migrated to the UK in 1976, three years before the Islamic Revolution. Aged 25, and too handsome for his own good, he had been sent by his older brother to make something of himself. He trained as a photographer, a graphic designer and then a schoolteacher. Like most immigrants, he also trained himself to take up as little space as possible, to make himself small enough to be tolerated. British masculinity demands brash, roguish coarseness, leaving my careful, sensitive father on the back foot. His encounters with men named Roofy John and Big Dave were mediated through football and home repairs, while he kept his more complex self cocooned for more favourable conditions.

In Iran, he became the man he had once been, and it gave us a sense of pride and security in the dubious way that restored masculinity tends to. Like a captive animal dropped back into the wild, we looked on in wonder as he thrived without us. We stumbled in our conversations with relatives, mastering the art of simplifying and carefully enunciating our English, using exaggerated gestures, and drawing on our small reserve of Kurdish and Farsi words. There were many comical scenes: my mother complaining to my perplexed grandmother about the “gasman” (she meant *magas*: the flies); my grandmother asking my mother whether we wanted “kitchen” kebabs for dinner (she meant chicken). In Iran, our communication became rudimentary, while my father’s wit and cleverness sharpened in his native tongues. He would have the whole room doubled over in laughter as he imitated the many regional accents of Iran, and would tell long, escalating anecdotes that we’d enjoy vicariously through our relatives’ facial expressions and exclamations.

Iranian masculinity is tactile and intimate. My father was jostled, teased and slapped on the back in ways that would have made us nervous back home. He beat his brothers at backgammon, built fire pits to cook kebabs, slept outdoors in a moth-eaten woolly hat, helped to capture snakes and scorpions and gave us tree resin to chew. The crushing weight of life as a foreigner was 3,000 miles away, waiting to be picked up in baggage reclaim on our return.

When I remember my twin sisters on those holidays, it is in that feral stage that is afforded only to youngest children in large families. The two of them ran wild in bright dresses until they were tucked into other people’s beds as

parties stretched late into the night. They were often seen wearing one oversized rollerskate each, careering dizzily around the porch and sending all the shoes awry, or bobbing in the plunge pool with a couple of floating watermelons.

I was the middle child, left to find a place for myself in the wide margin between my older sister's maturity and the twins' interminable babyhood. I was lauded for my cheekiness and chutzpah, called *namaki* (salty), and with a pinched cheek granted a freedom that would seed a ferocious independence in adulthood. The gender and respectability norms of life in the UK were adjourned, and without them new dimensions of mischief opened up to me. I nosed in the belongings of our relatives or roamed outdoors, burning things with my magnifying glass or rekindling abandoned barbecues on to which I'd throw discarded plastic, watching the corners lick in on shrinking text while alarming colours rose acrid into my lungs. An older cousin taught me how to make molotov cocktails, which we'd hurl uselessly over the high wall of my Uncle Khosrow's villa on the outskirts of Tehran into the dusty wasteland beyond. After swimming, I'd forgo my towel and stretch naked against the rough, baking stucco of the back wall of the villa, the sun refracting through the droplets on my squinted lashes, elated to have the light and air on my bare skin. I'd snap the cigarettes of uncles and replace them in their packs, drop cubes of cucumber on pedestrians passing beneath my grandfather's apartment, eat nothing but chicken and popcorn for days on end. Through early August, I'd lie awake until dawn, wedged between cousins on bedframes under the open sky, counting meteors as the Earth turned through the Perseids shower, yelling every time one flashed across the stars, and being shushed by indulgent aunties.

Every summer, our nervous little nuclear family became the heart of a sprawling community. Parties were thrown in our honour. Relatives usually separated by social status or ancient feuds broke bread together for the first time that year. My meek, over-protective parents wordlessly suspended the rules of home, relinquishing their responsibility to a rabble of adults and older cousins. We rejoiced in the ensuing chaos and stayed up till 2am, eschewed the buffets of rich, steaming dishes in favour of strawberry jelly and crisps. In England, we drank carefully diluted blackcurrant cordial, so pale it was almost grey. In Iran, we'd suck on sweating bottles of Parsi Cola

or Shad Noosh orangeade. Iran Air transformed us from being dark, weird, hairy, short kids with bad clothes to being fair, tall, cool and worldly. If there was wizardry in the world, this was it.



A night-time picnic in the mountains. Photograph: Courtesy of Arianne Shahvisi

All summer, we were smothered with affection. Distant relatives would seize me by the wrist and say “*Bah bah!*” (wow!), looking me up and down in wonder. I was applauded for my stature (though I was in the bottom row of the class photograph), the lightness of the hairs on my forearms (in school I was conscious of their thickness and reluctant to roll up my sleeves), my light ponytail (which was rounded up to black when described by British friends). The truth is that we were loved because we were family, but we were revered because we were whiter, and we lived in a place of whiteness, a place of money and opportunity. We were too young to see it then, but the same force that laced our days in Essex with anxiety swaddled us in confidence in Iran.

It would be many years before I would have the words to say it, but in the summer we were privileged, and privilege is a marvellous thing for growing girls. It fed the hope that that we held inside our fidgeting teenage shells until we were old enough to stop caring and choose our company more

carefully. Unlike my savings, privilege was not a transportable currency, but, like shame, it has a long shadow. We gritted our teeth through the homogeneity of school, ears burning at the racism, raging at the requirement that we make ourselves smaller, getting cleverer and cleverer because there was nothing else to do, buoyed up by the knowledge that special relativity takes metaphorical forms, too. Iran gave us the comfort that being special is relative, and we grew eagerly towards the light of other worlds.

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When you leave a house in Kurdistan, your hosts throw a bucket of water out over the doorstep. It's a superstition, a spell if you will, that makes tangible the hope that you will soon return. I'd remove my hijab and let it unfurl from the window as the car pulled away on the drive back to the airport, watching the seeping darkness on the steps until I could see it no more.

The thud when the plane hit the rain-speckled asphalt at Heathrow jarred us back into the glumness of life in Britain. The airport staff seemed to us like caricatures of Britishness: portly, red-faced people with beady, pale eyes who corrected your behaviour in icy, clipped tones. You could almost see the waves of restrained suspicion rolling off them as these scruffy girls skipped past with their pensive mother and moustached father. It was baffling that, in a country where everything worked so well, everyone was so irritated all the time.

Britain chafed at us for those first few days. My older sister would sob quietly as we drove back to Southend, the reality of the Muggle world and its indignities sliding back into the foreground. None of us attempted to soothe her. I looked away at the sterile, leaden lines of the M25 in this scentless place where nothing meant anything. What could we say? The spell was broken; my sister would have to live with that. My father would mutter a prayer in Kurdish as we tripped over a mound of letters into the sour air of our house, the thick carpets feeling alien underfoot. It was all so muted. Nothing magnificent could happen here.

I'd hover unhelpfully as my parents unclasped the suitcases, a fug of dried limes and fenugreek filling our nostrils. The holiday was over, but there was still the excitement of inspecting my fake branded school bag, shoes, and

trainers. They looked so real and enviable in Tehran's *Bazar-e Bozorg*, and my father had haggled hard for them while I stood by, getting worked up every time he pretended to walk away. But snatched out from between the bags of dried fruit and silver teacup holders, and held up to the weak light of the dining room, they were garish, wonky and cheap, too shiny to pass muster. Still, a fake Nike school bag was my only offering in the brutal status economy of our school, and my counterfeit Timberlands would pound the parquet corridors until the wooden soles had calloused my heels so completely that my parents forced me to wear an unbranded pair from the discount shop on the high street.

Our school years inched by cruelly, punctuated by long otherworldly summers. We were like tropical plants on a dim windowsill, shooting and wilting with the seasons. The future pressed in, and it became harder to find the time and togetherness to plan and make those long trips. The hopeful water on our relatives' doorsteps had long ago dried. So many of the elders whose bony grip I still feel around my shoulders died and we did not say goodbye, or thank you, or sorry. We stopped going to Iran, and it lived on in my subconscious like an unclaimed promise. I'd sometimes fleetingly mistake a low bank of cloud on the East Anglian horizon for a grey range of mountains, and my heart would shrink at the loss. They say Kurds have no friends but the mountains, so us mudbloods are half-friendless, with only clouds to look at.

Relations between Iran and Britain curdled, became hazardous. International sanctions were imposed in 2006, leaving my cousins to come of age in a country with a devalued currency, inflated costs of living and depressed wages. As the world opened up to us, it closed on them. In 2011, the UK severed relations with Iranian banks after a report on the Iranian nuclear programme. Sending money, letters and gifts became impossible, forcing us to rely on friends or acquaintances to make space in their suitcases and meet our relatives in the airport. The British ambassador was expelled, and the Iranian embassy in London closed, turning a privately tended discordance into something concrete and frightening. At one point, Iran Air planes were prevented from refuelling in the UK, and British Airways suspended its flights. Our Hogwarts Express was gone. As politics kept us from one home, it marginalised us in the other. The Dursleys of Essex nailed their racism to

the mast time and again. Anti-immigrant flyers landed on the doorstep, Ukip banners appeared in windows, two of the top five “vote Leave” constituencies were within a few miles of our family home.

And so the portal at platform 9¾ unceremoniously closed while we were busy with other things, committing us to full-time Muggledom, subsisting on the memories we share in private. I have not been back to Iran, and though in principle there is nothing to stop me, the complexities – personal and political – of navigating both identities as an adult have produced a state of fear, guilt, heartache and nostalgia that amounts to a kind of exile. For every migrant who says they’ll go back and never does, there’s a mixed person who says they’ll be both and can only be one. My thoughts often catch on that failure, like the trolley embedded in the bricks at King’s Cross, whole in neither one world nor the other, with a great thick wall down the middle.

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**The smart toilet era is here! Are you ready to share your analprint with big tech?**



Composite: Guardian Design; Volanthevist/William Andrew/Getty Images



[Emine Saner](#)

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Thu 23 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

For the past 10 years, Sonia Grego has been thinking about toilets – and more specifically what we deposit into them. “We are laser-focused on the analysis of stool,” says the Duke University research professor, with all the unselfconsciousness of someone used to talking about bodily functions. “We think there is an incredible untapped opportunity for health data. And this information is not tapped because of the universal aversion to having anything to do with your stool.”

As the co-founder of Coprata, Grego is [working on a toilet](#) that uses sensors and artificial intelligence to analyse waste; she hopes to have an early model for a pilot study ready within nine months. “The toilet that you have in your home has not functionally changed in its design since it was first introduced,” she says, in the second half of the 19th century. There are, of course, now loos with genital-washing capabilities, or heated seats, but this is basic compared with what Grego is envisaging. “All other aspects of your life – your electricity, your communication, even your doorbell – have enhanced capabilities.”

The smart toilet's time has come and it is a potentially huge market – in the developed world, everyone who is able to uses a toilet multiple times a day. Grego adds that she can “certainly envision a world” in which a toilet that does more than flush excreta “is available to every household”. There are numerous companies working on bringing that to market – a race to the bottom, if you will.

Smart toilet innovators believe the loo could become the ultimate health monitoring tool. Grego believes her product – which analyses and tracks stool samples and sends the data to an app – will provide “information related to cancer and many chronic diseases”. For general consumers, it will provide peace of mind, she says, by establishing “a healthy baseline”: “Having technology that tracks what is normal for an individual could provide an early warning that a checkup is needed.” For people with specific conditions, such as inflammatory bowel disease, the device could provide helpful monitoring for doctors. “It’s very difficult to know when to escalate or de-escalate treatment,” she says. “Stool-based biomarkers can provide that information.”

At some point, she thinks, a smart toilet could make lifestyle suggestions – it could tell you to eat more fibre or certain nutrients, for instance, or work out what kind of food triggered an uncomfortable gastric episode. “The science of nutrition is really moving in the direction of personalised nutrition,” says Grego. “Our technology will be an enabler of this, because you have information of what you eat, but we can make seamless the obtaining of information of what comes out.”

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The toilet technology being developed by Joshua Coon’s academic lab is focused on urine, because it is easier to sample and analyse. He describes himself as “a smart toilet enthusiast”, rather than someone who is racing to get a product to market, although he says he is in talks with industry leaders. “There are several thousand known different small molecules that exist in urine and they give you insight into what’s going on,” says Coon, who is a professor of chemistry and biochemistry at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

In [a small study he conducted](#), two people – one of whom was Coon – saved every urine sample for 10 days. “It turns out that you can detect compounds that are diagnostic of exercise [show you have done some]; you can see when an over-the-counter medication comes into the system and clears out; you can see molecules that correlate with how well you slept, how much fat you had in your diet, what your calorie intake was.”

The study wasn’t set up to look at long-term health, he says, but the implications are there. “Combining that with health records and lifestyle data, a lot of these molecules almost certainly could correlate with important disease risk and be able to much better predict a person’s need for intervention. That’s the vision, if one had the technical capability to make these measurements in a toilet.”



Numi, an ‘intelligent toilet’ designed by the US brand Kohler, at the Consumer Electronics Show in 2020. Photograph: Steve Marcus/Reuters

Similar developments have been made elsewhere. In 2018, [Panasonic launched a smart toilet in China](#) that tested urine and tracked body fat. This year, at the influential annual Consumer Electronics Show, the Japanese manufacturer Toto announced its “[wellness toilet](#)” – a concept, but something it is working on (it previously developed a toilet that analyses urine flow). Its sensors – including one for scent – would aim to detect

health problems and conditions such as stress, but also make lifestyle suggestions. In one image provided by the company, it envisioned the toilet sending you a recipe for salmon and avocado salad.

Researchers at the Stanford School of Medicine have been [working on technology](#) that can analyse faeces (including “stool dropping time”) and track the velocity and colour of urine, as well as test it. An article this month in the [Wall Street Journal](#) reported that the researchers have partnered with Izen, a Korean toilet manufacturer, and hope to have prototypes by the end of the year. In order to differentiate between users, Izen developed a scanner that can recognise the physical characteristics of whoever is sitting on the toilet – or, in the words of the researchers, “the distinctive features of their anoderm” (the skin of the anal canal). Apparently, your “analprint”, like your fingerprints, is unique.

Vik Kashyap says we are ready for it (well, perhaps not scanners – in Stanford’s study of user acceptance, “the least favoured module is analprint”). Kashyap’s company, [Toi Labs](#), has been working in the smart toilet space for about two decades and has a longstanding interest in gut health (he successfully treated his own ulcerative colitis by ingesting parasitic worms). He has seen other companies’ attempts at the smart toilet fail, but he thinks now may be the time. Not only has it become normal to track our data through wearables such as an Apple Watch or a Fitbit, but we are also less squeamish. Kashyap puts this down to the surge of interest and research in [the microbiome and our gut health](#), including poo, which “has made this topic less of a taboo”.

He also thinks the pandemic has accelerated matters – the run on loo roll highlighted the fact that people panicked about how they were going to wipe their bottoms, while laboratories have been testing [sewage to track the virus](#). “And then, finally, the cost of delivering sensor-based [Internet of Things](#) systems at home has come down considerably. Products like Alexa are well established and people are beginning to realise that their home is going to evolve over time.”

One company envisions its toilet sending you a recipe for salmon and avocado salad

Kashyap has developed a toilet seat, TrueLoo, which can be fixed to an existing toilet and recognises the user by their phone (one survey found that [a majority of Britons take their phone to the loo](#)) or a combination of physiological parameters: “What do they weigh? How are they sitting on the seat?” It then analyses excreta “using optical methods, looking at things like the volume, clarity, consistency, colour. It’s essentially understanding when someone has abnormal patterns and then it’s capable of documenting those patterns and providing reports that can be used by physicians to help in the treatment of a variety of conditions.”

For now, TrueLoo is focused on the older adult market – people more at risk of genitourinary and gastrointestinal problems, such as those in residential care homes – but, Kashyap says, “we very much have an eye towards this being a consumer product that is going to be used by anyone who has a toilet”.

When Kashyap started thinking about analysing waste, he thought he should go down the biochemistry route. “But I learned over the years there’s a lot of amazing technology in the visual analysis realm,” he says. It also comes at a much lower cost. “People think: ‘We’ll put all these very complicated sensors into a toilet, we’ll do chemical analysis.’ When you start doing that, you start increasing the cost. You can’t tell someone: ‘I’m going to replace your \$20 toilet seat with a \$2,000 toilet seat, or a \$12,000 toilet,’ that’s not really viable.”

Kashyap predicts (although he admits he is biased) that some version of the smart toilet “is going to be the most important home medical product in the future. There’s a limit to what can be done with wearables, but the toilet is going to be a far deeper way to understand a person’s health.”

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Is all this – your analprint out in the world, the makeup of your bowel movements analysed – a privacy breach too far? “Can it be kept secure?” asks Eerke Boiten, a professor of cybersecurity at De Montfort University in Leicester. “What sort of organisation has this data? Who will they be sharing data with? What data will it get combined with? Will we have any transparency about where the data goes? This is an area where we don’t even know fully what the risks are. We need significant research into this.”

Many people “wouldn’t, for very good reasons, like cameras pointing up their bottoms”, says Phil Booth, the coordinator of MedConfidential, which campaigns for the confidentiality of medical records. That said, under the guidance of a medical professional, “there are not necessarily inherent privacy risks” in using a smart toilet as a medical device, he says. However, it might get interesting if the data created by general consumer use was owned by a company: “You may trust that particular company, but every company is pretty much buyable by Google or Facebook or Amazon. Then, what I thought was something for my own health monitoring has become fodder to business models I really know nothing about.”



Smart toilets being assembled at a factory in Hangzhou, east China.  
Photograph: VCG/Getty Images

People bought Fitbits, says Booth, “thinking it was just a cool new item to monitor their exercise and, hey presto, Google buys it. All of a sudden, all that really rich data gets absorbed into a company that has other agendas.” Google has had its eye on the multitrillion-dollar health market, with an attempt to become dominant in health data, for some time – controversially, it has had access to the [health data of 1.6 million NHS patients](#) and 50 million Americans. Is Google interested in your bathroom habits? Well, [it patented a toilet seat sensor](#) way back in 2016.

When it comes to information about your bodily waste, Booth says: “What data are companies linking together? What are they trying to analyse about you? Profile you for? You call them ‘smart homes’, but they’re surveillance homes.”

Information from stool and urine samples could provide all sorts of information – your risk of disease, your diet, your exercise level; how much alcohol you drink and whether you take drugs. Even tracking something as trivial as the time of day you use the loo – regularly in the night, for instance, indicating sleeplessness – could reveal conditions such as depression or anxiety.

Where does it end? Could the police or others involved in surveillance track you by analprint, via the public and home smart lavatories you visit? Might you be asked to provide a print at a police station?

What data are companies linking together? What are they trying to analyse about you? Profile you for?

*Phil Booth*

Imagine a world where smart toilets in workplaces were able to tell which employees were pregnant, or taking drugs, or at risk of physical or mental ill-health, with the implication that they were potentially not as productive, or about to be absent from work. “Think about Texas,” says Booth of that state’s recently [tightened abortion restrictions](#). “If you can tell if someone’s pregnant from their poo, then all of a sudden the question is: ‘Are they seeking an abortion?’ That’s Gilead level, that’s science fiction, but it illustrates the risk.”

It is not so wacky to imagine parents using the technology to check whether their teenage children are using drugs. “Once you start to measure something that is of the body, the privacy line is stepped over,” says Booth. “If you don’t measure what’s going on with someone’s bowel movements, the bowel movement is private.”

This is an alarming thought – but, says Booth with a laugh, it is not as though governments will mandate smart toilets. He says there will always be

people – those into the “quantified self” movement – who are happy to measure and track themselves. If smart loos are considered clinical devices collecting medical data, “then it’s a straight medical breach risk – not special to toilets, but because you’ve turned the toilet into a medical data-generating experience. Are they managing those risks correctly?”

Coon is also mindful of the issues. “Do insurance companies get to know what’s in your urine? You can imagine those hurdles, but if the technology exists, and there’s benefit, people will figure out how to solve it.” Kashyap says: “The way I look at it, this is basically part of your medical record. This would probably fall in the same category of risk – and, at least in the US, there is a lot of protection around medical records.”

Will the smart toilet become a normal bathroom fixture? This question is applicable only in the developed world. If you want to talk toilet inequality, 3.6 billion people – nearly half the world’s population – have no access to safe sanitation, let alone a loo that can track sleep quality and fibre intake. But those working on smart toilets are optimistic. “It’s about figuring out how to get the technology we have in the laboratory into a toilet at a scale that’s affordable and robust,” says Coon. “That’s the challenge. It could be 10 years out, or 30 years out, but I think it’s something that’s going to happen.”

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## Release the rainbow! Why red, blue, yellow, pink and orange are the new black



Living colour ... some of the highlights of London fashion week.  
Composite: Guardian Design; Stefan Knauer; Edd Horder; Courtesy of Roksanda; Roland Mouret; Adam Duke



[Jess Cartner-Morley](#)

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Thu 23 Sep 2021 05.00 EDT

At first I thought London fashion week was going to be all about parma violet. “Did you know purple flowers attract the most bees?” Roland Mouret asked, as I stroked a low-backed silk blouse in pale, luminous lavender on a rail in his studio on the first day. Pantone had just announced [Orchid Bloom](#) as one of its key colours for 2022.

Then I changed my mind, and became convinced that apple green had it in the bag. Alice Temperley’s collection sold me on a halter-neck gown and a wrap dress, both in the bold mid-green, halfway between lime and emerald, that Americans call Kelly green and that reminds me of biting into a crisp granny smith. That sharp, outdoorsy green has been on the ascent in fashion for a while, beloved by label of the moment Bottega Veneta.



Emilia Wickstead's colourful florals. Photograph: Courtesy of Emilia Wickstead

But as shows went on over the weekend, one catwalk was a riot of yolk yellow and the one after that was a symphony in shades of orange and burgundy, and it dawned on me that there is no one colour of next season. Instead, next season is all about colour. Real colour, mind. Not the chalky, unusual shades that fashion tends to fall for – milky off-white pecorino, soft Tiepolo pink, rich espresso brown – but the brash shades you find in a box of crayons or a pack of highlighters, the colours of the neons at Piccadilly Circus or in an amusement arcade.

Colour is like sunshine on your face. It makes you feel happy

*Roland Mouret*

“Colour is like sunshine on your face,” Mouret told me. “Colour therapy really works. It makes you feel happy.” Designer Rejina Pyo, who not only paired a Lucozade blouse with a lime pencil skirt in her show but, at eight months pregnant, took her bow wearing the same colour combination, said colour brought “a sense of freedom which I’ve been longing for. Life has been all rules and guidelines, for so long.”

Bright colour is about optimism, and it is also about breaking free of monotony. This makes sense, for this moment in time, when an era of hybrid working patterns means that for many of us the week is finding a new rhythm – an uneven mix of commuting and home working, of Pret sandwiches and fridge leftovers. The old routine in which five days out of seven marched to the drum of the train timetable and office hours is no longer standard. One working day doesn't always look like another any more. There is room for different looks, and different colours.

Bright colours make me happy, partly because they are what I wear on holiday. I am not alone in that, and the holiday-suitcase appeal of coral and fuchsia, sky blue and lime is part of the attraction. A sunny holiday is right at the top of the post-pandemic wishlist for many of us, so clothes that remind us of bikinis, strappy dresses and maxi skirts that have been packed in a box for two years feel more appealing than ever.

Victoria Beckham said she was “drawn to the elegance of a European summer” and “the way a trip like that can make you feel quite detached from reality” when she designed her new collection, which goes on sale next spring. Her new long dresses in dandelion and marmalade had a drinks-at-golden-hour energy that feels hard to resist. Meanwhile, Emilia Wickstead had Leonardo DiCaprio in a Hawaiian shirt in Baz Luhrmann’s Romeo + Juliet in mind when she put turquoise-and-white florals with apricot-and-white ones this season.



Rejina Pyo's spring/summer 2022 collection. Photograph: Adam Duke

"If people do not notice you, you might as well not exist," read a note handed out at Bora Aksu's show. The quote was by Aksu's muse for the season, the late Dutch socialite Mathilde Willink, known for her exuberant dress sense and hedonistic lifestyle. Little chance of slipping under the radar in emerald tailoring over pink tulle, or ballet-slipper pink blouse with pineapple trousers. "I like finding a balance point between colours that don't normally work together," Aksu said after the show. There is something compelling about unexpected colour combinations that goes beyond mere beauty. "I like the way that colours have a conversation, when you put them together," says Pyo. "When you put lime green next to orange, or lavender with pink, it's like matchmaking – you try it out and see how the energy feels."

Some of fashion's rainbows appeared a result of shifting to a more sustainable, less wasteful mindset. "It just felt wrong to order new fabric, this season," said Edeline Lee, a London-based, British-Canadian designer whose clothes have been worn by everyone from Helen Mirren to Taylor Swift. "So I decided to use up all the leftover fabrics in my studio – we ended up with 53 colours in the collection." Lee found that jigsawing together these odds and ends proved satisfyingly creative – as is often the way, when cooking with leftovers. "If I order new fabric, then the logistics

of a business my size means that I order only a certain number," Lee said. "Having 53 to play with was fun." Aqua ended up spliced with chocolate brown, peach and coral with lawn green.

The days when sophisticates wore black and bright colours were basic are long gone. Decades gone, in fact. In 1997 Matthew Williamson's Electric Angels collection put Kate Moss in a peppermint cardigan with a fuchsia skirt, and fashion has never really been the same since. These days, on a catwalk front row the woman wearing all black is likely to be the Love Island contestant, while the woman wearing lime with crimson is a painter or a poet. Roksanda Ilinčić is a peerless colourist, her every show a bewitching masterclass in gloriously unexpected combinations of shades.

Colours have a conversation when you put them together. When you put lime green next to orange, it's like matchmaking

*Rejina Pyo*

This season, for a collection printed with Joan Didion quotes and worn in the Serpentine Gallery show by a mix of models and dancers, Ilinčić combined tobacco, coffee and coral in one dress, and yellow, merlot, pink and turquoise in another. "I've always been about colour and this season, after life has felt kind of small, I wanted everything to feel amplified again. Bigger, and brighter, like light at the end of the tunnel," she said. A Harrods buyer made the point that far from seeming un-serious, the colours are crucial in what makes Roksanda resonate with "a confident, intellectual and artistic woman".

Knocked on to the back foot by a year without anything to get dressed up for, and by the gathering storm of the climate emergency, fashion right now lacks both the authority and the swagger to issue a diktat anointing one colour, or one hemline, as the New Look. Instead, [London fashion week](#) made the case for fashion to be a source of joy again. The rainbow as a trend doesn't come with a shopping list. If anything, it is a call to action to get more wear out of pieces you already own, but don't often wear. Next time you open your wardrobe, instead of reaching for the neutral failsafes, give that pink skirt that you've never worn because you can't quite figure out

what it would work with a go. Or maybe the lime cardigan. Actually, I've got a better idea: why not both?

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- [Economy More than 100 countries face spending cuts as Covid worsens debt crisis, report warns](#)
- [Covid US to donate extra 500m vaccines to poorer countries, says Biden](#)
- [Canada Police seek man who allegedly punched nurse for vaccinating his wife](#)

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

## **Novavax applies for WHO emergency use approval – as it happened**

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## Global development

# More than 100 countries face spending cuts as Covid worsens debt crisis, report warns



A family outside their home in Lusaka, Zambia. Last year, the country became the first in Africa to default on debt amid the pandemic. Photograph: Tsvangirayi Mukwazhi/AP

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[About this content](#)

[Saeed Kamali Dehghan](#)

Thu 23 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

More than 100 countries face cuts to public spending on health, education and social protection as the Covid-19 pandemic compounds already high levels of debt, a new report says.

The International Monetary Fund believes that 35 to 40 countries are "[debt distressed](#)" – defined as when a country is experiencing difficulties in servicing its debt, such as when there are arrears or debt restructuring.

However, this figure is a "gross underestimation", according to the [study](#), led by the [Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies](#), based at New York University's Center on International Cooperation.

Unsustainable rising debt levels have seen inequality widening between high-income countries and those in the global south, researchers said.

"We compiled a list of countries that are labelled as debt-distressed across a number of criteria, and estimate around 100 countries will have to reduce budget deficits in this period, even though the majority are still facing the third or fourth wave of the [Covid-19] pandemic," the report said.

“Furthermore, the ability to cancel this debt is complicated because many of these countries have taken on debt under non-concessional terms from private lenders. The trends in [the UN’s] Financing for Development (FFD) were entirely insufficient to meet the SDGs [sustainable development goals] even prior to Covid-19. Now there is a full-blown crisis.”

Countries falling into debt distress include Tunisia, which has seen political upheaval, as well as Zambia and Ghana, said Faiza Shaheen, lead author of the report, which is being launched to coincide with a UN general assembly meeting of world leaders on Thursday.

Zambia was the first African county [to default on debt last year](#) during the pandemic and now has to allocate 44% of its annual government revenue to creditors, Shaheen said. Ghana spends about 37% of its national budget on debt interest payments.

In 2019, the cost of servicing external debts in 64 countries exceeded what they spent on healthcare, she said. Cameroon spent 23.8% of its budget on debt payments, compared with 3.9% of the country’s revenue spent on health.



A protester holds up bread at an anti-government demonstration in Tunis. The country’s political upheavals have added to its debt woes. Photograph:

Mohamed Krit/Sipa/PA

Researchers used a variety of indicators to identify countries deemed vulnerable due to rising level of debts, including their debt-to-GDP ratio, their debt-to-export ratio, as well as countries labelled as fiscally vulnerable by the UN Development Programme. The country's credit rating and growth trajectory were compared with its debt-service burden.

"The Covid-19 pandemic has brought to head a debt distress crisis that has been brewing since the aftermath of the 2008 global recession," said Shaheen.

"The situation is made worse as poor and middle-income countries are getting in more debt to buy vaccines, or having to rely on the UN's Covax, which only promises 20% of vaccine coverage by the end of the year," she said.

"The dynamics of global debt, which mean rich countries can borrow cheaply and employ huge fiscal stimulus packages while low and middle-income countries have to cut back, mean that global inequalities are likely to widen."

Shaheen said richer countries had spent on average about 6.5% of GDP on Covid-19 fiscal stimulus, which is almost twice the 3.3% of GDP spent by countries at risk of abrupt fiscal consolidation, defined as when government policies become focused on reducing deficits and debt, such as through austerity measures.

"We've heard a lot about the rhetoric of 'building back better', but of course these countries don't have the money to do that; they don't have it in terms of their borrowing and debt situations and they also often have a low tax base as well."

Researchers polled people in eight countries on their concerns about inequalities and the policy priorities of their governments.

"We've been talking to people around the world, and the polling is clear that people don't want their governments to cut – they want their governments to

spend more,” said Shaheen.

“If nothing changes and governments face having to make cuts, populations will see development stall and even reverse. For the person on the street, it means they are going to visibly see that it’s harder to access key services, and they’re not going to see improvements in their material wellbeing.”

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## [Global health](#)

# US to donate an additional 500m Covid vaccines to poorer countries, says Biden

01:13

Biden pledges US will be 'arsenal of vaccines' with donation of additional 500m doses – video

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*David Smith* in Washington

[@smithinamerica](#)

Wed 22 Sep 2021 12.59 EDT

Joe Biden has announced that the US will donate an additional 500m Covid-19 vaccines to low- and middle-income countries around the world, bringing America's total global donation to more than 1.1bn doses.

The US president outlined the plan on Wednesday at a virtual coronavirus summit where he urged world leaders to “go big” in tackling the pandemic and closing the vaccination gap with poorer nations.

The meeting on the margins of the UN general assembly offers Biden a chance to exercise soft power and gain an edge on rivals such as China in “vaccine diplomacy”.

In June Biden announced that the US would buy and donate half a billion Pfizer vaccines to 92 low- and lower-middle-income countries and the African Union through Covax, the global vaccine initiative. These have begun to ship, though the logistical challenges of distribution and storage are considerable.

On Wednesday Biden promised more and urged other countries to step up. “The United States is buying another half-billion doses of Pfizer to donate to low and middle income countries around the world,” he said. “This is another half-billion doses that will all be shipped by this time next year.

“And it brings our total commitment of donated vaccines to over 1.1bn vaccines. Put another way, for every one shot we’ve administered to date in America we have now committed to do three shots to the rest of the world.”

Biden reiterated his pledge that “America will become the arsenal of vaccines, as we were the arsenal for democracy during World War II”.

But he added pointedly: “We need other high-income countries to deliver on their own ambitious vaccine donations and pledges.”

He announced a new EU-US partnership to work more closely together on expanding global vaccinations. He said the participants should commit to “donating, not selling” vaccines to low-income countries “with no political strings attached”.

Virtual attendees included the UN secretary general, António Guterres, the European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, the British prime minister, Boris Johnson, the Canadian prime minister, Justin Trudeau, the

South African president, Cyril Ramaphosa, the Indonesian president, Joko Widodo, and the WTO director general, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala.

Biden told them the summit was about “supercharging” efforts to dramatically increase vaccine production and deal with logistical challenges, addressing the “oxygen crisis” in many hospitals around the world, improving access to testing and personal protective equipment, and making the global health security infrastructure more resilient.

The US alone has lost more than 670,000 people to the coronavirus, he noted, and the worldwide death toll is above 4.5m. “We’re not going to solve this crisis with half-measures or middle of the road ambitions. We need to go big and we need to do our part – governments, the private sector, civil society leaders, philanthropists. This is an all-hands-on-deck crisis.”

Biden was hosting the virtual summit amid scrutiny over why he is promoting a third vaccine dose for US citizens at a moment when less than 2% of people in developing countries have had their first shot.

Ahead of the meeting, a group of Democratic senators including Tina Smith, Tammy Baldwin and Elizabeth Warren wrote to Biden urging him to make firm commitments to expand global Covid-19 vaccine access and lead the world out of the pandemic.

“According to experts, 11bn Covid-19 vaccine doses are needed to vaccinate 70% of the global population and significantly reduce the spread of the virus,” the senators, joined by two representatives, wrote in the letter. “So far, 5.82bn doses have been administered globally, but less than 2% of the population living in low-income countries received even one dose.

“Clearly, there is an inequitable distribution of Covid-19 vaccine doses, and it is getting worse. Despite promises and pledges from some wealthy countries to donate nearly 1bn doses to the global effort, only 15% of those donations have actually been distributed.”

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) urged the US and other high income countries to immediately redistribute their excess vaccine doses to low- and

middle-income countries via the Covax facility and regional procurement mechanisms.

MSF also said the US government must demand that Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna share Covid-19 mRNA vaccine technology and knowhow so other manufacturers can make additional mRNA vaccines and meet the global needs.

Dr Maria Guevara, MSF international medical secretary, said: “The longer the world is divided into Covid-19 haves and have-nots, the longer the pandemic will drag on, the more variants can develop, and the more deaths and suffering will occur.”

The summit underscores Biden’s attempt to put the US back in a global leadership role after the “America first” nationalism of the Donald Trump era. [China announced this week](#) that it has delivered 1.1bn vaccine doses to more than a hundred countries, although experts have questioned the effectiveness of these vaccines.

Eric LeCompte, executive director of Jubilee USA Network and a UN finance expert, who is attending the summit, said in an interview: “It’s amazing that the Biden administration is filling a leadership void but we cannot move quickly enough from our perspective for two reasons. There’s the moral case that developing countries are experiencing a fourth wave of the pandemic and people are dying in the streets. We have to save lives.

“But there’s also something that is equally important: if we are not focused on getting shots in arms in the developing world, more variants are going to come to the United States and we will face a continuing health crisis. Perhaps even more significantly, we’ll continue to experience severe economic shocks all over the world in the years to come.”

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[Canada](#)

## Canadian police seek man who allegedly punched nurse for vaccinating his wife



A sign advertising the availability of the Covid-19 is displayed on the front door of a pharmacy in Edmonton, Canada. Photograph: Artur Widak/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

*Reuters in Montreal*

Wed 22 Sep 2021 12.30 EDT

Police in the Canadian province of Quebec are searching for a man they suspect of punching a nurse in the face for giving his wife a Covid-19 vaccine without his consent, a police spokesman said on Wednesday.

The man confronted the female nurse on Monday morning in the office of a pharmacy in the city of Sherbrooke, about 155 kilometres (96 miles) south-east of Montreal, where she was assigned to administer vaccines, a police spokesman, Martin Carrier, said by phone.

“Our suspect went directly into the office and began to yell at the nurse,” Carrier said.

The man appeared to be shocked that his wife was vaccinated at the pharmacy “without his authorization”, and hit the nurse in the face, Carrier added.

Sherbrooke police are asking for the public’s help in finding the assailant, who they say has short dark hair, dark eyes, thick eyebrows and a tattoo resembling a cross on his hand.

Nurses globally have faced abuse along with suffering burnout on the job in the fight against Covid-19, health advocates say.

It was not clear whether the suspect opposed vaccinations or whether his wife had in fact been inoculated at the same pharmacy, Carrier said.

Anti-vaccine protests across Canada [ramped up in the run-up](#) to [this week’s federal election](#), prompting the province of British Columbia to lock down schools.

Protesters had drawn ire from the prime minister, Justin Trudeau, on the campaign trail for targeting hospitals and healthcare workers, and he has vowed to crack down on such actions.

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[OpinionLabour](#)

## Starmer can't pin his hopes for success on Johnson's incompetence

[Peter Mandelson](#)



‘The prognosis that Keir Starmer offers needs to recognise a changed world.’ Photograph: House of Commons/PA

Thu 23 Sep 2021 03.00 EDT

Keir Starmer faces a formidable challenge to overcome the structural reasons for Labour’s 10-year electoral decline, which led to the collapse in 2019. This is no fleeting unpopularity. During the past decade, in the minds of millions of voters, the party’s identity became first confused and weak and then, under Jeremy Corbyn, alienating and unpatriotic. We parted company with millions of former Labour voters as the party moved further and further out of the mainstream and only serious repair will win back this support.

The party was seemingly departing from the legacy of Attlee, Wilson and Blair. Although these leaders had mixed records of achievement, they each personified the desire by [Labour](#), as a trusted party of conscience and incremental reform, to lean heavily against inequalities in society and, with their eyes fixed firmly on a better future, to build a solid platform of aspiration and opportunity for those with little security or privilege in society.

During the past decade the search by Labour's leaders for an alternative to this social democratic tradition first failed to find it and was then unable to convince the voters of its credibility or appeal. The result is that we ceded the ground of change and reform to the [Conservatives](#) and Boris Johnson's unique brand of political expediency, just as we did in a previous era to the Thatcherite right. It took 18 years before Tony Blair and Gordon Brown were able to seize back the mantle of reform and change from the Tories. The question now is whether Starmer will be allowed by the party and its union affiliates to do it in shorter time.

New research [released this week](#) by Progressive Britain into voters who are open to returning to Labour reveals that while they are hesitant, they are volatile and capable of turning to an alternative they see as workable and trustworthy. They need powerful reasons to look at Labour again. Voters like the fact that Labour cares about ordinary people and the public services they rely on but they do not yet recognise a programme of transformation of these services; they worry that the “big state” and spending and taxation that they associate with recent Labour manifestos would mean Labour losing control of the public finances. Labour, therefore, needs to focus hard on assuring as well as inspiring voters.

Essentially, Labour has to do three things. The first, which will be painful for some in the party, is to show we are breaking decisively from the rejected programmes and hard-left culture of the past decade. We are not going to get a different verdict from the electorate by offering a new version of the same thing. The [proposed reforms](#) to the party rulebook announced this week would curtail those who join or attach themselves to Labour in order to pursue their own factional objectives, and are important for Labour's electability.

Second, any policy rethink needs to be rooted in a critique of Britain as it is today. Since our 2019 manifesto, Britain has experienced the trauma of the pandemic and the consequences of Brexit. The prognosis that Starmer offers needs to recognise this changed world and the starting point needs to be the post-pandemic rebuilding of public services and fostering of economic recovery. Making a better fist of Brexit so as to relieve business and essential suppliers of the [costly barriers and obstacles to trade](#) that Johnson's botched deal has inflicted on the economy must accompany this.

But, third, Labour's longer-term thinking needs to be more radical and far-reaching. The huge acceleration of new-era technologies is creating exciting possibilities for transforming the UK's economy, as well as its health and education sectors. Labour needs to advance a new agenda of modernisation that will counter the risk, posed by Johnson's muddle and incompetence, of the UK descending into a new [bailout mentality](#) and sclerosis reminiscent of the 1970s.

Labour needs to bring both values and innovative thinking to the two major policy challenges Britain faces, demography and climate. People are living longer with fast-expanding health needs and care demands, and the state will have to widen its responsibilities to address these. And decarbonisation requires an energy transition that will have a profound impact on all of us. In both cases we will be using emerging technological solutions about which we can tell an exciting story.

This means a lot of intellectual drilling down into tough policy choices. The danger for us is that Tory unpopularity persuades us that we are being offered a shortcut back to power. As Johnson's government approaches its midterm, there is going to be huge pressure on living standards due to [swelling energy bills](#), rising prices because of Brexit border costs and supply chain disruption, national insurance tax rises and sharp increases in council tax. To an extent this will be offset by higher wage growth but the big question is whether this will lead to more permanent inflationary pressure, requiring a significant rise in interest rates. Against this backdrop will be very tight and painful decisions on public spending.

We should not delude ourselves that tougher times for the government will deliver us electoral success. We have experienced such false dawns before. Before they reject the government that has let them down, voters will be testing Labour's own efficacy, ability to deliver and return to the mainstream.

Persuading soft, sceptical voters that we can implement a modern and dynamic programme of government, and a genuinely more egalitarian one, is our task. There are no shortcuts to victory at the next election.

- Lord Mandelson was the Labour MP for Hartlepool from 1992 to 2004 and a cabinet minister under Tony Blair and Gordon Brown

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OpinionFamily

## **Proper sobbing and perspective – what I learned when my younger daughter left home**

Adrian Chiles





She's leaving home ... seeing the kids go off to university never gets any easier. Photograph: Thomas Barwick/Getty Images/Posed by model

Thu 23 Sep 2021 02.00 EDT

This child-leaving-home business seems to get harder every time. My first experience of it was as the child, albeit a 19-year-old one. Very upsetting it was, too. My parents went away for the weekend so as to avoid any doorstep melodramas. But my younger brother, who hitherto had only ever cried after coming off his skateboard, horrified me by shedding a tear as I left. A mate of mine was starting college in London the same day, so we'd hired a van for a friend of ours to drive us down from the West Midlands. "I couldn't believe your brother was crying," said the driver, as we left the place the three of us had called home all our lives. This was September 1986. You Can Call Me Al by Paul Simon was on the radio. To this day, that song tightens something in my stomach.

Accordingly, three years ago when I took my older daughter off to college, I was braced for the blubbing. It didn't quite happen as I expected. I was fine until I drove away from her halls of residence but then, almost without warning, I found myself sobbing so hard that a contact lens popped out. I found it, re-inserted, and carried on bawling for a good bit more. Then I felt kind of, sort of, OK, and drove home.

You would have thought these things get easier, but my younger daughter leaving last Sunday turned out to be even worse. I wonder if this is a known thing. If you have half a dozen kids, does it get progressively more painful?

I was dreading the day with some fervour, but again the pain didn't pan out quite how I expected. As a football commentator might put it, the tears came early doors. Forty-eight hours early, actually. I had taken the dog out for a poo late on Friday night and called my daughter to see how she was doing. She was in a pub I was just passing, where her mate was working her last shift before she too was off to university. "We're out the back," my daughter said. "Come and see us." No such invitation had ever been extended to me before; my lower lip may already have started wobbling.

The problem was that this pub, I now saw, turns into a big disco late on weekend evenings. (Is "disco" a word still in use, by the way?) Anyway, through steamy windows I could see flashing lights and writhing bodies. And there I was at the door, in shorts, covered in bits of mess from the cooking I'd been doing earlier, with a dog. The bouncer beheld us, doubtfully, but opened the door for me to blunder through the packed dancefloor pulling a large, astonished dog past a melee of puzzled dancers.

I sat with my daughter and her mates and talked about their hopes for, and fears of, what the coming weeks and months might bring. They were all so sweet, kind, open and honest. I became aware that my eyes were wet and I had to get out of there without delay. I hurried through a few hugs and croaked some goodbyes before tackling the dancefloor again, which was now even more packed. As Michael Rosen might have put it, we couldn't go over it, we couldn't go under it, we were gonna have to go through it. I was proper sobbing now, which made things no easier. Sweet Caroline was playing – So good! So good! So good! – and that song may now have the same effect You Can Call Me Al has had on me for the past 35 years. With a concerned dog looking on, I continued to make loud sobbing noises all the way home and into the early hours.

Yes, I know, all embarrassingly self-indulgent. I appreciate I am truly blessed to have a happy, healthy daughter opening a new chapter in her life at a university. I know things could be an awful lot worse. People have said this to me, as I have said it to myself. But at moments like this, when you're

feeling stuff so viscerally, it is very hard to be rational. As anyone who has suffered from depression knows, being told things could be worse helps not at all. Apart from anything else, it is so true that it is essentially meaningless. After all, unless you're tied to a train track with a freight train approaching there is always someone worse off than you.

I assumed that it was married couples who struggled most with their youngest flying the nest, leaving them to deal with just having each other for company for the first time in 20 or more years. But I've been divorced for donkey's years and still feel terrible. A generation or two ago there seemed to be much less fuss about this kind of thing. Few people of my vintage remember there being much parental emotion about their grand departure. Was everyone more stoic then? If so, was this necessarily a bad thing? We are told it's healthier to express emotion than suppress it, but I wonder if this licence to do so may cause as many problems as it solves. In other words, am I really just showing what I'm feeling, or is the freedom to show it heightening the feeling? Put it like this: I was feeling OK when I started writing this. Now, not so much.

The endless drive and university drop-off I had dreaded so much were no picnic, but generally bearable. It was only when I got back home that I realised I'd been so busy worrying about getting through the day itself that I'd somehow forgotten that my daughter wouldn't be around for a while. I miss her. But I'll also miss the whole phase of my life that has now come to an end. I am going to devote myself to lecturing exhausted-looking parents of younger children in parks and cafes to make the most of it all, because it's suddenly all over. And other useful stuff like that. As my older daughter has been blunt enough to put it to me: "Get a grip – you're being pathetic." I hope I live long enough to be around when it's my daughters' turn to be pathetic too so I can be of some assistance.

Adrian Chiles is a Guardian columnist

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[Opinion](#)[Social care](#)

## If Labour wants to win, it needs to promise the change Conservatives won't deliver

[Ellie Mae O'Hagan](#)





‘Nearly a quarter of a century after New Labour’s landslide victory, Keir Starmer is reaching for the old Blairite playbook.’ Photograph: Jessica Taylor/AFP/Getty Images

Thu 23 Sep 2021 04.00 EDT

After the government announced a [tax rise to pay for social care](#) last week, the political scientist Matthew Goodwin called it “[a new era in British politics](#)”. The already phenomenally popular Tories were stealing from the opposition playbook. “This is what leaning left on the economy and leaning right on culture looks like,” he said.

And he wasn’t the only one. When Boris Johnson said that the responsibility for paying for social care should fall on those with the broadest shoulders, the Mirror’s political editor, Pippa Crear, [commented](#): “Close your eyes and it could be a Labour PM talking. Suspect that will make many Tory MPs feel uncomfortable. And Labour ones anxious.”

We’ve been here before. In more than a decade now of Tory rule, whenever the government announces it’s going to intervene in the economy, the media can be relied upon to breathlessly announce that the Tories are parking their tanks on Labour’s lawn. The Spectator [asked](#) if anyone “noticed Tory tanks rolling on to Labour’s lawn” when George Osborne championed the

minimum wage in 2014. And in 2017 when Theresa May put forward a policy to cut energy bills, the Times headlined its story: “May parks tanks on Labour’s lawn.”

The underlying rationale here is the idea that having a laissez-faire state is rightwing, and having an interventionist state is leftwing. So whenever the Tory party intervenes in the economy, or spends money on public services, it must be doing something leftwing – and the [Labour](#) party ought to feel the heat.

The “interventionist state = leftwing” rationale underpinned a lot of Tony Blair’s strategy. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the winter of discontent and a string of Conservative victories, New Labour felt that rejecting leftwing orthodoxy in order to “[move] forward from where Thatcher left off”, as Peter Mandelson put it, would signal to voters that it was ready to govern.

Philip Gould, a senior party figure, believed that New Labour needed to reject its 1970s iteration, which oversaw “out-of-control public spending, strikes and taxes”. Thus, tax increases were out of the window, and Militant Tendency – a Trotskyist subgroup of the party – was proscribed.

Nearly a quarter of a century after New Labour’s landslide victory, Keir Starmer is reaching for the old Blairite playbook. It’s there in his [rueful observation](#) that “the Conservatives can no longer claim to be the party of low tax” after the national insurance rise announced last week, and in the party’s decision to [proscribe the Marxist grouplet Socialist Appeal](#). Don’t scare the public by suggesting you’ll spend too much, Labour’s top brass seem to be telling themselves, and excommunicate the left so they know you’re serious.

But the Blairite playbook won’t work against a Conservative party that has apparently abandoned the rules of 1990s politics in favour of splashing the cash. And to understand why, we must rethink what conservatism means, and what the purpose of the Conservative party actually is.

In his 2011 book, *The Reactionary Mind*, the political theorist Corey Robin argues that conservatism is primarily an exercise in the preservation of hierarchy, and specifically the resistance – or reaction – to attempts to redistribute wealth and power more widely by the left. Robin believes conservatives are willing to employ almost any strategy that protects the traditional holders of power in society, and that so-called conservative shibboleths such as limited government and individual liberty are merely “byproducts” of this ultimate goal.

This means a conservative government will happily ignore the principles it claims to hold in favour of its larger project – as long as the actions it takes ultimately don’t limit elites, or empower ordinary people too much. Robin writes that “the conservative has favoured liberty for the higher orders and constraint for the lower orders”.

Indeed some years earlier his argument was brought to life by the Guardian columnist Owen Jones, when [he wrote](#): “When I was at university, a one-time very senior Tory figure put it succinctly at an off-the-record gathering: the Conservative party, he explained, was a ‘coalition of privileged interests’. Its main purpose is to defend that privilege. And the way it wins elections is by giving just enough to just enough other people.”

When you think of conservatism this way, the Conservative party’s activities over the past two years make more sense. The furlough scheme becomes not an act of socialism, but of self-preservation. The same is true of the measly universal credit uplift – which is perhaps why it was taken away at the very first opportunity.

You can even see Robin’s argument in the fact that the government has introduced the Coronavirus Act, which allows the police to detain anyone they deem “potentially infectious”, even as [Boris Johnson](#) and Rishi Sunak themselves ignored the requirement to self-isolate (they later backtracked as a result of public outrage).

The increase in national insurance will be spent on care provision – but will be disproportionately paid by low earners. Rather than concluding that the Conservatives’ willingness to enlarge the state is evidence that they’re moving to the left, we should ask how the power of the state is being

wielded by the current government – and in whose interests. An actual leftwing government wouldn’t put the cost of social care on the backs of the country’s poorest working people.

If the Labour party wants to carve out an identity of its own, it needs to do the one thing the Conservatives are constitutively unable to: create a programme for the authentic redistribution of wealth and power, and present it to the public in a clear and credible way. This was in fact what [Keir Starmer](#) promised to do when he ran for leader of the Labour party.

An actual redistribution of wealth and power has the additional advantage of being popular. I was part of the Labour Together commission assembled to understand why Labour lost in 2019, and [our research](#) found that Labour’s voting coalition was willing to put cultural differences aside to vote for a programme of economic transformation. As the party of trade unions and the traditional representative of working-class people in parliament, Labour has the institutional capacity to outflank the Conservatives here.

But to do this the Labour party needs to accept that the Blairite playbook is out of date. And it needs to realise that if its offer to the public is egalitarian rhetoric combined with tinkering at the edges and keeping the establishment happy, then it will – in fact – find Conservative tanks parked on its lawn. Because that’s the approach the Tories have taken – and they’re already in government.

- Ellie Mae O’Hagan is director of the Centre for Labour and Social Studies
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[Opinion](#)[Universal credit](#)

## The £20 benefit cut is the most morally indefensible thing I've seen in politics

[Gordon Brown](#)



Volunteers at a soup kitchen in Blackpool make food parcels. Photograph: Paul Ellis/AFP/Getty Images

Wed 22 Sep 2021 08.00 EDT

There is, of course, never a right moment to cut social security benefits. But with the world dangling at the edge of an economic precipice, the price of basics – food and energy – threatening to rocket upwards and 30,000 Covid-19 cases a day, lives and livelihoods still hang in the balance. At this point, the government's planned [£20 a week cut](#) to universal credit in October seems more economically illogical, socially divisive and morally indefensible than anything I have witnessed in this country's politics.

For 75 years, the British welfare state has provided a safety net for families in dire need. After the cuts go into effect on 6 October, the last line of support for families will not be the welfare state, but food banks. Poor people in Britain can no longer rely on social security for the minimum they need to prevent their descent into extreme poverty. Their lifeline is now charity.

Already [almost 50% of families with three or more children](#) are below the poverty line. The £20 cut to universal credit will push [500,000 more people](#) into poverty. According to the Child Poverty Action Group, there will be [300,000 more children](#) pushed into poverty, taking the [child poverty rate](#) to one in every three children.

Twenty pounds a week is often the difference between breakfast and starting the day hungry; between school clothes and children going out ill-clad. Food poverty – as [Marcus Rashford](#) recently warned – is getting “devastatingly” worse. Fuel poverty will force a choice between eating and heating. And added to the country’s 2,000 food banks will be clothes banks, bedding banks and hygiene banks. As a patron of charities in my former constituency, I am already appealing to local businesses to make good the damage done by the withdrawal of the £20.

Our welfare state is no longer even attempting to fulfil the promise made in the Beveridge report of 1942: to abolish the five evils of squalor, want, disease, ignorance and idleness. No longer will social security, as was

promised then, take the fear – and the shame – out of need. I can tell ministers from experience that hope is being destroyed in the places they never deign to visit and there is desperation in the faces they never see.

Austerity has been the theme of the past decade, but this cut is vindictive even beyond austerity. It comes 11 weeks before Christmas and it is being coldly and inhumanely executed in spite of the new evidence, mounting month by month, of worsening hardship and continuing crisis.

I have never seen a government act so callously and with so little concern for the consequences of their actions on the poorest in our society. Ministers have published no study to explain their cut; offered no justification in, say, falling poverty figures (they are in fact rising); and offered only one pretext, a throwaway claim by the work and pensions secretary, Thérèse Coffey, that people on benefits could [simply work more](#).

This shows how little she – and her party – understand Britain today. The gain for working an extra hour on universal credit may be [as low as £2.24](#). Yet the breadwinner, she claimed, could make up the £20 cut by working two hours extra a week. The reality is more like eight to nine hours, and for many already labouring too many hours, this would be a return to Victorian conditions.

Instead of levelling up as they claim, they are doubling down on a losing formula that makes no economic sense. If they wanted to start balancing the books they could do what Labour did in 1997 and initiate a one-time windfall tax. They could easily raise £6bn by imposing a tax on those who have made the greatest speculative gains from the pandemic – there is a mass of evidence to show that it is reasonable. Instead they have decided that the most vulnerable will pay the price.

Ministers not only refuse to back down, but also fail to take the opportunity to abandon some of the most backward and punitive aspects of the system. They could easily raise the amount each adult can earn before their universal credit is clawed back. Today, as soon as a family with children, or a disabled employee, earns more than the monthly “work allowance” (£515 for people who do not receive housing support) their payments are clawed back at a rate of [63p per pound](#) earned. Ministers could also allow single parents to

claim back more of their high childcare costs. They could restore the [£30 a week](#) payment for those with a limited capacity for work.

And they could have implemented the [proposals of Rashford's child food poverty taskforce](#), ended the iniquitous two-child limit for many benefits (so inhumane that it could be subject to [an appeal to the European courts](#)), abolished the arbitrary cap on benefits that large families face, been more generous with rent allowances (which do not meet the full costs of housing), or removed the [five-week wait](#) for new payments which condemns so many families to spiralling debt. But little thought appears given to doing anything that could be seen as compensatory or even caring.

Twenty years ago we promised we would [abolish child poverty in a generation](#). Now all we can do is offer charity to prevent destitution. Rashford spoke for millions when he said that his community had little in material goods but what they lacked in money they had in compassion for each other. And that's what they will now have to rely on: poor people having to come to the aid of the poorest; and all people of conscience and decency, from local businesses to national charities, stepping up to fill the gap in empathy and moral fibre that this government has opened up.

- Gordon Brown is the WHO ambassador for global health financing, and was UK prime minister from 2007 to 2010
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## Myanmar

# Myanmar junta abducting children of people targeted for arrest, says UN expert



Houses in Thantlang, in Myanmar's Chin state, after allegedly being bombed by the military. Photograph: The Chinland Post/EPA

*[Rebecca Ratcliffe](#) South-east Asia correspondent*

Thu 23 Sep 2021 08.45 EDT

Myanmar's military junta is systematically abducting the relatives of people it is seeking to arrest, including children as young as 20 weeks old, according the UN special rapporteur for the country.

Tom Andrews told the UN Human Rights Council on Wednesday that conditions in the country had continued to deteriorate and "current efforts by the international community to stop the downward spiral of events in Myanmar are simply not working".

His speech was followed by the release of a report by the UN Human Rights Office on Thursday, which warned of a “human rights catastrophe” and said abuses perpetrated since the coup may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The military and its forces have killed more than 1,100 people, according to the UN report. It details systematic, targeted killings by the junta, including the use of semi-automatic rifles and snipers against pro-democracy protesters. Weapons designed for military confrontation, such as grenade launchers and artillery shells, have also been used against protesters and fired into residential areas, it said.

“Victims of security forces often sustained wounds to their heads and torsos, indicating that they were targeted for maximum harm,” the report said.

As of July, the junta had killed at least 75 children ranging in age from 14 months to 17 years, according to Andrews. The military, he added, was routinely abducting family members when it is unable to locate individuals it is seeking to arrest.

“I have received credible reports that junta forces have arbitrarily detained at least 177 individuals when the initial target of a raid had successfully eluded arrest. These victims include very young children as young as 20 weeks old,” he said.

More than 8,000 people have been detained since the military seized power on 1 February. The junta, which faces widespread public opposition, has arrested anyone who has challenged its rule – from elected politicians, to activists, medical workers and journalists.

Most are held without any form of due process, and lack access to legal counsel, or even the ability to communicate with their families, according to the UN Human Rights Office report.

“We continue to receive reports from multiple locations of interrogation techniques that amount to ill-treatment and torture, and have credible information that more than 120 detainees have died in custody – some

within 24 hours of their arrest,” said Michelle Bachelet, UN high commissioner for human rights, in a speech to the UN Human Rights Council on Thursday.

“Conflict, poverty and the effects of the pandemic are sharply increasing, and the country faces a vortex of repression, violence and economic collapse,” Bachelet said.

In response to the coup, peaceful protests and a civil disobedience campaign spread across the country. A [growing armed resistance movement](#) has also emerged, with civilians taking up arms to defend their areas from military repression. Bachelet warned of “the alarming possibility of an escalating civil war”.

Over recent days, virtually the entire population of a town in western Myanmar, home to 7,500 people, were forced to flee, after clashes between the military and its opponents, according to media reports.

The Global New Light of Myanmar, which is controlled by the junta, said the military was ambushed by “some 100 terrorists” while patrolling Thantlang in Chin state, near the border with India.

Residents started to flee on Monday after soldiers “began to randomly shoot out the windows” of houses in the town, according to a resident who spoke to AFP anonymously.

“Almost everyone has left,” he said, adding he was sheltering in a nearby village with about 500 people, and that several hundred had already headed towards India.

Another resident said she travelled for three days with her elderly parents to reach India after soldiers bombed her house and fighting escalated around the town.

“I never thought of running from my own house even after the military bombed it ... but as things got worse ... I finally had to flee,” she told AFP on condition of anonymity.

The independent outlet [Myanmar Now reported](#) that soldiers shot dead a Baptist pastor, who had gone outside to extinguish fires. His body was discovered with his left ring finger missing, the chair of the Thantlang Association of Baptist Churches said, adding that he believed troops had stolen his wedding ring.

The junta spokesperson Zaw Min Tun dismissed such reports as fake news. He said 20 homes and a government building had been destroyed in a fire after a clash on 18 September.

Attacks on junta troops have increased after Myanmar's self-declared parallel government, which was set up by pro-democracy politicians, [announced a "defensive war"](#) against the military earlier this month.

There are now more than 230,000 civilians who have been displaced as a result of the junta. Speaking to the Human Rights Council, Andrews called for greater humanitarian aid for the more than 3 million Myanmar people who are in need of assistance.

"The international community must make a stronger commitment to ensuring lifesaving aid reaches those in need," he said. "Myanmar civil society organisations who are saving lives need and deserve our support. The 2021 UN Myanmar Humanitarian Response Plan has received only 46% of requested funds to date. We can and should do better."

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[Hong Kong](#)

## **UK warns Hong Kong security law critics of extradition risk posed by China**



Activist Bill Browder said he was contacted by the UK Foreign Office earlier this month after he was named in a Hong Kong court during a foreign collusion case. Photograph: Dominic Lipinski/PA/PA

*[Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei*

*[@heldavidson](#)*

Thu 23 Sep 2021 05.03 EDT

Britain has warned some Hong Kong critics in the UK about travelling abroad, according to high-profile human rights advocate Bill Browder, highlighting concerns about the cross-border reach of the Chinese region's [national security law](#).

Browder, a well-known lobbyist for the use of sanctions against foreign governments involved in human rights abuses, said he was contacted by the UK Foreign Office earlier this month after he was named in a [Hong Kong](#) court during a foreign collusion case.

“[The] British government contacted me and other activists who were advocating for Magnitsky sanctions against Hong Kong officials to avoid travelling to countries with Hong Kong extradition treaties, to avoid getting ensnared in China’s new national security law,” Browder said on Twitter.

According to a report by Bloomberg, the Foreign Office contacted Browder by email, and then on a subsequent video call an official read a list of countries that can extradite individuals to Hong Kong.

Browder, a US-born naturalised British citizen, did not detail which other individuals had been contacted. The Foreign Office told Bloomberg it could not comment on private meetings.

Browder is a well-known critic of state-backed human rights abuses. In 2005 he was expelled from Russia after having run one of the country’s most successful investment funds, until it was hijacked by corrupt officials.

The subsequent arrest and murder in prison of a tax lawyer who worked for Browder, [Sergei Magnitsky](#), prompted Browder to [lobby the US to introduce sanctions legislation](#) which came to be known as the Magnitsky Act. The act allows for the targeting of individual foreign nationals with sanctions, and similar laws have since been passed in numerous other countries.

Browder has been outspoken on the Hong Kong crackdown, and [called for](#) foreign governments to use Magnitsky-style sanctions against government officials.

The national security law, introduced in June last year, broadly outlaws a host of acts and activities as foreign collusion, secession, subversion and terrorism. It has been used to arrest [more than 140 people so far](#), including pro-democracy figures, student activists, media executives, journalists and human rights activists.

Charges have been laid against about half the cohort, and some individuals who have since fled overseas are subject to warrants under the law. The law, which was [designed and implemented by Beijing](#), claims international jurisdiction, prompting concerns that it could be used to target people suspected of breaching it even if they are overseas.

Hong Kong government figures list 19 extradition agreements with other nations including India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, South Africa and Portugal. In response to the law, several countries including the UK, Australia, Germany, France and the US, tore up their Hong Kong agreements.

Chinese authorities record at least 59 extradition agreements, including with countries across Asia and Europe, although not all are ratified. Several countries [including France](#) and Australia have indicated they will not ratify their agreements.

Various government travel warnings urge caution when travelling to Hong Kong because of the new law. The UK's official advice warns of "a risk for those who commit an offence under the law of being detained and removed to mainland China".

"The legislation states that [national security] offences apply to activities conducted both inside and outside Hong Kong, which in practice could include activities conducted in the UK. China's mainland authorities could under certain circumstances detain and try individuals who commit an offence, or are accused of committing an offence, under the terms of this law."

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## Medical research

# Scientists use AI to create drug regime for rare form of brain cancer in children



Computer scientists and cancer specialists used AI to work out that combining the drugs everolimus and vandetanib could treat a rare and fast-growing type of brain tumour in children. Photograph: Manjurul Haque/Alamy Stock Photo

*[Andrew Gregory](#)*

Wed 22 Sep 2021 19.05 EDT

Scientists have successfully used artificial intelligence to create a new drug regime for children with a deadly form of brain cancer that has not seen survival rates improve for more than half a century.

The breakthrough, revealed in the journal [Cancer Discovery](#), is set to usher in an “exciting” new era where AI can be harnessed to invent and develop

new treatments for all types of cancer, experts say.

“The use of AI promises to have a transformative effect on drug discovery,” said Prof Kristian Helin, chief executive of The Institute of Cancer Research (ICR), London, where a team of scientists, doctors and data analysts made the discovery.

“In this study, use of AI has identified a drug combination which appears to have promise as a future treatment for some children with incurable brain cancer. It’s exciting to think that it could become one of the first examples of a treatment proposed by AI going on to benefit patients.”

Computer scientists and cancer specialists at the ICR and the Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust used AI to work out that combining the drug everolimus with another called vandetanib could treat diffuse intrinsic pontine glioma (DIPG), a rare and fast-growing type of brain tumour in children.

Currently, DIPG and other similar types of tumours are incredibly difficult to remove surgically from children because they are diffuse, which means they do not have well-defined borders suitable for operations.

But after crunching data on existing drugs, the team found everolimus could enhance vandetanib’s capacity to “sneak” through the blood-brain barrier and treat the cancer.

The combination has proved effective in mice and has now been tested in children. Experts now hope to test it on a much larger group of children in major clinical trials.

The research found that combining the two drugs extended survival in mice by 14% compared with those receiving a standard control treatment.

Both the drugs in the research, which was funded by Brain Research UK, the DIPG Collaborative, Children with Cancer UK and the Royal Marsden Cancer Charity, among others, are already approved to treat other types of cancer.

“DIPG is a rare and aggressive childhood brain cancer, and survival rates have not changed over the past 50 years so we desperately need to find new treatments for this disease,” said Chris Jones, professor of paediatric brain tumour biology at the ICR.

“Our study demonstrates just how much AI can bring to drug discovery for cancers like DIPG, in proposing new treatment combinations that would not have been obvious to people.

“The AI system suggested using a combination of two existing drugs to treat some children with DIPG – one to target the ACVR1 mutation, and the other to sneak the first past the blood brain barrier. The treatment extended survival when we tested it in a mouse model, and we have already started testing it out in a small number of children.

“We still need a full-scale clinical trial to assess whether the treatment can benefit children, but we’ve moved to this stage much more quickly than would ever have been possible without the help of AI.”

Dr Fernando Carceller, consultant in paediatric and adolescent neuro-oncology at the Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust, and leader of the paediatric and adolescent neuro-oncology and drug development team at the ICR, said the breakthrough was “encouraging” and highlighted the possibilities of “harnessing artificial intelligence” to find “cures” for cancer.

The initial idea for the research came from BenevolentAI – a company that has built an AI drug discovery platform. Researchers at the ICR worked with those from BenevolentAI to use its platform to identify drugs that could be used to treat DIPG.

Prof Peter Richardson, vice-president for pharmacology at BenevolentAI, said the early results were “promising”.

He added: “AI-enhanced approaches are already proving their value in expanding researchers’ capabilities to find innovative new treatment approaches – be it through uncovering new therapeutics or repurposing existing ones – not only in DIPG, but also other diseases in the future.”

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## Malka Leifer

# **Malka Leifer ordered to stand trial in Melbourne on child sex abuse charges**



Malka Leifer will face trial on 70 child sex abuse charges related to her time at Melbourne's Adass Israel School. She has pleaded not guilty.

Photograph: Mahmoud Illean/AP

*Australian Associated Press*

Thu 23 Sep 2021 02.25 EDT

Former ultra-Orthodox school principal [Malka Leifer](#) has been ordered to stand trial on 70 child sexual abuse charges.

Leifer, 55, pleaded not guilty to the charges at the end of a committal hearing in [Melbourne](#) on Thursday.

Four charges were withdrawn by prosecutors after it became clear during the evidence that those alleged incidents occurred in [Israel](#).

The allegations relate to sisters Dassi Erlich, Nicole Meyer and Elly Sapper during Leifer's time at Melbourne's Adass Israel School between 2004 and 2008.

Magistrate Johanna Metcalf said she believed the evidence presented during a hearing, which heard from all three sisters in closed court, was of sufficient weight to support a conviction.

Leifer's case will now go to Victoria's county court for a first hearing on 21 October.

During the hearing on Thursday, Erlich's former husband Joshua Erlich gave evidence about a "panicked" phone call he said his then-wife made to her sister Nicole Meyer when they lived in Israel in 2008.

Ms Erlich had been seeing social worker Chana Rabinowitz, who had previously counselled students at the Adass Israel School.

Joshua Erlich said he overheard a phone call between the sisters after one session, in which his wife had seemed "panicked" about something she had told Rabinowitz about her relationship with Leifer.

"Dassi was very worried about how it had been taken and that Mrs Rabinowitz was going to contact other people in Melbourne to speak about it," he said.

"She was very concerned about what was going to happen next and she was not sure why it was being taken in such a serious way."

He said he believed Ms Erlich had tried to persuade Rabinowitz not to do anything about it, but that she had also confirmed her sister Nicole could corroborate the information.

Mr Erlich said he believed Nicole had confirmed the information – which was not detailed in open court – and the school administration had been notified.

Leifer was stood down in 2008 and returned to Israel before charges were laid. She was extradited to Australia earlier this year to face charges.

The couple later separated, beginning divorce proceedings in 2011, after Ms Erlich decided to move away from religious observance.

Mr Erlich said Ms Erlich had previously described Leifer as taking the place of a mother, sharing that school had given the sisters respite from troubles at home with their mother.

He said he heard Leifer had hugged her, rubbed her thighs and gave her “special attention” but didn’t find it particularly concerning.

“If she had said it was under the clothes or something of that nature I would have been concerned,” he said.

“I don’t believe she would have said anything like that to me.”

Leifer remains in custody at Melbourne’s women’s prison, the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre.

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## US immigration

# Biden administration to reopen migrant detention camp near Guantánamo Bay prison



The migrant operations center will be close to the prison compounds housing the remaining 39 detainees held in the ‘war on terror’. Photograph: Paul Handley/AFP/Getty Images

*[Julian Borger](#) in Washington*

Wed 22 Sep 2021 19.22 EDT

The Biden administration is preparing to reopen a migrant detention camp at Guantánamo Bay in the wake of a [surge of migrants](#) and asylum seekers on the southern border.

The Immigration and Customs Enforcement (Ice) bureau is [inviting tenders](#) for private contractors to run the [Migrant Operations Center](#) on the US naval

base, close to the prison compounds housing the remaining 39 detainees held in the “war on terror”.

The migrant camp was first set up in 1991 and was intended to hold Cuban asylum seekers. Ultimately it was used to detain about 34,000 Haitians and roughly the same number of Cubans until it was wound down by the Obama administration. It has not been used to hold migrants since 2017.

Ice is looking for a private contractor to run the centre and provide unarmed custody and security officers.

“At least 10 percent of the augmented personnel must be fluent in Spanish and Haitian Creole,” states the advertisement, first reported by [NBC News](#). It was placed on the Sam.gov government contracting website on 17 September with a deadline for offers of 1 October.

Neither the Department of Homeland Security, which oversees Ice, nor the national security council had responded to a request for comment by Wednesday evening.

The advertised “contract opportunity” states: “The facility has a capacity of 120 people and will have an estimated daily population of 20 people, however the service provider shall be responsible to maintain on site the necessary equipment to erect temporary housing facilities for populations that exceed 120 and up to 400 migrants in a surge event.”

The contractor would have to assemble tents and cots for a surge of migrant detainees at short notice.

“In addition, the service provider must maintain a roster of at least 50 individuals who meet the minimum requirements of the unarmed custody officer job classification and have a viable contingency plan to deploy these individuals within 24 hours of notification,” it says.

The planned reopening of the site comes at a time when an estimated [14,000 migrants](#) have crossed the Rio Grande over the last two weeks. Most are Haitian and the crowd includes thousands of women and children, fleeing

the recent chaos caused by a powerful earthquake compounded by the political turmoil created by President Jovenel Moïse's assassination.

The Biden administration has stepped up deportation flights to Haiti but has come under severe criticism from human rights groups who say Haitian migrants and asylum seekers are being deliberately flown back into mortal danger.

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# Headlines tuesday 21 september 2021

- [Energy crisis Kwarteng admits ‘difficult winter’ ahead as energy bills soar](#)
- [Live Government hoping to reach deal to fix CO2 crisis, as food shortages loom](#)
- [Politics No 10 is warned energy crisis could plunge households into hardship](#)
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## [Politics](#)

# ‘More than tricky winter’ ahead, warns Hague as energy bills soar



William Hague said top government ministers should meet daily to solve the problems caused by rising gas prices. Photograph: Victoria Jones/PA

*[Jessica Elgot](#) and [Matthew Weaver](#)*

Tue 21 Sep 2021 04.23 EDT

The former Conservative leader [William Hague](#) has said Britons will suffer shortages due to the gas crisis, warning it could be a “more than tricky” winter for many families.

The business secretary, Kwasi Kwarteng, also admitted it could “could be a very difficult winter” with [families facing rising energy bills](#), as he sought to distance himself from the added burden of the cut to universal credit.

Hague said the government needed an elite group of ministers chairing meetings each day on how to tackle the crisis – akin to the Covid Operations committee during the height of the pandemic.

“If I was in government, I would be saying: ‘Get an elite group of ministers together in this reshuffled cabinet who are going to meet every day’ to be on top of all of these issues,” he told Times Radio. “And to do anything that the government needs to do, but they won’t be able to do everything. There just will be shortages of something.”

Kwarteng confirmed the government was [considering state-backed loans to energy companies](#) hit by soaring gas prices.

“Those are some of the ideas that are being discussed because it costs a company to absorb up to hundreds of thousands of customers from another company that has failed. That costs money and there may well be a provision for some sort of loan, and that’s been discussed,” Kwarteng told Sky News.

Kwarteng said he was committed to protecting British people, when confronted over whether the government would be forcing people to choose between heating and eating in the face of mounting fuel costs caused by the gas crisis.

But he said removing the increase in universal credit was “a matter for the chancellor and the work and pensions secretary”, adding that he was in conversations with them about the pressures.

“We face a global energy spike in terms of prices,” Kwarteng told BBC Breakfast. “But I’ve said that there are mechanisms in place now to protect consumers. I’ve been very clear that the energy price cap is staying, even though some energy companies I read today are asking for it to be removed.

“I’ve been very clear that that’s staying, so we’re protecting customers there. We’ve got the warm home discount, we’ve got winter fuel payments, which are again focused on the most vulnerable customers. So, we’re completely

focused on helping vulnerable customers through this winter – particularly with regard to energy prices.”

Pushed on the issue of universal credit, he said: “It’s a difficult situation, it could be a very difficult winter. That’s why, as energy minister, I’m very focused on helping people that are fuel poor. Universal credit, you will know, is an issue for the chancellor and the work and pensions secretary. I’m speaking to them a great deal about it.”

Earlier on Sky, Kwarteng hinted at a bailout for CF Industries, the UK’s biggest supplier of CO<sub>2</sub>. He said: “We’re definitely looking at trying to secure carbon dioxide supply. I’ve spoken to the CEO of the business, Tony Will. He flew over on Sunday. We spoke very candidly about the situation.

“He said the problem he had was that the natural gas price is much higher than the ammonia which he sells. So essentially what happened last week was that the plant downed tools. And I said of course we’ve got to manufacture this CO<sub>2</sub>. And that’s what we’re talking about this week. It’s pretty imminent.

“I hope we have a very clear plan to get CO<sub>2</sub> production going again. I’m very confident and hopeful that we can sort it out by the end of the week.”

Hague said there were more risks to come beyond the current crisis. “I think it could be a tricky winter, more than tricky, actually,” the former foreign secretary said.

“And I think, I’m one of those people who think that probably the central banks around the world or the US Federal Reserve, the Bank of England and so on, have underestimated the risks of inflation after the pandemic.

“And on top of that we see for all sorts of different reasons, these supply shortages, as you know, there’s so many things at work in this and that there’s a shortage of gas and the booming gas prices from the fact that it hasn’t been very windy for a few months, to last winter going on a long time, to Asian economies suddenly buying up the liquefied natural gas that comes out of Qatar, all of these things working together.”

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# **UK seeks to restart CO2 production; inflation expectations jump; Entain shares surge on takeover approach – as it happened**

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## Politics

# No 10 is warned energy crisis and cuts could plunge households into hardship



Former cabinet minister Damian Green was among those urging No 10 to take action. He said there were around 500,000 people who are particularly vulnerable this winter. Photograph: Leon Neal/Getty Images

*[Rowena Mason](#) and [Jillian Ambrose](#)*

Mon 20 Sep 2021 15.58 EDT

Hundreds of thousands of Britons face a “very, very difficult” winter thanks to rising household costs, No 10 has been warned, as firms said the energy price shock could trigger a three-day week for factories and further gaps on supermarket shelves.

Senior Tories were among those urging Downing Street to wake up to the threat of food shortages and households being plunged into hardship because

of rising energy bills combined with the universal credit cut and next year's rise in national insurance.

Damian Green, a former cabinet minister who was deputy to Theresa May, warned of the prospect of "very, very difficult times ahead for hundreds of thousands of people in this country", while Robert Halfon, a Tory former business minister, called for the government to consider scrapping or reducing the 5% VAT on energy bills.

Labour said many households would be crippled by the "triple whammy" of energy price rises, the NI rise and universal credit cut.

Labour will also force an opposition day debate in the House of Commons on Tuesday on the government's planned cut to UC, which will see 6 million families lose over £1,000 a year.

Energy bills are due to rise by an average of £139 in October, although the price cap restricts further increases over the winter. The spike in global gas prices – which has already triggered the collapse of several suppliers and threatened many more – means there is a risk of a further rise at the next review point in the spring.

No 10 insisted that the UK was "resilient" and Kwasi Kwarteng, the business secretary, said there was "absolutely no question of the lights going out", or of people being unable to heat their homes". The minister also dismissed the idea of "three-day working weeks or a throwback to the 1970s", saying such thinking was "alarmist, unhelpful and completely misguided".

However, the British Chambers of Commerce said factories were already discussing a "more permanent reduction in their operating capacity", such as a three- or four-day working week, or reducing their hours because of high gas prices and the consequent shortage of CO<sub>2</sub>.

Firms known to be considering such a move include energy-intensive industries, as well as the meat and fresh food packaging suppliers that rely on carbon dioxide.

A joint statement from Kwarteng and the energy regulator Ofgem on Monday night stressed that the crisis “was not an issue of supply” and said the UK has capacity “that can more than meet demand”.

A roundtable with energy suppliers and consumer groups held on Monday morning would be followed by one with smaller ones in the coming days. “Central to any next steps is our clear and agreed position that the energy price cap will remain in place,” the statement said.

Ranjit Singh Boparan, the owner of Bernard Matthews, the poultry producer, and 2 Sisters Food Group, has warned that workforce shortages along with the CO<sub>2</sub> shortage could result in Christmas being “cancelled”.

Suren Thiru, head of economics at the BCC, said the energy price crisis “risks aggravating the already severe supply chain predicament” facing many industries.

Companies are already struggling with a shortage of haulage and staff, linked to both Brexit and Covid, as well as global supply chain disruption linked to the pandemic, while experts warn higher energy prices are likely to lead to inflation.

Ed Davey, the Liberal Democrat leader and former energy secretary, said the prime minister and his government should not be dismissing the crisis as a “global problem or a hiccup” with supply.

He said the impending cost of living crisis will “hit the most vulnerable”, yet the government has “failed to invest in making homes warmer through insulation, he [Johnson] has failed to diversify the UK out of overdependence on gas for heating, and his botched Brexit deal is already hiking food prices”.

Green, a former work and pensions secretary, estimated there would be about 500,000 particularly vulnerable people this winter. “These are people many of whom are already working very hard to keep their families’ heads above water. Already the £20 cut was going to be difficult for them,” he said.

“Now we see we’re going to get rising energy prices, and we’ve already seen that the growth in inflation is faster than it has been for a generation. There’s the possibility of very, very difficult times ahead for hundreds of thousands of people.”

Ed Miliband said he feared the government was “much too complacent on the price and economic impact of the current situation” with energy.

The shadow business secretary called on Kwarteng to set out his plans to support businesses, particularly energy-intensive industries, and say whether he has considered the provision of government support in the form of loans for businesses facing difficulties.

Stephen Elliott, chief executive of the Chemical Industries Association, said the industry was “already paying a premium” for energy compared with the rest of Europe at a time when it is facing rising costs of cutting its carbon emissions.

Kwarteng said he was looking at options to help industry as well as making sure customers of collapsed energy companies do not lose money or supply of gas and electricity.

The Guardian understands officials are considering state-backed loans to help the UK’s large energy suppliers pick up potentially millions of unprofitable energy customers ahead of a “tsunami” of supplier collapses this winter.

As an alternative, the government is also mulling plans for a “bad bank”-style company to take on the customers left stranded by energy company failures to ensure they continue to receive energy at the price they agreed to pay.

Emma Pinchbeck, Energy UK’s chief executive, said there “are no easy solutions – but the priority of all involved is to protect customers as much as possible … And while the immediate focus is on the current situation, it shows why we must continue the low-carbon transition and further reduce our dependence on fossil fuels to remove the risk of being exposed to volatile international wholesale prices in future.”

Five small suppliers have gone under in recent weeks, and another four are likely to collapse before the end of the month, but the number of collapses is expected to escalate as cold weather compounds record energy price highs.

A source close to the talks confirmed that state-backed loans could be offered to financially robust energy companies that can take on customers, rather than small struggling energy companies.

The energy regulator, Ofgem, on Monday appointed British Gas as the new energy supplier for nearly 350,000 customers left stranded when [People's Energy ceased trading](#) last week.

Bulb Energy, which has 1.7 million customers, is reportedly hunting for fresh investment to fund the company's growth, but may struggle to find new backers due to the risky market conditions this winter.

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## Energy industry

# What caused the UK's energy crisis?



Gas prices in the UK have more than quadrupled over the last year to highs of 180 pence per therm, from around 40p/th this time last year. Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

*[Jillian Ambrose](#)*

Tue 21 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

The UK's energy system has been plunged into chaos by [a perfect storm of market forces](#) which threatens to rip through the economy from home energy suppliers to heavy industry, and from factories to farmers.

This has stoked [fears that a wave of energy suppliers will collapse](#), and that households will be saddled with unaffordable bills. As the colder weather draws in, these are the factors shaping the energy crisis.

## China's post-Covid bounce back

China's appetite for energy is always a key driver of global market prices. In 2021 its post-Covid economic ramp-up has coincided with an uptick in demand across Asia and Europe too.

As economies begin to recover from the fallout of the pandemic, countries across the northern hemisphere, which experienced a long, cold winter in 2020-21 that depleted gas storage levels, have been left scrabbling to secure supplies.

Gas prices in the UK have more than quadrupled over the last year to highs of 180 pence per therm, from around 40p/th this time last year. In the last month alone, prices have climbed by 70%.

Market experts at S&P Global Platts said earlier this year that China's demand for gas was likely to rise to 360 billion cubic metres (Bcm) this year, up 8.4% from an estimated 332 Bcm in 2020. To satisfy its record demand for gas, China's imports of gas via super-chilled tankers was expected to surge by almost a fifth, meaning fewer shipments travelling to Europe from countries such as Qatar.

## Russian gas games

As shipments of gas have turned from Europe towards China, flows of pipeline gas to Europe from [Russia](#) have failed to make up the shortfall.

On Monday gas prices across Europe surged by another 10% after Russia's state-backed gas company, Gazprom, refused to increase its exports to Europe – despite record-high prices across the continent.

The company has met its contractual obligations for gas delivery over recent months but Gazprom has come under fierce criticism for appearing to send little extra to help meet the enormous demand in Europe.

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EU lawmakers have called on the European Commission to investigate whether the company's behaviour has been designed to keep market prices high, and put pressure on regulators to approve of its controversial plans to

build the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, a major gas line which would double its capacity to send gas to Germany via the Baltic Sea.

Nord Stream 2 has faced US sanctions and provoked concern that the EU would increase its reliance on energy imports from Russia.

## Generation gap

The global gas crunch is particularly bad news for the UK. Around half of the UK's electricity is generated by burning fossil fuel in gas-fired power plants, a trend which has become more deeply entrenched over recent months after a string of problems in the UK electricity system.

Ageing nuclear power plants have been forced to undertake unplanned outages for maintenance, a main power cable used to import electricity from France has [shut down after a fire](#), and the UK's wind turbines have slowed during some of the least windy months since 1961.

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The UK also relies heavily on gas for home heating and cooking. Yet despite the obvious reliance on fossil fuels for electricity, homes and in heavy industry, the UK has some of the lowest amounts of gas storage capabilities in Europe, leaving the market uniquely exposed to the supply crunch. Less than 1% of Europe's stored gas is held by the UK.

Britain has been forced to temporarily fire up coal power stations, paying millions of pounds to the likes of Drax in North Yorkshire, to plug some of this power shortfall.

That fragile system faces further challenges in the years ahead, with most of the UK's nuclear power plants, which supply up to 20% of electricity, to close by the end of the decade. Just one new nuclear power station, Hinkley Point C in Somerset, is being built to replace them.

## Uncapped entry to a capped energy market

The UK can expect scores of suppliers to fold over the coming winter, leaving millions forced to switch to a new, more expensive supplier, as the government's policy of tough regulation on prices collides with loose rules on which companies can join the market.

The energy price cap sets out a maximum level for default energy tariffs twice a year based on the cost of supplying energy. It is to rise by more than 12% from 1 October and is likely to rise again next April. But the hikes will not come fast enough for dozens of small energy suppliers which don't have deep enough pockets to survive the wait until the next cap increase.

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Many small suppliers joined the market after the regulator dropped the barriers to entry for the energy supply market in 2014 to make it easier for entrepreneurs to set up an energy company without strong links to big banks and investors. It was designed to increase competition for the legacy Big Six suppliers, and caused the market to swell from less than a dozen to about 70 at the beginning of the year.

The regulator has already backtracked on the scheme, setting tougher financial stress tests for companies which hope to become energy suppliers. But the energy crisis may rewind seven years of loose regulation over six months, which some fear may leave only 10 suppliers standing by spring.

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## Fossil-fuel heavy industry

The impact of the energy crisis will not be contained to rising energy bills and struggling suppliers. Large steelmakers, chemical factories and manufacturers are all vulnerable to the impact of energy costs and are already feeling the financial pain of the energy price shock.

The steel industry association UK Steel has warned that steelmakers are already halting work during the hours of peak power demand to avoid record high prices. The soaring cost of gas has caused two fertiliser companies in

Teesside and Cheshire to shut for the winter, and another in Hull to reduce production by 40%.

This has knock-on effects for farming, meat production and the food and drinks industry. One of the byproducts of fertiliser factories is carbon dioxide which is used to make fizzy drinks and dry ice to keep food cold during transport. It is also used in abattoirs to stun animals before slaughter.

The government faces rising calls to tackle the problem of unaffordable energy before it erodes the UK's post-Covid economic recovery. The UK may not run out of gas, but running out of affordable gas would be problematic too.

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## Waste

# Maggots and mayhem: behind the scenes of Britain's big bin crisis



‘Sometimes the smell is that bad you think: how was that ever edible?’ ... Andy Gee with his recycling truck in Torbay, Devon. Photograph: Mark Passmore/Apex



### Sirin Kale

Tue 21 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

Andy Gee doesn't mind when people call him a bin man, but it depends on their tone. "If they say you're *just* a bin man," he says, sitting in the driver's seat of his recycling lorry, as we wind through Torquay, Devon, at the tail end of the tourist season, "then it's like, hang on a minute. I'm *just* a person getting rid of your rubbish! But to be described as a bin man – at the end of the day, I looked at bin men as bin men when I was a kid."

On the pavements, overflowing boxes of recycling stand to attention, waiting for collections that have become less frequent in recent months. Gee is contracted to work a 40-hour week, but lately he has been clocking up 55 hours, with paid overtime. "I personally will do every hour I can to help people catch up," he says. Today, Gee plans to finish his round and then pick up two weeks' worth of uncollected recycling on someone else's route.

The proper name for Gee's job is a waste and recycling driver, and men like him (they are almost always men) are in short supply. The UK is in the grip of a nationwide rubbish collection crisis, triggered by a shortage of the HGV drivers necessary to operate recycling and refuse lorries. This month, it was

reported that [at least 18 councils](#) have delayed bin collections due to a lack of drivers, with virtually all areas of the UK affected.

Across the country, effluence oozes from bloated sacks, rats rummage in recycling bins, and foxes enjoy nightly feasts of epicurean proportions. Meanwhile, council inboxes and Twitter feeds overflow with angry messages and unsightly images of uncollected rubbish. For the first time since the strikes of the winter of discontent in 1978, the public is starting to appreciate the essential work that bin men do – usually after a disturbing encounter with a particularly potent bin.

Keith Clark, a 27-year-old teaching assistant in Croydon, recently had one such encounter. He came home from work to find his front porch covered in what he initially thought was rice, but subsequently realised was hundreds of maggots swarming out of a food waste caddy that hadn't been collected in a month. "It was disgusting," Clark says. "It made me cringe. I couldn't stop scratching myself."

Meanwhile in Kirkby, Merseyside, Adam Brown, 35, who works in life sciences, stares out of the window at his general waste bin, which hasn't been emptied for six weeks. Brown is a new father. "Can you imagine what a six-week-old bin full of used nappies smells like?" he says glumly. "It was 32C the other day."

Tempers are fraying, too, on the hyperlocal app Nextdoor. "What are we paying council tax for?" one south London resident writes. "I'll dump my refuse at the town hall!" In response to an overwhelming volume of complaints, local authorities plead for understanding, explaining that an unprecedented set of circumstances beyond their control is to blame for the mounting rubbish on our streets.

First, and most significant, is [Brexit](#). EU HGV drivers are no longer able to obtain visas to work in the UK. The Road Haulage Association (RHA) estimates that nearly 20,000 European HGV drivers returned to EU countries in 2020.

Then there's the pandemic, which has caused many HGV drivers to reassess their priorities. "Covid has made a lot of drivers think about their quality of

life,” says Richard Burnett of the RHA. “How would you feel about starting a shift at 2am and driving for 12 hours, only to collapse, fall asleep and do it all over again the following day?” The average age of a HGV driver is 56, so many have taken early retirement to spend more time with their families.

Other, Covid-related challenges include the DVLA having been operating at limited capacity, due to staffing pressures, meaning fewer HGV licences have been issued. And the [“pingdemic” knocked entire crews off the road](#) for much of the summer, although such staffing shortages have abated recently.

To make matters worse, this year the government closed the IR35 tax loophole, which had allowed some HGV drivers to reduce their tax contributions. “Agency drivers withdrew their labour and said that if agencies weren’t prepared to pay the difference, they wouldn’t keep driving,” says Burnett.

As a result of all this, drivers find themselves in unprecedented demand and salaries have soared. Pre-Brexit and Covid, the average HGV driver would have earned about £35,000; now, Waitrose is reportedly offering £53,780 as a starting salary, while Gist, which supplies drivers for Tesco and M&S, is [offering £56,674](#), plus a [£5,000 bonus](#). Yet despite this largesse, bare shelves have become a routine sight at [many supermarkets](#).

Local authorities are haemorrhaging drivers like never before, because they can’t afford to match these salaries. “What we’ve got at the minute is a perfect storm,” says Beth Whittaker, human resources officer at the outsourcing giant Veolia, which handles refuse for 7m households across the country. Veolia currently has 80 vacancies for HGV drivers.

But Burnett says problems in the sector have been brewing for years. Even pre-Covid and Brexit, the logistics industry had a shortage of 60,000 HGV drivers. Unions had been sounding the alarm about pay, conditions, hours and an ageing workforce. “This isn’t a new phenomenon,” he says. “It’s been going on for years now.” But no one was listening.

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In Torquay, Gee is waging his own battle against the rubbish crisis. Eight of Torbay council’s 40 drivers have quit the service in recent months, tempted

by the high salaries of the private sector. The service is so short-staffed, managers are having to go out on rounds, but can still run only 18 of their 22 weekly collections.

Without Gee, the service would be in even direr straits. He's the best in the game – everyone says it. "I wish I could clone him," says Ian Hartley, Torbay council's head of waste and recycling. "He's so efficient that he always finishes his rounds, comes back, empties his vehicle, gets in another vehicle, goes out and finishes someone else's round." Gee, who is 51 and lives locally, is ripe for promotion into the office as a supervisor. "But I worry about that," Gee says. "Because then they won't have me out here. If they had five of me this place would be a different story. I'm not just blowing my own trumpet."



Best in the game ... Andy Gee on his rounds. Photograph: Mark Passmore/Apex

Refuse collectors work in three-man crews. Working with Gee today are two loaders, Nick Rushe, 30, and Jamie Haysham, 37. As the driver-loader, Gee is in charge.

He is a voluble and often hilarious presence, but so legendary is his fierce work ethic that some loaders dread being assigned to his crew. "I have got a

name for myself,” says Gee. “I’ve had people in the office saying they won’t come out with me. If you don’t want to work, don’t come out with me, because I won’t carry anybody.” But even Gee is starting to slow down. “I’ve been at the top of my game now for 11 years,” he says. “No one can touch me on this. But I can’t keep this up. That’s my only worry. I’m nearly 52.”

Today, Gee is operating a 12-tonne Romaquip kerbside sorting vehicle, which he handles as nimbly as a Mini Cooper. On the outside of the lorry are compartments for food waste, mixed paper, small electricals and textiles, glass, plastics and cans, and cardboard. Once each compartment is full, a hydraulic ram lifts it into a compartment at the top of the vehicle, where it is compressed. The cardboard compartment always fills up the quickest – all those Amazon parcels. Because dry cardboard is a nightmare to compact, experienced bin men pray for rain, like farmers. “People think we don’t want to work in the rain,” Gee says. “But it’s actually better for us, because we can get rid of all of the card.”

I hop in beside Gee in the cab, which is immaculately clean and fresh-smelling. “It’s like a game of chess,” he says, reversing around a residential cul-de-sac. “You’re always having to assess whether it’s worth continuing to fill the lorry, because the fuller it is, the longer it takes to compact the recycling. Or, should you drive back to the yard, get rid of the card, and speed the round up?” Gee generally prefers to do a “tactical tip”, as he terms it, even if it adds more time to his rounds, because it means he can clear away more rubbish.

Morale, he says, is low. Gee and his crew work long, unsociable hours, in all weather conditions. Because it’s dark when he starts his shift in winter, Gee often can’t properly see what he’s doing and gets sprayed with rotting food and dog poo. “Sometimes,” he says, “the smell is that bad you think: how was that ever edible? Chicken is the worst. Chicken goes off and gets maggots very quickly. And gone-off milk cartons – you can never get rid of the smell.”

Gee works bank holidays, except for Christmas and New Year’s Day. He gets holiday leave, but no sick pay above the statutory minimum. “I got food poisoning once,” he says. “It was bad; I was in hospital. The specialist said

he thought I got it from doing this job. Splash of chicken juice – it's that easy. It put me off work for two weeks. They paid me sick pay by accident, and took it back off me.”

Then there’s the general public, who tend not to treat Gee with the respect a man of his experience and professionalism deserves. “The public frustrates me, with the fact that they don’t care,” he says. “We’re heroes to zeros in seconds. During the pandemic we were heroes, because we were out working, but as soon as they went back to work we were zeros again. Some of them look at you like you’re scum.” The older generation show greater respect. “They care more,” Gee says. “They’re the ones who sort their boxes meticulously for us.” (When people fail to sort their recycling, it can add hours to Gee’s round.)

He would be lying if he said he hasn’t considered leaving. “A guy just left here and he’s gone up to £44,000,” says Gee. “All he does is drive from Didcot to Exeter.” But for now, he plans to stay put. “If I was in a lorry driving up and down the motorway all day I’d be on my own,” he says. “At least I’ve got these two idiots to talk to.” Gee is paid £24,000 a year. “That’s quite a sad salary,” he says, turning to me with a frank, open smile. “Isn’t it?”

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The great British public generally trouble their elected officials about one of only two things, says the Torbay councillor Steve Darling, from his office in an otherwise deserted town hall. “Bins and potholes.” Darling has the enervated air of a man with a heaving, angry inbox. “Most people have been incredibly understanding,” he says, with a tight smile. “But it’s wearing thin as time goes on.”

This month, Torbay, Teignbridge and North Devon councils wrote to the home secretary, asking her to allow EU HGV drivers back into the country for the two years it will take to train a new generation of British drivers. “We need that two-year visa waiver from Priti Patel,” says Darling, “so that we can take the pressure off the supermarkets. They’ll stop poaching our drivers, and people can start getting their bins collected more.”

So far, Patel has been unmoving, even as the UK chokes on its own filth. I ask Darling, who backed remain, whether it's frustrating to receive so many irate emails from his constituents, given that 67% of Torbay voted to leave the European Union. Doesn't he want to tell them to wake up and smell the bins? This is what they voted for. "It's pointless rubbing people's noses in it," Darling responds evenly.

In an attempt to retain drivers, Torbay council recently put up their salary by 61p to £11.49 an hour, plus £60 for every full week worked. This has cost the council £200,000, but it is not enough. "If you look at the average cost of a HGV driver around here," says Hartley, "it's currently £15 an hour. If we put all of our drivers on £15 an hour, it would add half a million pounds to our budget. We just don't have the money." For every pound the council used to get from central government, he says, it now gets 15p, and every bit of extra money he throws at his drivers is less money to spend on schools or social care.

But not all council refuse services are operated in-house by cash-strapped local authorities. Many are run by outsourcing giants such as Serco, which predicts [profits of £200m](#) this year, and Veolia, which [had global revenue of £26bn in 2020](#).

Veolia is offering bonuses of £1,500, trying to encourage more women to enter the refuse industry, and has started an in-house training academy to secure recruits' HGV licences, free of charge. Whittaker tells me that Veolia has also put up pay in some affected areas, but she won't tell me by how much, and neither will Veolia tell me how much it pays its driver-loaders. (Looking online, average pay appears to [be advertised at about £11.80 an hour](#).)

"It's not just about salary," Whittaker says, when I ask her why Veolia doesn't just pay its drivers more.

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At Torbay council's recycling plant in Paignton, Gee unloads his day's catch into an enormous blue contraption called the hopper, which rattles and shudders and makes a tremendous grinding noise. Seagulls line the approach

like well-wishers at a royal visit. Hawks are sometimes brought in to scare them off, but they're too expensive to have around full-time.



At the recycling centre. Photograph: Mark Passmore/Apex

I watch as a rainfall of glass, plastics and cans is fed into the hopper and emerges in orderly bales, ready to be sold as recycling. “That is one lorry,” Hartley observes. “And we have 22 lorries coming back, twice a day, every day, for 52 weeks a year. We’re shockingly bad at consuming stuff. Quite often you’ll see food in there that’s still in the package. A whole bag of chips.”

As I watch the hopper’s maw crunch down on an endlessly replenishing banquet of refuse, I think to myself that humans are the maggots, really. We buy and we consume and we waste and we complain, while the bin men carry away our rubbish at the crack of dawn, quietly, for paltry wages. And it’s only now that they’re scarce that they may finally get the recognition they deserve.

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## Relationships and sex education

# The Lovers' Guide at 30: did the bestselling video make Britain better in bed?



A scene from The Lovers' Guide being filmed. Photograph: Lifetime Productions Ltd



[Michael Hann](#)

[@michaelahann](#)

Tue 21 Sep 2021 05.00 EDT

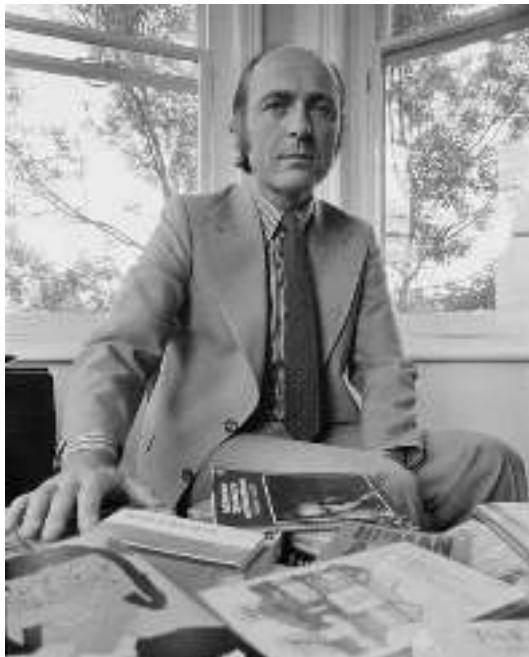
The second sexual revolution began 30 years ago, on 23 September 1991, with the release of an educational videotape called *The Lovers' Guide*. The revolution's unlikely figureheads were a film producer who had been making how-to videos about gardening and pets and cooking, and a 56-year-old doctor, while their ally was an American former TV and theatre director who had become Britain's chief film censor.

The producer was a man called Robert Page, who had been approached by Virgin – which had recently started making condoms – to make a sexual health film for men that explained how to use one. There were two difficulties with that. The first was that no erect penis had been shown on screen in Britain. The second was that Page had no interest in making a film about penises. The censor – James Ferman, the director of the British Board of Film Classification from 1975 to 1999 – took care of the first issue.

“I was talking to the great James Ferman,” Page says, talking from New York, where he now lives, “and he went, ‘There’s only one law, and it’s called obscenity and it’s that which will deprave and corrupt.’ He said, ‘I see

nothing depraving or corrupting in a man pulling a condom on in this era. I think it's downright sensible.””

Page brought up the second issue. “I went, ‘You know all these how-to videos? There’s this area of life that we don’t talk about. You wouldn’t let me make one about sex, would you?’ He said, ‘What would you want to show?’ I went, ‘Men and women, with actual intercourse.’”” Page wanted to show oral sex. He wanted to show genitals. He wanted to show the things that even films made for sex shops couldn’t show, and he wanted to show them in a film that would get an 18 certificate and be sold as a VHS tape on the high street.



Film censor James Ferman. Photograph: Evening Standard/Getty Images

Ferman laid down conditions. The film had to be fronted by a doctor. The script had to be approved by a reputable organisation. There was to be no lingering on the explicit shots. It was not, in short, to be a mucky film, regardless of what its viewers might use it for.

Page wanted Alex Comfort, the author of *The Joy of Sex*, to be the doctor, but Comfort’s publishers rejected the idea. Instead he turned to Andrew Stanway, another veteran “sexologist”, with a string of books to his name (Stanway did not respond to requests for an interview). “He was a quite tall,

wide man, with huge hands,” says Simon Ludgate, who was hired as director. “He had greying, curly, fair hair, a pointy nose and beady eyes. He reminded me of a bad magician with a ‘look into my eyes’ hypnotic stare.”

It’s Stanway who gives the clinical narration – “The clearest sign of male sexual arousal is an erection. Tissue within the penis fills with blood, making it stiffen. As arousal increases, so does heart rate. Breathing quickens and the nostrils flare” – and he both co-wrote the script and helped recruit the film’s stars. Chief among them were Tony and Wendy Duffield, former patients of his, who went on to be the Brad and Angelina of the sex ed video market. They later appeared on Desmond Morris’s *The Human Animal* making love with tiny cameras inside them to show the processes at work.

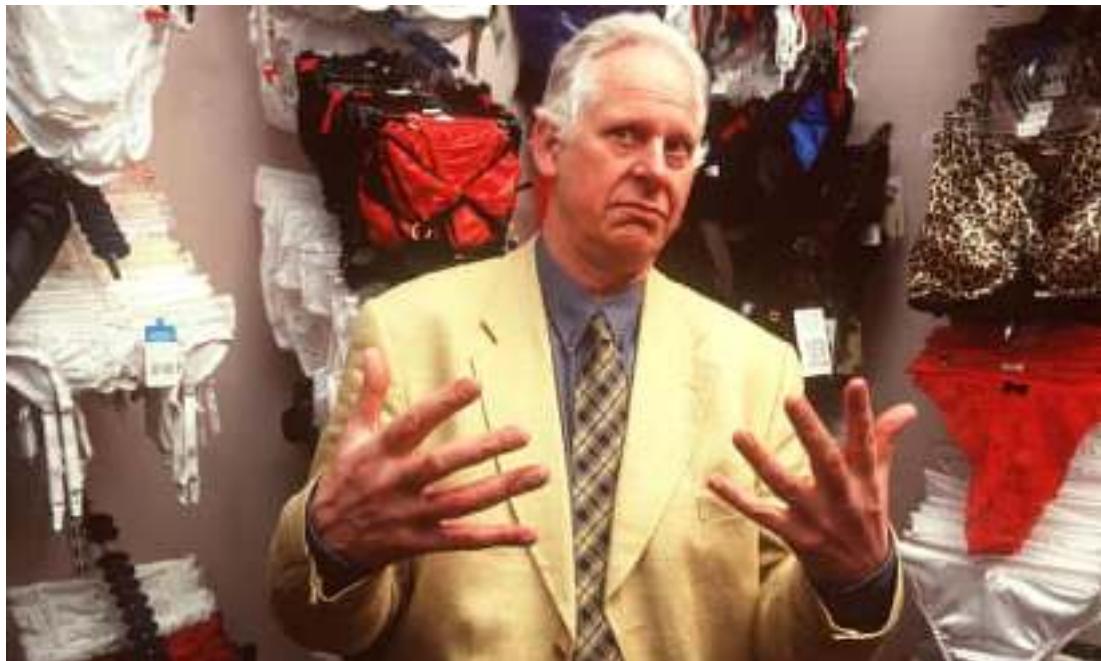
The Duffields weren’t the real problem, though. “There were a couple of people, who were supposed to be a couple and weren’t,” Page says. “One of the guys, the one who stands up to masturbate – Marino – was an adult film professional. We didn’t know that, but the press knew right away. I can’t tell you how naive we were. We had no idea. We had never been in this world. We had done very wholesome stuff, so doing this was breaking new ground.”

The press did indeed know right away, and before the film came out the News of the World revealed the fact that *The Lovers’ Guide* featured porn stars. “It almost sank us,” Ludgate says. “Woolworths at that point said they weren’t going to stock it, and Woolworths at the time were massive. And then WH Smith said they weren’t going to.”

The shops relented in time for release, and *The Lovers’ Guide* arrived on the high street. Page and Ludgate are insistent that their motives were purely to help couples, though the film’s makers knew the first certified film to feature explicit sex, even with Stanway’s lugubrious voiceover, would fly out of the shops, and not just to people wanting to learn some new positions. And so Page spent more on *The Lovers’ Guide* – it was shot on film, not tape, with purpose-built sets – than anything he had ever made before.

He says now he thought it might rival the 250,000 copies of a Neighbours tie-in video he had made. In fact, it sold 200,000 copies in its first fortnight,

going on to sell 1.3m in the UK alone, and hundreds of thousands more around the world. (“My greatest regret is not taking a percentage,” Ludgate says. “I still kick myself about that.”)



Dr Andrew Stanway, who did the voiceover for *The Lovers' Guide*.  
Photograph: Honey Salvadori/Channel 5

Looking at it now, in a world of Pornhub, YouPorn, PornMD and everything else, *The Lovers' Guide* seems almost unbearably innocent. It is sex at its gentlest. Everything is shot in soft focus; candles are everywhere. (Page was insistent the film’s primary market be women, though the soft focus and candles spoke more to male ideas of female sexuality. Nevertheless, 55% of buyers were women.) Couples wander through fields, smiling happily, before retiring to bedrooms and bathrooms for soft and sensual lovemaking (with a voiceover). Nothing from it would now get anywhere near the front page of a porn aggregator site.

“Some of the sex scenes in *The Lovers' Guide* were certainly erotic,” Ferman – who died in 2002 – would later say. “But eroticism was never, I think, the primary purpose of the scene. The primary function of the scene was to be helpful to couples in the audience who were trying to improve their own sex life.” He argued that what separated the finished film from pornography was context: “You weren’t looking at two bodies, two strangers

on screen having it away. You were actually looking at people who told what sex meant to them, what their relationships meant, what they wanted to do, what they were trying to do. And they were real people. And ordinary people watching felt, ‘They are just like us, and if this is what they do, this is what we can do.’”

Page accepts that not all his audience had education in mind, but takes the view that he was smuggling greens into their meal. “We discussed this with Jim Ferman. They were buying it to get off on it, but actually they’d learn loads of things along the way. If it had been some medical thing with diagrams, who would have bought it?” (Curiously, Ludgate says that’s exactly what Stanway wanted – women with their legs in stirrups while he pointed out the clitoris.) “There were 10,000 or so letters,” Page continues, “saying, ‘We’ve been married x years, we started watching your programme and we were making love on the living room carpet before it had finished. Thank you for saving our marriage.’ And that was fantastic.”

What was crucial was that you could buy *The Lovers’ Guide* easily. There were only 80 or so licensed sex shops in the UK, selling R18 films – which were not, at that point, as explicit as *The Lovers’ Guide*. “My family moved to Cornwall in the 1990s,” says Clarissa Smith, editor of the academic journal *Porn Studies*, “and the nearest sex shops were in Plymouth or Bristol, but you could buy *The Lovers’ Guide* in WH Smith. The ease of access was definitely really important.”

While it wasn’t pornography, it was revolutionary. Politics has the concept of the Overton window – the range of policies politically acceptable to the mainstream population at a given time – in which the centre of political gravity shifts left and right. One might think of sex, too, as having its own Overton window, and the 90s saw that window shift to allow portrayals of explicit sex, and an explosion in pornography.

There were simple, practical, legal reasons for that. From 1986, the Reagan and Bush administrations in the US had vigorously pursued obscenity prosecutions against pornographic film-makers. Bill Clinton came to power in 1993 promising to follow that agenda; in fact the Clinton administration had virtually no interest in prosecuting pornographers. In 1992, there were 42 prosecutions in the US in which federal obscenity offences were the lead

charge; by 1998, there were only six. The result was a boom in porn production, and the rise of mega-studios such as Evil Empire and Vivid Entertainment.

That would have been irrelevant had porn remained the preserve of sex shops. But three things were happening at once. First, escalating traffic loads caused the first wave of free porn sites – often run by college students, and usually consisting of images stolen from professional porn – to fade from business, because they didn't have the bandwidth to continue. Second, in summer 1994, a man sold a Sting CD to his friend over the internet, described by the New York Times as “the first retail transaction on the internet using a readily available version of a powerful data encryption software designed to guarantee privacy”. E-commerce was born. It wasn't long before those who lived too far from sex shops, or who couldn't bring themselves to walk into one, would be able to buy those Evil Empire and Vivid films without leaving their homes: they could visit a site such as Blissbox and have them delivered, in plain packaging, for the same cost as a Hollywood film, rather than the high prices charged by sex shops for something tamer. Third, a dancer and stripper called Danni Ashe noticed how many of her pictures were being traded on Usenet groups, and set up her own website, sparking a rush for porn producers to sell content directly via the internet.



Margi Clarke's TV show *The Good Sex Guide* launched in 1993.  
Photograph: PA Images/Alamy

At the same time, the culture was changing. Soft porn mags for women were launching, as was the hugely explicit Black Lace series of novels, also aimed at women, which sold more than 4m copies between its launch in 1993 and its closure in 2009. Margi Clarke's TV show *The Good Sex Guide* launched in 1993, and got unheard-of ratings for a late-night show: 13 million viewers. And a new kind of male culture – in which it was assumed and accepted that viewing porn was nothing to be ashamed of – was emerging. Porn was in newsagents, in the “lad mags”, and it was on screen.

By the end of the 1990s, what was officially licensed lagged so far behind what was readily available to anyone with an internet connection and a credit card that change was inevitable. The driver of change, again, was James Ferman. He was convinced the only way to draw people away from violent pornography – his particular *bete noire* – was to grant R18 certificates to films depicting consensual penetration and allow them to be sold in licensed sex shops. The test case was a film called *Makin' Whoopee*, to the outrage of the new home secretary, Jack Straw.

Straw summoned the BBFC's vice-president, Lord Birkett, to his office and railed at him. “Do you really mean that you are going to allow oral sex and buggery and I don't know what else?” Birkett later recalled Straw as saying. “That you are actually passing this? You are giving a certificate to it?”

In the face of Straw's rage, the BBFC withdrew *Makin' Whoopee*'s certification, and Straw changed the body's leadership, with Ferman and Birkett departing. But in his final report for the BBFC, Ferman displayed prescience. “It may well be that in the 21st century, it simply becomes impossible to impose the kind of regulation which the board exists to provide,” he wrote. “After all, what is the point of cutting a gang-rape scene in a British version of a film if that film is accessible down a telephone line from outside British territorial waters? I am probably the last of the old-time regulators.” Ferman may have lost his job, but he won the fight with Straw – for another statutory body, the Video Appeals Committee, simply reversed the BBFC's decision to back down, and seven porn films were licensed for

sale in sex shops. Censorship of pornography had, to all intents and purposes, finished in the UK.

The Lovers' Guide did not cause the collapse of censorship. It did not lead to YouPorn. That was the internet. But it was the starting point for a decade of change. "I think it was one of those moments in social history where there was a need for change, and we fulfilled the need," Ludgate says. "I think there was a collective need for change, and curiosity. Since the 60s, the cult of the individual had grown and this was part of that process. It was something people wanted individually that changed a lot of attitudes towards sex. I think it was a massive, seismic shift in attitudes."

And still it does its work. A few weeks after we talk, Page forwards an email he has just received. "Hi Robert. I just want to give you a VERY, VERY BIG THANK YOU AGAIN. I have bought your complete collection of The Lover's GUIDE. Your work is impeccable. I began watching them, and all I can say is. You sir are AWESOME. What I have been learning from them is amazing, and I just really wanted to THANK YOU AGAIN!!!!!!"

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## **‘The challenge for us now is drought, not war’: livelihoods of millions of Afghans at risk**



A grape farmer prunes vines below arid mountains near Kandahar, Afghanistan. Photograph: Gregory Bull/AP

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[Shah Meer Baloch](#) in Arghandab

Tue 21 Sep 2021 05.36 EDT

The war in [Afghanistan](#) might be over but farmers in Kandahar's Arghandab valley face a new enemy: drought.

It has hardly rained for two years, a drought so severe that some farmers are questioning how much longer they can live off the land.

Mohammed Rahim, 30, grew up working on a farm along with his father and grandfather in the Arghandab district of Afghanistan's southern province. Famous for its fruit and vegetables, the area is known as the bread basket of Kandahar.

Like most in the valley, Rahim's family relies solely on farming. "The fighting has just stopped. Peace has returned," Rahim says. "But now we face another war: drought."

"Now we have to dig deep to pump water out of the land. It has been two years, there has been little rain and we have a drought here. I don't know if our coming generations can rely on farming the way our ancestors used to do."

Pir Mohammed, 60, has been a farmer for more than four decades. “Not long ago, there were water channels flowing into the farm and we were providing the remaining water to other farmers,” says Mohammed. “Before, the water was running after us, flowing everywhere – but now we are running after water.”

We don’t make any profit. But we don’t have any other option as we do it for survival

*Pir Mohammed, farmer*

The water used to come free from the river but now the daily diesel cost for the water pump is at least 2,500 Afghani (£21).

“We don’t make any profit. We are in loss, rather. Instead, we are using our savings. But we don’t have any other option as we do it for survival,” says Mohammed. “However, the scarcity of water has affected the quality of crops as well.”

About 70% of Afghans live in rural areas and are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of drought.

Last week, Rein Paulsen, director of the Food and Agriculture Organization’s Office of Emergencies and Resilience, [said](#) severe drought was affecting 7.3 million people in 25 of the country’s 34 provinces.

He warned: “If agriculture collapses further, it will drive up malnutrition, increase displacement and worsen the humanitarian situation.”

Arghandab has been a favourite destination for farming because of the abundance of water and fertile lands. Neikh Mohammed, 40, left the Dand district of Kandahar to work in Arghandab in 2005. When he arrived he was amazed to see the greenery and pomegranate farms.



A dried up dam in Kandahar. A majority of Afghans are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of drought, as they live in rural areas. Photograph: Xinhua/Rex/Shutterstock

“It used to rain a lot here and we could not cross the river and come into our farms. We had a life with abundant water. But the past is another country now,” he says.

According to a report by the UN mission in Afghanistan, many local farmers were caught in the crossfire between the [Taliban](#) and the Afghan security forces. The Taliban carried out attacks from thick foliage on the farms, which provided a hiding place, ideal for an ambush.

“For the past 20 years, we did not have peace and could not work after dark in our farms. But now we can stay as long as we want without any fear,” says Neikh Mohammed. “Now the challenge is not just restoring peace but the drought and escalating cost of essential commodities.”

Farmers say they want support from international aid agencies and assistance from the new government headed by the Taliban to help them survive.

Pir Mohammed says: “The real challenge for us now is drought, not war. We need food, water, dams and infrastructure in our country. The world should invest in us and save us.”

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[David Squires on ... Soccer](#)

## David Squires on ... his favourite football cartoon panels



A warm place with no memory. Illustration: David Squires/The Guardian

[David Squires](#)

Tue 21 Sep 2021 05.00 EDT

The Guardian have granted me a week off from the back-breaking physical labour of drawing football cartoons, so I'm afraid you'll have to wait another week to read my searing analysis of Ralph Hasenhüttl's waistcoat game. However, as punishment, I've been asked to scour my back catalogue and pick out 10 panels from the last few years that I hate the least. Usually when I'm away from my drawing board, a huge story breaks, so feel free to dip in and out of this selection as you wait for the liveblog to refresh with updates on Pep Guardiola's shock move to Chippenham Town.

## The North Bank Redemption

This sequence comes from what is [probably my most popular cartoon](#), a parody of The Shawshank Redemption published when Arsène Wenger finally left Arsenal. Maybe if he and Gunnersaurus had stuck to sanding down boats in Zihuatanajo we wouldn't now be dealing with the prospect of a World Cup every fortnight.



Illustration: David Squires/The Guardian

## Emo Mourinho

The character of “Emo Mourinho” [was the longest I’ve let a joke run](#), as it was obvious from the early days of the 2018-19 season that he’d entered his

classic End Phase at Manchester United. By the time he left in December, I'd almost exhausted the "Emo Bands" entry on Wikipedia, so was relieved to see him move on.

TWO GAMES INTO THE NEW PREMIER LEAGUE SEASON  
AND SOME FAMILIAR PATTERNS ARE EMERGING, NOT  
LEAST AT MANCHESTER UNITED, WHERE A 3-2 DEFEAT TO  
BRIGHTON DID LITTLE TO ABATE JOSÉ MOURINHO'S ANGST.



Illustration: David Squires/The Guardian

## Shoegaze Hodgson

Similarly, I started drawing Roy Hodgson as an indie kid when rumours circulated that the over-70s might be banned from football stadiums at the [start of the coronavirus outbreak](#).

IT WAS RUHOURED THAT THE PREMIER LEAGUE WAS CONSIDERING BANNING THE OVER-70S FROM ATTENDING MATCHES, HOWEVER, NO SUCH MEASURE HAS BEEN IMPOSED, SO ROY HODGSON DOESN'T HAVE TO COW HIS WAY IN TO STADIUMS JUST YET.



Illustration: David Squires/The Guardian

## Mike Dean

Mike Dean [is one of my favourite people to draw](#) and I always enjoy watching him referee (possibly because he never refs Swindon games). Football is better for his flamboyant facial contortions, and no one delivers a yellow card quite like Dean. I also liked the idea of him booking a crab.

SELF-INFILCTED ECONOMIC PROLAPSE, THE CORONAVIRUS, THAT VACCINE THAT IMPLANTS AMSTRAD MICROCHIPS INTO YOUR BLADDY BRAINS; IT CAN ALL BE A BIT OVERWHELMING. THAT'S WHY IT'S IMPORTANT TO MAKE TIME FOR LIFE'S SIMPLE PLEASURES.



Illustration: David Squires/The Guardian

## Roy Keane

The background to drawing Roy Keane in a farmyard is too convoluted to explain now, but one day I hope to dedicate an entire cartoon to Roy's agricultural adventures.



Illustration: David Squires/The Guardian

## Poppygate

I drew my first cartoon for The Guardian [around Remembrance Day in 2014](#), when James McClean was receiving abuse for his refusal to wear a poppy. I've covered [Poppygate](#) nearly every year since, as the rhetoric around the day intensifies. This panel comes from one such cartoon in 2017, when people started wearing poppy onesies to football matches. It's definitely become harder to exaggerate human behaviour in recent years.

AT LEAST SOME PEOPLE ARE ABLE TO ACHIEVE THE APPROPRIATE LEVEL OF RESPECT. AT A COUPLE OF RECENT MATCHES, TWO FANS - IN ACTS OF PERFECTLY NORMAL BEHAVIOUR - CHOSE TO COVER THEMSELVES FROM HEAD TO TOE IN POPPIES.



Illustration: David Squires/The Guardian

## Pippo Inzaghi

All the cartoons have to be checked by the lawyers before they're published, which means that whoever is in the editorial hot seat on a Tuesday has to explain a few of the jokes to the legal department. On one such occasion, they were left with the task of acting as a middle man in an argument over whether it was libellous to suggest that [Pippo Inzaghi had really populated Italy with a plentiful sperm donation](#).

EARLIER, BARBARA BONANGEA HAD STUNNED AUSTRALIA WITH AN INJURY-TIME WINNER FOR ITALY. AUSTRALIA'S DEFENSIVE LINE WPS HIGHER THAN A CONSERVATIVE LEADERSHIP CANDIDATE AND JUST AS CATASTROPHIC. HOWEVER, ITALY'S INABILITY TO STAY ONSIDE WAS AS IF ONE DNA SOURCE HAD FUELLED THEIR NATION'S ENTIRE FERTILITY PROGRAMME IN THE 1990s.



Illustration: David Squires/The Guardian

## The Likely Lads

When England travelled to Sofia to play Bulgaria in October 2019, I filed a cartoon in advance that parodied the classic football episode of Whatever Happened to the Likely Lads, with Big Sam and Roy Hodgson in the roles of Bob and Terry, spending the day trying to avoid the result. Of course, when the England players [were subjected to racist abuse from the stands](#), there was no way the cartoon could be published on the site, but here's a panel showing how the former England managers spent part of their day together.



Illustration: David Squires/The Guardian

## Peter Drury

It's rare that anyone from the football world requests a copy of one of my cartoons. A member of the Manchester United backroom staff got in touch during the Mourinho era, and sometimes family members of featured players email me. My blood ran cold when I saw Peter Drury's name appear in my inbox after this cartoon was published, but he couldn't have been nicer. [The only part of the cartoon](#) he took exception to was the claim that he rehearsed his florid outbursts, so I'll choose to believe he drops words like "parabola" into his everyday conversations.



Illustration: David Squires/The Guardian

## Spygate

The great thing about writing about English football is that there's an endless cycle of new comedy characters. OK, I don't get to draw Harry Redknapp or Sepp Blatter as much as I used to, but now I've been gifted Marcelo Bielsa (plus interpreter). The Spygate story of early 2019 [was perfect cartoon material](#). Here's Marcelo making his getaway in an invisible James Bond car. I was a bit dehydrated when I drew this one.

AS WITH ALL GREAT SPY THRILLERS, AT SOME POINT THE MAIN CHARACTER GETS CAUGHT OUT. THIS WAS THE CASE LAST WEEK WHEN ONE OF LEEDS' OPERATIVES WAS CAPTURED SNOOPING AROUND DERBY'S TRAINING GROUND.



Illustration: David Squires/The Guardian

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## 2021.09.21 - Coronavirus

- Live Coronavirus: UK welcomes end of US travel ban; American Covid death toll passes 1918-19 flu pandemic
- US Demand soars for monoclonal antibody treatments in states with low vaccination rates
- New Zealand Police arrest pair trying to enter Auckland with 'large amount' of KFC
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## US Covid deaths reach average of 1,900 a day – as it happened

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## Biden administration

# Demand soars for monoclonal antibody treatments in states with low vaccination rates



A monoclonal antibody treatment site in Pembroke Pines, Florida. Governor Ron DeSantis promotes the antibody treatment even as he opposes vaccine and mask mandates. Photograph: Chandan Khanna/AFP/Getty Images

*Melody Schreiber*

Tue 21 Sep 2021 03.00 EDT

Demand has been soaring for monoclonal antibodies – a treatment to lessen the severity of Covid-19 symptoms – especially among states with larger populations of [vaccine-hesitant Americans](#), as the US continues to struggle with the highly contagious Delta variant in regions with lagging vaccination rates.

The demand for the treatment increased twentyfold in recent weeks because of the sharp rise in new cases accelerated by the Delta variant and lagging vaccination rates, and because of increased awareness of the treatment. But the distribution has, so far, been unequal.

Seven states that have seen Covid-19 rate spikes in recent weeks and months – Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee and Texas – have used 70% of the federal supply of monoclonal antibodies.

Several Republican leaders have made the treatments a central part of their pandemic response, even appearing to champion them over vaccinations. The governors of Florida and Texas, Ron DeSantis and Greg Abbott, have touted antibodies even as they oppose mask mandates and decry the federal vaccine mandates on large employers as “[illegal](#)” and a “[power grab](#)”. (The monoclonal antibodies are also provided by the US government.)

The Covid-19 vaccines are highly effective at preventing hospitalization and death, and they can also cut transmission of the virus – something the antibody treatments can’t do.

Antibodies are also significantly more expensive, at about \$2,100 a dose. In comparison, the Covid vaccines cost between \$10 and \$20 a dose.

Dr Marcus Plescia, chief medical officer of the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, said it was important to prevent the spread of the virus rather than simply treat the disease comparing the situation to “going upstream and turning off the spigot, rather than dealing with the waterfall”.

“By far the most effective [strategy] is vaccination,” he said. “That’s the way out of this thing.”

Monoclonal antibodies are important treatments for the early prevention of severe symptoms among those who test positive for the coronavirus. The treatment is [highly effective](#) when given early in the course of disease, and it may also be given to those who have had significant exposure to a positive case – for instance, a household contact. The treatments received emergency use authorizations among certain high-risk groups over the age of 12.

In the face of a shortage of the treatment, the [Biden administration](#) has changed its allocation system, and some states are objecting to the reduced shipments.

The Biden administration said on 9 September it would increase shipments of the treatment from 100,000 to 150,000 doses a week. Days later, the health department [announced](#) it would change the way the supply is distributed.

“They’re trying to come up with a way to make the monoclonal antibodies available, but do it in a fair way,” Plescia said.

“There wasn’t a lot of demand for monoclonal antibodies up until a month or two ago. This just popped up, and it’s going to take a while for the manufacturers to respond.



Greg Abbott, governor of Texas, has touted monoclonal antibodies.  
Photograph: Eric Gay/AP

“We may start to see surges in other states, and I think the government was partly intervening to make sure that not all of the supply was being used by states that are currently in the worst situation,” Plescia said.

Some of the states that have recently been hit hardest by the virus have objected to cuts in their supply of the treatment.

DeSantis said the new distribution system would cut Florida's supply in half, and he vowed to "fight like hell" for more treatments. Florida was due to receive nearly 30,000 doses of the treatment last week, which was still the biggest shipment in the US.

"Alabama's hospitals are full and under tremendous stress," said Dr Aruna Arora, president of the state's medical association. The state received 70% of the treatments it ordered last week, and new limitations on the treatment could add additional pressure to health systems, Aurora said.

The US government shored up supply last week by buying 1.4m more doses from Regeneron and 400,000 doses from Eli Lilly.

A similar allocation system was put into place earlier in the pandemic, but it was dismantled because of low demand. Then, providers could order the treatment from the US government's supplier, AmeriSourceBergen. But now, the administration is shipping doses to state departments of health.

The distribution process has been "adjusted" several times this year, an HHS spokesperson told the Guardian, and the new system will "help maintain equitable distribution, both geographically and temporally, across the country".

About 2.4m treatments have been shipped around the country, and at least 1.1m of them have been used.

For months, the antibodies sat on shelves because of testing delays and overwhelmed health systems. It's important to receive the treatment as soon as possible after a positive test, but lags in testing make that difficult. And hospitals and infusion centers struggled to administer the treatment widely.

"Our role as the government overseeing the entire country is to be equitable in how we distribute," Jen Psaki, the White House press secretary, said in a briefing on Thursday. "We're not going to give a greater percentage to Florida over Oklahoma."

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[New Zealand](#)

## New Zealand police arrest pair trying to enter Auckland with ‘large amount’ of KFC



New Zealand police found three buckets of KFC chicken and an undisclosed quantity of fries when they arrested two men trying to cross into Auckland despite city's strict lockdown. Photograph: New Zealand Police

*[Tess McClure](#) in Wellington*

*[@tessairini](#)*

Mon 20 Sep 2021 19.59 EDT

Two men have been arrested after police said they found them with a car boot-full of Kentucky fried chicken and over \$100,000 in cash as they tried to cross the border into Auckland despite New Zealand’s strict Covid-19 lockdown.

The men were arrested after allegedly trying to flee from police near the Auckland border. When their car was searched, police said they found a large quantity of KFC, as well as the cash and a number of empty ounce bags.

The arrest struck a chord with New Zealanders – especially Aucklanders, who have spent a month in a strict level four lockdown that does not allow restaurants to open or residents to order takeaway food.

In such an environment, fast food can take on the aura of a high-value illicit substance. Last week, a man was charged by police after posting a social media video of crossing the Auckland boundary in search of McDonald's.

After the KFC arrest, a police spokesperson said “officers noticed a suspicious looking vehicle travelling on a gravel road, and upon seeing the police car, the vehicle did a U-turn and sped off trying to evade police.

“The vehicle was searched and police located the cash, alongside empty ounce bags and a large amount of takeaways.”

Close examination of the police evidence photos revealed at least three buckets of chicken, up to 10 tubs of coleslaw, and an undisclosed quantity of fries.



New Zealand police also found more than \$100,000 in cash when they arrested the two men. Photograph: New Zealand Police

While the scene resembles the plot line of a buddy crime comedy, it is in fact a serious breach of New Zealand's lockdown laws. A breach of the Covid-19 Public Health Response Act can result in imprisonment for up to six months; or a fine of up to \$4,000.

The men will appear in court for breaching the health order, and police said further charges were likely.

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## Coronavirus

# Covid-19 has now killed as many Americans as the 1918-19 flu pandemic



Soldiers at Camp Funston in Kansas recover from the influenza pandemic in 1918. Photograph: US Army/Reuters

*[Oliver Milman and agencies](#)*

*[@olliemilman](#)*

Tue 21 Sep 2021 08.38 EDT

Covid-19 has now killed as many Americans as the 1918-19 flu pandemic, with more than 675,000 reported deaths.

The US population a century ago was just a third of what it is today, meaning the flu cut a much bigger, more lethal swath through the country.

But the Covid-19 crisis is by any measure a colossal tragedy in its own right, especially given major advances in scientific knowledge and the failure to

take maximum advantage of vaccines.

Unlike a century ago, vaccines have been made widely available. However, an extensive reticence to be inoculated, fueled in part by baseless fears about safety and efficacy, means that 36% of people in the US aged 12 and over have yet to be fully vaccinated, [according to data](#) from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

“Big pockets of American society – and, worse, their leaders – have thrown this away,” said Dr Howard Markel a medical historian at the University of Michigan.

The White House initially [forecast](#) 100,000 to 240,000 deaths from Covid-19, if people socially distanced. Donald Trump, who erroneously [predicted](#) the coronavirus would simply vanish, oversaw the lower end of this forecast being reached in May last year, the latter death toll arriving in November.

A surge in deaths in the spring of 2020 was surpassed by a larger wave of deaths over winter, with a record 4,197 people dying on a single day, 13 January, according to Johns Hopkins University. Since Joe Biden became president, the rollout of vaccines has helped push the rate of deaths down, although it started climbing again in August due to the spread of the Delta variant.

The true death toll may be [much higher](#) than the official total because, like the previous pandemic, it is estimated. Also similar to the 1918-19 flu, the coronavirus may never entirely disappear. Scientists hope it will become a mild seasonal bug as human immunity strengthens through vaccination and repeated infection.



Medical staff care for people with influenza at an emergency tent hospital in Brookline, Massachusetts, in October 1918. Photograph: Everett/Rex/Shutterstock

“We hope it will be like getting a cold, but there’s no guarantee,” said Rustom Antia, a biologist at Emory University, suggesting an optimistic scenario in which this could happen over a few years.

For now, the pandemic still has the US and other parts of the world firmly in its jaws.

While the Delta variant-fueled surge in infections may have peaked, US deaths are more than 1,900 a day on average – the highest level since early March – and the overall toll topped 675,000 on Monday, according to the count kept by Johns Hopkins.

Winter may bring a new surge, with the University of Washington’s influential model projecting an additional 100,000 or so Covid-19 deaths by 1 January, which would bring the overall US toll to 776,000.



A nurse cares for a patient in the influenza ward of Walter Reed hospital in Washington in 1918. Photograph: Library of Congress/AP

The 1918-19 influenza pandemic killed 50 million globally, at a time when the world had a quarter the population it does now. Global deaths from Covid-19 stand at more than 4.6 million.

The 1918-19 flu's US death toll is a rough guess, given incomplete records of the era and the poor scientific understanding of what caused the illness. The 675,000 figure comes from the CDC.

Before Covid-19, the 1918-19 flu was universally considered the worst pandemic in history. Whether the current scourge ultimately proves deadlier is unclear.

In many ways, the 1918-19 flu – which was wrongly named Spanish flu because it first received widespread news coverage in Spain – was worse. Spread by the mobility of the first world war, it killed young, healthy adults in vast numbers. No vaccine existed and there were no antibiotics to treat secondary infections.



Volunteers with the Red Cross hand out flu masks at a table in San Francisco in 1918. Photograph: Hamilton Henry Dobbin/California State Library handout/EPA

Jet travel and mass migrations threaten to increase the toll of the current pandemic. Much of the world is unvaccinated. And the coronavirus has been full of surprises.

Just under 64% of the US population has received at least one dose of the vaccine, with state rates ranging from a high of approximately 77% in Vermont and Massachusetts to lows around 46% to 49% in Idaho, Wyoming, West Virginia and Mississippi.

Globally, about 43% of the population has received at least one dose, according to Our World in Data, with some African countries just beginning to give their first shots.

“We know that all pandemics come to an end,” said Dr Jeremy Brown, director of emergency care research at the National Institutes of Health, who wrote a book on influenza. “They can do terrible things while they’re raging.”

Covid-19 could have been far less lethal in the US if more people had gotten vaccinated faster, “and we still have an opportunity to turn it around”,

Brown said. “We often lose sight of how lucky we are to take these things for granted.”

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[The Merkel years](#)[Angela Merkel](#)

## How the refugee crisis created two myths of Angela Merkel

[Daniel Trilling](#)



Illustration by Matt Kenyon

Tue 21 Sep 2021 04.00 EDT

When Angela Merkel steps down as chancellor once Germany's elections later this month produce a new government, the tributes will centre on her [role as the figurehead](#) of western liberalism; an island of stability, caution and openness in an era marked by turbulence and far-right reaction. She will be remembered "for serious work, stable leadership and having a gift for political compromise", [wrote Ishaan Tharoor](#) in the Washington Post last week. When she faced off against Donald Trump after his inauguration in 2017, some newspapers dubbed her the new "leader of the free world".

Fundamental to this image is the intervention she made in late summer 2015, at the height of Europe's refugee crisis. “[Wir schaffen das](#)” – we'll manage this – was Merkel's public statement as thousands of people, mainly from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, were making their way through Turkey, Greece and the Balkans to western Europe. By declaring Germany – and, by extension, Europe – open to refugees, she was making a bold, pragmatic statement of intent.

Yet two contradictory [myths have grown up](#) around the “*wir schaffen das*” moment, both of which overstate the significance of her intervention and mischaracterise its effects. The populist right blames Merkel for prompting one of the largest mass migrations in the continent's recent history, a “catastrophic mistake”, as Trump later put it, that would undermine Europe's security and identity through an overwhelming foreign intrusion.

Liberals, meanwhile, treat it as a triumph. Merkel's stance, in this telling, held true to the values that supposedly underpin the European project – the EU, after all, is the only geopolitical bloc to have been [awarded the Nobel peace prize](#) – and showed that a crisis could be met with compassion.

In truth, Merkel's contribution to Europe's politics of immigration went much further than “*wir schaffen das*”, and her legacy is far more mixed. As an investigation by Die Zeit [has since shown](#), “*wir schaffen das*” did not, for the most part, encourage migration: it acknowledged a reality that already existed.

The refugee crisis had already been under way for several months by the summer of 2015, with people motivated to travel more by what was pushing them from their homes than the reception they expected in Europe. Syrians in 2015, for instance, were facing a worsening conflict, decreasing food rations from aid agencies, and employment bans in Lebanon and Turkey, where most Syrian refugees have settled. When Germany announced in early September 2015, a few days after Merkel's speech, that it would keep its borders open to refugees who were heading westwards from the [Keleti railway station](#) in Budapest, people had been travelling for months already.

What's more, Europe's “crisis” – the chaotic and deadly arrival of people not just through Greece but across the central Mediterranean from Africa – was

in large part a product of the continent's own border policies, which had closed off safe routes to asylum and funnelled people into dangerous bottlenecks. Germany under Merkel, as the EU's most powerful member, played a key role in creating the problem. It helped maintain a system in which border security was given higher priority than refugee reception – between 2007 and 2013, [according to Amnesty International](#), the EU spent €2bn on the former, and only €700m on the latter. Likewise, Merkel's insistence on punitive austerity as the solution to Europe's earlier economic crisis fatally weakened the capacity of frontline states such as Greece to respond to greater numbers of refugees at a crucial moment.

Even the moment of openness that “*wir schaffen das*” expressed was short-lived, with Germany soon working to rebuild and strengthen Fortress Europe. By mid-September 2015, Germany had introduced [temporary controls](#) on its border with Austria, the beginning of a process that would eventually see migration routes through south-eastern Europe closed off. A few months later, Merkel was a leading proponent of the 2016 deal that effectively trapped many refugees in Turkey, while Germany has done nothing to challenge the EU's authoritarian turn that has made [search and rescue](#) in the Mediterranean almost impossible. Merkel may have been a bulwark against far-right domination of European politics, but the price was to absorb some of the far-right's agenda on border control.

Yet while Merkel did not radically alter the European course of the crisis, she shifted the tone of debate at a crucial moment. Fleeting as it was, this mattered. Its effects can be seen in the way German society accommodated the 1.7 million people who claimed asylum there between 2015 and 2019. Despite the dire predictions from the right, this has been an undoubted success: a survey published last year suggested that refugees who arrived in Germany between 2013 and 2016 were [finding jobs more rapidly](#) than in previous years. As the Guardian [reported last year](#), another survey suggested that more than 80% of refugee children felt that they belonged in Germany and were welcome. The xenophobic backlash, playing on fears of crime or terrorism, is real, but it is something that can be – and is being – challenged.

Britain's government makes an instructive comparison: even as it proclaims its generosity towards a small fraction of the people currently trying to flee

Afghanistan (the official scheme promises to [resettle 20,000 people](#) over five years), this is drowned out by its authoritarian posturing. The latest of these, a promise to “[turn around](#)” migrant boats in the Channel, one of the world’s busiest shipping lanes, risks deadly consequences if it ever comes to pass. The response to recent Afghan arrivals – sustained by a huge volunteer effort – itself reveals the shoddiness of Britain’s asylum system: why is it being left to volunteers and charities to provide essentials such as clothes?

Ultimately, Merkel’s legacy tells us less about one politician’s actions than about what can be done if a society has the will to help people in need. That is a collective effort. But the myths and symbols politicians trade in have the capacity to enable such efforts, or to destroy them. In Britain, it often feels like the debate on asylum is dominated by a competition to see who can sound the toughest: between politicians who enthusiastically push a hard-right agenda, and those who purport to be liberals but take a tough stance because they think it’s what the public wants.

This goes beyond the peculiar cruelties of our current government: it is the product of years of xenophobia encouraged by the rightwing press, and will take a huge effort to unpick. But Merkel should remind us, however inconsistent her actions might have been in reality, that there is always an alternative.

- Daniel Trilling is the author of *Lights in the Distance: Exile and Refuge at the Borders of Europe* and *Bloody Nasty People: the Rise of Britain’s Far Right*
- This article was amended on 22 September 2021, as it suggested that more than half of refugees in [Germany](#) were in work, but this was drawn from a study that suggested that 49% of those who had been in the country for more than five years were employed.

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## **Labour should be approaching its party conference with hope, not despair**

[Polly Toynbee](#)



Keir Starmer speaking at the TUC congress in London last week.  
Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA

Tue 21 Sep 2021 02.00 EDT

Ahead of the Labour party conference this weekend, many are hoping for a [magic leader's speech](#) to turn the tide overnight. Orthodoxy decrees that a midterm opposition should be polling far ahead, not in Labour's current position – three percentage points behind the Tories. But it would be a historic first for Labour to overturn its [worst defeat in eight decades](#) in just one leap. Many of the seats it lost in the 2019 election had been sliding away for years. “You go bankrupt gradually, then suddenly,” is how Ben Page of Ipsos Mori describes the slow erosion of support in seats such as Sedgefield, in County Durham.

Keir Starmer, who is polling well below Boris Johnson (though both have negative approval ratings), has remained relatively unknown, voters still vague on who he is and what he stands for. Covid-19 prevented the opposition from making bareknuckle assaults on a government coping with a deadly emergency. Meanwhile Tory mega-donors have funded “more polling and focus groups than I’ve ever seen”, says Page.

Labour’s frontbench is decent and serious, and surefooted in pointing out egregious policy blunders and dishonesties by Tory ministers, yet they too, remain largely unknown, the launch of numerous Starmer-era policies unnoticed. Anxious supporters call for charisma, as if a glitter ball over their conference hall might help. Too dull, too grey, where’s the zest? If Johnson has turned politics into a game show, [Labour](#) is neither in the celebrity jungle nor on the dance floor.

That’s why Labour people huddle together glumly, watching calamitous policies glide through parliament under Johnson’s untouchable majority. Aside from the endless internal strife caused by those who seem more intent on capturing the party than winning real elections, is it all over?

No, because what comes next is the show where Johnson’s balloons burst, his promises unredeemed. The one where the economy bites deep into pockets, with wages falling behind inflation, the cost of food rising, Brexit

denuding shelves and winter gas prices soaring. Save Christmas, Johnson orders his ministers, but he may be the turkey. Plentiful job vacancies in low-paid sectors are no replacement for better jobs that have been lost since the start of the pandemic, warns the Institute for Fiscal Studies. The end of the furlough scheme and the cut to universal credit will force many families into food banks and add to grim statistics on the nightly news. Positive forecasts are few.

Economic woe will collide with the chancellor's back-to-austerity budget in October. Schools will be worse funded than in 2010, NHS waiting times are already critical and phantom funds for social care will cause care home closures. The government's "levelling up" agenda is yet to materialise. Infrastructure projects take for ever, so Michael Gove will struggle to whistle up hi-vis quick wins.

Governments famously lose elections, oppositions don't conquer. The Exchange Rate Mechanism fiasco destroyed John Major. The global crash slew Gordon Brown: that was unjust, but governments take the rap for losing their grip on economic security. Tony Blair even [feared the end](#) in 2000, when hauliers blockading oil depots caused angry petrol pump queues. The public may not forgive another Covid surge; a masked Labour conference may look better than the flamboyantly [maskless Tory cabinet in a closed room](#).

Political earthquakes do happen. But waiting for a national disaster is a bad look. Besides, economic cataclysm only gifts power to an opposition fit to govern. Margaret Thatcher rode out the extreme unpopularity of the deep recession that her cuts caused in the early 1980s, because anti-Europe, anti-Nato Michael Foot was the unelectable alternative. (That's why the [SDP split from Labour](#), sealing her hegemony.)

Voters have yet to decide if Labour is a safe emergency service to rescue the country. Starmer has put its house in order, tightened his team and gripped the ruling executive, but the damage done by Jeremy Corbyn still lingers in doorstep encounters: it will rise up at conference, though most local party delegates are now Starmerites. His top team is quite chipper for a number of reasons. Yo-yo polls suggest a narrowing of the Tories' lead. "Even this government can't defy political gravity for ever," says Prof Tim Bale of the

University of London. Voters are fine-tuned to the real economy: the cost of living is increasing and many are indignant that tax rises have fallen on working people, not the rich. Bale agrees with party analysts who say Starmer may not be popular, but equally there is no hostility to him either. The phrase of the moment is that Labour now has “permission to be heard”. It means doors no longer slam in the party’s face.

Half-heard news clips from a leader’s speech butter few political parsnips on the day, but the right note struck incessantly does eventually filter into the public consciousness, despite a hostile media. Open goals will leave Labour spoiled for choice: after the economy, security is Starmer’s domain. Who can call Labour “soft on crime” with law and order collapsing under three-year delays for criminal trials? Elsewhere, on the environment, how can Johnson face Cop26 with no roadmap for missed environmental targets? On public services, people already trust Labour. And when it comes to Brexit, does Starmer dare to damn Johnson’s record and put forward a better deal? For those of us yearning for future radicalism, proportional representation is the one hope that could ensure it. Dare Starmer back it?

In his recent speech at the Trades Union Congress, Starmer pledged secure jobs, an end to zero-hours contracts and fire-and-rehire policies, £30bn for green jobs and an end to the freeze on key-worker pay. Expect shadow chancellor Rachel Reeves to fire up wealth creation through investment, closing unjust tax loopholes and calling for a windfall tax on pandemic profiteers. These policies also chime with soft Tory voters: don’t call them “lower than vermin”, as Aneurin Bevan did, when they need to be wooed.

If the economy turns dangerous, hourly focus groups will only tell Johnson what’s coming. But he’s only safe until a self-disciplined Labour party proves it’s the fire brigade people can trust.

- Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist

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## The real reason dogs are better than cats

[Zoe Williams](#)



Best in show ... PD Stark with his handler, PC Paul Hopley, and his Thin Blue Paw award. Photograph: Penny Bird/Thin Blue Paw Awards/PA

Tue 21 Sep 2021 02.00 EDT

The [Thin Blue Paw](#) is a new organisation honouring the achievements of police dogs, in active service or retired. The inaugural award for outstanding bravery was won by Stark, a West Midlands rookie police dog who kept holding on even as the suspect in his grip [attacked him with a machete](#). Initially, I thought, have these people never met a dog? That's what they do. There's an actual adjective named after them. It's like giving Kate Winslet an award for having expressive eyes (coincidentally, she did [win an Emmy](#) the same week for this very thing).

Then I read how many times Stark was hit with the machete and revised my view to be more awestruck. But I still thought: if it's tenacity the police are looking for, they should switch to staffordshire bull terriers. My dog would still be attached to the criminal – he wouldn't let go for long enough to attend the awards ceremony. Then I read the extent of Stark's injuries, and the happy news that he is now recovered, and I had a hard word with myself. This is indeed an outstanding dog, who deserves all the plaudits life throws at him.

Prison Service dogs also have quite a complex awards system, and so do staff members of the prison estate. I'm a trustee of the [Butler Trust](#), which celebrates the people (not the dogs). One year, another trustee was also on the dog judging panel, and I definitely considered – although I hope didn't say out loud – merging the two bodies so we could have the ceremony for both species at Buckingham Palace. The canines were just so incredible, so versatile: drug dogs that could also smell sim cards, perimeter dogs that also cheered people up. I wasn't thinking they should go head-to-head with the prison officers, by the way, who are more incredible still (details to follow next March, when we announce our winners).

People always call them “service animals”, presumably to indicate that cats are also eligible. Yet cats never win, because they are not pro-social. Cat people, one day, will accept this.

# Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist

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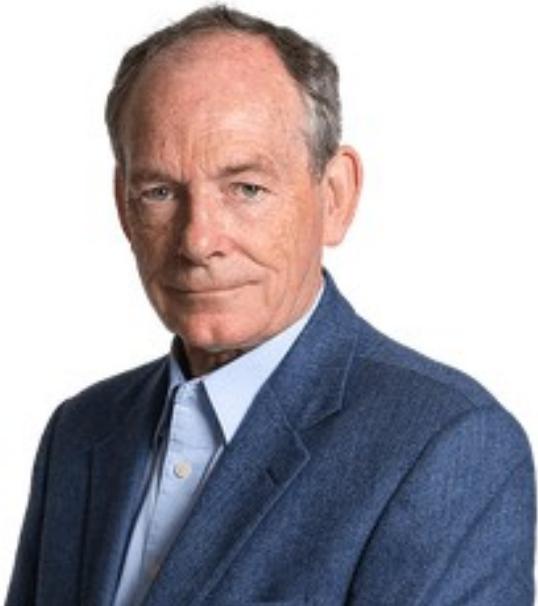
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## Boris Johnson's military alliance in the Pacific is reckless post-imperial nostalgia

[Simon Jenkins](#)





A Royal Australian Navy submarine at HMAS Stirling, Garden Island, Australia. Photograph: Australian Defence Force/Getty Images

Mon 20 Sep 2021 11.00 EDT

The Aukus defence deal between Britain, the US and Australia [grows murkier by the day](#). Essentially it is the outcome of an industrial dispute over who will build eight submarines for the Australian military. Australia ordered £48bn-worth of diesel-powered ones from France and then changed its mind, reneging on the deal. It now wants nuclear-powered ones from the US and Britain.

Crewed submarines are approaching obsolescence, near useless in an age of [“transparent” oceans](#) and underwater drones. Like tanks, they drip with cost, inefficiency and a craving to fight outdated wars. But defence contracts have a corporate and political existence that transcends utility. If Australia seriously thinks China is a threat, it might as well have some new gold-plated weapons ready.

However, this particular equipment contract appears to have morphed into a new military alliance in the Asia-Pacific region. Johnson’s defence adviser, Stephen Lovegrove, declares it to be “[a profound strategic shift](#)”. Unless

Downing Street is clueless, it was clearly intended to enrage China, [which it duly has](#), as well as humiliate France, which [it also has](#).

Boris Johnson protested that it was “[not adversarial](#)” toward China, but, when Theresa May asked if he seriously envisaged war over Taiwan, he refused to say no. “The United Kingdom remains determined to defend international law and that is ... the strong advice we would give to the government in Beijing.” Is he just playing with words? In July [he sent an aircraft carrier](#) near a disputed region in the South China Sea, prompting warnings from Beijing. This would be merely a mouse trying to roar, were vast sums of public money not involved in sustaining Johnson’s vanity.

Pompous remarks made for political effect, like sudden alliances and needless snubs, have consequences. Western defence interests born of the cold war refused to let Nato redefine its purpose in the 1990s, with the demise of the Soviet Union. Which is how Britain got sucked into Afghanistan and Iraq, ostensibly to protect the US from the new threat of terrorism. High rhetoric and military chest-beating likewise fuelled the preliminaries to the first world war.

Britain has no conceivable reason for adopting an aggressive position in the Pacific. It is all arcane post-imperial nostalgia. If the US is mad enough to return to war in south-east Asia over Taiwan, it is nothing to do with Britain, any more than Vietnam was. France, too, claims concern for its citizens in the Pacific. Europe’s second-rank states seem unable ever to let go of their empires.

China’s emergence as a world economic power in the past quarter-century has been a politico-economic miracle. It was achieved by marrying the disciplines of capitalism to those of dictatorship. The west may not like some of its manifestations and is free to say so. They are not the west’s business. [China](#) does not fall under the west’s sovereignty.

With its newly powerful status, China has embraced military aggrandisement, sensitivity to criticism and a regional sphere of influence, all syndromes that should be familiar to the US. Time alone will tell where

this leads. But for the west now to open a cold war with China must be beyond stupid, and for Britain especially fatuous.

So-called western diplomacy is currently a disaster area. It has failed to adjust to post-communist Russia, and its handling of the Muslim world has been ham-fisted and tragic. In Afghanistan the most expensive armies in the world have been sent packing by a fistful of AK-47s.

It is half a century since Harold Wilson formally withdrew Britain from “east of Suez”. Johnson clearly aches to return, to prove that he can somehow punch above his weight and put Britain back on the world stage after Brexit. Foreign policy so vacuously formulated is reckless. British diplomacy should now be concentrated on Europe, overwhelmingly so. One thing Brexit did not alter was geography.

- Simon Jenkins is a Guardian columnist
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[\*\*Rights and freedom\*\*](#)[\*\*Global development\*\*](#)

## **Top Thai union leader ‘targeted’ with jail for rail safety campaign**



Sawit Kaewvarn, president of the rail workers' union in Thailand, was sentenced to three years in prison, along with 12 other union officials.  
Photograph: Handout

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# HUMANITY UNITED

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[Rebecca Ratcliffe](#)

Tue 21 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

One of Thailand's most prominent union leaders is facing three years in prison for his role in organising a railway safety campaign, in a case described as the biggest attack on organised labour in the country in decades.

Rights advocates say the case involving Sawit Kaewvarn, president of the State Railway Union of Thailand, will have a chilling effect on unions and threatens to further weaken workers' rights in the country.

Sawit, who is also head of the State Enterprises Workers' Relations Confederation, the largest body of trade unions in Thailand, was convicted of omission of duties and sentenced to three years in prison last October. Twelve other national and local union leaders received the same sentence.

The group has been freed on bail and have appealed against the verdict, with a ruling expected soon.



Rescuers on the derailed train carriages in Hua Hin. Seven passengers were killed in the 2009 crash, which unions say was due to safety failings.  
Photograph: The Nation/AP

Phil Robertson, deputy director of Human Rights Watch's Asia division, said that the convictions would be "a major blow" to the Thai labour movement if they were upheld.

It could, he added, prompt the US to further suspend trade preferences for Thailand. In 2019, the US announced it would [halt \\$1.3bn \(£1bn\) in trade benefits](#), citing a failure to ensure labour rights.

"I think it would also raise some fundamental concerns both for the UK, and for the EU, who are trying to negotiate free trade agreements with Thailand: that it is impossible to do business with the Thai government without engaging in supporting an anti-union agenda," said Robertson.

The case dates back to 2009 when seven passengers were killed, and dozens more injured, after a train derailment near Khao Tao station in Hua Hin, a seaside town 125 miles (200km) south of Bangkok.

A fact-finding panel, led by the State Railway of Thailand (SRT), blamed the train driver, who it said had fallen asleep.

It was the third derailment in weeks, and the union argued that faulty safety equipment had contributed to the disaster. It launched a health and safety campaign, calling on the SRT to fix what it believed to be broken machinery. Drivers refused to operate trains that they alleged did not have functioning safety features, such as “dead man’s switches” and vigilance control equipment.

In response, the SRT accused the union of organising a strike – which, as state enterprise workers, they are forbidden from doing. It filed a lawsuit against 13 union leaders, including Sawit, which led to years of drawn-out negotiations and expensive litigation. Sawit was dismissed in 2011, and, though reinstated in 2014, was not compensated for the lost income.

In 2018, after the lawsuit was ended, seven of the national union leaders were ordered to pay 24m baht (£520,000) in fines and interest. The sum was to be deducted from their wages.

The verdict was financially devastating, but Sawit and the other union leaders believed the matter was, at least, finally closed. Then, in 2019, the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) brought criminal charges against the group, just days before the statute of limitations was due to expire, according to Sawit.

Sawit was accused by the NACC of omission of duties and of causing a work stoppage with an intention to cause damage, and was sentenced along with the 12 others on 21 October 2020.



‘Safety is a human right,’ said Sawit. ‘We need to work in a safe environment.’ Photograph: Handout

“It was not beyond expectation that they would try to attack me but I didn’t think it was going to be this hard,” said Sawit.

He said when the sentencing was announced last year, workers broke down and cried.

The various actions taken against the union workers have been condemned domestically, by the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand, and by international rights groups. The UN’s International Labour Organization has [repeatedly expressed concern over the cases](#).

Sawit has lost count of how much money he has lost in the lawsuit. Today, his monthly salary is only about 300 baht (£6.50) – just below the daily minimum wage in Thailand. Other workers have been forced to transfer ownership of their assets, fearing they will be seized. They have been unable to support their families or pay for their children to go to university. The union has estimated it will take a decade for the seven union leaders to pay the fines.

David Welsh, Thailand country director for the Solidarity Center, an international workers’ rights group that is advocating for Sawit and other

union leaders, said the case, by criminalising basic freedom of association activities, would have a chilling effect on other workers.

“They are targeting the most senior figure in the trade union movement. The message to rank-and-file trade union members or leaders is: this is what we do to the most senior leader in the movement, regardless of outside pressure, national or international.”

A sample of 90 trains checked by the SRT at the time of the Hua Hin crash found the vigilance systems on 21 trains were damaged, according to data later cited by a National Human Rights Commission of Thailand report.

Sawit stresses that the campaign was simply calling for safer conditions for workers. “Safety is a human right, it is the employee’s right; we need to work in a safe environment,” he said.

According to one order seen by the Guardian, issued after the union’s health and safety campaign was launched, workers were instructed to drive trains even if the vigilance system or dead man’s switch was not working properly. Staff were told to place these notices in the driver’s cab.

The union said the family of a victim killed in the Hua Hin crash had successfully sued the SRT for failing to maintain safety equipment – a sign, it argued, that its campaign was in the public interest.

The NACC and SRT did not respond to requests for comment.

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## [Sudan](#)

# Sudan coup attempt has failed, government says



Demonstrators blocked Port Sudan this week in protest at a peace deal with rebel groups. Photograph: Ibrahim Ishaq/AFP/Getty

*Peter Beaumont and agencies*

Tue 21 Sep 2021 08.22 EDT

Sudan's fragile political transition has been plunged into uncertainty after a reported coup attempt by soldiers loyal to the former autocrat Omar al-Bashir, who [was ousted in 2019](#).

As [Sudan](#) woke up to the government's claims of the alleged coup, details – including the individuals behind it – remained murky. Bashir himself came to power after a military coup in 1989.

Amid reports of sporadic shooting at a base in Khartoum's twin city of Omdurman, which is linked to the capital by bridge, government officials said the coup involving military officers and civilians linked to the deposed regime had failed.

Sudan's army said in a statement that 21 officers and a number of soldiers had been arrested in connection with a coup attempt on Tuesday morning, and a search was ongoing to capture the remainder of those involved.

In an address to troops on Tuesday, the powerful paramilitary commander Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, known as Hemeti, said: "We will not allow a coup to take place. We want real democratic transition through free and fair elections, not like in the past."

The reported coup attempt comes amid a period of heightened tensions over Sudan's long-delayed political transition after the end of Bashir's three-decade-long rule in April 2019, which [followed widespread street demonstrations](#).

According to local media reports, military forces were stationed on key roads on Tuesday and on the main bridges linking Khartoum to the neighbouring cities of Omdurman and Bahri.

Sudan's state-run television called on the public to "counter" the coup attempt but did not provide further details.

"All is under control. The revolution is victorious," Mohammed al-Fiky Suliman, a member of the ruling military-civilian council, wrote on Facebook. He called on Sudanese citizens to protect the transition.

The prime minister, Abdalla Hamdok, said the coup plotters involved military personnel and civilians, adding that the attempt was aimed at undermining the country's political transition.

A military official said an unspecified number of troops from the armoured corps were behind the attempt and that they had tried to take over several government institutions but were stopped.

He said they had aimed to seize the military headquarters and the state broadcaster. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to brief the media, said more than three dozen troops, including high-ranking officers, had been arrested. He did not provide further details, saying that a military statement would be released shortly.

The state-run Suna news agency quoted Brig Al-Tahir Abu Haja, a media consultant for the military's chief, as saying that the armed forces "thwarted the attempted coup and that all is completely under control".

Sudan has been wracked by instability since achieving independence in 1956, with the country governed since August 2019 by a hybrid military-civilian ruling council. However, frictions between the civilian and military wings have persisted, as well as tensions within various factions of the armed forces.

Despite an October 2020 peace deal with a number of Sudan's armed and unarmed opposition groups, including from Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile states, the country's political transition has been halting, confronted by a worsening economic situation and long-lasting tensions between the county's centre and its periphery.

Exacerbating the situation has been an unpopular attempt by the government to reform the country's economy in order to qualify for debt relief from the International Monetary Fund, including a cut to subsidies and a rising cost of living.

Describing the alleged coup, Mohammed Hassan al-Taishi, a member of the sovereign council, called it a "foolish and bad choice".

"The option of military coups has left us only a failed and weak country," he wrote on Twitter. "The path towards democratic transition and securing the country's political future and unity remains one option."

Later, in a statement read on state-run TV, the culture and information minister, Hamza Baloul, said authorities were chasing others "from the remnants" of Bashir's regime who were suspects in orchestrating the attempted coup. He did not give further details.

Bashir himself is detained in Khartoum's high-security Kober prison and is facing trial over the coup that brought him to power.

He is also [wanted by the international criminal court](#) on charges of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide for his prosecution of a deadly scorched-earth campaign against minorit-ethnic rebels in Darfur.

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**Prince Andrew**

## **Prince Andrew's US attorney served with sexual assault lawsuit, Virginia Giuffre's lawyers claim**



Prince Andrew has been served with a sexual assault lawsuit for a second time. Photograph: Chris Radburn/Reuters

*PA Media*

Mon 20 Sep 2021 20.29 EDT

The Duke of York has been served with a sexual assault lawsuit after the relevant paperwork was delivered to his US lawyer, his accuser's legal team said on Monday.

Virginia Giuffre is seeking damages after alleging she was forced to have sex with Andrew when she was 17 at the home of socialite Ghislaine Maxwell in London and at properties owned by disgraced financier [Jeffrey Epstein](#). The prince vehemently denies the claims.

Her lawyers said the duke had officially been served with the papers on 10 September, but his legal team disputed the claim.

The issue of whether or not Andrew has been notified about the case – known as service of proceedings – was contested during the first pre-trial hearing of the civil case last week in New York.

It was reported the judge in the case, US district judge Lewis Kaplan, had ruled Giuffre's legal team could attempt to deliver the papers to Andrew B Brettler, the duke's Los Angeles-based lawyer.

The certificate of service has now been delivered via email and FedEx, according to court records.

The email was sent on 17 September while the physical papers were delivered on Monday, the legal document claims.

It was left with the front desk of Brettler's office in Los Angeles, according to the FedEx receipt.

The email sent to Brettler stated: “Pursuant to Judge Kaplan’s September 16, 2021, order granting Plaintiff’s motion for alternate service (attached), I am serving by email the Summons and Complaint in the above-captioned matter on you in your capacity as counsel for the Defendant, Prince Andrew, the Duke of York.”

The filing says papers were also sent “to the designated central authority of the United Kingdom on the court’s behalf”.

Giuffre's lawyers claimed on 10 September that they had served the legal papers on Andrew by leaving them with a Metropolitan Police officer who was on duty at the main gates of the The Royal Lodge, Windsor Great Park, on 27 August at 9.30am.

Andrew's legal team contested whether he has been officially notified about her claim for damages from the duke.

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## [Hong Kong](#)

# Hong Kong leader defends election after single non-establishment figure picked for 1,500-strong committee



Hong Kong chief executive Carrie Lam rejected criticisms over the new electoral system in the territory. Photograph: China News Service/Getty Images

*[Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei*

*[@heldavidson](#)*

Tue 21 Sep 2021 01.46 EDT

Hong Kong's chief executive, [Carrie Lam](#), has defended the weekend's election of a powerful committee to appoint senior leaders, after just one candidate not strictly aligned with the establishment camp was elected among the 1,500 positions.

Under an overhauled electoral system, dubbed “patriots rule Hong Kong”, fewer than 5,000 people were eligible to vote on Sunday, choosing from candidates who had already been vetted for political loyalty and cleared of being a national security threat.

The results saw primarily Beijing loyalists and pro-establishment figures elected to the committee. The group will choose nearly half the Hong Kong legislature next year, and a new leader for the territory.

Just two candidates described by local media as not strictly from the establishment ranks , were able to run. Only one, Tik Chi-yuen, was elected.

On Tuesday at her regular press briefing Lam rejected criticisms of the lack of opposition figures among the candidates and eligible voters, saying “non-patriots” were not allowed to enter the establishment of Hong Kong as they may undermine it.

“You asked why so few candidates who are not from the pro-establishment camp got elected. How can I answer this question? There was only one objective behind the approved electoral system – to ensure patriots administer Hong Kong,” she said.

“Under the mechanism diverse views are welcome … They must uphold the basic law and swear allegiance to the People’s Republic of China and the Hong Kong SAR [Special Administrative Region]. I believe these are reasonable requirements.”

The new system was introduced by Beijing, amid a suite of measures designed to crack down on the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong following months of massive protests.

Under the electoral changes, the election committee will appoint 40 of Hong Kong’s 90 legislative seats. Another 30 will be chosen by special interest groups and just 20 will be directly elected. Sunday’s 5,000 voters were a fraction of the more than 230,000 Hong Kongers who were eligible to vote for the committee in 2016.

Beijing and Hong Kong authorities claims it will ensure “anti-China elements will be barred from office, but critics say it is bringing Hong Kong’s political system closer to that of the Communist Party-ruled mainland China.

“The improved electoral system will effectively improve people’s standard of living and livelihood and help Hong Kong better integrate into... our country,” Lam said on Tuesday.

“This is a form of democratic election because the members are returned by an election. When it comes to elections it’s not one size fits all - one has to take into account the actual situation of the place.”

Lam said individuals from the non pro-establishment or pro-democracy camps were welcome to run for elections, but whether they were eligible would be decided by the government’s review committee.

Last week seven pro-democracy district councillors were disqualified, after being accused of making “invalid oaths”. Councillors said they were not given reasons for their disqualifications, which they labeled “arbitrary”.

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## Global development

# Religious rehab centres fill gap as Nigeria grapples with soaring drug use



An NDLEA official with methamphetamine found at a lab in a village in south-east Nigeria. Demand for hard drugs has soared in recent years.  
Photograph: Stefan Heunis/AFP/Getty

Global development is supported by



## [About this content](#)

*Kemi Falodun in Ibadan*

Tue 21 Sep 2021 03.00 EDT

Kola\* was in secondary school in [Nigeria](#) when he started smoking cigarettes. He soon graduated to cannabis, heroin and eventually to crack cocaine. Access to drugs was easy and he felt the pressure of friends to participate.

In 2002, when he was 39, he was introduced to a private drug rehabilitation centre in Ibadan, in the south-west of the country, where he spent 90 days weaning himself off his addiction.

“Cold turkey … It was like dying,” Kola says. But he eventually got clean, married and now works as a community facilitator at the centre. He was one of the fortunate ones.

Nigeria has been grappling with a growing drug problem for several years, with cases surging since 2016. In its [World Drug Report](#), published in June, the UN recorded a rise in the country’s rate of abuse from 5.6% in 2016 to 14.4% in 2018, with cannabis the most commonly used drug.



The Goodworker rehabilitation centre in Ibadan, Nigeria. Patients are expected to take part in religious worship. Photograph: Kemi Falodun

Ease of access to drugs, poverty, job insecurity and unemployment have fuelled the increase. Now there are concerns that lockdown restrictions during the Covid-19 pandemic have exacerbated the problem.

According to Nigeria's [National Drug Law Enforcement Agency](#) (NDLEA), the south-west of the country has the [highest rates of abuse](#) and trafficking, with more than 22% of 15- to 65-year-olds using drugs in the past year.

In Ibadan, the capital of Oyo state, hundreds have passed through the same rehab centre as Kola, the Goodworker Ministry International. As well as accepting inpatients, the Christian-based centre, which says its drug treatment work was "divinely commissioned by the Lord" in 2002, organises outreach programmes to encourage people to bring their relatives to the centre.

Ahmed\* was in primary school when he started experimenting with drugs. He began smoking cigarettes, then marijuana, and went on to use opioids and crack cocaine. He explains that there are countless "bunks" (where users go to inject) and "joints" (for smokers) across Ibadan. "In Bere [a central

district] alone, the ‘joints’ there are over 40 ... and it’s increasing every day.”

After going through the rehab programme, Ahmed also started working at the centre. He says the work helped his recovery because he had little spare time to spend with drug users. “That was what led me out of cocaine and heroin.”

The centre received a rise in calls during lockdown. “Requests for treatment increased by more than 300% but we could not help [everyone],” says its founder, Tunji Agboola, a Christian pastor.

During the lockdown, the centre’s inpatients were discharged to their families. Many relatives were not equipped to care for them and some patients relapsed. “We suspect that it led to the increase in the usage of prescription drugs and substances such as Rohypnol, tramadol and many more,” says Agboola. “A drug user will not allow the lockdown to make him have withdrawal problems.”

The children of the rich get their drugs because the children of the poor exist

*Pastor Tunji Agboola*

Poverty and food inflation have also increased in the past year – 100.9 million Nigerians are [predicted to be living](#) in poverty by 2022 – and so has crime. “The fact that they were hungrier at that time made them do stuff,” Agboola says. “If anything disrupts their day-to-day activities, they will come at people. That was why crime increased.

“Most of these guys that live on the streets are the engine room for drug demand,” he says. “The children of the rich get their drugs because the children of the poor exist.”

Faith Yvonne Abiodun, a mental health counsellor and manager at the Compassionate Recovery Centre in Ibadan, another rehabilitation facility set up by a cleric, says that during the pandemic staff there had received more calls than they had ever before. “Normally, people go about their activities,

they have places and people to visit to make them feel better," she says. With the restrictions, habits were forced to change. "People take solace in these substances."

Founded in 2013, the centre only operated an outpatient model until last year. Such was the demand for its services [after lockdown restrictions eased](#), however, that it started admitting people to a residential facility, where they spend up to six months. "We moved from a seven-client capacity to 18 clients," Abiodun says of the surge in demand during the pandemic. "Even people who have been feeling well started using more [drugs]."

The local authorities are attempting to address the drug problem. Two years ago, Oyo state began enforcing free basic school enrolment as a preventive measure because drug use is so rampant among teenagers who have dropped out of school. It is too early to say if it is having an impact. The state government is also collaborating with community leaders on awareness programmes and targeted intervention.



Addicts turned to prescription drugs and over-the-counter products during lockdown, such as cough syrups containing codeine. Photograph: Reuters/Alamy

“The main goal is prevention,” says Olufemi Josiah, special assistant on community relations to Oyo’s governor. “When children escape certain menaces, the possibility of getting involved in drugs at adulthood is very slim.”

Josiah says that, to achieve impact at scale, agencies, communities and all levels of the government have to work together. He would like to see the NDLEA be more proactive and collaborate more with national and state government. “A lot of attention is placed on the elected government,” Josiah adds. “The institutions that should really treat some of these things, are they really working?”

Dr Victor Makanjuola, a consultant psychiatrist at University College hospital in Ibadan, also sees a clear need for more rehabilitation centres. There are only eight government-owned psychiatric hospitals in Nigeria.

“We need to have a full rehab centre,” says Makanjuola, who works with addicts and people with drug-related disorders such as psychosis and anxiety. He says UCH is planning a separate addiction centre for long-term patients.

Currently, the hospital works with private rehabilitation centres, such as Goodworker, referring patients there for long-term care.

The majority of rehabilitation centres in Nigeria are run by religious groups, and are widely accepted by the medical community. They meet a need the government is failing to address. However, although most operate under international standards of drug-use prevention, patients in these centres are usually expected to participate in some form of religious worship.

Goodworker has been admitting inpatients since lockdown was eased last year. After three months in rehab, recovering users are released to their families, but that can give rise to new challenges. The team at the centre monitor people after they leave. They know their families and friends, and follow up on them if they start socialising again with drug users. “The final stage is lifelong,” Agboola says. “That’s where we handle every form of relapse.”

*\* Names have been changed*

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## **Headlines saturday 25 september 2021**

- [Supply chain crisis Ministers poised to U-turn on foreign worker visas](#)
- [Energy price crisis Soaring electricity prices could add £500m to value of energy firm Drax](#)
- [Explained How will energy crisis and Brexit affect UK households?](#)
- [Analysis Is Brexit or Covid to blame for supply chain crisis?](#)

## Supply chain crisis

# Supply chain crisis: Tories poised to U-turn on foreign worker visas



Queues at a Shell garage in Clapham, London. Photograph: Yui Mok/PA

[Rowena Mason](#) and [Rob Davies](#)

Fri 24 Sep 2021 12.53 EDT

Ministers are poised to agree an extraordinary post-Brexit U-turn that would allow foreign lorry drivers back into the UK to stave off shortages threatening fuel and food supplies.

Boris Johnson ordered a rapid fix on Friday to prevent the crisis escalating. Ministers met in an attempt to agree a short-term visa scheme permitting potentially thousands more lorry drivers from abroad to come to the UK.

The prime minister is understood to have weighed in to demand a compromise from his [warring cabinet, which was split over the issue](#), after

scenes of chaotic queues at some petrol stations and warnings from suppliers that the shortage of fuel on forecourts could worsen. On Friday night, forecourt operator EG Group said it would introduce a limit of £30 worth of fuel per customer.

The shortage of up 100,000 heavy goods vehicle (HGV) drivers – exacerbated by the pandemic and Brexit – has also impacted the food sector and other industries. The British Retail Consortium [warned](#) on Friday that significant disruption to Christmas was “inevitable” unless the problem was contained in the next 10 days.

The prime minister and his cabinet have publicly played down the extent of the problem. A senior government source said some ministers appeared keen to avoid the perception that Brexit was to blame, and were therefore reluctant to relax immigration rules.

However, the Office for National Statistics revealed that millions of people were already facing empty supermarket shelves, with one in six struggling to find essential items.

Amid growing alarm within government about the threat to supermarket and fuel supplies, ministers are poised to allow lorry drivers to come to the UK on short-term visas, probably for a number of months.



Hand written signs are stuck to a petrol pump with no fuel available at a Shell filling station in Manchester. Photograph: Phil Noble/Reuters

A Downing Street spokesperson said the government was looking at “temporary measures to avoid any immediate problems, but any measures we introduce will be very strictly time-limited”.

She stressed that the UK has “ample fuel stocks in this country and the public should be reassured there are no shortages”.

While many have blamed Brexit for the shortage of drivers, Downing Street claimed it was a “temporary Covid-related shortage” also suffered by other countries around the world.

On Friday night, cabinet sources said discussions were ongoing but the plan was expected to be signed off over the weekend.

The move will be seen as a remarkable climbdown, as Johnson’s Brexit campaign was founded on giving the UK more control over immigration and ending free movement. It is likely that other sectors suffering from labour shortages – such as hospitality – will now put pressure on ministers to grant them exemptions as well.

Under the current system, lorry drivers do not meet the threshold for skills that would qualify them to come to the UK. But the proposed scheme could permit temporary visas, similar to the seasonal workers scheme under which people can apply to come to the UK for six months to do agricultural work if they have a sponsor and money to support themselves.



Supermarket shelves in a Sainsbury's superstore in London Colney, Hertfordshire, on Friday. The ONS has reported that one in six people have already reported difficulty finding essential items. Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

Anne McLaughlin, the SNP's immigration spokesperson, said: "The prime minister and senior Tory ministers were repeatedly warned about the damaging consequences of their extreme Brexit plans, including over the threat of staff shortages. Despite those warnings, the Tories recklessly ploughed ahead. The pandemic has undoubtedly led to challenges.

"However, scrapping freedom of movement and cutting immigration in pursuit of an ideological Brexit has piled on the hardship and been a major factor in the issues we are facing today: empty supermarket shelves, staff shortages, and a lack of drivers leading to petrol station closures."

The Home Office had been opposed to adding HGV drivers to the formal occupation shortage list but is thought to have been convinced to back a more short-term visa scheme.

Grant Shapps, the transport secretary, was also initially sceptical but on Friday he pledged to “move heaven and earth” to solve the problem, and said all options were on the table.

Kwasi Kwarteng, the business secretary, is understood to believe the problem should be solved by the haulage and fuel companies offering higher wages and better working conditions instead of allowing entry to workers who may accept lower pay.

However, the visa scheme was pushed by George Eustice, the environment secretary. Stephen Barclay, the Cabinet Office minister, was also in favour and among the ministers who were meeting on Friday to finalise the solution.

The Home Office will ultimately have to sign off the decision on whether to relax immigration restrictions for drivers, with the government recognising that something has to be done.

A Whitehall source said cabinet ministers opposed to the shortage-occupation-list solution would prefer a plan to tempt back to the sector some of the 600,000 people with heavy goods licences not currently employed as drivers.

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## Drax

# Soaring electricity prices could add £500m to value of energy firm Drax



The Drax power plant near Selby, North Yorkshire. Drax is preparing to sell its biomass electricity at record energy market prices. Photograph: Anna Gowthorpe/PA

*[Jillian Ambrose](#) Energy correspondent*

Sat 25 Sep 2021 03.00 EDT

Britain's gas crisis could add half-a-billion pounds to the market value of the energy company [Drax](#) as the company prepares to sell its biomass electricity at record market prices.

The FTSE 250 owner of the Drax power plant in North Yorkshire has climbed to its highest share value in almost seven years, as wholesale prices have spiralled to all-time highs, [claiming seven small energy suppliers in the past seven weeks](#).

The company is not exposed to the cost of gas, which has quadrupled on the UK markets in the last year, but it will benefit from the impact of rising UK wholesale electricity prices, which were already some of the highest in Europe.

Drax is poised to reap big profits from the crisis, alongside North Sea gas companies including Norway's state-backed oil company, Equinor, and independent UK producer Serica Energy, which will be able to sell the gas they produce at record rates.

Drax is expected to generate an earnings boom in 2022 and 2023 from contracts it has sold in advance for the electricity it generates from burning biomass wood chips, which it claims is carbon neutral.

The company is also expected to benefit from electricity produced in its last remaining coal units which it sold directly to the market to help meet demand in recent weeks. On some days this has earned the company up to £4,000 a megawatt-hour or 100 times the typical market price for electricity.

Drax's share price went above 500p a share for the first time since late 2013 this week, up from 412p two weeks ago, to value the company at £1.97bn. HSBC has set a target share price of 620p a share for the company, implying an increase in value of more than £500m.

"This 'crunch' has demonstrated the need for the UK to develop alternative, renewable, flexible sources of power generation, apart from intermittent wind and solar, to ensure security of supply," said Verity Mitchell, an analyst at HSBC.

Meanwhile, Drax earnings a share are expected to climb by 26% next year, and 28% in 2023, by selling electricity based on the "forward" market price which soared in line with short-term trading.

In addition to its lucrative electricity sales Drax may benefit from the UK's carbon dioxide shortage, Mitchell added, which was triggered by the shutdown of two major fertiliser factories in the north of England earlier this month due to the rocketing price of the gas they rely on to function.

The factories primarily produce ammonia but also sell carbon dioxide as a by-product, which makes up 60% of the UK's CO2 supplies that are essential to the country's food, drink and meat production industries.

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The government has agreed a multimillion-pound deal with the factories' US owner, CF Industries, to reopen for three weeks while food producers arrange for new supply chains, but the debacle is likely to spur investment in more diverse CO2 sources, which could benefit Drax.

"If Drax is a beneficiary of support to build bioenergy with carbon capture and storage as a member of the East Coast low-carbon consortium, it could be extracting carbon dioxide for commercial use from 2027," Mitchell said.

"Drax has demonstrated that it can provide a solution to a number of key issues for the government. Its future growth rate looks increasingly assured."

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## Inflation

# Perfect storm: how the energy crisis, pandemic and Brexit affect UK households



Empty supermarket shelves in the UK as the effects of Brexit and other factors hit home. Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

*[Sarah Butler](#) and [Zoe Wood](#)*

Fri 24 Sep 2021 13.31 EDT

The [Bank of England](#) warned this week that surging energy bills will lead to inflation topping 4% this winter, piling pressure on already tight household budgets. The economic fallout from the pandemic and Brexit is pushing up the cost of essentials such as food and clothing as well as travel and even doing up your home. We look at how this perfect storm is affecting you.

## Supermarket shopping



Sparse fruit supplies at a Tesco store in Swansea, south Wales. Photograph: Robert Melen/REX/Shutterstock

Widespread commodity price rises – from wheat to sugar, coffee and palm oil – are set to combine with shortages of lorry drivers and food processing workers as well as cost rises in supplies including packaging to drive up prices in supermarkets this autumn and winter. Suggestions are that food prices could [rise by at least 5%](#).

Meat processors were already warning in the summer that difficulties in hiring workers would force up costs. Those problems have only been added to by a dramatic rise in the cost of CO<sub>2</sub> gas, which is used in the slaughter of pigs and poultry as well as in packaging meat and dairy.

But problems are not just local. Rising post-lockdown demand amid the supply chain crisis and difficult weather conditions are pushing up food prices around the world. Coffee is at a seven-year global high, which experts say will hit consumers in the pocket. Pasta is also set to rise as a shortage of durum wheat caused by drought and [soaring temperatures](#) on farms in Canada, one of the biggest producers. One analyst [predicted](#) a 500g packet of spaghetti could increase in price by 60p, or 50%, to £1.80.

Clive Black, an analyst at Shore Capital, said there was not necessarily a straight line from commodities to price increases on supermarket shelves, as competitive pressures and levels of demand would also play a role in suppressing inflation. While wheat is up, for example, packaged breads are unlikely to rise as demand is falling and suppliers are competing heavily for business.

## Clothing and other household goods



A sale sign adorns a shop window. Less discounting by retailers is expected this autumn and spring. Photograph: Rob Wilkinson/Alamy

Less choice and higher prices are on the way if you wish to restock your wardrobe or revive your living room.

Retailers from Dunelm to Halfords have recently warned of difficulties in importing products pointing to inflation from higher prices of materials and transport costs. Bringing a shipping container from east Asia to the UK cost \$8,000 (£5,840) last year, but is now more than \$20,000 in some cases, adding to rises in the cost of metal, wood and cotton.

In clothing, price increases may not come through until spring as fabrics such as cotton and other materials are likely to have been bought well in

advance. The exchange rate with the dollar, in which most clothing is traded internationally, is also relatively favourable.

Clive Black at Shore Capital said the main impact on price was likely to be driven by a much lower level of discounting on clothing, and potentially many other goods, on the high street this autumn and winter as retailers had been cautious about buying in supplies. “I expect Black Friday to be very unusual. I don’t think there will be anywhere near the big reductions and discounts on clobber we have seen in recent years.”

## Going out



Restaurant bills will rise. Photograph: Anna Ivanova/Alamy

Staff shortages and increases in the cost of food and drink are likely to lead to bigger tabs in pubs and restaurants in the run-up to Christmas.

Three-quarters of hospitality businesses said they were likely to be raising prices for their clients according to a recent survey by industry analysts CGA and services business Fourth. That is not surprising when the price of sparkling wine was up 6% in supermarkets this month, according to the

latest data from analysts at Kantar, with crisps up more than 5% and fruit juices rising by 4%.

Increases in the cost of cleaning products and other supplies are also adding to upward pressure on wages for service staff amid heavy competition for workers. Highly skilled posts such as chefs are in high demand as many EU workers who have traditionally underpinned the industry have gone home after [Brexit](#). Now even coffee shops, which have tended to pay minimum wage, have been forced to put up wages. Both Pret and Costa recently announced they were increasing pay by about 5%.

## Transport



Petrol prices are the highest since 2013. Photograph: Geoffrey Swaine/REX/Shutterstock

Many households will have saved money on transport during the lockdowns but as restrictions have eased that cost has roared back. Petrol prices are at an eight-year high while rail commuters in England and Wales are having to get used to paying more after fares rose 2.6% in spring.

The [fuel shortage](#) has heaped more pain on drivers who are having to dig deeper when they fill up. Petrol has climbed to 135.9p a litre, a level not

seen since 2013, according to the AA. That is 15p more than before the pandemic and, based on a driver filling up their tank twice, adds up to an extra £16.50 a month on fuel.

“As UK families come under huge pressure from rising prices, one of the biggest hikes is in the cost of petrol,” said the AA’s Luke Bosdet. “Families might be able to switch to an alternative for their shopping but they can’t do that with fuel.”

## Household bills



Gas prices are rising fast. Photograph: Graham Corney/Alamy

More than 1.5m households have been affected by the [energy crisis](#), which has claimed seven small energy suppliers. Their customers were typically paying £800 to £900 a year but now face paying more than £400 extra. That is because the switch to a new supplier will have them moved on to a price cap figure set by Ofgem which, from the start of next month, is equivalent to £1,277 for an average household.

But higher energy costs are not the only problem, with households having to find the cash to cover higher council tax, water and even broadband and mobile phone bills. The council tax bill for the average house increased by

4% to £1,881 this year, while water bills went up 3% to £408, according to comparison site Money.co.uk.

## Home improvements



Some builders are reporting a shortage of building materials. Photograph: Maureen McLean/REX/Shutterstock

Over the past year Britons have been ploughing spare cash into home renovations, but the cost of loft conversions and extensions is going up as builders contend with big jumps in the cost of materials as well as a higher wage bill.

Plywood is up more than 80% in the past year, while wood is up 64%, according to Noble Francis, economics director at the Construction Products Association. There are also expectations that essentials such as cement and bricks are set to rise.

“Renovation costs certainly are rising, not just because of the materials side, which since last autumn has been the primary driver of inflation, but more recently we have seen labour costs rising significantly.”

In the three months to end of July, official data showed construction wages were 11% higher than in 2020 with workers taking home £636 per week. This is particularly relevant to the home improvement market where the wage bill accounts for about two-thirds of the project cost.

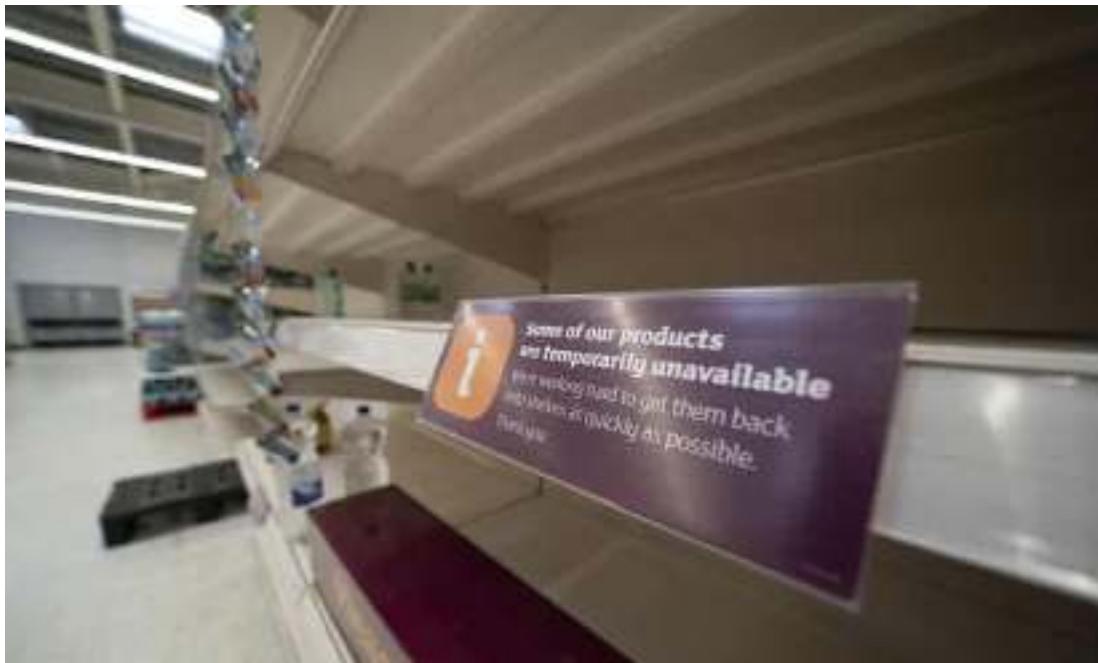
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## Supply chain crisis

# Is Brexit or Covid to blame for Britain's supply chain crisis?



'They are shortages that cover the full breadth of the supply chain from the initial inputs into farming all the way through to those that serve food and drink', said Grant Thornton. Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock

*Lisa O'Carroll* Brexit correspondent  
[@lisaocarroll](#)

Fri 24 Sep 2021 11.15 EDT

A recent report by the accountancy firm Grant Thornton concluded there were almost 1m vacancies in the UK. Half of them were in the food and drink sectors, industries that have for the past 20-30 years relied heavily on an EU workforce.

The chronic labour shortage has led to a crisis in supply chains, affecting a lengthening list of products. So what is the root cause of the problem?

The government argues it is the lingering impact of the pandemic. But industry bosses say it is the cliff-edge cause by [Brexit](#) with a lack of British workers filling the gaps left in the haulage industry, warehousing, hospitality and the meat production sectors.

Grant Thornton's research showed that since the start of the pandemic, 1.3 million foreign-born workers had left the UK and were yet to return.

"These shortages are placing huge pressure on the sector and there is a very real chance that they could quickly reach breaking point," Grant Thornton said in its report, Establishing the labour availability issues of the UK food and drink sector.

"They are shortages that cover the full breadth of the supply chain from the initial inputs into farming all the way through to those that serve food and drink 'at the table'."

As the crisis [spread to petrol supplies on Friday](#), the transport secretary, Grant Shapps, dismissed claims that Brexit had caused the problem, insisting that Covid was the "main reason".

The supply of lorry drivers was down to the fact 40,000 tests could not take place during the pandemic, he said.

"The pandemic is the cause, but Brexit is limiting our options for solutions," said Shane Brennan, the chief executive of the Cold Chain Federation, which represents chilled and ambient food warehousing owners.

Or put another way, Priti Patel's decision, supported by many Brexit supporters, to shut the door to low-skilled workers in new immigration laws seems to be exacerbating the problem.

"It is not EU policy that is to blame here. This is a domestic policy by the Home Office about who can and can't come into the country," said a spokesperson for the British Meat Processors Association (BMPA), which commissioned the Grant Thornton report.

The problem is that meat processing plants, retailers, care homes, hospitality and companies such as Amazon are all competing for a limited supply of

low-skilled workers at entry-level salaries. So even if there were enough lorry drivers, the supply chain has come under severe strain from labour shortages.

The Labour party, which has largely avoided commenting on Brexit since January, blames lack of planning in the face of countless warnings over shortages of EU nationals in the workforce.

Anneliese Dodds, the chair of the party and former shadow chancellor, told Sky News on Friday the crisis was a reflection of “big failures in planning for this situation”. The Liberal Democrats went further, calling on the government to rethink their immigration policy.

Industry leaders say the pandemic has exposed the weaknesses in the just-in-time supply chain model. Brennan said the food shortage crisis meant that supermarkets, and in turn consumers, may have to permanently reset their expectations as the model perishes.

“It’s not that we won’t have strawberries all year round, it’s that we won’t have 12 varieties of strawberries in supermarkets. Retailers are going to have to adjust their supply chain and may end up ordering every two days or once a week,” said Brennan.

The government has rejected all calls to [solve the problem by issuing short-term visas](#) to truckers and other workers from the EU. It is convinced that Brexit is the solution, as it can prod British employers to wean themselves off a low-wage culture and recruit and train local staff.

But industry bosses say their very survival is at stake. With the pandemic and Brexit already taking its toll, a winter of wage inflation is not the answer.

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## 2021.09.25 - Spotlight

- Greta Thunberg ‘I really see the value of friendship. Apart from the climate, almost nothing else matters’
- Amanda Gorman ‘I wanted my words to re-sanctify the steps of the Capitol’
- Bernardine Evaristo on a childhood shaped by racism ‘I was never going to give up’
- It’s No Time to Die But is it time to revoke James Bond’s licence to kill?

Sat 25 Sep 2021 08.00 BST

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[The books of my lifeAmanda Gorman](#)

## Amanda Gorman: ‘I wanted my words to re-sanctify the steps of the Capitol’



Amanda Gorman: “There’s nothing like a hot cocoa with a copy of Hamlet.”  
Photograph: Danny Williams

*Amanda Gorman*  
Sat 25 Sep 2021 05.00 EDT

### **My earliest reading memory**

My mom bought me a Hooked on Phonics reading kit when I was in early elementary school. I quite literally got hooked on reading and raced through as much material as I could.

### **The book that influenced me growing up**

In third grade my teacher read us Dandelion Wine by Ray Bradbury. It was the first time I’d heard a metaphor in such a way, and my mind was blown. It was a watershed moment for the way I viewed the power of language.

### **The author who made me want to write**

In eighth grade, I read Toni Morrison's [The Bluest Eye](#). It's not a poem, but it informed my thinking on how poetic language can infuse itself into a novel. It was also the first time I had seen a dark-skinned girl on the cover of a book and that absolutely enthralled me. Reading Morrison taught me how to write unapologetically with a Black feminist voice that was my own.

### **A moment that changed me**

It was such an honour to be chosen to perform at the [inauguration of President Biden](#). Following in the footsteps of such legendary poets as Maya Angelou, Elizabeth Alexander and Richard Blanco was an amazing opportunity, but one that became even more critical after the [Capitol insurrection](#). After that day, the vision of the poem I was crafting required a new level of depth. I wanted my words to re-sanctify the steps of the Capitol.

### **The poets who inspire me**

Poets and storytellers throughout history have often been the visionaries of change. Language makers are the ones who create a new dialect in which people can communicate shared dreams that challenge the status quo. Poets such as Maya Angelou, [Tracy K Smith](#), and Eve Ewing have been a constant source of inspiration to me.

### **My favourite book as a child**

I loved Corduroy when I was little. It's such a sweet, classic tale of friendship, I couldn't help but want to be a better person.

### **On my debut picture book and what I hope it captures**

I started writing my own children's book Change Sings four years ago, while I was still a student. My hope was to craft a poem that would take young readers on a journey of self-discovery and ultimately empower them to see how they could become change-makers. Illustrator Loren Long took my abstract vision and gave it texture and light. I'm so proud of the mosaic of language and images that we made together.

### **The book that changed my mind**

Citizen by [Claudia Rankine](#) reshaped what I had assumed a lyric to mean. It

expertly destabilised my preconceived notions of what a poem can look like, as well as how a sociological instinct can be so beautifully integrated into a work of art.

### **The book I reread**

I reread the Iliad this past year, which really hit differently this time. It's an epic tale about a plague that blights an army for their leader's chauvinism and short-sightedness. It felt close to home.

Quick Guide

### **Saturday magazine**

Show



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

Photograph: GNM

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## **What I'm reading now**

I'm always reading and rereading books. Newer books I've been reading are Four Hundred Souls, edited by Ibram X Kendi and Keisha N Blain, What Happened To You by Bruce Perry and Oprah Winfrey, and Postcolonial Love Poem by Natalie Diaz.

## **My comfort read**

Shakespeare. There's nothing like a cup of hot cocoa and a copy of Othello or Hamlet while sitting by the fireplace.

*Change Sings: A Children's Anthem* by Amanda Gorman, illustrated by Loren Long, will be published on 30 September by Puffin. *Call Us What We Carry* is published on 7 December by Chatto & Windus. To support the Guardian and the Observer, buy a copy at [guardianbookshop.com](https://guardianbookshop.com). Delivery charges may apply.

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Bernardine Evaristo: ‘I liked the same music as my little white pals, ate the same food, had the same feelings – human ones.’ Photograph: Suki Dhanda/The Observer

## **Bernardine Evaristo on a childhood shaped by racism: ‘I was never going to give up’**

Bernardine Evaristo: ‘I liked the same music as my little white pals, ate the same food, had the same feelings – human ones.’ Photograph: Suki Dhanda/The Observer

by [Bernardine Evaristo](#)

Sat 25 Sep 2021 04.45 EDT

When I [won the Booker prize](#) in 2019 for my novel [Girl, Woman, Other](#), I became an “overnight success”, after 40 years working professionally in the arts. My career hadn’t been without its achievements and recognition, but I wasn’t widely known. The novel received the kind of attention I had long

desired for my work. In countless interviews, I found myself discussing my route to reaching this high point after so long. I reflected that my creativity could be traced back to my early years, cultural background and the influences that have shaped my life. Not least, my heritage and childhood

Through my father, a Nigerian immigrant who had sailed into the Motherland on the “Good Ship Empire” in 1949, I inherited a skin colour that defined how I was perceived in the country into which I was born, that is, as a foreigner, outsider, alien. I was born in 1959 in Eltham and raised in Woolwich, both in south London. Back then, it was still legal to discriminate against people based on the colour of their skin, and it would be many years before the [Race](#) Relations Acts (1965 and 1968) enshrined the full scope of anti-racist doctrine into British law.

My English mother met my father at a Commonwealth dance in central London in 1954. She was studying to be a teacher at a Catholic teacher-training college run by nuns in Kensington; he was training to be a welder. They married and had eight children in 10 years. Growing up, I was labelled “half-caste”, the term for biracial people at that time.



My parents, Julius Evaristo and Jacqueline Brinkworth, on their wedding day, London, 1954. All family photographs: courtesy of Bernardine Evaristo

The concept of “black British” was considered a contradiction in terms during my childhood. Brits didn’t recognise people of colour as fellow citizens, and they in turn often aligned themselves with their countries of origin. I never had a choice but to consider myself British. This was the country of my birth, my life, even if it was made clear to me that I didn’t really belong. Yet Nigeria was a faraway concept, a country about which I knew nothing.

While the postwar Windrush Caribbean era of arrival has been well documented and explored, the equivalent African narratives have not. There were, however, many similarities. The moment my father arrived in Britain as a young man, he was brutally stripped of his self-image as an individual and had to assume an imposed identity. Britain was recruiting people from the colonies to fill the gaps due to casualties in the second world war and my father had duly travelled from his homeland, where he was just another human being. Instead of being welcomed as a Son of Empire, he encountered unfettered racism.

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Nana, my maternal grandmother, was a dressmaker. My mother’s father, Leslie, was a milkman. His family had previously owned a dairy. Once my mother had become a schoolteacher, one of the few professions available for educated women in the early 1950s, she was on the way to becoming middle class. However, she was rapidly demoted to the bottom of society through her marriage to an African. In a sense, my mother became black by marital and – once her children were born – biological association; an “honorary black”, if you like.



My mother's mother, Margaret...



and her father, Leslie

When my mother became engaged to my father, her side of the family joined forces to stop what they saw as an abhorrent union – the ruination of my mother and a besmirching of the family name. Interracial marriage was rare back then, and on the scale of social taboos it occupied the top spot. My parents were unstoppable in their love and determination to spend the rest of

their lives together. They had a small wedding attended by their Nigerian and English friends, with my grandmother the sole representative of her side of the family – looking resolutely sour-faced in the wedding photograph, while everyone around her celebrated with smiles.

It was seen as the worst thing to happen to my mother's family, and Nana and my father never really got over the animosity caused by her antipathy towards him. My mother's half-German grandmother never spoke to her again and her most beloved aunt, who had been her surrogate mother during the second world war when she was evacuated to the countryside, promptly cut her off, too, as did several other relatives.

Tellingly, although we were Nana's only grandchildren, our photographs were never on display in her home along with other family photos, except for the first child, my sister, as a very young and very pretty baby who, to my grandmother's relief, wasn't as dark as my father. When one of my brothers married a white woman, a photo of the two of them also made it on to the windowsill. So, that was two grandchildren out of eight on show in her home.

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Whatever my father's status in his homeland, in Britain he worked in factories. He belonged to what I call the brown immigrant class of the time; his social positioning was determined by his race and outsider status, which was deemed lower than the white working class.

Our family struggled financially. As my mother didn't return to teaching until her youngest child was of school age, my parents raised eight children on my father's factory salary. Prioritising education, they managed to pay for my oldest brother to attend prep school for a few years. He still recalls the time when his class had to read out loud in turn from the popular racist children's book *The Story of Little Black Sambo* (1899), about Sambo and his father, Black Jumbo, and mother, Black Mumbo. Sambo had long been a racial slur in America and Britain, and mumbo-jumbo was a pejorative term for black languages, which were considered nonsensical. When my seven-year-old brother, the only child of colour in the class, was forced to read from this racist text, everyone in the room erupted with laughter. He has never forgotten it.



The only photograph of all eight Evaristo children together. I'm the one looking seriously demonic (front left), 1960s

My parents also paid for some of us to attend the conveniently located Catholic convent primary school next door, a voluntary aided state school partially funded by the Church, but which required a nominal contribution of £10 a year for attendance. My father, who had grown up in a barter culture where the cost of everything is up for negotiation, haggled with the nuns for a group discount, which reduced our annual fees from £10 per child to six. Hardly Eton.

Growing up biracial and brown-skinned in an overwhelmingly white area, my family endured the name-calling of children who parroted their parents' racism, along with violent assaults on our family home by thugs who threw bricks at our windows on such a regular basis that as soon as they were replaced, we knew they'd be smashed again. My father chased after the throwers and literally dragged them to their parents' homes to make them pay for the damage. As a child, you are profoundly affected by this level of hostility without being able to intellectualise or articulate it. You feel hated, even though you have done nothing to deserve it, and so you think there is something wrong with you, rather than something wrong with them.

It seemed unfair because I felt the same inside as my little white pals. We liked the same music and television programmes, breathed the same air, ate the same food, had the same feelings – human ones. In time I developed a self-protective force field around me, which persists to this day.



My grandmother, Zenobia, probably on her wedding day in the 1920s

The inevitable culture clash of an immigrant whose idea of raising children originates in a completely different culture marred my childhood. For a Nigerian man born in the 1920s, children were to be seen and not heard, and should receive corporal punishment for crimes committed against his militaristic regime. I lived in fear of my father, of the wooden spoon he used for minor offences and the belt he used for major ones. My mother pleaded for leniency on our behalf but she didn't have much luck overriding the authority of the Oga, the chief, the patriarch in the household.

There was nothing in the British society of my suburban childhood that endorsed the concept of blackness as something positive, other than the music coming out of America such as that of the Supremes, the Jackson 5, Stevie Wonder and the Four Tops. It was otherwise synonymous with being bad, evil, ugly, inferior, criminal, stupid and dangerous – and my father was frightening. As one of my brothers used to say, “When Daddy walks through the front door, joy runs out the back door.” He never spoke to us unless it

was to deliver a very long lecture on our apparently bad behaviour, sometimes lasting up to an hour, while we had to stand there to attention, looking as if we were taking it all in like good little children – no smirks, frowns, yawns, eye-rolling, or we'd be for it.



Outside my childhood home with my younger sister, Charlotte, who had to endure my mini-dictatorship in our shared bedroom, 1972

If we wanted to go out somewhere with our friends, we needed to put in a request weeks in advance and would have to listen to another lecture, usually conducted while he ate the dinner he cooked himself – meat, potatoes, carrots, cabbage, all completely mashed up with gravy. He always came home from work and cooked his own dinner. This he ate straight from a saucepan, as he did his morning porridge, which was quite practical, when you think of it, as it saved on the washing-up. At the end of the interminable lecture, permission was likely to be declined.

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When my father came home from work, usually after our tea time, he sat in the kitchen with my mother while we children sat in the living room above, watching television. He always sounded angry, so we'd press our ears to the floor trying to decipher what he was saying. Most of the time he wasn't

angry at all, and it was only when I first visited Lagos that I realised the way he spoke was specific to his culture. Men everywhere appeared to shout angrily, until I discovered they were just talking expressively and, yes, loudly.

As a family we'd have lively conversations after our evening meal with our mother, who encouraged us all to speak up and express ourselves. We caught up on the day, teased each other and talked about current affairs. With stretched finances, she made sure we ate nutritiously, counting out the slices of cucumber and lettuce leaves on our plates. One or two boiled sweets a week were a Friday evening treat. We couldn't afford visits to cafes or restaurants, and holidays were few and far between. I remember a school trip to Stonehenge, a camping holiday in a crowded caravan when it rained all the time, and a horribly memorable trip to visit one of my mother's friends in Somerset, whose racist children called us "monkeys". Imagine the hurt. I was about nine and so excited to be going on holiday, only to be treated despicably by the very children who should have befriended us.

My mother had a kind of earth-mother vibe going on, which counterbalanced our father's authoritarian parenting. We children jostled each other to be the lucky ones to link arms with her when walking in the street to church, and to massage her feet in the evening when she finally joined us watching television after the housework had been completed.



With Patricia St Hilaire on a train, 1983

I was a tomboy, squashed between two brothers who let me play with them until they didn't. I'm the fourth in the family and we middle children tend to be very independent. You just get on with it. I've always felt myself to have an inner strength, by which I mean that I'm not needy or clingy, I don't crave approval all the time and I'm happy with my own company. In terms of my career, a tough inner core has been essential to my creative survival. This hardness probably first developed in my very early years. I've never had therapy as I like to live with my demons. By this, I don't mean that I'm living with unresolved trauma, but I've become adept at self-interrogation and have never felt driven to seek help. I like to work things out for myself.

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In time, I understood and appreciated that my father kept us safe. We were well looked after and he was financially responsible. My parents stayed together for 33 years in an era when interracial marriages tended not to last long. He was the best father that he could be, for one deracinated from his Nigerian culture where there would have been a lot more support for raising his large family. Yet we feared him and he, in turn, was fearful for us. He knew how unsafe it was for us in Britain. His four boys and four girls needed to be protected. As we became teenagers, we also probably needed to be protected from ourselves.



With the first version of my verse novel Lara, 1997

Outside the family, he was gregarious, the life and soul of the party, making friends with people of every race, much as I have always done myself. In the 1970s, my parents got involved in politics and I am inordinately proud of them for not only embodying love between the races but going one step further and flying the flag for equality. At work, my father befriended a Polish man who was a communist, and who influenced his thinking to the extent that my father joined the trade union and became a shop steward on the factory floor, standing up to management on behalf of his fellow workers, losing jobs as a result. He was also elected as a Labour councillor, an unpaid role, with a remit to assist disadvantaged people in his ward, especially those on benefits or low incomes, and to represent them at local borough council meetings. He was the first black man to hold this role in Greenwich. Twenty years ago, when I was told on the phone in the middle of the night that, after several strokes, my father had died, I collapsed sobbing on to the floor. My attitude towards him had evolved. Doubtless he rubbed people up the wrong way, but I am in awe of his journey from beleaguered immigrant to community champion of the working classes – of all colours.

My own journey has been a long one, from growing up in the 1960s in a family targeted by racists. Many of the roles I've assumed in my professional life would have been unthinkable at the time of my birth and I

could never have envisioned them as a young woman, not only writing books but also sitting on boards, editing publications, chairing prize juries and a professorship. The person I am today no longer throws stones at the fortress. I sit inside its chambers having polite, persuasive and persistent conversations about how best to transform outmoded infrastructures to accommodate those who have been unfairly excluded. The rebel without has become the negotiator within, who understands that we need to sit at the table where the decisions are made, and that enrolling people in conversations is ultimately more effective than shouting at them (satisfying as that can sometimes be).

## Quick Guide

### Saturday magazine

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Photograph: GNM

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I won the Booker prize at 60, which was the perfect age for it to happen to me, although astonishing that it happened at all. At this stage in my life, not only have I developed a formidable work ethic, but I know that I will not rest on my laurels. I feel lucky to have inherited these qualities from forebears who never gave up: my mother, who wasn't going to relinquish the man she loved because her family disapproved; my father, who walked into the flames of racism in Britain and fought to improve the lives of working-class people of all colours; all the other ancestors who kept going when life became impossible – crossing seas, relocating from home to hostile lands, the known to the unknown – in order to build new and improved lives for themselves. I was never going to be a person who accepts defeat, who was going to give up. I was walking on the ground they had laid for me over many generations.

This is an edited extract from *Manifesto* by Bernardine Evaristo, published by Penguin Books at £14.99. To support the Guardian and Observer, order your copy at [guardianbookshop.com](https://www.guardianbookshop.com). Delivery charges may apply.

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Composite for Bond feature, culture section. Illustration: Guardian Design/Guardian Design (images: Rex Features, United Artists, Getty Images, Alamy, PA, Allstar)

## **It's No Time to Die: but is it time to revoke James Bond's licence to kill?**

Composite for Bond feature, culture section. Illustration: Guardian Design/Guardian Design (images: Rex Features, United Artists, Getty Images, Alamy, PA, Allstar)

by [Stuart Jeffries](#)

Sat 25 Sep 2021 05.00 EDT

These blithering women," said [James Bond](#), "who thought they could do a man's work? Why the hell couldn't they stay at home and mind their pots and pans and stick to their frocks and gossip and leave men's work to the men?"

Ian Fleming wrote this in his spy's first adventure, 1953's Casino Royale, starting as he meant to go on. Dr No, published five years later, sees Bond and Honeychile Rider incarcerated in the eponymous evil genius's lair. "Honey, get into that bath before I spank you," Bond says, and Rider obediently does. "She said provocatively: 'You've got to wash me. I don't know what to do. You've got to show me.'"



Sexual politics ... Sean Connery with Ursula in 1962's film Dr No.  
Photograph: Danjaq/Eon/Ua/Kobal/Rex/Shutterstock

Nearly 70 years on and the old misogynist with his infantile projections is finally getting the symbolic castration he has long deserved. In the much-delayed Bond movie [No Time to Die](#), the new 007 (Nomi, played by the British actor [Lashana Lynch](#)) tells the old one: "The world has moved on, Commander Bond." While Daniel Craig's Bond has been furloughed, Nomi has replaced him at MI6, taking his licence to kill in the process.

True, No Time to Die's plot is microwaved hokum. Bond is back from retirement to take down Rami Malek's Safin, an uber-villain with an east European accent and a Phantom of the Opera mask. What's new is that Bond is second fiddle to the kind of woman who would once have been tasked with jumping into bed implausibly quickly. "You get in my way, I will put a bullet in your knee," Nomi tells Bond, before adding brutally: "The one that

works.” The implication is clear: British intelligence is no longer best served by a pale, male and stale former public schoolboy, but by a young woman of colour with more firepower, one imagines, than a Beretta in her stocking top. (Who knows, Nomi may even get a surname.) And she is right: the world has changed and Bond may no longer be fit for purpose.

Bond is a creation of the cold war, when, as Sean Egan puts it in James Bond: The Secret History, “Britain’s empire was sufficiently intact as to make plausible the idea that the UK could be an important player on the world espionage stage.” In his early years, Bond was a glamorous antidote to a glum time. Britain was emerging from postwar austerity only to see its empire disappearing over the horizon. For a grey nation getting by on powdered eggs and Spam, this rogue male’s cultivation of the finer things in life – meticulously prepared martinis, a supercharged [Bentley](#), intercontinental leg-overs – suggested that Britain could still rule the waves and waive the rules.



By the 1960s, Fleming supposed the cold war would soon end and so devised a new enemy to ensure his brand did not become obsolete. Spectre, the villainous cabal fronted on screen by Donald Pleasence’s cat-stroking megalomaniac weirdo Ernst Stavro Blofeld, replaced the Soviet counter-espionage organisation Smersh as Bond’s adversary. This shift freed the

franchise from the burden of geopolitical plausibility and imagined the future's clash of civilisations as a sequence of nuked-up nutjobs holding the world to ransom.



New enemy ... Donald Pleasence as Blofeld in 1967's *You Only Live Twice*. Photograph: United Artists/Allstar

Bond had a new enemy, but no new politics. Womankind was reduced to a sexual smörgåsbord, a thought punched up by Roald Dahl in his script for *You Only Live Twice*. "Why do Chinese girls taste so different from the others?" Sean Connery's Bond says to his love interest Ling, played by Tsai Chen, adding: "Like Peking duck is different from Russian caviar. But I love them both." His attitude to lesbians was more straightforward: they were either to be killed (Rosa Klebb) or "cured" (Pussy Galore).

But it did not seem to matter that 007 was racist, sexist, homophobic and increasingly silly. Along with the Beatles and swinging London, the franchise had become one of Britain's best sources of soft power. According to Jaap Verheul in *The Cultural Life of James Bond: Specters of 007*, the franchise was mainly a British affair in the 1950s, the novels read chiefly by lower-middle class men. That changed with the first four Bond films, which took the brand global in the 1960s. *Goldfinger* was particularly important in that respect, being partly set in the US and thus breaking the US market in a

way paralleled only by the Beatles. Indeed, Beatlemania and Bondmania went hand in hand: [I Want to Hold Your Hand](#) was the Fab Four's first US No 1 in 1964, while, in the same year, Goldfinger recouped its \$3m (£2.1m) budget in its first two weeks. It grossed \$ 46m worldwide and was at one point the fastest-grossing film of all time. The [bestselling toy](#) that year was Bond's Aston Martin DB5.



Brand upgrade ... Connery and Shirley Eaton in Goldfinger. Photograph: Danjaq/Eon/Ua/Kobal/Rex/Shutterstock

But there was a curious irony in all this global domination, set out by Simon Winder in his book *The Man Who Saved Britain: A Personal Journey into the Disturbing World of James Bond*. As the franchise went global, the body count of foreigners rose accordingly. "As the 1960s progressed," wrote Winder, "Bond's ability to maim and kill foreigners became a great consolation to millions of embittered and confused people whose traditional world picture had changed with alarming speed." By then, Bond was "pretty much the only British national capable of damaging anybody at all".

What should have done for Bond was not Rosa Klebb's shoe-knife, but time. He had always been somewhat risible even to fans, a quality heroically indulged by post-Connery Bonds such as Roger Moore and Pierce Brosnan. By the 1990s, [Mike Myers's](#) Austin Powers movies made the silliness

explicit (Alotta Fagina, Ivana Humpalot), quickly followed by Rowan Atkinson's own parody, Johnny English, while the Simpsons introduced the fan favourite, Dr No-like nemesis Hank Scorpio. ("Homer – what's your least favourite country, Italy or France?" "France," replies Homer. "Nobody ever says Italy," chuckles Scorpio, ominously pushing a button.)



Spoof ... Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me, 1999. Photograph: New Line Cinema/Allstar

With the rise of vulnerable-but-tough 21st-century action heroes such as Jack Bauer, Jason Bourne and Jack Reacher, retooling the Bond franchise in 2006 was a delicate business. "If something's been parodied as much as that, there's a reason for it," [Daniel Craig](#) told me before the release of Casino Royale. That film made Bond compelling anew: he was tougher and more serious, but sympathetic, too: an orphan, a man who seemed capable of real love with realistic women, and who didn't mind answering to Judi Dench's matriarch M.

The 25th Bond movie arrives in a strange new world. In 1953, Britain still had an empire

When Craig's Bond and the Queen parachuted into the Olympic Stadium for the 2012 opening ceremony (both stunt doubles – their insurance premiums

would have trebled the national debt), it was a symbolic moment. Two brands, both of which had arguably outlived their historical usefulness and would surely be wound down when Britain emerged as a truly egalitarian and diverse polity, were, as much as the NHS, made to typify the country not just as it was but, counterintuitively, as it was going to be.



The next Bond film, *Skyfall*, became the biggest-grossing instalment in the 007 franchise so far. [According to Forbes](#), the Bond movies have raked in more than \$7bn (£5.06bn) worldwide, making it the third highest-grossing franchise of all time behind Marvel and Star Wars. Kate Arthurs, the British Council's former director of arts, cited Bond along with Shakespeare, the Premier League, the royal family, the BBC and the English language as among the reasons that the UK pipped France to the top of the Soft Power 30 Index in 2018. One estimate suggests one in five people on Earth have seen a Bond film – and it is quite likely that most of the other 80% still know that the man likes his martinis shaken, not stirred.



Big time ... Daniel Craig as James Bond in 2012's *Skyfall*. Photograph: Allstar/Sony Pictures

It is arguable that the descent of Her Majesty and her tuxedoed lickspittle was a sign of what was to come in British politics, possessing the same unabashed patriotism and insistence on British exceptionalism that fuelled the daydreams for which we will be paying for decades. Now the 25th Bond movie arrives in a strange new world. In 1953, Britain still had an empire. In 2015, when the last film, *Spectre*, was released, we were still in the EU. Today a postcolonial, post-Brexit Britain is a geopolitical nonentity: friendless in Europe, clinging to the US, and humiliated in a recent [postage stamp dispute](#) by, with all due respect, a dot in the Indian Ocean called Mauritius.

Quick Guide

**Saturday magazine**

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Photograph: GNM

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Can James Bond continue to represent Britain with a new twist on the old cocktail, or should the franchise be terminated? Certainly this Bond, with his gammy knee and other physical shortcomings, suggests the latter: abseiling off bridges and going toe-to-toe with Johnny Foreigners 30 years his junior may finally be beyond him.



Bring in the new ... Lashana Lynch as the new 007. Photograph: MGM\Universal Pictures\Eon\Danjaq/Nicola Dove/Allstar

It might well be a good thing if Daniel Craig's licence to kill is permanently taken over by Lynch's Nomi, or even Regé-Jean Page, the 31-year-old Bridgerton heart-throb and other rumoured Bond successor. Although, what could be more British than an old white guy thwarting opportunities for others by hanging around too long?

*No Time to Die* is in cinemas from Thursday.

This article was amended on 25 September 2021. An earlier version referred to the Queen as "HRH" rather than Her Majesty.

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## 2021.09.25 - Coronavirus

- [Live Coronavirus: Covid cases in South Korea top 3,000; Northern Ireland to ease travel rules](#)
- ['A bit of a mystery' Why hospital admissions for Covid are falling in England](#)
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# Ireland ends mandatory hotel quarantine – as it happened

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## Coronavirus

# ‘A bit of a mystery’: why hospital admissions for Covid in England are going down



People in a pub . Some experts point out that the UK has not rushed back to ‘life-before-Covid’. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

*[Ian Sample](#) Science editor*

*[@iansample](#)*

Fri 24 Sep 2021 19.49 EDT

In early September, outbreak modelling for the government’s Sage advisers showed Covid hospitalisations had the potential to soar. If people rushed back to work and resumed all the socialising they had put on hold, the number of daily admissions in [England](#) could peak at 7,000 within six weeks. It was, in effect, a worst-case scenario, barring a dramatic waning of immunity or a troublesome new variant.

The optimistic scenario looked very different. Assuming a more gradual return to normality, the modelling had daily Covid hospitalisations rising slowly and slightly, topping out at nearly 2,000, before falling again in November. Now, even that looks overly gloomy. Over the past fortnight, hospitalisations have fallen in England, even as [schools](#) and offices reopened.

Mismatches between the modelling and the true course of the epidemic have caused confusion throughout the Covid crisis. The models are not predictions of what will happen. They are what the computers churn out when presented with a “what if?”. In this case, what if  $R$  (the reproduction number of the epidemic) reaches 1.1? And what if – as [Jonathan Van-Tam](#), the deputy chief medical officer for England, would say – people “tear the pants out of it” and push  $R$  to 1.5? That would mean, on average, every two people infected go on to infect three more.

## Q&A

### **What does the 'R' number of coronavirus mean?**

Show

$R$ , or the 'effective reproduction number', is a way of rating a disease's ability to spread. It's the average number of people on to whom one infected person will pass the virus. For an  $R$  of anything above 1, an epidemic will grow exponentially. Anything below 1 and an outbreak will fizzle out – eventually.

At the start of the coronavirus pandemic, the estimated  $R$  for coronavirus was between 2 and 3 – higher than the value for seasonal flu, but lower than for measles. That means each person would pass it on to between two and three people on average, before either recovering or dying, and each of those people would pass it on to a further two to three others, causing the total number of cases to snowball over time.

The reproduction number is not fixed, though. It depends on the biology of the virus; people's behaviour, such as social distancing; and a population's

immunity. A country may see regional variations in its R number, depending on local factors like population density and transport patterns.

**Hannah Devlin** *Science correspondent*

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

Sage expected hospitalisations in England to peak somewhere near the lower range, namely 2,000 a day, but no sooner was the modelling complete than hospitalisations began to fall. The decline was unexpected. What it suggests is that – for now – the effect of unlocking on fuelling the epidemic is more than offset by the combination of people's behaviour and immunity, whether from vaccination or infection.

"Those are two very powerful forces. Each by itself is perfectly capable of making the number of cases or hospitalisations go up or down, and they are basically fighting each other right now," said Mark Woolhouse, professor of infectious disease epidemiology at Edinburgh University.

On Friday, the Office for National Statistics reported a fall in infection rates in England for the second week running, with one in 90 now estimated to test positive for Covid. Elsewhere in the UK, rates remain stable but high.

According to Prof Graham Medley, chair of the Sage modelling subgroup, Spi-M, while infections and admissions have drifted down in the past couple of weeks, little has changed over the larger timeframe of the past 10 weeks. "This is unexpected," he said. "There must be a balance between the increasing immunity from infection and vaccination, and the amount of contact, but how they exactly balance to keep R roughly at 1 is a bit of a mystery."

It may be that vaccines are more effective at preventing transmission than studies – often based on symptomatic patients – suggest. If that is the case, Woolhouse said, immunity may be playing a larger role in suppressing the epidemic than thought. After a sharp rise in Scotland, cases appear to be falling back down, without any obvious change in behaviour, he added. "It's

a watershed moment. This is the first time in the history of the UK's epidemic that we've had a sustained decline in cases in the absence of a lockdown or not far short of it," he said. "We've never seen that before, so clearly something is fundamentally different, and the fundamental difference for me is the buildup of herd immunity."

That would be excellent news, particularly if the rest of the UK follows suit. On Friday, the R number for England was revised to 0.8 to 1, with the number of new infections estimated to be shrinking at 1% to 3% a day. The difficulty is that, with a lot of virus still around, a manageable situation could become challenging very fast. "If there is an uptick then we need to react to that quickly. If this does go wrong, the NHS will be in trouble very quickly," Woolhouse warned.

As Medley pointed out, the country has not rushed back to "life-before-Covid". What happens next is still as murky as ever. "We are still a long way from normal levels of contact, so there is still the possibility of an increase in transmission and hospitalisations, but the past couple of months gives a lot of hope," he said.

This article was amended on 25 September 2021. The colloquial phrase attributed to Jonathan Van-Tam is "tear the pants out of it", not "rip the pants off it" as an earlier version had it.

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[US news](#)

## CDC overrides advisory panel to back Pfizer booster for Americans with high-risk jobs



A man receives a Covid-19 booster shot on 23 September 2021 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Photograph: Steve Mellon/AP

*Reuters*

Fri 24 Sep 2021 09.12 EDT

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has broken with advice from its own internal advisory panel to back a booster shot of the Pfizer and BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine for Americans aged 65 and older, adults with underlying medical conditions and adults in high-risk working and institutional settings.

The move came on Friday one day after an advisory panel to the agency did not recommend that people in high-risk jobs, such as teachers, and risky

living conditions should get boosters. The panel had only recommended boosters for elderly and some people with underlying medical conditions.

Rochelle Walensky, the CDC director, said her agency had to make recommendations based on complex, often imperfect data.

“In a pandemic, even with uncertainty, we must take actions that we anticipate will do the greatest good,” she said in a statement.

“I believe we can best serve the nation’s public health needs by providing booster doses for the elderly, those in long-term care facilities, people with underlying medical conditions, and for adults at high risk of disease from occupational and institutional exposures to Covid-19. This aligns with the [FDA’s booster authorization](#) and makes these groups eligible for a booster shot,” she said.

The CDC recommendation follows [US Food and Drug Administration authorization](#) and clears the way for a booster rollout to begin as soon as this week for millions of people who had their second dose of the Pfizer shot at least six months ago.

Bernd Salzberger, head of infectiology at Regensburg university hospital in Germany, said that given uncertainty over the durability of protection experts could easily come to different conclusions over who should be eligible for boosters and when.

“The United States are currently undergoing a more severe wave of infections than here because there are many more unvaccinated in several states, mainly in the south. That could be a reason for someone to say we must protect health care workers in particular,” said Salzberger.

The CDC said people 65 years and older should get a booster and also recommended the shots for all adults over 50 with underlying conditions.

It said that, based on individual benefits and risks, 18- to 49-year-olds with underlying medical conditions may get a booster, and also people 18-64 at increased risk of exposure and transmission due to occupational or institutional settings.

The recommendations cover only people who received their second Pfizer/BioNTech shot at least six months earlier. The CDC said that group is currently about 26 million people, including 13 million age 65 or older.

The CDC's advisory committee on immunization practices on Thursday gave the thumbs down to additional doses for groups including healthcare workers, teachers and residents of homeless shelters and prisons.

Panel member Lynn Bahta, who works with the Minnesota Department of Health, voted against that measure. She said the data does not support boosters in that group yet. "The science shows that we have a really effective vaccine," she said.

The committee had said it could revisit the guidance later.

Last month the US president, Joe Biden, and eight top health officials said they hoped to start a broad booster shot program this week, saying data showed immunity wanes over time.

Vaccine expert Dr Paul Offit said he believed the CDC advisers were worried that recommending boosters based on employment would allow overly broad use.

"That was a hole that you could drive a truck through, that essentially what we were doing was basically what the (Biden) administration initially asked – to just have a vaccine for the general population, because obviously the pharmacists aren't going to figure out whether you're working in a grocery store or hospital," he said.

More than 180 million people in the United States are fully vaccinated, or about 64% of the eligible population.

Some countries, including Israel and Britain, have already begun Covid-19 booster campaigns. The United States authorized extra shots for people with compromised immune systems last month and around 2.3 million people have already received a third shot, according to the CDC.

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## Desperation, misinformation: how the ivermectin craze spread across the world



Over the past year, hype over ivermectin has led to runs on livestock suppliers, a boom in illegal trafficking and rampant misinformation.  
Illustration: Rita Liu/The Guardian

*Nick Robins-Early*  
Fri 24 Sep 2021 06.00 EDT

As Covid-19 cases in Peru rose rapidly during the early months of the pandemic, public interest in the drug ivermectin surged.

Misleading information suggesting the drug, used to treat parasites in humans and livestock, had been proven effective against coronavirus reached many Peruvians online, doctors told the Guardian.

With vaccines still in development, desperate physicians soon began administering ivermectin to patients and, despite a lack of evidence of the drug's effectiveness in treating Covid, Peru's government included it in treatment guidelines in early May 2020. A frenzy ensued.

"We ran out of ivermectin in all the pharmacies," recalled Dr Patricia Garcia, the country's former health minister. "Then there was a black market, and that's when things got even worse because the veterinary ivermectin use started."

Like several other Latin American countries, Peru in 2020 experienced a dire Covid emergency that overwhelmed its underfunded healthcare system. Many residents turned to self-medicating with ivermectin, Garcia said. Local politicians and television hosts told audiences to take the drug. Some Peruvians began taking ivermectin that was formulated for livestock and administered through injections, and images of people with necrotic tissue on their skin from shots made their way to Garcia's desk. [Evangelical groups](#) touted ivermectin as equivalent to a vaccine, sending volunteers to inject thousands of people in indigenous communities while referring to the drug as a "salvation".



House-to-house coronavirus testing outside Lima, Peru, in June 2020. The country experienced a Covid emergency that overwhelmed its healthcare system. Photograph: Rodrigo Abd/AP

Peru's experience with ivermectin was an early indicator of things to come. Over the past year, [the international hype over the drug](#) has led to runs on livestock suppliers, a boom in illegal trafficking and rampant misinformation in several countries.

[Clinical trials](#) are still under way to determine if ivermectin has any benefits against Covid. But in the meantime, US and international health authorities have cautioned against using it for the virus and have stressed that vaccines are a safe and effective means of preventing the disease. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) have put out advisories warning against using ivermectin as treatment or prevention for Covid. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) stated in February there was not enough evidence “either for or against” recommending the drug. The World Health Organization (WHO) similarly [advised](#) in March that the drug should be used only in clinical trials, [as did](#) the European Medicines Agency (EMA).

Still, a global network of profiteers, advocacy groups and online communities have sprung up around it. Ivermectin proponents in multiple

countries have touted the drug as a solution to the pandemic, leaving public health officials scrambling to correct the record.

## The ivermectin boom

Ivermectin was created in the 1970s to treat parasites in livestock, but the drug gained new life in recent decades as an inexpensive and effective anti-parasitic when formulated for humans. When researchers and doctors early on in the pandemic looked at repurposing [a plethora](#) of existing drugs to see what might be effective against Covid, some turned their attention to ivermectin.

One March 2020 peer-reviewed study involving in vitro laboratory tests on cell cultures in Australia showed promising results against the virus in the cultures, kicking off a wave of interest among researchers and doctors looking for anything to slow the pandemic. A non-peer-reviewed, pre-print study [released online](#) one month later claimed to find the drug also reduced mortality in humans.

The problem, medical experts say, is that the studies had serious flaws or lacked evidence that the drug could work in humans. Doctors evaluating the Australian study have [criticized](#) it for using extremely high concentrations of the drug that are likely [not achievable](#) in human blood plasma, saying that even using a dose 8.5 times higher than what the FDA approves for use in humans resulted in a blood concentration still vastly below the level that showed antiviral effects. Experts have also pointed out that the study's findings were limited to a laboratory setting rather than in humans, and that using ivermectin even at regular doses can have significant side effects.

“If Nobel Prizes were handed out for curing life-threatening diseases in a petri dish, then I (and virtually every translational research scientist) would have one,” said Dr Jorge Caballero, co-founder of Coders against Covid, an organization that analyzes Covid data.

There were even more concerns with the second study, as researchers found that it was [based on flawed data](#) from a now discredited healthcare analytics company called Surgisphere. The Surgisphere discovery led to prominent

scientific journals retracting several studies based on the data, as well as the retraction of the ivermectin pre-print.



Manuel Negrete holds ivermectin after buying it at a local pharmacy in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, in May 2020. Photograph: Rodrigo Urzagasti/Reuters

But the studies prompted desperate governments across Latin America – where ivermectin is commonly found as an over-the-counter medicine – to add the drug to their therapeutic guidelines, even as some medical experts pushed back.

In Peru, ivermectin's use proliferated in the spring and summer of 2020. Rampant misinformation about the drug's healing powers spread through social media and online messaging platforms, giving people a false sense of what the drug could do.

Garcia first saw ivermectin mentioned in relation to Covid in a WhatsApp group in which someone shared an article that falsely claimed the FDA had approved the drug for treating coronavirus.

Similar misinformation about unproven treatments circulated on social media and messaging platforms across Latin American countries. In Bolivia, one Facebook account [posted a video](#) claiming ivermectin could “save you from Covid-19” that was shared at least 285,000 times.

Bolivia's government announced in May 2020 that it would distribute 350,000 doses of ivermectin, even though the country's health minister, Marcelo Navajas, stated that same month that ivermectin was "a product that does not have scientific validation in the treatment of the coronavirus".



Demonstrators support Jair Bolsonaro in May 2020. The Brazilian president has touted unproven Covid treatments including ivermectin. Photograph: Ueslei Marcelino/Reuters

In Brazil, too, sales of ivermectin exploded, said Dr Silvia Martins, an associate professor of epidemiology at Columbia University. "Early on in Covid people began to look for a miracle medicine," said Martins.

Social media and messaging platforms became rife with falsehoods and rumors about Covid treatments such as ivermectin, she continued. "Even medical doctors spread that kind of misinformation, which to me is appalling," she said, adding that some physicians have prescribed the drug indiscriminately without evidence to support its effectiveness.

Ivermectin's popularity in Brazil was aided by its contrarian president, Jair Bolsonaro, who contracted Covid in July 2020 and refused to be vaccinated against the virus. Bolsonaro repeatedly promoted unproven Covid treatments such as ivermectin over policies like mask-wearing, social distancing or

vaccination. Brazil spent millions of dollars producing and distributing “Covid kits” filled with cocktails of pills including ivermectin as part of its public health campaign, despite criticism from medical experts that there was no compelling evidence such kits were effective.

By June 2020, health officials and organizations across Latin America started arguing against the use of ivermectin in the fight against Covid. That month, the Pan American Health Organization, an arm of the WHO, [advised](#) against using the drug for Covid. Brazil’s National Health Surveillance Agency, which regulates pharmaceuticals, [issued a statement](#) in July 2020 stating there was no conclusive evidence that ivermectin worked against coronavirus. Peru’s health ministry removed part of its recommendation for using ivermectin to treat Covid in October 2020, before cutting it altogether this year.

But much of the harm had been done, said Garcia. Ivermectin had given people a false sense of security against the virus, making it difficult for public health officials to later dispel unproven claims about the drug.

Many Peruvians still embrace ivermectin, said Dr César Ugarte-Gil, an epidemiologist at Cayetano Heredia University who ran a clinical trial of ivermectin along with Garcia. “Someone told me a few weeks ago he just got two doses of the vaccine, but he felt safe because he used the ‘correct’ dose of ivermectin,” said Ugarte-Gil.

## Ivermectin goes global

As a second wave of infections hit last October, misinformation about ivermectin began to spread to more and more countries. Many started to see echoes of what happened in Peru and elsewhere in Latin America.

Pro-ivermectin organizations [began to promote the drug](#) in several countries, gaining attention with the help of politicians and prominent media figures who questioned the safety of vaccines. Anti-vaccine and anti-lockdown groups [latched on](#), too, claiming a global conspiracy to suppress information about the drug.

Hungarian health officials [reported receiving accounts](#) from veterinarians about demand for ivermectin last November. The public interest and online misinformation was prevalent enough that it caused authorities in the country to issue a statement out of concern that citizens might start taking drugs formulated for horses and sheep. “We asked the veterinarians to emphasize the risk and to remind people about the dangers of treating themselves with veterinary medicinal products,” Hungary’s National Food Chain Safety Office said.

In Australia, the country’s drug regulator [moved to ban](#) medical practitioners from prescribing ivermectin for “off-label” uses such as for treating Covid, after prescriptions increased between three and four times. Ivermectin had prolific and controversial boosters in the country, including Craig Kelly, a member of parliament, who became a champion of ivermectin and other unproven treatments for Covid. Kelly has routinely shared anti-lockdown, pro-ivermectin messages to his more than 40,000 followers on Telegram. In September, a man claiming to be affiliated with an anti-lockdown medical activist group targeted one small town, with a largely Indigenous population, to push ivermectin, [telling the Guardian](#) he viewed the town as a “petri dish” to test the drug.



US Senator Ron Johnson, a proponent of vaccine misinformation, held a hearing in which an ivermectin advocate, Dr Pierre Kory, voiced support for

the drug. Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

In the US, the CDC [reported](#) in August that prescriptions for ivermectin had spiked in recent months, reaching around 88,000 in a single week in mid-August. Six months before, the Republican senator Ron Johnson, a known proponent of vaccine misinformation, held a hearing in which Dr Pierre Kory, an ivermectin advocate, called the drug “the solution to Covid-19”. A YouTube video of Kory’s testimony went viral and received [more than a million views](#) before the platform removed it for violating its policies on the disease. Kory later appeared on Joe Rogan’s top-rated podcast, praising ivermectin to millions of listeners. The drug became a rightwing rallying point, with Fox News anchors airing segments suggesting that it was being hidden from the public.

Livestock supply stores in the US and in Canada have [faced runs](#) on veterinary ivermectin. Iceland’s directorate of health [told citizens](#) in August not to eat a topical cream containing ivermectin after one patient was hospitalized. Authorities in [South Africa](#), [Northern Ireland](#) and other nations seized millions of dollars in illegally trafficked ivermectin intended for sale on the black market.

The Malaysian Medical Association, the main representative body for the country’s medical practitioners, warned against the use of ivermectin outside clinical trials in July, after seeing troubling reports of [illicit sales](#) and online misinformation. “MMA feels it has a responsibility to the public and the profession to speak out about the ethical and professional dangers involved in promoting unproven treatments without warning of the physical dangers,” Dr Koh Kar Chai, president of the Malaysian Medical Association, told the Guardian.

## ‘I see the same story’

In recent months, several researchers and analyses have found further issues with the [poor quality of studies](#) that examine ivermectin as a treatment for Covid. In July, one medical journal [retracted](#) a major pro-ivermectin study from November 2020 after researchers raised concerns over plagiarism and data manipulation, but not before it [was widely cited](#) and viewed more than 150,000 times. The authors of a review of 14 existing studies on ivermectin

found that evidence [did not support](#) using the drug for Covid outside well-designed randomized trials. A rigorous [clinical trial](#) at the University of Oxford is also under way to evaluate the efficacy of the drug.

Garcia and Ugarte-Gil said their research into ivermectin in Peru was hampered because so many potential trial participants had already self-medicated. A potential lesson for future pandemics, Ugarte-Gil says, is that the use of drugs without strong evidence behind them risks making it harder for researchers to evaluate whether such drugs should be administered in the first place.

Garcia argues that far from proving a “miracle cure”, ivermectin use has not stopped countries such as Brazil and Peru from having some of the world’s highest Covid death tolls per capita.

Instead, she says, it’s been baffling to see other countries rushing to embrace ivermectin after Peru’s experience. “I see the same story in the US,” Garcia said. “I think this is crazy.”

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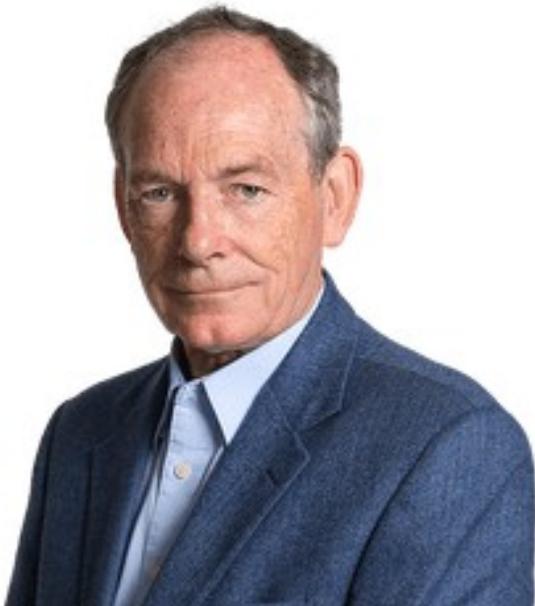
## 2021.09.25 - Opinion

- Ever-changing dialects keep English moving – but grammar is its north star
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[Opinion](#)[Language](#)

## **Ever-changing dialects keep English moving – but grammar is its north star**

[Simon Jenkins](#)



‘Clarity of language is crucial to the presentational skills now so important to a young person’s career.’ Photograph: Andrew Fox/Alamy

Sat 25 Sep 2021 05.00 EDT

I say *tomahto* and you say *tomayto*. My wife says *dahrling* and I say my dear. We all speak differently, and some of us speak different. Does it really matter?

Things matter if people think they do. I remember being with a group of Manchester businessmen whose bitterest complaint was that London stole their brightest young people and carried them off south. And not just that. As the young migrated south, they dropped their regional accents to conform to what London called “standard” English. When they came home they sounded like foreigners.

Last week the Dutch/Lancastrian linguist, Willem Hollmann, gave a new meaning to levelling up. He declared that teaching standard English and “received pronunciation” or London RP in schools discriminated against the majority of English children who did not use them at home. This should stop, he argued. There should be no such thing as correct diction because “children who do not speak received pronunciation might struggle and may feel marginalised”.

The great north-south divide, to which Boris Johnson has rightly directed our attention, has long had its roots in “talent skimming”. As long as clever people stayed at home, the rich tapestry of provincial English was just that, a rich tapestry. One of the most damaging things successive British governments has done to that tapestry is to make it necessary for each age cohort to travel miles from home for its higher education and job opportunities, usually in a south-easterly direction. Most never return home, and the brightest and best tend to drift to London. Some retain traces of their accents of origin, but many consciously or unconsciously camouflage it with standard English, to get better jobs and to fit in.

Hollmann believes they should not be encouraged to think their home dialect is “incorrect” and somehow inferior to standard English. If they prefer the northern “I were” for “I was”, that is their choice. He wants children to carry

their Norse/Saxon grammars and exotic regional vowels to the metropolis with pride. If they fail to get posh jobs as a result, so be it. They should sue for unfair discrimination.

This is a classic case of an argument with a grain of truth in it. In the last century the BBC used to ban regional accents on air and there was a justified outcry. It no longer does. Standard English grammar and pronunciation are no longer upper-middle class English. Linguists have long traced the permeation of RP with “estuarial” English. Privately educated children now drop their consonants. Tony Blair would say dunno, righ-on and geh-off. Even the Queen’s accent is noticeably different from the way she spoke in the strangulated voice of 40 years ago.

While a Graham Norton or a Huw Edwards voice is not that of a Stephen Fry, I cannot believe it is held against them, any more than are the voices of Paul McCartney or Geoffrey Boycott. Most people can manipulate their accents as they choose. But I think most Britons delight to hear regional accents.

Where Hollmann is on more difficult territory, I believe, is over grammar. As he has pointed out in his other writings, [grammar holds the key](#) to understanding in all forms of communication. The deployment of nouns and verbs, adjectives and adverbs carries with it the essence of meaning. I cannot see virtue in refusing to teach children standard English as “correct”, just to protect supposed regional sensitivities. How to say tomato does not matter. What does matter are the clarities embodied in singulars and plurals, tenses and conditionals, qualifiers and determinants. Clarity of language is crucial to the presentational skills now so important to a young person’s career – and so rarely taught while time is wasted on algebra and geometry. Protesting that “bad” grammar should not hold someone back will not stop it from doing so.

In the 19th century much debate in Wales and Ireland centred around whether the new school system should teach in the medium of English or in then prevalent local tongues. Nationalist intellectuals demanded that English be banned. To radicals such as Daniel O’Connell, this was antiquarian arrogance, denying poor Irish the skills by which their children might escape

poverty. It was “national suicide”. In Wales, Aneurin Bevan said the same of Welsh. English was the language of working-class unity and to deny it to Welsh children was debilitating.

No one wants to see the demise of English dialects. Like the landscapes and townscapes of which they form part, dialect is rooted in ancient customs and cultures. Of course, it should be honoured and studied in schools and colleges. Indeed, all children should be “bilingual in English”. The accents in which these various Englishes are spoken will always be alive and changing – from RP to [multicultural London English](#). It must be the most swiftly mutating language on the planet.

Grammar is different. English is full of irregularities handed down over centuries, and its “correctness” is a reasonable topic for argument. Its spelling is diabolical. But as long as English is the nation’s language – as well as much of the world’s – its communalism, its grammatical accuracy is in everyone’s interest. Accent we can leave to the diversity of the human marketplace. But the gods of grammar we should surely respect.

- Simon Jenkins is a Guardian columnist
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[Opinion](#)[Climate change](#)

## The climate crisis has made the idea of a better future impossible to imagine

[Ian Jack](#)



Illustration: Nathalie Lees

Sat 25 Sep 2021 03.00 EDT

Writing in 2003, the American environmentalist Bill McKibben observed that although “some small percentage” of scientists, diplomats and activists had known for 15 years that the Earth was facing a disastrous change, their knowledge had almost completely failed to alarm anyone else.

It certainly alarmed McKibben: in June 1988, the scientist [James Hansen](#) testified to the US Congress that the world was warming rapidly and human behaviour was the primary cause – the first loud and unequivocal warning of the climate crisis to come – and before the next year was out, McKibben had published *The End of Nature*, the first book about climate change for a lay audience. But few others seemed particularly worried. “People think about ‘global warming’ in the way they think about ‘violence on television’ or ‘growing trade deficits’, as a marginal concern to them, if a concern at all,” he wrote in 2003. “Hardly anyone has fear in their guts.”

McKibben’s words appeared in the literary magazine *Granta*, which I then edited, in a piece I’d commissioned for an issue on global warming: [This Overheating World](#). It seemed a timely and important theme, but sometimes editors can get too far ahead of the game. Many thousands of people across the world felt more and knew more about the climate crisis than I did, but few of them, unfortunately, appeared to be literary novelists or writers of narrative non-fiction. The issue included some fine pieces but was not a total success. In fact, Margaret Atwood did publish a novel that year, [Oryx and Crake](#), set in a world ruined by climate breakdown (among other causes), but the most prominent examples of its fictional treatment, the small genre sometimes known as “cli-fi”, had still to come. Cormac McCarthy’s [The Road](#), published in 2006, may never be surpassed, not even by the Book of Revelation, as the future’s most terrifying herald.

Literature had good reasons to resist. I’m never sure what the German philosopher-sociologist Theodor Adorno was driving at with his statement that “to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric”; only that he might be suggesting that in the prospect or memory of such a calamity, poetry was useless and the pretension of its relevance simple-minded. And so it might

be with novels and the climate crisis. Earlier writers such as Jules Verne and HG Wells entertained their readers with versions of the future that were sometimes frightening, but only in a hide-beneath-the-bedsheets way, and against the common grain of western optimism that the future would be better than the past (a feeling that survived the Eurocentric horror of the last century's first 50 years, and, in my generation's case, the Cuban missile crisis and the threat of nuclear war).

Who believes it now? The idea of a better future has been replaced by one of a future not as bad as it could be, providing urgent steps are taken; but for more than 20 years (more than 30 years, if the counting starts with Hansen's address to Congress) the science behind our understanding of climate breakdown was widely dismissed either as an international conspiracy or an inconvenient speculation, or relegated to a problem on a par with McKibben's "growing trade deficits". National electorates and their political leaders; media magnates; company stockholders and executives, especially those in the carbon fuel business: few of them wanted to know. As recently as 2015, Boris Johnson could describe worldwide concern over the climate as "global leaders driven by a primitive fear that the present ambient warm weather is somehow caused by humanity". In 2012 Anne-Marie Trevelyan, now his international trade secretary, wrote in support of a campaign against windfarms: "We aren't getting hotter, global warming isn't actually happening." As the gospel of St Luke tells us, there will be more joy in heaven over a single sinner who repents than over the 99 righteous people who don't need to bother, but here on Earth it might be appropriate to have statements such as Trevelyan's (she made several) incised on durable measuring sticks that can be inserted along the high tidemark of her Northumberland constituency, whose coastline is so long and low.

It would be wrong, however, to confine the blame for our delayed engagement to straightforward denialism. Recognising climate breakdown as a possibly terminal crisis for civilisation led to the difficulty of managing it inside our heads. As David Runciman, professor of politics at Cambridge University, wrote six years ago: "It's hard to come up with a good analogy for climate change but that doesn't stop people from trying. We seem to want some way of framing the problem that makes a decent outcome look less unlikely than it often appears." He listed the most common analogies: climate was a "moonshot problem", a "war mobilisation problem", a

“disease eradication problem”. Beyond giving a notion of the effort required, none worked; war, for instance, needed a clear enemy in view – and in the climate crisis, Runciman wrote, “the enemy is us”. Analogies offered a false comfort: “Just because we did all those things doesn’t mean we can do this one.”

Climate breakdown is like nothing that has gone before. Like an intermittent fountain, its ghastly prospect shoots high in the air one minute and then vanishes as though it had never been. On 9 August this year the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change published a report that spread alarm and despondency everywhere. “[A code red for humanity](#),” warned the UN secretary general. “The alarm bells are deafening, and the evidence is irrefutable: greenhouse gas emissions … are choking our planet and putting billions of people at immediate risk.” By 11 August, A-level results, Brexit lorry queues and Prince Andrew had squeezed the message from every front page.

An ordinary kind of life goes on. Research shows that in 2020 the word “cake” was mentioned [10 times more](#) often on UK television shows than the phrase “climate change”, and that “banana bread” was heard more frequently than “wind power” and “solar power” combined. [Research shows](#) that four in 10 young people around the world are hesitant to have children, while three-quarters of them find the future frightening and more than half believe humanity is doomed. Research (by the climate scientists [James Dyke, Robert Watson and Wolfgang Knorr](#)) shows that if humanity had acted on Hansen’s testimony immediately to stop the accelerating use of fossil fuels and begun a decarbonisation process of around 2% a year, then we would now have a two-in-three chance of limiting warming to 1.5C. If that calculation is correct, the odds these days must be quite a lot longer.

Is there fear in our guts? Boris Johnson spoke to the UN assembly on Wednesday like a boy who wanted the applause of the Oxford Union. He had a [clever reference](#) (Sophocles), a popular reference (The Muppet Show), and a reference to a particular kind of English life (“unlocking the drinks cabinet”) that vanished with the Austin Allegro. It seems unlikely that the world can be saved by such a speech, but there is no point complaining. For this dangerous moment, he is what we have.

- Ian Jack is a Guardian columnist
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## [Opinion](#)[United Nations](#)

# As world leaders gather at the UN, the violation of Palestinian rights must be on the agenda

[Hanan Ashrawi](#) and [Lakhdar Brahimi](#)



Israeli border guards block a street to Palestinians in the city of Hebron in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, 18 June 2021. Photograph: Mosab Shawer/AFP/Getty Images

Sat 25 Sep 2021 04.00 EDT

This week, world leaders have gathered in New York for the 76th session of the United Nations general assembly, struggling to prove its continued [relevance](#) in a bruised world. The major themes so far have been the climate crisis, vaccinating the world against Covid-19 and the new regime in Afghanistan – and rightly so. But there is another issue that also demands our attention, where progress could restore faith in the general assembly's

ability to act: the deepening regime of Israeli Jewish supremacy over millions of Palestinians, which has been recognised by more and more observers as a regime of apartheid. We join many global leaders in calling for the general assembly to investigate this regime, and consequently take the necessary measures of accountability to dismantle it.

Last year, in response to Israel's plans to annex further land in the occupied Palestinian territory, we were joined by tens of Arab civil society leaders and diplomats in [calling for sanctions](#) against Israel and defending the right of Palestinians to engage in legitimate resistance, including through boycott, divestment and sanctions. This is to safeguard not just the inalienable rights of the people of Palestine, particularly to self-determination, but also the sanctity of the international rule of law.

Through its relentless annexation, and expansion of its absolute control over all of Palestine, [Israel](#) blatantly denies the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to existence and sovereignty in their own homeland. It also destroys the basis of any solution based on the tenets of international law, while further entrenching a legislative system of institutionalised discrimination, segregation, and inequality, through laws and policies, throughout the entirety of historic Palestine. This system meets the UN definition of apartheid.

The Palestinian people – whether under occupation in Gaza and the West Bank, including Jerusalem, inside Israel or living as refugees and forced exiles – has waited for decades for the UN to implement the tens of resolutions it has adopted in support of Palestinian rights. Working to undo Israeli apartheid would give Palestinians, and every other community suffering from injustice around the world, hope that justice can indeed prevail.

Apartheid anywhere is a crime against humanity, and states as well as the UN are responsible for abolishing it. The general assembly played a critical role in defeating apartheid in southern Africa, which it regarded as a threat to international security and a flagrant violation of the UN charter and the right to self-determination of peoples under colonial and foreign domination. It called on all states to sever military, economic, cultural and diplomatic relations with South Africa and established a special UN committee and

centre to help eradicate apartheid. It is high time for the UN to do the same with Israel.

Leading Palestinian organisations have for decades been condemning and documenting Israel's perpetration of the crime of apartheid against the Palestinian people. In June 2020, 47 independent UN human rights experts authoritatively stated that Israeli government plans to illegally annex large parts of the occupied West Bank would constitute "a vision of a 21st-century apartheid".

Since July 2020, 10 former heads of state, more than 700 MPs, and scores of social and Indigenous peoples' movements from across Asia, Africa and Latin America have joined the Global South Response, expressing support of Palestinian civil society's call for a UN investigation of Israeli apartheid and for consequent targeted and lawful sanctions to end it.

In January 2021, the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem published a damning report, titled, "A regime of Jewish supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: This is apartheid."

In April 2021, Human Rights Watch published its own historic report, "A Threshold Crossed", detailing how Israel's policies against millions of Palestinians amount to the crimes against humanity of persecution and apartheid.

The states of South Africa and Namibia, where people have successfully overcome apartheid, have recognised Israel as an apartheid regime and suggested UN mechanisms to investigate it.

In June 2021 Ban Ki-moon, the former UN chief and vice-president of The Elders, also suggested that Israel is imposing apartheid on Palestinians, arguing that it is "conflict is between a powerful state, Israel, controlling Palestinians through 'open-ended occupation'".

It is incumbent on the UN, then, to urgently investigate Israeli apartheid as a first step toward dismantling it. In the meanwhile, states are called upon to adopt effective accountability measures to show Israel that there are serious consequences to its violent and relentless violations of Palestinian rights and

its disregard of the rule of law. Silence, vague diplomatic statements, or rhetorical condemnations will not deter Israel from continuing to methodically dispossess and oppress Palestinians. A serious riposte must involve a broad range of effective and targeted sanctions by the world community that has respect for international legality and human rights.

UN member states can begin by imposing a two-way military-security embargo on Israel and prohibiting all trade with complicit companies that are listed in the [UN database](#) of businesses implicated in Israel's illegal settlement enterprise. By standing against Israeli apartheid, the UN general assembly can truly express the world's conscience and demonstrate its relevance in the global pursuit of freedom, justice and equality for all.

- Hanan Ashrawi is a Palestinian politician, legislator, activist, and scholar who served in the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization; Lakhdar Brahimi is an Algerian and UN diplomat. He was minister of foreign affairs for Algeria, 1991-3, and is also a member of The Elders, a group of global leaders brought together by Nelson Mandela in 2007

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[OpinionBrexit](#)

## **The cause of our food and petrol shortages is Brexit – yet no one dares name it**

[Jonathan Freedland](#)





‘Brexit is the common thread that runs through crisis after crisis.’ Queues at a filling station in Pembrokeshire. Photograph: Rebecca Naden/Reuters

Fri 24 Sep 2021 10.54 EDT

It has become the Voldemort of British politics, the word few in government or opposition will breathe out loud. Once repeated with numbing frequency, it is now the cause that dare not speak its name. I’m talking about [Brexit](#) – there, I said it – and when I say “cause”, I’m not describing it as a righteous mission: I mean Brexit as a central explanation for the multiple crises currently afflicting us.

Cast your mind back to the major shortage before the other two major shortages, the one that was making headlines before the lack of petrol to run our cars or the dearth of domestic gas to heat our homes: namely, the shortage of CO<sub>2</sub>, used for fizzy drinks, in meat production and to keep food fresh. Can you guess which part of the UK was blissfully unaffected by that problem? Open a can of pop if you said Northern Ireland, and treat yourself to another if you knew the reason why: because Northern Ireland remains part of the single market for goods, which means its [bottling plants](#) could get their carbon dioxide supplies from continental Europe. The rest of the UK had no such luck, with the government [forced to pay](#) an undisclosed but

doubtless hefty chunk of our money to a US company to keep two CO<sub>2</sub> plants open, because ... Brexit.

It's the common thread that runs through crisis after crisis. Of course, it's not the sole explanation. Britain would have been more exposed than our continental neighbours to the gas shortage even if we'd stayed in the EU, thanks to a policy decision to hold much smaller reserves. You can put that one down to government incompetence rather than Brexit.

But too many of our other woes can be traced back to that fateful decision and the way it was handled. The empty supermarket shelves, like the [pubs running low on beer](#), are the result of "supply chain issues". In other words, a shortage of lorry drivers.

As it happens, there's a dearth of HGV drivers across Europe, and Covid made things worse, slowing the training of new ones. But the problem is especially acute in the UK, where the combination of Brexit and Covid prompted plenty of EU-born drivers to [go back home](#). It's Brexit alone that has made it hard for UK firms to hire drivers from the continent and tough for EU drivers to operate in the UK. Where once a haulier from Łódź might do a trip that took in Leicester and Lyon, the British leg is now so tangled in red tape as to be not worth the bother. We should hardly be surprised. As Sam Lowe, trade sage at the Centre for European Reform, puts it drily: "We did make a big decision to differentiate ourselves from our neighbours."

Or listen to Paul Kelly, a major and now struggling [turkey supplier](#) in Essex: "The reason we're having all these issues is entirely because of Brexit and nothing else." The issue in question is the shortage of labour: "The people who we used to have coming into the country to pluck and pack our turkeys: they're no longer allowed in."

It's as simple as that. Yet few dare say it so baldly. Note the words of Becton, Dickinson, the NHS's main supplier of blood collection tubes, when asked to explain the shortage of sample bottles that led GPs to be told to [stop performing](#) blood tests for most of this month. The company blamed "transportation challenges" and "UK border challenges". Hmm, border challenges. I wonder what those might be.

It's tempting for remainers to look at the forecourt queues or depleted supermarket shelves and say, "We told you so" – though if anything, "project fear" painted a rather less apocalyptic picture. Still, that tells only half the story. For one thing, as Lowe says, it was not "baked in" to the act of leaving the EU that, for example, we'd make it so much more difficult for hauliers to operate here. Instead, we are living with the consequences of the specific deal [Boris Johnson](#) chose to do with Europe. There were other options that would have kept us closer.

Even so, raising Brexit has to be about more than scoring points in an argument from 2016. Its value is in finding a way out of the immediate crises. Of course, the preferred, long-term solution is to train British drivers and pay them more. But right now, there clearly needs to be an effort to allow and encourage EU hauliers to work here. Until Friday, the government opposed that, out of the same ideological dogmatism that shaped its Brexit deal. The transport secretary, Grant Shapps, [wrote to MPs](#) last month, saying: "I do not support using foreign labour to tackle a longstanding issue in the haulage industry." Sorry if you needed that blood test: the sacred dogma of Brexit comes first.

Now there are signs of a U-turn, with the prime minister [reportedly willing](#) to exempt EU drivers from the post-Brexit rules that have left us in this mess, even if that triggers a stampede from other sectors demanding a return to free movement for their industries. But Johnson should be forced to name the problem. Of the 14,000 words in Keir Starmer's [Road Ahead](#) essay, only five are "Brexit". It's mentioned chiefly in the past tense. But this leaves Labour unable to punch the government on the bruise of these serial crises; it has tied its right arm behind its back. In the words of the Labour peer Andrew Adonis: "It's unbelievable that an organisation called the opposition is not opposing on this because it doesn't dare mention the word Brexit."

The government is currently failing in one of its most fundamental duties: securing the supply of the basic necessities of life. And yet, extraordinarily, it remains ahead in the opinion polls. That won't change until we have the courage to identify what is a central source of our troubles. In the end, Voldemort was defeated. But first he had to be named.

- Jonathan Freedland is a Guardian columnist
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# ‘Free and open’: Quad leaders call for ‘stable’ Indo-Pacific in veiled China dig



Joe Biden walks with, from left, Australian prime minister Scott Morrison, Indian prime minister Narendra Modi, and Japanese prime minister Yoshihide Suga, in the White House. Photograph: Evan Vucci/AP

*Agence France-Presse*

Fri 24 Sep 2021 22.40 EDT

US president Joe Biden and the leaders of Australia, [India](#) and Japan highlighted their Quad group’s role in safeguarding a stable, democratic Indo-Pacific in a veiled dig at rival China.

The first in-person summit of the Quad held on Friday [marked Biden’s latest effort to cement US leadership in Asia](#) in the face of a rising China.

Meeting in the White House's ceremonial East Room, the four leaders discussed their Covid vaccines drive, regional infrastructure, climate change and securing supply chains for the vital semiconductors used in computer technology.

And while [China](#) was not mentioned, the growing US rival loomed over much of the day.

“We liberal democracies believe in world order that favours freedom and we believe in a free and open Indo-Pacific, because we know that’s what delivers a strong, stable, and prosperous region,” Australian prime minister Scott Morrison said at the start of the summit.

That phrase “free and open” has become code for expressing the big regional powers’ worry about swelling Chinese economic, diplomatic and military presence - including threats to vital international sea lanes.

“This event demonstrates the strong solidarity between our four nations and our unwavering commitment to the common vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific,” Japanese prime minister Yoshihide Suga said.

Indian prime minister Narendra Modi hailed their countries’ “shared democratic values”.

Biden, who often talks about democracies needing to prove their capability in an age of powerful autocracies in Russia and China, told the Quad they were on the frontline.

“We’re four major democracies with a long history of cooperation. We know how to get things done and we are up to the challenge,” he said.

For Washington, the Quad meeting marked another step to reviving a US focus on diplomatic efforts, following its dramatic exit from the 20-year Afghanistan war.

And of three regional groupings that Washington leads in its strategic chess game to manage China’s ascent, the Quad is deliberately the most open.

The other two are the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing alliance, comprising Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States, and the newest arrival on the block - Aukus.

Aukus was unveiled only last week and centres so far on a project for Australia to acquire nuclear-powered submarines using US and British technology. Although it will take years for Australia's navy to actually get the vessels, the announcement sent waves around the world, angering China and separately causing a furious row with France, which saw its previously negotiated contract for selling Australia conventional submarines thrown out.

With the uproar over the Australian nuclear submarines plan only just dying down, officials and leaders were keen to stress there is no military component to the Quad.

“This is not a military alliance. It’s an informal grouping of democratic states,” a senior US administration official said. “I think concerns have been dispelled and I believe at a general level this initiative is welcome across the region.”

Morrison, speaking to reporters, called the Quad a “very practical initiative”.

But - even if still not mentioning China directly - he made a pointed statement about Quad members being ready to stand up to “any pressure that would come on any of us.”

“We want that opportunity for all countries in the Indo-Pacific,” he said. “They value their sovereignty. They value their independence, and that should be a shared project.”

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[New York](#)

## **Michael K Williams died from overdose of fentanyl, heroin and other drugs, medical examiner says**



A mural tribute to Michael K Williams is due to be unveiled in Brooklyn.  
Photograph: Chris Pizzello/Invision/AP

*[Martin Pengelly](#) in New York*

*[@MartinPengelly](#)*

Fri 24 Sep 2021 16.44 EDT

The actor Michael K Williams died after overdosing on fentanyl, p-fluorofentanyl, heroin and cocaine, the New York chief medical examiner [told reporters](#) on Friday.

Williams, 54, was found dead at his home in Brooklyn on 6 September. The death was ruled an accident.

Williams was a dancer before he began acting, becoming best known for his role as Omar Little in [The Wire](#).

Among other TV roles, he also starred in Boardwalk Empire and received an Emmy nomination this year for a role in Lovecraft Country. Film roles included 12 Years a Slave and Inherent Vice.

When he was playing Omar in The Wire, [Williams said in 2012](#), he found himself doing drugs “in scary places with scary people”, though “nothing stronger” than cocaine and marijuana.

“I was playing with fire,” [he told the New Jersey Star-Ledger](#). “It was just a matter of time before I got caught and my business ended up on the cover of a tabloid or I went to jail or, worse, I ended up dead. When I look back on it now, I don’t know how I didn’t end up in a body bag.”

The Wire, an ambitious survey of crime, law and order and politics in Baltimore, is widely seen as one of the greatest television series ever made. In 2015, Williams [told the Guardian](#) he struggled following its success.

“I was in a different place in life,” he says. “I was using Omar as a means of escape. Now I don’t use my job as a way to define me: it’s what I do, not who I am. I have that understanding now.”

A mural in tribute to Williams is [due to be unveiled](#) this weekend in Fort Greene, Brooklyn.

“The inspiration for the piece is to pay homage to a Brooklyn son, artist and activist who touched so many with his art and heart,” [Sally Rumble](#), the artist behind the mural, told Time Out.

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**Meng Wanzhou**

## Meng Wanzhou flies back to China after deal with US prosecutors



Meng Wanzhou has reached an agreement with US prosecutors. Photograph: Jennifer Gauthier/Reuters

*[Julian Borger](#) in Washington and [Vincent Ni](#) and agencies*

Sat 25 Sep 2021 04.42 EDT

Chinese telecoms executive [Meng Wanzhou](#) was freed after three years of house arrest in Canada, following an agreement with the US justice department to suspend the fraud charges against her that had poisoned Beijing's relations with Washington and Ottawa.

Meng – [Huawei's chief financial officer](#) and daughter of the giant corporation's founder – was granted release in a Vancouver court hearing, hours after US prosecutors announced an agreement in New York.

She then quickly boarded a flight to the city of Shenzhen, returning to [China](#) for the first time since her arrest in Vancouver's international airport at the behest of US authorities in 2018, Agence France-Presse reported.

She had been under house arrest since, monitored by a private security company she pays for as part of her bail agreement.

"Over the past three years, my life has been turned upside down. It was a disruptive time for me as a mother, wife and a company executive," she told reporters outside the court.

"But I believe every cloud has a silver lining. It really was an invaluable experience in my life," she said. "The saying goes, the greater the difficulty, the greater the growth."

Under the deal, Meng's prosecution will be deferred until December next year and will be dropped entirely if she complies with her obligations. One of those obligations was not to contradict a statement of facts she signed as her part of the deal, while maintaining her plea of not guilty, or suggest that she signed it involuntarily.

The US justice department will then drop its extradition proceedings against her and its attorney, David Kessler recommended she be released on bail.

Meng's lawyer William Taylor said: "She has not pleaded guilty and we fully expect the indictment will be dismissed with prejudice after 14 months. Now, she will be free to return home to be with her family."

A statement from [Huawei](#) Technologies said: "We look forward to seeing Ms Meng returning home safely to be reunited with her family. Huawei will continue to defend itself against the allegations in the US district court for the eastern district of New York."

The full agreement was not immediately made public in the court hearing.

Meng was indicted on bank and wire fraud charges for allegedly misleading HSBC bank on Huawei's activities in Iran.

According to news reports by Reuters in 2012 and 2013, which were referred to in the US case against her, Meng and Huawei were linked to a scheme to sell computer equipment to Iran, in violation of sanctions.

The US issued a sealed warrant for Meng's arrest in 2008, and asked the Canadian authorities to arrest her when she arrived at Vancouver airport on 1 December 2019.

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## Democrats

# ‘We couldn’t be more inconsistent’: discordant Democrats imperil Biden’s agenda



Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is one of two faces of a 193-year-old Democratic party confronting fundamental questions about what it stands for and what it wants to be. Photograph: Stephen Lovekin/REX/Shutterstock

*[David Smith](#) in Washington*

[@smithinamerica](#)

Sat 25 Sep 2021 02.00 EDT

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez cannot have been surprised that wearing a [“Tax the Rich” dress](#) to New York’s Met gala would trigger performative outrage from the right. But it also earned blowback from closer to home.

Eric Adams, a Black police veteran who won the party’s mayoral primary by appealing to its centre, [argued that](#) “when you talk about just blanketly

saying ‘tax the rich’ in this city”, it would potentially drive away firefighters, teachers and other taxpayers on whom the city depends. He advocated cutting wasteful spending instead.

The pro-business Adams and the democratic socialist congresswoman are two faces of a 193-year-old Democratic party confronting fundamental questions about what it stands for and what it wants to be. While [Democrats](#) have moved left on both economic and social issues since the 1990s, this remains a broad and unwieldy coalition by global standards.

Now its diverse and at times discordant voices in Washington are [imperiling the agenda of Joe Biden](#), a longtime centrist who has nevertheless embraced some of the radically transformative ambitions of past Democratic giants such as Franklin Roosevelt and Lyndon Johnson.

Divisions between progressives and moderates in Congress are threatening to scuttle a \$3.5tn social spending program, which includes childcare, education and green energy measures, and a \$1tn bipartisan infrastructure bill that has passed the Senate and is pending in the House of Representatives.

“Unfortunately for us, at a time when it’s so very important for Democrats to make it clear to the people that we serve where we stand, we couldn’t be more inconsistent with our values right now,” said [Yvette Simpson](#), chief executive of the progressive group Democracy for America. “We can’t get all on the same page to get this done.”

For four years of the Republican Donald Trump’s presidency, Democrats of all stripes united against [a common political foe](#). Since January, however, they have controlled all the levers of power – with House and Senate majorities so razor-thin that every disagreement is thrown into sharp relief against staunch Republican opposition.

Democrats cannot afford to lose more than three votes in the House, and none in the Senate, if they are to pass the social package that has earned comparisons with [Roosevelt’s “New Deal”](#) and Johnson’s “Great Society” in its reassertion of government’s power to improve lives.

There is added pressure from the expectation that Republicans are likely to win back the House and possibly the Senate in midterm elections in November of next year. The clock is ticking.

Moderate Democrats back a vote on the \$1tn bill for roads, bridges, ports and broadband connections scheduled for the House on Monday. But they have also raised objections to the size of the \$3.5tn social spending package, warning against government overreach that will drive up the national debt.

Senator Joe Manchin, who represents heavily Republican West Virginia, has [said he will not vote](#) for \$3.5trn, preferring instead a total of \$1tn to \$1.5tn. His Senate colleague, Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, also wants to trim the cost.

But progressives have vowed to defend the price tag of \$3.5tn over 10 years, having already come down from \$6tn. They have also said they will not vote for the infrastructure plan without first passing the social spending program, using a manoeuvre called “reconciliation,” which avoids the Senate requirement for a supermajority.

Progressives argue that opinion polls show broad bipartisan support for the plan and accuse the moderates of being beholden to corporate interests. [Manchin, for example, owns a big stake](#) in a private coal brokerage and his election campaigns have received donations from lobbyists for the oil giant Exxon.

Simpson said: “If we have certain members of our caucus who want to take money from Big Pharma, Big Oil, Big ‘insert name here’, then we’re never going to have a Democratic majority that’s willing to actually serve real people first.”

She added: “It’s really not Democrat versus Republican. It’s the ultra wealthy and the corporations versus all the rest of us because a bill like this in the midst of a pandemic should be very easy to pass. This is a part of Biden’s agenda. It’s actually already a compromise position because progressives wanted way more.”

The scale of ambition is a marker of how far the party has journeyed since, from the ashes of a third consecutive election defeat in 1988, it turned to Arkansas governor Bill Clinton to lead the “New Democrats” (later an inspiration for Tony Blair’s New Labour) to the political centre ground and back to the White House.

Al From, who founded the Democratic Leadership Council in 1985 and [handpicked Clinton for the job](#), is still putting the case for centrism. He points out that Biden comfortably beat Senator Bernie Sanders, a democratic socialist, in last year’s primary and contends that the significance of progressives is “exaggerated” by cable news networks and Twitter.

From also notes that the six progressives who comprise “the squad” in the House are from safe Democratic strongholds, whereas the moderates are from competitive swing districts. “The voters that are going to decide who’s controlling the Congress are probably going to be suburban voters and college graduates, and women are going to be key to that also,” he said. “The suburban voters tend to be more fiscally moderate.

“The vote on the \$3.5trn bill is automatic for the progressive caucus because they want to spend all the money in the world. But for the moderates, it may be an election deciding vote because the constituencies that they need to win often vote Republican and tend to be more conservative on economic issues. Part of what this fight is about goes back to who you represent and whose votes you need to get elected.”

From cautioned against viewing the debate as evidence a Democratic identity crisis, however. “We’ve always been a coalition party,” he added. “We’ve always been a very broad tent stretched all across the spectrum. It’s probably less now, in terms of the breadth of a party, that it has been historically. Thirty or 40 years ago it was even a lot more divided.”

The current impasse has led to some terse exchanges on Capitol Hill and forced Biden, a 36-year veteran of the Senate, to step in this week by [hosting both moderates and progressives](#) for talks at the White House. Much also depends on Nancy Pelosi, the House speaker, and Chuck Schumer, the Senate majority leader, displaying their political chess-playing skills.

It is a sign of progressive gains in recent years that Pelosi and Schumer have expressed support for their goals and that Sanders is now chairman of the influential Senate budget committee (he has warned plainly: “No infrastructure bill without the \$3.5tn reconciliation bill.”) Biden, a surprise radical at 78, appears to have set the tone for the party.

Matt Bennett, executive vice-president for public affairs at the Third Way thinktank and a former official in the Clinton White House, said: “When your party has the White House, you have an identity and the identity is personified by the president for good or bad.

“Republicans for a time were having an identity crisis under Trump because you saw people exiting the party in large numbers, particularly their intelligentsia. The core of the Bush administration announced they were opposed to a Republican president. That’s an identity crisis. What we’re having is a debate.”

It is a debate set to rage on, further complicated by Republicans reasserting their vow not to help Democrats raise the federal government’s debt limit before a mid-October deadline. The various moving parts look set to make or break Biden’s presidency and prove a defining chapter in the Democratic party’s long history.

Leah Greenberg, co-founder and co-executive director of the Indivisible Project, a progressive nonprofit organisation, said: “There’s a cohesive identity of a big faction of the Democratic party, ranging from the president to progressives; it really shows the total ideological and political incoherence of the conservative Democratic bloc.

“They just have random feelings about the price tag, various preferences around not taxing the rich, not actually limiting corporate power, et cetera. The fight here is not even between moderates and progressives. It’s between people who are trying to deliver on the full Democratic agenda and people who are trying to take bites out of it for complicated, incoherent reasons, usually involving delivering for corporate donors.”

And while Manchin and Ocasio-Cortez belonging to the same party might seem a recipe for political dysfunction, it is still in a different league from

events across the aisle over the past decade.

Greenberg added: “The dominant story in American politics is not necessarily the changes in the Democratic party. It is the fact that the Republican party has just been completely unmoored from political reality, from any commitment to democracy, and is hell bent on using the tools it has in order to maintain and exert power.”

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## Germany

# German election too close to call as polls find SPD has lost its lead



Candidates line up in Berlin on Thursday for the final televised debate ahead of Sunday's election. Photograph: Clemens Bilan/EPA

*[Kate Connolly](#) in Berlin*

Fri 24 Sep 2021 12.55 EDT

The race to succeed Angela Merkel as German chancellor remains completely open two days before [western Europe's most populous country goes to the polls](#), with the latest predictions showing the leading parties almost neck and neck.

Two leading polls published on Friday ahead of Sunday's election indicate the Social Democrats (SPD) have lost their lead over the Christian Democrats (CDU). One, carried out by Civey for the broadcaster ZDF, showed the SPD to be stable on 25%, but the CDU to have risen to 23%. A

poll released later in the day for the polling institute Allensbach for the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung showed the race to be even tighter, with the SPD on 26%, the CDU on 25%.

The SPD had been on a roll for weeks but has seen its lead whittled down to such a wafer-thin majority that its advantage is in effect non-existent, especially when a statistical margin of error of about 2.5% is also taken into account.

The battle for the runner-up is almost as open, and is being followed just as closely by punters, as it could be as, if not more decisive, in determining the make-up of the new government. The Green party is shown in the final polls to be on 16% and the FDP on 10.5% to 12%. The far-right AfD is on 10% followed by the far-left Die Linke on 5% to 6%, which means it is on the verge of not being reelected into parliament.

However, by a considerable margin, the most popular candidate for chancellor remains Olaf Scholz of the SPD, with 47% of those polled saying they would choose him if there was a direct vote for chancellor, while 20% said they were in favour of Armin Laschet of the CDU. Just 16% said they wanted Annalena Baerbock of the Greens.



German Chancellor Angela Merkel feeds Australian lorikeets at Marlow bird park in Marlow, Germany. Photograph: Georg Wendt/AP

A coalition government seems an inevitability and a [three-way alliance is highly likely](#), the first time this will have happened on a national level, in a reflection of the increasing fragmentation of German politics that is also occurring elsewhere in Europe and beyond.

The resulting scenario will have wide-reaching consequences for how a new government operates as well as affecting Germany's future role as a leading voice in Europe. Weeks, if not months, of heated negotiations over forming a new government are expected.

On Thursday night, the lead candidates of all seven parties expected to enter the Bundestag met for a final television debate, in which they sparred over the issues that have shaped the campaign, from economic recovery to climate change, pandemic management to energy security. But the gathering was too large, the time each candidate had too brief, to allow any one of them to make a significant impact.

The debate followed three previous encounters over the past month with the leaders of the CDU, SPD and Greens, after which audience polls had declared Scholz, the SPD leader, to be the winner on each occasion.

Thursday night's debate opened with focus on the [fatal shooting earlier this week of a petrol station attendant in Rheinland-Palatinate](#) after he had asked a customer to wear the mandatory medical face mask, an incident that has shocked Germany.

It triggered discussion on a wide range of security issues including the tightening of gun laws, online hate speech and arguments over the necessity of the coronavirus restrictions still in place across Germany.

The collapse in support for the CDU and its sister party, the Christian Social Union (CSU), has been the main talking point throughout this campaign, with much blame especially within the conservative alliance itself having

been put at the door of its candidate, [Laschet](#), who is also the leader of Germany's most populous state of North Rhein-Westphalia (NRW).

His campaign has been gaffe-prone – its lowest point came shortly after the floods that wreaked havoc in NRW and neighbouring Rheinland-Palatinate, when Laschet was caught on camera laughing during a moment of remembrance for the more than 180 people who died. His own party is perceived as being drained, empty of innovation or inspiration after 16 years in power under Merkel.

Even if the CDU catches up on the SPD, it is still on course for one of the worst results in its almost eight-decade history.

Relative to the CDU, the SPD has appeared to flourish, though even within the party itself its advantage is put down to some extent to a mix of luck and circumstance that could evaporate at any moment. Scholz, as incumbent finance minister who has helped steer the German economy through the pandemic, has presented himself as something of a continuity candidate to Merkel – even briefly adopting her famous rhomboid hand gesture, which, while meant as a joke, has gone down well with the electorate – at the same time as promising a change of course and widespread reform.

However, when it comes to the votes it has garnered over the past two decades, the SPD, like the CDU, remains a shadow of its former self as it has haemorrhaged supporters to other parties.

The party also remains haunted by the rise and fall of Martin Schulz, the former president of the European parliament who had stood as the party's chancellor candidate in 2017 and had initially been on a roll before the SPD fell to a postwar low in the election.

The Greens have not escaped a bumpy ride throughout the campaign, having dropped from 28% in April after Baerbock was appointed its lead candidate, to 16%. Despite environmental issues being its *raison d'être*, the party has failed to benefit from recent environmental disasters, including Germany's historic floods. In fact, it has actively resisted appearing to want to do so – even its own supporters accuse it of having shied away from seizing the reins over outlining the scale and challenge of the climate emergency.

Nevertheless, the Greens are very likely to play a significant role in any new government, in shaping future environmental policy as Germany struggles to meet the goals set out in the Paris agreement to reduce its carbon emissions.

On Friday, thousands of campaigners for Fridays for Future gathered in Berlin joined by the Swedish activist Greta Thunberg, accusing the traditional parties of failing to take the climate emergency seriously and demanding the new government do so.

One of their key requests is for what it calls “generational justice” – young people make up the smallest group of voters and parties are perceived to have shaped their manifestos to appeal to the older generation who are statistically less interested in environmental concerns.

Nearby, in a camp outside the Bundestag, a group of climate emergency campaigners calling themselves The Last Generation, entered the 25th day of a hunger strike. They are demanding a public audience with the three main candidates for chancellor ahead of polling day and calling for the establishment of a citizens’ assembly for climate policy.

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## Japan urges Europe to speak out against China's military expansion



Japan's defence minister, Nobuo Kishi, said China was 'attempting to use its power to unilaterally change the status quo in the East and South China Seas'. Photograph: Kim Kyung-Hoon/Reuters

*[Helen Davidson in Taipei](#)*

*[@heldavidson](#)*

Mon 20 Sep 2021 05.14 EDT

Japan has urged European countries to speak out against China's aggression, warning that the international community must bolster deterrence efforts against Beijing's military and territorial expansion amid a growing risk of a hot conflict.

In an interview with the Guardian, Japan's defence minister, Nobuo Kishi, said [China](#) had become increasingly powerful politically, economically and

militarily and was “attempting to use its power to unilaterally change the status quo in the East and South China Seas”, which are crucial to global shipping and include waters and islands claimed by several other nations.

Tokyo had “strong concerns in regards to the safety and security of not only our own country and the region but for the global community”, Kishi warned. “China is strengthening its military power both in terms of quantity and quality, and rapidly improving its operational capability,” he said.

Kishi’s comments are a strong signal of the rising international concern over China’s military ambitions in disputed regions like the [South and East China Sea](#), [the Indian border](#), and [in particular Taiwan](#). His remarks were echoed by senior figures on the island, with Taiwan’s former head of navy and deputy defence minister also warning that more deterrence was needed.

With China ratcheting up military activity in the region, experts and global military figures have also warned that small confrontations or maritime accidents could quickly escalate into a full-blown conflict.

The comments come amid fresh tensions over a new trilateral security partnership, under which the US and UK will give Australia the technology to build nuclear-powered submarines. The alliance is widely understood to be aimed at countering China.

Kishi, who spoke to the Guardian before the new security pact was revealed, said [Japan](#) had gained the understanding and cooperation of many countries, but far more was needed to counter Beijing. He said the European parliament, as well as the UK, France, Germany and the Netherlands, had shown interest in supporting “a free and open Indo-Pacific”, but “it is important for many countries to speak out about the situation, and this itself will become a deterrent”.

## [Map](#)

According to figures released by Japan’s coast guard, the number of “incursions” by Chinese vessels into disputed areas has [increased dramatically since 2012](#). Earlier this year Chinese vessels were seen near the

Japanese-administered Senkaku Islands for [a record 157 days in a row](#), and Japan recently lodged formal protest over a flotilla of seven Chinese coast guard vessels – the largest since 2016 – patrolling the contiguous zone on 30 August.

Japan has become [significantly more vocal](#) in recent months, calling for greater engagement with the US and other parties in resisting what they call Chinese expansionism. This week, the outgoing prime minister, Yoshihide Suga, travels to Washington to attend an in-person summit of Quad with the US, India and Australia.

The US – which is a key player in the geopolitical situation – has increased its presence in the region, issuing warnings to China and pledging support to those targeted. The UK has also announced a permanent military presence in the Indo-Pacific and recently [led a carrier strike group](#) – including Britain's largest warship and Dutch and US assets – to participate in joint exercises.



An image released by the Japan coast guard of a Chinese vessel cruising near the Senkaku islands in August 2021. Photograph: Japan Coast Guard Handout/EPA

In April, the EU jointly declared tensions in the South China Sea were threatening regional peace and stability, while French warships have

participated in joint exercises with the US and Japan, and Germany recently sent a warship for the first time in two decades.

A new Indo-Pacific strategy report last week showed China to be at the centre of EU concerns, but that the bloc was taking a cautious approach. The document warned regional tensions “may have a direct impact on European security and prosperity”, but urged “multifaceted engagement” with China.

Kishi said he had met recently with several foreign counterparts, including the UK, and “shared that what is happening in the East China Sea and the South China Sea is not only a regional problem, but at the same time also a problem for the international community”.

“I expressed that this is also something happening that is relevant to Europe.”

## ‘Slowly pushing the envelope’

Critics say it’s difficult to gauge exactly how much China is spending every year on defence as they question Beijing’s official figures. But estimates show it to be the world’s second highest spender – after the US – with a 2020 budget more than three times that of the UK, and four times the budgets of Germany, France, and Japan.

It has increased the budget of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) annually for the past two decades, building up coastal infrastructure and other capabilities. Recent reports have also said China is constructing hundreds of missile silos in its interior deserts, and [converting passenger ferries](#) for military amphibious lift – a key defence capability in which analysts had until now said China was well behind.

### Budget

China says it pursues a military policy that is “defensive in nature”. “We develop military capacity out of self-defence purpose. We do not intend to and will not pose a threat to any country,” spokesperson Hua Chunying said.

“[But] compared with 20, 10, or even five years ago, Beijing just has more tools – missiles, warplanes, aircraft carriers, etcetera,” said Carl Minzner, a senior fellow of China studies at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York. “It makes it more possible for Chinese officials to attempt to slowly push the envelope and essentially seize space.”

The PLA has increased military drills and intimidatory sorties [into Taiwan’s air defence identification zone](#), clashed with [Indian troops in border regions](#), and [amended coast guard law](#) to justify weapon use against other vessels. It has ignored a 2016 ruling by The Hague that there is no legal basis to its South China Sea claims, and continued building artificial geographic structures, inflaming tensions with other claimants. Earlier this year it sent hundreds of fishing boats carrying alleged militia to Philippines-claimed islands.

“These Chinese military trends, including the rapid strengthening, increasing activity and expansion of its operational capabilities, combined with the lack of transparency regarding its defence policy and military capabilities, have become a strong security concern for Japan, the region and the international community,” warned Kishi.

The PLA and Chinese coastguard frequently enter the waters around the disputed Senkakus – or Diaoyu islands in Chinese – and into Japan’s air defence identification zone, prompting the immediate [scrambling of Japanese jets](#). Kishi said Japan would take “all measures against airspace incursions in accordance with international law and the Japanese Self-Defense Forces Act”, and that the “incursions” around the Senkakus were “very regrettable” violations of international law which “must not be tolerated”.

He declined to say what would prompt a tougher response from Japan. “We have frankly communicated our concerns to China, and will continue to conduct such communication as much as possible.”

## **Beijing’s ‘core interest’**

Frank communication doesn’t appear to be working, critics say. China has ratcheted up its grey zone tactics: coercive activities which deliberately

don't meet the threshold for an act of war, but serve to exhaust and intimidate the other party.

Kishi warned that these acts pose the greatest risk of sparking a hot war.

"It is generally acknowledged that grey zone activities have the risk of leading to a larger military conflict," he said. "A calm yet robust stance is required in order to prevent such a situation."



Chinese vessels at Whitsun Reef in the South China Sea in March. The Philippine coast guard believed the ships were manned by Chinese maritime militia personnel. Photograph: Philippine Coast Guard/Reuters

Lowy Institute China analyst Natasha Kassam said China's aggression was the key factor, and its destabilising actions – routinely met with US or Taiwan responses – increased the risk of an accident.

"It feels much more tense now than one or two years ago," she said.

Adm Lee Hsi-ming, Taiwan's former head of navy and deputy defence minister, said while the South and East China Seas and the Indian border were major Chinese concerns, Taiwan was of "core interest" to Beijing, as the final piece of Xi Jinping's dream of national rejuvenation.

Beijing has pledged to take Taiwan – which it claims as a Chinese province – by force if necessary. The government of Taiwan says it seeks no conflict. Its president, Tsai Ing-wen, [said in 2020](#) that “we don’t need to declare ourselves an independent state. We are an independent country already.” The potential circumstances and timing [is vociferously debated](#), but there is general consensus that the [risk of a Chinese move on Taiwan is the highest in decades](#).

In preparation, Taiwan has increased its weapons purchases from the US and lobbied for international alliances. It conducts annual military drills to practise skills that would be needed [in the event of an attack by China](#).

Lee, who advocates for Taiwan to improve its asymmetric self-defence system rather than buy big weapons, said allies like Japan and the US served primarily as deterrence rather than tactical support, but echoed comments by Kishi that more deterrence was needed.

“There are two factors for war happening: capability and intention,” said Lee. “When they have both, we have a problem.”

Much of Japan’s desire for more support from western allies can be linked to Taiwan’s fate. Japan’s deputy prime minister, Taro Aso, told a fundraising event in July that a Chinese attack on Taiwan posed an existential risk to Japan, whose southern islands neighbour Taiwan’s northern tip.

“China is rapidly strengthening its military power, and the military balance between China and Taiwan is on the whole shifting in favour of China, with the gap widening every year,” said Nishi. “It is possible that the situation will further intensify, and therefore a close watch must be kept.”

Giulio Pugliese, a lecturer at the Oxford School of Global and Area Studies, said it was unrealistic to expect the EU to use finite military resources to balance China’s power in the region, and the sending of ships and aircraft and participation in drills was to “make a point”. Other collective efforts, such as joint statements, demonstrate “there’s a broad coalition of distant states with active stakes in regional stability and the preservation of the international law of the sea”, he said.

Drew Thompson, a former US defence department official responsible for managing bilateral relations with China and Taiwan, said all governments should be asking themselves: “What are you doing to raise the cost to Beijing for pulling the trigger?”

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## Climate crisis

# Johnson defends trade secretary after climate crisis denial tweets



The new international trade secretary, Anne-Marie Trevelyan, dismissed those who believe in global heating as ‘fanatics’ in resurfaced posts. Photograph: Aaron Chown/PA

*[Heather Stewart](#) Political editor*

Mon 20 Sep 2021 03.21 EDT

Boris Johnson has acknowledged that he has altered his views about the climate crisis over recent years, saying, “the facts change and people change their minds”.

As he travelled to the US in a bid to accelerate progress towards an [agreement](#) at the Cop26 climate summit, the prime minister was asked about the views of his new international trade secretary, Anne-Marie Trevelyan.

The shadow international trade secretary, Emily Thornberry, had highlighted a series of [tweets sent by Trevelyan](#) between 2010 and 2012 that explicitly rejected the science of global heating. “Clear evidence that the ice caps aren’t melting after all, to counter those doom-mongers and global warming fanatics,” read one.

Another, sent in support of a campaign against windfarms, said: “We aren’t getting hotter, global warming isn’t actually happening.” A third approvingly shared an article by an explicitly climate emergency-rejecting Twitter account Climate Realists.

Challenged about Trevelyan’s record, the prime minister said: “Anne-Marie will do an outstanding job as secretary of state for international trade.” He then went on to raise his own past record as a climate sceptic.

“I don’t want to encourage you, but if you were to excavate some of my articles from 20 years ago you might find comments I made, obiter dicta, about climate change that weren’t entirely supportive of the current struggle, but the facts change and people change their minds and change their views and that’s very important too,” he said, adding: “The fact is the UK is leading the world and you should be proud of it.”

As recently as 2015, Johnson claimed “global leaders were driven by a primitive fear that the present ambient warm weather is somehow caused by humanity; and that fear – as far as I understand the science – is equally without foundation”.

He also wrote an article in 2013 suggesting the government should consider preparing for a mini-ice age caused by solar activity, drawing on a discredited theory by the climate denier Piers Corbyn – brother of the former Labour leader. And in the same year, Johnson said windfarms – now a key part of the government’s plan to transition to net zero – couldn’t “pull the skin off a rice pudding”.

Johnson was expressing scepticism at a time when there was already a strong scientific consensus about the science of global heating.

Some friends attribute the prime minister's newfound enthusiasm for the cause of tackling the climate crisis partly to the influence of his wife, Carrie Johnson, who is an enthusiastic advocate of conservation.

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

[\*\*Politics\*\*](#)

# **UK gas supply robust and talk of three-day week ‘alarmist and misguided’, says business secretary – as it happened**

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## Emmys 2021

# Emmys 2021: Ted Lasso and The Crown triumph

02:10

Emmys 2021: key moments from the ceremony – video

[Adrian Horton](#)

[@adrian\\_horton](#)

Mon 20 Sep 2021 12.23 EDT

The [73rd Emmy awards](#) mostly stuck to the predicted script on Sunday, celebrating favorites Ted Lasso, The Queen's Gambit and The Crown, in [an awards-stuffed return](#) to a (mostly) normal ceremony that celebrated diversity yet handed almost all the acting awards to white performers.

It was a big night for Brits, with The Crown, Netflix's lavish drama on the royal family, entering the evening tied with The Mandalorian for the most nominations with 24, and leaving with a clean sweep of the drama categories, including acting wins for Olivia Colman (as Queen Elizabeth II), Josh O'Connor (as Prince Charles), [Gillian Anderson](#) (as Margaret Thatcher) and Tobias Menzies (as the late Prince Philip).

It was also named best drama for the first time, a milestone for Netflix, which led the year with 44 awards in total, including wins at the Creative Arts [Emmys](#), which took place recently.

A year after the final season of Schitt's Creek, which had taken up the mantle of Emmys comedy gold from Veep, [swept the comedy awards](#), Ted Lasso emerged as the heir apparent. The heartwarming British-set Apple TV+ comedy, based on a 2013 sketch promoting the Premier League on NBC in the US, took home four awards, including best comedy and acting

nods for Hannah Waddingham, Brett Goldstein and its star and co-creator Jason Sudeikis.

Hacks, one of HBO Max's debut comedies, about an odd-couple working relationship between an ageing comedian and a millennial writer, prevented Ted Lasso's clean sweep, with wins for best comedy writing and best lead actress, Jean Smart (a double nominee, up for best supporting actress in a limited series for Mare of Easttown). "We wanted to make a show that honors anybody who struggled to tell their stories, especially women who never got to tell their story at all because the world wasn't listening," said the Hacks co-creator Lucia Aniello (*Broad City*), who also won best comedy directing for Hacks' pilot.



Kate Winslet with her award for best lead actress in a limited series.  
Photograph: CBS Photo Archive/CBS/Getty Images

Awards for best limited series were split between Netflix's *The Queen's Gambit*, which won best limited series and best directing for Scott Frank, and HBO's *Mare of Easttown*, which garnered acting trophies for the supporting performers Evan Peters and Julianne Nicholson and best lead actress for [Kate Winslet](#).

For the sixth year in a row, HBO's Last Week Tonight with John Oliver won best variety talk series and the genre's outstanding writing award.

Though the telecast often exhibited diversity from presenters, including the cast of [Reservation Dogs](#), the first show on TV with an all-Indigenous cast and writer's room, there was little diversity to be found in the list of winners, with no acting awards handed to people of color during the broadcast. (At the Creative Arts Emmys last weekend, three black actors won: Courtney B Vance, for best guest actor in a drama series (*Lovecraft Country*), and Saturday Night Live's Maya Rudolph and Dave Chappelle for best guest actress and actor in a comedy series). RuPaul was one of only three people of color to accept an award during the broadcast, for RuPaul's Drag Race as best competition series – making him the most decorated person of color in Emmy history.

Another was Michaela Coel, for best writing in a limited series for her tour de force HBO show *I May Destroy You*, a breakout hit in summer 2020 and widely considered one of the Golden Globes' most egregious snubs. Coel is the first Black woman to win the award. In a clipped speech that packed a punch, she urged writers to “write the tale that scares you, that makes you feel uncertain, that isn’t comfortable. I dare you.

“I dedicate this story to every single survivor of sexual assault,” she added at the end.



Michaela Coel won for best writing in a limited series, for I May Destroy You. Photograph: CBS Photo Archive/CBS/Getty Images

The night did, however, mark strong progress for women behind the scenes – the first Emmy awards in which women swept the comedy and drama directing categories. *The Crown's* Jessica Hobbs became only the fourth female directing winner, while *Hacks'* Lucia Aniello is the fifth.

A year after Jimmy Kimmel stage-managed a collection of more than 100 live feeds, the Emmys returned to the Microsoft Theater in Los Angeles, where Cedric the Entertainer, the actor and standup comedian who has been a sitcom staple from *The Steve Harvey Show* to *The Neighborhood*, presided over a collection of star-studded tables and numerous reassurances that yes, everyone was vaccinated.

The three-plus-hour telecast squeezed in 28 live awards, including one notable stretch to present the lifetime Governor's Award to Debbie Allen, a consummate multi-hyphenate – dancer, choreographer, actor, director, producer, and singer – whose career spans such pop culture staples as *Fame*, *Grey's Anatomy* and *The Cosby Show*. “It’s taken a lot of courage to be the only woman in the room a lot of times,” said Allen, aged 71.

After dismissing the music to play her off – “honey, turn that clock off, I ain’t paying no attention to it” – Allen concluded her speech with a challenge to the youngest generations. “For young people who have no vote, who can’t even get a vaccine – they’re inheriting the world that we live in and where we lead them,” she said. “It’s time for you to claim your power. Play your voice, sing your song, tell your stories. It will make us a better place. Your turn.”

This article was amended on 20 September 2021. We incorrectly stated that no actors of color won awards, when in fact Courtney B Vance won Guest actor in a drama series for Lovecraft Country. This has been corrected.

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2021/sep/19/emmys-2021-ted-lasso-the-crown-diversity>.

# Emmys 2021: red carpet and award winners – in pictures

Emmys 2021: Showrunner Jen Statsky, actor Jean Smart, co-showrunners Lucia Aniello and Paul W Downs with their spoils on the red carpet for the 73rd Annual Emmy Awards. Photograph: Al Seib/Los Angeles Times/REX/Shutterstock

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## **Eat the rich! Why millennials and generation Z have turned their backs on capitalism**



Illustration: Jacky Sheridan/The Guardian



Owen Jones

Mon 20 Sep 2021 05.00 EDT

The young are hungry and the rich are on the menu. This delicacy first appeared in the 18th century, when the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau supposedly declared: “When the people shall have no more to eat, they will eat the rich!” But today this phrase is all over Twitter and other social media. On TikTok, viral videos feature fresh-faced youngsters menacingly raising their forks at anyone with cars that have start buttons or fridges that have water and ice dispensers.

So should the world’s billionaires – and fridge-owners – start sleeping with one eye open? Hardly. It’s clear that millennials (those born between the early 80s and the mid-90s) and zoomers (the following generation) are not really advocating violence. But it is also clear that this is more than just another viral meme.

The world’s most famous leftwing millennial, New York’s rebellious Democrat Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, neatly sums up the generation’s zeitgeist. If leftism often seems to be the preserve of socially awkward nerds – hi! – and shouty older white men, she is the totem of the cool kids who

like their redistribution of wealth and power with a hefty side order of mainstream popular culture.

It doesn't sit easily with some: when the congresswoman accepted a free invitation to the uber-exclusive Met Ball in a [dress emblazoned with “Tax the rich”](#), even some leftists joined the right in puffed-up outrage. Whether you thought it was an audacious demand for the sickeningly rich to cough up at their own exclusive party – or a stunt compromised by taking place in a real-life version of The Hunger Games's Capitol – it showed that elites can't escape the young flexing their political muscles.

According to a report published in July by the rightwing thinktank the Institute for Economic Affairs (IEA), younger Britons have taken a decidedly leftwing turn. Nearly 80% blame capitalism for the housing crisis, while 75% believe the climate emergency is “specifically a capitalist problem” and 72% back sweeping nationalisation. All in all, [67% want to live under a socialist economic system](#).

With a seemingly hegemonic Tory party on a high after routing Corbynism, the IEA warned that the polling is a “wake-up call” for supporters of market capitalism. “The rejection of capitalism may be an abstract aspiration,” it says. “But so too was Brexit.” It’s a striking phenomenon on the other side of the Atlantic, too: a Harvard University study in 2016 [found that more than 50% of young people in the heartland of laissez-faire economics reject capitalism](#), while a 2018 Gallup poll found that [45% of young Americans saw capitalism favourably, down from 68% in 2010](#).

Jack Foster, a 33-year-old bank worker from Salford, shows how lived experience has fed this disillusionment with capitalism. After he dropped out of university and worked in a call centre – a “horrible job” – the financial crash shaped his political attitudes, as they did for much of his generation. But housing loomed particularly large. “I was renting, thinking: ‘How will I ever be able to afford a house?’” he says. “My mum was a cleaner, my dad was disabled, and the people I knew who could afford a house got help off their parents. It wasn’t a case of having a job and saving up; you had to inherit money.”

Dating apps are another, less formal way of seeing where the wind blows. The apps have increasingly become no-go zones for Tory supporters. Given Labour [had a 43-point lead among the under-25s in the last election](#) – unlike in 1983, when [the Tories had a nine-point lead among our youngest voters](#) – the dating pools of the youthful true blue have shrunk. “No Tories – it’s a deal breaker”, “Absolutely no Tories (the left are sexier anyway, facts)”, “Swipe right if you vote left” and “Just looking for someone to hold hands with at the revolution” adorn profiles on Tinder, Hinge and Bumble.

Many of the young have concluded that an economic strategy that penalises them, coupled with a “culture war” that denigrates many of their deeply held values, amounts to a Tory declaration of war on their generation. Anyone who buys into that is, therefore, deemed profoundly unsexy.

For the IEA’s Kristian Niemietz, this is partly down to a “reputational change” for socialism. Once associated with “fringe groups”, he thinks it is now more “a fashion statement, definitely on social media, where people construct a socialist persona which they use for image purposes”. Where he agrees with the left is that an epic housing crisis should receive much of the blame for its renewed attractiveness.

“Whether you ask free marketeers, conservatives, centrists, the centre-left or socialists, all believe the UK has a housing crisis, that it’s a massive problem, but all have different answers about where it comes from and what to do about it,” he says. “If people are getting ripped off and think the market is rigged against them, the one way people can react to that is to generalise: ‘This is what capitalism is like – what the market is like’, making them more sympathetic to socialist ideas.”



Rather than a ‘property-owning democracy’, Britain looks more like a landlord’s paradise. Illustration: Jacky Sheridan/The Guardian

In the 80s, Margaret Thatcher’s ideological mentor Keith Joseph described the push for homeownership as resuming “the forward march of embourgeoisement which went so far in Victorian times”. The great hope, for many Thatcherites, was that the “right to buy” would transform Labour-voting council tenants into Tory-supporting homeowners, a view later echoed by either David Cameron or George Osborne, one of whom Nick Clegg recalled objecting to building more social housing on the grounds that “[it just creates Labour voters](#)”.

But rather than the “property-owning democracy” promised by Thatcherism, Britain looks more like a landlords’ paradise. By 2017, 40% of the homes flogged off under right to buy were owned by private landlords [charging twice the rent of council properties](#). Indeed, in the space of two decades, [the odds of a young adult on a middle income owning a home more than halved](#). These young people have been called generation rent, with [about half of the under-35s in England renting in a private sector](#) often defined by extortionate rents and insecurity.

Rents in England take up approaching half of a tenants’ take-home pay, and an [astonishing 74.8% in London, up one-third since the century began](#). And

if millennials bet the house, so to speak, on a parental lifeboat, disappointment beckons: the typical inheritance age is between 55 and 64, and the median amount handed down is about £11,000, meaning half receive less.

There is no rational reason, of course, for the young to defend this economic system. According to a 2019 poll by the charity Barnardo's, two-thirds of under-25s believe their generation will be worse off than their parents. Keir Milburn, an academic and the author of Generation Left – which argues widespread leftist sympathies among the young are a modern phenomenon bred by economic conditions – says this pessimism is new. "For someone born in the 60s who came into adulthood, there was a sense of optimism, that things will be better," he says. "It's the Enlightenment, modernist attitude that things will get better, society will always generally progress. Now it's just [the author] Steven Pinker who thinks this."

David Horner, 30, a charity worker in London, began feeling disenchanted with the prevailing system when he was at university. Now he has a child on the way, he worries about the world he's bringing them into. From working with younger people from poorer communities to listening to the experiences of friends working in crisis-ridden health and education services, he's in no doubt about the problem. "But we're told this is the apex, the best we can get as a political economic system, and any alternative – even if it's seemingly not that radical – just gets pushed away, that this is the way things have to be," he says. "As I've got older, there's that unfortunate feeling that you don't want to accept the way things are, but there's so much power, and corporations and people with vested interests in capitalism and the way the economy works at the moment."

A generation was told that it was important to go to university to have a salary you could live on. But the earnings gap between graduates and non-graduates has fallen substantially and, despite England's graduates accruing a student debt of £40,280 in 2020, more than one-third of employed Britons with a degree work in non-graduate jobs. In the years that followed the financial crash, and austerity in particular, it was the wages of young workers that fell the most in a protracted living-standards squeeze without precedent since the Victorian era.

Formal education plus economic insecurity is a heady mix, but it's not the only phenomenon at play. Non-academic routes to a secure standard of living have been stripped away, such as the skilled apprenticeships available to so many 16-year-old school leavers in the past. [Young working-class voters were considerably more likely to vote Labour in 2017](#) than their middle-class counterparts.

But a profound existential question has led many young people to question the entire economic system. "I saw a post on Instagram the other day asking if you'd rather travel a hundred years backwards or forwards in time, and all the comments asked: 'Are we even going to be around in a hundred years?'" says Haroon Faqir, a 22-year-old graduate. "Those comments sum up people my age and our attitudes towards the problems we face in a capitalist system."

Emily Harris, 20, a student in London, says her biggest worry is that "there's not even going to be a planet: we've got Jeff Bezos launching himself into space while Las Vegas runs out of water and half the world's on fire. If these billionaires stopped making money they could solve all of these problems and still have billions in the bank."

While much of the mainstream media offers little sympathy for the insecurities and aspirations of younger Britons, the internet has offered a political education. The journalist Chanté Joseph is 25, placing her in the borderlands between millennial and zoomer. "[The microblogging site] Tumblr radicalised me," she says. "Reading about race, identity and class made me think: 'This is all crazy,' and opened my eyes."

Many of her generation then migrated to Twitter and TikTok, she says, "where young people create a lot of political content that's really personable and relatable. That's why a lot of younger people feel more radical – it seems more normal when these ideas are explained in a way where you think: 'How can you possibly disagree?'"

More than one-third of workers on zero-hours contracts – [often not knowing how much they will be paid week to week – are under 25](#), while many others are in "[bogus self-employment](#)", where they are registered as self-employed but are actually working on contract for one employer while deprived of

rights such as a minimum wage or holiday pay. The free market would bring them freedom, they were told; instead it gifted them insecurity.

The sacrifices made by young people during the pandemic have further crystallised a sense of injustice. Hannah Baird, a 22-year-old student, grew up in Rotherham and has always felt dissatisfied by the status quo. Her fears about the climate emergency, and exposure to dissenting opinions on social media, strengthened her discontent. “During the pandemic it feels like a lot of blame has been put on young people for the cases,” she says. “I still have to pay the full tuition fees when exclusively doing online lessons for a year and a half, which feels like a slap in the face, and it always seems universities were the last to be mentioned in plans for unlocking. It just feels, in general, that the government don’t really care about our generation, like we’re left behind.”

That doesn’t mean the young have been transformed into committed revolutionary socialists, but of those millennials familiar with Karl Marx, half have a positive view of him, compared with 40% of generation X and just 20% of baby boomers.

In Beautiful World, Where Are You – the latest novel by the millennial author Sally Rooney – it’s not just the sex that is sexy. One of her characters mulls over how everyone is talking about communism. “When I first started talking about Marxism, people laughed at me,” they say. “Now it’s everyone’s thing.” While it’s probably not the backbone of the patter at newly bustling nightclubs in Newcastle or Cardiff, there’s no question that a post-cold war youth is far more open to this once roundly condemned 19th-century philosophy.

Many placed their faith in Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership to offer solutions to their economic grievances; recent polling suggests that younger Labour voters are nearly twice as likely to believe he would be a better leader than Keir Starmer.

Most young people are not immersed in radical literature, yet politicised zoomers and millennials leave an ideological footprint in their friendship groups. But this doesn’t mean the left should simply bank the two rising generations, waiting for demographics to eventually grant the political

victory that has so far eluded them. As the economist James Meadway warned in a recent article, entitled [Generation Left Might Not Be That Left After All](#), populist rightwing answers to their disenchantment might cut through. In France, many young people have swung to the far right; in the UK, few are members of trade unions, which historically help craft anti-capitalist attitudes; while some classically [rightwing sentiments coexist with leftish attitudes among many young people.](#)

The rich – whose wealth surged during the pandemic – remain uneaten. But it is clear that young people see no rational incentive to back a system that seems to offer little other than insecurity and crisis.

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Taliban fighters visit a Kabul amusement park

[The Guardian picture essay](#)

## One month in Kabul under Taliban rule— a photo essay

Taliban fighters visit a Kabul amusement park

by [Stefanie Glinski](#)

Mon 20 Sep 2021 02.00 EDT

Above its tightly clustered houses and peaks of the Hindu Kush mountains, Kabul's blue skies were once dotted with countless colourful kites, flown by children from the hilltops or their rooftops. Since the Taliban took the Afghan capital a month ago, they have disappeared.



- A girl stares at two Taliban members waiting for a glass of juice

And while more than 100,000 people managed to escape their country's uncertain future – evacuated through the international airport – those left behind are grappling with a new reality.

The Taliban rapidly took over [Afghanistan](#) in an aggressive offensive that only lasted a few weeks and saw much of the Afghan army surrender or escape. The militant group eventually entered Kabul without much of a fight as former president Ashraf Ghani and much of his cabinet fled.



- Top: a mother and her daughter wait for their flight to leave Afghanistan. Above: Kabul airport during one of history's biggest airlifts. Right: onboard the C-17 military aircraft, about 400 people are lifted out of Kabul, Doha-bound, leaving their country after the Taliban's takeover on 15 August



Forty years of war have already devastated Afghanistan, causing suffering, death and widespread poverty.

Now the militant group the Americans came to defeat is once again back in power. A message painted on to blast walls in the city centre reminds of just that: “Our nation has, with the help of God, defeated America,” one of the new Taliban slogans reads, replacing the previous colourful murals that once decorated Kabul.



Our nation has, with the help of God, defeated America

*Taliban slogan*

Over the past decades, the Afghan people have gained little but lost much. Again, many had to flee their homeland. They now live scattered across the continents, leaving behind their once comfortable lives and jobs – cherished even amid war – trading it for a future as refugees. Their hearts yearn for home, but many Afghans can't imagine a future under the Taliban yet again, remembering too well the group's brutal 1996-2001 regime.



- ‘US’ reads the inscription on this Talib’s vest

The ‘Islamic Emirate’ has not outlawed kites, nor has the group denied education to women, but with the formation of a new all-male interim government, details have emerged concerning the country’s future leadership: women are not to study with men and music is outlawed. The ministry for the propagation of virtue and prevention of vice is back – once feared as the strict enforcer of sharia law.

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- Top: Taliban fighters visit the capital's zoo. Above: Taliban fighters take a break to pray in Kabul

The Taliban are seen roaming the city, their fighters visiting the zoo and amusement parks, eating ice-cream by the roadside, guns flung over their shoulders. Some say they have come from rural provinces for “sightseeing” while others have brought their children. They stand in groups and take selfies together, high-spirited and excited to explore the city.



- Much of everyday life continues as usual

The Afghan flag has largely been replaced with the white “Islamic Emirate” emblem, with children selling the new banners amid heavy traffic across the city, walking up to rolled-down car windows, asking for a few small bills in exchange for the new banner.



- Children sell Taliban flags and headbands on the streets in Kabul

Women have taken to the street to protest the new regime in many parts of the city – demanding rights to work and education. Some protests have turned violent with Taliban fighters beating women in the crowd and journalists detained and flogged.



- Video journalists from the EtilaatRoz newspaper were severely beaten by the Taliban after being detained while covering a women's rights protest

While Kabul residents say security in the city – once plagued by regular explosions, magnetic bombs attached to cars and targeted killings – has improved, many are concerned about rising poverty levels. In one of Kabul's main markets women are seen selling their gold, trying to access some cash to support their families.



- Women sell their gold in central Kabul. With banks closed and most cash machines only distributing small amounts of money, most people are cash-strapped

The nation is cash-strapped, with the United Nations warning that up to 97% of Afghans could plunge into poverty by mid next year. With the departure of US and Nato troops much of the foreign aid has dried up, though donors have this week pledged an additional \$1bn in aid funds for the country.



- Aisha Nawabi, 62, stands with her granddaughter in Kabul. She says she remembers the Taliban well and fears that the new regime may be similar to their 1996-2001 rule

This time, women will not bow again

### *Aisha Nawabi*

On the outskirts of Kabul, Aisha Nawabi, 62, is one woman who remembers the Taliban's previous reign well. "Of course they haven't changed," she said from her home, a mud-walled compound surrounded by apple trees on a quiet gravel road.

Nawabi is concerned, though not hopeless. Over the past decades Afghanistan has changed she said. Access to education and technology has grown and the country has opened up.





- Top left: women shop in Mandai market. Top right: women queue outside a Western Union for a chance to withdraw cash . Above: women protest against the new regime

“This time women will not bow. This time they will fight for a better future,” she said, then paused. “I believe this time Afghanistan as a whole will not go back. We will stand firm.”

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Interview

## **Trauma, trust and triumph: psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk on how to recover from our deepest pain**

[Zoe Williams](#)



Bessel van der Kolk ... ‘The number of kids who get abused and abandoned is just staggering.’ Photograph: M. Scott Brauer/The Guardian



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Mon 20 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

When Dr Bessel van der Kolk published [The Body Keeps the Score](#) in 2014, it was a huge hit with yoga people. That is not a euphemism for “rich, underoccupied people”, it is just people who do yoga. Certain physical activities do something weird to your brain: ancient memories resurface, often with new feelings or perspectives attached; you start treating yourself with more compassion. It doesn’t make sense until you read [Van der Kolk](#). After that, nothing has ever made more sense.

His thesis centres on trauma: the urgent work of the brain after a traumatic event is to suppress it, through forgetting or self-blame, to avoid being ostracised. But the body does not forget; physiological changes result, a “recalibration of the brain’s alarm system, an increase in stress hormones, an alteration in the system that filters relevant information from irrelevant”, as he says in his book. The stress is stored in the muscles and does not dissipate. This has profound ramifications for talking therapies and their limits: the rational mind cannot do the repair work on its own, since that part of you is pretending it has already been repaired.

The reality, of course, is that being traumatised does make you a difficult person to get along with

The Body Keeps the Score is engagingly written and plainly not a textbook. Nevertheless, it is a searching, complex account of trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), not pop-psychology for the general reader seeking to live their best life through Bikram. So, how do you account for [its incredible popularity](#)? In the seven years since its publication, it has spent 147 weeks on the New York Times bestseller list and sold more than half a million copies in the UK alone, and nearly 2m worldwide; amid the shared trauma of the pandemic, it has become more popular than ever, spending the whole of July this year at No 1 on the nonfiction bestseller list in the US. On social media, it is ubiquitous, a psychiatric meme, the source of inspirational get-you-out-of-bed quotes and self-deprecating jokes. (If your body does keep the score, is that why you look so rough?) Is trauma really so widespread? And are people feeling particularly traumatised now?

Van der Kolk speaks to me on a video call from Boston, Massachusetts, where he has lived for the past 50 years. He still has the pronounced, reassuringly psychoanalytical western European accent of his birthplace – the Netherlands – even though he took his first degree in the 60s at the University of Hawaii and has practised in the US since. “We define ‘trauma’ as an event outside the normal human veins of experience,” he says. “At least one-third of couples, globally, engage in physical violence. The number of kids who get abused and abandoned is just staggering. Domestic violence, staggering. Rapes, staggering. [Psychiatry](#) is completely out to lunch and just doesn’t see this.”

His work with people who had PTSD began at around the time the term was defined, in 1978, at a veterans’ clinic in Boston, working with men who had fought in Vietnam. He picked up patterns in their symptoms and presentation: either a tendency to superimpose their traumatic experience on to everything around them or an inability to decipher what was going on around them and “very little in between”. Another pattern he picked up was in his own profession. Psychiatrists would diagnose these patients with everything from alcoholism to schizophrenia and miss – almost resist noticing – the trauma.



A US soldier in Vietnam ... Van der Kolk began his professional career working with men who had fought there. Photograph: Bettmann/Bettmann Archive

This became his life's work, learning in the first instance from his own patients. "I have had regular experiences, to this day, when a patient makes me realise something. I think: 'I'll pay *you* for this session, because that's an important lesson. You shouldn't be paying me.'" He explored, too, the lost or discredited work on trauma from the earliest days of psychoanalysis: Pierre Janet, writing insightfully in the 1880s, and the British psychiatric reactions to the first world war. "There's very good literature [on shellshock] from 1919 and 1920. But then there was pushback, people saying: 'You're just a bunch of cowards.' The assault on people who had been traumatised has been relentless – to this day, almost. You're not allowed to tell the truth about the horrible things that people do to each other."

He is a huge fan of John Bowlby, the inventor of [attachment theory](#). "I knew him slightly, actually. He didn't love me – he thought I was too impulsive. But I thought he was fantastic. Most of my colleagues haven't read Bowlby. In psychiatry, people don't talk a lot about attachment." In Van der Kolk's account, he has always been an outsider in his profession, which masks the pedigree of his credentials. He was a research assistant on the 1980 edition of the prestigious Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.

At the start of his career, he was driven by curiosity and a practical urge to find out what worked. The further he delved, the more important he realised the work was, in terms of the incidence and impact of trauma, on society and the self. “The reality, of course, is that being traumatised does make you a difficult person to get along with. Because you suddenly get angry, you suddenly shut down or you space out. But more difficult is to live that life: not being able to trust yourself. And there’s always this internal pressure to step up to the plate and keep functioning. So the next piece is a profound feeling of shame about yourself and your reactions.”

It would be much too simple to say that PTSD quashes any potential for creativity or success. “It is striking how many times people carve out a piece of exceptional intelligence – exceptional creativity – that allows them to go on. Isaac Newton was one of the most abused, abandoned children ever ... And then he invented mathematics.” The question, I suppose, is what else he might have invented, had his trauma been addressed. Van der Kolk is adamant; people shouldn’t be left as walking wounded. No one should have to keep hurling themselves at the same brick wall of therapy and antidepressants if they are not working.

European and American psychiatry have an obsession with analysis and pharmaceuticals, which is partly – especially in the US – about monetisation, with research grants flowing to the most profitable and established fields. Van der Kolk is keenly aware of inequality as a factor in untreated PTSD, and no great fan of capitalism generally. “I’m not sure that the fall of the Berlin Wall was the best thing that ever happened to us,” he says, gnomically, but I get the drift. Part of the commercial imperative in psychiatry has been the drive to find one thing that works for everyone: a Fordist factory-line approach to the brain that has seen millions spent on figuring out, for instance, what works best between pharmaceuticals and talking therapies, or between one therapy and another.

Van der Kolk’s insistence that no single treatment is likely to work alone, and no combination will be exactly the same for every patient, is iconoclastic enough on its own. Yet it is his engagement with what you could loosely classify as “hippy stuff” – eye-movement desensitisation and reprocessing, yoga, bodywork (Feldenkrais, craniosacral therapy) and touch – that shows how unperturbed he is in going beyond the realm of classic

psychiatry. His thinking on the body is so succinct and simple: if the body is storing trauma in its musculature, in its hormonal pathways, then it is the body that needs “experiences that deeply and viscerally contradict the helplessness, rage or collapse that result from trauma”, as he writes in his book.

This is not to say he is totally against pharmaceuticals, which can play a useful role in shutting down inappropriate alarm reactions. But he is much more interested in psychedelics, which are gaining widespread interest in the treatment of PTSD and depression, as well as [the fear of death](#). Van der Kolk has yet to nail down how MDMA differs from ketamine, psychiatrically speaking, but he has tried both a number of times.



‘You’re not allowed to tell the truth about the horrible things that people do to each other.’ Photograph: M. Scott Brauer/The Guardian

“Something has always really puzzled me. I was born in 1943 in the Netherlands. A very large number of kids of my generation died of starvation, and I was a very sickly child, but I’ve felt no trace of that sickly child,” he says. “The last time I took MDMA, I experienced what that child went through back then. It was very painful, actually. But the main effect was a very deep sense of self-compassion. I felt so much love for that child

who I once was, who had to go through all that sickness, who had a hard time breathing, who was hungry.”

The next day, in 2017, he had a calamity in his professional life. He had set up the Trauma Center, in Brookline, Massachusetts, in 1982, while he was still a junior faculty member at Harvard medical school, and had built it into a leading research, training and clinical institution for PTSD. In the mid-2010s, while he was writing *The Body Keeps the Score*, he took a step back – during which time, the executive director, Joseph Spinazzola, was accused of mistreating female employees and was removed from his post. The head of the Justice Resource Institute, its parent organisation, [fired Van der Kolk](#). “It was a purely cynical move,” he says; one designed to shift blame. “He was trying to pin the tail of that donkey on me.”

It was resolved to Van der Kolk’s satisfaction: his key staff left with him, in protest, and they have set up a new foundation. Because it happened in the middle of his MDMA study, though, he was “in this very open, compassionate mode. So the guy said: ‘You’ve created a toxic environment and you’re fired.’ And I said: ‘You know, that’s really not a good idea. It’s going to hurt you too much if you do this, and in the end it may hurt you more than it’ll hurt me.’” Separately, he mentions in passing that it is much easier to have compassion for your spouse if you have compassion for yourself. In Van der Kolk’s telling, the idea that self-love is a precondition for loving others – so popular in motivational statements on Instagram – has very credible and practical examples. That said, he did sue the guy from the Justice Resource Institute.

Collective trauma is complicated. Taboo is a core component of PTSD. The brain buries feelings only if they can’t be spoken about, because of the risk of alienation, from a family (this is particularly relevant to abused children) or from society (this is what silences veterans). Large, shared events – 9/11, for instance – which are not suppressed, which in fact bring those affected together, do not leave the same scars.

What about the pandemic? He shrugs: “I get a lot of questions about this, people talking about our collective trauma, and my answer is: for me and most of my colleagues, the pandemic has not been traumatic. Our friendships, our careers; they’re all fine. If you’re a single mother who’s 18

years old with no income, oh God. If you're a nurse who has dealt with people for a year, who are choking to death, then you're traumatised." Part of taking trauma seriously is not seeing it where it is not present.

In every academic institution I've been involved in, my approach has been pooh-poohed by my colleagues

When *The Body Keeps the Score* was published, his editor said, perhaps because of the yoga, the drugs or the very trenchant way in which he describes trauma's primacy and psychiatry's myopia around it: "Wait until the blowback hits." He is still waiting. "I've had very little blowback. I find it strange. Because I know how the academic world functions and, in every academic institution I've been involved in, my approach has been pooh-poohed by my colleagues."

Maybe it is not so strange. In the end, psychiatry is simply society in a white coat, the medical end of the norm-enforcement and denial of reality that drives individuals to suppress their trauma in the first place. Van der Kolk's life in practice has been to treat traumatised patients, but his life as an author is as an emissary from the world of PTSD, confronting his profession – and the world that created it – with what is actually happening. Ultimately, psychiatry and the world that created it can cope.

*The Body Keeps the Score: Mind, Brain and Body in the Transformation of Trauma* by Bessel van der Kolk (Penguin, £10.99) is out now. To support the Guardian and the Observer, order your copy at [guardianbookshop.com](https://guardianbookshop.com). Delivery charges may apply.

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## ‘We didn’t want to do a Grease’: how Everybody’s Talking About Jamie became a film



‘We didn’t want 30-year-olds playing 16’ ... Max Harwood leads a number in Everybody’s Talking About Jamie. Photograph: John Rogers/2021 Monarchy Enterprises, Regency Entertainment and Channel Four Television Corporation

Ryan Gilbey

Mon 20 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

Choosing a stage musical to see right now can feel like browsing the cinema listings of the 1980s and 90s. Pretty Woman and Back to the Future are playing across the street from one another in London's [West End](#), with The Lion King, Matilda and Heathers nearby. Indecent Proposal opens next month.

The speed of traffic travelling in the opposite direction, from stage to screen, tends to be a little faster, though. A film of [Dear Evan Hansen](#), the Broadway hit about an anxious, alienated student who pretends to have been friends with a suicide victim, has arrived only five years after it opened, with Julianne Moore and Amy Adams among the cast. [Everybody's Talking About Jamie](#), which follows a 16-year-old budding drag queen from Sheffield, has taken just four years, picking up Richard E Grant and Sharon Horgan along the way.

Producers from Warp Films, which is based in Sheffield, leapt on to Jamie with all the enthusiasm of the teenager getting his hands on some sparkly new heels. "They were there at the 10th performance," recalls Jonathan Butterell, who developed the show, which is based on a 2011 documentary, then directed it [at the Crucible theatre in Sheffield in 2017](#). "They loved it and asked to meet with me. I thought someone was going to say, 'Obviously, we'll look for a director for this' because I hadn't made a film before. But that conversation simply never happened."



27 going on 17 ... Ben Platt with Julianne Moore in *Dear Evan Hansen*, which took a different approach to age. Photograph: Erika Doss/AP

A screen version, adapted by the show's writers Tom MacRae and Dan Gillespie Sells, was already on the cards by the time the musical became a West End smash later that year. Butterell claims never to have faced any pressure from financiers to cast, say, Timothée Chalamet with a Sheffield accent. Instead, he put out calls on social media for newcomers, and found the dynamic 21-year-old Max Harwood. But why not bring back John McCrea, who originated the role in Sheffield and London but gets only a walk-on in the film? "By this time, John was 27," he explains. "And on camera, you do look 27. John knew it. We all knew it. I didn't want to do a *Grease*, where you've got 30-year-olds playing 16."

The mix is so subtle in film, you don't realise a song is coming. But in most musicals, it's: 'Here comes the band!'

This is precisely the criticism that *Dear Evan Hansen* has attracted by retaining the original Broadway star, Ben Platt, who is 27 but playing a decade younger. "I honestly didn't anticipate that reaction," says the film's director, Stephen Chbosky. "But if people see the movie and they're still talking about his age, then it probably wasn't for them anyway."

Unlike Butterell, Chbosky has form as a film-maker: he directed *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, adapted from his own YA novel, as well as scripting the movie version of *Rent* and co-writing Disney's live-action *Beauty and the Beast*. *Dear Evan Hansen* is his first stab at directing a musical, though, and while he had admired the show on Broadway, he knew it required a different texture on screen.

"I kept saying we were making a musical with a small 'm,'" he tells me. "I thought of it as a drama with songs. I love big, splashy musicals but this one takes place in dining rooms and bedrooms, so that approach wouldn't have worked. I wanted to deal with it sonically, as though the dialogue and lyrics were interchangeable. The mix is so subtle that you don't realise a song is about to happen, whereas in most musicals it's like: 'Here comes the band!'"



New cast ... Sharon Horgan in the film version of *Everybody's Talking About Jamie*. Photograph: John Rogers/Dean Rogers

A few songs have been axed, among them the opening number, *Anybody Have a Map?*, which introduced the characters in a way that felt inherently theatrical. Two songs were written specially for the film, including *A Little Closer*, which is sung by the dead boy, Connor, and lends the ending a different emphasis. On stage, Evan agonises over the lies he has told but there is little sense of the wider impact of his actions. Chbosky knew that

wouldn't sit well on film. "Evan confessed to everyone on stage but there are only eight characters in the play. Once you go into the real world on film, there are dozens of people who know him. He has to come clean to them, too."

He worked with the show's authors, Steven Levenson, Benj Pasek and Justin Paul, to find some solutions. "I told them I wanted Evan to confess to the community. I kept thinking about him at his 10-year high-school reunion. Like: is he still pretending to be Connor's friend? I didn't want him to have that burden."

Theatre and cinema audiences experience the material differently, he notes. "When you see a show, it washes over you, and maybe later you say, 'Wait, why didn't he ... ?' But it's a live experience. Whereas the film can be watched as many times as anyone would want. It's this permanent record, so it has to be more accountable. This is the version that a young person, who might need this movie, will eventually have on their phone. I wanted them to have one more example of the theme of the piece – that you have to be yourself, with no lying and no hiding."

Everybody's Talking About Jamie has also undergone some nips and tucks. On stage, Jamie's mentor Hugo performs The Legend of Loco Chanelle, a campy, spirited number about his days as a drag queen. "That's the rhythm you hit at that time in the show," says Butterell, "but I knew it wasn't filmic." What cinema audiences get instead is a home-movie flashback montage that encompasses the decimating sweep of Aids and the protest marches against Section 28, all set to a new song, This Was Me, performed by Holly Johnson of Frankie Goes to Hollywood. "I went on those marches," says Butterell. "And I lost young friends of 22 or 23 to Aids. They were the Jamies of their day. I wanted their stories to come to light."



Coming to a cinema screen near you ... *Matilda*. Photograph: Tristram Kenton/The Guardian

Not all the alterations are so beneficial. It seems perverse, for instance, to cut away from the Act Two showstopper, *He's My Boy*, when it has barely even begun. What should have been the big number for Jamie's mother (played in the film by Sarah Lancashire) is reduced to the level of musical accompaniment as we instead watch Jamie wandering the streets, stealing from a shop, and running on to the pitch during a football game to get the attention of his disapproving father. Divorcing the song from its singer risks turning the film temporarily from a musical into a pop video.

Why didn't Butterell simply leave the camera on Lancashire? "Sarah is more than capable of holding that four-and-a-half minutes on her own," he insists. "But I wanted to layer the scene, and to juxtapose different things. That's what cinema can do so beautifully. I tried to show how his mother was in some way culpable for Jamie's feelings of self-destruction, and for us to actually see him hitting that self-destruct button."

He cheerfully answers my other nagging criticisms – about why Jamie is so chaste and sexless, and whether the central struggle of the drama has been overtaken by the mainstream acceptance of RuPaul's Drag Race – with all the confidence of a man who stands by the film he has made. "I do

understand what you're saying," he says. "People have visceral reactions to the material, and that includes thinking, 'Oh, I wish they'd done it like *this* ...'"

Jamie and Evan represent only the first of this autumn's crop of new stage-to-screen musicals. In the next few months, fans of Matilda (the stage version, that is, with songs by Tim Minchin), Tick, Tick ... Boom! (directed by Lin-Manuel Miranda) and West Side Story (the Steven Spielberg remake) will also get their chance to say: "Oh, I wish they'd done it like *this*." And there's more to come. A movie of Wicked, the Wizard of Oz prequel that has been running since 2003, has been in the works for longer than it would take to build the Yellow Brick Road, but is due to reach cinemas next year. A film version of the brash, buzzy teen musical Be More Chill is also in development, just four years after its Broadway run.

Anything would look speedy next to Richard Linklater's film of Stephen Sondheim's Merrily We Roll Along, which tells the counter-chronological story of three friends from their 40s back to their 20s. Linklater's adaptation is currently in production – and will be until the late 2030s. Rather than resorting to wigs and makeup to show the young cast in middle age, Linklater (also responsible for 12-years-in-the-making Boyhood) is shooting scenes each year so that the actors will be the same age as their characters. The film's star? Ben Platt. Perhaps by the time the movie opens, around 2040, the carping about how old he looks in Dear Evan Hansen will finally have died down.

- Everybody's Talking About Jamie is in cinemas and on Amazon Prime. Dear Evan Hansen is in cinemas from 22 October.

## 2021.09.20 - Coronavirus

- Live Covid: jabs start for UK children; some workers in Ireland return to offices for first time since March 2020
- Coronavirus Gordon Brown calls for urgent action to avert ‘Covid vaccine waste disaster’
- New Zealand Auckland to move out of level 4 lockdown as 22 cases reported
- Chris Rock Comedian says he has Covid-19 and urges doubters: ‘Get vaccinated’

[Coronavirus live](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

## UK records 36,100 new cases – as it happened

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## Coronavirus

# Gordon Brown calls for urgent action to avert ‘Covid vaccine waste disaster’



The former prime minister has sent research by Airfinity to global leaders before a vaccine summit on Wednesday. Photograph: Russell Cheyne/Reuters

*[Andrew Gregory](#)* Health editor

Sun 19 Sep 2021 15.00 EDT

More than 100m Covid vaccine doses are due to expire and be “thrown away” unless global leaders urgently share surplus supplies with the world’s poorest countries, [Gordon Brown](#) has warned.

The “staggering” number of stockpiled “use now” jabs will be of no use to anyone by December, according to a new report from the research group Airfinity.

The former prime minister said the failure of Boris Johnson, Joe Biden and EU leaders to agree on a plan to distribute the spare doses meant the world was facing a “vaccine waste disaster”.

Brown has sent Airfinity’s research to leading politicians, including the US president, the UK prime minister, and senior figures in Brussels, before a global vaccine summit on Wednesday.

Airfinity said its research predicted that by the end of this month, 7bn vaccine doses would be available around the world, rising to 12bn by December.

Brown said the crucial issue was how and where the vaccines would be distributed, warning that there was no agreement on who would provide the vaccines to poor countries by December. Unless a plan was drawn up urgently, he said, lives would be lost needlessly.

“We need a vaccine release plan to provide ‘use now’ vaccines to prevent a vaccine waste disaster because ‘use by’ dates are missed,” he said.

“It is unthinkable and unconscionable that 100 million vaccines will have to be thrown away from the stockpiles of the rich countries while the populations of the world’s poorest countries will pay for our vaccine waste in lives lost.

“It will be a profound and collective political tragedy if this summit misses the opportunity to act, with doses transferred immediately to poorer countries.”

The campaign group Global Justice Now said wasting millions of doses of Covid vaccines would be an “atrocity” when they could be used in poorer countries.

Its director, Nick Dearden, said: “Rich countries like the UK are hoarding vaccines that are desperately needed in low- and middle-income countries.

“Poorer countries shouldn’t have to wait until our doses are about to expire to vaccinate their populations. Many are capable of safely manufacturing

vaccines, if only we would waive intellectual property, so vaccines can be produced patent-free in the countries that need them most.”

Last month, the director general of the World [Health](#) Organisation (WHO), Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, called for a global pause of Covid vaccine booster programmes until at least the end of the year to allow all countries to get more of their populations vaccinated.

Tedros said there should not be widespread use of third doses for healthy people who were already double-jabbed.

Covax, a programme backed by the WHO to help distribute jabs to developing countries, has cut its forecast of deliveries of doses by a quarter for this year.

Speaking before Wednesday’s summit, Brown added: “The Airfinity report is a guide for world leaders to fix a more ambitious action plan. It shows we have enough vaccines either on shelves or in production even to vaccinate 70% of the global population by May next year.

“Global political leaders must match the extraordinary commitment and cooperation of scientists and manufacturers who have created the opportunity to vaccinate the entire world.”

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## New Zealand

# New Zealand Covid update: Auckland to move out of level 4 lockdown as 22 cases reported



Lockdown restrictions in Auckland are set to ease at midnight on Tuesday, New Zealand prime minister Jacinda Ardern says, as Covid cases continue downward trajectory. Photograph: Getty Images

[Eva Corlett](#) in Wellington

Mon 20 Sep 2021 01.28 EDT

After nearly five weeks in lockdown Auckland will move out of the highest setting, New Zealand's prime minister, Jacinda Ardern, has said, adding she was confident there was no undetected transmission of the Delta variant in the community.

New Zealand recorded 22 new cases of coronavirus in the community – including three cases outside Auckland – on Monday which some had feared

could put the brakes on the easing of restrictions.

“Level 4 has done what we needed to do – it has helped us contain the outbreak. Level 3 helps us keep up that important work,” Ardern said.

“We are not stepping out of level 4 because the job is done, but nor are we moving because we don’t think we can achieve the goal of stamping out Covid-19 – we are moving because level 3 still provides a cautious approach while we continue to stamp out Covid-19,” she said.

“It means staying in your bubble, it means contactless transactions and keeping your distance. It means we say thank you to Auckland for their tireless work, and we collectively keep going.”

Almost all cases of the last 14 days have either been household or known contacts, and wastewater testing suggests there is no significant undetected transmission.

Ardern said the decision to move down levels is due in part to a couple of observations: there has not been widespread clusters around workplaces, and of the cases where a link has been established, none has resulted from people accessing essential services.

Level 3 allows for people to narrowly expand their bubbles to people who may be isolated and more businesses can provide click-and-collect services or deliveries.

Ardern strongly urged people over 65 years old who had not yet been vaccinated to stay home because of the risk the virus poses.

Auckland will move down settings from midnight Tuesday and stay in level 3 for at least 2 weeks.

A “bespoke” set of temporary level 4 restrictions will be put in place for the community south of Auckland’s border where three household contacts of a remand prisoner with Covid-19 have tested positive for the virus. All three live in the Waikato region, and two are schoolchildren at Mangatangi School. One of those students was symptomatic at school on Thursday.

The rest of the country is at alert level 2 – out of lockdown but with restrictions on gatherings and requirements on mask-use. This setting will remain in place as long as Auckland is in level 3 but gatherings will be expanded from 50 to 100 people.

There have now been a total of 1,071 cases in the outbreak, with 337 of those still active. Twelve cases in the last fortnight are yet to be epidemiologically linked to the outbreak, with five of those reported on Monday. There are 16 people in hospital and four in intensive care.

Just over 71% of eligible New Zealanders – those aged over 12 – have had their first dose of the Pfizer vaccine, and more than 37% are fully vaccinated.\*

Cabinet will review the lockdown settings on 4 October.

*\*A note on data: the Guardian has begun calculating the percentage of NZ's eligible population vaccinated from Statistics New Zealand population data, comparing numbers vaccinated against a total 12+ population of 4,355,300. This may differ slightly from government-generated percentages that use different denominators, such as the Health Service Utilisation Population – which measures all those 12+ who are engaged with the health system.*

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## Chris Rock

# Chris Rock says he has Covid-19 and urges doubters: ‘Get vaccinated’



Chris Rock presents an award in Los Angeles. Photograph: Chris Pizzello/Invision/AP

*Associated Press in New York*  
Sun 19 Sep 2021 14.32 EDT

The comedian [Chris Rock](#) on Sunday said he had tested positive for Covid-19 and sent a message to anyone still on the fence: “Get vaccinated.”

The 56-year-old wrote on Twitter: “Hey guys I just found out I have Covid, trust me you don’t want this. Get vaccinated.”

Rock’s tweet came at the end of a week in which another huge star, the rapper Nicki Minaj, caused controversy – [and hilarity](#) – with a tweet casting doubt on the safety of vaccines for Covid-19.

After the Trinidadian-born rapper tweeted that she had heard the vaccine could cause impotence through swollen testicles, a claim that went viral, the White House offered to connect her with administration doctors who might address her questions.

The Biden administration has sought out new ways to refute disinformation and reach young vaccine skeptics, earlier this year inviting the teen pop star Olivia Rodrigo to the White House to show her support for the shot.

Minaj had said she wouldn't get the shot until "I feel I've done enough research".

Rock has said he is vaccinated. Appearing on NBC's Tonight Show in May, he called himself "Two-Shots Rock" before clarifying that he had received the one-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

"You know, I skipped the line," he told host Jimmy Fallon. "I didn't care. I used my celebrity, Jimmy. I was like, 'Step aside, Betty White. Step aside, old people ... I did Pootie Tang. Let me on the front of the line.'"

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## 2021.09.20 - Opinion

- Political gestures can be inspiring. But let's not mistake them for victory
- Britain's public sector is paying the price for the government's consultancy habit
- We tried to transition to green jobs, but the bosses are closing our car factory down
- Is this the beginning of the end for Jair Bolsonaro?

## OpinionProtest

# Political gestures can be inspiring. But let's not mistake them for victory

Nesrine Malik



Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (left) and Aurora James, fashion designer and activist, at the Met ball last week in New York. Photograph: Justin Lane/EPA

Mon 20 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

The first anniversary of the global Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests was widely noted a few months ago, with acres of coverage and analysis asking: what has changed? Not much at all, appeared to be the broad [conclusion](#). It seems obvious now that the excitement of those initial protests was bound to provoke an organised backlash – which first became visible in Britain in September 2020, when a BLM-inspired dance on ITV's *Britain's Got Talent* [sparked](#) nearly 25,000 complaints.

The moment when much opinion seemed to harden against BLM is an anniversary just as worthy of marking as the start of the protests because it teaches us a vital lesson: political change does not naturally follow after the public's attention has been captured.

BLM's clearest cultural footprint has been the popularising of taking the knee. It could be argued that the gesture has in fact helped trigger some meaningful change in public attitudes. It went from the fringes of the American NFL, as a protest against police brutality and racism, to the halls of DC and Westminster, where politicians from [Nancy Pelosi](#) to [Keir Starmer](#) adopted the gesture. But there is a thin line between a symbol becoming mainstream and being hollowed out into an empty gesture. It's much easier to appear to have the right credentials than try to do anything about the problem.

The speed with which these symbols are circulated and consumed makes them even more likely to be appropriated, in a sort of cultural marketplace where politics is literally an accessory. Last week, for instance, the US congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez went to the Met ball wearing a dress emblazoned with the slogan Tax the Rich. She [explained](#) the decision as an opportunity to extend the reach of her anticapitalist politics. “The medium is the message,” she wrote on Instagram. “The time is now for childcare, healthcare and climate action for all.”

Tax the Rich. I had a chilling flash-forward to a line of Tax the Rich merchandise trotted out by rich influencers. Or maybe rendered in jewellery, much like the VOTE necklace, as popularised by Michelle Obama ([£310](#) RRP). On the way to the mainstream that Ocasio-Cortez wanted to reach through the Met ball, there is a giant cultural and commercial net: one that catches everything and turns as much of it as it can into a cheap (but still overpriced) product. Audre Lorde famously said: “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.” But the rest of the quote, less often cited, warns us that it will often look, at first, like winning. “They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.”

It is common enough to observe that political symbols and gestures are too easily co-opted and commercialised – a tale as old as advertisements. But

today there is a more insidious risk: that we will mistake this for winning.

Last summer, people of colour all over the world rose up and demanded systemic change, only to be offered little more than corporate back-covering diversity exercises, [product rebrands](#) and “pass the mic” events to give people of colour “exposure” before making them give the mic back. An important early stage of bringing about any sort of change is indeed about awareness and getting “a seat at the table”, but that is only part of how change happens. The rest of the time it’s about low-key, long-term work that creates the conditions for new ideas to take root. Think of symbols as fertiliser: pointless in untilled ground.

Over the past 18 months, even more of our politics than usual has been conducted in this strange liminal space online. Despite the stasis of this moment, there have been two big breakthroughs: the race and social equality protests, which revealed the persistence of racism and unjustified inequality, and the realisation that many western states had become so atrophied in the realm of welfare and care that they couldn’t sufficiently protect their populations from a pandemic. The gains from these once-in-a-generation moments of self-reflection risk dissolving in the pixels of a virtual world where, whether as spectators or participants, we exhaust our energy, scrolling through highlight reels of police brutality, falling statues and [black squares](#) of solidarity.

Any ground won here is illusory. The expansion of the online space overemphasises the impact and reach of virtual discourse, and so one could easily mistake the fact we are having these conversations at all for a sort of victory in itself. But if these arguments don’t translate to winning some power in the real world, they are all heat and no light.

For a democracy to work, for good and popular ideas such as racial equality or taxing the rich to become mainstream in meaningful ways, people can’t just be exposed to information that is presented to them as correct. They need to be converted, to see the way such policies or facts relate to their own lives. A campaign I think about often is the one that paved the way for Ireland’s historic gay marriage referendum in 2015. What may have seemed like a dramatic or even inevitable liberalisation of a socially conservative country was in fact the fruit of years of grassroots work. One of the most

successful tools of the campaign was the “[Ring your granny](#)” effort, where young people lobbied their grandparents, mostly in rural areas, to vote yes. The motion passed with two-thirds of the vote.

Specific campaigns are different to general movements with much broader goals, but there is a promising echo of this sort of organising in what BLM UK has been doing with the financial support it received briefly last year. The movement, while battling backlash and hostility, [spent it on](#) supporting organisations, such as African Rainbow Family and United Voices of the World, which help enfranchise people of colour by providing legal and community support, enabling them to secure the status, documents and stability to participate fully in democracy. I worry that we forget that this is the ultimate point of the symbols, the statements, the iconography.

A little over a year since Black Lives Matter started, we should mark our calendars and remember that gestures are necessary but never sufficient. By all means, take the knee and sport the slogans, but think of them, as Audre Lorde warned, as temporary wins in a game where the ultimate goal is to beat the opponent.

- Nesrine Malik is a Guardian columnist
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[Opinion](#)[Public services policy](#)

# Britain's public sector is paying the price for the government's consultancy habit

[Rosie Collington](#) and [Mariana Mazzucato](#)



An advert for the NHS test and trace app in London, September 2020.  
Photograph: Dinendra Haria/LNP/Shutterstock

Mon 20 Sep 2021 02.00 EDT

When he was leader of the opposition, David Cameron did not mince his criticism of the Labour government's dependency on consultancy companies. Speaking in 2008, he [lambasted](#) how, "for the last decade or so, in the name of modernisation, rationalisation and efficiency, we have been living under a regime of government by management consultant and policy by PowerPoint."

Fast forward 13 years, and those words could have been said by any politician about the decisions of Conservative governments since. As one Tory minister put it last year, Whitehall has been “infantilised” by an “unacceptable” reliance on expensive management consultants.

Lord Agnew’s comments came in the wake of revelations that the government was spending tens of millions of pounds on private sector consultants to deliver England’s test and trace system. Rather than see the challenge of developing this as an opportunity for public sector and NHS employees to put their expertise to use, ministers and civil servants relied on companies including Deloitte and Boston Consulting Group. The approach led to test result delays, IT system bugs and laboratory bottlenecks.

Even before the pandemic, similar patterns of events could be found across the public sector. In some areas of government, outsourcing core elements of new initiatives – analysis, management, delivery – to consultants has become the default. Meanwhile civil servants are assumed to be stuck in old ways and lacking relevant competences. Frequently, teams find they do not have enough internal capacity to deliver what ministers want, and feel they have no option but to outsource.

The UK state’s spending on consultancy has ballooned, notably in the past five years: Brexit and the pandemic have proved to be incredibly lucrative. Between 2017 and 2020, approximately £450m was spent on consulting fees related to Brexit by government departments, with the receipts for Covid-19 contracts coming in at over £600m. These figures alone could pay the salaries of more than 10,000 civil servants for three years – and total spending on consultants across the public sector is much higher. The bulk of this money has gone to large multinational firms, including the big four accounting consultancies – Deloitte, PwC, EY and KPMG.

The reliance on consultancies is not unique to the UK, though globally it is the second largest market for consulting after the US, with procurement more generally now constituting the single biggest component of government spending. Despite these sums, there remains very little awareness not just among the public, but also politicians and civil servants, about what these companies actually do.

In part, this is because their role over recent decades has broadly shifted from being one of providing specific insights to public officials, to taking over the delivery of core state functions and the development of policy areas.

The [consulting industry](#) has its roots in the late 19th century and the electrochemical revolution in the United States, but it was only in the postwar decades that the large, multinational firms characterising consulting today emerged. The rise of multidivisional companies and then the “shareholder revolution” of the 1980s created ample opportunities for management advice.

For much of the 20th century, consultants working for government did just that: consulted. All this began to change with the advent of neoliberalism in the 1980s and its public sector surrogate, [new public management](#). The liberalising and privatising reforms of politicians in the UK and the United States during this time were premised on an assumption that governments are, at best, “market fixers”, which should take up as little space as possible in the economy. The idea that government failure is even worse than market failure made states fear risk taking, and thus pass responsibility on to others. Under Margaret Thatcher, [government spending](#) on consulting services soared from around £6m annually in 1979 to £246m, with companies even contracted to help deliver the privatisation of state-owned enterprises.

New Labour did not change tack. Although they viewed the state as an important arbiter of social values, “Third Way” politicians did not see the advice of management consultants as potentially at odds with this role. They also did not believe that the delivery of these social objectives needed to come from public bodies, and in fact viewed the market as a more effective vehicle for providing and managing public services. As public bodies transferred more and more responsibility to management consultancies and outsourcing firms, the processes for delivering their core functions became more opaque, and less accountable.

Our gaps in knowledge about what consulting companies actually do today in their work for the British government are also owed in large part to the strategies of the companies themselves. In their work with governments and business, discretion is key. Opacity is what enables them to secure contracts

with clients, from crown princes to weapons manufacturers. Many companies have even adopted corporate forms that allow them to limit what they disclose to regulators and governments.

What we do discover about the activities of these companies is nonetheless often cause for alarm. Barely a week goes by without some reporting of a new consulting car crash, whether it's BCG and Deloitte's involvement in the test and trace programme; KPMG signing off on Carillion's accounts months before its collapse; or McKinsey advising the manufacturer of OxyContin how to increase its sales of the opioid now at the heart of the US overdose crisis.

Particularly in their work with private sector clients, we nonetheless simply do not know the scope and scale of these companies' activities. In the wake of tax haven leaks, one academic investigation from 2017 found that the big four have offices in 43 of the 53 secrecy jurisdictions, with more staff in Luxembourg, the Cayman Islands and Bermuda as a proportion of the total population than any other country. Although these companies purport to separate their audit, tax and consulting service lines, their likely role in such anti-democratic activity as tax avoidance should force us to question whether they can be trusted as government contractors.

The pandemic has highlighted just how important it is to have governments that are adaptable, capable and accountable. The more we rely on the consulting industry to deliver critical policy and service functions, the less our democratic system is able to maintain the dynamic capabilities and capacity that will enable us to confront the challenges of the future – from climate breakdown to health emergencies. It is time to put an end to today's "regime of government by management consultant and policy by PowerPoint" – and instead invest inside our public sector, building an economy that serves the common good.

- Rosie Collington is a PhD student at UCL Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose. Mariana Mazzucato is professor of economics at UCL, director of the Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose and author of *Mission Economy: A Moonshot Guide to Changing Capitalism*
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## [Opinion](#)[Automotive industry](#)

# We tried to transition to green jobs, but the bosses are closing our car factory down

Frank Duffy



Unite union members from GKN Automotive, September 2021. Photograph: Mark Thomas

Mon 20 Sep 2021 04.30 EDT

More than 500 workers, myself included, at the GKN Automotive factory in Birmingham have [voted for strike action](#) to save both our plant and British manufacturing. It's the last thing we ever wanted to do, but we feel we have been left with no choice.

Currently, we manufacture and assemble components for drivelines, the all-important section underneath your car for transferring power from the

engine and transmission to the wheels. In 2019, 90% of GKN's components went into traditional combustion engines, but that may halve by 2025, with electric vehicles (EVs) [taking 15%](#) of components, and hybrids about 40%. The move to electric will only continue, as UK factories unveil their [new vehicle plans before purely internal combustion engines are banned in 2030](#).

In order to future-proof our jobs and the British automotive industry, we need to transition to producing components for EVs, including new propulsion systems and e-drives. GKN has developed a new e-drive [with UK government funding](#) at its Oxfordshire research facility, but sadly we won't see this innovation creating new green jobs for British workers. Melrose, the owners of GKN, have decided to close our plant in 2022 and [move jobs overseas](#).

We realised that if we want to see a green future for the UK car industry and save our skilled jobs, we couldn't leave it to our bosses and had to take matters into our own hands. We put together a 90-page alternative plan detailing how we could reorganise production to save money and make these new components.

Ours is the first transition plan for an automotive plant proposed by union stewards in the UK, and an echo of the [1976 Lucas Plan](#), when shop stewards at Lucas Aerospace, also in Birmingham, proposed converting their plant to socially useful products.

Now, as then, our alternative plan proposed saving jobs in Birmingham while transitioning the plant into an asset to support the wider UK industry. That's a win for the workforce, the industry and the environment. If that isn't what's meant by the phrase "[just transition](#)", I don't know what is. However, Melrose declined to take our plan forward.

Melrose, an investment firm that specialises in buying up and reselling manufacturing businesses, acquired GKN after a [hostile takeover](#) in 2018. Our union, Unite, was critical of the takeover at the time, [arguing](#) that the company's track record of seeking to restructure companies that it acquires and sell them on after three to five years meant that it was not a suitable long-term owner.

Three years later, our factory is being closed. You can trace GKN's origin back as far as 1759 and our own site on Chester Road has seen generations of the same family work here since it opened in 1956. Now we're looking down the barrel of hundreds of skilled manufacturing workers being added to the local unemployment statistics.

Five of the 10 constituencies with the highest jobless rates anywhere in the UK can be found in Birmingham. Erdington, the home of our plant, has an unemployment rate of 12.5%, [significantly higher than the national average](#).

Birmingham has been here before. When the massive Rover factory at Longbridge closed in 2005 the impact was felt for years. Unite's predecessor union, Amicus, supported research which showed that despite 90% of the workers finding alternative employment, 66% were financially worse off, average incomes fell by more than £6,000 and 25% [reported](#) being in debt or being reliant on savings to get by.

Every automotive company in the world is gearing up for the transition. The future can't be built on outsourced or offshored jobs, where workers in different countries are pitted against each other in a race to the bottom.

If we all want to see British manufacturing transition to new environmentally friendly technologies so that there are employment opportunities in the future, we need to retain jobs and skills like ours to make that happen. Support us. We're fighting for your future too.

- Frank Duffy is the Unite the Union plant convener at GKN Automotive, Birmingham

[Opinion](#)[Jair Bolsonaro](#)

## Is this the beginning of the end for Jair Bolsonaro?

[Andre Pagliarini](#)



‘Thousands took to the streets in Brasília, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and elsewhere, but far fewer than was expected.’ Supporters of Jair Bolsonaro in Brasília, 7 September. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Mon 20 Sep 2021 05.37 EDT

There is something pathetic about a leader who cannot recognise his limitations. For months, Brazil’s president, Jair Bolsonaro, has insisted that he could bend democracy in Latin America’s largest nation to his will if he so desired. Brazil’s independence day, 7 September, was supposed to be a watershed moment, as the president mobilised his supporters to [take to the streets](#). Instead, it revealed the distance between Bolsonaro’s perception of the popular support that he enjoys and reality. Sinking in the polls and with mounting obstacles in the way of broadening his political alliances, the

president bet that he could compel enough of a grassroots backing to intimidate the political establishment, and the [supreme court in particular](#). Unsurprisingly, to quote Gabriel García Márquez's novel *The General in His Labyrinth*, the president "could not renounce his infinite capacity for illusion at the very moment he needed it most".

Bolsonaro backers and dispassionate analysts alike predicted a massive public outpouring of support for the president's ongoing efforts to undermine democratic processes. It was thought that 7 September might even culminate in a takeover of the supreme court building akin to the raucous invasion of the US Capitol building on 6 January. Days before independence day, Bolsonaro [called](#) the planned demonstration an "ultimatum" for supreme court judges, and declared ominously that "if you want peace, prepare for war". He even [hinted](#) at a constitutional "rupture that neither I nor the people want".

Why has Bolsonaro targeted his ire at the judiciary rather than the legislative branch, as Donald Trump did? Because the supreme court, especially judges Alexandre de Moraes and Luís Roberto Barroso, is [investigating](#) the president and those close to him for anti-democratic words and deeds, including taking part in a vast conspiracy to disseminate fake news [during the 2018 presidential election](#). The court has also refused to shield Bolsonaro's sons, almost all of whom are involved in politics, [from investigation](#). By comparison, Congress is friendly territory for Bolsonaro.

But the purported showdown set for 7 September left Bolsonaro and his most ardent followers wanting. Thousands took to the streets in Brasília, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and elsewhere, but far fewer than was expected, and certainly nowhere near the critical mass needed to convince other more cautious political actors to embark on a radical escapade led by Bolsonaro. History is no guide to the future but it can be instructive all the same. The only Brazilian head of state who successfully carried out a "self-coup" to increase his power was Getúlio Vargas, the authoritarian statesman credited with laying the institutional groundwork of modern Brazil. This is not the 1930s and Bolsonaro [is no Vargas](#).

For one thing, Vargas cannily presented himself as the only rational actor in a system riven by extremists on the right and left. By contrast, Bolsonaro is the one preaching the most radical far-right ideas, framing his aggressive anti-institutionalism as the only way of breaking through a sclerotic and self-interested political culture. Former president [Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva](#), meanwhile, is meeting with influential figures from across the political spectrum, seeking to blunt any equivalence between himself and the president. Lula, a moderate former trade unionist who governed ably for eight years, leads the pack by a wide margin in every poll – even as he insists he has not yet made up his mind about pursuing a third term next year. As the favourite to win in next year's presidential elections, Lula is talking about reconciliation and good governance. Bolsonaro and his allies point to the spectre of Lula's return as the main reason for their continued political relevance. A major problem for Bolsonaro, however, is that his rhetorical campaign against the status quo is simply not as potent as it was in 2018, when he rode a wave of anti-left hysteria and anti-political angst to power.

Now, Bolsonaro (and his sons) are at the pinnacle of authority, and yet can hardly be seen to be governing at all, on everything from the pandemic to the environment, economy and foreign affairs. In this context, his grievances appear more personal than political. The turnout on 7 September was far lower than expected in part because most Brazilians are not currently invested in the fights the president is picking. They simply do not share the president's resentment against individual members of other branches of government.

That said, there should be some caution against forecasting Bolsonaro's political demise. After all, he still managed to spur thousands to leave their homes and take to the streets during a pandemic. Indeed, many of his supporters were reportedly eager to take their protests further and descend into violence like the Trumpist mob. Those people aren't going away and are almost certainly beyond the reach of the other candidates vying to replace Bolsonaro next year. The lingering popular aftershocks of Bolsonaro's anti-democratic exhortations are the real cause for concern. But we also mustn't overthink things: relative to expectations set by the president himself and his followers, 7 September was a failure.

In the days after the underwhelming street demonstrations, Bolsonaro appeared to backtrack, insisting that he had no intention of disregarding Brazil's separation of powers. The widely reviled former president Michel Temer, eager for a return to political prominence, helped mediate a conversation between the president and De Moraes. For now, the political temperature has been turned down, although this has been at the expense of Bolsonaro facing any consequences for his behaviour. He will certainly continue to stoke the most dangerous impulses in the Brazilian body politic, but it is hard to see 7 September as anything but a defeat for the president – and a sign of hope that he has more days behind him in power than ahead.

- Andre Pagliarini is an assistant professor of history at Hampden-Sydney College in Virginia. He is working on a book about the politics of nationalism in modern Brazilian history.
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## **2021.09.20 - Around the world**

- [Aukus Acting PM says Australia proved its commitment to France during world wars amid dispute](#)
- ['We felt fooled' France still furious after Australia scraps \\$90bn submarine deal](#)
- [Aukus UK-France defence summit cancelled in row](#)
- [Aukus Baptism of fire for new UK foreign secretary on trip to US](#)

## Aukus

# Barnaby Joyce says Australia proved its commitment to France during world wars amid Aukus dispute



Barnaby Joyce says he understands disappointment over axing of submarine deal but that ‘Australia doesn’t need to prove … their resolute desire to look after the liberty and the freedom and the equality of France’. Photograph: Australian Defence Force/Getty Images

*[Amy Remeikis](#)*

*[@amyremeikis](#)*

Mon 20 Sep 2021 02.35 EDT

Acting prime minister [Barnaby Joyce](#) said Australia did not have to prove its “affinity” and “affection” for the French, because “tens of thousands of Australians died on French soil” during both world wars.

The French government's anger at the announcement of the strategic partnership between Australia, the US and the UK, known as Aukus, and the subsequent cancellation of the French-Australian \$90bn submarine deal, has shown no signs of abating, [with the French ambassador saying the nation felt it had been “fooled”](#).

In his first stint acting in Australia's top job since returning to the Nationals leadership, Joyce said he understood the French government's disappointment about the scrapped \$90bn submarine deal, but Australia had nothing to prove.

“Australia doesn't need to prove their affinity and their affection and their resolute desire to look after the liberty and the freedom and the equality of [France](#),” he said.

“We have tens of thousands of Australians who have died on French soil or died protecting French soil from the countries that surround them both in the first world war and the second world war.

“I never expected they came with a price because the price of those families, the tragedy of those deaths, is without price. It's without cost.”

Joyce made the comments after Scott Morrison jetted out of the country to the United States to meet Joe Biden.

The Morrison government's decision to scrap the French submarine contract and enter into a strategic alliance with the US and UK, known as [Aukus](#), “blindsided” the French, who claim they were left in the dark over the changes until the very last minute.

[France recalled its ambassador over the decision](#) and [has made no secret of its ongoing anger](#), [questioning Australia's treatment of its allies and partners](#), [while cancelling a defence summit with the United Kingdom](#).

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Meanwhile, Australia's diplomats are working to ease tensions over the Aukus deal in the Indo-Pacific, with several of Australia's partners expressing concern about what the "forever partnership" between the US, the UK and Australia will mean for the region.

Australia's ambassador to the Association of South East Asian Nations (Asean), Will Nankervis, is seeking to reassure regional partners including Indonesia and Malaysia the Aukus agreement did not mean a ramping up of defence infrastructure.

"Our commitment to Asean centrality remains as steadfast as ever following the announcement that we will create an enhanced security partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom and United States – AUKUS – that will allow us to better share technology and capability," he said in a statement.

"It is not a defence alliance or pact."

Nankervis also reiterated that Australia would not be hosting nuclear weapons or changing its stance on nuclear weapons, despite the understanding the Aukus agreement would lead to Australia purchasing nuclear-powered submarines.

"While these submarines will be nuclear-powered, they will not carry nuclear weapons," he said.

"Australia does not and will not seek such weapons. Nor do we seek to establish a civil nuclear capability.

"Australia remains staunch in our support for the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Australia will work closely with the International Atomic Energy Agency to ensure full compliance with our NPT obligations as a Non-Nuclear Weapon State. We remain committed to reinforcing international confidence in the integrity of the international non-proliferation regime, and to upholding our global leadership in this domain."

The Asean ambassador also sought to reassure Australia's regional partners it would continue to partner with them on Asean objectives, including

upholding a rules based maritime order.

“Australia is also committed to upholding our obligations under the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, as we have since we acceded in 2005, and to working with Asean and its member states to advance peace and prosperity in our region,” he said.

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## Aukus

# ‘We felt fooled’: France still furious after Australia scraps \$90bn submarine deal



France's ambassador to Australia Jean-Pierre Thebault at Sydney airport last week. He said his country had been the last to know that the Morrison government was tearing up its submarine contract. Photograph: David Gray/AP

*[Amy Remeikis](#)  
[@amyremeikis](#)*

Sun 19 Sep 2021 21.11 EDT

French anger at the Morrison government’s decision to scrap its \$90bn submarine program with [France](#) continues to boil over, with the country’s recalled ambassador saying it felt “fooled” by the announcement.

[Jean-Pierre Thebault was ordered back to Paris](#) in the wake of the [Aukus announcement](#), which will see Australia enter into a strategic “forever partnership” with the US and the UK.

Part of the still-to-be-determined arrangement [will include the sharing of nuclear-powered submarine technology with Australia](#), prompting the Morrison government to tear up its existing contract with France.

On Sunday [Scott Morrison](#) said his government had informed France’s President Emmanuel Macron that the deal was off at “around 8.30” the night before the deal was announced. But details had already leaked to the media and the French have said they felt “blindsided” by the decision.

“We discover through [the] press that the most important person of this Australian government kept us in the dark intentionally until the last minute,” Thebault told ABC radio on Monday. “This is not an Australian attitude towards France. And maybe we’re not friends.”

Thebault said the French had shared their knowledge with Australia in good faith but had been kept in the dark about Australia’s discussions with two other allied nations.

“This was a plot in the making for 18 months. At the same time while we were engaged with making the best of this [submarine] program where France committed its most well-kept military secrets ... there was a complete other project that we discovered, thanks to the press, one hour before the announcement. So you can imagine our anger – we felt fooled.”

Morrison said he had raised “issues” in the contract with the French “many months ago”.

“There had been a range of issues earlier in the contract and throughout the contract that we had continued, we had discussed on numerous occasions,” he said.

“But, ultimately, this was a decision about whether the submarines that were being built, at great cost to the Australian taxpayer, were going to be able to do a job that we needed it to do when they went into service.

“And, our strategic judgment, based on the best possible intelligence and defence advice, was that it would not. And, so, therefore, to go forward, when we were able to secure a supreme submarine capability to support our defence operations, it would have been negligent for us not to.”

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Thebault said the French had been the last to know. “It’s a question of principle, it’s a question of dignity and mutual respect in relations between states,” he said.

Australia’s trade minister, Dan Tehan, will touch down in Paris for meetings with his French counterpart in early October to discuss Australia’s hopes for a free trade agreement with the EU.

Thebault said “at this stage” he expected the negotiations to continue, although after the Aukus announcement [France asked its fellow EU member states to “reconsider” including Australia](#) in any free trade agreement.

So far, the two issues are being kept separate. Tehan said he saw no reason the 12th round of talks would not continue as planned. “My hope is we will be able to over the next 12 to 18 months finalise this agreement,” he told the ABC.

But France [has cancelled a UK-French defence summit in protest](#) at the UK’s part in the Aukus deal.

Labor’s [Penny Wong](#) said the Morrison government had mishandled its relationship with an ally in how it balanced the Aukus announcement with the French contract and had failed to “minimise the effect on Australia’s national interest”.

“It is not in our national interest to make our friends so angry and so disappointed,” she said. “The French would be asking, with friends like this,

# who needs enemies?"

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/20/we-felt-fooled-france-still-furious-after-australia-scaps-90bn-submarine-deal>

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## [Aukus](#)

# **UK-France defence summit cancelled in Aukus row**



The defence secretary, Ben Wallace, was due to hold a bilateral meeting with his French counterpart, Florence Parly, in London. Photograph: WIktor Szymanowicz/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

*[Dan Sabbagh](#), [Julian Borger](#) and [Heather Stewart](#)*

Sun 19 Sep 2021 13.47 EDT

A Franco-British defence ministers' summit due to take place this week has been cancelled as Paris steps up its protests over the loss of a £48bn submarine contract with Australia and its secret replacement with nuclear technology from the UK and US.

Ben Wallace, the UK defence secretary, and his opposite number, Florence Parly, had been due to hold a bilateral meeting in London and to address the

two-day Franco-British Council, now the latest casualties of the diplomatic row.

The council was also due to be attended by defence chiefs from both countries, the two largest military powers in western [Europe](#). The co-chair Peter Ricketts, a former UK national security adviser, confirmed the elite gathering had been “postponed to a later date”.

Without the event going ahead, it is understood that Party’s planned trip to London is deemed to have become redundant.

Earlier on Sunday, British sources said they had hoped the meetings would proceed. “We have a strong and close working defence partnership with the French as trusted allies,” one said, listing joint counter-terror operations such as in Mali and Iraq as examples of the relationship between the two.

But Paris is incensed after Australia abandoned a lucrative but troubled contract for new diesel submarines with a French contractor to switch to the nuclear-powered alternative after six months of secret negotiations with the UK and US.

France recalled its ambassadors to the US and Australia over the weekend, plunging relations between the countries to an almost unheard of low. The cancellation of the defence summit demonstrates there will also be repercussions for the UK, which could yet deepen as the row continues.

Concern about the French reaction also prompted Joe Biden to ask to talk to France’s Emmanuel Macron in an attempt to ease the dispute.

A French government spokesperson, Gabriel Attal, said: “President Biden asked to speak to the president of the republic and there will be a telephone discussion in the next few days between President Macron and President Biden.”

The escalating row also threatens to overshadow a trip to the US by [Boris Johnson](#) and his newly promoted foreign secretary, Liz Truss. Both will visit the UN general assembly, while Johnson is expected to visit the White House for the first time as prime minister to meet Biden.

On Sunday night, Johnson insisted “our French friends” should not worry about the controversial [Aukus](#) defence pact, saying: “Our love of France is ineradicable.”

He added: “We are very, very proud of our relationship with France and it is of huge importance to this country. It is a very friendly relationship – an entente cordial – that goes back a century or more and it absolutely vital for us.”

Although Macron had not been due to attend the annual world leaders gathering, Truss will have to face his foreign minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian, at a meeting of the UN security council on Tuesday.

Le Drian, considered close to Macron, has been vocal in denouncing the submarine deal, describing it as a “stab in the back” and accusing those involved of engaging in “duplicity, contempt and lies” over the past few months.

France is particularly unhappy that in bilateral and other meetings over the last few months, ministers from the three countries gave no indication of what was being planned, with some diplomatic sources saying the feeling of anger and betrayal in Paris is still being underestimated.

British defence sources argued that it was left to the Australians to break the news to the French, but it seemed there were divisions in Canberra about the best way of going about it.

“Some Australians wanted to ring up one week and say we’re so sorry, we’re putting out the diesel submarine contract, and ring up the next week and say we just want you to know that we found a better submarine and it’s British,” the defence source said.

“There was another school of thought that said: don’t do it like that. They’ll see through it and it will be worse because it will look duplicitous.”

In the end, neither side won. The French were not told before details began to leak to the Australian and US media on Wednesday morning.

The UK has argued that it was simply responding to a request from Australia to seek secret nuclear propulsion technology for its submarines in March this year, technology shared between Britain and the US under a defence agreement that dates back to 1958.

The defence source said that having secured British support, the Australians then went to the Biden administration.

But the claim of relative British passivity is undermined by other briefings from Downing Street, which have said that Johnson was eager to widen the nuclear submarine deal into something deeper in the aftermath of Brexit.

The three countries also announced Aukus, a defence technology pact, in which they confirmed they would work together on sharing breakthroughs in areas such as artificial intelligence and quantum computing. The nuclear propulsion deal was the first instance of that, the three said.

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aukus-row](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/19/uk-france-defence-summit-cancelled-in-aukus-row)

[The Observer](#)[Aukus](#)

## Baptism of fire as Liz Truss heads to US amid submarine row



Newly appointed foreign secretary Liz Truss in Downing Street on Friday for the first cabinet meeting of Boris Johnson's reshuffled team. Photograph: Mark Thomas/Rex

*[Toby Helm](#) Political editor, [Kim Willsher](#) in Paris and [Julian Borger](#) in Washington*

Sat 18 Sep 2021 19.05 EDT

Liz Truss is heading for a furious diplomatic confrontation with France on her first trip abroad as foreign secretary, as anger mounts in Paris over the cancellation of a [£48bn nuclear submarine contract](#).

Truss, whose appointment was one of the biggest surprises of [Boris Johnson's cabinet reshuffle last Wednesday](#), will arrive in the US on Sunday before a four-day visit to New York and Washington during which she is

aiming to promote the prime minister's vision of "global Britain" to international leaders.

But on Tuesday, when she convenes a meeting of the permanent five members of the UN security council – the UK, US, France, China and Russia – Truss will come face to face with her French counterpart, Jean-Yves Le Drian, who has described the way France has been treated by the [UK, US and Australia over a new tripartite security pact](#), and the cancellation of the submarine deal, as a "[stab in the back](#)" for his country.

It is believed that the French president, Emmanuel Macron, had never intended to attend in person but will address the assembly remotely.

The French are furious at Australia's decision to cancel a A\$90bn (£48bn) contract it signed with the French company Naval Group in 2016 for a fleet of 12 state-of-the-art attack class submarines.

That deal became bogged down in cost overruns, delays and design changes. The new deal will see Canberra acquire nuclear-powered submarines built by the US and the UK, instead of those from [France](#).

French newspaper *La Tribune* described the Australia-UK-US pact, known as [Aukus](#), as a "majestic slap in the face" for all those in France "who still want to believe that Joe Biden will be a different president to Donald Trump in matters of foreign policy".

The French are incensed at not being told by any of the countries involved that the submarine deal was being cancelled and that the new pact was coming into being.

Macron learned of the deal in a letter sent by the Australian prime minister, Scott Morrison, to the Élysée shortly before Morrison gave a press conference announcing the Aukus pact. Effectively, Paris was faced with a fait accompli. Diplomatic sources in France say if the Australians were so unhappy with the contract as it stood, it would have been the normal, expected behaviour for them to have expressed their concerns to Paris.

Le Drian, the French foreign minister, accused the Americans and Australians of “lies and duplicity” over the Aukus deal. And he warned: “It’s not finished.”



French foreign minister Jean-Yves Le Drian. Photograph: Dumitru Doru/EPA

He said Australia had told France that it was breaking the submarine contract, and making a new deal with the US and UK, just one hour before Morrison announced this at the press conference.

“That is why I say there has been duplicity, contempt and lies, and when you have an ally of the stature of France, you don’t treat them like that,” Le Drian said.

Asked if there had been a failure of French intelligence in uncovering the secret deal, he replied: “The agreement project initiated by the US and Australia was decided by a small group and I’m not sure US and Australian ministers knew about it.

“When we see the US president with the Australian prime minister announce a new agreement with Boris Johnson, the breach of trust is profound. In a real alliance you talk to each other, you don’t hide things, you respect the other party, and that is why this is a real crisis.”

Truss risks finding herself plunged into one of the most bitter and potentially far-reaching diplomatic spats with France in recent memory when she is less than a week into her new role, and as she tries to promote a new, less European-focused foreign policy to the world.

Speaking on Saturday night before the trip, Truss sounded upbeat about forging ever-stronger ties with the US in the post-Brexit era. “I’m delighted my first international visit as foreign secretary is to the United States – the UK’s closest and most important partner. At the UN general assembly, I look forward to convening global leaders to tackle the major issues of the day and projecting a positive, outward-looking global Britain that delivers for people across the UK.”

Johnson will also travel to the UN meeting and make a speech urging greater progress on climate change before the [Cop26](#) meeting in Glasgow this year. But there are now fears that the argument with the French will overshadow his efforts to bang heads together. Above and beyond the tearing up of the contract, Paris feels the decision of the US and the UK to sideline France, a key Nato ally, gravely damages its relationship with the organisation.

While the Élysée has made no public comment on the international row, Macron’s decision to recall its ambassadors from Washington and Canberra is a historic low in diplomatic relations between the countries after what Paris has described as a betrayal and humiliation of a European partner. It is still unclear when the Australians decided that the [dozen diesel submarines](#) they had ordered from the French in 2016 would be obsolete before they were ready in the late 2030s or 2040s. But by the time Biden took office, they had made the decision to ask the US for the nuclear propulsion technology Washington had only ever shared with the UK.



Peter Ricketts, crossbench peer and former UK ambassador to France.  
Photograph: Chris Ison/PA

According to one diplomatic source in Washington, Australian officials first approached the British government to check that London would give its support before going to the Biden administration, knowing they would be pushing at a partially open door. The appointment of Kurt Campbell as Biden's Indo-Pacific policy coordinator was a sign that the US president was fully behind Campbell's advocacy of the wholehearted "pivot to Asia".

Officials in Washington played down the impact on the general assembly. "France is not going to pull out of P5 or G7 events," one said.

However, Peter Ricketts, a former permanent undersecretary at the Foreign Office and former UK ambassador to France, said the fallout from the affair would be extensive.

"This is much more than a diplomatic spat about an arms deal or recalling ambassadors. The French had invested in a strategic security pact with Australia that they described as structural. Australia has now trashed that," he said.

Lord Ricketts pointed out that France has "territory and military forces" in the Indo-Pacific and that Australia had changed its mind about what kind of

submarine it wanted to the detriment of the French.

“The [Shortfin] Barracuda is a nuclear submarine by design but Australia said they wanted a conventional submarine. Now Australia says they want nuclear.”

He added: “France sees it as a betrayal by the British and the US, who did this secretly with Australia for the last six months. French diplomats have told me that America lied about what they were doing and they will be releasing documents to show that America lied. They are asking themselves, ‘What is the point of being a Nato ally if this is how the US behaves?’”

“You will remember about 18 months ago, Emmanuel Macron described Nato as ‘brain dead’ and this will confirm that view. This has caused a huge rift down the middle of Nato.”

The former ambassador predicted France would now be looking to allies closer to home to beef up European security and would “pull the shutters down on Nato”.

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## Headlines friday 24 september 2021

- [Supply chain crisis BP closes some petrol stations amid HGV driver shortage](#)
- [Live UK pledges to ‘move heaven and earth’ to fix HGV driver shortages](#)
- [Grant Shapps Minister will do ‘whatever it takes’ to fix lorry driver shortage](#)
- [Energy crisis Care homes warn crippling bills could force closures](#)

## Supply chain crisis

# BP closes some petrol stations amid HGV driver shortage



A BP petrol station in London. The company is prioritising fuel deliveries to sites it considers important, such as motorway services. Photograph: Dan Kitwood/Getty

*[Richard Partington](#) and [Joanna Partridge](#)*

Fri 24 Sep 2021 05.22 EDT

Some petrol stations in the UK have been forced to close after the nationwide shortage of HGV drivers left forecourts without supplies.

BP said on Thursday that up to 100 of its forecourts were short of at least one grade of fuel, with several forced to close entirely because of a lack of deliveries.

Esso said a handful of its petrol stations operated alongside Tesco Express stores were affected, while some of the supermarket chain's own-branded sites were also suffering outages.

Queues formed at some petrol stations in London and Kent on Friday as motorists rushed to fill up.

Although Downing Street claimed there was no shortage of fuel, the developments will add to pressure on ministers already facing calls to take action to ease acute labour and [supply chain shortages linked to Brexit](#) and the pandemic – with businesses calling for a visa scheme to help meet demand for more workers on farms, in factories and in road haulage firms.

Rod McKenzie, of the Road Haulage Association trade body, accused ministers of “government by inertia”, allowing the situation to get gradually worse in recent months.

He said a very short-term measure would be to allow drivers on to the shortage occupation list and “seasonal visas” for foreign drivers.

A BP spokesperson apologised for any inconvenience, adding: “We are experiencing fuel supply issues at some of our retail sites in the UK and unfortunately have therefore seen a handful of sites temporarily close due to a lack of both unleaded and diesel grades.”

Boris Johnson’s spokesperson said the prime minister acknowledged there were issues across several industries, and that the government was working closely with business leaders over the course of this week to resolve the problems.

But he said there was no need for concern. “It’s important to restate that there’s no shortage of fuel, so people should continue to buy it as usual. [For] fuel, as in food, we have a very resilient and robust supply chain. So, as I say, people should continue to shop for fuel as usual.”

While Downing Street has said there was no reason for people to panic-buy petrol, opposition parties castigated ministers for, they said, failing to get a grip of the situation.

Jim McMahon, the shadow transport secretary, condemned what he called “a rapidly worsening crisis that the government has failed to heed the warnings of for a decade”. He said: “Sticking plaster solutions are not going to solve it. Ministers must take decisive steps now to tackle the 90,000 driver shortfall.”

The Liberal Democrat business spokesperson, Sarah Olney, said the fuel shortage was “unprecedented, and poses a huge risk, not just for businesses but for everyone relying on a car to go to work or take their kids to school”.

She added: “The government must treat this crisis with the urgency it deserves. They need to abandon their anti-immigration ideology that brands key workers as unskilled, and scrap their arbitrary salary thresholds to get more drivers back in the UK.”

Meetings between the government and food industry executives were expected to take place on Friday, with company bosses hoping for action on driver shortages. One Tory MP from a red wall seat urged the government to take dramatic steps, including drafting in the military to keep the supply of goods flowing and cutting taxes on fuel to see the country through the winter.

Details of the disruption to petrol supplies emerged after a meeting between the government and executives from several companies convened to brief ministers about the severity of Britain’s supply chain crisis, including BP, McDonald’s and Amazon.

It is understood that BP’s head of UK retail, Hanna Hofer, told ministers it was important for the government to understand the urgency of the situation, which she described as “bad, very bad”, in comments first reported by ITV News.

She said the oil firm had “two-thirds of normal forecourt stock levels required for smooth operations” and the level was “declining rapidly”.

01:07

'We're moving heaven and earth': Shapps on trying to fix lorry driver shortage – video

BP's petrol delivery problems relate to shortages of staff at Hoyer, its transport contractor, which is struggling to find staff to take fuel tankers from refineries and depots to the company's network of 1,200 filling stations across the UK. About 400 drivers at Hoyer are understood to operate on the BP contract, with a handful of shortages enough to cause disruption to supplies.

Tesco is believed to be experiencing limited temporary shortages in a small number of areas across its 500 filling stations. "We have good availability of fuel, with deliveries arriving at our petrol filling stations across the UK every day," a spokesperson said. However, a number of service stations operated by Esso with a Tesco Express store on site have also been affected, out of a network of about 200.

A spokesperson for Esso said: "We are working closely with all parties in our distribution network to optimise supplies and minimise any inconvenience to customers. We apologise to our customers for any inconvenience."

The prospect of shortages at forecourts across Britain will reignite memories of the fuel blockade in [autumn 2000](#), when truckers and farmers protesting over the high cost of fuel prevented deliveries from leaving refineries.

Government plans, codenamed Operation Escalin, had been made in the run-up to [Brexit](#) to draft in 1,600 soldiers to drive 80 military fuel tankers to keep petrol and diesel flowing to forecourt pumps in the event of no deal. However, government sources stressed there was no need for the military to step in to meet driver shortages.

On Thursday, the Bank of England also warned that surging household energy bills would [drive inflation above 4%](#) this winter, sending the cost of living to its highest rate of growth for a decade.

Despite a slowdown in the economy since August, the Bank is forecasting that the surge in wholesale gas and electricity prices is expected to keep inflation high until at least the middle of next year.

Minutes released on Thursday from the Bank's interest rate setting meeting said chronic shortages of workers and supplies were weighing on Britain's economic recovery from lockdown, at a time when the cost of living is rising at the fastest rate in nearly a decade.

Voting unanimously to keep interest rates at the historic low of 0.1%, the Bank's [monetary policy committee](#) said household energy bills would drive inflation above 4% this winter, with persistent pressure expected to last until the middle of next year.

It said Ofgem's update of the energy price cap from April next year, which is likely to put further pressure on household energy bills, risked inflation sticking above 4% until the second quarter of 2022. Inflation is then expected to gradually fall back towards the 2% target rate set by the government.

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**Business live**

**Business**

# **Motorists urged not to panic buy fuel; ‘10 days’ to save Christmas – as it happened**

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## Supply chain crisis

# Grant Shapps will do ‘whatever it takes’ to fix lorry driver shortage

01:07

'We're moving heaven and earth': Shapps on trying to fix lorry driver shortage – video

*[Mark Sweney](#)*

*[@marksweney](#)*

Fri 24 Sep 2021 04.34 EDT

The UK transport secretary, Grant Shapps, said he would “move heaven and earth” to solve the nationwide shortage of truck drivers that [threatens fuel supplies at some petrol stations](#), adding that motorists should not panic as the problem would be “smoothed out relatively quickly”.

Shapps said he would consider all options, including the possibility of issuing short-term skilled worker visas to tap mainland Europe’s pool of potential HGV drivers.

“I’ll look at everything,” he told Sky News. “I wouldn’t rule anything out. We will move heaven and earth to do whatever it takes to make sure shortages are alleviated with HGV drivers.”

Asked about the Petrol Retailers Association warning that drivers should keep a quarter of a tank of fuel in their car in case forecourts ran out, Shapps downplayed the issue and said motorists should “carry on as normal” and not panic-buy.

“I’m not saying there is no issue,” he said. “There has been an issue. Although there are stresses and strains in the system, by and large it has not impacted on people’s everyday life when it comes to filling up with petrol. There is not a shortage of fuel at the refineries.”

Shapps blamed Covid-19, which he said delayed 40,000 drivers taking their HGV driving tests but added that the government had changed the law to ease the “bottleneck”. More than twice as many driver tests were now available than pre-Covid, he said.

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Shapps said the driver shortage was not a new problem and that the UK had relied over a long period of time on “importing cheap European, often eastern European, labour undercutting the domestic market”.

He added: “We need to make this a more attractive industry”, welcoming salary and wage increases for HGV drivers.

Asked about the role of [Brexit](#) in the driver crisis, he said EU countries such as Poland and Germany had “very large and even larger” shortages.

“I’ve seen people point to Brexit as the culprit here; in fact, they are wrong,” he said. “Because of Brexit, I’ve been able to change the law and alter the way our driving tests are taken in a way I could not have done if we were still part of the EU. Brexit has actually provided part of the solution.”

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## Gas

# Care homes warn crippling energy bills could force closures



Care home operators have said the gas price crisis could force many to close without an injection of funding. Photograph: Andrew Matthews/PA

*[Robert Booth](#) Social affairs correspondent*

Fri 24 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

Care operators facing 100% increases in their energy bills to keep residents warm this winter have demanded urgent government intervention to avoid home closures.

A typical care home of 50 residents already spends about £50,000 annually on gas and electricity but [price hikes](#) could mean operators paying double that, according to one energy broker. Care homes are not covered by the price cap which protects domestic consumers.

“It could be the straw that breaks the camel’s back,” said Melanie Weatherby, co-chair of the Care Association Alliance.

Nadra Ahmed, executive chair of the National Care Association, said the energy price crisis “will make some providers feel they are unsustainable”.

“We can’t turn [heating] off,” she said. “We need it running all the time. I think [the impact] is going to be substantial, especially through the winter months.”

Steve Silverwood, of ECA Business Energy who negotiates for firms including care operators, said: “The care homes that haven’t already purchased energy for forthcoming renewals are going to see 100% plus increases. A care home can be spending £50,000 plus [on energy] and to double that is unbelievable. It’s frightening times.”

The sharp rise is driven by a trebling of [wholesale 12-month gas contracts over the last five months](#), future uncertainty about supply, and energy taxes, Silverwood said.

Some operators suggested staff, entertainment and maintenance could all be cut to meet steeper bills.

Weatherby said many smaller operators, eager to find the cheapest deal, signed up to energy firms that have already collapsed.

“Because care home gas use is so high it will be hard for them to find anyone else at a reasonable price and it might be that they can’t find anyone at all,” she said. “This is something the government needs to take into account in their negotiations with energy companies because you can bet they are doing that with hospitals.”

Operators have also faced soaring insurance premiums, declines in occupancy and a [deepening staffing shortage](#) which has seen the cost of agency workers double in some areas. They are also bracing for the prospect of rising food bills.

One small operator who was already facing a 17% increase in gas costs this year and a 20% increase next year on deals negotiated a month ago, told the Guardian that, unless public funding for care home beds was not increased urgently, care providers “won’t be able to afford to operate. We will have to close our front doors”.

His annual energy bills will rise from £58,000 to £75,000 and the additional cost comes on top of a 75% increase in insurance premiums over the last two years and a doubling of wages for agency staff needed because of staff shortages. Meanwhile, his last annual care fee increase from the council was less than 5%.

Without an increase in funding, operators will face a decision about whether to “burn money” or withdraw from the market, he said, adding staff were quitting to work at “Aldi, Lidl and Amazon for up to £12 an hour” while council funding means he can only pay around minimum wage.

This week, six of the largest not-for-profit care operators who look after about 95,000 older people, wrote to the government warning of the worst staffing crisis in their history with staff turnover at 30% and essential care being denied to people who need it. MHA, Anchor Hanover, Sanctuary, the Orders of St John Care Trust and the National Care Forum want the home secretary, Priti Patel, to sanction greater recruitment of foreign care workers. They are seeking a cash bonus for care staff to stop them quitting, an extension of infection control grants which operators say have helped keep them afloat, but which are due to end this month.

Nicola Richards, who represents care homes in Sheffield, asked: “Where and how do you recover the cost [of utility price hikes] because we don’t have a surplus of money to put into the light and heat?”

She said homes could cut staff, scrap maintenance projects and cancel entertainers to balance the books. “You can’t have the new carpets, curtains and redecoration, and when it is their home, that’s quite difficult. It’s robbing Peter to pay Paul.”

The Department of Health and Social Care has been contacted for comment.

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Interview

**Ray Liotta: ‘Why haven’t I worked with Scorsese since Goodfellas? You’d have to ask him. I’d love to’**

[Hadley Freeman](#)



Ray Liotta: ‘Sometimes I’m angry and hyper, like at traffic, and sometimes I’m not.’ Photograph: Benjo Arwas/Contour by Getty Images



[@HadleyFreeman](#)

Fri 24 Sep 2021 03.00 EDT

I am a little trepidatious ahead of my interview with Ray Liotta because the reviews, shall we say, are mixed. Not about his acting, which has been accoladed and adored from his first major film role, as Melanie Griffith’s crazy ex in 1986’s [Something Wild](#), for which he was nominated for a Golden Globe. No, the problematic reviews are about Liotta personally. One person who worked with him described him to me as “the rudest arsehole I ever met”; another said he’s “a bit of a wildcard”, and I suspect that the latter is a euphemism for the former.

This would explain a long-running movie mystery: why isn’t he more successful? It took Liotta, now 66, until he was 30 to bag *Something Wild*, but after that, movie stardom seemed assured. He went from there to starring opposite [Tom Hulce](#) in the little-remembered [Dominick and Eugene](#), and then playing “Shoeless” Joe Jackson in the extremely well-remembered [Field of Dreams](#).

And from there, he was cast as Henry Hill in [Goodfellas](#), surely one of the greatest movie roles ever written for a young actor. Liotta was superb as the wannabe gangster, holding his own against that ultimate screen-chewer Joe Pesci, and at times acting Robert De Niro off the screen. And then ... what? Well, he certainly didn't disappear. He was great as Johnny Depp's father in [Blow](#), he memorably [ate his own brain](#) in [Hannibal](#) and I loved him in [Cop Land](#), playing Sylvester Stallone's one true friend, and as Adam Driver's deranged divorce lawyer in [Marriage Story](#). But he never became the leading man he seemed so destined to be in 1990, and no one could really explain why.

Anyway, he's back, again, in a supporting role, and great, as usual. He's in [The Many Saints of Newark](#), which is destined to forever be known as "The Sopranos Movie", and it is the best film I've seen in I don't even know how long. The film focuses on young Tony's (played by James Gandolfini's son, Michael) relationship with Christopher Moltisanti's (Michael Imperioli on the show) father, Dickie, played here by Alessandro Nivola, in what is surely one of the performances of the year. Fathers and sons echo throughout the film and Liotta plays Dickie's father, Hollywood Dick Moltisanti. (Moltisanti = many saints. It took me an embarrassingly long time to put that together.)

Liotta's role was greatly expanded once filming started, which is to the audience's benefit, because he is – as always – utterly magnetic in every scene. All of his scenes are with Nivola and, before I talk to Liotta, I ask Nivola what it was like acting opposite him. "Even at rest," he says, "Ray seems like he has a boiling cauldron inside and you never know when it might erupt. That allows him to be a very understated performer and still convey power, humour and surprise effortlessly."

Someone else who worked with Liotta told me that the way to get Liotta talking is to flatter him, so when our phone interview begins, I tell him – sycophantically but honestly – that when he's on screen, even if he's just sitting still in a chair, he's all the audience can look at. Does Liotta think about his screen presence when he's acting? "Nah, not really. I just commit to what's written to me on the page and the script dictates the character," he says, sounding neither especially interested nor flattered.



Liotta (centre) with Joe Pesci and Robert De Niro in Goodfellas.  
Photograph: Allstar/Warner Bros

One of the joys of seeing him in *The Many Saints of Newark* is that he gets to play the two extremes that his fans love best: the crazy manic Liotta (*Something Wild*, [The Place Beyond the Pines](#), *Marriage Story*) and the more Zen Liotta (*Field of Dreams*, *Blow*). Which is more fun to play? “Ah, they’re both fun,” he shrugs.

Which is closer to what he’s like normally? “I don’t know. Sometimes I’m angry and hyper, like at traffic, and sometimes I’m not. But my job is just to do what the script says,” he replies.

In [a recent interview](#), Nivola said that Liotta sent him a text saying that Nivola reminded him of himself in *Goodfellas*. “It was one of the most important accolades that I’ve ever gotten from anybody, and it was really that kind of thing that gave me the confidence to take off in the performance,” Nivola said.

That was kind of you, Ray, I say. “Mmm, I didn’t mean it exactly like that,” he says. “It was more in the sense of, he was the character that kept the piece together, like in *Goodfellas* the focus was on Henry. I just meant it like that.”

This feels less like I'm doing an interview and more like I'm trying to strike up a conversation with a guy in a bar who's more interested in watching the TV over my shoulder. And so, in that spirit, I go to my usual bar conversation topic: The Sopranos. Was he a fan of the show? "I'm not much of a TV watcher, so every now and then I'd put the TV on and if it was on, I'd watch what they were doing. But it's just not how I was spending my time," he replies.

I ask if that's because he was regretful that he – [according to rumour](#) – turned down the role of Tony Soprano. "No! I don't know where that story came from. David [Chase, creator of The Sopranos] once talked to me about playing Ralphie [eventually played by Joe Pantoliano]. But never Tony," he says.

So why did he say no? "I didn't want to do another mafia thing, and I was shooting Hannibal. It just didn't feel right at the time," he says.

But apparently The Many Saints of Newark felt extremely right, because when Liotta heard about it, he flew to New York to ask Chase for the role, paying for his own flights and accommodation (unheard of with most major actors). Why was he so keen to be in the film?

"I'm really not sure what made me so determined," he says in the tone of a man who doesn't spend an enormous amount of time investigating his inner motives. "But I was and luckily it all worked out."



Field of Dreams. Photograph: Everett Collection/Rex Features

For as long as he could remember, Henry Hill wanted to be a gangster. But for as long as Liotta could remember, he had no interest in acting at all. He only studied drama because it was a course at college that had no maths requirements, and he only started auditioning for plays because a pretty girl told him he should. “To be honest with you,” he says, “I thought I’d be in construction.” Liotta was adopted when he was six months old by an Italian-American couple and raised in New Jersey. He later tracked down his birth mother and discovered he had a clutch of half-siblings and a full sister. He’s so associated with being Italian-American, did discovering his biological family change his self-image?

“Not really, no. The reality is, in terms of ethnicity, I have no idea what I am. I found out a lot of things from meeting my birth mother, but it didn’t change anything. I just relaxed into [thinking]: ‘This is the way my life turned out.’”

Liotta’s father convinced his son to give college a go, at least for a term, and it was there, at the University of Miami, that he started studying drama, and he got his first role in a play, as a dancing waiter in Cabaret. “I’m a jock from New Jersey, so it couldn’t have felt further away from what I do,” he hoots. Nonetheless, he enjoyed it so much he stayed at college for the full

four years. Afterwards, he moved to New York where he got some advertising jobs, had a regular role in a soap opera and, eventually, was cast in *Something Wild*. And that was definitively the end of Liotta's hypothetical career in construction.

Liotta knows he'll forever be known for *Goodfellas*, and he's fine with that. "If you got one movie that people remember, that's great. If you got two, that's fantastic," he says. As it happens, he does have two, he just hasn't seen the second one. Is it really true he's never watched *Field of Dreams*? "Nope," he says firmly.

But Ray, I say, you're so good in it! So opaque, so weird, somehow so credible as the ghost of a disgraced baseball player. "It's just a personal thing that happened," he says with sudden real feeling. "My mom was sick when we went to see it, so we didn't stay the whole time so it's not something I want to do. It's on TV a lot, but I just pass over it. I've no desire. That's it."

Despite never seeing one of the greatest baseball movies ever made, Liotta is clearly not averse to the game itself, because he met his now ex-wife at a baseball game in 1997. They had one daughter, Karsen, and later divorced. Has his daughter seen *Goodfellas*?

"Good question. Have you seen it?" he says, asking his daughter who is apparently sitting next to him. "Yeah, you showed it to me that time," she replies. "Oh yeah! We saw it at, believe it or not, the Aruba film festival," he says.

And what did she make of it? "Well, she wasn't into my voiceover so much. She was like: 'Oh Dad, will you shut up already?' Heh heh heh," he cackles.

Martin Scorsese is known for using the same actors over and over, so why hasn't Liotta worked with him again? "I don't know, you'd have to ask him. But I'd love to," he says.

Maybe Scorsese just hasn't found a part for Liotta that matches up to Henry. Or maybe it's to do with something else. I tell Liotta that [when I interviewed Bruce Dern this year](#), he told me that when his daughter Laura was preparing to play Liotta's adversary in *Marriage Story*, she found out some "not cool

stuff” about him, such as instances of rudeness, and she thought about that when acting against him. Did he know about that?



With Melanie Griffith in *Something Wild*. Photograph: Allstar/MGM

“Nah,” he replies, totally unbothered. “People use whatever they need to use to find the person in the part, and if she needed that, that’s fine. But it’s all people telling stories, misinformation.”

I assume that Liotta must have his own extremely intricate acting methods. Even though he only fell into acting by chance, he then dedicated himself to it, and he continued to study with his beloved acting coach, Harry Mastrogeorge, even after *Goodfellas*. Nivola tells me that “of all the scary legends I’ve worked with – De Niro, Christopher Walken, Joaquin Phoenix, Shirley MacLaine – Ray is the one I was most intimidated by. Not because he’s mean – he’s not – but because he’s so intensely committed to the art of acting.” So maybe this is what people get wrong about Liotta: he’s not rude, he’s just acting. So go on, Ray, describe your art of acting.

“Just play pretend – that’s pretty much it. The biggest thing is self-reliance: you don’t need a director to tell you what to do, it’s all in the script. If you simplify it, it sounds like make believe, but it is!” he says.

I feel a little like [Ricky Gervais in Extras listening to Ian McKellen teach him how to act](#): “How do I know what to say? They had my lines written down on a script. How do I know where to stand? People showed me.” And to be fair, I’d rather that than him banging on about his craft, although it does leave certain questions about Liotta open.

We chat about what Liotta’s been up to during lockdown: “You know, just living,” he says. Then he suddenly drops into the conversation: “Also I’m getting married.”

Congratulations, I say. “Thanks,” he replies with a shrug.

Did he propose during lockdown? “I don’t wanna get into that.”

Is he able to say who he’s marrying? “You wouldn’t know her, and I don’t like talking about this stuff,” he says.

Alas, our time is almost up so Liotta and I bid our farewells. It was definitely one of the odder phone calls I’ve had in my life, but maybe Liotta saves his charisma for the screen. Only the truly talented can fake it so well.

The Many Saints of Newark is in cinemas from today

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2021/sep/24/ray-liotta-why-havent-i-worked-with-scorsese-since-goodfellas-youd-have-to-ask-him-id-love-to>

[iPad](#)

## Apple iPad 2021 review: still the best tablet for most people



It doesn't look any different from the outside, but latest iPad is best value yet and does most things most people will need. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

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

Fri 24 Sep 2021 02.00 EDT

Apple's updated low-end iPad looks set to continue its dominance of the market with newer chips, twice the storage and a brilliant new video-calling camera.

The 10.2in iPad costs £319 (\$329/A\$499) – £300 for students – making it Apple's best-value tablet, sitting below the [£479 iPad mini](#) and [£579 iPad Air](#).

Unlike most of its tablet models, Apple has taken to updating the internal components of the standard [iPad](#) once a year while keeping its cost and design the same, ensuring its long line of accessories such as keyboards, cases and pens remain compatible.

As such the experience of using the 2021 iPad is the [same as the 2020 iPad](#), but with the updated [iPadOS 15](#) and a few new additions that keep it firmly in pole position.

## Faster chip, double the storage but same battery life



The battery still lasts over nine hours for video or general purpose apps, which is really good compared with the competition. But it also still takes up to three hours to fully charge via lightning cable. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

The iPad now has Apple's A13 Bionic processor from 2019's [iPhone 11](#). It's not Apple's newest chip but it is considerably more powerful than most lower-cost rivals and easily able to handle anything you can do with an iPad. The tablet now comes with twice the minimum of storage compared with the previous version, at 64GB, which will be enough for those who mainly stream content rather download vast movie libraries.

## **Centre Stage camera and better screen**



The low-end iPad now has Apple's high-end video calling camera, which makes for a tremendous upgrade on previous efforts. Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

The new 12-megapixel wide-angle “Centre Stage” camera removes some of the annoyance of video calls by automatically panning and zooming to keep you and friends in frame without having to think about it. It also has much better low-light performance, meaning everyone gets a better, easier view, which will be particularly useful for remote education.

The screen has had a minor but welcome upgrade with the addition of Apple's “true tone” technology, which keeps colours looking true to life adjusting to ambient light. The display is otherwise still crisp and bright and significantly better than many cheaper rivals.

## **Sustainability**



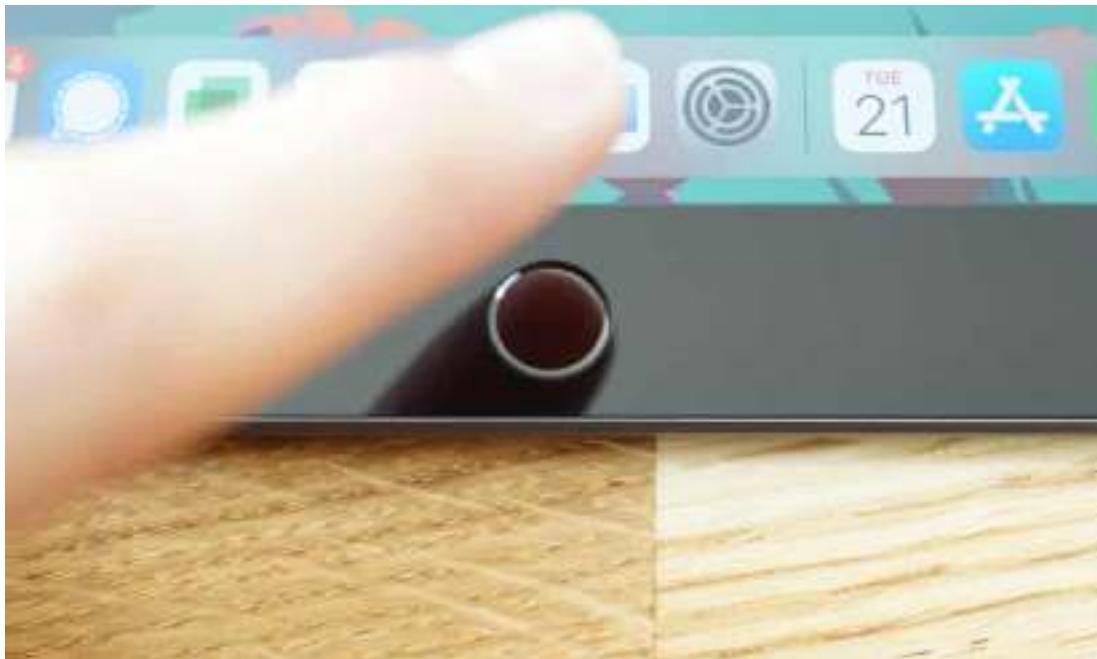
The recycled aluminium case feels and looks just as good as previous iPads.  
Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

Apple does not give a rated lifecycle for the iPad battery, typically 500 full-charge cycles in similar devices, but it can be [replaced for £99](#). The tablet is generally repairable, with an out-of-warranty service costing £246.44, which includes the screen.

The iPad uses 100% recycled aluminium in its case, 100% recycled tin in the solder of its main board, more than 65% recycled rare earth elements and at least 60% recycled plastic in multiple other components. Apple breaks down the [tablet's environmental impact](#) in its report.

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

## Observations



The iPad has the old Touch ID home button but you can also use the more modern swipe gestures to get to the home screen and recent apps menu.  
Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

- The iPad only has wifi5 and Bluetooth 4.2 connectivity, not wifi6 and Bluetooth 5 that has been available on most new devices for the last few years.
- The rear 8MP camera is slightly improved, but still miles off a good smartphone camera.

## Price

The iPad (9th generation) costs [£319 \(\\$329/A\\$499\)](#) with 64GB of storage or £459 (\$479/A\$729) with 256GB. 4G-capable models cost £120 (\$130/A\$200) more.

For comparison, the [iPad mini](#) costs [£479](#), the [iPad Air](#) costs [£579](#) and the [iPad Pro](#) costs from [£749](#), Amazon's [Fire HD 8](#) costs [£90](#), the [Fire HD 10](#) costs [£150](#) and Samsung's Galaxy Tab S7 costs [£519](#).

## Verdict

The 10.2in iPad is still the best tablet for most people offering an unbeatable combination of value, performance, software and longevity.

It's not flash and it has some older technology, such as the lightning cable and wifi5, but its old design means accessories made for many previous models still fit. Doubling the storage to 64GB is welcome, the faster chip and better display too, but it is the Centre Stage auto-tracking video call camera that is a biggest upgrade and will be particularly useful.

**Pros:** great performance, good battery life, good screen, iPadOS, plenty of apps, good speakers, very long support, recycled aluminium, Centre Stage camera.

**Cons:** older design, no USB-C, fairly slow charging, no multi-user support, more expensive than budget rivals.



You can turn the iPad into a more traditional computer with keyboards, mice and styluses from Apple or a variety of third-party manufacturers.  
Photograph: Samuel Gibbs/The Guardian

## Other reviews

- [Apple iPad mini 2021 review: the best small tablet gets stunning revamp](#)
  - [Apple iPad Air 2020 review: a cheaper iPad Pro for the rest of us](#)
  - [Apple iPad Pro M1 review: stunning screen and so much power](#)
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‘The most important thing to do was maintain a really interesting variety of sources’ ... Alison Krauss and Robert Plant at Sound Emporium in Nashville. Photograph: Alysse Gafkjen/The Guardian

## ‘We’re like Mork and Mindy!’ Robert Plant and Alison Krauss, music’s odd couple

‘The most important thing to do was maintain a really interesting variety of sources’ ... Alison Krauss and Robert Plant at Sound Emporium in Nashville. Photograph: Alysse Gafkjen/The Guardian

by [Marissa R Moss](#)

Fri 24 Sep 2021 01.00 EDT

More than half a century since arriving to play his first show in the US with Led Zeppelin, [Robert Plant](#) was in the strange position of having to explain himself to the authorities.

“I had to prove that I was contributing to the betterment of the American system somehow, which is kind of cute, really,” Plant says of this post-lockdown trip to Nashville. He is sitting in the city’s famous Sound Emporium studio with his collaborator, the bluegrass legend Alison Krauss. It is the same place where they recorded their second, highly anticipated record as a duo, [Raise the Roof](#), before the pandemic put the world on pause.

Due to various restrictions, Plant had to get special permission to get back into the country for this week of preparation and promotion; Krauss, he points out in a sarcastic huff, had to drive for only 10 minutes. “I had to present a form to Homeland Security and all that,” he says, sitting on a burgundy velvet couch in one of the facility’s dark, moody rooms. “Fifty-three years of coming here ... they should have my number down by now.”

A sublime re-imagining ... listen to Plant and Krauss’s version of Lucinda Williams’ Can’t Let Go, from the new album.

Raise the Roof, the follow-up to 2007’s much lauded debut LP [Raising Sand](#), could have worked as Plant’s immigration application. Fourteen years in the making – as long as Led Zeppelin’s entire career – it is a sublime re-imagining of roots music traditions, from unsung English folk singers to modern torchbearers and lost blues gems. Highlights include a magical rework of the Everly Brothers’ Price of Love, which Krauss and Plant turn from harmonica-laced pop into a slow burning lament anchored in Krauss’ infinitely emotive vocals; an exquisite, melodically joyful version of Go Your Way by the early Led Zeppelin influence Anne Briggs; and High and Lonesome, an original written by Plant and their returning producer, T Bone Burnett.

It is a warm day and Plant has just got back to the studio on foot after grabbing a bite down the street. [Nashville](#) is a driver’s city, so the 1.85-metre (6ft 1in) musician, with his silver curls tossed loosely in a ponytail, would have surely been a roadside attraction to anyone cruising down Belmont Boulevard, were it not for the white mask obscuring his face. Krauss is cosied up on the couch in a quilted black jacket, despite the late summer weather, a box of tea stashed in her tote. When she talks, she grabs the mic nearby, as if by instinct.

The pair had tried several times to make a second record, but nothing had stuck: the title is as a nod to the jubilation they feel about finally getting the band back together. “You can’t wait 14 years to try to get it right and then put it under the couch and say: ‘Well, that was good,’” says Plant. “You’ve gotta shout it out and raise the roof.”



‘None of this music is rock, it’s not about power and posture’ ... Plant and Krauss. Photograph: Alysse Gafkjen/The Guardian

It was a song by the Americana band Calexico that finally broke the creative barrier. Krauss was driving in Nashville, listening to a burned CD – she is not au fait with making digital playlists – when the song [Quattro \(World Drifts In\)](#) came on at an intersection. “We’d send songs back and forth, and you might hear the same song at a different time and it didn’t have the right moment, for whatever reason,” Krauss says, “This one had such a sparkle on it. One song sets the mood for everything – and that was the song.” She texted Plant immediately. He, too, fell in love with the lyrics. Their version of the track opens the new record, just as the original opened up the record to them.

Plant is as fascinated by border stories as he is by tales from the American south. Calexico, named after the city where California and Mexico join, sing of immigrants fleeing everything they know for the dream of a better life.

“Where they are living is what they are playing. It’s coming out of the ground,” Plant says of the band, now based in Tucson, Arizona.

Ever since he made Raising Sand in Nashville, Plant spotting has become urban lore in the city. There was the rumour that he lived in an apartment above an ice-cream shop in the east side; some people insisted they saw him eating dinner when he was supposed to be on tour. Plant seems to take to the place naturally, hanging out at a traditional country-themed night called Honky Tonk Tuesdays, grabbing a low-key Mexican breakfast at a place recommended by the musician Buddy Miller, or visiting a mural in [Grimey's record shop](#) of [John Prine](#), the late songwriter Plant described on social media as [“the real wordsmith”](#). The last time he saw Prine, “he made some really funny John Prine comment about me being Frodo or Gollum”. The story cracks Krauss up.

The duo assembled some musicians from the Raising Sand sessions, including the guitarist Marc Ribot and the drummer Jay Bellerose, along with some new forces, such as Miller and the renowned jazz guitarist Bill Frisell. Burnett insisted that no one get acquainted with the song choices before entering the studio, to get “the freshest idea with the most life”, as Krauss puts it.

I can’t wait 14 years [to make another album]. Otherwise it’s going to be a bit dicey for me

*Robert Plant*

She remembers walking into the Sound Emporium for overdubs and seeing Ribot with a set of car keys, scratching them along his instrument – a long way from the traditions of bluegrass, but she loved it. On the previous record, Burnett would suddenly appear in a robe, brandishing a toy piano.

“They all have the combination of being so nuts and so tasteful at the same time,” Krauss says. “Shocking. It’s shocking.”

“See, I can’t buy into that,” Plant says, doubtful that nuts and tasteful could coexist, at least in the genre from which he emerged. “I’m British and a rock’n’roll singer.”

Plant and Krauss both enjoyed the exercise of trying to shake off who they have come to be – she the traditionalist, he the flamboyant frontman. “No decision was made other than lyric and melody,” Krauss says. The blues isn’t her default style, but she wears it well. Plant, meanwhile, tried not to go into character or default to comfortable vocal tricks and signatures, but there is one song on the album that – thankfully – is particularly Plant. While the title, High and Lonesome, conjures up images of early Hank Williams and tears on acoustic guitars, it is far more like Led Zeppelin than weepy acoustic country.

Even when outside their comfort zones, though, Krauss and Plant’s disparate worlds overlap perfectly. A previous interviewer, Krauss says, was determined to find out if they argue. “It was so funny, just: do you fight?” she says, chuckling. “Did any of you fight? Did T Bone fight?”



‘Alison and I have something to live up to’ ... Krauss and Plant on stage at the Grammys in 2009. They won five awards. Photograph: Mark Boster/Los Angeles Times/Getty Images

“We’re like Mork and Mindy,” says Plant: an odd yet harmonious couple.

They have proved that all musical traditions can meet in the middle if you dig back far enough. When Raising Sand came out in 2007, it was an outlier

in a landscape entranced by watered down arena folk. Its songs, such as the blues singer Little Milton's Let Your Loss Be Your Lesson and Sister Rosetta Goes Before Us by the alt rock singer Sam Phillips, served as a reminder that the roots of roots music were far more diverse than the emerging Americana genre might lead one to believe.

Raising Sand won five Grammys, including album of the year, beating Radiohead's In Rainbows and Viva la Vida or Death and All His Friends by Coldplay. The concept for Raise the Roof is the same, digging up unsung artists such as Louisiana's Geesie Wiley, as well as Plant's more close-to-home influences, such as Briggs and Bert Jansch. Plant says with a laugh that when he plays their cover of Go Your Way for Briggs, "she'll probably wag a finger at me about some stolen piece of timeless folk history purloined by some bloke with long hair and cowboy boots".

What do we do in our quietest times, when we have a music machine?  
We go to places that really, really make us feel good

*Robert Plant*

He continues: "Alison and I have something – theoretically – to live up to, as far as how it worked out before. But the most important thing to do was maintain a really interesting variety of sources of song. Because what do we do in our quietest times, when we have a music machine? We go to places that really, really make us feel good."

And who doesn't want to feel good after months of lockdown and restrictions? Krauss recalls how, early on, she had trouble even listening to old bluegrass; similarly, Plant couldn't hear new music – he spent the worst months of the pandemic pillaging his own archive, finding cassette recordings he plans to allow the release of only after his death. They promise that the next collaborative album – if there is another – won't take so long, though. "I can't wait 14 years," says Plant, who is 73. "Otherwise it's going to be a bit dicey for me."

For now, he is enjoying this long detour. "None of this music is rock, it's not about power and posture," Plant says. "How remarkable for me to be able to

jump ship so long ago now. But I have a jetpack on my back in case I want to go back.”

That person is still in there, after all. On the way out of the studio to meet Burnett and the musician JD McPherson across town, Plant stops and makes a joke about his “Viking finger”. “If I come from the land of the ice and snow,” he says, a bit of mischief firing in his eyes, “I’ll be OK.”

*Raise the Roof* is released on 19 November on Warner Music. Plant and Krauss will tour together in 2022

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## ‘Someone who knows who she is’: the staunch, subtle style of Angela Merkel



The signature Merkel look: jacket, dark-hued wide slacks, necklace, flat shoes and a Longchamp bag. Photograph: Reuters



[Kate Connolly](#) in Berlin

Fri 24 Sep 2021 02.00 EDT

A four-storey house set a discreet distance away from Neuer Wall, Hamburg's luxury designer strip, holds the secrets to Angela Merkel's successful sartorial style.

Except that fashion designer Bettina Schoenbach, who has her studio here on ABC Strasse, has taken something of a vow of silence over her association with Merkel, who became her client after winning the 2005 election.

On her website, Schoenbach describes her philosophy. "Style is an expression of personal choices made many times over," she states, adding that she is "dedicated to helping customers take strategic control of their image". It is a remark that could be straight out of the lexicon of the pragmatic Merkel. Thanks to Schoenbach, Merkel has throughout her chancellorship, [now drawing to a close](#), been able to open her wardrobe daily and assemble her outfit with two or three flicks of the wrist: the dream of many a working woman.

The designer does not talk to the media, but that is probably how she has retained her role as the creator of Merkel's signature "uniform", as it is often

called: a jacket and a pair of dark-hued wide slacks, matched with a necklace, flat black shoes and a roomy Longchamp bag.

Merkel set out with the aim of avoiding drawing attention to her outward appearance, and the trademark blazer did the job, not unlike a doctor's white coat. It is now synonymous with her political style: concrete, constant, without embellishment, but never dull. With a bell-like form, to fit what the late Karl Lagerfeld once referred to as her "special proportions", the blazer typically has three or four buttons, always done up, and a round neckline, allowing space for the necklace. Sometimes with a collar and lapel, or pockets, sometimes without, Merkel is believed to have amassed several hundreds of the jackets over the years, in linen, silk, velvet and wool, mostly from Italian cloth, according to Germany's fashion press. They have come in all shades of the rainbow, from soft pastels to flaming purples and oranges, and were made for every season and occasion – the duller colours such as white and beige reportedly reserved for the less spectacular meetings with dark-suited business leaders. Lavender, it has been suggested, was worn ahead of difficult meetings, perhaps with the intention of contributing to a relaxed mood.

In one of the few remarks she has made about her style, Merkel told the Süddeutsche Zeitung in 2015: "There are occasions on which I have to wear dark colours, then sometimes I'm informed that I will be standing in front of a white background, and for that the blazer has to have a lighter colour. And sometimes I'm simply in the mood to wear something bright and colourful."

She has rarely worn patterns, and dresses were only ever seen when she made her annual trip to the opera in Bayreuth. The headlines that followed her appearance in 2008, when she wore a low-cut taffeta dress to the opening of Oslo's Opera House, are said to have irritated her so much that she never repeated the experiment. Her spokesperson was confronted the following morning with the question as to who had designed the distinctive creation, to which he sputtered the reply that it was a "new composition from her existing wardrobe" (it was designed by Anna von Griesheim). In a 2013 TV debate, she wore a necklace in the colours of the German flag, which sparked such a heated debate about expressing national pride that she was never seen wearing it again.

Like her wardrobe in the days before Schoenbach came along, Merkel's apparent lack of concern for her hair also drew scornful remarks early on, until a celebrity Berlin hairdresser taught how to blow-dry it, prompting the august Frankfurter Allgemeine to reveal the news that "Merkel no longer leaves her hair to dry naturally; she blow-dries it". It wasn't the first time a chancellor's hair had made headlines. Merkel's predecessor Gerhard Schröder dyed his, a media outlet dared to suggest, triggering a lawsuit from him and the forced withdrawal of the claim.

"I like the fact she has a recognisable style," Anna Wintour, the editor of US Vogue told German media recently. "She appears to me like someone who knows who she is. I don't have the impression she is trying to disguise herself."

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## German federal election 2021

# German progressives dare to dream of leftist ‘red-green-red’ coalition



Election posters for the SPD, Die Linke and the Greens in Stuttgart.  
Photograph: Thomas Kienzle/AFP/Getty Images



[Philip Oltermann](#) in Berlin

[@philipoltermann](#)

Fri 24 Sep 2021 00.00 EDT

As [Germany](#) heads to the polls this weekend, it is the scenario that haunts conservatives' nightmares and has progressives daring to dream: that after 16 years of conservative-led rule, Europe's most powerful economy could for the next four years have a full-throated leftwing government.

The possibility of a power-sharing deal between the centre-left Social Democratic party (SPD), the Greens and the leftwing Die Linke – nicknamed “red-green-red” or R2G – has been highlighted aggressively in recent weeks by the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in an attempt to paint a vote for the current frontrunner for chancellor, the pragmatic finance minister, Olaf Scholz, as tantamount to a radical lurch to the left.

The SPD and the Greens are more quiet on the subject, declining to rule out such a pact in public but voicing ample scepticism in private.

When pressed on the subject several delegates from the two large centre-left parties declined to answer on the record but made their views clear: talk of a

red-green-red-run Germany was to them above all a strategic weapon, potentially to nudge the centre-right Free Democratic party (FDP) into joining their governing alliance.

Yet while the chances of the SPD and Greens going out of their way to court Die Linke are slim, Germany is entering uncharted territory with this election: for the first time, a coalition between at least three parties looks inevitable. Old certainties will crumble either way.

“Red-green-red isn’t an election outcome that is especially likely, but it isn’t one you can rule out either,” said Stefan Liebich, a Die Linke delegate who has been one of the most vocal advocates of Germany’s left bloc overcoming its historic rivalries. “It’s more than just a bogeyman conjured up by conservatives.”

The SPD has been open in principle to talks with its far-left rivals since 2013, when it passed a motion to no longer rule out coalitions with any party “apart from rightwing populists and rightwing extremists”.

Since then, R2G coalitions have formed and worked together more or less harmoniously in the eastern state of Thuringia, where Die Linke provides the state premier, and in the city states of Berlin and Bremen.

Before Sunday’s national vote, polls forecast a slim but stable governing majority for a R2G alliance. The parties’ programmes suggest more scope for joint initiatives than in previous election years, with a [study](#) by Berlin WZB Social Science Center finding more policy overlap than between any other parties, especially on social issues.

Paradoxically, some Social Democrats see such commonalities as an obstacle rather than a boon for an effective power-sharing deal: since all three parties already call for a wealth tax, for example, it’s unclear what policy Die Linke could sell its supporters as a win even if were to get its hands on the coveted labour ministry.

“To prepare the ground for a robust and functioning coalition, you need to make sure that no one walks out of talks looking like a loser,” said one SPD

delegate. “That’s difficult enough with two, but it becomes even more difficult when you have three partners.”

For Die Linke to join a national German government would still represent the breaking of a taboo – not only for the party’s history as the democratic successor to the Socialist Unity party, East Germany’s all-controlling power, but for its strongly pacifist stance on foreign interventions and military spending.

In its election manifesto, Die Linke calls for dissolving Nato and replacing it with a “collective security system with Russia’s involvement”. Even the party’s own leaders say such demands pay tribute to historic creeds of faith rather than expressing contemporary ambitions. Discussions of the future of Nato, they say, are already taking place anyway, initiated by “centrists” such as France’s Emmanuel Macron.

But Die Linke’s decision to abstain on last month’s vote to send German troops on a rescue mission to Afghanistan has illustrated how far it remains apart from the other left-leaning parties on the issue. Its message control is tentative: MPs have used their slots in the Bundestag to voice support for Vladimir Putin, Bashar al-Assad and strongmen leaders in South America.

Especially among the Greens, where human rights champions around the chancellor candidate Annalena Baerbock are in the ascendancy, there is scepticism verging on disgust over the left party’s positions. Clashes with Die Linke over a pan-European military initiative, they say, would be as severe as disagreements with the FDP on matters of financial burden-sharing.

In a reference to Die Linke’s ideological baggage, the SPD’s Scholz has said he would only form a government with parties who had clearly committed themselves to Nato and a “strong EU”. And while Die Linke’s current leadership is more pro-European than, for example, the nationalist left of Jean-Luc Mélenchon in France, an emphatic commitment to these two key points may be hard to come by.

Willing delegates from the SPD and Die Linke have spent the last few years discussing how their clashing foreign policy views could be reconciled in a

coalition. One solution that has been mooted is an internal vote preceding foreign deployment votes, on a case-by-case basis. Most Social Democrats say such a mechanism would be unworkable, especially for longterm UN mandates.

Even then, in the weeks ahead there are likely to be some kind of preliminary talks over a left-bloc alliance. So-called *Sondierungsgespräche*, tentative talks to test each other's willingness to cooperate, usually precede coalition talks proper, and the coalition options to be explored this year are more plentiful than ever.

Should the FDP not move an inch on key Social Democrat pledges such as a minimum wage hike and the new wealth tax, talks with Die Linke may gain momentum.

One argument in favour of a pact with Die Linke could be the far left's current weakness. With its leads in its former eastern strongholds diminishing, polls forecast the party to only scrape into the Bundestag this year.

The party's leadership duo, Janine Wissler and Susanne Hennig-Wellsow, are relative newcomers on the national stage, and may see entering government as a final chance to reverse the party's decline, even if it means moving some of its red lines of old.

“We are entering a new world of three-way coalitions,” said one SPD delegate. “And we all have yet to work out what the rules of the game are going to be.”

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## 2021.09.24 - Coronavirus

- [\*\*'If I could donate my jab, I would' Readers share views on Covid vaccine boosters\*\*](#)
- [\*\*UK Growth is weakest since Covid rules eased in March\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Male life expectancy UK figure drops for first time in 40 years\*\*](#)
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## Coronavirus

# ‘If I could donate my jab, I would’: readers share views on Covid vaccine boosters



About 1.5 million people in England are eligible for a Covid booster jab.  
Photograph: Maureen McLean/Rex/Shutterstock



Rachel Obordo

@bordeaux8

Fri 24 Sep 2021 02.00 EDT

About 1.5 million people in England who are eligible for a [Covid booster jab](#), including over-50s, frontline workers and those who are vulnerable, will be sent an invitation this week to book an appointment.

Though the booster is welcomed by some, others feel that it is more important to ensure other countries have enough vaccines. Four people share their views on the booster jab and whether they will have it when it's offered to them.

## **‘If I could donate my jab, I would’**

I am concerned there is a shortage of vaccines and don't understand why we should use more when other countries don't have enough for two jabs. We are so very fortunate in the UK and it just seems that little old Britain, who went round conquering the world in days gone by, should be complacently offering a third jab, while seemingly ignoring countless people around the world who have not had a first or second dose.

It's that old feeling of how far does neighbourliness go, and we don't seem to be very neighbourly so far with the vaccine. It may be that politically we can't give them away but I don't see why not. We should have actually been sharing the vaccine from the word go.

I have Crohn's disease and I'm on the vulnerable scale. I would absolutely hate to get Covid and the thought of not being able to breathe is really scary. But if I could donate my jab, I would. The government is saying the booster would make things better but it seems unfair. I don't think we have any idea of the suffering of our neighbours abroad where Covid must be devastating.

**Heather Mary Bowering, 83, retired, Winchester**



Dave Fernley from Manchester.

## **'We should focus on ensuring the rest of the world is vaccinated'**

I think it's reasonable to offer booster jabs to people in clinically vulnerable groups, but my main feeling is that we should focus on ensuring that the rest of the world is vaccinated before topping up vaccines in the UK.

It feels as if, having gained a political boost from the vaccination campaign, the government is wanting to repeat this with booster jabs. It wants to give

the appearance of doing something, even if it isn't the most effective use of effort and resources. The government knows it can run a vaccination programme, so thinks: "let's do another one". It's a bit like Nightmare on Elm Street and its sequels, it's not really imaginative.

We've got a pretty high rate of vaccinations which is good, but this is not replicated across the world. From our own self-interest point of view, donating vaccines to help resist the prevalence of Covid in other countries is a benefit for us, and not only does it save people's lives it can also help in reducing the number of variants developing.

Personally, I am hesitant about getting a booster because I think more effort should be directed towards the Covax (vaccine sharing) scheme. I think people in this country often don't care much for what's happening around the world – just witness the cuts to foreign aid. **Dave Fernley, 60, retired, Manchester**

### **'I think a third dose is asking for too much'**

I've had Covid and know my body is full of natural antibodies because I've been tested for them. I'm also fully vaccinated and, with my natural immunity, I'm not sure I need a third booster jab.

In other countries like France, if you have already had Covid then you only need to prove you've had one dose of the vaccine. This isn't the case in England. There are also some medical communities that don't think there is a need for a third dose until more research is done – it's so confusing. It makes you wonder whether decisions made by governments are based on science or the amount of vaccines they have.

I think a third dose is asking for too much. To tell you the truth, it sounds like it's just about business and the never-ending machine of making money for the people who create the vaccines. Also, there are countries where people need them and don't have them. **Helena, 57, works in the creative industry, London**

### **'It should be given to everybody like a flu jab'**

The booster jab should be given to everybody like a flu vaccination. My view is the sooner people are offered one, the better. I have a daughter who is in her 50s, and even though she and her partner are double vaccinated they caught Covid and were quite ill. One of them now has long Covid.

It's a pity it has taken so long for the government to decide about boosters, but they always seem to be late in making any plans because they might upset other members of the party. I used to run an engineering firm employing about 45 people. Every year we had a company doctor who vaccinated us against typhoid, polio, etc because we didn't want anyone to get sick. Giving out a booster jab seems to be common sense.

I have a daughter and granddaughter in the Netherlands and at the moment it's very difficult to get there as my Covid passport is now out of date, because I was vaccinated in February. At least the booster will mean I would've been jabbed recently. **Ian Castle, 82, retired, Suffolk**

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## Economic growth (GDP)

# UK economic growth slows to weakest level since Covid rules eased in March



Activity faltered in the country's dominant service sector, which accounts for 80% of the economy. Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

*[Richard Partington](#) Economics correspondent*

*[@RJPartington](#)*

Thu 23 Sep 2021 07.40 EDT

Severe [shortages of workers and supplies](#) have dragged down economic growth in Britain to the weakest levels since pandemic restrictions were eased in March, according to a closely watched business survey.

The latest snapshot from [IHS Markit and the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply](#) (Cips) showed that growth in private sector output slowed in August as firms battled with severe shortages while costs rose at the fastest pace since the late 1990s.

Business activity faltered in the dominant service sector, which accounts for 80% of the economy, while the slowdown was more pronounced in manufacturing where severe supply-chain disruption held back growth in factory output.

In a sign that the economic recovery from lockdown is waning, business expectations for the year ahead fell to their lowest since January and new orders eased to a seven-month low.

The IHS Markit/Cips flash purchasing managers' index dropped from 54.8 in August to 54.1 in September, on a scale where anything above 50 indicates expansion. City economists had forecast a reading of 54.5.

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Chris Williamson, the chief business economist at IHS Markit, said the barometer of business activity would add to concerns that the UK economy was heading for a bout of stagflation, a period of weak economic growth accompanied by rapid growth in consumer prices.

The survey of about 1,200 service-sector firms and manufacturers, which is closely watched by the Bank of England and the Treasury for early warning signs from the economy, showed a sharp acceleration in companies' costs. Against a backdrop of rising transport costs, product shortages and higher staff wages, firms raised their prices at the fastest pace since the survey began in July 1996.

"Shortages are meanwhile driving up prices at unprecedented rates as firms pass on higher supplier charges and increases in staff pay. [Brexit](#) was often cited as having exacerbated global pandemic-related supply and labour market constraints, as well as often being blamed on lost export sales," Williamson said.

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## Life expectancy

# Male life expectancy in UK drops for first time in 40 years as Covid takes toll



The new estimates also show variations between the four countries in the UK. Photograph: UK Stock Images Ltd/Alamy

*[Nadeem Badshah](#)*

Thu 23 Sep 2021 13.36 EDT

Life expectancy for men in the UK has fallen for the first time since current records began 40 years ago because of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, figures show.

A boy born between 2018 and 2020 is expected to live until he is 79 years old, down from 79.2 for the period of 2015-17, according to the [Office for National Statistics](#) (ONS).

It is the first time there has been a decline when comparing non-overlapping time periods since the research began in the early 1980s.

Estimates for females are broadly unchanged, with a girl born in 2018-20 likely to live for 82.9 years, the same as in 2015-17

Pamela Cobb, of the ONS centre for ageing and demography, said: “Life expectancy has increased in the UK over the last 40 years, albeit at a slower pace in the last decade. However, the coronavirus pandemic led to a greater number of deaths than normal in 2020.

“Consequently, in the latest estimates, we see virtually no improvement in life expectancy for women, while for men life expectancy has fallen back to levels reported for 2012 to 2014.”

Comparable data on life expectancy begins in 1980-82, when a newborn male was expected to live for 70.8 years and a female 76.8.

However, the latest figures do not mean a baby born between 2018 and 2020 will necessarily go on to have a shorter life.

“These estimates rely on the assumption that current levels of mortality, which are unusually high, will continue for the rest of someone’s life,” Cobb said.

“Once the coronavirus pandemic has ended and its consequences for future mortality are known, it is possible that life expectancy will return to an improving trend in the future.”

The new estimates also show variations between the four countries in the UK.

Life expectancy for males has fallen in England, from 79.5 years in 2015-17 to 79.3 years in 2018-2, and [Scotland](#) from 77 to 76.8.

But it has risen slightly in [Northern Ireland](#) from 78.4 to 78.7, while staying broadly unchanged in Wales at 78.3.

For females, life expectancy has dropped in Wales from 82.3 to 82.1 and Scotland from 81.1 to 81. In Northern Ireland, the figure increased slightly from 82.3 to 82.4 and remained mostly stagnant in [England](#) at 83.1.

Across England, the ONS said there were “significant reductions” in male life expectancy at birth in most regions, with falls of nearly four months in north-east England and Yorkshire/Humber and of three months in the West Midlands and north-west England.

In contrast there was an increase of just over one month for males in south-west England, impacted by the pandemic in 2020, with the region recording lower male and female Covid-19 mortality rates than other parts of the country.

South-west England also had fewer extra deaths, or “excess deaths”, than elsewhere, along with a smaller proportion of its total number of deaths that involved Covid-19.

For the female population, the biggest regional falls in life expectancy were in the West Midlands and Yorkshire/Humber. In south-west England there was a “significant increase” of four months.

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## US healthcare

# US public health workers leaving ‘in droves’ amid pandemic burnout



Just as the pandemic has fuelled a burnout crisis among frontline medical staff, it has been calamitous for the mental health of workers in public health. Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

*Abdullah Shihipar*

Thu 23 Sep 2021 05.30 EDT

Alexandra was working in the public health emergencies unit in a major north-eastern American city when the first wave of the pandemic hit. Although her job was in public health policy research, and not treating Covid-19 patients on the frontlines of the healthcare system, she recalls the spring of 2020 as a blur of 24-hour shifts.

Beginning last March, Alexandra estimates that she and her colleagues worked the equivalent of three full-time years in 12 months. (Her name has been changed to protect anonymity.)

“There was no overtime, there was no hazard pay,” Alexandra recalls. Throughout the public health department where she worked, symptoms of anxiety, depression and stress-related physical maladies were commonplace among staff.

This summer, despite the protestations of her superiors, Alexandra quit. She says she’s one of roughly 25 staff members who have left the department since the start of the pandemic.

Alexandra’s story is not unique. Just as the pandemic has fuelled a burnout crisis among frontline medical staff, it has been calamitous for the [mental](#) health of workers in public health – the data analysts and policy advisers whose recommendations are supposed to shape the nation’s pandemic response. Many feel stonewalled by elected officials and scapegoated for the death toll of Covid-19.

Some, like Alexandra, are opting to leave the job for good.

The results of a nationwide [CDC survey](#) of public health workers, released this July, were revealing. Of the more than 26,000 surveyed individuals working in public health departments across the United States, more than half reported recent symptoms of at least one major mental health condition. Their reported prevalence of [PTSD](#) was 10 to 20% higher than in frontline medical workers and the general public.

Some public health workers, including Alexandra, cite a lack of cooperation from elected officials as a driving source of widespread overwork and discontent. Others even say they have faced pressure from elected officials to alter their findings to fit a political agenda.

“When they didn’t like how our [data on] vaccination coverage by race/ethnicity was looking, they actually asked me – the least senior member of the health department – to edit the data to artificially inflate BIPOC

categories,” alleges Kristine, an epidemiologist at a Connecticut health department. (Her name has been changed out of fear for her job.)

Meanwhile, public health workers are at the receiving end of mounting resentment. Since last March, threats against public health officials have increased. In a high-profile incident this past July, an angry crowd targeted Dr Faisal Khan – the acting director of the St Louis department of health – at a meeting on mask mandates. The disgruntled attendees lobbed racial epithets and surrounded Khan after the meeting like a mob.

“I don’t tell strangers what I do for a living any more,” says Rey, a recent public health graduate who joined the New York City department of health and mental hygiene as a data analyst during the pandemic (her name has been changed for this story). Rey says that even some family members, who were once supportive of her decision to study epidemiology in graduate school, have become openly dismissive of expert guidance from the CDC and local public health departments.

“It’s hard to gauge whether people will have a visceral reaction to what I do,” she says.

Dr Morgan Philbin, an assistant professor at the Columbia University School of Public Health, concurs. Throughout the pandemic, Philbin has hosted an informational segment for a conservative talk radio station in her California home town. She says that while she has succeeded in getting through to some listeners, she has received her share of vitriol.

“It’s been so hard to watch people disparage our field and argue that we’re not doing enough, or that we don’t know what we’re doing, when nothing could be further from the truth,” says Philbin. “We know exactly what to do. It’s just that people are refusing to listen.

The public health workforce had been shrinking before the pandemic, but Covid-19 is accelerating the downward trend. Across the US, as of late last year, more than 180 public health officials had been fired or resigned from their posts in 38 states. Current public health resignation numbers are probably much higher, especially once staff-level positions are taken into

account. All the while, public health departments have [faced budget cuts](#) and [challenges to their power](#).

Some in public health fear that the toll of the pandemic poses an existential threat to their line of work.

“I worry that the field is going to [keep losing] a lot of people – people who are nearing retirement age, but also the people around my age,” says Rey, the public health data analyst in New York City. Though relatively new to the job, she has seen many of her contemporaries opt to throw in the towel.

“They are already burned out and are leaving the workforce in droves,” she says.

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## 2021.09.24 - Opinion

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- Why do children in Britain always bear the brunt of Tory cuts?
- We have to insulate Britain, but M25 protests don't make the case for it
- If the UK's energy suppliers were publicly owned, would we be having this crisis?

[OpinionLabour](#)

# The problem is bigger than Keir Starmer – Labour's centrists have run out of ideas

[Andy Beckett](#)



Thomas Pullin

Fri 24 Sep 2021 02.00 EDT

These ought to be good times for the British centre left. A divisive Tory government is running into trouble. The [Labour](#) left has been marginalised. The Liberal Democrats are still recovering from their disastrous decisions in office. Across the western world, from France and Spain to Canada and the United States, politicians of the centre and centre left are in power.

Meanwhile rightwing populist regimes have performed particularly badly during the pandemic. After an exhausting, polarised few years, it is possible

to believe that politics is entering a quieter, more centrist phase.

But not in Britain. Even in mid-term, and with mounting problems, the Conservatives lead Labour in the polls. Even worse, Labour has few memorable policies, an indistinct political identity and little sense of momentum. With its annual conference starting this weekend, outside interest in the party is mostly confined to the question of whether it can mount a fightback. Such a scenario – welcome though it would be – is a long way from preparing for power.

Labour's critics inside and outside the party like to blame Keir Starmer, and it's easy to see why. The leader's limited political experience and stiff public persona, his narrow circle of advisers and [messy party management](#), his disproportionate emphasis on voters in the so-called red wall, and his failure to say clearly what he stands for: all these are convincing explanations for Labour's underperformance. Starmer's [publication of a long essay](#) this week, to try to set out his vision for the party and the country is an acknowledgement that his leadership needs yet another relaunch.

But the focus on his mistakes and flaws misses a much bigger problem. Over the past 20 years, ever since Tony Blair's government peaked – around the time of his final landslide victory, in 2001 – the British centre left has failed to renew itself.

The failure is especially stark because New Labour regarded the ability to change as one of the most important political skills, and prioritised “reconnecting the party to the modern world”, as Blair put it in his memoirs. However dated and discredited his project may look now, New Labour and its intellectual allies did engage seriously with how Britain and the world were changing during the 1990s. Yet since then, despite dominating Labour's parliamentary party and bureaucracy, and receiving much more media support than the party's other factions, New Labour's descendants have failed to update their politics – to “modernise”, in Blairite language.

Instead of coming up with new and compelling ideas to address big contemporary issues, such as the accelerating problems of capitalism, the rise of identity politics and the sharply diverging economic interests of the

young and old, Labour centrists have turned inward. Rather than also seeking to understand and shape society, they have become increasingly fixated on shaping their party.

This week Starmer announced surprise [plans to change how Labour elects its leaders](#), makes policy and reselects its MPs – all of which would reduce the influence of party members. The plans seem an unsubtle attempt to weaken the left – which is still strong in the membership – but equally striking is their introspectiveness. While the worst Tory government for decades runs amok, Labour is fiddling with its rulebook, creating a controversy that threatens to become the main story of the party conference.

There is something perfectionist and self-defeating about this centrist desire for control. Since Blair stood down in 2007, three of Labour's four leaders have come from the centre left – Starmer, Ed Miliband and Gordon Brown. Yet all three have been criticised by New Labour purists, including Blair himself, for not being centrist enough. As it was with Thatcher and her remaining disciples after her ejection from office in 1990, no one who heads the party after the great leader is ever seen as quite good enough.

Jeremy Corbyn's leadership was also treated by the centrists as a time for infighting – rather than for reflecting on the fact that his rise was a symptom of centrism's problems, such as its inability to speak for the young. On the rare occasions the centre-left did present an alternative vision – the leadership challenge to Corbyn by Owen Smith in 2016, the breakaway from Labour by the [Independent Group](#) in 2019 – the absence of fresh policies was telling.

This contrasted with the profusion of plans for government produced by Corbyn's advisers and shadow cabinet. This policy glut proved too much for many voters at the 2019 election. But even then, Corbyn's vote was still bigger than Blair, Brown and Miliband had won between 2005 and 2015. The collapse of Corbynism hid the continuing decline of Labour centrism.

Starmer's essay does show some awareness that the centre left needs to change. Compared with the clever but euphemistic manifestos produced by New Labour, his language is blunter and his critique of the status quo harsher. He writes about "completely rethinking where power lies in our

country". There is also a new emphasis on rebalancing the relationship between workers and employers. Starmer seems to appreciate that Britain is much more unequal and troubled than during the Blair era, and that the kind of modest economic reforms New Labour promised and enacted will no longer be enough – even if he doesn't often specify what a Starmer government would do instead.

There are a few similar, equally belated concessions to radicalism in another ambitious centre-left document published this week: [Rebuilding Labour and the Nation](#), from the thinktank Progressive Britain (a new incarnation of the old Blairite organisation Progress). Behind its standard centrist claim that Labour can win only by appealing to "soft Tory" voters, the report also recommends that the party make "a bold offer on the environment", to appeal to "voters on Labour's left, who have been flirting with the Green party". Until now, Labour centrists have complacently assumed such voters had nowhere else to go.

But anyone hoping that the centre left is finally modernising shouldn't get too excited. Much of Starmer's essay and Rebuilding Labour is devoted to wearily familiar centrist themes: the need for the party to be patriotic and pro-family, to value community and "people who work hard", and to be tougher on crime. Labour leaders have been saying these things, to diminishing electoral effect, for a quarter of a century. The Conservatives say them better.

The essay's one big idea is "the contribution society": a clunky phrase for the Britain that Starmer wants to create, where every adult is both a contributor to, and a beneficiary of, a partnership between socially responsible business, a protective state and vibrant local democracy. It's quite an appealing vision – until you think for a moment about how far removed it is from reality. Britain is full of competing interests. To say it can be otherwise is either naive or a deliberate evasion in order to appeal to as broad a range of voters as possible.

Under Blair, this sort of centrist talk was a sign of confidence. Under Starmer, it feels increasingly like desperation.

- Andy Beckett is a Guardian columnist
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[Opinion](#)[Children](#)

## **Why do children in Britain always bear the brunt of Tory cuts?**

[Polly Toynbee](#)



‘I still have to pinch myself to believe that a third of children in the UK live below the poverty line.’ Photograph: Julian Claxton/Alamy Stock Photo

Fri 24 Sep 2021 05.15 EDT

This is no country for babies. It’s no surprise the [birthrate keeps falling](#) when would-be parents face impossible obstacles. As in the 1930s, it happens in hard times. It’s no snowflake generation whim, but the result of a harsh lost decade of stagnant wages and rising rents, with some people still living at home into their 30s. And there’s no welcome for babies when children are the first to bear the brunt of cuts to benefits and services.

Another week, another battering by reports revealing what looks like a deliberate assault on children. The Royal College of Psychiatry (RCP) has found that the number of children referred to already meagre mental health services [has doubled](#) from pre-pandemic levels, with dangerously long waits. Mental health provision remains neglected, despite pious ministers promising “[parity of esteem](#)”. There will be no extra money for it from the [national insurance levy](#); much of that will be devoted to the more politically sensitive NHS waiting lists.

But even within mental health’s slender rations, children always get the least. Why? The chair of the child and adolescent faculty at the RCP, Dr Elaine Lockhart, tells me “it’s a blind spot” of the commissioners who allocate funds. In purely financial terms, LSE health economist Martin Knapp says the evidence is conclusive that treating children early saves huge expenditure later. Following birth cohorts from 1946, 1958 and 1970 reveals that the damage done by not treating mental health issues persists throughout life. “Programmes like anti-bullying schemes in schools pay for themselves 120 times over,” he says.

There seems to be a national bias against children in everything, almost as if adults are pushing them out of the queue. Earlier this week, [an extensive survey](#) from the children’s commissioner for England revealed the poor state of children’s mental health, calling for a three-year catchup programme in schools. No chance, since Sir Kevan Collins, the government’s education catchup chief, [resigned in June after](#) being offered a tenth of the money needed: schools are worse funded now than in 2010.

In a succession of budgets, the Conservatives have targeted child benefits, knowingly impoverishing families. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation [this week finds](#) typical low-income families will be another [£1,750 worse off](#) by April, thanks to universal credit cuts, the national insurance hike, plus soaring gas prices (that may rise even higher in the spring). Though I write it often, I still have to pinch myself to believe that a [third of children](#) in the UK live below the poverty line – defined as being in a household earning less than 60% of median income. [Gordon Brown writes in outrage](#) in the Guardian this week, calling the universal credit cut the most “socially divisive and morally indefensible” policy he has ever witnessed. UK benefits are the lowest among equivalent European countries (while we cut, Emmanuel Macron’s government in France [sends vouchers](#) to families for energy price rises).

Here’s what [Marcus Rashford publicised](#) with his child food poverty campaign: in England, to get free school meals, a family’s income must be under £7,400 and so only [around 20% of children](#) qualify, leaving out [37% of poor children](#).

I can fill pages with the ways the government in the last decade has become an abusive parent, raining austerity down hardest on children. Labour’s shadow minister for schools, Peter Kyle, told me that [70% of secondaries have super-sized classes](#) above 30 and he lists the huge losses in art, drama, dance, music and modern languages, while 2,500 PE teachers [have gone since 2011](#), with playing fields sold off. Underfunded schools risk becoming joyless [Gradgrind institutions](#).

Among many policies Labour somehow fails to get across is a pledge to bring back breakfast and after-school clubs. Now add in what Keir Starmer promises in his new [Fabian pamphlet](#): by the age of 10, all children will have the chance to “play an instrument, join a competitive sports team, visit the seaside, the countryside, or the city, go to cultural institutions, ride a bike and learn how to debate their ideas”. How did we reach a point where so many have had none of those?

British parents may gasp at Justin Trudeau’s victory speech confirming Canadian families will pay just CAN\$10 a day for childcare and nurseries – that’s £5.70. Here, the average cost for young children full-time is [£263 a](#)

[week](#), while the median weekly salary is £585, before tax. The 30 hours’ “free” childcare for over-threes is so underfunded that [442 nurseries have closed](#) in a year. How perverse that the families in most trouble, those not in work, only qualify for [15 hours](#) – though their children may need most attention. By 2019, [health visitors](#), those kindly eyes and ears spotting early problems, had been cut by a third under the Tory government. According to estimates, the demise of most Sure Start children’s centres will have resulted in an [18% rise](#) in young children’s A&E visits.

The [Commons DWP select committee](#) this week called for a strategy to overcome child poverty: that’s whistling in the wind in the face of the oncoming hurricane of that £20-a-week universal credit cut.

This is the backdrop to a falling birthrate. The [Social Market Foundation](#) calls for pro-natalist policies to boost a birthrate that is down to 1.58 in England and Wales, when level-pegging replacement requires 2.1 babies per woman. Malthusians might celebrate, along with some environmentalists and de-growthers, while economists worry. My own strong view is women should have the children they want, no more, no fewer. The emotional question is what becomes of a society that deliberately neglects its children, leaving them the leftovers?

Birthrates do reflect policy. No wonder they rose in Labour years, with the first free nurseries, children’s centres everywhere, child tax credits, new maternity and paternity rights – and a [million fewer poor children](#). A good society warmly welcomes the birth of babies.

With an ageing population and fewer babies born, the electoral power of young people grows ever weaker. A [depressing IFS report](#) published yesterday on attitudes to inequality finds large numbers believe the UK is a meritocracy where rich and poor deserve their lot, resisting redistribution. Those complaining that Labour is too cautious, remember Blair and Brown won by promising little and doing much in power: it seems the only way around these hostile, child-unfriendly attitudes.

- Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist
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## We have to insulate Britain, but M25 protests don't make the case for it

[Gaby Hinsliff](#)



Insulate Britain climate activists block the M25 in Surrey, September 2021.  
Photograph: Mark Kerrison/Alamy Live News/Alamy Live News.

Fri 24 Sep 2021 03.00 EDT

If anything was going to make me well up in public, I never imagined it would be the joys of insulation. Loft lagging does not generally make the heart sing. People do not normally get choked up over cavity wall filling. But it turns out they probably should.

A few weeks ago someone showed me a film about a [regeneration project](#) to retrofit a social housing estate in Padiham, near Burnley, with green energy measures – and frankly, it would have melted a heart of stone.

The houses were draughty and mouldy, with elderly storage heaters that cost a fortune but still didn't keep people warm. One woman's heating bills were so high she was skipping meals so that her son didn't go without. When the housing association-turned-developer Places for People promised to install solar panels, insulation and new windows, they were met with some suspicion. If you live in social housing, you've seen promises come and go.

But the film ended with residents marvelling at how much money they were saving every week (more than some are probably likely to lose this winter in universal credit, to put it in perspective) and how marvellous it was not to be huddled miserably under a duvet all day for warmth. Parents could now afford the occasional treat for their kids. Even the builders doing the work looked a bit emotional.

This column isn't going to be a defence of [Insulate Britain](#), the protesters currently dicing with death on the M25 to highlight [demands](#) that all social housing be retrospectively insulated in this way by 2025. If anything, it's a column about how such tactics risk handing the moral high ground to cabinet ministers [seeking injunctions](#) against them, on behalf of people understandably distressed about ambulances getting stuck in gridlock, or the risk of serious casualties as protesters run into high-speed traffic.

Insulate Britain's members are doubtless sincere in wanting people to wake up to looming disaster, but we're arguably past the stage of wake-up calls

and why-isn't-this-leading-all-the-news-bulletins now; this is about as awake as we're going to get.

One in four young people are thinking twice about having children because of global heating, according to a [global poll](#) published recently in the Lancet. Nearly half of voters say spending on preventing the climate crisis should be a priority even if that means cuts elsewhere, [according to YouGov](#), which finds the environment ranking consistently in Britons' top three concerns even during a pandemic. Anyone still choosing not to take it seriously by this point isn't going to change their mind because a protest made them late for work.

Institutions of all kinds – including government departments, with the prime minister visibly scrabbling for ideas to make this autumn's Cop26 summit shine – are genuinely anxious to respond. What's needed now isn't people willing to lie down in the fast lane so much as planners and managers and technical experts; people with innovative ideas for raising the money, not to mention rapidly training the workforce required. You might call it the unheroic stage, except that in its own quiet way there's something very heroic about plugging away at a not very well-paid or glamorous job that ultimately changes lives.

Insulating the houses of people who can't afford to do it themselves isn't the sexiest green idea on the table. But it's one of the few that doesn't deprive people of something they enjoy, or rely on some technology not yet invented; that creates new jobs without destroying old industries; and demonstrably saves money for people in circumstances where every penny counts. And without it there's little point in removing gas boilers, since greener replacements such as air-source heat pumps work best in well-insulated homes.

Selling the idea to politicians is actually relatively easy, although getting the money out of the Treasury is another matter. While everyone in housing knows this has to be done, it remains hard to see how, unless the autumn spending review turns out to be unexpectedly generous. (The money for the Padiham project came from the EU, should you wish to add that to the long list of things not mentioned on the side of a referendum bus.) It's the drudge work of actually making it happen now that matters.

Talk to staff who actually work with housing association residents and you'll hear of the many people reluctant to have their boilers ripped out in return for technology they don't necessarily trust. If you lack the power or the money to fix what some faceless authority has screwed up, as social housing tenants often do, then change can become something to be feared. For them, "But the planet is burning!" is a far less effective message than "This will be cheaper, and warmer."

Similarly, shouting, "Apocalypse now" isn't always as politically effective as it sounds. Fear is paralysing, so much so that some people tune out at the very mention of climate. The scale of it all can feel overwhelming, and in the middle of a deadly pandemic there's perhaps only so much gloom people can take.

What the climate story needs now is hope and joy, and a recognition that both of these might be found in unexpected places. As the kids say, not all heroes wear capes. Sometimes they turn out to be simply carrying clipboards, wearing hard hats and bringing the warmth inside.

- Gaby Hinsliff is a Guardian columnist
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[Opinion](#)[Energy industry](#)

# If the UK's energy suppliers were publicly owned, would we be having this crisis?

[David Hall](#)



‘The monopoly grid companies haven’t invested much in upgrading the system for renewable energy, but they have extracted huge amounts in dividends and interest.’ Photograph: Gareth Fuller/PA

Thu 23 Sep 2021 12.00 EDT

Government ministers say they will [not bail out](#) badly run energy supply companies with a poor business model. Bankruptcy is a natural part of business, and companies must be allowed to fail.

But the energy we need for our lives is not an ordinary consumer product; it’s a basic necessity. As a result, even though the sector is in the hands of

private companies, we expect our government and local authorities to deal with the problem, because they have an unavoidable responsibility to ensure a reliable supply.

The real issue here is the business model of the energy sector as a whole, not those of individual companies. It was broken up into separate companies for transmission, distribution, generation and supply in the 1980s to enable privatisation, and the same formula was later applied by the EU throughout Europe.

But it doesn't work, in many different ways. The monopoly grid companies haven't invested much in upgrading the system for renewable energy, but they have extracted huge amounts in dividends and interest. National Grid shareholders [took £1.4bn](#) out of the company in both 2020 and 2021, although that is still below their record take of [£3.2bn in 2017](#). The [private generators didn't invest](#) in renewables until we started injecting public money. The supply companies didn't compete and just enjoyed [extracting dividends](#), until even Theresa May admitted there had to be a price cap – a humiliating acknowledgement of market failure.

Would it make any difference to the problem of rising world gas prices if we had public sector energy suppliers? The pressures of the wholesale cost would be the same, after all, and public subsidies would still be needed to keep price rises down. But there are some key differences. The job of the public sector is to serve the public interest, so money doesn't get taken out by private shareholders. Public companies can plan to use surpluses to help cushion events such as this. And public sector companies can be far more open with the public, providing more information and being more responsive to public concerns.

This isn't just theoretical. In other major western countries, most households do not have to play the market as in the UK. In Germany, public sector suppliers of energy are more trusted, and [two-thirds of all electricity](#) is bought from municipally owned energy companies ("Stadtwerke"). They avoid other problems of the UK system, too. *Stadtwerke* own and run the great majority of the distribution companies and have also played a leading role in developing renewable electricity generation. The *Stadtwerke* of Munich city council has been supplying [enough renewable energy](#) for the

needs of every household in the city since 2016, and by 2025 will supply enough for all the local industries, too – your BMW will be made using public renewable energy. In France, too, two-thirds buy their electricity from EdF, majority-owned by the French state, which also runs the grids and generates most of the electricity. In Italy, a similar proportion buy from AU, a public company owned by the regulator.

In the USA, where the states were allowed but not compelled to liberalise the sale of electricity, the state of California chose the exciting option of a free market in energy supply. This blew up in its face in 2000, when the state's economy was crippled as Enron and other generators were alleged to have unfairly boosted wholesale power prices. The only place that escaped the repeated blackouts was the city of Los Angeles, where the whole energy system is run by a 100% municipal company, the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP). The lights stayed on in Hollywood thanks to the public sector. No state in the USA has introduced retail competition since then, many retain public utilities, and most households and small businesses use the “default suppliers” set up by the states, rather than playing the market.

So why is the population of the UK doomed to struggle on, pretending, at great cost to ourselves, that this is a suitable arena for private business? Even under the EU rules, other countries find ways of relying on the strength of the public sector. And post-Brexit, we can do so much more easily – because we are no longer subject to the EU legislation that props up this discredited and unpopular system. The UK government seems to make great efforts to support the EU system, instead of recognising that the public sector is central to addressing the multiple challenges of the energy system.

- David Hall is a visiting professor and former director of the Public Services International Research Unit at the University of Greenwich

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## [The Pegasus project](#)[France](#)

# Spyware ‘found on phones of five French cabinet members’



Phones belonging to French education minister, Jean-Michel Blanquer, left, and minister of territorial cohesion, Jacqueline Gourault, were among those to have been targeted, said Mediapart. Photograph: Jacques Witt/SIPA/REX/Shutterstock

*[Jon Henley](#) and [Stephanie Kirchgaessner](#)*

Thu 23 Sep 2021 17.47 EDT

Traces of Pegasus spyware were found on the mobile phones of at least five current French cabinet ministers, the investigative website [Mediapart has reported](#), citing multiple anonymous sources and a confidential intelligence dossier.

The allegation comes two months after the [Pegasus Project](#), a media consortium that included the Guardian, revealed that the phone numbers of

top French officials, including French president Emmanuel Macron and most of his 20-strong cabinet, appeared in a leaked database at the heart of the investigative project.

There is no firm evidence that the phones of the five cabinet members were successfully hacked, but the Mediapart allegations indicate that the devices were targeted with the powerful spyware known as Pegasus, which is made by NSO Group.

When it is successfully deployed by the Israeli company's government clients, Pegasus allows its users to monitor conversations, text messages, photos and location, and can turn phones into remotely operated listening devices.

The Pegasus Project consortium, which was coordinated by the French media non-profit Forbidden Stories, revealed that global clients of NSO had used hacking software to target human rights activists, journalists and lawyers.

NSO has said that its powerful spyware is meant to be used to investigate serious crime, and not to target members of civil society. It has said that it has no connection to the leaked database that was investigated by the Pegasus Project and that the tens of thousands of numbers contained in the list are not the targets of NSO's government clients. It has also staunchly denied that Macron was ever targeted by Pegasus spyware.

In a statement released on Thursday night, NSO said: "We stand by our previous statements regarding French government officials. They are not and have never been Pegasus targets. We won't comment on anonymous source allegations."

Mediapart said the telephones of the ministers for education, territorial cohesion, agriculture, housing and overseas – respectively Jean-Michel Blanquer, Jacqueline Gourault, Julien Denormandie, Emmanuelle Wargon and Sébastien Lecornu – showed traces of the Pegasus malware.

It said not all the ministers were in their current posts at the time of the alleged targeting, which occurred in 2019 and, less frequently, in 2020, but all were ministers. The phone of one of Macron's diplomatic advisers at the Élysée Palace had also been targeted, it said.

Forensic analysis of their devices at the end of July had revealed the presence of "suspect traces" of the spyware, according to a report by French state intelligence services and a parallel criminal investigation by the Paris public prosecutor, it said.

The alleged victims, approached either directly or through their offices, had either not responded or said they did not wish to comment publicly on such a sensitive subject. Some referred Mediapart to France's secretariat-general for defence and national security (SGDSN), which also declined comment.

The Élysée Palace also said it would not comment on "long and complex investigations which are still ongoing". At least one of the ministers has since changed both their telephone and phone number, Mediapart said.

The prosecutor's office has declined to comment on the progress of its investigation or to confirm whether or not it had uncovered the hacking of the ministers' phones, saying the inquiry was governed by rules of judicial secrecy.

The Élysée has not commented on the Pegasus scandal since late July, when palace officials advised prudence, saying there was "no certainty at this stage". Macron is, however, understood to have changed his phone number for some calls.

The French defence minister, Florence Parly, met her Israeli counterpart, Benny Gantz, in Paris in July and reportedly discussed the scandal, but no details of their conversation have leaked, Mediapart said.

The state secretary for European affairs, Clément Beaune, said in August that the "gravity of the allegations" and the ongoing judicial proceedings meant the government could say little. "We are still untangling the truth of the situation," he said.

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## Canary Islands ‘miracle home’ stands alone against volcano’s lava flow



Lava flows surrounded a house following the eruption of a volcano in the Canary Islands. Photograph: Reuters

*Helen Sullivan and agencies*

[@helenrsullivan](https://twitter.com/helenrsullivan)

Thu 23 Sep 2021 22.25 EDT

Like a cartoon house with its own raincloud, a Canary Islands home has survived rivers of lava flowing from the [volcanic eruption on La Palma](#), with images showing the untouched residence and nearby landscape surrounded by charred black landscape.

Social media users called it the “[miracle house](#)”, the BBC reported. Its owners, a retired Danish couple who are not on the island, said they were

“relieved it’s still standing”, according to Ada Monnikendam, who built the house.

“We all started crying like crazy when I told them [the owners] that their beloved house was intact,” Monnikendam told [El Mundo](#).

The house is in El Paraíso, where more than half of homes and the local school have been destroyed.

The couple chose La Palma specifically because of its volcanic landscape, Monnikendam told El Mundo. She said it was “sad to know that the house is there alone without anyone being able to take care of it”.

The advance of lava on the island slowed significantly on Thursday, which raised fears that the molten rock might fan out further in the coming days and cause more destruction instead of just flowing out into the sea, Associated Press reported.

One giant river of lava 600 metres (2,000ft) wide slowed to a speed of four metres (13ft) an hour after reaching a plain on Wednesday, officials said. On Monday, a day after the eruption on La Palma, it was moving at 700 metres (2,300ft) an hour.

A second stream of lava has virtually ground to a halt, the head of the National Geographic Institute in the Canary Islands, Maria Jose Blanco, told a news conference.

Blanco said seismic activity on La Palma island was now “low” but molten rock was still being thrown out of the volcano.

01:20

Lava fills swimming pool as La Palma eruption continues – video

As it slowed, the lava grew thicker. In places, it rose up to 15 metres (50ft) high, authorities said. It now covers 166 hectares (410 acres) and has swallowed up around 350 homes.

The uncertainty has left many residents on the western side of the island of 85,000 people in limbo. Scientists say the lava flows could last for weeks or months.

La Palma witnessed its last eruption in 1971.

— *with Associated Press*

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## Five climbers die after blizzards on Russia's Mount Elbrus



A video image of the rescue operation on Mount Elbrus in the North Caucasus in Russia.

Photograph: Russia's emergencies ministry/Reuters

*Agence France-Presse in Moscow*

Fri 24 Sep 2021 04.20 EDT

Five climbers have died after a blizzard on Mount Elbrus, Europe's highest peak, Russia's emergencies ministry has said.

Thursday's incident happened when a group of 19 climbers were at an altitude of over 5,000 metres (16,000ft).

Elbrus, located in Russia's North Caucasus, is the highest mountain in Europe at 5,642 metres (18,510 ft).

“Unfortunately, five people died,” the emergencies ministry said.

The remaining 14 were taken down to the Azau valley below and the rescue was carried out in “the most difficult conditions” with strong winds, low visibility and subzero temperatures, it said.

The company that organised the climb said there were four professional guides accompanying the climbers. During the ascent, one of the climbers felt unwell and turned back with one of the guides. She later died “in his arms”, it said.

The rest of the group continued to the summit but an “unprecedented storm” struck on their way down. One of the climbers broke a leg, further slowing down the group.

Two climbers froze to death and two others lost consciousness and died as they were brought down, the company said. The guides and some of the participants were hospitalised with frostbite.

While the ascent is not considered technically difficult, dozens of climbers die every year during summit attempts.

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[China](#)

## ‘Eerie silence’ as Evergrande misses payment deadline



The Evergrande Center in Shanghai, China. The company has total debts of about \$305bn (£222bn). Photograph: Aly Song/Reuters

*[Vincent Ni](#) and [Julia Kollwe](#)*

Fri 24 Sep 2021 04.06 EDT

The embattled Chinese property developer Evergrande is inching closer to the potential default that investors fear, after missing an interest payment deadline.

The company, which has total debts of about \$305bn (£222bn), has run short of cash, and investors are worried that a collapse could pose systemic risks to China’s financial system and reverberate around the world.

A Thursday deadline for paying \$83.5m in bond interest passed without remark from Evergrande, and bondholders had not been paid nor heard from the company, two people familiar with the situation told Reuters.

The firm is now in uncharted waters and enters a 30-day grace period. It will default if that passes without payment.

“These are periods of eerie silence as no one wants to take massive risks at this stage,” said Howe Chung Wan, head of Asia fixed income at Principal Global Investors in Singapore. “There’s no precedent to this at the size of Evergrande … We have to see in the next 10 days or so, before China goes into holiday, how this is going to play out.”

China’s central bank again injected cash into the banking system on Friday, seen as a signal of support for markets. But authorities have been silent on Evergrande’s predicament and China’s state media have offered no clues about a rescue package. Shares in Evergrande fell by 11.6% in Hong Kong on Friday.

The saga of Evergrande has been closely watched by local as well as international media outlets, with some going as far as calling it “[China’s Lehman Brothers moment](#)”.

Some Chinese banks disclosed the sums they were owed by the developer, insisting they could cope with a potential default. One of Evergrande’s biggest lenders, Zheshang Bank, said it was owed 3.8bn yuan (£430m), adding that it has “sufficient collateral” and that “the overall risk is controllable”.

Others, including Shanghai Pudong Development Bank, said their lending was small, tied to individual projects and secured by claims to land. Changshu Rural Commercial Bank in the eastern province of Jiangsu said it was owed 3.9m yuan.

Evergrande promised to hold a phone meeting with some individual investors. Other creditors are waiting to see whether the government will step in to oversee a restructuring.

Economists said that if Beijing were to become involved, it would most likely focus on making sure families get apartments they have already paid for, rather than trying to bail out banks or other creditors.

China's housing regulator is stepping in to protect funds earmarked for housing projects from being diverted to creditors, [Bloomberg reported](#). The Evergrande funds must first be used for construction to ensure project delivery, it said, citing people familiar with the plan.

Evergrande is one of China's biggest private-sector conglomerates, with more than 200,000 employees, 1,300 projects in 280 cities and assets of 2.3tn yuan. Other major developers such as Vanke, state-owned Poly Group and Wanda Group have not reported similar problems. However, hundreds of smaller developers have shut down since regulators started tightening controls on financing in 2017.

In the past few weeks, protesters have gathered outside Evergrande's headquarters in Shenzhen, southern China, to demand payment.

On Thursday, the rating agency [Fitch downgraded its forecast](#) for China's economic growth because of concerns about a slowdown in the country's colossal housing market and fears about the unfolding Evergrande saga.

At the heart of the concerns is the risk of a possible spillover effect to the broader [Chinese economy](#) and its consequences for social stability. In the past few days, local governments have been asked to contain the ripple effect of Evergrande's demise. According to reports, officials were tasked with preventing unrest and mitigating the impact on homebuyers and potential job losses.

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However, it is unclear whether officials think Evergrande should eventually impose losses on offshore creditors. If it does, it will dampen foreign investors' mood when making investment decisions in China in the future, analysts say.

“A lot of Chinese people have a lot to lose if their property prices plummet as a result of a disorderly collapse of Evergrande. It will hurt people’s confidence,” said Dexter Roberts of the Washington DC-based Atlantic Council’s Asia Security Initiative. “But on the opposite side, if the government is seen to have helped Evergrande too much, it will cause moral hazard.”

The trouble engulfing Evergrande is only the tip of the iceberg in China’s once unrestrained property market. UBS estimates there are 10 developers with potentially risky positions with combined contract sales of 1.86tn yuan – or 2.7 times Evergrande’s size.

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## Gabby Petito

# Gabby Petito case: Brian Laundrie charged with illegal bank card use



Gabby Petito's remains were found on the edge of Grand Teton national park in Wyoming. Officials are searching for her boyfriend Brian Laundrie. Photograph: North Port Police Department/ZUMA Press Wire Service/REX/Shutterstock

*Guardian staff and agencies*

Thu 23 Sep 2021 22.01 EDT

The boyfriend of [Gabby Petito](#) has been charged on Thursday with unauthorized use of a debit card as the search for him continued in a Florida swampland.

An arrest warrant has been issued for Brian Laundrie, who was indicted by a federal grand jury on Wednesday for allegedly using a Capital One Bank card and someone's personal identification number to make unauthorized

withdrawals or charges worth more than \$1,000 during the period in which Petito went missing. The indictment does not say who the card belonged to and the nature of the charges have not been disclosed.

Petito's [remains were found](#) on the edge of Grand Teton national park in Wyoming and her death has been ruled a homicide. She disappeared while [on a cross-country road trip](#) with Laundrie, who has been named a person of interest in the 22-year-old woman's death.

Michael Schneider, the FBI special agent in charge, said an arrest warrant will allow law enforcement across the country to continue pursuing Laundrie while the investigation continues into Petito's homicide.

In Florida, searchers on Thursday spent a fifth unsuccessful day searching for Laundrie in the Carlton Reserve park, a forbidding wilderness preserve. A [dive team has also joined](#) the manhunt.

Officials urged anyone with knowledge of Laundrie's role in Petito's death or his whereabouts to contact the FBI. With [online sleuths and theories](#) multiplying by the day, the FBI and police have been deluged with tips about possible Laundrie sightings.

"No piece of information is too small or inconsequential to support our efforts in this investigation," Schneider said in a statement.

Petito and Laundrie grew up together on Long Island, New York, but they moved in recent years to North Port where his parents live. Their home, about 35 miles (55 km) south of Sarasota, was searched by investigators earlier this week.

The couple documented online their trip in a white Ford Transit van converted into a camper, but they got into a physical altercation on 12 August in Moab, Utah, that led to a police stop for a possible domestic violence case. Ultimately, police there decided to separate the quarreling couple for the night. But no charges were filed, and no serious injuries were reported.

The case has garnered enormous public interest, but has also raised uncomfortable questions over the unequal attention given to the hundreds of cases of Native American and other minority women missing or murdered across the United States.

On Thursday, the interior secretary Deb Haaland told reporters that the extensive news media coverage of the case should be a reminder of missing or murdered Native American girls and women.

Haaland, the first Native American Cabinet secretary, said that her heart goes out to Petito's family, but that she also grieves for "so many Indigenous women whose families have endured similar heartache for the last 500 years".

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