



# The Guardian

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## 2021.04.18 - Opinion

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## OpinionRape and sexual assault

# Every woman who sees this film will secretly cheer its antiheroine

Barbara Ellen



Promising Young Woman explores the meaning of consent and the men who ignore it



‘Broken, sardonic, dead-eyed’: Carey Mulligan as Cassie in *Promising Young Woman*. Photograph: AP

‘Broken, sardonic, dead-eyed’: Carey Mulligan as Cassie in *Promising Young Woman*. Photograph: AP

Sat 17 Apr 2021 12.30 EDT

Emerald Fennell’s Bafta-winning, Oscar-nominated film [\*Promising Young Woman\*](#) is being viewed as a female revenge fantasy. But in every way that counts, it’s grimly recognisable. Cassie, played by Carey Mulligan, fakes inebriation in nightclubs to entrap predators.

Self-styled “nice guys” are shocked when she turns out to be sober and intent on avenging her friend, the incapacitated victim of a campus rape cheered by braying frat boys. Cassie’s revenge trip may be a fantasy, but the premise is realistic enough for a documentary. This is the grainy footage that plays on a loop inside the female subconscious. This is the bargaining inner dialogue of many a “party girl”: “How much fun can I have before I’m vulnerable, and before everything – even rape – becomes my fault?”

[Promising Young Woman review – a deathly dark satire of gender politics](#)  
[Read more](#)

While a jerky cinematic ride, the triumph of *Promising Young Woman* is the lightning bolt of female recognition. Not just regarding famous cases (such as Brock Turner's [grotesque assault](#) on Chanel Miller, for which he served a paltry [three months](#)), but for everybody. Women aren't so much relating to the broken, sardonic, dead-eyed Cassie as they are thanking her for sticking up for them, for exposing the creeps who think an incapacitated woman unable to say "no" gives consent. This isn't some weird side issue of sexual life. It's only extraordinary because it's so ordinary. Intoxicated women have long been taken advantage of.

You have to wonder at the toxic perfect storm of entitlement, opportunism and sexual inadequacy that convinces this breed of men that "practically unconscious" is a come-on. The moral squalor of enablers who applaud them for "scoring". And what about women? Those who sneer and judge, whose misogyny is so strong they put other women's distress into the "asked for it"/"learning experience" brackets, as if rationalising sexual assault is a skills course every modern woman needs to take.

Then there are the women it happens to, who blame themselves. [Women](#) know – they *always* know – what they consented to. They know the difference between a mutual, inconsequential drunken tumble and something they were helplessly coerced into. Still, too many have felt compelled to play sexual peacekeeper. While women have lied about being raped, I'd wager they're far outnumbered by those who've lied that they weren't raped. [Women](#) who've told themselves to do better, to learn the lesson and their reward for all this self-monitoring will be lessening their chances of assault.

Maybe this is another achievement of the film. It's a wake-up call about consent that resonates across generations. While younger women may cheer on the antiheroine, older women may wonder: why did we put up with that? Why weren't we angrier? What took us so long?

**Mick Jagger has checked out of Memory Motel, it would appear**



Mick Jagger: can't get no recollection. Photograph: Mario Anzuoni/Reuters

Mick Jagger's memoirs are the Bermuda Triangle of rock publishing – wreathed in myth and legend but no human eyes have gazed upon them and survived... or something.

The famously “unfinished” memoirs are to remain unfinished. Jagger (who, with his Eazy Sleazy collaborator, Foo Fighters’ Dave Grohl, just donated digital artwork in aid of artists suffering in the pandemic) [told the BBC](#) that he stopped writing an autobiography because it took too much out of him. “It takes a lot of reliving emotions, reliving friendships, reliving ups and down... it was all simply dull and upsetting and there really weren’t that many highs out of it.”

Hmm. Either Jagger is a big fibber or I’ve imagined past news that he couldn’t write his memoir because he couldn’t remember anything. He famously asked Bill Wyman for a loan of his fastidiously kept Stones-era diaries but Wyman refused.

So, never mind plaintive waffle about the agony of remembrance, Jagger can’t remember at all. In a meta twist, at one point, he also [forgot writing 75,000 words of a memoir](#) that he then stopped from being published.



How deliciously on-brand for the spirit of the 60s. If you can remember it, then you weren't there, right, Mick?

## **A Chris Whitty foxtrot? Have we not suffered enough?**



Chris Whitty: a natural for Strictly? Mm... Photograph: PA Video/PA

Is *Strictly Come Dancing* really going after Chris Whitty? It seems the show is interested in featuring a “[star of the pandemic](#)” and “discreet inquiries” have been made about England’s chief medical officer. Failing that, his deputy, Jonathan Van-Tam, or vaccines chief, Kate Bingham. *Strictly* was even considering the health minister, Matt Hancock, but apparently he has a “hectic schedule”. Yes. It must get very hectic answering all those questions about Covid-cronyism. Card, dance card, whatever, Hancock’s seems well and truly marked for the foreseeable.

Back to Twinkletoes Whitty. In light of all the suffering and loss, is this “star of the pandemic” thing appropriate? Is the public in the mood for him skidding across a dancefloor in full pancake makeup and sparkly jumpsuit? Is Whitty capable of smiling in a way that doesn’t channel the Tooth Fairy from the film *Manhunter*? *Strictly* rehearsal footage often features some snug athleisurewear. Are we mentally strong enough for that? Can Whitty



even dance? From the looks of him, a foxtrot could end up resembling a scene from George A Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*.

Figures from the serious end of public life have featured on *Strictly*. Former Labour shadow chancellor Ed Balls reinvented himself as a pelvis-swivelling groove-machine – it's rumoured his jive can still only be shown from the waist up in several countries. Former Tory shadow home secretary Ann Widdecombe was dragged around the dancefloor by Anton Du Beke, as though he was performing an exorcism. Last year, former Labour home secretary Jacqui Smith went out first and, I'm sure she'd agree, even that was too late.

However, these contestants all had one thing in common: retirement. Sorry *Strictly*, you can't have Mr Whitty. We're still using him.

Barbara Ellen is an Observer columnist

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## OpinionDavid Cameron

# The Observer view on the lobbying scandal engulfing the government

Observer editorial

Politicians will continue to line their pockets until a ministerial code is strictly enforced and breaches are punished



‘David Cameron reportedly messaged Rishi Sunak many times on his personal phone. Photograph: Matt Dunham/AP

‘David Cameron reportedly messaged Rishi Sunak many times on his personal phone. Photograph: Matt Dunham/AP

Sun 18 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

When [David Cameron](#) predicted in 2010 that lobbying was “the next big scandal waiting to happen”, he could not have envisaged that a decade later he would be at the heart of it. But that is exactly where he is: a former prime minister who has traded his time in public office to accept a lucrative role at now-collapsed financial services firm Greensill Capital, lobbying former

colleagues for access to government schemes that would have helped protect his financial interests in the company.

[Role call: the former ministers who found private sector jobs](#)

[Read more](#)

Cameron's role has propelled Greensill's lobbying activities into the headlines, but it does not stop there. There are questions over the impact Cameron's lobbying of the chancellor, Rishi Sunak, and the health secretary, Matt Hancock, may have had on government policy. Cameron reportedly [messed Sunak](#) many times on his personal phone; while Greensill did not get access to the emergency loans Cameron was asking for, it is not clear whether in "pushing" his team to explore an alternative, Sunak effectively gave Cameron and Greensill privileged access to Treasury officials. Cameron arranged a [private drink](#) for himself and Lex Greensill with Hancock in 2019 to discuss a payment scheme for the NHS, which went on to be used by several trusts. It has also emerged that two senior civil servants held paid roles for Greensill, giving the appearance of an extraordinary conflict of interest: [Bill Crothers](#), the former head of procurement for the government, became an adviser to Greensill before he left the civil service, and [David Brierwood](#) became a director of Greensill while a crown representative.

This episode highlights the extensive opacity around lobbying and corporate influence. A lack of transparency and regulation makes it far too easy for people with the right contacts to get privileged access to policymaking in a way that swings outcomes in their favour. Vague and incomplete rules on lobbying allow ministers to evade proper scrutiny. There is almost no meaningful policing of the revolving door that sees special advisers, former ministers – and prime ministers – take lucrative jobs that allow them to profit from personal contacts with former colleagues. All of this has been compounded in the past decade by a naively starry-eyed approach to bringing private-sector experience into government policymaking and delivery, as if the PFI and outsourcing disasters of recent years had never happened.

Boris Johnson has sought to distance himself from this by painting it as a scandal of the Cameron era. But not only do questions hang over his

ministers, he himself is no role model for integrity in public office. He failed to declare personal interests while he was mayor of London, including the fact that a woman he appointed as an unpaid adviser was the mother of one of his children, and his relationship with [Jennifer Arcuri](#), who benefited from thousands of pounds of public money over a four-year period. His government has faced questions about how it awarded contracts to personal contacts of ministers during the pandemic: the National Audit Office has found that PPE suppliers with political connections were directed to a “[high priority](#)” procurement channel, where bids were 10 times more likely to be successful. Hancock failed to declare that the 15% of shares he owns in a company that is a supplier to the NHS in Wales has his [sister](#) as a director. Johnson ignored the finding of his independent adviser on ministerial standards that Priti Patel had broken the code by [bullying civil servants](#), prompting the adviser to resign.

Governments of all political colours have got themselves in trouble over lobbying scandals. What has changed is that a demonstrable lack of integrity once swiftly claimed ministerial scalps: witness the two resignations of Peter Mandelson or [the suspensions](#) of Patricia Hewitt, Geoff Hoon and Stephen Byers from the Labour party in the cash-for-access scandal. Johnson seems to think that so long as he brazenly it out, he can avoid forcing the resignation of ministers who have broken the ministerial code. The government still has not published the register of ministers’ interests that was [due at the end of last year](#), while the post of independent adviser on the ministerial code has remained vacant for five months after [Sir Alex Allan’s resignation](#).

All this gives the impression of a government in which ministers feel entitled to use public office for personal gain. In a system that depends overwhelmingly on self-regulation according to the [Nolan principles of public life](#), with a political majority that means they are unlikely to face any immediate political accountability, they can get away with it. Johnson himself has irrevocably eroded the unwritten honour code of politics; he is a prime minister who has proved willing to [unlawfully suspend parliament](#) in order to try to get his way or to dupe voters with what the UK Statistics Authority has ruled a “[clear misuse of official statistics](#)”.

Other parliamentary democracies such as Canada and Ireland take a much tougher approach to lobbying. We do not need a long inquiry to tell us that

we need a much more robust system in the UK, with a comprehensive register of all political lobbying, an agency to regulate the revolving door with the power to impose sanctions, for example by docking the pensions of former ministers and civil servants, and an independent regulator of the ministerial code. But most fundamentally, we deserve political leaders who take their ethical obligations as holders of public office seriously, rather than approaching politics as an ego trip, a game and, ultimately, a route to personal financial gain.

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## [Opinion](#)Joe Biden

# The Observer view on Joe Biden's sanctions on Russia

## [Observer editorial](#)

The US president has chosen to stand up to Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping with steady diplomacy



President Joe Biden speaks about new sanctions on Russia at the White House. Photograph: Andrew Harnik/AP

President Joe Biden speaks about new sanctions on Russia at the White House. Photograph: Andrew Harnik/AP

Sun 18 Apr 2021 01.15 EDT

In one respect, the [punitive measures](#) imposed on Russia last week by the Biden administration are an attempt to clean up the mess left by Donald Trump. On issue after issue, such as Russian meddling in the 2016 and 2020 elections and cyber-attacks and hacks of US government agencies and



businesses, the former president failed to take prompt retaliatory action or any action at all.

Trump cast doubt on Russia's responsibility for these and other hostile acts, contradicting the findings of America's intelligence agencies. He routinely declined to criticise [Vladimir Putin](#), Russia's president, for his support for Syria's murderous regime, the 2018 Salisbury poisonings and the persecution of the opposition activist Alexei Navalny.

Why Trump behaved in such a fawning, servile way towards Putin, a malicious and unapologetic adversary of the US, is one of the great unsolved mysteries of his presidency. Like the mafia boss he resembles, did Putin have some kind of personal hold on Trump? Answers to this puzzle will hopefully emerge over time.

What is certain is that Joe Biden, Trump's successor, feels no such constraints. As Barack Obama's vice-president, Biden led a vain bid to "reset" relations with Moscow. In the process, he gained what he said was a telling [insight into Putin's "soul"](#). He didn't have one, Biden told him to his face at a 2011 Kremlin meeting. Putin reportedly took this as a compliment.

[Biden hits Russia with new sanctions in response to election meddling](#)  
[Read more](#)

Putin is evidently less happy about the [latest sanctions](#), which include diplomatic expulsions, measures targeting companies involved in cyber-espionage and a ban on US banks buying new Russian sovereign debt. Moscow [retaliated swiftly](#) with expulsions of its own. It [accused Britain](#), which publicly applauded the US moves, of lamely dancing to Washington's tune.

Explaining his action, Biden cited a long list of US grievances, most of which originated in the Trump era or before. But as Russia's unrepentant reaction shows, it would be a mistake to think these problems belong to the past. Just as Putin tested Obama in 2014 with his illegal annexation of Crimea, for example, he now tests Biden with a [renewed military build-up](#) on Ukraine's borders.

If anything, Putin's behaviour, judged from a western perspective, grows more aggressive. Whether or not he invades Ukraine, or incites more separatist violence in the Donbas, he has already succeeded, to some extent, in destabilising the democratically elected government in Kiev and highlighting [US-Europe divisions](#) within Nato.

Repressive measures against the [opposition network](#) run by Navalny, who is effectively being tortured in jail, reflect Putin's contempt for open government and human rights concerns. So, too, does his developing alliance with China's autocratic leader, Xi Jinping, who shares his animosity to the west.

Momentum towards dangerous confrontation between the US and its allies, on the one hand, and the authoritarian Chinese and Russian regimes is undoubtedly growing. Biden faces numerous flashpoints, notably Taiwan and the Black Sea. A White House meeting with Japan's prime minister on Friday underscored his efforts to [shore up western defences](#).

Yet Biden is no Ronald Reagan, simplistically bent on vanquishing evil empires. Even as he punished [Russia](#), he invited Putin to a summit on neutral ground to iron out their differences or at least defuse them. "The United States is not looking to kick off a cycle of escalation and conflict with [Russia](#). We want a stable, predictable relationship," he said.

At the same time, John Kerry, Biden's climate envoy, travelled to Shanghai, [seeking enhanced Chinese co-operation](#) ahead of Biden's [global climate summit](#) this week. Disagreements over Hong Kong and Xinjiang were temporarily set aside. Biden's clear-eyed, pragmatic approach, though unsatisfactory in some respects, has the virtue, in theory at least, of avoiding head-on super-state collisions.

Realistically, Putin and Xi are not going to change their ways. The challenge is to find constructive means of working with them while defending western democratic values and security.

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## [Opinion](#) Greensill

# David Cameron and the Greensill scandal is just the tip of the fatberg

[Andrew Rawnsley](#)



The ethics of government need a deep clean. That's not likely to happen when Boris Johnson is prime minister



David Cameron: 'His ability to make a speech was not the reason he was put on the books by Lex Greensill.' Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

David Cameron: 'His ability to make a speech was not the reason he was put on the books by Lex Greensill.' Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

Sun 18 Apr 2021 03.00 EDT

It is in danger of becoming received wisdom that the [Greensill affair](#) is an example of “Tory sleaze” similar to that which polluted the party’s reputation in the late 1990s. They do not compare. I had a ringside seat for the seedy death throes of John Major’s government. The scandals of those years mainly involved hitherto obscure politicians being caught with their peckers out or their snouts in the trough. The tabloids discovered various Conservative MPs in bed with people who were not their wives, often a career-busting transgression then, but now so accepted that Boris Johnson can be prime minister. There were also some notorious cases of Tory backbenchers taking undeclared payments – “cash for questions” – to promote business interests in parliament. This swelled the public’s feeling that the Conservatives had been corrupted by a long stretch in power and contributed to their landslide defeat at the 1997 election, but none of it threw into question the integrity of government itself.

The [Greensill affair](#) is several orders of magnitude more serious. A former prime minister is at the heart of this scandal that points to something rotten about how we are governed and is now embroiling not just politicians, but also the civil service.

Cameron has demonstrated his protections against abuse are as much use as a chocolate fireguard

Guardrails to prevent abuse in the murky world of influence-peddling were supposedly put in place during David Cameron's time as prime minister. So it is one of politics' piquant ironies that he has played such a large role in demonstrating that those protections are as much use as a chocolate fireguard.

He has belatedly issued a "lessons to be learned" [statement](#) about his frantic efforts to bend government policy to suit the commercial needs of his paymasters at Greensill Capital, the collapsed Australian financial services company. At best a half-apology, he included this pompous account of why he was hired.

"My responsibilities included providing geopolitical advice to the leadership, helping to win new business, speaking for the company at conferences and events and helping with plans for international expansion."

Who is he trying to kid – himself or us? I am sure the Greensill board politely nodded along when Mr Cameron offered them the benefit of his "geopolitical" prognostications. I expect they dutifully clapped when he strung together some cliches for company events. But his ability to make a speech was not the reason he was put on the books by Lex Greensill, who had a desk in Number 10 when Mr Cameron lived there and a Downing Street business card with bragging rights that he was an adviser to the prime minister. Everyone on both sides of the equation knows the deal. Those who employ former politicians do so to get access to their networks and use of their inside knowledge of how to navigate the system. They are hired to be a golden swipecard that will open doors in Whitehall and also abroad. Someone once [described this](#) very well. "We all know how it works. The lunches, the hospitality, the quiet word in your ear, the ex-ministers and ex-



advisers for hire, helping big business find the right way to get its way.” That someone was Mr Cameron, speaking shortly before he became prime minister, when he predicted that “the far-too-cosy relationship between politics and money” was “the next big scandal waiting to happen”, though he failed to foresee that he would be at the core of it. Former ministers – and especially former prime ministers – are hired because they can bend the ear of government decision-makers.

In that respect, Mr Cameron tried to earn his corn for [Greensill](#). When its risky business model ran into trouble, he sent fusillades of text messages and emails to Rishi Sunak and other Treasury ministers to persuade them to tweak the rules to allow the company to draw on emergency support for businesses hit by Covid.

Cameron insists it is an exaggeration to say he stood to gain \$60m from share options in Greensill

Mr Cameron is not hard up. He owns three homes that we know of. He can pull more than £100,000 for a speech. He has several well-remunerated roles with other firms. Yet that was apparently not enough to satisfy his gargantuan sense of entitlement. While he insists it is an exaggeration to say he stood to gain \$60m from share options in Greensill, he won't divulge the anticipated payday. Says one senior Tory: “Dave's eyes were out on stalks at the gold on offer.”

This would be a big story if it were only about an avaricious former prime minister wrecking what remained of his Brexit-shattered reputation. What makes it even larger is the illumination being cast on the dark undergrowth of entanglements between commercial interests and government. Conversations with MPs, officials and others suggest to me that Greensill is just the tip of a fatberg. Many MPs and advisers – Mr Cameron being one of them – were corporate lobbyists before they got a perch at Westminster. Many ex-MPs and former advisers work in paid advocacy. This is a very hectic revolving door.

In response to previous scandals, codes were drawn up that supposedly commit ministers and officials not just to avoid conflicts of interests, but

also any appearance of them. Yet it has now [emerged](#) that Bill Crothers, who managed billions of pounds of taxpayers' money as the government's chief procurement officer, remained a senior civil servant while also having an advisory role at Greensill before later becoming one of the company's directors. "I wasn't surprised about David Cameron, because that is the way he ran government. You're a mate. I've got your phone number. Do me a favour. That's how he does business," says one former Tory cabinet minister. "I was shocked that you can be a civil servant and simultaneously have a part-time job with a company. That's genuinely jaw-dropping."

There has long been a pattern of senior mandarins securing a nice earner on retirement by sliding into seats on company boards. The Crothers case, a still active civil servant also having a commercial gig, is at a different level. Mr Crothers's troubling defence is that double-jobbing is "not uncommon" and he had been given the nod by the Cabinet Office. That, he argues, released him from any obligation to seek permission from the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments. [Eric Pickles](#), the former Tory cabinet minister who chairs that toothless watchdog, says his "eyebrows raised the full quarter-inch" when he found out. Most people will have struggled to stop their eyebrows from hitting the ceiling upon learning that a civil servant can moonlight in the private sector. How "not uncommon" is this straddling of the boundary between the public interest and commercial ones? When I asked someone who once held a very senior position at the Cabinet Office how many civil servants had a private sector job on the side, he replied: "I simply don't know. I never thought to ask, because it was so unthinkable."

There are now more than half a dozen [inquiries](#) of various kinds. The government will probably be forced to rewrite some of the rules. The most obvious gaps may be tightened up, such as the loophole that did not require disclosure of Mr Cameron's activities. That was brought to light by enterprising journalism. More rigorous safeguards will be promised. Ex-ministers may be subject to a longer quarantine period before they can lobby government.

[Cameron's 'insurgents' under scrutiny amid row over lobbyist influence](#)  
[Read more](#)

Yet I struggle to believe that there will be a thorough clean-up so long as Boris Johnson is prime minister. Much as he may be relishing the humiliation of “Dave”, a rival since they were at Eton together, anything concerning conflicts of interests asks questions about the current tenant of Number 10. He sees nothing wrong with [Jennifer Arcuri](#) securing financial sponsorship for her business from City Hall when he was mayor of London and they were lovers. We still don’t know the identity of the mystery benefactors who paid for the expensive [makeover](#) of the Downing Street flat. [Robert Jenrick](#) remains seated in the cabinet despite expediting an “unlawful” planning decision that saved Richard Desmond, the property developer and Tory donor, £45m in taxes. The government continues to resist a comprehensive accounting of which friends and contacts of Tory ministers, MPs, peers and advisers were given first-class berths aboard the [Covid-contracts gravy train](#), the crony express. Five months have passed since the resignation of Sir Alex Allan as the invigilator of the ministerial code in protest at Mr Johnson’s [refusal to accept his findings](#) about bullying by Priti Patel. The position of ethics prefect remains vacant, which tells you all you need to know about how much priority the prime minister gives to policing the integrity of his government.

This Augean stable needs mucking out, but it is unlikely that Mr Johnson will be a vigorous shovel.

Andrew Rawnsley is Chief Political Commentator of the Observer

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[Observer notebook](#)New York

# New York deserves better than Andrew Cuomo's towering folly

[Rowan Moore](#)



The state governor seems determined to give the city's famous skyline a lumpy revamp



The area of New York around Penn Station is to be redeveloped and the station itself will be rebuilt. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

The area of New York around Penn Station is to be redeveloped and the station itself will be rebuilt. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Sun 18 Apr 2021 02.15 EDT

Andrew Cuomo, the governor of New York state, is currently resisting calls to resign over allegations of sexual harassment. So what better way to prove that he is definitely not a phallocratic bully than to “ram through”, as one outlet puts it, a [super-tall tower](#) called Penn 15, and a vast development around it?

It's not just that its name reads like the personalised licence plate of an inadequate and not-literate male. It is also that this lumpy object will compete on the New York city skyline with the nearby [Empire State Building](#) – Penn 15 would be bulkier than its famous neighbour and almost as tall. It is part of the Penn District, a proposed “campus” that will rip up several city blocks and replace them with what, on the available evidence, looks like further big lumps swathed in bland and generic design.

The plan's attraction is that it would help pay to rebuild the loathed and labyrinthine Penn Station, which is at its centre. It's a common enough idea,

to cross-subsidise public benefits with commercial profits, but one in which the former can become a hostage to the latter. “If you stop this tower,” tends to be the message, “something terrible might happen to the public transport/affordable housing/public space that you want so much.” But opponents of the scheme should hold their nerve. Their city deserves better than this.

## **Morph the wharf**

[Canary Wharf](#), according to *Wired* magazine, is in trouble. The financial district’s great big office blocks will, it suggests, struggle to adapt to the new world of hybrid working. Which (if true) would not be an entirely terrible thing, except for the site’s owners and shareholders. Cities progress through failure and sometimes bankruptcy. The rich history of Notting Hill and of adjoining districts of west London, for example, came about as a result of overreach by the Victorian speculators who built them, which left abundant and cheap space where immigrant communities could take root and where art and music could flourish.

Now that this richness has become literal riches, Notting Hill being one of the most expensive residential areas in the world, a deserted Canary Wharf could find a new role as the social and cultural incubator of a future London.

## **Protect and serve**

In the southern Brazilian city of Encantado, builders have recently added a head and arms to the armature of a 43-metre-high statue of [Christ the Protector](#), which is five metres more than the famous Christ the Redeemer in Rio de Janeiro. The statue, due for completion later this year, was the idea of the local politician Adroaldo Conzatti, who died last month from Covid-19. The ambition behind it looks impressive, even if it’s not quite clear why you would want to express your faith in this way. But it’s hard not to reflect that Brazil would be better off if its leaders showed a comparable determination to address the pandemic.

## **Old Father Thames**



As 13 months of lockdown hopefully ease, I'd like to express my gratitude to the Thames. It's a mile from my home – the broad, un-bridged lower part where you begin to get a sniff of the sea. Its tides are marvels, barrelling upriver in their twice-daily flirtation with catastrophe – it seems impossible that all that water won't overflow. It has beaches. You can even sunbathe on them. When the rest of the city disappears into winter morning mists, the river feels like the last place left on Earth. It is a precious aid to sanity. If it feels as if I'm living near a wonder of the world, it's because I am.

- Rowan Moore is the Observer's architecture correspondent

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[Observer comment cartoon](#)  
[Conservatives](#)

# Tory sleaze: business as usual – cartoon

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[The weekly stats uncovered](#) **Coronavirus**

## Which countries have fared worst in the pandemic?

[David Spiegelhalter](#) and [Anthony Masters](#)

The ‘league table’ is changing and it’s not over yet



Maria Van Kerkhove: ‘We are in a critical point of the Covid-19 pandemic now.’ Photograph: Martial Trezzini/AP

Maria Van Kerkhove: ‘We are in a critical point of the Covid-19 pandemic now.’ Photograph: Martial Trezzini/AP

Sun 18 Apr 2021 01.45 EDT

Last April, one of us (DS) wrote an [article](#) saying it was too soon to compare how lethal the pandemic had been in different countries. Nearly a year later, has the time come?

Unfortunately, countries have different ways of counting; [Sciensano](#) in Belgium counts both suspected and confirmed deaths from Covid-19, while

Hungary counts only hospital deaths within lab confirmation. So the [Office for National Statistics](#) ignores these labels and just looks at excess mortality compared with the 2015-2019 average, standardising the figures to a “standard European” population, so accounting for differences in population size and age structure.

When it did this last June, England topped the table with the highest “relative age-standardised mortality rate” (7%) among 21 European countries. In Spain and Italy, the epidemic in spring 2020 was like an explosion, with an epicentre with the blast dissipating outwards. For England, the mortality impact was broader, longer and more equal across the country, so of the 20 areas in Europe with the highest peaks in excess mortality, only four were in England (Brent, Enfield, Ealing and Thurrock). At that time, [Scotland](#) was third (5%) behind Spain (6%).

But by the end of the year, positions had changed. Poland, which did not see increased mortality in the spring, suffered large fatalities from October onwards and now topped the table (total relative rate of 12%), with Spain second (11%). Other eastern European countries also endured outbreaks in autumn and winter and [England](#) and Scotland had fallen to seventh (8%) and 10th (6%) respectively in this macabre league table.

This year has seen a steady decline in deaths in the UK, while the Covid death rate in Italy and France is 10 times that of the UK. Vaccines are racing against the virus and Dr Maria Van Kerkhove of the World Health Organization [has said](#): “We are in a critical point of the Covid-19 pandemic now.”

So it’s still too soon to say where we will end up in the final rankings, but whatever happens we will have done badly.

David Spiegelhalter is chair of the Winton Centre for Risk and Evidence Communication at Cambridge. Anthony Masters is statistical ambassador for the Royal Statistical Society

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

# If Boris Johnson has his way, a woman's work will truly never be done

[Catherine Bennett](#)



Once finally retired, female carers are the PM's choice when it comes to looking after aged parents





‘Is Matt Hancock familiar with the works of Anita Brookner?’ Anna Massey in the 1986 BBC TV version of Hotel du Lac. Photograph: Ronald Grant Archive

‘Is Matt Hancock familiar with the works of Anita Brookner?’ Anna Massey in the 1986 BBC TV version of Hotel du Lac. Photograph: Ronald Grant Archive

Sun 18 Apr 2021 02.45 EDT

Did we miss it? No, of the “clear plan” an incoming Boris Johnson [promised](#) within 12 months, thus differentiating his resolve from the way social care funding had been “shirked by governments for about 30 years”, there is still no sign. Nor of promised cross-party talks.

Although to be fair, [Matt Hancock](#), the health secretary, did ask every single MP and peer for any social care hints or hacks they might have – excluding the thrifty tip, inexplicably omitted from [Andrew Dilnot’s 2011 report](#), that where possible, middle-aged men restrict their relationships to future care-givers at least a decade younger than themselves. This is already being [trialled](#).

Happily, with clear plan formulation now looking as imminent as quite shortly, an academic study has just introduced policymakers to an actual

strategy, one potentially controversial, but well tested and with some illustrious exponents – is Hancock familiar with the work of Anita Brookner? The brilliant art historian who, only after she had cared for her parents in their decline, went on to build a parallel career as a prolific, Booker-winning novelist? Some of her best fiction addressed the lot of promising but not particularly young women who resign themselves, seeing no decent alternative, to the unpaid care of elderly parents.

“How many more nights,” the heroine of *A Start in Life*, an academic, asks herself, “would she have to undress her mother, only to dress her again in the morning? Would she soon have to wash her, to bathe her, to feed her? Was there any way in which this could be avoided? Apparently there was not.” Basically, that’s the new idea: assume all women will care intensively for their parents, unpaid.

Or it would be if only successive governments hadn’t extended women’s retirement age with as little thought for the ramifications in unpaid care (given the [disproportionate female contribution](#)) as they gave to the cost to a host of women denied fair warning of their redeployment.

Last week, the Royal Economic Society conference attracted media interest in a [paper](#) advertised as “Downsides of Postponed Retirement: UK evidence of reduced informal care support for parents and greater pressures on the NHS”. For the benefit of [Daily Mail](#) readers, this translated as: “State picks up £5,600 bill for the caring of elderly relatives that could have been covered by women if they were not still working.”

This coverage duly generated useful online outrage of “the 50s called, they’d like their headline back” variety including, pithily, from Mandu Reid, leader of the Women’s Equality party and a candidate for mayor of London: “[Say hello to patriarchy](#) and structural sexism on steroids.” A look at the original research suggests, however, that the *Mail* had no need to put its signature patriarchal twist on [findings](#) elsewhere entitled “Should I Care or Should I Work? The Impact of Working in Older Age on Caregiving.”

Leaving aside the economic jargon (“an altruistic caregiver embeds the health status of the care-recipient into her own utility function”), this bizarre contribution probably does have its uses as an illustration of the mood in

around 1893, when the publication of George Gissing's *The Odd Women* featured some startling new notions about women and paid work, women and financial dependency, women as natural carers. There really were people, once, who thought, like the current scholars, of women's paid labour as an unhelpful deflection from their true purpose, as angels in the home. Or – once it's embedded into their utility function – that of their parents.

‘Parents who receive less help from their daughter do not receive more help from other family members or formal services as a counterbalance,’ the new study establishes. The remedy, we discover, is to work with, rather than confront, such evidence that caring for elderly parents is an activity widely considered, unlike, say, childcare or teaching, so congenitally unsuited to the majority of men as to make their conscription not just arduous but unnatural. The authors ponder what would help dutiful daughters who are now compelled, like sons, to work until 66, better to emulate the pension sacrifices of an Anita Brookner heroine. Or, failing that, at least to carry on subsidising the UK's [cash-starved](#) statutory care, which in turn continues, contrary to [official guidelines](#), to factor into an elderly person's care eligibility any unpaid or “informal” help. What about, they suggest, improvements to the maximum £67.60 [a week carer's allowance](#)?

And further signalling which sex is expected to keep the UK's elderly population alive, a proposal whose impact on the gender pay gap is therefore presumably justified: “Optimal welfare may also require alternative policies such as work flexibility laws that enable women to combine demanding jobs with caring responsibilities.” Maybe there will never be an end to obituaries regretting, like recent tributes to the great Shirley Williams, how family duties smothered a woman's ambition.

In a [2018 report](#) sponsored by Age UK, the Social Market Foundation cited sex differences in the provision and extent of unpaid care, the stress and financial cost involved, and soaring demand from an ageing population, including from the many people with no children, before urging the government not to continue to rely on families to deliver social care. “It would be dangerously complacent for policymakers to assume there is an infinite supply of wonderful people able and willing to provide informal care for their loved ones,” [said Caroline Abrahams](#), charity director at Age UK.

In which case, especially since the majority of these wonderful people are female, it is natural to think a government of Johnson's would never assume anything else. Even as he made his unfulfilled promise, Johnson came close to floating the Anita Brookner scheme. "Should families be looking after their elderly relatives?" [he said](#), promptly answering himself in the affirmative: "To what extent?"

Has anyone told his daughters?

Catherine Bennett is an Observer columnist

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## The shifting patterns of EnglishThe Hundred

# May I have a word about... the language of cricket

Jonathan Bouquet

Turning wickets into ‘outs’ and batsmen into ‘batters’ makes the Hundred even less appealing



Jason Roy and Sam Curran of Oval Invincibles at the launch of the Hundred in 2019. Photograph: Charlie Crowhurst/Getty Images for ECB

Jason Roy and Sam Curran of Oval Invincibles at the launch of the Hundred in 2019. Photograph: Charlie Crowhurst/Getty Images for ECB

Sun 18 Apr 2021 01.30 EDT

What for you has been the most noteworthy event of the week? The [Greensill](#) lobbying rumpus? The eulogies to [Prince Philip](#)? Russian sabre-rattling in [Ukraine](#)? For some of us, these pale into insignificance alongside the pronouncement that when cricket's newfangled competition, [the](#)

[Hundred](#), starts, the word “wicket” is to be replaced by “out” and that “batsmen” will become “batters” (the latter term is insidiously prevalent among some commentators already). Many people, from the great and the good to Simon Heffer, have commented on the Americanisation of the greatest of games. Indeed, not since Dennis Lillee walked to the wicket (I think I can still use the word in this context) in Perth in 1979 carrying an [aluminium bat](#) has it known such a furore. I think rather than fulminating further, we should rise above it and treat the Hundred with the disdain it deserves. After all, it’s simply not cricket.

I wrote in my last column about the [pluralisation of words](#), in particular “musics”, and received a sympathetic message from Nick Chadwick of Oxford, who also alerted me to a musical conference called “Envoicing the Other”. He, like me, is thoroughly bewildered by “envoicing”, for, as he says, there is no such verb and he suspects a surfeit of academic clever dickery. I can only concur.

The other great kerfuffle of the week was that certain universities are now [overlooking mistakes](#) in students’ written English. The University of the Arts London has issued guidelines telling staff they should “actively accept spelling, grammar or other language mistakes that do not significantly impede communication unless the brief states that formally accurate language is a requirement”. I would have thought proper spelling would enhance communication. Yet more academic clever dickery, I suspect. Anyway, over and out.

Jonathan Bouquet is an Observer columnist

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[Names in the news](#) **Mark Zuckerberg**

# Mark Zuckerberg, the modern Bond villain, is now coming for your children

[Rebecca Nicholson](#)



Instagram for kids? If the billionaire catches them early, he'll have them for life





Mark Zuckerberg: the bottom line is everything. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Mark Zuckerberg: the bottom line is everything. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Sat 17 Apr 2021 10.00 EDT

As terrible ideas go, Instagram for kids is up there with lunchbox lager and power tools for toddlers. In March, [Buzzfeed reported on](#) Facebook's plans to develop a product for those too young to sign up to Instagram officially, as the platform requires users to be at least 13.

A company post cited "youth work as a priority for Instagram", which sounds sinister even from the empire of [Mark Zuckerberg](#), whose mission in life is seemingly to make Bond villains appear cuddly. Facebook says it will allow the company to focus on privacy and safety for children.

Last week, an international [coalition of children's health advocates](#), brought together by the Boston-based, non-profit Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, disagreed and wrote an [open letter](#) to Zuckerberg urging the company to drop its plans. "While collecting valuable family data and cultivating a new generation of Instagram users may be good for Facebook's bottom line, it will likely increase the use of Instagram by young children

who are particularly vulnerable to the platform's manipulative and exploitative features," it said.

Heart emoji, thumbs-up emoji. The ethical issues involved are vast and mindboggling; one can only wonder how targeted advertising would work for users with no income, though I'm sure Nick Clegg will be on hand to mount a robust defence. There is something quietly devastating about giving children a platform that deliberately thrives on self-consciousness in its many insidious forms. Maybe it is naive of me to expect that children will have any period of freedom from wondering "but how will it/I look?", but surely we should at least try to maintain that for as long as possible.

I am an adult and I know Instagram is bad for me. It manipulates me into buying things I don't care about, makes me compare myself unfavourably to other people and wastes a colossal amount of time. Yet I still use it daily. And my complaints are minor; last week, Instagram said it had fixed a "[mistake](#)" in its new search functionality that recommended search terms such as "appetite suppressants" and "fasting" to users with eating disorders.

Many of my friends have deleted the app and check it only on their desktops, because they don't trust themselves not to fall into the endless scroll. Perhaps children do have more self-control but we shouldn't be asking them to show it.

**Tom Rhodes: MasterChef was a triumph, even without all the trimmings**



Tom Rhodes: cook supreme. Photograph: Production/BBC/Shine TV

After refreshing a search for “MasterChef final when on” almost hourly since the weekend, we were finally served us up the last course of the series on Wednesday, the BBC having postponed it for several days following the death of Prince Philip. The winner, Tom Rhodes, fully deserved his crown, even though his olive oil ice-cream dessert, with salt and an added drizzle of oil, was the very definition of having to take the judges’ word for it.

Before the competition, Rhodes had been a restaurant manager at a Newcastle branch of Nando’s and he said that while furloughed he decided to take a chance on applying for MasterChef. It seems remarkable that he was only an amateur cook, given the level of his talent, and it felt neat that he won a series filmed during Covid.

The usual MasterChef tasks lean heavily on a functional, thriving restaurant industry, which meant they had to be tweaked and adjusted. There was no cooking for crowds of workers in canteens or customers in fancy dining establishments, and certainly no trip to glamorous locations to try making the local cuisine. The contestants did, however, have to cook for critics and chefs, again and again, which I think made it a far tougher challenge.

To make a series of MasterChef this entertaining during such unsettled times was deeply impressive. Much as I enjoyed the adapted version, I hope that, for the industry's sake, the next series involves cooking for punters and, for the viewers' sake, that contestants stop trying to cook do a rack of lamb in the space of an hour.

## **Yuh-Jung Yoon: now that was what I call an acceptance speech**



Yuh-Jung Yoon: gracious in victory. Photograph: BAFTA/Reuters

Ordinarily, the film [Baftas](#) tend to tee up the Oscars and can be a predictable red carpet opportunity for the usual suspects but, as with most occasions in 2021, this year's ceremony did not quite stick to the plan. It might have been the vague air of scrappiness – can somebody check if the wifi router in Hollywood needs turning off and on again? – or it might have been the fact that there were some genuine surprise winners, but I felt more fondly towards the [Baftas](#) this year than I have for a long time.

As it was largely Zoom-based, with an exception made for in-person presenters, including my new favourite stand-up comedian Hugh Grant, there was a slight delay between a winner's name being called and the recipient hearing it, which emphasised the shock, and was oddly delightful.

But the speech given by Yuh-Jung Youn, who won best supporting actress for her role in *Minari*, stole the evening. “Every award is meaningful, but this one, especially to be recognised by British people, known as very snobbish people – they approve me as a good actor, so I’m very very happy,” she said. This should set the bar for all acceptance speeches from now on.

Rebecca Nicholson is an Observer columnist

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## [Observer letters](#)[Northern Ireland](#)

# Letters: Boris Johnson is lying to the DUP and to himself

Northern Ireland will be beset by violence and unrest until the prime minister accepts the reality of the protocol



A loyalist protester opposed to the Northern Ireland protocol on Brexit at Stormont, Belfast. Photograph: Peter Morrison/AP

A loyalist protester opposed to the Northern Ireland protocol on Brexit at Stormont, Belfast. Photograph: Peter Morrison/AP

Sun 18 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

Jonathan Powell reminded us of Boris Johnson's pledge to the DUP that he would never agree to a border in the Irish Sea, only to do precisely that when he negotiated the Northern Ireland protocol to "get Brexit done" ("[Peace in Northern Ireland is in danger – Johnson's lies and inaction offer no help](#)", Comment). Loyalists in Northern Ireland feel betrayed and we are witnessing the consequences playing out in rising anger and violence. The



protocol is now enshrined in legislation and all interested parties have an obligation to make it work in order to reduce the tensions it is causing.

However, there is one stumbling block: Johnson's stubborn refusal to admit that there is an effective trade border in the Irish Sea. In addition to lying to the DUP, he continues to lie to himself. Until Johnson accepts the reality of what the protocol means in practice, and stops playing cowardly political games, there is little chance of making it work as it should and the unrest will continue.

**Mike Pender**

Cardiff

Jonathan Powell is right to draw attention to the many causes of rioting in Belfast, but he neglects to mention some of the flaws in the architecture of the Good Friday agreement, chiefly that it reinforces a voting system based on a sectarian head count in order to push the more extreme parties into the forced marriage of a compulsory coalition.

One might expect the UK Labour party, to which I belong, to be at the forefront of arguing for measures to counter the social and economic disadvantage Powell identifies, but it does not let our own members in [Northern Ireland](#) stand for election. This is defended on the disingenuous grounds that having the odd Labour councillor in Newry or Armagh would prevent it taking a non-partisan position at Westminster. Neocolonialism or just hypocrisy?

**Tom Wylie**

Oxford

## **Pity us republicans**

You might be right that Prince Philip “deserves respect and acclaim for the positive impact he had on Britain” (“[For the Queen, a beloved partner. For the nation, a fine servant](#)”, Editorial). Surely, however, those of us who find everything about the royal family anachronistic and embarrassing are also entitled to be heard. The BBC shut down its complaints page about the blanket coverage of the Duke of Edinburgh's death, despite being bombarded with complaints.



Maybe it is the fate of the many republicans, like myself, to have to endure being gaslit by the BBC about our supposed love of all things royal, especially while we have a populist Conservative prime minister and a frightened corporation.

**Joe McCarthy**

Dublin

## **Australia's stranded citizens**

Robin McKie points to the example of Australia and its success in containing coronavirus by rapid closure of its borders ("[Is vaccination enough? What we can learn from other countries](#)", News). Before we look down under in admiration, however, we should be aware that there are still tens of thousands of Australians stranded abroad since last year, after the country brought in a strict quota policy for arrivals from abroad.

One couple I know, visiting in February 2020 to see family here, suffered a flight cancellation home and were then caught by the quota. They are still in the UK. They have run out of money and visa time, and are dependent on the overstretched resources of the NHS. A group of stranded citizens have now taken matters into their own hands and are taking a case to the UN human rights committee. I am amazed that this part of the Australian government policy has not received more publicity; I don't think I would want to live in a country that wouldn't let me come home.

**Judith Anderson**

Bath

## **Make yourself comfrey**

James Wong is right to say that plants "mainly require nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium" as fertiliser, but doesn't mention comfrey "tea" ("[Some home truths about DIY fertilisers](#)", Magazine). The comfrey plant draws up essential minerals and transfers them to its leaves. Cut these as they grow and let them decompose in a perforated container that is placed in another, or directly over the rain butt. Dilute the resultant liquid 1:10 and water everything, especially tomatoes. Lay the stalks between rows of potatoes to extract the maximum goodness and enjoy watching bees feed on the flowers.

I wish I had a £1 for every time I've given this advice to new plot-holders on the allotment.

**Harold Mozley**

York

## **So much for a caring society**

As the father of a young adult with Down's syndrome, I firmly support Barbara Ellen's concern about contributions to care being increased ([“What kind of society leaves a disabled person with £3 a day?”](#), Comment). My son received two disability premiums in addition to his standard benefit. Immediately, the entirety of these premiums was swallowed up in the contribution to his care from the local authority. The result was a rise of just over 20% in the proportion of his overall benefit which now goes towards that contribution.

In the interests of developing his level of independence, he has moved to supported living. Finances are a key element in being able to do this but this laudable aim has been frustrated by this unfair decision. Two letters sent to the Department of Health and Social Care met with no response; they are “not currently dealing with individual enquiries”. This seems to be a denial of democratic accountability.

**David Welch**

Merley, Wimborne, Dorset

## **The value of faint praise**

Tim Adams's piece reminded me of the life-enhancing influence of strictly rationed praise ([Notebook](#), Comment). In 1949, at my very selective school, I competed in the under-14 instrumental class in the inter-house music competition. My then form master, the relentlessly austere and unbending Mr Bridge (nephew of the composer Frank Bridge), had donated the Bridge Cup, awarded to the winning house. I duly played my piece on the violin in front of the assembled school. As I returned to my place, Mr Bridge beckoned to me with crooked finger. “Hitchin!” he growled. “Now what have I done?” I thought, inwardly quaking. Then he said: “I've heard worse.” I made my way back to my seat walking on air. I've never forgotten

that moment.

**David Hitchin**

Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire

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

# For the record

This week's corrections

Sun 18 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

The decision not to prosecute republican leaders who attended a funeral for Bobby Storey, a former head of intelligence of the IRA, while Covid restrictions were in place was made by the Public Prosecution Service in Northern Ireland, not the Police Service of Northern Ireland, as an opinion piece said ([“Peace in Northern Ireland is in danger – Johnson’s lies and inaction offer no help”](#), 11 April, page 43).

An article about the easing of lockdown (“Scientists warn: virus hotspots could lead to third Covid wave”, 11 April, page 1) said the UK was “poised to lift many Covid restrictions on Monday” and went on to mention how food and drink could be served outside, “while non-essential retailers will reopen, along with gyms, hairdressers, spas, libraries and community centres”. It should have made clear that this was a reference to changes from 12 April in England only.

The surname of the scientist and BBC broadcaster Maggie Aderin-Pocock was misspelled as “Alderin-Pockcock” ([“No 10 rewrote ‘independent’ report on race, experts claim”](#), 11 April, page 12).

We miscaptioned the photograph that accompanied a commentary ([“Full pubs are a sign of communities that work. Let’s toast their return”](#), 11 April, page 28). It did not show “a bustling scene in London’s Soho last month”. The picture was taken in 2014.

Homophone corner: “But I do think children today are given more reign to be themselves.” ([“This much I know”](#), 11 April, Magazine, page 6).

*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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## Headlines saturday 17 april 2021

- [Lobbying Cameron's 'insurgents' under scrutiny amid row over influence](#)
- [Greensill Inquiry chairman on board of bank linked to Tory party](#)
- [Cheshire Council pauses deal to sell land to Lex Greensill](#)
- [Role call The Tory ministers who found private sector jobs](#)

## Politics

# Cameron's 'insurgents' under scrutiny amid row over lobbyist influence

At least four senior civil servants were allowed to keep second jobs in private sector between 2010-15



John Manzoni, chief executive of the civil service, was allowed to keep a non-executive company director job for seven months. Photograph: Facundo Arrizabalaga/EPA-EFE

John Manzoni, chief executive of the civil service, was allowed to keep a non-executive company director job for seven months. Photograph: Facundo Arrizabalaga/EPA-EFE

[\*Rajeev Syal\*](#) and [\*Peter Walker\*](#)

Sat 17 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

Among experienced civil servants, they were jokingly referred to as “the insurgents” – a group of executives lured from the private sector by David

Cameron's government to shake up Whitehall.

But now that same group is under intense scrutiny amid a growing row about the influence of lobbyists and business on senior Cabinet Office officials once held up as impartial and untouchable.

At least four of the senior civil servants brought in by former Cabinet Office minister [Francis Maude](#) between 2010 and 2015 are among those who were allowed to keep second jobs in the private sector, it has emerged this week.

The revelation that Bill Crothers, a former head of Whitehall procurement, became an adviser to the finance firm [Greensill](#) Capital in 2015 while still working in the civil service caused criticism and fuelled fears that other mandarins may have been paid for external roles that could present a conflict of interest.

John Manzoni, chief executive of the civil service, was allowed to keep a £100,000-a-year job for seven months as a non-executive director for the drinks company SABMiller. He was brought in to Whitehall by Maude in February 2014, before being swiftly promoted.

A third senior civil servant, Stephen Kelly, joined the government as adviser to the commercial management board from the private sector in September 2010. He then took on a salaried civil service role as the government's chief operating officer in September 2012 and was also head of the Cabinet Office's Efficiency Reform Group. Between December 2010 and November 2012, he was director of three tech companies, Companies House records show. Kelly told the Telegraph he was not remunerated for any of the roles.

Then on Thursday the Guardian disclosed that the former Morgan Stanley banker David Brierwood was brought into government as an adviser during Cameron's administration in 2014, the same year Greensill's founder Lex Greensill apparently took on a similar role as crown representative. Two months later, Brierwood was recruited to join Greensill Capital's board as a director.

As criticism mounted over Crothers' dual roles, and their approval by the Cabinet Office, Maude launched a staunch defence not just of the former



procurement chief but his fellow incoming directors.

“I gathered together a collection of the best commercial directors from around Whitehall and he was one of them. He was one of the capable commercial directors who had a big contribution to make by saving taxpayers’ money,” Maude said. It is understood that Crothers had sought permission from Manzoni before taking up the Greensill post.

After the coalition government was formed in 2010, Maude was given the Cabinet Office brief and threw himself into it with zeal, ex-colleagues recollect. The former shadow chancellor appeared to have something to prove. Overlooked for a great office of state, his was a non-voting cabinet post, but Cameron had given him a free reforming hand.

Maude assembled a team of people around him, including Simone Finn – who is now Boris Johnson’s deputy chief of staff and was managing director of the advisory firm [Francis Maude](#) Associates – and Henry Newman, currently a special adviser in No 10.

Maude let it be known that their arrival was part of a plan to bring in new blood with experience of the markets to transform Cabinet Office working methods and streamline costs. The reforms included overhauling the commercial function of government, establishing the Major Projects Authority and setting up the Government Digital Service.

But then came the snag: how does a government lure highly paid private sector executives during an austerity programme where they are paid so much more than civil servants?

Part of the answer, or so former colleagues allege, was for someone within government to dispose of the previous convention that civil servants should not take private sector second jobs.

It also seems to have been done with the full knowledge of the department. When the Guardian pointed out in 2014 that Manzoni was still being paid to work for SABMiller, the Cabinet Office released a statement saying he could keep his role because the government was satisfied it was not a conflict of interest.

Dave Penman, the head of the FDA union which represents senior civil servants, said that the government was caught in a bind: it wanted to bring in big-hitting executives while sticking by an austerity pledge to hold down public sector pay.

“The approach of government at that time was defined by two contradictory obsessions, greater commercial skills – mainly being brought in from the private sector – and restricting public sector pay. Government had champagne tastes, but lemonade money.

“It was inevitable then that those who came in from the private sector, taking huge pay cuts, would be moving back there once they’d gained some public sector experience and that they would want to retain some of those commercial interests and connections,” he said.

Their “insurgents” nickname was coined because of the new recruits’ apparent fervour as they sought to transform Whitehall’s methods. There were, at times, clashes between senior staff.

One insider said: “Maude’s team and the insurgents were on a mission and were forcing through changes at a rapid pace. The civil service culture inevitably clashed with a more aggressive City culture, and it was not always pretty.”

Crothers, a Belfast-born accountant who had previously worked for the outsourcing firm Accenture, was known to employ a particularly bullish attitude towards suppliers he believed were ripping off taxpayers.

Following one row with the tech firm Hewlett-Packard over charges which Crothers decided were too high, global executives from the US-based firm complained, forcing Sir Jeremy Heywood, the former cabinet secretary, to smooth over tensions. “No one minded – Bill was doing his job,” a source said.

Other veterans of the coalition era recall a wider culture of close links to business. Ed Davey, now the Liberal Democrats leader, who was energy secretary alongside the [Conservatives](#) from 2012 to 2015, said significant lobbying went on.

One example, Davey said, was the then-head of British Gas, Sam Laidlaw. “You got a sense he was in and out of No 10. He’d come and talk to me as energy secretary, I’d tell him ‘no’ over something, and he’d clearly go to Tory ministers – you’d hear the arguments coming back to me two weeks later from the ministers,” said Davey.

It was also clear that senior civil servants talked to business, Davey added. “When I called for the break-up of British Gas I hadn’t told them, and deliberately, because I knew they would have tried to stop me.”

Many in Whitehall remain shocked by the disclosures and await results which will shed light on whether there has been a major change in culture since Cameron’s premiership.

Penman said there has been a fundamental shift since then – “they went from being an austerity government to a spending government following Brexit, so the pressure to save money whilst hiring people with particular skills has subsided” – but Johnson’s government will be braced for revelations that bring the lobbying and revolving doors scandal even closer to home.

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## Greensill

# Greensill inquiry chairman sits on board of private bank linked to Tory party

Questions raised over Nigel Boardman's appointment given role at Arbutnot Banking Group, which also employs former civil servants



The supply chain lender Greensill Capital, which collapsed last month, recruited a number of political heavyweights and Westminster officials, including former prime minister David Cameron. Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

The supply chain lender Greensill Capital, which collapsed last month, recruited a number of political heavyweights and Westminster officials, including former prime minister David Cameron. Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

[Kalyeena Makortoff](#) *Banking correspondent*  
[@kalyeena](#)

Fri 16 Apr 2021 13.16 EDT

The man appointed by Boris Johnson [to rule over the Greensill lobbying scandal](#) is on the board of a private bank that has close ties with the Conservative party and has a number of former civil servants in its ranks, the Guardian can reveal.

The position held by Nigel Boardman with Arbuthnot [Banking](#) Group has raised concerns among anti-corruption campaigners that his inquiry could be undermined by the perception of bias.

The bank specialises in managing money for the wealthy and is chaired and majority owned by one of the largest donors to the Tory party, and one of its former treasurers, Sir Henry Angest. Arbuthnot has also stacked its boardroom with former government staffers, including the former British ambassador Christopher Meyer, the former Tory MP and Treasury minister Angela Knight, and – until January – Baroness Finn.

George Havenhand, a senior legal researcher at anti-corruption campaign group Spotlight on Corruption, questioned Boardman's ability to independently scrutinise [Greensill](#) Capital's influence on government officials, given his own links to Arbuthnot, which has also recruited a number of former public servants.

“As a director and shareholder in a bank that itself has deep political affiliations and is riddled with the revolving door, we have real concerns that Boardman is too close to the industry to be truly objective and independent in this investigation,” Havenhand said. Boardman currently holds about 11,345 shares in Arbuthnot, worth around £132,204.

[Role call: the former ministers who found private sector jobs](#)  
[Read more](#)

“We have serious concerns that the appointment of Nigel Boardman to lead the inquiry into the use of supply chain finance in government was done in haste and without appropriate assessment of potential conflicts of interest, whether perceived or actual,” Havenhand added.

The Cabinet Office denied that there was any conflict of interest.

The [Greensill Capital lobbying scandal](#) has raised concerns over the way private businesses are able to use former officials to try gain preferential access to government contracts.

The supply chain lender, which collapsed last month, recruited a number of political heavyweights and Westminster officials, including the former prime minister David Cameron, former home secretary David Blunkett, former homelessness tsar Dame Louise Casey and the government's former chief commercial officer [Bill Crothers](#). There is no suggestion of wrongdoing by the Greensill appointees.

[Greensill lobbying scandal: the full list of inquiries](#)  
[Read more](#)

The scandal was prompted by revelations that Cameron had lobbied a string of Whitehall officials last year – including texting the chancellor, Rishi Sunak – in hopes of securing Greensill access to the UK's largest emergency Covid loans scheme, which would have involved bending the rules.

He also took its founder, Lex Greensill, [to a “private drink”](#) with Matt Hancock, the health secretary, in 2019 to promote the company's wage advance app, Earnd, for use in the NHS.

On Tuesday, it emerged that Crothers had joined Greensill [while remaining a civil servant](#) – in a move sanctioned by the Cabinet Office. The news prompted alarm within No 10, and concerns were raised further on Thursday that [a second Cabinet Office adviser](#), David Brierwood, had been hired by Greensill while still working inside Whitehall.



Nigel Boardman, a partner at law firm Slaughter and May. Photograph: Micha Theiner/Cityam/REX/Shutterstock

Meanwhile, one of Arbuthnot's former advisers, Lawrence Weiss, simultaneously worked as a non-executive director of UK Export Finance – a government credit agency – until he resigned from the advisory role in September 2020. It adds to the growing list of government officials facing scrutiny for straddling public and private sector interests.

The shadow chancellor of the duchy of Lancaster, Rachel Reeves, said: "Claims that the Boardman investigation is independent are lying in tatters.

"The more that serious questions like these emerge about Boardman, the more it looks like the Conservatives are set on glossing over cronyism in their ranks, so they can carry on like nothing has happened."

Boardman's investigation, [announced on Monday](#), will look at the development and use of supply chain finance offered by Greensill, and its associated activities in government.

Arbuthnot Banking Group, which appointed Boardman as a director in mid-2019, is also known for providing financial support to the Tory party. It has made combined donations worth at least £412,975 to the party and its members, including David Davis and Dominic Raab, since 2005, according

to Electoral Commission records. Angest, its chief executive and chairman, has been a major supporter, [offering at least £7m in loans and donations.](#)

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The Cabinet Office said in a statement: “Nigel Boardman is a distinguished legal expert and he was asked to lead this review following his own declaration of interests. It would be wrong to suggest there is a conflict of interest.

“The review will examine the facts thoroughly.”

An Arbuthnot Banking Group spokesman said: “As one of the leading corporate solicitors of his generation with deep financial services experience and having served as a partner of Slaughter & May for nearly four decades, the value he provides to the bank and its governance should be self-evident.

“Separately, Arbuthnot Banking Group’s political donations are entirely appropriate and are a matter of public record.”

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## Greensill

# Cheshire council pauses deal to sell land to Lex Greensill

Auditors are to review all aspects of the transaction in light of the Westminster lobbying row



Lex Greensill. The council is acting because of the ‘high level of public interest in [his] relationship with central government’. Photograph: Ian Tuttle/Rex

Lex Greensill. The council is acting because of the ‘high level of public interest in [his] relationship with central government’. Photograph: Ian Tuttle/Rex

[Helen Pidd](#) *North of England editor*

Fri 16 Apr 2021 13.19 EDT

A council in the north-west of England has paused a deal to sell 500-acres of local authority-owned farmland to Lex [Greensill](#) owing to the Westminster

lobbying row surrounding his firm.

The Labour-run Cheshire West and [Chester](#) council approved the sale in February but on Friday the chief executive said auditors would review the transaction to ensure it acted with “integrity”.

As [first reported by the BBC](#), Greensill secured the deal after telling councillors that he planned to create a “a thriving environment of wildlife habitats and natural features” by planting new woodlands, wildflower and grassland meadows and by restoring ancient hedgerows and watercourses.

He began developing proposals in 2019 to buy part of the council’s Shotwick Park farm estate near his home in the village of Saughall near Chester.

The council approved the sale for an undisclosed sum earlier this year, on the condition that there would be public access to the land.

The council’s chief executive, Andrew Lewis, said the “high level of public interest in Mr Greensill’s relationship with central government” had led him to ask the authority’s internal auditors to review “all aspects of the transaction”, the BBC reported.

“The council has acted with full transparency and integrity in its relationship with Mr Greensill and his agents, and we have received no evidence or suggestions otherwise,” he said.

Lewis said the review was intended to “assure our residents that best value has been secured, and that the steps taken by the council at every stage in the transaction demonstrate integrity, due diligence and good governance”.

The authority said it had also “sought assurances” from Greensill that his “commitment” to the plan was “unaffected” by his firm going into administration last month, [with the loss of 440 jobs](#), most of them in Cheshire.

The collapse of Greensill Capital and the extent of its lobbying operation are [now the subject of a number of inquiries](#), including independent and parliamentary investigations.

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## Greensill

# Role call: the former ministers who found private sector jobs

The Greensill affair shows how some of David Cameron's appointees have been among the most enthusiastic corporate jobseekers. Here's the list...



David Cameron (left) and George Osborne make a speech during the EU referendum campaign in 2016. Photograph: Daniel Leal-Olivas/AFP via Getty Images

David Cameron (left) and George Osborne make a speech during the EU referendum campaign in 2016. Photograph: Daniel Leal-Olivas/AFP via Getty Images

[Rob Davies](#) and [Georgina Quach](#)

Fri 16 Apr 2021 11.15 EDT

David Cameron's lobbying efforts on behalf of his employer Greensill Capital have shone a spotlight on the often lucrative corporate work on offer

to former cabinet members and junior ministers with valuable experience of government and a bulging contacts book.

While the former prime minister's overtures to serving ministers are unusual in that they prompted an [unprecedented formal inquiry](#), there is nothing new about senior politicians taking private sector jobs after they leave office. Indeed, some of Cameron's closest allies and cabinet appointees have been among the most enthusiastic corporate jobseekers.

## George Osborne

### **Last cabinet job: chancellor of the exchequer**

Osborne has taken at least 10 private sector jobs since leaving office, including a [£650,000-a-year role with BlackRock](#), the world's largest fund manager, and the [editorship of the Evening Standard](#). He abandoned most of his broad employment portfolio earlier this year to concentrate on [being a full-time banker](#) with Robey Warshaw.

## Philip Hammond

### **Last cabinet job: chancellor of the exchequer**

Before Hammond was Theresa May's chancellor, he was Cameron's foreign secretary. After leaving the House of Commons in 2019, he sought advice from the government's advisory committee on business appointments (Acoba) before accepting more than a dozen positions. He became a partner at the energy investment firm Buckthorn, an [adviser to the banking startup OakNorth](#) and a non-executive at the packaging company Ardagh. His own consultancy, Matrix Partners, has worked for the Kuwait Investment Office, Canary Wharf Group and the Japanese bank Nomura.

## Nick Clegg

### **Last cabinet job: deputy prime minister**

The former deputy PM [joined Facebook as its head of global public affairs](#) in 2018, moving to Silicon Valley for the role. According to US visa data, Facebook paid Clegg an annual salary of \$656,000 (£475,000) when he took the job, although that could have since gone up and does not include bonuses.

## Amber Rudd

### **Last cabinet job: home secretary**

The Cambridge cybersecurity firm Darktrace, which is [gearing up for a lucrative stock market float](#), recruited Rudd as senior adviser last May. As home secretary, Rudd pushed for an industry crackdown on radicalising material on the internet. Rudd was energy and climate change secretary from 2015 to 2016 in the Cameron government. She chairs the international advisory board of the Norwegian energy company Equinor, and is co-chair for climate and energy at Public Policy Projects. Rudd also offers “strategic advice” to clients of the City PR firm Teneo as of 2020 and has also advised Pool Reinsurance, insurers for terrorism risk.

## Greg Barker

### **Last cabinet job: minister for energy and climate change**

One of the entries for the former energy minister lists his address as 8 Oktyabrskaya Street, Kalingrad (sic). That’s thanks to his directorship of EN+, the Anglo-Russian energy and metals company founded by Oleg Deripaska, whose [yacht-based encounters with Osborne and Peter Mandelson](#) proved controversial in 2008. He is also a director of the Electric Vehicle Network.

## Chris Grayling

### **Last cabinet job: transport secretary**

Grayling, who famously [hired a ferry company with no ferries](#) to ease Brexit congestion, [took a £100,000 job](#) advising Hutchison Ports, the owner of

container hubs including Felixstowe. While transport secretary, Grayling had taken part in an event at the same port.

## **Jo Johnson**

**Last cabinet job: minister for universities, science, research and innovation**

Boris Johnson's brother has sought advice from Acoba about 10 appointments since leaving office. Jobs include advisory roles with the investment firm Seminal Capital Holdings and Skyrora, a private space company.

## **Andrew Lansley**

**Last cabinet job: health secretary**

The former health secretary, one of the few cabinet ministers to be the [subject of a breakout rap hit](#), stepped down as MP in 2015 and took a job with the Swiss pharmaceuticals firm Roche the same year. He has also drawn on his experience in health and politics to advise the private equity groups Blackstone and Bain & Company.

## **Michael Fallon**

**Last cabinet job: defence secretary**

After leaving government amid sexual harassment allegations, Fallon became chairman of the property developer Avanton and deputy chairman of the Kurdistan-focused oil explorer Genel. Fallon accepted consultancy work for Wilton Engineering Services despite having been involved in the award of a contract, as energy minister, that the company stood to gain from. He has taken roles with the private equity firm Investcorp, the industrial business Klesch & Company and a firm called Infinite Percent.

## **Nicky Morgan**



### **Last cabinet job: culture secretary**

She is a senior adviser to the PR firm Grayling, with whom she had meetings while in government. She also acts as a consultant to the law firm Travers Smith.

## **Justine Greening**

### **Last cabinet job: education secretary**

This year, she took up a non-executive position with the holiday firm On The Beach. Her salary has yet to be disclosed but others who have held the position have earned between £60,000 and £100,000, depending on responsibilities.

## **William Hague**

### **Last cabinet job: leader of the House of Commons**

Cameron's former deputy – and the former Tory leader – is a non-executive director of the financial markets firm Intercontinental Exchange, an adviser at the City PR firm Teneo, a consultant at Citigroup bank and chairman of the international advisory board at the law firm Linklaters.

## **Sajid Javid**

### **Last cabinet job: chancellor of the exchequer**

Shortly after resigning from the Treasury in 2020, Javid [accepted a £150,000-a-year position advising Wall Street investment bank JP Morgan](#), reprising his [pre-politics role as an investment banker](#). He also earns £151,835 a year advising the Silicon Valley firm C3.ai for up to 86 hours a year. He continues as an MP.

## **Greg Hands**

### **Last cabinet job: trade minister**

He is back as trade minister now, a role he previously held under Theresa May, who demoted him from chief secretary to the Treasury, the position he held under Cameron. Between ministerial stints, he advised the French bank BNP Paribas.

## **Francis Maude**

### **Last cabinet job: trade minister**

The man who led Cameron's government efficiency savings drive has been very efficient at finding work. Roles include the chairmanship of the marketing agency Cogent Elliott, the advisory board of the corporate intelligence group GPW and – like [Philip Hammond](#) – the advisory board of OakNorth bank.

## **David Lidington**

### **Last cabinet job: lord chancellor/justice secretary**

Europe minister throughout Cameron's tenure, which ended with an unplanned Brexit vote. He has taken roles with firms including the professional services business Mitie and the market research outfit Cicero/AMO.

## **David Willetts**

### **Last job: universities minister**

Lord Willetts sought advice from Acoba on 11 occasions for roles across science and academia after leaving office in 2014. Last month he joined the cybersecurity firm Darktrace as non-executive director, in the run-up to its stock market float. He is on the board of the Biotech Growth Trust, a venture capital fund investing in life sciences.

## **Others**

Both the former Welsh first minister **Carwyn Jones** and the former armed forces minister **Mark Lancaster** sought advice from Acoba before giving advice to GFG Alliance, Sanjeev Gupta's steel group, which has been [swept into the heart](#) of the Greensill affair. **Esther McVey** accepted roles with Floreat Group and Hume Brophy after leaving her role as housing minister. Cameron's former policy director **Lord O'Shaughnessy** became an external adviser at the private equity group Bain and Co and the PR group Portland Communications. **David Gauke**, who held ministerial roles at the Treasury, is head of public policy at the law firm Macfarlanes. The former chief whip **Andrew Mitchell** advises the South African bank Investec. A non-executive directorship with Leo Group pays former communities minister **Eric Pickles** £40,000 a year. **Lord Strathclyde** was leader of the House of Lords under Cameron. He chairs the private bank Banks & Clients, is a director of Galena Asset Management and the chairman of Raytheon UK, part of the US firm that makes [bombs used by the Saudi Arabian army in Yemen](#).

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## 2021.04.17 - Coronavirus

- [Live Global Covid death toll tops 3m; fears Indian variant could scupper UK roadmap](#)
- [Roundup World's death toll over 3m and cases near 140m](#)
- [Canada Ontario gives police sweeping powers as Covid crisis mounts](#)
- [Brazil Women warned to delay pregnancy amid Covid-19 surge](#)

## [Coronavirus live](#)

### [Coronavirus](#)

# Coronavirus live news: France to impose 10-day quarantine on Brazil arrivals; Oscars reinvented for pandemic – as it happened

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## India

# Global Covid deaths top 3m as India posts another daily record rise in cases

Country records almost 235,000 infections as new wave takes hold

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



Relatives wear protective equipment amid burning funeral pyres for Covid-19 victims in India. Photograph: Sanjeev Gupta/EPA

Relatives wear protective equipment amid burning funeral pyres for Covid-19 victims in India. Photograph: Sanjeev Gupta/EPA

*Staff and agency*

Sat 17 Apr 2021 05.44 EDT

The global coronavirus death toll has topped 3 million as the race for immunisation continues and countries such as **India** grapple with rising infections and new lockdowns.

Data released by Johns Hopkins University on Saturday showed 3,000,225 deaths and 139,963,964 cases globally.

The figures come as a new wave of the pandemic in India pushed the number of cases in the country to almost 14.5m, second only to the **United States**, which has reported more than 32m.

India recorded 234,692 new infections in the 24 hours to Saturday morning, according to health ministry data, the eighth record daily increase in nine days. Fatalities rose by 1,341 to reach a total of 175,649.

[‘A tsunami of cases’: desperation as Covid second wave batters India](#)  
[Read more](#)

In **Japan**, rising virus cases have stoked speculation that the Olympic Games – postponed last year due to the pandemic – could be cancelled.

Japan’s prime minister, Yoshihide Suga, [in his first meeting with US president Joe Biden](#), said his government was listening to experts and doing its “utmost” to prepare for the Tokyo games in July.

In **Brazil**, the country with the third-highest death toll in the world, night shifts have been added to several cemeteries as diggers work around the clock to bury the dead. Women have been advised to delay becoming pregnant because [the virus variant that is devastating the South American country](#) appears to affect expectant mothers more than earlier versions of the coronavirus.

Hopes that south Asian countries might have beaten the pandemic have been dashed with India recording [more than 2m cases this month](#) alone and **Bangladesh** and **Pakistan** imposing shutdowns.

India’s per-capita rates remain low by international comparison, raising the prospect that infection numbers – fuelled possibly by a virulent new “double

mutant” – may explode further.

After a national lockdown a year ago led to hundreds of deaths and one of the worst slumps of any major economy, the Indian government has been desperate to avoid a second stoppage. However, many states are clamping down, including Maharashtra, where the biggest city is Mumbai, industry-heavy Gujarat, and Karnataka, which is home to the IT hub Bengaluru.

Uttar Pradesh state, home to about 240 million people, announced on Friday that all villages and cities would be under lockdown for one day on Sunday.

In the capital, Delhi, which has overtaken Mumbai as the worst-hit Indian city, restaurants, malls, gyms and spas were shut for the weekend. Weddings can go ahead with guests limited to 50, while a maximum of 20 people can attend funerals. Movie theatres can open with one-third capacity.

“Don’t panic. All essential services will be available through the weekend,” said the city’s chief minister, Arvind Kejriwal.

The northern state of Uttarakhand restricted gatherings to 200 people, but exempted the vast ongoing Hindu festival Kumbh Mela.

The gathering in Haridwar has attracted as many as 25 million people since January, including about 4.6 million this week alone, with most people ignoring Covid-19 guidelines. One seer died from the virus on Thursday and 80 other holy men have tested positive. Experts fear that the millions of devotees will now take the virus back to their home towns and villages.

Election rallies are also going ahead in the eastern state of West Bengal, with home minister Amit Shah attending two roadshows and one public meeting on Friday alone.

In state capital Kolkata, railway employee Samaresh Tapna fell sick after attending one such gathering and was admitted to hospital. “I felt angry with myself ... I cursed my fate,” the 42-year-old told Agence-France Presse.

Hospitals are running short of oxygen and coronavirus medicines such as Remdesivir, prompting desperate people to pay exorbitant rates on the black market.



Social media is full of horror stories of desperate calls to help a loved one needing hospital treatment for Covid-19 or other complaints. “I lost a cousin on Saturday. He was not admitted after a stroke. Tried 4 hospitals,” read one message on a Delhi neighbourhood WhatsApp group this week.

India’s drive to vaccinate its 1.3 billion people has also hit obstacles, with just 117 million shots administered so far and stocks running low, according to some local authorities.

“[It is] understandable that many people are sick of the restrictions and want to resume normal life. We must redouble our efforts to contain this disease as too many lives are at stake,”

“This is a wake-up call to the world. Vaccines must be available to everyone, everywhere, rich and poor to overcome this terrible pandemic,” said Udaya Regmi from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), calling the surge across south Asia “truly frightening”.

There was some better news in Europe, where some countries are easing their lockdowns in response to not only fatigue, but falling infection numbers and progress with vaccinations.

**Italy** announced on Friday it would ease coronavirus restrictions for schools and restaurants from 26 April. **England** [eased some restrictions this week](#) with other countries in the **UK** following closely behind. In the US, nearly 200 million people have been vaccinated.

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## [Canada](#)

# Ontario gives police sweeping powers as Covid crisis spirals out of control

New measures to enforce stay-at-home order with hospitals ‘bursting at the seams’ but civil liberties campaigners cry foul



Ontario's premier, Doug Ford, puts his mask on after announcing the new measures at Queen's Park in Toronto on Friday. Photograph: Canadian Press/Rex/Shutterstock

Ontario's premier, Doug Ford, puts his mask on after announcing the new measures at Queen's Park in Toronto on Friday. Photograph: Canadian Press/Rex/Shutterstock

[Leyland Cecco](#) in Toronto

Fri 16 Apr 2021 17.49 EDT

Ontario has announced sweeping new police powers to enforce an extended stay-at-home order, in the latest sign that officials in Canada's most

populous province have [lost control of the rapidly spreading coronavirus](#).

With a record number of new cases, there is growing worry among experts that the already-strained healthcare system is being further pushed to the brink.

[Ontario declares one-month lockdown as it battles surge of Covid cases](#)  
[Read more](#)

“We’re losing the battle between the variants and vaccines,” Ontario’s premier, Doug Ford, said on Friday as he announced the new measures. “We’re on our heels. If we dig in, remain steadfast, we can turn this around.”

Police in Ontario will now have the power to stop drivers or pedestrians and ask for their address and reason for being out. Residents could face fines of up to \$C750 (US\$600) for refusing to comply. Checkpoints will be established on provincial borders with Manitoba and Quebec to stop non-essential travel – but not on the frontier with the US.

The measures prompted an immediate and furious backlash.

“Blanket powers for police to stop vehicles like this bends our constitutional freedoms too far, and will cause a rash of racial profiling,” Michael Bryant of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association said in a statement.

Ford also announced restrictions on playgrounds, camping and outdoor sports.

And although most of the current cases [involve frontline and essential workers](#), the premier made no mention of sick pay – a policy health experts say would help slow the spread of the virus.

The restrictions came as new modeling forecast more than 15,000 new cases a day in Ontario by June if current growth continues – even with vaccinations. If measures are weakened prematurely, the province could see more than 30,000 a day. Ontario announced a record 4,812 new cases on Friday.

The new modeling also projects that as many as 1,800 residents could be in the intensive care unit by the end of May.

“[Our hospitals] are bursting at the seams, we are setting up field hospitals,” Adalsteinn Brown, co-chair of the province’s science table, told reporters. “Our children’s hospitals are admitting adults. This has never happened in Ontario before. It’s never happened in [Canada](#) before.”

Ontario estimates it will need more than 4,000 additional nurses in the coming months and has asked all provinces and territories for 620 nurses – especially those with intensive care experience – as soon as possible.

Brown said that while growth over the next two weeks is effectively “baked in”, strong measures, including extending the stay-at-home order, and a ramp-up of vaccinations could help limit how much worse the third wave becomes.

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## [Coronavirus](#)

# Brazil warns women to delay pregnancy amid Covid-19 surge

Advice comes as country's clinicians claim P1 Covid variant more aggressive during pregnancy

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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A healthcare worker assists a pregnant woman, in a hospital in Santarem, Brazil. A health ministry official advised women to ‘delay pregnancy until a better moment’. Photograph: Tarso Sarraf/AFP/Getty Images

A healthcare worker assists a pregnant woman, in a hospital in Santarem, Brazil. A health ministry official advised women to ‘delay pregnancy until a better moment’. Photograph: Tarso Sarraf/AFP/Getty Images

*Reuters in São Paulo*

Fri 16 Apr 2021 16.55 EDT

Brazil has warned women to delay getting pregnant until the worst of the pandemic passes, saying [the virus variant that is devastating the South American country](#) appears to affect expectant mothers more than earlier versions of the coronavirus.

The recommendation comes as [Brazil](#) continues to be one of the global epicenters of the pandemic, with more Brazilians dying of the virus each day than anywhere else in the world.

Hospitals are buckling under the strain and stocks of drugs needed for intubating severely ill patients are running perilously low, with Brazil turning to international partners for help with emergency supplies.

“If it’s possible, delay pregnancy a little until a better moment,” a health ministry official, Raphael Parente, said during a news conference on Friday.

He said the recommendation was partly due to the stress on the health system but also due to the more easily transmissible Brazilian variant known as [P1](#).

“The clinical experience of specialists shows that this new variant acts more aggressively in pregnant women,” Parente said.

Previously, Covid-19 cases during pregnancy were focused on the final trimester and birth, whereas lately there have been more serious cases in the second and occasionally first trimester, he said.

[Spreading faster, hitting harder – why young Brazilians are dying of Covid](#)  
[Read more](#)

The P1 variant, first discovered in the Amazon city of Manaus, has quickly become dominant in Brazil. It is thought to be a major factor behind a massive wave of infections that has brought the country’s death toll to over 350,000 – the second highest in the world behind the US.

Brazil’s outbreak is [increasingly affecting younger people](#), with hospital data showing that in March more than half of all patients in intensive care were aged 40 or younger.

Jair Bolsonaro, the president, has opposed lockdowns and held large events in which he often does not wear a mask. He has only recently embraced vaccines as a possible solution, but the inoculation rollout has been plagued by delays and missed targets for getting people inoculated.

This week, vaccinations were stopped in several cities due to a shortage of vaccine supply, according to local media.

The surge in Covid-19 cases has also left hospitals short of sedatives needed for patients who require mechanical ventilation.

[Brazil's Covid-19 response is worst in the world, says Médecins Sans Frontières](#)  
[Read more](#)

An emergency shipment of the drugs arrived in Brazil late on Thursday from China, while donations from Spain are expected to arrive next week.

Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo have both sounded the alarm over shortages, with São Paulo's health secretary saying this week that the city's ability to care for seriously ill coronavirus patients is on the verge of collapse.

Despite the shortage of drugs and 85% of intensive care beds occupied, São Paulo announced on Friday it would begin reopening stores and restaurants, saying the number of new hospitalisations had fallen sufficiently to do so safely.

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## 2021.04.17 - Opinion

- An independent Scotland could turn to Denmark for inspiration
- Today's pop industry cheats songwriters – and deters the risk-taking that made Abba
- My night out in New York took me across the latest Covid dividing line
- I once became an editor by mistake. It taught me to value the people behind the scenes



## [OpinionScotland](#)

# **An independent Scotland could turn to Denmark for inspiration**

[Ian Jack](#)



Instead of looking south, campaigners are looking north, to the egalitarian models of small Nordic nations



Illustration: Nathalie Lees/The Guardian

Illustration: Nathalie Lees/The Guardian

Sat 17 Apr 2021 03.00 EDT

What kind of country should Scotland be and how can it prosper? Surprisingly, given the swell of Scottish opinion in favour of independence, these questions aren't much discussed. A swirling mist obscures the road beyond the referendum, occasionally lit up by neon signs reading "green" and "fair" and "free". Independence, like Brexit, is predicted by its supporters to have a galvanising effect. Few are as gung-ho as Alex Salmond, [who estimates](#) that Scotland is one of the world's richest countries, the "Saudi Arabia of renewables". Nonetheless, despite the contrary evidence of a recent economic forecast by the [London School of Economics](#), a view prevails that any damage will be easily overcome. In the words of the scientist and engineer Hillary Sillitto, there has always been "lots of talk about a better, fairer society [and] none about where the wealth was going to come from to pay for it".

Last month Sillitto and two other Edinburgh-based writers – another reputable scientist, Ian Godden, and a nurse-turned-entrepreneur, Dorothy Godden – published an online edition of their book, [Scotland 2070](#), which aims to rectify what the writers identify as "the poor quality and short-term

perspective of Scotland's political debate". Avowedly detached from political parties, they warn against conventional solutions such as inward investment and low corporate taxes: the first is a poor substitute for the development of local industry, and the second is already well-catered for by Ireland.

Instead they propose that Scotland looks north rather than south, to the Arctic's melting icecap and the new east-west sea route that will open up off the northern coasts of Russia, shortening the traditional voyage via Suez between (say) Yokohama and Rotterdam by nearly [5,000 nautical miles](#). "Within 25 years," they write, "Scotland will be on the doorstep of a major new global trading passage and a new economic region in the Arctic."

The old naval anchorage in the Orkneys, Scapa Flow, could be filled again with shipping as "a container port and transit facility to rival Singapore" – the centrepiece of a six-point plan that also includes planting [Scotland](#) with 5bn trees; adopting new farming techniques that reduce the atmosphere's carbon content; exporting renewable energy and technology; and, perhaps the hardest to achieve, transforming Scottish industry by doubling university spending on research and development. They say that with hard work and proper funding over the next 50 years, Scottish manufacturing could recover from its near total destruction by globalisation and under-investment.

This is Scotland as Scandinavia, a version of the future that has been tickling Scottish political appetites since the 1960s. In the words of Sillitto and his co-authors, "many Scots like the cohesive and egalitarian social models of the small Nordics which lead the world in many economic and wellbeing indices". Sillitto wants Scotland to emulate their industrial innovation, their social policies and their "hard, focused work ethic".

The two places have a long connection. Several parts of Scotland, particularly the northern and western isles, were colonised by Norse and other Scandinavian settlers between the [8th and the 15th centuries](#); voyages across the North Sea – coal, salt and herring out, timber by return – were the trade routes that mattered most to Scotland until the late 18th century, when industry and empire moved the focus of energy from the Forth to the Clyde, from east to west. North Sea oil switched attention back again. At the height of the oil boom, the SNP's favourite country was Norway, which conserved

its revenues in a sovereign wealth fund (as an independent Scotland could have done) rather than using them to finance the social costs of deindustrialisation (as Margaret Thatcher's government actually did). But now, there being no point crying over exhausted oil, the exemplary country, the newest Not-England to which independence campaigners aspire, is Denmark.

The two countries share similar-sized populations and a temperate climate. Each has a glamorous capital city, though Edinburgh is undeniably lovelier and more spectacular. Beyond that, similarities are hard to find. Scotland is nearly twice as large, with a landscape that has appealed to the world's imagination for at least two centuries. "Spectacular" is not a word associated with Denmark. At its highest it reaches 171 metres above sea level, refusing heights or depths. Statistically and historically, Scotland knows little else. On the left, the high road to Loch Lomond; on the right, the low road to the [worst drug-death rate in Europe](#) (and, in western Europe, the [lowest life expectancy](#)). There is Morningside ... and there is Greenock.

The long, corrupting reach of history is to blame. The reason for the contrast with [Denmark](#) – where, to condense the statistics, people pay more tax to live more equally, happily and soberly, for longer – lies in two different experiences of the industrial revolution. It came to Scotland early, swiftly and savagely. The historian Tom Devine has written that between 1760 and 1830 "Scottish urbanisation was faster than probably anywhere else in Europe ... and the rate of growth simply overwhelmed the contemporary structures of sanitation and amenity in a great rising tide of humanity." Inadequate sewerage, squalid housing, disease, the continuing surge of poor migrants from the Highlands and Ireland: Glasgow's notoriety was established in those years.

Industrialism reached Denmark much later, in the 19th century's second half, and its factories never scarred the country as the iron forges, steel mills, collieries, shipyards and heavy engineering workshops did Lowland Scotland, transforming a peripheral little country into a great industrial power. Denmark invested more modestly and shrewdly: breweries, shipbuilding, marine diesel engines (which their Danish makers pioneered). After German and Italian unification, Denmark became the smallest state in western and central [Europe](#). Excepting Iceland and the Faroes, it had no

secure colonial markets – it had abandoned its little outposts in India and Africa by 1850 – which meant that, unlike Scottish and British industry, it never suffered their confounding loss.

Like Germany and Japan, Denmark might be said to owe its successful society to a national humiliation. In 1863, for famously complicated reasons including the view of romantic nationalism that national boundaries should be determined by language, it laid claim to the duchy of Schleswig. All hell broke loose. Austria and Prussia, then under Otto von Bismarck's leadership, declared war and within six months inflicted a crushing defeat on Denmark that shrank the size of its population and territory – the opposite of its intention.

In the description of the historian Bo Lidegaard, the damage to Denmark's national pride “became a defining national trauma” over several generations. The country turned in on itself. It compensated territorial losses with schemes for land reclamation, turning moors into pastures and conifer plantations, and began to specialise in dairy produce and animal husbandry, happy to boast that it supplied Britain with so many breakfasts. Many of its new dairy farms were run as co-operatives. Again to quote Lidegaard, the co-op movement developed into “both an important feature of society and a centrepiece of Danish self-perception ... a strong model for social progress through co-operative action rather than through social confrontation”.

Nationalism had been a fragile glory. The serious inspiring of the nation needed certain conditions and a certain time. When will Scotland be like Denmark? In 50 years or a hundred? If it happens, it will have been worth the wait.

- Ian Jack is a Guardian columnist

[Abba](#)

# Today's pop industry cheats songwriters – and deters the risk-taking that made Abba

[Björn Ulvaeus](#)



It's the song, not the album, that rules modern pop – but payment for writers is dysfunctional at best. We urgently need a new model





‘We live in an era when the song fuels everything’ ... Abba winning the Eurovision Song Contest in 1974. Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

‘We live in an era when the song fuels everything’ ... Abba winning the Eurovision Song Contest in 1974. Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

Sat 17 Apr 2021 02.01 EDT

In 1973, [Abba](#) were invited to submit a song as Sweden’s entry to the Eurovision song contest. We had a perfect song: it was called [Hasta Mañana](#). It was a ballad, it was catchy, it sounded like the kind of thing that did well in the Eurovision song contest. So we didn’t enter it. We chose [Waterloo](#) instead, which sounded like nothing we had ever heard at Eurovision before. That was the point: I thought we might come sixth or seventh, but people who saw the show – people outside Sweden, who had never heard of Abba – would remember us. It was a huge, calculated risk, and it paid off in a way we could never have imagined.

[Songwriters fight to be heard in streaming revenues debate](#)  
[Read more](#)

If I was a young songwriter today, I’m not sure if I would take a risk like that, because the world of songwriting has changed. As a result of this, I commissioned a report in collaboration with [MIDiA Research](#) to provide an

evidence-based overview of how the songwriter fits into today's music business culturally, creatively and commercially. I had just been appointed president of [CISAC](#), an international not-for-profit organisation that promotes the rights and protects the interests of creators worldwide. I didn't want to point fingers or put blame on anyone, I wanted something constructive, that the music industry and music fans could both read and hopefully get on board with.

[Rebalancing the Song Economy](#) shows that we live in an era where the song fuels everything: whereas albums used to be the go-to consumption format, the dominant currency in streaming is individual songs; data shows that when people use a streaming platform such as Spotify, they search more for songs than they do for artists. That means songwriters are more important than ever – but, if you are a songwriter, the system is dysfunctional.

Performance royalties from broadcast TV and radio are in long-term decline, because audiences have migrated from broadcast TV and radio to on-demand alternatives. Physical sales of music and sync revenue – where both artists and songwriters are rewarded – continue to fall, which means fewer mechanical royalties for songwriters. They have none of the other means of making money available to artists – no diversity of income: songwriters don't tour, nor do they sell T-shirts and other merchandise. In essence all of their income comes from the song.

Streaming has changed everything, but songwriters are last in line for streaming royalties: the system works in such a way that for a million subscriber streams, an independent label artist could earn more than \$3,000 (£2,175), whereas the songwriter could expect to earn between \$1,200 (£870) and \$1,400 (£1,015) and, even then, only if they are the sole songwriter on the track. If you co-wrote the song, that money is split between you and your fellow writers. On average, songwriters therefore earn between a third and a half of what artists do. If we live in a “song economy”, that's unfair: the distribution of royalties needs to change to reflect that.





Long-term songwriting partnerships such as that of [L-R] Robbie Williams and Guy Chambers could offer one solution to the trials facing songwriters. Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

This isn't about becoming rich. It's about new songwriters both being able to develop their craft and receive fair remuneration for their work. Before [Abba](#), Benny Andersson and I had a kind of songwriting apprenticeship, nearly 10 years in Sweden where we wrote, apart and together, getting better at what we did. You can't have that time – or the creative freedom you need to improve – without royalties. If you don't earn enough to support yourself, you have to take on another job, which means you can't concentrate on the thing you want to do.

There are other problems that continue to make the songwriter equation unbalanced. Streaming has led to a vast volume and faster turnover of music. It has shortened listeners' attention spans and led to a weaponised form of songwriting. There are songwriting camps, where writers and artists are thrown together for a day and have to finish writing a song by the evening; a reliance on a small group of elite songwriters, organised into teams, to come up with machine-tooled hits, "optimised for streaming".

It's an industrialised process and creates a climate that discourages any kind of risk-taking or creativity, making it even harder for a writer to build on any

initial success. Certainly, it's a climate in which Benny and I wouldn't have stood a chance – we only ever wrote 13 or 14 finished songs a year, we ruthlessly threw away anything that we thought was mediocre and worked and worked at the ideas we thought were good.

Streaming has led to a two-tier system of music. There are “lean-back” songs, tracks that just play in the background on playlists, functional music that you barely notice: there are whole lean-back playlists designed for studying or relaxing, populated with made-for-purpose filler. And there are “lean-forward” songs – tracks you actively look for and click on, tracks you want to listen to, the modern equivalent of going to a record shop and buying something, instead of hearing it on the radio and ignoring it. Why shouldn't royalty payments differentiate between these two kinds of song? Songwriters should be paid higher royalties on “lean-forward” songs than on “lean-back” tracks. You could achieve this by measuring whether users have searched for or linked to a track or added it to their collection.

There are other potential solutions. Record labels could encourage a “songwriter in residence” model, where artists are paired with songwriters at the development stage, as a long-term partnership: the writers would effectively become part of the band, paid a regular salary. It's a radical solution, and it would require imagination to match up the right personalities, but it's not unprecedented – think about Robbie Williams and Guy Chambers in the late 90s and early noughties, an artist and a professional songwriter working together to create a career – and it could create really interesting music as a result.

[Top songwriters call for end to 'bully tactics' by artists over royalties](#)  
[Read more](#)

There is another very important issue in the report: about changing the way money within the system is distributed to a “fan-centric” model. In order to ensure that all songwriters get paid fairly, I suggest that streaming services allocate their royalty payments based on the behaviour of individual listeners. The subscription should be divided by the number of songs the individual listener has played during a month. That gives each song a value. If the subscription is \$9.99 and the listener has played 10 Arne Jansen Trio songs that month, each song has the value of \$0.99, almost a dollar, and

that's the amount that will be paid to the trio. Under the current system [where artists receive their proportional share of all plays across the platform], you can be sure that Arne's songs would get the value of point-zero-zero-something dollars. A fan-centric approach to royalties would be fairer and build on important starts made by Deezer and Soundcloud.

I am not, for a moment, about to suggest that we should turn back the clock, which you may have expected from an elderly pop star. What's happened in the last decade has the potential to be incredibly positive for songwriters. A movement has started on both sides of the Atlantic, gaining momentum during the pandemic: 2021 promises to become the year of the song.

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[Opinion](#)**New York**

# My night out in New York took me across the latest Covid dividing line

[Emma Brockes](#)



As restrictions ease, tensions linger about what you should and shouldn't do.  
So booking a babysitter felt outlandishly exciting



‘Stepping out of the cab was like being dropped into Ayia Napa after spending a year in a monastery.’ New Yorkers wander among reopened restaurants, March 2021. Photograph: Eduardo Muñoz/Reuters

‘Stepping out of the cab was like being dropped into Ayia Napa after spending a year in a monastery.’ New Yorkers wander among reopened restaurants, March 2021. Photograph: Eduardo Muñoz/Reuters

Sat 17 Apr 2021 05.00 EDT

On Saturday night, for the first time in over a year, I hired a babysitter and took a cab downtown. I’d heard rumours about the parallel realities of different neighbourhoods in [New York](#), divided along lines of age and proximity to bars. It was hard to imagine, however; uptown, in areas heavily populated with families, the streets were and still are mainly empty by 9pm. As I got out of the cab on 14<sup>th</sup> Street, it was like being dropped into Ayia Napa after spending a year in a monastery.

So it has been since the beginning of all this, a tale of two pandemics, in which each successive wave has brought more and more cartoonish divisions with it. If it started in March last year with people [fleeing their apartments](#) for large second homes, moving on through the stark divide between fully functioning private schools and the shuttered state system, into [vaccination access](#) and the overweening schism between working-from-

home and sudden redundancy, then the new border, across and within social groups, is venturing out and how far one will go.

Some of the prohibitions are, at least technically, legal, although as with so many pandemic restrictions, they rely on voluntary compliance for their efficacy. It has been a source of continuous amazement, for those in the US with links to Britain, to observe just how conscientious Brits have been about following the baroque and (to our eyes) largely arbitrary rules governing meet-ups from different households and what constitutes “exercise”, while simultaneously going about their business often totally unmasked. In the US, where masking is mandatory for even the youngest children hoping to enter a building, decisions to meet up in small groups has been left to individuals.

Many of these decisions are reflected at the level of manners. Prior to doing anything wilder than watching TV, there is the question, these days, of what one feels comfortable doing, and also what one wishes to broadcast as one’s position on what one is comfortable doing. This was most evident, recently, in the first few waves of vaccinations, during which a certain type of well-padded middle-class person made extravagant gestures of getting to the back of the line, while feverishly checking out how he might ultimately qualify. Vaccination martyrs abound in my timeline, including those with serious co-morbidities for whom delay is absurd, but more socially rewarding, presumably, than piping down and turning up along with everyone else.

Now the new line is travel, at home and abroad. Flight bookings in the US [are surging](#), while [travel advisories](#) differ between those who are vaccinated, and those who aren’t. (For the former, there’s no need to take a Covid test before leaving the country, which the unvaccinated are still required to do, although testing is mandatory for all those boarding a return flight to the US). Travelling to countries with Covid mutations, meanwhile, might incur additional quarantine on the way home.

As with every other stage of the pandemic, what one does or doesn’t do is governed as much by social pressure as formal restrictions. Booking a babysitter on Saturday night felt outlandish, even more so when she came in and – having been vaccinated – took off her mask, the first time in over a year that anyone outside a tiny number of people has been unmasked in our



house. Meanwhile, [pushback from the teaching unions](#) against fully reopening the schools is starting to crack as group behaviours change. With bars, restaurants and businesses [long open in New York](#), keeping millions of students at home on Zoom appears increasingly absurd. Now, in the wake of changing guidelines on social distancing, and more opaque changes in expectation, some individual elementary schools are announcing that they will reopen full time.

None of which, I have to say, prepared me for the vision of downtown on Saturday night. On the street, a quarter of the crowd was unmasked, a number that dropped to zero inside, save for servers. As we waited in line to get in, a strange split-screen reality took hold. Except for the mandatory temperature check at the door, everything looked precisely as it had two years earlier: large groups of people, hammered enough to be weaving from one side of the pavement to the other, drinking straight from the bottle and yelling at top volume. An ancient feeling resurfaced: wow, I'd forgotten how much I hate going out.

- Emma Brockes is a Guardian columnist

## [Hadley Freeman's Weekend column](#)Life and style

# I once became an editor by mistake. It taught me to value the people behind the scenes

[Hadley Freeman](#)



Actors and pop stars can be hit-and-miss as interviewees, whereas directors and music producers rarely disappoint. The same is true of writers versus editors





Legendary Washington Post editor Ben Bradlee, with publisher Katherine Graham, in 2001. Photograph: Zuma/Rex

Legendary Washington Post editor Ben Bradlee, with publisher Katherine Graham, in 2001. Photograph: Zuma/Rex

Sat 17 Apr 2021 04.00 EDT

I am going to assume you are a Guardian reader, given that you are at this moment reading the Guardian. Whenever I meet Guardian readers, they invariably ask me about my fellow Guardian writers: what's [Tim Dowling](#) like? (*Extremely* scary.) Have I ever met [Polly Toynbee](#)? (No, because she lives in a castle guarded by dragons.) Do I eat lunch with [Marina Hyde](#)? (She doesn't eat lunch: she's a vampire.) But I am never asked about my editors.

One of the many cultural differences between British and American journalism is that in the US, even among non-journalists, there is a genuine reverence for editors: [Ben Bradlee](#), who edited the Washington Post during Watergate; former New Yorker editor [William Shawn](#); [Robert Silvers](#), the late founding editor of the New York Review of Books.

It is a different story in the UK, where editors tend to be ghostlier presences. Unlike the writers, they don't even get their names in the paper, which

would be like a movie's end credits acknowledging only the actors and not the crew. This week, after eight years in charge of the Guardian's Weekend magazine, the editor, Melissa Denes, is leaving, having finally realised that there might be more to life than correcting my spelling mistakes and begging me not to [write about Alec Baldwin's wife again](#). A happy day for her, a sad one for those who relied on her to save us from our own worst tendencies every week, from not understanding how semicolons work to writing too much about famous men's wives (just as examples).

Readers, friends, even my parents often ask if I choose who I interview, and whether I can just write what I want in this column. It's a good reminder of how little understanding there is among casual readers about how journalism works, because the answers to both those questions is a resounding no. Writers get the byline glory, but everything they've actually written has been chosen and then picked over by an editor. My five-year-old twins might be the ones showing up in reception every day, clean and dressed, but believe me, there was a lot of work behind the scenes to get them there.

A good editor will see and encourage a writer's strengths. In my first week at the Guardian, [Jess Cartner-Morley](#) asked me to write about Gucci wedding rings. Being a sarky dickhead who didn't understand how to write about fashion, I wrote that you'd know how much your fiance loved you by how big your Gucci ring was. Jess laughed and said, "That's funny!" Aha, I thought, funny is good. I then spent the next eight years trying to be funny about fashion.

Another editing memory: a discredited British politician who shall remain nameless informed me on a Friday night that he was suing me over something I had tweeted. Frantic, I called the then editor of this newspaper, Alan Rusbridger. "Don't worry," he replied. "Come see me on Monday morning." On Monday morning I walked into his office and he had already compiled an actual dossier to defend me in court, should it come to that (it didn't). My favourite editors understand my strengths (interviewing 80s movie stars), and my favourite subeditors – the people who pore over every word – understand that my jokes are *deliberately* bad (but also remove the ones that are non-ironically terrible).

[I love awards ceremonies – but losing on Zoom is another story](#) | [Hadley Freeman](#)

[Read more](#)

I had a very brief career as an editor. A million years ago, when I was at university, the people in charge of the student newspaper suddenly realised they didn't have an editor for the next term so they installed me, the idiot who had been reviewing films for the past two years. It was like one of those 80s films in which someone (probably played by Rodney Dangerfield) becomes president by mistake. I spent the holiday before term started not planning what I should commission for the paper, but writing every feature myself – because I had no idea how to edit other people's writing, and even less of one about how to cope with the stress of waiting on late copy. (To be fair to 20-year-old me, I don't think I was wrong on that one: writers are extremely annoying when it comes to respecting deadlines.) By the end of my editorship, the one thing I'd learned for certain was that I am definitely not an editor. Make your mistakes as young as possible, kids. They're less messy to clean up.

Perhaps because of that experience, I am much more interested in the people behind the scenes than those in front. Actors can be hit and miss as interviewees, whereas directors and screenwriters almost never disappoint, because they have more expertise and less narcissism. The same rule applies to pop stars versus music producers, and also to writers versus editors.

Everyone who's lucky has someone who looks out for them, who makes sure they don't make fools of themselves in public, don't get themselves cancelled, or sued (but will stand right beside them if they are). It just so happens that, with writers, that person is their boss and, if that writer is especially lucky, also their friend. □

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## 2021.04.17 - Around the world

- [Russia Prosecutors move to liquidate Navalny's 'extremist' movement](#)
- [Putin Residence has cryo chamber, Navalny team alleges](#)
- [Russia US diplomats expelled as part of retaliation for sanctions](#)
- [UK Russia hits out at British support for US sanctions](#)

[Alexei Navalny](#)

## Russian prosecutors move to liquidate Navalny's 'extremist' movement

Seeking to designate organisation as extremist group is most sweeping assault on opposition supporters yet



The decision in effect severs Navalny from his supporters in the regions and his financial donors. Photograph: Kirill Kudryavtsev/AFP/Getty Images

The decision in effect severs Navalny from his supporters in the regions and his financial donors. Photograph: Kirill Kudryavtsev/AFP/Getty Images

[Andrew Roth](#) in Moscow

Fri 16 Apr 2021 13.38 EDT

The Moscow prosecutor's office has announced that it will seek to designate [Alexander Navalny](#)'s Anti-Corruption Foundation and his regional political headquarters as "extremist groups", moving to in effect liquidate the jailed opposition leader's political organisation in Russia.

It is the most sweeping assault yet on supporters of Navalny, and comes after his two-and-a-half-year sentence on embezzlement charges and the arrest of his top aides on various charges following large protests in January and February.

In a statement released on Friday evening, the law enforcement body said it was seeking the designation usually reserved for violent organisations such as al-Qaida or Aum Shinrikyo, because it believed Navalny's organisations were "creating conditions for changing the foundations of the constitutional order, including through the scenario of a 'coloured revolution'".

Coloured revolutions were pro-democracy uprisings in former Soviet republics in the mid-2000s now seen in [Russia](#) as western-backed coups. Navalny's organisations have strongly criticised Vladimir Putin and his government, but have not called for any kind of armed rebellion to overthrow the Kremlin.

The decision, if approved, threatens to sever Navalny from his supporters in the regions and even from his financial donors, many of whom could be liable for financing an extremist group if they continued to provide support.

"They've decided to steamroll the Anti-Corruption Foundation and the headquarters," wrote the head of the organisation, Ivan Zhdanov. "We won't surrender."

In a statement, he said: "The Kremlin has just demanded that anyone who does not agree with them to be called an extremist ... It's absolutely clear that the Kremlin's new attack is connected with the planned protest and the elections in September."

Leonid Volkov, another close Navalny ally, said the Friday evening press release was a "test of public opinion" and called Navalny supporters to make their voices heard.

The prosecutor's office said that it had applied for a court ruling to recognise both organisations as extremist, which, if granted and upheld on appeal, would allow the government to fine and imprison members of the pro-Navalny groups.

On Friday, a former camera operator for Navalny was sentenced to two years in prison on extremism charges for writing two strongly worded tweets that said top Kremlin officials “didn’t deserve to live”. The tweets came after a regional journalist set herself on fire in an act of protest and died.

In the statement, the prosecutor’s office also claimed that Navalny’s organisation was acting in place of international bodies in Russia whose activities had been deemed “undesirable”. The statement in effect calls Navalny’s movement a front for western interests.

Navalny’s political movement has evolved over the last decade from a lone gadfly blogger on LiveJournal to a guerrilla newsroom, an opposition research centre and a campaign strategy headquarters seeking to unseat the United Russia party by channelling votes to its most likely opponents.

[Putin residence has cryo chamber and stables, Navalny team alleges](#)  
[Read more](#)

The Anti-Corruption Foundation has angered Russia’s elites by publishing investigations into their expensive watches, yachting trips, lovers’ trysts, inflated procurements and other aspects of government corruption that Navalny says has characterised the Putin era.

On Friday, it published its [latest investigation into a lavish residence allegedly used by Putin](#), which is reportedly fitted out with a luxury spa complex with cryo chambers and a float pool, and which it claimed was rented from a close ally of Putin’s using taxpayers’ money.

The continuing investigations have proven that [Navalny can be dangerous to the Kremlin even while he remains on hunger strike in a Russian prison](#). He was arrested upon returning to the country in January following treatment for a poisoning attempt on his life that he, in a joint investigation with Bellingcat, traced back to the Russian FSB.





## [Alexei Navalny](#)

# Putin residence has cryo chamber and stables, Navalny team alleges

Investigators have released floor plans and photos of expanded residence they say is Putin's favourite



Alexei Navalny's team claimed the residence was partially leased from one of Putin's closest allies on taxpayer money. Photograph: YouTube/AFP/Getty Images

Alexei Navalny's team claimed the residence was partially leased from one of Putin's closest allies on taxpayer money. Photograph: YouTube/AFP/Getty Images

[Andrew Roth](#) in Moscow

Fri 16 Apr 2021 11.18 EDT

An investigation by [Alexei Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation](#) (FBK) has revealed new details about another of Vladimir Putin's alleged lavish

residences, complete with stables, a golf course and an expansive spa complex that [includes a cryo chamber](#).

Using satellite and drone footage, company records, photographs and other data, investigators have released [floor plans and some of the first photographs](#) of an expanded residence near Valdai, which they said was the Russian president's favourite and most secret.

They claimed the residence was partly leased from one of Putin's closest allies on taxpayer money. While some of the lakeside property is state-owned and designated for official use, a more lavish section with a mansion has been privately developed into what has been described as a playground for the health-conscious head of state.

In particular, the investigation focuses on a 7,000 sq metre (75,000 sq ft) spa complex whose floor plans show a float pool, massage rooms, a swimming pool, and other amenities, such as an extreme-cold treatment cryotherapy chamber, that are rented from a company alleged to belong to one of Putin's close friends.

Company statements showed that the owner of the complex has made more than 2.7bn roubles (£25.8m) in the past decade.

The investigation was released as [Navalny remains on hunger strike in a Russian prison](#) and his supporters are being pressurised by the government not to continue protests against his two-and-a-half year sentence on embezzlement charges.

The emails of more than 500,000 Navalny supporters, many of whom had signed up online to attend new protests against the Kremlin, was leaked to journalists this week by an anonymous group that called the Navalny team "losers" and claimed the database was heavily populated with bots.

Navalny's team confirmed that the leaked database was real, but did not say if any of the emails were run by automated accounts. It apologised to those on the list, saying the leak contained only emails and no other personal information. The leak came as Navalny's team is closing in on collecting

500,000 online signatures in order to launch new protests calling for the opposition leader's freedom.

“[The database] is real as opposed to the fakes that were released earlier,” wrote Ivan Zhdanov, the director of the group. “It’s happening now, when the campaign needs just 70,000 more signatures and every confirmation to attend the protests is much harder for us to collect.”

In a message posted online on Friday Navalny said that he was being threatened with being force-fed in a straitjacket unless he ended [a hunger strike in protest](#) against his treatment in a Russian prison. He has demanded to be seen by his doctor for reported numbness in his back and legs, which he says may be linked to the [poisoning attempt](#) on his life that took place last year.

His wife earlier this week said he looked gaunt during his meeting with her and he had lost an estimated 16kg since arriving at a prison colony about 60 miles east of Moscow last month.

“He is still as cheerful and upbeat as ever,” Yulia Navalnaya wrote in an online post on Wednesday. “He speaks with difficulty, though, and from time to time he hangs up the phone and leans on the table to take a break. He has lost a lot of weight ... and weighs 76kg.”

01:32

Alexei Navalny releases investigation into Vladimir Putin's wealth – video

Some of the anger at the Kremlin has been sparked by a previous investigation into [a Black Sea dacha](#) that was said to cost nearly £1bn and to have been established for the special use of the president, although recent photographs suggest that it was no longer in use. That residence included flourishes such as an “aqua-disco” and a wine cave dug into a cliff overlooking the Black Sea.

The investigation into that residence, which has been called Putin's Palace, came after Navalny's arrest upon returning to [Russia](#) in January and showed that the opposition leader remained a danger to the Kremlin even while behind bars.

The authors of the new investigation concluded it with a call for his freedom. “Putin illegally imprisoned Navalny for telling the truth about his corruption, lies, and duplicity. We will continue to tell this truth.”

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## Russia

# Russia expels 10 US diplomats as part of retaliation for sanctions

- Moscow will also restrict activities of US NGOs
- Freeze on non-US staff potentially crippling for diplomatic effort



The US embassy with its national flag, seen behind a monument to the Workers of 1905 Revolution in Moscow, Russia. Photograph: Alexander Zemlianichenko/AP

The US embassy with its national flag, seen behind a monument to the Workers of 1905 Revolution in Moscow, Russia. Photograph: Alexander Zemlianichenko/AP

[Andrew Roth](#) in Moscow

Fri 16 Apr 2021 16.11 EDT

Russia has delivered a sharp response to the Biden administration's sanctions, blacklisting senior officials and targeting the US diplomatic mission, including the US ambassador, with potentially paralysing restrictions.

In a tit-for-tat response to [US sanctions for elections interference and the recent SolarWinds hack](#), Moscow said on Friday that it would expel 10 US diplomats from the country.

[Biden hits Russia with new sanctions in response to election meddling](#)  
[Read more](#)

The Russian foreign ministry also barred entry to eight current and former US officials, including the US attorney general, the heads of the NSA, FBI, Department of Homeland Security, the Federal Bureau of Prisons and the domestic policy council director, Susan Rice. The former national security adviser John Bolton and former CIA director James Woolsey were also barred from Russia.

And in a dramatic move, Moscow also recommended that the US recall its ambassador, John Sullivan. Russia recalled its own ambassador to Washington last month after [Joe Biden agreed with a journalist when asked if he considered Vladimir Putin “a killer”](#).

Russia’s foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, said that Putin “has endorsed these measures in response to the absolutely hostile and unprovoked actions that Washington has announced with regard to Russia, our citizens, individuals and legal entities and with regard to our financial system”.

The sanctions row is the worst since the 2018 Salisbury poisonings, when Washington expelled 60 Russian diplomats and closed the Seattle consulate following the use of a novichok nerve agent in the UK by men believed to be Russian military intelligence agents. Russia responded by expelling 60 US diplomats and closing the US consulate in St Petersburg.

Russian [diplomats have lashed out at the UK](#) for joining the US in condemning Russia’s international cyber-espionage efforts, although no sanctions measures were announced against the UK (Russia has extended a flight ban ostensibly due to the UK coronavirus strain). Moscow will also expel five Polish diplomats in a retaliatory move.

Anger has been growing in the United States over alleged Russian meddling in the 2016 and 2020 US elections and Russian intelligence agencies’ cyber-



espionage campaign, culminating in the SolarWinds supply chain hack that has compromised nine US federal agencies and more than 16,000 computers, according to the US government.

The sanctions also appear to be making up for lost time, as the Trump administration was seen as failing to confront the Kremlin for its aggressive moves.

In the new sanctions, the White House signalled it could target Russia's economy by enforcing a ban on buying newly issued rouble bonds, a move that could drive down demand for Russia's sovereign debt if it is extended to secondary markets.

Russia cannot similarly threaten the US economy, so compensated by targeting what it has called US influence operations in the country, saying it plans to ban NGOs and funds run by the US state department and other government organisations.



The foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, noted that Russia had, for now, refrained from taking 'painful measures' against US business interests in the country. Photograph: Yuri Kochetkov/AFP/Getty Images

“We’ll restrict or stop activities in our territory of US foundations, US non-governmental organizations, which, in reality, are directly interfering,



without hiding it, in our domestic political life,” Lavrov said.

Lavrov also said that Russia “has the ability to take painful measures in relation to US business. We’ll save them for future use, too.”

And in a potentially crippling move for the US diplomatic mission, Russia said it would bar the embassy and consulates from hiring Russian and third-country workers, exacerbating a personnel shortage that has already slowed US visa processing and other consular services in Russia down to a crawl.

Russia in 2017 cut the US diplomatic head count by 755 people, a handicap that has continued to hamper the US diplomatic mission. Late last year, the US said it would close its consulate in Vladivostok and suspend work at its Yekaterinburg consulate due to ongoing labour shortages. Lavrov on Friday said that Moscow was considering cutting US diplomatic staff to 300, saying that Russia had the same number in the United States.

Both sides have nonetheless said they would still seek to hold [a summit proposed by Biden during a phone call with Putin](#) earlier this week. There is “a lot of talk about Joe Biden’s proposal to organise a bilateral summit”, Lavrov said. “As we have already noted, we received it positively and are now examining various aspects of this initiative.”

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## Russia

# Russia hits out at UK support for US sanctions over hacking

UK's release of details on Russian cyber-espionage 'nothing more than an attempt to play along with' US



The flag on the car of the British ambassador Deborah Bronnert outside the Russian foreign ministry. Photograph: Vladimir Gerdo/Tass

The flag on the car of the British ambassador Deborah Bronnert outside the Russian foreign ministry. Photograph: Vladimir Gerdo/Tass

[Andrew Roth](#) in Moscow

Fri 16 Apr 2021 08.23 EDT

Russian diplomats have lashed out at the UK for joining the US in condemning Russia's international cyber-espionage efforts, including elections interference and the SolarWinds hack.

The UK ambassador to Russia, Deborah Bronnert, met Russian diplomatic officials at the foreign ministry in Moscow on Friday, hours after the Russian embassy in London called the UK's release of details on hacking by Russia's foreign intelligence service, the SVR, as "nothing more than an attempt to play along with the USA".

The embassy said Bronnert had not been summoned and that the meeting had been planned in advance. Bronnert left the ministry after an hour without answering questions from journalists.

## Q&A

### **What was the SolarWinds hack?**

#### Show

In early 2020, malicious code was sneaked into updates to a popular piece of software called Orion, made in the US by the company SolarWinds, which monitors the computer networks of businesses and governments for outages.

That malware gave hackers remote access to an organisation's networks so they could steal information. Among the most high-profile users of the software were US government departments including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the state department, and the justice department.

Described by the Microsoft president, Brad Smith, as "the largest and most sophisticated attack the world has ever seen", US intelligence agencies have accused Russia of launching the attack.

SolarWinds, of Austin, Texas, provides network monitoring and other technical services to hundreds of thousands of organisations around the world, including most Fortune 500 companies and government agencies in North America, Europe, Asia and the Middle East.

Its compromised product, Orion, is a centralised monitoring tool that looks for problems in an organisation's computer network, which means that breaking in gave the attackers a "God view" of those networks.

Neither SolarWinds nor US cybersecurity authorities have publicly identified which organisations were breached. Just because a company or agency uses SolarWinds as a vendor does not necessarily mean it was vulnerable to the hack.

[Kari Paul](#) and [Martin Belam](#)

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

The Foreign Office summoned Russia's ambassador in London on Thursday to express its concern over Russia's "malign behaviour" and express support for [US sanctions announced by the Biden administration](#). The Russian embassy responded that its critics had "met their latest failure in ensuring their own cybersecurity and according to their habit have tried to put the blame on Russia".

Russia has extended a flight ban to the UK until 1 June, ostensibly because of fears over the UK coronavirus strain, despite an aggressive British vaccination programme in which nearly half the population have now received their first dose. Less than 10% of Russians have received their first jab of Sputnik V or any other vaccine. Russia suspended the flights last December.

Russia recently instituted a coronavirus ban on flights to and from Turkey, a move whose timing was suspected to be partially motivated by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's meeting with Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, and discussions of arms sales to one of Russia's most bitter rivals.

The strongest reactions remained targeted at the US, which sanctioned cybersecurity companies and suspected Russian disinformation outlets, and banned US financial institutions from buying newly issued rouble bonds. Russian legislators, diplomats and even a spy chief have accused the US of playing a dangerous game of brinkmanship with Russia.

On Friday the Kremlin press secretary, Dmitry Peskov, said the US sanctions did not threaten Russia's economy and that the "efficiency of our economic

wing has been recognised internationally, and we see no reasons to doubt their efficiency”.

The rouble fell before the announcement of US sanctions but posted gains once they were revealed to be limited in scope. One analyst called the measures “largely a signal exercise” to show that Joe Biden was negotiating from a position of strength.

Russia has not yet retaliated against the US sanctions, although Peskov hinted at future expulsions and sanctions, saying that Russia’s response would be based on the “principle of reciprocity”. On Friday he said the response would “entirely depend” on the decision of the Russian president, Vladimir Putin.

Earlier, Sergei Naryshkin, the head of the SVR, Russia’s equivalent to MI6, called the sanctions an “unfriendly step, which in my opinion is also poorly considered”. He said it would contribute to the “destruction of international stability”.

US intelligence and the British spy agency GCHQ on Thursday attributed the SolarWinds hack for the first time to the SVR. GCHQ also accused the agency of targeting diplomatic and military institutions in Nato countries since 2011 and research institutes since 2015.

Peskov gave more measured comments than many of the angrier responses given by the Russian establishment, calling the sanctions “mild”.

“You know that President Putin has spoken about the reasonableness of forging, normalising and de-escalating relations [with the United States],” Peskov said. “It is really a positive thing that the two presidents see eye to eye on this.”

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## Headlines thursday 15 april 2021

- [Live Lobbying watchdog chief says ‘not for one moment did I anticipate anything like Greensill’](#)
- [Greensill scandal Cameron and Sunak to be called to give evidence to inquiries](#)
- [Q&A What is the Greensill lobbying scandal and who is involved?](#)
- [Comment What did Greensill Capital actually do?](#)

[Politics live with Andrew Sparrow](#)

[Politics](#)

# Sturgeon promises four-day working week pilot at SNP manifesto launch – as it happened

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## Lobbying

# Cameron and Sunak to be called to give evidence to Greensill inquiries

David Cameron's spokesperson says former PM would respond 'positively' to any request to give evidence

- [What is the Greensill lobbying scandal and who is involved?](#)



David Cameron has suggested he regrets the manner in which the lobbying was conducted, saying there were 'lessons to be learned'. Photograph: David Levenson/Getty

David Cameron has suggested he regrets the manner in which the lobbying was conducted, saying there were 'lessons to be learned'. Photograph: David Levenson/Getty

[Jessica Elgot](#) *Deputy political editor*  
[@jessicaelgot](#)

Thu 15 Apr 2021 09.15 EDT



David Cameron and Rishi Sunak will be among senior politicians called to give evidence at a growing number of inquiries into the Greensill lobbying scandal, after two committees of MPs said they would begin their own investigations.

In a sign that ministers are struggling to contain the most serious crisis over political ethics for years, three separate committees of MPs said they would launch inquiries, in addition to an independent inquiry ordered by No 10.

A spokesperson for Cameron has said he would respond “positively” to any request to give evidence to any of the inquiries, once they have established their terms of reference.

Eric Pickles, the former Conservative minister who now chairs the watchdog that examines the appointments of ex-ministers and civil servants, gave evidence to MPs on Monday where he made clear his fury at the growing scope of the scandal.

Pickles wrote an angry letter to the Cabinet Office on Monday which revealed for the first time that a senior civil servant, Bill Crothers, had begun [working for Greensill while in office](#) – with the approval of the Cabinet Office.

That revelation prompted the cabinet secretary, Simon Case, who heads the civil service, to issue an order across Whitehall that any similar conflicts of interests be brought to his attention by Friday, saying the matter was of “acute concern for us as the senior leadership team of the civil service”.

On Thursday Downing Street defended the Conservative peer [Francis Maude](#), who is implementing changes in Whitehall for Boris Johnson.

Maude, who runs his own consulting firm which he set up with Johnson’s deputy chief of staff, Simone Finn, recruited Crothers to the Cabinet Office during the Cameron administration and then contracted Crothers to work for his firm, Francis Maude Associates, after leaving office.

Crothers took a part-time board advisory role with [Greensill](#) Capital in September 2015 while he was still employed as a civil servant. He later

became a director of the company.

Downing Street rebuffed calls for Maude to step back from his role in the Cabinet Office while the independent inquiry into the lobbying scandal, chaired by the corporate lawyer Nigel Boardman, is carried out.

“This is an individual who brings a huge amount of relevant experience to this role,” Johnson’s spokesperson said.

The former Home Office permanent secretary Sir David Normington said he was “absolutely amazed” that a senior civil servant had been permitted to work as a part-time adviser at Greensill while still in Whitehall.

“I thought it was absolutely baffling. I’ve never come across anything like it in my over 40 years in Whitehall,” he said. “I’m absolutely amazed that Bill Crothers should be allowed to work for Greensill while he was still in the civil service. But worse, I think, this enabled him to evade scrutiny of his appointment after he had left the civil service, and that is completely unacceptable.”

02:12

Westminster watchdog chief ‘did not anticipate anything like Greensill’ – video

The government used its Commons majority [to defeat](#) an attempt by Labour to force the creation of a committee of MPs specifically to examine the issues of lobbying and the Greensill affair.

The scandal grew after it emerged that Cameron had personally lobbied Sunak on behalf of the now-collapsed company in order to gain access to coronavirus loan schemes, and had been able to arrange for the company’s founder, Lex Greensill, to have a “private drink” with the health secretary, Matt Hancock.

Cameron has suggested he regrets the manner in which the lobbying was conducted, saying he did not break any rules but acknowledging there were “lessons to be learned” and that as a former prime minister any contacts he had with government should be through the “most formal channels”.

Pickles [gave evidence](#) to the public administration committee on Thursday, and its chair, the Tory MP William Wragg, formally announced on Thursday morning it would conduct a full inquiry into lobbying rules.

Wragg said during a Commons debate on Greensill on Wednesday that his committee would start investigating, referring to the fictional police anti-corruption unit in the BBC series Line of Duty by calling the committee “the AC-12 of Whitehall”.

The Treasury select committee’s chair, the Conservative MP Mel Stride, said it would look at what lessons could be learned about the appropriateness of Sunak’s response to Cameron’s lobbying efforts, as well as that of Treasury officials. It will also examine regulatory lessons from the failure of Greensill Capital.

Labour MPs on the committee said their original efforts to begin an inquiry had been blocked by the committee’s Tory majority.

On Thursday the public accounts committee, chaired by the Labour MP Meg Hillier, announced it would launch an inquiry into supply chain financing and Covid corporate financing facilities – the fund to which Cameron hoped to gain access on behalf of Greensill. The former prime minister will be invited to give evidence.

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## [Greensill](#)

# What is the Greensill lobbying scandal and who is involved?

From an Australian financier to David Cameron, here are the key elements in the controversy so far



David Cameron, left, and Lex Greensill in Saudi Arabia in January 2020.  
Photograph: Unknown

David Cameron, left, and Lex Greensill in Saudi Arabia in January 2020.  
Photograph: Unknown

[Peter Walker](#) *Political correspondent*

[@peterwalker99](#)

Wed 14 Apr 2021 10.34 EDT

The most serious controversy about government lobbying and cronyism for years [is unfolding in the UK](#) – and it is a complex story. Here are the key elements so far.

## What is Greensill Capital?

Set up by the Australian financier Lex Greensill, the firm specialises in supply-chain finance, which settles business bills immediately for a fee, assisting with the issue of late payments. Greensill began working with the NHS as part of Citibank in 2012, but then set up his own firm. This [collapsed](#) in March.

## How is David Cameron involved?

Cameron was prime minister when [Greensill](#) started to seek government work, although the Australian was reportedly first brought in by Jeremy Heywood, who was cabinet secretary at the time. But in 2016, after leaving office, Cameron became an adviser to [Greensill](#) Capital. He was given share options reportedly worth tens of millions of pounds.

## What did Cameron do?

Last year he sent “multiple” texts to Rishi Sunak, the chancellor, and “informally” phoned two other Treasury ministers, asking for Greensill Capital to get the largest possible allocation of [government-backed loans](#) under the Covid corporate financing facility, or CCFF. He also lobbied a No 10 aide, and in 2019 took Greensill [to a “private drink”](#) with Matt Hancock, the health secretary.

## What was the government response?

Text replies from Sunak in 2019, released after a freedom of information request, show that in April last year [the chancellor told Cameron](#) he had “pushed the team” in the Treasury to see if he could arrange full access to CCFF loans. Other released documents show Treasury officials had a series of meetings with Greensill Capital but eventually refused it access to the CCFF. The company was later accredited to the coronavirus large business interruption loan scheme (CLBILS), handing it the ability to offer government-backed loans of up to £50m.

## Who else is involved?

On Tuesday [it emerged that](#) the government's chief commercial officer, Bill Crothers, began working as an adviser to Greensill Capital in 2015 – while still employed in the civil service. Remarkably, he was given official approval to do this. On Wednesday, Boris Johnson declined to rule out the possibility that more officials could have been connected to the company.

## What are the main concerns about all this?

There are several. One is how Greensill became so embedded within Cameron's Downing Street; he had [a No 10 business card](#) calling him a “senior adviser” and was nominated by Haywood for a CBE.

There are also questions over why the government, which does not have cashflow problems, needed to use supply chain finance.

Cameron's role is under particular scrutiny. He appears to have used personal contacts to seek preferential treatment for a company in which he had a financial stake.

Sunak's pledge that he had “pushed the team” to help also raised eyebrows.

Finally, the dual role of Crothers has prompted new worries about a revolving door between Whitehall and private companies that then benefit from government contracts.

## What has Cameron said?

For 30 days, nothing. Then, on Sunday he [released a statement](#) saying he had done nothing wrong, but accepting his communications with ministers should have been “done through only the most formal of channels, so there can be no room for misinterpretation”. The former PM said reports of the value of his share options had been exaggerated, but declined to say how much they would have been worth.

## ... and Downing Street?

No 10 [said on Monday it was launching](#) an independent investigation into Cameron's lobbying, led by the corporate lawyer and government adviser [Nigel Boardman](#). Labour questioned Boardman's independence and [called for a wider inquiry](#) based around a cross-party panel of MPs. This idea was defeated after a Commons debate. However, two Commons select committees have announced that they will look into the issue.

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## [Opinion](#)**Greensill**

# What did Greensill Capital actually do?

[Adam Leaver](#)

Behind David Cameron's lobbying lies a surreal web of 'supply chain financing' and 'factoring'



Greensill Capital's offices near Warrington, Lancashire. Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty Images

Greensill Capital's offices near Warrington, Lancashire. Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty Images

Thu 15 Apr 2021 04.30 EDT

The focus on [David Cameron's](#) role in lobbying for [Greensill Capital's](#) involvement in NHS payment systems has obscured a less glamorous question: how did a firm involved in such a mundane part of the financial services ecology become so significant, so quickly?



Greensill Capital, which entered administration last month, provided payment services including “factoring” and “supply chain financing”. Although the company represented itself as part of the “fintech” revolution, these services were not in themselves particularly noteworthy or innovative. To understand the growing appeal of [Greensill](#) and other providers, we therefore need a wider lens.

[Greensill scandal: ex-civil servant had \\$8m stake in lender](#)

[Read more](#)

Supply chain financing (or “reverse-factoring”) solves a common payment problem. Firms traditionally supply goods or services to a customer and issue an invoice for payment. While the supplier might prefer the invoice to be paid immediately, the customer might want to delay payment. In situations where the customer is large and influential, they might insist the supplier wait two or more months. With reverse factoring, a financial institution offers to step in to pay the supplier sooner on the customer’s behalf, minus a small discount which they take as their fee, or part of their fee. The customer then settles with the financial institution at an agreed later date, often four or five months later. On paper, everyone wins and there are no risks.

But textbook definitions don’t always apply neatly to the real world. In recent years, the appeal of supply-chain finance has included the possibilities it provides for what’s euphemistically called creative accounting. Creative accounting has [blossomed](#) under the fair-value revolution – a change in the accounting rules towards a more market-based outlook.

This essentially means the business of doing one’s accounts has pivoted towards an evaluation of future cashflows rather than a valuation of past transactions. Many assets are no longer valued on the basis of the price paid for them, but on their current market values or even modelled estimates of the future cashflows they will generate. This also applies to some contracts, where profits are booked on the basis of future expectations. This approach to accounting creates the scope for discretion, subjectivity and speculation. It has arguably made it easier for firms to “recognise” profits than to generate

the actual cashflows that support them. And it is here that supply chain financing can be misused.

The gap between cashflow and profit was a defining feature of what happened to [Carillion](#), the outsourcing company that folded in 2018. Carillion used reverse factoring to hold on to its cash for longer and thus report higher net operating cashflows. This accounting trick allowed the company to report a higher “cash conversion” rate (the amount of profit realised as cash), which was used to calculate a portion of [executive director pay](#). Carillion’s accounting treatment of its supply chain financing also allowed the company to disguise its debt. Carillion’s obligations to banks in the form of overdrafts and loans stood at £148m in 2016, but its supply chain financing liability was estimated to be [£498m](#). This partly helped Carillion look much healthier than it was.

Carillion, like many large firms, became a kind of portal, capable of moving income and costs around in time and space based on projections of its future economic fortunes. Supply-chain financing allowed it to produce operating cashflow figures that gave those profit figures some credibility. Many other firms may be [exploiting this loophole](#), in a market estimated to be \$3.5tn (£2.5tn).

Fast forward to Greensill, which was not involved with Carillion but had factoring arrangements with other large firms. Whereas reverse factoring offers early payments to a customer’s suppliers, straight “factoring” is when a business sells its invoices or receivables to a third party at a discount. As Greensill pushed for growth, the collateral underlying the transactions with some of those companies appeared to be speculative. As [investigative work](#) has shown, Greensill did not just lend against the security of invoices for transactions that had already occurred, it lent against the “[prospective receivables](#)” the company might generate in the future. In other words, it would lend against transactions that had not occurred and may never occur with companies that had never done business with its clients. (Representatives of Greensill have declined to comment.)

That is the unsettling context within which the Cameron story should be understood. Greensill was carrying a lot of risk going into the negotiations over payment systems in the NHS. That deal, if the company could have

secured it, would have provided Greensill with an extremely large, near-riskless income stream because of the state's creditworthiness. But it may also have created sizeable too-big-to-fail problems if the company became an intrinsic part of the public sector payment machinery. Would the state need to support or bail out Greensill if its risky private ventures produced solvency problems that threatened to disrupt wage payments to nurses and doctors? Although the company was not given this deal, it did manage to make some inroads via its [Earned app](#) and also provided [supply-chain financing to pharmacies](#). It remains to be seen how far its involvement in public provision has stretched.

Supply chain finance provides many benefits, but it can be misused when it operates as a temporal fix for a rather surreal, holographic form of capitalism. Greensill's model was never going to be sustainable in the long term because at some point debts need to be settled. Yet that was hardly the point: it was sustainable enough for long enough for the owner of Greensill Capital – and perhaps some of its clients – to become richer. It also raises questions about the relationship between the state and private providers, and the blurring of that boundary. It has become increasingly unclear whether such firms really do help the state with their service delivery problems, or whether the state helps them with their risk and profitability problems.

- Adam Leaver is professor of accounting and society at the University of Sheffield

## 2021.04.15 - Coronavirus

- [Science Oxford/AstraZeneca Covid vaccine research 'was 97% publicly funded'](#)
- [US Company illegally peddling 'miracle cure' bleach for new Covid variants](#)
- [US J&J vaccine use will remain paused pending evaluation](#)
- [Paradise cost High prices and strict rules deflate Palau-Taiwan travel bubble](#)

## Medical research

# Oxford/AstraZeneca Covid vaccine research ‘was 97% publicly funded’

Analysis rebuts claim by Boris Johnson that jab was developed ‘because of greed’

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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Staff train at Oxford Biomedica during production of the Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine. Researchers looked at the source of hundreds of millions of pounds of research grants from 2000 onwards that underpinned work on the vaccine. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

Staff train at Oxford Biomedica during production of the Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine. Researchers looked at the source of hundreds of millions of pounds of research grants from 2000 onwards that underpinned work on the vaccine. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

[Michael Safi](#)  
[@safimichael](#)

Thu 15 Apr 2021 00.00 EDT

At least 97% of the funding for the development of the Oxford/AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine has been identified as coming from taxpayers or charitable trusts, according to the first attempt to reconstruct who paid for the decades of research that led to the lifesaving formulation.

Using two different methods of inquiry, researchers were able to identify the source of hundreds of millions of pounds of research grants from the year 2000 onwards for published work on what would eventually become the novel technology that underpins the jab, as well as funding for the final product.

The overwhelming majority of the money, especially in the early stages of the research, came from UK government departments, British and American scientific institutes, the European commission and charities including the Wellcome Trust.

Less than 2% of the identified funding came from private industry, the researchers said, a finding they said posed a challenge to the views of people such as Boris Johnson, who has said that the record-fast development of Covid-19 vaccines was [“because of capitalism](#), because of greed”.

Johnson made the remark privately, but the same message has been promoted by the pharmaceutical industry, which has warned against waiving patents for Covid-19 vaccines – and other measures that could widen access – by arguing that ownership rights and the ability to generate profits are a key driver of vaccine innovation.

“Our study shows that quite the opposite is true: public investment and international collaboration gave us the Covid-19 vaccines,” the team of researchers, from the advocacy group Universities Allied for Essential Medicines UK, said in a statement.

The paper is awaiting peer review but a preprint version [was published online](#) this week.

It provides a snapshot of the money that went into developing the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine and there is no definitive figure. This is partly because scientific progress is not linear – with studies neatly building on earlier studies – but also because of a significant lack of transparency around who pays for both public and private research.

To cast the widest possible net, the researchers first identified every relevant piece of published research since 2002 into the adenovirus vector technology employed by the vaccine, extracting the names of the sources mentioned in their funding declarations. Where possible, they matched the funders to a specific grant of money.

In most cases, they were unable to determine how much funding a particular source gave, but were able to identify more than £228m worth of grants – the largest chunk from overseas governments including the EU, followed by the UK and then charitable foundations.

Separately, the researchers lodged freedom of information (FOI) requests with Oxford University including for details of the grants given since 2000 to Sarah Gilbert and Adrian Hill, the two scientists who led research into the vaccine technology.

The information disclosed showed that until 31 December 2019, the day China announced the detection of a “pneumonia of unknown cause” in the city of Wuhan, most of the funding for relevant research came from overseas governments and the European Union. Industry funding amounted to 2.8% of the money identified by the FOIs.

Once the new coronavirus was identified and started to spread in January 2020, the UK government stepped in with more than £33m of funding for the vaccine, on top of the £5m it had given earlier, making it the largest overall source of money, according to the FOIs.

[Breakdown of funding sources](#)

The research team said neither method provided the full picture, but both made it clear that the overwhelming majority of funding for the vaccine came from governments, universities or charities, rather than from industry.

“We need to stop perpetuating the narrative in which the private sector and profit are the sole drivers of innovation, and recognise that the life-saving ChAdOx vaccine technology was developed with near total governmental and charitable funding,” the researchers said.

Oxford University initially said any vaccine it developed would be open to qualified manufacturers to produce without paying royalties, and priced either at cost or at a small profit. However, by August 2020, [reportedly at the urging](#) of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the university entered an exclusive licensing agreement with the British-Swedish drugmaker AstraZeneca.

AstraZeneca has pledged to sell the vaccine at a not-for-profit rate for the entirety of the pandemic and entered into several licensing agreements with large manufacturers, including the Serum Institute of India, to try to ensure the vaccine is widely produced.

But the company reserves the right to raise the price of the vaccine when it decides the Covid-19 pandemic has ended – which will lead to a potential windfall if regular booster shots are required in the years ahead to maintain immunity against the virus and its variants.

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## US news

# US company illegally peddling ‘miracle cure’ bleach for new Covid variants

Oclo in Florida exploiting fears around new virus strains by selling chlorine dioxide, despite FDA warnings against fraudulent ‘cures’



The appearance of a new marketing push out of Miami by peddlers of the bleach ‘cure’ signals the FDA’s uphill struggle in trying to control the potentially lethal trade. Photograph: Danilo Balderrama/Reuters

The appearance of a new marketing push out of Miami by peddlers of the bleach ‘cure’ signals the FDA’s uphill struggle in trying to control the potentially lethal trade. Photograph: Danilo Balderrama/Reuters

*[Ed Pilkington](#) in New York*

*[@edpilkington](#)*

Thu 15 Apr 2021 03.00 EDT

Peddlers of industrial bleach who urge Americans to drink the fluid as a “miracle cure” for cancer, HIV/Aids and other diseases have begun touting the product illegally as a treatment for the latest variants of Covid-19.

Chlorine dioxide, a powerful bleaching agent used in textile and paper manufacturing, is being compounded and sold out of a makeshift laboratory in Miami, [Florida](#). The company, Oclo Nanotechnology Science, is playing on fears of the new strain of the coronavirus discovered in the UK, which is now spreading rapidly and widely through the US.

['Archbishop' of Florida church selling bleach 'miracle cure' arrested with son](#)  
[Read more](#)

[The UK variant](#), B117, is thought to be more transmissible and deadly than the initial form of the virus.

The Miami company is invoking B117 to drive up sales of its bleach products, which the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) [warns](#) are potentially dangerous and can be life-threatening. The front page of Oclo's [website](#) is dominated by a photograph of vials of its chlorine dioxide product billed as an “antiviral” treatment.

The image is superimposed with the words: “B117 ... new variant of coronavirus, the most contagious and dangerous in the United States. Rescuing chlorine dioxide and its great curative potential against pathogens.”

The appearance of a new marketing push out of Miami by peddlers of the bleach “cure”, often referred to as “miracle mineral solution”, or MMS, signals the FDA's uphill struggle in trying to control the potentially lethal trade. Since the start of the pandemic, the federal agency has been [clamping down](#) on fraudulent products which claim to treat or cure Covid-19.

It has also been using its enforcement muscle to move against chlorine dioxide dealers. Last August, the FDA [arrested](#) Mark Grenon and his four sons, who were among the most prominent “miracle” bleach peddlers in the US.

Members of the Grenon family claimed to be “bishops” of the Florida-based Genesis II “church” that sold bleach under the guise that it was a “sacrament”. They remain in jails in Miami and Colombia awaiting extradition to the US facing [charges](#) of conspiracy to defraud the US and to introduce a misbranded drug into interstate commerce.

Having taken down Genesis II, the FDA is now facing outcrops of new MMS dealers. Oclo is run by a former Cuban living in Hallandale Beach, north of Miami.

Ricardo Garcia describes himself as a “research and development scientist” trained in chemistry at the University of Havana, though he also identifies as a real estate agent. Most of his customers in the US are Latino Americans.

He is also known to be offering to transport bleach in enema form to Europe for use on autistic children, at a cost of \$680 per liter plus shipping.

In text messages between Garcia and an autism advocate based in Europe, he said that he was distributing the vials mainly in “local areas in the USA”. He added: “We have been censored several times on social media but are still producing to save lives.”

Despite Garcia’s protestations, his main trading route still appears to be through social media sites. He promotes his toxic products on [Facebook](#), [Amazon](#) and eBay.

He clearly has some success selling through Amazon. His “immune booster against pathogens”, costing \$49.99, is a bestseller ranked 105 in the “sports nutrition and hydration products” category.

The Guardian asked Garcia why he was selling bleach illegally as a treatment for the B117 strain of Covid and other diseases. He gave the reply: “We are really sorry for the loss of your loved one. Thank you for publishing the latest scientific advances with chlorine dioxide in the treatment of Covid-19. We have a great interest in saving lives – you too, right?”

The Guardian also contacted the three social media giants to ask them why they were hosting a potentially life-threatening fraudulent “cure” on their

platforms. Within hours eBay responded by blocking the Oclo page.

An eBay spokesperson said: “Our first priority is to ensure the safety of our employees and customers around the world. We are taking significant measures to block or quickly remove items on our marketplace that make false health claims, including listings that promote chlorine dioxide as a cure for Covid.”

Amazon was more ambivalent. It said that third-party sellers were “independent businesses” required to follow all applicable laws and regulations.

“Those who violate our policies are subject to action including potential removal of their account,” Amazon said. It left the Oclo page up, however.

Facebook did not reply.

Fiona O’Leary, a campaigner against pseudoscience, said she was concerned about Garcia because unlike other bleach peddlers he was a practicing scientist. “It’s very worrying to me because he’s a professional, and I’ve never seen a scientist make this product before. He has more knowledge on the chemicals and he’s going to be trusted more.”

Garcia claims to follow the protocols of Andreas Kalcker, one of the leading figures in the bleach “cure” movement. Kalcker, a German citizen who lives in Switzerland, is author of an influential book, *Forbidden Health*.

He is [reported](#) to be under criminal investigation in Argentina following the deaths of a five-year-old boy and a man aged 50 who both drank chlorine dioxide.

On his website, Garcia claims that his product treats autism – a common and especially abusive application of bleach. He quotes a parent who says that their experience of chlorine dioxide was “truly miraculous. Our five-year-old son with autism has been able to make an extraordinary recovery.”

Garcia also quotes a New York resident who says his grandfather almost died from Covid but recovered after drinking the bleach.

His site encourages consumers to buy chlorine dioxide and give it to their dogs as well as marketing the fluid as a treatment for vaginal infections in women. “Vaginal washing with a solution of chlorine dioxide allows the treatment of some vaginal and other sexually transmitted diseases,” it claims.

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## Coronavirus

# Johnson & Johnson vaccine use will remain paused in US amid evaluation

CDC advisers say they need more evidence to decide if cases of unusual blood clots were linked to the Covid vaccine



The setback for Johnson & Johnson comes as the worldwide death toll from Covid-19 approaches 3 million. Photograph: Damian Dovarganes/AP

The setback for Johnson & Johnson comes as the worldwide death toll from Covid-19 approaches 3 million. Photograph: Damian Dovarganes/AP

*Associated Press*

Wed 14 Apr 2021 19.03 EDT

Johnson & Johnson's Covid-19 vaccine will remain in limbo a while longer after US health advisers told the government on Wednesday that they need more evidence to decide if a handful of unusual blood clots were linked to the shot – and if so, how big the potential risk really is.

The reports are exceedingly rare – six cases out of more than 7m US inoculations with the one-dose vaccine. But the government recommended a pause in Johnson & Johnson vaccinations this week, not long after European regulators declared that such clots are a rare but possible risk with the AstraZeneca vaccine, a shot made in a similar way but not yet approved for use in the US.

At an emergency meeting, advisers to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention wrestled with the fact that the US has enough vaccine alternatives to do without the Johnson & Johnson vaccine for a time, but other countries anxiously awaiting the one-and-done shot may not.

[Should I worry about side-effects from the Johnson & Johnson Covid vaccine?](#)

[Read more](#)

One committee member, Dr Grace Lee, was among those who advocated postponing a vote. She echoed concerns about getting more data to better understand the size of the risk and whether it was greater for any particular group of people.

“I continue to feel like we’re in a race against time and the variants, but we need to [move forward] in the safest possible way,” said Lee, of Stanford University.

The clots under investigation are highly unusual. They occurred in strange places, in veins that drain blood from the brain, and in people with abnormally low levels of clot-forming platelets. The six cases raised an alarm bell because that number is at least three times more than experts would have expected to see even of more typical brain-drainage clots, said CDC’s Dr Tom Shimabukuro.

“What we have here is a picture of clots forming in large vessels where we have low platelets,” Shimabukuro explained. “This usually doesn’t happen,” but it’s similar to European reports with the AstraZeneca vaccine.

The clot concerns could undermine public confidence in a vaccine many hoped would help some of the hardest-to-reach populations – in poor

countries or in places like homeless shelters in the US.

Health officials recommended the Johnson & Johnson timeout in part to make sure doctors know how to recognize and treat the unusual condition.

The US set up intensive systems to track the safety of Covid-19 vaccines, knowing that side-effects too rare to have occurred in studies of thousands of people could pop up once millions rolled up their sleeves. Shimabukuro said spotting such a rare potential risk amid the nation's huge vaccine rollout "is an example of a success story for vaccine safety".

The setback for Johnson & Johnson comes as the worldwide death toll from Covid-19 approaches 3 million, including more than 560,000 in the US, which continues to report tens of thousands of new infections every day and an average of almost 1,000 deaths.

So far, the Johnson & Johnson vaccine has been a minor player in US vaccinations. More than 122 million Americans have received at least one vaccine dose, the vast majority with shots made by Moderna or Pfizer, and nearly 23% are fully vaccinated.

Both companies are on track to have delivered 300m doses each by mid- to late July – and federal health authorities stress that there are no signs of the unusual clots with the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines.

Vaccinations are slower in Europe, where many countries have struggled for supply. Johnson & Johnson delayed some of its European deliveries amid the clot evaluation, but Poland said it would use the batch it already has in hand. European medical regulators plan to issue their own evaluation of the clot issue next week.

Health officials caution against confusing the normal flu-like symptoms that occur a day or two after many Covid-19 vaccination with the clot concern. The problematic clot symptoms, such as severe headache or severe abdominal pain, have occurred about a week to three weeks after the Johnson & Johnson shot.

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## The Pacific projectTaiwan

# Paradise cost: high prices and strict rules deflate Palau-Taiwan travel bubble

Taiwan eases restrictions on travellers after bookings fall into single digits and flight is cancelled

- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



A woman waits to give test samples ahead of the first travel bubble flight connecting Taiwan to Palau on 1 April. Photograph: Daniel Tsang/SOPA Images/REX/Shutterstock

A woman waits to give test samples ahead of the first travel bubble flight connecting Taiwan to Palau on 1 April. Photograph: Daniel Tsang/SOPA Images/REX/Shutterstock

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Thu 15 Apr 2021 00.32 EDT

It launched with a presidential escort and the promise of rare international travel to a postcard-perfect tropical island, but the Taiwan-Palau travel bubble has deflated after just a couple weeks, with Taiwanese bookings dwindling to single figures.

Travel agents, consumers and health authorities have blamed the high cost of the tours and the Taiwanese government's strict rules for returning travellers.

The “sterile corridor” of [bilateral tourism](#) guaranteed travel between the two archipelagos, which are both otherwise closed to all tourists, on strictly managed, twice-weekly package tours.

The inaugural flight, packed with nearly 100 passengers including Palauan president Surangel Whipps Jr, boded well, but this week China Airlines announced it had cancelled an upcoming flight from Taipei after just two people booked tickets. The airline told the Guardian it was constantly assessing the situation but it couldn't guarantee further cancellations.

## [Trans-Tasman travel bubble between New Zealand and Australia to start on 19 April](#)

[Read more](#)

To go on the Palau holiday from Taiwan, tourists must make several health declarations, pay for Covid tests, and not have left Taiwan in the last six months. Upon return they had to complete 14 days of “self-health management”, including five “enhanced” management days banned from public transport and spaces. On Wednesday health authorities announced it was dropping the enhanced requirement, and agencies are hoping it’s enough to restore interest.

One of the six agencies contracted to run the tours, Phoenix travel, told the Guardian they’d had “sporadic” individual bookings and inquiries about future tours, “but the momentum is not as good as expected”.

“The fare is higher than normal, plus the cost of two PCR tests, and the inconvenience of health management after returning home are the reasons why most travellers maintain a wait-and-see attitude,” the spokesperson said.

Gibsen Lin, marketing manager of Lifetour travel, said they had received many more inquiries for the upcoming summer holiday period from May to July, and that uncertainty about the process had also discouraged early take-up.

“Many details were not determined at the beginning. They changed the rules of the game ... and then gave consumers less time to react in the market,” Lin said.

Taiwanese passengers pay between \$2,100 and \$2,800 plus associated costs for the group tour which runs for fewer than eight days, keeps the tourists away from crowded locations and local people, and doesn’t allow for autonomous activity.

On Wednesday evening Whipps welcomed the easing and said returnees who didn’t show signs of fever and hadn’t been in the presence of anyone who did, could “go about their daily lives as usual”.



Two-dogs beach in Palau's Rock Islands. Photograph: Richard Brooks

Whipps also said costs had also been decreased, but did not detail by how much. He claimed the presence of Tropical Storm Surigae had also affected bookings, but that the two governments were working closely together to improve the bubble.

He said his office had been “assured” that the next scheduled flight on 21 April would have more passengers. The Guardian has contacted the Taiwan government for confirmation of the changes and comment.

Palau has recorded zero cases of Covid, and is on track to have 80% of its population vaccinated by the summer, while about 90% of Taiwan's 1,062 cases were recently arrived people in quarantine, and there is no community transmission.

[Palau's marine sanctuary backfires, leading to increased consumption of reef fish](#)

[Read more](#)

The travel bubble was hailed as a lifeline for Palau's tourism industry, which contributes almost half of its GDP, but had been completely stalled by the

pandemic. Taiwanese made up the third-largest proportion of tourists in pre-Covid times, behind people from China and Japan.

“We seek everyone’s support and patience as we continue to address challenges and improve the sterile corridor. Challenges help us improve customer experience and increase demand,” said Whipps.

“During this trying time, the private sector’s support is ever more important.”

Prior to Whipps’ statement, China Airlines told the Guardian it was making “constant adjustments” and couldn’t rule out further cancellations.

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## 2021.04.15 - Spotlight

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- [Danny Huston 'I went around the world with my father – making his drinks'](#)
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# Out of thin air: the mystery of the man who fell from the sky

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## [Movies](#)

### Interview

# Danny Huston: ‘I went around the world with my father – making his drinks’

[Hadley Freeman](#)

The actor grew up on film sets, rubbing shoulders with the biggest stars on earth. Now he’s stepping into his father John’s shoes again – to direct a film about grief, secrets and the Lockerbie bombing



‘Time doesn’t heal all wounds’ ... Huston directs and also stars in *The Last Photograph*. Photograph: Phil Miller

‘Time doesn’t heal all wounds’ ... Huston directs and also stars in *The Last Photograph*. Photograph: Phil Miller



[@HadleyFreeman](#)

Thu 15 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

With his father, the legendary director [John Huston](#), it was that gravelly voice that you noticed first. With his sister, [Anjelica Huston](#), it is her magnificent nose. And with his nephew, actor [Jack Huston](#), it's the moustache. But with actor-director Danny Huston, it is, unarguably, the eyebrows: those great looping Ls that waggle away as you chat with him, as if they were having their own separate conversation with you. People often talk about his resemblance to his father, but, I tell him, the celebrity he always looked most like to me is [Jack Nicholson](#), thanks to those brows.

“Yes, Jack defined these eyebrows before I was able to grow into mine,” he grins, bearish in size and wolfish in smile. Isn't it a little weird for his sister Anjelica that her baby brother looks so much like her ex-boyfriend? “Hmmm, I know what you mean. Well, I think that only enabled her to have greater affection towards both of us – ha!”

Those distinctive features have also helped to make him one of the most ubiquitous and enjoyable character actors to have emerged in the past two decades. He deployed them to superb effect in his breakthrough performance, in one of my favourite films of the early 2000s, [Ivans xtc](#), a

modern retelling of *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, directed by Bernard Rose, in which Huston played a drug-addicted Hollywood agent who feels death's cold breath on his neck. Imagine Robert Altman's *The Player*, but more pitiless and with more heart, simultaneously.



Acting breakthrough ... Huston as the drug-addicted agent in *Ivans xtc*.

It was Huston's first major acting role, having intended to be a full-time director, but he was so extraordinary in it that his little lark turned into an accidental career. Martin Scorsese cast him as airline magnate Jack Frye in *The Aviator*, and he looked more at home in Hollywood's golden era than Leonardo DiCaprio. As evil General Ludendorff in *Wonder Woman*, those eyebrows made him look ferocious and pleasingly cartoonish, and as moneyman Jamie Laird in *Succession*, he was lugubrious and calculating.

“When I was making [the 2005 film written by Nick Cave] [The Proposition](#), the director John Hillcoat took me aside at one point and was having trouble saying what he wanted, and I said, ‘What? Just tell me!’ And he said, ‘When you turn around, can you to keep that eyebrow down?’” he says, and laughs again.

Huston, 58, is talking to me by video chat from his home in the Hollywood hills. The Hollywood sign is behind his house “but you really have to crane

around at a right angle to see it. It's not in your face," he says. Hanging behind him is a drawing of a racehorse given to him by his nephew Jack, who recently played Bobby Kennedy in *The Irishman*.

"It's nice, huh? Yeah, Jack's doing great in the family business," Huston says. He also has a home in Berkshire, which he describes as "a family home", where his mother, the actor Zoë Sallis, is staying, and where he and his partner, the English actor Rosie Fellner, and their two-year-old daughter, Luna, will spend the summer. (He also has an 18-year-old daughter, Stella, from an earlier relationship.)



Ta da! ... grandfather Walter Huston, centre, with Humphrey Bogart in *The Treasure Of The Sierra Madre*. Photograph: Warner Bros/Kobal/Rex/Shutterstock

Before the interview, I promised myself I wouldn't ask Huston too much about his fascinating family, a proper Hollywood dynasty with roots as deep as the Barrymores, going back to his grandfather, the Oscar-winning actor, Walter Huston. But his relatives prove to be unavoidable because he is surrounded by them, even if they're not in your face and you have to crane a little to see them. "My relationship with film began with lacing film into old projectors, anxious maybe the film would rip, then the beam of light through

some [of my father's] cigar smoke on the wall and then," he smiles, holding up his hands in a "ta da" pose, "there's my grandfather."

We're talking today about Huston's latest film, *The Last Photograph*, in which he stars, and it also marks his return to directing after an almost 20-year break.

"I wanted to get back in the saddle and the reason I cast myself was I knew I was available," he says. Adapted by Simon Astaire from his novel of the same name, the film opens with a morose bookseller, Tom (Huston), realising that his bag has been stolen from his shop, and in the bag is a hugely important photograph. We then learn in flashbacks why that photo was so significant to him, and the cause of his unhappiness. Huston's eyebrows do sterling work in helping to delineate the timelines: in the scenes from the 1980s before the tragedy, they dance about happily; in the present, they hover hopelessly.

It's not really a spoiler to say that Huston's character suffered a terrible bereavement, and it involved the [Pan Am 103](#) flight, which exploded over Lockerbie in 1988. Huston is excellent at conveying the heaviness of grief and the scene in which he finally realises that his loved one has been killed is unbearably poignant.

"The closed nature of the character, the psychological difficulty he's had trying to make sense of the tragedy, even all those years later – I thought that was interesting. Time heals all wounds? I don't think so. It doesn't," he says.

I ask if there were losses in his past that he drew on for the role, thinking he might mention friends who died, or Katie Jane Evans, the mother of his older daughter, who killed herself during their divorce. But instead, he goes back to his family.

"Yes, absolutely. The people I loved who are no longer here, the small things that make them relive but also break my heart. It's the 80th anniversary of *The Maltese Falcon* [which his father directed] and when I see my grandfather in small parts, like in *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, he comes alive again. We all have last photographs, things that are closed off



and tucked away,” he says. Among those tucked away things are elements of his personal life: like Nicholson, Huston has a naughty glint in his eye and when I ask about some of the [tabloid stories](#) he’s appeared in he says they are too complicated to discuss. So we return to the comparatively safer ground of his family.

Was going into film-directing a way of staying close to his father? “Yes, absolutely. I grew up on his film sets so I’ve always been comfortable on sets. Telling stories, that’s the family thing,” he says.



Wonderful glee ... as the baddie in Wonder Woman. Photograph: Everett Collection Inc/Alamy

Huston was born in Rome in 1962, after his parents had an affair when his father was directing and his mother was starring “in a film based on a rather well-known book called the Bible”. As well as directing The Bible, [John Huston](#) played Noah and the voice of God.

Therapists would have a lot of fun with that, I say.

“Exactly! And my mother was playing Hagar [Abraham’s second wife], and she had a child dying from thirst in the desert, and the child wasn’t me. That’s where the therapy starts. I had a lot of difficulty separating truth from fiction with those characters,” he says.

My father was like a pirate who would return from faraway countries bearing gifts

Huston didn't have "a Hollywood upbringing" because his father was living in Ireland, having turned his heel on the US in disgust during the House Committee on Un-American Activities investigations, which resulted in the blacklisting of many of his friends. So Huston was raised in Ireland and England, and still has US and UK citizenship. But given that John was married to Enrica Soma, the mother of Anjelica, Allegra and Tony Huston, when Danny was conceived, and remained so until Soma's death in a car accident in 1969, I tell him I assumed that his father wasn't around much when he was growing up.

"Oh no, he was very involved in my childhood. He was like a pirate that would return from faraway countries, bearing gifts. I was lucky enough to visit him on film sets, like up in the Atlas mountains when he was making [The Man Who Would Be King](#), and there was Connery and Caine and Christopher Plummer. For a young boy, it felt like the absolute adventure," he says.

I ask if it was ever awkward between him and Anjelica, given that their father was married to her mother when he was conceived.

"Ummm no, I don't think it ever was. We hit it off right from the start, and she was always very caring, my angel, my big sister. And she was really cool – she knew the Rolling Stones! She would take me out to various scenes that were cool for a kid to experience," he says with, I imagine, some understatement.



Danny Huston, right, in 1985 with his father John, mother Zoë Sallis and sister Anjelica. Photograph: Alan Davidson/Rex/Shutterstock

It was his dad who gave him his first directing job back in 1984. “I would go around the world with my father and I would make his drinks for him, the flavour depending on the place. So he was shooting [Under the Volcano](#) with Albert Finney in Mexico and for some reason he was drinking Cuba libres. So I would make his rum and Cokes and normally he would complain and say, “No no, the Coke is only there to colour it!” But my father was having trouble with the title sequence, it was too slow, and I’d been to film school, so I said, ‘You could do this...’ And he said, ‘You do it!’ [And it made the cut](#),” he says, the filial pride still in his face.

Still, did he never think, “Maybe I shouldn’t do the job for which my father got 13 Oscar nominations and two wins?”

“Oh very much so. I rebelled for a while. Drawing was what I was really into – you don’t need anyone else’s money or permission to do that, you just pick up a pencil. But then I realised what the art scene was, and there might be even more grossness there [than in film],” he says, and clearly the only career options that exist are artist or film director.



His family sweetly encouraged his entry into the family business. His sister starred in his first directing job, Mr North, and his father initially agreed to appear in it too, but he then fell ill with the emphysema that would ultimately claim his life in 1987. So instead, John asked “an old friend” to appear in his young son’s film, and that friend just happened to be [Robert Mitchum](#). Since then, Huston’s sister has regularly appeared alongside him in films and, in *Ivans xtc*, Anjelica’s now late husband, the sculptor Robert Graham, played his father. There is no doubt that Huston grew up with enormous privileges, but the cross-Huston pollination in films reads to me more like genuine familial closeness than simple backslapping and nepotism.



Encouraged ... directing Mr North in 1988. Photograph: Everett Collection Inc/Alamy

“Yes, I am very close to my sister, and my father had real generosity and bravado, and he was very generous with me,” he says.

Was he reminded of his father when he worked with [Brian Cox](#) while they were making *Succession* together? Certainly Cox has bravado to spare.

“Yeah, he does, he does. I have a crush on Brian – I absolutely adore the man. The two of us would talk about old films on the set and he has this

wonderful glee about him, this force of nature, and my father was all of those things.”

Never mind his father’s achievements, if I were Huston, I would envy the times in which he lived, when Hollywood figures really were forces of nature, not PR-controlled automatons, and when a man could romance socialites and it wouldn’t live on the internet for ever. I expected Huston to be annoyed by all the interest in his family, given that he, unlike so many other Hollywood progeny, has genuinely made a successful career for himself. But he seems to have more fascination with them than anyone. When we talk about what he’s doing next, he says he’s developing an adaptation of something by Hemingway, who was close friends with his father. In fact, his father had tried to adapt [Hemingway](#)’s novel *Across the River and Into the Trees*, and now that an adaptation of that book is finally in production, Huston himself will appear in it.

“I remember my father writing the screenplay, so it just made cosmic sense to be in it,” he says. And this time when he smiles again he looks less like a wolf and more like a son who simply loved his father.

The Last Photograph is released digitally on 26 April.

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## Life and style

# Married to the job: how a long-hours working culture keeps people single and lonely



‘The pandemic has made many people face up to loneliness in a way they would not have done in the pre-lockdown world.’ Composite: Getty/Guardian Design/Getty

‘The pandemic has made many people face up to loneliness in a way they would not have done in the pre-lockdown world.’ Composite: Getty/Guardian Design/Getty

Demanding bosses, impossible workloads, 24/7 email – no wonder many employees feel they have no time outside work to find love

[Sarah Jaffe](#)

Thu 15 Apr 2021 05.00 EDT

Laura Hancock started practising yoga when she worked for a charity. It was a job that involved long hours and caused a lot of anxiety. Yoga was her counterbalance. “It saved my life, in a way,” she says.

Yoga brought her a sense of peace and started her journey of self-inquiry; eventually, she decided to bring those benefits to others by becoming a yoga teacher. She studied for more than eight years before qualifying. That was about 10 years ago; since then, she has been teaching in Oxford, her home town.

At first, the work felt like a privilege, even though she was working a lot and not earning much. “There was a sense that, if you gave it your all and you did it with integrity and love and all those things, then it would eventually work out for you.”

But recently she had a moment of realisation. “I can’t afford my rent, I have no savings, I have no partner, I have no family. I’m 38 and most of my friends have families; they’re buying houses,” she says. “There is a lot of grief around that. I feel like I’ve just landed on Earth, like a hard crash on to the ground, and am looking around and feeling quite lonely.”

In many sectors, offices have been designed to look, feel and act like a home, to keep employees there for longer

Hancock is one of the many people in recent years to recognise that they have devoted themselves to their work and neglected everything else that might give their life meaning. For workers across many sectors, long, irregular hours, emotional demands and sometimes low rates of pay mean it is increasingly hard to have a life outside of work – and particularly hard to sustain relationships.

Long before Covid locked us all in our homes, alone or otherwise, the evidence was pointing out repeatedly that loneliness and singledom are endemic in this phase of capitalism. [Fewer people are marrying](#) and those who are are doing so later; we are having [less sex](#). A [2018 study](#) found that 2.4 million adults in Britain “suffer from chronic loneliness”. Another

projection found that nearly one in seven people in the UK [could be living alone by 2039](#) and that those living alone are less financially secure.

For Hancock, turning her yoga practice into her career meant giving up much of her social life. She was “knackered” at the end of a long day of practice and teaching – and the expectation that she would continue her education through pricey retreats meant, at times, that she was spending more than she was making. It was at the end of a four-hour workshop in a local church in 2018 that the penny dropped. A student came up to her and said: “You are not well. We need to go to the doctor.”



Composite: Getty/Guardian Design/Getty

Her GP found infections in her ear and her chest. She spent seven weeks recovering in bed, which gave her a lot of time, alone at home, to reconsider her career and face the reality of exactly how vulnerable she was.

Lauren Smith\*, 34, a teacher in the west of England, was given a warning by a colleague before she applied for her postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE). “It’s going to be the most intense year of your life,” they said. At the time, she thought she was ready for it, but it took its toll on her relationship. “I remember coming home and just ... not even being able to talk to him.”

Things did not improve when she started working as a teacher. “There’s this culture in education where it’s almost competitive about how much you work,” she says. The social relationships at school become almost a substitute for a personal life; she briefly dated another teacher. However, apart from “the odd fling here or there”, she says, “in terms of actually dating, I find that my enthusiasm or my energy for it ...” She trails off.

The strain on their personal lives has made Smith and Hancock look much more closely at the sustainability of their working lives. Hancock is one of the founding members of the new [yoga teachers’ union](#), a branch of the Independent Workers of Great Britain (IWGB), the union representing gig economy workers and those in traditionally non-unionised workplaces. Smith is active in the National Education Union, but is considering a career change. “The demands on teachers have just increased so much and, with the funding cuts, I’m now doing the job of three people,” she says.

“Everything else you love about your job has been pushed to the wayside and it’s all about those exam results,” says Smith. The number one thing she would like “would be more planning time in my job. Maybe I could have one less class, which is 30 kids’ worth of data that I don’t have to do and it means I can put my mental energy into the students themselves and have the time and the headspace to do other things.”

The well-off are more likely to marry and have more stable families

It is not that she is hanging everything on the hope of a romantic relationship – and she does not want children – but nevertheless Smith longs for time and energy to devote to the people she cares about, rather than her job. “In the nine years that I have been a teacher, it has got harder and harder. If things don’t change, I can’t see myself staying in this job beyond two years from now.”

If work is getting in the way of our relationships, it is not an equally distributed problem. The decline in marriage rates “is a class-based affair”, [say the law professors Naomi Cahn and June Carbone](#), the authors of the book [Marriage Markets: How Inequality Is Remaking the American Family](#). The well-off are more likely to marry and have more stable families – and

the advantages of this family structure are conferred on their offspring. For those in a more precarious financial situation, it can often be easier to stay single.

Economic stability provides “a better foundation for loyalty, one based on relationship satisfaction and happiness rather than economic dependency or need”, [found the academics Pilar Gonalons-Pons and David Calnitsky](#) when they studied the impact of an experiment with universal basic income in Canada. If we were not so worried about paying the bills, perhaps we would have the time and mental space for better relationships.

In an increasingly atomised world, being in a couple is how most people have access to care and love. The status of being partnerless, or, as the writer [Caleb Luna](#) has put it, being “singled” – an active process that means single people are denied affection or care because they are reserved for people in couples – can leave many people without life-sustaining care. As Luna writes, the culture of “self-love”, in which we are encouraged to love, support and sustain ourselves, leaves out those for whom this is not a choice.

Care is overwhelmingly still provided by partners in a romantic couple or other family members: in the UK, 6.5 million people – one in eight adults – provide care for a sick or disabled family member or partner. The charity [Carers UK](#) estimates that, during the pandemic in 2020, 13.6 million people were carers. What happens to those, however, without partners or family members to provide care? It becomes someone’s job – a job that can end up placing enormous stress on the personal life of whoever is doing it.





Composite: Getty/GNM design/Getty

Care is often outsourced to paid workers – many of whom are immigrants – some of whom have left their own partners and children behind in order to go elsewhere for work, says Prof Laura Briggs, of the women, gender and sexuality studies department at the [University of Massachusetts Amherst](#).

The harsh crackdowns on migration to the US and [the UK](#) have left these workers in a uniquely vulnerable position. They would “work for almost any wage, no matter how low, to support family and household members back home, without the entanglements that come with dependents who are physically present, such as being late to work after a child’s doctor’s appointment, say, or the sick days that children or elders have so many of,” wrote Briggs in her 2017 book [How All Politics Became Reproductive Politics](#). In other words, with their family far away, the worker is free to devote all their time – and their care – to their employer.

It is not just care work that is blending the boundaries between people’s work lives and personal lives. In many sectors, [offices have been designed to look, feel and act like a home](#), to keep employees there for longer – with free food available 24/7, areas to rest and play with Lego, office pets, informal dress codes and even showers to create a feeling that work is a “family”.



When I met Karn Bianco while I was researching my book on how work is increasingly taking over our lives, he was a freelance computer game programmer who had tired of the long hours. “Your life became just work,” he said. “You would go in at 9am and would work through until 10 or 11 at night sometimes – you could get an evening meal there.” It was fine for a while, he said. “When I was an intern, I was single, I knew I was only in that desk for a year. I had no responsibilities, no dependents.”

But as Bianco, who is now 31 and living in Glasgow, got older and entered into a relationship, it became impossible to deal with. “I even tried to start coups of sorts,” he said, trying to convince his colleagues to walk out en masse at 5pm on the dot. But it did not take, so he was stuck trying to improve his own conditions, going home at 5pm on his own – something that was possible, he noted, only because he had worked his way up the ladder. Eventually, Bianco went freelance, then left the industry entirely.

Dating apps just feel like another admin task: ‘Ugh, I’ve got to reply to another email now.’

Bianco is one of the founding members of the gaming industry branch of the IWGB, which is fighting the long hours in the sector. Traditionally, there was a crunch time, when, just before a product launch, programmers were expected to put in 100-hour weeks with no extra pay. Now, as games are connected to the internet and consumers expect constant updates, [crunch time is pretty much all the time](#). “They try to instil that feeling of: ‘You have to do this for the family [company],’ rather than: ‘This is a transaction. You pay me and I work,’” said Austin Kelmore, 40, when I met him along with Bianco.

But what happens when the “family” is gone and the workers are left on their own? Layoffs are common in the games industry – so common that [one observer](#) created [a website to track them](#). (In 2020, there were an estimated 2,090 job losses as part of mass redundancies in the gaming industry.) When Kelmore was laid off, his partner’s income was a lifesaver, but it made him think: ‘Do I want to do games any more?’ He is still in the industry and active in the union working against what he says is a systematic issue with work-life balance. “Without unions, we had no idea what our rights were,”

Bianco says. “We were working illegal hours and didn’t even know it. Most of my time at home during some of those weeks was just sleeping.”

The pandemic, of course, has made many people face up to loneliness in a way they would not have done in the pre-lockdown world. One-third of women and one-fifth of men [report feeling lonely or isolated in this period](#).

Ruth Jones\* trained as a librarian in Canada and moved around from job to job – nearly once a year for 14 years. “Finding work, and especially having to take whatever work I can get, has definitely been a factor in why I haven’t dated much at 31,” she says via email. “How do you date someone wholeheartedly knowing that, at some point in a year, max, you’re going to have to make a decision about someone taking or not taking a job, being split up, doing long distance?”

A chronic illness means that, recently, she has been out of the workplace, stuck at home. She has realised the way in which our obsession with work is entangled with our romantic relationships. On dating apps and sites, “most people identify strongly with their jobs”, she says. Where does this leave someone who is unable to work long-term? “At a minimum, I am supposed to feel guilty for being unproductive, useless – and live a frugal, monk-like life,” she says.

[Why are increasing numbers of women choosing to be single?](#)  
[Read more](#)

She does not mind that she might not be able physically to do the same things as a potential partner, but she often finds that *they* do, especially as the apps are designed to pass judgment on people immediately. All of this means it feels impossible to find someone with whom to connect. “I feel like I’m not looking for a unicorn, I’m looking for a gold Pegasus.”

The apps often feel like another job to take on, says Smith. She will click on the dating site, flick through some profiles, maybe match with someone and exchange a couple of messages. Then a week of teaching goes by in a blur and, she says: “You have a look and you’ve missed the boat.” She often ends up deciding to spend her spare time with friends, or catching up on rest. “It just feels like another admin task: ‘Ugh, I’ve got to reply to another email

now. I've got to put some data into a form.'” And, of course, those dating apps are big business, profiting from workers being kept single by their jobs. A couple of months ago, the founder of the dating app Bumble was lauded as the “[world’s youngest self-made woman billionaire](#)”.

Hancock, who works in a deeply solitary industry, has found the process of organising with her union enormously helpful. “I remember being in this room and hearing so many different people from different industries talking and realising that we shared so much,” she says. “I wasn’t alone.”

It is through the union that she hopes to be able to change not just her own situation, but also the industry. After all, as the games workers learned, going home early by yourself – or leaving the industry – might be a temporary solution, but the real challenge is ending the culture of overwork. Perhaps it is time to revisit the original wants of International Workers’ Day, which called for the day to be split into [eight-hour chunks](#): for work, for rest and time for “what we will”, whether that is romance, family, friends or otherwise.

\*Names have been changed

*Work Won’t Love You Back by Sarah Jaffe is published by Hurst (£20). To order a copy, go to [guardianbookshop.com](https://guardianbookshop.com). Delivery charges may apply*

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## Dogs

# Dog-bite Britain: the problem with the pandemic puppy explosion

Over the past year, dog ownership has surged, and they have brought many of us untold joy. But the lack of proper training or socialisation has led to a growing danger of attacks



Beware of the dog? ... the idea that all incidents are caused by ‘dangerous dogs’ is a myth, and we should be wary of our pets not being properly socialised. Photograph: Christina Reichl Photography/Getty

Beware of the dog? ... the idea that all incidents are caused by ‘dangerous dogs’ is a myth, and we should be wary of our pets not being properly socialised. Photograph: Christina Reichl Photography/Getty

[Simon Usborne](#)

Thu 15 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

Annie Forman's cockapoo was not a pandemic puppy, but she became one: a furry lifebuoy to cling to during the first lockdown. Forman, 28, a receptionist at a GP surgery in a small Devon town, had grown up with dogs. They had never let her down, which she couldn't say for some of the humans in her life.

So when in January last year, Forman moved from her parents' dog-filled home to her own place, the first thing she did was get a puppy. "There was no way I was going to go anywhere in life without a dog," Forman says on the phone. As she speaks, Nellie the cockapoo is curled up on her lap. "I've struggled with my mental health for many years, and dogs were what got me through it. That's why it was a bit crap what happened – because everything that had made me feel better sort of got taken away."

Forman had seen the rottweiler before. It spent its days penned in a front garden, looking forlorn. In late October, Forman had dropped Nellie at her parents' house after a morning walk, and was heading home to get ready for work. "I saw the owner first, standing on the edge of the pavement with the dog," she recalls. She squeezed between the pair and some railings when the dog began to bark.

"And then it just leapt up at me," she says. "It was aiming for my face, but I put my arm up, and it took a massive chunk of it clean off. I couldn't feel anything at first because it had taken all the nerve endings."



Furry friend ... Annie Forman, who was bitten by a rottweiler, and her calmer companion, Nellie. Photograph: Annie Forman

Forman had joined the unfortunate ranks of Britain's dog-bite survivors. They are a growing breed. While statistics do not yet paint a complete picture, what we know is troubling: hospitals, personal injury lawyers, dog walkers and trainers all report that soaring demand for canine companions in the past year is coming back to bite us.

Some cases grab the headlines, and cannot simply be blamed on the pandemic. Earlier this month Lucille Downer, a grandmother in her 80s, [died after being attacked](#) in her West Midlands garden by dogs that had escaped from a neighbouring property. The animals were euthanised. In March in London, a QC said she was "heartbroken" [after her dog attacked "Freddie Mercury"](#), a seal that had made a home in the Thames. Freddie had to be put down. Meanwhile, in the US, after Joe Biden's rescue dog, Major, nipped two staffers, a White House spokesperson said the german shepherd was "still adjusting to his new surroundings".

But it is an everyday pattern of nips in the park and attacks in the home, including on children, that is raising wider concern. The Pet Food Manufacturers' Association estimates there are now 12 million dogs in the UK, up about 2 million in 12 months. French bulldogs and labradors have



been the most popular new dogs, according to analysis of pet insurance quotes by GoCompare.

As pandemic puppies grow into dogs with sharp teeth, too many lack the training to walk safely into the post-lockdown world. Meanwhile, dogs that do remember a life before Covid are on edge after a topsy-turvy year and face more upheaval as lockdown restrictions are eased.

“Puppies haven’t been getting the same mental stimulation they would have done,” says Dr Jenna Kiddie, the head of canine behaviour at [the Dogs Trust](#). “They haven’t been exposed to visitors to the home in the same way or been around other dogs. So we’re very worried about how they’re going to respond. Because they will probably respond with fear, and one way a dog can cope with fear is to use aggression.”

When Forman went to hospital in Exeter for emergency surgery on her arm, she was recorded as a “W54”. The “exposure to animate mechanical forces” section of the World Health Organization’s classification system for health problems includes the codes W58 (“bitten by a crocodile”) and W60 (“contact with plant thorns”). W54 is “bitten or struck by a dog”.

I remember one day seeing three or four cases, which was unusual.  
That’s what started alarm bells ringing

*Simon Minford*

More than 200 miles north of Exeter, in Liverpool, doctors at Alder Hey children’s hospital had begun to notice a rise in W54s soon after the first lockdown started last March. Social isolation was good for children’s physical health, if not always their mental wellbeing; there were fewer acute infections and accidents, for example. “But there was what felt like a lot of dog bites,” says Simon Minford, an advanced nurse practitioner specialising in cosmetic surgery for trauma patients at Alder Hey. “I remember one day seeing three or four cases, which was unusual. That’s what started alarm bells ringing.”

Alder Hey was already part of the [Merseyside Dog Safety Partnership](#), which includes academics, charities and councils. When Minford and his

colleagues shared their concerns at a meeting of the group, John Tulloch's ears pricked up. Tulloch, a vet and epidemiologist at the University of Liverpool, has been fascinated by injuries to humans caused by animals, partly since breaking a rib while calving a cow (a W64, by the way).

Tulloch has led a push to record and better analyse dog-bite data. In January, he published a study that used the W54 code to examine hospital admissions in England from 1998 to 2018. In 20 years, admissions for dog bites almost tripled, from six to 15 per 100,000 people, which equalled 8,000 admissions in 2018. Children aged under 14 made up a quarter of that number, which does not include bites patched up by GPs or in the home. The rise easily outpaced growth in the dog population.

After the meeting, Tulloch began crunching the numbers at Alder Hey. His latest study, published last week, revealed a threefold increase in dog-bite attendances after the start of the first lockdown, peaking last July when doctors there dealt with 44 attacks – about 12 a week. While W54s include dog “strikes” – people being knocked over – Tulloch says records show the vast majority of cases are bites. “Often these are children who maybe have had only a graze on the knee before,” says Minford, who has two cocker spaniels and two sons. “And suddenly they’re in hospital with a bite to the face. Every interaction is heartbreaking.”

The jump at Alder Hey echoes evidence recorded elsewhere. West Midlands police dealt with 800 dog-attack incidents in 2020, a three-year high. Tulloch wants to do more research, partly to capture how many bites happen without leading to hospital admissions. He also wants to better understand why dogs attack and why they are doing so more now. “One of the key research questions we have is: ‘What is happening just before a bite occurs?’” he says.

With kids stuck at home, there has been more exposure – and a greater leaning on dogs for play or emotional support. Small children are more vulnerable, clumsy and fearless. But dogs, more than ever, are also now treated as family members. Boundaries have become blurred; guards have dropped.





Dr Carri Westgarth, who was bitten as a toddler, and her dog Roxie.  
Photograph: Carri Westgarth

Carri Westgarth was about two when her mum ran upstairs to fetch a nappy, leaving her alone with the family's two placid jack russells. By the time she came back down, one of the dogs had bitten Carri on the head. She still has the scars. She thinks she may have crawled over to the animal, which was going blind, and confused it enough to trigger an attack.

Now 39, Westgarth was not put off dogs. Like everyone I spoke to for this article, she is a dog-lover. A former canine-behaviour counsellor, she is now a senior lecturer in human-animal interaction at the University of Liverpool, and co-author of Tulloch's studies.

Westgarth, whose book *The Happy Dog Owner* is out this month, says that even dog trainers often share the commonly held view that some attacks are inevitable and associated with certain breeds – and certain types of owners. Yet fatal attacks remain extremely rare; there were fewer than three a year, on average, from 1981 to 2015. While attacks by “dangerous” breeds such as pit bulls make front pages, Tulloch says there is no good data on breeds and bites.

Any breed can bite, Westgarth adds. She believes stereotypes stymie research and prevention. The pandemic has highlighted the breadth of the problem, in and out of the home, where too many pandemic puppies have missed out on socialisation. “You see them coming down the street,” she says. “They avoid you or look nervous, and a lot of my colleagues are doing a lot of work with very nervous adolescent dogs bought by well-meaning people who just didn’t realise how important those early months are.”

People think it's dangerous dogs with irresponsible owners doing all the biting, but it's not like that

*Carri Westgarth*

Hannah Molloy, a dog-behaviour expert based in the West Midlands, says puppies need to be socialised to get used to the human world from eight to 16 weeks. “Too many people don’t do it or think they can do it alone,” she says. “We want everything tomorrow, and then we’re shocked when dogs go from calm to biting. But they’ve never had the opportunity to learn alternative behaviours.”

Molloy says owners can spot warning signs before a dog becomes anxious or threatened enough to bite. “The earliest sign is it licking its nose and turning its head away,” she says. Clutching a paw to the chest can be another sign. Some scared dogs roll on to their backs; a tummy tickle is the worst possible way to respond. Instead, Molloy recommends giving an anxious dog space.

Setting boundaries is important, but severe or sustained punishments can repress emotion, displacing problems. “If you constantly shout at a dog not to growl at a child, all that happens is that when that adult punisher isn’t around, the dog is more likely to bite, in my experience, because they associate that child with bad things happening,” Molloy says.

Jenna Kiddie, at the [Dogs](#) Trust, says there are ways of getting dogs used to visitors to the house again. Owners can teach a dog to associate a door-knock or bell-ring with a treat in its bed, so that it automatically heads for bed rather than the door. “The doorbell going is also a situation where it’s so easy to take your eyes off the children,” she warns.



Puppies can be trained to be comfortable with visitors by being given a treat when the doorbell rings. Photograph: Capuski/Getty Images

Above all, Westgarth says, do not be complacent. She warns any owner never to leave children and dogs together unsupervised. Stair or door gates should also separate them overnight and during meal times. Even old, docile dogs can respond badly to undiagnosed joint pain or sight loss. “People think there are dangerous dogs with irresponsible owners going round doing all the biting,” she says. “But it’s not like that. The phrase you hear time and time again is: ‘He’s never done anything like this before.’”

The emotional and financial effects of a bite can take longer to heal than the wounds. Jenna Foxton, a freelance photographer, was walking her rescue pomeranian-pug hybrid, Disco, near her home in Cornwall last December when a passing greyhound on a lead went for its throat. When she tried to prise apart the greyhound’s jaws, one of its teeth tore through one of the tendons in her finger. A surgeon had to reattach it.



Jenna Foxton in hospital after being bitten. Photograph: Jenna Foxton

Foxton, 36, was stuck in casts for seven weeks, in pain and unable to work. Friends persuaded her to seek compensation. She found James McNally, AKA “the dog bite solicitor”, who is based at Slee Blackwell, a firm in Taunton. His inbox went crazy when the pandemic took hold; inquiries leapt from about two a week to five a day.

More than half of McNally’s clients are self-employed delivery drivers, who are bringing more stuff to more homes with more dogs. “But because everyone was out walking their dogs and jogging in the same parks at the same time, we were also getting a lot of attacks and injuries like that,” he says. McNally only pursues insured dog owners via their insurance companies, although owners themselves are also liable to be sued or prosecuted for failing to control a dog, depending on the severity of the attack. Penalties can rise to 14 years in prison. Compensation varies; an Amazon delivery driver McNally acted for last year received £3,000 after being bitten on the leg.

McNally predicts a further rise in cases as pandemic dogs adjust to eased restrictions. He says victims should always exchange details with owners, call the police and get medical attention (any break in the skin can lead to infection). Delivery workers should also take photos of the house at the time

of the attack. “It’s not unheard of for ‘beware of the dog’ signs to appear afterwards,” he says.

Foxton, who is still fearful while walking Disco, is waiting to hear if she will get compensation. She may require more surgery to improve movement in the finger. “I can still hold a pint at least,” she says. Disco recovered much more quickly; vets think her fleshy folds saved her life. “Dogs are just cute, cuddly things on Instagram for some people who maybe haven’t grown up with them,” Foxton says. “But people forget that they are animals.”

[How the world's funniest-looking dog finally found a home](#)  
[Read more](#)

Forman knew this, just as she knew that dogs also helped keep her afloat, not least when the pandemic left her isolated. “She became everything,” she says of Nellie. The attack left Forman in a spin. She had nightmares and felt a return of the stress disorder she had experienced after a traumatic episode in her teens.

Forman’s scar now looks remarkably neat compared with the gory picture she sent me of her arm after the attack. But going for a walk, with or without Nellie, can still make her anxious. “I still love dogs – they’re everything – and I think that’s why all this has upset me so much,” she says.

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## 2021.04.15 - Opinion

- The real scandal is that the revolving door between government and business is still open
- Unionist leaders in Northern Ireland must banish the ghosts of grievance and rage
- Now I'm dating again, I'm skipping all that blather about books and films
- We can mourn Prince Philip, but not the monarchy.



## Opinion Greensill

# The real scandal is that the revolving door between government and business is still open

Richard Brooks

Greensill is merely the latest chapter in a long story of distorted decision-making and falling public trust



‘Gliding from a position of public responsibility into one of private gain is now the norm.’ David Cameron (left) and Lex Greensill in January 2020.

‘Gliding from a position of public responsibility into one of private gain is now the norm.’ David Cameron (left) and Lex Greensill in January 2020.

Thu 15 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

Spare a thought for Britain’s ministers and mandarins. Making the right call in the public interest isn’t always easy when they’re endlessly having their

ears bent by those with vested interests in their decisions. It is, however, their duty. But it's one that has been compromised by public service becoming, for too many, just one part of a career in which acquiring the kind of wealth available only beyond Whitehall is a key objective.

This week's [revelation](#) that, for a couple of months in 2015, the government's chief commercial officer was also working for supply chain finance company Greensill Capital was called "extraordinary and shocking" by the shadow Cabinet Office minister, Rachel Reeves. Yet as part of a culture in which gliding from a position of public responsibility into one of private gain is now the norm, the overlap in roles looks no more than a curiosity. The dual role had [been approved by a Cabinet Office](#) at the top of which sat the late cabinet secretary, Sir Jeremy Heywood.

Heywood returned to government in 2007 after a spell at investment bank Morgan Stanley, [where he'd met Greensill's founder, Lex Greensill](#). By 2011, he was reportedly bringing the Australian into Downing Street to advise on using supply chain finance in government. Fast-forward to Covid-era Britain, when the former prime minister who encouraged him, David Cameron, was found [lobbying for taxpayer-funded support](#) for the hitherto obscure Greensill.

This is the "revolving door" in action: it brings into government senior figures not just with a certain expertise, but also a view that favours private over public interests. Going the other way, lucrative opportunities loom for influential public figures to profit in future in areas over which they hold sway. The effect is more insidious than premeditatedly corrupt. Few officials or ministers gleefully rub their hands as they rig decisions to favour future employers, but they do begin to see the world a bit more like those whom it will pay to keep onside. And with lobbying now so technologically easy, the hybrid public-private servant is likely to be more amenable to the text messaging from old colleagues – the modern version of Yes, Minister's Sir Humphrey's armchair chats at the gentleman's club.

The revolving door – and the concern over it – is nothing new. Cameron could be forgiven for pointing to the myriad positions taken up by his chancellor, George Osborne, in the past five years. After presiding over years of austerity that ultimately enriched the haves at the expense of the



have-nots, Osborne [landed](#) a one-day-a-week, £650,000-a-year job at asset manager BlackRock. The company also took on his [former chief of staff, Rupert Harrison](#), the [architect](#) of the UK's pension reforms.

So frequently does the revolving door turn that the magazine for which I write, Private Eye, can cover such questionable moves almost every issue. It is not unheard of, for example, for top military brass and Ministry of Defence officials to acquire directorships or advisory positions at the major arms companies – or consultancies deftly sandwiched between them and officialdom – later in their careers. The result is a cadre of officers and civil servants who as good as know that these companies will be their employers before long and that they might well be back in the corridors of power representing them. Even without ill-intent, decision-making is distorted.

The policing of the revolving door remains homeopathically weak. The government's Advisory Committee on Public Appointments (Acoba), which ex-ministers and the more senior civil servants should consult, is just that. It can be ignored with near impunity and its advice, even in cases with apparently obvious conflicts of interest, is invariably that appointments can go ahead with weak limitations on lobbying former colleagues [for just two years](#). The public and media learn of a revolving door move only after the event, by which time reasons that it might not be such a good idea cannot be considered. In one notable case, the committee approved the former HMRC permanent secretary, Dave Hartnett, joining accountancy firm Deloitte [even though he had met](#) one of its senior partners on 48 separate occasions in five years and had been criticised for agreeing a number of “sweetheart deals” with major corporations.

[Britain believes it's free of corruption. But there's still the stench of decay\\_| Rafael Behr](#)  
[Read more](#)

This kind of example has led to repeated reviews of the revolving door system, to no avail. In 2017, parliament's Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee found that “the failures of governments to regulate [the revolving door] properly have damaged public trust in politics and public institutions and led to repeated scandals”. The advisory committee was [“toothless”](#). But even relatively mild recommendations from

the MPs, such as preventing public servants taking jobs that relate to previous areas of regulatory responsibility for two years, [were rejected](#).

The new Acoba chair, Lord Pickles, promises to be a new broom. But he's operating under a very old system, which can be changed only by the same politicians who benefit from it. Failure to reform, warned the MPs' committee four years ago, "will lead to an even greater decline in public trust in our democracy and our government". In the wake of the [Greensill](#) scandal, they can say certainly that again – and on past evidence will probably have to in another few years' time.

- Richard Brooks is a Private Eye journalist and the author of Bean Counters

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## [Opinion](#)**Northern Ireland**

# Unionist leaders in Northern Ireland must banish the ghosts of grievance and rage

[Susan McKay](#)

Fearing democracy, the DUP and loyalist groups are retreating into a paranoid huddle



Violence on Lanark Way in West Belfast on 7 April. Photograph: Peter Morrison/AP

Violence on Lanark Way in West Belfast on 7 April. Photograph: Peter Morrison/AP

Thu 15 Apr 2021 05.00 EDT

A few of the boys and men asked about their alleged involvement in last week's street violence in [Northern Ireland](#) spoke as if struggling to

remember troubled dreams. A person was holding a plastic off-licence bag. They had already had a lot of drinks and this looked like more, but then the bag contained petrol bombs. Someone for reasons unknown to himself made the journey from mid Ulster to Belfast. He found himself in the middle of a riot. Another was passing the end of a street and saw boys attacking the police. A child he knew was disappearing down an alley. He followed but then he was at other riots in other parts of the city.

Watching clips of the many videos taken of the disturbances had a similar, dislocated, nightmarish feel. A fleet of white police Land Rovers speed down to block a road. [A man's voice roars](#): "Party time!" A cheering crowd surges forward, missiles flying. A doubledecker bus lurches along a city street, a ball of fire where the driver should be. The gate across the peaceline, with "No peace is bad, no war is good" painted across it, is locked. Hooded boys slosh petrol over it, set it alight and finally wrench the gate open to reveal, facing them from the other side, their mirror image, hooded boys.

But for some people, what happened was brutally clear. A press photographer was violently set upon from behind by men who called him a ["fenian cunt"](#) and told him to go back to his own area. In Carrickfergus, masked men smashed the windows of certain houses and Catholic families hastily prepared to flee. It was, in the words of a local Alliance party politician, ["raw, naked sectarianism"](#). About 70 police officers were injured. [Bus drivers stood](#) in solidarity with their shaken colleague outside Belfast's City Hall, remembering other bus drivers, killed during the Troubles.

All of these people might have been ghosts, figures summoned up from history, from the riots that have been going on here since the end of the 18th century, many of them in the same areas – places stuck in poverty. These particular events took place in the week of the 23rd anniversary of the signing of the [Good Friday agreement](#), with its fine commitments to peace, reconciliation and an end to the use of violence for political ends. It is two years since dissident republicans whipped up a riot against the police in Derry, and someone shot dead the young writer [Lyra McKee](#).

The historian of northern riots, the late Andrew Boyd, wrote in his 1969 book *Holy War in Belfast*, about the "fetishes that pass for politics" in a state

founded on the maintenance of sectarian division. Boyd planned his book to end in 1886 but then “history began to repeat itself” in the 1960s. “Ian Paisley is but a reincarnation of Hugh Hanna,” he wrote. In the 19th century, Hanna roared in opposition to Home Rule that “our safety ... lies in the union ... with our kith and kin across the narrow seas”. In 1998 Paisley warned the authorities to allow the anti-agreement Orange Order march in Drumcree to go ahead. Otherwise, he said, “anyone with any imagination knows what is going to happen”. [What happened was](#), loyalist paramilitaries set fire to Chrissie Quinn’s house in Carnany, burning to death three of her four small sons. Other Catholic families were forced out.

The republicans who taught a new generation of Catholic boys how to make and throw petrol bombs in Derry, and the loyalists who did the same for Protestant boys in Belfast, Coleraine and Carrickfergus, have in common a hatred of the 1998 peace deal. Loyalists claim it began a process of “appeasement” that will end with the destruction of Northern [Ireland](#). They use archaic language, calling up the “steadfast sons of Ulster”. They speak of the “jackboot” of Europe and call the Irish government Nazis.

The problem right now is that all of unionism has turned dissident. Its three main parties have joined forces to bring the British government to court, citing breaches of the 1800 Act of Union and the Good Friday agreement (which two of those three parties opposed). The DUP pulled out of the north-south arrangements that are a mainstay of the agreement. All of the leaders demanded that the chief constable resign over his handling of a republican funeral. DUP MP Sammy Wilson declared [“guerrilla warfare”](#) over the protocol that has created a trade border in the Irish Sea. This mechanism by which the EU and the UK resolved Brexit became inevitable after the DUP rejected every other proposed deal. It held out for a hard border across Ireland, but this was incompatible with the GFA, for which 71% of people in Northern Ireland voted in favour in 1998, while 56% of them voted to remain in the EU in 2016.

The inconsistency extends to the attitude to the government. Unionists insist there must be no regulatory diversion between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK, yet the first minister and DUP leader, Arlene Foster, told the secretary of state to [“back off”](#) when he insisted British law must be implemented to allow abortions for women in Northern Ireland. [Feminists](#)

[are angry](#) about this. Anti-poverty activists working in neglected communities are angry too. So are Irish language campaigners promised legislation that has not been delivered. None of these people have rioted.

The IRA has gone. What unionism fears now is democracy. The dread is existential. The Good Friday agreement enables the secretary of state to initiate a border poll. Time to play the Orange card, the one that unites Protestants in a paranoid huddle. In February, Foster met the Loyalist Communities Council (LCC), an all-male organisation hardly anyone had heard of which claims to represent working-class unionism, including [paramilitary organisations](#). Its chairperson David Campbell [told BBC Radio Ulster](#): “If it comes to the bit where we have to fight to maintain our freedoms within the United Kingdom then so be it.”

In 2005, after loyalist riots in Belfast, [Ian Paisley said](#): “You’re not going to ballyrag me and say I’m responsible.” The then leader of the UUP, Reg Empey, said: “There’s no use picking on me.” Unionist leaders condemned last week’s violence, [as did the LCC](#). But it is not enough. They need to banish old ghosts full of grievance and rage. If young people had hopes and ambitions, they would not be out fighting with shadows.

Susan McKay is an Irish writer and journalist

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## [OpinionDating](#)

# Now I'm dating again, I'm skipping all that blather about books and films

[Megan Nolan](#)

After so long in lockdown, I'd rather sniff my dates than talk about our rich inner lives



‘I’ve done nothing but regard, absorb, and think for so long now ...’

Photograph: Yuki Cheung/Getty Images/EyeEm

‘I’ve done nothing but regard, absorb, and think for so long now ...’

Photograph: Yuki Cheung/Getty Images/EyeEm

Thu 15 Apr 2021 02.00 EDT

God help me, I’m dating again. I thought about this with reverent anticipation for so long and now it’s here. Of course, I have forgotten how to speak, and what an attractive woman is supposed to wear, and how many messages a day it is legal to send to someone you fancy.



There are, unsurprisingly, several differences between dating now and dating before I spent months on end living alone, becoming eccentric and fundamentally intolerant of other people. One of them is that I have lost all interest in the traditional dating foreplay of trading cultural interests with the object of my desire.

This is a big deal. For those of us who don't have the luxury of relying solely on our looks, flaunting a carefully curated record collection, or an extensive knowledge of BFI programming, has traditionally been a vital method of snaring a mate. I have a distinct and painful memory of trying to attract the attention of my first crush by standing near him in the newsagent and picking up a copy of NME with theatrical flourish. I stood beside him, leafing through it, occasionally making an actual, audible noise of interest. "Hmml!" I grunted, at news of the latest Klaxons single.

[From Naked Attraction to Love Is Blind: The couples who found lasting love on wild TV dating shows](#)

[Read more](#)

It wasn't all for show, either – it was because the books and films and songs I loved seemed to make up my most essential parts. I had no idea who I would be in their absence, so I made them stand in for a personality. To this day, there is still a bit of me that feels defined by the fact my favourite film is [Harold and Maude](#).

Seeing, however, as I have had nothing but cultural products for company for most of a year, I'm done with them. I never want to watch prestige television again, or listen to a podcast. Music is strictly only for soundtracking sex. I've done nothing but regard, absorb and think for so long that I'm ready to be a mostly mute philistine who lives only for base pleasures. When I go on a date, I'm not asking who their favourite composer is, or what they think about Philip Roth. I'm going to suggest cutting right to it: seeing if we like the smell of each other and taking it from there.

- Megan Nolan is an Irish writer based in London
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## Opinion Prince Philip

# We can mourn Prince Philip, but not the monarchy

[Afua Hirsch](#)



The Duke of Edinburgh may have been a man of his time, yet the royal family cannot be separated from the history of empire



The Queen and Prince Philip on a visit to Sierra Leone in 1961. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

The Queen and Prince Philip on a visit to Sierra Leone in 1961. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

Thu 15 Apr 2021 02.00 EDT

Within minutes of Prince Philip's death having been announced, I began receiving messages from friends in Ghana. "My sincere condolences for your loss," one said. "May God bless you and everyone in the UK who is grieving," said another. On a human level, acknowledging respectfully the loss that comes with death makes sense. But why did these messages describe it as *my* loss?

I am not alone in feeling that the monarchy is an institution that cannot be embraced – although even now, it is not easy to say so. If I fail to express my deference and loyalty, I will be viciously attacked by those who regard me as unpatriotic. I will be the bad Black person, the ungrateful "guest" (never mind that this is my country), the disloyal colonial subject who forgot how much Britain did for me.

The [public reaction](#) to Prince Philip's death has centred on how much he, personally, has done. By all accounts he was the most active member of the

royal family, having conducted, apparently, more than [20,000 engagements](#), and holding more than 800 presidencies and patronages. Many young people benefited from the Duke of Edinburgh awards scheme.

But these acts of public service come with strings attached. We become complicit in a toxic transaction that, in exchange for their privileges, deprives the royals of their privacy or control over their own destinies, and entitles us to endless and poisonous coverage of the minutiae of their lives.

On our side of the bargain, we abandon our supposed commitment to meritocracy and equality by accepting that these human beings are born deserving of special reverence. We receive access to their charity, but in return we lose our freedom to challenge their authority. The royals' good deeds and charitable endeavours are not in themselves a justification for the monarchy.

The truth is that there is no escaping the haunting legacy of empire. Its ghosts have long taken possession of our royal family, turning them into emperors without colonies, bounty hoarders without raids, conquerors without wars. Instead, they are the heads of a Commonwealth in which the colonised are rebranded "friends" with "a shared history". This is [fantasy stuff](#).

As is the idea – ludicrously popular in tributes to Prince Philip – that he was some kind of frustrated comedian. We have all by now been reminded of his famous remarks: telling the Nigerian president, Olusegun Obasanjo, who was wearing national dress, "You look like you're ready for bed"; or advising British students in China not to stay too long or they would end up with "slitty eyes". A Black British, Cambridge-educated friend of mine received a classic Prince Philip "compliment" when she met him: "You speak English beautifully!" he said.

In the past few days we've heard numerous euphemisms deployed to cover these outbursts without calling them what they were. "His 'gaffes' were [typical of the clubbish humour](#) of the officer class." He was "politically incorrect", and "blunt". Nobody likes to speak ill of the dead, but these are not excuses for Philip so much as alibis for British commentators, desperate to avoid confronting the real legacy of British imperial expansion: racism. A

dirty word that inconveniently undermines the glorious narrative the royals still help project. The colonisation of “lesser peoples” was by definition a project of white supremacy, and one personified by the royal family at the head of the empire: of course he made racist jokes.

If calling Prince Philip “a man of his time” is an admission that the royals exist in something of a time capsule, then I have to agree. The institution is, as the experience of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex has made clear, outdated.

Both Meghan’s presence and the racist press treatment to which she was subjected offered the monarchy a unique opportunity to embrace a woman of African heritage, acknowledge its complicated relationship with this heritage in the past, and at least appear committed to a new era of equality. It could not have failed the test more dramatically.

Meanwhile, Britain’s honours system continues to glorify the pain felt by survivors of colonialism and their descendants. This system – which, two generations on from Prince Philip is still being actively promoted – rewards British people for their achievements on remarkable terms. It asks us to aspire to see ourselves as “Members”, “Officers” or even “Commanders” of the British Empire – a painful act of betrayal to our histories.

For those who object to projecting this painful history on to a single, recently deceased old man, this is the very problem with the concept of monarchy. Of course there is an individual analysis, in which Prince Philip was a fascinating historical actor whose passing points towards the end of an era. His childhood was shaped by the collapse of the Ottoman empire. His body carried the genetic memory of the Bolshevik revolution and its fatal consequences for the Romanovs: in 1993, [his DNA was used](#) to identify their remains.

Philip’s marriage to the Queen is a legacy of Queen Victoria’s project to unite Europe through dynastic marriages, based on a deep appreciation of the need for peace on the continent. It’s a virtuous ideal with much to offer the very same people most noisily prostrating themselves before the royals, if they actually cared to learn.

But our personal relationships with the monarchy cannot exist in a vacuum. Before expressing any fondness for the royals, I have to ask myself, am I subconsciously seeking the approval of the predominantly white society that rewards particular Black people for showing their allegiance?

Am I threatened by the penalties for not engaging in this period of forced mourning? Many TV journalists like me are, after all, at the mercy of a governing party that has made clear its willingness to [upbraid broadcasters](#) who do not appear sufficiently patriotic.

Above all, the unspoken requirement for us to publicly celebrate the monarchy's gains – or mourn any of its losses – demands that I internalise a history of violence and racism against my own ancestors. The instinct I still feel to apologise for not doing so is evidence of how strongly those forces still exist. So if there is a fitting tribute to the passing of Prince Philip, I believe it would be to learn – with honesty – the lessons from both his life and the reaction to his death.

- Afua Hirsch is a Guardian columnist

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## 2021.04.15 - Around the world

- [Afghanistan Biden announces US and Nato troops to leave by 11 September](#)
- ['Terrible days ahead' Afghan women fear the return of the Taliban](#)
- [Environment All new US vehicles could be electric by 2035, study finds](#)
- ['Very creepy' ABC apologises for Australian navy ship twerking video after dancers allege 'deceptive editing'](#)

## US military

# Biden announces all US and Nato troops to leave Afghanistan by September 11

- Withdrawal of US and Nato military personnel to begin on 1 May
- [‘It’s time to end America’s longest war’ – Biden at White House](#)



Biden said from the White House: ‘We cannot continue the cycle of extending or expanding our military presence in Afghanistan.’ Photograph: Reuters

Biden said from the White House: ‘We cannot continue the cycle of extending or expanding our military presence in Afghanistan.’ Photograph: Reuters

[Dan Sabbagh](#) in London and [Julian Borger](#) in Washington

Wed 14 Apr 2021 15.06 EDT



US president Joe Biden has declared it was time “to end America’s longest war” as he announced that nearly 10,000 US and Nato troops would return home from [Afghanistan](#) in the run-up to the 20th anniversary of 9/11.

Addressing the world from the White House, Biden said 2,500 US troops plus a further 7,000 from “Nato allies” including 750 from the UK would gradually leave the country starting on 1 May. “The plan has long been in together, out together,” he added.

“We cannot continue the cycle of extending or expanding our military presence in Afghanistan, hoping to create ideal conditions for the withdrawal and expecting a different result,” Biden said in a late afternoon speech.

Biden said he was the fourth president to preside over the US-led fight against the [Taliban](#). “I will not pass this responsibility on to a fifth,” he said, and added he had told his predecessor, George Bush, who first ordered troops into the country in the aftermath of the terror attack on the Twin Towers, of his decision on Tuesday.

[Damned either way, Biden opts out of Afghanistan as US tires of ‘forever wars’](#)

[Read more](#)

The plan was debated at a Nato summit in Brussels earlier on Wednesday. Member states did not oppose the plans for a full withdrawal once the US has made its intentions clear earlier this week, partly because they cannot guarantee the security of their own forces without the presence of the US.

Minutes after Biden’s confirmation of the withdrawal plan, all Nato members, including the UK, put out a joint statement, confirming they would join in with an “orderly, coordinated, and deliberate” removal of troops alongside the US.

The alliance said that it had achieved a goal to “prevent terrorists from using Afghanistan as a safe haven to attack us” but acknowledged also there was no good reason to stay on. “There is no military solution to the challenges Afghanistan faces,” Nato members said.

The UK, which has been present alongside the US for nearly 20 years, had been preparing to withdraw for several weeks, once the new administration had decided on its plans. If they [the Americans] go, we'll all have to go. That's the reality of it," a British defence source said.

Ben Wallace, the UK defence secretary, said: "The British public and our Armed Forces community, both serving and veterans, will have lasting memories of our time in Afghanistan. Most importantly we must remember those who paid the ultimate sacrifice, who will never be forgotten."



US Marines inside a tent at Camp Leatherneck in Afghanistan's Helmand province in 2009. Photograph: David Guttenfelder/AP

The threat from the Taliban to the US is judged to be at a level where a military presence is no longer required, but many officials, diplomats and analysts believe the hardline group could soon be back in control across the country, and that there could be a resurgence of al-Qaida and Isis in Afghanistan.

William Burns, the CIA director, told the Senate on Wednesday that there was a "significant risk" that the terrorist groups could re-establish themselves and pose a threat to the US and its allies.

“I think we have to be clear-eyed about the reality, looking at the potential terrorism challenge, that both al-Qaida and Isis in Afghanistan remain intent on recovering the ability to attack US targets, whether it’s in the region, in the west or, ultimately, in the homeland,” Burns told the Senate intelligence committee.

“When the time comes for the [US military](#) to withdraw, the US government’s ability to collect and act on threats will diminish. That simply a fact,” he added, but he stressed there were actions that US intelligence would take to mitigate the threat and raise the alarm if needed.

Nick Reynolds, a research analyst with the Rusi thinktank, said: “Ultimately, now is not a good time to leave. However, there was never a good time to leave, nor does one seem possible, and Nato was never able to create a window in which good leaving conditions were in prospect.”

More than 2,300 US personnel have been killed and 20,000 wounded in the long-running conflict, which has also claimed the lives of nearly 50,000 Afghan civilians. The Taliban were driven out of Kabul early in the conflict but more recently the security situation for civilians has worsened.

Action on Armed Violence, a research group that monitors deaths in conflict, said in 2020 that Afghanistan had the highest level of civilian casualties harmed by explosive weapons recorded by any country in the world, overtaking Syria. Last year the UN recorded 3,035 civilian deaths in the country.

### [Graphic](#)

Britain played a major role in combat operations in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2014, leading the fight against the Taliban in the southern Helmand province. A total of 454 British soldiers and civilians were killed on operations during the period, according to the Ministry of Defence.

Veterans of the conflict in Afghanistan said they had mixed feelings. Craig Monaghan, 30, a rifleman who was left with a brain injury and deaf in one ear after being hit by an improvised explosive device in 2009, said he still believed the decision to fight the Taliban was correct, even though he and

many other veterans he knew had had mental health problems in the years following.

“I have to believe it was worth it, partly because of what we lost. When we took on the Taliban, we took away the fear many local people had. So if you sit and digest it, leaving completely is a bitter pill to swallow. Until a country can provide its own security, can it ever be a good time to go?” he said.

Richard Mitchell, 38, who served on four tours in Afghanistan with the Parachute Regiment, said he did not think the UK would “commit to a campaign on that scale again”. He said: “I think about my mates who lost their lives, the toll on the civilian population, the resources we poured in, and can’t help but conclude it wasn’t worth it. We never had a coherent strategy or a notion of what success would look like.”

The Trump administration had agreed to withdraw all forces by May after striking a peace deal with the Taliban under which the hardline Islamist group was to crack down on al-Qaida, stop attacking international troops, and engage in peace negotiations with the Afghan government.



Joe Biden lays a wreath in Arlington National cemetery to honor fallen veterans of the war in Afghanistan on 14 April. Photograph: Brendan

Smialowski/AFP/Getty Images

The election of Biden as president last year prompted a review, but his final decision appears not much different. The previous orthodoxy had been to demand that the Taliban meet certain conditions before US troops withdraw, but on Tuesday it was clear this had changed. A senior US official briefing reporters on the decision said: “The president has judged that a conditions-based approach, which has been the approach of the past two decades, is a recipe for staying in Afghanistan for ever.”

Barack Obama praised the withdrawal, saying Biden “has made the right decision”.

The former president acknowledged there will be “very difficult challenges and further hardship ahead in Afghanistan”, and he urged the US to remain involved in diplomatic efforts to ensure the human rights of Afghan people.

“But after nearly two decades of putting our troops in harm’s way, it is time to recognize that we have accomplished all that we can militarily, and that it’s time to bring our remaining troops home,” Obama said.

Earlier, Germany, which contributes 1,300 troops to the training and stabilisation mission, indicated before the Nato meeting that it would support withdrawal

Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, the country’s defence minister, told ARD public television: “We always said, ‘We’ll go in together, we’ll leave together.’ I am for an orderly withdrawal and that is why I assume that we will agree to that today.”

About 36 countries provide troops for Nato’s Resolute Support mission, which largely provides training advice and assistance to Afghanistan’s security forces. Larger contributors include Italy, Georgia, Romania and Turkey, which supply several hundred troops each.

Later on Wednesday, Biden paid a visit to Section 60 of Arlington National Cemetery, where service members who died fighting in America’s recent wars, including the war in [Afghanistan](#), are buried.

Asked by a reporter whether it was a difficult decision to withdraw US troops from Afghanistan, Biden said it was not.

“To me, it was absolutely clear,” Biden said. “We went for two reasons: get rid of bin Laden and to end the safe haven. I never thought we were there to somehow unify ... Afghanistan. It’s never been done.”

*Joan E Greve contributed reporting*

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## [Afghanistan](#)

# ‘Terrible days ahead’: Afghan women fear the return of the Taliban

After 20 years of liberty, female education is once again threatened by hardline Islamists



Afghan women at an earlier rally to support peace talks. Many fear the withdrawal of Nato troops will lead to severe restrictions of their freedoms. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Afghan women at an earlier rally to support peace talks. Many fear the withdrawal of Nato troops will lead to severe restrictions of their freedoms. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

[Akhtar Mohammad Makoi](#) in Herat and [Michael Safi](#)

Wed 14 Apr 2021 11.34 EDT

Outside a college from which their mothers were banned, the women waited for friends finishing exams they fear will be some of the last they can take.

“The Americans are leaving,” said Basireh Heydari, a Herat University student. “We have terrible days ahead with the [Taliban](#). I’m worried they won’t let me leave the house, let alone what I’m doing now.”

The Biden administration’s [decision to withdraw](#) all US troops from Afghanistan by 11 September will bring an end to the US’s longest war. With Nato allies such as Germany already announcing on Wednesday that [they will follow Washington’s lead and exit the country](#), Afghans fear an intensification of fighting between the national government and the Taliban, who were ousted by the US-led intervention two decades ago.

[Afghans dread the ‘danger hours’ as fragile gains of 20 years slip away](#)  
[Read more](#)

Violence against civilians, especially women and children, has surged over the past year, according to UN statistics [released on Wednesday](#), and Taliban control of the country is greater than at any point in the past two decades. The benefits of an ongoing foreign military presence in the country are unclear.

But a return to hardline Islamist rule could mean the rollback of one of the intervention’s least disputed achievements – the lifting of a Taliban prohibition of female education.

On Wednesday, Heydari and her friends were trying to absorb the news as they sat in a rickshaw by the university gates. “I have only one wish, and that’s to finish my studies and of course work, but with the Taliban coming, I don’t think I’ll reach it,” she said.

There is no guarantee the Islamist group will take power, and they have signalled – perhaps opportunistically – that their future rule would be more flexible on the question of female schooling. If not a total change of heart on the part of the fundamentalists, Heydari hoped at least for a compromise. “If they have problems with co-education, I’m ready to study in girl-only classes,” she said.

Beside her, Salma Ehrari, an economics student, was more sceptical. “I want the world to know that the Taliban are fooling them, they are not changed,”



she said. “They are using technology and are on Twitter, but they have the same thoughts as they had 20 years ago. I’ll lose my education and of course Americans are responsible for that, not the Taliban – this is just the Taliban’s nature.”

Some in the province, where the Taliban controls some districts, said deteriorating security was already leading to a curtailment of their liberties. “My outlet restricted my colleagues’ movements because of security concerns, and my father recently asked me to stop working for a while,” said Atifa Alizadeh, a reporter and part of a generation of Afghan women who have gone to school and found work since the downfall of the Taliban in 2001.

At least eight journalists have been killed in the country over the past six months, as part of a [wave of attacks](#) against media workers, activists and other civil society figures.

Basireh Safa Theri, a social activist, started a girls’ school in the aftermath of the US-led invasion, and said she was closely monitoring halting negotiations between the national government and the Taliban about what will come after international forces depart.

[Damned either way, Biden opts out of Afghanistan as US tires of ‘forever wars’](#)  
[Read more](#)

“They are negotiating each day but unfortunately no word on girls’ education, they only talk about power,” she said.

In the meantime, the girls at her school have started to study harder. “They feel that they are in the very last days of their schooling,” she said. “Many students and families are coming and telling me they will only be able to go to school for a few more weeks or months, and want to learn as much as they can.

“Students are coming to my office and asking, ‘Are the Taliban coming? Will we be able to keep coming to school or not? We want to use the very last seconds’.”

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## America's race to zero emissionsElectric, hybrid and low-emission cars

# Advances mean all new US vehicles can be electric by 2035, study finds

- Cost of batteries to fall and recharge points to increase
- Rapid electrification could save drivers \$2.7tn by 2050



A car carrier hauler bearing electric vehicles departs Tesla's vehicle factory in Fremont, California, last year. Photograph: John G Mabanglo/EPA

A car carrier hauler bearing electric vehicles departs Tesla's vehicle factory in Fremont, California, last year. Photograph: John G Mabanglo/EPA

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Thu 15 Apr 2021 00.01 EDT

Rapid advances in the technology and cost of batteries should allow all new cars and trucks sold in the US to be powered by electricity by 2035, saving

drivers trillions of dollars and delivering a major boost to the effort to slow the climate crisis, new research has found.

Electric vehicles currently [make up](#) only about 2% of all cars sold in the US, with many American drivers put off until now by models that were often significantly more expensive than gasoline or diesel cars, as well as concerns over the availability of plug-in recharge points.

[New US vehicles must be electric by 2030 to meet climate goals – report](#)  
[Read more](#)

This situation is likely to drastically change this decade, according to the [new University of California, Berkeley study](#), with the upfront cost of electric cars set to reach parity with petrol vehicles in around five years' time. As electric cars are more efficient and require less costly maintenance, the rapid electrification of transport would save about \$2.7tn in driver costs by 2050.

Researchers said the plummeting cost of batteries, the main factor in the higher cost of electric vehicles, and improvements in their efficiency mean that it will be technically feasible for the US to phase out the sale of new petrol and diesel cars within 15 years. This would shrink planet-heating emissions from transport, currently the largest source of greenhouse gases in the US.

“In order to meet any sort of carbon goals, the transport sector needs to be electrified,” said Amol Phadke, a senior scientist at University of California, Berkeley and report co-author.

Phadke added: “The upfront price of electric vehicles is coming down rapidly, which is very exciting. Because of battery technology improvements, most models now have a range of 250 miles, higher than the daily driving distance of most people, and now come with pretty astonishing fast-charging capabilities.”

Joe Biden has identified the growth of the electric vehicle market as a key plank in his administration's efforts cut US emissions to net zero by 2050, with the US president framing the issue as a boon to American

manufacturing and jobs. Biden's administration has pledged to roll out 500,000 new electric charging ports for cars within the next decade.

Some states, and other countries, have gone further. California has vowed to sell only electric vehicles by 2035, a date also set for the end of the internal combustion engine in the UK. General Motors, meanwhile, recently pledged to shift all of its fleet to electric cars by the same year.

The University of California, Berkeley study makes clear that government intervention will be required for the US to hit the 2035 target of all-electric sales, with a business as usual approach meaning that less than half of cars sold in America would be electric by this point.

“The role of government policy is crucial, firstly with incentives to buy electric vehicles until there is price parity and then to rapidly ramp up fast-charging infrastructure,” said Phadke. “If the US government set a date for the end of gasoline cars, it would give a very clear signal to the market. If it does nothing, the transition will still take place but not quick enough to deal with climate change. It's not going to be easy, but it's achievable.”

Melissa Lott, an energy policy expert at Columbia University who was not involved in the research, said “the battery technology is largely there and we are very close to price parity” but that questions remain around extending recharging infrastructure to low-income people and those in high-density housing.

“If I can't charge my car, it won't matter if the car itself is cheaper,” Lott said. “What Biden has proposed on chargers is a drop in the bucket. We need hundreds of thousands more than that.”

Improvements in battery technology and their falling cost have led to hopes they will be a key tool in helping reduce emissions – the global market for electric vehicle batteries alone is expected to hit [almost a trillion dollars by 2030](#).

The Biden administration has outlined plans to electrify buses, while data centers and airplanes may also start to rely upon batteries in a shift to cleaner energy. An electricity grid powered by wind, solar and other renewables

will, too, require some battery storage, although the technology isn't yet able to retain power over long periods to account for seasonal power surges and troughs.

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## [Australian Broadcasting Corporation](#)

# ABC apologises for Australian navy ship twerking video after dancers allege ‘deceptive editing’

101 Doll Squadron dance group say they feel ‘threatened’ after footage they say was shot from a ‘creepy’ angle at HMAS Supply launch



101 Doll Squadron dancers perform at the launch of the Australian navy ship HMAS Supply in Sydney. They say they feel ‘unsafe’ after the ABC video of their twerking routine went viral. Photograph: [@alexbrucesmith/Twitter](#)

101 Doll Squadron dancers perform at the launch of the Australian navy ship HMAS Supply in Sydney. They say they feel ‘unsafe’ after the ABC video of their twerking routine went viral. Photograph: [@alexbrucesmith/Twitter](#)

[Mostafa Rachwani](#)

[@Rachwani91](#)

Thu 15 Apr 2021 00.49 EDT



The twerking dancing troupe who performed at the launch of the Australian navy's newest ship have condemned the [ABC](#) claiming that the broadcaster's video coverage of their performance contributed to the group feeling "threatened" and "exploited" in the wake of intense media interest surrounding their performance.

101 Doll Squadron released a statement saying they felt "unsafe" and personally attacked, blaming what they say was the ABC's "deceptive editing" of a news clip, which appeared to show dignitaries present during their performance.

"We are very disappointed at the ABC's deceptive editing of their video piece which cut to guests and dignitaries who were not in attendance, and shot from angles which could not be seen by the audience," they said.

"We found this very creepy."

The statement also condemned what they believed was the ABC's "need to sexualise these women and their dance piece".

"These are the images appearing in the media and the ABC have a lot to answer for in making us feel threatened and exploited."

The ABC has issued an apology for the way the video was edited, saying a government MP had told the reporters both the governor general and the chief of navy were present for the dance.

"The video should not have been edited in that way and the ABC apologises to the Governor-General and the Chief of Navy, and to viewers, for this error," the statement said.

The ABC has also added a correction to the original story, which acknowledges the video was edited in a way that did not reflect the actual chronology of events.

The prime minister, Scott Morrison, said he was "disappointed" in the way the ABC reported on the event.

“I am disappointed that this event was so misreported. I think that was disrespectful to the performers to suggest the governor general or others were in attendance in that way.

“I think standards have failed and so I think obviously defence will look at these matters and make what changes they wish to in the future. I will leave that to them. It is disappointing that Australians were so misled on that issue.”

The PM refrained from commenting on the performance itself, saying he would “leave that to defence”, but that the ABC should “reflect” on the way they edited the clip.

Earlier, 101 Doll Squadron contested the timeline presented in the ABC’s news clip, saying they had performed before the formal event, and before the dignitaries arrived.

“A short piece taken out of context in what was a very long day performed before the official ceremony and before the arrival of dignitaries, and not part of it,” they said.

“It was in no way meant to be disrespectful and we are hurt and disappointed it has been misconstrued that way.”

[Australian Financial Review betrayed by numbers after Samantha Maiden misfire | The Weekly Beast](#)  
[Read more](#)

The Sydney-based dance group, who specialise in dancehall and afrobeats, have deleted their Facebook page and made their Instagram account private amid the controversy surrounding the performance.

The group describes themselves as a “squadron of dancehall women facilitating a movement to unite and collaborate unique projects inna dancehall”, and were booked to perform at the commissioning of HMAS Supply on Saturday.

The event was held at Garden Island in Sydney, with high-profile attendees including the Australian defence force chief, General Angus Campbell, and the governor general, General David Hurley.

101 Dance Squadron said they had worked on their choreography together.

“It was meant to bring an informal sense of celebration; a gift from one of our community groups to open a modern ship, with a modern dance form.”

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- [Exclusive Rapid Covid testing in England may be scaled back over false positives](#)
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- [Covid Variant first detected in India is found in the UK](#)
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## [Coronavirus](#)

# Rapid Covid testing in England may be scaled back over false positives

Exclusive: In leaked emails, Matt Hancock's adviser says there is 'urgent need for decisions' on asymptomatic testing

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



Members of the English National Opera take lateral flow tests before entering socially distanced rehearsals. Boris Johnson urged everyone in England to take two rapid-turnaround tests a week. Photograph: Ian West/PA

Members of the English National Opera take lateral flow tests before entering socially distanced rehearsals. Boris Johnson urged everyone in England to take two rapid-turnaround tests a week. Photograph: Ian West/PA

[Josh Halliday](#)

Thu 15 Apr 2021 12.48 EDT

Senior government officials have raised “urgent” concerns about the mass expansion of rapid coronavirus testing, estimating that as few as 2% to 10% of positive results may be accurate in places with low Covid rates, such as London.

Boris Johnson last week urged everyone in England to take [two rapid-turnaround tests a week](#) in the biggest expansion of the multibillion-pound testing programme to date.

However, leaked emails seen by the Guardian show that senior officials are now considering scaling back the widespread testing of people without symptoms, due to a growing number of false positives.

In one email, Ben Dyson, an executive director of strategy at the health department and one of health secretary Matt Hancock’s advisers, stressed the “fairly urgent need for decisions” on “the point at which we stop offering asymptomatic testing”.

On 9 April, the day everyone in [England](#) was able to order twice-weekly lateral flow device (LFD) tests, Dyson wrote: “As of today, someone who gets a positive LFD result in (say) London has at best a 25% chance of it being a true positive, but if it is a self-reported test potentially as low as 10% (on an optimistic assumption about specificity) or as low as 2% (on a more pessimistic assumption).”

[What is a lateral flow Covid test and how accurate is it?](#)

[Read more](#)

He added that the department’s executive committee, which includes Hancock and the [NHS](#) test and trace chief, Dido Harding, would soon need to decide whether requiring people to self-isolate before a confirmatory PCR test “ceases to be reasonable” in low infection areas where there is a high likelihood of a positive result being wrong.

The accuracy of rapid coronavirus tests and how they should be deployed have been the focus of months of [debate](#) in the UK. The proportion of false positives – people incorrectly told they have the virus – increases when the prevalence of the disease falls. This happens because although the number of

true positives is falling, the tests produce roughly the same number of false positives – meaning the proportion of incorrect results becomes greater.

It means thousands of people could be wrongly told to self-isolate and miss out on earnings or education due to inaccurate results. The government has advised anyone who tests positive with a rapid test to take a follow-up PCR test and self-isolate until they receive a negative result – but [some experts](#) have said this process is too slow and that a second lateral flow test would be as likely to produce the correct result.

Figures produced by government officials estimate that currently only one in 10 positive results are likely to be accurate in London and south-east and south-west England, where there is less Covid-19 in circulation. In England as a whole, they estimate that only 38% of self-reported tests are thought to be accurate, based on the current prevalence of the disease. The Guardian has also learned that Public [Health](#) England (PHE) raised concerns about the plan for mass testing, days before it was announced on 5 April.

#### [How a rapid lateral flow test works](#)

Prof John Simpson, head of PHE's public health advice, guidance and expertise pillar, told officials in Hancock's department that the strategy did not appear to be backed by evidence.

He wrote: "We are a little concerned that this proposal does not provide the evidence needed to justify the extension of testing in the way proposed, does not consider alternative approaches to achieving the over-arching aim (of reducing community transmission) and does not provide a framework for evaluation that would make it possible to determine if the approach actually achieves what it intends."

Mass testing has been at the centre of the government's plan to release the UK from lockdown, alongside the vaccination programme. The government has bought millions of the lateral flow tests as part of the £37bn budget for NHS Test and Trace.

The Department of Health and Social Care said that all testing policy was kept under continuous evaluation but that there are "no plans to halt the

universal programme”. It added: “With around one in three people not showing symptoms of Covid-19, regular, rapid testing is an essential tool to control the spread of the virus as restrictions ease by picking up cases that would not otherwise have been detected.

“Everyone in England can now access rapid testing twice a week, in line with clinical guidance. Rapid testing detects cases quickly, meaning positive cases can isolate immediately, and figures show that for every 1,000 lateral flow tests carried out, there is fewer than one false positive result.”

Ministers have defended concerns about the accuracy of the Innova lateral flow tests by saying that only one in 1,000 tests will produce a false positive. The government’s enthusiasm for rapid-turnaround tests has divided experts. They are cheaper and quicker than the gold-standard PCR tests and are good at finding the most infectious cases and those that may not otherwise be found – but they are more likely to produce erroneous results.

Data [obtained by the BBC](#) from 26m lateral flow tests in March found that, among 30,904 positive results, 82% were correct and 18% were false positives. Coronavirus levels were higher in March and have since fallen, meaning the proportion of false positives will have increased since then, however.

The vast majority of those tests also took place under supervision in schools, where [prevalence of the disease was higher](#) last month. The proportion of false positives would be expected to rise as the general population self-administer regular bi-weekly tests at home.

A recent Cochrane review – an analysis of 64 studies – [found](#) that rapid tests correctly identify on average 72% of people who are infected with the virus and have symptoms, and 78% within the first week of becoming ill. But in people with no symptoms, that drops to 58%.

Jon Deeks, professor of biostatistics at the University of Birmingham and one of the authors of that review, said the government figures suggested that false positives would outnumber true positives in parts of the country where less than one in 1,000 people have the virus, or 0.1% of the population.



As of last week, according to government figures, England's prevalence was 0.12% while it was 0.04% in London, 0.02% in the south-east and south-west, and 0.08% in the north-east of England. Deeks said: "When disease is this rare, this is a real waste of resources which could be better used by improving our test, trace and isolate programme."

Based on the government's analysis, he said, it would take more than 16,000 tests to find one infected person in London: "If these tests cost £10 each that's £160,000 to find one person. It shows that this is a complete waste of money at this point."

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

# UK Covid: one in six adults now fully vaccinated against coronavirus – as it happened

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## [Coronavirus](#)

# Covid variant first detected in India is found in the UK

Seventy-seven cases of B.1.617, which has potentially worrying mutations, reported in England and Scotland

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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A health worker collects swab samples at a hospital in Mumbai. It is not clear whether the B.1.617 variant is helping to fuel the current surge in India. Photograph: Rajanish Kakade/AP

A health worker collects swab samples at a hospital in Mumbai. It is not clear whether the B.1.617 variant is helping to fuel the current surge in India. Photograph: Rajanish Kakade/AP

[Nicola Davis](#) *Science correspondent*  
[@NicolaKSDavis](#)

Thu 15 Apr 2021 15.09 EDT

A coronavirus variant with potentially worrying mutations that was first detected in [India](#) has been found in the UK.

In total, 77 cases of the variant, known as [B.1.617](#), have been recorded in the UK up to 14 April, according to the latest update from Public Health England (PHE), released on Thursday. Of these, 73 were recorded in England and four in Scotland.

It was the first time PHE had reported the variant in the UK.

It currently has the label “variant under investigation”. If worries about it are borne out, for example if it appears to be more infectious or more resistant to the body’s immune response, then it may be designated a “variant of concern”.

The UK has a handful of “variants of concern”, including ones first detected in Kent, South Africa and Brazil.

These variants contain a different overall set of mutations, although there are some overlaps. For example all three have a mutation called N501Y, which is believed to make the virus more infectious, while the Brazil and South Africa variants both have a mutation called 484K, which is believed to help the virus at least partially evade the body’s immune responses towards coronavirus – including those produced by some Covid vaccines. This mutation later cropped up in the Kent variant, giving rise to a new variant of concern.

The B.1.617 variant was first detected in India, but has since been found elsewhere, [including California](#). [It has worried experts as it](#) contains two mutations in the spike protein that, it has been suggested, may boost its ability to escape the body’s immune responses. It is thought the variant may also be able to infect the body more easily.

Prof Paul Hunter, professor in medicine at the University of East Anglia, said the arrival of the India variant was potentially worrying.

“These two escape mutations working together could be a lot more problematic than the South African and Brazilian variants who have only got one escape mutation,” he said. “It might be even less controlled by vaccine than the Brazilian and South African variants.”

However, more research is needed to explore the role of these mutations and the impact they might have.

News of the arrival of the India variant in the UK came as surge testing was expanded in London in an attempt to control the spread of coronavirus variants, with parts of Hillingdon, as well as certain postcodes in [Lambeth](#), [Wandsworth](#), [Southwark and Barnet](#) all having testing and contact tracing ramped up. Sandwell council in the West Midlands [has also announced](#) it will undertake surge testing.

India is [experiencing a devastating wave of coronavirus](#), although [it is not clear whether the B.1.617 variant is helping to fuel the surge](#). Boris Johnson is expected to travel to India later this month, [although his trip has been curtailed as a result of the infections there](#).

Prof Christina Pagel, director of the Clinical Operational Research Unit at University College London and a member of the [Independent Sage](#) group of experts, said the discovery of the variant in the UK was worrying, and [tweeted that Johnson should not head to Delhi](#).

“We don’t know yet whether it can escape existing vaccines but it has several concerning mutations,” she told the Guardian. “It is ridiculous that India is not on the travel red list yet – or many other countries for that matter – when India is seeing 200,000 new cases every day at the moment.”

## Coronavirus

# What is a lateral flow Covid test and how accurate is it?

People in England are now able to take the free rapid tests twice a week – but experts have raised concerns

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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Lateral flow tests have the advantages of being cheap, offering results in about 30 minutes, and can be carried out at home. Photograph: Ben Stansall/AFP/Getty Images

Lateral flow tests have the advantages of being cheap, offering results in about 30 minutes, and can be carried out at home. Photograph: Ben Stansall/AFP/Getty Images

[Nicola Davis](#) and [Josh Halliday](#)

Thu 15 Apr 2021 12.49 EDT

Everyone in [England](#) is now able to take a free Covid-19 lateral flow test (LFT) twice a week, but experts have raised concerns about accuracy. We take a look at the issues.

## **What is a lateral flow test?**

LFTs are a rapid way of testing for Covid-19. A swab is taken from the back of the nose or throat, mixed with an extraction fluid, and a drop of this mixture is placed in a well on a small device. The fluid is then drawn into the device and along a strip of test paper. Should coronavirus proteins be detected, a red line will appear, in addition to a second line that indicates the test is working. It works a little like a pregnancy test, but instead of looking for certain hormones, the test contains antibodies that bind to coronavirus proteins.

These tests differ from polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests, which look for genetic material from the virus, called RNA (ribonucleic acid) and are more accurate. However, LFTs have the advantages of being cheap and offering results in about 30 minutes, and they can be carried out at home.

## **Where are LFTs used?**

Until recently the tests were used for mass testing in particular settings, [such as schools](#). However, earlier this month the government announced that LFTs would be made available [for all adults to take a test twice a week](#). The idea is that the tests will help pick up cases of Covid that may otherwise go undetected, for example because of few or no symptoms, and help prevent the spread of the virus.

## **How accurate are LFTs?**

There are two important measures to think about when it comes to accuracy: false positives, where a test erroneously suggests someone has Covid, and false negatives, where the test fails to pick up that someone has the virus.

When it comes to LFTs, the accuracy appears to depend on the make of the test used, [whether people have symptoms](#), and who is conducting the test.

For example, one study by researchers at the University of Oxford and Public Health England's Porton Down lab found the LFTs were more accurate in the hands of skilled scientists, picking up 79% of Covid cases, than self-trained members of the public, who detected [58% of Covid cases](#).

[Estimates for these rates](#) vary. However, [according to the Department of Health and Social Care](#) (DHSC), and comparing results against those obtained by PCR testing, the false positive rate for LFTs is fewer than one in 1,000, while the false negative rate could be as high as 50%.

## **What are the concerns?**

One concern is that those who receive a negative result from LFTs may still have the virus – experts have previously said this means the tests should be seen as offering a “red light” rather than a “green light”.

But as the prevalence of Covid falls, the problem of false positives also becomes pressing. That is because the false positive rate refers to the [proportion of erroneous positive tests](#) out of people who are not infected, not the proportion of positive tests that are incorrect.

This is not a big problem when there is lots of Covid about, as the number of false positives will be far lower than the number of true positives. But when Covid cases plummet, the problem grows.

Look at it this way: if one in 1,000 tests mistakenly show up positive (a false positive rate of 0.1%), then even if there is no Covid around, 10 people out of every 10,000 tested would receive a positive result. That could mean a large number of people are asked to self-isolate who do not have Covid.

In a leaked email seen by the Guardian, a senior government official warns that – at the current Covid levels – someone who tests positive with a lateral flow device in London has “at best a 25% chance” of it being a true positive. If the test is taken at home, that falls to as low as 10% or even 2%.

Leaked government modelling produced last week suggested that in places where fewer than one in 1,000 people have the disease, the proportion of false positives will outnumber true positives, because there is little virus in



circulation. As of last week, overall prevalence in England was 0.12%, while it was 0.04% in London, 0.02% in the south-east and south-west, and 0.08% in the north-east.

This article was corrected on 16 April 2021. The announcement about the twice-weekly LFTs was made by the government, not NHS England.

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## Coronavirus

# Spreading faster, hitting harder – why young Brazilians are dying of Covid



Gravediggers bury a Covid-19 victim at the municipal cemetery in Abaetetuba in Para state, Brazil, on Thursday. Photograph: Joao Paulo Guimaraes/AFP/Getty Images

Gravediggers bury a Covid-19 victim at the municipal cemetery in Abaetetuba in Para state, Brazil, on Thursday. Photograph: Joao Paulo Guimaraes/AFP/Getty Images

Highly transmissible variant and behavioural factors blamed as intensive care units fill with younger patients

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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[Tom Phillips](#) in Rio de Janeiro

Fri 16 Apr 2021 05.00 EDT

One month after Michel Castro's premature brush with death, the coronavirus infection has receded but the nightmares persist.

In them the 31-year-old father relives the spine-chilling scenes he witnessed as his Covid-hit body battled for survival in a Rio ICU. The six-month-old baby who appeared to be suffocating right next to him. The man urinating blood after his kidneys failed. The unnerving bleep-bleep-bleep of machines warning doctors that yet another life was on the line.

"It was agony. When you closed your eyes – God forgive me – but it was as if you were in hell," said Castro, a systems analyst and devout Christian who fell ill in early March as [Brazil](#) was thrust into the deadliest month of a coronavirus disaster that has killed more than 365,000 people.

[Brazil's Covid-19 response is worst in the world, says Médecins Sans Frontières](#)

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"I saw everything in there. Children, adults, young people, bodybuilders – the lot. All of them going through the same thing," Castro recalled,

rubbishing the idea that only elderly people were in danger. “If you’re a human being you’re at risk,” he said. “This disease is a total game of Russian roulette.”

When Covid first hit [Brazil](#) last February it was, as elsewhere, considered mainly a threat to the ageing or infirm. A year later, as [Brazil grapples with by far the most traumatic phase of its epidemic](#), a troubling trend has emerged, as intensive care units fill with younger patients such as Castro, some seemingly battling more severe forms of the disease. An unusually high number of [infant fatalities](#) has also been reported with more than 1,000 Brazilian babies dying last year compared with 43 in the US.

Brazilians have been particularly shocked by the case of [Paulo Gustavo](#), a 42-year-old television star who has spent the past month fighting for his life in a Rio ICU despite being previously fit and healthy. Last week, the Brazilian Association of Intensive Care Medicine said that for the first time, most Covid patients in ICU were under 40 – a finding echoed by frontline doctors.



Nurses prepare to attend to Covid patients at Nova Iguacu General Hospital.  
Photograph: António Lacerda/EPA

“We’re seeing a really big increase in young patients,” said Pedro Carvalho, a critical care doctor from the country’s northeast whose hospital’s ICUs have admitted Covid victims aged 27, 28, 29, 32, 33 and 34 in recent days. Two were women who had just given birth. The wife of the 33-year-old patient is expecting their fourth child but he is on dialysis and his chances of survival slim. “It really feels like we’re at the eye of the hurricane and things are just getting worse and more intense,” Carvalho said.

Clarisse Bressan, a tropical medicine specialist working at Rio’s Fiocruz Covid hospital, said she had detected a similar shift in the last three weeks, including a disturbing rise in the number of pregnant women being admitted. “The average age really has gone down. One Friday we had more patients in their 40s than over-80s.”

“The patients seem to be suffering a more drawn-out illness. They deteriorate later – after 12 or 14 days rather than 10 – and I’ve seen young people with more symptoms,” Bressan added. “They don’t necessarily end up with more serious conditions but I’m seeing fewer completely asymptomatic young people than I did at the start of the pandemic.”

### [Brazilian Covid variant: what do we know about P1?](#)

#### [Read more](#)

The explanation for the generational shift remains unclear, although some suspect a highly transmissible new variant linked to the Brazilian Amazon may be partly to blame. “It’s clearly connected to [the P1 variant](#),” said Marcos Boulos, a infectious disease specialist from the University of São Paulo who believes the virus is now both spreading faster and hitting young people harder.

Boulos said the vaccination of older Brazilians partly explained the increasing proportion of younger patients in ICU. “But there’s no doubt young people are being [physically] more affected by this new variant. It’s unquestionable.”

“Sometimes ... these young people will die after just a few hours or days with very acute, severe illnesses – and you won’t find any comorbidity or

factor to explain why. It's dramatic," added Boulos, pointing to similar suspicions that [the South African variant](#) might be affecting the young more.

Bressan suspected behavioural factors were also at play, with younger Brazilians more likely to be frequenting places where they might be exposed to greater doses of the virus, more often. "It's younger people who are going out to work, to parties, restaurants and nightclubs," said Bressan, adding that many of the patients she was now seeing in their 40s were domestic workers, cleaners, retail workers and waiters. "People who absolutely have to leave home to work."



Everton Nascimento de Oliveira, 32, lies in an emergency unit bed of a field hospital in Ribeirao Pires. Photograph: André Penner/AP

Castro has no idea which variant brought him to the casualty of a hospital on Rio's northern outskirts last month, with a raging temperature and a respiratory system on the verge of collapse. "My lungs were totally black," he said, recalling how one doctor told him it was a miracle he had made it there at all. "You should be drowning on dry land," the doctor said as Castro was rushed into an improvised ICU.

"It's terrifying," he said of what he saw inside. "It's like those war films where you see a warehouse full of wounded people and say, 'No this is just a



scene from a movie – The Walking Dead.’ Only it’s for real. *This* is what’s happening.”

After a sleepless night, Castro was moved to a specialist Covid unit where he came within a whisker of death. His oxygen levels plummeted and he suffered a series of cardiac arrests, with his heart rate shooting up to 140 beats per minute, then back down to 40.



Michel Castro, his wife Juliana and one-year-old son Arthur. ‘If you’re a human being you’re at risk,’ he said Photograph: Michel Castro

“I remember feeling something so strange that I’d never felt before. I felt so cold, so much pain. My chest hurt so much. I was coughing so much. Everything hurt. And then suddenly everything just stopped. The feeling I had was that I was going to die. I didn’t feel afraid any more. I didn’t feel pain. I didn’t feel the cold. I stopped feeling everything ... it was as if my body had switched off ... I felt I was dead.”

More than 66,000 Brazilians lost their lives last month and as many as 100,000 are expected to die in April with their country now the global epicentre of the pandemic. But somehow Castro survived, the inflammation and infection suddenly clearing over the next four days before he was allowed to return to his home in the Chatuba favela.

“Dude, this is a miracle,” Castro remembered his doctor telling him as he was discharged into the arms of his overjoyed wife and 20-month-old son, Arthur. “Your lungs are really badly damaged but you’ve beaten the disease.”

A month later, Castro said he still suffered occasional panic attacks and fatigue and was relearning how to breathe, walk and eat. A childhood friend was also struggling to recover after being taken off a ventilator. She was so weak she was using a walking frame to get around. “We’re talking about someone in her 20s, who exercises, eats well ... and doesn’t have any major health problems and now she’s debilitated like a 90-year-old woman.”

Castro, who believes he was infected at a small family gathering, said he hoped telling his story would convince other young Brazilians to take fewer risks.

“Contrary to what they say, this disease is extremely aggressive. It does attack young people,” he said. “Maybe with you it won’t be so aggressive – maybe you’ll feel nothing. But the person next to you – your friend, your dad, your mum, your uncle, your aunt – they might never make it home.”

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## [Zero-hours contracts](#)

# Workers in insecure jobs twice as likely to die of Covid, TUC research finds

Those with no sick pay and fewer rights, such as many care workers and delivery drivers, at higher risk

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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Covid mortality among male workers in insecure jobs, such as many delivery drivers, was 51 per 100,000 people aged 20-64; it was 24 per 100,000 in more secure work, the research found. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/the Guardian

Covid mortality among male workers in insecure jobs, such as many delivery drivers, was 51 per 100,000 people aged 20-64; it was 24 per 100,000 in more secure work, the research found. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/the Guardian

[Richard Partington](#) *Economics correspondent*  
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Thu 15 Apr 2021 19.01 EDT

Workers on zero-hours contracts and other insecure jobs are twice as likely to have died of Covid-19 as those in other professions, according to a report revealing stark inequalities in the workplace.

The research from the [Trades Union Congress](#) in England and Wales showed those on the frontline of the pandemic, such as care workers, nurses and delivery drivers, were at a higher risk of death. It said many of these key workers were in insecure work, such as zero-hours contracts and agency employment, landing them with a “triple whammy” of no sick pay, fewer rights and endemic low pay, while having to shoulder more risk of infection.

According to analysis of official figures by the trade union umbrella group, Covid-19 mortality rates among male workers in insecure jobs was 51 per 100,000 people aged 20-64, compared with 24 out of 100,000 in more secure work. For female staff the rate was 25 per 100,000, compared with 13 per 100,000 in higher-paying secure work.

Insecure jobs were defined using occupations with a higher proportion of workers employed on contracts that did not guarantee regular hours or income, or low-paid self-employment.

According to the TUC’s analysis, sectors such as care, leisure, and occupations such as labouring, factory and warehouse work have the highest rates of insecure work, compared with managerial, professional and administrative roles, which have some of the lowest.

[Official figures](#) have previously indicated that men working as machine operatives, restaurant managers, chefs, taxi drivers, nursing assistants, local government administrators, nurses and bus drivers all had higher Covid-19 mortality rates.

Insecure workers account for one in nine of the total workforce, with women, disabled people and BAME workers more likely to be in precarious roles.

The TUC said the figures were stark, and called for more research to understand the links between precarious work and infection and death. It said the pandemic needed to be a turning point so that everyone could enjoy dignity in employment.

The union body said the lack of proper sick pay was forcing those in insecure jobs to choose between protecting their lives and putting food on the table. The UK has one of the lowest rates of sick pay in Europe and nearly 2 million workers, including many in insecure work, do not earn enough to qualify for it.

Polling by Britain Thinks on behalf of the union group found that 67% of insecure workers said they had received no pay when off sick, compared with 7% of those in secure employment.

[Census staff forced to take unpaid leave after death of Prince Philip](#)  
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As Covid restrictions are gradually relaxed this spring, the TUC said the UK's lack of proper sick pay was failing those in insecure work and undermining the prospect of a safe return to work. It called on ministers to raise statutory sick pay in line with the real living wage, a voluntary minimum pay rate set at £9.50 an hour and £10.85 in London, saying this would stop insecure workers suffering hardship when needing to self-isolate.

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Frances O'Grady, general secretary of the TUC, said the government had failed to bring forward an employment bill promised in 2019 to bolster workers' rights and legal protections. She said urgent action was required to tackle insecure employment practices and support low-paid workers.

“Lots of them are the key workers we all applauded – like social care workers, delivery drivers and coronavirus testing staff. This must be a

turning point,” she said. “If people can’t observe self-isolation when they need to, the virus could rebound. No one should have to choose between doing the right thing and putting food on the table.”

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## FTSE

# FTSE 100 closes above 7,000 for first time since Covid crash

Shares rise by more than 30 points as China reports record economic growth

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The recovery in the FTSE 100 comes against a backdrop of accelerating growth in the world economy, fuelled by the Covid-19 vaccine programme and the easing of restrictions. Photograph: Getty Images

The recovery in the FTSE 100 comes against a backdrop of accelerating growth in the world economy, fuelled by the Covid-19 vaccine programme and the easing of restrictions. Photograph: Getty Images

[Richard Partington](#) *Economics correspondent*  
[@RJPartington](#)

Fri 16 Apr 2021 19.56 EDT



The [FTSE 100](#) has closed above 7,000 for the first time since the Covid-19 pandemic triggered a collapse in global markets last year, driven by rising hopes for the world economy after record growth in China.

The index of leading UK company shares ended the day up 36 points on Friday, or 0.5%, at 7,019, the highest level since late February 2020 when the first wave of [Covid-19 sent shock waves through financial markets around the world](#).

On a day of rising optimism among financial investors, the Dow Jones industrial average closed up 0.5% at another record high of 34,201 points helped by a 19.4% rise in new housing starts in the US. The S&P500 also closed at a new record of 4,185.47 points.

In Europe, Germany's DAX 30 index closed up 1.3% and France's CAC 40 gained 0.9%.

The domestically focused [FTSE](#) 250 index of UK company shares hit a record high, ending the day up 0.2% at 22,522, boosted by travel and leisure stocks amid hopes for a boom in consumer spending as lockdown measures are relaxed.

The fresh momentum came as China's economy continued its recovery from the pandemic with record growth of 18.3% in the first quarter of 2021, according to official figures. Buoyed by rising factory output, analysts said the figures demonstrated the prospects for a stronger recovery in the world economy and rising demand for raw materials.

### [FTSE chart](#)

Mining companies and oil producers were in demand on the FTSE 100. Evraz, the natural resources firm, was the biggest riser on Friday, finishing the day up almost 4%, while shares in banks also rallied.

The recovery in the FTSE 100 comes against a backdrop of accelerating growth in the world economy, fuelled by the coronavirus vaccine programme and the easing of restrictions in several large economies.

Retailers standing to benefit from a rise in consumer spending after lockdown rose on the FTSE 100, including Tesco and Next. Shares in travel and tourism companies also gained on the FTSE 250, with the airline easyJet up by 0.5% and the holiday firm Tui gaining by a similar amount. WH Smith, which runs shops at airports and railway stations, finished the day up 1.5%.

Although having broken the psychologically important 7,000 barrier, the FTSE 100 remains more than 500 points below its level at the start of last year and has lagged behind several other big markets, including the Dow Jones and Japan's Nikkei.

The London market has more mining companies and oil firms that have suffered from weaker global demand during the Covid crisis until now, and fewer big technology companies that have ridden the wave of an investment boom.

Steve Clayton, a fund manager at the stockbroker Hargreaves Lansdown, said: "The UK market has been something of a laggard, compared to international markets on both sides of the Atlantic.

"But today the FTSE100 has passed a big milestone, rising through 7,000 for the first time since the pandemic sent it tumbling a year ago. Investor confidence in economic recovery is rising as governments roll out stimulus packages and business confidence surveys are hitting highs."

Analysts said evidence of strong global growth in the US and China was propelling stock markets higher, with hopes that the vaccine programme would keep a lid on infection rates and allow a faster return to relative normality.

[US stock markets hit record highs as economy appears to rebound strongly.](#)  
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However, rising infections and renewed lockdown measures would rapidly curtail progress. There are also concerns over renewed geopolitical tensions as the [US imposes sanctions on Russia](#), and fears that faster economic

growth could trigger a bout of inflationary pressure, leading to higher central bank interest rates putting a brake on growth.

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The recovery in global markets came after China reported strong growth across all sectors. In March the country's industrial output rose 14.1% year on year, bringing first-quarter growth to 24.5%, the official data showed. Retail sales surged 33.9% in the three months.

China's was the only major economy to grow at all in 2020, supported by industrial activity and better-than-expected exports as the virus [hit markets around the world](#).

While coronavirus first emerged in central China in late 2019, the country was also the quickest to bounce back after authorities imposed strict control measures and consumers stayed at home.

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## [Coronavirus](#)

# Covid booster shot could be needed after nine to 12 months, White House says

Pfizer CEO has also said it is ‘likely’ people will need a third coronavirus vaccine dose within a year



A man receives a Covid-19 vaccine shot in Union City, California. Booster shots could be required within a year of initial doses, says a top aide to Joe Biden. Photograph: Anda Chu/AP

A man receives a Covid-19 vaccine shot in Union City, California. Booster shots could be required within a year of initial doses, says a top aide to Joe Biden. Photograph: Anda Chu/AP

*Guardian staff and agencies*

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The US is preparing for the possibility that a booster shot will be needed between nine and 12 months after people are initially vaccinated against Covid-19, a White House official said on Thursday.

While the duration of immunity after vaccination is being studied, booster vaccines could be needed, David Kessler, the chief science officer on Joe Biden's Covid-19 response taskforce, told a congressional committee meeting.

"We are studying the durability of the antibody response. So I think for planning purposes, planning purposes only, I think we should expect that we may have to boost," Kessler said.

"The current thinking is those who are more vulnerable will have to go first," he said.

[Johnson & Johnson vaccine use will remain paused in US amid evaluation](#)  
[Read more](#)

The CEO of Pfizer, Albert Bourla, has also said it is "likely" that people will need a third coronavirus vaccine dose within a year, with annual revaccinations also a possibility.

"We need to see what would be the sequence, and for how often we need to do that, that remains to be seen," Bourla told a CNBC reporter during an event with CVS Health. The CEO's comments were released on Thursday, but they were filmed two weeks ago.

Bourla added: "A likely scenario is that there will be likely a need for a third dose, somewhere between six and 12 months and then from there, there will be an annual revaccination, but all of that needs to be confirmed. And again, the variants will play a key role."

Initial data has shown that vaccines from Moderna and partners Pfizer and BioNTech SE retain most of their effectiveness for at least six months, though for how much longer has not been determined.

Even if that protection lasts far longer than six months, experts have said that rapidly spreading variants of the coronavirus and others that may emerge could lead to the need for regular booster shots similar to annual flu shots.

The US is also tracking infections in people who have been fully vaccinated, Rochelle Walensky, the director of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, told the House subcommittee hearing.

Nearly 200m coronavirus vaccine doses have been distributed so far in the US, and about 38% of the American population has received at least one shot.

Of 77 million people vaccinated in the US, there have been 5,800 such breakthrough infections, Walensky said, including 396 people who required hospitalization and 74 who died.

Walensky said some of these infections have occurred because the vaccinated person did not mount a strong immune response. But the concern is that in some cases, they are occurring in people infected by more contagious virus variants.

This month, Pfizer and BioNTech said their vaccine was about 91% effective in preventing Covid-19, citing updated trial data that included more than 12,000 people fully inoculated for at least six months.

## 2021.04.16 - Spotlight

- ['A poor man's rainforest' Why we need to stop treating soil like dirt](#)
- [UK rap star AJ Tracey 'I'm not all the way out of the streets'](#)
- [From the coronation to The Crown How Prince Philip fell out of love with TV](#)
- [From Beethoven's Ninth to Theme from Shaft The best exercise anthems](#)

## The age of extinctionSoil

# **‘A poor man’s rainforest’: why we need to stop treating soil like dirt**

The mysterious world under our feet is under threat. Protecting it is as vital as tackling the climate crisis, scientists warn



Layers of soil under grass. It is believed that a quarter of species on the planet live in the soil. Photograph: Jon Helgason/Alamy

Layers of soil under grass. It is believed that a quarter of species on the planet live in the soil. Photograph: Jon Helgason/Alamy

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[Phoebe Weston](#)

[@phoeb0](#)

Fri 16 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

Hidden under our feet is a miniature landscape made up of tunnels, caves and decaying matter. [Soil](#) is where a quarter of the species on our planet are believed to live and in this dark, quiet, damp world, death feeds life. Rotting leaves, fruits, plants and organisms are folded into the soil and burped out as something new.

Good soil structure provides many nooks and crannies that house organisms, which, in turn, create an environment that suits them, directly altering – and improving – the structure of soil. Like a collective of tiny chemists, they keep soils healthy and productive by passing nutrients between them, either by collaborating or killing each other.

Complex food webs move nutrients around the system, generating healthy soils that provide goods and services for humanity. Goods include food, fibre and clean water. Services include regulation of the carbon and nitrogen cycles, nutrient recycling, water storage, regulation of disease and detoxification of pollutants.

Soil - the 'poor man's tropical rainforest' [pic.twitter.com/1QLFJ9BcE1](https://pic.twitter.com/1QLFJ9BcE1)

— Phoebe Weston (@phoeb0) [January 26, 2021](#)

Despite all this and the fact that soil is at the heart of our existence, we know very little about it. We do know, however, that this fertile skin has been damaged by intensive farming, pollution, deforestation and global heating. A third of the planet's land is severely degraded and 24bn tons of fertile soil are lost every year through intensive farming alone, according to a [UN-backed study, the Global Land Outlook](#).

The future of our soil hangs in the balance as the UN prepares for the first [Global Symposium on Soil Biodiversity](#), with [scientists warning](#) that soil degradation is as important as the climate crisis and destruction of the natural world above ground.

## **Earthworms – ecosystem engineers**

Earthworms are the unsung heroes of soil biodiversity. As they burrow and feed underground, they break down organic matter, which is then passed along the conveyor belt to smaller organisms. Worm holes create crucial porous structures for water and air to travel through. Deep-burrowing earthworms – known as the ecosystem engineers – can dig tunnels up to two metres deep and dramatically increase soil fertility. In the Arctic invasive earthworms are actually [making the soil too fertile](#).



Earthworms break down organic matter as they feed and burrow, passing it on to other organisms. Photograph: Duncan Mcewan/naturepl.com

Charles Darwin's final book, published in 1881, praised the work of earthworms. "It may be doubted if there are any other animals which have played such an important part in the history of the world as these lowly organised creatures," Darwin wrote.

Millions of other species of soil organisms exist but [only a fraction have been identified](#), and most are too small to see. Soil macrofauna (creatures larger than 2mm) include mammals such as moles, mice and rabbits, which build dens in soil, as well as smaller creatures such as centipedes, woodlice, snails and slugs. Soil mesofauna (creatures smaller than 2mm) include springtails, mites, nematodes and tardigrades. Then there are the microfauna – bacteria, fungi and algae. [One teaspoon of healthy soil](#) can contain up to a billion bacteria and more than 1km of fungi.

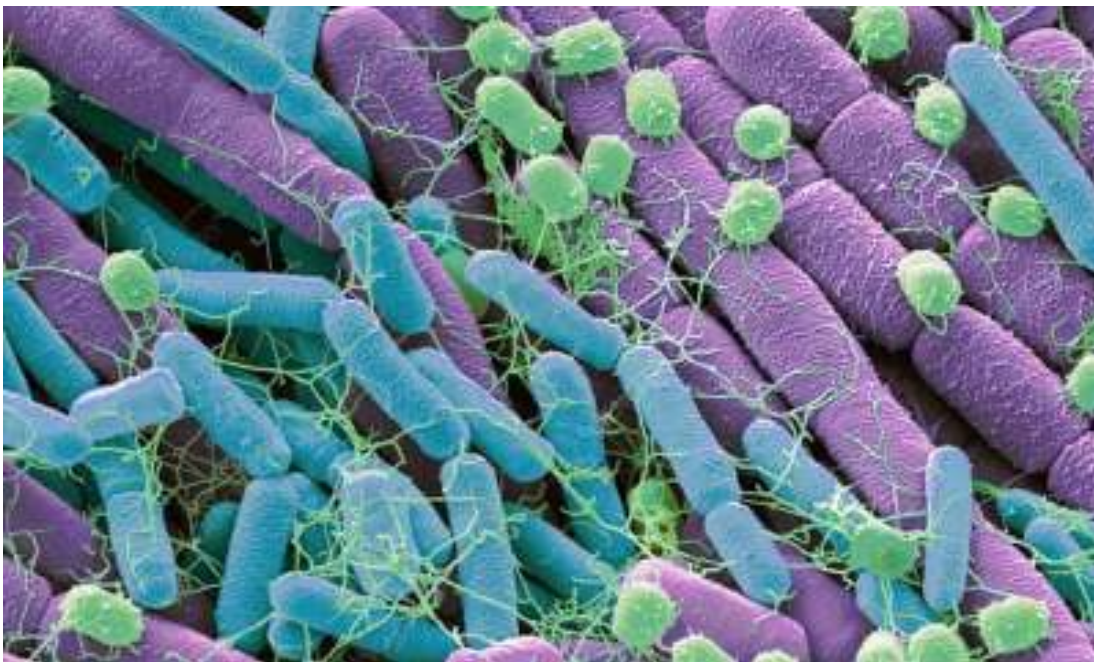
It may be doubted if there are any other animals which have played such an important part in the history of the world

*Charles Darwin on the earthworm*

"We are always looking for aliens elsewhere, but we cannot protect the aliens under our feet. These really are aliens – if you look at them you'll see

they are movie-type organisms,” says Carlos António Guerra, a soil ecologist at the German Centre for Integrative [Biodiversity](#) Research.

If you’re talking about the health of soil, you’re not just talking about how it facilitates agriculture, but the health of an entire system, says soil scientist Felicity Crotty, [speaking at the Oxford Real Farming Conference](#) in January. “Soils are often referred to as a poor man’s tropical rainforests. This is due to the abundance and diversity of life within the soil ... These organisms are the ones that are driving the decomposition and nutrient cycling within the soil.”



Soil bacteria, seen here with a coloured scanning electron micrograph (SEM), are linked to nutrient recycling, especially carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus and sulphur. Photograph: SPL

Yet, despite providing all these benefits, this complex tangle of life isn’t included in most food webs. “Soil scientists often emphasise the physics, the chemistry, without the soil biology part, but without the biology [soil] is just an inert substrate,” says Crotty.

## Canaries in the coalmine



Soil is the top layer of the Earth's crust and is composed of a mixture of water, gases, minerals and organic matter. Soil [considered "good"](#) for agriculture is about 50% solid, 25% air and 25% water. If soil is too compacted, less air and water pass through, which inhibits root growth and overall productivity.

Topsoil is where [95% of the planet's food](#) is grown and, like rainforests, is extremely fragile; it takes more than 100 years to build 5mm of soil, and moments to destroy it, according to [the Royal Society](#).

Unfortunately, humans have been [treating soil like dirt](#), losing it 50 to 100 times faster than we are able to rebuild it.

Soils that are poor in biodiversity are more fragile because they have lost the structure and all those connections that keep particles together. This means they are more likely to be dispersed by strong winds, or washed away in flooding. "Losing the soil is an extreme example of land degradation, but land degradation starts earlier when you start losing diversity, or functions, or other things related to soil organisms," says Guerra.



A deforested area of the Amazon rainforest in Rondonia state, Brazil. Deforestation, along with intensive farming, global heating and pollution is damaging the planet's soils. Photograph: Carl de Souza/AFP/Getty Images

Soils hold twice as much carbon as the atmosphere, and when soil degrades, the carbon is released. In the 30 years from 1978, the soil in the UK's croplands lost 10% of the carbon it could store.

“Like ‘canaries in the coalmine’, when soil organisms begin to disappear, ecosystems will soon start to underperform, potentially hindering their vital functions for humankind,” researchers, led by Guerra, wrote in a [paper](#) published in Science that urged policymakers to take account of soil when considering conservation priorities.

“If we do not protect soils for the next generations, future above-ground biodiversity and food production cannot be guaranteed,” the 29 soil scientists warned.

## **Monitoring soil biodiversity**

Historically, soil has been left out of wider debates about nature conservation because we know next to nothing about it. “Every soil ecologist in the world does presentations with the same two slides at the beginning – soil biodiversity is very, very important, but we don’t know enough about it,” says Guerra. “In 2018 we got together with the only purpose of working out what it would take to remove that second slide.”

Soils are often referred to as a poor man’s tropical rainforests ... due to the abundance and diversity of life within the soil

*Felicity Crotty, soil scientist*

Authors of the Science paper have created the first global [Soil biodiversity observation network](#) to collect and systematically sample data on the condition of soil biodiversity and its functions. The programme will assess soil diversity and soil ecosystem functions in protected and non-protected areas. The goal is to deliver information on the state and trends of soil biodiversity so it can be drawn into policymaking, such as the 2030 European biodiversity strategy.

“We wrote this paper as a grassroots initiative; all of the people involved are investing their own resources to monitor soils. What we are basically saying,

is that we are not waiting any more for the politicians to understand that this is a valuable way of investing their money,” says Guerra.



Soil exposed after a landslide. Photograph: Guido Paradisi/Alamy

Soil biodiversity must be considered when creating policies for nature’s protection because biodiversity below ground seems to require different things to terrestrial biodiversity, researchers say. Soil-focused biodiversity strategies would include better management of dead wood, for example, and environmental compensation schemes that specifically protect areas of unique soil biodiversity.

“We aim for a future where the conservation value of giant earthworms or endemic fungi is recognised and their ecology is properly protected by nature conservation measures,” the researchers say.

Generally, soils that support natural ecosystems have the greatest diversity. In agricultural landscapes, crop rotation, planting cover crops, hedges and ley strips are believed to increase soil fertility. Less intensive, rotational grazing systems, and reducing the use of chemical fertilisers also improve soil fertility. The no-till movement, which started in the US, is [taking off around the world](#).

Protecting soil structure is expected to be included in the UK's new farming subsidy system, which pays farmers for delivering public goods, as it shifts away from the common agricultural policy. And there are signs the world is waking up to the importance of soil; 2015 was declared the [International Year of Soils](#) and the UN increasingly [stresses the importance of soils](#) to future food security.



Soil erosion in Maasai heartlands, Tanzania. Photograph: Carey Marks/Plymouth University

The clock is ticking. A [UN-backed report](#) in 2018, found that land degradation is already undermining the wellbeing of two-fifths of humanity, and urgent action is needed to reverse this trend. Its authors warn there is a strong association between land degradation, migration and political instability, and as the global population rises this problem will become more intractable.

“While soil biodiversity deserves to have a value in itself, if policymakers don’t see soils for what they are – a rich and diverse world – we will quickly see ourselves in a situation where both the subsidies to farmers and the price of our food will systematically increase,” says Guerra. “The depletion of soil organic matter will make the food system less resilient and less adaptable to changes in climate.”



*Find more [age of extinction coverage here](#), and follow biodiversity reporters [Phoebe Weston](#) and [Patrick Greenfield](#) on Twitter for all the latest news and features*

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## [AJ Tracey](#)

Interview

# UK rap star AJ Tracey: ‘I’m not all the way out of the streets’

[Tara Joshi](#)



‘I’m suspicious of everyone, more men than women’ ... AJ Tracey.  
Photograph: Michael O’Donnell

‘I’m suspicious of everyone, more men than women’ ... AJ Tracey.  
Photograph: Michael O’Donnell

The west Londoner is up for two Brit awards and is hoping for a No 1 album – but fame and success haven’t eclipsed his insecurities or impoverished past

Fri 16 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

On the cover of his eponymous 2019 debut album, [AJ Tracey](#) was already pronouncing himself the greatest of all time, or GOAT in rap parlance, by posing with an actual goat. He used two for the shoot so neither would get

lonely. What happened to his animal friends? “I donated them to a farm in Hounslow,” he says. “They’re pygmy goats, so they’re way smaller, but all the other goats there are scared of them. They run tings.”

The goats are more widely symbolic, then. The 27-year-old Tracey has come from a poor background to end up running things, dominating British rap’s mainstream as a fully independent artist. Known for his party tunes and his gorgeous, low vocal delivery (there is a Reddit post titled “AJ Tracey’s voice could slide the knickers off a nun”), his funny and boastful bars flit glossily over any beat: UK garage, grime and drill, but also Caribbean soca (his dad is from Trinidad) and US trap and R&B. He has even folded in a country music influence.

His debut is certified gold (100,000 UK units), and five of his singles have gone platinum (600,000), one of those twice over: the glorious summer anthem Ladbroke Grove. Tracey is up for two Brit awards next month, British male and British single; he actually crops up twice in the latter category, on his own track Rain with Aitch and his guest spot alongside Stormzy on Headie One’s Ain’t It Different. He is indifferent about the awards, which were once out of touch with Black British music (“It’s flattering and I’m grateful, but they don’t really measure cultural impact”). Still, he says he would like Headie to win.

Digga D x AJ Tracey: Bringing It Back – video

It is cold but sunny in west London, and Tracey – real name Ché (after the Argentinian revolutionary, Ché Guevara) Wolton Grant – has arrived in his PA’s back garden, tall in a blue puffa jacket, hands burrowed deep in his pockets, his publicist’s tiny dogs dancing excitedly around his ankles. When he settles into a chair, he speaks in assured, lengthy but thoughtful monologues, and is incredibly polite; every time he swears he says “excuse my language”.

We discuss his impending second album, named Flu Game after the basketball match when Michael Jordan improbably overcame food poisoning to lead the Chicago Bulls to victory in game five of the 1997 NBA finals. Partly, he confirms, he is framing himself as being on Jordan’s level in his respective field: “I think I’m the best rapper in the game.” Alongside

mic partners such as Dave, Headie, Aitch and so many more, Tracey has helped British rap evolve into the country's dominant pop-cultural force, and says he now wants to develop an organic relationship between the UK and US scenes. But in spite of all his self-confidence and success, Tracey is still subject to insecurities.

Their cause might be an ugly duckling complex. "I was chubby, short and misunderstood," he says of his childhood. On the album track Perfect Storm he references "girls tryna air [dismiss] me in school, now they're hollering". During our interview he talks at length about people who doubted him, and how much he loves revenge: "People who shat on me years ago? I'll never forget – I'm crossing off names." There are multiple lyrics asking romantic partners to "prove you love me like you say", but he brushes off any suggestion that he is especially suspicious of women.

Everyone who's alive right now will not remember a stupider decision than Brexit

"I'm suspicious of everyone, more men than women," he says. "But when I was younger, girls didn't show me attention and now, because I've done well, I can't know if a girl likes me because of who I am or because I've got money or my looks. But I'm a 27-year-old man, I can admit that most of the things I say about 'prove you love me' are about my own insecurities, rather than anything to do with her." He is now happily in a long-term relationship, and says that lyrically the record would probably be very different – and a lot more sexual – if he was still single.

Flu Game is also about more generally overcoming the odds in a situation that he feels is stacked against him, a young mixed-race Black man raised by his single mother in Ladbroke Grove, where, even for London, the discrepancy between rich and poor is damning: "The Queen lives round the corner but [people] can't afford electric," he says.

Although Tracey was previously associated with [#Grime4Corbyn](#) and has expressed interest in the Green party, he is jaded about how impactful party politics actually is for communities like his: "Labour is not actually here for us either, they're just better than the Tories." But he keeps up to date with

the news (“Everyone who’s alive right now will not remember a stupider decision than Brexit”), and like many other public figures during the pandemic, he has used his platform to raise money for the NHS. Political lyrics are mostly absent on Flu Game, although on the track Bringing It Back he does shout out Marcus Rashford for his work on free school meals – and mocks Boris Johnson for his miserliness on the issue.



AJ Tracey performs at the independent music awards, 2020. Photograph: Anthony Harvey/Rex/Shutterstock

Even if he does not write about current affairs, Tracey is feeling the strain of the past year, and says he and his friends have struggled with their mental health during the pandemic. “I employ countless people,” he says. “I’ve got friends to look after, my family – so if I take an L [loss], everyone takes an L. I feel a lot of pressure.”

It started building a decade ago when Tracey began uploading music on SoundCloud under the moniker Looney or Loonz, changing his name when he decided to commit to music. It helps having a pseudonym, he says, because “there’s a mental heaviness that comes with being AJ Tracey because my life is everyone else’s”. When he’s just Ché, he can relax.

He was initially known for grime, the UK rap style that flourished in the early 2000s and again in the early 2010s. He scowls good-naturedly at the mention of Thiago Silva, his gargantuan 2016 collaboration with another of the UK's most lauded rappers, Dave (it had a second flush of fame after the teenager "Alex from Glastonbury" did AJ's verses in a viral festival performance). Fans still clamour for a part two, especially after Dave teased that they'd done a track named after another footballer, Kylian Mbappé.

Grime is a horrible culture now, I really don't like it

"It was a *long* time ago," Tracey says. "And also, sorry, but it was a grime beat, and grime is not really lit any more. It's not what it used to be, and it's their fault because [people in the grime scene] don't like change. I was in there, I was open to change, I changed and I'm doing well. They did not want to change and it's just crabs in a barrel. They don't want to see anyone do better than themselves; it's a horrible culture and I really don't like it. I will not be making any more grime music ... unless [scene veterans] P Money or D Double E asked me to."

Tracey is at the forefront of a younger generation in UK rap who can bounce effortlessly between styles without feeling restricted by tribalism, an ambitious shaping of the zeitgeist that earns him comparisons to artists such as Drake, who has similarly skated across genres. "I'm not interested in making music people think they want, I'm making the music they need," he says. But a decade in the scene also makes him an elder statesman; he recently joined TikTok and says it makes him feel old, but "you've gotta get with it or be a boomer".

We talk about drill music, the most innovative and exciting UK rap style right now, and how its often nihilistic and aggressive lyrics have been censored by the Metropolitan police, and used in court as evidence against MCs charged with criminal offences. Under the terms of a criminal behaviour order, Tracey's partner on Bringing It Back, Digga D, has to run all his lyrics past the police before he can record them.



On stage with Jorja Smith on Glastonbury's West Holts stage, 2019.  
Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

"I don't preach to anyone about changing their lyrics," Tracey says. "I started off making very violent, aggressive music, because I was angry, I was poor. I had my weapon with me wherever I was, and thankfully that's not what it's like for me any more, but that's what it was, so that's what my music sounded like. So I understand these kids. If that's your reality, that's what you're gonna rap about. And I find it confusing when fans – predominantly white fans – get gassed [excited] with these songs, then suddenly think these artists are horrible when they're arrested for doing these crimes."

This takes us to the question of authenticity in lyrics full stop. Throughout Flu Game there are references to "banana clips", "Glockies" and "working white" – slang for weapons and selling drugs on the street, all of which is surely pretty far removed from his lifestyle now. "I'm obviously not going to incriminate myself, but I'm not all the way out of the streets," he replies. "Some of my friends and family are still doing what they need to do. I don't like lying, so even if I've spiced it up a little bit, everything in my lyrics is always from the truth. And my friends wouldn't let me go in the booth and start lying. I'm not leaving that stuff out, because it's part of my truth, even if my life is mainly nice things now."



Another of his lyrical tropes is bragging – he even makes fun of it on Flu Game’s opening track Anxious, with the line “AJ Tracey’s such a dickhead, all he do is boast” – and the album does contain a lot of boasting about girls, partying, possessions. “I feel like I deserve to brag,” he says. “I’ve worked hard for what I have, and no one believed I was going to get it.”

[Skepta, JME, Julie ... are the Adenugas Britain's most creative family?](#)  
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Tracey’s career has spanned a decade in which UK rap has become the mainstream, and he has been an intrinsic part of that. But he does not want to outstay his welcome, and is already talking about retiring. “I’m in the middle of my prime window,” he says, “And I just think when I reach 31, I’ll be done with rap. Maybe I’ll start managing artists, building artists, mentoring, being a stockbroker, who knows. But I only have a limited time to affect the landscape. I feel like I already have, and I see this younger generation coming through who I know I’ve impacted, and I love that. I think I’ve shown you can do what you want, how you want, and there’s still room for you. But there’s more I want to do. You should never get stuck in a moment.”

Although he mentions dreaming of a No 1 album, and his disappointment when one of his videos only got a couple of million views, Tracey insists he is not interested solely in numerical goals. He cites advice from [Skepta](#), one of grime’s originators. “He said it’s not good to have a solid end goal: you complete it and want the next thing, it’s not fulfilling. So I don’t want to sound like a hippy, but my goals are spiritual, mental and emotional fulfilment. I want to feel like I’ve changed people’s lives.”

AJ Tracey’s self-released album Flu Game is out now. The Brit awards take place on 11 May

This article was updated on 16 April to correct the spelling of Tracey’s name: Ché Wolton Grant, not Walton.

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## Prince Philip

# From the coronation to The Crown: how Prince Philip fell out of love with TV

The duke was instrumental in getting the royals on screen, but his reduced funeral coverage will reflect how he came to regret the increasingly torrid exposure



The 1969 documentary Royal Family ... some feared its revelations risked destabilising the institution. Photograph: PA

The 1969 documentary Royal Family ... some feared its revelations risked destabilising the institution. Photograph: PA



[Mark Lawson](#)

Fri 16 Apr 2021 02.00 EDT

By numerous accounts, [Prince Philip](#) liked being proved right – so there might be posthumous vindication in his death getting broadcasters into trouble. The BBC’s decision to reduce its five national TV networks and 11 radio networks into a single obituary stream for much of the day led to a rush of complaints – and a rapid email to staff acknowledging that subsequent coverage would be scaled back.

This diminution of coverage neatly reflected the duke’s relationship with broadcast media: over eight decades he went from not being able to get enough airtime to not wanting any. In line with his wishes, his funeral tomorrow will be televised, by modern royal standards, as minimally as possible.

Yet what became chilly distance towards the medium began in an enthusiastic embrace. As chair of the committee organising his wife’s 1953 coronation, the duke overruled the fierce view of then prime minister, Winston Churchill, and the archbishop of Canterbury, Geoffrey Fisher, that admitting cameras to film the ceremony would destroy the majesty of the occasion. But Philip, already an early adopter of home videos, gambled that

letting family pictures into homes would humanise and popularise the royal family.



Early adopter ... the duke was an enthusiastic amateur film-maker. Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

The televised coronation led to an exponential increase in the number of TV sets in the UK, creating the first royal ratings hit. In 1957, there was another, when the duke became the first royal to present a TV show other than monarch's Christmas addresses – a science programme called [The Restless Sphere: The Story of the International Geophysical Year](#). Subsequently, he allowed the BBC series *Man Alive* to accompany him on a tour for a 1966 film called *The Duke Goes West*. In the same year, the keen reader of history and former officer of the Royal Navy filmed an introduction to Terence Rattigan's television play *Nelson*, about the hero of Trafalgar.

These positive experiences with mainstream culture must have made him easier to persuade when, in the late 60s, the Queen's press secretary William Heseltine suggested inviting a documentary crew behind the scenes at the palace and Balmoral.

Heseltine believed the project could help negotiate the difficult balance between the royal family's historical public invisibility and the celebrity

culture that the media had extended, thanks to the Kennedy dynasty, to heads of state.

After a [BBC](#) team started filming Royal Family in March 1968, the duke himself chaired a committee of TV executives charged with approving or refusing each piece of footage that the BBC's head of documentaries Richard Cawston wanted to include. The producer subsequently said that he was always cautious about what he captured, reflecting British broadcasting's awed approach to monarchy at the time (and sometimes since), and so no sequence was vetoed.

The two hours of material shown by the BBC on 21 June 1969 included the royals cooking a summer barbecue at Balmoral, and the Queen buying the young Prince Edward an ice-cream in a shop, disproving the long rumour that her handbag contained none of the currency with her picture on it.



Dropping in ... the royals welcome President Richard Nixon to Buckingham Palace. Photograph: Joan Williams/Rex/Shutterstock

Although some influential figures – including critic Milton Shulman and David Attenborough, then a BBC TV executive – argued that such revelation risked destabilising an institution that gained appeal from



mystique, the film was well received. It was broadcast five times, lastly in 1977, at the time of Philip and Elizabeth's ruby wedding anniversary.

The palace had cannily imposed crown copyright on the film, and broadcast rights were eventually withdrawn, reportedly on Philip's insistence. Only short clips have been licensed for use in documentaries or exhibitions.

The reason for the ban will be a significant subject of inquiry for Philip's biographers. It seems unlikely, however, to have been motivated by what was shown, or the tone of it. I was lucky enough to watch the full 120 minutes as research for a BBC Radio 4 item marking the 40th anniversary of the film's premiere, and the content is charming, innocuous and a rich source for historians.

There has been speculation that the duke and palace advisers became worried by the frequent citing of the film's existence as a justification for media invasion of the family's privacy during the cult of Princess Diana and anti-cult of Sarah, Duchess of York in the 80s and 90s. (A common legal argument of broadcasters and paparazzi is that public figures, having once given cooperation to the media, cannot expect to withdraw it.)



Apprehensive ... Trevor McDonald is shown around one of the duke's estates. Photograph: ITV



Yet Philip never, contrary to some accounts, completely barred broadcasters from his life. Buckingham Palace again allowed TV flies on to its walls, for BBC One's Elizabeth R: A Year in the Life of the Queen (1992), marking the 40th anniversary of the Queen succeeding her father to the throne.

This respectful and discreet treatment might have softened the duke's hostility to television, although it soon hardened again when, in the mid-90s, the Prince and Princess of Wales decided to effectively end their marriage through rival broadcast interviews: Charles admitting adultery to Jonathan Dimbleby on ITV, Diana to [Martin Bashir on BBC One's Panorama](#). Philip was reportedly infuriated by what he saw as another disaster caused by flashing family life at the cameras.

Even so, in 2008, after a period in which the royals lost some core support due to Diana's death and Charles's marriage to Camilla Parker Bowles, the institution again used television to make a case for its durability and usefulness in Monarchy: The Royal Family at Work, a BBC One five-parter, the title deliberately positioning the Windsors as a business.

Access was tightly controlled but the programme confirmed the capacity of television to cause trouble for the clan. A trailer for the series that gave the impression the Queen had stormed out of a photoshoot with photographer Annie Leibovitz triggered a row that led to the resignation of BBC One controller Peter Fincham. The most recent authorised family documentary – Our Queen (2013), marking six decades since the coronation – was pointedly given to ITV.



Fireside chat ... the Queen and David Cameron in a scene from *Our Queen*, which was pointedly given to ITV. Photograph: Oxford Film and Television/ITV

While keeping his own appearances in the various family documentaries as fleeting as possible – the duke disliked seeing himself on screen – he intermittently allowed himself to be the focus of whole shows, although his answers tended to be short and barked, and often conveyed incredulity at the stupidity of the question. In 2008, he drove a visibly apprehensive Trevor McDonald at high speed round one of his estates in *The Duke: A Portrait of Prince Philip*, and discussed 60 years of the Duke of Edinburgh awards with Phillip Schofield in a 2016 film (later heavily clipped for the duke's TV obituaries).

The fact that the royal got titular second billing in *When Phillip Met Prince Philip* was evidence of TV's increasing lese-majesty on the subject of the royal family. The death of deference had also been illustrated by [Prince Philip – The Plot to Make a King](#), screened in 2015 as part of Channel 4's Secret History series. The clickbait name – there were no circumstances in which the duke could ever have been crowned – was attached to a documentary about the alleged machinations of his uncle, Lord Mountbatten, to insert his nephew and his family name into the royal family by ensuring that Philip married Princess Elizabeth.

## [Watch a preview of Prince Philip: The Plot to Make a King on YouTube](#)

While the duke was rarely seen on TV after his retirement from public life in 2017, other family members catastrophically filled the gap. In 2019, Prince Andrew attempted to use a Newsnight Special interview with Emily Maitlis to refute allegations over a long and loyal friendship with the convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. The attempted exoneration failed so disastrously that Andrew soon followed his father into a retirement from royal duties.

## [The Crown has slipped: how the Netflix epic captures our relationship with the royals](#)

[Read more](#)

Hospitalised in March, the duke may have been protected from the latest major TV interview by one of his relatives – and probably the most sensational: [When Oprah Met Harry and Meghan](#). That show, if Philip did see it, is unlikely to have improved his view of the medium as a conduit for royal business.

The duke's own climactic screen appearances were at a remove, portrayed first by Matt Smith and then Tobias Menzies in the Netflix royal docudrama [The Crown](#). (Jonathan Pryce will act out the later years in series five and six.) The duke was characterised as a proud, arrogant, short-tempered man who struggled with playing second fiddle to his wife's majestic solo, at a time when patriarchy prevailed in all other parts of society. It was also suggested that his frustration may have imperilled his marriage vows on occasion. It would have been hard to imagine the BBC or ITV risking such a depiction of living royals, but Netflix, American-funded and screening in cyberspace, is exempt from the traditions and regulations that often turn British networks, when dealing with the family, into quasi-state broadcasters.



Two steps behind ... Matt Smith as the duke with Clare Foy as the Queen in the Netflix series The Crown. Photograph: Robert Viglasky/AP

A stark illustration of the liberties [Netflix](#) could claim was the callous calumny in season two of The Crown that Philip had been responsible, through selfish behaviour, for his sister's death in a plane crash, by which he was for ever haunted. But, with a characteristically loose attitude towards chronology and accuracy that may not have been realised by all viewers of The Crown, both events and dates had been changed by screenwriter Peter Morgan. Indeed, with weird neatness, The Crown offered especially strong evidence for the duke's later suspicion of television through a script that dealt with the documentary that had symbolised his early enthusiasm towards the medium.

During the fourth episode of the third season, Royal Family is being filmed at Buckingham Palace. However, Morgan moved the film's transmission from 1969 to 1967, completely invented a subplot involving a Guardian interview with the duke's seriously unwell mother, and showed the documentary receiving such uniformly brutal reviews that the Queen and her husband instruct the BBC never to repeat it after its single showing. This simplified – and falsified – Philip's disillusionment with TV, which in reality was more prolonged and complex.

But the fact that he did eventually reach the position into which Morgan accelerated him means that an interesting decision for his executors and successors will be whether ever to release the unseen footage from Royal Family. If they do, historians will have great cause to thank the duke for a publicity decision that he personally came to regret.

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## 10 of the best ...Pop and rock

# From Beethoven's Ninth to Theme from Shaft: the best exercise anthems

Soul classics, German film soundtracks and chugging rap – here's a workout of bangers to get you off the couch



Move ... Franka Potente in Run Lola Run. Photograph: Alamy

Move ... Franka Potente in Run Lola Run. Photograph: Alamy

[George Bass](#)

Fri 16 Apr 2021 04.00 EDT

## Theme from Shaft

**Isaac Hayes**



With gyms reopened, what better way to warm up than a brisk walk to the horns and wah-wah guitar of Hayes's soul classic? You're John Shaft, scattering pimps and watch-sellers as you cut through downtown New York in your no-nonsense beige polo neck. It's time to go to work.

## **Running One**

### **Tykwer/Klimek/Heil ft Franka Potente**

[The Guide: Staying In – sign up for our home entertainment tips](#)

[Read more](#)

The exhilarating techno soundtrack to German thriller Run Lola Run beats any starting pistol. By the time Franka Potente's deadpan vocals wrap round the driving piano, any runners out there pounding the streets will be torn between pausing for breath and thinking they're zooming through Berlin on a Steadicam.

## **Johnny B Goode**

### **Chuck Berry**

Warmup sets might seem old hat to a seasoned lifter, but there's nothing wrong in revisiting the basics. It's what Marty McFly did in Back to the Future when he performed Chuck Berry's "oldie", whose stomping 12-bar blues is a salute to the 1950s – a time when rock'n'roll was in its infancy.





Get lost ... Eminem. Photograph: Nicky J Sims/Redferns

## [Lose Yourself](#)

### **Eminem**

If pushing through a HIIT routine, this chugging call-to-arms from the rapper (and its narrator's "I'm going back to work" ethic) are the ideal reminder that you're only ever competing with yourself. Keep your eyes off your neighbours, and instead focus on your own form and breathing.

## [Suicide Scherzo \(Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, Second Movement, abridged\)](#)

### **Wendy Carlos**

Isolation exercises are awful after compound movements: proof life can bite twice. Take Malcolm McDowell in *A Clockwork Orange*, who's sure he's paid his dues only for his victim to assail him with this overhaul of Beethoven's Ninth.

## Why Do We Fall?

### **Hans Zimmer**

After four months of lockdown three, trying to beat your old PB may lead to injury. Fortunately, there's no better recovery tune than this brew of synthesised strings and runway-level bass. If it can help Bruce Wayne recover from a snapped back, it can help you heal your clicky parts with mobility exercises.

## Pearl's Girl (Tin There)

### **Underworld**

When the second wind grips an exercising gamer, there's every chance their brain will drop them into an F5000 racing hovercraft. Underworld's contribution to the WipeOut 2007 game soundtrack is a feedback loop of synths over a beat that's perfect for sprints – but not for the drive to the gym, unless you fancy picking up three points.



Flexing it ... Jimi Hendrix.

## [Voodoo Chile](#)

### **The Jimi Hendrix Experience**

For your post-workout stretch, forget the mindfulness app and try something that balances flexibility with brain expansion. Hendrix's sinuous licks can be heard in Withnail and I, when the Marwood character gets twisted around in the back of the Jag that his sozzled mate is driving. Too ferocious for downward dog, but a proper stretch should be its own workout too.

## [Strobe \(Adagio in D Minor\)](#)

### **John Murphy**

The end of your session is in sight, but you may need one last dose of gooseflesh to get you over the line. Remember the incendiary guitar track that played in Kick-Ass (2010) when an armed Year 7 took out a warehouse full of goons? Originally heard in Sunshine (2007), composer John Murphy remixed the piece into this escalating assault of bass and distortion pedals.

## [Training Montage](#)

### **Vince DiCola**

Rocky's "Gonna Fly Now" may be the greatest workout anthem of all time but, three sequels later, Vince DiCola's pumping Roland riffs effectively helped finish the cold war. No one can hear his exhilarating keyboard motif and not immediately want to either jog across Siberia or take on a brawler who's at least one weight class bigger than you.

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## 2021.04.16 - Opinion

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## OpinionRace

# The UK government's race report is so shoddy, it falls to pieces under scrutiny

[Aditya Chakraborty](#)



The report is full of mistakes and distorted facts. Evidence has been retrofitted to inspire outrage



Illustration: Eleanor Shakespeare/The Guardian

Illustration: Eleanor Shakespeare/The Guardian

Fri 16 Apr 2021 01.00 EDT

Plenty has been said about the politics of the government's [latest report](#) on race. Barely any attention has been paid by most of the media to its actual evidence, even from supporters delighted that it has some. "This report DOES have facts," [cooed](#) Rod Liddle in the Sun, with the same sunny pleasure that a toddler might take from a book having words.

Yet the nature of those facts has barely been scrutinised by journalists. Instead, newspapers on the right have [complained](#) about "zealots of wokedom" (the Express) and their "[baseless abuse](#)" (the Telegraph) of Tony Sewell, the commission's chief. As Matthew Syed [wrote](#) in the Sunday Times, "shouldn't this be on the evidence rather than the person who assembled it; shouldn't we play the ball rather than the man?" Fair enough, although he doesn't bother examining the evidence either. Not so much playing the ball as just being very chuffed there's something that looks like one.

And so the entire debate has been framed as outrage versus science, fury versus footnotes. You might not like the politics, runs the argument, but you

can't dispute the data.

Except you absolutely can. After reading the report and speaking to a range of experts on the subjects it covers, the most striking thing about that much-vaunted evidence is how shaky it is, littered with mistakes and outright mangling of sources, alongside the kind of selective quoting normally seen on hoardings outside West End shows.

Some indication of its shoddiness comes from the number of experts cited in the report who are now rushing away from it. The “stakeholders” who [deny](#) any stake; the providers of supposedly bespoke work who did no such thing; the professors quoted who feel misused, from leading public health expert [Michael Marmot](#) to Oxford psychiatry professor Kamaldeep Bhui, who [damns](#) the report as “really poor scholarship”. And those commission members who [now claim](#) they don't recognise the report published in their name.

Forget the hostility from critics; I can't recall any government report flopping so badly among its own contributors. How did it happen? An explanation [comes from the commissioner](#) who accused Downing Street of “bending” the report to fit “a more palatable” narrative for the government. This partly explains the report's incoherence.

Whatever Liddle and the rest of Her Majesty's Loyal Hot Takers think, the report doesn't deny institutional racism. It dismisses the term in the foreword, accepts it in the early pages and later on forgets what it means. The report's argument can be boiled down to two parts. First, that racism is much less of a force in the UK than socio-economic deprivation – even though the two go hand in hand. Second, that the British discourse on race is obsessed with victimhood when it should be celebrating progress. To sustain that argument, a lot of bending takes place.

Here's one example of quite a haul: the police's use of stop and search has always been controversial, especially as black boys mainly seem to be the ones on the receiving end. But the Sewell report backs it, and cites a study in the British Journal of Criminology “suggesting that drug crime patterns change when stop and search is taking place in an area”.



Look up the [original study](#) and at the very top it says: “[T]he effect of stop [and search on] crime is likely to be marginal, at best. While there is some association between stop and search and crime (particularly drug crime), claims that this is an effective way to control and deter offending seem misplaced.” The source argues the opposite to the report quoting it.

On deaths of ethnic minority men while in police custody, Sewell’s team quotes Dame Elish Angiolini’s report for Theresa May: “Racial stereotyping may or may not be a significant contributory factor in some deaths in custody.” See? No proof of racism.

Except it omitted Angiolini’s very next sentence: “However, unless investigatory bodies operate transparently and are seen to give all due consideration to the possibility that stereotyping may have occurred or that discrimination took place in any given case, families and communities will continue to feel that the system is stacked against them.” In other words: to find proof of racism, you must first look for it. She might as well have been addressing Sewell and his colleagues.

Research is wheeled out to celebrate the progress ethnic minorities have made over decades in the jobs market, yet [the actual paper](#) also finds “there is still net ethnic disadvantage”.

And there’s more, much more. Each time, the effect is akin to watching an 18-rated movie edited for an aeroplane’s in-flight service: so much of the action is missing that it’s a different film.

Then there’s sheer sloppiness. At the beginning of the chapter on crime is the statement that “Class B drug offences [cannabis and the like] accounted for nearly half of prosecutions of almost all ethnic groups”: that is, including white people. On first reading, that seemed amazingly high: how can weed account for more court appearances than motoring offences or theft? Sure enough, the spreadsheet pointed to by the report shows that court prosecutions for class B drug possession were just over 1% of the total. When I asked the Cabinet Office, it admitted its mistake – sadly, too late for James Forsyth of the Times, whose column last week [featured the assertion](#) that laws on class B drugs “account for almost half of prosecutions of ethnic

minorities”, which is a misquoting on top of the original misquoting: a kind of error squared.

Supporters of the report and its politics often quote its points about how much of what is ascribed to racism is instead down to black boys being raised by single mums. There’s a reason for that: the Cabinet Office went hunting for research to establish a link. I have seen an email from last November to two leading social scientists that says the commission is interested in “whether there is any evidence to support perceptions that young people living in single parent households ... experience poorer outcomes and in turn a higher propensity to become involved in risky or criminal activity”. In other words, the government went looking for proof to back up a prejudice, [long expressed](#) by Sewell, against lone-parent families. The Cabinet Office did not respond to my questions about this correspondence. The academics declined the invitation.

If this report was handed to you by an undergraduate, I asked researchers this week, how would you mark it? “It wouldn’t get to marking,” replied one, a leading criminologist at the University of Kent, Alex Stevens. “We’d be having words about intellectual dishonesty.” So what happens when that same sly dishonesty is practised by people in power using taxpayers’ money to fund government reports that retrofit evidence to suit positions designed to outrage? And when most of the press don’t do the basic interrogation? The obvious answer is: culture wars break out.

“Without objective truth we are sunk,” writes Syed in the Sunday Times. “Without shared empirical standards, we are finished.” Maybe he should tell No 10.

- Aditya Chakraborty is a Guardian columnist

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[OpinionCentrica](#)

# Will the British Gas sackings be a harbinger of doom for workers' rights?

[Owen Jones](#)



If companies can use the pandemic to 'fire and rehire', a relentless race to the bottom beckons for Britain's workforce



‘The pandemic provides a renewed opening for big business to shift power even further away from workers so it can to boost long-term profits for shareholders.’ Striking British Gas workers in Sidcup, Kent, in March 2021. Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian

‘The pandemic provides a renewed opening for big business to shift power even further away from workers so it can to boost long-term profits for shareholders.’ Striking British Gas workers in Sidcup, Kent, in March 2021. Photograph: Martin Godwin/The Guardian

Fri 16 Apr 2021 04.51 EDT

Back in the early months of the pandemic, the nationwide [clap for carers](#), performed on Thursday evenings, was supposed to be an outpouring of solidarity and gratitude to frontline workers for their efforts in tackling the virus, not self-congratulatory hypocrisy. [Now that British Gas workers](#) have been sacked en masse for refusing to sign up to slashed terms and conditions, it is worth wondering how many of the company’s senior executives on exorbitant salaries applauded their key workers last year. How many of them whooped, cheered and banged pots and pans to show their neighbours they really, *really* care, before undermining the working conditions of engineers and other workers at the company who risked their health to help keep Britain functioning during its gravest postwar emergency?

The fate of British Gas employees should disturb millions of other workers because it could prove a harbinger for their own futures. The Conservatives have laid so many obstacles to industrial action that it has become unthinkable for most workers: that a super majority of [89% of GMB union members](#) who took part in the ballot at British Gas voted in favour of striking over its plans – overcoming acute legal thresholds – is indicative of the strength of feeling among the rank and file. At a time when many workers were suffering unprecedented stress because of the pandemic, British Gas sought to bully them into either accepting longer working hours or losing their jobs.

[Hundreds of British Gas engineers to lose jobs in ‘fire and rehire’ scheme](#)  
[Read more](#)

“We’ve been treated like criminals,” Paul Vowles, a 40-year-old striking worker from Cannock, tells me. “It’s been a horrific experience. Before fire and rehire was proposed, I didn’t realise how bad it was for mental health.” While most workers have been coerced into signing the new agreement – they have families to feed and work is hardly abundant in Covid-era Britain – hundreds who refuse are to have their employment unceremoniously terminated.

It is a saga that tells many stories. British Gas was a jewel in the crown of Britain’s privatisation programme of the 1980s and 90s, a nationally respected institution. Today, it is a byword for rip-off services and now a poster boy for tawdry treatment of workers. The fact that British bosses see the country’s recent crises as opportunities to gut workers’ rights is a story largely left untold. During the financial crash, the Confederation of British Industry – the bosses’ official federation – [boasted of using the disaster](#) to establish a so-called “flexiforce”: an ever-diminishing core of permanent workers with rights and a larger ring of flexible workers lacking basic security. The pandemic provides a renewed opening for big business to shift power even further away from workers so it can boost long-term profits for shareholders. Covid-19 has proved a useful cover for British Gas: media outlets are hardly favourable to striking workers even in times of supposed normality, but the biggest strike of the year has attracted derisory coverage.

It would be facile to write off these courageous strikers as just another inevitable “glorious” defeat for Britain’s beleaguered unionised workers. Our own Conservative government claims to be opposed to such “fire and rehire” tactics, where businesses sack workers only to re-employ them on reduced terms. Yet it is certainly true that several Tory cabinet ministers – principally Liz Truss, Dominic Raab, Priti Patel and Kwasi Kwarteng – [once co-authored a leaflet](#) calling British workers “among the worst idlers in the world” as justification for attacking their rights. While many workers voted for Brexit as a sign of displeasure with a broken status quo, for Tory politicians it provided an opportunity to scrap what they call “red tape” but which is more accurately described as “hard-won rights and protections”.

British Gas strikers have succeeded in raising the profile of this grim means of undercutting rights, and if the Tories wish to prove fears about their intentions wrong, here is their opportunity. Indeed, Kwarteng – the cabinet minister with the relevant brief – [now claims](#) “Brexit gives us the opportunity to have higher standards”: he now has his chance to prove it.

“If anything comes from this strike in future, it’s to stop it happening to anyone else,” Vowles tells me. “That would be a massive victory for everybody.” While Labour has commendably backed the strike, it should use this moment to pile pressure on a Tory party that extols its supposed “blue-collar” credentials. The danger, otherwise, is that other bosses see British Gas get away with it and take note – and then a relentless race to the bottom truly beckons for Britain’s workforce.

- Owen Jones is a Guardian columnist

## [Opinion](#) **Coronavirus**

# I've been agoraphobic – what I learned may help those with post-lockdown anxiety

[Rhianon Lucy Cosslett](#)



When home feels like a place of safety, ‘re-entry’ syndrome makes sense. But there are ways to gradually return to society





‘You might not be ready for crowds, but a quiet pint outside your local is manageable. Going to places at less busy times, or with someone you trust makes a difference. Slowly, you build up.’ Taplow, Buckinghamshire, 15 April. Photograph: Maureen McLean/Rex/Shutterstock

‘You might not be ready for crowds, but a quiet pint outside your local is manageable. Going to places at less busy times, or with someone you trust makes a difference. Slowly, you build up.’ Taplow, Buckinghamshire, 15 April. Photograph: Maureen McLean/Rex/Shutterstock

Fri 16 Apr 2021 04.00 EDT

We have been trying to get the cat to go outside. You can tell a part of her wants to; she’s curious, certainly, but her fight-or-flight wins out. If you try to let her out of the building’s main entrance, she bolts back upstairs and sits in front of the door to the flat until she is let inside again. She feels safe in her home territory.

Perhaps being a [lockdown kitten](#) has affected her. Her behaviour reminds me of [when I was agoraphobic](#). I desperately wanted a normal life, of going into the office on public transport, seeing friends, eating in restaurants, travelling. But any time I wanted to do these things my threat response was triggered; I became terrified, like a frightened animal. I believed that bad things happened when you left the house, and I had reason to believe that. I had

been attacked, and then, several years after being successfully treated for PTSD, the Paris attacks set it off again: but this time it was full-blown agoraphobia. Home became safety to me.

As we venture out of lockdown and the world opens up, I have huge sympathy for those who don't feel ready, especially those who have been shielding for so long now and may feel panicked by re-entering the world. UK charities have [warned](#) that the end of lockdown could trigger anxiety for many, especially those with pre-existing mental health conditions. Dr Tine Van Bortel, a senior research associate in public health at the University of Cambridge, said: "Lockdown has given people with mental health conditions like anxiety and PTSD permission to stay at home, and knowing that at some point you'll have to go out again can actually trigger stress and anxiety."

When home feels like a place away from danger, and there is a very real risk of infection outside, "re-entry" syndrome makes sense. That's not to say that millions of people will have developed actual agoraphobia as it is defined in the [DSM-5](#) (the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) – it is not simply a fear of open spaces but a fear of being in places that it might be difficult or embarrassing to get out of, or a fear of having a panic attack.

Nevertheless, what I learned from having agoraphobia – and being successfully treated – might be helpful to those who are feeling anxious about the easing of lockdown. Being kind to yourself is important, but not so kind that you allow your fears to win out, and give in to the desire become a hermit. Weighing up each potential exposure and putting a plan in place so that it doesn't become too much can ease the feelings. Having people who are informed and understanding really helps, especially if you need to leave a situation abruptly.

Last weekend I met my mother outside King's Cross station, but I had not been prepared for so many people being around. Though I don't have agoraphobia any more and consider myself healthy, it was still a lot to process – I had moved from one extreme, my quiet neighbourhood, to another, a bustling city concourse, in the space of a relatively short walk. I found that my eyes were darting around a bit, "hazard spotting", like they

used to in the bad old days, when I thought I could be shot dead at any moment. “Do you mind if we go somewhere a bit quieter?” I said. And so we went and sat on a bench in a square.

Some people will be embracing the loosening of lockdown with full enthusiasm, and I think it’s that disconnect that can be anxiety-inducing, too. When I was ill, I used to look at all the people going about their daily lives and oscillate between thinking, “what’s wrong with you? Aren’t you scared?” and wanting to be like they were, living without fear.

I had to put up with a lot of older people conjuring the blitz and IRA bombings and proclaiming that “we all just got on with it”, as though PTSD were some new-fangled craze the kids were doing. There remains a lot of ignorance about anxiety disorders, which just exacerbates the shame and embarrassment that sufferers can feel.

It didn’t feel great to need exposure therapy; to have to be accompanied to Topshop by a therapist, to have to spend many weeks getting the tube one stop from Tufnell Park to Archway, hyperventilating the whole time. But being exposed to the outside world in small doses really helped. I imagine millions of people are doing an informal version of this as I write. They might not be ready for crowds, but a quiet pint outside your local is manageable. Going to places at less busy times, or with a friend or family member who you trust makes a difference. Slowly, you build up.

It’s still bizarre to think that so many millions of people have spent the last year, on and off, as housebound as I was in 2016. Genuine agoraphobia of course needs proper treatment, but it did teach me that, just as your brain can create new pathways that associate the world as a frightening place, so can you rewire it to become habituated to society again.

This weekend, I’m looking forward to a meal with a friend who I haven’t seen in months. As for the cat, she’ll go outside in her own time. I know she’ll love it once she’s there.

- Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett is a Guardian columnist
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## Reality checkedTelevision

# Is producer meddling ruining reality TV?

Yomi Adegoke



From The Circle to Love Island, ‘shocking’ twists don’t fool contestants – or viewers. Surely the best dramas occur when people are allowed to be themselves



Natalya (left) who scooped the £100,000 prize on The Circle after masquerading as ‘the perfect man’ with host Emma Willis. Photograph: Channel 4/PA

Natalya (left) who scooped the £100,000 prize on The Circle after masquerading as ‘the perfect man’ with host Emma Willis. Photograph: Channel 4/PA

Fri 16 Apr 2021 05.00 EDT

Channel 4’s mind-bending social media-based reality show The Circle continues to go from strength to strength, with season three’s closing episode airing last week and finding 1.24 million viewers – its most-watched finale ever. Since 2018, the show has garnered a dedicated following, with a second US series screening at the end of the month.

Like many of the best reality shows, it sounds ridiculous on paper and is utter genius on screen. The premise appears convoluted, yet it’s simple: it is a popularity contest in the most literal sense. Contestants battle it out for £100k, sucking up and scheming their way to the final. The cast live in the same apartment building but can’t meet, and rate each other based on their carefully curated profiles. The most popular players come out on top as “influencers”, complete with blue ticks and the ability to “block” their rivals.

Some players choose to play it straight, usually accompanied by a self-righteous speech about the importance of “being yourself”. Others fake it til they make it, such as season one’s Freddie Bentley, a gay 20-year-old from Essex, for whom “playing it straight” had a more literal meaning. This gives way to a number of surreal set-ups, such as a woman, 43, using her 25-year-old son’s pictures to chat up other women, or Richard Madeley masquerading as a 27-year-old PR girl called – wait for it – Judy.

[The next Big Brother? How The Circle breathed new life into reality TV](#)  
[Read more](#)

There’s a lot going on with this show already, which is why the incessant meddling of producers this year almost ruined it. From the outset, it was clear that the programme-makers would be taking a more hands-on approach to a show which is already, like any reality show, heavily produced. The first contestant blocked from the game was Yolanda, who had gone in as her husband, Chris. She was, however, immediately given the opportunity to re-enter the game, this time by cloning the profile of an existing contestant, Tally, and making the rest of the players decide who was the real one and who was the fake. While watching Yolanda scramble to try to convince the other players of the arbitrary meanings she had ascribed to Tally’s tattoos was amusing, she ultimately failed and was sent home. The twist somewhat failed, too; the novelty wore off when it became clear that Yolanda wouldn’t succeed in her mission. It wasn’t as sly as producers thought either; Vithun, one of the sharper contestants, immediately twigged that Yolanda was behind the new account.





Jack Fincham and Dani Dyer, whose Love Island relationship was tested by producer twists. Photograph: Jonathan Hordle/ITV/REX/Shutterstock

This “twist” was repeated later down the line when two other blocked players, catfish Femi (a Londoner named Joey, playing as a newly arrived immigrant from Nigeria) and Pippa, were given the chance to return by joining forces to impersonate a priest. The contestants ended up guessing that it was them, too. And since the show finished, it has been claimed that one of the most tense moments of the series was entirely orchestrated. James, former cast member Hunter on the 90s series *Gladiators*, entered The Circle as an NHS nurse named Gemma. After his departure he visited his on-screen nemesis Manrika, but [in a recent Instagram live](#) video, he revealed that he had actually wanted to see 85-year-old grandmother Dot (who was really her grandson, Scott, 30) instead. The producers had asked him to visit Manrika, he said, and had allegedly controlled who he had been able to speak with during the game.

Producers poking about is part and parcel of every reality show; to say I’m entirely against it would be to say I’m against reality TV. If I didn’t want it at all, I’d be writing columns about documentaries. But it’s an art; the people behind the scenes should never be so obviously present that they feel like characters themselves. At its best they can foster some incredible TV moments, but at its worst their input can feel last-ditch and desperate. For

instance, in series four of Love Island, producers seemed to do everything in their power to cause drama between eventual winners Dani Dyer and Jack Fincham. They roped in his ex-girlfriend Ellie Jones, and then sent a video of his shocked reaction to her entrance to a distraught Dyer. She was beside herself with worry and so was the public; [it led to more than 2,500 Ofcom complaints](#). This kind of manipulation becomes more drastic as series progress, in the hopes of spicing up a long-running show. The producers of The Bachelor have long been accused of [telling the bachelor who to save](#) in the eliminations, while multiple, unnecessary gimmicks and challenges were the nail in Big Brother's coffin. Season 13 of Drag Race has been subject to criticism for its most recent twist, too, which saw queens introduced in pairs, and then immediately asked to lip sync for their life to avoid elimination. It was, however, instantly clear that these exits couldn't be real, or the series would progress with half the number of cast members. It was so clear in fact that – you guessed it – the contestants realised immediately.

The latest series of The Circle might have felt like it was being masterminded by its makers, but, ultimately, it was saved by a shock orchestrated by the contestants themselves. In one of the biggest upsets in the show's history, military policewoman Natalya, posing as paratrooper Felix, won the show by faking a romantic relationship with resident villain Manrika. The outcome was entirely unexpected, unlike the dramas which had preceded it. It served as a reminder that reality TV is at its best when contestants are given the space to be their weird and wonderful selves – even if they're catfishing.

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## [Russia](#)

# Biden hits Russia with new sanctions in response to election meddling

Ten diplomats expelled as part of fresh package of sanctions announced by US president as Russia says retaliation ‘inevitable’



Vladimir Putin at the Kremlin on Wednesday. Photograph: Alexei Druzhinin/Tass

Vladimir Putin at the Kremlin on Wednesday. Photograph: Alexei Druzhinin/Tass

[Andrew Roth](#) in Moscow and [Julian Borger](#) in Washington

Thu 15 Apr 2021 17.25 EDT

The Biden administration has announced the expulsion of 10 Russian diplomats and broad sanctions against Russian officials and companies in retaliation for Moscow’s interference in elections and cyber-espionage campaigns such as the [SolarWinds hack](#).

The sanctions, which were the Biden administration's largest punitive action against the Kremlin yet, also targeted six Russian cybersecurity companies deemed to be involved in the SolarWinds hack, as well as 32 individuals and entities deemed to be involved in efforts to influence the outcome of the 2020 US presidential election.

[Biden urges Russia to de-escalate Ukraine tensions in call with Putin](#)  
[Read more](#)

The Biden administration also barred US financial institutions from buying rouble bonds newly issued by Russia's central bank or other large financial institutions, targeting the country's sovereign debt and its broader economy.

In a formal statement later on Thursday, Joe Biden stressed the calibrated nature of the US measures, and his hopes that he and [Vladimir Putin](#), whom he had warned about the coming sanctions earlier in the week, would be able to stabilise the US-Russian relationship. But at the same time he warned against any Russian military moves in Ukraine.

"I was clear with President Putin that we could have gone further, but I chose not to do so. I chose to be proportional. The United States is not looking to kick off a cycle of escalation and conflict with Russia," Biden said in televised remarks from the White House. He confirmed [he had offered Putin a summit meeting in Europe this summer](#), and their aides were discussing arrangements.

"Throughout our long history of competition, our two countries have been able to find ways to manage tensions, and to keep them from escalating out of control," the president said. "I expressed my belief that communication between the two of us personally and directly was essential to moving forward to a more effective relationship."

He said he had made clear US support for Ukrainian territorial integrity. "Now is the time to de-escalate," Biden said. "The way forward is through thoughtful dialogue and diplomatic process."

The report published by the administration went into granular detail exposing Russian espionage methods. For the first time, the US identified

the SVR, Russia's foreign intelligence agency, as the spy agency that carried out the SolarWinds software supply chain hack, which penetrated federal government networks and compromised more than 16,000 computers systems. Members of Russian intelligence would be among the diplomats expelled from the United States, the White House said.

## Q&A

### **What was the SolarWinds hack?**

#### Show

In early 2020, malicious code was sneaked into updates to a popular piece of software called Orion, made in the US by the company SolarWinds, which monitors the computer networks of businesses and governments for outages.

That malware gave hackers remote access to an organisation's networks so they could steal information. Among the most high-profile users of the software were US government departments including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the state department, and the justice department.

Described by the Microsoft president, Brad Smith, as "the largest and most sophisticated attack the world has ever seen", US intelligence agencies have accused Russia of launching the attack.

SolarWinds, of Austin, Texas, provides network monitoring and other technical services to hundreds of thousands of organisations around the world, including most Fortune 500 companies and government agencies in North America, Europe, Asia and the Middle East.

Its compromised product, Orion, is a centralised monitoring tool that looks for problems in an organisation's computer network, which means that breaking in gave the attackers a "God view" of those networks.

Neither SolarWinds nor US cybersecurity authorities have publicly identified which organisations were breached. Just because a company or agency uses SolarWinds as a vendor does not necessarily mean it was vulnerable to the hack.

[Kari Paul](#) and [Martin Belam](#)

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

In a coordinated release, the British spy agency GCHQ on Thursday also attributed the SolarWinds hack to the SVR, and accused the agency of targeting diplomatic and military institutions in Nato countries since 2011 and research institutes since 2015. Previously identified as APT 29, Cozy Bear and the Dukes, the SVR has also been accused of penetrating the Democratic National Committee during the 2016 US presidential elections.

“We see what Russia is doing to undermine our democracies,” said the British foreign secretary, Dominic Raab, in a statement. “The UK and US are calling out Russia’s malicious behaviour, to enable our international partners and businesses at home to better defend and prepare themselves against this kind of action.”

The UK foreign office said it had summoned the Russian ambassador in London to express its deep concern at what it called Moscow’s “pattern of malign activity”.

Russian officials reacted angrily to the new sanctions, with some saying it would scuttle any chance of [a summit between Biden and Vladimir Putin](#). The Russian foreign ministry summoned the US ambassador for a “difficult talk” and called the sanctions “aggressive behaviour”, adding that Russian counter-sanctions were “inevitable”.

Those sanctioned included Alexei Gromov, a Kremlin official who curates Russia’s media and was accused of seeking “to exacerbate tensions in the United States by discrediting the 2020 US elections process”. Yevgeny Prigozhin, a Kremlin-linked businessman [accused of running the Internet Research Agency online trolling operation and an overseas paramilitary outfit](#), was a key target of the sanctions, as were information outlets tied to Russian intelligence agencies. Konstantin Kilimnik, a Ukrainian political consultant and former aide to Paul Manafort, was also sanctioned for election interference and aiding Ukraine’s disgraced ex-president Viktor Yanukovich.



Officials had said that the new sanctions were meant to cut deeper than previous attempts to punish Moscow for its attacks on US institutions and allies. Some Russian officials have laughed off being added to the treasury department's office of foreign assets control (OFAC) sanctions lists, comparing it to being elevated to an elite club.

There are some limits to the severity of the sanctions. Many of those in Prigozhin's network targeted by the sanctions are intentionally expendable, and the ban on buying rouble bonds only applies to their primary issue, meaning they would remain available to trade on secondary markets.

The sanctions on IT companies that contract with government agencies could be disruptive for the sector, said Vladimir Frolov, a political analyst, but "other than that, it's largely a signal exercise" to show Biden negotiating from a position of strength.

Nonetheless, Frolov added, Moscow might have "to respond aggressively to deny Biden the optics advantage of negotiating from a position of strength and chewing gum".

There are already signs that the sanctions will add tension to an already strained relationship between Russia and the US. Since last month, Moscow has been engaged in the largest troop [buildup on its border with Ukraine](#) since the 2014 annexation of Crimea, provoking fears of an invasion.

[US has 'low to moderate confidence' in reports of Russian bounty on US troops](#)  
[Read more](#)

The US president's tough approach differs considerably from that of the Trump administration, which sought to avoid confronting Russia over reports of election interference. During a summit in Helsinki, Trump sided with Putin over an FBI assessment that Russia had interfered in the 2016 elections, saying: "President Putin says it's not Russia. I don't see any reason why it would be."

The sanctions are also retaliation for Russian interference in the 2020 elections, in which US intelligence agencies concluded that the Kremlin had

backed Trump over Biden, although it is not believed to have considerably influenced the result.

Dmitri Peskov, the Kremlin spokesperson, said Russia would retaliate against the new sanctions. “The principle of reciprocity applies ... to best ensure our own interests.”

A senior US official said: “We want to be clear that we have no desire to be in an escalatory cycle with Russia ... We intend these responses to be proportionate and tailored to the specific past actions that Russia has taken.”

He explained that until now US sanctions had covered non-rouble denominated debt, a small part of Russia’s total sovereign debt. Rouble denominated portion accounts for over 80%.

“This is a matter of principle. There’s no credible reason why the American people should directly fund Russia’s government when the Putin regime has repeatedly attempted to undermine our sovereignty,” the official said.

The Biden administration [announced sanctions last month](#) over [the poisoning](#) and [imprisonment](#) of the opposition politician Alexei Navalny. The sanctions included visa restrictions, export restrictions on items that could be used to make chemical and biological weapons, and targeted action against seven senior members of the Russian government.

The measures also entailed an expansion of sanctions under the Chemical and Biological Weapons Control and Warfare Elimination Act.

## Music festivals

# Fyre festival attendees to receive \$7,000 each in settlement

New York bankruptcy court rules in favour of payout to 277 people who travelled to Bahamas for notorious ‘luxury’ event



Fyre festival organiser Billy McFarland outside court in 2018. Photograph: Mark Lennihan/AP

Fyre festival organiser Billy McFarland outside court in 2018. Photograph: Mark Lennihan/AP

[Ben Beaumont-Thomas](#)

[@ben\\_bt](#)

Fri 16 Apr 2021 04.49 EDT

A group of 277 attendees at the notorious Fyre festival are to receive settlement payouts of \$7,220 (£5,240) each after the conclusion of a lawsuit against the organisers.

The 2017 event drew global attention after the supposedly luxury music experience, promoted by supermodels and set to feature artists such as Major Lazer and Migos, turned out to resemble a disaster relief camp with windswept tents and decidedly non-gourmet food. Attendees had spent between \$1,000 and \$12,000 on tickets to the festival, which was cancelled on its opening day.

[Fyre Festival: ‘I paid \\$4,000 to go. It’s fair game to make fun of me’](#)  
[Read more](#)

Organiser Billy McFarland apologised and said he was “committed to, and working actively to, find a way to make this right”. Numerous lawsuits were filed against him and his co-organiser, the rapper Ja Rule, and McFarland was arrested in June 2017. He pleaded guilty to numerous fraud charges relating to the festival and his company NYC VIP Access, which sold fake tickets to events such as the Met Gala. He was sentenced to six years in prison in October 2018. Ja Rule was [cleared of wrongdoing](#) a year later.

The latest lawsuit ruling, at the US bankruptcy court in New York, is still subject to a vote of approval, which will take place on 13 May, and there remains the chance that the the payout figure could be lower depending on Fyre’s bankruptcy case with other creditors.

In 2018, a judge ruled in favour of attendees Seth Crossno and Mark Thompson in another lawsuit against the festival, awarding the pair \$5m in damages.

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## New Zealand

# **‘Only in New Zealand!’: Relics found in coffee jars in rubble of Christchurch cathedral**

The relics – purported to be bones of saints – were found buried in rubble of the 2010 and 2011 earthquakes



Archivist Triona Doocey goes through some of the relics unearthed during demolition of the Catholic cathedral in Christchurch, New Zealand  
Photograph: Chris Skelton/CHRIS SKELTON

Archivist Triona Doocey goes through some of the relics unearthed during demolition of the Catholic cathedral in Christchurch, New Zealand  
Photograph: Chris Skelton/CHRIS SKELTON

[Tess McClure](#) in Auckland

[@tessairini](#)

Fri 16 Apr 2021 02.09 EDT

It might seem like an inauspicious end for a saint, being laid to rest in a Greggs coffee jar.

But for the holy relics buried beneath Christchurch's destroyed Catholic cathedral, those repurposed containers have housed them safely through more than 40 years and two enormous earthquakes, until they were finally unearthed by demolition teams this week.

The relics – purported to be the bones of saints and apostles – are [just the latest treasures salvaged](#) from the rubble of Christchurch's Catholic Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, which was badly damaged in the devastating earthquakes of 2010 and 2011.

[Christchurch: Treasures arise from cathedral ruins, 10 years after earthquake](#)  
[Read more](#)

Workers have been gradually deconstructing the remaining building and its ruins, but in the process unearthed a number of treasures that the church had previously thought could be lost. Items and artifacts recovered include altar stones, a decapitated nativity scene, and a charity collection box with out-of-circulation coins.

Christchurch diocese archivist, Triona Doocey, said they knew the location of the relics, and had expected to recover them during demolition. But she said it was “very surprising” that they were housed in such unexpected vessels.





A safe containing coffee jars filled with holy relics and bones from Christchurch's Catholic Cathedral, uncovered during demolition work. Photograph: Cathedral House

While one might have expected a clay urn or gold-plated chest, the bones were instead found nestled in a pair of 1970s Greggs coffee jars and a Schweppes soda bottle.

“When you think of the reverential objects that they contain, these holy relics, and they’re in a Greggs coffee jar. Only in New Zealand!” she said. While unexpected, she said the containers were a pragmatic, reasonably watertight choice. “That was the 1970s,” she said. “People were very practical.”

The jars held fragments of bone, including one vertebra, and reliquaries – small metal containers that hold relics. Holy relics like these were once a core part of the Roman Catholic tradition. They are believed to be the literal remains of key founders and sites of the faith: bones and blood, fingers and foreskins, burial shrouds, shards of the cross, even mummified heads, from important saints, apostles, and Jesus himself.

In the first century, church authorities had decreed that the altar of every church should have a relic – a ruling that officially lasted until Catholic



leaders discarded it in the late 1960s. These had been displayed in the Christchurch cathedral until the 1970s, when relics went out of fashion. At that point, they were buried in consecrated ground beneath the chapel.



A jar containing holy bones and relics recovered from Christchurch's Catholic Cathedral. Photograph: Cathedral House

Doocey was in the process of identifying which saints the relics belonged to – some names she'd identified were Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint Vincent. They had been brought to New Zealand by Bishop John Grimes, and Doocey said the collection included some “quite obscure” and unusual saints. “It's quite nice to see his personality coming through... the relics he wanted to collect.” She said the church had old authenticity certificates for some relics, and hoped to connect with the Vatican archives to get more information.

In 2017, the Vatican issued a decree that restated their longstanding ban on buying and selling relics, but there is still a roaring illicit trade – [the New York Times has reported](#) that “according to the Italian police, on average more than 300 relics have been stolen in the country every year since 2010”.

But in the 10 years since the Canterbury earthquakes, these have remained safe as the cathedral ruins fell into some disrepair.

Other items from the Cathedral have not been so lucky – speaking to [The Guardian last week](#), Doocey said some pieces had been taken by enterprising looters.

Two bronze angels set into the Chapel altar and dating back to when the cathedral first opened in 1905 were found to have gone missing from the site when the altar was removed last month. Doocey said the Church was still hoping for their return.

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## [Access to water](#)

# Handwashing and hot tea: Eswatini celebrates roll out of solar-heated water

New stations at health clinics improve hygiene in locations where warm water seen as ‘an absolute luxury’, helping to tackle Covid



Acting prime minister Themba Masuku performs a ceremonial handwash to mark the completion of the Lobamba clinic. Photograph: Courtesy of Frazer Solar

Acting prime minister Themba Masuku performs a ceremonial handwash to mark the completion of the Lobamba clinic. Photograph: Courtesy of Frazer Solar

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[Saeed Kamali Dehghan](#)

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Fri 16 Apr 2021 03.00 EDT

In Eswatini, the southern African country [which lost a prime minister to Covid-19](#) in December and where most people have no access to hot water, handwashing – a key weapon in the fight against the pandemic – has been a problem.

No government health clinic in the kingdom, formerly known as [Swaziland](#), had hot running water for patients. Nine out of 10 didn't have hot water for operations and cleaning instruments.

But in just nine months, a solar sanitation project has reversed that, bringing hot water to all 92 clinics scattered across Eswatini. "To places we'd never have dreamed would have hot water," said Lizzie Nkosi, minister for health.

Hot water stations have been set up outside clinics with solar-powered tanks drawing cold water from the mains.

"In 25 years working as a nurse, I have never had hot water in a clinic. Not for patients, not for nurses," said Lindiwe Magongo, head nurse at the

Ezulwini clinic, 14km away from the administrative capital, Mbabane.

“Not only have all my patients had clean, hot water, I have also had a hot cup of tea every single day.”

The country has 14 hospitals but because of the poor state of the roads most people rely on their nearest clinic to deal with everything from emergencies to minor illnesses and vaccinations.

['Not a sip of water in the house': living with HIV in a drought – in pictures](#)  
[Read more](#)

Eswatini has the highest incidence of HIV in the world, [according to Unicef](#), and among the lowest life expectancies. Levels of tuberculosis and obesity are high and 63% of the 1.3 million population live in poverty.

Ezulwini, and the Lobamba clinic 20km away, each have a dozen staff who live on-site. They each treat 200 to 300 patients daily, who will often have walked 10 to 15km and queued for hours to be seen.

Robert Frazer, managing director of Frazer Solar, the German company behind the tanks, said the impact is “massive”.

“We take hot water for granted in the west but in Eswatini it’s an absolute luxury,” he said.



Hot water is a luxury in Eswatini, where 63% of people live in poverty. Photograph: Courtesy of Frazer Solar

The system needs no electricity or moving parts. The water from the mains is fed into the storage tank using water pressure. The coldest water flows to the bottom of the solar panel, which traps the warmth of the sun, heats the water and sends it back up to the tank in a cycle that takes the temperature of the supply to between 80 and 90C. No servicing should be required for 20 years and the system benefits about 10,000 people every day.

The project, which cost €300,000 (£260,000) , was finished last month. At the Lobamba clinic its completion was marked with a ceremonial handwash for the cameras by Themba Masuku, the deputy prime minister who has been acting PM since the country's leader, Ambrose Dlamini, died in December after testing positive for Covid.

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[This land is your land](#)[Environment](#)

## How Canada is trying to protect its last three spotted owls

Canada announced a more full-throated response to the potential extinction of the owl within its borders and boost the species



The northern spotted owl's territory stretches from old growth forests in southern British Columbia, through Washington, Oregon and into northern California. Photograph: Robin Loznak/Zuma Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

The northern spotted owl's territory stretches from old growth forests in southern British Columbia, through Washington, Oregon and into northern California. Photograph: Robin Loznak/Zuma Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

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[About this content](#)

[Cara McKenna](#) *in Vancouver*

Fri 16 Apr 2021 05.15 EDT

There are only three known northern spotted owls left in the wild in Canada, including just one breeding pair. Their chicks have on occasion been taken for a captive breeding program, to try and boost the species' prospects.

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Now Canada and British Columbia have announced a more full-throated response to the potential extinction of the owl within the country's borders. In tandem with the breeding scheme, the province will enforce a one-year halt to logging in the few remaining old-growth forests that the owl favors, until more permanent protections can be instituted.

The local Spô'zêm First Nation, in southern British Columbia, was part of the announcement, calling it a "monumental step".

The Spô'zêm chief, James Hobart, explained that northern spotted owls, also called skelúleʔ, are considered messengers, and their health is indicative of the health of the rest of the environment.

"Our messengers are extremely powerful beings," Hobart said in a statement.

"For years the province systematically swathed throughout our nation extracting major old growth forests while desecrating any chances of livelihood for the spotted owl."

The northern spotted owl's territory stretches from old growth forests in southern British Columbia, through Washington, Oregon and into northern California. In the US, northern spotted owls are also listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act.



A 10-day-old chick in 2018, just before she was returned to a spotted owl nest to be raised after being hand-raised by the Northern Spotted Owl Breeding Program. Photograph: Northern Spotted Owl Breeding Program

In British Columbia, conservation groups estimate there were once up to 500 breeding pairs of the bird in the wild, but they say since the introduction of industrial logging and increased competition for habitat, those numbers have plummeted.

A statement from British Columbia's ministry of environment added that the new agreement will build on existing plans to protect the spotted owl, and is part of a wider commitment to protect 25% of Canada's lands and waters by 2025.

In 2007, British Columbia established an outdoor breeding centre for northern spotted owls in a facility outside Vancouver, where there are currently 29 captive northern spotted owls living in outdoor aviaries.

The Northern Spotted Owl Breeding Program is the only centre of its kind in North America. Jasmine McCulligh, the facility coordinator, said it is currently working to get to 10 captive breeding pairs of northern spotted owls before any offspring can be released.

There are currently nine breeding-suitable female owls in the facility, but she said reaching their goal has been a challenge since the owls can be unpredictable. However, once they mate, they typically mate for life.

This year, the centre announced eggs began arriving on 26 March – one to three eggs typically arrive in a clutch, about three days apart, McCulligh explained. Once the eggs arrive, they typically take about 32 days to actually hatch.

“The numbers vary quite a bit,” she said. “Last year we had two chicks born, the year before that we had four. Fertility is something we’ve struggled with.”

The centre also recently took in a rescued male northern spotted owl that was found injured on the side of a road in California. McCulligh said as the center grows to meet its goals, capacity has become a concern, and expansion will likely be necessary in the future.

One of the key next steps of the new agreement will include a strategy to start releasing these owls into the wild, according to the provincial environment ministry, with an eventual target of 125 wild breeding pairs.

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