



# The Guardian

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2021.05.10 - 2021.05.12

- [Headlines wednesday 12 may 2021](#)
- [2021.05.12 - Coronavirus](#)
- [2021.05.12 - Spotlight](#)
- [2021.05.12 - Opinion](#)
- [2021.05.12 - Around the world](#)
- [Headlines tuesday 11 may 2021](#)
- [2021.05.11 - Coronavirus](#)
- [2021.05.11 - Spotlight](#)
- [2021.05.11 - Opinion](#)
- [2021.05.11 - Around the world](#)
- [Headlines](#)
- [2021.05.10 - Coronavirus](#)
- [2021.05.10 - Spotlight](#)
- [2021.05.10 - Opinion](#)
- [2021.05.10 - Around the world](#)

## Headlines wednesday 12 may 2021

- [Israel-Gaza violence Death toll rises as UN envoy warns over escalation](#)
- [Analysis Flare-up has caught Biden administration unprepared](#)
- ['Our children are getting killed' Human cost of Israel-Gaza violence](#)
- [Explainer What has caused Jerusalem's worst unrest in years?](#)
- [Kim Leadbeater Jo Cox's sister may stand for Labour in Batley and Spen](#)
- ['Flabbergasted' Cerne Giant dates from Anglo-Saxon times, analysis suggests](#)
- [Exclusive British troops were twice as likely to be killed in Afghanistan as US forces](#)
- [Guardian morning briefing Petrol pumps run dry in US after pipeline hack. Get up to speed quickly](#)
- [Coronavirus India variant calls in question 17 May UK reopening – experts](#)
- [Economic growth UK economy rebounds in March after rapid Covid vaccine rollout](#)
- [Brit awards Women dominate as Dua Lipa tops winners](#)
- [Queen's speech Cross-party MPs aim to force government to rectify rights breaches](#)
- ['Tragic misstep' Arts education cuts risk UK cultural leadership, government told](#)
- [Animal welfare Animals to be formally recognised as sentient beings in UK law](#)



## [Israel](#)

# Israel-Gaza violence: death toll rises as UN envoy warns over escalation

Further airstrikes and rocket fire reported in worst violence since 2014 war between Israel and Hamas

- [What has caused Jerusalem's worst violence in years?](#)

01:28

Israeli airstrikes demolish tower block and Hamas rocket hits bus as violence escalates – video

[Oliver Holmes](#) in Jerusalem and agencies

Wed 12 May 2021 02.33 EDT

Israeli jets and Palestinian militants traded fresh airstrikes and rocket fire early on Wednesday as the UN's Middle East envoy warned: "We're escalating towards a full-scale war."

The death toll since bombardments broke out on Monday night rose to 40 – 35 in Gaza and five in Israel – as Israel carried out hundreds of airstrikes in Gaza and Palestinian militant groups fired multiple rocket barrages at Tel Aviv, Beersheba, and other central Israeli cities.

It was the worst descent into violence since a 2014 war between Israel and Hamas. Israel said militants had fired more than 1,000 rockets in total.

Earlier, the defence minister, Benny Gantz, said "this is just the beginning" of Israel's strikes. The Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh vowed in turn that "if Israel wants to escalate, we are ready for it".

The UN envoy Tor Wennesland said leaders on all sides “have to take the responsibility of de-escalation” after a day of ferocious confrontations and the Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, [promising to intensify attacks on Gaza](#).

“The cost of war in Gaza is devastating and is being paid by ordinary people,” said Wennesland, who is expected to brief the 15 members of the UN security council on the crisis on Wednesday, its second such meeting in three days.

“Stop the fire immediately. We’re escalating towards a full-scale war,” he warned.

In the latest violent exchanges early on Wednesday, sirens warning of incoming rocket fire blared in Tel Aviv and several explosions were heard, after Hamas said it had fired 110 rockets towards the coastal city in response to Israeli airstrikes on Gaza. In the mixed Arab-Jewish town of Lod, near Tel Aviv, two people were killed after a rocket hit a vehicle in the area. Local media reported they were a father and daughter.

At 4.30am the Israeli Defence Forces said in a [statement](#) that it had struck a number of “significant terror targets and terror operatives across the Gaza Strip” in response to “hundreds” of rockets.

[‘Our children are getting killed’: the human cost of Israel-Gaza violence](#)  
[Read more](#)

Israeli aircraft also attacked another high-rise building in Gaza City. Five warning rockets were fired from a drone to alert people in the nine-storey block of the incoming bombing. Shortly afterward, the jets struck the building again after journalists and rescuers gathered around.

The structure, which houses residential apartments, medical production companies and a dental clinic, was heavily damaged. There was no immediate word on casualties.

The overnight exchanges echoed violence hours earlier on Tuesday, when a 13-storey tower housing apartments and the offices of officials from Hamas,

the Islamist group that holds power in [Gaza](#), was hit by an Israeli airstrike and collapsed. Residents had earlier been told to evacuate. In response, Hamas's military wing said it had fired 130 rockets towards Tel Aviv on Tuesday night, and air raid sirens and then explosions were heard in the coastal city.

A state of emergency has been declared in Lod, the scene of two nights of rioting by Palestinian citizens of Israel, also known as Arab Israelis, in which synagogues and Jewish schools were reported to have been set on fire, as Israel's internal strife threatened to be more destabilising than rocket attacks from Gaza.

The White House has responded by saying its "primary focus" was de-escalation and that Joe Biden was being updated on the worsening situation. His spokeswoman, Jen Psaki, said US officials were talking to their counterparts in the region.

[What has caused Jerusalem's worst violence in years?](#)

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"We believe Palestinians and Israelis deserve equal measures of freedom, security, dignity and prosperity," Psaki said. "US officials in recent weeks have spoken candidly with Israeli officials about how evictions of Palestinian families who have lived for years, sometimes decades, in their homes, and how demolitions of these homes, work against our common interests and achieving a solution to the conflict."

Wednesday's UN security council session is likely to be a test of the Biden administration's position on an issue that it has sought to play down. On Tuesday, it blocked a UN security council statement calling for a ceasefire.

In recent weeks, there has been a sharp escalation in anger over Israel's half-century occupation its ever-deepening military grip over Palestinian life and a wave of evictions and demolitions. In Jerusalem, hundreds of Palestinians have been wounded in near-nightly protests that escalated over the weekend and spread to other areas of Israel and the occupied West Bank.

In a statement issued on Tuesday, the Hamas leader, Ismail Haniyeh, had said the rocket attacks would continue until Israel stopped “all scenes of terrorism and aggression in Jerusalem and al-Aqsa mosque”.

Israel and [Hamas](#) have fought three wars, which were largely seen as failures for both sides, with Hamas still in power and Israel continuing to maintain a crippling blockade.

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |



## Israel

# Israel-Palestine flare-up has caught Biden administration unprepared

Analysis: The White House is playing for time and needs to decide quickly how to deal with Trump's legacy of unwavering support for Netanyahu

- [Israel-Gaza violence: death toll rises to 38 as UN envoy warns over escalation](#)



Joe Biden has reversed some of Trump's more radical Israel policy steps, restoring US funding for Palestinians and resuming diplomatic contacts with Palestinian officials, but other policies remain. Photograph: REX/Shutterstock

Joe Biden has reversed some of Trump's more radical Israel policy steps, restoring US funding for Palestinians and resuming diplomatic contacts with Palestinian officials, but other policies remain. Photograph: REX/Shutterstock

*[Julian Borger](#) in Washington*

Wed 12 May 2021 00.45 EDT

Joe Biden came into office thinking he could put the Israel-Palestine issue on the back burner to focus on other, bigger, issues. That is not working out well.

The upsurge in violence has caught the new administration on the back foot, under-staffed and without a clearly defined approach.

There is not even a nominee for the post of US ambassador to [Israel](#). Faced with calls for a united UN security council statement on Tuesday, the US balked and played for time. But trying to duck the traditional US mediating role is no longer looking like a viable option.

The approach thus far has been described as “hands-off”, but Khaled Elgindy, senior fellow at the Middle East Institute, argues that implies a neutrality that is lacking in reality.

“They are heavily involved. They are just not involved in the part that has to do with conflict mitigation,” Elgindy said, pointing to the \$3.8bn annual US support for the Israeli military, and the blocking move at the security council.

[Israel-Gaza violence: death toll rises to 38 as UN envoy warns over escalation](#)

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“So they are not hands off. They are quite hands on, but not in the ways that are needed to make things better, because that would require putting pressure on Israel and that is anathema to this administration.”

The Trump administration trashed the US mediating role by adopting a policy of unstinting support for Benjamin Netanyahu and hostility towards the Palestinians. Its principal foreign policy achievement, the [Abraham Accords](#), which moved towards normalising relations between Israel and some Gulf monarchies, was an attempt to sideline the plight of the

Palestinians as an intractable issue. The Trump White House saw emphatic Palestinian defeat, and the Gulf abandonment of the Palestinian cause, as the resolution to the conflict. Trump escaped the consequences of that policy and they have come to haunt his predecessor.

“Turns out that the strategy of having some wealthy Emiratis post selfies in Tel Aviv will not in fact bring peace to Israel-Palestine,” Senator Bernie Sanders’ foreign policy adviser, Matt Duss, [wrote on Twitter](#).

Biden has reversed some of Trump’s more radical steps, restoring US funding for Palestinians and resuming diplomatic contacts with Palestinian officials, but other Trump policies remain, such as the moving of the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. The administration has also been coy about a return to pre-Trump official references to the occupied territories.

“The latest escalation of violence demonstrates the folly of trying to marginalise this conflict: folly for Israel, for its new Arab partners, and for the Biden-Harris administration,” Tamara Cofman Wittes, a former state department official now senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, said.

“They may all prefer to focus on cooperation in pursuit of what they see as higher priorities. But the current crisis threatens to overturn that fragile consensus and divert the new administration’s attention from other foreign policy goals.”

The low-key approach has not just been dictated by past failures, the difficulty of the problem, and the desire to conserve diplomatic resources for other issues. Biden also has to maintain a political balance at home, where Trump set the bar high for support of Israel, and where his own party is divided.

The president’s perceived inaction is now a focal point for progressive dissatisfaction, however.

“Right now, it’s critical that the [Biden administration](#) engage proactively in securing an immediate ceasefire and pushing all sides to de-escalate,” the liberal Jewish American lobby, J Street, said in a statement. “With lives on the line, our government can and should be doing more.”

Now that standing by is no longer an option, the battle is on within the Democratic party to guide what path the administration takes now.

“It was absolutely understandable for them not to want to prioritise this issue, but this issue has a way of prioritising itself at inconvenient moments. What starts in Jerusalem does not stay there,” a senior Democratic congressional aide said.

The aide added: “If you want to put human rights back on the US foreign policy agenda, don’t just do it where it’s easy. Even Trump did it where it was easy. If you want to actually be credible, you have to do it where it’s hard.”

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## Gaza

# ‘Our children are getting killed’: the human cost of Israel-Gaza violence

As attacks leave 28 Palestinians and two Israelis dead, residents caught in the fighting share their stories



A wounded Palestinian girl is being brought to receive medical treatment at Shifa hospital after Israeli airstrikes hit various parts of Gaza Strip on 11 May. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

A wounded Palestinian girl is being brought to receive medical treatment at Shifa hospital after Israeli airstrikes hit various parts of Gaza Strip on 11 May. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

[Hazem Balousha](#) in Gaza and [Oliver Holmes](#) in Jerusalem

Tue 11 May 2021 12.50 EDT

Lying in Gaza’s main hospital and unconscious for most of the night, the patient was unsure which members of his family were still alive.

Muhammad al-Masri, 22, was in front of his house on Monday night, just before breaking his fast for Ramadan. “I heard the sound of a bombardment coming towards us from the frontier,” he said.

[What has caused Jerusalem’s worst violence in years?](#)

[Read more](#)

He started running, but it was too late. An explosion hit his body, fracturing his right arm. “There’s a piece of shrapnel in my right eye,” he said, “I cannot see with it.”

Asleep or in surgery at Shifa hospital for the past 24 hours, all al-Masri says he knows is that at least one brother, a sister and a cousin were also wounded, as they were taken to hospital in the same car. At the time of the interview, he was not sure about their condition.

Al-Masri is from the town of Beit Hanoun, near the Israeli frontier. Seven members of the same family, including three children, died there overnight, residents said.

Following weeks of intense violence in Jerusalem, Hamas, the Islamist group that holds power inside Gaza, [fired a barrage of rockets towards Jerusalem on Monday evening](#). Since then, it has launched hundreds more at Israeli towns nearby, and Israel has conducted dozens of airstrikes, including hits on residential buildings.

01:28

Israeli airstrikes demolish tower block and Hamas rocket hits bus as violence escalates – video

In total, [28 Palestinians, including 10 children](#), have died, according to the enclave’s health ministry, and three women – two Israelis and an Indian national – died and scores of people were wounded inside Israel, where air sirens blared in nearby towns almost continuously.

In the southern Israeli city of Ashkelon, an empty school was bombed. Local media reported four members of the same family, including an 8-year-old and an 11-year-old, were wounded by shrapnel. Holon, just south of Tel

Aviv, was also hit, set alight a bus and several cars, and injuring at least three people.

A medic for United Hatzalah, a volunteer-based emergency medical services agency, said he treated a woman in her 70s after her home in Ashkelon was hit. “The woman was in critical condition,” he said.

[The Guardian view on Jerusalem and Gaza: old struggles bring fresh violence](#) | [Editorial](#)

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Across the Gaza Strip, families spent a full night and day shuddering inside.

Souad, 30, said it was terrifying. “We couldn’t sleep,” said Souad, who asked to give only her first name. “The children do not know what is happening.”

Abdel-Hamid Hamad said his nephew Hussein, 11, was killed on Monday in what residents said was an Israeli airstrike. He told Reuters the boy was collecting wood when he was hit.

“Gaza has had enough, and nothing makes a difference now. Our children are getting killed. What should we do?” Hamad told Reuters.

In Barzilai hospital in Ashkelon, an Israeli woman treated for injuries after her apartment was hit by a Palestinian rocket recalled moments of panic.

An air conditioning unit fell on her and one of her children during the night and a bathroom door fell on her husband’s head, the woman told Channel 13, which did not give her name.

*Additional reporting by Julian Borger in Washington*

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## [Israel](#)

# What has caused Jerusalem's worst violence in years?

Hundreds of Palestinian protesters wounded in clashes with Israeli police and more than 20 dead in Gaza

01:28

Israeli airstrikes demolish tower block and Hamas rocket hits bus as violence escalates – video

[Oliver Holmes](#) in Jerusalem

Tue 11 May 2021 05.24 EDT

## What is happening in Israel and Palestine?

Jerusalem has experienced its worst unrest in years, with [hundreds of Palestinian protesters wounded](#) in clashes with Israeli police. More than 20 people have been killed in Gaza following fighting between militants and Israel, violence has surged into the occupied West Bank and Arab communities inside Israel have held demonstrations.

## What has caused the increase in violence?

It all relates to Israel's half-century military occupation and its ever-deepening grip over Palestinian life. Long-building anger has exploded because a series of events have all converged at once, reaching a crescendo on Monday.

## What is the background to those events?

In the wake of [steps taken by the Trump administration and Israel](#) to cement the county's control over the Palestinian territories, hope for a resolution to



the decades-old crisis is at a nadir.

A decision by Mahmoud Abbas, the 85-year-old leader of the unpopular semi-autonomous Palestinian Authority, to postpone planned elections has added frustration for Palestinians, whose last parliamentary ballot was in 2006.

Meanwhile, an Israeli election in March further emboldened Israel's far right, bringing a [party of Jewish ultranationalists](#) allied with the prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, into parliament.

## **What has happened since then?**

A month ago, the Muslim holy month of Ramadan began, and Palestinians have complained of what they say are [unnecessarily severe restrictions](#) by Israeli police, who prevented them from gathering on steps outside the Old City – an unofficial tradition after evening prayers.

Amid rising tensions, there was an increase in communal violence, [with videos](#) shared online of street harassment and several attacks between Jews and Palestinians. Events came to a head [in late April](#) when hundreds of far-right Israelis marched down city streets [chanting](#) “death to Arabs” and confronted Palestinians.

## **How did it escalate over the past week?**

Anger built ahead of an Israeli court ruling, which was due on Monday, on whether authorities would evict dozens of Palestinians from the majority-Arab East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah and give their homes to Jewish settlers.

On the same day, thousands of flag-waving Israeli nationalists were due to march through Muslim neighbourhoods in the Old City in a provocative parade that celebrated Israel's capture of the city in 1967.

By Monday, the court date had been delayed and the march was rerouted, but by that point, the situation has already spiralled.

## What is the history?

Jewish families claim they lost land in Sheikh Jarrah during a war that accompanied Israel's creation in 1948, a conflict in which hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were also displaced.

Two decades later, Israel captured East Jerusalem from Jordanian forces in the 1967 war and later annexed it. Under Israeli law, Jews who can prove pre-1948 title can claim back their Jerusalem properties. No similar law exists for Palestinians who lost homes in West Jerusalem.

## Why is Jerusalem such a flashpoint?

Jerusalem has always been the centre of the Israeli-Palestinian crisis, with its holy sites revered by Jews and Muslims. The Old City's [Western Wall](#) forms part of the holiest site in Judaism – the Temple Mount. It is equally part of the al-Haram al-Sharif, or the Noble Sanctuary, with the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa mosque – the third holiest site in Islam – above it.

## How does the current violence compare historically?

There has never been a time when there is complete calm in Israel and Palestine, so it is hard to compare episodes of violence. However, the last similar event being pointed to occurred in 2017, when anger over moves by Israel to install metal detectors outside the al-Aqsa mosque compound [triggered weeks of bloodshed](#).

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## [Labour](#)

# Jo Cox's sister considering standing for Labour in Batley and Spen

Murdered MP's sister Kim Leadbeater has told friends she could contest crucial byelection for party



Kim Leadbeater is a campaigner and an ambassador for the Jo Cox Foundation, dedicated to continuing her sister's legacy. Photograph: Gary Calton/The Observer

Kim Leadbeater is a campaigner and an ambassador for the Jo Cox Foundation, dedicated to continuing her sister's legacy. Photograph: Gary Calton/The Observer

[Josh Halliday](#) *North of England correspondent*

Wed 12 May 2021 01.00 EDT

The sister of the murdered MP [Jo Cox](#) is considering standing for Labour in the Batley and Spen byelection.

Labour is facing a huge test to cling on to [the West Yorkshire constituency](#) where Cox was killed by a far-right terrorist in June 2016. Her sister, Kim Leadbeater, has told friends she is considering running as the Labour candidate in what would be her first entry into politics.

Leadbeater, 44, is a campaigner who lives locally and is an ambassador for the [Jo Cox Foundation](#), which is dedicated to continuing her sister's legacy.

Labour is defending a slender majority of 3,525 votes in a seat it has held since 1997. The byelection was called after Tracy Brabin, the local MP, was elected as the [first mayor of West Yorkshire](#) on Sunday.

The Labour leader, Keir Starmer, is [under huge pressure](#) over the party's performance in its former heartlands following a [devastating defeat](#) in the Hartlepool byelection. Losing another seat to the Conservatives would embolden his critics.

Leadbeater, leader of the [More in Common Batley and Spen community volunteer group](#), was awarded an MBE in the new year honours in December for her work tackling social isolation during the Covid-19 pandemic. She is the most high-profile name to emerge so far as a potential candidate.

One local Labour source said some unions were waiting to see whether Leadbeater stood before deciding which candidate to back. Another Labour figure said Leadbeater would “cut through” any attempt by rival parties to inflame a row over the suspension of the Batley grammar school teacher who showed a cartoon of the prophet Muhammad, prompting [days of protests](#) in the constituency in March.

Paula Sherriff, the former [Labour](#) MP for neighbouring Dewsbury, is also considering putting her name forward. She is understood to want to return to Westminster after losing her seat in 2019.

Labour's candidate is expected to be shortlisted in the coming weeks and chosen by a vote of local members, a reversion to the standard procedure after an outcry by some members after Paul Williams [was selected](#) to run in Hartlepool without a vote, due to the snap byelection.

A date for the byelection has not yet been set but it is understood 22 July has been suggested. There is some discussion about holding the contest in mid-June, the earliest opportunity. However, this would clash with the fifth anniversary of [Cox's murder](#), on 16 June.

Lisa Johnson, the GMB union's external relations director, who is seen as a key Labour power player, had been tipped for the candidacy but said she was not interested. Salma Arif, a Leeds council cabinet member, has been mooted, as has Habiban Zaman, a Batley East councillor. Dan Howard, a Labour party press officer who worked for Cox's predecessor, has also put his name forward.

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## [Archaeology](#)

# Cerne Giant in Dorset dates from Anglo-Saxon times, analysis suggests

Sand samples examined by National Trust experts indicate hillside chalk figure was created in the 10th century



Local lore has that Cerne Abbey was created in 978AD to convert people away from an Anglo-Saxon god. Photograph: Ben Birchall/PA

Local lore has that Cerne Abbey was created in 978AD to convert people away from an Anglo-Saxon god. Photograph: Ben Birchall/PA

[Mark Brown](#) *Arts correspondent*

Wed 12 May 2021 01.00 EDT

Over the centuries the [huge, naked, club-wielding giant](#) carved into a steep hillside in Dorset has been thought prehistoric, Celtic, Roman or even a 17th century lampoon of Oliver Cromwell.

After 12 months of new, hi-tech sediment analysis, the National Trust has now revealed the probable truth and experts admit they are taken aback. The bizarre, enigmatic Cerne Giant is none of the above, but late Saxon, possibly 10th century.

Martin Papworth, a senior archaeologist at the trust, said he was somewhat “flabbergasted ... He’s not prehistoric, he’s not Roman, he’s sort of Saxon, into the medieval period. I was expecting 17th century.”

The geoarchaeologist Mike Allen, who has been researching microscopic snails in the sediment, agreed. “This is not what was expected,” he said. “Many archaeologists and historians thought he was prehistoric or post-medieval, but not medieval. Everyone was wrong, and that makes these results even more exciting.”

The research has involved studying samples, which show when individual grains of sand in the sediment were last exposed to sunlight. Material from the deepest layer suggest a date range of 700-AD1100.

It was in the middle of that date range, AD978, that Cerne Abbey was founded nearby. Stories talk about the abbey being set up to convert locals away from worshipping an early Anglo-Saxon god called Heil or Heilith, all of which invite the question, is the giant Heilith?

For various reasons Papworth said that theory did not ring true. The whole story of the giant is made more confusing by there being no mention of the giant in surviving abbey documents. “Why would a rich and famous abbey – just a few yards away – commission, or sanction, a naked man carved in chalk on the hillside?”

Documents from the 16th and 17th century also make no reference to the giant, which suggests to Papworth that it was created and then forgotten about, perhaps overgrown with grass until someone noticed the glimmer of an outline.

Gordon Bishop, chair of the [Cerne Historical Society](#), said the conclusions were as intriguing as they were surprising. “What I am personally pleased about is that the results appear to have put an end to the theory that he was



created in the 17th century as an insult to Oliver Cromwell. I thought that rather demeaned the giant.”

Bishop said it seemed to him likely the giant had a religious, albeit pagan, significance. “There’s obviously a lot of research for us to do over the next few years.”

More broadly the analysis results shed important light on the phenomenon of chalk hill figures in Britain, said Allen. “Archaeologists have wanted to pigeonhole chalk hill figures into the same period. But carving these figures was not a particular phase – they’re all individual figures, with local significance, each telling us something about that place and time.”



Volunteers rechalking the Cerne Giant’s ribs on 28 August 2019. Photograph: Ben Birchall/PA

At 180ft (55 metres) the Cerne Giant is Britain’s largest, rudest and as a result best-known chalk hill figure. He is also the most mysterious.

Some have said he is Hercules. The more fanciful suggest he was an actual giant slain by villagers as he slept on the hill after a busy day eating their livestock.



Many people doubt that the phallus is original. “If he does date to the time of the abbey then he is more acceptable with trousers on than without,” said Papworth.

Asked for his most likely theory on its origins he admitted he was stumped. “I don’t know. I don’t have one. I can’t get my head round it ... you can make up all sorts of stories. I don’t know why he is on the hill, I’ve no idea. I can’t work it out. I never would have guessed he would be 10th century.”

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

## [Afghanistan](#)

# British troops were twice as likely to be killed in Afghanistan as US forces

Exclusive: Costs of War study looked at losses suffered by Nato allies over 2001-17, finding UK lost 455 lives



British soldiers arriving in Kandahar. While UK forces suffered the most deaths in relative terms, US forces did in absolute terms, with 2,316 lost. Photograph: Wakil Kohsar/AFP/Getty Images

British soldiers arriving in Kandahar. While UK forces suffered the most deaths in relative terms, US forces did in absolute terms, with 2,316 lost. Photograph: Wakil Kohsar/AFP/Getty Images

[Julian Borger](#) in Washington

Wed 12 May 2021 00.00 EDT

British and Canadian troops were more than twice as likely to get killed in [Afghanistan](#) as their US counterparts, according to a study that looks at the

scale of the sacrifice made by Nato allies over the course of the 20-year war.

The UK also gave more to Afghanistan than the US in the form of economic and humanitarian assistance as a percentage of GDP, [the study published on Wednesday](#) by the Costs of War project at Brown University found.

Although the US suffered by far the greatest number of fatalities in absolute terms compared with other members of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) – 2,316 American troops were killed between 2001 and 2017, the period of the study – Canadians and British soldiers sent to Afghanistan were more likely to die.

The Costs of War report looks at fatalities as a percentage of national troops levels at peak deployment in Afghanistan. The US losses were 2.3% of its vast military presence. The UK lost 455 lives, which was 4.7% of its peak deployment level, while the 158 Canadians killed represented 5.4% of their total.

The study refers to a grim joke told by American soldiers in Afghanistan that ISAF stood for “I Saw Americans Fight”, but points out in the case of the UK and [Canada](#) at least it was grossly unfair.

“Americans do not fully understand, do not acknowledge, the sacrifices that allies made in Afghanistan,” said Jason Davidson, the author of the report, and professor of political science and international affairs at the University of Mary Washington.

“It’s something that not only doesn’t get attention from those who are critics of the allies. It doesn’t even get the attention that it deserves from those who are generally cheerleaders for allies, like the current administration. I would like to see more American policymaker acknowledgment and discussion with the public of the costs that America’s allies have incurred in these wars.”

Davidson suggested that the reason for the proportionally high British death toll was being based in the heart of the hotly contested Helmand province and the absence of caveats limiting soldiers’ involvement in combat. The German contingent was largely confined its bases at night and to armoured

vehicles on patrol in the relatively quiet north of the country, and its fatality rate was 1%. The rates for the French and Italian contingents were 2.1% and 1.2% respectively.

The findings echo a [study in December](#) by the UK-based group Action on Armed Violence, that found British soldiers were 12% more likely to have been killed than their American counterparts in the overall “war on terror” in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“It is clear that Afghanistan proved to be a significant burden for UK troops,” Iain Overton, the editor of that study, said. “The UK military suffered almost three-quarters of its total deaths there in the last two decades.”

Another striking finding of the Costs of War report was that the UK spent slightly more on foreign aid to Afghanistan as a percentage of GDP (0.16%) than the US (0.15%) with Germany and Canada close behind with 0.14%.

Elinor Sloan, professor of international relations at Carleton University in Ottawa, said that Canada’s relatively high casualty rate was due in part to a lack of mine-resistant vehicles, MRAPs, and troop helicopters.

[The US is pulling out of Afghanistan. But it will never leave those of us who served there](#)  
[Read more](#)

“We moved from Kabul into Kandahar in early 2006, and troops were going out in convoys, so almost all of the casualties are taken in the convoys. We didn’t have the MRAPs,” said Sloan, who wrote an [assessment of Canada’s role](#) in Nato in 2012.

After 20 years of conflict in Afghanistan, as the US and the coalition embark on [the last stages of withdrawal](#), the costs of the long war are coming under increasing scrutiny.

Nearly 50,000 Afghan civilians were killed. Overton said 40% of the civilian casualties from US and Afghan airstrikes between 2016 and 2020 were children.

“What is clear is that Afghanistan proved to be not only a graveyard for British troops,” Overton said. “Coalition military forces there also were part of making it a graveyard for countless Afghan civilians.”

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

# Wednesday briefing: Warning over escalation of Israel-Gaza violence

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## [Coronavirus](#)

# Indian Covid variant calls in question 17 May reopening in UK, say experts

Highly transmissible B.1.617.2 is now second most common variant and is spreading in north-west England

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



Andy Burnham, the mayor for Greater Manchester, has said the JCVI is considering a request to vaccinate all over-16s in Bolton. Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty Images

Andy Burnham, the mayor for Greater Manchester, has said the JCVI is considering a request to vaccinate all over-16s in Bolton. Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty Images

[Natalie Grover](#) *Science correspondent*

Wed 12 May 2021 01.00 EDT

The dramatic rise in UK cases of a variant first discovered in India could undermine the country's roadmap for reopening, scientists are cautioning.

The variant, called B.1.617.2, is one of three closely related variants that were initially detected in India. Public Health England designated it a ["variant of concern"](#) on Friday, acknowledging it appears to be at least as transmissible as the dominant so-called Kent variant in the UK. It is unclear if and to what extent B.1.617.2 can reduce vaccine effectiveness.

Prof Christina Pagel, director of the clinical operational research unit at University College London and a member of the Independent Sage group of experts, speaking in a personal capacity said the rise in B.1.617.2 cases was concerning enough to delay the next stage of the roadmap scheduled for Monday, [when a range of restrictions are to be lifted](#).

#### [uk corona case](#)

According to the Covid-19 genomics UK consortium database – which may include duplicates and does not record whether sequences of the variants are linked to travel – for sequences up to 7 May, there have so far been [1,393 instances of B.1.617.2](#), making it the second most common variant in the UK.

Meanwhile, Wellcome Sanger Institute's Covid-19 genomic surveillance data – which excludes recent travellers and surge testing specimens – suggests that about [6.1% of Covid genomes in England sequenced](#) in the four weeks to 24 April can be attributed to B.1.617.2.

While the Kent variant is decreasing or stabilising, B.1.617.2 is flourishing. In some parts of the country, such as Bolton and Blackburn the variant accounts for over 50% of cases. Andy Burnham, the mayor for Greater Manchester, has said the Joint Committee for Vaccines and Immunisations is considering a request to vaccinate all over-16s in Bolton in response to the rising infection rate.

Pagel pointed out that, while B.1.617.2 numbers are not currently that big, they are doubling every week – and this is all within the space of three weeks.



“We’ve done this so many times – waited until things got really bad before we realised we should have acted several weeks ago,” she said. “So why don’t we actually act several weeks ago – which is now!”

On Thursday, leaked Public Health England documents [seen by the Guardian](#) showed that 48 clusters of B.1.617.2 had been identified, including those linked to secondary schools, care homes and religious gatherings.

Recent meeting minutes from the UK government’s Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage) showed the scientists expected that a variant that substantially escapes immunity or is highly transmissible (more so than the Kent variant) could lead to a wave of infections potentially larger than that seen in January 2021 in the absence of interventions.

“Given that so much of our plans for unlocking rely on the protection afforded by vaccination my main concern is that we do not yet know the extent to which many variants escape either naturally acquired or vaccine-induced immunity,” said Andrew Hayward, Sage member and director of the UCL Institute of Epidemiology and [Health](#) Care.

“We know that the vaccine is very effective against the B.1.1.7 [Kent] strain ... but we also know that the vaccine is less effective at protecting against the variant originating in South Africa. For the variants arising in India ... we have no real-world data and relatively little laboratory data to assess whether it is likely to evade immunity.”

Early data suggested there might be a slight decrease in the effectiveness of vaccines against B.1.617.2 – but not as much as against the variant discovered in South Africa, said Deborah Dunn-Walters, professor of immunology at the University of Surrey and chair of the British Society for Immunology’s Covid-19 and immunology taskforce, adding that she was feeling very cautious.

Martin McKee, a professor of European public health at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, said he and his colleagues are very worried.

“There are still many people, especially the young, those in disadvantaged areas, and those from ethnic minorities that are still unvaccinated. I am less concerned about meetings out of doors, as the risks there are low, but I will personally continue to avoid indoor meetings, such as restaurants, even though I am fully vaccinated.”

*Additional reporting by Nicola Davis and Maya Wolfe-Robinson*

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

## [Economic growth \(GDP\)](#)

# UK economy rebounds in March after rapid Covid vaccine rollout

GDP lifted by 2.1% that month and dropped by only 1.5% in first quarter of 2021

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



A London bus carries the message by the UK government to ‘join the millions’ having the Covid-19 vaccine. Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

A London bus carries the message by the UK government to ‘join the millions’ having the Covid-19 vaccine. Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

[Phillip Inman](#)

[@phillipinman](#)

Wed 12 May 2021 03.17 EDT

A rapid rollout of the Covid-19 vaccine across the UK's four nations lifted GDP [by 2.1% in March](#), helping prevent a steep fall during the first three months of the year, according to official figures.

The economy retreated by a better than expected [1.5% during the first quarter](#) of 2021 as the successful vaccine programme allowed the government to begin easing restrictions while businesses adapted to the constraints at a quicker pace than expected.

City economists had expected a 1.7% contraction while earlier in the year there were fears that the second wave of the virus last year and a third lockdown would hit the economy harder and [plunge the UK into a full-blown recession](#).

School closures and a large fall in retail sales were blamed by the [Office for National Statistics](#) for much of the economy's contraction. Growth returned to all the main sectors of the economy in March as Covid restrictions eased, at a speed not seen since August 2020.

The services sector, which accounts for about three-quarters of activity, fell by 2%, mostly because of the closure of the hotel and leisure sector.

Manufacturing, which has been hit by falling demand because of Brexit and the lockdown, maintained much of the momentum it gained in the second half of last year, after it shrank by only 0.7% in the first quarter.

The construction sector, which accounts for about 6% of economic activity, expanded by 5.8% over the quarter.

Last week the [Bank of England](#) upgraded its forecasts for GDP growth during 2021 to 7.25%, which would propel the economy to its fastest annual expansion since the second world war.

The central bank's bullish outlook, mostly based on the faster than expected vaccine rollout, also predicted that unemployment would peak at below 5.5% in the third quarter of this year and business investment would rebound strongly.

Several countries have published first estimates of GDP for the first quarter of the year, including the [US](#), [Germany](#), [France](#), [Italy](#) and [Spain](#). Real GDP is estimated to have increased by 1.6% in the US and 0.4% in France, while there were contractions in Germany, Spain and Italy, the ONS said.

Dean Turner, an economist at UBS Global Wealth Management, said: “There is reason for optimism as today’s figures confirm that the UK economy has weathered the first-quarter restrictions much better than initially feared.

“Moreover, the bounce in activity seen in March, which was the strongest monthly GDP print since August 2020, provides an encouraging backdrop for the second quarter.”

The chancellor, [Rishi Sunak](#), said: “Despite a difficult start to this year, economic growth in March is a promising sign of things to come. As we cautiously reopen the economy, I will continue to take all the steps necessary to support our recovery.”

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/may/12/uk-economy-rebounds-in-march-after-rapid-covid-vaccine-rollout>

## [Brit awards](#)

# Women dominate 2021 Brit awards as Dua Lipa tops winners

2020's heavily male ceremony reversed with wins for Arlo Parks, Haim and Billie Eilish, as Little Mix become first all-woman winner of British group

- [Brit awards 2021: every performance reviewed, from Coldplay to Arlo Parks](#)



Dua Lipa performs on stage during the Brit awards. Photograph: JMEInternational for the Brit awards/Getty Images

Dua Lipa performs on stage during the Brit awards. Photograph: JMEInternational for the Brit awards/Getty Images

[Ben Beaumont-Thomas](#) and [Tobi Thomas](#)

Tue 11 May 2021 17.31 EDT



Dua Lipa has topped the winners at the 2021 Brit awards, calling for Boris Johnson to approve “a fair pay rise” for frontline NHS staff as she picked up gongs including the top prize of British album for her chart-dominating disco spectacular [Future Nostalgia](#).

She also won female solo artist, bringing her total Brit award tally to five and cementing her position as one of the UK’s most successful and critically acclaimed pop stars.

Receiving the latter award and addressing the 2,500 key workers given tickets to the show, she said: “It’s very good to clap for [frontline NHS staff], but we need to pay them,” as she dedicated her award to nurse and healthcare pioneer Dame Elizabeth Anionwu.

She later dedicated her album award to Folajimi Olubunmi-Adewole, the 20-year-old man who died after attempting to save a woman who had fallen in the river Thames in April. She called for a bravery award to be made to him and Joaquin Garcia, who also attempted a rescue and survived along with the woman.



Taylor Swift accepts the global icon award. She is the first female winner.  
Photograph: Ian West/PA

The [2020 Brit awards were widely criticised](#) for their heavy bias towards male artists, with only one British woman – pop singer Mabel – nominated across 25 slots in the mixed-gender categories. There has been an [emphatic reversal in 2021](#), with Lipa among a diverse range of female winners.

Little Mix became the first all-female band to win the British group award, with Five Star in 1987, Stereo MCs in 1994 and Gorillaz in 2018 the only previous category winners to feature women.

Little Mix's win crowns a career that began on TV show The X Factor 10 years ago, with six UK Top 5 albums since, plus 16 Top 10 singles, five of those reaching No 1. The group are expected to now go on hiatus, with members Perrie Edwards and Leigh-Anne Pinnock each announcing pregnancies this month, and founder member [Jesy Nelson](#) leaving the group in December.

Pinnock said on receiving the award: "It's not easy being a female in the UK pop industry. We've seen the white male dominance, misogyny, sexism and lack of diversity. We're proud of how we've stuck together, stood our ground, surrounded ourselves with strong women and are now using our voices more than ever."

Los Angeles trio Haim won international group, the first all-female group to do so in nearly two decades following Destiny's Child's win in 2002. [Billie Eilish](#) won international female, pop singer Griff won the rising star award, and Taylor Swift became the first woman to receive the global icon award, previously won by David Bowie, Elton John and Robbie Williams. "There is no career path that comes free of negativity," she said on receiving the award in person. "If you're met with resistance that probably means that you're doing something new."





Arlo Parks, who won breakthrough artist, performs on stage. Photograph: John Marshall/AFP/Getty Images

Twenty-year-old Arlo Parks won breakthrough artist, having released one of the most admired albums of the year so far with her debut [Collapsed in Sunbeams](#), blending trip-hop and soul in songs full of emotive storytelling.

She had been nominated for three awards and also performed at the ceremony, telling the Guardian beforehand: “It feels pretty crazy, and I think it hasn’t fully sunk in. I’ve been doing a lot of preparation and rehearsals, and it feels beautiful putting the time into constructing something that is like a step towards bringing gigs and concerts back. When they do come back properly they will be even more special because these songs will have grown roots in people’s lives and will have soundtracked such a difficult time.”

Each year this century, at least half of the winners in the mixed-gender categories have been men, but in 2021, six out of seven are women. The celebration of female talent follows similar recognition at this year’s Grammy awards, where Eilish, Swift, Megan Thee Stallion and HER won the top four awards, and where Lipa won one of her six nominations, for best pop vocal album.

Lipa couldn't sweep the board at the Brits though, and was beaten to British single by Harry Styles with his song [Watermelon Sugar](#), an enduring hit since its release in November 2019 that has spent 62 weeks in the UK chart in total.



Headie One got in a jab against Boris Johnson's government. Photograph: JMEInternational for the Brit awards/Getty Images

He also addressed the key workers in the audience, saying: "Thank you for everything you did for this country", while Headie One and AJ Tracey added new lyrics to their hit track Ain't It Different, rapping: "Team work keeps the dream working, it's only right we show love to the key workers." The pair also got in a jab against Boris Johnson's government, "saying eat out to help out but won't help out [Marcus] Rashford when he's feeding the youths", while performing on a stage set designed by Louis Vuitton artistic director Virgil Abloh.

British male was won by J Hus, the east Londoner whose sophisticated blend of rap with African pop production cohered on his No 1 album [Big Conspiracy](#).

International male was won by the Weeknd, who was [snubbed at this year's Grammys](#), earning zero nominations despite having one of the year's biggest

global hits with [Blinding Lights](#). He also performed at the Brit awards via video, and his award was presented to him with a video message by Michelle Obama.

Further performances came from Lipa, Parks, Griff, Coldplay and Olivia Rodrigo, the latter making her UK live debut after her single Drivers License topped the chart for nine weeks earlier this year. Elton John and Years & Years performed a surprise collaboration, of Pet Shop Boys' It's a Sin.

Rag'n'Bone Man closed the show alongside Pink and the Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust Choir. Prior to the event, the British blues-soul singer told the Guardian he was honoured to share the stage with key workers, and added: "It's been difficult not having the kind of output that I usually have, being able to stand on stage and let everything out. I really feel for people where [live performance] is their livelihood, especially if you're at a certain point in your career where you have to do a lot for so little – I know what that feels like. I think they're the people that are most affected."



Pink and Rag'n'Bone Man perform with the Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust Choir. Photograph: JMEnternational for the Brit awards/Getty Images

The 2021 Brits was the first large-scale indoor event to be held as part of a government-led research programme into how crowds can return safely to events. Scientists monitored the event and tracked any potential areas of contamination. “The learnings that the government will get out of this will be very important and hopefully will allow them to inform their approach and policy going forward,” said a [Brit awards](#) spokesperson.

Hannah, a 26-year-old nurse who was attending the awards, said that it felt like a long overdue party after what has been a difficult year. “I can’t believe I’m actually here,” she said. “It’s so nice to have an evening out to dress up and dance, although it does feel strange as we’re not completely out of the thick of it. But it does feel like the difficulties over the past year are ending.”

## 2021 Brit award winners

**British female:** Dua Lipa

**British male:** J Hus

**British group:** Little Mix

**Breakthrough artist:** Arlo Parks

**British single:** [Harry Styles](#) – Watermelon Sugar

**British album:** Dua Lipa – Future Nostalgia

**International female:** Billie Eilish

**International male:** The Weeknd

**International group:** Haim

**Global icon:** Taylor Swift

**Rising star:** Griff

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## [Queen's speech](#)

# Cross-party MPs aim to force government to rectify rights breaches

Stella Creasy and David Davis leading attempt to protect at-risk women and extend bereavement benefits to unmarried parents



MPs David Davis and Stella Creasy are seeking all-party support for her group's efforts to make the government comply with recent human rights judgments in the UK courts. Composite: PA

MPs David Davis and Stella Creasy are seeking all-party support for her group's efforts to make the government comply with recent human rights judgments in the UK courts. Composite: PA

[Heather Stewart](#) *Political editor*

Wed 12 May 2021 02.00 EDT

A cross-party coalition of senior MPs including Labour's [Stella Creasy](#) and the Conservative David Davis will try to use the Queen's speech debate to



force the government to comply with legal judgments that found it in breach of human rights.

They are highlighting two issues: unmarried parents who are not entitled to bereavement benefits; and victims of domestic violence who have a special “sanctuary room” to flee into in case of danger and have been made liable to pay [the bedroom tax](#) as a result.

The government was found to be in breach of the European convention on human rights for [failing to pay bereavement support to unmarried parents](#) by the supreme court in 2018, and again by the high court in February 2020, after the benefit had been renamed.

Similarly, the [European court of human rights](#) ruled in October 2019 that applying the bedroom tax to “Sanctuary Scheme” homes – those that are specially adapted to enable at-risk women and children to live safely at home – amounted to unlawful discrimination.

Neither issue has since been rectified by the government. The MPs hope to amend the motion approving the Queen’s speech – usually a formality – until the government commits to resolving them both.

The group, who have written to all their colleagues asking for support, represent nine political parties. They include Liberal Democrat leader Ed Davey, Green MP Caroline Lucas and Plaid Cymru’s Westminster leader, Liz Saville Roberts.

[What made it into the Queen’s speech, and what was left out](#)

[Read more](#)

“We ask for your support for our amendment to the Queen’s speech to urge the government to make it a priority to remedy these situations and so end the destitution victims of domestic violence and orphaned children face as a result,” they say in the letter.

“This would send a strong message that parliament is committed to ensuring and supporting prompt action in support of protecting the rights of the people and in upholding the rule of law as a result.”

They point out that the issue of bereavement payments affects 2,000 families a year, where a parent dies without being married to, or in a civil partnership with, their partner.

“Parents make the same national insurance contributions whether they’re married or not, and this builds up their entitlement to certain benefits including bereavement support payment – worth almost £10,000 over 18 months to grieving families. It should be understood that the primary victims of this inaction are the children rather than the parents,” the MPs say.

Creasy has a history of rallying cross-party support to force concessions from the Conservatives, including [over abortion rights in Northern Ireland](#), after an amendment to the 2017 Queen’s speech looked likely to succeed.

MPs are due to continue debating the Queen’s speech until next Wednesday. The Speaker decides which amendments are selected; but he is more likely to pick those with broad cross-party support. He can choose up to four.

A Department for Work and Pensions spokesperson said it was “carefully considering the court’s decision” on the bedroom tax, adding that discretionary housing benefit was also available for those in most need.

On payments to bereaved parents, the spokesperson said: “We understand how vital this support is to families. As we have said, we will be taking forward the legislative process to extend Bereavement Support Payment and Widowed Parent’s Allowance to unmarried couples with children, and we are carefully considering the detail and implementation which we will outline in due course.”

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## [Arts](#)

# ‘Tragic misstep’: arts education cuts risk UK cultural leadership, government told

Arts sector leaders speak out against proposed 50% funding cut for arts subjects at universities in open letter



Sonia Boyce, the artist who will represent Britain at this year’s Venice Biennale, was a signatory to the letter, along with the directors of all four Tate galleries. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

Sonia Boyce, the artist who will represent Britain at this year’s Venice Biennale, was a signatory to the letter, along with the directors of all four Tate galleries. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

[Lanre Bakare](#) *Arts and culture correspondent*

[@lanre\\_bakare](#)

Wed 12 May 2021 01.00 EDT



The UK's position as a cultural leader is at risk if proposed 50% cuts to arts subjects at universities go ahead, arts sector leaders have told the government in [an open letter](#) opposing the move.

The letter – organised by the Contemporary Visual Arts Network and signed by 300 art world figures, including [Sonia Boyce](#) and the directors of all four Tate locations – said [the plan to halve the amount spent](#) on some arts subjects was a “tragic misstep”.

The current plan would affect courses – including music, dance, drama and performing arts; art and design; media studies; and archaeology – that were deemed to not be “strategic priorities” after a consultation by the Office for Students (OfS) and the education secretary, [Gavin Williamson](#).

“The current proposal may limit the availability and accessibility of places on arts courses and result in fewer courses being offered,” the letter reads.

“This will have a detrimental impact on our ability to retain our world leading position, attract inward investment through our cultural capital and our share of the global art market.”

The letter added that the plan was a “strategic misstep” and contradicted the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport's strategy laid out in its [Here for Culture campaign](#).

Signatories included Maria Balshaw, the director of Tate, Ralph Rugoff, the director of the Hayward Gallery, and dozens of academics and artists from around the UK, including Boyce, [who will represent](#) Britain at this year's Venice Biennale.

The letter asked that the policy is revoked in order to ensure the continuation of “a UK success story”.

“If you believe that innovation is a strategic priority, you will not cut higher education funding to the arts – but better recognise our value as integral to the fourth Industrial Revolution,” it stated.

[Plans for 50% funding cut to arts subjects at universities ‘catastrophic’](#)

## [Read more](#)

The cuts will come from an overall teaching budget of £1.47bn, with a student on an affected course seeing their funding [fall from £243 to £121.50](#). Signatories of the letter and other opponents of the proposal, [including musician Jarvis Cocker](#), have said that will deter those from lower socio-economic backgrounds and leave arts subjects as the preserve of wealthy students.

An OfS spokesperson said: “The proposed changes relate to a small fraction of how these courses are funded, equating to a reduction of £120 per student, or 1% of overall funding. Alongside this we plan to maintain funds to support disadvantaged students, and to boost funding for specialist institutions by £10m.

“The OfS has a fixed funding budget that is set by government. This will have to stretch further in the coming years with significant growth forecast in student numbers – particularly for courses that are expensive to teach like medicine and nursing. In this context we need to make difficult decisions about how to prioritise our increasingly constrained budget. We will carefully consider all responses to our consultation before making any final decisions on changes to our funding.”

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## [Animal welfare](#)

# Animals to be formally recognised as sentient beings in UK law

Set of government measures will include halting most live animal exports and a ban on hunting trophy imports



Animal welfare protesters at a rally in front of the Al Kuwait live export ship as sheep are loaded in Fremantle harbour, 16 June 2020. Photograph: Richard Wainwright/AAP

Animal welfare protesters at a rally in front of the Al Kuwait live export ship as sheep are loaded in Fremantle harbour, 16 June 2020. Photograph: Richard Wainwright/AAP

[Fiona Harvey](#) *Environment correspondent*

Wed 12 May 2021 01.00 EDT

Animals are to be formally recognised as sentient beings in UK law for the first time, in a victory for animal welfare campaigners, as the government set

out a suite of animal welfare measures including halting most [live animal exports](#) and banning the import of hunting trophies.

The reforms will be introduced through a series of bills, including an animal sentience bill, and will cover farm animals and pets in the UK, and include protections for animals abroad, through [bans on ivory](#) and [shark fins](#), and a [potential ban on foie gras](#).

Some of the measures – including microchipping cats and stopping people keeping primates as pets – have been [several years in preparation](#), and others – such as the restriction of live animal exports – have been the subject of decades-long campaigns.

George Eustice, the environment secretary, said: “We are a nation of animal lovers and were the first country in the world to pass animal welfare laws. Our action plan for animal welfare will deliver on our manifesto commitment to ban the export of live animal exports for slaughter and fattening, prohibit keeping primates as pets, and bring in new laws to tackle puppy smuggling. As an independent nation, we are now able to go further than ever to build on our excellent track record.”

The action plan for animal welfare includes measures that will involve cracking down on [pet theft](#), which has become a growing problem in the “[puppy boom](#)” sparked by the coronavirus lockdowns with a new [taskforce](#). Controversial [e-collars](#) that deliver an electric shock to train pets will be banned, and import rules changed to try to stop [puppy smuggling](#).

Illegal hare coursing will also be the subject of a new crackdown, and the use of glue traps will be restricted. In response to [worries from farmers over dogs loose in the countryside during the lockdowns](#), police will be given new powers to protect farm animals from dogs.

However, the use of [cages for poultry](#) and [farrowing crates for pigs](#) will not be subject to an outright ban, as campaigners had called for. Instead, their use will be examined, and farmers will be given incentives to improve animal health and welfare through the future farm subsidy regime.

The government also repeated its pledge to uphold UK animal welfare in future trade deals, but will not put this commitment into law as [campaigners have urged](#).

James West, senior policy manager at Compassion in World [Farming](#), a pressure group, said some of the measures were the subject of protracted campaigns: “We have long been calling for UK legislation that recognises animals as sentient beings and for sentience to be given due regard when formulating and implementing policy. We are also delighted the government has confirmed it will legislate for a long-overdue ban on live exports for slaughter and fattening. We have been campaigning for this for decades: it is high time this cruel and unnecessary trade is finally brought to an end.”

He called for the government to go further, and stop the import and sale of foie gras, and ban the [use of cages](#) for the UK’s 16 million sows and laying hens that are still kept in cages.

He added: “All of these positive announcements must be supported by a comprehensive method of production labelling, and it is essential that the government ensure these much-needed animal welfare improvements are not undermined by future trade agreements.”

The ban on the import and export of shark fins, the subject of a campaign by the chef Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall and others, was also welcomed. Steve Backshall, the Wildlife TV presenter and patron of the Bite-Back campaign on shark finning, said: “[This] will be significant in helping restore the balance of the oceans [and] sends a clear message to the world that [shark fin soup](#) belongs in the history books, not on the menu.”

Claire Bass, executive director of Humane Society International/UK, said: “Delivering on the plan will require understanding and real commitment from across Whitehall. Respect for animal welfare is not only the right thing to do for animals, it will also play a critical role in tackling global environmental and public health challenges such as climate change, antibiotic resistance, and pandemic prevention.”

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

## 2021.05.12 - Coronavirus

- [Live Coronavirus: India variant reaches 44 countries – WHO; Taiwan faces new outbreak](#)
- [UK PM says inquiry into handling of pandemic will begin this parliament](#)
- [Scotland Hugs and indoor visits to be allowed from 17 May](#)
- [AstraZeneca Nearly 40% of investors reject boss's bonus rise](#)
- [Vaccine Unicef calls on UK to give 20% to other countries](#)
- ['We won't be bouncing back' The unsettling truth about the big reopening for UK culture](#)
- [Care homes More residents died of Covid in second wave than first in England and Wales](#)



## [Coronavirus](#)

# Coronavirus live news: India variant found in 44 countries – WHO; Taiwan faces new outbreak

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## [Coronavirus](#)

# Johnson says public inquiry into Covid will begin this parliament

PM announces full inquiry into UK's handling of crisis will be 'within this session' – expected to be a year

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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00:38

Boris Johnson promises public inquiry into government handling of pandemic – video

[Robert Booth](#) *Social affairs correspondent*

Tue 11 May 2021 12.39 EDT

Boris Johnson has for the first time put a loose timeframe on launching a full public inquiry into the government's handling of the coronavirus crisis, saying it would start in this session of parliament.

A session is usually around a year, although it could be longer. One recent session lasted from 21 June 2017 to 8 October 2019.

"I do believe it's essential we have a full, proper public inquiry into the Covid pandemic," the prime minister said, in response to questioning from the leader of the Liberal Democrats, Ed Davey.

"I can certainly say that we will do that within this session," Johnson told him.

But the pledge disappointed the bereaved who have been lobbying for a statutory inquiry to be launched this summer at the latest, insisting it is the

government's [legal duty](#). If the current parliamentary session lasts until next summer, the inquiry could be launched in the first half of next year but not start hearings until autumn 2022.

The Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice Group, which instigated [the wall of 150,000 hand-drawn hearts](#) to remember the UK's pandemic dead opposite the Houses of Parliament, also noted Johnson had not confirmed he would launch a statutory inquiry which would allow witnesses to be ordered to appear under subpoena and force written evidence to be produced.

“Learning lessons from the pandemic is critical to saving lives now and in the future,” the group said in a statement. “The prime minister knows that and he’s said as much. So why does he think it can wait? Who delays learning critical lessons that can save lives? We know that the majority of the public support an independent inquiry and that 72% of those that do, want one by the autumn, so the prime minister needs to get on with it like the British public want.”

## [Cases](#)

Downing Street has repeatedly said there would be an independent inquiry “at the appropriate time” but Johnson has argued that the government is [too busy](#) to start now. Last month, government lawyers told the bereaved that “the very people who would need to give evidence to an inquiry are working round the clock” and were likely to be too occupied for months to come.

A public inquiry into Covid is likely to be one of the most wide-ranging ever undertaken, but public support has been high. A poll conducted for the Guardian in March found 47% of people said they supported a public inquiry which has legal powers to compel people to give evidence under oath. Only 18% said they were opposed.

Its [themes are likely to include](#) the country's readiness, the timing of lockdowns, protection of care homes, the disproportionate impact on ethnic minority people, supplies of PPE, the functioning of NHS test and trace, control of borders and handling of scientific advice.

Two weeks ago, the highly respected Institute for Government thinktank, whose leadership includes the former Tory cabinet minister David Lidington, [said](#) an inquiry should be launched at the start of this new session of parliament with hearings to start in September. The King's Fund, the leading health thinktank, also said: "Now is the time."

The archbishop of Canterbury, [Justin Welby](#), is among faith leaders demanding a statutory public inquiry.

Labour [has previously called](#) for inquiry preparations to begin so it can start in earnest as soon as lockdown measures are lifted, which is scheduled to happen on 21 June. Other supporters of a full public inquiry include the government scientific adviser Prof John Edmunds, the head of the civil service under David Cameron, [Bob Kerslake](#), the Royal College of Nursing and the British Medical Association.

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/11/boris-johnson-public-inquiry-into-covid-begin-this-parliament>

## Scotland

# Scotland: hugs and indoor visits to be allowed from 17 May

Controls to be eased across most of country, but Covid hotspot of Moray ‘highly probable’ to remain at level 3

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Nicola Sturgeon confirmed her government would initially adopt the same set of 12 countries and territories on England’s green list for travel. Photograph: Stuart Wallace/Rex/Shutterstock

Nicola Sturgeon confirmed her government would initially adopt the same set of 12 countries and territories on England’s green list for travel. Photograph: Stuart Wallace/Rex/Shutterstock

[Libby Brooks](#) *Scotland correspondent*

Tue 11 May 2021 11.17 EDT

Most Scots will be able to hug their loved ones and meet indoors for first time in up to eight months from next Monday, with the country also moving to a traffic light system for foreign travel, in a significant relaxation of coronavirus restrictions.

Nicola Sturgeon said Scotland was “charting a course back to normality” as she announced the move from level 3 to 2 of her government’s five-tier system of Covid controls for the majority of the mainland, and confirmed her government would initially adopt the same set of 12 countries and territories [on England’s green list](#).

The changes, which will come into force from 17 May, will allow up to six people from three households to meet up in their own homes, where physical distancing will no longer be required and with overnight stays permitted. Indoors visiting has been banned in the west of [Scotland](#) since September.

Restrictions on meeting up outdoors will ease further, with up to eight adults from eight different households able to gather, but requirements on physical distancing will still apply outside homes and private gardens.

As well as allowing pubs, restaurants and cafes to serve alcohol indoors until 10.30pm, cinemas, theatres and bingo halls can also reopen under level 2. Sports stadiums and music venues can open, with capacity limits, while adult outdoor contact sports and indoor group exercise will also be able to resume.

Sturgeon said it was “highly probable” that the council area of Moray in the north-east of Scotland, where numbers of new cases are four times higher than elsewhere in the country, would remain at level 3.

“The situation in Moray, together with the emergence of new variants globally, should be a sharp reminder to all of us that the virus remains a real threat,” she said.

Local health officials have pointed to widespread community transmission, in particular among younger age groups, and the vaccine programme has

been accelerated to include 18- to 39-year-olds. Sturgeon also said travel restrictions could be reimposed there.

Meanwhile, Scotland's island communities have far lower rates of infection and good vaccine coverage, meaning restrictions there will be eased more quickly, down to level 1 on Monday.

Asked if her government would continue to mirror the travel lists agreed by the UK government, Sturgeon said: "We will not sign up to decisions that will put our progress at risk."

Announcing the loosening of restrictions on foreign travel, Sturgeon asked Scots to consider how essential their journeys were. She said that while she accepted the importance of families reconnecting, "when it comes to holidays abroad my advice continues to be to err on the side of caution and staycation this summer".

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In February, Sturgeon warned about ongoing international travel restrictions, pointing to the experience last summer in Scotland when officials believed elimination of the virus was almost achieved, but it was then reseeded from overseas travel and movement across the UK.

Asked if her government's thinking had changed since then, she pointed out that mitigations such as quarantine and PCR testing had not been in place last summer.

“We are being much more cautious this year ... but like every other aspect of our life, we need to start to chart the course back to normality, even if with this case it is a more gradual course with greater mitigations required for longer. So it's a much, much more cautious approach than the one that was taken last summer because we have worked really hard to learn the lessons.”

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## [AstraZeneca](#)

# Nearly 40% of AstraZeneca investors reject boss's bonus rise

Covid vaccine maker passes its remuneration policy but suffers sizeable rebellion

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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Protesters outside the AstraZeneca offices in Macclesfield, north-west England. Photograph: Paul Ellis/AFP/Getty Images

Protesters outside the AstraZeneca offices in Macclesfield, north-west England. Photograph: Paul Ellis/AFP/Getty Images

[Julia Kollewe](#) and [Damien Gayle](#)

Tue 11 May 2021 13.26 EDT

AstraZeneca has suffered a substantial shareholder rebellion over proposals to hand its chief executive, Pascal Soriot, bigger bonus awards for the second consecutive year.

Nearly 40% voted against the policy, which could hand him pay and perks of nearly £18m for 2021.

At the company's annual meeting in Cambridge, the Anglo-Swedish drugmaker managed to win approval for its remuneration policy, which required support from shareholders holding more than 50% of the firm's stock, but investors owning 39.8% of the shares opposed it.

[A host of shareholder advisory groups and big name fund managers, including Aviva Investors and Standard Life Aberdeen, had opposed](#) the pay proposals.

The potential new payout could take Soriot's pay to more than £100m since he took over in 2012 – equal to £1m a month since he joined the company. In that time he has completely overhauled the company's drug portfolio, tripling the share price. The group is now valued at £100bn.

Working with Oxford University, AstraZeneca was one of the first to develop a Covid-19 vaccine, which it is selling at cost price.

Under the company's long-term plan, Soriot's share bonus is set to rise from 550% of his £1.3m base salary to 650%, depending on performance targets being hit. AZ will also raise Soriot's maximum annual bonus to 250% of salary from 200%.

The US investor advisory groups ISS and Glass Lewis, as well as their UK counterpart Pirc, had [recommended investors vote against the pay policy](#), while the UK's Investment Association issued an "amber top" warning, the second most severe in a traffic light system of alerts about corporate governance. AZ has seen off [several shareholder pay revolts](#) over the years.

AZ's remuneration committee said it had undertaken an in-depth consultation process with its largest shareholders, and recognised that "a meaningful proportion of shareholders" were not able to support the policy.

“The committee will continue to engage and listen to ensure investors’ concerns regarding the approach to executive remuneration are understood,” it said.

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“The committee acknowledges that it is unusual to seek approval for a revised remuneration policy at two consecutive AGMs and that remuneration is a sensitive matter during this pandemic period.”

It added: “Our executive directors have demonstrated solid and visionary leadership to steer the company towards delivering another outstanding performance in terms of achieving stretched financial goals, over-delivering pipeline management targets to accelerate innovation, and negotiating new partnerships with great potential.”

It stressed that AZ had not applied for any government funded wage subsidies or furlough arrangements around the world. “Additionally, the company has been a world-leading actor in the pandemic response through its non-profit vaccine initiative and other humanitarian actions.”

The company has pledged to provide its vaccine on a not-for-profit basis for the duration of the current pandemic. By contrast, US rivals [Pfizer and Moderna have forecast](#) combined revenues of \$45bn (£32bn) from their Covid vaccines this year.

But AZ faces [court action from the EU](#) in a row over vaccine supplies and the EU has not made any new orders beyond June when the current contract ends. AZ has had to fend off concern about a very small number of cases in which its jab has been linked to blood clots.

Pharmaceuticals firms are also coming [under mounting pressure to waive patents](#) on vaccines, to increase supply and make them affordable for developing nations.

AZ has 20 manufacturing partners around the world, with which it has shared its Covid-19 vaccine technology. With its partners, which include

India's Serum Institute, the world's biggest vaccine manufacturer, it has supplied 300m doses so far to 165 countries.

On Tuesday, [Global Justice Now](#), a campaign group, criticised AstraZeneca for not joining the World Health Organization's Covid-19 technology access pool, which facilitates the sharing of technology for vaccines and treatments.

Dozens of protesters gathered outside the AZ headquarters in Cambridge to demand open access to everyone for the Covid vaccine. Heidi Chow, Global Justice Now's lead pharmaceutical campaigner, said: "This vaccine that was discovered at a public university, by public scientists, based on 20 years of public research, and then tested on members of the public, this should have been the people's vaccine."

An AZ spokesperson said the criticism was unfounded: "We agree with the view that the extraordinary circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic call for extraordinary measures. AstraZeneca has risen to the challenge of creating a not-for-profit vaccine that is widely available around the world, and we are proud that our vaccine accounts for 98% of all supplies to Covax. We have established 20 supply lines spread across the globe and we have shared the IP [intellectual property] and knowhow with dozens of partners in order to make this a reality.

"In fact, our model is similar to what an open IP model could look like."

## **Soriot's pay at AZ**

2021\* £17.8m

2020 £15.4m

2019 £15.3m

2018 £12.9m

2017 £10.4m

2016 £14.3m

2015 £8m

2014 £3.5m

2013 £3.3m

2012 £3.7m

\*potential maximum package

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |



## Vaccines and immunisation

# Unicef calls on UK to give 20% of vaccines to other countries

Children's charity urges UK to set example and start sharing jabs with lower-income countries from June

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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A health worker administers a vaccine dose in Hull, north-east England, last week. Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty Images

A health worker administers a vaccine dose in Hull, north-east England, last week. Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty Images

[\*Sarah Boseley\*](#) and [\*Peter Beaumont\*](#)

Wed 12 May 2021 01.01 EDT

The UK should commit to giving 20% of its vaccines to other countries that are in urgent need of them as early as June, according to Unicef, which says the UK will still have enough to vaccinate every adult by the end of July.

The children's charity estimates the UK will have enough spare doses this year to fully vaccinate a further 50 million people around the world, and urges the government to set an example to the G7 by starting to share them next month. Vaccinating the populations of other countries is the only way to ensure new coronavirus variants do not spread, it says.

Unicef made its call before the G7 summit in the UK next month and as France announced it would donate up to 5% of its vaccine stocks to Covax, the UN-backed initiative to get vaccines to lower-income countries.

The French president called on Europe and the US to do the same. "We're not talking about billions of doses immediately, or billions and billions of euros," Emmanuel Macron told the Financial Times. "It's about much more rapidly allocating 4-5% of the doses we have.

"It won't change our vaccination campaigns, but each country should set aside a small number of the doses it has to transfer tens of millions of them, but very fast, so that people on the ground see it happening."

Joe Biden has committed to sharing surplus vaccine stocks with the developing world and has undertaken to send the 60m doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine it holds, which has not yet been approved in the US.

Unicef says the UK should lead by example and called on other G7 countries also to donate 20% of their vaccine stocks to Covax.

"The UK has done a fantastic job in rolling out Covid-19 vaccines to more than half of its adult population and we should all be proud of what has been achieved. However, we can't ignore that the UK and other G7 countries have purchased over a third of the world's vaccine supply, despite making up only 13% of the global population – and we risk leaving low-income countries behind," said Joanna Rea, the director of advocacy at Unicef UK.

“Unless the UK urgently starts sharing its available doses to ensure others around the world are protected from the virus, the UK will not be safe from Covid-19. Our vaccine rollout success could be reversed and the NHS could be fighting another wave of the virus due to deadly mutations.”

Vaccine production is limited. Bruce Aylward, a senior adviser to the World [Health](#) Organization who is part of the implementation team for Covax, echoed the call for wealthier countries to share a percentage of the doses they have available.

“Where we are now is that 1.3bn doses have been administered into the arms of people around the world,” he told the Guardian. “But for the 20-30 poorest countries the total is less than 5m. There is no scenario where that is equitable.

“There’s lots of vaccine in the world. We have healthcare workers and vulnerable people in the poorest parts of the world and we don’t need that many doses to make a huge impact. In sub-Saharan Africa the number of people who are vulnerable is 3-4% of the population. And an even smaller percentage of health care workers.

“Watching India and Brazil, all the arguments have been made. Right now we have a real-time window to avoid seeing that tragedy repeated elsewhere.”

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/may/12/unicef-calls-on-uk-to-give-20-of-vaccines-to-other-countries>

## Lockdown cultureCulture

# **‘We won’t be bouncing back’ – the unsettling truth about the big reopening**

Next week, after 14 months of closure and despair, the arts are reawakening. But the damage caused by Covid runs deep – and recovery is by no means assured



Bygone days ... The Phantom of the Opera faces worrying staff cuts.  
Photograph: Johan Persson/PA

Bygone days ... The Phantom of the Opera faces worrying staff cuts.  
Photograph: Johan Persson/PA



[Charlotte Higgins](#)

Wed 12 May 2021 01.00 EDT

“If we had to close down again,” says [Andrew Lloyd Webber](#), “we couldn’t survive.” Webber is staging his new musical Cinderella, with book by Oscar-winner Emerald Fennell, in a full-capacity theatre in July, having already delayed its premiere twice. He has mortgaged his house in London and will be selling one of his seven theatres. “It cost £1m a month to keep them dark,” he says. “You can’t just lock them up and throw away the key. I don’t run the theatres for profit and there wasn’t a reserve.”

Across the UK, the arts are reawakening after over 14 months of unprecedented disruption. As venues reopen – dates differ across the nations, though 17 May is a key date in Scotland and England – there will be much to celebrate, and many delights in store for audiences. But the pandemic [hit culture and entertainment more severely](#) than any other part of the economy, including hospitality, throwing fresh light on already deep inequalities.

“The arts are defined by low or no pay and a huge oversupply of workforce,” says Suba Das, artistic director of the east of England’s High Tide theatre, and a trustee of Sage, Gateshead. “It is a sector with

exceptionally poor working practices that is rife with exploitation. The question is, ‘How do we find the energy and bravery to rebuild more equably?’” Behind the joy, in short, there is a sense that damage runs deep, that recovery will be slow, and that the arts will never be the same again.



Shrinking at speed ... Tate Britain. Photograph: Guy Bell/Rex/Shutterstock

Musicians in Webber’s musical *The Phantom of the Opera* have learned this the hard way. When the West End production reopens, it will use 14 musicians rather than 27, a cut that has [horrified artists’ unions](#), who fear this is the shape of things to come. Smaller casts and bands mean fewer people in work and, as London-and-Anglesey-based actor and director Steffan Donnelly tells me, there are already worrying signs elsewhere of creatives being asked to work for less, or for no fee at all, often to prepare shows that might or might not go ahead. *Phantom* is produced by Cameron Mackintosh, not by Lloyd Webber. “I just had 81 musicians at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane for a recording session,” says Lloyd Webber. “It is pretty clear where my heart is.”

For many, the ground has shifted so significantly that the world of 2019 is now basically irrecoverable. [Tate](#), an organisation that grew rapidly over the past 30 years, is now shrinking itself at devastating speed, a process causing huge heartache and much disarray internally. Last year, there were



redundancies equivalent to 217 roles at Tate Enterprises, the bars, restaurants and shops that had propped up its expansionist economic model.



Dearth of diary dates ... mezzo soprano Jennifer Johnston. Photograph: Antonio Olmos/The Observer

This year it is the turn of the core operation, Tate itself. Through voluntary redundancies, says director Maria Balshaw, “we are saying goodbye to 150 colleagues across our four galleries and stores”. The [government’s £1.57bn arts rescue package](#) last summer “prevented mass closures” across the museums world, she says, but “it’s not possible to have an extreme reduction in modes of operation without long-term consequences”. There will be less activity generally, with longer, less flashy shows: “We won’t be bouncing back.” Unlike, one suspects, many of the art-loving, blue-chip super-rich who love to be associated with Tate Modern’s outward glamour, but who have little idea of the internal angst of running a public sector institution.

Classical music has had a particularly tough time. Unbound by language constraints, its business model has hitherto been highly internationalised, involving a complicated web of artists, powerful agents, orchestras and opera houses spread across many countries – countries that are now grappling with a baffling array of different quarantine, lockdown or social-distancing regulations. Added to that, there is – for British artists – the



disaster of Brexit, meaning expensive visas and work permits. In short, the old economic machinery of classical music is broken, and the wreckage has collapsed primarily on the self-employed, whether musicians, composers, singers, technicians, designers or directors.

Jennifer Johnson, a Liverpool-based mezzo-soprano, saw her packed 2020 diary collapse. Instead of several productions in Munich, her Glyndebourne debut and “I don’t know how many concerts”, she has done a single recital and three dates with orchestras since the pandemic hit. She was eligible for one round of the self-employment income support scheme, but 45% of musicians [fell through the gaps altogether](#).



Financial challenges ... Snape Maltings. Photograph: Beki Smith

The sole breadwinner of a single-parent family, this internationally renowned singer has taken two teaching jobs. Her most frequent regular employer, the Munich opera house, is in lockdown throughout June. In the meantime, she says, “if I was offered a recital in, say, Spain I would have to quarantine for two weeks to do a single date, as well as get a visa.” Her core repertoire is one of massed forces and vast orchestras – Mahler symphonies, Wagner, Elgar, the kind of music that doesn’t work in slimmed-down versions. She is seeing colleagues drift out of the business. “If you have to give up a new source of income to take up a [performing] job,” she says,

“that puts you in a very difficult position. I’m very lucky that my teaching is flexible.”

As Suba Das points out, those most likely to leave the arts altogether are those who lack financial cushioning: “Disabled people, people of colour, those from socially deprived backgrounds – it is these people who are stepping away from the precarious business of working in culture.” This narrowing will be bad for the arts and for society.

Freelancers I have spoken to feel left behind by some institutions, which on the whole have been relatively protected – in the short term at least – by the culture recovery fund and furlough for employees. But institutions are also grappling with difficulties. Britten Pears Arts, which runs Snape Maltings concert hall and the Aldeburgh festival in Suffolk, would normally be partly funded by Benjamin Britten’s royalties, and a range of shops, galleries and cafes – the kind of mixed, entrepreneurial business model favoured by New Labour and the Tories. But around £1.4m of Britten royalties and £1m of shop income has been lost to the pandemic. The organisation was helped by the recovery fund but expects to be in deficit by around £750,000 this year.

May and June will see a range of concerts, from artists such as mezzo Sarah Connolly and violinist Daniel Pioro. They promise to be wonderful – but they won’t be on a pre-pandemic scale. “We can’t pack the stage with choir and orchestra,” says Roger Wright, the chief executive. “We can’t for example put on Tom Coult and Alice Birch’s new opera.” Planned for 2020, that work, the much anticipated Violet, has now been rescheduled – for the third time – to 2022.



Delayed opening ... Derby's Museum of Making. Photograph: Chris Seddon Photography

Across the arts, delayed new works are having to wait their turn, and it is hard not to imagine a serious slowing of commissioning, especially given the all-round reduction in resources: bad news for creators. Meanwhile, even getting going this summer is impossible for some, most notably for such music festivals as [Glastonbury](#). Uncushioned by public subsidy, and in the absence of a government-backed insurance scheme, they have judged the danger of sudden enforced cancellation too ruinous to risk.

Amid all the difficulties, it is clear that the arts are needed not only on an emotional level: there will be tears as people hear beloved music, or see great art, or sit in a theatre audience once more). They also have the capacity to play an important part in the UK's recovery. In Derby, Tony Butler, who runs the city's three museums, is eagerly anticipating at last being able to open, on 21 May, the delayed new [Museum of Making](#), set in a 1721 silk mill. But it will open into a city centre – like many up and down the UK – utterly transformed by Covid-19.

“Fifty per cent of shops that closed during Covid won't reopen,” he says. “Derby is not the place it used to be.” Its high street, like many, was already struggling. The council, he says, “has had a Damascene conversion to the

idea of a culture-led recovery” for the town. But it has desperately stretched resources – and that is reflected in the museums’ funding, which has taken a 10% cut in its council grant already. And that’s just this year. “Among civic museums, most of us have seen cuts of 30-50% in the past seven years.” This is thanks to ex-chancellor George Osborne’s flawed, damaging austerity policy.

Many artists and organisations have strained hard to adapt and change and keep going. Some of these adaptations will presumably be temporary. David Greig’s new play *Adventures With the Painted People*, premiered on Radio 3 last year, seems perfectly suited to outdoors performances in Pitlochry, Perthshire, this June. In the long term, however, you imagine that audiences will prefer the warmth of the town’s Festival theatre. Meanwhile, a wholly online [Hay festival](#) may mean no queues for the toilets, and no sold-out events, but also a huge hit for the economy of its hometown on the Welsh-English border.



Uncushioned by subsidy ... Glastonbury, last seen in 2019. Photograph: Henry Nicholls/Reuters

But hybridity – adapting events to have a combined online and live existence – is surely here to stay. Kwame Kwei-Armah has announced that he intends to [livestream](#) all future performances at his theatre, the Young Vic in

London, as well as stage them to a physical audience. It is as much an issue of broadening access as anything else, he says. The same is true for Nick Barley at the [Edinburgh international book festival](#), for whom there is no going back after last August's online festival attracted audiences (and artists) who could never have attended in person. The climate crisis is making it morally necessary to limit international travel. "But more fundamentally," says Barley, "it is about making the festival accessible to people who can't come whether because they are in prison, or for health reasons, or for neurodiversity reasons, or for geographical reasons". A mixture of live and online audiences seems the way forward.

Some organisations have neither closed their doors, nor stopped working, at any point over the past 14 months. Slung Low, a theatre company that runs an arts centre in Holbeck, Leeds, became one of the council's community hubs during the first lockdown, and the area's food bank. [Theatre](#) companies in general are excellent at logistics: Slung Low was thus well-suited to getting its neighbours fed as well as entertained.

"Our job is to provide Holbeck with the best cultural life we can," says Alan Lane, the artistic director. "But if you are terrified of hunger, then you aren't going to come, are you? We're still artists even if we are humping beans out of a van." Operating at full tilt and with no staff furloughed, it was relatively straightforward for the company to put on shows as soon as they were allowed. From Lane's perspective, though, "the ecosystem that kept the arts going is broken. The spider's web that connected everything only existed if you had privilege anyway."

What about the future? His answer is simple, though its ramifications are not. "You can't live in proximity to historical events and not be changed. The future has to be different."



## Coronavirus

# More care home residents died of Covid in second wave than first in England and Wales

ONS data shows 20,664 deaths from March to September 2020, and 21,677 from September to April

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Rainbow posters adorn the windows of Oakland House care home in Manchester during the first Covid wave. Photograph: Anthony Devlin/AFP/Getty

Rainbow posters adorn the windows of Oakland House care home in Manchester during the first Covid wave. Photograph: Anthony Devlin/AFP/Getty

[Pamela Duncan](#)

Tue 11 May 2021 11.59 EDT

More people died with Covid in care homes in [England](#) and Wales in the second wave of the pandemic than in the first, according to official figures.

[Data released by the Office for National Statistics](#) shows that, while the rise in coronavirus deaths among care home residents was much sharper during the first wave between March and September 2020, the number and proportion of Covid deaths were higher in the second wave from September to April 2021.

However, the ONS notes that, because of subsequent enhanced testing and increased medical knowledge, there may have been other Covid deaths in the first wave caused by undiagnosed cases of the virus.

There were 20,664 care home deaths (23.1%) in wave 1 – from mid-March to mid-September 2020 – that mentioned Covid on the death certificate. This compared with 21,677 deaths (25.7%) between then and the start of April.

The release covered deaths that occurred in a care home as well as deaths where the person lived in a care home but died elsewhere.

However, Dr Jason Oke, senior statistician at the Nuffield department of primary care health sciences, University of Oxford, noted that at least some of these deaths would have been caused by coronavirus but not diagnosed as such.

“We have to put this into context with the excess deaths which paints a very different picture. To quote directly from the [ONS report](#): ‘By contrast, there were more total deaths of care home residents above the five-year average in wave 1 (27,079 excess deaths) than in wave 2 (1,335 excess deaths),’” Oke said.

However, not all such deaths would be because of Covid. Other causes cited by the ONS included delayed access to healthcare, known as “[mortality displacement](#)”.



Prof Kevin McConway, emeritus professor of applied statistics at the Open University, said: “Those issues will make it difficult to understand the patterns in the data when we eventually come to an inquiry about the pandemic.”

[Separate figures](#), also released by the ONS on 11 May, showed there were 205 Covid deaths in England and Wales in the week to 30 April, accounting for 2.1% of all deaths, a decrease of 55 deaths compared with the previous week.

This brings the total UK Covid death toll to 151,480, according to the ONS, which counts all fatalities that mention Covid on the death certificate, higher than the [more commonly cited government figure](#) that counts those occurring within 28 days of a positive test.

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## 2021.05.12 - Spotlight

- [Anthony Brown The man who resisted deportation – then fought tirelessly for Windrush survivors](#)
- [The Guardian picture essay Price of gold: DRC's rich soil bears few riches for its miners](#)
- [Clive Tyldesley Football commentary is all I ever wanted to do](#)
- ['It was so terrifying' One woman's experience of 'tech abuse'](#)
- [Robert McFerrin This man made opera history. Why did I not know him?](#)
- [It's oh so quiet Silent whale watching on Iceland's first electric boat tour](#)
- [Brit awards 2021 Every performance reviewed, from Coldplay to Arlo Parks](#)
- ['It's terrifying' The English village overwhelmed by landfill stink](#)

# Anthony Brown: the man who resisted deportation – then fought tirelessly for Windrush survivors

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# Price of gold: DRC's rich soil bears few riches for its miners – photo essay

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/may/12/price-of-gold-drcs-rich-soil-bears-few-riches-for-its-miners-photo-essay>.

## [Soccer](#)

### Interview

# Clive Tyldesley: 'Football commentary is all I ever wanted to do'

[Donald McRae](#)



Clive Tyldesley: 'I've got an illogical dislike of commentators who personalise their work.' Photograph: Tom Jenkins/The Guardian

Clive Tyldesley: 'I've got an illogical dislike of commentators who personalise their work.' Photograph: Tom Jenkins/The Guardian

From Shankly, Clough and the Camp Nou in 1999 to the failed European Super League, the broadcaster reflects on the game



[@donaldgmcrae](#)

Wed 12 May 2021 03.00 EDT

“The first thing you’ve got to get your head around as a broadcaster,” Clive Tyldesley says, “is that it’s not actually about you. It’s about the event. I think the greatest quality a commentator can possess in order to connect with a large number of people is warmth. This applies even more so to television presenters as they look into that little coal-black hole and somehow reach you on your sofa, on your commute, sitting in your bedroom with a tablet on your lap, whatever it is, and you want to invest some trust and affection in them.”

Tyldesley, the ITV football commentator who has been working in broadcasting since 1975, is just warming up for an interview that, fittingly, lasts the length of an entire match. “Football commentary is all I ever wanted to do,” Tyldesley explains as passion pours out of him. “I’ve got an illogical dislike of commentators who personalise their work and complain about what they have to watch. They make it sound like a waste of their time. Well, it might be a shit match but the result still really matters to people.

[Sir Alex Ferguson: ‘Did I think we could still beat Bayern in 1999? No chance!’](#)

[Read more](#)

“At the height of the pandemic there was a touching feature on Sky News every night. Instead of just giving the numbers of those that had died they had photographs of people who had passed during the previous two days and it introduced us to these strangers. We often heard that he was an accountant, a good father and a big Luton Town fan. I’d think that supporting Luton can’t have been one of the most important things in this man’s life. But it was – and that brings home to me and fellow football commentators how much the game matters.”

Football matters hugely to Tyldesley. He is consumed by his work and so it is understandable that last July he broke his own rule, briefly, and became the story rather than an observer. “I’m being replaced as ITV’s senior football commentator,” Tyldesley [explained in an emotional video he released on social media](#). “I am upset, annoyed, baffled. I’ve done nothing wrong.”

Tyldesley was shocked that he had been demoted after 22 years in the lead role at ITV. We will eventually explore his disappointment but Tyldesley makes it clear that his pain has eased and he feels reconciled to his new position as ITV’s No 2, behind Sam Matterface. His dedication remains undented and he asked to bring forward this interview by three weeks so he can concentrate fully on his preparation for this summer’s [European Championship](#) finals.

We are also here to talk about Tyldesley’s first book. “It’s the one I’ve been wanting to write for 66 years, which is how old I am,” he says. Before any cynics put the boot in and assume Tyldesley is again betraying his own mantra by putting himself in the public eye, it should be said the book is an enjoyable and interesting journey through football over the decades rather than an autobiography.



Clive Tyldesley with co-commentator Andy Townsend during England's Euro 2016 qualifier against Slovenia in June 2015. Photograph: Mike Egerton/PA

Our interview took place the day after the hapless attempt to set up the [European Super League](#) was announced. Tyldesley was impressively incandescent: "Football cannot be the same, ever again, since 9:30 last night. Even if they backtrack we've caught our spouse in bed with another person and the marriage is effectively over. It may continue, but it's over as we understand it. It is over. These [club owners] are meant to be very smart, successful people. But they've totally lost touch with what this sport means.

"A year ago, the consolation we all found in lockdown was an enhanced sense of community and perspective, an appreciation of those who were most vulnerable, those who made the biggest contributions. It was almost uplifting. Somewhere in the midst of that was a genuine belief that football might find a new economy, something more workable and sensible which places new value on its fans. Instead, the biggest clubs are more self-serving than ever. Their answer to cutting their cloth in response to what we've all been through has been to try to buy up all the cloth and keep it for themselves."



Tyldesley's memories of working with Brian Clough, Bill Shankly and Sir Alex Ferguson are very different, and they enrich his book. One of his first jobs was to cover Nottingham Forest under Clough as a callow reporter for Radio Trent in 1975. "This was the first manager I was transfixed by. He was charismatic, had such aura and presence, gave me some of the greatest interviews I've ever had, came to my leaving do, and was charming to my parents because he could turn it on with them like with [Michael] Parkinson. But he was a difficult man to look at, and be around, when I came across him again a little later. He was an ITV World Cup pundit and he was more at the bar.

I've always believed that the great goals deserve something better than:  
'Amazing, incredible, brilliant'

"In later years, when I heard people telling after-dinner jokes about his drunkenness, I was angry. It was a disease, it was sadness, and it hauled down a man who was great. That's an overused word in football – but [he was a great achiever](#), a true character and brilliant at what he did. The only contest he couldn't win was with alcohol."

Did he also detect sadness in Shankly, who worked alongside Tyldesley as a co-commentator on Merseyside radio after the [inspirational former Liverpool manager](#) had been eased out of the club he transformed? "I was too young then to ask those sorts of questions. But I couldn't get enough of Shanks. I've still got tapes of interviews I did with him. When he says my name I kind of shiver.

"I remember a famous European Cup game [at Nottingham Forest's City Ground in 1978]. Forest had come from nowhere and started taking titles off Liverpool, and they met in the first round of the European Cup. Liverpool were the defending champions and Cloughie gave a debut to a guy the previous Saturday. So that Wednesday night Garry Birtles was making his second senior appearance against Liverpool in the European Cup. Birtles scored in the first half, put them 1-0 up. Shanks was my co-commentator on local radio. So away I go, in typical commentator-ese, and shout into the mic: 'Garry Birtles, three days ago, we'd never even heard of him!' Shankly

picks up his mic and says live on air: ‘You’ve fucking heard of him now!’ and slams it down on the desk.

“We didn’t receive one phone call of complaint. He was talking for every Liverpool fan that night – from the heart. I actually believe every commentator should be allowed one “fuck” per year because sometimes, whether it’s a great goal or a free-kick that flies over the bar, we should be allowed to go: ‘Fuck!’”

Would Shankly and Clough have been successful managers in any era? “Whether their views of life and football could adapt to the 21st century is a fascinating question. Our best answer lies with Fergie, because he managed Cristiano Ronaldo differently to Ryan Giggs. He got Giggs by knocking on his parents’ door in Swinton. He got Ronaldo by sitting down with [his agent] Jorge Mendes. You have to manage 21st-century footballers differently. Fergie could do that. Could Shankly and Clough? I’m not so sure. Part of their brilliance was their stubbornness.”



Teddy Sheringham celebrates after scoring the equalising goal for Manchester United against Bayern Munich in the 1999 Champions League final. Photograph: Ben Radford/Allsport

Ferguson gave Tyldesley his most memorable commentating experience when Manchester United came back from the dead to score two goals in the last few minutes to win the [Champions League final against Bayern Munich in 1999](#). Tyldesley was under intense pressure that night but he was astute enough to remain totally silent for the first eight of the 108 seconds that separated the astonishing goals that won United the treble.

“The importance of the match for me was that the late, great Brian Moore retired after the World Cup final in 1998. So 1998-99 was my first season as ITV’s senior commentator and if I’d messed up that night in front of 20 million people, they’d have found somebody else. So it’s the most significant few minutes in my career. We wouldn’t be having this conversation if I’d screwed up.

[Manchester City’s title is a triumph of class and refinement on the hoof | Barney Ronay](#)  
[Read more](#)

“Reg Gutteridge [ITV’s boxing commentator] gave me a journalistic view of broadcasting. His editorial nous was drilled into me. It was pretty cruel love at times because he was very critical. But I became a great advocate of it and I am to this day. It’s easy to say TV commentators talk too much but Reg said that when you pause it’s not a rest, it’s thinking time. The pause should be in order for the next thing you say to have had some consideration – even if it’s only a few seconds.

“I’ve always believed that the great goals deserve something better than: ‘Amazing, incredible, brilliant.’ If they’re so special, they deserve individual words which capture that moment. So if you can, in those few seconds, somehow editorialise what you see and give it some context for the present and the future, you’ve got a chance of coming up with a commentary line which the moment deserves.

“After I’d shouted ‘Sheringham!’ for the equaliser, I saw Ron Atkinson next to me with the microphone in his hand. I put my arm across him. I didn’t count but I was thinking. The next thing I said [eight seconds later] was slightly strange: ‘Name on the trophy.’ The fact that they did win means I’m reasonably pleased. There was that sense in 1999, and with [Liverpool in](#)

[2005](#), that this is written. It was fate, a momentum which defied explanation or analysis. Sir Alex's wonderful post-match interview summed it up: 'Football, bloody hell.' In a way, 'Name on the trophy' got the moment. It was much better to have had eight seconds of roaring crowd and simple pictures without me decorating it by screaming."

The Fiver: sign up and get our daily football email.

Tyldesley admits: "I didn't see the ITV episode coming. It was a shock when it happened last June. I already had my rota of games for the summer and so part of me felt: 'Well, if you think I'm capable of doing these games in the summer of 2020, why am I not capable of doing them in the summer of 2021?' I'm getting old but I'm not in vertical decline. Whilst I was upset, I completely respect my contract was up and it was their right to make a change. What's made it easier to accept is that I don't think they've just replaced me with a younger person. They've replaced me with a different kind of commentator. That is evolution, whether you agree with it or not.

"If they had just brought in somebody who was 40 but sounded like me, I would have had more cause for umbrage. I'm going to be a very happy and conscientious part of ITV's commentary team at the European Championship and, yes, one of my games is Germany v France. You can't complain. I just feel very lucky to do the work I have loved so long."

*[Clive Tyldesley's book Not For Me, Clive is published by Headline.](#)*

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## Domestic violence

# ‘It was so terrifying’: one woman’s experience of ‘tech abuse’

Amy Aldworth was bombarded with aggressive messages, leading to anxiety and panic attacks

- [Tech playing growing role in UK domestic abuse cases, experts say.](#)



Amy Aldworth: ‘I couldn’t guarantee that if I walked out of my door he wouldn’t be there tracking me.’ Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

Amy Aldworth: ‘I couldn’t guarantee that if I walked out of my door he wouldn’t be there tracking me.’ Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian



[Jamie Grierson](#) *Home affairs correspondent*

[@JamieGrierson](#)

Tue 11 May 2021 19.01 EDT

Amy Aldworth went on a date with a banker she met through an app and she thought it had gone well after both agreed to meet again.

But before the second date happened, she received an unusual message from the man, whom she has asked the Guardian not to name, insinuating she had given him a sexually transmitted disease.

Confident she had recently been tested, she attempted to reassure him and thought that would be the end of it. But the messages kept coming – and the tone became more aggressive and confrontational.

Amy, 26, who lives in London and works in an NHS pharmacy department, said: “It escalated to him not feeling very well to him *knowing* I’ve given him HIV. ‘I have the symptoms of HIV, you need to get tested.’ I was getting these for weeks.”

The messages perturbed Amy to the point she decided to get an emergency test.



“I was so petrified, I knew I didn’t have it but I thought he might be one of those guys who deliberately gives it to girls,” she said.

“I had to get an emergency appointment at a clinic. The nurse sat with me and it came back negative.”

The man did not accept the result of the tests and, over nine weeks, he bombarded Amy, her mother, her grandmother and her friends with messages implying she had infected him with a sexually transmitted disease.

He used Facebook, Instagram, text messages and the dating app through which they first met to contact Amy and her friends and family.

“What disease do you have and WHY did you get someone to take the test on your behalf. Tell me the fucking truth,” one message read.

Amy did not use her surname on social media, and was surprised the man was able to find her so easily online.

She was also fearful the online harassment would move into the “real world” and he would appear outside her house or place of work.

“That’s why it was so terrifying. I didn’t know where he was, it was all happening online; I couldn’t guarantee that if I walked out of my door he wouldn’t be there tracking me,” she said.

“I wouldn’t walk to and from work without meeting my colleagues. I didn’t want to go out and shop.”

Amy said that prior to the harassment, she had periods where she suffered from depression and this episode acted as a fresh trigger.

“I felt like the world was eating me up,” she said. “My doctors were really good, as soon as it happened, they changed my medication, it wasn’t having the same effect as before.

“I had to go on very short course of strong anxiety medication, I couldn’t leave the house without having a panic attack. I also had a six-week course of CBT [cognitive behavioural therapy].”

With support from a family member within the police service, Amy pursued a prosecution, providing about 90 pieces of photographic evidence of different messages sent by the man.

He ultimately pleaded guilty to two counts of harassment, in relation to both Amy and her mother, and was sentenced to a 12-month community order and subjected to a restraining order.

Amy was signposted to the charity Refuge, which drew her attention to the phenomenon of “tech abuse” – domestic abuse facilitated in part by technology.

She worked with the charity to develop [a new website](#) aimed at helping women improve their tech security and raise awareness over the signs of tech abuse.

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## Opera

# This man made opera history. Why did I not know him?

Peter Brathwaite knew Bobby (Don't Worry Be Happy) McFerrin but not his father Robert, the first Black man to sing at the Met. He celebrates a trailblazer and an inspiration



Pioneering ... Robert McFerrin as Amonasro in Aida, his debut role at the Met. Photograph: Bridgeman Images

Pioneering ... Robert McFerrin as Amonasro in Aida, his debut role at the Met. Photograph: Bridgeman Images

*Peter Brathwaite*

Wed 12 May 2021 03.00 EDT

Here's a little song I wrote  
You might want to sing it note for note  
Don't worry, be happy"

Everyone knows Bobby McFerrin's 1988 earwormy hit and [its gloriously silly video](#). I remember dancing round the living room with my sisters singing along full pelt, each of us taking turns to try our hands at imitating the vocal percussion. More recently, a friend put it on one evening. I took that as an invitation to sing and dance, but really she just wanted to test my trivia. Did I know that Bobby McFerrin's dad was an opera singer? No. Did I know Bobby's dad – born 100 years ago – was a baritone, like me? No. Did I know that Bobby's dad was the first Black man to sing at America's flagship opera company – the Metropolitan Opera? I had no idea.

It was in the role of [Rigoletto – Verdi's tragic disabled jester](#) – that Robert McFerrin Sr became the first Black man to sing a title role at the Met. In [a photograph from McFerrin's Met debut](#), you see the young baritone smiling, in full costume, and shaking general director Rudolf Bing's hand. That picture is full of hope. McFerrin's Rigoletto emerged against the backdrop of the burgeoning civil rights movement in the US. His debut with the prestigious company came in January 1955 – hot on the heels of the Supreme Court ruling that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional and the final elimination of all racially segregated regiments in the armed forces.



An image of hope ... McFerrin, costumed as Amonasro, with the Met's Rudolf Bing. Photograph: Sedge LeBlang/E Azalia Hackley

## Collection/Detroit Public Library

Within the Metropolitan Opera, this cause was being spearheaded by Bing, who knew what it meant to be an outsider. An Austrian of Jewish heritage, Bing had fled the Nazi regime in the 30s. He arrived in New York having helped set up Glyndebourne Opera festival in England and later the Edinburgh international festival, where he programmed [a recital by the African American baritone Todd Duncan](#) in its opening year. At the Met, he set about casting without racial prejudice, starting with principal ballerina [Janet Collins](#), the first full-time Black American artist in the company, and followed by the contralto [Marian Anderson](#), who appeared in Verdi's Un ballo in Maschera just three weeks before McFerrin made his first appearance on the Met stage, as the Ethiopian King Amonasro in Aida. Regarding his casting of Black singers, Bing simply said: "As far as the Metropolitan Opera is concerned, I shall be happy to engage [them] if I find the right voice for the right part."

McFerrin's voice is one of warmth, of golden luminosity, a voice that displays all the charisma and personality of McFerrin the stage performer. But it's also a voice that holds the hopes and struggles of the Black singers in [New York](#) City at that time – who, his son Bobby recalled, would congregate at his parents' apartment.

He said: "It felt as if the entire classical-music African American community would come by the house for classical jam sessions. It was a wonderful experience as a kid to hide behind the piano while they would sing and talk about the opportunities – or the lack thereof – they had to perform their art. I clearly remember that they would discuss the fact that my dad was auditioning at the Met at the time and what that would mean if he won the audition."



‘I wanted to sing Wotan, or a romantic lead...’ Robert McFerrin. Photograph: Bettmann Archive

McFerrin Sr’s voice holds all of this. Yes, it’s a baritone of beautiful quality, the evenness of his tone from the lowest notes through to the highest, and the brilliance of his high notes, akin to a tenor’s ringing sound, always grab me, but McFerrin’s voice is more than just a technical reference point. He’s a model and an anchor, a potent reminder of the cyclical nature of conversations about representation in classical music – conversations that are still going on today. The great African American soprano Leontyne Price gave an interview [in the 80s](#) in which she pointed out that the continued lack of Black operatic heroes in opera is absurd because “there is a wealth of talent around”. She was speaking *three decades* after McFerrin broke the colour bar for Black men in opera. Three decades after McFerrin resigned from the Met, because, in his own words:

“Opportunities [...] were at a stalemate. I had been there for three years and had done only three roles. I did not want to continue the uncertainty of my future of whether or not I would progress beyond the status of singing the role of a brother, or father. I wanted to sing [Wotan](#) or [Count di Luna](#), or a romantic lead. I guess this would have created too much controversy; therefore, I simply chose to resign my position on the Met roster and take my chances in Hollywood.”



Peter Brathwaite. Photograph: Inna Kostukovsky

In 1959, he provided the vocals for Sidney Poitier's Porgy in [Otto Preminger](#)'s film adaptation of Gershwin's Black-cast-only opera Porgy and Bess. He sang some operatic roles in Europe, gave concerts and taught. Despite suffering a stroke later in life, his voice was in supreme shape into his 80s. But the fact remains that he was woefully under-recorded, and those romantic leads never came.

As tenor George Shirley – the second Black man to sing at the Met – wrote in an obituary tribute: “McFerrin instilled in Black males the resolve to pursue our destinies as performers in the profession of grand opera.”

So, rather than tell the young singers I coach that here in the UK today I'm able to count on two hands the number of men in the opera world who, like them, are Black and British, instead I pop on a bit of McFerrin. Hearing him is enough for us to collectively lean in, poised and ready to open wide the doors to one of western classical music's most exclusive clubs – Black Men in [Opera](#).

[Peter Brathwaite](#)'s [essay on Robert McFerrin](#) Sr is on Radio 3 on 13 May at 10.45pm, part of a week-long series The Essay: In Their Voices. All episodes are on BBC Sounds for 30 days.

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

## Iceland holidays

# It's oh so quiet: silent whale watching on Iceland's first electric boat tour



Quiet please... Tourists on one of North Sailing's electric boats spot a whale off Húsavík. Photograph: Phoebe Smith

Quiet please... Tourists on one of North Sailing's electric boats spot a whale off Húsavík. Photograph: Phoebe Smith

A carbon-neutral tour off Húsavík, in north Iceland, makes for a greener, more peaceful experience for visitors and sea creatures

[Phoebe Smith](#)

Wed 12 May 2021 01.30 EDT

‘Look! Look! Over there ...’ The boat listed dramatically as 50 passengers raced to its starboard side.

Seconds earlier someone had spied the distinct blow – a spray of airborne water – that signalled a whale was about to emerge. A silence fell over the



crowd as we waited, patiently.

[Iceland map.](#)

“Port side. Quick,” called the spotter from the crow’s nest and everyone shuffled to the opposite rail. A shiny black fin rose from the water, while two flashes of white – its pectoral fins – could be made out beneath the surface.

“Watch for the tail,” came the cry, and the crowd gasped as the humpback revealed its fluke, dripping with water, before diving back into the waters of mountain-edged Skjálfandi bay.

It’s the kind of scene I’ve been lucky enough to witness many times when watching whales around the world: the silence of anticipation, followed by the cheer of the sighting. Then – after the encounter – the enthusiastic chatter and cries of otherwise level-headed strangers suddenly hugging each other with joy. All of this against the noise of rumbling and roaring diesel engines.



Húsavík. Photograph: Andrew Deer/Alamy

This particular encounter, off the northcoast of Iceland, was different. This time the whoops of delight and exhilaration were the only sound. We were

on a silent, electric boat – a kind designed especially for whale-watching here in Húsavík.

It's the brainchild of North Sailing, the company that, in 1995, pioneered whale-watching in Iceland (prior to this the only value cetaceans were seen to have was as food, hunted and, predominantly, shipped to Japan). This move made the town the "whale capital of Iceland" – and the firm since determined to find a carbon-neutral way of getting up close to the whales. My visit was pre-Covid, but the three-hour excursions are running again, albeit with a reduced capacity per sailing.

Some people ask if they need to be quiet on board. Of course they don't, but it does seem to inspire it.

*Aggi Arnarson*

"We tried it first about five years ago," North Sailing's Arngrímur "Aggi" Arnarson had said before I headed out on the water. "We invested in a project to convert one of our sailing boats to have a backup electric engine rather than diesel, so that it would rely on wind and battery power only."

The now-electric Opal set sail triumphantly, and another boat has since been added. In a wonderful reversal of use, former diesel whaler Andvari – named for the old Norse that means a gentle breeze that glides silently through the air – now also silently takes people out to shoot marine mammals with cameras rather than harpoons. Both craft are charged from the 100% renewable hydro and geothermal energy that powers most of Iceland.

"Some people ask if they need to be quiet on board," laughed Aggi. "Of course they don't, but it does seem to inspire it."



The writer's boat trip group spotting wildlife. Photograph: Phoebe Smith

I noticed a gentle calmness on the waves. And, without the racket of an engine to shout over, people seemed to speak in muted tones.

Even the ship's captain, Cristian, loved the new arrangement: "After a day on this boat I come back to shore and I have no headache," he said as we sat, peacefully, in the wheelhouse scanning the water for signs of one of the 23 species often spotted here. The most common are humpback, minke, white-beaked dolphin, sei and harbour porpoise – all of which I saw – with blue whale, orca, pilot whale and sperm whale spotted less frequently.

Over three days, I went out on Andvari and Opal on several occasions, inspired to take it slow, and linger in one place. But it's not just passengers and crew who benefit from an electric engine. Several scientific studies suggest, unsurprisingly, that whales exhibit less signs of stress in quieter waters.



The North Sailing vessel off the north Iceland coast. Photograph: Phoebe Smith

“I’ve seen the whales come much closer and stay for longer,” said Roderick, a boat-builder-cum-whalewatch-guide with North Sailing, who came to Húsavík several years ago from Switzerland and never left. I headed out with him on the second day of my visit. We were joined for about a mile by a curious minke whale, a school of dolphins danced in front of the bow and, in addition to one humpback lingering under and beside our vessel for an hour, we also sighted a pod of five.

“You really hear the whales when they come up and breathe. It’s so calming, and I think it makes people have a more meaningful connection to them. It’s even changed locals’ opinions on whales now they’ve seen the tourists come in,” said Roderick.



A scene from Eurovision Song Contest: The Story of Fire Saga. Húsavík, a song from the film, was nominated for a 2021 best original song Oscar. Photograph: Elizabeth Viggiano/AP

Prior to Covid, the tourists did come – in their thousands – and the hope is that it won't be long before they return. Iceland is one of the few countries currently on [the UK's green list](#). In 2020 the film Eurovision Song Contest: The Story of Fire and Saga, starring Will Ferrell and Rachel McAdams, kept the town in the spotlight after title song Húsavík was nominated for an Oscar. This prompted locals to launch a [video extolling the town's beauty](#).

“You have, on average, about 300,000 people arriving in Húsavík to see the whales each year – that's nearly the same as the population of Iceland,” said Tom Grove, a volunteer at the town's [Whale Museum](#), who is also studying the impact of whale-watching on sea life at university. “As watching has increased there has been a decrease in support for whaling locally.”

The whales come to the waters off Húsavík looking food, the tourists arrive hot on their tails, and the town has begun to generate new attractions to keep them there. The harbourside [Gamli Baukur](#) restaurant, for example, is made from reclaimed parts of whaling ships and is a proud member of the [Meet Us Don't Eat Us campaign](#), encouraging visitors to abstain from sampling



whale meat. [Húsavík Öl](#) is a microbrewery in the old dairy house, which brews using locally foraged ingredients (think birch and juniper).



The writer's tour group getting close to sea life. Photograph: Phoebe Smith

Then there is a much smaller and less-touristy version of the Blue Lagoon near Reykjavík. [GeoSea spa](#) is a saltwater borehole discovered by locals who would bathe in it at the end of a long day, and where I ended day three of my trip. On top of the west-facing sea cliffs, it offered the perfect place to toast a long weekend of sighting marine mammals and watching the sunset from an infinity pool, while dolphins frolicked in the waves below.

On my last morning, I went back out to see the whales. There, amid the high-speed inflatables and diesel-powered vessels, I noted that the whales seemed to linger longer alongside ours. But although North Sailing has offered competitors blueprints so they can make their vessels carbon neutral, too – choosing benefit to whales and the environment rather than profit margins – no other operator has taken that step so far.

Before we headed back to land, a humpback performed a breach – leaping skyward from the water – shocking us all into an even more pronounced silence. A suitably quiet end to the most memorable of trips.

*[North Sailing](#) has silent (carbon-neutral) whale-watching trips from ISK10.690 (£60pp) and sailing trips from ISK11.990 (£68pp) between May and September. Accommodation was provided by [Árból Guesthouse](#) (doubles from £112 room only) and [Fosshotel Húsavík](#) (rooms from £90). Húsavík is a nine-hour bus ride, or six-hour car drive, from Reykjavík*

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |



## [Brit awards](#)

# Brit awards 2021: every performance reviewed, from Coldplay to Arlo Parks

From Coldplay's opening spectacular on the Thames to Rag'n'Bone Man movingly performing with an NHS choir, we rate all of this year's live performances

- [News: Women dominate 2021 Brit awards as Dua Lipa tops winners](#)



In fine voice ... Coldplay. Photograph: JMEnternational/Getty Images for the Brits

In fine voice ... Coldplay. Photograph: JMEnternational/Getty Images for the Brits



[Ben Beaumont-Thomas](#)

[@ben\\_bt](#)

Tue 11 May 2021 18.52 EDT

## Coldplay

Coldplay are the Brits in band form: trying to be cool and youthful, way too corporate to get away with it, and yet almost always enjoyable. Chris and co are in that tricky part of a career recently faced by Katy Perry and others, where they're not ready for a life on Radio 2, but their age means that any climb up the charts must now be done up a tricky, crumbling north face rather than the gentle inclines afforded the likes of younger, more relevant likes of [Headie One](#), Dua Lipa and Joel Corry.

They could make it, though, with Higher Power, a really stellar new single produced by pop powerhouse Max Martin (who has worked with many shortlisted artists tonight such as [Taylor Swift](#), Ariana Grande and the Weeknd). It's essentially the War on Drugs on actual drugs, with a peppy Dancing in the Dark-type snare keeping the energy high, and Chris using his traditional whoa-oh-ohs to encircle quasi-religious bromides presumably gleaned from an ayahuasca ceremony with Instagram fitness models in Tulum. He is in really fine voice right across the broad octave range needed

for this track, and they perform it on a pontoon in the Thames with holograms instead of backing dancers – social distancing kings!

## Dua Lipa



Referencing Geri ... Dua Lipa. Photograph: JMEInternational for the Brit awards/Getty Images

One of the key pleasures of the Brits is a medley, and Lipa delivers one straight off the back of Coldplay's set. A take on Love Again set amid a depressing pandemic tableau on the London underground brightens into a blast of Physical on a tube train on stage itself. There's Pretty Please's high-tempo strut, Hallucinate's club energy, and then into Don't Start Now and Future Nostalgia – and all of it in a Geri-referencing pleated union jack miniskirt, her second chaotic look of the night. The consummate British pop star – it takes such confidence, glamour, fitness and technical mastery to deliver such a seamless and highly choreographed spectacle.

## Olivia Rodrigo



Take it away ... Olivia Rodrigo performs Drivers License. Photograph: Ian West/PA

“In the words of Tiger Woods: Drivers License, take it away.” Jack Whitehall amusingly introduces this nice coup for the Brits, the debut UK performance from a woman who has gone from being completely unknown to anyone outside the High School Musical fandom to having the biggest song in the world this year, Drivers License. While in the Disney show she dramatises fiction, this breakup ballad is drawn from her real life, and yet for me there’s still something actorly about her delivery on the studio version that I find a bit distancing: the bruised vocal fry, the pat rebellion of the F-word. On the other hand, doesn’t the heartbreak she sings about sometimes feel as torrid as a stage tragedy or film romance?

So the stage is perhaps the most natural place for her and, having ditched her earlier highlighter-coloured dress, she’s like a flicker of flame in red and gives her ballad real presence. Backed by harp and piano, she would perhaps benefit from a bit more orchestral oomph and support for *that* middle eight where her voice sounds a little hard and stark – but this is just fine tuning for a live show that will no doubt grow to become something really dramatic.

## Arlo Parks





Breaking through ... Arlo Parks. Photograph: John Marshall/PA

Fresh from the night's first award, it's breakthrough artist winner [Arlo Parks](#). A subterranean meeting by the lizard people who run the British media decreed that every mention of her must be followed with the words "the voice of her generation" – a rather paternalistic boomer framing that underplays both how varied her generation is, and the universal appeal of her music. Her debut album *Collapsed in Sunbeams* is stacked with yearning melodies and the emotional strife is stuff we all go through. But can she scale up the intimate feel to a rather empty O2 Arena?

Taking the lockdown houseplant craze to a psychedelic extreme by fringing her band with dozens of sunflowers, and wearing her second excellent suit of the night, she performs *Hope*, and shows that her voice works just as well beaming to the back of the bleachers as it does cupping your ear. She adds in a spoken middle eight referring to the pandemic's difficulties, and how we've learned to talk over Zoom and continue to allow relationships to blossom – much like those flowers. A brass band, *Kinetika Bloco*, then arrives to bring the song into full bloom. One of the night's best performances.

## **Elton John and Years & Years**



Elton John and Olly Alexander. Photograph: John Marshall/AFP/Getty Images

One of the many, many good things about [Elton John](#) is how much of a fiend for contemporary pop he is. Having already championed Rising Star nominee Rina Sawayama, he now does a take on Pet Shop Boys' It's a Sin with Years & Years (whose frontman Olly Alexander starred in the TV drama of the same name). Olly performs lying on Elton's piano, in a crop top for an acoustic piano version, but there's no way this wasn't going to go full disco: the electropop of the original kicks in and Elton takes over lead vocals as Olly negotiates his way through a literal and metaphorical maze. A more thoughtful arrangement might have given Elton more room for audible piano-bashing, but it's still a winning combination, especially as Olly lasciviously signposts all sorts of sin with his gyrating hips. You can [download the track now](#) to benefit the Elton John Aids Foundation.

## The Weeknd



Victory lap ... the Weeknd. Photograph: Richard Young/Rex/Shutterstock

There's usually some guilty schadenfreude in seeing stars have their dreams of award glory crushed – all those pursed lips after their names aren't read out provide a particular glee, showing A-listers to be just as prone to the same petty insecurities as all of us. But the Grammys' snub of the Weeknd this year was just bafflingly wrong. Despite having the biggest album and single of 2020, which were also stone-cold pop classics, he didn't even get nominated. The pungent fishiness of the whole thing has meant the Grammys have since done away with the secret committees that decide the nominations, which led to this wonderfully dramatic riposte from the Weeknd: "The Grammys' recent admission of corruption will hopefully be a positive move for the future of this plagued award."

He gets to have a victory lap at the [Brit awards](#) instead, performing Save Your Tears via video in a thoroughly waterproof outfit – a J Hus fisherman reference, we hope – alongside Daniel Lopatin, AKA Oneohtrix Point Never, continuing his unlikely path from super-underground electronic producer to impresario of highly theatrical Weeknd performances (he was also musical director of the Super Bowl half-time show). This is a much more ambitious spectacle than the usual phoned-in video link, with the Weeknd leaving a concrete performance box to step into a rainy apocalypse, presumably full of precipitation formed from the tears of his spurned lovers.



His vocal, as ever, is supremely confident, studio quality but still live-feeling. World class.

## Griff



Griff, winner of the rising star award. Photograph: JMEnternational for the Brit awards/Getty Images

It's perhaps a measure of the work still to be done around race and equality that pop stars of east Asian heritage, either from the region itself or the UK, almost never find success here; the massively successful BTS are often discussed by the British media in terms usually reserved for British Museum wall text, even though their music is about as straightforwardly appealing as pop gets.

Hearteningly, though, this year's rising star award shortlist featured two east Asian singers, Japanese-British singer Rina Sawayama, and the winner Griff, who is of Chinese and Jamaican parentage. Sawayama's mashup of nu-metal, glossy pop and influences from deconstructed club music is progressive and thrilling; Griff is a safer, decidedly major label prospect who, so far, has been delivering blandly capable songwriting rather than true pop magic. She gives everything to Black Hole in a Weeknd-style apocalyptic wilderness, and her keening, wronged voice in the chorus is full

of character. But it's hard to escape the fact that this is a bit of a "third single from Rita Ora's comeback album" level song.

## Headie One, AJ Tracey and Young T & Bugsey



A rare smile ... Headie One. Photograph: JMEnternational for the Brit awards/Getty Images

With an outfit referencing his Ghanaian heritage and a stage set fringed with news headlines, all of it designed by Louis Vuitton's artistic director Virgil Abloh, Headie continues the recent tradition of rap artists making high-profile anti-authoritarian statements at the [Brit awards](#) – witness Dave calling Boris Johnson a “real racist”, or Stormzy asking: “where’s the money for Grenfell?” News reporter-style voices are heard criticising drill rap, perhaps a nod to Skepta, who used similar voices in a track following the criticised Kanye West performance of All Day at the 2015 Brits, that had middle England shifting uncomfortably on their sofas.

[AJ Tracey](#) appears in a light-up corridor and delivers his verse of Ain't It Different on point, and the two then trade freestyled bars in lieu of an absent Stormzy for verse three. “The government is saying eat out to help out but won't help out Rashford when he's feeding the youths” – another bit of Boris bashing and Rashford promotion to file alongside AJ's similar verse in

his track with Digga D, Bringing It Back – and “two black Brits stand here at the Brits but still we ain’t seen as British”. It’s not quite as clear and emphatic as those aforementioned examples, but nevertheless they’re still using the Brits stage as a space to question racism and government decisions during the pandemic – unimaginably different, and better, than the purely lairy energy of the Brits in previous decades.

Then it’s a segue into brighter, wavier fare with Young T & Bugsey for Don’t Rush, with Headie even cracking one of his rare, slightly enigmatic smiles. A great showcase of all sides of his artistry.

## **Rag’n’Bone Man & Pink, with the Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Choir**



Powerful ... Rag’n’Bone Man and Pink perform with the Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust Choir. Photograph: JMEnternational for the Brit awards/Getty Images

I first heard Anywhere Away From Here when Rag’n’Bone Man did a bare-bones acoustic performance prior to release, and it was really powerful: that richly soulful voice and honest lyricism doesn’t need anything more than a piano or guitar. But with the many, many cooks that surround a major label release, bags of cheese and sugar were emptied into the production on the

studio version, then toasted with vocal fry from [Pink](#), who hit the song's emotional beats with all the enthusiasm of a boxercise instructor having to teach in the rain thanks to the pandemic.

But set amid the context of the hopefully waning pandemic, amid an O2 Arena full of frontline heroes, and backed by the estimable key workers of the Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Choir, the song wrenches back its power – the extra choral heft gives it the grandeur it lacks in the recorded version, Rag'n'Bone Man's voice is reliably stirring, and the shots panning across the singing NHS staff are truly moving. It is also [now available to download](#), to benefit NHS charities.

A fitting climax to a show that repeatedly acknowledged the extraordinary work done by key workers during the pandemic – a task that the [Brit awards](#), hosting pop at its most universal and shamelessly emotional, was so well placed to deliver on.

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## Landfill

# **‘It’s terrifying’: the English village overwhelmed by landfill stink**

For miles around Walleys Quarry in Silverdale, people have reported waking up in the night struggling to breathe



Residents of Silverdale protest outside Walleys Quarry landfill site.  
Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

Residents of Silverdale protest outside Walleys Quarry landfill site.  
Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

[Jessica Murray](#)

Tue 11 May 2021 10.09 EDT

It may have been labelled the country’s smelliest village but it is much more than a bad stench from the local landfill making life miserable for the residents of Silverdale in Staffordshire, who have now started crowdfunding for potential legal action against the site.

For miles around Walleys Quarry landfill near Newcastle-under-Lyme, people have reported waking up in the middle of the night struggling to breathe, with itchy eyes and sore throats. Those with asthma have had their medication increased, and some have reported nosebleeds.

On the Facebook campaign group set up to “stop the stink” from the escaping hydrogen sulphide fumes, children pose for pictures next to air purifiers, many donated by local businesses to struggling families. On the worst days, teachers keep pupils indoors at lunchtime while parents are plagued with worry about the potential health effects.

“I just don’t think people can take it much longer,” said Gill Shears, a supply teacher living in nearby Westlands. “My daughter woke up at four o’clock in the morning with a nosebleed, and that’s scary. You worry what you’re putting your children through. Should I take her away? What’s going to happen to us in years to come, are we going to be ill?”

[graphic](#)

“It is a disgusting smell, but it’s far more than that. My asthma got a lot worse so I went on to regular inhalers and now I’m on an oral tablet as a direct result of the landfill fumes,” said Sian Rooney, who also lives in Westlands, more than a mile away. “I’m also extremely concerned about my three-year-old boy who’s developed a night-time cough. It’s terrifying.”

They joined hundreds of residents protesting outside the landfill on Monday, as operations resumed at the site after work to “cap off” areas as requested by the Environment Agency (EA) when emissions breached safe limits.

Residents say the capping has made no difference, with the smell last weekend worse than ever, and have now started looking into taking legal action.

“It’s an environmental catastrophe, and it’s becoming a public health disaster as well. I can’t understand why the EA hasn’t acted more quickly on it,” said the local Conservative MP Aaron Bell. He welcomed a letter from Matt Hancock last week urging the regulator to use the full range of its powers to deal with the “woefully inadequate” site management.



“It’s grinding people down, I think we all feel like we’re under siege because it’s completely casting a cloud over the town. It’s been horrific,” Bell said.



The landfill has been operating since 2005, despite objections to the original application in 1997 from local councils. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

Dr Paul Scott, a GP at Silverdale and Ryecroft practice, said hundreds of patients have come to the surgery reporting issues, from physical symptoms to mental distress. “It’s the sheer numbers of people affected by it and we are probably only getting the tip of the iceberg coming to us,” said Scott, adding the surgery was tagging issues on their system as “environmental pollution” to track the scale of the problem.

“We’re connecting breathing trouble, particularly at night, with it. There’s also people getting bad hay fever-type symptoms: eyes streaming, nose irritated. And then there’s the stress if you live nearby and you’re getting the smell on and off for seven days a week. It’s relentlessly lowering the quality of people’s lives.”

The landfill has been operating since 2005, despite objections to the original application in 1997 from the local councils that were overruled by the then environment secretary, John Prescott. The smell has always been a nuisance



in such a heavily populated area, but since February the problem has escalated.

[What lies beneath: the nature park covering up a dirty secret](#)  
[Read more](#)

Some of the hardest hit are residents of a Traveller site situated just metres away from the quarry, where people feel they are being ignored by authorities.

“I think we’re the closest to it, it’s definitely affected our health since we’ve lived here. I’ve had to move on to inhalers, I could hardly breathe,” said Dorothy Price, 76, who has lived at Cemetery Road caravan park for close to a decade.

A spokesperson for the EA said it had installed monitoring equipment at four locations in the area to collect emissions data and had increased inspections in recent months. It has identified five incidents of non-compliance since January and has “required the operator to take immediate action”. The spokesperson said: “We will continue to hold the site operators to account to improve its management of landfill gas from the site and do everything within our power to bring the site back into compliance with its permits as quickly as possible.”

Red Industries, which bought the landfill in 2016, said it voluntarily curtailed operations at the quarry to speed up capping work, which was now complete. “We recognise that we are hosted by the local communities in which we operate and are acutely aware of their concerns regarding our landfill operations,” a spokesperson said. “Capping, gas management and other engineering works will continue throughout the operational life, as well as in the restoration phase of the landfill, at which point the area will be returned to greenfield.”

## 2021.05.12 - Opinion

- My friend was the victim of a scam – and cuts mean she can do nothing about it
- 2021's Brit awards showed pop can have it all: success, quality and diversity
- 'Buy now, pay later services' are helping to create a new generation of debtors
- It's not just racism and sexism. The Golden Globes have been sunk by sheer stupidity
- Labour can be reformed if it looks outwards, not just inwards
- It's none of my business how often you shower. But I can't help wondering ...
- Mandatory voter ID would dangerously undermine UK democracy
- The nature of ... The Scottish Highland Cow: 'Benevolent vegetarian gods of the very few animals with a fringe'

## OpinionConsumer rights

# My friend was the victim of a scam – and cuts mean she can do nothing about it

[George Monbiot](#)



The state is now unable to tackle fraud even when you track down the offender yourself. As I found out



‘It’s no accident that businesses are taking risks with their workers’ lives: health and safety enforcement has been gutted.’ Photograph: Rui Vieira/PA

‘It’s no accident that businesses are taking risks with their workers’ lives: health and safety enforcement has been gutted.’ Photograph: Rui Vieira/PA

Wed 12 May 2021 01.00 EDT

It was a classic insulation scam. The conman had targeted a vulnerable elderly person, discovered a nonexistent damp problem in the loft, and claimed his product would solve it. In reality, it was useless and dangerous, more likely to cause damp than to remedy it. He had brought a card reader in his briefcase, and extracted the money on the spot.

It was pure luck that the victim knew an investigative journalist. By the time I rang the scammer, I’d discovered enough to put the fear of God into him. A few minutes into our conversation, he panicked and started telling me everything, including the name of the aggregation agency he uses, which collects the phone numbers of vulnerable people, rings them, probes their weak points and then puts them in touch with the appropriate predator, who pays a fee for the service.

As soon as the call finished, he repaid the money. But I wanted to stop him, and the agency, from operating. I now had enough information to help an

enthusiastic investigator take down an entire network. So I tried to contact the county's trading standards office, only to discover that it's impossible. Contact with the public has been outsourced to a charity: [Citizens Advice](#).

The people I spoke to were pleasant and professional. They recorded what I told them and promised they would pass it on. Three weeks later, I phoned again to see how the case was progressing. No, Citizens Advice told me, I had no means of finding out. Trading standards would contact me only if they needed more information. Otherwise, they don't speak to us any more.

In the meantime, I'd discovered that trading standards offices have been cut to the bone across the country. Staff numbers have fallen [by at least 50%](#) since 2010 as council budgets have been slashed. Skilled, experienced officers have been [replaced by unskilled](#), sometimes untrained workers. And much of their time is now spent trying to raise money for the council by offering paid advice to businesses.

It would not surprise me if the information I gave them was filed in the bin. If complainants have no means of discovering whether their cases are being investigated, councils facing [extreme budgetary pressures](#) have little incentive to pursue them. It's a cast-iron rule of officialdom: no accountability is likely to mean no action.

I could have tried a different channel, a national agency called Action Fraud. But this too is a skeleton service. Complaints are screened by AI, and the great majority [are not pursued](#), often for opaque and [inexplicable reasons](#). This system is also unaccountable to complainants.

When I mentioned this case on social media, I was inundated with similar stories: of people running into a wall of unaccountable, opaque bureaucracy when they tried to report the theft of their money. Builders who abscond with deposits, travel companies failing to provide refunds, scammers registering cars in another person's name and racking up fines, fake letting agents, predatory landlords, crooks selling phoney electronics, phishing outfits: all may now steal with impunity because the systems that were meant to stop them have fallen over. Those who fail to reclaim their money find there is no recourse. If you snatch someone's bag, you might feel the

hand of the law on your shoulder; if you empty their bank account, you have little to fear. So guess where the crims are directing their efforts.

Sometimes austerity involves sudden rupture: an immediate loss of services that we notice and protest against. More often it's death by a thousand cuts: incremental destruction of the public realm, leaving us with outsourced, inaccessible, dysfunctional services. Successive Conservative governments have made these cuts in the name of efficiency. We experience this marvellous efficiency as The Four Seasons plays on an endless loop while we wait to talk to someone in a call centre with no power to act, subcontracted to someone else in a Kafkaesque nightmare of privatised, inscrutable bureaucracy, unable to resolve our problems or meet our needs. Nothing works any more.

[Labour's chance will come when Johnson's bogus promises start to crumble](#)  
[| Polly Toynbee](#)  
[Read more](#)

None of these cuts and dysfunctions were necessary: they are all political choices. It's no accident that workers are being illegally ripped off: minimum-wage inspectors are now so scarce that businesses, on average, can expect a visit [once every 250 years](#). It's no accident that businesses are taking risks with their workers' lives: health and safety enforcement [has been gutted](#). It's no accident that the Environment Agency appears to have [stopped prosecuting](#) river pollution by farmers, or that Natural England can [no longer prevent](#) illegal habitat destruction: both have lost around [two-thirds of their funding](#) over the past 10 years. It's no accident that London has become the world's [money-laundering capital](#). It's the business model. In most cases, the laws required to protect us exist. But without enforcement, they're a dead letter.

I doubt it began as a deliberate strategy, but if it were, it could scarcely be bettered. You position yourself as the party of law and order and fulminate about crime. But, incrementally and almost invisibly, you destroy the state's capacity to tackle it. A cynical politician might note that the more vulnerable to crime we are, and the more fearful and insecure we become, the more their brand of rightwing demagoguery will prosper. Heaven forbid we should be governed by such a person.

- George Monbiot is a Guardian columnist

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |



## [Brit awards](#)

# 2021's Brit awards showed pop can have it all: success, quality and diversity

[Alexis Petridis](#)



The industry acknowledged megastars but didn't solely reward commercial success, and is finally nurturing more than a small handful of female artists



Dua Lipa picks up the first of her two Brit awards. Photograph: JMEnternational for the Brit awards/Getty Images

Dua Lipa picks up the first of her two Brit awards. Photograph: JMEnternational for the Brit awards/Getty Images

Wed 12 May 2021 01.00 EDT

You could, if you were so inclined, look on this year's Brit winners as a reaction to last year's. The gender disparity in the 2020 nominations – in the mixed-gender categories, one British female artist got a nod in a field of 25 available slots – overshadowed the event itself: “In the spirit of sustainability, the Brits have been recycling all sorts of excuses for why there were so few women nominated,” offered comedian Jack Whitehall, not on a topical TV panel show, but in the middle of hosting the awards themselves. But this year, at a ceremony visibly struggling with the remaining Covid restrictions – an audience of key workers, flecked with empty seats, that appeared to be miles away from the action; the weird sight of the people doling out the awards standing two metres away from each other, as if they'd had a furious row shortly before coming onstage – six out of seven winners in mixed gender categories were female: only Harry Styles' British single award for the ubiquitous Watermelon Sugar broke the trend.

There's doubtless someone drafting an angry tweet about woke box-ticking, but if so, they won't have been paying attention to the charts over the last year. The Brits exist to reward success – you can be nominated for most of the awards only if you've had a Top 40 album or two Top 20 singles in the eligibility period – and so this correction is more a reflection of the quality of female artists that have succeeded in the last year.

You could have predicted that Dua Lipa would walk off with the British album and solo female awards long before she took the stage in a union flag outfit that appeared to nod towards the Spice Girls' famed 1997 Brit awards performance: her album *Future Nostalgia* was a transatlantic platinum-seller that also went to No 1 in 15 countries and is currently enjoying its 58th consecutive week on the UK albums chart, and that sense of major, cross-generational pop success certainly will have won her votes. But its win was sealed by the quality of the material: a smart, hook-packed fusion of disco and pop that bore the influence of Prince, sampled INXS, name-dropped a [mid-20th century architect](#) and spawned hit after hit.



Arlo Parks, who won the breakthrough artist award. Photograph: JMEInternational for the Brit awards/Getty Images

Breakthrough artist winner [Arlo Parks](#) also showed that when it comes to winning, you need more than just sales – she beat the much more

commercially successful Joel Corry, Celeste and Young T & Bugsey thanks to her debut album *Collapsed in Sunbeams*, which united critics and a passionate fanbase with its unhurried, conversational lyrical tone and commercial-but-fresh retooling of classic soul and – more unexpectedly – 90s trip-hop. Of the British rappers nominated for British male, AJ Tracey and Headie One have had the biggest hit singles, but J Hus won for his second album *Big Conspiracy*: more pointed and introspective than his Brit-nominated debut *Common Sense*, but equally musically eclectic – Afrobeats, dancehall, scrabbling free-blowing jazz sax – with lyrics running the gamut from sex rhymes to examinations of the legacy of colonialism.

Taylor Swift earned the intermittently awarded global icon award, and is deserving, not just for recording two hugely successful albums while in lockdown. Her bullish response to a dispute over the ownership of the masters of her first six albums – she plans to rerecord the lot – was a huge media victory that played on longstanding public sympathy for artists held to be manipulated by an uncaring music industry: a hugely impressive chess move that, with her first re-recorded album, *Fearless*, earned her yet another No 1.



The Weeknd performing at the 2021 Brits. Photograph: Richard Young/REX/Shutterstock

Megastars dazzled in the international categories, too – the Weeknd, provider of the inescapable lockdown soundtrack *Blinding Lights*, was rewarded with the international male and [Billie Eilish](#), who earned a million Instagram likes in six minutes for her *Vogue* cover last week, was given international female. But again, star wattage wasn't the only factor: between them they released music that set new high bars for both introversion and extroversion in pop. Haim, meanwhile, beat the world's biggest band BTS in the international group category, thanks to their third album, *Women in Music Pt III*, a snarkily-titled return to form that blended sunlit pop rock with powerfully confessional lyrics.

As you might expect for an awards ceremony at least partly predicated on chart success, it's all a fair reflection of where the pop industry currently stands. The switch in gender disparity suggests the industry might finally be putting as much effort into nurturing bright female artists as it has the Lewis Capaldis and Rag'n'Bone Men of recent years.

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## Opinion**Borrowing & debt**

# **‘Buy now, pay later services’ are helping to create a new generation of debtors**

Kitty Drake

Easy payment schemes such as Klarna make accruing debt from online shopping seem like a form of self-care



‘Products that were previously unaffordable to many are now placed tantalisingly within reach.’ A delivery from Asos, an online clothing company. Photograph: True Images/Alamy Stock Photo

‘Products that were previously unaffordable to many are now placed tantalisingly within reach.’ A delivery from Asos, an online clothing company. Photograph: True Images/Alamy Stock Photo

Wed 12 May 2021 03.00 EDT

I opened a PayPal credit account in January which I use to buy things secretly on the internet, usually in the dead of night. My purchases are small

and mad but they are also aspirational: a miniature gong; a leopard-print hat; a candle that says “ciao” on it. I only move one thumb when I shop, but in my head I am whizzing through time and space. I am the woman wearing the leopard-print hat and lighting the candle. I am now in several hundred pounds’ worth of debt.

PayPal is just one company that lets you “buy now, pay later” (BNPL). Services including Clearpay, Laybuy, Openpay and the [industry leader, Klarna](#), known for its pastel graphics and marketing targeted at young women, allow customers to either delay the whole bill for their chosen item or stagger payments. Now [worth £2.7bn](#), the BNPL sector nearly quadrupled in size in 2020 and an estimated [5 million people](#) in the UK have purchased with BNPL since the beginning of the pandemic. Providers aren’t required to run affordability checks on customers, because the sector isn’t currently regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), although regulation is expected to arrive soon. There are few checks and balances to verify how much a person’s income is when they use BNPL (the application for PayPal credit took me less than four minutes).

The easy availability of this line of credit makes BNPL seem less like a new way to accrue debt and more like a uniquely pleasurable way to shop, where the experience of parting with money is obscured by the invitation to pay in three instalments. Klarna ran a series of Instagram adverts in 2020 that have since [been banned](#) by the Advertising Standards Agency for linking the deferment of payment with the lifting of low mood in lockdown. The posts show influencers using their new purchases, with captions such as “getting dressed up can be a total mood booster... #KlarnaIt”. Retail therapy is nothing new, but what sets BNPL apart from traditional shopping is how it repackages debt into a form of self-care.

The idea that BNPL is a way to invest in your emotional health is a seductive one. One friend, who lost her job during the pandemic, tells me she uses Klarna because it makes her feel “sensible”: “I massage my face and I have images of those beautiful girls on Instagram very slowly and elegantly massaging cream into their faces. They’re so lovely, the way they talk is so lovely, and everything is glistening and gleaming.” My friend likes being able to pay for products (mostly serums) in £45 chunks, and she



enjoys the fantasy of picturing herself as the kind of person for whom a £140 serum is attainable. “In reality, my life is a pit.”

Shopping has always been an exercise in fantasy (with this new chair/dress/eye-mask, who will I be?). But until credit cards arrived, living this dream required the consumer to submit to the pain of actually parting with money. Dr Joe Deville, a specialist in debt and credit at Lancaster University, sees BNPL as a step beyond the credit card that numbs consumers to the financial consequences of their purchases. “For the past 60 years the credit card industry has been constantly trying to make this moment of transaction as smooth as possible. But ‘buy now, pay later’ is so smooth, it doesn’t even require a proper credit check.”

This smoothness is delightful because it’s deceptive. The balance I owe for the hat and the candle (and many other things) won’t appear on my bank statement; I will only have to see it if I log in to my PayPal account. Until I can bring myself to look at it, it will be as if my debt does not exist.

Critics have likened BNPL to Wonga, the controversial payday lender that [went bust in 2018](#). But the reality is more complicated. Wonga’s interest rates were extortionate (at one point more than 5,000% APR), while Klarna, Clearpay and Laybuy charge no interest at all. The danger of BNPL is more subtle: it creates a new generation of debtors who may not even realise they are in debt. If you reach your limit with Klarna, you can put a payment on Clearpay, or PayPal, and bounce blissfully between them. A [recent report](#) into the sector by the FCA found it would be relatively easy to amass £1,000 of BNPL debt doubling up on lenders in this way. And while BNPL companies won’t charge you interest on credit, they could, in the event you fail to pay, pass your details to a debt collection agency. The routine use of BNPL, speculates Deville, “will for some users in due course lead to debts that they cannot manage, and perhaps will then push them into more expensive, subprime means of borrowing”.

[Instagram has looked deep into my soul – and I really don’t like what it has found there](#) | [Zoe Williams](#)  
[Read more](#)

It is worth noting that this new generation of debtors is overwhelmingly female: 75% of BNPL users are women, 25% are aged 18-24, and 90% of transactions involve fashion and footwear, according to FCA data. Self-improvement is an endless pursuit, and now we have “endless” credit to pursue it with. You can buy now and pay later for your Asos order, your retinol face cream, your salicylic acid serum. The seamless integration of this kind of credit into the online checkout encourages you to run your body like a small business. Products that were previously unaffordable to many are now placed tantalisingly within reach. It is even possible to [Klarna your botox](#).

The thrill of hunting and tracking an online purchase is the tunnel vision it affords you: if I can only have this hat/candle, I will emerge from lockdown transformed. As a result of fewer opportunities to shop during the lockdown, [£12bn of debt was repaid](#) in the second quarter of 2020, but this was mainly by higher income households. The explosion of BNPL tells a different story: women, many of them young, first-time borrowers, are accumulating debt in the name of self-improvement. Now lockdown is over and human contact is back, I hope to spend less time in my bed buying things. Perhaps, after my tiny gong arrives, I will stop.

- Kitty Drake is a writer and editor based in London

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## [Movies](#)

# It's not just racism and sexism. The Golden Globes have been sunk by sheer stupidity

[Peter Bradshaw](#)



The preposterous Hollywood Foreign Press Association gravy train might have chugged on for ever if its members had just swallowed their pride and done more for diversity



‘Drenched in antediluvian attitudes’ ... the HFPA administers the Golden Globes. Photograph: Robyn Beck/AFP/Getty Images

‘Drenched in antediluvian attitudes’ ... the HFPA administers the Golden Globes. Photograph: Robyn Beck/AFP/Getty Images

Tue 11 May 2021 11.20 EDT

An [investigative report by the Los Angeles Times](#) into the Hollywood Foreign Press Association, that notoriously rackety organisation which administers the Golden Globes, has shown an eminently corruptible body drenched in antediluvian attitudes; this has resulted in NBC [cancelling its TV coverage of next year’s ceremony and Tom Cruise handing back the three Globes](#) he has personally won over the years.

[Golden Globes backlash: Tom Cruise hands back awards and NBC drops broadcast](#)

[Read more](#)

The HFPA is famed for having a bizarre voting membership of 87 people; some write for credible publications, but most are a hilarious ragbag of sub-Norma-Desmond has-beens with the most reactionary worldview outside Mar-a-Lago, including freelancers, part-time writers, bit-part actors, former beauty queens and bodybuilders who have lucked into LA’s juiciest club,

which pays its committee members handsomely from the TV rights income, allowing them to get luxurious junkets and to “scalp” their assigned tickets to the awards ceremony itself for tens of thousands of dollars.

It is really not a critical organisation, but the owner of what was recently a very lucrative TV franchise, developed over decades, shrewdly positioned as a curtain-raiser to the Academy Awards, fanatically protected and run by a fractious, querulous bunch of insiders. Their gravy train might have chugged on for ever, despite the open secret of the HFPA’s absurdity, had it not been for the openly outrageous junkets in which HFPA members were whisked off to the set of Netflix’s [Emily in Paris](#) and the simple fact that the HFPA had no black people in its ranks, combined with this year’s apparent indifference to some TV shows, elsewhere lauded, such as Michaela Coel’s [I May Destroy You](#).

[Scarlett Johansson joins criticism of Golden Globes body amid accusations of racism and sexism](#)

[Read more](#)

And here is the crunch. As well as [accusations of racism and sexism and greed](#), what has sunk the HFPA’s 87 is their pure stupidity. If they could only have swallowed their pride, and done more work on diversity like the Academy, they might have maintained their customary position just below the indignation tipping point.

Because the awful truth, not readily acknowledged by those expressing saucer-eyed outrage at the HFPA today, is that until this year its actual results, the movies and TV shows it was rewarding, were really not much different to the ones being garlanded by the Academy or the critics’ organisations. [This year it gave Globes to](#) Andra Day, Daniel Kaluuya, Chloé Zhao – and indeed the late, great Chadwick Boseman, who was passed over by the Academy.

And as for those bribes – well, there’s a famous phrase about the number of people necessary to tango. People are outraged about the HFPA voters taking the freebies from the studios, but how about the studios shovelling out the freebies? Is anyone boycotting them? No: they are the people leading the charge against the HFPA. And NBC cancelling its TV coverage isn’t that

dramatic, considering the steep drop in ratings this year.

The Hollywood Foreign Press Association was always a preposterous organisation; if it is slapped into some semblance of humility and common sense by these events, that will be all to the good. And perhaps it will also be a reality check for awards ceremonies generally.

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

## OpinionLabour

# Labour can be reformed if it looks outwards, not just inwards

Peter Mandelson

The party gains from its trade union links with working people, but it's damaged by union leaders who use it as their political plaything



‘New digital businesses are fast emerging, and their impact on employment rights and practices needs balancing with the welcome new jobs they create.’

Photograph: peterhowell/Getty Images/iStockphoto

‘New digital businesses are fast emerging, and their impact on employment rights and practices needs balancing with the welcome new jobs they create.’

Photograph: peterhowell/Getty Images/iStockphoto

Tue 11 May 2021 14.00 EDT

Earlier this week [I wrote that](#) “hard left factions seeking to control our largest trade unions should not have a guaranteed place in the governing



counsels of the party”. I did not realise that affirmation would come so quickly from Aslef’s general secretary Mick Whelan, who chairs the national trade union-Labour organisation, TULO. He demanded that [Keir Starmer repudiate me](#) and make clear that there would be no attempts to break or water down the union link; and he was instantly supported by fellow Corbynista John McDonnell.

Of course, I was not attacking the trade union link but the power of hard left factions that abuse it. I clearly touched a raw nerve. The [Labour](#) party gains from its trade union links with working people, but it is damaged by trade union leaders, such as Whelan and Unite’s Len McCluskey, who use [Labour](#) as a political plaything to pursue their ultra-leftism, which is completely unrepresentative both of their own members’ and [Labour](#) members’ views.

This is why Labour needs party reform. If we are going to flourish once more as a party that speaks for ordinary, decent working people like my former constituents in Hartlepool, as I desperately want it to do, Labour needs once again to reflect, and be a political extension of, those people, their values, their patriotism and their demands for social justice.

For too long the Labour party has behaved as if ritual incantations of the “labour tradition”, appearances behind union banners and invoking the spirit of past struggle were enough to maintain our efficacy in the eyes of working people. No wonder they have lost interest in what we have to say, because we sound old-fashioned and insult their intelligence.

They know automation and other technological innovation is transforming how we work, manufacture and provide services, and yet too many in Labour seem buried in an industrial past. New digital businesses are fast emerging, and their impact on employment rights and practices needs balancing with the welcome new jobs they create. Working people are not just experiencing this technological revolution in their jobs but in how health, education and other public services are being delivered. They are not Luddites, but they also look to a progressive party such as Labour to ensure that democratic values and social rights are embedded in these life-changing technologies, so that they reduce rather than entrench inequality.

The new [policy review](#) that Anneliese Dodds is going to steer should draw on the thinking of other social democrats in the US and Europe and be genuinely forward-looking and innovative, not just split the difference between old and new. There is vast scope for new policies to make a profound electoral impact if Labour has the courage and confidence to embrace the future. For example, an associated revolution in vocational and digital skills and lifelong training needs to accompany the dawn of the new technological era and must be incorporated into a radically reformed education system.

Boris Johnson's luck will not last for ever. Politics isn't like that. The vaccine delivery is the principal thing propping up the government's popularity. Labour should draw important policy lessons from this for industrial strategy. The vaccine resulted from government investment in top university research, backing for high-risk technology ventures, nimble, accelerated regulation, manufacture by the private sector and distribution through the NHS.

This was hardly a model of pure capitalism – more a demonstration of the power of public procurement and dynamic government intervention across the public and private sectors in an open and international economy. Labour should be applying this model, at scale, to similar UK market and supply-chain opportunities linked to the transitions under way in life sciences, mobility, AI and clean energy.

This needs to be combined with our clear focus on regional devolution. The government talks about “levelling up”, but it does not realise that you can't level up from the top down: local foundations of growth and inclusiveness need genuine transfers of powers, people and money.

The failure to deliver on social care, raising taxes while holding down spending rises on public services including the NHS, and deficient “levelling up”, as well as the independence battle in Scotland, are going to become major tests both of Johnson's credibility and Starmer's skills in forensic attack. Disappointment on any of these issues will puncture the prime minister's braggadocio.

Labour needs first-rank politicians capable of going for Johnson on these and other Tory vulnerabilities. A different party culture and rulebook needs to protect them from party factionalism so that they can face the country and not just the membership. The members themselves need protection from harassment and bullying, and the candidates they select to fight future key seats need better to reflect our communities rather than the choices of union barons. Party activists need to be out talking to voters, not stuck in endless meetings arguing over minutes and matters arising. This programme of party reform is urgent, alongside policy changes that ensure we have a manifesto that wins voters over and does not just make the faithful feel virtuous.

We hold victory at the next election in our own hands. We can either talk about change while wanting everything to remain the same or we can face up to the task of transformation on which our success depends. This requires the whole of the party closing ranks behind change and giving Starmer his chance to lead so that the party we love does not lose, lose, lose, lose and lose again following our 2010 defeat.

- Lord Mandelson is president of the Policy Network. He was the Labour MP for Hartlepool from 1992 to 2004

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## OpinionHygiene

**It's none of my business how often you shower. But I can't help wondering ...**

[Arwa Mahdawi](#)



Rarely a week goes by without a new study announcing people have stopped washing. I know I should ignore them – but I'm gripped



‘Even before the pandemic, people got very worked up about the “rules” of good hygiene.’ Photograph: Peter Cade/Getty Images

‘Even before the pandemic, people got very worked up about the “rules” of good hygiene.’ Photograph: Peter Cade/Getty Images

Wed 12 May 2021 02.00 EDT

“Don’t admit to anything dirty, OK?” my partner cautioned when I told her what I was writing about. I’ll try not to. However, I do want to raise a mild stink about how weirdly invested we all seem to be in the shower habits of strangers. Each week brings a flurry of new articles about how the pandemic has turned us all into dirt-monsters – normally pegged to some supposedly shocking survey results. [Last November](#), for example, the media were abuzz about an Ipsos Mori study that found a quarter of Britons were less likely to shower daily than at the start of the pandemic. In February, a [YouGov survey](#) found 17% of adults in Britain were showering less often than in the Before Times. This week, a company called VoucherCodes came out with a survey that found [half of Britons don’t shower daily](#). Judging by the fact that voucher sites are now running studies on the matter, it seems there is an endless appetite for this kind of hygiene-related content.

Even before the pandemic, people got very worked up about the “rules” of good hygiene. In 2019, for example, there was a [heated debate](#) on Twitter

about whether white people were less likely to wash their legs in the shower and whether a lack of leg-washing was incredibly gross. The argument spilled over to mainstream media: [Jenna Bush Hager](#), George W Bush's daughter, pondered the question on primetime TV. Taylor Swift got involved, [telling Ellen DeGeneres](#) that she thought shaving your legs was basically washing your legs.

You think not washing your legs is gross? An increasing number of people in the rich world seem to be turning not showering into a core part of their identity. Influencers like the Paleo Mom, for example, have boasted about only using water to wash, despite sweaty gym sessions. "I don't smell," [she has said](#). We will have to take her word for it. Similarly, Stella McCartney has said she is "[not a fan](#)" of cleaning clothes. Which is the sort of thing you can only boast about if you're rich.

OK, I don't know what happened here. I started this piece trying to explain that we shouldn't judge people for their washing habits. Now I'm judging people for their washing habits. I think I now understand why we're so sucked into shower debates. When the world seems to be falling apart, personal hygiene drama is a welcome distraction. It's good clean fun.

- Arwa Mahdawi is a Guardian columnist

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## [Opinion](#)**Electoral reform**

# Mandatory voter ID would dangerously undermine UK democracy

[Jess Garland](#)

The best electoral systems are the most inclusive. This government plan will lock out many legitimate voters



Votes for the London mayoral election being counted at Olympia, London, 7 May. Photograph: Dan Kitwood/Getty Images

Votes for the London mayoral election being counted at Olympia, London, 7 May. Photograph: Dan Kitwood/Getty Images

Tue 11 May 2021 08.46 EDT

Last week millions of voters across Britain went to the ballot box in a [bumper set](#) of elections. But government plans to restrict access to the ballot box could mean that Thursday's elections will have been among the last of their kind to be fair and free in the UK.



Proposals to introduce [mandatory voter ID](#), as unveiled in today's Queen's speech, are a dangerous attack on our democratic rights that could lead to millions of legitimate voters being locked out of the polling station on election day. It is estimated that implementing the proposals could cost up to £20m per election, a hefty price tag for an unnecessary policy, and an expensive distraction from the real issues that affect our democracy and our country more widely.

On the face of it, requiring voters to show ID at polling stations may seem like a sensible policy. A necessary step, even, to ensure that those casting a vote have the right to do so. But while the government claims the potential for fraud is there, the evidence it exists is hard to find.

Widespread voter fraud at the ballot box would be easy to see. We'd find hundreds of people turning up to vote on polling day to find a ballot had already been cast in their name – yet few such claims exist.

Of the 595 alleged [cases of electoral fraud](#) investigated by the police in 2019 only 33 related to voter impersonation at a polling station – that is just 0.000057% of the over 58m [votes cast](#) in all the elections that took place that year.

Quite apart from the absence of any widespread voter impersonation, there are clear problems with forcing people to produce ID before they vote. According to official figures, 3.5 million people do not have access to photo ID in the UK and 11 million [don't have a passport or a driving licence](#). Unlike most countries where ID is required to vote, the UK has no free or low-cost ID option. In fact, in many of the countries used by the government as examples of successful voter-ID schemes, an ID is actually mandatory already, meaning everyone automatically has what they need to cast a ballot.

Many of the groups who are likely to be affected are already among society's most marginalised. Earlier this year, three leading US civil rights groups [criticised the UK government's plans](#), highlighting how ID laws disproportionately affect people from poorer and marginalised communities.

It's no wonder that opposition to voter ID has brought together a wide coalition, from homeless charities, groups representing elderly people and

LGBT+ campaigners, to democracy organisations such as the Electoral Reform Society; each concerned that these proposals could shut out millions of legitimate voters from the ballot box.

Even senior conservatives are opposed to the proposals, with former Brexit secretary David Davis [describing the plans](#) as an “illiberal solution in pursuit of a nonexistent problem” and urging the government to drop its “pointless proposals”.

And Davis is right: this policy is a solution in search of a problem. Voting is safe and secure in the UK – the government has said so itself.

In March the Cabinet Office published a joint statement from the UK, Scottish and Welsh governments which declared “the United Kingdom is world-renowned for running elections of the highest standards in which [voters can have full confidence](#).” A far cry from the Cabinet Office’s recent support for the proposals that they claim “combat the inexcusable [potential for voter fraud](#) in our current system.”

While the need for mandatory voter ID remains difficult to prove with genuine evidence, its potential pitfalls are far-reaching. Requiring photo ID introduces a new complexity to the voting process. Much like how the government’s coronavirus restrictions forced shopkeepers and hospitality staff to police mask-wearing and monitor group sizes, so too will these laws place polling staff’s judgment between voters and the ballot box.

These proposals would mean poll workers being forced to decide who gets a vote and who doesn’t. It could see many turning away legitimate voters from casting their ballots because their face shape has changed too much since their passport photo, or their new beard makes it hard to tell if it is in fact the same person as their driving licence shows.

It would place a huge burden on already strained electoral administrators to enforce these new laws and could result in lengthy delays and US-style lines outside polling stations as people are forced to queue for hours to cast their ballot – providing of course they have the right kind of ID.

Now it may still seem strange for a democracy organisation to oppose a policy such as this. But protecting voter access to the ballot box is vital in protecting our democracy too. More inclusive systems have better electoral integrity, and if the government wants to properly address the threats to our politics it must look beyond the ballot box.

The truth is that our democracy is under threat, but not from people wearing fancy dress or cunning disguises at the ballot box.

There remain dozens of loopholes in our electoral laws – loopholes that make our elections and voters themselves vulnerable to corporate donations, dark ads and disinformation, and the laws that govern our elections are woefully out of date. When it comes to electoral fraud, it is far more often campaigners and parties behind the breaches than the voters themselves.

It is disappointing that this Queen's speech misses the opportunity to pledge real action on the glaring inadequacies of our electoral law, instead going after ordinary voters through their misguided mandatory voter ID plans.

Instead of suppressing the rights of ordinary voters, the government should focus on combating the real threats to our democratic system and bring forward proposals to ensure the integrity of our elections that we can all get behind.

- Dr Jess Garland is director of policy and research, Electoral Reform Society

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## The nature of ...Environment

# A Scottish Highland Cow: ‘On yonder hill there stood a coo’

[Helen Sullivan](#)



They are benevolent vegetarian gods. They watch over, through shielded eyes, the very few animals that have a fringe.



‘Among the most common Google search terms for highland cows is simply, “fluffy cows”.’ Photograph: Chris Dorney/Alamy

‘Among the most common Google search terms for highland cows is simply, “fluffy cows”.’ Photograph: Chris Dorney/Alamy

Tue 11 May 2021 13.30 EDT

William Topaz McGonagall, the “[worst poet in the history of the English language](#)”, is responsible for some of my mother’s favourite words in the world to say. She delivers them in a decent-enough Scottish accent, and she does so whenever the opportunity presents itself: “On yonder hill there stood a coo / It’s no’ there noo / It must’a shif’ted”. When I hear this rhyme I picture a Scottish highland cow, its coat waving in the icy flaff.

McGonagall, who has a certain genius for coos, unfortunately also felt moved to capture in rhyme disasters, “calamities” and freak accidents. He chose to pay tribute to the people who died in the 1879 Tay Bridge disaster thus:

Beautiful railway bridge of the silv’ry Tay  
Alas! I am very sorry to say  
That ninety lives have been taken away

On the last sabbath day of 1879  
Which will be remember'd for a very long time.”

[A singing fish: it glows green during courtship and looks like Boris Johnson's hardship face | Helen Sullivan](#)

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My mother's house contains several cow-themed artworks. A ginger cow on a hill, against the sort of dark blue daytime sky that looks very deep, as though it is constantly zooming in, pixelating and sharpening. Once, Picasso's 11 charcoal bulls were exhibited in Johannesburg. The lithographs grow more abstract as they progress. Afterwards, my mother welded a great dane-sized, black steel copy of the most simplified bull and put it in the garden to graze.

My father prefers Robert Burns, and I heard the words “cow'rin tim'rous beastie!” applied to many creatures before I knew the beastie was a mouse. When I think of him saying it, I think of him putting down an injured bird. He used a brick. I remember each time I read DH Lawrence's poem about the snake – “He lifted his head from his drinking, as cattle do, / And looked at me vaguely, as drinking cattle do,” that he throws a log at it in the end.

In South Africa, when you think of cattle, it might be of the smell of their dusty hides in the hot sun. A Scottish highland cow – a heilan coo – with its long hair, wet from dew or rain or sea spray, must smell quite different. Among the most common Google search terms for these cattle is simply, “fluffy cows”. They have long, shaggy coats – two layers. One layer is oily, like a duck's feathers. Their horns, which they use to scrape away at snow to get at food, are long and thin. Their legs are short and fat.

They are benevolent vegetarian gods. They watch over, through shielded eyes, the very few animals that have a fringe (bangs). They spread wild flower seeds, they are friendly to people, they are “[an excellent choice for conservation grazing](#)”. They have babies: wee heilan coos.





A highland cow grazes in a field near Pitlochry, Scotland. Photograph: Russell Cheyne/Reuters

I have never been to [Scotland](#), but there are highland cows living in Australia. I saw a one on a hill in Byron Bay: it was all alone. Its shiny nose was like a bar of pink soap, almost translucent, so healthy did it seem. There was brown mud around it and there were lush green hills behind it, and despite the heat, it didn't look flustered. It stood proudly, thinking of [Scotland](#), perhaps, while its hair waved slightly in the breeze.

*"[The Nature of](#) ... " is a column by Helen Sullivan dedicated to interesting animals, insects, plants and natural phenomena. Is there an intriguing creature or particularly lively plant you think would delight our readers? Let us know on Twitter [@helenrsullivan](#) or via email: [helen.sullivan@theguardian.com](mailto:helen.sullivan@theguardian.com)*

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## 2021.05.12 - Around the world

- ['We must speak the truth' Liz Cheney defiant ahead of ouster from top Republican job](#)
- [Capitol breach Ex-Pentagon chief will defend military's response](#)
- [New Zealand Māori party co-leader ejected from parliament after performing haka in racism row](#)
- [Pacific footballfish Rarely seen deep sea fish washes up in California](#)
- [Caroline Crouch Greece offers €300,000 reward for killers who strangled British-born student in front of baby](#)
- [Atlanta spa shootings Man accused of killing eight people indicted on murder charges](#)
- [Cryptocurrencies Goldman Sachs executive quits after making millions from Dogecoin](#)
- [Russia Nine dead in school shooting in Kazan, say officials](#)
- [Afghanistan UK diplomat says few signs Taliban willing to engage in peace talks](#)
- [Germany Conservative candidate to replace Angela Merkel accused of allowing antisemitism](#)
- [Revealed Biden administration holding tens of thousands of migrant children](#)

## [Republicans](#)

# **‘We must speak the truth’: Liz Cheney defiant in speech ahead of ouster from top Republican job**

The Wyoming representative stands by her opposition to Trump’s election lies as she prepares to be removed from No 3 House role

01:53

Liz Cheney castigates Republican colleagues for backing Trump – video

[\*Maanvi Singh\*](#)

[\*@maanvissingh\*](#)

Wed 12 May 2021 02.09 EDT

On the eve of a vote almost certain to remove her from a leadership role in the Republican party, a defiant Liz Cheney embraced her fall from party grace and offered a final appeal to her colleagues: “We must speak the truth.”

Republicans are poised to remove Cheney from her House leadership position over her refusal to support Donald Trump’s [“big lie”](#) that last year’s election was stolen from him. Cheney, a Wyoming representative who hails from a Republican political dynasty, was one of 10 Republicans who voted to impeach Trump for “incitement of insurrection” following the deadly 6 January attack on the Capitol.

[Republican Joni Ernst accuses party of cancel culture over Liz Cheney ousting](#)

[Read more](#)

In the weeks since, her assertions that the 2020 elections were valid, and that Trump was wrong to stir up supporters who rioted in his name, have driven a

wedge between her and fellow [Republicans](#) who remain loyal to the former president.

In a speech on the House floor on Tuesday evening, Cheney was steadfast. “I will not sit back and watch in silence while others lead our party down a path that abandons the rule of law and joins the president’s crusade to undermine our democracy,” she said.

Wearing a pin replicating George Washington’s battle flag, Cheney justified her positions by referencing her time at the US state department, comparing the Capitol attack to events she’s seen in authoritarian countries.

A staunch, lifelong conservative and the daughter of former vice president Dick Cheney, she is almost certain to be replaced on Wednesday as the No 3 House Republican by Elise Stefanik, a New York representative who holds more moderate views on most matters, bar the validity of the last elections.

“This is not about policy. This is not about partisanship,” Cheney said. “This is about our duty as Americans.”

Critics have said that Cheney’s appeals for a fair democracy sound hypocritical, considering that she voted against the For the People Act to protect voting rights, and against enfranchising Washington, DC residents.

Cheney’s fate is a sign of Trump’s enduring grip on the Republican party. Her ouster comes as Arizona Republicans carry through a [sham audit](#) of the votes in Maricopa county, Arizona, employing a firm called Cyber Ninjas to investigate conspiracy theories including the false claim that ballots with traces of bamboo were smuggled in from Asia.

As part of her swan song on the House floor, Cheney referred to Trump as a “threat” and reiterated: “The election is over. That is the rule of law.”

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## US Capitol breach

# Ex-Pentagon chief will defend military's Capitol riots response to Congress

Christopher Miller will testify that he was concerned sending troops to the Capitol would cause a repeat of Kent State shootings



Christopher Miller will testify before Congress on Wednesday. Photograph: Michael Reynolds/EPA

Christopher Miller will testify before Congress on Wednesday. Photograph: Michael Reynolds/EPA

*Associated Press*

Tue 11 May 2021 17.18 EDT

Donald Trump's acting defense secretary during the 6 January Capitol riots plans to tell Congress that he was concerned in the days before the insurrection that sending troops to the building would fan fears of a military

coup and could cause a repeat of the deadly Kent State shootings, according to a copy of prepared remarks obtained by the Associated Press.

Christopher Miller's testimony is aimed at defending the Pentagon's response to the chaos of the day and rebutting broad criticism that military forces were too slow to arrive even as pro-Trump rioters violently breached the building and stormed inside. He casts himself as a deliberate leader who was determined that the military have only limited involvement, a perspective he says was shaped by criticism of the aggressive response to the civil unrest that roiled American cities months earlier, as well as decades-old episodes that ended in violence.

[Republican says party leader dismissed his warnings of Capitol violence](#)  
[Read more](#)

The defense department, he will tell members of the House oversight committee on Wednesday, has "an extremely poor record in supporting domestic law enforcement", including during civil rights and anti-Vietnam war demonstrations in the 1960s and 1970s.

"And some 51 years ago, on May 4, 1970, Ohio national guard troops fired at demonstrators at Kent State University and killed four American civilians," Miller will say, adding, "I was committed to avoiding repeating these scenarios."

He will also deny that Trump, criticized for failing to forcefully condemn the rioters, had any involvement in the defense department's response and will say that Trump had even suggested that 10,000 troops might be needed for 6 January.

Miller, expected to testify alongside the former acting attorney general Jeffrey Rosen and District of Columbia police chief, Robert Contee III, will be the most senior defense department official to participate in congressional hearings on the riots. The sessions have been characterized by finger-pointing by officials across agencies about missed intelligence, poor preparations and an inadequate law enforcement response.

The Capitol police have faced criticism for being badly overmatched, the FBI for failing to share with sufficient urgency intelligence suggesting a possible “war” at the Capitol, and the defense department for an hours-long delay in getting support to the complex despite the violent, deadly chaos unfolding on TV.

Rosen, for his part, is expected to tell lawmakers that the justice department “took appropriate precautions” ahead of the riot, putting tactical and other elite units on standby after local police reports indicated that 10,000 to 30,000 people were expected at rallies and protests, according to prepared remarks obtained by the AP.

Miller’s testimony will amount to the most thorough explanation of Pentagon actions after months of criticism that it took hours for the national guard to arrive.

In his remarks, he defends his resistance to a heavy military response as being shaped by public “hysteria” about the possibility of a military coup or concerns that the military might be used to help overturn the election results.

Democrats have signaled that they intend to press Miller on why it took so long for the national guard to arrive despite urgent plans for help. Miller will contend that those complaints are unjustified, though he also concedes that the guard was not rushed to the scene – a decision that he maintains was intentional.



Donald Trump supporters storm the Capitol in Washington. Photograph: John Minchillo/AP

“This isn’t a video game where you can move forces with a flick of the thumb or a movie that glosses over the logistical challenges and the time required to coordinate and synchronize with the multitude of other entities involved, or with complying with the important legal requirements involved in the use of such forces,” he will say.

Even after the guard was requested, he said he felt compelled to send them “in with a plan to not only succeed but that would spare them unnecessary exposure and spare everyone the consequences of poor planning or execution”.

Although the timeline Miller offers in his remarks generally matches up with that provided by other high-ranking leaders, he notably puts himself at odds with William Walker, who as commanding general of the DC national guard testified to what he said were unusual Pentagon restrictions that impeded his response and contributed to a three-hour delay between the time he requested aid and the time it was received. Walker has since become the House sergeant-at-arms, in charge of the chamber’s security.



Miller will say that Walker was given “all the authority he needed to fulfill the mission” and that before 6 January he had never expressed any concern about the forces he had at his disposal.

Miller said he approved the activation of the guard at 3pm. He said that though that support did not arrive at the Capitol complex until 5.22pm, the coordination, planning and deputizing of personnel by civilian law enforcement all took time.

Miller, a Green Beret and retired army colonel, served as a White House counter-terrorism adviser under Trump before being tapped as the acting defense secretary for the final months of the [Trump administration](#). He replaced Mark Esper, who was fired after the election after being seen by Trump as insufficiently loyal.

The abrupt appointment raised concerns that Miller was in place to be a Trump loyalist. In his opening statement, though, he will say that he believes Trump “encouraged the protesters” but decline to say if he thinks the president bears responsibility. He recounts a conversation on 5 January when Trump, struck by a crowd of supporters at a rally that day, told him that 10,000 troops would be needed the next day.

“The call lasted fewer than 30 seconds and I did not respond substantively, and there was no elaboration. I took his comment to mean that a large force would be required to maintain order the following day,” Miller says in his statement.

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## New Zealand

# Māori party co-leader ejected from parliament after performing haka in racism row

Rawiri Waititi had accused the opposition of racism and was asked to sit down by the speaker, but instead performed the ceremonial dance



Maori party co-leader Rawiri Waititi has been thrown out of parliament in New Zealand. Photograph: Nick Perry/AP

Maori party co-leader Rawiri Waititi has been thrown out of parliament in New Zealand. Photograph: Nick Perry/AP

[Tess McClure](#) in Christchurch

[@tessairini](#)

Wed 12 May 2021 01.07 EDT

Māori party co-leader Rawiri Waititi has been thrown out of New Zealand's parliament after denouncing rhetoric from the opposition as racist and performing a haka.

Waititi said the opposition was inciting racism across New Zealand through its stance on [Māori](#) healthcare. The haka is a ceremonial dance for [Māori](#), the indigenous people of New Zealand – it can represent a challenge, and is sometimes performed in moments of conflict.

The altercation comes after weeks of escalating debate, in which the opposition National party [has accused the government of a “separatist agenda”](#) and creating “two systems by stealth”. Their arguments began after the government announced [expanded, independent health services for Māori](#), who typically have far worse health outcomes than other ethnic groups.

“This has incited racism with venom towards Māori, because of this type of propaganda and rhetoric – we won't stand for it any more,” Waititi said, speaking [to reporters outside](#). “The opposition leader has been constantly bashing Māori to gain the votes of her Pākehā [non-Māori New Zealander] constituents. That's all it is.”

[Judith Collins' comments on Māori health policy are a diversion | Claire Robinson](#)  
[Read more](#)

Waititi was ejected from the House by speaker Trevor Mallard, after making a series of points of order. “Over the past two weeks there has been racist propaganda and rhetoric towards tangata whenua [indigenous people]. That not only is insulting to tangata whenua, but diminishes the mana [dignity] of this House,” Waititi said.

“When it comes to the rights and views of indigenous peoples – those views must be from those indigenous people,” he said, in a second point of order.

When asked to sit down by Mallard, he instead stepped into the centre of parliament to perform a haka, and was subsequently thrown out.

“There are various worlds here, and they are colliding,” Labour MP Aupito William Sio said, as members of parliament continued to debate. “Because the system here is not an indigenous system ... there’s a duty of care in how we approach it – how it’s handled in this House has ripple effects for the wider community.” He said some of the discussion of race and policy in the House was “painful” for minority groups. “There’s a line that’s often crossed here”.

“Tangata whenua are a minority in this House, and are unable to express their offence [under the current rules],” said Green party co-leader James Shaw. Co-leader Marama Davidson said via Twitter that she applauded Waititi and co-leader Debbie Ngarewa-Packer Ngarewa-Packer for “calling out the absolute ongoing racist comments from Judith Collins in the House just now”.

“This House absolutely deserves better,” she said.

Speakers for ACT and National said the House needed to allow for free and open debate.

Mallard made a ruling “asking people to take care as they express themselves, to think of the wider consequences as they do”. He said he would not rule against MPs saying that policy was race-based or racist, or that the views of other members were racist.

In February, [Waititi was ejected from the House for not wearing a tie](#). He said he had chosen to wear cultural dress in defiance of dress code: Waititi has dubbed ties a “colonial noose” and wore a pounamu, or greenstone, necklace in place of a necktie. House rules were [subsequently revised to remove the necktie requirement](#).

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## California

# Fangs and tentacles: rarely seen deep sea fish washes up on California beach

The Pacific footballfish, which was featured in Pixar's Finding Nemo, was found in perfectly preserved condition



Though they are rarely encountered, anglerfish are among the best-known deep sea creatures. Photograph: Ben Estes

Though they are rarely encountered, anglerfish are among the best-known deep sea creatures. Photograph: Ben Estes

[Gabrielle Canon](#)

[@GabrielleCanon](#)

Wed 12 May 2021 01.00 EDT

With its mouth agape – revealing a set of pointy black teeth – and a large protruding appendage surrounded by a series of tentacles, the sea creature resembled something out of a horror film. But, the 18in-wide fish, which

somehow found its way from the depths of the Pacific to the shores of Newport Beach last Friday, is very real. It's just a rare find.

One of the roughly 300 species of [anglerfish](#) found around the world (perhaps best known as the one [with fangs and the lightbulb-like antennae](#) dangling from its head that appeared in Pixar's Finding Nemo) the Pacific footballfish was spotted at Crystal Cove state park by a beachgoer, Ben Estes. The specimen was all the more surprising because of its perfectly preserved condition.

"I knew it was an unusual find," Estes told the Guardian of his discovery. He described himself as a regular beachgoer and lifelong fisherman but said: "I have never seen a fish that looked like that before."



The Pacific footballfish found on Crystal Cove Beach. Photograph: Ben Estes

"I don't know if he understood the implications of what he found," Jessica Roame, the education coordinator at Davey's Locker Sportfishing & Whale Watching, [told](#) the Los Angeles Times of Estes's discovery. The organization was among the first to post photos of the fish on Facebook and Twitter after Estes alerted park rangers. "It happens when you're walking along – you find dead things here and there that just shouldn't be on the beach," she



added. “The thing about this was that it was almost perfectly intact. Where did it come from that deep below?”

There aren’t yet a whole lot of answers to those questions, said John Ugoretz of the [California](#) department of fish and game in an email. Researchers are just glad to get another glance at the species, which typically dwells in the dark underwater abysses about 3,000ft from the surface. They are rarely recovered from the depths.

After it was frozen, officials in the California state parks service were connected with the LA county Natural History Museum “in hopes that it can be transferred to their collection”, Ugoretz said. The museum has only three others in its collection but, Ugoretz added, just one is from California and none are in such good condition.

RARE FIND! Deep sea anglerfish washed up in Newport Beach on Friday morning! On Crystal Cove beach [@CrystalCoveSP](#) staff were alerted by beach visitor Ben Eslef and were able to retrieve this intact specimen.. [pic.twitter.com/vERGy5Zujt](https://pic.twitter.com/vERGy5Zujt)

— Davey's Locker (@DaveysLocker400) [May 9, 2021](#)

Even though they are rarely encountered, anglerfish are among the most known deep sea creatures. Their spiny teeth, though menacing, serve more to trap than to chomp their prey. With deep underbites prepared to receive any unfortunate creature lured close by their flashy phosphorescent bulbs – which glow underwater with the help of light-emitting bacteria – they sweep up other fish, squid, and crustaceans, that [dwell at depths of 2,000-3,300ft](#), according to the California Academy of Sciences.

Or at least the females do. The males have evolved into “sexual parasites” and are much smaller in size. After fusing themselves to females, they lose all their internal organs – including their eyes – and are left with nothing but testes. Forever forged, the male provides sperm in exchange for nutrition.

The first [one was found in 1833](#), according to a feature on the fascinating fish published in 2019 in the New York Times, after one washed up in



Greenland. Since then, most of the knowledge gathered on them was from the few dead specimens that somehow wound up on shore. But in recent years, scientists and deep-sea explorers have been able to observe them on their own turf.

In a 2016 underwater expedition, researchers observed a pair procreating [for the first time](#). Caught on tape off the coast of the Azores islands, the female was illuminated by her own bioluminescent whiskers, while her tiny partner climbed on board.

“It was amazing,” [Theodore W Pietsch](#), an emeritus professor at the University of Washington in Seattle told the New York Times. “They’re glorious, wonderful things that need our attention, and our protection.”

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## Greece

# Greece offers €300,000 reward for killers who strangled British-born student in front of baby

Minister says country ‘shaken up’ by killing of Caroline Crouch, 20, while husband tied up and dog hung from banister



The body of Caroline Crouch is removed from her home in Athens.  
Photograph: Eurokinissi/Rex/Shutterstock

The body of Caroline Crouch is removed from her home in Athens.  
Photograph: Eurokinissi/Rex/Shutterstock

[Helena Smith](#) in Athens

Tue 11 May 2021 15.28 EDT

The Greek government has offered a €300,000 (about £257,000) reward to try to track down the culprits behind the murder of a British-born student in

her suburban Athens home.

The reward was publicised hours after Caroline Crouch, 20, was strangled in front of her baby daughter by armed burglars who had bound her husband, Babis Anagnostopoulos, to a chair after breaking in. The intruders also killed the family's dog, leaving it hanging from a banister in the house.

Greece's citizens' protection minister said the county was reeling from the crime. "We are all shaken up and personally I am shaken up," Michalis Chrisochoidis told the annual Delphi Economic Forum on Tuesday. "We rarely encounter such brutality in Greece, both in Greek society and in crime."

Crouch is believed to have been tortured for up to an hour as the thieves tried to coerce her into revealing the location of thousands of pounds of cash and jewellery, which they then made off with. They are believed to have taken €15,000 hidden in a board game.

Greek media reported that Anagnostopoulos, a helicopter pilot, 32, had been forced to listen as his wife cried for help, before he managed to set himself free and alert authorities.



Michalis Chrisochoidis: 'We rarely encounter such brutality in Greece.'  
Photograph: Stéphanie Lecocq/EPA

The raid took place at about 4.30am when three masked men broke into the house while another stood outside guarding the building. “I saw them suddenly in front of me,” the news portal, Newsit, quoted Anagnostopoulos as telling police. “Sometimes they pointed the guns in their hands at me and at others the baby ... They kept saying: where’s the money? Immediately I told them where I had hidden it.

“We had bought a plot of land and had money in the house for initial works. I heard my wife, who was tied up in the bed, constantly shouting for help. We begged them not to do us any harm.”

Crouch, the daughter of a British couple who had moved to the Greek island of Alonissos when she was an infant, was sleeping with her 11-month-old baby in an attic area when the thieves broke in. One police officer said there were signs Crouch “had put up resistance”.

Greek authorities said distraught relatives, including her parents, were being given psychosocial support. Her mother is believed to work in the tourism industry on Alonissos.

Two specialist police units have been seconded to investigate the crime and were concentrating on CCTV footage in the belief that the culprits had followed the couple for several days.

The bounty is highly unusual in Greece – according to the broadcaster ERT there have only ever been four previously, in cases of terrorism or to catch hardened criminals. The reward was outlined in a ministerial decision co-signed by Chrisochoidis and the deputy finance minister, Theodoros Skylakakis; an announcement said €300,000 would be given “to anyone who hands over data and information to the relevant authorities that will lead ... to the arrest of the culprits”.

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## [Atlanta spa shootings](#)

# Man accused of killing eight people in Atlanta spa shootings indicted on murder charges

Hate crime charges and the death penalty are being sought against Robert Aaron Long, accused of killing six women of Asian descent



Jesus Estrella holds a sign of solidarity outside Youngs Asian Massage where four people were shot and killed on 17 March in Acworth, Georgia. Photograph: Elijah Nouvelage/Getty Images

Jesus Estrella holds a sign of solidarity outside Youngs Asian Massage where four people were shot and killed on 17 March in Acworth, Georgia. Photograph: Elijah Nouvelage/Getty Images

*Associated Press*

Tue 11 May 2021 16.07 EDT

A Fulton county grand jury indicted Robert Aaron Long, 22, in the March 16 slayings of Sun Cha Kim, 69; Soon Chung Park, 74; Hyun Jung Grant, 51; and Yong Ae Yue, 63. The indictment only covers those four killings that happened at two spas in [Atlanta](#), and not the attack in Cherokee county in which Xiaojie “Emily” Tan, 49; Daoyou Feng, 44; Delaina Yaun, 33; and Paul Michels, 54, were killed.



Robert Aaron Long's booking photo. Photograph: Crisp County Sheriff's Office/EPA

Fani Willis, Fulton county district attorney, also filed notice that she intends to seek hate crime charges and the death penalty against Long, who is white. The hate crime charges are based on actual or perceived race, national origin, sex and gender, according to online records. Georgia's new hate crimes law does not provide for a stand-alone hate crime. After a person is convicted of an underlying crime, a jury must determine whether it's a hate crime, which carries an additional penalty.

The indictment charges Long with four counts of murder, four counts of felony murder, five counts of assault with a deadly weapon, four counts of possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony and one count of domestic terrorism, according to online records.

It will be up to a separate grand jury in Cherokee county to decide on charges in the shooting at a spa near suburban Woodstock in which four were killed and one person was wounded.

Willis' decision to seek the death penalty is a departure from her stance during her campaign to be district attorney last year.

During a candidate forum last year, Willis answered yes when asked: "Will you commit to refuse to seek the death penalty?"

Police have said Long shot and killed four people, three of them women and two of Asian descent, at Youngs Asian Massage near Woodstock just before 5pm on 16 March. He also shot and wounded a fifth person, investigators said.

He then drove about 30 miles (50km) south to Atlanta, where he shot and killed three women at Gold Spa before going across the the street to Aromatherapy Spa and fatally shooting another woman, police have said. All of the Atlanta victims were women of Asian descent.

[US saw estimated 4,000 extra murders in 2020 amid surge in daily gun violence](#)

[Read more](#)

After the shootings at the two Atlanta spas, Long got back into his car and headed south on the interstate, police said.

Long's parents called authorities to help after recognizing their son in still images from security video that the Cherokee County Sheriff's Office posted on social media. They provided cellphone information that allowed authorities to track their son to rural Crisp county, about 140 miles (225km) south of Atlanta.

State troopers and sheriff's deputies spotted his SUV on Interstate 75, and one of them forced Long to spin to a stop by bumping his vehicle. Long then surrendered to authorities.



In an initial interview with investigators, Long claimed to have a “sex addiction”, and authorities said he apparently lashed out at businesses he viewed as a temptation.

But those statements spurred outrage and widespread skepticism given the locations and that six of the eight victims were women of Asian descent.

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

## [Goldman Sachs](#)

# Goldman Sachs executive quits after making millions from Dogecoin

The crypto asset is down more than 30% this week but is still up by more than 1,000% from the start of 2021



Created in 2013 by two software engineers Dogecoin started as a joke parodying bitcoin. It has rocketed in value amid a wave of speculative investment. Photograph: Beata Zawrzal/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

Created in 2013 by two software engineers Dogecoin started as a joke parodying bitcoin. It has rocketed in value amid a wave of speculative investment. Photograph: Beata Zawrzal/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

[Richard Partington](#)

[@RJPartington](#)

Tue 11 May 2021 13.14 EDT

A senior manager at [Goldman Sachs](#) in London has quit the US investment bank after making millions from investing in Dogecoin, the joke crypto asset which has risen by more than 1,000% in value this year.

City sources said Aziz McMahon, a managing director and head of emerging market sales, had resigned from the bank after making money from investing in the digital currency based on the Doge internet meme.

Backed by famous supporters including the Tesla founder, [Elon Musk](#), the rapper Snoop Dogg and the Kiss bassist Gene Simmons, the digital asset similar to bitcoin has soared in value over recent months.

Based on an internet meme – a humorous online phrase or photo, on this occasion a dog called Doge – the cryptocurrency rose above \$0.72 (£0.51) against the dollar last week in anticipation of [Musk's appearance on the hit US TV show Saturday Night Live](#).

Q&A

**What is cryptocurrency?**

Show



Cryptocurrencies are an alternative way of making payments to cash or credit cards. The technology behind it allows the ‘money’ to be sent directly to others without it having to pass through the banking system. For that reason they are outside the control of governments and are unregulated by financial watchdogs – and transactions can be made in a way that keeps you reasonably pseudonymous.

If you own a crypto-asset you control a secret digital key that you can use to prove to anyone on the network that a certain amount of that asset is yours. If you spend it, you tell the entire network that you have transferred ownership of it, and use the same key to prove that you are telling the truth. Over time, the history of all those transactions becomes a lasting record of who owns what: that record is called the **blockchain**.

[Bitcoin](#) was one of the first and biggest cryptocurrencies and has been on a wild ride since its creation in 2009, sometimes surging in value as investors have piled in – and occasionally crashing back down. Dogecoin – which started as a joke – has also seen [a stratospheric rise in value](#).

Sceptics warn that the lack of central control make crypto-assets ideal for criminals and terrorists, while libertarian monetarists enjoy the idea of a currency with no inflation and no central bank.

The whole concept of cryptocurrencies has been criticised for its ecological impact, with "mining" for new coins requiring [vast energy reserves and the associated carbon footprint](#) of the whole system.

## **Richard Partington and Martin Belam**

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

It has plunged by more than 30% this week since Musk’s appearance to about \$0.50, according to Coindesk. However, it is still up by more than 1,000% from the start of 2021.

Little is known about how much money McMahon made exactly from betting on Dogecoin, after his departure was first reported by the website

efinancialcareers. The banker, who has worked for Goldman Sachs for 14 years, did not respond to requests for comment. However, sources said they believed it was a substantial sum and that he had since left Goldman Sachs.

It is believed Aziz made the money investing on his own personal account and was not involved in trading cryptocurrencies for Goldman Sachs.

[Dogecoin's record-breaking rise shoots 'joke' cryptocurrency to wider attention](#)

[Read more](#)

Created in 2013 by two software engineers from IBM and Adobe, the Dogecoin digital currency started as a joke parodying bitcoin. It has however rocketed in value amid a wave of speculative investment in crypto assets, fuelled by a buzz online and an aim to perpetuate the joke by pumping up its value.

Some early buyers of the digital currency are believed to have amassed small fortunes as the value of Dogecoin soars, including one anonymous owner with a stake [thought to be worth more than \\$2bn](#).

It also comes amid growing interest in digital currencies from investment banks and large money managers. Goldman Sachs opened a bitcoin trading desk last week, in a move reversing a 2018 decision to stay out of the market.

Some investors believe crypto assets could offer protection against inflation, fearing the value of fiat currencies – such as the pound, dollar and euro – could be eroded as global economic growth accelerates this year as the Covid-19 pandemic recedes.

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However others warn prices are only sustained by speculative buyers.

Andrew Bailey, the governor of the Bank of England said last week that investors risked losing all of their money.

“They have no intrinsic value. That doesn’t mean to say people don’t put value on them, because they can have extrinsic value. But they have no intrinsic value,” he said.

“I’m going to say this very bluntly again. Buy them only if you’re prepared to lose all your money.”

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

## [Russia](#)

# Nine dead in school shooting in Kazan, say Russian officials

President of Tatarstan republic describes incident as ‘great tragedy for the whole country’

00:47

Kazan school shooting: students evacuated through windows – video

[Andrew Roth](#) in Moscow and agencies

Tue 11 May 2021 12.16 EDT

Seven students and two staff members were killed on Tuesday in Russia deadliest school shooting in years when a gunman opened fire in the city of Kazan.

Rustam Minnikhanov, the president of the Tatarstan republic where Kazan is the capital, said four male and three female eighth-grade students died in “a great tragedy for the whole country”. Minnikhanov’s press service later said a teacher and another female staff member were also killed. Eighth-grade children in Russia are 13 and 14 years old.

The gunman, identified as 19-year-old Ilnaz Galyaviev, wrote on social media before the attack that he felt “like a God” and planned to kill a “huge number” of people. Security camera footage showed Galyaviev approaching School 175 in Kazan on Tuesday morning wearing a black mask and carrying a gun with a long barrel.

Footage posted on social media showed students escaping from the building by jumping out of a third-story window and emergency responders carrying the wounded to ambulances. Several students described locking classroom doors and hiding on the third floor of the school as Galyaviev attempted to break in.



Heavily-armed police raided the school and arrested Galyaviev, who was pictured being pinned to the ground outside the building by a police officer.

Minnikhanov described Galyaviev as a “terrorist” and said that the firearm used in the shooting was registered in the suspect’s name. Galyaviev had recently received a licence for a semi-automatic shotgun, a Russian MP told journalists. “Other accomplices haven’t been established, an investigation is under way,” Minnikhanov said after visiting the school, adding that security had been restored.



Security forces take up positions outside the school. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

According to Tatarstan health officials, 21 people were taken to hospital with wounds after the attack, including 18 children, six of whom were in intensive care. Officials have not publicly identified the victims. Children as young as seven were injured in the attack, police have said.

Galyaviev, who Russian media have reported was a graduate of the school, appeared to have acted alone. In a videotaped police interrogation later leaked online, the shirtless Galyaviev told a questioner that he had “realised I was God two months ago ... during the summer a monster awoke in me”.

He had been studying programming at a college in Kazan before dropping out last month, Russian media reported.

The Russian president, Vladimir Putin, expressed his condolences to families of the victims.

He also ordered Viktor Zolotov, head of Russia's National Guard, to revise the regulations on types of weapons allowed for civilian use in light of the attack. Russia has fairly tough restrictions on obtaining firearms, requiring potential gun owners to pass a battery of tests before receiving permission to buy a smoothbore weapon, such as a shotgun. Permission to buy a rifle requires a further five-year waiting period.



Security officers at the school in Kazan. Photograph: Max Zareckiy/Reuters

Authorities said additional security measures had been put into place in all schools in Kazan, about 430 miles east of Moscow.

While school shootings are relatively rare in Russia, there have been several violent attacks on schools in recent years, mostly carried out by students.

One of the last major shootings took place in Russian-annexed Crimea in 2018, [when a student at a college killed 20 people](#) before killing himself.

Putin similarly ordered a toughening of Russia's gun-control measures after that incident. But a review by the Russian newspaper Kommersant showed that efforts to keep tabs on gun-owners' whereabouts or to raise the ownership age to 21 had failed. After Tuesday's attack, Tatiana Moskalkova, Russia's ombudswoman for human rights, called for the gun ownership age to be raised to 21, except for those who have served in the armed forces.

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

## [Afghanistan](#)

# UK diplomat: few signs Taliban willing to engage in peace talks

Alison Blake, UK ambassador to Afghanistan, says power-sharing talks are ‘nowhere near where we hoped’



Taliban co-founder Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, bottom right, speaking last September at the opening session of peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban in Doha, Qatar. Photograph: Hussein Sayed/AP

Taliban co-founder Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, bottom right, speaking last September at the opening session of peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban in Doha, Qatar. Photograph: Hussein Sayed/AP

[Patrick Wintour](#) *Diplomatic editor*

Tue 11 May 2021 13.00 EDT

There are few signs that the [Taliban](#) is willing to engage in peace talks, Alison Blake, the British ambassador to Kabul, has said.

With the UK joining the US in a military exit from [Afghanistan](#) by September, she told a Chatham House conference that the Taliban was engaged in psychological warfare and was ignoring western voices calling for power sharing and a commitment to protect women's rights.

International terrorist groups were still active in Afghanistan as evidenced by the [“terrible bombing” on a school in Kabul that left more than 80 dead](#), she also admitted.

“The Doha talks are clearly becalmed. We are nowhere near where we hoped to be at this point,” she said, referring to the negotiations in the Qatari capital between the Afghan government and the Taliban to try and reach a power-sharing deal.

[Inside Afghanistan as troops prepare to leave after the US's longest war](#)  
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“We are still committed to an international conference in Istanbul to inject momentum into the Doha process, and not replace it. But there as yet few signs that the Taliban are transforming in a political partner that we hoped would be capable of engaging in a political process in good faith.”

She also admitted “the Taliban have, as yet, given us a few headlines saying ‘of course girls can be educated’ but they have not begun to sit down with the Afghans to explain what that looks like”.

Her remarks show the challenge the British government faces in proving that Nato's 20-year intervention will leave a permanent legacy in Afghanistan. There are still 10,000 Nato troops in the country, including about 700 British personnel.

“They may be tempted to discount western voices because at the moment they think we are going because they have won,” she said. “It's really important they understand that although the international troops are going, the field is not being left open to them”.

She claimed it would be a point of some danger for the Taliban “when they bump into the new reality” that they must share power. Future aid would be



dependent on that power sharing, she said.

She insisted there was “a window for peace” due to the unprecedented willingness, inconceivable a year ago, for the Afghan government to share power with the Taliban on the right terms.

At the same time there was stronger regional support, including in Pakistan, for an orderly withdrawal from Afghanistan leading to a stable peaceful neighbourhood. “This is not the moment where we abandon Afghanistan to retrograde forces or walk away to allow it to implode or struggle, or for proxy wars to rage under the surface,” she insisted.

Her remarks came as reports circulated in Whitehall that overseas aid to the Afghan security forces is set to be cut, and that NGOs operating in Afghanistan are being forced to work with two-month budgets pending government decisions. As recently as November 2020 the UK had promised £155m for 2021, and £70m in overseas aid for the Afghan security forces.

Blake gave no specific promises on future aid but said the Afghan state was “still critically dependent on support from international financial institutions and the donors. It would be challenging for them if that was to decline dramatically or stop”.

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## Germany.

# Conservative candidate to replace Angela Merkel accused of allowing antisemitism

Leading environmentalist criticises Armin Laschet for refusing to sack former spy chief Hans-Georg Maaßen



Armin Laschet (above), the conservative candidate for chancellor in September's elections, denied Hans-Georg Maaßen was spreading antisemitic texts. Photograph: Markus Schreiber/AFP/Getty Images

Armin Laschet (above), the conservative candidate for chancellor in September's elections, denied Hans-Georg Maaßen was spreading antisemitic texts. Photograph: Markus Schreiber/AFP/Getty Images

[Kate Connolly](#) in Berlin

Tue 11 May 2021 10.50 EDT



The conservative candidate for German chancellor in September's elections has been told by the country's leading environmentalist that he is legitimising antisemitism by refusing to oust the former head of domestic intelligence from his party.

The accusation was levelled at Armin Laschet, the leader of the CDU, by Luisa Neubauer, the face of the Fridays for Future movement in [Germany](#), in a standoff on a popular weekly chatshow on Sunday night.

Hans-Georg Maaßen was the head of the BfV, the domestic intelligence service, until 2018, when he was [sent into early retirement](#) after criticising Angela Merkel's immigration politics and making comments seen to chime with far-right opinions.

Neubauer accused Maaßen, who is standing for the CDU in the central state of Thuringia in September, of spreading antisemitic and racist content, and told Laschet he was legitimising those views by keeping the former chief spy in the party.

Critics of Maaßen's candidature in for the constituency of Suhl-Schmalkalden say he is trying to push the party to the right. Maaßen and his supporters say he is running to prevent the constituency from falling into the hands of either the leftwing Die Linke party or the rightwing populist Alternative für Deutschland (AfD).

On the chatshow, Neubauer urged Laschet to study messages and content that she said Maaßen had been spreading online, as well as discussing in interviews and commentaries. She accused Laschet of "legitimising racist, antisemitic, identitarian as well as science denial content, as embodied by Hans-Georg Maaßen".

Laschet, who hopes to succeed Merkel in September, defended Maaßen, who he said was not antisemitic and had not spread antisemitic texts. "If he was doing so, that would be a reason to exclude him from the party ... there is nothing in which I would be so vigorous as with antisemitism," Laschet said.



Hans-Georg Maaßen, was the head of the BfV, the domestic intelligence service, until 2018. Photograph: Jens Schlueter/AFP/Getty Images

The chatshow's moderator, Anne Will, said her research team would examine Neubauer's allegations. After the broadcast she [tweeted a thread](#) from the account Union-Watch, which describes itself as a leftwing observer of conservative politics in Germany, listing examples of views expressed by or shared by Maaßen.

However, on Monday she deleted the tweet, saying it had been a mistake to share it. The thread stated that whether or not Maaßen could be described as an antisemite was legally unclear, but added: "What is certain is that he regularly, and over a long time, has spread antisemitism and other agitation".

Neubauer did not produce examples during the TV show to back up her claim, but [Maaßen's views](#) have long been a cause for concern in the CDU and beyond and kept him in the headlines. Observers note his regular use of the word "globalist", often an antisemitic dog whistle in far-right circles.

At a gathering of the right wing of the CDU, the WerteUnion, Maaßen is on record as referring to an alliance of "capitalists ... and Leninists" – which detractors have said is reminiscent of the "Jewish-Bolshevism" conspiracy theory, according to which Jews were behind the 1917 Russian Revolution.

Maaßen has also come under fire for his remarks criticising Germany’s attempts to take on a pioneering role in climate protection, stating in an interview: “We’ve already tried to save the world twice, and each time it went wrong.”

He has denied Neubauer’s accusations, telling Die Welt newspaper: “What Frau Neubauer said about me in the programme Anne Will were baseless and unfounded remarks which I reject.” He said he saw the discussion in the context of a “brutalisation of political discourse” and added that Laschet was “correct ... to say that there should be no place for antisemites in the CDU”.

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

## US immigration

# Revealed: Biden administration holding tens of thousands of migrant children



Young migrants wait to be tested for Covid-19 at the Donna facility in the Rio Grande Valley in Donna, Texas, on 30 March 2021. Photograph: Dario Lopez-Mills/AFP/Getty Images

Young migrants wait to be tested for Covid-19 at the Donna facility in the Rio Grande Valley in Donna, Texas, on 30 March 2021. Photograph: Dario Lopez-Mills/AFP/Getty Images

Confidential data obtained by AP shows the number of children in government custody more than doubled in the past two months

*Garance Burke, Juliet Linderman and Martha Mendoza for the Associated Press*

Tue 11 May 2021 11.37 EDT

The [Biden administration](#) is holding tens of thousands of asylum-seeking children in an opaque network of some 200 facilities that the Associated

Press has learned spans two dozen states and includes five shelters with more than 1,000 children packed inside.

Confidential data obtained by the AP shows the number of migrant children in government custody more than doubled in the past two months, and this week the federal government was housing around 21,000 kids, from toddlers to teens.

A facility at Fort Bliss, a US army post in El Paso, Texas, had more than 4,500 children as of Monday. Attorneys, advocates and mental health experts say that while some shelters are safe and provide adequate care, others are endangering children's health and safety.

"It's almost like 'Groundhog Day'," said the Southern Poverty Law Center attorney Luz Lopez, referring to the 1993 film in which events appear to be continually repeating.

A US Department of Health and Human Services spokesman, Mark Weber, said the department's staff and contractors were working hard to keep children in their custody safe and healthy.

A few of the current practices are the same as those that Joe Biden and others criticized under the Trump administration, including not vetting some caregivers with full FBI fingerprint background checks. At the same time, court records show the Biden administration is working to settle several multimillion-dollar lawsuits that claim migrant children were abused in shelters under Donald Trump's presidency.

Part of the government's plan to manage thousands of children crossing the US-Mexico border involves about a dozen unlicensed emergency facilities inside military installations, stadiums and convention centers that skirt state regulations and do not require traditional legal oversight.

Inside the facilities, called emergency intake sites, children are not guaranteed access to education, recreational opportunities or legal counsel.

In a recent news release, the administration touted its "restoration of a child centered focus for unaccompanied children", and it has been sharing daily

totals of the number of children in government custody as well as a few photos of the facilities. This reflects a higher level of transparency than the Trump administration. In addition, the amount of time children spend, on average, inside the system has dropped from four months last fall to less than a month this spring, according to the Department of Health and Human Services.

Nonetheless, the agency has received reports of abuse that resulted in a handful of contract staffers being dismissed from working at the emergency sites this year, according to an official who was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

Attorneys say sometimes, even parents cannot figure out where their children are.

Jose, a father who fled El Salvador after his village was targeted in a massacre, requested asylum in the US four years ago. He had hoped to welcome his wife and eight-year-old daughter to southern California this year, but the pair were turned around at the border in March and expelled to Mexico. The little girl crossed again by herself and was placed in the government shelter in Brownsville, Texas, on 6 April. Jose called a government hotline set up for parents seeking their migrant children repeatedly but said no one would tell him where she was.

“I was so upset because I kept calling and calling and no one would tell me any information about where she was,” said Jose, who asked to be identified only by his first name out of fear of endangering his immigration case.

For nearly three weeks, his daughter was held inside the Brownsville facility before finally being released to him in late April after an advocacy organization intervened to get the government to foot the bill for her airfare, as is required by the agency.

HHS declined to say whether there are any legally enforceable standards for caring for children housed at the emergency sites or how they are being monitored. The Biden administration has allowed very limited access to news media once children are brought into facilities, citing the coronavirus pandemic and privacy restrictions.

“HHS has worked as swiftly as possible to increase bed capacity and to ensure potential sponsors can provide a safe home while the child goes through their immigration proceedings,” HHS spokesman Weber said in a statement.

Weber confirmed a number of specific shelter populations from the data the AP obtained.

Of particular concern to advocates are mass shelters, with hundreds of beds apiece. These facilities can leave children isolated, less supervised and without basic services.

The AP found about half of all migrant children detained in the US are sleeping in shelters with more than 1,000 other children. More than 17,650 are in facilities with 100 or more children. Some shelters and foster programs are small, little more than a house with a handful of kids. A large Houston facility abruptly closed last month after it was revealed that children were being given plastic bags instead of access to restrooms.

“The system has been very dysfunctional, and it’s getting worse,” said Amy Cohen, a child psychiatrist and executive director of the non-profit Every. Last. One., which works to help immigrant families fleeing violence in Central America. Although there have been large numbers of children arriving in the US for years, Cohen said she had never seen the situation as bad as it is today.

Cohen described parents receiving calls from people refusing to identify themselves. They are told to be at an airport or bus station in the next two hours to pick up their children, who have been held for more than a month without notice, or they would not be released. Some parents are told to pay a travel agency thousands of dollars to have their child sent to them, she said.

“The children are coming out sick, with Covid, infested with lice, and it will not surprise me to see children dying as a consequence, as we saw during the Trump years,” Cohen said. “The Biden administration is feverishly putting up these pop-up detention facilities, many of which have no experience working with children.”



One reason so many children are now arriving without their parents dates back to a 2020 Trump administration emergency order that essentially closed the US-Mexico border to all migrants, citing public health concerns about spreading Covid-19.

That emergency order still applies to adults, but the Biden administration has begun allowing children traveling without their parents to stay and seek asylum if they enter the country. As a result, some parents are sending their kids across the border by themselves.

Most already have a parent or other adult relative or family friend, known as a sponsor, in the US waiting to receive them. But first they are typically detained by US Customs and Border Protection, or CBP, then turned over to a government shelter.

Over the course of 2019, the federal government held nearly 70,000 children in a system of contracted shelters, mass detention camps and foster parents. This year those numbers are expected to be even higher.

Some of the facilities holding children these days are run by contractors already facing lawsuits claiming that children were physically and sexually abused in their shelters under the Trump administration, while others are new companies with little or no experience working with migrant children. Collectively, the emergency facilities can accommodate nearly 18,000 children, according to data the agency provided earlier this month.

“There are a lot of questions about are there standards and who is ensuring that they are meeting them, and what kind of transparency and accountability will there be,” said Jennifer Podkul, a vice-president at Kids in Need of Defense, which represents children in immigration court.

Several organizations have filed legal claims against the federal government seeking hundreds of millions of dollars in damages for parents who said their children were harmed while in government custody after being forcibly separated at the border under Trump administration policies. In some lawsuits, families claim children suffered physical and sexual abuse while in government custody, at both foster homes and private shelters.

Biden's justice department is defending the government against these claims, which were filed in 2019 under the Trump administration. But the federal response has been mixed since the change in leadership. Some cases continue to be argued, while others are in settlement discussions.

In a recent filing in one case currently in litigation, federal attorneys agreed with the assertion that these policies indeed inflicted harm.

As for the eight-year-old girl, her father, Jose, said she was adjusting to life in Los Angeles, enjoying playing with her older brother and, bit by bit, opening up.

"She keeps asking me where her mom is, and I keep telling her not to worry, that she is in Mexico and she is OK," he said. "Soon I hope she'll tell me what it was like inside."

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## Headlines tuesday 11 may 2021

- [Live Queen's speech: Tories keeping many pledges but struggling to fulfil key ones, says thinktank](#)
- [Queen's speech Focus on adult learning and easing planning rules](#)
- [Gaza Twenty-four dead after Jerusalem violence spreads](#)

[Politics live with Andrew Sparrow](#)

[Queen's speech](#)

# Boris Johnson signals inquiry into handling of Covid crisis to be launched within year – as it happened

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## [Queen's speech](#)

# Queen's speech to focus on adult learning and easing planning rules

Levelling up agenda accompanied by bills bringing in voter ID and banning conversion practices



Boris Johnson's legislative programme is intended to entrench the swing to the right in the Midlands and north of England. Photograph: Reuters

Boris Johnson's legislative programme is intended to entrench the swing to the right in the Midlands and north of England. Photograph: Reuters

[Peter Walker](#), [Aubrey Allegretti](#) and [Lisa O'Carroll](#)

Mon 10 May 2021 17.30 EDT

Ministers are to unveil a legislative programme aimed at the Conservative government's new electoral strongholds in northern England and the Midlands, with a Queen's speech focused on adult education and home ownership.

It also features proposals to bring in mandatory voter ID, which has been [condemned by US civil rights groups](#) as akin to Republican-style voter suppression. Another plan will pave the way to outlaw conversion practices.

The list of planned laws for the new parliament, billed by Downing Street as seeking to put into policy Boris Johnson's idea of levelling up, will be unveiled by the monarch in an unprecedented and stripped back version of the event.

Usually the Queen delivers the speech to a crammed House of Lords. This time the chamber will be restricted to just 74 people. The only people invited from the House of Commons will be the Speaker, Lindsay Hoyle, party leaders and whips. All attendees must have a Covid test in advance and wear a mask.

Ahead of the speech, Downing Street trailed a bill pushing through previously announced plans to boost adult education and training, including a transformation of the student loan system into one usable for any university or college, and at any point in someone's career.

Other elements of the proposed skills and post-16 education bill, to be introduced later this month, include giving the education secretary more powers over the further education sector, including being able to directly intervene with colleges that "fail to meet local needs".

While Boris Johnson touted the plans as "the rocket fuel that we need to level up this country and ensure equal opportunities for all", the higher education sector sounded a note of caution.

David Hughes, chief executive of the Association of Colleges, said that while he welcomed "an important step on the journey to ending the snobbery around technical and vocational education", there was no mention of finance so people could support themselves.

"It will only work if people can afford to live whilst studying through a mixture of loans, grants and welfare support," he said. "Without this, many simply won't be able to afford it."

A previously briefed element of the legislative programme will be a new measure to simplify planning for housing, seen by No 10 as a way of shoring up Conservative support in areas where it attracted new voters at last week's local elections by helping more people buy a home.

One element which is likely to be largely missing is a plan to reorganise adult social care, despite Johnson having promised in his first speech as prime minister that this would happen.

Health minister Nadine Dorries said on Monday the Queen's speech would have "mentions" of social care reform, but officials cautioned against this being anything substantive.

One of the most contentious bills is likely to be one introducing mandatory identification for all voters in future elections, a plan that has been condemned given that people from more deprived communities are less likely to possess the necessary document.

Downing Street said it is needed to combat voter impersonation, even though electoral experts say this is [a negligible problem](#) in England.

The government will also use the Queen's speech to press forward with its plan to outlaw conversion practices, a government source said. The source said it would involve "tough but balanced action that stamps out harmful and coercive practices but that defends free speech and legitimate forms of spiritual guidance for consenting adults".

The ban has been promised for several years so, while campaigners and Tory MPs will probably welcome any progress, some are understood to be frustrated a change in the law will not be as imminent as they would like.

Jayne Ozanne, who resigned from the government's LGBT advisory panel over the delay to outlaw conversion practices, said she was concerned that more consultation would be launched. "They've consulted long enough, now it's time to act and bring forward legislation that protects everyone from this degrading abuse," she added.



There are also hopes the speech will deliver on a Tory promise that up to three million Britons living overseas for more than 15 years could get the right to vote in British elections.

The inclusion would be a dream come true for 99-year-old Harry Schindler, a veteran of the second world war who has been campaigning for the voting right for at least a decade.

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

## [Israel](#)

# 31 people dead as Netanyahu vows to intensify Gaza attacks

Medics say 28 Palestinians, two Israelis and an Indian woman have died after day of fierce confrontation

- [Explainer: what has caused Jerusalem's worst violence in years?](#)

01:28

Israeli airstrikes demolish tower block and Hamas rocket hits bus as violence escalates – video

[Oliver Holmes](#) in Jerusalem and [Julian Borger](#) in Washington

Tue 11 May 2021 17.04 EDT

The Israeli prime minister, [Benjamin Netanyahu](#), has vowed to increase the intensity of attacks on Gaza, after a day of ferocious confrontations that left 31 people dead as Israeli jets and Palestinian militants traded airstrikes and rockets.

As medics on both sides put the death toll at 28 Palestinians, including 10 children, two Israelis and an Indian woman working in Ashkelon, the Israeli prime minister said there would be no pause. “It was decided that both the might of the attacks and the frequency of the attacks will be increased,” he announced.

Netanyahu vowed that [Hamas](#) and Islamic Jihad “will pay a very heavy price for their belligerence”.

Residents in [Gaza](#) City reported bombings of high-rise buildings, while families spent the night cowering in basements. On Tuesday evening, a 13-storey tower housing apartments and the offices of officials from Hamas, the

Islamist group that holds power in [Gaza](#), was hit by an Israeli airstrike and collapsed. Residents had earlier been told to evacuate. In response, Hamas's military wing said it had fired 130 rockets towards Tel Aviv, and air raid sirens and then explosions were heard in the coastal city.

Three people were reported injured when a rocket hit a bus in Holon, just south of Tel Aviv. Nearby Ben Gurion airport was closed and incoming flights were diverted to Cyprus.

A state of emergency was meanwhile declared in Lod, south-east of Tel Aviv, the scene of two nights of rioting by Arab Israelis, in which synagogues and Jewish schools were reported to have been set on fire, as Israel's internal strife threatened to be more destabilising than rocket attacks from Gaza.

Those attacks began on Monday evening, when after weeks of intense violence in Jerusalem, Hamas fired a barrage towards the holy city, believed to be the first time it had targeted Jerusalem in more than seven years.



Rockets are launched towards Israel from Gaza City. Photograph: Mahmud Hams/AFP/Getty Images

Gaza health officials earlier said seven members of a single family, including three children, had died in an explosion. It was not clear if the

blast was caused by an Israeli airstrike or a rocket that landed short.

Medics in Israel said more than 25 civilians were being treated following rocket fire, including those wounded from broken glass and shrapnel. Militants had fired at least 250 rockets toward Israel, many of which were intercepted but some made direct hits on apartment buildings. One hit an empty school. The national ambulance service, Magen David Adom, said rocket strikes killed two women in the southern city of Ashkelon on Tuesday afternoon.

Israel's military said it had killed 15 Hamas "operatives" and a battalion commander in its airstrikes. The government said it would send troop reinforcements to the Gaza frontier and mobilise 5,000 reserve soldiers, leading to fears of a wider confrontation. Previous flare-ups have lasted a few days, with resolutions mediated through indirect talks.

The White House said its "primary focus" was de-escalation and that Joe Biden was being updated on the worsening situation. His spokeswoman, Jen Psaki, said US officials were talking to their counterparts in the region.

"We believe Palestinians and Israelis deserve equal measures of freedom, security, dignity and prosperity," Psaki said. "US officials in recent weeks have spoken candidly with Israeli officials about how evictions of Palestinian families who have lived for years, sometimes decades, in their homes, and how demolitions of these homes, work against our common interests and achieving a solution to the conflict."

A UN security council session on the crisis was called for on Wednesday, by the Norwegian, Tunisian and Chinese missions. It is likely to be a test of the Biden administration's position on an issue that it has sought to play down.

In recent weeks, there has been a sharp escalation in anger over Israel's half-century occupation its ever-deepening military grip over Palestinian life and a wave of evictions and demolitions. In Jerusalem, hundreds of Palestinians have been wounded in near-nightly protests that escalated over the weekend and spread to other areas of Israel and the occupied West Bank.

Jerusalem: hundreds injured as violence at al-Aqsa mosque sparks heightened tensions – video

Israeli police have responded with stun grenades and rubber-coated bullets. On Monday morning, despite calls for calm from the US, Europe and elsewhere, officers in riot gear [stormed into al-Aqsa mosque](#) – the third holiest site in Islam – and faced off with worshippers. Hamas threatened action and began firing rockets on Monday evening.

In a statement issued earlier on Tuesday, the Hamas leader, Ismail Haniyeh, said the rocket attacks would continue until Israel stopped “all scenes of terrorism and aggression in Jerusalem and al-Aqsa mosque”.

Israel and [Hamas](#) have fought three wars, which were largely seen as failures for both sides, with Hamas still in power and Israel continuing to maintain a crippling blockade.

[graphic](#)

Instead of full-scale conflict, the enemies have engaged [in regular on-off battles just shy of war](#) over the past few years. After each round, both sides claim they have scored points over the other and then an uneasy status quo is restored.

Netanyahu has sought to show Israelis that he can keep them safe by not letting the violence spiral while also batting away criticism from his political partners on the far right, who accuse him of a tacit alliance with Hamas and an unwillingness to use greater force.

[Israel-Hamas relations: a predictable but fatal dance](#)  
[Read more](#)

Israel's longest-serving leader is facing an especially precarious moment, with the 71-year-old's personal freedom at stake while under criminal corruption charges and his political future also hanging in the balance.

Last week, the opposition leader, Yair Lapid, [was tasked with forming a government](#) after Netanyahu [failed to do so](#), leaving the prime minister

facing a fresh challenge.

One prominent Israeli columnist, Ben Caspit, wrote on Tuesday that the recent violence may play in Netanyahu's favour as Lapid has been attempting to negotiate a deal with an Arab party in Israel, called the United Arab List, to form a government. With such high tensions, those negotiations appear in doubt.

"It's not certain Netanyahu himself is shedding any tears," wrote Caspit. "At the end of the day, Netanyahu's strategic alliance with Hamas has proven its worth. Not for Israel's benefit, but for Netanyahu's."

Jerusalem has long been the centre of the Israeli-Palestinian crisis, with its religious sites revered by Christians, Jews and Muslims. Al-Aqsa mosque is built on a compound that is the holiest site in Judaism, known to Jews as the Temple Mount.

Palestinians have complained of what they say are [unnecessarily severe restrictions](#) on nightly gatherings during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

[Israeli police storm al-Aqsa mosque ahead of Jerusalem Day march](#)  
[Read more](#)

Meanwhile, anger had been mounting for weeks among Palestinians around an Israeli court case on whether Israeli authorities are able to evict dozens of Palestinians from a majority-Arab Jerusalem neighbourhood and give their homes to Jewish settlers.

That ruling, due on Monday, was delayed but a provocative annual parade by thousands of Israeli nationalists in the city went ahead the same day. Jerusalem Day celebrates Israel's capture of the entire city, including the Old City and Palestinian neighbourhoods, from Jordanian forces in 1967.

Ayman Odeh, an Israeli politician from the country's Arab minority, [tweeted a video](#) of Israeli nationalists dancing and singing at the Temple Mount's Western Wall on Jerusalem Day as a fire – apparently started during earlier

confrontations – roared on al-Aqsa mosque compound above. “Shocking,” he wrote in Hebrew.

מזעזע [pic.twitter.com/7JM5ADoPJf](https://pic.twitter.com/7JM5ADoPJf)

— Ayman Odeh (@AyOdeh) [May 10, 2021](#)

Senior church leaders in Jerusalem criticised the “coordinated provocation of rightwing radical groups” that have contributed to violence in the city. In a joint statement, the 13 patriarchs and heads of churches of various Christian denominations said events over recent days “violate the sanctity” of Jerusalem as a holy city, and undermined the safety of worshippers. They called for intervention by the international community “to put an end to these provocative actions”.

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## 2021.05.11 - Coronavirus

- [Live Coronavirus: NHS app to 'prove' vaccine status for international travel; EU opens AstraZeneca court case](#)
- [OECD Call for higher inheritance tax after Covid pandemic](#)
- [Mount Everest Nepal urges climbers to return used oxygen canisters amid Covid crisis](#)
- [Pfizer US authorises vaccine for children ages 12 to 15](#)

## [Coronavirus live](#)

### [Coronavirus](#)

# Americans offered free taxis to vaccine centres; airlines plead for reopening – as it happened

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## OECD

# OECD calls for higher inheritance tax after Covid pandemic

Wealth inequality will rise over the next decade unless death duties also increase, says thinktank

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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Houses in Kensington, south-west London. Financial assets, including property, have soared in value in recent years. Photograph: Warming/Rex/Shutterstock

Houses in Kensington, south-west London. Financial assets, including property, have soared in value in recent years. Photograph: Warming/Rex/Shutterstock

[Phillip Inman](#)  
[@phillipinman](#)

Tue 11 May 2021 05.26 EDT

[Inheritance tax](#) should become a larger slice of government tax revenue after the pandemic, according to a report by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) that warns wealth inequality will rise over the next decade unless death duties also increase.

A more robust tax on inheritances that prevents the use of avoidance measures by the super-wealthy would also support efforts by governments to pay down debts incurred over the past year to cope with the Covid-19 virus, said the Paris-based thinktank, which advises 36 mainly richer countries, including the UK.

In a report that argued the moment was ripe for governments to deploy arguments of fairness and the need for higher tax revenues, the [OECD](#) said decades of rising asset prices meant there were more wealthy people than in previous generations and as individuals they had become wealthier than in the past.

Financial assets, including pensions and property, have soared in value in recent years across the developed world.

[Baby boomers](#), who in the UK are 57 years of age and older, have accumulated a disproportionate amount of assets compared with previous generations, leading to greater inequality.

Inheritance tax has declined in most countries as a proportion of overall tax revenues and now accounts for only 0.5% of tax revenues on average across the 36 countries.

“Inheritance taxation has the potential to play a particularly important role in the current context. Wealth inequality is high and has increased in some countries over recent decades,” the OECD said.

“Inheritances are also unequally distributed across households, and they are likely to grow in value (if trends in asset prices continue) and in number (with the baby-boom generation getting older). The Covid-19 crisis will place countries under greater pressure to raise additional revenues and

address inequalities, which have been exacerbated since the start of the pandemic.”

Using studies by academics, including [the French economist Thomas Piketty](#), the report found that after a fall in wealth inequality through most of the 20th century there had been a marked rise in the past two decades, especially in the UK, the US and Germany.

In the UK, the top 20% of wealthy households hold 57% of all wealth compared with the OECD average of 39%. In the US the top 20% of wealthy households hold 67% of all wealth.

“There is evidence that the share of inheritances in private wealth is returning to the highs seen at the turn of the 20th century in some countries. If these trends continue, inherited wealth may once again reach the high levels of the early 1900s,” the report said.

“There is significant cross-country variation in the wealth shares held by the top 1%, ranging from 9% in Greece to 43% in the US.”

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It added that a recent study by the UK government’s Office for [Tax Simplification](#) showed that tax relief for business and agricultural assets “predominantly benefit the wealthiest households, significantly reducing the effective tax burden on some of the largest estates”.

Pascal Saint-Amans, the director of the OECD’s centre for tax policy, said it was concerning that a rentier class who lived on inherited financial and property wealth was expanding across the developed world.

“Income and wealth inequalities are mutually reinforcing and that creates a vicious circle. It means that the richer you are the more wealth you have.”



## Nepal

# Nepal urges Everest climbers to return used oxygen canisters amid Covid crisis

Climbers and their Sherpa guides were estimated to have carried at least 3,500 oxygen bottles this season – now they need to be refilled

- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



The Nepal Mountaineering Association has asked the climbers to help Nepal deal with a surge in Covid-19 cases Photograph: Sunil Sharma/ZUMA Wire/REX/Shutterstock

The Nepal Mountaineering Association has asked the climbers to help Nepal deal with a surge in Covid-19 cases Photograph: Sunil Sharma/ZUMA Wire/REX/Shutterstock

*Reuters*

Mon 10 May 2021 23.17 EDT



Nepal is so short of oxygen canisters that it has asked climbers on Mount Everest to bring back their empties instead of abandoning them on mountain slopes, an official said on Monday, as it struggles with a [second wave of the coronavirus](#).

The country issued climbing permits to more than 700 climbers for 16 Himalayan peaks – 408 to Mount Everest – for the April-May climbing season in a bid to get the mountaineering industry and tourism back up and running.

The [Nepal](#) Mountaineering Association has asked the climbers to help [Nepal](#) deal with a surge in Covid-19 cases that has brought the country's fragile healthcare system to breaking point, as it has in neighbouring India where deaths held close to record highs on Monday.

[‘A hopeless situation’: oxygen shortage fuels Nepal’s Covid crisis](#)  
[Read more](#)

Kul Bahadur Gurung, a senior official with the NMA, said climbers and their Sherpa guides were estimated to have carried at least 3,500 oxygen bottles this season. These bottles often get buried in avalanches or are abandoned on the mountain slopes at the end of the expedition.

“We appeal to climbers and sherpas to bring back their empty bottles wherever possible as they can be refilled and used for the treatment of the coronavirus patients who are in dire needs,” Gurung said.

On Sunday, Nepal reported a daily increase of 8,777 infections, 30 times the number recorded on 9 April. The total caseload stands at 394,667 and 3,720 deaths, according to government data.

Many private and community hospitals in Kathmandu have said they are unable to take any more patients due to lack of oxygen. There was a shortage of both the gas and canisters.

“We need about 25,000 oxygen cylinders immediately to save people from dying. This is our urgent need,” Samir Kumar Adhikari, a health ministry official said.

“We also need oxygen plants, compressors and ICU beds urgently,” Adhikari said. Nepal has asked China to send 20,000 cylinders, some of which will be airlifted to meet urgent needs, another official said.

China has pledged to provide oxygen cylinders, ventilators and other medical supplies, Health and Population Minister Hridayesh Tripathi said.

Nepal has only 1,600 intensive care beds and fewer than 600 ventilators for its population of 30 million with just 0.7 doctors per 100,000 people, according to ActionAid Nepal.

Prakash Thapa, a doctor at the Bheri hospital in Nepalgunj, in southwest Nepal bordering India, said patients were sleeping on the floor and corridors.

“We are somehow managing so far but it will be difficult to take any more patients,\* he said. (Reporting by Gopal Sharma; Editing by Sanjeev Miglani and Nick Macfie)

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/11/nepal-urges-everest-climbers-to-return-used-oxygen-canisters-amid-covid-crisis>

## Coronavirus

# US authorizes Pfizer coronavirus vaccine for children ages 12 to 15

Move expands inoculation program as vaccination rates slow



The Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine has been authorized in the US for children as young as 12. Photograph: Carlos Osorio/Reuters

The Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine has been authorized in the US for children as young as 12. Photograph: Carlos Osorio/Reuters

[Edward Helmore](#) and agency

Mon 10 May 2021 17.30 EDT

US regulators on Monday authorized [Pfizer](#) and its partner BioNTech's Covid vaccine for use in children as young as 12, widening the country's inoculation program even as vaccination rates have slowed significantly.

The vaccine has been available under an emergency use authorization (EUA) to people as young as 16 in the United States. Today's decision means the FDA is amending the EUA to include children aged 12 to 15. The vaccine makers said they had started the process for full approval for those ages last week.

"Today's action allows for a younger population to be protected from Covid-19, bringing us closer to returning to a sense of normalcy and to ending the pandemic," [said Janet Woodcock, the acting FDA commissioner.](#)

"Parents and guardians can rest assured that the agency undertook a rigorous and thorough review of all available data, as we have with all of our Covid-19 vaccine emergency use authorizations," Woodcock added.

According to the FDA, about 1.5m cases have been reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in individuals 11 to 17 years of age between March 2020 and April this year.

Pfizer's vaccine is being used in multiple countries for teens as young as 16, and Canada recently became the first to expand use to 12 and up.

While children are far less likely than adults to get seriously ill, the age group represents nearly 14% of coronavirus cases in the US. At least 296 have died in the US after contracting the virus and more than 15,000 have been hospitalized, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).

The agency also said "the known and potential benefits of this vaccine in individuals 12 years of age and older outweigh the known and potential risks, supporting the vaccine's use in this population."

"With science guiding our evaluation and decision-making process, the FDA can assure the public and medical community that the available data meet our rigorous standards to support the emergency use of this vaccine in the adolescent population 12 years of age and older," said Peter Marks, the director of the FDA's Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research.

The CDC says unvaccinated people – including children – should continue taking precautions such as wearing masks indoors and keeping their distance

from other unvaccinated people outside of their households.

The latest news is welcome for many families struggling to decide what activities are safe to resume when only the youngest family members remain unvaccinated.

For Carrie Vittitoe, a substitute teacher in Louisville, Kentucky, who is fully vaccinated, as are her husband and 17-year-old daughter, the FDA decision means her 13-year-old son soon could be eligible, leaving only her 11-year-old son who would be unvaccinated.

“I can’t feel totally comfortable because my boys aren’t vaccinated,” Vittitoe told the Associated Press. “We can’t really go back to normal because two-fifths of our family don’t have protection.”

Pfizer isn’t the only company seeking to lower the age limit for its vaccine. Moderna recently said preliminary results from its study in 12- to 17-year-olds show strong protection and no serious side effects.

Another US company, Novavax, has a Covid-19 vaccine in late-stage development and just began a study in 12- to 17-year-olds as well.

The next hurdle is to test whether the vaccine works for even younger children. Both Pfizer and Moderna have begun studies in children aged from 6 months to 11 years that explore whether babies, preschoolers and elementary-age kids will need different dosages to teens and adults.

Outside of the US, AstraZeneca is studying its vaccine among six- to 17-year-olds in Britain. And in China, Sinovac recently announced it has submitted preliminary data to Chinese regulators showing its vaccine is safe in children as young as three.

The AAP welcomed FDA’s decision.

“Our youngest generations have shouldered heavy burdens over the past year, and the vaccine is a hopeful sign that they will be able to begin to experience all the activities that are so important for their health and development,” said Dr Lee Savio Beers, the AAP president, in a statement.

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

## 2021.05.11 - Spotlight

- [Olivia Williams I've been close enough to stardom to see how horrifying it is](#)
- [Juliana Hatfield Women don't know what to do with anger. We turn it on ourselves](#)
- [Bells v boutique hotel The battle to save Britain's oldest factory](#)
- [Guardian 200 The rudest things they ever said about the Guardian](#)



## [Television](#)

### Interview

# Olivia Williams: ‘I’ve been close enough to stardom to see how horrifying it is’

[Zoe Williams](#)

As she prepares to star in *The Nevers*, an eerie TV drama about supernatural Victorian women, the actor talks about fame, cancer – and squaring up to Bruce Willis in *The Sixth Sense*



‘If the money or the location or the leading man had been right, I’d have ditched my privacy’ ... Olivia Williams. Photograph: Sarah Lee/The Guardian

‘If the money or the location or the leading man had been right, I’d have ditched my privacy’ ... Olivia Williams. Photograph: Sarah Lee/The Guardian



[@zoesqwilliams](#)

Tue 11 May 2021 01.00 EDT

What I wouldn't have given to be in an actual room with [Olivia Williams](#), rather than down a Zoom. For all her early-90s RSC pedigree, she is forever the surprise find of *The Postman*, *Rushmore* and *The Sixth Sense*, films in which her casting seemed so idiosyncratic.

How did this British actor, with her amused detachment and her totally rose-garden, tan-resistant complexion, end up in Hollywood? I always saw her as an ambassador for the nation, roaming around the end of last century, giving the world the impression that we were all incredibly graceful and surprisingly tall. She, conversely, maintains that she only ever got those parts because they'd blown the budget on their male lead and needed someone cheap. I just won't have that, I'm afraid. Surely it's faux modesty? Nope, she's pretty dug in – all those films, “they needed people who were just going to get on with it. Because they didn't have any budget or time to worry about people who were overly concerned with vanity or how long their trailer was.”

She will, however, allow that there was a bit more to it: “I had a sort of theatrical fearlessness that I think stood me in good stead. They were

looking for someone in [Sixth Sense](#) who could square up to Bruce Willis. They were looking for someone in The Postman who could square up to Kevin Costner. For [Rushmore](#), Hope Davies suddenly became unavailable, God bless her. I'm not proud, my father was a barrister and he always said his best cases were returns, the ones that nobody else was available for."



'They needed people who were just going to get on with it' ... with Bruce Willis in The Sixth Sense. Photograph: Buena Vista/Allstar

We're here to discuss [The Nevers](#). I can't tell you much about Williams's character because of spoilers; let's just say she is stunningly austere. The show has had a rocky entry on to the screens: some time between conception and delivery, several actors from previous shows by its creator, Joss Whedon, accused him of creating a "toxic environment". What was originally slated as a 12-episode first season of The Nevers has become two six-ep mini-seasons, with Whedon replaced by Philippa Goslett as showrunner and executive producer for the second. Whedon cited the level of commitment necessary and the "physical challenges of making such a huge show during a global pandemic", saying it was "more than I can handle without the work beginning to suffer".

It's had mixed reviews. I thought it was wonderful: an intricately built universe of magnetic inventiveness, its tempo almost like a teen drama, its

themes unbelievably dark and densely allegorical. I thought about it for days afterwards. At one point, I became convinced that its premise – “touched” people, mainly women, with freakish abilities, demonised and feared in Victorian London – was actually a metaphor for the pitfalls of third-way progressive politics. Williams wasn’t really having that. When she thinks a question is stupid, she sort of nods, and moves along.

But she will tell me what attracted her to the role. “It was Joss calling me up and saying, ‘I’ve got a new job for you.’ Because the last time he did that it was a fabulous role in *Dollhouse*.” Yes, about Joss Whedon ... “I know I brought him up, but I don’t want to dwell on it,” she says. “There’s nothing I can say that couldn’t be twisted into something on Twitter. I don’t speak in 240 characters. Everything I say takes 24,000 characters.” She’s deeply suspicious of social media. “Very early on, I read something racist about my elder child on an IMDb message board. And I thought, ‘OK, we’re not going to be doing that any more.’” (She has two teenage daughters, Esme and Roxana, with the actor and writer [Rhashan Stone](#).)



Stunningly austere ... Williams in *The Nevers*. Photograph: HBO/Warner Brothers

More than that, though, Williams is extremely chary of talking about what is currently the hot button issue of acting: sexism, sexist pay scales, sexual

harassment, sexist bullying – the lot. She won't go anywhere near it (I get a lot of brisk nods), and it's frustrating, since when she does talk freely about politics or her industry, she does so with such openness and precision that you get a really strong sense of who she is. You could predict that she'd be anti-Brexit, for instance, but not the extent of her self-recrimination: "I just can't believe how negligent I was, all those years between the ages of 18 and 48, when Brexit came up, when I didn't vote for an MEP", nor her anguish at the human consequences. "I feel like weeping about Northern Ireland. I was over there making a radio play recently and it seemed so transformed, so hopeful and so positive a place, with a chance of being the great city it should be, and it's just been cut off at the knee."

She also has a stout critique of her industry, but it's quite tailored. "The thing that's bruising is business affairs. The director wants you, the casting director wants you, the producers love you. And then the deal goes from your agent to business affairs, and some little shit who's just got out of law school says, 'What have you been in?' They will say anything, no matter how offensive it is. 'Well, she's not looking so great ... well, she's had cancer.'"

In 2018, Williams was diagnosed with a very rare pancreatic cancer, which had taken four years of miserable ill health to identify. She wrote about it at the time, concluding with mournful wit: "Soon after my six-month all-clear, I was asked to be an ambassador for Pancreatic Cancer UK. I ... pointed out I wasn't really famous enough to raise lots of money. They replied that I wasn't being asked because I was famous. I was being asked because there are so few survivors."





Finery ... in the Nevers. Photograph: Album/Alamy

She talks about it very briskly now, but it's left its scars. "I don't have a spleen. So we got out of London before lockdown and stayed out of London for both lockdowns. I had a good war with my delightful family in a small place far from infection."

Between those early cinematic performances and her recent television work – before *The Nevers*, she was in the US sci-fi thriller, [Counterpart](#), for two years – Williams made a number of British films that you might call classic but discreet: [An Education](#) (2009), based on Lynn Barber's brilliant memoir; *The Heart of Me* (2002), adapted from a Rosamund Lehmann novel; *The Ghost Writer* (2010), Robert Harris's thinly veiled take-down of Cherie Blair (Williams played Ruth Lang, who's the Cherie in my highly personal interpretation). She resolutely claims that there's never been any plan; she's always simply taken what she was offered. Yet she has a visceral aversion to stardom. "I've been close enough to it to see how horrifying it is. It's like some sort of dream."

Antonio Banderas and I went out for lunch and, within an hour, he'd had to be escorted out with a blanket over his head

She describes shooting in Rome with Antonio Banderas, trying to persuade him to go to a gallery, which he said was just impossible. So they went to a tiny place for lunch instead. “When we sat down, it was just us, and within an hour he had to be escorted out by security with his head in a blanket. And I thought, ‘How fucking miserable is that?’ If you love acting, is celebrity necessarily part of acting?” Surely on some level she prioritised privacy over blockbusters? “No, absolutely not,” she says staunchly. “If the money or the location or the leading man had been right, I’d have ditched my privacy and taken the job.”

If there were a throughline to both her career and her conversation, it may be that she’s always drawn to the subtle and complex, and faintly repelled by the obvious and splashy. “There was a wonderful drama teacher [at the Bristol Old Vic theatre school], who was old enough to be Prussian. My favourite admonishment of his was, ‘Ducky, your subtext is showing.’ In the age of therapy, subtext becomes text, but I think it’s much more interesting to keep your subtext sub.”

In spite of her fierce denial of ever having had a plan, she has “navigated the way through, past the Scylla and Charybdis of either not working at all or a celebrity that stops you going about your business unmolested. I don’t know how that’s happened and I’ve earned a living at the same time. So I feel truly blessed by that.” Perhaps more the point: “Between action and cut, between curtain up and curtain down, I’m just about as happy as I can be.”

The Nevers is on Sky Atlantic and Now on 17 May.

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## Indie

Interview

# **Juliana Hatfield: ‘Women don’t know what to do with anger. We turn it on ourselves’**

Erin Osmon



‘It’s really healthy to explore darkness’ ... Juliana Hatfield. Photograph: Getty Images

‘It’s really healthy to explore darkness’ ... Juliana Hatfield. Photograph: Getty Images

The indie-rocker is now a touchstone for a generation of young songwriters – and after learning to channel her pain and frustration, her 18th album is one of her best

Tue 11 May 2021 05.30 EDT

Juliana Hatfield speaks with deliberation: her thoughts unfurl after pregnant pauses and are sharpened by astute clarifications. “I’m sorry, I lost my train of thought,” she says at one point, doubling back to ensure her meaning is clear. Such consideration isn’t a surprise, given the rippling effect of an infamous early-career interview.

Nearly 30 years ago, while promoting her debut solo album *Hey Babe*, 23-year-old Hatfield, who was brand new to interviews, admitted to an inquiring male journalist that she was still a virgin. The casual comment became the focus of his piece, and incited scrutiny that followed the American songwriter throughout her rise. “When I was in the thick of it, it wasn’t really computing for me,” she says on a phone call from her home in Cambridge, Massachusetts. “It wasn’t until much later that I realised how intense it was, how gross it was, and how it affected my career in negative ways.”

Cynics viewed the admission as a strategic attempt to bolster her girlish image. Hatfield’s dulcet singing was already a point of contention among critics. “People thought it was put on, like I was trying to be coy or flirtatious, which is crazy because I was born with that voice and above all I was trying to be honest,” she says. As Hatfield’s second album, *Become What You Are*, climbed the alternative charts with its bubbly, slightly askew guitar-centric sound, coverage focused on her sex life, particularly her relationship with Evan Dando of [the Lemonheads](#), a friend and bandmate. “At the time, I’d try to laugh it off,” she says. “I was on tour a lot, or I was recording and trying to keep my head down and work.” But the headlines were appalling. “Birds Do It, Bees Do It, But Have Evan and Juliana Done It?” *Melody Maker* asked on the cover of its November 1993 issue. “I was so clueless about all this stuff, about sexism and image,” Hatfield says. “I just thought my music would speak for itself.”



Juliana Hatfield in London in 1991. Photograph: Martyn Goodacre/Getty Images

Eighteen solo albums later, Hatfield is set to release her excellent latest, *Blood*, an album that is both a reinvention and a return to form; she releases it amid a new generation of female songwriters – such as [Soccer Mommy](#), [Snail Mail](#), Julien Baker and [Phoebe Bridgers](#) – whose fierce yet melodic and thoroughly feminine sounds are implicitly linked to Hatfield's in the 1990s. *Blood* furthers Hatfield's skill for pairing hard with soft; her seraphic voice sings of fever dreams, anger and frustration, much of it spurred by four years of the Trump administration. "I think it's really healthy to explore darkness in artwork and music, better to breathe it out rather than push it down," she says. Its pop hooks are laced with formidable waves of guitar distortion.

It's also the first album she's recorded almost entirely on her own, playing most of the instruments at her home studio amid the coronavirus pandemic. "It was not a seamless experience," she says. "Sometimes I would only work for like an hour and then I would get frustrated by the technology. It took me a lot longer to finish." The resulting 10 songs take you into Hatfield's inner world as it truly is: vibrant, unpredictable and messy, rather than tamed and neatly packaged for the outside. Mellotron flutes, synth washes, dextrous guitar playing and understated drum beats build a tightly stitched yet dreamy

framework around Hatfield's voice, an instrument she once tried to roughen up via cigarette smoking, but now accepts for its uniqueness. "Some great technical singers don't have that," she says. "I don't really sound like anyone else."

The 53-year-old was born in Wiscasset, Maine, and raised in the Boston suburb of Duxbury. In 1986, she co-founded the indie-rock trio Blake Babies as a student at the Berklee College of Music. Though they played the same clubs as fellow Bostonians Pixies, Dinosaur Jr and the Lemonheads, Blake Babies are cult favourites in comparison. "We were overshadowed by the more hyped bands around us," Hatfield says.



Her band the Juliana Hatfield Three, in 1993. Photograph: Gie Knaeps/Getty Images

In 1991, she recorded her first solo album and began collaborating with the Lemonheads, supplying bass and backing vocals on the band's 1992 breakthrough *It's a Shame About Ray*. By the mid-90s, Hatfield's albums *Become What You Are* and *Only Everything* were staples on alternative radio and music television; *Spin the Bottle*, a buoyant pop-rock charmer written in 5/4 time, was featured on the soundtrack of the 1994 slacker dramedy [Reality Bites](#). The following year, Hatfield made her acting debut on the teen television show [My So-Called Life](#), after writing a song for its

Christmas episode. “Everyone was really nice, and they were coaching me through it, but I definitely felt like a fish out of water,” she says. Cartoon delinquents Beavis and Butt-Head even spewed debased commentary while watching her music videos.

Hatfield’s unrepentantly feminine singing and skilled guitar playing took up space in a male-dominated alternative rock landscape, but she was unafraid to give voice to the anger, fear and longing experienced by many women and girls, singing of sisters, crushes, body image and broken hearts. “Making music has always been really helpful emotionally, to work through difficult and confusing situations and emotions,” she says. “We [women and girls] get confused because when we get angry, we don’t know what to do with that anger because we’re not encouraged to express it or even feel it. So then we start turning our anger inward on to ourselves. We start hurting ourselves or imploding.” Hatfield is no stranger to the cycle. Her career with major labels all but ended after she cancelled the European portion of the Only Everything tour due to depression in 1995. She has also struggled with anorexia and disordered eating.

On Blood, she channels these complex emotions into tuneful, three-minute vignettes whose lyrics often teem with anxiety, horror and existential dread. “A lot of bad stuff has been happening over the last four years, and the last year in particular, and writing was a way for me to deal,” Hatfield says. “Writing these songs didn’t cure me of all the anger but it definitely helped.” Throughout the album, she dreams about stabbing the former president, describes life in a world controlled by fascists, bites her tongue until it bleeds and is paralysed by love. Hard truths are conveyed through fantasy and imagined brutality, like a cleverer Game of Thrones. “In my real life I’m obviously not a violent person, and writing these songs doesn’t mean I want to go out and stab someone,” she says. “It’s a metaphorical stabbing.” Hatfield is doing what she’s always done: relaying dark, vulnerable and embarrassing feelings with remarkable insight.

Over the last year, Hatfield has found another form of release. The gym she frequents has been closed, so she’s taken up running, something she used to do in college. The practice doesn’t clear her mind, but it does reduce the noise. “It’s not exactly meditative because I’m very present, aware of

everything that's going on around me, but not focused on anything but taking steps," she says. As for the continued speculation about her friend Evan Dando, which has been intermittently fanned by the pair's interactions on Twitter? "We're playing along in a way," she says. "We don't have to answer the question. Let them keep guessing."

Blood is released 14 May on American Laundromat Records

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

# The bells v the boutique hotel: the battle to save Britain's oldest factory

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# The Guardian For 200 years

[Guardian 200Media](#)

## The rudest things they ever said about the Guardian



From left: Tony Blair; David Cameron; Donald Trump; Jonathan Aitken; Alastair Campbell; files being destroyed at Guardian HQ. Composite:

PA/Getty

From left: Tony Blair; David Cameron; Donald Trump; Jonathan Aitken; Alastair Campbell; files being destroyed at Guardian HQ. Composite: PA/Getty

This newspaper has upset public figures from Blair to Trump. Here we look at some of the resultant indignation



[Rupert Neate](#)  
[@RupertNeate](#)

Tue 11 May 2021 02.00 EDT

The Guardian has never tried to ingratiate itself with the rich and powerful. But its reporting has, over the years, provoked indignation, pique and even rudeness from prime ministers, presidents and corporate titans as well as the odd pop singer and Hollywood movie star.

[embed](#)

Conservative leaders probably don't expect a particularly warm reception at the Guardian's offices when invited to set out their policies to the paper's editors and commentators. But nor it seems did [Tony Blair](#).

Soon after he was elected leader of the Labour party, in 1994, Blair marched into the Guardian's offices on Farringdon Road with a stack of clippings and his new spin doctor, [Alastair Campbell](#). While Blair spoke, Campbell sat in the editor's chair, swung back and put his feet on the desk, the Guardian columnist Jonathan Freedland remembers.

"It was like being hauled before the headteacher," recalls the editor at the time, [Alan Rusbridger](#), of the meeting with Blair and about 20 senior Guardian editorial staff. "He told us off for various articles, dropping them on the floor one at time, and then warned us that he would tell Labour party members to read the Telegraph because it was fairer."

Rusbridger, who was newly installed in his role at the time, says he was "secretly longing" for Blair to follow through with his threat. "Money couldn't buy that kind of marketing."



Alastair Campbell fends off the political hacks as Tony Blair gives an interview in 1998. Photograph: Don McPhee

Several Tory MPs have pursued the Guardian through the courts, not very successfully. Most dramatically, [Jonathan Aitken](#) added some poetic invective to his 1995 lawsuit after the Guardian revealed that he allowed

aides of the Saudi royal family to pay his £1,000 hotel bill during a stay at the Ritz in Paris.

“If it falls to me to start a fight to cut out the cancer of bent and twisted journalism in our country with the simple sword of truth and the trusty shield of fair play, so be it,” he intoned. Unfortunately, he lost the case, lied on the witness stand, and had to take both sword and shield with him to a seven-month stint in jail.

But Aitken was by no means the first, or last, to call the Guardian names. Donald Trump called Guardian reporter Ewen MacAskill a “[nasty, nasty guy](#)” in 2016, when the mild-mannered Scot pointed out that Trump was “toxic” in the UK and mainstream British politicians did not want to be seen meeting him.

[Donald Trump calls reporter Ewen MacAskill ‘a nasty, nasty guy’ – video](#)  
Guardian

MacAskill had already ruffled more than a few feathers after interviews with [Edward Snowden in 2013](#) revealed the scale of US government surveillance.

David Cameron, when prime minister, ordered the Guardian to destroy hard drives of computers that had contained top secret documents leaked by Snowden. Under the watchful gaze of two technicians from the British government spy agency GCHQ, senior journalists took angle grinders and [drills to the internal components](#), rendering them useless and the information on them obliterated.

“The plain fact is that what has happened has damaged national security and in many ways the Guardian themselves admitted that when they agreed, when asked politely by my national security adviser and cabinet secretary to destroy the files they had, they went ahead and destroyed those files,” Cameron said at prime minister’s questions.

The former Labour home secretary Jack Straw accused the Guardian of “indulgent irresponsibility” [and “adolescent excitement”](#) in publishing the leaks, which he said had put lives at risk. “I’m not suggesting for a moment that anybody at the Guardian gratuitously wants to risk anybody’s life. But

what I do think is their sense of power of having these ‘secrets’ and excitement, almost adolescent excitement, about these secrets, has gone to their head.

“They’re blinding themselves about the consequence and also showing an extraordinary naivety and arrogance in implying that they are in a position to judge whether or not particular secrets which they have published are not likely to damage the national interest, and they’re not in any position at all to do that.”

A deep scepticism of war has, over the years, generated plenty of name-calling.

When the Guardian voiced concern about the looming conflict with Argentina over the Falkland Islands in 1982, the Sun warned of “[the traitors in our midst](#)”, such as “the pygmy Guardian”.

## **Slurs, outrage and death threats**

The Guardian’s dogged reporting has often gotten under the skin of business leaders. In 2003 Topshop’s Philip Green described the Guardian’s then financial editor, Paul Murphy – born in Oldham and raised in Portsmouth – as a “fucking Irishman” who “can’t read English”. In the short conversation with the Guardian, [which the newspaper printed in full](#), he said the words “fuck” or “fucking” 14 times. Green, who lives in the tax haven of Monaco, eventually [apologised to Ireland](#).

More recently, Green threatened Guardian reporters [with “unpleasant things”](#) when they tracked him down to his £100m superyacht in Monaco to ask him about the looming collapse of his Arcadia retail empire putting 19,000 jobs at risk.

The Tesla billionaire Elon Musk emailed a reporter in 2018 to [tell them](#) that the Guardian “is the most insufferable newspaper on planet Earth”, in response to a question about whether it was appropriate for the chief executive of one of the world’s biggest companies to smoke marijuana on a live web show.

The Guardian G2 section's lighthearted attempt to influence the 2004 US presidential election by pairing up undecided voters in a swing county with passionate letter writers in the UK and elsewhere wasn't met with the good humour that the then section editor, Ian Katz, intended. "A quixotic idea dreamed up in a north London pub had morphed into a global media phenomenon complete with transatlantic outrage, harrumphing over journalistic ethics, grave political predictions," he says of [Operation Clark County](#).

The US radio talkshow host [Rush Limbaugh](#) devoted a whole programme to questioning the Guardian's ethics, the website was attacked by hackers and thousands of Americans wrote to castigate the Guardian. One wrote: "Keep your fuckin' Limey hands off our election. Hey, shitheads, remember the revolutionary war? Remember the war of 1812? We didn't want you or your politics here. That's why we kicked your asses out."

Public death threats, though, came not from politics but our coverage of a 1979 production of Hamlet. Steven Berkoff issued the warning to the Guardian's then theatre critic, [Nicholas de Jongh](#), after he described Berkoff's production as "[fatally miscast](#)". The threat was reportedly considered so seriously that police protection was felt necessary.

More recently, another artist expressed his fury at Guardian criticism in a less threatening but equally unambiguous fashion. After articles expressed dismay at Morrissey's support for a far right group, he performed in Los Angeles wearing a vest with a simple slogan: "[Fuck the Guardian](#)."



## This charming man: Morrissey states his views on the Guardian

Josh Halliday

The former Smiths frontman Morrissey has decided he really doesn't like the Guardian and underlined his disapproval on stage in Los Angeles at the weekend by wearing a vest bearing the slogan "Fuck the Guardian" as he performed.

Morrissey wore the top during a concert at the Hollywood Bowl on Saturday. In the summer he described this newspaper as "the voice of all that is wrong and sad about modern Britain".

The 60-year-old singer, who once sang songs about loneliness and shyness, has more recently repeatedly expressed support for the far-right For



▲ The singer Morrissey expresses his opinion on stage in Los Angeles

Britain movement – a party described as "Nazis and racists" by Nigel Farage. And Morrissey has increasingly lashed out at the Guardian.

Writing on his own website in May, Morrissey claimed he was the victim of an "Inexhaustible Hate Campaign" by the Guardian. "Please do not buy this wretched hate-paper," he urged, adding that its "every 2009 utterance echoes the late Mary Whitehouse".

Morrissey insisted: "It is the voice of all that is wrong and sad about modern Britain."

Morrissey sported a For Britain badge during a performance on the Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon in May and earlier this month ejected an anti-far-right protester from one of his concerts in Portland, Oregon.

The protester had been carrying two posters, one of which depicted the logo of For Britain struck through with a red line.

The other poster simply said: "Bognorath indeed".

Morrissey wears 'fuck the Guardian' T-shirt on stage. Composite: Guardian

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## 2021.05.11 - Opinion

- Labour can no longer assume it would hold the whip hand in a 'progressive alliance'
- London's pain could become the north's gain, but Johnson isn't up to the job
- Champions League final switch good for environment but football must do more
- I've spent 27 years squabbling in French. Is that enough to earn me citizenship?

## [OpinionElections 2021](#)

# Labour can no longer assume it would hold the whip hand in a ‘progressive alliance’

[Gaby Hinsliff](#)



With local Green and Liberal Democrat gains, the balance of power between the parties on the left in England is shifting



Supporters of Greta Thunberg, Bristol 2020. The Greens made big gains locally in last week's elections. Photograph: Leon Neal/Getty Images

Supporters of Greta Thunberg, Bristol 2020. The Greens made big gains locally in last week's elections. Photograph: Leon Neal/Getty Images

Tue 11 May 2021 02.00 EDT

When Greta Thunberg came to [Bristol a year ago](#), it was to a heroine's welcome.

Thousands turned out in the rain to attend a climate crisis rally in a city she had picked, she explained, because “the movement is very strong here”. Well, it's stronger now. The Greens deprived Labour of its control of the council in last week's local elections and came a strong second in mayoral elections to Labour's Marvin Rees, who has spent much of the past month struggling to defuse either clashes between protesters and riot police on Bristol's streets, or factional fighting within his local party. Significantly, they took [nearly half the vote](#) in neighbourhoods covered by the Labour-held Bristol West seat, where they have long dreamed of getting a second Westminster MP. (Despite the sitting MP Thangam Debonnaire's thumping majority, the seat is famously volatile, with a constantly shifting student population.) Now the Greens have a chance to show what they could do in

power, in a young, diverse city with a history of protest and a strong subversive streak.

It's been all but drowned out by Labour's dramas, but the Green surge is real, albeit still small. The party gained more than 80 seats in English local elections last week, advancing not only in its Bristol and Sheffield strongholds but in more unexpected places, too. It overtook Labour as the opposition on [Suffolk county council](#), and gained its first toeholds [in Oxfordshire](#), [Derbyshire](#) and [Essex](#). While in big cities it is soaking up former Corbynites who have deserted Keir Starmer's Labour party, elsewhere its appeal is very different; it presents as a gentle, worthy way for the politically homeless to do their bit for the environment, making voting Green seem barely more radical than buying a reusable coffee cup or admiring David Attenborough. Strangely for a party whose pescatarian, hybrid-driving leader was into environmental politics decades before it was fashionable, Labour lacks a distinctive message yet on the climate crisis, and suddenly that looks like a dangerous omission. While the Tories woo pragmatic northern towns with promises of green jobs, and the Greens inspire a more idealistic climate strike generation, Starmer risks falling between two stools. And the problem doesn't end there.

The one ray of sunshine in a grim week for the left has been the prospect of new opportunities opening up in what were once solidly Tory but remain-voting parts of the south-east. The "red shires" theory of priced-out Londoners rippling out across the commuter belt and changing its demographics certainly helps explain Labour gains in towns such as [Worthing in West Sussex](#) and [Folkestone in Kent](#), or Liberal Democrat progress in Essex commuter towns [such as Chelmsford](#). The post-pandemic trend for home-working could even accelerate matters, if it encourages city dwellers to move farther away from the office. But there are now three progressive parties – Labour, the Lib Dems and increasingly the Greens – fighting for this new demographic, and in some cases all they're doing is knocking each other out. When the Greens launched their national campaign in the quirky, alternative-minded but highly marginal Labour-held seat of Stroud in 2019, local Tories were thrilled; the left vote splintered just enough to get a Conservative MP elected.

Ah, say the optimists, the answer is a progressive pact in which opposition parties carve up the country according to their respective strengths. Just leave pickings in Surrey and Cambridgeshire to the Lib Dems, the Kent and Sussex coast to [Labour](#), Brighton or Bristol to the Greens. There are already glimmers of something like that happening between cash-strapped parties on the ground; in my corner of rural Oxfordshire, the Green candidate was very anxious to explain that the Lib Dems (the traditional anti-Tory vote locally) were standing down in my ward while next door the Greens returned the favour for them. But it's a quantum leap from here to organising a stable general election alliance between three parties with historical reason to distrust each other, in a political landscape so volatile it's far from obvious who the rightful challenger should be in some seats, and [Labour](#) cannot assume the smaller parties will simply roll over. If this really is the path back to power, then it's going to be longer, harder and significantly more humbling than some of those advocating it like to think.

- Gaby Hinsliff is a Guardian columnist

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[OpinionCities](#)

# London's pain could become the north's gain, but Johnson isn't up to the job

[Simon Jenkins](#)



Stemming the 'brain drain' to London is a vast undertaking that will take a lot more than political gimmicks



Apartments in Collyhurst, Manchester, beyond the Northern Quarter, March 2018. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

Apartments in Collyhurst, Manchester, beyond the Northern Quarter, March 2018. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

Tue 11 May 2021 05.22 EDT

Modern British government is a lurch from catchphrase to cliché. Policy is rarely in sight. Following the Tories’ remarkable success in the local elections, Boris Johnson will today announce a new campaign to “[stop the brain drain](#)” from northern cities. Bitten by Covid’s big spending bug, he will tip cash into infrastructure to get people to “live local and prosper”.

Two consequences follow, both significant. Few have noticed, but London, after decades spent sucking the north dry of talent, is suddenly in big trouble. Its [population is falling](#) – a bad sign in any city. Its transport network, Transport for London, suffered a [90% collapse in passenger revenue](#) last year, requiring a £1.6bn bailout in May 2020, with further funding put on hold until the result of the London mayoral elections. Now the votes are in, if Johnson refuses the necessary further funding, this would mean soaring fares and slashed services, humiliating his Labour successor as mayor, Sadiq Khan.



['We're happier, calmer': why young adults are moving out of big cities](#)  
[Read more](#)

At the same time, London's flatulent property market faces a crash if and when Johnson's extravagant buyers' subsidies and stamp duty breaks end. His mayoral obsession with office towers and foreign-owned luxury flats, prodded by his property consultant aide, Eddie Lister, has left London [littered with empty skyscrapers](#). Huge numbers of office workers will simply [vanish to home working](#). Coupled with Brexit's hit to tourism, this promises a capital of vacant hotels, deserted high streets and plummeting tax revenues. It is easy to say that London had it coming. But the government may soon need a policy for "levelling up" London too, which contains some of the poorest people in Britain.

The second question is how realistic is it to ensure "the north" is the beneficiary of London's pain? Johnson is correct that a talent drain has been at the root of Britain's regional divide, and "live local and prosper" is a sound catchphrase. But what is the actual policy?

It is a massive undertaking to make northern cities as enriching as London has seemed. It is not a finger-snapping exercise. Nor is it about this week's proposed pro-developer splurge of [state-subsidised private homes](#) in open fields. The region is well supplied with property, and people in the north may not share Johnson's philistine distaste for their countryside. The surefire consequence of his policy is simply endless sprawl over the south-east of England.

[When Covid is over, what buildings do we actually want to see in Britain's cities? | Owen Hatherley](#)  
[Read more](#)

Besides, it is the vitality of inner cities that matters. As Hebden Bridge or [Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter](#) and [Manchester's Northern Quarter](#) demonstrate, magnetism is about old buildings, culture and youth appeal. It is not about an executive estate in every dale, but a Shoreditch on every canal. I doubt if a single Tory minister knows what that means.

The age of home working and home shopping now requires a deep reappraisal of the city of the future. Dispersal from London may be in the national interest. Johnson's mere dispersal of housing across the English landscape is not. It means more cars, more roads, more infrastructure and more fragmented, less diverse communities. It will not deliver the excitement and vigour that has made London so popular. At the very least, the essential re-urbanisation of the north needs thought, not political gimmicks.

Simon Jenkins is a Guardian columnist

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

## Champions League

# Champions League final switch good for environment but football must do more

Andrew Simms

Shifting the all-English final from Istanbul would reduce carbon emissions but there is still a lack of long-term thinking from Uefa when it comes to doing the right thing



For a second season in a row, the Champions League final could take place in Lisbon. Photograph: Matthew Childs/Reuters

For a second season in a row, the Champions League final could take place in Lisbon. Photograph: Matthew Childs/Reuters

Tue 11 May 2021 05.07 EDT

It was bad enough in 2019 when tens of thousands of football supporters from the United Kingdom traipsed across Europe to watch two English clubs, Tottenham and Liverpool, play the Champions League final at

Atlético Madrid's stadium in Spain. More easily, cheaply and comfortably they could have hopped on a train or coach, or driven to meet each other halfway in Birmingham.

Now, not only are we still in the middle of a pandemic, with [Turkey](#), where this season's Champions League final between Manchester City and Chelsea was initially scheduled to take place on 29 May, registering an average of [29,000 new coronavirus cases per day](#), but since 2019 there has been a rising tide of awareness about the climate emergency and the urgent need to reduce carbon emissions.

[The climate crisis and football – Football Weekly special](#)  
[Read more](#)

The governing body is infamous for not reading the room on issues ranging from racism to corruption, and has the fossil fuel company Gazprom as a [long-standing major sponsor](#). But this time it failed to read the stadium. Flying to Istanbul under current restrictions was always going to be a joyless, isolated, experience and, most importantly, risk the spread of infection. Four thousand fans flying each from Manchester and London on half-full planes [would have put about 6,400 tonnes of CO2](#) into the atmosphere (assuming everyone flew economy, and not including players, staff, media and entourage). That's the equivalent of burning the gasoline from [84 tanker trucks](#). Sport knows all about the importance of marginal gains in athletic performance, but decisions like this make it look, in climate terms, like it's still stuck on the sofa, drinking, smoking and downing doughnuts.

“Once again Uefa misses an open goal,” said Prof Peter Newell of Sussex University, author of a recent groundbreaking report on [sustainable behaviour change](#) and research director at the [Rapid Transition Alliance](#), before the change of venue was announced. “Rather than playing a leading role in modelling sustainable behaviour change, it shows itself to be off the ball firstly, by getting two British teams to play a final in Turkey and thereby generating huge amounts of carbon through unnecessary travel, and secondly by getting two sets of fans to mingle in the middle of a global pandemic which calls for social distancing.”

Thankfully sport is slowly waking up to the realisation that, like everyone else, it has a part to play in preventing environmental disaster. It's not just about football acting responsibly, the game has its own self-interested reasons to act which could also improve accessibility and the experience for fans. Sports events already are being hit and cancelled increasingly due to extreme weather events. Within the next three decades one quarter of English Football League grounds will be [at risk from flooding every season](#).

And, something wider is stirring in the game to push for rapid change. New groups like [Pledgeball](#) are already working with fans and clubs to change behaviour and cut emissions. Its founder, Katie Cross, points out: "On average, 70% of carbon emissions from a single fixture come from fan travel. Moving the final to England will, therefore, significantly reduce the carbon footprint of the final and demonstrate the impact of fan behaviour on match day and beyond."

Other groups like [Spirit of Football](#) will be using future World Cups as platforms to argue for a major shift in the game. [Football for Future](#), is a brand new campaign and founder, Elliot Arthur-Worsop, believes that a greener sport could also make things better for supporters. "Localising venues significantly reduces travel emissions and makes matches more convenient for fans," he says. "Not all supporters can afford to follow their club across continents, and younger supporters might have to sacrifice multiple days off school to watch their team for just 90 minutes." Encouragingly there is leadership from below in the game with League Two [Forest Green Rovers](#) – the first UN certified carbon zero football club in the world – setting an exemplary example in everything from community involvement to renewable energy and fresh, local food sourcing.

Sign up to The Recap, our weekly email of editors' picks.

How quickly can elite clubs and administrators catch up? Uefa is thankfully shown an ability to think on its feet by making moves to shift the Champions League final from Istanbul, with Lisbon looking the most likely alternative venue, but the fact it took the UK government putting Turkey on the red list for travel to force the change shows there is still a lack of long-term thinking from those at the top of sport when it comes to doing the right thing. As Katie Rood, a New Zealand international who plays for Women's

Championship side Lewes LFC and is a vocal campaigner on environmental issues, put it, with football's global reach and influence "comes the ability to be a sporting leader and to show others what's possible. It's time the governing bodies of the beautiful game start protecting the future by doing the right thing by the planet."

*Andrew Simms is co-director of the [New Weather Institute](#), coordinator of the [Rapid Transition Alliance](#) and co-author of [Sweat not oil: Why sports should drop advertising and sponsorship from high-carbon polluters](#)*

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## [OpinionFrance](#)

# I've spent 27 years squabbling in French. Is that enough to earn me citizenship?

[Emma Beddington](#)



I'm about to take the language test to become a citizen. I'll be fine so long as I can talk about tortoises and snoring





Gallic intent ... a Paris scene. Photograph: Sorasak Charerdunrongkeat/Getty Images/EyeEm

Gallic intent ... a Paris scene. Photograph: Sorasak Charerdunrongkeat/Getty Images/EyeEm

Tue 11 May 2021 02.00 EDT

Just as [“whelk war” with France](#) is – perhaps – narrowly averted, I am unpatriotically heading to an outpost of the Fifth Republic in Manchester to take the French language test that is a prerequisite for citizenship. [After 18 months of trying to become French](#), I am perhaps two-thirds of the way: close, but no handshake from a man in a sash. It’s a slow, bureaucratic business, but a stroll in the Tuileries compared with the [cruel, expensive and idiotic process of becoming British](#).

Conflicting commitments and, I admit, a little complacency mean I will be taking the exam without a second’s preparation. I am hoping that 27 years of speaking French with my husband will help me scrape through. The exam is not particularly hard, [unlike the notorious Quebec French language test](#), which another native speaker recently failed. I just need to manage reading and listening comprehension, conduct a general conversation, and write a short essay on a set current affairs topic.

The problem is that – and I hope I am not shattering any illusions about long-term relationships here – our domestic conversation, and thus all my current French consumption and output, is extremely repetitive. We rarely discuss books or music, and I refuse to debate politics, because my spouse relishes a devil’s advocate argument just for fun. Our main foray into current affairs is me screeching “*Éteins!*” (turn it off!) when he happens on Boris Johnson while channel hopping.

So, like every inadequately prepared exam candidate ever, I will be hoping one of my pet topics comes up. They are:

[Your tortoises are not my responsibility and here are some reasons why.](#)

Domestic heating and insulation: types, cost, aesthetics and recriminations.

A thing a blackbird did that is of no interest to you but that I will relate nevertheless.

Here are some reasons it is OK to have an alcoholic drink on this, a weeknight.

Where did all our money go?

No, *you* snore.

With a life this Britishly prosaic, do I even deserve to be French? Wish me *bonne chance*: I’ll need it.

- Emma Beddington is a Guardian columnist

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## 2021.05.11 - Around the world

- [Opioids crisis US states oppose 'unjust' plan to shield Sackler wealth in settlement](#)
- [Escape tunnel 20-metre excavation found under Australian immigration detention centre](#)
- [China Population growth at slowest rate in generations](#)
- ['They came to kill' Rio's deadliest favela police raid sparks calls for change](#)
- [Myanmar Journalists and activists arrested in Thailand after fleeing across border](#)

## Opioids crisis

# US states oppose ‘unjust’ plan to shield Sackler wealth in opioid settlement

Twenty-four states object to bankruptcy proposal for Sacklers to settle lawsuits by paying \$4.3bn but family would keep about \$7bn



24 states object to the proposal for Sacklers to forfeit ownership of Purdue Pharma, manufacturer of the prescription painkiller OxyContin. Photograph: Jessica Hill/AP

24 states object to the proposal for Sacklers to forfeit ownership of Purdue Pharma, manufacturer of the prescription painkiller OxyContin. Photograph: Jessica Hill/AP

[Chris McGreal](#)

Tue 11 May 2021 05.00 EDT

Nearly half of US states have joined growing opposition to a highly unusual bankruptcy plan that would protect the wealth of the Sackler family after it

made billions of dollars from selling the drug that kickstarted the [US opioid epidemic](#).

Attorneys general of 24 states, members of Congress, municipalities and victims' families object to the proposal for the Sacklers to forfeit ownership of Purdue Pharma, the manufacturer of the powerful prescription painkiller OxyContin, and surrender part of their immense fortune in return for immunity from further litigation over their part in a drug epidemic that has claimed more than 500,000 lives.

A federal judge in New York, who has already expressed sympathy for the plan, will decide after a hearing on Wednesday whether the Sacklers have made the necessary financial disclosures for it to advance toward the final stage.

Criticism has centered on the unusual proposition to shield the wealth of individual Sacklers, even though they are seeking bankruptcy only for their company and not for themselves.

Under the proposals, the two branches of the Sackler family that own Purdue Pharma would settle more than 3,000 lawsuits against the company by paying \$4.3bn. But the Sacklers would keep about \$7bn, which would be personally protected from legal action over the part played by some family members in the illegal drive to mass-market OxyContin, for which Purdue has been twice convicted of criminal charges, in 2007 and last year.

State attorneys general called the proposed settlement “unjust” in [a brief](#) to the court, because it is intended to sidestep individual accountability. They also questioned its legality.

Massachusetts attorney general, Maura Healey, told National Public Radio: “The bankruptcy system should not be allowed to shield non-bankrupt billionaires.

“It would set a terrible precedent. If the Sacklers are allowed to use bankruptcy to escape the consequences of their actions. It would be a roadmap for other powerful bad actors.”

The US justice department has also raised objections on the grounds that the court is overstepping its authority in extending broad immunity to the Sacklers when they are not themselves applying for bankruptcy.

Critics have accused what [one member of Congress called](#) the “most evil family in America” of seeking to buy its way out of accountability, while failing to admit the part played by Purdue Pharma in creating the opioid epidemic with an unprecedented [marketing drive](#) to sell OxyContin built on manipulated data and false claims that the drug federal agents called “heroin in a pill” had a low risk of causing addiction.

Purdue used its wealth to influence politicians and regulators to keep the floodgates open, even as the evidence grew of an epidemic in the making.

Lawyers for states and municipalities say that the billions of dollars retained by the Sacklers under the plan would go a long way to provide social services for children left orphaned or forced into foster homes by their parents’ opioid addiction, and to offset the financial burden caused by the epidemic on healthcare and policing.

Documents released by a congressional committee last month show that the family is worth about \$11bn. The Sacklers’ assets include nearly \$1bn in cash, with billions more held in trusts. Their vast holdings also include art and property.

The family’s lawyers say the \$4.3bn payment is fair because it is more than the Sacklers made from OxyContin after tax. It is not clear where the balance of the family’s wealth came from given that the drug was the primary source of Purdue’s profits. Lawyers suing the Sacklers have suggested that a large part of the difference was made up by earnings from investing the proceeds of OxyContin and so should be counted as profits from the drug.

Healey is in the midst of an investigation of the part played by individual members of the family after identifying eight of them she claims knew that OxyContin was causing overdose deaths but kept pushing sales of the drug. They include Dr Richard Sackler, who as Purdue’s head of marketing

[ramped up sales](#) of OxyContin and painted people who overdosed on the drug as criminals to blame for their own condition.

While the Sacklers have expressed regret for the crisis, they have continued to deny wrongdoing. Kathe Sackler, a former member of Purdue's board, drew scorn at a congressional hearing in December when she said that while "my heart breaks for the parents who have lost their children", the company was not at fault.

"There's nothing that I can find that I would have done differently," she said.

- Chris McGreal is the author of *American Overdose, The Opioid Tragedy in Three Acts*

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## [Australian immigration and asylum](#)

# Escape tunnel found under Western Australia immigration detention centre

Twenty-metre-long unfinished tunnel beneath Yongah Hill detention centre had been dug ‘over several months’

00:32

Video shows detainee digging escape tunnel under Yongah Hill Detention Centre in WA – video

[\*Ben Doherty\*](#)

[\*@bendohertycorro\*](#)

Tue 11 May 2021 00.11 EDT

A 20-metre-long unfinished escape tunnel has been discovered at an immigration detention centre in [Western Australia](#), refugee advocates say.

The nascent tunnel – dug three metres underground – was found on Monday morning, built underneath an accommodation block in Falcon compound of the Yongah Hill detention centre.

The tunnel ran from underneath the floor of room 6F, underneath two inner fences to within five metres of the outer perimeter fence. The tunnel had been built “over several months”, advocates told the Guardian. It is not known who dug the tunnel or with what.

[Communities step up: private groups ready to cover costs and support refugees to Australia](#)

[Read more](#)

Footage of the tunnel under construction shows it being dug, apparently by hand. Lined with earth, it is just high enough for a person to crouch in.

Reminiscent of world war two efforts by prisoners of war seeking to escape, it is not the first time attempts have been made to breach detention centre compounds.

Nearly 20 years ago, 23 asylum seekers escaped by tunnelling out of the Villawood detention centre in suburban Sydney. In 2002, about 40 refugees escaped from the Woomera detention centre during a protest.

Refugees have also escaped from Christmas Island detention centre by scaling fences.

Australian Border Force statistics show about 315 men were being held in Yongah Hill: approximately 175 non-citizens who have had their visas cancelled by the government, and 140 asylum seekers. There were no women or children in the centre.

The average length of time spent in Australian immigration detention is now 627 days. Yongah Hill is often used to detain people for extended periods of time. Seventy-three people in immigration detention have been held more than five years, and the Guardian is aware of several who have been held more than nine years.

“The systematic abuse of long-term detention is hidden behind the fences of Australia’s detention regime. With almost none of the oversight that applies to prisoners of the judicial system, asylum seekers are systematically being deprived of their liberty and mental health,” Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition, said.

“The government, for example, is vindictively holding Iranian asylum seekers for years, even though it knows that they cannot be returned to Iran. Indefinite detention is pointless and destructive. Visa cancellation powers allow asylum seekers and refugees to be punished twice, first by the judicial system and then by immigration detention.”

The Guardian has approached the Department of Home Affairs seeking comment.

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

## China

# China's population growing at slowest rate in generations



China's population is growing at its slowest rate since the introduction of the one-child policy. Photograph: Mark Schiefelbein/AP

China's population is growing at its slowest rate since the introduction of the one-child policy. Photograph: Mark Schiefelbein/AP

Census data reveals demographic timebomb, adding pressure on Beijing to boost incentives for couples to have more children

[\*Helen Davidson\*](#) in Taipei and [\*Vincent Ni\*](#)

Tue 11 May 2021 03.06 EDT

China has reported the slowest population growth since the early 1960s, despite scrapping its one-child policy in 2015 to encourage more births and stave off a looming demographic crisis.

On Tuesday, the government released the results of its once-a-decade census, saying the overall population of China grew to 1.41178 billion in the 10 years to 2020, up by 5.38%. The increase reflects an average annual rise of 0.53%, down from 0.57% reported from 2000 to 2010.

The reported slowdown is not unexpected, and is in fact better than some analysts expected, but is a sign China has yet to adequately address the social drivers behind fewer people having children, including delayed marriages, high cost of living, and stalled social mobility.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics, there were officially 12 million babies born in 2020, 2.65 million fewer than were born in 2019, marking an 18% decrease. Preliminary data released [earlier this year](#) based on registered births, had indicated a year-on-year drop of 15%.

The data showed China avoided an early population peak, which had been feared by some analysts, but had also missed its growth target set in 2016, to reach 1.42 billion people by 2020.

[Can China recover from its disastrous one-child policy?](#)  
[Read more](#)

The census also found the proportion of citizens aged over 65 increased from 8.9% in 2010 to 13.5%, while the proportion of children grew by 1.35% and the working population stayed steady, highlighting China's rapidly ageing population and associated economic concerns.

Ning Jizhe, the deputy head of the census leading group, acknowledged there was a "moderation" in population growth.

"The number of women of childbearing age ... was declining, and there is a postponement of childbearing and the rising cost of child raising," said Ning. "All of these are reasons behind the decline on newborns."

Ning said it was "a natural result of China's economic and social development" but said the ageing population "imposed continued pressure" on long-term development.

At the “Two Sessions” meeting of China’s key government apparatus in March, premier [Li Keqiang confirmed](#) the country would phase in a raising of the retirement age, which has remained unchanged for four decades at 60 for men and 55 for women. He also said Beijing would “promote the realisation of moderate fertility” and work to achieve “an appropriate birthrate”.

### [china birth rate](#)

On Tuesday, officials said the adjustment of fertility policies had “achieved a positive result”, noting the higher proportion of 0- to 14-year-olds, and a “steadily improving” gender imbalance.

The annual growth rate of 0.53% is the lowest since the early 1960s when China was dealing with the aftermath of tens of millions killed by famine, according to the [National Bureau of Statistics](#).

Between the last census and this one, the Chinese government also scrapped its infamous one-child policy, lifting the limit to two, [but it has had little impact](#).

The two-child limit was “cheap policy”, said Dr Ye Liu, a senior lecturer in international development at King’s College London. “Government lifted the birth quota without any commitments, so they basically shifted responsibilities to individuals, particularly women.”

[China’s lost little emperors... how the ‘one-child policy’ will haunt the country for decades | Mei Fong](#)

[Read more](#)

Tuesday’s figures could provide an opportunity “to think outside the box and take a proactive and wholistic approach”, Liu said.

The government had to address the intersecting factors behind the low birthrate, which include rampant workplace discrimination against women of childbearing age and “scandalously low” public childcare funding, Liu said. Working mothers rely on parents and in-laws for childcare, but with a higher retirement age, those grandparents are going to be less available.

Liu's suggestions echoed those made by China's central bank, which in April [called for an end to all birth limits](#), to “fully liberalise and encourage childbirth”, and remove difficulties for women.

Some things cannot be changed. Yen-hsin Alice Cheng, an associate professor at Academia Sinica in Taiwan, said east Asian societies such as China's industrialised so rapidly that social changes could not keep up, and now generations coexisted with wildly different expectations about gender roles, and how to balance work and family.

“It's parental pressures on the younger generation's life course. But the younger generations feel they're facing a whole different set of uncertainty and risk and difficult competitiveness from the labour market. It's not that they don't want to have families, but it's getting difficult,” said Cheng.



People walk in the subway as the outcome of the seventh national population census by the National Bureau of Statistics of China, are released in Beijing. Photograph: Noel Celis/AFP/Getty Images

The only way to address that was with time, she said, noting that young people across east Asia still feel filial piety and are uneasy about going against their parents' wishes.



Tuesday's census data also revealed an increase in population movement to urban centres, and a decrease in the average household size to 2.62 persons, which Ning said reflected "increasing population mobility" and improved housing allowing young people to move out of home.

Prof Carl Minzner, a law professor at Fordham University and Chinese governance expert, said the data was in line with China's rapid urbanisation, but there were concerns about whether the moving population would become "second class citizens".

"The real question is will they enjoy social services and education on same level as urban residents."

The census results were based on data gathered by 7 million census takers who began going door to door in November 2020. The release had been delayed by more than a month, without explanation, sparking rampant speculation and rumours, including that there were deficiencies in the data [because of the impact of Covid](#), or that birthrates had moved in a direction unaligned with government plans.

"For Chinese authorities population is getting increasingly sensitive and when numbers get sensitive, like you saw with GDP data, that's where you see possibilities for data getting massaged, and I think you have to flag that as a potential question," said Minzner.

## **'It's not our obligation to have children'**

Antonia, a legal sector worker in Shanghai, realised she didn't want children about six or seven years ago. The 34-year-old likes kids and as a young girl always imagined she's have one of her own, but as she grew up life began to look increasingly unfair, and she started pushing back on the pressure of family, society, and government to become a mother.

"More and more I thought: this is not the life I want. I had a choice," she said.

Antonia, who describes herself as a feminist and from the labour class, is not having children for reasons which align to the broad factors noted by

analysts: Social mobility is stalling, costs of living are high, public childcare is rare, and workplaces discriminate. Women are rejecting the higher cost that parenting puts on their bodies, careers and personal lives compared to what it puts on men's.

“Honestly I think if the government wants people to have more children, their job is to get us to live more comfortably,” said Antonia.

“It's not our obligation to have children.”

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

# ‘They came to kill’: Rio’s deadliest favela police raid sparks calls for change

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## Myanmar

# Myanmar journalists and activists arrested in Thailand after fleeing across border

Thai foreign correspondents club says the reporters face ‘certain arrest and persecution’ if deported back to Myanmar



The junta in Myanmar has banned several media outlets and arrested dozens of journalists since taking power in a coup in February. Photograph: AP

The junta in Myanmar has banned several media outlets and arrested dozens of journalists since taking power in a coup in February. Photograph: AP

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

Tue 11 May 2021 00.58 EDT

Three journalists and two activists from Myanmar who fled over the border to [Thailand](#) have been arrested for illegal entry and could face possible

deportation, according to the reporters' employer.

Broadcaster DVB (Democratic Voice of Burma) said their lives would be "in serious danger" if they were forced back to Myanmar, where the military [took power in a coup](#) on 1 February and has since arrested dozens of journalists.

The junta banned DVB and several other media outlets in March in an attempt to [suppress independent coverage of protests](#) against its rule. Despite the risks, journalists have continued to work in hiding, documenting the military's brutal crackdowns in which 781 people, including 52 children, [have been killed](#).

[Myanmar junta labels opposition government of ousted MPs a 'terrorist' group](#)

[Read more](#)

Since February, 4,916 people have been arrested by the military, according to the advocacy group, Assistance Association for Political Prisoners in Burma. The majority remain in detention, often in unknown locations.

There have been widespread reports of torture among those being held by the military. On Monday, it was reported that the poet Khet Thi, who opposed the ruling junta, had [died in detention](#). His body was returned with the organs removed, his family said.

The Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand said the DVB reporters "would face certain arrest and persecution, if not worse, for their work and association with the DVB", and that they should not be deported back to [Myanmar](#).

The Committee to Protect Journalists' senior South-east Asia representative Shawn Crispin also urged Thailand to offer sanctuary to the group: "Myanmar's military regime has repeatedly abused and detained journalists, and Thai authorities should not force these members of the press to face potentially severe retaliation for their work."

In a statement, Aye Chan Naing, DVB's executive director, appealed to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees for help.

Thapanapong Chairangsri, the head of police in the San Sai district outside the Thai city of Chiang Mai, told Reuters that five Myanmar citizens had been arrested for entering the country illegally and would be brought to court on Tuesday.

He said they would be deported in accordance with the law, but added that because of the coronavirus outbreak they would be held in detention for 14 days before being handed to immigration authorities.

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## Headlines

- [Israel Police storm al-Aqsa mosque ahead of Jerusalem Day march](#)
- [Israel Settlement ruling delayed as Jerusalem tensions run high](#)
- [Coronavirus Government to advise caution when hugging allowed in England](#)
- [Roadmap Johnson to allow hugging and indoor venues to reopen in England from 17 May](#)



## [Israel](#)

# Israeli police storm al-Aqsa mosque ahead of Jerusalem Day march

More than 300 people reported injured as hardline Israelis prepare for parade through Old City

01:11

Israeli police clash with Palestinian protesters at al-Aqsa mosque – video

[Oliver Holmes](#) in Jerusalem and [Peter Beaumont](#)

Mon 10 May 2021 10.05 EDT

The militant group Hamas has fired rockets into [Israel](#) from Gaza just minutes after the passing of its ultimatum for [Israel](#) to withdraw its security forces from the Jerusalem compound which is home to the al-Aqsa mosque, and from the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood in the city's east.

Residents in Jerusalem reported hearing air raid sirens shortly after 6pm local time when the ultimatum was due to expire, and the sound of three distant explosions, although it was not clear if the detonations were rockets exploding or anti rocket systems being deployed.

The Hamas ultimatum followed the latest clashes around the compound on Monday that left over 300 injured. The latest violence came after Israeli police stormed the compound early on Monday firing stun grenades and tear gas and clashing with Palestinians inside following days of worsening clashes.

Hamas's military wing claimed responsibility for the rocket fire in a statement saying it struck Jerusalem in response to Israel's "crimes and aggression in the Holy City, and its harassment of our people in Sheikh Jarrah and Al-Aqsa Mosque."

“This is a message that the enemy should understand well,” said a spokesperson for the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades.

Hamas escalation of the already dangerous crisis, came as the Israeli military suspended its biggest military exercise in 30 years to redeploy its forces fearing rocket attacks from Gaza.

Israel also ordered roads near Gaza closed, while the mayor of the southern city of Ashkelon ordered public bomb shelters opened. Flights into Ben Gurion airport were also reportedly diverted to a northern flight path away from Gaza.

The growing tensions follow the most serious clashes in the city since 2017, the Palestine Red Crescent reported 305 people had been injured after officers in riot gear clashed with Palestinian demonstrators in East Jerusalem.

The latest violence came as Israel’s police commissioner, Kobi Shabtai, intervened following appeals from the Israeli domestic security agency the Shin Bet and the Israeli military to reroute a controversial annual “flag march” march by Israeli nationalists away from Muslim Quarter of Jerusalem’s Old City amid fears it could provoke a further escalation.

Anger had been mounting for weeks among Palestinians ahead of a now-delayed Israeli court ruling on whether authorities were able to evict dozens of Palestinians from the Old City’s Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood and give their homes to Jewish settlers.

Hundreds of Palestinians and several dozen police officers have been hurt in recent days in clashes in and around the Old City, including the sacred compound, which is known to Jews as the Temple Mount and to Muslims as the Noble Sanctuary – or Haram al-Sharif.

Seven of the injured from Monday’s clashes were in serious condition with local media reporting that a seven-month-old Israeli had been injured by stones thrown at her family’s car.

01:51

Jerusalem: hundreds injured as violence at al-Aqsa mosque sparks heightened tensions – video

Monday morning's early-morning incursion by Israeli police firing teargas and stun grenades into the Haram al-Sharif compound, site of the al-Aqsa mosque, had raised tensions significantly given the huge historical sensitivity over the site, not least during the Holy month of [Ramadan](#).

The latest violence occurred as the UN security council scheduled closed consultations on the situation in Jerusalem on Monday. Diplomats said the meeting was requested by Tunisia, the Arab representative on the council.

The decision to cancel the part of the annual Jerusalem Day “flag march” that enters the Muslim Quarter Old City followed concerns from senior Israeli security officials that it could worsen the already dangerous situation.

Palestinian residents of the Old City have long complained that the flag march, to mark Israel's capture of the Jerusalem and its Jewish holy sites in 1967 during the Six Day war, is deliberately provocative.

Confrontations continued until after dawn, when police moved in to an Old City compound housing the al-Aqsa mosque, and fired stun grenades at worshippers, who threw stones. Footage from the scene showed crowds of people running in front of the mosque through clouds of smoke.

החלה ההתפרצות בהר הבית [pic.twitter.com/A3rd4EE2mV](https://pic.twitter.com/A3rd4EE2mV)

— Yossi Eli יוסי אלי (@Yossi\_eli) [May 10, 2021](#)

As fears mounted of Jerusalem descending further into chaos, police [published dramatic CCTV video](#) from a road near the Old City of a white car being pelted by Palestinians with stones, before the driver reverses and rams into one of them. The downed man gets up and limps away while an armed Israeli police officer runs in to protect the driver, believed to be Israeli, who faces more rock-throwing.

01:06

Israel: car hits Palestinian protesters after being pelted with stones – video

[Israeli settlement ruling delayed as Jerusalem tensions run high](#)  
[Read more](#)

Addressing a special cabinet meeting before Jerusalem Day, the prime minister, [Benjamin Netanyahu](#), said Israel “will not allow any extremists to destabilise the calm in Jerusalem. We will enforce law and order decisively and responsibly”.

The US national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, expressed “serious concerns” about the violent clashes in Jerusalem in a phone call on Sunday with his Israeli counterpart, Meir Ben-Shabbat, the White House said.

There were also signs the violence was spreading. Late on Sunday, Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip fired four rockets towards Israel, setting off air raid sirens in southern city of Ashkelon and nearby areas, the Israeli military said. One rocket was intercepted, while two others exploded inside Gaza, it added. There were no reports of damage or injuries.

01:44

Israeli police clash with Palestinians at al-Aqsa mosque – video

Earlier in the day, Israel carried out an airstrike on a Hamas military group post in response to another rocket attack. People in Gaza also launched incendiary balloons into southern Israel during the day, causing dozens of fires.

Israel has faced mounting international criticism of its heavy police response and the planned evictions. Last week a UN rights body [described the expulsion of Arabs](#) from their homes as a possible war crime.

In East Jerusalem, which includes the Old City, Palestinians feel an increasing threat from settlers who have sought to expand the Jewish presence there through buying homes, constructing buildings, and court-ordered evictions, such as the case in Sheikh Jarrah.

Nabeel al-Kurd, a 77-year-old whose family faces losing their home, said the evictions were a racist attempt to “expel Palestinians and replace them with

settlers”.

Under Israeli law, Jews who can prove a title from before the 1948 war that accompanied the country’s creation [can claim back their Jerusalem properties](#). Hundreds of thousands of Arabs were displaced in the same conflict but no similar law exists for Palestinians who lost their homes in the city.



A Palestinian man helps a wounded fellow protester during clashes with Israeli security forces at Jerusalem’s al-Aqsa mosque. Photograph: Ahmad Gharabli/AFP/Getty Images

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## Israel

# Israeli settlement ruling delayed as Jerusalem tensions run high

More than 120 injured in continuing Palestinian protests over planned evictions in the Sheikh Jarrah area



Palestinian protesters throw stones at Israeli security forces amid clashes in Jerusalem. Photograph: Emmanuel Dunand/AFP/Getty Images

Palestinian protesters throw stones at Israeli security forces amid clashes in Jerusalem. Photograph: Emmanuel Dunand/AFP/Getty Images

[Oliver Holmes](#) in Jerusalem

Sun 9 May 2021 11.33 EDT

Israel's supreme court has delayed a deeply contentious decision on whether Palestinians can be evicted by force to make way for Jewish settlers, after hundreds of Palestinians were wounded in confrontations with the police in some of [Jerusalem's worst unrest in years](#).



A former Israeli defence official described the atmosphere as like a powder keg ready to explode at any time, after more clashes erupted outside the Old City overnight on Saturday.

More than 120 people were injured, including a one-year-old child, and 14 were taken to hospital, according to the Palestine Red Crescent. Israeli police said 17 officers were hurt.

Saturday night's violence came a day after [more than 200 Palestinians were wounded](#) in violence around Jerusalem's al-Aqsa mosque, the third holiest site in Islam.

Israel has faced mounting international criticism of its heavy police response and the planned evictions. Last week a UN rights body [described](#) the expulsion of Arabs from their homes as a possible war crime. On Sunday Jordan, which has custodianship of Muslim and Christian sites in Jerusalem, described Israel's actions against worshippers at al-Aqsa as "barbaric".

00:49

Scores injured in fresh night of clashes in Jerusalem – video

Israel's prime minister [Benjamin Netanyahu](#) was defiant, saying his country would continue to build in the city – a reference to internationally condemned Jewish settlements in majority-Palestinian areas that Israeli occupies. "We firmly reject the pressure not to build in Jerusalem," Netanyahu said during a televised address.

Tensions in Jerusalem had soared in recent days in advance of the now-delayed Israeli court ruling on whether authorities can evict dozens of Palestinians from the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood and give their homes to Jewish settlers.

In East Jerusalem, which includes the Old City, Palestinians feel an increasing threat from settlers who have sought to expand the Jewish presence there through buying homes, constructing new buildings, and court-ordered evictions, such as the case in Sheikh Jarrah.

[Map](#)



Nabeel al-Kurd, a 77-year-old whose family faces losing their home, said the evictions were a racist attempt to “expel Palestinians and replace them with settlers”.

Under Israeli law, Jews who can prove a title from before the 1948 war that accompanied the country’s creation [can claim back their Jerusalem properties](#). Hundreds of thousands of Arabs were displaced in the same conflict, but no similar law exists for Palestinians who lost their homes in the city.

“This an attempt by the settlers, supported by the government, to seize our homes with force,” al-Kurd told the Guardian. “Enough is enough.”

On Sunday afternoon, in light of the tensions and after a request from the attorney general, Avichai Mandelblit, the supreme court agreed to delay the hearing. It said it should be held within a month.

Still, the hiatus might not be enough to end the crisis. Inflaming the situation, Israelis will mark Jerusalem Day on Monday, celebrating the anniversary of when troops captured the entire city in 1967. Previous marches have seen participants harass Arab residents and bang on shuttered doors as they descend through the Muslim quarter.

Amos Gilad, an ex-head of military intelligence and former top defence ministry official, said the parade should be cancelled or rerouted. “The powder keg is burning and can explode at any time,” he told Army Radio.

Palestinians have also complained of [oppressive restrictions](#) on gatherings during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Police defended their actions after dispersing a protest in Sheikh Jarrah on Saturday night, where demonstrators had thrown stones at security forces. Earlier, before Laylat al-Qadr, considered to be the holiest night during Ramadan, police had blocked busloads of pilgrims headed to Jerusalem to worship.

Palestinian medics said Palestinians were wounded by rubber bullets, stun grenades or beatings, among them a woman whose face was bloodied.



People help an injured Palestinian woman during a protest in Damascus gate supporting Palestinian families that face eviction from their homes at Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, in Jerusalem. Photograph: Abir Sultan/EPA

Police chief Kobi Shabtai said he had deployed more officers in Jerusalem after Friday night's clashes, which left 18 police wounded.

“The right to demonstrate will be respected but public disturbances will be met with force and zero tolerance” Shabtai said.

On the frontier with Gaza, troops fired teargas towards Palestinian protesters, as officials said three incendiary balloons were launched into Israel, causing fires but no injuries.

On Friday, [riot police stormed the al-Aqsa mosque compound](#) after they said Palestinians threw rocks and fireworks at officers.

Nir Hasson, a writer for the left-leaning Israeli daily newspaper, Haaretz, [accused](#) Israeli authorities of making a series of bad decisions during the past few weeks, “including the unrestrained freedom given to police in [Jerusalem’s] streets, where [on Friday](#), they acted as if they had been sent to fan the flames, not to extinguish them”.

He added: “In the end, half of Israel’s capital city is occupied, and 40% of its residents are non-citizens who view Israel as a foreign, oppressive regime. The police and other authorities must recognise this and act to restore calm.”

Jerusalem has long been the centre of the Israeli-Palestinian crisis, with its holy sites revered by Jews and Muslims.

The Old City’s [Western Wall](#) forms part of the holiest site in Judaism – the Temple Mount. It is equally part of the al-Haram al-Sharif, or the Noble Sanctuary, however, with the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa mosque above it.

Palestinians have held nightly protests in Sheikh Jarrah. A reporter for Israeli public TV tweeted footage of a Jewish driver whose car was attacked with stones and windows shattered at the entrance to Sheikh Jarrah on Saturday.

The Islamist movement Hamas, which is in power in Gaza, urged Palestinians to remain at al-Aqsa until Ramadan ends, saying: “The resistance is ready to defend al-Aqsa at any cost”.

A decision last month by Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas, the 85-year-old leader of the semi-autonomous Palestinian Authority, to postpone planned elections has added frustration for Palestinians, whose last parliamentary ballot was in 2006.

The quartet of envoys from the EU, Russia, US and the United Nations expressed deep concern over the violence. “We call upon Israeli authorities to exercise restraint,” they wrote. The US said it was extremely concerned and urged both sides to “avoid steps that exacerbate tensions or take us farther away from peace”.

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## [Coronavirus](#)

# Government to advise caution when hugging allowed in England

Nadine Dorries calls on people to remain vigilant amid concerns over possible increase in Covid variants

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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People hugging in Soho, London. Infection rates in England are at their lowest level since September. Photograph: Guy Bell/Rex/Shutterstock

People hugging in Soho, London. Infection rates in England are at their lowest level since September. Photograph: Guy Bell/Rex/Shutterstock

[Lucy Campbell](#)

Mon 10 May 2021 05.34 EDT

The government will advise cautious cuddling when hugging is permitted in the next phase of lockdown easing in [England](#), amid concerns over the possible increase in Covid variants.

With the data looking “extremely positive” and the roadmap “on course”, the health minister [Nadine Dorries](#) suggested friends and family would be allowed to hug when the next stage of easing restrictions goes ahead from 17 May, but called for cautious optimism.

Indoor dining will be allowed for groups of up to six or two households, while cinemas, galleries and the rest of the accommodation sector will reopen. Foreign leisure travel will also resume, with some [“green list” destinations](#) allowing travellers to return without self-isolating.

Though infection rates in England are at their lowest level since September and more than two-thirds of UK adults have had their first dose of a vaccine, scientists are concerned about the possible spread of variants, particularly [one of three first found in India](#), as restrictions are relaxed and international travel resumes.

Dorries was asked on BBC Breakfast about what “cautious cuddling” means. “I don’t think you can cautiously cuddle,” she said, before adding that even with testing capacity people still needed to be cautious as lockdown eases.

“We do have variants of concern on one hand, on the other hand we have the capacity to lateral flow twice test everybody in the UK, we have the capacity to surge test in localised areas where we see those variants of concern and where we know problems may be rising,” she said.

“We have that in our armoury now which we never had before, but we still need to be cautious. We’re incredibly aware that everybody wants to get together, that people want to hug each other, that people want to entertain in their own homes.”

She said the UK was “still in the tail end of the pandemic” while “globally the world is still in the grips of this pandemic”.

Later on Sky News, Dorries said hugs and physical contact were “massively important” but urged “caution balanced with optimism”. “I think it’s what most people have missed, that intimate contact with family and friends, and entertaining, having people in your own house, meeting outdoors.”

Prof Sir John Bell, of the University of Oxford, agreed the country was in a “very strong position” to move forward with the easing of restrictions, and suggested it could even be accelerated, enabling people to “try and get back to normal”.

He told Good Morning Britain: “I think we’ll still probably go steady but perhaps a bit faster ... I’m feeling pretty comfortable with where we are at the moment.”

But despite data from vaccination programmes in the UK, Israel and the US showing a “really very striking fall” in cases of the virus, hospital admissions and deaths, Bell said the UK was still vulnerable to importing variants from abroad.

He said: “Tactically, the most important thing for us to do is to make sure that other bits of the world get vaccines faster – the state of global vaccination is pretty lamentable at the moment and I think we need to really push to help that happen much more effectively.

“Because, in the end, we’re vulnerable, not because we haven’t vaccinated our population, but if more variants come onshore from overseas – which they will naturally as people start to travel – we’re potentially going to be in trouble and that’s why we have a real interest in making sure everyone else is vaccinated.

“That plus the humanitarian importance of making sure that people don’t die unnecessarily.”





## Coronavirus

# Johnson to allow hugging and indoor venues to reopen in England from 17 May

Spread of Indian Covid variant has not deterred PM from return of cinemas and indoor hospitality and permitting mixing at home

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



Bars, museums and cinemas are among the venues that will be able to reopen for indoor business from 17 May in England. Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty Images

Bars, museums and cinemas are among the venues that will be able to reopen for indoor business from 17 May in England. Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty Images

[Sarah Boseley](#) *Health editor*

Sun 9 May 2021 17.30 EDT

Friends and family will be able to hug and mix indoors from next week, while cinemas and museums can reopen, [Boris Johnson](#) is to confirm on Monday despite growing concerns over the spread of the India coronavirus variant.

Scientists warned this weekend that cases are doubling in some areas where the variant, B.1.617.2, has been detected. More deprived areas and those with large ethnic minority communities where vaccination rates may be lower are most affected, they said.

But at a press conference today the prime minister will hail the Covid vaccine rollout, with more than two-thirds of UK adults having had a first dose and a third now fully vaccinated. Just two deaths within 28 days of a positive test were reported on Sunday.

Johnson will confirm that the next [stage in the easing of Covid restrictions](#) for England will go ahead from 17 May. Indoor drinks and meals will be allowed for groups of up to six or two households, while cinemas, galleries and the rest of the accommodation sector will reopen.

### [UK corona cases](#)

International leisure travel will be possible, with some destinations [given a “green light”](#) enabling return without self-isolation, and ministers indicated that “intimate contact” will once more be permissible.

“The roadmap remains on track, our successful vaccination programme continues – more than two-thirds of adults in the UK have now had the first vaccine – and we can now look forward to unlocking cautiously but irreversibly,” Johnson said in comments released overnight.

Speaking on BBC One’s Andrew Marr Show on Sunday, the Cabinet Office minister, Michael Gove, said that the government wants to see families able to [hug](#) again. “As we move into stage three of our roadmap it will be the case that we will see people capable of meeting indoors. And without

prejudice to a broader review of social distancing, it is also the case that friendly contact, intimate contact, between friends and family is something we want to see restored,” he said.

Scientists are concerned about the possible spread of variants as the country relaxes. The notification by Public Health England that [one of three variants first seen in India is now “of concern”](#), with increased transmissibility, demonstrates the need for continued caution, they said. There is [anxiety about the anticipated ending of mask-wearing](#) in schools, where clusters of cases linked to the variant have been reported.

Prof Susan Michie, director of UCL’s Centre for Behaviour Change, talked of a mixed picture. If people carry on getting vaccinated at the current rate, it should be possible to keep transmission low, she said.

But the spread of the virus was very uneven. “We have pockets of high rates of transmission, especially in more deprived communities, and where you get high rates of transmission, you obviously also get the likelihood of variants that might undermine the vaccine programme,” said Michie.

Cases of the Indian variant are thought to be doubling every week. “There’s definite signs of community transmission in London. Now that’s obviously concerning, because we don’t yet know what effects it’s likely to have on our vaccine programme,” she added.

Paul Hunter, professor in medicine at the University of East Anglia, said it was “the Indian variant that is giving me most unease”. The Kent variant (B.1.1.7) had been collapsing in recent months but the Indian variant had been increasing quite rapidly. “I do worry that we will see cases increasing again soon when and if the Indian variant B.1.617.2 becomes dominant,” he said.

But it was difficult yet to know how serious an issue this was. “The signs are troubling but probably not yet strong enough to delay the next stage of lockdown easing. In particular we don’t know how severe the Indian variant will be in people who have been vaccinated,” he said.

Michael Head, senior research fellow in global health at Southampton University, said his personal view was that we could encourage larger outdoor gatherings but leave the reopening of indoor settings until all adult groups are vaccinated, which is expected by mid-July.

“Meeting friends and relatives outdoors is much lower risk. Personally, I’d be happier to spend two hours sat outdoors in a sports stadium with a few thousand spectators than I would be inside a cinema watching a film with 100 other people,” he said.

Michie said she thought the public should be given more information about the importance of ventilation indoors to prevent aerosol transmission. Hugs, as long as people did not breathe in each other’s faces, were not so risky, she said. “I think the issue about opening up all the indoor spaces, whether it’s pubs, restaurants, cinemas, theatres, etc, is the ventilation. I don’t know how that’s going to be communicated.”

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## 2021.05.10 - Coronavirus

- [Live Coronavirus: Johnson to announce timetable for lifting England restrictions; France to reopen outdoor bars](#)
- [England Traffic light travel plan will let new Covid variants into country, scientists warn](#)
- [Tokyo Olympics Poll shows 60% of Japanese want Games cancelled](#)
- [Technology UK Covid-related cybercrime fuels 15-fold rise in scam takedowns](#)

## [Coronavirus live](#) [England](#)

# Vaccines offer high protection against death, report finds; Malaysia to enter lockdown – as it happened

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## [The Observer](#)[Coronavirus](#)

# Traffic light travel plan will let new Covid variants into UK, scientists warn

Key advisers are among those who say scheme is flawed as holiday firms report huge rise in bookings

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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The arrivals hall at Heathrow airport, London last year. Photograph: Aaron Chown/PA

The arrivals hall at Heathrow airport, London last year. Photograph: Aaron Chown/PA

[Michael Savage](#) [Robin McKie](#) and [James Tapper](#)

Sun 9 May 2021 06.15 EDT



It is inevitable that new Covid variants will continue to enter the country, scientists warned this weekend, claiming there are “obvious flaws” in the government’s system for reopening international travel to and from England.

On Friday ministers decreed that some international travel could resume from 17 May, with travellers from England allowed to return from “[green list](#)” destinations without needing to quarantine. Portugal and Israel are on the list, along with South Georgia, the Faroe Islands and the Falklands.

However, it is understood that members of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage) are concerned that the government’s traffic light system amounts to “window dressing” and is not based on evidence about the risks of the spread of variants.

These concerns are shared by other scientists such as Professor Martin Hibberd, of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM), who told the *Observer* that more testing was necessary before international travel should be allowed to reopen. With the current approach, it was inevitable that new variants would enter the country, he said.

“While in the UK, we look forward to less disease and fewer restrictions, this is not the case in most of the world. Indeed, for many countries infections are likely to come in waves for at least another year and perhaps longer. As a result, imports are likely to become an increasingly important part of new transmissions circulating within the UK. We should develop an effective strategy to cope with the competing desires to allow international travel, while keeping circulating virus in the UK to a minimum.

“From my infectious disease perspective, for travel, I would like to see more testing, preferably with professionally taken swabs, and more support for quarantining, at home when it is possible – and which can be verified for compliance – together with an effective tracing programme.”

This point was backed by another LSHTM expert, Martin McKee, professor of European public health. “If everyone from England going to Portugal was only mixing with people from Portugal, that would be one thing. But if you go to a Portuguese resort, it is likely you would be mixing with people from other places.

“The criterion you should be looking at is not the infection rate and vaccination rate in the host country, but among the people who you’re likely to be mixing with. It’s an obvious flaw. And if you’re going to be transiting through any airport, you’re going to be mixing with people who are going to be coming from other places.”

As a result, some health experts have called for holidays abroad to be subject to strict controls. Gurch Randhawa, professor of diversity in public health at the University of Bedfordshire, said people should only take holidays in the UK at present.

“Permitting overseas holidays without universal quarantine measures for all countries is not a risk we should take,” he said. “Without strict measures we will have more Covid-19 deaths in the coming months because of imported variants, as vaccines have reduced efficacy against some of these different strains.”

[England’s traffic-light system for foreign travel: all you need to know](#)  
[Read more](#)

These warnings were made as travel firms hailed their best day for holiday sales in months. Tui, the UK’s largest holiday company, said it had seen a huge increase in bookings with 60% of all holidays sold on Friday being trips to Portugal.

The firm added that new flights and extra holidays had been added for people who wanted to “get away as quickly as possible”. Similarly, Thomas Cook said holidays to Portugal had been its “number one seller” since the government made its announcement about foreign travel.

In contrast to the warnings made by some UK scientists, Clive Dix – who recently stood down as interim head of the British vaccine taskforce – said he thought there would be “[no circulating virus in the UK](#)” by August. He told the *Telegraph* that the UK vaccination programme would “have probably protected the population from all the variants that are known” which meant that the country would be “safe over the coming winter”.

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

## Olympic Games

# Tokyo Olympics: poll shows 60% of Japanese people want Games cancelled

- Limited public support amid surge in Covid-19 cases in Tokyo
- Time for discussion about Games is now, says Naomi Osaka



People holding placards protest against the Tokyo Olympic Games outside the Japan Olympic Museum. Photograph: Rodrigo Reyes Marin/ZUMA Wire/REX/Shutterstock

People holding placards protest against the Tokyo Olympic Games outside the Japan Olympic Museum. Photograph: Rodrigo Reyes Marin/ZUMA Wire/REX/Shutterstock

[Justin McCurry](#) in Tokyo and agencies

Mon 10 May 2021 00.13 EDT

Preparations for the Tokyo Olympics have suffered another setback after a poll found that nearly 60% of people in [Japan](#) want them to be cancelled, less than three months before the Games are due to open.

Japan has [extended a state of emergency](#) in Tokyo and several other regions until the end of May as it struggles to contain a surge in Covid-19 cases fuelled by new, more contagious variants, with medical staff warning that health services in some areas are on the verge of collapse.

[Tokyo's Olympic Stadium holds test event with 420 athletes including Gatlin](#)  
[Read more](#)

The Olympics, which were delayed by a year due to the pandemic, are set to open on 23 July, with the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and organisers insisting that measures will be put in place to ensure the safety of athletes and other visitors, as well as a nervous Japanese public.

The survey, conducted between 7 and 9 May by the conservative Yomiuri Shimbun, showed 59% wanted the Games cancelled as opposed to 39% who said they should be held. “Postponement” – an option ruled out by the IOC – was not offered as a choice.

Of those who said the Olympics should go ahead, 23% said they should take place without spectators. Foreign spectators have been banned but a final decision on domestic attendance will be made in June.

Another poll conducted at the weekend by TBS News found 65% wanted the Games cancelled or postponed again, with 37% voting to scrap the event altogether and 28% calling for another delay. A similar poll in April conducted by Kyodo news agency found 70% wanted the Olympics cancelled or postponed.

As public opposition holds firm just over 70 days before the opening ceremony, the IOC and the Japanese government appear to be sending mixed messages over who is ultimately responsible for deciding the Games' fate.

The IOC's vice president, John Coates, said on Saturday that while Japanese sentiment about the Games "was a concern", he could foresee no scenario under which the sporting extravaganza would not go ahead.

"The prime minister of Japan said that to the president of the United States two or three weeks ago. He continues to say that to the IOC," Coates said.

But on Monday, Japan's prime minister, Yoshihide Suga, said the IOC would have the final say, insisting that his government had not prioritised the Games over public health.

Asked in a parliamentary committee meeting whether the Games will continue even if Covid-19 infections spike, Suga replied: "I've never put the Olympics first".

He added: "My priority has been to protect the lives and health of the Japanese population. We must first prevent the spread of the virus."

Suga has repeatedly vowed to go ahead with the Olympics despite the spike in Covid-19 cases, but the TBS survey found his support rate at 40%, close to record lows marked earlier this year.

A visit to Japan by the IOC president, Thomas Bach, originally expected to take place next week, is being arranged for June, Fuji News Network reported on Monday, citing multiple unidentified sources.

Japanese media had reported that Bach would take part in a torch relay event in Hiroshima on 17 May, but Tokyo 2020 organisers said the visit had not been confirmed. A prerequisite for his visit would be the lifting of Japan's targeted states of emergency, the broadcaster said.

While no prominent athlete has publicly opposed the Games being held this summer, the Japanese tennis star Naomi Osaka said the time had come to discuss the merits of holding the event in the middle of a pandemic.

The world No 2 said staging the Games should be discussed as long as the issue was "making people very uncomfortable".

“Of course I want the Olympics to happen, but I think there’s so much important stuff going on, especially the past year,” she told a news conference ahead of the Italian Open.

“A lot of unexpected things have happened. For me, I feel like if it’s putting people at risk ... then it definitely should be a discussion, which I think it is as of right now. At the end of the day I’m just an athlete, and there is a whole pandemic going on, so, yeah.”

### [IOC and Pfizer strike vaccine deal for Tokyo Olympics competitors](#) [Read more](#)

The virus has brought disruption to the torch relay and to qualifying events. Last week, Gymnastics Canada said it would not be sending a team to a last-chance Olympic qualifier in Rio de Janeiro in June over coronavirus concerns, effectively denying men’s artistic, women’s artistic, and rhythmic gymnasts the chance to compete in Tokyo.

Japan has recorded more than 600,000 coronavirus cases and more than 10,500 deaths – the highest in east Asia. On Saturday, it reported more than 7,000 infections – the highest since January.

In addition, only about 2% of Japan’s 126m people have received at least one vaccine dose since its rollout began in mid-February, while hospitals are struggling to secure beds for newly diagnosed people.

A hospital in Tachikawa, western Tokyo, is displaying a banner warning that medical capacity had reached its limit. “Give us a break! The Olympics are impossible!” it says.

In Osaka prefecture, which has seen a surge in cases, more than 13,000 people diagnosed with Covid-19 have been asked to stay at home as hospitals are full, according to health ministry data.





## Cybercrime

# UK Covid-related cybercrime fuels 15-fold rise in scam takedowns

Vaccine rollout used as a lure via email and text to harvest people's personal information for fraud



Forty-three fake NHS Covid-19 apps hosted outside of official app stores were pulled. Photograph: Jakub Porzycki/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

Forty-three fake NHS Covid-19 apps hosted outside of official app stores were pulled. Photograph: Jakub Porzycki/NurPhoto/Rex/Shutterstock

*PA Media*

Mon 10 May 2021 01.00 EDT

The UK's cybersecurity agency has taken down more scams in the last year than in the previous three years combined, with coronavirus and NHS-themed cybercrime fuelling the increase.

Experts oversaw a 15-fold rise in the removal of online campaigns compared with 2019, according to the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC).

There was a jump in the number of phishing attacks using NHS branding to dupe victims, with the Covid-19 vaccine rollout used as a lure via email and text message to harvest people's personal information for fraud.

Forty-three fake NHS Covid-19 apps hosted outside of official app stores were also pulled.

"The big increase in Covid-19-related scams, fake vaccine shops, fake PPE shops, show – to me anyway – that criminals have no bounds on what they will abuse and the fear that they engender to try and harm and defraud people," Dr Ian Levy, the technical director of the NCSC told reporters.

However, HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) remains the most copied brand used by fraudsters, totalling more than 4,000 campaigns, followed by the government's gov.uk website, and TV Licensing.

Overall more than 700,500 campaigns were taken down, accounting for 1,448,214 URLs, the NCSC's fourth active cyber defence report revealed.

Another problem highlighted were endorsement scams, which falsely claim to be supported by celebrities such as Sir Richard Branson and Martin Lewis, as well as using UK newspaper branding.

"They're really convincing things, they're really well created, so it's not surprising people fall for them," Levy said.

The report comes before the start of the two-day CyberUK event on Tuesday, with experts among the NCSC due to speak, as well as the home secretary, Priti Patel, the foreign secretary, Dominic Raab, and the director of the GCHQ, Jeremy Fleming.

Lindy Cameron, the chief executive of the NCSC, said: "Whether it has been protecting vital research into the vaccine or helping people work from home securely, the NCSC has worked with partners to protect the digital homeland during this unprecedented period.

“I look forward to hearing from thought-leaders at CyberUK as we reflect on this period and look ahead to building a resilient and prosperous digital UK after the pandemic.”

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

## 2021.05.10 - Spotlight

- [Calais smugglers speak 'We thank your government for our full pockets'](#)
- [Grotesque, paranoid, frazzled Why the mum is TV's most compelling character](#)
- [Seafood The four fish I would still eat – even after watching Seaspiracy](#)
- [Madonna: Truth or Dare at 30 The most revealing pop star documentary ever?](#)

## [Rights and freedom](#)[Human trafficking](#)

# ‘We thank your government for our full pockets’ – Calais smugglers speak

As the UK pours millions into security measures, migrants say the gangs who control the Channel just get more powerful



Migrants carry a boat on to the beach at Gravelines, near Dunkirk, as they embark on an attempt to cross the Channel. Photograph: Sameer al-Doumy/AFP/Getty

Migrants carry a boat on to the beach at Gravelines, near Dunkirk, as they embark on an attempt to cross the Channel. Photograph: Sameer al-Doumy/AFP/Getty

Rights and freedom is supported by



# HUMANITY UNITED

[About this content](#)

*Mathilda Mallinson*

Mon 10 May 2021 02.00 EDT

“Sorry, my battery’s low because I drained it watching YouTube tutorials on how to assemble dinghies,” Abuzar says. He is speaking on a video call from the abandoned shed in [Calais](#) he calls home. “I want to join my brother for asylum in the UK, but I have to work for smugglers because I don’t have enough money to pay for the crossing.

“They hide boat parts on the beaches for me to assemble at night, but I’m so scared— if I mess it up, children could drown on the boat.”

The home secretary, Priti Patel, has spent £33.6m on border controls in Calais and announced plans to [crack down on smugglers](#) – even though charities and lawyers say those arrested are often vulnerable migrants themselves.

[Behind the Channel crossings: migrant stories of life or death in tiny inflatables](#)

[Read more](#)



On the northern coast of France, asylum seekers tell the Guardian that tighter border controls have helped smugglers become [ever more powerful](#).

“I think the security controls are only helping smugglers, not anyone else,” says Bijan, a Kurdish asylum seeker who paid smugglers £3,500 at the end of last year for one of 24 spaces on a 12-person dinghy. Migrants stood to save space as others baled water from the dinghy’s slatted floor.

He describes an exploitative system operating in Calais and Dunkirk, with smugglers using desperate migrants for dangerous jobs in return for the promise of cheaper passage.

“It’s a kind of slavery. Poor refugees work as house servants for smugglers; women sell their bodies; others are made to be lookouts or drivers, and can then be arrested and thrown in jail. But they do it because it is their best chance at a safe life. That is all refugees want: peace. We are tired.”



Gendarmes patrol the beach of Oye-Plage, near Calais, with a police helicopter overhead as they look for migrants trying to cross the Channel. More than 5,000 migrants crossed the Channel last year, up from just 13 in 2017. Photograph: Philippe Huguen/AFP/Getty

Charities working with migrants report observing the same pattern. “What we’ve seen in Calais and Dunkirk is a shift from people crossing alone to an

infrastructure that completely revolves around smuggling,” says Charlie Whitbread, founder of Mobile Refugee Support. “This has never stopped people coming to Calais – they have been through far worse and will stop at nothing to be safe again. Frankly, it’s unbelievable the government still seems to think these measures deter them when the reality is so obvious to anyone on the ground.”

Even those profiting from the illicit trade agree that the situation has become more extreme. The Guardian spoke to two men who have worked on the Channel crossing, carrying people across for increasingly large sums as security made it harder to cross.

“The violence is getting worse and worse because the mafias just get more powerful,” says Zoran, a Kurdish smuggler who operated in Dunkirk lorry carparks until last year. “It became too much for me.”

Yet he adds, with some pride, that growing security has emboldened mafias by tightening their monopolies over routes. “Smugglers know everything about security on the border, that is their job. So when security gets worse, smugglers just get cleverer and more powerful ... Some were even working with the police. You could get away with anything if you worked with the police.”



Boats used by migrants at a UK Border Force facility in Dover, after being intercepted in the Channel. Photograph: Gareth Fuller/PA

Maya Konforti, secretary of L'Auberge des Migrants, says there is truth behind his boast. "For years and years now it's the same story on repeat: one way is blocked and another appears. Smugglers just keep outsmarting security."

Zoran says his job became ever more lucrative as security between the UK and Calais increased. "The bosses charged just a few hundred euros in 2014, but when I left it was four [or] five grand for the same lorry crossing."

"Prices went up with each new bout of security spending," says another man, Saad, who worked with Sudanese and Kurdish mafias in Calais at the peak of the refugee crisis four years ago. Over the years he was there, the UK funded [£98.9m](#) worth of barbed-wire fencing, riot police deployment and infrared detection in the area, which he claims only made smuggling more profitable, and enabled mafias to come to dominance in the first place.

Smugglers are our only allies

*Aran, young asylum seeker*

"A growing obstacle course on the border made crossing alone impossible for migrants. This attracted mafia groups who studied the controls and found ways around them, knowing what desperate people would pay for these ways.

"We thank your government for our full pockets," he says.

For years refugee charities have called for the government to process asylum claims on the UK's external border and to focus on expanding safe routes rather than border controls. But legal routes have instead been closed. In January, Brexit cut off reunification routes for refugee families separated across [Europe](#) and the government has abandoned target quotas for resettlement schemes of the UN refugee agency (UNHCR).



Migrants in a small boat off Sangatte, France, as they try to cross the Channel. Photograph: Sameer al-Doumy/AFP/Getty

In 2019, when there was a 16-year peak in arrivals before lockdown reduced European migration flows, Aran crossed the Channel as an unaccompanied 15-year-old boy fleeing Isis in Iraq, joining his uncle in the UK after a year of travelling alone.

He describes how a smuggler in Dunkirk once took out a knife and threatened to cut off another boy's finger, before beating him up badly while Aran watched. "I was terrified and helpless. But I couldn't stay in [France](#), the situation there is terrible. Every morning, police kick you awake, slash your tent with a knife and tell you to move. Where should I go? You won't even let me sleep in a tent!

"The horrid truth," says the teenager quietly, "is that smugglers are our only allies."

"Smuggling can be terrible, harsh, cruel," Saad admits, "but it's a privilege to be smuggled. That is what the government can't see."

| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

## Culture

# Grotesque, paranoid, frazzled: why the mum is TV's most compelling character



Keeping mum ... (clockwise from top left) Josie Long, The Letdown, Tully, Scummy Mummies, Motherland.

Keeping mum ... (clockwise from top left) Josie Long, The Letdown, Tully, Scummy Mummies, Motherland.

Parental comedy Motherland is back – a reminder that some of pop culture's most watchable matriarchs are anything but perfect





[Nell Frizzell](#)

Mon 10 May 2021 03.00 EDT

Plastic plates, damp washing, stretched vaginas, nursery drop-offs, felt-tip knees, tepid baths and the constant, unfinished lists. We are experiencing a boom in popular culture right now that celebrates and interrogates motherhood in all its yoghurt-smeared, sleepless, Technicolor glory. From television shows such as [Motherland](#) – which returns this week – [The Letdown](#), [Workin' Moms](#), [Trying](#) and [Better Things](#), to podcasts such as [Zombiemum](#), [Scummy Mummies](#) and Mother Tongue, you can hardly swing a cot without hitting a mum these days.

[The Guide: Staying In – sign up for our home entertainment tips](#)  
[Read more](#)

Of course, there have been varied depictions of mothers on screen for decades. Some, such as Roseanne or Nora Ephron's film *Heartburn*, were even written by mothers themselves. There were the long-suffering, or straight-faced mothers such as Barbara Royle in *The Royle Family* or Pam Shipman in [Gavin & Stacey](#); eye-rolling mothers such as Karen in *Cold Feet* or Sue in [Outnumbered](#); the lovelorn single mums of *Birds of a Feather*; the formidable matriarch Peggy Mitchell in *EastEnders*; or the animated cottage



loaf that was Ma Larkin in *The Darling Buds of May*. But lately more complex portrayals of motherhood have emerged, serving as sweetcorn-like nuggets of honesty in the nappy contents of popular culture.

“I think the hunger is to hear from mothers. Because I think most depictions of motherhood have been at one remove,” says the comedian Josie Long, [whose most recent standup show, \*Tender\*](#), was a beautiful look at labour and early motherhood. “There is a hunger for a first-person narrative, showing you what is happening while it’s happening,” she continues, her little daughter chatting in the background. “All my life, I had been told that as a woman comedian I should avoid ‘women’s experiences’. I was sick of it. This experience had completely changed my life, my body, my brain, everything. If that isn’t the thing to write about then I don’t know what is.”



Generation game ... Barbara Royle and her mum Norma in *The Royle Family*. Photograph: Granada/Rex/Shutterstock

The hunger is not just for stories of motherhood, but stories that can reflect the imposter-syndrome, peanut butter-encrusted, lonely experience of motherhood. What characterises this new era of parental representation is the conscious move away from the soft-focus depictions of mothering found in advertising and on a particular type of social media, towards the dirty, the desperate, the hilariously deranged.

“I think it was initially a reaction against something that started with that whole ‘domestic goddess’, ‘yummy mummy’ idea,” says Clover Stroud, the author of [My Wild and Sleepless Nights](#), a memoir about birthing her youngest and fifth (fifth!) child as her elder son crashed into the everyday delinquency of adolescence. “When I joined, Instagram presented this really idealised version of what motherhood should look like, which in no way equates with what it actually feels like,” says Stroud, as I watch my own son slowly but deliberately put a rock in his mouth, while also kicking at someone’s greenhouse. “It was very curated; cashmere-wrapped, caramel-coloured and glossy.” I instantly think of Katherine Ryan and Sharon Horgan’s incredible wardrobes in [The Duchess](#) and [Catastrophe](#). What Stroud wanted to make, watch and listen to was more complicated and more messy than that version of motherhood. “From the grinding boredom of it to the off-the-scale, cosmic, spiritual enlightenment,” she says. “And those two feelings are simultaneous. You will feel like you’ve been turned into a jigsaw puzzle and totally euphoric. I wanted to capture that strange dichotomy.”



Growing pains ... Sharon Horgan in *Catastrophe*. Photograph: Mark Johnson/Channel 4

There have been some attempts to puncture the #blessed #cherisheverymoment culture of social media motherhood, of course.

Grazia's recent Instagram parenting community called [The Juggle](#) was designed, in the words of Grazia editor Hattie Brett, to give practical advice, offer light relief and remind parents that they're not alone in feeling as if life is hanging by a very thin thread. "We knew parents needed help," Brett writes over email, as my son stands naked at the window, shouting at a bin, "but also humour."

In the hunt for humour, the swing of the pendulum can sometimes go quite far the other way: painting parenting as a joyless, unrelenting task enacted by resentful, often inebriated adults towards their wholly monstrous offspring. If Jenny from Cold Feet had been on Twitter back in the day, she would almost certainly have been posting about her crap husband, moaning baby and desire to dump both in a supermarket and run away. "There was a time when it felt like there were a lot of people saying they were fed up with their kids. And I get that," says Sarah Turner, the author of *The Unmumsy Mum*. "Despite being in the camp of baring all to make each other feel less alone, there was a moment where it felt, particularly on social media, that everything had become very 'wine o'clock'."

But that sort of self-deprecation is not the same as representation. As [Hannah Gadsby](#) has argued in standup, it's not equality if you always have to be the butt of the joke. Equality would mean presenting motherhood with the same nuance and attention to detail that people talk about their football teams or relationships or jobs. You need the love, the passion, the loneliness and the humour, too. Which is where tender-yet-hilarious shows such as *Better Things* or *The Letdown*, films like *Tully* and a thousand mum-centric podcasts step in.

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"All my friends are grotesque but not grotesques," says *Motherland*'s co-creator [Holly Walsh](#), who sounds a little like gravel rolling off a spade after

picking up the lurgy from one of her children. “I don’t think there was a single one of us when we were writing it who would profess to being a good parent, but I also think we’d never say we didn’t love our children with all our hearts and want to do the best for them.”

The new-found popularity of the motherhood narrative has presumably been partly spurred on by the last year of lockdown. “Lockdown has given everybody a taste of what it feels like to have a newborn baby,” argues Stroud. “You are isolated, can’t go anywhere, can’t buy any new clothes; you’re bored, paranoid. All those things.” There has also been, for some households at least, a cold, damp confrontation with just how much work goes into parenting while the other partner is out of the house. As Walsh puts it: “I bet you a lot of men watch Motherland now through new eyes. That work all had to be done before the pandemic, during the pandemic and will carry on being done after the pandemic. But it will be interesting to see how a lot of partners will now see the nature of that labour and responsibility.”



Playing happy families ... Better Things. Photograph: Fx Network/Kobal/Rex/Shutterstock

Parents, particularly mothers, may have finally seized the means of production and be able to tell their own stories of joy, fury, passion and chaos. But they are still having to fit that in around the full-time, 24-hour-a-



day, less-than-minimum-wage job of being a parent. “We have always described our show as a workplace comedy but the work is mothering,” says Walsh. “What’s interesting about our little group of writers and performers is that most of us are in it, doing it. We are balancing writing and making shows around children with looking after our own children. I don’t think there are many TV shows where people come home from a day of writing about, say, Goldman Sachs and then have to do an evening shift on the trading floor of a bank.”

Sometimes culture is a window, sometimes a mirror. Whether you have children, want them, had them decades ago, or are still trying to grow out of being one, parenting and motherhood is relevant to you. It should, if presented properly, be interesting, funny, painful and shocking. Which is why writers, performers and broadcasters are drawn to it. There is a long way to go, of course: we need more non-white, non-heterosexual, non-cisgender, non-London and non-wealthy mums in popular culture – both featured in it and making it.

After all, becoming a parent is possibly the most universal human experience there is, after birth and death. “There are so many versions of motherhood and so many different ways of relating to it,” says Walsh, as Alice in Wonderland blasts out from my front room and my son throws himself off the sofa on to a hard wood floor. “People are being brought up in so many different ways, by different people and it’s a really inclusive thing. Also, my children are tax-deductible now.”

*Motherland returns on Monday 10 May at 9pm, BBC Two and BBC iPlayer; [Nell Frizzell is the author of The Panic Years.](#)*

## Seafood

# The four fish I would still eat – even after watching Seaspiracy



Salmon-fishing in Alaska. Photograph: Luis Sinco/LA Times/Getty

Salmon-fishing in Alaska. Photograph: Luis Sinco/LA Times/Getty

The hit Netflix documentary encourages viewers to give up seafood altogether. But when it comes to a sustainable diet, I do believe in a few exceptions

*Paul Greenberg*

Mon 10 May 2021 02.00 EDT

Seaspiracy, the buzzy, frenetic, slick, sloppy, confused and gripping documentary that premiered on Netflix in March, [is often wrong but mostly right](#). Led by Ali Tabrizi, and produced by the maker of [Cowspiracy](#), Kip Andersen, the film takes you on a bumpy ride with pit stops at every imaginable ocean horror: from the slaughtered dolphins of Taiji in Japan to the sea slaves of the South China Sea, north to the fetid corpses of disease-

stricken Scottish farmed salmon and out into the plastic-strewn blue of the great Pacific garbage patch. It then dumps you at the side of the road, kicks you in the ribs and shouts: “And, remember – stop eating fish!”

Not surprisingly, many fishers, conservationists and fisheries scientists feel similarly assaulted. [Indignant posts abound](#) from nonprofits to fisher’s associations asserting that, contrary to the film’s claims, sustainable fishing is possible, and that we can, if we’re careful, keep eating fish.

Many others outside the fish echo chamber have told me that after watching Seaspiracy they will no longer eat fish. And you know what? I mostly agree with them. Humanity removes 80-90m tonnes of wildlife from the oceans every year (the equivalent of the human weight of China). We call it “seafood” to feel OK about that appalling deduction. Of course, there are communities in the developing world that rely on local seafood as their primary source of protein. Please, let them have it. But for those of us who are lucky enough to have the power of choice over our diets, a move toward plant-centred eating is the only justifiable decision. [Seafood](#) should never have grown into the vast, global concern it has become. We need to return it to its artisan, community-based roots, and we need to find a path forward to aid that transition.

And yet ... there is merit in keeping a toe in the water. We already befoul our oceans at a tremendous level. Were we to cut our food relationship with the seas entirely, I fear we would befoul them even more. So, in light of that, and with the idea of striking not quite a compromise but rather a managed retreat, I wanted to throw out four exceptions to Tabrizi’s rule.

## **1. Farmed oysters, mussels and clams**





An assortment of oysters on display in Portland, Maine. Photograph: Getty Images

“Shellfish farming is the economic argument for clean water.” So said a clam, mussel and oyster farmer in Maine to me a few years back. Think about it: who has a bigger stake in water being clean? Sure, there is tourism. But when you have to farm something in the water, and have it pass inspection before you can sell it, you have to bet on the water being clean. [Oysters](#), mussels and clams feed by filtering the water. If the water is filthy, they in turn bring that filth to the consumer. It’s no coincidence that shellfish farmers stand up for clean water regulations. For this reason, I will always put some bivalves in my shopping bag. If they weren’t out there, making sure the water is clean, who would do the job? Ali Tabrizi?

## **2. Alaskan sockeye salmon**



A side of wild sockeye salmon. Photograph: eyecrave/Getty

If you eat salmon, you've probably never given much thought to Bristol Bay, Alaska. But this is home to one of the largest remaining wild salmon runs on earth. Every year, something like 60m salmon come into the system, a portion of which are harvested and sold all over the world. If you've ever bought frozen or tinned salmon from Alaska, you have eaten this fish. For the past two decades, the region has been threatened by [a massive copper and gold mine](#) project. But thanks to a campaign driven primarily by commercial and sport salmon fishers, the proposal was effectively killed off last autumn. Now, a huge swath of wild territory that supports everything from grizzly bears to eagles to indigenous communities will be spared. I will gladly put money in the pockets of the fishers who fought so hard to keep this landscape wild. Bristol Bay and indeed pretty much all Alaskan salmon get high marks from sustainability authorities, which Tabrizi dismisses as so in the pocket of the fishing industry as to be useless. But having logged many hours on Alaskan rivers and seen the meticulousness with which managers ensure yearly "escapement" goals, allowing large numbers of salmon upstream to seed future generations, I think the biology argues for itself. Bristol Bay proves that fishers and conservationists can work together, and these alliances need to become more common if fishing is to have a future.

### 3. Anchoveta from Peru



Peruvian anchoveta at a processing factory in Lima. Photograph: Getty Images

A dirty secret of the booming aquaculture industry ([growing](#) by more than 5% a year) is that much of it relies on the “reduction” of little fish into feed pellets. The greatest victim of this massacre is the Peruvian anchoveta, which in some years represents 10% of the entire global catch of seafood, with 99% of it being reduced. Almost none of it reaches human plates. Here I agree with the Seaspiracy sentiment: let’s stop the reduction industry dead in its tracks. But here is another thing. Peruvian anchoveta are not just extremely nutritious, they are better in terms of carbon footprint than many vegetables, and certainly any meat. They taste the same as any anchovy and could be a human staple. But because of the lock the industrial fish feed business holds on the fishery, there is almost no production for human consumption. This has to change. So, on the rare occasions when I can find them, I eat Peruvian anchoveta.

### 4. The fish that I catch



Catch and go home ... Photograph: Posed by model/Robert Smith/Alamy

Here I await the wrath of vegans, but yes, I do continue to venture out to pursue, catch and kill fish myself. I avoid “catch and release”, which I believe is torture, practising what the conservationist [Carl Safina](#) calls “kill and go home” instead. That is: catch what you need, eat it all (head, too) and understand that fish are not there for your amusement. To enter a river, a bay or the azure blue Gulf Stream as a predator, as part of the Earth’s barter of give and take, is to go from being a passive observer to an active participant. You learn to interpret the rising of insects, the watermelony smell of menhaden schools on open water and the hungry whine of diving terns. You can take in some of this while you scroll through Instagram and munch on an ersatz fish fillet. But much is lost in this kind of passive observation, as is the motivation to actually do something about what’s gone wrong with life underwater.

Yes, we should heed the call of suffering that film-makers such as Tabrizi clearly heard and captured. But we can’t just take in the oceans through a one-way porthole. To save the sea we have to be participants in its drama and feel what is at stake in our bones. Watching a movie alone just won’t cut it. We’re not just spectators.



*Paul Greenberg is the author of the New York Times bestseller [Four Fish](#).  
His most recent book is [The Climate Diet](#)*

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

## Documentary films

# Madonna: Truth or Dare at 30 – the most revealing pop star documentary ever?

The 1991 hit film gave us the pop star at her most open, inviting us into her uncensored world, a far cry from the tightly protected celeb docs we see today



A promotional image for Madonna: Truth Or Dare. Photograph: Miramax/Allstar

A promotional image for Madonna: Truth Or Dare. Photograph: Miramax/Allstar



[Guy Lodge](#)

Mon 10 May 2021 03.09 EDT

When teenage pop phenomenon Billie Eilish recently unveiled [a drastic new image](#) on the cover of Vogue magazine, the internet went into feverish overdrive. Previously distinguished by raven-dark locks and loosely androgynous, body-concealing attire, the singer instead turned to hyper-feminised exaggeration: bombshell-style platinum curls atop a tightly cinched, rose-coloured bustier, with a polite nod to fetishwear in its visible buckles and accompanying nude PVC skirt.

[Express yourself: why Madonna directing her own biopic isn't as ominous as it sounds](#)

[Read more](#)

As showbiz makeovers go, it was unexpected, though not without precedent: older onlookers were quick to note that the 19-year-old had effectively “done a Madonna”, borrowing not only the chameleonic instincts of her 62-year-old elder, but riffing plainly on the OG queen of pop’s most defining look: the wildly stylised pinup aesthetic of her 1990 Blonde Ambition tour, with its corsetry, conical bras and underwear-as-outerwear cheek. The stars’ motivations might have differed slightly – in line with her new single Your



Power, Eilish's getup accompanied an interview meditating on body positivity, consent and abuse, while Madonna's was dedicated to expanding sexual boundaries – yet in 30 years, it seems, the pop impact of a well-chosen corset hasn't dimmed.

More coincidentally, Eilish's Madonna homage arrives just as the older star's most significant contribution to cinema celebrates its 30th anniversary. It's three decades since *Madonna: Truth or Dare* (or *In Bed With Madonna*, to use its international title) hit screens with a raucous bang, outperforming expectations with a \$29m gross that landed it the record, held for 11 years, of the highest-earning documentary of all time. In doing so, it altered the popular perception of what the concert movie was supposed to be, turning the usual priorities of the filmed stage performance record inside-out, or backstage-forward: *Truth or Dare* was a hit not because it replicated the *Blonde Ambition* experience for those who couldn't be there, but invited fans into the altogether more unruly performance of the star's real life.

None of this may sound especially revolutionary to a generation raised on 21st-century reality television, or indeed Instagram, where forging a candid sense of private life – off-camera but very much on camera – is now a standard clause of the celebrity contract. In 1991, however, stars of the magnitude of Madonna were prized for their distant mystique, not their familiarity. *Truth or Dare*'s glimpses of the star at rest, kicking back with her entourage, her family and even her temporary squeeze Warren Beatty, felt genuinely revealing, even subversive. This was no well-behaved personality profile. The objective, stage-managed or otherwise, was to present her highness as rude, raucous and hard to pin down – real, perhaps, but nothing like us.

That wasn't always the plan. *Truth or Dare* was initially conceived, more simply, as a straight-up concert doc, capturing what was already pretty cinematic about the *Blonde Ambition* tour's raunchy, elaborately choreographed theatre of sexual revolution. David Fincher, who had made his name with stylish music videos for the star's singles *Vogue* and *Express Yourself*, was lined up to direct; the film would effectively be a live, feature-length version of that same flash.

When Fincher pulled out, however, the young, Harvard-schooled music video director Alek Keshishian entered with different ideas. He was less fascinated by Madonna's admittedly impressive onstage show than by the freewheeling circus of her backstage life, surrounded by her self-described "family" of assistants, adjuncts and predominantly queer backup dancers, with their own spiralling dramas and conflicts. Keshishian likened the crew to the bawdy ensemble of a Federico Fellini film; *Truth or Dare*, in turn, fashioned itself as the *La Dolce Vita* of rockumentaries, chaotically freeform and in thrall to sensuality and decadence, and shot largely in limber, grainy black-and-white for maximum *vérité* cred.

By rights, it should have been an unendurable indulgence: it's certainly an enthralled paean to a force-of-nature celebrity who already didn't want for attention. Yet *Truth or Dare* was, and remains, wholly riveting, as a study in community as well as a solo portrait. Keshishian's film is perhaps still undervalued as a queer cinema milestone, normalising as it does the out-and-proud gayness of most of her dancers, without fetishising or exoticising their sexuality – relative, at least, to the blazing sexual energy of their glittery leader. *Truth or Dare* was rare at the time in its everyday depiction of queer performers at work and at play, hanging out, gossiping or mingling around a New York Pride parade: Madonna is the freak of nature in their midst, not the other way round.

And yes, for Madonna cultists, it's an exhilarating snapshot of the star in her godly, don't-give-a-fuck prime, well before Kabbalah and Guy Ritchie and that cut-glass Ameringlish accent ate away at her cool. Contrastingly shot in bright, varnished colour, the film's concert sequences may be its least interesting material almost by design, yet they capture the brazen, cocksure performance presence that – well ahead of her vocal chops, as she herself admits – made her a phenomenon to begin with.



Photograph: Miramax/Allstar

Backstage, the magnetism is undimmed. Thirty years on, the surprise of Truth or Dare is just what a blast Madonna is: nastily funny, openly horny, undisguised in her contempt for anyone she deems less fabulous than herself and her blessed collaborators. A post-concert encounter with an out-of-his-element Kevin Costner culminates in her gagging behind his back after he describes her show as “neat”; elsewhere, she announces her raging crush on then-rising star (and her future Evita leading man) Antonio Banderas, and her blatant rage at his being married.

Such disarmingly awkward, off-the-cuff moments would never make the cut today, and if they did, the unholy alliance of Twitter and TMZ would scrutinise, analyse and meme all the fun right out of them: Truth or Dare captures celebrity culture in a tender transitional era between ironised self-awareness and exhaustive, personality-sapping PR training. As such, the film blazed a trail for a genre of behind-the-music documentary that has rarely replicated Truth or Dare’s genuine backstage-pass fizz and freedom. Fan-service films like Katy Perry: Part of Me or Justin Bieber: Never Say Never offer their viewers guarded, artificial access, carefully managing their subjects’ private personae, and never risking the level of offence and outrageousness that Madonna blithely builds into her act here. Is it the “real” Madonna performing fellatio on a water bottle, or sprawling dramatically on

her mother's grave, or is this another version of herself she's devised for Keshishian's camera? Madonna's whole deal in the Blonde Ambition era was that it didn't much matter: the real Madonna *was* the constructed one, and vice versa.

It's a far cry from the present day, where celebrities are expected to project a less mannered, less arrogant, altogether less fabulous authenticity to their admirers. Which brings us back to Billie Eilish, recently the subject of an altogether different documentary portrait: renowned documentarian RJ Cutler's solemn, tasteful and rather affecting [Billie Eilish: The World's a Little Blurry](#), which focuses intimately on the star's stern, introverted songwriting process, between more confessional interludes in which she reflects thoughtfully on her fears, insecurities and mental health.

In its own way, it's as devoted and ambiguous a feat of pop portraiture as Truth or Dare, inviting similar questions over what is real and what is presented as such by its enigmatic star – yet what it's selling is vulnerability, not fiery, untouchable, self-adoring confidence, which tells you much about how the ideal relationship between celebrity and fan has shifted in the last 30 years. Still, Eilish and her peers have many eras, and makeovers, ahead of her: perhaps generation Z's Truth or Dare still awaits us.

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## 2021.05.10 - Opinion

- Johnson's lesson for Labour: politics is not a consumer product
- Covid's cruellest blow? Keeping the dying from their loved ones
- Many Scots don't want independence, but a more cooperative union
- Labour's crisis comes from the huge gap between politics and people
- Two more Tory terms? Before the party gets too excited, there is work to be done

## [OpinionLabour](#)

# Johnson's lesson for Labour: politics is not a consumer product

[Nesrine Malik](#)

Successful political movements are polarising projects that promise to make things better for those who get on board



‘For Labour, no condemnation of the Tories can be remotely effective without creating a set of competing values.’ Photograph: Jessica Taylor/UK Parliament/AFP/Getty Images

‘For Labour, no condemnation of the Tories can be remotely effective without creating a set of competing values.’ Photograph: Jessica Taylor/UK Parliament/AFP/Getty Images

Mon 10 May 2021 02.00 EDT

For much of the past month, the liberal commentariat has been excitedly debating how badly “[Tory sleaze](#)” would damage Boris Johnson’s

Conservatives at the polls. The scandals were clear to see – and hardly surprising, in the light of our unusually detailed knowledge of the prime minister’s character flaws. The matter for debate was the extent to which they might “cut through”, a phrase beloved by the UK’s political commentators to describe when voters take note of a news story and factor it into their choice at the ballot box.

We are still having this debate even though Johnson is decades into this sort of behaviour, and decades into being humoured for it. Now he is riding high on the back of this week’s election results, with his allies boasting on the [front page of Saturday’s Times](#) that a “decade in power” awaits. The spectacular contrast between Johnson’s personal weaknesses and his political strengths has induced a vertiginous delirium among professional observers of British politics, who cannot decide if he is an unstoppable juggernaut or a very lucky fool whose time will surely run out soon. And so we have endless iterations of what might be called the Boris blues: lyrical lamentations and indignant protestations over each new victory.

Johnson supporters do not suffer from the Boris blues – not because they haven’t been paying attention, but because they have priced in his failings. An LBC phone-in last week dedicated to the question of cutting through received calls and messages from supporters saying that Boris was “their man”. His actions are consistent with a vision of Britain that the Conservative party has been selling to voters for years. Yes, Johnson may get up to no good; but as long as he represents their values, they’re willing to stick by his side. Those values include championing a Britain that is anti-immigration and nationalistic, as well as protecting economic interests through the continuation of house price inflation, all while maintaining a [flamboyant hostility](#) towards those who need taxpayer-funded help.

When voting behaviour doesn’t align with liberal expectations of rational decision-making, we are told that people at best didn’t have access to the right information, or at worst have been lied to. But this is the wrong model for thinking about politics: it is not a consumer product, with a “retail offer” carefully tailored to already existing customer demand. Successful political movements *supply* a vision that creates enthusiasm and loyalty – they attract voters to a polarising project that promises to make things better for those who get on board. Johnson and the Conservative party benefit from a



political and economic environment of their own making. As wages decrease and precarity increases, voters feel the [need to preserve](#) whatever capital they have. As communities crumble, a sense of belonging is created against an imagined and threatening “other”.

This Tory-friendly landscape is a legacy of, among other things, the increased dominance of the rightwing media, the weakening of trade unions and Labour’s capitulation on immigration. In this climate, Johnson’s honesty, technical competence and morality are subordinated to the bigger goal he can deliver – a Britain for his team – whether it is something that has a positive effect on his supporters’ lives or not.

[Two more Tory terms? Before the party gets too excited, there is work to be done | Katy Balls](#)  
[Read more](#)

For Labour, no condemnation of the Tories can be remotely effective without creating a set of competing values; without the necessary antagonism required to cultivate the voters who are *your* team. It is not enough to point in horror and passively lament the seemingly immovable institutions [that created Johnson](#): Eton, class, wealthy old boys’ networks. It is not enough to keep trying to convince the public of the Tories’ faults.

Smarting from the effects of the pandemic, we have gained an awareness of the expanding cracks in our society. Labour could start by being a healing, protective force, a spirited advocate for the large numbers who are falling through these gaps every day.

We must also rebalance the larger forces. This means reckoning with the cruel and self-interested economic, media and political culture that continues to attract voters to the right. It means less “forensic” caution. Despair and anger quietly flow along Britain’s streets, ready to be tapped and channelled. Boris Johnson’s corruption is cutting through, you see – it’s just not landing.

- Nesrine Malik is a Guardian columnist
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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

## [Opinion](#)Coronavirus

# Covid's cruellest blow? Keeping the dying from their loved ones

[Rachel Clarke](#)



The NHS did its best, but too many were isolated when they needed connection most, leaving a legacy of deep trauma

- Rachel Clarke is a palliative care doctor
- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



The intensive care unit in the Western general hospital, Edinburgh.  
Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

The intensive care unit in the Western general hospital, Edinburgh.  
Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/The Guardian

Mon 10 May 2021 04.34 EDT

When the pandemic first struck, I met a patient who described being rushed into hospital as “like being dropped into Hades”. She grimaced as she struggled to convey the trauma of the masked and faceless staff looming over her bed, the mechanical bleeping and human moaning. Blood leaked from her arm where an exhausted doctor had tried and failed – multiple times – to insert a tube into her vein. The other patients looked shell-shocked or moribund. “This is where I’m going to die,” she had thought to herself, “listening to people howling, staring at doctors in masks, with blood all over my hands.”

The most hellish detail, though, was not what was present, but what my patient lacked. No husband, no children, no friends at her bedside. Disorientated and fighting for air, she faced the prospect of dying from Covid entirely cut off from those she loved most. Worse, her experience wasn’t rare but ubiquitous. On stretchers, in care homes, on trolleys, in corridors, tethered to ventilators, blasted by high-flow oxygen, sequestered

inside negative pressure rooms, patients in their thousands throughout the last year have confronted death's proximity alone.

No other disease in our lifetimes has required hospitals to be almost completely purged of visitors, even at the end of life. In place of the deathbed vigil – families clustered round the one they love, watching, waiting, clasping, holding – Covid has torn parent from child, sister from brother, husband from wife, grandparent from grandchild. We have been forced to exile the one group of people who matter more than anyone else when death draws near.

[UK's Covid bereaved suffer heightened grief, finds study](#)  
[Read more](#)

This particular cruelty of Covid disrupts a fiercely primal need. Across cultures, eras and institutional settings, what we crave in extremis is the same. Someone to cling to, preferably someone we love, their presence an antidote to fear and pain. As my patient put it: “I wanted someone to scoop me up. It really doesn't matter if you are three or 53, it's still the same feeling.”

In the early days of the pandemic, then, our efforts to contain the virus – to prevent it from claiming even more lives – violated everything I knew about good palliative care. We all understood the rationale for banning visitors. Rigorous infection control was obviously critical. Yet almost overnight, the hospital became a brutal world of absences and barricades – loved ones jettisoned and patients marooned in their personal Hades, alone.

Denying family members their place at the bedside of someone who is gravely unwell – “so sick they may die”, as we often phrase it – felt profoundly wrong. For me, the car park, of all places, exposed this. One day, I noticed the handful of stationary vehicles, all of them angled to face the hospital. Their occupants sat impassively, sometimes for hours, staring at the threshold they were forbidden from crossing. These watchers held vigil, strained and desperate, as near as they could possibly get to the person they loved despite the fact that they were not even in sight. I am not sure I have seen anything in the hospital more plaintive.

The preliminary findings from UK-wide research into how people have coped with the deaths of loved ones during the pandemic have shown, unsurprisingly, that Covid grief is [worse](#) than other types of grief. The research team from Cardiff and Bristol universities found that 70% of bereaved people whose loved one died from Covid had limited contact with them in the last days of life, 85% were unable to say goodbye as they would have liked and 75% experienced social isolation and loneliness. For people whose loved ones died of non-Covid illnesses such as cancer over the same period, 43% had limited contact, 39% were unable to say proper goodbyes and 63% experienced loneliness.

When I spoke to one bereaved daughter, Kathryn de Prudhoe, whose father, Tony, died of Covid in April last year, these statistics were brought painfully to life. Tony was rushed overnight into hospital, leaving his wife alone at home. “Even when they told us they were going to withdraw Dad’s life support, no one from the hospital offered us the chance to come in,” says Kathryn. “No one suggested a video call or a phone call. And we just meekly complied. We thought it was what we had to do. We were obedient and I never even thought to question it.”

Eventually, when it was clear Tony would not survive, the hospital called to say they were disconnecting him from his ventilator. Kathryn sat outside with her mother, scrupulously obeying the social-distancing rules, as they waited for him to die. “I kept thinking of the last three days when he’d been totally alone, surrounded by strangers. His lungs were filled with fluid, he’d had a bleed on the brain. It must have been physical torture and then, at some point, on top of all that, he would have known he was dying. I cannot bear to think of him there all alone,” she told me.

['There are times when I've been in tears': a year of Covid in the UK](#)  
[Read more](#)

The only thing worse than inflicting such suffering on people like Kathryn would be for the NHS not to have learned from the pain we have so reluctantly caused. Thankfully, early on in the pandemic, staff recognised the anguish of absence for families and did all we could to alleviate it. We used mobiles and tablets to link patients and families by video. Hospitals made exceptions to draconian visitor restrictions for patients judged to be dying.

The Centre for The Art of Dying Well at St Mary's University, London, published a [guide](#) to “deathbed etiquette”, advising relatives unable to be physically with their loved ones to communicate with them virtually, trust in the care of doctors and nurses, and not let feelings of guilt take over.

And, while knowing we could never replace families, staff strove to fill that terrible void. Doctors, nurses and care workers held dying patients' hands, recited poems, played favourite music, whispered farewell letters from those at home. One junior doctor played her violin at her patient's bedside – his last wish before he died. In my hospital's ICU, the nursing team were resolute. No one, but no one would die there alone – and indeed they have not. A member of staff has always sat there, offering that most vital of medicines: another human being, reaching out with love and tenderness towards one of their own.

We cannot prevent pandemics, and there remains the alarming prospect of a further wave, perhaps caused by a new strain of the current one. The next time our hospitals become overwhelmed, loved ones must be permitted the deathbed vigil. Never again, at the moment when people need to cling to each other most, can we allow an infectious disease to wrench them apart.

- Rachel Clarke is a palliative care doctor and the author of [Breathtaking: Inside the NHS in a Time of Pandemic](#)
- Join a Guardian Live discussion at how the NHS has performed during the pandemic, amid new government plans for another reorganisation. With Denis Campbell, Dr Rachel Clarke and Sir David Nicholson on Thursday 12 May, 7pm BST | 8pm CEST | 11am PDT | 2pm EDT. Book tickets [here](#)



## [OpinionScotland](#)

# Many Scots don't want independence, but a more cooperative union

[Gordon Brown](#)



There is an alternative to the dysfunctional status quo – one that gives each nation a say and mobilises our shared resources



Boris Johnson and Nicola Sturgeon outside Bute House, Edinburgh, in 2019.  
Photograph: Jane Barlow/PA

Boris Johnson and Nicola Sturgeon outside Bute House, Edinburgh, in 2019.  
Photograph: Jane Barlow/PA

Sun 9 May 2021 11.55 EDT

No [prime ministerial letters](#), flying visits to Scotland or one-off meetings, however welcome, can wallpaper over the cracks in the United Kingdom. Lying ahead of us are months of constitutional standoffs, court hearings, ultimatums and acrimony. But there is one way that Scotland and the UK can work together again.

An in-depth poll conducted by the thinktank Our Scottish Future (of which I am a founding member), the full results of which are to be published early this week, found that on the same day as [48% of voters](#) opted for the SNP, a far higher number of Scots – 73% – wanted better cooperation between Scotland and the rest of the UK, support that remains as high when it comes to the specifics of addressing the health, poverty, jobs and climate crises we so obviously share in common.

On the surface, the election results reveal a [Scotland](#) divided down the middle into two warring camps, one half headlong for independence and the

other half clinging to the union.

But what I see every day is not two Scotlands but three, the two blocs for and against independence framing a larger group in the middle. It is this group, not the enthusiasts on either side, who will decide whether our 300-year-old union lives or dies.

To an outsider, the people in middle Scotland may appear to be nationalists. They will tell you that they feel more Scottish than British, that they prefer the Scottish parliament to the UK parliament and [Nicola Sturgeon](#) to Boris Johnson. In a choice between being Scottish or being British, most would opt for the former; and they will tell you that at elections they vote for the party they see as standing up for Scotland.

But they have a fundamental difference of view to the nationalists. Middle Scotland has not written a British dimension out of their lives. They don't want to be forced to make the choice between being Scottish and British. They are best described as patriots who love our country, but not nationalists who see life in terms of a never-ending struggle between "us", the Scots, and "them", the rest of the UK.

The Britain middle Scotland connects with isn't the Britain defined by ancient institutions or deference to them. The living symbol of unity is the NHS, which continues to be, for Scots, a British icon, despite the fact the healthcare is administered differently in each nation. The NHS speaks to feelings of empathy, solidarity and reciprocity – exactly the sentiments that underpin a desire to cooperate and share. The recent UK-wide vaccination effort – UK mass purchasing, [Scottish delivery](#) – may yet revitalise the idea of a partnership that works, and encourage middle Scotland to consider a range of constitutional options that could deliver their priorities more effectively than those currently in existence.

While middle Scotland wants cooperation, it doesn't think [Boris Johnson](#) and Nicola Sturgeon share that aspiration. Only 23% of Scots agree that the Scottish and UK governments cooperate well. Of course Nicola Sturgeon won't change – her life's work is to break up the UK – but the inescapable duty of a UK prime minister should be to bring the different nations and regions of the UK together.

His “muscular unionism” involves putting up more flags, bypassing the Scottish government and badging Scottish bridges and roads as gifts that come courtesy of the UK (as if there is nothing more to bridge-building than spending on bricks and mortar). It is Johnson’s attempt to show that Britishness can win a competition with Scottishness. When he says devolution is a “[a disaster](#)”, he may have thought he was attacking the SNP. In fact nearly 90% of Scots are proud of their devolved parliament, and he is at war with mainstream Scottish opinion. When he says there should be no referendum for [40 years](#), he is not just at odds with the SNP but with the majority of Scots, who certainly don’t want a referendum now but don’t think it right that he alone can rule it out for ever.

Johnson may believe that he can be, at one and the same time, an English nationalist and save the union. The reality is that no prime minister can hold the UK together if at war with a large part of it. He must become the minister for the union and not just the minister for unionists, and the first step is to set up – as Keir Starmer has already done – an inquiry into the UK’s future, instructing it to find an alternative not just to separate nationalisms but to the poorly performing status quo.

[While Salmond tanked, pro-unionist tactical voting made its mark in Scotland](#)

[Read more](#)

It should be a UK-wide review because there is disenchantment too across Wales, Northern Ireland and the English regions. Hartlepool shows that the Conservative promise of levelling up is still a political vote-winner, but only time will tell if it is an economic gamechanger. When Johnson admits the north has [lent him](#) their votes, he too is recognising that “the man in Whitehall” doesn’t know best, and has got to find better ways of listening and taking the electorates’ views into account.

Civil society movements will now spring up championing cooperation across the UK, and from today Our Scottish Future will turn itself into a campaigning organisation committed to making the UK more acceptable to all of its constituent parts. It will put the patriotic, principled and progressive case for Scotland to remain in Britain. But the prime minister is in a unique

position: through the authority of the office, and through statesmanship, he can build the ties that bind our country together.

A constitutional inquiry would show how we can build a more inclusive centre to the UK, repairing its relations with the regions and nations and ensuring that they have the resources to become real focal points for joint creation and prosperity. But we also urgently need a permanent forum of the nations and regions – something all too absent during the pandemic. It should focus on the crises in health, employment, poverty and the climate, the solutions to which require both cooperation and the mobilisation of all the resources of the UK. Sooner or later a UK prime minister will decide that a first and fundamental responsibility is to unite our country. The question is who that prime minister will be, and whether it will be too late.

- Gordon Brown was the Labour prime minister of Britain from 2007 to 2010

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[OpinionBirmingham](#)

# Labour's crisis comes from the huge gap between politics and people

[John Harris](#)



Out in the real world, grassroots work shows where the left's renewal will have to start



Illustration: Nathalie Lees/The Guardian

Illustration: Nathalie Lees/The Guardian

Sun 9 May 2021 11.10 EDT

In some parts of Birmingham, around [one in seven](#) people are currently out of work. There are areas of the city in which child poverty is [about 50%](#). And like so much of this country, it is a place now full of empty spaces: pubs, shopping centres – and, atop the redeveloped New Street station, a vast and newly vacant branch of John Lewis.

When the store opened, John Lewis's managing director was Andy Street. Two years later, against plenty of expectations, he became the Conservative mayor of the West Midlands region. On Saturday, it was confirmed that Street had beaten his Labour adversary, Liam Byrne, and been elected for the second time. Here was proof, as in [Hartlepool](#), that hard times are no barrier to success for the Tories. But his success was also a symbol of something even more significant: a crisis for Labour and the left that goes far beyond the so-called red wall and deep into the past.

Clearly the story of working-class disconnection and realignment that first reared its head in Scotland and then during the Brexit referendum is about huge, historic forces. The fact that Labour's decline echoes the fate of



[social-democratic parties across Europe](#) only confirms that we are talking about something genuinely era-defining. But this country's political discourse cannot really cope with such momentous stuff: as evidenced by three days of hot air about the personal qualities of Keir Starmer and whether Labour ought to quickly tilt right or left, the biggest questions tend to be largely ignored.

So, back to a few political basics. Between people and power lie institutions and organisations that fuse together to create the political weather. As the party of the establishment, the Conservatives have huge sources of strength, from a largely supportive press to the elements of a market economy that endlessly reinforce rightwing values. [Labour](#) and the left, by contrast, have always been faced with the necessity of finding and building their own political foundations. And though some islands of collectivism and common interest still exist, the old bases of the party's clout – factories, coalmines and shipyards; mass trade unionism; the nonconformist church – have long since dwindled away. In their absence, things may still occasionally align in Labour's favour, as happened in the Tony Blair years and, perhaps, at the election of 2017. But in too many places, [Labour](#) is dangerously close to being a 20th-century party adrift in the 21st.

Birmingham and the West Midlands are full of everyday examples of all this. In the largely Asian area of Alum Rock – a bustling, dazzling neighbourhood centred on a mile-long stretch of shops and small businesses – communities based around faith and a shared history of immigration still have such a tight bond with Labour that voting Conservative seems all but unthinkable. In a very different sense, the university students I spoke to in [Birmingham](#) city centre seemed also to base their affinity with the party on shared interests and common institutions – in the way that higher education and the experience of undergraduate life tends to either introduce people to a liberal-left mindset, or firm up that view of the world.

But elsewhere, things often seemed to be in freefall. We all know the stereotype of the older voter who once supported Labour and had at least a memory of the party's industrial-era heyday, but who stepped away around the time of Brexit, still winces at the mention of Jeremy Corbyn, and has tentatively embraced the Tories. But the left should also worry about much younger people, at the sharp end of all kinds of injustices but completely cut

off from politics. In the Birmingham suburb of Kingstanding, for example, I had a long conversation with an 18-year-old who passionately wanted the minimum wage increased, but did not know either what Labour stood for or what a trade union was. The further I got from the centre of the city, in fact, the more I got the sense of a vacuum and the political turnabouts that have filled it – from Birmingham’s narrow vote for Brexit to the arrival of Conservative MPs in such traditional Labour redoubts as Dudley, West Bromwich, Walsall and Wolverhampton.

Are such places now permanently lost? Since the 2016 referendum, there has been an increasingly judgmental, all-or-nothing aspect to the politics of the left. This has lately manifested in suggestions that it might be time to simply write off so-called left-behind places, and somehow build an alternative coalition of support focused on the liberal middle class, Labour’s new bedrock of minority-ethnic voters and the educated and insecure under-30s. But to do that would not only invite electoral disaster but also risk ignoring places where many of the economic inequalities and unfairnesses the left professes to oppose are vividly present – places in which some people live their collectivism as a matter of everyday experience.

Whenever we are on the road for the Guardian’s video series [Anywhere but Westminster](#), we now make a point of focusing on the sources of hope we have found in places as diverse as Grimsby, Walsall, Stoke-on-Trent and inner-city Edinburgh: the kind of local initiatives and projects that sit apart from the state, and are often run by energised, inspirational women. As romantic as it may sound, these things look to me like the modern equivalents of the miners’ institutes, friendly societies and working-class self-help organisations that were the wellspring of the early labour movement and the party it eventually spawned.

To attempt to bring them anywhere near formal politics would be a difficult business, made even harder by the fact that many of the people involved, understandably, have little interest in such things. But in five days in and around Birmingham, the most hopeful thing I found was not in a manifesto, but at the heart of a trailblazing local institution called the [Witton Lodge Community Association](#). This is about to convert a huge disused swimming pool in Erdington into an incubator for small businesses, along with an event

space, creche and cafe, which will all sit at the core of local life. As a vision of one small part of a better society, it spoke for itself.

The fact that creative, rooted, determinedly localist Labour councils in such places as Wigan, Preston and Salford bucked last Thursday's trends is part of the same picture. The predicament of the left in England will not be resolved by reshuffles, policy reviews and the usual political theatre; it needs to be [truly refounded](#), and that will happen only when it reconnects with the wonders of ordinary life. In that sense, the most damning indictment of Starmer and his people is not mishandling the day-to-day Westminster game, but an apparent inability to think long-term about how to start refilling the gap between politics and people; tellingly, rather than develop his party's Corbyn-era Community Organising unit, he simply scrapped it. Labour's tragedy, indeed, is that its leadership feels not just remote but almost blank: one more vacant space in a country where emptiness is close to becoming the national condition.

- John Harris is a Guardian columnist

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## [Opinion](#)Local elections

# Two more Tory terms? Before the party gets too excited, there is work to be done

[Katy Balls](#)



Boris Johnson has promised some big reforms. Now he will have to build the apparatus that can deliver them



Boris Johnson and MP Jill Mortimer (left) in Hartlepool, 7 May 2021: ‘For all the heady forecasts of Tory wins for years to come, not everyone is on the same page.’ Photograph: Owen Humphreys/PA

Boris Johnson and MP Jill Mortimer (left) in Hartlepool, 7 May 2021: ‘For all the heady forecasts of Tory wins for years to come, not everyone is on the same page.’ Photograph: Owen Humphreys/PA

Sun 9 May 2021 09.22 EDT

When news broke on Friday afternoon that Ben Houchen had been reelected as the Tees Valley mayor with an [eye-watering 73%](#) of the vote, the Tory party was in shock. Downing Street aides turned to celebratory drinks, Boris Johnson called Houchen to discuss the size of his majority and ministers started to predict another 10 years of Tory rule.

When the mayoralty first came up, in 2017, the assumption was that Labour would win it; now it’s one of the safest Tory positions in the country. It fits into a pattern emerging from this week’s local elections of the Conservatives not just holding on to support in areas they took from Labour in the 2019 election, but building on it.

It’s for this reason that ministers have taken to referring to Johnson as a “Tory Blair” – the 2019 election was his 1997 moment. It’s not just that they

like to see Johnson as riding a new centre ground: they believe that, thanks to his leadership, the Conservative party – like Blair then – has another two general election wins in it.

“This is a new government and we are just beginning,” says a minister. “There is a realignment and it will keep on going. Remember that Blair’s 2001 victory proved the most radical.” Even Tory strategists known for caution say they struggle to foresee a scenario in which Labour wins [the next election](#).

Unsurprisingly a bout of Boris-mania has broken out in the parliamentary party. After a [difficult few weeks](#) of negative headlines for the prime minister on Tory sleaze, MPs feel reassured that his brand is firmly intact. Backbenchers have spent the weekend tripping over themselves to praise Johnson for making this possible. One MP goes so far as to argue that the row over who paid for expensive gold wallpaper in the Downing Street flat may have even helped. “People like that Boris is a character,” they contend.

But for all the heady forecasts of Tory wins for years to come, not everyone is on the same page. As more results have come in over the weekend, the picture has become more complicated. The Tories aren’t the only incumbents enjoying success. Welsh Labour [held firm](#) despite Tory efforts, Labour metro mayors such as [Andy Burnham](#) boosted their vote share, and the SNP enjoyed [electoral success](#) in Scotland.

The question some Tories are beginning to ask: is this down to a political realignment or part of a wider political trend in which incumbents across the UK are benefiting from a vaccine bounce and a loosening of restrictions? If it’s the latter, it’s harder to say how long it will last. “My colleagues have very short memories,” says one sceptical MP. “Just six months ago they were all talking about how long [Johnson] would last. Things can change fast.”

There are also results that will give Tory strategists pause for thought. In London Sadiq Khan held on, but with a reduced vote share – an argument not to write the capital off. “It shows that, contrary to the media narrative that the Labour party is most loved in London, it’s not actually that loved, and with the right candidate we could win there,” says one MP in the



commuter belt. “If Rory Stewart [had stayed on](#) as a candidate, I think he would have won.”

But if Conservatives can find joy in their gains and hope in the capital, it's the home counties where there is some concern. The Tories suffered losses to Liberal Democrats, Labour and independents in places such as Surrey and Tunbridge Wells and in Cambridgeshire, where the Tory mayor was [unseated by Labour](#) in a shock result. “I would have said there is absolutely no way that could happen,” says a bemused Tory. MPs on the ground say the anti-Tory vote has been more organised than usual.

Southern MPs argue that it shows Downing Street cannot take their voters in the south for granted. While Johnson may be shiny and new in the north, in the south there is no such novelty value. “In places where you haven't had Conservatives in power for a long time, it feels like the beginning of a new government,” says one involved. “But in the south, that isn't the feeling – it feels like what it is: over 10 years of Tory government.” They say that in order to remedy this, area-specific issues such as concern over planning reform and the impact of new housing need to be taken seriously.

They may be left disappointed when the [Queen's speech](#) is presented on Tuesday. Johnson plans to use the event to prove his commitment to his new voters and the “levelling up” agenda. Bills are expected on a lifetime skills guarantee, bringing jobs to newly Conservative areas and planning reform legislation (an issue that divides MPs in these constituencies and shire Tories).

[Hartlepool fell victim to the Labour leader's lack of vision | Owen Jones](#)  
[Read more](#)

But with his authority boosted, Johnson is in a strong position to choose what he wants to focus on. Those close to the prime minister say he is acutely aware he now needs to focus on delivering policy and reform, which has so far been rather lacking. In a nod to this, he has already revived [Tony Blair's old delivery unit](#) in order to keep his agenda on track.

Johnson allies believe other changes may be needed. There has been a large amount of churn in Downing Street, with his long-serving political secretary,



Ben Gascoigne, the latest to go. MPs believe the prime minister needs a senior figure in place with the authority to tell him when he is making a mistake.

Johnson is also under pressure from ambitious MPs to reshuffle his cabinet. Both the prime minister and the chief whip are said to be concerned it could be too disruptive to party management. This result could give him the confidence to press on.

Johnson's ministers believe this weekend's results show he will go down in history as a transformational prime minister. He has the votes; in order to deliver the reform he craves, Johnson will need to take another tip from Blair and get the apparatus in place to do so. It's how he can prove his party's success is down to more than a vaccine bounce.

- Katy Balls is the Spectator's deputy political editor

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## 2021.05.10 - Around the world

- [Madagascar At least 1m people facing starvation as drought worsens](#)
- [Afghanistan Taliban declares three-day truce but new bombing leaves 11 dead](#)
- [US Emergency powers invoked after cyberattack shuts crucial east coast fuel pipeline](#)
- [Dunedin stabbing Five injured in attack at New Zealand supermarket](#)
- [Cars Electric cars 'will be cheaper to produce than fossil fuel vehicles by 2027'](#)

## Hunger

# At least 1m people facing starvation as Madagascar's drought worsens

People eating termites and clay as UN says acute malnutrition has almost doubled this year in south



This youth travelled for more than an hour to find water for his family of 10 after recent light rain but found the well was dry. Photograph: Ainga Razafy/MSF

This youth travelled for more than an hour to find water for his family of 10 after recent light rain but found the well was dry. Photograph: Ainga Razafy/MSF

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[Kaamil Ahmed](#) and Rivonala Razafison in Antananarivo

Mon 10 May 2021 01.00 EDT

Madagascar's [worst drought in 40 years](#) has left more than a million people facing a year of desperate food shortages.

The south of the island will produce less than half its usual harvest in the coming months because of low rains, prolonging a hunger crisis already affecting half the Grand Sud area's population, the UN estimates.

The south saw 50% of its usual rains during the October planting season, in a fourth year of drought.

Julie Reversé, emergency coordinator in [Madagascar](#) for Médecins Sans Frontières, said: "Without rain, they will not be able to return to the fields and feed their families. And some do not hesitate to say that it is death that awaits them if the situation does not change, and the rain does not fall."

According to the Famine Early Warning System Network, most poor families have to rely on foraging for wild foods and leaves that are [difficult to eat and can be dangerous](#) for children and pregnant women. Aid agencies have reported people eating termites and mixing clay with tamarind.

Reversé said violent sandstorms (known as *tiomena*) in December made the situation worse by covering farming land and food such as the cactus fruit, which is often relied on during the “lean” season.

“Most of the people living in the southern part of Madagascar rely essentially on their harvest for food and income. Because of the drought and the lack of rain, people cannot cultivate what they usually eat or sell at the market,” said Reversé.

Jean-Louis Tovosoa, 52, a father of 15 who lives on the outskirts of Ambovombe, in Androy, the southernmost region of Madagascar, said life had become very difficult. “This year, we have nothing to eat. We rely on God’s providence for our survival. We are also asking the government to assist us. Otherwise, we will die,” he said.

“Over the five last years, tiomenas have become more and more frequent. They have been affecting a wide range of territory. There were no rains over the three last years. Because of the persistent drought, violent winds have swept away the good soil for cultivation. They have killed the cactus plants, which are vital for us in the time of famine. They have also destroyed crops and killed animals such as zebus [cattle], sheep and goats.”



Prickly pears are one of the last foods available in this arid environment. These women walked for a day to collect fruit for their stall. Photograph: Ainga Razafy/MSF

The UN World Food Programme says acute malnutrition in children under five has [almost doubled](#) over the past four months in most districts in the south. Ambovombe has the highest rates.

On Friday the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), a multi-agency body that monitors global food security, [issued an alert](#) of a “sustained deterioration in food insecurity in the Grand South of Madagascar from April to December 2021”.

It said: “Over 1.1 million people are in high acute food insecurity due to insufficient rainfall, rising food prices and sandstorms. The lean season is expected to begin earlier than usual for the current consumption year, as households will deplete their low food stocks due to minimal production.”

Voriandro Tiandrainy, 42, a father of four from the district of Toliara II, on the western coast, said the drought had left many farmers unable to grow rice. “We enjoyed a wet climate before. Over recent years, it has become more and more dry. Farmers have had to abandon rice cultivation,” he said. Many people are now eating just one meal a day.

“Parents are also unable to pay school fees for their children. Moreover, a new disease has affected our zebus. We have never known this disease; it has killed 10 to 20% of the livestock.”

[Ravaged by drought, Madagascar feels the full effect of climate change](#)  
[Read more](#)

In response to the crisis, MSF began running a mobile clinic in late March and has so far treated [more than 800 children for malnutrition](#), a third of whom were in a severe condition.

Reversé said MSF staff are also noticing other illnesses in the areas they work in, including bilharzia (a waterborne disease caused by parasitic

flatworms), diarrhoea, malaria and respiratory infections. They said the illnesses were caused by malnutrition, as well as a lack of clean water.

According to the UN's food agency, the [number of people](#) suffering from hunger has risen by about 85% on last year because of the accumulative effects of years of drought and people having to sell livestock and belongings to buy food.

People in the south are still sending family members to the cities to look for work but with little success because the Covid-19 pandemic has shut down small businesses and ended the seasonal work created by the tourism industry that had provided crucial income.

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## [Afghanistan](#)

# Taliban declare three-day Eid ceasefire as 11 killed in new bombing

Bus attack comes after jihadist group denies atrocity at secondary school that killed at least 50 mostly girls



People dig graves for the dozens of victims, mainly schoolgirls, of bomb blasts in Kabul, Afghanistan, on Saturday. Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock

People dig graves for the dozens of victims, mainly schoolgirls, of bomb blasts in Kabul, Afghanistan, on Saturday. Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock

[Akhtar Mohammad Makoi](#) in Herat and [Luke Harding](#)

Mon 10 May 2021 11.07 EDT

The Taliban have announced a three-day ceasefire in Afghanistan after an upsurge in violence in which 11 people died in a bomb attack on a bus, and [a](#)

[gruesome attack on a girls' school in Kabul](#) that killed dozens.

A [Taliban](#) spokesman said the group would halt “all offensive operations” later this week to mark the end of Ramadan and the Muslim holiday of Eid. The pause was being called in order to secure “a peaceful and secure atmosphere”, the spokesman added.

Afghanistan's president, Ashraf Ghani, said his government would observe a similar truce. Ghani called on the Taliban to announce a permanent end to the country's bloody war, amid fears the security situation is poised to get worse.

Basir Ahmad, a shopkeeper and former army soldier in Herat, said he could now go and visit his parents in a Taliban-controlled area. He said: “Of course I'm happy. But there will be no good news other than me and my family going home to my parents and brothers for Eid.”

Last month, the Biden administration [announced it would withdraw all US forces by 11 September](#), 20 years after the US's 2001 military intervention. Nato troops are also pulling out.

Since last year, intermittent peace talks have taken place in Doha but there seems little prospect of a lasting settlement, with a mistrustful Taliban keen to grab further territory. Washington has yet to determine what security assistance it will provide in future and it is unclear if a weak central government can survive a fresh insurgent onslaught.

Hours after the imminent ceasefire was announced, a bus struck a roadside mine in southern Zabul province, said Tariq Arian, an interior ministry spokesman. Eleven people were killed and at least 24 injured.

Early on Monday, another blast hit a minibus in Parwan province, north of the capital, Kabul, killing two people and wounding nine, officials said. Improvised explosive devices litter the countryside. The Taliban has used them extensively.

[Afghans bury their dead after dozens of girls killed in school blasts](#)  
[Read more](#)

The latest explosions follow a brutal attack on Saturday at the Sayed Al-Shuhada girls' school. A suicide bomber blew up a car full of explosives outside the building in Kabul's Dasht-e-Barchi district. The pupils rushed outside in panic – only for two more bombs to go off, killing many more.

“The ceasefire has no meaning for us in the west of Kabul. We will not even have Eid as many of the families here are in grief over the dead girls,” Sharif Watandoost, a local resident, said.

More funerals were taking place on Monday. Watandoost, a member of a volunteer group that helps families bury relatives, said one girl had died overnight from her injuries. The death toll – at 67 on Monday – was likely to rise further, he said, and could pass 80.

The government has blamed the Taliban, which denies responsibility. The victims were members of Afghanistan's mostly Shia Hazara community. Extremist Sunni Islamist militants have long targeted the minority group, with frequent attacks on mosques, schools, rallies and hospitals.

The Hazaras have complained that the government has failed to protect them. The Taliban have stepped up their attacks since 1 May – the original deadline for US troops to withdraw agreed by the Trump administration. In recent days, heavy fighting has been under way for control of Lashkar Gah, the capital of Helmand province.

“We, the Hazara people are so much concerned about the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan. We believe that the Taliban's thinking has not changed regarding us,” Watandoost said.

“Many of us, including my own relatives, are leaving Afghanistan. We feel that the US has surrendered us to the Taliban. Americans just want to leave. We will again be tortured,” he predicted.

The Hazaras took advantage of the US security presence in Afghanistan to send their daughters to school. Many played an active role in politics and the wider workforce. The prospect of the Taliban's return – and a possible civil war – has prompted widespread dismay.

“I’m deeply concerned about my future. The Taliban have not changed. They have the same rules they had 20 years ago in areas under their control,” said Sonia Ahmadi, a graduate in Herat. “I’m concerned that I’ll lose my very basic rights once the Americans leave”.

She added: “The Taliban’s return to power means that the female half of the Afghan community will go backwards. I will not be able to go out without a male companion. I will not be able to work, go to a café, restaurants or protest, so I’ll be restricted a lot. I should wait and see if they even allow me to breathe.”

Maryam Ayoubi, who has an online business in western Farah province, said under the Taliban it would be impossible to be an “independent woman”. “I’m looking for a way to leave Afghanistan. If you don’t have the right to education and work, this country is not a good place to stay. I’m prepared for very bad days,” she said.

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## US news

# US invokes emergency powers after cyber-attack on fuel pipeline

Scramble to avoid shortages after Colonial Pipeline targeted in attack on US infrastructure



Holding tanks at a Colonial Pipeline facility in New Jersey. Photograph: Colonial Pipeline/Reuters

Holding tanks at a Colonial Pipeline facility in New Jersey. Photograph: Colonial Pipeline/Reuters

*Guardian staff and agencies*

Mon 10 May 2021 07.49 EDT

The Biden administration has invoked emergency powers as part of an “all-hands-on-deck” effort to avoid fuel shortages after the worst-ever cyber-attack on US infrastructure shut down a crucial pipeline supplying the east coast.

The federal transport department issued an emergency declaration on Sunday to relax regulations for drivers carrying gasoline, diesel, jet fuel and other refined petroleum products in 17 states and the District of Columbia. It lets them work extra or more flexible hours to make up for any fuel shortage related to the pipeline outage.

Commodity traders are also understood to be scrambling to secure tankers to deliver fuels by sea rather than pipeline. At least six tankers could be diverted across the Atlantic to bring gasoline from Europe to the US, according to reports. Others plan to use idle fuel tankers as temporary, floating gasoline storage in the Gulf of Mexico in case the outage is prolonged and threatens to drive fuel prices higher.

Experts said on Sunday that [gasoline prices were unlikely to be affected](#) if the pipeline was back to normal in the next few days but that the incident should serve as a wake-up call to companies about the vulnerabilities they face.

The pipeline, operated by Georgia-based Colonial Pipeline, carries about 2.5m barrels of gasoline and other fuel from Texas to the north-east a day. It delivers roughly 45% of fuel consumed on the east coast, according to the company.

It was hit by what Colonial called a ransomware attack, in which hackers typically lock up computer systems by encrypting data, paralysing networks, and then demand a large ransom to unscramble it.

On Sunday, Colonial Pipeline said it was actively in the process of restoring some of its IT systems. It said it remained in contact with law enforcement and other federal agencies, including the energy department, which is leading the federal government response.

The company has not said what was demanded or who made the demand.

However, two people close to the investigation, speaking on condition of anonymity, identified the culprit as DarkSide, which is one of the ransomware gangs in a criminal industry that has cost western nations tens of billions of dollars in the past three years.

DarkSide claims that it does not attack hospitals and nursing homes, educational or government targets, and that it donates a portion of its take to charity. It has been active since August and, typical of the most potent ransomware gangs, is known to avoid targeting organisations in former Soviet bloc nations.

Colonial did not say whether it has paid or was negotiating a ransom, and DarkSide did not announce the attack on its dark website. The lack of acknowledgment usually indicates a victim is either negotiating or has paid.

On Sunday, Colonial Pipeline said it was developing a “system restart” plan. It said its main pipeline remained offline but some smaller lines were operational.

“We are in the process of restoring service to other laterals and will bring our full system back online only when we believe it is safe to do so, and in full compliance with the approval of all federal regulations,” the company said.

Colonial transports gasoline, diesel, jet fuel and home heating oil from refineries on the Gulf coast through pipelines running from Texas to New Jersey. Its pipeline system spans more than 5,500 miles (8,850km), transporting more than 100m gallons (380m litres) a day.

Debnil Chowdhury, at the research firm IHSMarkit, said if the outage stretched to one to three weeks, gas prices could begin to rise. “I wouldn’t be surprised, if this ends up being an outage of that magnitude, if we see 15 to 20-cent rise in gas prices over next week or two,” he said.

Goldman Sachs, one of the world’s biggest oil traders, warned that future attacks on key US fuel pipelines could be “far more disruptive” for consumers. Demand for fuels is currently lower than usual due to the ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, and fuel storage facilities are well stocked. But when travel restrictions begin to lift during the busy summer driving season, the US will be more vulnerable to sharp fuel price spikes, according to the US bank.



Gina Raimondo, the commerce secretary, said on Sunday that ransomware attacks were “what businesses now have to worry about”, and that she would work “very vigorously” with homeland security officials to address the problem, calling it a top priority for the administration.

“Unfortunately, these sorts of attacks are becoming more frequent,” she said on CBS’s Face the Nation. “We have to work in partnership with business to secure networks to defend ourselves against these attacks.”

She said the president, Joe Biden, had been briefed on the attack.

“It’s an all-hands-on-deck effort right now,” Raimondo said. “And we are working closely with the company, state and local officials to make sure that they get back up to normal operations as quickly as possible and there aren’t disruptions in supply.”

A source close to the Colonial investigation said the attackers also stole data from the company. Sometimes stolen data is more valuable to ransomware criminals than the leverage they gain by crippling a network, because some victims are unwilling to see sensitive information dumped online.

Ed Amoroso, the boss of the security firm TAG Cyber, said Colonial was lucky its attacker was at least ostensibly motivated only by profit, not geopolitics. State-backed hackers bent on more serious destruction use the same intrusion methods as ransomware gangs.

“For companies vulnerable to ransomware, it’s a bad sign because they are probably more vulnerable to more serious attacks,” he said. Russian cyber-attackers, for example, crippled the electrical grid in Ukraine during the winters of 2015 and 2016.

In the US, attacks have forced delays in cancer treatment at hospitals, interrupted schooling and paralysed police and city governments. Tulsa this week became the 32nd state or local government in the US to come under ransomware attack, said Brett Callow, a threat analyst with the cybersecurity firm Emsisoft.

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

## [New Zealand](#)

# New Zealand stabbing: four injured in attack at Dunedin supermarket

Prime minister Jacinda Ardern said there was no evidence the attack at a Countdown store was an incident of domestic terrorism



New Zealand police respond to a stabbing attack at a Countdown supermarket in the city of Dunedin Photograph: Arthur Taylor/Facebook

New Zealand police respond to a stabbing attack at a Countdown supermarket in the city of Dunedin Photograph: Arthur Taylor/Facebook

[Helen Livingstone](#) and agencies

Mon 10 May 2021 01.59 EDT

Four people have been injured, three critically, after a stabbing attack at a supermarket in the [New Zealand](#) city of Dunedin.

Police said a suspect had been arrested and taken into custody after the incident at a Countdown supermarket on Monday afternoon. Two supermarket staff members were among those injured.

Prime Minister [Jacinda Ardern](#) said the motivation for the attack had not been established but police did not have any evidence to suggest it was domestic terrorism.

“Needless to say that such an attack is hugely concerning, and I do want to acknowledge the really early reports of courageous acts by bystanders who have taken action in order to protect those around them,” Ardern said. “Our thoughts are with all those affected by this attack.”

The local district health board said five people had been taken to hospital following the attack, with three people admitted to intensive care. Police said four people had been seriously injured and that the suspect had also been taken to hospital with minor injuries and would appear in court on Tuesday.

“This was a fast-moving and extremely traumatic event for every person in that supermarket – the victims who were injured, those present who tried to intervene and those who had to flee to a place of safety,” Superintendent Paul Basham said in a statement.

“While we are satisfied we have the person responsible in our custody, we are in the very early stages of our investigation into the circumstances.”

He said the attack appeared to be random.

“This includes understanding the motivation for this attack which will be a key component of the investigation. However, on the face of what we currently know, we believe this was a random attack.”

People in the store at the time told local media that it was a chaotic scene as people began screaming and running toward the exits. They said some brave shoppers had tried to stop the man and pin him down.

One witness at the supermarket [told the news outlet Stuff](#): “It just sounded like someone fell over and then screaming got louder and louder. We walked

past the aisle and we heard someone say, ‘he has got a knife’, so we just kept moving forward.” Another said the man appeared to be having a psychotic episode.

“We are shocked and devastated by the events in our Dunedin Central Store this afternoon,” Countdown said in a statement. “Our priority right now is our injured team members and caring for our wider team in the wake of this extremely traumatic event. We are deeply upset that customers who tried to help our team members were also injured.”

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

## [Automotive industry](#)

# Electric cars ‘will be cheaper to produce than fossil fuel vehicles by 2027’

BloombergNEF forecasts result of falling cost of making batteries as well as dedicated production lines



Tighter emissions regulations could put electric vehicles in pole position to dominate all new car sales by the middle of the next decade, research by BloombergNEF has found. Photograph: Guglielmo Mangiapane/Reuters

Tighter emissions regulations could put electric vehicles in pole position to dominate all new car sales by the middle of the next decade, research by BloombergNEF has found. Photograph: Guglielmo Mangiapane/Reuters

[Joanna Partridge](#)

Sun 9 May 2021 16.00 EDT

Electric cars and vans will be cheaper to produce than conventional, fossil fuel-powered vehicles by 2027, and tighter emissions regulations could put

them in pole position to dominate all new car sales by the middle of the next decade, research has found.

By 2026, larger vehicles such as electric sedans and SUVs will be as cheap to produce as petrol and diesel models, according to forecasts from BloombergNEF, with small cars reaching the threshold the following year.

Electric vehicles reaching [price parity with the internal combustion engine](#) is seen as a key milestone in the world's transition from burning fossil fuels.

[Electric car insurance in UK 'is £45 less than for petrol or diesel vehicle'](#)  
[Read more](#)

The falling cost of producing batteries for electric vehicles, combined with dedicated production lines in carmakers' plants, will make them cheaper to buy, on average, within the next six years than conventional cars, even before any government subsidies, BloombergNEF found.

The current average pre-tax retail price of a medium-sized electric car is €33,300 (£28,914), compared with €18,600 for a petrol car, according to the research. In 2026, both are forecast to cost about €19,000.

By 2030, the same electric car is forecast to cost €16,300 before tax, while the petrol car would cost €19,900.

The report's timeline for cost parity is more conservative than other forecasts, including one from the investment bank UBS, which has predicted that electric cars will [cost the same to make by 2024](#).

However, forecasters are in agreement that the cost of new batteries will continue to fall in the coming years.

The new study, commissioned by Transport & Environment, a Brussels-based non-profit organisation that campaigns for cleaner transport in [Europe](#), predicts new battery prices will fall by 58% between 2020 and 2030 to \$58 per kilowatt hour.

A reduction in battery costs to below [\\$100 per kWh](#), is viewed as an important step towards greater take-up of fully electric vehicles, and would



largely remove the financial appeal of hybrid electric vehicles, which combine a battery with a conventional engine.

Electric vehicle sales [boomed in 2020](#), especially in the EU and China, but environmental campaigners are calling on governments to introduce tougher emissions regulations to encourage more consumers to make the switch.

The UK government plans to [ban the sale of new fossil fuel vehicles](#) from 2030, while European companies have called on the EU to set 2035 as the end date for selling new combustion engine vehicles in the bloc.

Julia Poliscanova, T&E's senior director for vehicles and emobility, said stricter CO2 targets were needed to accelerate the switch to electric.

“With the right policies, battery electric cars and vans can reach 100% of sales by 2035 in western, southern and even eastern Europe. The EU can set an end date in 2035 in the certainty that the market is ready. New polluting vehicles shouldn't be sold for any longer than necessary,” she said.

The high cost of batteries, accounting for between a quarter and two-fifths of the cost of an electric vehicle, has previously led to [reluctance among the world's biggest carmakers](#) to switch production away from their profitable fossil fuel models.

Guardian business email sign-up

Reduced cost is seen as critical to make electric vehicles more attractive to consumers, especially when combined with increased range – the distance a vehicle can travel before it requires charging, and an improved charging network.

“Once you are well over 200 miles per range, and you've got a really good charging infrastructure, it becomes a no-brainer. We've seen that in Norway,” said David Bailey, a professor of business economics at the University of Birmingham.

However, he believes the UK government needs to improve the charging network: “We are lagging behind some other north European nations, and

we certainly need a much more rapid rollout of the charging infrastructure, at home, on-street and fast.”

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| [Section menu](#) | [Main menu](#) |

# Table of Contents

[The Guardian.2021.05.12 \[Wed, 12 May 2021\]](#)

[Headlines wednesday 12 may 2021](#)

[Israel-Gaza violence Death toll rises as UN envoy warns over escalation](#)

[Analysis Flare-up has caught Biden administration unprepared](#)

['Our children are getting killed' Human cost of Israel-Gaza violence](#)

[Explainer What has caused Jerusalem's worst unrest in years? Kim Leadbeater Jo Cox's sister may stand for Labour in Batley and Spen](#)

['Flabbergasted' Cerne Giant dates from Anglo-Saxon times, analysis suggests](#)

[Exclusive British troops were twice as likely to be killed in Afghanistan as US forces](#)

[Guardian morning briefing Petrol pumps run dry in US after pipeline hack. Get up to speed quickly](#)

[Coronavirus India variant calls in question 17 May UK reopening – experts](#)

[Economic growth UK economy rebounds in March after rapid Covid vaccine rollout](#)

[Brit awards Women dominate as Dua Lipa tops winners](#)

[Queen's speech Cross-party MPs aim to force government to rectify rights breaches](#)

['Tragic misstep' Arts education cuts risk UK cultural leadership, government told](#)

[Animal welfare Animals to be formally recognised as sentient beings in UK law](#)

[2021.05.12 - Coronavirus](#)

[Live Coronavirus: India variant reaches 44 countries – WHO; Taiwan faces new outbreak](#)

[UK PM says inquiry into handling of pandemic will begin this parliament](#)

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