

# The Guardian

卫报

2021.05.24 - 2021.05.26

- [Headlines wednesday 26 may 2021](#)
- [2021.05.26 - Coronavirus](#)
- [2021.05.26 - Spotlight](#)
- [2021.05.26 - Opinion](#)
- [2021.05.26 - Around the world](#)
- [Headlines monday 24 may 2021](#)
- [2021.05.24 - Coronavirus](#)
- [2021.05.24 - Spotlight](#)
- [2021.05.24 - Opinion](#)
- [2021.05.24 - Around the world](#)
- [Headlines tuesday 25 may 2021](#)
- [2021.05.25 - Coronavirus](#)
- [2021.05.25 - Spotlight](#)
- [2021.05.25 - Opinion](#)
- [2021.05.25 - Around the world](#)

# Headlines wednesday 26 may 2021

- [Dominic Cummings Ministers brace for testimony on Covid crisis](#)
- [Explainer What to expect when Cummings gives evidence](#)
- [Covid Boris Johnson 'had no plan to protect vulnerable people'](#)
- [England Ministers back down over limiting travel to hotspots](#)
- [Environment Climate crisis inflicting huge 'hidden costs' on mental health](#)
- [Amazon Shareholders to vote on revealing plastic footprint](#)
- ['Mob boss' Bashar al-Assad tightens grip as Syria goes to polls](#)
- [Blimp and you're there Airships could cut short-haul emissions by 90%](#)
- [Guardian morning briefing One year since George Floyd changed America. Get up to speed quickly](#)
- [Housing Black, Asian and disabled tenants discriminated against](#)
- ['Please save him' Belarus blogger's parents urge action](#)
- [Donald Trump New York district attorney convenes grand jury](#)
- [Northern Ireland Woman told to go to England for abortion gets case heard](#)
- [Israel Ireland condemns 'de facto annexation' of Palestinian land](#)
- [In the verges End mowing of roadsides to create huge wildlife habitat, says UK study](#)



## Dominic Cummings

# Ministers braced for Dominic Cummings testimony on Covid crisis

PM's former top adviser to be quizzed by senior MPs conducting inquiry to learn lessons from the pandemic

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



Dominic Cummings has promised to provide a ‘crucial’ document on Covid decision-making. Photograph: James Veysey/Rex/Shutterstock

Dominic Cummings has promised to provide a ‘crucial’ document on Covid decision-making. Photograph: James Veysey/Rex/Shutterstock

*Aubrey Allegretti Political correspondent  
@breeallegretti*

Wed 26 May 2021 01.00 EDT

Dominic Cummings, the prime minister's former top adviser, is preparing to expose many of the mistakes he claims the government made as the Covid pandemic hit Britain last year.

After years spent in the heart of Westminster but operating mainly behind the scenes, Cummings will deliver on-camera testimony as he is quizzed by two committees of senior MPs conducting an inquiry into lessons to be learned from the crisis.

Some Tory figures fear bombshell evidence about Johnson's actions, forecasting "Domageddon", a "nuclear Dom" or a "sword of Damocles" moment. Others are unfazed, believing Cummings to be distrusted by the public for his lockdown-breaking trips, and clearly out for revenge against his former boss.

[Dominic Cummings, tosser of pretend hand grenades: you're no war hero](#) |  
[Marina Hyde](#)

[Read more](#)

This month Johnson finally announced the independent public inquiry into ministers' handling of the pandemic, to begin in spring 2022. Cummings has pushed for parliament to set up its own investigation to learn lessons more quickly.

On the eve of the evidence session, Cummings continued to add to a 63-tweet long thread on Twitter, claiming one of the "worst failings" last year was the "[almost total absence of a serious plan for shielding/social care](#)" and adding: "There was widespread delusion we HAD a great plan. It turned out to barely exist."

He also hinted he plans to shine a light on an alleged but firmly denied government strategy of "herd immunity", meaning enough people gaining resistance to a virus that it no longer spreads unchecked.

Last month Cummings, who left Downing Street in November after a power battle, made clear his disdain for Johnson, writing that the prime minister had fallen "so far below the standards of competence and integrity the country deserves" and denying he was the source of a series of leaks.

## What to expect when Dominic Cummings gives evidence to MPs

Read more

He has also promised to provide a “crucial” document on Covid decision-making to the health and science committees chaired by two Tory MPs, Jeremy Hunt and Greg Clark.

Former Brexit secretary David Davis said Cummings may have correctly identified some of the government’s failings, but there was little evidence he had tried to correct them when inside government. “This is a man whose primary purpose in life is to rewrite history to make him look good; but that doesn’t mean that everything he says is completely wrong,” he said.

Some of Johnson’s allies will most likely be keen to discredit Cummings but the prime minister and other members of the cabinet publicly backed him after his lockdown trips, exposed by the Guardian and Daily Mirror, last year.

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/may/26/ministers-braced-for-dominic-cummings-testimony-on-covid-crisis>

## Dominic Cummings

# What to expect when Dominic Cummings gives evidence to MPs

What is the former No 10 aide likely to say about the government's handling of the pandemic?

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



Dominic Cummings will face senior MPs on two parliamentary select committees, on Wednesday. Photograph: House of Commons/PA

Dominic Cummings will face senior MPs on two parliamentary select committees, on Wednesday. Photograph: House of Commons/PA

*Aubrey Allegretti Political correspondent  
@breeallegretti*

Tue 25 May 2021 08.36 EDT

After years spent largely dwelling in the shadows around Westminster, [Dominic Cummings](#) is poised to give potentially explosive and damning testimony on the government's handling of coronavirus.

Boris Johnson's former chief adviser, whom the prime minister and cabinet protected at all costs for his trips to Durham and Barnard Castle during the first national lockdown, will face senior MPs on two parliamentary select committees on Wednesday.

His appearance could be another “nuclear Dom” – as his recent interventions have been dubbed by some in Westminster – and will come one year and a day since the infamous and unprecedented press conference he gave from [No 10's rose garden](#) to explain his trips.

## **What should we expect?**

Cummings was ordered out of Downing Street by the prime minister in mid-November 2020, so has had plenty of time to mull over misgivings about how ministers and officials handled the outbreak of Covid-19, implemented lockdowns and devised strategies for reopening society.

[Dominic Cummings must be held to account – not made the star of the show](#)  
[| Gaby Hinsliff](#)

[Read more](#)

He announced in a blog post last month that he would give a tell-all testimony to two parliamentary committees investigating “lessons learned” from the pandemic. Cummings signalled he would be happy to hand over key documents as evidence and made clear his disdain for Johnson – saying he had fallen “so far below the standards of competence and integrity the country deserves”.

Reports have said Cummings will “shoot to kill” during the evidence session, and speculation has risen that he may provide evidence to substantiate damning claims against Johnson and the government with alleged recordings he made during his time in No 10.

In the past few days, the former Vote Leave director has been rapidly firing off tweets that may offer some insight into what he will say on Wednesday.

He has [insisted that herd immunity was the UK government's initial plan](#) to respond to Covid-19, saying public documents backed up his claims and a denial by the health secretary, Matt Hancock, ' "bullshit". He said the strategy was only ditched when ministers feared it would lead to mass deaths and an economic "implosion".

Cummings added: "Critical as I am of the PM in all sorts of ways, it's vital to understand the disaster was not just his fault: the official plan was disastrously misconceived, [the Department of Health and Cabinet Office] did not understand this or why, & a PlanB had to be bodged amid total & utter chaos."

## **How will the session work?**

The hearing is scheduled to last three hours – though it could go on longer. Jeremy Hunt and Greg Clark, two Tory MPs and former cabinet ministers who chair the health and social care and science and technology select committees, respectively, will take turns leading the questions – with follow-ups from other backbenchers.

Some crucial decisions for which the government has been much criticised are likely to feature; among them: the UK's border policy, the timing of lockdowns and other restrictions, as well as procurement, testing and contact tracing.

Other issues on the agenda to be put to Cummings include decision-making in the months leading up to the first lockdown, what scientific evidence was available to the government and the effectiveness of public health communications.

The last topic will prove particularly thorny for him, given [research found there was a clear and lasting "Cummings effect"](#) on public confidence in the government's handling of coronavirus after his lockdowns trips.

Cummings will also likely be asked about reported claims Johnson declared “[no more fucking lockdowns – let the bodies pile high in their thousands](#)” – in a meeting ahead of deciding whether to introduce a second national lockdown in England, weeks later than recommended by the government’s scientific advisers, known as SAGE.

## How worried is the government?

Concern is mounting among Conservative figures about what Cummings may have to say.

Some are relatively relaxed, given they believe his reputation is severely damaged given the massive public backlash for his lockdown trips, and so think whatever he has to say will not carry much weight.

Others think that with the public inquiry not due to begin until Spring 2022, Cummings will make sensible points about lessons not being learned quickly enough for a potential fourth wave of the virus if variants emerge and derail Johnson’s roadmap.

Westminster insiders quietly wonder what efforts the government will make to clear Cummings’ interventions from the top of the news agenda – with a mooted cabinet reshuffle strongly denied by No 10, and the announcement of a wedding date for Johnson and his fiancee, Carrie Symonds, over the weekend.

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/may/25/what-to-expect-when-dominic-cummings-gives-evidence-to-mps>

## [Coronavirus](#)

# Dominic Cummings says PM had no plan to protect vulnerable people from Covid

Boris Johnson braced for criticism when MPs question man who was once his most senior adviser

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



On Tuesday, Cummings said on Twitter that those in care homes and other social care, and vulnerable people asked to shield, had been failed.  
Photograph: Alberto Pezzali/AP

On Tuesday, Cummings said on Twitter that those in care homes and other social care, and vulnerable people asked to shield, had been failed.  
Photograph: Alberto Pezzali/AP

*[Heather Stewart](#)* Political editor

Tue 25 May 2021 15.16 EDT

Dominic Cummings ramped up his attacks on Boris Johnson on the eve of the former aide's evidence session, accusing the prime minister of having no "serious plan" to protect society's most vulnerable people from Covid.

Johnson – along with ministers, government scientific advisers and civil servants – is braced for a lambasting from the man who was his most senior adviser until November, when [Cummings is questioned by MPs on Wednesday](#).

It has been reported Cummings will use his appearance before MPs to claim Johnson referred to coronavirus as "kung-flu", and was willing to be infected with the virus live on TV – a statement that was allegedly made before he contracted the disease.

Downing Street did not deny the claim. A No 10 spokesperson said: "We are entirely focused on recovering from the pandemic, moving through the roadmap and distributing vaccines while delivering on the public's priorities."

Cummings is expected to blame those around him for failings in the handling of the pandemic in February and March last year, and in September when Johnson rejected a "circuit-breaker" lockdown.

"Throughout this pandemic, the government's priority has been to save lives, protect the NHS and support people's jobs and livelihoods across the United Kingdom."

On Tuesday, Cummings added to a 63-tweet thread on Twitter, saying that those in care homes and other social care, and vulnerable people asked to shield, had been failed.

"One of the worst failings in Feb/March, less discussed than lockdown, was the almost total absence of a serious plan for shielding/social care," he claimed. "As in general, there was widespread delusion we HAD a great plan. It turned out to barely exist."

He said a helpline number was left off letters to members of the public being asked to shield from the virus because the helpline had not yet been set up.

[Dominic Cummings, tosser of pretend hand grenades: you're no war hero | Marina Hyde](#)

[Read more](#)

Cummings is to allege that, when Johnson rejected the argument for a September lockdown, he claimed “Covid is only killing 80-year-olds”, according to ITV’s political editor Robert Peston. The former aide will also be questioned on allegations – denied by No 10 – that Johnson said he would rather “let the bodies pile high in their thousands” than impose another lockdown.

The failure to properly protect care home residents, with many discharged from hospital back into care settings where the virus then spread, is regarded as a key mistake of the early days of the pandemic.

This month the Guardian [revealed](#) that more people died with Covid in care homes in England and Wales in the second wave of the pandemic than in the first. In total, more than 40,000 had Covid mentioned on their death certificate since March 2020.

Angela Rayner, Labour’s deputy leader, said Johnson’s comments about Covid “only killing 80-year-olds” was “utterly disgraceful”.

“The prime minister has once again shown a shameful disregard for other people’s lives.”

Cummings will be questioned by the House of Commons science and technology committees for several hours as part of their inquiry into the government’s handling of the pandemic. He has also promised to hand over relevant documents.

[Dominic Cummings evidence could settle Boris Johnson’s fate](#)

[Read more](#)

According to a statement from the committees, they plan to cover “the government’s preparedness; decision-making in the early months of the pandemic; the level of scientific evidence available to the government; its border policy; and the effectiveness of its public health messaging and communications”.

Johnson loyalists on the panel may also seek to discredit the prime minister’s former aide, whom friends say remains hurt by his abrupt departure from the centre of power and wants revenge on his former boss. Cummings has previously dubbed the government’s border policy a “joke” and described the Department of Health as a “smoking ruin”. Government insiders are infuriated by the drip, drip of accusations from the former adviser, whom many believe damaged the credibility of the government with his trip to Durham during lockdown – and who they point out was involved in making many of the decisions he is now criticising.

[What to expect when Dominic Cummings gives evidence to MPs](#)  
[Read more](#)

Former Brexit secretary David Davis said Cummings may have correctly identified some of the government’s failings – but there was little evidence he had tried to correct them when he was inside government. “This is a man whose primary purpose in life is to rewrite history to make him look good, but that doesn’t mean that everything he says is completely wrong,” he said.

Wednesday’s session will be chaired by two Conservative former cabinet ministers, Jeremy Hunt and Greg Clark, chairs of the cross-party health and science select committees respectively.

Over the weekend, Cummings argued that a fundamental problem with the government’s approach to the early days of the pandemic was the pre-existing plan for tackling a flu-like virus, which pointed to the impossibility of stopping its spread.

Instead, [Cummings claims the central plan initially was to rely on building up herd immunity](#), as more people caught the disease – until modelling showed that would involve an unmanageable death toll and put impossible pressure on the NHS.

Downing Street adamantly denies that herd immunity was ever the aim of government policy, though it was [mooted by chief scientific adviser Patrick Vallance](#).

On 13 March last year, Vallance said: “Our aim is to try and reduce the peak, broaden the peak, not suppress it completely; also, because the vast majority of people get a mild illness, to build up some kind of herd immunity so more people are immune to this disease and we reduce the transmission, at the same time we protect those who are most vulnerable to it.”

Other contentious issues expected to be aired at the hearing include whether Johnson devoted sufficient time to focusing on the pandemic in its early days, amid allegations – also denied by No 10 – that he was also trying to finish a long-promised book on Shakespeare.

Cummings fell out with Johnson and left Downing Street in November alongside the prime minister’s then director of communications, Lee Cain. No 10 has since accused Cummings of being involved in a series of damaging leaks, something he has denied.

So intense is the speculation at Westminster about the impact of the hearing that Downing Street was forced to deny last week that Johnson is planning a cabinet reshuffle in order to detract from Cummings’ intervention.

The announcement at the weekend that Johnson will marry his partner, Carrie Symonds – though not until July 2022 – was also widely regarded as an attempt to detract attention from the Cummings hearing.

The evidence session is due to start at 9.30am and is expected to be ongoing on Wednesday when Johnson has to face the Labour leader, Keir Starmer, at prime minister’s questions, at noon.

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/25/dominic-cummings-says-pm-had-no-plan-to-protect-vulnerable-people-from-covid>

## Coronavirus

# Ministers back down over limiting travel to English Covid hotspots

The government drops advice against non-essential travel to and from some areas after angry criticism

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



Hounslow council's leader, Steve Curran, said the travel advice relating to his borough was ridiculous given it is on many major transport routes and is next to Heathrow. Photograph: Kirsty O'Connor/PA

Hounslow council's leader, Steve Curran, said the travel advice relating to his borough was ridiculous given it is on many major transport routes and is next to Heathrow. Photograph: Kirsty O'Connor/PA

*[Helen Pidd](#), [Aubrey Allegretti](#) and [Heather Stewart](#)*

Tue 25 May 2021 14.36 EDT

Ministers were forced to climb down on travel restrictions to English Covid hotspots after a day of [mounting confusion](#) and anger left millions of people wondering if they needed to cancel bank holiday plans.

[Contentious advice](#) will be removed from the government website, a spokesperson confirmed on Tuesday evening. It had advised against all but essential travel to and from eight areas of England where the Covid variant identified in India has been spreading. Instead, people will be advised to “minimise travel”.

The controversial guidance directly affected 1.7 million people living in eight local authorities – Bedford, Blackburn, Bolton, Burnley, Kirklees, Leicester, North Tyneside and the [London](#) borough of Hounslow – as well as many others who had holidays or family visits planned to those areas following the easing of restrictions.

[The Guardian view on ‘rules’ for Covid hotspots: another fine mess](#)

[Read more](#)

It was criticised by Conservative and Labour politicians as having been introduced “by stealth” after it appeared on the government website last week with no warning.

At lunchtime, Downing Street defended the move as part of a concerted shift away from legislation and towards individual judgment – but critics said this would mean cautious people bearing the weight of reducing the variant’s spread.

“We are moving away from central government edicts back to the situation where the public are able to exercise their judgment and that is what we are seeing up and down the country,” a No 10 spokesperson said.

But pressure built up on the government throughout Tuesday to remove the travel advice as MPs and councils were bombarded with queries from constituents about whether they should cancel bookings they had made for the bank holiday weekend and half-term break.

Hoteliers and campsite operators around the country were also left unsure if they should refuse bookings from guests from the affected areas. One couple from Bolton told the local paper they were being treated “like lepers” after a hotel on the Isle of Wight cancelled their reservation.

Officials held meetings with the eight directors of public health for the affected areas, who later issued a joint statement to say they had been assured “there are no restrictions on travel in or out of each of our areas: there are no local lockdowns”.

### Graph

On Tuesday evening a government spokesperson said: “We will be updating the guidance for areas where the new Covid-19 variant is spreading to make it clearer we are not imposing local restrictions. Instead, we are providing advice on the additional precautions people can take to protect themselves and others in those areas where the new variant is prevalent.

“This includes, wherever possible, trying to meet outdoors rather than indoors, keeping 2 metres apart from anyone you don’t live with and minimising travel in and out the area. These are not new regulations but they are some of the ways everyone can help bring the variant under control in their local area.”

Dominic Harrison, director of public health for Blackburn, said he opposed any restrictions on movement for residents. “Just to be very clear- I do not support any advice that asks people to ‘minimise’ travel to and from our borough,” he tweeted.

“Travel advice is the same for the whole of the UK . Travellers just need to take extra to be ‘Covid-safe’.”

Earlier in the day leaders in Bolton and Leicester encouraged residents to in effect ignore the new government advice to not leave their local area, while a government minister said people should “use their common sense”.

Bolton’s Tory council leader, David Greenhalgh, said residents should not cancel their breaks and were free to travel “if they behave sensibly and

follow the guidance”. Leicester’s director of public health, Prof Ivan Browne, [said he met](#) government officials on Tuesday who “confirmed there are no restrictions on travel in or out of each of our areas and it was a mistake to suggest there was”.

Andy Burnham, the mayor of Greater Manchester, agreed people should not have to change their holiday plans but demanded clarity so that “everybody knows exactly where they stand”.

Throughout Tuesday, the government continued to insist that it had been open about the guidance despite every affected local authority expert and their corresponding MPs all insisting they knew nothing about it until Monday evening. No 10 said “marketing assets” such as posters and social media graphics had been shared with local authorities to publicise the new guidance.

Summoned to the Commons on Tuesday morning to answer an urgent question, vaccines minister [Nadhim Zahawi](#) repeated the advice to avoid travelling in and out of the affected areas “unless it is essential, for example for work purposes”.

The shadow health secretary, Jonathan Ashworth, told him: “Cities like mine in Leicester, or towns and boroughs like [Burnley](#) or Bolton, or Batley and Blackburn, have borne the brunt of this crisis these last 15 months. We’ve often been in lockdown longer than elsewhere. At times we’ve felt abandoned.

“Can he understand how upsetting it is? Can he understand how insulting it is – to have local lockdowns imposed by the back door?”

The Twickenham MP, Munira Wilson, challenged Zahawi about whether her constituents should avoid travelling across the borough boundary into neighbouring Hounslow to shop or go to school. The minister replied: “People need to exercise that caution, common sense.”

Local council leaders were incredulous at the travel advice. The leader of Hounslow council, Labour’s Steve Curran, said the ban was ridiculous for his particular area. “For one of London’s most connected boroughs – with

Heathrow on its doorstep, the M4 and A4 running through it, the Piccadilly line, the main line from Waterloo, plus the North Circular via Kew Bridge – to try and limit travel within its borders is not only impossible, it's a ridiculous idea,” he said.

The confusion came as Covid rates continued to climb in many areas. In Bolton, the worst affected local authority in the UK, cases have reached the highest level for more than six months, with a total of 1,300 new cases of coronavirus recorded in the seven days to 21 May – the equivalent of 452.1 cases per 100,000 people.

Patients were urged only to attend A&E at the Royal Bolton hospital if it was absolutely necessary on Tuesday as the NHS trust reported one of the busiest days the department had ever had. But, the number of patients in hospital with coronavirus was still less than a third of what it was at the peak of the pandemic despite a higher prevalence of cases, according to Sir Richard Leese, the deputy mayor of Greater Manchester.

[Last week the Scottish government](#) announced a temporary travel ban for Scots visiting Bolton, Bedford and Blackburn.

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/25/ministers-back-down-over-limiting-travel-to-english-covid-hotspots>

## Climate change

# Climate crisis inflicting huge ‘hidden costs’ on mental health

Vicious circle of climate impacts, trauma and depression must be broken, say scientists



A man walks through a flooded street caused by Hurricane Eta in Planeta, Honduras, in 2020. Photograph: Delmer Martinez/AP

A man walks through a flooded street caused by Hurricane Eta in Planeta, Honduras, in 2020. Photograph: Delmer Martinez/AP

*[Damian Carrington](#) Environment editor  
[@dpcarrington](#)*

Wed 26 May 2021 01.00 EDT

The climate crisis is damaging the mental health of hundreds of millions of people around the world but the huge costs are hidden, scientists have warned.

Heatwaves are increasing rates of suicide, extreme weather such as floods and wildfires are leaving victims traumatised, and loss of food security, homes and livelihoods is resulting in stress and depression. Anxiety about the future is also harming people's mental health, especially the young, the scientists said in a report.

Mental health conditions already affect a billion people and cost trillions of dollars a year. The researchers said global heating would worsen the issue unless action was taken. They described a vicious circle where climate impacts increase mental health difficulties, leaving people even more vulnerable to further consequences.

However, they said tackling climate change could turn this into a virtuous circle. Action by individuals, communities and governments not only cuts the impacts of heating but also boosts people's mental wellbeing by giving them healthier lives and a sense of hope and agency.

"Mental health is the unseen impact of climate change at the moment," said Emma Lawrance of Imperial College London, who led [the report](#). "It is a big problem that is going to affect more and more people into the future, and in particular exacerbate inequality. It is very likely to be a really big unaccounted cost."

"If you have lost your home, if you're at risk of repeated flooding, if you're grieving because you've lost a family member to a fire or your livelihood because of a drought, that is shock and trauma that translates for some into very prolonged distress and diagnoses of PTSD, anxiety, depression and increased risk of suicide."

Even for those not yet directly affected, so-called eco-anxiety about the future has an impact, Lawrance said. "Anecdotally there are rising rates of distress, and it is going to affect a huge number of people. The grief and fear that comes with that, and especially for young people who see inaction on climate, can really exacerbate distress." Even in the midst of the pandemic in 2020, young people in the UK reported significantly more stress about climate change than Covid-19, she said.

But Lawrence added: “Taking climate action seems to be very positive for mental health, both on an individual and community scale, but also as a society.” She said the costs to mental health and the benefits of action must become part of the mainstream work on tackling the climate crisis.

Adrian James, the president of the UK’s Royal College of Psychiatrists, said: “This is a landmark paper providing an essential summary for governments and healthcare services alike. [It] underlines that without urgent action the planetary crisis will impact on all aspects of health for generations to come.”

The report concludes: “The climate crisis affects the mental wellbeing of hundreds of millions of people around the world. These impacts are currently ‘hidden costs’, unaccounted for in policy and planning.”

Less than 1% of 54,000 medical research papers that mentioned climate change from 2010-20 also mentioned mental health, the researchers found. But while much more research is needed, it is already known that [rates of suicide increase with rising temperatures](#), with one study finding a rise of 1% per 1C increase in heat above a certain threshold.

[Suicides of nearly 60,000 Indian farmers linked to climate change, study claims](#)

[Read more](#)

There is also evidence that [air pollution](#) and extreme weather events such as wildfires and hurricanes can contribute towards higher rates of suicide. Furthermore, people with pre-existing mental illness, particularly psychosis, dementia and substance abuse, are two to three times more likely to die during heatwaves.

How high temperatures directly affect mental health is unknown but scientists suggest changes in blood flow to the brain, perhaps exacerbated by medications, and lost sleep may be factors.

The number of cases of psychological trauma arising from a disaster can exceed physical injury cases by 40 to one, the report said, noting that after recent Australian bushfires the government spent A\$76m (£42m) providing mental health support.

Climate impacts can also indirectly damage mental health by harming loved ones, causing the loss of homes or jobs, reducing access to water, food or healthcare, or displacing people from their communities. Poorer mental health has been reported by people affected by flooding in the UK and Thailand, by displacement including in Puerto Rico and Florida after Hurricane Maria, and from rural areas into towns after droughts in Australia and Sudan.

However, actions that cut global heating can also benefit mental health, such as making walking and cycling easier, providing nature-rich places that people can visit, and making homes warmer and less damp through energy efficiency measures.

Climate action is likely to improve the mental wellbeing of everyone, Lawrence said. “For example, in a community experiencing higher temperatures, there are reports of worse emotional wellbeing across the board. Climate actions that create greener, cleaner cities and reduce inequalities can potentially improve the mental health of all citizens.”

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/may/26/climate-crisis-inflicting-huge-hidden-costs-mental-health>

## Seascape: the state of our oceans**Pollution**

# Amazon shareholders to vote on revealing retailer's plastic footprint

Move follows report saying online retailer generated 210,000 tonnes of packaging that ended up in oceans



Workers at the Amazon depot in Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire. The retailer is under pressure to reduce plastic footprint. Photograph: Adrian Dennis/AFP/Getty

Workers at the Amazon depot in Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire. The retailer is under pressure to reduce plastic footprint. Photograph: Adrian Dennis/AFP/Getty

Seascape: the state of our oceans is supported by



[About this content](#)

[Karen McVeigh](#)

[@karenmcveigh1](#)

Wed 26 May 2021 01.00 EDT

Amazon is under pressure to reduce its plastic footprint, as shareholders prepare to vote on Wednesday on a resolution calling for it to disclose how much of its plastic packaging ends up in the environment.

The resolution, co-proposed by the activist shareholder group As You Sow, calls on the world's largest online retailer to provide a report by December 2021 showing how much plastic packaging is attributable to its activities, and what actions it has taken to tackle the issue. Amazon's board of directors have [recommended that shareholders vote against](#) the proposal.



Oceana estimated Amazon had generated 210,000 tonnes of plastic packaging waste in 2019. Photograph: NurPhoto/Getty

Last year a report by Oceana, a conservation group, [estimated](#) that Amazon had generated 210,000 tonnes (465m lbs) of plastic packaging waste in 2019, including enough air pillows to circle the Earth 500 times, and that up to 10,000 tonnes of plastic entered freshwater and marine ecosystems that year.

Amazon has disputed Oceana's figures, accusing the group of "dramatically miscalculating" its use of plastic, saying it had used "about a quarter" of the figure quoted. The company claimed to have reduced the weight of outbound packaging by more than a third and eliminated more than 1m tonnes of packaging material since 2015.

The new resolution cites growing concern about the amount of plastic ending up in oceans, where it harms marine life. It notes that Unilever aims to cut plastic packaging use by 100,000 tonnes by 2025, and that PepsiCo has committed to substituting recycled content for 35% of virgin plastic in its beverage division.

Earlier this month, As You Sow's campaign got a boost when a proxy advisory firm, Institutional Shareholder Services (ISS), recommended that

Amazon shareholders vote in favour of the proposal. It cited rising concern over the environmental damage caused by plastics, as well as regulations expected in the future.

Conrad MacKerron, senior vice-president of As You Sow, said: “The ISS recommendation is huge and very influential. A lot of investors rely on these recommendations because they don’t have time to read all of the arguments and all of the proxies. We will have a very healthy vote on Wednesday.”

Amazon’s board is expected to get its way in the matter, but MacKerron said he was hoping for up to 30% of the vote.

The chemical multinational Du Pont recently [lost a shareholder vote](#) calling for more transparency over plastic pollution, when a record 81% of investors voted in favour.

“It was unprecedented,” said MacKerron, who has filed 10 proposals this year to corporate shareholders to reduce plastic and reached agreement on five of them, including with [Walmart](#), the largest US grocery retailer. “It shows the changes afoot by the big investors.”

Amazon is “critically important” because of its dominance in the e-commerce market, he said.

[Regulators missing pollution's effect on marine life, study finds](#)  
[Read more](#)

In its recommendation to shareholders, ISS notes Amazon’s various initiatives to design packaging that uses less plastic or is more recyclable. But it said: “While the company discusses the impact in terms of plastic waste reduction, it does not provide an overall baseline amount of plastic used throughout its supply chain.”

In response to the resolution, Amazon said it would review and address the “concern for reducing plastic pollution” by taking steps to share information on its progress on the issue.

It said it had made progress to reduce plastic use in four key areas: plastics in packaging for products manufactured by other companies; plastics in packaging that Amazon repackages for delivery; plastics in Amazon's own devices and labelled products; and plastics in physical stores, such as Whole Foods.

"In addition, we are focused on our goal of having the packaging for Amazon devices be plastic-free and made up of entirely kerbside recyclable material by 2023," Amazon said.

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/may/26/amazon-shareholders-to-vote-on-revealing-retailers-plastic-footprint>

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

## [Syria](#)

# Bashar al-Assad tightens grip on power as Syria goes to polls

The war-torn country's emergence as a mafia state leaves election result in little doubt



Damascus is festooned with campaign billboards supporting the Syrian president Bashar al-Assad in the 26 May election. Photograph: Louai Beshara/AFP/Getty Images

Damascus is festooned with campaign billboards supporting the Syrian president Bashar al-Assad in the 26 May election. Photograph: Louai Beshara/AFP/Getty Images

*[Martin Chulov](#) Middle East correspondent*

Wed 26 May 2021 00.00 EDT

Tyrant, war criminal, mob boss or, to his loyalists, their shrewd saviour: views about [Bashar al-Assad](#) rarely fall in between. As the Syrian leader

faces a presidential poll on Wednesday – the result a foregone conclusion – a truer test of the authority he wields across a broken country has taken shape away from the political banners and faux campaigning.

In battered towns and villages, ravaged by a decade of savagery, the now veteran president has been clawing back losses, consolidating himself as the only figure who could plot a course from the ruins of the region's most devastating modern conflict. Slowly, over the past year, Assad and his extended family have been shoring up their influence. Seldom seen during much of the crisis, he has become a fixture in what remains of Syria's industrial heartland, visiting factories, pressing employees on their hardships, and hosting delegations with an ease few observed at the height of the fighting.

Syria's allies Russia and Iran may have done the heavy lifting to save the regime from defeat on the battlefields but a more traditional structure, the house of Assad, has been just as integral in holding the country together from within. The husk of Syria is, in many ways, more under the Assad family's control than at the war's outset. Power structures established over four decades have anchored dynasty and dictatorship.

As the civil war ground to a stalemate, and Islamic State (Isis) was defeated, Assad and his wife, [Asma](#), made an extraordinary move to oust [Syria's wealthiest man](#). Rami Makhlouf, a first cousin of Assad and financial consigliere, was an untouchable – until all of a sudden he wasn't.



The Assads have taken control of the finances of Syria's richest man, Rami Makhlouf. Photograph: AP

In early 2020, [Asma al-Assad](#) took over the charity foundation Makhlouf had used to provide for the families of loyalists killed in the fighting. "At that point, Bashar and Asma had worked out where money was still coming into Syria," said one senior Syrian businessman, now exiled from Syria for supporting the 2011 revolution to topple Assad. "There was the UN system and charities. Asma consolidated all charities under her auspices and Rami very quickly lost his role as a patron. The rest was easy."

Next, Makhlouf was stripped of his shares in the mobile network Syriatel – one of the few cash cows left in an economy ravaged by sanctions, a collapse in neighbouring Lebanon, a plunging exchange rate and soaring inflation. The consortium he had established as the biggest investment vehicle in Syria was also taken off line. The Assads now controlled the finances, and Makhlouf was left pleading his case in a series of Facebook videos, the last of which he posted two weeks ago lamenting his change of fortunes and claiming a "miracle" would soon take place in Syria.

Many observers say the only real miracle will be if the presidential election [returns Assad for another seven-year term](#) with less than a 90% majority. The US and EU describe the poll as illegitimate, because it does not include

all of Syrian society – much of north is not under central government control – and does not abide by UN terms aimed at ending the conflict.

The ease of Makhlof's ousting and the consolidation of Assad's control over the country's revenues has fed regular comparisons to a mafia system, which uses weak state structures to bolster its hold and keep followers under tutelage.

"The key moment for Bashar was when his mother, Anisa, died [in 2016]," the senior businessman said. "It opened the gates for Asma, and Bashar felt freer to do what he wanted. Anisa was a hardliner. She insisted on repressing the protesters in 2011."

Assad is the Tony Soprano of the Middle East – at bare bones, a mob boss with omnipresent family crises and rivalries

*Former CIA officer*

The violence that followed displaced half of Syria's population, with half of them remaining outside its borders, while more than 500,000 people were killed and the economy disintegrated.

Four Syrian businessmen who spoke to the Guardian said they had been extorted in recent months by Syrian officials, who had arrived at their office claiming fees were outstanding on imports or inventories.

"They came to my friend's workshop and sales yard claiming to be from customs," said one senior businessman. "They started with an outlandish demand and got it down to \$400,000. It was a shakedown plain and simple. They are broke and are trying to recoup money wherever they can. They lost tens of billions in Lebanon, and there are no revenues coming in."

Another businessman, in Syria's third largest city, Homs, said he was visited in March by security officials who claimed he was in arrears. "After a week I could fix this, but it cost me \$180,000 and I had to give the major a car."

Syria's emergence as a mafia state surprised many who had met Assad in the early years of his presidency, but others who dealt with him extensively said the outcome was never in doubt.

A former CIA near east operations officer who knew the Syrian leader said: “Assad is the Tony Soprano of the Middle East – at bare bones a mob boss with omnipresent family crises and rivalries, overseeing a crime syndicate simply designed to enrich himself and his family, and always willing to inflict violence to achieve his goals.

“Yet he also has a charming side, just like the HBO character, which has fooled generations of American and European leaders who called on him. One would have thought that killing hundreds of thousands of his countrymen and committing war crimes would have changed world opinion.



A bus in Beirut sporting flags in support of Bashar al-Assad. Photograph: Mohamed Azakir/Reuters

“It is clear that the notion of Bashar the progressive that was pushed in the early 2000s – the dashing young ophthalmologist trained in the UK, in love with western technology, married to a beautiful former banker – was all a farce. And for many of us Syria watchers, we argued in vain that Bashar was anything but a mafia don. Perhaps it was the simple hope that [the Arab spring](#) would take hold in Syria that clouded collective judgment, or that the strength of a highly educated population would be able to rise up and be a model for the Middle East.

“The bottom line, however, is that Bashar was a pure product of his father, and Syria was destined to suffer with him on the throne. He would never relinquish *al-kursi* (the chair) under any circumstances other than death.”

A first cousin of Assad, Ribal al-Assad, who has lived in exile for the past two decades, said the global community seemed to have given up on Syria. “The world is allowing him to hold this election,” he said. “There has been nothing to be optimistic about for the past 10 years. There are many good Syrians living abroad, smart, decent people who have looked at the opposition and said, ‘If these are supposed to be the new guys, they’re worse. And we’re not going to join the regime, it’s a dictatorship. And we’ll be on the sanctions list the next day.’”

Among the Syrian diaspora response to the election has been mixed, with crowds in neighbouring Beirut attacking flag-waving convoys travelling to the Syrian embassy to cast pre-poll ballots, and several Lebanese officials saying those voting were being forced to do so. Turkey and Germany have banned voting, with legislators describing the poll as “theatrical” and a “farce”.

“When it’s all boiled down, the family is still in charge,” the senior businessman said. “They are very sensitive to internal issues and they know how to manage them. They have a saying: ‘You may not have to listen to your cousins, but you do need to listen to their mothers.’”

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/26/bashar-al-assad-tightens-grip-on-power-as-syria-goes-to-polls>

## [Air transport](#)

# Airships for city hops could cut flying's CO2 emissions by 90%

Bedford-based blimp maker unveils short-haul routes such as Liverpool-Belfast that it hopes to serve by 2025



Hybrid Air Vehicles hopes to produce 12 of its Airlander 10 airships a year by 2025, each capable of carrying 100 people on short-haul flights  
Photograph: Hybrid Air Vehicles

Hybrid Air Vehicles hopes to produce 12 of its Airlander 10 airships a year by 2025, each capable of carrying 100 people on short-haul flights  
Photograph: Hybrid Air Vehicles

[Rupert Neate](#)

[@RupertNeate](#)

Wed 26 May 2021 01.01 EDT

For those fancying a trip from Liverpool to Belfast or Barcelona to the Balearic Islands but concerned about the carbon footprint of aeroplane travel, a small Bedford-based company is promising a surprising solution: commercial airships.

[Hybrid Air Vehicles](#) (HAV), which has developed a new environmentally friendly airship 84 years after the Hindenburg disaster, on Wednesday named a string of routes it hoped to serve from 2025.

The routes for the 100-passenger Airlander 10 airship include Barcelona to Palma de Mallorca in four and a half hours. The company said the journey by airship would take roughly the same time as aeroplane travel once getting to and from the airport was taken into account, but would generate a much smaller carbon footprint. HAV said the CO2 footprint per passenger on its airship would be about 4.5kg, compared with about 53kg via jet plane.

Other routes planned include Liverpool to Belfast, which would take five hours and 20 minutes; Oslo to Stockholm, in six and a half hours; and Seattle to Vancouver in just over four hours.

HAV, which has in the past [attracted funding from Peter Hambro, a founder of Russian gold-miner Petropavlovsk, and Iron Maiden frontman Bruce Dickinson](#), said its aircraft was “ideally suited to inter-city mobility applications like [Liverpool to Belfast](#) and Seattle to Vancouver, which Airlander can service with a tiny fraction of the emissions of current air options”.

Tom Grundy, HAV’s chief executive, who compares the Airlander to a “fast ferry”, said: “This isn’t a luxury product it’s a practical solution to challenges posed by the climate crisis.”

He said that 47% of regional aeroplane flights connect cities that are less than 230 miles (370km) apart, and emit a huge amount of carbon dioxide doing so.

“We’ve got aircraft designed to travel very long distances going very short distances, when there is actually a better solution,” Grundy said. “How much

longer will we expect to have the luxury of travelling these short distances with such a big carbon footprint?”

Grundy said the hybrid-electric Airlander 10 could make the same connections with 10% of the carbon footprint from 2025, and with even smaller emissions in the future when the airships were expected to be all-electric powered.

“It’s an early and quick win for the climate,” he said. “Especially when you use this to get over an obstacle like water or hills.”

HAV said it was in discussions with a number of airlines to operate the routes, and expected to announce partnerships and airline customers in the next few months. The company has already signed a deal to deliver an airship to luxury Swedish travel firm OceanSky Cruises, which has said it intends to use the craft to offer “experiential travel” over the North Pole with Arctic explorer Robert Swan.

Grundy said the company was in the final stages of settling on a location for its airship production line, which he hoped would be in the UK. He said the company would hire about 500 people directly involved in building the craft, and it would support a further 1,500 jobs in the supply chain. The company currently employs about 70 people, mostly in design, at its offices in Bedford. He said the company aimed to produce about 12 airships a year from 2025.

The craft was originally designed as a surveillance vehicle for intelligence missions in Afghanistan. HAV claims independent estimates put the value of the airship market at \$50bn over the next 20 years. It aims to sell 265 of its Airlander craft over that period.

The £25m Airlander 10 prototype undertook six test flights, some of which ended badly. It [crashed in 2016](#) on its second test flight, after a successful 30-minute maiden trip. [HAV tweeted](#) at the time: “Airlander sustained damage on landing during today’s flight. No damage was sustained mid-air or as a result of a telegraph pole as reported.”

The aircraft, which can take off and land from almost any flat surface, reached heights of 7,000ft (2,100m) and speeds of up to 50 knots (57mph) during its final tests. The company has had UK government backing and grants from the European Union.

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/26/airships-for-city-hops-could-cut-flyings-co2-emissions-by-90>

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

# Wednesday briefing: Tories brace for Cummings appearance

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/26/wednesday-briefing-dominic-cummings>

## Housing

# Black, Asian and disabled tenants ‘more likely to face housing discrimination’

Shelter says those affected will disproportionately inhabit shoddy, unsafe and unsuitable homes in UK



Shelter’s survey of 13,000 people’s housing experiences suggests that overall 17.5 million people are affected by what the charity calls the ‘housing emergency’. Photograph: Tim Goode/PA

Shelter’s survey of 13,000 people’s housing experiences suggests that overall 17.5 million people are affected by what the charity calls the ‘housing emergency’. Photograph: Tim Goode/PA

*[Patrick Butler](#) Social policy editor*

Tue 25 May 2021 19.01 EDT

Black, Asian and disabled tenants are disproportionately likely to face discrimination looking for a home, and to end up inhabiting shoddy, unsafe

and unsuitable accommodation, according to the housing charity Shelter.

Its survey of 13,000 people's housing experiences suggests that overall 17.5 million people are affected by what the charity calls the "housing emergency" – meaning they live in housing that is substandard or hazardous, unaffordable, or unfit for their needs.

High housing costs – and the failure of housing allowances to keep pace with rents – meant that for a fifth of people housing was a source of stress, while 14% admitted they cut back on food or fuel to prioritise paying the rent or mortgage.

Shelter said the pandemic had shone a stark light on the state of Britain's housing, with poverty and poor and overcrowded accommodation recognised as a key factor in many areas where Covid infections and deaths were highest.

### Graph of discrimination faced

Structural racism and discrimination mean black, Asian, and disabled people, gay people, people on low incomes and single parents are overwhelmingly more likely to experience poor and inadequate housing, the charity said.

As well as being more likely to be on low incomes, racial minorities were more likely to be offered poorer homes or "steered" into certain neighbourhoods, Shelter said. So-called "No DSS" discrimination and the ineligibility of some migrant workers for housing support further diminished the housing chances of marginalised groups.

Shelter's survey found:

- Black and Asian people were almost five times more likely to experience discrimination when looking for a safe, secure and affordable home than white people (14% versus 3%). More than one in 10 disabled people, and 7% of those earning under £20,000 a year, found it hard to find a safe and secure home.

- Twelve per cent of black people and 14% of Asian people reported safety hazards in their homes, such as faulty wiring and fire risks – compared with 6% of white people. Fourteen per cent of black people and 16% of Asian people reported living in a property with significant defects with walls or roof, compared with 8% of white people.
- Overall, 56% of black people were affected by the housing emergency, compared with 49% of Asian people and 33% of white people. More than half (54%) of disabled people were affected (compared with 30% of non-disabled people) and 58% of single parents.

Polly Neate, the chief executive of Shelter, said: “Decades of neglect have left Britain’s housing system on its knees. A safe home is everything, yet millions don’t have one. Lives are being ruined by benefit cuts, blatant discrimination and the total failure to build social homes.”

Despite big changes in the housing market in recent decades – 11 million people now rent in the private rented sector, twice as many as 20 years ago – housing laws have changed little since the 1980s, trapping many in a series of short-term private lets and creating a “permanent state of stress and instability” for many tenants, Shelter said.

Not only were an estimated 1.5 million people bringing up children in the private rented sector – twice as many as 15 years ago – but hundreds of thousands of older people were likely to be renting privately in years to come, “facing unaffordable rent increases at a time when most owner-occupiers are starting to be mortgage-free”.

Shelter is calling for 90,000 social homes to be built every year to stem the crisis of affordability and to cut the estimated 1 million people on council waiting lists.

A Ministry of Housing, [Communities](#) and Local Government spokesperson said: “We’re providing over £750m this year alone to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping and are investing over £12bn in affordable housing.”

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/may/26/black-asian-disabled-tenants-more-likely-face-housing-discrimination>

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

## Belarus

# ‘Please save him’: Belarus blogger’s parents urge action as Biden mulls sanctions

Parents of Raman Pratasevich fear for his life, as mother of girlfriend Sofia Sapega says she was not involved in politics

01:27

Belarusian journalist was forced to record confession video, says father – video

*Staff and agencies*

Tue 25 May 2021 22.27 EDT

The parents of Raman Pratasevich have pleaded for international help to free the Belarusian journalist as US president [Joe Biden](#) said sanctions against Alexander Lukashenko’s regime were “in play”, without revealing further details.

From their new home in [Poland](#), Natalia Pratasevich, the blogger’s mother, told Agence France-Presse: “I’m asking, I’m begging, I’m calling on the whole international community to save him.

“He’s only one journalist, he’s only one child but please, please ... I am begging for help. Please save him. They’re going to kill him in there.”

Her husband, Dmitry Pratasevich, a former soldier, said: “The lawyer tried to see him today but she was turned down, she could not see him. We still don’t know if he is in there, what his condition is, how he is feeling.

“One of the ways our authorities torture is by not telling relatives where their loved ones are being held until the last minute,” he said.

## [Russia wary to support Belarus amid fallout from plane ‘hijack’](#)

[Read more](#)

Pratasevich, 26, was detained after Belarus's president, Alexander Lukashenko, [personally authorised the forced downing of his Ryanair flight](#) travelling between Greece and Lithuania. His Russian girlfriend, Sofia Sapega, was also seized. Lukashenko is due to address Belarus' parliament on Wednesday, the first such address since Sunday's incident.

The forced landing has sparked global outcry and accusations of state terrorism, with EU leaders working on [further sanctions](#), airlines avoiding Belarusian airspace, and Belarus's opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya calling for an international meeting to discuss the situation.

Biden said on Tuesday that US sanctions against [Belarus](#) were in play, but declined to offer more details. “I don’t want to speculate until we get it done,” Biden said when asked what the US was considering in terms of a sanctions response.

On Tuesday evening, a video featuring Sapega was released. Reading a memorised text, apparently under duress, she confessed to editing a Telegram channel that releases personal information about, or doxes, Belarusian police officers and other security agents.

The video indicates that Belarus may plan to threaten Sapega, who is not known to have played a serious role in last year’s protests, with years in prison. Her lawyer, Alexander Filanovich, told the BBC’s Russian service she was being [held at a KGB detentions centre](#) for two months as “a preventive measure”.

Sapega’s mother, Anna Dudich, told Reuters her daughter steered clear of politics. “My hopes are now probably based on a miracle and on the knowledge that my daughter is definitely not guilty of anything,” Dudich said. “She simply showed up in the wrong place at the wrong time.”

Neither Dudich, speaking from the Belarus town of Lida, nor a lawyer have been able to contact Sapega since her detention, and have not been informed of any charges against her.

Dudich said her daughter, a Russian citizen who is in the final year of international law studies at the European Humanities University in Vilnius, said she feared for her daughter's health and safety in detention, but that she was strong. "She is a very tough girl in a moral sense. She will get through, she will withstand, I'm sure of that," she said.

EU leaders have promised fresh economic measures against Lukashenko's government as well as a flight ban on the national carrier Belavia.

On Tuesday, French president Emmanuel Macron said: "Additional sanctions? Will this be sufficient? I absolutely can't say today." But, he added: "The unacceptable character of what happened justifies them."

German chancellor Angela Merkel said the video of Pratasevich was "worrying and disturbing" and made the EU demand for his release "all the more urgent". "And we will use all channels at our disposal to do this," she said.

Estonia's president, Kersti Kaljulaid, urged the UK to take action to [stop corrupt money siphoning through London's financial centre to Belarus](#). "We were not very shy here in Estonia, also after the Salisbury attack, to point out that there is a lot of [this] money in your own country," Kaljulaid told BBC Radio.

[Belarus: end flow of corrupt money via UK, says Estonia president](#)  
[Read more](#)

Dmitry Pratasevich said his son looked extremely nervous in his video appearance, appeared to be missing some teeth and had bruises on the left side of his face and on his neck. "The video was clearly staged. It was done under pressure and it should not be believed." But, he added, "at least it shows he is alive".

Pratasevich's parents moved to Poland eight months ago after being harassed during a crackdown against unprecedented mass protests that followed a disputed presidential election in August 2020. They said their son felt safe in the [European Union](#), first in Poland, where he moved in 2019, and then in Lithuania.

Dmitry Pratasevich welcomed action taken by EU leaders at a summit this week, saying that it would “help radically change the situation”. “I think it will help free my son,” he said.

Raman Pratasevich, who was born a year after president Alexander Lukashenko first came to power in 1994, began his journalism and political activism in his teens and has been arrested several times and spent weeks in jail. “He’s a fighter for justice,” his mother said.

She is still in disbelief that Belarusian authorities would deploy a fighter jet to force the plane her son was on to land. “They sent a fighter jet to get this young man. It’s an act of terrorism, I don’t think you can call it anything else. He’s been taken hostage. This is an act of pure revenge.” she said.

“My son, this young man just wanted to tell the truth about the situation. He didn’t do anything wrong.”

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/26/belarus-bloggers-parents-raman-pratasevich-sofia-sapega-biden-sanctions-ryanair-flight>

**Donald Trump**

## New York district attorney convenes grand jury in Trump criminal inquiry

Investigation includes matters such as hush-money payments to women on Trump's behalf, property valuations and employee pay



Donald Trump has said he's being 'unfairly attacked and abused by a corrupt political system'. Photograph: Alex Brandon/AP

Donald Trump has said he's being 'unfairly attacked and abused by a corrupt political system'. Photograph: Alex Brandon/AP

*Associated Press*

Tue 25 May 2021 20.09 EDT

New York prosecutors have convened a special grand jury to consider evidence in a criminal investigation into Donald Trump's business dealings, a person familiar with the matter told the Associated Press on Tuesday.

The development signals that the Manhattan district attorney's office was moving toward seeking charges as a result of its two-year investigation, which included a lengthy legal battle to obtain Trump's tax records.

The person familiar with the matter was not authorized to speak publicly and did so on condition of anonymity. The news was first reported by [the Washington Post](#).

Cyrus Vance Jr, the Manhattan district attorney, is conducting a wide-ranging investigation into a variety of matters such as hush-money payments paid to women on Trump's behalf, property valuations and employee compensation.

[Trump bills Secret Service \\$40,000 at Mar-a-Lago since leaving office](#)  
[Read more](#)

Vance has been using an investigative grand jury through the course of his investigation to issue subpoenas and obtain documents. That panel kept working while other grand juries and court activities were shut down because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The investigation includes scrutiny of Trump's relationship with his lenders; a land donation he made to qualify for an income tax deduction; and tax write-offs his company claimed on millions of dollars in consulting fees it paid.

The new grand jury could eventually be asked to consider returning indictments. While working on that case, it also will be hearing other matters. The Post reported that the grand jury will meet three days a week for six months.

Vance's office declined to comment. A message seeking comment was left with Trump's lawyer.

The new grand jury is the latest sign of increasing momentum in the criminal investigation into the Republican ex-president and his company, the Trump Organization.

Letitia James, the [New York](#) attorney general, said last week that she assigned two lawyers to work with Vance's office on the probe after her civil investigation into Trump evolved into a criminal matter.

James, also a Democrat, said her office also is continuing its civil investigation into Trump. She did not say what prompted her office to expand its investigation into a criminal probe.

In recent months, Vance hired the former mafia prosecutor Mark Pomerantz to help run the investigation and has been interviewing witnesses, including Trump's former personal lawyer, Michael Cohen.

Vance declined to run for reelection and will leave office at the end of the year, meaning the Trump case is likely to pass to his successor in some form. An election next month is all but certain to determine who that will be.

Trump issued a statement last week complaining that he's being "unfairly attacked and abused by a corrupt political system". He contends the investigations are a "witch hunt" and part of a Democratic plot to silence his voters and block him from running for president again.

In February, the US supreme court buoyed Vance's investigation by clearing the way for the prosecutor to enforce a subpoena on Trump's accounting firm and obtain eight years of tax returns and related documents for the former president, the Trump Organization and other Trump entities.

The documents are protected by grand jury secrecy rules and are not expected to be made public.

Vance's investigation has appeared to focus in recent weeks on Trump's longtime finance chief, Allen Weisselberg. His former daughter-in-law, Jen Weisselberg, is cooperating with both inquiries.

She's given investigators reams of tax records and other documents as they look into whether some Trump employees were given off-the-books compensation, such as apartments or school tuition.

Allen Weisselberg was subpoenaed in James' civil investigation and testified twice last year. His lawyer declined to comment when asked Tuesday if he

had been subpoenaed to testify before the new grand jury.

A message seeking comment was left with Jen Weisselberg's lawyer.

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/may/25/trump-criminal-investigation-new-york>

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

## [Abortion](#)

# Northern Irish woman told to go to England for abortion gets case heard

Action is being brought against the Northern Ireland secretary, the Northern Ireland Executive and its health department



Abortion pills. Photograph: Jason Cairnduff/Reuters

Abortion pills. Photograph: Jason Cairnduff/Reuters

[Alexandra Topping](#)

Wed 26 May 2021 02.00 EDT

A Northern Irish woman told to travel to England for an abortion during the pandemic lockdown will have her case against the [Northern Ireland](#) secretary, the [Northern Ireland](#) Executive and its health department heard at Belfast high court on Wednesday.

The woman, whose is bringing the case with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC), argues she was put at risk even though abortion should be legally available to women in the country.

The NIHRC [launched the landmark legal action](#) against the parties at the start of the year for their failure to commission safe and accessible abortion services, [more than a year after abortion was made legal in](#) Northern Ireland.

It accuses the Northern Ireland secretary, Brandon Lewis, of unlawfully denying the rights of women in the country, warning that they continue to be forced to use unregulated services and to travel during the pandemic.

In a statement, the woman at the centre of the case said the service in her trust area was suspended and she could not be referred anywhere else in Northern Ireland. “Travelling to England would have put me at risk at a time when we were being urged not to travel,” she said.

“It would have left me having to explain why I was travelling to England at the time of the pandemic and needed time off work at short notice. I would have had to invent an excuse or refuse to give any reasons. I was not comfortable with doing either of those things.”

Instead the woman obtained early medical abortion pills through [Women on the Web](#), a digital community that provides medical consultations, abortion drugs and online support which advised her to go to her GP or A&E if anything went wrong.

“I felt that I was left with no choice and [had] to take a risk I could have avoided,” she said. “I had not told my GP about my circumstances and arriving at A&E would have been awful.”

The woman said she was lucky to have a supportive husband, to be able to pay for abortion pills and have no complications. “Having to deal with this unexpectedly and at such short notice was extremely stressful and I do wonder what it would be like for other women facing different circumstances,” she said.

Abortion was legalised in Northern Ireland in October 2019 after a Westminster vote led by the Labour MP Stella Creasy took advantage of a paralysed Stormont, despite an 11th-hour attempt by the region's assembly to block change. Officials confirmed termination could go ahead in April 2020 after the threat of legal action by pro-choice campaigners.

Les Allamby, chief commissioner of the NIHRC, said the failure to fund and commission abortion services in Northern Ireland breached the European convention on human rights.

“The secretary of state is saying he is doing his best to resolve the matter, the NI Executive claim it is not a matter for them and the Department of Health say it cannot go ahead without the agreement of the NI Executive,” he said.

“This ‘pass the parcel’ where the music never stops has been going on for over a year with little sign of movement until we decided to go to court,” he said. “It is indefensible that in 2021 women and girls are still being asked to travel to England to access abortion services or being left with no other option than to take unregulated pills.”

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/26/northern-irish-woman-told-to-go-to-england-for-abortion-gets-case-heard>

## Ireland

# Ireland condemns ‘de facto annexation’ of Palestinian land by Israel

Foreign minister Simon Coveney supports parliamentary motion and says treatment of Palestinians is ‘manifestly unequal’



A Palestinian woman protests in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. The Irish government has called Israeli settlements ‘de facto annexation’. Photograph: APAImages/REX/Shutterstock

A Palestinian woman protests in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. The Irish government has called Israeli settlements ‘de facto annexation’. Photograph: APAImages/REX/Shutterstock

*Reuters*

Wed 26 May 2021 01.58 EDT

Ireland’s government has supported a parliamentary motion condemning the “de facto annexation” of Palestinian land by Israeli authorities in what it said

was the first use of the phrase by a European Union government in relation to Israel.

Ireland's foreign minister, Simon Coveney, supported the motion on Tuesday, and condemned what he described as Israel's "manifestly unequal" treatment of the Palestinian people.

[US to reopen Palestinian diplomatic mission in Jerusalem](#)

[Read more](#)

But he also insisted on adding a condemnation of recent rocket attacks on Israel by Palestinian militant group Hamas before he agreed to government support for the motion, which had been tabled by the opposition Sinn Féin party.

"The scale, pace and strategic nature of Israel's actions on settlement expansion and the intent behind it have brought us to a point where we need to be honest about what is actually happening on the ground. ... It is de facto annexation," Coveney told parliament.

"This is not something that I, or in my view this house, says lightly. We are the first EU state to do so. But it reflects the huge concern we have about the intent of the actions and of course, their impact," he said.

John Brady, Sinn Féin foreign affairs spokesman, [said](#): "We are baldly stating that Israel is acting illegally under international law".

"Ireland has the potential to be a pathfinder for a principled and morally robust approach within the European Union and the UN security council."

Most countries view settlements Israel has built in territory captured in the 1967 Middle East war as illegal and as an obstacle to peace with the Palestinians. The United States and Israel dispute this.

Israel cites historical and biblical links to the West Bank and around 450,000 of its settlers live there, among roughly 3 million Palestinians. It also denies any systematic violation of the human rights of Palestinians.

The motion came days after a ceasefire ended [11 days of the worst fighting](#) between Palestinian militants and Israel in years. The violence sparked large pro-Palestinian protests in Dublin.

Sinn Fein refused to support the government amendment condemning Hamas attacks.

“The acts of terror by Hamas and other militant groups in firing rockets indiscriminately into Israel ... cannot and should not ever be justified,” Coveney said.

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/26/ireland-israel-de-facto-annexation-palestinian-land>

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

## [A spotter's guide to urban wildlife](#)Wild flowers

# End mowing of road verges to create huge wildlife habitat, says UK study

Managing verges for nature would create combined area the size of London, Birmingham, Manchester, Cardiff and Edinburgh for wildflowers



The Exeter University report said the strip of land between the roadside and the fence presented 'significant opportunities' to improve verges as 'multifunctional green spaces' in urban areas. Photograph: Simon Dack/Alamy

The Exeter University report said the strip of land between the roadside and the fence presented 'significant opportunities' to improve verges as 'multifunctional green spaces' in urban areas. Photograph: Simon Dack/Alamy

*[Rhi Storer](#)*

Wed 26 May 2021 01.00 EDT

Road verges cover 1.2% of Great Britain, an area the size of Dorset, and could be used to grow wildflower meadows and create habitat for wildlife, a new study says.

In a [report](#) outlining the scale of road verges in England, Scotland and Wales, researchers from the University of Exeter used Google Earth and Google Street View to estimate that verges account for about 1,000 sq miles (2,579 sq km) of the UK's land.

According to the report, up to 707 sq km (27.47%) of road verges are short, frequently mown grassland. The rest includes 1,062 sq km (40.87%) of regular grassland, while 480 sq km (18.73%) is woodland, and 272 sq km (10.66%) is scrub.

The report states this type of land, defined as the strip of land between the roadside and the fence, presents "significant opportunities" to improve verges as "multifunctional green spaces" in urban areas and densely populated regions, where land scarcity is an issue.

Ben Phillips, lead author into the report from [University of Exeter's Environment and Sustainability Institute](#), said: "Our key message is that there's a lot of road verge in Great Britain and we could manage it much better for nature. About a quarter of our road verges are mown very regularly to make them look like garden lawns – this is bad for wildlife."

Previous research has shown that reducing mowing to just once or twice a year provides more flowers for pollinators, allows plants to set seed and creates better habitats for other animals.

The study, carried out with the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, and funded by the Natural Environment Research Council and the Cornwall Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty unit, also argues planting trees in some verges could provide a wide range of benefits for people, nature and the environment, and contribute towards the government's tree-planting ambitions.

Phillips said: "We found that only a quarter of frequently mown verges had trees, so there's potential to add trees and shrubs, which will also help to

capture carbon. But tree planting must be done carefully to avoid damaging flower-rich grass verges, and to prevent any impacts on visibility for drivers, or damage to infrastructure from roots and branches.”

Phillips said while some verges needed to be mowed “regularly for safety”, many could be mown less frequently, which would save local council’s money.

The UK has lost 97% of its wildflower meadows since the 1930s. The research follows the success of projects such as the Weymouth Relief Road in Dorset, where native wildflowers have thrived on chalk verges. The area is now home to half of the butterfly species in the UK, including the smallest, the small blue.

Dr Trevor Dines, botanical specialist at Plantlife, said: “Our research estimates that if all of the road verges in the United Kingdom were managed for nature, there would be a spectacular 418,88 bn more flowers, or 6,300 per person in the UK.

“If all our verges were managed for nature we would see an area the size of London, Birmingham, Manchester, Cardiff and Edinburgh combined adorned with wildflowers. This surge in pollen and nectar would have a genuinely transformative effect on the prospects of wildlife.”

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/may/26/end-mowing-of-road-verges-to-create-huge-wildlife-habitat-says-uk-study>

## 2021.05.26 - Coronavirus

- [Live Coronavirus: India variant found in at least 53 countries; calls grow for new inquiry into Covid origins](#)
- ['Unnecessary secrecy' 42 NHS trusts in England criticised over Covid deaths data](#)
- [England More than 77,000 NHS staff have caught Covid – research](#)
- [Canada Soldier faces charges for trying to block vaccine distribution](#)
- [Virus origin US joins calls for transparent, science-based investigation](#)
- [Tokyo Olympics Asahi Shimbun newspaper says Japan Games must be cancelled](#)
- [Schools DfE was unprepared for pandemic, says report by MPs](#)

[Coronavirus live](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

# **Coronavirus live news: NHS England extend vaccines to adults 30 and over; calls for new inquiry into Covid origins**

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2021/may/26/coronavirus-live-news-india-variant-found-in-at-least-53-countries-calls-grow-for-new-inquiry-into-covid-origins>

## Coronavirus

# ‘Unnecessary secrecy’: 42 NHS trusts criticised over Covid deaths data

Patients and doctors groups react to failure to provide figures on hospital-acquired infections and deaths in England

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



Up to 8,700 patients lost their lives in England after probably or definitely becoming infected during the pandemic while in hospital for surgery or other treatment. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

Up to 8,700 patients lost their lives in England after probably or definitely becoming infected during the pandemic while in hospital for surgery or other treatment. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

*[Anna Bawden](#) and [Denis Campbell](#)*

Tue 25 May 2021 14.50 EDT

Hospitals have been accused of “unnecessary secrecy” for refusing to disclose how many of their patients died after catching Covid on their wards.

The Patients Association, doctors’ leaders and the campaign group Transparency International have criticised the 42 NHS acute trusts in [England](#) that did not comply fully with freedom of information request for hospital-acquired Covid infections and deaths.

The Guardian [revealed on Monday](#) that up to 8,700 patients lost their lives after probably or definitely becoming infected during the pandemic while in hospital for surgery or other treatment. That was based on responses from 81 of the 126 trusts from which it sought figures.

The British Medical Association, the main doctors’ trade union, said the 42 trusts that did not reveal how many such deaths had occurred in their hospitals were denying the bereaved crucial information.

“No one should come into hospital with one condition, only to be made incredibly ill with, or even die from, a dangerous infectious disease,” Dr Rob Harwood, chair of the BMA’s hospital consultants committee, said.

“Families, including those of our own colleagues who died fighting this virus on the frontline, deserve answers. We will only get that if there is full transparency.

“This shouldn’t be about blaming individual trusts, but preventing a catastrophe on the scale we saw over the last year ever being allowed to happen again. It’s vital if we’re to learn from the tragic events that unfolded over the last year that all facts and evidence are laid out transparently.”

Twenty-six trusts did not provide any figures at all to the freedom of information request, despite their legal obligation to do so. Another 16 trusts replied and gave some figures but did not say how many patients died after contracting Covid in hospital.

One other trust provided an array of figures but refused to explain what they meant. Two other trusts answered, but only after publication of the story.

Hospitals are displaying “unwarranted secrecy”, the Patients Association said. “We expect openness and transparency from the [NHS](#), particularly about such important matters as patient deaths arising from hospital-acquired infections, said Rachel Power, its chief executive.

“The eventual public inquiry will no doubt consider this issue in depth, so hospitals should not attempt to hide behind unwarranted secrecy, even in the short term.”

Some of the non-complying trusts insisted that NHS England publishes data on hospital-acquired Covid deaths and directed the Guardian to an area of NHS England’s website. However, it only publishes figures for the number of patients infected while in hospitals, not the deaths that follow.

Others claimed they did not have figures for what doctors call nosocomial deaths, meaning those from a disease originating in a hospital, even though all do and 81 trusts honoured their obligations by providing them.

A handful said they were too busy dealing with the pandemic and vaccination programme to process freedom of information inquiries, despite the fact staff who handle such requests are not involved in either effort.

Transparency International UK, which campaigns for openness and to “hold the powerful to account”, claimed the 42 trusts had displayed “an overly casual approach to the law”.

A spokesperson said: “The right to access information held by public institutions is key to good governance and established clearly in statute, yet increasingly obstructed in practice.

“Understandably the pandemic has affected the ability of some to respond to outside inquiries, yet the manner in which many requests are dealt with points to an overly casual approach to the law and unnecessary secrecy.

“Whether it’s about Covid contracts or the contraction of Covid in hospitals, learning from our recent experience requires public bodies to recognise its right to know, not their right to conceal.”

Labour MP Karin Smyth, an ex-NHS manager and member of the Commons public administration and constitutional affairs committee, said: “I do think this secrecy is a problem. People have a right to know what is happening in their local hospitals, which are public bodies.

“These were extraordinary circumstances. But the refusal to be open and explain outcomes, as well as demonstrate learning from what happened, is concerning, not least regarding the missed chances to improve practices around infection control and rapid curtailment of non-emergency work. It is also crucial to have a full picture to inform our understanding of preparedness for this pandemic and whatever comes next.”

A few trusts defended not responding by claiming it would take too long and cost too much to supply the figures.

The Guardian has raised trusts’ widespread non-compliance with the information commissioner, who oversees public bodies’ adherence to the Freedom of Information Act.

## **The 26 trusts that gave no figures at all**

Ashford and St Peter’s hospitals NHS foundation trust

Barnsley hospital NHS foundation trust

Bedford hospital NHS trust

Chelsea and Westminster hospital NHS foundation trust

Doncaster and Bassetlaw teaching hospitals NHS foundation trust

Dorset county hospital NHS foundation trust

East and north Hertfordshire NHS trust

East Cheshire NHS trust

East Suffolk and North Essex NHS foundation Trust

Epsom and St Helier university hospitals NHS trust

Gloucestershire hospitals NHS foundation trust

Kingston hospital NHS foundation trust

Leeds teaching hospitals NHS trust

London north-west university healthcare NHS trust

Luton and Dunstable university hospital NHS foundation trust

Mid and south Essex NHS foundation trust

Mid Cheshire hospitals NHS foundation trust

Mid Yorkshire hospitals NHS trust  
The Newcastle upon Tyne hospitals NHS foundation trust  
Norfolk and Norwich university hospitals NHS foundation trust  
Royal Devon and Exeter NHS foundation trust  
Sandwell and west Birmingham hospitals NHS trust  
Southport and Ormskirk hospital NHS trust  
South Tees hospitals NHS foundation trust  
South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS foundation trust  
United Lincolnshire hospitals NHS trust

## The 16 trusts that gave some figures but not deaths

Barking, Havering and Redbridge university hospitals NHS trust  
Buckinghamshire healthcare NHS trust  
Cambridge university hospitals NHS foundation trust  
Dartford and Gravesham NHS trust  
East Sussex healthcare NHS trust  
Guy's and St Thomas' NHS foundation trust  
Isle Of Wight NHS trust  
Manchester university NHS foundation trust  
Milton Keynes university hospital NHS foundation trust  
North Cumbria university hospitals NHS trust  
North Middlesex university hospital NHS trust  
Royal Berkshire NHS foundation trust  
St George's university hospitals NHS foundation trust  
University hospitals Bristol NHS foundation trust  
West Suffolk NHS foundation trust  
Wye Valley NHS trust

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/25/unnecessary-secrecy-42-nhs-trusts-criticised-over-covid-deaths-data>

**NHS**

## More than 77,000 NHS staff in England have caught Covid, shows research

Exclusive: figure based on results of Guardian investigation likely to be an underestimate

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



Frimley Health NHS foundation trust reported 4,464 staff had caught coronavirus at some point; the most of any respondent. Photograph: Getty Images

Frimley Health NHS foundation trust reported 4,464 staff had caught coronavirus at some point; the most of any respondent. Photograph: Getty Images

*[Anna Bawden](#) and [Denis Campbell](#)*

Tue 25 May 2021 13.08 EDT

At least 77,000 hospital staff in [England](#) caught coronavirus during the pandemic, while there were nearly a quarter of a million absences for Covid-related reasons, Guardian research has revealed.

However, the true totals are likely to be much higher, because out of the 142 acute and specialist trusts in England sent freedom of information requests, only 55% (78) provided figures on staff who were infected, while 60% (85) gave data on time off for sick leave related to the virus.

The responses, which cover the year following 1 March 2020, offer the first official data on Covid's impact on frontline workers who risked their own health while caring for the more than 400,000 patients who have ended up seriously ill in hospital.

They show that at least 77,735 doctors, nurses and other hospital personnel contracted Covid, while staff had 243,864 periods of absence – either because they had the disease or were isolating, quarantining or shielding – exacerbating existing workforce shortages.

Of the trusts sent requests, 75 (53%) provided figures on infected staff who went on to die of Covid, totalling 152 deaths. This appears to underestimate the total, given that ministers have already acknowledged at least 305 deaths involving Covid-19 among healthcare workers.

NHS bosses and health trade unions claim many of those who fell ill became infected because [hospitals had too little personal protective equipment](#) (PPE) and capacity to test workers.

“This is a stark realisation of just how hard the pandemic has hit nursing staff who from the very beginning were working without adequate protection,” said Jude Diggins, the Royal College of Nursing’s interim director of nursing, policy and public affairs.

Chris Hopson, chief executive of hospitals group [NHS](#) Providers, said: “While the situation has improved significantly in recent months, we know trusts faced major challenges at the beginning of the pandemic with regards

to accessing PPE and rapid, regular and reliable testing, as well as significant numbers of staff having Covid-19 without showing symptoms.”

Many staff are still suffering lingering physical and mental effects of having had Covid, warned Sara Gorton, head of health at Unison.

“NHS and care employees have borne the brunt of the pandemic. Their work caring for Covid patients has been stressful, traumatising and exhausting. Many now struggle with poor mental health, others with the effects of long Covid,” she said.

The high rates of Covid infection among staff raise concerns that even more could become infected in future. While most health service personnel in England have received their first dose of the vaccine, the [latest figures](#) showed that 168,449 out of the 1,378,502 workers directly employed by the NHS – 12% of the total – still have not done so.

“Now with the new variant of the virus spreading it is vital that nursing staff who will be needed to care for increases in cases are properly protected to prevent them from being put at risk,” said Diggins.

Out of those trusts who responded, Frimley health trust in Surrey had the largest number of staff who caught the virus – 4,464 – followed by Guy’s and St Thomas’ in London (3,654) and University [Hospitals](#) Birmingham (2,554).

[The stress of the Covid pandemic is driving NHS doctors like me out of frontline care | Anonymous](#)

[Read more](#)

Liverpool University Hospitals recorded 14,139 “episodes of absence” at its four hospitals among staff due to Covid or isolation – by far the highest number at any trust. The trust said that it has had to deal with three surges of Covid – last spring, last autumn and earlier this year – compared with two in most of the rest of the country. The trust came close to being overwhelmed last October.

Lancashire teaching hospitals reported 10,897 episodes of absence – the second largest number.

At Shrewsbury and Telford an average of 205 full-time equivalent staff were absent from work every day due to Covid, which equated to 7,442 absences. Workers were off because they had Covid symptoms, had tested positive for Covid, were “shielding” to protect their health, were isolating because someone in their household had symptoms, were in quarantine after returning from abroad or had been told to isolate by test and trace.

Coronavirus has badly affected frontline personnel and left hospitals even more short-staffed than usual during the pandemic, Hopson said.

“Staff sickness and self-isolation levels due to Covid are now thankfully falling. But we mustn’t underestimate the relentless physical, psychological and emotional pressure the NHS workforce has been under over the past 15 months and the toll this has taken on a workforce, which was already facing over 100,000 vacancies when the pandemic started,” he said.

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/may/25/more-than-77000-nhs-staff-in-england-have-caught-covid-shows-research>

## [Canada](#)

# **Canadian soldier faces mutiny charges for trying to block vaccine distribution**

- Ladislas Kenderesi urged soldiers not to distribute vaccine
- Officer cadet took part in anti-lockdown rally in December



Canadian Armed Forces personnel load freezers for Covid-19 vaccines near the Ottawa airport. on 12 December, a week after Ladislas Kenderesi urged fellow soldiers not to disobey orders. Photograph: Cpl Matthew Tower/Reuters

Canadian Armed Forces personnel load freezers for Covid-19 vaccines near the Ottawa airport. on 12 December, a week after Ladislas Kenderesi urged fellow soldiers not to disobey orders. Photograph: Cpl Matthew Tower/Reuters

*[Leyland Cecco](#) in Toronto*

Tue 25 May 2021 15.52 EDT

A Canadian soldier is facing rare mutiny charges after allegedly urging fellow members of the armed forces not to help with the distribution of Covid-19 vaccines.

The Department of National Defence has announced charges against officer cadet Ladislas Kenderesi, a reservist in Ontario. Kenderesi has been charged with “endeavoring to persuade another person to join in a mutiny” and “behaving in a scandalous manner unbecoming of an officer”, according to officials.

The charge of mutiny is rare in [Canada](#) and has not been used in decades.

On 5 December 2020, Kenderesi appeared at an anti-lockdown rally in Toronto, wearing his military uniform. He warned attendees about “killer” vaccines – and called on other soldiers to disobey their orders to help distribute the vaccine.

“I’m asking the military, right now serving, truck drivers, medical, engineers, whatever you are, do not take this unlawful order in distribution of this vaccine,” [he said](#) at the rally. “I might get in a lot of shit for doing this. But I don’t care any more.”

He also called taking the vaccine “criminal”.

Officials say Kenderesi was relieved of his duties soon after his appearance at the rally and charged by military police on 12 May.

Kenderesi’s supporters have launched a crowdfunding account for his legal fees, saying he was speaking out against what they called “experimental gene therapy” during the event.

Under the country’s military law, mutiny carries a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. Experts have said a life sentence is highly unlikely. The maximum sentence for scandalous conduct is five years.

[Canada: vaccine rollout raises questions on what it can do for poorer nations](#)  
[Read more](#)

The armed forces have played a key role in Canada's vaccine rollout, overseeing national distribution through [Operation Vector](#). Soldiers have also helped manage long-term care homes in Ontario and Quebec, the centre of previous outbreaks. The prime minister, Justin Trudeau, has called the operation the “greatest mobilization effort Canada has seen since the second world war”.

Despite Kenderesi's statements, Canadians have expressed a strong interest in receiving the vaccine. More than 50% of the population has [received at least one dose of a vaccine](#).

No court martial date has yet been set for Kenderesi.

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/25/canadian-soldier-mutiny-court-martial-vaccine-coronavirus>

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

## Coronavirus

# **US joins calls for transparent, science-based investigation into Covid origins**

Several countries tell the WHO annual meeting that a new inquiry with new terms of reference must be launched



World Health Organisation chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus in Geneva where the annual meeting discussed the origins of Covid-19.. Photograph: Christopher Black/World Health Organization/AFP/Getty Images

World Health Organisation chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus in Geneva where the annual meeting discussed the origins of Covid-19.. Photograph: Christopher Black/World Health Organization/AFP/Getty Images

*Agence France-Presse*

Tue 25 May 2021 22.01 EDT

The United States and other countries have called for a more in-depth investigation of the pandemic origins, after an international mission to China

earlier this year [proved inconclusive](#).

Addressing the World Health Organization's main annual meeting of member states in Geneva, representatives from several countries stressed the continued need to solve the mystery of how Covid-19 first began spreading among humans.

“We underscore the importance of a robust comprehensive and expert-led inquiry into the origins of Covid-19,” US representative Jeremy Konyndyk told the meeting on Tuesday.

[UK and US criticise WHO's Covid report and accuse China of withholding data](#)

[Read more](#)

Australia, Japan and Portugal were among other countries to call for more progress on the investigation, while the British representative urged for any probe to be “timely, expert-driven and grounded in robust science”.

Determining how the virus that causes Covid-19 began spreading is seen as vital to preventing future outbreaks.

But a long-delayed report by the team of international experts sent to Wuhan and their Chinese counterparts drew no firm conclusions as to the origins of the pandemic. Instead, they ranked a number of hypotheses according to how likely they believed they were.

The report said the virus jumping from bats to humans via an intermediate animal was the most probable scenario, while it said a theory involving the virus leaking from a laboratory was “extremely unlikely”.

After the report was released, however, WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus insisted all theories remained on the table.

The investigation and report have also faced criticism for lacking transparency and access, and for not evaluating the lab-leak theory more deeply. There had been calls for the WHA, which has the power to redefine the focus of the investigation, to decide the next stages in the probe.

One concern is the investigation's terms of reference negotiated with Beijing at last May's WHA, which stated the task was to identify the "zoonotic" – or animal – source of the virus.

US health secretary, Xavier Becerra, backed the call for new terms of reference.

"Phase 2 of the Covid origins study must be launched with terms of reference that are transparent, science-based, and give international experts the independence to fully assess the source of the virus and the early days of the outbreak," he told the assembly.

But amid diplomatic sensitivities there are no resolutions on the way forward on the agenda.

"The purpose of the inquiry is not to assign blame, but to be grounded in science, to find the origin of the virus and the outbreaks, and to help us all prevent future global catastrophes from happening," Konyndyk said.

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/26/us-joins-calls-for-transparent-science-based-investigation-into-covid-origins>

[Japan](#)

## Tokyo Olympics: Asahi Shimbun newspaper says Japan Games must be cancelled

The liberal daily, an official sponsor of the Games, says public health should be a priority while the coronavirus is still spreading

- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



Major Japanese newspaper Asahi Shimbun has called for the cancellation of the [Tokyo Olympics](#). The liberal paper is also an official Olympic partner. Photograph: Eugene Hoshiko/AP

Major Japanese newspaper Asahi Shimbun has called for the cancellation of the [Tokyo Olympics](#). The liberal paper is also an official Olympic partner. Photograph: Eugene Hoshiko/AP

*[Justin McCurry](#) in Tokyo*

Tue 25 May 2021 23.36 EDT

A major Japanese newspaper has called for the cancellation of the [Tokyo Olympics](#), warning that the Games pose a threat to public health and will place additional strain on the country's health service as it struggles to contain the latest wave of coronavirus.

In an editorial on Wednesday, the liberal Asahi Shimbun – an official Olympic partner – urged the prime minister, Yoshihide Suga, “to calmly and objectively assess the situation and decide on the cancellation of the event this summer”.

The Asahi is the first of several Japanese media organisations listed as official Tokyo 2020 sponsors to call for the Games to be scrapped, less than two months before they are due to open.

The Asahi, whose morning edition has a circulation of just over 5 million, pointed to widespread [public opposition](#) to the Olympics and criticised the International Olympic Committee (IOC) for its heavy-handed [insistence](#) that the Games will be held this summer regardless of the coronavirus situation in Japan.

Recent polls show that as many as 83% of people in [Japan](#) do not want the Games to be held, with many fearing the arrival of about 80,000 officials, journalists and support staff could turn Tokyo 2020 into a coronavirus super-spreader event.

Organisations representing doctors and nurses say the event would redirect stretched [medical resources](#) from the battle against Covid-19 and the vaccine rollout, which is only just picking up speed.

Tokyo and nine other areas are currently under a [state of emergency](#) introduced late last month in response to a surge in infections driven by more contagious variants.

While Covid-19 cases in the capital have fallen in recent days, media reports said Suga is likely to extend the measures into next month as they have failed to make a significant dent in the daily caseload.

Japan has reported 726,000 Covid-19 cases since the start of the pandemic and more than 12,500 deaths – higher than in many other countries in the region – but praise for its response to the pandemic has turned to frustration over repeated curbs on businesses and the slow vaccine rollout.

The Asahi sympathised with athletes who have trained for years in preparation for Tokyo 2020, but added that public health should take priority. “Don’t let the Olympics threaten it,” the editorial said.

The newspaper’s objections to Tokyo 2020 caused a stir on social media, with “Decision to cancel”, taken from the title of the editorial, generating more than 20,000 tweets on Wednesday morning.

The campaign to cancel the Games was given a further boost after a prominent economist warned that the ¥1.8tn (\$16bn) Japan would lose from cancellation would be dwarfed by the economic hit from emergency measures imposed if the Olympics turn out to be a Covid-19 super-spreader.

Takahide Kiuchi, executive economist at the Nomura Research Institute and a former Bank of Japan board member, said that the first nationwide state of emergency last spring had caused an estimated ¥6.4tn yen loss, adding that further damages have resulted from subsequent states of emergency.

“If the [Olympics] trigger the spread of infections and necessitate another emergency declaration, then the economic loss would be much greater than cancellation,” Kiuchi said in a report. The direct loss from a cancellation would be equivalent to a third of a percent of nominal gross domestic product (GDP) in fiscal 2020, he added.

“These calculations suggest that the decision of whether to hold or cancel the Games should be made from the perspective of infection risk rather than economic loss,” he said.

*With Reuters*

---

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

## Schools

# DfE had no plan for dealing with a pandemic, says critical report by MPs

Public accounts committee also said a failure to set standards for remote learning led to ‘unequal experiences’



The DfE told the committee that the laptops and tablets were now owned by schools and local authorities, which would have to maintain and update them using existing budgets. Photograph: Peter Byrne/PA

The DfE told the committee that the laptops and tablets were now owned by schools and local authorities, which would have to maintain and update them using existing budgets. Photograph: Peter Byrne/PA

*[Richard Adams](#) Education editor*

Tue 25 May 2021 19.01 EDT

The [Department for Education](#) had no plan for dealing with a pandemic and failed to set standards for remote learning during lockdown, leading to

“unequal experiences” for many children, according to a critical report by MPs.

Parliament’s public accounts committee also said there was evidence that [the government’s £1.7bn catch-up programme](#) – designed to restore the learning lost during school closures – [may not be connecting with many of the most disadvantaged children](#). The committee’s report describes the DfE as having “worthy aspirations but little specific detail”.

Meg Hillier, chair of the PAC, said: “The pandemic has further exposed a very ugly truth about the children living in poverty and disadvantage, who have been hit particularly hard.

[Experts reject claim Covid has worsened behaviour in English schools](#)

[Read more](#)

“Online learning was inaccessible to many children even in later lockdowns and there is no commitment to ongoing additional funding for IT. [Schools](#) will be expected to fund laptops out of their existing, and already squeezed, budgets.”

Hillier said the DfE “appears uninterested in learning lessons from earlier in the pandemic,” preferring to wait for later public inquiries.

“It shows little energy and determination to ensure that its catch-up offer is sufficient to undo the damage of the past 14 months,” Hillier said.

The report, after hearings conducted by the bipartisan committee, was deeply critical of the DfE’s failings towards children with special educational needs and disabilities, many of who struggled with remote learning, and over the future of the more than one million digital devices it had distributed to schools at a cost of £400m.

The DfE told the committee that the laptops and tablets were now owned by schools and local authorities, which would have to maintain and update them using existing budgets.

The committee accused the DfE of being “unprepared” for the disruption despite taking part in the government’s 2016 cross-departmental exercise to test the UK’s response to a pandemic, called Operation Cygnus. The MPs also found that the DfE was “surprisingly resistant” to investigating its response since March 2020.

“More than a year on from the start of pandemic, the department has not yet carried out a full review of its response during the early stages to identify lessons to improve its emergency preparedness and response to any future disruptions,” the committee said.

In response the DfE said it wanted to wait and conduct a review alongside other departments, but the MPs said it risked “learning lessons too late” to improve its future responses.

The MPs said they were concerned at the scale and design of the government’s plans for catch-up learning, noting that just 44% of children receiving tuition through the flagship National Tutoring Programme were eligible for pupil premium funding, “raising questions over whether the scheme would reach the most disadvantaged children”.

[Schools struggling to access tutoring programme for disadvantaged children](#)  
[Read more](#)

Paul Whiteman, general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT), said the committee’s findings were “extremely disappointing but not surprising”.

The NAHT has launched its own blueprint for school recovery, supporting earlier estimates of an additional £15bn in new funding to invest in early years education and mental health provision, as well as targeted academic support for pupils.

“The government has an opportunity to make a real difference to the lives of young people, both in the short and long term. But this will only come true if there is significant new investment from the Treasury to support the good work of schools,” Whiteman said.

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/may/26/dfe-had-no-plan-for-dealing-with-a-pandemic-says-critical-report-by-mps>

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

## 2021.05.26 - Spotlight

- Grace Spence Green The medical student who was paralysed by a falling man – and found new purpose
- 'Sex-toy stuff would not fly today' The mag that gripped 'lesbian mecca' San Francisco
- 'Stranger than anything dreamed up by sci-fi' Will we ever understand black holes?
- Brave front Thought-provoking art on England's south-east coast
- Epic Iran at the V&A – review Five thousand years of mystical magnificence
- 'Highway of death' Animals pay ultimate price on Brazil's most dangerous road for wildlife
- The war against snails Can gardeners ever win?
- Raman Pratasevich The Belarus journalist captured by a fighter jet

# Grace Spence Green: the medical student who was paralysed by a falling man – and found new purpose

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/may/26/grace-spence-green-the-medical-student-who-was-paralysed-by-a-falling-man-and-found-new-purpose>

## Movies

# ‘The sex-toy stuff would not fly today’ – the mag that gripped ‘lesbian mecca’ San Francisco



‘For the first time in my life, I was sexually free’ ... Stevens and staff had a polishing pop-up business at the Dykes on Bikes festival. Photograph: Frankly Speaking Films / Together Films

‘For the first time in my life, I was sexually free’ ... Stevens and staff had a polishing pop-up business at the Dykes on Bikes festival. Photograph: Frankly Speaking Films / Together Films

Three decades ago, Franco Stevens turned a win at the horses into a glossy lesbian mag. As Curve’s astonishing story hits cinemas, she relives a heady time of sex clubs, ‘leather days’ and topless staff



[Rebecca Nicholson](#)

Wed 26 May 2021 01.00 EDT

In 1991, Franco Stevens was 23, broke and working in an LGBT bookshop in [San Francisco](#). She thought the world needed a glossy lesbian magazine, but she didn't have the money to launch one. So she took out 12 credit cards, borrowed the maximum on each, then gambled it all on a horse race. The horse came in. She took the money and put it on another horse, which also won, and then another, which did the same. With her winnings, she set up Deneuve.

"I almost felt like, 'Well, if this is meant to be, it will happen,'" she says, from her home in the city's Bay area. She lives with her wife, their two sons of college age, and a younger boy whom they call "a son of the heart", who splits his time between their house and "his biological home". Stevens is in her 50s, bright and sharp, and seems like the kind of person who quietly gets a lot of things done. "I mean, I wasn't going into it completely blind. I grew up with [horse racing](#), so I know this business from a different angle." Plus she had the recklessness of youth. "I just felt like, I've lived in my car, I've had nothing to eat – if it's meant to be, it will be. And my bankruptcy would be off my record by the time I was 30. So it seemed like everything lined up."

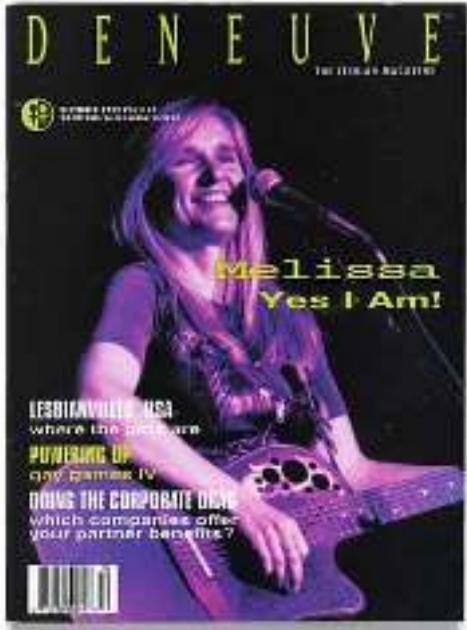
The first issue of Deneuve appeared in April/May 1991. Early editions featured scene reports, lesbian fashion shoots, fiction, reviews, personal ads and “news, rumors and tidbits from the lesbian nation”. It became [Curve](#) in 1996 after the French film star [Catherine Deneuve](#) sued them for trademark infringement, though Stevens always denied it had been named after her. The magazine almost buckled under the cost, and, with the stress of it all, Stevens’ hair began to fall out. Eventually, she changed the name. “When I got that summons for the lawsuit, I was like, ‘Oh, this is a joke, right? *What?*’ Catherine Deneuve is suing us? It’s crazy.” How does she feel towards her now? Stevens is tactful. “I’m not a great fan.”

### [Watch a trailer for Ahead of the Curve](#)

Curve has weathered plenty of storms, and now exists as a philanthropic foundation and online archive, with Stevens undecided about whether it can return in print. It has been a remarkable 30 years, which are now the subject of [Ahead of the Curve](#), a documentary co-directed by Rivkah Beth Medow and Jen Rainin, who is Stevens’ wife. While it is the story of Stevens and her magazine, it is also a portrait of how life has changed for LGBTQ+ people since the early 90s. “Just as I felt it important to create the magazine to serve the community, Jen and Rivka thought it was important to make the film to serve the community.”

When staff came back from festivals where you didn't have to wear clothes, I'd say: 'Can you just keep a bra on?'

The project evolved even as it was being shot. On camera, Stevens learns that Curve, under the ownership of a different publisher, is struggling and may be forced to close. It was supposed to be the final scene of the film, but it ended up being the first: it set Stevens off on a journey to find out what a queer audience wants and needs from an inclusive publication in the modern age. It is a wonder the story hasn’t been told until now. Does she think there is a lack of documented history when it comes to queer women? “Oh, 100%,” she says. Why does she think that is? “First of all, we’re women. Second of all, we’re queer. People are not telling our stories.”



‘We have arrived’ ... rock star Melissa Etheridge starred on the cover in 1993

They are missing out, if some of these stories are anything to go by. Stevens’ win on the horses funded the early days of the magazine, but it wasn’t enough to sustain it for long. There was a trip to a loan shark to pay staff wages, and the time Stevens realised that there was money to be made in a pop-up business polishing the motorbikes that arrived daily in the Castro, the city’s gay district.

“Some of the office shenanigans didn’t make it into the movie,” she says, tantalisingly. Like what? “OK, so shenanigans, for real? I was on the road a lot. Once I came back from the Book Fair in Chicago, walked into my office, and there was a stack of Polaroids on my desk. Apparently, there was a ‘leather day’ at the office when I was gone, and they were all posed on my desk, scantily clad in leather attire. When some of the staff came back from festivals where clothing was optional, I’d be like, ‘Can you just keep a bra on or something?’” She smiles. “There was definitely some sex-toy stuff that would not fly today.”

Before Stevens arrived in San Francisco, she had been an army wife, married to a man in the military. When she realised she was gay and left him, her family refused to support her (though their relationship improved

with time). She ended up living in her car. Younger queer people might be surprised at how different life sounds for gay women in San Francisco during the late 80s and early 90s. “It was the first time in my life I was sexually free. San Francisco was a lesbian mecca. There were sex clubs for women, where you could just go and either watch or partake, and men were not allowed in. When I was homeless, I would sometimes sleep at a friend’s house. And there were four different roommates there, and honestly, I shared a bed with them all, I think.”

However, there was a darker side to this sexual idyll. “San Francisco was very accepting but only in certain areas. And, even in those areas, it was very dangerous. They used to have this big Halloween party in the Castro. That was our time, the queers’ big night out.” One year, she was walking past the house with the four roommates to pick up her friends. “Somebody in a sheet with eyes cut out, like a ghost, walked by and hit the person in front of me over the head with a baseball bat, and shouted a gay slur. That was a reminder that, even though we have this little 10-block radius, we’re not safe.”

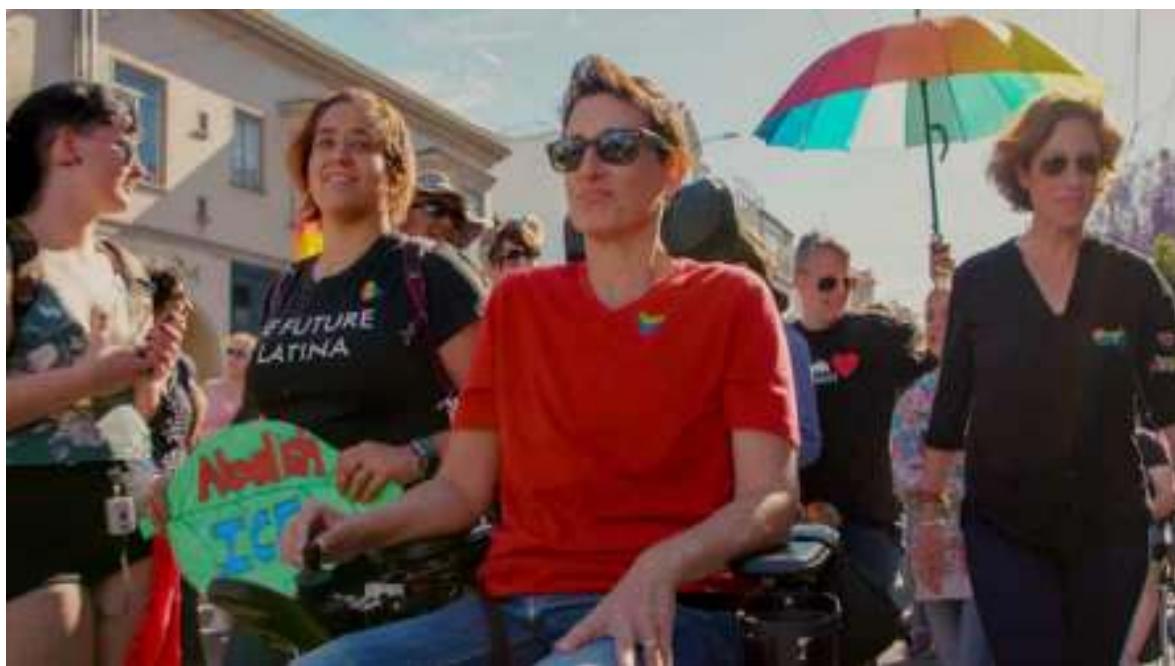


Out and about ... Franco Stevens interviews women at the Michfest festival

In the early days, few advertisers would pay for ads and no celebrities would give an interview. After two years, in 1993, the out musician [Melissa](#)

[Etheridge](#) appeared on the cover. “I owe her so much gratitude,” says Stevens. “To me, she was a humongous celebrity. And for her to say, ‘Yeah, I’ll do that. Come to my show.’ We were like, ‘We have arrived!’” These days, there are far more celebrities who will talk about their queerness publicly. “For young people to see queer celebrities be out, it’s so validating. When celebrities are out, not only does it affect queer people, but the mainstream acceptance goes up so much.”

But the fight is not over, she warns. “Here in the States, we have active government trying to repeal rights that we have. With Trump in office, he was pushing the country towards a very conservative angle, where, if you are not a heterosexual, white person, you are to be feared and hated. Even now, there are a lot of anti-trans bills being battled.” She mentions [Arkansas, where legislation banning gender-affirming treatment](#) for transgender people under the age of 18 was passed, as well as the struggle over including LGBTQ+ history in schools. “There is a battle over having those rights expanded versus states wanting to repeal them. Because God forbid we should teach our kids to be whoever they are.”



Stevens, centre, at a Dyke March in 2019

Stevens recently bought Curve back from the Australian publisher that owned it for a time, and established [the Curve Foundation](#), “to continue with

the mission of the magazine". There are two initial projects. The first is to build an online archive of every issue. The second is a financial award to support emerging queer women journalists in the US. After 30 years, they are still helping people to tell their stories. But will we ever see the likes of Curve again? "Well," Stevens smiles. "You might."

Ahead of the Curve is in UK cinemas and available digitally from 4 June. You can also [Host a Screening](#).

---

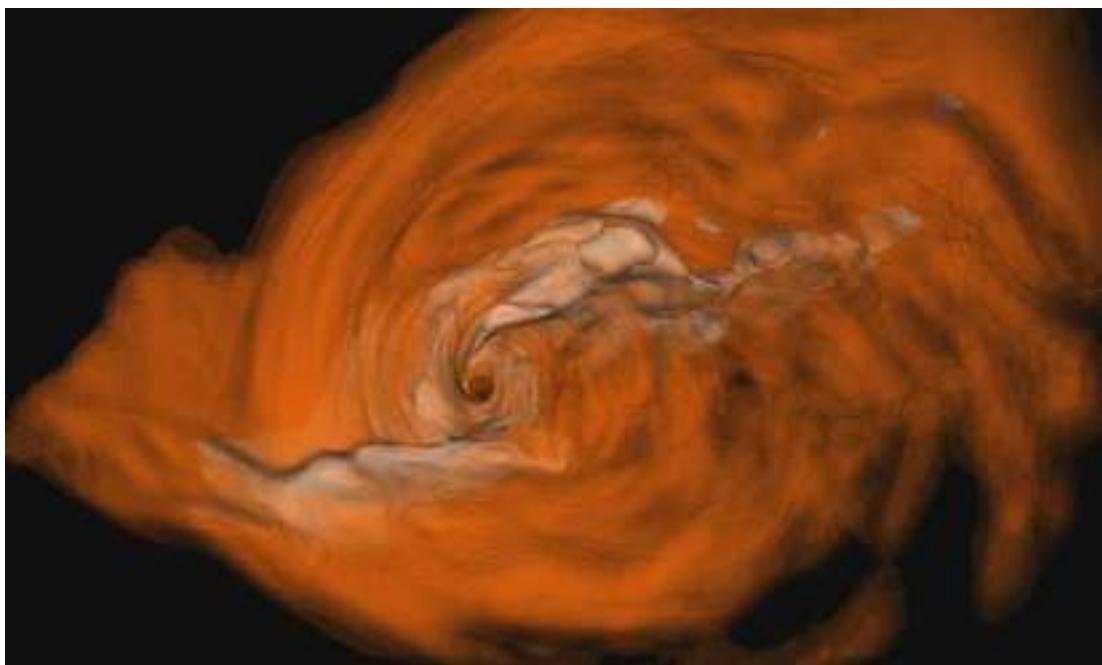
This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2021/may/26/sex-toy-lesbian-mecca-franco-stevens-curve-magazine-ahead-documentary-san-francisco>

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

## Documentary films

# **‘Stranger than anything dreamed up by sci-fi’: will we ever understand black holes?**

In the new documentary Black Holes: The Edge of All We Know, the work of Stephen Hawking and others in trying to figure out a mystery for the age is put under the spotlight



A visualisation from Black Holes: The Edge of All We Know Photograph:  
Sandbox Films

A visualisation from Black Holes: The Edge of All We Know Photograph:  
Sandbox Films



[David Smith](#) in Washington

[@smithinamerica](#)

Wed 26 May 2021 02.09 EDT

So, what would it feel like to fall into a black hole?

“Well, at the moment you crossed the horizon, you wouldn’t feel anything – there would be nothing dramatic,” [Peter Galison](#), co-founder of the Black Hole Initiative at Harvard University, says over the phone.

Huh. Doesn’t sound *too* bad. “But inevitably, you would be pulled towards the centre,” he continues. “There’s no going back; everything that falls into a black hole just keeps falling; there’s no resisting that pull and things don’t end well.”

[Mysterious swirling light gives new insights into black holes](#)

[Read more](#)

Ah. Go on. “Physicists have an expression called ‘[spaghettification](#)’ because if you were falling in feet first, your feet would be more attracted towards the centre than your head, and your sides would be pushed towards your middle and this process would extend and compress you.”

Right. So, terrifying, then. Especially when Galison adds with cosmic understatement: “In the long term that’s not a good survival event.”

We are talking about his documentary film, [Black Holes: The Edge of All We Know](#), four years in the making and available on Netflix from 1 June, which follows two scientific collaborations to understand the most mysterious objects in the universe. Among the highlights is being a fly on the wall as the late Stephen Hawking tries to figure them out.

It is Hawking’s voice, that instantly recognisable computer speech synthesiser, that opens the film: “A black hole is stranger than anything dreamed up by science fiction writers. It’s a region of space where gravity is so strong that nothing can escape. Once you are over the edge, there’s no way back.”

City-sized black holes form when certain stars run out of fuel to burn and collapse under the force of their own gravity. Supermassive black holes – millions or billions of times bigger than our sun – are found at the centre of almost every galaxy including our own, the Milky Way. Given that there are 100bn galaxies in the visible universe, there are probably 100bn supermassive black holes.

They are a source of fascination for astrophysicists, mathematicians and philosophers and a ready-made metaphor for artists. But television is an insatiable visual medium so Galison – Pellegrino University professor of the history of science and physics at Harvard – had an unenviable task in making a film about “something that struggles with all of its might to be unseen”, as one of his interviewees puts it.

“I think that I’m perversely drawn to topics of invisible things,” he says cheerfully, noting that his previous films include national security secrecy and the need to bury nuclear waste. “Black holes are the hardest to see objects in the universe because they reflect no light, they emit no light. The one we’re looking at is 55m light years away so its imprint on the sky, so to speak, is like trying to read the date on a coin in London from New York.

“But the first good news in the effort is that these black holes accrete gas and matter, stuff that flows around it and gets heated up in that swirl to a temperature of roughly 10bn degrees, and that glows. So what you’re seeing is a kind of shadow of the black hole and by looking at this glowing ring around the black hole, we can deduce a lot about its size and its properties. We use the visible things that are near a black hole to deduce things about the black hole itself.”

The black hole at the heart of a galaxy known as Messier 87 is so far away that it would ideally require a telescope the size of Earth. That being impractical, the next best thing is the [Event Horizon Telescope collaboration](#), an array of eight radio observatories on six mountains spanning four continents, acting together like shards of a single mirror.

The effort produced spectacular results two years ago by capturing [the first ever image of a black hole](#), displayed on newspaper front pages around the world and now printed in large format at [the Museum of Modern Art](#) in New York.

Galison, himself a member of the Event Horizon Telescope team, recalls: “It resonated for people because it did seem to recalibrate our relationship with the world. Even if you know there are black holes – from the equations or from more indirect observations – to actually look at it and say, ‘*There is a black hole,*’ I think was thrilling for the public and thrilling for the scientists involved.”



Malcolm Perry, Andrew Strominger and Stephen Hawking in *Black Holes: The Edge of All We Know*. Photograph: Sandbox Films

He adds: “The scientists were not divorced from broader cultural philosophical meanings. We’d seen simulations of this thing for years so it wasn’t a matter of not having any idea what it would look like, but seeing an actual black hole was something different.

“One colleague said she looked at it and she felt terrified of it. Another said the image on the cellphone was captivating for hours – just walking around staring at this image before it was released. So I think there is something arresting about the image beyond its technical achievement.”

Galison’s film also follows a separate group of theoretical physicists – Sasha Haco, Malcolm Perry, [Andrew Strominger](#) and Hawking – working on a problem known as “the information paradox”. Strominger describes how he thinks about the paradox 24 hours a day, seven days a week, even when he’s brushing his teeth and when he’s dreaming.

“It is the most interesting, well-posed question in modern physics,” he says, looking like a decade-older version of Mark Ruffalo’s Bruce Banner in the *Avengers* movies. “So interesting that I was ready to devote my life to trying to understand it.”

So what is it? That goes back to Hawking in 1974 when it was thought that a black hole had only two properties: how big it was and how much it was spinning. No one could say how it was formed.

Galison continues: “What Hawking realised was that this was in fundamental contradiction with something essential to what physicists believed, which was that if you knew the state of the world at a given moment, you could figure out what it was like in the past. If you knew what was in the present, you could predict the future.

“But black holes defy that. You can’t tell whether they were made from stars or made from pianos or made from giraffes. You can’t say anything about how they formed. So they seem to defy our extracting, even in principle, what the past was, and that really bothers physicists. They like to look at a table of billiard balls move in motion: you tell us how fast they’re moving and where they are, we’ll tell you where they were and where they’re going to be.

“Black holes didn’t seem to be like that. So the information loss paradox is that we’ve lost the information about how they were formed and this seems to violate the several-hundred-year aim of physics, since the time of Newton at least. If you knew things now you could say where things were and where they’ll be.”

The film shows Hawking and collaborators puzzling over the paradox and suggesting that the fields around a black hole have enough capacity to store information that mean it is not lost, creating a kind of record of what went in. Galison, in turn, has captured a precious record of Hawking, who died in 2018 at the age of 76, in intellectual flight.

Galison says: “I wanted to show Hawking working, not just the iconic Hawking making delphic pronouncements about the world, but the Hawking doing what he really does, which is doing science. I thought that would be really interesting for people to see.”



The Event Horizon Telescope collaboration is an array of eight radio observatories on six mountains spanning four continents. Photograph: Sandbox Films

His respect and affection for Hawking kept growing. “He remained in such good humour and curiosity about the world. There’d be a party in Cambridge and he would come to the party. He visited here in Boston and went to a dinner party and enjoyed that. He wanted to take a boat trip. He liked life and I thought that was great and I admired him all the more.

“I knew his physics before then but I came to appreciate his engagement with the world. Once I asked him about what he thought of the history of black holes and he said, ‘J Robert Oppenheimer really discovered black holes. Too bad about the bomb.’ It’s funny and lapidary. Each word, each sentence had to be laboriously formed so there wasn’t a lot of extraneous talk. That doesn’t mean it was all business either but it was compressed, like a good joke.”

But this is a film that also subtly pushes against the heroic myth of individual genius. Science, in practice, is a team sport. Galison reflects: “All the biggest problems that we face now, which are not particularly astronomical, like global climate change or the pandemic, require

collaborative efforts, not just the multiplication of the same sort of person a million times over.

“I wanted to show how central, how vital, how productive collaborations could be, whether it was the small collaboration on the theory side or the much bigger one on the observational side, and to see the human complementarity that made it possible to find out new things when people work together.”

- Black Holes: The Edge of All We Know is available on Netflix on 1 June
- 

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2021/may/26/stranger-than-anything-dreamed-up-by-sci-fi-will-we-ever-understand-black-holes>

## England holidays

# Brave front: thought-provoking art on England's south-east coast



‘This worm’s a metaphor for uncertainty’ ... Holly Hendry’s *Invertebrate* at Bexhill-on-Sea. Photograph: Rob Harris

‘This worm’s a metaphor for uncertainty’ ... Holly Hendry’s *Invertebrate* at Bexhill-on-Sea. Photograph: Rob Harris

The new Waterfronts exhibition – part of the England’s Creative Coast project – brings contemporary sculpture to seaside towns to attract, and challenge, visitors

[Stephen Emms](#)

Wed 26 May 2021 02.00 EDT

I’m escaping a downpour in the Margate shelter where TS Eliot sat in 1921 scribbling *The Waste Land*. I’m not the only one: holidaying families huddle in waterproofs, wet dogs shake, tinny music emanates from smartphones,

and a boy skips rhythmically with a rope. All the while the rain lashes the low-tide sand beyond.

I'm here to see the town's newest public artwork, April is the Cruellest Month, its title inspired by Eliot's poem. Positioned next to the shelter, it's a lifesize sculpture of Daniel Taylor, a soldier who served in Iraq, by Chicago-based artist [Michael Rakowitz](#).

One of seven temporary site-specific commissions – known as Waterfronts – it's part of a new project, England's Creative Coast, which spans the Essex, Kent and East and West Sussex shores, spearheaded by Margate's [Turner Contemporary](#) and connecting key galleries and arts organisations. Visitors to the participating towns – the others are Eastbourne, Bexhill-on-Sea, Hastings, Folkestone, Gravesend and Shoeburyness – are offered “the chance to consider the natural, historical and political aspects of England's coastline through the eyes of seven artists from five countries,” says curator Tamsin Dillon.

The sculpture is pointing inland towards parliament, where the decision to invade Iraq was made, not at some enemy across the water

It's the latest in a long line of ambitious art projects along this coast, from the [Whitstable Biennale](#), which launched in 2002, and the [Folkestone Triennial](#), beginning in 2008, to the gamechanging openings of Turner Contemporary in 2011 and [Hastings Contemporary](#) (originally the Jerwood) in 2012. Having been put back a year owing to Covid, the Creative Coast initiative is also aimed at helping rebuild after the pandemic, especially with so many British residents holidaying at home this year.

Back in Margate a volunteer from the Turner, tablet in hand, is asking the sheltering audience what their thoughts are on the new sculpture. An aggregate of chalk, sand, concrete and other materials, it's embedded with military medals and items donated by veterans and local residents. A local man turns to me to say that while he personally loves it, some think it “an insult to those serving Queen and country”. This stems from the fact that the figure is pointing inland in the direction of parliament, where the decision to

invade Iraq was made, not at some enemy across the water. It's in striking contrast to a 19th-century memorial of a lifeguard nearby gazing out to sea.



Michael Rakowitz's soldier points accusingly towards parliament.  
Photograph: Thierry Bal

The Waterfronts project is not just public art, however. It's accompanied by the "world's first art Geotour", a digital trail made by local communities to help visitors venture off the beaten track using a free app. As the rain eases, I head along Margate seafront to discover six geocaches hidden across town: each have clues to help you find them, revealing a QR code on a building or object. It's both fun and educational listening to observations and memories about the historic Theatre Royal, the lesser-known Dane Park and the multicultural Northdown Road area in Cliftonville.

The following day, a breezy sunny morning in Bexhill-on-Sea, I'm standing before Invertebrate, [Holly Hendry](#)'s large-scale work, whose main segment is on the seafront lawn outside the De La Warr Pavilion. "My starting point was really being here on the edge of the land, on the edge of the coast, thinking about borders," says the 31-year-old Woolwich-based artist.

A composite form in three parts strewn around the Pavilion, Hendry's sculpture appears to burrow its way up to the first-floor balcony and the roof

of the gallery . “It’s a worm, or a gut, or some kind of processing organism,” she says. “I wanted it to feel like it goes under the ground and through the building.”

The various sections of its anatomy resonate with its location: metal ducting, brickwork and sandbags are welded together, each suggesting varying degrees of vulnerability. “One thing that really became evident about the De La Warr is it’s struggling against the elements,” Hendry says, sighing as she spots a bit of rust after the rain. “This worm’s a metaphor for uncertainty ... it feels very timely in relation to everything that’s happening.” Her exhibition continues inside the gallery, showing the apparent after-effects of the invertebrate’s actions, with the modernist building imagined as a “porous body”, its gallery walls playfully munched.

I’m stopped in my tracks by a hand-written notice, ‘Regulars only, sorry’, pinned to the door of the George Inn

In Gravesend the next day, I’m stopped in my tracks by a handwritten notice, “Regulars only, sorry”, pinned to the door of the George Inn. Is this what Rakowitz means when he says, in his artist statement, that coastal towns are where “hospitality and hostility mix”? With Covid restrictions on indoor drinking now eased, the note perhaps suggests something about borders and boundaries. It’s in stark juxtaposition with the town’s new Waterfronts artwork by Glasgow-born artist Jasleen Kaur, a glorious celebration of immigration.

This ancient estuary stronghold at the mouth of the Thames has long been London’s gateway to the world, notably for Caribbean immigrants arriving on the Empire Windrush in 1948. It’s now home to a large Sikh community with whom Kaur, a third-generation Punjabi immigrant, has collaborated for her commission with north Kent arts organisation [Cement Fields](#). Her work, to the right of the pier entrance (an accompanying sound-piece is sited at the tip of the pontoon), is entitled The First Thing I Did was to Kiss the Ground. Its luminous base is topped with a wave painted to look like marble, echoing the faux marble render of the nearby Gurdwara temple, while a Sikh head with long top-knotted hair refers to “uncut sacred hair – often cut by early migrants to counter racism,” says the artist in her statement.



The First Thing I Did was to Kiss the Ground by Jasleen Kaur, near Gravesend pier. Photograph: Thierry Bal.

The semi-abstract figure gazing out towards Tilbury Docks, where the Windrush landed, is a reminder of “when migration was welcomed and bound up with rehabilitating a postwar Britain”. Fittingly, it’s Tilbury Docks where I head via a small ferry on the way to my next destination. I stand on the open deck as we speed over the wash, watching the receding spire of St George’s church, home to the statue commemorating Pocahontas – another symbol of Gravesend’s diverse history.

From the docks I walk to the station for the 45-minute journey to Shoeburyness, the end of the line. Its low-tide beach is epic, all rickety pontoons, rocky outcrops and wild bushes. A mile-long defence boom is visible, built in the second world war to prevent submarines from accessing the Thames.

“It’s the precarious edge of England,” says artist [Katrina Palmer](#). “This particular spot is between the MoD relics of Gunners Park and the military testing site, an unusual recreation area and nature reserve. I spent time here, walking, and thinking about the coast, and borders, about how we’re having a sort of vacillating relationship with Europe and the rest of the world.”

In response, Palmer, with Southend's [Metal](#) gallery, has created a concrete-form acoustic mirror adorned with one word: HELLO. While sound mirrors once dotted the coast to detect enemy aircraft, her welcoming sculpture "faces out over the sea, rather than the estuary, towards the rest of the world. It's actually directed towards Brussels," she says, adding that that shouldn't be interpreted too literally.



The sculpture section of Katrina Palmer's Hello Retreat, in Shoeburyness, offers a welcome to those arriving in Britain. Photograph: Thierry Bal

It's nearly time to leave. I walk along the promenade to Gunners Park, where the second part of Palmer's work, Retreat, is accessed by QR code on the locked door of a brick powder magazine, one of its many Victorian military structures. It can be scanned to hear a short story and audio-visual documentation of Palmer's time in Southend.

As I sit on the train from Shoeburyness to London, I wonder if the other three artworks, not yet installed at the time of writing (launching on 29 May), will prove as powerful: Mexican artist Mariana Castillo Deball's silhouette in Eastbourne; Chile's Pilar Quinteros' double-faced Janus on the clifftop in Folkestone; and Athens-based Andreas Angelidakis' Seawall outside Hastings Contemporary.

Of course, ultimately Waterfronts can be seen simply as a starting point for a memorable day trip to the coast – whether or not you choose to reflect on Britain’s complex history, borders or landscapes. “It’s about using the power of partnership to forge human connections,” says project director Sarah Dance, “allowing people to explore a place, an artwork, and its community, together – something that is needed now more than ever.”

*Waterfronts, [England's Creative Coast](#), until 12 November*

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2021/may/26/waterfronts-exhibition-englands-creative-coast-art-sculpture-project>

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

## Art and design

# Five thousand years of mystical magnificence: Epic Iran at the V&A – review

**V&A, London**

Persepolis and Isfahan are dazzlingly brought to life in a blockbuster show that explores five jaw-dropping millennia of cultural history, from soaring domes to charging horses



A projection of Tribute to Ahuramazda (359-338 BC) at the V&A's Epic Iran exhibition. Photograph: Guy Bell/REX/Shutterstock

A projection of Tribute to Ahuramazda (359-338 BC) at the V&A's Epic Iran exhibition. Photograph: Guy Bell/REX/Shutterstock



[Jonathan Jones](#)

Tue 25 May 2021 19.00 EDT

Typical. You go for months without any culture, then 5,000 years of it come along at once. That's what the V&A's luxury coach tour of a blockbuster promises, and delivers, including quite brilliant recreations of Iran's two most renowned sites, Persepolis and Isfahan. Epic [Iran](#) shows there is a cultural history that connects the country as it is today with the people who lived here five millennia ago. To put this in perspective, that's like telling the story of Britain from before Stonehenge to the present and hoping it all connects up somehow. But in [Iran](#), it does.

That's partly because of a pride in history that preserved traditions across the millennia. The most important document of that is The Shahnameh, The Book of Kings, written at the start of the 11th century CE by the poet Ferdowsi. Iran had been converted to Islam in the seventh century, but Ferdowsi's epic is packed with the heroic deeds and bloody battles of the ancient, pre-Islamic Sasanian empire. It is also written in Persian, as opposed to Arabic. There are gorgeous manuscripts of this classic. A masterpiece made in Tabriz in the 1500s for the Safavid ruler is open on a battle scene in which bejewelled horsemen charge each other across a sea-

like expanse of blue: the painter takes time to depict little flowers blooming on the battlefield, just before the horses trample them.

That eye for nature is rooted in antiquity. A pottery jug in the shape of a humpbacked bull from 1200-800 BCE, a golden bowl from the same period with exquisite 3D gazelles bursting from it, and many more horned and frolicking beasts fill the earliest art here with animal life. In the Persian empire, which ruled much of the Middle East in the sixth and fifth centuries BCE, the beasts become even more mythic and ornate. An armlet has horned griffins on it, in gold, lapis lazuli and other precious stuffs.



‘Isfahan’s walls and domes flow up around you’ ... Epic Iran at the V&A, London. Photograph: Guy Bell/REX/Shutterstock

The Persian empire is brought to stately, ceremonial life in one of the exhibition’s big set pieces. Real treasures such as a spindly gold model of a chariot and huge horn of plenty drinking vessels are displayed among ever-changing virtual images of Persepolis, as it was and is now. Persepolis was built for rituals and tribute ceremonies, not living in: its mystique soaks in as you watch a cast of its sculptures change colour to show how it was originally painted. Yet even here there was room for artistic delicacy. A real chunk of the reliefs of Persepolis, lent by the Fitzwilliam Museum in

Cambridge, shows one courtier touching his friend's beard in a gesture of intimacy: the other reciprocates with a similarly warm tap on the shoulder.

Alexander the Great torched Persepolis and crushed the Persian empire. You can read the ancient Greek historian Herodotus if you want to see what the Persian empire looked like to outsiders and how the Greeks defined themselves, and hence "the west", against it. What you get here is the view from inside. The ruler Cyrus the Great speaks for himself on the Cyrus Cylinder from the British Museum, a clay roll incised with cuneiform letters telling how Cyrus has restored religious rights in his empire.

The artistic richness of Iran has to have come from its geographical openness to east and west, absorbing influences from China, Mesopotamia, Greece, the Mongols. That gives Persian Islamic art a subtle strength that in turn influenced the whole Islamic world. Readers of [Orhan Pamuk's My Name is Red](#) will know that as far away as Istanbul, miniaturists illustrated the Shahnameh and imitated the Persian masters.



The Cyrus Cylinder (539-538 BC), from the British Museum. Photograph: Guy Bell/Rex/Shutterstock

This artistry went into overdrive when the Safavid empire united Iran behind Shia Islam in the 1500s. And the V&A makes its dazzling capital Isfahan

materialise around you. One of the reasons it can do so is that the Victorian founders of this museum commissioned full size copies of some of Isfahan's most beautiful decorated walls and domes. These flow up around you, their colours merging with video images of Isfahan's architecture on a dome-shaped screen above. I have never been to Isfahan but in palaces and mosques I've visited, it is the ensemble of light and space, sun catching on lustrous tiles, domes cooling the mood, that creates magic. They catch that rhapsodic feeling here.

Then, like Coleridge disturbed in his reveries of [Kubla Khan](#), I was punched awake by reality. A 19th-century painting shows the women of a harem, and you realise the Persian past was not all poetry and paradise. [Shirin Neshat's 1998 video Turbulent](#) makes a similar point. Across a dark space, two singers face each other on separate screens. While a man sings a medieval love poem by Jalal al-Din Rumi, a woman, alone in the dark, responds with an anguished wordless wail. There isn't any model for her feelings, or the world she imagines. Iran's next 5,000 years are still to be written, and the past probably doesn't offer any answers.

[Epic Iran at the V&A](#) opens on 29 May.

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2021/may/26/epic-iran-five-thousand-years-mystical-magnificence-epic-iran-va-review>

## The age of extinctionAmazon rainforest

# **‘Highway of death’: animals pay ultimate price on Brazil’s most dangerous road for wildlife**

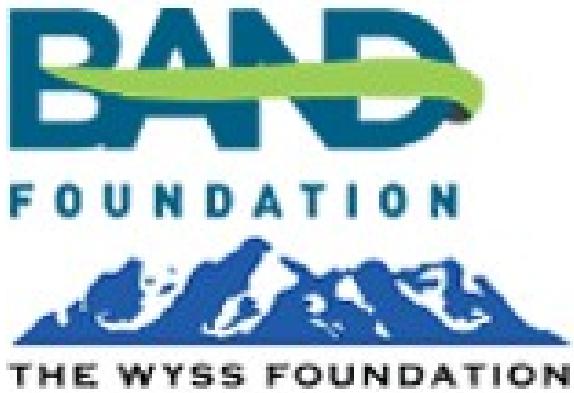


A dead anteater on the ‘highway of death’, the BR-262, which is the deadliest roadway for wildlife in Brazil. Photograph: Gustavo Figueirôa/SOS Pantanal

A dead anteater on the ‘highway of death’, the BR-262, which is the deadliest roadway for wildlife in Brazil. Photograph: Gustavo Figueirôa/SOS Pantanal

More than 3,000 animals die on the country’s BR-262 road each year, but legal action by activists is forcing authorities to take notice

The age of extinction is supported by



### About this content

*Jill Langlois*

Wed 26 May 2021 02.29 EDT

The last time Schwartz's tracking monitor registered his location, he was standing at the edge of the "highway of death". A massive male giant anteater, he was roaming his habitat in the Brazilian Cerrado – a vast tropical savanna that neighbours the world's largest tropical wetland, the Pantanal – when he disappeared next to the federal highway officially known as the BR-262. No more GPS datapoints, collected every 20 minutes, were recorded.

But biologists and veterinarians from the Institute for the Conservation of Wild Animals' (ICAS) [Anteaters and Highways Project](#), who had placed the collar on him, were sure of what happened.

The driver who hit Schwartz probably didn't see him until it was too late. It was night-time, and Schwartz's dark colouring and eyes that wouldn't have reflected the headlights of oncoming vehicles would have made it almost impossible to avoid him. The impact on his body was most likely so great that the tracking collar broke, and researchers think he dragged himself away from the road to die. The team searched for him, but he was never found.



The most lethal stretch of the BR-262 is along the Bolivian border between the cities of Aquidauana and Corumbá. More than 3,000 animals die on the road every year. Photograph: Octavio Campos Salles/Alamy

Schwartz is thought to be one of thousands of animals killed in wildlife-vehicle collisions every year on the highway of death. It is one of the many roads that cut across Brazil's fauna-rich ecosystems without taking into account the animals that live alongside. The BR-262 was built in the 1960s, long before [environmental impact regulations](#) came into being in 1986 – and effective measures to prevent accidents on the road still haven't been put into place. Now, decades after its construction, a class action lawsuit has forced authorities to open their eyes to the dangers of the road for both wildlife and humans.

## Life and death on the BR-262

The BR-262 stretches east-west across the states of Espírito Santo, Minas Gerais, São Paulo and Mato Grosso do Sul, cutting straight through the Atlantic Forest, the Cerrado and the Pantanal.

The most lethal stretch is the near-300km that runs through the Pantanal between the cities of Aquidauana and Corumbá on the Bolivian border, where lorries are numerous and mining for metals is rampant. According to

research from the Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul, [more than 3,000 animals die](#) in collisions on the road every year, affecting as many as 88 different species.



A female jaguar injured in the Pantanal wetland fires is treated at the Nex Institute, Corumbá de Goiás. Wildlife deaths rose on the BR-262 during the fires as animals were forced to cross the road to escape. Photograph: Ueslei Marcelino/Reuters

In 2020, the Pantanal experienced [its worst drought](#) in 47 years – with the damage made worse by the fires that overtook the wetland – leaving its main source of water, the Paraguay River, at levels so low that many ships meant to carry mining cargo had to remain docked.

“The low level of the river has forced mining companies to start sending shipments by road,” says Gustavo Figueirôa, a biologist studying wildlife-vehicle collisions with the nonprofit organisation SOS Pantanal, “so the flux of trucks on the highway has increased”.

The fires also added to the number of wildlife deaths by pushing more wildlife to cross the road, and by causing poor visibility leading to more collisions.

[BR-262 map](#)

Highway BR-262 is now one of many old roads being reviewed as part of a partnership between the ministries of the environment and infrastructure to understand how to lessen their impact on the environment. Experts say some of the best tools to keep animals off the road are aerial, terrestrial and arboreal fauna passages, built with the specifications of the region's wildlife in mind and using strategically placed fencing to guide animals to the passages for safe crossing.

The fencing is very low. Capybaras and anteaters break it, coatis climb it, armadillos dig under it and deer jump it

*Fernanda Abra, ViaFauna*

According to Fernanda Abra, a biologist specialising in the ecology of roads, and cofounder of environmental consultancy firm ViaFauna, there are several spots along the BR-262 where attempts to keep animals off the road have been made, but they are inefficient and inadequate.

"It's fencing that is not extensive enough, that's very low," she says. "Capybaras and anteaters break it, coatis climb it, armadillos dig under it and deer jump it."

She and the rest of the ViaFauna team started monitoring wildlife-vehicle collisions on the BR-262 between Aquidauana and Corumbá in December 2020, after a 2018 class action lawsuit brought against the National Department of Transport Infrastructure (DNIT) demanded better measures be taken to protect the area's wildlife.



A giant anteater climbs a cattle fence. Barriers to keep wildlife away from the BR-262 are often easily breached by animals. Photograph: Nature Picture Library/Alamy

According to the [Federal Prosecutor's Office in Mato Grosso do Sul](#), DNIT had previously attempted to implement measures to lower the rate of animal deaths along the stretch of highway, such as installing speed traps and signs at critical points, but these weren't enough.

Fencing that both blocks animals from gaining access to the road and guides them to safe passages should be DNIT's top priority, according to the Federal Prosecutor's Office, which lists specific stretches of road where those changes are required.

Luiz Guilherme Rodrigues de Mello, director of the DNIT, says the department was aware of the problem on the BR-262 and other highways like it, but that it was the lawsuit that made them sit up and take notice of its severity.

"Fortunately, the Federal Prosecutor's Office assisted us with this, and opened our eyes to a situation that is critical, and that we need to look into so that we can do better," he says.

The lawsuit led to DNIT's contract with ViaFauna, providing funding for the team to monitor the stretch of highway for a year. Abra says a final report, which will include a detailed explanation of the most efficient mitigation methods, should be ready by December 2021 or January 2022. As an expert, she is involved in three other similar lawsuits, including one in the state of Goiás that was won this February.

[How creating wildlife crossings can help reindeer, bears – and even crabs](#)  
[Read more](#)

Both she and other specialists want people to understand that wildlife-vehicle collisions can be just as dangerous for humans as they are for the animals crossing the roads, and can come with a significant monetary cost when vehicles and surrounding infrastructure are damaged.



An anteater on the side of the BR-262 as traffic speeds by. Photograph: Gustavo Figueirôa/SOS Pantanal

[A study](#) that Abra conducted in São Paulo showed that an average of 3,000 collisions in the state every year are caused by wildlife, leading to the deaths of 22 people. Attending to those accidents costs the state 56m Brazilian reais (£7.5m).

[Another study](#), coauthored by Abra and members of the Anteaters and Highways Project, concluded that the average material cost during wildlife-vehicle collisions on 1,158km of highway in Mato Grosso do Sul with animals weighing more than 1kg was \$885 (£650) per incident, with 5% causing total vehicle loss. In the three-year period studied, the total estimated cost was between \$4,455,730 and \$5,645,009.

Investments in proper mitigation methods, they say, would easily be paid back by the number of accidents they would prevent.

## The giant anteater

While animals such as the [crab-eating fox](#), the [yellow armadillo](#) and the [nine-banded armadillo](#) are among the most killed in wildlife-vehicle collisions along the BR-262, their stable numbers mean the impact is less severe than it is on those with populations already in decline, such as the [giant anteater](#), which tends to cross roads at night, when it is most active and when 80-90% of wildlife-vehicle collisions happen. It also has a long and slow reproductive cycle, giving birth to one pup at a time. According to Arnaud Desbiez, a biologist and coordinator of the Anteaters and Highways Project, the data the team collected shows that roads have had a huge impact on the animal's population.



A zebu watches as a giant anteater explores a termite mound. The road has had a big effect on the already declining anteater population. The creatures are most active at night when more than 80% of wildlife-vehicle collisions occur. Photograph: Westend61 GmbH/Alamy

“Vehicle collisions are not directly causing local extinctions,” he says. “But they’re reducing the population growth rate by half, meaning the animals have less capacity to recuperate from other threats, such as fire, poisoning by agrochemicals, dog attacks and habitat loss.”

That was why the ICAS researchers chose to study the giant anteater to better understand how highways affect wildlife populations as a whole, particularly in Mato Grosso do Sul, which has some of the most dangerous paved roads in the country. Desbiez says: “In Mato Grosso do Sul, all highways are highways of death.”

While the BR-262 gets the most attention, others can be just as lethal, Desbiez says. Another federally-run highway, the BR-267, was equally as deadly for giant anteaters monitored in Desbiez’s project. There is also ‘tapir highway’, the state-run MS-040, so-called because it has the highest number of collisions with [lowland tapirs](#), another species vulnerable to extinction and with a declining population.

Back at the DNIT, Rodrigues de Mello says another highway that is a cause for concern is the BR-319, which runs through the Amazon, connecting the state capitals Manaus and Porto Velho. The department is already working with ViaFauna to improve the safety of the road and expects changes to be implemented this year.



A giant anteater carrying her baby on her back. The species is listed as vulnerable to extinction and its long reproductive cycle makes it harder to recover from population decline. Photograph: Wolfgang Kaehler/LightRocket/Getty Images

At ICAS, Desbiez and the rest of the team continue to monitor giant anteaters while also moving on to other phases of the project, such as focusing on the human dimension of the problem. Their plan includes training road workers, making lorry drivers part of the solution with an app to document animal sightings, working with companies to reduce night-time driving, changing mindsets and reintroducing orphaned giant anteaters into the wild.

They hope education, teamwork and using the term wildlife-vehicle collision as opposed to roadkill will create a shift in culture and a change in policy.

“This is not just a biodiversity issue,” says Desbiez. “This is a human safety issue. People are dying on our roads.”

*Find more [age of extinction coverage here](#), and follow biodiversity reporters [Phoebe Weston](#) and [Patrick Greenfield](#) on Twitter for all the latest news and features*

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/may/26/highway-of-death-animals-pay-ultimate-price-on-brazils-most-dangerous-road-for-wildlife-aoe>

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

## How to live nowGardens

# The war against snails: can gardeners ever win?

In the past few weeks, the slugs and snails have risen in British gardens – and they are hungry. Before you reach for the shovel or pellets, experts suggest some other options



A common garden snail. Photograph: SADLERC1/Getty Images/iStockphoto

A common garden snail. Photograph: SADLERC1/Getty Images/iStockphoto



[Emine Saner](#)

[@eminesaner](#)

Wed 26 May 2021 02.00 EDT

If there is anything likely to send even the most mild-mannered gardener on a murderous rampage, it is waking one morning to find the lettuce has been shredded and the carefully nurtured young plants have been razed overnight. In the past few weeks, the slugs and snails have risen – and they are hungry. It's not that there are more than usual this year – experts don't think that's the case – but after a cold and dry April, perhaps the ones that are emerging are doing so with a vengeance and heading for the hostas. Go out at dusk with a torch, particularly if it has been raining. "It's quite shocking what you find sometimes," says [Charles Dowding](#), an organic gardener and author. "You suddenly see these swarms of slugs everywhere."

It is tempting to view gastropods as the enemy, and to start a war that can include search and destroy techniques alongside biological weapons and traps. Less extreme options include gently relocating them, or surrounding their victims with protective barriers. But what is clear is that for most gardeners doing nothing is not an option: in its annual pest ranking, [the Royal Horticultural Society \(RHS\) found that slugs and snails were again gardeners' biggest foe](#), after sliding down the chart in recent years.

But before you scatter the slug pellets too liberally, it is worth remembering that only eight or nine of the more than 40 slug species in the UK are a nuisance; of the 100 or so types of snail, “probably only three of them are problematic in gardens,” says Hayley Jones, an entomologist and the slug and snail expert at the RHS. “The others either don’t do much damage, or they eat other things like algae or fungi.” Some slugs and snails can be beneficial “because they eat rotting material so they’re all part of the recycling process in the garden. They all get tarred with the same brush, but they are much more interesting than that.”



On guard ... the leopard slug is very territorial, which may actually help to protect your plants. Photograph: Ewa Saks/Getty Images/iStockphoto

They come in different patterns and colours, have thousands of teeth and their slime is a non-Newtonian fluid (its viscosity changes under pressure), which has been researched for medical uses, [such as surgical glue](#). A whole load of [TikTok users got very excited earlier this year](#) when one posted a video of two leopard slugs mating – sexily, [it involves hanging upside down by a string of mucus and entwining their giant blue penises](#) (slugs are hermaphrodites, having male and female sex organs), which emerge from their heads. Curious sex life aside, leopard slugs – they are brown or grey with dark spots – prefer to eat fungi and rotting matter, and are a good thing to have in your garden. “The leopard slug is very territorial, which is where

its reputation for being a cannibal comes from,” says Jones. “It doesn’t actually eat other slugs, but it will attack them for encroaching on its territory.” It may therefore actually help to protect your plants by acting as a guard slug.

If you use pellets or traps you can indiscriminately kill creatures that wouldn’t have bothered your darling dahlias in the first place. “People often measure success by the number of dead bodies and that’s not necessarily very informative,” says Jones of methods such as the beer trap – a sunken bowl of beer, which attracts and drowns slugs: “There is quite a lot of science being done on bait in terms of beer and yeast, but they only really measure how many slugs you catch, rather than how undamaged the plants were as a result.”

Jones says the common garden snail – the one with the brown shell – is probably the most pernicious of snails, and the main slug to watch out for is the netted field species. “They are about 4cm when they’re fully grown but for a lot of the year, they’re way smaller than that. They’re a grey beige colour, with darker speckles over the skin. If you go rummaging around in the leaf litter or underneath plants that have got holes in them, you’ll probably find them. They’re also the ones that you find inside the heads of your lettuce.”

The best way to ensure you find the guilty ones is to catch them in the act. The garden designer and [TV presenter Flo Headlam](#) calls it going on “an evening patrol, particularly after it’s rained”. The question then is what to do with them. Headlam tends to put them in the bin or takes them to the park.



Caught in the act ... a common garden slug. Photograph: EzumeImages/Getty Images/iStockphoto

Previous surveys for the RHS have found that [a fifth of gardeners admit to throwing snails over the fence](#) (Londoners being the worst offenders), and one study found moving them at least 20 metres away from prized plants prevented their homing instinct. Saul Walker, the head gardener at Stonelands House in Devon and host of the gardening podcast Talking Heads, collects them from plants, under and around pots, and the greenhouse, then moves them, although, he points out, he does have the benefit of 25 hectares (60 acres). “I throw them in the woodland. They don’t make their way back, I don’t think.”

The garden designer Cleve West relocates “them to another part of the allotment, or somewhere they’re not going to damage what we’re growing. Not everyone’s going to have that luxury, but do what you can because we’re in such a biodiversity crisis, all forms of wildlife should be respected.” I’ve often taken tubs filled with slugs and snails to the park and released them, but Jones advises not to do this. “Lots of the slugs that you find in the UK aren’t actually native species, so if you take them to a wild area, you might actually be [introducing a non-native slug](#) that wasn’t there before,” she says. She suggests moving them to a compost heap. “Encourage them to eat the rotting stuff rather than your favourite plants.” But won’t your

compost be full of slugs' eggs? "I don't think that's going to push the slug numbers up any more than it would them laying eggs anywhere else," she says. So you may as well put them to work while they're at it.

If you want to outsource the cull, Jones says nematodes – microscopic parasites that release bacteria into the slug's body – are effective, but they require a bit of effort and are expensive (they also only affect slugs, not snails, as they work underground). Slug pellets containing metaldehyde are harmful to other wildlife, and [will be phased out by next year](#), but the [RHS has found that organic pellets work almost as well](#).

Once you've collected the offenders over a few nights and reduced the population, you can think about making your garden less hospitable. "For example, I don't use any mulches of hay or straw, or grass clippings – I only use compost on the beds," says Dowding. "There's nowhere for them to hide on a sunny day, so they're not near plants at night. Keep the edges of the garden tidy. If you have beds with wooden sides, particularly if the wood is starting to decay, that's an amazing habitat for slugs." Headlam recommends finding out where their hiding places are. "The classic thing is if you've got a pile of bricks or pots or whatever, they tend to congregate there. Move things around, open things up."

There are numerous barrier techniques such as placing crushed-up eggshells, coffee grounds, grit, sand or salt around the base of the plant in the hope slimy bodies will be repelled, but "there isn't much evidence for how well they work," says Jones. In lab studies, copper – which can be wrapped around pots, or in a ring around plants – put slugs and snails off, says Jones, "but they don't perform so well actually out in the garden. It's worth trying, but not necessarily spending heaps of money on." She doesn't advise making homemade pesticides – steeping garlic in water is a popular one – to spray on the leaves to make them less tasty. "Technically you're using an unregistered pesticide, so it's not something we would ever recommend."

Headlam has had some success with sheep's wool pellets, which act as a barrier, and she also likes applying petroleum jelly around the sides of pots "because I've had more damage to plants in pots than in the ground. It's a texture they don't like moving over."

The question of sacrificial plants – providing favoured food for slugs and snails in the hope they'll leave the lupins alone – is contentious; Walker and Dowding think it will just encourage them. Another option is to only grow things slugs and snails will ignore, such as geraniums and astrantias, but that feels like giving in. Watering in the morning rather than the evening is thought to help, as it gives the surface of the soil a chance to dry during the day and discourage slugs at night.

All agree the best way to deal with slugs and snails is to approach the garden as a whole and “build up a robust ecosystem” as Walker puts it. “I don’t try to intervene too much, then things will control themselves in some way.” Dowding, who has pioneered his organic, no-digging principle, feels the same. “If you don’t dig the soil, you are not destroying any predators such as beetles. Digging is very destructive of soil life that we don’t normally see or appreciate, and it breaks that whole balance.” Make your garden as wildlife-friendly as possible, says Jones, and you will encourage natural predators such as beetles, frogs and toads (create a pond, however small) and hedgehogs. However, you can’t just leave them to it, she points out. “No more than 10% of a hedgehog’s diet is slugs – they’re never going to make a huge dent.”

The other idea is to grow robust plants, and get them to a decent size before you plant them out. If stronger, bigger plants get nibbled, “they can outgrow it,” says Walker. West advises keeping an eye on the weather forecast and ideally planting out when it’s dry, though he adds this is probably less important when the plants are bigger. With vulnerable seedlings that have been sown directly, he also sows a line of lettuces nearby to distract slugs and snails. “We need to try to get over this idea that we’re the supreme species on this planet and accept the fact that other creatures have a right to enjoy their time on Earth as well. That’s a much more balanced way of looking at it rather than just waging war on everything that moves.”

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2021/may/26/war-against-snails-can-gardeners-ever-win>

## Belarus

# Raman Pratasevich: the Belarus journalist captured by a fighter jet

Friends describe arrest of influential opposition journalist as an act of ‘personal revenge’ by the country’s president



Raman Pratasevich in 2019. Photograph: AP

Raman Pratasevich in 2019. Photograph: AP

*[Luke Harding](#) and [Andrew Roth](#) in Moscow*

Tue 25 May 2021 13.20 EDT

In an interview last November the 26-year-old opposition journalist Raman Pratasevich said he was not planning to spend his life in exile. “I would go back to [Belarus](#) immediately if my safety was guaranteed,” he said. “My intention is to return.”

The extraordinary circumstances of Pratasevich's involuntary homecoming have provoked international outrage, after [his Ryanair flight was forced on Sunday to land in Belarus's capital Minsk](#). It was on its way from Greece to Lithuania, where Pratasevich was living.

Friends have wryly noted that the thunderous and [very public manner of his arrest](#) is in keeping with his outsized career and personality. "Everything he does is loud," Nicolai Khalezin, who has known him for a decade, said. "The riot police came and arrested me. Roma got a fighter jet."

Khalezin, the co-artistic director of the Belarus Free Theatre, pointed to Pratasevich's other achievements. They include working as the main editor for [Nexta-Live](#), the Telegram channel which played a key role last year in organising protests against Belarus's vengeful president Alexander Lukashenko.

At its peak Nexta had 2 million subscribers, making it the largest channel of its kind in eastern [Europe](#). Pratasevich was key to its success. Those opposed to Lukahsenko's rigging of last August's presidential election were able to upload videos anonymously, thereby dodging an internet clampdown.

Pratasevich got involved in journalism early at the age of 15 and 16. He attended and filmed anti-government rallies and flashmobs. One of his early investigations probed how Belarus's secret police – the KGB – recruited journalists. "He's full of energy. He likes straight talking," Khalezin said. "And he's funny, always ready to laugh, chatting after work about the situation."



Raman Pratasevich at an opposition rally in Minsk, Belarus, in 2012.  
Photograph: AP

Pratasevich was always clear in his views – more of an eastern European reporter than a dispassionate British one, friends say. “He’s a person who always wants to be on the frontline,” Franak Viačorka, a senior aide to opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya said. “He’s always taking risks, involved in every protest that was happening”.

Viačorka added: “He’s an activist, turned to journalist, turned activist again. He was very good on YouTube and on Telegram. He knows what the audience expects so he’s great at explaining complicated things. And he was very critical of Lukashenko.” The president’s decision to force down his Boeing aircraft was “personal revenge”, he added.

In 2019 Pratesevich left Belarus because of pressure from the authorities. He teamed up with Nexta's 22-year-old founder Stsiapan Putsila. The pair operated from an office in Warsaw, Poland. When last summer's revolution began, they disseminated footage of street marches and helped plan and coordinate them.

The authorities responded in furious fashion. A court declared Nexta's logo extremist. Pratasevich – co-recipient of the European parliament's Sakharov

prize for freedom of thought – was placed on a terrorist watch list. He was charged with organising mass disorder, disrupting public order and inciting social hatred.

Eight months ago his parents exited Belarus for Poland. His father, Dmitry, said he didn't necessarily agree with his son's opinions but always supported him. The pair had a heart-to-heart in the kitchen: 'I told him: 'Whatever you do, even if I don't approve of it, I will accept it. It's your choice.' A military servicemen, Dmitry was stripped of his rank because of Pratasevich's political stance.

[Belarus journalist's father says video confession carried out under duress](#)  
[Read more](#)

Last year Pratasevich left Nexta and joined another Telegram channel after its editor was arrested and jailed. The split with Putsila was creative rather than personal, friends say, with Pratasevich keen to move away from activism towards a more traditional kind of journalism.

In his [November interview with the channel Country-Life](#), Pratasevich said that Belarus's transformation into a democracy would take time. Lukashenko may flee to Russia, he suggested, but would leave behind the KGB and law enforcement bodies, as well as officials with an enduring "Soviet mentality".

A post-Lukashenko Belarus needed urgent judicial reform as well as a free and fair elections, a parliamentary system and an overhaul of its constitution, he said. He didn't see himself playing a political role as a future minister. Instead, he would carry on with his media activities, he suggested.

On Sunday Pratasevich was travelling to Vilnius with his Russian girlfriend, 23-year-old Sofia Sapega, a student at Lithuania's European Humanities University. The pair had known each other for some years and began dating recently. Vilnius is home to Tsikhanouskaya and the de facto capital for Belarus's opposition.

Sunday's dramatic events could not have been anticipated but he was fully aware of the danger, Viačorka said. "Everyone who joined the movement, who works in journalism and at Nexta knows the risk they face. It was a

conscious choice. He knew what he did and he knew all the risks. And even an accusation of terrorism didn't stop him."

Pratasevich's fate is now darkly unclear. Viačorka added: "He's been tortured, I'm sure of this, and this confession that we saw was the result of this torture. We are living in the Orwellian, Stalin-style dictatorship that destroys lives in order to let the supreme leader stay in power."

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/25/hes-always-taking-risks-how-raman-pratasevich-lives-life-on-the-frontline>

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

## 2021.05.26 - Opinion

- Britain has promised net zero – but it's on track to achieve absolutely nothing
- This Australian trade deal shows how ‘Global Britain’ has already lost its way
- How did I satisfy my restless hunger for touch? I got a new tattoo
- The Tory ‘war on woke’ has a manifesto – and its targets are crushingly familiar
- As Hancock ‘throws a sickie’, Zahawi suffers a dose of the hotspots
- George Floyd’s death started a fire, but the kindling had been piling up for years

[Opinion](#)[Climate change](#)

## **Britain has promised net zero – but it's on track to achieve absolutely nothing**

[George Monbiot](#)



Despite producing ambitious targets, governments have failed to tackle the big environmental issues over the past 15 years



‘We did the easy things first. Coal-burning power stations were replaced with gas, and some of the gas with renewables.’ Photograph: Ben Stansall/AFP/Getty Images

‘We did the easy things first. Coal-burning power stations were replaced with gas, and some of the gas with renewables.’ Photograph: Ben Stansall/AFP/Getty Images

Wed 26 May 2021 02.00 EDT

Every week governments make headline announcements about saving the planet, and every week their small print unsaves it. The latest puff by the G7 is a classic of this genre. Apparently, all seven governments have committed “[to conserve or protect](#) at least 30% of the world’s land and at least 30% of the world’s ocean by 2030”. But what does it mean? The UK, which says it secured the new agreement, claims already to have “conserved or protected” [26% of its land](#) and [38% of its seas](#). In reality, it has simply drawn lines on the map, designating our [sheepwrecked hills](#) and trawler-trashed seas “protected”, when they’re [nothing of the kind](#). This is the way the world ends. Not with a bang but a press release.

All governments do this, but Boris Johnson’s has perfected the art. It operates on the principle of commitment inflation: as the action winds down, the pledges ramp up. Never mind that it won’t meet the targets set by the

fourth and fifth [carbon budgets](#): it now has a [thrilling new target](#) for the sixth one. Never mind that it can't meet its old commitment of an 80% [cut in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050](#). Instead, it has promised us "net zero" by the same date. Yes, we need more ambition, yes, the government is following official advice, but ever higher targets appear to be a substitute for action.

### [British banks finance 805m tonnes of CO2 production a year](#)

[Read more](#)

Fifteen years ago, I wrote a book called Heat. I tried to work out how far we would have to cut greenhouse gases to fulfil our international obligations fairly, and how we could do it without destroying the prosperity and peace on which success depends. The best estimates at the time suggested that if the UK were justly to discharge its responsibility for preventing climate breakdown, we would need to cut our emissions by 90% by 2030.

[Researching the preface](#) for a new edition, I wanted to discover how much progress we've made. An article in the journal Climate Policy uses a similar formula for global fairness. Its conclusion? If the UK were justly to discharge its responsibility for preventing climate breakdown, we would need to cut our emissions by [90% by 2030](#). And by 2035, it says, our emissions should reach "[real zero](#)". In other words, in terms of the metric that really counts, we have gone nowhere. The difference is that we now have nine years in which to make the 90% cut, instead of 24.

How could this be true, given that the UK has reduced its greenhouse gas emissions by 49% since 1990? Surely we've been a global leader on climate action?

It's partly because we now know that limiting global heating to 2C commits us to a dangerous world. In theory, governments have accepted a more stringent [target of 1.5C](#). But it's also because, if we ignore the impact of the pandemic, our reduction of greenhouse gases has stalled.

We did the [easy things](#) first. Coal-burning power stations were replaced with gas, and some of the gas with renewables. This makes no difference to most people: when we flick the switch, the lights still come on. But almost all the

other reductions must involve us directly. They won't happen unless the government mobilises the nation: encouraging us to drive less and use our feet, bicycles and public transport more; [taxing frequent flyers](#); refitting our homes; reducing the amount of meat we eat; reducing the emissions embedded in the stuff we buy. On these issues, the government's commitment to action amounts to zero. Not net zero. Absolute zero.

Road transport in the UK releases the same amount of greenhouse gases as it [did in 1990](#): a shocking failure by successive governments. Yet Johnson intends to spend [another £27bn](#) on roads. Every major airport in the UK has [plans to expand](#).

### [Trials to suck carbon dioxide from the air to start across the UK](#)

[Read more](#)

Buildings release more [greenhouse gases](#) than they did in 2014, and the schemes intended to green them have collapsed. The green homes grant, which the government outsourced to a private company, has been a total fiasco, meeting roughly [8% of its target](#). At the current rate of installation, the UK's homes will be equipped with low-carbon heating in a [mere 700 years](#).

When I wrote Heat, we were promised that all new homes would soon be green ones. It still hasn't happened, and the date has been [pushed back](#) yet again, this time to 2025. Rubbish homes are still being built, which will either require a much more expensive refit or will lock in high emissions for the rest of their lives.

And no one in government wants to touch the biggest issue of all: the greenhouse gases embedded in the stuff we buy, which account for some [46% of our emissions](#). Government ministers [urge China](#) to cut its greenhouse gases, but our economic model depends on us buying junk we don't need with money we don't have. Because the fossil fuels required to produce most of it are burned overseas and don't appear in our national accounts, the government can wash its hands of the problem.

But something has changed for the better: us. In 2006, climate campaigners beat their heads against public indifference. Now, at last, we have mass

movements, and some highly effective actions, such as the successful shutdown of the McDonald's network by Animal Rebellion last week. If there is hope, this is where it lies.

- George Monbiot is a Guardian columnist
- 

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/may/26/britain-net-zero-targets-environmental-issues>

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

[Opinion](#)[Trade policy](#)

## This Australian trade deal shows how ‘Global Britain’ has already lost its way

[Rafael Behr](#)



Just like the prime minister’s promises on Brexit, Boris Johnson’s pledges of support to UK farmers will ring hollow



‘Welsh and Scottish rural communities are especially vulnerable to competition from Australian mega-farms.’ Boris Johnson visits Moreton farm near Wrexham, north Wales, in April. Photograph: WPA/Getty Images

‘Welsh and Scottish rural communities are especially vulnerable to competition from Australian mega-farms.’ Boris Johnson visits Moreton farm near Wrexham, north Wales, in April. Photograph: WPA/Getty Images

Wed 26 May 2021 03.00 EDT

You can tell that British farmers will be betrayed by Boris Johnson by the way he promises to look after them. The prime minister [has pledged support](#) equivalent to forfeited European subsidies. He says the sector will be safe from cut-price competition when new free trade deals are signed. He has told Minette Batters, president of the National Farmers’ Union, that he would “[rather die](#)” than hurt her members. Really? Death before cheap beef? Maybe Johnson can honour those pledges, but it would be out of character.

It would also defeat the purpose of Brexit for many Tory MPs. “Take back control” signalled many things to voters, but to Eurosceptic ideologues it meant liberation from the EU’s common external tariff. Having trade policy run from Brussels was proof of Britain’s colonisation by continental bureaucrats. Deals with non-Europeans are the prize for emancipation.

That is why Liz Truss, the trade secretary, is determined to secure a [zero-tariff agreement with Australia](#) in time for next month's G7 summit in Cornwall. The economic benefits would be marginal – shifting the growth dial by 0.02% over 15 years. But as a trophy for the “Global Britain” chest it is priceless. Other ministers – Michael Gove at the cabinet office and the environment secretary, George Eustice – [fret about the impact on domestic producers](#) who cannot compete with Australian mega-farms. Welsh and Scottish rural communities are especially vulnerable. Ministers who worry about the future of the union fear a fresh pot of nationalist grievance brewing.

Johnson's instincts are with the libertarians. His promises to farmers are as reliable as the assurances he once gave businesses in Northern Ireland that Brexit would erect “[no barriers of any kind](#)” to trade across the Irish Sea. He lied. The prime minister likes to be the giver of good news, and will satisfy that appetite (in himself and his audience) sooner than serve unpalatable truth.

The deal with Australia will be done. UK farmers will be told they have nothing to fear because current food safety standards will still apply and tariffs will be phased out gradually. Agriculture will continue in the British countryside, but its scale and character will change over time. Competition will generate new rural businesses and bankruptcies. That is how markets are supposed to work in the free-trade [Brexit](#) model – a stimulus to innovation; creative destruction. Tory MPs tend not to phrase it that way to farmers in their constituencies.

The Australian deal will be most consequential in setting expectations for what might be conceded when the time comes to do a deal with Washington. That is the holy grail of post-Brexit deals. Cabinet rows over antipodean livestock are just a rehearsal for a battle that will erupt when US demands land on the table.

The underlying tension is between the electoral tactics that delivered Brexit and its ideological genesis. Johnson's appeal to his party is rooted in Euroscepticism as an agenda for deregulation and buccaneering adventure on the high seas of globalisation. His Commons majority was won by appealing to voters whose economic and cultural demands point inwards, to

a policy of Britain-first protectionism. In campaign mode, Johnson managed to package that as one coalition. Government requires choices that pull it apart.

Such stresses are a routine feature of trade politics in the US. Candidates at state and federal level are steeped in arguments about the consumer benefits of cheap imports and jobs lost to offshoring. This only feels new to Westminster because for a generation the action was in Brussels. If MPs had better understood what was coming their way, they might have fought harder for powers of scrutiny, amendment and veto of future deals. Congress has vast leverage over a US president in such matters. The European parliament has more say in EU trade policy than the Commons can contribute to anything Johnson signs.

Trade agreements are international treaties and, as such, concluded by royal prerogative. There is a procedural mechanism by which MPs might, in theory, thwart ratification, but it has never been tested. And by then it is too late to change the actual terms of the deal. Brexiteers might call this a restoration of parliamentary sovereignty, but it looks a lot more like concentration of quasi-monarchical power in the hands of the prime minister.

In economic terms, autonomy in trade deals is no compensation for the loss of frictionless access to the EU single market. That exclusion is also a strategic downgrade. Brussels is a place where international standards are set, as is Washington; also, increasingly, Beijing. London is not in that club. Lord Frost, the minister for Brexit loose ends, last week told a committee of MPs that it was an “over-simplification” to carve the world into three rule-making superpowers and that Britain might also count alongside the US, the EU and China. No veteran of trade wars believes him.

It is a story that Brexiteers tell to justify a move that looks historically misjudged and outdated. The Eurosceptic idea of Britain as a global hub and free-trade evangelist was conceived in a different era. It is a hybrid of imperial nostalgia and late-20th century market utopianism. It took a generation for Tory acolytes of that cult to achieve their total victory in English politics, by which point the rest of the world had moved on.

The US has no reason to indulge Johnson's fantasies. A cosmetic trade deal to make Brexit look clever is not a priority for [Joe Biden](#). He is interested in rehabilitating a transatlantic alliance that Donald Trump vandalised, to which end Britain's insistence that it is something other than European is unhelpful: economic vanity and geopolitical stupidity.

Johnson has never been one for diplomacy, perhaps because it involves tact and relationships built on trust. His speeches rarely contain foreign policy or even references to other countries, except as caricature or metaphor. "[As Saudi Arabia is to oil, the UK is to wind](#)," he told last year's virtual Tory conference. It was the only glimpse of a world beyond British shores. The only reference to the EU was a false accusation that Labour is "scheming" to rejoin the bloc. There was no mention of the US, China, Russia, India or Africa.

Johnson's agenda is more parochial than he likes to imagine. He does not weigh trade deals in terms of jobs or growth but as rhetorical props in the great Brexit showcase. Who will pay for the production is an issue for later. For now, "Global Britain" is a performance put on for a domestic audience by a prime minister with his back turned to the real world.

- Rafael Behr is a Guardian columnist

---

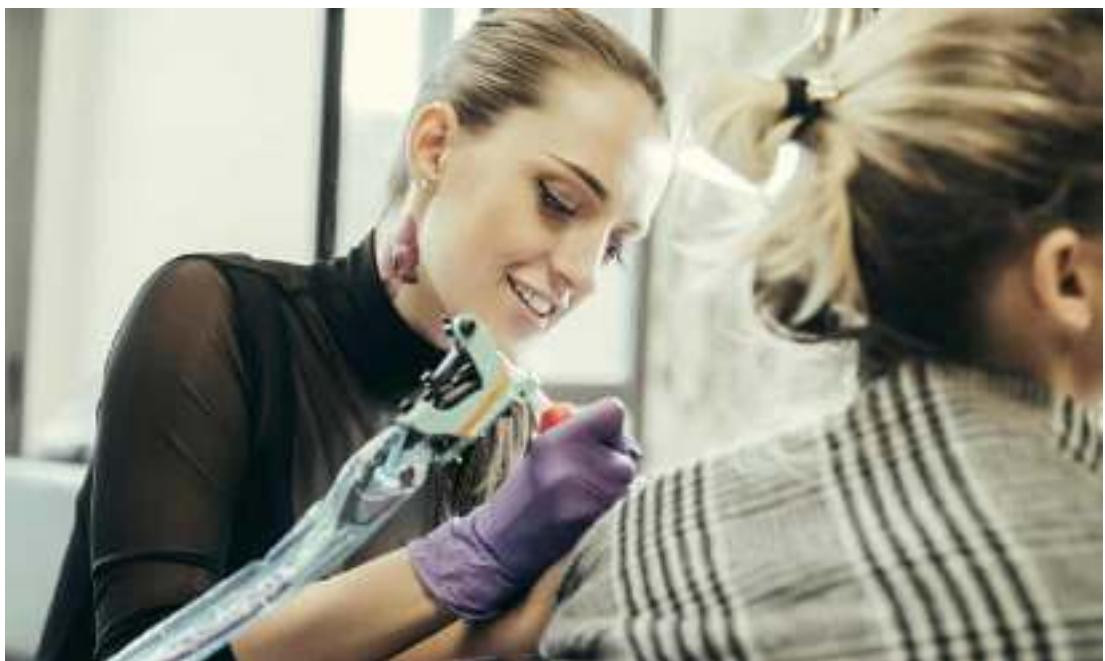
This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/may/26/australian-trade-deal-global-britain-boris-johnson-uk-farmers>

## OpinionTattoos

# How did I satisfy my restless hunger for touch? I got a new tattoo

[Megan Nolan](#)

As lockdown lifted, I commissioned another piece of body art. After an impossible year, the touch of the needle offered catharsis



‘Even for a comparative amateur like me, the experience of going back in was cathartic and special ...’ Photograph: Posed by models/Getty Images

‘Even for a comparative amateur like me, the experience of going back in was cathartic and special ...’ Photograph: Posed by models/Getty Images

Wed 26 May 2021 02.00 EDT

There was one thing I really wanted during the lockdowns (aside from the, uh, cessation of the pandemic). I quickly stopped entertaining the idea of anything so unimaginably distant and decadent as sex, but my hunger for touch did lead me to become consumed by the thought of getting a tattoo. I

also thought longingly of the brisk head massage I once received from a slightly cruel hairdresser, but it was the tattoo I kept coming back to.

By the time of the March 2020 lockdown, I counted seven tattoos, most of them small and simple doodle-like things, given by friends or at ill-advised parties in foreign countries. There is one particularly hideous rendition of a snail that was largely taken over and blurred by scar tissue after it was given to me by a very handsome and very drunk man at a squat party in Milan. It looks awful but I love it, of course, because of its origin and how it will help me to never forget that party, or the way it felt to be 26 and so stupid you let someone permanently mark your body because you fancy them a bit.

I got my first since the December lockdown last week, and one of the studio's artists told me I was far from alone in my preoccupation. He had clients who were in tears, he told me, as soon as the needle touched their skin – not from pain, but from relief and euphoria. Some of them were already fairly compulsive about regularly accruing tattoos in ordinary times, and the general sensory deprivation of being at home and understimulated increased their need. Even for a comparative amateur like me, the experience of going back in was cathartic and special. The specific, productive pain, the undeniability of the sensation, felt like a healing counteraction to a year in which nothing seemed to touch the sides.

Megan Nolan is an Irish writer based in London

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/may/26/how-did-i-satisfy-my-restless-hunger-for-touch-i-got-a-new-tattoo>

## OpinionConservatives

# The Tory ‘war on woke’ has a manifesto – and its targets are crushingly familiar

[Tim Bale](#)

A collection of essays from the Common Sense Group is a heady mix of hyperbole and risible conspiracy theory



‘Chris Loder (above) and Tom Hunt complain of politically correct police officers too busy taking the knee to chase criminals.’ Photograph: UK Parliament/Jessica Taylor/PA

‘Chris Loder (above) and Tom Hunt complain of politically correct police officers too busy taking the knee to chase criminals.’ Photograph: UK Parliament/Jessica Taylor/PA

Tue 25 May 2021 11.00 EDT

With 365 Conservative MPs in the Commons, it’s understandable that some of them, especially those who are relatively new to Westminster, are looking

for something to help them stand out from the crowd.

In the Theresa May years it was easy: declare yourself a member of the European Research Group (ERG) and you'd be whisked to a television studio before you could say "[“chuck Chequers”](#)" or "bin the backstop". But after Boris Johnson won an 80-seat majority to get Brexit done, things have got a bit harder.

True, there's now the [Northern Research Group \(NRG\)](#) and the [Covid Recovery Group \(CRG\)](#) but the trouble is neither of them have yet shown much sign of worrying the whips, so simply belonging to one of them isn't enough to get you a few minutes on Newsnight, let alone Good Morning Britain.

Cue the formation last summer of the ultra-traditionalist Common Sense Group. It has been set up by veteran MP John Hayes, who, back in the summer of 2005, helped found the [Cornerstone Group](#) (motto: "Faith, Flag and Family") in the belief that "the next Conservative leader must mount a counter-offensive in the culture wars [against rampant liberalism](#)".

David Cameron may have dashed those hopes, but Hayes and his erstwhile colleagues were clearly clairvoyant. A decade-and-a-half later, he and the 60 or so MPs who have gravitated to his new group can now claim to be at the cutting edge of the Johnson government's "[war on woke](#)".

So what better way to get themselves and their credo taken seriously than to put together a book? After all, it worked for the authors of 2012's [Britannia Unchained](#) – the *ne plus ultra* of 21st-century Thatcher fan-fiction. The fact that four of the five (Kwasi Kwarteng, Priti Patel, Dominic Raab, and Liz Truss) are now cabinet ministers must surely mean *something*, right?

Well, maybe. But the idea that the CSG's online oeuvre [Common Sense: Conservative Thinking for a Post-Liberal Age](#) will make as much of a splash strikes me as unlikely.

For one thing, it's a mixed bag in terms of topics covered and willingness to propose specific, workable policies. For another, too many of the contributions read more like extended op-eds for, say, the Mail or the

Express (one of whose journalists [helped to write and promote the book](#)) rather than anything you haven't seen somewhere before.

Its [folk devils](#) are all too familiar, too. James Sunderland MP bemoans a BBC desperate to "manipulate culture" by making Doctor Who female. His colleagues Chris Loder and Tom Hunt complain of politically correct police officers too busy taking the knee to chase criminals. Inevitably, though, the real villains of the piece are environmental "extremists" and identity politics iconoclasts, all of whom, Gareth Bacon MP informs us, are "motivated by darker emotions: hatred, jealously, malice, insecurity".

Meanwhile, any genuine attempt to generate a worthwhile discussion – an examination, say, of the difficulties around so-called cancel culture or the highly subjective recording of "non-crime hate incidents" – rapidly evaporates in the heat of a heady mixture of hyperbole, highly questionable assertions (institutional racism is a thing of the past, supposedly), and frankly risible conspiracy theory: apparently, social media companies have silenced lockdown sceptics because keeping us all at home is good for business.

Still, at least some of this wackier stuff has novelty value – something that can't be said for the [Migration Watch](#) boilerplate that dominates the three chapters on immigration. One such chapter, written by the MP Nick Fletcher, does little more than update the constituent who [infamously complained](#) to Enoch Powell about excrement being pushed through her letterbox; Fletcher reports that one he spoke to was obliged to live next door to six Eastern European men and was therefore "naturally concerned because he could see his community being withered away before his eyes, and his daughter no longer had friends on her street to play with".

There are, it should be said, some worthy exceptions. I might not agree with MPs Edward Leigh and Sally-Ann Hart about the threat posed by judicial activism to parliamentary democracy, but they have a case to make. Likewise, I couldn't quite get my head round their colleague Danny Kruger's excursion into political theory or Robin Millar's attempt to redefine poverty, but it was good to see them having a go.

Similarly, it's hard to believe that anyone could object to Joy Morrissey's emphasis on vocational and technical education – and while it's difficult to imagine Rishi Sunak being willing to meet the costs of the family support policies proposed by Fiona Bruce and David Burrowes (a current and a former MP), the problems they discuss clearly do require urgent action. Finally, even if you can't find much on which to agree with Alexander Stafford, the MP for Rother Valley, his chapter does at least expose the tension inherent in wanting a government committed to "levelling up" and prosecuting a culture war at the same time as promoting a smaller state and Thatcherite individualism.

It is precisely that Tory tension that will be the one to watch in the coming years. While [relatively few people in Britain](#) may actually be familiar with the term "woke", research suggests that many of the voters in former Labour strongholds who switched to the Conservatives in 2019 would agree with a lot of what the Common Sense Group stands for. But [that same research](#) also suggests that a significant proportion of other Tory MPs are (like many of their constituents) still socially, as well as economically, liberal. Whether, given their government's current complexion, they will be quite as keen as their culturally conservative colleagues to express their views in print, or elsewhere, remains to be seen.

- Tim Bale is a politics professor at Queen Mary University of London
- 

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/may/25/tory-war-on-woke-manifesto-common-sense-group>

[The politics sketch](#)[Nadhim Zahawi](#)

## **As Hancock ‘throws a sickie’, Zahawi suffers a dose of the hotspots**

[John Crace](#)



Vaccines minister forced to answer an urgent question about new Covid guidance for eight regions



Nadhim Zahawi digging himself in deeper. Photograph: UK Parliament/Jessica Taylor/PA

Nadhim Zahawi digging himself in deeper. Photograph: UK Parliament/Jessica Taylor/PA

Tue 25 May 2021 13.05 EDT

You're worried about the rate of infection in Covid hotspot areas. So what would you do? A) Get in touch with local leaders and health chiefs to agree extra local restrictions. B) Nothing and hope it goes away. Or C) Slip out some new guidance on the government website when no one is looking on a Friday night and express total surprise when local journalists only discover it three or four days later.

If you're Matt Hancock, you "throw a sickie". You've had enough punishment beatings in the [House of Commons](#) to last several ministerial careers and you've no intention of showing up for another. So it was left to the vaccines minister, Nadhim Zahawi, to answer an urgent question from the shadow health secretary, Jonathan Ashworth, about the new guidance for eight areas of the country. Fair to say, that's an hour of Zahawi's life that will have left him feeling more than a little under the weather.

“Let’s keep the politics out of this,” he began. Some hope. It was like this. The prime minister had mentioned as an aside in a press conference on 14 May that just because we were at step 3 on the roadmap on lockdown, it didn’t mean that people should stop being cautious. And any fool could see that what he really meant was that people should not travel in or out of the eight designated hotspots, which was the guidance put out on the government website a week later. So if the government was guilty of anything, it was that the techies responsible for uploading official advice had been a little slow on the uptake.

Understandably, this answer didn’t impress many MPs on either side of the house, with many Tories clearly fed up that their constituencies had been put into regional lockdown without any consultation with them, public health officials and local authorities. And the angrier they got, the more Zahawi found himself unable to stop digging himself in deeper. Of course people could travel to and from Covid hotspots, providing they only did it if it was for something essential. Such as going to visit a friend outdoors over the half-term break.

Only that wasn’t anything like the guidance on the government website, Ashworth and others pointed out. The official line was that essential travel did not include going to visit a few mates in their garden. And it was also completely opaque on whether travelling to school or work in an affected area counted as essential. When pressed on this last point by the Lib Dem Munira Wilson, Zahawi sounded shifty and evaded the question. Largely because he was just as in the dark as everyone else on this.

Labour’s Yvette Cooper tried to join the dots for him. Were people from Leicester, Bolton and the other six areas allowed to go on holiday to countries, such as Portugal, that were on the green list? And wasn’t the fundamental problem that the government had created the fiasco for itself by failing to put India on the travel red list until far too late in the day? Zahawi opened and closed his mouth but nothing coherent came out.

But it was the Tory MPs who inflicted the most damage. Though a few mates tried to come to his rescue by praising the vaccine rollout, most could barely contain their anger at the levels of incompetence on view. They certainly had no recollection of the prime minister effectively imposing

regional lockdowns on 14 May and were buggered if they would let their constituents be treated with such disrespect. The guidance is just guidance, Zahawi said, desperate to appease them. So people were free to ignore it if they felt like it. Though obviously he would rather they didn't. Was that more or less clear? It was the new take-it-or-leave-it lockdown. He couldn't have looked more relieved if he had tried when the speaker finally called time on his ordeal.

Still, the vaccines minister wasn't the only one having a bad day. In between trying to prepare for a prime minister's questions on Wednesday that could have some Classic Dom shaped curve balls, Boris Johnson was trying to explain both why the report into Islamophobia in the Tory party wasn't a whitewash and why he would never have described Muslim women in burqas as letterboxes if he had known he was going to become prime minister. Because it's fine to splatter casual racism across the comment pages of the Daily Telegraph. Just not when you're sitting in Downing Street. Then you have to keep your thoughts to yourself and say nothing.

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/may/25/as-hancock-throws-a-sickie-zahawi-suffers-a-dose-of-the-hotspots>

## OpinionGeorge Floyd

# George Floyd's death started a fire, but the kindling had been piling up for years

[Kojo Koram](#)

The killing a year ago sparked a justified, constructive anger at racial injustice that is still felt around the world



'In the wake of George Floyd's death came a remarkable change of atmosphere, even on the distant island of Great Britain.' A Black Lives Matter protest, London, 21 June 2020. Photograph: Leon Neal/Getty Images

'In the wake of George Floyd's death came a remarkable change of atmosphere, even on the distant island of Great Britain.' A Black Lives Matter protest, London, 21 June 2020. Photograph: Leon Neal/Getty Images

Tue 25 May 2021 03.00 EDT

It was all supposed to blow over in a few days. Thomas Jefferson once said of Black Americans that “[their griefs are transient](#)”. These were people who lived life with a more muted emotional palette than everybody else. As their pain was fickle and their depths of feeling shallow, their lives were more expendable than others’. An unemployed Black American in his mid-40s with a criminal record, George Floyd’s life wasn’t supposed to add up to much, especially in our age of mass distraction. Perhaps his name would trend on Twitter for a while. Perhaps there would be a handful of marches. But inevitably, we would soon all move on to more important matters. We always do.

After all, it is difficult to imagine a more mundane police encounter than the one facing the [officers who confronted Floyd](#) for apparently buying cigarettes with a counterfeit \$20 bill a year ago. This is not a scenario that should produce a world-changing event. And it wouldn’t have done, had things unfolded a little differently. With [last month’s conviction](#) of Derek Chauvin leading commentators to argue that, in the end, the system does work, it is worth remembering the direction that this case was taking before it sparked a global movement.

On 26 May 2020, a Minneapolis police spokesman, John Elder, issued a press release headlined: “Man Dies After Medical Incident During Police Interaction”. It [stated that](#) this man had “physically resisted officers” who were eventually able “to get the suspect into handcuffs” before they “noted he appeared to be suffering medical distress”. They called for an ambulance. The suspect went to the hospital. He died. The end.

No mention of “I can’t breathe”. No mention of Floyd calling for his “mama” as he pleaded for his life. No mention of an officer kneeling on Floyd’s neck for over nine excruciating minutes. Had the 17-year-old [bystander Darnella Frazier](#) not recorded a video of the incident on her phone, had that video not spread across the internet like wildfire and had masses of angry protesters not spilled on to the streets across the world, it is very possible that Chauvin would still be patrolling the streets of Minneapolis right now.

Does this mean that, but for a twist of fate, we might have never seen the mass demonstrations for racial justice that have marked the past year? In

truth, the death of George Floyd caused last summer's worldwide Black Lives Matter protests in the same way that the death of Franz Ferdinand caused the outbreak of the first world war. This was the spark, but the kindling had been piling up for years. If it hadn't been Floyd, it might have been [Breonna Taylor](#). Or [Ahmaud Arbery](#). Or [Daunte Wright](#). Here was [the fire next time](#) that James Baldwin had prophesied.

In its wake came a remarkable change in atmosphere, even on the distant island of Great Britain. There was a rush to at least be seen to be doing the right thing. Suddenly, "taking the knee" in protest against racial injustice, an action that cost the American footballer Colin Kaepernick his career [just a few years ago](#), became the standard way to begin all Premier League and English Football League matches. Establishment bodies such as the BBC and [the National Trust](#) faced the wrath of government ministers, high-profile journalists and even some of their own supporters by publicly taking steps to reckon with their racial legacy. Eventually even the most enduring of institutions, the monarchy, faced [charges of racism](#) from members of its own family.

The government had to respond. It launched yet another commission to look at racial disparity in the UK. A curious step, considering [multiple reviews](#) had already been conducted into the issue over the past few years, and the recommendations from these investigations were still being ignored. However, once the figures who would lead the commission were announced, questions were raised. The prime minister's policy adviser Munira Mirza, famous for arguing that institutional racism was "[a perception more than a reality](#)", was tasked with running the commission and Tony Sewell, who spent years [questioning the idea of institutional racism](#), was appointed as its chair.

So, when what has become known as the Sewell report was delivered and [the commission stated](#) that it "was especially concerned with the way the term 'institutional racism' is being applied in current discourse", few readers were surprised. The Black Lives Matter protests had begun, for many, to expand the common understanding of what constituted racism. That was dangerous, and needed shutting down.

Institutional racism was a phrase coined in the 1960s by civil rights organiser [Stokely Carmichael](#) (also known as Kwame Ture) to illustrate how racism was more about institutional power than individual prejudice. Carmichael stated that “if a white man wants to lynch me, that’s his problem. If he’s got the power to lynch me, that’s my problem.” Racism was not about what you wanted to do, but about what you could do and who you could do it to. What will the institutions of society – the police, the courts, the prison system – allow particular classes of people to endure? Racism was a question of which lives mattered to the state.

Half a century later, this question was still being asked by those looking at the aftermath of the Windrush scandal and the Grenfell Tower fire. Would Windrush have occurred if the people involved had been from Canada rather than the Caribbean? If Grenfell Tower had been home to some of the richer residents of Kensington and Chelsea rather than poor immigrant families, might their [pleas for fire-resistant cladding](#) have been heeded? As much as the Sewell report claimed that perceptions of racism today rested on the memory of “[historical incidents](#)”, a social system 500 years in the making did not crumble into dust with the passing of a few pieces of equality legislation in the late 20th century.

Yet despite government opposition and a wider cultural backlash against the movement, Black Lives Matter retains a broad appeal in the UK. By October last year, over half of the British public [continued to support](#) Black Lives Matter, with that number rising to seven in 10 for young people.

At the heart of criticism of the movement is the presumption that the increased focus on questions of race makes innocent white people feel bad about themselves. It leads to a spiral of guilt and self-recrimination that is no good to anybody. In reality, much of the response to Floyd’s murder and the movement that followed was not about laying blame and making people feel guilty. It was about making people, from all backgrounds, feel angry at things as they are. It was an outburst of anger at institutions that continue to carry the violence of the past into the present day. It was a justified, constructive anger, which resonated [not only in London and Birmingham and Manchester](#) but also in Buckinghamshire, St Ives and the Shetland Islands. And it is this wave of feeling – set into motion by one man in

Minneapolis – that is perhaps most concerning for those invested in preserving the status quo.

- Dr Kojo Koram teaches at the School of Law at Birkbeck College, University of London, and writes on issues of law, race and empire
- 

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/may/25/george-floyd-death-racial-injustice>

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

## 2021.05.26 - Around the world

- [India WhatsApp sues government over ‘mass surveillance’ internet laws](#)
- [Cyclone Yaas More than a million evacuated as storm nears India’s east coast](#)
- [Zimbabwe Anger over Nehanda statue amid collapsing economy](#)
- [George Floyd Family urges Biden to pass police reform bill as it stalls in Senate](#)
- [George Floyd Minneapolis marks a ‘troubling, long year’](#)
- [Colorado Police say man’s 1982 mountain rescue holds key to double murder mystery](#)
- [‘I had to step up’ Child labour in poorest countries rose during Covid, says report](#)
- [Iran Leadership accused of fixing presidential election](#)
- [Libya Children’s bodies wash up on beach after migrant boats sink](#)
- [China Shepherd hailed for saving six runners in deadly ultramarathon](#)
- [Turkey Mafia boss’s YouTube claims rattle government](#)

## [India](#)

# WhatsApp sues Indian government over ‘mass surveillance’ internet laws

Lawsuit says controversial new laws are unconstitutional and violate the right to the preservation of privacy



The WhatsApp legal challenge is the latest escalation of a battle between big tech companies which have a huge and growing user base in India  
Photograph: Sajjad Hussain/AFP/Getty Images

The WhatsApp legal challenge is the latest escalation of a battle between big tech companies which have a huge and growing user base in India  
Photograph: Sajjad Hussain/AFP/Getty Images

*Hannah Ellis-Petersen in Delhi*

Wed 26 May 2021 01.54 EDT

WhatsApp has sued the Indian government over new internet laws which the company says will “severely undermine” the privacy of their users.

The new IT laws, which have been called oppressive and draconian, give the Indian government greater power to monitor online activity, including on encrypted apps like WhatsApp and Signal. They were passed in February but were due to come into effect on Wednesday.

Under the laws, encryption – which keeps communications on the app private and inaccessible to outside parties – would have to be removed from WhatsApp in India and messages would have to be put into a “traceable” database. The government would then be able to identify and take action against the sender if any content was ruled “unlawful”.

['Wolf in watchdog's clothing': India's new digital media laws spark fears for freedoms](#)

[Read more](#)

WhatsApp, which has over 400 million users in India and is a fundamental tool of communication across the country, had previously said it would not store the data of its users. The company filed a lawsuit in the Delhi courts on Wednesday on the basis the new laws are unconstitutional and a violation of citizen’s right to the preservation of privacy, as mentioned in a 2017 supreme court ruling.

“Some governments are seeking to force technology companies to find out who sent a particular message on private messaging services. This concept is called ‘traceability’,” said WhatsApp in an online statement. “WhatsApp is committed to doing all we can to protect the privacy of people’s personal messages, which is why we join others in opposing traceability.”

The legal challenge is the [latest escalation](#) of a battle between big tech companies which have a huge and growing user base in India, and the Indian government, led by prime minister Narendra Modi, which has brought in increasingly heavy-handed measures to regulate the online sphere, which is seen as a space for dissent.

A lawyer for WhatsApp told the Delhi high court: “A government that chooses to mandate traceability is effectively mandating a new form of mass surveillance.

“In order to trace even one message, services would have to trace every message. There is no way to predict which message Indian government would want to investigate in the future.”

The Modi government has already clashed repeatedly with Twitter, demanding that the site remove anti-government tweets related to the farmers’ protests earlier this year and more recently tweets which criticised the government’s handling of the pandemic.

Twitter has complied with some requests and made certain posts unavailable to view inside India, but refused to comply with others. Facebook and Instagram were also recently instructed to remove anti-government posts mentioning coronavirus, on the basis they could cause “panic”.

Under the new IT rules, social media companies have to remove content within 36 hours of a legal order and have to appoint an Indian-based “compliance officer” to deal with any complaints. The laws also apply to online media, and have been described as further muzzling of the media in India.

On Monday, the Delhi police, who are under the control of the home ministry, arrived at the empty Twitter offices in Delhi late at night in what was initially described as a “raid”. It was later clarified as a legal notice being served to the company, after a tweet by a politician from the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was labelled as “manipulated media”. The tweet was of a document which evidence had shown was faked.

This is one of the first times that WhatsApp, an encrypted messaging app owned by Facebook, has filed a lawsuit against a national government. WhatsApp have also clashed with the government in Brazil over similar privacy concerns which led to the service being shut down multiple times.

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/26/whatsapp-sues-indian-government-over-mass-surveillance-internet-laws>

[India](#)

## Cyclone Yaas: more than a million evacuated as storm hits India's east coast

Winds snap power lines and kill two as residents in Odisha and West Bengal scramble for safety



National disaster response workers patrol the shore in West Bengal, India, ahead of Cyclone Yaas. Photograph: Rupak de Chowdhuri/Reuters

National disaster response workers patrol the shore in West Bengal, India, ahead of Cyclone Yaas. Photograph: Rupak de Chowdhuri/Reuters

*Associated Press*

Wed 26 May 2021 00.56 EDT

More than 1.2 million people have evacuated low-lying areas of India's east coast as Cyclone Yaas made landfall on Wednesday.

A week after [Cyclone Tauktae](#) claimed 155 lives in western India, wild weather has already caused two deaths and inflicted damage to homes amid heavy rain and high winds rains in Odisha and West Bengal states.

[Cyclone Tauktae: death toll rises to more than 90 after huge storm hits India](#)  
[Read more](#)

The Indian meteorological department said landfall began around 9am (3.30am GMT) on Wednesday and warned that it would generate waves higher than rooftops in some areas.

Coastal areas experienced wind gusts up to 155km/h (95mph) and pounding rain.

“We have been experiencing heavy rainfall and strong winds since last night,” said Bibhu Prasad Panda, a resident of Balasore district in the storm’s path. “Several trees have been uprooted. The cyclone has also led to snapping of overhead electricity cables.”

A tornado snapped electricity lines that electrocuted two people and damaged 40 houses in West Bengal’s Hooghly district on Tuesday, an official said.

Kolkata airport was shut until 8pm on Wednesday and train services were cancelled before the storm as a precaution, the railroad department said.



A satellite image provided of Cyclone Yaas approaching India's eastern coast. Photograph: AP

The cyclone has dumped more than 17cm (6.5in) of rain in Chandabali and Paradip regions of Odisha state since Tuesday, the meteorological department said.

A record 4,800 disaster workers had been positioned in the two states, equipped with tree and wire cutters, emergency communications, inflatable boats and medical aid, the national disaster response force said.

At least 20 districts in West Bengal state were expected to feel the brunt of the storm. Fishing trawlers and boats were told to take shelter.

The storm “is a terrible blow for many people in coastal districts whose families have been struck down by Covid-19 infections and deaths”, West Bengal state minister Bankim Chandra Hazra said.

“This cyclone spells double trouble for millions of people in India as there is no respite from Covid-19,” said Udaya Regmi, South Asia head of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Odisha’s chief minister, Naveen Patnaik, appealed to people being moved to cyclone shelters to wear double masks and maintain social distancing. “We

have to face both the challenges simultaneously,” Patnaik said.

A year ago, the most powerful cyclone in more than a decade hit eastern India. Nearly [100 people died in Cyclone Amphan](#), which flattened villages and destroyed farms in eastern India and Bangladesh.

“We haven’t been able to fix the damage to our home from the last cyclone. Now another cyclone is coming, how will we stay here?” said Samitri, who uses only one name.

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/26/cyclone-yaas-india-evacuation-odisha-west-bengal-landfall>

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

## Global development

# Anger in Zimbabwe at Nehanda statue amid collapsing economy

Criticism of priorities as tribute to liberation leader unveiled despite foreign food aid and lack of jobs



President Emmerson Mnangagwa unveils a statue in Harare of Mbuya Nehanda, a spirit medium who led the uprising against European settlers.  
Photograph: Aaron Ufumeli/EPA

President Emmerson Mnangagwa unveils a statue in Harare of Mbuya Nehanda, a spirit medium who led the uprising against European settlers.  
Photograph: Aaron Ufumeli/EPA

Global development is supported by



[About this content](#)

[Nyasha Chingono](#) in Harare

Wed 26 May 2021 02.00 EDT

The Zimbabwean government unveiled a statue of the liberation heroine and anti-colonialism figurehead Mbuya Nehanda in the capital, Harare, on Tuesday amid controversy about its priorities while the economy and health system collapse.

President [Emmerson Mnangagwa](#) vowed that the government would “repatriate Mbuya Nehanda’s skull and the skulls of others from the UK”, and said discussions about this were “on course”. The human remains of Nehanda and others who fought British colonisers are held at the Natural History Museum in London.

Critics attacked the government’s decision to spend an unknown amount of money on the statue, which had to be remade after the original sculpture was rejected for not looking enough like the figurehead of the first *Chimurenga*, or uprising.

[Robert Mugabe tells Natural History Museum to return human skulls](#)

[Read more](#)

The Zimbabwean novelist Tsitsi Dangarembga said the statue's unveiling on [Africa Day](#), which commemorates the founding of the Organisation of African Unity on 25 May 1963, was "absurd".

"The absurdity and misguidedness of co-opting a historical figure as a partisan symbol, and celebrating this symbol in a partisan manner in a way that hinders citizens' right of movement, on a day dedicated to a continental vision is so fundamental that only comprehensive transformation will improve Zimbabwe's prospects," Dangarembga told the Guardian.

Nehanda Charwe Nyakasikana, known as *Mbuya* – "grandmother" in the Shona language – was a spiritual leader of the Shona people who led a revolt against the 19th-century colonisation of Zimbabwe by [Cecil Rhodes](#) and his [British South Africa Company](#), whose officers eventually [captured and hanged her](#) in 1898.

She is widely commemorated in Zimbabwe, in street names and on buildings, and her legacy is linked to the notion of resistance that ignited the [guerrilla war](#) – known as the second Chimurenga – that began in 1972.

The journalist and government critic [Hopewell Chin'ono](#) said it was a disgrace for the government to squander money on a statue when the country's hospitals were in a state of collapse, short of medicines and reliant on donors during the pandemic.

"Ordinarily, honouring cultural and liberation heroes is a noble thing to do but I think it is a disgrace to do it at a time when Zimbabweans are going to bed on empty stomachs," Chin'ono said. "It is a disgrace to do it at a time when Zimbabweans are going to hospitals without medication. It is a serious disgrace when we build statues when our youths do not have jobs."

He said: "The person being honoured would have wanted people to have access to good medication."

Chin'ono [tweeted](#): "Doctors and nurses at Mpilo hospital in Bulawayo are having to carry sick patients or the dead using staircases, because elevators are not working! This is why we are saying building multimillion dollar statues when hospitals are not working is illogical!"

Nehanda, a spirit medium who led early resistance to white settler rule when the British arrived in 1890, was honoured with a larger-than-life bronze statue atop a lofty footbridge in Harare city centre.

After the statue was unveiled, traditional leaders from across the country performed ceremonies and festivities included a military parade, traditional music and dance.



Five-year-old Desire Matanda uses a pan to search for gold on the Odzi River in Mutare. The collapsing economy has forced many Zimbabwean children out of school and into work. Photograph: Aaron Ufumeli/EPA

Some Zimbabweans questioned how Mnangagwa could spend an undisclosed amount on the statue after receiving a donation of 5,000 tonnes of maize meal from South Africa for victims of Cyclone Idai , which [ravaged eastern Zimbabwe](#) in 2019.

Obert Masaraure, president of the Amalgamated Rural Teachers Union of Zimbabwe, said: “The education crisis, for example, cannot be solved by a mere statue but by paying teachers a living wage.

“Mbuya Nehanda did her part and departed; we are duty bound as a generation to find solutions to the current challenges.”

After successive lockdowns in Zimbabwe during the pandemic, [life has become unbearable](#) for ordinary people working in the informal sector. The deteriorating economy has further crippled a health sector under the additional strain of Covid.

Blessing Vava, national director of the [Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition](#), said the government should focus on tackling the soaring unemployment rate.

“It is a matter of priorities – what we need now is a clear, concrete economic revival plan, and statues can be constructed later. The erection of a statue should not be a preoccupation or even a success story of any serious government in the modern day,” Vava said.

The unveiling of the monument sparked wide debate on social media, with [many people questioning](#) spending money on “non-essentials”, even though they agreed on the historical importance of Nehanda.

However, Mnangagwa said: “This statue is a bold and unapologetic statement that we are a people who know who we are and where we came from. It is a declaration that we stand proud of our nation and history.”

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/may/26/anger-in-zimbabwe-at-nehanda-statue-amid-collapsing-economy>.

## George Floyd

# George Floyd family urges Biden to pass police reform bill as it stalls in Senate

Floyd's brother describes Biden as a 'genuine guy' but urged him to pass a law 'to protect people of color' at White House meeting

- [Special report: The fight to whitewash US history](#)

02:42

George Floyd's family urges Biden to pass laws to 'protect people of colour' – video

*[David Smith in Washington](#)*

*[@smithinamerica](#)*

Tue 25 May 2021 17.42 EDT

"Say his name," said seven-year-old Gianna Floyd. In bright sunshine outside the west wing of the White House, family members and lawyers raised their fists and said her father's name in chorus: "George Floyd!"

They were marking exactly one year since the police murder of Floyd, an African American man, in Minneapolis shook America with months of nationwide protests against racial injustice and demands for police reform.

[Biden to meet George Floyd's family on anniversary of his murder – live](#)  
[Read more](#)

On Tuesday the family brought that conversation to Washington. [Joe Biden](#), whose own family has been haunted by grief, apparently demonstrated an empathy many found lacking in his predecessor, Donald Trump, during a private meeting of more than an hour.

Floyd's brother, Philonise described Biden as a "genuine guy" and told reporters the family had a "great" discussion with him and Vice-President Kamala Harris. "They always speak from the heart and it's a pleasure just to be able to have the chance to meet with them when we have that opportunity to," he said.

According to a pooled report, Biden, who later travelled to Wilmington, Delaware, to attend the funeral of a former staff member, reflected on the anniversary. "It takes a lot of courage to go through it," he said of the Floyd family. "And they've been wonderful."

Asked about Gianna, Biden said the first thing she did was run to him and give him a hug, then ask for snacks. Gianna had Cheetos and milk, he added before joking: "My wife's going to kill me."



A marine holds the door as Gianna Floyd, the daughter of George Floyd, walks into the White House. Photograph: Evan Vucci/AP

America's racial reckoning across business, culture and society has not yet been matched by legislative action. Biden had set a deadline of Tuesday for the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, which contains reforms such as a ban on chokeholds, to become law.

It passed the House of Representatives in March but is faltering in the Senate where Republicans object to a provision ending qualified immunity, which shields officers from legal action by victims and families for alleged civil rights violations. The family urged quicker action.

Philonise said pointedly: “If you can make federal laws to protect the bird which is the bald eagle, you can make federal law to protect people of colour.”

Brandon Williams, Floyd’s nephew, added: “He let us know that he supports passing the bill, but he wants to make sure that it’s the right bill and not a rushed bill.”

The family’s lawyer, Ben Crump, said the group was about to meet Senators Cory Booker and Tim Scott, who are working on a bipartisan deal. “We all want just policing where George Floyd will get an opportunity to take a breath without having a knee on his neck,” he said. “It has been 57 years since we’ve had meaningful legislation.”



George Floyd's family meets with Joe Biden and Kamala Harris.  
Photograph: REX/Shutterstock

Some observers have suggested that Biden should use his bully pulpit to push Congress harder. The anniversary came as a warning that patience

could wear thin.

The president, who made racial justice central to his election campaign and enjoyed strong support among African American voters, issued a statement following the meeting. “The Floyd family has shown extraordinary courage, especially his young daughter Gianna, who I met again today,” he said. “The day before her father’s funeral a year ago, Jill and I met the family and she told me, ‘Daddy changed the world’. He has.”

Biden added that he appreciates “the good-faith efforts from Democrats and Republicans” to pass a meaningful bill out of the Senate. “We have to act. We face an inflection point. The battle for the soul of America has been a constant push and pull between the American ideal that we’re all created equal and the harsh reality that racism has long torn us apart.”

Floyd died on 25 May 2020 when the then Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin kneeled on his neck for more than nine minutes, despite the 46-year-old repeatedly saying he could not breathe.

The killing, captured on video by a bystander, triggered months of demonstrations at systemic racism and policing. Chauvin was convicted of murder and is awaiting sentencing next month.

Floyd was honoured across America on Tuesday. In Minneapolis, a foundation created in his memory organised an afternoon of music and food in a park near the downtown courtroom where Chauvin stood trial. Nine minutes of silence were observed. Later, mourners were to gather for a candlelight vigil.



A woman meditates on the anniversary of the police murder of George Floyd, at George Floyd Memorial Square in Minneapolis. Photograph: Kerem Yucel/AFP/Getty Images

Barack Obama, the first Black US president, issued a statement that acknowledged hundreds more Americans have died in encounters with police but also expressed hope.

“Today, more people in more places are seeing the world more clearly than they did a year ago.” he said. “It’s a tribute to all those who decided that this time would be different – and that they, in their own ways, would help make it different.”

Chuck Schumer, the Democratic Senate majority leader, noted how the “stomach-churning video” of Floyd’s death rippled beyond the US.

“The name of George Floyd was chanted in Rome, Paris, London, Amsterdam, Berlin and Mexico City,” he said. “As recently as this weekend, professional soccer players in the [English] Premier League knelt before the game in support of the global movement against racism touched off by George Floyd.

“This was not only a fight for justice for one man and his family, who I’ve had the privilege to meet with, but a fight against the discrimination that

Black men and women suffer at the hands of state power, not just here in America but around the globe.”

Earlier, the Floyd family had visited the Capitol to push the police reform legislation in meetings with members of Congress including House speaker [Nancy Pelosi](#).

Karen Bass, a Democrat and the lead House negotiator, renewed her commitment to compromise with Republicans.

“We will get this bill on President Biden’s desk,” she said. “What is important is that ... it’s a substantive piece of legislation, and that is far more important than a specific date. We will work until we get the job done. It will be passed in a bipartisan manner.”

Legislation has been pursued in all 50 states and the District of Columbia to increase accountability or oversight of police; 24 states have enacted new laws.

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/may/25/biden-george-floyd-family-anniversary-of-murder>

## [George Floyd](#)

# Minneapolis celebrates George Floyd's life after a 'troubling, long year'



A concert at George Floyd Square on the first anniversary of George Floyd's death, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Photograph: Nicholas Pfosi/Reuters

A concert at George Floyd Square on the first anniversary of George Floyd's death, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Photograph: Nicholas Pfosi/Reuters

Residents gathered across the city to honor Floyd and other victims of police violence, and vowed to hold officers accountable

*[Amudalat Ajasa](#) in Minneapolis*

Tue 25 May 2021 21.15 EDT

In downtown Minneapolis, the city that was plagued with tension during the Derek Chauvin murder trial last month, a celebration of George Floyd's life was held less than a mile from where the white former Minneapolis officer was convicted of all three counts of his murder.

The event, organized by the George Floyd Memorial Foundation, was filled with shrieks from children as they leapt in bouncy houses while others filled the air with bubbles. The smells from a dozen food trucks penetrated the space as people danced and basked in the sun.

[Teen who filmed George Floyd's death speaks out: 'It changed me'](#)

[Read more](#)

"I consider this a celebration of life and George Floyd," said Theodia Henry as he sat with his family in downtown [Minneapolis](#). "I haven't seen this in a long time. It's peaceful and people are dancing."

Organizers and community members clapped and stepped to line dances as popular hip-hop and R&B songs blasted on the speakers.

On the stage in the middle of the field, members of the Floyd family, the Minneapolis mayor, Jacob Frey, the former president of Minneapolis' NAACP Nekima Levy Armstrong, and others spoke to the crowds of people.



George Floyd's sister Bridgett speaks on stage between Floyd family attorney Ben Crump and Reverend Al Sharpton during a rally hosted by the George Floyd Global Memorial in Minneapolis. Photograph: Nicholas Pfosi/Reuters

“It’s been a troubling year, a long year,” Floyd’s sister Bridgett told the crowd. “But we made it. They say with God all things are possible and I’m a true believer in that … The love is very outpouring today. The love is here. George is here.”

Bridgett Floyd [opted to sit out a](#) family meeting [with Joe Biden](#) at the White House, saying [the president](#) must do more to expedite action on police reform legislation.

01:57

Thousands gather in US cities mark one year anniversary of George Floyd's death – video

Floyd’s killing a year ago spurred dramatic protests across Minneapolis that spread to the rest of the US and eventually the world, calling for an end to racism and especially police brutality. Floyd’s dying plea, “I can’t breathe,” the same last words as Eric Garner, who was killed in New York in 2014, became a rallying call as tension between police forces and civilians came to a head.

“George Floyd wasn’t an act that was only about American justice, it was global,” said local resident Michael Jones, 59, as he sat at a table in his wheelchair. “There were protests around the world at the inhumanity of that officer with his knee on his neck.”

In the days leading up the day of remembrance, organizers across Minneapolis hosted a series of memorial events. As well as events in Minneapolis, a moment of silence was also held in New York and a rally was held in Los Angeles to honor Floyd. Globally, rallies took place in Greece, Spain and Germany to mark the day.

George Floyd wasn’t an act that was only about American justice, it was global

*Michael Jones*

Despite the beaming sun and humidity, protesters bore the heat to pay their respect to victims and vow to hold police officers accountable.

Amid chants of “You can’t stop the revolution” and “I believe that we will win,” family members of Floyd, Daunte Wright, Breonna Taylor, Oscar Grant, alongside family members of local victims of police brutality, marched with protesters.

The intersection of 38th and Chicago, also known as George Floyd Square where Floyd was killed, was set to host a candlelight vigil along with musical performances.



The intersection of 38th Street and Chicago Avenue on in Minneapolis.  
Photograph: Brandon Bell/Getty Images

Many people expressed their disappointment with the lack of concrete change they have seen in policing in the year since Floyd died. Calls to defund, abolish or rebuild the police force have circulated across the United States.

“The only time we are going to see change is if we dig up the whole system, the whole United States system and rebuild it,” said Trinity Shaw, a 22 year-old activist who lives near the third police precinct that was burned down last May. “White supremacy is so ingrained in the system that there’s no way around it.”

While some people are doubtful that change will come, others said they feel a shift coming.

“We are on the move. Like when Martin Luther King said, ‘We’re on the move and change is going to come,’” Jones concluded.

Chauvin awaits sentencing, but faces up to 40 years in state prison for his murder charges. The three other fired officers involved in George Floyd’s death are set to go to trial next March.

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/may/25/minneapolis-george-floyd-memorial-one-year>

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

## [Colorado](#)

# Police say man's 1982 mountain rescue holds key to double murder mystery

- Alan Phillips accused of killing two female hitchhikers in 1982
- Phillips, 70, rescued from mountain pass in Colorado that night



Alan Phillips was arrested in March over the deaths of Annette Schnee and Barbara Jo Oberholtzer 39 years ago. Photograph: AP

Alan Phillips was arrested in March over the deaths of Annette Schnee and Barbara Jo Oberholtzer 39 years ago. Photograph: AP

[Richard Luscombe](#)

[@richlusc](#)

Wed 26 May 2021 02.00 EDT

Investigators in [Colorado](#) have linked the extraordinary 1982 rescue of a stranded motorist from a frozen mountain pass to the murders the same day

of two young female hitchhikers – one of the state's most notorious and enduring cold cases.

Alan Phillips, 70, was arrested in March over the killings of Annette Schnee, 21, and Barbara Jo Oberholtzer, 29, who went missing while hitchhiking separately near the ski resort of Breckenridge, where they both worked.

['I allowed myself to feel guilty for a very long time': the teenage cashier who took George Floyd's \\$20 bill](#)

[Read more](#)

Four decades of progress in DNA testing allowed detectives to finally match Phillips to samples found at the murder sites, through genetic genealogy.

The appearance of his mugshot on local television caught the attention of retired fire chief Dave Montoya, who recognised the man he rescued from the top of Guanella Pass on a freezing January night 39 years ago.

Phillips drew attention by flashing an SOS message with his truck's headlights. It was spotted by a sheriff who was in an airliner flying overhead, then relayed to authorities by the plane's pilot.

The bodies of the two victims were found months apart, but detectives now allege that Phillips, a father of three, kidnapped, assaulted and murdered both women on 6 January 1982, the day he was rescued. He was arrested in Dumont, Colorado, 20 miles from Guanella Pass, and is scheduled to make a first court appearance in September.

“We ended up picking up a guy straight out of hell,” Montoya told [Denver's KUSA TV](#).

Montoya said the circumstances of the rescue were “the craziest thing I ever heard of”, and recalled reaching Phillips shortly after the alert was received by the fire department in Clear Creek county.

“Sure as heck, there he was in his little pickup, and he saw me and said, ‘Oh, God, I’m saved,’” Montoya said.

“He said he got drunk and decided to drive home. And I said, ‘You came up over the pass?’ And he said, ‘Well, it seemed like a good idea.’ I thought, how in the heck did this guy get so lucky, for all the stuff to fall into place?”

Montoya said he noticed a large, fresh bruise on Phillips’s face, which he said the then 30-year-old said he sustained when he left his truck to urinate then collided with it in zero visibility as he returned.

Detectives believe Phillips, a car mechanic, shot both women and dumped their bodies before attempting to drive across the mountain as the temperature fell to -20F.

Oberholtzer was found by her family 10 miles south of Breckenridge on a snow embankment the following day, about 20 miles from where some of her belongings were recovered, according to the Colorado bureau of investigation (CBI).

Schnee was found six months later by a youth in Park county. The CBI said she was discovered face down in a stream with a gunshot wound to her back.

Charlie McCormick, a detective who worked on the case from 1989 as a private investigator for the victims’ families, and later as a volunteer for Denver law enforcement, said genetic genealogy research had unlocked the case.

The process involves uploading crime scene DNA to genealogy databases in the hope of finding a familial match. It was a “phenomenal” moment when the lead researcher called to say the link to Phillips was found, McCormick said.

The detective said he was surprised Phillips had remained living so close to the scene of the murders.

“If I had done something like that, I’d have been long gone,” he told KUSA TV. “After avoiding it for all these years, he’s now going to have to deal with it.”

After Phillips’s arrest in March, Schnee’s mother, Eileen Franklin, 88, said her family had endured “39 years of hell”.

“I thought there’d be no closure. I thought maybe I’d be gone before I had closure to this case,” she told Denver’s [Channel 7 News](#). “I’m ready to go when it’s my time now.”

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/may/26/colorado-police-murder-cold-case-alan-phillips>

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

## Global development

# **'I had to step up': Child labour in poorest countries rose during Covid, says report**

Study finds children in Ghana, Nepal and Uganda in dangerous, exploitative work, with long hours and little pay



A child selling vegetables in Kathmandu, Nepal. The vast majority of children interviewed for the report said their family income had been hit by the pandemic and resulting lockdowns. Photograph: Sunil Sharma/ZUMA Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

A child selling vegetables in Kathmandu, Nepal. The vast majority of children interviewed for the report said their family income had been hit by the pandemic and resulting lockdowns. Photograph: Sunil Sharma/ZUMA Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

Global development is supported by



[About this content](#)

[Lizzy Davies](#) and [Pete Pattisson](#)

Wed 26 May 2021 01.30 EDT

Gopal Magar's father has had a drinking problem for as long as he can remember, but when Kathmandu went into lockdown last spring, it got worse. With five members of his family confined to a small room in the south of the city, tempers frayed and the 14-year-old saw his father beat his mother again and again. One day Gopal could stand it no longer. He fought back, and then fled, leaving his parents, and his school, behind.

Gopal now lives with his older brother on the other side of the city, and has swapped his classroom for a construction site. "I have fewer problems now, but I need to work really hard," he says. He starts work at six in the morning and for the next 12 hours hauls sand, loads bricks and mixes concrete. He earns about £7 a day and sends some of it to his mother to help her buy food and pay the rent.

Gopal does not know if he will ever go back to school: "I have no interest in study at the moment because of my family problems."

His story is not unusual: the lockdowns in some of the world's poorest countries have seen schools close, households lose their incomes, and, in some cases, a growth in domestic abuse. The result, according to a report, has been a rise in child labour, as children like Gopal have found themselves in often precarious and exploitative work, with long hours, low pay, and scant regard for safety.

Jo Becker, director at [Human Rights Watch](#) (HRW), which co-published the report with the [Initiative for Social and Economic Rights](#) in Uganda and [Friends of the Nation](#) in Ghana, said: “The key driver is the economic situation that so many families are facing because they have lost jobs, they have lost income. The lockdowns in many countries have really dealt a blow.”

“Some of the children we spoke to said their parents had been taking out loans, falling into debt, and so they have felt pressure to work to help their families meet their needs.”

Researchers interviewed 81 children between the ages of 8 and 17 in Ghana, Nepal, and [Uganda](#). The vast majority said their family income had been hit by the pandemic and resulting lockdowns, and all of them described undertaking work ranging from rickshaw driving and gold mining to carpet weaving and brick making.

“I started working because we were so badly off,” says Florence, 13, in Uganda. “The hunger at home was too much for us to sit and wait.”

[Covid-19 prompts 'enormous rise' in demand for cheap child labour in India](#)  
[Read more](#)

In each of the countries, more than one-third of the children interviewed worked at least 10 hours a day, in some cases every day. Some Nepali children recounted working 14 hours a day or more in carpet factories. Gita, 14, says that her family could “barely get by” on her mother’s salary and that she feels it is her duty to bring in some money to the home. “I couldn’t just sit back,” she says. “I had to step up.” So Gita worked at a loom from 4am until 10 pm each day, with an hour’s break. Once she returned to school she

continued to weave for 13 hours a day – five hours before classes and eight hours after.



Gold panners, Kibi, Ghana. The report found children working in the county's mines despite the practice being illegal. Photograph: Cristina Aldehuela/AFP/Getty

Some of the most shocking testimony in the report is from [Ghana](#), where children detailed their work in goldmines, carrying heavy loads, crushing ore with hammers, breathing dust from processing machines, and handling mercury. Ibrahim, 14, says crushing ore is the most difficult part of the work: "I get really exhausted whenever I do that." For his after-school job – five hours at the mine – he is paid 20 cedis (£2.40).

It is illegal for children to work in Ghana's goldmines and the government has identified child labour as a "rapidly growing concern". But, Becker said, in many places enforcement of such laws has suffered as a result of the pandemic.

"Most of the countries that we've looked at have good child labour laws that are in line with international standards, but because of Covid-19 restrictions labour inspections are down and without enforcement and monitoring employers are going to feel less pressure to apply the law," she said.

## 'I miss school': 800m children still not fully back in classes

[Read more](#)

According to the International Labour Organization, the number of children worldwide in some form of child labour decreased by about 38% between 2000 and 2016, partly it is thought as a result of the strategic use of child benefit payments to families with children.

Becker said that progress had been sent into reverse by the pandemic. She urged governments to re-commit to child benefit payments to “[relieve] the financial pressure on families so that they can buy food, pay for their housing without resorting to child labour”.

National back-to-school campaigns were also needed to make sure that children return to the classroom once schools reopen, the report said. Unicef warned last month that an estimated 800 million children around the world were still not fully back in school and that the longer closures continued the less likely it was that pupils would return.

HRW has called on governments to embark on mass outreach programmes to persuade communities that children – especially girls and migrants – should come back “as soon as it is safe”.

Such efforts would be welcome news to one of Gopal’s teachers, Sagendra Shrestha. Gopal, he said, “was improving so much. Without the pandemic I’m sure he’d still be in school”. Most schools in Kathmandu have been closed for 11 of the past 14 months. Shrestha said many parents had no internet access and did not know how to support children’s learning. “They have to go out to work, so they take their children with them,” he said. “I see lots of children on construction sites nowadays.”

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/may/26/i-had-to-step-up-child-labour-in-poorest-countries-rose-during-covid-says-report>

## [Iran](#)

# Iran's leadership accused of fixing presidential election

Guardian Council's bar on reformist candidates has left narrow field of hardliners for June poll



The seven candidates in the running: Mohsen Rezaei, Abdolnasser Hemmati, Alireza Zakani, Mohsen Mehralizadeh, Amir-Hossein Ghazizadeh Hashemi, Saeed Jalili, Ebrahim Raisi.

Photograph: AP

The seven candidates in the running: Mohsen Rezaei, Abdolnasser Hemmati, Alireza Zakani, Mohsen Mehralizadeh, Amir-Hossein Ghazizadeh Hashemi, Saeed Jalili, Ebrahim Raisi.

Photograph: AP

*[Patrick Wintour](#) Diplomatic editor*

Tue 25 May 2021 13.53 EDT

Iran's leadership has been accused of a transparent fix after most prominent reformists were barred from running in next month's presidential elections, leaving one of the most politically constrained fields in the 41-year history of the republic.

Delaying the announcement to the last minute, the country's 12-strong Guardian Council – the body that vets candidates – barred most reformist or centrist candidates, leaving a field of seven, largely made up of hard-liners. The manipulation was so clear that even one of the candidates likely to benefit most, Ebrahim Raisi, the current head of the judiciary, claimed he was trying to persuade the council to rethink. Raisi said he was conducting consultations to make the election more participatory and competitive.

The outgoing president, Hassan Rouhani, [criticised the move](#) and had urged the ministry of interior not to publish the list of seven. "Minimal participation is not in anyone's interest and the first losers as a result of minimal participation are the people and no political group will benefit from minimal participation," Rouhani's spokesman said.

Azar Mansouri, of the Iran Reformists Front, an alliance of smaller parties, said: "What the Guardian Council did is illegal and in violation of people's rights to vote in free elections . It has made elections meaningless."

Another reformist, Ali Sufi, insisted the game was not yet over and said they may swing behind one of the seven qualified candidates, probably Abdolnasser Hemmati, the technocratic governor of Iran's central bank.

The reformist Etemad newspaper published an opinion piece in which the author said he had laughed so much when he saw the list he shocked his family. "The list of seven shows that there is a complete disconnect between the forces involved in the Guardian Council and society, with each travelling in their own world," the article said.

The risk the hardliners run is a mass boycott, leaving the Conservatives with a threadbare mandate but control of all the branches of government. The implications for Iran's willingness to negotiate with the US on the future of the nuclear deal is disputed.

Among those barred from standing include Ali Larijani, the former speaker of the parliament and a close adviser to the current supreme leader; Es'haq Jahangiri, the current vice-president; and Mostafa Taijadeh, who was held in Evin prison from 2009 to 2016.

Amoli Larijani, who is the younger brother of Ali Larijani and is himself a member of the Guardian Council, tweeted that he had never seen such an indefensible decision by the council as the list of qualified candidates. He blamed “the increasing involvement of the intelligence services” in the vetting.

No woman was permitted to stand, in common with all previous elections, even though members of the council claimed the rules did not exclude women.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the populist president between 2005 and 2014, has also been banned. The elections are on 18 June.

Ali Larijani told his campaign team: “I have accepted the result and I have no objection and I do not request a re-examination.” He also urged everyone to participate in the elections, adding he had done God’s duty.

Larijani was disqualified in part because his daughter Fatemeh lives in the US, where she is studying medicine at Cleveland State University in Ohio.



Mohsen Rezaei, centre: the candidate took running for election seriously, posting a video of himself exercising to prove his fitness. Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock

Another candidate, Mohsen Rezaei, the secretary of the Expediency Council, hastily posted a video of himself running, exercising and playing football following rumours that he was to be excluded on health grounds. It clearly convinced the Guardian Council as he was allowed to stand, in his fourth tilt at the presidency.

The qualification criteria include age, education and piety. The 12 members of the Guardian Council, six jurists and six lawyers, are not required to give any explanation of why they exclude particular candidates but always assert they are not politically motivated.

The exclusion of a relative moderate like Larijani suggests Iran's true power brokers do not want to take any risks in the election and feared that he might have won.

The mood of the Iranian electorate is hard to gauge in advance, and a wave can build quickly in the brief election campaign if a candidate can overcome [the apathy that currently seems to be pervasive](#).

Larijani was always going to face an uphill task since he is associated with the current Rouhani administration, which has failed to bring Iranians the promised economic rewards from signing the nuclear deal with the US in 2015. Hardliners are claiming a vote for their camp is a vote to reject the status quo.

Those who have been cleared to stand include the clear frontrunner and approved choice, Ebrahim Raisi. Raisi, the current head of the judiciary, is standing with largely the same programme he had when he stood and lost in 2017, with a manifesto that includes fighting corruption, “caring for the downtrodden and the underprivileged” and achieving stable employment.

Besides Raisi, Rezaei and Hemmati, the others cleared to stand are Saeed Jalili, a frugal principalist and past nuclear negotiator, Alireza Zakani, a former MP who has been twice previously disqualified, Amir-Hossein Ghazizadeh Hashemi, spokesman for radical principlist group Jebheh Paydari; and Mohsen Mehralizadeh, who was vice-president during the Khatami administration and the candidate with the most reformist connections and credentials.

Opponents of the conservatives face a choice between Hemmati, Mehralizadeh, or a boycott.

The names on the approved list were leaked overnight to the conservative website Fars News, showing the political links between the council and the conservative press.

A total of 592 had applied to stand.

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/25/irans-leadership-accused-of-fixing-presidential-election>

## Migration

# Children's bodies wash up on Libyan beach after migrant boats sink

Charities post photographs of dead babies and toddlers said to have left Libya in dinghies in recent days



More than 130 people died when a rubber boat capsized in the Mediterranean on 22 April. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

More than 130 people died when a rubber boat capsized in the Mediterranean on 22 April. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

[Lorenzo Tondo](#)

[@lorenzo\\_tondo](#)

Tue 25 May 2021 08.21 EDT

Photographs have emerged of the bodies of babies and toddlers washed up on a beach in Libya, highlighting the human tragedy of the migration crisis on Europe's borders.

According to one of the charities that posted the photos on Twitter, the children had been travelling with their parents on one of the many dinghies that set off from [Libya](#) in recent days.

“I’m still in shock for the horror of these images,” Oscar Camps, the founder of Proactiva Open Arms, wrote on Twitter. “These small children and women had dreams and life ambitions.”

Nancy Porsia, an Italian journalist and Libya expert, said the bodies were discovered on a beach in Zuwara on Saturday, when they were collected by the Libyan military and buried in the cemetery in nearby Abu Qamash.

The images have been compared to the photograph of [Alan Kurdi, the three-year-old](#) who was found face down on a Turkish beach in 2015, which galvanised public attention to the refugee crisis.

### [A photo of a child's body on the beach in Libya](#)

Mario Draghi, the Italian prime minister, said: “Images of bodies of babies and toddlers washed up on a beach in Libya are unacceptable.”

Their publication came as he met the French president, Emmanuel Macron, in Brussels to discuss the management of migrant arrivals and the prospects for stabilisation in Libya and central [Africa](#) with the help of reinforced French-Italian cooperation.

A spokesperson for the UN migration agency in Italy said it was not clear when the victims had set off from Libya and what had happened to their vessel. “These are dramatic images,” said Flavio Di Giacomo. “We’re trying to get to the bottom of this with our colleagues in Libya. There are many shipwrecks that are never recorded. We can’t exclude that it may be one of those.”

Thousands of people have departed Libya for the coast of Europe in recent weeks as people-smugglers take advantage of calm seas to launch dozens of boats. Many never reach their destination.

Last week, Tunisian authorities [said dozens of people died](#) in a shipwreck off the coast of Tunisia, while in April [more than 130 people died](#) when their

rubber boat capsized in stormy seas off the coast of Libya.

[According to the UN's migration agency](#), about 630 people have died in the central Mediterranean this year while attempting to reach Europe.

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/25/childrens-bodies-wash-up-on-libyan-beach-after-migrant-boats-sink>

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

[China](#)

## Shepherd hailed for saving six runners in deadly China ultramarathon

Zhu Keming rescued runners during cross-country mountain race in which 21 other competitors died



Zhu Keming in the cave where he sheltered the runners, which he had previously stocked up with food and clothes for emergencies. Photograph: CNS/AFP/Getty Images

Zhu Keming in the cave where he sheltered the runners, which he had previously stocked up with food and clothes for emergencies. Photograph: CNS/AFP/Getty Images

*Agence France-Presse in Shanghai*

Tue 25 May 2021 08.31 EDT

A shepherd has been hailed as a hero in [China](#) after it emerged that he saved six stricken runners during an ultramarathon in which 21 other competitors

died.

Zhu Keming was trending on Weibo on Tuesday, three days after a 100km (60-mile) cross-country mountain race in the north-western province of Gansu turned deadly in freezing rain, high winds and hail.

The incident triggered outrage and mourning in China, as questions swirled over why organisers apparently ignored warnings about the incoming extreme weather.

Zhu was grazing his sheep on Saturday around lunchtime when the wind picked up, the rain came down and temperatures plunged, he told state media.

He sought refuge in a cave where he had stored clothes and food for emergencies but while inside spotted one of the race's 172 competitors and checked to see what was wrong because he was standing still, apparently suffering cramps.

Zhu escorted the man back to the cave, massaged his freezing hands and feet, lit a fire and dried his clothes.



Zhu Keming outside the cave. Photograph: CNS/AFP/Getty Images

Four more distressed runners made it into the cave and told the shepherd others were marooned outside, some unconscious.

Zhu headed outside once more and, braving hail and freezing temperatures, reached a runner lying on the ground. He carried him towards the shelter and wrapped him in blankets, almost certainly saving his life.

“I want to say how grateful I am to the man who saved me,” the runner, Zhang Xiaotao, wrote on Weibo.

“Without him, I would have been left out there.”

Zhu has been feted in China for his selfless actions, but the shepherd told state media that he was “just an ordinary person who did a very ordinary thing”.

Zhu rescued three men and three women, but regrets that he was unable to do more to help others who reportedly succumbed to hypothermia.

“There were still some people that could not be saved,” he said. “There were two men who were lifeless and I couldn’t do anything for them. I’m sorry.”

The tragedy has thrown a renewed spotlight on the booming marathon and running industry in China, with authorities ordering organisers of events to improve safety.

According to the Paper in Shanghai, five cross-country, marathon or other running races have been cancelled at short notice.

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/25/shepherd-hailed-for-saving-six-runners-in-deadly-china-ultramarathon>

[Turkey](#)

## Mafia boss's YouTube claims rattle Turkish government

Sedat Peker accuses senior government figures of crimes including murder, rape, corruption and drug trafficking



Sedat Peker's YouTube videos have racked up more than 30m views.  
Photograph: YouTube

Sedat Peker's YouTube videos have racked up more than 30m views.  
Photograph: YouTube

*[Bethan McKernan](#) in Istanbul*

Tue 25 May 2021 11.42 EDT

Turkish television shows are popular fare throughout the Muslim world during Ramadan, full of tales of palace intrigue and the criminal underworld.

This year's surprise hit, however, isn't fictional.

The notorious real-life mob boss Sedat Peker has electrified [Turkey](#) with a series of YouTube videos over the last three weeks in which he has levelled an array of allegations – including murder, rape, rampant corruption and drug trafficking – at prominent Turkish government figures.

The dizzying claims stretch back decades and are unsubstantiated. But the timing of Peker’s hour-long monologues, in which he portrays himself as a whistleblower, is devastating for Turkey’s president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, whose party is already struggling in the polls amid Turkey’s economic misery and criticism over [handling of the pandemic](#).

Peker’s seven episodes to date, of a promised 12 in total, took time to register in Turkey’s traditional media, which since a coup attempt in 2016 has been tightly controlled by the state. On various online platforms, however, the videos have racked up more than 30m views. The video series, titled Sedat Peker vs AKP (Erdogan’s ruling Justice and Development party), briefly became the world’s top rated television show on the Internet Movie Database until the entry was removed on Monday.

Peker, 49, rose to notoriety in the 1990s, the peak of Turkey’s [political-mafia nexus](#), when intelligence agencies were revealed to have collaborated with gangsters to carry out political assassinations. He has served several prison sentences.

On his release in 2014 the mafioso appeared to ingratiate himself in AKP circles, but fled the country in 2020 after the interior ministry opened a new investigation into his networks, and he says he is currently in Dubai. His Istanbul home was raided by the authorities in April.

Sitting at a desk in a hotel room, gold medallion around his neck and books and notes neatly organised in front of him, Peker has veered from topic to topic and person to person, offering up dramatic accounts of crimes committed on behalf of elected officials, and using legal terminology and careful signposting that suggest his allegations have been designed to build cases in court.

In airing two decades’ worth of dirty AKP laundry, Peker has also called on the country’s youth to challenge the political status quo.

“My precious brothers, my brothers under the age of 40 ... You should make a new world, a new country, in this country: this country needs its 84 million [population] to be one,” he said.

“There are days ahead that will be troubling. They will make us struggle ... We must unite.”

Little by little, the gangster has painted a picture of extensive collaboration between organised crime networks and top officials. His main target so far is the powerful interior minister Süleyman Soylu, whom Peker says he protected from rival factions within the AKP. He has also accused a former prime minister’s son of smuggling cocaine from Venezuela as part of a trafficking network stretching through the casino economy of northern Cyprus and a port controlled by the Syrian regime. The former prime minister has said his son went to Venezuela to donate masks and PPE from Turkey.

According to Peker, one former interior minister who was sentenced to five years in jail for working with gangland figures in the 1990s was directly involved in the unsolved murder of a journalist in 1993, and his son, also a politician, raped and murdered a journalist in 2019. The former interior minister said on Twitter that Peker’s claims are “slander”.

He has also said a former lieutenant colonel and a senior official of the Turkish intelligence service (MIT) ordered the murder of a Turkish Cypriot journalist in 1996.

Peker has even implicated himself in crimes, saying that his men attacked a newspaper’s offices in 2015 and threatened academics calling for peace in Turkey’s long-running conflict with the Kurdistan Workers’ party (PKK) on the orders of AKP officials, and helped seize assets and properties belonging to the ruling party’s enemies.

Several of the people the crime boss has pointed the finger at were important figures in Turkish-US relations during the Trump administration, according to [Dr Ayşe Zarakol](#), a reader in international relations at the University of Cambridge.

It is widely expected that the remaining episodes will address gun-running over the border to Syria and rumours about figures buying oil from Islamic State several years ago.

While Peker has not touched “Brother Tayyip”, as he calls the president, the takedowns of Erdoğan’s inner circle make clear he is the ultimate target. The videos have only drawn an indirect rebuke from Erdoğan himself, who said last week that his party had earned credibility and brought peace to Turkey by tackling criminal gangs when it came to power 19 years ago.

But the mafioso’s allegations have had such impact precisely because they bolster Turks’ suspicions that the relationship between the establishment and organised crime has not only endured, but flourished in recent years. Turkey’s political alliances were transformed in the aftermath of the 2016 coup attempt: the far-right Nationalist Movement party (MHP), with which Erdoğan is in coalition, has well-documented links to criminal figures.

The AKP’s opponents can smell blood in the water, and there are growing calls for investigations and resignations. “Peker’s legitimacy or position does not justify silence or impunity,” Erol Önderoğlu, the Turkey representative for Reporters Without Borders, told AFP.

All the men have denied Peker’s allegations, and Soylu has launched slander proceedings against him. But in a three-hour interview broadcast on the government-friendly HaberTürk channel on Monday evening, Soylu had to defend himself against the gangster’s claims. Pro-government media were silent on the issue on Tuesday morning, raising speculation that his political career is in serious trouble.

So far, one arrest has been made: of Peker’s own brother, Atilla, after Sedat said he was part of a failed 1996 mission to kill a journalist. But now that the mobster has blown the lid off what was previously a culture of silence, more could be on the way.

“Today’s picture is even worse [than the 90s]. At that time, at least there was a functioning structure. We were doing our duty, we were doing it seriously. We were getting support,” Mehmet Eymür, a former head of counter-terrorism for MIT, told Cumhuriyet newspaper.

“In the 90s there was not this much shady activity. It was not at this level ...  
The end of this is going to be political murders.”

Peker’s next video is due to be released on Sunday.

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/25/mafia-bosss-youtube-claims-rattle-turkish-government>

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

## Headlines monday 24 may 2021

- [Belarus KGB believed to be on plane forced to land in Minsk, says Ryanair CEO](#)
- [Belarus Ryanair flight diverted to arrest blogger](#)
- [BLM Activist Sasha Johnson in critical condition after gunshot to the head](#)
- [BBC Oliver Dowden: broadcaster needs far-reaching change after Diana scandal](#)

## [Belarus](#)

# **Belarus KGB believed to be on plane forced to land in Minsk, says Ryanair CEO**

Michael O'Leary made comments as EU, US and UK consider action against act of 'air piracy'

02:00

Belarus seizes blogger after 'hijacking' Ryanair flight – video report

*[Andrew Roth](#) in Moscow and [Daniel Boffey](#) in Brussels*

Mon 24 May 2021 07.46 EDT

Ryanair's chief executive has said he believes that agents of the Belarusian KGB were travelling on the plane that was diverted to Minsk on Sunday, as EU leaders prepared to meet to discuss what action to take against Belarus.

Belarusian police [arrested opposition blogger Roman Protasevich and his girlfriend, Sofia Sapega](#), after forcing their Ryanair flight to land in the Belarusian capital, sparking outrage from European leaders, who have called the plane's grounding a hijacking and act of "air piracy". Belarus's ambassador to the EU, Aleksandr Mikhnevich, was summoned on Monday for a dressing down by senior officials in Brussels over "another blatant attempt to silence the opposition".

In an interview on Newstalk Breakfast, the Ryanair CEO, Michael O'Leary, said that "it appears the intent of the authorities was to remove a journalist and his travelling companion ... we believe there were some KGB agents offloaded at the airport as well".

O'Leary's remarks were the first official confirmation of reports that four other passengers had disembarked in Minsk after the emergency landing,

driving speculation that Protasevich was being shadowed by the security services before the plane was forced to land. O'Leary said he believed it was the first time such an incident had taken place with a European airline.

On Monday, it was revealed that Sapega, a Russian citizen studying at the European Humanities University (EHU) in Lithuania, was forced off the flight along with Protasevich, whom Belarusian authorities have accused of fomenting the mass protests last year against the president, [Alexander Lukashenko](#).

They were flying from Athens to Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, when the plane was diverted to Minsk. Protasevich, a former editor of the influential Telegram channels Nexta and Nexta Live, was detained by police in Minsk after Lukashenko ordered his military to scramble a Mig-29 fighter to meet the plane.

Passengers onboard said Protasevich began handing his phone and other personal items to Sapega when he learned that the flight would be making an emergency landing.

01:18

Ryanair passengers describe flight 'hijacking' and journalist arrest in Belarus – video

Neither Minsk nor Moscow have publicly confirmed Sapega's arrest and it is not clear if she has been charged with a crime. EHU has demanded the release of Sapega, saying that she was detained by the Minsk Investigative Committee on "groundless and made-up conditions". She was preparing to defend her master's thesis in Vilnius, the university said.

According to colleagues, Protasevich had sent them messages claiming he was being followed by a man in the departure lounge in Athens he suspected was a Belarusian KGB agent. The man was said to have been behind him in the queue to board. He was said to have tried to take a photo of his documents before asking Protasevich a "stupid question" in Russian and leaving.

[Map](#)

European leaders will meet on Monday evening to discuss what action could be taken against Belarus.

Latvia and Lithuania said the airspace over Belarus should be considered unsafe, with Latvia's foreign minister, Edgars Rinkēvičs, saying it should be closed to all international flights. Lithuanian police said it had launched a pre-trial investigation into "forced disappearance".

In a statement on Monday morning on behalf of the EU, Josep Borrell, the bloc's high representative for foreign affairs, called for an international investigation into the incident and warned that those involved faced sanctions. "The EU will consider the consequences of this action, including taking measures against those responsible," he said.

Further measures that will be assessed by leaders include banning Belavia, the Belarusian national airline, from landing in EU airports, suspending flights of EU airlines going through Belarusian airspace and suspending all Belarusian flights over EU territory.

"We are working on a package of measures that go beyond sanctions against individuals" and may also suspend ground transit links with the EU, preventing the refuelling of flights carrying cargo, a spokesman for the French president, Emmanuel Macron, said.

A spokeswoman for the European Union Aviation Safety Agency said that two flights – to Ukraine and Georgia – had already been re-routed to avoid Belarusian airspace.

She added that the Cologne-based agency was "monitoring the situation from a safety perspective" and had contacted the national aviation authorities of the EU member states on Sunday "to raise awareness of the situation".

Dominic Raab, the UK foreign secretary, said: "We are coordinating with our allies. This outlandish action by Lukashenko will have serious implications."

On Sunday evening, the US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, said the US was demanding Protasevich's immediate release.

"This shocking act perpetrated by the Lukashenka regime endangered the lives of more than 120 passengers, including US citizens," a statement said. "Initial reports suggesting the involvement of the Belarusian security services and the use of Belarusian military aircraft to escort the plane are deeply concerning and require full investigation."



Roman Protasevich was taken into custody by Belarusian police.  
Photograph: Artur Widak/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

Last year Nexta broadcast footage of mass protests against Lukashenko via the Telegram messenger app at a time when it was hard for foreign media to do so. Protasevich is accused by the Belarusian authorities of organising mass riots and of inciting social hatred, allegations he denies.

"I'm facing the death penalty here," a trembling Protasevich reportedly told a fellow passenger from the plane before he was led away by Belarusian police. The mass unrest charges against him carry a sentence of up to 15 years. His current whereabouts is not known.

Profile

## **Who is Alexander Lukashenko?**

Show



Born in August 1954 in Kopyščy, Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko has served as president of Belarus since the establishment of the office in July 1994. On his initial election, Lukashenko set about establishing an effective dictatorship, sustained by shamelessly rigged elections.

Over the years, Lukashenko has offered his people a sort of Soviet-lite system that prizes tractor production and grain harvests over innovation and political freedoms, and the key part of his political offer has always been political and economic stability.

Lukashenko tried to push this line again into the run-up to 2020's disputed presidential vote, painting Belarus as an island of stability in a world buffeted by economic crises, political unrest and coronavirus. But the scale of discontent has shown that for many Belarusians, this messaging will no longer work.

The 2020 elections have been described as the deepest crisis he has faced in his career, and in order to secure his supposedly crushing victory, Lukashenko required what appears to be some of the most brazen vote-

rigging in recent European history. He appears to have subsequently forced his main opponent, Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, into exile.

After the election, in a congratulatory message, Vladimir Putin urged Lukashenko to consider further economic and legal integration with Russia, which the opposition has warned would undermine Belarus's sovereignty.

Photograph: Sergei Grits/AP

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

Simon Coveney, the foreign minister of Ireland, where Ryanair is based, welcomed Von der Leyen's comments, adding: "[EU inaction or indecision will be taken as weakness by Belarus](#)."

Nato's secretary general, Jens Stoltenberg, said the incident was "[serious and dangerous](#)" and required an international investigation.

Data from the flightradar24.com website showed the plane was diverted just two minutes before it was due to cross into Lithuanian airspace. After seven hours on the ground, the plane took off and finally landed in Vilnius where the Lithuanian prime minister, Ingrida Šimonytė, was waiting to meet the passengers. "This is a completely unprecedented situation you have had to face," she told the passengers.

The EU has already [imposed sanctions on nearly 60 Belarusian officials](#), including Lukashenko and his son Victor, over accusations of elections fraud and then a heavy-handed crackdown on protesters that included widespread reports of brutal torture in Belarusian jails. Minsk has increasingly turned to Moscow for support, isolating it from the west but also limiting the effect of possible sanctions from Brussels or Washington.

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/24/belarus-seizure-blogger-ryanair-flight-us-outcry>.

## Belarus

# **Belarus accused of ‘hijacking’ Ryanair flight diverted to arrest blogger**

Roman Protasevich is wanted for organising last year’s protests against Alexander Lukashenko

01:18

Ryanair passengers describe flight 'hijacking' and journalist arrest in Belarus – video

*[Andrew Roth in Moscow](#)*

Sun 23 May 2021 11.14 EDT

Belarus has been accused of hijacking a European jetliner and engaging in an act of state terrorism when it forced a Ryanair flight to perform an emergency landing in Minsk after a bomb threat and arrested an opposition blogger critical of authoritarian president Alexander Lukashenko.

Roman Protasevich, a former editor of the influential Telegram channels Nexta and Nexta Live, was detained by police after his flight was diverted to Minsk national airport. Minsk confirmed that Lukashenko ordered his military to scramble a Mig-29 fighter to escort the plane.

The Polish prime minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, said the plane had been “hijacked” and accused Lukashenko of a “reprehensible act of state terrorism”. He said he would demand new sanctions against Belarus at a European Council meeting scheduled for Monday.

Tom Tugendhat, the chair of the UK foreign affairs select committee, said: “If aircraft can be forced to the ground … in order to punish the political opponents of tyrants, then journalists here in the UK, politicians anywhere in Europe will find it harder to speak out.”

He joined counterparts from the US, Ireland, Germany, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland and the Czech Republic in condemning the action as “an act of piracy” and calling for the suspension of all overflights. “This act of state terror and kidnapping is a threat to all those who travel in Europe and beyond. It cannot be allowed to stand,” they said in a joint statement.

“We are coordinating with our allies,” said Dominic Raab, the UK foreign secretary. “This outlandish action by Lukashenko will have serious implications.”

Charles Michel, president of the European Council, said EU leaders would decide on the repercussions for Belarus at Monday’s meeting.

He said: “I call on Belarus authorities to immediately release the detained passenger and to fully guarantee his rights. EU leaders will discuss this unprecedented incident tomorrow during the European Council. The incident will not remain without consequences.”

Forcing the emergency landing of a European jetliner would be an extraordinary act even for Lukashenko’s government, which has launched a broad crackdown on opposition leaders and independent media. Opponents of the regime have been arrested, including some who have fled abroad to avoid reprisals, including a former spokesman for Lukashenko who vanished last month during a trip to Moscow and then reappeared in custody in Minsk.

Protasevich has been accused by Belarus of terrorism and provoking riots after the Nexta channels became one of the main conduits for organising last year’s anti-Lukashenko protests over elections fraud. Protasevich had been living in exile and Poland had previously rejected an extradition request sent by Minsk.

Protasevich was flying on an intra-EU flight from Athens to Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, when the plane was diverted to Minsk. According to online flight data, the plane was over Belarusian airspace when it diverted course but was closer to Vilnius than Minsk.

“I’m facing the death penalty here,” a trembling Protasevich reportedly told a fellow passenger from the plane before he was led away by Belarusian police. The mass unrest charges against him carry a sentence of up to 15 years. His current whereabouts are unknown.

The grounding of a plane flying from Greece to Lithuania on an Ireland-based carrier with a Poland-based political exile on board provoked broad from across the EU bloc and the threat to European transportation routes also triggered a strong reaction from EU officials.

“Unprecedented event!” wrote Gitanas Nausėda, the president of Lithuania. “The regime is behind the abhorrent action. I demand to free Roman Protasevich urgently!”

The German foreign ministry state secretary, Miguel Berger, demanded “an immediate explanation by the government of Belarus on the diversion of a Ryanair flight within the EU to Minsk and the alleged detention of a journalist” and the European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, said “any violation of international air transport rules must bear consequences”.

The EU has already sanctioned nearly 60 Belarusian officials, including Lukashenko and his son Victor, over accusations of elections fraud and then a heavy-handed crackdown on protesters that included widespread reports of brutal torture in Belarusian jails. Minsk has increasingly turned to Moscow for support, isolating it from the west but also limiting the effect of possible sanctions from Brussels or Washington.

Protasevich had been covering a visit to Athens by Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, a former presidential candidate who has declared herself the country’s leader-in-exile due to widespread fraud during last year’s elections. She called on the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) to investigate Belarus.

“The regime forced the landing @Ryanair plane in Minsk to arrest journalist and activist Raman Pratasevich. He faces the death penalty in Belarus. We demand immediate release of Raman, @ICAO investigation, and sanctions against Belarus,” she wrote. “Lukashenko’s regime endangered the lives of

passengers onboard the plane. From now – no one flying over Belarus – can be secure. International reaction needed!”

In a statement sent to the Guardian, Ryanair said it had been ordered to divert the flight to Minsk by Belarusian air-traffic controllers.

“The crew on a Ryanair flight from Athens to Vilnius today (23 May) were notified by Belarus ATC of a potential security threat on board and were instructed to divert to the nearest airport, Minsk,” a spokesperson for the low-cost airline, which is headquartered in Ireland, wrote in an e-mail. “Ryanair has notified the relevant national and European safety and security agencies and we apologise sincerely to all affected passengers for this regrettable delay which was outside Ryanair’s control.”

The statement did not mention reports that a military jet had been scrambled to escort the jetliner or that a passenger from the flight had been detained during the stop in Minsk.

Protasevich told colleagues earlier on Sunday he had been followed while travelling to the airport in Athens. A Russian speaker had followed him into a line at the airport and attempted to photograph his documents, he wrote to colleagues. They said they had not heard from him since.

Editors at Nexta who mostly live in exile have said they have been threatened with extraordinary rendition in the past. “We get [threats] all the time,” Stepan Svetlov, its founder, told the Guardian last year. “They say they’re going to blow the office up, they say they’re going to kidnap us and drive us back to Belarus.”

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/23/belarus-diverts-ryanair-plane-to-arrest-blogger-says-opposition>

## Race

# Sasha Johnson: BLM activist in critical condition after gunshot to the head

Shooting in Southwark, London came after numerous death threats, says her Taking the Initiative party

- [Latest: BLM activist Sasha Johnson may have been shot by mistake](#)



Sasha Johnson, co-organiser of the Million People March and Black Lives Matter activist, on a demonstration in London last August. Photograph: Thabo Jaiyesimi/Sopa Images/Rex/Shutterstock

Sasha Johnson, co-organiser of the Million People March and Black Lives Matter activist, on a demonstration in London last August. Photograph: Thabo Jaiyesimi/Sopa Images/Rex/Shutterstock

*[Edna Mohamed](#)*

Sun 23 May 2021 17.00 EDT

The Black Lives Matter activist Sasha Johnson is in a critical condition after sustaining a gunshot wound to her head in an incident in south London, her affiliated group, Taking the Initiative party, has announced on social media.

In a statement on the group's Facebook page, the party said the incident happened in the early hours of Sunday and followed "numerous death threats".

A Met police statement said there was nothing to suggest that it had been a targeted attack.

Taking the Initiative's [statement](#) said: "It is with great sadness that we inform you that our own Sasha Johnson has sustained a gunshot wound to her head. She is currently hospitalised and in critical condition. The incident happened in the early hours of this morning, following numerous death threats."

"Sasha has always been actively fighting for black people and the injustices that surround the black community, as well as being both a member of BLM and a member of Taking the Initiative Party's Executive Leadership Committee. Sasha is also a mother of 3 and a strong, powerful voice for our people and our community."

Johnson is a prominent member of TTIP, which has been described as "Britain's first Black-led political party". She rose to prominence after last year's BLM protests spread around the country, helping to organise marches and addressing crowds.

She has worked in activism and community support and studied community development and youth work at Ruskin College, Oxford, graduating last year.

Her page on the TTIP website said: "She has an immense passion for implementing change and justice and has been actively supporting the eradication of injustices in society by attending and leading protests."

The TTIP has asked people to "all come together and pray for Sasha, pray for her recovery and show our support to her family and loved ones".

Claudia Webbe, the MP for Leicester East, [wrote online](#): “Shocking to hear of the gunshot to the head of Sasha Johnson; All women should be safe on our streets. Wishing her a full recovery. Sending love and solidarity to her family, friends and loved ones. There are still too many guns and violent weapons damaging too many lives [#BLM](#). ”

The Metropolitan police later reissued an appeal for witnesses in relation to a 27-year-old woman in hospital with life-threatening injuries after being shot in the early hours of Sunday.

The Met said the woman was found after officers were called to reports of gunshots in Peckham, south-east London, shortly before 3am.

It is believed the shooting occurred in the vicinity of a house where a party was taking place and a number of people may have been in the area.

A spokesperson said that, while the investigation was at an early stage, there was nothing to suggest it was a targeted attack or that the woman had received any credible threats against her before this incident. Detectives from the Met’s specialist crime command (Trident) were leading the investigation.

DCI Jimi Tele said: “This was a shocking incident that has left a young woman with very serious injuries. Our thoughts are with her family who are being provided with support at this terribly difficult time.”

He said detectives were making “good progress” in hunting the attackers but they needed help from the public and it was “crucial” that anyone who saw anything suspicious in the Consort Road area in the early hours of Sunday or who had heard information since then get in touch.

Tele added: “Finally, I recognise that this incident will have shocked those in the local community and further afield. I would ask people to avoid speculating as to the motive or the circumstances behind it.”

No arrests have so far been made.

This article was amended on 24 and 25 May 2021. Claudia Webbe is no longer a Labour MP, as we said in an earlier version of this story. And Sasha

Johnson studied community development and youth work at Ruskin College, Oxford, not social care at Oxford Brookes University. This has been corrected.

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/23/blm-activist-sasha-johnson-in-critical-condition-after-gunshot-to-the-head>

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

**BBC**

## Dowden: BBC needs far-reaching change after Diana scandal

Culture secretary accuses broadcaster of adopting ‘we know best’ attitude over Martin Bashir’s interview



Lord Dyson’s report found Martin Bashir’s actions were covered up by a ‘woefully ineffective’ internal BBC investigation. Photograph: Tim Graham/Corbis/Getty Images

Lord Dyson’s report found Martin Bashir’s actions were covered up by a ‘woefully ineffective’ internal BBC investigation. Photograph: Tim Graham/Corbis/Getty Images

*Sarah Marsh  
@sloumarsh*

Mon 24 May 2021 04.24 EDT

The UK culture secretary, Oliver Dowden, has said the BBC needs far-reaching change, accusing the broadcaster of adopting a “we know best” attitude in the scandal surrounding its Panorama interview with [Diana, Princess of Wales](#).

Dowden said Lord Dyson’s report, which found Martin Bashir used “deceitful conduct” to obtain the 1995 interview with Diana, had exposed “failures that strike at the heart of our national broadcaster’s values and culture”

Dyson, a former master of the rolls, found Bashir’s actions were then covered up by a “woefully ineffective” internal investigation.

Writing in [the Times](#), Dowden said far-reaching change was needed to ensure the corporation was in tune with “all parts of the nation it serves”.

He said the BBC’s leadership was too narrowly drawn – succumbing to “groupthink” – and that “cultural change” was needed in the organisation.

“The BBC can occasionally succumb to a ‘we know best’ attitude that is detached both from the criticism and the values of all parts of the nation it serves,” he said.

“Groupthink in any organisation results in a lack of challenge and poor decision-making. That’s why cultural change must be a focus for the director general and new chair.”

Dowden said the BBC needed “to improve its culture to ensure this never happens again and that means a new emphasis on accuracy, impartiality and diversity of opinion”.

His remarks came after the home secretary, Priti Patel, refused to rule out the prospect of criminal prosecutions after Dyson’s findings. She told Sky News: “If there is subsequent action that needs to be taken, then clearly ... that will follow.”

With the BBC facing a midterm review of its charter next year, Dowden said the government would not be rushed into “kneejerk reforms”, but it would

not “stand idly by”.

He suggested the only way the BBC could justify its funding model was by providing distinctively British programmes.

Dowden said it needed to “step up to project British values and distinct quality programming with renewed vigour and ambition as our national champion”.

The release of the report prompted the former BBC director general [Lord Hall to quit as chairman of the National Gallery](#). He was head of news and current affairs when the BBC carried out the 1996 internal investigation into the way the Diana interview was obtained.

MPs are expected to press for answers as to how Bashir was rehired by the [BBC](#) in 2016 as religious affairs correspondent – later promoted to religion editor – even though it was known he lied to the internal inquiry.

There have been calls for compensation for BBC whistleblowers whose careers suffered after they tried to raise concerns about the way Bashir operated.

Bashir said he was “deeply sorry” to the dukes of Cambridge and Sussex but disputed William’s charge that he fuelled Diana’s isolation and paranoia.

He told the Sunday Times: “I never wanted to harm Diana in any way and I don’t believe we did. Everything we did in terms of the interview was as she wanted.”

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2021/may/24/oliver-dowden-bbc-needs-far-reaching-change-diana-scandal-martin-bashir>

## 2021.05.24 - Coronavirus

- [Spain Britons should not be holidaying in country yet, says UK minister](#)
- [Faster than a PCR test Dogs detect Covid in under a second](#)
- [Fitness UK class sales soar despite demand for online sessions](#)
- [South-east Asia Region battles Covid resurgence amid lack of vaccines](#)

## Coronavirus

# Britons should not be holidaying in Spain yet, says UK minister

Anne-Marie Trevelyan urges people not to travel to country on coronavirus amber list ‘unless you have to’

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



Tourists on Palma Beach in Palma de Mallorca. Photograph: Jaime Reina/AFP/Getty Images

Tourists on Palma Beach in Palma de Mallorca. Photograph: Jaime Reina/AFP/Getty Images

*Sarah Marsh  
@sloumarsh*

Mon 24 May 2021 05.33 EDT

Britons have been urged not to travel to [Spain](#) after the country opened its doors to tourists from the UK.

Spain has lifted its restrictions on holidaymakers from the UK but the business minister Anne-Marie Trevelyan has urged people not to go there unless there is an urgent reason.

The country is still on the UK government's [amber list](#), meaning people should not visit unless it is for essential family or business reasons. Travellers will have to quarantine for 10 days and get tested for the virus upon leaving and returning.

Despite this, Fernando Valdés, Spain's tourism minister, suggested Spain could be added to the UK's green list in the next government review, meaning travellers would not have to self-isolate on their return to England.

He told Sky News: "What I can say is that right now Spain is doing a great effort not only in terms of vaccination ... but also, we do have some holiday destinations which are very loved by British tourists such as the Balearic islands, Costa Blanca or Málaga, with our notification rates which are pretty low and by the same notification range of the UK, so I have to suspect that on the next review that the UK government can provide ... Spain is going to change on its notification."

Earlier on Monday, the Spanish prime minister, Pedro Sánchez, said the country would "be delighted, very delighted to welcome all British tourists". He said those coming over would also be welcome for non-essential travel.

A state of emergency in Spain was lifted on 9 May, although curfews remain in some regions.

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

Trevelyan told Sky News that amber meant "please don't go unless there is an urgent family reason and so on.

"Because we are still trying to slowly move through our roadmap to being able to open up on 21 June and we want to do that in a steady and careful way," she said.

She later told Times Radio: “The reality is, at the moment, amber countries are still not meeting the criteria for our scientists to say that they should be green. So the recommendation remains don’t go unless you have to and remember that, if you do go, you will have to quarantine for 10 days and that will be monitored.”

The energy minister said: “The reason we ask people still not to go is because there is still too great a risk as far as our scientists are concerned.”

Her words echoed those of the transport secretary, Grant Shapps, who said people considering going to not-yet-green-listed countries should have “more patience”.

Those who come back from countries on the green list will need to take a pre-departure Covid-19 test and a post-arrival test, but they will not need to self-isolate upon return.

On Monday, Andrew Pollard, the head of the Oxford Vaccine Group at the University of Oxford, said the public health message to get people vaccinated was key, as new variants will spread and evolve among those who have not been inoculated.

“If you’re unvaccinated then the virus will find [those] individuals in the population ... There is a really important public health message that we have to get those small proportion of people not vaccinated to get their first dose,” he said.

## **Share your story**

## **Share your stories**

If you have been affected or have any information, we'd like to hear from you. You can get in touch by filling in the form below, anonymously if you wish or contact us [via WhatsApp](#) by [clicking here](#) or adding the contact +44(0)7766780300. Only the Guardian can see your contributions and one of our journalists may contact you to discuss further.

Tell us

Share your experiences here

---

Name

You do not need to use your full name

---

Where do you live?

Town or area is fine

---

You can upload a photo here if you think it will add to your storyOptional

We accept images and pdfs. Maximum total file size: 6MB

---

You can upload another photo or video hereOptional

We accept images and pdfs. Maximum total file size: 6MB

---

Can we publish your response?

Yes, entirely

Yes, but please keep me anonymous

Yes, but please contact me first

No, this is information only

---

Are you contacting us because you read a Guardian article? If so which one?

---

Email address

Your contact details are helpful so we can contact you for more information.  
They will only be seen by the Guardian.

---

Phone number Optional

Your contact details are helpful so we can contact you for more information. They will only be seen by the Guardian.

---

You can add any extra information here Optional

---

Share with the Guardian

[Terms and conditions](#)

Amid concern about the spread of the variant first detected in India, he added that understanding how effective vaccinations were in reducing hospital admissions was critical to understanding how they respond to new variants and, eventually, ending the pandemic.

“If the current generation of vaccines is able to stop people going into hospital ... then the pandemic is over,” he said.

He added that it was unclear yet whether booster vaccines would be needed. “We might not need them but we are in a good place [if we do] as we have highly effective vaccines at the moment,” he said.

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/24/britons-should-not-be-holidaying-in-spain-yet-says-uk-minister-coronavirus>

## Coronavirus

# Faster than a PCR test: dogs detect Covid in under a second

Study in London used six enthusiastic dogs in a double-blind trial

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



Tala, 3, a medical detection dog, during training to detect the presence of Covid-19 in samples of socks worn for 12 hours by volunteers across the UK. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

Tala, 3, a medical detection dog, during training to detect the presence of Covid-19 in samples of socks worn for 12 hours by volunteers across the UK. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

*[Linda Geddes](#)*

Mon 24 May 2021 01.00 EDT

Faster than PCR and more accurate than lateral flow tests, the latest weapons against Covid-19 have four legs and a wet nose.

A study published on Monday found that people who are infected with coronavirus give off a distinct odour, which these highly trained dogs can detect with pinpoint precision.

Tala, a golden labrador in a red work jacket, greets me with a cursory sniff, before returning to his handler. I'm relieved to have passed the test, but feel a wet train of mucus on my hand where I petted him. This mucus fulfils an important purpose: dissolving odour molecules from the air and transporting them to olfactory receptors in the top of their nose, where the magic happens. Whereas humans have about 5m of these receptors, dogs have up to 300m.

Dr Claire Guest has always been fascinated by dogs, and humans' relationship with them. After studying psychology, she worked for Hearing Dogs for Deaf People, where she met a woman who said her pet dalmatian had diagnosed a malignant melanoma on her calf. "She kept saying, 'The dog sniffed it,'" Guest recalled. In 2002, Guest joined forces with an orthopaedic surgeon, John Church, to test whether dogs could be trained to distinguish between urine from healthy people and those with bladder cancer. The research, [published in the BMJ](#), showed that they could.



Dr Claire Guest, CEO of Medical Detection Dogs with her dog Tala, 3, a medical detection dog. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

Medical Detection [Dogs](#) was formed in 2008. The charity trains companion dogs that can detect odour changes in people with type 1 diabetes and other severe disorders, emitted shortly before their health deteriorates, alerting them to take action. It also researches dogs' abilities to detect cancers, and other diseases, including Parkinson's. When the pandemic hit it had just completed a study with the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM), demonstrating that dogs can detect malaria.

Tala is one of six dogs who took part in the Covid study, which has not yet been peer-reviewed. It found that dogs could detect Covid-19 on clothing worn by infected people with up to 94.3% sensitivity: they would correctly identify 94 out of every 100 infected people. This compares with a sensitivity of 58-77% for lateral flow tests, and 97.2% for PCR tests.

However, dogs beat PCR tests on speed, making a diagnosis in under a second. "This includes people who are asymptomatic and also people with a low viral load," said Prof James Logan of LSHTM, who co-led the study.

Tala was the most accurate sniffer, achieving 94.5% sensitivity, and a specificity of 92% – the proportion of uninfected people that he would

correctly identify.

I watch as Tala's trainer, Mark Somerville, guides him towards three low stands, each holding a fragment of blue nylon sock beneath a metal grille. The labrador's assessment is over in seconds: he walks calmly up to each stand, swiftly passing his nose over the grilles, before pausing at the second and furiously wagging his tail – Tala's way of communicating that he has identified the target scent.

Each dog has a different “tell”. Millie, a fox red golden retriever, sits and utters a whining sound when she detects the target sock. Other dogs stand stock-still.

Tala is one of Guest's dogs, and the great nephew of Daisy, a detection dog pioneer who was involved in the original bladder cancer study – and subsequently diagnosed an early-stage tumour in Guest's breast. “She just kept staring at me and nudging,” Guest said.

Some of the dogs were born into this occupation, others are rescue dogs that have been donated. Asher, a cocker spaniel who also lives with Guest, was too active for his previous family but is now a valued member of the Covid-detection squad.

Gundog breeds such as spaniels, retrievers and labradors make particularly good detection dogs. “These are dogs that absolutely just love searching,” said Guest. “They're also very friendly and they enjoy working in public places.”

It takes eight to 10 weeks to train a Covid-19 detection dog. They are rewarded with an edible treat or ball for correctly indicating a positive sample or correctly ignoring a negative one. For the Covid study, the dogs were trained using T-shirts, socks and masks donated by members of the public and NHS staff, some of whom had tested positive for Covid.



Each dog has a different tell: some utter a whining sound while others stand stock-still. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

Accurate as they are, dogs will never replace PCR tests. While they might be useful at airports, where they could rapidly screen disembarking passengers, those identified would require a confirmatory PCR test, and to quarantine while awaiting the results – but this would inconvenience far fewer people than requiring everyone to quarantine and undergo PCR tests.

The biggest challenge is scaling up: training takes time, and requires clothing worn by infected and uninfected individuals. Work is under way to identify which odour molecules the dogs are detecting; this could enable a “pseudo-odour” to be manufactured, increasing the number of dogs that could be trained.

01:16

Sniffer dogs used to detect coronavirus in Helsinki airport as part of September 2020 trial – video

So will you see Covid sniffer dogs at airports in the near future? Given that similar projects are under way in countries including [Finland](#), [France](#) and Lebanon, it seems entirely paw-sible.

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/24/faster-than-pcr-test-dogs-detect-covid-coronavirus-london-bmj>.

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

## Fitness

# UK fitness class sales soar despite demand for online sessions

As Covid controls ease, many return to gym and ClassPass reports 600% week-on-week rise in new members

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



ClassPass says: ‘In the short-term, many studios will continue to offer online classes but there is no doubt that studios and gyms are shifting focus back to in-person sessions.’ Photograph: Tempura/Getty Images/iStockphoto

ClassPass says: ‘In the short-term, many studios will continue to offer online classes but there is no doubt that studios and gyms are shifting focus back to in-person sessions.’ Photograph: Tempura/Getty Images/iStockphoto

*Sarah Marsh  
@sloumarsh*

Mon 24 May 2021 02.00 EDT

Fitness classes have recorded a sharp rise in sales as British consumers return to the gym after lockdown despite demand for online sessions that experts say will persist after the coronavirus pandemic.

ClassPass, a company that provides access to fitness classes across the UK, said in the past week it had recorded a 600% week-on-week increase in the number of new members as lockdown measures were relaxed.

The business said that while live-stream reservations remained strong, two of its top London fitness studios, Blok and Digme, reported a tenfold increase in reservations since in-person classes relaunched, compared with digital-only reservations the previous week.

[Half of pools, gyms and leisure centres in England at risk, prime minister told](#)

[Read more](#)

In other cities that have lifted restrictions, members who have returned are taking on 110% of their pre-Covid usage, Classpass said.

Despite higher than normal closure rates at gyms across the country during the pandemic, the fitness booking platform said its partner network had grown by 12% year on year in [Europe](#), with thousands of businesses partnering with the company for the first time.

Chloe Ross, the vice-president of international at ClassPass, said: “In the short-term, many studios will continue to offer online classes but there is no doubt that studios and gyms are shifting focus back to in-person sessions.

“It’s likely that part of our user base will opt for a hybrid routine, doing some workouts at home and returning to studios part of the time, and that others will prefer to return to studios entirely – this increased flexibility is a good thing for establishing a long fitness habit and encouraging more people to get into fitness.”

It comes as consumers returned to gyms across central London as lockdown measures were relaxed. The gym network 1Rebel is due to launch an eighth London site at Oxford Circus in early June.

Sandy Macaskill, who runs Barry's Bootcamp in the UK, said it added new classes at its St Paul's studio because of rising demand.

"That's very encouraging because we only opened our studio there a couple of weeks before the first lockdown, so it's effectively still a brand new studio," he said.

"I think we're in a fortunate position that Barry's is the kind of place our clients are happy to make a journey to.

"While online workouts are here to stay, I strongly suspect that we will see a mass return to working out in boutique studios like Barry's because there is nothing that comes close online."

### Guardian business email sign-up

Max Henderson, the founder of Hotpod Yoga, said the minute bookings went live the company started to sell out: "While we saw a strong recovery in attendance when we opened relatively briefly last year, this is a far bigger swing in momentum. Within the first week of bookings being open, we'd seen tens of thousands of people book classes.

"That's a sure sign that people are ready and excited to come back ... Against a backdrop of generally positive Covid news in the UK, where larger portions of the population are vaccinated every day, it's great that this confidence is back – and quite rightly so."

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2021/may/24/uk-fitness-class-sales-soar-despite-demand-for-online-sessions-covid>

## [Coronavirus](#)

# South-east Asian countries battle Covid resurgence amid lack of vaccines

Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam and Singapore race to contain clusters as experts warn jabs must be distributed more evenly

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



Covid testing in Bangkok, Thailand. The country's cumulative caseload has quadrupled since 1 April. Photograph: Chaiwat Subprasom/SOPA Images/REX/Shutterstock

Covid testing in Bangkok, Thailand. The country's cumulative caseload has quadrupled since 1 April. Photograph: Chaiwat Subprasom/SOPA Images/REX/Shutterstock

*[Rebecca Ratcliffe](#) and [Navaon Siradapuvadol](#)*

Mon 24 May 2021 00.00 EDT

South-east Asian countries, including nations that managed to control the coronavirus last year, are struggling to contain recent outbreaks as new variants and vaccine shortages leave populations exposed.

Thailand's cumulative caseload has more than quadrupled since 1 April, rising to almost 130,000, after infections spread in its cramped prisons, densely populated areas of the capital and construction sites.

In neighbouring [Malaysia](#), field ICUs are being established to cope with the increase in patients with severe illness, while one hospital converted a shipping container to a makeshift morgue because its facility was overrun. The country reported almost 7,000 cases on Sunday.

Vietnam and [Singapore](#) – both widely praised for their success in containing the coronavirus – are also racing to contain clusters, and have introduced lockdown measures.

Cases are far lower than the peaks seen in other areas of the world, but health experts say the outbreaks are a warning sign that vaccines must be distributed more evenly.

“It is entirely possible that because of the inequity that we are starting to see in accessing vaccines that the epicentre [of the pandemic] will shift,” said Teo Yik Ying, a professor at the Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, National University of Singapore.

He did not believe the recent outbreak in Singapore was due to a lack of compliance with health measures, but said it was instead driven by the more aggressive nature of the new strain B.1.617, which was first detected in India. “Our defences that we put in place that have worked very well for the past one year now seem to be being breached by the coronavirus,” he said.

“It is the speed that is frightening. We’ve seen how we have got four generations of spread – meaning from the index case to the primary transmission, and then to secondary transmission and so on – within a period of 10 days. Compared to what we were faced with last year, it is quite a different situation,” he said.

While Singapore has fully vaccinated one quarter of its population, immunisation campaigns have been far slower elsewhere in the region. Thailand has fully vaccinated fewer than 1.5% of its population, while only 2.88% of people in Malaysia have received both jabs.

Vietnam, which has imposed lockdowns in some districts in a race to contain new clusters, has fully vaccinated less than 1% of its population. Its recent outbreak has led to more than 2,000 new cases since late April – almost 40% of the 5,119 cumulative infections detected in the country since the pandemic began.

Malaysia has imposed a full lockdown in its fourth-largest city, Ipoh, while other restrictions, such as shorter opening hours for businesses, have been announced elsewhere. “If the same picture continues for one or two weeks, it will be very hard for the health system in the country to cope,” said Dr Abhishek Rimal, Asia health coordinator for the International Federation of the Red Cross.

Health experts in Malaysia fear that social activities for Eid al-Fitr may lead to a rise in cases detected over the coming week. Restrictions were imposed, but just days before the holiday.

Governments faced a difficult balancing act, said Rimal. “When they [introduce] a lockdown there are so many people who are daily wage workers. What will happen to their income, their food, to their family? That is one of the biggest humanitarian challenges,” he said.

Thailand, which imposed strict measures last year and virtually eradicated the virus, has stopped short of a full lockdown. Instead, it has allowed shopping malls to remain open and permitted restaurants to operate at 25% capacity. Schools, parks, gyms and businesses such as massage parlours and bars are shut.

Cases have spread rapidly in Thailand’s notoriously crowded prisons, infecting thousands of inmates, and prompting the government to consider releasing some early. Construction worker camps, where many migrant workers live in shared rooms, have also emerged as hotspots for the virus. On Friday, Thailand identified its first domestic cases of the B.1.617.2

variant, which had infected 15 people, including 12 construction workers at a camp in northern Bangkok. About 1,100 of the 1,667 workers at the site tested positive. The variant that was first identified in South Africa has also been detected in the country.

“The government needs to assure the workers that if they get Covid, they will be treated equally,” said Adisorn Kerdmongkol, coordinator of Migrant Working Group. He said many people worried they would not be able to receive care, and lacked information about what to do if they had symptoms. The government should also allay fears that migrants will be penalised if they come forwards for treatment and are found to not have the correct papers, he said.

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/24/south-east-asian-countries-battle-covid-resurgence-amid-lack-of-vaccines>

## 2021.05.24 - Spotlight

- 'I'm way older, but I'm still doing it' Tony Hawk on his skateboarding legacy
- 'It was like a horror film' Sophie Walker on her stalking nightmare – and how the police failed her
- Dylan at 80 My favourite song – by Mick Jagger, Marianne Faithfull, Tom Jones, Judy Collins and more
- Real estate How retirement villages are becoming part of high street life in the UK

## Skateboarding

# ‘I’m way older, but I’m still doing it’: Tony Hawk on his skateboarding legacy



Tony Hawk ‘There’s a machine that goes along with celebrity, where people just fabricate a certain persona and they put it out there and that’s what you’re led to believe they are.’ Photograph: Anton Corbijn/Contour by Getty Images

Tony Hawk ‘There’s a machine that goes along with celebrity, where people just fabricate a certain persona and they put it out there and that’s what you’re led to believe they are.’ Photograph: Anton Corbijn/Contour by Getty Images

He’s the record-breaking skateboarder who took the sport mainstream. Here he reflects on how the sport has changed, and how he feels knowing he may never do a 720 again

*[Brianna Holt](#)*

Mon 24 May 2021 04.00 EDT

In January, after a few attempts the previous days, Tony Hawk [landed a 720](#) – a skateboarding trick involving two full rotations mid-air. Hawk is widely understood to have invented the 720, a move he has performed many times during his career. But this time, as he wrote on Twitter, it “was a battle … I can’t imagine doing any more”.

I’m speaking to Hawk from his car. He is on his way home to Encinitas, California, having just wrapped a snowboarding trip in Mammoth Mountain. At 53, it’s not that he’s physically incapable of performing the trick again, he says, but that “the risk” – think a broken pelvis and teeth knocked out – “versus the reward will not be worth it in years to come”.

Hawk is a busy guy. Looking at his [Instagram page](#), it would seem his schedule – speaking on podcasts, juggling meetings, taking trips and visiting events – comes easy to the man who has made a lifelong career from skateboarding. But it isn’t. I’ve witnessed the hours that it demands up front: I spent some time around him and his family during a trip to California with my boyfriend – also a pro skateboarder – and it was clear that Hawk is pretty much always on call.

But one other thing was clear: the man really does just love skateboarding.

If you grew up in the 1990s, it is almost impossible for you not to know him. The most famous name in skateboarding, he invented [89 vertical tricks](#), won more than 70 contests, and even [guest-starred as himself on The Simpsons](#). His hugely popular video game series saw him pick up a Teen Choice Award, and his cameos in the show Rocket Power and film, Lords of Dogtown speak to the influence of his name in the industry.

But fame was never Hawk’s aim. Growing up in San Diego in the 1970s, Hawk was bound to get on a board. His older brother, Steve, was an outstanding surfer who skated frequently and kept boards around the house.

Out of curiosity, Hawk tried his luck, eventually using skateboarding as a means of transportation to and from school. But it was photos of skaters from a magazine that set him on a new path. “I was flabbergasted by what I saw – literally [skateboarders] flying in and out of swimming pools and I just thought, ‘I want to get to that level. I want to learn how to do that,’” he

says. Little did he know, one day he would be competing against those same skaters, names such as Steve Caballero, Eddie Elguera, and Billy Ruff.

At the time, learning unique tricks wasn't the norm; skating was more focused on style and how high one could go. But Hawk enjoyed maneuvering his body and board in new ways, setting him apart from many in his cohort. He was also learning to play the violin, which involved additional practices after school and extracurricular concerts on the weekends: "At some point I told my music teacher that I'm skateboarding and competing on the weekends, and he flat out told me that I have to choose violin or skateboarding."

He chose the latter.



Hawk in action at Bondi Beach in Sydney in 2016. Photograph: Pacific Press/Rex/Shutterstock

After a couple of years of moving up the ranks in competitions, Hawk went pro at 14. And almost four decades later, Hawk can claim he took skateboarding mainstream.

Not that he would: "I never think of it in such personal lofty terms. I'm happy if whatever I've done has raised the profile of skating and has maybe changed the stigma that skating is for outcasts, losers and whatnot."

Instead, Hawk likes to think of himself as a skateboarding advocate, and someone who just helped it along. Aside from his talent on the board, Hawk is embedded in numerous projects that prioritize the intersection of skateboarding and community. His foundation, [The Skatepark Project](#), helps build public skateparks in underserved communities. The non-profit directly contributes to diversifying a sport that has historically lacked inclusivity in its earlier days. Individually, Hawk is always supporting skaters in need, most recently [helping a skater get prosthetic legs](#).

Anything you do or say can be misconstrued

Today, skateboarding looks different to when Hawk was getting started. You can find anyone at the skatepark despite their gender, sexual orientation or ethnic background. More women are going pro, and this year the sport will make its Olympic debut in Tokyo.

During the pandemic, learning to skateboard saw an unlikely boom, as the practice can take place safely outdoors and alone. And with more facilities and skateparks popping up left and right, coupled with major fashion collaborations like Louis Vuitton's first skate shoe with Lucien Clarke, skateboarding is more embedded in popular culture than ever before. "Everyone skates now, or has some attachment to it, or has some interest in it. It's woven into the fabric of youth now," Hawk says.

But members of the skateboarding community have differing views on skateboarding's mainstream facet. Some people have labeled Hawk as a sellout because of his endorsements in the early 2000s with brands like McDonald's, Mountain Dew and Bagel Bites. Others have frowned upon the unspoken sentiment that he popularized skating as a competitive sport, rather than as an art form.



Hawk in Canoga Park, California, in 2015. Photograph: Tibrina Hobson/Getty Images

Popularity and success always open the door for scrutiny, and as Hawk tells me about fame, “it’s like you’re living under a microscope and anything you do or say can be misconstrued or taken down a rabbit hole.” What few realize is his role in the future of skateboarding, simply through the relationships he holds with young, upcoming skaters. Often opening his home, which has a bowl in the backyard, and his private warehouse which features a 13.5ft vertical ramp and a street/flow course, Hawk is hoping to inspire the next generation.

That’s how I got to spend a bit of time with him, when my boyfriend spent a month skating with him and his sons. “I just love that I still get to be in the mix, that I get to participate. It’s such a fun window to be in, where I’m way older, but I’m still doing it. And then I get to skate with these guys who are truly pushing limits of what I thought was possible,” he says.

Hawk is notably free of public scandals and controversial statements. He says it’s because he isn’t ever trying to present a fake version of himself, which certainly reflects my experience of being a guest in his home. He is authentically himself, laughing at *The Office* reruns, ordering takeout quite frequently, and always up for a game of Mario Kart. “There’s a machine that

goes along with celebrity, where people just fabricate a certain persona and they put it out there and that's what you're led to believe they are," he says.

But Hawk admits he didn't always get it right. "I followed and chased my career a little too much, and gave up time with my family because of that. I wished that I had a better balance of work and family back then," he says. His only other regret is the carelessness that came with his worst injury: a broken pelvis during a skit for MTV's WildBoyz. "They wanted me to dress like a gorilla and skate through it. I misjudged my speed and fell from the top. If I could go back to that time, I would have been a lot more careful with what I was doing," he says.

It seems now Hawk really is being careful. How does it feel knowing that he won't be able to perform some of his favorite tricks much longer?

"It's been kind of a fun process to do them for the last time. I don't think many athletes get to go through that process very much because at some point they're just not doing it any more, and they never had any sort of closure," he says. "And I'm at a place, and more of an awareness, that I can have closure on these things."

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2021/may/24/tony-hawk-skateboarding-legacy-interview>

## [Crime](#)

Interview

# ‘It was like a horror film’: Sophie Walker on her stalking nightmare – and how the police failed her

[Hannah Summers](#)



‘I thought – I’m going to be dead before they can stop this man’ ... Walker.  
Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

‘I thought – I’m going to be dead before they can stop this man’ ... Walker.  
Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

In April 2020, Walker’s home was subjected to repeated attacks that left her in fear for her life. And yet the police brought only two charges of criminal damage. She talks about her ordeal – and why the law must change

Mon 24 May 2021 01.00 EDT

It was a warm, sunny Saturday in May 2020 but Sophie Walker was locked inside her house in north London, in the dark, with her 10-year-old daughter. She had drawn all the curtains and was sitting well away from the windows, doing jigsaws, listening to the country singer Kacey Musgraves and counting down the hours until her husband came home from work.

Walker, who was the founding leader of the Women's Equality party (WEP), had good reason to be fearful. The next morning her neighbour, whom she had asked to keep an eye on the house, would call to tell her his CCTV had captured a man hanging around outside her house at 4am. Later that day, she discovered the embers of a fire smouldering in her back garden. "Near the fire was a vodka bottle with petrol in it and a big pile of wood. The word 'cunt' was scrawled on the path in graffiti."

Walker was sure she knew who this man was. She believed he had been stalking her for weeks and was the person responsible for other incidents: slashing the tyres on her car, setting fire to her garden fence and eventually throwing a brick through her window, for which he pleaded guilty to criminal damage. The day Walker and her daughter were holed up, the man had already been banned from the area as part of his bail conditions. The police would later confirm that his electronic tag hadn't been activated. "I thought: 'I'm going to be dead before they can stop this man,'" she says. "He seemed to be able to act with total impunity."

Through her job, Walker was acutely aware of the impact of stalking – in fact, she ran a WEP campaign on the issue in 2016 with the singer Lily Allen, calling for a register of stalkers similar to that of sex offenders. Allen backed the campaign after her own seven-year ordeal with a stalker culminated in the perpetrator breaking into her bedroom intending, he later told the police, to stick a knife through her face.

"I was appalled by what happened to her," says Walker, who at the time was also running to be mayor of London. "But now here I am talking to you with this horrible new emotional understanding that I didn't have then. It has changed me for life. I don't think I will ever feel 100% safe again."

It has changed me for life. I don't think I will ever feel 100% safe again

Walker is speaking to me via Zoom from her new home. At the beginning of the year, she moved for a fresh start. “We’d raised our babies in that house, renovated it, painted it, loved it. In the end, it was a mess,” she says. The fires started by her alleged stalker were “close to my daughter’s playhouse, which was decorated with pretty pink flags. After the arson attacks it just looked tattered and hopeless.”

Walker’s ordeal started in April 2020, just as the first lockdown began. She returned from a walk to find her car tyres slashed. “It was upsetting because I thought it must have been someone having a bad reaction to lockdown and put it down to a one-off incident.”

Then it happened again. “I felt really sick,” she says. “Because we were clearly being targeted.” She contacted the police and installed security cameras.

A few days later, she was making dinner when her husband ran into the room shouting that their back fence was on fire. They called 999. The fire brigade extinguished the blaze, which had also engulfed some mature trees, but deemed it not to be suspicious.

“The police were called too, but didn’t show up,” Walker says. “I spent the whole of the next day begging them to come out because I just knew in the pit of my stomach that something was wrong, that the back of my house being on fire was related to the fact my tyres were slashed. But nobody came.” The next day, one of her daughters spotted another fire. She saw flames at the back of the house, beside her playhouse in the garden, which spread along the fence and up into the trees.

The police came and took a statement and a police engineer installed a panic button at the property. The couple made plans to send their three eldest children, who are aged 16 to 18, to stay with relatives. “My eldest daughter is autistic and was already having a really hard time dealing with lockdown. None of us slept that night – my little one spent the night in my bed feeling very frightened.” The three teenagers left the next day and did not return for several weeks.

Two days later, in the early hours of the morning, someone threw a brick through the living room window. “We heard a massive smash that shook the front of the house ... Telling you this just makes me feel sick,” she says, her voice cracking, “but I remember thinking: ‘He’s in.’”



Walker delivers her keynote speech at the Women's Equality Party's first annual conference in Manchester, November 2016. Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

“My husband and I leapt up together and ran downstairs. I was terrified but wanted to stop him getting up to my daughter’s bedroom.”

Her attacker had fled but their newly installed CCTV picked up an image of a figure in the early-morning light. “He was wearing a parka with a hood drawn down to cover his face,” she recalls.

Walker pressed the panic alarm and the couple ran out to the street to meet the police when they arrived. The patrol car sped off and soon caught up with a man matching the description they had given. “I couldn’t tell who it was until the police arrested him and told me. After that, when I knew who it was, I saw him frequently – and realised I’d seen him frequently before.”

The man was found to be carrying lighter fuel and matches. After pleading guilty to criminal damage on 25 April in a virtual court, he was released on

bail. “I was very frightened at this point,” says Walker. “I thought: ‘He’s out and the police aren’t recognising this as a pattern of obsessive and controlling behaviour.’”

On 28 April, the couple were downstairs in their house when they heard a crash from above. Walker’s husband looked out of the window and caught the man having accessed their roof and smashing the tiles with a big stick.

Again, they called the police. And again, sighs Walker, they had to explain the whole story from the start.

The man was picked up once more and charged with a further count of criminal damage and released on bail on the condition he did not enter her postcode. “I was absolutely terrified to be left in the house,” she says. “And when I was at home, I was frightened to move around inside or go near the windows in case he was outside watching.”

By the time of the weekend in May that she spent locked inside with her youngest daughter, Walker was at a complete loss. Her husband had to go away for work and “I was hysterical,” she says. “The whole situation was spinning out of control.” She turned to social media, [tweeting](#): “There was a man in front of my house at 4am who has been ordered to stay away. Another fire at my house this afternoon. What do you do when the police and CPS seem incapable of stopping someone?”

She believes the [Metropolitan police](#) were alerted to her tweets after they were shared by her friends in political circles. After the man was arrested again that night, a senior detective rang her to say he was trying to build a harassment case. The vodka bottle filled with petrol, which police had left on her kitchen table, was finally taken away and a partial fingerprint found. However, due to the length of time it had taken to collect this crucial piece of evidence, it had been compromised.

The terror of someone coming after you is matched only by the terror of the police not knowing what they are doing

On 4 May, Walker's case was referred to the Met's specialist Stalking Threat Assessment Centre and identified as stalking. The same day, the CPS refused the harassment and arson charges the police were trying to bring.

"They couldn't charge him with stalking because he had already pleaded guilty to two counts of criminal damage," explains Walker's lawyer Sophie Naftalin of [Bhatt Murphy Solicitors](#), who claims there are clear "systemic failings" in Walker's case.

"A stalking conviction could have been in the bag just on the criminal damage offences, but the prosecutor was not thinking about it in those terms," Naftalin explains. "Sophie and her family were therefore denied the justice of him being prosecuted for stalking, which more adequately reflects their suffering and could have seen him face a more severe penalty. Stalking with intent is a much more serious offence than two counts of criminal damage."

"Even when we used the panic button, the officers who responded weren't across the case," says Walker. "There was no sharing of information, no joining of the dots. The terror of someone coming after you relentlessly is matched only by the terror of the police not knowing what they are doing. It's like a horror film with the character coming for you again and again and nobody can get there in time."

According to the [Suzy Lamplugh Trust](#), which runs the National Stalking Helpline, one in five women will be victims of stalking in their lifetime. The charity defines stalking as "a pattern of fixated and obsessive behaviour which is repeated, persistent, intrusive and causes fear of violence or engenders alarm".



‘There is a hole in the police understanding of the psychological fear involved’ ... Walker. Photograph: David Levene/The Guardian

The pandemic has emboldened perpetrators, as lockdown has confined victims to their homes and made them more easy to find. The Met reported a 300% increase in stalking reports in London during the first year of the pandemic – 7,909 offences were recorded by police between April 2020 and February 2021, compared with 1,908 between April 2019 and March 2020. The police put this down to better recording. However, a [report](#) published last month by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust revealed that stalking – both online and in person – has become [more frequent](#) and more intense during the lockdowns. Walker believes lockdown may have driven her attacker to act. “This man knew I was a sitting duck,” she says.

Walker stepped down from the WEP in 2019 and co-founded [Activate](#), which supports women from minoritised communities who want to run for political office. She says she missed out on months of work due to the advocacy she had to do on her own case. “You become a campaigner for your own cause out of fear and to keep you and everyone around you safe,” she says. Now she is throwing herself back into the feminist campaigning that drives her professional life, including her work as chief strategy officer at the feminist law firm [McAllister Olivarius](#).

I'm still here. There are many women who are not because they were not listened to or taken seriously

The ONS estimates that there are 1.5 million victims of stalking in England and Wales, yet conviction rates are staggeringly low. Data from the CPS shows that only 30,931 cases of stalking were reported to the police in 2019-20 and, of these, only 3,067 were charged and 2,288 prosecuted, which is roughly [double what it was five years ago](#).

This is not for a lack of high-profile women speaking about their experiences. The journalist Emily Maitlis described being stalked for 25 years by a man who has repeatedly breached restraining orders – even sending her letters from prison – as being akin to a “[chronic illness](#)”. The presenter Christine Lampard has [told](#) how she had to hide in her bathroom when her stalker appeared; the singer Nicola Roberts described the five years she was [stalked by her ex-partner](#) as the “unhappiest of my life”.

There have been attempts to improve things. Stalking protection orders (SPOs) were introduced in 2019. But according to the Suzy Lamplugh Trust, only 9% of the victims it surveyed on its helpline whose experience of stalking started after the first lockdown had an SPO in place. Walker is not surprised. “There is a hole in the police understanding of the psychological fear involved. When I was terrified and asking them to come, I was met with ‘Calm down’ and ‘What’s wrong with you?’

“They understand crime against property, but the psychological stuff and the imbalance of power women feel – they don’t get at all.”

A Met spokesperson says: “We have made significant investments into training our frontline officers in how to appropriately respond to, and investigate, allegations of stalking and we are sorry that the victim felt our response was not satisfactory.” They add that the force has recently invested more than £7m into Predatory Offender Units that are dedicated to tackling those posing a significant risk to adults and children.

Last month, plans to introduce a register of stalkers and serial domestic abusers [were shelved](#), sparking anger within the women’s sector. The

government had briefed that it would be supporting the proposed amendment to the [domestic abuse bill](#) in the wake of the killing in March of Sarah Everard, 33, [for which a police officer has been charged](#). Laura Richards, the founder of the stalking advisory service Paladin, said the briefings were “misleading … most likely intentionally so” and “a huge insult to victims and families”.

Walker still supports the idea of the stalking register that she campaigned for all those years ago. But she does point out that “the man who made my life miserable would not appear on a stalking register because he was never charged with stalking”.

She has no idea why she was targeted. As a feminist campaigner in the public eye, she says she is often inundated with misogynistic abuse, “including very intense and sustained violently graphic abuse via social media, mainly on Twitter.” However, given these accounts were always anonymous, she never reported any incidents to the police. The [journalist Rosamund Urwin](#) recently told of how her stalker, who had escaped from a secure unit, began abusing her online before approaching her in person.

On 11 May 2020, Walker got a restraining order against her alleged stalker. Now, she is determined to change things for other women. She has written to the [Met](#) and the [Independent Office for Police Conduct](#) seeking an investigation into the failure of frontline officers to understand and identify the offence of stalking in her case.

“I’m still here,” she says. “There are many women who are not because they were not listened to or taken seriously. If I have any leverage at all I would hope that it can be useful because, my God, we need any leverage we can get in this area. Women are just not being taken seriously.”

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/may/24/it-was-like-a-horror-film-sophie-walker-on-her-stalking-nightmare-and-how-the-police FAILED-her>

**Bob Dylan**

## **My favourite Dylan song – by Mick Jagger, Marianne Faithfull, Tom Jones, Judy Collins and more**



‘Scary and apocalyptic lyrics, viciously delivered’ ... Mick Jagger’s verdict on Desolation Row by Dylan, pictured at the BBC in June 1965. Photograph: Val Wilmer/Redferns

‘Scary and apocalyptic lyrics, viciously delivered’ ... Mick Jagger’s verdict on Desolation Row by Dylan, pictured at the BBC in June 1965. Photograph: Val Wilmer/Redferns

Bob Dylan is 80 today. But what’s his greatest song? Stars pick their favourite – and recall their own encounters, from Marianne Faithfull turning him down to Judy Collins whacking a policeman to get backstage

*Interviews by [Dave Simpson](#)*

Mon 24 May 2021 01.00 EDT

## **Mick Jagger**

### **Desolation Row (1965)**

I was playing Bob Dylan records at my parents' house when he was still an acoustic folk singer, but he was already very important and his lyrics were on point. The delivery isn't just the words, it's the accentuation and the moods and twists he puts on them. His greatness lies in the body of work. I was at a session for Blood on the Tracks [1975] and really enjoyed watching him record [Lily, Rosemary and the Jack of Hearts](#), with this incredible depth of storyline, surrounded by all these boring people from the record company who he had sitting in the control room. I couldn't record like that.

Desolation Row's lyrics are just so interesting and diverse. It isn't a real street so you create your own fantasy. I imagine an unforgiving place, somewhere you don't want to spend much time, peopled with strange characters. The opening line about the "postcards of the hanging" sets the tone, but then this awful event is juxtaposed with "the beauty parlour filled with sailors" and all these circus people. The lines "The agents and the superhuman crew / Come out and round up everyone that knows more than they do / Then they bring them to the factory where the heart-attack machine is strapped across their shoulders" are scary and apocalyptic, viciously delivered.

My reading is that that's about governmental, military control, but then there's the payoff: "When you asked me how I was doing, was that some kind of joke? Don't send me no more letters unless you mail them from Desolation Row." That sounds like a really personal thing. Musically, he prettifies it. I love the lovely half-Spanish guitar lines from the session guitarist, Charlie McCoy. It's actually a really lovely song, which shouldn't work with the imagery but does. You can listen to it all the time and still get something wonderful and new from it.

## **Judy Collins**

### **Bob Dylan's Dream (1963)**

I met Bob in Denver in summer 1959, when he was still called Robert Zimmerman. Then he came to see me in Colorado and, as he still reminds me, sat at my feet. Back then, he was always trying to get slots on the hootenannies and sang Woody Guthrie songs very badly. He was a nice guy. We'd get drunk together. He was homeless, so would sleep on people's floors, devouring their books. Then in 1961 folk bible Sing Out! printed the lyrics to Blowin' in the Wind, by which time he'd changed his name, and I was astonished. Soon after that I sat outside a blue door in the basement of a party in Woodstock listening to him playing Mr Tambourine Man over and over again. It was a moment I'll never forget.

I've sung lots of his songs, but my favourite is Bob Dylan's Dream. [British folk singer] Martin Carthy had taught him the melody of a traditional song called Lady Franklin's Lament, the story of the North West Passage, but Bob's lyrics transform it into something personal and dreamlike that's always haunted me. [Sings] "While riding on a train goin' west / I fell asleep for to take my rest ..." By then I was a raging Dylan fan. I once saw him at Madison Square Garden when I was very drunk and when a policeman tried to stop me getting backstage I actually slugged him, but not hard, with my purse.

## Marianne Faithfull

### It's All Over Now, Baby Blue (1966)

I first met Bob at the Savoy in 1965. There's [a clip of me and Joan Baez singing As Tears Go By](#) in the hotel room while Bob is hammering away on a typewriter. Later when I turned him down, he told me that it had been a poem about me, but he'd torn it up. I was so upset, but we got over that and have been friends for 56 years. I really like him.

I think It's All Over Now, Baby Blue is about those times in life where you just have to say, "OK, we tried, it didn't work", but it's a much sleeker way of saying it. It's very loving, but obviously it's all over. I don't really know why I love it so much, but I've been in many situations where I would have liked to have time stop and have a band playing and sing that song to people. I've recorded it twice. [The second time](#), I'd had more experiences and really

felt it. I love the way his songs change octaves. I'm suffering long Covid and my voice is cracked, but I'm trying to recover it by singing It's All Over Now, Baby Blue.

## **Yola**

### **Corrina, Corrina (1963)**

From his second album, The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan. It's his adaptation of a country blues song written in 1928, but what gets me is his beautiful delivery. He sings it in the same tone he sings Lay Lady Lay [1969], almost a speaking style. It's a song about someone he wants to come home and there's real delicacy in his voice. He's thought of as a folk singer but the blues are another foundation of his career, and you can hear him starting to flex his vocal muscles and finding ways of using his voice so you can hear every word.

## **Tom Jones**

### **Blowin' in the Wind (1962)**

I was on tour in the States in the summer of '65 with a British act, Peter and Gordon. Gordon Waller was a huge Dylan fan and played his records in the Holiday Inns. I wasn't struck by Dylan's voice at first but then I heard Blowin' in the Wind and I've been a fan ever since. The lyrics are fantastic. He's basically asking, "How many times do we have to go through all this shit before we realise that we're fucking up the world?" He paints pictures with his songs so you can see things happening. It's the same with What Good Am I [1989], which I've recorded. What good am I if I just stand by and let things happen that I know I should be changing? He was the first singer-songwriter to make me think.

## **Lee Fields**

### **Blowin' in the Wind (1962)**

When I was a kid and Martin Luther King was trying to enlighten people, Blowin' in the Wind personified the future. That opening line, "How many roads must a man walk down before you call him a man?" is amazing. That song helped me as a person of colour and the things Dylan was singing about are still happening, from hate crimes and attacks on Asians to the George Floyd situation. We're still walking those roads, because that's the only thing the common man has against power. We come together, we protest and hopefully build up enough momentum for things to change.

## **Suzanne Vega**

### **A Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall (1963)**

This song is so prophetic that it still speaks to the age we live in today. Lines such as, "I saw guns and sharp swords in the hands of young children" or "the pellets of poison are flooding their waters" are now facts found in today's newspapers. Other lines are the embodiment of mystery. The imagery in "I saw a white ladder all covered with water" will always haunt me, along with "I saw a black branch with blood that kept dripping." Each image stands alone, a miniature painting, a snapshot in the landscape of the soul. Still filled with power, needing no explanation.

## **Gillian Welch**

### **Ballad of a Thin Man (1965)**

I bought my first Dylan record – The Times They Are a-Changing [1964] - when I was 17, but to experience those early records in real time as he was releasing them must have been like being around when Shakespeare was creating new plays. Ballad of a Thin Man typifies the way Dylan's songs shine a spotlight on the world and human truths. The derision in his finger-pointing at Mr Jones ["Something is happening and you don't know what it is, do you?"] instilled in me at a young age that I did not want to be the person that didn't understand or he's calling out – the judge, the man in power. You want to be the person who knows what's up. This song changed my life.

## **Wayne Coyne, the Flaming Lips**

### **It's Alright Ma (I'm Only Bleeding) (1965)**

I heard this in 1971, by which time we'd been through Woodstock, Vietnam and the hippie era and he was already hailed as a genius. My 10-year-old ears agreed. I loved the line, "They made everything from toy guns that spark to flesh-coloured Christs that glow in the dark." I had no idea what he was talking about, but I wanted a flesh-coloured Christ. It sounded cool. As I've got older the song sounds even better. My favourite Dylan is when he's pissed off and he knows he's right. It's such a remarkable torrent of lyrics. It feels like it could go on for hours and not lose the energy. People didn't stop war because of Dylan. They all started singing about war being wrong, but his legacy is intact before he's dead. I think that in 200 years, no one will want to be an Adolf Hitler or a Donald Trump. They'll want to be a Bob Dylan.

## **Billy Bragg**

### **Mr Tambourine Man (1965)**

In 1972, I had a Saturday job in a hardware shop that had a record store in the basement. One day the guys there put on Dylan's Greatest Hits. I'd heard the Byrds' version of Tambourine Man but they only used one verse. Hearing the full four verses aged 14 blew my mind. Dylan gave me the blueprint for my career of a solitary figure on stage, holding a mirror up to the world and the idea that a song can't change the world but can change someone's perspective. "To dance beneath the diamond sky with one hand waving free, silhouetted by the sea, circled by the circus sands, with all memory and fate, driven deep beneath the waves, let me forget about today until tomorrow." I can still recite huge chunks of it, and if I hear that song now, it stops my day.

## **Meghan Remy, US Girls**

## **Changing of the Guards (1978)**

I loved Dylan but had been put off the Street Legal album by the cover until someone told me to check it out because it was a perfect example of live recording with all the mistakes left in. It's like the backing singers have never heard the song before. They aren't on time, the second voice is always late but that's the charm and spirit of the recording. The lyrics are like a fantasy – you'd think they're impossible to sing but he somehow cuts the syllables up so they fit in. It's an insane skill to have, and meanwhile the hooks just keep on coming.

## **Dan Bejar, Destroyer**

### **The Groom's Still Waiting at the Altar (1981)**

This is on Shot of Love [1985; it was initially a 1981 B-side], the last of his Christian albums. It's a real burner blues number that harks back to his 60s style and has a lot of wild imagery and equally wild singing. He's older and in some ways more interesting. It's a doomsday song about a world in need of salvation in a Christian sense. Many of his songs take place on the brink of destruction and there's a lot of apocalyptic stuff about a world burning, but then there are all these asides about a woman named Claudette. He's effectively and kinda manically describing a world that's falling apart, but makes it sound fun. The chaos is infectious. Suddenly all that 60s mumbo-jumbo about Dylan being a prophet started to make sense to me.

## **Mike Scott, the Waterboys**

### **Lonesome Day Blues (2001)**

When I was a kid of 12 or 13 in the 70s listening to Bob and wishing he'd go back to rock'n'roll, Love and Theft is the album I'd have wanted him to make. He'd been ill and rallied, and it's so full of life force. I bought it on tour in America on 9/11, the day it came out. Lonesome Day Blues won my heart very quickly. It's about a guy who has lost everything but never loses

that sparkle in his eye. When I listen to it, the scenes in the song – driving a car, “weather not fit for man nor beast”, somewhere in the south like Mississippi and seeing “your lover man, comin’ ’cross the barren fields” – play in my mind like a movie. It’s got gravity, power, it’s funny. The relentless minimalism of the repeated, hypnotic riff drives it. It’s punk, too. When I played it at [the 75th birthday tribute in Greenwich Village](#), I played a one-note guitar solo.

## Eleanor Friedberger

### I've Made Up My Mind to Give Myself to You (2020)

Rough and Rowdy Ways came out during the pandemic when we were all trapped at home, and this song hit me hardest. Dylan writes super-beautiful, romantic love songs. This one is a travelling song, and he does something that I’ve stolen and mentions specific place names [“From Salt Lake City to Birmingham, from East LA to San Antone”], which makes it real and relatable. We don’t think of Dylan as vulnerable, but he lays himself on the line. He’s world-weary, and his delivery is so languid as he stretches out the words. He was almost 80, and made an album just as great as the ones he made decades ago.

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2021/may/24/favourite-dylan-song-mick-jagger-marianne-faithfull-tom-jones-judy-collins-and-more>

## Real estate

## How retirement villages are becoming part of high street life in the UK



Lady Gadsden moved into Audley Nightingale Place retirement village in Clapham last October to be closer to her daughter and is ‘going to book in for exercise classes’. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

Lady Gadsden moved into Audley Nightingale Place retirement village in Clapham last October to be closer to her daughter and is ‘going to book in for exercise classes’. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

Developers snap up vacant retail and office sites in urban areas for apartment blocks for over-65s



[Julia Kollewe](#)

Mon 24 May 2021 01.00 EDT

The ideas to reboot Britain's pandemic-stricken high streets are coming in. After a record number of shop closures last year during the worst recession in history, stores are being replaced with student flats, gyms and crazy golf courses. But in one corner of south [London](#), there is a different approach: retirement homes.

A retirement village has been built between Balham and Clapham high streets in south London, one of a number of purpose-built apartment blocks for older people that are springing up in town and city centres across the UK after a year of devastation for shopping districts.

Local planners hope that by bringing more people into town centres, these residences will help to regenerate Britain's high streets.

Dominic Curran, a property policy adviser at the British Retail Consortium, said: "It is a very good idea to get more people living in town centres. We also need more housing for older people over 65, and it absolutely makes sense for them to be living in urban locations. Many will move with a lot of housing equity in their pockets, which will generate spend and footfall for local shops."



The swimming pool at Audley Nightingale Place retirement village in Clapham. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

The retirement home idea is running alongside plans to convert empty shopping sites. All over the UK, there are proposals to change [derelict high street locations into something else](#). In Reading, a House of Fraser outlet is being converted into a food hall, bowling alley and crazy golf course, while on London's Oxford Street a former BHS store has become a Swingers golf centre and food hall. In Edinburgh, the House of Fraser on Princes Street is being developed by the drinks firm Diageo into a tourist attraction promoting Johnnie Walker whisky.

However, Curran said high streets need more housing to survive alongside retail and leisure.

Retirement villages have traditionally been gated communities in the rolling countryside and on the edge of towns

To help struggling high streets, the BRC is calling for reforms to business rates – the tax businesses pay on the properties they operate from – as part of a landmark government review under way. It also said support is needed to address £2.8bn of [rent arrears built up by retailers](#) unable to trade from physical premises during the coronavirus pandemic. Retailers make up 5%

of the economy yet account for 25% of business rates. Firms have benefited from rates relief during the pandemic but this is set to end on 30 June.

Retirement villages [have traditionally been gated communities in the countryside](#) and on the edge of towns but developers have been snapping up retail and office sites that lie vacant in urban areas to build apartment blocks for the over-65s, many of whom want to be closer to bustling city centres for eating out, shopping and cultural pursuits. Several village builders reported that inquiries for retirement housing jumped during the Covid crisis, with more people feeling isolated and lonely.



The library and lounge at Audley Nightingale Place retirement village in Clapham. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

“Too often retirement villages are built away from local amenities with poor public transport links,” says Liz Emerson, a co-founder of the Intergenerational Foundation, a charity. “We welcome any developments that bring older generations back into the heart of communities.”

Dorothy Fowler, 79, was one of the first to buy an apartment in the Audley retirement village in Clapham that opened at the start of the pandemic in 2020. As soon as Covid restrictions were eased in April, she went out for a restaurant meal with a group of other residents.

“We’ve all become good friends, probably because of Covid,” she says. “We are right next to Clapham South tube and will be able to go to the West End.” Audley also offers to take residents in a van for regular shopping and cultural trips.



Residents, who include Pi the dog, meet for coffee at Audley’s retirement village in Clapham. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

As cities are being reshaped, the Social Market Foundation, a thinktank, said retirement housing could play a key role in the town and city centres of the future, especially if there is reduced need for retail and office space.

A record 11,120 chain store outlets closed between January and June last year, while 5,119 opened. The 6,001 net store closures were double the level in the same period a year earlier, as many shops fail to reopen, and the switch to working from home risks permanently lower levels of city centre footfall.

Developers are spoiled for choice. Audley’s chief executive, Nick Sanderson, said the company was offered three shopping centre sites in only one week, as well as “every Debenhams department store” after the retailer’s liquidation.

“Bringing [older communities] back into the centre of things is good for town centres because they are bringing economic vitality when everyone else is working,” he said.



Audley's Nick Sanderson says it was offered three shopping centre sites in a week, as well as 'every Debenhams department store'. Photograph: Jill Mead/The Guardian

Retirement Villages Group, which is backed by Axa Investment Managers, the French asset management firm, [plans to build 5,000 homes for older people across 40 urban sites over the next 10 years](#). It recently received planning consent for West Byfleet and Chester, which will include some rental homes. “Our strategy going forward is urban,” says Will Bax, the firm’s chief executive.

The pensions and insurance group Legal & General has the ambition to [build 3,000 retirement homes in UK city centres](#) in a £2bn project in coming years. Its Guild Living arm has plans for retirement residences on the sites of former Homebase stores in Walton-on-Thames and Bath, and on the site of a former hospital in Epsom, as well as its first London project in Uxbridge on the site of a retail warehouse.

However, not everyone is a fan of retirement residences in urban areas.

Legal & General's projects for Walton-on-Thames, Bath and Epsom have been rejected by council planners; the company has lodged appeals. Eugene Marchese, a co-founder of Guild Living, has accused Elmbridge borough council of ageism but the council rejected this and insisted that family homes were also “much-needed” in Walton-on-Thames. In Bath, one critic described the company's plans a “ghetto for the elderly”.

Nonetheless, retirement accommodation will remain part of the conversation over the future of the high street.

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/may/24/how-retirement-villages-are-becoming-part-of-high-street-life-in-the-uk>

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

## 2021.05.24 - Opinion

- [Abandoned by governments, Palestinians rely on the kindness of strangers](#)
- [How I've missed people who are pointlessly, breathtakingly rude](#)
- [Why fast-track grocery delivery apps could soon leave supermarkets on the shelf](#)
- [In Japan most people want to cancel the Olympics, but the government won't listen](#)
- [Happy 80th birthday to Bob Dylan, rock's most prescient, timeless voice](#)

---

[\*\*Opinion\*\*](#)[\*\*Palestinian territories\*\*](#)

# **Abandoned by governments, Palestinians rely on the kindness of strangers**

[\*\*Nesrine Malik\*\*](#)

The fight for justice has been left to individuals to champion – but we're growing in number



A pro-Palestine demonstration in Athens, Greece, on 22 May 2021.  
Photograph: Nikolas Georgiou/ZUMA Wire/REX/Shutterstock

A pro-Palestine demonstration in Athens, Greece, on 22 May 2021.  
Photograph: Nikolas Georgiou/ZUMA Wire/REX/Shutterstock

Mon 24 May 2021 01.00 EDT

There was a time when support for the Palestinian cause was fed to Arabs with their mothers' milk. I am of a generation that grew up in the shadow of

the [Camp David agreement](#) and the assassination of the president of Egypt, Anwar Sadat, for what was seen as a betrayal of the Palestinians. Until Camp David in 1978, Egypt had been Palestine's main ally and the strongest military power in the region after Israel. The peace treaty returned Sinai to Egypt in exchange for recognition of Israel. With that normalisation, Egypt closed the door to any sort of Arab military assistance to the Palestinians for ever.

We inherited that era's bitter disappointment. Palestine had been such an integral part of Arab identity for so long that it came to be known as "the case" or "the file" – an urgent unresolved issue at the heart of our world. After the Camp David agreement, "the case" went from being a rousing call for solidarity to something more melancholy and scattered.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the Iranian revolution motivated Arab and Gulf governments to ingratiate themselves with the US, and that wouldn't work if [Israel](#) remained their public enemy number one. So even the lip service paid to the Palestinian cause in the period immediately after Camp David fell away, and the Palestinians were slowly rubbed out of the public consciousness from the 1990s onwards.

Poems about Palestine stopped appearing in our Arabic-language textbooks and in the media. The Lebanese singer Fairuz once sang, "The striking anger is coming and I am full of faith", in a popular song about the return of the Palestinians driven out of Jerusalem. But her chant was no longer on the airwaves. The Arab world's most celebrated poet, Nizar Qabbani, wrote, "The [migrant pigeons will return](#)/ To your sacred roofs/ And your children will play again", again about Jerusalem. But they did not.

Eventually, the cause became something governments didn't even feel the need to namecheck any more. The idea that was subtly passed down, via erasure and silence, was that any active support for the Palestinians was naive, a hangover from the past, or part and parcel of an extremist religious agenda. By the time Donald Trump announced he was moving the American embassy [from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem](#), Al Jazeera noted the muted response from Arab governments and [asked](#), "Why would Arabs not forget the Palestinian cause, now that they have themselves a thousand causes?" By withdrawing even their moral backing of the Palestinians, weak despotic

regimes across the region helped make the cause seem a fringe issue, something only romantics and radicals held on to.

This same suspicion hangs over support for Palestine in the west. And with that suspicion comes an accusation – that there is an unreasonable fixation with the issue. A question hovers over solidarity with Palestine – why focus on this crisis when there are so many others around the world that demand the same, if not more, outrage? What about the Uyghurs in China or the Rohingya in Myanmar? The answer to that question is that western politicians may be doing too little in Myanmar or China, but they are certainly doing enough to acknowledge that human rights abuses are taking place. British MPs declared a genocide in China. Myanmar is under sanctions. Even the west's other coddled ally in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia, is coming under censure, with Joe Biden suspending arms sales to Saudi Arabia earlier this year. Meanwhile, the UN security council [failed to pass](#) even a statement condemning Israel's military response in Gaza and calling for a ceasefire.

The view that Palestine attracts a disproportionate degree of moral outrage fails to account for the fact that so little of that outrage comes from the places that count – the ranks of government ministers, political elites and the mass media. And because that advocacy is only allowed to thrive outside the respectable mainstream, it is easier then to frame it as disreputable, as a sinister singling out of Israel, or special pleading for a not-so-special cause.

But the stubborn reality is that the Palestinians are special. They have, unlike most other oppressed peoples, been denied the language of legitimacy. The facts of their occupation, their resistance and the apartheid they are subjected to have been annulled or made ambiguous. The Palestinian cause has been rendered dubious through a kind of reversal of roles in the narration of the conflict. The victims became the aggressors. The Palestinians were abandoned to their fate, and then framed for it.

Palestinians were held responsible for the crimes of individual terrorists and punished for the retaliations of Hamas. There was no defensive action they could legitimately take, whether in response to eviction from their homes or attacks on civilians. A well rehearsed line, slickly delivered by credible politicians, defined the situation – Israel had the right to defend itself. What

kind of person doesn't support the right of Israel, or indeed, any country, to defend itself? Perhaps someone with terrorist sympathies, perhaps someone who is antisemitic, perhaps someone who is a crank conspiracist who collects lost causes and has no grasp of international law or the region's history.

[Israel should take note: the weight of opinion is turning against it | Jonathan Freedland](#)

[Read more](#)

But something is changing. That negative profile of the unsavoury Palestine supporter is being challenged. The latest assault on Gaza, met once again with the same robotic excuses for Israel's actions, seems to have shifted the balance. The geopolitics may be the same, but the ability of governments to maintain a monopoly on explaining what is happening on the ground in Israel and Palestine is weakening. [Hagai El-Ad](#), the executive director of human rights group B'Tselem, spoke directly to those who might now be questioning the official line. "Believe your eyes. Follow your conscience. The reason that it looks like apartheid is simply because it is apartheid."

More and more people are believing their eyes. The individuals who [support the Palestinians](#) are growing in number and confidence, shaking off the "fringe activist" stereotype. Social media and the rise of an anti-establishment protest movement last summer are bringing in the Palestinian cause from the cold. Its advocates are beginning to find each other, to share information and footage, to draw legitimacy for the cause with every new connection. They are not terrorist sympathisers, antisemites or radicals, though any mass mobilisation will inevitably attract its share of cranks and thugs, who should be vigorously called out. They should not be allowed to taint a growing movement of foster carers for the cause, those who see a gross injustice visited on the Palestinians every day, and see no pledge or promise from their leaders that anything will be done about it. People are showing up for Palestine not because their politics are dodgy or their characters questionable, but because governments across the Arab and western worlds have left them with no other choice.

- Nesrine Malik is a Guardian columnist

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/may/24/abandoned-governments-palestinians-kindness-strangers>

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

[Opinion](#)[Life and style](#)

# How I've missed people who are pointlessly, breathtakingly rude

[Zoe Williams](#)



There haven't been many encounters with casual spikiness during lockdown. But when this newspaper and I were gratuitously insulted, I found it completely thrilling



Whatevs ... ‘Nobody’s so much as said “You’re welcome” in a sarcastic voice since 2019.’ Photograph: Chris Rout/Alamy

Whatevs ... ‘Nobody’s so much as said “You’re welcome” in a sarcastic voice since 2019.’ Photograph: Chris Rout/Alamy

Mon 24 May 2021 01.00 EDT

Occasionally, I appear on Sky to do a press preview. In the couple of hours before midnight, two people selected to disagree with each other choose the cream of the next day’s headlines, and talk about them. More often than not, five or six papers will go with the same story; in extreme cases – such as when some actual news has occurred – all the papers lead with the same thing. Then, just to mix it up, you have to talk for five minutes about whether or not the Loch Ness monster really was just the penis of a whale, as the Daily Star recently revealed.

Before you go on air, you discuss which stories you want to do, expecting this to be a rufthy-tufty sort of exchange, since the whole point of the two guests is that they will never agree about anything.

So anyway, there I am, discussing the papers with a producer and a foe, and I have chosen a story from our own front page, and the foe says: “Can we

not do that? It's just so dismal. Nobody's interested." And I say: "Well, I'm quite interested ..."

"I'm going to die of boredom!" she exclaims. "The Guardian is just so boring."

It was incredibly rude and completely thrilling. I'm not talking about rage, that's horrible, but I can't believe how much I've missed this insouciant, studs-first, deliberate offence-giving, like a flash storm after months of claggy humidity. Between one thing and another – never seeing anyone, the grinding seriousness of the world – casual spikiness just fell out of fashion. Nobody's so much as critiqued my eyeliner or said "You're welcome" in a sarcastic voice since 2019. That bracing feeling, where half of you wants to retaliate and the other half is laughing at how slow and clunky your retaliating half is, and the laughing half always wins because your rapier is just not sharp enough, and never will be – it's the best. Wild water swimming can do one.

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/may/24/how-i've-missed-people-who-are-pointlessly-breathtakingly-rude>

[Opinion](#)[Retail industry](#)

# Why fast-track grocery delivery apps could soon leave supermarkets on the shelf

[Collin Wallace](#)

Investors are betting the big chains won't be able to compete with startups that bring your shopping within minutes



‘Grocery is a multibillion-pound industry in the midst of a massive disruption.’ A Weezy courier in London. Photograph: Toby Melville/Reuters

‘Grocery is a multibillion-pound industry in the midst of a massive disruption.’ A Weezy courier in London. Photograph: Toby Melville/Reuters

Mon 24 May 2021 04.00 EDT

Over the past year, you may have noticed the rapid growth in all kinds of app-based delivery services. For a while, supermarkets weren't involved:

traditionally, the industry does not grow very much. The margins are small, but predictable.

But something strange has happened: interest and investment in app-based delivery has exploded, with various fast-track services offering to have groceries at your door within a specified number of minutes. [Weezy](#) is the market leader in the UK, but you may also have heard of Fresh Direct or Sainsbury's 60-minute delivery option, Chop Chop. Grocery is a multibillion-pound industry that appears to be in the midst of a massive disruption.

One of the most famous business cases here is the story of Webvan. It was one of the first grocery delivery apps, started in the late 1990s in the US, but it also offers a cautionary tale. It was fuelled by massive investment, all too common for the dotcom era. It built massive warehouses, and bought trucks, delivery vehicles and machinery in a bid to become a digitally enabled grocery delivery chain. It raised [US\\$800m](#), and ended up bankrupt three years later.

So why is this rash of apps any different? Onlookers could be forgiven for seeing the massive losses posted by some of the companies, and thinking they could be heading in the same direction. Simultaneously, you may also wonder at the even larger investments that continue to pour into them. If you are confused about why this is possible, you're not alone.

To understand why this is happening, you have to understand that grocery delivery apps are not in the grocery business. They are in the data and logistics business. Grocery delivery apps today are “four-sided marketplaces”. Most people are only familiar with two of these “sides”: the customer and the grocer. If you have had a really bad, or really good, delivery experience, then you are probably also familiar with the third, courier “side” of the market – while food producers/manufacturers make up the fourth.

Delivery apps make money from all of these market participants. Customers pay the delivery cost, service fees and usually a mark-up on the groceries they purchase. The grocery chains pay a commission for each item sold. The couriers, typically classified as contractors, “pay” by forgoing the usual

benefits of an employee, thus subsidising the cost of delivery, and the food producers/manufacturers pay for customer data and advertising within the apps.

You might think chains such as Tesco, Walmart and Aldi are better positioned than grocery delivery apps, because they're so much bigger and have correspondingly large scale. However, it's important to note the scale grocery chains have is largely a response to their low margins, and so doesn't necessarily provide a competitive advantage. They have large operations, supply chains and shopfronts because competition has reduced their profits to a meagre 2% to 3%. They have to have tremendous scale not because they are thriving, but because it keeps them alive.

[Fast food: the new wave of delivery services bringing groceries in minutes](#)

[Read more](#)

Which gets to the crux of why these delivery apps are different to Webvan – and why grocery chains might have a hard time competing with delivery apps. The two businesses have completely different economics: while supermarket chains sell groceries, these delivery apps sell access to supermarkets (and also to supermarket customers and their data). So, even though grocery delivery apps are still offering groceries on their platforms, they don't have any of the infrastructure cost associated with the grocery business: employees, warehouses, trucks and costly shops. They only have the cost of moving electrons to power their website and coordinate armies of contractors.

To understand the explosion in grocery delivery apps, understand that growth-driven investors are betting not on the growth of the grocery business. Instead, investors are betting that grocery delivery apps represent an entirely new type of business, with fundamentally different margins and economics than the supermarket business.

Supermarket chains, trying to spin up their own grocery delivery services, are a lot like Webvan; a low-margin grocery store whose business model is only complicated by expensive logistics and delivery. Like Webvan, grocery chains trying to move into this space are equally likely to fail. Grocery chains will have to find their own unique ways to offer customer

convenience, without compromising their own experience, supply chains, shopfronts and infrastructure.

- Collin Wallace is the CEO and co-founder of ZeroStorefront
- 

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/may/24/fast-track-grocery-delivery-apps-supermarkets>

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

## OpinionJapan

# In Japan most people want to cancel the Olympics, but the government won't listen

[Koichi Nakano](#)

Prime minister Yoshihide Suga risks playing host to a coronavirus spike if he doesn't check his Games hubris

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



Protesters march in Tokyo last week to call for the cancellation of the Olympics. Photograph: Koji Sasahara/AP

Protesters march in Tokyo last week to call for the cancellation of the Olympics. Photograph: Koji Sasahara/AP

Mon 24 May 2021 05.00 EDT

The Olympic torch is currently making its way across Japan in a [live-streamed relay](#) – at the time of writing, it had passed through 28 of all 47 prefectures in the country. The Games are scheduled to take place in two months. But whereas you might expect the national mood to be crackling with excitement, things are different, with more and more Japanese people reaching an uncomfortable conclusion: the Games need to be scrapped altogether.

A recent poll shows more than 80% of the public [want](#) the Tokyo Olympics to be either cancelled or postponed again, an option the International Olympic Committee has [ruled out](#). As the public see it, the Games are distracting the government from dealing with the Covid crisis head-on. They are also expected to drain medical and financial resources when they are needed most. About [80%](#) of all Covid deaths in Japan have occurred since December. Many fear that the worst is yet to come.

It is true that, with 12,261 deaths, Japan's record is not as bad as that of Britain, the US or the other G7 countries (though it is considerably worse than many other countries in Asia and Oceania). The problem is that most Japanese people do not attribute this relative success to their political leaders. Public approval of the prime minister, Yoshihide Suga, and his cabinet has dropped to its lowest since he took office last September at 35% (against 43% who disapproved), according to [a recent poll](#). Meanwhile, 63% expressed dissatisfaction at his handling of the pandemic (as opposed to 33% who had a favourable opinion).

The largest urban centres of [Japan](#), including Tokyo, are currently in the third state of emergency since the start of the pandemic, and the second this calendar year; this was initially slated to end on 11 May, but has now been extended until 31 May, with further extensions and even expansions possible. The state of emergency has never been a hard lockdown, with schools, shops and restaurants mostly remaining open, albeit with earlier closing times and other restrictions in place, though larger venues have been more severely controlled.

The Japanese public tend to see these measures as too little, too late. A hard lockdown would not be popular, but the never-ending limbo of repeated soft lockdowns puts off even the most patient and cooperative of people. Unlike

in other countries, the root cause of the cycle of denial and delay isn't a new variant or poor public health infrastructure: it's the Olympics.

Although Suga insists he has “[never put the Olympics first](#)”, it is hard not to see the fact the world will have its eyes on Japan this summer as having an effect. He delays making hard decisions, such as introducing states of emergency. When he finally does make them, he sets the period too short and ends up having to extend it. In the meantime, lockdown measures are starting to grate. Serving alcohol at eateries and bars has been banned, though the commuter trains remain crowded at rush hours. Incomprehensibly, theatres may continue to operate at half-capacity for live performances, whereas large cinemas were ordered to close. The arbitrariness of the measures partly comes from the failure of coordination between the national and prefectural governments, which are both keen to avoid having to take responsibility.

The most damning factor is the spectacular failure of the vaccination programme. With a mere [4.4%](#) of the population getting their first jab to date, Japan is at the very bottom of the OECD rankings – it has yet to even [finish inoculating](#) all medical professionals. Suga recently proclaimed that he aimed to finish vaccinating elderly people by the end of July (which would be during the Olympics), but that would require administering a million jabs a day, when the [daily rate of doses](#) administered so far is a mere third of that at this point. Japan is rich enough to have procured the vaccines, but it has been sitting on its stockpiles. It is now certain the vast majority will remain unvaccinated and exposed to the risk of infection when the Games begin.

Although there has been a blanket ban on all new entries for foreign nationals, including students, about [90,000](#) Olympics-related visitors, including some 11,500 Olympians and Paralympians, will be let in. Unless the athletes remain strictly isolated from one another, the Olympic village could easily turn into a land-based version of the [Diamond Princess](#), the infamous cruise-ship that became a Covid “petri dish” last year. The organisers are about to designate 30 hospitals that would have priority access for the athletes, and have recruited 200 doctors and 500 nurses as “volunteers” – at a time when the medical system is already under enormous strain.

## [79,000 people flying in for Tokyo Olympics, Japanese media reports](#)

[Read more](#)

Suga seems to think the Games will provide some much needed distraction and relief for the world at the end of the long tunnel that is the pandemic. (He must also have in mind the fact general elections are scheduled for autumn this year.) He has repeatedly claimed the occasion will be “proof that humanity has defeated the virus”. It’s a lofty sentiment that is increasingly contradicted by the pandemic’s development, particularly in the global south, which remains unvaccinated and exposed to new threats in the form of variants.

The IOC vice-president, John Coates, has made the astounding claim the Games can be held [even if Tokyo remains under a state of emergency](#). But creating a televised bubble to beam images of the fast and the strong around the world during a global pandemic – it would be hard to justify this happening anywhere, and Japan is no exception.

- Koichi Nakano is a professor of political science at Sophia University, Japan
- 

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/may/24/japan-cancel-olympics-coronavirus>

[Opinion](#)[Bob Dylan](#)

## **Happy 80th birthday to Bob Dylan, rock's most prescient, timeless voice**

[John Harris](#)



As he has aged and changed, so have his songs, but the essentials remain: honesty, wisdom and hope in the face of despair



Illustration: R Fresson/The Guardian

Illustration: R Fresson/The Guardian

Sun 23 May 2021 09.00 EDT

When I first properly listened to Bob Dylan, I was 10 years old. Each Saturday, Radio 1 aired a series titled [25 Years of Rock](#), based on news and music spanning the years 1955 to 1979. And that week, in among archive clips of Lyndon Johnson, Harold Wilson, the Vietnam war and whatever else had happened in 1965, there was the sudden whip-crack of a snare drum followed by six minutes of music unlike anything I had ever heard: a great cascading noise, led by a voice that, as the US composer Michael Pisaro [later wrote](#), somehow managed to be simultaneously “compassionate, tragic ... vengeful, gleeful, ironic, weary, spectral, [and] haranguing”.

I soon found out that what I had experienced was [Dylan's watershed single](#). Like a Rolling Stone, whose lyric is ostensibly addressed to some unnamed wealthy socialite as she is suddenly cut off from money and privilege. But as a matter of instinct, what I still hear in that song is a message from someone in the midst of early adulthood about how to live at that time of life. The best way to be when young, Dylan seems to insist, is restless, light on baggage, and scornful of any conventions or rules – reconciled, as Like a Rolling Stone [famously puts it](#), to having no direction home.

On Monday, Dylan turns 80. The music he now makes – most recently heard on last year’s very good album, [Rough and Rowdy Ways](#) – has a rather different relationship to home, history and the load we amass as we live. Unlike so many musicians, he has not tried to deny his advancing years, but fully embraced them – something clear in both his words, and the growly, lived-in voice in which he sings them. Dylan’s songs now remind us that the past is inescapable, and age and experience ought to be treated with the utmost respect. And in doing so, they capture an understanding that surely settles on us as we get older: that few things are in any way new, and if we want to even begin to understand what’s going on, we should start by looking back.

This is what it’s like growing up with a songwriter – even if, as in my case, you are 30 years behind them. To take a few other examples, on the album [New Morning](#), released in 1970, you hear the sound of what followed his years of iconoclasm and defiance: domestic contentment, and the joy of settling down. By contrast, 1975’s [Blood on the Tracks](#) is a raw picture of separation and upheaval. The apparently brief period Dylan then spent as an evangelical Christian saw someone hitting their 40s trying to connect with a cast-iron set of certainties that seemed to quickly prove untenable; a decade or so later, on 1989’s [Oh Mercy](#), early middle age was portrayed as a time of regret, exasperation, and resignation to the fact that, as one song put it, “[everything is broken](#)”.

Listen to a recent song somewhat mischievously called [False Prophet](#), and what ties everything together is clear: “I’m the enemy of the unlivéd, meaningless life,” Dylan sings, which takes you to the core of what he does, and the sense of insights passed on from each stage of his existence.

Among the many things that have always set him apart from most other songwriters, moreover, is his awareness of death, that great pop-cultural unmentionable, and something he clearly feels has to be not just accepted, but explored. The many Dylan songs that deal with mortality evoke life’s constant proximity to it, something obvious in the titles alone: Knockin’ on Heaven’s Door, Not Dark Yet, Tryin’ to Get to Heaven. Within their lyrics lurk truths so plain that they sometimes take your breath away: “[The emptiness is endless](#), cold as the clay”; “[We sit here stranded](#), though we’re

all doing our best to deny it". The words might seem bleak, but they offer solace, of sorts: life's most basic limitation, after all, applies to everybody.

Dylan's innate awareness of everything being fragile and contingent has also extended beyond the self, into the world at large. At only 21, he wrote A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall, which was long understood as an evocation of nuclear war, but now sounds like a portent of a world being transformed by a changing climate: "I've stepped in the middle of seven sad forests/ I've been out in front of a dozen dead oceans/ I've been 10,000 miles in the mouth of a graveyard". These are not the only words from that song with modern resonances: "10,000 talkers whose tongues were all broken" elegantly captures the cacophony of social media, and in his vision of "guns and sharp swords in the hands of young children", there is a glimpse of horrors that have reared up in this century just as much as they did in the one before. Some of this stuff is a reflection of Dylan's Jewish roots, and an apocalyptic sensibility at least partly taken from both Hebrew scripture and the New Testament. But it also speaks a direct, everyday truth: like death, chaos and senselessness are a lot nearer to us than a lot of people assume.

In wishing him many happy returns, what are we really saluting? The list is as multifaceted as the man himself: talent, charisma, prescience, the simple fact that he is still here. But having listened to his music for 40 years and tried to soak up what it says, I think a lot of the answer boils down to two things: an unflinching existential honesty, and the humility that comes from it.

The key can be found in another song released in 1965, and sung in ironic, weary, spectral tones – It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding), whose closing line offers priceless advice to anyone either getting carried away with themselves, or in danger of facing the world's terrors and excesses and succumbing to despair: "It's life, and life only".

- John Harris is a Guardian columnist

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

## 2021.05.24 - Around the world

- [George Floyd anniversary Minneapolis rally begins events to commemorate death](#)
- ['I allowed myself to feel guilty' The cashier who took Floyd's \\$20 bill](#)
- [One year on How the murder has changed the world](#)
- [Visual guide How centuries of racist images came down](#)

## George Floyd

# George Floyd: Minneapolis holds rallies in build-up to anniversary of police killing

Program starts with march led by the Rev Al Sharpton and Benjamin Crump to mark the anniversary of black man's murder

- [One year on, how George Floyd's murder has changed the world](#)



People march in Minneapolis on Sunday to begin a series of events to mark one year since George Floyd's death. Photograph: Brandon Bell/Getty Images

People march in Minneapolis on Sunday to begin a series of events to mark one year since George Floyd's death. Photograph: Brandon Bell/Getty Images

[Oliver Laughland](#)

[@oliverlaughland](#)

Sun 23 May 2021 22.57 EDT

Members of George Floyd's family, and others who lost loved ones to police encounters, have joined crowds in Minneapolis for a march that was one of several events planned nationwide to mark the one-year anniversary of Floyd's death.

Hundreds of people gathered on Sunday for the rally in front of the courthouse in downtown [Minneapolis](#) where a month ago former policeman Derek Chauvin was found guilty of murdering the black man by kneeling on his neck.

['I allowed myself to feel guilty for a very long time': the teenage cashier who took George Floyd's \\$20 bill](#)

[Read more](#)

Many marchers carried signs with pictures of Floyd, Philando Castile and other black men killed by police.

Amid chants of "no justice, no peace!" and "Say his name," Minnesota's governor, Tim Walz, the Minneapolis mayor, Jacob Frey, and St Paul mayor, Melvin Carter, watched alongside a dozen of Floyd's family members as speakers called for justice for families of black men slain by police.



George Floyd's sister Bridgett speaks in Minneapolis on Sunday, flanked by the Rev Al Sharpton, right, and lawyer Ben Crump. Photograph: Kerem Yucel/AFP/Getty Images

"It has been a long year. It has been a painful year," Floyd's sister Bridgett told the crowd on Sunday. "It has been very frustrating for me and my family for our lives to change in the blink of an eye – I still don't know why."

Tuesday will mark one year since Floyd's death sparked worldwide protests and calls for change in policing in the US.

Speakers at the event included several local activists, the Floyd family attorney Ben Crump, the Rev Al Sharpton, who called on the US Senate to pass legislation on policing in Floyd's name. The legislation, which would bring about the most significant changes to policing on the federal level, would ban the use of chokeholds and establish a national database of police misconduct.

"We want something coming out of Washington. We want something that will change federal law," Sharpton said. "There's been an adjournment on justice for too long. It's time for them to vote and make this the law."

The program of events marking the first anniversary has been organized by the George Floyd Memorial Foundation, a non-profit organization founded by [Bridgett Floyd](#).

The events will also include a number of roundtable discussions featuring activists and family members of other Americans killed by police, including Gwen Carr, the mother of Eric Garner, who was killed by New York City police in 2015, and Katy and Aubrey Wright, the parents of Daunte Wright, who was killed by police in a Minneapolis suburb last month.

Floyd was placed in a fatal knee-to-neck restraint by Chauvin in May last year. The incident was captured on video by a number of bystanders and [sent shockwaves around the world](#). Last month Chauvin was convicted of second-degree murder and two other felonies and faces up to 40 years in prison. Three other officers involved in the arrest are awaiting trial.

On Tuesday, the first anniversary of Floyd's death, Joe Biden will meet the Floyd family at the White House as negotiations continue in Congress over police reform legislation. The foundation will also host a "celebration of life" event at a downtown park in Minneapolis.

"We will celebrate the life and legacy of George Floyd through Black culture, art, history and support of local businesses," organizers said, adding there will be performances from a number of local and "Grammy award-winning artists".

On Friday the foundation awarded a \$25,000 scholarship to Fayetteville State University, a historically Black college in North Carolina.

Bridgett Floyd presented the check to the university and said: "That's what it's all about – generational stamps. We need to put things in place for our kids' kids. That's what I'm here to do."

During an address to Congress last month, the president had said he wanted major police reform legislation on his desk by Tuesday, but negotiations are still far from a resolution.

One of several sticking points on the bill, which already passed the Democrat-held House, is the issue of ending qualified immunity, which protects police officers from being personally sued by victims and their families for alleged civil rights violations. While ending or restricting qualified immunity is largely seen as a must-have for police reform advocates, it is staunchly opposed by police unions.

“My concern is, and I’ve communicated this to the White House, is that we come with a toothless bill to meet a hard deadline,” Sharpton, president of the National Action Network, told Politico. “I’d rather have a bill with teeth late than a toothless bill on time.”

Since Floyd’s killing, at least 17 states, including Minnesota, have enacted legislation to ban or restrict the use of chokeholds and neck restraints by police officers, according to data provided to the Associated Press by the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Before then, only two states, Tennessee and Illinois, had bans on such police hold techniques. A majority of the bans enacted over the past year are in states controlled politically by Democrats.

*Associated Press contributed to this report*

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/may/23/george-floyd-minneapolis-anniversary-events>

## George Floyd

# ‘I allowed myself to feel guilty for a very long time’: the teenage cashier who took George Floyd’s \$20 bill



Christopher Martin: ‘I just kept replaying that decision in my head. What if I would have just told him he couldn’t buy the cigarettes?’ Photograph: Tom Silverstone/The Guardian

Christopher Martin: ‘I just kept replaying that decision in my head. What if I would have just told him he couldn’t buy the cigarettes?’ Photograph: Tom Silverstone/The Guardian

A year ago, Christopher Martin took an allegedly counterfeit bill. The police were called, and shortly after, Floyd would be dead

*[Oliver Laughland](#) and [Amudalat Ajasa](#) in Minneapolis*

Sun 23 May 2021 02.00 EDT

Christopher Martin lived above a bricked grocery store in south [Minneapolis](#), with a maroon awning and bold red signage that reads Cup Foods. So when a cashier's position came up last year, he took it without thinking.

He quickly learned the regulars' orders by heart, their specific tobacco preferences, their favored snacks. The job was more than just a paycheck. "A family, community base," he remembered. "A lot of jokes and laughs."

[One year on, how George Floyd's murder has changed the world](#)  
[Read more](#)

But on 25 May last year, he served a customer he had never met before, igniting a chain of events that rippled around the world and irreversibly changed Martin's life.

It was [George Floyd](#), who had come to Cup Foods that day to buy a packet of cigarettes. He handed Martin an allegedly counterfeit \$20 bill. Martin accepted, and then informed his managers. A co-worker called the police. And shortly after, [George Floyd](#) would be dead, held for nine minutes and 29 seconds under a white police officer's knee as Martin watched from the sidewalk in disbelief.

Within hours Minneapolis would be awash with protest and the world would grapple with yet another reckoning on racism and policing. And for months Martin would be plagued with guilt.

In the year since George Floyd was murdered by former police officer Derek Chauvin, Martin, 19 years old, has been on his own journey. Within a week he and his family moved from their apartment. He quit his job. He battled with grief and trauma. And eventually he testified as an eyewitness in Chauvin's murder trial – one of the most closely watched and significant cases in modern American history.

---

On a warm spring day, shortly after testifying, he sat in a park near his new home, one of a number of interviews Martin has given to the Observer over the past months.

“I allowed myself to feel guilty for a very long time before the trial happened,” he said softly, with an eloquence that belies his teenage years. “I just kept replaying that decision in my head. What if I would have just told him he couldn’t buy the cigarettes?”

Martin testified on the third day of the trial. He was one of seven bystanders to take the stand, a choice he made “to tell the whole world what really happened that day”.

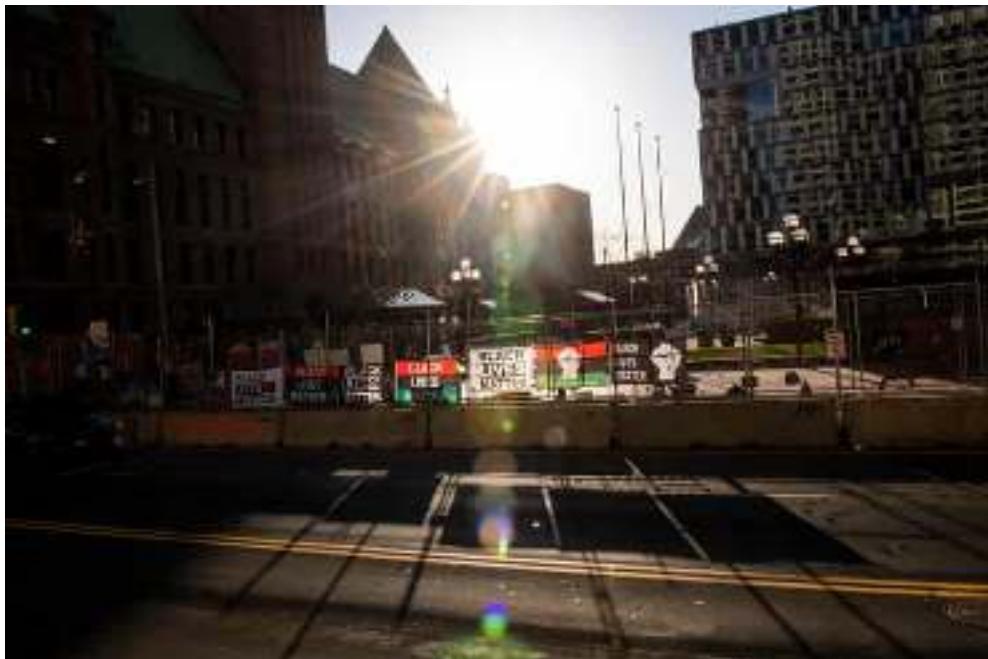
Dressed in a black and grey windbreaker, he told the jury calmly how he had considered putting the counterfeit \$20 on his own tab, but had been told by store managers instead to confront Floyd before the police had been called. The court saw CCTV footage of Martin pacing the sidewalk, his hands on top of his head, as Floyd was pressed to the ground by officers.

“Disbelief and guilt,” he said as prosecutors asked him to describe how he felt in those moments captured on CCTV.

Despite his composure, Martin recalled his anxiety as he began to testify. It was his first time in a courtroom and he was aware that his words were being watched all around the world. He felt himself sweat. At times he zoned out. He was thankful that Chauvin was not in his eyeline.

After he was dismissed, he left the courtroom and broke down in tears. In all of the months leading up to the trial he had never cried for George Floyd, but delivering his testimony was overwhelming.

“It was like a wave of sadness and grief out of nowhere,” he remembered. “It was a good cry. It was kind of like a release of everything.”



Black Lives Matter banners hang on the fencing outside the courthouse in Minneapolis where Derek Chauvin stood trial. Photograph: Stephen Maturen/Getty Images

The Floyd murder had entered his mind periodically before the trial – sometimes he would fixate on it, at other times he would try to let it pass, but after testifying he set aside his pride and began to lean more on church mentors and family for support and counselling.

“It was a Matrix sort of feeling,” he said, describing how it felt to witness a man he had only met for a moment die in front of him. “Like an out-of-body experience. It’s unreal. Unexplainable. You know there’s nothing you can do. There’s a lot of things in life that you have no control of. But it’s even worse when it’s right in front of you. And, you know, you just wish you could take back the decisions you made.”

---

Martin was raised by a single mother, the youngest of five siblings. He struggled with his studies and was expelled a number of times, before transferring to a Christian boarding school 70 miles from Minneapolis. He learned the trombone and loved maths class. And last year he graduated high school in a state which has the lowest graduation rate, [just 65%](#), for Black students anywhere in the United States.

He harbors a long-term desire to leave Minnesota and become a realtor in California. For now, he has taken up a new job as a store clerk in a local Adidas retailer and spends some of his spare time obsessing about the Premier League, following Manchester City.

Almost as soon as the murder had taken place last year, his family left home. Martin no longer felt safe and worried about reprisals from the police themselves.

His opinion of the Minneapolis police department had already been coloured by an episode he'd had six years earlier. He had been on his way to football practice, dressed in sports gear, when an officer began asking questions about what was inside his bag, and tried to seize it. His older brother attempted to intervene and was slammed against a wall.

“It was just so uncalled for.”

Martin had initially refused to be questioned by investigators examining Floyd's death, a decision guided by his distrust of police. He said he was subpoenaed in order to give his account. His mother and sister had moved into a hotel and he was living with his youth pastor. The stress of it all took a toll.

“I felt like I was always on go mode,” he said of those months in the immediate aftermath. “I never got a chance to take a break and just lie down and get some rest.”

---

Hours after the [guilty verdicts against Chauvin were delivered](#), Martin returned to Cup Foods and stood at the site where Floyd took his last breath.

“Miss you brother,” he posted on Instagram below a picture of himself looking up at a giant mural of Floyd painted next to the store.

The verdicts led to a collective exhale of tension around the world and a feeling that some form of accountability had been reached. For Martin, it was a moment of personal catharsis. He felt the weight of the guilt beginning to dissipate.

“I can realize the only person responsible is Derek Chauvin,” he said, acknowledging his own testimony had helped secure the conviction. “It’s a day by day thing, a long process. Hearing he was guilty took a lot of [my] guilt factor away.”

15:04

George Floyd: a landmark moment for justice in America? – video

And then there is the prospect of having to testify again. Three other officers involved in Floyd’s arrest have been charged over the incident by local prosecutors, and earlier this month the federal government announced a separate suite of civil rights charges against all four officers involved.

“I guess it kind of sucks it’ll be dragged up again in a year,” he said as he shrugged his shoulders and sighed.

The cycle of trials in the Floyd case underlies a broader cycle of police violence. Martin watched in horror as the police killing of Daunte Wright in a Minneapolis suburb unfolded during the Chauvin trial, a couple of weeks after his own testimony.

“I grew up without a father,” he said reflecting on the police killings of two Black men in his city within a single year. “So the fact that someone else is going to have to grow up without their father always hits home for me, and I just pray a blessing over their family. I hope that they will be able to make it through this.”

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/may/23/christopher-martin-george-floyd-minneapolis-cup-foods>

# One year on, how George Floyd's murder has changed the world

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/may/22/george-floyd-murder-change-across-world-blm>

[Skip to main content](#)

Advertisement

[The Guardian - Back to home](#)

Thank you

Your support powers our independent journalism

Support the Guardian

Available for everyone, funded by readers

[Contribute](#) [Subscribe](#) [Contribute](#)

[Subscriptions](#)

[Search jobs](#)

[Sign in](#) My account

- [Account overview](#)
  - [Billing](#)
  - [Profile](#)
  - [Emails & marketing](#)
  - [Settings](#)
  - [Help](#)
  - Comments & replies
  - [Sign out](#)
- 
- 

[Search](#)

- [switch to the US edition](#)
- [switch to the UK edition](#)
- [switch to the Australia edition](#)
- [switch to the International edition](#)

current edition: US edition

- [News](#)
- [Opinion](#)
- [Sport](#)
- [Culture](#)
- [Lifestyle](#)

Show More

- News
  - [US news](#)
  - [World news](#)
  - [Environment](#)
  - [Soccer](#)
  - [US politics](#)
  - [Business](#)
  - [Tech](#)
  - [Science](#)
  - [Newsletters](#)
- Opinion
  - [The Guardian view](#)
  - [Columnists](#)
  - [Letters](#)
  - [Opinion videos](#)
  - [Cartoons](#)
- Sport
  - [Soccer](#)
  - [NFL](#)
  - [Tennis](#)
  - [MLB](#)
  - [MLS](#)
  - [NBA](#)
  - [NHL](#)
- Culture
  - [Film](#)
  - [Books](#)
  - [Music](#)
  - [Art & design](#)

- [TV & radio](#)
  - [Stage](#)
  - [Classical](#)
  - [Games](#)
- Lifestyle
  - [Fashion](#)
  - [Food](#)
  - [Recipes](#)
  - [Love & sex](#)
  - [Home & garden](#)
  - [Health & fitness](#)
  - [Family](#)
  - [Travel](#)
  - [Money](#)
- [Make a contribution](#)
- [Subscribe](#)
- US edition
  - [switch to the UK edition](#)
  - [switch to the Australia edition](#)
  - [switch to the International edition](#)
- [Search jobs](#)
- [Digital Archive](#)
- [Guardian Puzzles app](#)
- [The Guardian app](#)
- [Video](#)
- [Podcasts](#)
- [Pictures](#)
- [Inside the Guardian](#)
- [Guardian Weekly](#)
- [Crosswords](#)

- [Facebook](#)
  - [Twitter](#)
- 
- [Search jobs](#)
  - [Digital Archive](#)
  - [Guardian Puzzles app](#)

- [US](#)
- [World](#)
- [Environment](#)
- [Soccer](#)
- [US Politics](#)
- [Business](#)
- [Tech](#)
- [Science](#)
- [Newsletters](#)

More

Loading...

## How centuries of racist images came down in one year – a visual guide

The Black Lives Matter protests after George Floyd's death forced leaders to re-examine the images in our everyday lives – in the US and beyond

by [Alvin Chang](#)

*Research by Kaylin Dodson*

Photos: AP, Getty Images, Wikimedia Commons, Reuters, EPA, AFP

Jefferson Davis, who led the southern states during the US civil war, said that Black people are the "servile race" and that slavery is a "blessing".

For 84 years, the statue of the president of the Confederate States of America greeted visitors in the Kentucky state capitol.

Bill Pugliano/Getty Images

The state not only helped pay for the statue, Kentucky governor AB Chandler also stood in front of a Confederate flag to dedicate the monument and said: "Jefferson Davis is not dead – his spirit lives in the heart of the people."

Courtesy of Lexington Herald archive photo via Newspapers.com

For more than a century Black Americans argued that Confederate monuments were racist.

The statues, including this one, were a propaganda effort pushing the false narrative that the Confederacy fought to preserve their "culture". In reality, they fought to preserve slavery.

Bill Pugliano/Getty Images

Racist imagery is baked into everyday American life, from state-sponsored monuments, to major cereal brands, to popular sports logos.

But the police killing of George Floyd in May 2020 spurred a newfound effort to remove racist images – sometimes officially, sometimes unofficially.

Eze Amos/Getty Images

In June 2020, a Kentucky commission voted to remove the Jefferson Davis statue.

Ryan C. Hermens/Lexington Herald-Leader via AP

In the following year, nearly 170 other Confederate monuments would also be removed, according to data from the Southern Poverty Law Center.

Alabama  
Huntsville

Alabama  
Montgomery

Alabama  
Mobile

Alabama  
Birmingham

Arizona  
Phoenix

Arkansas  
Little Rock

Arkansas  
Bentonville

Arkansas  
Pine Bluff

Arkansas  
Little Rock

Delaware  
Georgetown

District of Columbia  
Washington

Florida  
Quincy

Florida  
St Augustine

Florida  
Fort Myers

Florida  
Jacksonville

Georgia  
Athens

Georgia  
McDonough

Georgia  
Conyers

Georgia  
Decatur

Indiana  
Indianapolis

Kentucky  
Frankfort

Kentucky  
Louisville

Louisiana  
Minden

Louisiana  
Lake Charles

Louisiana  
New Orleans

Maryland  
Lothian

Maryland  
Dickerson

Maryland  
Frederick

Mississippi  
Oxford

Missouri  
Cape Girardeau

Nevada  
Las Vegas

North Carolina  
Raleigh

North Carolina  
Raleigh

North Carolina  
Asheville

North Carolina  
Wilmington

North Carolina  
Salisbury

North Carolina  
Wilmington

North Carolina  
Raleigh

North Carolina  
Greenville

North Carolina  
Asheville

North Carolina  
Fayetteville

North Carolina  
Fayetteville

North Carolina  
Fayetteville

North Carolina  
Lexington

Tennessee  
Nashville

Tennessee  
Nashville

Texas  
Houston

Texas  
Denton

Texas  
Dallas

Texas  
Fort Worth

Texas  
Beaumont

Texas  
Houston

Virginia  
Portsmouth

Virginia  
Richmond

Virginia  
Norfolk

Virginia  
Newport News

Virginia  
Richmond

Virginia  
Lexington

Virginia  
Leesburg

Virginia  
Alexandria

Virginia  
Charlottesville

Washington  
Seattle

### Confronting symbols of colonialism and empire

This is a statue of Christopher Columbus asking Queen Isabella to support his 1492 journey to the Americas, where he would enslave indigenous people and nearly cause the native Taíno people to become extinct.

The statue stood in the California state capitol for 137 years.

Rich Pedroncelli/AP

State leaders agreed to remove the statue in June 2020.

Daniel Kim/The Sacramento Bee via AP

But this reckoning wasn't just happening in the US. It happened in nearly every country built on the labor and land of other peoples.

This statue of Robert Milligan, a British slave trader who enslaved more than 500 people in Jamaica, stood in London for more than 200 years.

Hasan Esen/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images

The statue was taken down in June 2020 after London's mayor, Sadiq Khan, said all statues with links to slavery should be removed.

Hasan Esen/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images

In countries around the world, from the US to Belgium to Australia, people protested the commemoration of white leaders who had long been revered.

Australia

Kimberley

Barbados

Bridgetown

Belgium

Ghent

Belgium

Brussels

Belgium

Ekeren, Antwerp

California

Ventura

California

Sacramento

California

Carmel

California

Sacramento

California

San Luis Obispo

California

Sacramento

California

Los Angeles

California

Davis  
California  
San Gabriel  
California  
San Francisco  
California  
San Francisco  
California  
San Francisco  
Canada  
Montreal  
Canada  
Edmonton  
Colombia  
Popayán  
Colorado  
Denver  
Colorado  
Denver  
Colorado  
Denver  
Connecticut  
Hartford  
Connecticut  
New Haven  
Connecticut  
Bridgeport  
Delaware  
Wilmington  
District of Columbia  
Washington  
Georgia

Decatur

Illinois  
Chicago

Illinois  
Chicago

India  
Bangalore

Louisiana  
New Orleans

Maryland  
Baltimore

Maryland  
Baltimore

Massachusetts  
Boston

Michigan  
Detroit

Michigan  
Dearborn

Minnesota  
Minneapolis

Minnesota  
St. Paul

Minnesota  
Minneapolis

Missouri  
St Louis

New Jersey  
Atlantic City

New Jersey  
Newark

New Mexico

Alcalde

New Mexico

Santa Fe

New Mexico

Albuquerque

New Mexico

Santa Fe

New York

New York City

New York

Buffalo

New Zealand

Hamilton

North Carolina

Charlotte

North Carolina

Raleigh

Ohio

Columbus

Ohio

Columbus

Oregon

Eugene

Oregon

Portland

Oregon

Portland

Oregon

Eugene

Oregon

Portland

Oregon

Portland  
Pennsylvania  
Philadelphia  
Rhode Island  
Providence  
Scotland  
Glasgow  
South Carolina  
Columbia  
South Carolina  
Charleston  
Tennessee  
Nashville  
Texas  
Dallas  
Texas  
San Antonio  
UK  
Bristol  
UK  
London  
UK  
Plymouth  
UK  
Bristol  
UK  
Bristol  
UK  
Bristol  
UK  
London  
UK

London  
Virginia  
Richmond

## Racist brands and imagery

As far back [as 1980](#), critics said Aunt Jemima, the pancake mix and syrup brand, was racist because it was [named after a minstrel song](#).

For years, the owner, General Mills, refused to change the brand.

Justin Sullivan/Getty Images

Amid the protests, General Mills renamed the brand "Pearl Milling Company".

Andre M Chang/ZUMA Wire/REX/Shutterstock

In the past year, several other brands, artists, and sports teams also reconsidered their names.

Australia  
California  
San Diego  
California  
Santa Barbara  
Canada  
Edmonton  
India  
Kentucky  
Louisville  
Louisiana  
New Orleans  
Maryland

Landover

Tennessee

Nashville

Texas

Dallas

UK

Isle of Wight

US

US

Virginia

Staunton

Worldwide

Worldwide

Most racist images remain

This statue of Jefferson Davis in the US Capitol building still stands, along with [more than 2,100](#) Confederate symbols in public spaces, according to data from the Southern Poverty Law Center.

Jim Lo Scalzo/EPA

But the Jefferson Davis statue in the Kentucky state capitol rotunda is gone.

As far back as 1974, the first Black person elected to the Kentucky state senate, Georgia Davis Powers, [argued](#) that the statue was embarrassing and should be replaced – perhaps with one of Martin Luther King Jr.

Ryan C. Hermens/Lexington Herald-Leader via AP

Powers died five years before the statue was removed.

But now state leaders are [suggesting](#) it be replaced with another statue – one depicting the first Black person and first woman elected to the Kentucky senate: Georgia Davis Powers.

Kentucky General Assembly

Close

- [US](#)
- [World](#)
- [Environment](#)
- [Soccer](#)
- [US Politics](#)
- [Business](#)
- [Tech](#)
- [Science](#)
- [Newsletters](#)

- [News](#)
- [Opinion](#)
- [Sport](#)
- [Culture](#)
- [Lifestyle](#)

- [About us](#)
- [Contact us](#)
- [Complaints & corrections](#)
- [SecureDrop](#)
- [Work for us](#)
- [Privacy policy](#)
- [Cookie policy](#)
- [Terms & conditions](#)
- [Help](#)

- [All topics](#)

- [All writers](#)
- [Digital newspaper archive](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- [YouTube](#)
- [Instagram](#)
- [LinkedIn](#)
- [Twitter](#)
- [Newsletters](#)

- [Advertise with us](#)
- [Guardian Labs](#)
- [Search jobs](#)

Support The Guardian

Available for everyone, funded by readers

[Contribute](#) [Subscribe](#)

[Back to top](#)

© 2021 Guardian News & Media Limited or its affiliated companies. All rights reserved.

Close



This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2021/may/22/racist-statues-monuments-removed-us-world>

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

## Headlines tuesday 25 may 2021

- [Live ‘Strong perception’ that Tory party is insensitive to Muslim communities, report finds](#)
- [Nadia Whittome Britain’s youngest MP to take time off with post-traumatic stress disorder](#)
- [Coronavirus Health chiefs seek urgent answers on travel advice for England hotspots](#)
- [England Up to 8,700 patients died after catching Covid in hospitals](#)
- [Analysis Weaknesses that led to hospital-acquired Covid remain](#)

**Politics live with Andrew Sparrow**  
**Coronavirus**

# Today's UK Covid news: government to change guidance 'to make it clearer we are not imposing local restrictions'

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/live/2021/may/25/uk-covid-live-news-travel-advice-indian-variant-hotspots-england-coronavirus-latest-updates>

## Labour

# Britain's youngest MP to take time off with post-traumatic stress disorder

Nadia Whittome, Labour MP for Nottingham East, says she had been 'battling persistent health issues'



Nadia Whittome: 'Through being open about my own mental health struggle, I hope others will also feel able to talk about theirs.' Photograph: Ollie Millington/Getty Images

Nadia Whittome: 'Through being open about my own mental health struggle, I hope others will also feel able to talk about theirs.' Photograph: Ollie Millington/Getty Images

*Aubrey Allegretti Political correspondent  
@breeallegretti*

Tue 25 May 2021 04.31 EDT

Britain's youngest MP has been signed off work for several weeks on the advice of her doctor after being diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Nadia Whittome, 23, who has represented Nottingham East in the Commons since 2019, said she had been “battling some persistent health issues” for several months, and that while she had “been attempting to manage them” alongside her duties as a politician, it had recently “become clear that this is not feasible”.

The [Labour](#) backbencher said that despite one in four people experiencing a mental health problem each year, “there is still a great deal of shame and stigma”. She said she hoped that by “being open about my own mental health”, others would “feel able to talk about theirs”.

The decision was “incredibly difficult” to make, Whittome admitted, but she said her constituents could continue to contact the “fantastic staff” working in her office as normal.

“I cannot wait to come back to the job I love, representing the community that means so much to me,” the MP added [in a Twitter message posted on Tuesday morning](#). She also thanked the Labour leader, Keir Starmer, his adviser Jenny Chapman and party whips for their “support in enabling me to take this course of action”.

Whittome, who was elected in December 2019 and is the youngest serving MP, received supportive messages from colleagues, including Starmer, who said he hoped she “gets well soon”.

He added: “I respect Nadia’s bravery in speaking openly about her mental health and I look forward to welcoming her back to parliament.”

Angela Rayner, Labour’s deputy leader, sent “love, solidarity and strength”, and said that “even by just publishing this statement you’ve shown so much bravery and you will have helped so many other people”.

Jeremy Corbyn, the former Labour leader who sits as an independent MP after having the party whip suspended, hailed Whittome as “bold and

brave”. [He tweeted](#): “By being honest about looking after her #MentalHealth she helps all those who are struggling.”

Whittome, a former care worker and a hate-crime project worker, was described as “one of Labour’s brightest new talents” by the shadow environment secretary, Luke Pollard. He said: “She is brave and courageous. She has my full support and best wishes.”

Her transparency was praised by the chief executive of a leading mental health charity. Mark Winstanley, of Rethink Mental Illness, said: “The enduring stigma surrounding mental health in the workplace can be hugely damaging, preventing people from accessing support and leading them to prioritise work over their own wellbeing for fear of judgment.

“Being signed off from work for poor mental health is not a sign of weakness, but a recognition that wellbeing should always be a priority. We welcome Nadia’s openness around her diagnosis and wish her well in her recovery.”

You can contact the mental health charity Mind by calling 0300 123 3393 or visiting [mind.org.uk](https://www.mind.org.uk)

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/may/25/britains-youngest-mp-nadia-whittome-to-take-time-off-with-post-traumatic-stress-disorder>

## Health policy

# Health chiefs seek urgent answers on travel advice for England hotspots

Local officials ‘astonished’ as Westminster fails to notify them of new Covid guidance

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



A mobile vaccination clinic in Little Harwood, Blackburn, one of the areas affected by the new advice on Covid hotspots. Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

A mobile vaccination clinic in Little Harwood, Blackburn, one of the areas affected by the new advice on Covid hotspots. Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

*[Damien Gayle](#) and [Josh Halliday](#)*

Tue 25 May 2021 04.31 EDT

Public health chiefs are demanding urgent answers about why the government failed to announce new travel advice urging millions of people not to travel into or out of Covid hotspots.

As news spread of the guidance on Tuesday, four days after it was quietly published on a government website, Dominic Harrison, the director of public health for Blackburn with Darwen council, said local councils had still had no notification from Westminster about it.

Harrison said he was “astonished” that public health chiefs had not been told about the latest advice, which affects millions of people, and that it was “very difficult” to support the advice without seeing the government’s risk assessment.

He added: “This advice has massive implications for school trips, for hospitality, for people playing football matches, for footfall for small businesses, and for the economic recovery for town centres. The fact that the government’s just announced it without consultation or evidence is astonishing.

“It does reflect the fact that in relation to our management of surges in areas that have variants, we simply have no strategy at the moment. What we seem to be subject to is random policy announcements.”

The Labour leader, Keir Starmer, said it was “utterly shameful” that the government had made such a “major change” without telling local leaders. He said: “The government needs to provide clarity, fast. Local lockdowns are the wrong approach for both public health and local economies.”

Wendy Burke, North Tyneside’s director of public health, said there had been no indication of any additional restrictions when an announcement about extra testing was made last week.

According to [the guidance](#), which appears to have been updated on 21 May and is not law, journeys to and from the affected areas – Bedford, Blackburn and Darwen, Bolton, Burnley, Kirklees, Leicester, Hounslow, and North

Tyneside – should be avoided “unless essential”. Exemptions include travel for work, where working from home is not possible, and education.

The guidance affects not only the 1.97 million people in the eight areas but also the millions of people who enter and leave those boroughs every day to go to work, school or for leisure.

The update did not seem to have been accompanied by an official announcement. On Tuesday, Harrison and Burke confirmed local public health directors were unaware of it.

### Hotspots

One public health official pointed out that Simon Stevens, the NHS England chief executive, travelled to Bolton on Friday to visit a vaccination site. It is not clear whether he knew about the guidance although his trip may constitute “essential” travel.

Jamie Driscoll, the North of Tyne metro mayor, said nobody from central government had told his officials of the travel guidance. He said he would be speaking to ministers later on Tuesday “to get to the bottom of it”.

Another public health official, whose council borders one of the eight listed authorities, said she first heard the news on BBC Radio 4 on Tuesday morning – shortly after unwittingly breaching the advice by travelling into the neighbouring area for exercise. “It’s just really silly,” she said.

Burke was quoted by the PA Media news agency as saying: “Last Wednesday it was announced in parliament that North Tyneside, along with five other areas in England, would be subject to enhanced testing and vaccinations.

“When the announcement was made there was no indication it would come with any additional restrictions for North Tyneside or the other areas. We understand that, later, government guidance around travel in and out of North Tyneside was posted on the government website.

“This has not been accompanied by any communication to the local authority, local residents or businesses. We have already queried this with

the Department of [Health](#) and Social Care to seek clarification.

“We will continue to work with government on our enhanced testing and vaccination plan which is now in place.”

Yasmin Qureshi, MP for Bolton South East, tweeted it was “beyond insulting” that her office learned Bolton had been placed in a “quasi-lockdown state” from a local journalist.

“We received no official correspondence of this change from the UK Govt,” she said.

The areas subject to the new advice are those where the coronavirus variant first identified in India, known as B.1.617.2, is believed to be spreading fastest. As well as asking people not to travel in and out, the new guidance also recommends keeping meetings with others outdoors “where possible” and maintaining social distancing of two metres between people who do not live together.

Asked about the apparent confusion on Tuesday morning, Thérèse Coffey, the work and pensions secretary, insisted the government had already been working with local areas where the B.1.617.2 variant was spreading fastest.

“This guidance was simply put out at the same time as the risk was identified and effectively notified of the increased caution which people should take,” Coffey told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme.

“It’s just putting something on the record alongside that encouraging communities to take what had already been communicated about some of the extra precautions people should be mindful of in trying to stop the transmission of coronavirus.”

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/may/25/health-chiefs-seek-urgent-answers-on-travel-advice-for-england-hotspots-covid>

## Coronavirus

# Up to 8,700 patients died after catching Covid in English hospitals

Exclusive: official NHS data reveals 32,307 people contracted the virus while in hospital since March 2020

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



The Guardian obtained the data under freedom of information laws from 81 of England's 126 acute hospital trusts. Forty-five trusts refused to disclose their death figures. Photograph: Peter Byrne/PA

The Guardian obtained the data under freedom of information laws from 81 of England's 126 acute hospital trusts. Forty-five trusts refused to disclose their death figures. Photograph: Peter Byrne/PA

*[Denis Campbell](#) and [Anna Bawden](#)*

Mon 24 May 2021 12.50 EDT

Up to 8,700 patients died after catching Covid-19 while in hospital being treated for another medical problem, according to official [NHS](#) data obtained by the Guardian.

The figures, which were provided by the hospitals themselves, were described as “horrifying” by relatives of those who died.

Jeremy Hunt, the former health secretary, said that hospital-acquired Covid “remains one of the silent scandals of this pandemic, causing many thousands of avoidable deaths”.

### [Guardian graphic](#)

NHS leaders and senior doctors have long claimed hospitals have struggled to stop Covid spreading because of shortages of single rooms, a lack of personal protective equipment and an inability to test staff and patients early in the pandemic.

Now, official figures supplied by NHS trusts in [England](#) show that 32,307 people have probably or definitely contracted the disease while in hospital since March 2020 – and 8,747 of them died.

That means that almost three in 10 (27.1%) of those infected that way lost their lives within 28 days.

“The NHS has done us all proud over the past year, but these new figures are devastating and pose challenging questions on whether the right hospital infection controls were in place”, said Hunt, who chairs the Commons health and social care select committee.

### [Guardian graphic](#)

The Guardian obtained the data under freedom of information laws from 81 of England’s 126 acute hospital trusts.

The responses show that every trust had to grapple with what doctors call [nosocomial or hospital-acquired infection](#). Many hospitals were unable to keep Covid-positive patients separate from those without the disease, which led to its lethal transmission.

According to the FoI responses, University Hospitals Birmingham trust had the highest number of deaths (408), followed by Nottingham University Hospitals (279) and Frimley [Health](#) (259). Nine trusts had 200 or more deaths.

However, the numbers of deaths are influenced by factors such as a hospital's size, number of single rooms and capacity of its intensive care unit, and the make up of its local population and level of infection among them, as well as weaknesses in infection control procedures.

At a handful of trusts, about a third of all people who died after catching Covid had become infected in hospital. They include Royal Cornwall hospitals (36%), Salisbury (35.2%) and Kettering general hospital (31.2%).

The answers provided to the Guardian reveal that the 8,747 who died were all in hospital for another reason, such as treatment for a fall, flare-up of a serious illness, or to have an operation.

The figures include people who died in hospital and after discharge. They do not distinguish between those who died of Covid, with Covid or of another condition potentially exacerbated by the virus, such as a heart attack.

### [Guardian graphic](#)

While NHS England has published data on hospital-acquired Covid infections since last August, it has not released any statistics on how many people died as a result.

The figures provide the most detailed and comprehensive insight yet into how widespread a scourge nosocomial Covid has been over the last 15 months and the huge death toll it has exacted.

Forty-five trusts refused to disclose their death figures, despite their legal obligation to do so under the Freedom of Information Act.

The Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice UK campaign, many of whose members lost a loved one to nosocomial Covid, said the disease spread in hospitals because they were poorly prepared for the pandemic. It urged

ministers to act before a third wave, driven by the highly transmissible India variant [that is taking hold across Britain, causes fresh havoc.](#)

“The mortality rate for patients and staff who were infected in hospitals is horrifying and must be stopped from happening again ahead of a potential third wave.

“On issues such as segregating patients on wards, PPE for frontline workers and testing patients who are discharged, there are critical questions around how prepared hospitals were and the resources they were provided,” said Matt Fowler, the group’s co-founder.

NHS trusts are required to monitor how many people caught Covid in their hospitals. If someone tests positive between eight and 14 days into their stay, their Covid is deemed to be “probable” hospital-acquired. Any inpatient’s positive test result 15 days or more after admission is deemed a “definite” case of nosocomial infection.

The trusts with the highest numbers of “probable” and “definite” nosocomial infections were University hospitals Birmingham (1,463), Liverpool University hospitals (1,160) and Manchester University hospitals (1,081). Their size and high levels of Covid in their catchment areas are likely to be key factors.

### [Guardian graphic](#)

The trust at which the highest proportion of patients died after catching Covid in hospital was Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh trust in Lancashire. It only provided figures for October 2020 to March 2021. In that time 273 patients became infected while in hospital, of whom 174 died – a mortality rate of 63.7%. The trusts with the next highest percentages by that measure were Gateshead health (55.6%) and Wirral University teaching hospital (53.5%).

Fowler said Boris Johnson should bring forward the public inquiry he has promised from 2022 to this summer so it would produce by the autumn an interim report “that includes best practices on preventing transmission within hospitals”.

“Not doing so puts more lives at risk,” he added.

Dr Claudia Paoloni, president of the Hospital Consultants and Specialists Association, said the death toll was “a human tragedy” from which lessons must be learned.

She lambasted government “foot-dragging”, such as delaying the wearing of face masks in hospitals becoming mandatory and its mishandling of how much mixing people could do over Christmas. Those led infections in the community to “spiral out of control” which, combined with inadequate testing and lack of space in hospitals to segregate patients, boosted nosocomial spread, she said.

“These unforgivable failings overwhelmed some hospitals and tragically patients including NHS staff who could have been alive today are instead lost, leaving behind a legacy of mourning families and devastated lives”, said Paoloni.

Chris Hopson, chief executive of hospitals group NHS Providers, said nosocomial Covid had affected hospitals worldwide and stressed NHS trusts’ determined efforts to keep it in check.

“These figures are distressing and lay bare how difficult the past 15 months have been. Every Covid-19 death has been a tragedy and trust leaders’ first thoughts are with the families of all those who have died from Covid-19, whatever the original source of the infection.

“Trusts have worked incredibly hard to maintain a safe environment but Covid-19 brought unique challenges to every health system in the world. These include significant numbers of patients having Covid-19 without showing symptoms and, early in the pandemic, insufficient access to rapid turnaround testing.”

An NHS spokesperson said hospitals were not to blame.

A spokesperson said: “The Office for National Statistics and other data conclusively demonstrate that the root cause of rising infection rates in hospitals is rising rates in the community and throughout the pandemic

weekly reports from Public Health England have consistently shown that outbreaks in hospitals are less common than in other settings.”

Hospitals’ “robust infection control measures” include treating Covid and non-Covid patients in separate areas and testing all inpatients on admission and twice in their first week, the spokesperson added.

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/24/up-to-8700-patients-died-after-catching-covid-in-english-hospitals>

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

**NHS**

## Weaknesses that led to patients getting Covid in hospital remain

Analysis: While some problems have been addressed, another wave could hit the NHS hard



Before the pandemic the NHS was over-stretched and resources were limited. The crisis distorted it further out of shape. Photograph: Lynsey Addario/Getty Images

Before the pandemic the NHS was over-stretched and resources were limited. The crisis distorted it further out of shape. Photograph: Lynsey Addario/Getty Images

*[Denis Campbell](#) Health policy editor*

Mon 24 May 2021 16.16 EDT

Almost as soon as the pandemic struck early last year, NHS England recognised that patients catching Covid-19 while they were in hospital for

non-Covid care was a real risk and could lead to even more deaths than were already occurring. Unfortunately their fears have been borne out by events since – every acute hospital in England has been [hit by this problem to some extent.](#)

Over the last 15 months various NHS and medical bodies have looked into hospital-acquired Covid and published reports and detailed guidance to help hospitals stem its spread. They include the Healthcare Safety Investigation Branch (HSIB) and Public [Health](#) England (PHE). Last May, for example, PHE estimated that 20% of coronavirus infections in hospitalised patients and almost 90% of infections among healthcare staff may have been nosocomial, meaning they were caught in a hospital setting.

Researchers have produced estimates of how prevalent it has been. The government's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) has said that “out of all Covid-19 infections in hospital patients, we estimate approximately 20%-25% may have been nosocomial across the first wave (beginning February to end of July)”. Media outlets have highlighted both outbreaks at particular hospitals and the serious threat to life generally posed by such a deadly virus spreading among patients who are already in hospital for another reason, such as for surgery, many of whom are vulnerable, often because they have one or more serious underlying illnesses.

NHS England aided understanding of the problem by starting to publish figures for how many nosocomial infections have occurred at each trust since last August. They show that trusts logged 41,216 cases of hospital-acquired Covid between 1 August 2020 and 9 May this year.

But what has not been clear – until now – is a more detailed picture of how many people are believed to have died either in total or at each trust after catching Covid from a fellow patient or member of staff. Freedom of information requests that were submitted still do not tell the whole story, not least because 45 of the 126 acute trusts the Guardian sought data from either did not reply or declined to say how many people who caught Covid in their hospitals had later died.

Replies from the 81 other trusts disclosed that a total of 32,307 inpatients either probably or definitely became infected during their stay, and up to

8,747 of them died, either while they were still in hospital or after they were discharged. In lieu of the NHS publishing exact figures for England as a whole, that is the closest approximation yet of the true death toll.

Given the fatalities the FoI responses contained, it is easy to see why Jeremy Hunt, the former health secretary, calls hospital-acquired Covid “one of the silent scandals of the pandemic”. In a pandemic of many tragically large numbers, 8,747 is another sobering reminder of just how lethal Covid is. The great majority, but not all, had Covid on their death certificate. With the few that did not, it is likely that Covid played a part by worsening an existing chronic illness.

Hospital-acquired Covid deaths, however many there actually have been, matter beyond numbers because, as Hunt points out, they involve a loss of life that was potentially avoidable.

As NHS leaders themselves acknowledge and expert reports have shown, they have happened because often-ageing and cramped NHS hospitals starved of cash to modernise during a decade of austerity have had too few single rooms to isolate the infected, and because trusts had little or no scope to test their staff and too little personal protective equipment, such as FFP3 masks, especially early in the pandemic.

Before the pandemic the NHS was over-stretched and resources were limited. The crisis distorted it further out of shape and despite NHS staff making huge efforts to contain the virus in extremely challenging circumstances, too often they were overwhelmed.

There are many other reasons, including inadequate ventilation, the sharing of equipment, and nurses and doctors having to gather at nurses’ stations and in doctors’ messes. Some bereaved relatives also cite hospitals deciding – inexplicably – to put their Covid-free loved ones in a bay or ward with one or more people who had the disease, sometimes resulting in tragedy.

While some of these inherent weaknesses have been addressed, others remain, leaving further infections and even more deaths in this way a distinct possibility if the NHS is hit by another Covid surge.

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/may/24/weaknesses-that-led-to-patients-getting-covid-in-hospital-remain>

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

## 2021.05.25 - Coronavirus

- 'The world did not wake up' Oxygen shortages threaten 'total collapse' of dozens of health systems
- Tokyo Olympics US tells citizens to avoid travel to Japan due to outbreak
- Wuhan China rejects report of sick staff at lab prior to Covid outbreak
- Children Most with post-Covid disease recover within six months, study finds

## Global development

# Oxygen shortages threaten ‘total collapse’ of dozens of health systems

Data reveals Nepal, Iran and South Africa among 19 countries most at risk of running out as surging Covid cases push supplies to limit

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



Oxygen cylinders in a makeshift emergency unit at Steve Biko Academic hospital in Pretoria, South Africa. Photograph: Themba Hadebe/AP

Oxygen cylinders in a makeshift emergency unit at Steve Biko Academic hospital in Pretoria, South Africa. Photograph: Themba Hadebe/AP

Global development is supported by



[About this content](#)

*Madlen Davies and Rosa Furneaux*

Tue 25 May 2021 04.30 EDT

Dozens of countries are facing severe oxygen shortages because of surging Covid-19 cases, threatening the “total collapse” of health systems.

The [Bureau of Investigative Journalism](#) analysed data provided by the Every Breath Counts Coalition, the NGO Path and the Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI) to find the countries most at risk of running out of oxygen. It also studied data on global vaccination rates.

Nineteen countries around the world – including India, Argentina, Iran, Nepal, the Philippines, Malaysia, Pakistan, Costa Rica, Ecuador and [South Africa](#) – are deemed most at risk after recording huge increases in demand since March – at least a 20% rise – while having vaccinated less than 20% of their populations.



A man keeps vigil for his wife, who is suspected of having Covid-19, at a hospital in Lomas de Zamora, Argentina. Photograph: Natacha Pisarenko/AP

There are concerns that other Asian countries like Laos are at risk, and African countries including Nigeria, Ethiopia, Malawi and Zimbabwe, which have less mature oxygen delivery systems, meaning a small increase in need could create big problems.

Many of these countries faced oxygen shortages before the pandemic, said Leith Greenslade, coordinator of the Every Breath Counts Coalition. The extra need is pushing health systems to the brink.

“The situation last year, and again in January this year in Brazil and Peru, should have been the wake up call,” she said. “But the world did not wake up. We should have known [India](#) would happen after seeing what happened in Latin America. And now looking at Asia, we should know this will happen in some of the big cities in Africa.”

Robert Matiru, who chairs the Covid-19 Oxygen Emergency Taskforce, told the bureau: “We could see the total collapse of health systems, especially in countries with very fragile systems.”

Hospitals in India have reported [significant shortages of oxygen](#) as the country battles its second wave. By the middle of May, India needed an extra 15.5m cubic metres of oxygen a day just for Covid-19 patients, more than 14 times what it needed in March, according to the bureau's analysis.



Oxygen provided by an NGO in Amritsar, India. Photograph: Narinder Nanu/AFP/Getty

In response, India has banned all exports of liquid and cylinder oxygen.

But experts are worried about India's neighbours – [Pakistan](#), Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Myanmar – some of which rely on Indian-made oxygen and equipment.

“You’d imagine if they start to see peaks of the same degree, then it could be even worse, because India needs all the supply,” said Zachary Katz, vice-president of essential medicines at CHAI.

The bureau's data shows that [Nepal now needs](#) more than 100 times as much oxygen as it did in March.

Demand for oxygen in Sri Lanka has risen sevenfold since mid-March. In Pakistan, which is suffering its third wave of cases, almost 60% more patients are on oxygen in hospital than during the country's previous peak

last summer, according to a government minister, who warned in late April that pressure on the oxygen supply was reaching dangerous levels.

['Urgent. Oxygen needed': Nepalis mobilise to take charge in Covid crisis](#)

[Read more](#)

“The mood is extremely grim,” says Dr Fyezah Jehan, a doctor in Karachi. “I think we are very scared of an India-like situation. We’re hoping that some magic happens, and this [current] lockdown can prevent a new onslaught of cases.”



A lorry is loaded with oxygen cylinders to supply private hospitals in Karachi, Pakistan. Photograph: Fareed Khan/AP

“Rapidly rising need for oxygen puts pressure on the health system, which it can’t meet, and we see patient deaths,” said Greenslade. “And that will keep happening week after week, month after month, if the vaccine rollout is slow, because at this point, in many of these countries, it’s only increases in vaccine coverage that will bend the curve on transmission.”

The health systems of many poorer countries “could not be more ill-prepared”, Greenslade said. “From the head of state, the health minister, the finance minister … these countries haven’t prioritised oxygen as an essential

medicine. As we see in India, many, many people have died and continue to die every day for lack of oxygen.”

Several countries have demanded that companies which produce liquid oxygen divert products from their industrial clients to hospitals. Medical oxygen makes up just 1% of global liquid oxygen production.



Newly installed oxygen tanks are filled at Ramlila Ground in New Delhi, India. Photograph: Arun Sankar/AFP/Getty

However, data from Gasworld Business Intelligence, which analyses the global industrial gases market, shows that many of the countries most in need would still see shortages even if all local oxygen production was diverted to hospitals.

In Iraq, gas companies can produce about 64,000 cubic metres of liquid oxygen a day, a third of what the country's Covid-19 patients need. In Colombia, the industry can only provide 450,000 cubic metres a day, less than two-thirds of what is needed.

In Peru, gas companies can only reach 80% of the oxygen it needs if all oxygen was diverted to healthcare. “Currently, Peru is registering a drop in [Covid] cases,” said Dr Jesús Valverde Huamán, who works in an ICU in Lima. “However, we are still in need of medical oxygen, especially for

hospitals.” It has been a constant struggle to find enough oxygen for patients, he said, apart from a short stretch in November and December last year, when cases dipped.



Hundreds of people in Peru wait to refill oxygen tanks outside a gas plant in San Juan de Lurigancho, Lima. Photograph: Gian Mazco/AFP/Getty Images

Greenslade said: “We have to ask a very critical question: why such an essential resource as oxygen is locked up in mining, steel, oil and gas when the poor public hospital system can’t provide enough to keep babies, adults and the elderly alive.

“These countries have to take a good look at how they’re investing in medical oxygen in the health system. If oxygen capacity is there for mining companies to extract, the capacity must be there for the health system to save lives.”

While liquid oxygen is a major source for medics in many countries, it does not account for all of the supply. Hospitals can also obtain oxygen from on-site factories that turn ambient air into oxygen, and from portable concentrator machines.

The World [Health](#) Organization, Unicef, the World Bank and other donors and NGOs have shipped hundreds of thousands of concentrators to countries

to help them deal with rises in oxygen needs, but manufacturers are running short of parts.

The World Bank has warned that many countries have not applied for emergency loans available to help them upgrade oxygen systems. Last year the World Bank made \$160bn (£113bn) available for countries to prepare for Covid-19 and added an additional \$12bn this month. The cash can be used to import oxygen or shore up production.

Unitaid and Wellcome have donated \$20m in emergency funding for oxygen in low-income countries. The Global Fund has also made \$13.7bn in grants available for countries to use on Covid-19 response programmes, including to buy oxygen concentrators and build public oxygen plants.

Campaigners want emergency, fast-tracked funding for oxygen supplies anywhere in the world.



Paramedics from a community-run ambulance service assess a Covid-19 patient in Lenasia, Johannesburg. Photograph: Michele Spatari/AFP/Getty

But Mickey Chopra, a senior official at the World Bank, said countries had applied for loans for ventilators and PPE but not for oxygen supplies. “The variants and the sudden spikes that we’ve seen now have caught people by

surprise, to a large extent, and the weakest point in the system has turned out to be the oxygen supply system.”

Looking ahead, Greenslade would like to see governments create comprehensive national medical oxygen strategies, with workers trained to give patients oxygen safely and maintain and fix equipment.

Countries need to have plans in place for unexpected rises in demand, she said. “What they’re doing at the moment is when a crisis hits, [governments] scramble to bring a group together to come up with some way of managing it. But they need to get ahead of the game.”

*Additional reporting by Oksana Grytsenko, Anmol Irfan, Ivan Ruiz, Rizwan Shehzad, Natalie Vikhrov, Claudia Chavez and Ralph Zapata*

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/may/25/oxygen-shortages-threaten-total-collapse-of-dozens-of-health-systems>

[Japan](#)

## US tells citizens to avoid travel to Japan due to Covid outbreak

Move comes amid preparations in Tokyo for the Olympics, which are due to be held from 23 July despite a raging fourth wave



A demonstration against the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at Shinjuku in Tokyo  
Photograph: Kimimasa Mayama/EPA

A demonstration against the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at Shinjuku in Tokyo  
Photograph: Kimimasa Mayama/EPA

*[Justin McCurry](#) in Tokyo and agencies*

Tue 25 May 2021 01.50 EDT

The US has urged its citizens to avoid all travel to [Japan](#), where concern is rising over new variants of the coronavirus, but officials insist the move will not complicate preparations for the [Tokyo 2020 Olympics](#).

The state department on Monday issued its highest Level 4 travel warning for [Japan](#), where a month-long state of emergency has helped reduce cases in Tokyo but failed to have a significant impact on the country's fourth wave of Covid-19 infections.

“Travelers should avoid all travel to Japan,” the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC] said in new guidance issued less than two months before the Olympics are due to open.

[Tokyo Olympics: anger in Japan at IOC call to make ‘sacrifices’](#)  
[Read more](#)

“Because of the current situation in Japan even fully vaccinated travelers may be at risk for getting and spreading Covid-19 variants and should avoid all travel to Japan,” it added.

The state department’s warning was more blunt. “Do not travel to Japan due to Covid-19,” it said.

The decision will have little impact on leisure travel: Japan has [closed its borders](#) to tourists, with only Japanese citizens and foreign residents permitted to enter the country.

In Tokyo, officials said the warning would not impact preparations for the Games, which Olympic and Japanese organisers insist will go ahead as planned on 23 July.

Joe Biden told Japan’s prime minister, Yoshihide Suga, that the US backed plans for a “safe and secure” Games when they met in Washington last month, and Japan’s top spokesman, Katsunobu Kato, told reporters on Tuesday he did not believe the advisory would affect the Olympics.

The US Olympic and Paralympic Committee [USOPC], which oversees Team USA, said it was aware of the advisory.

“We feel confident that the current mitigation practices in place for athletes and staff by both the USOPC and the Tokyo organising committee, coupled with the testing before travel, on arrival in Japan, and during Games time,

will allow for safe participation of Team USA athletes this summer,” the committees said in a statement.

## [79,000 people flying in for Tokyo Olympics, Japanese media reports](#)

[Read more](#)

More than 11,000 athletes due to compete in Tokyo will not have to complete 14 days’ quarantine but must test negative before leaving their home countries and on arrival in Japan, and submit to daily tests inside an Olympic village “bubble” during their involvement in the Games.

Japanese organisers have already decided to ban overseas spectators and are expected to decide whether to allow Japanese citizens to attend Olympic venues next month.

Despite the recent fall in cases in Tokyo and Osaka – where hospital beds for Covid patients have [reached capacity](#) – Japan recently qualified for Level 4 status, defined by the CDC as a “very high level” of Covid-19 cases.

Level 4 notices apply to countries where the [coronavirus](#) incidence rate – or cumulative new cases over the past 28 days per 100,000 people – exceeds 100, according to the Kyodo news agency.

Japan met the criteria on Friday, and its current incidence rate is 120 cases per 100,000, an official of the US health protection agency said.

Very few people in Japan have been vaccinated against the virus, adding to concerns about possible new outbreaks driven by more contagious variants.

Just over 4% of the country’s 126 million people have received at least one jab, but Suga has vowed to have 36 million people aged over 64 fully protected by the end of July.

Vaccinations for the general population are not expected to get into full swing until after the Olympics end on 8 August.

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

## Coronavirus

# China rejects report of sick staff at Wuhan lab prior to Covid outbreak

Spokesperson dismisses Wall Street Journal claims based on ‘previously undisclosed’ intelligence

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



Security personnel keep watch outside the Wuhan Institute of Virology during a World Health Organization visit in February. Photograph: Thomas Peter/Reuters

Security personnel keep watch outside the Wuhan Institute of Virology during a World Health Organization visit in February. Photograph: Thomas Peter/Reuters

*[Vincent Ni](#) China affairs correspondent*

Mon 24 May 2021 10.15 EDT

China has vehemently denied [a Wall Street Journal report](#) citing US intelligence materials that said several members of staff at a key virus laboratory in Wuhan had fallen ill shortly before the first patient with Covid-like symptoms was recorded in the city on 8 December 2019.

Foreign ministry spokesperson, Zhao Lijian, said it was “completely untrue” that three researchers at the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) became sick in autumn 2019. The report, based on “previously undisclosed” US intelligence, said the lab staff had become sick “with symptoms consistent with both Covid-19 and common seasonal illness”.

“The United States continues to hype up the ‘lab-leak’ theory … Does it care about traceability or is it just trying to distract attention?” Zhao said. He also cited a [March statement from WIV](#), in which the institute said it had “never dealt with Sars-CoV-2 before 30 December 2019”.

The [Wall Street Journal](#) report came on the eve of a key meeting of the World Health Organization’s decision-making body, which is expected to discuss in detail the next phase of an investigation into the origins of Covid-19.

Separately, [CNN reported](#) on Monday, citing people briefed on the intelligence, that the intelligence community “still does not know what the researchers were actually sick with”. “At the end of the day, there is still nothing definitive,” one of the people who has seen the intelligence told CNN.

Shi Zhengli, who directs the Centre for Emerging Infectious Diseases at WIV, said earlier this year that all staff had tested negative for Covid-19 antibodies, and there had been no turnover of staff on the coronavirus team.

[News Corp exclusive on Chinese ‘bioweapons’ based on discredited 2015 book of conspiracy theories](#)

[Read more](#)

International experts investigating the origins of the coronavirus said in February, following their trip to [China](#), that it was “extremely unlikely” that the virus had spread from a lab leak in the city of Wuhan.

Peter Ben Embarek, the head of the WHO mission, said at the time that work to identify the origins of Covid-19 pointed to a “natural reservoir” in bats, but it was “unlikely” that this occurred in Wuhan.

### Graphic

The organisation’s director general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, however said in March that “all hypotheses remain on the table” after 14 countries, including the US and UK, made a joint statement to express concerns over the WHO team’s conclusions.

WHO spokesman Tarik Jasarevic on Monday said that the organisation’s technical teams were now deciding on the next steps. He said further study was needed into the role of animal markets as well as the lab-leak hypothesis.

In Washington, a US national security council spokesperson said that the Biden administration continued to have “serious questions about the earliest days of the Covid-19 pandemic, including its origins within the People’s Republic of China.”

She said the US government was working with the WHO and other member states to support an expert-driven evaluation of the pandemic’s origins “that is free from interference or politicisation.”

[UK and US criticise WHO's Covid report and accuse China of withholding data](#)

[Read more](#)

The lab-leak theory has been around since last year. In January 2020, as China attempted to contain the spread of the virus, rumours began to spread amid the scramble for answers. The conservative US website Washington Times, for example, alleged that coronavirus “may have originated in a lab linked to China’s biowarfare programme”.

But what many virus experts deemed a pure science issue was quickly turned into a diplomatic row, amid growing tensions between China and the United States. Three weeks after the Washington Times’s report, Republican

senator Tom Cotton raised the lab-leak theory, while admitting he had no evidence to support it.

In March 2020, Zhao alleged on his Twitter account that the coronavirus was an “American disease” that might have been brought to China by members of the United States army who had visited Wuhan a few months earlier. He provided no evidence to support his theory, either.

Soon afterwards, several US allies began calls for an independent inquiry into the origin of Covid-19. Australia’s prime minister, Scott Morrison, for example, reiterated his country’s call in his address to the United Nations general assembly in September.

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/24/china-rejects-report-of-sick-staff-at-wuhan-lab-prior-to-covid-outbreak>

## Coronavirus

# Most children with post-Covid disease recover within six months, study finds

Small study looks at complications affecting tiny minority of children, which had caused major concern

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



Great Ormond Street children's hospital in London. Photograph: Justin Tallis/AFP via Getty Images

Great Ormond Street children's hospital in London. Photograph: Justin Tallis/AFP via Getty Images

*[Sarah Boseley](#)*

Mon 24 May 2021 17.30 EDT

Children at a leading London hospital who were admitted with a rare but severe illness as a result of coronavirus infection had made a good recovery by the end of six months, although some needed ongoing physical therapy or mental health support, according to a small study.

The unusual and very serious complications of Covid experienced by a tiny minority of children caused concern last year. In April 2020, NHS doctors were told to look out for a rare inflammatory disease linked to coronavirus. It looked like Kawasaki disease shock syndrome, which usually affects the under-fives, but this was afflicting children twice that age and older. Symptoms included high fever, rash, red eyes, swelling and general pain.

[Up to 100 UK children a week hospitalised with rare post-Covid disease](#)

[Read more](#)

Between March and June 2020, 250 cases were identified in the UK and Ireland. More were diagnosed in the second wave this year. It is thought the condition is caused by an overreaction of the immune system to the virus. Symptoms occur more than four weeks after coronavirus infection. In some rare cases, they have led to multiorgan failure.

One of the major centres that treated the more severely ill children with what became known as PIMS-TS (paediatric inflammatory multisystem syndrome temporally associated with Sars-CoV-2) was the Great Ormond Street children's hospital (GOSH) in central London.

A [study in the Lancet Child and Adolescent Health journal](#) reports on 46 of those children, with a median age of 10. Thirty patients were male and 16 were female, 37 were from minority ethnic groups, and eight had pre-existing health issues.

None died and most of the children's complications had resolved within six months of going home. "Most inflammation, gastrointestinal, heart, and clinically significant neurological symptoms were resolved within six months of being discharged from hospital, suggesting long-term damage to the organs is rare," says the study.

All but one of the children returned to school, in person or online. But some of the children needed further help for muscle fatigue, which prevented them walking far or exercising. Others continued to experience mental ill-health including anxiety and severe mood changes. Seven children's parents reported their children were experiencing emotional difficulties, while eight children reported emotional difficulties themselves.

**'It's terrifying': parents' struggle to get help for children with long Covid**  
**Read more**

Dr Karyn Moshal from GOSH cautioned that this was an observational study, so the children were not compared with others of their age and it was not possible to be sure these effects were caused by the syndrome.

"The levels of fatigue and muscle weakness we found at six months follow-up are concerning and require close monitoring, but it's difficult to determine whether this finding is caused directly by PIMS-TS or if it's a result of the disruption in children's lives that the Covid-19 pandemic has caused on a wider scale. Therefore, it's crucial that we continue to monitor these conditions as social distancing relaxes and children return to school and more active routines," she said.

Dr Justin Penner, a co-author of the study from GOSH, said it included only a small group of children from one hospital. "Nevertheless, these findings can hopefully signal cautious optimism that many of the most severe effects of PIMS appear to resolve within six months. However, the persisting fatigue, difficulty exercising, and mental health effects we saw in some children, which can interfere with daily lives, must be closely monitored, and patients should continue to be supported by medical teams with a range of specialisms."

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/24/most-children-with-post-covid-disease-recover-within-six-months-study-finds>

## 2021.05.25 - Spotlight

- ['I was sleeping in laybys' The people who have spent the pandemic living in vans](#)
- [The secret deportations How Britain betrayed the Chinese men who served the country in the war](#)
- [The Guardian picture essay The best photos from a tumultuous Premier League season](#)
- ['I've had to keep changing' Les Dennis on his move into opera](#)

## Caravans and campervans

# ‘I was sleeping in laybys’: the people who have spent the pandemic living in vans



Parked life ... Suzanna Jones, a former truck driver who lives in her van near Caernarfon, Gwynedd, with her dog, cat, hens and a quail. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

Parked life ... Suzanna Jones, a former truck driver who lives in her van near Caernarfon, Gwynedd, with her dog, cat, hens and a quail. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

For some, living in a van is their culture or a symbol of resistance. But for many others it is the only possible response to our growing housing crisis – and proposed legislation could make life much harder for them

*[Simon Hattenstone](#) and [Daniel Lavelle](#)*

Tue 25 May 2021 01.00 EDT

For Stef, living in a van made perfect sense. He was on the road all the time, travelling from music festival to music festival, feeding revellers his homemade pizzas. Soon, he had saved enough money to buy a secondhand white LDV Convoy. He moved into it in December 2019, but by early 2020, the pandemic had kicked in, lockdown was under way, and music festivals were a non-starter.

Stef didn't have enough money to rent a place to live. "I'm on universal credit: £490 a month to live on," he says. "Half of that goes on running and insuring the van. So there's not a lot of wiggle room." He may have dreamed of living in a van before, but now it was his only option.

His LDV conked out in March and he replaced it with a big secondhand silver Mercedes Luton Sprinter. "It's completely unconverted as finding materials is proving to be a nightmare," he says. He has no mod cons or running water, and relies on friends for laundry trips. "I've got a couple of little camping stoves and little jerrycans full of water and I can make do with that," he says. Not only has the pandemic robbed him of his work, it has made van-dwelling more problematic. "The van doesn't have a toilet or a shower so relying on public facilities has been really difficult," Stef says. "Gyms are closed, so I've had to shower at service stations."

There have been a few upsides. "It's given me a chance to not be stuck in the cities – to spend time in the middle of nowhere, in the woods." But listening to Stef, who is usually based in Bristol, it's hard not to conclude that the negatives outweigh the positives.

By last winter, he could no longer afford the fuel to heat his van. "That was costing me an extra two or three pounds a night." He ended up "skipping": raiding [huge containers outside supermarkets looking for food](#). "Sometimes you find bread, a bit of meat, pasta. You can get a bit of good produce if you're lucky. If you're unlucky they've locked the bins and thrown bleach over them. They do that to stop people going in the bins, which is disgusting, if you ask me."



Stef with his Mercedes van. Photograph: Sam Frost/The Guardian

Stef, 29, is a warm, happy-go-lucky loner, and has tended to keep himself to himself since he started living in his van. Like many van dwellers, he values his privacy, and asked us not to use his surname. “I just prefer keeping my details and searchable info low-key,” he says. He generally enjoys his own company, but at times he finds it difficult. He has a shortlist of places he likes to stay at night, places where he knows he can get a decent night’s kip. “I know I’ll be left alone, more or less. I circulate between them depending on where I am in the day.”

Does he ever get moved on by the police? “No, not really. There have been a couple of knocks and a couple of checks. But I’ve not really been bothered too much.”

He gets pulled over more often in the day, but he doesn’t think it’s anything to do with the van. “I’m brown – half Singapore Chinese, and I look kind of Middle Eastern – and I’m bearded in a big white van.”

Most days, Stef occupies himself with carpentry, making furniture. He and his boss from the festival catering company started it as a hobby that they hoped might develop into a business. But it hasn’t done, as yet. “It’s

something just to kill the time, not really an income.” What they really need is to get back on the festival circuit, as the country comes out of lockdown.

When the pandemic started, he would have laughed at the suggestion that he was homeless. But now he’s not so sure. “It’s a bit of a grey area for me because I’m fairly comfortable with my life – I’ve adapted to living within the means I have available to me. I’ve not really reached out to homeless charities because I know there are people who need help a lot more than I do who don’t have a van to live in,” he says.

Living in a van can represent so many different things these days. For some, it is their culture, heritage and way of life. For others, it’s a philosophy, a symbol of resistance, a two-fingered salute to convention. For still others, it is an aspirational lifestyle to be monetised on social media under the hashtag #vanlife. And then there are those [for whom it is a humiliation and a trap](#). In recent years, the number of homeless people living in vehicles has doubled as conventional homes become increasingly unaffordable. Yet even this precarious way of life is under threat, as a government bill threatens the future of those living in vehicles, whether through choice or necessity.

“The road” has been romanticised as a way of life. While it has deep roots in nomadic cultures, for traditionally settled communities it has also been shaped by penury. In the US, [after the Great Depression](#), it became common for the millions of people searching for work on the road to live in trailers. By 1960, between 1.5 million and 2 million Americans had acquired house trailers, so-called recreational vehicles or RVs. In the US, people living in them are counted among the homelessness statistics whether they regard themselves as homeless or not.



Frances McDormand in *Nomadland*. Photograph: PictureLux/The Hollywood Archive/Alamy

The Oscar-winning film *Nomadland*, about American communities living in vans, shows [the toughness of life on the road](#), but it has also been accused of being somewhat rose-tinted, with landscapes of sublime beauty, and [the uncritical depiction of an Amazon warehouse](#) where working conditions have been described by the Trades Union Congress as “dehumanising”.

In Britain, there’s no official count of people living in vehicles. But in December 2018 the charity Crisis estimated that 12,000 people were living in cars or tents or on public transport in the UK – double the number in 2012. Jon Sparkes, chief executive of Crisis, adds that an increasing number of people are falling into poverty and homelessness because of the pandemic’s impact on the economy. “It is absolutely unacceptable that people are forced to live in their vehicles simply because they have nowhere else to go, other than our streets,” he says.

---

Jeremy Flynn is providing a guided tour of his van – double bed, cooker, fridge-freezer, crockery, a couple of cupboards, computer, guitar. Then he remembers his prized possession – an Oculus virtual reality headset. It is one of the few luxuries he owns. Flynn moved into his van to save money and escape the daily grind. But sometimes his alternative lifestyle also gets a bit

too much. “You can escape reality living in a van, then escape the reality of living in a van by putting on the headset.”

Flynn, 46, says he had been a wage slave all his adult life. He had five children, divorced, and worked constantly just to get by. “Work, food, sleep, every day. Just going to work to be able to pay your rent.”

For two years, he spent his spare time at home watching videos of people who lived in vans, telling his kids he was going to do the same thing. But he continued renting the annexe of an elderly couple’s house and struggling to get by. Then around Christmas 2019, the couple died within a month of each other. Flynn managed to save £2,000 for rent and a deposit on a new place, before asking himself why he was planning to chuck away his hard-earned cash to fund somebody else’s mortgage. Instead, he spent £1,500 on an 18-year-old Peugeot Boxer – a large, white commercial van – and moved into it.

It’s 14 months since he swapped bricks and mortar for a van. His move coincided with the start of the pandemic. As a result, he has barely travelled from his starting point of Christchurch in Dorset. Now he is in a car park just down the road, but he says his life has been transformed: no money worries, no anger issues, and a new sense of freedom.

Flynn is a tough-looking man with a sentimental streak. He is heavily tattooed with huge angel wings wrapped around his neck – a tribute to his father, who passed away a few years ago. He talks about how he and his friends would gather in the pub once a week, and moan about their lot. Now, he turns up with barely a worry in the world, and his mates can’t understand the change. He’s still doing the same job as a gift card printer and part-time personal trainer, but while they worry about life and work and the pandemic, he sits there content.

What do his children think of his new lifestyle? “They think I’m crazy.” Did they think he was crazy beforehand? “Oh yeah. Yeah.” For Flynn, one of the most liberating things is being relatively possession-free. “I’ve been in houses, flats, and bedsits and slowly my belongings moved down to a duffel bag. Now I put my bag on the passenger seat and go: well that’s it, all my stuff.”



Jeremy Flynn, in his van near Ferndown, Dorset. Photograph: Karen Robinson/The Guardian

Most people, he says, assume he is in crisis and desperate to find himself a place to rent, but he doesn't see it like that. "On my Instagram, I will hashtag 'houseless not homeless'. I would imagine 99% of people who live in vans, if you said you're homeless, they would say: 'Go fuck yourself.'" Does he think he would ever move back to a house?

"No, I genuinely don't. I enjoy this so much that if I won the lottery, I might get a slightly bigger van, but that's it."

Flynn's lifestyle may not have been forced upon him, but it was fuelled by a shortage of money and affordable housing. For others, van living is not a lifestyle choice, it's a necessity.

---

Sarah (not her real name), who lives in the north of England, says she never imagined she would end up living in a van. She is in her 50s and had been homeless once before in her life – but that was only for a few weeks after a relationship ended. For many years she held down a good job in management. "It wasn't the best pay, but I could afford to live on it," she says. Then her mother became ill and needed her support full-time. Sarah gave up her job and moved in with her.

She says some relatives didn't like the fact that she was so close to her mother and threatened her. "They were constantly asking for money. I said: 'Look, Mum, you don't want to be giving all this money away – you need it yourself.' That's when things got ugly."

Sarah says that after she was badly beaten, she fled from her mother's home, terrified for her life. Soon after this, her mother died, and Sarah blamed herself. "They kept leaving her on her own, and she fell out of her wheelchair because she wasn't strapped in."

Two years ago, she took her savings and headed off in her 14-year-old red Ford Transit van, "without a damn thing". She loved her battered old van, in which she had occasionally slept on overnight trips, associating it with freedom and good times. But now it was her home, she found it simply wasn't equipped for living in.

She told the council that she had been physically abused and threatened, and that she needed social housing. The council told her she would have to go to the bottom of the list because she had moved from her home area – it would be a three-year wait if she was lucky. She was offered an emergency shelter, which she found even more traumatising than living in the van. "I got my backside grabbed, I got sexual remarks. They were all addicts. I felt more unsafe in that hostel than in my van."

She moved back into the van, living without water, toilet and electricity. "It was horrible. I went to bed in my clothes in my sleeping bag with a quilt on over the top and I still woke up frozen. In the summer it was often the other extreme – red hot."

Sarah was ashamed of the way she was living. She has adult children, and made a joke out of it when talking to them. "They are key workers and they had enough on without worrying about me." She has not seen her children and grandchildren for two years because she didn't want them to know the reality of her situation. As for her old friends, she found it too humiliating to tell them, so she simply disappeared out of their lives. "I never thought that at my age I'd have to live in a bloody van," she says.

Sarah tried to find work but was in no condition to present herself for job interviews. “I’m a tidy person. I’m normally very clean. Living in the van I just felt scruffy and unkempt all the time. People said: ‘Well, go and get a job’, and I said: ‘You try going for a job when you stink, you can’t get a shower, and you can’t get dressed up because you’ve got no suitable clothes.’”

She was often moved on by residents or by police and found herself living in laybys. “I was sleeping in laybys, dogging laybys mainly.” Did she feel at risk? “God, yeah … I didn’t get much sleep, I’ll put it that way. Some nights people were trying your door handles. It was horrible. I had a baseball bat in the back of my van just in case.” Did she ever use it? “I shouted a few times and pretended I was a bloke.” She laughs. “You just try and adapt, don’t you?”

Eventually, things got too much, and she tried to take her own life. “I got stopped by some nice gentleman who saw I was a bit stressed. He talked me round.”

After five months of living in laybys, she had a stroke of luck. The father of a friend told her she could park her van on his drive, and allowed her to shower in the house in the morning. When the country went into lockdown last spring, her friend said she could move into his flat, which is where she has stayed for the past year. But she knows she will have to move out soon, as the country comes out of lockdown, and she’s already panicking.

“I cry a lot,” she says. “I don’t know how I’m going to react to things from one day to another.”

Sarah had been told by the council that it could prioritise her only if she pressed charges against the family members who she says assaulted her. She refused to – partly out of fear and partly because her mother was still alive at the time and would have been left with no one to look after her. Now she feels betrayed. “You think: why have I paid into the system all these years just to be dumped? I feel the least they could have done is give me a house or bloody flat. Like I said to the council: how would you like to live in a van and pee into a bucket at my age? To be honest, it makes you feel like a piece of crap on someone’s shoe.”

---

---

Suzanna Jones adored her job driving heavy-goods vehicles. She was queen of the road, trucking her way through Europe. “It was a fantastic wage. I was living a great life and loving every minute of it.” One day, three years ago, she came out of the yard at the end of her shift and shut the heavy iron gate behind her, just as she had done for years. A heavy gust blew the gate back on her, smashing her ankle bone. She hasn’t worked since.

The ankle was left to heal, but it never did. Complications set in. She went on an NHS waiting list and was due to be operated on in early 2020. Then the pandemic started, and routine operations were cancelled. By then, she was using a frame to get around, convinced she would never walk properly again.

At the time, Jones was renting a lovely Victorian chapel house in north-west Wales. Convinced she wouldn’t drive again, she got herself four hens, three quails and a cat to keep her and her dog company. Without work, she quickly went through her savings, and found herself scraping by on benefits.



Suzanna Jones. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

Last November, she finally had her operation and learned to walk again. But her savings were gone. In March this year she was evicted. The council could not provide her with social housing. She was offered a place in an

emergency shelter, but it wouldn't take her animals. "I love them all, and they love me," she says. "I've rescued these hens from cages, and I'm not going to send them back to them. It would be terrible." As we talk on Zoom, they cluck away in the background.

Jones moved out of her home into a white LDV Maxus van. Jones says it's cramped inside, with only enough room for her bed, which is too low, and two small chests of drawers crammed with her belongings. She found an abandoned warehouse and parked at the back of it. The day before we talk she found out it wasn't abandoned; the owner saw her, and told her she couldn't stay, for insurance reasons. His business partner then came along with a bag of chicken for her, and some food for her dog. "She's been so wonderful, this lady," Jones says. All the same, she thinks she will have to move on soon.

She has quickly discovered the van's flaws. "The doors aren't shutting right. Last night, it absolutely threw it down and the rain comes in, so I got a plastic bag at the end of my bed with a towel on top to try to stop it soaking my bed. It's not ideal, but I'm a truck driver – I'm used to living in a cab." As for keeping clean, she's not worried at the moment. "I can do a full body wash with a face cloth and a bowl of water. My granny taught me how to do that when I was a little girl."

Jones has a friend in nearby Caernarfon who will help out with her laundry. Another friend has just given her an old caravan fridge. There is just one problem: with the chickens, cat, dog and quails, there's no room for it in the van.

When she tells people she's living in a van with chickens, they pull a face. But that's just prejudice, she says. "They say: 'Ugh, as if you're living with chickens – they stink.' I say: 'Any animals stink if you don't clean them – cats, dogs and everything. As long as you keep everything clean, they don't smell.'"

Jones is angry with the council for not finding her anywhere to live, but for now she says she's coping. "The situation is a disgrace, but I'm happy. Living on the road is something I love anyway."

A month later, Jones gets in touch to say things are looking up. Gary the cat had knocked a mug of tea over her computer, frying its motherboard, but she has received £4,000 from more than 100 donations to her GoFundMe campaign, which she used to buy a new laptop. She has been declared fit to drive, the owner of the derelict warehouse has allowed her to stay on site, and she has finally been able to shell out for much-needed van repairs.

But when we reconnect in May, things have taken a turn for the worse. As we talk on the phone, there is loud banging from the mechanic who is fixing her van in a local garage. She's living there until the repairs are complete. She says the landowner of the warehouse is now asking her for £100 a month to stay. She is paid up for the rest of May, but doesn't know beyond that, as she only receives £300 from the Department for Work and Pensions, and the money from her GoFundMe is dwindling. Even so, she says, she was ready to get back on her feet and back to work when she found a lump in her neck.

Jones noticed it at the beginning of April and became concerned when it was still there a month later. "I went to the doctor. He sent me to see a specialist who found another lump behind my nose." She worries that it's cancer. Jones had a biopsy a couple of weeks ago and is waiting for the results. "So, I've got that hanging over me on top of this other business of not having anywhere proper to live."

Despite the uncertainty she's more concerned about her dog, Amy. "Me and her have never had a moment apart. She sleeps in my bed, she has a bath with me. I couldn't imagine anyone giving her as much cuddles and love as I do. I don't know what I'll do without my girl and what she will do without me."

---

The van-dwelling lifestyle has become a phenomenon on social media in recent years. Type in #vanlife on Instagram or YouTube and you will come across numerous van dwellers [documenting the good life](#). Typically, the accounts belong to young, attractive couples taking photos of all the fun they are having, the beautiful spots they are staying at, and their designer vans. Those with huge followings can make an income from their share of ad revenue.

Martin Cowe is a YouTuber who is more interested in showing the mundane reality of life on the road. He understands why people tend to prefer the utopian vision of van life. “When people come home from work, they don’t want to see people like me saying: ‘I’ve had another problem today. The toilet was full, and I still need to go.’ They want to see people having a damn good time. It sells the dream to a lot of people. It’s a glorification of van life.”

Cowe becomes animated at the mention of the film *Nomadland*. “I haven’t seen it, but apparently they use my name. My [YouTube channel is Houseless Not Homeless](#) and that phrase gets referenced in the film. Maybe I should have trademarked it back in the day.”

Why did he choose that name? “I got sick of people saying I was homeless because I live in a vehicle,” he says. Cowe is a quietly spoken, polite man but he is militant on this subject. Nobody, he insists, is ever homeless: you can make a home anywhere, whether it’s a doorway or a tent.



Martin Cowe.

He has lived in a van for eight years, mostly in Bristol. Last year he moved to the Algarve in Portugal – partly for the weather, but largely because of the politics surrounding van life in Britain. He has little time for those who

romanticise van life, but even less for the authorities in his home country who are trying to clamp down on it.

Cowe, 34, grew up in Crewe and then lived an itinerant life – moving between Nantwich, Chester, Liverpool, Bristol and Gloucester before heading to Portugal. As a teenager, his closest friends were Irish Travellers. While his parents took him on extravagant holidays to the Gambia or Cyprus, he wished he could go away with his Traveller friends for a couple of months. Their lives seemed so liberated.

Does he come from a privileged background? “I wouldn’t say so, no. Both my parents are lorry drivers who work all hours God sends. They weren’t around that much when we were kids, but they made up for it by giving us nice holidays. They took us to Gambia because they wanted to show us that some people don’t have the luxuries in life.”

But it wasn’t luxury that Cowe wanted, it was freedom. As soon as he could afford it, he bought himself an old VW camper van. Then he bought himself a second VW and took the best parts from both vehicles to make into one.

Despite his yearning to escape the treadmill, Cowe held down regular jobs, doing long hours as a CCTV security officer for the council, then working in student welfare and security at the University of Chester. He was working 80 to 90 hours a week and was exhausted and dissatisfied.

In his mid-20s he and his girlfriend split up. He initially moved into his camper van for a couple of weeks to save money for a rental deposit. After a couple of weeks, he decided to stay another month. Eight years on he is a confirmed van liver – and, he thinks, probably a van lifer. His current vehicle is a white 1992 LMC Liberty.

He continued to work at the university, but he found he was making new friends. “I discovered a whole different community and lifestyle. I enjoyed spending my time with them and wanted a piece of that for myself.” How were they different?

“They were against systems – high taxes on anything from vehicles to salary. They could do a weekend of gardening and that was their money for

a couple of weeks.” He began to ask himself why he had been working all those hours just to give away most of his money to landlords.

When we speak, he has just finished his work for the day: restoring an old ruin at a campsite on the Algarve. He does the work in exchange for getting fed and a free pitch. “My only other income is a bit of revenue through YouTube. I do need money to do repairs on the van, but for everyday things I like exchanges.”

Cowe says he makes between \$50 (£35) and \$100 a month from his YouTube channel, “enough to pay my necessities, and a beer at the end of the week”. While he has no time for those who paint a rose-tinted picture of van life, he says there is much to recommend it – the simplicity, the low environmental footprint, the lack of stress, the breaking down of social norms.

Does he ever get bored? No, he says – he loves photography, making YouTube films, playing his instruments; he has a rigorous daily fitness regime that he would never stick to if he was living a regular life. Sometimes he’s just happy to watch the world go by.

Cowe left England because he believes the country is becoming increasingly hostile to those who live in vehicles. “They see us as people who go out and steal or who are bringing down the area with our crappy hippy vans. I had a few incidents with people in Bristol who were intolerant of people living in vehicles. For the last two years there was more and more controlled parking, even in the wildest, deepest forest in Gloucestershire.”

Many van dwellers in Britain believe that the government is making it harder for them to live in their vehicles. Despite the fact that renting or buying property is increasingly unaffordable, the [proposed police, crime, sentencing and courts](#) act will create a new offence of “residing on land without consent in or with a vehicle” and make it easier for the police to remove unauthorised encampments on highways. Bristol Vehicles for Change (BVfC), a campaigning group that exists to protect and [advance the rights of vehicle dwellers in the Bristol area](#), believes the bill violates existing legislation by targeting communities with protected characteristics

under the Equality Act 2010, such as Gypsies and Travellers, and breaches article 8 of the Human Rights Act 1998: the [right to respect for one's home](#).



For Cowe, who has campaigned for BVfC, the bill presents a huge threat. “If this becomes law, van life in the UK as we know it is dead. I’ve been on the phone to friends in recent weeks and they are so scared that if this comes in, they won’t be able to live the way they live.”

He was so alarmed at the prospect that he headed for the Iberian peninsula. “I knew that Portugal was looking to ban wild camping, but if I go into Spain, which is only half an hour from here, I’m free to park where I want. As long as I’m respectful and abide by local rules, there are no sanctions there. I won’t be trespassing.”

There is another reason he is so well suited to van life, he says. “I have massive depression and anxiety, and if I lived in a house, I’d just be sat playing computer games. I wouldn’t go out. I would not be the man I’ve turned out to be if I lived in bricks and mortar.” In the past, he was constantly making excuses for not seeing people. Now, the rules of socialising aren’t so rigid.

“I can park up at any campsite or go to any place where there’s wild camping. Language barriers don’t matter – just walk over for a beer, sit your

arse down and join in with everybody.”

For Cowe, living in a van isn’t so much a necessity or a practicality, it’s a belief system, an act of faith. “It’s the only way of life. Deep down, when people say they want this and that, I don’t think they’re really happy – buying all this material stuff trying to keep up with the Joneses.”

Meanwhile, Sarah is petrified she’ll end up back in the van. “There are no other options,” she says. How will it affect her if she does have to return to it? She exhales loudly. “Put it this way, I don’t think I’ll be here next year if I have to go back in my van.”

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

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2021/may/25/i-was-sleeping-in-laybys-the-people-who-have-spent-the-pandemic-living-in-vans>

# The secret deportations: how Britain betrayed the Chinese men who served the country in the war

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2021/may/25/chinese-merchant-seamen-liverpool-deportations>

# Premier League 2020-21: the best photos from a tumultuous season

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2021/may/25/premier-league-2020-21-the-best-photos-from-a-tumultuous-season>

## Opera

# ‘I’ve had to keep changing’: Les Dennis on his move into opera

He’s gone from quiz shows and Corrie to the ENO, and says his biggest achievement is he’s still here



Les Dennis on Family Fortunes in 1987. Photograph: ITV/Rex/Shutterstock

Les Dennis on Family Fortunes in 1987. Photograph: ITV/Rex/Shutterstock



### Caroline Davies

Tue 25 May 2021 03.00 EDT

When the comedian and actor [Les Dennis](#) played Uncle Fester in the Addams Family UK tour in 2017, the Guardian wrote of his "[long, strange trip](#)" of a career taking "another left turn".

"And I am proud of those left turns" says Dennis, who is about to make the most surprising change of direction yet with his [opera debut](#) at the age of 67, a prospect leaving him not a little excited – and daunted.

"I am always nervous. I always have that impostor syndrome," he adds of being cast as the upwardly mobile Sir Joseph Porter, "ruler of the Queen's navy", in the [English National Opera's](#) production of the Gilbert and Sullivan comedy classic HMS Pinafore at the London Coliseum.

When Dennis made his RSC debut two years ago, "on the first day of rehearsals I thought: well, everybody is going to have been to drama school, and I've come from the working men's clubs and the cabaret and summer season circuit. Am I going to get found out? But I found at the RSC all these trained actors were lovely, and welcomed me. And I am hoping I will find the same in the opera world."

No one is more surprised than Dennis at landing the comic baritone part of Sir Joseph for the run in October. “Yes, it’s good to take people by surprise, and take myself equally by surprise. So on that opening night I will be excited, nervous, and know that people will be going ‘ah, let’s see’.”

Dennis, erstwhile television quiz show host and Coronation Street cast member, is already experienced in musical theatre, and is due to appear in Hairspray, also at the Coliseum, from 21 June.

But opera was not on his tick list until [Cal McCrystal](#), who is directing the production, suggested he audition. The artistic director, Annilese Miskimmon, said he “completely blew us away in the audition process”. He was hired on the spot.

“I got the job in the room. I was just: ‘Oh, woah, OK. This never happens,’ says Dennis. “Normal procedure is they say thank you very much, we’ll let you know, then you sit waiting for the phone to ring.” He was in a bit of a daze afterwards.

Though he has singing lessons – since the pandemic these have consisted of his singing teacher setting him exercises to perform alone at home – like all performers he wonders how so long off stage will affect his performance, though he did manage to appear in pantomime over Christmas. He will find out the answer when HMS Pinafore rehearsals properly start in September.

Will gargling help? “Not sure,” he says. He’s not even sure yet if opera singers are miked on stage. “I’m sure I’ll get tips from the people I’m working with. I loved Tom Jones on the radio recently when he was asked if he needed to warm up, and he just coughed and said ‘I’m ready’. I do a little more than that.

“Every night in Hairspray we will be doing a vocal warmup, so I hope that will improve the muscles. It is a muscle, and we’ve not been using it – anybody that is on stage, that is.”

Though he has never performed Gilbert and Sullivan he is familiar with their work and is relishing playing Sir Joseph, whose songs include When I Was a Lad.

“I love the idea that this is a man who has never been to sea. It’s a satire on class, on party politics and on people who are not qualified for jobs. So he is this guy who has polished up the handle of the big front door, and polished it so well that he’s become the ruler of the Queen’s navy. I love it. I think it’s very funny.”

When people ask Dennis what he considers to be his biggest achievement, “I actually say it’s the fact that I am still here,” he says. “If I’d been doing the cabaret circuit or the club circuit or the Saturday night telly that was around in the 80s, I wouldn’t be around any more, because those shows have fallen by the wayside. So I have had to keep changing.”

His ever-expanding portfolio will also include his first movie lead role when the dark comedy *Sideshow*, in which he plays “an ageing past-his-prime psychic”, is released in the UK this autumn.

So are the days of his [famous Mavis Riley impressions](#) long gone? “Well, it always comes up at some point,” he says. “But I don’t think there’s room for it in the Sir Joseph canon.”

This article was amended on 25 May 2021. We misquoted Dennis about his role in *Sideshow*; he is playing a psychic, not a “sidekick” as stated in an earlier version.

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2021/may/25/ive-had-to-keep-changing-les-dennis-on-his-move-into-opera>

## 2021.05.25 - Opinion

- Dominic Cummings must be held to account – not made the star of the show
- The BBC's enemies are triumphant, but British people still trust it
- To survive in America as a Black man, make yourself small
- Kevin Spacey and the rise of uncancel culture

[Opinion](#)[Dominic Cummings](#)

## **Dominic Cummings must be held to account – not made the star of the show**

[Gaby Hinsliff](#)



In the excitement about what secrets he might reveal, it's easy to forget the former adviser is not a hapless bystander



‘Dominic Cummings’ inquisitors must not allow themselves to be hijacked, either for the settling of old scores or in the creation of a personal myth.’

Photograph: Aaron Chown/PA

‘Dominic Cummings’ inquisitors must not allow themselves to be hijacked, either for the settling of old scores or in the creation of a personal myth.’

Photograph: Aaron Chown/PA

Tue 25 May 2021 01.00 EDT

The stage is set, the props laid out, the audience whipped into a frenzy of anticipation. He may by his own account have struggled to get the prime minister to listen to him, but [Dominic Cummings](#) has half the country hanging on his every word in the run-up to Wednesday’s select committee hearing.

The tantalising dance of the seven veils he performed last week over a mystery Covid document he claims to be holding – should [he auction it off for charity](#), or just plain old vanilla give it to MPs? – and the noisy headlines he keeps generating about a supposed secret [herd immunity strategy](#) or the woeful failure to shut Britain’s borders are all ways of ramping up the drama. Pass the popcorn, feel the hype and maybe in the process even learn something about why so very many people died.

What should have been a process of holding power to account – for Cummings was the prime minister’s most senior adviser through the crucial stages of the pandemic, not some hapless bystander – is in danger of morphing into a vehicle for its star witness and his timeless theme that almost everyone but him is an idiot. In all the excitement about what dirty secrets he might reveal, it’s easy to forget that Cummings is not a wholly disinterested witness and nor, judging by his performance when finally forced to account for his trip to Barnard Castle, necessarily an untarnished one.

He may well have been an early advocate for lockdown; a better judge of the data than [Boris Johnson](#), or quicker to grasp the flaws in a pandemic plan originally designed for handling flu not a coronavirus. But those who have worked closely with Cummings say that while he is indeed brilliant, an original thinker capable of producing the solution that nobody else would have considered, like many original thinkers some of his ideas are frankly for the birds. There will have been misses as well as hits, which are unlikely to feature prominently so long as he is in charge of telling the story. His inquisitors this Wednesday must not allow themselves to be hijacked, either for the settling of old scores or in the creation of a personal myth.

They may well want to explore last week’s contested allegations that Johnson skipped Cobra meetings during the earliest stages of the outbreak in order to [finish a book](#) on Shakespeare that he hoped would fund his divorce – a rumour reporters have tried and failed to stand up previously. They will surely also want to know whether, after being forced into a second lockdown, the prime minister really did shout that he would rather “[let the bodies pile high](#)” than have a third.

[How quickly Boris Johnson’s triumph has given way to doubt and instability](#)  
| [Martin Kettle](#)

[Read more](#)

But if even half the stories now doing the rounds are true, they must also examine whether Johnson’s most senior aides reacted appropriately to behaviour that should by rights have disturbed them. As the prime minister’s all-powerful adviser, Cummings bore significant responsibility for knocking a dysfunctional Downing Street operation into shape. If he concluded that

was impossible, then he had the option of resigning and going public with his concerns much earlier. He could even have sought, with the cooperation of the cabinet and senior backbenchers on the 1922 committee, to engineer a face-saving handover of power to a caretaker leader, perhaps on medical grounds given the prime minister's brush with death from Covid last spring. Yet Cummings waited until his own services were dispensed with to blow the whistle, and the committee should not be afraid to ask why.

Sources of confidential information close to power have traditionally been repaid with the lightest of scrutiny. Reporters receiving juicy leaks have a hefty incentive to keep the scoops coming by writing them up in a way that makes their source look good, and so long as they're juicy enough, nobody wants to look too closely into the gift horse's mouth.

The genius of the [long accusatory threads](#) Cummings has recently taken to posting on Twitter, in which he dangles information but strictly on his own terms, is that they're now drawing half the country into the same faintly compromising game. The puppeteer pulls the string, and a nation jerks accordingly. Until there is a formal public inquiry in which all sides of the story can be aired, he remains the single most authoritative source on what happened inside government during one of this country's darkest moments. It's just that bitter experience suggests such access all too often comes at a price.

- Gaby Hinsliff is a Guardian columnist
- 

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/may/25/dominic-cummings-held-to-account-secrets>

**OpinionBBC**

# The BBC's enemies are triumphant, but British people still trust it

[Polly Toynbee](#)



Yes, Martin Bashir used forgery and falsehood, but the response has been an epic groundswell of hypocrisy



The BBC made ‘terrible errors, terribly covered up’. BBC Broadcasting House. Photograph: Hufton+Crow-View/Alamy Stock Photo

The BBC made ‘terrible errors, terribly covered up’. BBC Broadcasting House. Photograph: Hufton+Crow-View/Alamy Stock Photo

Tue 25 May 2021 04.00 EDT

The BBC [crashes out of the sky](#), again. The forgery and [falsehood](#) used by Martin Bashir to help work his way into Diana, Princess of Wales’s confidence was despicable, [her sons’ outrage](#) inevitable. It remains inexplicable that the BBC branded him still “an honourable man”, though the fateful rehiring in 2016 appears more cock-up than conspiracy: Tony Hall didn’t know until too late; James Harding, the ex-Times editor, had never heard what everyone knew about Bashir’s skulduggery. These were terrible errors, terribly covered up.

But here we are again: another scandal, another triumph for the BBC’s enemies. However often its governance is restructured – twice already by the Conservatives – no journalism is ever iron-clad against future trouble. The vultures are circling. Priti Patel on the [Andrew Marr Show](#) warned that “all options, naturally, will be considered” for the BBC’s proper “governance, accountability and transparency”. She joins the epic groundswell of hypocrisy, her behaviour contrary to the [ministerial code](#) and yet she escaped

unscathed, her untransparent, under-governed Home Office still abusing Windrush victims and randomly imprisoning European travellers. But this is open season.

What a pity Prince William didn't denounce Rupert Murdoch, whose press [hacked his phone 35 times](#), his brother's nine times, and his then girlfriend Kate's a full 155 times. This future king might consider the useful role one national institution – the BBC – plays in promoting another – the monarchy. Look at how the last BBC row came from a public backlash over its role as prime royal publicist: people rightly rebelled at the BBC's shutdown to mourn the Duke of Edinburgh.

"I believe it was the cover-up that cost Princess Diana's life," is the headline on an [Andrew Neil column](#) in the Daily Mail. Not even Diana's distraught sons go that far. Paparazzi selling pictures were chasing Diana on the night of her death, the BBC was never in that universe. Andrew Morton, whose book was her first defence against her deceiving husband, told Sky news, "There's no question at all that Diana was going to speak her mind." She would have said "three of us in the marriage" to whoever won that interview out of "a long queue outside Kensington Palace".

Andrew Neil's GB News channel launches shortly. Here's Allister Heath in the Telegraph: "GB News will smash the BBC's biased, leftwing broadcasting hegemony." The Mail on Sunday leader calls out the BBC's "self-satisfied ideology of wokeness", claiming: "We have a strong government born out of a huge shift in public opinion." No, not a "huge shift": the Tories took absolute power with just a 1.2-percentage-point increased vote share: only our monstrous electoral system translated that into hegemony.

As for BBC leftist bias, Neil at the BBC had a political freedom unthinkable for any slightly leftish presenter: he chairs the Spectator and was able to do such things as give an anti-big government, pro-flat tax [Hayek lecture](#) to the rightwing Institute of Economic Affairs.

The risk remains that Mail editor-in-chief, [Paul Dacre](#), will be appointed chair of Ofcom to regulate broadcasting impartiality, says media analyst Prof Steven Barnett. The hair-raising book [War Against the BBC](#), by Patrick

Barwise and Peter York, lays out the full threat: they show the BBC's annual £3bn public cost matches one aircraft carrier: which better conveys global influence?

During the election campaign, Boris Johnson threatened to [abolish the licence fee](#), and right now Tim Davie, the BBC's director-general, is deep in government negotiation over its level. With its public funding cut [by 30% since 2010](#), a five-year freeze with rising inflation risks a downward spiral.

Enemies framing the BBC with “woke” nonsense spread disinformation about the level of dissatisfaction: the BBC remains the most used broadcaster by far, its iPlayer viewed [1.7bn times](#) in just the first three months of this year. Its lockdown learning home-schooled [5.8 million children](#), while local radio was the Covid volunteers’ network. Fifty-one per cent of people name the BBC as their [most trusted for impartiality](#): the next most trusted is Sky at just 7%. Last year Ofcom upheld [no complaints](#) against the BBC.

The government hired its own choice as chair, and there’s a new director-general. One of their own may prove tougher in defending the BBC against the cacophony of Tory noise. As for Lord Grade’s suggestion, encouraged by Patel, for a board of journalists to oversee the BBC’s day-to-day coverage – who would they be? Which of us is without bias? Most UK journalists spend their lives employed by foreign owners to attack from the right. BBC journalists navigate the growing nightmare, blasted by foghorns from all sides. But it holds the public’s trust – and the public needs to stand ready to defend it.

- Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist

## OpinionRace

# To survive in America as a Black man, make yourself small

[Marlon James](#)

No matter how skinny I made myself – and I shrunk into an anorexia of sorts – in society's mirror I was still not small enough



‘Every person of color in this city has to deal with the very real possibility that to call for help can mean that you are the one who gets killed.’  
Photograph: Amy Harris/Rex/Shutterstock

‘Every person of color in this city has to deal with the very real possibility that to call for help can mean that you are the one who gets killed.’  
Photograph: Amy Harris/Rex/Shutterstock

Tue 25 May 2021 05.29 EDT

*After George Floyd was killed by the police in Minneapolis, I wrote about all the ways I have had to make myself small living here as a Black man. The*

*question begs to be asked— are my reflections from last summer as true today as they were then? The answer is yes, for one reason: This essay was not a response to George Floyd’s murder but Philando Castile’s in 2017. That it should reappear four years later unchanged is answer enough. There are some stories that we share in the hope of never telling again, so it says something that is a retelling, of the retelling, of a story. “How long must we sing this song?” U2 sang on Sunday Bloody Sunday. It’s a powerful question, as urgent now and it was in 1983. But the answer never comes – Marlon James*

---

Not long ago some Minnesotans wanted to rebrand this state as the north. It became something of a movement, but “north” also developed an aptness nobody could have anticipated. Because, as it turns out, we are the most northern of the north, not just in geography, but in the truly peculiar ways northern racism works, and how the police has sharpened itself to become the fine point of it.

Minnesota’s call for “north” status reminds me of the comedian Dick Gregory’s take on American racism, still the most succinct and dead-on analysis of race in American society I have ever read. He wrote in a 1971 issue of Ebony: “Down South, white folks don’t care how close I get as long as I don’t get too big. Up North, white folks don’t care how big I get as long as I don’t get too close.”

Which for me always meant that in the south, white people can gaze at their own personal cast of The Help with genuine affection, but if Viola Davis goes and opens a beauty salon for Black people, they’re surely going to burn that mess down, and everything around it, as if Tulsa was just a dress rehearsal. But in the north, Viola will get all sorts of grants to set up shop. Just don’t set up in our neighborhood, and don’t drive the property values down and us out, and don’t be surprised when an officer beats down your husband because, though we met him 17 times already, he was still the threatening Black guy loitering in his own backyard.

But, I should have known that a man as wise as Gregory meant more than that. And, I did not realize until just now that big can mean less than 5ft tall and close can mean 20ft away, and how 10 years of living in Minnesota as a

“big, Black guy” has led me to a gradual though futile reduction of myself. This reduction meant losing weight, not to get fit but to shrink that target on my back. I shrunk to a skeletal 174lb once, and white people still gave me a wide berth at the Mall of America. It was anorexia of a sort. No matter how skinny I made myself, in society’s mirror I was still not small enough.

I leave the party as soon as I see a maximum of six white people drunk, because the only person who will remember that moment when somebody didn’t mean to be racist will be me. I have a self-imposed curfew of when to leave the park and when to ride my bike home. I would rather risk my life riding late at night on the empty, and mostly dark greenway, than on the street with police officers looking for whoever matches the latest description.

I go out of my way to avoid police, because I don’t know how to physically act around them

I go out of my way to avoid police, because I don’t know how to physically act around them. Do I hold my hands in the air and get shot, do I kneel and get shot? Do I reach for my ID and get shot? Do I say I’m an English teacher and get shot? Do I tell them everything I am about to do, and get shot? Do I assume that seven of them will still feel threatened by one of me, and get shot? Do I simply stand and be a big Black guy and get shot? Do I fold my arms and squeeze myself smaller and get shot? Do I be a smartass and get shot? Do I burst out crying and get shot? Do I shake too hard from being nervous and get shot? Do I try to control my nerves and get shot? Do I leave my iPhone on a clip of me on Seth Meyers, so I can play it and say: “See, that’s me, I’m one of the approved Black guys.” And still get shot?

And when I do get shot and killed, do Black and brown people take it as a given that the cop will get off, tune out of the story from this point, and leave the outrage at the inevitable verdict to white people? Because white people still look at fear of Black skin as one of their rights, and God help you if that skin moves.

Cops, the lethal arm of this society, along with neighborhood watchdogs, and white neighbors with phones get the privilege to always act on any fear,

no matter how ridiculous, and society always gives them the benefit of the doubt. Brewing fresh outrage every morning is not a privilege people of color get to have. The situations that cause outrage never go away for us. It never stuns us, never comes out of the blue. We don't get to be appalled because only people expecting better get appalled.

Get big but don't get close also means it doesn't matter how famous I get in this city, because cops probably don't read and don't listen to liberal BS on Minnesota Public Radio. Get big, but don't get close means never dating someone in law enforcement ever, ever, ever. Get big, but don't get close means that there are certain neighborhoods I simply don't get to walk through at night, because those first few seconds in Get Out have happened to everybody.

At least, don't go walking without your white friend. Get big but don't get close means I still feel safer with a white person around, and usually a white woman, because they are far more likely to challenge the cop on unconstitutional bull while it is happening (another scene captured perfectly in Get Out) than the white guy, who will be the loudest shouter of how messed up it all was, as soon as the cops leave. Not that she is any more woke than the white dude, but because the idea that her rights could be punched right back into her own face would never have even occurred to her. But if cops assume that you might be sleeping with her, things could get unspeakably worse.

Get big but don't get close can mean that even a thin Black man complying with the law can still be seen as a justifiable threat.

Get big but don't get close can mean we're hearing too much of you, so get your loud, angry voice out of my face, Black lady. Get big but don't get close can sometimes mean don't get big the way we get big. Or, it can literally mean nimby. So, if it's Minnesota, you drop a highway through the Harlem of the midwest before it could ever have its renaissance, then wonder why if the state is doing so good, how come its Black people are doing so bad.

Get big but don't get close means everybody is so proud of their liberal credentials, so proud that they don't see color, that they never see the

absence of it. Because well, to see that, one would have to get close.

Get big but don't get close means that I'm more famous than most people of color in Minnesota, and yet in 13 years, I have only four close friends who were born here. In 13 years, I have only seen the home of five people. I like to think that I'm insulated by academic privilege, but Skip Gates was messed with in the north, as was every person Claudia Rankine writes about in Citizen. I would bike to work in full academic regalia if not for police assuming that I probably stole it anyway, and, of course, shooting me.

I don't trust law enforcement, even when I need to call on law enforcement, and every person of color in this city has to deal with the very real possibility that to call for help can mean that you are the one who gets killed.

One of the myriad reasons why the word empathy pisses me off is not that I think it's impossible; it's that most white people won't do the work

So, white lady, I'm sorry, but I can't be the guy who calls the cops if somebody is robbing, shooting, beating or raping you, because they will assume that I'm the guy I called about. A friend of mine once bought fully into the image of Black men fed to him by a local cop (the bad ones want to be in jail, you see) until the night a cop dragged him out of his own home, threw him to the ground and stepped on him in front of his white wife.

One of the myriad reasons why the word empathy pisses me off is not that I think it's impossible; it's that most white people won't do the work. You will never know how it feels to realize that it doesn't matter how many magazine articles I get, or which state names a day after me. Tomorrow, when I get on my bike, I will be the big Black guy, who might be shot before the day ends because my very size will make a cop feel threatened. Or, if I'm a woman, my very mouth. And a jury of white people and people of color sold on white supremacy will acquit him. And even my hoping for hipster points on my fixed wheel bike, is undercut by cops thinking I probably stole it.

When Jamaican bus conductors want to pack an already full bus, they shout to the passengers to "small up yourself". I don't know what to do in this city

to get any smaller. But, as I said earlier, that's futile. Because whether smaller or bigger, I'm never the one with the measuring stick.

- This essay first [appeared](#) in the Star Tribune
- 

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/may/25/to-survive-in-america-as-a-black-man-marlon-james>

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

## Movies

# Kevin Spacey and the rise of uncancel culture

[Peter Bradshaw](#)



Does the announcement that Spacey is returning to acting suggest a way back for other Hollywood men who were accused but not convicted of misconduct?



Sidling back into the limelight ... Kevin Spacey in 2017, the year of his so-called cancellation. Photograph: Evan Agostini/Invision/AP

Sidling back into the limelight ... Kevin Spacey in 2017, the year of his so-called cancellation. Photograph: Evan Agostini/Invision/AP

Tue 25 May 2021 04.18 EDT

Could this be Hollywood's hot new thing – uncancel culture? The phenomenon whereby famous men once rendered unemployable in showbusiness due to a #MeToo campaign, but with no actual criminal conviction, sidle back into the limelight, testing the reaction, playing grandmother's footsteps with social-media outrage? Of course, uncancel culture may not be new exactly. It could be as old as Hollywood itself.

[Kevin Spacey set for return to movies with paedophilia drama](#)

[Read more](#)

When actor and director Kevin Spacey was accused in 2017 of alleged sexual misconduct by 20 men, he was widely shunned. [His scenes in Ridley Scott's All the Money in the World were reshot](#), replacing him with Christopher Plummer. And the last word on Spacey was said to have been delivered by comedian Dave Chappelle, with his devastatingly callous gag to the effect that if only Spacey's victims had just borne their pain in silence

for a month or so longer, we could have all found out how House of Cards ended. (As it is, that Netflix show had to be hastily re-scripted when Spacey was dropped.)

But now, having had no criminal charge and with civil suits pending, and having perhaps gauged the conversation around artistic freedom and the legal presumption of innocence, Spacey has placed a cautious toe in the tepid waters of public opinion. He has taken a small role in L’Uomo Che Disegnò Dio, or The Man Who Drew God, a forthcoming Italian movie from veteran director-star Franco Nero, with Nero playing a blind artistic savant who is wrongly accused of child abuse, and Spacey as the cop investigating his case. Spacey’s fictional role cleverly appears to address aspects of his own situation, the questions of abuse, guilt and innocence quibblingly transposed and absorbed into a story inviting interest and sympathy. And so his rehabilitation has begun. But then, the business has always been soft on alpha male stars.

Spacey’s European comeback tour may not be well-judged. It could end like the spoof heavy metal band Spinal Tap suddenly becoming big in Japan at the very nadir of their fortunes in the United States. It could cement Spacey’s exiled status. And many in LA will be all too aware of the European reputation for worldly and unreconstructed permissiveness, which does not precisely pave the way for renewed acceptance back in nervy Tinseltown.

Roman Polanski notoriously uses his French passport to live in France and avoid extradition to the United States on the still-pending charge of unlawful sexual intercourse with a minor. This case, from 1978, predates the whole debate so extensively that Polanski is, ironically, the one male film professional whose life is utterly unaffected by the #MeToo debate. Polanski cannot be uncancelled because he was never cancelled, but he is now in a strange limbo: UK distributors opted to avoid his latest movie, An Officer and a Spy, but Robert Harris suffered no obloquy for co-writing the script with Polanski.

Roman Polanski’s most recent film, An Officer and a Spy, which as yet does not have a UK distributor

[Mel Gibson](#) did not have to wait all that long to be uncancelled after outbursts of homophobic, racist and antisemitic language. And Woody Allen continues – just about – to work, because whatever the sensational, and to many, damning testimony of his adoptive daughter Dylan Farrow, he is still in the grey area between cancellation and uncancelation, precisely because there is no criminal conviction. (In Allen's case, the allegations were investigated by the authorities twice and no charges brought.)

[Allen v Farrow is pure PR. Why else would it omit so much? | Hadley Freeman](#)  
[Read more](#)

As for other possible uncancellees, comedian [Aziz Ansari](#) was accused of sexual misconduct in 2018, with an attendant debate about what was and was not consensual, but after what appears to have been a private apology, he has resumed his standup career, and even had [a Netflix special](#), in which he was semi-repentant. The case of [Louis CK](#) is tougher: he was accused of [repeated patterns of abusive behaviour](#), but he is trying to restart a standup comedy career below the media radar. [Liam Neeson also managed to get away with a bizarre statement in 2019](#), when he recounted being briefly crazed with rage after a female friend was raped by a man who was black, and going around looking for a revenge attack on any black man looking for a fight. Neeson was tacitly forgiven, on the grounds that his unverifiable anecdote was offered as an illustration of toxic masculinity.

As ever, there is hardly any subject more fraught with hypocrisy and humbug than cancel culture and its conceited elder brother, uncancel culture. Women have for decades raged about the settled climate of entitlement and abuse and sexual assault for which the law seems to offer no effective protection, and so they appeal to the courts of social media. But these courts do not have anything like due process or the assessment of evidence. Where there is no actual verdict from a court of law, then we may all be in for a long goodbye from cancel culture, with tarnished stars settling in for a long haul and rebooting their reputations outside Hollywood. Uncancel culture will bring about a European Super League of the unrepentant uncancelled, with Roman Polanski at the top of the table.

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2021/may/25/kevin-spacey-problem-uncancel-culture>

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

## 2021.05.25 - Around the world

- [European Union Report details role of race and ethnicity in use of ‘stop and search’](#)
- [Robert Mugabe Zimbabwe chief orders remains to be exhumed for reburial at heroes’ shrine](#)
- [India Police visit Twitter offices after BJP tweet flagged as manipulated media](#)
- [Climate change Turkey struck by ‘sea snot’ because of global heating](#)
- [Princess Latifa UK urged to intervene after another photo emerges](#)

## Race

# EU report details role of race and ethnicity in use of ‘stop and search’

Roma, sub-Saharan Africans and other minorities stopped frequently by police across Europe



A demonstrator holds a placard at a protest against the misuse of stop and search powers in London in December.

Photograph: Guy Smallman/Getty Images

A demonstrator holds a placard at a protest against the misuse of stop and search powers in London in December.

Photograph: Guy Smallman/Getty Images

*Daniel Boffey in Brussels*

Tue 25 May 2021 00.00 EDT

The scale of the discrimination faced by people from minority ethnic backgrounds at the hands of European police forces has been detailed in an

EU agency report marking the [anniversary of the killing of George Floyd](#) by an officer in the US.

The findings of the [European Union](#) Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) highlight a general trend in which minority ethnic people are stopped and searched more regularly across the continent, and the particularly stark picture in some European countries.

Nearly half (49%) of immigrants and descendants of immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa in Austria were stopped by the police during a recent sample year, compared with 25% of the general population, the report finds. Amnesty International [wrote last year](#) that there was “institutional racism within the Austrian police force and other component parts of Austria’s criminal justice system”.

[Croatian police accused of 'sickening' assaults on migrants on Balkans trail](#)  
[Read more](#)

A third of Roma in both [Croatia](#) and Greece were stopped compared with 18% and 17% of the wider population. In 2018, the Council of Europe (CoE), the 47-member state strong human rights body, castigated the inadequate response of the Croatian authorities to widespread expressions of racism and xenophobia against Serbs, LGBT people, refugees and Roma. The culture of the Greek police has also been heavily criticised by the CoE.

In [Spain](#), just 4% of the general population reported being stopped by police but that rose to 14% of surveyed immigrants from or descended from north Africa and 32% of Roma. Last year the CoE reported that non-discrimination training for police officers had delivered positive results in [Spain](#) but officials found “exceptions concerning ethnic profiling by the police when asking for identity papers on the streets”.

In the UK, 3% of the general population was stopped by police compared with 5% of people from or descended from sub-Saharan Africa and 10% of Gypsies and Travellers. The Independent Office for [Police](#) Conduct last year criticised the Metropolitan police, responsible for almost half of all the police stops carried out in England and Wales, for multiple errors that had undermined confidence in the community.

## [Police watchdog castigates forces over use of stop and search](#)

[Read more](#)

It was found that police across the countries surveyed – the 27 EU member states plus the UK and North Macedonia – most often stopped men, young people, minority ethnic people, Muslims or people who did not identify as heterosexual.

Officers searched or asked one in three minority ethnic people for their identity papers compared with 14% of the general population, defined as all groups surveyed. Four in five people in the general population said police treated them respectfully, compared with 46% from minority groups.

The agency's paper draws on findings from the FRA's Fundamental Rights Survey (2020), EU Minorities and Discrimination Survey (2017) and its Roma and Travellers Survey (2020).

The FRA also found a strong belief among those stopped in the last five years, in almost all of the countries surveyed, that ethnic profiling led to them being stopped.

Discriminatory profiling, where race or ethnicity is the police's sole basis for stopping someone, is unlawful across [Europe](#). In some countries, more than 80% of minority ethnic people surveyed perceived their most recent police stop as an example of profiling.

The perception was most common among immigrants and descendants of immigrants from south Asia in Greece (89%) and Roma in the [Netherlands](#) (86 %) and Portugal (84%).

Michael O'Flaherty, the director of the FRA, said: "Everyone has a right to be treated equally, including by the police. One year ago, the Black Lives Matter protests underscored the need to tackle racism and discrimination that are still all too common in our societies. It is time to rebuild trust among all communities and ensure police stops are always fair, justified and proportionate."

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/25/eu-report-highlights-widespread-use-of-stop-and-search-on-ethnic-minorities>

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

**Robert Mugabe**

## Zimbabwe chief orders Mugabe remains to be exhumed for reburial at heroes' shrine

Fresh row brews over final resting place of late president after ruling by traditional chief



The remains of Zimbabwe former president Robert Mugabe lie in his home village of Kutama. Photograph: Phill Magakoe/AFP/Getty Images

The remains of Zimbabwe former president Robert Mugabe lie in his home village of Kutama. Photograph: Phill Magakoe/AFP/Getty Images

*[Jason Burke](#) in Johannesburg*

Tue 25 May 2021 05.34 EDT

The family of [Robert Mugabe](#) have been ordered to exhume the remains of the late dictator for reburial at a monument to Zimbabwe's national heroes,

in a move likely to rekindle a row over the memory of one of Africa's foremost revolutionary leaders.

A traditional chief made the order after accusing Mugabe's second wife, Grace, of breaking local custom by interring him at his rural home.

Mugabe, whose increasingly authoritarian 37-year rule was ended by a coup in November 2017, was buried at his village of Kutama in 2019 after weeks of dispute with the government of his successor, Emmerson Mnangagwa.

Senior officials had made it clear they wanted the remains of the former dictator to be buried at Zimbabwe's national heroes' shrine outside Harare and may now get their way.

Though much of Mugabe's rule was marked by violence, economic mismanagement and corruption, the former guerrilla fighter is still revered as a liberation leader for his role in the war against white supremacist rule. His [funeral in Harare](#) was attended by dozens of current and former heads of state from across Africa.

Mnangagwa was a close aide and ally of Mugabe and has sought to reinforce his own image through association with the former revolutionary leader. Much of the legitimacy of the ruling Zanu-PF party relies on the legacy of the late president.

Chief Zvimba, whose district includes Kutama, said he had received a complaint from a Mugabe clan member over the manner of his burial.

Chiefs in Zimbabwe have jurisdiction over their local subjects but it is rare for them to order families to exhume bodies for reburial. Many are local politicians who can broker their influence over communities with more powerful political actors.

[Zimbabwe's intellectual despot: how Mugabe became Africa's fallen angel](#)  
[Read more](#)

After presiding over a village court last week, Zvimba on Monday issued a ruling that found Grace Mugabe guilty of breaking traditional norms by

burying her husband in the courtyard of his home. He also fined her five cows and a goat. The former first lady did not attend the hearing.

“I give powers to those who are permitted by law to exhume the late Robert Mugabe’s remains from Kutama and rebury them at the National Heroes Acre in Harare,” said a copy of the ruling in the local Shona language.

The original complaint made by the traditional chief accused Mugabe’s widow of “abandoning Robert Gabriel Mugabe’s property which is scattered nationwide”.

A list of the former ruler’s estate published by a state-owned newspaper in Zimbabwe after the funeral listed \$10m (£7.7m) in the bank, some small plots of land and a handful of modest properties.

The report of the relatively limited fortune was greeted with scepticism by many in the poor southern African country. Mugabe was thought to have amassed a portfolio of investments worth hundreds of millions, if not billions, of dollars.

Leo Mugabe, spokesman for the Mugabe family, immediately rejected the ruling. “He [Chief Zvimba] has no jurisdiction over Kutama. And even if the correct chief had made that ruling we would have appealed to the court,” he said.

When Mnangagwa had pushed for Mugabe to be buried at the monument for liberation war heroes shortly after his death, the family refused, saying Mugabe had expressed fears to close family members before his death that some of the people who ousted him would seek to conduct a traditional ritual with his body parts.

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/25/robert-mugabe-remains-must-be-dug-up-and-reburied-at-heroes-shrine-zimbabwe-chief>

## [India](#)

# India police visit Twitter offices after BJP tweet flagged as manipulated media

Move in Delhi comes after tweet by spokesperson of the ruling Hindu-nationalist party was tagged as ‘manipulated media’



Delhi police visited Twitter’s offices after a spokesman for India’s ruling BJP party was flagged as manipulated media. Photograph: Chandan Khanna/AFP/Getty Images

Delhi police visited Twitter’s offices after a spokesman for India’s ruling BJP party was flagged as manipulated media. Photograph: Chandan Khanna/AFP/Getty Images

*Guardian staff and agencies*  
Mon 24 May 2021 21.05 EDT

Police in India's capital served a notice at Twitter's offices late on Monday, seeking information for a complaint about why a tweet by the spokesperson of the ruling Hindu-nationalist party was tagged as "manipulated media".

Tensions have been high between the Indian government and the US social media giant after Twitter this year reversed its [blocking of a number of accounts related to farmers' protests](#) near Delhi following a request from authorities. The government claimed the posts were aiming to incite violence. Twitter said it believed the directives were not in line with Indian laws.

An Indian climate activist was arrested in February after allegedly helping to create a guide to farmer protests against the laws that was tweeted by environmentalist Greta Thunberg.

[Twitter concerned for staff in India after row over account removals](#)

[Read more](#)

The government last month also ordered Twitter and Facebook to [remove dozens of posts critical of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's](#) handling of the coronavirus crisis.

The latest incident followed Twitter's labelling of a tweet on Tuesday by ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) spokesperson Sambit Patra as "manipulated media".

He had shared a document allegedly showing the opposition Congress party's masterplan to contrast the BJP's efforts to combat the pandemic with theirs.

Congress tweeted that it had sent a letter to Twitter's headquarters in the US, calling for Patra's account as well as that of several other BJP representatives to be permanently suspended. The opposition party said the document shared was fake.

Delhi Police confirmed to AFP it had gone to Twitter's offices to serve the notice about the tweet, saying it was part of a "routine process".

## [Twitter accused of censoring Indian critic of Hindu nationalism](#)

[Read more](#)

“Delhi police is enquiring into a complaint in which clarification is sought from Twitter regarding the classification of a tweet by Shri Sambit Patra as ‘manipulative’,” police said in a statement.

“It appears that Twitter has some information which is not known to us on the basis of which they have classified it as such. This information is relevant to the enquiry.”

A Twitter spokesperson told AFP it had no comment about the police visit to its offices.

Under Twitter’s rules, a post is tagged as “manipulated media” if it includes “media (videos, audio, and images) that have been deceptively altered or fabricated”.

A leading factcheck organisation, AltNews, said it had analysed the documents and claimed that some were created with a forged letterhead.

Modi and the BJP have been criticised for their slow response to a new wave of Covid-19 infections that has pushed India’s healthcare system to breaking point.

The BJP has hit back via its social media army, blaming state governments and others for ignoring what it says were Modi’s repeated warnings of a second wave.

India is in the grip of a devastating Covid wave. The country has reported just over 26.7 million [Coronavirus](#) infections and more than 300,000 deaths, according to health ministry data, but experts warn that the actual toll could be much higher.

Twitter has about 17.5 million users in India.

*Agence France-Presse contributed to this report*

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/25/india-police-twitter-offices-bjp-tweet-flagged-manipulated-media>

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

## Seascape: the state of our oceansClimate change

# Turkey struck by ‘sea snot’ because of global heating

Increasing blanket of mucus-like substance in water threatens coral and fishing industry



An aerial view of sea snot in Istanbul. Photograph: Anadolu agency/Getty Images

An aerial view of sea snot in Istanbul. Photograph: Anadolu agency/Getty Images

Seascape: the state of our oceans is supported by



### [About this content](#)

*Selin Uğurtaş in Istanbul*

Tue 25 May 2021 05.36 EDT

When seen from above, it looks like a brush of beige swirled across the dark blue waters of the Sea of Marmara. Up close, it resembles a creamy, gelatinous blanket of quicksand. Now scientists are warning that the substance, known as sea snot, is on the rise as a result of global heating.

The gloopy, mucus-like substance had not been recorded in Turkish waters [before 2007](#). It is created as a result of prolonged warm temperatures and calm weather and in areas with abundant nutrients in the water.

The phytoplankton responsible grow out of control when nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus are widely available in seawater. These nutrients have long been plentiful in the Sea of Marmara, which receives the wastewater of nearly 20 million people and is fed directly from the nutrient-rich Black Sea.

In ordinary amounts, these tiny, floating sea plants are responsible for breathing oxygen into the oceans, but their overpopulation creates the

opposite effect. Under conditions of stress, they exude a mucus-like matter that can grow to cover many square miles of the sea in the right conditions.

In most cases, the substance itself is not harmful. “What we see is basically a combination of protein, carbohydrates and fat,” said Dr Neslihan Özdelice, a marine biologist at Istanbul University. But the sticky substance attracts viruses and bacteria, including *E coli*, and can in effect turn into a blanket that suffocates the marine life below.



Sea snot near the Maltepe, Kadıköy and Adalar districts of Istanbul.  
Photograph: Anadolu agency/Getty Images

This year’s event, the largest yet seen, began in deep waters in late December, and was initially only a nuisance to fishers, who have been unable to cast their nets since the sea snot appeared.

Around this time, Dr Barış Özalp, a marine biologist at Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, had a chance encounter with the substance in the Çanakkale strait, the narrow passage that connects the Aegean and Marmara seas.

Özalp was startled by the extent of the sea snot he encountered during his regular dive to monitor corals, his main research focus. It is particularly damaging to immobile organisms such as corals as it gets wrapped around them, inhibiting their ability to feed or breathe and often killing them.

## [Map](#)

“The gravity of the situation set in when I dived for measurements in March and discovered severe mortality in corals,” Özalp said, naming gold coral (*Savalia savaglia*) and the violescent sea-whip (*Paramuricea clavata*) as the most affected species. He warned that if the sea snot were to persist, invertebrate life at the bottom of the Sea of Marmara would be under severe threat.

When the mucus eventually reached the shoreline in the following months, it also started to threaten the breeding ground of fish.

“Once the mucilage covers the coasts, it limits the interaction between water and the atmosphere,” said Dr Mustafa Sarı, the dean of Bandırma Onyedi Eylül University’s maritime faculty, who is leading a study into the economic effects of the sea snot.



Photograph: Anadolu agency/Getty Images

It further depleted oxygen during decomposition, essentially sucking air out of the area, Sarı explained. He also noted that thousands of fish started dying a few weeks ago in Bandırma, a coastal town on the southern banks of the Marmara.

Scientists are calling for urgent action to reduce wastewater pressures on the Sea of Marmara in order to diminish nutrients.

“The main trigger is warming related to climate change, as phytoplankton grow during higher temperatures,” said Özdelice, noting that the seawater had warmed by 2-3C since preindustrial times. But since countering climate change requires a global and concerted effort, she urged [Turkey](#) to focus on factors it could control: overfishing and waste water discharges.

“This is also an outcome of overfishing because as filter feeders which consume phytoplankton are excessively hunted, it allows room for [phytoplankton and sea snot] to breed,” she said.

Even before the added pressure of climate change, the semi-enclosed Sea of Marmara could barely shoulder the burden of the densely populated and industrialised Marmara basin, Sari said. “But as temperatures rise, the sea reacts in a completely different manner.

“We are experiencing the visible effects of climate change, and adaptation requires an overhaul of our habitual practices. We must initiate a full-scale effort to adapt.”

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/may/25/turkey-struck-by-sea-snot-because-of-global-heating>

[\*\*Dubai\*\*](#)

## **UK urged to intervene after another photo of Princess Latifa emerges**

Peter Hain says government must demand proper proof of life of Emirati royal after third image appears on Instagram within days



The latest photo appears to show Sheikha Latifa bint Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum (right), a daughter of the ruler of Dubai, with a friend, Sioned Taylor. Photograph: Instagram

The latest photo appears to show Sheikha Latifa bint Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum (right), a daughter of the ruler of Dubai, with a friend, Sioned Taylor. Photograph: Instagram

*[Patrick Wintour](#) Diplomatic Editor*

Mon 24 May 2021 10.42 EDT

The UK government has been urged to intervene to find out whether the Emirati royal Princess Latifa has been genuinely freed from house arrest by

her father, after a third Instagram photo appeared in as many days purporting to show her in a [Dubai](#) shopping mall.

The latest photo showed Sheikha Latifa bint Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum, a daughter of the ruler of Dubai, looking at the camera blankly next to a clairvoyant at a coffee table.

“British ministers must stop dragging their feet over Princess Latifa and demand proper proof of her life and her freedom,” said the former Foreign Office minister [Peter Hain](#). “These photos are very far from that. Why is she not allowed to speak directly to journalists for instance?”

Lord Hain is one of a number of peers who have been pressing the UK to take a more interventionist role to defend Latifa’s right to freedom, including by potentially seizing the assets of her father, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum. He is the vice-president and prime minister of the United Arab Emirates, of which Dubai is one of the seven emirates.

The sheikh is often described as close to Queen Elizabeth owing to their shared interest in horseracing. The UAE and the UK have close security, trade and political ties, and the Foreign Office has been reluctant to raise issues of human rights in public.

Latifa, 35, has not been seen in public since a failed attempt to flee Dubai in March 2018.

On Saturday, [a photo was posted on an Instagram account](#) apparently showing the royal and a friend, Sioned Taylor, on the terrace of an Italian restaurant called Bice Mara, with Dubai’s glittering skyline in the background. The caption reads: “Lovely food at Bice Mare with Latifa earlier.”



An image apparently showing Princess Sheikha Latifa, in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, with Sioned Taylor. Photograph: Reuters

Earlier last week [another picture was posted on the same account](#), apparently showing the princess sitting at the Mall of the Emirates (MoE) in Dubai, along with Taylor and another woman. The caption read: “Lovely evening at MoE with friends.”

Both photos appeared on the account of Taylor, a Royal Navy veteran, teacher and former court employee.

The third photo included a smiling companion called Fiona Day, who describes herself online as a compassionate intuitive consultant and a psychic medium.



An image apparently showing Sheikha Latifa, Sioned Taylor and another woman. Photograph: Reuters

It may be that the three Instagram posts are part of a gradual process that will lead to Latifa's full release from detention, or alternatively a PR stunt designed to convince the public her freedom has been at least partially restored.

The UAE ruler is facing a potential civil court action over the princess's detention, and it is likely that permission to publish the photos was sought.

The UN human rights office has been seeking proof of life from the UAE rulers since February, when Latifa [smuggled out a video message saying she was being detained under house arrest](#) in a "villa prison" by her father as a punishment for a previous attempt to escape.

In a statement, David Haigh, a co-founder of the Free Latifa campaign group, said: "We confirm that there have been several potentially significant and positive developments in the campaign. We do not intend to comment further at this stage, a further statement will be issued at the appropriate time."

After the BBC aired Latifa's video in February, the UAE's embassy in London issued a statement saying she was being cared for at home by her

family and medical professionals and would return to “public life at the appropriate time”.

On 20 April, the UN described that response as insufficient and said concrete proof of her wellbeing was needed.

Latifa came to international attention in 2018 when a human rights group released a video made by her in which she described her attempt to escape Dubai. She was captured off the coast of India by special forces and taken back to Dubai.

In March 2020, a London high court judge, Sir Andrew McFarlane, the president of the family division of the high court, said he accepted as proven a series of allegations made by Princess Haya, the former wife of Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum, in a legal battle, including that the sheikh ordered the abduction of Latifa. The sheikh’s lawyers rejected the allegations and tried to make the judgement public.

McFarlane ruled that the sheikh had orchestrated the abduction and forced captivity of Latifa and her older sister Shamsa.

Shamsa, then 19, was kidnapped on the orders of her father after fleeing the family’s Longcross estate near Cobham, Surrey, in 2000. She was taken to her father’s 3,300-acre Dalham Hall estate in Suffolk, which includes his celebrated Godolphin racing stables, and by helicopter from the UK. She has not been seen in public since.

Ministers, such as Stephen Parkinson in March, have tried to distance themselves from the controversy, saying the “civil court proceedings were a private matter between two individuals and the UK government have no involvement in it”.

Asked about reports that Latifa was abducted in international waters with the help of Indian special forces, Lord Parkinson said no British shipping or citizens had been involved. He said the UK government had not been in touch with the UN over proof of life requests but awaited to hear the response from the UAE.

The Detained in Dubai campaign group said: “The public is split over where to praise or curse the women who are photographed with Latifa but ultimately, it shows she is out with friends, that there appears to be an intention to return Latifa to the public arena.

“Although we are pleased to see Latifa out and about, we must not forget that she was brought to the United Arab Emirates unlawfully.”

---

This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/24/princess-latifa-uk-intervene-peter-hain-proof-life-instagram>

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

# Table of Contents

[The Guardian.2021.05.26 \[Wed, 26 May 2021\]](#)

[Headlines wednesday 26 may 2021](#)

[Dominic Cummings Ministers brace for testimony on Covid crisis](#)

[Explainer What to expect when Cummings gives evidence Covid Boris Johnson 'had no plan to protect vulnerable people'](#)

[England Ministers back down over limiting travel to hotspots Environment Climate crisis inflicting huge 'hidden costs' on mental health](#)

[Amazon Shareholders to vote on revealing plastic footprint 'Mob boss' Bashar al-Assad tightens grip as Syria goes to polls](#)

[Blimp and you're there Airships could cut short-haul emissions by 90%](#)

[Guardian morning briefing One year since George Floyd changed America. Get up to speed quickly](#)

[Housing Black, Asian and disabled tenants discriminated against](#)

['Please save him' Belarus blogger's parents urge action](#)

[Donald Trump New York district attorney convenes grand jury](#)

[Northern Ireland Woman told to go to England for abortion gets case heard](#)

[Israel Ireland condemns 'de facto annexation' of Palestinian land](#)

[In the verges End mowing of roadsides to create huge wildlife habitat, says UK study](#)

[2021.05.26 - Coronavirus](#)

[Live Coronavirus: India variant found in at least 53 countries; calls grow for new inquiry into Covid origins](#)

['Unnecessary secrecy' 42 NHS trusts in England criticised over Covid deaths data](#)

[England More than 77,000 NHS staff have caught Covid – research](#)

[Canada Soldier faces charges for trying to block vaccine distribution](#)

[Virus origin US joins calls for transparent, science-based investigation](#)

[Tokyo Olympics Asahi Shimbun newspaper says Japan Games must be cancelled](#)

[Schools DfE was unprepared for pandemic, says report by MPs](#)

## [2021.05.26 - Spotlight](#)

[Grace Spence Green The medical student who was paralysed by a falling man – and found new purpose](#)

['Sex-toy stuff would not fly today' The mag that gripped 'lesbian mecca' San Francisco](#)

['Stranger than anything dreamed up by sci-fi' Will we ever understand black holes?](#)

[Brave front Thought-provoking art on England's south-east coast](#)

[Epic Iran at the V&A – review Five thousand years of mystical magnificence](#)

['Highway of death' Animals pay ultimate price on Brazil's most dangerous road for wildlife](#)

[The war against snails Can gardeners ever win?](#)

[Raman Pratasevich The Belarus journalist captured by a fighter jet](#)

## [2021.05.26 - Opinion](#)

[Britain has promised net zero – but it's on track to achieve absolutely nothing](#)

[This Australian trade deal shows how 'Global Britain' has already lost its way](#)

[How did I satisfy my restless hunger for touch? I got a new tattoo](#)

[The Tory 'war on woke' has a manifesto – and its targets are crushingly familiar](#)

[As Hancock 'throws a sickie', Zahawi suffers a dose of the hotspots](#)

George Floyd's death started a fire, but the kindling had been piling up for years

2021.05.26 - Around the world

India WhatsApp sues government over 'mass surveillance' internet laws

Cyclone Yaas More than a million evacuated as storm nears India's east coast

Zimbabwe Anger over Nehanda statue amid collapsing economy

George Floyd Family urges Biden to pass police reform bill as it stalls in Senate

George Floyd Minneapolis marks a 'troubling, long year'

Colorado Police say man's 1982 mountain rescue holds key to double murder mystery

'I had to step up' Child labour in poorest countries rose during Covid, says report

Iran Leadership accused of fixing presidential election

Libya Children's bodies wash up on beach after migrant boats sink

China Shepherd hailed for saving six runners in deadly ultramarathon

Turkey Mafia boss's YouTube claims rattle government

Headlines monday 24 may 2021

Belarus KGB believed to be on plane forced to land in Minsk, says Ryanair CEO

Belarus Ryanair flight diverted to arrest blogger

BLM Activist Sasha Johnson in critical condition after gunshot to the head

BBC Oliver Dowden: broadcaster needs far-reaching change after Diana scandal

2021.05.24 - Coronavirus

Spain Britons should not be holidaying in country yet, says UK minister

Faster than a PCR test Dogs detect Covid in under a second  
Fitness UK class sales soar despite demand for online sessions

[South-east Asia Region battles Covid resurgence amid lack of vaccines](#)

[2021.05.24 - Spotlight](#)

['I'm way older, but I'm still doing it' Tony Hawk on his skateboarding legacy](#)

['It was like a horror film' Sophie Walker on her stalking nightmare – and how the police failed her](#)

[Dylan at 80 My favourite song – by Mick Jagger, Marianne Faithfull, Tom Jones, Judy Collins and more](#)

[Real estate How retirement villages are becoming part of high street life in the UK](#)

[2021.05.24 - Opinion](#)

[Abandoned by governments, Palestinians rely on the kindness of strangers](#)

[How I've missed people who are pointlessly, breathtakingly rude](#)

[Why fast-track grocery delivery apps could soon leave supermarkets on the shelf](#)

[In Japan most people want to cancel the Olympics, but the government won't listen](#)

[Happy 80th birthday to Bob Dylan, rock's most prescient, timeless voice](#)

[2021.05.24 - Around the world](#)

[George Floyd anniversary Minneapolis rally begins events to commemorate death](#)

['I allowed myself to feel guilty' The cashier who took Floyd's \\$20 bill](#)

[One year on How the murder has changed the world](#)

[Visual guide How centuries of racist images came down](#)

[Headlines tuesday 25 may 2021](#)

[Live 'Strong perception' that Tory party is insensitive to Muslim communities, report finds](#)

[Nadia Whittome Britain's youngest MP to take time off with post-traumatic stress disorder](#)

[Coronavirus Health chiefs seek urgent answers on travel advice for England hotspots](#)

[England Up to 8,700 patients died after catching Covid in hospitals](#)

[Analysis Weaknesses that led to hospital-acquired Covid remain](#)

#### 2021.05.25 - Coronavirus

['The world did not wake up' Oxygen shortages threaten 'total collapse' of dozens of health systems](#)

[Tokyo Olympics US tells citizens to avoid travel to Japan due to outbreak](#)

[Wuhan China rejects report of sick staff at lab prior to Covid outbreak](#)

[Children Most with post-Covid disease recover within six months, study finds](#)

#### 2021.05.25 - Spotlight

['I was sleeping in laybys' The people who have spent the pandemic living in vans](#)

[The secret deportations How Britain betrayed the Chinese men who served the country in the war](#)

[The Guardian picture essay The best photos from a tumultuous Premier League season](#)

['I've had to keep changing' Les Dennis on his move into opera](#)

#### 2021.05.25 - Opinion

[Dominic Cummings must be held to account – not made the star of the show](#)

[The BBC's enemies are triumphant, but British people still trust it](#)

[To survive in America as a Black man, make yourself small Kevin Spacey and the rise of uncancel culture](#)

#### 2021.05.25 - Around the world

[European Union Report details role of race and ethnicity in use of 'stop and search'](#)

[Robert Mugabe Zimbabwe chief orders remains to be exhumed for reburial at heroes' shrine](#)

[India Police visit Twitter offices after BJP tweet flagged as manipulated media](#)

Climate change Turkey struck by ‘sea snot’ because of global heating

Princess Latifa UK urged to intervene after another photo emerges