

# The Guardian

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## 2022.02.20 - Opinion

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## OpinionElectoral reform

# The Observer view on the non-aggression pact between Labour and the Lib Dems

[Observer editorial](#)

Tactical voting has suddenly become an even more effective tool in ousting the Tories



Labour's Kim Leadbeater hears the results of the Batley and Spen by-election on 1 July, 2021. Photograph: Danny Lawson/PA

Sun 20 Feb 2022 01.30 EST

A first-past-the-post voting system is a phenomenally crude and democratically weak way of electing MPs. All the prizes go to the party that wins a minority of the votes, with other parties excluded – a route to unchecked, unbalanced, even corrupt, government.

Elsewhere in Europe, only Belarus adopts it, backed by Vladimir Putin, as a way of ensuring that Russia's puppet president, Alexander Lukashenko, has remained in power since 1994 to ensure Belarus's fealty.

The Conservative party's dominance – it has been in power [twice as often](#) as Labour since 1918, notwithstanding it [never winning a majority](#) of votes – is because the opposition parties fight each other and divide their vote. The only rational response, if not an electoral pact to allow only one candidate against the Tories in each constituency, is some form of informal non-aggression pact. At the very least, Liberal Democrats and Labour should not campaign actively in those seats where neither has a chance of winning and give the other as free a run as possible.

It was thus very welcome news last week that the two parties are discussing precisely that. Labour will [not campaign actively](#) in the Lib Dems' top 30 target seats where they lie a good second, nor will the Lib Dems campaign actively in Labour's top target seats. Only in Sheffield Hallam and Cambridge is the arrangement threatened, but not enough to imperil the wider enterprise. Given Labour's challenge – [it needs to win 128 seats](#) to form a government – if the Lib Dems can win 15 seats in the Tories' blue wall it makes a non-Tory government more likely. This is no more than scaling up what was done in the [Batley and Spen byelection](#) last summer, where the Lib Dems fought a limited campaign, so allowing Labour to hold a tough seat, and [Chesham and Amersham](#) and [North Shropshire](#), where only the Lib Dems had the prospect of winning the seats. They duly won.

Most party activists understand and support the argument, although for Labour the memory of Nick Clegg [supporting austerity](#) remains a blot on the Lib Dem record, while Lib Dems cannot easily forget or forgive Jeremy Corbyn. Both should relax. Most Lib Dem and Labour members share the same views of both. In the Lib Dems' case, the prospect of another coalition is toxic: any arrangement will be confined to agreeing to support a minority Labour government on a “supply and motion” basis – voting through the budget and treating each legislative motion on its merits.

Most voters understand the shortcomings of first past the post and want to use their vote wisely

Purists will say voters require a choice, that parties should not take their preferences for granted and that the policies are distinct. Wrong. Most voters understand the shortcomings of first past the-post and want to vote wisely, hence the recent by-election results and the growth of tactical voting websites. As for policy, the priorities are shared: clean up politics, repair our broken relationship with the EU, mobilise levelling up, bind our fractured society and reset capitalism. There will even be agreement on reforming the voting system, now [trade union opposition](#) that blocked it at Labour's 2021 party conference has been dropped.

But the parties cannot be too quiet in their non-aggression pact. Voters – and newspapers such as the *Observer* that have long championed tactical voting – need to know what the parties expect in different seats. The sample sizes to get accurate opinion poll predictions in hundreds of constituencies are too large and expensive and it is easy to make mistakes. Both parties urge open and transparent government. They are right. They should start with open and transparent communication with the electorate about which seats they intend fiercely to contest and those they don't. Let's do it properly this time.

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## OpinionMonarchy

# The Observer view on the future of the British monarchy

[Observer editorial](#)

Andrew's settlement with Virginia Giuffre and claims of corruption at one of Charles's charities raise questions about how the institution will survive after the Queen has gone



The Long Walk outside Windsor Castle: the British monarchy may be less solid than it appears. Photograph: Steve Parsons/PA

Sun 20 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

In the ideal world of Buckingham Palace public relations, the most prominent headline about the royal family last week might have been a hurrah for the shortlist of the Queen's platinum jubilee pudding competition, organised by Fortnum & Mason and judged by Mary Berry. However, try as the Palace might to make this a celebratory summer of bunting and "God bless you ma'am", the monarch's offspring keep on trashing the party plans.

No sooner, it seems, has a table been prepared for a royal tea than an inspector calls.

It is said that the secret to great longevity is never to stop having novel experiences. Whatever the truth of that idea, one experience that the Queen might have preferred to avoid is the necessity, in her 95th year, of bailing out her 62-year-old child with reportedly up to £12m so that he could avoid appearing in an American court to defend himself against allegations of coerced sex with a trafficked 17-year-old. Andrew, of course, maintains his innocence and in settling the case with his accuser, Virginia Giuffre, accepts none of her accusations. We might have to wait for long distant episodes of *The Crown* properly to imagine how the conversations went that led to those funds being released, but it is to be hoped that the Queen's second son did not offer his mother versions of his "incapable of sweating" and Pizza Express excuses. One result of those chats was that Andrew was stripped of his military titles. The city of York is now looking for ways to cut ties with its disgraced duke.

Following hard on that shameful legal episode came the revelation that the heir to the throne may be questioned by the Metropolitan police in connection with alleged criminal corruption at one of his charitable foundations. Pending the inquiry, there is no reason not to cleave to the outraged faith of Prince Charles's biographer Jonathan Dimbleby that his friend had no knowledge of those dealings: "If there has been some scam, some breaking of the law, you honestly think that he would have been party to that? It beggars belief!"

The police will concentrate on the letter from the prince's close aide Michael Fawcett, which allegedly offered to help Saudi tycoon Mahfouz Marei Mubarak bin Mahfouz upgrade his honorary CBE to a knighthood – and to support his application for British citizenship – in exchange for generous donations to Charles's charitable efforts to restore £45m Dumfries House in Ayrshire. Fawcett has resigned and Clarence House repeated its statement that "the Prince of Wales had no knowledge of the alleged offer of honours or British citizenship on the basis of donation to his charities".

Still, as details have emerged of the visitors' book of donors who lined up for candlelit dinners with the heir to the British throne in support of that

project, one question is hard to avoid: what, you wonder, did [Prince Charles](#) imagine was in it for them? It's only a surprise that the *News of the World*'s fake sheikh never discussed funding the panelling of a Georgian dining room or pored over plans for Knockroon, the "Scottish Poundbury".

The Queen has made the wearing of a crown with the world's largest diamonds seem like a cross she is prepared to bear

In her long reign the Queen, aided by a tight grip on privy purse millions, has avoided even the most distant whiff of venality. She has made the wearing of a crown containing some of the world's largest diamonds seem like a heavy cross she is prepared to bear. Though she and her late husband may have moved between gilded palaces, they convincingly did so with Thermos flasks and Tupperware. The idea that such a sense of rectitude can be reliably passed on between generations is, as Thomas Paine long ago observed, an idea "as absurd as an hereditary mathematician; as ridiculous as an hereditary poet laureate".

Whether, as might seem preferable but unlikely, the Queen decides that 70 years on the throne is long enough for anyone, and effects a smooth handover this summer, or whether she soldiers on towards her self-addressed centenary telegram, the events of last week are another reminder that it is not going to be an easy transition. When crises come, as crises surely will, [Charles III](#) will not be able to draw on the deep reserves of affection that the Queen has always enjoyed.

Assuming the expected succession, the future king will inherit the problem of his brother, which may recede along with Andrew himself into the Palace shadows, and the problem of his younger son, which will not. The other snippet of news last week that can hardly have brought jubilee cheer to Clarence House was the announcement that [Prince Harry's "frank memoir"](#) will be published before the end of the year. As his father will know, publishers don't pay \$15m for a book without some guarantee of explosive candour.

For most of her reign, and certainly in the last 40 years, the steadfastness of the Queen has held together the rickety and anachronistic institution itself.

Charles, for all his good intentions, shows negligible evidence of perhaps the most remarkable of his mother's qualities, her apparent self-contained indifference to how she is viewed. Is there public appetite for an emotionally needy monarch? Time will tell. Most likely, the succession will demonstrate the abiding truth baked into the hereditary principle, just as surely Mary Berry's currants are baked into her fruit cakes. The institution may have struck lucky in the integrity and grace of the three score and ten of the present incumbent's reign. But luck is all it ever can be.

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## A chill wind: Storm Eunice and Vladimir Putin – cartoon

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NotebookUK news

## Some of François Truffaut's new wave films are still coming of age

[Rachel Cooke](#)



The Bride Wore Black has something to say to modern audiences, but let's draw a veil over The Woman Next Door



Gerard Depardieu and Fanny Ardant in *The Woman Next Door*. Photograph: Everett Collection Inc/Alamy

Sat 19 Feb 2022 12.00 EST

The [François Truffaut season](#) at the BFI in London remains a delightful event for me, irrespective of the fact that some of the director's less well-known films turn out to be turkeys. Agreed: *The Woman Next Door* from 1981, starring Gérard Depardieu and Fanny Ardant, is quite terrible. But deprived of travel, as we have been for so long, there in the darkness I hardly cared. The clothes, the houses, the restaurants: not since I was a moody teenager and obsessed with Françoise Sagan has *la vie française* seemed more bewitching.

Each film makes me think again about the way movies date (or not). While some age painfully fast – the scene in which Ardant finds herself in her underwear at a garden party, her dress having been ripped off in one fell swoop, is straight out of Benny Hill – others come into their own only late in life. When *The Bride Wore Black* was released in 1968, for instance, the critics disliked it. But in 2022, it reads rather well, at least for any women in the audience. Every time the vengeful widow played by Jeanne Moreau (in a startling monochrome wardrobe by Pierre Cardin) sets about killing another of the men responsible for the shooting of her husband on her wedding day,

she must first endure not only their utter conviction that, yes, of course this beautiful woman only wants to sleep with them, but also their inevitably pompous monologues. Truffaut gave us mansplaining *avant la lettre*.

## Piano was not my forte



‘I should give grateful thanks to the many teachers who had to put up with my rotten arpeggios and barefaced lies.’ Photograph: Rob Walls/Alamy

Parents, don’t give up on your recalcitrant children! They will come good in the end. My young self, who refused ever to practise the piano no matter how much I was nagged, would be amazed to learn of my latest project: [an essay I’ve written](#) for BBC Radio 3 about JS Bach (part of a series celebrating the 300th birthday of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, it will be broadcast this week).

These days, I don’t even own a piano. But my love for classical music grows exponentially with every year that passes, a blessing for which I should really give grateful thanks, not only to my long-suffering parents but also to the many teachers who had to put up with both my rotten arpeggios and my barefaced lies (“Yes, I have practised every night for an hour... No, I have no idea why this has had no effect whatsoever on my playing”).

## Sweet memories



Sweets on sale on the Old City, Jerusalem. Photograph: Ton Koene/Alamy

I'm enjoying *Nine Quarters of Jerusalem*, a new biography of the Old City by Matthew Teller (it's published next month). The fact that it's as much about the present as the past makes it vivid, even if it does come with standard tales of the utterly dysfunctional Church of the Holy Sepulchre, where a ladder has leant against the facade for 265 years and Ethiopian Christians have long since been [exiled to the roof](#).

But there is a catch. Every time I open it, all I want to do is eat. I long for halawa, a sweet I haven't liked since childhood; I've never been more desperate for a warm slice of mutabbaq, the fragrant, sugary pastry that in Jerusalem is folded over melting Nabulsi cheese.

Teller writes that the Via Dolorosa branch of [Zalatimo's](#), a Palestinian baker that has been making mutabbaq since the 19th century, closed its doors in 2019, and this has come as the most terrible news to me (I was last there in 2018).

As someone once said, to visit Jerusalem without calling in at Zalatimo's is not really to visit Jerusalem at all.

# Rachel Cooke is an Observer columnist

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## Gavin Rossdale should stick to what he knows and stay out of the kitchen

[Rebecca Nicholson](#)



Celebrities look increasingly desperate when they turn their hands to reality TV genres to try to keep in the spotlight



Gavin Rossdale sings at a Bush concert in Ventura, California in 2020.  
Photograph: Chelsea Lauren/REX/Shutterstock

Sat 19 Feb 2022 10.00 EST

Another week and the smell of another celebrity cooking show permeates the air. Gavin Rossdale, of 90s grunge-adjacent, arena-stuffing band Bush, is the latest star to turn to cookery, with *Deadline* reporting that he is to [launch a cooking](#) and entertainment show called *E.A.T.* In it, he will talk to celebrity guests, including Tom Jones, at his house in the Hollywood Hills, while designing, preparing and making them a three-course meal.

He is part of a broader picture of celebrities widening their repertoires and this is not the first celebrity-to-chef shift of recent times. Those who follow such news will be familiar with Brooklyn Beckham's move from photography to cookery, [\*Cookin' With Brooklyn\*](#), a social media series presumably conceived of as rhyme first, content later, in which Beckham describes making a sandwich, but confuses slices of bread with loaves. (Unless he really does put fish between two loaves of bread. Maybe that's the twist.) Selena Gomez learns to cook on [\*Selena + Chef\*](#), which is like a high-end version of that bit on *Sunday Brunch* where soap stars chuck flour in a bowl and pretend to enjoy baking. Sadly, Paris Hilton's Netflix show,

Cooking With Paris, has not been renewed for a second series, despite being a work of genuine high art.

In an era of fame for fame's sake, it gets harder and harder to work out what most celebrities do. Famous people now insist on doing a bit of everything, even interviewing other famous people, a format beloved of pivot-to-podcast celebrities, though it rarely pays off; with a handful of exceptions, it's far too cosy and polite. Travel shows used to be fronted by professional travellers or explorers. Now, any comedian who's done 15 minutes on *Live at the Apollo* gets given a camper van and a GoPro.

The problem with this celebrity vogue for cooking – and travel shows, podcasts and so on – is that I'd still rather watch actual chefs in the kitchen, using their years of training and expertise to explain how to do something. (Gomez gets a pass, because she's more student than cook.) I know it's old-fashioned, in these post-expert times, to value skill over personality, but cookery isn't even a field that's lacking in personalities. I have no idea if Rossdale can cook and perhaps the show will reveal that he's the René Redzepi/David Frost hybrid we've all been waiting for. However, the idea that cooking is in dire need of special celebrity sparkle is as daft as making a sandwich with two loaves of bread.

## **Academy Awards: and the Oscar for best voter goes to Twitter**



Regina Hall, Amy Schumer, Wanda Sykes, this year's Oscars presenters.  
Composite: Getty images

We are mid-awards season and award ceremonies are still being reformed, revised and polished up. Some have taken categories that were previously divided by gender and removed gender from consideration, which did not stop women winning the bulk of the awards at the Brits a couple of weeks ago, or from dominating the [Berlin film festival](#), which gave its Golden Bear to *Alcarràs*, directed by Carla Simón.

The Oscars, shunted to the end of March, remain the grande dame of the season, haughtily adjusting her bosom as the young 'uns play havoc at her feet. But it has famously struggled to find its identity in recent years and ratings have fallen away. It seems as tough to recruit a presenter as it is to find anyone who is up for replacing Laura Kuenssberg, but this year the ceremony has opted for three presenters: [Wanda Sykes](#), [Amy Schumer](#) and [Regina Hall](#). It will be the first time that three women have hosted and hopefully it will resemble the heady days of Tina Fey and Amy Poehler's reign at the now less-appealing Golden Globes.

In the spirit of reform, the Oscars have also added a sort of people's choice moment, allowing [Twitter users](#) to vote for their favourite film of 2021, regardless of its nomination status, by tweeting #OscarsFanFavorite. This

will then be “recognised” during the ceremony, though that sounds like it’s being held at a careful arm’s length – will it get a chocolate Oscar instead? I can’t imagine that there will be any problems at all, whatsoever, no way, with using a Twitter hashtag as a voting device.

## **Taylor Swift: Glastonbury will probably get over her absence**



Taylor Swift: no show at Glasto. Photograph: Jeenah Moon/Reuters

In 2019, [Taylor Swift tweeted](#) that she was “ecstatic” to announce that she would be headlining Glastonbury on its 50th birthday. I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but it has been an eventful couple of years and while all fingers are crossed that the festival will go ahead this summer for the first time since 2019, rumours have emerged suggesting that Swift will not be rolling over her booking. In other words, she is not feeling ’22.

Right now, Billie Eilish is confirmed as the headliner on Friday night and, it’s rumoured, [Kendrick Lamar on](#) Sunday night, leaving one main slot to fill. But the beauty of Glastonbury, above almost every other festival, is that it hardly matters who is playing at all. It’s so vast that you’re as likely to spend an unknowable amount of time trying to find your way out of the gong bath section as you are making sure you see an act that seemed

essential when the tickets arrived. I would love to see Swift at Glastonbury. She is an exquisite performer with a decade of hits to her name. Hopefully, it will still happen, at some point, but I am sure this year's crowd will, forgive me, shake it off.

Rebecca Nicholson is an Observer columnist

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## **This may come as a surprise, but I think the Tories' levelling-up policy has got it right**

[Will Hutton](#)



The flagship policy would transform the UK. If only this government could deliver it



Burbo Bank windfarm and an art installation by Antony Gormley at Crosby Beach on Merseyside. Photograph: Peter Byrne/PA

Sat 19 Feb 2022 14.00 EST

There are transformative moments in politics when the opposition gets gifted the political agenda. In the 1970s, it was the power of trade unions and inflation that gave the Tories control of the narrative, just as after 2008, it was the aftermath of the financial crisis. Today, Covid and Brexit have combined to make the condition of the people the number one political issue. The question of how to react to this threatens to overwhelm a Tory party that is divided between its libertarian wing and its one-nation advocates and whose leader is self-evidently unfit for high office.

It is a new transformative moment. The news last week that January inflation hit [a 30-year high of 5.5%](#) to produce the biggest cost of living squeeze for 60 years is the backdrop to a mounting social crisis. The pressure is reflected in a [falling birth rate](#) and stagnating, even declining life expectancy, desperately unfair life chances, disempowerment, justified post-Brexit economic pessimism and social neglect, all alongside phenomenal private wealth. Labour, for the first time in 15 years, has the chance to command the agenda and do to its opponents what was once done to it.

“Levelling up” is the talismanic policy that brings all this together. [Boris Johnson](#), for all his glaring deficiencies, had the wit to see that. It was not his alleged campaigning genius or what the deluded Europhobes think is the compelling case for Brexit that won the 2016 referendum and 2019 general election. Rather, it was the massive disaffection of millions of working-class voters with the status quo. There had to be change and levelling up, whose need is reinforced by the lethal unfairness of Covid, represents his personal commitment to deliver the change.

Except, as the recent [white paper on levelling up](#) reveals in a way its drafters never imagined, this Conservative party cannot deliver. The first two-thirds of this at once intellectually exciting but finally disappointing [document](#) is among the best government analyses of Britain’s economic and social failings I have read. It is hard not to be impressed by the scrupulous marshalling of devastating data, ranging from the slow travel to work times to the disastrously higher prevalence of obesity in left-behind Britain – social science at its best. It recognises that the many self-reinforcing causes of this cruel inequality require numerous self-reinforcing responses. If the foundational framework it outlines is followed through, it could deliver, as the paper says, a generational £2.5tn increase in national output over and above whatever growth Britain might have otherwise expected. It is a fabulous national prize – except the last third of the paper demonstrates how far away such mobilisation is and the thinness of the government’s planned response.

For some time, economic theory has been moving away from the simplistic “market is magic” doctrines that defined the past 40 years, but the white paper’s opening chapter marks the first decisive official rupture with that orthodoxy. The new consensus is to focus on how the state must mobilise and integrate the six capitals – human, financial, intangible, physical, institutional and social – that together constitute the “six-cylinder” model driving growth and, in particular, catalysing the growth serendipities available in densely populated cities. This is the “Medici” effect, so called because of the growth of the culturally and economically vibrant city states of the Italian Renaissance. It is combining these “agglomeration effects” with the right amounts of the varying capitals, brought together by empowered, self-confident local leaders, which is the alchemy of self-amplifying growth.

No great economy can be built on a weak society; no great society can be built with a weak economy – and both need inspired local leadership. None of this is rocket science, even if it is a breakthrough for a Tory government, but it does require system change.

Chapter two calls for just that. It is scathing about the consequences of too much political centralisation, the constant chopping and changing of Westminster-driven policies – 40 policies between 1975 and 2015 to promote regional growth – and the bewildering plethora of at least 100 sub-scale mini funds and pots of money for which local authorities have to bid, often with wholly different criteria.

Instead, it argues there needs to be consistency over time, a massive streamlining of all the varying funds and a national consensus over interconnecting “missions” behind which the country can mobilise.

It suggests 12, ranging from spreading out the national research and development budget more fairly to targets for improved life expectancy. Progress must be regularly and publicly reported. Above all, by 2030, every citizen should have the opportunity of being led by a local, empowered mayor to make these missions happen.

Serious transport investment so that journey times and frequencies match those of London? A joke

So far, so good, then you hit the chapter on policy. The suffocating veto of Rishi Sunak’s Treasury is all too obvious. The imagination and verve disappear. Instead of streamlining all those sub-scale pots of money, the white paper boasts about them. Build up the British business and infrastructure banks to support local enterprise? Forget it. Serious transport investment so that journey times and frequencies match those of London? A joke. Search in vain for serious investment in the social infrastructure. New or repurposed institutions that might be decentralised to support the six-cylinder capitals’ growth model in all our localities? Conspicuous by their absence. The aim of creating one globally competitive city in each of our regions is noble – but over Sunak’s dead body. Nor is there any recognition

that British capitalism itself is sorely in need of a makeover if it is to deliver its part.

This is where [Labour](#) could pick up the thread. The country is ready to rally behind genuine levelling up.

Money? Issue 100-year or even perpetual bonds to finance the vital capital spending. Create the institutions that will work with newly empowered mayors to revitalise our economy and society. Around the drive to net-zero, England from the Tyne to the Humber could reindustrialise around manufacturing windfarms, turbines, electric cars and batteries.

Get back into the single market and export those green manufactures into the EU. Economic prospects for the next few years are dire: a shrinking working population, diminished trade, squeezed demand and stagnating investment together with the risk of falling house prices as interest rates rise. Against that outlook, Britain cannot let that potential £2.5tn of extra output go begging. The narrative, the foundational framework and the prize are there for the taking. All that is required is the chutzpah and vision to go for it.

Will Hutton is an Observer columnist

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## OpinionEquality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)

# The EHRC is here to support the rights of all – whatever anyone says to the contrary

[Kishwer Falkner](#)

My commission is accused of shifting its approach to equality but this is far from the truth



Protesters outside Downing Street demanding an end to discrimination against trans people. Photograph: Vuk Valcic/SOPA Images/REX/Shutterstock

Sun 20 Feb 2022 02.00 EST

It is 15 years since the [Equality and Human Rights Commission](#), the independent body charged with protecting and promoting equality and human rights for everyone in Britain, came into being. We regulate and enforce human rights and equality laws and advance rights through carefully

considered recommendations for reform. While we have made significant progress over the past 15 years, there will always be more to do.

We have many and varied stakeholders – knowledgeable and effective advocates in encouraging and challenging us to address the equality and human rights issues about which they care deeply. Our relationships with civic organisations, campaigners and those they represent are vitally important in helping to inform our thinking and our priorities. But with our vast remit and so many people and groups advocating on so many issues, it is inevitable that we can't please all of them all of the time.

My position and integrity as the EHRC's chair have come in for particular criticism by some stakeholders, who perceive that the commission has undergone a shift in its approach. I can't speak for how the previous chair ran things, but I can say that what matters to me, to the board and our new chief executive is that we are determined to uphold our independence, impartiality, evidence-based decision-making and to resist undue influence from any quarter.

This has put us at odds with some of our stakeholders recently, but this isn't new. The EHRC has often been criticised over the years and it is not a comfortable place to be in – for our commissioners, for our committed staff or for those stakeholders who disagree with us. But it is an unavoidable part of our role in regulating a legal framework that recognises nine protected characteristics, frequently with competing rights and needs.

We have a statutory duty to consider equality and human rights for everyone and that includes how the rights of one person, or group, might be affected by the rights of another. We do not allow our decisions and actions to be swayed by the loudest voices in any particular debate. We are accountable to parliament and held to exacting standards in fulfilling our mandate.

We do not allow our decisions and actions to be swayed by the loudest voices in any particular debate

The legal basis for our governance, including the process for the appointment of the chair and commissioners, is enshrined in our founding

legislation and is unchanged since the EHRC was established. It applied to my appointment as it did for those of my predecessors under previous Labour, coalition and Conservative governments.

The latest pressure arises from the polarised debates about the rights of transgender people, who face hate crime and barriers to changing their legal gender, such as excessively [long waiting times](#) for gender identity clinics. This is wrong and we have been lobbying government to do something about it. We have also been upholding the rights of [transgender people at work](#), in recent legal interventions with employers.

Where we have modified our position on [self-ID for trans people](#) or the Gender Recognition Act, we have done so because new evidence about the tension between trans and women's rights is emerging. Only last week, there have been seemingly contradictory legal judgments on the meaning of "sex" in law. Other cases are in the pipeline. Recently, public responses to our strategic plan have shown a huge increase in concern about these competing rights.

Last month, [I wrote to the Scottish government](#) to advise that further consideration is needed to some specific aspects of the proposals, to take account of issues raised in relation to data collection, single-sex service provision and new case law. I said absolutely nothing to suggest any wavering of our commitment to trans rights.

We have also been [accused of standing in the way](#) of a ban on "conversion therapy". Not true. Conversion therapy is harmful and the EHRC supports its ending for both sexual orientation and being transgender. We have advised the UK government that a lack of legal definitions of terms such as "being trans" risks ambiguity about what will be caught by the ban and what will not.

We recommended that parliament conducts comprehensive scrutiny of the legislation to ensure not only that harmful practices are prevented but also that transgender people can receive the advice and support they need.

Debate about contested issues is necessary and I admire all who stand up for rights and causes, fight discrimination and seek equality and justice. They

help our country to shape a fairer future. And so do we.

So I ask those – and it is a minority – who seek to undermine the EHRC: what do they hope to achieve and who do they think will protect and advance equality and human rights in our country if they have their wish?

Baroness Falkner is the chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission

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

# For the record

This week's corrections

Sun 20 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

We said the New Zealand police played Barry Manilow songs to tackle protesters in Wellington. It was actually the parliament Speaker, Trevor Mallard, who took this action ([Politics after the pandemic](#), 13 February, p37).

An article about David Hoffman's new book, *Whitechapel Markets 1972-1977*, was illustrated with an image, supplied to us by the publishers, of Sclater Street Market, Shoreditch, London, said to be taken in 1977. In fact the scene was photographed in 1990 ([The big picture](#), 13 February, the New Review, p2).

Owing to an error in information supplied by the Intergenerational Foundation, we said its researchers predict that a graduate earning £27,000 a year will see their “disposable” income drop by almost 30%. Disposable income is what remains after tax. In fact, the researchers were referring to that percentage drop in “discretionary” income, meaning the money an individual has left to spend or save after tax and essential spending ([‘Tax by stealth’ will hit under-30s on low wages hardest](#), 13 February, p19).

Other recently amended articles include:

[Lies come in all shapes and sizes. This government is familiar with them all](#)

This article was amended on 13 February 2022. The picture of the Speaker, Sir Lindsay Hoyle, was replaced to remove any suggestion that he is part of the government.

[NHS staffing levels are at crisis point, so why isn't it allowed to plan for the future?](#)

This article was amended on 16 February 2022 because an earlier version gave the percentage increase of doctors between October 2020 and October 2021 as 1.5%. The correct figure is 3.8%.

[Maria Friedman: ‘Sondheim was a kind man, but God, he could be very direct’](#)

This article was amended on 13 February 2022 to remove an image of Friedman that incorrectly said she was pictured with Stephen Sondheim.

[How DNA link could unlock mystery of cancer patients ‘wasting away’](#)

The photograph accompanying this article was replaced on 15 February 2022. The previous image showed a rare left-handed helix; DNA, however, is typically right-handed.

[Sugarcane London: ‘This is all comfort food’ – restaurant review](#)

This article was amended on 15 February 2022. An earlier version mistakenly gave James Lowe’s first name as “Jason”.

[Spain by train: a three city mini-break to Bilbao, Barcelona and Madrid](#)

This article was amended on 18 February 2022 to remove a reference to “Mediterranean food” in connection with Bilbao. The writer was referring to a style of food rather than the geographical location of Bilbao which is in the north of Spain.

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

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**Observer lettersBoris Johnson**

## **Letters: where is the anger over Boris Johnson's lies?**

Our politics has sunk so low that people now believe that all politicians are liars and in it for themselves



‘What have we become, when, to many, a prime minister and his crew economical with the truth are seen as just a joke?’ Photograph: Carl Recine/PA

Sun 20 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

I found Nick Cohen’s opinions on the lack of honesty in this government both moving and profound (“[Lies come in all shapes and sizes. This government is familiar with them all](#)”, Comment). The most worrying part of this state of affairs is where is the public anger? What have we become, when, to many, a prime minister and his crew being economical with the truth are seen as just a joke?

I fear for the future of our democracy, because the voting public tend to believe that all politicians are liars and in it for themselves; this government confirms their opinions, so they just shrug their shoulders and accept it.

**Mrs A Sturton**

Oakley, Basingstoke, Hampshire

Nick Cohen's article was an impressive free verse tour de force. I can't be the only one reminded of Adrian Mitchell's To Whom It May Concern (Tell Me Lies About Vietnam). It's too much to expect Cohen to give a reading at the Albert Hall but it would be good to see it on an *Observer* wallchart, with a copy on the walls of every classroom, hospital, foodbank and GP waiting room in the country.

**Mike Hine**

Kingston upon Thames, London

That parliamentary procedure forces the Speaker to dismiss Ian Blackford for correctly calling out the prime minister's lies, while leaving him impotent to enforce either the truth or an apology from the PM, emphasises the anachronism and shamefully demeans the system.

**Jan Mortimer**

Lewes, East Sussex

## Better recruits, better police

As a retired police officer with experience of recruiting, I agree with former chief officer Sue Fish's analysis of the reform needed to outlaw bad behaviour in the Met and elsewhere ("Can the Met change?", Focus). Structures that last and give best service use the best material available and continue to do so when properly maintained. She hits the nail on the head when she blames poor policing on the failure to identify decent, diligent and empathetic applicants and to continue monitoring performance using the same measures.

If these qualities are being subsumed by the requirement for purely technical skills, then it's about time some deeper thought was given to the personal qualities of those whose function is to deal fairly with the public.

**Tony Burnley**

Brampton, Cambridgeshire

## Racism is as racism does

Michael Crick misunderstands the question of who is a racist (“[I don't think Farage is a racist but he does pander to racists](#)”, the New Review). Racism is as racism does: a politician who mobilises racist sentiments to win support, as Crick's book shows that Farage has made a career out of doing and as Boris Johnson has also done, is as much a racist as a person who thinks people of a different ethnicity are inferior – and a more dangerous one to boot.

**Martin Shaw**

Seaton, Devon

## Megalomaniac Putin

“[The edge of war: what, exactly, does Putin want in Ukraine?](#)” (News) hinted at the real cause of the artificial crisis in saying that Vladimir Putin regarded Ukraine “as an integral part of historical Russia”. Putin's Russia has turned away from the Soviet recognition of a Ukrainian people and stagnated to a tsarist imperial definition of Ukraine (together with Russians and Belarusians) as one of the three branches of a pan-Russian nation. Russian media repeatedly deny the existence of Ukraine and Ukrainians.

Why is the crisis artificial? Nato has never intended to offer Ukraine membership, the US never had plans to instal missiles and Ukraine's military cooperation with Nato is three decades old. The root cause is Putin's obsession with Ukraine as a “Russian land” and his megalomaniac view of himself as the “gatherer of Russian lands”. We should not forget that contemporary pan-Russianism is as dangerous as was pan-Germanism in the 1930s.

**Dr Taras Kuzio**

London SW1

“What's so terrible about neutrality for Ukraine?” asks Simon Tisdall (“[Macron fights to halt slide to war](#)”, World). The answer is because neutrality means nothing to the Russians. At the outbreak of the Second World War, the Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania declared their neutrality. They were occupied by subterfuge and then annexed by the

USSR in 1940. It took until 1990-91 for those countries to regain their independence. Knowing the nature of their eastern neighbour, they began negotiating for Nato and EU membership, finally achieved in 2004. The Ukrainians know the region's history, unlike many western commentators. They know neutrality is not the answer.

**Aleksas Vilcinskas**

London SW20

## So much for ECHR ‘threat’

David Murray is right to suggest that the low estimation of politicians for the prison service “could be addressed by giving prisoners the vote, as most of the rest of western Europe does” ([Letters](#)). In fact, the European court of human rights has ruled that Britain’s blanket ban on votes for convicted inmates is a breach of their human rights. The response in 2013 of the then prime minister, David Cameron, was that prisoners “damn well shouldn’t” be given the right to vote. His short-sighted refusal to implement the ruling has remained without consequence for the UK. So much, then, for the so-called threat of the ECHR to parliamentary sovereignty.

**Professor Gwyneth Boswell**

Norwich

## Face the facts on flying

Johan Lundgren, easyJet CEO, says it’s “intellectually lazy” to argue that not flying is the best way to cut aviation emissions ([Business profile](#)). I wonder if he has seen the academic analysis from UK Fires on this issue. It’s not light reading. Having reviewed all low-carbon options for aviation between now and the 2050 net zero deadline, it concludes that Lundgren’s industry has left it too late to develop enough new aircraft, renewable energy, carbon capture and carbon capture storage facilities to balance the carbon books in time.

What is “intellectually lazy”, I’d argue, is to go straight from observing that aviation brings people benefits (of course it does) to concluding that we must, despite the climate emergency, carry on flying to get these benefits

rather than, say, using video conferencing and taking domestic holidays to cut emissions from business travel and tourism.

Lundgren says “we’ve done our job at easyJet on this whole thing”. But there is not a single commercial aircraft in operation that doesn’t emit CO<sub>2</sub>, and no scalable zero-carbon technology is on the horizon. It’s hard to say whether this is because of laziness, complacency, lack of regulation, or simply the barriers of physics. But if we want to find solutions, we need to face the facts.

**Cait Hewitt**  
London, SE1

## Scotland, land of dreams

Can I advise Will Hutton that his imaginary country, supervised by a government that is gradually pulling its citizens together to create a new normal, actually exists and is not far away (“[I relish life opening up. But this libertarian dash for the Covid exit is reckless](#)”, Comment). It is Scotland, where, despite propaganda to the contrary, a largely contented population has been helped through this pandemic by a government that has acted on the whole in a careful and thoughtful way. Mistakes have been made, but generally admitted to, and it seems that the careful approach has been both popular and accepted.

**Brian Bannatyne-Scott**  
Edinburgh

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## OpinionWork & careers

# Forget all you've heard about working life in modern Britain. It's wrong

[Torsten Bell](#)

The myths perpetrated about modern employment have left us perilously ill prepared for true economic change



Young people in the gig economy, such as these Deliveroo workers, are less likely to be fired and have less need to move to find work. Photograph: Guy Bell/REX/Shutterstock

Sun 20 Feb 2022 02.00 EST

Economic change is speeding up. Technology means that industries are shrinking and growing faster than ever. The young change jobs incessantly while firms fire at will, ending the “job for life” enjoyed by previous generations. Everyone moves around the country for work these days, vacating poorer parts of Britain and hollowing out communities.

All of these statements are almost universally accepted as truths about 21st-century Britain. They guide what policymakers see as the important questions to be asked and the right answers to give. However, all of them are wrong, in many cases wildly so. In most senses, change has been flat or is actually slowing down.

A safe option for anyone needing to sell an economics book for the past decade is to put a robot on the cover and warn that machines are taking our jobs and whole sectors are set to be wiped out – from taxi [drivers](#) to [lawyers](#).

History shows us that big structural changes do happen. There were 7.7m manufacturing jobs in 1970 and there are only 2.5m today. The share of jobs in professional services, education and health has doubled over the same period.

However, this kind of economic change, where the workforce shifts from one industry to another, has been slowing since the 1980s. In the 2010s, it was running at just one-third of the pace seen 30 years earlier because Britain's de-industrialisation is broadly complete. More recent trends, such as the decline of retail jobs and growth in the care sector, are minor in comparison and industrial change is actually at its lowest rate for a century.

Economy-wide trends can hide what happens to individuals, but there too the evidence points in the opposite direction to popular narratives. A job-hopping epidemic is something managers moan about rather than a thing that actually happens.

Nostalgia is a dangerous guide to just about anything – there never was a job for life

In 1993, the average time that workers had been in their post was 60 months. Almost three decades later, it's still 60 months. Nostalgia is a dangerous guide to just about anything – there never was a job for life.

The UK has a flexible labour market, where it's easy for workers to move or firms to hire and fire. But that doesn't mean lots of moving or firing is going on.

The rates at which people change jobs is actually down by a full quarter this century with only 2.4% of us moving during the three months prior to the pandemic. The fall is particularly large for those workers held to be most likely to move: the young.

We have seen a growth in less secure work, from zero-hours contracts to self-employment, but firms are much less likely to fire these days. In the late 1990s, 0.8% of workers would lose their jobs each quarter; immediately pre-pandemic that had halved. Modern business has nothing in common with *The Apprentice*.

More young adults in university means more moving away from home for education. However, when it comes to young people moving around the country for work, that is now less common, down a third from the late 1990s to the late 2010s.

More broadly, odd ideas about exactly who moves around the country are widespread. Take discussions of the so-called red wall seats that the Conservatives won at the last general election. You'd think from how people talk about the likes of Bolton and Ashfield that these constituencies have seen a youth exodus but their defining feature is that far fewer young people leave them than depart other, richer, Conservative seats – and for that matter, far fewer people are moving in.

This huge gap between rhetoric and reality on economic change matters. It focuses our attention on the wrong problems and drives us to the wrong answers, taking our politics down rabbit holes that do nothing to help us build a better Britain.

Worries about too much change distract us from the real disaster of the past decade: our pay and productivity levels have not changed nearly enough. Before the financial crisis, productivity grew at roughly 2% a year. Since then, it has averaged only 0.4%, resulting in our wages having only just recovered to their pre-financial crisis level when Covid turned up.

The young aren't too footloose and fancy free - they're dangerously stuck in the mud.

Those making fewer job moves, particular younger workers, have missed out on significant pay rises: individuals who moved job typically enjoy five times the pay rise of workers staying put. The young aren't too footloose and fancy free - they're dangerously stuck in the mud.

Far from all change is good, of course. The decline in job losses means fewer people now see the downgrades and falls in pay that often follow. Instead of panicking about jobs being destroyed, we should focus on the fact that different groups face very different risks: lower-paid workers are six times more likely than managers to lose work. They are the ones under threat from the Cameron-era decision to give workers protection from unfair dismissal after only two years in post.

Recognition that workers are now less likely to move for a new job has important lessons for us that are obscured by misplaced panic about everyone moving around the country. This is happening for a mixture of good (there are now far fewer places where people have to leave if they want to find work), bad (housing costs rise faster in higher wage areas and put better paid jobs out of reach for many) and important reasons, such as wanting to remain near family, that policy must reinforce, tackle and understand respectively.

Finally, understanding that our recent past has not involved significant economic change should warn us that we may not be well prepared if that rate of change speeds up. Pent-up desire for change during the pandemic has pushed job moves temporarily to record highs, while the lasting consequences of the home-working surge remain to be seen. The aftermath of Covid-19 and the rate at which our population is ageing could combine with Brexit and the net-zero transition to reshape our economy over the decade ahead. If they do, it'll be a shock to Britain's workers, companies and the state. Our benefits system without its furlough bolt-on does little to insure us against change, while corporate Britain has a weak record on investing when new opportunities and challenges emerge.

Watching Apollo 11's 1969 triumph in taking humans to the moon was a formative experience for my dad. Whenever he's told technological change has accelerated, he notes that it's taken us another 50 years for Amazon to

get [William Shatner into space](#). He has a point, which is as true for economic change here on Earth as it is for travel to the stars.

Torsten Bell is chief executive of the Resolution Foundation. Read more at [resolutionfoundation.org](#)

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## Headlines tuesday 15 february 2022

- [Live Ukraine crisis: Russia says it is returning some troops to base in possible de-escalation](#)
- [Live UK politics: Ukraine crisis could lead to aggression by other nations, warns Truss](#)
- [Russia Moscow says it will withdraw some of its troops from Ukraine border](#)
- [Ukraine crisis Standoff a ‘dangerous moment for the world’, warns Truss](#)

## Ukraine

# Kyiv vows to ‘resist’ cyberattacks; stock markets bounce back – as it happened

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[\*\*Politics live with Andrew Sparrow\*\*](#)

[\*\*Politics\*\*](#)

# **Boris Johnson warns threat of Russian invasion of Ukraine remains but hopes for ‘diplomatic opening’ – as it happened**

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## Russia

# Russia confirms ‘partial’ withdrawal of troops from Ukraine border

Move could be sign of de-escalation but western officials say there are no immediate signs of Russian drawdown

- [Ukraine-Russia crisis live updates: follow the latest news](#)

01:06

Russia says it is sending some troops back to base after drills – video report

*[Andrew Roth](#) in Moscow and [Philip Oltermann](#) in Berlin*

Tue 15 Feb 2022 13.42 EST

Vladimir Putin has confirmed a “partial” drawdown of Russian forces near the Ukrainian border, in a step that could begin a de-escalation of tensions but has left western officials sceptical that the Kremlin has ruled out an attack in the near future.

The size of the withdrawal remains unclear and it may involve only a fraction of Russia’s forces at the border, which western officials estimate at more than 130,000 troops, at least 60% of the country’s ground forces.

Western officials said there were no immediate signs of a Russian drawdown. “So far we have not seen any de-escalation on the ground from the Russian side. Over the last weeks and days we have seen the opposite,” Jens Stoltenberg, Nato’s secretary general, said on Tuesday.

Security officials said they had seen “reinforcements of combat and other capabilities close to the [Ukraine](#) border”.

Russia has always denied planning to invade Ukraine, saying it can exercise troops on its own territory as it sees fit. It has been pressing for a set of security guarantees from the west, including a guarantee that Ukraine will never join Nato.

Asked for the reason for the drawdown on Tuesday, Putin was not forthcoming. “It’s a partial withdrawal of troops from the areas of our exercises,” he said in response to a question during a press conference with the German chancellor, Olaf Scholz. “What is there to comment on?”

In another sign of Russia turning the screw on Ukraine, the [State Duma voted](#) on Tuesday to ask Putin to recognise the independence of the two Russian-controlled separatist regions in the east of the country.

Putin, hinting that he intended to use them as leverage, said he would not recognise the “republics” immediately, but called on Nato to negotiate with him on Russia’s security guarantees before it was “too late”.

“We hear that Ukraine is not ready to join Nato; we know that,” Putin said. “At the same time, they say it’s not going to join tomorrow. But by the time they get ready for it, it may be too late for us. So we have to decide this question now, right now, in the very near future, we have to have a negotiation process for this.”

The drawdown was first announced on Tuesday morning by the defence ministry spokesperson Igor Konashenkov, who described [ongoing exercises](#) that involved forces from “practically all military districts, fleets, and the airborne forces”.

“Units of the southern and western military districts, which have accomplished their missions, are boarding trains and trucks and will head for their garrisons later today,” Konashenkov said.

The defence ministry released video apparently shot in Crimea of Russian tanks and other heavy weaponry from two brigades being loaded on to railway cars. Otherwise, the Russian military gave little information about which forces would be withdrawn and where they would be sent.

Nato's Stoltenberg said: "We believe there is some ground for cautious optimism based on the signals and signs coming from Moscow, that they are ready to engage in a diplomatic effort and we are ready to continue to engage in a diplomatic effort."

Ukrainian officials said they would not take Moscow at its word about a drawdown. "Many statements are constantly being made from [Russia], so we have a rule: we'll believe it when we see it," said Dmytro Kuleba, Ukraine's foreign minister. "If we see the withdrawal then we will believe in de-escalation."

The Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov accused the west of manufacturing "manic information madness". "We've always said the troops will return to their bases after the exercises are over. This is the case this time as well," he said.

Peskov said Putin had joked about US intelligence reports that he could give an order to launch an invasion as early as this week. "He asks [us] to find out if the exact time, to the hour, of the start of the war has been published. It's impossible to be understanding of this manic information madness.

Russian state media pundits rushed to praise Putin's use of military pressure on the west. "Before, no one wanted to talk to us about security; now look at the line of those wanting to visit Moscow in February," wrote the RT head, Margarita Simonyan, in an apparent reference to visits by leaders such as Scholtz and Emmanuel Macron. "At the same time, Kyiv's economy has been torn to shreds ... it's a small thing but nice to see."

Russia's rouble currency posted gains after the announcement, indicating that investors hoped this would mark the beginning of a de-escalation of tensions between Russia and the west.

Scholz arrived in Moscow on Tuesday for meetings with Putin, the latest in a series of visits and phone calls from western leaders seeking to avert a potential war through negotiations.

Putin said he was "ready to work further" with the west on how to de-escalate the crisis on the Ukrainian border, while Germany's chancellor said

the diplomatic channels were “not yet exhausted”, at a joint press conference marked by subtle swipes and simmering historical resentment.

“We are ready to work further together, we are ready to go down the negotiations track,” said Putin, who denied that his country was seeking an invasion of Ukraine. “As to whether we want [war]: of course not. That’s why we have made these proposals about negotiations, the results of which should be an agreement about equal security for all countries, including ours.”

The US and other western countries have called a Russian drawdown of its troops on the border a precondition for successful negotiations on the Kremlin’s demands for “security guarantees”.

Russia has previously announced the conclusion of military exercises near the Ukrainian border, but social media and satellite photography taken in the following days have not shown considerable changes to Russia’s force posture. Those exercises involved only a small number of troops.

Many of the troops located close to the Ukrainian border are not involved in any formal training. When questioned on the buildup, Russia has said it has the right to move troops as it wishes within its own territory.

Russia is holding large [joint exercises with Belarus](#) scheduled to end on 20 February. Western countries have said those drills could be used as cover to prepare for an attack on Ukraine, while Russia has said the troops will return to base once the exercises have concluded.

On Tuesday, Russia also deployed long-range nuclear-capable bombers and fighter jets carrying state-of-the-art hypersonic missiles to its airbase in Syria for massive naval drills in the region.

Defense minister Sergey Shoigu met Syria’s president Bashar al-Assad after arriving in Syria to oversee the drills that mark the biggest Russian naval deployment to the Mediterranean Sea since cold war.

*Additional reporting by Daniel Boffey in Brussels and Patrick Wintour in London*

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## Russia

# Russia-Ukraine crisis a ‘dangerous moment for the world’, warns Truss

UK foreign secretary says invasion by Putin could embolden Iran and China to expand their ambitions

- [Ukraine-Russia crisis live updates: follow the latest news](#)



Ukrainian soldiers conducting military exercises. Liz Truss said the UK had trained up 20,000 Ukrainian troops. Photograph: EyePress News/Rex/Shutterstock

*Jamie Grierson*

[@JamieGrierson](#)

Tue 15 Feb 2022 03.55 EST

The UK foreign secretary, [Liz Truss](#), has warned of a “dangerous moment for the world” as the “highly likely” prospect of a Russian invasion of Ukraine could embolden other countries such as Iran and China to expand their ambitions.

Speaking on Sky News, Truss said “we could be on the brink of a war in Europe, which would have severe consequences not just for the people of Russia and [Ukraine](#) but for the broader security in Europe”, adding she was “very worried”.

Her comments came as [last-ditch efforts for a diplomatic situation](#) to the crisis on the Russia-Ukraine border are sought by world leaders including Boris Johnson and Joe Biden.

A core pillar of the dispute is Russia’s demand for the west to guarantee Ukraine will not join Nato, the defensive alliance of 30 countries. Truss has said it was not for [Russia](#) to determine Ukraine’s security arrangements.

She said: “The big risk is if there is an invasion into Ukraine. That would be hugely damaging for Russia and Ukraine, and it would further undermine stability in [Europe](#).

00:59

Liz Truss 'very worried' about possible Russian invasion of Ukraine – video

“President Putin has actively questioned why other countries in eastern Europe are members of [Nato](#) as well, so this I fear would not stop at Ukraine.

“This is an attack on the neighbouring states of Russia and other east European countries in trying to undermine the legitimacy of them being part of Nato.”

Asked to expand on this point, the foreign secretary said: “If we saw an invasion into Ukraine, there would be severe costs in terms of a long-running conflict. We could see the undermining of security more broadly in Europe, we could also see other aggressors around the world see it as an

opportunity to expand their ambitions too so this is a very dangerous moment for the world.”

Asked to which other countries she was referring, Truss cited Iran and China as examples of potential aggressors.

Russia has amassed at least 130,000 troops on the Ukrainian border and Truss said an invasion of the country “could be imminent and it is highly likely”.

She said any conflict could be a “long, protracted war”. When asked on Times Radio whether Russia had the military capacity to take and hold all of Ukraine, Truss said: “What we know is that the Ukrainians will fight. The UK has trained up 20,000 Ukrainian soldiers.

“We’ve supplied defensive weapons as have other allies. So, this will not be easy or simple for Vladimir Putin. This could be a long, protracted war, which would, of course, create huge damage for both the people of Ukraine and the people of Russia as well as threatening European security.”

However, Truss said Putin could still “change his mind”.

She added: “We know or we believe that Vladimir Putin has not yet made a decision about whether to invade Ukraine. We think it’s highly likely.

“There are huge numbers of troops lined up on the border. We know that they’re in a position to attack imminently, but he can still change his mind and that is why diplomacy is so vital.”

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## 2022.02.15 - Spotlight

- 'Every year it astounds us' The Orkney dig uncovering Britain's stone age culture
- Exhibition review The World of Stonehenge – even the stone axes amaze
- Opening nightmare Launching a restaurant into a world stricken by Covid and Brexit
- Analysis Inflation may pose a tougher challenge than the end of Covid restrictions

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## **‘Every year it astounds us’: the Orkney dig uncovering Britain’s stone age culture**



‘A gateway into a liminal world’ ... the standing stones of Stenness, Orkney, built c 3000-2500BC. Photograph: Theasis/Getty Images/iStockphoto

Archaeologists excavating the windswept Ness of Brodgar are unearthing a treasure trove of neolithic villages, tombs, weapons and mysterious religious artefacts, some to be displayed in a blockbuster exhibition



[Charlotte Higgins](#)

Tue 15 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

If you happen to imagine that there's not much left to discover of Britain's stone age, or that its relics consist of hard-to-love postholes and scraps of bones, then you need to find your way to Orkney, that scatter of islands off Scotland's north-east coast. On the archipelago's Mainland, out towards the windswept west coast with its wave-battered cliffs, you will come to the Ness of Brodgar, an isthmus separating a pair of sparkling lochs, one of saltwater and one of freshwater. Just before the way narrows you'll see the Stones of Stenness rising up before you. This ancient stone circle's monoliths were once more numerous, but they remain elegant and imposing. Like a gateway into a liminal world of theatricality and magic, they lead the eye to another, even larger neolithic monument beyond the isthmus, elevated in the landscape as if on a stage. This is the [Ring of Brodgar](#), its sharply individuated stones like giant dancers arrested mid-step – as local legend, indeed, has it.



Stone age mystery: the Ring of Brodgar Photograph: Allan Wright/Alamy

It's between these two stone circles that archaeologist Nick Card and his team are excavating a huge settlement of neolithic stone buildings. The earliest date from about 3300BC, their walls and hearths crisply intact, their pots and stone tools in remarkable profusion, the whole bounded by six-metre-wide monumental walls. "You could continue for several lifetimes and not get to the bottom of it," says the neatly white-bearded, laconic Card as we gaze out over the site, presently covered with tarpaulin to protect it from the winter storms. "Every year it never fails to produce something that astounds us." After nearly two decades of digging, they have excavated only about 10% of its area, and about 5% of its volume. It goes deep: buildings are stacked on the ruins of older ones; the place was in use for 1,000 years. When summer comes, they'll dig again. When the coverings come off each July, says Card's colleague, Anne Mitchell, "down you go and you're among the ghosts of the past".

You could continue for several lifetimes and not get to the bottom of it

Many of the most intriguing finds from the Ness of Brodgar will be on show at the British Museum this month in a new exhibition, [the World of Stonehenge](#), a survey of northern-European prehistory from the era of the

hunter-gatherers to the early bronze age, using the long, complex history of Britain's most celebrated neolithic monument as the story's spine. The landscape around the ness reminds me of the barrow-studded downs around Stonehenge, in fact – both have the feel of a vast stage, ready to be used for ritual or performance. The earliest buildings here are older than Stonehenge, though. "For neolithic stone architecture, Orkney blows everywhere else out of the water," says Neil Wilkin, curator of the British Museum show.



Spellbinding ... the Hove amber cup, c 1750BC Photograph: Royal Pavilion & Museums, Brighton & Hove

Elsewhere in Europe – including the settlement at Durrington Walls in Wiltshire, now thought to be where the builders of Stonehenge lived – wood was the favoured construction material for neolithic domestic buildings. But in Orkney the inhabitants also built their houses from stone. (There were perhaps many wooden structures too, but stone architecture around here is so profuse that the search for postholes feels less urgent; there are few trees on Orkney now, but maybe more then, as well as a plentiful supply of driftwood.) It means the whole archipelago is dotted not just with incredibly well preserved neolithic tombs, neatly built out of the local flagstone, but also villages – construction of a scale and quality that would not be repeated until well into the medieval era, 4,000 years later. These include the famous [Skara Brae](#), a coastal settlement revealed when a storm whipped away the

great blanket of sand that had hidden it until 1850. But there are other, more ghostly places, too, like the unexcavated village on the eroding coastline of Sanday that Mark Edmonds, local resident and York University archaeology professor emeritus, describes at the start of his book, [Orcadia](#). Orkney was not peripheral or cut off in the stone age; its surrounding waters were not barriers but pathways, to Ireland, to mainland Britain, and beyond. Neolithic axes made of jadeite, quarried in the Italian Alps, have been found in Scotland: the most beautiful example, on loan from the [National Museum of Scotland](#), will be in the World of Stonehenge show. “It’s so simple and so exquisite,” says the exhibition’s assistant curator, Jennifer Wexler, “with a kind of modernist feel to it. And it just sparkles in the light.” Aesthetics were important in this world.



‘For neolithic stone architecture, Orkney blows everywhere else out of the water’ ... the dig at the Ness of Brodgar. Photograph: Mark Ferguson2/Alamy

The characteristic pottery – “grooved ware” – used by the builders of Stonehenge was first made in Orkney, it is thought. Card and his team have found 100,000 sherds of it so far. Mitchell explains how they tease it out of the middens (ancient refuse heaps) using a cake slice and an aluminium sheet salvaged from an old helicopter. A lot of these sherds are in boxes stacked floor-to-ceiling in their HQ, a bungalow on the site bursting with

material. Some of the pottery is rather crumbly – like “digestive biscuits”, says ceramics expert Roy Towers, one of the volunteers on this [donations-funded dig](#). Jan Blatchford, another highly skilled volunteer, shows me how [reflectance transformation imaging](#) – a digital photography technique using multiple camera angles – can expose details barely visible to the naked eye. Here is the mark where a plaited mat made its imprint on the base of one newly made, unfired pot; here are the whorls of the maker’s [thumbprint](#) on another, bringing the dizzyingly intimate sense of a human hand shaping the vessel 5,000 years ago.

It was out of the window of this little house that, washing vegetables at her sink one day in 2003, the former owner saw a plough stutter as a piece of masonry got lodged between its blades. It was worked, neolithic stone. The farmer contacted the local archaeologists. “We’d all been driving past the place for years assuming it was a natural ridge,” says Edmonds – rather than ancient ruins, hiding in plain sight. The immense settlement is an ongoing revelation – and yet, perhaps, not entirely surprising. The islands are teeming with neolithic remains. Edmonds tells me he once interviewed Orcadian families, asking them about the ancient stone axes and other finds they have on their mantelpieces, rich with stories of discovery by this or that great-grandparent. Some of these neolithic finds, like the intricately [carved stone balls](#) that turn up here and elsewhere, or [the incredible newly discovered Burton Agnes](#) and [Folkton “drums”](#), little stone cylinders found buried with children in North Yorkshire, have no obvious practical purpose, and are decorated with designs that are obscure to our eyes, dense with irrecoverable significance. The same goes for the ancient “cup and ring” marks that exist on naturally occurring outcrops in the British landscape, in great quantity in places like [Kilmartin Glen](#) in Argyll. “I like the idea that each is a prayer or a mantra … I think the meaning may be in the making,” muses Wilkin of the patterns.



Outrageously strange ... a Schifferstadt gold hat, c 1600 BC. Photograph: Kurt Diehl/Trustees of the British Museum

The buildings of the Ness of Brodgar are also decorated and inscribed, thickly but often subtly, with patterns – lozenges, cross-hatching, sometimes a kind of butterfly shape. At times the marks can be hard to make out. “One building had been exposed for several years and it wasn’t until the sun hit it in a particular way that we began to see it,” Card says. “We find more in August than July, in the raking light,” adds Mitchell.

These patterns, these subtle strokes in the stone, have their echoes throughout the [British Museum](#) exhibition. Wilkin tells me he wanted to tell a story of influence and connection, of ideas travelling beyond the horizon, of people on the move. That starts with those who trudged across Doggerland when Britain’s east coast was still connected to continental Europe, and continues with those who brought farming to Britain from across the Channel about 6,000 years ago, to the “Beaker people” who arrived from around 2500BC, all but replacing them. The story is almost unimaginably long, told through artefacts from the haunting headdress fashioned by hunter-gatherers from deer antlers 11,000 years ago in Star Carr, Yorkshire, all the way to the outrageously strange conical hats fashioned from gold in France and Germany up to 8,000 years later. Not to mention the spellbinding teacup-size vessel, shaped from a single lump of

amber about 1750BC, that's a treasure of the Hove Museum and ought to be better known, and what I can't help thinking of as "the amber spyglass" – a disk of translucent amber set in bronze, made in Denmark around 1200BC, that might once, possibly, have been used to "catch" the sun.

Why the peoples of Orkney, and Wiltshire, and many other places in Britain, built vast monuments of stone 5,000 years ago, is a question that can never be definitively answered – and when we try, we almost certainly say more about ourselves than the real intentions of our distant ancestors. When I ask Edmonds what he thinks – we are standing in the little reconstructed neolithic house at Skara Brae at the time, sheltering from a hailstorm with a flask of coffee – he offers one word, albeit with a question mark: "Hubris?" Humans, he argues, seem to build remarkable monuments when they are either establishing power – or feeling under threat or pressure. Maybe these far distant people, their lives so alien and so unreachable, would find something to recognise in us, after all.

This article was amended on 16 February 2022. The time difference between the deer antler headdress and the gold conical hats is up to 8,000 years based on the date range of the discoveries, not 10,000 as stated in an earlier version.

- [The World of Stonehenge](#) is at the British Museum, London, 17 February to 17 July. For information about the neolithic remains of Orkney, visit [orkney.com](http://orkney.com).
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## The World of Stonehenge review – even the stone axes amaze



Glowing in gold ... The Nebra Sky Disc at The World of Stonehenge exhibition at the British Museum, London. Photograph: Neil Hall/EPA

### **British Museum, London**

This fiercely emotional exhibition venerates the people of ancient Britain,

uncovering a mystical landscape of gods and kings



[Jonathan Jones](#)

Mon 14 Feb 2022 19.01 EST

Stonehenge is a place you just have to go and see. An exhibition inspired by it is surely doomed to fail – the mystery killed by cases of broken beakers. But [The World of Stonehenge](#) is as magical as a great barrow full of glinting treasure. It hooks you with a wooden trident (two of these are on display) and plunges you into primal waters of the imagination. It is a knockout epic.

It can't include Stonehenge, of course, but it does have [Seahenge](#). This monument is made of wood and had to be removed from its seashore home to preserve it – so here it returns from the past. Gnarled wooden columns stand in the twilight. You go up to the semicircle and stare closer into their ridged brown surfaces. Maybe you glimpse a face, an eye, a shadowy form. You know these are not just old posts but the embodiment of ancient powers whose names we have forgotten, for now.

Seahenge is the physical and emotional heart of the British Museum's moving journey to the lost world of European prehistory. It was erected by the shore in Norfolk in 2049BC (according to tree ring analysis), around 500

years after the main construction of Stonehenge. It brings the outdoors inside, and holds you mystified.

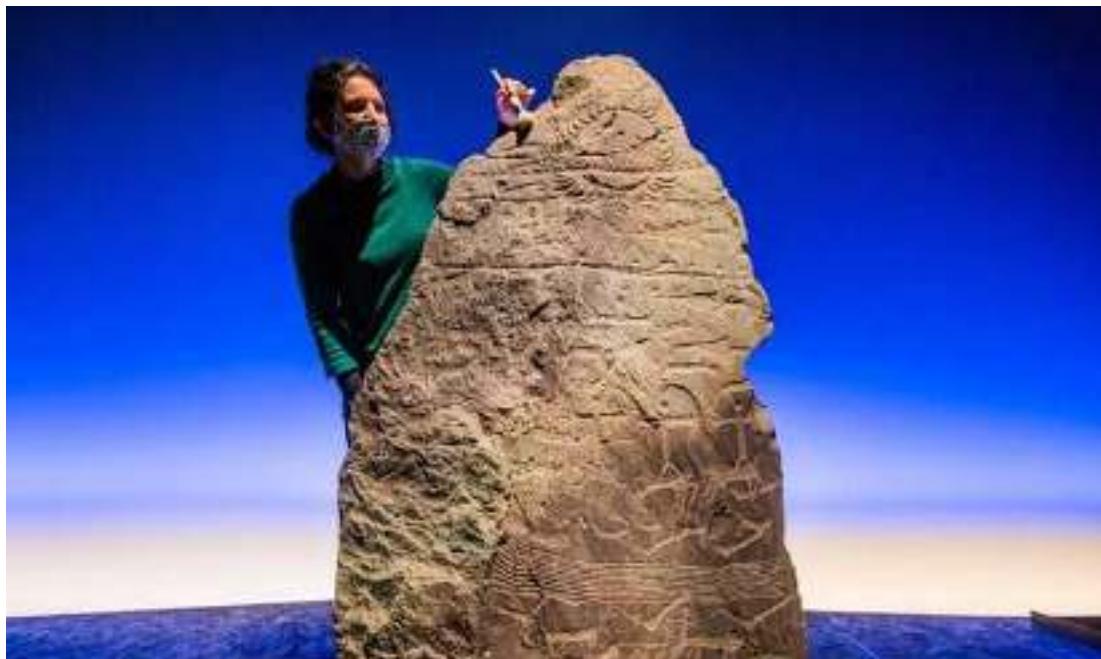


Bringing the outdoors inside ... A curator working on the timber columns of Seahenge in The World of Stonehenge exhibition. Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

But if you are not already in a pretty woozy state by the time you reach this installation, you haven't paid attention. Even the stone axes astound, arranged in a wall of smooth jade forms whose similarity becomes an asset. In front of the axes are finds from [Avalon Marsh](#). This is not a new folk festival but a bog outside Glastonbury whose name associates it with King Arthur. The ancient wooden track reassembled here helped people keep their feet dry crossing this wetland nearly 6,000 years ago. Also from Avalon Marsh is a rough wooden idol that's contemporary with Stonehenge. It has "male and female attributes", says the catalogue: breasts and a phallus.

Was it thrown in the marsh deliberately? Like Arthur getting his sword from the Lady of the Lake, ancient people seem to have seen magic in water and cached gods and weapons there. Seahenge is surely the expression of a reverence for the grey waters of the North Sea.

The centre of the belief system that built Stonehenge, however, was the sun. You meet it right at the start of this exhibition on a standing stone from Italy that has drawings scratched on its front. Human figures and herds of animals scurry about under a huge round flaming sun engraved at the summit of the stone. The sun also glows in gold against a blue bronze sky on the [Nebra Sky Disc](#), from Germany, a stunning map of the night sky made about 3,600 years ago: the Pleiades twinkle between the sun and a crescent moon, apparently showing a juxtaposition that was later used by Babylonian astronomers to calculate leap years. There is also a boat on the Sky Disc – the boat of the sun. This is a reminder that Stonehenge was built when the pyramids were being raised in Egypt. Next to the Great Pyramid at Giza survives the [Solar Boat of Khufu](#), a full-sized ship for him to sail through the sky with the sun god.



Sun at the centre ... A carved standing stone from Italy, c2500BC, in The World of Stonehenge exhibition. Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

It's customary to look down on the people who created [Stonehenge](#), compared with the ancient Egyptians and Mesopotamians: they were after all illiterate. But this exhibition turns that upside down. The world unveiled here is remote but not "primitive". Stonehenge and other monuments in the British landscape are cleverly, exactly aligned to sunrise on the winter solstice, so people could gather there at the dawn of the shortest day to

propitiate the sun to renew their crops. It worked: they had a hearty lifestyle. This is shown by the cosy domesticity of Skara Brae, Orkney, where people lived in snug houses with stone shelf units – it was like The Flintstones.

This is a fiercely emotional exhibition, full of love for the people of the distant past. It even wants us to learn from them. The early agriculturalists who built the henges were communal, sharing feasts at a camp called [Durrington Walls](#) near Stonehenge. There are even remains from a party when early farmers and the last hunter-gatherers ate together, the hunters cooking venison they caught, the farmers serving beef from their herd.



Remote but not primitive ... Wooden carvings from Yorkshire, c1200BC, in The World of Stonehenge exhibition. Photograph: Neil Hall/EPA

Soon after the lintels were placed across the sarsens at Stonehenge, evidence of inequality and power intrudes on the hippy days of collectivism. The landscape around Stonehenge is dotted with barrows where notables were buried with rich grave goods. Trade was on a new scale. So was war. The exhibition culminates in glory and horror, with astonishing evidence of a Europe where combat was king. There are shattered human remains from a German battlefield, stunningly sophisticated Bronze Age armour and a man buried on Salisbury Plain with arrow heads in his spine.

This is up there with the British Museum's legendary shows on the Terracotta Army and Aztecs. It uncovers a rich and strange world under our own feet. You almost agree with the William Blake prints at the end that Stonehenge is the temple of lost Albion, a better Britain before our dark satanic mills.

- [The World of Stonehenge is at the British Museum, London, from 17 February to 17 July](#)
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Restaurateur Russell Norman at Brutto in Farringdon. Photograph: Sarah Lee/The Guardian

[The long read](#)

## **Opening nightmare: launching a restaurant into a world stricken by Covid and Brexit**

Restaurateur Russell Norman at Brutto in Farringdon. Photograph: Sarah Lee/The Guardian

The past two years have been the hardest ever for restaurants. Amid critical shortages of staff, food supplies and even customers, can a new venture from the man behind Polpo survive?

by [George Reynolds](#)

Tue 15 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

Every morning last autumn, as he took the short walk from Farringdon station in central London to his new restaurant, Russell Norman came face to face with a ghost. The pandemic had hit the hospitality sector hard, and this stretch of takeaway outfits and dine-in burger chains was no exception. A Byron, a Coco di Mama, an Itsu – all long gone, doors locked, interiors dark. And then, just before the final right turn, the one that really hurt, the words on its signage removed but the outline unmistakable: Polpo.

The Venetian-inspired restaurant, which took its name from the Italian for “octopus”, had been a breakout success for Norman in the early 2010s. With its small plates, no-reservations policy and stripped-down interiors, the original Soho site had been credited with reinventing casual dining after the Great Recession. But then, like so many brands that emerged during the same period, it started to expand: taking on investors, extending tentacles across the UK, and then collapsing in instalments from 2016 onwards. Most of its sites were forced to close in the context of a broader [casual dining crunch](#), as the cost of running a restaurant rose and the number of customers fell. These days, just two Polpos survive, in Soho and in Chelsea, west London, under the management of Norman’s former business partner Richard Beatty. Norman’s own departure from the project was finalised in June 2020.

Now, after a hiatus, he was back. For years, Norman had wanted to open an old-fashioned trattoria, replicating the homely, family run restaurants of Italy for a central London audience. A 2017 trip to Tuscany had brought his vision into sharper focus. Many of the region’s most celebrated dishes are rooted in the tradition of *cucina povera* (“poor cooking”), which makes resourceful use of pasta, beans, bread and offal. The food is nourishing and full of flavour, but beige and unphotogenic. In recognition of this, the restaurant would be called Brutto – or, in English, Ugly.

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Almost from the start, the name felt less like a clever, self-confident nod to Tuscan gastronomy – Tuscan food is not just ugly, it is “ugly but good”, *brutto ma buono* – and more like a description of Brutto’s own fortunes. The past two years have been the hardest in living memory for restaurateurs.

Brutto was supposed to open in June 2021, but the global shortage of construction materials delayed it until autumn. A further delay to the completion of the kitchen had left the head chef, Oli Diver, little time to develop the menu for opening day. Brexit had made it difficult to recruit staff. Brexit- and pandemic-related disruption had made it nearly impossible to secure crucial ingredients. When I first visited the restaurant in late September 2021, Britain was in the midst of a fuel crisis and the queues at the petrol stations were at their longest. The shortage of lorries with drivers and full tanks meant that the bar – intended to be a space where local people could pop in for an espresso – would have to get through its first few weeks without any coffee cups.

The Norman I met was a macchiato-sipping, cigarette-smoking caricature of an anxious restaurateur. But he also seemed perversely thrilled, vibrating with the nervous energy of someone facing an enormous challenge. His highly caffeinated sentences tripped over one another, offering abundant rephrasings, clarifications and reformulations. He was dressed in his typical attire: a mixture of slightly rumpled continental tailoring, open-collar shirts and Chelsea boots, as artfully dilapidated as a restored Florentine palazzo.

This was, he calculated, his 31st restaurant opening. Most of the first 15 had come as he worked his way up through the ranks at Caprice Holdings, a hospitality industry behemoth that specialised in central London restaurants in which rich people unthinkingly parted with large sums to enjoy pristine shellfish (Scott's), haute nursery food (The Ivy), or high-grade protein wrapped in gold leaf and garnished with caviar (Sexy Fish).

Polpo, which opened in 2009, was different: the room was dark, the décor distressed. But before long, the queue snaked out the door; punters packed the bar as they waited for their table. Its instant success earned Norman a slew of adulatory headlines – '[the coolest man in food](#)'; '[the new king of Soho](#)' – and introduced many Londoners to concepts like small sharing plates that would soon become ubiquitous.

Polpo targeted a younger crowd, but Brutto would be a broader church, welcoming dog-owners, parents with babies, older couples; its backstreet location gave it the cachet of a neighbourhood restaurant. Still, the parallels between the two restaurants were unavoidable: the focus on regional Italian

cuisines, the playful two-syllable names, the fact both were born into a time of crisis. All of which made the proximity of the shuttered Polpo seem like a warning. It was a constant reminder of how most restaurants end.

The economics of running a restaurant pre-pandemic were not favourable – even before Covid, restaurants in the UK went bust at three times the rate of other businesses – but they were at least familiar and, with good management and luck, survivable. Now, mid-pandemic and post-Brexit, Norman was operating in a new economic reality. The pandemic had wiped out [one in 10](#) of Britain's restaurants. When we spoke in September, as much as he was excited about the next few weeks, he was realistic about how they might conclude.

“The pressure in business terms running a restaurant is always the first month,” he said. “There’s a massive, massive capital outlay and you don’t get any money coming back into the business until a good week and a half after you’ve started to operate – partly because most restaurants open with a preview period where everything’s discounted 50%, which means you’re not making any money at all, just about covering your costs. So that first month is critical. A lot of restaurants fail because they literally run out of money, it’s as simple as that.”

“If things aren’t great, if it’s not a hit from the beginning, I’m going to have to look to borrow money in order to keep it afloat. And that’s where it gets scary.”

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A new restaurant is a precarious business venture, but to start with, it is also an empty stage. Before he found his home in restaurants, Norman had worked as a council arts administrator and then as drama teacher at a north London school; he is still, unmistakably, a thespian, from the way he works a room to his flair for circumlocution. And as much as he cared about Brutto’s financial success it was clear that the *artiste manqué* in him was just as focused on the aesthetics of the thing. Early in our time together, Norman professed: “I don’t think of myself as an entrepreneur, I think of myself as a creative.” Running a restaurant was not so different from putting on a theatrical performance – tellingly, Norman referred to Brutto’s very first service as a “technical rehearsal”. Spurred by past failures to fully realise his

vision – “I was trying for Bohemian Rhapsody but I ended up with the Birdie Song” – with Brutto he was exacting.

Push on the front door with its Italian blue-and-white *spingere* sign, and inside, everything is as precisely curated as the restaurant’s 18-and-a-half hour Spotify playlist (a mix of [Pitchfork](#)-approved rock, lo-fi electronica, and a lot of Everything But the Girl). Lampshades fashioned from napkins float from the ceiling like tiny ghosts; tables are dressed with red-and-white checked tablecloths and candles wedged into chianti bottles. One wall is given over to framed portraits, photographs and still lifes, a nod to the decor of Florentine favourite Trattoria Camillo; another is covered by a cacophonous mural by artist Neil Fox – Bosch’s Garden of Earthly Delights populated with uncanny-valley celebrity portraits and 20th-century pop culture arcana (is that Christopher Hitchens? Damien Hirst? Chet Baker?; that’s definitely Mickey Mouse, King Kong and Captain Haddock). If the inspiration for Brutto was a traditional Tuscan trattoria, the end result is 90% earnest homage and 10% high-camp pastiche.

As Norman and Diver worked together in the weeks before Brutto opened, they ran into problems in realising his very specific vision. To stock the restaurant, they relied on a diffuse network of suppliers: about 20 different outfits provided ingredients for Brutto’s kitchen; a further 15 or so provided the linen, crockery, glassware and other bits and pieces used in the dining room; another 20 serviced the restaurant’s well-stocked bar – six or seven wine merchants, then separate sources for traditional Italian aperitivi and amari like Select and Fernet-Branca, plus soft drinks and beer. All in all, Norman calculated, “60, 65 individual suppliers just to open a restaurant on a Tuesday”.



Service at Brutto. Photograph: Paul Winch-Furness

But finding the suppliers was tricky. The pandemic had forced even some of the biggest names in hospitality to downsize or shut down entirely. “About 80% of the bread suppliers we tried to contact,” Diver recalled, “Google search: permanently closed”. Those who survived were struggling with their own supply chain issues, and insisted on weekly payments, rather than the old industry standard of 60 days – agonising for a restaurant not yet producing a reliable cashflow. Even those suppliers that had stock available were running into problems. “One said they had a three-month wait time because they had no drivers, and the drivers don’t have fuel,” said Diver. “You’re expecting things to be like ‘Yep, we’ll have an account for you next week’ and instead you’re like ‘OK, so I can’t get any of that for another three months now’.”

Across the country, restaurants were suffering in similar fashion. In the month before Brutto opened, [Nando’s was forced to close](#) about 50 of its branches as it faced the prospect of running out of chicken. Another poultry giant, KFC, warned customers to expect shortened menus and packaging that “might look a little different to normal” as it struggled to secure supplies of food and materials. [McDonald’s reported a shortage of milkshakes](#) and some bottled drinks. [Pizza Hut](#) ran out of ice-cream in the same week as [Wetherspoon’s suffered nationwide beer shortages](#). And it wasn’t just fast

food and pub chains: in a [survey](#) conducted by Deliveroo last year, 89% of the small and independent restaurants on its platform had seen wholesale costs increase, and 54% had removed items from their menus owing to a lack of availability.

Given the context, even a generic pizza and pasta joint would have been challenging to get off the ground. But the task at Brutto was complicated because it took its inspiration from Florence, a city of arcane and singular culinary traditions that include *lampredotto* (stewed cow's stomach), *cibrèo* (a stew of rooster testicles, crests and wattle) and *pappa al pomodoro* (a cold tomato soup thickened with chunks of stale Tuscan unsalted bread). Norman had wanted the menu on opening day to feature a dish of wild boar sausages with lentils, but no wild boar could be found. The bread supplier was unable to offer a crusty white roll of the kind typically used in a sandwich stuffed with lampredotto; the lampredotto itself had to be shipped in from France. Except the French suppliers only sold it 20kg at time, so Brutto also had to buy a separate freezer, purely to store the vast slabs of offal.

It wasn't always this way. When Norman opened Polpo, he had far less trouble in securing outre fare like *baccalà* (salt cod) and *moscardini* (tiny baby octopuses). But these days, the economic pressures of the pandemic and the post-Brexit difficulty of getting produce into the country has forced suppliers to cut their offerings to only the guaranteed bestsellers. "The niche stuff, the suppliers just don't bother with," said Norman. "So what you end up with is a choice of goods which is really basic."

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It wasn't just supplies that were scarce. So, too, were staff. The key lieutenants had come together quickly: general manager Monique Sierra and the restaurant manager, Alexis Ross, had worked with Norman before. In the kitchen, Diver had been recruited from the well-regarded modern European restaurant Allegra, with the promise of his first head chef gig. But after this, they spent weeks hunting for a qualified deputy to Diver, a team of three or four chefs de partie, and a further three or four front of house.

On 27 September, two days before Brutto's first dress rehearsal, Norman posted on the restaurant's Instagram account a sketch of a chicken standing on a restaurant table in front of a bemused customer. The caption read

“There’s not enough staff, so you’ll have to cook me yourself”. Subsequent posts would include a list of vacancies that still need to be filled – amounting to practically the entire staff of the restaurant.

Sierra – “Russell’s representative on Earth,” as one waiter described her – led the recruiting effort for front-of-house staff. “To be blunt,” she told me, “all the people who love working in restaurants are hard to find here at the moment, because they’ve all gone home”.

The impact on the industry was brutal. Industry platform Big Hospitality [reported](#) that 660,000 jobs disappeared in 2020. And then, as businesses sought to rebuild last year, they found workers in short supply. “When the uncertainty started to ease, the market just went crazy with outbidding and competing with each other,” said Joanne Searley, operations director for JKS Restaurants, which owns 20 establishments ranging from the fast casual Bao in Borough Market to the two Michelin-starred Kitchen Table in Fitzrovia. In December 2021, JKS Restaurants found itself with more than 300 vacancies to fill.

Chefs and operators agreed that this was an unprecedented crisis. “It’s definitely the worst I’ve ever seen,” said Tom Anglesea, an acclaimed chef who has spent the best part of 18 months attempting to assemble a team for a new project in Mayfair. “You look, every week there’s new openings – and there’s just not enough manpower to go around, you know?”



A central-London restaurant during lockdown in November 2020.  
Photograph: James Veysey/Rex/Shutterstock

In an industry notorious for its exploitative and abusive workplace culture, the sudden scarcity of staff placed power in the hands of cooks and waitstaff who had long been treated as fungible. At the multinational chains like [McDonald's](#) and [Chipotle](#), food service workers put pressure on their employers to improve working conditions and wages.

“It’s an employee’s market really,” said Mandy Yin, who runs the celebrated Malaysian restaurant Sambal Shiok in north London. “There’s been high turnover since reopening last year with many choosing to leave the industry altogether – a much smaller pool of available staff.”

It also led to fierce competition, especially when it came to hiring kitchen staff. “There have been lots of attempts to poach key team members,” lamented Crispin Somerville, an industry veteran of 25 years who co-owns a London-based restaurant group including Quo Vadis, Barrafina and El Pastor. “It’s definitely got much more cut-throat out there.” In June 2021, the Italian restaurant Ombra – based in east London, but casting around for cooks in the same pool as Brutto – announced via Instagram that it would be closing on Tuesdays and Wednesdays until further notice, blaming a “major shortage of staff both on the floor and in the kitchen caused by the brutal

trifecta of the pandemic, Brexit and a wasteman poaching some of our team.”

As he tried to set up Brutto’s kitchen, Diver quickly became acquainted with the brutal trifecta. He took to advertising vacancies on industry job boards, paying up to £200 per post for negligible returns. Even promising leads had a habit of crumbling to dust. “Ten per cent of [chefs] you try to get in contact with will turn up,” he began, before pausing to correct himself. “No, less, less. 10% say they’ll turn up, 5% turn up, 2% are fit for the job, and you’ll say ‘OK, well let me know what you think in a couple of days’, and they’ll come back to me and say they’ve been offered a sous chef job somewhere else for about £35,000.”

In the weeks building up to opening day, Russell’s brother, Lloyd, was called into action in the kitchen, despite having no prior culinary experience. (Even someone relatively unskilled can be useful: any time a chef is not chopping onions or peeling potatoes, they can spend on more complex tasks.) For front-of-house, “Hire on the basis of attitude rather than experience” became the motto. Among the new hires was Ryan Petersen, a former theatre publicist who had not waited tables for two decades. (“Russell took a real chance on me,” he said.) Meanwhile, Diver tailored his menu to take account of an understaffed, underskilled kitchen, rejecting labour-intensive tasks like preparing fresh pasta in-house and focusing on dishes that could be prepared, as much as possible, before service began.

One dish that could not be prepared in advance was the legendary bistecca – a giant T-bone steak that represents one of the cornerstones of Florentine gastronomy, cooked over flames and served bloody, like something out of Dante’s Inferno. Norman had a provisional arrangement in place with a supplier, but was always looking for ways to shorten his supply chain. The day before opening, an opportunity presented itself, courtesy of the Flat Iron Steak founder Charlie Carroll: would Norman be interested in a supplier based just metres away in Smithfield market, who could provide him with the giant 15kg loins from which the Bistecca would be hewn? Norman jumped at the chance, and hours before his new project opened its doors it was possible to see the onetime king of Soho strolling through Farringdon with the best part of a dry-aged cow slung over his shoulder.

It was chancy, last-minute stuff, but it worked. Through the technical rehearsal on Wednesday 29 September and a series of soft opening services in the days that followed, customers came and went and the whole shaky edifice did not topple over. Partly, this was due to carefully managing the number of orders – no more than 15 every half hour was the sweet spot that kept punters happy without overloading the kitchen.

“I was pessimistic and had many prepared apologies up my sleeve should things go wrong,” Norman told me the following Monday. But disaster had not struck. “At the end of each service we all looked at each other and thought ‘My God, we did it, it felt like a real restaurant!’”

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Before Brutto opened its doors, Norman had planned for all the predictable things – wages, food bills, rent – but one unknowable was how much each punter would be willing to part with. Brutto’s pricing was London mid-market: more expensive than an Italian casual dining mainstay like Franco Manca, but a long way off the capital’s Italianate heavy hitters like Locanda Locatelli or Murano, where dinner with wine could run to hundreds of pounds per person. Norman had therefore originally budgeted for a spend of £40 a head, enough to cover a starter like *coccoli* (fried dough “cuddles” served with prosciutto and tangy *stracchino* cheese); a pasta like the tagliatelle ragù, winkingly undersold on the English menu as “pasta with meat sauce”; a glass of wine and a coffee.

But the Brutto Instagram account from the time, with its photos of the bistecca blackboard – its offerings systematically crossed out as customers order steaks costing £62, £70, £75, £80 – demonstrated how readily punters were parting with their money. Lots of people were coming in: local designers, new mothers, camera-happy food dorks – all of them spending more on food and booze than Norman had expected (the figure per head, in fact, was closer to £70). Sierra spoke in awed terms about the gentleman at table 49, a prodigious consumer of negronis, champagne and brandy who would come in for lunch and take down an entire bistecca and bottle of wine by himself.

“I think it’s working,” Norman told me on a rainy day in early November. “The restaurant has a very good chance of survival.” But he also admitted

that the kitchen was running on fumes, and the challenge of finding enough people to get Brutto off the ground had now become the challenge of finding reinforcements to give the vanguard time to recover. A typical kitchen might expect to manage with a head chef and a handful of sous chefs working on rotation, but in Brutto's early days Diver had to churn through 90-hour work-weeks with only his senior sous chef Alan Williams (and Norman's brother, Lloyd) for company. Diver was phlegmatic – "I've never worked in a kitchen that's calm and relaxed" – but with no days off and no end in sight, he seemed to be hitting his limit.



Brutto. Photograph: Paul Winch-Furness

There were two principal problems. The first was time. Diver's strategy of lightening the load on the kitchen during service meant that a huge amount of prep had to be fitted into the remaining hours. Carrots, onion and celery had to be chopped and simmered down into *soffritto*, the aromatic base for the soups and meat ragùs that are central to Tuscan gastronomy. The sauces themselves had to blip and bubble for hours before they could be set aside, decanted and refrigerated for later use. It was impossible, at the start of the week, to do all the necessary prep for the 10 services ahead (lunch and dinner, Tuesday to Saturday). The fix here was easy, though painful financially: from 14 October, Brutto would be closed on Tuesday lunchtimes.

The second issue was gnarlier. Up to this point, front of house had tried to keep things manageable for the kitchen by limiting numbers in the dining room. Occasionally, it would be the customers who lost out: amid positive online reviews, there was a small but volatile subset of [Tripadvisor](#) reviews decrying long wait times for a table, or how front-of-house had handled them in their disgruntlement. Now that the restaurant was up and running, Norman wanted to increase the number of covers. “We’re serving more than 130 people a day and we could definitely do more,” he told me. “This is a finely balanced mathematical machine.” The margins between success and failure, profit and loss, were razor-thin.

“It’s a constant worry for me that I’m going to burn my chefs out because demand is so high,” Norman said. His hope was that he had bought enough goodwill from his staff to get through the gruelling first few months. “Everything has been collaborative and so they are completely invested in it, and even though they grumble at the end of the shift, ‘Oh my God, that was tougher than I expected’ I say look, guys, come on, here’s a beer, here’s a second beer, let’s talk about it. We have to push on. We need more staff, we need more prep chefs – we’ll get there. It’s hard work at the moment but I promise you – you will be rewarded.”

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Despite mounting stress, I wasn’t aware of any blow-ups in the kitchen. “[Diver] is just so calm all the time,” Sierra said. For Petersen, who had last worked front of house in the days of Gordon Ramsay and Marco Pierre White, the difference was striking. “The old notion of the bully and shouting chef does still exist – we know this – but it doesn’t happen here. The kitchen isn’t a scary place for a waiter to go.”

And, in time, Norman’s optimism and the kitchen’s perseverance were vindicated. In Brutto’s opening weeks, Norman had fretted that people might not “get” it: that they would come expecting Polpo 2.0, or something MasterChef-flashy, or Michelin-star precise. He emphasised how Brutto’s inspiration was family run *trattorie*, that the food could be strikingly simple: a plate of raw cabbage, seasoned with lemon and olive oil; bitter chicory puntarelle, dressed with garlic and anchovy. Still, Norman was perhaps overanxious about managing customer expectations. Pasta, £5 negronis and decent music was an easy enough concept to “get”.

And people clearly got it. Good reviews kept appearing in the newspapers. One night, the Michelin-starred [celebrity chef Jun Tanaka](#) visited, and went into the kitchen after service to pass on his congratulations. Websites regularly scoured by London's foodies began to include Brutto on rankings of the city's [hottest restaurants](#). Its booking policy – nothing taken further than 14 days out, with reservations for the 14th day released at 9.30am on the dot – created further demand. As Brutto's fame spread, so did the number of chefs interested in working there. After spending thousands on recruitment ads, Diver now had chefs coming to him.

By early December, the team was as jubilant as I had seen it. Norman had shaved his head in the spirit of “fuck it” when things had been at their most parlous; now it had started to grow back, he no longer looked like a condemned man. On one of the days I visited, it was his birthday and the team had banded together to get him a smart Missoni tie that he immediately put on in place of the one he had been wearing. He was quick to credit his young crew for all Brutto's recent success, pointing out Lily, a 19-year-old waiter now running her own section of the restaurant with the elan of a seasoned veteran; and Filippo, a part-time waiter who alternated studying for his politics degree with stints in front of house, adding observations about what real Tuscan food looks like (“It's not a real bistecca if it's under a kilogram”).

The buildup to Christmas was well under way; business was booming; life at Brutto was, for the first time, unambiguously *buono*. Norman couldn't resist a joke, as I prepared to finish reporting for the day. “I guess,” he said, “you need more jeopardy.”

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We did not have to wait long. As the Omicron variant took hold around the globe, the UK government announced on 8 December that it would be tightening Covid-related restrictions and recommended that everyone work from home if they could. It was a painful blow for Brutto, which relied heavily on custom from the offices and studios around it.

But, when I spoke to Norman in the week before Christmas, it was more what the government *wasn't* doing that was the real source of anger. “There

doesn't seem to be any joined-up thinking," he lamented. Like many other restaurants in the UK, Brutto was on a precipice.

The run-up to Christmas is traditionally the busiest time of the year for the hospitality industry: pubs host raucous team drinks; restaurants cater to team lunches or office parties. But now, customers were spooked. Things were especially bad in London, where diners were down to 57% of their 2019 volumes; bookings at Brutto were down 40% on usual levels as the threat of another lockdown lingered.

Then again, a lockdown would at least have represented some clear action. What was so punishing about the current situation was the barrel was being drained without anyone in the Treasury prepared to top up the shortfall. "It's just so frustrating that it's neither one thing nor the other," Norman said. "Because there's no edict from the government to close down hospitality, there's no support."



Boris Johnson's September 2020 address on new Covid measures affecting the hospitality industry. Photograph: Peter Summers/Getty

It felt like a return to Brutto's early days, with a skeleton staff trying to make do, and financial disaster constantly hovering, as fixed costs – wages, rent, taxes – continued to demand attention even as takings dwindled. "It's not

“just day by day, it’s hour by hour,” said Norman, as he nervously awaited another batch of lateral flows. “If one of them comes back with two lines, it’s game over.”

Norman and his lieutenants agonised over the number of staff available, gaming out different scenarios. Could they just open as a bar? Serve cold food only? With a future lockdown still a possibility, could Diver really take the risk of ordering a week’s worth of supplies if they were going to end up unused? Hospitality margins are thin: a day’s ingredients cost about £3,000; Brutto’s profit from the 10 weeks since it opened were only three or four times that. The restaurant could be plunged into the red with a single ill-judged shopping spree.

Bit by bit, the number of healthy staff dwindled into single figures. In a two-week span, more than three-quarters of them had contracted Covid. In the end, it was inevitable: Brutto closed its doors for Christmas on 21 December, three days earlier than planned.

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Brutto was not alone in its suffering. Omicron had cut a swathe through pre-Christmas festivities. One of the many restaurants that closed early was the Quality Chop House, just up the road from Brutto in Clerkenwell. Its co-owners, Daniel Morgenthau and Will Lander, made the proactive but painful decision to close on 16 December. “We just had this impending sense of doom,” explained Morgenthau, citing increasing Covid cases among his staff and declining guest bookings. The closure took its toll: “I think it was three weeks that we were paying full salaries and full rent with no government support and no trade – that cost us significantly, not least because that would historically be our best period of trade of the year.” The trade body UK Hospitality would eventually estimate that the combination of fewer bookings and early closures would cost pubs, bars and restaurants an average of £10,000 each.

And now it was January, a month dreaded by restaurateurs. The first month of the year is always a tough sell as customers are recovering from overeating and overspending. But it soon became clear that it had been fear of missing Christmas – rather than Omicron itself – that had been the real deterrent. Now that customers no longer had to worry about a positive test

forcing them to cancel Christmas with loved ones, they began to return to the restaurants they had been so studiously avoiding.

On 7 January, I paid a visit to Brutto, to find the team in good spirits once again. The first few days back had been better than expected, and another lockdown seemed less likely by the day. There were still staffing issues – Filippo was stuck in Italy, owing to the latest round of border closures – but there had been enough of the core team fit and healthy to reopen earlier that week, and enough part-timers keen for a few extra hours to fill the gap. As the restaurant slowly built towards service – a wine delivery decanted on to shelves, bread ferried over to the service station – Norman’s new puppy, Twig, nosed its way around the unfamiliar floorboards.

For Diver, the Christmas break had come at an opportune time, giving him a chance to recharge. Forty minutes before lunch service, he had already put in a shift in the kitchen, but was full of energy, singing the praises of a soon-to-be-delivered pasta boiler, which would both simplify one of the kitchen’s most boring-but-important tasks and free up some much-needed space on the hob. “It constantly tops itself up,” he rhapsodised. “It’s going to be such a dream!”

There was a broader optimism, too, a sense that there were finally enough spare hands to deliver the restaurant as originally envisioned. Since launch, Brutto’s menu had barely changed. The first order of business was to start mixing it up a bit, better to channel the spirit of the Tuscan restaurants that inspired the place. “The menu was going to be seasonal, changing,” Diver said. “That was always the idea, but over the last few months there’s been no time to think.”

At last, he had the time – and the staff – to do it. He walked back downstairs to show two new trainees the basics, preparing them for life at Brutto. Diver told me that the previous day was the first time they had actually been prepared for dinner service before it started. By 5.30, they were ready, and a new and uncertain peace had descended. “People were asking me what to do,” Diver said. “And I was like: just wait for the customers.”

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## Inflation

# Inflation may pose tougher challenge than end of Covid restrictions

[Larry Elliott](#)



Employees are in a strong position – but the Bank will be keen to avoid a wage-price spiral



With inflation hitting a 30-year high, employees will seek to protect their living standards by asking for wage increases. Photograph: Vuk Valcic/Sopa Images/Rex/Shutterstock

Tue 15 Feb 2022 04.29 EST

The UK [labour market](#) was hit by two big shocks towards the end of 2021: the end of the government's furlough scheme and the arrival of the Omicron variant.

The good news from the latest [official data](#) is both were negotiated without the feared lengthening of the dole queues. Employment is up, job vacancies are at a new record high and the unemployment rate is down.

The bad news is that the challenge posed by [rising inflation](#) looks like it will prove to be a trickier hurdle to surmount than the end of the furlough or the restrictions that were imposed by the four nations of the UK in response to Omicron.

When the [Bank of England](#) held off from raising interest rates last November it did so because it wanted to judge the impact of ending wage subsidies. The evidence is now in: there is nothing in the latest figures to

stay the hand of Threadneedle Street's monetary policy committee. Borrowing costs have been raised at the MPC's last two meetings and will go up again.

The tightness of the labour market means average earnings are rising at an annual rate of more than 4%. That's because the demand for workers as businesses recover exceeds supply. The number of people in employment is more than 500,000 below its pre-pandemic level, largely because of a fall in self-employment. Older workers have left the workforce, many of them on health grounds. This combination of factors means employees are in a stronger bargaining position than they might have expected a year ago, when the economy was locked down and the furlough still in place.

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But earnings would need to rise by even more to keep pace with rising prices. [Inflation](#) hit a 30-year high of 5.4% in December and will rise still further over the coming months, which means the squeeze on real incomes will intensify.

In the circumstances, workers will seek to protect their living standards by asking for higher pay. That pressure will be sufficient to make the [Bank of England](#) nervous about a wage-price spiral, but not strong enough to compensate employees when the cost of living exceeds 7% in the spring.

## Going is tough in post-furlough Britain

Government support meant corporate insolvency was a dog that didn't bark earlier in the pandemic. Help came in a number of forms: firms had their wage bills covered, there were grants and business rates holidays; and companies in trouble were given breathing space from their creditors.

Businesses are now being asked to manage on their own, and unsurprisingly a large number of them are finding the going extremely tough. The [latest figures](#) for England and Wales in January show the number of company insolvencies more than doubled from the same month in 2021, as did the number of compulsory liquidations.

That's not quite as alarming as it looks given the artificially low levels of business distress during the pandemic. Business failures last month were only slightly up on the pre-pandemic month of January 2020, a better comparison.

Even so, the trend is now clearly upwards. Creditors are taking a tougher line now that they can. And, having just about kept going through two years of Covid-19, the owners of some small businesses are giving up because they can't see things improving with a year of rocketing energy bills, rising inflation and higher interest rates ahead.

To some extent, this is perfectly normal. Businesses cease trading all the time, and the failure rate is bound to be higher now given the acceleration of structural changes – the increase in online shopping, for example – seen in the past two years.

So while insolvencies are still a dog that hasn't really barked, they are starting to emit a low growl. They need to be watched.

## US inflation figures a worry for UK

Another day, another set of worrying inflation news from the other side of the Atlantic. US producer prices – a gauge of what businesses charge for their goods and services – [rose by 1%](#) last month, double what Wall Street was expecting. There are two points to note here: producer prices are a good early guide to future consumer prices and, as a rule of thumb, what happens in the US happens in the UK with a lag of a few months.

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## 2022.02.15 - Coronavirus

- Live Covid: South Korea records highest number of deaths in a month; Cook Islands reports first case of virus
- Vaccines Plans to delay jabs for UK children aged five to 11 criticised
- UK Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall tests positive for Covid
- France Covid ‘freedom convoy’ heads for Brussels despite police warning

[Coronavirus live](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

# **Coronavirus: long Covid less common in fully jabbed, says UK health agency; Japan records highest daily deaths – as it happened**

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## Vaccines and immunisation

# Plans to delay Covid jabs for UK children aged five to 11 criticised

JCVI advised vaccinating the age group last week, but government is still ‘reviewing’ the evidence

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A child receiving a Covid vaccination. Photograph: Norberto Duarte/AFP/Getty Images

*[Nicola Davis](#) and [Rowena Mason](#)*

Mon 14 Feb 2022 13.42 EST

Plans to offer Covid vaccinations to all children aged five to 11 have been [delayed by the government](#) because the jabs have not been deemed urgent.

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) decided more than a week ago to expand the vaccination programme to all that age group and handed its advice to ministers.

However, the government has not publicly declared whether it will go ahead with the offer and is still “reviewing” the evidence for another week. The delay represents a break with its previous moves to accept JCVI advice straight away.

The decision is now expected to be announced on 21 February, when a long-term strategy for “living with Covid” is to be outlined by [Boris Johnson](#). It is understood any vaccination programme for five- to 11-year-olds would not start until Easter (mid-April) at the earliest.

JCVI members told the Guardian they were in the dark as to reasons for the delay. But the holdup appears, at least in part, to be down to the JCVI advice that the jabs are non-urgent.

A government spokesperson said: “We have received advice from the JCVI as part of the wider work on the living with Covid strategy so we will set out more details in due course. You can expect more detail next week.”

The decision to offer the jab to clinically vulnerable children in the five-to-11 age group [was made in December](#).

Prof Christina Pagel, director of UCL’s Clinical Operational Research Unit and a member of the Independent Sage group of experts, criticised the approach.

“I definitely welcome the news that parents are given the choice whether to vaccinate their primary school-age children with a vaccine that has proven both very safe and very effective. Unfortunately it is coming too late to prevent the maybe half a million or more infections in five- to 11-year-olds this year so far, and the lack of transparency around JCVI decision-making and government intervention remains worrying,” she said.

“Waiting until after the end of term seems perverse, when [rates in that age group are the highest](#) in all age groups. This delay in announcing is just

causing additional stress and confusion for the many families that have been waiting to vaccinate their children with no clarity.”

Dr Simon Williams, a behavioural scientist at the University of Swansea, also expressed concern.

“The fact that the JCVI have now apparently recommended the offer, and the UK government have delayed action on this, despite the fact that a majority of parents report wanting it for their children, and the fact that Covid is ripping through the primary school population, beggars belief,” he said.

Dr Nathalie MacDermott, of King’s College London, a clinical doctor sub-specialising in paediatric infectious diseases in the NHS, also raised questions about transparency.

“It is unusual that the government have chosen not to announce the decision made by the JCVI in relation to the immunisation of five- to 11-year-olds against Covid-19, particularly as they have not given a clear reason for this,” she said.

“If they are doing this because they are seeking information or evidence from other sectors then this is perhaps understandable, but then this reason should be clearly stated ... To simply delay ... without giving a reason, when it is public knowledge a decision has been made, raises concerns, not least since recent comments and decisions relating to public health no longer seem to be ‘following the science’.”

Mike Short, Unison’s head of education, said: “Offering the vaccine to younger children is crucial if many more hours of learning are not to be lost. Ministers should stop dithering and announce jab plans for all primary pupils to reassure parents and school staff.

“Covid is running rife in schools. The half-term holidays should help infection rates, but the prime minister’s decision to jettison sensible isolation rules next week could make everything significantly worse.”

Prof Penny Ward, visiting professor in pharmaceutical medicine at King's College London, said: "Additional issues which come into play include how to schedule these vaccinations in the context not only of Covid vaccination delivery but also delivering other childhood vaccines, which are equally important in this age group, in the context of a service which is overstretched."

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**Camilla, the Duchess of Cornwall**

## **Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall tests positive for coronavirus**

Clarence House says Camilla is self-isolating after Prince Charles contracted Covid last week



Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall is self-isolating. Photograph: Tolga Akmen/PA

*[Caroline Davies](#)*

Mon 14 Feb 2022 07.51 EST

The Duchess of Cornwall has tested positive for coronavirus, Clarence House has announced.

A spokesman said: “Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Cornwall has tested positive for Covid-19 and is self-isolating. We continue to follow government guidelines.”

The announcement follows that made on Thursday disclosing Prince Charles, 73, had tested positive for the virus.

The duchess, 74, carried out a string of engagements on the same day. She described herself then as “luckily” negative, saying of her testing regime during a visit to the Thames Valley Partnership in Buckinghamshire: “I’ve taken it so many times.”

Concern for the Queen’s health mounted after it emerged the monarch had been in direct contact with Charles two days before he tested positive. Buckingham Palace said on Thursday that the Queen was not displaying any symptoms, but refused to confirm whether she had tested positive or negative, citing medical privacy.

The 95-year-old spent time with Charles last Tuesday, when the prince was carrying out an investiture on her behalf at her Windsor Castle home.

The evening before his positive test result, Charles and Camilla had met the chancellor, Rishi Sunak, and others at a reception at the British Museum.

It was the second time Charles had tested positive, but this is the first time for the duchess.

Charles first tested positive in March 2020, when he suffered mild symptoms. Prince William tested positive shortly afterwards. Charles and Camilla have been triple vaccinated, according to royal sources.

The duchess was maskless when she met dozens of people on a visit to the Nourish Hub community kitchen in Notting Hill, west London, on 10 February, where she joined a cooking demonstration. She did wear a mask for some of her visit to Paddington Haven, a sexual assault referral centre, the same day.

On Monday morning, Clarence House alerted the organisations Camilla visited and the media who covered her engagements. It is understood the charities have begun the process of contacting the scores of people who were in close contact with the duchess.

According to government guidelines, when the prince tested positive, the duchess was not required to self-isolate because she was fully vaccinated. It is said she followed recommendations to begin taking lateral flow tests every day for seven days, in keeping with the rules.

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## Belgium

# Belgian police prevent French ‘freedom convoy’ from entering Brussels

Barriers and checkpoints set up around European quarter, and drivers directed to park and rest area

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A demonstrator waves a Canadian flag in a parking lot outside Brussels on 14 February. Photograph: Kenzo Tribouillard/AFP/Getty Images

*[Kim Willsher](#) in Paris*

Mon 14 Feb 2022 13.25 EST

Belgian police have stopped drivers taking part in France’s so-called freedom convoy from entering Brussels, where they planned to hold a

demonstration on Monday.

Hundreds of protesters had headed north from Paris region on Sunday but Brussels authorities said the convoy would not be allowed to enter the city.

Police set up barriers and enforced checks around the European quarter, home to the EU headquarters and other buildings including the European parliament.

The protest against Covid restrictions and high energy prices shifted its focus to the symbolic heart of the EU after police prevented most of the estimated 3,000 vehicles from [entering Paris](#) at the weekend.

About 100 managed to get past the police and converged on the Champs Élysées, where they were eventually dispersed with teargas on Saturday evening.

Belgian police said they had deployed forces along several motorways and stopped vehicles with French registration plates heading for the capital.

The mayor of Brussels, Philippe Close, said police were directing vehicles to a parking and rest area just outside the city, capable of accepting up to 10,000 vehicles, and warned demonstrators this was the only place they would be allowed to converge.

He said protesters could be allowed to enter Brussels on foot, but they would not be allowed to “take the capital hostage”. Officials banned any demonstrations in the city on Monday.

On Sunday night French police said there were about 1,300 vehicles converging on the northern city of Lille, not far from the Belgian border.

01:17

French ‘freedom convoys’ head towards Paris to protest against Covid rules – video

The French convoy, inspired by the movement that has paralysed [Ottawa in Canada](#), has brought together people opposed to the vaccine pass, *gilets*

*jaunes* (yellow vests), and anti-government protesters angered at energy price rises.

Jean-Pierre Schmit, 58, an unemployed man from Toulouse, told Agence France-Presse: “We’re going to Brussels to try to block it to fight against this policy of permanent control.”

Sandrine, 45, from Lyon, said: “We’re aiming to get to all the European institutions one by one. We don’t know where this is leading, but we’re on our way and we will make ourselves heard.”

The convoy was reported to be aiming for Strasbourg, where the European parliament also sits, after Brussels.

### Chart

Jean-Christophe Couvy, the secretary general of the SGP police union, said the convoy appeared to have a number of targets. “There’s Brussels and the European parliament in Strasbourg. We have officers on standby and for the moment we’re being vigilant. We’re closely following the journey of this freedom convoy,” he told FranceInfo.

Officials said only about 10% of the convoy that had converged on Paris at the weekend had left for Brussels.

It is not clear what protesters are now planning, but one told Belgian television: “There’s no hurry. We’ll get there in the end.”

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## 2022.02.15 - Opinion

- Without state funding, Britain's politics will always stink
- The fall of Cressida Dick gives us the opportunity to truly reform Britain's police
- Do fairytale weddings really mean an unhappy ending?
- Girls should be educated, not mutilated. The cutting of women must end, now

## OpinionParty funding

# Without state funding, Britain's politics will always stink

[Polly Toynbee](#)



A colossal amount of power is wielded by dangerously few donors, with just 10 people donating a quarter of Tory funds



Boris Johnson and Tory party co-chairman Ben Elliot. Photograph: David M Benett/Dave Benett/Getty Images for Din Tai Fung

Tue 15 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

Another week, another sewage outflow of corruption into the polluted river of Tory politics. Are voters so profoundly cynical that no political bribery or MPs touting for contracts shocks them? Polling suggests the country is not losing its sense of smell.

The time may soon be here to take up [John Major's call](#) in the Guardian to clean up party funding and stop dirty donations from distorting democracy. For that, the public has to swallow what it deplores: state funding for political parties. [Every inquiry](#) has concluded there is no alternative.

Here's the latest filth: the Tories direct their biggest donors to apply for public posts controlled by a Downing Street unit hidden from public scrutiny. The Sunday Times reports "officials offering behind-the-scenes support and directing applicants to a [secretive Number 10 unit](#)". That's their win-win: collecting cash for the party while trying to pack Tories into appointments to public and arts bodies.

This comes on top of openDemocracy revealing that donors giving £3m or more to the Tories are virtually guaranteed to be offered a [peerage](#). The stink surrounding Tory fundraising leaks out in an email from its treasurer's office telling their big donors: "We thought you may be interested in the latest list of public appointments. It is important Conservatives rebalance the representation at the head of these important public bodies." The party's donor club the [Leaders' Group charges](#) a minimum of £50,000 a year for access to ministers.

The Tory party co-chairman, Ben Elliot, the Duchess of Cornwall's nephew, is founder of [Quintessentially](#), a luxury concierge service offering "lifestyle management" for the ultra-wealthy. It boasts it can do anything: they once told me of delivering bongo drums to the bored teenage son of a billionaire on a yacht mid-Pacific; and paying a top Manchester United footballer to play with a plutocrat's seven-year-old. That's the world Elliot fishes in while he also guides donors to public appointments.

The Times reports that Elliot told senior advisers at No 10 that one major donor would be an "excellent candidate" to oversee emergency Covid-19 loans. His staff lobbied for [Mohamed Amersi](#), the telecoms millionaire and £750,000 Tory donor, to chair the National Lottery Community Fund; he made it to the last round of selection. This week Elliot's fundraising comes under scrutiny when Amersi takes his [feud with the Tory party](#) to the high court in a libel claim against former Tory MP Charlotte Leslie for questioning the origins of his wealth.

In all this murk, no one knows a donor's true influence, but sometimes they break to the surface. Jonathan Leavesley, the chair of the secretive Midlands Industrial Council [bankrolling the Tories](#) and the [Taxpayers' Alliance](#), threatens their cash in the Daily Telegraph: "I have been a party donor through bad times as well as good, but my [enthusiasm can ebb and flow](#)." Castigating the rise in national insurance contributions and corporation tax, Leavesley writes: "Have they never heard of the Laffer curve? It is time for the government to act as a free enterprise champion and act Conservative. Get a grip Boris, or go."

Other donors are on the rampage over Johnson's failings, but it's not for them to ordain his fate. Colossal power is [wielded by dangerously few](#)

donors, says Brunel University's Prof Justin Fisher, with just [10 people donating](#) a quarter of Tory funds – more than £10m – since Johnson became prime minister. Particularly pernicious is Johnson's elections bill abolishing the Electoral Commission's [power to prosecute](#) illegal donations.

Labour was always over-reliant on power-wielding union leaders. Unite's leader, Sharon Graham, last week [rattled her money bags](#) in a crude threat over a dispute with bin lorry drivers in Labour-run Coventry. "Let me be very clear – the remaining financial support of the Labour party is now under review," she said.

Keir Starmer would have none of it: "The Labour party I lead is not going to be influenced by threats from anybody, whoever they are, and that is just an absolute matter of principle." Fisher points to the 2019 general election, when Unite donated £4.6m of Labour's £8.3m; the union has already cut funding after Jeremy Corbyn's departure. This politicking ignores union members' interests, since Labour's strongest policies include fair pay deals in every sector, ending zero hours insecurity and guaranteeing every workplace access to union recruiters. Unlike secret Tory influencers, at least Unite's attempt at cash-for-influence is rudely transparent.

John Major rose to a tremendous philippic against Boris Johnson's corruptions, though as prime minister he was no Cicero. As ever with former prime ministers, you sigh at their retrospective wisdom, regretting radical reforms they never dared, such as party funding. "The system needs cleansing," he writes, to stop politics being "the plaything of the rich or of pressure groups". Limit donations by individuals and unions so donors no longer "sway policy through an open cheque book".

The last review in 2011, by the Committee on Standards in Public Life, called for capped donations, with state funding at 50p a year per voter. But Nick Clegg slaughtered it at birth in the Commons, saying austerity spending couldn't afford it. Deep public mistrust means politicians fear asking taxpayers to foot the bill, though political parties are essential to a functioning democracy: less than [2% of the electorate](#) ever join a party. The best idea for distributing state cash came from the Power Inquiry, chaired by

Helena Kennedy: voters at elections should allocate a [f3 state voucher](#) to any party. That too was killed stone dead.

[Plummeting polls](#) show the limit to how much voters “priced in” corruption with Johnson. Enough is enough, the country hasn’t run out of outrage. Whoever inherits Johnson’s filthy stables can only make a clean break by purging political funding.

- Polly Toynbee is a Guardian columnist
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## OpinionMetropolitan police

# The fall of Cressida Dick gives us the opportunity to truly reform Britain's police

[Abimbola Johnson](#)

Trust in policing has been badly dented, but by holding chiefs accountable we can develop an anti-racist police service

- Abimbola Johnson is chair of the independent scrutiny and oversight board on the police's action plan on inclusion and race



‘Confidence in the police among certain groups is extremely low.’  
Photograph: Tejas Sandhu/SOPA Images/REX/Shutterstock

Tue 15 Feb 2022 03.00 EST

In 1998, Sir Paul Condon, the then [Metropolitan police](#) commissioner, wrote a letter to the Macpherson inquiry into the response to the murder of Stephen Lawrence. “Racism in the police is much more than ‘bad apples’,” he wrote. “The debate about defining this evil … is cathartic in leading us to recognise that it can occur almost unknowingly, as a matter of neglect, in an institution. I acknowledge the danger of institutionalisation of racism. However, labels can cause more problems than they solve.”

In one sense, Condon’s words were insightful – his rejection of the “bad apple” argument strikes a contrast with [Cressida Dick’s words about her own officers years later](#). But the fact that Dick would eventually be forced to resign amid a similarly fractious debate about problems of culture and institutional behaviour within the Met shows just how much work there is still to be done.

Dick was internally popular, but ultimately failed to convince Sadiq Khan that she would address the Met’s problems with the [urgency and on the scale](#) that was required – particularly in light of the [recent Charing Cross report](#) by the Independent Office for Police Conduct. That contained [shocking details](#) of police officers sharing racist and misogynistic messages with each other. But the sad truth is that it also revealed nothing new.

It was released after a period of consultation with the Met and related to investigations that were several years old. In April 2021, the director general of the IOPC had cause to [write](#) to the National Police Chiefs’ Council raising a concern that they were seeing cases that “may be indicative of broader cultural issues within some police forces”. The letter referred to a number of cases in which officers shared inappropriate images or content on social media that was “racist, misogynistic or homophobic”. It drew the NPCC’s attention to the fact that often the cases would start by “looking at the conduct of one officer but were then broadened to include the actions of others because inappropriate content was shared widely”.

A corresponding [statement](#) was placed on the IOPC’s website, listing examples of cases the regulator had seen since replacing the IPCC in 2018. This referred to cases in the Met, south Wales, Cheshire, Warwickshire and Kent. The highlighted Met case dated back to December 2020 and dealt with

several officers receiving “final written warnings for gross misconduct after sharing text messages which contained offensive references to people with disabilities and jokes about rape, paedophilia, racism, and homophobia.”

There was very little press coverage of that letter and statement. The NPCC [responded](#) with a general commitment to “actively [work] with the IOPC to put further guidance and safeguards in place” around use of social media and messaging. There was no public outcry, and no push for the highlighted forces to respond with substantive measures they would take to deal with those problems. Yet those cases identified the same poisonous culture that allowed Wayne Couzens to continue to serve as a police officer despite co-workers nicknaming him “the rapist” due to his outrageous behaviour; and that allowed [two police officers](#) not only to take photographs of Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman’s bodies, but also to share them with impunity in WhatsApp groups with colleagues.

Dick’s resignation has symbolic significance. The Met is England and Wales’ largest police force and it serves the most diverse population in Britain. Not only does it have regional responsibility, it holds national portfolios and heads counter-terrorism. The direction of policing in the Met can have a huge impact on national policing. However, substantive transformation requires more than a change at the top. It needs commitment from all levels of officers; scrutiny from the press; public engagement and demand for change; and the mandate from the Home Office. So far, frankly, those elements have not come together for a long enough period to apply the required pressure.

This is despite the fact that trust and confidence among certain groups is extremely low. In [December 2021, a YouGov](#) survey found that more than half of Britons from minority ethnic backgrounds no longer trust the police; in [October 2021, YouGov](#) found that 47% of women and 40% of men said trust in police had decreased since the murder of Sarah Everard. Instilling confidence entails a willingness to call cultural and institutional problems exactly what they are and then doing something radical about it. This doesn’t detract from the fact that many officers are in the job for positive reasons, or that some progress has been made in these areas. Engaging with criticism of

an institution does not undermine it, it legitimises it and keeps it relevant. It shows a willingness to be held accountable.

Since last August, I've been in post as chair of the independent scrutiny and oversight board for the police's action plan on inclusion and race. My role is to hold all 43 police chiefs across England and Wales accountable while they, with the College of Policing, develop and implement an [action plan to create an “anti-racist police service”](#) – their words. The plan focuses in particular on the experiences of Black communities with the police. By committing to it, each police chief accepts the need to deal with these problems. That acceptance reflects an acknowledgement that racial disparities are present in most areas of policing, and that conscious steps need to be taken to deal with them. The initiative was announced in June 2020; however, we're now in February 2022 and discussions about [institutional racism](#) remain ongoing.

I hope that this resignation, and the clear gauntlet that has been thrown down by the mayor of [London](#), will provide the next Met chief with the mandate to push for reform internally, while externally acknowledging the extent of the issue. It shows that the elected officials really do have the power to hold police chiefs to account. I hope that other chiefs will be galvanised and inspired to undertake the charge – some of them already have. Dick's resignation marks an opportunity for us, the public, and the media to make sure police reform stays at the top of the agenda.

- Abimbola Johnson is a barrister at 25 Bedford Row, and chair of the independent scrutiny and oversight board on the police's action plan on inclusion and race

OpinionWeddings

# Do fairytale weddings really mean an unhappy ending?

[Zoe Williams](#)



New research has shown that couples who have really expensive weddings are less likely to stay together than those who do it on the cheap. But that's not the whole story



Happy days ... a bride and groom on their wedding day. Photograph: kkshepel/Getty Images/iStockphoto (Posed by models)

Tue 15 Feb 2022 02.00 EST

There are some general rules around surprising surveys, such as: when a result isn't what you'd expect, it's often because the question was posed in a peculiar way, or the conclusion has taken an unreasonable leap. Then there are some specific rules, such as: if you want to know the truth about what makes a marriage last, don't necessarily go first to a thinktank that is avowedly pro-marriage – maybe try a more neutral source. These rules collided, or should have done, at the weekend, when [the Marriage Foundation](#) announced that couples who had really expensive weddings were less likely to stay together than those who did it on the cheap. One in 10 marriages that cost over £20,000 had ended within three years. So, some people, at least, have escaped the sunk cost fallacy.

Marriage and divorce experts were quick to comment: it was surely down to the fairytale expectation that £20,000 creates. After that much white tulle and the delightful country house, the brutal reality of life in athleisure, and a not-country house, was too much to take. And it brings a certain narratorial satisfaction: anyone who blows a fortune on a single day must surely be shallow, and incapable of doing dreary or lasting work.

But the Marriage Foundation is missing something major, here, which is weird because it comes from their own research: [second marriages are more likely to last than the first ones](#), with 31% ending in divorce against 45%. If there's one thing all second marriages have in common, it's not the age and definitely not the wisdom of the participants, but rather, that they're definitely, positively still skint from the dissolution of the first marriage. So they can't have a massive, meringue-style wedding, and their no-frills, pay-bar nuptials have skewed the data. This is how to make a marriage last – not with small economies, but by taking the precaution of a previous, failed marriage.

- Zoe Williams is a Guardian columnist
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[\*\*Opinion\*\*](#)[\*\*Global development\*\*](#)

## **Girls should be educated, not mutilated. The cutting of women must end, now**

Waris Dirie

Female genital mutilation is about the subjugation of women. But I am optimistic about ending it in my lifetime

- [Hiding from the cutters: the fight to save girls from mutilation in Kenya](#)



The Somali model, actor and activist Waris Dirie, who suffered FGM as a young girl, has dedicated her life to ending the practice. Photograph: Desert Flower Foundation

Global development is supported by



[About this content](#)

Tue 15 Feb 2022 02.30 EST

It is down to sheer ignorance that the misogynistic practice of female genital mutilation still exists in the world. In the UK, for example, FGM has been banned since 1985, but the [country's first court conviction](#) occurred only in February 2019. The truth is, FGM will continue as long as there is inequality between men and women. It is about power and oppression, and its only purpose is to subjugate the woman and her sexuality to the man. Anyone who says otherwise is lying.

The UN has a stated goal of eliminating FGM by 2030. Unfortunately, this is pure announcement policy. I worked as a UN special envoy from 1997 to 2003 and came to realise that the organisation is not doing what it should. That disappointed me and is why I started my own organisation, the [Desert Flower Foundation](#). And, in my opinion, we are doing a better job than the UN.

A change in thinking is taking place among young people in Africa. More and more are renouncing FGM

When we began the foundation in 2002, few people knew about FGM. Today, the whole world knows about this crime. When we started, few African countries had a law against FGM; today, [only four African countries do not have a law against it](#). A change in thinking is taking place among young people in Africa. From my conversations, especially with young mothers and fathers, I know that more and more are renouncing FGM. This makes me optimistic about ending the practice in my lifetime, which is my goal.

The Desert Flower Foundation builds schools in Africa, gives girls access to education and empowers women. All the girls in our sponsorship project, Save a Little Desert Flower, are not only protected from FGM and forced marriage, they also receive a school education. Countries with the highest illiteracy rates in Africa happen to be those with the greatest prevalence of FGM. Lack of education limits women, no matter where they are in the world. Only a strong, self-determined and economically independent woman will be confident enough to resist the pressures of a community.

## Q&A

### **Female genital mutilation: what does it involve and what are its consequences?**

Show

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is the removal of part or all of the external genitalia for nonmedical reasons, as [defined by the World Health Organization](#).

There are different types of cutting: removal of the clitoris and/or its hood; removing the clitoris and the inner fold of the vulva (labia minora); and the narrowing of the vaginal opening by cutting and repositioning the labia minora through stitching. Also known as infibulation, this has the worst health consequences. The fourth type of cutting includes other forms of injury to the genitalia such as incising, scraping or cauterising.

Since traditional practitioners use razor blades or knives, with no anaesthesia, girls experience excruciating pain and are at risk of severe

bleeding and infections which can lead to sepsis. Some do not survive.

For the girls, who are often married off soon after genital cutting, sex is traumatic and painful, and enjoying sex will always be difficult unless they have surgical reconstruction.

In pregnancy, delivery is often risky due to obstructed and prolonged labour. Women are at risk of developing obstetric fistula (an abnormal opening between a woman's genital tract and her urinary tract or rectum) which can cause incontinence – leading to shame, stigma and rejection from their partners.

- Dr Mercy Korir is a medical doctor and health and science editor at the Kenyan media organisation [Standard Group](#)

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

Change can happen quickly when the right measures are taken. Two years ago, the foundation opened its first school in Sierra Leone for 400 children. Before we built the school, the entire community had to stop FGM. Our deal was: education instead of mutilation. At that time, many girls in the community were working in a local quarry. Today, they attend our school. Hearing the girls say, “Waris, I want to be a lawyer, a doctor or a teacher,” makes me happy – these are success stories.

The frightening thing is that FGM is also happening in Europe, where [rates are rising](#) rapidly. The UK and France have the highest figures. Politicians in Europe must take the FGM problem much more seriously.

I have a series of demands to help lawmakers tackle the scourge of FGM:

I demand that the authorities carry out regular health checks on all girls who are at risk of FGM.

I demand that health authorities report when they detect FGM in girls and women.

I demand education for all migrant women, obligatory educational work by asylum and social counsellors, as well as harsh penalties for those who take their daughters abroad for FGM.

I demand that the international community recognises FGM as grounds for asylum.

I'm often asked if I feel hatred towards my mother. Because she took me to this witch for circumcision when I was a little girl, because she held me down during the torture. No, I do not feel hatred. After many discussions and wild quarrels, my mother, contrary to all her former ideals, now thinks differently. Today she supports me in my fight against FGM. Probably my greatest victory.

- Waris Dirie is a an award-winning anti-FGM campaigner and founder of the Desert Flower Foundation

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## 2022.02.15 - Around the world

- [Myanmar Junta's atrocities may amount to war crimes, says rights group](#)
- [Refugees Long-term intake targets ‘would help west regain moral purpose’](#)
- [Sarah Palin Defamation case against New York Times thrown out](#)
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- [US unions Amazon warehouse workers prepare for historic vote](#)

## Myanmar

# Myanmar military atrocities may amount to war crimes, says rights group

A report by Fortify Rights claims soldiers have carried out massacres and used civilians as human shields



Burned-out vehicles near Hpruso township in Myanmar's Karen state after alleged atrocities by junta forces in December. Photograph: KARENNEI NATIONALITIES DEFENSE FO/AFP/Getty Images

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

Mon 14 Feb 2022 22.14 EST

The [Myanmar](#) military kidnapped civilians and forced them to work as human shields, attacked homes, churches and carried out massacres, according to a report that warns recent atrocities in eastern Myanmar may amount to war crimes.

The report, by the Myanmar-founded human rights group [Fortify Rights](#), documents abuses by the country's military in Karen state, also known as Kayah state, [an area that has seen intense fighting](#) between the army and groups opposed to last year's military coup.

The military has faced strong resistance in Karen state, and has responded with brutal violence in an attempt to crush opposition.

The report includes claims that the army used civilians as human shields and as forced porters – allegations which have also been reported elsewhere in the country, [including in Chin state](#).

An 18-year-old student from Moe Bye township, located on the border between Karen and Shan states, told interviewers that he was taken, along with his uncle and two other men, in early June 2021 and used as a human shield in clashes between the military and the local armed resistance. The group escaped after having been detained for four days, during which time they were tied up, blindfolded and tortured, the student said.

Another interviewee alleged that he and nine others were captured by the military and forced to porter army equipment for five days.

The Fortify Rights report, a flash report providing preliminary documentation, based on interviews with 30 people, including eyewitnesses and survivors, adds to growing evidence of military abuses.

Numerous international organisations have raised concern over recent atrocities in Karen, including the [Christmas Eve massacre](#) of at least 40 civilians, including a child and two humanitarians working with Save the Children, near the village of Moso in Hpruso township. The victims were killed and burned.

The Karen Civil Society Network estimates that 170,000 civilians, more than half the state's estimated population, have been displaced since the military seized power last year. UN estimates suggest about 91,900 have been forced to flee their homes.

According to Fortify Rights, the military has targeted shelters for those who are displaced, including camps and churches, resulting in the deaths of civilians. In January, the military killed at least three people, including two children, when it bombed a camp for displaced people near the village of Ree Khee Bu in Hpruso.

Banyar Khun Naung, director of the non-profit Karen Human Rights Group, said there were no indications that violence would reduce in intensity and that he feared shortages of food and essential supplies would worsen over the coming months.

“In Karen we can see that our socio-economic condition has collapsed. Ordinary people, even if they are not [internally displaced people], even if they are the host community of IDPs, they can hardly survive.

“We cannot grow rice, or vegetable, we cannot trade between township to township, the online banking system has failed,” he said. The supply of food and medicine to Karen state was also being blocked by the military, he said.

Statements by the UN expressing concern over the situation in Myanmar have had “no discernible effect” on the military junta, Fortify Rights said. The junta has also failed to honour a five point plan developed last year by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, which calls for the “immediate cessation of violence” and a commitment for all parties to exercise “utmost restraint.”

Asean, which has led diplomatic efforts to ease the crisis and will meet this week, should support the establishment of a UN security council-mandated global arms embargo, Ismail Wolff, regional director at Fortify Rights.

“The Myanmar junta is murdering people with weapons procured on the global market, and that must stop,” said Wolff. “The UN security council must urgently impose a global arms embargo on the Myanmar military, and it would be strategic and sensible for Asean to support it.”

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## Refugees

# Long-term refugee targets ‘would help west regain moral purpose’

Under former Tory MP Rory Stewart’s plans, countries would take in an agreed number of refugees annually



Afghan refugee schoolchildren at a makeshift school on the outskirts of Islamabad, Pakistan. Photograph: Rahmat Gul/AP

*[Patrick Wintour](#) Diplomatic editor*

Tue 15 Feb 2022 00.00 EST

Liberal democracies can regain their lost sense of shared moral purpose by agreeing to set a long-term internationally agreed target for the number of refugees they are each prepared to take each year, [Rory Stewart](#), a former Conservative cabinet minister, has proposed.

Unveiling his plan to the Guardian, Stewart said: “Reforming the international resettlement coalition around the Afghan crisis presents a rare opportunity for key liberal democracies to restore their moral authority, form a workable international coalition, and deliver rapid, concrete, ethical results.”

Stewart has already garnered preliminary support for his plan from a group of Afghan specialists, including three former US envoys to [Afghanistan](#), as well as parliamentarians from the UK, Germany and Canada.

He proposes each country joining the coalition should aspire within two years to take refugees equivalent to 0.05 % of their population annually.

The voluntary target would be similar to [the aspiration for advanced economies to spend 0.7% of their GDP](#) on overseas aid. Stewart said the plan could be adopted at a global pledging summit possibly convened by Germany as the chair of the G7 group of industrialised nations.

However, it is unclear whether the UK government would consider the plan. Last year, the government [cut its aid pledge](#) to 0.5% of GDP, ending the Tory commitment to spend 0.7%, claiming it was “difficult to justify to the British people”. Under the Stewart plan, the UK would take a minimum of 32,000 refugees annually, several times the number it accepted last year.

The plan has won the support of Tom Tugendhat, the Conservative chair of the UK foreign affairs select committee, Tobias Ellwood the chair of the UK defence select committee, Michael Roth, the chair of the German Bundestag’s foreign affairs select committee, and Ret. Gen David Petraeus.

The co-sponsors, in a joint forward for an Atlantic Council paper written by Stewart, argue the humanitarian system has “atrophied” since the refugee crises of the 2010s and has not been able to respond to a sense of duty the west feels towards Afghans trapped under Taliban rule.

Stewart said: “We currently find ourselves in the very odd position that an important part of what it means to be a thoughtful modern international player – a willingness to take people at real risk of persecution – has been severely eroded.”

He added: “[The] shared tradition of such democracies, acting in concert, is now being questioned and challenged by authoritarianism abroad and populism and isolation at home.

“This is the moment to answer some of those challenges. A practical international response to the Afghan refugee crisis through a credible resettlement system would revive the values that formed the multilateral system in the wake of the horrors of second world war. We have a very special obligation towards Afghanistan after 20 years. We can see we played a direct part in tipping the Afghans into this horror.”

Stewart says the 0.05 % commitment would be a modest and realistic move towards transparent burden-sharing. He estimates if a coalition of Germany, France, Benelux and Nordic countries, as well as the UK agreed voluntarily to sign up the proposal, then 120,000 refugees would be guaranteed a home a year. By adopting the target, the US would be committing itself to taking 160,000 a year – slightly more than the number of refugees Joe Biden proposes to take this year.

Stewart says the target is the equivalent of a town of 10,000 people hosting a single Afghan family of five. For Canada, the target would be slightly lower than 52,290 refugees it is seeking to take in 2022.

For the scheme to work Stewart, a former UK international development secretary, said there would have to be some processing of asylum applicants inside Afghanistan since so many of the countries surrounding Afghanistan were refusing to let more refugees cross their borders.

At least three major categories of resettlement priority would be targeted within these overall numbers. The three categories would be those who have been evacuated but lack permanent settlement in a new country; those who remain in their country having already been promised a right to resettle; and those at risk of persecution.

He saysas many as 200,000 Afghans are still trapped there who are already eligible for resettlement under existing international scheme but could not cross into the countries on Afghanistan’s borders. In addition there are tens

of thousands not designated for existing schemes that are under extreme threat, such as female judges.

Even though many embassies remain closed, Stewart said, “a window is open to process in Afghanistan and evacuate with the consent of the Taliban, which may not remain for long. It should be used”.

But Stewart said Taliban cooperation to allow its political opponents to leave would be contingent on the west’s behaviour. He criticised Biden’s decision last week [to seize the Afghan Central Bank’s \\$7bn \(£5.2bn\) assets frozen](#) in the US and hand half to the victims of 9/11.

“For Biden to help himself to half that money is compounding betrayal upon betrayal. The first betrayal was to abandon the country to the Taliban. The second is to leave millions on the edge of starvation. Now the US president is proposing to steal Afghanistan’s own money which could have been used to feed the starving.”

Overall global resettlement spaces have fallen by 50% between 2016 and 2019. According to the UN agency for refugees, UNHCR, out of 1.44 million refugees in urgent need of resettlement globally, only 22,770 were resettled through the agency.

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**Sarah Palin**

## **Sarah Palin's defamation case against New York Times thrown out**

Judge tosses the former vice-presidential candidate's case while allowing the jury to continue deliberations



Sarah Palin said the editorial left her feeling 'powerless' and 'mortified'.

Photograph: Eduardo Muñoz/Reuters

*[Maya Yang](#) and agency*

Mon 14 Feb 2022 16.33 EST

Sarah Palin's lawsuit accusing the [New York Times](#) of defaming her by incorrectly linking her to a mass murder was thrown out on Monday.

US District Judge Jed Rakoff in Manhattan said he will order the dismissal of the former Alaska governor and 2008 Republican vice-presidential

candidate's lawsuit, but in an unusual twist, he will enter his order after the jury finishes its own deliberations.

"I think this is an example of very unfortunate editorializing on the part of the Times but having said that, that's not the issue before this court," Rakoff [said](#) in court on Monday. "The law here sets a very high standard [for actual malice]. The court finds that that standard has not been met."

Rakoff said he expected Palin to appeal, and that the appeals court "would greatly benefit from knowing how the jury would decide it".

The judge's order effectively pre-empted a possible jury verdict to the contrary, in a case seen as a test of longstanding protections for American media.

The nine jurors – five women and four men – began deliberating on Friday and resumed their work on Monday. They are not being told about the judge's ruling, and will continue deliberations.

Palin, 58, had sued the newspaper – one of America's most prominent media organizations – and its former editorial page editor James Bennet, arguing that a 2017 editorial incorrectly linked her to a mass shooting six years earlier that wounded the Democratic congresswoman Gabby Giffords.

It is rare for a major media outlet to defend its editorial practices in court, as the Times had to do in this case. Palin had sought unspecified monetary damages, but according to court papers, had estimated \$421,000 in damage had been done to her reputation. The Times has not lost a libel case in a US courtroom in more than 50 years.

Palin had said that if she lost at trial, her appeal might challenge New York Times v Sullivan, the 1964 supreme court decision establishing the "actual malice" standard for public figures to prove defamation.

The lawsuit concerned a 14 June 2017 editorial headlined "America's Lethal Politics" that addressed gun control and lamented the rise of incendiary political rhetoric.

It was written the same day as a shooting at a congressional baseball practice in Alexandria, Virginia, where the Republican congressman Steve Scalise was wounded.

One of Bennet's colleagues prepared a draft that referred to the January 2011 shooting in a Tucson, Arizona, parking lot where six people were killed and Giffords was wounded.

Bennet inserted language that said “the link to political incitement was clear” between the Giffords shooting and a map previously circulated by Palin’s political action committee that the draft editorial said put Giffords and 19 other Democrats under crosshairs.

Bennett said in court that the incident left him feeling guilty and that he had thought about it nearly every day. “It was just a terrible mistake,” he testified.

The Times corrected the editorial and removed any connection between political rhetoric and the Arizona shooting. In a statement to CNN, a Times spokesperson said: “We published an editorial about an important topic that contained an inaccuracy. We set the record straight with a correction. We are deeply committed to fairness and accuracy in our journalism, and when we fall short, we correct our errors publicly, as we did in this case.”

On the witness stand, Palin compared herself, a celebrated conservative politician with a national following, to the biblical underdog David against the Times’ Goliath, while accusing the newspaper of trying to “score political points”.

Palin testified that the editorial left her feeling “powerless” and “mortified” and that the correction issued by the newspaper the morning after publication was accurate but insufficient and did not mention her by name.

She maintained that the Times undermined her reputation by falsely linking her to a mass murder and by not being fast or thorough enough in correcting its error.

Palin, who no longer commands as much public attention as she once did, struggled under cross-examination to provide specific examples of how the editorial harmed her reputation and cost her opportunities.

*Reuters contributed to this report*

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## Opioids crisis

# US could loosen some restrictions on prescribing opioids

CDC considers rolling back limits on which doses can be prescribed and for how many days in cases of acute pain



Bottles of prescription painkiller OxyContin. Photograph: George Frey/Reuters

*[Melody Schreiber](#)*

Tue 15 Feb 2022 02.00 EST

The US could see loosened guidance around prescribing opioids, as the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) considers relaxing some of its guidelines in a move that could signal a new direction for managing chronic pain.

The CDC last Thursday released proposed changes to its guidance on prescribing opioids, rolling back limits on which doses can be prescribed and for how many days in cases of acute pain.

The agency created rules in 2016 to reduce prescriptions that were fueling the opioid overdose epidemic. But as rules like these were put in place, opioid overdose deaths rose instead of falling.

New [laws](#) in several states were drafted to codify the restrictions, and some insurers began basing their coverage of medications on the guidance.

The sweeping actions cut off medications for some patients battling chronic pain and substance disorders, sometimes without the option of tapering down the medications or undergoing substance dependence treatment.

As the sources of medications dried up, some patients turned to illicit substances like heroin and fentanyl.

“You’re inadvertently driving people to an illicit supply if they’re being cut off,” said Kate Nicholson, executive director of the National Pain Advocacy Center. “The street supply is so tainted that you’re really pushing people to a very dangerous thing.”

Fatal overdoses rose from 63,000 in 2016 to more than 100,000 last year, many of them driven by the powerful synthetic opioid fentanyl. Deaths from fentanyl have [doubled](#) in the US in the past two years – but teens in particular have been hit hard by fentanyl overdoses, with the death rate tripling in that time.

Yet harm reduction groups have [struggled to access affordable naloxone](#), the drug that reverses opioid overdoses. And only one state, Arizona, had enough naloxone in 2017 to prevent a majority of overdose deaths, according to a study [published](#) in the Lancet on Thursday.

## **‘It was being used against me’**

For patients like Bev Schechtman, the 2016 CDC rules made what would have been a routine hospitalization traumatic.

Schechtman has Crohn's disease, and frequently suffers from kidney stones – sometimes several times a month.

In 2017, a case of kidney stones grew too difficult to treat at home. She checked into the hospital because she was worried she was developing an infection and she was vomiting too much to keep food, water and prescribed painkillers down.

It was something she'd done several times before. But on this visit, Schechtman said, she was inexplicably denied intravenous painkillers because the doctor believed she was at higher risk of addiction since she had survived abuse as a child.

"He said, 'Childhood sexual abuse changes your brain chemistry, and so do IV opioids, and so I can't be part of that,'" Schechtman recalled.

She was floored – and horrified. "They're using something that was already traumatic from my childhood, something that already is this painful experience that wasn't my fault. And I felt like it was being used against me to punish me for – for what?"

That question nagged at her. When she was home and finally recovered, she started digging.

"Until then, I had no idea what the CDC guidelines were, I didn't know any of this stuff," Schechtman said. Since then, she has become an outspoken proponent of pain management and the vice-president of the non-profit Doctor Patient Forum.

She believes her experience happened because of an over-reliance on the stringent rules, and she applauded the new direction in guidance.

But the changes shouldn't stop there, she said. "If these guidelines go through the way they are, then we have a lot of work ahead of us, because now we have to get them removed from state laws, we have to get them removed from the insurance companies."

## **Caught in the pendulum swing**

Drugmakers in the 1990s marketed new opioids as less addictive and pushed for wider use among patients.

“We overdid it with prescription medications – we were kind of sold a bill of goods by pharmaceutical companies that told us, no, these things are not addictive,” said Bryce Pardo, associate director of the Rand Corporation’s Drug Policy Research Center.

In reaction to the rising opioid overdose crisis, new rules in the late 2000s made it more difficult to prescribe the drugs – and around the same time, overdose deaths from illicit opioids began rising.

“We turned the tap off too quickly without really trying to increase the access to drug treatment programs,” Pardo said. Substance dependence treatment didn’t expand as quickly as patients needed.

“I think that’s what CDC is trying to do by relaxing some of the prescription guidelines now because they realize, well, we may have overdone it by trying to cut people off too quickly,” Pardo said.

But, he argued, the guidance shouldn’t go too far in the other direction: “We ping-pong back and forth between extremes.”

The new guidelines need to strike a delicate balance between making sure patients with serious pain have access to the medications they need, but also not introducing new patients unnecessarily to opioids, he said.

People in chronic pain can “manage their lives fine on an opioid – that’s fine. What we don’t want is a 19-year-old who blew out his knee at football practice getting 90 days’ worth of prescription medication.”

It’s difficult to reach that balance, said Nicholson, who called it “the Goldilocks solution”.

“There was a harm from overly liberal prescribing, so I do think the CDC stepped in in order to try and stem that harm,” she said. But “the people who actually needed it got caught in the crosshairs of this pendulum swing.”

She was on an advisory board to review an earlier draft of CDC guidelines last year. She said the new guidance, which incorporated the independent advisers' feedback, is "a tremendous improvement for people with chronic pain".

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## [Amazon](#)

# US Amazon warehouse workers prepare for historic union vote

Labor board overturned first election over company's unfair conduct, giving workers another chance to be the first Amazon facility in US to unionize



Michael Foster of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union outside the Bessemer Amazon warehouse last week. Photograph: Jay Reeves/AP

[Michael Sainato](#)

Tue 15 Feb 2022 04.00 EST

Workers at the Amazon warehouse in Bessemer, Alabama, have begun the rerun of a historic union election after the US labor regulator ruled Amazon's conduct had interfered with a previous election in 2021 and [ordered](#) a new vote.

The union drive comes as other large US employers including [Starbucks](#) and [Target](#) are fighting off union drives. If successful, the warehouse would be the first Amazon facility to unionize in the US. Employees said that Amazon – which now employs more than 1 million people in the US – is fighting hard to make sure this vote also fails, but some are feeling more confident the second time around.

Darryl Richardson, an employee at the [Amazon](#) warehouse in Bessemer for two years, said workers and organizers are now more apt to resist Amazon's union-busting efforts.

"They're still using the same scare tactics they used last time, but due to the first election, you have employees who understand and know that Amazon isn't telling them the truth," said Richardson. "I feel better this time than I did the first time. Employees have been voicing their opinions and standing strong this election."

More than 6,100 workers are eligible to vote in the union election, which will determine if workers will be represented by the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU). Due to high employee turnover, [almost half](#) of the eligible workers in this election were not working at Amazon during the first union election.

Ballots were sent to [Alabama](#) workers on 4 February, with ballots due to be returned by 25 March. Results will be tallied beginning on 28 March.

Two other Amazon warehouses, [JFK8](#) and [LDJ5](#) in Staten Island, New York, have filed petitions to hold union elections with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), though election dates have not been set by the NLRB regional director.

Perry Connelly, 59, who has worked in outbound stowing at the Bessemer warehouse for two years, said that organizing ahead of the first union election started off well, with a majority of workers signing union authorization cards, but that Amazon's aggressive anti-union campaign and promises of improvements confused or deterred many workers from voting at all or persuaded them to vote against the union.

“We just want Amazon to be held accountable for all the things that make the job, the workplace, unbearable,” said Connelly. “What we do and what we put out, Amazon can pay a lot better and not have such a high rate of turnover of employees. A lot of people come in and they’re not there for six or seven months, they don’t make it that long because of the working conditions.”

Rerun union elections are relatively rare, with unions prevailing in a [slim majority](#) of those elections in recent years. But Connelly claimed this time around, there’s more support for the union. He said many workers switched from voting no in the first election to supporting it, because Amazon didn’t fulfill the promises they made during the first election, and the union organizing campaign has expanded to handing out union T-shirts, door-knocking efforts that weren’t possible earlier in the Covid-19 pandemic, and partnering with other local unions and community groups.

Connelly cited issues such as better pay, better promotional opportunities, more respect from management toward workers and less hostility toward productivity rates as a few of the reasons he is supporting the union.

“We’re not asking for a lot. We’re just asking for better conditions and less work hassle. We feel like we’re in a hostile work environment day in and day out,” said Connelly. “Working for Amazon, no one should be worried about paying bills when you work for a multibillionaire, and we just want what we think is fair.”

US businesses have fought hard against union drives in recent years. A 2019 [report](#) by the Economic Policy Institute found that 41.5% of employers had violated federal labor law in union election campaigns and employers spend about \$340m annually on union avoidance, issues that have driven campaigns for [federal labor law reforms](#) to expand workers’ rights and steepen penalties for employers violating labor laws.

As part of the new election ruling, Amazon reached a [settlement](#) with the NLRB, agreeing to refrain from threatening workers with discipline or calling the police on workers engaging in union activity outside the warehouse. If Amazon is found to violate the settlement, the NLRB could more easily sue the company.

Amazon is once again aggressively opposing the unionization effort at the warehouse, with regular [anti-union meetings](#) where outside consultants and managers are encouraging workers to vote against the union. A worker at the Bessemer warehouse has already [filed](#) unfair labor practice charges with the NLRB against Amazon, [alleging](#) the settlement was violated because he claims management warned him about speaking with co-workers about the union.

During the first union election, Amazon installed a United States Postal Service mailbox in front of the warehouse, surrounded by signs encouraging workers to vote no in the election. That mailbox was a significant factor in the first union election being [overturned](#) by the NLRB. The union has already made a [request for review](#) to the NLRB of objectionable conduct over the mailbox, as it remains on site at the warehouse, but was just moved to a different location.

The union argued the mailbox undermined the election as it is subject to constant surveillance by the company, and the stigma surrounding the mailbox as employer-controlled remains. The NLRB [ruled](#) the claims would be resolved after the new election.

Contacted by the Guardian, Amazon did not comment on how its conduct this election has changed from the previous one.

A spokesperson said in an email: “Our employees have always had the choice of whether or not to join a union, and they overwhelmingly chose not to join the RWDSU last year. We look forward to our team in BHM1 having their voices heard again.”

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## **Headlines friday 18 february 2022**

- [Live Storm Eunice: Cobra to meet as millions urged to stay home amid Met Office red 'danger to life' warning](#)
- [Storm Eunice London added to red weather warning amid 'danger to life'](#)
- [Buy batteries and shelter pets How to prepare for Storm Eunice](#)
- [Storm Eunice How does it compare with UK's worst weather?](#)

## UK weather

# Storm Eunice: at least four die as winds of up to 122mph batter UK and Ireland – latest updates

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## UK weather

# Storm Eunice: Cobra meeting called as UK braces for ‘worst storm in decades’

Millions told to stay home to avoid winds of up to 90mph as army placed on ‘high readiness standby’

- [Storm Eunice: live updates](#)

01:04

Red warning issued as UK readies for Storm Eunice – video

*Jamie Grierson and agencies*

[@JamieGrierson](#)

Fri 18 Feb 2022 04.16 EST

An emergency Cobra meeting will be held as England and [Wales](#) are braced for what is expected to be one of the worst storms in decades, with millions told to stay at home to avoid winds of up to 90mph and the army placed on standby.

Ministers and officials will meet on Friday afternoon, after Storm Eunice prompted rare red weather warnings – meaning danger to life – across much of England and Wales.

A government spokesperson said: “The minister for the Cabinet Office will chair a COBR this afternoon to discuss the response to Storm Eunice.”

The highest alert – meaning a major impact is very likely – was widened shortly before 4am to cover the east of England including London, to run from 10am until 3pm on Friday, due to fears of the storm “causing significant disruption and dangerous conditions due to extremely strong winds”, the Met Office said.

The warning covering Greater London, Kent, Surrey, Essex and east Sussex joined an earlier red weather warning starting from 7am along the coastline of Devon, [Cornwall](#) and Somerset, as well as the south coast of Wales, due to the combination of high tides, strong winds and storm surge.



Waves batter the New Brighton promenade in Liverpool as Storm Eunice moves closer. Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

There is a risk of “flying debris resulting in danger to life” and “damage to buildings and homes, with roofs blown off and power lines brought down” along the coastline of [Devon](#), Cornwall and Somerset as well as the south coast of Wales.

The Met Office chief meteorologist, Paul Gundersen, said: “After the impacts from Storm Dudley for many on Wednesday, Storm Eunice will bring damaging gusts in what could be one of the most impactful storms to affect southern and central parts of the UK for a few years.”

On media morning rounds on Friday, Hinds said people should take precautions, adding that the army was on “high readiness standby” to help.

He told Sky News: “We are strongly encouraging people to take precautions and make sure they stay safe.”

He added: “Over the longer term a lot of learning has been done from Storm Arwen, particularly on dealing with welfare issues, staying in touch with people, staying in touch with customers for the [power] networks.

“But in the immediate term there are troops on high readiness standby, the Environment Agency on the ground, the networks themselves have to be very much active, and they are.

“Weather is unpredictable and it is really important that we all continue ... to take those precautions and try to keep everyone safe.”

Asked if people could get “cut off” by the storm, Hinds said that was “absolutely a risk”, and the red weather warning indicated a “risk to life and limb”.

People have been warned to tie down objects in their gardens and be wary of fierce winds, which could cause trees to topple over and tiles to fly off buildings. “Make sure you follow the advice of local authorities and councils, fasten doors and windows tonight and tomorrow morning and keep your cars locked in garages or away from trees and walls,” said the Met Office forecaster Annie Shuttleworth.

### [map](#)

“People will see significant delays to travel and power cuts, so you should avoid travelling if you can and stay at home when winds reach the highest speeds.”

A Network Rail spokesperson said [disruption was “inevitable”](#) and Welsh services would be suspended for the whole day. The railway operator said there would be blanket speed restrictions of 50mph in most places.

London North East Railway urged customers with tickets for Friday to travel on Saturday instead or get a refund due to expected disruption and damage. Some airports including Gatwick and Stansted advised customers to check the status of their flights with airlines, as well as allowing plenty of time to travel.



Commuters queue at a London train station after the cancellation of some services due to the storm. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

Transport for Greater Manchester has asked customers to “please consider whether your journey is essential today and take care if you are out and about”. The operator said Storm Eunice was likely to cause significant disruption from 5am until 9pm.

The Met Office also took the unusual step of issuing a severe weather alert with National Highways for strong winds covering the whole of the country’s strategic road network from 6am to 6pm.

National Highways said high-sided vehicles and other “vulnerable” vehicles such as caravans and motorbikes could be blown over so should avoid bridges and viaducts.

Those travelling between England and Wales faced difficulties with the closing of the M48 Severn Bridge.

The service said the A14 Orwell Bridge in Suffolk would be closed in both directions from 4am with the QEII Bridge in Dartford closed from 5am.

Serious flooding may take place along the coastlines of the south and west of England as spring tides are expected on Friday morning. It comes after Storm Dudley caused travel disruption and power cuts to parts of the UK on Wednesday. The government's Cobra emergency committee met on Thursday to discuss the storm response and plan for power cuts.

Amber warnings – the second highest alert level – for wind were in place across the whole of England from 5am to 9pm on Friday, while yellow weather warnings – the next level down – for wind and snow were in force for a large part of [Scotland](#) where blizzards were predicted and the whole of Northern Ireland.

Some councils across the UK are to help shelter homeless people and halt bin collections.

In Scotland, a weather warning for snow was in place between 3am and 6pm on Friday, while a wind warning encompasses the south-west Scottish borders, including most of Dumfries and Galloway. Snow was forecast for most of mainland Scotland on Friday, south of Inverness and Fort William.

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## UK weather

# Buy batteries and keep pets safe: how to prepare for Storm Eunice

Fire services, breakdown services and animal welfare charity suggest how to get ready for power cuts and other disruption



The calm before the storm: now's the time to check you've got batteries for torches and radios. Photograph: Geoffrey Swaine/Rex/Shutterstock

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

Thu 17 Feb 2022 10.58 EST

Obviously it's a cliche, but "be prepared" is the best advice ahead of Storm Eunice, which could bring gusts of up to 90mph as well as heavy snow and blizzards.

Power cuts caused by fallen trees are highly likely and there are a few straightforward things which people can do in preparation, [Northumberland](#)

fire and rescue service said.

That includes checking you've got batteries for torches and radios. Have some food in that doesn't need cooking. Charge your mobile phone. Check in with elderly neighbours.

If power is down then turn off electrical appliances at the socket in case everything comes on when you're not there or asleep. Torches are safer than candles.

Most councils will have a page on their website giving information about storms and who to contact if the power is out or you need to report a fallen tree.

The advice from road agencies and travel companies is for people not to go out on Friday unless they absolutely need to.

“For anyone who has to set out, we recommend sticking to major roads and avoiding exposed and coastal routes,” said Rod Dennis, a spokesperson for RAC Breakdown. “It’s also vital to reduce speeds and to take extra care when passing high-sided vehicles so as not to get buffeted off course.”

If there is ice or snow then be gentle on the accelerator. If the car skids “it’s best to gently steer into the direction of the skid and wait for the car to regain grip. Avoid the temptation to stamp on the brake.”

During previous storms there have been alarming reports of cats being lifted in the air and dogs being swept away.

Amy Ockelford, a spokesperson for the RSPCA, said: “We’re urging pet owners to keep an eye on the forecast where they live and to plan ahead to ensure the safety of their animals.”

Tips to keep pets safe include planning dog walks around the worst of the weather and avoiding dangerous locations. Wear reflective clothing. If the dog is old or feels the cold get them a jacket to keep warm.

For cats, ensure they have access to the house or a warm, inside area where they can escape the weather. If conditions are extreme consider keeping the

cat inside.

It's not just pets, the RSPCA says. Wild animals can struggle to find food and water during extreme weather or may get lost so consider leaving out food and water for them.

01:04

Red warning issued as UK readies for Storm Eunice – video

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/feb/17/buy-batteries-and-keep-pets-safe-how-to-prepare-for-storm-eunice>

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## UK weather

# How does Storm Eunice compare with UK's worst weather in recent history?

As the Met Office issues rare red warning, a look back at some of Britain's most devastating storms

- [Storm Eunice: rail firms urge people to avoid travel on Friday](#)



Giant waves crash over Seaham lighthouse near Durham in February 2018, when the beast from the east brought heavy snow and freezing temperatures to much of the country. Photograph: Owen Humphreys/PA

*[Mark Brown](#)*

Thu 17 Feb 2022 10.16 EST

Thirty-five years ago Michael Fish chirpily told BBC television viewers that a woman had called in and said she heard there was a hurricane on the way.

“If you’re watching,” [he told the woman](#), “don’t worry, there isn’t.”

Of course Fish was correct, it was not a hurricane. But it was an unforgettable monster of a storm that caused incredible damage and killed 18 people.

The Great Storm of 1987 took hold in the early hours of 16 October and brought winds that peaked at 120mph. It caused mayhem and devastation not seen for 250 years, including damaged buildings, major travel disruption and the uprooting of 15m trees. Numerous small boats were wrecked or blown away and a Channel ferry was blown ashore near Folkestone.

The most damaged areas of the country were London, the south-east and East Anglia.

[In the Observer Tim Walker](#) compared the sensational coverage of the storm – arguably justified – to Daniel Defoe’s account of England’s last great storm in 1703.

Defoe wrote: “Very early in the morning there began a very great and dreadful Storm of Wind ... which continued with a strange and unusual violence.”

## Q&A

### **How do storms and hurricanes get their names?**

Show

In Europe storms are named as a joint enterprise between the UK’s Met Office, Ireland’s Met Éireann and the Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute (KNMI). The list is set in advance, runs in alphabetical order, and usually alternates between names associated with male and female gender.

According to the Met Office, the decision for a storm to be named is “based on a combination of both the impact the weather may have, and the likelihood of those impacts occurring. A storm will be named when it has the potential to cause an amber or red weather warning.”

The list of names is partially generated from suggestions sent in by the public - and the Met Office says it is happy for people to either [email suggestions or submit them via social media](#).

Bad luck if your name begins with a Q, U, X, Y or Z though - you'll never get a storm named after you. This is because names beginning with those letters are never used either in Europe or by the US National Hurricane Center (NHC).

## Martin Belam

Was this helpful?

Thank you for your feedback.

The winds caused 2,000 chimney stacks to collapse in London and ships were blown hundreds of miles off course. More than 1,000 sailors died on the Goodwin Sands off the Kent coast. Meteorologists now believe that storm was a hurricane.

That is not the case with Storm Eunice, with the predicted wind speeds comparable to what can be seen in northern Scotland during a storm. But the Met Office is sufficiently concerned to [give it a red weather warning](#).

01:04

Red warning issued as UK readies for Storm Eunice – video

The last red weather warning was for [Storm Arwen in November 2021](#), which caused particular chaos and heartache for north-east England and Scotland. The damage was much worse because, unusually, the winds came from the north.

Falling trees damaged power lines, leading to power cuts for hundreds of thousands of people, some without heat and light for more than two weeks during bitterly cold weather. If it had happened in London, politicians and numerous callers to local radio argued, it would have been condemned as a national scandal with an instant visit from a concerned prime minister.

Arwen, which brought [a recorded wind speed of 110mph](#) to Settle in North Yorkshire, was the worst storm in a generation for many.

Before Arwen, you would have to go back to March 2018 for a similar red warning. That was during [the beast from the east](#) when the mild weather changed dramatically in the last week of February. Temperatures plunged as low as -11.7C overnight and Storm Emma prompted wind warnings for parts of south-west England and south Wales.

Before then, only two red weather warnings had been issued by the UK Met Office since the current system came in to force in 2011.

This article was amended on 17 February 2022. An earlier version said “about 9,000 people suffered power cuts” in Storm Arwen; in fact this was the number of homes still without power in the second week after the storm. Hundreds of thousands of homes lost power when the storm first hit.

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## 2022.02.18 - Spotlight

- ['Joyous personality' The stars of Roger Michell's final film, The Duke, pay tribute](#)
- [Shepherd's delight The young Italian nomads high in the Dolomites – photo essay](#)
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## **‘A testament to his joyous personality’: the stars of Roger Michell’s final film, *The Duke*, pay tribute**



Helen Mirren and Jim Broadbent, with Goya's portrait of the Duke of Wellington, whose theft is the subject of their new film, *The Duke*.  
Photograph: James Veysey/REX/Shutterstock

As the director's last feature – a true-life crime caper – finally opens, Helen Mirren, Jim Broadbent, Anna Maxwell Martin and more remember the quiet genius of British cinema



[Xan Brooks](#)  
[@XanBrooks](#)

Fri 18 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

On 4 September 2020, [Roger Michell](#) and Jim Broadbent came to Venice to unveil a British film called [The Duke](#). The forecast was stormy and the festival was in peril, staged in defiance of a global pandemic, with tubs of hand sanitiser on the red carpet and thermal cameras at the doors. The premiere shouldn't have worked and yet somehow it did. Afterwards, Broadbent recalls, he and the director unhooked their masks and breathed a sigh of relief. "I remember turning to Roger and saying: 'Oh, I am glad that we came.'"

Sign up to Film Weekly, our newsletter recapping the week in cinema.

I was in Venice that day; I was glad they came, too. The premiere was a hit and *The Duke* was a hoot, a boisterous true-crime caper, pungently set in early 60s Newcastle and spotlighting the theft of a famous oil painting.

Michell's timing was impeccable. He delivered the perfect picture for the perfect moment, a tonic for flagging spirits. For a few hours at least, The Duke felt like a reaffirmation of core values, a tale of the past that pointed to a brighter tomorrow. Indirectly, it assured us that everything was OK. But 18 months later, the world is still waiting to see it.

Onscreen, The Duke plays out as a comedy. Offscreen, however, the film is a tragedy – at once a casualty of the pandemic and a posthumous classic. Covid scuppered its scheduled release. Michell [died suddenly](#) in September last year. The film's cast and crew are still reeling, in shock.



He created fine work but he flew under the radar ... Michell (on right) on the set of The Duke. Photograph: Nick Wall

I speak to Nicky Bentham, The Duke's producer. She explains that she now sees her role as that of the director's spokesperson. She wants to honour his intentions and celebrate his legacy. But she's still processing the loss; can't quite believe that he's gone. She had hoped the film would be the first of many collaborations with Michell. Instead, it turned out to be the last. "I get quite emotional talking about it," she says. "This is like therapy for me."

Perhaps fittingly, The Duke spins the tale of a dead man's masterpiece, whisked from under our noses and securely hidden from view. It stars

Broadbent as the true-life Kempton Bunton, a soapbox revolutionary and wannabe playwright who stashed a stolen Goya in his back bedroom as part of a crackpot scheme to secure free TV licences for the nation's pensioners. Along the way, Michell juggles knockabout farce with kitchen-sink social realism; domestic spats with soaring rhetoric. Ostensibly, *The Duke* is a salute to the racketey British underdog – a comic tradition that extends back through [Tony Hancock](#), *Lucky Jim* and [The Lavender Hill Mob](#). But it is also, inadvertently, a film about its creator. It shows us what moved him, what drove him. His presence back-shadows what we see in the frame.

It's a wonderful film to be his last because it carries within it all his strengths. His brilliant technique. His warmth

### *Helen Mirren*

"This is his last film," says Helen Mirren, who co-stars as Dorothy Bunton, Kempton's pinched, harried wife. "And it's a wonderful film to be his last because it carries within it all his strengths as a film-maker. His brilliant technique. His warmth as a person. His wonderful understanding of life and humanity. And we all recognised that as we were making it. We all knew that we were in Roger's film."

It's curious, in hindsight, to realise that there was ever anything so instantly recognisable as a Roger Michell production. Most successful directors like to announce their presence and perfect a signature style. Michell, though, was the quiet man of British cinema, a sort of expert butler in the wings. In the course of an eclectic 40-year career, he glided from the stage to TV to feature film-making and back again. He directed big, splashy Britpics (1999's *Notting Hill*) and small, knotty human dramas (*Venus*, *The Mother*). He shot Hollywood pictures (*Changing Lanes*, *Hyde Park on Hudson*) and oversaw intimate documentaries (the acclaimed *Nothing Like a Dame* and the forthcoming *Elizabeth*, completed just before his death). He created fine, lasting work but he flew under the radar.

Bentham would largely go along with that. Actually, she says, that's what she loved about the man: the fact that he could turn his hand to anything and find a home in any setting. "Probably he flew under the radar because he

wasn't paying attention to the radar. He was paying attention to the story, the people, the script." She sighs. "If he were more guided by trends – by public opinion or branding – he might have been seen as a landmark director of a certain genre. But that wasn't him. He was never guided by external forces."

It's clear he was loved. His cast and crew all adored him. Broadbent first worked with Michell on the 2013 film *Le Week-End*, in which he played an anguished old academic rattling around Paris. After that the pair became friends. They were north London neighbours. Michell was imaginative, generous, entirely without ego. "He was my favourite director," Broadbent says. "He allowed everyone to be the best possible version of themselves."



Helen Mirren and Jim Broadbent as married couple Kempton and Dorothy Bunton in *The Duke*. Photograph: Lmk Media Ltd/Alamy

The Duke's co-writers, Richard Bean and Clive Coleman, paint a similar picture. They recall that the project was initially offered to several other directors, who either weren't interested or weren't available. "The key thing that Roger brought was a kind of calm," Bean says. "He made us all confident that the film was going to get made. There was no anxiety, or histrionics, or drama. The sense was just: 'Oh, here's the guy who knows what he's doing.' And all of a sudden everyone's happy."

“Yes, he was a calming presence,” says Coleman. “I think that’s probably why actors loved him. Whatever neuroses actors suffer from, he was somehow the great antidote.”

Finally, I hear from Anna Maxwell Martin, who plays a supporting role in *The Duke*. Martin says that she first met the director on a play, *Honour*, at the National theatre, and “fell in love with him straight away”. The pair were married between 2002 and 2020 and had two daughters together, Maggie and Nancy.

I suppose I had a particularly intimate experience of working with Roger. He thought I mucked about far too much

#### *Anna Maxwell Martin*

“Roger only made films and plays about human interaction,” she explains. “That seems obvious. Aren’t all films and plays about human interaction? But no, they aren’t. They get swamped by bells and whistles. The relationships get lost.” In Michell’s work, she feels, the human element was always front and centre.

“I suppose I had a particularly intimate experience of working with Roger,” Martin says. “He thought I mucked about far too much. ‘Put the cheese down, dear!’ he’d shout across the set as I was lobbing about a wheel of cheddar, just because. He’d sit in the corner with a little handheld monitor, like a monk. Never being demonstrative. Just doing the work, serving the script.”

*The Duke* wrapped production just before the first lockdown. It premiered to glowing reviews at Venice and Telluride and was set for release in autumn 2020. Cameron McCracken, managing director of Pathé UK, says that the plan was to capitalise on the festival buzz and introduce it into the all-important awards corridor, riding the wave through the Baftas to a possible finish at the Oscars. But Covid rates kept spiking and the film’s success depended on an older audience showing up. The release was delayed a full year, to September 2021, before being pushed back yet again in response to Omicron. It has been a wretched situation, an ongoing exercise in crisis management. But McCracken doesn’t see how it could have been handled

differently. Pathe, he points out, is a small independent outfit. It develops, produces and finances perhaps three or four films every year. So the stakes are high; every release is a gamble. He says: “If we get it wrong, I’ve destroyed the company.”



Anna Maxwell Martin and Michell at the after-party for *Farewell to the Theatre*, which he directed at the Hampstead theatre in 2012. Photograph: Dan Wooller/REX/Shutterstock

Next Friday, two years after it went before the cameras, Michell’s film comes limping across the finish line. McCracken is pleased to have at last seen it through, but it is a bittersweet coda; hardly the triumph he had envisaged. “This was supposed to be a great time,” he says. “It was going to mark the moment a modest, understated, brilliant director suddenly came into his own. I looked at *The Duke* as a coronation.”

Instead, it’s a funeral, which feels rubbish and wrong. McCracken is sad that the delayed release appears to have largely shut the film out of the awards conversation. Mostly, he’s upset that Michell never had the chance to watch this quintessentially British movie on home soil. “The fact that he was denied that is horrible,” he says.

Ultimately, though, it's the work that remains. One winter evening I revisit *The Duke* in more humdrum surroundings (in the living room, on a laptop), 18 months after its Venice premiere. There, on screen, as if by magic, is Broadbent's glorious performance as loudmouthed Bunton, a socialist upstart who puts his faith "not in God but in people". He is berating shopfloor managers in Newcastle. He is telling the Old Bailey jury: "I'm you and you're me." That we are stronger together; that we build a better world, too. The film, I am relieved to note, is just as good as it ever was. But its circumstances have changed and those ripples are still being felt. What was conceived as a rousing class-war comedy now looks slightly different. It is shop-damaged and tragedy-struck a victim of human frailty; perhaps a reflection of it, too.

"The film doesn't change," says McCracken. "What's changed is the emphasis of the message and how that is read by the public. Because when we started shooting, the idea that Kempton speaks to in the film – that a society is only as strong as its weakest link – might have seemed a bit abstract. We couldn't know that we were moving into two years of Covid, death and insecurity, where our society would be judged on a daily basis by how well it protects its oldest and most vulnerable. So that journey's been fascinating. It somehow makes the film feel more trenchant."



Michell working with Julia Roberts and Hugh Grant on the director's biggest hit, Notting Hill (1999). Photograph: AA Film Archive/Alamy

Michell died on 22 September 2021 at his London home. He was 65. The cause of death was never made public, but his family has now confirmed that he died of a heart attack. He is survived by four children (including Harry and Rosanna by his first wife, the actor turned lawyer Kate Buffery) and 15 feature films, heaps of stage productions, buckets of TV dramas. He leaves us *The Duke*, which is a particularly lovely parting shot.

Coleman says he was devastated when Bentham called him with the news. Then he attended the funeral and came away feeling better. "It was an absolutely extraordinary experience," he says. "I almost made notes and gave them to my family. The funeral was held in a church in Hampstead and there must have been 350 people there, everyone he'd ever come into contact with; the place was rammed to the rafters. And as well as being sad, it was also fantastically uplifting and joyous. I think that Roger was a truly joyous man, actually. That's why *The Duke* is a great testament to his personality. But in a strange way, I think that the funeral was, too."

This is the last chance to celebrate what a brilliant director Roger was.  
That makes me want to promote the film more

### *Jim Broadbent*

It is a drizzly afternoon in mid-February and [Jim Broadbent](#) has been speaking to reporters all day. The journey that began alongside Michell on the Venice red carpet wraps up here, in a London hotel, staring down the barrel of a laptop and doggedly moving from one interview to the next. The actor is dry-mouthed and exhausted; he says that he has never talked quite so much in his life. Nonetheless he's determined to do right by the film.

"It's an emotional day for me," he says. "It's not enjoyable, but it's something I want to do. Because this is the last chance to celebrate what a brilliant director Roger was, and what a wonderful person he was. That makes me want to promote the film more than I would normally want to promote a film. I want to put it out there and remember what we did. I want to tell people about it. To tell them about him."

# The Duke is out in the UK on 25 February

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Fabio at dawn with his flock in the Belluno Dolomites, north-east Italy

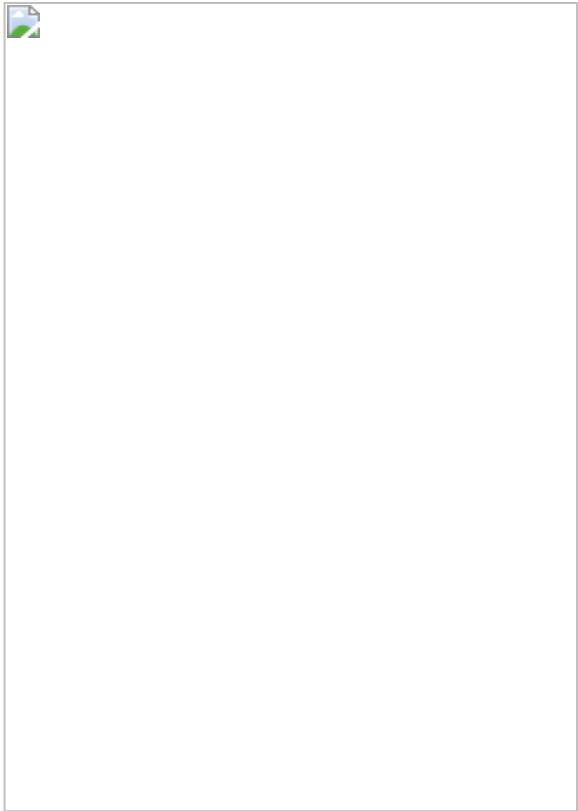
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## **Shepherd's delight: the young Italian nomads high in the Dolomites – photo essay**

Fabio at dawn with his flock in the Belluno Dolomites, north-east Italy

Renowned photographer Bruno Zanzottera and anthropologist Elena Dak spent a year following a shepherding family and their flock across mountainous pastures. Words by [Tom Levitt](#).

Animals farmed is supported by



## About this content

Fri 18 Feb 2022 02.01 EST

Alice and Fabio have been nomadic shepherds for almost 10 years, taking their sheep every year from pastures high in the Dolomites to and from the Po valley, a large expanse of agricultural landscape in northern [Italy](#).

Between June and September, they move around various pastures in the Dolomites, but when the weather starts to get cold, they take their flock of about 1,000 to the lowlands.

From the winter months until May they live in a caravan, travelling around the countryside in the provinces of Venezia, Padova and Treviso, looking for harvest leftovers in unused fields.



- Fabio drives his flock of 1,000 sheep through the Fochet pastures in the Belluno Dolomites

They rent land in the mountains to graze their flock in the summer but for the rest of the year they move every day in search of landowners who will let them graze their animals in post-harvest fields. Some oblige, but others refuse. Every day begins as an uncertain struggle to find land and food for their sheep. It is a lifestyle, with no holidays, that few Italians could imagine living today.





- Alice and Fabio have a baby boy, Martin. He has started to walk and enjoys following the flock with Fabio. Alice milks the goats for fresh milk for him

A year ago, Alice and Fabio had a baby boy, Martin. They continue to follow the flock, alternating between changing nappies and negotiating the sale of sheep, singing lullabies and giving commands to the sheep and sheepdogs.

In the long term, Alice plans to rent an apartment in the mountains where the sheep graze in the summer and send Martin to a local school. Fabio will continue travelling with the sheep to find land and food.



- Fabio leads the flock along a road near the village of San Martino di Lupari, in the province of Padua

The couple's sheep are reared for their meat, with the animals sold to an intermediary trader. This is their only source of income. The wool has little value and is sold to the trader for a small fee, while the milk is left entirely for the lambs.

Fabio and Alice have no plans to start selling their meat directly to consumers. It would be too complicated, they say. They prefer to live in the countryside and mountains, far from crowds, and are happy to have a trader take care of the marketing and sale of their sheep.





- Fabio and Alice have no plans to start selling their meat directly to consumers. It would be too complicated, they say. They prefer to live in the countryside and mountains, far from crowds

There are 60–70 nomadic shepherds like Alice and Fabio living in Veneto, a region in north-eastern Italy stretching from the Dolomites to the Adriatic. Each family has a flock of about 1,000 sheep, keeping a certain number of males and females each year to ensure they can replenish their flock without having to buy in new animals.



- Wool from the sheep is sold to a trader, for very little money

The couple, like many nomadic shepherds, do not have access to the [billions of euros of EU farm subsidies](#) given to landowners. But they do hope one day to be able to obtain fields of their own for their sheep.



- Fabio's flock graze high in the Dolomites in summer
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## Eleven strangers watched me write this article. Is this the answer to our productivity crisis?



‘Sitting down with another human being and sharing those goals creates both accountability and urgency.’ Illustration: Carmen Casado/The Guardian

When the pandemic hit, I realized the work that would take me a few hours in the office drags on at home. Discovering a site that forced me to be accountable saved me



[Sam Wolfson](#)

Fri 18 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

The first thing I did when I sat down to write this piece was to have a conversation with Ben. Ben is a polite, clean-cut, white American thirtysomething with a five o'clock shadow, and he's sitting against a plain blue wall. The only thing hanging in his study is a white frame with "less" on it in lower-case serif, which makes me think he's a graphic designer. But the only thing I really know about Ben is he's too easily distracted, and so am I.

I have been randomly assigned to work with Ben on a website I use every day called [Focusmate](#), which uses a sense of accountability to help you focus. The homepage kind of looks like a Google calendar: you book in a 50-minute session and the site matches you with someone else who wants to work in that time slot (this is mostly done randomly, although brand new users are matched with more experienced ones). When the time comes, you and your buddy get placed on a video call. You politely and briefly tell each

other what you're planning to use the time to do – and then you get on with it.

When the pandemic hit and many of us started to work from home, I experienced what I like to call the kitchen drift. You sit down to write six emails, but halfway through the first you find that you're making a cup of coffee, and then, actually, your bedroom is messy so why not just put a few clothes away, but that's also where your phone is charging, and so why not treat yourself to a YouTube video or five – after all, no one is watching. Oh, look, it's lunchtime.

This kind of procrastinating didn't mean I ended up working less, just that work that would take me a few hours in the office was dragging into my evenings and early mornings, eating up my social time. I know I'm not alone in this: after monitoring changes in web activity of their huge user base during the pandemic, NordVPN released a study that showed the average American's working day was [lengthened by three hours](#) once they started working from home.

I had tried other things in the past to cut down on distraction – putting blockers on my Chrome to stop me going on non-work websites, the popular “Pomodoro technique” in which you work for 25 minutes and then take a break for five (my breaks could last for hours).



Illustration: Carmen Casado/The Guardian

Discovering Focusmate saved me. First of all, it makes you think about what you can reasonably do in 50 minutes – the length of a session. It forces you to organise your day and prioritise your goal. Sitting down with another human being and sharing those goals creates accountability and urgency.

The site was created by Taylor Jacobson. The brainwave came to him in 2015: a friend had a big presentation coming up but was a terrible procrastinator and was worried he wouldn't get his preparation done in time. They decided they would stay on a Skype call, telling each other what they were doing and leaving the window open to make sure they were doing it. Both of them felt they were suddenly in a productive, concentrated state of flow they hadn't previously managed to reach.

I wanted to ask Jacobson about how he got from that idea to setting up a business, but when I put in my interview request he suggested that rather than a phone call we send each other voice notes on WhatsApp. "It can be a nice way to get high fidelity and do some back and forth, *sans* scheduling." Who am I to argue with the person who has already improved my productivity threefold? I record my first message for him.

In his reply, Jacobson says almost as soon as he had done the proto-Focusmate Skype call, he thought that “millions of people need this”.

He speaks loftily about what he describes as the philosophical aims for the project. He says he had “a dramatic paradigm shift of vulnerability” and started to think: “What if we stopped trying so hard to figure out everything on our own, and just asked ourselves: what do we actually need in order to be successful?”

He says he took a lot of inspiration from tribal psychology, nervous system co-regulation, concepts that have been popularised recently by [Bessel van der Kolk](#)’s 2014 book *The Body Keeps the Score*, a book about trauma that is rarely off the Amazon bestseller list.

“Our lifestyles create constant stress in a way we weren’t designed to handle,” Jacobson says. “Our nervous systems are designed to handle imminent physical danger and help us survive. There’s a tiger, so I need to run or fight for my life, for example.”

He says that in our daily lives we experience stressors that our nervous systems can’t distinguish from those life and death situations. “So socially and physically, we repress all of the fight/flight energy that is constantly being stimulated in our nervous system. A low attention span is basically just a symptom of stress. When we feel safe we can focus, and humans are designed to experience safety through connection with others, through the tribe.”

Our lifestyles create constant stress in a way we weren’t designed to handle

*Taylor Jacobson*

When my session begins, I move my buddy to the corner of the screen and focus on what I need to be doing – constantly aware that we will be swapping notes about our progress at the end. For anyone who slouched their way through school but managed to pull it out of the bag during the final exam, you’ll know the feeling of working with a proctor – everything speeds up as you feel the time pressure.

Since the start of the pandemic I have booked more than 180 of these sessions, although many users I match with have completed thousands. If you respect the session and set a clear goal, I find you can get more done in three 50-minute blocks than you could in a whole day not using it.

What people are trying to achieve, and how much they think they can get done in the time, varies greatly. Some are just trying to read academic texts without distractions: “I made it to the end of the article!” is a common, joyous refrain at the end of a session. Not everyone uses it for work – in early morning sessions you get people writing stream-of-consciousness “morning pages”, or even just reading the paper. I’ve had a couple of people use it just for tidying their room.

Occasionally, at the end of the session, we talk a bit more about what we worked on. One young woman in Philadelphia tells me she would never have completed her undergraduate degree in psychology without hundreds of Focusmate sessions. A teacher in Oregon says it has changed the way she marks papers, and has given her more demarcation between work and life.

By connecting with someone on a video call, you’re providing some of those tribe-like feelings; it stops you feeling like just a little atom alone at your kitchen table. “When you mix together some structure, some accountability, and the human element, we move into an optimal, focused state,” says Jacobson.

This might all seem like some deep psychology for an app that basically puts you on a Zoom call with a stranger, but Jacobson is far from the only one who is concerned that our lack of focus is now a central societal problem. There are big concerns that technology has stolen our ability to enter any kind of flow state, and this has been worsened by the disintegration between our personal and work lives. Recent books like Oliver Burkeman’s *Four Thousand Weeks* (named after the amount of time most of us have on earth), Jenny Odell’s *How to Do Nothing* and Johann Hari’s *Stolen Focus: Why You Can’t Pay Attention* are part of an ever-growing literature that suggests an inability to use time meaningfully is one of the central problems facing the world today.

Jacobson says that there were almost a million Focusmate sessions last year, and his aim is for the platform to one day reach 100 million users. People often ask me whether there are any weirdos on the site – Chatroulette, a somewhat utopian website that launched in the late 00s and lets you speak with a random person anywhere in the world, quickly descended into little more than a meet-up for masturbators – but I have never been matched with anyone who wasn't using the service genuinely. Jacobson says the high barriers to entry (you have to create a profile and talk about why you want to join) mean in the site's history there has only ever been a tiny handful of isolated complaints, all dealt with by his team.

A bigger problem is that it does feel as though its initial power can wane over time. Sometimes, by the fourth session of the day, I take my pledge to my working partner less seriously and end up distracted. In those moments I go full nuclear mode and share my screen with my Focusmate – the site offers this functionality – obliterating my right to privacy and creating an extra layer of accountability. This is incredibly effective – although make sure the Guardian doesn't find out about this, as I'm sure it violates their privacy policy in 12 different ways.

About 11 Focusmate sessions later, I'm now at the end of working on this piece – I finish with Hilla, on the west coast of the US, who is making some changes to an online course. At the end, she asks me what my article is about, and I lie and tell her it's about the US midterms. Talking to your Focusmate about your Focusmate article? I have to draw the line somewhere.

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[You be the judge](#)[Relationships](#)

## You be the judge: should my husband keep his motorbike in the house?



Illustration: Joren Joshua/The Guardian

She says the bike has got to go; he thinks it's a work of art. We air both sides of a domestic disagreement – you deliver the verdict

[If you have a disagreement you'd like settled, or want to be part of our jury, click here](#)

*Interviews by [Georgina Lawton](#)*

*@georginalawton*

Fri 18 Feb 2022 03.00 EST

## The prosecution: Sandy

*Peter loves his bikes; we now have a garage, but he still keeps one in the house*

When I first met my husband Peter, he lived in a flat and kept a large, powerful motorbike, a Kawasaki Z1, in the hall. Trying to squeeze past it with shopping was a nightmare. Then there was a smaller vintage bike, called a Gilera, in the living room and another huge bike, a Ducati, in the bedroom. I was surrounded by them.

We recently bought a house together with a beautiful garage and I thought: great, the bikes will be happy and comfortable there. But then a storm approached. Peter began to get agitated and worried that a branch would crash through the roof and damage the bikes. Before I knew it, the Gilera had snuck into the house again. He said it would only be there for a few days. But after the storm passed it was still there and ended up staying for weeks.

A few months later, we got a puppy. It started biting everything – that's when Peter finally returned the Gilera to the garage.

I think the only reason he did it was to protect it from the puppy, not because I wanted it gone. After it disappeared I felt joy. I thought: I'm not going to trip over it or find bits of it in my kitchen. I often say Peter loves his Gilera more than he loves me. He's had it since he was 16.

Peter loves to stick bits of his motorbike into the dishwasher, which I find alarming

The two bigger bikes stay in the garage, but once the puppy stops biting, Peter wants to bring the Gilera back into the house. But it creates a mess. I've had a lot of stains on our carpets and flooring.

One time, Peter hung lights around one of the bikes to make it look like a nice art display, but something happened and he burned a hole in the carpet. We've also bought a posh dishwasher – and Peter loves to stick bits of his motorbike into it, which I find alarming.

I'm not against Peter having his bikes – we've taken several trips with me on the back, and I go to his vintage motorbike shows. But bikes in the house are a hazard. The Gilera really needs to stay in the garage unless there's a real emergency. The bigger bikes stay out entirely.

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## **The defence: Peter**

*Sandy's paperweight collection is on display; it's only fair I can bring in one little motorcycle*

Vintage motorbikes are things of beauty, they make the house a better place. It's also widely accepted that they work better when you store them in dry, warm places so I really feel they should be allowed in the house.

After we bought this house, we learned that a branch from the walnut tree above our garage had once blown off during a gale and crashed through the roof. I really didn't want that to happen during the storm when the Gilera was in there, so I moved it inside. Sandy wasn't pleased. She said: "What the heck is this doing in my house?"

The Gilera is the only bike I really want inside. It was built in 1973 and it's a gorgeous little thing. With the Z1, I do admit that it was difficult to walk past in my old place. I remember one time my bag got caught on a hook and split and the shopping went everywhere. But when you're careful it's usually not a problem. I've also never put any bike parts in the dishwasher that are

greasy or oily. There's actually a lot more grease from a tray you cook chicken on.

My wife feels that houses are for ‘nice’ things – but in my eyes, motorbikes have the same status as a work of art

Sandy’s extensive paperweight collection is displayed in our home – it’s only fair that I’m allowed to bring in a precious little motorcycle. People have preconceived ideas of what should be in houses, and they can be unfair. My wife feels that houses are for “nice” things. Her friends agree with her and gang up on me. But in my eyes, motorbikes have the same status as a work of art.

The time I tried to hang lights around the bike was a terrible accident. The lights swung on to the carpet and burned holes in it – but I was attempting to treat the bike as an art display.

It’s not true that I love bikes more than I love Sandy. I have told her: “If it came between the Gilera and you, the Gilera would be gone in an instant.” She’s never asked me to get rid of it, though. I think to compromise I can ask Sandy before I need to move a bike inside the house next time, but I can’t promise there won’t be a next time.

## **The jury of Guardian readers**

### **Should Peter move his bike out once and for all?**

The ridiculousness of Peter’s first sentence says it all. Unless they can build an extension for the bikes, the garage should be adapted to make it suitable. To compromise, Sandy should reduce the number of paperweights on display.

**Alison, 61**

When Peter lived alone, he was free to store his bikes wherever he wanted. Now that he and Sandy own a home together, there should be some compromise. Sandy’s paperweights aren’t really a comparison; they aren’t

obtrusive and haven't caused damage to the home.

**Sam, 33**

They clearly love each other, though Sandy has made it clear that she simply doesn't want the bike in the house (or the dishwasher) for cleanliness and clutter reasons. Perfectly understandable.

**Michelle, 50**

It's reasonable that Sandy doesn't want to feel as if she's living in a garage when there is one outside. Why not trim that tree branch and turn the garage into a shrine for the Gilera and other bikes to really shine?

**Olivia, 33**

Sorry Peter, but you're guilty. I can't agree with many of the things you said, not least that bikes "make the house a better place". Why not develop the garage into a garden house, or even build a small cabin that could serve as a place to not just store but display them as well?

**Charlie, 44**

## You be the judge

So now you can be the judge, click on the poll below to tell us: should Peter keep his motorbike in the house?

We'll share the results on next week's You be the judge.

**The poll will close at 9AM GMT on 24 February**

## Last week's result

We asked if Paolo's housemate Ray should [stop cooking meat in the kitchen](#) as Paolo is now vegetarian.

96% of you said no – Ray is innocent

4% of you said yes – Ray is guilty

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## 2022.02.18 - Coronavirus

- 'No light at the end' How Hong Kong's Covid response went so wrong
- Western Australia Border to reopen 3 March to triple-vaccinated travellers
- Exclusive Ministers to stop supply of free tests to universities in England
- US More than 1m excess deaths during pandemic

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## ‘No light at the end’: How Hong Kong’s Covid response went so wrong



Hong Kong’s hospitals are under pressure as an Omicron outbreak spreads through the city. Photograph: Lam Yik/Reuters

A policy of admitting every positive case to hospital means thousands are being added to an already huge backlog every day



[Helen Davidson](#) in Taipei and Sum Lok-kei in Hong Kong

[@heldavidson](#)

Fri 18 Feb 2022 01.55 EST

The beds pile up outside Hong Kong's Caritas hospital. In the cold night, elderly patients lie on gurneys covered with blankets and thermal foil sheets. A woman in pink folds her arms against the chill, while another reaches across her bed in an apparent gesture of comfort to a neighbour. Nearby, others crowd into yellow and blue spillover tents lining the car park edges. The hospital staff attend people calling out when they can, but they are outnumbered. Wails from patients carry through the air.

There are similar scenes across the city, where 11 public hospitals were operating at or beyond capacity as of Friday. Private hospitals refuse to take Covid patients. Photos supplied to the Guardian show a treatment room inside one hospital earlier this week (88% capacity) with gurneys three deep across the thoroughfare, on a floor strewn with garbage. Bathrooms that no one has had time to clean were soiled with faeces, dirt and discarded biohazard bags.

Health workers and residents who spent two years after strict Covid controls are now asking how it all went so wrong. The city that had managed to quash outbreak after outbreak was finally being engulfed and the authorities didn't seem to be ready.

## **'Nowhere near the peak'**

At North Lantau hospital, a doctor on the emergency ward says frontline medics can no longer keep up with the mounting caseload. More than 10,000 Covid patients are waiting for hospital treatment or isolation during Hong Kong's Omicron outbreak, with thousands more added to the backlog each day.

The doctor, who asked not be named, says some patients are having to wait outdoors because wards equipped to house Covid patients are perpetually full.



Patients wait for treatment in a temporary holding area outside the Caritas medical centre in Hong Kong. Photograph: Leung Man Hei/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

“The most ridiculous thing we've seen so far is ... a 90-year-old woman lying outside for three days and still she could not be admitted.”

He says medics are spread too thinly to keep a close eye on patients.

“If someone’s condition urgently deteriorates, we may not catch it. It is sheer luck that it has not happened yet,” he says.

Hong Kong has been [smashed by a wave of Omicron](#). It has recorded more than 16,600 cases so far this year, surpassing the Covid totals for 2020 and 2021 combined. At the moment there are about 5,000 people in hospital or isolation, though fewer than 20 are critical and about 60 in a serious condition.

On Friday, chief executive Carrie Lam said next month’s elections for her post would be postponed to 8 May, saying the administration’s focus now had to be on the fight against the pandemic.



More than 10,000 Covid patients are waiting for hospital treatment or isolation during Hong Kong’s Omicron outbreak. Photograph: Leung Man Hei/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

Hospital beds were already at 90% capacity because of a policy which saw every positive case hospitalised regardless of symptoms. Close contacts were isolated offsite in government facilities which quickly began to strain. Labs buckled under a requirement for a second test to confirm every “preliminary positive”, with reported delays of up to five days.

“No system is designed to be able to cope with this level of cases,” says government adviser and University of Hong Kong’s dean of medicine, Prof Gabriel Leung.

But it’s going to get worse. “We are nowhere near the peak.”

## ‘Sandcastles in a tsunami’

Hong Kong social media is littered with mirthless and sarcastic responses of “if only they’d had two years to prepare”.

For most of 2020 and 2021 Hong Kong had one of the world’s most effective responses to the pandemic. It kept total case numbers below 15,000 by quickly crushing outbreaks under a strategy of pursuing zero cases.

The stakes were high. Being Covid-free is Beijing’s requirement for opening its borders to the city, something Hong Kong has prioritised over opening to the rest of the world.



Under Hong Kong’s ‘dynamic zero’ Covid strategy, people have enjoyed long stretches unencumbered by public health restrictions. Photograph: Marc Fernandes/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

Under the “dynamic zero” strategy, Hongkongers enjoyed long stretches of time largely unencumbered by the pandemic, as long as they didn’t need to travel. Between those stretches, when four waves of Covid hit the city, the government introduced restrictions which were often complicated and harsh, sometimes illogical, and changed frequently. But they worked – until Omicron arrived and the system crumbled.

On Thursday more than 6,100 cases were officially recorded. Dr Sarah Ho of the Hospital Authority described a “crisis situation”.

Online, Hong Kong clinical virologist Dr Siddharth Sridhar said the hospitals were “sandcastles in a tsunami”.

“I’ve worked in healthcare in Hong Kong for a decade. Our public hospitals are always stressed. We buckle every time there’s a flu surge.”

The Hospital Authority did not respond to the Guardian’s inquiries.

For health experts, the major current concern is elderly people. Hong Kong had early and plentiful access to vaccines, which have been shown to significantly reduce severe infection. But for a range of reasons the immunisation rates in older age groups are alarmingly low. In aged care homes it is about 20%, says Leung.

He attributes the low rate to early misinformation feeding vaccine hesitancy, but also Hong Kong’s earlier success, which he says led to both a false sense of comfort and a belief among elderly that they were at higher risk from the vaccine side-effects than from getting Covid-19. This far into the pandemic, many had not sought out updated advice.

## An insurmountable task?

The government had plenty of warning.

“The big surprise with Omicron is how predictable it really is,” says Leung.

He says daily case numbers may go higher than previous predictions of 30,000, but they need to “flatten the curve”.

Leung says the answer is to reduce mobility and mixing among the population to slow down the spread enough to maintain the integrity of the health system.



People queue at a makeshift Covid testing centre in Hong Kong. Experts say some of the more cumbersome health protocols should be relaxed.  
Photograph: Lam Yik/Reuters

Rumours of a “mainland [China](#) style” city-wide lockdown – which were also heavily utilised in other countries including Australia and New Zealand – were ruled out by Lam, on Tuesday, but few people seem to think it’s a concrete promise given how often things have changed.

Lockdowns and social restrictions have had a huge impact on lives and businesses. Jason Lowe, president of the Craft Beer Association of Hong Kong, says their revenue has dropped by more than half.

“For businesses, we already feel like we’re in a dark tunnel with no light at the end,” he says. “Instead of helping us get out, the government’s ever stricter restrictions and lack of support is more like pushing us further inside and trapping us there.”

Prof Ben Cowling, an epidemiologist at the University of Hong Kong, says mild Covid cases should be allowed to stay home.



Hong Kong chief executive Carrie Lam has said the government is still committed to elimination. Photograph: EyePress News/REX/Shutterstock

“At the moment the pressure is from not being able to admit and discharge mild cases quickly enough,” Cowling says. “But in a couple of weeks I fear the pressure is going to come from having too many patients with severe Covid and not with the resources to manage them.”

The spread has slowed a little. Cases in Hong Kong are doubling every three days compared to every 1.5 to 2 in other countries, but it’s not slow enough.

In the meantime the government is still committed to elimination. On Tuesday Lam declared that “surrendering to the virus” was not an option. On Wednesday’s front pages of local pro-Beijing papers Xi Jinping called on her to grasp the “overriding mission” of controlling the outbreak.

Having bet the house on prevention, Hong Kong’s authorities are now faced with a potentially insurmountable task.

“I’m not sure there was a failure to prepare for this type of scenario as there was a failure to anticipate the potential for this type of scenario,” says

Cowling.

*Additional reporting by Xiaoqian Zhu and Vincent Ni*

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/18/no-light-at-the-end-how-hong-kongs-covid-response-went-so-wrong>.

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## Western Australia

# Western Australia to reopen 3 March to triple-vaccinated travellers

‘There comes a point where the border is ineffective when you get to high case numbers within the state,’ premier Mark McGowan says

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Western Australian premier Mark McGowan announced the reopening date as the state recorded 194 local Covid cases. Photograph: Richard Wainwright/AAP

*Elias Visontay*

[@EliasVisontay](#)

Fri 18 Feb 2022 03.15 EST

Western Australia's hard border will come down on 3 March, as the premier, Mark McGowan, acknowledges that sealing off the state has become "ineffective" in the face of a surging local outbreak.

McGowan announced the new border reopening date on Friday, allowing quarantine-free travel for those who have received three vaccine doses.

The announcement comes [four weeks after McGowan backflipped](#) on his [initial promise](#) to ease entry requirements from 5 February due to the spread of Omicron in other jurisdictions and WA's low booster rate.

The state's reopening will happen nearly 700 days after WA first sealed itself off from other states in April 2020, with its international border remaining tightly controlled since the federal government initially shut Australia's borders in March 2020.

WA had been the last Australian state to succeed in avoiding significant community transmission of Covid. However, local cases have surged in recent days, with a record 194 new local infections reported on Friday.

McGowan explained on Friday that the new date had been chosen as daily Covid numbers in eastern states had fallen from their peaks in January and WA's third dose vaccination rates was increasing.

He also acknowledged the inevitable surge in cases from the current outbreak in his state.

"I firmly believe saving West Australian lives has been worth every effort over the past two years," McGowan said.

"Eventually there comes a point where the border is ineffective when you get to high case numbers within the state," he said.

"It is plain to see that four weeks of caution has paid dividends. It means it is now far safer to relax our hard border settings," McGowan said.

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From 12.01am on 3 March, travellers who have had three doses of Covid-19 vaccine will be able to enter WA, however they will still have to complete a G2G border pass prior to entry and take a rapid antigen test within 12 hours of arrival. Unvaccinated travellers from interstate will not be able to enter WA.

The reopening of the international border will be in line with the federal government's previously announced plan that is already in place in all other jurisdictions – which requires two doses of Covid vaccine. In WA, unvaccinated returning Australians will have to undergo seven days of hotel quarantine, with a smaller cap of 70 people per week.

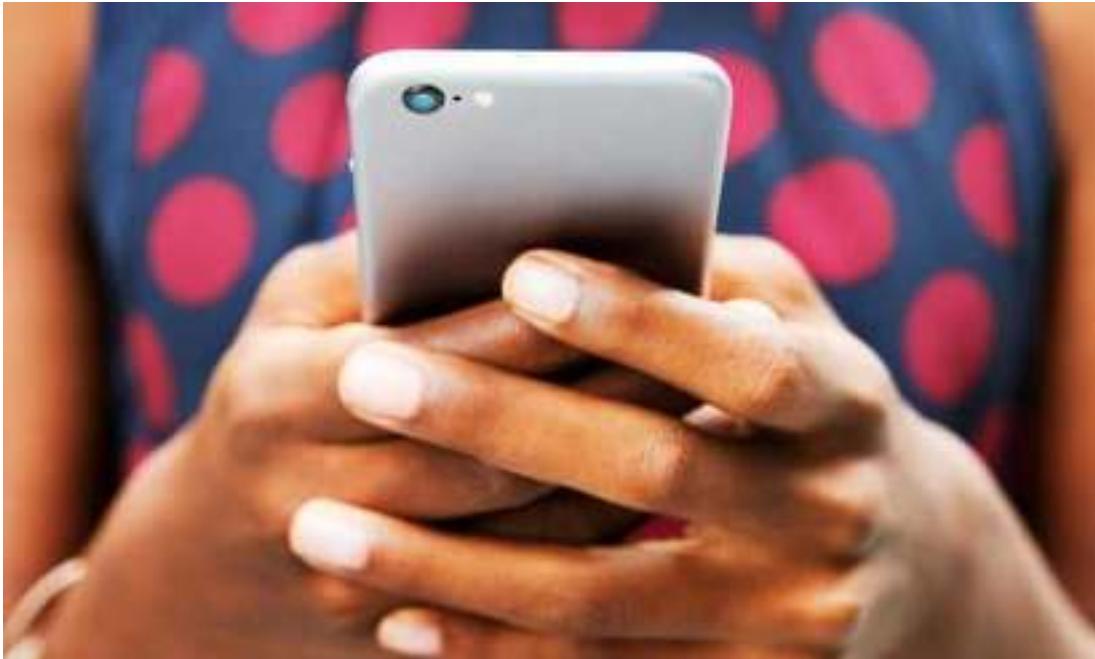
New [mask rules, as well as density and gathering restrictions](#), will also be introduced ahead of the 3 March reopening, to protect the state's health system from being overwhelmed by the spread of the Omicron variant.

Amber-Jade Sanderson, WA's health minister, said health authorities were expecting a peak in local infections at the end of March.

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Photograph: Tim Roberts/Stone RF

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Modelling predicts this will be 10,000 daily infections. After “peak immunity” is reached in March, the modelling predicted that four people will die each day as a result of ongoing transmission of Covid.

From 21 February, masks will be required for indoor settings across the state.

In Perth, Peel, South-West, Wheatbelt, Great Southern and the Pilbara, additional settings include a two person per square metre rule that will apply

to gyms, hospitality and entertainment venues.

Home gatherings will also be limited to 30 people, and outdoor gatherings limited to 200 people in those regions.

On Friday, McGowan said “this date [3 March] is locked in and I can’t foresee a situation where it would change”.

Today we announced the new date for WA’s full border opening – and it’s worth talking through how we got here.

Four weeks ago, on January 20, we took the difficult decision to delay Western Australia’s full border opening. [pic.twitter.com/zEpV2tQRoR](https://pic.twitter.com/zEpV2tQRoR)

— Mark McGowan (@MarkMcGowanMP) [February 18, 2022](#)

“I know removing the hard border is a step that some in the community have been looking forward to for some time,” he tweeted. “I note there are also Western Australians who will be apprehensive, but I want them to know – WA is prepared.

“We have the supplies, we have the policy settings. We have one of the most vaccinated populations in the world,” he said.

McGowan said the notice period “of nearly two weeks gives the community and businesses time to prepare and make plans”, and urged residents not yet boosted to get their third vaccine dose.

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## Coronavirus

# Ministers to stop supply of free Covid tests to universities in England

Exclusive: Education leaders criticise ‘reckless’ move, after first case of ending mass distribution of LFTs

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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A student at Hull University, takes a swab for a lateral flow Covid-19 test. The government has been accused of ‘playing fast and loose’ with the safety of staff and students on campus. Photograph: Paul Ellis/AFP/Getty Images

*[Richard Adams](#) Education editor*

Thu 17 Feb 2022 11.21 EST

Ministers are stopping supplies of coronavirus tests to universities in [England](#), in the first case of ending the mass distribution of free lateral flow testing kits before dropping all remaining Covid restrictions.

Universities are currently advised that students and staff on campus should take lateral flow tests (LFTs) twice a week, even if they do not have coronavirus symptoms. But the contract to supply the kits, through NHS test and trace and the UK Health Security Agency, will be terminated on Friday and not renewed.

The cabinet [is said to be split](#) over Covid strategy and the future of testing, with the Treasury pushing to end mass testing as a cost-saving measure, while the health secretary, Sajid Javid, wants to retain some free testing to aid community surveillance of the virus.

A government spokesperson said: “No decisions have been made on the provision of free testing. Everyone can continue to get free tests, including university students and staff who can order from the government website or their local pharmacy.”

Higher education leaders were informed of the surprise decision only on Wednesday. Universities also appear to have been told they cannot distribute any remaining stocks of LFTs past the end of this week.

Alistair Jarvis, the chief executive of Universities UK, which represents vice-chancellors and college leaders, said: “The ending of the legal agreement which allows universities to hand out lateral flow testing kits to students and staff ahead of the confirmation that all remaining Covid restrictions in England is hard to understand.

“We are asking government for urgent clarification that universities can continue to distribute test kits from the supplies they have on campus. This makes sense when universities have kits which would otherwise go to waste and while there is still demand from students and staff this term.”

Jo Grady, the general secretary of the University and College Union, accused the government of “playing fast and loose” with the safety of staff

and students on campus, and said the decision could jeopardise in-person teaching.

“This approach is reckless and may lead to Covid outbreaks being undetected until it is far too late to limit infections. It is also completely irresponsible for the government to make this change at such short notice,” Grady said.

“Ministers must explain how employers are supposed to ensure campuses remain safe when testing is a key health and safety control measure. They must also commit to not abandoning free PCR testing for symptomatic cases. University staff and students need these reassurances urgently.”

The government spokesperson said: “We continue to encourage people to use rapid tests when they need them.”

The Guardian [revealed](#) this week that the Treasury was seeking to cut the budget for coronavirus provisions by up to 90%, including an end to distributing LFTs for asymptomatic testing from March.

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## Coronavirus

# US has suffered more than 1m excess deaths during pandemic, CDC finds

The latest statistic hints at the breadth of Covid-19's impact on health in the United States



Most of the excess deaths were caused by Covid-19, but overwhelmed health care systems may have been a factor in others. Photograph: Jae C Hong/AP

*[Melody Schreiber](#)*

Thu 17 Feb 2022 12.51 EST

There have been more than 1m excess deaths in the US during the pandemic, [according](#) to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The deaths are mainly attributable to Covid-19, as well as conditions that may have resulted from delayed medical care and overwhelmed health

systems.

At least 923,000 Americans have died from confirmed Covid cases, [according](#) to the CDC. Other causes of death above the normally expected number have [included](#) heart disease, hypertension and Alzheimer's disease.

Some Americans also die months after their initial Covid diagnosis, because the virus created other fatal complications.

Excess deaths are calculated by looking at previous years' fatalities. In 2019, there were [2.8m](#) deaths in the US; in 2020, it was approximately [3.3m](#).

[Chart of the number of weekly deaths in the US from 2019 to the beginning of 2022. Shows an estimated 1 million excess deaths occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic.](#)

“All-cause excess mortality is one of the most reliable and unbiased ways to look at the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic,” said Jeremy Faust, an emergency physician at Brigham and Women’s Hospital and an instructor at Harvard Medical School.

“It does not rely on how many tests were done or on subjective cause of death designations.”

While cause of death can sometimes be difficult to ascertain, and political pressures can lead to [miscounting](#), excess deaths can indicate the broad scope of a health emergency.

“Whenever we hear that another 100,000 people died of Covid, there’s a reliable chorus of naysayers who claim that these deaths would’ve happened anyway,” Faust said. “Excess deaths cuts through that, because it’s about reporting whether the total number of deaths is out of the ordinary.”

These figures can reveal the truer toll of Covid – including deaths directly from infection as well as deaths from the circumstances of the crisis.

The global number of excess deaths may be [millions higher](#) than the official count of Covid deaths.

The toll of Covid has been geographically uneven in the US. At first the virus was largely confined to major cities, but then it began [spreading in rural areas](#), with devastating effect.

Deaths among working-age Americans are up 40% during the roughly two years of the pandemic, one insurance executive [said in December](#).

Many Americans delayed seeking care during the pandemic, and others may have seen the quality of their care decrease as health systems were overburdened by Covid.

The US is also in the midst of an overdose crisis, with more than [100,000 overdose deaths](#) in the first year of the pandemic.

Excess deaths are also known as untimely or “early” deaths. While the majority of excess deaths in the US occurred among those 65 and older, many of those Americans had many years left to live.

The average 80-year-old in the US has a life expectancy of eight more years, Faust noted. “If suddenly more 80-year-olds are dying than usual, it’s a simple fact that many of them had not just months but years, even a decade or more, of life left otherwise in some cases.

“Sometimes people say that stopping Covid merely ‘delays death’. To that, I say, ‘Exactly. That’s what medicine and public health are all about.’”

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## 2022.02.18 - Opinion

- Universal basic income can be the worst of all worlds - but ‘free money’ schemes do work
- British police are hounding a journalist for his sources – it’s vital he resists
- MPs’ groups are taking millions from private interests – that can’t go unchecked
- The evidence is all around us: life outside the single market is an utter disaster

OpinionUniversal basic income

## **Universal basic income can be the worst of all worlds - but ‘free money’ schemes do work**

Gaby Hinsliff



A trial in Wales for care leavers is brave and imaginative, but a benefits system must work for all



Illustration by Ben Jennings

Fri 18 Feb 2022 02.00 EST

It is the unspoken promise of parenthood, the deal millions make as their fledglings fly the nest: that in an emergency, they can always come fluttering back. Even if they never have to cash that unwritten cheque, just knowing it's there can be enough to see them through the wobbly early years of independence. That place is home. It is what gives young adults the confidence to flee a toxic relationship or a dodgy flatshare, knowing they're not going to end up on the street, or to stick it out in the kind of insecure careers where persistence ultimately pays off. But home isn't like that for everyone, and shamefully it's least like that for children parented by the state.

Once they turn 16 they're no longer looked-after children, a euphemism already covering a multitude of sins, but "care leavers". At best that means staying with a loving foster family until they're ready to leave, but at worst it means the kind of downhill slide that explains why too many rough sleepers have previously been in care. Almost half of care leavers have mental health issues and [more than a third](#) aren't in education, employment or training between the ages of 19 and 21. Although the state now offers a

“personal adviser” to guide them into their 20s, with the best will in the world it’s not going to be like crying on a parental shoulder.

And that’s the backdrop to the Welsh government’s brave and imaginative decision this week to [trial a universal basic income \(UBI\)](#) of £1,600 a month – equivalent to an annual salary of just over £19,000 – to care leavers. Brave, because it invites not just predictable [tabloid outrage](#) at handing out “money for nothing” but also understandable resentment from workers slogging away at minimum-wage jobs that they don’t enjoy for the same money. But imaginative, because if it works – which will mean coupling that money with the kind of intensive support and guidance that care leavers should frankly be getting anyway – it opens up a much broader debate about the future of welfare. It’s road-testing an idea that will make instinctive sense to most parents, which is that the emotional security money buys is not nothing; indeed, for some, it might actually be everything.

A now famous [trial of UBI](#) for unemployed people in Finland, originally designed to test whether the carrot of free money was more effective than the stick of sanctions in getting people back into jobs, found only a slight increase in days worked but a much [bigger impact on happiness and health](#). Recipients reported less stress, depression, sadness and loneliness than the control group, plus more confidence in the future. More surprisingly, they also reported higher cognitive skills – things such as the ability to remember, learn and concentrate – and higher levels of trust in their fellow Finns and in public institutions. If buying happiness, focus and trust doesn’t sound like a terribly efficient use of public money then you are not thinking hard enough about how much unhappiness and all its spiralling consequences – from anxiety and depression to drug and alcohol addiction, relationship breakdown, or the lifelong emotional and educational impact on children’s lives of having parents continually pushed to the limit – costs the taxpayer. Or just how much public trust in institutions from the police to public health experts turned out to matter in a pandemic, or how easily the politics of hate feeds off misery and suspicion.

What’s interesting about the Finnish findings is that they chime with research from [developmental economists](#) suggesting that giving away cold hard cash can be a surprisingly effective way of delivering aid. As the Dutch historian and UBI enthusiast Rutger Bregman has [repeatedly argued](#), the

myth that poor people will only blow it on booze and cigarettes is just that: people counting every penny tend to know exactly what they'd do with a bit more, using it strategically and frugally. If anything it's grinding deprivation that drives humans towards bad choices, and money that helps us make better ones, lifting the fog of panic and exhaustion and helplessness that accompanies poverty and giving recipients the confidence to take risks. The catch for UBI advocates, however, is that the magic of universal basic income may well lie in the last two words, not the first.

For many the whole point is the universality, or the dream that free money for everyone will miraculously engender a warm fuzzy feeling of togetherness even in those too wealthy to actually benefit (because for them UBI would be effectively taxed away) while delivering on the [Keynesian dream](#) of prosperity buying ever-expanding leisure. But that's not where the evidence points. The secret sauce seems to be providing people who just can't see another way out with *enough* free money to catch their breath and make plans. An extra pittance for everyone regardless of need – which is what every economically realistic proposal for UBI I've ever seen ends up apologetically boiling down to, given the exorbitant cost – is the worst of all worlds; not quite enough to be meaningful to those who could really benefit, but still too expensive to be politically plausible. Better to start by funding the existing welfare system properly, recognising that the benefit cuts of the past decade went far too deep and left millions without enough to live on, and then targeting those for whom the security of a basic income could be genuinely life-changing.

In San Francisco and Vancouver, there have been [small but fascinating pilots](#) involving free cash transfers to homeless people. The success of furlough in keeping people attached to the workplace despite being temporarily out of a job suggests another possible avenue. Most people who lose their jobs aren't out of work for long, but for those who don't have savings, even a few months on benefits that are a fraction of their normal salary mean racking up debt that can leave long-term scars. Some kind of time-limited basic income for newly redundant people could bridge that gap, and give people a chance to retrain; it could be useful too in softening the transition to net zero, offering people who lose jobs in dying fossil-fuel industries time to rethink their futures. The possibilities are exciting, but only if we let go of the utopian theory and focus relentlessly on what actually works. It's not about

money for nothing. It's money for things that might just turn out to be priceless.

- Gaby Hinsliff is a Guardian columnist
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## OpinionBirmingham Six

# British police are hounding a journalist for his sources – it's vital he resists

[Duncan Campbell](#)

Chris Mullin's exposure of the Birmingham Six's wrongful conviction was only possible because he was able to protect his sources



Chris Mullin (centre) with, from left: John Walker, Paddy Hill, Hugh Callaghan, Richard McIlkenny, Gerry Hunter and Billy Power. Photograph: Independent News and Media/Getty Images

Fri 18 Feb 2022 03.00 EST

It is a memorable photograph. Outside the Old Bailey on 14 March 1991 stand the Birmingham Six, free at last after 16 years in prison for a mass murder in which they played no part. At the centre of this happy band, scarf askew and beaming with pleasure and pride, is the man whose diligence as an investigative journalist and later MP has led to their victory in the court

of appeal. Now, more than 30 years later, that same man, Chris Mullin, will himself [be back at the Old Bailey](#) on 23 February facing an action brought against him under the Terrorism Act of 2000 to make him reveal the sources of his information all those years ago.

The [Birmingham Six](#) were jailed for life in 1975 for an IRA bomb attack on two pubs the previous year, which killed 21 people and injured more than 200. It was a grim, unforgivable crime and understandably the police were anxious to nail those responsible. They swiftly arrested five men on their way to Ireland for a funeral and a sixth the following day. After days of brutal interrogation, four “confessed”, admissions that were immediately retracted once their violent ordeal ended. The government’s forensic scientist claimed that at least two of them had been in touch with the explosive nitroglycerine. That evidence was discredited by the time of the trial – many household products and notably the pack of cards with which the men had been playing on their train journey before their arrest gave similar results – but the Six were convicted and jailed for life.

The late [Peter Chippindale](#), who covered the trial for the Guardian, told his journalist friend Mullin that he felt that the police had got the wrong people. A spark was lit. While working for Granada Television’s World in Action programme, Mullin set about trying to discover the truth by tracking down those really responsible. If it was possible to prove that others had carried out the attack, the Six could be shown to be innocent. Eventually he found the real men involved and interviewed them on the understanding that he would not identify them. In 1986, he published his account, Error of Judgement, and the following year became an MP for Sunderland South and continued to campaign. The Sun noted his persistence thus: “Loony MP backs bomb gang”.

Other Irish cases – the Guildford Four, the Maguire Seven, Judith Ward – were also being exposed as miscarriages of justice. At their appeal on that fateful day in 1991, the Six were cleared. Some of them, Billy Power and Paddy Hill, in particular, have since lent their names and energies to free others wrongly convicted.

Then in 2018, under pressure from relatives of those killed and the organisation Justice 4 the 21, came a decision to reinvestigate the case. The

West Midlands police, a very different crew from the disgraced Serious Crime Squad of the 1970s, embarked on a fresh inquiry. Mullin was asked to surrender all his data: notebooks, manuscripts and so on. He provided the notes of his interview with one of the men, Michael Murray, who was the bomb-maker and who had died 20 years ago, but declined to provide anything that would break his agreement. The police now seek a court order from a judge to force him to comply or face jail.

There are precedents. In 1963, [Reg Foster](#), the Daily Sketch's crime reporter and Brendan Mulholland of the Daily Mail were jailed for contempt of court for three and six months respectively for refusing to reveal the sources for stories about John Vassall, who had been convicted the previous year of being a Soviet spy. At the inquiry into the affair Foster delivered an impassioned speech in which he said: "I have been in journalism for 40 years. From the first I was taught always to respect sources of information." He added that he had lost many Fleet Street colleagues in the second world war and "I would feel guilty of the greatest possible treachery to them if I were to assist ... in this matter."

The Guardian faced its own crisis in the case of the civil servant [Sarah Tisdall](#), who was jailed for six months in 1984 after leaking details to the paper about the arrival of American cruise missiles in Britain. The then editor of the Guardian, the late Peter Preston, was prepared to go to prison to defy a court order to provide material that would identify her, but was advised that it was more likely that an ever-increasing fine would be imposed on the newspaper. He described passing on the information as the "worst day" of his editorship and offered his resignation.

While Mullin has the strong support of the National Union of Journalists and from politicians ranging from Labour's Jack Straw and Charlie Falconer to the Conservatives' David Davis, he [has been called](#) "scum" by relatives of the victims and asked, "How do you sleep at night?" While one has great sympathy for the bereaved, the betrayal of sources – which in this case would be very unlikely to lead to any convictions – is not the path to be taken in any pursuit of justice.

Journalists already enjoy little public respect. An Ipsos Mori poll in 2020 put the percentage of people who trust journalists to tell the truth [at 23%](#); only

politicians rank lower. Mullin is absolutely right to stand firm – especially at a time when attempts are being made to amend the Official Secrets Act to make punishing whistleblowers easier. If journalists routinely betray sources and break their word why should anyone ever trust them and how will scandals like that of the Birmingham Six – the likes of which continue to this day – ever be uncovered?

- Duncan Campbell is the former crime correspondent of the Guardian
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## OpinionLobbying

# MPs' groups are taking millions from private interests – that can't go unchecked

[Chris Bryant](#)

All-party parliamentary groups are a valuable tool, but without regulation they risk becoming fronts for commercial interests

- Chris Bryant is the Labour MP for Rhondda
- [Lobbying fears as MPs' interest groups receive £13m from private firms](#)



'It would be wrong for any APPG to give the impression that one of its reports or publications has a parliamentary imprimatur or seal of approval.'

Photograph: Pawel Libera/Getty Images

Thu 17 Feb 2022 12.15 EST

All-party parliamentary groups may be informal, but they provide a great service in our democracy. In good hands, they can foster better relations with other countries, keep a weather eye on an authoritarian regime, or bring into sharp focus a policy issue that may otherwise have been forgotten.

In that vein, I set up the APPG on [acquired brain injury](#), which produced a report with a list of recommendations after a series of round tables with patients, families and practitioners. Just before Christmas, that bore fruit in the shape of a government commitment to launch a new national strategy on the issue. So an APPG can make a big difference, and the vast majority are run simply and cheaply on the back of the enthusiasm of a few MPs and peers without any extra spending.

It's also an important way of baking cross-party working into the system. No MP can launch their own APPG with the support of their party colleagues alone – they need support from across the benches.

But I worry that the number of APPGs has risen dramatically in the last few years. Instead of one cancer APPG, there are now more than a dozen.

Some industries are especially well-resourced, with every part of the supply chain and every trade body getting its own group. Some countries have more than one. We now have [more APPGs than we do MPs](#). It sometimes feels as if every MP wants their own APPG, and every lobbying company sees them as an ideal way to make a quick buck out of a trade or industry body. “Look,” they say, “if you really want to get this on the agenda politically, we can get you access to MPs, peers and ministers – but the more financial support you give the APPG (through us, of course) the more effective the group will be.” Hence the rise in the number of APPGs that are serviced by lobbying, PR or communications companies.

There are several problems with this. For a start, nobody should be touting access or influence on behalf of an APPG. Second, the rules on what APPGs have to register are pretty clear, but until now this has virtually been a self-policing area of policy. The Commons authorities have neither the powers nor resources to investigate every APPG, and since we abolished the requirement to get permission to launch a new one, the only substantial requirement for an APPG to keep going is to hold an annual general

meeting. Sometimes these are so poorly attended as to make one question whether they are really an APPG or just a personal campaign or money-making venture masquerading as a parliamentary affair.

I don't think anyone is concerned when an APPG is supported by a charity. (The acquired brain injury APPG, incidentally, is supported by the UK ABI Forum.) But it may be time for us to ban commercial operators from acting as the secretariat for APPGs, unless they can prove a public interest and enough interest from a larger number of MPs and peers. When lobbying firms are effectively driving a group in the interests of their clients, we should not only know who those clients are, but we should be able to close down the group where there is a clear conflict of interest.

Which takes me to another point. The [House of Commons](#) and the Lords both have formal select committees covering all the government departments. Proceedings in these committees, and their publications, are covered by parliamentary privilege, which is an important aspect of ensuring MPs and peers can speak without fear or favour. It would be – and is – wrong for any APPG to give the impression that one of its reports or publications has a parliamentary imprimatur or seal of approval. Newspaper editors would be well advised to stop referring vaguely to “a committee of MPs” and to start drawing a clear distinction between the authorised, privileged work of a select committee and the unauthorised work of an APPG.

If you have evidence of something that doesn't smell right in the way an APPG is run, the Committee on Standards on Public Life will run an inquiry into it. We can't investigate individual groups, but we'd be [happy to hear](#) from you as background for our inquiry.

I certainly don't want to curtail the work of APPGs so much that their valuable work comes to an end. They are a vital tool in many backbench MPs' campaigning armoury. But if an APPG feels like front-of-house for a direct commercial interest or a cover for free trips to exotic locations, or if it's the brainchild of a lobbying company, then MPs and peers should run a mile.

- Chris Bryant is the Labour MP for Rhondda
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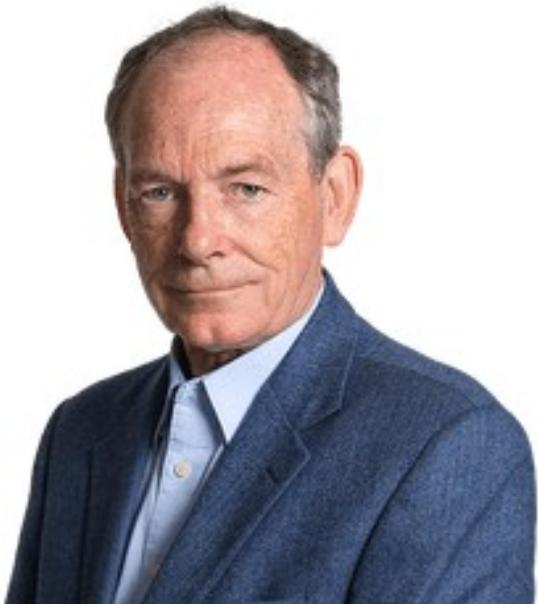
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OpinionBrexit

# The evidence is all around us: life outside the single market is an utter disaster

[Simon Jenkins](#)



An island nation must trade with its nearest mainland, whatever our new Brexit opportunities minister claims



Jacob Rees-Mogg's 'first act has been to 'implore' readers of the Sun to tell him what opportunities they could think of'. Photograph: Tom Nicholson/Reuters

Thu 17 Feb 2022 11.17 EST

A massacre is occurring. More than 35,000 healthy British pigs have been slaughtered and buried on farms since September, with [an estimated 200,000](#) languishing in a backlog.

The reason is that abattoirs lack the staff to process them, largely due to Britain's exit from the pan-European labour market. In October, the environment department [offered 800](#) six-month visas for foreign butchers. But it insisted they go through its laborious scheme for seasonal workers: barely 100 turned up. Whitehall also refuses to curb imports of European pork – which now makes up 60% of the UK market and rising. To the National Pig Association, Brexit means [buy from Europe](#).

For pig farmers, we can read apple growers, flower producers, fishing fleets, road hauliers, house builders, medicine suppliers, care home managers – a whole range of workers on the frontline of Britain's economy. All have benefited in the past from the open market in European labour. All must now

lobby Whitehall for permits, visas, waivers and, if not, compensation. Hundred-page documents must accompany every food convoy to and from Dover and Belfast, where hours of tailbacks quietly rot produce.

You might think all this comes from some statist socialist regime. Yet it is the brainchild of the right wing of the Conservative party, now in government. Ironically, the last such seismic distortion of the free market was also instigated by a lapsed libertarian Tory, Edward Heath, with his [statutory controls](#) on incomes and prices to combat inflation in 1972. This saw Whitehall officials invading company offices and vetting individual payslips.

Those officials are now peering into food containers and poring over job advertisements, exerting the full force of their regulatory zeal. Jobs must be categorised by specialism, shortage, pay and length of stay. Vast Whitehall charts must be mapping labour flows. The Home Office aversion to foreigners has bred a “hostile environment” culture. At the end of last year, private care homes were [forced to sack](#) 50,000 unvaccinated staff. To pretend to compensate, the government then offered care homes extra visas. It turned out they could be only for [one year](#) – despite the essence of care being continuity. As for getting a visa, [it is said](#) to take a minimum of 16 weeks.

I care about elderly people more than I do pigs, but the principle is the same. Both are victims not – repeat not – of the UK’s decision to leave the [European Union](#). They are victims of Boris Johnson’s subsequent decision, to aid him in toppling Theresa May, to interpret Brexit as requiring Britain to depart the world’s most efficient and benign economic entity, the single market. This had been in large part the creation in 1986 of the right’s hero, Margaret Thatcher, to honour her free-market principles.

Leaving the EU had some arguments for it. Leaving the single market had none. “Soft” Brexit within that market would have been far been easier to negotiate. Leaving it has meant wrecked supply chains and terminated scientific collaboration. It has undermined recruitment patterns and destabilised Northern Ireland. It has crippled the fish industry and [impeded billions of pounds](#) of UK trade. Its consequences have wavered between [nuisance and disaster](#).

Brexit has seen a consummation of the very thing Tories are supposed to hate – bureaucracy. Whitehall officials used to be accused of “gold plating” Brussels regulations. “Taking back control” has licensed their wildest dreams. Brexit is [estimated to have](#) required a civil service army of 50,000 new officials, more than the entire central bureaucracy of the EU in Brussels. The latest addition to this apparatus is Jacob Rees-Mogg calling himself the “Brexit opportunities” minister. His first act has been desperate, to “implore” readers of the Sun to tell him what opportunities they could think of.

Rees-Mogg is now [advocating](#) an Institute of Economic Affairs suggestion to boost trade with other countries by abolishing non-tariff barriers and “recognising [their] regulations, without requiring reciprocity, starting with the EU”. Why should they negotiate at all? Surely this negates the whole point of “taking back control”. But then the government is also desperate to reopen trade talks with the US and China. The idea that Britain might “control” such talks is beyond naive.

The battered band of Brexiteers is now seen as wandering in a hostile desert, mystified at why their promised land has failed to materialise. Former European partners were supposed to come crawling to London begging for business. We were told: “They need us more than we need them.” But Europe’s other nations have no interest in rewarding separatism of any sort. A Britain divided, weakened and ill-led is merely the subject of scorn and ridicule. Chaos at Dover is an excellent advertisement for European union.

Britain’s position as an island has to be one that trades openly with the mainland. Sooner or later, the free movement of goods, services, capital and labour will have to be restored, however painfully. It would greatly help if Labour’s Keir Starmer stopped vacillating and committed himself to that objective, as should candidates for Johnson’s succession. No, this is not revoking Brexit or rejoining the EU. It is just embracing sanity.

- Simon Jenkins is a Guardian columnist

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## 2022.02.18 - Around the world

- [Exclusive Canada was warned before protests that violent extremists infiltrated convoy](#)
- [Ottawa Protesters defy police presence after officers warn of crackdown](#)
- [Greece Fire breaks out on ferry near Corfu with 288 people on board](#)
- [Afghanistan Rescuers race to reach boy trapped in well for two days](#)

## Canada

# Canada was warned before protests that violent extremists infiltrated convoy

Exclusive: intelligence assessments warned in late January that it was 'likely' extremists were involved in protests

- [How conspiracy theorists steered Canada's trucker protest](#)



Police are followed by yelling protesters as they attempt to hand out notices to protesters in Ottawa on Thursday. Photograph: Justin Tang/AP

*[Justin Ling](#) in Ottawa*

Thu 17 Feb 2022 12.52 EST

Days before the so-called Freedom Convoy reached Ottawa, starting a weeks-long occupation of Canada's capital and triggering a string of copy-

cat blockades, the federal government was warned that violent extremist groups were deeply involved in the protest movement.

Intelligence assessments – prepared by Canada’s Integrated Terrorism Assessment Centre (Itac) and seen by the Guardian – warned in late January that it was “likely” that extremists were involved and said that the scale of the protests could yet pose a “trigger point and opportunity for potential lone actor attackers to conduct a terrorism attack”.

The assessments offer the first real glimpse into how federal law enforcement and intelligence agencies have assessed the threat of Canada’s anti-vaccine and conspiracy theory movement.

“We knew these people were coming,” said a federal government source, who indicated that the Security Intelligence Service Canada – Canada’s main intelligence service, of which Itac is a part – had flagged the involvement of extremist groups and individuals in official briefings.

The intelligence reports also show that clear warnings were sent to Ottawa police ahead of the convoy’s arrival in the capital. The city’s police has become the focus of a fierce debate over whether they should have done more to prepare for, or prevent, the occupation.

Itac reported that supporters of the convoy have “advocated civil war”, called for violence against prime minister Justin Trudeau, and said the protest should be “used as Canada’s ‘January 6’”, in a reference to the storming of the US Capitol.

An early report, dated 27 January, Itac concluded that “a coordinated, complex terrorist attack or planned storming Parliament or other federal locations is unlikely”.

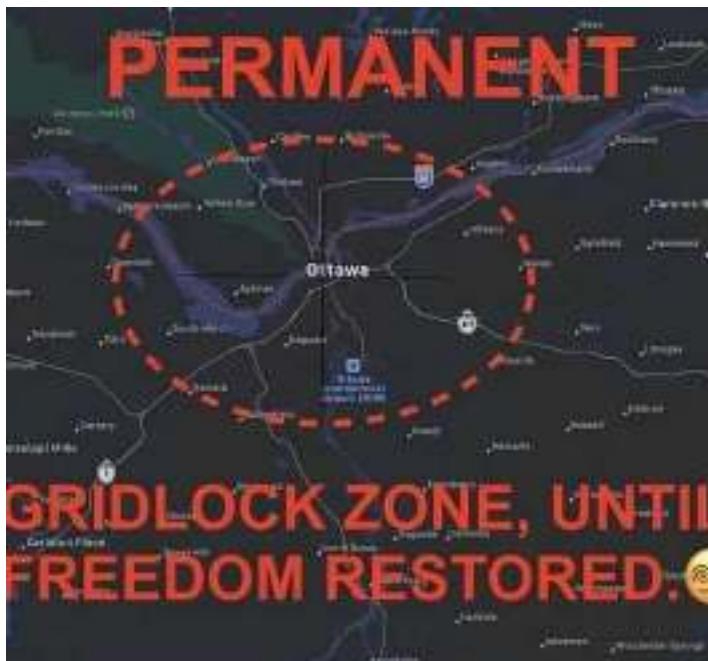
But it concludes that the potential for violence remained very real.

“While the organizers have declared that this is an act of peaceful protest, some ideologically motivated violent extremism followers in Canada have seized upon this rally to advocate for their own ideological objectives,” the January document reads. “Extremists and other individuals supporting

Covid-19 conspiracy theories and violent anti-authority/anti-government views have expressed intent to participate in the convoy and to attend the accompanying protest in Ottawa.”

The assessment warns that protesters, and possible extremists, “could use rudimentary capabilities, such as trucks, cargo and fuel, to cause disruptions to infrastructure”.

Presciently, the report warned that the 31 January return of Parliament “could motivate a dedicated group of protesters to prolong their protest in Ottawa”.



A meme, which was shared widely in the early days of the convoy, that reads: ‘Permanent gridlock zone, until freedom restored.’ Photograph: twitter

Included in the report is a meme, which was shared widely in the early days of the convoy, which shows a map with a circle surrounding Ottawa and reads “permanent gridlock zone until freedom restored”.

As the occupation dragged into its second week, Itac issued another report on 8 February.

“All events remained relatively peaceful, with limited low-level conflict,” it reads. “However, violent online rhetoric and the physical presence of ideological extremists at some gatherings remain a factor of concern.”

The report makes particular mention of the QAnon figure Romana Didulo, [the self-styled “Queen of Canada”](#), who has instructed her followers to kill healthcare workers and politicians. She and some of her followers appeared in Ottawa for the occupation, waving flags representing her supposed kingdom.

Itac also drew attention to a constellation of other demonstrations across the country, including in Quebec City where “the QAnon flag was observed, and the extremist group La Meute stated that approximately 100 members participated in the protest.” [La Meute](#), or The Pack is one of the most visible and influential far-right, anti-Islam organizations in Quebec. It also claimed to have sent supporters to the Ottawa protests, the report said.

In the second report, Itac continued to assess the likelihood of a January 6-style insurrection as unlikely, but began warning that “the most likely ideologically motivated violent extremism-related scenario involves an individual or small group using readily available weapons and resources such as knives, firearms, homemade explosives and vehicles in public areas against soft targets, including opposition groups or members of the general public.”

Earlier this week at a blockade at the Coutts border crossing in Alberta, police arrested four men and charged them with conspiring to kill police officers and civilians.

On Wednesday, the public safety minister, Marco Medicino [confirmed that some of those arrested had ties to some extremist elements in Ottawa](#). Some of the men arrested are believed to belong to a loose-knit group known as Diagolon.

Itac reports are largely based on open source intelligence, meaning information already available in the public domain, and law enforcement

sources – the centre does not actively monitor individuals or conduct its own investigations.

The purpose of Itac is to provide various levels of local law enforcement with reliable information on emerging threats, said Stephanie Carvin, a former intelligence analyst with the Canadian Security Intelligence Service who now teaches at the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs at Carleton University in Ottawa.

“They seem to recognize the nature of the event, and who’s coming to the event,” she said. But, the analysts appear to have missed some of the extreme elements of the leadership of the convoy, Carvin said. “It was a movement led by extremists to begin with, and we should not be surprised they turned to extremist tactics.”

Itac’s warning that only a dogmatic few would brave the Ottawa cold for parliament’s return on 31 January proved to be a significant underestimation. Yet, even that warning wasn’t heeded. The deputy chief of the Ottawa police service said in early February that they planned for “a potentially weekend-long demonstration”, and were caught off guard when the convoy parked in front of Parliament.

“Was the problem that he didn’t have the information?” Carvin said. “Or was the problem that they just don’t take white supremacy seriously?”

Carvin said intelligence agencies had been briefing the Canadian government as far back as late December on the possible threat posed by the convoy.

“[The protest leaders] were exceptionally clear on what they wanted to do, and how they were going to go about doing it,” she said.

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## Canada

# Protesters defy police presence in Ottawa after officers warn of crackdown

Justin Trudeau says 'high time these illegal and dangerous activities stop' after nearly three weeks in Canadian capital



Ontario provincial police officers walk in front of the trucker blockade protest in Ottawa on Thursday. Photograph: Adrian Wyld/AP

*[Leyland Cecco in Ottawa](#)*

Thu 17 Feb 2022 20.59 EST

Truckers who have blockaded downtown Ottawa for nearly three weeks have defied a growing police presence in the Canadian capital and ignored repeated warnings that they could face steep fines and possible arrest.

Officers had warned of an impending crackdown on Thursday, as busloads of police reinforcements arrived in the city and work crews took the rare step of erecting metal fences outside the senate and parliament.

Despite heavy rain, supporters flocked to Parliament Hill, while the mood of imminent confrontation receded. “I ain’t going anywhere,” said Pat King, one of protest organizers. “I haven’t overstayed my welcome. My taxes paid for me to be here.”

One of the leaders of the so-called “freedom convoy” was arrested as the interim police chief warned that action was “imminent”. Chris Barber was taken into custody on Thursday afternoon and was set to face criminal charges.

Hours later, Tamara Lich, another organizer of the convoy, was arrested in downtown Ottawa. Tamara had earlier tearfully told supporters she expected to be arrested. Both of the arrested leaders will face charges of mischief as well as counselling to commit mischief.

As snow fell heavily, police also arrested at least two other individuals. A speaker on the stage in front of parliament pleaded for protesters to “bring in the human reinforcements” amid fears that police could use the inclement weather to begin breaking up the blockade.

Earlier in the afternoon, the city’s deputy police chief said officers had planned for a number of scenarios after people ignored two formal warnings to leave the area immediately. “We want people to peacefully leave,” said Steve Bell said, adding: “But I can tell you that if they do not peacefully leave, we have plans, strategies and tactics to be able to get them to leave.” Police had established 100 checkpoints along a wide-ranging cordon around the city’s downtown.

Amid growing criticism of police tactics, the deputy police chief had declared his intention to break up the protest and take back Ottawa’s downtown “in the coming days”.

In parliament, the Canadian prime minister, Justin Trudeau, told MPs that it was “high time that these illegal and dangerous activities stop”.

“They are a threat to our economy and our relationship with trading partners,” he said. “They are a threat to public safety.”

Additional police officers from Quebec were deployed to reinforce Ottawa city police, the Ontario provincial police, and the Royal Canadian Mounted police in the city.

With heavy snow expected in the evening, police handed out a second round of written warnings – most of which were refused by the protesters or immediately thrown away.

“I’m Romanian, I lived through communism – this is a communist country!” said Christian Muntean, a trucker from Windsor, Ontario, who said he had no intention of leaving.

Other members of the so-called “freedom convoy” jeered at the officers, with some calling them “traitors” and others claiming they had no authority to move the vehicles blockading the city centre.

Despite the largest show of police numbers in weeks, the strategy for enforcement remained unclear. Police started blocking off key roads to isolate groups of protesters, but officers were often chased off by groups of demonstrators.

And despite local bylaws prohibiting the transport of fuel – used by protesters to keep heaters and truck engines running – officers continued to turn a blind eye as activists towed wagons of fuel towards the protest camp.

Ottawa is the convoy’s last stronghold after weeks of demonstrations and blockades that have spawned a national crisis, shuttering key border crossings and halting hundreds of millions in trade. The protests, which have increasingly large support from prominent US conservatives, have inspired similar convoys in France, New Zealand and the Netherlands.

Late on Wednesday prominent organizers had appeared to recognise the occupation was nearing its end, but also attempted to rally the protesters for a final showdown.

“It’s going down,” said King in a Facebook video early Thursday morning. “Truckers, get up. Get on your radios. Get on your horns. One long blast. Let’s go, guys.”

The warnings from police came days after [Trudeau invoked Canada’s Emergencies Act](#), empowering law enforcement authorities to declare the blockades illegal, tow away trucks and punish the drivers by arresting them, freezing their bank accounts and suspending their licenses.

Addressing a handful of supporters gathered outside parliament, King claimed that Trudeau’s actions were “unlawful” and that they did not need to comply with police orders to leave.

Since late January, protesters in trucks, tractors and motor homes have jammed the streets of Ottawa and obstructed border crossings. The demonstrations initially focused on Canada’s vaccine requirement for truckers entering the country but soon morphed into a broad attack on Covid-19 restrictions and Trudeau’s government.

The protesters are a tiny minority in a country which has, on the whole, embraced the protection against Covid offered by science. Canada has one of the highest rates of full vaccination anywhere in the world, with more than 80% of people covered.

The protests around the country have [drawn support from rightwing extremists and military veterans](#), and authorities hesitated for weeks to move against them – in part out of fear of violence.

But Ottawa police have come under intense criticism for the cautious approach – and for failing to prevent or disperse the occupation.

The force’s commander resigned on Monday, but Ottawa mayor Jim Watson has also come under pressure. Frustration erupted at a chaotic city council meeting on Wednesday night amid tears and recriminations over the handling of the crisis.

“Mayor Watson, I have lost all confidence in you as mayor of the city of Ottawa,” said councillor Catherine McKenney at a council meeting that

descended into chaos the night before.

Councillor Anne Meehan echoed such calls, and abruptly resigned from the Ottawa Police Services Board, saying: “This city is in chaos and it doesn’t need to be.”

As of Tuesday, Ottawa officials said more than 350 vehicles remained with the blockade, down from a high of roughly 4,000.

But many of those were large trucks crammed into a handful of downtown streets, presenting a logistical challenge for police hoping to tow them out of the area. The occupation has infuriated many Ottawa residents, who have complained of being harassed, intimidated and forced to endure a constant barrage of truck horns.

At a cafe near the protests, one woman said: “ I don’t care what the police do, as long as they end this thing. I work two jobs, and when I get home all I can hear is horns. I’m sick of this. I just want it to end.”

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## [Greece](#)

# Five ‘missing’ passengers found alive after ferry blaze in Greece

Elite forces and frogmen sent in to help rescue operation on Euroferry Olympia, which was headed to Italy



Greek emergency services await the arrival of the ferry’s passengers after a fire broke out on the vessel. Photograph: Eurokinissi/Rex/Shutterstock

*[Helena Smith](#) in Athens, and [Lorenzo Tondo](#) in Palermo*

Fri 18 Feb 2022 14.58 EST

Five out of 14 people feared missing after a ferry burst into flames have been found alive onboard, Greek media reported.

Two lorry drivers trapped in the ship’s garage were also reportedly rescued, after elite forces and frogmen were sent in to bolster the rescue operation.

A Super Puma helicopter had attempted several times to approach the Euroferry Olympia, an Italian liner en route to Brindisi, when the fire broke out at around 4am. State-run TV described the pair – a Bulgarian and a Turk – as lorry drivers trapped in the ship's garage.

Four lifeboats carrying an estimated 279 people had meanwhile headed for the Ionian island of Corfu, where authorities were hoping to match arrivals with the passenger list assembled by crew.

"There are unconfirmed reports of missing people although the Italian captain of the ship claims everyone has disembarked," Stefanos Ghikas, a local MP, was quoted earlier as saying by the news outlet *Protothema.gr*.

When asked about the prospect of missing passengers, a spokesman at the Greek shipping ministry overseeing the rescue operation told the *Guardian* nothing could be ruled out. By midday, Hellenic navy ships, and at least three coastguard vessels, were participating in the rescue operation.

"We still don't have a clear picture and until everyone is counted and identified we won't have one," Giorgos Skordilis, the spokesman, said.

The 183-metre Grimaldi Lines ferry had set sail from Greece's western port of Igoumenitsa with 239 passengers and 51 crew onboard. Most of the passengers were believed to be Italian. The Greek shipping ministry said 25 vehicles and 153 trucks were also registered on the vessel.

The fire, the cause of which remains unknown, broke out about two hours after the ship left port, 10 miles north of Corfu, with residents on the island reportedly hearing explosions before large plumes of smoke were seen engulfing the vessel.

Paul Kyprianou, a spokesman with Grimaldi Lines, said there were indications the fire started in the ship's hold. "Damage is severe because despite their efforts the crew was unable to extinguish the fire," he told Reuters.

In a statement, the company said the blaze had erupted at 4.12am on a third-level car deck. "The ship's crew immediately intervened to fight the flames.

For the safety of passengers, the captain decided to abandon the ship ... the Grimaldi group wishes to express its deep regret for the incident and will offer full cooperation to the authorities to shed light on the cause of the fire.”

An Italian finance police boat, which happened to be in the area, was credited with playing a seminal role in the rescue operation with the country’s president, Sergio Mattarella, calling the finance unit’s commander personally to thank him.

Describing the dramatic moments when passengers were told to evacuate as flames licked the sides of the ferry, the finance police vessel’s captain, Simone Cicchetti, told the Italian news agency Ansa: “When the fire broke out, the ship’s commander went around the cabins and brought the passengers together on a single desk. Then he gave the order to abandon ship, but the evacuation wasn’t a stroll in the park.”

Speaking to the newspaper La Repubblica, he added: “A blaze onboard is a terrible experience.”

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## [Afghanistan](#)

# Rescuers race to reach boy trapped in Afghanistan well for two days

The five-year-old boy is believed to have fallen into the well in a remote village while helping adults dig a borehole



People gather as rescuers try to reach a boy trapped for two days down a well in a remote southern Afghan village of Shokak. Photograph: Javed Tanveer/AFP/Getty Images

*Agence France-Presse*

Thu 17 Feb 2022 21.28 EST

Rescuers were desperately scrambling to reach a five-year-old boy trapped for two days down a well in a remote southern Afghan village.

The operation in Shokak village, Zabul province, comes less than two weeks after a similar attempt to rescue a child from a Moroccan well gripped the

world – but ended with the boy found dead.

Taliban officials said the boy slipped to the bottom of the 25-metre (80-foot) shaft around 120km (75 miles) north-east of Kandahar, but was pulled to about 10 metres before becoming stuck.

Video shared earlier on social media showed the boy, named Haidar, wedged in the well but able to move his arms and upper body.

“Are you OK my son?” his father can be heard saying. “Talk with me and don’t cry, we are working to get you out.”

“OK, I’ll keep talking,” the boy replies in a plaintive voice.

The video was obtained by rescuers lowering a light and a camera down the narrow well by rope.

Engineers using bulldozers then dug an open slit trench from an angle at the surface to try to reach the point where Haidar was trapped.

The boy’s grandfather, Haji Abdul Hadi, said Haidar fell down the well when he was trying to help the adults dig a new borehole in the drought-ravaged village.

“I said, ‘no, not him’,” Hadi said. “One of the wells was open ... [then] the boy fell down. He was yelling and yelling.”

Hadi added that food and water were passed down to his grandson via a bucket attached to a rope.

“We gave him cake and water ... he was eating them all,” he said.

The operation employed similar engineering to what rescuers attempted in Morocco in early February, when “little Rayan” Oram fell down a 32-metre well, but was found dead five days later.

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## **Headlines saturday 19 february 2022**

- [Storm Eunice Hundreds of thousands still without power in UK](#)
- ['Day of destruction' How the papers covered Britain's battering by Storm Eunice](#)
- [Europe Death and disruption as Eunice hits mainland Europe](#)
- ['Sting jet' Scientists warn of repeat of 1987 phenomenon](#)

## UK weather

# Storm Eunice: tens of thousands still without power in UK

Widespread disruption to services continuing in aftermath of worst storm in 32 years that has led to at least four deaths

- [‘Day of destruction’: how the papers covered Britain’s battering](#)



A roadside filled with debris torn from the rooftops of houses during storm Eunice in north-west London. Photograph: James Manning/PA

*[Miranda Bryant](#)*

Sat 19 Feb 2022 06.19 EST

Tens of thousands were still without power and travel continued to be disrupted on Saturday as the cleanup effort after record-breaking deadly Storm Eunice threatened to be hampered by more weather warnings.

Friday's storm brought record-breaking winds to the UK and Ireland, and killed at least four, leaving a trail of damage and destruction in its wake.

On Saturday, there were still thousands without power. The Energy Networks Association said that although around 1.2 million people had been reconnected, about 195,000 customers still remained without power in the south, Wales and the east.

Kwasi Kwarteng, the business and energy secretary, said 8,000 field staff and engineers were “working day and night to restore power”.

He tweeted: “We expect most customers to have supplies restored promptly. Strong winds across southern England are impacting restoration efforts.”

He added: “I would like to thank our emergency services and engineers who are working tirelessly.”

Millions were advised to remain at home on Friday amid safety fears over one of the worst storms to hit the UK in a generation and transport issues meant many could not travel.

On Saturday morning, National Rail said that routes across most of the UK remained affected and that disruption was expected to continue for the rest of the day.

Southern, Thameslink and Great Northern rail networks issued “do not travel” notices, warning that “many parts of our network have no service”. They said the situation was changing regularly as trees and objects have been blown on to the line and that they are working to reopen as many routes as possible.

South Western Railway also expected significant disruption and Great Western Railway and Greater Anglia suspended services until about 10am.

Friday's winds, which reached a high of 122mph, a record for England, created havoc on roads from flying debris and falling trees, killing four people.

01:15

Storm Eunice: planes struggle and roofs are ripped off as millions face disruption – video report

A woman in her 30s was killed after a tree fell on a car in Haringey, north London, a man in his 50s was killed in Netherton, Merseyside after debris hit his windscreen, a man in his 20s died in Alton, Hampshire, in a collision with a tree and a man in Co Wexford, Ireland, was killed by a falling tree. There were also reports of people suffering serious injuries after being hit by debris in Henley-on-Thames and south London.

It caused damage to homes and buildings across the country, including London's O2 Arena, which had part of its roof ripped off, and the spire of St Thomas Church in Wells, Somerset.

But as clean-up efforts were due to commence on Saturday, the [Met Office](#) warned that further rain and winds could “slow down and hamper clear up operations”.

Saturday saw heavy snow in parts of Yorkshire, strong winds on the south coast and forecasters warned that Sunday could bring gales of up to 70mph to some parts of England.

Craig Snell, a Met Office forecaster, said that although Eunice had moved on to central Europe, the arrival of a new weather system was likely to bring spells of heavy rain and less severe but potentially problematic winds that “will make things a little bit more difficult”.

A yellow warning for wind was issued for England and Wales on Sunday from midday until 3pm, and in Northern Ireland and north-west England until midnight. The same warnings have also been issued for Monday.

Cumbria, Lancashire and West Yorkshire were issued a yellow warning for rain from midnight until 6pm on Sunday.

On Saturday there were three flood warnings in place – in Bosham and West Itchenor and Climping in West Sussex, and Shrewsbury in Shropshire.

On the roads, the M4 Prince of Wales bridge was open on Saturday, but the M48 River Severn Bridge [remained closed](#) “due to forecasts of further high winds”.

Meanwhile, the Association of British Insurers warned that although it was too early to estimate the cost of the damage caused by Eunice, previous storms have led to insurers paying out more than £360m.

London fire brigade said it took 1,958 calls on Friday as Eunice hit the capital – three times more than on Thursday. The fire service [warned on Saturday](#) that although the worst was over, “its effect may extend into the coming days”. They urged people to be wary of “the potential for loose structures or falling debris”.

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/feb/19/hundreds-of-thousands-without-power-in-uk-after-storm-eunice-disruption-services>

## Media

# ‘Day of destruction’: how the papers covered Britain’s battering by Storm Eunice

The front pages feature dramatic pictures and warnings that more wild weather could hamper recovery efforts



Storm Eunice front pages.

[Martin Farrer](#)

Sat 19 Feb 2022 04.07 EST

Dramatic pictures of huge waves, fallen trees and the damaged roof of the Millennium Dome have knocked the Ukraine crisis off the front of most front pages on Saturday after Storm Eunice battered Britain.

The **Guardian**'s lead story is "[At least four dead as worst storm in decades roars in](#)" along with a picture of wild seas crashing into the harbour wall in Porthcawl in Wales. At least 20 million people in Britain have been told to stay at home, it reports.

Guardian front page, Saturday 19 February 2022: At least four dead as worst storm in decades roars in [pic.twitter.com/6FfPUJpAAI](#)

— The Guardian (@guardian) [February 18, 2022](#)

The **Mirror**'s headline is "Carnage" and is laid over a photograph of huge waves and spray on the seafront at Blackpool, with the town's famous Tower seen forlornly in the background.

Tomorrow's front page: Eunice Batters Britain - Carnage.  
[#tomorrowspaperstoday](#)

Read here: <https://t.co/snuHjFkZqQ> [pic.twitter.com/JJyVTa1vjz](#)

— The Mirror (@DailyMirror) [February 18, 2022](#)

Several papers feature pictures of the Millennium Dome damage, with the **Times** calling Friday a "Day of destruction" and reporting that energy companies are under pressure to restore power to hundreds of thousands of homes cut off after the violent weather brought down electricity lines.

The Times: Day of destruction [#tomorrowspaperstoday](#)  
[pic.twitter.com/3guMKIK3dT](#)

— Helena Wilkinson (@BBCHelena) [February 18, 2022](#)

The **Telegraph** also likes the Dome picture and has the accompanying headline "Chaos of Storm Eunice". It says the bad weather is going to continue for the next week, hampering efforts to clean up the mess and reconnect homes.

□ The front page of tomorrow's Daily Telegraph:

'Chaos of Storm Eunice'[#TomorrowsPapersToday](#)

Sign up for the Front Page newsletter<https://t.co/x8AV4Oomry>  
[pic.twitter.com/33BhbU7hfg](https://pic.twitter.com/33BhbU7hfg)

— The Telegraph (@Telegraph) [February 18, 2022](#)

The **Mail** has the headline “Britain’s 122mph Dome-lition day”, but its lead story is “MI5 chief: UK’s ‘fight to keep our way of life’”.

Saturday's [@DailyMailUK](#) [#MailFrontPages](#)  
[pic.twitter.com/I3d9BdCgZc](https://pic.twitter.com/I3d9BdCgZc)

— Daily Mail U.K. (@DailyMailUK) [February 18, 2022](#)

The **Express** says “Battered by killer storm” and reports that Britain could face a bill of £500m to repair the damage caused by the biggest storm for decades.

Daily Express: Battered by killer storm [#tomorrowspaperstoday](#)  
[pic.twitter.com/PFkWkLUk7y](https://pic.twitter.com/PFkWkLUk7y)

— Helena Wilkinson (@BBCHelena) [February 18, 2022](#)

The **Star** focuses on the sheer speed of the winds – “122mph killer” – which is what was provisionally recorded at the Needles on the Isle of Wight. If verified, it would be the highest ever recorded in England and converts to 196km/h. The previous record was 118mph at Gwennap Head in Cornwall in 1979.

Tomorrow's Daily Star front page: 122Mph killer  
<https://t.co/4M1oYHGIxt> [pic.twitter.com/o3ffj84yAJ](https://pic.twitter.com/o3ffj84yAJ)

— Daily Star (@dailystar) [February 18, 2022](#)

The **i** notes that “red alerts” related to weather events will become more common because of climate breakdown under the main headline “122mph storm batters Britain”. The **Sun’s** splash headline is “Blown apart”.

i weekend: 122mph storm batters Britain [#tomorrowspaperstoday](#)  
[pic.twitter.com/hMA4MDKUOB](https://pic.twitter.com/hMA4MDKUOB)

— Helena Wilkinson (@BBCHelena) [February 18, 2022](#)

The storm has brought snow and freezing weather to Scotland. The **Record’s** headline is “Storm troupers”, and the story of a mother thanking “heroes” who helped push an ambulance up a hill in the snow so her sick child could be treated.

Tomorrow's Daily Record leads on hero passers-by who got a sick baby to hospital by pushing an ambulance that was stuck in snow  
[#scotpapers](#) [#TomorrowsPapersToday](#) [@BBCHelena](#)  
[pic.twitter.com/N2iq3OewZL](https://pic.twitter.com/N2iq3OewZL)

— The Daily Record (@Daily\_Record) [February 18, 2022](#)

The **Press and Journal** says “More misery on way after Eunice” with wild weather set to continue until Monday.

The Press and Journal: More misery on way after Eunice  
[#tomorrowspaperstoday](#) [pic.twitter.com/52HyT64F1O](https://pic.twitter.com/52HyT64F1O)

— Helena Wilkinson (@BBCHelena) [February 18, 2022](#)

## Europe

# Death and disruption as Storm Eunice hits mainland Europe

Warnings issued in the Netherlands, Germany, France, Belgium and Denmark as record winds batter continent

- [Record-breaking gusts bring chaos to millions across UK](#)



A fallen tree on the Reguliersgracht in the centre of Amsterdam due to storm Eunice. Photograph: Ramon van Flymen/EPA

[Kate Connolly in Berlin](#)

Fri 18 Feb 2022 13.07 EST

Storm Eunice has claimed the lives of at least five people on mainland Europe, after it whipped through the UK and Ireland on Friday, [bringing chaos to millions](#).

From England, the record-breaking gales have begun moving across the continent, hitting Belgium, the [Netherlands](#) and parts of northern France, and are expected to reach Denmark and Germany on Friday evening.

Dutch authorities issued a red weather warning and hundreds of flights were cancelled, while trains were halted on Friday afternoon. Four people were reported to have been killed after being hit by falling trees. Pieces of the roof of the ADO The Hague football club stadium were blown off, authorities said.

A 79-year-old British man died in the Belgian town of Ypres after being pushed from his boat by the strong winds, according to Reuters. Belgian authorities had appealed to citizens only to venture out in an emergency, while in the northern French province of Brittany, four-metre high waves were reported and rail travel was curtailed.

In Denmark, trains were ordered to reduce speed and bridges and roads have been closed in preparation for record winds.

In Germany, where the storm has been named Zeynep by meteorologists, it is expected to reach speeds of up to 160km (100 miles) an hour and to last into the early hours of Saturday morning. In addition, a thunderstorm is expected to develop within the storm, meteorologists said. The country, along with neighbouring Poland and the Czech Republic, is still reeling [from storm Ylenia](#), which hit on Wednesday night, uprooting trees, overturning lorries and causing three deaths in Germany, including that of a 37-year-old man whose car was hit by a tree.

Deutsche Bahn, the national train operator, cancelled regional and long-distance trains, as emergency services in parts of northern and western [Germany](#), including North Rhine Westphalia, Berlin, Brandenburg and Hamburg, were put on high alert. A spokesperson for DB described the weather warnings as “severe” and urged travellers to delay their journeys, promising that the validity of their tickets would be extended.

The German meteorological service (DWD) declared a level three storm warning for the whole country, and highest level four warning for the entire

1,300km (808 mile)-long North Sea coast. On the North Sea islands, winds were expected to reach speeds as high as 170km (105 miles) an hour.

The carmaker Volkswagen was one of many factories to close its works in the North Sea coastal town of Emden on Friday afternoon, cancelling both the late and night shifts in anticipation of the storm.

DWD called the storms “life threatening” due mainly to flying objects such as falling trees. People were urged to close doors and windows and to secure all movable objects including garden furniture, bikes and portable bins.

DWD has predicted widespread flooding in the coming days, particularly in the port cities of Cuxhaven and Hamburg, which was also badly hit by Wednesday’s storm. Authorities said they were braced for water levels to rise three metres above their usual height and put officials on standby to observe all dykes in the region.

The weather is expected to remain stormy across large parts of Germany over the following days.

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## UK weather

# What is a ‘sting jet’? Scientists warn of repeat of 1987 phenomenon

After Met Office warning, we explain hard to predict phenomenon that could cause risk to life

- [Storm Eunice – live updates](#)



Large waves and strong winds during Storm Eunice, in Cornwall.  
Photograph: Tom Nicholson/Reuters

[Nicola Slawson](#)

Fri 18 Feb 2022 07.00 EST

A weather phenomenon known as a sting jet similar to the one seen during the Great Storm of 1987 could form on Friday as [Storm Eunice takes hold](#), scientists have warned.

The Met Office has warned that the weather phenomenon could cause “significant damage and risk to life”.

But what is a sting jet? Matt Priestley, a research scientist at the University of Exeter looking at storm tracks and extratropical cyclones, said they were small areas of very intense winds within a storm’s cyclone that were hard to predict.

“They’re generally about 10 to 20 kilometres wide and are generated by specific instabilities within the flight lines of storms and cause very high wind speeds.

“They’re not a feature of all storms. They’re often just a feature of the most intense ones like Storm Eunice. The fact that they are such small scale but can have such high wind speeds makes forecasting them very, very difficult.”

The Great Storm of 1987, which claimed 18 lives, was the most famous example of a sting jet forming, Priestley said.

“That storm had a sting jet and it uprooted millions of trees. Sting jets cause a big intensity increase compared to the rest of the cycle so they can cause a lot of extra damage very quickly like they did in 1987.”

Sting jets can cause a phenomenon whereby a narrow area of land is hit by very intense winds, which could reach 100mph or more, but 30 miles away there may be much slower wind speeds associated with a normal storm, of about 60-70mph. This means the damage from a sting jet can be very localised.

They usually only last for about three or four hours, whereas the main storm may last a lot longer.

Storm Eunice looks as if it has the features that could create a sting jet. Priestley said: “There has not been a storm this intense for 10 or 15 years.”

Storm Eunice: planes struggle and roofs are ripped off as millions face disruption – video report

The jets get their name from their resemblance to the sting in a scorpion's tail, the Met Office said. They can be spotted as they develop on satellite images, where the end of the so-called cold conveyor is marked by a hook-shaped cloud with a point at the end.

Dr Peter Inness, a meteorologist at the University of Reading, said a strong jet stream could "act like a production line for storms, generating a new storm every day or two".

He added: "Eunice looks like it may be able to produce a sting jet, a narrow, focused region of extremely strong winds embedded within the larger area of strong winds and lasting just a few hours."

He said two red warnings for wind in a single winter was unusual for the UK, as it was more typical to get one every two or three years.

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/feb/18/storm-eunice-could-create-sting-jet-similar-to-great-storm-of-1987>

## 2022.02.19 - Spotlight

- ['I'm very willing to listen, but not to be scammed' Margaret Atwood on feminism, culture wars and speaking her mind](#)
- [The abortion travel agents 'Some women know what they need, others just say: help'](#)
- ['So many soundbites' PR experts on Prince Andrew's disastrous denials](#)
- [Jeffrey Epstein After Andrew, where will tentacles of the case reach next?](#)

[Playing with fire: a Margaret Atwood guest edit](#)[Margaret Atwood](#)

## **Margaret Atwood on feminism, culture wars and speaking her mind: ‘I’m very willing to listen, but not to be scammed’**

At 82, the Canadian author has seen it all - and her novels predicted most of it. Just don’t presume you know what she thinks, she tells [Hadley Freeman](#)

[Hadley Freeman](#)

Sat 19 Feb 2022 03.00 EST

‘How are you? You’re named after Ernest Hemingway’s [first wife](#),’ Margaret Atwood announces by way of a greeting when we meet on a hotel’s heated patio near her home in Toronto. Atwood, 82, has often been described as a prophet, thanks to her uncanny ability to foresee the future in her books. When Trump supporters [stormed the Capitol](#) in January 2021, it looked, terrifyingly, like a scene out of *The Handmaid’s Tale*, when the government is overthrown and the dystopian land of Gilead is founded. She seemingly predicted the 2008 financial crash in her nonfiction book [Payback: Debt and the Shadow Side of Wealth](#), published that year. Atwood has always scoffed at any suggestion of telepathy, pointing out that every atrocity in *The Handmaid’s Tale* had been carried out by totalitarian regimes in real life, and she “predicted” the crash by noticing the number of adverts offering to help people with their personal debt. But as she stands in front of me, snowflakes glittering around her like stars, the flames of the hotel’s gas heaters leaping on either side of her, dressed all in black save for her little red hat, correctly guessing who I’m named after, she certainly seems to have a touch of magic about her. How did she know about the Hemingway connection?

“Because I’m deep into Martha Gellhorn,” she says, launching into a long discussion about the celebrated war correspondent and Hemingway’s third

wife. Atwood isn't writing a book about Gellhorn (yet), but she found a letter from her to the father of her late partner, [Graeme Gibson](#), who [died in 2019](#), and is now a Gellhornologist. After six or so minutes, I wonder if we'll ever talk about anything else, but Atwood has a regal quality that makes interruption unthinkable. It does not, as I later learn, render argument impossible.



'I'm in favour of holding the centre in so far as it's possible,' says Margaret Atwood. 'But I'm going to be dead soon, so good luck with it all'

Proceedings begin peacefully enough. Atwood and I are meeting because this month she will publish her latest collection of essays, [Burning Questions](#), a 500-page doorstopper that gathers together her nonfiction output from the past two decades. During this period she also published five novels, one novella and Payback. Atwood is arguably the most famous living literary novelist in the world and unarguably one of the most prolific: in her half century of writing, she has published, on average, a book a year. She has won the Booker twice – [in 2000 for The Blind Assassin](#) and in [2019 for The Testaments](#), controversially sharing the prize with Bernardine Evaristo for Girl, Woman, Other. Atwood shrugs off that literary hoo-ha – "So fun! Bernardine's a great gal" – and adds that she is "a veteran of not winning the Booker". Of course, being a veteran of not winning means being a veteran of being shortlisted, which in Atwood's case is four times on top of

her wins. So when she describes herself to me as a “grade-A procrastinator and goof-off”, I say that seems unlikely, given how much she writes, and she looks abashed. “I know – it’s horrible, isn’t it?” she says. When I ask how she managed to whittle her essays down to a mere 500 pages, she cringes again at her own productivity. “Horrible!” But adds, “If writing wasn’t a pleasure, I wouldn’t do it.”

And Atwood’s writing is – unfailingly – a pleasure to read. She is one of the all-time great storytellers, a truth sometimes obscured by her highbrow reputation. Whole days of my life have been lost to her novels, including [Alias Grace](#), [Cat’s Eye](#), [The Robber Bride](#) and [The Blind Assassin](#). When it comes to making you want to know what happens next, Atwood is up there with [Stephen King](#) and [JK Rowling](#). She has written in every literary genre, from poetry to sci-fi to mystery. But there is one connecting thread: many of her novels are told using a retrospective narrative, with a character looking back on their former life while trying to make sense of their current one. It is a device that winks at Atwood’s love of Victorian literature, but it’s also how she thinks, always looking forward, but also looking back. When she writes her books, she types up yesterday’s handwritten pages and handwrites the pages for tomorrow. “The rolling barrage!” she laughs. When we talk about modern social movements, she refers back to the French Revolution; when we talk about the rollback of abortion rights in the US, she cites [Nicolae Ceaușescu](#), the [notoriously anti-abortion](#) dictator of Romania from 1974 to 1989. “As you may have noticed, I like to do my research,” Atwood smiles, after we’ve segued into long discussions of Stalin, or Mao, or Robespierre. It’s all fascinating, and evidence of her tirelessly curious mind. But it can also feel as though she is building a wall of words to protect herself from prying questions. At one point, when she pauses in the middle of such a digression, I ask if her research into Gellhorn has been a way to stay close to Gibson.

“Of course. No-brainer. Next question.” She picks up the menu. “Shall we split the ubiquitous avocado toast?”

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Atwood always has a book on the go, so even though she has only just received the finished proofs of *Burning Questions*, she is already deep into her next project: her 10th collection of short stories. When it comes to work,

she is indefatigable: “This has sometimes been resented by friends and family. But I come from a hard-working background and a hard-working generation. I always knew I should be able to support myself.” She has “no time routine, but a space routine: a certain number of pages or words. No cork-lined Proustian writer’s haven. For me, it’s roll up sleeves and get it done.”

Yet it’s a mystery how she does get it done, considering how deeply involved she is with the world around her, as Burning Questions proves, with its clear-eyed essays about the climate, feminism and the future. By now, Atwood has more than earned the right to lock herself away in an ivory tower, but she keeps jumping into the mud. She has been involved in multiple controversies, due partly, but by no means solely, to her fearlessness in addressing hot-button issues in her writing. During the Trump era, her name became a byword for the feminist fightback against the creep of misogynistic legislation that sparked many comparisons to Gilead; Handmaid’s Tale costumes became a staple of pro-choice protests. Both [that book](#) and [Alias Grace](#) were turned into TV series, propelling her into a stratosphere of celebrity unknown to most authors. When The Testaments, her keenly awaited sequel to The Handmaid’s Tale, was published in 2019, bookshops stayed open until midnight so fans could get copies as soon as they arrived, a privilege usually granted only to titles such as new Harry Potter books. Her fearlessness has not worked against her commercially.

“Not fearless,” she corrects me. “I am afraid of thunderstorms, bears, certain kinds of heights, also totalitarian forms of government, the behaviour of mobs when they get going. What passes for fearlessness is sometimes just naivety. I am not suspicious or cautious when others might be. Also, I don’t have a job, so I can’t be fired.”

I don’t like to favouritise my books. The others would be out to get you: ‘How could you? I spent all this time with you!’

This may partly explain her fondness for signing politically charged open letters, such as, in 2020, the so-called [Harper’s letter](#) about cancel culture, which [denounced “an intolerance of opposing views” on the left](#), and, three months later, [another one](#) expressing support for non-binary and trans people, written as a critical response to an essay by Rowling [explaining her](#)

[views on gender](#). Atwood's involvement made those letters headline news. Given that the two ostensibly contradicted one another – and we'll get back to this – she arguably annoyed everyone. "People want you to be on their side, which to them means you have to be their puppet. Not a good fit for me," she says. She is also a regular [tweeter](#), addressing controversial subjects – politics, gender – most well-known people steer clear of. The week before our interview, Atwood spent almost an hour on Twitter, arguing with strangers about the environmental cost of building more housing in Toronto. When one anonymous tweeter bluntly informed her she wouldn't be able to control what happened to the land after she died, Atwood [wrote back](#) "I ... wouldn't ... be ... too ... sure ... of that! I ... may ... retuuurn ... (creaky door sound)" and added a spooky ghost emoji.

Does she ever think: maybe I should make life easy and not comment on this or that controversial issue, but instead focus on my novel?

"Oh, I always think that," she says.

So why quarrel about green spaces on Twitter?

"I know – why aren't I sensible? It's an interesting question. I don't belong to a political party, I don't have any purist ideological positions. So the key questions are, as they always have been for me, is it true and is it fair? And once you are interested, you get sucked in."

Because she feels she has to fight for them?

"Because you notice people deflecting to some other question, which is not the one you're asking."

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A young man comes up to our table to pay his respects, and he tells her they grew up in the same area. At first, Atwood is interested and asks questions. But after five minutes she's done. "OK, shoo! Shoo! Bye-bye!" she says, turning back to her avocado toast so suddenly that the man is left dazed, mid-sentence. I'd heard from others who have met her that Atwood can be "a bit fearsome" and it's true she exudes a cerebral grandeur that means you don't want to displease her. In her obituary of [Doris Lessing](#) in Burning Questions, she writes: "If you don't think of yourself as an august

personage, you don't have to behave yourself." Does she think of herself as an august personage?

"Of course not! I'm Canadian, you're not allowed to think that," she laughs. I suspect she does a bit – and she should, because she is – and when I later ask what's the best thing about being in her 80s, she replies: "I get to be condescending towards young people." But it's also true that she's not scared of kicking over people's expectations. In her books, the female characters can be just as cruel as the men: there are the aunts and wives in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* who torment the handmaids, and also the girls who viciously bully one another in *Cat's Eye*.

"My fundamental position is that women are human beings, with the full range of saintly and demonic behaviour this entails, including criminal ones," she writes in one of the most interesting essays in *Burning Questions*, which was born out of a classic Atwood controversy. In 2016 she, with several other Canadian authors, [signed an open letter](#) criticising the University of British Columbia for publicly suspending the author and then tenured associate professor Steven Galloway due to allegations of sexual misconduct, thereby denying him due process. After an investigation conducted on behalf of the university, [a judge cleared him of sexual assault and Galloway apologised for having had an affair with a student](#). UBC decided not to rehire him and later [paid compensation](#) for damage to his reputation and violating his privacy. The authors who signed the open letter were criticised for what some saw as privileging Galloway's side over his female accuser, and a number of them [removed their names](#) from the letter.



Coat: JW Anderson, from thebay.com. Hat: Lilliput Hats. Scarf: Acne Studios. Gloves: Nouveau Riche. Boots: Söfft, from nordstrom.com. Main image: Coat: Alaïa, from thebay.com. Dress: Alexander McQueen, from holtrenfrew.com. Boots: Moncler, from nordstrom.com. Gloves: Nouveau Riche. Composite: Derek Shapton

Atwood's response was different: in 2018 she [wrote an essay defending her position](#) and questioned the social shifts that contributed to Galloway's downfall. "The #MeToo movement is a symptom of a broken legal system. All too frequently, women and other sexual-abuse complainants couldn't get a fair hearing through institutions, so they used a new tool: the internet ... [But] if the legal system is bypassed because it is seen as ineffectual, what will take its place? In times of extremes, extremists win," she wrote, and titled her essay *Am I a Bad Feminist?* The essay [caused shock](#) among some of her fans, with one college newspaper headline describing her as a "[problematic fave](#)". Atwood sounds pretty cross when writing about the "Good Feminists" who now think of her as a "misogynistic, rape-enabling Bad Feminist". Did it hurt her to be criticised by those who had once idolised her?

"I'm too old! I feel bad for the 'Good Feminists' who got misled. This kind of thing does no good to feminism. All it does is provide ammunition to the people who say the whole thing is a crock of shit," she says now.

The criticism hasn't diminished her interest in Galloway, whose case she still follows keenly. "Oh, let me catch you up!" she says, and later sends me links to articles and a Substack to follow. What fascinates her is not the disproven allegation, but how UBC reacted: in their rush to do the right thing, they did the wrong thing, by treating him as though his guilt were a given. It's a subject that reverberates through her fiction – in books such as *The Robber Bride* – and an example of her refusal to bow to ideological purity. Her clear-eyed focus on what's fair and true over any kind of ideology, with little concern about public criticism, is part of what has made her personally so inspiring and her work so enduring.

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The tenderest pieces in *Burning Questions* are the personal ones, such as those recalling her childhood in the woods in Ontario and Quebec, scrabbling around in the trees looking for infestations of beetles and caterpillars with her father, a research entomologist. "We'd be driving along and suddenly we would pull over. 'An infestation!' we would cry. Other families stopped for ice-cream cones. Ours stopped for infestations," she writes in *Trees of Life, Trees of Death*. Atwood didn't go into full-time education until she was 12, and she suggests one reason she is not cautious about jumping into the fray is that she lacks the wariness children tend to learn when they grow up among other social groups. A lot of her own upbringing features in *Cat's Eye*, with adult Elaine recalling her woodland childhood very wistfully, and describing how much of an outsider she felt at school. Does Atwood feel especially close to that novel?

"I don't like to favouritise my books, because the other ones would get annoyed," she says, and laughs. "Then you have all these vengeful books out to get you: 'How could you? I spent all this time with you! No gratitude!'"

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And there are, of course, also essays about Gibson, who she was with from the early 1970s and with whom she has a daughter. Gibson, a writer and conservationist, was so supportive of his wife that she famously gave him a T-shirt with the slogan: "Every woman writer should be married to Graeme

Gibson”, a quote from a journalist. His books included [The Bedside Book of Birds](#), but towards the end of his life, due to the progress of his vascular dementia, he could no longer identify the birds in their garden. Nonetheless, Atwood recalls in her 2020 foreword to The Bedside Book of Birds, which is included in Burning Questions, he still liked to watch them. “‘I no longer know their names,’ he told a friend. ‘But then, they don’t know my name either,’” she writes. Gibson died in the UK, with Atwood on her book tour for The Testaments. She continued the tour. “Given the choice between hotel rooms and events and people on the one hand, and an empty house and vacant chair on the other, which would you have chosen, Dear Reader? Of course, the empty house and vacant chair were simply postponed. They came my way later, as such things do,” she writes in the prologue to the collection.

What was it about Gibson that made him so supportive?

“He wasn’t an egotist, so he wasn’t threatened by anything I was doing. He said to our daughter towards the end of his life, ‘Your mum would still have been a writer if she hadn’t met me, but she wouldn’t have had as much *fun*,’” and she nods, as if agreeing with something clever he just said while sitting next to her. She has also included in Burning Questions the 2020 introduction she wrote for his novels Perpetual Motion and Gentleman Death. Was writing those introductions a way of saying goodbye to him or celebrating him?

“Celebrating him. You don’t actually say goodbye to the dead when you’re my age. They don’t leave.” I start to ask another question about Gibson but she waves her hand, saying: “It’s in the book, it’s in the book.”

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Lockdown was not as brutal as it could have been for Atwood, because her daughter and her family went to stay with her. Also, she adds, it’s not like this was mankind’s first pandemic, and she’s on to talking about how illnesses tore through previous generations: “Young people say, ‘This is the worst!’ But it’s not! We’ve been here before.” Research sates Atwood’s curiosity and helps to keep her balanced rather than getting caught up in the madness of the day, by locating it instead within the ebb and flow of history.

“I’m in favour of holding the centre in so far as it’s possible. But I’m going to be dead soon, so good luck with it all,” she says.

She looks – and talks – like she’ll outlive us all, I tell her, which is the truth. We’ve been talking for two hours, in fairly brutal temperatures, despite the heaters, but her chattiness never fades, her bright eyes never dim.

“Come on, look at the numbers! Here’s the hourglass, here’s how much sand is left.”

Well, she doesn’t seem as if she’s running out of sand.

“I know,” she says. “It’s a good act.”

I ask if she’s as combative in real life as in her writings.

“Not at all. I’m very willing to listen to other people’s points of view, but I am not willing to be scammed.”

XY and XX are not the only chromosomal combinations possible. Look it up. This has been in flux for a very long time

And this is when things go momentarily pear-shaped. One burning question I am especially keen to discuss with Atwood is the fraught modern debate over gender identity. Gender theorists argue that gender identity – how a person defines themselves – is as important as biological sex. Gender-critical people argue that gender identity is irrelevant because women are oppressed due to their biological sex. This debate, which has [threatened to fracture feminism at times](#), with younger feminists subscribing more to the former argument and older ones cleaving to the latter, does not feature in Burning Questions, but Atwood has tweeted and spoken about it multiple times. Given that she wrote the ultimate novel about the sexual exploitation of women, The Handmaid’s Tale, it would be easy to assume her views veer towards the gender-critical end of the spectrum. But she is no purist. After all, she signed the Harper’s letter, which many saw as an argument against, in part, the left’s objection to gender-critical views; then, three months later, the letter obliquely criticising Rowling. She has posted articles on Twitter that [support](#) gender ideology and videos that [criticise Rowling](#). Yet she also

posted [an article](#) asking whether the word “woman” was being erased out of concern for trans women’s feelings – a gender-critical view – followed by [a post reassuring her followers](#) that the writer “is not a terf”, a derogatory term for gender-critical women meaning trans-exclusionary radical feminist. It has not been easy to tell where her feelings lie on this issue. So I ask about a recent comment of hers, in which she said biological sex is not either/or – [“Rejoice in nature’s infinite variety!”](#) In other words, it’s too simplistic to say people are either male or female.

“Everything in nature is on a bell curve. We have this two-box thinking [about gender] because it’s biblical, so wool over here, linen over there,” she says.

If biological sex is not binary, how do people know who to make a handmaiden or who is given FGM?



Photograph: Derek Shapton/The Guardian. Styling: Nadia Pizzimenti. Hair and makeup: Taylor Savage

“OK, let me say this again,” she says more sharply. “This is going to take a while to settle down, but XY and XX are not the only chromosomal combinations possible. Look it up, OK? This has been in flux for a very long

time and in the Bible, a male wearing female clothes would be – ” and she makes a slicing gesture across her neck. “You want to do that? No.”

Gender-critical people would argue that those are different issues, I say.

“What is a gender-critical person?” she asks

It’s someone who believes that all living creatures are either male or female and that rare chromosomal variations don’t disprove that.

“I’m not going to argue about this. That’s not what my book is about and that’s not what we’re here to discuss,” she says.

Given how discursive our interview has been, this objection surprises me, but I return to the book. In one essay, Literature and the Environment, she writes: “[People] are very ready to tell the writer what a bad person he or she is because he or she has not produced the sort of book or essay the preacher feels he or she ought to have produced.” Does that not contradict her oblique criticisms of Rowling’s essay as anti-trans?

“Open question. We’re not even sure what anti-trans is, and the trans community will take a while to sort this through. It is not true that there are no trans people, so then a lot of questions come into that, and we’re not going to get into those, although they seem to be your obsession of the day.”

But Margaret, I say, you write so brilliantly about women’s rights. Of course women want to know what you think about this subject, given how much it pertains to women’s rights.

“I’m not informed enough,” she says briskly. “But there doesn’t seem to be much fuss about trans men. Why is that?”

Why does she think?

“I don’t know.”

Because men aren’t physically threatened by them?

“They’re not physically threatened by trans men,” she agrees, then corrects herself. “They do not feel physically threatened by trans men, although it is possible a trans man could murder one of them.”

A little later, she mentions how dangerous it is for people to make generalisations about one another, so I give it one last go and ask why, then, did she use the sweeping term “terf” on Twitter?

“I think you’re making too much of this!” she says, sounding thoroughly fed up now. The subject is closed; the interview moves on.

Our conversation continues peacefully enough, but after we say our goodbyes my overwhelming feeling is one of frustration. I give her credit for not storming out of the interview, but I feel no closer to understanding her views and assume I never will, given how reluctant she seemed to be to discuss them. But then – as she has done so often in her books – Atwood surprises me with a plot twist. Just an hour or so later, she sends me several emails, some about the Galloway case, others elaborating on her thoughts about gender. This becomes an ongoing back and forth, in which she lays out her views, patiently and thoughtfully. Most of it is off the record, but I think she won’t mind me saying that, ultimately, we both want the same thing, which is truth and fairness.

The more we email, the more I realise we are not arguing about this the way I’m used to arguing about it, ie the social media way, which is just shouting at one another and not listening to the other’s point of view. We are genuinely curious to understand one another and send each other links we think the other will find interesting. After several days of this, I become self-conscious about how much of her time I am taking up, time she should be spending on her new book of short stories, and I apologise for being so stubbornly argumentative. She writes straight back: “Don’t worry, Hadley. Some people won’t really discuss things with me because they are intimidated. I agree with Orwell: the truth does matter.”

Burning Questions by Margaret Atwood is published by Vintage on 1 March at £20. To support the Guardian and Observer, order your copy at [guardianbookshop.com](http://guardianbookshop.com). Delivery charges may apply.

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## The abortion travel agents: ‘Some women know what they need, others just say: help’



Hanien supports women in Malta, where abortion is a criminal offence.  
Photograph: Cliona O'Flaherty/The Guardian

With reproductive rights being increasingly restricted in Europe, people are relying on a network of volunteers to help them

*Introduction [Margaret Atwood](#) Interviews [Candice Pires](#)*

Sat 19 Feb 2022 04.45 EST

When *The Handmaid's Tale* first came out in 1985, the initial response was broadly that people thought such threats to women's bodies and reproductive rights "couldn't happen here". By the time it aired as a TV series in 2017, just after Donald Trump was inaugurated in the US, people were no longer so sure. With every headline about gains in reproductive rights – [Ireland repealing the eighth amendment in 2018](#), which had effectively banned abortions – there are others that underscore how fragile these rights are, wherever you live.

Recent changes to abortion law in Texas, which have [prohibited abortions after six weeks](#) – one of the most restrictive rules in the nation – and Poland's near total ban on the procedure last year make it clear just how slippery the slope still is. We have to ask: what kind of country do we want to live in? A democratic one in which every individual is free to make decisions concerning their health and body, or one in which half the population is free and the state corrals the bodies of the other half?

Women who are not allowed to make their own decisions about whether or not to give birth are, in fact, owned by the state, as the state claims the right to dictate the uses to which their bodies must be put. The work of the [Abortion Support Network](#) (ASN) and the need for it in apparently progressive Europe is a stiff reminder: democratic rights don't grow on trees. They must be struggled for and maintained. Those at risk of forced childbearing should be very grateful to have such organisations and their volunteers in their corner.

– MARGARET ATWOOD

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In the evenings, after she is done with her day job in London, Ciara makes phone calls to people across Europe. Everyone she calls has contacted the ASN, a UK-based charity that helps people from European countries to

access abortions. She is one of about 80 volunteers providing logistical advice, travel planning, a place to stay and solidarity to people who live in countries with restrictive abortion access. Mara Clarke, who founded ASN in 2009, says, “People think that abortion travel is an American or developing-world thing, but it isn’t.”

While there has rightfully been extensive coverage of the US, given the introduction of restrictive abortion laws in Texas and the potential for the [Roe v Wade](#) ruling to be overturned this year, the evolving situation in Europe has received little attention.

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When she set up ASN, Clarke was told there was no demand for a European abortion helpline. “I knew that wasn’t right,” she says. “If there were women who could afford to pay to travel for an abortion, there were other women who couldn’t.”

Clarke was proved right. Calls came first from the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man, and the charity began helping hundreds of women every year. As abortion laws became more liberal in those countries in 2018 and 2019, ASN opened their services to Poland, Malta and Gibraltar, and anyone else in Europe who needs it (just because abortion is technically legal in a country does not mean it is always straightforward to access). ASN also works with partner organisations across the continent who direct people to one another for local advice and funding.

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**‘Money is often the biggest hurdle for our callers’: Ciara, 36, helpline volunteer, London**



Photograph: Olivia Harris/The Guardian

I grew up in Dublin. [Abortion](#) was something I'd talk about with my friends, but the "going to England" part it entailed was mysterious to us. There was always this concern that if one of us needed an abortion, none of us would know how to go about it.

I heard about ASN when I went to a vigil at the Irish embassy in London in 2012 for [Savita Halappanavar](#). Savita had died from a septic miscarriage at a Galway hospital after her requests for an abortion were denied. Her death underlined to me that the fight for reproductive rights is about life and death, and it drove the campaign to repeal Ireland's eighth amendment, which effectively banned abortion.

I began donating to ASN, and soon after responded to a call for volunteers. Working on the helpline was scary at first. I got training and support, but I was speaking to people in vulnerable situations. In my second week, a man called from a Northern Ireland hospital because his wife's pregnancy was in danger. He thought they might have to travel to England to get an abortion and wanted to know what he needed to do.

We work with each caller to see what they need. It can be anything from a simple question about arranging an appointment at a clinic, to figuring out

the most efficient travel plan for them and assisting with money. The later the abortion, the more expensive it becomes. The cost of the procedure, which is £1,300 in England for a second trimester abortion, plus travel, childcare and time off work, can be high. Money is often the biggest hurdle for our callers. I've given a grant of £5 before – that was all that was preventing a woman from accessing an abortion.

You need to speak to most clients several times. I fit the calls around my day job, either during lunchtime or in the evenings. When I was in the office, I'd find a meeting room where I could speak privately. It can require a mental shift to go from speaking to someone about something that is so emotionally challenging for them, to returning to my regular life.

You really get the warm and fuzzies from doing this. In 2018, when the [eighth amendment](#) was put to a referendum in Ireland and repealed, an ASN colleague was approached by a woman who mentioned me by name and said I saved her life. I think about that often.

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## **‘Some know what they need; others just say, “Please help me”’: Kasia, 35, adviser and helpline volunteer, London**



Photograph: Olivia Harris/The Guardian

A few years ago I joined some activist groups on Facebook and saw ASN's ad for Polish-speaking volunteers. This work combines my two favourite things: feminism and logistics. When someone calls, I can give tangible support. There are people who know what they need, and others who are completely lost and just say, "Please help me."

We have a checklist of questions to understand their circumstances. We find out how far along they are, as there are different legal limits in different countries – sometimes abortion pills can be an answer. The UK has the longest limit at 24 weeks. That, and where they live, helps us figure out the most suitable place for callers to travel to. Most people from Poland travel to the Netherlands or Spain, and most people from Ireland go to England. We get calls from other countries where the law is more liberal; in Italy, many doctors conscientiously object to abortion and in France abortion is permitted on demand only up to 14 weeks.

Now we ask about passports; Brexit means people from the EU can no longer travel to the UK using only their national ID card, which affects many callers. We also find out how much money they have, to give grants.

Callers are often angry, especially from Poland. They feel abandoned by the government and stigmatised by society. It can be nice to offer solidarity and say, "It's not you, it's the system. It shouldn't be like this." And to remind them that they are not alone.

There's this unspoken assumption that abortion is always a difficult choice, or there is suffering to endure, but that's not the reality. No one wants an abortion, but there are people who don't feel guilt. I've also spoken to callers who didn't believe in abortion, but need one.

The work can get stressful and busy, but there's a feeling of solidarity. We have a few WhatsApp groups, and when something happens, the volunteers reach out and lift each other up; that support is tremendous.

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## **‘The people who come from Ireland are so brave and strong to travel such a distance’: Patricia, 67, host and retired social work trainer, Liverpool**



Photograph: Simon Bray/The Guardian

My daughter works at the city’s Merseyside Clinic and told me there were women coming over from Ireland seeking abortions who had nowhere to stay. This was nine years ago and I thought, “I’ve got a spare room.” I became ASN’s first host in Liverpool. There are about seven of us now.

We get emails asking if anyone can take a client on particular dates. When I say yes, I’m given their name, age and when they’re coming. It’s not a lot of background, but it’s as much as I need.

Everybody I’ve hosted has come from Ireland. Even though the law has changed there, access to an abortion after 12 weeks is permitted only in limited circumstances, so the women who come now tend to be further along than they used to be. I’ll pick them up, make a meal and we’ll eat together. Some want to tell you everything about their lives and you have a laugh; others are feeling more vulnerable and don’t want to engage. I let people talk

as much or as little as they want. Why they are having an abortion has nothing to do with me.

Most come on their own. Many have children at home. Often they haven't told anyone what they're doing. I had a young woman who was a refugee in Ireland. There was also a grandmother who brought her 15-year-old granddaughter. The people who come are so brave and strong to travel such a distance. They're having to make decisions and organise things quickly. It's rewarding to be able to support them through that.

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**'In Malta, we're taught from a young age that abortion is synonymous with murder': Hanien, 24, volunteer for a helpline in Malta, currently living in Dublin**



Photograph: Cliona O'Flaherty/The Guardian

I was against abortion when I was younger because that was the only reality I knew. Malta is a Catholic country and there is anti-abortion sentiment in its institutions. We're taught from a young age that abortion is synonymous with murder, and that a woman who seeks one is evil.

Maltese law states that abortion is a criminal offence, with no exceptions. Any person who seeks or helps with one can face up to three years in prison. The penalty is higher for medical professionals.

I became interested in women's rights around 2016 when the morning-after pill became legally available. I've volunteered for the [Family Planning Advisory Service](#) in Malta since it started in 2020. It's a pro-choice helpline providing information about reproductive health choices. Because of the law in Malta, we cannot help people get an abortion or give them money towards travel to get one, but we can share publicly available information, like the fact that ASN exists.

The main danger in this work is the social stigma. Malta is a small country and you can be easily identified. The stigma is greater if you're a woman and even more so if you are a person of colour. It's framed as, "Look at this person who is foreign and bringing this evil on us."

Sometimes people are surprised that I do this. I wear a hijab and people associate being religious with being anti-choice and anti-abortion. But that is misinformation and ignorance about how Muslims view abortion. This work is my way of standing up against damaging patriarchal structures that affect me and my peers.

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**'I hate that people are panicking about money, childcare and flights': Pip, 26, veterinary surgeon and volunteer, Manchester**



Photograph: Simon Bray/The Guardian

My job is to make posts for ASN's Instagram that help people understand the charity's work and encourage people to donate. I fit it in around my day job.

I became interested in abortion access when I was 17. I was at boarding school and a girl asked me for help getting an abortion. She felt alone and terrified – and this was in England where abortion is legal. I hate that people from countries where abortion isn't legal are panicking about money, childcare and booking flights.

Being an openly queer person, I'm no stranger to online abuse and harassment, which helps with the moderation side of the job. We have a coordinated response which boils down to, "Don't feed the trolls." So on Instagram, hateful comments get deleted immediately and people get blocked. We have a lot of evangelical Christian, American men harassing us. "Murderers" is a common insult. And there's a lot of misogynistic harassment and insinuations that if a woman wants to have unprotected sex, then she should have to deal with the consequences.

An American man was repeatedly making threatening comments on our Facebook page and one of our followers reported him to the FBI. He was

recently sentenced to 20 months.

You can feel powerless in the face of the wave of restrictions on people's bodily autonomy. But it does feel powerful to know the work we're doing changes lives.

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**'We can't change the law on our own, but this work gives me a sense of agency': Aga, 27, Abortion Without Borders volunteer, Warsaw, Poland**



Photograph: Piotr Malecki/The Guardian

After the recent death of a [37-year-old woman](#) who was denied an abortion in Poland, there's been an atmosphere of grief here. It's the third known case reported since a [near-total ban came into force in January 2021](#).

Three years ago, I moved to the Netherlands and a friend told me the [Abortion Network Amsterdam](#) (ANA) needed Polish-speaking volunteers. I did email shifts responding to people and helping them set up travel and

appointments. I once accompanied someone to a clinic; my role was to translate, but there was a support element, too.

ANA helps people with costs, and when their funds aren't enough, they contact ASN. Both are part of the [Abortion Without Borders](#) network, which is made up of groups across Europe.

The volume of emails increased dramatically in the run-up to the Polish abortion ban. After I returned to Poland six months ago, I had to stop helping individuals directly: I work as a translator, helping with medical records and press releases, but I no longer set up abortions myself because when you're in Poland, you have to be far more careful. You need to find where the line lies and that's murky; the way the laws are set up means there's a lot of room for interpretation. We're very careful to stick to things we can't be prosecuted for.

While we don't have control over what happens in Polish hospitals, and we can't change the law on our own, doing this work gives me a sense of agency in an otherwise overwhelming situation.

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## **'I cannot have this baby': testimonies from women who have contacted the charity**

"I am 21 weeks and three days pregnant. I wish I could have this baby, but it has been diagnosed with severe brain defects. I need help in arranging a trip abroad. I have no idea how to go about this."

"I am eight or nine weeks pregnant. I have a very difficult family and financial situation. My husband beats me and my children, and abuses alcohol. I don't want the same for my third child. My husband raped me and it turns out that I am pregnant."

"I am pregnant: 21 weeks. I only found out at 16 weeks. I live in Poland. I cannot have this baby. I have no money or support because the baby's father left me as soon as he found out. I don't have money to go abroad to a clinic, so I ordered abortion pills, but after over a month, they still haven't arrived. I don't know what to do."

“I am 18 weeks pregnant and the baby has a serious heart defect. The doctors told me to expect that at any moment the baby may die. I can’t bear it, I can’t function normally. All the antenatal tests so far have ruined us financially because they are not covered in Poland.”

“I feel incapacitated in my country and am ashamed that I live here and have to get help from people from a foreign country. I know that after the procedure a stone will fall from my heart. Carrying such a sick child is probably every mother’s worst nightmare. I will be grateful to you till the end of my life, and I will support you as much as I can because there will be more women like me because of the stupid law in this country.”

“The doctor told me the baby was very unlikely to survive in the womb, but because of our legislation I was not able to access an abortion. I wish that I lived in a country where they trusted women to make the right choices for themselves.”

“I don’t want to write that our pregnancy was a matter of life and death, but it was. You gave us a chance for further life. We are still so shocked and grateful that there is still such a thing as genuine, honest kindness and selflessness in this world.”

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## ‘So many soundbites’: PR experts on Prince Andrew’s disastrous denials



‘The Emily Maitlis Newsnight interview was like being in a comedy clown car with a lit cigarette driving into a fireworks factory.’ Photograph: Mark Harrison/BBC/PA

The duke's legal battle was blighted by blunders, aggression and the lack of apology, which did not wash in the #MeToo era



[Caroline Davies](#)

Sat 19 Feb 2022 02.00 EST

The Duke of York's legal battle with his accuser [Virginia Giuffre](#), which he [settled](#) out of court this week, was characterised by a years-long series of damaging and unnecessary PR blunders, experts have said.

His [disastrous Newsnight interview](#), his ducking and diving to frustrate the serving of legal papers, and claims from “friends” that the [infamous photograph](#) of him with his arm around Giuffre’s waist was faked, all served to inflict further public opprobrium on the Queen’s second son, it was claimed.

The aggressive way Andrew fought the case, casting aspersions on Giuffre’s character, also attracted harsh censure from victims’ groups in the era of #MeToo, leading to a “volte face” when, in a joint statement issued this week, he said he had “never intended to malign” her.

Twelve years after he was photographed with the sex offender financier Jeffrey Epstein in New York's Central Park, Andrew has been stripped of his patronages and titles. And though he has made no admission of liability and has repeatedly denied Giuffre's allegations he had sex with her on three occasions when she was 17 and had been trafficked by Epstein, he has agreed to pay her an undisclosed sum, reportedly as high as £12m.

"The Emily Maitlis Newsnight interview was like being in a comedy clown car with a lit cigarette driving into a fireworks factory," said the PR agent Mark Borkowski. "I don't believe anyone in the profession that I know would have advised him to do the Maitlis interview.

"But he thought he could roll with it. He thought he had the charisma. And he thought that he had his own story. It's an archetypal psychopathic reaction to the fact you are not accepting [the situation]."

Andrew's claims in the 2019 interview – that he was at a Pizza Express in Woking and that he had a condition that prevented him from sweating – were absolute gifts to social media, spawning hundreds of memes.

03:16

Prince Andrew sexual abuse case: what we now know – video report

His denial that he had thrown a birthday party for Epstein's then girlfriend, and now also a convicted sex offender, [Ghislaine Maxwell](#), insisting it was just a "straightforward shooting weekend", showed how wide the chasm was between him and the public he was attempting to persuade.

"He gave so many soundbites," said Borkowski. Andrew should have looked to his mother for PR advice. [The Queen's statement that "recollections may vary"](#) in response to claims made by Harry and Meghan in their Oprah interview was a masterclass "in what it said by saying so little", said Borkowski. "And that is the art of dealing with a crisis."

Missing from Andrew's Newsnight interview, and immediately seized on by commentators, was any acknowledgment of Epstein's victims. It took the joint statement, made earlier this week, for him redress this by accepting that Giuffre had suffered "as an established victim of abuse".

Missing, too, was any expression of regret over his decades-long friendship with Epstein, who at the time the two were photographed had served 13 months for soliciting and procuring a minor for prostitution. Again, it took this week's statement for Andrew to promise to "demonstrate his regret for his association with Epstein by supporting the fight against the evils of sex trafficking".



Prince Andrew in Windsor in April 2021. Photograph: Steve Parsons/AP

He did apologise in the interview, not for his relationship with Epstein but for its impact on the royal family. "We try to uphold the highest standards and practice," he said, "and I let the side down, simple as that." If he was guilty of anything, added the duke, it was of being "too honourable" in choosing to visit Epstein to break off their friendship in person.

PR experts would hope in such crisis interviews their client would answer questions and address the facts put to them in a way that persuades viewers to interpret those facts in the way you want. A declaration that it's "just not true" is not enough. "You have to be very certain about how the audience will look at your reactions to a negative comment. And I think another blunder he made was underestimating, not just the media, but ... the actual public and ... the power of social media," said Borkowski.

Given the out-of-court settlement agreed in principle, which has spared Andrew the ordeal of cross-examination on his private life before a jury, Maitlis said this week her interview “may be the only testimony” we will ever get directly from the duke. She is far from alone in now finding it difficult to marry his three words to her – “it didn’t happen” – with his decision to pay millions to a woman he has said he had no recollection of meeting.

There are questions, too, over the aggressive tactics used by Andrew, especially in the #MeToo era.

His apparent attempt to frustrate the serving of Giuffre’s legal papers did not play well. “It was unedifying, it looked ridiculous. But, more than a PR disaster, he was annoying the court,” Nick Goldstone, a lawyer at the disputes resolution firm Ince, said.

Andrew’s defence document was “ludicrous in parts”, saying he was unable to answer questions such whether he had been habitually photographed at social events with Maxwell for lack of sufficient information, Goldstone added.

Suggestions from “friends” of Andrew that the photograph of him with his arm around Giuffre’s waist was faked were “high risk”, especially as he did not have the original photograph. His claim of an inability to sweat, and the Pizza Express alibi, were ridiculed. Photographs were published allegedly showing him sweating on other occasions. His security team should have records of any Pizza Express visit – “so, produce those at the time you make the allegation”, Goldstone said.

Andrew’s US legal team “could only play with the cards they were dealt” and on the instructions they received from their client, he said. And, by the time they took on the case, options for the prince were diminishing.

The attacks on Giuffre’s character, accusing her of seeking a “payday” from Andrew, and attempts to introduce in to evidence a US tabloid story describing her as a “money-hungry sex kitten” who recruited young women for Epstein, have also been criticised.

“He took an enormous decision to actually be aggressive. It’s different now, particularly when you are so behind the eight ball you’re snookered. And you come out fighting in the wrong way. His team did all the wrong things really really well,” said Borkowski. It backfired, and Andrew then had to say he did not intend to “malign” Giuffre. “A volte face,” said Goldstone.

But perhaps the biggest blunder was not settling earlier, and only agreeing to after his attempts to have the case struck out failed, Goldstone said. Pinning hopes on Giuffre’s 2009 \$500,000 secret settlement with Epstein was “going to be the trump card”. “But in my view, that didn’t have a hope of getting him out of this case.”

Borkowski said: “The bottom line is, if you are representing somebody, or in particular if you are running a crisis campaign, you can give as much good advice as a PR person, but it’s whether the client, whether the person at the centre of the whirlwind, actually accepts it. And I think through all of this, this has been heavily laden with hubris.

“I think I would have gone for the route of settlement, the route of arbitration. That was needed all the way down the line. There needed to be more jaw jaw, less war war.”

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## Jeffrey Epstein

# After Prince Andrew settled, where does the Epstein case go next?

The prince's settlement with Virginia Giuffre leaves several loose ends, including whether more in the disgraced financier's circle could be implicated



Jeffrey Epstein moved in the company of the powerful, elite, famous and wealthy. The repercussions of his sex-trafficking ring could yet extend further. Photograph: Uma Sanghvi/AP

[Edward Helmore](#)

Sat 19 Feb 2022 10.43 EST

After news of Prince Andrew's settlement with his accuser Virginia Giuffre, the question of who or what the tentacles of the Jeffrey Epstein and [Ghislaine Maxwell](#) sex-trafficking conspiracy will envelope next remains.

New York attorneys believe it is unlikely any more will be said by the parties involved in Andrew's case, assuming the senior British royal keeps to the agreed settlement. The letter that accompanied the court filing last week, agreed by both sides, was unusually explicit and calculated to the purpose of settling the matter for good.

"It gave Giuffre something, including recognition that she'd been a victim of sex trafficking, but not everything she wanted, including an admission of guilt," said the New York lawyer Julie Rendelman.

But attention will now return to a slew of other unfinished business stemming from the sex-trafficking ring run by the disgraced financier Epstein, his one-time girlfriend Maxwell and possibly others. Certainly the nature of the circles that Epstein moved in – powerful, elite, famous and wealthy – make continued interest by media and law enforcement inevitable.

The loose ends in the Epstein saga include the outcome of challenges to Maxwell's conviction and her yet-to-be scheduled sentencing over the summer, which will include victims' impact statements. There is also the question of prosecutors' appetite to reach down the conspiracy chain and the disposition of about \$440m left in Epstein's estate after \$121m was paid out to victims through a compensation fund. Finally, there is potential for a new round of civil claims against those involved in the sex-trafficking conspiracy.

But the release of the names of 16 "John Does" – in effect, potential clients of the conspiracy – that were redacted from depositions in Virginia Giuffre's defamation lawsuit against Maxwell may initially produce little more than headlines.

Maxwell, who was returned to Brooklyn's Metropolitan detention center, where she has been held in isolation since her arrest in July 2020, has said she no longer wishes to fight the release of men's identities. "Each of the listed Does has counsel who have ably asserted their own respective privacy rights. Ms Maxwell therefore leaves it to this Court to conduct the appropriate review," her lawyers wrote.

“Generalized aversion to embarrassment and negativity … is not enough to warrant continued sealing of information,” Giuffre’s attorney Sigrid McCawley wrote to the court. “There is little reason to retain protection over the vast swaths of information about Epstein and Maxwell’s sex-trafficking operation.”

It’s up to Judge Loretta Preska, who presided over the Giuffre-Maxwell action, to unseal them. When Preska [previously ordered the release of testimony](#), she said that claims to privacy were “far outweighed by the presumption of public access”.

That in turn could lead to a wave of new civil cases, said Professor Marci Hamilton, an expert on [child sex abuse statutes of limitations at the University of Pennsylvania](#) and CEO of [Child USA](#), citing a New York City law that allows sex abuse cases outside the normal statute of limitations to be brought. The law goes into effect in September, and opens for cases to be filed in March 2023.

“It’s not over for the survivors and we’ll see new lawsuits against Epstein’s co-conspirators – the men who willingly accepted the girls to abuse them, the men who were frequently in his space. As of March, any woman will have her claims revived and be able to sue any and everybody involved in the Epstein system, even if they have received compensation for the Epstein victim’s fund.”

Hamilton was involved in advising both the compensation fund and the US Virgin Islands attorney general, Denise George, [who filed claims against Epstein’s estate](#).

While most say the fund was administered fairly, the overall amount released by the estate to compensate Epstein’s victims is questioned. “In the end I was disappointed that more women weren’t compensated higher dollars. Reserving so much of it just didn’t seem like a laudable goal,” says Hamilton.



Little St James Island, Jeffrey Epstein's property in the US Virgin Islands where some of his abuse is alleged to have taken place. Photograph: Marco Bello/Reuters

Arick Fudali, a lawyer with the Bloom Firm that represented eight women to the fund, said he had mixed feelings. "It was a good opportunity for them to have their voices heard in a non-confrontational way and get some measure of justice. But I think every single penny from Jeffrey Epstein's estate should have gone to victims, and I fault the program for leaving any money in the estate."

Late last year, the Virgin Islands' George asked the British bank Barclays to hand over information related to Epstein, days after its former chief executive Jes Staley left the bank over his ties to the financier that included unexplained emails referring to "snow white". Barclays said it had "complied with its obligations".

These issues have been dragging for years. But, with a saga as sprawling as the Epstein scandal, new wrinkles are constantly appearing. There is now pending, and highly contentious, litigation between the multibillionaire former Apollo CEO Leon Black and his former mistress Guzel Ganieva, who claims she was trafficked to Epstein.

Black denies the allegation and has countersued in federal court, claiming that his former business partner, Josh Harris, masterminded a smear campaign in 2021 to “destroy” him.

But the question of whether the justice department itself wants to go after others lower down in the Epstein-Maxwell conspiracy – “reaching down”, in prosecutorial terms – remains open.

Following Maxwell’s conviction, the government dropped perjury charges against the ex-British socialite and complaints against two detention guards who failed to keep watch over Epstein the night he took his life. Lawyers for members of Epstein’s personal staff, including Sarah Kellen, have [indicated Epstein’s staff are not in the frame.](#)

“I don’t believe there will be further criminal charges,” said Rendelman.

The next criminal aspect of the Epstein conspiracy would then be Maxwell’s sentencing. Maxwell’s defense attorneys will submit a lengthy motion – typically public record – incorporating every positive aspect of Maxwell’s life – lack of criminal record, any time of community service, her family background, mental health.

“You name it, they’ll include it in an effort to get the judge to go as low as possible in terms of sentencing guidelines,” said Rendelman.



Ghislaine Maxwell with Jeffrey Epstein. Her sentencing and/or appeal against conviction remains outstanding. Photograph: SDNY/ZumaA Press Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

But that assumes her conviction survives expected motions for a mistrial on various grounds, including two jurors saying they had omitted from a pre-trial questionnaire that they had been sexually abused as children and may later have helped shape jury deliberations.

If Maxwell seeks to overturn the verdict, or launch an appeal, any cooperation she might offer the government in exchange for a lighter sentence, would probably fail, said David Weinstein, a former assistant US attorney in the southern district of Florida.

“It’s always been a practice and policy of the Department of Justice that if you’re pursuing an appeal of your conviction, then we’re not interested in having you cooperate with us because you’re not really cooperating, you’re fighting with us.”

On the other hand, if she offered to cooperate against high-value individuals who were equal or only slightly lower down, that might be something the government would be interested in.

“Epstein was their big target. Maxwell was their No 2, who became No 1. There may be some high-profile individuals involved, but for the most part they were not necessarily co-conspirators recruiting and providing victims but rather – and for lack of a better word - their services,” Weinstein said.

For Andrew, his immediate legal woes are over, even though a horrific PR problem remains. But for others, just maybe, their troubles might be just beginning.

03:16

Prince Andrew sexual abuse case: what we now know – video report

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## 2022.02.19 - Coronavirus

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## Coronavirus

# Living with Covid: what are risks of England's plan to lift restrictions?

As the new plan is set to be announced, here's what might change, from testing to shielding

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



A man walks past a Covid-19 test site in London. The Treasury is due to announce plans for its 'living with Covid-19 strategy', which may mean an end to free testing in England. Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

*[Aubrey Allegretti](#) and [Nicola Davis](#)*

Sat 19 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

As Britain emerges from the Omicron wave, ministers are thrashing out a “living safely with Covid” plan for England expected to be announced next week. The strategy should see freedoms expanded back towards pre-pandemic norms in an attempt to readjust people’s attitudes towards coronavirus.

The decisions taken this weekend in Whitehall will have major repercussions for public health across the country. While vaccines have drastically blunted Covid hospitalisations and deaths, and restrictions came with significant downsides, lifting further measures is unlikely to come without a cost – particularly for those in vulnerable groups.

Here we take a look at what could change, and the potential implications:

## Testing

Free home-delivered lateral flow tests (LFTs) for all are likely to be scrapped, possibly within weeks. Ministers are divided over when the tests, designed for people who do not have Covid symptoms, should be wound down – with “hawks” pushing for a reigning in of billions of pounds in public spending while “doves” believe mass surveillance of the virus should continue.

Discussions are also under way about when over the next month advice should be rescinded for people in schools and universities to get tested twice a week. Those with Covid symptoms may be moved off PCR tests, which are also likely to cease being free at some point in March, and on to LFTs.

About 1.3 million of the country’s most vulnerable people will probably continue to get free access to tests.

Some scientists have raised concerns at the proposals, pointing out that reducing PCR testing may compromise the UK’s capacity to spot and monitor new variants. They also worry about the availability of LFTs being reduced because of their importance for detecting Covid outbreaks and letting people manage the risk of spreading the virus to vulnerable contacts.

“If testing is not free, people won’t do it,” said Dr Julian Tang, a clinical virologist at the University of Leicester, adding that would mean relying on hospital tests and so-called “sentinel testing networks” to track the virus, as is the case for flu. Tang said he believed the virus is likely to evolve to become milder, but added: “On the way, there may be the occasional more virulent variant that causes more hospitalisation briefly before dying out – as we have seen with Beta, Gamma, Lambda, Mu variants.”

## Isolating

Johnson announced in his final Commons appearance before recess that the legal requirement for anyone with Covid to isolate was expected to end a month earlier than the planned date of 24 March.

Contact tracing will also likely be scaled back, along with an end to “support payments” worth £500 for low-income workers who would struggle to afford missing work by isolating.

[According to a paper from behavioural scientists advising the government](#), withdrawing testing and making isolation voluntary might give some the message it is acceptable to socialise with others despite being infected or having symptoms.

The scientists warned that removing restrictions would disproportionately impact vulnerable sections of the population such as those in precarious employment.

While Downing Street has stressed “we would never recommend anyone goes to work when they have an infectious disease”, this may not have much effect: that advice is often unheeded.

Prof Susan Michie, director of the UCL Centre for Behaviour Change and part of the writing group for the paper, said: “We need to change our whole culture to be more oriented to health and safety, with presenteeism at work disapproved of and people told by employers to stay at home if unwell or likely to be infectious.”

Though a surge in cases may not be as alarming as it once was, [experts warn](#) that the high prevalence of Covid means an uptick could see hospitalisations quickly reach levels seen over the festive period, putting more pressure on the NHS when [waiting lists are already at a record high](#).

## Vaccines

Driving up the level of jabs administered to help increase the population's immunity will remain a key priority for the government. So far, around a third of people over the age of 12 have still not had a Covid booster.

According to the [UK Health Security Agency](#), protection against death in over-50s was about 60% 25 weeks past the second vaccine dose, while two weeks after a booster dose it was about 95%. Two jabs offered 25-35% protection against hospitalisation after 25 weeks, compared with about 75% 10 to 14 weeks after a Pfizer booster.

However the [World Health Organization has warned](#) that offering further boosters of the original Covid jabs is not a “viable strategy” against new variants. Instead, it has stressed the importance of developing vaccines that do a better job at preventing transmission, and which elicit a broad, long-lasting immune response.

Experts are divided about the best route to take when it comes to vaccinations, not least because of a lack of data on the benefits of repeated mRNA boosters.

Ministers are also understood to be keen to help make more use of [antiviral treatments](#) – currently available to about 1.3 million people – to help treat those who catch Covid and limit the risk of severe illness developing.

## Travel

While most of the toughest travel restrictions have already been scrapped, the currently empty “red list” will remain in reserve should ministers need to use it again to redirect all arrivals from a particular country into hotel quarantine.

For now, unvaccinated people will continue to need to take a Covid test before they travel to England and another within two days of arrival. The passenger locator form will remain mandatory, but be “simplified” and could be scrapped later in the year.

Dr Michael Head, senior research fellow in global health at Southampton University, said the success of vaccines in reducing both symptomatic infection and onward transmission has been pivotal.

## Masks

Since [plan B was scrapped](#) in England a month ago, masks have returned to being optional rather than mandatory on most public transport and in shops. Some services, such as Transport for London, still require face coverings to be worn.

Ministers are still discussing what should happen in healthcare settings like hospitals and care homes, the last remaining places where masks are mandatory.

### [The differences between a face mask and a FFP2 respirator](#)

Michie said that for masks, as with other measures, removing legal requirements wrongly signalled that the risk was not great or that the measures were not effective enough. “The extent to which they will be retained will depend on the messaging from government and other institutions,” she said.

## Shielding

The government ended shielding advice for people previously considered to be clinically extremely vulnerable [in September 2021](#). [Further specialist advice](#) for those people, which included suggestions such as asking home visitors to wear face coverings and avoiding enclosed crowded space, [also looks set to be withdrawn](#).

Baroness Brinton, a Liberal Democrat peer who is clinically extremely vulnerable, said she was “utterly astonished” that the reported change had received little publicity. “It’s all part of the prime minister’s tactic of pretending the pandemic’s over, while making no mention of the millions of clinically vulnerable people who will suffer as a result,” she told the i.

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## Coronavirus

# Covid infection increases risk of mental health disorders, study finds

Researchers note need to follow patients after recovery for any emerging disorders



‘Millions of people in the US infected with Covid are developing mental health problems,’ said Ziyad Al-Aly. Photograph: Mark Lennihan/AP

*[Melody Schreiber](#)*

Fri 18 Feb 2022 12.51 EST

Having Covid-19 puts people at a significantly increased chance of developing new mental health conditions, potentially adding to existing crises of suicide and overdoses, according to new research looking at millions of health records in the US over the course of a year.

The long-term effects of having Covid are still being discovered, and among them is an increased chance of being diagnosed with mental health disorders. They include depression, anxiety, stress and an increased risk of substance use disorders, cognitive decline, and sleep problems – a marked difference from others who also endured the stress of the pandemic but weren't diagnosed with the virus.

"This is basically telling us that millions and millions of people in the US infected with Covid are developing mental health problems," said Ziyad Al-Aly, chief of research and development at the VA St Louis Healthcare System and senior author of the paper. "That makes us a nation in distress."

The higher risk of mental health disorders, including suicidal ideation and opioid use, is particularly concerning, he said.

"This is really almost a perfect storm that is brewing in front of our eyes – for another opioid epidemic two or three years down the road, for another suicide crisis two or three years down the road," Al-Aly added.

These unfolding crises are "quite a big concern", said James Jackson, director of behavioral health at Vanderbilt University's ICU Recovery Center, who was not involved with this study. He is also seeing patients whose previous conditions, including anxiety, depression and opioid use disorder, worsened during the pandemic.

Research like this shows the clear need to follow patients in the weeks and months after even mild Covid diagnoses and to seek quick treatment for any emerging disorders, the experts said. "If we apply attention to it now and nip it in the bud, we could literally save lives," Al-Aly said.

More than 18% of Covid patients developed mental health problems, compared with 12% of those who did not have Covid, according to the [study](#) published on Wednesday.

The study followed more than 153,000 patients who tested positive for Covid in the Veterans Affairs health system between March 2020 and January 2021, and compared them with other health records: to 5.8 million people who did not test positive in that time, but lived through the same

stresses of the pandemic, and with 5.6 million patients seen before the pandemic.

Among all patients who developed new mental health problems during the pandemic, the Covid patients were significantly more likely to develop cognitive problems (80%), sleep disorders (41%), depression (39%), stress (38%), anxiety (35%) and opioid use disorder (34%), compared with those who didn't have Covid.

The study looked only at patients with no history of mental health diagnoses in the past two years. It compared those hospitalized for Covid versus other illnesses, and compared outcomes to thousands of flu cases. The study also adjusted for factors like demographics, other health conditions and other factors.

The results were all clear: Covid has a marked effect on mental health.

Those with more severe cases of Covid, especially those who need to be hospitalized, tend to be at higher risk. But even those with mild or asymptomatic cases were more likely to receive mental health diagnoses.

"People who were hospitalized had it worse, but the risk in non-hospitalized [patients] is significant and absolutely not trivial – and that represents the majority of people in the US and the world," Al-Aly said.

The study did have some limitations: most of those analyzed were older white men. But controlling for race, gender and age found no changes in risk.

The coronavirus can be found in the brain, other studies have shown. "We can actually see the virus in the amygdala, in the hippocampus – the very centers responsible for regulating our moods, regulating our emotions," Al-Aly said.

The study adds to other research showing that "mental health issues are a huge concern" after Covid, Jackson said. And the results line up with what he sees among patients.

“We’re learning that Covid may be even more problematic and more impactful than we thought,” Jackson said.

Early treatment of patients facing new or additional mental health challenges after Covid can make a crucial difference, the experts said.

“The idea here is to identify patients’ data early to hopefully reduce this from becoming a much larger problem down the road,” Al-Aly said. “If you leave a disease unattended, it only gets worse.”

But the longer the virus continues circulating, the more long-term problems it may create – adding even greater pressure to health systems.

“The wave of people with mental health disorders is going to be hitting the clinics in the next year or two or three, as a result of Covid and as a result of the pandemic,” Al-Aly said.

And many mental health practitioners don’t accept insurance, creating a large stumbling block for patients, while others have long waiting lists.

“This is a gigantic problem, and I’m not really sure what we’re going to do about it,” Jackson said. “The needs are vastly greater than the resources.”

Jackson has set up peer support groups to offer counseling to patients dealing with long Covid – brain fog, cognitive impairment, memory problems, feelings of inadequacy. The groups are held on Zoom, so patients can join from all over the country.

“We need to pay attention to the long-term consequences of Covid,” Al-Aly said. “If we only pay attention to the short-term consequences, the first 30 days or the first 90 days, we really, really are missing the larger picture.

“The pandemic itself caught the US unprepared, and we’re going to be caught unprepared again for long Covid,” Al-Aly said. “The reality is that Covid is producing long-term consequences, and we cannot just wish it away or sweep it under the rug or not deal with it.”

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## Vaccines and immunisation

# Six African countries to begin making mRNA vaccines as part of WHO scheme

Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa and Tunisia first countries to be assisted by global mRNA hub

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The Biovac bio-pharmaceutical company in South Africa. Currently only 1% of the vaccines used in Africa are produced on the continent of about 1.3 billion people. Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

*Peter Beaumont*

Fri 18 Feb 2022 07.44 EST

Six African countries – Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, [South Africa](#) and Tunisia – will be the first on the continent to receive the technology needed to produce their own mRNA vaccines from a scheme headed by the World Health Organization.

The groundbreaking project aims to assist low- and middle-income countries in manufacturing mRNA vaccines at scale and according to international standards, with the aim of ending much of the reliance of African countries on vaccine manufacturers outside the continent.

The announcement comes in the same week that BioNTech, which produces the Pfizer vaccine for Covid-19 – itself an mRNA vaccine – announced it planned to deliver factory facilities built out of shipping containers to several African countries to allow the Pfizer vaccine to be produced on the continent.

Primarily set up to address the Covid-19 pandemic, the global mRNA hub has the potential to expand manufacturing capacity for other vaccines and products, such as insulin to treat diabetes, cancer medicines and, potentially, vaccines for diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis and HIV.

The WHO established its global mRNA technology transfer hub after vaccine hoarding by wealthy countries – and problems with supply from India, as companies prioritised sales to governments that could pay the highest price – meant low- and middle-income countries were pushed to the back of the queue for Covid-19 vaccines.

The scheme's ultimate goal is to spread capacity for national and regional production to all health technologies.

While the BioNTech initiative was welcomed for potentially shortening the supply chain of the Pfizer vaccine to Africa, it was also criticised for not sharing technological knowhow, which the WHO project will go some way towards redressing.

“No other event like the Covid-19 pandemic has shown that reliance on a few companies to supply global public goods is limiting, and dangerous,” said the WHO chief, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, announcing the first recipients of the technology on Friday after visiting the hub in South Africa last week.

“The hub will be not just for South Africa, it’s for Africa, Africa and the whole world, because the spokes will be distributed all over the world.”

“The best way to address health emergencies and reach universal health coverage is to significantly increase the capacity of all regions to manufacture the health products they need.”

“We expect clinical trials [in South Africa] to start in the fourth quarter of this year, with approval expected in 2024, but this process can be sped up, [and] there are other options that the hub is exploring.

Tedros added that the benefits of this initiative would “extend far beyond Covid-19, by creating a platform for vaccines against other diseases including malaria, tuberculosis and even cancer. So this is a strategic investment, not just for Covid, but for all the major health problems that we face”.

Tedros has repeatedly called for equitable access to vaccines in order to beat the pandemic, and rails against the way wealthy nations have hoarded doses, leaving Africa lagging behind other continents in the global vaccination effort.

He pointed out on Friday that 116 countries globally were still off-track for the target of vaccinating 70% of the population by the middle of this year, while 80% of the population of Africa was yet to receive a single dose.

Currently only 1% of the vaccines used in Africa are produced on the continent of about 1.3 billion people.

The WHO said it would work with the six countries to develop a roadmap of training and support so they could start producing vaccines as soon as possible. Training will begin in March.

The South African hub is already producing mRNA vaccines at laboratory scale and is scaling up towards commercial scale.

The South African president, Cyril Ramaphosa, said Friday’s announcement “means mutual respect, mutual recognition of what we can all bring to the party, investment in our economies, infrastructure investment and, in many ways, giving back to the continent”.

The French president, Emmanuel Macron, said supporting African health sovereignty was one of the key goals of starting up local production, “to empower regions and countries to fend for themselves, during crises, and in peacetime”.

Ramaphosa said on Friday that the global vaccine distribution scheme Covax and vaccines alliance Gavi should commit themselves to buying vaccines from local manufacturing hubs.

“The lack of a market for vaccines produced in Africa is something that should be concerning to all of us. Organisations such as Covax and Gavi need to commit to buying vaccines from local manufacturers instead of going outside of those hubs that have been set up,” Ramaphosa said.

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## So, can I eat on the bus again? And other pressing questions for the return of real life



What should you do if someone wants to try your drink? Illustration: Nishant Choksi/The Guardian

Forgotten how to behave in public? As Covid restrictions lift, a quick refresher on everyday encounters from shaking hands to sharing drinks

[Joel Golby](#)

Fri 18 Feb 2022 07.30 EST

Recently, while out for drinks and sharing plates, a friend reached over and took a sip of my cocktail. There are key parts of this anecdote that still, two years into the push-pull of pandemic guidance, strike nervousness into me. They include the words “dinner”, “friend”, “sharing plates”, not to mention the thought of a bathroom where there’s nice soap but the water from the tap still comes out cold and for some reason there’s no dainty way of opening the door once you’ve washed your hands, so you just have to grab the door handle with your newly washed hand, which seems to instantly negate the point of washing the hands. But the crucial information here is that I had a very nice negroni in front of me, and they wanted to try it, so they *took the glass and raised it to their lips and took a sip.*

Sign up to our Inside Saturday newsletter for an exclusive behind-the-scenes look at the making of the magazine’s biggest features, as well as a curated list of our weekly highlights

In 2019, I would not have minded. That’s because All This hadn’t happened, and I considered myself fairly normal. This is no longer true. I have forgotten how to talk to anyone. How to greet people. How to meet new people. How to sit in an office. A lot of people forgot how to talk back to me, too. [Restrictions are easing up](#), but people aren’t necessarily doing the same. So I spoke to some experts to get some guidance.

## Gossiping

If you were on any local Facebook groups over the various lockdowns, you will know that, deliriously starved of day-to-day gossip, people became obsessed with the comings and goings of their neighbours, reporting whether they wore a mask and gloves to put the bins out, or how many Amazon parcels they were getting every day. This is because, lightweight as it is, gossip is vital. “Gossip is social currency,” says Jessica Barrett, an editor at

Grazia, the gossipiest magazine in the biz. “If you have some, you hold power.” Recently, it’s been hard to know what to do – and how hard to go – with gossip, but Barrett has some guidelines. “There are three things you need to consider when it comes to gossiping IRL: who’s it about; who told you (and are you allowed to relay it); and how far you want to go when it comes to the details – as in, how will it affect them? The perfect piece of gossip won’t damage someone’s relationship, say, but will be entertaining enough to keep you chatting for an entire round of drinks.”

Gossiping about friends can be a bit of a minefield, she says: “Some people don’t want to do it, and others can’t be trusted not to feed back as soon as they get on the bus home” – but that’s why celebrities still play such a vital role in society. “Love Island unites us all every summer for good reason: we love talking shit about people we think we know inside and out.” If you still don’t trust yourself to gossip properly about people you know, try having an opinion about, say, [Julia Fox](#).

## Shaking hands

We all more-or-less understand how Covid spreads, now. It’s in the air, right? It’s sort of ... around? And that all that panicked hand-washing we did from March 2020 onwards was hygienic, sure, but not entirely effective. Has that made handshaking any less fraught? No. Despite my best efforts, shaking hands isn’t going to go away for ever, so it makes sense to relearn how to do it in a way that makes everyone involved feel secure.

“Everyone is comfortable doing different things,” William Hanson, etiquette coach and co-host of the [Help, I Sexted My Boss](#) podcast, tells me. “I personally am fine with a handshake – we are [more informed now](#) about Covid, and people are not maybe quite as touch-phobic as they were at the start – but if you are not comfortable shaking hands, then I would say you need to be proactive in giving a contactless greeting.” This can be anything from an elbow bump or a namaste or a regal wave, but fundamentally, if you don’t want to do a handshake, you have to be first to fire. If you do? Old rules still apply. “Imagine you’re going into a fruit bowl, you’re going to squeeze a peach or nectarine to see if it’s ripe,” Hanson explains. “That’s the sort of strength you want to use.” Stone fruit season doesn’t really kick in until August, so you might just have to practise this one on actual hands.

## Eating in public

There was always something mildly embarrassing about eating on the go – “Yes, correct,” your meal deal seems to announce, “I, an adult person who is nominally in charge of myself and legally allowed to vote, mistimed my meals so badly that I have to eat a sandwich between the next three stops on the train” – but the additional hurdle of the mask, and the intricate dance you have to do to eat through it (unhook one side, bite, re-hook, chew; repeat), has made public consumption the refuge of the desperate. “There are two types of people in the world: those who feel seething rage when a stranger three seats away eats a samosa, and the rest of us who have better things to do,” says Justin Myers, who dissects this magazine’s blind date column every week on his [Guyliner](#) website. “If anything, I’d hope the pandemic might inspire scolds to give empathy a go: we all get hungry; we’re all short on time; it might be someone’s only chance of a seat all day. Respect the commitment of someone chewing a tuna mayo baguette behind a surgical mask – the resulting trapped cloud of bad breath will far outlast your mild inconvenience.”

## Making small talk

For some people, small talk is an effortless social tool that helps warm up the cold gap between two people when left alone abruptly at a party, or makes the time go faster when for some reason your card is taking ages to be accepted at the till (“There’s money on it, mate! Ha, ha, ha!”). For others (me) it is not, and they have to make a deliberate effort to get small talk going, something that’s become harder and harder without practice. It’s been a good run, but abruptly asking, “*Did you get Covid, then?*” to people you haven’t seen for 18 months is no longer a cool small talk starter. (One of my party go-tos – “Have you ever seen anyone break a bone?” – remains effective, though.) The key to small talk is the same now as it was when you were also hopeless at it, pre-March 2020: ask questions, ideally open-ended ones, but don’t pepper them in as if you’re trying to figure out their mother’s maiden name, their national insurance number, and the street they grew up on. If you’re really stuck, try, “What incident led to you having to have a ‘special assembly’ at your school?” Nobody in this country can resist answering that question.

## **Apologising**

I have found that, with my rusted-up social skills, I have had to apologise fairly often since the world reopened. But though the frequency of apologising has changed, the fundamentals remain the same. That is, saying “Sorry you were offended” or just, “Soz” doesn’t quite cut it. In 2012, Prof Beth Polin of the Eastern Kentucky University co-authored a paper called [The Art of the Apology](#), which specified that a good apology includes at least one of the following six components: 1. An expression of regret (the actual “I’m sorry” bit); 2. An explanation (but, importantly, not a justification); 3. An acknowledgment of responsibility; 4. A declaration of repentance; 5. An offer of repair; and 6. A request for forgiveness. Sadly, the glowering feeling of “being a toddler forced to apologise because you have frightfully misbehaved” never really goes away.

## **Sharing food, or indeed drink**

Etiquette expert Hanson is reassuringly outraged by my negroni story, but responds with an idea of how to respond next time this happens with something so gloriously passively aggressive that it makes me feel as if he’s walked over and slapped me sharply – but not unlovingly! – in the face. “If we were out and I said, ‘Oh, my gin and tonic’s delicious,’ and you said, ‘Oh, can I have a sip?’ I would say, ‘Of course – let me order you one,’ and beckon the waiter over as nicely as I could.” Myers is slightly less elegantly vicious, but still enforces boundaries. “Sharing food can be a bonding experience – an opportunity to explore the farthest reaches of a menu together, especially with tapas or mezze – but Covid has exposed our previous cleanliness hypocrisy. We’d demand five-star hygiene ratings from restaurants, but then spend the entire meal sticking unwashed hands into each other’s dinner.” If you want a nibble of someone else’s plate, “you should wait to be asked”, but do think how much you actually want to try their pasta. “Consider a fork in your pie or a bite of your burger to be their tongue in your mouth,” Myers says. “If you’re unwilling to accept their saliva, everybody’s mouths and hands need to stay on their own side of the table.”

## **Flirting**

Flirting is fun, isn't it – adding a flicker of electricity to what is often a normal, even banal conversation ("No way one of your top three biscuits is a *digestive*, sorry! No!") – but it's been hard to do in the last two years. First, when it was basically illegal to touch people's arms in a significant way, and second, since we've all been released, there's been a feral edge to it. "Historically, flirting felt fun and pleasantly aimless, a sport that prioritised taking part over the podium," Myers laments. "Now, after so much time lost, people are reluctant to waste it; if they don't feel an instant connection, they scoot on, in search of someone to tick their boxes."

Annie Lord, a [dating columnist for Vogue](#) and [contributor to the Guardian](#), treats flirting like a contact sport. "Touch works as well – obviously after you've assessed they'd be comfortable with that," she says. "But like a little shove when they make an annoying joke or nudging them when you're both leaning at the bar waiting for drinks, it warms things up." Another thing worth bringing back is "looking at people", something that feels especially intense in a post-mask world. "The sort of thing that works on me is intense eye contact," Lord says. "It makes me go all shy and giggly, and I start playing with my hair. It feels as if they're seeing who you really are. It makes you feel special. Since the pandemic, I've felt this even more because we went for such long periods without anyone looking at us, without being noticed."

## Taking public transport

People acting bizarrely on public transport is a cherished tradition in this country, and something I think we lost sight of during the first few lockdowns. Recently, I was on a bus that turned its engine off because a woman was shouting at the driver so much, and I was oddly soothed by the interruption: it felt like normality again. Public transport is a place where people can be their most authentic selves, so I am loth to enforce any particular rules over it, but it's worth using this space to remind people to wear masks if the service demands it and – because I can't believe how often this happens, still – have your payment method ready *before* you set foot on the bus or towards the barrier. How do some of you not know this yet? How?

# Saying no to things

All of that said: is it still OK to be anxious about the outside world? After absorbing months and months of messaging saying that it's a place that can hurt you: yes, a bit. I, for one, have been guilty of using, "Sorry mate, can't: pandemic" as an excuse not to go to things I didn't want to go to anyway, and it's still a fairly useful get-out, but – as with a lot of these new social rules – playing it by ear and leaning into what you're comfortable with is key. If there's a new variant doing the rounds, feel free to welch on dinner. If there's a mask-less bowling party happening and you don't feel great about putting your fingers in there, don't. And if someone tries to drink your negroni, then pull it away from them. They'll look like fools, not you. We're still feeling out what society looks like in a post-vaccine world, but saying, "No thanks – not for me!" is still a fairly vital part of it.

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# If Nick Clegg wants to fix Meta, he needs to tackle its problem with human rights

[Frederike Kaltheuner](#)

Instead of pursuing the ‘metaverse’, the company’s new head of global affairs should address the surveillance business model that has done so much harm



Nick Clegg during the 2021 Web Summit, Lisbon, Portugal. Photograph: Zed Jameson/SIPA/REX/Shutterstock

Sat 19 Feb 2022 04.00 EST

When the former British deputy prime minister Nick Clegg joined Facebook in 2018, the company was immersed in a number of scandals. Cambridge Analytica had been [harvesting personal data](#) from Facebook profiles. UN

human rights experts said the platform had played a role in facilitating the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya in Myanmar. Its policies during the 2016 US presidential election had come under fire. Now Clegg has taken a top role as the company's [president of global affairs](#). Will he be able to tackle the seemingly endless problems with the way that Facebook – which recently rebranded as Meta – works?

For better or worse, Meta and Google have become the [infrastructure of the digital public sphere](#). On Facebook, people access the news, social movements grow, human rights abuses are documented and politicians engage with constituents. Herein lies the problem. No single company should hold this much power over the global public sphere.

Meta's business model is built on pervasive surveillance, which is [fundamentally incompatible](#) with human rights. [Tracking and profiling](#) users intrudes on their privacy and feeds algorithms that promote and amplify [divisive, sensationalist content](#). Studies show that such content [earns more engagement](#) and in turn reaps greater profits. The harms and risks that Facebook poses are unevenly distributed: online harassment can happen to anyone, but research shows that it disproportionately affects people who are marginalised because of their gender, race, ethnicity, religion or identity. And while disinformation is a global phenomenon, the effects are particularly severe in fragile democracies.

Despite his new title, Clegg alone won't be able to fix these problems. But there are several things he should do to protect the human rights of its users. To begin with, he should listen to human rights activists. For years, they have recommended that [Facebook](#) conduct human rights due diligence before expanding into new countries, introducing new products or making changes to its services. They have also recommended the company invest more in moderating content to effectively respond to human rights risks wherever people use its platforms.

The likelihood of online speech causing harm, as it did in Myanmar, is inextricably linked to the inequality and discrimination that exists in a society. Meta needs to invest significantly in local expertise that can shed light on these problems. Over the past decade, Facebook has [rushed to](#)

[capture markets](#) without fully understanding the societies and political environments in which it operates. It has targeted countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, promoting a [Facebook-centric version](#) of the internet. It has entered into partnerships with telecommunications companies to provide free access to Facebook and a limited number of approved websites. It has bought up competitors such as WhatsApp and Instagram. This strategy has had [devastating consequences](#), allowing Facebook to become the dominant player in information ecosystems.

It's also essential for Meta to be more consistent, transparent and accountable in how it moderates content. Here, there is precedent: the [Santa Clara principles](#) on transparency and accountability in content moderation, developed by civil society and endorsed (though not implemented) by Facebook, lay out standards to guide these efforts. Among other things, they call for understandable rules and policies, which should be accessible to people around the world in the languages they speak, giving them the ability to meaningfully appeal decisions to remove or leave up content.

Meta should also be more transparent about the algorithms that shape what people see on its sites. The company must address the role that algorithms play in directing users toward harmful misinformation, and give users more agency to shape their online experiences. Facebook's [Xcheck system](#) has exempted celebrities, politicians and other high-profile users from the rules that apply to normal users. Instead of making different rules for powerful actors, social media platforms should prioritise the rights of ordinary people – particularly the most vulnerable among us.

As Meta is trying to become the “metaverse”, these problems will only become more apparent. Digital environments that rely on extended reality (XR) technologies, such as virtual and augmented reality, are still at an early stage of development. But already there are signs that many of the same issues will apply in the metaverse. Virtual reality glasses can collect and harvest user data, and some VR users have already reported a prevalence of [online harassment and abuse](#) in these settings.

So far, Meta hasn't put its users' rights at the centre of its business model. To do so would mean reckoning with its [surveillance methods](#) and radically

increasing the resources it puts towards respecting the rights of its users globally. Rather than rebranding and pivoting to XR, where the potential for harm stands to grow exponentially, Meta should press pause and redirect its attention to tackling the very tangible problems it is creating in our present reality. The time to address this is now.

- Frederike Kaltheuner is the technology and human rights director of Human Rights Watch
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**Opinion**[\*\*Boris Johnson\*\*](#)

# Was Boris Johnson at work when he partied? Can anything he does be called work?

[Stefan Stern](#)



The prime minister's denial of breaking Covid rules rests on what exactly he gets up to in the office and elsewhere



‘There are a lot of photo-opportunities in hi-vis jackets, a lot of knockabout speeches ... It is quite a performance.’ Photograph: Jeff J Mitchell/Getty Images

Sat 19 Feb 2022 03.00 EST

The read-outs from this week’s [Cobra meetings](#) held to discuss the Russia-Ukraine crisis do not reveal what, if any, refreshments were available for participants, but it seems unlikely they were asked to bring their own booze.

These are work meetings. There are serious things to discuss. Anyone given security clearance to attend will not find much party spirit in evidence.

But what about the other “work-related events” that have taken place in Downing Street over the past two years and that are now, finally, being investigated by the police? Was this work or play, a bit of both, or some new hybrid and uncategorisable form of activity?

Boris Johnson seems likely to defend his perilous position in myriad ways. That, as allies claim, he thought he was attending work events (raising the question of why he did not halt proceedings when he realised they weren’t). That his (brief, perhaps reluctant) attendance at some of these gatherings was all just part of the job. Of course he had to drop in on morale-boosting

parties and leaving dos, to say hello and thank his colleagues. Why, he didn't even realise these were parties. Such was his commitment to the task of being prime minister that he failed to register that alcohol was being drunk, games were being played and that all of this ran counter to the restrictions he kept announcing in media briefings from his prime ministerial lectern.

All work and no play makes Boris Johnson a dull boy. And we should acknowledge that any useful definition of work must allow for the variety of forms that work can take.

In the past we might simply have described work as “the completing of tasks”. Work is about getting stuff done. In this simple framing, you are either working or you are not. Productivity has to do with output, and quantifying what you have done. In the context of manufacturing and parts of the service sector, you aim to hit targets and deliver goods and services on time and preferably in full.

But clearly the nature of quite a lot of work has changed. The management writer [Peter Drucker](#) first started talking about “knowledge workers” 60 years ago. What does knowledge work *look* like? It might involve creative people chewing their pencils and staring out of the window. It might even mean going to the pub. All this could be part of work and lead to the successful completion of tasks.

This may partly explain why [measuring productivity](#) accurately can be difficult. Is work going on or not? And in an increasingly digital economy, what constitutes meaningful output? When does work stop, if it ever does? The push for a “[right to disconnect](#)” and moves to introduce a four-day week are both responses to the risk of non-stop permawork.

Work can carry on in unexpected ways. When lawyers and other professionals charge you for their services, they may talk in term of “billable hours”. This refers to the time during which they were working for you. And if your star legal adviser was thinking hard about your case and making a breakthrough while lying in the bath, then that was a billable bath. It was work.

Does this mean that the prime minister is in the clear, and that everything he did at the various parties the police want to investigate in fact constituted work? Not so fast.

For one thing, several of these gatherings seem to have been entirely social in nature. This was downtime. It was not work. Indeed, Johnson has [already admitted](#) that at least one of the gatherings should not have taken place at all.

And then we have to ask: what sort of work does Johnson get up to as prime minister? There are the meetings we don't see – although some witnesses suggest getting him to focus [can be difficult](#). There are a lot of photo-opportunities in hi-vis jackets, a lot of [knockabout speeches](#) that prove more or less successful, and there is quite a lot of phrase-making for pooled news clips. It is quite a performance. He seems to be enjoying himself at least some of the time.

But as the American writer and mystic [Joseph Campbell said](#): “Work begins when you don’t like what you’re doing.” Is our prime minister really working? It doesn’t always look like it.

For any journalist, this is pot calling the kettle black territory. And perhaps it lies behind the irritation (and worse) that Johnson provokes in his critics. He seems to be getting away with the sort of bad behaviour some journalists might also want to get away with, on expenses, and with a country house to relax in at the weekends. He is world king for now, and the fact that he enjoys it delights his remaining fans and is hard for his enemies to bear.

Now the Metropolitan police have some work to do. Sue Gray will [hand in a complete report](#) in due course. When their work is done, Johnson’s time at No 10 may be done, too.

His time in office will not exactly have been a non-stop party. But there has still been too much partying going on by far. “Follow your bliss,” the mystic Campbell also urged. Follow your bliss ... but don’t take the piss.

- Stefan Stern is co-author of *Myths of Management* and the former director of the High Pay Centre

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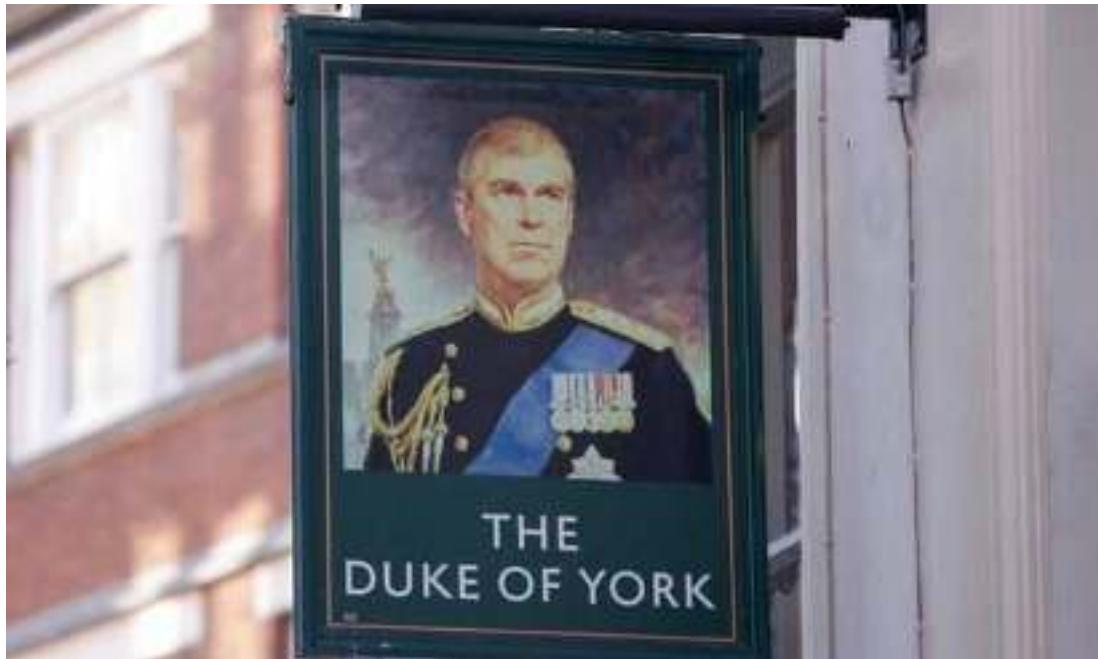
**OpinionPolitics**

# You can't erase history. But if you lived on Prince Andrew Way, you might have a go

[Marina Hyde](#)



Thanks to the Duke of York and Oliver Dowden's preposterous war on woke, the culture wars are now being fought in a street near you



The Duke of York pub, London. Photograph: John Sibley/Reuters

Fri 18 Feb 2022 07.54 EST

As you know, Oliver Dowden laments threats to all British statues – indeed, this week found the [Conservative chairman in Washington DC](#), making a speech about such things to an American thinktank. As a keen student of his joined-up theories, I've always looked forward to the day Oliver feels ready to give us his speech on the disgraceful 2012 removal of the [Jimmy Savile statue](#) from Glasgow's Scotstoun leisure centre. Have we not got to live with our history? Debate it, yes, question it, yes – but ultimately preserve every handcarved wooden statue of a paedo in whatever family setting happens to boast one.

In the meantime, according to Dowden, woke ideology is putting the west at risk from countries such as Russia, even though Russians are so woke they have whole parks of torn-down statuary, featuring figures whose historical legacy they didn't feel particularly minded to debate or live with when they were yanking them off the plinths. Absolute snowflakes.

I can't remember whether the Tory chairman does street name culture-warring yet – only a matter of time, obviously – but he could certainly salute the tailors of London's Savile Row for sticking with the name, no matter the

vicious jibes about bespoke shellsuits that it doubtless drew from the wokerati of the time. And Oliver could also take issue with the [users of the Scarborough footpath](#) who no longer wished it to be known as Savile's View, to say nothing of the local council which stripped Savile of the freedom of Scarborough. The monstrous television presenter's ability to make use of said freedom was arguably limited at the time, given he was dead, but it was widely felt the act was symbolic and respectful of the victims.

Forty odd miles away [in York this week](#), the issue raises itself once more in the wake of Prince Andrew's decision to agree a multimillion-dollar settlement with a woman he has "no recollection" of meeting, not even when she was a trafficked minor, and not even when there's a [photo of him](#) with his arm round her which also features convicted child sex trafficker Ghislaine Maxwell – a photo that was probably snapped by dead paedophile Jeffrey Epstein. According to the settlement statement, "Prince Andrew regrets his association with Epstein". Which is weird, because when [Emily Maitlis asked](#) his HRH if he did, he honked: "No, still not ... and the reason being that the people that I met and the opportunities that I was given to learn ... were actually very useful." Well quite. You don't throw the baby out with the bathwater, and you don't throw the Dummies Guide to Business out with the international child sex trafficker. In fact, you don't even throw out the international child sex trafficker.

Anyway. For whatever reason, the city of York is mulling its ties with the Duke thereof, with councillors declaring they will seek to revoke Prince Andrew's honorary freedom of their city at the next full council meeting. Excitingly for Dowden's speechwriters, this is not an isolated incident. Mid and East Antrim council will hold a debate in June on the renaming of [Prince Andrew Way](#) in Carrickfergus, though Prince Andrew Park and Prince Andrew Gardens in south Belfast both look to be getting away with it as things stand.

By chance, a couple of weeks ago I read in the Shropshire Star about the residents of a Telford street who are also [mulling a name change](#). Where once they were pleased or simply indifferent to live on Prince Andrew Drive, there are now differences of opinion among residents. Some feel that

it's time to freshen things up. "We think it should change," said one, who was planning to write to the council. Others were more of the Dowden persuasion. "We don't agree with what he might have done," another neighbour told the paper, "but you can't keep changing things. You can't erase history. He's still part of the royal family." A further resident speculated that it wouldn't make any difference. "I couldn't be doing with the hassle of changing my address on everything," she added.

That in some ways feels most relatably British – the weary understanding that your street is named after some out-and-out shit, set against the full spectrum bureaucratic horror show of attempting to do something about it. It's the absolute knowledge that what should be relatively simple will pretty soon involve someone very nice at the post office explaining to you that while your street might have a new name, you're going to have to pay for a redirection of mail from your own home, to your own home, as technically the mapping software hasn't caught up. Next: the bank. By the time you're into your second hour of robot chat assistant with Yodel you're very much at the stage of "Fine! I give in! I have always lived in Harold Shipman Row, and I always will! Restore factory settings and leave me to my fuming."

As one of the residents of Prince Andrew Drive commented tartly: "There's another street near here called Sussex Close. I wouldn't want to live there either!" Well now. That feels sufficiently generalised as to open a whole other can of worms. Could the entire county of Sussex suffer a kind of genre-killing, at the remote hands of two Montecito residents whose [Spotify podcast](#) has been taken into special measures? Given the deep-set establishment resistance to changing literally anything at all in the country if it relates to slavers and princes and other people who've "suffered enough", we could be nearing the phase where it's simpler for the Duke of York to hang on to his titles and York-based honours and so on, and for York itself to rebrand as something else entirely. Giuffre, say, or Maitlis.

For now, it all remains very unclear. The fact is, we simply don't KNOW what we're allowed to feel about any of our local community environments unless some politician who lives in London tells us – ideally while he's twatting about in Washington. Washington DC, that is – not Washington

Tyne and Wear, which might well wish to consider the unfortunate associations with some of the most shameless opportunists in the world.

- Marina Hyde is a Guardian columnist
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**Guardian Opinion cartoon**

**Conservatives**

## **Martin Rowson on Tory party people and stormy weather – cartoon**

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[Vladimir Putin](#)

## **Belarus leader expected to join Putin for strategic nuclear drills**

Alexander Lukashenko to join Russian leader for exercises at which ballistic and cruise missiles will be launched



Vladimir Putin, right, and Alexander Lukashenko talk during their meeting in the Kremlin. Photograph: Mikhail Klimentyev/AP

*[Andrew Roth](#) in Moscow*

Fri 18 Feb 2022 09.47 EST

Alexander Lukashenko may join [Vladimir Putin](#) at strategic nuclear drills, one day after offering to host nuclear weapons in Belarus to “defend our country”.

The annual strategic Grom drills of nuclear-capable missiles will take place on Saturday “under the supervision of Russian armed forces supreme

commander-in-chief, Vladimir Putin”, Russia’s defence ministry has said in a statement. “Ballistic and cruise missiles will be launched in its course.”

Western countries remain concerned over [Russia’s troop buildup on the Ukraine border](#). Russia has deployed up to 30,000 soldiers, tanks, artillery and ballistic missile systems to Belarus for joint exercises.

At a Kremlin summit on Friday, Putin said that he and Lukashenko, who met the Russian president at a [much closer proximity than German chancellor, Olaf Scholz](#), this week, would be attending a “major military cooperation event” on Saturday.

“We’re going to be at an interesting event tomorrow,” Lukashenko said while discussing ongoing military exercises.

“And we’ll be participating,” Putin interjected. “We’ll actively take part.”

The Kremlin did not confirm whether they meant the nuclear drills, saying only: “If they decide to be there together, then they will be there together.”

The surprise announcement came as the two men were expected to discuss the fate of the [Russian troops sent to the Allied Resolve military training exercises](#) concluding on Saturday.



The Belarusian president, Alexander Lukashenko, visits the site of joint military exercises with Russia in the Mogilev region.

Photograph: EPA

Western officials have warned that the military drills in Belarus could be cover for preparations for an invasion of [Ukraine](#) and a possible attack on Kyiv. Another option is that Russia could leave its troops in Belarus, creating a permanent threat on Ukraine's border.

Satellite imagery has shown Russian armour and artillery within miles of the Belarus border with Ukraine, and western officials have pointed out unusual military activity such as the construction of a pontoon bridge over the Pripyat river in the [Chernobyl exclusion zone](#).

The Russian-backed separatist states in east [Ukraine](#) on Friday announced a mass evacuation, stoking fears that Moscow is seeking a pretext to launch an intervention.

Russian officials have pledged that the troops will leave [Belarus](#) after the exercises conclude. But in contradictory remarks, Lukashenko on Thursday said: "If it makes sense to keep Russian troops here, we will keep them as long as necessary. I emphasise once again: this is our territory and this decision is up to us."

The two men did not address questions of whether the troops would leave after 19 February. But Putin did say that the "active phase of [the exercises] will last in Belarus until 20 February," perhaps indicating that a withdrawal would not take place immediately.

Lukashenko also said that he would be ready to host Russian nuclear weapons "in order to defend our territory". He has also said he wants to obtain Russian Iskander missile systems that could deliver strikes against countries in [Europe](#).

Moscow has so far agreed to neither.

Permanently stationing Russian troops in the country would be a controversial decision in Belarus. Many Belarusians, even supporters of

Lukashenko, do not want to see further integration with [Russia](#) and would view a large Russian military presence as an occupation.

Lukashenko has resisted efforts to integrate his economy and politics with Russia under a union state plan but increasingly needs Russia's financial and diplomatic support in his own standoff with the west.

The Russian troops in Belarus are some of the most concerning to western analysts because they have been sent thousands of miles from Russia's eastern military district.

Thomas Bullock, a senior analyst at the defence intelligence provider Jane's, said that the troops were among the Russian units that would have to withdraw in order for Russia to meaningfully decrease tensions.

"You want to see those long-distance journeys being pulled back," he said.

Rochan Consulting has estimated that Russia has sent 50-70% of the eastern military district's combat potential to Belarus. Units include armour, artillery, Spetsnaz special forces, engineering brigades, Iskander ballistic missile battalions, SU-35 fighters, paratroopers and anti-aircraft systems.

Western governments had warned that Russia was planning to hold the strategic nuclear drills this month, rather than in late summer as is customary.

The Russian drills would "involve forces and hardware belonging to the aerospace forces, the southern military district, the strategic missile forces, the northern fleet, and the Black Sea fleet", the defence ministry said.

The Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said that Putin would take part in the exercise from a defence ministry operations centre. "Even test launches of this type are impossible without the head of state," he told reporters. "You all know about his famed 'black briefcase', 'the red button' and so on."

The exercise would "check the preparedness of military commands and crews of missile systems, warships and strategic bombers to accomplish

their missions and at verifying the reliability of weapons of strategic nuclear and conventional forces”, the ministry said.

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Volodymyr Zelenskiy, right, and Olaf Scholz, left, during their talks in Kyiv on 14 February. Photograph: AP

## Ukraine: the crisis that brought the west together

Volodymyr Zelenskiy, right, and Olaf Scholz, left, during their talks in Kyiv on 14 February. Photograph: AP

As Kyiv confronts the possibility of Russian invasion, Vladimir Putin's opponents have had an unexpected bonus

by [Patrick Wintour](#) Diplomatic Editor

Fri 18 Feb 2022 10.28 EST

Just over a year ago, the western system of alliances largely lay in ruins, its confidence sapped by Covid and by a US president who saw Europe as a protection racket, treated Nato with contempt and seemed in mysterious thrall to [Vladimir Putin](#). Six months later, Nato suffered the ignominy of the

retreat from Kabul and two months after that it lost Angela Merkel – the former German chancellor who was its last best interpreter of Vladimir Putin's mind.

So as a hinge point in the Ukraine crisis arrives, western diplomats are awarding themselves a sigh of relief that diplomatic and security institutions, atrophied by lack of use, have at last cranked back into life and held together. No one is proposing a victory lap – the situation is too tense and unstable – but there is satisfaction that Putin knows he faces a surprisingly cohesive, even galvanised, western diplomatic effort built on exhaustive consultation and shared analysis.

Whether the Russian president will as a result wager that the long-term price of an invasion of Ukraine is too high seems unknowable until the missiles launch. Merkel herself once said Putin lives in his own world. The only problem is that he makes us all inhabit it as well. So even if it is too early to tidy up events still in flux, it is already clear where the west has succeeded, and may yet fail.



Olaf Scholz, right, at the far end of the Kremlin's long table in talks with Vladimir Putin earlier in the week. Photograph: Mikhail Klimentyev/AP

Orysia Lutsevych, head of the Ukraine Forum at the Chatham House thinktank, said: “The west has grasped the importance of this moment. Putin may control the narrative, but the west has not turned away.”

Olaf Scholz, the German chancellor, made a similar point when he said: “What is important is that western countries had been able to agree on what they were confronting. If we had not been able to do that, it would have scared me.”

There has not just been a shared analysis, but a sharing of responsibilities. The military deployments to shore up the eastern flank have been quick, including French troops into Romania and US troops into the Baltic states. Many of these deployments may prove permanent, UK officials say privately, an assessment they believe Poland, France and [Germany](#) shares – although that would require full Nato endorsement.

Intelligence has been used in a new way – if a somewhat “the Russians are coming” one – in a bid to win an information war, signal Putin’s next steps and so block them.

Dr Anders Åslund, adjunct professor at Georgetown University, said: “The western strategy – I mean here primarily the US and UK strategy – I think has been just right: expose it all, emphasise as much as possible what is going on, and provide as much intelligence as reasonably can be provided, and by doing so, the west is really pushing Putin into a sort of dead end. Either he goes for everything, and then he is likely to lose, or he is not getting anything.”

## **Sanctions and Nord Stream 2**



Construction work on the German-Russian Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline in the Baltic Sea. Photograph: Jens Buettner/AP

Putin may also have inadvertently engendered unity. The UK may still – slightly neurotically – harp on about its leadership role, but it has also tried to stop being rude about the [European Union](#). French and British defence ministers, for instance, met bilaterally this week in Brussels, ending their standoff caused by the row over the Aukus pact between Australia, the UK and US. David Miliband, the former foreign secretary, said: “The UK has been trying to run a foreign policy as if Europe did not exist. That is a problem when your closest ally, the object of your ardour, the US, thinks self-evidently the EU does exist.”

Boris Johnson even went so far as to congratulate the EU Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, for her cooperation so far over sanctions. The UK has also been forced, in the face of international ridicule, to wake from its slumbers about [Russian dirty money circulating in London](#), going so far as to say that in the event of an invasion Russian firms will be unable to raise capital in London.

Differences still exist within the EU over the precise triggers that would launch the sanctions package, but something credible spanning energy and

finance is now ready to go, even if it would require Viktor Orbán, the Hungarian prime minister, to withhold his veto.

In a concession to the US, Germany has made it understood that Nord Stream 2, the Russian-German pipeline, will not go ahead in the event of an invasion. Even if Scholz did not say as much on his visit to Moscow for legal reasons, US senators came away from private briefings with him the week before, happy with what they heard. Scholz is anyway losing patience with the former chancellor Gerhard Schröder, Putin's placeman on the Nord Stream supervisory board and an increasing embarrassment to the country's Social Democratic party.

All of this meant at the time of a maximum tension last Friday the US national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, was able to give a warning to the Kremlin that rang true.

"If Russia proceeds," he said, "its long-term power and influence will be diminished, not enhanced, by an invasion. It will face a more determined transatlantic community. It will have to make more concessions to China. It will face massive pressure on its economy and export controls that will erode its defence industrial base. And it will face a wave of condemnation from around the world."

But [Joe Biden](#) has also made clear the limits of the deterrence he is proposing. To the frustration of Kyiv, he insists the west will help arm Ukraine, but will not intervene militarily or impose sanctions before an invasion. British diplomats acknowledge that the US president has probably read the mood of Americans right on their limits in terms of protecting Ukrainian sovereignty.

That is the good news so far, and a rebuff to those only a year ago warned of a "westless world". For a whole generation of Europeans that have never conceived of a war on their continent, Nato has introduced itself, and has not fallen over.

## Deterrence and its limits



Protesters rally in a show of solidarity with Ukraine outside the United Nations in New York. Photograph: Timothy A Clary/AFP/Getty Images

Beneath the surface, the differences linger about the west's strategy of deterrence, and how best to constrain Putin. Some of it is about little more than emphasis or tone, but it is also the product of geography, national histories and different politics. The British sniffer dogs in Whitehall in particular remain on patrol for the first "whiff of Munich" or appeasement to emerge, ironically, from Berlin.

No one denies the difference in outlook between London and Berlin, to take the two most extreme examples. Scholz, for instance, assured Putin that security in Europe was not possible against Russia, "but only with Russia". He refused to describe the crisis as hopeless, saying: "War in Europe has become unthinkable for my generation." Politicians must ensure "that it stays that way". Bilateral economic relations continued to have great potential, Scholz said.

Those that criticise the west's strategy most also point to the pilgrimage of European politicians to Moscow and worry that it only encourages Putin to conclude armoured tanks massed in the right place can bring the level of attention the country's status and grievances warrant.

Putin felt Russia's demands had been ignored ever since he put them on the table in a speech to the Munich Security Conference in 2007. "What Putin is after, in part, is our full attention. He has certainly succeeded in that," said Fiona Hill, the former White House Russia adviser.

The critics worry that Putin is not only getting leaders running to his door, but results. Coercive diplomacy works. Russia can already point to the revival of the Nato-Russia security council, a body founded in 2002 that had not met for three years. In response to Putin's unrealistic treaty demands tabled in December, [Nato](#) has replied by making formal offers to hold talks on conventional forces, a replacement for the intermediate nuclear treaty as well as proposals on the transparency of weapons.

Two distinguished former British diplomats, Roderic Lyne and David Manning, admit this should have happened anyway, writing in a Chatham House report: "Many agreements underpinning European security and strategic stability between Russia and the US have dissolved, so a more stable order would bring obvious benefits to both sides."

But arms reduction, in Putin's current mood, is a third-tier prize. Ukraine is his real target, and here Putin can claim to have at least forced the west to pay new attention to the frozen conflict in the Donbas. Political directors in the Normandy format – the four-nation body that oversees the Minsk agreements signed at the end of the 2014 conflict in eastern Ukraine – have met twice after not meeting for three years.



Volodymyr Zelenskiy meeting Emmanuel Macron in Kyiv earlier in February. Photograph: Gleb Garanich/Reuters

Little progress was made, but Putin will have detected that Ukraine's president, [Volodymyr Zelenskiy](#), long critical of the support he was receiving from Merkel and Emmanuel Macron, has come under private pressure to shift ground on how to interpret those agreements.

Scholz brought with him to Moscow from Kyiv firm promises that three legal texts needed for the Minsk process to continue were being prepared in the Ukrainian parliament – on the status of eastern Ukraine, on a constitutional amendment and on the preparation of elections.

Putin is maintaining the pressure by describing what has been happening in the east as genocide and by allowing the Russian Duma, by 351 votes to 16, to back a proposal to recognise the people's republic in the Donbas as an independent state, a move that was quickly condemned by the US State Department as calling into question Russia's stated desire to return to diplomacy.

Putin will also be surveying the cracks in the west's resolve about Ukraine's future security status. More and more western politicians and analysts say out loud that Ukraine's membership of Nato, put on the table at a Nato

summit in Bucharest in 2008, was a mistake that raised false expectations and it would be better to admit as much.

Scholz told the German press accompanying him to Moscow: “There’s a fact and this fact is that all participants know that Ukraine’s Nato membership is not on the agenda. So everyone should take a step back and be clear that we can’t have a situation where there might be a military conflict over an issue that isn’t even on the agenda.”

In saying Ukraine cannot join Nato as long as it has a pre-existing conflict with Russia, as the UK defence secretary, Ben Wallace, did on the BBC this week, he was stating a fact. But, perhaps inadvertently, he was giving Russia a near veto over Ukraine’s membership.

Others, including Sir John Sawers, the former head of M16, propose as “a sensible solution” the possibility of some form of neutrality status for Ukraine akin to Austria’s from 1955.

“This issue needs to be finessed,” Manning said. “If the border conflict was settled, and other measures agreed to ensure Ukraine’s independence was no longer under threat, the way would be open for Ukraine to leave its Nato application on the table but commit not to proceed with it within a defined and lengthy period. This would recognise reality without breaching Nato’s principles.”

## No half measures



Civilian volunteers in Obukhiv, Ukraine, train in preparation for a possible Russian invasion. Photograph: Bryan Smith/Zuma/Rex/Shutterstock

This approach would be hard to sell to Ukraine, where support for Nato membership is rising. But it also presumes Putin is in this for a deal. “The problem is that Russia is contemptuous of Ukraine as an independent state, but also scared of Ukraine as a functioning democratic state that cleaves westward,” Miliband said. Quoting George Kennan, he said: “Russia sees its neighbours either as a threat or a vassal, never as a partner.”

Senior serving British intelligence officers also believe Putin is not interested in half measures. These officials say the key text lies less in Putin’s treaty demands – tabled in January and restated this week – but on his essay on the historical unity of the Russians and Ukrainians in July 2021. One British official points to analysis by historian Andreas Kappeler which, they said, not only shows Putin sees Ukraine as an artificial construct, but also gives a glimpse into his mind – one which “mixes Soviet patriotism, imperial and ethnic nationalism, and a blood-and-soil pathos”.

The British official said: “There is a visceral emotional, even semi-spiritual attachment around his view of Ukraine. I think if he’s going to do something, which is going to cause him some significant challenge in his

relationship with western nations, I think the answer for him is to look at resolving the question on his terms in the first instance, and then dealing with the fallout from there. I don't see how something smaller, limited to those separatist republics, is enough to resolve the Ukraine question on his terms."

The argument about Putin's true intentions is not just a parlour game but goes to the heart of the best response, not just now but in the event of an invasion. James Nixey, head of the Russia programme at Chatham House, said: "What is at stake here is a basic grasp of the nature of relations between states in the 21st century. What Russia is insisting on is its right to a land empire which is entirely at odds with the principles of statehood that now govern Europe, and indeed much of the rest of the world.

"By failing to address the real nature of Russia's demands, Europe is avoiding critical decisions that will affect its future security for generations to come. The implications of that avoidance do not only affect Europe – they are global in importance."

Miliband, too, sees something fundamental at stake not just for the west. "The reset seems to be happening now – and of which Putin is an acute form presents a system of disorganised lawlessness that is dangerous," he said. "It is happening at a time at greater interdependence. The ramifications of system failure in one part of the system is greater than before because the world is hyper-connected.

"And we are only at the beginning of this phase of disorganised lawlessness, involving state and non-state actors. We don't know where we are going to end up."

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## Daunte Wright

# Daunte Wright family ‘cheated’ by two-year sentence for officer who shot him dead

- Kim Potter convicted of manslaughter over Wright’s death
- Judge says former officer made ‘tragic, tragic mistake’



Daunte Wright's parents, Arbuey Wright and Katie Bryant, in court on Friday. 'I feel like we were tricked,' Arbuey Wright said. Photograph: Nicole Neri/AP

*[Richard Luscombe](#)*

*[@richlusc](#)*

Fri 18 Feb 2022 22.02 EST

The family of [Daunte Wright](#) said they felt “cheated” of justice on Friday after the white former Minnesota police officer Kim Potter received just 24 months in prison for the manslaughter of the 20-year-old Black motorist during a traffic stop last year.

Judge Regina Chu said that Potter, a 26-year veteran of the Brooklyn Center police department, made “a tragic mistake” when she shot Wright with her Glock 9mm service pistol in April 2021, thinking she was pulling out her Taser.

Potter, 49, who was [convicted of first- and second-degree manslaughter in December](#), was a “respected officer” who was “acting in the line of duty” when she shot Wright, Chu concluded, justifying a “significant downward departure” in sentencing guidelines that could have seen her impose up to eight and a half years.

Speaking outside the Hennepin county courthouse in Minneapolis shortly after the hearing’s conclusion, Arbuey Wright, Daunte Wright’s father, broke down in tears as he condemned the sentence.

“I feel cheated. I feel hurt. I’m very upset that my son’s life was taken, and it seemed to me nobody even cared enough,” he said, referring to Potter’s own tearful apology in court to his family.

“It was like they were so tied up into her feelings and what was going on with her that they forgot about my son being killed. I feel like we were tricked. We actually thought we were going to get a little justice … but I walk out of this courthouse feeling like people are laughing at us because this lady got a slap on the wrist.”

Katie Bryant, Daunte Wright’s mother, added: “Yes, we got a conviction, and we thank everybody for that, but this isn’t OK. A white woman’s tears trumped justice.”

A group of demonstrators [was seen](#) gathering outside Chu’s home on Friday to protest against the sentencing.

In a statement, Keith Ellison, the Minnesota attorney general who prosecuted Potter, said he “accepted” the judge’s sentence, and hoped Potter would use her experience to educate other police officers.

“I urge everyone to accept her judgment. I don’t ask you to agree with her decision, which takes nothing away from the truth of the jury’s verdict,” [he wrote](#).

“What can we do now? We can talk. We can try to understand. We can change policy, and we can work together. Ms Potter could make a powerful contribution. She could have a profound impact on police officers, departments, and manufacturers about the urgency of ending weapons confusion and saving lives.

“It will be up to her to show that she can do this with true remorse and make true amends.”

With credit for time already served since her conviction, and a third of the sentence on supervised release, Potter could be free within 14 months.

“I recognize there will be those who disagree with the sentence. [It] does not in any way diminish Daunte Wright’s life. His life mattered,” Chu said. “To those who disagree and feel a longer prison sentence is appropriate, as difficult as it may be, please try to empathize with Ms Potter’s situation.”

Wright’s family had joined prosecutors in calling for the maximum sentence, Bryant insisting in court on Friday that Potter “failed Daunte, our family and our community”.

“She was a person of authority who betrayed her badge, not only when she shot Daunte, but when she rolled around on the ground crying for herself,” Bryant said.

“She should have said, ‘Please help him.’ She didn’t even try. A police officer who was supposed to serve and protect took so much away from us. On this day she did not protect. She left our world with so much darkness and heartache.”

Addressing Potter directly, she added: “I’ll never be able to forgive you for what you’ve stolen from us.”

Daunte Wright’s sister, Diamond Wright, highlighted killings of Black men by white police officers in her own victim impact statement, alluding to the 2020 murder of [George Floyd](#) by former officer Derek Chauvin, also in Minneapolis.

Chauvin was convicted of Floyd’s murder nine days after Wright’s killing, in the same courthouse as Potter was sentenced on Friday.

“I remember when Daunte was alive and the George Floyd killing was being discussed,” Ms Wright said.

“Me, my mom and Daunte were having a talk, saying just maybe we have enough whiteness for us not to be a threat to the police. We were wrong.”

In handing down the sentence, Chu said there were no comparisons with Floyd’s killing.

“This is not a cop found guilty of murder for using his knee to pin down a person for nine and a half minutes as he gasped for air,” she said.

“This is a cop who made a tragic, tragic mistake. She drew her firearm thinking it was a Taser and ended up killing a young man.”

The death of Wright, who had a two-year-old son, sparked several days of violent protest outside the Brooklyn Center police headquarters. He was killed after officers pulled over his vehicle for having an expired tag, and an air freshener hanging in the rear window, contrary to Minnesota law.

In police body-cam footage of the shooting, Potter is heard shouting “Taser, taser, taser,” before firing the fatal shot, something Chu said confirmed her belief that her “conduct was significantly less serious than your usual manslaughter case.

“Police officers and experts testified that the use of her Taser was reasonable and appropriate under the circumstances. The fact she never intended to draw her firearm makes this case less serious than other cases.”

Former federal prosecutor Neama Rahmani, the president of West Coast Trial Lawyers, disagreed with Chu's reasoning.

"This is a miscarriage of justice. For someone to kill another human being, even if it wasn't intentional, and for that person to get a two-year sentence is an unjust result," he told the Guardian in a statement.

"I understand she had no criminal history and that she's remorseful, but this is someone who didn't accept responsibility for her conduct and pushed her case all the way to trial. Not only that, but she got on the stand and testified, and the jury rejected her testimony. This was not a fair and just sentence."

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## Republicans

# Renewed opposition to Trump stirs among establishment Republicans

There are different constellations in the Never Trump firmament and it's unclear if they can unite



Mike Pence's remark that the former president was simply 'wrong' about overturning the election surprised many observers. Photograph: Stephen M Dowell/AP



*David Smith in Washington*

*@smithinamerica*

Sat 19 Feb 2022 10.53 EST

As Joe Biden lurched from crisis to crisis with plummeting approval ratings, the Republican party seemed largely content to bury its internal differences and enjoy the show.

But not for long.

Earlier this month [Alyssa Farah Griffin](#), once communications director for President Donald Trump, made clear that her loyalties have shifted to former vice-president Mike Pence and the Senate minority leader, Mitch McConnell. “Put me squarely in the Pence/ McConnell camp,” Farah Griffin [wrote on Twitter](#). “Certain denunciations must be unequivocal.”

This drew a sharp retort from Keith Kellogg, who served as Pence’s national security adviser. “As midterms draw close and 2024 looms large, choices will have to be made and lines will be drawn,” [he tweeted](#). “For me – it is Trump.”

The exchange was a microcosm of factional struggles once again boiling to the surface of the Republican party. Trump remains dominant but, with

elections in 2022 and 2024 concentrating minds, fragments of the establishment wing are stirring and probing for signs of weakness.

What is unclear, however, is how much these disparate forces have in common and whether they are willing to make sacrifices to unite.

Republicans' recent ceasefire between Trumpists and not-Trumpists ended when Pence, who served as Trump's loyal deputy for four years, uttered four words that few imagined they would ever hear: "[President Trump is wrong](#)." It was a reference to Trump's false claim that his vice-president could have overturned the 2020 election.

The comment was endorsed by Pence's former chief of staff, [Marc Short](#), who has also testified to the House of Representatives select committee investigating the January 6 insurrection. Should Pence challenge Trump for the Republican nomination in 2024, he would have a ready-made entourage, including Short and Farah Griffin.

McConnell has made clear that he approves of Pence's actions on January 6 and refused to amplify [Trump's bogus claims of voter fraud](#), even as opinion polls suggest a huge majority of the Republican electorate wrongly believes that Biden did not legitimately win the 2020 election.

The senator from Kentucky also recently [condemned the Republican National Committee](#) for censuring Representatives Liz Cheney of Wyoming and Adam Kinzinger of Illinois for sitting on the January 6 committee, which is led by Democrats and has subpoenaed many in the former president's inner circle.

Such positions have earned Trump's wrath. [He declared:](#) "Mitch McConnell does not speak for the Republican Party, and does not represent the views of the vast majority of its voters." Like other Trump antagonists before him, McConnell, who turns 80 on Sunday, has even suffered the indignity of a Trump nickname – "Old Crow".

Senate [Republicans](#) have never entirely yielded to Trump. Seven voted to convict him at last year's impeachment trial. Mitt Romney of Utah is a trenchant critic. Last month Mike Rounds of South Dakota rejected his false

claim of widespread voter fraud, prompting Trump to lash out: “He is a weak and ineffective leader, and I hereby firmly pledge that he will never receive my endorsement again!”

But House Republicans are more tightly in Trump’s grip. Kevin McCarthy, the minority leader, frequently breaks with McConnell in his expressions of fealty, in part because his caucus includes “Make America great again” extremists such as Madison Cawthorn, Matt Gaetz, Ronny Jackson, Jim Jordan and [Marjorie Taylor Greene](#).

Then there are Republican state governors who, typically more pragmatic, have shown greater willingness to speak out against Trump. They include Larry Hogan of Maryland, who [said on Sunday](#) he is “certainly going to take a look” at a presidential bid in 2024. But as the centrist leader of a Democratic-leaning state, Hogan has little affinity with hardline conservatives such as Pence or Cheney.

Add in vociferous groups of disaffected alumni such as [the Lincoln Project](#) and the Republican Accountability Project and it is clear there are different constellations in the Never Trump firmament. What they are against is self-evident; what they are for is more ambiguous.

[Henry Olsen](#), a senior fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center thinktank, said: “There’s not really a Never Trump movement. There is a collection of people who aren’t for Trump’s continued domination of the Republican party. They tend to be on various sides of what we would have recognised pre-Trump as establishment Republicans.”

But, notably, even Trump’s Republican critics rarely denounce his policies on border security, crime, immigration, taxes, voting rights or issues such as abortion or how race is taught in schools. Pence, for example, tempers his rare dissent with paeans to the accomplishments of the Trump administration.

Olsen, author of [The Working Class Republican](#), added: “Centrist Republicans have to ask whether or not they want to be leaders of this Republican party or of the Republican party they wish they had. The centre

of the Republican party today is broadly pro-Trump policies, but preferring to move beyond Trump personally.”

“A lot of these people still have problems with Trump policies. Larry Hogan is definitely not somebody who is national material for the Republican party, which is why I don’t think he’s going to run. He would have his hat handed to him because he’s not a conservative of any stripe and the Republican party is still a conservative party of some stripe or another, whether it is a Trump personality aspect or pre-Trump movement conservatism or something in between.”

The challenge for any future standard bearer may be to create a coalition that links these different blocs. Olsen argues that the Florida governor, [Ron DeSantis](#), a co-founder of the conservative House Freedom Caucus, has shown an ability to adapt to the new Trumpist Republican party and is widely seen as an heir apparent.

But first the party must navigate the midterm elections in November. It is expected to regain the House and possibly the Senate but Trump’s obsession with the “big lie” of a stolen election could prove a dangerous liability among voters focused on the future.

[McConnell is reportedly manoeuvring](#) to recruit Republican candidates who reject the baseless assault on American democracy, with limited success so far, but is working behind the scenes rather than offering the kind of full-throated repudiation of Trump that some would like.

[Michael Steele](#), former chairman of the Republican National Committee, said: “If you’re trying to achieve real change inside the party, if you’re trying to take the party back or you want to move off of Trumpism, you’ve got to make it very clear. Mitch McConnell no more wants Donald Trump to be the nominee of the party in 2024 than I do. Then come out and say that.”

If McConnell, McCarthy and Republican governors held a joint press conference to declare that Trump lost, denounce his lies and set out their governing principles, “then it begins to move the needle inside the party”, Steele added.

Such an act seems unlikely, to put it mildly.

McConnell is not a figure of mass popular appeal and his powers as a kingmaker are limited. Trump, by contrast, retains a fervent fanbase in the Republican grassroots, as evidenced by the big crowds at his campaign rallies. Next week's [Conservative Political Action Conference](#) in Orlando, Florida, is expected to be another show of strength, with speakers including Trump, DeSantis, Cawthorn, Gaetz, Jackson and Jordan.

[Tim Miller](#), writer-at-large for the Bulwark and former political director for Republican Voters Against Trump, said: "I think the problem is bottom up, not top down. The voters want Trump and crazy and so the politicians that are giving it to them are doing the best."

Even so, the midterms could give Trump a black eye. He has showered endorsements on dozens of candidates, some of them long shots who trail their establishment counterparts in the polls and in fundraising. Defeats for Trump's champions in marquee races such as Georgia would revive the perennial question – asked every year since 2015 – of whether [his command of the party is declining](#).

[Frank Luntz](#), a pollster and strategist, said: "It's now over a year since January 6 and support for Trump has decreased a little but those who have stayed with him are even more passionate and that's what is going to characterise the next 12 months."

An [NBC News poll](#) last month found that 56% of Republicans now define themselves more as supporters of the party than of Trump, compared with 36% who are first and foremost committed to the former president (this marked a reversal from October 2020 when 54% put Trump above party). But his favorability remains high among registered Republicans – just under 80% in an [Economist-YouGov tracking poll](#) – and he is the clear frontrunner for 2024.

[Michael D'Anonio](#), a political author and commentator, added: "He does still have a death grip on the party and I don't see that fading. As much as people who I admire want that to happen, I don't think it's at hand just yet."

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**Donald Trump**

## Trump improperly took away classified material, National Archives says

Archives says it has alerted Department of Justice about former president's removal of files from White House



White House staff members carry boxes to Marine One before President Donald Trump leaves the White House on 20 January 2021. Photograph: Alex Brandon/AP

*[Hugo Lowell](#) in Washington*  
Fri 18 Feb 2022 15.59 EST

The US [National Archives](#) confirmed on Friday that officials found classified materials in boxes of documents [Donald Trump](#) improperly removed from the White House – and that they had alerted the Department of Justice (DoJ).

The disclosure is expected to escalate an investigation by [the House oversight committee](#) into whether Trump violated the Presidential Records Act of 1978 by removing and destroying White House documents.

In [a letter to the committee](#), David Ferriero, of the National Archives and Records Administration (Nara), said it had “identified items marked as classified national security information in the boxes”.

“Because Nara identified classified information in the boxes,” he wrote, “Nara staff has been in communication with the Department of Justice.”

The agency also confirmed that deleted tweets from Trump’s personal account and accounts belonging to top White House officials including former press secretary Kayleigh McEnany and senior adviser Peter Navarro have probably been lost forever.

Ferriero said: “Some White House staff conducted official business using non-official electronic messaging accounts that were not copied or forwarded into their official electronic messaging accounts.”

Nara, he said, was in the process of obtaining those records.

The news of potential violations of the Presidential Records Act, which mandates the preservation of White House documents, came after a series of reports that Trump openly flouted the statute.

In late January, after protracted negotiations with Trump lawyers, the Archives secured the return of 15 boxes of documents Trump took from the White House to Mar-a-Lago, his post-presidency home in Florida.

The boxes included White House documents considered presidential records, as well as items including “love letters” from Kim Jong-un of North Korea, a letter left for Trump by his predecessor as president, Barack Obama, and a model of Air Force One with red-white-and-blue livery Trump chose.

But some materials in the 15 boxes were marked as classified, the Archives said. That prompted officials to consult with the DoJ over whether Trump’s actions were potentially unlawful.

The chair of the House oversight committee, Carolyn Maloney, noted last week in opening her investigation that “removing or concealing government records is a criminal offense”. Trump must be held accountable, the New York Democrat said.

The DoJ has declined to comment on whether it will open a criminal investigation. Experts have said prosecuting violations of the Presidential Records Act is tricky, since it lacks clear enforcement guidelines.

The Archives also said in its letter on Friday staff were in the process of inventorying the 15 boxes to determine if other materials from the Trump White House remain missing, work they expected to complete next Friday.

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## **Headlines monday 14 february 2022**

- [Ukraine crisis Scholz heads to Kyiv amid fears invasion is imminent](#)
- [Live German chancellor heads to Ukraine as fears grow of Russian invasion](#)
- [Live UK politics: armed forces minister fears Russian invasion of Ukraine 'very imminent'](#)
- [Ukraine Europe closer to war than at any point in 70 years, fears UK minister](#)

## Ukraine

# Ukraine crisis: Scholz heads to Kyiv amid fears invasion is imminent

German chancellor is expected to talk about how to stabilise Ukraine's economy as tensions rock global stock markets



A member of the Ukrainian State Border Guard stands watch at the crossing between Ukraine and Belarus. Germany's Olaf Scholz heads to Kyiv on Monday. Photograph: Chris McGrath/Getty Images

*[Philip Oltermann](#) in Berlin, [Julian Borger](#) in Washington and agencies*

Mon 14 Feb 2022 00.27 EST

The German chancellor, [Olaf Scholz](#), will travel to Kyiv on Monday as western leaders voiced concerns of a Russian invasion of Ukraine could happen at any moment, sending stock markets tumbling and the price of oil soaring.

On the eve of his departure, Scholz said that any [Russia](#) attack would lead to “tough sanctions that we have carefully prepared and which we can immediately put into force”.

“(These trips are) about how we can find a way to ensure peace in [Europe](#),” he said.

Scholz and Ukrainian president [Volodymyr Zelenskiy](#) are expected to talk about how Germany could help stabilise Ukraine’s economy after fears of an imminent war took a toll on its currency. A moratorium on Ukraine’s eligibility for Nato accession was not on the table for Germany, a German source told Reuters, though Die Welt reported earlier a compromise whereby Russia would be assured that Ukraine would not join Nato “in the next 10 years” had been discussed in Scholz’s circles as a “thought experiment”.

Ukraine’s ambassador in London, Vadym Prystaiko, suggested to the BBC earlier that Kyiv [“might” consider shelving its Nato plans](#) if “pushed to it”.

The prospect of a Russian invasion sent shares plunging when the trading week began in Asia on Monday morning. The Nikkei in Japan lost 2%, the Hong Kong market was off 1.2%, and futures trade pointed to more selling on European bourses when they open later in the day.

The price of Brent crude soared 1% to a seven-year high of \$95.46 over worries that a conflict in the region could disrupt supplies from Russia, a major oil producer.

On Tuesday Scholz is expected to use a trip to Moscow to [press home the economic cost of an invasion of Ukraine](#), German government sources have said.

Meanwhile, Boris Johnson said he would hold further talks with world leaders to [bring Russia “back from the brink” of war](#). His office did not say which world leaders Johnson was hoping to talk to or where he plans to travel, but it was understood he is keen to engage with Nordic and Baltic countries.

On Sunday, Zelenskiy urged Joe Biden to visit Kyiv “in the coming days” in a show of moral support. The White House made no mention of the invitation in its readout of the 50-minute call.

A White House statement said Biden made clear the US would “respond swiftly and decisively to any further Russian aggression” and the two leaders agreed on the need to continue pursuing diplomacy and deterrence. Biden has already ordered a near-total evacuation of the US embassy in Kyiv.

The latest moves come amid signals in the west that time is running out to find a diplomatic solution to the crisis. US intelligence over the weekend claimed that Russia had accelerated plans for an invasion and could move troops across the border as soon as Wednesday, before the end of the Winter Olympics on 20 February.

Jake Sullivan, the US national security adviser, told the CBS News programme Face the Nation: “We have seen over the course of the past 10 days, dramatic acceleration in the buildup of Russian forces and the disposition of those forces in such a way that they could launch a military action essentially at any time.

“But of course, it still awaits the go order. And so therefore, we cannot predict the precise date or time that they make any action.”

Reflecting the West’s concerns, Dutch airline KLM cancelled flights to Ukraine until further notice. The Ukrainian charter airline SkyUp said on Sunday its flight from Madeira, Portugal, to Kyiv was diverted to the Moldovan capital. And Ukraine’s air traffic safety agency Ukraerorukh issued a statement declaring the airspace over the Black Sea to be a “zone of potential danger” and recommended that planes avoid flying over the sea from 14 to 19 February.

Russia denies it plans to invade Ukraine, but there were reports on Sunday of attack and troop-carrying helicopters being moved close to the Ukrainian border. Moscow failed to reply to a formal request from Ukraine to clarify the purpose of its military manoeuvres in Belarus by the 48-hour deadline

set by the Vienna document, an international agreement intended to provide transparency and reduce the risk of war.

The Belarus government responded to a similar request from Baltic nations, but said that some of the Russian units on its territory were there to guard its southern border, suggesting they would not be leaving on 20 February, when the military exercises are supposed to end.

Ukraine's foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba said the "next step" was requesting a meeting within the next 48 hours for "transparency" about Russia's plans.

A submarine armed with cruise missiles from Russia's Baltic fleet also sailed through the Bosphorus towards the Black Sea. Meanwhile, Lithuania announced a delivery of Stinger anti-aircraft missiles to Ukraine while the [US embassy said](#) a 17th planeload of US military hardware had arrived in Kyiv, including shoulder-fired grenades.

German government circles on Sunday talked of a "very worrying overall picture" on the Ukrainian border but rejected the suggestion that Scholz's trip represented a "last attempt" at averting a war.

German government sources said Scholz would press home the "unity of the EU, the US and Great Britain" when it came to economic sanctions in response to an invasion. Biden has said a Russian invasion would spell the end of the controversial Nord Stream 2 pipeline, something Scholz has been more reluctant to spell out.

Scholz's options during his trip to Moscow are limited. The Russian president is demanding "security guarantees" from the west, which would in effect undermine the sovereignty of independent states in east-central [Europe](#) and the Baltics.

German government sources said on Sunday Scholz would offer Putin a dialogue and seek to find out more what Russia's grievances entailed. The broadsheet Die Welt said he could stress Ukraine joining Nato is not a realistic prospect in the near future, adding that a compromise whereby

Russia would be assured that Ukraine would not join Nato “in the next 10 years” had been discussed in Scholz’s circles as a “thought experiment”, though not as a concrete plan.

Ukraine has expressed an interest in joining since 2002 but it would require the unanimous approval of existing members, based on factors such as a functioning democracy and an absence of “unresolved external territorial disputes”.

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**Ukraine**

## **Incursion could start at ‘any time’, White House warns – as it happened**

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[\*\*Politics live with Andrew Sparrow\*\*](#)

[\*\*Politics\*\*](#)

# **Liz Truss warns Russia could launch Ukraine invasion ‘almost immediately’ – as it happened**

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## Ukraine

# Europe closer to war than at any point in 70 years, says UK minister

James Heappey says threat of Ukraine invasion is credible, in comments that appear to discount several wars in Europe



The Russian navy's Kilo class submarine Rostov-on-Don sails through the Bosphorus Strait, Turkey, on the way to the Black Sea on 13 February.  
Photograph: Ozan Köse/AFP/Getty Images

*Rachel Hall*

*@rachela\_hall*

Mon 14 Feb 2022 04.03 EST

Europe is closer to war than at any point over the past 70 years, a UK government minister has warned, as Russian troops amass on the borders of [Ukraine](#) and western leaders warn that an invasion could take place early this week.

The armed forces minister James Heappey told the BBC Radio 4 Today programme he feared “we are closer than we’ve been on this continent” to war “for 70 years”.

The comments have caused confusion as there have been several wars in Europe over the past seven decades, including conflicts in which the UK played a military role, such as in Kosovo. Heappey also appeared to discount the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974, and the war that has been continuing in [Ukraine](#) for the past eight years.

Heappey said: “There’s 130,000 Russian troops around the borders of Ukraine, thousands more on amphibious shipping in the Black Sea and the Azov Sea.

“All of the combat enablers are in place and my fear is that if all of this was just about a show to win leverage in diplomacy, that doesn’t require the logistics, the fuel, the medical supplies, the bridging assets, the unglamorous stuff that actually makes an invasion force credible, but doesn’t attract headlines. Yet all of that is now in place, too.”

Western leaders are mounting a final effort to negotiate diplomatic solutions after US intelligence said an attack could be imminent. The [German chancellor, Olaf Scholz, will travel to Kyiv](#) for talks with Ukrainian officials and Boris Johnson said he would hold further talks with world leaders to [bring Russia “back from the brink” of war](#).

His office did not say which world leaders Johnson was hoping to talk to or where he planned to travel, but it is understood he is keen to engage with Nordic and Baltic countries.

The Foreign Office has asked British citizens to leave the country while roads are still open and commercial airlines are still flying.

Heappey said there was “real urgency” to ongoing negotiations.

He said: “That is why this is a very serious time for the whole world, really, to come together and to send a message to Russia that this is behaviour that

will not be accepted and that we stand behind Ukraine, and that the financial sanctions if he were to cross the border would be absolutely profound.”

In an interview with BBC Breakfast, Heappey said that although he could not comment on whether parliament would be recalled from recess this week as this was a decision for the Speaker, the prime minister and opposition party leaders, if it happened it would offer an opportunity for MPs to show the UK’s resolve that if Russia crossed the border into Ukraine, it would encounter more than “febrile tactical responses”.

He said: “We’re entering into a period of sustained, strategic competition with Russia, in which we need to make sure that Putin’s wider aims beyond any territorial aim he may have in Ukraine, but his wider aims about Russia’s role in the world, his wider aims around constraining [Nato](#), that he fails to achieve those and that Nato shows its resolve within its own borders.”

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## 2022.02.14 - Spotlight

- 'I've almost died a few times' Johnny Knoxville on parties, moral panic and risking it all for Jackass
- Living in a woman's body Hate has taken hold in India and I am restless with grief
- Ghostbusters director Ivan Reitman was Hollywood's master of multiplex comedy
- Super Bowl show review Dr Dre, Snoop Dogg, Eminem, Kendrick Lamar and Mary J Blige put on an all-timer
- Eminem NFL denies it tried to stop rapper taking knee



‘Who doesn’t like being compared to Buster Keaton?’ ... Johnny Knoxville in London in February.

Photograph: Pål Hansen/The Guardian

[The G2 interview](#)

## **‘I’ve almost died a few times. But I’m still here!’ Johnny Knoxville on parties, moral panic and risking it all for Jackass**

‘Who doesn’t like being compared to Buster Keaton?’ ... Johnny Knoxville in London in February.

Photograph: Pål Hansen/The Guardian

His outrageous stunt show ran for just 10 months, but became wildly popular. He tells of being inspired by his hard-drinking father, his years in therapy and suffering brain damage

by [Chris Godfrey](#)

Mon 14 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

I hear Johnny Knoxville's Tennessee drawl before I see him. "I'm gonna getcha!" he barks – part children's entertainer, part axe murderer – as he chases the small child of one of his entourage down the hotel corridor. "Where's my little honey bunny?" His infectious cackle and her giggling shrieks ricochet into the room where I am waiting to meet him.

Knoxville has been provoking shock and delight for 22 years, ever since his TV show Jackass first aired on MTV. The formula was beautifully simple: a ragtag group of skateboarders and oddballs with a punk-rock aesthetic filmed themselves undertaking painful, grotesque DIY stunts – no context necessary. Audiences tuned in for the back yard suburban anarchy, but stayed for the gang's camaraderie. It was absurd and puerile – the [New York Times dismissed the film](#) that followed the TV series as "a documentary version of Fight Club, shorn of social insight, intellectual pretension and cinematic interest".



Johnny Knoxville, Sean "Poopies" McInerny, Rachel Wolfson and Steve-O in a scene from Jackass Forever. Photograph: Sean Cliver/AP

Not many would have described Knoxville and co as visionaries when they started hitting each other in the testicles for laughs. But years before

YouTube or Twitter, let alone the Kardashians or TikTok, it showed where culture was heading: towards reality TV and would-be celebrities putting themselves in danger for viral footage; towards the constant documenting of our lives for content.

When you grow up with an alcoholic father, you want to put out fires and make sure everything's OK

Knoxville, 50, was born Philip John Clapp Jr. He grew up in the Tennessee city from which he took his stage name, the third and youngest child of a tyre company boss and a Sunday school teacher. He has often suggested the genesis of his career lies with his prankster father. "I grew up idolising him; he was my biggest comedic influence," he says.

Philip Sr liked to trick his employees with laxative-spiked milkshakes or fake letters from sexual health clinics. His son was also a target. "Sometimes he would wake me up by throwing a glass of water in my face," Knoxville recalls, as if that was the most natural thing in the world. "I'd wake up and, of course, I would laugh. He would just start telling me jokes – he couldn't wait for me to be up so he could start telling me jokes!"

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But his father's influence ran deeper than giving him a bug for buffoonery. "I grew up always wanting to please people, because my dad drank pretty hard," says Knoxville. "And when you grow up with an alcoholic father, you want to put out fires and make sure everything's OK. That's what you think as a kid, right? That you can help it that way."

"Maybe I didn't love myself so much a lot of the time," he suggests. "Maybe my self-worth had taken some hits."

Knoxville's body has taken plenty of hits, too. The "comedic masochist", as he calls himself, has been [hit by a riot-control mine](#), knocked unconscious by a heavyweight boxer and mauled by bulls on multiple occasions. He has suffered breakages, concussions, vertigo and a [ripped penis](#), from his

attempts to backflip a motorcycle. It has all been in pursuit of “good footage”. His career is one of the purest expressions of “no pain, no glory”.

But his sense of humour has remained intact throughout. He rarely stops laughing, often breaking into a smile that consumes his face, his eyes turning to slits behind thick, black-rimmed glasses.

Knoxville created Jackass with two longtime collaborators, the film directors/producers Spike Jonze and Jeff Tremaine, but of the trio only he did stunts. “It just naturally happened,” he says. “I have a big personality and sometimes I have to reel myself in. That’s something that, in therapy, I realised: like, *wow*, I can be a lot! So just have some cocoa and settle down.”

Someone running and falling down is timeless. It’s just funny. Thank God, or I would have no career

He has been in therapy since 2006. Although he admits he “probably got addicted to doing larger stunts”, he has so far resisted delving into that side of his psyche. “There’s other stuff that needs work,” he says. “I’m like: ‘Fix everything else. Let’s not mess with the side of me that does stunts, because I don’t want to know.’”

We are talking before the launch of Jackass Forever, the fourth of the films that grew out of the initial TV series. He was in his late 40s when it was filmed and you can see the mileage creeping in – the blows hit harder, recovery takes longer. But, judging by early box office results, audiences are not bothered. Even the critics have finally caught up, with [GQ asserting](#) that Jackass operates “at the intersection of a number of ancient American traditions”, with “traces of Buster Keaton and the Three Stooges”. [The New Yorker](#) has saluted its “joyous vision of resilience in the face of obvious traumas”.



Nearly not funny ... Johnny Knoxville in the bull-charging scene in Jackass Forever. Photograph: Paramount/Sean Cliver/Allstar

“Some things make us laugh when we read them, you know, when it gets too highbrow,” says Knoxville. “But who doesn’t like being compared to Buster Keaton? He’s a legend. And he’s as funny today as he was back then. Someone running and falling down is timeless. It’s just funny. Thank God, or I would have no career.”

Jackass Forever very nearly wasn’t funny. In one stunt, in which Knoxville stood in front of a charging bull, he was flipped, spinning into the air before landing on his head. He sustained a broken wrist, broken ribs and a concussion that left him with brain damage. It took him months to recover, including a course of antidepressants.

Did that brush with death change his perspective? “No,” he says, after a long pause. “I knew going into this film that this will be the last time I’m gonna be doing big stunts. I didn’t know I was going to get as injured as I did, but I brought that on myself. I have nothing to complain about, only things to be grateful for.”

His father died in hospital just before filming began on Jackass Forever. “He was my hero,” says Knoxville. “In the back of my mind, I was like: ‘God, I

wanted to tell him we were making another film, because that would have made him so happy and lifted his spirits.’ But I didn’t get to do that.”

Despite his father’s drinking, Knoxville had a happy childhood and did well at school – for a while. “As soon as I hit puberty, I cast my protractor aside,” he says, with another of those big smiles. “I was no longer interested in school, because I didn’t feel like it was going to be very useful to me.” He set his heart on showbiz, moving to Los Angeles at 18.

I didn’t care about the moral outrage. But I didn’t like the copycat incidents when kids would get hurt

“I wanted to be remembered,” he says. “I wasn’t making much money at all. I’m sure I was struggling, but I didn’t really look at it like that, because I was young and pursuing something I believed in.”

Plus, he adds: “I was young and in Los Angeles! It was so much fun that I took my eye off the ball for a number of years. I was more interested in going out and partying. It wasn’t until my then girlfriend, who became my first wife, got pregnant and we had a daughter on the way that I was like: ‘OK, I really have to figure out what I’m going to do to support this child.’ That’s what really kicked everything into high gear.”

He started writing for Big Brother, a southern California skateboard-and-culture magazine, where Tremaine was the editor and Jonze a photographer. He acted in TV commercials, with little concern about compromising artistic integrity.



Living dangerously in the first Jackass film. Photograph: Reuters

“Oh, are you kidding? I was fucking thrilled!” he says. “You work for a day and then you get residuals. When Jackass got on TV, there were a handful of people who were like: ‘Oh, he sold out.’ I’m like: ‘Fuck you! I sold out years ago.’ I was advertising [Dentyne Ice gum](#), [Taco Bell](#), whatever I could do to support my family.”

One day, he pitched Big Brother a story in which he would test self-defence equipment on himself (pepper spray, stun guns and so on). Tremaine suggested he film it. The resulting video was widely circulated on VHS, like a sort of analogue viral video. Before long, they were making Jackass for MTV.

The outrage at the resulting show was inevitable. There was disgust at its aggressively lewd, low-brow larks – and alarm that others would imitate them. The moral panic was fuelled by the Connecticut senator Joe Lieberman, who said: “There are some things that are so potentially dangerous and inciting, particularly to vulnerable children, that [they should not be put on TV](#).”



Johnny Knoxville and Jackson Nicoll in *Bad Grandpa*. Photograph: Paramount/Allstar

“I didn’t really care about the moral outrage,” says Knoxville. “But I didn’t like when we would have copycat incidents and kids would get hurt.” The public outcry forced MTV’s hand; lawyers and health-and-safety officials got involved. Defanged and demotivated (“They said you can’t jump off anything higher than 4ft!”), Knoxville quit – to make movies exactly the way he wanted to.

The franchise that began in 2002 with *Jackass: The Movie* has since spawned spin-off films such as *Bad Grandpa*, more TV shows, a video game and countless imitators.

“I went from no one knowing my name, working in a restaurant, waiting tables, to the cover of *Rolling Stone*, which is a big jump from a small town in east Tennessee,” says Knoxville. “It took a while for me to get my feet under me.”

Numerous *Jackass* cast members have spoken about their battles with [drug and alcohol addiction](#), most notably [Stephen Glover \(Steve-O\)](#), who spent time in a psychiatric hospital (he is now sober). Knoxville doesn’t think you can blame his creation. “Everyone was doing that, quite honestly, before we

started,” he says. “I guess you get a certain personality that does what we do, that lives hard and laughs hard. But we’re never loaded during shooting. If someone’s drinking, they can’t do stunts.”

Jackass Forever was the first film without Ryan Dunn, one of the original cast members, who died in a [drink-driving accident](#) in 2011. “It was crushing to have that spirit extinguished,” Knoxville says. “It’s something that we all are still dealing with and will be dealing with the rest of our lives. We all lost a brother.” For a while, he wasn’t sure he should make another film without Dunn. “But we all felt we still had something to say.”



Knoxville: ‘I laugh in my sleep. My wife hears it.’ Photograph: Pål Hansen/The Guardian

Does Knoxville worry about dying? “I have fear, but I have a way to manage it. I’ve almost died a few times making Jackass over the years. But I’m still here,” he says, knocking the wooden table between us.

No nightmares about former stunts? No bulls hurtling toward him in his sleep? “No, the opposite. I laugh in my sleep. I just cackle,” he says. “My wife hears it. So, yeah, I go to bed feeling pretty good.” What does scare him, then? “Something happening to my children, my family,” he replies,

earnestly. “I’m a father first, right? And I worry about them. That scares me.”

Knoxville lives with his second wife, Naomi, and their two young children, Rocko and Arlo (he also has a grownup daughter, Madison, by his first wife). He had tried to keep the younger kids blissfully unaware of his career – but then six-year-old Rocko found out about the show from school friends. “I said: ‘Yeah, Dad has a silly show where he does pranks and stunts, but it’s not really appropriate for you to see.’ Especially for him, because he’s wired like my father. He has that rambunctious spirit and I’m afraid that he would want to do it. And that’s just not going to be on the cards.”

Does Knoxville ever think he is being selfish by putting his life on the line? Does he worry about how his wife and children might be affected? It is not as if Jackass is his only career option. As well as running Dickhouse Productions with Tremaine and Jonze, he has had acting roles in The Dukes of Hazzard, The Ringer and Men in Black II. He will soon be filming a new show for Hulu – a Steve Levitan project called Reboot. Then there is Big Ass Happy Family Jubilee, the radio show he does with his cousin, the singer-songwriter Roger Alan Wade.

“There’s risk,” Knoxville admits. The stunts “upset everyone. During filming, they’re worried – and for good reason. But, at the end of the day, this is what I do. And there’s a lot of people who have jobs that are dangerous. Can you imagine how a policeman’s wife feels? Or a fireman’s? I’m just a half-assed stuntman.”

*Jackass Forever* is in cinemas now

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## Living in a woman's bodyWomen

# **Living in a woman's body: hate has taken hold in India and I am restless with grief**

I was taught our minds were the most important part of us – now so many have been captured and polluted



‘My mind wonders when the people of my beloved country will relearn compassion’ ... Shabnam Hashmi. Photograph: Courtesy of Shabnam Hashmi

*Shabnam Hashmi*

Mon 14 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

In 1995, the celebrated Indian film-maker Saeed Mirza made a film called Naseem. Set in Agra, a town in Uttar Pradesh, between June and December 1992, it portrays the lead up to the demolition of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya by rightwing Hindu organisations, led by the Rashtriya

Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The film's titular character asks her grandfather why he did not go to [Pakistan](#) at the time of partition. He says: "Your grandmother loved the neem tree in the back yard." In the middle of the partition riots of 1947, when thousands of Muslims were being massacred in India, as were Sikhs and Hindus in Pakistan, Naseem's grandmother was so emotionally connected to the neem tree, to the mother Earth, that she would rather take the risk of being killed than leave.

One hundred and twenty-five miles from Agra, in Delhi, my father, Haneef Hashmi, also refused to go to Pakistan during the riots. He was a student leader, a freedom fighter, and had spent years in the British jail. He refused to leave [India](#), despite an attack on his family, because he believed in the idea of a diverse, democratic secular country, which was not formed on the basis of religion but on the principles of fraternity, equality and justice.

The most important things I learned during my childhood were compassion, love and, later, rationality. My parents loved kitchen gardening, planting all kinds of fruit trees in our home's little garden space. When a snake ate our chickens, we all cried for hours.

Years later, in the 90s, hate campaigns started again across India. Today, when asked what story my body wants to share with the world, there is only one answer I can give: the story of the capturing of the mind. To me, the most important part of the body is the mind: not the eyes, not the ears, not the nose, not the vagina, not the bosom. If minds are controlled and polluted, then everything else can be destroyed.

After India attained freedom in 1947, people taught their children the meaning of love, peace, living together, studying, building the nation and working for progress. But those who were opposed to the idea of a diverse, peaceful India kept spreading hatred, targeting and othering sections of the society on the basis of caste, religion, region, sexuality, telling lies a hundred times over until they seemed like the truth. Today, they have captured power; they have captured the minds of a large section of the population and filled it with hatred.

My mind, the most important part of my body, is restless. It is in grief. And it wonders when the people of my beloved country will relearn compassion

and how to love others again.

*Shabnam Hashmi is a social activist and human rights campaigner*

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**Ivan Reitman**

# **Ghostbusters director Ivan Reitman was Hollywood's master of multiplex comedy**

[Peter Bradshaw](#)



The director and producer, [who has died aged 75](#), brought his golden touch to family mega-hits from Ghostbusters to Kindergarten Cop

- [Hadley Freeman: my Hollywood hero](#)
- [Ivan Reitman: a life in pictures](#)



Ivan Reitman (centre) with the stars of Twins, Danny De Vito and Arnold Schwarzenegger, 1988. Photograph: Universal/Kobal/Shutterstock

Mon 14 Feb 2022 04.12 EST

Ivan Reitman was a [director and producer](#) with a golden touch for Hollywood comedy and feelgood entertainment – the heir, perhaps, of Ernst Lubitsch or Gregory La Cava from the golden age, but with a multiplex talent for the 80s and 90s – able to detonate serious box-office explosions. His great heyday, importantly, coincided with the great heyday of video rental and home entertainment – an era of couples and families browsing the VHS racks at video rental stores on a Friday and Saturday night and deciding that comedies were the best bet: Reitman’s comedies.

And this, most famously, was for the glorious high-concept fantasy comedy Ghostbusters in 1984, which brilliantly absorbed SNL-type comedy into the movie mainstream and made stars and serious players of its leads: [Bill Murray](#), Dan Aykroyd and Harold Ramis. I have a happy memory of Ivan Reitman appearing on stage in London just last year, to deafening applause, joining his son Jason before the premiere of the newest film in what became the Ghostbusters franchise: [Ghostbusters Afterlife](#).

Reitman was able to hyper-evolve a comedy style which started in the wacky, boisterous, non-PC style of the frat house – there was his Canadian debut Meatballs (which was also Bill Murray's acting debut) and the army comedy Stripes (again Murray, developing his miraculously laidback droll style). Before this, Reitman had produced National Lampoon's Animal House, a movie that showed what a huge mainstream market there was for goofy, borderline-crass guys' comedy. [Ghostbusters](#) and Ghostbusters II took him to the stratosphere: an effects-laden spectacular with the heft and power of a big sci-fi or action movie – but a comedy with cool, even subtle performances.

The same can't exactly be said for his other directing coup, but it showed his pure Hollywood genius: realising the family comedy potential of Arnold Schwarzenegger in movies such as Twins and Kindergarten Cop. Those movies put Arnie's muscular power and box office chops at the service of Reitman's inspired talent for popular comedy. He was a titan of showbusiness and a master of the impossible task of making people laugh.

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## **Dr Dre, Snoop Dogg, Eminem, Kendrick Lamar and Mary J Blige's half-time show – an all-timer**



Eminem, Kendrick Lamar, Dr Dre, Mary J Blige and Snoop Dogg  
Photograph: Chris O'Meara/AP

The supergroup of hip-hop and R&B legends delivered the most entertaining Super Bowl half-time show in years



[Sam Wolfson](#)

Sun 13 Feb 2022 21.55 EST

Even by Super Bowl standards, an event in which the mythologising is as much of a sport as the football, this has been a particularly hyped half-time show. Three weeks before the fact, the NFL released a four-minute trailer, a third as long as the performance itself, which saw Dr Dre, the most important producer in rap history, assemble a superhero cast of 90s hip-hop and R&B legends: Eminem, Mary J Blige and Snoop Dogg as well as [Kendrick Lamar](#), the great west-coast hip-hop talent of his generation, who went to the same Compton high school as Dre.

Yet, despite all that pomp, this felt like a different kind of half-time show, directorially and musically more inventive than the normal tropes of marching bands and fake fans on the pitch. There was more collaboration and smart interstitial set-pieces, all brought together by Anderson.Paak's impressive live band. Just before it began, the NBC hosts whispered it might be the greatest [Super Bowl](#) half-time show ever – it wasn't far off.

It began with [Snoop Dogg](#) – in a regal ultramarine blue tracksuit – and Dre, atop a set built to look like a Compton street (which included a replica of the trailblazing Black architect Harold Williams' MLK memorial outside the Compton Civic Centre). They shared the grin of two men reveling in how far they had come as they performed The Next Episode and California Love (although there was no 2Pac hologram to join them for the latter, despite rumors). The camera panned out to reveal a troupe of dancers free-styling across an aerial map of Compton's streets, and inside the set's houses were more dancers and the band playing on couches, a bustling scene.



Photograph: Mike Segar/Reuters

From the roof of one of the houses emerged 50 Cent, recreating his classic 2003 video for In Da Club by performing the song upside down, hanging from the ceiling (plus some enjoyable nightclub choreography reminiscent of every birthday party this song has been played at since its release). There was barely time to catch a breath before [Mary J Blige](#) stood atop the set to sing Family Affair and No More Drama, the camera panning between her powerful rooftop performance and the party scenes below.

She gave way to Kendrick Lamar, emerging with an army of zombie dancers from a series of cardboard boxes to perform Maad City and Alright, before

Eminem's set-piece performance of Lose Yourself, from 8 Mile. Dre finished with a small tribute to 2Pac, playing the piano riff of I Ain't Mad At Cha before a moving finale: three generations of artists that Dre mentored, collaborated with and produced, gathered together to watch him perform Still Dre, a song that nods to his unrivaled dominance over west-coast hip-hop.

Dre Day. [@KendrickLamar](#) [@DrDre](#) [#PepsiHalftime](#)  
[pic.twitter.com/W9tFZfSRsf](https://pic.twitter.com/W9tFZfSRsf)

— NFL (@NFL) [February 14, 2022](#)

In one telling, this is the redemption moment for the Super Bowl half-time show, after the NFL came under widespread criticism for failing to back players who took the knee. In 2016, Rihanna, Cardi B, Adele and other high-profile artists were reported to have rejected opportunities to perform at the show in solidarity with Colin Kaepernick. The event had to squeeze by with Maroon 5, surely not the top of any booker's list, and questions about its relevance lingered.



Mary J. Blige at the Super Bowl half-time Photograph: Ronald Martinez/Getty Images

Since then the production has been taken over by Jay Z's Roc Nation, with acclaimed artists such as the Weeknd and a celebrated shared performance by Jennifer Lopez and Shakira returning prestige to the slot. Now with five of the defining artists of 90s hip-hop and R&B sharing the stage, led by Dr Dre – who, as part of NWA, gave America's music its most powerful statement against police racism – it could be argued the Super Bowl has regained some credibility among black fans. The choice of artists was enough for at least one police force, in Long Island, to [encourage residents to boycott the ceremony](#).

There were rumors that there would be limits to how much restitution the NFL would allow: reporting in [Puck](#) said the NFL had rejected Eminem's request to take the knee at the ceremony (something they later claimed to be false), and told Dre that he would not be able to include the lyric "still not loving police" in his performance of Still Dre. Yet both those powerful moments did happen. But even they were emotionally overshadowed by Kendrick Lamar emerging from a row of cardboard boxes to perform Alright, the song that was heard at Black Lives Matter protests across the country, now being performed at the centerpiece event of a league that had told black athletes five years ago they had no right to protest against racism.

The Super Bowl half-time show remains the biggest gig in the world, with an unparalleled live TV audience; not for nothing did Mary J Blige, who at 51 is one of the most decorated R&B singers of all time, describe this performance as "the opportunity of a lifetime". Yet this year it felt about more than great production values and Pepsi sponsorship. You can't do much in 12 minutes, in the gap between a football game, but everything you can do, Dre did. There will be debates that follow about whether all this powerful symbolism is more than glossy gesture politics, but given the brief they had, you can't imagine them trying any harder to make this mean something.

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2022/feb/13/dr-dre-snoop-dogg-eminem-kendrick-lamar-and-mary-j-bliges-half-time-show-an-all-timer>

## Super Bowl LVI

# NFL denies it tried to stop Eminem from taking knee at Super Bowl halftime show

- Rapper made gesture in apparent tribute to Colin Kaepernick
- League has admitted in past failing to listen to its own players



Eminem kneels during his Super Bowl halftime show performance.  
Photograph: Kevin C Cox/Getty Images

*[Guardian sport and agencies](#)*

Mon 14 Feb 2022 01.18 EST

The NFL has denied reports that it attempted to stop Eminem from kneeling during his performance at the [Super Bowl](#) halftime show.

The game took place at Los Angeles' SoFi Stadium and the halftime show was headlined by Dr Dre, who hails from nearby Compton. He was joined by fellow Californian stars Snoop Dogg and Kendrick Lamar as well as Mary J Blige, Eminem and 50 Cent [in an electrifying set](#).

As his rendition of Lose Yourself ended, Eminem took a knee and held his head in his hand in apparent tribute to former San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick, who took a knee during the national anthem to protest police brutality during the 2016 season. Other players followed suit after the quarterback's gesture, and the move created widespread cultural controversy, with the league receiving criticism of its handling of the matter. Kaepernick has not played in the NFL since the end of the 2016 season and it is [widely believed he was blackballed](#) by the league's teams and owners over his stance.

This is it. Right here. Eminem takes a knee as Dr. Dre plays Tupac's I ain't mad at cha on the piano. Here's when I lost it  
[pic.twitter.com/uDIaSYJJB8](https://pic.twitter.com/uDIaSYJJB8)

— Luis Miguel Echegaray (@lmechegaray) [February 14, 2022](#)

After Sunday's game the NFL denied reports that it had attempted to stop [Eminem](#) from making the gesture.

"We watched all elements of the show during multiple rehearsals this week and were aware that Eminem was going to do that," league spokesman Brian McCarthy said.

In the wake of the protests following the police murder of George Floyd in 2020, the [NFL](#) admitted it had failed to listen to its players' concerns over racism in the United States.

"We, the National Football League, admit we were wrong for not listening to [NFL](#) players earlier and encourage all to speak out and peacefully protest," [said NFL commissioner Roger Goodell in June 2020](#), without explicitly mentioning Kaepernick. "We, the National Football League, believe black lives matter."

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## 2022.02.14 - Coronavirus

- [Live Covid: England delays plan to vaccinate children aged 5-11; Hong Kong ‘overwhelmed’ by fifth Covid wave](#)
- [Covid vaccinations Plan to jab children aged 5-11 delayed amid No 10 and JCVI impasse](#)
- [Australia Delayed diagnoses and self-imposed lockdown: living with cancer during Covid](#)
- [New Zealand Authorities deploy Barry Manilow against protesters](#)

[Coronavirus live](#)

[Coronavirus](#)

# **Coronavirus live: UK records 41,648 new cases and 35 Covid-linked deaths; French protest convoy reaches Brussels – as it happened**

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/feb/14/covid-news-live-england-delays-plan-to-vaccinate-children-aged-5-11-hong-kong-overwhelmed-by-fifth-covid-wave>

## Vaccines and immunisation

# Plan to jab children aged 5-11 delayed amid No 10 and JCVI impasse

Expert committee gave verdict a week ago but government's decision will not be announced until 21 February

- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



It is understood the JCVI's recommendation is to expand vaccinations to all younger children but via a 'non-urgent' offer to parents. Photograph: Robin van Lonkhuijsen/EPA

*[Peter Walker](#) and [Nicola Davis](#)*

Sun 13 Feb 2022 13.55 EST

The announcement of a plan to expand Covid vaccinations to all children aged five to 11 has been delayed amid an apparent impasse between the

government and its vaccinations watchdog.

While the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) made its decision more than a week ago, Downing Street is reviewing the verdict. A decision is now expected to be announced on 21 February, when [Boris Johnson](#) unveils the government's long-term Covid plan.

The JCVI's recommendation has not yet been made public. It is understood it will expand vaccinations to all younger children but via a "non-urgent" offer to parents, given the relatively small health risks to the age group.

Clinically vulnerable five- to 11-year-olds [were offered vaccines](#) from December, but moves to expand the programme to all younger children were held up to allow the JCVI to hear a broad range of evidence on the issue.

Officials scheduled a briefing to announce the advice on Friday of last week, and then for this Monday, but it has been again delayed, prompting some bafflement within the JCVI.

Ministers are deciding whether to accept the recommendation, with a decision coming in just over a week when Boris Johnson is due to outline his long-term strategy for Covid. It is set to include an end to [all domestic restrictions in England](#).

A government spokesperson said: "No decisions have been made by ministers on the universal offer of a Covid-19 vaccine to all five- to 11-year-olds. We are committed to reviewing the JCVI's advice as part of wider decision-making ahead of the publication of our long-term strategy for living with Covid-19."

The move appears especially unusual given that, while JCVI recommendations are seen by ministers before being announced, this is usually just a brief process to consider legal and logistical issues. This is ordinarily done by the health department, not No 10.

Ministers have previously expressed frustration at the JCVI's caution in extending vaccines to children, an area where the UK lags behind several EU nations and the US.

The vaccines watchdog, which is completely independent, has a remit that means its decisions are meant to be based largely on the health impact on the particular cohort being considered, and less on wider benefits such as lower Covid transmission and the impact on education.

In September, the JCVI [declined to recommend](#) vaccination for healthy 12-to 15-year-olds, saying the margin of benefit was “considered too small”. But in an unprecedented suggestion it said ministers could consider seeking separate advice on areas outside its remit, such as disruption to schools, and make a different decision – which they did.

With Covid vaccinations the JCVI makes recommendations that health departments in the four UK nations decide whether to accept. The confusion around JCVI advice comes as the government faced further criticism for suggestions that access to free lateral flow tests could be reduced or removed all together.

According to sources [speaking to the Guardian last week](#) the Treasury is looking at a number of options to cut spending, with the provision of free lateral flow tests to people without symptoms expected to end.

While a government spokesperson said there were no plans to stop free tests when regulations are due to end on 24 February, following Johnson’s announcement Dr Stephen Griffin, a virologist at the University of Leeds, said the alleged idea was concerning.

“I remain astonished at the prospect of dismantling our testing system and, more specifically at the withdrawal of free tests,” he said. “Even if we come to a point where asymptomatic testing en masse feels no longer viable, the opportunity to test prior to engaging with at risk activities, or more importantly with at risk people, should remain. It certainly shouldn’t be restricted to those wealthy enough to afford it.”

Prof Lawrence Young, a virologist and molecular oncologist at the University of Warwick, said ending free tests “reinforces the misplaced view that the pandemic is over and that we can all go back to a pre-pandemic world where Covid doesn’t exist”.

He added: “This move will encourage people not to bother about getting tested, leaving those who are actively infectious to spread the virus. Those who recognise the value of testing and are concerned about spreading the virus to elderly relatives and the clinically vulnerable will be tempted to stock up on lateral flow tests while they remain free – and who can blame them?”

A further 41,270 positive Covid cases in the UK were reported on Sunday, together with a further 52 deaths within 28 days of a positive test.

While the trend in daily reported cases – which reflects infections picked up by testing – continues to show a marked decline, [data from the Office for National Statistics](#), based on swabs collected from randomly selected households, suggests infection levels nonetheless remain high.

While trends in the ONS data typically lag a couple of weeks behind case data – in part because the former can include people [who test positive for some time](#) after acquiring their infection – the latest figures suggest about one in 19 people in England had the virus in the week ending 5 February.

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## [Australia news](#)

# **Delayed diagnoses and self-imposed lockdown: Australians living with cancer during Covid**

Two years of the pandemic have meant drops in essential screening and detection, while cancer patients undergo treatments alone and isolate to avoid Covid risks



Claire Simpson standing in front of her home in Melbourne. Photograph: Kim Landy/The Guardian



[Calla Wahlquist](#)

[@callapilla](#)

Sun 13 Feb 2022 11.30 EST

When Claire Simpson turned 50 in early 2020, she received a letter telling her to get a mammogram. Then the pandemic hit, and [Victoria](#) went into lockdown.

“Like many people, I put it off until we were coming out of that lockdown, but by then it was September and I couldn’t get an appointment until December,” she says.

In February 2021 she was diagnosed with breast cancer and had a mastectomy. Tests showed she was positive for the aggressive HER2 receptor, so she began 12 weeks of chemotherapy as well as a treatment called Herceptin, which she received an IV infusion of every three weeks.

Simpson says the delay in screening “really, really delayed diagnosis for me, by a good six months”.

“I can’t help but feel that [an earlier screening] could have probably saved me from having to have chemotherapy and this Herceptin infusion therapy that I’m having,” she says.

Her last Herceptin treatment was last Wednesday. She has been living in self-imposed lockdown, terrified as the Omicron wave built that she would have to isolate due to Covid and disrupt her treatment. That self-imposed isolation will continue until her final surgery, an elective operation scheduled for mid-year.



Simpson will continue to live in self-imposed isolation until the final surgery in her breast cancer treatment, an operation scheduled for mid-year.  
Photograph: Kim Landy/The Guardian

Navigating a cancer diagnosis in a pandemic requires a particular level of fortitude. Family and friends are not allowed to sit with you for hours in hospital, and two years of staggered lockdowns have interrupted travel and important get-togethers. Activities which may be low-risk for others – like going to the supermarket in a mask or attending a picnic – become high risk.

While the Omicron variant is less severe, high rates of infection in the eastern states have had a significant impact on the healthcare workforce, interrupting continuity of care and straining already overloaded systems.

Fear of contracting Covid also means many people are avoiding going to their GP or putting off essential screening, as Simpson did.

Cancer screening [dropped by 10% in Victoria alone](#) in the first year of the pandemic. In 2021, referrals to the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, a leading treatment and research facility in Melbourne, were down 40%.

“That is certainly going to bounce back at some point,” says Prof Sherene Loi, an oncologist and researcher at Peter MacCallum. “It is potentially going to be a real problem in a few years’ time. At the moment we have a lot of very young cancer diagnoses, a lot of breast cancer … we are just flat chat.”

Loi has so far avoided having to isolate as a close contact, but her colleagues have been less lucky.

“There’s lots of staff shortages, there’s lots of staff being furloughed because of their children coming home and giving them Covid,” she says. “When I came back from holidays, I was pretty much the only one in clinic. It’s very, very busy and crazy from a staff shortage point of view and constantly trying to replace staff.

“And the patients are definitely more anxious in this wave because there’s so much more Covid around – they’re anxious about what’s going to happen when they get Covid, and whether they will get the right treatment, and having to reorganise scans and chemo.”

Despite the “disorganisation and chaos”, Loi says, surgeries and traditional therapies like chemotherapy have continued. The impact has been on new therapies and clinical trials, particularly for people with terminal cancer.



Claire walking out the front of her home. Photograph: Kim Landy/The Guardian

“I don’t think anyone’s care has been compromised,” she says. “But from my point of view, doing research and clinical trials and drug development, a lot of people have probably missed out on that because we haven’t had the resources to do more innovative stuff that could make a difference.”

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For most patients, Loi says, the main impact has been having to attend treatment alone.

Simpson’s mother also had breast cancer; she celebrated 10 years cancer-free just before Simpson was diagnosed. Not being able to have her support in hospital for the latter half of her chemotherapy, which coincided with the Delta lockdown, was difficult.

“It’s quite isolating to go through something like that without being able to have support people with you,” she says. “I also live alone, so I’m going home to an empty house as well.”

Another woman, who asked that her name not be used, was diagnosed with breast cancer last May and had to ask a friend to drive her up to three hours for treatment only to walk into the hospital alone. She recalls sitting alongside a teenage girl, also alone, who cried throughout the two-hour chemotherapy session. “It is uncomfortable, it is difficult, but you don’t have to look far to find people who are doing it worse,” she says.

The 58-year-old was diagnosed after a routine mammogram, then had three rounds of surgery including a mastectomy, then four rounds of chemotherapy and three weeks of radiotherapy.

Her radiotherapy coincided with the Omicron wave, with her last session on 25 January.

The weekend before she was due to finish radiotherapy, a member of her household was identified as a close contact. She had spent the week at Inala House, an accommodation service for cancer patients in Tamworth, but usually went home on the weekends.

“I didn’t want to go home and risk not being able to finish my treatment,” she says. Inala House was able to provide weekend accommodation at short notice. “It’s just one less thing that you have to worry about, if you know that you have your accommodation,” she says.

Philip Lipscombe spent most of the last two years in self-imposed lockdown, and now fears the isolation more than the virus. Christmas 2020 was the hardest. Sydney’s northern beaches, where Lipscombe lives, was locked down just before the holidays, so he had to spend it alone.



Claire Simpson feels she might have been able to avoid chemotherapy and Herceptin infusion therapy if lockdown had not delayed her breast cancer screening and detection. Photograph: Kim Landy/The Guardian

“I sat at home here and pulled a chicken to bits on my own, and that was Christmas,” he says. “And I mean, there is no point to life unless it’s got a little bit of quality.”

The 76-year-old has been living with pancreatic cancer for eight years. He was originally told he would be lucky to live a few months, after surgery to remove most of his pancreas and 18 rounds of chemotherapy. It was a long, hard battle, and left him with two lesions on the bottom of his lungs, a timebomb that will one day go off.

So when the pandemic first struck he was very careful. He avoided the shops, relying on meals on wheels and local group Golden Days to deliver essentials, and spent hours in the garden trying to pass the time.

“I don’t think there was a weed that was game enough to show its face in that period of time,” he says. “I was very lonely, though, for human contact, because the only contact I really had was by phone.”

Lipscombe now goes out two to three days a week with Easylink, a community organisation in the northern beaches which provides social

outings and a medical shuttle service. On Wednesday they went for lunch at a football club, on Thursday they had a mystery picnic. He's made friends on the buses, and the social outing is worth the risk of catching Omicron – all passengers are masked and triple-vaccinated, and most outings are outdoors.

"I am a social person – I did 30 years on a post office counter talking to people every day," he says. "I realised that I probably will get it – hopefully only a mild version probably, but my body, I'm in hopes, will be able to cope with that."

Lipscombe says he feels for those who have received a new diagnosis in the pandemic and are undergoing treatment without a loved one to hold their hand.

He advises anyone who has been recently diagnosed to contact the [Cancer Council](#) about joining a support group. He has attended fortnightly support group sessions for pancreatic cancer for seven years.

Calls to the Cancer Council's support line increased in January, says Amanda Piper from Cancer Council Victoria.

"We're fortunate that we've got vaccinations in place for many people, and that's an added layer of protection," she says.

"But people are fatigued. Cancer treatment takes a long time – people can sometimes undergo treatment for a year or more. It's difficult to suggest that it's that it's worse now [than during lockdown] but it's still hard. And people need support during this time."

- ***If you need help, you can phone the Cancer Council support line on 13 11 20 or Lifeline on 13 11 14***
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## New Zealand

# New Zealand authorities deploy Barry Manilow against Covid protesters

Sound system on parliament grounds plays vaccine messages, Macarena and the crooner's 1970s hits

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



Police and protesters outside parliament in Wellington. Photograph: Marty Melville/AFP/Getty Images

*Associated Press in Wellington*  
Sun 13 Feb 2022 07.08 EST

New Zealand authorities have deployed Barry Manilow against protesters at its parliament, playing his greatest hits at hundreds camped out over

coronavirus restrictions.

The protest began when a convoy of trucks and cars [drove to parliament from across the country](#), inspired by protests in Canada. At first there were more than 1,000 protesters but that number dwindled as the week wore on before growing again on Saturday.

The parliament speaker, Trevor Mallard, on Saturday said he had authorised the use of a sound system to blast out vaccine messages, decades-old [Barry Manilow songs](#) and the 1990s earworm hit Macarena on a repeat loop.

Protesters responded by playing their own tunes, including Twisted Sister's We're Not Gonna Take It.

Police have been taking a more hands-off approach after [a number of physical confrontations](#) when they moved in on protesters, including an incident that was filmed and went viral of two female officers dragging a naked woman by her hair. But by Friday, Mallard had changed tack and told staff to turn on water sprinklers overnight.

"No one who is here is here legally, and if they're getting wet from below as well as above, they're likely to be a little bit less comfortable and more likely to go home," Mallard said, according to the news website Stuff. He told media he had also ordered the sound system into operation.

Among the protesters' grievances is the requirement in New Zealand that certain workers get vaccinated against Covid-19, including teachers, doctors, nurses, police and military personnel. Many protesters also oppose mask mandates, such as those in shops and for children over about eight years old in classrooms.

Parliament's grounds have often been the site of peaceful protests, although mass campouts are unusual. Typically at least some politicians will come out to listen to the concerns of protesters, but politicians reconvening at parliament after a summer break were in rare unison in not acknowledging the protesters.

New Zealand was spared the worst of the pandemic after it closed its borders and implemented strict lockdowns, limiting the spread of the virus. The nation has reported 53 virus deaths among its population of 5 million.

But some have grown weary of the restrictions. The prime minister, Jacinda Ardern, last week said the country would end its quarantine requirements for incoming travellers in stages as it reopened its borders. With about 77% of all New Zealanders vaccinated, including under-12s who are not currently eligible, Ardern has also promised she will not impose further lockdowns.

This article was updated on 14 February 2022 to clarify that the vaccination rate is for the total population, not just the eligible population.

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/13/new-zealand-authorities-deploy-barry-manilow-against-covid-protesters>

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## 2022.02.14 - Opinion

- Britain's long consumer binge is ending – and the political fallout will be huge
- Johnson's Starmer slur was just the latest proof of Britain's rotten political culture
- I've a nice dinner date this week in Kyiv. As things stand, it's still on
- Like most, I relish life opening up. But this libertarian dash for the Covid exit is reckless

**Opinion****Cost of living crisis**

# **Britain's long consumer binge is ending – and the political fallout will be huge**

[Andy Beckett](#)

The cost-of-living crisis is a direct challenge to the kind of lives many of us have become accustomed to living



Illustration: Nathalie Lees/The Guardian

Mon 14 Feb 2022 03.00 EST

One of the main promises of modern capitalism – of modern life, really – is that you will always be able to buy more and better stuff. It's not true, of course. Capitalism takes away as well as provides. And for poorer people, or those who are just financially stretched, the constantly advertised pleasures of consumer life often lie tantalisingly out of reach.

But for more than half a century, enough people have been able to afford them – or been able to borrow the necessary money – for society to be largely shaped around consumer habits in Britain and other rich countries. City centres, suburban retail parks, huge stretches of the internet and the inside of our heads: all are alive with, and constantly remade by, our acquisitive desires.

The social and environmental costs of this – for the low-paid workers needed to produce and sell cheap goods, for the non-consumerist parts of our lives that get neglected, for the climate – increasingly worry many people. Yet there is little sign that consumerism is receding as a social or political priority. Most British shops may have been made to close, some of the time, during the early phases of the pandemic, but since last spring they have been allowed to stay open regardless of its resurgence. Going to the shops has been seen by government and many citizens as almost as important as public health.

So the onset of the cost-of-living crisis, which looks likely to last many months and quite possibly years, is a direct challenge to how many of us live. Already squeezed by a dozen years of falling or stagnant wages, Britain now faces its worst inflation and fuel prices for decades, rising taxes and interest rates, [more expensive loans for students](#) and extra import duties thanks to Brexit. To an extent that has yet to be fully appreciated, many people will become significantly poorer: on its own, the recent increase in the household energy price cap of £693, which is expected to be followed by others, represents more than 2% of the [average full-time salary](#).

And unlike the last time we faced such a significant threat to our standard of living, in the 1970s and early 1980s, most Britons will not be protected from inflation to some extent by the negotiating leverage on pay of strong trade unions. Instead, we are about to learn what it's like to live in an inflationary economy dominated by corporate interests, such as the fossil fuel companies, which can profit from the crisis without being required by the government to pay windfall taxes that might soften it for their customers.

Some of the consequences of this new economic reality are already with us. Instead of choice, bargains, instant gratification and easy access to European goods – all the modern British shopper's customary privileges – we are

encountering empty shelves, suddenly marked-up prices and shipping delays.

The change is all the more difficult to adjust to because it comes after what for many consumers was a golden age. Between the mid-1950s and mid-2000s, despite periodic recessions and government cuts, the average disposable income grew consistently faster than inflation, [according to the Resolution Foundation](#). During the 1990s, the steady improvement in living standards [accelerated](#) as a whole new world of cheap consumption opened up in Britain: low-cost supermarkets, budget airlines, factory outlets, bargain fashion and furniture chains. Some of these businesses had traded here before, but never previously on such a scale. Their expansion was partly made possible by moving manufacturing to countries with lower wages.

Even shrewd business commentators expected this highly convenient arrangement for western consumers to last a long time. In 2006, the veteran retail analyst Richard Hyman told me: “Our forecasts do not anticipate any major increase in retail price inflation ever again.”

Instead, the golden age gradually ended. Wages stopped rising in Britain, and then the Conservatives disempowered poorer consumers further through their austerity policies. For a time, the new pressures on British consumerism were partly hidden by low inflation and more borrowing. Between 1990 and 2019, the amount of unsecured (non-mortgage) debt held by the average household [more than trebled](#). But by the mid-2010s the increasingly tense and angry quality of British politics and everyday life suggested a country where many people were barely coping financially. Last year, the Resolution Foundation said that 2007 to 2022 was expected to be “the [worst \[period\] on record](#) for household income growth”.

What sort of society might the cost-of-living crisis produce? One where millions don’t eat or heat their homes as often as they should, according to reports published last week by the [Food Foundation](#) and the [National Institute of Economic and Social Research](#).

For many less vulnerable Britons, the crisis will be less awful. Essentials will still be paid for, but they will absorb more and more of people’s incomes. Even during the golden era for consumers, Britain still had high

housing and travel costs – trying to offset those was partly what made us such bargain-hunters. Now the personal financial trade-offs between escapism and realism will be even harder.

But probably not for the rich. A week ago, after walking along Oxford Street in London with its abandoned department stores and thinned-out shopping crowds, I went to Harrods in Knightsbridge. Its narrow marble corridors were as clogged as ever with expensively groomed customers. As shopping for pleasure becomes less affordable, it may revert to what it was in past centuries: the elite competing for luxuries.

Some people won't be sad if that happens. Plenty of Britons hate shopping. And the planet needs us to do less of it – or at least, to do it in a more sustainable way, for example by buying secondhand. It's even possible that the internet, through its constant flood of novel facts and images, is making us less interested in acquiring new material possessions. But digital commodities, from artworks to fashion, are increasingly being offered instead. And the internet also keeps us window shopping and wanting physical goods in ways that did not exist before.

Under capitalism, for there to be social and political stability, common expectations about living standards need to be satisfied. It's no coincidence that British consumerism's best years were also years of relative political calm – or that populism began to take off here, in the late 2000s, when the rise in wages [started to stall](#). Once people feel life is getting too expensive, they often believe everything is getting worse. If enough people feel like that, governments don't last long.

- Andy Beckett is a Guardian columnist

## [Opinion](#)[Politics](#)

# Johnson's Starmer slur was just the latest proof of Britain's rotten political culture

[Nesrine Malik](#)

There was more pushback than usual, but the smear didn't come out of a clear blue sky – and there will be more mudslinging to come

01:36

Anti-vax protesters shouting false Savile slurs target Keir Starmer – video

Sun 13 Feb 2022 12.05 EST

It shouldn't be remarkable, but it is. The prime minister's suggestion that Keir Starmer, in his former role as director of public prosecutions, was responsible for the failure to prosecute the paedophile Jimmy Savile may soon be lost to the slipstream of political memory – but for a while, for more than a brief moment, it was met by a sustained chorus of anger and criticism across the country.

The BBC made clear that there was "[no evidence](#)" for the claim; other broadcasters unequivocally referred to it as a "[slur](#)" in their headlines; the former Tory chief whip and House of Commons Speaker both publicly rebuked Johnson; even one of his most loyal aides, [Munira Mirza](#), hitched her resignation to it.

Behind the incredulous responses you could detect a sense of relief that "we are not there yet" – the "there" being a sort of post-Trump US, where [QAnon](#) conspiracy theories regularly make the headlines. But this is no moment for complacency. We are somewhere else, somewhere also troubling: a place where people are in denial about how Johnson's Savile

slur was the product of a political culture saturated with falsehoods, so often aimed at the political left and minorities.

The wrongness of the Savile claim “cut through” because of the specific climate and manner in which it took place. The contempt for the man who made it, and his political position at the time – desperately lashing out to divert attention from his sinking premiership and sunken morals – made it seem lower and dirtier than if it had been made in any normal course of political business. The timing also amplified the claim, made as it was in a televised Commons session when the stakes were high, immediately after the release of Sue Gray’s damning “[update](#)”. Then there was the position of Starmer himself in this unique scenario, a protagonist sanctified in his role as representative of an angry and wounded nation.

It was poor timing and optics on Johnson’s part. But, other than that, you can’t blame him for thinking that he would get away with it scot-free. All he was doing was taking part in a long, successful Conservative tradition that now involves shady extremists on social media, but has historically relied on a zealous rightwing press that brought us such smash hits as Ed Miliband, the son of the man who “[hated Britain](#)”.

Let’s not forget that two Conservative prime ministers had either directly accused Jeremy Corbyn of being a “[terrorist sympathiser](#)”, or boosted claims that he had been a Soviet asset. In 2015, David Cameron called Corbyn a “security-threatening, terrorist-sympathising, Britain-hating” ideologue, using out-of-context [quotes](#) suggesting that the Labour leader was distressed by Osama bin Laden’s assassination, rather than the lack of any attempt to bring him to trial.

When, in 2018, the Sun published an [exposé](#) asserting that Corbyn was a “paid collaborator” who had been “recruited” by cold war Czechoslovakian spies, Gavin Williamson, then defence secretary, ran with it. “That he met foreign spies is a betrayal of this country,” [Williamson said](#). The Conservative MP Ben Bradley – in a since-deleted post, for which he [later apologised](#), paying a “substantial sum” to charity – said that Corbyn had “sold British secrets to Communist spies”. When asked about the allegation, Theresa May said that Corbyn should be “open and transparent” and

“account” for past actions. “The story lived on,” [wrote](#) the Washington Post, “provided oxygen by none other than Prime Minister Theresa May.”

Cameron, whose political record in general has been buried under his colossal Brexit folly (better to be remembered as a fool than a knave), also enthusiastically embraced and promoted specious theories to support Zac Goldsmith’s London mayoral campaign against Sadiq Khan. He [once said](#) in prime minister’s questions that he was “concerned about Labour’s candidate as mayor of London” because he had “shared a platform” with a “radical imam”. Not only was that wrong: that very imam then [told LBC radio](#) that he was a Tory supporter, and felt rather bruised that he had been used to discredit Khan.

Little of this is clever, studied stuff. It is more a strategy of throwing mud and hoping some sticks. If things get out of hand, then politicians soberly condemn the consequences with straight faces, as Johnson did when Starmer was harassed by anti-lockdown protesters who repeated, among other things, the Savile slur.

When political rhetoric spills over into the real world, as it inevitably does, it’s attributed to an extreme minority of cranks – anti-vaxxers, lockdown sceptics, racists, loners and weirdos. But these people pick up their views from a larger cloud in which two fronts of misinformation constantly swirl – the demonisation of migrants, Muslims and other minorities, and the smearing of Labour politicians and leftwing movements as anti-British.

Driving these winds is a poorly regulated press prone to having ideological motivations at worst, or being straight-up gullible at best. The Sun can [publish](#) a far-right conspiracy about a “hard-left extremist network” at the heart of the Labour party, and then delete it before the day is out, with no explanation or, more crucially, much outrage. The same goes for discredited front-page stories about [Muslims fostering Christian children](#), and faked “plots” to take over British schools.

It’s hard to look at the past decade and conclude that Johnson’s Savile slur came out of a clear blue sky. It’s a good thing that many were appalled by it, but that’s of no use if we are going to continue to be selective about which falsities we let slide in the future. It will happen again. Even Starmer’s

amnesty is fading. Despite the force of the pushback to Johnson's lie, the machine is already mobilising to defend and launder it. Before long, it will probably pass into the realm of vexatious and plausible tropes tarring the Labour party.

That's not Johnson's or the far right's doing alone. The truth is that, deep down, too many people who aren't radicalised or conspiracist think targets of smears are somehow fair game, perhaps not guilty of this or that particularly outlandish offence, but generally flawed enough for lies to capture a wider truth about them. The natural outcome of this is the entrenchment of a political culture in which dangerous untruths are rife and rarely challenged. Either every one matters, or none of them do.

- Nesrine Malik is a Guardian columnist
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## OpinionUkraine

# I've a nice dinner date this week in Kyiv. As things stand, it's still on

[Andrey Kurkov](#)

In the shadow of war, the Ukrainian novelist tells of how citizens are trying to live, work and maintain hope



Children play in Independence Square as Kyiv remains calm despite the Russian military presence at its borders. Photograph: Bryan Smith/ZUMA Press Wire/REX/Shutterstock

Sun 13 Feb 2022 05.00 EST

Five planes from Egyptian resorts returned to Boryspil airport yesterday, picked up new passengers and flew back. A plane also flew in from the Cuban resort of Varadero, where my friend, the publisher Anetta Antonenko, recently had 10 days rest. Ukrainians are already used to warming up and sunbathing in Egypt in winter.

I do not know how they feel now, flying to warmer climes. Do they take with them documents for their property and everything that the Ukrainian government advised its citizens to put in one “emergency suitcase”, along with a supply of food for two days, a change of underwear and personal documents?

Actually, I checked the departures/arrivals website because the British embassy sent an email to my English wife with a warning that she and the children must leave while there are commercial flights. If they stay, they should not count on the help of the embassy. I am not British, I am a citizen of [Ukraine](#). Nobody sends me emails demanding I leave as soon as possible. My wife decided to stay. As did our sons Theo and Anton, who do not want to go anywhere. The elder, Theo, works at an animation film studio and recently signed a contract until the end of May. Anton is 19 and waiting for spring to fix a 1974 Soviet Moskvich car he bought a year ago for \$800.

In the past two days, there have been many statements from the United States, Canada, Japan and other countries announcing that almost all diplomats are leaving Ukraine, as there is information that active hostilities, including city bombing, may begin in the next 48 hours.

But as long as the planes are flying, I am calm. Not only that, my wife and I are going to dinner with the ambassador of Brazil tonight. Brazil has not yet made any announcements.

My friend said that we should actually keep an eye on the Chinese embassy. As soon as it announces the evacuation of its employees, then the threat of war must be taken seriously. [Russia](#) will definitely warn China before bombing Kyiv. They are now strategic partners.

The Chinese embassy is silent for now.

Our close friends, an elderly Japanese-French couple, are at a loss. They have been living in Kyiv for a long time, they bought two large apartments in the centre. One is for rent, the other is for living, as is the case with many of the foreigners who moved to Ukraine. They too don't want to go anywhere.

I've lost a lot because of the pandemic. I wouldn't want to lose everything again, this time because of the war

The war barometer in Kyiv is exchange rates and statements by the president, Volodymyr Zelensky. If the dollar and the euro rise sharply against the hryvnia, then the war has become even closer. Today, the dollar and the euro have risen in price more than usual. But, in truth, in recent weeks they have already been at this level and even more expensive. Petrol has already risen noticeably in price too, but it is still cheaper than in the UK.

Zelensky again reassured Ukrainians and said that everything was under control. He has repeatedly accused western politicians of exaggerating the danger of a Russian attack, though after his speeches, I feel as if he's downplayed the threat.

I am one of many Ukrainians who has to change euros and dollars regularly to pay for living and utility bills. My main income comes from selling books abroad. A week ago, I went to the exchange office, where the rate is usually very good. A young guy was standing at the window of the exchange office and changing several packs of \$100 bills for hryvnias.

An employee approached me and said: "This client has a very large amount, the cashier will be busy for a long time. How much do you want to change?"

"One hundred dollars," I replied.

"Tanya, give me small change, for a hundred dollars!"

Putting the hryvnias in my pocket, I went outside and for the first time thought about the fact that \$100 no longer means so much in Ukraine. Prices in the country have long since become European, while ordinary salaries and pensions have largely remained post-Soviet.

Most of my neighbours in the village receive a pension of just over \$100 a month. But they usually have large stocks of vegetables and canned food in the cellar. However, civil servants in Kyiv receive salaries of thousands of

dollars a month. They live in a different reality. Now both of these realities are under threat. Under the threat of war.

Yesterday, I noticed that the exchange office where I changed money the other day had already closed. Disappeared. It is no more. But there are several other exchanges nearby. As long as banks and exchange offices are open, you can be relatively calm.

Today, my friend invited my wife and me to one of the best restaurants in Kyiv for his birthday. Next Saturday, 19 February. Does this mean that there will be no war until 19 February? I really hope so. I've lost a lot because of the pandemic – trips abroad, book festivals and exhibitions and also, for we need pleasure, dinners in good restaurants. I wouldn't want to lose everything again, this time because of the war.

It's so strange to think that the whole world now depends on what can happen in the head of a single, ageing man.

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[Opinion](#)[Coronavirus](#)

# Like most, I relish life opening up. But this libertarian dash for the Covid exit is reckless

[Will Hutton](#)



Will the end of restrictions usher in a change in Britons' behaviour, or will we continue to live by our own calculations of pleasure and risk?

[Coronavirus – latest updates](#)

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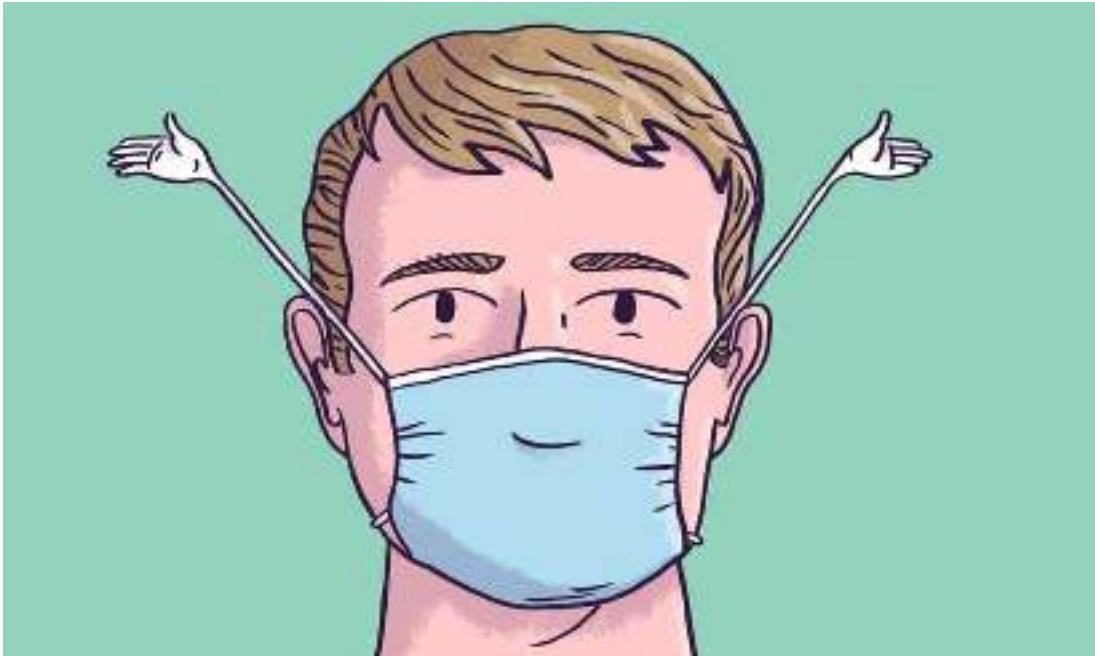


Illustration by Dom McKenzie.

Sun 13 Feb 2022 04.00 EST

It was an extraordinary way to end nearly two years of restrictions and lockdowns. With no explanatory briefings from either the chief medical officer or chief scientific adviser, no input from Sage and no consultation with Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, the prime minister [told a surprised House of Commons](#) he would unilaterally lift all Covid restrictions a month ahead of time on 24 February.

How public health could be sustained thereafter was plainly an afterthought, of little consequence to be unveiled after the recess in a document pointedly called Living with Covid. Nobody expects other than the scantest of strategies, with even the Office for National Statistics's (ONS) highly regarded surveillance survey, which allows the UK to pick up the emergence of high-risk variants, likely to be scaled back or even scrapped after April.

Any continuing requirement to self-isolate? Wear masks? Any social distancing? Working from home? Covid passports? All over. Even, it seems under Treasury pressure, [free PCR testing is to be stopped](#) for all but the most at risk. With a confidence born of Omicron proving to be much less dangerous than feared in December (helped perhaps by Britons behaving in

a guarded way), the gamble not to lock down has been validated; Britain is to be the “first in the world” to be free of restrictions. But this was not a decision driven by public health considerations; it was rather buying the prime minister crucial political support.

Allow me to let you in on a dream I have. I’m living in a country in which, after months of sacrifice, hardship and dislocation, the leaders are pulling the country together to create a new normal. Flanked by experts and supported by the encouraging data that hospital admissions are falling, with death rates falling even further for the vaccinated, we are told that, after consultation with the three nations and the leaders of the opposition parties, the entire country is going to enjoy an immediate, phased, watchful relaxation of restrictions as fast as possible. Of course, surveillance through surveys would continue as we guard against new dangerous variants and, to make it worthwhile, testing would not be scrapped but become more sparing so that those with symptoms could know whether they had Covid. The expectation would remain that people with Covid would legitimately stay at home rather than infect others, while nightclubs and sporting venues could and should ask for proof of vaccination. Masks would continue to be worn on public transport.

Living with Covid will be an imposition of a conception of liberty by the dominant faction of a discredited party

In this imagined country, we had come through the pandemic together and, while the new normal could never be the normal of pre-pandemic, it was still normal enough. Recognising that Covid is global, we would be actively mobilising our now surplus public health capacity to help others.

This dream is where the vast majority would love us to be. Personally, I delight in the escalating return to normality – dinners, lunches with colleagues, getting out and about much more freely – but I am watchful. On buses, trains and tubes, I take care to wear a mask and make sure, if I can, that I sit with others wearing them. I willingly wear a mask in shops, cinema, theatre or going around galleries. I keep my social distance. I enjoy the possibilities of Zoom, a working life organised around online slots, but saving time on travelling. If asked to take a lateral flow test before a large

gathering, I happily comply. I live a life as normally as possible – but remain vigilant about the danger of contracting Covid. It's how I expect to continue.

Instead, Living with Covid will be an enforced imposition of a particular conception of liberty by the dominant faction of a discredited party – a fundamental misreading of public opinion and the dynamics of pandemic management.

I am like the vast majority. The modellers who warned about the potential explosive impact of Omicron were not exponents of big state socialism. Rather, they were surprised and their models caught out by the degree to which the majority of us constrained our own liberty, were watchful about contact and social interaction, partly as a result of the models' alarming projected scenarios, and lived by the rules.

It was our new behaviour, as much as state rules, which drove the better-than-expected outcome. We were, in philosopher Isaiah Berlin's famous formulation, practitioners of positive liberty – taking control of our individual destinies through acting together. By contrast, Tory libertarians are really Big Brother imposers of Berlin's negative liberty, defining liberty not in terms of individuals trying to control their life in concert with others but wholly in terms of removing what they describe as coercive state restrictions and obstacles.

Concerns about coercion might make arguable sense in some second-order walks of economic and social life – objecting, say, to councils' over-zealous imposition of swingeing parking fines – but in public health issues negative liberty is bonkers. Big Brother removal of safeguards to my good health in the name of individual liberty so that I am free to be made seriously ill by others is as dangerous as any socialist Big Brother.

As I have argued in an earlier column, the good society fuses the claims of the “we” with the needs of the “I”. Be sure Living with Covid, informed by the bossy negative libertarians of the Tory Covid Recovery Group, will neglect the “we” almost entirely.

Nor is any of this made easier by chancellor Rishi Sunak's obsession with Treasury orthodoxy. The purpose of the state is the creation of public goods

for which we readily pay – of which the Office for National Statistics surveys of the incidence of Covid and testing are prime examples. This short-sighted, mad-dash exit from the pandemic mirrors its beginning – a painful refusal to accept that human beings benefit from the group acting together, especially in matters of public health. Libertarianism is the new political virus. Immunisation from its baleful effects cannot come too soon.

Will Hutton is an Observer columnist

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## [Syria](#)

# Assad regime's grip on aid agencies in Syria must be addressed, says report

Resurgent Syria government forces control distribution and one militia has contract to rebuild city it destroyed, claims thinktank



Banners of President Bashar al-Assad hang from buildings destroyed in fighting in the city of Homs. Photograph: Reuters/Alamy

*Tessa Fox*

Mon 14 Feb 2022 01.15 EST

The manipulation of aid by Bashar al-Assad's government in Syria is a unique and persistent form of control that needs to be urgently addressed, according to a new report.

Based on interviews with UN officials and humanitarian workers in Syria, the 70-page [Rescuing Aid in Syria report](#) has been released by a Washington

thinktank, the Centre for Strategic & International Studies ([CSIS](#)).

“There aren’t many situations in our history, where someone who has committed mass atrocities to the level that the Assad government has, stays in power and controls the aid apparatus,” said the author, Natasha Hall.

The Assad regime has such a [tight grip on aid groups’ access](#), including through visa approvals, that it had become normalised for relatives of senior regime officials to have jobs within UN bodies, the report says.

“How could you not know who these people are, when you have their CV in front of you? I find it a dereliction of duty,” one UN official said on condition of anonymity. “This is a massive protection issue, not only for the beneficiaries, but for other national staff you have working with you.”

A spokesperson for the [United Nations](#) Development Programme said: “The UNDP has found no evidence of having contracted with these entities, nor have we found any records of them in our vendor database. We are nevertheless carrying out a thorough internal review to verify that no such contracting took place either by UNDP or our subcontractors.”

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said it “hires its staff based on merit, and on their ability to deliver”.

The spokesperson said: “Employees are expected to fully abide with humanitarian principles and the UN code of conduct. All UN staff are required to take an oath to act in the best interest of the UN and not to seek or accept instructions in regard to performance of duties from any government or other source external of the organisation, as mandated by the UN staff regulations.”



A girl passes debris at Abrar refugee camp at Taoum, Idlib, after it was shelled by the Syrian military last June. Photograph: Muhammad al-Rifai/NurPhoto/Rex

Relations are warming between the Assad regime and Arab states such as Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Algeria – as well as with the US, which is reworking sanctions in the war-torn country. Meanwhile, the report says, there has been an increase in threats, arbitrary detention and torture of Syrian aid staff in the past year.

Employees of one local humanitarian organisation were detained and killed, and their relatives ordered to evacuate their houses or be arrested.

The threat of coercion and murder hanging over aid workers prevents independent monitoring of UN agencies and NGOs, the report said.

“If the Assad government is going to stay in place, which it seems a lot of governments are resigned to, this needs to be sorted out, because aid is probably going to continue to go into this hostile environment,” Hall said.

Beyond the diversion of UN food to the military, people directly responsible for human rights violations are benefiting.

The report found [Mohamad Hamsho](#), a businessman close to the [Fourth Division](#), an elite army unit, and the president’s brother, Maher al-Assad,

had won UN procurement contracts to strip metals in areas retaken by the government and rework them for sale at his Hadeed Metal Manufacturing Company.

“It’s a very perverse cycle that’s being created,” said Hall.

The UNDP allegedly contracted the Aleppo Defenders Legion, a pro-regime militia responsible for forcibly displacing residents, to clear rubble and rehabilitate the city they helped destroy, as outlined also [by Human Rights Watch](#).



The Hadeed metal plant, which is owned by a businessman close to the regime. The firm won a UN contract to reprocess metal from areas seized by the government. Photograph: handout

Sara Kayyali, HRW’s Syria researcher, said: “The UN did zero human rights due diligence when contracting people; we’re not talking about them contracting for tens of thousands of dollars, we’re talking about millions of dollars that are going to ... companies owned by individuals who we know have committed human rights violations.

“When you consider the UN is one of the primary ways that money is going into Syria ... [and] plays a huge role in revitalising the economy, it’s playing into the hands of [the regime’s] war economy.”

The OCHA spokesperson said the UN's activities were governed by "core humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence".

They added: "Some governments, such as the one in Syria, insist that UN agencies work with a list of authorised implementing partners. However, we choose our partners from that list based on our own assessments of their capacity to deliver and following due-diligence processes."

When aid was transported across lines of conflict or control, in both north-west and east Syria, known as cross-line shipments, there have been thefts and medical equipment has been distributed haphazardly, the report states.

Only two cross-line convoys carrying 43,500 food portions each made it to opposition-controlled north-west Syria between August and December last year compared with 1.3m rations delivered from Turkey in November alone. Supplies took four months to reach people in need as it sat in warehouses because the regime would not allow opposition-linked NGOs to distribute it, Hall said.

The manipulation of aid had grown in the past decade of war, and a thorough audit and evaluation of aid in Syria was necessary, Hall said.

"This is part of a systematic issue that needs to be resolved because it will be copied over and over again by other actors ... who are learning lessons from what the Syrian regime has done," Hall said.

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## Global development

# Sudanese woman who killed rapist spouse ‘let down’ by lack of support

Campaign by celebrities saw Noura Hussein’s death sentence quashed but, now free, promises of help have not materialised



Noura Hussein before her prison sentence. She feels ‘disappointed’ that nothing came of promises to help with her education or to go to France.  
Photograph: Amnesty International

Global development is supported by



[About this content](#)

[Zeinab Mohammed Salih](#) in North Darfur

Mon 14 Feb 2022 01.45 EST

Noura Hussein, the Sudanese woman whose conviction for killing her rapist husband four years ago caused an international outcry, said she is “disappointed” that promises of support have not materialised.

Speaking to the Guardian after her release from prison last year, Hussein, who was 19 when she was convicted, said she felt let down by the people and organisations that had campaigned for her release and who had offered her support.

“I am disappointed,” she said. “Yes, they helped me to get an easier sentence at the end, but they also gave me false promises. Many said that they will help me with my education or to travel abroad. None of that has happened.”

Hussein was [sentenced to death](#) for premeditated murder in 2018, after stabbing her violent husband, whom she was forced to marry when she was 16.

Her [conviction was quashed](#) after a global campaign, backed by celebrities, including the model Naomi Campbell and actors Mira Sorvino, Emma

Watson and Rose McGowan, as well as lobbying by two UN agencies and the [UN Office of the Special Adviser on Africa](#). She was eventually convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to five years in prison.



Some of Hussein's celebrity backers. Clockwise from top left: the model Naomi Campbell and actors Mira Sorvino, Emma Watson and Rose McGowan. Photograph: PA/Rex/Shutterstock/Getty

Now released from prison, Hussein said offers to assist with her studies and help her move to France, where she has relatives, had not materialised.

Hussein, originally from Gezira state, south of Khartoum, now lives in North Darfur and last month married her cousin, a market trader. She said the relationship developed while she was in prison.

"He encouraged me to finish school and supported me a lot to take the secondary school exam. He pushed me hard to overcome all my challenges and succeed in the exam," she said.

But she added: "I wasn't really planning to get married at this stage of my life. I wanted to finish school first, but nobody helped me to do so. I wanted to become a lawyer to help the so many other girls who I left behind in the prison. I had a feeling of responsibility towards them when I learned their stories.

“I wanted to have an organisation to help those girls to have a better life. They lost their youth behind the bars.”

Although she was offered a place to study law at Sudan Open University while in prison, she could not afford the fees. Her family lost everything after her conviction. She says her late husband’s family confiscated her parents’ land – an illegal but common practice in parts of Sudan to avenge murdered family members. “My family had to flee to a camp far away,” she said.

Her parents, who were traders, now live in a camp in Gezira state, which has no running water or electricity. “My parents are now agricultural workers with very limited income, which has affected all our lives. They even stopped sending three of my siblings to schools. They can’t pay for all the expenses.”

Hussein said prison life was hard. “If I were not very strong, I could have lost my mind in the prison. It was just so hard and tough, but I was also really worried about my family.”

Hussein and her husband share a home with his family. The couple hope to buy their own house one day. For now, Hussein spends her days cooking and cleaning and looking after the family.

“When I went into prison for the first time, my way of thinking was very limited. I had all those ideas developed during [my] prison years. I learned a lot, despite everything.”

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**Business live**

**Business**

# Stock markets hit by Ukraine crisis; UK petrol prices at record high – as it happened

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[China](#)

## Chinese fans claim censorship as gay storylines removed from Friends

Fans who had seen the programme before were quick to notice the absence of several scenes, including those relating to Ross's ex-wife, Carol, who is gay



Scenes from Friends that included Ross's ex-wife Carol, who is gay, were removed from storylines by China's censors. Photograph: NBC/Getty Images

[Helen Davidson in Taipei](#)

[@heldavidson](#)

Mon 14 Feb 2022 01.28 EST

Friends has been stripped of its lesbian storyline for the Chinese re-release of the sitcom, prompting censorship concerns.

On Friday a number of entertainment platforms including Tencent – which made headlines earlier this month for carrying a version [of Fight Club](#) with a totally different ending – began airing the first season of Friends, which was originally broadcast in 1994.

Fans who had seen the programme before were quick to notice the absence of several scenes, including those relating to the character Ross explaining that his ex-wife, Carol, is gay. Other viewers reported cuts or mistranslations of lines by LGBTQI characters or scenes that included mildly suggestive references to strip clubs and orgasms.

On China's Weibo the apparent censorship became a trending topic, with tens of millions of views of related hashtags and comments.

“Covering your mouth and ears does not mean non-existence,” said one user, while another wondered how the censors would treat a storyline in later seasons, of Phoebe acting as a surrogate for her brother and his partner.

One viewer praised the show for having portrayed LGBTQI characters in “a natural and normal way” at a time when few other pop culture products were.

“On the other hand, in today’s China, under a similar environment, not only is there no TV drama with high popularity and high reputation, which can insert gay characters into the play in a similar way, but even introduced foreign TV shows don’t dare to completely show gay content,” they said. “I don’t understand why this line was cut, why it’s still the same here after 30 years, we are even going backwards.”

The backlash was itself soon censored and replaced with a more positive “why is Friends so popular” hashtag.

Friends is hugely popular in China and was previously streamed online and uncensored until 2018. DVDs of the show are also widely available. However, there has been an apparent rise in censorship of entertainment in recent years, in an increasingly politically sensitive environment under Xi Jinping, which has also targeted non-traditional family values and culture.

Guidelines [first introduced in 2016](#) banning the depiction of gay people on TV, as well as presentation of extramarital affairs and one night stands, have tightened further. Last year regulators [ordered broadcasters](#) to avoid what it called “abnormal aesthetics”, and “sissy men”. LGBTQI online accounts, university groups, and publications have been shut down.

Foreign productions have also struggled to gain access to China. Major Hollywood blockbusters, including the recent Marvel film Shang-Chi, have been denied releases apparently over perceived slights to China or its government. Earlier this month the discovery that the plot of Fight Club had been changed on Tencent to tell viewers police had “rapidly figured out the whole plan and arrested all criminals” sparked widespread backlash and subsequent restoration of the original ending. Scenes were also cut from Bohemian Rhapsody, the 2019 film about Queen and Freddie Mercury, before its theatrical release in Chinese cinemas.

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[France](#)

## **Valérie Pécresse rally focuses on immigration as threat from rivals grows**

Les Républicains' presidential choice promises crackdown after defections to Macron and rise in far-right's polling



Valérie Pécresse told the audience in Paris she was willing to support building walls around parts of Europe to keep out migrants. Photograph: Benoît Tessier/Reuters

*[Angelique Chrisafis](#) in Paris*

*[@achrisafis](#)*

Sun 13 Feb 2022 14.14 EST

The rightwing French presidential candidate [Valérie Pécresse](#) vowed to crack down on immigration as she held her first big rally on Sunday amid competition from the growing far right and defections from her party to the centrist leader Emmanuel Macron.

“There is no sovereignty without borders,” Pécresse said on stage in Paris as more than 6,000 people waved French flags in support of the first female presidential candidate for Les Républicains, the traditional rightwing party of Jacques Chirac and Nicolas Sarkozy.

Pécresse, who on a recent trip to Greek migrant camps said she was not against “barbed wire” to keep migrants out of Europe, told the rally that she would support the building of barriers and “even walls” on the edge of Europe if the countries on the frontline wanted it. It was a clear reference to her rival, the controversial, far-right TV pundit [Éric Zemmour](#), who this week suggested building a Donald Trump-style anti-immigration “wall” around the edges of the EU.

A former budget minister under Sarkozy, Pécresse, 54, wants to be seen as the only feasible rival to Macron ahead of the April election. But she faces the serious challenge of whether she can make it to the second round runoff. The far right has risen in force to represent about 30% of the vote in current polls, and is split between two candidates, [Marine Le Pen](#), running for the third time, and the newcomer Zemmour. Both are hovering around the same score as Pécresse in the polls.

At the rally, Pécresse cited her heroes, Britain’s Margaret Thatcher and Germany’s Angela Merkel, as “women who always defended their people”, saying she wanted to create a “New France” of law and order, with tight controls on immigration and quotas for migrants.

She said she would also oppose what she termed woke movements, which she said threatened to “demolish French identity”, telling the rally that as leader of the Île-de-France region, which includes Paris and its surrounding area, she had banned “burkinis” or full-body swimsuits, from pools. To cheers from the hall, she said: “For me, the headscarf is not a piece of clothing like any other. It’s not a religious prescription. It’s a sign of the submission of a woman.” She criticised Macron’s government for refusing to ban the Muslim headscarf from competitive sports.

Pécresse repeated her promise that “the salaries of French people will increase by 10% during my presidency”, and said she would decentralise

France, attacking Macron for a top-down leadership style and high public spending, which she said had tipped France into dangerous debt.

A fluent Russian-speaker, Pécresse delved into international affairs, saying that under Macron, France had been “humiliated” on the international scene, including over the Aukus defence agreement between Australia, the US and the UK.

While Macron is at 24% in the first round, according to the latest [Cevipof poll for Le Monde](#), Pécresse is at 15.5%, with Le Pen at 15% and Zemmour at 14.5%.

Without naming Zemmour or Le Pen, Pécresse told the crowd: “The extremists are lying to you. Refuse the venom of their nostalgia. Don’t let anger and fear win.”

Pécresse is under pressure from her party to pull ahead of her far-right rivals in the polls just as president Macron is expected to declare his re-election bid this month.



Valérie Pécresse speaking at the Zenith de Paris, in Paris, on 13 February.  
Photograph: Alain Jocard/AFP/Getty Images

But she suffered a blow this week on immigration when Natacha Bouchart, the rightwing mayor of Calais, broke ranks and announced she would support Macron for the presidential race.

Bouchart is an outspoken critic of the situation of migrants wanting to reach Britain from the northern French coast on small boats. Bouchart said Macron had “listened attentively” to the problems of Calais and increased government involvement. She said she was supporting Macron “in the general interest of Calais”.

Pécresse has failed to dominate the political debate with her policy ideas, in part because she is seen as attempting to cover all ideological bases in a divided party.

She is seen as hailing from the moderate, centrist wing of the right, which Macron himself has won over by appointing two rightwing prime ministers. But Pécresse is also veering very hard right to win over the increasingly anti-immigration line on French national identity in her own party. Pollsters say her messaging to voters is not always clear.

Chloé Morin, a political analyst who interviewed Pécresse on her communication style for a new book, *We Get The Politicians We Deserve*, said the rightwing candidate had been accused of appearing too studious and lacking spontaneity on screen. But Pécresse has criticised those who “act” in front of the cameras.

Morin added: “Today, part of Pécresse’s space is occupied by [Emmanuel Macron](#), who has the advantage of being the president in office ... he has stifled her ground on the economy. And on the other side, she’s facing serious competition from Éric Zemmour and Marine Le Pen, who have the advantage of being in a more populist register of one-upmanship and can make themselves more audible in a media world that values clashes and buzz. They are more audible than Pécresse, who has to be more measured.”

Meanwhile, Le Pen and Zemmour continued their own vicious battle to win far-right voters, with another defection from Le Pen’s National Rally party. Stéphane Ravier, Le Pen’s only senator, jumped ship to Zemmour saying he was best able to “unite” the far right.

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## **Headlines thursday 17 february 2022**

- [Live Ukraine crisis: Russia has deployed 7,000 more troops to border, US official claims](#)
- [Ukraine crisis Russian claim of drawdown is disinformation, says UK minister](#)
- [Cyber-attacks Russia accused of attack on two banks and defence ministry](#)
- [Ukraine US and UK trying to fend off invasion by making intelligence public](#)

## Ukraine

# Biden to host call with Nato allies as invasion fears grow – as it happened

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## [Russia](#)

# Russian claim of Ukraine drawdown is disinformation, says UK minister

James Heappey says Moscow still sending more troops to region and is on ‘threshold of a major war’

- [Russia and Ukraine crisis latest news: live updates as US warns of Russian invasion](#)

01:50

Russia still sending troops to Ukraine border, say UK ministers – video

*[Aubrey Allegretti](#), [Julian Borger](#) and [Daniel Boffey](#)*

Thu 17 Feb 2022 04.14 EST

Russia’s claim to be withdrawing troops from the border with [Ukraine](#) seems to be a “disinformation campaign” and the troops are instead making their final preparations to invade, a UK defence minister has said.

James Heappey, the armed forces minister, said Moscow was continuing to deploy thousands more soldiers to the region and building bridges across rivers that could be used as part of a military incursion into Ukraine.

Despite brief hopes of a respite in tensions after Vladimir Putin’s [announcement](#) on Tuesday that there would be a “partial” drawdown of forces, some Nato countries remained sceptical about how many of the roughly 130,000 troops had really been withdrawn.

There have been suggestions that the Kremlin has [deployed a further 7,000 soldiers](#) to the border, and Heappey said: “Worryingly what we’ve seen over the last 48 hours is not the reversal that has been announced in Moscow.”

He said he still hoped Russia was committing a “hugely expensive exercise” that would end up being a hoax to “wind us up”, but he admitted: “We’re on the threshold of a major war in [Europe](#) in which tens of thousands of people could die”.

Heappey told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme: “I fear that it is a disinformation campaign when we are seeing apparent footage of Russian troops moving away from the border. Because all of our indicators suggest that the buildup and the preparations continue.”

He said that equally as challenging as an immediate invasion would be Putin’s decision to “leave this military mass in place indefinitely”, given the impact it would have on Ukraine’s internal security, political system and economy.

Earlier, Heappey told Times Radio that having seen “open source intelligence”, key “combat enablers” being moved by Russia to the Ukrainian border was one of a number of indications to “suggest the final preparations are being made for them to invade”.

The foreign secretary, Liz Truss, will embark on another tour of European countries this week, visiting Ukraine, Poland and Germany in an effort to present a united front among western states to dissuade Russia from invading.

A senior US official said late on Wednesday that Russia’s claims about withdrawing troops were false and that Moscow had “increased its troop presence along the Ukrainian border by as many as 7,000 troops”, many of them arriving in the past 24 hours.

“Every indication we have now is they mean only to publicly offer to talk and make claims about de-escalation while privately mobilising for war,” the official said.

The Nato secretary general, Jens Stoltenberg, said earlier on Wednesday that Russia was continuing to send troops to what is now the biggest concentration of forces in Europe since the cold war.

03:15

## What exactly does Putin want in Ukraine? – video explainer

Stoltenberg said the military alliance was considering deploying further battle groups in eastern and central Europe, to complement those established in 2014 in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, led by the UK, Canada, Germany and the US. The French government has offered to lead a force in Romania.

“We will have advice from the military commanders within weeks and we will make a decision after that,” Stoltenberg said. “What we see today is that Russia maintains a massive invasion force ready to attack with high-end capabilities from Crimea to Belarus.”

On Thursday he said Nato would prepare for “the new normal” of Russia showing “a disregard for the principles underpinning European security” and threatening force “in pursuit of its objectives”.

Russia’s foreign ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova dismissed all claims of reinforcements and criticised Stoltenberg, who is to leave his Nato post at the end of September to become chief of the Norwegian central bank.

Zakharova said: “Frankly, I can tell you the truth. We’re not interested in these statements made by Stoltenberg, who is either Nato secretary general or a banker, I haven’t figured out which yet. We’re no longer interested in them. He is not a person whose statements Moscow would consider serious arguments. He is a Nato has-been now.”

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## Ukraine

# Ukraine accuses Russia of cyber-attack on two banks and its defence ministry

Kremlin denies it was behind the attack, which Ukraine's deputy prime minister said was the largest of its type ever seen

- [Russia and Ukraine crisis latest news: live updates as US warns of Russian invasion](#)



Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said: 'We do not know anything. As expected, Ukraine continues blaming Russia for everything.' Photograph: Beata Zawrzel/NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

*Dan Sabbagh* Defence and security correspondent

Wed 16 Feb 2022 14.12 EST

Ukraine accused Russia on Wednesday of being behind a cyber-attack that targeted two banks and its defence ministry, which the country's deputy prime minister said was the largest of its type ever seen.

The Kremlin denied it was behind the denial of service attacks – attempts to overwhelm a website by flooding it with millions of requests – but the disruption reignited wider concerns of ongoing cyberconflict.

Ilya Vityuk, cybersecurity chief of Ukraine's SBU intelligence agency, said it was too early to definitively identify specific perpetrators, as is typically the case with cyber-attacks, where perpetrators make efforts to cover their tracks.

But the official added: “The only country that is interested in such … attacks on our state, especially against the backdrop of massive panic about a [possible military invasion](#), the only country that is interested is the Russian Federation.”

Denying responsibility, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said: “We do not know anything. As expected, Ukraine continues blaming [Russia](#) for everything”. He added that Russia had had “nothing to do with” the denial of service attacks.

Russia has been accused of being behind [a string of cyber-attacks](#) against Ukraine since the 2014 war between the two countries, and some experts believe that if the Kremlin does de-escalate militarily, similar deniable attacks could follow.

Danny Lopez, a former diplomat who runs cybersecurity firm Glasswall, said: “While we trying to find out if de-escalation is real, it’s in Russia’s interest to keep everybody guessing. Cyber-attacks could now play an important role, to keep the pot warm on the stove but not spilling over into actual conflict.”

Some of the incidents in the years following the war alarmed the west. Two brief regional power outages in [December 2015](#) and [2016](#) were blamed on Russian hackers from the GRU military intelligence, [according to a US indictment](#).

The first affected 225,000 customers in the west of Ukraine. The second, affecting northern Kyiv, lasted about an hour, but amounted to the loss of about one-fifth of the capital's power consumption.

The same group, members of Unit 74455, according to the US Department of Justice, was also accused of being behind the [NotPetya malware attack of June 2017](#). That initially targeted Ukraine's financial, energy and government sectors but spread indiscriminately, causing billions in financial damage to western and even Russian companies.

Ciaran Martin, the former chief of the UK's NCSC cyber-agency, warned: "If Russia escalates against Ukraine, there's the risk of another NotPetya-style accident. After all, NotPetya, perhaps the most economically damaging cyber-attack of all time, was the accidental fallout against the west of the Russians hacking Ukraine."

Such attacks may suggest what is possible in an all out conflict, but Ukraine's defences have been improving. Mindful of the risks, Kyiv signed a cybersecurity pact with the US in November. Help followed Tuesday's attack, which disrupted banking services and, less seriously, knocked out the Ministry of Defence website.

Other analysts, however, also believe that the attacks likely emanating from Russia have become more carefully calibrated to avoid international condemnation. Jamie MacColl, a research fellow at the Rusi thinktank, said: "Since NotPetya, the more disruptive ops have been more limited."

A recent example of a more limited attack, according to MacColl, was the WhisperGate malware, which [Microsoft detected in Ukraine](#) in the middle of January. It was designed to look like ransomware, a virus that encrypts an organisation's data, but without the unlock for payment mechanism that is a feature of such attacks.

The political cost of such attacks is relatively low. Periodically western intelligence agencies will accuse the Russian actors as being behind such hacking, but the Kremlin is resistant to embarrassment. The US also seeks to indict individuals but as Russia will not extradite them, there is no danger of any trials going ahead.

Yet the goal of any cyber-attacks need not be a dramatic effort to knock out a utility or banking system; it could simply be to wear out the morale of a country like Ukraine.

Esther Naylor, a research analyst at Chatham House, said: “Attacks don’t have to do anything more destructive than a denial of service. Their goal is to cause panic, and to make people think what might come next.”

03:15

What exactly does Putin want in Ukraine? – video explainer

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/16/ukraine-accuses-russia-of-cyber-attack-on-two-banks-and-its-defence-ministry>.

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## Russia

# US and UK trying to fend off Russian invasion by making intelligence public

Washington and London holding regular briefings and hoping to rob Putin of element of surprise

- [Russia and Ukraine crisis latest news: live updates as US warns of Russian invasion](#)



US state department counselor Derek Chollet said: ‘We are trying to be as forthcoming as possible, to say that’s their play and what could be coming.’  
Photograph: AP

*[Julian Borger](#) in Washington and [Dan Sabbagh](#) in London*

Wed 16 Feb 2022 14.11 EST

The US and the UK have sought to fend off a feared Russian invasion of Ukraine in part by going public with an unusual amount of intelligence, hoping to rob [Vladimir Putin](#) of the element of surprise.

There have been regular briefings in Washington and London – sometimes from national security officials who do not often talk to the press – [going into detail about potential Russian military tactics, regime change plots](#), and [“false flag” operations Moscow is allegedly planning](#) to provide a pretext for invasion.

Derek Chollet, the state department counselor, said on Wednesday that the US and its allies wanted to warn of Russia possibly carrying out such operations in [Ukraine](#) “in order to hinder their ability to do so”.

“We are trying to be as forthcoming as possible, to say that’s their play and what could be coming,” Chollet said.

In doing so, the US and UK are trying to beat [Russia](#) at what has largely been Moscow’s game in recent years – or at least to provide better opposition.

“I think it’s the west getting a little more savvy on using intelligence in an actionable way,” John Sipher, a veteran of the CIA’s clandestine service, said. “It’s what we used to call – when the Russians did it – information warfare, and it’s something we’ve never got very good at.

“What’s interesting is this information isn’t meant for Americans or British citizens. It’s meant for one consumer: Vladimir Putin,” Sipher said. “He’s the one who knows whether it’s true or not. So if we put out intelligence that the Russians thought was secret, and Putin knows it’s true, he’s got to decide how it has consequences for what he was trying to do, and how it’s affecting his strategy.”

US and British officials have repeatedly said the ultimate decision to attack or not will be Putin’s alone, and even he may be leaving it to the last moment to make up his mind. If the decision is indeed on a knife-edge, the

thinking goes, any small factor, such as taking away the surprise element and the satisfaction of catching the west off guard, could make a difference.

“We’re in an information war with the Russians and we have been for some time,” Angela Stent, director of Georgetown University’s center for Eurasian, Russian and east European studies, said. “I think the Russians have been taken by surprise. I think they didn’t realise how much the US and Britain knew about this, but also that they would put it out there publicly. So I think it’s possible that this has had the impact of making Putin maybe rethink some things he might do.”

On Wednesday, the US State Department claimed Russia was attempting to create a “pretext” for invading Ukraine with unsupported claims of “genocide” and mass graves in Ukraine’s eastern Donbas region.

Russian media published articles and photographs this week of purported secret mass graves in the region and on Tuesday, Putin claimed that Kyiv was committing “genocide” there.

State department spokesman Ned Price claimed that Moscow was making the claims as an excuse for invading Ukraine. “There is no basis of truth to any of these allegations,” Price said.

Fiona Hill, a former senior director for European and Russian affairs in the national security council, and co-author of a Putin biography, contrasted the current approach to the western response to past Russian operations, such as the attacks in Britain on the defectors [Alexander Litvinenko](#) and [Sergei Skripal](#).

“We never really kind of revealed what we knew about what they were up to, and then they were able as a result to take advantage of all the grey zones and the uncertainty and spin their own narratives,” Hill said.

Going public also serves a domestic political purpose, especially for a US administration that has been widely criticised for failing to predict the collapse of the Afghan government and Taliban takeover last year. If there is a Russian attack, no one will be able to say the Biden White House was taken unawares.

The flip side of that is if Putin does not attack, US and British intelligence will be accused of crying wolf and getting it wrong once more, especially as neither has shown evidence for their assertions. The Kremlin is already taunting the [western media for reporting US and allied claims of imminent war.](#)

Another downside is that the deliberate alarmism is publicly alienating the government in Kyiv, which argues it is seeding panic among Ukrainian citizens and would-be foreign investors, insurers or trade partners.

“This hysteria is now costing the country two to three billion dollars every month. We can’t borrow in foreign markets because the rates there are crazy. Many exporters refuse,” David Arakhamia, the head of the Ukrainian president’s Servant of the People party, told a local talk show, accusing western media of being more damaging than Russian propagandists.

If Putin’s aim was not to carry out an invasion, with all the costs that would inflict on Russia, but to create an air of long-term crisis, then US and British amplification of the threat risks serving his purpose, argued Oksana Antonenko, a director of the global political risk team at the UK-based Control Risks consultancy.

“The tactic only works if it’s a short term crisis,” Antonenko said. “But if we assume that what we’re facing at the moment is Putin’s long term strategy of applying pressure on Ukraine and managing confrontation with the west, then it is something which has a very high cost.”

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## 2022.02.17 - Spotlight

- If they could turn back time How tech billionaires are trying to reverse the ageing process
- 'We need to start dealing with male anger' Kit Harington on Henry V and life after Jon Snow
- Future-proofed piste Sustainable skiing in the French Alps
- Stunning vistas, sumptuous food Readers' favourite Alpine ski cafes and restaurants
- Table talk Italian and Spanish firms vie to claim credit for Putin's furniture

## Ageing

# If they could turn back time: how tech billionaires are trying to reverse the ageing process

Jeff Bezos and Peter Thiel are pouring huge sums into startups aiming to keep us all young – or even cheat death. And the science isn't as far-fetched as you might think



Composite: Getty/Guardian design



[Ian Sample](#), science editor

[@iansample](#)

Thu 17 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

In the summer of 2019, months before the word “coronavirus” entered the daily discourse, Diljeet Gill was double-checking data from his latest experiment. He was investigating what happens when old human skin cells are “reprogrammed” – a process used in labs around the world to turn adult cells (heart, brain, muscle and the like) – into stem cells, the body’s equivalent of a blank slate.

Gill, a PhD student at the Babraham Institute near Cambridge, had stopped the reprogramming process midway to see how the cells responded. Sure of his findings, he took them to his supervisor, Wolf Reik, a leading authority in epigenetics. What Gill’s work showed was remarkable: the aged skin had become more youthful – and by no small margin. Tests found that the cells behaved as if they were 25 years younger. “That was the real wow moment for me,” says Reik. “I fell off my chair three times.”

A lot has happened since then. Last summer, Reik resigned as the director of the Babraham Institute to lead a new UK institute being built by Altos Labs, a contender for the most flush startup in history. Backed by [Silicon Valley](#)

billionaires to the tune of \$3bn (£2.2bn), Altos has signed up a dream team of scientists, Gill and numerous Nobel laureates among them. They will start work in the spring at two labs in the US and one in the UK, with substantial input from researchers in Japan. Their aim is to rejuvenate human cells, not with an eye on immortality – as some reports have claimed – but to stave off the diseases of old age that inexorably drive us to the grave.

“This is a field whose time has come,” says Prof Dame Linda Partridge at University College London’s Institute of Healthy [Ageing](#). “I think what Altos will do is hugely accelerate the process of finding out whether it is going to deliver or not. We need to see some clinical success stories.”



‘If nothing else, Altos is good news for over-the-hill rodents.’ Photograph: Thomas Leirikh/Getty Images/iStockphoto

Prof Janet Lord, director of the Institute for Inflammation and Ageing at the University of Birmingham, is enthusiastic, too. “This is not about developing the first [1,000-year-old human](#); it’s about ensuring old age is enjoyed and not endured. Who wants to extend lifespan if all that means is another 30 years of ill health? This is about increasing healthspan, not lifespan.”

It is not the first time Silicon Valley billionaires have thrown their wealth at the ageing problem. In 2013, Google launched Calico – the California Life Company – with its own high-profile hires. With \$1bn to burn, the secretive firm began studying mice, which have an average lifespan of six years, and naked mole rats, which, with a lifespan of 30 years, appear to have traded good looks for longevity. The company aims to map the ageing process and extend healthy lifespan, but has yet to produce any products.

Not that this has dampened Silicon Valley's expectations. In a microcosm shaped by big tech, ageing is framed as code to be hacked, with death merely a problem to be solved. [Peter Thiel](#), co-founder of PayPal and the big data analyst Palantir, has poured millions into anti-ageing research, notably the Methuselah Foundation, a non-profit that aims to make “90 the new 50 by 2030”. As powerful computation is brought to bear on biology, Thiel has claimed it will be possible to “reverse all human ailments in the same way that we can fix the bugs of a computer program. Death will eventually be reduced from a mystery to a solvable problem.”

There is more to death than old age, of course. From the moment Homo sapiens arose, we have been cut down by acts of violence, accidents, starvation and disease. To solve death would take far more than putting an end to ageing, but the billionaires seem less fired up about solving poverty, war, famine, infant mortality, drug addiction and so on.

Who wants to extend lifespan if all that means is another 30 years of ill health?

*Prof Janet Lord*

Partridge finds phrases such as “solving ageing” and “solving death” wrong-headed. “Apart from being silly at the moment, it raises all kinds of societal issues. I think it’s morally dubious. Huge things would percolate through society with a substantial increase in life expectancy brought about by human intervention,” she says. “We’re living longer and longer already. People are suffering from disability and loss of quality of life because of ageing. That’s what we should be trying to fix. We should be trying to keep people healthier for longer before they drop off the perch. Stay healthy then drop dead, die in your sleep. I think that’s what most people want.”

Thiel, who hopes to live to 120, is one of the more adventurous advocates of anti-ageing therapies. One that caught his eye – although it is unclear if he has tried it – stems from a series of [macabre experiments](#) that found the muscles, brains and organs of old mice were partially rejuvenated when they shared the blood of a young animal. (The younger animals, in return, appeared to age.) Scientists are still trying to establish which blood components are behind the effect, with a view to slowing dementia and other age-related diseases. But that didn't stop a number of US firms from offering young blood transfusions for thousands of dollars – until [the US Food and Drug Administration intervened](#), warning consumers that there was “no proven clinical benefit”.

Another approach that has pulled in private funders aims to flush worn cells from the body. When cells are damaged – for instance, by toxins or radiation – they can switch into a zombie-like state known as senescence. The process has benefits: senescence can shut down cells with mangled DNA and prevent them from becoming tumours. But senescent cells cause trouble, too: they accumulate in our bodies like junk and release substances that ramp up inflammation. This, in turn, drives diseases of old age.

Peter Thiel believes it will be possible to ‘reverse all human ailments in the same way that we can fix the bugs of a computer program’

In 2016, a Silicon Valley startup called Unity Biotechnology raised \$116m from investors including Thiel and Amazon's Jeff Bezos to create therapies that flush out senescent cells. Unity's co-founder, Ned David, [believes the drugs](#) could “vaporise a third of human diseases in the developed world”. The evidence so far is encouraging. In 2018, James Kirkland, a researcher at the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota, showed that “senolytic” drugs that destroy senescent cells not only [improved the physical capabilities](#) of aged mice, but also extended their lifespans. [More than a dozen clinical trials](#) are under way in humans, targeting osteoarthritis, Alzheimer's and frailty.

In case death turns out to be a hard nut to crack, Thiel and others have hedged their bets and signed up with the Alcor Life Extension Foundation, which has been freezing bodies and brains of the dead [since 1976](#). For about \$200,000 and annual dues, the Arizona-based firm (motto: “A fulfilling life

doesn't have to end") will keep your corpse on ice until science can reanimate you. For those of more modest means, Alcor will freeze your dead head for \$80,000. Lord, at the University of Birmingham, describes the procedure as "total nuts".

Altos emerged from stealth mode last month, with the Russian-Israeli tech billionaire Yuri Milner a confirmed backer. Bezos is rumoured to be involved, too. Clearly, they mean business. The chief scientist and co-founder, Rick Klausner, is the former head of the US National Cancer Institute, while the chief executive, Hal Barron, left a role at GlaxoSmithKline [that paid more than £8m a year](#).

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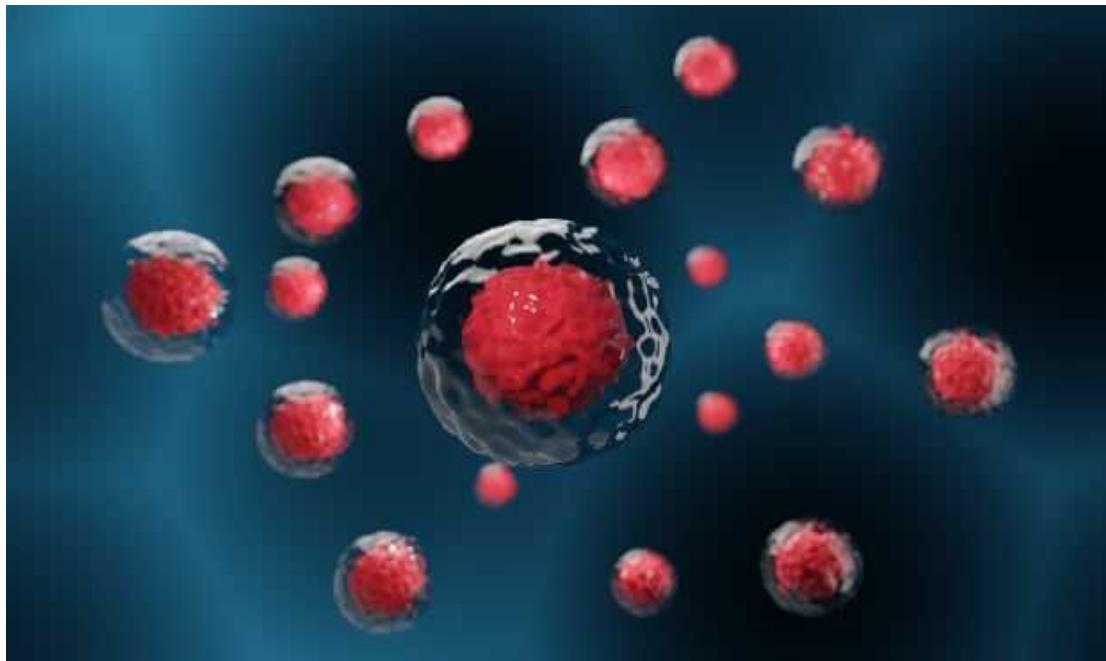
But what is it with middle-aged male billionaires and anti-ageing research? Has the penny dropped that they, too, will one day fade away? Is rejuvenation science poised to swell their fortunes further? Or – and humour me for a moment here – could this be about the greater good?

Asked about the trend after Calico launched, Bill Gates was scathing: "It seems pretty egocentric while we still have malaria and TB for rich people to fund things so they can live longer," he told an ["ask me anything" forum on Reddit](#). Perhaps the motivation doesn't matter. Lord says: "We've got an ageing population, but we are living longer without living healthier. If you are going to do something with your squillions, it's as good a target as any."

Prof Lorna Harries, a molecular geneticist at the University of Exeter's medical school, agrees. "There's nothing like increasing age to make you aware of your own mortality. I think the urge to extend your life as long as possible is something that's behind a lot of this," she says. "But I'm glad they're putting their money into something that I think will have very tangible benefits down the line. If you are really deadly serious about getting things into the clinic, this is not something we are going to be able to do on academic grants."

Altos's Cambridge Institute of Science is under construction at Granta Park, a landscaped 120 acres south of the city that is home to AstraZeneca, Pfizer and Illumina, a gene-sequencing firm. The first researchers are due to arrive in May. Two more institutes are being set up in San Diego and the San

Francisco Bay Area, with further support coming from Prof Shinya Yamanaka, a Nobel prizewinning stem-cell scientist at Kyoto University in Japan.



Skin cells can be ‘reprogrammed’ into stem cells, the body’s equivalent of a blank slate. Photograph: GrafiThink/Getty Images/iStockphoto

One area Altos will explore is called the integrated stress response (ISR). When cells in the body become stressed by, say, a viral infection, a lack of oxygen, or the buildup of malformed proteins, the ISR can reboot the cell’s protein-making machinery. It is the biological equivalent of the IT department’s “turn it off and on again”. If this doesn’t work, the ISR tells the cell to self-destruct: the biological equivalent of chucking your laptop in the bin.

In the past decade, scientists have discovered that the ISR is involved in a host of age-related diseases, including Alzheimer’s. In December 2020, Peter Walter, who will run Altos’s Bay Area institute, showed that drugs can retune the ISR and rapidly restore youthful [cognitive powers to aged mice](#). If nothing else, Altos is good news for over-the-hill rodents.

Another area in which Altos hopes to make headway is rejuvenating the immune system. As we age, our immune system weakens, leaving us more

prone to cancer and infections. Part of this is driven by changes in the thymus, a gland the size of an oyster that sits between the lungs. The thymus is where the immune system's protective T cells go to mature, but from puberty onwards it shrinks and is steadily replaced by fat.

I'm glad they're putting their money into something that I think will have very tangible benefits down the line

*Prof Lorna Harries*

Steve Horvath, a human-genetics professor who is moving to Altos from the University of California, Los Angeles, found evidence in a [small clinical study](#) that a growth hormone, taken with two anti-diabetes drugs, can regenerate the thymus and reverse a person's biological age. A therapy based on the work might help prevent cancer and make elderly people more resilient to infections.

Central to Altos's vision is a procedure called cellular reprogramming. With every human birth, biology demonstrates its rejuvenative powers by turning the old cells from parents into the youthful tissues of a newborn. In 2006, Yamanaka created a similar effect in the lab. He found that activating four genes in skin cells transformed them into an embryonic state, from which they could grow into the body's numerous tissues. The work fuelled a wave of interest in growing [spare parts](#) for patients, but the procedure has its risks: activate the "Yamanaka factors" inside living animals and they can develop teratomas – tumours made due to a grim confusion of different cell types.

13:50

The people on a mission to live for ever – video

Scientists are refining the procedure, winding back the clock just enough to make cells youthful, but not cancerous. In one landmark study, Juan Carlos Izpisua Belmonte, a developmental biologist who will lead the Altos institute in San Diego, showed that switching on Yamanaka factors for a six-week burst [rejuvenated old mice](#) and extended their lifespan by nearly one-third. "With careful modulation, ageing might be reversed," he says.

The same trick would be hard to pull off in humans. Instead, the hope is to find new biological pathways that, when targeted with drugs, rejuvenate old or senescent cells without causing cancer. Scientists such as Reik and Gill plan to explore these mechanisms in detail, drawing on sophisticated biological clocks to measure how much they turn back time on aged cells. The beauty about targeting ageing itself is that a therapy that helps to prevent one disease might well do the same for others.

“If you’ve got the rights to something that works for dementia, a huge public health problem, which you can then turn around and apply to cardiovascular disease, or stroke, or osteoarthritis, that is going to make someone a lot of money,” says Harries, who is also the director and co-founder of [Senisca](#), a biotech spin-off of the University of Exeter that is developing “senotherapeutics” to reverse senescence.

There are no guarantees of success, of course, but that is the nature of medical research. “What excites me about Altos is that it’s a new way to do science,” Reik says. “It appeals to me because you can achieve so much more in a bigger team. We want to knuckle down.”

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Interview

## Kit Harington on Henry V and life after Jon Snow: ‘We need to start dealing with male anger’

[Emine Saner](#)



‘Even a sober addict can be a very selfish person’ ... Kit Harington.  
Photograph: Christian Sinibaldi/The Guardian

As the Game of Thrones star swaps furs for modern dress to play Shakespeare’s monarch, he reflects on what the play tells us about masculinity, and how it addresses the issues that drove his struggle with addiction



[@eminesaner](#)

Thu 17 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

When some people found out Kit Harington was [playing Henry V](#), he says, they immediately thought of Jon Snow, the courageous moral heart of HBO’s giant hit [Game of Thrones](#). It is still Harington’s defining role – and there are a few superficial similarities: the leadership issues, the swords, the battle; Henry’s “band of brothers” and the Night’s Watch brotherhood in the TV series. But resurrecting Snow is “definitely not what we’re going for”, says Harington, who is 35. Snow is honourable and selfless; Henry is not.

Presented at the [Donmar Warehouse](#) in London, it’s a modern staging in “an alternate universe, if the monarchy were still in charge”. Harington was “very keen not to do swords”, he says with a smile, though he seems relaxed about carrying the weight of Snow’s furs, nearly three years after the show

ended. “There’s an element of me always trying to get away from that comparison, but at the same time, you’re not going to, so why try? A large portion of the audience coming to this will be fans of that show, and that’s a great thing.”

We speak over Zoom, Harington at his house in London, some good art on the walls. He met his wife, the actor [Rose Leslie](#), on Game of Thrones and they have a baby son. There seems to be a lightness to Harington, at odds with the pensiveness that his face tends to settle into, and he is quick to make fun of himself. At one point a woman – at first I think it’s Leslie, but he says it’s her sister, Portia, who is also an actor – brings him a coffee, and he laughs and says: “That looks like I have things brought to me.”



Harington as Jon Snow and his wife, Rose Leslie, as Ygritte in Game of Thrones. Photograph: HBO/courtesy Everett Collection

A couple of years ago, he went to talk to the Donmar’s artistic director, Michael Longhurst, about the possibility of him working there, and suggested the play. “The more I thought about what part I’d quite like to play,” he says ... then immediately stops and adds “it’s a wonderful thing to have that choice”, wary of sounding arrogant. “But the more I thought about that play, and reread it, the more I thought, ‘That’s a really interesting one for our times.’”

At drama school, Harington thought Henry was the hero, the dream role, and one of Henry's speeches was his audition piece. "I was like, he's the coolest character, very strong and charismatic. And in re-looking at it, he is strong and charismatic but he's a very questionable leader. So we're posing, I guess, the question of who is he and why are we following him?" As a leader, "there's something very populist about Henry", says Harington. "He has a selfish motivation towards most things he does. I'm not sure my Henry is doing it for the good of the country. I think he's doing it for himself, and I think that can speak to certain leaders we have at the moment. Are they servants to the country? Or are they purely ambitious politically?"

I'm not sure Henry is doing anything for the good of the country. I think he's doing it for himself – which I think speaks to certain leaders we have at the moment

Centuries on, there is [war looming in Europe](#). On the day we speak, Britain has agreed to send more troops to Poland amid growing concern that Russia is about to invade Ukraine. And the issue of England's relationship with Europe is not so much an echo through time, as a howl. Henry invades France to bolster his power; [modern-day Brits get Daniel Hannan](#), the Conservative MEP and Brexiter, standing on a desk in his office on the night of the referendum, reciting Henry's St Crispin's Day speech in celebration.

Or you could talk about the current epidemic of male violence and the play's portrayal of masculinity (though perhaps that's less obvious in this production, in which 50% of the cast are female). "I see it everywhere," says Harington, who has given "toxic masculinity" a lot of thought over the years, even if he bristles at the phrase, not least because of the roles he has played. "I see confused men walking the streets. I see terrible role models. I see a lot of anger, and I think we need to start dealing with that anger – we as men, but we as a society as well."



Harington in rehearsals for Henry V at the Donmar Warehouse. Photograph: Marc Brenner

For Harington, the play became more personal than he was expecting. In 2019, he went to rehab for addiction, mostly alcohol. In an interview last year, he said it had left him feeling suicidal at points. Henry V, he says, was “a way of exorcising demons, I think. But I think all acting is in some way.” He looked at Henry as a recovering addict – as Shakespeare implies – and asked: “What happens to a person when they put down one lifestyle and cross to a different thing? And if that different thing is power, what does that look like?” Particularly, he says, because “addiction gone wrong is a very selfish trait. Even a sober addict can be a very selfish person. It’s a self-centred disease.”

Harington believes he may have become an actor because of the same issues that underpinned his addiction. “This is a very addictive job,” he says. “In a week’s time, I’m going to go out, stand on stage and get applause and it’s going to be a huge rush and a high. The trouble is, I never really wanted to come down from that high. Now, I’ve learned how I do that and I’m much happier for it.” He has been sober for nearly three years, “so I’m well on my path to recovery, and all I can say to anyone thinking about it is it’s a wonderful way of living your life. It saved me, for sure.” Harington’s son has just turned one, which has prompted the actor to reflect on the last year.

“I feel like a much more grounded, settled person,” he says. “I’m so grateful that I got sober before having a child.”

Did Harington identify with Henry at all? “I’m going to quote Shakespeare now,” he says – before adding a deadpan “how embarrassing”. “But Henry has this one line where he says: ‘Think’st thou the fiery fever will go out, with titles blown from adulation?’ . That question of, ‘Will this thing inside that’s wrong go away, if I get adulation?’ That really spoke to me.”



Kit Harington: ‘All acting is a way of exorcising demons.’ Photograph: Christian Sinibaldi/The Guardian

His mother, the playwright turned artist [Deborah Catesby](#), would take him and his brother to the theatre regularly when they were children. His father, David, a businessman, is a baronet, but although the family were “solidly middle-class”, he says, they weren’t rich. He had a state education, partly because of his mother’s politics, but also there wasn’t the money for school fees. Seeing a touring production of Waiting for Godot was a formative experience. Harington and a friend put on a scene from the play at school and he remembers the audience’s laughter. “They were probably just being polite – parents coming to see their kids’ show.” Seeing [Adrian Lester as Henry V](#) at the National Theatre while at drama school was another decisive moment.

What did acting give him? “You know, I’ve noticed that my little boy loves applause,” he says, in mock horror. “He’s the son of two actors so he’s going to, isn’t he? But everything he does, he wants applause. It’s making me and Rose terrified.” But he’s the same. “It’s something about that. I think I was a show-off and I liked getting celebrated by my mother. I like attention.”

My little boy loves applause. He’s the son of two actors so he’s going to. But everything he does, he wants applause. It’s making me and Rose terrified

In a prime example of the need to be careful of what you wish for, there can’t have been many actors as applauded or given as much as attention as Harington was in 2019, when Game of Thrones concluded. It’s easy to forget just how huge it was. Although he sometimes gets stopped on his walk to the Donmar, these days he doesn’t cause a riot. Harington is careful not to sound ungrateful, but it must have been a difficult, intense experience. Before Jon Snow, his biggest role had been in the National Theatre’s production of War Horse. Game of Thrones, his first TV role, brought extreme fandom (hundreds would camp outside hotels he was staying in), vast financial wealth and intense scrutiny, all before he hit 30.

Does he look back and wonder how he survived it? “I wasn’t very well through a portion of it towards the end, so I could say that an element of me didn’t survive it,” he says. “But I think that would have happened were I in that show or not. I look at it with great fondness. I feel very privileged to have been in it and I’m continuing to get to be in the theatre, in large part, because of that show.” Any downsides are more than balanced out, he says. “There’s a baby boy downstairs, and my wife, who I met on the show. I looked at it from a perspective of tortuousness and anxiousness a lot when I was in it.” He smiles. “I’ve got no reason to be doing that now.”

- Henry V is at the Donmar, London, 15 February–9 April, and will be broadcast as part of NT Live

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## Future-proofed piste – sustainable skiing in the French Alps



Going off piste in Serre Chevalier. Photograph: Luka Leroy

Serre Chevalier near Briançon is defying the sceptics with its solar, wind and hydro-powered shift towards building the ski resort of the future

[Phoebe Smith](#)

Thu 17 Feb 2022 02.00 EST

“Studies predict that with climate change, skiing will be able to take place here in its current form until 2050...” These profound words came not from an environmentalist, but from the lips of Patrick Arnaud, the manager of [Serre Chevalier ski area](#) in the French Alps. As I sat there, looking up at the snow-capped peaks behind him, with my 16-month-old son on my lap, all I could think was how close that date suddenly felt.

Ask people if taking a ski trip is good for the environment and they’ll likely come back with a resounding no. First there’s the way people often access it – via short-haul, carbon-emitting flights. Then there’s the type of work that has to be done on the mountain to make it suitable for skiers – from deforestation and grooming pistes (using diesel-powered vehicles), to running chairlifts to get people back up the slopes (yet more greenhouse gas emissions). And then there’s the catch-22 in the form of snow production – with temperatures rising, more snow needs to be made artificially to keep the traditional areas open, but this emits more carbon into the atmosphere, exacerbating the problem.



Phoebe Smith travelled by train to Briançon then took a bus to the resort.  
Photograph: Phoebe Smith

Yet, as I was finding out in Serre Chevalier, it doesn't have to be this way.

It started for me by ditching the plane and heading to the region's capital, Briançon, via train. The all-electric Eurostar started my family off on a green footing straight from London (Eurostar says you can take 13 journeys on it before you produce the same amount of carbon emitted in just one flight to an equivalent airport, such as Grenoble or Lyon), before catching the SNCF sleeper train from Paris the same day. The next morning, we awoke in our cosy couchette to a panoramic view of the Alps from our beds. Despite any fears (mine and, undoubtedly, other passengers'), the baby slept well in his travel cot on the floor, while I too was rocked to sleep by the motion of the carriage.

If all the resorts made this change, imagine the difference it would make

We arrived on the train at Briançon and to a well-timed bus connection to head immediately into Chantemerle, the hub of the four-centre valley. Serre Chevalier was due to celebrate 80 years as a ski resort in 2021, and when Covid hit in 2020 and tourists couldn't come, rather than lamenting its loss the resort decided to up its environmental plans. The four centres – Briançon, Chantemerle, Villeneuve la Salle and Le Monetier-les-Bains – had already pledged to do their best to reduce their carbon footprint by 2030, but on reflection they decided to aim at producing 30% of all their electricity supply themselves by 2023.

"Everyone said we were crazy, that it was impossible," said Patrick, "but now we are on track to exceed that figure."

After dropping off my boy at nursery I headed up the mountain. Patrick had explained how ski resorts were the easiest places to convert to renewable energy. They have 300 days of sunshine a year, plenty of wind high up, and streams already piped for snow-producing cannon can be harnessed to produce hydroelectricity (this accounts for 80% of all renewables here) – they are plugged into the existing network but give electricity rather than takes it when not producing snow. And to install everything requires no cutting down of trees, as the infrastructure is there already.



Some of the lifts at Serre Chevalier are powered by wind turbines.  
Photograph: Thibaut Durand

As I ascended higher I noticed the glinting solar panels on the roofs of the chairlifts. So effective are they in winter – thanks to the intensity of the sun reflecting off snow – that the chairlifts produce more power than they consume. As I went to the top of the mountain and began my descent on a particularly swooshy blue, I spied one of the wind turbines – another of Chevalier’s renewables – which efficiently powers yet more lifts.

For my final run of the day I found myself navigating a slightly bumpy slope, part of the experimental changes at Chevalier.

“Grooming accounts for 90% of our energy consumption,” Patrick said, “and 50 years ago we groomed less.” Even though most of their piste bashers have been hybrid (diesel and electrically powered since 2012 – with the plan to be electric and hydro-powered by 2030 – the resort has been asking customers if they need all slopes to be groomed quite so widely. As I bounded down the piste, screaming with glee, I decided that perhaps a little stomach lurch now and again was worth it for the greater good.



‘A new, low-impact offering – a 1.1km zipline’ Photograph: Phoebe Smith

Our accommodation that evening was at the [Gîte Le Rebanchon](#) (from €70 bed and breakfast) in the tiny village of Le Casset, at the northern end of Chevalier. Although located further out from the pistes, its mountain-themed rooms were comfy, and the hotel’s Eco Gite label denotes a pledge to preserve natural resources, use renewable energy and source natural, local and recyclable products.

That night we walked up to [Trinquet des Boussardes](#), a brand new Ecotable-certified restaurant, where owner Nicolas Boutard cooks fresh, seasonal and local produce on an open fire, with zero waste. We enjoyed a vegetable tartare made with a mix of greens from Hautes-Alpes farmers, followed by wood-fired, spiced mushrooms and potatoes from the [Altitude Bio](#) organic shop in Briançon.



The snowshoeing trip took Phoebe Smith into woodland where tipis were set up with food and drink. Photograph: Phoebe Smith

Over the next couple of days, besides more skiing – Chevalier has 81 runs spread over Briançon, Chantemerle, Villeneuve and Le Monêtier-les-Bains – there were also a number of environmentally sound activities to try.

Where other resorts have introduced snowmobiles for an adrenaline rush, here there is a different sort of horse power. Ski joëring involves harnessing yourself to a horse and being pulled along at speed. Though my instructor, Fanny, was sympathetic to my lack of core strength (vital, apparently) she didn't waste time getting the horse to gallop around the icy course – while warning that my screaming would only encourage it to go faster.

Slightly more sedate was snowshoeing, which I took my son along for one evening, as it began just outside our gite. There, guide Laura took a group of us hiking into the woodland of the surrounding Ecrins national park, telling us about the two glaciers within – which were formerly one, but global warming saw it retreat and split – before bringing us to a clearing where two tipis were set for us to make our own fondue with local cheese.

“We normally offer this experience in an igloo,” Laura said, gesturing poignantly at a huge mass of snow, “but it got too warm and it's melted

already.”

On the final day, before my last run on the slopes (during which I would try a new, low-impact offering – a 1.1km zipline down), I took my baby to [Les Grand Bains](#) in Monêtier, pools fed by natural thermal springs. There he happily splashed in the outdoor baths while I gazed up at the slopes behind him through rising steam.



Phoebe Smith tries ski joëring. Photograph: Phoebe Smith

When it comes to being more sustainable, Chevalier is not only attempting to produce its own electricity, but also reducing its consumption. Plans include running ski lifts slower when there are no queues (a minute longer on the lift means a 20% saving on energy used) and using snow cannon sparingly (last season, pre-Covid, they made 25% less snow with no impact on customer satisfaction).

This ski region’s attitude – and marketing slogan – is “All we need is change”, and that goes from the resort switching to renewables, reducing energy use and offering sustainable accommodation and locally sourced food, to us, the skiers, doing our bit to make our favoured activity less carbon intensive. Because, as Patrick said when he revealed they were offering their blueprint for renewable conversion to competitor ski resorts,

“we’re not doing this for Chevalier, we’re doing this for the planet. If all the resorts make this change, imagine the difference it would make.”

I thought about that on our way to the railway station. One family committing to take a more sustainable ski trip may be akin to a single snowflake falling. But, with enough of us making the change, the cumulative results could ensure a winter wonderland survives well past 2050.

*The trip was provided by [Serre Chevalier](#); rail travel by [Eurostar](#) (London-Paris return from £79) and [SNCF](#) (Paris-Briançon from €29 for a shared couchette – private option available). [Buses](#) run from the station to main ski areas. Ski passes at Serre Chevalier from €54; snowshoe and fondue excursion with [Igloo Food](#) €60 adult, €35 child. Ski joering with [Ranch du Grand Aigle](#) from €30pp; [Les Grands Bains du Monêtier](#) from €21.50 adult; [zipline](#) ride from €29*

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## **Stunning vistas, sumptuous food: readers' favourite Alpine ski cafes and restaurants**



Restaurant Chez Vrony has views of the Matterhorn. Photograph: Image Professionals GmbH/Alamy

Our tipsters dish out piste-side classics in mountain chalets and Bond-style hangouts this week – all served with astonishing panoramas

*[Guardian readers](#)*

Thu 17 Feb 2022 02.00 EST

## **Winning tip: Strudel in the sun: Zermatt, Switzerland**

If you are skiing or walking near Zermatt, a visit to the 2,130-metre-high [Chez Vrony](#) in Findeln is not to be missed. It is located next to an easy ski run and is easily accessible on foot in summer months too. It is like walking into someone's beautiful house, cosy chairs, log fires, a sunny terrace and a view of the Matterhorn to die for. My favourite time is mid-afternoon when the lunch crowds have gone, and you can sit in the sun on the terrace and enjoy homemade apple strudel with vanilla sauce, washed down with the best *glühwein* you'll find anywhere in the Alps. The only difficult part is motivating yourself to leave.

**Jayne Pearson**

## **Skiing with sausages: La Plagne, France**



Belle Plagne. Photograph: Roger Cracknell 01/Alamy

If you're looking for a morning coffee stop in the La Plagne ski area with super service, delicious coffee and a sun trap terrace, look no further than [Carlina](#) in Belle Plagne. Its central location and ski-on, ski-off access makes it the destination of choice on a relaxed "food-first" ski trip. It also has a superb lunch menu with a reasonably priced plat du jour and classic French mountain meals such as *diot* (sausage) and *tartiflette* (made with potatoes, reblochon cheese, lardons and onions). If you're in the area it's not one to miss. Coffee is about €7 for two and dishes €16-€25 each.

**Marcus Standish**

## **Beer and schnitzel on high: Kitzbühel, Austria**



Photograph: hs001jde/Alamy

Refuel and refresh with a traditional schnitzel paired with a cold crisp beer while basking in the picturesque panoramic views of the Austrian Alps. Situated 1,800 metres up, in the heart of the Kitzbühel ski area is the [Sonnenrast](#) restaurant. Being just across from the [Fleckalmbahn gondola](#) means skiers of all abilities have access to this mountaintop eatery. The Sonnenrast offers traditional Austrian dishes along with hot and cold beverages, which can be enjoyed on the beautiful wooden terrace; this star attraction wraps around the building providing spectacular views of the mountain terrain. Dishes start at about €15.

**Thea**

## A view to a hill: Hochgurgl, Austria



You can almost hear the James Bond theme tune playing as you reach the [Top Mountain Star](#) in [Obergurgl-Hochgurgl](#). Perched on a narrow ridge of the [Wurmkogel](#) peak, this glass structure with a Swarovski studded bar on a ridge at 3,080 metres really is a cafe with a view – a 360-degree panorama across the Ötztal Alps. Truly breathtaking. There is a black run down but if you don't fancy that there is a long blue track and failing that you can use the lifts to go on foot. Ice cool!

**Samantha Little**

## **Barnstorming côte de boeuf: Samoëns, France**



Giffre valley. Photograph: MichaelGrant/Alamy

A slightly tricky but doable red piste downhill, or a 40-minute snowshoe up, and you arrive at [Grand Crêt 17](#), the 300-year-old barn that Onno and his family have spent the past four years restoring. It's beautiful inside and out, with a breathtaking view of the [Giffre valley](#) and the landmark Criou mountain above Samoëns in the Grand Massif. Expect a delightful warm tuna niçoise, super garlicky chicken or the massive côte de boeuf, all cooked on the barbecue in summer or winter. Leave space for great puds, too. Mains are €20ish.

## V Young

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## Elephant in the room: Laax, Switzerland



Photograph: Dani Ammann

We stumbled upon [Das Elephant](#) on a ski trip. Our snowboard crazy boys were blitzing the black runs and ... well, their parents weren't! In search of a hot drink and a radiator we were just blown away by the views from this restaurant at 2,475 metres above sea level on a mountain called Crap Masegn. The food is also superb (its signature dish is penne from the parmesan loaf but there's also cream of rocket and wasabi soup with prawns, and slow cooked beef with polenta among menu favourites) and is mentioned by [Michelin](#). There is also an intriguing backstory to the place: in 1992, as part of the Crap Art (a reference to the mountain's name, not the art's quality) cultural event, an elephant was a guest for four days on the mountain Crap Sogn Gion, leading to the restaurant being named after it.

**Ceri Fitzpatrick**

## **Winter warmer in a white-out: Mürren, Switzerland**

The restaurant at [Sonnenberg](#) will always feel like home. On one holiday to Mürren, all the ski lifts were closed due to a heavy snowfall. Undeterred, my family and I hiked up the mountain through the woods in a total white-out. After several chilly hours walking, we noticed the smell of wood smoke and spied some glowing lights through the fog. When we got to the door, the Sonnenberg's proprietor welcomed us with warming bowls of gulaschsuppe in an otherwise empty dining room. Years later, we returned to the Sonnenberg to discover its fantastic views of the Jungfrau, something we had missed out on through all that snow. **Charlotte**

## **Chalet of chocolate: Three Valleys, France**

A characterful 120-year-old chalet, hung with family photos, [Le Corbeleys](#) is unfailing in its warm welcome and hot, hot chocolate. Serving homemade Savoyard fare – diots €20 and blueberry tart €8.50 – this is great value in the [Trois Vallées](#), where lunch can command silly money. Enjoy spectacular views from the large deck or cosy up inside in a nest of sheepskins and red gingham, hang your gloves to steam by the log burner and sip a *vin chaud* from the neat little bar. Fitting reward after burning down the rollers of epic blue run Jérusalem (formerly a red run but now reclassified). The chalet is on the plateau between Saint Martin 1 and 2 lifts, above Saint Martin de Belleville.

**Caroline Elderfield**

## **Doling out dumplings in the Dolomites: Val Gardena, Italy**

The Dolomites are the most beautiful mountains in Europe, and I'm hugely looking forward to returning there very soon. Even though it'll be four years since I last skied in the area, I feel sure of a warm welcome at [Muliné](#) above [Selva Val Gardena](#). It's just off the Saslong B red piste above the romantic,

ski-in, ski-out Fischburg castle. The interior perfectly exemplifies the concept of *gemütlichkeit* (good cheer). The food is the marvellous mixture of north Italian and Austro-German that you get in the Alto Adige/Südtirol, with lots of meat and cheese and dumplings. If I'm skiing I'll avoid the wine list, but if I go back in the evening...

**Martin Lunnon**

## **Meat and gravy – yum! Near Innsbruck, Austria**

Growing up in Birmingham, a mixed grill was the ultimate pub lunch. Every meat imaginable, egg and chips. So when I saw mixed grill on a menu at the Bärenwirth in Patsch, just south of Innsbruck, I thought, why not? Cosy timbered restaurant with Alpine views. Bring it on! But, ugh – potatoes, slimy vegetables (yuck) and gravy. Yes there was meat, but just one kind. To be polite and not to betray my ignorance, I had to at least have a crack. And on a month-long trip around Europe, it proved to be hands down the best meal I ate. I even mopped up the gravy with the bread. Added bonus of staying in the hotel above, balcony overlooking a Tyrolean church backed by not one, but two stunning V-shaped valleys.

**Antony T**

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[Vladimir Putin](#)

## Table talk: Italian and Spanish firms vie to claim credit for Putin's furniture

Mystery surrounds the origins of the vast table across which the Russian and French leaders faced off over Ukraine



The image of Vladimir Putin and Emmanuel Macron in the Kremlin on 7 February has become a metaphor for the fraught negotiations over Ukraine.  
Photograph: EyePress News/Rex/Shutterstock

[Stephen Burgen](#) in Barcelona and [Angela Giuffrida](#) in Rome

Thu 17 Feb 2022 00.00 EST

When presidents Vladimir Putin and Emmanuel Macron faced each other at either end of an [improbably long, white table](#) last week, the image became a metaphor for the fraught negotiations over Ukraine.

Now the table stakes have been raised after furniture makers in Spain and Italy both claimed that they were commissioned by the Kremlin to make the now famous four-metre-long table.

Vicente Zaragozá, head of the furniture company that bears his name in Alcàsser, near Valencia, says he is in no doubt that the work is his.

In an interview on Spanish radio on Tuesday, Zaragozá said that as soon as he saw the photograph he started examining the table for defects. “I have an eye for the smallest defects so that we can keep improving,” he said, adding that the table was made from Alpine white beech inlaid with gold leaf.

However, Renato Pologna, owner of Oak, a family-run furniture business based in Como, is baffled by the Spaniard’s claims.

“Look, this is a story I’ve been hearing about for the past few days,” Pologna said. “Sincerely, I don’t know what to say, because I did this work in 1995-96 and photos of the table were published in books, mostly Russian ones, which were officially published in 2000.

“This man, who I don’t know, says he made this table in 2005 – therefore, something doesn’t quite add up. As proof we have all the certificates for the work done, and even the recognition of the president, who at the time was Boris Yeltsin.”

The Spanish company, which ceased trading in July 2020 and whose Facebook page is in English and Russian, worked on numerous commissions to make furniture for the Kremlin and former Soviet republics from 2002-2006, among them the Uzbek president’s kitchen and dining room.

Zaragozá broke down in tears as he told the interviewer: “We have made bigger and more beautiful tables, but seeing photographs of this table makes me proud that, as a Spaniard and a Valencian, I have done something worthwhile.”

Pologna remains unmoved. “The books published in 2000 show the interiors of the Kremlin building where you see a photo of the table made by us,” he said. “Maybe the Spanish guy made a copy that went somewhere else, who

knows. We're talking about a table, not an aircraft. It could be that he made a copy."

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## [Coronavirus](#)

# Pregnant women's vaccination protects baby from Covid – study

Research finds much lower risk of infant hospitalisation when mother had mRNA vaccine during pregnancy

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Health experts recommend that women who are pregnant, breastfeeding or trying to get pregnant now, get vaccinated. Photograph: Bogdan Kosanovic/Getty Images

*[Andrew Gregory](#) Health editor*

Wed 16 Feb 2022 14.51 EST

Babies whose mothers get vaccinated against Covid-19 during pregnancy are less likely to be admitted to hospital for the disease after they are born, a study suggests.

The new findings are the first real-world evidence that pregnant women can not only protect themselves by getting vaccinated but can also protect their newborn infants.

Babies of mothers who had two doses of the Moderna or Pfizer/BioNTech vaccines while pregnant had a much lower risk of being hospitalised with Covid-19 in the first six months of their lives, according to the study from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

“The data CDC is publishing today provides real-world evidence that getting a Covid-19 vaccine during pregnancy might help protect infants less than six months of age from hospitalisation due to Covid-19,” Dr Dana Meaney-Delman, the CDC’s chief of infant outcomes monitoring research and prevention branch, told [a press briefing](#).

This is likely because they are born carrying their mother’s antibodies, she said.

“When people receive an mRNA Covid-19 vaccine during pregnancy, their bodies build antibodies to protect against Covid-19 and these antibodies have been found in umbilical cord blood, indicating that the antibodies have transferred from the pregnant person to the developing infant. And while we know that these antibodies cross the placenta, until this study, we have not yet had data to demonstrate whether these antibodies might provide protection for the baby against Covid-19.”

Researchers from paediatric hospitals and the CDC looked at children under six months old between July 2021 and January 2022.

The study analysed data from 379 hospitalised babies – 176 with Covid-19 and 203 who were admitted for other issues. It found that Covid-19 vaccines were 61% effective overall at preventing hospitalisations in children whose mothers were vaccinated during pregnancy.

That protection rose to 80% when the mothers were vaccinated after 21 weeks to 14 days before delivery. Vaccination effectiveness fell to 32% for the babies whose mothers were inoculated earlier during their pregnancy. The study did not include data on vaccine effectiveness of booster jabs, or on mothers who were vaccinated before pregnancy.

“The study found that Covid-19 vaccination during pregnancy was 61% protective,” said Meaney-Delman. “Meaning that babies less than six months old, whose mothers were vaccinated, were 61% less likely to be hospitalised with Covid-19. And in fact, the majority of babies, actually 84% who were hospitalised with Covid-19, were born to people who were not vaccinated during pregnancy.

“Most concerning, they found that among babies with Covid-19, who were admitted to the ICU, the sickest babies, 88% were born to mothers who were not vaccinated before or during pregnancy. And the one baby who died in the study was born to a mother who was not vaccinated. The bottom line is that maternal vaccination is a really important way to help protect these young infants.”

The study’s authors warned that the estimates for effectiveness earlier in pregnancy should be interpreted with caution due to the small sample size.

Pregnant women are at increased risk for severe illness from Covid-19, and having Covid during pregnancy can increase the risk of preterm birth, stillbirth and possibly other pregnancy complications.

Health experts recommend that women who are pregnant, are breastfeeding, are trying to get pregnant now, or might become pregnant in the future get vaccinated and stay up to date with Covid-19 jabs.

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## Vaccines and immunisation

# Vaccine offer lets parents weigh finely balanced benefits and risks

Analysis: JCVI recommends jabs for children to ‘future-proof’ against later Covid waves, but says offer is non-urgent

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A child washing her hands. The JCVI aims to ‘future-proof’ younger children against waves of infection that are predicted to occur later this year.  
Photograph: Andrew Boyers/Reuters

*Hannah Devlin* Science correspondent  
[@hannahdev](https://twitter.com/hannahdev)

Wed 16 Feb 2022 15.11 EST

The decision to extend the offer of Covid vaccination [to younger children](#) was reached after months of intense deliberation about the benefits and risks by the [Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation \(JCVI\)](#). Finally, on Wednesday, the group's recommendation that vaccination should go ahead for five- to 11-year-olds was made public.

Surprisingly, given this was a long-awaited decision, there was no public briefing by the government. The short, neutral statement from Sajid Javid, the health secretary, that children in England would be eligible for vaccination from April "so that parents can, if they want, take up the offer" may have left some parents feeling confused or that the buck had simply been passed to them.

However, the JCVI makes clear that while the children are at very low risk from Covid-19, it recommends that vaccination goes ahead, and the reasoning behind its decision provides some useful guidance to parents. The main motivation is not to avoid school absences but to "future-proof" younger children against waves of infection that are predicted to occur later this year.

The benefits and risks are finely balanced. The number of cases of very severe illness avoided will be small, and vaccine safety is well established at this point and side-effects tend to be mild. To give a sense of the numbers being considered, the JCVI estimates that in a future severe wave of Covid, vaccinating 1 million children with two doses each would avoid 58 hospitalisations and three ICU admissions. When the committee considered school absences, it found the impact of vaccination was "indeterminate" because side-effects from vaccination, though mild, might cause children to miss school.

The JCVI recommends a "non-urgent" offer because the threat from Covid-19 is not the most pressing public health priority for this age group. It is crucial, for instance, that extending Covid vaccines does not disrupt childhood vaccination programmes such as MMR, which have fallen behind during the pandemic and tackle a more serious threat to the health of most young children.

However, the government announcement may have left some parents wondering if the lack of urgency should be taken as a personal instruction – don’t worry about coming forward, it isn’t that important – or even reflect some degree of uncertainty about the decision. The JCVI has said parents should not be rushed into a decision, but the recommendation is that people come forward when a vaccine is offered.

Given the fine balance, it is right that parents are free to choose whether to vaccinate their children against Covid-19, and experts have welcomed this move.

Simon Williams, a senior lecturer in people and organisation at Swansea University, said: “I think leaving the decision to parents is a good idea. The important thing is that parents of younger children in the UK, like parents in many countries internationally, now have the choice. Ultimately, what most parents seem to have wanted is the choice to have or to not have the vaccine for their children.”

In the absence of a formal recommendation from government, it is crucial that the science behind this policy is clearly communicated so that parents can, as they have been asked, come to their own informed decision.

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## Coronavirus

# ‘I’m joyful for children’: parents react to vaccine extension for England, Wales and Scotland

Covid jabs for children of five and over is welcome news for most families – although anxieties linger

- [Coronavirus – latest updates](#)
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A seven-year-old in Michigan, in the US, shows off her sticker after getting her Covid jab. Now most UK children will also be offered the vaccine. Photograph: Jeff Kowalsky/AFP/Getty Images

*[Jem Bartholomew](#) and [Alfie Packham](#)*

Wed 16 Feb 2022 14.38 EST

Children aged five to 11 in [England](#), [Wales](#) and [Scotland](#) will be offered protection against Covid, meaning millions more will be eligible for the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine.

The Pfizer vaccine, given at one-third the dose of adults, was [approved](#) as safe and effective for children by the UK's Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency in December. But the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation previously recommended the vaccine only for [vulnerable](#) five- to 11-year-olds.

Millions of children aged five to 11 have been vaccinated in other countries, such as the US and countries in Europe.

Five parents share their reactions.

### **‘We’ve slipped behind everybody else’**



Loretta Maddox and her husband. Their five-year-old daughter caught Covid twice

We'll get it as soon as my daughter gets the opportunity to be vaccinated. She'll be quite happy about it after catching the virus twice.

My five-year-old daughter got Covid the first time in August. We hadn't seen my dad and my family, since Covid started, for over a year. She felt really bad, saying "Now I can't see grandad". The second time, at the end of November, there was a massive outbreak and they had to close the school. We live in a village. It's very isolating for these kids who are just building their social skills. We felt the worst thing about the pandemic was the loss of a normal childhood.

I'm glad about the decision, but I don't understand why it took so long, as we were the first country to approve the vaccine. Much fanfare was made of that, but we've slipped behind everybody else. **Loretta Maddox, 47, PhD researcher, Brecon Beacons, Wales**

## **'We don't know if other variants will affect children in more dangerous ways'**

I'll be getting the vaccine as soon as possible for my nine-year-old. She got Covid at Christmas after spending a few weeks with school friends, all getting positive results. We live in London, so it was everywhere at that time. You knew it was inevitable. I had hoped that the vaccine programme would have started before she got it, but one child fell sick after another.

We were worried because our eldest child, who is 11, has a pre-existing health condition and our nine-year-old has asthma. They were poorly and had temperatures, but luckily they don't seem to have any long-term symptoms. Our 11-year-old has now had the vaccine and we'd like to give our nine-year-old the best chance of not getting long Covid.

The Omicron variant has been mild, but we don't know if other variants will go on to affect children in more dangerous ways. Maybe it will be suitable for my three-year-old at some point, but we'll wait and see if that's needed.  
**Laura Seabright, 44, secondary school teacher, London**

## **'I wasn't sure about giving it to my children'**



Janine Ainscow from Leicestershire was initially hesitant but has changed her mind

During the early pandemic, I wasn't sure about giving it to my children, now aged seven and 10. My slight hesitation at the time was around long-term health consequences of being vaccinated – if there was something it kicked off in your body that was not understood. Really, it was fear of the unknown and of the untested.

My 10-year-old son caught Covid in November from school and is still suffering the long-term consequences. He's gone from being a bright, engaged, academic, sporty kid with more energy than anybody, to a short walk being impossible. On his worst days, he'd get dressed and bring his pyjamas downstairs for the evening so he wouldn't have to go upstairs to collect them.

Now that most of the developed world has done it, I would without hesitation get my children vaccinated. I'm actually just angry it wasn't available earlier. It's quite sad that it's been available, but not to our children – their futures have been taken for a gamble. **Janine Ainscow, 45, Leicestershire**

**'I feel anxious about making this decision'**

If there are clear and worthwhile benefits to vaccinating five to 11-year-olds, I don't feel these have been communicated effectively, and as the father of a healthy six-year-old girl, I feel anxious about making this decision.

From all the information that's currently available, the risk to children of severe illness and death from Covid appears to be vanishingly small. We now know that although vaccines are crucial for protecting the lives of elderly and immunocompromised people, the benefits for the wider population are relatively short-lived, and its ability to prevent the spread of infection limited.

In this context it's difficult to understand what the impetus is for focusing energies on healthy children. Wouldn't it be much better to redouble efforts toward the unvaccinated vulnerable and elderly categories? **George, 38, small business owner, London**

## **'I'm concerned about long Covid for my children'**



Melissa Branzburg, 38, of north London, had her children vaccinated in Ireland

I'm really joyful for children; every child deserves this protection. I'm thrilled that England has decided to move forward and do what everyone

else was doing. I'm from Boston and have lived here for eight years, and all my American friends have been quite shocked and in huge disbelief that we couldn't get the kids vaccinated here.

After my husband's office said he'd need to come back in later this month, we took our five- and seven-year-old over to Ireland to get vaccinated. We just called up and they said we could get it. Luckily, RyanAir flights are very inexpensive – now hopefully for the second jab we won't have to travel.

There are lots of motivations. My infant can't get vaxed, and I wanted to protect her; babies don't have developed immune systems. I'm also concerned about long Covid for my children. Hopefully now this means we can go back to the US and visit their grandparents without bringing a disease from the UK. **Melissa Branzburg, 38, London**

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This article was downloaded by **calibre** from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/16/im-joyful-for-children-parents-react-to-vaccine-extension-for-england-wales-and-scotland>

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Space

## **Privatising the moon may sound like a crazy idea but the sky's no limit for avarice**

[Arwa Mahdawi](#)



A free-market thinktank says it's time to start selling off 'plots of moon land' – we need to act now before the plundering starts



‘Modern space exploration seems to be all about money, money, money.’  
Photograph: Fraser Gray/Rex/Shutterstock

Thu 17 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

Ever heard of the [overview effect](#)? It was coined by a space writer called Frank White to describe how looking down at our little blue planet from above can create a shift in how astronauts think about Earth: all of a sudden you realise how fragile the Earth is and how important it is that we all work together to protect it. “Looking at the Earth from afar you realise it is too small for conflict and just big enough for cooperation,” the astronaut Yuri Gagarin said.

Alas, it looks like we needed to replace the overview effect with the avarice effect, because attitudes towards space seem to have shifted. Rather than making people imagine a better world, modern space exploration seems to be all about money, money, money. Elon Musk’s SpaceX has been working with a Canadian startup on plans to launch satellites with billboards on them into space so that [adverts can light up the night sky](#). No doubt some of those ads will be for space tourism: on Wednesday Virgin Galactic opened [ticket sales](#) to the public for the first time. And by the “public” I mean that the small sliver of the public that can afford \$450,000 for a joyride 300,000 feet above Earth.

The real money, of course, is not in intergalactic billboards or short space trips: it's in plundering space for resources. Apparently, the race to privatize the moon is on. Of course, many people who are starry-eyed about space mining would balk at the idea that they're suffering from the avariceeffect: they'd argue that it's all for the good of mankind. Take, for example, the forward-thinking folk at the Adam Smith Institute (ASI), an influential thinktank that champions free markets. To achieve peace and prosperity on Earth, we need to sell off pieces of space, "with a particular focus on plots of moon land", the ASI recently declared in a [paper](#).

What's the logic behind this? Well, they reckon that, as long as you're not too bothered by the fact that global inequality contributes to the death of one [person every four seconds](#), per Oxfam, untrammeled capitalism has done the world a lot of good. "Property rights play a key role in boosting living standards, innovation and human dignity here on Earth," Daniel Pryor, head of research at the Adam Smith Institute, says. "The same would be true if we applied this logic to space, which presents a unique opportunity to start afresh when designing effective rules of ownership."

This ASI report, titled Space Invaders: Property Rights on the Moon, may seem a little out there but it is very on-brand for the UK-based thinktank. "We propose things which people regard as being on the edge of lunacy," its president, Dr Madsen Pirie [once boasted](#). "The next thing you know, they're on the edge of policy." That's not hyperbole: the thinktank helped propel a range of privatization efforts in the UK during the 80s and 90s. Alan Rusbridger, the Guardian's former editor, has described the institute as "a body which has built up a startling track record for floating ideas which end up on the statute books". In short: don't dismiss this paper as the ramblings of a bunch of space cadets.

There are a few obstacles that stand in the way of the ASI's fantasies of intrepid capitalists plundering the cosmos

That said, don't expect a McDonald's on the moon imminently. There are a few obstacles that stand in the way of the ASI's fantasies of intrepid capitalists plundering the cosmos. Chief among these is the [1967 Outer Space Treaty](#), which is the foundation for international space law. The treaty

establishes that space belongs to everyone and no nation has the right to appropriate a celestial body.

The Outer Space Treaty was drawn up in the early days of space exploration. It was easy for world leaders to be magnanimous about not monetizing space back then because the idea was still largely theoretical. Now that mining the moon is becoming more of a practical possibility, however, the treaty is swiftly falling out of favour and there have been a series of attempts to undermine it. In 2015, for example, the US Congress and President Barack Obama passed [legislation](#) giving American companies the right to own and sell anything they obtain from space. The US argued that this wasn't a contravention under the Outer Space Treaty (which is not particularly detailed) because there is no claim of sovereignty involved.

Donald Trump advanced the [commercialization of space](#) further during his time in office. In 2020 he signed an executive order encouraging the commercial development of space. "Outer space is a legally and physically unique domain of human activity, and the United States does not view it as a global commons," the [executive order stated](#).

The steady commercialization of space has not passed the ASI by. "With more countries and companies competing in the space race than ever before it's vital for us to move past the outdated thinking of the 1960s and tackle the question of extraterrestrial property rights sooner rather than later," the thinktank's report says.

They are absolutely right about that: the Outer Space Treaty is outdated and is already being ignored. We desperately need to establish a framework regarding property rights before billionaires, private corporations and self-interested world leaders start auctioning off the universe. As the [outraged online reaction](#) to the ASI's report demonstrates, not everyone is sold on the idea that giving corporations free rein to mine the moon is going to make the world a better place. It's already well established that trickle-down economics doesn't work. Do they really expect us to believe that wealth is going to trickle all the way down from space?

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**OpinionCoronavirus**

# There's a reason thousands of people take quack cures for Covid

[Nick Robins-Early](#)

While scientists were coming up with vaccines, many people fell into online communities that sprang up around quick fixes, conspiracy, and livestock medicines



‘What is the right dose of the anti-parasitic drug ivermectin?’ Photograph: Bloomberg/Getty Images

Thu 17 Feb 2022 03.33 EST

Every day, in social media groups with hundreds of thousands of members, a debate rages about the best way to treat Covid with laundry lists of unproven medicines.

What is the right dose of the anti-parasitic drug [ivermectin](#)? When should it be taken? Should it be combined with hydroxychloroquine? With the antibiotic azithromycin? What about Pepcid, hydrogen peroxide, [colloidal silver](#)? Vitamin C? Take it all, one user tells people. And chew a lemon peel, says another.

Two years into the pandemic and we now have a range of [safe and effective vaccines](#) and [treatments](#) that are readily available in much of the world. Yet millions of people have chosen to reject vaccines and rigorous medical research in favour of unproven treatments and pseudoscientific home remedies.

There's no single reason that explains why people from varied backgrounds in numerous countries have latched on to these treatments with such fervour. But there is clearly a desperate demand for a quick fix to the pandemic. There is also a near limitless supply of medical misinformation telling people that such a solution is available but nefarious forces are intent on keeping it from the public.

The mass belief in unproven treatments is often spurred on by a vast ecosystem of medical hucksters profiting from unsound treatments, and media influencers ready to insert their dubious claims into pre-existing political battles.

In the US, for instance, Republican lawmakers and conservative media have attacked public health officials advising lockdowns while championing unproven drugs as miracle cures. One of the first times hydroxychloroquine appeared in mainstream media was on Fox News host Tucker Carlson's primetime show, where a cryptocurrency investor [falsely claiming](#) to be affiliated with Stanford University School of Medicine announced the drug as "the second cure to a virus of all time". The show did not run a correction.

Although they are often presented as secret cures, hidden away by mainstream medicine and media, some of these drugs are well known and commonly consumed for other conditions. Many are even the subject of numerous clinical trials. Take ivermectin, which is approved for use to treat parasites in both animals and humans. Ivermectin was [extremely widely](#)

used in Latin America during the first months of the pandemic as regional health agencies recommended it as a potential Covid treatment, but misinformation claiming that the drug was a cure-all led people to clear out supplies and resort to taking unsafe versions of ivermectin formulated for animals. Health officials stopped recommending ivermectin after scrutiny over the science behind it, and frontline evidence cast doubts on its effectiveness.

But instead of falling by the wayside in favour of more promising drugs, a combination of US culture war politics and pundits caused ivermectin use to explode across North America and the United Kingdom. A fringe doctor whose medical activist group has affiliated with anti-vaccine organisations appeared in a viral YouTube video touting the drug, then months later sat for a sympathetic interview on Joe Rogan's top-rated podcast.

In September, as the ivermectin craze was in full swing, Dr Patricia Garcia, Peru's former health minister, told me that she watched in disbelief as the rest of the world appeared to be replicating her country's mistakes.

None of this would have been possible without social media platforms allowing medical misinformation to spread at an unprecedented speed and scale, while influential media figures such as Carlson and Rogan act as megaphones for fringe actors and junk science. It's an ecosystem that fosters deep distrust, both of traditional media outlets and public health officials.

But the supply of medical misinformation is only one side of the equation. Within groups dedicated to unproven Covid treatments, believing in these drugs has become its own form of identity. In addition to asking for dosage recommendations or links to telehealth sites for prescriptions, people develop echo chambers that provide a sense of community while attacking outsiders as brainwashed or part of a vast conspiracy. They talk about how they can't trust doctors, or the media, or family members. All they have left is each other.

The online communities promoting ivermectin and other unproven Covid treatments are filled with what appear to be average people misguidedly trying to help one another, giving medical advice or offering comfort. When someone posts that they are sick, they're met with a flurry of well wishes,

and also pseudoscience remedies. In one recent post, two men promised they would pray for each other's loved ones who had been intubated after contracting Covid.

“Alternative medicine” communities are certainly full of scam artists with financial incentives to spread medical misinformation, and far-right extremists attempting to radicalise others, but many people in these unproven treatment groups simply appear desperate for someone to tell them that things are going to be OK.

Conspiracy movements tend to consume people who are at their most vulnerable, in times of great distress, often regardless of their intelligence or profession. The pandemic has taken a deep emotional toll on millions of people, and similarly appears to have left many distrusting of public health officials and susceptible to misinformation. One study published last month in the Journal of American Medical Association found that people experiencing symptoms of depression were more than twice as likely to express opinions that contained medical misinformation.

There's little reason to think that the demand for unproven treatments and pseudoscience cures will go away soon. The anti-vaccine movement has become more militant. Covid-19 will not be eradicated. The financial and political incentives for pushing medical misinformation will remain. There will still be people whose deep distrust and belief in conspiracies means that they will reach for whatever paste or pill or placebo they have been told will work. Some will recover and praise these unproven treatments as lifesavers. Others won't get the chance.

- Nick Robins-Early is a journalist based in New York. He reports on extremism, disinformation, tech and world news
- This article has been amended to correct the name of Stanford University School of Medicine

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## Record Store Day

# Record Store Day is harming, not helping, independent music shops like mine

Rupert Morrison

Supply chain chaos and a worldwide vinyl shortage means the annual event that once saved record shops from extinction has lost its way



Queues outside the Sounds of the Universe record shop in London on Record Store Day 2020. Photograph: Andy Hall/The Observer

Thu 17 Feb 2022 03.52 EST

Even in the age of social distancing, [Record Store Day](#) survived during the pandemic. After the 2020 edition was cancelled – it was scheduled for what became the middle of the UK’s first lockdown – the organisers staged separate release “drops” later that year, and again in 2021. You may have

seen eager shoppers queueing outside record shops of all sizes up and down the country, wearing face masks as well as the usual thick coats and scarves to brave the pre-opening hours chill; perhaps you saw an obligatory news puff piece about how “vinyl is back” as the David Bowie and Prince estates scraped together yet another previously unreleased artefact.

This year, on 23 April, it’s a return to business as usual as record stores around the world celebrate the 15th annual Record Store Day (RSD) with help from [Taylor Swift](#), its starriest ambassador yet (who’s releasing a seven-inch to mark the event). But what was once a shot in the arm for physical retail is now an albatross around the neck of the establishment it purports to help.

I run an independent record shop that predates both RSD and the internet. In the early 2000s, when physical record shops were decimated thanks to the rise of illegal downloads, RSD pumped millions of pounds through tills and undoubtedly turned a new generation on to the world of physical music. RSD is a remarkable event and its early years should be remembered as the revolution they were.

But 15 years is a long time in technology and retail. Peer-to-peer filesharing pre-empted the digital download and the streaming model. Plucky music blogs evolved into multimedia digital outlets. Even the most idiosyncratic physical record shops now reach a global audience via the internet. Record Store Day, meanwhile, hasn’t adapted to the modern realities of selling physical music.



Music lovers queue outside Jack White's Third Man Records in Nashville on Record Store Day 2015. Photograph: Mark Humphrey/AP

Critics have long derided the event's penchant for novelty discs and lack of discerning curation. This year, RSD offers 411 new releases, a fact that should leave those in the physical music business seething. Thanks to Brexit and the pandemic, we simply can't make enough records. There is an international shortage of the various components required in vinyl manufacture, as well as a backlog [exacerbated by last year's pop-heavy release schedule.](#)

The issue is not going away. Whereas vinyl would typically take 12 weeks to produce, we're now looking at nine months for a short run of 12-inch vinyl. (Don't even mention the shortage on coloured vinyl, the lifeblood of RSD.) New pressing plants opening in Middlesbrough and Gothenburg are cause for optimism, but even their added capacity pales compared with demand.

And yet, these 411 records – among them, yep, four Bowie releases and one Prince – will be ready and awaiting sale on 23 April. When I first got a glimpse of the sheer scale of what was in production, I suggested on social media that the best thing for the whole record community would have been to take a year out. Inevitably, many people responded, "If you don't like it, don't take part." But this is perhaps the greatest modern mistruth of RSD.

Even shops that opt out altogether are suffering long term thanks to continued stock delays and shortages which are exacerbated by the RSD production schedule. The logistics of the celebration now affect every month of the year, riding roughshod over carefully planned campaigns.

We have online customer pre-orders that were placed 12 months ago for albums that have been delayed so frequently that it feels futile to set a new hypothetical release date. The administrative ramifications are hugely consuming for shops and the economic impact for independent artists and labels is devastating. Instore tours – crucial for promotion and first-week sales – have been cancelled and rescheduled; artists are missing out on the chart positions they should expect; entire summer touring schedules are being scrapped because there is such uncertainty about when the physical product will materialise.

The job of the record shop in its simplest terms is to sell records. We are part of a long established musical ecosystem and now, in no small part due to RSD, we are becoming ever more impeded in fulfilling our duties. Will there be shops to celebrate when the racks are threadbare and retail prices continue to rocket?

I hope RSD can reconfigure itself as a genuine friend to record shops. The event needs to be postponed until these catastrophic production logjams are alleviated and the organisers must consult with shop owners about the best way to help them celebrate this unique culture in the future. It's ironic that the other 364 days in the record shop calendar now play second fiddle to RSD.

Rupert Morrison is the owner of [Drift Records](#) in Totnes

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## OpinionNetflix

# What we learn from Anna Delvey: scams are all the rage for Generation Hustle

[Laura Martin](#)

A wave of TV shows such as Inventing Anna are sympathetic portrayals of the con artist that lies within us all



Julia Garner as Anna Delvey in Netflix's Inventing Anna. Photograph: Nicole Rivelli/AP

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We are living in [the age of the scammer](#). If you weren't aware of it, just turn on your TV: there's a rash of real-life dramas about master con artists.

Netflix's [Inventing Anna](#) – a fictionalised account of the fake heiress Anna Delvey (real name Sorokin) – is topping the streaming service's popularity chart, while in March, Disney+ is releasing [The Dropout](#), which dramatises the tale of health-tech fraud [Elizabeth Holmes](#). It's no wonder that the New Yorker's Rachel Syme has declared a "Scam Spring".

Each of these stories is stranger than fiction, and has already spawned podcast series and investigative magazine features. But the drive to turn them into glossy, high-end TV dramas with star-studded casts suggests that we view their protagonists as more than mere tricksters: we are intrigued, even beguiled by them. Perhaps that's because at the heart of each of their stories lies a question: did they really believe that their visions would become a reality? Or were they out to scam people from the start?

The Dropout shows Holmes (played by Amanda Seyfried) being told that there is no way a pin-prick blood test to accurately detect myriad illnesses could ever work; but wide-eyed, she continues, lying to investors – and, horrifyingly, to patients. In Inventing Anna, Delvey (Julia Garner) screams at her tech-bro boyfriend that of course her arts foundation – named after herself, naturally – will succeed, because she deserves it. There are echoes of Billy McFarland's disastrous Fyre festival, immortalised in 2019's [Fyre: The Greatest Party That Never Happened](#) – McFarland believed he could pull off a luxury, A-lister music festival on a Caribbean island, despite never having worked a day in events production in his life.

What the now-convicted Sorokin, McFarland and Holmes have in common – apart from being venture capitalist-whisperers with a staggering level of entitlement – is that their trajectory seems to coincide with the rise of the concept of "hustle" on social media. Within this culture – which appears to be most prevalent on the image-based site Instagram, with #hustle appearing 28.7m times, shortly followed by #grind on 24.8m posts – wealth and success are prized above all, with the myth reinforced by influencers that if you just #hustle hard enough, the world is yours for the taking.

The logic then follows that if you're in poverty, disadvantaged or unsuccessful, well, that's because you didn't go to the lengths to get where

you want to be in the future, to paraphrase Love Island influencer [Molly-Mae Hague](#).

Self-belief and positive thinking are all well and good, but left unchecked, they can push people into a distorted reality. A 2018 survey found that 53% of millennials [expected to become a millionaire](#) at some point in the future; but the real story is far more sobering: in 2019, millennials were [less wealthy than people of a similar age](#) in any year from 1989 to 2007.

So perhaps it makes sense that people retreat to spaces online where dreams feel as if they can become a reality. An Instagram account such as [Success Factory Global](#) (bio: Helping YOU win the game called “LIFE”!; followers: 363,000), demonstrates how wellness-centred self-help memes are colliding with crypto-tech lad culture. Here, in posts such as “The goal is to be a legend” and “You will be the first millionaire in your family” (or, weirdly, over the top of the a picture of Cillian Murphy as murderous gangland boss Tommy Shelby in Peaky Blinders: “They will ignore you until they need you”), the message is clear: let nothing stand in your way of success. Fake it ’til you make it, just like Anna Delvey’s [carefully curated Instagram](#) image of a fine art-loving German trust fund girl – an image that made her high-profile friends and scored her meetings with investors.

The prioritising of appearance over reality on social media could, perhaps, be driving the latest spate of scammers – and our fascination with them. Holmes, McFarland and Sorokin took ideas that eventually *might* have worked, and pushed on regardless, breaking the law in the process, when confronted with the reality that it wasn’t likely to happen.

Yon Motskin, co-creator of HBO’s Generation Hustle – a sort of greatest hits of the scam world documentary, released last year – recently told [Salon](#): “They have grown up in a different generation, right? It’s this ‘fake it ’til you make it’ generation people now. We live online, we post half-truths all the time, all day without ever thinking twice about the morals of it. So I think all these cons were an extension of that.”

Meanwhile, one of Sorokin’s victims, Rachel Williams – who is fictionalised in Inventing Anna – has criticised the TV series, telling [Vanity Fair](#) it was was “dangerous”, as “hunger for this type of entertainment urges media

companies to make more of it, incentivising people like Anna and making [crime] seem like a viable career path”.

Of course, there will always be people out to scam others outright (as the pandemic [depressingly demonstrated](#)), and most of us would draw the line at criminality when it comes to keeping up with the Kardashians. But perhaps what these stories of scammers show, more than anything, is that rather than being surrounded by yes people, we could all do with being told “no” once in a while.

- Laura Martin is a freelance journalist
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## [Poland](#)

# More Polish opposition figures found to have been targeted by Pegasus spyware

Analysis by Amnesty International linked them to Pegasus Project leak of more than 50,000 phone numbers



The EU's data watchdog has advised that the use of NSO Group's Pegasus spyware should be banned. Photograph: Joel Saget/AFP/Getty Images

*[Stephanie Kirchgaessner](#) in Washington*

*[@skirchy](#)*

Thu 17 Feb 2022 00.00 EST

The use of intrusive spyware by members of the [European Union](#) is expected to face new scrutiny following revelations that the mobile phones of two more Polish citizens with close links to an opposition senator were targeted by a client of NSO Group, according to security experts.

Forensic analysis by Amnesty International found that both Magdalena Łośko, the former assistant to Polish senator Krzysztof Brejza, and Brejza's father, Ryszard Brejza, received text messages in 2019 that researchers said were technically consistent with spyware attacks by clients of NSO Group using Pegasus.

In both cases, the timing of the targeting matched the appearance of Łośko's and Ryszard Brejza's mobile phone numbers in a leaked database at the heart of the Pegasus Project, an [investigation into NSO Group by a media consortium](#) including the Guardian, Wyborcza and Die Zeit, coordinated by the French non-profit group Forbidden Stories.

The data leak is a list of more than 50,000 phone numbers that, since 2016, are believed to have been selected as people of interest by government clients of NSO Group. The consortium believes the data indicates the potential targets that NSO's government clients identified in advance of possible surveillance. The presence of an individual's phone number in the database does not mean the mobile phone was hacked. NSO has strongly denied that the data has any connection to the Israeli firm and said the phone numbers on the list are not targets of NSO customers.

When successfully deployed against a target, Pegasus can infiltrate a mobile phone, giving the user of the spyware full access to phone calls, text messages, encrypted messages and photographs. It can track a mobile phone user's location and turn the phone into a remote listening device.

[Polish authorities' use of Pegasus](#) first came to light in December 2021, after the Associated Press, in association with researchers at the Citizen Lab at the University of Toronto, reported that Pegasus – the NSO Group spyware – had been used against at least three people, including Krzysztof Brejza. In his case, forensic analysis of his mobile phone showed it had been compromised numerous times in 2019 while he was running the electoral campaign of the opposition Civil Platform party. The attacks stopped a few days after the vote.

The new revelations by the Pegasus Project indicate that a client of NSO Group also sought to hack at least two individuals close to Brejza. Amnesty International's security lab found four suspicious text messages were sent to

Łośko in April 2019, when she was running Brejza's campaign for the European parliament. Amnesty found 10 suspicious text messages on Ryszard Brejza's mobile between July and August 2019.

Amnesty said that, in both cases, the SMS messages directed the recipient to websites that were created before the attacks in 2019 and are no longer active. The available forensic evidence did not allow security researchers to confirm whether attempts to hack either Łośko or Ryszard Brejza were successful.

Poland's Central Anticorruption Bureau, the CBA, bought Pegasus in 2017 using funds from the Ministry of Justice, according to documents presented at a Polish senate hearing by the former head of the National Audit Office.

The CBA has previously declined to confirm whether it used Pegasus against any individuals, but it has said that any use of the surveillance tool would have obtained legally required consents.

A spokesperson for Poland's special services said, in response to a request for comment by the Pegasus Project, that it cannot comment on reports of methods of its "operational work" and would not comment on whether any specific individuals had been subjected to methods of "operational work". The spokesperson said that any allegations that surveillance methods had been used against individuals for "political purposes" were false.

NSO Group said in a statement: "Without referring to any specific governmental customer, a misuse of cyberintelligence tools is a serious matter and all credible allegations are immediately investigated. Unfortunately, a number of organisations with clear political agendas continue to release biased, inaccurate and incomplete reports based on scant, if any, evidence. As repeatedly stated, NSO does not operate the technology, and [is] not privy to the collected data. The company does not and cannot know who the targets of the customers are."

The company has previously said that its clients are only allowed to use its spyware to target criminals and terrorists.

The company is facing intense pressure in the European parliament, where the bloc's data watchdog has advised [the use of Pegasus should be banned](#) because of its power to intrude into the lives of its targets.

In interviews with the Pegasus Project, Ryszard Brejza described being shaken up by the news that his mobile phone was targeted with the intrusive spyware, particularly since the suspicious text messages he was sent were catered to appeal to his personal interests. In one case, he received messages laced with the suspected Pegasus-linked domain advertising a holiday home on the Baltic Sea, at a time when he was about to go on holiday on the Baltic coast.

Łośko, who is now a member of the Polish parliament, received suspicious SMS messages in 2019 about bullying, which researchers now say are linked to Pegasus. While she never sought out reports on bullying, Łośko recalled having conversations about bullying at the time.

In a statement, Amnesty said: “These new findings increase concerns, not only for politicians, but for the whole of Poland’s civil society in general, particularly given the context of the government’s record of persistently subverting human rights and the rule of law.”

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## Saudi Arabia

# Women apply in their thousands to drive trains in Saudi Arabia

Rail company advertised 30 positions and received 28,000 applications in kingdom where women couldn't drive cars until 2018



Women have applied to drive trains on the high-speed Mecca to Medina line.  
Photograph: Giuseppe Cacace/AFP/Getty Images

*Reuters*

Wed 16 Feb 2022 20.25 EST

A job advert to recruit 30 female train drivers in [Saudi Arabia](#) has attracted 28,000 applicants, highlighting the scale of pent-up demand as the conservative kingdom loosens some restrictions on women's employment.

The Spanish railway operator Renfe said an online assessment of academic background and English language skills had helped it to reduce the number

of candidates by around a half, and it would work through the rest by mid-March.

The 30 selected women will drive bullet trains between the cities of Mecca and Medina after a year of paid training. Renfe, which said it was keen to create opportunities for women in its local business, currently employs 80 men to drive its trains in Saudi Arabia, and has 50 more under instruction.

Job opportunities for Saudi women have until recently been limited to roles such as teachers and medical workers, as they had to observe strict gender segregation rules. Women were not even allowed to drive in the kingdom until 2018.

Female participation in the workforce has nearly doubled in the last five years to 33% amid a drive by the Saudi crown prince to open up the kingdom and diversify the economy, and women are now taking up jobs once restricted to men and migrant workers.

But the proportion of women working in the kingdom was still around half that of men in the third quarter of 2021, at 34.1%, and female unemployment was well over three times higher than for men, at 21.9%.

Saudi Arabia is highlighting progress on gender issues at a time of [scrutiny in the west over its human rights record](#), including a crackdown on dissent that ensnared dozens of women's rights activists and the 2018 murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

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## US Capitol attack

# US Capitol attack panel discusses subpoena for Ivanka Trump

House select committee is considering best way to get evidence from ex-president's daughter about his efforts to cling to power



Ivanka Trump has been asked by the committee what she did to influence her father on 6 January 2021 and why he did not call off the rioters.  
Photograph: Mandel Ngan/AFP/Getty Images

*[Hugo Lowell](#) in Washington*

Thu 17 Feb 2022 02.00 EST

The House select committee investigating the Capitol attack is considering issuing a subpoena to [Ivanka Trump](#) to force her cooperation with the inquiry into [Donald Trump's](#) efforts to return himself to power on 6 January, according to a source familiar with the matter.

Any move to subpoena [Ivanka Trump](#) and, for the first time, force a member of Trump's own family to testify against him, would mark a dramatic escalation in the 6 January inquiry that could amount to a treacherous legal and political moment for the former president.

The panel is not expected to take the crucial step for the time being, the source said, and the prospect of a subpoena to the former president's daughter emerged in discussions about what options remained available after she appeared to refuse [a request for voluntary cooperation](#).

But the fact that members on the select committee have started to discuss a subpoena suggests they believe it may ultimately take such a measure – and the threat of prosecution should she defy it – to ensure her appearance at a deposition on Capitol Hill.

The select committee did not address a possible subpoena for Ivanka Trump at a closed-door meeting last Friday, and the panel wants to give her a reasonable window of opportunity to engage with the investigation before moving to force her cooperation, the source said.

The panel would also have to formally vote to move ahead with such a measure, the source said, and Thompson would probably inform the House speaker, Nancy Pelosi, of the decision before formally authorizing a subpoena to the former president's daughter.

But members on the select committee are not confident that Ivanka Trump would appear on her own volition, the source said, and the discussion about a subpoena reflected how important they consider her insight into [whether Trump oversaw a criminal conspiracy](#) on 6 January.

The chairman of the select committee, Bennie Thompson, [said in an 11-page letter](#) requesting her voluntary cooperation last month that the panel wanted to ask about Trump's plan to stop the certification of Joe Biden's election victory to return himself to office.

Ivanka Trump was close to the former president in the days leading up to the Capitol attack, Thompson said, and appeared to have learned the plan to

have the then vice-president, Mike Pence, refuse to certify Biden's election win in certain states was possibly unlawful.

"The committee has information suggesting that President Trump's White House counsel may have concluded that the actions President Trump directed Vice-President Pence to take would ... otherwise be illegal. Did you discuss these issues?" the letter said.

The letter added House investigators had additional questions about whether Ivanka Trump could say whether the former president had been told that such an action might be unlawful, and yet nonetheless persisted in pressuring Pence to reinstall him for a second term.

Thompson also said in the letter that the panel wanted to learn more about Trump's indifference to the insurrection, and discussions inside the White House about his tweet castigating Pence for not adopting his plan as a pro-Trump mob stormed the Capitol in his name.

The letter said a persistent question for Ivanka Trump – who White House aides thought had the best chance of persuading the former president to condemn the rioters – was what she did about the situation and why her father did not call off the rioters in a White House address.

The select committee said in the letter that they also wanted to ask her about what she knew with regard to the long delay in deploying the national guard to the Capitol, which allowed the insurrection to overwhelm law enforcement into the afternoon of 6 January.

Thompson said that House investigators were curious why there appeared to have been no evidence that Trump issued any order to request the national guard, or called the justice department to request the deployment of personnel to the Capitol.

A spokesperson for the select committee declined to comment on whether the panel was considering a subpoena for Ivanka Trump or the content of the Friday meeting. Neither a spokesperson for the former president nor Ivanka Trump responded to requests for comment.

But Ivanka Trump has appeared to suggest she is not prepared to appear voluntarily, and said in a statement at the time of the letter requesting voluntary cooperation that “as the committee already knows, Ivanka did not speak at the January 6 rally”.

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## Rights and freedomHuman rights

# Vietnamese activists routinely placed under house arrest, report finds

Authorities regularly detain environmentalists, rights campaigners and dissidents to prevent them travelling or attending events, says Human Rights Watch



Activist's homes have been padlocked without warning, or they've been bundled into cars on their way to meetings. Photograph: Eric Lafforgue/Art in All of Us/Corbis/Getty

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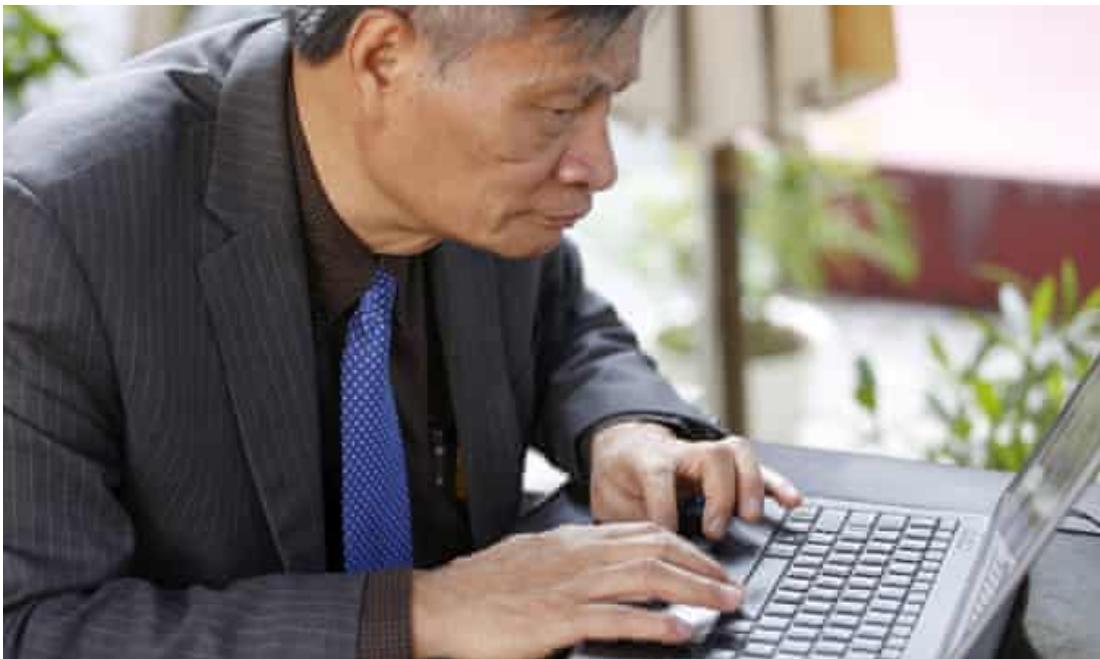
# HUMANITY UNITED

[About this content](#)

[Rebecca Ratcliffe](#)

Thu 17 Feb 2022 01.00 EST

The Vietnamese government is routinely placing activists under arbitrary house arrest, employing tactics including stationing guards outside their homes, setting up roadblocks nearby and using superglue and padlocks to jam their doors shut, according to a report.



Activist and economist Nguyen Quang A was forced into a car to stop him attending a meeting with former US president Barack Obama. Photograph: Nguyen Huy Kham/Reuters

The study by [Human Rights Watch \(HRW\)](#) documented cases involving 170 rights activists, bloggers, dissidents and their family members who were prevented from domestic and international travel between 2004 and 2021. The real number of those affected is likely to be higher, the report warned.

Those targeted had worked on various issues, from land rights and environmental activism, to advocating for media freedom and the rights of political prisoners, to participating in anti-China protests.

Detentions are often employed around sensitive political dates and anniversaries, or to prevent individuals from attending protests, court hearings and meetings with diplomats, according to the research. Dissidents are also regularly stopped from travelling abroad, and prevented from returning to the country, it found.

It is so common for activists to be subjected to arbitrary house arrest that bloggers have developed a code name for the practice, the report said, calling it *banh canh*, after a southern dish – *banh* is a Vietnamese word used for cake or noodles, while *canh* means either soup or to guard. Activists post

on Facebook that they are eating *banh canh* to signal that they are under house arrest.

Some try to bypass restrictions by leaving their homes in advance of dates that might prompt a clampdown, or by taking alternative transport to attend events. Often, they are intercepted.

In one prominent case, when then-US president Barack Obama visited Hanoi in 2016, more than half of the civil society representatives he invited to the US embassy were unable to attend. One of the invitees, Nguyen Quang A, an economist and activist, was forced into a car and driven around for hours. Others were blocked from attending or detained en route.

Restrictions were also imposed during visits by Presidents Bill Clinton in 2000 and Donald Trump in November 2017 and February 2019 , when he attended the Hanoi summit between Trump and Kim Jong-un, and activists were stopped from meeting UN officials.

“The Vietnamese government apparently considers it a crime for some people to attend human rights or freedom of religion events, or meet with visiting foreign dignitaries,” said Phil Robertson, deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch.

Such practices had become more common during Covid lockdowns, he added, when the authorities intensified their crackdown on dissidents. During the pandemic, while foreign governments were distracted with health crises at home, the Vietnam authorities also ramped up arrests and imposed longer sentences, said Robertson.

“The government realised they could run the table, they could go after all the dissidents, try to lock up as many people as possible, and the international community would not react in a concerted way,” he said.

People who are subject to travel bans or detentions are not notified or told how long they will face restrictions. A lack of judicial independence means it is often impossible to challenge the measures in the courts.

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## Thailand

# Amnesty faces pressure to leave Thailand amid ‘growing intolerance’

Royalist groups have organised petitions calling for Amnesty to be expelled from the country, accusing it of threatening national security



Thai royalists protesters hold demonstrations against Amnesty in Bangkok on Thursday, calling for it to shut down the country's branch of the human rights organisation. Photograph: Panumas Sanguanwong/AP

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

Thu 17 Feb 2022 01.50 EST

Amnesty International has said attacks against its operations in Thailand were taking place against a backdrop of “growing intolerance for human rights discourse” among the country’s authorities, and warned of a clampdown on civil society groups.

Amnesty has come under increased pressure in [Thailand](#), where ultra royalists have accused it of threatening national security and interfering in the country's internal affairs after it criticised legal cases filed against monarchy reform protesters.

In November, prime minister Prayuth Chan-ocha ordered an investigation into the NGO, while royalist groups have organised petitions calling for it to be expelled from the country.

On Thursday morning, a small group of protesters gathered outside the Ministry of Interior, holding signs that said "Get out from Thailand", and submitted a letter calling for an end to Amnesty's presence in the country, according to footage broadcast on online news.

Seksakol Atthawong, a vice minister in Prayuth's office, who has organised a petition against the NGO, said last week that it had attracted 1.2m signatures.

Amnesty has provoked the anger of royalist groups by condemning court judgments against young protesters who led mass rallies calling for curbs to be placed on the wealth and influence of the royal family. Prior to the protests, which peaked in 2020, the royal family had long been considered beyond direct public criticism. It is also protected by a lese majesty law that states anyone who "defames, insults or threatens" the monarchy can face up to 15 years in prison.

[At least 1,767 people](#), including hundreds of children aged under 18, have been charged under various laws for expressing political opinions or taking part in rallies, according to Thai Lawyers for Human Rights.

In November, the constitutional court ruled that the protesters' calls for reform [amounted to attempts to overthrow the monarchy](#) – a judgment that Amnesty said was "a dangerous warning to hundreds of thousands of Thais who want to express their opinions or legitimate criticisms".

Alongside petitions against Amnesty, NGOs have also raised concerns over a proposed law that aims to regulate non-profits in Thailand. It is widely

opposed by civil society groups who warn that its terms are vague, overly broad and could easily be misused.

Amnesty said it could have “severe consequences” for all NGOs in Thailand.

Kyle Ward, Amnesty International’s Deputy secretary general, said: “The targeting of Amnesty is taking place against a backdrop of a growing intolerance for human rights discourse among Thai authorities.”

In a statement, Ward said: “We offer constructive recommendations to authorities on steps they can take to uphold their international human rights obligations. We will continue to do this independently and impartially on the basis of facts. In response to the anti-Amnesty campaign and related investigation, we continue to answer any questions the Thai government may have about our work in the country.

“While we recognise that the royal Thai government has a duty to protect public order and national security, we continue to highlight that the authorities must do so in a manner that is in accordance with international human rights law, and that is proportionate, necessary and fulfils the government’s obligations to ensure and facilitate respect for human rights, including the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.”

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